

Bridging troubled waters?

Everyday inter-ethnic interaction in a context of violent conflict in Kottiyar Pattu, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka



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Bridging troubled waters?

**Everyday inter-ethnic interaction in a context of violent
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Timmo Gaasbeek

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For Kunju, Ryan, Joel and Boaz
Home is where you are

Preface

A long journey has ended. What started off as a simple question out of curiosity became a long and fascinating inquiry into everyday inter-ethnic interaction in a context of violent conflict in the region known as Kottiyar Pattu in Trincomalee District, Sri Lanka. For six years, I have been able to read anything I could lay my hands on, and speak to hundreds of people in Sri Lanka, India, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States about irrigation and paddy cultivation (the topic that the inquiry started off with), Gods and their temples and festivals, politics and violence, the tsunami, labour migration and its culinary consequences for the husbands who stay behind, birth control, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), history, saints and villains, fish, caste and cattle brands, a magical vegetable garden on a rock, and many other things. From this jumble a story emerged that crystallised into this dissertation.

Once, when I showed her a book by Mark Whitaker that I had just bought, my mother-in-law asked me “Now why do you fellows study the East Coast? I can imagine people doing research in Jaffna, but why such godforsaken places like Mandur or Muthur?” Apart from the fact that I have a soft spot for Muthur and its surroundings, I hope this book is sufficient proof that remote places can very well be a source of valuable insights.

As Michel de Certeau has written, “we never write on a blank page, but always on one that has already been written on” (De Certeau 1988: 43). I owe a great debt to many people who have been sources of inspiration when doing my research and writing this book; a debt that goes way beyond a mere “borrowing that can be exorcized by homage or acknowledgement” (*id.*: 44), and thus remains in existence despite me expressing thanks in the next few paragraphs. There will be many whose names I forget to mention here: I beg your forgiveness.

Without the initial positive reactions of Linden Vincent and Georg Frerks, this research would have remained an interesting question, shelved in my mental drawer for questions worth asking but never elaborated on. Thank you for that and for your continued enthusiasm and support, even when at times my research ran wildly off course.

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The practical implementation of my research would have been impossible without my Sri Lankan research assistants, who will remain anonymous on the request of one of them because unfortunately I do not know how dangerous it is to mention their names. If there are any people whom I need to say ‘thank you’ to, it is this group of people. I also had an important research assistant in the Netherlands: my father. Pa, thanks for your unrelenting support and encouragement, and for the many hours of painstakingly pouring over ancient Dutch texts as well as over the

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different texts that I produced over the years. In 2006, Erik Dekker came to Sri Lanka for an MSc research on water delivery in the Allai Extension Scheme. Unfortunately, a renewed outbreak of violence upset his plans and forced him to abandon his field site and his measurements. Nevertheless, the observations that he was able to make before leaving Kottiyar Pattu, and his eventual thesis proved very helpful for my own research, particularly for chapter 6.

I am grateful to ZOA Refugee Care for letting me use the office in Muthur (and, every now and then, in Trincomalee, Malaimunthal and Kilivetti) as research base, and for allowing considerable flexibility in my work scheduling after I returned to the Netherlands and combined a part-time job at ZOA's headquarters with my research. My colleagues in ZOA Trincomalee and the colleagues of my wife in Trincomalee deserve a big thank you for all the discussions that we had over the years. Your insights have enriched my insight considerably. Anneke van Eijk, Bertien Bos, and Nithya and Anton: thank you for letting me stay at your places when I was in Trincomalee.

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Google Earth™ mapping service is gratefully acknowledged for giving permission to use imagery for this dissertation.

Over the years, a group of academics studying Sri Lanka has been a great source of ideas, reflection, and friendship. An article by Mark Whitaker was the first anthropological article on Sri Lanka's east coast that I ever read (years before I even thought of writing this thesis), and his intriguing perspectives on things have been a source of ethnographic inspiration throughout. Dennis McGilvray's enthusiastic response to my first tentative mail with questions about caste triggered off a conversation that is still ongoing. Thanks for taking so much time to write what amounts to about two hundred pages of emails, thanks for hosting me in Boulder twice, and for letting me spend days sniffing through the treasure chest of your bookshelves, but perhaps most of all thanks for bringing me in touch with a very experienced research assistant. 'Aunty' Pat Lawrence: thanks for being such a wonderful friend and for all your academic and personal encouragement. Jonathan Spencer: thanks for your inspiring feedback, thanks for getting me to Edinburgh and on the panel in Chicago, and thanks for introducing me to Becky.

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Oom Piet Oosterom: your PhD research sparked in me the desire to one day conduct my own PhD research. Thanks for that, and thank you and Tante Heleen for your support and hospitality over the years, particularly after we moved back to Wageningen.

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The people dearest to me in the entire world are my wife Natasha and our sons Ryan, Joel and Boaz. Thank you for meaning the world to me, and thank you for being so patient with me over the years that I had much less time for you than you deserved. I love you to the moon... and back. It is to you that I dedicate this book.

Finally, I want to thank the people of Kottiyar Pattu, about whom I have written this book. Thank you for taking the time to talk, and for sharing so much about your own lives with me. May peace – not just the absence of war, but genuine reconciliation – prevail in Sri Lanka, and may happiness return to the beautiful piece of earth that is called Kottiyar Pattu.

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Abbreviations

AES	Allai Extension Scheme
AGA	Additional Government Agent
A/L	GCE Advanced Level (upper secondary education)
AR	Administrative Report
ASC	Agrarian Services Centre
CC	Cultivation Committee
CEPIP-W	CERES-Wageningen Programme for Innovative PhD Research
CERES	Research School for Resource Studies for Development
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CIRM	Centre for Information and Resources Management
CO	Co-ordinating Officer
CPA	Centre for Policy Alternatives
DO	Divisional Officer
DS	Divisional Secretariat
EPDP	Eelam People's Democratic Party
EPRLF	Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front
EROS	Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations
FC	field channel
FCE	Foundation for Co-Existence
FP	Federal Party
FO	Farmers' Organisation
GA	Government Agent
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GN	<i>Grama Niladhari</i>
GS	<i>Grama Sevaka</i>
GTZ	<i>Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit</i> (German Technical Co-operation)
HSZ	High Security Zone
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICES	International Centre for Ethnic Studies
ID	Irrigation Department
IDP	internally displaced person
IE	Irrigation Engineer
IGP	Inspector-General of Police
IMARD	International Movement Against all forms of Racism and Discrimination
IMD	Irrigation Management Division
INMAS	Integrated Management of Agricultural Schemes
IPKF	Indian Peace Keeping Force
JHU	<i>Jathika Hela Urumaya</i> (National Heritage Party)

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JVP	<i>Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna</i> (People's Liberation Front)
LA	Local Authority
LB (MC)	Left Bank (Main Channel)
LDD	Land Development Department
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MBRL	multi-barrel rocket launcher
MC	Municipal Council
MIC	Muslim Information Centre
MP	Member of Parliament
MPC	Muthur Peace Committee
NESOHR	North-East Secretariat on Human Rights
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NUA	National Unity Alliance
NVPF	Non-Violent Peace Force
O/L	GCE Ordinary Level (lower secondary education)
O&M	operation and maintenance
PLOTE	People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam
PS	<i>Pradeshiya Sabha</i>
RB (MC)	Right Bank (Main Channel)
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SLA	Sri Lankan Army
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLMC	Sri Lanka Muslim Congress
SLMM	Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission
SPUR	Society for Peace, Unity and Human Rights in Sri Lanka
STF	Special Task Force
SU	<i>Sihala Urumaya</i> (Sinhala Heritage Party)
TA	Technical Assistant
TELO	Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation
TNA	Tamil National Alliance
TRO	Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation
TULF	Tamil United Liberation Front
UC	Urban Council
UCHC	University of Ceylon History of Ceylon
UDA	Urban Development Authority
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UN-HIC	United Nations Humanitarian Information Centre
UN-OCHA	United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNP	United National Party
UPFA	United People's Freedom Alliance
UTHR(J)	University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna)
VOC	<i>Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie</i> (United East Indies Company)
VVT	Valvettithurai
WV	<i>wattai vidane</i>
ZOA	<i>Zuid-Oost Azië</i> (South East Asia)

Glossary

Ampattar	Tamil caste of barbers
<i>amunam</i>	(also <i>avanam</i>) a measure for weight, and equals about 5 to 6 bushels of paddy, or 140 to 168 kilograms of unhusked paddy; one <i>amunam</i> of seed paddy is equivalent to a sown area of about 2½ acres, which is about one hectare
<i>anicut</i>	inlet weir
<i>appa</i>	father
<i>aru</i>	river
<i>balasthanam</i>	ritual to mark the start of the renovation and purification of a Hindu temple
<i>boru</i>	false, lie
<i>bo tree</i>	(also <i>bodhi tree</i>) <i>ficus religiosa</i> ; the kind of tree under which the Buddha is claimed to have attained enlightenment
<i>Buddha Dharma</i>	law of truth of Buddha
<i>cadjans</i>	coconut fronds
Chakkiliyar	Tamil caste of cobblers
<i>chaitiya</i>	Buddhist or Jain shrine including a <i>dagaba</i>
<i>chena</i>	slash and burn cultivation; term used both for the practice and for the fields
Chetty	Tamil caste of traders and jewellers
<i>crore</i>	10,000,000 (100 <i>lakh</i>)
<i>dagaba</i>	bell-shaped shrine holding relics
<i>dargah</i>	a Sufi shrine built over the grave of a revered religious figure, often a Sufi saint
<i>Deepavali</i>	Hindu festival of light
<i>dissava</i>	feudal title associated with high office in the Kandyan kingdom; a <i>dissava</i> headed the administration of a large province of the Kingdom known as a <i>Dissava</i> and was the king's personal representative and tax collector in that area.
Dhobies	Tamil caste of washermen
Durava	Sinhala caste of toddy-tappers
<i>Fathiha</i>	Sura Al-Fathiha ("The Opening") is the first chapter of the Qur'an; this chapter has a special role in daily prayers, being recited at the start of each unit of prayer
<i>ganga</i>	river
<i>ganja</i>	marijuana
<i>gansabhawa</i>	village council of elders
<i>goni billa</i>	"ghost covered in a sack" - a mythical monster that comes and snatches (naughty) children away in his gunny bag

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<i>goonda</i>	lower-ranking ruffian with a <i>thug</i> as leader
Goviya	Sinhala caste of farmers
<i>Grama Niladhari</i>	also <i>Grama Sevaka</i> - lowest-level government official in Sri Lanka
Hali or Hannali	Sinhala caste of tailors
<i>hartal</i>	a shut-down of public life in protest against a perceived injustice .
<i>hamuduru</i>	Buddhist monk
<i>hondai</i>	good
Id-Ul-Fitr	Muslim festival to celebrate the end of the fasting month of Ramadhan
<i>iluppai-pāl</i>	'the milk of the <i>iluppai</i> tree', a kind of oil that was used for burning the lamps in the temple
<i>Iyakkam</i>	'movement', a colloquial term used to describe the LTTE
<i>jihad</i>	struggle in the way of God
<i>jumma</i>	Muslim Friday prayers
<i>kalvettu</i>	stone inscription; term is also used for chronicles
Kammal	Sinhala caste of carpenters
<i>kandoori</i>	annual celebration of the death of a Muslim saint, involving a public feast
Karaiyar	Tamil caste of sea-fishermen
Karava	Sinhala caste of fishermen
<i>kiramath</i>	miracles
Kollan	Tamil caste of blacksmiths
<i>kotiya</i>	one <i>crore</i> , or ten million
<i>kottai</i>	fort
<i>kotti</i>	a kind of flower
Kovilar	also Koviya – Tamil caste of temple labourers
<i>kovil</i>	Hindu temple
<i>kudi</i>	generic term for an exogamous matrilineal clan among the Tamils and Muslims of eastern Sri Lanka; the <i>kudi</i> is the largest unit of matrilineal descent organisation, with local strength in specific areas
<i>kulam</i>	(irrigation) reservoir; term is also used for caste
<i>kumbh abishekam</i>	ritual to re-dedicate a Hindu temple
Kuravar	Telugu-speaking gypsies
<i>Kurukkal</i>	Tamil caste of non-Brahmin Hindu priests
<i>Kuyavar</i>	Tamil caste of potters
<i>lakh</i>	100,000
<i>larijnen</i>	Ancient Dutch currency unit: 1 <i>larijn</i> = 10 <i>stuiver</i>
<i>Lascorin</i>	Javanese and Malay soldier in Dutch military service in Ceylon (from Arab <i>lashkar</i> = army)
<i>maha</i>	great; term also used for the major cultivation season (October-March)
Malabars	term used in colonial documents to denote the Tamil ethnic group until well into the 19 th century
Malayali	an ethnic group originating from the Indian state of Kerala
<i>maravar padai</i>	Tamil vigilantes, trained by the LTTE

Moors	older term for Tamil-speaking Sri Lankan Muslims, derived from the Portuguese word for North African Muslims, <i>mouro</i>
<i>moulavi</i>	Muslim cleric
Mukkuvar	Tamil caste of Kerala origin
<i>mulam</i>	measure of length, indicating the distance from fingertips to elbow; roughly equal to 1'6" (45 cm)
<i>mulastanam</i>	the 'holy of holies' of a Hindu temple, the shrine in which the main idol is kept. The roof of the <i>mulastanam</i> is often covered with statues
<i>murid</i>	disciple (arab.)
<i>nele</i>	also <i>nely</i> – rough rice; paddy
Negati	Sinhala caste of drummers
<i>nikaya</i>	congregation of Buddhist monks
Pachchan	Tamil caste
Pallawilli	Tamil caste of seafarers and fishermen (see also Paravar)
<i>pandal</i>	ceremonial platform or gate
<i>pansala</i>	Buddhist temple
Paravar	Tamil caste of boatmen
Paraiyar	Tamil caste of funeral drummers
<i>perahera</i>	procession
<i>pooja</i>	temple ritual
<i>poosari</i>	ritual specialist, presiding over poojas
<i>Pradeshiya Sabha</i>	municipal-level local authority in rural areas
<i>pulavan</i>	poet
<i>purana</i>	original
<i>Quraish</i>	the dominant tribe of Mecca when the Muslim religion emerged; its prophet Muhammad belonged to this tribe
Rada	Sinhala caste of washermen
<i>rajakariya</i>	compulsory unpaid labour as a service to the King (abolished in 1832)
<i>reddi</i>	washerwoman
<i>samanera</i>	young recruit to the Buddhist monkhood
<i>sari</i>	six-yard-long cloth worn as a traditional women's garment throughout South Asia
<i>sathyagraha</i>	philosophy and practice of nonviolent resistance
<i>Shawwwaal</i>	six days of Islamic fasting after the obligatory fast of Ramadhan
Sufi	practitioner of Sufism - generally understood to be the inner, mystical dimension of Islam
<i>taanattaar</i>	temple administrators, originating from Marunkur
Thai Pongal	Tamil harvest festival (14-15 January)
<i>thaikka</i>	Muslim prayer hall where no <i>jumma</i> prayers are said
Thaththar	Tamil caste of goldsmiths
<i>thero</i>	Buddhist priest
Thimilar	from <i>thimil</i> (a kind of boat) or <i>thimir</i> (strong, courageous or stubborn) - Tamil caste found today mainly in the region just south of Trincomalee,

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	where they claim legendary origins as people from Sindh (<i>Sindhunadar Thimilar</i>)
<i>theertham</i>	water-cutting ritual
<i>thiruvola</i>	Hindu temple festival
<i>thoppu</i>	orchard
<i>vannimai</i>	feudal divisions that were ruled by petty chiefs south of the Jaffna peninsula in the present-day Northern, North Central and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka
<i>vanniyar</i>	title of a feudal chief in medieval Sri Lanka
<i>Valiullah</i>	'Friend of Allah' – honorific term used for Sufi saints; in colloquial use, the term <i>Avuliya</i> ('Friends') is also used
<i>varipattaar</i>	temple labourers, originating from Karaikal
<i>vayupurana</i>	Hindu religious text, dedicated to the god Vayu (the wind god)
<i>Vedar</i>	'hunter' - Veddas
<i>Velaikkarar</i>	guards' regiment or king's regiment in the Chola army
<i>Velalar</i>	Tamil land-owning caste
<i>Vesak</i>	the most important full-moon day in the Buddhist calendar; on this day, the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha are remembered
<i>vidane</i>	government servant
<i>wattai vidane</i>	irrigation headman or 'tract headman'; a tract usually has an extent of 300-500 acres
<i>vihara</i>	Buddhist temple
<i>wannichee</i>	female chieftain
<i>yala</i>	minor cultivation season (April-September)
<i>yakkha</i>	demon
<i>yakkhini</i>	demoness
<i>yodhaya</i>	bodyguard
<i>yojana</i>	Vedic measure of distance between 6 to 15 km (4 and 9 miles).
<i>ziyaram</i>	tomb-shrine for a Muslim saint

Note on transliteration

Since Sinhala and Tamil have alphabets that are different in shape and structure from the English alphabet, some form of transliteration is necessary. The problem is that there are no commonly agreed upon transliteration systems. For readability's sake, I have avoided the use of diacritics except in the case of citations from other texts. Where possible, I have tried to stick as closely as possible to the spelling of words in their original language. While for example Mutur and Muttur are commonly found spellings, I have stuck to Muthur for the name of the main town in Kottiyar Pattu. For bigger places around the research area and for people's names, I have used spellings as they are commonly found in English-language maps and in English-language newspapers, respectively.

1 Introduction

“Despite a wealth of information on ethnic violence, we actually know very little about the micromechanics of coexistence – about the neighborhoods and colonies that achieved and maintained intergroup peace in the midst of civic strife. There is a pressing need for scholarly analysis of the day-to-day poetics of intergroup cooperation. But even more pointedly, we cannot view this everyday life, this peaceful coexistence, as the static context or backdrop against which “things” (like riots, violence, or “breakdown”) happen. Rather, peace itself is the product of a relentless creative labour. Coexistence, as much as conflict, needs to be explained” (Ring 2006: 3).

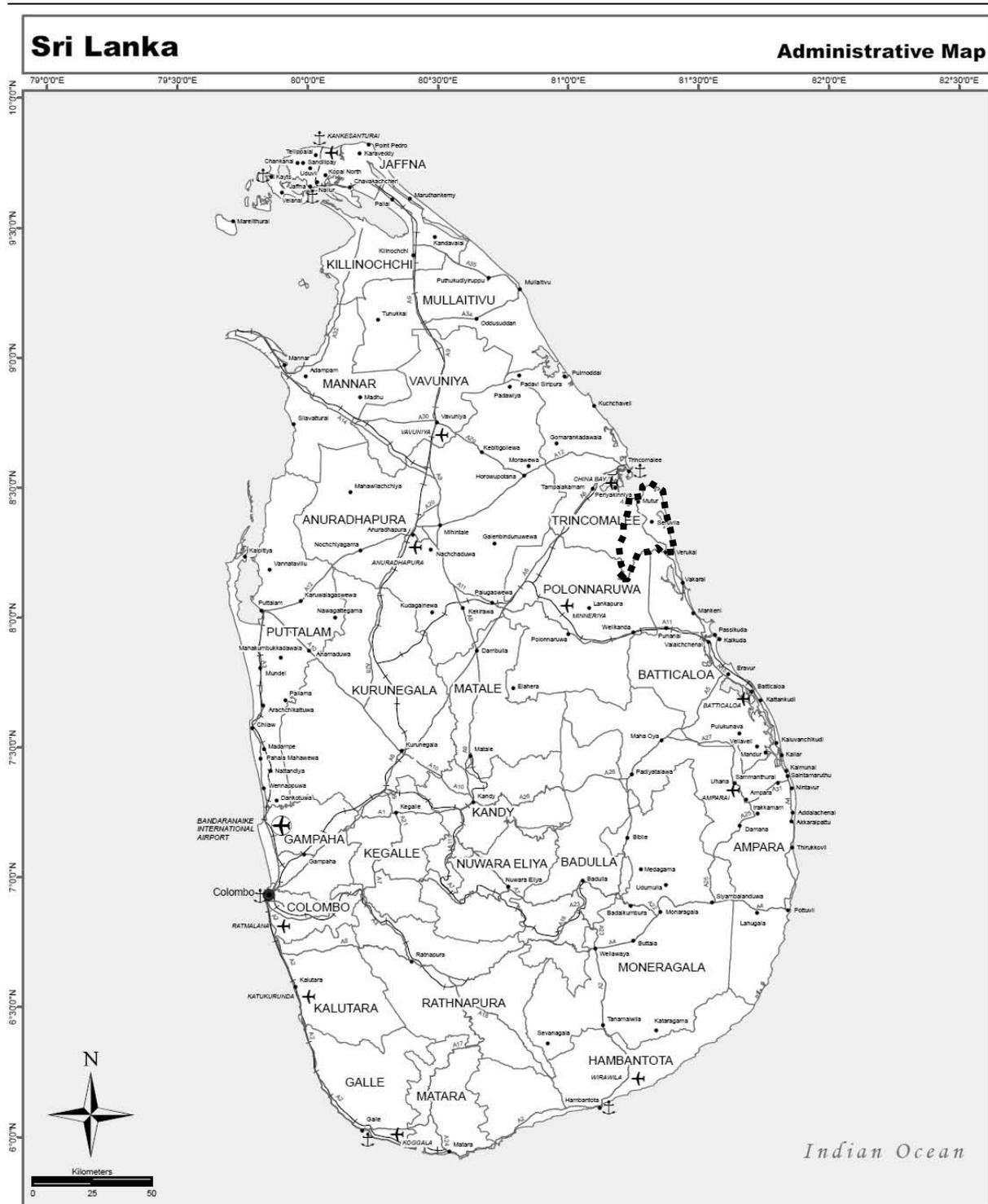
1.1 *Problem statement: extraordinary ordinariness*

This is a book about ordinary people doing ordinary things in extraordinary circumstances. Based on fieldwork that was carried out between 2003 and 2008, it describes and analyses everyday forms of inter-ethnic interaction in Kottiyar Pattu, a multi-ethnic region in Sri Lanka’s north-eastern war zone (map 1.1). Through case studies on inter-ethnic interaction in the day-to-day pursuit of (agricultural) livelihoods, during periods of acute violence and tension, and in inter-ethnic marriages, contextualised in the complex past and present of the area they live in, I bring out how people who are separated from each other by ethno-nationalist discourse and violent boundary maintenance continue to live in the same area and try to maintain a form of normalcy.

This focus on the ordinary aims to enrich the literature on violent conflict in Sri Lanka, but has wider implications. In the study of conflict and disaster, the focus is often either on agony, suffering and survival, or on wider political, economic and social causes, implications and discourses. In the process, people are reduced to pitiful victims, skilful survivors or mere pawns on the chess-board of larger actors. However, there are many aspects of normalcy that continue during crisis and that need to be accounted for (Hilhorst 2007). I have come to believe that the mundane practices of everyday life are crucial in helping people to disengage from contexts of violence and disaster and build up fragile islands of normalcy, peace, and sanity.

The topic of everyday inter-ethnic interaction is also relevant for those interested in dynamics of (ethnicised) conflict and peace. If, despite the context of conflict, people still interact across ethnic boundaries, then the question arises how deeply ethno-nationalist discourse has been internalised by ‘people on the ground’, and to what extent these forms of inter-ethnic interaction can inform peace-building interventions.

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Legend	
•	Main Towns
⚓	Ports
●	Capital City
✈	Airports
✈	International Airport
+	Railway
—	Roads
□	District Boundary

Survey Department, Government of Sri Lanka	
Updated as at:	02-Mar-2009
Produced on:	02-Mar-2009
Projection / Datum:	Transverse Mercator Kandawala
Admin boundaries provided by:	Survey Department, Government of Sri Lanka

Mapnumber: OCHA/LK/Admin/001/V4
This map is designed for printing on A4 size
The boundaries, names and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
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Map 1.1. Sri Lanka, with Kottiyar Pattu demarcated by dotted line (source: UN-OCHA 2009)

1.1.1 Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims: a triptych of ethnic categories

When, in May 2006, my (Sri Lankan) wife delivered our first child and I went with my mother-in-law to register his birth, the form asked for the nationality of the father and mother. For me, this was easy: I am Dutch. For my wife however, there proved to be a problem. Initially, I simply wrote 'Sri Lankan' in the box, but the form was returned with a rather terse comment that I should add my wife's ethnicity. Protests that the form clearly asked only for 'nationality' were to no avail. The Sinhala word on the form is '*jatiya*', an ambiguous term that can mean nationality, ethnicity, and caste all at the same time. To the lady processing the form (as to many others in Sri Lanka) ethnicity was the dominant one among the possible translations of the term. This led to another problem: my wife is of mixed ethnic background. Her father belongs to the Malay community¹, her mother is Tamil, and they brought up their children as distinctly multicultural people, using English rather than Malay or Tamil as the language in the home². We ended up filling in 'Malay' just to get the form processed, and now we face the interesting situation that our children on the one hand have no ethnicity at all, and on the other hand they fit perfectly into yet another ethnic category: that of the Burghers, descendants of unions between Europeans and inhabitants of Sri Lanka.

Ethnicity is big in Sri Lanka: so big, that (except during international cricket tournaments) patriotism and nationalism tend to be phrased in ethnic, rather than national terms. The relevant 'others' to most Sri Lankans are not the Indians, Chinese, or for that matter the Dutch, but those within the country who belong to another ethnic group. There are three main ethnic groups in Sri Lanka: Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. Sinhalese form about three quarters of the population, speak the Sinhala language, and are largely Buddhist (though about 7% are Christian, predominantly Roman Catholic). Tamils form slightly less than a fifth of the population, speak the Tamil language, and are largely Hindu (though about 20% are Christian, half Roman Catholic and half Protestant). Among Tamils, a distinction is made between Sri Lankan Tamils, whose ancestors settled in Sri Lanka many centuries ago, and Indian Tamils, who came to the island in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to work on the British coffee, tea, and rubber plantations. Muslims form about 7% of the population, speak Tamil and often also Sinhala, and are Muslim by religion. Apart from these, there is a range of tiny ethnic groups: Veddas, who are considered the aboriginal population of Sri Lanka in common discourse, Burghers and Malays (whom I mentioned earlier), and a number of South Asian trading communities.

¹ The Malays are a small community of descendants from troops and exiled royalty brought by the Dutch and British colonial administrators from what is now known as Malaysia and Indonesia

² Multiculturalism runs wide and deep in her family. I have Tamil, Sinhala, Muslim, Malay, Indian and Nepali in-laws, who speak all sorts of languages (most are bi- or trilingual), and have all sorts of religions: Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian (both Protestant and Roman Catholic).

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In line with what people like Thomas Hylland Eriksen have written, I see ethnicity as an “emic category of ascription” (2002: 12), rather than as an in-born part of a person’s identity. This means that ethnic identities are continuously developed and reaffirmed by ordinary people in their day-to-day life, as much as this is done by external sources like politicians, the media, religious leaders, academics. Ethnicity is a constructed set of claims to essential and unique qualities, separating those belonging to that ethnicity from the rest of the world (*idem*: 10). This separation is given shape by (1) the name of the group, (2) a belief in common ancestry, (3) a belief in shared historical experiences, (4) a shared culture – which may include elements of “language, religion, laws, customs, institutions, dress, music, crafts, architecture, even food”, (5) a territorial attachment, and (6) a self-perception among the members of being a group (Brown 2001: 210). However, the process of developing a story of ethnic purity involves the necessary ambiguity. The example of Vijaya, the founding father of the Sinhalese according to their myth of origin, is instructive. According to the myth, Vijaya originated from somewhere around Orissa in East India. Due to his unruly character, he was banned from his father’s palace, and ended up in Sri Lanka, where he took two wives. His first wife was a demoness from the island, and her descendants are claimed to have become the Veddas. His second wife, whose descendants are claimed to have become the Sinhalese, was a Tamil princess from Madurai in South India³. On top of that, as Steven Kemper (1991) has documented, large groups of Sinhalese have no ancestral link with Vijaya whatsoever. Most of the castes present along the south-western fringe of the country settled there in the course of the last millennium, originate from the regions that are now known as Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and some groups spoke Tamil until well into the 20th century⁴.

The ambiguity goes beyond origin stories: where cultural practices (except for religious expressions) are concerned, Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims are very similar. Between Sinhalese and Tamils, language is a clear differentiating element. As I have shown above, both groups have origins in South-East India, and neither can make any serious claim to aboriginality. In Sinhala nationalist discourse, the Buddhist religion is often invoked as a distinctive element, but there are also

³ This sort of post-mortal allocation of an ethnic identity to a ‘founding father’ is by no means unique. To give a Dutch example: William of Orange, the Dutch ‘father of the fatherland’, was a German prince who ruled over a fiefdom in France, and grew up at the court of the Spanish king... which was located in Belgium. For any serious Dutch ethno-nationalist the national anthem must be a horror, with lines like ‘William of Orange / Am I of German blood’ and ‘The king of Spain / I have always honoured’.

⁴ I encountered a contemporary example of extreme ethnic ambiguity in Kottiyar Pattu. One man whom I interviewed one day told me that his father was Malayali (from Kerala, in South India), and his mother was Sinhala. When I asked him what his own ethnic identity was, he told me – without a trace of confusion – that he was Tamil.

substantial minorities of Christians among both Sinhalese and Tamils. Besides, Buddhists and Hindus alike worship Hindu gods, and a lot of Hindus do have respect for the Buddha. Muslims distinguish themselves from Sinhalese and Tamils by religion. With exception of a fairly recent territorial discourse laying claim to the south-eastern region of Sri Lanka, territory was never a topic; neither was language, since Muslims speak either Tamil or Sinhala as their mother tongue, and many are bilingual. While some Muslims claim Arab or Indian ancestry, the initial growth of the community was due to intermarriage with (particularly Tamil) wives, who subsequently converted to Islam.

While every person obtains an ethnic classification at birth (depending on the ethnic identity of his or her parents), a person's having of an ethnic identity depends on ascription by those around him- or herself, as much as on self-ascription. Importantly however, one can generally have only one ethnic identity at any given time. This in turn makes it relatively easy for me to operationalise the concept of ethnicity in my research. I use ethnicity as consisting of a limited repertoire of classifications (Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim⁵), from which people are given one at birth (generally the ethnic classification that applies to their father), and which in most cases they retain and confirm as they grow up, though it is possible to take on another ethnic identification.

1.1.2 The rise of violent conflict in Sri Lanka

What is often called the 'ethnic conflict' in Sri Lanka can be benchmarked as having started with a militant attack and subsequent widespread rioting in July 1983, and ended with the annihilation of the leadership of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in May 2009. The conflict has discursive and mythical roots in ancient Buddhist chronicles that at times, though definitely not always, portray 'Damilas' (Tamils) as enemies of Sinhalese Buddhists. Its direct roots lie however in the ethnic bias that entered Sri Lanka's nationbuilding practice in the run-up to independence. When, in preparation for independence, the British colonial government introduced universal suffrage, politics (which until then had been the preserve of a small elite) became dependent on large numbers of votes. Where earlier the main ethnic groups had had equal representation, group size suddenly became directly linked to access to power: this was a threat for over-represented minority groups, and an opportunity for the under-represented Sinhalese. Apart from this, particularly Tamils (who had access to good missionary schools in Jaffna, while Sinhalese had not wanted such schools and thus had much less access to English education) were

⁵ Other ethnicities like Vedda, Malay and Burgher are hardly found in Kottiyar Pattu. Parallel to the process that Jon Dart has described for Vakaraï (Dart 1985), Veddas and Burghers in Kottiyar Pattu have by and large become identified as Tamils, and Malays as Muslims.

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heavily represented in the civil service and the professions. Attempts at achieving a more proportional representation of Sinhalese in the civil service and the professions were easily construed as being anti-Tamil in intent by Sinhala and Tamil ethno-nationalists alike.

While this was still largely a problem of elites vying for a share of power, a landmark change happened in 1956. After a hotly contested election, the newly elected S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike made Sinhala the official language of the country overnight, without leaving adequate room for the Tamil language. Suddenly, the impact of Sinhala nationalism (fired up by the fact that 1956 was also the year in which Buddhists celebrated 2,500 years since the enlightenment of the Buddha) was felt in the everyday lives of non-Sinhalese in the country. This was underscored by riots in 1956 and 1958 which were distinctly anti-Tamil in nature. While a large part of the (English-speaking) Burgher community left to Australia and the United Kingdom after the adoption of the 'Sinhala Only' law, Tamils responded with their own version of ethnonationalism and a long campaign of nonviolent protests that were suppressed increasingly harshly and counterproductively. The longer the protests and their suppression lasted, the stronger the support for Tamil nationalist discourse became. In this discourse, adequate representation at the national level was one topic; the safeguarding of a 'Tamil homeland' was another. This second point had become an issue after the availability of funding and technology (particularly the introduction of anti-malaria spraying just after World War II) made the rehabilitation of ancient irrigation infrastructure in the malaria-infested plains of the North and East possible from the 1930s onwards. Sri Lankan leaders framed this as a reclaiming of the old Sinhala kingdoms (Senanayake 1985 [1935]), and began settling Sinhalese from the densely populated South and West of the country in the newly developed areas (among which was Kottiyar Pattu). Sparsely inhabited though these areas may have been, they had been predominantly inhabited by Tamil-speaking people for centuries. Tamil nationalists thus saw the redevelopment of what is known as the 'Dry Zone' as a deliberate attempt by the state to undermine Tamil claims to territory.

Though Sri Lanka's economy stagnated soon after independence was attained in 1948, other developments did generate significant changes. By the late 1960s, educational institutions had spread across the country. The post-independence and post-malaria babyboom generation graduated from secondary school *en masse*, only to find that there were not enough jobs for them. In synchrony with other socialist and communist youth protests across the world, many of which were partially about jobs for the new generation, the originally maoist (and largely Sinhala) Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP, or People's Liberation Front) staged an uprising against the state in 1971. The uprising failed, and the JVP was ruthlessly hunted down; estimates of the numbers killed vary between 12,000 and 20,000 (Senaratne 1997). In the same year, Bangladesh successfully waged a war for independence from Pakistan, which strengthened Tamil nationalists in their conviction that they had the

right to determine their own fate. When, a year later, an overtly Sinhala and Buddhist constitution was adopted, Tamil youth in the north of the country decided that the nonviolent protests that had been staged thus far had not brought enough improvement, and formed the first of many Tamil militant groups. In 1976 the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), a Tamil nationalist coalition of political parties, adopted what became known as the 'Vaddukottai Declaration', which advocated the establishment of a separate state of Tamil Eelam. This declaration further reinforced the militant mood among a section of Tamil youth. Over time, the militancy gathered strength, particularly after catastrophic anti-Tamil riots in July 1983 that had widespread support from government officials. What began with assassinations, bank robberies and ambushes of police and military personnel soon escalated into an orgy of massacres, counter-massacres and terrorist attacks, and then 'graduated' into full-scale warfare.

Neither the government nor the Tamil militants (among whom the LTTE had become the dominant group by 1987) were capable of sustaining intense conflict for very long. In 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2002, cease-fires were called during which peace talks were held and both sides prepared for a next round of fighting. In 1987, the Indian government intervened by sending the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to patrol the North-East, forcing the Sri Lankan military to stay in their barracks, and pushing a programme of devolution of powers to the provincial level down the throat of the Sri Lankan government. In response, the revitalised JVP launched a second anti-state uprising in the south of the country that was to last for three years and cause the deaths of about 60,000 people (Senaratne 1997). While the state took on the JVP, the LTTE took on the IPKF (with, bizarrely enough, state support), and by early 1990 the IPKF was forced to abandon its mission. A brief ceasefire between the government and the LTTE in 1990 ended with an orgy of violence; the same thing happened on a smaller scale after a ceasefire in 1995. In 2002, amidst an economic crisis that badly hit the Sri Lankan government and the post-9/11 tightening of the noose on the LTTE's international funding channels, a new ceasefire was declared that formally held until early 2008, but had in fact already been scrapped by mid-2006 when the Sri Lankan armed forces launched a massive offensive to recapture LTTE-controlled territory, starting from Kottiyar Pattu. By mid-2007 the LTTE, which had been weakened by the defection of a large faction from the Eastern Province in 2004, was routed from the east. The war ended in May 2009 with the annihilation of the LTTE (including its entire senior leadership) in the north of Sri Lanka. Though the war has ended, peace is still elusive as the arrogance of the victors determines the current political agenda, rather than a genuine desire to find a political solution for valid grievances over language, education, land and political power that have fuelled the conflict right throughout.

As far as casualty figures are concerned, the estimate that was commonly in use in 2007 and early 2008 was in the range of 70,000, half of whom were civilians. Nobody knows how many people died in the last five months of fighting. The British newspaper 'the Times', basing itself on an internal estimate by UN staff, claimed that there were about 20,000 civilian casualties, mostly by artillery fire from the Sri Lankan Army. The Sri Lankan government denied this and the only civilians who

had died were killed by the LTTE while they were trying to escape the fighting ('The hidden massacre: Sri Lanka's final offensive against Tamil Tigers', *Times*, 29-05-2009). UTHR(J), based on a detailed analysis of available information, puts the number of civilian casualties as high as 40,000 (2009b: 115).

Apart from those who died in the years of conflict, there are thousands who disappeared without a trace, and thousands who were physically or mentally scarred for life. Virtually every person in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka has been displaced (many more than once); over half of the houses have been damaged, looted or destroyed at some point during the conflict; and hundreds of thousands of Tamils have permanently left the country to find new lives in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and a range of other European countries, India and Malaysia.

While the conflict has always been ethnicised in the sense that it was ethnic in its representation, I would be reluctant to call the Sri Lankan conflict an ethnic conflict. It is undeniable that many people have been targeted for harassment and violence simply because of their ethnic identity, but (with possible exception of a number of cases in the early 1980s) those who perpetrated the violence were not random mobs. By and large, the perpetrators of violence were soldiers, paramilitaries, militants or mobs that were deliberately organised by people with vested interests. So while the conflict can be represented as ethnic, it can equally be represented as a conflict between the state and separatist groups, or as a conflict over access to resources between a politico-economic core (centered in Colombo) and its periphery (Frerks and Klem 2004; Goodhand and Klem 2005).

1.1.3 Kottiyar Pattu

Home to about 90,000 people of mostly Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim origin, the region that is known to its inhabitants as Kottiyar Pattu covers the divisions of Muthur, Seruwila and Eechchilampattu in the southern part of Trincomalee District (maps 1.2 and 1.3). Kottiyar Pattu is bounded by sea on the north and east and by two arms of the Mahaweli River on the south and west. It consists of a central plain of paddy fields irrigated by the Allai Extension Scheme (AES), surrounded on three sides by a fringe of shrub jungle, interspersed with villages, small irrigation tanks, and a few lagoons. The northern edge of the plain is punctuated by the town of Muthur, which functions as a business centre (together with the small towns of Thoppur and Serunuwara that are located in the middle of Kottiyar Pattu). Apart from agriculture, fishing is a key source of livelihoods in the coastal settlements.

Centuries-old remains of earlier greatness as well as its more recent colonial and post-colonial history tell a story of a frontier region, oscillating between strategic investment and utter neglect. As a consequence of this fluctuating existence on the fringe of Sri Lanka, different population groups have moved into and out of the area; all current inhabitants are immigrants whose ancestors settled within the last millennium (see chapter 2).



Administrative Map
DS Divisions

DISTRICT: Trincomalee



Legend

- Town
- ▬ Main Road
- ▬ Secondary Road
- ▭ DS Division
- ▭ District

Notes

This road data is from the Survey Department. Some roads originally classified as tracks are shown here as secondary roads due to their local importance and frequent usage by the local community.

Data source:

Survey Department, Govt. of Sri Lanka

Updated as at:	20-02-2006
Produced on:	20-02-2006
Projection / Datum	Transverse Mercator
GLIDE number	TS 2004-0001470LKA
Admin boundaries	Survey Department, Govt. of Sri Lanka

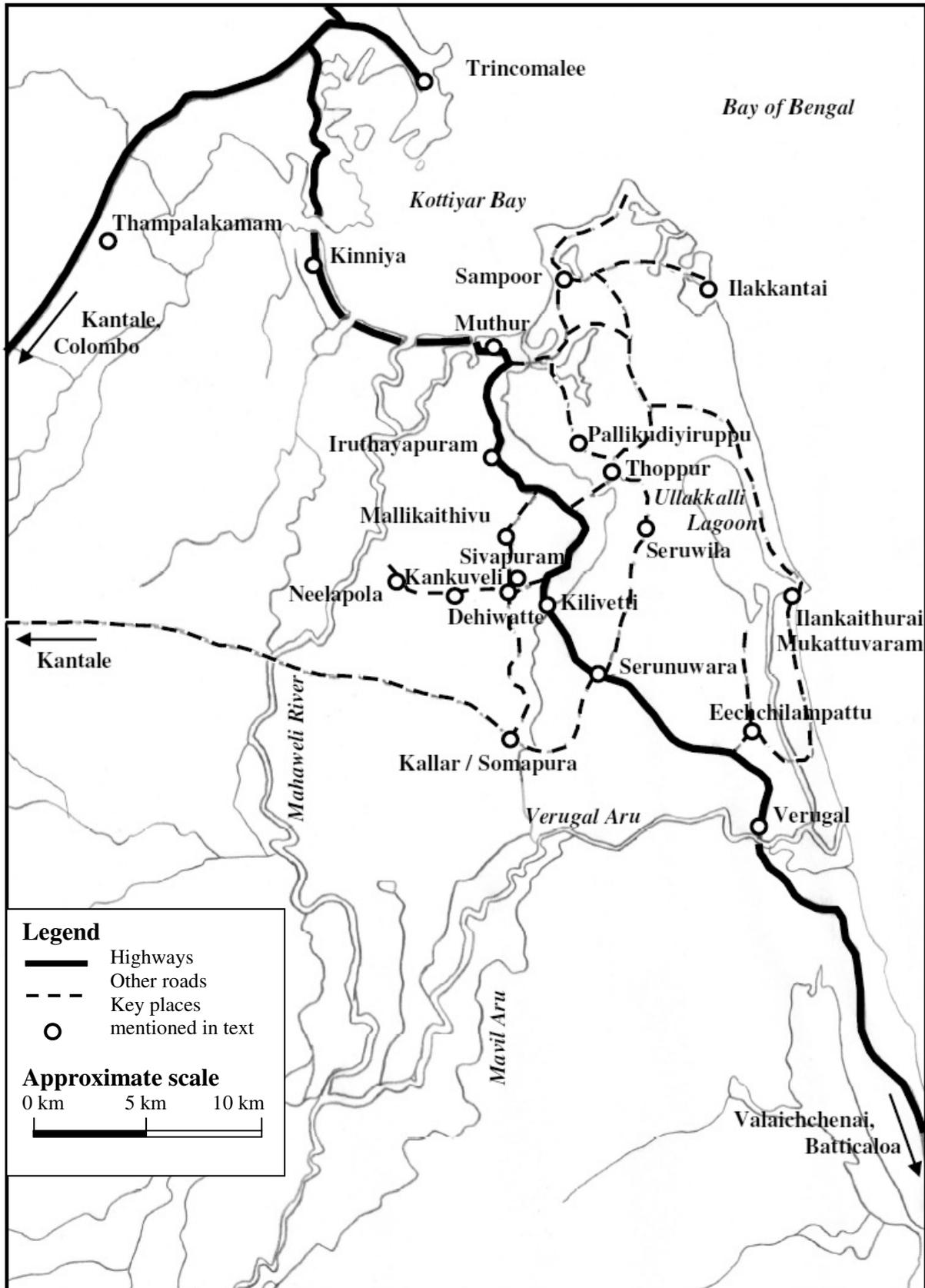
Map Number: HIG/UTRN/ADMIN/0011/2
This map is designed for printing on A0 size
The boundaries, names and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.



Produced through the generous support of:



Map 1.2. Trincomalee District, with Kottiyar Pattu demarcated by dotted line (source: UN-HIC 2006b)



Map 1.3. Sketch map of Kottiyar Pattu

Kottiyar Pattu forms a complex social arena. Apart from ethnicity, social life is structured by a range of other, intersecting realities: (among others) caste, class, employment, religion, gender, age, length of stay, political affiliation and – until recently – military frontlines (see chapter 3).

The area has had more than its fair share of violence since the early 1980s: about 5% of the pre-war population has been killed, over half of the houses have been destroyed at least once, and almost everybody has had to flee his or her village two or three times (see chapter 4).

It was in this context that one day I noticed something interesting when I visited the village of Sivapuram, in the heart of Kottiyar Pattu.

1.1.4 A surprise observation in Sivapuram

Sivapuram was established in the 1950s as a farmers' colony in the Allai Extension Scheme, which provides some 7,000 hectares of prime paddy land with year-round irrigation. It is home to about 80 Tamil families, who live in small houses along the village's single main road and two side-lanes. There is one small temple for Pillaiyar, the Hindu 'God of Beginnings', and (since 2002) a pre-school and a community hall, but not a single shop. Most of the families belong to two matrilineal castes of the high-status Velalar (cultivator) caste. They mostly originate from the ancient Velalar village of Sampoor, but there are historical family ties with the ancient Velalar villages of Kilivetti, Kankuveli and Menkamam. A few families belong to service castes: potters, washermen, barbers; they live(d) on the fringes of village society.

Sivapuram is bordered by two villages: the ancient Tamil village of Menkamam to the north-east, and the Sinhala colony of Dehiwatte to the south-west. The Menkamam tank, a largely defunct small irrigation reservoir, bounds the village to the north-west. Although there are family links between Menkamam and Sivapuram, some farmers from Menkamam resent the fact that Sivapuram and all the other new colonies ate up all the available arable land. This led to a sharp reduction in average land holding sizes as the population grew, and in turn has led to landlessness and out-migration of some of the youth.

When I visited Sivapuram for the first time in May 2000, relationships with the people in Dehiwatte were tense. In June 1985, Sivapuram and every other Tamil village within walking distance from the Sinhala colonies in the area had been burned to the ground in an orgy of violence that was repeated on a smaller scale in 1987 and 1990. A string of massacres of Tamil civilians in the area and the ever-present threat of harassment or arrest by the security forces made most people very cautious. Farming was a difficult affair because the army did not allow Tamils to buy urea (which could be used for making bombs), and every visit to the market involved negotiating a range of checkpoints. At the same time, several dozen inhabitants of Dehiwatte had been killed by Tamil militant groups since 1985, the Sinhala farmers were routinely 'taxed' by the militants, and the people of Dehiwatte suspected that the militants received support from Tamil villagers.

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Because the Sinhala farmers had better access to farming inputs and had access to reasonably well-paid jobs as home guards, they were generally better off economically than their Tamil neighbours, but from about the mid-1980s landlessness was becoming an issue. Among Tamils and Sinhalese alike, there were many frustrations about the lack of available options.

Even though, economically speaking, Sivapuram was better off than some of the other Tamil villages in the area, the pervasive atmosphere of despair (underlined by rampant alcoholism and a high number of suicides) was the reason that it was selected for a psychosocial pilot project by ZOA Refugee Care, the humanitarian NGO that I was working with at the time. The staff attached to the project wanted to look at addressing sources of stress in the widest sense of the word. Therefore, when villagers listed near-annual flooding as an important problem, the issue was included in the project⁶. Since I had been trained in irrigation engineering and had some experience in the field, I was asked in to look for possible solutions.

During one of my visits to Sivapuram, I asked a colleague who worked there if she knew of any research literature on the area, because I wanted to learn more about the context. She gave me a paper produced by a German-funded development project (Devarajah *et al.* 2001), that describes a conflict between Dehiwatte and Menkamam over the Menkamam tank. Sinhala settlers had encroached on the land inside the reservoir, and had broken the tank bund to prevent their fields from flooding. This in turn deprived paddy fields cultivated by Tamil farmers from Menkamam of irrigation water, triggering a stand-off that had been going on for decades⁷. As I re-read the paper a while later, it suddenly struck me that *despite the strongly “ethnicised” conflict that had visibly caused a lot of damage in the area (idem: 5), Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim farmers were still sharing sharing irrigation water from the Allai Extension Scheme*. The paper even contained hints of active cooperation across ethnic lines (which received no attention in the analysis section): Sinhalese farmers employing Tamil farm labourers on outlying fields, and Tamil cattle owners sending their milk out of the area through Sinhalese milk collectors (*idem: 11, 13*). This triggered my curiosity: a research project was born.

⁶ The village got flooded because a reservation area for a natural drain along the edge of the village had been encroached upon and turned into paddy fields, thus blocking the flow of the water. Even after I made a design for a drainage channel, it took a further two years before it was constructed because one of the encroachers, a man who was known as a sorcerer, refused to give up part of his field, and the villagers were afraid of magical retribution.

⁷ This paper documents part of the fieldwork that was used by Benedikt Korf for his PhD research on property rights and the political economy of war in Sri Lanka, focusing on Trincomalee District. Korf presents an insightful game-theoretical analysis of this conflict in his dissertation (2004: 115-144). I return to this case in section 6.6.1.

1.1.5 Structure of the chapter

The rest of this chapter consists of four parts. Section 1.2 elaborates on the research design: the objective of the research, the research questions, my own positionality, and a chronology of the research. This is followed in section 1.3 by a discussion of four inter-related conceptual lenses that I looked through when looking at everyday inter-ethnic interaction: violence and everyday normalcy; intersecting social realities; agency, subversion and tactics; and arenas as intermediary interactional settings. The methodology is discussed in section 1.4, and in section 1.5 the overall structure of the book is presented.

1.2 Research design

1.2.1 Research objective and research questions

The initial focus of my research was on understanding how farmers of different ethnic backgrounds and irrigation department staff had been able to keep the AES functioning to a reasonable extent despite the context of ethnicised conflict and ethnic “unmixing” (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004: 46). While this has remained a topic of interest for my research, I came to realise that in order to understand the functioning of the AES, I needed to understand an underlying issue: *everyday inter-ethnic interaction in a context of violent ethnicised conflict*. Bookshelves full have been written about Sri Lanka’s conflict, about its history, about its post-colonial development, and about a range of topics of sociological and anthropological interest. Most is however focused on the entire country or, in the case of much research on irrigation-related topics, ignores ethnicity altogether. Locally grounded ethnographic research generally studied ethnically defined communities in isolation or in parallel, and not in integration. A notable exception is Dennis McGilvray’s work on Muslims and Tamils in the region around Akkaraipattu, in the east of Sri Lanka (McGilvray 2003 and 2008). However, even McGilvray has primarily focused on historical links and structural parallels between the communities rather than on everyday interaction between Muslims and Tamils. Nur Yalman’s work on the mixed Sinhala-Tamil village of Panama, not far south from Akkaraipattu (Yalman 1971), is another exception, but his research predated the conflict and focused on an exceptional (and already disintegrating) community that had formed a distinct hybrid between both ethnic identities.

In the literature on Sri Lanka, there are quite a number of hints about the existence of everyday inter-ethnic interaction and (rather idyllic) claims about past or even present (but very localised) harmonies⁸. There are also detailed studies of the sharing

⁸ See for example Rajasingham-Senanayake 2001a, 2001b and 2004; Montani 1999; Dewaraja 1994; Kottegoda 2004; Niriella 2005; Silva 2004; Fuglerud 2003; Schrijvers 1998, and Skinner 2005.

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of gods and the appropriation and ethnic purification of the worship of these gods by Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus (Obeyesekere 1984; Goonasekara 2007). Nevertheless, I found there to be a near total lack of detailed analysis of the how, when and why of what Laura Ring calls “the micromechanics of coexistence” and “the day-to-day poetics of intergroup cooperation” (2006: 3). This therefore became the focus of my own research. In my work, I prefer to use the term ‘interaction’ as a middle way between ‘coexistence’ (which merely assumes people sharing the same space irrespective of whether or not they interact with each other) and ‘intergroup cooperation’ (which implies (a) that the interaction is between groups of people, thus excluding interaction between individuals, and (b) that there is always something to cooperate about, thus excluding interaction for no other reason than the interaction itself, like a chat between friends or lovers).

As my research has been highly exploratory in nature, its objective is rather broad: *to come to an understanding of everyday inter-ethnic interaction in a context of violent ethnicised conflict, its implications for the everyday lives of those living with conflict, and its implications for peace-building interventions.*

The main research question is therefore *how can everyday inter-ethnic interaction in a context of violent ethnicised conflict be understood, and what are its consequences for people’s everyday lives and for peace-building interventions?*

To be able to answer the main research question, a range of underlying questions needs to be answered:

How is everyday life in Kottiyar Pattu shaped by history, geography, social complexity and violence?

Who engages in everyday forms of inter-ethnic interaction?

How do people shape everyday inter-ethnic interaction?

Why do people engage in everyday inter-ethnic interaction?

What are the implications of inter-ethnic interaction in a context of violent conflict for people’s everyday lives?

In order to answer these questions, I have studied three cases of everyday inter-ethnic interaction. The first case, already presented, deals with inter-ethnic interaction relating to irrigated paddy cultivation, which is the primary source of income for the majority of Kottiyar Pattu’s population. Irrespective of the conflict, people need to manage resources (of land, water, labour and money) for cultivating paddy and making a living. Apart from the questions mentioned above, a specific question that comes up in this case is:

How was it possible that the Allai Extension Scheme continued functioning to a reasonable extent during over two decades of violent ethnicised conflict, despite the fact that the scheme is shared by Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim farmers?

Where in the first case violence and tension are threats that are always there but generally in the background, the second case focuses on periods of acute tension and violence: riots and almost-riots. Additional questions that come up in this case are:

What happens to inter-ethnic interaction under acute tension and violence?

To what extent and how does inter-ethnic interaction have a mitigating influence on acute tension and violence?

The last case deals with the most intimate form of inter-ethnic interaction: inter-ethnic marriages. Where co-operation over resources and acts of goodwill in times of acute crisis can to some extent be kept distant from the self, the deliberate choice to marry someone from outside the own group brings the ethnic boundary within the threshold of the home, and renders its crossing permanent. Additional questions that come up in this case are:

How have mixed-ethnic couples managed to live as a mixed couple in a context of ethnicised violent conflict?

To what extent do mixed couples, positioned as they are between two ethnic communities, perform a bridging function, especially given the violent context?

A secondary objective of this research is to fill in a white spot on the ethnographic map of Sri Lanka. So far, no in-depth ethnographic description exists of Kottiyar Pattu in the English language. In order to fill this gap, I have (particularly in chapters 2-4) provided more detail than strictly necessary for meeting the primary objective of this research.

1.2.2 Research chronology

The research started officially in September 2003, though I had regularly visited Kottiyar Pattu since May 2000. The first year was spent reading whatever literature I could find, getting familiar with Trincomalee District, and making the odd exploratory visit to Kottiyar Pattu. My fieldwork started in earnest in September 2004. Over the next 20 months (up to April 2006), I spent about two thirds of my research time in Kottiyar Pattu.

The 2004 Boxing Day tsunami and its aftermath interrupted my fieldwork for two months because I got involved in emergency response (Gaasbeek 2010). A further disruption was caused by a period of Muslim-Tamil tensions in December 2005 and January 2006 that made it impossible to conduct fieldwork. During these periods, I did spend about half of my time in Trincomalee, and continued to learn about Kottiyar Pattu. From late April to September 2006, violence in Kottiyar Pattu escalated to such levels that I was not able to visit the area at all. Although it was virtually impossible to visit Kottiyar Pattu during this period, it was possible to gather a lot of information through conversations with friends, colleagues and

acquaintances in Trincomalee town⁹. In August 2006, virtually the entire population of Kottiyar Pattu fled to safer areas. A week of direct involvement in ZOA's emergency response operations meant that I was able to visit people in their sites of displacement, and – albeit briefly – speak with a number of people about their experiences. From September 2006 until July 2007 I spent about one week every other month in Kottiyar Pattu because the security situation was still unstable; from then until October 2008 I focused on analysis of secondary sources and writing, and only visited the area once in a way to investigate specific issues that came up while writing. After I left the country, my research assistant conducted a final series of interviews in Kottiyar Pattu in August 2009.

Throughout the time that it took to complete the field research, I have worked about one third of my time as free-lance consultant with ZOA and various other humanitarian agencies in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Liberia, Ethiopia and India. Some of these consultancy missions were about conflict, others about irrigation and water management, and yet others were about the tsunami. While this took time away from the fieldwork, it also provided many moments of inspiration and broadening of insight. Particularly three consultancy missions to tsunami-affected villages in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry were enriching, because they offered me the opportunity to learn about Tamil culture in India, to buy piles of useful books, and to visit the Brihadeeswara Temple in the former Chola capital of Thanjavur, which contains the only known inscription in India that mentions Kottiyar Pattu. About a third of the work that I did in Sri Lanka was in Trincomalee (both with ZOA and with other agencies), and this enabled me to get to know more people, gather further knowledge about Trincomalee District and its people, and look at the district from a range of different perspectives.

1.2.3 My own positionality

No research is independent of the researcher. It is therefore important to elaborate a little bit on my own positionality. My study background is in irrigation engineering, which at Wageningen University is taught with deep attention to its interdisciplinary context. Together with a pre-existing fascination with ethnography, this focus on the importance of contextual embeddedness has clearly shaped my current research. In the meantime, four years of intensive involvement in university politics taught me about the crucial importance of individual agency within a context of (institutional) structures.

When I began my research, Sri Lanka and its conflict were not new to me. Right after I graduated from university, I found a job with ZOA Refugee Care, a humanitarian NGO that works with conflict-affected people. This took me first to Cambodia and

⁹ Between April and December 2006, I replaced ZOA's Programme Manager in Trincomalee for about a week per month so that she could take a break from the very tense situation that she was working in. This meant that I had ample opportunity for participative observation in the humanitarian scene of Trincomalee.

then to Sri Lanka, where I spent a little over eight years. In Sri Lanka, I was originally based in Batticaloa, but – particularly from February 2002 onwards – I spent extensive amounts of time all over the conflict zone in the north and east of the country, as well as in Colombo. I also knew Kottiyar Pattu: it was the first part of the conflict zone that I saw when, on my way back from Cambodia to the Netherlands in May 2000, I stopped over in Sri Lanka for three days to see if I would be interested in working there. In December 2000, I was asked to be in charge of ZOA's emergency response operations after a cyclone had hit Trincomalee District, and I spent ten intense days criss-crossing the area. Then, over the course of 2001 and 2002, came the visits to look at Sivapuram's drainage problem that triggered this research.

My wife forms a further element in my positionality. She is Sri Lankan, and in the "day-to-day poetics" of being married to her (and thus, by happy extension, to my in-laws!) I have learnt a great deal about the country and its people. Her professional involvement in first the psychosocial field, and then the field of peacebuilding and reconciliation, has been a source of great inspiration, long discussions, and contacts with others in the same fields.

1.3 Conceptual framework

In order to get a grip on everyday inter-ethnic interaction in a context of violent conflict, I have taken a social constructionist perspective, looking at how people "engage with and thus co-produce their own (inter)personal and collective social worlds" (Long 2001: 3). As my research was exploratory in nature, I did not set out with a preconceived conceptual framework. Rather, as I was doing my research and reflected on my findings, four conceptual lenses emerged through which I could look at my findings. The first of these looks at violence and everyday normalcy as interlinked realities. Interethnic interaction in a context of violence is a form of everyday life that continues in, and is shaped by, the context of conflict. Both everyday normalcy and violence occur at the same time, and neither can be understood without looking at the other or by only foregrounding one of them. The second lens looks at identities, and views people's identities as composed of a wide range of intersecting social realities apart from ethnicity. Inter-ethnic interaction cannot be understood by looking only at ethnicity; other social realities also need to be considered when studying it. The third lens is closely linked to my social constructionist perspective, and views inter-ethnic interaction as expressing agency to the degree of even subverting prevailing hegemonic ethnicised discourse. Even though the context of violence and ethnicised conflict in which people live is extremely constraining, inter-ethnic interaction indicates that people are not entirely determined by their contexts, and remain capable of engaging with what happens around them. Thus violence and normalcy can co-occur, and thus people continuously shift and move between a wide range of social realities. The last lens looks at the setting in which interaction takes place as an arena. This notion helps in placing interethnic interaction in more specific contexts that incorporate forms of both contestation and cooperation. In what follows, I describe each of these conceptual lenses in more detail.

1.3.1 Violence and everyday normalcy

It is impossible to look at everyday inter-ethnic interaction in Kottiyar Pattu without taking into account the agony and suffering that the inhabitants have gone through over the past decades of ethnicised violence. This violence was a radical break with the past: records confirm that at least in the 100 years before the war broke out, Kottiyar Pattu was largely free of communal violence. As I show in chapter 4, the initial violence in Kottiyar Pattu was organised by external actors (the state and Tamil militants).

After a number of massacres of Sinhala settlers about 70 km north of Kottiyar Pattu by Tamil militants in late 1984, the government distributed weapons to Sinhala farmers in settlement areas all over the North and East of Sri Lanka, including the Allai Extension Scheme. Following another massacre, in which over a hundred Sinhala pilgrims were killed at one of Sri Lanka's holiest Buddhist sites, an orgy of violence was orchestrated in Kottiyar Pattu that culminated in the destruction of every single village within walking distance from a Sinhala village by a mob comprised of soldiers from outside and local villagers. Suddenly the violence became intimate, and for some people revenge became a motive for further violence: local dynamics of violence evolved that became to some extent self-sustaining. Under the influence of violence and omnipresent ethno-nationalist propaganda, local disagreements were increasingly rephrased in ethnic terms (Korf 2004).

Although actual violence was mostly concentrated in comparatively brief and very intense periods, and the periods in between were considerably calmer, an atmosphere of fear and tension became pervasive. This is because the experience of violence incorporates much more than actual violence: it is a mixture of remembered past violence, intermittent actual violence, and the threat of potential future violence. Apart from that, the militarisation of public discourse and of the landscape (through round-ups, checkpoints and frontlines that required careful negotiation whenever encountered) made sure that the war was never far from people's minds.

Despite this pervasiveness however, a focus on violence by itself is not enough for understanding everyday life in Kottiyar Pattu. As Paul Richards has said, "[f]oregrounding war risks disabling precisely the strategies and tools of social organisation, culture and politics through which violence can be reduced and its adverse effects mitigated" (2005: 3). No matter how dominant the violence was in shaping life in Kottiyar Pattu, the violence has always been "one social project among many competing social projects" (*ibid.*). Throughout the decades of war, everyday life in Kottiyar Pattu has been about a lot more than just violence and survival. No matter how pervasive the violence and fear are, and no matter how constraining the environment is, life goes on relentlessly, and most of the time that means that food is cooked, shops and markets are open, couples get married, babies are born, spouses quarrel, people try to find an income, and children (at least in Sri Lanka) play cricket. These mundane acts together create a form of normalcy that makes it possible to live and stay more or less sane. How 'normal' this normalcy is,

is another question. For an outsider who has not experienced life in war or disaster, there is very little that is normal about people's everyday lives because the constraints of violence, fear and deprivation are overwhelming. What is important for me at this point is not this normative discussion, but the simple fact that people continue to do a wide range of things that they would anyway do, war or no war, and that they deliberately strive to do so (Hilhorst 2007)¹⁰. I contend that it is in normalcy that people find ways for "re-inventing peace" (Richards 2005: 5). In this dissertation, I look at how people maintain normalcy in three situations of inter-ethnic interaction: the normalcy of engaging in livelihoods, attempts to maintain normalcy when it is acutely threatened by violence, and the normalcy of family life. These three widely different situations were chosen pragmatically: they were the ones that came up when I looked around for different situations that could teach me about inter-ethnic interaction.

1.3.2 Intersecting social realities

The ambiguous co-occurrence of war and peace draws attention to another element of ambiguity and complexity in the way people's social life is organised. Even though discourses of ethnic separation dominate public life in much of Sri Lanka, there are other social realities as well. And just like the everyday realities of violent conflict can only be understood by looking at its social context, the everyday realities of ethnicity (and inter-ethnic interaction) can only be understood by looking at other social realities as well:

'There are a million possible Earths with a million possible histories, all of which actually exist simultaneously. In the course of one's daily life, one weaves a course between them, if you like, but that does not destroy the existence of pasts or futures we choose not to enter' (Rushdie 1996: 53)

Everyday life is "messy" (Gardiner 2000:16) and consists of "multiple realities" (Long 2001: 19). Nobody in Kottiyar Pattu is simply Tamil, Muslim or Sinhalese. Gender, caste, religion, class and a whole range of other categories of identification all are part of people's repertoires of social realities. People use these realities to "improvise and experiment with 'old' and 'new' elements and experiences, and react situationally and imaginatively, consciously or otherwise, to the circumstances they encounter" (Long 2001: 3). This ambiguity is important for understanding social

¹⁰ Note that I use the term 'normalcy' in a different meaning than Maček's use of the term 'normality' (2005). Maček focuses on how abnormal war realities are reworked as 'normal' by warring parties, states and other interested parties in their propaganda. What I call 'normalcy' refers to a wide range of elements of everyday life under peaceful circumstances that continue to exist, more or less similarly, under conditions of war.

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interaction. In their article on interethnic co-operation, Fearon and Laitin start with the useful premise that sustained co-operation is more likely if people know each other, see longer-term benefits to co-operation, and/or have reputations to uphold, and less likely in situations of anonymity¹¹:

“if you know nothing more than that the person facing you is a Serb, then you cannot condition your behaviour on how the person acted in the past, but only on the fact that the other person is a Serb. Moreover, ‘the Serb’ may have no individual reputation to worry about protecting in interactions with non-Serbs” (1996: 719).

Where I disagree with Fearon and Laitin is in their singular focus on the overlap between ethnic otherness and anonymity. Because of the limited size of the social arena that is Kottiyar Pattu, geographical proximity and the small population sizes of each ethnic group make inter-ethnic acquaintance a lot more likely than in the segregated cities that provided the empirical data for Fearon and Laitin’s article. Apart from that, non-ethnic group differences can be equally important sources of anonymity and animosity.

Fearon and Laitin are not alone in falling in the trap of declaring one category of identification dominant over other categories. In their overview article on the study of boundaries in the social sciences, Lamont and Molnár (2002) do give examples of researchers who explain intra-group differentiation by looking at other categories of identification than the one that defines the main group that is looked at (generally ethnicity or race). In all their examples however, the other categories of identification are treated as secondary, hierarchically ranked below the primary category. This way of presenting things obscures the fact that different categories of identification (ethnicity, class, gender etcetera) in social life *intersect* rather than have a hierarchical ranking (Sen 2006: xii-xiv)¹². The key to understanding social life in such a context is to understand the ways in which people manage the “multiplicity” of their identifications (Siebers 2004: 81, see also Maček 2005: 65). For this, it is a prerequisite

¹¹ This link between cooperation and acquaintance obviously does not mean that relations between known people are necessarily peaceful: spouses, relatives and friends may even fight more with each other than with strangers.

¹² The simplest way of graphically depicting such a situation would be a (multi-dimensional) Venn-diagram. To give an example: there are men and women among Tamils, just as there are men and women among Sinhalese and among Muslims. Similarly, there are children, youth and adults among all ethnic groups, and among both genders, though not necessarily in the same proportions. Some boundaries do overlap to a large extent: by and large, every person in Sri Lanka who is Muslim by ethnicity is Muslim by religion (though I know at least two people who are exceptions to this rule), and the vast majority of Sri Lankans who are Muslim by religion are also Muslim by ethnicity (but there are also Malay Muslims, and small numbers of Muslims belonging to other ethnic groups).

to find out which identifications people themselves use. Chapter 3 documents nine of the more prominent locally used identifications other than ethnicity that I came across during my fieldwork.

I contend that it is this intersection of boundaries that makes inter-ethnic interaction (and cross-boundary interaction in a broader sense) possible: in Kottiyar Pattu, people mostly interact positively across ethnic divides with other people whom they somehow relate to as 'in-group' members in some other category of identification (see also Lee and Gudykunst 2001: 375).

In a study on inter-ethnic interaction in post-war Bosnia that I came across as I was finalising this dissertation, Paula Pickering (2006) found that people who interact with each other across ethnic lines do so because they perceive a form of similarity in employment, a shared history of staying in a neighbourhood or mixed-ethnic family ties (which are mentioned but not analysed at all), or because the establishment of inter-ethnic links is seen as necessary for being able to live a normal life. She uses the notion of bridging social capital to explain what she observed. Social capital, "the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures" (*idem*: 80), comes in two forms: bridging social capital and bonding social capital. Bonding social capital refers to interaction between people who consider each other to be similar, while bridging social capital refers to interaction between people who consider each other to be different (see also Prakash and Selle 2004). If, however, categories of identification are not ranked hierarchically and definitions of similarity and otherness are variable, then the distinction between bridging and bonding social capital becomes highly ambiguous. A clear example of this can be found in Pickering's paper. While she focuses on ethnicity as a dominant category of identification, for many people in the two Bosnian cities that she studied, the divide between those who had been living in the towns before the war and newcomers from rural areas who moved in during or after the war seems to be an equally important source of distinction.

Another point that I will show is that a lot of inter-ethnic interaction in Kottiyar Pattu occurs between individual people, and not in networks. I have therefore avoided the use of the term social capital.

1.3.3 Agency, subversion and tactics

An important debate in the social sciences revolves around the question to what extent people can shape their own lives (agency), and to what extent people's lives are determined by physical, social, political, and economic factors outside their control (structure). The answer, quite obviously, lies somewhere in the middle: nobody is entirely free to do as he or she likes, and at the same time nobody is a mere dice in the hands of structure (Rapport and Overing 2004: 1-9). For understanding people, you need to understand the structural context they live in, as well as the way they play around within the room for manoeuvre that is open to them. Everyday inter-ethnic interaction is in itself an expression of agency, and to

understand it it is important to look at the actors who engage in it. At the same time, it can only be understood within the structural contexts of violence, social complexity, history and geography, which I describe in chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Given the oppressive context of violence and dominant discourses of ethnic separation, everyday inter-ethnic interaction is more than just an example of people's capacity to act: it has a subversive quality to it. In that perspective, valuable insights are offered by De Certeau's notion of "tactics": "clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline'" (De Certeau 1988: xiv-xv). This notion represents subversion not as an act of angry counter-oppression, but as an act of creativity and improvisation, an act of stretching up people's room for manoeuvre which is threatened by dominant and dominating manifestations of power.

1.3.4 Arenas as intermediary interactional settings

Any kind of social interaction takes place between specific (groups of) people in specific settings. For understanding interaction and interactional settings, the analogy with arenas is useful. Arenas are bounded sites of interaction, contestation and co-operation (Long 2001: 242)¹³, with actors on the centre stage, with an audience watching the actors, and placed within a wider context. For the actors, an arena is a source of power (or agency) and identity. Within the arena actors (re)interpret and (re)negotiate the way things are organised; what is outside the arena is however largely beyond the direct control of the actors. The intermediary nature of arenas is therefore important: they are not just self-contained contexts for interaction, but also sites where the external context is interpreted, given meaning, and reworked into the internal reality formed by the arena.

Some forms of interaction are public, while other forms of interaction are private in nature. The capacity to define how private or public a form of interaction is (to control who the audience on the seats of the arena is, so to say) is an important element of any interaction.

Arenas can have any shape or size; a meeting room or a family compound can be as much an arena as an entire country. This dissertation focuses on Kottiyar Pattu as such an arena, set within the wider contexts (or 'meta-arenas') of Trincomalee District, the war zone, and Sri Lanka as a whole. Interaction within Kottiyar Pattu is structured by its physical, social, economic, military and political situation. At the same time, the wider contexts have their undeniable influence and are mediated,

¹³ Note that I stretch up Long's concept of arena, which focuses on "contests" and "struggle", to include neutral and positive forms of negotiation, interaction and co-operation. While struggle is very real in many people's lives, there is also a lot of interaction that has little to do with struggle.

interpreted and negotiated in order for people to make sense of them within the specific setting of Kottiyar Pattu.

The case studies focus on arenas within Kottiyar Pattu. In chapter 6, I focus on the Allai Extension Scheme as an arena within which farmers, farmer representatives and government officials interact, contest and co-operate with regard to irrigated paddy cultivation. In so doing, I have taken a sociotechnical perspective: irrigation “is socially constructed, has social conditions of use, and has social effects” (Vincent 2001: 69). The first half of chapter 7 largely focuses on the area around Muthur town as an arena for Muslim-Tamil interaction during a riot; the second half of the chapter focuses on the area around the small town of Serunuwara as an arena for Tamil-Sinhala interaction. This chapter is informed by the wider literature on riots, their patterns and participants (Horowitz 2001; Varshney 2002; Brass 1998; Tambiah 1996; Scott 1985 and 1990; Kalyvas 2006). In chapter 8, the arena is more conceptual rather than geographical: here, I look at people’s (mixed) marriages as a setting for interethnic interaction. I base myself on a wide body of literature on mixed marriages, and compare findings from Kottiyar Pattu with patterns identified in this literature.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Research methods

From the start, this research has been an in-depth exploratory case study (Yin 1993). Everyday inter-ethnic interaction in a context of conflict was largely uncharted terrain, and so particularly the first years of my research were focused on capturing as much of the complexity of life in Kottiyar Pattu as possible. Paraphrasing the character Trinity in the movie ‘The Matrix’, “it was the question that drove me”, rather than a pre-set research plan. Though chaotic, this initial lack of structure proved invaluable for gaining in-depth understanding of what was going on in Kottiyar Pattu (and in Sri Lanka as a whole). As time wore on, more and more structure evolved in the research. Within the overall case study of Kottiyar Pattu, I selected three topical case studies: the functioning of the Allai Extension Scheme, inter-ethnic interaction during ‘everyday’ periods of acute violence, and inter-ethnic marriages.

In studying Kottiyar Pattu, I have used a variety of research methods. The core of my research has consisted of semi-structured interviews, unstructured conversations over endless cups of very sweet tea, and plain observation (Bernard 1988). Where possible, I have analysed texts and quantitative data to triangulate findings and to enrich the picture. I have *not* used structured interviews and questionnaires, other than for a survey of marriage practices that was carried out towards the end of my fieldwork. There were two reasons for this. Many of the topics that I raised were so personal that people would only talk about them in an informal setting, and surveys would not have yielded any valuable information. Apart from that, a wide range of

humanitarian NGOs was active in Kottiyar Pattu (particularly after the 2004 tsunami), and together they conducted surveys and assessments so often that many people knew exactly which answers to give and which kinds of interventions to ask for. In order to avoid unrealistic expectations, I have deliberately avoided anything that might even remotely identify me as someone preparing another rehabilitation project¹⁴. Whenever relevant issues came up however, I did pass these on to different agencies so that they could improve their programming.

An issue that I ran into when I started with my fieldwork is that using the technique of participative observation is not possible when studying a situation in the past, as I was doing in the early stages of my field research, when a ceasefire was in place. It is technically impossible to observe things that happened in the past in real-time. Another problem with historicity is that memories are complicated (Bernard *et al.* 1984), and narratives that are already coloured by discourses and ideology become re-coloured as new experiences come to pass, and as people forget things. I was forcefully confronted with this when in early 2007 I started talking with a number of people about the violence that hit Kottiyar Pattu in April 2003 (see chapter 7). In 2003, many Muslims and Tamils told me that the 'April violence' was the worst period of tension that hit Muthur during the entire history of the conflict with exception of the violence of 1990¹⁵. This was significant, because – in terms of numbers of casualties – there was not really that much to write home about. To my surprise however, the incidents were almost forgotten when I started re-inquiring about the incidents in 2007. When I asked people if they could tell me about what happened in April 2003, most people either started talking about periods of Muslim-Tamil tension in October 2001 and June 2002 or about the battle that had taken place in Muthur in August 2006. When people did recount the violence of April 2003, only very few were able to go into any amount of detail.

To some extent, 'the past caught up with me' when from late 2005 onwards violence increased and a new 'conflict phase' developed, giving me the opportunity to study a pre-conflict situation (or more accurately, an in-between-conflicts situation), an in-conflict situation and to some extent a post-conflict situation¹⁶ in the present tense.

¹⁴ A very effective additional measure to minimise the chances of being identified as an NGO staff member was the use of a motorbike rather than a car when moving around the research area. Apart from a few run-down passenger vans and a few government vehicles, the only passenger vehicles in the area are NGO vehicles, and expatriates are rarely seen moving around Kottiyar Pattu in anything other than airconditioned four-wheel drive vehicles. Being on a bike made it easier also to randomly stop along the road and chat with people.

¹⁵ The violence that raged in Kottiyar Pattu in 1985 was even worse than the violence of 1990, but did not affect Muthur town very much.

¹⁶ The situation in Kottiyar Pattu at the time that I ended my fieldwork – autumn 2008 – can be described as 'post-conflict' in the sense that the military offensive to capture those parts of Kottiyar Pattu that were controlled by the LTTE (as part of an offensive to recapture the entire Eastern Province) had been completed, open fighting had ended, and many of the

1.4.2 Data collection

In order to collect information, I have largely used what is euphemistically called the technique of 'snowball sampling': picking up leads wherever one comes across them, then interviewing people who are suggested as interesting, and so spreading out until the added value of further interviews becomes so comparatively small that it is more worthwhile to sit back, reflect, and see what other leads are interesting to follow. I would hardly call this serious sampling in the scientific sense, but it is definitely a valuable way of quickly gaining in-depth understanding of key issues. A key weakness of this sampling method is that the researcher runs the risk of getting stuck within one among several available discourses, because people tend to refer to others who follow similar lines of thinking. I have therefore combined 'snowball sampling' with random conversations with anyone I came across who was willing to talk. Most of these conversations were brief, but some suddenly opened up a new line of 'snowball inquiry', and sometimes the people whom I spoke to had so much that they wanted to share that we ended up spending hours talking.

1.4.3 Research assistants

Over the course of my fieldwork, I have worked with three research assistants: two Tamils and one Muslim; all were male. Two were living in Trincomalee town, and the third, while originating from the Eastern Province, is now based in Colombo (where he did a yeoman's service in translating Tamil documents and going through most of the newspaper clippings in the archive at the Nadesan Centre). All three were familiar with the district but (almost) new to Kottiyar Pattu, all three speak Tamil and English, and two also speak Sinhala. Apart from these three, my wife and a friend (who are both trilingual) have also occasionally acted as translators.

I have tried hard to find a Sinhala research assistant to prevent any ethnic bias in my research, but I was unable to find someone who was familiar with Trincomalee District, willing to work in Kottiyar Pattu, and sufficiently fluent in English. Some Sinhala texts were translated by an acquaintance of one of my research assistants.

Particularly during the latter part of my research when violence between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan military escalated again, having a Muslim research assistant made a big difference, because Sinhalese and Muslims visibly perceived him as being more neutral than my Tamil assistants.

civilians who were displaced had been allowed to resettle. However, this had not brought peace to the area. Many Tamil families who used to live in what had become the Sampoor High Security Zone remained displaced, occasional incidents of violence still took place, and particularly the Tamil population still lived in fear.

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In the Netherlands, my father conducted research at the National Archives, locating a range of relevant Dutch colonial reports and maps, and transcribing a number of these reports.

Apart from my research assistants, I have also been helped by Erik Dekker, an MSc student (Irrigation and Water Management) from Wageningen University, who conducted his thesis research on the Allai Extension Scheme under my co-supervision.

1.4.4 Gender bias in my data collection

As noted, all my research assistants were men. I have felt this to be a serious issue, because it complicated interviewing women and learning from their perspectives. In the rural areas of Sri Lanka, men and women live in largely separate worlds (see section 3.6), and it is generally not considered appropriate for women to speak elaborately with unknown men. Though I did end up having quite a few in-depth conversations with women (generally in a situation where either their husbands or more women were present), most of my conversations were with men. Even if I had had a female research assistant (which would have made interviews with women easier), it would have been highly culturally inappropriate for me to be riding around Kottiyar Pattu on a motorbike with a lady who is not my wife.

I have tried to reduce this gender bias in several ways. Once, I spent a weekend with my wife in Kottiyar Pattu, during which we conducted a long string of interviews, many of them with women. Also, my wife had female acquaintances from Kottiyar Pattu who visited us regularly when they came to Trincomalee or Colombo. During such visits, we often spoke about the area, and I learnt a lot from their observations. Some of these acquaintances are involved in a local NGO, and once in a way they asked me to help them with funding applications. Preparing these applications together provided excellent opportunities for learning about their perspectives on issues related to conflict and development in the area. Lastly, both my wife and myself had female colleagues from Trincomalee District with whom I was able to have elaborate conversations on things that went on in the district.

1.4.5 Doing research in a context of conflict

My fieldwork took place in a wider context where the 2002 cease-fire slowly disintegrated and where in 2006 open warfare resumed, starting in Kottiyar Pattu. This had several implications for my research.

First of all, quite a few people were reluctant to venture opinions on potentially sensitive issues, particularly if others were present. As many Sri Lankan friends have told me, it is generally uncommon for Sri Lankans to speak about personal feelings and opinions with strangers. The return to open violence made this worse as it became dangerous to let unknown others know what you think. You never knew when someone was going to use things against you, or even inadvertently say things

that others could use against you. Patricia Lawrence succinctly described this self-censorship when she said that a key to survival in Sri Lanka's conflict zones is "to know what not to know" (comment made at the South Asia Conference, Madison, October 2006). Combined with the presence of humanitarian agencies conducting countless surveys and assessments and the strategic 'wish-lists' that this generated (see section 1.4.1), this strengthened my conviction that to get to know anything serious about people's opinions, anything that reeks of formal data collection methods must be avoided. Rapport was essential, but what also helped was familiarity with the area, with the wider social, economic and political context of Sri Lanka, and with the Tamil (and to some extent Sinhala) languages that deepened over the eight years that I spent in the country. This familiarity made it possible to interpret more accurately what people did and did not say. I would have been unable to do this research if I had had only the 12 to 18 months of in-country presence that is common for much current PhD research.

The context of violence also had consequences for personal safety. Because violent incidents along the roads generally happened under the cloak of darkness, I generally avoided being outside the village or town where I spent the night after dusk and before about half past eight in the morning, by which time most roads had been cleared¹⁷. Exceptions to this were nights when there were large crowds on the road, particularly during temple festivals. Only very late in my field research did I realise that this did create a bias in my observations. I interviewed a lot of farmers, but I rarely saw them in the field outside land preparation and harvesting periods. That was because between land preparation and harvest, farmers mostly go to their fields during the cool parts of the day around dawn and dusk. When the security situation improved in the very last stages of my fieldwork, I have tried to counter this somewhat by going out early, having a break in between, and going out again in the evening.

During periods of open violence, the fieldwork was put on hold for safety reasons, but also because I did not want to bother people with my questions when they had other, much more urgent things on their mind. Instead, I focused my attention on interviews with relevant people in Trincomalee and on literature study in libraries and archives. Now and then, I did get involved in emergency response with ZOA Refugee Care, which made it possible to observe what was going on from up close and, while implementing relief work, still get a chance to talk to some people.

As the violence escalated, it became increasingly important to keep track of what was going on and avoid potential trouble spots. From April 2006 onwards, humanitarian agencies set up 'security trees' through which they passed on

¹⁷ When entering or leaving Kottiyar Pattu by road via Kantale, there was another reason to be cautious: late evenings and early mornings are the times that elephants come out of the jungle near the Mahaweli River to drink and bathe. I was advised that solitary elephants should be avoided at all times.

information about security incidents by SMS; I was included in three such trees. This mechanism worked well until an overkill of major incidents drowned out reporting on the smaller incidents that were equally important in local situations. This went to the point where in late August 2006 I received a message saying that “shelling towards LTTE controlled areas in Trinco happens every morning and evening but unless it's particularly heavy or prolonged it is not reported on now through the security tree as, sadly, it has become the norm”. Over time, the security trees faded into irrelevance: where in mid-2006, I received over 200 messages per month, this had reduced to about 20 per month by mid-2007.

1.5 Structure of the book

The structure of this book is graphically depicted in figure 1.1.

Introduction (Chapter 1)
Background <ul style="list-style-type: none">• History and geography of the research area (Chapter 2)• Social complexity in the research area (Chapter 3)• Chronology of violence in the research area (Chapter 4)
Intermezzo <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local narratives (Chapter 5)
Case studies <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Irrigation (Chapter 6)• Riots and almost-riots (Chapter 7)• Mixed-ethnic marriages (Chapter 8)
Conclusion (Chapter 9)

Figure 1.1. Structure of the dissertation

Taken together, chapters 2, 3 and 4 provide a detailed description of Kottiyar Pattu, the research area. These chapters are deliberately very detailed, because I believe that a detailed understanding of the setting in which the people in Kottiyar Pattu live their lives is fundamental for understanding the everyday forms of inter-ethnic interaction documented later on in this book. Those readers who are constrained in their time availability can limit themselves to reading the opening and closing sections of each of these chapters to get the gist of each chapter.

Chapter 2 consists of two parts. The first part presents a description of the present-day geography of Kottiyar Pattu: the administrative setting, demography, economy, land use, infrastructure and climate. The second part contains an elaborate historical analysis of how the area became what it is today. Insight into the history of the area is important not just for understanding the physical present, but also for understanding the different socio-political perspectives that people have on the area.

In chapter 3, I describe the complex structure of social life in Kottiyar Pattu. This is done through a description of nine categories of identification (apart from ethnicity, which I discussed in section 1.1.2) that people from the area used in the conversations that I had with them, to distinguish themselves from others. These categories, presented in random order, are caste, class, employment, religion, gender, age, length of stay, political affiliation, and military control. The aim of this chapter is not to discuss the concepts underlying these categories of identification, but to describe which groups are commonly identified within each category, and how these groups relate to other groups. In this multitude of identifications, sameness and otherness often coexist between individuals. As I will show in the case study chapters, shared non-ethnic sameness creates room for manoeuvre for people to interact with ethnic others. At the same time, ethnic sameness does not necessarily mean intra-ethnic harmony.

Chapter 4 rounds off the block of background chapters with a reconstruction of the chronology of violence in Kottiyar Pattu. The aim of this chapter is to impress upon the reader the extent of violence that the people in Kottiyar Pattu have had to live through for so many years, and to underscore the extraordinariness of the continued existence of everyday forms of inter-ethnic interaction.

Between the background chapters and the case studies, I have inserted an intermezzo. Chapter 5 provides four local narratives about Kottiyar Pattu, which are bewilderingly different from each other. Each in its own way, the narratives form integrations of the background information presented in the previous chapters. On the other hand, the diversity among the narratives shows how much people's own perspectives on life in Kottiyar Pattu vary, and have strong potential to keep people separated from each other.

The next three chapters describe case studies on everyday forms of inter-ethnic interaction, and form the core of the thesis. Chapter 6 deals with inter-ethnic interaction revolving around irrigated paddy cultivation in the Allai Extension Scheme, and looks at how Irrigation Department officials, farmer representatives, and ordinary farmers managed to keep the irrigation scheme functioning to a considerable extent throughout most of the conflict.

Chapter 7 deals with inter-ethnic interaction in situations of acute (threats of) violence. It opens with an in-depth analysis of what happened during a Muslim-Tamil riot in and around Muthur in April 2003, and draws further lessons from a period of Sinhala-Tamil tensions in 2005 and 2006.

Chapter 8 looks at mixed-ethnic couples. Through a description of who they are, how they met, and how they manage their married life, I look at how such couples negotiate the ethnic boundary that runs through them in their everyday life, and to what extent they perform a bridging function between the ethnic groups they represent.

In the last chapter, I return to the research objectives and the research questions with a discussion on what the findings of this research can teach us about everyday inter-ethnic interaction. This is followed by a discussion on the wider academic implications of the research, a discussion of topics that are worthy of further study, and a discussion on how everyday inter-ethnic interaction can inform outside interventions aiming at peace-building.

2 Kottiyar Pattu – the study area

“*Cottiar (Cottiarum)*, a small province of Trincomalee, extending along the east coast of the Island from the north bank of the Virgel ganga to the frontiers of Tambalagam. It is about 27 miles long from north east to south west, and 15 miles broad from east to west. It contains 28 villages, and according to the census of 1814, a population of 1757 souls; of which two thirds are Malabars, and the remainder Moors. The country, from Anetivoe to Topore is almost level, diversified with extensive plains, interspersed with thick jungles, and intersected by several nullahs, most of which are fordable; but from Topore to the northward, it assumes an elevated aspect, and abounds with high rocks and hills. The soil is generally sandy. The low lands yield fine crops of paddy, and the high grounds all the varieties of dry grain. The forests supply almost all sorts of timber, and harbour a vast number of wild animals, amongst which elephants prove a great pest to the inhabitants. The province was originally the hereditary domain of a female chieftain styled *Wannichee*; and one of her descendants still nominally presides over it:– her husband is allowed to bear the title of Assistant or Adjutant Wanniya. [...] In 1803 PANDARA WANNIA, the famous rebel chief, took possession of the province; but it was almost immediately recovered by the light company of H. M. 19th regiment, which had been detached for that purpose from Trincomalee. (*Cordiner.*)

Cottiar, the principal village of the above province, situated on the south side of the inner harbour of Trincomalee, was anciently a place of some importance; and KNOX states that at the time he was residing in the interior, it was frequented every year by twenty or thirty sail of small vessels from the opposite coast, and the customs derived from it, formed a considerable part of the king’s revenue. It is very populous, occupied by Malabars, and the country around is well cultivated; cattle abound, and the pasture is extremely good. It is remarkable in the Singhalese history as the port where the princess, who afterwards became the wife of Wijaya, landed from Madura with her numerous attendants. (*Philateles.*)

[...]

Topore, a very pretty village in the province of Cottiar, situated amidst rich paddy fields, interspersed with tamarind trees of very majestic size and imposing appearance. It is 34 miles distant from Trincomalee, and is inhabited by Malabars and Moors.

[...]

Virgel, a river branching off from the Mahawelli ganga at Kurinjamoone, falls into the sea 25 miles southward of Trincomalee, and separates that district from Batticalo. Near the mouth of this river there is a village of the same name, where the Malabars have a very large temple, with extensive paddy fields attached to it.” (Casie Chitty 1834: 79-81, 211, 217)

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 What's in a name?

Kottiyar Pattu is an old name that local people use for the southern part of Trincomalee District, in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. It covers 654.4 square kilometres (Trincomalee Kachcheri 2003: 3), and is bounded on all sides by water: to the north, there is the Kottiyar Bay; to the east, there is the Indian Ocean; to the west, the Mahaweli River forms the boundary, and to the south, there is the Verugal River, which branches off the Mahaweli River. Until 1972, it was the name of an administrative subdivision. After that, the area has been divided into three separate divisions: Muthur, Seruwila and – since 1988 – Eechchilampattu (see map 2.1 for more details). While no longer used administratively, inhabitants still commonly use the term Kottiyar Pattu to designate the area.

A late 10th century inscription in Thanjavur (Tamil Nadu) is proof that the name has been in use for at least a millennium (Hultsch and Venkayya 1992 [1916], part IV, inscription no. 92). Almost as a metaphor for the situation in Kottiyar Pattu however, even the meaning of its name is contested. While the term 'Pattu' is an old term for an administrative division, Kottiyar has several meanings ascribed to it. The first meaning is very straightforward. Taken together, the Tamil words *kottai* (fortification) and *aru* (river) mean "the river near the fortification". Different rulers have kept garrisons stationed at the mouth of the river Mahaweli since at least the late 10th century, and it was only in the early 20th century that the last remains of a Dutch fortalice next to the river were demolished¹⁸. I consider this the most likely original meaning of the name Kottiyar. A second meaning has a more mythical flavour to it. Some Buddhists living in the area claim that once upon a time there were as many as one *kotiya* (= one *crore*, or ten million; *Rajavaliya*: vii) temples in the area. While several very old ruins are indeed proof of the existence of Buddhist temples in Kottiyar Pattu, their number must be counted in the dozens rather than in the millions. The third meaning is poetic: *kotti* is apparently a kind of flower (Samad 2003: 2). I have been unable to verify which kind of flower it is, and whether or not it is found in Kottiyar Pattu.

2.1.2 Structure of the chapter

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part (section 2.2), I describe aspects of Kottiyar Pattu as I encountered them in 2008: administrative set-up, public services, demography, infrastructure, economy, land use and climate. In the second part (section 2.3), I have tried to distil a more or less cohesive historical narrative about how Kottiyar Pattu came to be what it is today. Together, these descriptions

¹⁸ The site retains some strategic value: during the time of my fieldwork, the Sri Lankan Army maintained a small outpost right next to where the old Dutch fortalice had been.

form the backdrop for two much more detailed chapters discussing social complexity in Kottiyar Pattu (chapter 3) and a chronology of violence in the area (chapter 4).

2.2 *Kottiyar Pattu in 2008*

2.2.1 Administrative set-up

Sri Lanka is divided into 8 provinces, each headed by an appointed governor. The provinces are subdivided into 25 districts, each headed by an appointed District Secretary, formerly known as Government Agent (GA)¹⁹. The districts are subdivided into Divisional Secretariat (DS) divisions, which are headed by appointed Divisional Secretaries (DS), formerly known as Additional Government Agent (AGA). Finally, each DS division is subdivided into between about 10 and 50 *Grama Niladhari* (GN) divisions, also known as *Grama Sevaka* (GS) divisions. GN divisions generally have a population of between 400 and 2,000 people, and may cover one or more villages or hamlets. Towns and big villages may be spread over more than one GN division. In every GN division there is an appointed *Grama Niladhari* (GN), formerly known as Village Headman.

The public administration function of the state is located at district, DS division, and GN division level, and not at the provincial level; the GA reports directly to the central government.

Local government is organised at the provincial level through elected Provincial Councils, headed by a Chief Minister. Below the provincial level, there are elected Municipal Councils. In smaller towns (to which category Muthur and Kinniya belong) these are known as Urban Councils, and in rural areas these are known as *Pradeshiya Sabhas* (literally ‘regional councils’). The boundaries of most *Pradeshiya Sabha* territories are parallel to DS Division boundaries; Urban Councils and Municipal Councils may cover territories that are smaller, equal or bigger than DS Divisions. To make things more confusing, line ministries each have their own structures. Some ministries have structures at provincial level (sometimes under the Provincial Council²⁰, and sometimes directly under the national level), and others at

¹⁹ In order to avoid confusion, I will use the abbreviation GA throughout this book to indicate the person in charge of the district.

²⁰ The Eastern Province currently has four provincial ministries: (1) the Ministry of Health and Indigenous Medicine, Social Welfare, Probation and Child Care Services, Women Affairs, Youth Affairs, Sports, IT Education, Cooperative Development, Food Supply and Distribution; (2) the Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs, Lands and Land Development and Transport; (3) the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Production and Development, Rural Industries Development and Fisheries, and (4) the Ministry of Road Development, Irrigation, Housing and Construction, Rural Electrification and Water Supply (www.ep.gov.lk). Under each ministry, there are line departments.

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district level; below these levels, sub-divisions may or may not run parallel to administrative boundaries.

Together with Batticaloa and Ampara Districts, Trincomalee District forms the Eastern Province. The first elections for the Provincial Council were held in 1989, when the province was provisionally merged with the Northern Province. This council became dysfunctional in 1990, and instead the North-Eastern Province was run by a Chief Secretary and his administrative staff, who were answerable to the provincial governor. In 2007, the Northern and Eastern Provinces were demerged, and, following elections, a new Provincial Council was installed under the leadership of Pillaiyan, a former insurgent who broke ranks with the LTTE in 2004. At least since 1989, the governors of the (North-)Eastern Province have always been retired military officers.

The strategic importance of Trincomalee District can be seen in the fact that since the 1950s, every single GA for Trincomalee District has been Sinhalese, despite Tamils and Muslims being the dominant population groups. In late 2005, President Rajapakse appointed a retired army general as GA for Trincomalee, further militarising the administration. Not long after, a retired navy rear admiral was appointed co-ordinator for rehabilitation in the district.

Trincomalee District consists of 11 DS divisions; three of these (Muthur, Seruwila and Eechchilampattu) cover the area known as Kottiyar Pattu. From the mid-1940s onwards, the DSs of Kottiyar Pattu (and, from 1972 onwards, of Muthur DS Division) have alternately been Tamil and Muslim. It has been common practice that the deputy DS was Muslim if the DS was Tamil and vice versa. Since Seruwila DS Division was established in 1972, the DS has always been Sinhalese, and since its establishment in 1988, the DS of Eechchilampattu DS Division has always been Tamil. Within Muthur DS Division, there are attempts to split the division into two or three: one division centered around Muthur, one centered around Thoppur, and possibly one centered around Kilivetti. The comparatively large number of GN divisions within Muthur DS Division is a valid argument in this case (many DS divisions only have about 12 GN divisions). However, local rivalries between Muthur and Thoppur also play a role.

GN divisions are generally subdivided when the population increases beyond the levels that are manageable for one GN. In 2008 Muthur DS Division had 42 GN Divisions, Seruwila DS Division had 17, and Eechchilampattu DS Division had 8 (EPC 2008: 23-4). GNs are mostly from the area, but do not always originate from the GN division that they are responsible for. A sizeable number of the GNs in Kottiyar Pattu reside in Trincomalee Town, and only visit their area once a week.

There are eleven *Pradeshiya Sabhas* and two Urban Councils in Trincomalee District (EPC 2008: 190). In Kottiyar Pattu, there are three *Pradeshiya Sabhas*, with parallel names and boundaries to the three DS divisions in the area. However, both the Seruwila *Pradeshiya Sabha* and the Eechchilampattu *Pradeshiya Sabha* are dysfunctional, with the DS functioning as representative instead of a council of elected members. The history of these local authorities goes back to 1935, when five

Village Councils were established in Kottiyar Pattu: one each at Muthur, Kattaiparichchan, Sampoor, Thoppur, and Kilivetti. After 1945, two more Village Councils were established in Eechchilampattu and Mallikaithivu. In 1965, the Muthur Village Council was upgraded to the status of Town Council. The six council areas in Muthur DS Division were merged into one *Pradeshiya Sabha* in 1994 (Samad 2003: 434, 439, 450). Separate *Pradeshiya Sabhas* were established in Seruwila and Eechchilampattu.

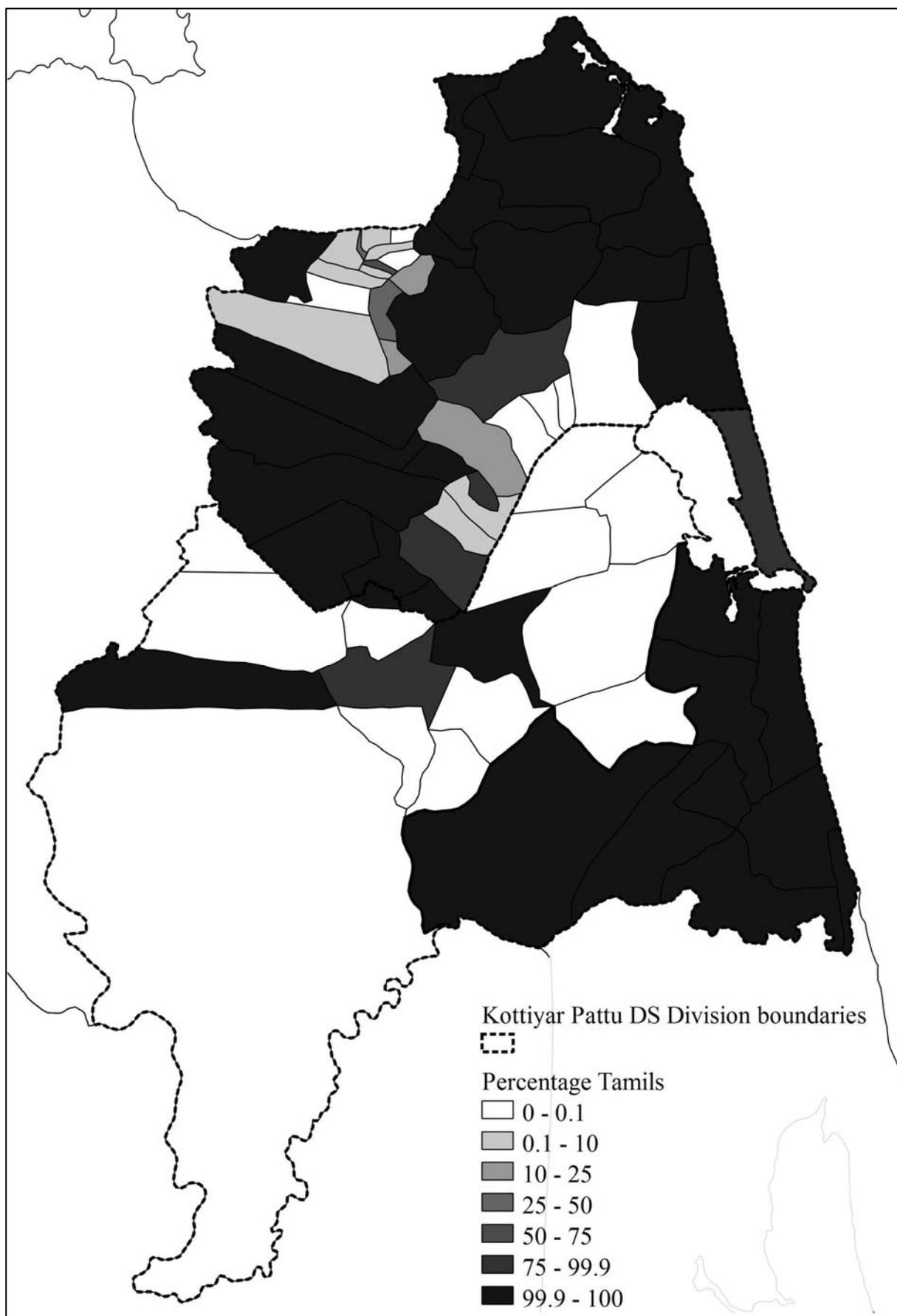
2.2.2 Demography

In 2005, the estimated population of Kottiyar Pattu was 89,499. Broken down by DS division and ethnicity, the situation was as follows:

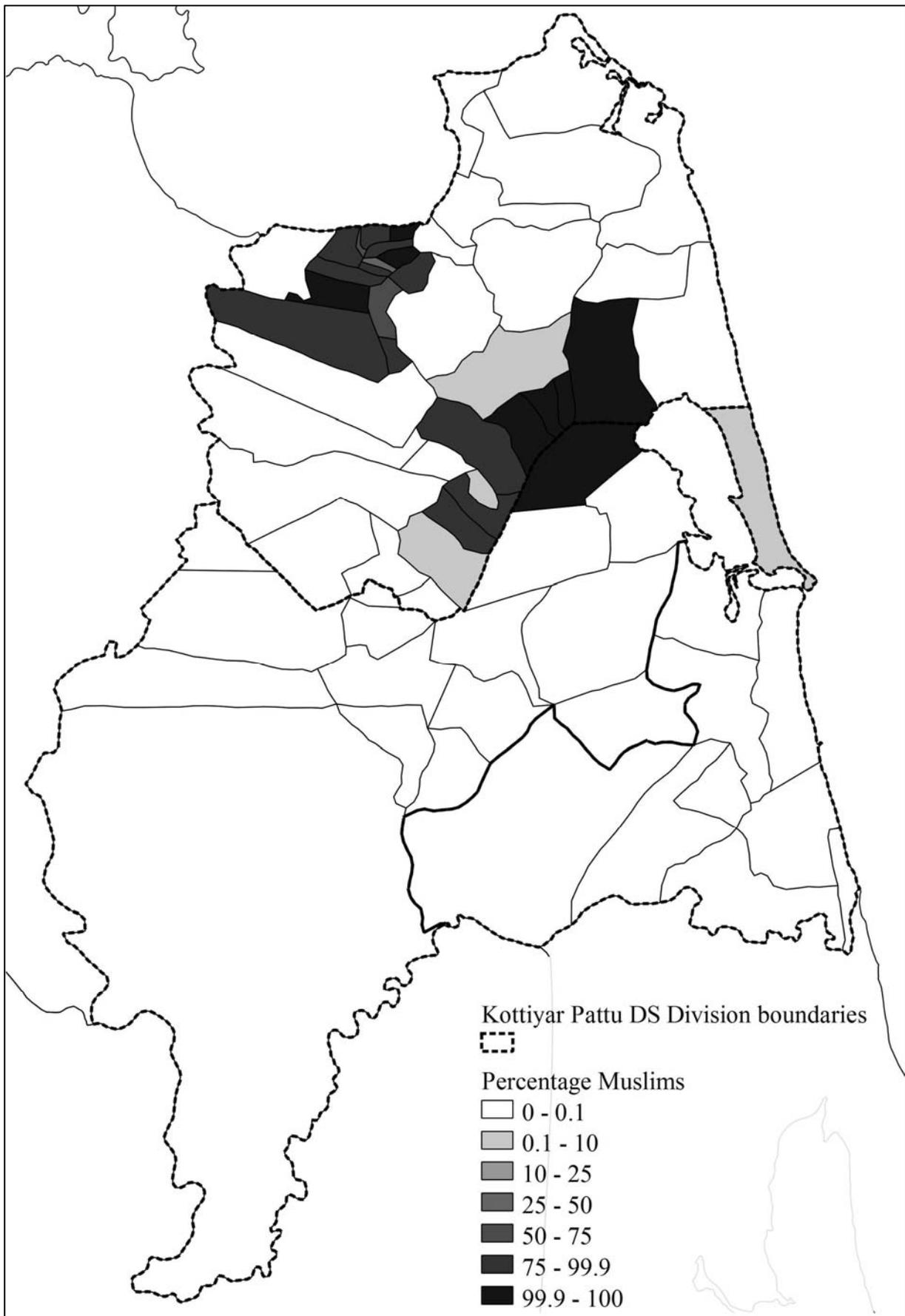
DS Division	Total population	Tamil	Muslim	Sinhala	Other
Muthur	63,690 (71.2%)	28,199 (44.3%)	35,319 (55.5%)	172 (0.3%)	0 (0%)
Seruwila	13,886 (15.5%)	3,516 (25.3%)	1,956 (14.1%)	8,414 (60.6%)	0 (0%)
Eechchilampattu	11,923 (13.3%)	11,923 (100.0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	89,499 (100.0%)	43,638 (48.8%)	37,275 (41.6%)	8,586 (9.6%)	0 (0%)

Table 2.1. Population of Kottiyar Pattu by DS Division and ethnicity (source: UN HIC 2007; data from the Trincomalee District Planning Secretariat)

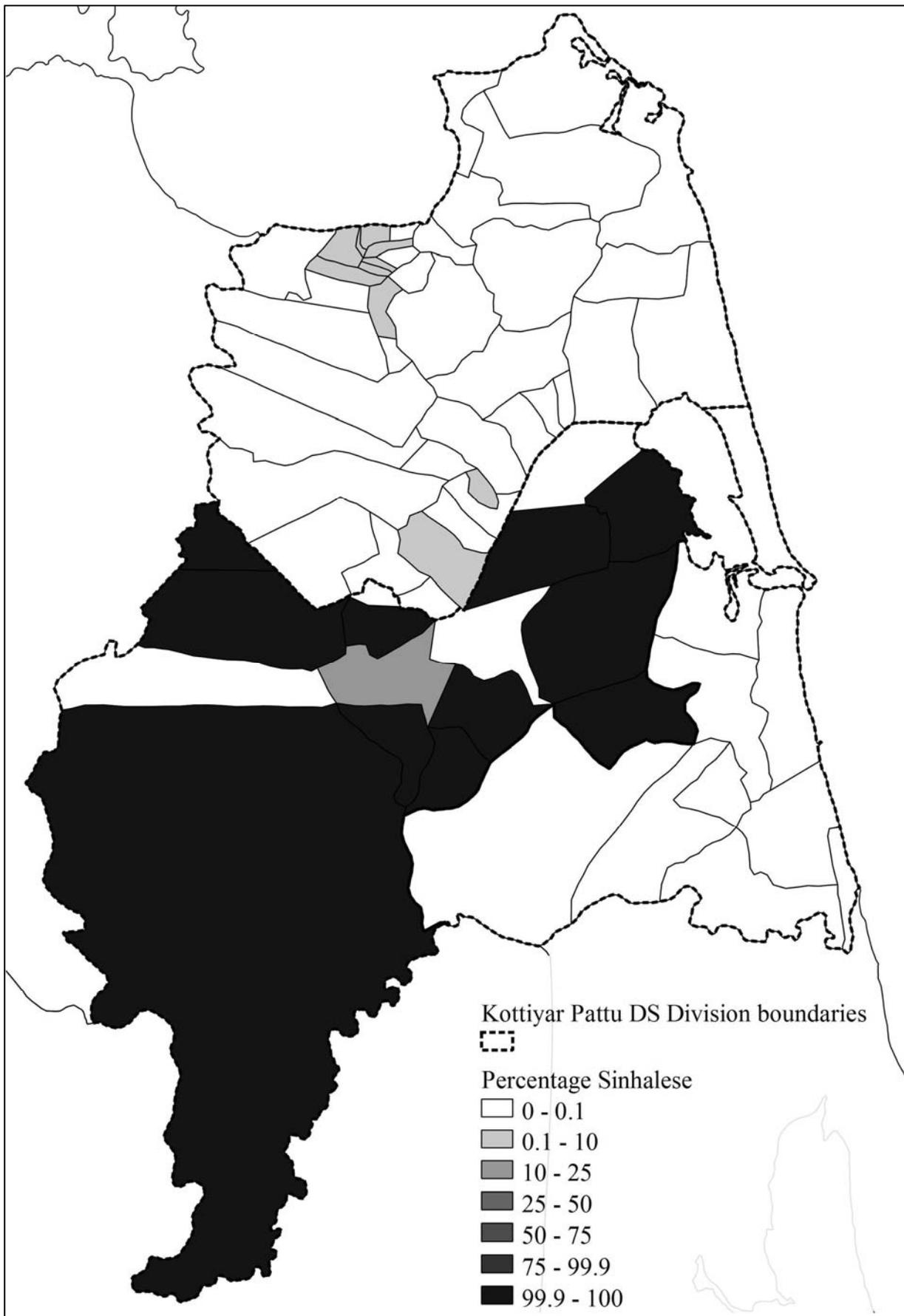
In maps 2.2 to 2.4, the ethnic breakdown of the population is given for each GN division in Kottiyar Pattu. As can be seen, the geographical spread of the population is not equal. Tamils are concentrated in three clusters (one in the *purana* part of the Allai Extension Scheme (including Menkamam, Kilivetti, Mallikaithivu and Kankuveli), one around Eechchilampattu, and one around Sampoor). Muslims are concentrated in two clusters (one around Muthur, and one around Thoppur). Sinhalese are concentrated in the colony areas (with a small concentration in Muthur). While not all GN Divisions are ethnically homogeneous, hamlets and neighbourhoods are pretty much ethnically segregated. On the other hand, it is near impossible to live ethnically segregated lives: there are always ethnic others living in close proximity.



Map 2.2. Percentage Tamil population by GN division in Kottiyar Pattu (source: CIRM 2004a, b, c)



Map 2.3. Percentage Muslim population by GN division in Kottiyar Pattu (source: CIRM 2004a, b, c)



Map 2.4. Percentage Sinhala population by GN division in Kottiyar Pattu (source: CIRM 2004a, b, c)

The population of Kottiyar Pattu has changed dramatically over the past century, after a century of stability before that. The oldest available population count for Kottiyar Pattu is from 1786, when Van Senden counted 616 male inhabitants, after the region had been devastated by epidemics and storms not long before (Van Senden 1786b). This would give a total population of about 1,200 people. The census of 1814 yielded a population of 1757 people (Casie Chitty 1834: 79). In 1871, the recorded population had increased to 3,739²¹. That would mean an annual population growth over this entire period of only about 1.4%²². Over the following 75 years, the population almost quadrupled: the recorded population in 1946 was 13,637. Still, the average annual population growth rate was not more than about 1.7%. In the 17 years between 1946 and 1963, the population nearly tripled to 33,021 – an average annual growth rate of 5.3%. Two factors contributed to this. Firstly, there was a significant reduction in mortality due to improved health care and anti-malaria spraying²³, while birth rates did not yet reduce correspondingly (see section 3.8). Secondly, the development of the Allai Extension Scheme during this period saw an influx of settlers. Subsequent censuses show a reduction in population growth as the influx of new settlers ended and birth rates started to drop. In 1971, the population was 42,460 (an annual increase of 3.2%), and in 1981 the population was 60,160 (an annual increase of 3.55%). Between 1981 (which was the last census before the war started) and 2005 (when a lot of the displaced who wanted to return after the ceasefire had already returned), the average annual population growth was only 1.67%.

²¹ If the average household consisted of five people, this means that there were still less than 800 households by this time. This is significant information for a discussion on caste and historical marriage practices. If the caste communities in Kottiyar Pattu were really as endogamous as is claimed, the largest caste groups would have consisted of 200 households at most, and the smallest ones of less than 100 households. In order to prevent inbreeding, caste endogamy would thus have required long-distance marriage relationships, in a period when hardly any road transport was possible due to the absence of roads.

²² Note however Peebles' caveat that the data for the 1814 census are not fully reliable as "neither the methods of enumeration nor the dates are known", and the "hastily prepared" census of 1871 seems to have suffered from underenumeration (Peebles 1982: 26). Sarkar (1957: 19) adds that in 1871 a widespread rumour that the census was intended to forcibly recruit young men to "make good the depletion in manpower caused by the Franco-Prussian war" caused panic and saw many people fleeing into the jungle. In his book, Sarkar expresses serious reservations regarding the quality of more recent census data as well. Given these caveats, I have used census data as indicative estimates only. What matters for my research are not the detailed percentages, but the larger trends.

²³ For comparison, the average annual population growth for Sri Lanka as a whole was 1.5% between 1931 and 1946, 2.8% between 1946 and 1953, 2.7% between 1953 and 1963, and 2.2% between 1963 and 1971 (Kearney n.y.: 5).

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Apart from the general reduction in birth rates due to the spread of family planning, a large part of this reduction was caused by people permanently fleeing the war. I estimate that about 7,500 Sinhalese settlers moved back to their original villages and never returned, about 1,500 Tamils moved to Trincomalee, Colombo and Canada in roughly equal proportions, and several hundred Muslims moved to Kinniya, Trincomalee or Colombo. Another part of the reduction in population growth was caused by the death or disappearance of about 2,450 people from Kottiyar Pattu during the conflict: about 400 Sinhalese, about 1,800 Tamils, and about 250 Muslims. Between 2005 and the end of the war, I estimate that another 650 people died or disappeared: about 50 Sinhalese, 500 Tamils and 100 Muslims (see chapter 4 for more details). In total, this brings the war-related death toll to about 3½%, 8½% and 2% of the pre-conflict population of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims respectively. And finally, there was the tsunami that killed about 200 Muslims and 150 Tamils.

Figure 2.1 shows estimates for the population by ethnicity and year, based on population figures for 1981 and 2005 estimates for demographic changes during the period in between.

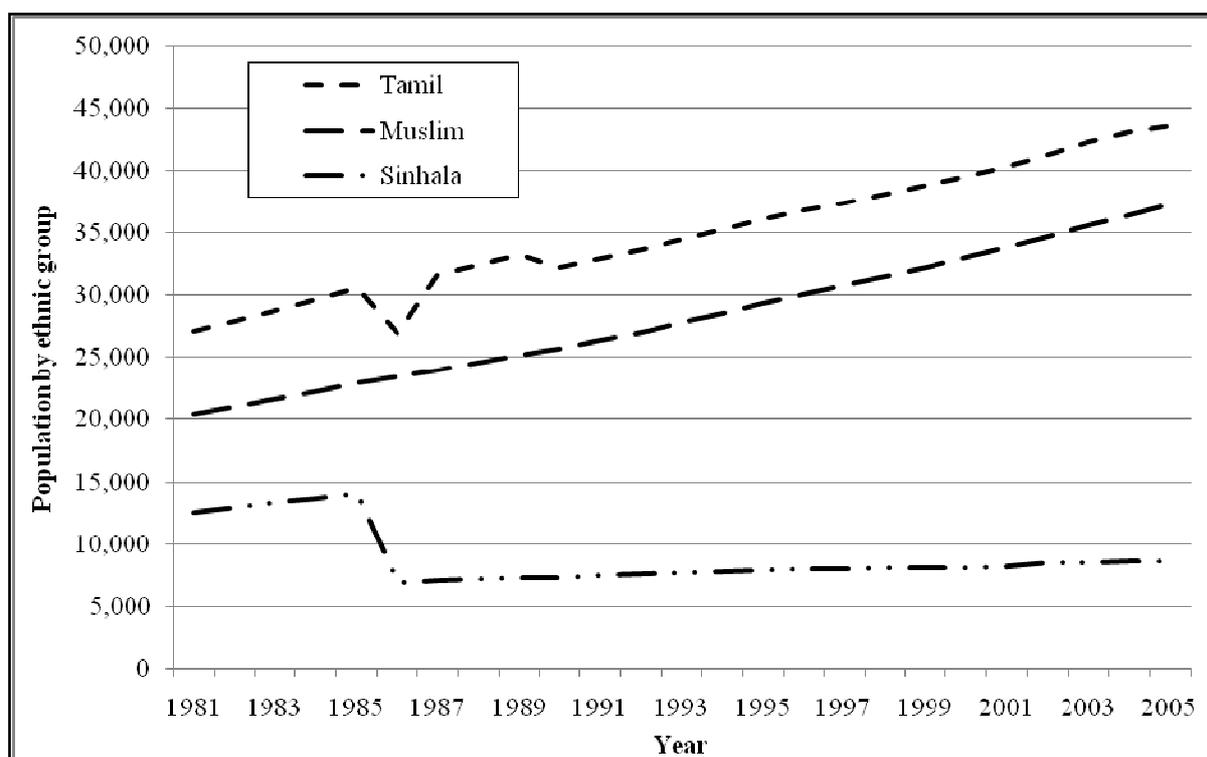


Figure 2.1. Estimated population of Kottiyar Pattu by ethnicity, 1981-2005 (source: 1981 census, UN HIC 2007, own estimates)

2.2.3 Economy

The economy of Kottiyar Pattu centres on paddy cultivation and fisheries. Apart from this, cultivation of highland crops, vegetables and fruit, and livestock production are reasonably important sources of income. However, because there are no processing facilities for fish, meat or crops, and because there are no big rice mills,

very little value adding takes place. In Muthur and to a lesser extent in Thoppur and Serunuwara, there are shops and markets.

In 2004 the Centre for Information and Resources Management (CIRM), a semi-government institute linked to the North-East Provincial Council, collected a wide range of data for each village in the entire North and East, with the objective of establishing vulnerability profiles for every village (CIRM 2004a, b and c). Data enumeration was done via a village questionnaire by the Samurdhi development officers, who are the grassroots level officers in Sri Lanka’s official poverty reduction programme. According to data collected in this survey, almost 1,600 of the roughly 22,000 heads of households in Kottiyar Pattu were self-employed, nearly 2,000 were employees of government agencies or private companies, and about 1,000 were abroad. The rest, about 17,400 heads of households, were involved in agriculture or fisheries. Because only one source of income per family was registered, the total numbers of self-employed people, government or private sector employees, and people working in the Middle East have probably been underestimated.

Poverty is widespread in Kottiyar Pattu. According to the CIRM data, 42% of the households survived on less than 3 meals per day, and 60% of the households received food stamps or dry rations. Since several people told me that it is quite possible to bribe your way into the food stamp beneficiary lists, I consider the first indicator the most reliable. A breakdown by ethnicity is given in table 2.2.

Ethnicity	Total number of households	Households eating less than three meals per day (%)	Households entitled to food stamps or dry rations (%)
Sinhala	2,251	388 (17.3%)	952 (42.3%)
Muslim	8,842	3,065 (34.7%)	5,209 (58.9%)
Tamil	10,576	5,485 (51.9%)	6,762 (63.9%)
Total	22,063	9,266 (42.0%)	13,253 (60.1%)

Table 2.2. Indicators for the extent of poverty in Kottiyar Pattu by ethnicity (source: CIRM 2004a, b and c)

An important conclusion that can be drawn from the table is that the distribution of poverty across ethnic groups is considerably skewed due to a differential access to income. A key source of income for between a quarter and half of the roughly 2,300 Sinhala families and for several dozen Muslim families in Kottiyar Pattu are the security forces. While not many have joined the police, army, navy or air force, many hundreds have enlisted as ‘home guards’, to protect their own villages against attacks by Tamil militants. With a salary of about Rs. 9,000 (US\$ 90 at 2005 prices) per month, this part-time job ensures the home guards a steady source of cash income in addition to what they earn from paddy cultivation or from daily labour. In comparison: an agricultural labourer earns Rs. 200-300 (US\$ 2-3) per day, but is rarely able to work more than 15 days a month – this comes to a monthly income of Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 4,500 (US\$ 30 to US\$ 45). A farmer with 3 acres of double-cropped paddy land can earn about Rs. 150,000 (US\$ 1,500) per year in a very good year – this comes to Rs. 12,500 (US\$ 125) per month.

2.2.4 Land use

Of Kottiyar Pattu's total surface area of 654.4 km², some 380 km² is state land, largely covered by more or less dense shrub jungle, and some stretches of grassland. Almost 125 km² is registered to be in use as paddy land: about 8,500 ha under irrigation, and some 4,000 ha under rainfed conditions. The balance 150 km² is occupied by roads, water bodies, and 128 villages and hamlets, several of which have been clustered into the towns of Muthur and Thoppur (Trincomalee Kachcheri 2003²⁴). Not specifically quantified in the statistical handbook, there are several hundred hectares of legal and illegal fields of *chena* (rainfed upland crops) on private land and state land (largely in Eechchilampattu DS Division and the eastern half of Muthur DS Division). The dominant crops in these fields are maize, chilli and groundnuts.



Figure 2.2. Typical landscape in the irrigated plain of Kottiyar Pattu (own photograph)

The irrigated paddy lands are fed by two schemes that are classified as 'major irrigation schemes' – which means that the command area is over 200 acres (80 ha): the Allai Extension Scheme (formally a little over 7,000 ha) and the Ilakkantai tank (a little over 140 ha). The rest of the paddy lands is irrigated from 'minor tanks' with command areas below 200 acres (Trincomalee Kachcheri 2000: 59). In 2000, half of the 82 minor tanks in the area were registered as abandoned. Several dozen have subsequently been renovated by various agencies, while tanks that fall within the High Security Zone around Sampoor are currently not accessible.

²⁴ Except where other sources are mentioned, the figures given in this section are from the Statistical Handbook of Trincomalee District for 2003 (Trincomalee Kachcheri 2003).

The actual extent of paddy fields is significantly larger than officially registered. All around the Allai Extension Scheme, areas of state land (in the jungle around the main channel, reservations along channels, and bordering the formal command area) have been encroached upon. Dekker (2007), basing himself on conversations with Irrigation Department staff, concluded that about 2,000 ha have been taken into use in this way. On the other hand, a similar extent of paddy fields on the fringes of the Allai Extension Scheme have been abandoned during the war because cultivation became too dangerous (see section 6.5).

Much of the western half of Kottiyar Pattu is flat, with elevations not exceeding 10 metres above sea level. This area has alluvial clay soil that is excellent for paddy cultivation (see figure 2.2). Those areas that do not fall under the Allai Extension Scheme are to a large extent covered by rather dense forest vegetation.

In the eastern half of Kottiyar Pattu, the landscape is more elevated (with elevations up to about 60 metres above sea level) and has an undulating topography, interspersed with rocky outcrops. It is cut in two by the Ullakkalli lagoon, which once upon a time may have been the mouth of (a branch of) the Mahaweli river. The soils in this area are a mix of noncalic brown soils, soils on old alluvium and solodized solonetz (Panabokke 1996:81). This area is a patchwork of small irrigation tanks with small command areas, rainfed paddy fields, *chenas*, and thorny scrub jungle. Saline soils occur along the northern and eastern coastline, where there is a seasonal influx of seawater into a string of small lagoons and creeks which form important breeding grounds for fish.

Human settlements have traditionally been founded on elevated pieces of land near paddy fields or near the coast. As roads developed in the last decades of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century, new villages were established near these roads. In order to house the settlers who were brought into the Allai Extension Scheme in the 1950s, colony villages were established on suitable places along the main channels. In many of these villages, small but old ruins seem to indicate earlier inhabitation.

As of December 2008, an area of 37.4 km² bordering the Kottiyar Bay east of Muthur was a so-called 'High Security Zone' (HSZ), and was entirely off-limits to its original inhabitants. This zone was declared in May 2007 with the aim of protecting Sri Lanka's primary naval base at Trincomalee from attacks by the LTTE; it was reduced in size in October 2008 (Gazette no. 1573/19, 2008; map 2.5). The people who used to live in the villages inside the HSZ are now staying in squalid camps around Kilivetti. Even though the war ended in May 2009, it is unlikely that these people will be allowed to return: not long after the declaration of the HSZ, the Sri Lankan government decided to construct a coal power plant in the area, of which construction has since commenced (CPA 2009).

2.2.5 Infrastructure

There are four routes to get into the area, none of which are very easy.

To the north-east, the A15 (Batticaloa-Trincomalee) highway towards Kinniya and Trincomalee involves the crossing of four river mouths by ferry. For many years, a part of this road was closed to traffic due to the conflict situation, and over time it became badly degraded. The road reopened in 2007, largely with a laterite surface. In 2008, a bridge was finally being constructed at Kinniya, which will substantially reduce travel time. From Trincomalee, it takes about 1½ to 2 hours to reach Muthur by this road.

To the south, the A15 highway leads towards Batticaloa. Going along this route involves the crossing of the Verugal River by ferry, and the crossing of two lagoons in Vakarai by causeways that get flooded in the rainy season. Much of the road has been tarred, but between Muthur and Verugal the road was still in very poor condition in 2008. From Batticaloa, it takes about two hours to reach Verugal, and it takes another hour to reach Muthur from Verugal. In both directions along the A15, checkpoints needed to be negotiated, which could be very time-consuming. On my last visit to Muthur in August 2008 I saw a vehicle with Chinese contractors who, I was told, were going to reconstruct the entire A15.

To the west, a long tarred road leads to Kantale from Kallar/Somapura. This former Irrigation Department road has only been in public use since the mid-1960s. From Trincomalee, it takes about three hours to reach Muthur using this road.

The last access route is by ferry from Trincomalee. There is one big ferry with a capacity of about 150 people and about a dozen motorbikes. If the ferry is not undergoing repairs, the twice-daily trip across the Kottiyar Bay takes about 45 minutes one way. Apart from the big ferry, there are small launches that tend to get dangerously overcrowded²⁵, and which take a little over an hour. As a back-up, it is possible to go to Kinniya in a 20-foot open fishing boat; a distinctly unpleasant trip during the rainy season because of the high waves.

After the Sri Lankan military regained control over the entire Trincomalee District, the Army Engineers started building the “Trincomalee Circular Road”, a massive ring road that is intended to link the entire district. When I last visited the area, the road was still under construction.

Within Kottiyar Pattu, travel is not very easy either. There are only a few tarred roads: the A15 stretch from Verugal via Serunuwara, Palathoppur and Muthur to Upparu; a road from Serunuwara to Seruwila along the Right Bank main channel of the Allai Extension Scheme; a road from Serunuwara to Kallar/Somapura; a road from Kallar/Somapura to Neelapola along the Left Bank main channel; a road along

²⁵ In 1993, an overcrowded launch sank after it capsized in rough seas. Estimates for the number of people killed vary between about 50 and about 125 (Ubaidullah 2008: chapter 5; ‘Request for sittings at Muttur and Thopur’, *Daily News*, 10-3-1993; ‘Capsized ferry 3 times overloaded’, *Daily News* 24-5-1993)

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the so-called 'Muthur Channel' from its start in Dehiwatte until the point where the channel meets the A15 at Bharatipuram; a road from the A15 at Manalchenai via Mallikaithivu to Menkamam; and a road from Palathoppur to Thoppur. The other roads are covered with either laterite or clay, and some get very muddy in the rainy season.

Public transport is limited. Two to four buses each go every day to Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Kantale and Colombo from Kottiyar Pattu. Some leave from Muthur, others from Thoppur or Serunuwara. Apart from this, a small number of passenger vans (locally known as 'route vans') drives to different destinations.

In 2007, there were close to 140 threewheelers in Muthur town, and maybe two or three dozen in the rest of Kottiyar Pattu. This was a steep increase from just seven threewheelers in Muthur town in 1993 (interview with a threewheeler driver, Muthur town, April 2007).

Very few people own cars or vans in Kottiyar Pattu. Motorbikes are more common: I would estimate that in 2008 there were perhaps 5,000 to 7,000 motorbikes. Apart from this, there were probably about 2,000 two-wheel tractors ("landmasters"), 200 tractors, and 100 lorries in the area. When I started my research in 2003, the number of vehicles was less than half of what it was five years later. Improved credit facilities, aggressive marketing, and increasing wealth levels clearly contributed to this. The use of oxcarts has visibly reduced over the last couple of years. Despite the improvement in the situation, most people still move around on bicycles or by foot. Motorised vehicles are not equally spread across the area. Particularly in the Tamil villages that were under LTTE control until 2006, hardly any vehicles could be found due to poverty and fuel restrictions.

2.2.6 Climate

Kottiyar Pattu falls within Sri Lanka's so-called 'Dry Zone'. This zone covers roughly the northern half of the island and the strip of land east of the central mountain massif, all the way down to Hambantota. The line separating the 'Wet Zone' (which covers the south-west of the country) and the 'Dry Zone' coincides "more or less with the line of 75 inches [1,900 mm] rainfall" per year (Brohier 2006: 26; Farmer 1957: 5). Apart from receiving much less rain than the 'Wet Zone'²⁶, it also receives rain in a different time of the year. While the 'Wet Zone' gets most of its rainfall during the South-West monsoon (May-September), The 'Dry Zone' receives most of its annual rain during the North-East monsoon, which lasts from about November to January. There are three rainfall stations in and near Kottiyar Pattu for which I had access to long time series of monthly rainfall data: one in the Trincomalee fort (1869-

²⁶ Rainfall is as little as 900 mm per year in Mannar and Hambantota as compared to over 4,000 mm per year in the interior areas just south-east of Colombo (Farmer 1957: 23)

2004), one on the Allai Tank (1879-2004), and one in the Irrigation Department compound at Kallar (1941-2004). For my analysis, I have used the following data²⁷:

Rainfall station	Period for which reliable monthly data are available	Number of complete hydrological years in the series ²⁸
Trincomalee	1901-1910; 1930-2004	80
Allai Tank	1901-1970; 1978-2004	85
Kallar	1941-2004	50

Table 2.3 Available monthly rainfall data for Kottiyar Pattu (source: Meteorology Department)

Annual rainfall is highly variable, and varies between a little under 900 mm to almost 3,100 mm. Average annual rainfall for the last 30 years in the series (1975-2004) is about 1,500 mm; median annual rainfall is about 1,400 mm. While there does not seem to be a specific pattern between wet and dry years, there does seem to be an overall trend of reducing rainfall. This is shown in figure 2.3, which depicts median annual rainfall per decade (for those periods where 8 or more values are available). As can be seen, median annual rainfall over the period 1981-2004 is about 400 mm less than for the first half of the 20th century – a reduction of over 20%!²⁹ This means that all irrigation designs before about 1980 (which covers pretty much all the major irrigation schemes of Trincomalee District) were based on assumptions about rainfall quantity that have become unrealistic. Therefore, problems in irrigation water distribution may have been caused as much by long-term climate variability as by inefficient institutions. To give an indication of the average pattern of rainfall throughout a year, figure 2.4 presents the average monthly rainfall (in mm/month) for each of the three stations, in contrast with monthly evapotranspiration.

²⁷ In all three series, there are some months for which data are not available. In those cases, I have left the entire year out of the analysis. Up to 1901, the recorded annual rainfall at Trincomalee is regularly much less (up to 1,300 mm!) than at Allai Tank. Because I have no third set of data to triangulate with, I have decided to leave all data before 1901 out of the analysis. Also, there are no rainfall data for Trincomalee from 1911 to 1929. Comparison of the data for the various stations shows that for the years 1970 to 1977, the rainfall recorded at Allai Tank is unusually low, and much lower than the rainfall at both Kallar and Trincomalee. As it seems like something is wrong with these data, I have decided to leave those data out of the analysis.

²⁸ In line with common practice in Sri Lanka I have used hydrological years, which run from October through to September, rather than calendar years as the basis for my analysis of climatological data.

²⁹ I am not sure whether this is a ‘permanent’ decline, or merely a long-term oscillation such as has been documented for several sites in Asia by Kripalani and Kulkarni (1997). In the last case, rainfall will probably start increasing again within the next decade or so.

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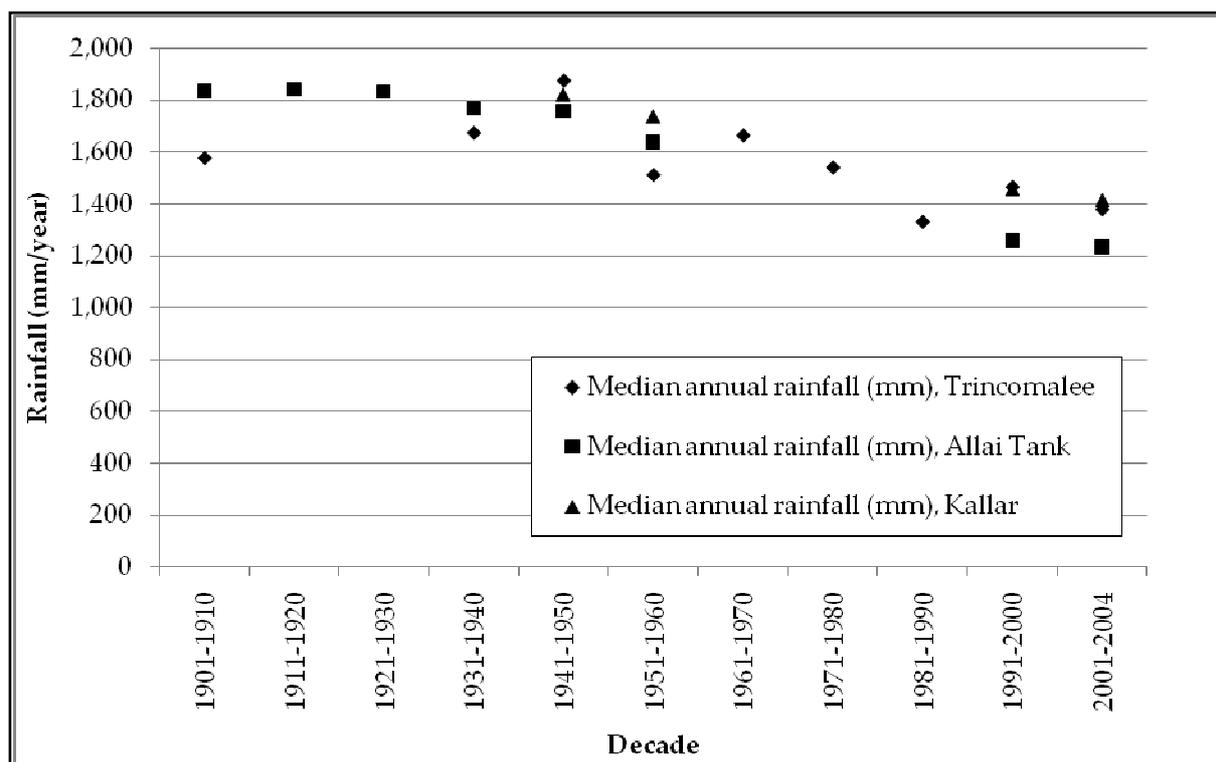


Figure 2.3. Median annual rainfall per decade, 1901-2004 (source: Meteorology Department)

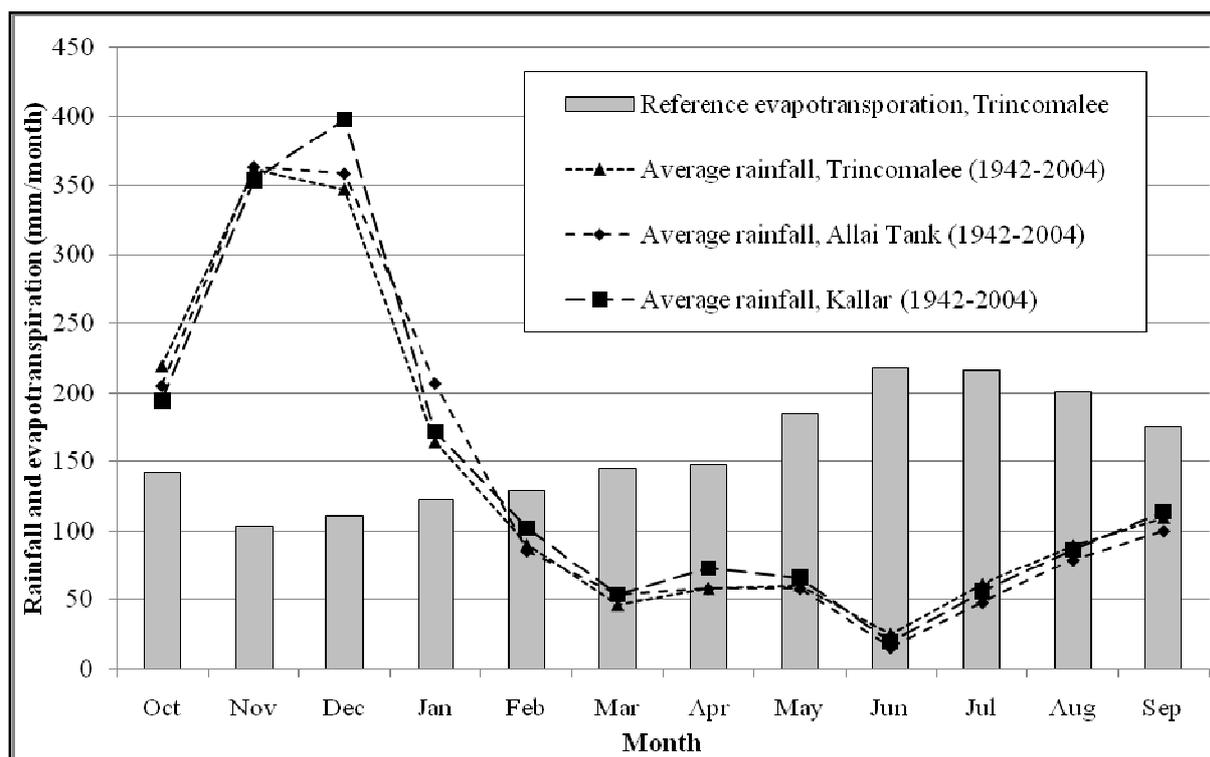


Figure 2.4. Monthly rainfall and evapotranspiration (source: Meteorology Department and FAO CLIMWAT database).

As can be seen, rainfall exceeds evapotranspiration for four months a year (from October to January), and the reverse is the case in the other eight months. The average patterns are similar for all three stations: there is heavy rainfall in November and December, after which the rain gradually reduces until March. In April and

May, the inter-monsoon brings thunderstorms, after which the weather calms down again. During the South-West monsoon between June and September, some rain may spill across Sri Lanka's central mountain range. Before the North-East monsoon sets in, the inter-monsoon in October again brings thunderstorms.

Apart from short- and long-term temporal variability, rainfall is also spatially variable. Between the rain gauges at Trincomalee, Allai Tank and Kallar, annual rainfall may vary by as much as 40%. The spatial variability in monthly and daily rainfall data is even greater. Because most rain showers are comparatively limited in extent, a single shower may give a very high rainfall figure in one station, while hardly anything falls in another station.

Temperatures have a slight seasonal variation. During the dry season, the average day-time temperature is about 35°C; in very hot periods the temperature exceeds 40°C. During the rainy season, the temperature drops to a little under 30°C. Average night-time temperatures vary between 25°C in the rainy season and 28°C in the dry season. Humidity varies between 60% in the dry season and as much as 90% in the rainy season.

2.3 A history of Kottiyar Pattu

2.3.1 Making sense of history

Since the history of the development and settlement of Kottiyar Pattu kept coming back in the narratives of people who tried to explain the present to me, I am of the opinion that a reconstruction of the area's history is essential background information for this thesis. However, as Nandini Sundar (2004) has described in her insightful analysis of the multiple histories of an Indian village, historical narratives (both written and oral) are by definition incomplete and often inconsistent with each other. They are also sometimes violently contested. While chronicles, legends, and physical remains may provide additional bits of information, they often complicate this picture.

Written contemporary accounts

Written contemporary accounts (particularly the older ones, but, as I will show in chapters 4 and 7, also contemporary newspaper articles) have generally been produced by either outsiders or by members of local elites, and tend to ignore perspectives of ordinary people. Quite regularly, these accounts have been written by people who were not very familiar with the place, or who had never visited it. While such accounts may contain very valuable observations, they need to be viewed critically – particularly where descriptions of local social dynamics are concerned.

During my research, I was able to obtain access to three (sets of) contemporary accounts written by residents of Kottiyar Pattu. The first is a very elaborate social geography of the area by M.A. Samad, a retired school teacher (Samad 2003). Though Samad's version of the early history of the area needs to be viewed critically,

the rest of the book is a veritable goldmine for anyone interested in learning more about Kottiyar Pattu and the changes it went through in the 20th century.

The second set of contemporary accounts consists of short stories, written by a number of Muslim and Tamil authors, most prominent among whom was V.A. Rasaratnam, a Catholic teacher from Muthur (Rasaratnam 1962, 1996a, 1996b and 1999; Amanullah 2007; Ubaidullah 2008)³⁰. Most of these stories are about Kottiyar Pattu, and span a period of nearly seven decades, from the 1930s right up to the 2004 tsunami. The value of the stories for my research is that they provide a series of historically situated snapshots of Kottiyar Pattu. Though the characters in the stories are fictitious, the events, places and issues described are real. By placing the stories in chronological order of first publication, one gets a fair sense of what were the hot topics over the years.

Lastly, there is a book describing the Seruwila temple that was written by two resident monks, Seruwila Saranariththi *Thero* and Kotapola Amarakiththi *Thero* (2002). This book mostly describes the founding, renovation and further development of the Seruwila temple, but here and there also gives background information on broader developments in Kottiyar Pattu.

Chronicles

Sri Lanka is peculiar in having been blessed (or cursed, depending on one's perspective) with a tradition of chronicle-writing that goes back to at least the fourth century AD. The most prominent chronicles are the 4th-century *Dipavamsa*, the 6th-century *Mahavamsa*, and the *Culavamsa* (which is a continuation of the *Mahavamsa*), produced in several stages from 12th century AD onwards – the last expansion was written in the late 1970s, on orders of President Jayawardene. Apart from the main chronicles there is a range of minor chronicles, among which are the *Dathavamsa* which describes the arrival of the Tooth Relic in Sri Lanka, the *Dhatuvamsa* which pays elaborate attention to the temple at Seruwila, and the *Rajavaliya*, a fairly hard-line Sinhala-Buddhist rendition of the history of the Sinhala royal lineages³¹. In the Eastern Province, a range of local chronicles developed in the 17th and 18th centuries. Among these are the *Konesar Kalvettu* (Nevill 1887b; Akilesapillai 2000), *Dakshina Kailasapuram* and *Thirukonasala Puranam* (Pathmanathan 2006b), which deal with

³⁰ I am grateful to Mr. Rasaratnam's daughter for telling me about the stories, to his son (who lives outside Kottiyar Pattu) for giving me photocopies of most of Mr. Rasaratnam's remaining books (many were lost in the violence of 1990), and to my research assistant for translating the texts. Regretfully, a follow-up interview that I had wanted to conduct with Mr. Rasaratnam's daughter was not possible, as she was killed in the violence of August 2006.

³¹ *Dipavamsa*, *Mahavamsa*, *Culavamsa* and *Dathavamsa* have a subdivision in chapters and verses. *Mahavamsa*, chapter 12, verse 12 is therefore referred to as (*Mahavamsa* XII: 12). The *Rajavaliya* and the translation that I have of *Dhatuvamsa* have no such subdivision. In these cases, I refer to page numbers in the 1900 English edition of the *Rajavaliya* and the 1946 Sinhala edition of the *Dhatuvamsa*.

Trincomalee District, and the *Mattakalappu Manmiyam* (Kamalanathan and Kamalanathan 2005; McGilvray 2008: 55-96) which deals with present-day Batticaloa and Ampara Districts).

While the chronicles do describe historical events and historical people, and therefore have value for historians, the texts should be treated with utmost caution. The chronicles are not neutral annals; they were very much intended to present own glory at the expense of the 'other', irrespective of whether the 'other' was a rival monks' order, a rival monarchy from South India or from another part of Sri Lanka, a colonial power, or a rival caste. Own virtues and opponents' vices were highlighted, and poetic freedom allowed for mythical embellishments to further strengthen the author's argument. The problem for the historian is that descriptions of actual events and embellishments are never separated, and it is thus impossible to fully separate history from myth (Kemper 1991; Trainor 1997; McGilvray 2008: 55-96; Gunawardana 1990 and 1995; Obeyesekere 1984: 361-380; Goonasekera 2007). Still, it is possible to triangulate the chronicles with other archaeological and historical evidence and distill a core chronology. Secondly, casual details outside the main storyline can be highly informative – such as the reference to copper mined in Seruwila being used for the construction of a *dagaba* in Anuradhapura in the 2nd century BC (see section 2.3.2). Thirdly, the chronicles can tell us much about the socio-political context in which they were written – such as about inter-caste rivalry and Muslim-Mukkuvar relationships in the case of the *Mattakalappu Manmiyam* (McGilvray 2008).

Physical remains

While physical remains (buildings, ruins, statues, inscriptions) can give very useful clues about an area's history, they should not be looked at uncritically. Statues can be moved, buildings and ruins re-designated, and inscriptions can be faked or tampered with. Estimating the age of ruins, statues and inscriptions can be very difficult, because the harsh climate can cause anything to weather almost beyond recognition within a matter of months. Shortly after the Sri Lankan military had chased the LTTE out of Kottiyar Pattu, a group of government officials and religious dignitaries visited a hill 5 km south of Muthur in an attempt to resolve competing ethno-religious claims to the significance of the place (see section 3.5 for a more detailed description). During the visit, an inscription was found which the Sinhala Buddhists among the group claimed to be proof of ancient Buddhist roots. However, one of the non-Buddhists in the group later told me that the dust and rock chips of the carving of the inscription were still lying around; this man claimed that the inscription was a fake. I do not know which of the claims is correct. Several years earlier, people working in the adjoining rock quarry site had told me there was an inscription; my research assistant and I made a sweaty, and ultimately failed attempt to get to the top of the hill to see it. This may have been a different inscription: the people who told us about the inscription insisted that the inscription was in *European* lettering. They could read the characters, but were unable to understand what it said. Similarly, a number of temples in the area (both Buddhist and Hindu) display carved stones that seem very ancient, but the age of which is hard to estimate.

Oral accounts

In contrast to other sources of information, oral accounts can be told by ordinary people, and may provide both elite and subaltern perspectives on the past. However, oral accounts are complicated because they “represent the sedimentation of memory in selective and often unconscious ways”, and are “entrammeled within the thickets of local cunning and subterfuge” (Sundar 2004: 154). More fundamentally, oral accounts depend on the availability of narrators to tell the story. That this premise is of crucial importance in Sri Lanka’s war zone was driven home forcefully one day when I was interviewing the key-holder of an old Hindu temple in Thampalakamam, a part of Trincomalee District that has historical links with Kottiyar Pattu (see section 2.3.6):

One morning, looking for information on the history of the Thampalakamam area and on caste links with Kottiyar Pattu, my research assistant and I visit the beautiful, three centuries old, Adhi Konesar temple in Thampalakamam. As we make some conversation with the few people (all elderly men) who are present in the temple, one of them suggests that we should meet the key-holder of the temple, as he will be able to tell us the stories we are looking for. One of the men gets on his bike and shows the way to one of the many islands of trees and a few houses that dot the landscape that otherwise consists of bright green paddy fields. The key-holder is at home, and he invites us in. Seated on a wooden bench in one of three buildings that form a compound, my assistant and myself are treated to a cup of tea. Three people live here: the key-holder (who is 87 years old), his wife, and their sixty-year old, unmarried son. After my assistant introduces us and explains that I’m very interested in the history of the area, the old man starts talking enthusiastically. All sorts of subjects are touched upon: how his father used to go hunting in the nearby jungles; how his grandfather built the oldest house in the compound (a little over a century ago); how, about fifty years ago, a paddy store was built as a kind of attic on top of the house that we are sitting in, but how it is not used anymore since the paddy is now taken straight to the mill and storage is no longer necessary; and how the family used to own 75 acres of paddy land, but has given most of it away because the father and his son do not have the energy anymore to cultivate all the land. We also talk about the history of the temple, and his own role as key-holder. The wife and son join in the conversation every now and then to add some details, to explain some things, or to repeat a question (the old man is rather deaf). Regularly, when I ask a question about things that happened a longer time ago, the man indicates that he’s getting old and he has forgotten the details, “but if you ask so-and-so, he will be able to tell you in much more detail than I can”. Invariably, the son replies with “*Appa*, the man you refer to is dead”. After this has happened a few times, the key-holder sighs that he is then the only one left who knows about certain things. The younger generation (he says this referring to his not-so-young son) is not interested in the history of the area, so it will die with him (field notes, February 2006).

This was a pattern that I came across frequently. When asking around who could tell me about the history of a village or an area, I was generally referred to some of the oldest people around, because (with the exception of a few interested younger people, generally members of a village-level elite) the younger people only know basic summaries of the popular narrative of local myths of origin. “In a South Asian context, knowledge, skills, and institutions do not survive from age to age through the unembodied transmission of ideas and practices. They are recited by one generation, [...] and learned by the next” (Kemper 1991: 31). While I agree with Kemper, I argue that the problem is in the transmission. Put bluntly, history is knowledge transferred from the ‘almost-dying’ to those who will be ‘almost-dying’ in the near future. With the exception of a small elite, everybody else is too busy staying alive to bother. This also means that in times of disturbance (such as war or massive epidemics) the risk is that those who will be ‘almost-dying’ in the near future are too busy surviving to have time to listen to the stories of the ‘almost-dying’, or that they die at the same time as the ‘almost-dying’. In the process, (hi)stories literally die out. In an area as littered with ruins and political meaning as Kottiyar Pattu, a subsequent process that occurs is the re-invention of history. Once, I was talking to an old man at the site of a small Pillaiyar shrine near Kilivetti that is marked as ‘ruin’ on the one inch to a mile topographical map (Survey Department 1988). I asked him about the history of the shrine. He told me that his parents had told him that when their parents came to settle in the area with some others (this must have been somewhere in the late nineteenth century), they came across an old irrigation reservoir, a *bo* tree and a bunch of ruins, and nobody whom they asked knew what it was. “So they thought up a (hi)story”, to give meaning to the landscape that the settlers encountered (conversation, Kilivetti, October 2004). Following the settlement of Sinhalese in the Allai Extension Scheme in the 1950s, alternative interpretations of the encountered landscape developed. These interpretations became increasingly competitive and politically charged, particularly from the early 1970s onwards, when Sinhala nationalist discourses claiming the North-East as originary Sinhala-Buddhist territory gathered momentum (with open support from influential members of successive governments), and Tamil counter-discourses about a ‘Tamil homeland’ equally gained in strength. At this point, some people in Kilivetti decided to neutralise the contesting (hi)story by removing the only element that was being claimed as Buddhist (and thus as Sinhala). In 1976, the *bo* tree disappeared (*idem*: 148-160, see also section 4.2.1).

What follows below is my interpretation of all the bits and pieces of information that I came across, and an attempt to put them into a more or less cohesive narrative on Kottiyar Pattu’s history. In order to do justice to the wide variety in contemporary local narratives that exists, I present and contrast four such narratives in chapter 5. Note that I do not discuss the recent history of violent conflict here; that is dealt with in chapter 4.

2.3.2 Early history: copper mining, *dagabas* and Sinhala myths of origin

Copper

Kottiyar Pattu was an area of some importance from very early on in Sri Lanka's documented history. The oldest written reference to the area is made in the *Mahavamsa*. In chapter 28, passing reference is made to copper being mined in the area during the reign of king Dutugemunu (161-137 BC), who is credited with having been the first to establish control over the whole of Sri Lanka. One of the things that Dutugemunu did after capturing the throne in Anuradhapura was to order the construction of the Ruwanweliseya *dagaba* (*Mahavamsa* XXVIII:1 – XXXIII:5; Nāuyana Ariyadhamma Maha Thera 2002). The copper that was required for the *dagaba* came from a place called Tambapittha, “seven yojanas East of Anuradhapura, on the other side of the river” (*Mahavamsa* XXVIII: 16,17). There is no doubt that Tambapittha refers to Seruwila, where copper ore can still be found³². This would mean that people were working, and probably living, there at the time, and that there were existing logistical links with Anuradhapura.

Because Seruwila was the only place where copper ore was found south of Madhya Pradesh in India, regional powers may have had some strategic interest in the place from very early on. During excavations in the ancient port town of Mantota (present-day Mantai, just north of Mannar on the north-west coast of Sri Lanka), some slag (refuse from the melting of copper ore) was found among material that was dated to around 1,800 BC. According to Siran Deraniyagala (n.d.), this might mean that copper was already mined at Seruwila almost four thousand years ago, and shipped to India via Mantota. If this hypothesis is correct, there was a fairly developed society present in Sri Lanka at least a millennium before Vijaya, the mythical genitor of Sinhala civilisation, is claimed to have landed in Sri Lanka.

The temple at Seruwila

More elaborate attention to Seruwila is given by the *Dhatuvamsa*, a chronicle that was originally written in the early 13th century. According to this chronicle, Kavanthissa (Dutugemunu's father) built a *dagaba* at Seruwila in order to fulfil a prophecy that he would enshrine the forehead relic of the Buddha there. Seruwila, the chronicle claims, was one of the sixteen places that the Buddha visited on his three trips to Sri Lanka, and is therefore of particular sanctity.

³² A *yojana* is an ancient Indian measurement of distance, equivalent to something between 13 and 16 kilometres (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yojana>). Seven *yojanas* would thus be something between 90 and 113 km. As the crow flies, the distance between Anuradhapura and Seruwila (centre of *dagaba* to centre of *dagaba*, measured using Google Earth) is about 102 kilometres, and the direction is almost perfectly dead east. The “river” that is referred to must be the Mahaweli Ganga.

While this claim is not uncontested³³, the Seruwila described in the *Dathuvamsa* does seem to be the same as present-day Seruwila³⁴. Monk's caves around the temple with inscriptions dating back to the second century BC (Dias 1991: 25, 26, 68) lend chronological credence to such a hypothesis.

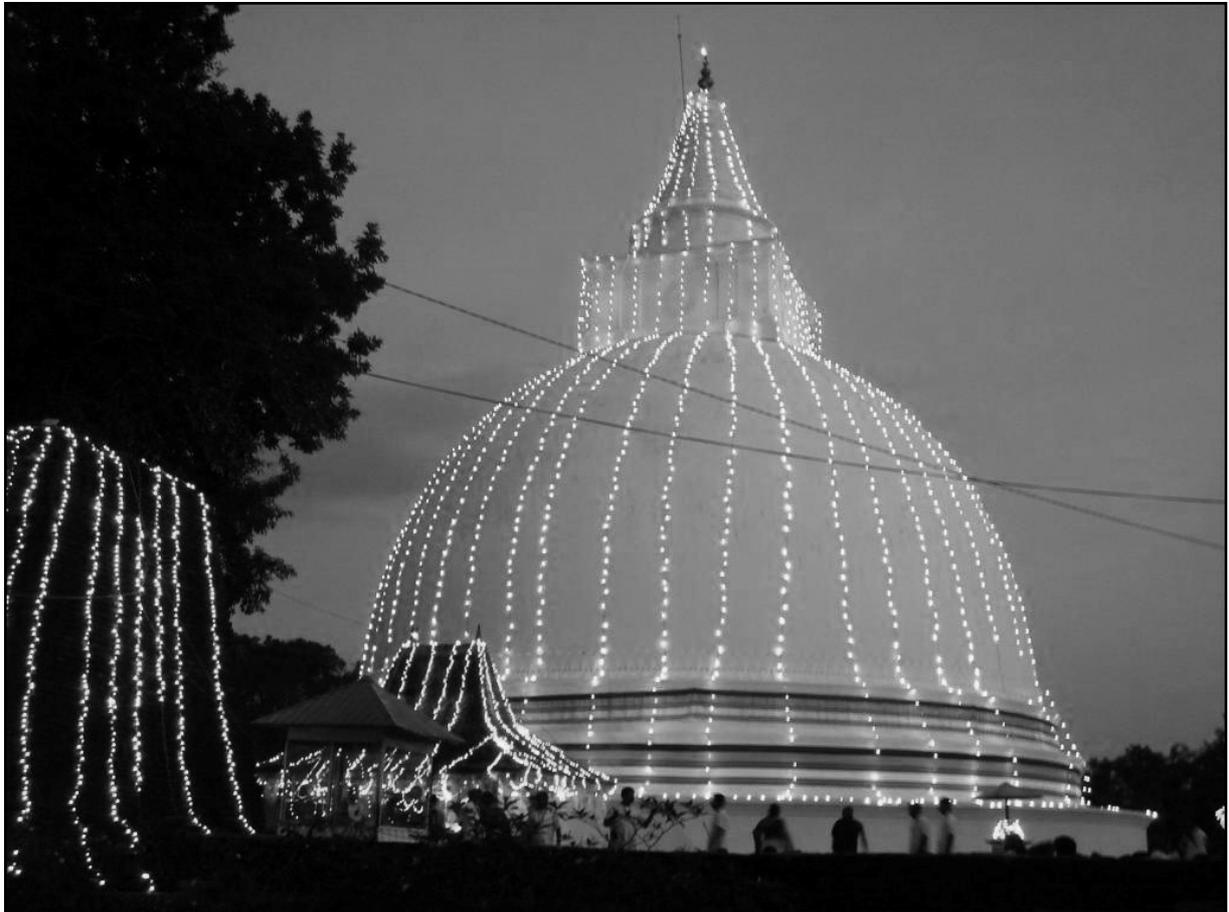


Figure 2.5. The temple at Seruwila during the annual temple festival, August 2007 (own photograph)

Because the story of the temple's founding has been an important element in local Sinhala narratives over the past decades, I treat it in some detail.

At the time that the temple was built, Kottiyar Pattu formed the northern extremity of the kingdom of Rohana, with its capital near present-day Tissamaharama. The Mahaweli River formed a natural boundary between Rohana and the Anuradhapura kingdom, which was controlled by Elara, a wise but foreign (South Indian) king who

³³ Kemper (1991: 149, n.34) notes that other traditions do not include Seruwila among the 16 places visited by the Buddha, and that these traditions locate the forehead relic in Tissamaharama instead of in Seruwila.

³⁴ Quite separate from whether or not the forehead relic was enshrined in Seruwila, I do not share Kemper's scepticism regarding the identification of the Seruwila temple as the temple described in the *Dhatuvamsa*. The alternative site that he refers to is far away from the mouth of the river, where ships laden with treasures were discovered that helped to cover the construction expenses (*Dhatuvamsa*: 40).

would later be fought and killed by Dutugemunu. Over time, this boundary had become marked by religious edifices that may have served to visualise claims to space: the *Dhatuvamsa* credits Kavanthissa's father Gotabhaya with building 500 temples on one side and 500 temples on the other side of the Mahaweli River (*Dhatuvamsa*: 23). Kavanthissa is subsequently credited with positioning military guards at the fordable places across the river (*Mahavamsa* XXIII:16), in order to stop incursions by troops from Anuradhapura. The construction of the temple at Seruwila must be seen in this context of ongoing (and increasing) tensions that escalated into full-scale war within years after the relics were enshrined in the temple. It is interesting to note the contrast in the description of Kavanthissa's actions between the *Mahavamsa* and the *Dhatuvamsa*. The *Mahavamsa* (which does not mention the Seruwila temple at all) depicts Kavanthissa as a coward who refused to engage Elara: Dutugemunu sent his father a set of women's clothes to let him know how he thought about him, and subsequently fled to Malayarata, the mountainous region in the centre of Sri Lanka (*Mahavamsa* XXIV:3-7), where he remained until after his father's funeral (*Mahavamsa* XXIV:16-17). According to the *Dhatuvamsa*, Dutugemunu was sent to a place called Girinuwara by his father, to stay with Kavanthissa's sister Soma Devi and her husband (Giri) Abhaya (*Dhatuvamsa*: 32). No mention is made of any conflict between father and son. Since the name Girinuwara means something like 'rock city', it might well refer to a place somewhere in the mountains, and thus both chronicles may have documented the same journey. While Dutugemunu was in Girinuwara, a conflict developed between him and Abhaya. In order to avoid a fight, Abhaya and his wife moved to stay with his friend king Siva of Serunuwara, together with a full complement of soldiers. Siva welcomed them, and built a new settlement for them "on a beautiful land beside a lake", which was called Somanuwara after the queen (*Dhatuvamsa*: 33). Foreseeing that Kavanthissa did not have much longer to live, a monk reminded him of a prophecy by the Buddha himself, namely that a king called Kavanthissa would enshrine his forehead bone relic in a temple near the banks of lake Seru on the right bank of the Mahaweli river. Kavanthissa thus called Dutugemunu back to Mahagama, handed over royal authority to his son, and went to Seruwila. There, he got the support of Abhaya, Siva of Serunuwara, and a certain Mahanaga (or Mahanama) of Lonanuwara.

In the version of history as re-told by the *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon* (UHC; vol. I, part I: 150, cited in Kemper 1991: 150), Kavanthissa is neither a coward nor simply a religious old man, but a very strategic operator. Having put his son in charge of day-to-day operations in the kingdom, Kavanthissa proceeded to the kingdom of Seru with his army in order to ensure the regional king's allegiance in the upcoming war against Elara. Publicly announcing the plan to build a temple and enshrine relics of the Buddha with the (requested) help of the people of Seru was a mere ruse to ensure obedience: nobody wants to be accused of opposing a benign act of religiosity, particularly if some of the most important relics of the Buddha are involved. In this way, Kavanthissa established his control over this strategic border region without having to fight for it.

Unfortunately, I do not know on which sources the authors of the UCHC based their version of events. While the analysis sounds plausible, I am therefore a little reluctant to accept it unhesitatingly.

After the site for the *dagaba* was miraculously pointed out by bulls, horses and an elephant, preparations for construction began (*Dhatuvamsa*: 37-8). Kavanthissa's next worry was how to get the required materials without unduly burdening the people living in the area. Fortunately for him, the gods were in his favour, and organised a pile of bricks on the land of a poor Brahmin, who was promptly rewarded with many treasures for passing them on to the king (*Dhatuvamsa*: 39). Subsequently, four ships laden with gold mysteriously appeared at the mouth of the river. The guard who found them, was rewarded with many treasures, and the gold was used to finance the construction of the temple and to make a wealth of decorations for the relic chamber (*Dhatuvamsa*: 40)³⁵. With divine help, the temple was finished quickly. The *Dhatuvamsa*'s narrative ends with a description of an elaborate inauguration ceremony (*Dhatuvamsa*: 40-3).

Apart from the obvious importance of the Seruwila temple as marker of the start of Buddhism in Kottiyar Pattu, there are three other conclusions that can be drawn from the early references to the area. First of all, Kottiyar Pattu was sufficiently strategically important to warrant a visit by king Kavanthissa himself. Secondly, Kottiyar Pattu was already inhabited by non-Buddhists: *vide* the claim of queen Soma Devi that there was no Buddhist temple in the area (*Dhatuvamsa*: 33), the reference to a Brahmin owning the field where the bricks were found (*Dhatuvamsa*: 39), and the fact that both regional kings who are mentioned (Siva and Mahanaga) have Hindu names (*Dhatuvamsa*: 38). Thirdly, the fact that copper from Seruwila was used to build the Ruwanveliseya *dagaba* within decades after the construction of the Seruwila temple seems to hint at a reasonable extent of incorporation into the larger economy and administrative organisation of Sri Lanka.

Ilankaithurai/Lankapatuna

The second major site of current (Buddhist) politico-religious value in Kottiyar Pattu can be found in the hamlet of Seenanveli³⁶, on the north shore of the lagoon mouth near Ilankaithurai (Tamil for "Port of Lanka", or "Ceylon Jetty" as someone once poetically translated it for me). The fame of the place comes from the claim that it was once a major port with the name Lankapatuna (Sinhala for "Port of Lanka" or

³⁵ Note the similarities with the *Mahavamsa*'s description of the construction of the Ruwanveliseya *Dagaba*: the king not wanting to tax the people, first bricks and then precious metals being miraculously provided, and divine assistance with the logistics of the construction.

³⁶ Seenanveli means "the field of the Chinese" in Tamil. The origin of the name is shrouded in mystery. A Chinese armada did visit Sri Lanka several times in the thirteenth century (Viviano, 2005), but I did not come across any local narratives referring to these events.

Bridging troubled waters?

“Place of Lanka”). It was here that the Tooth Relic of the Buddha (now housed in Kandy) arrived in Sri Lanka somewhere around the year 370 AD, en route from a port town somewhere in India to Anuradhapura (*Dathavamsa* IV:41, IV:56, V:3). The description of the journey given in the *Dathavamsa* is conducive to such an interpretation, which was first pronounced after a visit by the Archaeological Survey Department in 1962 (Solheim and Deraniyagala 1972: 4, 21).

I first visited the place in 2001, when it was still under LTTE control. At the time, it was merely a rocky outcrop on the outskirts of a hamlet called Seenanveli. There was a small Murugan temple next to it, and – so I was told – some small old statues on top. On the other side of the lagoon mouth, there was another Hindu temple, perched on what is arguably one of Sri Lanka’s most beautiful beaches. Not long after the 2002 ceasefire, a group of about 20 Sinhala Buddhist architects and engineers suddenly showed up, and started working out plans for a *pansala* in front of a startled group of Tamil villagers. They were so offended by the arrogance of the group, that the statues were smashed up no sooner the Sinhalese left, with obvious support of the local LTTE leadership (conversation with NGO staff working in Seenanveli at the time, 2002).

After the Sri Lankan army captured the area from the LTTE in late 2006, Sarath N. Silva (Sri Lanka’s Chief Justice at the time, and a prominent member of the Society for the Development of the [Seruwila] Mangala Maha Chaitiya) was taken on an



Figure 2.6. The newly constructed shrine at Lankapatuna, August 2007 (own photograph)

inspection tour, during which he ‘discovered’ the site of the Lankapatuna Samudragiri *vihara*. Subsequently, the army built a small *dagaba*, and a place for a monk to stay. Since then, the place has seen a steady trickle of pilgrims (see figure 2.6). The Hindu temple next to the rock on which the *dagaba* was built has been destroyed. Another Hindu temple on the other side of the lagoon mouth was fenced off with barbed wire and inaccessible when I visited the place in August 2007.

Apart from the ruins at Seruwila and Seenanveli, almost every Sinhala village, as well as a few non-Sinhala villages, in Kottiyar Pattu has some kind of ruin: an earth mound that looks like a *dagaba*, some carved rocks, or a Buddha statue. In the rocky outcrops in Eechchilampattu DS Division, a few man-made caves can be found that seem to have been inhabited at some point in time. Little is known about these remains.

2.3.3 Chola influence (1017-1070) and Kulakkottan

Trading port between Polonnaruwa and Thanjavur

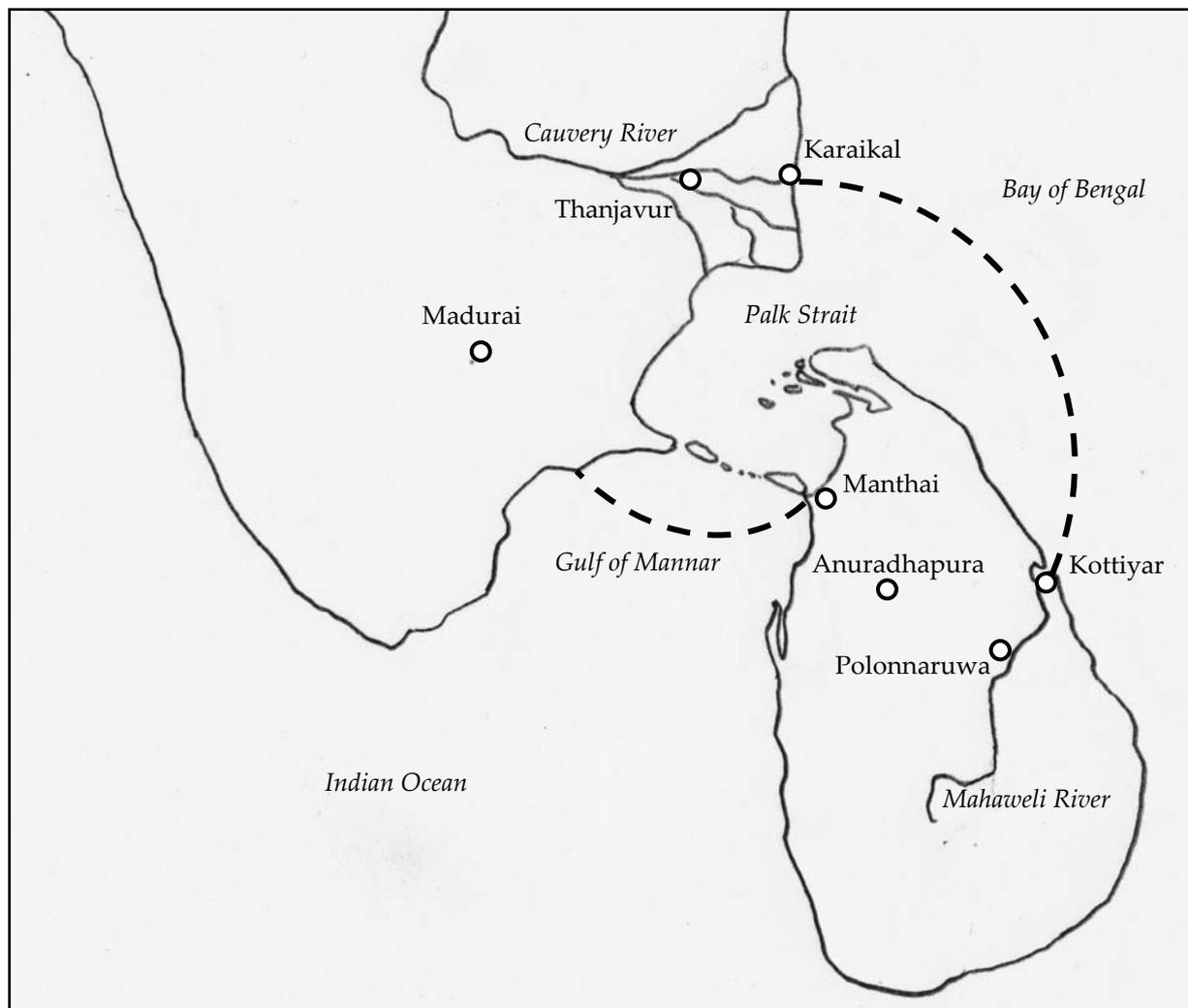
In the first millennium AD the town of Trincomalee, also known as Gokarna, seems to have seen quite some trade with other ports in the Bay of Bengal. According to the *Mahavamsa* (XXXVII: 40-1), Mahasena destroyed a Hindu temple in Gokarna and replaced it with a Buddhist *vihara*³⁷ in the third century AD. Two centuries later, the *Vayupurana* documents the existence of “a great temple of Sankara named Gokarna” on the eastern coast of Sri Lanka (Pathmanathan 2006b: 59). In the seventh century, the Indian sage Sampanthar described Trincomalee as a “spacious and prosperous [town] supporting a large population” (*idem*: 61). Together with Manthai in the north-west (which served trade with Madurai and long-distance trade with Europe and China), Trincomalee seems to have been a key trading centre for the Anuradhapura kingdom.

Towards the end of the tenth century the kingdom that was centred in Anuradhapura collapsed, and the capital shifted to Polonnaruwa. Not long afterwards, the Cholas from South India (who, as well as the Pandiyans – another South Indian kingdom – had been making brief forays into Sri Lanka since the middle of the ninth century but always retreated again) annexed large parts of Sri Lanka. They remained in charge until 1070 (De Silva 2003: 61). Because the Mahaweli river flowed right past Polonnaruwa, Kottiyar at the mouth of the river was a key port. The quickest way to travel between Polonnaruwa and the Chola capital Thanjavur was to sail down the Mahaweli River to Kottiyar, then cross the sea, land at one of the towns in the Cauvery delta, and sail up the Cauvery River to Thanjavur

³⁷ This reference was used as justification for the construction of a Buddhist temple in the fort of Trincomalee, despite the total lack of archaeological evidence. Hoole contends that there were other places with the name Gokarna, and this particular reference may refer to another place with the same name (Hoole 2001: 75-77).

Bridging troubled waters?

(map 2.6). Copper from Seruwila may have been shipped to the Chola kingdom for use in some of the intricate brass statues that can still be seen in the National Art Gallery in Chennai.



Map 2.6. Key places and shipping routes in mediaeval Sri Lanka and South India

During the period of Chola domination, Kottiyar Pattu seems to have had a somewhat special position. Among many inscriptions documenting tax obligations of foreign territories to the Rajarajesvara temple in Thanjavur, there is only one that refers to Sri Lanka (figure 2.7). This inscription (no. 92) documents that five villages from the areas of Mappisumbu-Kottiyaram (also called Rajaraja-valanadu) and Kanakkan-Kottiyaram (also called Vikrama-Chola-valanadu), identified as together covering the area that later was called Kottiyar Pattu, were paying tributes to the temple during the reign of Rajaraja I, who reigned from 983 to 1014 AD (Hultsch and Venkayya 1992 [1916]; de Silva 2003:25). Unfortunately, except for one (Masar – which does not sound like any contemporary village in the area), the names of the villages cannot be identified because the inscription has been damaged. The inscription does however underscore that the area was of some importance to the Chola kings. Of further interest is the fact that the tributes were to be paid partly in

paddy, partly in cash, and partly in *iluppai-pāl* (“the milk of the *iluppai* tree”, a kind of oil that was used for burning the lamps in the temple), whereas most villages mentioned in other inscriptions were to pay in gold or money. From this, it might be possible to infer that significant amounts of paddy were produced in Kottiyar Pattu. Since Kottiyar was a key trading port, the alternative interpretation that there was not enough cash in circulation seems unlikely.



Figure 2.7. Inscription about Kottiyar Pattu, Thanjavur (own photograph)

Kulakkottan

The fact that villages in Kottiyar Pattu were tributable to the temple in Thanjavur gives the impression that they most probably were not tributable to any major temple in the area itself, which brings me to the starting point of local Tamil myths of origin: the rule of a king called Kulakkottan. Documented in the 17th-century *Konesar Kalvettu*³⁸, the myth explaining the arrival of Tamils in Trincomalee District states that Kulakkottan, a man of royal (Chola) blood, renovated the Koneswaram temple in Trincomalee. After doing so, he brought settlers: thirty *tanattaar* families

³⁸ This chronicle was probably written after Rajasinha II had supported the construction of a new Konesar temple in Thampalakamam, following the destruction of the original Konesar temple in Trincomalee town (Velupillai 1990).

from Marungur³⁹, north of the Cauvery river, who were to administer the temple and perform ritual roles (Pathmanathan 2006b: 70 mentions only six families), and twenty-one *varipattaar* families from Karaikal (nowadays part of Pondicherry), south of the Cauvery river, who were to perform menial chores in the service of the temple. In order to supply the temple with income, he renovated irrigation infrastructure, and brought the irrigated fields under the ownership of the temple. Kulakkottan assigned to each village in the district the tributes it was to pay to the temple: rice, oil, flowers, milk, and so on. Kottiyar Pattu was assigned to annually provide the temple with 100 *amunam* (roughly 10 metric tonnes) of rice⁴⁰, as well as fruit, flowers, plantains, milk and curd.

In addition, Kulakkottan is claimed to have brought down a *vanniyar* from either Madurai or the Chola kingdom, to serve as local ruler for what is now Trincomalee District (Nevill 1887b; Velupillai 1990; Pathmanathan 2006b; McGilvray 2008: 80).

The administrative system that Kulakkottan put in place seems to have largely survived until the arrival of the Portuguese (De Queyroz 1992 [1930/1687]: 736), and was replaced by a similar system after the Portuguese destroyed the Koneswaram temple in 1624 (see section 2.3.6). To this very day, some caste communities in Kottiyar Pattu claim to be descendants from the settlers brought by Kulakkottan, and place names like Mallikaithivu (“Jasmine island”) and Sandanavettai (“Plot with sandalwood trees”) refer to particular items that were to be supplied to the Konesar temple.

While nobody seems to doubt that Kulakkottan was a historical person, there is much debate about who this Kulakkottan was and when he lived. Staunch Tamil nationalists date him to a period before the arrival of Vijaya. Others date him to the

³⁹ Marungur has not been identified. Velupillai (1990) has suggested that it may be the same as the present-day town of Marunkapuri, in Trichy District. I have found two places in Tamil Nadu that are still called Marungur: one, which has an old temple, is located not far from Nagarcoil in the deep south of Tamil Nadu (which disqualifies it as a possibility). The other is an insignificant hamlet near Cuddalore, north of the Cauvery delta. Geographically, this hamlet fits the description perfectly. Just before I finalised this dissertation, Dennis McGilvray sent me a newspaper article about ancient remains that have been found at this place (‘Tamil Brahmi potsherds found at urn burial site’, *The Hindu*, 05-03-2010). According to the article, an ancient habitational mound is evidence that this Marungur has been inhabited by people since the first century BC; the potsherds are evidence that some of them were literate.

⁴⁰ An *amunam* is a measure for weight, and equals about 5 to 6 bushels, or about 105 to 125 kilograms of unhusked paddy. The term has been in use for centuries as a measure of cultivated area: an *amunam* of paddy fields equals the area that can be cultivated using an *amunam* of seed paddy. One *amunam* equals 2 ½ acres or about one hectare (<http://www.mnlaw.lk/pages/MEASURES.html>, accessed 9-11-2009). This makes sense; farmers whom I asked how much seed paddy they use generally told me they use 2 bushels per acre.

middle of the first millennium AD (a few hundred years before Aggabodhi II whom I will return to later), while yet others identify him as a contemporary of Magha of Kalinga, who overran Sri Lanka in the first quarter of the thirteenth century (Veluppillai 1990; Pathmanathan (ed.) 2006a). Veluppillai identifies him as Chola-Lankeswara (this means ‘the Chola lord of Lanka’). This man was the viceroy in charge of the Chola possessions in Sri Lanka in the middle of the 11th century, “before he was called upon to assume the Imperial crown as Vira Rajendra in 1063 AD” (Veluppillai 1990:97). Pathmanathan stresses the point that the *Konesar Kalvettu* should not be seen as a rigidly chronological document (interview, Kandy, October 2008; see also Pathmanathan 2006b:72). It is very well possible that things that happened earlier or later in time were ascribed to Kulakkottan. Still, with regard to the formal settlement of people from the Chola kingdom, Veluppillai’s dating of Kulakkottan seems to make sense. I doubt that Kottiyar Pattu would have been made tributary to both the temple in Thanjavur and the Koneswaram temple at the same time. Perhaps a form of decentralisation took place after Rajendra Chola I (1012-1044) shifted the capital to Gangaikonda Cholapuram. On top of this, the available legends subsequently credit king Gajabahu II, who ruled from 1132 to 1153 and who subsequently retired to Kantale, with “invit[ing] service castes to come and settle in Trincomalee. Five families each of blacksmiths, potters, barbers, washermen and drummers were settled with house sites and cultivable land, and were designated as service castes of Kōnēsvaram temple” (*ibid.*). Settling service castes without first settling high castes makes no sense.

As with many other kings, Kulakkottan is claimed to have been involved in the construction of irrigation reservoirs. The reservoir that he is most often associated with is the tank at Kantale, which has been a Brahmin agricultural settlement since at least the Chola period (Pathmanathan 2006c: 199). This association is contested: according to the Sinhala chronicles, this reservoir was built during the rule of king Aggabodhi II (606-618 AD), and later rehabilitated during the rule of king Parakkamabahu I (1153-1186 AD)⁴¹. It may well be that Kulakkottan was involved in repair works or extension works, but I doubt that he constructed the entire tank.

⁴¹ In May 2006, this claim was visualised by the construction of a statue of king Aggabodhi II on the reservoir bund under the leadership of the Member of Parliament for Kantale, a member of the Sinhala nationalist JVP, and chairman of the irrigation committee for the Kantale irrigation scheme. The construction of the statue was evidently a slap in the face of the Tamil population of Trincomalee District. At the same time, a group of nationalist Sinhala Buddhists set up a Buddha statue on the Trincomalee bus stand. This generated much controversy, and was the cause of many months of tension, *hartals* and violence in Trincomalee. A court case to get the statue removed ran into a stalemate when the order was given to remove all illegal religious structures in Trincomalee – most of which were Hindu shrines, and some of which had been put up by powerful Tamil leaders. The leader of the Tamil opposition to the statue, Mr. Vigneswaran, was killed in April 2006, presumably by forces linked to the state. Note that the location of the Buddha statue was entirely inappropriate: it is next to the fish market (where living beings are being killed), and very close to a bar. No orthodox Buddhist would think of putting up a place of worship in such a

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In the *Konesar Kalvettu*, Kulakkottan is linked to the Allai tank in Kottiyar Pattu:

“In the fourth year [after the Koneswaram temple was finished], the great tank was made, and the waters of the Maha Vili river, where the Sêr fish leap, conducted to it, and distributed in five directions.

He invoked as guardian of the sluice Paravi Vênthan, the Green Mâl who sleeps on the Milky Ocean, and the Vênthan, Mâyan who slept on the Pântal (serpent) awoke, and opened the sluice, and said, ‘you have laboriously made a tank, in Ilankai Tivu for the Konai Linkar of the perfume-wafting Red Hair-lock One, and thus gained boundless felicity.’

Circling the five-handed Pulleâr, the king then saw the beauty of the waters that filled up the hollows, and finding it sufficient as an endowment, he thanked the gods that he was permitted to see the ever-full Sêr-fish skimmed tank.

[...]

The Manar-manan thus irrigated 2,700 amunams of land, and greatly extended the flower forests that yielded honey.” (Nevill 1887b:173-174)

Nevill identifies this as the Allai tank, on account of the water originating from the Mahaweli River (I do not know if Nevill knew that there actually *is* an ancient channel connecting the Mahaweli to the Kantale tank). Apart from this, he interprets the mention of the “Sêr-fish” as a mistaken attempt by the *kalvettu*’s author to establish an ethymological explanation for the lake’s old name of “Sêru-wâ-wila” (*idem*: 176). I agree with Nevill’s interpretation for an entirely different reason. The command area of the tank is mentioned to be 2,700 *amunam*, which is about 2,700 ha. This was about the command area of the Allai tank before the Allai Extension Scheme was implemented, while the Kantale tank had a much larger command area. De Queyroz claims that “in two fields alone [...] called Tambalagâma and Gantale they sowed in those days [prior to the destruction of the Koneswaram temple in Trincomalee in 1624 – TG] in each of them 10,000 *amanões* of *nele* [...], and that twice a year.” (Queyroz 1992 [1930/1687]:68,69).

This link is interesting, because it is the only reference I know of that links Kulakkottan to the Allai tank, and because the Dutchman Van Senden, writing around the time that the chronicle was written, explicitly links Kulakkottan to the Kantale tank, but has nothing to say about the origins of the Allai tank which he also visited (Van Senden 1786b). If there is any historical truth in the story, this would directly link Kulakkottan to Kottiyar Pattu and confirm local myths of origin.

defiled place, and that is what makes many Tamils believe there are other, political forces behind the whole issue. Due to the tensions over the ‘Trincomalee Buddha statue’, the construction of the statue of Aggabodhi II was kept on hold for several months, but it has since been completed.

2.3.4 Between the Cholas and the Portuguese (1070-1620)

By the year 1070, the Cholas had been expelled from Sri Lanka. Polonnaruwa was the capital of an independent kingdom until Magha of Kalinga dealt it its death blow about 180 years later (De Silva 2003: 60-4). As long as Polonnaruwa was the capital of Sri Lanka, Kottiyar (or Kotthasāra as it is called in the *Culavamsa*) remained an important port (Pali Dictionary n.y., entry for Kotthasāra). Because of its strategic importance, the Sinhala rulers of Polonnaruwa maintained a garrison of elite *Velaikkarar* mercenaries (of Chola origin) and mercenaries from Kerala in Kottiyar. During times of internal conflict, both Vikkamabahu I and Gajabahu II (who converted to Hinduism, actively supported the spread of Hindu teaching by bringing in people from South India, and ended his days in the Brahmin settlement at Kantale) sought refuge in Kottiyar, which could be reached easily from Polonnaruwa, and from where – in case of extreme emergency – it was possible to escape to India (*Culavamsa* LXI: 43, LXX: 355, LXXI: 6, 11, LXXIV: 44).

There is only one reference to the presence of Sinhalese in the area, dated to somewhere around 1155 AD. Around this time, the “Sihala and Kerala (mercenaries) dwelling in Kotthasara banded themselves together with the Velakkara force” (*Culavamsa* LXXIV: 44-9), and decided to capture Polonnaruwa while Parakramabahu I had sent most of his troops out to conquer Rohana. After he had put down the uprising, Parakramabahu I withdrew the local ruling rights from the mercenaries, granted autonomous status to some villages, and declared other villages to be royal property.

Several years later, the “Damila kings, Maghinda and Jayabahu,” built fortifications in Kottiyar and Kantale, as in many other places (*Culavamsa* LXXXIII: 15, 20). Tamil and Kerala soldiers were stationed there, until a Sinhala army chased them away. If Geiger’s identification of these kings as Magha of Kalinga and Vijayabahu III is correct, the construction of these fortifications took place around 1230 AD.

It may well be that the Seruwila temple was abandoned during the reign of Magha, who is claimed to have destroyed a wide range of Buddhist temples (*Rajavaliya*: 62), and who local traditions closely associate with turmoil in Batticaloa District, where the Mukkuvar rose to power around the same time (McGilvray 2008). The *Dhatuvamsa*, which was probably composed not long after Magha’s rule, is the last description that was made of the Seruwila temple for a long time. One of its objectives may have been to preserve the tradition of a temple that had been destroyed, just like the *Konesar Kalvettu* did for the Koneswaram temple (Veluppillai 1990). The *Sri Lamkadvipaye Kadaim*, a detailed description of the geography of Sri Lanka and its important places that was written sometime around 1344 AD (Abeyawardana 1999: 47), mentions Kotthasara as a separate administrative unit, but makes no mention of the temple at Seruwila. The same is true for two fairly detailed descriptions of Trincomalee District that were written by VOC officials in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (De Graauwe 1676; Van Senden 1786b).

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After the reign of Magha, the Polonnaruwa kingdom disintegrated. Over the next two centuries, the capital was shifted southwestward in several steps. By the middle of the fifteenth century, three separate kingdoms had developed in Kotte (near Colombo), Kandy and Jaffna. It seems that at this time, Kottiyar Pattu was part of a more or less autonomous region that roughly overlapped with present-day Trincomalee District. It was ruled by *vanniyars* who paid tribute to whichever of the three kingdoms was dominant⁴². A fourteenth-century inscription that was found at the Agasthiyar Stabanam, near Kankuveli⁴³, indicates that the Trincomalee *vanniyar* had control over Kottiyar Pattu. It records the granting of grazing land (or grazing rights) by the *vanniyar* of Trincomalee to temple of Konainathan in Kankuveli, in the presence of the seven *adappar* (the priests who served in the Koneswaram temple), the *tanattar* and the *varipattar* – precisely the groups that Kulakkottan was said to have brought into the area (interview with prof. Pathmanathan, Kandy, August 2008; see also Nevill 1888: 26; Pathmanathan 1976: 5⁴⁴).

The loss of Polonnaruwa as a hinterland for trade must have caused a significant economic backlash in Trincomalee District. Nevertheless, when the Portuguese arrived, they found a thriving agricultural society. As indicated by Farmer (1957:17), the theory that society in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka collapsed rapidly following the abandonment of Polonnaruwa (De Silva 2003: 81-4) is flawed. While the collapse of the Polonnaruwa kingdom did mean that many irrigation schemes in north-central Sri Lanka were no longer maintained and collapsed after bunds and channels disintegrated, some reservoirs had been built so solidly that they continued functioning for a long time. The large reservoir at Kaudulla (built in the 3rd century AD) only broke around 1680 (Pybus 2001 [1958/1762]: 36), and the Minneriya tank (built in the 3rd century AD) remained operational right until it was renovated in the 1930s (Brohier 1998 [1941]: 18-39). Around Trincomalee, the Kantale tank and the Allai tank suffered from lack of maintenance and from periods of displacement, but remained operational to some extent until they were thoroughly renovated in the 1860s (De Graauwe 1676; Van Senden 1786b, AR 1867). As mentioned above, De Queyroz even claimed that the Kantale tank irrigated 20,000 *amunam* (about 20,000 ha) twice a year, right until the Portuguese intervention caused the displacement of the population.

⁴² De Queyroz (1992 [1930/1687]: 32) claims that all the regions of Sri Lanka paid tribute to the king of Kotte. This may have been a ruse to make the Portuguese believe that Kotte was more important than it actually was, thus preventing the Portuguese from dealing with the king of Jaffna or Kandy instead.

⁴³ Kankuveli means “field near the [Mahaweli] Gangai”. Being the largest river in the island, and definitely the largest river in the region, it is often simply referred to as “Gangai” (in Tamil) or “Ganga” (in Sinhala).

⁴⁴ Van Senden (1786b) included a transcript of this inscription in his diary, and recorded a (very poor) translation that someone gave him.

2.3.5 Portuguese presence (1621-1639)

When, in 1505, the Portuguese established a presence in Sri Lanka, they limited their presence to the coastal areas of the kingdom of Kotte, up to the port town of Mannar. Jaffna, which was then an independent kingdom, and the east coast, which by then fell under the kingdom of Kandy, were not touched. Kottiyar was an important port for Kandy, as “clothes, opium, saltpetre and lead” were imported through it (De Queyroz 1992 [1930/1687]: 65). For almost a century, the Portuguese in Sri Lanka had no competition from other Europeans. The first time that rivalling traders from Europe set foot on the island was in 1602, when a small Dutch fleet under the leadership of Cornelis Boschhouwer landed in Batticaloa. Over the next couple of years, the Dutch visited Sri Lanka several more times, and established contact with the king of Kandy. Boschhouwer returned to Sri Lanka in 1611, when he landed in Kottiyar. While he was negotiating a treaty with the king in Kandy, Portuguese troops ambushed the troops he had left behind in Kottiyar, only to be ambushed themselves by Kandyan troops a few days later (Baldaeus 1996 [1703/1672]: 687). Trade, however, does not seem to have picked up very much. Boschhouwer, who saw trading potential, wanted to return to Sri Lanka. As the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC, or United East Indies Company) had its resources tied up in warfare in Indonesia and was not willing to fund another expedition, he linked up with the king of Denmark. A Danish merchant fleet landed in the Kottiyar Bay in 1620, but Boschhouwer had died on the way. The Danish dispatched an emissary to meet the king of Kandy and started building a small fortress. They were not very lucky. The king does not seem to have been very welcoming, and as soon as the Portuguese heard of the arrival of the Danes, they sent troops who captured Trincomalee and chased the Danish fleet away (*idem*: 699-700; Pieris 1995 [1918] and 1999 [1920]). After Jaffna had been conquered in 1619 (Abeyasinghe 2005), it suddenly became important to close off the east coast, which functioned as a ‘back door’ to Kandy, to competing European fleets. Fortifications were built and small troop concentrations were established in Trincomalee and Batticaloa:

“The objective for which this fort [Trincomalee] was built at this place and for which it is maintained is to prevent European enemies from putting up a fort on this side of the island and then contact the king of Kandy and from having communications with him through Kottiyarama. No less important are the land which this fort commands [in Thampalakamam] and which could be cultivated if there were people enough. Nor should we fail to mention the excellent facilities of navigation to all ports of Bengal, Pegu, Malacca and the entire southern region starting from as well as returning to the Bay of Bows⁴⁵” (Bocarro 1996 [1635]: 53).

⁴⁵ The Bay of Bows (*Bahia dos Arcos*) is the name the Portuguese gave to the Kottiyar Bay. The shore of this bay indeed consists of a string of small bays that look like arches. This name may have survived to the present day. Someone in Trincomalee once told me that China Bay, which covers the interior part of this bay, is a corrupted version of “Chain of bays”.

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Apart from this, the Portuguese realised that the Trincomalee harbour is the only harbour in the entire Bay of Bengal where ships can be sheltered from wind and waves right throughout the year (*ibid.*). It was therefore a kind of safety net for anyone engaged in naval trade in the region.

Kottiyar Pattu was of strategic value for another reason: there were salterns near Ilankaithurai, that provided some of the best salt in the country⁴⁶. One of the key strategies to force Kandy into negotiations was by blocking access to sources of salt, which was considered a crucial resource (De Queyroz 1992 [1930/1687]: 66, 1153). As the salterns in Kottiyar were not captured, this strategy failed.

The Kandyan king was not amused by the actions of the Portuguese, and neither were the Dutch. In 1638, the Dutch signed an agreement with king Rajasinha II to chase out the Portuguese from Ceylon. In the onslaught, Kottiyar and Trincomalee were captured in 1639, a mere 18 years after the Portuguese first set foot in Trincomalee. The Portuguese struck back one last time in 1640 with a raid against the Dutch fortification in Kottiyar, in which they massacred those present, only to be ambushed themselves on their way back to the west coast.

Brief though their reign may have been, the Portuguese fundamentally altered the socio-political landscape of Trincomalee District. With the brashness that he became reputed for, Constantine de Sa de Noronha, the Portuguese captain-general of Ceylon, planted his fortification in Trincomalee right across the heart of local society. The Koneswaram temple, around which the religious, political and economic organisation of society in the district revolved, was destroyed and re-used as building material for the fort that was built right next to it. By doing so, De Sa cut the ritual heart out of the vanniya-ship of Trincomalee⁴⁷. As the constituent vanniya-ships of Kottiyar Pattu, Kattukulam Pattu and Thampalakamam Pattu had no more obligations to the temple, the political connectedness of the district disintegrated.

Not long afterwards, the Kantale tank and its paddy fields in Kantale and Thampalakamam were abandoned, and the population fled to Kottiyar Pattu. Whether this was in response to the collapse of Trincomalee, in response to attacks by Portuguese, or in response to a strategic decision of the king of Kandy to deprive

⁴⁶ This area, a salty marsh, is known as Uppural (Tamil for 'saltern') to this very day, even though no salt is collected anymore. The distance from Kottiyar is given as 2½ leagues (about 15 km), which fits neatly. De Queyroz' initial identification of the place as "Tamâncauarê" (Tamankaduwa) is mistaken (De Queyroz 1992 [1930/1687]: 66). De Graauwe's description (1676) and several Dutch maps do show that Tamankaduwa stretched all the way to the coast, but this was at Vakarai.

⁴⁷ According to de Queyroz, Koneswaram even had islandwide significance as "the honoured sepulchre of the Kings of Cota and of the others in Ceylon, or the Urn of their ashes" (1992[1930/1687]: 736). If true, the desecration of the royal cemetery would have added significant insult to injury.

the Portuguese of a food-producing hinterland is not clear⁴⁸. What is clear, is that by the time Bocarro wrote his report (less than two decades after the destruction of the temple), the Portuguese could only dream of harnessing the vast productivity of the area (Bocarro 1996 [1635]: 52). After the Kantale tank was abandoned,

“the lands [...] became unhealthy on account of the swamps and the water stagnating in those extensive plains. And for want of a garrison and ships of war, the [Trincomalee fort] became a cage, looking on at what entered or left for the profit of the Candiot [*sic*] without being able to do him any injury or to prevent him from doing any” (De Queyroz 1992 [1930/1687]: 1153).

Over time, Kottiyar Pattu came firmly under the control of the Kandyan kingdom. Kottiyar suddenly became one of the most important ports for international trade, as Kandy’s access to other ports was cut off. In parallel with the decline of Trincomalee, Kottiyar Pattu bloomed.

2.3.6 The ‘Dutch period’ (1639-1796)

After the Dutch took control of Trincomalee in 1639, the town remained in their control pretty much uninterrupted until the end of the 18th century. Dutch control over the hinterland (including Kottiyar Pattu) varied over time. As mentioned above, the Dutch outpost in Kottiyar was raided in 1640, and it was not until 1668 that control over the area was re-established under Governor van Goens the Elder. The cash-strapped Council of the VOC in Batavia disagreed with Van Goens’ fairly successful but expensive strategy aimed at colonising the entire country (De Silva 2003: 137-141). Under Van Goens’ successor, Dutch interests shifted back from controlling territory to controlling trade. The areas outside the forts of Trincomalee and Batticaloa were given back to the king of Kandy, though small garrisons were maintained at Thampalakamam and Kottiyar. The second and final phase of Dutch control started in 1766 when, following a successful Dutch offensive, the Kandyans ceded control over large stretches of the coastline to the Dutch. Thirty years later, the Netherlands ceased to exist, having become a colony of France, and the British won the tussle over who should take control over the Dutch colonies.

In 1676, during the first period of Dutch control over Kottiyar Pattu, Pieter de Graauwe (commander of Batticaloa, Panama, Kottiyar and Trincomalee), wrote a handing-over document for his successor. In it, he describes Kottiyar Pattu in four pages. Kottiyar Pattu consisted of “16⁴⁹ villages and towns which are ruled by great

⁴⁸ Pybus 2001 [1958/1762]: 25) and De Queyroz (1992[1930/1687]: 1153) seem to have thought that the latter possibility was the most likely one.

⁴⁹ Note that the reported number of villages is three less than the 19 reported by De Queyroz (1992 [1930/1687]: 65).

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and small chiefs, and populated by 11 lineages” (De Graauwe 1676 f. 12; my translation). In the document, the service obligations that each caste had to the “lord of the land” (probably referring to the *dissava* who was appointed by the king of Kandy to govern the area) are described, followed by a description of the people’s obligations to the VOC: catching two elephants a year and feeding them as long as they are in the stables, and supplying salt as tax. The limited taxes that were levied do not seem to have been in line with the flourishing state of the area: a year before De Graauwe wrote his report, Governor Rijckloff Van Goens the Elder described Kottiyar Pattu as

“full of people, cattle and food, and since long a famous trading port, where one can find 80 to 100 ships of all sorts, who call on it from Coromandel with fabrics and other goods, like arrack, sugar, planks, timber etc.

This region of Kottiyar is a very fertile island, which is surrounded by the River on the land-side, and otherwise by the sea.

It is full of villages, and all over it is endowed with flat meadows and paddy fields. Because of this, commonly some 200 to 300 *lasts* of rice⁵⁰ are exported annually to Coromandel and Jaffna.

It was inhabited by Malabars, Sinhalese, Moors, and Chetties from the opposite coast [i.e. Tamil Nadu], who are the most powerful here.

In this well-sited region all the roads of the entire island [of Ceylon], both from the highlands and the lowlands, come together, which generates a lot of activity and traffic, and makes everyone prosper.

From the King’s customs books it has appeared that over 100,000 *pagodas* of import duty has been collected on cloth, and it is important to note that only a minor part of it has been declared for duty. This is why we try to have the trade there proceed, why we have established an earthen fortress at the first place where one arrives and that the vessels must pass, near a populous village called Erkelenchene⁵¹, and why we have established another guard house on the beach in the Outer Bay of Trincomalee, although that fortalice will only be needed for one or two years, until the trade has truly picked up, after which the guard house can be used just for the lascorins, and then Kottiyar will be an exquisite granary for Trincomalee [...]” (Valentijn 1726: 221, my translation).

By this time, Kottiyar Pattu thus was clearly well-integrated into the national and regional economy through its trading port and transport network, as well as through its significant paddy production. This was however not to last. 110 years after De

⁵⁰ A *last* (Dutch for “load”) initially was equal to 1,250 kg; in later years, it was equal to 2,000 kg. The annual rice export from Kottiyar Pattu thus was somewhere between 250 and 600 metric tons.

⁵¹ A map of this fortalice (which could hold a maximum of several dozen people) can be found in the Dutch National Archives (de Graaff, ca. 1695). The map indicates that a plan existed to upgrade the defensive walls from earth to stone.

Graauwe and Van Goens wrote their reports, and nine years before the end of Dutch rule in Trincomalee, Junior Merchant Jacques Fabrice Van Senden wrote a very detailed description of the district. Van Senden was the VOC's representative in Trincomalee at the time, and kept a beautifully written diary on an inspection tour through the entire Trincomalee district (van Senden 1786b; see Schrikker 2006 for an analysis of the context in which Van Senden wrote his diary). Van Senden's description is one of decay, epidemics and displacement. The population of Kottiyar Pattu had been devastated by disease and natural disaster, and several villages had already been abandoned. The remaining people mostly clung on to a precarious existence as subsistence farmers, and there was hardly any trade with Kandy or with South India.

What seems clear from these descriptions is that Kottiyar Pattu flourished during periods that other ports were blocked by the VOC. Around the time that the Dutch took control of Trincomalee, two groups of people moved into the village of Muthur. According to their own remembered history, the first Muslims came to Muthur around the year 1638; they were sent to Muthur by Rajasinha II, the king of Kandy with the objective of improving trade (Samad 2003: 33). In the second half of the 17th century (after the Dutch started persecuting Catholics on the west coast of Sri Lanka), a group of Roman Catholic seafarers of the Pallawilli Paravar caste settled in Muthur, and engaged in fishing and regional trade with other parts of Sri Lanka and with the coast of Tamil Nadu; when the first Catholic missionary visited Muthur in 1697, he found a congregation of about 100 Catholics (Rasaratnam 1992; Samad 2003: 95; De Graauwe 1676 f.14). Before they were displaced from Sri Lanka's west coast, they originated from Tuticoryn⁵²; it is quite well possible that trading links with the South Indian coast still existed when these people settled in Muthur.

As the area became more and more important for the kingdom of Kandy, the king of Kandy increasingly staked his claims to the area. As with the Seruwila temple and the Koneswaram temple, this was done through the sponsoring of politico-religious

⁵² The Paravar of Tuticoryn were a seafaring caste. They converted to Catholicism *en masse* around 1536 in exchange for Portuguese support in a conflict over trade with a group of Muslim merchants. When the Dutch set up a trading post in Tuticoryn, they established a substantial trade in cloth. This enabled a group of Paravar to take cloth trading as their new hereditary occupation (Casie Chitty 1837). According to Van Senden (1786b), the Paravar of Muthur belonged to the Pallavilli subcaste. I am not sure whether this subcaste was one engaged in fishing, maritime trade, or cloth trade. Given the location of Muthur as a fishing village and a key port for international trade of the Kandy kingdom (with cloth being a particularly important product being imported through Muthur), all options are open. Note that Casie Chitty (1834: 55, 232) identifies Paravar and Pallavilli as separate castes. An inquiry into the names and hereditary occupations of Paravar subcastes during a visit to a number of Paravar villages near Kanniyakumari in Tamil Nadu (summer 2008) generated so much embarrassment among the people whom I asked that I had to abandon my quest for a more definite answer.

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set-ups revolving around temples. As, by this time, the vast majority of the population in Kottiyar Pattu and in Thampalakamam was Hindu, the supported temples were Hindu temples, despite the Kandyan kings being Buddhists themselves.

Within decades after the Dutch established firm control over Trincomalee, king Rajasinha II sponsored the construction of the Adhi Konesar (Siva) temple in Thampalakamam and what seems to have been a fairly elaborate renovation and expansion of the Cittiravelayutham (Murugan) temple in Verugal⁵³. Both of these temples are regional temples, just like the temple in Mandoor that has been described by Mark Whitaker (1999). Rather than being served by just one village or one caste, these temples are linked to complicated patronage networks, in which different castes and villages have their specific roles, responsibilities, and hierarchical rankings. By presenting himself as the restorer (or builder) and supporter of these temples and the religio-political networks surrounding them, the king of Kandy assured himself of the allegiance of the population in both areas, without having to send his troops to enforce allegiance. This strategic move is very reminiscent of what Kavanthissa did with the Seruwila temple. But where the claim to authority of the Seruwila temple was based on the presence of relics of the Buddha, the authority of the temples at Thampalakamam and Verugal rested in their (reinterpreted) continuation of the politico-religious structure that had existed before the destruction of the Koneswaram temple.

In the case of the temple at Thampalakamam, this was visualised by the fact that the statues of the principal deities in the temple (Siva and his wife Parvathi) were claimed to have been salvaged from the original Konesar temple in Trincomalee. With the construction of the Adhi Konesar temple, the king resettled the people who had fled to Kottiyar Pattu in the area around Kantale and Thampalakamam (Varathasuntharam 2006). Paddy cultivation under the Kantale tank was restarted, and a 10% tax was levied on the harvest. He subsequently gave half of the tax back for the maintenance of the temple, thereby perpetuating his role as benefactor without having to pay a cent for it (van Senden 1786b, entry for June 7). The religio-political network that was set up around the temple was very closely modelled on the system that Kulakkottan was said to have instituted, and to prove these links a chronicle (the *Tirukonacala Puranam*) was commissioned (Varathasuntharam 2006; Veluppillai 1990). Links with the people's temporary hosts in Kottiyar Pattu were

⁵³ The oldest map mentioning the "Virgel Pagood" that I have come across dates back to around 1695 (Toorzee, ca. 1695). A diary that was maintained by Governor Falck during a tour that he undertook in 1767 mentions the temple. On his tour, Falck and his entourage "arrived at Suamikoil or Wirgel-koi (verukal), a large stone built heathen (Hindu) temple" (Sinnathamby 1976: 3). In 1843, Bennett declared the Verugal temple an attraction for tourists travelling through the area: "The pagoda upon the left or north bank is of great antiquity, and worth examining" (Bennett 1998 [1843]: 247).

also maintained: the bards at the temple festival are still brought in from Sampoor (where one can still find a *pulavankudi* [“clan of poets”]), the festival flag is painted by someone from Kilivetti, and a ritual sacred thread is worn by a Sindhunadar Thimilar from Eechchilampattu (Varathasuntharam 2006: 109).

The Verugal temple had no formal link with Koneswaram, but here also the caste hierarchy is justified with reference to a local myth of how Kulakkottan settled seven castes in Kottiyar Pattu and gave each of them a specific task. The myth of origin of the temple is instructive:

A certain Nallainathan, an Indian merchant of the Chetty caste, used to trade between India and Sri Lanka and had based himself in Trincomalee. Once, when he was in Sri Lanka, he contracted a skin rash. No matter what doctors he consulted, the disease could not be cured. In the end, he decided to go to Katharagama on a pilgrimage. He had to walk, because there were no roads yet at the time, and also no vehicles. As he made his way through the jungle, he came at the river crossing where the temple is found today, and stopped for the day. There were Veddas living in that area, but they could not communicate as they did not understand each other’s language. The Veddas gave him deer skins, meat and honey as gifts. He ate and fell asleep under a tree where the Veddas worshipped a *vel*, Murugan’s sacred lance.

As he was sleeping, Murugan came to him in a dream and told him: ‘Do not go to Katharagama. Build a temple here.’

Nallainathan Chettiyar said: ‘I have no money and I am sick. How can I build a temple?’

‘Build the temple tomorrow. Your sickness will change, it will disappear from half of your body’.

The next morning, Nallainathan Chettiyar woke up and looked at himself. Half of his body was clean. Because of this, he decided to stay another night.

The second night, Murugan appeared in a dream again, and again said: ‘Do not come to Katharagama. Go to Arippu; there you will find gold coins⁵⁴. To prove that I am right, the rest of your body will be clean.’

When Nallainathan woke up, he saw that he was completely cured. He got up and went to Arippu. There he found the gold coins, which he took to build the temple. The gold that he had found was however not enough to properly finish the temple, so Nallainathan went to Kandy to ask king Rajasinha for assistance. Verugal was part of the Kandy kingdom at that time. During his time in Kandy, Nallainathan worked as a jeweller. One day, he took a pearl necklace that belonged to the king, because he wanted to offer it to Murugan in Verugal⁵⁵. The king found out, had him arrested, and ordered Nallainathan to be executed by

⁵⁴ The place where this pot is supposed to have been is now called Thanganagar, “gold settlement”. Somewhere cast away along the road, there is a large stone with a perfectly round hole in it, which is said to have contained the pot of gold.

⁵⁵ In some versions of the myth, Nallainathan was falsely accused. What saved him there was not only his devotion to Murugan but also his genuine innocence.

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letting an elephant trample his skull. When the elephant was brought out, it refused to kill Nallainathan. Instead, it knelt down and worshipped the man. Seeing this, the king repented. He realised that Nallainathan had genuinely wanted to honour Murugan. Rajasinha set Nallainathan free, and gave him gems and money. The money was used to pay for the ceremony in which the statue of the god was ritually 'brought through the gate' and installed in the temple, and the gems were used to decorate the statue.

Nallainathan invited the king to come for the opening of the temple, which he did. Rajasinha donated paddy land and orchards to the temple (it is not known anymore where these lands are, it has all become jungle.)

At that time, the wealthiest village in the surroundings was Eechchilampattu; it was inhabited by the Sindhunadar Thimilar. Nallainathan Chettiyar gave the people of Eechchilampattu the key of the temple, and gave them the responsibility for its maintenance. After that, he stepped into the holy of holies to worship, and mysteriously disappeared. There is still a statue of him on the *mulastanam*⁵⁶: it is the statue of the man with the turban.

Because the people could not perform *pooja* due to their poverty, Murugan gave them 'golden rice': grains of gold. There was still a lot of gold in the temple before the war broke out, but it has all disappeared during the years that the temple was closed⁵⁷.

(field notes, October 2004, December 2004, August 2005, and April 2007; see also Navaratnam 1964: 78)

A few elements in the story deserve attention. First of all there is Nallainathan's identity as a Chetty merchant. Nallainathan's presence in Kottiyar Pattu, which is a long way off from Katharagama, indicates the presence of more than incidental trading links between South India and the Kandy kingdom that passed through Kottiyar Pattu (as confirmed in the description by Van Goens cited earlier). The existence of a very similar myth of origin (involving Chetty pilgrims on the way to Katharagama) for the temple at Kokkaddicholai (Theyvanayagam 2006: 282-283) is a further hint that the pilgrims' route to Katharagama along the east coast is centuries old. The location where Nallainathan is said to have found the pot of gold may be more than a coincidence: Thanganagar adjoins Kilivetti, which was the main market in the area in Kottiyar Pattu, and the person in charge of this market was... a Chetty (De Silva *et al.* 1995: 406). It is thus possible to read the 'pot of gold' metaphorically.

⁵⁶ The *mulastanam* is the 'holy of holies' of a Hindu temple, the shrine in which the main idol is kept. The roof of the *mulastanam* is often covered with statues, generally of gods; the *mulasthanam* of the Verugal temple is covered with some peculiar statues, including one of the temple's mythical founder, and one of a group of stark naked women with highlighted genitals (see figure 2.8).

⁵⁷ Note however Nevill's comment that the temple "used to have very valuable jewels, and some rubies, given by Gajabâhu, king of Ceylon, according to tradition. *These were all robbed, and the temple looted some years ago*" (Nevill 1887a: 163, *emphasis mine*).

A last, and very important detail is the claim that the king of Kandy participated in the inauguration of the temple. For the king to attend this inauguration of what is, by any standard, not a very elaborate temple, one could surmise that he had a strategic, rather than merely a religious reason to do so. Ensuring allegiance of a frontier population may have been this reason.



Figure 2.8. Statues on the *mulasthanam* of the Verugal temple (own photograph)

Towards the end of the 18th century, Kottiyar Pattu sank into a deep hole of neglect, disease and disaster. When the Englishman Pybus passed through the area in 1672, he hardly saw any paddy in the fields, and was told that most of the paddy fields had been abandoned due to three years of drought. As a consequence, the village of “Temmungalay” (Thirumankalai) had been abandoned and most of the population of “Malledeve” (Mallikaithivu) had left (Pybus 2001 [1958/1762]: 33-35)⁵⁸. Epidemics in the early 1780s⁵⁹ and a famine that hit Sri Lanka in 1782 and 1783 ravaged the

⁵⁸ Note however that Pybus travelled through the area at the peak of the dry season; it may have been the case that the *yala* cultivation had failed, but that there was some *maha* cultivation.

⁵⁹ These epidemics quite possibly included smallpox, which was rampant in Ceylon during the end of the Dutch period. Though smallpox was earlier sufficiently prevalent to warrant

population (van Senden 1786b, entry for June 3). A cyclone in April 1786 added to the people's woes (van Senden 1786a). When Van Senden described the area in May 1786, Kottiyar Pattu had pretty much hit rock bottom. Most of the population had either died or moved away, agriculture had been devastated, and with the slow but steady disintegration of the kingdom of Kandy, international trade had largely collapsed, which had further undermined the economy of the area. An alternative hypothesis that is worth exploring is that Kottiyar Pattu may have been deliberately depopulated by the king of Kandy, thus creating an inhospitable buffer on the boundary of his kingdom in order to discourage incursions by foreign armies (see Nevill 1886 for a description of the deliberate depopulation of the Sabaragamuwa region between Colombo and Kandy).

2.3.7 The 'British period' (1795-1948)

Limited revival in the 19th century

After the British took over control of Trincomalee District from the Dutch in 1795, Trincomalee was used as a naval base and garrison town, and an unhealthy one at that: it had the reputation of being "the worst station on the whole Island" (Thomas 1994 [1940]: 29). Outside the town, the British do not seem to have paid much attention to the district until well into the nineteenth century.

Within years of the British take-over, Kottiyar Pattu experienced a revival of its local economy, even though its role as a regional port had ceased forever. People returned, and cultivation started to pick up again, though not everywhere. In 1802 the Governor of Ceylon, Frederic North, passed through the area on a tour of Ceylon. One of his companions described the journey as follows:

the development of a cult for a smallpox goddess, it "was in fact so rare in the 16th and 17th centuries [in among others Ceylon], that some of the Portuguese navigators believed that no such disease had ever existed there" (Moore 1815: 37). In 1811, "Dr. Christie, a judicious physician, who resided many years in this island, state[d] that the Small Pox, according to the most moderate calculation, carried off a sixth part of the population; yet no attempt was made by the Dutch Government to lessen this destruction" (*idem*: 238). People were apparently so afraid of the smallpox "that, when it appeared, husbands were wont to forsake their wives, and parents their children, leaving them only a little drink and food. When villages were thus abandoned, wild hogs, bears, panthers, and elephants, often issued from the woods and jungles; broke down the enclosures, and ravaged the gardens and orchards. Every sweet-smelling flower and esculent herb was rooted up; the plantain and cocconut trees were levelled with the earth, the cottages unroofed, and not even the bones of the deserted sick were afterwards to be found" (*ibid.*). It is thus not entirely surprising that, just south from Kottiyar Pattu, Jon Dart (1985) encountered a cult among the Coast Veddas that indirectly linked the smallpox to the spirit of a European who had arrived on a ship.

“[April 25th.] At half past one P.M. we left Ganga choultry [Gangai, a landing place near Muthur], and at three passed Malladew [Mallikaithivu], a very pretty village. At five P.M. we arrived at Topore [Thoppur], a populous village, where there were good pandals erected for our accommodation. All the road this afternoon was through very rich paddee fields, interspersed with beautiful and majestic tamarind trees. This formed a charming scenery, but the road was excessively bad, as we were obliged to travel on the embankments of the paddee fields, which were uneven, and interrupted.

[April] 26th. We this morning visited an extensive tank at Topore, where the water is collected in a valley, and confined by mud-banks, which are in want of repair. At seven o’clock A.M. we left Topore, and at half past ten arrived at Anadyve [Anaithivu], a small village where pandals had been erected for the governor. The road this morning was very good, through a beautiful flat country, though but little cultivated. [...] Within two miles of Anadyve is the Wergel [Verugal] Ganga, a broad, deep, and rapid river [...]. On the north bank of the Wergel there is a pagoda of considerable extent and antiquity, which is much esteemed by the natives” (Cordiner 1983 [1807]: 131-2).

Despite the initial revival, Kottiyar Pattu remained a neglected and near-empty backwater until the late 1860s. Note the comment that the paddy fields between Muthur and Thoppur were in good shape, but *there was no road*. The paucity of British attention for the area was such that minor repairs to the Allai tank in 1812 were still remembered as a significant event 55 years later. The repairs, organised by a certain Mr. Lusignan, included the fixing of stoplogs in the sluices of the tank⁶⁰. However, as the inflow into the tank came straight from the Mahaweli river during periods of high rainfall, the sluices were not strong enough to withstand the floods, and the stoplogs needed frequent replacement (AR 1867:104).

Kottiyar Pattu’s role as a grain-exporting region might have come to an end, but the area was not entirely without economic relevance. An entry on Kottiyar Pattu in the ‘Edinburgh Gazetteer’, published 27 years after the British took control over the area, reads “[b]eside cinnamon, the principal produce of the district are beetel nuts [*sic*], cocoa nuts, and timber: salt is also made, and fish cured with it for exportation” (1822: 655).

Irrigation

Under the governorship of Henry Ward (1855-1860), irrigation development became a priority in Ceylon. Among the first irrigation schemes that were taken up for rehabilitation were the Allai irrigation scheme and the Kantale irrigation scheme. Both were schemes that required comparatively limited investment. The

⁶⁰ After Lusignan’s repairs, the tank seems to have been neglected again. In 1843, J.W. Bennett wrote “[a]t Tapootorré [Thoppur] there is a very extensive tank; but want of capital unfortunately prevails, or this country would produce a thousand—fold where it now does one” (1998 [1843]: 246).

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rehabilitation of the Allai tank and of the Periyakulam (which was connected to the Allai tank by a feeder channel) commenced in 1868 and was completed the next year, restoring the irrigable area from about 800 acres to about 3,100 acres (AR 1870:159). In 1870, work commenced on the extension of what was to become the Muthur channel, with the objective of bringing a further 1,000 acres under irrigation. A massive flood in January 1871 caused a breach of the Allai tank bund, and necessitated further repair works.

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, various plans were made to further expand the Allai irrigation scheme, because both land and water were still available in excess. Particularly the situation of having excess water available was very rare in Sri Lanka, where most irrigation schemes depend on streams that are pretty much seasonal, and have small catchment areas. A chronic lack of budget however delayed the further development of the scheme. Very sluggish sales of newly developed lands were not helpful either: if there was nobody who wanted to buy the land, further development would be pointless. Ultimately, a limited expansion was implemented in the 1930s. This included the construction of an *anicut* (an inlet weir) in the Verugal River, the construction of a flood protection bund along the Mahaweli River, and the construction of the first part of what was to become the Left Bank Main Channel (AR 1925: E23).

Infrastructure

Access remained a big problem throughout the 19th century. When, in 1870, the Duke of Edinburgh visited Thoppur and Kilivetti for an elephant hunt, an “impromptu road [...] [t]hrough elephant-jungle, thorny and thick, over long tracts of fallow fields, through pretty Moor villages, with their neat gardens and corn-ricks, across dried-up beds of streams” had to be cleared for the occasion, to enable the duke and his hunting party to travel from Muthur to Kilivetti (Capper 1871: 113).

An all-weather road connection between Trincomalee and Colombo was only developed in the 1870s (Bastiampillai 1968: 52), and the project of turning the path from Trincomalee via Kinniya and Muthur to Batticaloa into an all-weather road was still ongoing by the turn of the century (AR 1901: F4). It was not until well into the 20th century that easy road access became a reality.

Land development

Around 1911 the government alienated jungle land in two places, each of which would have far-reaching consequences. The first was a stretch of land between Thoppur and the seashore at Uppural, which was alienated to Muslims from Thoppur. Over time several small tanks and the bigger Ullaikulam were developed. Some Muslim families settled in Uppural, and were later joined by a group of Tamil squatters. After the LTTE took control over the area in 1990, access was denied to the Muslims who thus lost access to hundreds of acres of good paddy land. This became, and still is, a very contentious issue (Kohlee 2002).

The second land alienation covered a stretch of land between Thoppur and Muthur. This stretch of jungle land was transformed into irrigated paddy fields by Roman Catholic missionaries, who settled a group of people of the Pachchan caste in a new

village that was called Iruthayapuram ('Sacred Heart Village'), but which is also known as Pachchanoor ('Place of the people of the Pachchan caste'). The sudden access that these people got to irrigated land meant a huge jump in status, which was not appreciated by the traditional land-owning castes in the area (see section 3.2.1). It also meant that the area between Muthur, Mallikaithivu, Pallikudiyiruppu and Thoppur rather suddenly became a contiguous stretch of paddy fields, which in the long run imposed limits on the expansion possibilities for older paddy-cultivating villages.

By the 1930s, population pressure in existing villages led to the development of new settlements at Thanganagar, Palathadichenai and Palathoppur. While Palathoppur is clearly a satellite of Thoppur, the inhabitants of the other villages came from various villages and castes. Palathoppur, located on the junction where the road to Thoppur branches off from the Batticaloa-Muthur road, developed a bazaar function apart from its agricultural function. Thanganagar and Palathadichenai, on the other hand, have always remained villages of farmers and labourers, without much other economic activity. Apart from these places, a number of smaller settlements (including places like Ithikulam and Sinnakulam) were established in the jungles around Eechchilampattu and Pallikudiyiruppu.

Seruwila

An event that proved very important for the future of Kottiyar Pattu was the restoration of the Seruwila temple in the 1920s under the charismatic leadership of the Buddhist monk called Dambagasare Sumedhamkara *thero* (Kemper 1991: 152-3, Saranakiththi and Amarakiththi 2002). Though local narratives credit Sumedhamkara with discovering the site in the jungle, it had in fact already been surveyed half a century earlier⁶¹. In 1909, "the Trincomalee assistant government agent inspected the ruins and found 'a mound of earth 25 feet high and comprising the remains of a square platform, flights of steps, large pillars, and a single door-frame still held in place'" (Kemper 1991:152, citing from an article in the *Observer* newspaper of 15-4-1979).

Though the temple was abandoned for centuries, it was never entirely forgotten. In 1797, the new king of Siam (Thailand) sent a request to the king of Kandy, asking him for the relic that was said to be buried in the Soma *dagaba*, near Seruwila⁶². King

⁶¹ Sheet G/4 3^A of the 16 chains to one inch map of 1956 (Survey Department, 1956) gives the reference number P.P. 596 for the site of the temple. According to the register accompanying the map, the site with this reference number was surveyed in 1872, just after the renovation of the nearby Allai Tank. The temple itself was resurveyed in 1925, under reference number P.P. 6033.

⁶² Kevin Trainor (1997: 145) states that other than the Dhatuvamsa, the only other Pali chronicle that mentions Seruwila is the Jinakalamali, a sixteenth-century Thai chronicle. The Thai king may have got his inspiration from this text. Note that the search was conducted in the wrong place. The *dagaba* referred to is not the Seruwila *dagaba*, but one built nearby by queen Soma. Nowadays, this temple is often assumed to be the Somawathie *dagaba*, about 33

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Rajadhirajasimha readily obliged and sent out a small team to Kottiyar Pattu, which had just fallen into British hands, to dig up the relic. However, “[p]erceiving their undertaking impracticable with so small a party, they returned to Kandy, and made no further attempt to penetrate to the relic” (Forbes 1848, vol. II: 223)

After the surveying of the site in 1872, news of the presence of a large temple ruin must have trickled down to the south-west of Sri Lanka. This fired the imagination of those engaged in the Buddhist revival movement that developed around the same time. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Buddhist reformer Anagarika Dharmapala was campaigning for the restoration of the Seruwila temple (Hellman-Rajanayagam 2004: 78); in 1909, Henry Parker wrote that “some Sinhalese of other parts of the island still make pilgrimages in order to worship at this time” (Parker 1999 [1909]:331).

By 1930 the temple was completed. In order to provide for maintenance of the temple and the resident monks, Sumedhankara’s “first major supporter”, D.D. Weerasingha, “purchased 500 acres of nearby land and gave it to the monkhood” (Kemper 1991: 153). Excitement over the reconstruction of the temple led to a temporary surge in the number of pilgrims, as can be seen in table 2.4.

Year	No. of pilgrims in the entire year
1928	8,000
1929	10,000
1930	20,000
1931	3,000
1932	2,500
1933	2,300

Table 2.4. Annual numbers of pilgrims to the Seruwila temple, 1928-1933 (source: Saranakiththi and Amarakiththi 2002: 70)

The annual temple festival drew about three to four thousand pilgrims by 1936 (AR 1936: E17); a year later, the crowd was estimated at four to five thousand people (AR 1937: E18). By 1939, the last year for which I have found attendance figures, enthusiasm seems to have waned somewhat: only about 1,250 people visited the festival (AR 1939, part I: E19).

2.3.8 Kottiyar Pattu after independence

The first three decades after Sri Lanka attained independence in February 1948 saw massive change in Kottiyar Pattu, by and large centered around the Allai Extension Scheme. In the late 1940s, the ideas that existed for a significant expansion of irrigation in Kottiyar Pattu were turned into project plans and detailed designs. From a national perspective, the choice for this area as one of the first post-

km southwest of Seruwila. Nearer to Seruwila, there are also ruins of small temple mounds at Dehiwatte (Samagipura) and at Neelapola.

independence irrigation-cum-settlement schemes makes a lot of sense: for a comparatively low investment, the project was likely to show a good output. No expensive reservoirs needed to be constructed, and there was a fairly reliable and ample supply of water that made an expansion of the irrigated area possible. Construction work on the Allai Extension Scheme started in 1951. The first settler families took up residence on their plots a year later. Things were however not easy for these families: before they could start farming, they needed to clear the jungle on their fields. Soon, some fairly serious design flaws also came to light: in several of the colonies, housing plots and paddy fields were flooded regularly because drainage facilities were insufficient (AR 1954: A168; AR 1963-64: A17). By 1957, the bulk of the work was completed, and cultivation had come up to speed. Unfortunately, that year saw the worst floods in living memory, when following days of heavy rain the Mahaweli broke its banks. Much of Kottiyar Pattu was under several feet of water, and everywhere people were marooned on patches of high land. Luckily, a British or American aircraft carrier happened to be in the Trincomalee harbour. The helicopters it was carrying were used to ferry relief supplies to the affected population. Many houses were damaged, as was much of the irrigation infrastructure. The subsequent years saw a massive recovery effort, and from about 1962 things seem to have been normal again (Wijayatilleka 2000; AR 1960-1961: A11). However, a further setback followed when a cyclone hit Trincomalee district in December 1964, causing severe damage in and around Muthur (AR 1964-1965: A17).

Most of the settlers were Sinhalese from Kurunegala, Hambantota and from the south coast. Two of the colonies (LB3/Lingapuram and LB6/Sivapuram) were opened up for Tamils, who were largely drawn from Sampoor, Kilivetti and Kankuveli – all high-caste Velalar villages.

In the mid-1960s, a new string of colonies was developed along the Muthur-Batticaloa road: the largely Tamil settlement of Bharatipuram, and the Muslim settlements of Azathnagar (58th Milepost), Jinnanagar (59th milepost), and Sirajnagar (Koorkandam). Bharatipuram accommodated a population overflow from a range of villages and castes in the area. The Muslim settlements attracted landless families from as far away as Batticaloa, as well as some population overflow from Thoppur and Palathoppur. Muthur saw a further expansion with the founding of Hairyanagar and Shafinagar, and Thoppur saw the founding of Allainagar.

The settlement of Sinhalese in the Allai Extension Scheme became politically controversial when the Federal Party (by then the dominant Tamil political party) alleged that the government was planning to divide the 'Tamil homeland' by settling Sinhalese. These allegations were first made in 1956, when Sri Lanka saw a flurry of ethnonationalist activity, including the election of the populist SLFP under S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, the adoption of Sinhala as the national language (at the exclusion of Tamil), and the subsequent riots in Colombo and Ampara. It also coincided with the celebration of 2,500 years having passed since the Buddha attained enlightenment. While there may be some truth in the allegation, there is another side to the coin. The son of a Tamil leader who worked in land clearing in the Allai Extension Scheme

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told me that at the time Tamils from Jaffna were simply not interested in settling as paddy farmers in Trincomalee District – a problem which had delayed irrigation development in the area since the British first started their rehabilitation works.

The 1950s saw the slow introduction of mechanisation: a few buses were running from Muthur and Thoppur to Batticaloa and Trincomalee, and the first two-wheel tractors (commonly called ‘landmasters’) were introduced. The number of lorries could be counted on two hands. Most of the transport was still done by oxcart, by pushbike or by foot. The main road was tarred, and other roads were slowly upgraded.

As the population increased and the country developed, government services – especially schools – were developed in the area, particularly from about 1970 onwards. This period also saw the introduction of green revolution technology, which was to have a profound impact on society in Kottiyar Pattu (section 6.3.1). Over a period of a few years, the local economy became thoroughly monetised. As a consequence, successful farmers had increasing amounts of cash to spend, which had a spin-off effect on local traders. On the other hand, many people became indebted and the gap between poor and rich in the area became increasingly wide. The outbreak of violence in 1985 (see section 4.2.2) brought further development of the area to a near standstill until about 2000.

2.4 Reflection: oscillation between frontier and backwater

Throughout its recorded history, Kottiyar Pattu has oscillated between being a frontier region and being a rural backwater. As a consequence, the area has seen periods of strategic investment, followed by periods of utter neglect. That is the same to this very day: political interest in the area is highly intermittent and strategic, not structural. A second consequence of this oscillation has been population movement. Over the centuries, whoever was in charge of the area brought settlers into the area. Because of this, many different versions of history, each with its own claim to prominence, have developed (I reproduce four of these stories in chapter 5). In a context where the population has dramatically expanded since the 1950s and where pressure on resources has increased, competition over claims to the area has intensified significantly.

The third consequence is that, though investments in for example infrastructure have been made, in between such periods of investment the people in the area are pretty much left to fend for themselves. This has produced a strange paradox: on the one hand, much of Kottiyar Pattu’s economy is subsistence-focused, while on the other hand, people have fended for themselves by establishing links with other areas, thus firmly integrating the area into the wider national, and even global, economy.

3 Social complexity in Kottiyar Pattu

“The hope of harmony in the contemporary world lies to a great extent in a clearer understanding of the pluralities of human identity, and in the appreciation that they cut across each other and work against a sharp separation along one single hardened line of impenetrable division” (Sen 2006: xiv).

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 L'enfer, c'est les autres

During my time in Sri Lanka, I was thrice told, with slight variations, a peculiar joke. Without taking into account the context in which it was said, the joke seems rather racist; its peculiarity is the only reason why I find it acceptable to reproduce it here:

A man dies and finds himself at the gates of heaven. St. Peter, who holds the key to heaven, looks in his books and says “Dear sir, your files are in order, so welcome to heaven. However, if you like, we can organise a little tour of hell for you before you enter, just so that you know what you are missing.”

The man agrees, and is taken for a tour of hell. He soon finds out that hell is a rather odd place: it is a large plain, dotted with deep pits that all have been fenced off with barbed wire and other nasty means to make it impossible for those inside the pits to escape. The angel who acts as a tour guide explains that each pit is for a specific group of people: “This one is for the Dutch; that one is for the Americans; the one behind that is for the Germans”, and so on, and so forth. But then the man notices something strange. One of the pits has no fencing at all.

“Who is in there?”

“Oh, that pit is for the Sri Lankans. No fence is needed for them, because they keep each other in the pit.”

The first time I was told the joke, it was by a Jaffna Tamil who was proud of his Jaffna roots. In his version, the pit without fencing was for the Jaffna Tamils. The second time, I was told the joke by a Tamil of mixed regional origin, who was proud of being a Tamil. In her version, the pit without fencing was for the Tamils. The third time, I was told the joke by a mixed-married and convincingly multicultural Sri Lankan. This time, the pit without fencing was for the Sri Lankans in general. “Hell” may be “the others” (Sartre 1947: 75), but in this case hell is not just everybody: the problem is with the in-group members who are divided among themselves. Every time the joke was told, *it was told as a form of self-criticism*⁶³.

⁶³ Steven Kemper has reproduced another version of the same joke. This time, it was told by Gamini Dissanayake, a powerful UNP minister at the time, and the joke was used as a self-criticism of the “most visible weakness” of the Sinhalese: “lack of unity” (1991:207, citing from *The Island*, 18-4-1986).

As illustrated by the joke above and the various contexts in which I heard it, Sri Lanka is a country divided along many different boundaries. Each boundary separates people into groups that are identified within particular categories of identification, and between the groups within each category of identification there may be fierce competition. Within the ethnic category of identification, boundaries separate Muslims, Sinhalese, Tamils, Burghers, Veddas, Malays and members of other small ethnic groups; within the gender category of identification, boundaries separate men and women; within the caste category of identification, boundaries separate people belonging to different castes. Each category of identification is constituted of a finite (and in most cases limited) number of groups, but the relationships and rankings among the groups within each category vary by place and time, and may be viewed very differently by members of different groups. These categories of identification are not rigidly structured in relation to each other. The consequence is a jumble of parallel, crosscutting and hierarchical boundaries, some more and some less contested, some clear and some more vague.

3.1.2 Structure of the chapter

As I have stated in chapter 1 and show in more detail in chapters 6, 7 and 8, focusing on ethnicity alone and treating ethnic groups as homogeneous is insufficient to explain everyday life in Kottiyar Pattu (or in the rest of the world for that matter). In chapter 1, I have described the ethnic category of identification as it is encountered in Kottiyar Pattu. In this chapter, I describe (in random order) a further nine categories of identification that the people whom I spoke to used when describing social realities in Kottiyar Pattu: caste, class, employment, religion, gender, age, length of stay, political affiliation, and military control. I am interested not so much in the conceptual nature of the different categories of identification, but more in which identity groups within each category of identification are defined in people's representations of their lives. In describing these categories, I hope to show *some* of the complexity and multi-interpretability of the social world that is Kottiyar Pattu, and within which people live their everyday lives⁶⁴. The stress on the word 'some' is important. This chapter is not intended to replace a one-dimensional (ethnic) explanatory model of social life in Kottiyar Pattu by a ten-dimensional model. Even though it captures a lot more detail, such a bounded model is still constraining by its very nature. There are many other identities that people can choose for themselves

⁶⁴ My inspiration for writing this chapter (and, for that matter, this thesis) comes to a large extent from Mark Whitaker's seven-fold description of the temple festival at Mandoor (Whitaker 1999, chapter VII). Precisely because of his attention for complexity, multi-interpretability, and the way people deal with it in 'amiable incoherence', Whitaker sets a very high standard for what ethnographic understanding and description of complex contexts should look like.

(for example as fans of particular Indian movie stars), and – given for example the number of Rajani Kanth lookalikes that one encounters on a random walk through the area – quite strongly so. If there is to be any value in the model, it must be open-ended and allow room for the many other identities that exist.

3.2 *Caste*

Caste is a controversial and often rather embarrassing topic that has long been the “central symbol for India”, and is an obsession for Indian anthropology, history and literature alike (Dirks 2008:3). Something similar was true for Sri Lanka before particularly the topics of ethnicity and violence pushed caste to the background. Between independence and the country-wide escalation of violence in 1983, the workings of caste were studied in great detail by many social scientists⁶⁵. It was also a key topic in literature during the same period: “the arrogance of caste” was a mandatory topic for members of the Progressive Writers’ Association, along with “the evils of poverty and the haughtiness of authority” (Rasaratnam 1996a, “my discourse”).

So what is caste? In his PhD dissertation on the Coast Veddas of Vakara, Jon Dart settled for the following definition: “[a caste is] a named group that exists in exclusive contrast to, and in a ranked relationship with, other groups of the same kind” (Dart 1985:64). Though in some quarters caste is increasingly ignored, all Sinhalese and Tamils belong to one caste or another, whether they are Buddhist, Hindu, or Christian. This is not the case for Muslims (including members of small ethnic communities of foreign origin such as Malays, Bohras and Memons) and Burghers. Caste is an ascribed identity: everyone who is born to parents with a caste identity will be given the caste identity of the parents. In case the parents are not of the same caste or if one of the parents is either a Muslim or a foreigner, and thus has no caste, a pragmatic solution will need to be found. It is virtually impossible to change one’s caste, and it is impossible to have more than one caste identity at the same time – hence Dart’s use of the expression “exclusive contrast”. Linked to this is a strong ideology of caste endogamy.

Caste identities are generally linked to hereditary occupations, though nowadays it is very well possible to have a very different occupation. Another important element of castes is that they are hierarchically ranked, though – as McGilvray (2008) has shown, the precise ranking of castes within clusters of roughly similar status is ambiguous and to some extent variable over time and place. The ranking of the castes has its reflection in ritual roles and responsibilities regarding Hindu and Buddhist temples: to some extent, ideas of purity and pollution play a role here, but

⁶⁵ Among them are Ryan (2004 [1953]); Yalman (1971); Pfaffenberger (1982); McGilvray (1982, 1983 and 2008); Dart (1985); Whitaker (1999) and Roberts (1997 and 1998a).

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local (and colonial) political dynamics are equally important (McGilvray 1982; Dirks 2008; Whitaker 1999).

The Sinhala and Tamil caste systems have pretty much the same structure. The upper stratum is formed by a small group of religious specialists and a large group of cultivators; fishermen and a range of artisanal castes form the middle stratum; and service castes like washermen, barbers and drummers form the lowest stratum. The priestly castes and the princely castes, which dominate the Indian caste system, are virtually absent, as are so-called 'untouchables' (Ryan 2004 [1953]; Pfaffenberger 1982; McGilvray 1982 and 2008).

There is only one way in which a Tamil person's caste can be established with near certainty: through the markings on his cattle. Most cows owned by Tamils and Muslims are branded with three markings: the initials of the owner on the flank, the first letter of the name of the village on the hip, and a symbol marking the caste on the thigh (there is one symbol for all Muslims). Particularly among Muslims however, it is increasingly common to see cattle without the caste brand, with the village initial and the initials of the owner in English lettering, and with a number. In very rare cases, cows that have been sold to someone of another caste will have the original markings cancelled with a large 'x', and new markings branded on the other side of the cow⁶⁶. Some cattle owners hire someone to do the branding, and others do it themselves. This leads to considerable variation in details of the cattle brands.

Rivalry and discrimination between (groups) of castes comes in three different forms. The first is rivalry among high castes. This is largely an elite problem that has to do with status and control over temples, but also with control over (local) politics. The long drawn-out battle between the Velalar of Kankuveli and the Thimilalar of Mallikaithivu over the Kankuveli Sivankovil is an example of this. Since high-caste status is linked to cultivator status, this battle is also one over 'who are the originary farmers in the area'. The second form revolves around upward claims to status by middle-level castes, and disparaging attempts by high castes to keep the upwardly mobile at bay. Michael Roberts (1998b) has written extensively about such processes that took place around the rise to prominence of the Karava, Durava and Salagama castes along Sri Lanka's south-west coast. I personally came across an example in the autumn of 2006, when I asked a high-caste (Velalar) colleague what he knew about the background of President Mahinda Rajapakse and his brothers. The man merely snickered, and said "huh, fishermen..." Rajapakse and his brothers might have been the most powerful people in Sri Lanka, but in the eyes of my colleague they would never be able to leave their middle-level caste status behind them. The third form is

⁶⁶ To what extent cattle branding is an indigenous custom is not clear. It became compulsory in the Cattle Ordinance of 1898, which was repealed in 1936 (AR 1936: E26). Implementation of the branding by the village headmen was not always done very thoroughly (AR 1925: E23). Despite the repeal of the Cattle Ordinance, branding became common practice in the North-East, possibly in order to reduce the risk of cattle theft.

discrimination against members of the service castes by high- and middle-caste people, which at times turned violent when the low-caste people were considered to be insubordinate (Pfaffenberger 1990).

Particularly among Tamils, but to a lesser extent also among Sinhalese and Muslims, animosities and exclusionary behaviour between caste(-like) groups seriously undermine impressions of ethnic homogeneity.

While caste hierarchies with their related status competitions (and, to some extent, caste discrimination) are very much alive, their salience has weakened considerably over the last half century. The caste-related conflicts described above are thus mostly relevant for middle-aged and elderly people. Urbanisation and increasing contacts with the 'modern' outside world through radio, television and increased mobility further contributed to this (Ryan 2004 [1953]). In the 1950s, low-caste people in some areas would not be allowed to sit at the same level as high-caste people, and they could be beaten off the road if they did not pay the proper respect and step aside when a high-caste person passed (interview with high-caste man, Mallikaithivu, December 2004). Fairly straightforward modernisations such as the expansion of the public transport system however undermined this: in a bus everybody sits at the same level, and (with very few exceptions) anyone who can pay is welcome as a passenger. The land alienations of the early 20th century and the development of the Allai Extension Scheme further undermined the local Tamil caste hierarchy as also some Tamils of lower castes were given land, and the highest castes could no longer claim to be the sole landowners among the Tamils. In the war-affected areas of the country, displacement further undermined the separation between the castes. After people had to flee, they were all roughly in the same desperate situation, and it was hard to maintain status differences. Also, life in the cramped conditions of IDP camps meant that it suddenly became much easier for youth of different castes to meet and fall in love, leading to a surge in intercaste 'love marriages'. In the study area, I frequently heard elderly people complain that "before 1985 (the year of the first big displacement), our youth stuck to traditions, but now they just run away with whoever they like".

In the following sections, I describe what I have picked up on caste dynamics among Tamils and Sinhalese in Kottiyar Pattu. The last section deals with Muslims, who very explicitly do not acknowledge caste but who in practice have a subdivision that in some respects comes close.

3.2.1 Caste dynamics among Tamils in Kottiyar Pattu

The Tamil (and Muslim) population of Kottiyar Pattu belong to a larger cultural region that covers the entire east coast between Muthur and Panama, and that is distinct from the Tamil-speaking cultural region of northern Sri Lanka in two ways: the political dominance of non-Velalar castes (Mukkuvar, Seerpathar and Thimilalar) in the Tamil caste hierarchy, and the existence of exogamous *kudis* or matrilineal clans among both Muslims and Tamils (McGilvray 2008).

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As I mentioned in section 2.3.6, Pieter de Grauwe wrote one of the oldest remaining detailed descriptions of the people who lived in Trincomalee District. The opening sentences of the paragraphs on Kottiyar Pattu and Thampalakamam Pattu (covering present-day Thampalakamam, Kantale and Kinniya DS Divisions) are revealing:

“We will shift our attention to the division of Kottiyar in which the former king Kannakkapillai Majjevou Perumal is the Vidane⁶⁷; the river Mahaweli makes from this area an island, and it consists of 16⁶⁸ villages and towns which are ruled by great and small chiefs, and populated by 11 lineages, namely the Thimilar, Velalar, Karaiyar, Moors, Veddass, Kovilar, Aandies⁶⁹, Chetties, Paraiyar, Pachchan and Pallawelles⁷⁰ and besides 5 Vidanes who are carpenters, potters, washermen and barbers. Among all these, the Thimilar are the highest in rank.

[...]

Thampalakamam Province is populated by seven lineages and nations, namely Thimilar, Karaiyar, Thamilar⁷¹, Warrepattes⁷², Veddass, Pallas⁷³ and Velalar, *who are always struggling to be the most important*, but as far as [I] have been able to observe until now, the Thamilar should be the most important, since the pagoda of Trincomalee and the great and famous reservoir of Kantale and [surrounding]⁷⁴ countries have been founded, governed and cultivated by the Thamilar (after whom that lineage was named).” (De Graauwe 1676: f.12-13,16; my translation, *emphasis mine*)

For the purpose of my analysis, De Graauwe’s description reveals four important details. Firstly, the inclusion of the Moors and the Thamilar (Tamils) in the caste lists indicates that De Graauwe was writing about endogamous communities that were not, as they are now, bound by their Tamil ethnic identity. The fact that the Thamilars are mentioned separately as a royal lineage (and *not* as an overarching ethnic identity) indicates something similar to what happened to the Sinhala identity:

⁶⁷ *Vidane* means something like ‘chief’

⁶⁸ It is not clear whether 16 or 96 has been written here, but as later counts of the numbers of villages are below 20 until at least 1900, I assume the correct number should be 16.

⁶⁹ Not clear which caste is referred to.

⁷⁰ Casie Chitty (1837) describes this caste as Pallawilli and identifies them as fishermen. Van Senden (1786b) uses the term ‘Parewea Pallemilij’, and locates these people in Muthur town. As far as I know, their descendants are all Roman Catholics, and currently identify themselves as Paravar.

⁷¹ There is still a group of people who claim to be direct descendants of king Kulakkottan, the man whom many Tamils from Trincomalee claim built the Kantale tank and who repaired the Koneswaram temple.

⁷² Not clear which caste is referred to.

⁷³ Not clear which caste is referred to; possibly Pallar.

⁷⁴ Probable translation. The manuscript has the partly illegible ‘ge[...]’.

“contrary to popular belief, in ancient times the Sinhala identity was associated primarily with the dynasty which ruled Anurâdhapura. Thus the term Sinhala would bear comparison with other South Asian dynastic names like Moriya, Gupta, Pallava and Cōla. In a secondary sense this identity denoted the leading families in the kingdom politically linked to the dynasty. [...] at that early stage, the term represented a political identity which excluded lower rungs of society” (Gunawardana 1995: 25).

While I cannot imagine that a small group with claims to royal descent in an obscure corner of Sri Lanka has been the source of the present-day Tamil ethnic identity (rather, I think that the source for both Tamil identities must be found in Tamil Nadu), fact is that colonial documents used the term ‘Malabar’ (which, curiously, is a part of Kerala rather than Tamil Nadu), rather than ‘Tamil’ to denote the Tamil ethnic group until well into the 19th century.

The second point is the explicit link between caste hierarchies and struggles over power, which can still be found today (McGilvray 2008, Whitaker 1999).

Thirdly, the top of the caste hierarchy (at least among Tamils) is the same today as it was in De Graauwe’s time. Whatever the earlier dynamics between the different communities may have been, the fact that the Dutch granted legitimacy to the claims of the Thimilar, Thamilar (and, in Batticaloa, the Mukkuvar – see McGilvray 2008) contributed to solidifying the top of the pecking order through the generation of differential access to positions in colonial institutions for local government.

Lastly, the Moors (Muslims) do not acknowledge castes among themselves, but as they had their own claims to status and were endogamous, this posed no threat to the overarching model of a political, rather than religious, caste system: the Moors were simply included as a separate caste in themselves.

120 years after De Graauwe, Van Senden compiled a census of the male population of Trincomalee District. In table 3.1, the castes that Van Senden found in Kottiyar Pattu are presented, ranked by size.

Caste	Number of males		
Sindhunadar	193	Silversmiths	10
Moors	143	Carpenters	6
Velalar	119	Washermen	5
Paravar	48	<i>Panneassen</i> ^a	4
<i>Kanneasen</i> ^a	31	<i>Tannekasa</i> ^a	4
Pachchan	25	Chetty	1
Potters	12	Temple priest	1
Smiths	12	Unspecified	2
		Total	616

Table 3.1. Male population by caste in Kottiyar Pattu, 1786 (source: Van Senden 1786b)

^a Not clear which caste this refers to.

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As mentioned in chapter 2, Van Senden conducted his census around what was probably Kottiyar's lowest point in the last millennium, but after Van Senden's census, the population of Kottiyar Pattu remained very small for at least another century. The extremely small size of the various caste groups an important issue: despite the importance of endogamy in the ideology behind the caste system, maintaining endogamy would have been extremely difficult. This raises a range of questions that are worthy of further exploration, but fall outside the scope of my dissertation. If endogamy among small groups was seriously practiced, did inbreeding cause the population to be more vulnerable to the epidemics that hit the area in the late 18th century than larger groups? If endogamy was practiced, to what extent were people able to communicate with fellow caste members in other parts of the country, and how mobile were people to facilitate long-distance marriages? And lastly, if endogamy was *not* enforced, how were caste distinctions maintained, and when and why did endogamy become the norm?

By and large, the same castes that Van Senden and De Graauwe mentioned can still be found in Kottiyar Pattu today; I briefly describe them in the rest of this section.

Sindhunadar Thimilar

From at least the late seventeenth century until about 1970, the Sindhunadar or Thimilar, who mostly live in Mallikaithivu, Pallikudiyiruppu and Eechchilampattu and their satellite villages, have been the politically dominant (land-owning) caste in Kottiyar Pattu. The origin stories of this caste are the most confusing of all castes in Kottiyar Pattu.

While De Graauwe spoke of the Thimilar, Van Senden described them with a different name: Sindhunadar ("those from the country of Sindh"). Both names are currently in use, but while people of other caste describe this community as Thimilar, the Thimilar themselves prefer the more honourable epithet Sindhunadar as an addition to a claimed Velalar caste status. From Van Senden's account, it is clear that Velalar and Thimilar are different castes: the villages where Van Senden came across Velalar are still Velalar villages today. However, as Velalar are more broadly recognised as a respectable caste, the Thimilar are currently claiming Velalar status, despite the fact that this constitutes, in fact, a step down on Kottiyar Pattu's caste ladder as it has existed for centuries.

In the Chola empire, there was a community of boatmen called Thimilar⁷⁵ (as indicated in a list of castes that can be found in the museum for Rajaraja Cholan in Thanjavur); in Jaffna, there is a low-ranking fishing caste that is called Thimilar, and in the mytho-history of Batticaloa, there is talk of a community of Thimilar who were

⁷⁵ As *thimil* is the Tamil name for a kind of boat, Thimilar literally means 'boatmen'. Another etymological interpretation links the name to *thimir*, which is Tamil for 'strong', 'courageous' or 'stubborn'. To be called *thimir* is generally not very positive, except perhaps in the case of warriors.

chased out of Jaffna and subsequently settled near Batticaloa until the Mukkuvar (who can be found in the southern tip of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and who are also found as a low-ranking fishing caste in Jaffna and all the way down to Puttalam) took power and chased the Thimilars north of Vakarai, to precisely the area where they can be found today: Kottiyar Pattu (Kamalanathan and Kamalanathan 2005, McGilvray 2008, Lewis 1923). If McGilvray's argument that the Mukkuvar came to Batticaloa as mercenaries for Magha of Kalinga is correct, then it is quite possible that the Thimilars came with an earlier invading army: the Cholas. This makes sense in the light of Kulakkottan legend and in the light of the Culavamsa's comments that there were Keralas and Velaikkarar (soldiers and/or mercenaries) stationed in Kottiyar Pattu during the time of Gajabahu II, just after the Chola incursion and just before Magha's invasion. If all the different references to the Thimilars are correct, then the Thimilars were part of the Chola navy who stayed behind in Jaffna and around Trincomalee. While in Jaffna they assumed a lower-middle ranking in the local caste hierarchy, the Thimilars became a dominant community south of Trincomalee, and even took control over a part of Batticaloa District, only to be confined to Kottiyar Pattu (and to a lesser extent, Thampalakamam Pattu) when the Mukkuvar took over around the fifteenth century⁷⁶.

The Sindhunadar epithet adds glamour to this story, and may have been a strategic act of self-aggrandisement with the objective of claiming local political status from the Dutch, such as McGilvray (2008) has documented for the Mukkuvar. The Sindhunadar claim to originate from Sindh, "somewhere in India" (but most Sindhunadar whom I asked do not really know where exactly in India this region is). There is a region called Sindh in the south of modern-day Pakistan, but I never heard anyone associate this Sindh with the Sindh that gave the Sindhunadar their name. One Sindhunadar whom I spoke to actually claimed that his caste originated from the Indian cradle of civilisation in Harappa and Mohenjodaro in the valley of the Indus River. This river is also known as the Sindh River in the second book of the Mahabharata (telephone conversation with Prof. Philip Lutgendorf, Boulder, October 2007). If the argument about a division between Aryans and Dravidians holds any water at all, this would make the Sindhunadar more Aryan than the Sinhalese, who claim descent from a prince from Orissa (Vijaya) and his Tamil, thus Dravidian, wife!

Somewhere in the now-forgotten shrouds of history, the Sindhunadar moved to the town of Marungur, north of the Cauvery River in the Chola kingdom⁷⁷, and from

⁷⁶ Not far from Batticaloa Town, there is a village with the name Thimilaithivu ('Island of Thimilars'). On my request, Patricia Lawrence asked around about the history of the Thimilars when she visited the village for other work. An old friend whom she spoke to told her that indeed there had been Thimilars fishermen living in Thimilaithivu once upon a time, but that there were no more Thimilars in Batticaloa District these days (e-mail, 18-7-2008).

⁷⁷ As I have mentioned in section 2.3.3 (fn. 39), the location of Marungur has not been identified and remains a mystery.

there Kulakkottan brought them over to take command over Kottiyar Pattu. While the hypothesis of strategic self-aggrandisement makes sense, there is one detail that undermines it. In the first half of the 19th century, Casie Chitty found that the mythical area of origin of the Thimilar in Jaffna, with whom the Thimilar of Kottiyar Pattu have had no marriage links for a very long time, is Sindh (1834: 232, 235). This means either that the link to Sindh was already part of the Thimilar myths of origin before a group of Thimilar were expelled from Jaffna to Batticaloa (which must have happened before the 15th century to fit the Mukkuvar story), or that the Thimilar of Jaffna (and a small group who can still be found in the village of Thimilai near Chilaw⁷⁸) moved there from Trincomalee after the name change from Thimilar to Sindhunadar, instead of the other way around. This last option runs counter to the story in the *Mattakalappu Manmiyam*, and it is complicated by the fact that neither the Thimilar whom I spoke to in Kottiyar Pattu, nor the Thimilar whom my research assistant spoke to in Thimilai know anything about each other.

The local myths surrounding the management of the Verugal temple clearly put the Thimilar in charge of the temple, with Velalar and other castes in subservient positions. This is very similar to the (pre-war) situation at the Kokkatticholai Tantondriswaram temple in the south of Batticaloa District, where a non-Velalar kingly caste is in charge of the temple, with Velalar and the lower castes acting as servants⁷⁹. This may have been a pre-existing situation, or the Thimilar may have risen to (local) kingly status around the time that Rajasinha II upgraded the temples at Verugal and Thampalakamam, reorganised the caste structures around them, and had a chronicle written to link these caste structures to the pre-existing organisation structure as it had existed before the Portuguese destroyed the Koneswaram temple at Trincomalee. This all makes sense, but there are two further complications. In the Konesar Kalvettu and in local myths of origin, the Thimilar are said to originate from Marungur, and other settlers brought in by Kulakkottan are said to originate from Karaikal (which nowadays is part of the Union Territory of Pondicherry). In myths of origin in Batticaloa, Marungur and Karaikal also figure with a similar difference in status, but both are identified as towns of origin of the *Velalar* caste. Secondly, the (caste-specific) cattle brand that the Thimilar use depicts a lotus flower and, for some

⁷⁸ In late 2008, my research assistant made a trip to Chilaw and Thimilai for me, and spoke to a number of people who still identify themselves as Thimilar. These Thimilar identified themselves as belonging to the *Kuru kulam*, a group name which they could not explain, but which indicates a link with Jaffna. Casie Chitty (1834: 232) mentions that *Kuru kulam* is a name for a caste cluster of fishermen and boatmen in Jaffna who had become town servants; this cluster includes both the Thimilar and the Mukkuvar. The Thimilar of Thimilai claimed to have originated from Thirunelveli, a couple of generations ago. They were unaware of a reference in a temple chronicle to Kulakkottan settling the Thimilar in Thimilai (along with 17 other castes) to serve the Munneswaram temple. They were also entirely unaware of the presence of a group of Thimilar in Kottiyar Pattu (interviews by my research assistant, Thimilai, July 2008).

⁷⁹ This was pointed out to me by Dennis McGilvray (e-mail, 25-10-2007).

kudis (matriclans), a plough. The plough is an obvious reference to farming, and on top of that the lotus flower is a *Velalar* cattle brand in parts of Batticaloa District, while the Velalar in Kottiyar Pattu (who still live in the villages that were identified as Velalar villages by Van Senden) have a crescent as a cattle brand.

What is clear is that in between the late 17th century and the middle of the 20th century, the Thimilar dominated political power among Tamils in Kottiyar Pattu, and that they controlled most of the paddy land and the important temples at Verugal and Kankuveli. The sense of being the rightful leader was so strong that, when lower castes started challenging the status of the Thimilar, a number of Thimilar responded by hunting down disrespectful low-caste Tamils with shotguns. The “shooting incidents in Mavadichenai and Menkamam” were important enough to be reported in the annual report of the Trincomalee GA (AR 1954: A174). Fifty years later, a Thimilar man whose relatives had taken part in the shootings told me about these incidents with some pride.

The Thimilar were however unable to hold on to power. In the 1950s, as the lower castes were beginning to deny the Thimilar their customary respect, the Velalar of Kankuveli took control of the Kankuveli Sivankovil and Agasthiyar Stabanam, two related temples near Kankuveli that had been under the control of a family from Mallikaithivu for generations. A court case followed, which was concluded in favour of the Velalar of Kankuveli: the Brahmin judge ruled that since the temples were in the territory of their village, they should control it. Together with the temple for Murugan at Verugal, the temple for Kali at Sampoor and (until 1983) the temple for Pattini at Neelapola, the Kankuveli Sivankovil has regional importance, with people from the entire region visiting its annual (one-day) water-cutting ritual in the Mahaweli River in June/July. After losing control over the temple, the people of Mallikaithivu built a new temple for Siva in their own village, and they now organise their water-cutting ritual on the same day as the Kankuveli Sivankovil, but at a location that is slightly upstream from (and thus both physically and ritually ‘higher’ than) the original water-cutting site.

The loss of power of the Thimilar was completed in 1970, when A. Thangathurai of Kilivetti, a Velalar, became Member of Parliament. Even though Thangathurai proved through his actions that he was not anti-Thimilar (one of the interventions for which he is remembered most in the area is the tarring of the road from Mallikaithivu to Kilivetti, starting at Mallikaithivu), the Thimilar suddenly had to come to terms with the fact that they were now ordinary inhabitants of Kottiyar Pattu.

Some anti-Thimilar sentiments do exist among other Tamils in the area: when I asked non-Thimilar about the different castes in Kottiyar Pattu and their hereditary occupations, I was often told (accompanied by other disparaging remarks) that the Thimilar were either toddy tappers or washermen.

In the 1970s and 1980s, much of the land owned by the Thimilar of Mallikaithivu was sold to Muslims. I have not been able to find out why this happened; it might have been to settle debts that had developed with the introduction of green

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revolution rice, or to free up cash for investments outside agriculture. What is clear is that some of the money was used to educate youth. When the war broke out, this proved to be an advantage. One person from Mallikaithivu fled to Canada, and started sponsoring members of his extended family, who in turn sponsored others. Over time, about half of the population of Mallikaithivu moved to Toronto, earning Mallikaithivu the nickname 'little Canada'. I was told that there is now even a separate Sindhunadar caste association in Toronto. Helped by their education levels, some of the refugees did well and started sending money back to the village, which enabled those left behind to buy back their lands from the Muslims to whom they had sold them a few decades earlier. Eechchilampattu and Pallikudiyiruppu and their satellite villages did not do so well, because these villages were under full LTTE control from 1997 onwards. Here, not much land had been sold to outsiders, but the restrictions instituted by the army made it very hard for people to invest in these villages. Nevertheless, it was clear that these villages were better off than surrounding villages in the LTTE-controlled area.

The Thimilar are subdivided into exogamous *kudi* matrilineal clans. In 1971, Dennis McGilvray collected data on Thimilar *kudis* in Eechchilampattu and Pallikudiyiruppu; the data that I collected in Eechchilampattu, Pallikudiyiruppu and Mallikaithivu during my fieldwork are very similar. I present them below in random order (table 3.2).

<i>Kudis</i> identified in 1971	<i>Kudis</i> identified in 2005
Cakkalattikudi	Sakkaravattikudi
Patattaarkilaikudi	Padaththaarkudi
Maalayankudi	Maalayarkudi
Maraikkaalkilaikudi	Marakkaarkudi
Vilvaraacankudi	Vilvaranyankudi
Toppuccukilaikudi	Thoppichchikudi
Umanakirikudi	Umanakirikudi
Kutiyiruppukudi	Kudiyiruppukudi
Veelaiyankudi	
Veerappanikkankudi	
Naiyinaarkudi	
Alavantaarkudi	
	Vithanakudi

Table 3.2. Thimilar *kudis* identified in 1971 and 2005 (source: fieldnotes Dennis McGilvray, 1971; own fieldnotes, 2005)

Most of the people who gave me names of Thimilar *kudis* told me that the *kudis* are hierarchically ranked; the problem is that everybody gave me a different ranking. Some claimed high status for certain *kudis* based on political positions, others claimed high status based on religious positions, and others did not give any specific explanation for the ranking. While Yalman (1971: 326) was told that *kudi* rankings in the area around Akkaraipattu are reinforced by the practice of hypergamy, McGilvray (2008: 179-180) found no evidence of it. In Kottiyar Pattu, I did not come

across any references to hypergamy either. I have not had the time to sort the puzzle of *kudi* rankings out in more detail; what is clear is that the *kudi* ranking is ambiguous, either because it is contested or because people do not think it is important enough anymore to have the hierarchy worked out properly.

Velalar

The Velalar in Kottiyar Pattu can mostly be found in Sampoor, Kilivetti, Kankuveli and Menkamam, as well as in the colonies LB3 (Linganagar), Athiyammankerny (an extension of LB3) and LB6 (Sivapuram); the abandoned village of Thirumankalai was also a Velalar village. Bharathipuram, a colony along the Muthur-Serunuwara road, has a sizeable population of Velalar, as well as two other caste groups. Traditionally, the Velalar are cultivators (and most of them still are); their landholdings centered around a number of small tanks around the fringe of the Allai scheme before it was extended: the Kankuveli tank, the Menkamam tank, the Kirankulam (near Kilivetti), and a number of small tanks near Sampoor.

Apart from a number of village temples, the Velalar control two old temples with a wider geographical relevance: a temple for Kali in Sampoor that was famous for its trance rituals, and a temple for Siva at Kankuveli (see above). In contrast, the Velalar play only the subservient role of temple sweepers in the Verugal temple, and are thus sometimes described as Koviyaar (temple labourers) by Thimilar. Nevertheless, the shrine for Pillaiyar, to whom most devotees pay obeisance before entering the main temple, was added to the Verugal temple by a Velalar.

Before the conflict, the Velalar community in Kottiyar Pattu was largely endogamous. Inter-marriage with other castes was rare, but even inter-marriage with Velalar from other areas was not very common. Kilivetti is an exception to this pattern, as it had some influx of people from Jaffna in the late 19th and early 20th century; this group has pretty much amalgamated into the village community.

As with the Thimilar, the Velalar have *kudis*. When he visited Sampoor in 1971, Dennis McGilvray was given the names of seven *kudis*. 34 years later, I was told that there were ten *kudis*. Of these, the people I spoke to could give me six names:

<i>Kudis</i> identified in 1971	<i>Kudis</i> identified in 2005
Kāraiapparkudi (the most prestigious <i>kudi</i>)	Karaiappukudi (poosaris)
Pulavankudi	Pulavankudi (bards)
Periyakāraiapparkudi	Periyakaraiappukudi ('volunteers')
Iraiyāththukudi	Iraiytheevukudi (take oil to Koneswaram temple)
Kāppukkattikkudi	
Manjanirkudi	
Ilankudi	Ilankudi ('volunteers')
	Pasunkudi (management of the temple)

Table 3.3. Velalar *kudis* identified in 1971 and 2005 (source: fieldnotes Dennis McGilvray, 1971; own fieldnotes, 2005)

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According to the myth of origin of the Adhi Konesar temple in Thampalakamam, Karaiyappar was brought from India by Kulakkottan to be the secretary of the temple⁸⁰; he ultimately settled in Sampoor. As he did not have children, he adopted a son whom he made his heir. This man is known as Periya ('Big') Karaiyappar. The Pulavankudi provided the bards for the Koneswaram temple: *pulavan* is Tamil for 'poet'.

While all the abovementioned *kudis* are found in Sampoor, the other old villages are dominated by either the Karaiyapparkudi and the Periyakaraiyapparkudi, or by the Pulavankudi, and the colonies have been settled primarily by people of the top three *kudis*.

A curious detail about the Karaiyapparkudi and the Pulavankudi is that a number of people from both *kudis* insisted that the *kudis* are endogamous, and that intermarriage between the two *kudis* is not allowed. These people identified certain Velalar villages as belonging to the Karaiyapparkudi, and others to the Pulavankudi. What may have happened is that with the expansion of the population, the two exogamous *kudis* transformed into endogamous sub-castes, which would be fairly unique along Sri Lanka's east coast: Yalman (*idem*: 326-331) only found *kudi* endogamy among the priestly Kurukkal *kudi*, which can thus either be seen as an endogamous sub-caste of the Velalar, or as a separate caste altogether⁸¹. The problem is that *kudi* endogamy constitutes incest, and is thus taboo: *kudi* members are classificatory siblings. If this *kudi* endogamy does indeed exist, it must have started at some point with a marriage between parallel cousins (which constitutes incest but may be forgivable if it concerns distant cousins), and exogamous sub-divisions must have formed within the *kudis*. I did not come across any named sub-*kudis*, but the lack of names may be due to the lack of a ritual role for these groups⁸². An alternative interpretation might be that there is no *kudi* endogamy, but a rule of marriage avoidance between the two *kudis* if both have traditional marriage links with a third *kudi* (possibly the Periyaparaiyapparkudi). As McGilvray (2008: 179-182) has documented, cross-cousins of cross-cousins are classificatory siblings, who are not allowed to marry.

The other castes in Kottiyar Pattu may or may not have *kudis*. I never came across any reference to their existence, but also did not inquire into the matter in detail. Whenever I did ask non-Velalar and non-Thimilar about *kudis*, people either thought I was asking about caste or did not recognise the term at all.

⁸⁰ This probably refers to the Koneswaram temple in Trincomalee

⁸¹ Yalman may have been confused by the multiple ways in which the term *kudi* is used: both to designate (high-caste) matriclans, and to designate service castes. McGilvray (2008) has documented the existence of a number of exogamous *kudis* among the Kurukkals.

⁸² When I visited the Somali region of Ethiopia in May 2008, I was told of a similar process that had taken place among some Somali clans that used to be exogamous, but became endogamous as the population grew. In order to avoid incest, exogamy rules were maintained at the level of the sub-clan.

Karaiyar

Karaiyar (fishermen) can be found in the strip that covers Kattaiparichchan, Chenaiyoor and Kadatkarachenai. Apart from fishing, some people also engage in subsistence farming. There may have been a small community there earlier (Van Senden mentions the existence of Kattaiparichchan), but it saw a comparatively big influx about a century and a half ago. Around the middle of the 19th century, a group of fishermen from Valvettithurai, on the Jaffna Peninsula, settled permanently in Thirukadaloor, a neighbourhood on the northern edge of Trincomalee Town. From there, they expanded into other coastal settlements, including the strip around Kattaiparichchan, and engaged in fishing, shipping of goods between Trincomalee and Jaffna, and smuggling. As the Karaiyar community in Trincomalee District increased in size the ties with Valvettithurai faded, though particularly during the economically restrictive regime of Sirimavo Bandaranaike (1970-1977) some people remained involved in lively smuggling with Valvettithurai and India (conversation with a retired policeman who was based in Trincomalee at the time, 2007). Valvettithurai shot into prominence as the Tamil militancy developed, because it was the birthplace of Veluppillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the LTTE, and because the smuggling routes maintained by the Karaiyar became lifelines for the militant groups (Narayan Swamy 2003a, 2003b). This saw Valvettithurai being targeted for violence by the Sri Lankan military (including the massacre that triggered the Anuradhapura massacre in May 1985, which in turn triggered the carnage of May-June 1985 in Kottiyar Pattu, see section 4.2.2). The link with Valvettithurai may have been a reason behind the particular viciousness with which Thirukadaloor and the other Karaiyar settlements in Trincomalee District were attacked repeatedly throughout the war.

The Karaiyar villages in Kottiyar Pattu all fell under the full control of the LTTE between 1997 and 2006, and now fall into the High Security Zone (see sections 4.2.8 and 4.2.10), which means that the entire population is currently languishing in camps.

Access to boats has made it comparatively easy (though not at all safe) for members of this community to flee; the Karaiyar from Trincomalee are disproportionately represented among the refugee population in India. But where the Thimilmar who moved to Canada were able to send back substantial amounts of money to their relatives in Kottiyar Pattu, the Karaiyar who fled to India were unable to do the same, and those left behind remain quite poor.

Because this community has little to do with agriculture, it falls somewhat outside the local caste hierarchy; I have not come across any references to status conflicts between the Karaiyar and the other communities in Kottiyar Pattu. Karaiyar from Thirukadaloor do have one important ritual role to play in the annual temple festival at Verugal: they are responsible for the flag hoisting ceremony with which the temple festival opens. Apparently, the very first flag for the festival was provided by Karaiyar from Valvettithurai, who were therefore given the right to hoist the flag every year. Over time, this responsibility shifted to Thirukadaloor for logistical reasons.

Mukkuvar

There are two Mukkuvar villages in Kottiyar Pattu. Both were established in the 1930s, and the inhabitants all originate from Batticaloa District. As is the case in Batticaloa, the Mukkuvar in Kottiyar Pattu primarily engage in agriculture, though not many have access to own land. While the Mukkuvar are traditionally the dominant caste in Batticaloa (McGilvray 2008), they have no dominance whatsoever in Kottiyar Pattu.

Thaththar

A small community of Thaththar (goldsmiths) used to live in Koonithivu, a coastal village near Sampoor that is now part of the High Security Zone. With jewelrymaking being in continuous demand, some men of this community have retained their traditional occupation. Some of them work in Muthur, while others work in Trincomalee and in towns as far afield as Colombo. Unfortunately, I have never been able to visit Koonithivu, but I did speak to some goldsmiths and, separately, to some Muslim jewellers in Muthur in March 2008. The striking thing about the goldsmiths is the interdependence between them and the owners of jewelry shops, who in Muthur are all Muslims. Each jeweller employs one or a few goldsmiths, and they often have very long-standing working relationships. Because the jewellers are entirely dependent on the work of the goldsmiths, they do everything they can to protect them when needed. Both the goldsmiths and the jewellers whom I spoke to confirmed this. Whenever tensions broke out while the goldsmiths were still in Muthur, the jewellers would look after them in their own houses until it was safe to escort them to the bridge at Kattaiparichchan, from where the goldsmiths returned home safely.

This local inter-ethnic interdependence provided no protection in Koonithivu itself. Statistics collected by CIRM (2004b) indicate that violence hit Koonithivu harder than most other communities in Kottiyar Pattu (see also section 4.3): two fifths of the households were female-headed, and over three quarters of the households were directly war-affected (which means that at least one person in the household was either killed, maimed or traumatised in the conflict). Being located near the entry of the Trincomalee harbour and with a number of LTTE bases nearby, Koonithivu and the neighbouring village of Soodaikudah were hit regularly by naval and artillery shelling and aerial bombardment. On top of that, particularly in the 1990s, there were regular roundups and 'search and destroy' missions in the area in which it is quite possible that ordinary civilians got caught up.

Pachchan

The Pachchan are another caste community with mysterious origins. In Kottiyar Pattu, nobody was able to tell me where the Pachchan came from or what their hereditary occupation was, and there does not seem to be a Pachchan caste anywhere else among the Tamils in Sri Lanka or in South India. The oldest reference that I found to their presence in Kottiyar Pattu is by De Graauwe (1676: f. 14), who mentioned the presence of the "Patjes". Their responsibilities were to guard the fordable place across the Mahaweli River at "Pajanature", still known as

Pachchanuthurai (between present-day Shafinagar and Neelapola, and very near to the place where the new Trincomalee Circular Road will ultimately cross the Mahaweli River), and to catch elephants; however, from De Graauwe's account it seems that a number of Pachchan had fled to Kantale, outside of the area under Dutch control. In 1786, Van Senden counted 14 adult men of the "Passen" caste at the village of "Patjewelij" or Pachchanveli, half an hour's travel from Neelapola and near Pachchanuthurai (entry for 25-5-1786)⁸³.

Ryan mentions that the Portuguese authors Ribeiro and De Queyroz described a low-ranking caste of Pachas, and mentions that in the 1824 census the "Patchies" were included as a separate caste, which was identified with the present-day Sinhala Batgam caste (2004 [1953]: 64, 72)⁸⁴. Jon Dart, referring to an article by Ferguson in JRAS 1899, mentions that Teixeira, an early Portuguese writer on Ceylon, mentioned the Pachas, a wild tribe who conserved meat in honey (Dart 1985: 21). Ferguson identified them with the Veddas. De Queyroz identified the Pachas as a low caste, separate from the Veddas, involved in the preparation of cinnamon, and geographically concentrated in the Four Korales and the Seven Korales (1992 [1930/1687]: 19-20). Pachas were seemingly quite prominent among the *lascorins*, or native troops, and were "the worst enemies of the Portuguese, but self-interest made them friends" (*idem.*: 104, 230).

What we thus probably have here is a group of soldiers of the (Sinhala) Pacha caste who settled – with their families – near the fordable place they were supposed to guard, lost contact with the rest of their community somewhere during the Dutch period, and adopted first the language and then the ethnic identity of the Tamils living around them, in a very similar process to what happened to the Coast Veddas. Around the beginning of the 20th century this community was destitute and, according to people of the community, lived in the jungle. Under the leadership of Fr. Bonnel, a missionary, a large swathe of jungle was converted into paddy fields, the people were settled in Pachchanoor, and a church was built. In response to Fr. Bonnel's work, a large part of the community became Roman Catholic (Lange n.y.: 158; interview with middle-aged couple, Iruthayapuram, August 2005). In recent years, the village has adopted the Catholic name of Iruthayapuram, which means 'Sacred Heart Village'. Socially speaking, the village has a fairly isolated position in Kottiyar Pattu. There are no regular marriage relationships with other Tamil villages

⁸³ Near Pachchanveli (which is now only a stretch of paddy fields, without a village), one can still find the remains of an old tank that is known as Pachchankulam. While I was unable to determine the age of the tank, it is not unthinkable that the Pachchan who settled near Pachchanuthurai began cultivating paddy. In the census of 1824, a village with the name "Patchan Ore" (Pachchanoor) is included; I am not sure whether this was located where Pachchanveli was, or where the present-day village of Pachchanoor/Iruthayapuram is found.

⁸⁴ This caste, which is found "throughout the Kandyan provinces including the north-central jungle", is traditionally one of hired labourers, though own traditions claim a former status as royal palanquin bearers (Ryan 2004 [1953]: 72-73, 127-128).

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(not even with the Tamil Catholics in Muthur), and higher-caste landowners in surrounding villages resent the fact that the community, which is considered fairly low on the pecking order, is well endowed with fertile and well-irrigated paddy fields.

Iruthayapuram is something of a village in-between. First of all, the village and its paddy fields form the boundary between the Muslim-dominated area around Muthur and the Tamil-dominated area to the south. Around Iruthayapuram, Tamil- and Muslim-owned paddy fields were interspersed before the conflict; after the conflict caused an ethnic homogenisation of land use (see chapter 6), the boundary between Tamil and Muslim fields came to run just north of the village. Secondly, neither the Catholic Tamils from Muthur, nor the Hindu Tamils from particularly Mallikaithivu appreciated the Pachchans' 20th-century rise in status from destitute jungle people to landowning farmers. This made the village an outlier among the Tamil community until the equalising effect of the war mitigated this to some extent. Thirdly, this village used to have a disproportionate share of mixed-ethnic marriages before the conflict – all marriages between Sinhala and Tamil Catholics. The mixed-ethnic couples have moved out, and inter-ethnic marriage was replaced by a small, but increasing trend of interreligious marriage between Catholic and Hindu Tamils (see chapter 8).

Kuyavar

There is one small village of Kuyavar (potters) in Kottiyar Pattu; it used to be known under the name Kusavanoor ('the village of potters'). Many of the people in the village survive as landless labourers or tenant farmers. As far as I know, no pottery is made in the village. This is in interesting contrast to the potters' village where Deborah Winslow has been doing anthropological research for many years. There, pottery was discovered as a very viable income generating activity, and the village became rather wealthy in comparison to the surrounding villages (conversation, Madison, October 2006; see also Winslow 2003). In Kottiyar Pattu, this is visibly not the case.

About a year and a half after the tsunami, another problem appeared on the horizon. Since there was a huge labour demand for post-tsunami reconstruction work, agricultural labour became scarce, and agricultural labourers demanded increasingly high wages⁸⁵. This meant that the profitability of paddy cultivation came under

⁸⁵ Note however that the scarcity of agricultural labour in Kottiyar Pattu was much less extreme than in other parts of the country, particularly Ampara District. Also, the scarcity of agricultural labour in Kottiyar Pattu manifested itself only about 1½ years after the tsunami, whereas elsewhere it manifested itself already within a few months after the tsunami. During national-level meetings to coordinate the construction of transitional shelters for the tsunami-displaced (which I attended in the capacity of shelter coordinator for ZOA), there were strong debates about the need to keep wages paid for labourers limited, so as not to

pressure for the farmers. In response, April 2006 saw the first combine harvester machine being put to work in Kottiyar Pattu. The consequence of this was that unskilled agricultural labourers had much less work available, and suffered from under-employment. The potters' village was among the hardest hit. Because of the violence of August 2006, there was barely any harvest in the 2006 *yala* season, and the area cultivated for the 2006-2007 *maha* season was also below average. I have not been able to ascertain what happened subsequently.

Paraiyar

Entering into the only old Paraiyar (funeral drummer) village in Kottiyar Pattu (there is a drummer section in one of the Tamil colonies as well), you would not think that you have reached the bottom of the local caste hierarchy: it is among the most pleasant villages in the area. The compounds are shaded by arecanut palms and fruit trees, the village is clean, and there are two small but well-maintained temples.

While De Graauwe's report (1676) mentions the presence of Paraiyar in Kottiyar Pattu, Van Senden's report (1786b) does not. This leads me to surmise that the drummers probably left the area when the local economy collapsed under the weight of epidemics, and the remaining high-caste farmers were unable to sustain the service castes. A hand-written village history that was once read out to me does not mention caste in any way. It states that the first five families came to Kottiyar Pattu from Kaluthavalai in Batticaloa District in 1840⁸⁶. It is very well possible that since in this time the situation slowly improved again, the dominant castes wanted to re-establish themselves and thus invited people of various service castes to come back and work for them.

As far as I have been able to figure out, there are very few Paraiyar who have married outside their caste. The village has marriage links with Paraiyar communities in Batticaloa, Ampara (McGilvray 1983 and 2008: 247-265), and Jaffna Districts.

mess up other markets for unskilled labour (Gaasbeek 2010). My guess is that the labour shortage in Kottiyar Pattu arose when labourers started migrating to other parts of the country to work there. Though there was a fair bit of tsunami damage in Kottiyar Pattu itself, the permanent housing reconstruction efforts hardly took off. During an evaluation that I did for a Sri Lankan NGO that had built houses in Muthur, the DS told me that of about 1,200 houses that needed replacement in the DS division, by June 2007 only about 250 had been completed and another 100 were under construction.

⁸⁶ I have never raised the caste issue with people from the drummer's village, because I did not want to embarrass anyone. The caste affiliation is however clear from its old name: Paraiyoor. In the village itself, I never heard anyone use this name. Palaiya Oor ("old village"), a similar-sounding name, was used several times. This name makes no sense to people from other villages however, since some of the other villages are hundreds of years older.

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The drummer community has an ambiguous reputation. The Paraiyar are clearly looked down upon by people from other villages, but some are also sought after traditional healers and others are feared for their skills in sorcery and black magic.

Similar to what McGilvray has described for the drummer village near Akkaraipattu, a process of emancipation has taken place over the last twenty years. The emancipation of Kottiyar Pattu's Paraiyar was triggered or reinforced by the displacement of 1985. Irrespective of caste, almost all the Tamils in the area had lost their houses, all were displaced, and all had become dependent on handouts. This dependency was reinforced by the fact that the Tamil farmers were unable to harvest the crop that was on the fields when the 1985 carnage broke out, which meant that people would not have had resources to provide the customary donations to the service castes.

Over time, more and more people refused to perform their traditional demeaning role of funeral drummers, and by the mid-nineties drumming at funerals had ceased entirely. This process was reinforced by demographic trends. Since the peak in births that occurred with the baby boom of the 1940s preceded a sudden increase in deaths (and thus in funerals at which drumming is required) by some fifty to sixty years, this meant that by the 1960s there were simply too many people in 'drumming age' for the drumming that was required. Part of the Paraiyar thus grew up without ever having to drum, which showed others that a life without drumming was entirely possible and may have increased the momentum for emancipation.

The development of the education system further reinforced the process of emancipation. Access to primary education gave some youths a chance to pursue further education in secondary schools outside Kottiyar Pattu, where fellow students and teachers would not know the caste affiliations of the students. By 2005, three people from the village had become medical doctors in some of the country's best hospitals. The self-emancipation of the Paraiyar has not earned them more respect among other Tamils in Kottiyar Pattu though, and the sad reality remains today that the only way the drummers can really break free of caste-based disrespect is to migrate to the cities and become anonymous (Rasaratnam 1996a: chapter 41).

There are not many landowning farmers in the village at the moment, though this has not always been the same. The initial families who settled in 1840 were given some plots of paddy land to sustain themselves, and their descendants have cleared some more jungle around the village. By the 1950s however, there was no more jungle to clear and the village was not given access to colony lands under the Allai Extension Scheme. Most villagers sustain themselves as landless agricultural labourers or as tenant farmers. The village is however not as desparately poor as some other villages are. As I mentioned earlier, many Paraiyar families have planted arecanuts in their compounds. Though one will not get rich from a few arecanut trees, they do provide a useful additional income. It is interesting to see that the drummer community is the only community that has taken to this source of income in a large way.

Vannar and Ampattar

Different from the other castes in Kottiyar Pattu, Vannar (washermen, also known as Dhobies) and Ampattar (barbers) do not live in separate villages but are dispersed, with a slightly larger group living in Muthur, where they serve both Muslims and Tamils. To a larger extent than what Dennis McGilvray (2008: 228-247) has documented for Akkaraipattu, both of these communities have over the last few decades emancipated from their subservient role while largely maintaining their traditional professions. Ritual services are still performed for temples, but only to a limited extent for polluting events like funerals. Particularly the barbers, but also some washermen no longer visit people's homes to offer their non-ritual washing and hairdressing services; rather, they have set up shops that people now need to come to if they want their clothes washed or their hair cut. This process has been reinforced by the monetisation of the transaction. Where earlier, high-caste families would give 'their *dhoby*' and 'their barber' a gift of rice or other relevant goods on a regular basis, all customers now need to pay in hard cash. A high-caste man who told me about this strongly expressed his frustration over the loss of status that this entailed for his own caste community. Despite this emancipation and the (limited) increase in wealth that came with it, both communities still find themselves on the social margins of the villages they live in.

Vedar

Most Sri Lankans consider the Veddas to be a distinct, aboriginal, ethnic group⁸⁷. Among them, Nevill identified a group living around Vakarai, directly south from Kottiyar Pattu, as "Coast Veddas" (Nevill 1886: 183-184, see also Seligmann and Seligmann 2003 [1911]: 331-340). The Coast Veddas had intermarried with Tamils, spoke Tamil, and identified themselves as Vedar (Tamil for hunters). Interestingly, they started speaking "pure but quaint Sinhalese with a Vaedda accent, as a rule, though mixed with some words characteristic of true Vaedda" when both Nevill and Seligmann and Seligmann asked them to speak their original language (Nevill 1886: 183; Seligmann and Seligmann 2003 [1911]: 332). This, combined with local claims of origin, led Nevill to surmise that the Coast Veddas originated from what is now

⁸⁷ The Mahavamsa relates how, when he first landed in Sri Lanka, Vijaya was seduced by Kuveni, a *yakkhini* (demoness), into marrying her. She handed control over Sri Lanka to Vijaya, and arranged for Vijaya and his men to massacre the other *yakkhas* (demons), lest they would kill Kuveni for her betrayal. After things had settled down, the time came to properly consecrate Vijaya as ruler of Sri Lanka. However, Vijaya refused to take the throne if he did not have a wife of royal lineage. His men promptly arranged for a Tamil princess from Madurai to be brought. Vijaya sent Kuveni with their son and daughter away so he could marry the princess, whose descendants became the Sinhalese. Unfortunately for Kuveni, not all *yakkhas* had been massacred, and she was killed by an angry *yakkha* who recognised her. The son and daughter fled to Adam's Peak, where they married each other. Their children became the Veddas (*Mahavamsa* VII: 1-74).

known as Sabaragamuwa Province, which Rajasingha II would have wanted to empty of people so that the wilderness functioned as a buffer between the Portuguese possessions around Colombo and the Kandy kingdom, and there would be nobody who could guide invading troops through the wilderness.

Jon Dart (1985) identified a string of Coast Vedda villages south of Verugal, but missed out on a cluster of Coast Vedda villages in Kottiyar Pattu that covers much of the area between Sampoor, Pallikudiyiruppu, Ilankaithurai and the ocean shore.

De Graauwe (1676: f. 13) mentioned the presence of two groups of Veddas in Kottiyar Pattu: one group near Thirumankalai, guarding the frontier with the Kandy kingdom, and another living around the Dutch fortalice at Erikalanchenai, not far from Kankuveli; this second group acted as servants to the local chiefs. Both groups were involved in hunting and the collection of honey and bees' wax.

Local Vedda narratives fit nicely with De Graauwe's description and Nevill's hunch about their settlement history. The narratives tell of two Vedda brothers migrating from the Kandy kingdom, first to Karaithivu (south of Batticaloa), and then to Kottiyar Pattu, where they settled near Kankuveli (which is not far from Erikalanchenai). Later on, one of the brothers moved to an area near Verugal (which is not far from Thirumankalai) with his clan; the other brother took his clan and moved towards Pallikudiyiruppu, where he married a Tamil (Thimilar) woman and began a long tradition of intermarriage with high-caste Tamils. The group that had settled near Verugal was badly affected by an epidemic; the survivors settled near the Ullackalli lagoon, where their descendants can still be found (Samad 2003: 163-171). Over time, the Coast Veddas of Kottiyar Pattu became integrated into the local Tamil caste system as the Vedar (hunter) caste, similar to what Dart (1985) and Thangarajah (1995) have documented for the Coast Veddas of Vakara.

Intermarriage with high-caste Tamils (and particular the Thimilar) seems to have been fairly common for many years. Nevertheless, the Coast Veddas are still seen by the rest of the population as recently-settled, uncivilised tribals who worship their ancestors. Until the 1950s, hunting formed an important part of their livelihoods, next to fishing and subsistence agriculture. Before the tsunami, most Veddas in Kottiyar Pattu lived in tiny wattle-and-daub huts. When an NGO planned to build houses in one Vedda village in 2003, a model house that was set up was criticised by the intended beneficiaries as being so big that not only people but also spirits would move in – despite having a total surface area of just 30 m².

Despite the important role that the Veddas play in the founding myth of the Verugal temple, they have not been given the right to be responsible for the ritual on one of the 18 nights that the annual festival lasts. For a number of years, the Veddas have had a small ritual of their own on the thirteenth night of the festival, just outside the temple compound.

Kuravar

Samad (2003: 342-343) mentions the presence of a community of Kuravar (gypsies) in three marginalised hamlets in Eechchilampattu. I have never visited these hamlets, and thus have no specific knowledge about this community. The Kuravar speak Telugu (the official language of Andhra Pradesh in south-central India) and, until at least the middle of the 20th century, were nomadic. Typically engaging in activities like snake charming, fortune telling and begging (beside unskilled labour), the Kuravar find themselves on the very margins of Tamil society. I know of two other Kuravar settlements on the east coast. One is near Thampalakamam (which was set up under the leadership of a local Protestant pastor); the second is the settlement of Alikambe, near Akkaraipattu, (which was set up under the leadership of a Catholic missionary, see McGilvray 2008: 47-49).

Indian Tamils

A separate category within the Tamil community is formed by the so-called 'Indian Tamils': descendants of those who were brought down from Tamil Nadu to work in the plantations in Ceylon. From the moment their ancestors arrived in Sri Lanka, this group of people has been discriminated against and exploited by the British colonial establishment, Sinhalese and Tamils alike (Daniel 1997). After a reduction in rice rations had caused starvation among the Indian Tamils and after many Indian Tamils were affected by the violence of the 1977 riots, thousands of Indian Tamils fled the hill-country and sought safety in the North-East. With assistance of a number of NGOs, several thousand families were housed in a string of settlements that was set up all over the North-East. In Kottiyar Pattu, several hundred Indian Tamils were settled in Puliyaicholai, on the outskirts of Kankuveli. After this settlement was burnt down in 1983 (see section 4.2.1), several dozen families settled in Kumarapuram (adjoining Kilivetti), while others returned to Puliyaicholai.

Even though various castes are represented among the Indian Tamils, many Sri Lankan Tamils treat Indian Tamils as belonging to one low-ranking caste⁸⁸. The people who settled in Puliyaicholai and Kumarapuram have no access to land or other productive resources, and mostly depend on manual labour. Being very recent immigrants, this community has no role in the local caste hierarchy, and ranks somewhere near the bottom of the status ladder. That they are tolerated but not necessarily accepted as equals became visible in 2005 and 2006, when the population of both Kankuveli and Puliyaicholai lived in the Kankuveli school for many months due to the security situation. Even though the Velalar and the Indian Tamils lived in the same school, both communities stayed in separate parts of the school compound and asked for separate facilities for water and sanitation (observations during field visit, September 2006).

⁸⁸ This further underscores the ambiguity in the vernacular vocabularies on ethnicity, nationality, caste and community. What Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils see is endogamy and uniform status ranking (relative to the status of different Sinhala and Sri Lankan Tamil castes) and pretty much endogamous. The representation of Indian Tamil ethnicity and/or nationality thus takes the shape of caste.

Chakkiliyar

In Palainagar, on the outskirts of Muthur, there is a small community of Chakkiliyar (cobblers). This community arrived in Muthur around 1940. After the British government brought a number of Chakkiliyar from Tamil Nadu to work as scavengers in Trincomalee⁸⁹, 16 families from Trincomalee were asked to move to Muthur and work there as scavengers and street sweepers for the local government. In the 1960s, 10 small houses were built as quarters in Palainagar, on the outskirts of Muthur. Over time the entire community settled around these quarters. By the time I did my fieldwork, their community had expanded to 45 families. As a consequence of being shunned by almost everybody else, this community is strongly endogamous: spouses are mostly found from within the Chakkiliyar neighbourhoods around Trincomalee, but even from places as far away as Jaffna and Colombo. While a number of people have low-paid permanent jobs with the Muthur Pradeshya Sabha, the rest depend on their traditional trade of shoemending and on unskilled labour jobs; most are desparately poor. I was once told that there are five scavenger families in Thoppur as well, but have not been able to verify this.

Other castes

Apart from the castes discussed above, there may be small groups of people of other castes present in Kottiyar Pattu. For example, one of the backwaters that runs through Muthur bears the name Kollanaru: 'the river of the blacksmiths'. Also, with the in-migration of small numbers of people from Jaffna over the course of the past two centuries, people from outside the local caste hierarchy may have moved into the area. Their numbers are however probably negligible, and they never featured in any narrative that I heard about the Tamil population in Kottiyar Pattu.

3.2.2 Caste dynamics among Sinhalese in Kottiyar Pattu

The Sinhalese in Kottiyar Pattu are all fairly recent immigrants, and have no locally grounded stories to use as arguments for making caste-related claims to status. Gaining insight into the caste background of the Sinhalese in Kottiyar Pattu and into inter-caste dynamics was much more difficult than it was among the Tamils. Only once did anyone provide me a list with the castes that were present in the colonies; this man was a Buddhist monk who proudly claimed top-notch caste status: he belonged to the *Brahmana* (Brahmin) community, which has only about 60 families in

⁸⁹ In Akkaraipattu, Chakkiliyar arrived around the same time. McGilvray (2008: 154) links this to the introduction of the bucket latrine around World War II. This kind of latrines required a system where buckets with faeces were collected on a regular basis for disposal and cleaning. Carrying faeces was quite probably not something that anybody in the local caste hierarchy was willing to do. As pit latrines replaced the bucket latrines, the work of the Chakkiliyar shifted to garbage disposal and street sweeping.

the whole of Sri Lanka⁹⁰. According to the monk, the following castes are represented (he presented them in random order): Kammal (carpenters⁹¹); Rada (washermen); Karava (merchants and fishermen); Durava (toddy tappers); Hali or Hannali (tailors⁹²); Goviya (farmers), and Negati (drummers⁹³).

Rather than by caste, Sinhalese whom I spoke to identified the other settlers by area of origin⁹⁴. Dehiwatte for example has a 'Kurunegala street' and a 'Hambantota street', the settlers in Neelapola originate from the Southern Province, those in Mahaweligama originate from Kurunegala and Kegalle, and those in Seruwila originate from Matale, Kurunegala and Kandy. This regional distinction is significant: the people from Kandy, Kurunegala, Matale and Kegalle are so-called Up-country Sinhalese (with a caste structure dominated by the Goviya caste of cultivators), while the people from the southern coastal districts are so-called Low-country Sinhalese (with a caste structure dominated by the Karava caste of fishermen). Though love marriages within the colonies (rather than marriages with spouses from the region of origin) have become common, there is still a strong preference to marry within the same geographical (Up-country or Low-country) community. That some status competition exists between these two groups is visible in Dehiwatte, where the settlers from Kurunegala were planning to put up their own, separate *pansala* by the time I finished my fieldwork.

One of the colonies stands apart as a low-caste community. There are quite some squatter families in this colony, and there seems to be very little intermarriage with people from the other colonies.

3.2.3 Caste-like dynamics among Muslims in Kottiyar Pattu

As any Muslim will tell you, Islam teaches that everyone is equal before Allah, and therefore the concept of caste is unislamic. There are indeed no ranked and named caste groups among the Muslim community in Sri Lanka, with exception of small groups of religious and ritual specialists, as described by McGilvray (2008).

⁹⁰ Ryan does not mention Brahmins as a separate caste, but states that Karava (fishermen), Salagama (weavers and cinnamon peelers) and Navandanna (smiths) claim brahminical origins (2004 [1953]: 110, 113).

⁹¹ This caste is not mentioned by Ryan.

⁹² Interestingly, Ryan (*idem*: 113-114) claims that the use of this caste name was already all but extinct by the early 1950s; the only Hannali whom he came across lived in a village near Kandy.

⁹³ Ryan (*idem*: 129) mentions that the term Negati (or Nekati) is a term used in parts of the Low Country to indicate members of the Oliya caste, who are ritual dancers and "hold a virtual monopoly in astrological practices".

⁹⁴ Particularly for those settlers who did not belong to the highest castes, the shift to the colonies offered an opportunity to deny their caste origins: the other families who settled in the same colony were generally from the same region, but often did not know each other.

Nevertheless, I contend that this absence of caste needs to be qualified. At the bottom of the pecking order, Muslims traditionally did not have service castes (with exception of a small group of circumcision specialists), *at least not within the Muslim community*. Whenever services were required, it was common to hire Tamil barbers, drummers and washermen: *the service castes were outsourced*. At the top end of the status hierarchy, the Muslim religious specialists have a position that is somewhat similar (but in secular life more influential) position to that which Brahmins and Kurukkals have among Hindu Tamils. The crucial part is however in the middle. In Muthur and Thoppur, there is a subtle distinction between farmers and fishermen: though it is reducing, these groups are still pretty much endogamous, and there is a perceived status difference between them. When I asked Muslims if their community had something similar to a caste system, this was unanimously denied. However, when I started asking whether farming and fishing families would let their children marry each other, there was more reluctance. While many people claimed that they would let their children marry between the occupational groups, practical objections were raised: a farmer's son who marries a fisherman's daughter will not get land for a dowry and he will also not know how to fish; a fisherman's son who marries a farmer's daughter may get land for a dowry but will not know how to farm; choosing a place of residence will be very dependent on whatever job the husband decides to take. One man of farming origin ultimately stated "you know, fishermen have a smell [of dead fish] around them", indicating that he felt that fishermen were somehow lower in status than farmers.

A mini-survey in which my research assistant collected very basic information (age of the spouses, village of birth, village of present habitation, occupation) on 42 Muslim couples and their parents, and two elaborate family trees that I wrote up with two Muslim acquaintances from Kottiyar Pattu clearly hint in the direction of in-group endogamy⁹⁵. One family tree is of a petty trader from Muthur; the majority of men in his and his wife's extended family are (or were) petty traders, while a small group is farmer or labourer. The second family tree is of a government servant from Thoppur: all the men in his and his wife's extended family are either farmers, businessmen or government servants, but there are no fishermen.

Nine of the twelve married fishermen who were interviewed in the mini-survey had a father and a father-in-law who were either fishermen or fishing labourers (some of whom at times also worked as agricultural labourers); in three cases either the father or the father-in-law was a farmer or an agricultural labourer. Three of those interviewed were farmers. In two cases both the father and the father-in-law were farmers, while in one case the father was a farmer and the father-in-law was a petty trader. Six interviewees were teachers. Five had a teacher as father or father-in-law;

⁹⁵ The mini-survey and the two family trees together only cover between 0.5% and 1% of the Muslim couples in Kottiyar Pattu; it is therefore entirely possible that the sample is not representative. In order to minimise the risk of this, my research assistant went to different farming and fishing neighbourhoods of Muthur and Thoppur and randomly interviewed a number of men in each neighbourhood.

the only person for whom this was not the case had married a teacher. Those fathers or fathers-in-law who were not teachers were either farmers or businessmen. Most of the other interviewees were labourers. In most cases, the father or father-in-law (and sometimes both) was a labourer himself, with the other being either a fisherman, a farmer or a petty trader.

My impression from these data is that the marital separation between farmers and fishermen is maintained most strongly among families who control assets; both groups intermarry with businessmen, but particularly teachers seem to have closer marital links with farmers than with fishermen. At the lower end of the economic ladder people depend on their own labour, and intermarriage is less of an issue.

The increasing popularity of a more reformist form of Islam in particularly Muthur is beginning to undermine the practice of giving dowry. This may lead to an increase in intermarriage between farmers and fishermen over the coming years.

3.3 Class

With class, I refer to an economic ranking of people, depending on their access to and control over (productive) assets. While there are many ambiguities in definitions of social classes and their boundaries and while the concept of class is controversial in anthropology (Hann 2000: 98-9), access to and control over (productive) assets is very much a category of identification that influences everyday life in Kottiyar Pattu, and one that cuts straight through the other categories. Despite the importance of class, social organisation rarely follows class lines: "it seems that 'vertical' links across apparent class boundaries impede the formation of horizontal linkages between those sharing the same 'objective' economic situation'" (*idem*: 99).

In Kottiyar Pattu, it is possible to identify four classes. They are presented in table 3.4, ranked according to their position in the pecking order. I estimated the size of each group based on own observation and on a range of interviews in which my research assistant asked people how many percent of the population in their community belonged to the different classes. There was some variation in the answers, simply because in some villages more people have access to assets than in other villages, but the overall picture that people painted was fairly consistent.

Extent of control over resources	Occupations	Estimated population share
Control over significant amounts of physical and financial resources	Politicians; wealthy businessmen / moneylenders; senior government servants	1-2%
Control over some physical and financial resources	Petty traders; land-owning farmers; boat-owning fishermen; middle-level government servants; some artisans	15-20%
Control over own labour and use of leased assets	Tenant farmers; boat-hiring fishermen; three-wheeler drivers; some artisans	25-30%
Only control over own labour	Unskilled and semi-skilled labourers	50-60%

Table 3.4. Categorisation of classes in Kottiyar Pattu

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While these categories have been present in Kottiyar Pattu for a long time, the salience of the pecking order and the size of the lowest group have increased significantly in the last century or so. After Kottiyar Pattu lost its position as rice-exporting region and trading port for the kingdom of Kandy in the late 18th century (which coincided with epidemics and a massive reduction in population), the area became pretty much a subsistence economy (Van Senden 1786b). Only Muthur town retained some economic importance through the production of bricks, roofing tiles, earthenware and tobacco (which were mostly sold to Trincomalee town and to the Jaffna peninsula). The sale of paddy lands that came with the rehabilitation of the Allai irrigation scheme in the 1860s and its further improvement in the 1920s and 1930s brought in a gradually increasing degree of (absentee) landlordism (with the landlords mostly living in Trincomalee, Kinniya and Muthur). The increase in paddy acreage led to the resumption of the export of paddy, and particularly straw, to the Jaffna peninsula somewhere in the late 1920s or early 1930s (Rasaratnam 1996b). This in turn led to an increase in the amount of cash that revolved in the regional economy, and enabled the accumulation of some wealth in the hands of businessmen and landlords. Those landlords who had more land than they could or wanted to cultivate on their own, established links with cultivators who would cultivate part of the land on a sharecropping basis. Some of these landlord-cultivator links were inter-ethnic, and such relationships could last for many years: one elderly Muslim man whom I interviewed in Muthur had cultivated 8 acres for a Tamil landlord for twenty years. After the harvest, the cost of the inputs would be deducted, and the remaining paddy would be divided equally between landlord and cultivator (interview, Muthur, August 2007).

Another change happened in the 1930s, when several dozen Catholic fishermen from Negombo started coming to Navalady in the mouth of the Mahaweli river to fish during the period that no fish could be caught in the south-west of the country. This migratory pattern was probably facilitated by the development, around the same time, of logistical facilities that enabled the transport of the fish back to the populated regions in the south-west. As V.A. Rasaratnam has documented in several of his short stories from the 1950s, these fishermen were part of a rigid economic structure that was pretty much isolated from the economy of Kottiyar Pattu: wealthy men in Negombo owned the boats and nets, and the fishermen worked as labourers, trapped in a near unbreakable cycle of debt (Rasaratnam 1962: chapter 6, Rasaratnam 1996a: chapter 17).

The increasing population and improved logistics and fishing technologies had a local spin-off as well. Where fishing had traditionally been done on a subsistence basis, a system slowly developed where traders, through middlemen, bought up the fish from the fishermen and in return gave them improved boats and nets on credit. By about the 1970s, structural indebtedness to increasingly powerful businessmen had become a fact of life for many local fishermen as well.

Change in the agriculture sector happened in two stages. In 1958, land reform legislation was passed with the intention of giving tenants and sharecroppers a better bargaining position against the landowners. One element of this legislation was that a tenant would be able to claim ownership of the land if he had cultivated it for several years. In response, landlords severed their ties with their cultivators, and started leasing out their land for up to three seasons at a time to whoever wanted to pay the lease (interview, Muthur, August 2007; see also Seneviratne 1993: 37). As tenants knew that they were not going to be allowed to cultivate the same land after the end of the lease, they lost an important incentive to maintain fields and channels carefully.

The monetisation of agriculture increased dramatically with the widespread introduction of 'green revolution' packages of rice, fertiliser and pesticides, combined with the introduction of tractors. This was a trend that started in the 1930s, stagnated during the 1970-1977 Sirimavo regime, and truly kicked off with the economic liberalisation of 1977 (see section 6.3.1). Even though harvests increased significantly, this did not bring wealth to all those involved in agriculture, particularly to tenants and labourers. V.A. Rasaratnam's story 'for Seethevi', first published in 1978 and set around the same time, describes the change:

"[The main character of the story] was a tenant farmer five years ago. [...] There were buffaloes belonging to someone from Chenaiyoor to make the field muddy and to level it. The rent for the land and animals were to be paid from the harvest. The seed paddy was bought on interest. His physical labour – that was his investment. [...] He would have four *avanams* of paddy after paying in paddy the lease for the land and buffaloes, harvesting and threshing charges. [...] There would be no worry for rice when he has this at home, coconuts from the palms in his compound, fish in the stream, and bunches in the banana trees.

However, now the situation has changed. The lease has to be paid in advance. He needs cash for tractor hire, seed paddy, weed-killer, imported fertiliser, reaping and threshing charges. Money up-front is needed for all this. Yes, you need money, money, money! Farming has become a business for a rich man who has money in the bank and not a vocation for a farmer like him. As a result [...] [h]e became a labourer in the field[...] as he did not see any other possibility for livelihood except harvesting in the Vadichalchenai fields. Still, he somehow collected two *avanams* of paddy per season by doing reaping and threshing. [...] The system of paying people in the form of paddy ceased from last year. When agriculture became a business for moneyed people, only cash was paid as wages for reaping." (Rasaratnam 1999, chapter 8)

While agricultural credit facilities had spread into the area under the Sirimavo government (Seneviratne 1993: 39), it was the liberalisation of the national economy in 1977 that truly turned Muthur's agricultural economy into a cash economy. With it came widespread indebtedness and the rise to power of moneylenders. Apart from the indebtedness, the transition from payment-in-kind to payment-in-cash for

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labourers meant a reduction in their food security. The amounts of payment-in-kind that were paid to labourers had hardly changed for many years. This meant poverty, but a reasonably reliable supply of staple food. The purchasing power of wages in money however kept reducing under inflationary pressure, while wages were not increased sufficiently to accommodate for inflation. As a consequence, the social underclass rapidly expanded.

The increase in population pressure in combination with the stagnation of the regional economy following the start of the war further boosted the numbers of people depending on unskilled labour, as there simply were not enough resources available anymore to give regular jobs to everyone.

Among Sinhalese, the out-migration of people in the period 1985-1987 (see sections 4.2.2, 4.2.4, 4.2.5 and 4.2.6) counterbalanced this process of proletarianisation to some extent. The development of a group of underemployed people also created a large reservoir of people in their twenties and thirties who could be hired as home guards (and, to a lesser extent, as policemen and soldiers). While some Muslims were also recruited as home guards, policemen or soldiers, for most underemployed Muslims and almost all underemployed Tamils the 1980s and 1990s saw a descent into deepening poverty.

From what I have gathered in conversations with people from Kottiyar Pattu and with a few people who worked in a project to re-integrate former child soldiers with their families in 2004 and 2005, lack of job opportunities itself does not seem to have been a major reason for recruitment to Tamil militant groups. Many people joined in their mid- to late teens, *before* they had reached the age to worry about how to provide for their families. Many seem to have joined out of frustration over perceived (and often very real!) injustice by the state and its representatives, and because their own family had been directly affected by the violence. Among the child soldiers, some joined out of conviction or because they wanted to avenge a close family member who had been killed. Others joined to run away from a dysfunctional family or, as in the case of three former child soldiers whom my wife and I met in a village in Ampara District one day, simply because they were fed up with the household chores (conversation, Thangavelayuthapuram, July 2004⁹⁶).

⁹⁶ This particular village also had its share of tragedy. When my wife and I were leaving the village (where we had visited some activities that ZOA was implementing), an elderly lady stopped us and asked if we had seen her son who, with many others, had been taken by the STF in 1990. She believed that her son, together with thousands of others who had disappeared, was still being kept in a secret prison in the jungle. The mother of the girls whom we spoke to told us that when the people of Thangavelayuthapuram returned after twelve years of displacement, they found human bones in many of the wells in the village, including the well that were sitting next to as we were chatting.

Many others became the victim of forced recruitment under the infamous slogan 'one child per family' (UTHR(J) 2001, 2002 and 2003a)⁹⁷.

The expansion of the secondary education system between 1976 and 1985, when post-primary education in the Tamil and Muslim areas of Kottiyar Pattu increased from 2 secondary schools and 5 junior schools to 13 secondary schools and 6 junior schools (Samad 2003: 489-519)⁹⁸, meant a significant increase in the number of youth continuing their education until secondary school. This in turn delayed their entry on the labour market by several years. Once the first significant batches of youth finished their secondary education in the early 1980s, the number of people entering the labour market peaked, as did the number of un(der)employed youth. The problem with the youth who had completed their secondary education was however that a lot of them had never learnt to do hard agricultural or fishing labour work because they were in school, and that some considered menial jobs below the standing of someone with secondary education. This last group was un(der)employed by choice, not just by lack of opportunity. I would not be surprised if comparatively many youth belonging to this group joined the separatist groups and the home guards in the 1980s and early 1990s.

As fewer and fewer people could fall back on subsistence production, it became increasingly important for the rest to earn cash incomes to survive. The urgency of the need to survive contributed to the intensification of inter-group competition over access to productive resources (fishing grounds, paddy fields, jobs). As Benedikt Korf (2004) has documented, this competition has often been framed in ethnic terms. Since people primarily identified the problem as one of general resource scarcity and not as one of exploitation, this did not bring the 'have-nots' together in resistance against the 'haves'; class conflict was therefore minimised.

⁹⁷ An acquaintance who asked around about the caste background of the former child soldiers told me that child soldiers in Trincomalee District had predominantly been recruited from lower castes. This may mean that the higher castes were less supportive of the LTTE or that they were better able to avoid the recruitment of their children; it may also mean that among the lower castes there are comparatively more extremely poor families. I had planned to verify the correlation between caste and LTTE membership by counting the number of LTTE cadres buried in the cemetery near Sampoor by village of origin (which generally has a strong correlation with caste). The resumption of violence in early 2006 made this impossible.

⁹⁸ A similar expansion of post-primary education seems to have happened around the same time in the Sinhala areas, though Samad does not provide details on this.

3.4 Employment

To some extent linked to caste and class, but also a distinct category of identification is employment. In the survey that CIRM undertook in 2004, people were asked what the primary source of income of their household was. The result is presented in the table below.

	Muthur DS Division	Seruwila DS Division	Eechchilampattu DS Division	Total Kottiyar Pattu
Cultivation (own land)	1,381 (8.7%)	700 (19.6%)	598 (23.6%)	2,679 (12.1%)
Cultivation (leased land)	583 (3.7%)	254 (7.1%)	31 (1.2%)	868 (3.9%)
Livestock rearing	302 (1.9%)	37 (1.0%)	53 (2.1%)	392 (1.8%)
Sea fishing (own boat)	406 (2.5%)	31 (0.9%)	44 (1.7%)	481 (2.2%)
Sea fishing (hired boat)	1,186 (7.4%)	62 (1.7%)	7 (0.3%)	1,255 (5.7%)
Lagoon / inland fishing	472 (3.0%)	8 (0.2%)	56 (2.2%)	536 (2.4%)
Daily labour	5,573 (34.9%)	1,187 (33.2%)	1,006 (39.7%)	7,766 (35.2%)
Self-employment	1,237 (7.8%)	264 (7.4%)	76 (3.0%)	1,577 (7.1%)
Formal employment (government and private sector)	1,557 (9.8%)	264 (7.4%)	114 (4.5%)	1,935 (8.8%)
Work abroad	762 (4.8%)	175 (4.9%)	67 (2.6%)	1,004 (4.6%)
No answer	2,491 (15.6%)	598 (16.7%)	481 (19.0%)	3,570 (16.2%)
Total	15,950 (100%)	3,580 (100%)	2,533 (100%)	22,063 (100.0%)

Table 3.5. Primary source of household income by DS Division, 2004 (source: CIRM 2004a, b and c)

As can be seen, the largest group of people (slightly over two fifths of the households who answered) depend primarily on daily labour for their income; on top of this, a substantial part of the formally employed people are also labourers. The questionnaire does not specify whether this is agricultural labour, fishing labour, or other kinds of daily labour. My impression is however that labourers are primarily involved in agriculture. Those depending primarily on cultivation form a big group in Seruwila and Eechchilampattu DS Divisions (over a quarter of those who answered), while cultivation, fishing, self-employment and formal employment are roughly equally important in Muthur DS Division (at about one eighth of those who answered for each group). The data show clearly how rural the economy of Kottiyar Pattu is: about three quarters of those who answered are primarily dependent on the primary sector. I estimate that two thirds of these people depend on agriculture, and one third on fishing.

It needs to be noted that many households have more than one source of income. Many owner-cultivators also lease land; some labourers also lease small plots of land. Government servants may also cultivate land, while most families that primarily depend on having someone abroad (in the Middle East) have tenant farming, fishing on a hired boat, or daily labour as a secondary source of income. Apart from this, the survey did not ask how many people are employed as home guard, police officer or soldier. I estimate that this kind of employment is relevant for 20-25% of the Sinhala households, and perhaps 2-3% of the Muslim households.

3.5 Religion

In August 2007, a group of Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu and Christian religious leaders and local government officials climbed to the top of a hill three miles south of Muthur, in order to investigate claims that there were remains of a Buddhist shrine on top of the hill. Recent events had generated significant tension among the Muslims and Tamils of Muthur, many of whom were concerned that a new phase of settling Sinhalese and evicting Tamils and Muslims was around the corner. The Tamil-inhabited eastern half of Muthur DS Division had been declared a High Security Zone; near the Tamil village of Ilankaithurai Muhattuvaram (which had been renamed to Lankapatuna), a brand-new Buddhist temple had just been put up under the auspices of the Chief Justice (see section 2.3.2); the army had started constructing a massive road from the High Security Zone to Trincomalee straight through people's paddy fields without any legal procedures for land alienation being followed; an NGO that was constructing houses for Muslim tsunami victims on the outskirts of Muthur was suddenly told that the second phase of the project could not be implemented because the land involved was owned by the Buddhist temple at Seruwila⁹⁹, and the soldiers based at the foot of the hill that was visited by the multireligious group had started enforcing the renaming of the area into Pansalawatte ("the place where there is a Buddhist temple").

Not long after the inspection visit, I spoke to two of the people who climbed the hill that day. On the top of the hill, they had come across a pile of bricks, which the Seruwila chief priest claimed to be 2,500 years old, and part of a ruined Buddhist shrine. The residents of Muthur among those present disagreed, claiming that these bricks had been taken up there in 1987 by the IPKF for the construction of a bunker. On the top of the hill, they also found a 40 *mulam* long tomb of a Muslim saint¹⁰⁰ and fourteen broken crosses that had been put up there by Catholics a couple of years earlier and were smashed up not long afterwards. When I, semi-jokingly, asked whether the people who inspected the hill had also come across a Hindu shrine, the

⁹⁹ When the second phase of the housing scheme was planned, everybody involved in giving the formal approvals thought that the plot of land that was involved was state land. Rather unexpectedly, the chief priest of the Seruwila temple claimed that the land was owned by his temple. A search in the files of the Survey Department yielded a title deed which stated that in 1939, the field was donated to the Seruwila temple by a certain Aron Silva (interview with a local government official attached to the DS office in Muthur, Muthur, March 2008). Note that the first Sinhalese to settle in Muthur only came in 1942 (Samad 2003: 145). His name was David Silva, and he may well have been related to Aron Silva. This would probably mean that Aron Silva lived in Trincomalee and owned some land in Muthur. Alternatively, the deed may have been forged, though I do not think this is very likely.

¹⁰⁰ A *mulam* is a measure for length equal to the distance from the finger tips to the elbow, or about 45 cm. For some reason, quite a few graves of Muslim saints in Sri Lanka have a length of 40 *mulam* (18 m).

reply was a serious face and “there is a Hindu shrine at the foot of the hill” (interview, Muthur, August 2007)¹⁰¹.

Kottiyar Pattu is home to Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians (both Roman Catholics and Protestants). As shown above, though less pronounced than particularly the ethnic boundary dynamics, the boundary dynamics between (and, equally importantly, within) religious groups have a clear relevance for an understanding of the overall social dynamics in Kottiyar Pattu. I briefly describe each of the groups below.

3.5.1 Hinduism

Hindu social life is structured around temples, some of which have a regional significance. Other than among Buddhists, Muslims and Christians, Hindu priests generally have very little to say in social life. The lay administration of these temples is the location where status competitions are being fought, but otherwise the religion has comparatively little structuring impact on group (boundary) dynamics among Hindus.

In the divine geopolitics of Hinduism, the territory of Kottiyar Pattu is historically laid claim to by two deities in two temples: Siva in the Koneswaram temple in Trincomalee (whose territory covers the entire Trincomalee District), and Murugan (Skanda) in the Chittiravelayuthaswamy temple in Verugal (whose territory stretches from Muthur to Chenkalady in Batticaloa District)¹⁰².

As I have described in section 2.3.3, Kottiyar Pattu has probably had direct links with the Koneswaram temple in Trincomalee since the period of Chola rule in the late 10th century: temple-owned paddy fields provided grain and revenue to the

¹⁰¹ The hill, which is also in use as a rock quarry, has a rather haunted status in local narratives. One of the first descriptions that I got of Kinanthimunai was a statement that, when it was still covered with jungle, it was a place where the spirits roamed. A second story that I was told was that in the 1970s, a magician set up a vegetable garden on top of the hill and positioned himself next to it, dressed in his finest ritual attire. He attracted fairly large crowds of visitors, curious to see how anyone could grow vegetables on a rock. After a while however, word got around that the magician had rather darker intentions with his garden. He had heard that there was a treasure hidden in the rock that would only be revealed if a human sacrifice was conducted, and therefore tried to lure a youth to stay on top of the hill after the other visitors had left so that he could kill him. An angry mob swiftly chased the magician away, and he was never heard of again. Then, in August 2006, about 40,000 civilians fleeing from Muthur got stuck near the hill and were subjected to an intense artillery barrage. While the remarkably low numbers of deaths and injuries that this caused generated many stories of divine intervention, it further contributed to the hill’s reputation as a dark place.

¹⁰² For a fascinating analysis of the dynamics of temple politics in another fiefdom of Murugan, centered around the regional temple of Mandoor, see Whitaker (1999).

temple, the village of Mallikaithivu provided jasmine flowers for the temple worship, Sampoor provided lamp oil and bards who recited the sacred texts in the temple, and so on. With the destruction of the Koneswaram temple by the Portuguese, the worship at Koneswaram ceased, and the *vanniyar* system of governance that embodied Siva's rule over Trincomalee District collapsed. Rajasinha II, the king of Kandy, was instrumental in setting up a new system of governance, centered around the Adhi Konesar temple in Thampalakamam, where a statue that was rescued from the Koneswaram temple was installed. However, as the human political leadership was located in Kandy and not around Thampalakamam, Siva's hold on the governance of Trincomalee District never regained its earlier stature. Ironically, the rebuilding of the Koneswaram temple and the surge in its nation-wide popularity in the 1960s was the last straw. The revived temple administration had no geographical representation and was entirely separated from the day-to-day administration of the district; Siva lost his earthly kingdom.

Murugan still rules over Kottiyar Pattu from his temple in Verugal. As I have described in section 2.3.6, the myths of origin revolve around Rajasinha II's financing of the (re)construction of the temple, and the institution of a system of administration that matched the worldly power relations between the castes in Kottiyar Pattu. This administration system remains fairly intact, despite the emancipation of the service castes and attempts by the LTTE to erase caste from the Tamil cultural repertoire. Instead of castes, (caste-homogeneous) villages are now represented in the temple committee, and the order in which the different villages/castes organise their nights of the temple festival no longer reflects the local caste hierarchy. Nevertheless, the real power still lies with the Sindhunadar community that controls the key positions in the temple management.

3.5.2 Buddhism

Buddhism in Kottiyar Pattu revolves around the temple at Seruwila and around smaller village temples. Virtually without exception, the Buddhists in Kottiyar Pattu are Sinhala by ethnicity. Every Sinhala settlement has its own *pansala*, most of which were built in the 1950s and 1960s. Almost casually exhibited near each of these temples are smaller or larger collections of carved stones, broken stone pillars or – in a few cases - an old Buddha statue, thus laying an explicit claim to ancient heritage. Some of the temple compounds also feature round hills with bricks scattered around – which looks like the remains of ancient *caityas*.

Each temple has its own resident monk, and some of the larger temples provide training for *samaneras*, young recruits to the monkhood. Each village temple belongs to one of the three main congregations of monks (Siam *nikaya*, Ramanya *nikaya* and Amarapura *nikaya*) that exist in Sri Lanka. Despite being connected to different *nikayas*, all Buddhist temples in Kottiyar Pattu (and Kantale) fall under the regional authority of the temple at Seruwila. This is symbolically represented during the Seruwila temple festival in August: each village temple has the (shared)

responsibility for one day of the festival. During the *perahera* (procession), wider links are also made visible: in August 2008, troupes from Trincomalee, Matale, and Dompe (near Galle) formed part of the line-up (as were a Muslim troupe and three Tamil troupes from Mallikaithivu, Kankuveli and Trincomalee).

Apart from the politicians, the Buddhist monks are among the most important leaders in the Sinhala communities in Kottiyar Pattu. *Primus inter pares* among the monks is the head monk of the Seruwila temple. The second most respected monk is the resident monk of the Neelapola temple, who has stayed there right throughout the conflict, encouraging his flock of settlers not to abandon their role as frontiersmen.

3.5.3 Islam

Muslim religious life in Kottiyar Pattu is organised around two separate clusters of mosques: one cluster in and around Muthur, and the other in and around Thoppur. Each cluster originated from a single mosque. Muthur had only one mosque until 1932, while Thoppur had a single mosque until 1933 (Samad 2003: 36-54, 251-252). As the population grew and expanded geographically, it became clear that the mosques were becoming too small. In Muthur, solving the practical problem of how to enable all Muslim men to attend *jumma* (Friday) prayers led to a power struggle between the trustee board of the Muthur Grand Mosque and the people of Akkaraichenai and Anaichenai, two neighbourhoods about a kilometre away from the mosque. In both neighbourhoods, *thaikkas* (prayer halls where Muslims come for their daily prayers but where no sermons are given) had been set up in 1924 and 1930 respectively, but in 1932 and 1935 the people of Akkaraichenai and Anaichenai decided to set up their own *jumma* mosques. By doing so, they not only established independence where worship was concerned, but also with regard to the day-to-day running of community affairs: marriages, funerals and conflict resolution were now done by the trustee boards of the independent mosques. The Anaichenai mosque was burnt down within months after it started functioning independently; it took until 1956 before *jumma* prayers were again conducted there. Around the same time, a conflict within the Akkaraichenai mosque led to the establishment of a separate mosque nearby. As they were within earshot of each other, it was soon decided to alternate *jumma* prayers between both mosques. This practice continued until the new mosque was accidentally bombed by the air force in 1990; the building has been under renovation ever since.

The disagreements were finally put aside in 1981, when the Administrative Federation of Muthur Mosques was established. This overarching body of mosque administrators, religious leaders, teachers and other community leaders has since played an important role in binding the Muslim community of Muthur together.

As the population kept growing, it became necessary to construct new *jumma* mosques and *thaikkas* to accommodate them. By 2003, Muthur and the surrounding Muslim settlements counted 10 mosques and 6 *thaikkas*. After the tsunami, relief

funds from Islamic organisations enabled a significant expansion: by the end of 2005, there were 11 *jumma* mosques and 23 *thaikkas* (interview with Muslim religious leader, Muthur, December 2005).

The decision to set up new *jumma* mosques in the settlements that sprang up around Thoppur seems to have been taken in much greater harmony than in Muthur. Starting with Palathoppur in 1933, a *jumma* mosque was built within a few years of the establishment of each new settlement. By 2003, there were eight mosques in the cluster around Thoppur.

Apart from having separately organised clusters of mosques, Muthur and Thoppur also each have their own cluster of *ziyarams*, or graves of Muslim saints. These clusters have territorial associations: I have been told stories about the saints of the Muthur cluster gathering together after dark for a cup of tea at the grave of the most prominent saint, about lights emanating from a main shrine and travelling to the other shrines in the cluster, and about the most prominent saint patrolling through the area, past the other shrines, in times of tension: nothing could be seen, but the sound of a horsecart travelling along the route could be heard clearly. Some of the saints came from Yemen, others came from other areas - one is called 'Vankali (Bengali) Appa' -, and some of the saints were local people. Some lived many centuries ago, while others lived on the edge of living memory; descendants of 'Wattaividane Appa', one of the saints, can still be found in Thoppur.

Each of the saints has his or her own specific blessing to give: one gives rain during droughts, a number of saints heal various skin diseases, and so on. The shrines are zones of peace where chicken and predators live side by side, but the protection that emanates from the saints goes much further: I have been told several times of bombs exploding near *ziyarams* with nobody being hurt. When 40,000 people fleeing Muthur in August 2006 came under heavy artillery and rocket fire in open terrain and remarkably few people were hurt, one man (whose own child had been killed by artillery fire earlier in that week) interpreted this as an act of protection by a nearby saint. He told me how the rockets, as they flew over the *ziyaram*, started swerving and slammed into nearby rocks rather than into the crowd of civilians that they were headed for (interview, Muthur, April 2007). Apparently, the fame of the *ziyarams* had spread beyond the Muslim community. The same man told me how a Sinhala army officer was a regular visitor to one of the shrines, while a *ziyaram* in the area controlled by the LTTE was apparently visited by LTTE cadres who prayed there for protection before they went out on missions.

The *ziyarams* are all small shrines without day-to-day worship going on, and without decorations; at most, one will find a few green prayer flags and a tillbox next to the saints' grave. Those who believe in the strength of the saints go to pray at their graves whenever they have a specific need, and some of the shrines have an annual *kandoori* (feast).



Figure 3.1. The *ziyaram* for Wattai Vidane Appa in Thoppur (own photograph)

As in the rest of Sri Lanka, an increasing percentage of Muslims considers the worship of saints unislamic: prayers should be directed at Allah directly, without any intermediaries. This is part of a larger worldwide trend of Islamic reform, but is also linked to Sri Lankan dynamics. On the one hand, the development of separate Muslim schools from the 1960s onwards made the younger generation more aware of what it means to be a Muslim; this was complemented by the spread of Arabic Colleges. On the other hand, the war contributed to the hardening of ethnic identities, and for aspiring to gain political clout it became increasingly important to stress ethnic and religious purity. *Kandooris* lost their popularity, and a number of *ziyarams* in Kottiyar Pattu seem to even have been abandoned altogether. At the same time, mosque attendance (even for the early morning prayers and the late evening prayers) has surged, as has the number of children and youth (both boys and girls) attending religious education. Another aspect of this process was very visible in Muthur (though less so in the cluster of Muslim villages around Thoppur and in the agricultural settlements around Muthur). Between 2000, when I first visited Kottiyar Pattu, and 2008, when I ended my fieldwork, the number of veiled women increased dramatically, and among veiled women, there was a big increase in the percentage of those who covered not only their hair but also their face from about 2004 onwards.

3.5.4 Christianity

Where the followers of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam in Kottiyar Pattu are pretty much mono-ethnic, the Roman Catholic Church in Kottiyar Pattu is organised across ethnic lines. Kottiyar Pattu forms one parish, with churches at Muthur and Iruthayapuram and chapels at Sahayapuram (64th Milepost) and the Sinhala village of Somapura. The Roman Catholics in Kottiyar Pattu live mostly in Muthur and Iruthayapuram, with small numbers of Catholic families living Sahayapuram, Somapura and places like Kilivetti and Lingapuram (LB3 Colony) ¹⁰³. Even during the war, Tamil Catholics would visit the chapel in Somapura if there was a special occasion. Before the war, there were about two dozen Sinhala-Tamil mixed families in the parish, but most of these families have moved to Trincomalee or other comparatively safe places. While ethnicity thus does not seem to have been a big dividing factor among the Catholics of Kottiyar Pattu, caste is a divider among the Tamil Catholics. I regularly heard Catholics of Muthur and Iruthayapuram make disparaging comments about each other. There is hardly any intermarriage between the two groups: despite the small size of both communities, many would rather marry a Hindu than to marry a Catholic from the other village. While local caste dynamics are divisive, the shared faith is a binding factor when a threat to the Catholic religion is perceived. In 2000 or 2001, Catholics from Iruthayapuram made a local pilgrimage site with the 'Stages of the Cross' by adding 13 crosses to a cross that was already standing on top of Kinanthimunai hill, next to the village. Over time some of the Muslims in Muthur started to take offense: the crosses on the highest point of Kottiyar Pattu were perceived as a Christian (and, more importantly, Tamil) claim to space that needed to be undone. After a couple of months, a group of Muslims smashed up the statues (in the process also destroying a recently revived shrine for a Muslim saint at the foot of the hill). Catholics from Muthur and Iruthayapuram were united in their disapproval of this desecration.

Both caste communities are integrated into the wider Catholic community of the Trincomalee-Batticaloa Diocese. Particularly the Catholic community in Muthur, but to a lesser extent also the one in Iruthayapuram, has marriage links with the Catholic communities of Trincomalee and Batticaloa. This wider integration is also visible in the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in Palaiyoothu, on the outskirts of Trincomalee Town. This shrine was erected in the beginning of the 20th century, after a potentially disastrous cholera epidemic in Muthur was warded off, and an annual pilgrimage has been conducted ever since. Over time, the shrine developed a life of its own, and it is now visited by people from all over Trincomalee District.

¹⁰³ As I mentioned earlier, the Catholics of Muthur (and those who settled in LB3 and Sahayapuram) are largely Paravar and were Catholics from the time they settled in Muthur. This community also includes some Burgher families and, according to some people I spoke to, some Barber families, but pretty much functions as one community. The Catholics of Iruthayapuram are largely Pachchan, and converted only in the beginning of the 20th century.

Kottiyar Pattu also has a small Methodist community, centered around the Methodist Church in Muthur. Some of the members originally moved in from outside, while others come from local families that converted over the last century. Conversion happened in two stages. In the first decades of the 20th century, the Methodist Church operated a number of schools in Kottiyar Pattu (the schools were taken over by the government around 1930). Some of the people who went to these schools converted to Christianity, and small groups of Methodists can still be found in Mallikaithivu and other villages. A second group of people converted in recent years, after the Methodist Church got involved in long-term community development and evangelisation in some of the most destitute villages in Kottiyar Pattu. This group has grown so fast that two chapels have been put up to provide the new converts with a possibility to worship close to their home.

While the Catholic and Methodist communities are numerically small, the churches have played an important role throughout the conflict. Where Muslims and Sinhala Buddhists have their religious leaders as spokespeople in times of crisis, such leadership is absent among the Tamil Hindu community. The churches however, with their national network of contacts, their international access to resources for emergency relief, and their relative neutrality in the conflict, were able to fulfil a leadership role for the Tamils when negotiating for safety and access to relief assistance. Within Muthur, the Catholic and Methodist church compounds have always been places of comparative safety for Christians and Hindus alike in times of tension. The Catholics of Muthur have also fulfilled a bridging function in another way: until the number of trained Muslim teachers expanded from the 1990s onwards, many of the teachers in Muslim schools in Muthur were Catholics.

3.6 Gender

Adolescent and adult men and women in rural Sri Lanka live in quite segregate worlds. This segregation is not just social, but also geographical. Other than with their own close relatives, men and women rarely interact across the gender divide. The norm is for the men to be 'outside', and the women 'inside'. This segregation exists at various geographical levels:

- the men go out to the fields, to the sea, to the jungle or to the town, while the women stay in the village and look after the household;
- when the men are out on the road, the women stay in the compound – they mostly come onto the road only after the men have left the village, and visit their female friends and neighbours (in matrilineal East Sri Lanka, these are generally their sisters and cousins);
- when a man invites an unrelated man into his compound, the women disappear into the house, and
- when a man invites another man into his house, the women disappear into the kitchen or into the bedroom.

The norm for gender segregation is a strong one, particularly among Muslims and Tamils. Some statistics from the 1971 census can serve as a proxy indicator for this point. In this census, data on employment among adults were collected, segregated by gender. For each of the current three DS Divisions, the gender-disaggregated employment rates are as follows¹⁰⁴:

DS Division	Employment rate (male)	Employment rate (female)
Muthur	82%	2%
Seruwila	87%	23%
Eechchilampattu	91%	3%

Table 3.6. Employment rates by DS Division and gender, 1971 (source: 1971 census)

As can be seen, only a tiny minority of women were engaged in any form of paid work, and the percentage of working Sinhala women (who were concentrated in Seruwila DS Division) was much higher than the percentage of working Tamil and Muslim women. I have not come across more recent statistics in this regard, but the impression I got during the years that I did my fieldwork is that this has not changed significantly, except for the large group of war widows (who largely found employment within their village).

Obviously, not everybody adheres equally rigidly to the norm for gender segregation. There are ambiguous spaces like shops where women often work as hard as their husbands, and where they will interact with other men, but only because the men have been recategorised as ‘customers’. This seems to be only true in Sinhala and Tamil shops though, and generally only where the shop is adjoining the house. Muslim shops in Kottiyar Pattu are, as far as I know, without exception run and staffed only by men.

For Buddhists, Hindus and Christians, there are places of worship where men and women come together – but even there people are either segregated by sex, or people largely stay in clusters of relatives. Religious festivals and particularly weddings are places where men and women find themselves in the same space at the same time. Even then, they interact only to a limited extent, and considerable social policing takes place¹⁰⁵. I was however told several times that weddings are key events where unmarried youth (and their parents) check out potential spouses, and sometimes even arrange marriages. Lastly, with the expansion of co-education

¹⁰⁴ I have calculated the employment rates by dividing the total number of people reported to be employed by the total number of people of 15 years and older (1971 census, table 28 and 29 [p. 116-9, 124-5]). Employment refers to any form of paid work, whether formal or informal.

¹⁰⁵ In 2001 and early 2002, I lived in a house on the beach in Batticaloa, not far from a temple that had a fairly big annual festival. Between my house and the temple was a casuarina plantation that was policed at night during the period of the temple festival by villagers anxious to prevent adolescent men and women from getting up to mischief.

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secondary schools (for Sinhala and Tamil students; Muslim secondary schools in Kottiyar Pattu are segregated by gender) and, perhaps more importantly, tuition classes, adolescent boys and girls increasingly mingle.

Among Muslims in Muthur, the custom of wearing full body-covering veil has visibly gained in popularity over the past decade. In Thoppur and its surrounding cluster of villages, this is much less so. There, it is still common to see women covering their hair with the end of their *sari* (a six-yard-long cloth worn as a traditional women's garment throughout South Asia). While the veil rigidly visualises the separation between the genders, the paradox is that it has in fact facilitated a form of emancipation: it is very common to see un-chaperoned, veiled Muslim women on the road and in shops in Muthur, while in Thoppur you will rarely see any women outside their compounds at all. Precisely because the veil marks separation, it has become possible for women to be among unrelated men and still remain separated.

For two very practical reasons, women do move out of their villages against the dominant norm. The first, and most obvious, reason is poverty. If the husbands are unable to earn enough to sustain their families, or if they are dead or have abandoned their family for someone else, women will have to jump in. Thus it is not uncommon to see poor, often elderly, Muslim women sitting near threshing sites, gleaning the straw for any rice that may have been left behind, or to see poor Tamil women working with their husbands in the rock quarry at 64th Milepost. Notice however that, though these women do go out of their villages to work, the Muslim women who look for rice grains sit separately from the farmer and his labourers, and the Tamil women who work in the rock quarry work together with male relatives¹⁰⁶: where possible, separation is maintained or buffered through proximity of male relatives. Particularly in the poorest Muslim villages (much less so among Sinhalese and Tamils), migration to the Middle East for work as housemaids was also a fairly common response to poverty. As stories of women being ill-treated filtered back however (including the story of a young girl from the outskirts of Muthur who was sentenced to death for accidentally causing the death of the baby of her employers), the number of migrating women reduced. A last option that is available for young women is employment in the garment factories north of Colombo. Not more than several dozen Sinhala and Tamil women from Kottiyar Pattu seem to have followed

¹⁰⁶ I have not been able to spend sufficient time in Sinhala villages to figure out to what extent Sinhala women go out to work due to poverty. It is however not uncommon in other parts of the country to find Sinhala women (but not Tamil or Muslim women) working in road repair gangs – clearly a job that people would not choose if they had better options. Also, I have the distinct impression that extreme poverty is much rarer among Sinhalese than among Muslims and particularly Tamils in Kottiyar Pattu: there is always the option of becoming a homeguard, police(wo)man or soldier.

this route. I am not sure however whether joining the garment industry is a choice of the poorest families or of slightly less poor families who have had the resources to enable the women to learn sewing.

The second reason for the emancipation of women in Kottiyar Pattu was the conflict. Virtually every single person in Kottiyar Pattu has been displaced at least once, and often three or more times, over the course of the conflict. Life in crowded IDP camps, where the customary separations were hard to maintain, undermined traditional practices. Apart from the displacement, the threat of violence put a disproportionate strain on particularly Tamil women. Irrespective of ethnicity, there has been a disproportionate share of men between 20 and 45 years of age among those who lost their lives. This age range is the prime fighting age, but that does not mean that most men in this age group died fighting. As Patricia Lawrence (1997) has documented vividly, the simple fact of being in the fighting age range made people, suspect in the eyes of 'the other parties'. Particularly Tamil men in this age group have suffered from arbitrary arrest, torture and disappearance throughout the war. This has had two consequences. On the one hand, those men who were married left behind widows, who in many cases had to fend for themselves and had no other option but to go out and find work (Thiruchandran 1999; Shanmugam 1999). On the other hand, Tamil men had to minimise any tasks that involved passing checkpoints (like going to the market) in order to reduce the risk of getting arrested¹⁰⁷; in their stead, women took on these tasks. As Annamarieke Hoekzema (1999) has pointed out, this reversal of roles has meant an extent of emancipation for the women, and it has caused an identity crisis for many men, who were no longer able to live up to the standard of 'provider for the family'.

3.7 Age

Generational differences play out in several ways. For the purpose of this research, the population of Kottiyar Pattu can roughly be divided into three categories: those who were born before about 1965-70, those who were born between about 1965-70 and about 1980-5, and those who were born after about 1980-5. The youngest category of people was born after the war began, and had never known life in peace before the 2002 cease-fire. The middle category has known life before the war, but was generally too young to have inter-ethnic friendships before the war began.

¹⁰⁷ This was particularly the case in areas under LTTE control, where many people had lost their identity papers during the various episodes of displacement. After the 2002 ceasefire, this situation changed and men started visiting the Sinhala and Muslim market places again. However, after the renewed violence of 2006, the people were back to square one. On market days, one can see the main road in the Sinhala town of Serunuwara lined with Tamil women sitting in the shade, waiting for one of the few available buses to take them and their groceries back to the villages around Eechchilampattu.

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Those in the oldest category were already adults before the war began, and part of them had (very) friendly relations with people of other ethnicity before the conflict constrained inter-ethnic interaction.

When I spoke to people of the three age groups, it became clear that they had different perspectives on issues of peace and reconciliation. Those in the oldest age group know what was lost because they know what life was like before the war; I generally found a yearning for reconciliation to be strongest among this generation. On the other hand, they are also most acutely aware of how things were lost, and who was responsible for the descent into violence. Therefore, resentment may be intense. The middle group has a special position. This is the age group from among which most people bearing arms have been recruited on all sides. Particularly among Tamils, this is thus also the age group that has been targeted most directly for harassment and arrest throughout the conflict. Letting go of militarised mindsets and learning to trust the ethnic other again are important and difficult tasks ahead. The youngest group was too young to have consciously witnessed the start of the war. For them, peace is a novelty. Particularly before the 2002-2005 cease-fire period (which was not calm at all where Muslim-Tamil relations around Muthur are concerned), most lived ethnically segregated lives in largely mono-ethnic villages and mono-ethnic schools. For this generation, inter-ethnic peace largely meant starting from scratch during the cease-fire years.

Largely parallel to the age categories described above, there are generational differences among the settlers in the Allai Extension Scheme colonies. The first generation of settlers was given a house, a homestead, and enough paddy land to serve a family. These people worked hard to conquer the jungle and make a living for themselves and their families. The second generation of settlers generally was able to make a living as tenant farmer or labourer. There was no land available for distribution among this generation, as colony lands can normally only be transferred undivided upon the death of the original settler. The out-migration of large numbers of (Sinhala) colonists after 1985 meant that land became available for lease, and by and large this generation has been able to look after itself. The third generation however has a problem. After second-generation colonists started cultivating those lands that were abandoned by displaced settlers and that were not too risky to cultivate, land again became a rather scarce commodity, which meant that the option of being a tenant farmer is not open to many third-generation settlers. As other jobs are hard to come by, the only alternative for many is to work as an agricultural labourer. However, many youth of this generation have gone to secondary school. Because they spent so much time in school, they never got used to hard agricultural labour. Also, manual labour is considered to be below the dignity of an educated person. Therefore, even if labour work is available, not all youth want to do this work, rather preferring to wait for an office job that is unlikely to come their way because they lack the skills for office work (interview with a mother and her

adolescent son, Neelapola, March 2005)¹⁰⁸. The likely consequence is that a new generation of underemployed and frustrated youth grows up in the colonies, which may be a risk factor for future ethnic relations.

While a similar pattern exists among the original inhabitants of the area, the demographic spread among the original inhabitants is much more gradual than among the colonists (who all came at a similar point in time and were of a similar age when they came). Therefore, generational boundaries with respect to economic development are a bit less marked among original inhabitants.

3.8 *Length of stay: settlers versus original inhabitants*

In Kottiyar Pattu, the boundary between settlers and original inhabitants runs largely (but not entirely, given the presence of a few Tamil and Muslim colonies in the Allai Extension Scheme) parallel to ethnic lines. Though it has become increasingly ethnicised in popular discourse, length of stay deserves attention as a separate category of identification that is linked to a distinct set of issues. These issues were described in 1957 by the British geographer B.H. Farmer, who wrote one of the first critical analyses of irrigation-cum-settlement schemes in Sri Lanka:

“A set of problems of a somewhat different nature is created by the fact that almost all colonies are set down adjoining or even encircling *purāna* villages which, though mainly small, are tending to grow rapidly and which, moreover, are peopled by peasants who are most tenacious of their rights in *purāna* lands and of the status that goes with such ownership. At the very least, colonization in these circumstances means disturbance of peasant rights to *chena*; it may mean very much more if paddy lands are affected, or if social relations between colony and village are bad. [...]

No very consistent policy has been followed in the treatment of private land [...] which is found to be included in or to adjoin the area which it is intended to colonize [...]. If all such private land is acquired and reorganized to conform with a consistent pattern of development, *purāna* holders are likely to absorb a large proportion of the available holdings. *Indeed, if an attempt had been made to give holdings in the colony to all the villagers affected by the Allai scheme there would not have been enough land to go around.* Thus, quite apart from the feelings of villagers about their ancestral lands, the tidy solution may be physically impossible” (Farmer 1957:308-309, *emphasis mine*).

Even though it does not receive much public attention, length of stay is an important category of identification, particularly for land-owning (Tamil and Muslim) ‘original inhabitants’. Until about 1930, the villages in Kottiyar Pattu were separated from

¹⁰⁸ Similar concerns were regularly raised when I spoke to Sinhala parents of adolescent children who lived in Kottiyar Pattu.

each other by large patches of jungle that acted as expansion buffers. As the population increased, villages and surrounding agricultural fields gradually expanded into these jungle buffers. The first concerted land development in Kottiyar Pattu happened around 1911, when Catholic priests developed a stretch of paddy fields around the settlement that became known as Iruthayapuram (see section 3.2.1). While the sudden jump in status from landless jungle dwellers to land-owning farmers caused conflict between the people of Iruthayapuram and particularly the old land-holding elite of Mallikaithivu, this land development did not yet cause any land shortage.

In the 1930s, the government's support to village extensions led to the development of a range of satellite settlements around Muthur, Thoppur, Pallikudiyiruppu, Eechilampattu and Mallikaithivu, to accommodate for the increase in population, as well as two settlements for Mukkuvar immigrants from Batticaloa District. Still, there was enough land available, and most of the people moving into the settlements originated from Kottiyar Pattu and retained their status. These village extensions do not seem to have caused any problems.

Things changed when the Allai Extension Scheme was developed in the mid-1950s. Suddenly, all the low-lying land that was available was alienated and redistributed among settlers, and (particularly around Mallikaithivu, Menkamam, Kankuveli and Kilivetti) all room for future expansion was abruptly taken away. This problem was made more acute because between about 1965 and 1975, the first batch of people who were born after anti-malaria spraying was introduced between 1945 and 1947 got married.

Between 1945 and 1955, the crude death rate in Sri Lanka dropped sharply, from 2.2% in 1945, to 1.26% in 1950, to 1.1% in 1955 (Abhayaratne and Jayewardene 1967: 22, table 6). At the same time, crude birth rates which had fluctuated around 3.8% from 1900 to 1935 and had dropped to around 3.5% between 1935 and 1940, spiked around 4.0% between 1947 and 1953 (*idem*: 24, table 7). After 1953, the crude birth rate dropped gradually to reach 3.0% by 1970 and 2.0% by 1990 (CBSL 1998: 272).

Infant mortality also dropped sharply: from 14.0% in 1945 and 1946 to 10.1% in 1947, 8.2% in 1950, 7.1% in 1953, and 5.7% in 1960 (Meegama 1986: 7, table 2). As a consequence, the cohort of children born in the period 1951-1955 who survived their first year of life was about 30% larger than the cohort for the period 1943-1947¹⁰⁹.

In Trincomalee District, the change was even more marked: the crude death rate, which had fluctuated around 3.5% between 1900 and 1944, dropped to about 1.0% in just four years (Abhayaratne and Jayewardene 1967: 71-2, table 24). With birth rates going up during this time, this led to a near 5% annual population growth by the mid-1950s (*idem*: 51-2, table 22). Assuming an even higher drop in infant mortality

¹⁰⁹ This was calculated using the data mentioned above, and Abhayaratne and Jayewardene 1967: 32, table 10.

rates than for the entire country¹¹⁰, the cohort of children born in Trincomalee District in the period 1951-1955 who survived their first year of life was more than 50% larger than the cohort for the period 1943-1947. This had dramatic consequences 25 years later.

In the matrilineal Eastern Province, land is normally given as a pre-mortals inheritance to the daughter for her wedding (McGilvray 2008). Just when room for expansion had been taken away by the colonies, demand for additional land increased dramatically when the baby boomers started getting married. To some extent, the dramatic increase in paddy yields that happened around the same time allowed for a process of agricultural involution somewhat similar to what Geertz (1963) has described for Java to take place; people also started encroaching on reserved lands such as tank beds and drains (which is significant when looking at the conflict over the Menkamam tank, see section 6.6.1). The increase in population density due to the lack of expansion possibilities is acutely visible in villages like Mallikaithivu and Menkamam, where housing densities became very high over time.

After the war broke out, the security forces made it very difficult for Tamil farmers to access fertiliser, because fertiliser can be used for making bombs. As a consequence, yields declined and the incomes of Tamil farmers dropped drastically. Muslim farmers suffered less from restrictions by the security forces. However, the higher birth rate among the Muslim community meant that the amount of paddy land per family reduced at a greater speed than among the other ethnic communities. The consequence of these trends was a descent into poverty for many original inhabitants of the area¹¹¹.

¹¹⁰ I have found no infant mortality figures for Trincomalee District. However, Meegama gives infant mortality figures for the 'endemic, intermediate and non-endemic malaria zones' of Sri Lanka for the period 1936-1948 (1986: 27, table 31). Much of Trincomalee District was in the endemic zone. While the countrywide infant mortality was about 14.0% in 1946, 10.0% in 1947 and 9.2% in 1948, infant mortality in the endemic zone, which was about 20.0% from 1943 to 1945 and peaked at 24.8% in 1946, dropped to 12.8% in 1947 and 10.3% in 1948. As malaria was effectively held back after that, infant mortality figures for subsequent years can be assumed to be similar to the countrywide average.

¹¹¹ During the post-2002 cease-fire, some people opted for interesting alternative strategies to escape the pressure on residential and paddy land in their village. One Tamil man in his fifties told me how he was planning to clear a piece of jungle that had become safe again. Then he would go to the local office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), claim he that he was a refugee who had just returned from India, obtain materials for a shelter and a loan or grant for livelihood purposes, settle in the jungle, and give his land in the village to his children. The man knew full well that UNHCR and its implementing partner NGOs would not be able to figure out whether or not he was genuinely a returning refugee; he also knew that these agencies would be happy with every beneficiary they assisted, because it would help them reach their targets.

Between about 1970 and 1980, children of the first generation of settlers got married and started setting up their own families. As a consequence, land scarcity became an issue in the colonies as well. As mentioned in section 3.7, colony land can only be transferred undivided, which would have meant that most of the new families would need to find other sources of income. As in the original villages, (informal) fragmentation of landholdings and encroachment on reservations were strategies used to absorb some of the increased pressure. By the 1990s, the situation in the Muslim and Tamil colonies was similar to that in the original villages. The flight of about half of the Sinhala population between 1985 and 1987 meant that for the remaining people the problem of a lack of available land reduced in severity for about 15 years, though this was partially offset by the abandonment of areas that had become too dangerous. Therefore, while Muslim and Tamil settlers sank into similar conditions as the Muslim and Tamil original inhabitants, Sinhala settlers remained comparatively better off in terms of land availability per farmer. As a consequence, the distinction between settlers and original inhabitants became less prominent over time, being incorporated into a broader ethnic distinction. Particularly for the older generation of original inhabitants however, it remains a clear category of identification.

Now that the war has ended, all sides will benefit by the end of “tax collection” by the LTTE (provided that this form of extortion does not get taken over by other actors), the renewed accessibility of areas that were long considered too dangerous, and hopefully by a general increase in economic growth. My hunch is that initially the Tamil farmers will benefit comparatively much from the reducing restrictions on among others fertilisers. This will make it possible to increase productivity, and make up some of their comparative disadvantage with Muslim and Sinhala farmers. For Muslims, not much will change, while Sinhalese in Kottiyar Pattu might find themselves having to pay a price for peace, when more settlers who fled the area two decades ago return and increase the pressure on resources, and when, ultimately, the military apparatus will need to downsize and home guards will lose their income.

3.9 Political affiliation

Sri Lanka has two large political parties, three or four medium-sized parties, and a large number of small parties. The United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) have dominated the political landscape ever since independence, and control over the government has alternated between the two. The UNP generally leans towards the neoliberal side, while the SLFP tends to be more populist, but both parties have at times borrowed quite freely from the other’s ideological base whenever that was opportune.

Originating from the urban labour movement is a cluster of small, but at times influential socialist and communist parties that is often grouped together under the term ‘Old Left’. Over time, the ‘Old Left’ was superseded in importance by the JVP. This originally maoist party developed over time into a staunch left-leaning Sinhala-nationalist party that initiated two violent uprisings against the state in 1971 and

1987-1989. Although the party leadership was almost entirely annihilated by the end of the second uprising, the JVP bounced back. By 2004 it formed an alliance with the SLFP under the name United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and became part of the government, only to be split in two by internal rivalries two years later. On the right-wing Sinhala-Buddhist side of the spectrum, a small but highly vocal party is the Sihala Urumaya (SU). In order to increase its electoral chances, the party reinvented itself into the Jatika Hela Urumaya (JHU), a party of Buddhist monks, striving to protect Buddhism in Sri Lanka (while remaining as rabidly Sinhala-nationalist as it had been before). The restyling worked: until 2010, the JHU had nine seats in parliament. However, infighting in combination with the successful Sinhala-Buddhist self-representation by a section of the SLFP has severely eroded the JHU's support base.

Since its founding in the late 1940s, the Federal Party (FP) became the dominant party representing Tamil interests. In alliance with a few other Tamil parties, it formed the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in 1972. Under pressure of the LTTE, the TULF in turn aligned itself with more Tamil parties in 2001 to form the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). Right throughout, there have been smaller Tamil parties. Prominent among these are the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) and Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) which were originally Tamil militant groups that gave up the fight and joined mainstream politics in the late 1980s.

A separate Muslim political party only came to its own in the late 1980s, when the Muslim political activist M.H.M. Ashraff founded the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC). Before that, Muslims had largely voted for either the UNP or the SLFP. Over the course of the 1990s, the SLMC became dominant among the Muslim electorate, although its electoral heartland was always confined to the Eastern Province (Ameerdeen 2006). After Ashraff died in a helicopter crash just before the elections of October 2000, the SLMC disintegrated. Rauff Hakeem took over the leadership of the party, but very soon Ashraff's widow Ferial split off and formed her own party, the National Unity Alliance (NUA). In 2003, further splits followed, and by 2007 the bigger Muslim towns on the east coast were like small town republics, each with its own dominant political party.

In Kottiyar Pattu, as in the rest of Sri Lanka, voting behaviour differs by ethnicity. Among Sinhalese, the most popular parties for national elections have always been the UNP and the SLFP, while since 2003 the JVP also gained some popularity. Both the parties of the Old Left and the SU/JHU hardly get any votes. Since the establishment of Tamil political parties, Tamils have always overwhelmingly voted for the FP, and later TULF and TNA. From the 1970s, Muslims largely supported the UNP until the establishment of the SLMC, which has since developed a solid voter base in Muthur (though much less so in Thoppur); before that, votes were given to whichever candidate MP was considered suitable. In the 1960s, concerns over the settling of Sinhalese in the AES led many Muslims to vote for the FP.

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In local elections, national political parties are less important, and votes tend to be divided among the big parties as well as a range of local 'independent lists'. In the bi-ethnic Muthur Pradeshya Sabha, this has meant that whichever ethnic group managed to minimise vote dispersal could claim dominance. During the *Pradeshya Sabha* elections of 2006, the Muslim leadership of Muthur forced all Muslim candidates to jointly come under one list that was given the meaningful symbol of the pineapple – a fruit with many 'eyes'. Between the various candidates there was fierce competition for votes, but because all were on the same list, Muslims for the first time managed to ensure dominance in the council.



Figure 3.2. Propaganda for the local council elections in Muthur, 2006 (own photograph)

3.10 Military control

For most people in Kottiyar Pattu, military control was a category of identification that they had very little control over (except when they chose to leave their homes and flee to a territory under another regime of military control).

From about 1990, there were three acknowledged regimes of military control in Sri Lanka's war zone. They were designated, in formal as well in colloquial usage, with the English terms 'cleared', 'uncleared' and 'grey'. Territory designated 'cleared' was controlled by the Sri Lankan military (and its paramilitary counterparts) during the

day and, at least officially, also at night. Territory designated 'uncleared' was controlled by the LTTE during day and night¹¹². Territory designated 'grey' was generally controlled by the Sri Lankan military during the day and by the LTTE at night, but could also be visited by government-allied Tamil paramilitary groups (Goodhand, Hulme and Lewer 2000). In Kottiyar Pattu, 'grey' areas basically covered everything outside the Sinhala and Muslim settlements, outside the 'uncleared' areas, and further than a few hundred metres away from army camps in Tamil areas. Very similar to Kalyvas' analysis of violence in civil-war Greece (2006), 'grey' areas were the most dangerous areas since military control was unstable, and one could find both the military and the LTTE in the same area at the same time (Hoekzema 1999). Because of the continuous movement of LTTE cadres in or through these areas, there were more cordon-and-search operations, and people were at greater risk of getting arrested or getting caught in a crossfire than elsewhere. Still, soldiers and rebels seem to have found practical solutions to minimise casualties when no leadership-sanctioned operations were ongoing. One night in 2000, a friend who was in Muthur was kept out of his sleep because the LTTE was plundering the warehouse of the Multi-Purpose Cooperative Store. The militants had walked into Muthur without firing a shot, and left the town without firing a shot, *after loading their loot on noisy and slow ox-carts*. There was obviously some sort of silent agreement with the army, which could have easily intercepted the cadres and ambushed them on their way back to base if the will had been there. There were similar hints of accommodation elsewhere. In Batticaloa District, the (army) brigade headquarters at Valaichchenai got its water via a pipeline from LTTE-controlled area, while the local LTTE headquarters at Karadiyanaru got its electricity from government-controlled area. An acquaintance who was in the north of Sri Lanka in the early 1990s told me how he was taken to a frontline where soldiers and LTTE cadres had established a practice of loudly insulting each other's mothers at regular times, but only firing their guns when ordered to do so by someone high up in the respective hierarchies.

Formally, the category 'grey areas' did not exist or was a subcategory of 'cleared areas'. Therefore, the only formal boundary that was in force was that between 'cleared' and 'uncleared' areas. This boundary was marked by checkpoints, bunkers, barbed wire and in some parts of Sri Lanka, though not in Kottiyar Pattu, with minefields. Physical movement of people and goods across this boundary was restricted. People, vehicles and goods travelling in both directions were subjected to thorough checking, and every crossing of the boundary was registered on both sides

¹¹² To make things more confusing, the LTTE insisted on designating areas under its control 'cleared' and areas under government control 'uncleared'. Civilians in LTTE-controlled territory sometimes used the LTTE's set of designations, and sometimes the government's set. As the government's version of things was also part of the formal discourse, I stick to that categorisation.

in elaborate logbooks. Anything that could directly benefit the rebels was banned from being taken to the other side. This included items like fertiliser and batteries (which could be used for making bombs), but also packets of instant noodles, which could be used as combat rations. At times, the restrictions went so far as to include basic medicines like panadol (Rasaratnam 1996a: chapter 18). Fuel and construction materials could only be taken in small quantities and with the right paperwork.

Since the checkpoints were only open during the day and health care facilities in LTTE-controlled areas were very limited, any medical emergency between dusk and dawn could easily turn deadly because people could not be taken to hospital in time. The restrictions had two direct consequences. For the bulk of ordinary civilians living in LTTE-controlled territory, the restrictions meant severe hardship and poverty; for a small group of people with the right contacts, the development of a black market opened up opportunities for making money¹¹³.

Within the 'cleared' areas, a wide network of checkpoints developed over time. Like the boundary checkpoints, these checkpoints had to be negotiated with care, particularly by Tamils, for whom the risk of arrest was always present (Montani 1999: 145-171)¹¹⁴. This checkpoint infrastructure contributed significantly to the militarisation of the landscape, but was more an institution of domination than a serious hindrance for the militants. Rarely was military hardware discovered at the checkpoints, which was not entirely surprising because many checkpoints could fairly easily be bypassed via by-lanes, or through patches of jungle¹¹⁵. The bureaucracy of registrations was however formidable.

¹¹³ People on all sides of the conflict profited from this. To give an example: after the government closed the checkpoints into the Vanni for building materials in 2007, a lively smuggling route for cement developed via Mannar Island. Lorry-loads of cement drove from the south to Mannar Island, where the cement was loaded into small boats. Then it was smuggled into the Vanni. Despite the formal embargo, cement was available in bulk, but the price per bag was Rs. 1,000/- more than in the rest of Sri Lanka, where a bag cost about Rs. 700/-. Half of the price difference went to the Sri Lankan navy, a quarter went to the LTTE, and a quarter went to the smugglers (conversations with people living in Mannar and NGO staff working in Mannar and the Vanni, 2007).

¹¹⁴ Interestingly, such checkpoints did not exist inside LTTE-controlled areas. Within the 'uncleared' areas, people could freely move around 24 hours a day. In the 'cleared' areas, movement after dark varied depending on whether people were in a Tamil-dominated area or in a Muslim- or Sinhala-dominated area. One night in October 2000, I drove home late to Batticaloa with some colleagues following an emergency food distribution to flood-affected families near Verugal. Every Tamil settlement that we drove through was deserted, but in the Muslim town of Eravur shops were open and there were many people on the road. For one of my (Tamil) colleagues, it was the first time in ten years that he had been outside Batticaloa town after dark.

¹¹⁵ One day, I was travelling in a threewheeler from Battaramulla, 10 km out of Colombo, to my house in the heart of the city, when the authorities decided to check every single vehicle

3.11 Reflection: shades of otherness

In this chapter, I have discussed nine axes along which people whom I spoke to in Kottiyar Pattu defined sameness and otherness: caste, class, employment, religion, gender, age, length of stay, political affiliation, and military control. There may well be more, but these nine, together with ethnicity which I discussed in chapter 1, figured most prominently in people's stories. The point here is to show complexity, not to reduce everyday social interaction in Kottiyar Pattu to a mere nine-dimensional model. As shown, each of these categories of identification comprises (almost) the entire population of Kottiyar Pattu, and divides it up in different ways.

While some of the boundaries and (status) hierarchies within categories of identification are contested, the constituent groups within each category are pretty much fixed, and it is more or less possible to categorise everybody in Kottiyar Pattu according to each of the categories of identification that have been discussed above.

The extent to which the boundaries within each category of identification overlap with the boundaries in other categories of identification is schematically represented in table 3.7. As can be seen, some categories overlap more than others, and in some cases the extent of overlap is co-determined by a structuring third category, which is generally ethnicity.

For each person, there will be a small group of people who are in the same group as the self within (almost) all these categories of identification, as well as a small group of people who are 'others' according to (almost) all of these categories. There are however also many people who are 'same' in some respects and 'other' in other respects: Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims who are all farmers, Buddhists and Christians who are Sinhalese, Tamils and Sinhalese who are Christians, Hindus and Muslims who are labourers, Muslim farmers and fishermen who both vote SLMC, and so on.

There are two other important categories of identification that I did not discuss so far: relatives and friends. (Almost) everyone has a circle of relatives and a circle of friends around them, and these circles of relatives and friends are of crucial importance for people and their social interactions. The problem is that every person's circles of relatives and friends are unique, though there tends to be considerable overlap among clusters of people. On the scale of Kottiyar Pattu, it is impossible to identify identity groups in the categories of relatives and friends in the same way as it is possible for ethnicity, caste, class, and the other categories discussed in this chapter. That does not mean that nothing can be said about the

entering the city, and massive traffic jams developed. The driver, who was known to me, suggested to take a 'long-cut' (as opposed to a short-cut). He got me home through backroads, without us passing a single checkpoint. Significantly, this '100% checking' was instituted the day *after* there had been a bomb blast in Colombo. Officially, the objective was to apprehend those who had planted the bomb. However, *only incoming traffic was checked*, while outgoing traffic could move freely.

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structural location of relatives and friends. For the vast majority of people, relatives are in-group members according to at least three of the four following categories: ethnicity, caste, class and religion. Friends, on the other hand, are in-group members according to at least one category of identification, and on top of that they are generally of the same gender. Friends need to have something in common, but what it is that they have in common does not really matter. Gender homogeneity among (adult) friends is a strong cultural norm among people of all ethnicities in Kottiyar Pattu: cross-gender friendships are risky, because they can easily be misinterpreted as scandalous affairs.

While there is no denying that the ethnic category of identification predominates in public discourse across Sri Lanka and that ethnic boundaries are fiercely and violently guarded by ethno-nationalists, the ambiguity of what constitutes otherness allows people room for manoeuvre to interact with a much larger group of people than just the small in-crowd. It allows people of the same ethnicity to interact across boundaries of caste, class or religion, and it allows people of different ethnicity who share a religion or livelihood to interact across the ethnic boundary, and still frame it as a form of intra-, rather than inter-group interaction. Inversely, this also means that apart from the conflict along ethnic lines, there are also conflictuous issues along other lines that may keep people of the same ethnicity separated. As I will show in the case studies, this manoeuvring is crucial for understanding everyday inter-ethnic interaction.

	Caste	Class	Employment	Religion	Gender	Age	Length of stay	Political affiliation	Military control
Ethnicity	Sinhalese and Tamils have parallel caste systems; Muslims officially not, but somewhat ambiguous practice	Largely cross-cutting, though ethnically differentiated access to resources has generated differences in the average wealth status per ethnicity	Cross-cutting; home guards and soldiers predominantly Sinhala; comparatively few Sinhala fishermen	Largely structured by ethnicity. Christians are either Sinhala or Tamil	Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	hardly any Sinhalese non-colonists; some Tamils and Muslims among colonists	Largely structured by ethnicity, with intra-ethnic divisions. Some support for SLFP and UNP among Muslims and to a lesser extent Tamils	All Sinhalese and Muslims and part of the Tamils formally under government control; part of the Tamils under LTTE control (until 2007)
Caste		Largely cross-cutting; people of low castes are generally also low on the class hierarchy	Partly parallel, partly cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting

Social complexity in Kottiyar Pattu

	Caste	Class	Employment	Religion	Gender	Age	Length of stay	Political affiliation	Military control
Class			Partly parallel, partly cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	Not entirely sure; probably largely cross-cutting	Crosscutting though wealthier groups concentrated in government controlled area
Employment				Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting
Religion					Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	Length of stay and religion are both largely structured by ethnicity	Political affiliation and religion are both largely structured by ethnicity; both Muslim and Sinhala political parties use religious discourse.	Linked to ethnicity: all religions represented in government-controlled area, only Hindus and some Christians in LTTE-controlled area
Gender						Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	cross-cutting
Age							Cross-cutting	Cross-cutting	cross-cutting
Length of stay								Cross-cutting; as Sinhalese are dominant among colonists, Sinhala parties dominant there, and other parties dominant among non-colonists	only colonists in government-controlled area
Political affiliation									linked to ethnicity; cross-cutting only among Tamils

Table 3.7. Overlap between boundaries within categories of identification in Kottiyar Pattu

4 Violence in Kottiyar Pattu

How many lives were destroyed during [the] violence? You cannot count them. In this land, water should flow, but it is blood that is flowing. Almost every family has lost one of its loved ones due to the war. Still, they are longing for them. How many souls are longing for their loved ones? Violence is like a crocodile's snout.

By a 15-year old girl (Cassiere et al., 2000: 12)

Between two cats
That are fighting for the soil
We are trapped and suffering
Like rats that can't close their eyes

From the poem 'Letter of tears from the Muthur refugee camp' (Navamani 2006)

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Suffering and its documentation

A week after the tsunami, I spent a day in the small town of Valaichchenai with a team of ZOA to assess the water and sanitation facilities in a number of sites where those who were unable to return home had found temporary accommodation. Two journalists also joined us. When, during a tea break, we heard that some bodies of recently recovered tsunami victims were being cremated nearby, the journalists asked to be taken there. As I had seen the smoke and knew the roads in the area well, I offered to show them the place, where we found one improvised funeral pyre made of vehicle tyres. The acrid smell of burning rubber outswamped the putrid smell of decaying and burning flesh, and in the deepening rays of the late-evening sun the thick billowing smoke suddenly revealed the empty eye-sockets of a skull. Next to it, a faithful dog crouched close to its former owner. As I watched in silence, the only thing the journalists found to say was "the lighting is stunning".

The sight was unspeakable, but infinitely more so were the horror of this person's dying moments and that of the surviving relatives who would now have to face life without him or her. As Patricia Lawrence (1997) and Rebecca Walker (2010) have documented in their work on Batticaloa, those who suffered from violence faced a further tragedy: even if they had words to express their suffering, it was often too dangerous to express them.

In order to place my findings on everyday inter-ethnic interaction in proper context, it is important to document the extent and impact of the ethnicised violence that has affected the people living in Kottiyar Pattu. And therein lies a triple problem: how to document agony; how to compile a 'bigger picture', and how to link individual stories to this 'bigger picture'.

Narrating agony is painful and, particularly during the latter half of my research, could be dangerous for the narrator. Because of this, I have avoided asking about people's personal experiences, except when they themselves started talking about them. Apart from that, documenting agony requires writing skills that I simply do not have (see Walker 2010, chapter 3 for a good example of how it can be done). As a lesser substitute, I have tried to demonstrate the sheer ubiquitousness of violence in Kottiyar Pattu in the chronology presented in this chapter.

When I started my research, I assumed that compiling a factual chronology of violence would be fairly simple; all the more so, since a cease-fire was in place. It was clearly noticeable that people were not as reluctant to talk about past violence¹¹⁶ as they had been during my first year and a half in Sri Lanka, when the conflict was still ongoing. However, things proved to be more complicated than that. I have asked many people in Trincomalee District if they were willing and able to describe the local chronology of the conflict, but most people limited themselves to general statements about "[19]85" and "[19]90"¹¹⁷. In Kottiyar Pattu, many people referred me to others, who they said would be better able to tell me about what happened. In the end, all these referrals led me to one person, who was recommended as something of the ultimate source for me. I had met this person before. He had already told me much about the area, and he had been extremely helpful. However, when I asked him about the history of the conflict, he broke down in tears and was unable to help me further. With that, I gave up – until I came across the Nadesan Centre For Human Rights Through Law. The diligent work of the staff at this centre has resulted in an elaborate collection of newspaper clippings related to the conflict, from late 1982 to the present. My research assistant spent weeks going through most of them, and getting every single article about Trincomalee District that he came across photocopied – this amounted to about 15 cm of double-sided photocopies! Together with the insights and information that I've been able to gather from interviews, translated texts from Kottiyar Pattu, human rights-related reports and the wider literature on Sri Lanka, this generated a disjointed, but reasonably structured story.

¹¹⁶ This talking was mostly in descriptive terms, without reference to what this meant personally for the narrator: "there was a bomb there", "on such and such a date, this and that village were attacked", etc.

¹¹⁷ I found that violence tends to be described in deceptively factual terms. Death of close relatives, destruction of property, and displacement were often reduced to the year in which they occurred. Something similar happened after the tsunami: without exception, people whom I met spoke of the dead as having been 'washed away', not as having died. While I assume that understating the painful is a fairly common practice, I had not expected it to be so unemotional. It must of course be stated that most my sources were speaking to an interested stranger with whom they had no close connection, so they would probably show a lot less of their feelings to me than they would to their friends and relatives. Nevertheless, even close friends used a similar extent of understatement.

The disjointedness of my description of violent events in the area is definitely proof of gaps in my information, but it is also indicative of the third problem in documenting violence: violence is temporal, spatial and individual. Still, it is these little details that matter (Richards 2005: 14) because together they shape a violent context.

Violence is temporal, often orgasmic in nature. Traumatic and dramatic though violent events may be, most of the time during a period of violent conflict no actual violence is happening. What is however always present is the memory of earlier violence, as well as the anticipation of potential new violence. It is in this force field of actual, remembered and anticipated violence that everyday life takes place. Each of these three varies in intensity, but as long as the conflict is not over, they will all be present.

Violence is also spatial. In people's narratives, violence is always linked to specific locations. People carry with them 'topographies of violence', so to speak. This is true for remembered, actual and anticipated violence. Any reference to a remembered violent event includes its location, often in great detail. Any actual event of violence is spatially bound: some areas are affected, while others are not. Finally, there are places that people consider potentially risky and therefore to be avoided:

Several months after the Sri Lankan armed forces had captured Eechchilampattu DS Division from the LTTE, I visited the area with my research assistant. On the way, we gave a ride¹¹⁸ to a young mother with her seven-month-old baby who was returning home after going to the market. When we asked her about the situation in the area, she told us that she avoided walking alone along one particular stretch of road that we passed, because of the soldiers posted in the bushes along the road (and because there are no houses within screaming distance) – she was afraid of being raped and therefore preferred to travel in groups. Had we not given her a ride, then she would have waited in a safe place until someone else going the same way showed up (fieldnotes, August 2007).

There is more. It is not only that violence is topographical in nature; people also carry 'violent topographies' with them. Even when conversations were not about violence, places were often identified by referring to violent events that happened there: "Kinanthimunai is the hill where the Muslims were shelled", "this junction is

¹¹⁸ Under normal circumstances, it would be culturally highly inappropriate for unknown males to give rides to unknown females. However, as the woman had a small baby and a bag of goods to carry, as walking distances are considerable (this woman lived about 10 kilometres from the market), and as there simply were not many other sources of transport available, the convenience won from the restraint. Giving rides to people provided unique opportunities to talk to them without them having to be afraid of others (army, paramilitaries, LTTE) listening in, and I noticed that people were remarkably free in expressing their opinions about the situation in the area.

where so-and-so was shot”, “over there is where a claymore mine blew up a soldier”. It took me a while to realise it, but it is indeed remarkable that violence has become a primary marker on people’s mental maps, rather than more innocent things like trees, shops, etcetera¹¹⁹.

In a broader sense, the geographical location of Kottiyar Pattu was of influence on the occurrence of violence. While the main conflict theatres were always Jaffna and Batticaloa, the communication and supply routes between both theatres ran through Trincomalee District. As documented by Gunaratne (2000), it was important for the government to block these routes through a combined strategy of settling Sinhalese in buffer zones and subsequently militarising these zones. The northern coast of Kottiyar Pattu is also of strategic importance because control over the coast east of Muthur gives a form of control over access to Sri Lanka’s main naval base at Trincomalee

Apart from being temporal and spatial in nature, the experience of violence is also individual. It only takes one violent incident to ruin somebody’s life, but most of these incidents are irrelevant to almost everybody else (more so with increasing temporal and spatial distance). Because public memory leaves out most of these individual incidents, a public narrative on violence is little more than a symbolic collection of elements, quite far removed from the actual experiences of suffering of individual members of the public. Individual narratives consist of an undifferentiated interweaving of the symbolic elements of the public narrative and details on own experience of a limited number of incidents. This is what makes documenting violence so difficult, because every story is different and has a limited scope.

Newspaper articles provide a much larger collection of incidents, but suffer from two defects. Firstly, incidents are only reported if they are considered newsworthy. As will become obvious in the rest of this chapter (and in chapter 7), the English-language newspapers that I have been able to look at have had a definite bias,

¹¹⁹ Newcomers to a conflict zone quickly develop their own violent topographies. In January 2006, the local branch of the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) in Trincomalee published a map of Trincomalee town and its surroundings with key landmarks (UN-HIC 2006a). On it, five junctions were named and marked with red squares. As such, these junctions are not remarkable, and there are many other junctions in Trincomalee that are equally important. However, these five junctions (Anuradhapura Junction, Third Milepost Junction, Fourth Milepost Junction, Madathadi Junction and Abeyapura Junction) were locations where many incidents were taking place. The junctions were geographical markers of violence, but as this could not be publicly stated, red squares were used instead.

Similarly, after a person had been assassinated about 100 metres from the house of an expatriate friend, she took me along and showed me the place. Part of ‘talking about it’ was to give an on-site reconstruction of what had happened, who had come from where, where the victim had fallen, and where the assassins had run off to.

reporting casualties caused by militants in great detail while largely ignoring casualties caused by government-related forces. There is thus no way of verifying completeness of documentation. Secondly, with few exceptions the journalists and editors who produced the articles were neither from the area where incidents occurred nor familiar with their context. Therefore, descriptions may be flawed and important context factors may be ignored.

Specific human rights-related reports are a third source of information. These tend to be well-researched and provide detailed analyses of specific incidents. While being extremely valuable, such reports can however by their very nature only cover a limited number of incidents.

A last source of information are so-called 'massacre lists' (Sinhaya 2009; SPUR n.d.; NESOHR 2007; Anon. 2004). These long lists, produced by Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim nationalists respectively, document attacks against their own ethnic group. While these documents are obviously one-sided propaganda tools that are primarily intended to show the evilness of the enemy, the incidents included *did* all happen (though not always exactly in the way they are presented). While the descriptions need to be read critically, the lists themselves can serve as a valuable addition to check a chronology for completeness.

4.1.2 Structure of the chapter

Section 4.2 provides the chronology of violence. It is subdivided in ten sections that deal with specific stages in the conflict as they were distinguished by the people whom I spoke to in Kottiyar Pattu. This chronology needs to be seen in the light of the wider chronology of violence as summarised in section 1.1.2. Of the remaining chapters, particularly chapter 7 is related to specific parts of the chronology (sections 4.2.9 and 4.2.10). While this chronology is centered around Kottiyar Pattu, I have regularly included references to key incidents outside the area that shaped the immediate setting in which incidents within Kottiyar Pattu took place.

I present something of a 'balance sheet of suffering' in section 4.3, in order to come to a tentative summary of conflict-affecteness by ethnicity.

Section 4.4, finally, returns to the chronology from some distance, and summarises characteristic patterns in the violence.

4.2 *A chronology of violence in Kottiyar Pattu*

4.2.1 Up to May 1985: silence before the storm

All people from Kottiyar Pattu whom I spoke to were unanimous in stating that there was no major ethnically motivated violence in the area before 1985, and relations between Sinhalese and Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims, and Muslims and Tamils had been friendly¹²⁰. The Administrative Records of the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century lend credence to such a view: “Trincomalee”, thus wrote the district’s chief administrator in 1922, “is not a criminal district” (AR 1922: E22). From the oldest records that I have found (covering the late 1860s) until the second world war, the sections on crime consistently describe Trincomalee District as an exceptionally calm area (see for example AR 1890: F25 and AR 1899: F20). The only troublemakers were some criminals in Kinniya who were active between about 1912 and 1920 (AR 1912-13: E6, AR 1920: E20). The construction of the Trincomalee-Colombo railway and the expansion of the navy base saw the influx of several thousand male jobseekers from elsewhere, and with it a, still fairly limited, increase in crime (theft, gambling, prostitution, but also some assaults and murders) in and around Trincomalee town: “[t]he indigenous population is very rarely involved in crime and the stranger within our gates commits over 85 per cent. [sic] of the crime” (AR 1939, part I: E28; see also AR 1924: E24). After World War Two, reported crime dropped, only to increase again in with the influx of labourers working on the irrigation schemes. The Administrative Report for 1953 documents:

“There has been an increase of grave crime during the year. The total number of cases was 437 as against 384 in the previous year. The Magistrate is of opinion that the Colonization and Land Development Schemes in the District are a contributory factor to the increase of crime and that the opening of the police stations at Mutur and Kantalay should be expedited as they are unpoliced areas where the schemes are in full swing and most of the workers appear to be undesirables.

Crime was steady on the increase in the above areas and it is imperative that a police station should be opened at Mutur.” (AR 1953: A151).

In or around August 1954, a “communal clash” took place in Muthur; a month later, a police station was opened (AR 1954: 172, 174). Samad sheds light on what happened:

“The Land Development Department (LDD) brought outsiders as labourers [...]. These outsiders were from the majority community. Their language was Sinhala, which was new and incomprehensible to the villagers of this area. These workers

¹²⁰ Some typical examples of what people told me can be found in the next chapter.

used to come to Muthur to buy provisions and to watch movies because the Allai-Kantale road was not yet opened at that time. [...] These labourers from the majority community, who came here to spend their leisure and to transport materials in trucks sang, danced and made a lot of noise. The people of this area, who lived a disciplined life, did not like these activities and began to hate the outsiders. During this period, Muthur Muslims had arguments that turned into fistfights with the Sinhalese who came to the cinema, as the former did not understand the language of the latter. This hostility began to intensify daily. Since 1945, the wealthy paddy merchants from Jaffna used to come to Muthur by boat during the paddy-harvesting season to buy paddy and straw. They paid advances and bought paddy through Muslim intermediaries from Muthur. These brokers sent local traders to the villages and purchased the paddy. The Sinhalese labourers in the colony area attacked late Mr. V. A. Caseer from Muthur, who went to purchase paddy. He escaped but they robbed his money. The people of the area who could not tolerate this began to attack them whenever they came to Muthur. This turned out into big riots" (Samad 2003:585-6).

It is important at this point to note that the colonists themselves were not involved in the Muslim-Sinhala violence. This is a pattern that resonates with what Stanley Tambiah observed during the 1956 riots in Gal Oya (Tambiah 1996: 82-94) and with what Tarzie Vittachi noted with regard to the 1958 riots in Padaviya and Polonnaruwa:

"A notable feature of these [riotous] activities was that the Sinhalese colonists who had settled in the area for some years, and therefore had some stake in general orderliness, took no part in the rioting. The vast majority of the [rioters] were imported Government labourers and the rest were recently arrived squatters who had no roots yet in the area" (Vittachchi 1958: 37).

Apart from the unrest between Muslims and Sinhalese, there were also incidents of caste-related violence among Tamils. The decades after independence saw increasing self-assertion and emancipation among lower caste Tamils in the North and East of Sri Lanka (Pfaffenberger 1990, McGilvray 1983). Locked in struggles over temples and privileges (see section 3.2.1), high-caste Tamils in Kottiyar Pattu sometimes asserted their dominance with violence. A high-caste Tamil once told me with glee how people from his village would go with shotguns to hunt down low-caste Tamils from a neighbouring village who had stopped showing the customary respect (such as getting off the road when a high-caste man came walking past)¹²¹. As mentioned in section 3.5.3, there was also some violence among the Muslims of Muthur over the setting up of new mosques.

¹²¹ In 1954, there were "shooting incidents at Mavadichenai and Menkaman" (AR 1954: 174). This may be a reference to the caste violence referred to.

Bridging troubled waters?

When other parts of Sri Lanka saw large-scale Sinhala-Tamil violence in 1956, 1958, 1961, 1977, 1979, 1981 and 1983, nothing much happened in Kottiyar Pattu¹²². As if to underscore this, a Tamil lady who married a Sinhala man in the 1950s mentioned that her family had been displaced during the 1958 riots, because her brother had been beaten up. While they were displaced, her husband and two sons went back to their fields to harvest the standing crop (interview, August 2007). Violence was so rare that one beating was sufficient to make an entire household flee the area for an entire year.

Following the riots of 1956 and 1958, the early 1960s saw a series of civil disobedience campaigns that were harshly repressed by the government. As in many parts of the world, the late 1960s saw increasing radicalisation of youth who had been able to complete their secondary and higher education, but had few perspectives on jobs that met their qualifications. As mentioned in section 1.1.2, the JVP attempted to overthrow the government in a failed uprising in April 1971 that was brutally repressed. In Jaffna, youth also became more and more militant. The adoption of a new and explicitly Sinhala-Buddhist constitution in 1972 changed the political scene. A small, but growing section of the Tamil population began to question whether the non-violent approaches that had been used up to that time would be sufficient to ensure Tamil rights. In the same year, the first Tamil militant group was started under the name 'Tamil New Tigers'. When police action during a Tamil studies conference in Jaffna led to 8 deaths in 1974, emotions surged. In 1975, the Tamil New Tigers killed the mayor of Jaffna; he was the first casualty of many that were to follow. In this setting of increasing youth militancy, 1976 was a crucial year. During a party congress on May 14th, the TULF, which had been formed from the Federal Party and two other Tamil political parties, adopted what became known as the 'Vaddukottai Declaration'.

"This historic pronouncement accused the Prime Minister Mrs Bandaranaike of having 'callously ignored' the TULF's 'last attempt ... to win constitutional recognition of the Tamil nation without jeopardising the unity of the country'. The convention called on 'the Tamil nation in general and the Tamil youth in particular to come forward to throw themselves fully in the sacred fight for freedom and to flinch not till the goal of a sovereign socialist state of Tamil Eelam is reached'" (Wilson 1994: 128).

¹²² The riots of 1956 were largely limited to Gal Oya and Colombo, and the violence of 1979 and 1981 was largely confined to Jaffna and pockets with Tamil people in the south-west of Sri Lanka.

In 1958, there was severe anti-Tamil unrest in – among others – the Padaviya irrigation scheme in the North of Trincomalee District and in Polonnaruwa, and there was an anti-Sinhala response in Batticaloa (Vittachi 1958). Rajan Hoole mentions that "Kantalai erupted during the 1977 violence claiming the lives of 30 Tamils" (2001: 72). In all these instances, I have not found any reports of anything serious happening in Kottiyar Pattu.

In the same year, the Tamil New Tigers changed their name into the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Over the coming years, about three dozen Tamil militant groups were formed.

The year 1976 also saw a controversy that significantly raised ethnic stakes between Sinhalese and Tamils in Kottiyar Pattu. In the Tamil village of Kilivetti, there was an old *bo* tree in the premises of a Hindu temple. From the early 1960s onwards, some influential Sinhala-Buddhists identified it as a sapling from the Anuradhapura *bo* tree belonging to the Seruwila temple (despite the fact that the tree was almost five kilometres away the Seruwila temple!), and claimed that it was the second-oldest known *bo* tree in Sri Lanka. Fearing that the involvement of the archaeology department would lead to the claiming of the village as Sinhalese, and thus to the settlement of Sinhala colonists in the village, a group of Tamil villagers got together, allegedly with the support of A. Thangathurai, MP (who was from Kilivetti), and destroyed the tree (Kemper 1991: 148-160)¹²³. By 1977, the place where the tree had been was filled in with concrete. In the months after the cutting of the tree, a string of incidents occurred of which I have not been able to ascertain the chronological order: a small group of intermarried and well-integrated Sinhalese petty traders who had settled in Kilivetti were chased out and their shops were burnt; at least one Sinhalese shop owner was killed; and six houses of Tamil families who had been living in Dehiwatte from before the time that the colony was developed were burnt down. After this, no incidents happened in Kottiyar Pattu for a couple of years, and generally things seem to have been peaceful.

The controversy over the tree helped raise the public profile of Seruwila: in 1979, the area around the Seruwila temple was declared a sacred area by the rabidly Sinhala-nationalist minister Cyril Matthew, who played a crucial role in organising anti-Tamil mobs during the 1983 riots (see below, footnote 129). Seruwila was actively promoted as a Sinhala-Buddhist pilgrimage site, but its isolation seems to have prevented it from really picking up in popularity.

Around the same time as the controversy over the *bo* tree, a young Tamil man from the area, who was known as Kanda Podiyan, roamed through the jungles near Kankuveli, Neelapola and Dehiwatte. He was engaged in robberies (and in the process ended up murdering several people as well), but attained a Robin Hood-like status among Tamils because he redistributed some of his wealth among poor Tamil families. Among Sinhalese however, his actions further reinforced anti-Tamil sentiments. During the riots of 1983 only one incident took place in Kottiyar Pattu: the village of Kankuveli was attacked and burnt. I have not been able to discover how much damage was actually caused, but to older people living in the nearby villages (the Sinhala villages of Neelapola and Dehiwatte and the Tamil villages of

¹²³ Branches of the tree had already been cut in 1964. In 1970, Thangathurai was instrumental in extending the electricity line from Serunuwara to his own village of Kilivetti. In order to make way for the cables, several more branches had to be removed (Kemper 1991: 156).

Bridging troubled waters?

Kilivetti, Lingapuram, Sivapuram, Menkamam and Kankuveli) this was a significant event. A Tamil person of some social standing who lived in the area at the time gave me the following account:

Interviewee: The first problem was in 1978. This was Sinhala-Tamil. After this, there were riots again in 1986¹²⁴. In 1978, there was no *iyakkam*¹²⁵. There was a young man, called Kanda Podiyan, who was hiding in the forest. He was a thief and robbed places. But if people were without food, he would give them. One day in Dehiwatte, a post master who came with his salary was killed by him. That is how it started.

TG: Did they catch him?

Interviewee: They caught him in the end, and he was shot and killed in Vellaveli¹²⁶. Because nobody knew who he was, he would be sitting and listening during meetings at which people discussed how to catch him. He was actually caught several times, but managed to escape every time, until he met his end at Vellaveli.

One day I met him near Dehiwatte, and noticed that he was hiding his gun in the sleeve of his shirt, keeping it in place with one folded finger.

I told him 'I understand who you are. Will you talk to me for a while?' I took him to [a nearby building]. There I said 'you leave these things, I will teach you ways to be a good man.' The boy responded 'now it is too late, I cannot change, but I will not harm people like you.'

In the beginning, relations with the Sinhalese were good, but they became bad over this boy. The Sinhalese people saw it as a Tamil harassing them, not as an individual doing this.

The "Che Guevarists" were active in the area before this¹²⁷.

During this period [that Kanda Podiyan was active], seven [Tamil] people were taken to the forest, and after being forced to pose for photographs¹²⁸ in the forest, they were killed. The Police officer in Muthur, who was a just man, refused to

¹²⁴ Here my source is mistaken. The first major violence hit Kottiyar Pattu in 1985. I found that it is common for people to mix up years when recounting events in the past. The first year mentioned may have been 1976 instead of 1978.

¹²⁵ "*Iyakkam*" is Tamil for "movement"; it is a colloquial term used to describe the LTTE, but probably in this case was intended to mean Tamil militancy in general.

¹²⁶ Vellaveli is an area in the South-West of Batticaloa District.

¹²⁷ "Che Guevarists" was the term used in the 1970s and 1980s for the youth who were involved in a violent uprising in April 1971, led by the JVP. The term is rarely used for those involved in the second JVP-led insurrection, which lasted from 1987 to 1990.

¹²⁸ This seems to have been a reasonably common tactic. I have heard stories several times of soldiers forcing civilians whom they had arrested to pose for photographs with weapons in their hands and/or wearing camouflage clothing, before being executed. The photographs were then used as proof that the dead had been terrorists. More common were stories about civilians who were first killed and then photographed with weapons or military equipment next to them to create an alibi for the killers.

accept the bodies, so they were buried somewhere in the forest. This happened in 1978 or 1979.

TG: Was Kankuveli burnt during this time?

Interviewee: Yes, the village was nearby. After this, we could not go to that area for a whole year. This was because politicians made it a big problem (Interview, Muthur, April 2007).

I had heard the story about Kanda Podiyan and the related burning of Kankuveli from several other people but nobody gave me this much detail, and the references to the people being killed and buried in the forest and to a big issue being made out of it by politicians were unique to this interview.

To what extent Kanda Podiyan was merely a criminal who did not engage in separatist militancy can be doubted. In November 2007, I had a conversation with a Tamil lady who originated from Kilivetti. When I asked her what she knew about Kanda Podiyan, her face lit up: "He was from Kilivetti. It was him who started the *iyakkam* in our area! He had a shotgun. There would always be groups of young men who would be with him, and he trained them in the use of the gun".

This lady knew Kanda Podiyan personally. Once, after she had given birth, he came and visited her with a gift for the baby. From what she further said, I gather that Kanda Podiyan himself did not deliberately engage in separatist politics, but that he did provide a kind of role model for wannabe militants, and that he did train them.

After the LTTE ambushed an army patrol at Tinneveli near Jaffna in July 1983, a wave of ethnic violence engulfed Colombo and spread to many parts of Sri Lanka. Tensions had already been building up for a while, and many observers are of the opinion that the riots, if not actively stage-managed¹²⁹, were definitely not stopped by the government of the time (Hoole 2001; Tambiah 1986 and 1996; ICES 2003). In his painstaking study of the Sri Lankan conflict, Rajan Hoole lends further credence to his thesis that the government of the time was actively involved in generating or stimulating ethnic tensions and violence by describing the situation in Trincomalee in the period before the riots broke out in Colombo (Hoole 2001: 69-82). Over a period of a month and a half, an unprecedented series of violent incidents took place, in which about two dozen people died – all Tamils. As far as I know, Kottiyar Pattu remained calm, with exception of the attack on Kankuveli and the chasing out of the few remaining Tamil families in Neelapola¹³⁰. In the process, an old temple for

¹²⁹ The widespread use of voter lists for the identification of Tamil-inhabited houses seem to point at active complicity from elements in the state apparatus. Several prominent people linked to the government were leading mobs. Minister Cyril Matthew, a rabid Sinhala-nationalist, was seen organising an attack against a prominent Tamil business (Hoole 2001: 110-111).

¹³⁰ Before the Allai Extension Scheme was implemented, Neelapola (which is located next to Kankuveli) was a Tamil village with the name Neelappalai. Originally, it was scheduled for development as a colony for Tamil people from the area. In 1958, "rough elements from

the goddess Pattini Amman was damaged and the statue taken. The temple has since been restored and is now under the patronage of Sinhala Buddhists, but among many Tamils the impression exists that the temple was totally destroyed. According to some Tamils whom I spoke to, the attack was a delayed act of revenge by Sinhalese inhabitants of Neelapola, who suspected the Tamils living in Kankuveli of supporting Kanda Podiyan.

I am inclined to view the 1983 attack on Kankuveli as something much bigger than just local revenge. After a famine among plantation workers and anti-Tamil violence following the elections in 1977 caused the displacement of thousands of Indian Tamils, Tamil NGOs (particularly Gandiyam) took it upon themselves to settle these people in the North and East of Sri Lanka. In Kottiyar Pattu, several hundred were settled in Puliyaadicholai (which forms part of Kankuveli). Some people have told me that it was not the whole of Kankuveli but Puliyaadicholai that was burnt in 1983 (see also Shanmugathan 2003). With Kanda Podiyan allegedly being an Indian Tamil, this might explain the targeting of Puliyaadicholai, were it not that at exactly the same time a whole string of state-sponsored attacks took place against settlements of Indian Tamils, and Gandiyam became the focus of Sinhala-nationalist wrath (Hoole 2001, chapter 3 and 5). After the attack on Puliyaadicholai, some of the affected families rebuilt their houses in the same place, while others were settled in Kumarapuram, near Kilivetti (only to be faced with a massacre thirteen years later). Apart from the incidents around Neelapola and Kankuveli, Kottiyar Pattu was calm between 1978 and 1985. This is not entirely surprising. At least until July 1983, *there was no active Tamil militancy in Kottiyar Pattu*. The militant groups that existed simply did not have enough recruits to cover large areas, and largely limited themselves to the Jaffna District, with the odd foray towards Mannar or Vavuniya. When, after the 1983 riots, militant groups *did* establish a presence in Trincomalee District, they seem to have started in the northern half of the district. Only gradually did they expand their network of jungle hideouts into Kottiyar Pattu, primarily to support a 'Ho Chi Minh trail'-like logistics network between Batticaloa and Jaffna (Whitaker 2007: 89-92). The first militant attack in Kottiyar Pattu does not seem to have occurred before mid-1985.

Not only were there no active militants; there was also hardly any presence of state security forces. Until about 1980, the only force that was present was the police, which was limited to police stations in Muthur and Serunuwara and a few posts in the Sinhala colonies; a very small army detachment seems to have been posted in Dehiwatte and Neelapola from the early 1980s onwards. After the LTTE killed about 60 Sinhalese in Kent and Dollar Farms, Kokkilai and Nayaru on the northern

colonisation schemes around Polonnaruwa" were settled there overnight on instructions of the hardline Sinhala-nationalist minister of agriculture, C.P. de Silva (UTHR(J) 1996). The village seems to have had a mixed population until the early 1980s, when little by little the Tamil inhabitants were worked out. The remaining Tamil villagers were chased away in 1983.

boundary of Trincomalee District on November 30th and December 1st 1984¹³¹, an apparently pre-existing plan to provide weapons to Sinhala settlers became politically acceptable¹³². Starting in January 1985, weapons were distributed and training was provided to colonists in three 'frontline' areas: the Weli Oya irrigation-cum-settlement scheme on the boundary between the Northern and Eastern Provinces, a range of colonies near the Malwattu Oya on the southwestern boundary of the Northern Province, and lastly the Sinhala settlements around Trincomalee, which had been designated as the intended future capital of the Tamil state. Weapons and training were provided to Sinhala settlers in the Allai Extension Scheme sometime between February and April 1985. At the same time, the army built up a permanent and growing presence in the area (Hoole 2001; Gunaratne 2000; Vije 1986).

For many decades farmers of all communities used to have shotguns to keep wild boar out of their paddy fields, but the possession of firearms had been banned under Emergency Regulations. Even as weapons were being distributed among Sinhalese, this ban was enforced against Tamil farmers (Rasaratnam 1999, chapter 14). By taking away this meagre resource for self-defence from Tamil civilians, the power balance was further disrupted. A timebomb had been set up and armed; the waiting was for somebody to light the fuse¹³³:

¹³¹ The attacks on Kent and Dollar Farms, Kokkilai and Nayaru constituted the first massacres of Sinhalese civilians in the war. Kent and Dollar Farms had been Tamil settlements earlier. The inhabitants had been chased out several months before the massacre, and replaced by Sinhala ex-convicts and other ruffians who were engaged in sustained harassment of the surrounding Tamil population (Hoole 2001). The settlement of Sinhalese happened under the guise of an irrigation system development. A region that used to be called 'Manal Aru' was renamed 'Weli Oya'. The development of the 'Mahaweli System L' was a clear deception. Hardly any investment was made in irrigation infrastructure, and most of the land remains unirrigated. It did however become a massive militarised wedge between the Northern and Eastern province (UTHR 1993b and 1995; Hoole 2001: 206-212). An acquaintance of mine once described the area as follows: "there are a thousand farmers there, protected by seven thousand soldiers" (private conversation, Batticaloa, early 2001).

¹³² Gunaratne (2000) indicates that the plan of arming settlers already existed earlier, but was considered politically inappropriate. While Gunaratne presents the arming of settlers as an initiative of a few well-meaning civilians, soldiers and monks, the fact that the president's son led the operation and that Air Force helicopters and planes were used to transport the weapons and trainers indicate clear involvement of the highest levels of the state.

¹³³ Twenty-one years later, there was again an elaborate distribution of guns for 'self-defence', and 'protection against elephants', in many Sinhala and Muslim villages (some people whom I spoke to openly doubted why Sinhalese in the suburbs of Trincomalee would need to protect themselves against elephants, as there was no jungle there). President Mahinda Rajapakse instituted the '*Jathika Saviya*' programme, ostensibly a village development programme. However, the core of the programme seems to have been the distribution of weapons and the recruitment and training of thousands of new home guards. All that was needed to be issued a gun was a letter from the *Grama Sevaka*, which stated that

“Arming border Sinhalese was bound to provoke a steep increase of tensions as they actually did. An individual bully with a gun was going to make, apart from his neighbours, also those in adjacent Tamil villages insecure. This in turn was bound to increase militant recruitment in Tamil villages, followed in time by serious action against Sinhalese thought to be close to the Army. This process was bound to push relations to breaking point, resulting in uncontrolled violence. Further, arming Sinhalese home guards with shotguns has been conclusively shown to be futile over the years. Home guards proved useless against attacks by Tamil militants coming in groups with surprise on their side, armed with automatics.” (Hoole 2001: 326)

4.2.2 The carnage of May and June 1985

The proverbial fuse was lit within a few months after the distribution of arms to settlers in the Allai Extension Scheme. In May and June 1985, an orgy of violence resulted in some 200 deaths in the area, and changed Kottiyar Pattu forever.

On May 7th and 9th, 1985, two landmine attacks by the LTTE in the village of Valvettithurai¹³⁴ in the Jaffna peninsula killed ten soldiers and an officer. This triggered a string of tit-for-tat attacks that spread across much of the North-East. May 10th saw a revenge massacre of 70 Tamil civilians in Valvettithurai by the Sri Lankan Army. Four days later, a group of LTTE cadres walked into the sacred area of Anuradhapura and started shooting indiscriminately. In the mayhem, 120 Buddhist worshippers were killed and 85 were injured. The massacre at one of the most sacred sites of Sinhala Buddhism shocked the nation, and triggered a wave of reprisal massacres. On the two days following the Anuradhapura massacre, 75 Tamil civilians lost their lives; dozens more were killed in the following weeks. In the northern half of Trincomalee District, about 30 people were killed up until May 24th

the bearer of the letter was considered fit to carry a weapon. Of course, the guns were only available for Sinhalese and Muslims. 1,600 Muslim youth from Muthur and Thoppur were recruited as home guards in early 2006 and given two weeks of training. When they were subsequently told that they would be incorporated in the Sri Lankan Army to form a Muslim regiment that could be posted anywhere in the country, the vast majority quit and went home. In the Sinhala villages, several hundred youth (including, as a special group, the pre-school teachers) were trained as home guards, and many others were simply given weapons. This contributed considerably to tensions and instability in the area (interviews in Kottiyar Pattu, 2006 and early 2007).

¹³⁴ Valvettithurai, or VVT for short, was the birthplace of the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. Along with a few ‘daughter settlements’ that had been established near Trincomalee in the late nineteenth century, VVT had a reputation for smuggling contraband between India and Sri Lanka.

(Hoole 2001: 331-332)¹³⁵. Then, the violence shifted to Kottiyar Pattu (*ibid.*; see also NESOHR (2007) and Sinhaya (2009) for accounts from Tamil and Sinhala nationalist perspectives).

On May 24th, two Tamil civilians from Kankuveli were killed by Sinhala home guards in or near Dehiwatte. The next day, two Tamil civilians from Lingapuram were killed by Sinhala home guards not far from Kankuveli. This was followed by the burning of forty Tamil houses in Poonagar by Sinhala home guards from Mahindapura. "As though in a bid to orchestrate further violence, the Government announced fictitiously over the state media that about 40 houses of Sinhalese had been set on fire and destroyed at Mahindapura" (Hoole 2001: 332).

On the same day, four Tamil civilians from Lingapuram (LB3 colony) disappeared, presumed killed by Sinhala home guards, and three Tamil youths fishing near Koonithivu were shot and killed by the Army. On May 27th, Sinhalese home guards stopped a bus near Mahindapura, killed six Tamils on the bus and injured one more. In four days, 17 people (all Tamils) had lost their lives, but this was only foreplay.

The next act in the drama took place after a lull of four days. On May 31st, around 8.30 pm, Thanganagar was raided by police and home guards. About fifty houses were burnt, and 37 Tamils were taken. They were killed and the bodies burnt along the Allai-Kantale road. One person survived. A little while later, "Tamil militants, believed to be of the TELO, opened fire at the Sinhalese villages of Mahindapura and Dehiwatte killing 5 civilians" (*idem*: 333)¹³⁶. In the national press, a big deal was made out of this attack: after the Anuradhapura massacre, this was presented as further evidence of the mortal threat that the Tamil militants posed to innocent Sinhala civilians. Note however that T. Sabaratnam, a generally well-respected Tamil journalist, claims in his biography of the LTTE leader Prabhakaran that those killed were home guards and not mere civilians (Sabaratnam 2005, chapter 42).

An article in the New York Times of June 2nd, 1985, citing a "senior member of the Government party", states that "at least fifty" people were killed and "more than 50"

¹³⁵ Space does not permit me to elaborate on the many violent events that have occurred in the northern half of Trincomalee District. More detailed accounts can be found in Hoole (2001: 69-82, 202-214 and 308-349) and UTHR(J) (1993a, b and c).

¹³⁶ Sinhaya.com (2009) dates this event on May 30th, which would mean it happened before the incident in Thanganagar. On the other hand, some Tamil sources, like Vije (1986) date the incident in Thanganagar on May 30th as well. The order of these two events does carry some weight, in the sense that whichever attack occurred first may be perceived as unprovoked, while the second incident was a swift retaliation. On the other hand, the maelstrom of violence had already been unleashed in Kottiyar Pattu a few days earlier, and until the attack in Mahindapura and Dehiwatte all the incidents had been one-sided: Sinhalese (home guards and Army) attacking Tamils. In the lists that I am aware of, the Dehiwatte attack is marked as the fifth incident in which Sinhala civilians were killed by Tamil militants.

houses were burnt by “separatist guerrillas” in Seruwila, Neelapola, Dehiwatte and Mahindapura, all *Sinhala* villages (‘New Sri Lanka attacks reported’, *New York Times*, 2-6-1985). The next day, the government denied this and stated that only five people had died (‘Only five were killed in terrorist attack’, *Sun*, 3-6-1985; ‘Govt states only 5 were killed in Trinco’, *Island*, 3-6-1985). The initial report was actually fairly correct, but – as shown above – the bulk of the damage took place in a Tamil village and was inflicted by Sinhalese rather than the other way around.

The next day, on Saturday, June 1st around 2 p.m., “the Army, Police, home guards and a Sinhala mob from Dehiwatte” descended on Kilivetti, killed ten Tamils, burnt 125 houses, and took eight men and five women back to Dehiwatte, where the men were killed and the women raped (Hoole 2001: 333). “Later people from Kilivetti obtained help *from some local Sinhalese* to rescue the women. They went with cloth and sarongs to cover their naked bodies. One of them was found tied naked to a tree” (*ibid*; emphasis mine). The death toll would have been much higher if someone from Dehiwatte had not warned an acquaintance in Kilivetti that an attack was being planned, enabling most of the people to find refuge in surrounding Muslim villages (*ibid*).

There is an important detail here. While it is undeniable that Sinhala mobs were attacking Tamil civilians, not everybody joined in and not everybody agreed with what was happening. I contend that for a group of Sinhalese to be able to walk over to the raped Tamil women and rescue them, they either had to have the backing of a sufficiently powerful section of the local leadership, or be sufficiently large in numbers to prevent a backlash. The argument that the mob may have let the women go because their thirst for revenge was satisfied is not valid in my eyes, because less than 48 hours later one-sided anti-Tamil violence flared up more ferociously than ever, and the same mobs were involved.

On June 1st, militants attacked a navy camp and police station in Trincomalee, claiming to have killed 30 navy personnel (Narayan Swamy 2003a: 150). The next day or the day after that (Hoole indicates that different sources give different dates), thirteen (Tamil) civilians were killed and nine injured not far from Trincomalee town, when a bus was stopped by armed Sinhalese and the passengers attacked.

After a lull on June 2nd, an orgy of violence and destruction broke out in Kottiyar Pattu on June 3rd and 4th. Details are sketchy, but the end result was that *every single Tamil village within walking distance from a Sinhala settlement in the Allai Extension Scheme was destroyed in what may well have been some of the most destructive days of the entire conflict*. The villages of Kilivetti, Menkamam, Sivapuram, Kankuveli, Pattitidal, Palaththadichenai, Arippu, Poonagar, Mallikaithivu, Peruveli, Munnampodivattai, Manalchenai, Bharatipuram, Lingapuram, Eechchilampattai, Karukkamunai, Mavadichchenai, Muttuchenai and Valaithottam were razed to the ground by a looting and plundering mob of Sinhala soldiers, policemen, home guards, and ordinary civilians. Over 80 people were reportedly killed, and 200 disappeared (‘Over 80 killed, 200 missing, many homeless in Mutur after clashes’, *Island*, 7-6-1985). Estimates of the number of houses destroyed vary between “more than 1000”

(Narayan Swamy 2003a: 150) and 3,500 (Vije 1986, annex 3). The entire surviving Tamil population fled to Tamil villages that had not been attacked and to Muslim villages, where they were sheltered (Rasaratnam 1999, chapter 11).

The extent of the destruction explains why it was calm for two days before the attack: organising the logistics of destruction (manpower, fuel for burning the houses, etc.) on such a scale is a daunting task that takes some time. The logistics involved show that this was no ordinary case of spontaneous mob anger, but a well-orchestrated attempt at victimising the Tamil population in this part of Trincomalee District. The violence was also entirely one-sided. Without exception, all those who died or disappeared, and all those whose houses were destroyed, were Tamils.

After this, the sources that I have available do not document any incidents in Kottiyar Pattu for an entire week. This is not surprising: there probably was hardly anyone left to attack, and if there was anything left to loot or destroy there were no witnesses who would be interested in reporting it. The vacuum that was created by the displacement of the Tamil population was however bound to implode, since Tamil militants were no longer restrained by the possibility of revenge actions against Tamil civilians in the area. On June 11th, Tamil militants again attacked Dehiwatte (and, according to some sources, Mahindapura), and killed thirteen Sinhalese civilians¹³⁷. This time, the Sinhala population fled to Kantale and beyond. Many settlers went to their areas of origin, never to return.

Two days later, the military attacked the remaining Tamil settlements that were too far from the Sinhala colonies:

“On 13th June, violence and arson against Tamils in Cottiar Division [*sic*] resumed. Mr. Athulathmudali was present in the area on this day¹³⁸. 900 houses of Tamils were burnt at Kattaiparichchan, Sambur [*sic*], Chenaiyoor and Muthur. The arson continued in the coming days and Tamil civilians continued to be shot and killed along the roads and in paddy fields. In one incident in Lingapuram, Mr and Mrs Pathakuddy and their 3 children were shot and killed by the armed forces.” (Hoole 2001: 335)

In general, when people talk of the ‘troubles of 1985’, things tend to be phrased in such a way that the unsuspecting listener gets the impression that there was a series

¹³⁷ This second attack was later claimed to have been made by the LTTE, under the leadership of its Muthur leader Ganesh after whom, posthumously, the village of Ganeshapuram near Sampoor was named (‘Forces lose 11 men in mine blasts’, *Daily News*, 7-11-1986; ‘7 Policemen and four soldiers killed’, *Island*, 7-11-1986).

¹³⁸ Lalith Atulathmudali was Minister of National Security at the time, and regularly directed attacks in person. An acquaintance who was in Jaffna in the mid-1980s once told me how people used to tune their radios to the frequency used by the air force in order to have some early warning in case of an airstrike, and how he could sometimes hear Atulathmudali, who was flying overhead in a helicopter, indicating which targets were to be attacked.

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of attacks and counterattacks by mobs, and that in the end everybody fled. As will have become clear from the above, there was no such thing. There were two incidents in which Sinhala civilians were shot and killed by small groups of militants; there were no attacks by Tamil mobs; no Sinhala women were raped; and no Sinhala properties were damaged or looted. On the other hand, after a number of steadily escalating incidents, June 3rd and 4th of 1985 saw what cannot have been anything else but a well-planned and well-organised mob offensive against every single Tamil village within walking distance of the Sinhala settlements in Kottiyar Pattu, and when that was done, the armed forces took on a cluster of accessible villages that had no Sinhala villages nearby.

While this was going on, the Tamil villages of Thiriyai (400 houses) and Kallampattai (300 houses) in the north of Trincomalee District were attacked and destroyed by armed forces on June 5th. Things then calmed down somewhat, as the government declared a three-month ceasefire on June 18th, 1985. Two rounds of peace-talks followed in Thimpu, the capital of Bhutan, but did not lead to much. Even before the ceasefire expired, violence escalated again. On August 10th and 14th, sixteen Tamil civilians were killed in the north of Trincomalee District in two incidents. On August 17th, a rumoured (and probably wildly exaggerated) massacre of Tamils in Sambalthivu, just north of Trincomalee town, was taken by the militant groups as a cue to walk out of the peace talks. The day after the incident in Sambalthivu, Tamil militants killed 6 Sinhalese in the village of Namalwatte. This caused a large part of the Sinhala population of Morawewa and Gomarankadawela DS Divisions, north of Trincomalee, to flee (Hoole 2001: 335-336).

Again a month later, from September 4th to 9th, soldiers, home guards and Sinhala hoodlums attacked and destroyed the Tamil neighbourhoods in and directly north from Trincomalee Town:

“The last of the large-scale attacks intended to cause destruction was a marathon which went on uninterrupted from 4th to 9th September along the northern coastal suburb of Trincomalee. It covered the town’s main shopping area in Central Road and Main Street, through Ehambaram Road, Veeranagar, Thirukadaloor, Manthottam, Uppuveli Navalar Road, up to the 3rd Mile Post, Uppuveli Junction. It was an operation involving Sinhalese home guards ably assisted by the national armed forces from land, sea and air. All premises, private and commercial, were looted before being committed to the flames.

It was a grand carnival of light, sound and screams. The Air Force fired from airborne helicopters, the Navy’s gunboats shelled from the sea and the Army, armed to the teeth, took up positions to the north of the isthmus so that the good work could go on without being spoilt by intruders. The main business was done by Sinhalese home guards brought from outside Trincomalee and service personnel in plain clothes.” (Hoole 2001: 336)

An acquaintance from the area told me that the northward spread of the destruction was stopped when a group of Tamil fishermen decided to fight back. A mob of

Sinhalese who landed on the Uppuveli beach in a number of boats had not expected a counterattack, as so far everyone had simply fled for them. Being drunk, they were no match for the defenders, and after a while they fled back to where they had come from.

After five days, the carnage ended for rather cynical, but very practical reasons: “[f]urther destruction on such a scale was brought to an end because there was little else to destroy in the Trincomalee District.” (*ibid.*)

The carnage in Trincomalee District was one of the most destructive periods of the entire conflict, and – in terms of houses destroyed per day – the attacks on the Tamil villages in Kottiyar Pattu on June 3, 4 and 13 must have been among the most destructive single days in the conflict¹³⁹. It is therefore puzzling that – with the notable exception of Hoole’s book – the incidents in Kottiyar Pattu have barely received any attention in the literature on the Sri Lankan conflict. Even in the book “Tigers of Lanka” by M.R. Narayan Swamy, one of the more detailed descriptions of the Sri Lankan conflict, the incident is described in only one sentence: “[a]rmed Sinhalese went on a rampage in a number of Tamil villages in Trincomalee on June 4, leaving at least 30 people dead” (Narayan Swamy 2003a: 150). I contend that three factors contributed to the incidents receiving so little attention. Firstly, Kottiyar Pattu was and remains a backwater that few people of importance in politics, press, and academia are really interested in, and that even fewer people of importance are familiar with. Secondly, the events may have suffered from their timing because of the ceasefire. During the honeymoon period of any ceasefire, it is inconvenient and inappropriate to talk about gross human rights violations by either of the signing parties. By the time the honeymoon period of the 1985 ceasefire was over, there were many other events that were more pressing. Thirdly, there was a clear trend in the English newspapers of paying extensive attention to any attack against Sinhalese, but virtually – if not entirely – ignoring attacks against Tamils.

Following the twin attacks on Dehiwatte, about 3,500 Sinhalese were reported to have displaced from Kottiyar Pattu (‘More flee their homes in Trinco’, *Sun*, 8-6-1985). That amounts to about 25% of the Sinhala population of the area.

About 12,000 Tamils from Kottiyar Pattu fled to Batticaloa District (‘Tension in B’caloa over flood of refugees from Trinco’, *Island*, 17-11-1985). Within Trincomalee District, a further 12,000 Tamils were displaced (‘More Tamil refugees in Trinco’, *Daily News*, 28-6-1985). About half of these also originated from Kottiyar Pattu. With a total of about 18,000 displaced Tamils, this means that about 65% of the Tamil population of Kottiyar Pattu was displaced.

Many of the displaced Tamils and about half of the displaced Sinhalese returned between three months and three years later. I have not been able to verify how long

¹³⁹ For all this, there is only one – heavily censored – newspaper article in the archive of the Nadesan Centre that describes what happened on June 3rd and 4th 1985 in some detail (‘Over 80 killed, 200 missing, many homeless in Mutur after clashes’, *Island*, 7-6-1985).

the villages really remained empty, as everybody whom I asked about this gave me a different answer. What is clear is that the returning Tamil families were unable to live in their destroyed houses and that many were afraid to stay away from others. They were 'temporarily' settled in camps in or near their own villages, where many lived until the arrival of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in 1987 provided a sense of protection, which enabled people to slowly start rebuilding their villages – only see them get burnt down again in 1990. Returning Sinhalese were technically able to live in their houses, but from people's stories I get the impression that, at least in the beginning, quite a few people preferred to stay together (and near the existing police and army posts) for safety against attacks by Tamil militants.

4.2.3 October 1985: the first Muslim-Tamil violence

Initially, the violence in Kottiyar Pattu had largely bypassed the Muslim inhabitants. Moves to instigate violence between Muslims and Tamils had resulted in a string of attacks on Tamil villages by Muslim mobs in Batticaloa and Ampara Districts in April 1985. The mobs were led by members of the STF and Muslim thugs who had been sent from Colombo by a Muslim cabinet minister. A.L.A. Majeed, former MP for Kinniya for the SLFP, worked hard and initially successfully to prevent violence to break out in Muthur (Hoole 2001: 328-329). However, in October 1985 things started to go wrong. On October 15th, three partly burnt bodies of Muslim coconut sellers were found near Mallikaithivu Junction. They were on their way back from Neelapola to Muthur. The government claimed that they had been killed by Tamil militants, who tried to put the blame on the government. Authorities of the National Security ministry stated that "these senseless killings are an attempt made by the terrorists to create antagonism among the Muslims towards the security forces". ('Security for Mutur Muslims', *Daily News*, 17-10-1985)¹⁴⁰. On October 17th, a government press communiqué stated that two Muslims had been abducted and killed at Mallikaithivu on the 16th ('Terrorists abduct & kill 2 Muslims at Malikativu', *Island*, 18-10-1985). Whether this is the same incident or a different one is not clear. Without providing further details, Vije (1986, Annex 3) puts the number of casualties at 5 Tamils and 10 Muslims, which seems to indicate that there was more to the story than meets the eye.

In response to the incident(s), Muslims put up protest posters ('Terrorists kill three Muslim vendors', *Island*, 16-10-1985). Significantly, the government responded to the incident by taking "special measures to ensure the protection of the Muslim residents of Muttur [sic]" ('Security for Mutur Muslims', *Daily News*, 17-10-1985).

¹⁴⁰ This needs to be read critically. The accusation that the militants wanted to create antagonism against the government forces may indicate that Muslims genuinely suspected the state machinery of killing the victims. Given the cynicism of state propaganda of the day, I would consider it quite possible that it was the state that wanted to engineer communal problems in order to divide Muslims and Tamils, and put the blame on the militants.

On October 27th, the body of a Muslim cowherd was found on a prominent junction at the entrance to Muthur town with a notice explaining why he was killed. People whom I spoke to in Kottiyar Pattu commonly marked this as the first incident that triggered Muslim-Tamil violence. Many of my sources, both Tamils and Muslims, went to rather great lengths to explain how bad they thought this was, and they all stressed the point that before this happened, the relations had been good – to the extent that when Sinhalese burnt the Tamil villages in June 1985, many Tamils were sheltered by Muslims.

The newspapers reported that the man had been killed for refusing to support the militant cause ('Anti-Eelam Muslim a lamp post victim', *Daily News*, 30-10-1985; 'Tension in Muttur eases', *Sun*, 30-10-1985). Local narratives paint a somewhat different picture of the victim. Some of my sources claimed that he was a cattle thief who was caught by one of the Tamil militant groups (not the LTTE), and that the notice explained the misdeeds that the man was alleged to have committed. UTHR(J) (1993c, section 4.6) documents that a complaint letter about this man had been sent to the Muslim leadership earlier, asking the leadership to conduct an inquiry, and that the man was executed after the Muslim leadership refused to do this.

In response, Muslims burnt "a few" Tamil houses ('Anti-Eelam Muslim a lamp post victim', *Daily News*, 30-10-1985), in what was the first time the destruction reached Muthur town. This triggered the abduction of 20 Muslims, and a retaliatory abduction of 23 Tamils. Muslim and Tamil leaders, the MP for Muthur, and representatives of the Security Forces intervened and managed to secure the release of all those who were abducted on October 29th. In the morning of the same day, a Muslim father and his 14-year old son, one of them a (trainee) *mullah*, were shot dead somewhere in Trincomalee District ('Terrorists kill mullah and 14-year son', *Island*, 30-10-1985; 'Mullah and father shot dead', *Daily News* 30-10-1985). The next day, "several houses of Muslims" were destroyed by "bomb explosions" ('Muslim homes bombed', *Sun*, 31-10-1985). This triggered the flight of two thousand more people ('Exodus from Muttur', *Sun*, 1-11-1985). Five days later, the number of displaced was reported to have increased by 7,200, both Muslim and Tamil ('More refugees in Muttur', *Island*, 6-11-1985). I have been unable to ascertain in detail what happened. However, the true extent of destruction must have been much larger than reported in the papers. Every single Tamil from Muthur whom I spoke to about the 1985 violence said that they had lost all they had, as did many Muslims. About half of the population of the town became displaced.

4.2.4 Mines along the Allai-Kantale road

On November 6th, 1985, a police jeep was blown up by a landmine on the Allai-Kantale road, killing seven policemen. An army jeep that was sent from Vakarai with reinforcements was hit by another mine somewhere on the way, killing another four soldiers and injuring four more. This was the first reported mine attack along the Allai-Kantale road, and there were many to follow. I was first made aware of this when my translator and I were having tea in a roadside stall in Somapura, one day in February 2006:

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A policeman was there, and the shop owner and another man working in the shop, and they were all very talkative. They said the situation was bad, that the road from Kallar to Kantale had had the highest number of landmine blasts in Sri Lanka. The man working in the shop said his parents had died in a blast in 1983, and later someone pointed out the artificial foot of the old man who owned the shop [I had already noticed it a bit earlier] – he lost his lower leg due to a landmine. They also said that some 165 civilians had died there [I am not sure which ethnicity, only Sinhala or also Tamil and Muslim], and that people were afraid of the LTTE (Field notes, February 2006).

What I did not realise while having the conversation was that we were actually sitting next to a mass grave for 27 victims of one of these attacks ('Mass burial of victims', *Sun*, 22-2-1986). For the period from January 1985 to December 1990, I have found reports of twelve attacks along the Allai-Kantale road, most involving (claymore) mines and most at a place called Siththaru, in the newspaper-clipping collection of the Nadesan Centre¹⁴¹. In total, 128 civilians, mostly Sinhalese, and 21 soldiers and policemen were reported to have died in these attacks, and nearly 100 civilians and one soldier were reported to have been injured. The casualty toll may have been higher if some of the injured succumbed to their injuries after the attacks had disappeared from the newspapers.

In an otherwise somewhat tendentious article¹⁴², E.M.S. Ekanayake states that there have been "151 LTTE attacks on the Seruwila DS division within the timeframe of 1986-2000, which resulted in 585 deaths, and 250 reported injuries. Also, 94 Tamil civilians have disappeared within the timeframe of 1989-1992 (Police Crime Report 2000, Serunuwara Police)" (Ekanayake 2004:124)¹⁴³. It is clear that the mine attacks account for a disproportionately large part of the deaths and injuries.

¹⁴¹ Except for one, all attacks took place between November 1985 and May 1988. On January 26th, 1986, six landmines were found and defused, and thus at least one other attack was prevented ('Tiger fuel dump found in Trinco', *Sun*, 28-1-1986). A foreign deminer working in Kottiyar Pattu told me in 2005 that when the Allai-Kantale road was done up somewhere in the 1990s, demining proved too complicated, and the simple solution was to add a thick layer of laterite and compact it well – the pressure of the compaction would probably force any remaining mines to explode, and if anything remained, the laterite layer is a fairly solid protection against further incidents.

¹⁴² The article's underlying storyline seems to be that Sinhalese in Seruwila DS Division have suffered significantly more than Tamils or Muslims. While I do agree that many other publications on the Sri Lankan conflict tend to ignore the suffering of Sinhalese in the area (if any attention at all is paid to Kottiyar Pattu), I think that such a conclusion is not grounded in fact. The active support from the state and its military apparatus created a situation that was significantly more favourable for Sinhalese than for Tamils, with the Muslims somewhere in between.

¹⁴³ This presentation of facts is misleading, as it creates the impression that a disproportionately larger fraction of Sinhalese than of Tamils or Muslims was killed or injured. Firstly, the "585 deaths, and 250 reported injuries" are taken over a period of 15

4.2.5 November 1985-August 1987: massacres and counter-massacres

From November 1985 onwards, Trincomalee District saw a string of massacres and counter-massacres that continued well into 1987. This needs to be seen in the light of a general trend of using massacres as a tool of warfare, particularly between 1984 and 1990 (Sinhaya 2009; SPUR n.d.; NESOHR 2007; Anon. 2004).

On November 7th 1985, Tamil militants attacked the Sinhala settlement of Namalwatte in Gomarankadawela DS Division and killed at least twelve civilians, including ten children. The next day, a three-day operation was launched near Sampoor by the army, navy and air force, with the stated objective of finding those responsible ('33 terrorists killed, 80 arrested in army swoop', *Island*, 11-11-1985). While the jungles around Sampoor had become well-known as militant hideouts by this time, it is unlikely that the attackers would have been able to reach Sampoor from Gomarankadawela within 24 hours. Quite possibly, there was an additional reason for attacking Sampoor: the double landmine attack of November 6th, mentioned in section 4.2.4. The loss of fifteen men and two vehicles was the biggest loss that the forces had had to take so far in Kottiyar Pattu.

On November 11th, victory was declared: thirty-three 'terrorists' had been killed by the time the operation ended on November 10th (*ibid.*). Others had a different version of what happened: those killed were ordinary civilians. Apart from those killed, another seventy people disappeared and are presumed to have been killed. Over 100 houses were reported destroyed. (Vije 1986: Annex 7; Hoole 2001: 340).

Revenge was swift. On November 10th, a van hit a landmine on the Allai-Kantale road killing the Muslim driver and seven Sinhalese passengers, and injuring ten more ('Troops kill 33 terrorists, capture 80', *Daily News*, 11-11-1985; 'Terrorists first shot the van driver', *Sun*, 13-11-1985). The same day, six Sinhalese civilians were killed near the Kantale sugar factory ('6 killed in 'Uksirigama' attack', *Sun*, 12-11-1985; 'Terrorists attack village: 8 killed', *Island*, 12-11-1985).

Two days later, Trincomalee was declared forbidden terrain for foreigners and journalists, in order to prevent "mischievous reporting", that might "cause a backlash in the South" ('Mischievous reporting can cause unrest – Brigadier', *Daily News*, 13-11-1985)¹⁴⁴.

years, while the disappearances of "94 Tamil civilians" are taken over a period of four years, and on top of that, the year 1985 – in which a significant number of Tamils was killed as against a fairly small number of Sinhalese – is excluded. Secondly, the "585 deaths, and 250 reported injuries" include soldiers, policemen and home guards, while the 94 Tamils who disappeared were all civilians. Thirdly, the "585 deaths, and 250 reported injuries" are not specified by ethnicity. Fourthly and lastly, the population of the Seruwila DS division in 2000 was 62% Sinhala, 25% Tamil and 13% Muslim. For a proper comparison of casualty rates, the per capita casualty rate for each ethnicity should have been calculated and compared.

¹⁴⁴ The cynicism of this statement should be obvious. No attempts were ever made to discourage the reporting on massacres of Sinhalese civilians – on the contrary, journalists were regularly flown in by helicopter to the sites of the massacres within 24 hours! The only

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Around the same time, President Jayawardene declared Sampoor, Chenaiyoor, Kattaiparichchan, Koonithivu and “other villages” to be “prohibited zones”, which meant that nobody would be allowed to live there (“TULF protests over ‘forcible eviction’ of Tamils in Trinco”, *Island*, 25-11-1985). I am unaware of whether this was actually implemented or not. Twenty-one years later, the very same area was declared a High Security Zone, in order to protect the Trincomalee naval base (see sections 2.2.4 and 4.2.10).

In the rest of November, three more incidents were reported. On November 13th, eight militants were reported to have been killed, and 18 taken prisoner, at Ralkuli (“Terrorist casualties in Trinco encounter”, *Daily News*, 14-11-1985); on November 18th, 59 Tamils were arrested in a round-up in and around Muthur, and on November 27th, sixteen militants were reported to have been killed at Kattaiparichchan and Sampoor, while one soldier was injured (“Security forces kill 40 terrorists”, *Island*, 29-11-1985). I have found no further references to first two incidents, but the last incident is again strongly contested: UTHR(J) reported that “21 Tamils from Kadatkaraiachenai, Koonithivu and Chenaiyoor were killed by the army. According to the citizens’ committee 30 fro [sic] Koonithivu and 56 from Sambur [sic] were missing” (UTHR(J), 1993c, section 4.6).

On December 3rd, five soldiers and a civilian were killed when the jeep they travelled in hit a mine on the Allai-Kantale road (“Five soldiers killed in mine blast”, *Sun*, 4-12-1985). Three days later, ten ‘terrorist suspects’ who had been detained at the Seruwila Army Camp, were claimed to have been shot dead as they tried to escape (“10 terrorists shot dead trying to escape”, *Island*, 7-12-1985; ‘10 terrorist suspects killed in escape bid’, *Sun*, 7-12-1985). Given the context, and given that it is fairly common in Sri Lanka for arrested suspects to mysteriously die before they end up in court¹⁴⁵, there is every reason to suspect that these ten people were executed.

On Christmas Day, “[f]our home guards arrested two Tamil women from a house in Muthur, raped and shot them. One woman died and the other escaped with injuries” (Vije 1986: 29).

1986 began with the killing of a home guard at Sumedankarapura on January 2nd. While he was patrolling his village with a colleague, the home guard encountered a group of people who were looting window panes and doors from houses abandoned by their Sinhala occupants. The looters claimed to be Muslims and lured the home guards into the jungle, where one was shot dead. The other lived to tell the tale (“Home Guard killed”, *Island*, 8-1-1986; ‘Vigilante describes how fellow officer was shot’, *Sun*, 10-1-1986).

“mischievous reporting” that was prevented was the reporting of massacres of Tamil civilians, and that was very unlikely to cause a “backlash in the South”.

¹⁴⁵ Somewhere in 2007 or 2008, I read an article in a Sri Lankan newspaper that described how a murder suspect had ‘accidentally’ fallen out of a small boat and drowned when the police took him to a lake to look for the murder weapon which he said he had thrown into the water. The bizarreness of the search for the weapon was in its timing: it was conducted after dark!

On January 17th, three soldiers were killed by a landmine in Dehiwatte, and several were injured ('3 soldiers killed in landmine blast', *Island*, 18-1-1986).

The end of the month saw another three-day operation near Kattaiparichchan. Thirty-six militants were claimed to have been killed ('Forces take terrorist base in land-sea-air assault', *Daily News*, 3-2-1986). Almost three weeks later, on February 19th, a landmine exploded on the Allai-Kantale road near Siththaru, and hit a lorry that was travelling in a convoy of four vehicles. After the blast, gunfire was heard. 36 Sinhalese civilians and four soldiers lost their lives, and about 35 civilians were injured ('39 killed in mine explosion', 'Seruvawila tragedy', and "'To hell and back': Survivors tell their tale', *Sun*, 20-2-1986; 'The Dehiwatte carnage', *Daily News*, 21-2-1986).

The next two months seem to have been fairly calm. On March 23rd, a Muslim homeguard was abducted with his gun ('Navy destroy boat with terrorists', *Island*, 31-3-1986), and on April 14th, five Muslim civilians were killed as they got caught in a cross-fire ('Good work by army in Trinco', *Daily News*, 15-4-1986). Probably as a measure to prevent outside infiltration, the Muthur and Kuchchaveli Divisions were closed off to outsiders. To get in, a pass would be needed from the divisional administration ('Out of bounds to visitors', *Daily News*, 7-4-1986). For the people in Muthur DS Division, this caused great suffering. One day, when I was interviewing a man from Kottiyar Pattu,

I explained that I was trying to piece together what happened but I had noticed that many people are too affected by what happened to be able to talk, and I had heard that he might be able to give me an outline. The man said that he did not want to talk. People had moved on and he did not want to disturb them (he gave the example of people from one area going and raping a girl in another area, and subsequently a lot of boys from this area marrying girls from her area and moving abroad and having good lives).

Then he told about how the armed forces officers had called all GSs in the area, and told them that the Tamils in Muthur would be issued with a new ID card, without which they would not have a right to be in their villages. As the first group came to register for the ID cards (and have their pictures taken with a Polaroid camera), about 100 people were arrested, after having been identified by people with hoods over their faces as being LTTE, PLOTE, TELO, etcetera. They all disappeared. Subsequently people did not dare to go and register, but the lack of ID cards caused great fear because of the risk of getting arrested. "Fighting is one thing, but this..." (Fieldnotes, March 2006).

Chaos broke out in the district on April 20th, when the Kantale tank bund collapsed. The floodwaters killed 125 people, destroyed hundreds of houses and 3,000 acres of paddy land, and also cut Trincomalee's road and railway connections with Colombo ('Fresh theory on Kantalai disaster', *Weekend*, 27-4-1986). Although a bomb attack by Tamil militants was initially suspected to have been the cause of the disaster, an investigation by a team of engineers concluded that the masonry in one of the sluices had given way due to poor maintenance, thus causing the collapse of the dam.

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The end of April saw two military attacks. On April 24th or 25th, an LTTE camp in the jungle near Verugal was raided. Twelve cadres were reported killed, and several injured ('12 terrorists killed in jungle shootout', *Island*, 26-4-1986). On April 29th, a mine hit a bus at Kattaiparichchan, killing two policemen and a soldier, and injuring thirteen ('Three killed, 13 injured in landmine blast', *Daily News*, 30-4-1986).

The first week of May saw an attack by LTTE cadres on a Muslim settlement in the Kinniya division in which four died, ten were injured and several dozen houses were burnt ('Four killed, ten injured in terrorist revenge', *Daily News*, 7-5-1986).

Two weeks later, Sri Lanka's Buddhists celebrated the *Vesak* full moon day, which is among the holiest of days for Buddhists. On this day the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha are remembered. Tamil militants marked the festival with a string of attacks. On May 19th, nine Sinhalese were killed in Morawewa. On *Vesak* day itself, six or seven Sinhalese were killed and eight or nine were injured in two attacks at Block C/RB4 and Kallar/Somapura ('Ten killed in *Vesak* day terror strike', *Weekend*, 25-5-1986; 'Terrorists kill 9 in 3 villages in Trinco', *Island*, 25-5-1986). Two more Sinhalese were killed in the north of the district. Two days later, 21 Sinhalese were killed in another massacre ('Massacre at Mahadivulwewa: 20 shot dead', *Island*, 26-5-1986). In revenge, seven Tamils were killed in two attacks in Thampalakamam (Hoole 2001: 340). On May 27th, two home guards were killed and one was injured at Muthur ('Two home guards killed', *Sun*, 28-5-1986). Three days after that, on May 30th, a military convoy was attacked by a landmine. A bus was hit, killing 25 soldiers, and injuring several more; five civilians were also killed ('18 soldiers killed at Muttur; 9 dead in Cold Stores blast', *Island*, 31-5-1986; 'Death toll 30', *Sun*, 2-6-1986). On the same day, nine civilians were killed in a bomb blast in Colombo; on May 31st, the train between Batticaloa and Colombo was blown up at Veyangoda, killing 13 and injuring 50 ('B'caloa-Trinco train blasted: 13 dead, 50 injured', *Island*, 1-6-1986). On June 4th, 18 Sinhalese, including a Buddhist monk, were killed and several were abducted near Andankulam, just outside Trincomalee town ('Another terrorist strike at Trinco', *Daily News*, 6-6-1986). On June 11th, two buses were blown up in Trincomalee town, killing around twenty and injuring around seventy ('Trincomalee bleeds after terrorist attacks', *Daily News*, 12-6-1986; 'Carnage in Trincomalee as terrorists bomb two buses', *Sun*, 12-6-1986; 'Genocide', *Weekend*, 15-6-1986).

The attacks triggered a new exodus of Sinhalese from Trincomalee District. The army was sent in to protect outlying villages ('Army begins 'Operation Watchdog' in Trinco', *Sun*, 13-6-1986). Over five hundred Tamils were arrested during the days that followed, and ten Tamils were murdered in Trincomalee town ('500 Tamil youths detained in Trinco', *Island*, 27-6-1986; Hoole 2001: 341). The day after the bus bombings, a convoy of "20 Tamil refugees accompanied by 3 government servants and 2 village headmen" taking relief materials to displaced people in Eechchilampattu was attacked by homeguards from Mahindapura; "21, including 2 Muslims were killed, 2 were injured and 2 escaped." ('25 bodies found at Muttur', *Island*, 14-6-1986; '19 civilian deaths in Trinco to be probed', *Sun*, 17-6-1986; Hoole 2001: 341; NESOHR 2007: 101; Vije 1986: Annex 3). The government denied the report ('Only 3 bodies found at Muttur', *Island*, 15-6-1986). Hoole reports three more attacks at Thampalakamam, Kantale and Minneriya, in which 28 Tamils

disappeared, as well as an attack on the Kantale market that killed 2 and injured 18 Sinhalese.

On June 25th, a pick-up truck of the Seruwila AGA that was travelling to Kantale with a load of civilian passengers was hit by a mine at Siththaru. Sixteen people died, and seven were injured ('Terrorist peace 'starter': 3 attacks, 16 killed', *Daily News*, 26-6-1986; 16 killed & 55 injured in three blasts', *Sun*, 26-6-1986). The next day, almost forty Tamils were killed in two incidents at Thampalakamam and Sambalthivu, a village North of Trincomalee (Hoole 2001: 341).

July 5th saw the return of violence to Kottiyar Pattu, when an LTTE hideout at Kattaiparichchan was attacked. The next day, a Sinhala family on a bullock cart was shot at from the direction of LB3 (Lingapuram) as they were travelling on the channel bund road between Dehiwatte and Somapura. Two people were killed, and two were injured ('Woman and infant killed', *Sun*, 7-7-1986).

On July 8th, two fish lorries travelling from Trincomalee to Colombo with passengers were attacked 10 kilometers out of town. Sixteen Sinhalese died; there was one survivor ('Terrorists kil 16 civilians', *Sun*, 10-7-1986). Two days later, eleven Tamils were killed in a nearby Tamil settlement, and five in Trincomalee ('Survivors feigned death or fled', *Daily News*, 12-7-1986).

July 16th saw a gruesome massacre with a very cynical cover-up. Both the 'Sun' and the 'Island' of July 18th describe two parallel incidents ('37 terrorists killed', *Sun*, 18-7-1986; '16 terrorists killed in shoot out with troops' and '... 37 more die at Pathidal [sic]', *Island*, 18-7-1986). The first incident happened when an army patrol that originated from the Kattaiparichchan army camp was reportedly fired at from the jungle at Pattitidal. When fire was returned, 37 "terrorists" were killed, and a woman and child were accidentally killed in the crossfire. *There was no report of any army casualties*. Both papers add that the government ordered an inquiry into the events, after MP Amirthalingam (TULF) made allegations on (unspecified) incidents in Pattitidal. The second incident is described differently in the two newspaper articles. The 'Sun' claims that fifteen people were arrested in a 24-hour roundup at Pattitidal, among whom two EROS members. The 'Island' reports that the security forces, acting on information, surrounded an LTTE hideout "north of Dehiwatte", and attacked it:

"The terrorists had retaliated. In the encounter that followed 16 terrorists were killed and several injured. Security forces also believe that some civilians may have been victims in the shoot-out. Forces later recovered a large quantity of hand grenades with the LTTE insignia on them and other weapons. The forces suffered no casualties, according to these sources"¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴⁶ The claim that the hand grenades that were supposedly recovered had "the LTTE insignia on them" seems intended to graphically stress the 'truth' of the story, but it is almost silly. Hand grenades are merely expendable ammunition that nobody would bother painting logos on; even re-usable weapons like guns are rarely marked with insignia.

Nothing could be further from the truth. What happened was an unprovoked attack on a refugee camp, and all those killed were civilians. During the night, armed forces and home guards surrounded the Peruveli Government Mixed School (which had been turned into an IDP camp after the destruction of the surrounding Tamil villages). At dawn, they moved into the camp, opened fire, and burnt down part of the camp (interview with a survivor, Mallikaithivu, December 2004; see also UTHR(J) 1993c, section 4.6 and NESOHR 2007: 107-109). According to an eyewitness account presented in the NESOHR document, civilians who had gone to Mallikaithivu to work were killed there, and their bodies were thrown into wells. A number of women were raped. Different sources report different numbers of people killed: according to NESOHR (2007: 108), "48 people were shot dead and more than 20 were injured". UTHR(J) (1993c, section 4.6) reports that 67 were massacred, but that the bodies of only 32 victims were recovered – 15 of them women and children.

The next day, ten people (seven Sinhalese, two Muslims and one Tamil) were massacred by Tamil militants near the Kantale sugar factory ('Terrorists kill 10 colonists in swoop at Kantale', *Daily News*, 19-7-1986; 'Terrorists kill ten Kantalai Sugar Corp. employees', *Island*, 19-7-1986; Hoole 2001: 343). The morning after that, a round-up was staged at Manalchenai, not far from the site of the Peruveli school massacre, and 44 people were arrested, taken and killed. They were from Menkamam, Kankuveli and Mallikaithivu (Hoole 2001: 343, NESOHR 2007: 111).

On the same day, 21 Sinhalese were massacred at Medirigiriya, South of Kantale, followed by the blowing up of a bus in Vavuniya on July 22nd ('Death toll rises to 18', *Sun*, 22-7-1986; 'Mine rips CTB bus: 29 killed', *Daily News*, 23-7-1986).

Hoole places the string of incidents and massacres in May, June and July 1986 in a very specific context. On May 7th, the LTTE turned its guns on TELO, and in the process "massacred a large number of the TELO cadre" (Hoole 2001: 341). Because many of the killed TELO members originated from Trincomalee District, the LTTE had a major reputation problem there. This was resolved by drawing attention away through the creation of another problem. The LTTE knew that if they attacked Sinhala targets, retaliation would be swift to follow, thereby putting the Tamil civilians in grave danger. In such a situation, the LTTE could then present itself as capable of avenging the injustice done to the Tamils by staging yet more attacks against Sinhala civilians, in the process regaining the trust of the Tamil population.

In the second week of August, severe Tamil-Muslim violence broke out in and around Kalmunai, causing over 10,000 people to flee their homes ('Clashes continue in Kalmunai: nine dead', *Sun*, 13-8-1986). The violence continued until at least the end of the month ('Tension mounts in Kalmunai as terrorists abduct six more', *Weekend*, 31-8-1986; 'Kalmunai clash: Army takes over', *Island*, 1-9-1986). While this was going on, a Muslim home guard was shot dead in Muthur on August 20th. No backlash seems to have followed ('Home guard and old farmer shot dead', *Sun*, 21-8-1986).

After this, the situation seems to have calmed down somewhat. In September, two more landmine attacks at Kattaiparichchan were reported that killed three soldiers

and injured five ('Landmine injures 4 soldiers', *Island*, 1-9-1986; '3 patrolmen killed by landmine', *Daily News*, 29-9-1986). UTHR(J) (1993c, chapter 7) reports two incidents in which four Tamil civilians were killed in retaliation for an (unspecified) incident involving Sinhalese on September 26th.

The next incident of significance took place on November 5th, when 'Ganesh', the LTTE's area leader for Muthur was killed at Periyapalam ('2 terrorists shot dead', *Sun*, 6-11-1986).

From February 14th to 18th, 1987, the security forces carried out another operation in Kottiyar Pattu. At the time, newspapers reported that several militant camps had been overrun, and at least 12 militants were killed and 10 captured ('12 terrorists killed in Muttur', *Sun*, 17-2-1987; 'Terrorist mine factory raided', *Island*, 17-2-1987; 'Freedom returns as Tigers retreat', *Daily News*, 18-2-1987; 'Tree LTTE camps in Muttur destroyed', *Island*, 18-2-1987). The *Daily News* article even claimed that militants were now fleeing from Muthur, because it had got too dangerous for them. An article in the 'Island' of March 29th gives a fairly elaborate description of a journalist's visit to Trincomalee and Muthur. In the article, the author describes a search for casualty figures of the army operation. The answers are revealing. An army colonel who is the Co-ordinating Officer (CO) for Trincomalee District claimed that there were no civilian casualties, but that "24 terrorists were killed". Civilian sources contest these claims:

"[w]e have been given a figure of 23 civilians killed and fifty six missing. In Muttur [sic] we are given a death toll of 48. Earlier a representative of the Trincomalee Citizen's Committee has said 56 people died. The CO seizes on this and points out that an army on the move cannot really stop to make an accurate count of bodies. Death tolls are estimated when the operation is over, and incidents are reported to the police." ('Fear grips Muttur-Trinco border', *Island*, 29-3-1987)

As had by now become an almost standard pattern, the militants retaliated by attacking a lorry on the Allai-Kantale road at Siththaru, killing its three occupants ('Landmine kills driver, two others', *Island*, 24-2-1987).

The middle of April is Sinhala/Tamil New Year. This holiday is celebrated with fun and games, and many people return to their home areas. In Muthur, three Muslims taking part in a cycling race were shot dead, allegedly by Tamil militants ('3 Muslims shot by terrorists', *Sun*, 13-4-1987). A few days later (which happened to be Good Friday), three buses carrying people on their way back to Trincomalee after the holidays were waylaid near Habarana, and most passengers (including 31 security forces personnel in civils) were massacred by LTTE cadres. About 130 people were killed and several dozen injured ('Black Friday massacre', *Island*, 18-4-1987; 'Terrorists slaughter 122 bus travellers in East', *Sun*, 18-4-1987; 'Survivors talk of massacre', *Weekend*, 19-4-1987).

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In response, the army launched a “‘once-and-for-all’ mopping up of the LTTE’s suicide squads based in the Eastern Province” (‘Trinco troops poised for decisive blow to LTTE’, *Daily News*, 20-4-1987)¹⁴⁷. One of the focus areas of this operation was Kottiyar Pattu.

Two days after the massacre at Habarana, another 15 Sinhalese civilians were killed in a village near Kantale (‘15 civilians killed by Tigers’, *Sun*, 21-4-1987). Again two days later, a massive bomb went off in the Pettah bus stand in Colombo, killing over 100 people and injuring around 300 (‘Hospital staff rally round’, *Daily News*, 22-4-1987).

On April 26th, 1987, a vehicle carrying troops was hit by a landmine near Thoppur, killing six soldiers, a policeman and a civilian (‘Eight killed as vehicle hits landmine’, *Island*, 27-4-1987). On the same day, a clash took place between the LTTE and government armed forces near the Tamil village of Pattitidal. In the clash, a Muslim home guard and two others (possibly soldiers) died. In retaliation for the attack, armed forces descended upon Pattitidal. Almost the entire population fled, except for three Christian households who were having a prayer meeting as it was a Sunday. They were shot and cut to death, after which the house they were in was set on fire (NESOHR 2007:117-119, UTHR(J) 1993c, section 4.6).

In the months that followed, the attention shifted away from Trincomalee to particularly Jaffna; very few incidents are documented in the newspaper cuttings that are kept at the Nadesan Centre.

4.2.6 August 1987 – April 1990: the Indian Peace Keeping Force

In the middle of 1987, the Indian government intervened in the Sri Lankan conflict. At that time, the Sri Lankan army had nearly taken control of Jaffna, at heavy cost to the civilian population. India compelled Sri Lanka to sign an agreement that would see a cessation of hostilities, devolution of power, and the deployment of the IPKF to the North and East of Sri Lanka to enforce the cessation of hostilities, maintain law and order, and to facilitate elections for the newly-formed North-Eastern Provincial Council. The presence of the IPKF changed the local power balance because the Sri Lankan armed forces had to stay in their barracks, and the home guards had to hand in their guns. This enabled Tamil militant groups to regroup and recuperate. Incidents against Tamils significantly reduced, but the number of attacks by the LTTE against Sinhalese increased dramatically. Another change that happened was that the LTTE, which hardly had any presence in Kottiyar Pattu before 1987, was able to establish itself and – within a short period – become the dominant militant

¹⁴⁷ Note that this was written 2 ½ months *before* the LTTE carried out its first suicide bombing on July 5th, 1987. The reference to suicide squads is to the practice of wearing cyanide capsules to prevent capture, rather than to the suicide attacks that the LTTE became notorious for in subsequent years.

group in the area. Even then, it is important to realise that the total number of Tamil militants in Kottiyar Pattu was probably not more than a few dozen until the middle of 1990.

The honeymoon did not last very long. In early October 1987 the LTTE took up arms against the IPKF, which soon got mired in a losing battle that was largely fought in Jaffna and the jungles of Batticaloa (Gunaratna 1994; Dixit 2003; Singh 2001; Singh 2006). Trincomalee District saw a string of attacks against Sinhalese in the first ten days of the month, in which about 260 were killed. The primary targets were the Sinhala settlements that had been set up to form a ring around the old town, from Sirimapura via Mihindupura to China Bay. The outlying agricultural colonies were less affected, but a large part of the farmers had already fled in 1985 and 1986. The difference with the 1986 massacres was that this time, the Tamil militants sought to physically destroy Sinhala property on a much larger scale than earlier (Hoole 2001: 226-8; 'LTTE rampage in Trinco continues', *Sunday Times*, 4-10-1987; 'Trinco burns 24 hours after truce with Tamil terrorists', *Weekend*, 4-10-1987; 'The port of trouble', *Sun*, 6-10-1987; 'The blow up in Trincomalee', *Weekend*, 11-10-1987). While this was going on, two LTTE vessels ferrying arms to Trincomalee were apprehended. In order to avoid being transferred to Colombo, a number of the captured LTTE cadres, including some leaders, committed suicide ('Captured 17 tigers take cyanide en masse', *Sun*, 6-10-1987). In response the LTTE started fighting the IPKF with devastating consequences, particularly in Jaffna (Hoole *et al.* 1992).

On October 15th, the LTTE shot dead 14 Sinhalese travelling on two lorries on the Allai-Kantale road (SPUR n.d.).

As the attacks against Sinhala settlements eased after October 9th, Muthur town was struck by violence. According to the newspapers, Tamil rebels had attacked and set fire to the camps of the Sri Lankan army and the IPKF, the police station, the DS office, the education office and a petrol shed, after which they set fire to about 50 houses and shops of Muslims. In response to this, Muslims reportedly burnt down a number of Tamil houses ('Tigers attack Muttur as IPKF advance on Jaffna', *Daily News*, 14-10-1987; 'Tiger rampage in Muttur', *Sun*, 14-10-1987; 'Tigers' burn Muttur army camps', *Island*, 14-10-1987). Some people I spoke to in Muthur claimed that the violence was instigated by the IPKF. The first batch of IPKF soldiers in Muthur apparently came from Tamil Nadu, and connived with the EPRLF to arrest Muslims, who were accused of belonging to the 'jihad' group (see section 7.3.5). Muslims had been upset about this, and attacked the EPRLF office. In response, the EPRLF had attacked Muslim houses while the IPKF stayed in their barracks (interview, Muthur, March 2008). UTHR(J) gives a third version, documented from local testimony in 1993:

"By the time the IPKF arrived in August '87, relations between the LTTE and the Muslims had soured. In early September 1987, Habib Mohamed, AGA/Muthur was shot dead. Muslim civilians stoned the local LTTE office. On 12th October 1987, a Muslim police constable was murdered. The police and homeguards started shooting Tamils. The LTTE then retaliated against Muslims. Mr. A.L.A.

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Majid [sic], SLFP, MP for Kinniya, was then very active trying to bring about a settlement. The LTTE invited him to Vavuniya for talks. During the IPKF presence the Muslims generally had it rough. Majid [sic] was assassinated [sic] just after the commencement of war between the IPKF and the LTTE on 10th October 1987. Those who attribute the murder to the LTTE cite his closeness to the IPKF. Others who are sceptical [sic] about the LTTE wanting to murder him suspect the Cassim group within the Sri Lankan army. This group had been credited with a mission to bring about a breach between Tamils and Muslims - a mission later taken over by the LTTE" (UTHR(J) 1993c, section 4.6).

In the Muslim-Tamil violence of 1985 and 1987, quite a few people must have been killed. In his photobook "Paradise in Tears", Victor Ivan has included a photograph of a Muslim protest placard with the text "over 200 killed in Muthur so far" (2008: 179). This photograph was taken in late December 1987 or early January 1988.

While the IPKF and the LTTE fought their battles, the Sri Lankan government had its hands full with a JVP-led insurgency that had erupted in response to among others the Indian intervention. This insurgency and its brutal suppression caused the deaths of an estimated 60,000 people between 1987 and 1990, the vast majority gruesomely killed by forces linked to the state (Gunaratna 2001, Alles 1990, Chandraprema 1991). On October 4th, 1987, JVP activists overran the army camp at Kallar, and ran away with seven guns, some ammunition, and some spare parts ('IPKF acts to restore peace in Trincomalee', *Sun*, 6-10-1987). Ostensibly, this was done to defend the Sinhala villages in the areas against the Tamil rebels and against the IPKF. Since the army was confined to its barracks under the peace agreement and the guns of the home guards had been confiscated, the colonists were in no position to defend themselves, and the state could not protect them either. However, the JVP never attacked either the IPKF or the LTTE. Chandraprema claims that the JVP used the plight of the fleeing settlers to boost its propaganda against the peace agreement and against the government, and even went to the extent of staging attacks on colonies to chase more settlers away (1991: 179-184).

In my conversations with people in Kottiyar Pattu, the IPKF was rarely mentioned. If the IPKF was mentioned at all, then generally by Tamils making the point that the arrival of the IPKF brought a period of peace and quiet for the Tamils (with exception of the abovementioned violence in Muthur town), who were able to resettle in their villages and rebuild their houses. In his "The story of a banyan tree", Rasaratnam describes the comparative calm:

"There was a lot of fun at the banyan tree [a tree at a key junction in Muthur town] during the time of the Indians. There would always be four persons standing 'sentry' by the banyan tree. We also come and squat there. The English of the Indian is laughable. He would say 'No, go' for 'Don't go' and 'Go' for 'Go'. When four soldiers stand sentry, forty would shop in the bazaar. They would buy small umbrellas, flash lights, coconut oil, tape recorders, cassettes, TVs and so on, which are valuable in India. When they take it there, they do not have to pay any tax." (Rasaratnam 1996a, chapter 48)

Things were not entirely peaceful though. UTHR(J) reports the killing of ten civilians in the village of Pattitidal by the IPKF (1993c, section 4.6), and several people whom I spoke to mentioned that a number of Tamil villages were burnt a second time in 1987.

4.2.7 The carnage of June 1990

After the JVP insurrection had been crushed, the government and the LTTE agreed to a ceasefire in order to make the IPKF redundant. Formal peace talks were held, but as soon as the IPKF left tensions began building up again.

After a few incidents had raised the stakes, the LTTE overran a range of police stations in the East on June 10th, capturing and executing about 600 Sinhala and Muslim policemen. This in turn triggered a massive counteroffensive by the Sri Lankan armed forces. Within a few months, almost a million Sri Lankans (overwhelmingly Tamils) had to flee from their homes. In the East, almost every other village was razed to the ground, and thousands of people died or disappeared (Sessional Paper no. VII 1997; UTHR 1990a; UTHR 1990b; Lawrence 1997)

V.A. Rasaratnam has succinctly described the start of the war in his stories "Boldness" and "The story of a banyan tree" (with a Muslim as the narrator in both stories):

"[After the IPKF left, the LTTE] were wandering in Muthur. They built a sentry near the army camp. Suddenly one night you hear gun shots from both sides. The navy fired shells from gun boats in the sea to chase the 'boys'. Many people were injured in Akkaraichenai and Vedankandu by the navy shells. Six Muslims died. All of us were on the beach. We ran into the village fearing the shells. Nine people died by the bombs from an aeroplane on Periyapalam mosque¹⁴⁸. [...] Later the army got the upper hand. We returned to our houses as usual." (Rasaratnam 1999, chapter 15)

"The helicopters are roaring above the head. Shots are flying from the sky. Shells are coming from the [army] camp. The sound of cannons from gunboats can be heard in the sea. We are afraid as to what is happening.

The 'boys' who were standing sentry on the road for three weeks have backed out. It is said that the army that has come by the sea has joined those in the army camp here. When it was dark there was no noise to be heard. It was quiet!

¹⁴⁸ With a near characteristic display of excessive force, the bombing raid was intended to kill a single LTTE cadre who had been spotted nearby (UTHR(J) 1993c, section 4.6). In 2006, a similar incident happened when heavy artillery shells were fired to kill individual LTTE cadres, but landed in the Arabic College compound, holding 30,000 Muslim refugees, instead, killing and maiming many Muslims.

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When it dawned the army had captured the village. I see them going about in all the streets. Army fellows have started 'clearing' the village. Clearing means cleaning.

We write 'Muslim house' hurriedly in Sinhala on the wall and door frame of our house. The army fellows break open all the Tamil houses and take all things in unoccupied ones. They even remove the doors and windows. They take the television, radio and [cassette] deck. They pile up the rest [of the things] and set fire to them. The fire is 'clearing' everything¹⁴⁹.

I am squatting under the banyan tree on the day the war starts. Teacher Veithanayagam goes this way carrying some of his books and his grandson. All the Tamil people are running away from the village carrying suitcases, bags and baggage. Even the tiny tots are running. It is pathetic to see them." (Rasaratnam 1996a, chapter 48)



Figure 4.1. The banyan tree in Muthur (own photograph)

An ex-LTTE cadre who was in Muthur in 1990 told me that in the weeks before the war they had, by smart manoeuvring, managed to give the army in the Kattaiparichchan army camp and the police in the police station the impression that

¹⁴⁹ UTHR(J) (1993c, section 4.6) confirms this: "When the army came into Muthur just after 5th July 1990, the Tamil houses were looted by the forces and to put the blame on the Muslims, the police ordered Muslims to set fire to Tamil houses"

Muthur was besieged by a large group of LTTE cadres – despite being with only about ten people. The unfortunate result was a massive counterattack once the war did break out. The destruction was still very visible when I visited Muthur in 2000 and 2001.

In the subsequent clearing operation, hundreds of Tamil youth were arrested; many never returned: “[a]t Kattaiparichchan and Mutur, 230 bodies were seen in a burnt state and hundreds of Tamils were missing according to reports” (UTHR(J) 1990b: section 2.2). Because the violence was so overwhelming, little has been documented in detail. From what has been documented in newspapers and in the reports of UTHR(J) (1990a, 1990b and 1993c), and from what people in Kottiyar Pattu have told me, I estimate that at least about 400 people were killed between June and September 1990, almost without exception Tamils.

4.2.8 September 1990 – February 2002: towards a stalemate

In the last months of 1990, the heat of the fighting reduced somewhat, and most of those who were displaced in Kottiyar Pattu returned home. The duration of displacement was measured in months, unlike in 1985. According to quite a few people whom I interviewed in the area, one factor that contributed to this was that in 1985, the conflict was perceived as being between Sinhalese and Tamils in general, whereas in 1990, the conflict was primarily perceived as being between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the LTTE. While the risk of death or disappearance had not reduced, the conflict had become less primordial and more military in representation. A changing discourse on the conflict from the side of the government contributed to this.

Another change that happened was a significant militarisation of the landscape. After the landmine attack on the Allai-Kantale road in November 1985, reinforcements consisting of a single jeep with a handful of soldiers had to be called all the way from Vakara (see section 4.2.4). By early 1991 “over 125 SLA [Sri Lankan Army] detachments, mini camps and camps” had been established in Trincomalee District, most of them after the war broke out in June 1990 (“Trincomalee – ‘the ruined city’”, *Sunday Island*, 3-11-1991). Though the withdrawal of troops during the Vanni offensive in the late 1990s led to several camps being closed, some new camps were opened in government-controlled areas during 2000 and 2001, and again from 2005 onwards.

Incidents continued to happen regularly, but were rarely reported on: violence had become so common that it had lost newsworthiness. Every so often, there were still bigger incidents. In March 1991, an ambush with a claymore killed eleven soldiers (‘Fifteen soldiers killed in Trinco’, *Island*, 11-3-1991; ‘Deaths of 11 soldiers: Tigers first detonated Claymore mine – Lance Corporal’, *Island*, 14-3-1991). A month later, LTTE cadres forced several dozen Sinhala and Muslim fishermen to the shore near Foul Point and opened fire. At least 11 were killed (‘Massacre of fishermen by Tigers at Trinco’, *Daily News*, 4-4-1991; ‘Tigers attack fishing craft killing 11 fishermen’, *Island*, 4-4-1991). In response, a search operation under the name ‘operation Smash’ led to

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the capture of 10 suspected LTTE cadres in Sampoor ('Koddiyar Bay killers captured by troops', *Daily News*, 19-4-1991; 'Major LTTE base in Trinco captured', *Island*, 19-4-1991). On September 10th 1992, the ferry at Kilivetti was blown up by the LTTE, killing 22 soldiers and 7 civilians, and injuring a soldier and two civilians (SPUR n.d.).

In 1994, the UNP lost its hold on power, and Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge became prime minister and (in 1995) president on a programme that was strongly pro-peace. A ceasefire was declared, and four rounds of peace-talks followed. Despite the high hopes, mistrust between the government and the LTTE kept building up, and on April 19th, 1995, the LTTE started fighting again. To mark the renewal of hostilities, LTTE frogmen destroyed two ships in the Trincomalee harbour (Narayan Swamy 2003b: 251-255; 'LTTE blasts two navy gunboats', *Observer*, 19-4-1995; 'Tigers break truce, sink two boats', *Island*, 20-4-1995).

A month later, Muslim-Tamil violence broke out in Muthur. After a Muslim soldier attached to the intelligence unit of the army at Muthur was shot dead by the LTTE, 24 Tamils who had gone to collect firewood in the jungle were abducted in revenge by Muslim hoodlums; three Tamils were killed. After this, the people of Kattaiparichchan displaced. The tensions were sufficient to warrant a visit by a Member of Parliament ('Tension in Kattaiparichchan', *Veerakesari*, 24-5-1995; UTHR(J) 1996 (introduction); 'Majeed pours oil on troubled waters', *Daily News*, 30-5-1995). In the same week, the LTTE massacred 42 Sinhalese in the village of Kallarawa, in the north of Trincomalee District¹⁵⁰. The army detachment at Kallarawa, which had lost a third of its men in an ambush only two weeks earlier, fled into the jungle when the attack started ('Tigers massacre 42 at Kallarawa', *Island*, 27-5-1995; 'Why did soldiers fail to defend Kallarawa village?' and 'Did Soldiers Desert Kallarawa Village?', *Sunday Island*, 28-5-1995).

February 11th 1996 saw a massacre at Kumarapuram, next to Kilivetti. In response to the death of two soldiers earlier on the day, troops from nearby army camps went on the rampage and killed 24 (Indian) Tamil civilians from the village. The responsible officer was merely transferred to another army camp in Kottiyar Pattu, after an investigation by a group of officers that included this man's immediate superior (UTHR(J) 1996; Shanmugathan 2003; 'Army, police probe attack in Muttur', *Daily News*, 13-2-1996; 'Govt probes civilian death toll in Muttur', *Daily News*, 14-2-1996; 'The Kiliveddi massacre', *Sunday Island*, 18-2-1996; 'Army's Mr. Clean image tarnished?', *Sunday Leader*, 18-2-1996). Ten years later, people in the area were threatened with a repeat of the Kumarapuram massacre if any soldiers would get attacked (see section 7.6.2).

After the LTTE started fighting again in 1995, Kumaratunge's government embarked on what it called a 'war for peace', which saw the successful recapture of the Jaffna peninsula in 1995, followed by a hugely expensive and ultimately unsuccessful bid

¹⁵⁰ This was the first massacre after a series of massacres on Muslim villages and revenge massacres on Tamil villages in Polonnaruwa District in 1992 caused international outrage. After the Kallarawa massacre, massacres have been rare.

to recapture the Vanni between 1997 and 1999. The army was so short of manpower that troops were taken from the East and sent to the northern theatre of war. Army camps in the villages of Pallikudiyiruppu, Selvanagar, Eechchilampattu, Verugal and Anaithivu in Kottiyar Pattu, and Kathiraveli, Vakara and Mankerni in the northern part of Batticaloa District were abandoned in mid-1996. By autumn 1997, camps in the villages of Mallikaithivu, Palathoppur, Pachchanoor, Mahindapura, and Selvanagar (this camp had apparently been re-established) in Kottiyar Pattu and Panselgodella, 64th Colony and Siththaru along the road to Kantale were vacated. In some cases these camps were handed over to small detachments of policemen; in other cases, the camps were abandoned entirely. This effectively handed over much of the territory between Muthur and Valaichchenai to the LTTE ('Demo in Seruwila', *Island*, 4-7-1996; 'Nine schools closed in Seruwila', *Island*, 6-7-1996; 'Seruwila woes remain unsolved – Thera', *Island*, 12-7-1996; 'Clockwork scenarios and the reality', *Sunday Times*, 19-10-1997). Rather remarkably, this significant shift in the power balance in the area did not cause an increase in violence. The LTTE itself was too busy with the battles in the Vanni. Apart from this, I contend that the LTTE had good reason for not staging big attacks in Kottiyar Pattu. Any serious attacks would lead to an increase of military presence in the area, which would make its use as a transit zone between Batticaloa and the Vanni difficult¹⁵¹. There was one exception: in October 2000, M.L. Ubaithulla, a candidate for the ruling party was killed in a suicide blast as he was leaving an election rally; at least 20 people died and 45 were injured ('Dozens killed in blasts', *TamilNet*, 2-10-2000; 'Sri Lanka: suicide bomber kills 24', *New York Times*, 4-10-2000). There was more than just politics behind this assassination: Ubaithulla had been head of the police intelligence unit in Trincomalee. In that capacity, he had earned notoriety in the 1990s, particularly for arresting men so that he could bribe their pretty wives or sisters to have sex with him; the men invariably never returned, and a number of the women ended up as prostitutes (conversation with local human rights activist, Trincomalee, 2005). On the same day, two home guards were killed in a firefight with LTTE cadres. Revenge was swift: the next day, seven Tamils civilians were massacred as they were working in a paddy field between the Tamil village of Poonagar and the Sinhala village of Mahindapura ('Civilians massacre in Trinco', *TamilNet*, 4-10-2000; 'Impartial inquiry into civilian massacre – TULF', *TamilNet*, 5-10-2000).

¹⁵¹ Something similar happened along the Valaichchenai-Polonnaruwa road. This road was the main route by which the army supplied its troops in Batticaloa. Crossing this road somewhere west of Valaichchenai was an important supply route by which the LTTE smuggled goods from Batticaloa to the Vanni. For both parties, it was fairly easy to ambush entire convoys. This rarely happened however. During the day, soldiers patrolled the road, and by night they mostly stayed put in their camps. During the night, the LTTE moved people and goods around. The only incidents of open fighting during the period that I lived in Batticaloa occurred around dusk and dawn, in cases where either the army or the LTTE was too early or too late and they happened to bump into each other.

In the middle of 2000, the LTTE managed to capture the strategic Elephant Pass, and almost recaptured the entire Jaffna peninsula. Ultimately, the tables turned and the LTTE was beaten back, but the cost on the economy had been so enormous that the state was unable to continue the war at this level of intensity. The LTTE's attack on the Katunayake airport near Colombo on July 24th 2001 ('LTTE's three times lucky terror at Katunayake', *Sunday Times*, 29-7-2001) dealt a further crippling blow to the economy. On its side, the LTTE ran into trouble after the 9/11 attacks in the United States. The 'war on terror' became a global phenomenon that the Sri Lankan government cunningly latched on to. As a consequence, the LTTE lost international legitimacy, and its fundraising operations became increasingly difficult. If only to recuperate, both parties had little option but to go for a ceasefire, which was signed in February 2002.

4.2.9 February 2002 – November 2005: cease-fire and new violence

Following the signing of the 2002 ceasefire, violence between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces stopped almost entirely for about three years. However, June 2002, April 2003, December 2005 and April 2006 saw violence and rioting between Muslims and Tamils, with people on both sides regularly accusing the LTTE, Muslim politicians and Muslim armed groups (the existence of which is publicly disputed by many Muslims, but was confirmed by trusted sources in Muthur) of being behind the violence. I elaborate on this Muslim-Tamil violence in chapter 7.

Peace talks that had been held intermittently after the signing of the ceasefire agreement broke down in April 2003. Several months later, President Kumaratunge took control over the defence ministry and two other key ministries from the government under Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. The reason she gave for this was that Wickremesinghe had been too lenient where national security was concerned, particularly around Trincomalee. The LTTE had set up a range of new camps around the Bay of Trincomalee, which was seen as a serious threat to the security of the navy base (Fernando 2008: 215-45).

In April 2004, the LTTE's eastern leadership under Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan (better known under his *nom de guerre* "colonel Karuna Amman") split off from the LTTE with about 5,000 of the estimated 20,000 cadres that the LTTE had in total. The official reason for the split was the claim that the LTTE was too much dominated by Jaffna Tamils, a resentment that had existed for many years already (UTHR(J) 1991, section 1.1). The talk on the ground was more mundane: Karuna had allegedly been found guilty of embezzling money¹⁵², and had been called for an inquiry that could not have ended in anything else than his execution. Therefore, to save himself, he

¹⁵² These claims were also not new. During a visit to some villages in the jungle west of Batticaloa about a year before the split, an acquaintance pointed out a big tiled house along a main road and told me that was the villa that Karuna had been building for himself.

jumped ship. Whatever the real reasons may have been, the result was first a successful offensive by the LTTE against cadres loyal to Karuna, and then a long drawn-out string of assassinations and counter-assassinations that filled the Tamil civilians in the Eastern Province with fear.

The physical boundary between the area where people mostly supported Karuna and the area where people mostly supported Prabhakaran lay at the Verugal River. When the LTTE began its counteroffensive, one of the key battles took place in Verugal. About 200 Karuna cadres, mostly child soldiers, surrendered and were promptly executed.

After Karuna sent most of his cadres, including about 2000 child soldiers, home (only to start a vigorous campaign of forced recruitment again not long after), both factions were severely understaffed and focused their struggle in Batticaloa District. Until mid-2005, Kottiyar Pattu remained very calm.

In the second half of 2004, tensions between the government and the LTTE were building up to the extent that in November 2004 everybody I spoke to in Trincomalee District was convinced that war would break out again by mid-January 2005. The LTTE was openly warning people to enjoy Christmas and the Tamil festival of Thai Pongal (January 14th), but to prepare for war immediately after. The tsunami that devastated Sri Lanka's coastline on December 26th disrupted this situation. For about two weeks, everybody was focused on helping the survivors, and whatever threats of war had existed were put on hold. I personally witnessed how the LTTE actively tried to take control of the emergency response in the East from the beginning by sending in hardcore cadres wearing T-shirts with logos of the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO – an NGO that had intimate links with the LTTE) to take over IDP camps, and by sending cadres of the Political Wing to convince the relevant government administrators that they should work through the LTTE. Largely because international aid agencies simply ignored them (for many expatriates this was due to sheer ignorance of the situation), this attempt failed (Gaasbeek 2005).

By the middle of 2005, the conflict between the LTTE and the Karuna faction heated up again, and cadres of the Karuna faction, which had by that time linked up with state intelligence forces, increasingly infiltrated into Kottiyar Pattu to attack the LTTE there (conversations, Trincomalee, 2005). In parallel to this, tensions between the Tamils and Sinhalese in Trincomalee District increased significantly from May 2005 onwards, after the highly provocative placing of a Buddha statue in the heart of Trincomalee town. A string of demonstrations and attacks followed. In Kottiyar Pattu, attacks by the LTTE on home guards and soldiers in the Sinhala villages near Serunuwara increased. Most of these attacks did not lead to any tension, but on several occasions where victims' relatives had links to nationalist political parties tensions occurred, which were usually brought under control by local negotiation mechanisms in a few weeks (Bock, Lawrence and Gaasbeek 2006; see also section 7.5 for a more detailed description and analysis of these events).

4.2.10 November 2005 – May 2009: the end of the war

A fundamental change took place in November 2005, when Mahinda Rajapakse won the presidential elections on a hardline Sinhala-nationalist ticket, with a narrow majority of about 181,000 votes (1.9% of the total number of valid votes). What is important to realise is that the majority of Sri Lankans was not in favour of Rajapakse's war rhetoric at the time, and that the elections were rigged. The LTTE effectively banned about 300,000 Tamils in the North and East from voting after allegedly having been bribed by the Rajapakse camp ('President's Tiger Deal Exposed', *Sunday Leader*, 8-7-2007). Also, some 400,000 voters in areas that were predominantly in support of Ranil Wickremesinghe, the opposition candidate, had been surreptitiously scrapped from voter lists ('400,000 voters to be stripped again', *Sunday Times*, 4-12-2005). Had these people been allowed to exercise their vote, then Ranil Wickremesinghe would have become president on a much less hawkish ticket. From this moment onwards, the Sri Lankan government became increasingly anti-LTTE, to which the LTTE responded with ever more attacks and provocations. In January 2006, five Tamil students were killed execution-style on the boulevard in Trincomalee town, in a joint operation of Army, Police, Navy and Special Task Force. These murders, committed in front of about three hundred witnesses, had the clear intention of terrorising the Tamil civilian population into silence (UTHR(J) 2006a and 2007a). After a bomb exploded in the Trincomalee market in early April 2006, many Tamil shops were burnt in revenge by a mob that was organised suspiciously quickly, while police and troops stood by and watched. The total death toll that day was about 25. The following week, violence spread to Kottiyar Pattu (see section 7.6). Another week later, an LTTE suicide bomber attempted to assassinate the Army Commander, Sarath Fonseka. In retaliation, the combined armed forces started a massive bombardment of LTTE-controlled areas in Kottiyar Pattu from sea, air and land. At the checkpoints on the boundaries of these areas, soldiers prevented civilians and NGOs from taking any significant quantities of goods into LTTE-controlled territories. As a consequence, tsunami rehabilitation projects came to a standstill, but worse, people from the area were unable to sell their produce and unable to buy food, which caused severe hardship. On July 20th, the LTTE blocked the sluice gates in the Verugal *anicut*, denying irrigation water to the farmers in the Allai Extension Scheme and very nearly destroying their crops¹⁵³. The Sri Lankan

¹⁵³ The official reason given by the LTTE was that a planned water project that was scheduled to supply Muthur and Seruwila with drinking water excluded Tamil villages in Eechchilampattu that are also chronically short of drinking water in the dry season ('Colombo caused Mavilaru crisis – Elilan', *TamilNet*, 26-7-2006). This seems to have been a ruse: two weeks before the sluice gates were closed, an SLMM representative who had visited the LTTE office in Sampoor ('SLMM Trinco head meets Elilan in Sampoor', *TamilNet*, 7-7-2006) told a friend of mine that the LTTE were under a lot of pressure from the civilians in the area to do something because they were starving. Following this line of argument, the

government responded with a massive offensive to capture not only the *anicut*, but the entire LTTE-controlled territory in the Eastern Province. This offensive was pre-planned, and the blocking of the sluice gates was merely an excuse: at least a month before the attempt to kill the Army Commander, the army camp at Kallar was rather suddenly, and with no obvious reason, upgraded to brigade status (conversation with SLA officer, Trincomalee, April 2006). A slow but massive influx of troops and military hardware followed. The LTTE, for its part, had vigorously intensified its provision of compulsory military training to civilians. On June 30th, some 6,000 people from the LTTE-controlled part of Muthur DS Division (a large part of the adult population in the area) participated in a 'graduation' ceremony after completing the training programme ('Six thousand civilians complete training in Muttur east', *TamilNet*, 1-7-2006).

It is interesting to note here that according to a report in the Daily Mirror newspaper, local Buddhist priests had already sorted out the issue with the LTTE and an agreement had been reached on re-opening the channel at the time that the Sri Lankan Army started its operation to capture Mavil Aru ('Military offensive 'disrupted deal with LTTE'', *TamilNet*, 1-8-2006).

While the fighting at Mavil Aru was ongoing, the LTTE overran Muthur town on August 2nd. After artillery shells fired by the army had hit several sites where people had gathered (killing about two dozen people and injuring many more), the entire population of Muthur town fled to Kantale on August 4th, where they were joined by the Muslims from Thoppur who had also fled the fighting. The LTTE stopped the fleeing population – about 40,000 people – at a row of hills 5 km out of town, and forced people to walk over a narrow path, where a hooded person picked out suspected Muslim militants. When somebody attacked an LTTE cadre, a gun went off. The sound of the gun alerted the army, which started firing heavy artillery and multi-barrel rocket launchers in the direction of the hills – putting the thousands of civilians who were stuck there at grave risk. The strange thing about this is that the fleeing civilians had passed an army camp about two kilometres out of town, and on top of the hills there was one army outpost that had not been abandoned, from where the sea of civilians was easily visible. Also, the army and the central government had been informed by the Muslim leadership that they were going to walk towards Kantale. The army knew full well that these civilians (most of whom were pro-government and anti-LTTE) were there, and still fired its heaviest weapons at them.

closure of the sluice gates would have been intended as a means to pressurise the government to relax the restrictions on taking goods in to Sampoor and Eechchilampattu. The government totally ignored this line of reasoning, and the LTTE came up with the rather weak argument of the drinking water pipeline.

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Through sheer luck, most of the shells and rockets hit the rocks, and only about 100 people were killed or injured. About 30 Muslims who were arrested by the LTTE never returned.

On the same day, Muthur was retaken by the government forces. Seventeen staff of the NGO Action Contre la Faim who had stayed behind were lined up and summarily executed by forces linked to the state (UTHR(J) 2006c and d, 2007b, 2008 and 2009a).

I was in Trincomalee during this week and was closely involved in the humanitarian co-ordination meetings. On August 4th, I drove a van towards Muthur to help with the evacuation. A few hours after the shelling at Kinanthimunai, I reached a place several kilometres before Kinanthimunai where I had to turn around because there were simply too many people on the road (figure 4.2). With about 30 passengers on board, I joined the row of vehicles that was evacuating people and drove back to Kantale.



Figure 4.2. People fleeing Muthur, 04-08-2006, around 3 p.m. (own photograph)

NB: Also in the picture is a vehicle of the NGO Action contre la Faim (ACF), part of a convoy that made an attempt to rescue their colleagues who were trapped in Muthur but was turned back by the army on the outskirts of town. About an hour after this picture was taken, 17 ACF staff members were lined up and shot through their heads.

NB2: The image is wobbly because there was something wrong with the camera, and because I took the picture while driving.

As the displaced reached Kantale, a big disappointment awaited them. While two large sites that could easily accommodate thousands of displaced were available (an abandoned sugar factory and a large Sinhala school), the Muslims and Tamils from Muthur and surroundings were denied access. Instead, they were herded into hugely overcrowded mosques and Muslim and Tamil schools. In September and October, the government discontinued the supply of water to the camps, forcing the displaced to return to Muthur at a time that many people considered Muthur still unsafe.

After the recapture of Muthur, the offensive continued. A slowly shifting and indiscriminate barrage from multi-barrel rocket launchers (MBRLs), heavy artillery, and aerial bombardment forced the LTTE and with it the entire population of the eastern half of Muthur DS Division and Eechchilampattu DS Division (about 25,000 civilians) to flee towards Vakarai. A body count was never maintained, but estimates by people from the area suggest that at least 180 Tamil civilians from Kottiyar Pattu died on their long flight that ended in IDP camps in Batticaloa District in January 2007 (UTHR(J) 2007c). An indication of the extent of damage that was generated during and possibly after the offensive can be gleaned from figures 4.2 and 4.3, which depict satellite imagery of the village of Sampoor, taken in June 2006 and September 2009 respectively. As can be seen, almost all houses were turned into ruins between the taking of the two images, while the school complex (in the middle bottom of the images) was turned into a military camp.

On December 7th 2006, the LTTE fired a few artillery shells at the army's main ammunition dump in Kottiyar Pattu, the Paddy Marketing Board stores in Somapura which had been requisitioned for the purpose. The shells missed their target, and instead hit a school right next to it, killing a teacher and injuring a teacher and nine students. Another shell hit a nearby house, killing a student and three adults ('Bunkers in houses at Serunuwara', *Daily Mirror*, 13-12-2006). The government, embarrassed by an artillery bombardment that had killed several dozen refugees in a school in Kathiraveli not long before, presented this as a case of the LTTE deliberately targeting civilians, and about half of the Sinhalese population of Seruwila DS Division fled to Kantale. Two days after this incident, army shells hit a school full of IDPs in the LTTE-controlled village of Palchenai not far from Kathiraveli, killing 15; the next day, 19 were killed in another school ('15 Tamil civilians feared killed, 41 wounded in 11 hour artillery barrage', *TamilNet*, 9-12-2006; '19 more Tamil refugees killed, new SLA offensive south of Vaharai', *TamilNet*, 10-12-2006).

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Figure 4.3. Satellite image of Sampoor, 17-06-2006 (source: Google Earth)



Figure 4.4. Satellite image of Sampoor, 27-09-2009 (source: Google Earth)

The displaced Muslims were home in September 2006. Though many wanted to get home in time for the Id-Ul-Fitr festival, those who did not yet consider Kottiyar Pattu safe as the fighting was still ongoing were forced back because the government stopped providing assistance (including the supply of drinking water) to the camps where Muslims were staying¹⁵⁴. The displaced Sinhalese were sent back to their villages as soon as Eechchilampattu was taken in late 2006. Most of the displaced Tamils were forced to return to Kottiyar Pattu, sometimes at gunpoint, between September 2006 and March 2007, only to find themselves dumped in incomplete 'transit camps' because the villages where they came from had been declared off-limits (IASC 2007, CPA and IMARD 2007). The population of Ralkuli and Eechchilampattu was allowed to return to their villages in early 2007 - only to find them plundered by the armed forces (conversations with various people in Eechchilampattu, Ilankaithurai, Punniyadi and Ralkuli, 2008). A large area around Sampoor was declared a High Security Zone (HSZ), and the residents were barred access. Over time, the size of the HSZ has been reduced, and people have been allowed to return to their destroyed and plundered villages as new areas were opened up. The people who originate from the remaining HSZ are still stuck in the camps, without viable alternatives for resettlement¹⁵⁵. (ICG 2008 and 2009; CPA 2009;

¹⁵⁴ In Kantale, where most of the Muslim IDPs found shelter, the local government was distinctly hostile to the influx of such a large group of non-Sinhalese. While the Muslim schools and the mosques were absolutely overcrowded and woefully short of sanitary facilities, the Muslims were not allowed to spread out into large Sinhala school that was empty for the school holidays and the massive compound of the defunct sugar factory. In meetings, local government officials explicitly stated their displeasure with the presence of the Muslim IDPs (own observations and conversations with NGO staff, Kantale and Trincomalee, August 2006).

¹⁵⁵ The nature of the HSZ has also changed, and the area is increasingly described as a 'Special Economic Zone' (SEZ) (UDA 2007a, UDA 2007b, UDA 2007c). Now that the war is over, the military justification has lost most of its validity. Instead, a large area has been appropriated bypassing all procedures, and a power plant is being constructed. The siting of the power plant is a study in politics in itself: originally, the plan was to build one power plant in the Muslim settlement of Noracholai (near Kalpitiya, in the north-west of Sri Lanka), but this ran into severe opposition (because of the pollution it would cause) under leadership of the Roman Catholic bishop. As an alternative, it was then proposed to put the power plant in China Bay, near Trincomalee. The Sinhala inhabitants of this area opposed the idea, and the UNP government of the time decided to put the power plant in Hambantota instead. In November 2005, Mahinda Rajapakse won the presidency. Hambantota is his home area. Within months of coming to power, work started on the Noracholai plant, and as soon as the LTTE was chased out from Sampoor, that area was selected for a second plant. Neither site has any Sinhalese living nearby, nor any substantial SLFP voter base.

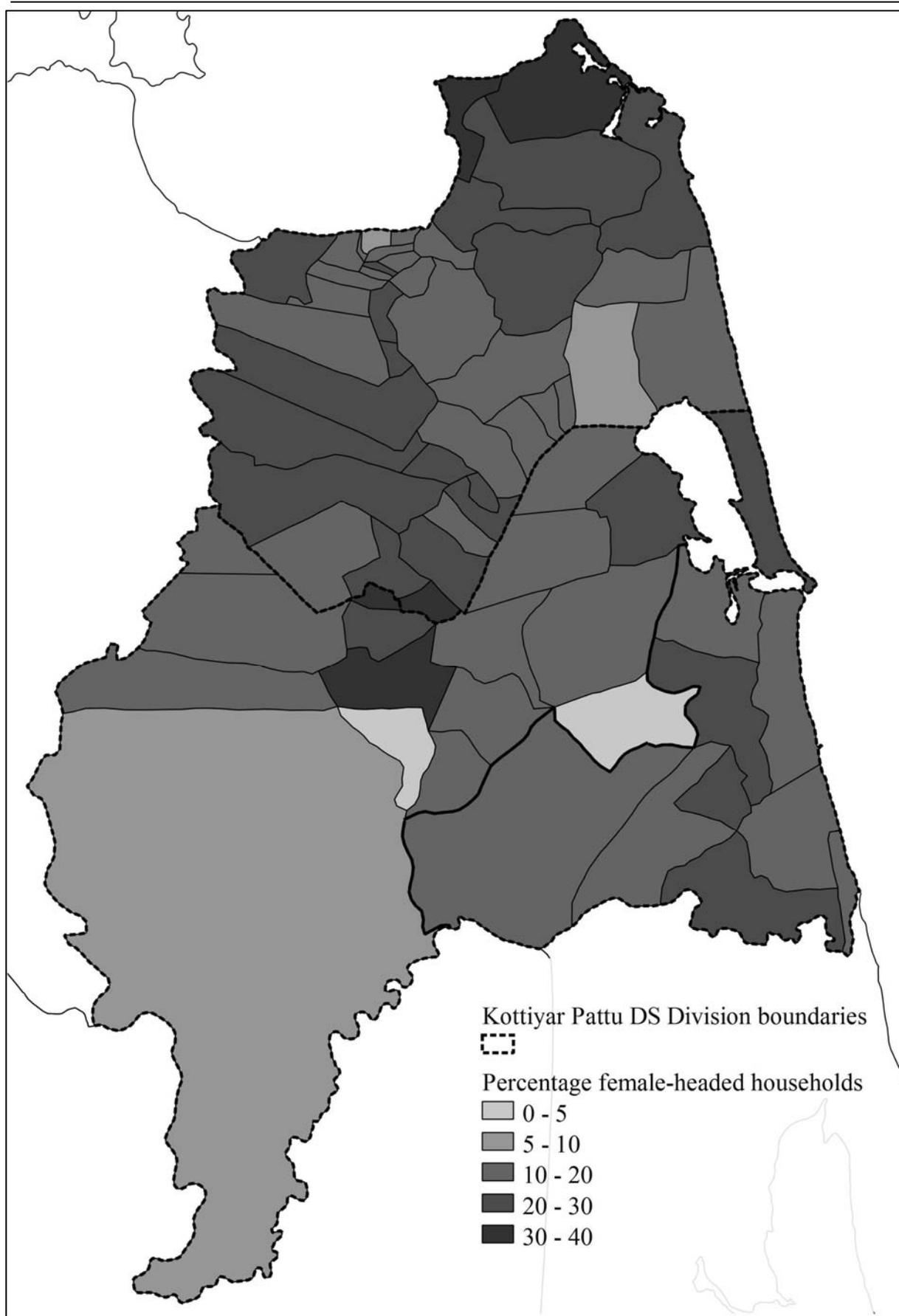
UTHR(J) 2007c; 'Feasibility of Sampur Thermal Power Plant. Ethnic cleansing? No thanks, just cleansing for power', *Lakbima*, 1-6-2008).

After the expulsion of the LTTE from Kottiyar Pattu, Muslims and Sinhalese have largely lived in peace, and free of fear. A sense of relief was evident when speaking to people. This relief was not there among Tamils. After the displaced returned to the area, there was a wave of targeted killings of people with suspected LTTE links, but also some killings that seemed intended as acts of theatrical violence, meant to instil fear among the Tamil population. Between late April and the end of May 2007, 15 killings and 9 disappearances were documented (UTHR(J) 2007c)¹⁵⁶. By the time I ended my field research, regular round-ups and arrests took place, and stories of women getting harassed and even raped caused fear and apprehension. With the final defeat of the LTTE in May 2009, the war seems to have finally ended. It will be interesting to see how things develop over the coming years.

4.3 *A balance sheet of suffering*

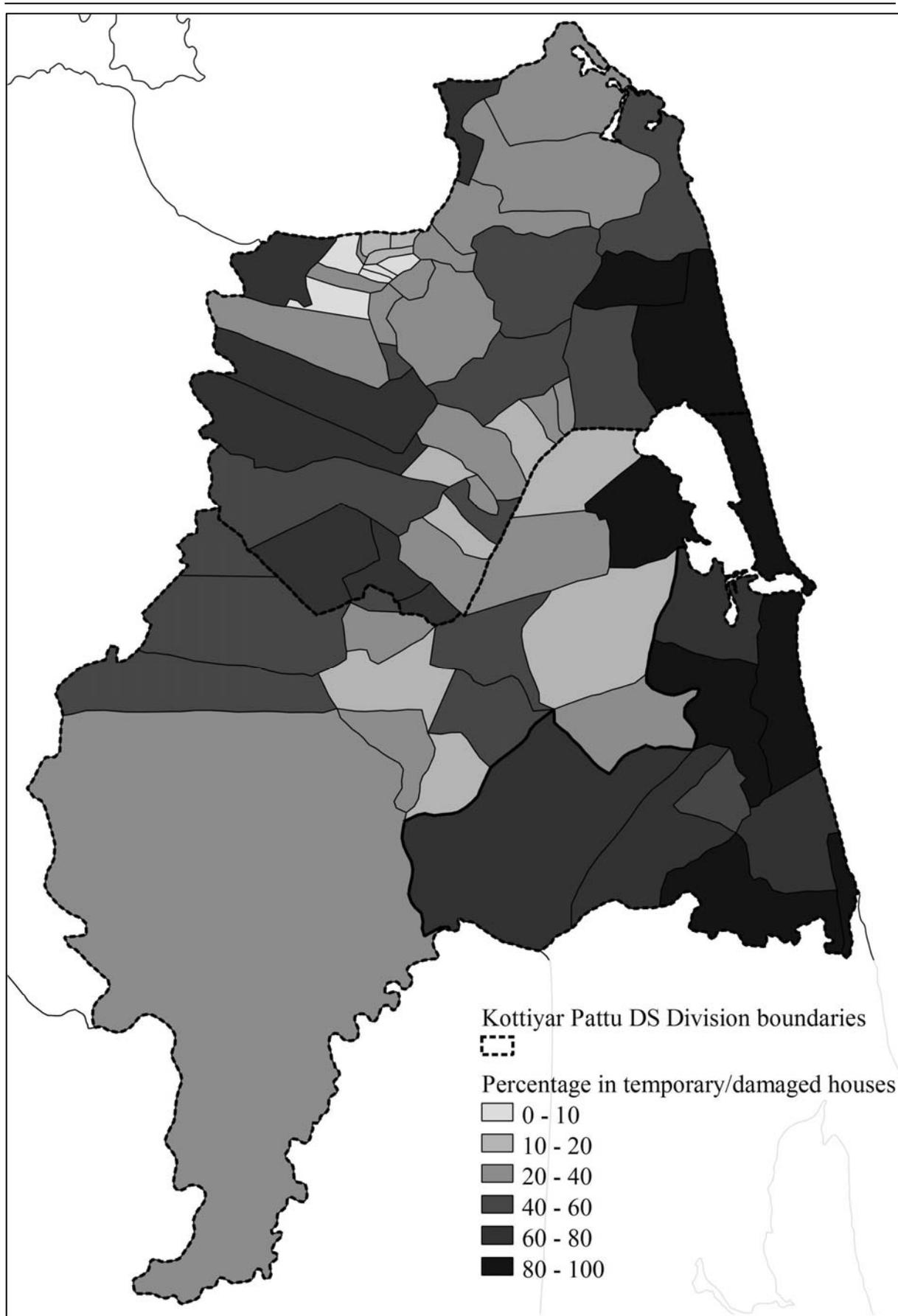
As I mentioned in section 2.2.3, CIRM has compiled an elaborate database with information on vulnerability for each village, hamlet and neighbourhood in Trincomalee District (CIRM 2004a, b and c). In the context of this chapter, three indicators from the CIRM data sheets are of specific interest: the percentage of female-headed households, the percentage of households living in a temporary or damaged house, and the percentage of households "directly affected by the war" (households of which members were killed, maimed or severely mentally affected due to the war). When aggregated at GN division level and plotted on a map of Kottiyar Pattu (maps 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3), these data make it possible to make a geographical analysis of war-affectedness. In order to visualise the correlation between the geographical and ethnic spread of war-affectedness, it is useful to compare the maps with maps 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5.

¹⁵⁶ One particularly nasty killing took place on August 4th, the day the people fled from Muthur. Late in the evening, an elderly Tamil man who had decided to stay the school in Kilivetti for the night was dragged out by soldiers, and executed at point blank range on the road in front of the school. After that, relatives were not allowed to remove the body for many hours. A relative who told me of the killing was of the opinion that the man had been randomly picked, and was executed merely to instil fear among the Tamil population (conversation, Trincomalee, September 2006).

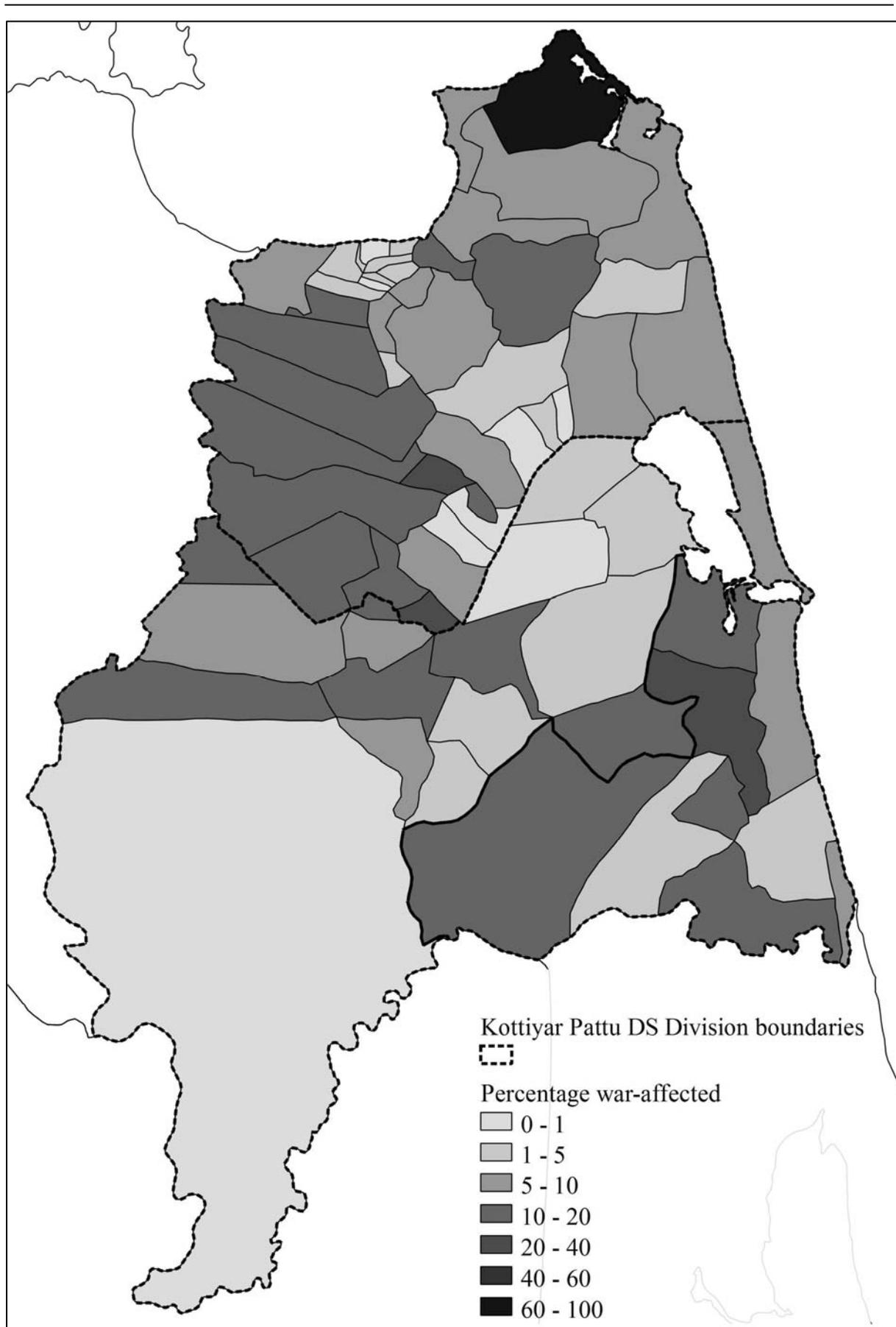


Map 4.1. Percentage female-headed households in Kottiyar Pattu by GN division (source: CIRM 2004a, b and c)

Bridging troubled waters?



Map 4.2. Percentage temporary or damaged houses in Kottiyar Pattu by GN division (source: CIRM 2004a, b and c)



Map 4.3. Percentage war-affected households in Kottiyar Pattu by GN division (source: CIRM 2004a, b and c)

Indicator 1: Female-headed households

The percentage of female-headed households is an indicator of conflict-affectedness in three ways: women become widows because their husbands are killed¹⁵⁷; couples get separated more often than normal because the conflict puts a strain on family relations; or running away with a mistress becomes easier due to reduced social control (particularly in contexts of displacement). Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims generally frown upon divorce and running away with a (married) lover, and social control keeps this in check to a fair extent. There are three geographic concentrations of female-headed households. The first of these is in Tamil-dominated GN divisions along the A15 Batticaloa-Trincomalee highway. Attacks on military targets have largely been concentrated along the A15, and therefore crossfire, retaliatory attacks and round-ups have also concentrated there. In the area between Kilivetti and Muthur, another factor contributed to this: the landscape largely consists of paddy fields, making it difficult to 'melt away into the landscape' in the case of a round-up. The second concentration of female-headed households can be found in the Tamil-inhabited north-eastern tip of Kottiyar Pattu. From the beginning of the violence, this has been an area where militants had hideouts in the jungle; this area has seen a disproportionate amount of military incursions, in which a lot of civilians have got caught up. The third concentration is found in Tamil and Sinhala areas around the Ullakkalli lagoon. This was a narrow passage through which militant supply routes passed, and therefore the scene of regular ambushes and counter-ambushes.

Indicator 2: Housing conditions

The percentage of households living in a temporary or damaged house is an indicator of conflict affectedness in two ways: directly, because many houses have been damaged in the war; and indirectly, because war-related restrictions have hampered economic development. Note that these data were collected about 2 ½ years after the 2002 ceasefire agreement was signed; this period saw a boost in the local economy and in rehabilitation efforts by humanitarian agencies. Many of the houses were repaired or upgraded in this period (often only to be damaged again in the tsunami or in the fighting of late 2006). Before the ceasefire, the situation was considerably worse, particularly in the areas under LTTE control. It is clear from the map that on average, housing conditions in Tamil-dominated GN divisions are worse than in Sinhala- or Muslim-dominated GN divisions. The fact that average housing conditions are comparatively good in the Tamil-inhabited north-eastern tip of Kottiyar Pattu is no indicator of a lack of damage; rather, comparatively many

¹⁵⁷ Note that this is not an indicator of the concentration of Tamil militants: most Tamil militants were unmarried. While some of the married Tamil men may have actively supported the insurgents, they will rarely have been militants themselves. Sinhala and Muslim home guards on the other hand live among their families; many are married.

families in this area were able to access funds to improve their houses between 2002 and 2004 (only to lose everything again in 2006).

Indicator 3: War-affectedness

Rather obviously, the percentage of households directly affected by the war is a direct indicator of conflict-affectedness. It needs to be mentioned here that the percentages recorded for this indicator are likely understatements. It often happens that more than one household member gets killed or injured in the same incident (for example because they happened to be travelling on the same bus, or because they found themselves in the same house). Apart from this, people are more likely to be traumatised if a household member has been killed or maimed than if that is not the case. Also, my impression is that households that have lost people are more likely to move or flee to safer areas than other households. These data should therefore be viewed as lower thresholds; the actual number of people who have been affected is likely at least twice as high as the number of affected households. As with the other two maps, the conflict-affected families tend to be concentrated in Tamil-dominated GN divisions, with a particular concentration in stretches along the A15 that border Sinhala- or Muslim-dominated areas, and along the coast (which saw frequent shelling by the Sri Lankan Navy). This is in line with Kalyvas' assessment that border areas where one side is dominant but both sides in the conflict have access see most violence (Kalyvas 2006)

Another way of presenting these data is to aggregate them by ethnicity. Because not all villages are entirely ethnically homogeneous, I have taken the short-cut of dividing the number of female-headed households, households living in temporary or damaged houses, and households directly affected by the war for such villages pro rata over the ethnic communities present in such villages. After that, I have calculated the total number of families in each category for Kottiyar Pattu, and compared this with the total number of families of each ethnic group in Kottiyar Pattu. That gives the following results:

Ethnicity	Total number of households	No. of female-headed households (%)	No. of households living in temporary or damaged houses (%)	No. of households directly affected by the war (%)
Sinhala	2,251	287 (12.7%)	659 (29.3%)	120 (5.3%)
Tamil	10,576	2,236 (21.1%)	6,282 (59.4%)	1,299 (12.3%)
Muslim	8,842	1,361 (15.4%)	1,707 (19.3%)	330 (3.7%)
Total	22,063	3,986 (18.1%)	8,798 (39.9%)	1,798 (8.1%)

Table 4.1. Rates of war-affectedness by ethnicity in Kottiyar Pattu (source: CIRM 2004a, b and c)

As can be seen, there is a clear ethnic bias in war-affectedness, with Tamils being significantly more affected than Muslims and Sinhalese.

Between 1985 and 2008, I estimate that a total of about 3,100 people died or disappeared as a consequence of the conflict: 2,300 Tamils (including about 500-600 militants), 450 Sinhalese (including about 150-200 home guards, policemen and soldiers), and 350 Muslims (including about 50-100 home guards, policemen and soldiers). That is about 5% of the 1981 population of Kottiyar Pattu. Broken down by ethnicity, this comes to about 3.5%, 8.5% and 2% of the pre-conflict population of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims respectively.

If the casualty rate for Kottiyar Pattu – which was pretty much an outlying corner of the war zone – is representative for the total war zone, then the number of people killed during the war must have been significantly higher than the number of 70,000 that was long quoted (this excludes the many thousands killed during the last six months of the war). In 1981, the total population of the Northern and Eastern provinces was a little over 2 million people. A 5% casualty rate would give an estimated conflict-related death toll of about 100,000 in the North-East. Add to this between 10,000 and 30,000 civilians and LTTE cadres killed in the last six months of the conflict, and some 20,000 soldiers and civilians from outside the North and East killed during the entire conflict, and the total death toll comes to 130,000 to 150,000. If, instead of the overall average casualty rate, the average casualty rates per ethnicity are used to estimate deaths in the North-East, the death toll estimate increases by a further 40,000.

4.4 Reflection: patterns of violence

Over the past decades, Kottiyar Pattu has seen great suffering and devastation due to violent conflict. Popular discourses about inter-ethnic harmony among residents of the area are largely correct for the period up to the mid-1970s. The only major disturbances between 1870 and 1970 revolved around unruly construction labourers who were working on the Allai Extension Scheme, and around high-caste Tamils who violently suppressed the emancipation of lower castes; both these incidents occurred in the 1950s.

Ethnicity only became problematic in Kottiyar Pattu after national-level ethnic politics had set the stage for the genesis of separatist violence in the 1970s. From the Kilivetty *bo* tree incident onwards, violence in Kottiyar Pattu has always been induced by national-level agendas. At the same time, demographic and socio-economic changes in the decades after independence created ground conditions that were highly conducive for the development of violence, particularly among youth: within a short timespan, access to land, jobs and other livelihoods resources had become scarce for an expanding population of youth, while at the same time access to some of these resources became increasingly controlled by party-political patron-client relationships that became increasingly ethnicised.

Violence in Kottiyar Pattu has always come in peaks that rarely lasted more than a few days. The build-up and aftermath of such 'violence peaks' were generally marked by strings of smaller incidents. Once violence had become established as a

pattern, the mere threat of violence in combination with infrequent, but generally fairly limited, incidents was enough to keep the entire population in a near permanent state of fear. During much of the conflict period, there was little destruction, simply because there was very little left to destroy; every time people had rebuilt their villages, a new wave of destruction followed not long after.

For understanding why peaks of violence occurred at specific points in time, it is important to look at the military balance. Every time that the balance shifted, the side that had the advantage engaged in violence: newly-armed home guards against disarmed Tamils in 1985, Tamil militants against disarmed Sinhalese in 1987, an invigorated and vastly expanding army in 1990, and an invigorated LTTE against Muslims in the years 2002-2005.

The first major outbreak of violence in 1985 comes close to having been communal in nature. There was a large involvement of 'ordinary' Sinhala civilians in inflicting violence on 'ordinary' Tamil civilians. While willingness to avenge the Anuradhapura massacre may have been there among Sinhalese in the area, the 1985 violence was strongly orchestrated from the side of Sri Lanka's security apparatus. At the same time, the fact that Sinhalese warned Tamils and otherwise tried to help them is clear evidence that by far not everybody agreed with the violence.

After 1985, the character of violence between Sinhalese and Tamils changed. Between 1986 and 1988, violent incidents mostly involved soldiers (and home guards) or militants deliberately attacking civilians of the 'other (ethnic) side', as well as clashes between fighting parties. The second major outbreak of violence in 1990 saw the deaths of many (mostly Tamil) civilians at the hand of the Sri Lankan military. Still, people in the area distinguish the period from 1990 onwards from the earlier years. From 1990 onwards, it was 'the army versus the LTTE', rather than 'the Sinhalese versus the Tamils'. The vast expansion of the military apparatus in the area contributed to this: from several dozen policemen and soldiers in the early 1980s, it expanded to two army battalions (plus police, plus home guards, plus navy) by the mid-1990s, and to an entire brigade (plus police, plus home guards, plus navy) by 2006. Over the same period, the number of resident Tamil militants expanded from maybe a dozen to several hundred. Apart from the militarisation of the area, local dynamics also played a role:

The area [Kottiyar Pattu] is one where Tamils have considerable interaction with the Sinhalese, and both communities are bilingual. Relations have generally been good, with both communities attending functions in each others' villages. With severe restrictions placed on Tamil village shops, supposedly as a means of curtailing supplies reaching the LTTE, Tamils regularly shop for groceries and items like batteries in the Sinhalese and Muslim villages (eg. Thoppur). All these complicated arrangements for mutual survival and welfare have given the three communities a strong vested interest in continuing good relations. It is notable that the Sinhalese of the area have been very much against the security forces being harsh with the Tamils, nor has the LTTE attacked Sinhalese civilians in the area in any significant incident since the late 80s (UTHR 1996).

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Between Muslims and Tamils, the trend was different. The first periods of Muslim-Tamil violence (in 1985, 1987 and 1990) were clearly orchestrated. Only after repeated violence did relationships really sour. The destruction around Muthur and the slow pace with which some form of normalcy returned in the decade after 1990 meant that there was little worth attacking, and despite communal animosity there was comparatively little violence. It was only after the 2002 ceasefire that cycles of revenge between Tamils and Muslims became common again. However, with the defeat of the LTTE, violence between Muslims and Tamils seems to have come to an end.

With the details presented in this chapter, I have wanted to underscore the point that the people of Kottiyar Pattu have suffered immensely from the conflict. The everyday inter-ethnic interaction that I have documented and analysed in chapters 6 to 8 needs to be seen in this light. Most people have every reason to fear and/or hate the ethnic other. The fact that there still is so much everyday inter-ethnic interaction is a small miracle in itself.

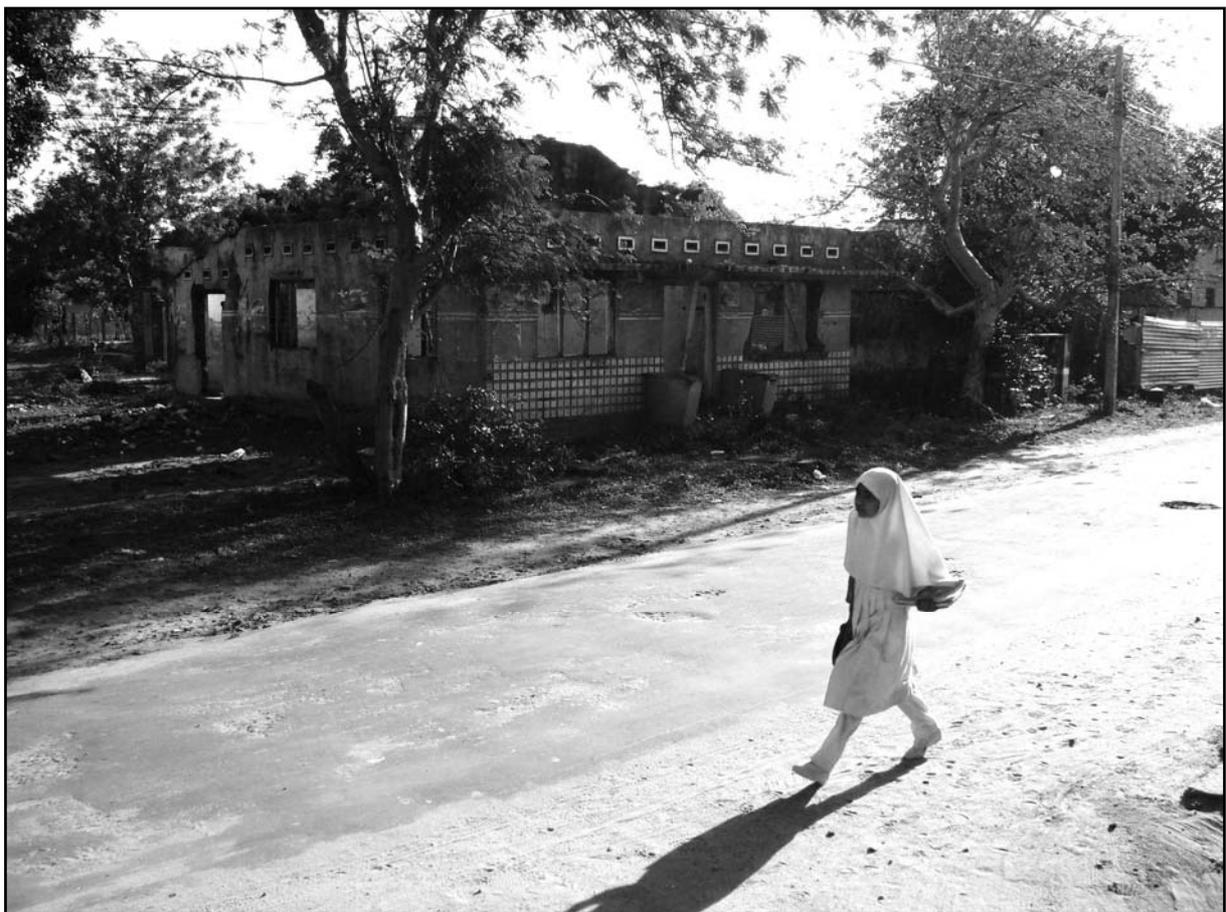


Figure 4.5. Muslim schoolgirl walking in front of a destroyed house in Muthur (own photograph)



Figure 4.6. Militarisation of the landscape: children's drawings on a wall, Dehiwatte (own photograph)



Figure 4.7. Militarisation of the landscape: contested Buddha statue in Trincomalee (own photograph)



Figure 4.8. Militarisation of culture: pre-school children with brand-new camouflage caps on a 'Peace Sportsmeet', Dehiwatte, April 2003 (own photograph)

5 Intermezzo: local narratives

5.1 Introduction

This chapter forms a link between the background information presented in the first half of the book and the case studies presented in the second half. Though rooted in local sources, the background chapters contain my interpretation of things; the same is true for the case studies that follow. To let the voices of those who live in Kottiyar Pattu be heard more clearly, I reproduce four indigenous texts in this intermezzo. The texts have been selected for their own articulateness, and because they are representative for specific discourses that I came across in Kottiyar Pattu during my fieldwork. The first text gives a Sinhala perspective, the second an orthodox Muslim perspective, the third a Sufi Muslim perspective (which is distinctly different from the 'standard' Muslim perspective on Kottiyar Pattu), and the last text gives a Tamil perspective. Each text gives its own interpretation of the history of Kottiyar Pattu, and each has noteworthy comments about inter-ethnic relations in the area. When reading the texts apart, it is sometimes hard to imagine that they are all about the same small part of Sri Lanka. When taken together, they show something of just how bewildering the variations in stories are, and how closely verifiable facts and garbled-up legends (and sometimes verifiable nonsense) are interwoven.

5.2 First text: interview with a Sinhala man

The first text that I present is a slightly edited transcript¹⁵⁸ of my fieldnotes on a fascinating interview that I had with a Sinhalese man in the area in August 2007, around the time that the Sri Lankan security forces were completing their offensive to chase the LTTE out of the Eastern Province. I have included this rather long narrative because it was by far the most complete and elaborate Sinhala perspective that I heard while doing my research and, more importantly, because the man who was talking to me had a reputation for being pro-peace, which had become fairly rare among Sinhalese in Kottiyar Pattu after mid-2005.

The interview from which I have taken this text took place in a Sinhala village in Kottiyar Pattu. While my research assistant and I were asking some people about the arrival of Buddhist monks in the area, one of the people listening to the conversation started talking:

¹⁵⁸ The editing consisted of removing a limited number of questions that were asked to clarify details, and inserting the answers into the narrative wherever relevant.

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In 1921, Buddhist monks came to Batticaloa. In 1922, for Vesak, they came to Trincomalee, by the ship *'Mary Queen'*¹⁵⁹. The monks asked for the way to Seruwila, and found some Muslims who showed them the way to Thoppur. The people who helped the *hamuduru* were Muslims from Thoppur. In 1931, the Seruwila temple was rebuilt.

At the site where there is now a *kovil* in Kilivetti, there was a Buddhist temple with a big *bo* tree. Similarly, at the Verugal *kovil*, there was a Buddhist temple. The name was really *Vehara-gala*¹⁶⁰. Kavanthissa's younger brother Saddhatissakumara's wife earmarked the place, where a pansala was built. This is not the actual birthland of the Tamils.

In 1800¹⁶¹, there was a king in Polonnaruwa, whose name was Valagambahu. There were 108 kings here, and he was one of them. In the reign of the king before Valagambahu, there was an army officer called Hāta. There was some problem with the king, and he (Hāta) ran away to Tamil Nadu. (Up to Kandy it all belonged to the Polonnaruwa kingdom then. There were four divisions in Sri Lanka then. The Polonnaruwa kingdom was called Pita Rata. Seruwila was part of Ruhunumagampattuwa; that division, east of the Mahaweli River, was all the way from here to Kirinda).

Before Hāta ran to India, in South India everything was *hondai* (good), but they did not know how to govern the place. This man became friendly with the king, and learnt that the king did not know how to develop agriculture in the country. Hāta said "there are people who can work and can develop agriculture in my country". He came to Sri Lanka with some people, and he took all the strong, young people – 12,000 of them – to South India.

If you want to frighten little children, then you say "the *goni billa* is coming"¹⁶². Well, these people who came with Hāta were disguised in gunny bags (looking like *goni billa*).

When Valagambahu became king, he brought people and made this area prosperous. He had a weapon with the name *Yakkadāwa*, that was kept to the

¹⁵⁹ This must be a reference to passenger ship that circled around the island. It was probably called 'Queen Mary'.

¹⁶⁰ Sinhala for "Vihara rock".

¹⁶¹ This must have been "1800 years ago". The king referred to as Valagambahu is identified as Gajabahu I in *Rajavaliya*: 47-8; he reigned from 114-136 AD (De Silva 2003: 566).

¹⁶² The *goni billa* (Sinhala for "ghost covered in a sack") is a monster that comes and snatches (naughty) children away in his gunny bag, somewhat similar to the figure of "Zwarte Piet" in Dutch folklore. Note that when people with sacks over their heads started to be used by the army to identify possible enemies (who would then be tortured and often killed), the mythical monster became a real person.

right of the king's throne. Only the person who could lift this weapon was worthy to be king¹⁶³.

A *reddi* (washerwoman) came to the palace to wash the king's clothes. She had a son of twelve or thirteen years old who used to come with her. While the mother did her work, this child used to walk around everywhere. One day, he went near the throne of the king. He saw the weapon, which was made of iron, facing one particular way. There was a hollow in the weapon which was filled with water, and it could be dismantled. The boy looked at it, took it apart, and put it back with the pieces in a different order. This is when the Tamils came to the Eastern Province.

The king saw that the weapon had been tampered with. He asked "who came to the palace today?" "Only the washerwoman and her son," was the answer. "This weapon is very heavy. Only I can lift it. Someone else must have come who is as strong as I am."

The washerwoman and her son were brought, and the king told the son to lift the weapon and give it. This child came without fear, lifted it and gave it to the king. The king brought up this child and took him into his army as his *yodhaya* (bodyguard).

This boy was known as the cleverest officer in the army. He became like a lieutenant-general¹⁶⁴.

The king used to go to the country secretly to find out whether his people had been doing their work properly. One night, some time after the boy had become the commander of the army, the king went in disguise to check how the people were doing. In one house, the king heard a woman crying. He made a mark on the door with a piece of limestone, and the following day he told his men to bring the woman.

He asked her "why did you cry in your house last night?"

"Two of my sons, healthy and strong, were taken away by the *goni billa*," she said. "If I can see my sons before I die, that is sufficient. I was thinking of that and cried."

When the king inquired, he learnt about this army man who had gone to India. These two boys must have been taken by Hāta.

"These people are my subjects. They have to be brought back to my country. The Buddhist people who lived here always followed the *Buddha Dharma* and never caused any trouble. My subjects, my people, have been taken to another country, and are being ill-treated. I need to bring them back."

¹⁶³ Note the similarity with the legend of King Arthur's sword, which could only be lifted by the rightful heir to the throne.

¹⁶⁴ At the time of the interview, this was the highest rank that anyone in the Sri Lankan Army had. The comparison is therefore a comparison with the Sri Lankan Army Commander, lieutenant-general Sarath Fonseka.

The king and his army commander, whose name was Neela Maha Yodhaya¹⁶⁵, went to Mannar, crossed the sand dunes¹⁶⁶, and went to South India. In Tamil Nadu, they went separate ways. The king went to the palace of the king of Tamil Nadu, while the army commander went to the place where these people were imprisoned and where they did forced labour.

The king spoke to the king of that country and negotiated their release. The army commander brought the people to the entrance of the palace. As a kind of interest (on a loan), he also forcibly brought another 24,000 people. Until these 24,000 people came here we were people who did not harm anybody, we were good¹⁶⁷.

These 12,000 plus 24,000 people were brought back, across the sand dunes, to Sri Lanka. Until these 24,000 people came, there were no Tamils at all, neither in Jaffna nor in the Eastern Province. This is a Sinhala Buddhist country. Although it is our land, we have never shown hostility towards Muslims or Tamils, to anybody. This was an agricultural land. To do agriculture, we needed some animals. These 24,000 people were taught how to do agriculture and they took to cultivation. Over time, the population increased. Only after that did they see the North-East. Gradually they went to the East and North to settle down. Up to 1954, all these people have not done anything to destroy Buddhist temples. They had a political party, got into government, began to be stable in politics, and began to talk about a homeland. Then they started doing minor discriminatory acts against the Sinhalese. For them to go up, they have to do some harm to the king or to the people.

These people came and built a *kovil* in Kilivetti (on the site of a pansala). We (the Sinhalese) never told them not to do that. The tree was cut in the early 1980s¹⁶⁸. In one night, it was cut and destroyed without a trace. Sampanthan (the MP) was involved in that. Sampanthan, Thangathurai, and Vigneswaran¹⁶⁹. They were

¹⁶⁵ Sinhala for “the great blue giant warrior” (Obeyesekere 1984: 26)

¹⁶⁶ Adam’s Bridge

¹⁶⁷ Note that this is an almost literal version of a legend on the settlement of Chola prisoners-of-war in Sri Lanka as given in *Rajavaliya*: 47-8, and elaborated on by Abeyawardana (1999: 17-18, 115-8). Obeyesekere (1984:361-80) discusses the “Gajabahu myth” at length, and concludes that the story has very little historical value, but rather serves as a kind of master dialectic that has been used and adapted for centuries whenever a need was felt to explain the presence of settler groups of comparatively Indian origin: “it is very likely that most, if not all, Sinhala groups in this island were at some period or other immigrants from South India. The Gajabahu myth is a symbolic way of expressing this sociological fact” (*idem*: 374-5).

¹⁶⁸ This was 1976.

¹⁶⁹ Thangathurai, who originated from Kilivetti, was MP for Muthur from 1970 to 1977, and later again from 1994 until his assassination by the LTTE in 1997. Sampanthan (who has been in parliament intermittently since 1989) and Vigneswaran were both lawyers. To my

from Kilivetti, and started this homeland talk. Vigneswaran was not involved in the incident with the tree.

These people started destroying Buddhist relics. When they did this, we lost our temple there.

Without getting into confrontation, we asked for justice through the priests etc.

Then the leaders of Kilivetti got together (to chase the Sinhalese away). There was a Paddy Marketing Board stores, where there was a Sinhalese officer in charge. There were also some Sinhala businesspeople in Kilivetti. People who came to Seruwila from Muthur were killed¹⁷⁰. All were innocent Sinhalese. They started hurting the Sinhala people, started talking about their motherland. They killed Sinhalese, harassed them, destroyed places of worship. In this period only, the LTTE developed. Only then the Tamils started saying “we have ownership of this land”. I am not a communalist to tell this story. I am telling the truth about what I have learnt.

Tamil leaders are trying to create a *boru* (false) story, but from this story you will understand to whom the land belongs. There were one *crore* of pansalas here. Earlier people called this place “Kottiyara Pattu”, because there were so many places of worship. Other communities have no history here.

If anyone else says “this place is ours”, that is a lie. This land belongs to the Sinhalese. Whatever they say, whether Kilivetti or Verugal, these lands have proof in the foundations that there were *viharas*. Although the *bo* tree was destroyed, we know where the *vihara* was, we know where the *chaitiya* was. This land belongs to us, to nobody else. There is a history. Those who say otherwise are just communalists. They make up stories.

In June 2006, the terrorists blocked Mavil Aru. The water comes from there. Seruwila is the central place here, the *hamuduru* is the main man. Mavil Aru is the heart of the place. It belongs to the people of Seruwila, Eechchilampattu and Muthur: Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, all groups. The terrorists blocked the water that was going to Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims.

Water is a humanitarian thing. In North America they said 2,500 years ago that you cannot do harm to water. It is purely a terrorist act. Christopher Columbus, the man from England [*sic!*] said that you should not harm a thing like this. He went in the ship and discovered America. There were red Indians there. There was a red Indian leader. Christopher Columbus wanted to buy the land from him

knowledge, Sampanthan is not from Kilivetti. The Vigneswaran referred to here is a different person from mr. Vigneswaran who led the protests against the Buddha statue in Trincomalee in 2005 and was subsequently shot dead.

¹⁷⁰ When I asked my source when this took place, he answered “somewhere between 1978 and 1985” – so between the cutting of the tree at Kilivetti and the first large-scale outbreak of violence in 1985.

with money. He told Christopher Columbus “nobody has any authority over the land, it does not belong to anybody”. Now this has changed.

In June 2006, the terrorists blocked the water and land belonging to the people here. The leaders of Seruwila and the priests spoke to the LTTE: “please do not do this, please open the sluiceway”. There was a chap called Elilan; he was the area leader. He was not interested in solving the problems of the people, only in blood. Everybody, the peace committee, everybody spoke to the LTTE for twenty-three days to solve the problem, but that did not happen. The army salvaged this. It was a strong necessity for Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people in the area, so the army had to salvage this. The LTTE started shelling Sinhala areas from Verugal¹⁷¹, so the army had to get the LTTE out. Twenty-one families remained in Eechchilampattu. The Sinhala army has never fought with Tamils with any haughtiness. The army gave the 21 families that remained food, medicine, and saved them¹⁷². During this period, nobody destroyed any places of worship or anything important to the Tamils. The LTTE destroyed Buddhist places of worship. Today, the Verugal temple festival is conducted because of the Sinhalese army¹⁷³.

The LTTE has claimed that Sinhalese and Muslims are enemies of the Tamils, but Sinhalese have never said anything like that. The LTTE is saying that Buddhists and Muslims are living in their motherland. When looking at history, anybody can understand whom this land belongs to.

Without talking about these things, if all three communities come together and work together, this area can be developed. All religious leaders in this area should come together and explain this to the people. I believe and I hope that during my life there will be some peace and unity between the communities. If you want, I can show you the important places which prove that this area belongs to the Sinhalese.

5.3 *Second text: “The history of Kottiyarpurapattu”, chapters 3 and 27*

The second text in this intermezzo is a reproduction (with permission) of most of chapters 3 and 27 of the book “The history of Kottiyarpurapattu”, written by M.A. Samad, a retired school principal from Muthur (Samad 2003: 23-31, 423-430). As is the case with all Tamil texts that I have used in my research, the translation of the chapters was done by one of my research assistants. This narrative is important,

¹⁷¹ This refers to the shelling of Somapura on December 7th, 2006, in which a school located next to an ammunition dump was hit (see section 4.2.10)

¹⁷² UTHR(J) (2007c, Appendix 1) confirms this story. Except for one person, all survived.

¹⁷³ This refers to the *balasthanam* ritual that was celebrated in the last week of August 2007. This ritual marked the start of a process of renovation and purification, meant to do the physical and ritual pollution that happened during the conflict. The process culminated in a *kumbh abishekam* (re-dedication) festival a few months later, after which the temple was re-opened for regular worship.

because Samad's book has become the standard reference work for all secondary school students from Muthur who want to learn about the history of the area; some local leaders whom I met in Muthur promoted the book as the standard canon on the history of Kottiyar Pattu. The book is based on twenty years of collecting stories from the elderly people in the entire area (interview, Muthur, 10-8-2005), and (at 606 pages) is by far the most comprehensive description of Kottiyar Pattu that is available.

I present chapter 3 here, because it gives a very clear Muslim perspective on the settlement history of Kottiyar Pattu, and because – for the older history of the area – it demonstrates an ingenious combination of post-dating verifiable events regarding the settling of South Indian Hindus in the area, and omitting in their entirety other key events, particularly those regarding the introduction of Buddhism in the area many centuries ago. As an aside, note that Muslims are claimed to have been the first settlers in the region (in the seventeenth century), despite the acknowledgement of the presence of “hunters” (Veddas) since “ancient times” (Samad 2003: 23)¹⁷⁴. In the struggle over who were the original inhabitants of eastern Sri Lanka, Veddas are represented by Muslims, Sinhalese and Tamils alike as people without history, and thus without significance in the debate¹⁷⁵.

Chapter 27 is important, because it gives the most detailed historical perspective on the development of Muslim-Tamil relations that I have come across.

Chapter 3 [first part]. Emergence and growth of the villages of Kottiyapurapattu

It could be understood from the history of the descendents of the Vedda community here that there were only some villages formed as result of that community coming into settlement in ancient times. The hunters who moved from places like Bintenne in the south settled in Kankuveli area at the beginning and later moved to Umanagiri (present Thoppur), Malaimunthal, Mattappukali,

¹⁷⁴ The word used in Tamil is *vedar*, which means hunter. The Vedar community is commonly referred to as Coast Veddas (see section 3.2.1).

¹⁷⁵ Note however Nevill's claim that the 'coast Veddas' originated from the area that became the Sinharaja rainforest, and settled on the east coast in the reign of a Kandyan king, probably Rajasinha II (Nevill 1886: 183-184). There may be some truth in this version of history. Samad has recorded a strikingly similar historical narrative from Veddas in Kottiyar Pattu: “[a] person known as Kunchar and his brother Sempar had migrated with their wives and children during the time of the Kandy King and settled [in Kottiyar Pattu] [...] before the time in which the Verugal Sri Siththiravelautha temple was built [...] about 400 years ago” (Samad 2003: 164, 171). The argument is further strengthened by the fact that both Nevill and Seligmann and Seligmann have noted that the original language as remembered by the now Tamil-speaking coast Veddas was in fact a form of Sinhala. The narrative that Samad has documented claims however that the Veddas in Kottiyar Pattu originate from the area around Katharagama, and not from the area around Ratnapura.

Karukkamunai and Ilankaithurai and stayed there and so these villages came into being.

The Portuguese who came to Ceylon in 1505 seized the coastal provinces of Ceylon and brought it under their control as there were splits between the kings of the Kotte Kingdom and since they wanted to capture the harbors where the Muslims carried out their businesses and they wanted to do business by themselves. Moreover, they blocked the businesses carried out, through the harbours of Puttalam, Kalpitya and Colombo, by the Muslims who were their business rivals, and drove them out of those areas.

The Muslims who were affected by this, approached the king of Kandy and sought his assistance. Realizing the impact his kingdom had as a result of the effect on businesses, king Rajasinha II asked them to settle down in the east which came under his rule and to carry out their business through the ports of Batticaloa and Kottiyaram in order to obtain the provisions his regime required and to get their produce and spices sold. Accordingly, one group settled down in Batticaloa. Another group was involved in business through Kottiyapura harbor in 1626 and settled down there. This is how the village of Mutur emerged.

The Dutch, who followed the Portuguese to the eastern countries, were their enemies and they became friendly with the king of Kandy. He took this favorably and requested the Dutch to help him chase off the Portuguese from Ceylon and in return he made an agreement with them to give them the right to do business and pay them the war expenses. Consequently, the Dutch captured the eastern coastal provinces from the Portuguese and drove them away. At the end of the war since the King did not fulfill his promise and violated the agreement, the Dutch closed the harbors of Batticaloa, Kottiyaram and Trincomalee and built their forts there and guarded the places.

Since businesses were blocked and the harbors were closed, the affected Muslims living in this area got involved in agriculture. Similarly, the Tamils who embraced the Catholic religion during the Portuguese regime were subjected to cruelty and torment by the Dutch. As a result, these Catholics moved from the coastal area and settled down in the Kingdom of Kandy. The Kandy King honoured and respected the Catholic Clergy. He granted them permission to perform religious services in his territory. A group of Catholics who went away like this came to Kottiyaram and settled down there. They were not only friendly with the Muslims who were already there but also began to live near them.

There were Catholics from Thoothukudi among the people who came and settled down on Mutur. Most of them were seafarers and they were able to carry on with their vocation in the sea. Since the Dutch prohibited entry to the sea and its surrounding, they could not work there and so they lived here and got involved in cultivation.

Subsequently, Tamils in areas like Trincimalee and Jaffna were tormented, their belonging looted and temples destroyed during the Portuguese and Dutch periods. These Hindus were expelled from there. It can be learnt from historical evidence and from the older generation that a group of those Tamils came and settled in Thampalagmam and Kottiyaram.

It is said that the Hindus, Muslims and Catholics who came to Kottiyaram lived together making their homes close to each other and settled down in Mutur. When we look at how the dwellings of these three communities are situated, the Muslim who came initially were close to the jetty, the Catholics houses next and

then the Hindu settlement. Their places of worship are also similarly located. This is an example of the communal harmony and friendship of the people of this village.

It is not surprising that Mutur became an ancient village where all three communities lived united because the interval between their colonization is between about 40 to 60 years. The Dutch Governor Rijckloff van Goens, in a report written to his superior on 14-09-1665, has mentioned that the people who lived in Jaffna and Kottiyaram under their regime had two different dispositions and cultures. It is clear from this that Muslims came to Kottiyaram first.

The Trincomalee Konesar temple and other temples were destroyed by Portuguese General Constantine de Sa. The properties of the Tamils were plundered and they were persecuted and driven away. King Kulakkottan, who is called Ilamsingan¹⁷⁶, visited the temples that were destroyed after the people were driven away and did holy service by restoring them. The book called 'Konesar Kalvettu' explains this in detail. According to this, people from service caste were brought from places like Sindhunadu, Marungoor and Karaikal and settled in Trincomalee, and Vannimais were brought and settled in Kattukulampattu, Thampalagamampattu and Kottiyapurapattu to take care of them.

Similarly people from service castes from Sindhunadu, Marungoor and Gurunadu were brought to restore and maintain Verugal Sri Chiththira Velayutha Swami temple and Kankuveli Agasthiyar Stabanam. He distributed agricultural lands to these people and dug the Allaikulam, Kanthalaikulam and Vendarasankulam to irrigate these lands.

According to these notes, people from Sindhunadu were Velalars and were settled in Anaithivu, Eechchilampattai, Mallikaithivu, Pallikudiyiruppu, and Sampoor. People from Gurunadu began living in Kankuveli, Kilivetti, Muthur, Sampoor and Koonithivu and those from Marungoor in Chenaiyoor and Kattaiparichchan.

The ancient tribes of hunters (Veddas) lived in Mavadichenai, Ilankaithurai and Ilankaithurai Mukathuwaram, Karukkamunai and Valaithottam. It is said that people of the service castes lived in villages like Paraiyanoor, Palathadichenai, Pattithidal, Kusavanoor and Manalchenai.

When we look at these villages, we can observe they have names concerning cultivation land usage, natural lands and dwelling lands. For example:

Names referring to agriculture and other forms of land use

Kamam (agriculture) – Menkamam

Vetti (cut) – Kilivetti (cut and cleared place)

Chenai (upland cropping area) – Chenaiyoor

Veli (field) – Periyaveli

Names referring to elements in the landscape

Piddy (hill), Pallam (pit), Meidu (raised ground), Veli (field), Manal (sand)

Manal – Manalchenai

Piddy – Allaipiddy

Veli – Chinaveli

¹⁷⁶ Tamil for "young lion".

Bridging troubled waters?

Names referring to dwellings

Ur (place of origin) – Muthur

Kudiyiruppu (settlement) – Pallikudiyiruppu

Names referring to trees, bushes, creepers etcetera

Sampu (rose apple tree) – Sampur

Eanchu (a species of palm) – Eachilappattu

Mallikai (Jasmine) – Mallikaithivu

Maa (Mango) – Maavadichenai

Some parts of this area with natural wealth and splendour have disappeared due to natural disasters and calamities of the sea. For example, many hundreds of acres of residential lands and coconut estates in Muthur Mukaththuwarem and the earlier jetty area (near the present Police Station) have been swallowed up by the sea. The coconut estates belonging to M. Krishnapillai, Kasilebbe and Seenithamby have become sea now. Likewise, the land area from the coast of Sampoor to Thalaiyadimunai and Vattathumunai areas have been destroyed by the sea.

The names of some ancient places have been changed due to the colonization undertaken in this area in recent times. For example:

Thirumangalapuri (Old Kilivetti) – Thirumangalapura

Palaichenai – Neelapola

Kalarippu – Mahindapura

Vettaiyadivempu – Gemunupura

Thumpaaraivembu – Somapura

Elumichchaiyadipatti – Dehiwatte

“Where history is silent, the names of places may open their mouths and speak” so said the savant S. L. Ramasamy. Therefore it is very important to know the parts of names of places. There may be occurrences in our country too in keeping with changes of the transforming world. There is room to think that this would affect lands as well.

Hence it is imperative to preserve our ancient villages, their excellence and individually so that the descendents of the future generation could live without any ethnic or religious differences.

[Chapter 3, second part.] Political developments

The politicians from the Eastern Province became members of majority parties after this country attained independence in 1948 and worked for the betterment of the party they were aligned to. They failed consider the integration of the area or its future prosperity. As a result, ancestral lands that by historical and archaeological evidence were proven to belong to the Tamils and Muslims of the Eastern Province have been taken away from them for activities like excavation research, the declaration of sacred areas, agricultural expansion schemes and green revolution. This has been implemented continuously to make these people who were already there a minority. Particularly Ampara and Trincomalee Districts have been affected in this way.

Mutur, being a dual-member constituency which could elect the representatives of the Tamil and Muslim minority communities in Kottiyapurapattu, was changed into two electorates in 1977 [sic]. Consequently, political representation and land areas have been lost. The future generation that has improved due to the growth of civilization and the development of education should see to it that the ancient heritage of the area is not harmed and that the individuality of the villages is preserved in their quest for modernity and refinement.

By knowing fully the history of the arrival of the Muslims, Catholics, Hindus, Muslims and hunters in sacred Kottiyapurapattu and their religious and cultural traditions, the historical evolution of the place can be understood to a certain extent. It is the duty of every son and daughter who live here to know the history of these communities. So, let us enter into it.

Chapter 27. The relationship between the Tamils and Muslims in the Muthur region and the present situation

When the Muthur region was known as Kottiyarpurapattu, the Tamil villages of Eechchilampattu, Verugal, Anaithevu, Karukkamunai, Ilankaithurai, Mavadichenai, Mattappukali, Malaimunthal, Ilakkanthai, Koonithivu, Sampoor, Chenaioor, Kattaiparichchan, Pallikudyiruppu, Kilivetti, Menkamam, Kankuveli, Mallikaithivu, Peruveli and Pachchanoor, and the Muslim villages of Thoppur and Muthur were the ancient villages. All the other villages are colonization villages that came up gradually after the 1930s in accordance with the need of the time.

The Tamils and Muslims who lived in these ancient villages have been living cordially like members of the same family without any caste or religious differences from the beginning. There was not any discrimination between the villages. Transport between the villages was mostly on foot or by bullock carts. It was not possible to travel about frequently as the distances between villages were far and the roads were through jungle areas.

During this period, the traders who lived in Muthur and Thoppur area brought goods for the people's daily needs and sold them. Transactions were on a barter system as very little money was in rotation. Agricultural produce, livestock, honey, ghee and so on were brought from the villages and sold in the Muthur area.

It was difficult for the Muslim traders who went to the Tamil areas to return home immediately and so they used to stay in those Tamil villages for a few days to do business. The relationship between the two communities developed as there was mutual understanding and goodwill. Similarly, it was a practice for people who came from remote Tamil villages to Muthur for various needs, to stay in Muslim homes.

The association which grew like this later turned into a relationship based on work. These regions changed into agricultural areas with the passage of time due to colonization. Consequently, the two communities worked together in preparing new paddy lands for cultivation, making channels, irrigating, ploughing, protecting crops and harvesting. Moreover, the Tamils were share holders and lessees of the cultivation activities of the wealthy Muslims and worked with them closely.

Agricultural lands were close to each other and were generally near Tamil villages. Both communities were involved in breeding livestock well. All the

grazing grounds were far away from Muslim villages. Therefore it was possible for Muslims to continue rearing livestock only with the assistance and cooperation of the Tamils.

Close relationships were found among the people of this region for ages as a result of occupational ventures like this. They had cordial relationships in that they participated in the happy and sad events of each others family, they borrowed and lent money and worked together. After the 1950s, labour opportunities dwindled due to the changes that transpired in the field of agriculture by the introduction of machines and modern methods of agriculture and the use of chemical insecticides and fertilizers.

While the wealthy got involved in cultivation in accordance with their financial positions, the poor had to go to other places seeking jobs. Consequently, the occupational relationships between the communities slackened. Only a limited number of persons from the communities were permitted into each others ventures.

It was customary for Muslims to go into jungle areas near Tamil villages during seasonal rains for a few days to hunt and feast under the guidance of the villagers.

It has to be remembered that Muslims used to go annually to the Sampoor, Chenaiyoor and Verugal temple festivals to see the gala occasion and entertainment throughout the night. They intermingled with the people and returned the following day.

This type of concord was prevalent in the vocation of fishing as well. Many fishermen from Muthur used to go in groups to a place called Kokkatti in the Sampur area and to the area around Ilankaithurai Mukathuwaram during the season and stay there for months for fishing. It was customary for fishermen of neighbouring villages to go to those places as well during the period and catch fish in harmony. Similarly, this type of unity was found among fishermen who catch prawns every night in places like Ralkuli, Suvaanthirai and the Kokkatti River. Fishermen of both communities were involved in fishing by casting nets in the Chenaiyoor area and in places like Ralpalam and Chenaiyoorkali. Fishmongers from Muthur used to go to these places day and night to purchase fish and prawns.

The same harmony was found in jungle occupations as well. There is a long history of both communities of clearing forest together for cultivation of crops and for dwelling, and living side by side. Kayalmuthan, Kulathuchenai, Thiruppanavettai, Kalladichenai, Pattalipuram, Seenanveli, Uppural and areas of Ullaikulam and Ithikulam could be mentioned as examples.

The activities of Tamil parties were intensified due the ethnic differences and discrimination in administration and the disregarding of the rights and benefits of the Tamils that transpired in the politics of this country after the 1960s. Tamil political parties were involved in nonviolent struggles like sathyagraha and stoppage of work etc. to win self-determination rights for the Tamil-speaking people. Tamils who lived in the Northern and Eastern provinces participated in large numbers in these struggles. However Muslims took part in the struggles only during the period when Muslim politicians were with the Federal Party. The association ceased when the Muslim politicians left the party. There was no leadership or institutionalized system to guide them to continue in these nonviolent struggles. Since the politicians of the North-East were either

independent or aligned to the southern political parties, they failed to guide the Muslims of this region in the proper path. Later, when a political leadership emerged among the Muslims, they got their supporters together independently and began to part ways and function separately. The close relationship between communities that was prevalent for a long period of time began to slacken. During the period of political elections the distance between these two communities became much larger.

Moreover, gaps began to appear in the relationship between the younger generation of both communities as a result of education being imparted along ethnic lines with schools being separated as Tamil and Muslim schools, and with cultural traditions being introduced and practised in schools.

A situation emerged after 1970 when unemployed educated youth of each community in this area had to get the assistance of their respective member of parliament to obtain government jobs. 95% of the jobs were awarded on the recommendation of the MP of the community and a Tamil-Muslim division appeared. Consequently the closeness between the communities slackened.

Since the governments that came after 1948 paid no attention to the non-violent struggles for their rights, a situation arose when the frustrated Tamil youths ignored the moderate approach of the Tamil politicians and began an armed struggle to win the self determination rights and authority. The struggle that began to win the rights took the shape of communal riots due to the war action undertaken by the government forces after 1983. Tamils suffered loss of lives and damage to their properties and became refugees as result of this. Many youths got involved seriously in the struggle forming different armed groups to protect the people and to achieve a home land. However some of these groups gave up their struggle and joined the political stream and their supporters had to join them and act accordingly.

However the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are continuing their struggle to win their goal, declaring certain jungle areas where only Tamils live as areas under their control so that enemies would not know their activities and people of other communities would betray them. It is on this basis that all the Tamil villages in Muthur region have come under LTTE control.

It is with this intention that the Tigers have prohibited the Muslims of Mutur and Thoppur from going into Tamil villages with which they have had long cordial relationships.

However, Tamils who live in Tiger controlled areas come to Mutur and Thoppur for their livelihood and to obtain their needs. They could be seen having friendly and cordial relationship with the Muslims. [...]

5.4 *Third text: description of the Kalladiyappa ziyaram*

The third text is a reproduction (with permission of the author, M.A.C. Juhais) of an essay that was published in the *Thinakaran* newspaper. This essay gives a description of the Kalladiyappa *ziyaram*, a shrine for a Sufi saint that is located some five kilometres south of Muthur ('Al Kuthb As-Seyed Ash-Sheikh Abdul Qader Makky

Kalladiappa Valiullah', *Thinakaran*, 23-12-2002) ¹⁷⁷. I present the text here because it contains a distinctly alternative version of Muslim claims to history in the area. A Muslim religious leader involved with this shrine told me a very similar version of the story of the shrine before I came across this article. Note that the increase in attention for this shrine took place at the same time that more reformist forms of Islam became visibly more present in Kottiyar Pattu. While people have worshipped at the shrine for decades, the recent explicit emphasis on the site reads like a form of resistance to the reform movement. It is also noteworthy that in Kottiyar Pattu, this shrine has become something of a symbolic battle ground. It is only at this site that worship has been reinvigorated; at the same time, most of the other *ziyarams* in Kottiyar Pattu are increasingly neglected.

This essay was published on the occasion of the 5th anniversary *Kandoori* of As-Sayed Al Kuthb Ash-Sheikh Abdul Qader Makky Kalladiyappa *Valiullah*. This great man's *ziyaram* is found in Jebelnagar, south of Muthur.

The period during which he arrived

History says that the *Quraish*¹⁷⁸ who were deported during the regime of Abbacies came towards South East Asia by sea visited and lived in places there. Accordingly, Kalladiyappa *Valiullah*¹⁷⁹ should have arrived here towards the latter part of the eighth century AD. Researchers say since Jebelnagar with natural surroundings during that period was suitable for meditation, he should have lived and died in that area. The opinion of historian Sir Alexander Johnston supports these researches. His view follows:

"According to the customs prevalent among the descendents of Mohammedans who settled down in Ceylon at the very beginning, they were Hashemite Arabs who were expelled from Arabia at the beginning of 8th Century during the tyrannical regime of Caliph Abdul Malik bin Marvan, went south from Euphrates to the Concan, to the southern parts peninsular India, to the Island of Ceylon, and to Malacca and settled down there. The group that came to Ceylon made eight big settlements in the north east and north of the island each in Trincomalee, Jaffna, Manthottam, Mannar, Kuthirai [Horse] Hill, Puttalam, Colombo, Barbaryn [Beruwala] and Point de Galle"¹⁸⁰.

The observation of Sir Alexander Johnston is noteworthy.

The fact that Mutur region is one of the places in the east where the initial Muslim settlements took place needs to be underlined. It is evident from research that Kalladiappa *Valiullah* was an Arab from Mecca and many of his *Murids* [disciples] had also come with him to that area. It is considered that Kalladiyappa may be the great man referred to in the Islamic Encyclopedia as the saint who lived and died in AD 832.

¹⁷⁷ See section 3.5 for more on this shrine and the multiple claims to the area.

¹⁷⁸ The *Quraish* were the dominant tribe of Mecca when the Muslim religion emerged; its prophet Muhammad belonged to this tribe.

¹⁷⁹ Literally 'friend of Allah'. This is an honorific term used for Sufi saints.

¹⁸⁰ This text seems to have been quoted literally from Abdul Azeez 1907. Abdul Azeez referred to a letter that Alexander Johnstone wrote in 1827.

The appearance of the ziyaram

Kalladiyappa Valiullah's *ziyaram* must have been identified about 300 or 350 years ago as it has come under the maintenance of many generations.

It is situated in a field where paddy is cultivated. Before the *ziyaram* was identified, a Tamil man named Deva had cultivated paddy near it. His crop had withered without rain or water and he had to face loss due to the drought. He was badly indebted and he had gone home with the idea of drinking poison to commit suicide, and had fallen asleep. While he was sleeping, a saintly man appeared in a dream and told him that he was buried there; he also told him to identify the place. Kalladiyappa went away telling Deva that he would meet with a very good crop. As a result Deva identified Kalladiyappa's *ziyaram* and it rained despite the fact that it was dry season. It is possible to learn from the people who lived at that time that Deva had a very good crop. Deva had maintained the *ziyaram* until he died.

Later on the *ziyaram* was treasured, preserved and patronized by a lady called Valli Amma. She lit incense sticks and she lit lamps at night. It is also said that Kalladiyappa chaperoned her at night. Later on, the Kalladiyappa *ziyaram* was maintained by a Hindu called Oblamaniyam. It was maintained by him until AD 1985 or 1990. Oblamaniyam's paddy land was situated near the *ziyaram*. It was customary for this Hindu son to vow a rooster when sowing his field. After the harvest, that bird was slaughtered, a Moulavi was invited and a *fathiha* was recited at the Kalladiyappa *ziyaram*.

Kalladiyappa has been responsible for many *kiramath* (miracles). The Muthur area was a business centre before 1983. Muslim traders who came there on business from other areas used to visit the Kalladiyappa *ziyaram* and pay their respects. It is now maintained by the Kalladiyappa Foundation.

The emergence of the Kalladiyappa Foundation

This foundation was created in 1998 to maintain the Kalladiyappa *ziyaram* on the request of [four names mentioned]¹⁸¹. As a result, some services have been undertaken amidst numerous difficulties.

The administrative members of this foundation are [the names of three *moulavis*, two teachers, and nine others are given here].

A temporary hut with corrugated iron sheets was built for the Kalladiyappa *ziyaram* in 1998. It was completely destroyed during the communal riots in 2002¹⁸².

It is significant that a *kandoori* has been given in memory of this great saint since 1999. A *kandoori* in his memory is given at this *dargah* every year on 7th day of the

¹⁸¹ Since worship at Sufi shrines is becoming an increasingly sensitive topic among Muslims in Sri Lanka, I have decided not to reproduce the names of people mentioned in the article.

¹⁸² An interesting point here is that it is not clear whether the hut was destroyed by Tamils, upset at the destruction of a row of crosses on a nearby hill, or whether it was destroyed by the group of orthodox Muslim youth who are alleged to have destroyed the crosses, and took on this 'heretical' site as well.

Islamic month of *Shawwaal* by the members of the foundation. Since there are paddy fields around the Kalladiappa *ziyaram*, people have to walk on ridges carrying things during the *kandoori*. There are no buildings or huts to keep things at the *ziyaram*. There is no well either. The *kandoori* is given under lots of difficulties; people erect tents during this period.

5.5 *Fourth text: interview with a Tamil man*

The fourth and last text in this intermezzo is the partial, and slightly edited¹⁸³ transcript of an interview that I did with a Tamil man of the Sindhunadar caste, who has in-depth knowledge about the Verugal temple and its myth of origin. This text presents a Tamil perspective on local history, but it also demonstrates inter-caste competition.

The interview started with a description of the myth of origin of the Verugal temple (which can be found in section 2.3.6 and is not reproduced here), followed by the myth of origin of the Sindhunadar caste. After this, the discussion shifted back to the Verugal temple and its current situation. Finally, we spoke about inter-ethnic relations in Kottiyar Pattu when my source was a young man, before the war broke out.

At the end of his time, Nallainathan Chettiyar handed the keys to the people in Eechchilampattu, and disappeared.

The *kudi* that used to be responsible for holding the key was the *Sakkalaththiyaar kudi*.

However, now it has changed and Eechchilampattu village is now responsible in its entirety. This change came about 10 years ago, because they were not very efficient in maintenance¹⁸⁴.

Pallikudiyiruppu, a Sindhunadar village, has its own temple. The annual festival lasts ten days, and the *thiruvilaa* are allocated as follows:

The first, second, third and sixth *thiruvilaa* are organised by small groups which have no *kudi*.

¹⁸³ As with the first text in this chapter, I have written the narrative of my source into a single, uninterrupted text. While the man was talking, I did ask a number of questions for clarification; the answers have been woven into the narrative.

¹⁸⁴ While there may be truth in the lack of responsibility among the *Sakkalaththiyaar kudi*, it may also have been that the LTTE (which, according to people whom I spoke to in the area, actively discouraged caste and *kudi* identification) forcibly replaced the identification by *kudi* by an identification by village. For the temple committee and the temple festival, a similar change happened, apparently on orders of the LTTE: where earlier positions in the temple committee and entitlements to a *thiruvilaa* in the annual festival were allocated to castes or *kudis*, the entitlements have now come to be identified by village.

The fourth *thiruvilaa* is organised by the Maalayarkudi, which is found in Eechchilampattu, Mallikaithivu and Pallikudiyiruppu

The fifth *thiruvilaa* is organised by the Vilvaranyankudi, which is found in Eechchilampattu, Mallikaithivu and Pallikudiyiruppu

The seventh *thiruvilaa* is organised by the Padaththaarkudi, which is found in Eechchilampattu, Mallikaithivu and Pallikudiyiruppu

The eighth *thiruvilaa* is organised by the Thopichchikudi, which is found in Eechchilampattu, Mallikaithivu and Pallikudiyiruppu

The ninth *thiruvilaa* is organised by the Umanakariyaarkudi, which is found in Mallikaithivu and Pallikudiyiruppu

The tenth *thiruvilaa* is organised by the Kudiyiruppukudi, which is found in Mallikaithivu and Pallikudiyiruppu

All people in these villages are relatives, and there are no limitations on which *kudi* you can marry. Earlier, there was a strong system of marrying outside your own *kudi*, but now it does not matter anymore and people marry anyone, even within their *kudi*.

In Eechchilampattu, the biggest *kudi* is the *Sakkalaththiyaar kudi*. They are not found in Pallikudiyiruppu, but in Mallikaithivu and Eechchilampattu. Apart from that, there are the four *kudis* mentioned above.

The Sindhunadar have a cattle brand consisting of a lotus flower with various additions to the stem¹⁸⁵. This cattle brand is also found in Siththandy and in Palukamam, where our relatives are into temple management¹⁸⁶.

The term 'Sindh' in the [caste] name 'Sindhunadar Thimilar' refers to Sindh Province, to Harappa and Mohenjodaro. That is where we originate from. Nowadays though, we all use Tamil names; no more names from Sindh are in use.

This year there will not be a festival in the Verugal temple; we cannot go there now. If there are no people, the festival cannot be held. Then the god does not mind. After 1985, the temple was closed for 15 years. It was only reopened in 1999, and that was celebrated with a *kumbh abishekam*. The temple was repainted, big kurukkals from other temples were invited, and it was reopened in style. Normally, the *kumbh abishekam* is to be held every ten years.

Earlier, the Kankuveli Sivankovil and the Neelapola Pattiniyamankovil were under Sindhunadar management just like the Verugal temple. However, there was a court case after the colonies were established, and the Kankuveli people took over the Kankuveli and Neelapola temple. The Neelapola temple is still there. Sinhalese people took the statue of the goddess away, but they brought it

¹⁸⁵ See section 3.2.1, paragraph on Sindhunadar Thimilar.

¹⁸⁶ This statement is interesting: in Batticaloa District, the lotus flower cattle brand is associated with the Velalar caste, and Siththandy and Palukamam both have relatively important, Velalar-managed temples. There are at present no (Sindhunadar) Thimilar in Batticaloa District.

back. It does not have a thiruvilaa, only a one-day festival in the period from March to May.

The Kankuveli Sivankovil is now under management of Kankuveli, but the Sindhunadar still have a separate *theertham*¹⁸⁷ at Kurukkalgangai. It is on the same day, but on a different location¹⁸⁸.

When I was young, the people in Pallikudiyiruppu were involved in paddy cultivation and cattle rearing. At the time, the relations with the Muslims in our area were very good. They came to our village, and we gave them free curd. The Muslims did not have any milk, so we gave it to them. Later on¹⁸⁹, we started selling the curd. We used to go for their funerals and weddings, and they came for ours. But there was no marriage between Tamils and Muslims. We are very different. Tamils marry Tamils, Muslims marry Muslims. After the problems, the relations are still there, Tamils still go to Thoppur for weddings and funerals.

The Pallikudiyiruppu people used to be in Thoppur. When the Muslims came, we moved to Pallikudiyiruppu. There was enough land then, so we just shifted.

5.6 Reflection: a bewildering array of stories

Together, the texts presented above present a bewildering array of myths, historical claims, and claims about the present. I have selected these four texts because they were particularly eloquent, but – with exception of the specific reference to the ‘Gajabahu myth’, which I heard only once – the texts are not unique. Very similar narratives were given by other people whom I interviewed. Also, these four narratives are not the only versions of reality that are recounted in the area. There are many self-identifying groups in Kottiyar Pattu, and each group has its own stories.

Though an outsider might snicker at the sometimes ingenious ways in which historical, mythical and sometimes nonsensical elements have been weaved into comprehensive stories, it is very important to realise that these stories are part of people’s sense of reality, and significantly contribute to the shaping of people’s sense of reality. Crucially, these stories shape the preconceptions that people have about people of other (ethnic, religious, caste etc.) groups.

In chapter 2, I have described the complex history of Kottiyar Pattu. In chapter 3, I have described the complex structure of society in Kottiyar Pattu. In chapter 4, I have described the widespread violence and suffering that people in Kottiyar Pattu have had to endure during the war. All of these aspects of complexity are necessary for placing everyday inter-ethnic interaction in context, but they are not sufficient for understanding what everyday inter-ethnic interaction means and how it is shaped.

¹⁸⁷ Tamil for ‘water-cutting ritual’

¹⁸⁸ See section 3.2.1, paragraph on Sindhunadar Thimilār.

¹⁸⁹ After the monetisation of the local economy that followed the introduction of green revolution rice, fertilisers and credit.

This chapter displays some of the preconceptions that are part of public discourses, and the next chapters will focus on the importance of individual agency.

The first important element of the preconceptions that comes back across the board is a sense

of 'we were here first, we are the original bearers of the history of Kottiyar Pattu, and therefore we are its rightful heirs'. The Sinhalese were there before the Tamils (and the Muslims), the Muslims were there before the Tamils and the Sinhalese, the Sufi saints were there before the other Muslims, and the Tamils were there before the Sinhalese and the Muslims. Sometimes, the narratives contain remarkable claims. For example, the ('Dravidian') Sindhunadars' claim of originating from Harappa and Mohenjodaro makes them more 'Aryan' than the Sinhalese, while the very same narrative acknowledges the important role played by the king of Kandy in the establishment of the Verugal temple. And Samad's history, which otherwise is very thorough, makes the Muslims the earliest settlers by merging events (involving the settlement of Tamils in the area) that happened between the tenth and thirteenth centuries with Dutch documents, and by ignoring the obviously ancient Seruwila temple altogether. The first (Sinhala) narrative, finally, makes claims about Tamil (or Hindu) settlement in Kottiyar Pattu by almost literally re-narrating a section of the *Rajavaliya*, and then diverging from the text on one critical point: the *Rajavaliya* claims that the Chola prisoners-of-war were all settled in the Central Highlands and in the South-West (Obeyesekere 1984: 365), and thus *not* in the East of Sri Lanka. Such textual creativity, and the mutual incompatibility of the narratives, may seem ridiculous to a self-respecting social scientist, but that is entirely irrelevant. What matters is that these narratives are fundamentally part of people's lived experience. They may or may not be true, but they are very real indeed.

Another important element of the preconceptions found in the narratives has to do with intergroup relations. In essence (though regularly presented in very kind ways), the presence of other groups is condoned on the precondition that they acknowledge the primacy of the narrator's own group. Intergroup (and particularly inter-ethnic) interaction is therefore acceptable to fellow group members as long as it is fundamentally unequal, with the 'other' being the lower-ranking element in the equation. As a consequence, intergroup interaction becomes subversive to fellow group members only when the person interacting does this from a premise of equality.

A further point of note is the extent to which local narratives are linked to old texts: a 17th-century Dutch memoir, an 18th-century Sinhala chronicle, and a 19th-century British report, none of which are easy to come across if you are in Sri Lanka and do not have access to the internet, a good bookshop, or the National Library. As indicated by the way references to such textual sources are used, the formulation and continuous sharpening of narratives is very serious business. This is all the more remarkable given the comparative isolation of Kottiyar Pattu. It must be said though that at least three of the four narratives that I have reproduced were given by teachers, who are likely to have an above-average access to written sources.

6 Water: irrigation management in the Allai Extension Scheme

“The conflict, that was between the government and the LTTE. We are all farmers” (ex-LTTE member turned farmer and family man)

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the first of three case studies from Kottiyar Pattu on inter-ethnic interaction in a context of violent ethnicised conflict. It is focused on the question that triggered my research: *how was it possible that the Allai Extension Scheme continued functioning to a reasonable extent during over two decades of violent ethnicised conflict, despite the fact that the scheme is shared by Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim farmers?*

In the subsequent sections, I first describe the technical and institutional set-up of the AES in some detail (section 6.2), followed by an analysis of major trends that influenced scheme performance in the years before violence broke out (section 6.3): the introduction of green revolution technology, increasing land scarcity, and decreasing water availability. In section 6.4, I discuss trends in paddy cultivation in Trincomalee District during the conflict, followed by a discussion of the performance of the AES during the conflict (section 6.5). Section 6.6 deals with strategies followed by ID staff, farmer representatives, and farmers that contributed to the sustained functioning of the AES during the conflict. After this, I invert the question: to what extent did the shared use of the AES contribute to ethnic violence (section 6.7)? The chapter closes with a reflection on what the case can teach us about everyday inter-ethnic interaction (section 6.8).

I approach this case study from a sociotechnical perspective (Mollinga and Bolding 2006, Vincent 2001, van der Zaag 1992). This perspective views technology (and its artefacts) and social interaction as intricately related. Technology, of which an irrigation scheme with its channels and structures is an example, forms a site for social interaction. On the interface formed by an irrigation scheme, a range of stakeholders (among others Irrigation Department staff, farmer representatives, and farmers) contest and co-operate to keep the scheme functioning (Ubels 1992; Kalshoven 1992). This interaction is shaped by the physical infrastructure, but – as different stakeholders meddle with the infrastructure, the interaction also shapes the infrastructure:

“To discover the rules governing water supply, the primary point of entry should not be property rights in water (and land and infrastructure), but more generally the social and technical relations that determine who exerts water control” (Mollinga and Bolding 2006: 33).

6.2 *A description of the Allai Extension Scheme*

6.2.1 Design of the scheme

The AES is a run-off-the-river scheme with a command area of about 7,000 ha (map 6.1 and 6.2); it is the most downstream scheme that gets its water from the Mahaweli Ganga. The AES was developed in the 1950s, and greatly expanded the extent of irrigated agriculture in Kottiyar Pattu. The original Allai irrigation system is centuries old, and was rehabilitated by the British in the 1870s. Between then and about 1930, the system was gradually improved upon, but expansion was hampered by lack of funds and a shortage of buyers for the newly developed land. A further expansion became feasible when, under the enthusiastic leadership of D.S. Senanayake (who was minister of Agriculture and later Prime Minister), a drive to recolonise the Dry Zone and settle Sinhalese from the densely populated south-west of the country gathered momentum in the 1940s.

Headworks

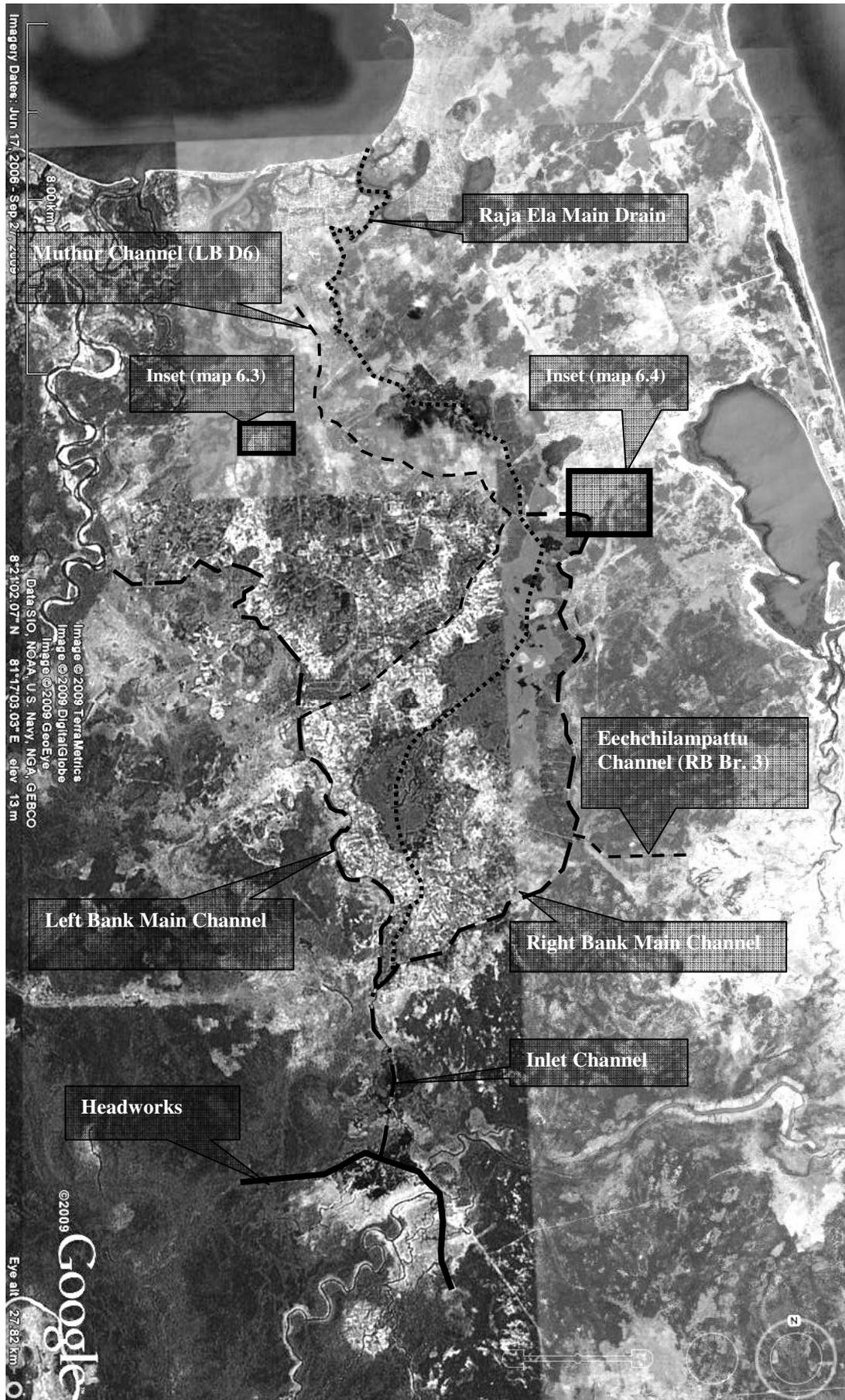
The scheme's headworks are located about three kilometres south of Kallar, across the Verugal Aru and the Mavil Aru, which branch off from the Mahaweli Ganga near a place called Kandakkadu. The headworks consist of a weir with four radial gates, a 300 m long concrete spillway, a silt extraction sluice, and a sluice at the head end of the main channel.

An embankment connecting these different elements forms a buffer reservoir with a live storage of 4,000 acre feet, or about 5,000,000 m³ (interview, Irrigation Department office, Kallar, December 2004)¹⁹⁰.

When I did my fieldwork, the headworks had been in poor condition for many years: two of the radial gates had been broken and had been replaced by a temporary concrete structure, the spillway had disintegrated in several places, part of the flood bund was in poor condition, and the silt extraction sluice had been dysfunctional since the LTTE blew up a bridge that runs over it in 1990¹⁹¹. As a consequence, the buffer capacity of the reservoir had been reduced, which affected the reliability of water supply in the dry season. The destruction of the silt extraction sluice significantly worsened the silting up of irrigation and particularly drainage channels that was already identified as a "major problem" when the silt extraction sluice was still operational (Brewer 1984: 3). The silting up of drainage channels has worsened flooding problems in low-lying parts of the scheme, and has affected water supply in particularly the channel to Muthur and the channel to Eechchilampattu.

¹⁹⁰ This buffer is enough to meet full system requirements for about five days if the Verugal Aru and Mavil Aru both run dry, or about ten days if the combined inflow reduces to 5 m³/s.

¹⁹¹ In October 2009, Prof. Vincent visited the AES and was taken to the headworks. By then, the implementation of a rehabilitation programme worth about US\$ 2 million had come up to speed. This programme focuses primarily on the rehabilitation of the headworks.



Map 6.1. Overview map of the AES (Source: Google Earth image and AES blocking-out plan)

Channel network

At Kallar, the inlet channel splits into two contour channels: the Left Bank Main Channel (LBMC), with a formal command area of about 4,800 ha, and the Right Bank Main Channel (RBMC), with a formal command area of about 2,400 ha.

Below the level of the main channels, the fairly flat topography and the presence of pre-existing villages and irrigation infrastructure within the command area have made the lay-out of the scheme very complicated and confusing. There is no uniformity in the size of tertiary units, and even the terminology used for secondary and sub-secondary channels varies across the scheme.

The LBMC feeds 18 secondary units (known locally as 'tracts') which vary in size from about 15 ha to almost 800 ha (map 6.2). Below the LBMC, there are 12 'distributary channels' (LB D1 to LB D12). Some of these secondary channels have been subdivided into 'branch channels', one of which in turn has distributary channels. In two cases, distributary channels branch off from each other (D3 and D4, and D9 and D10). The RBMC feeds 9 tracts of land which vary in size from about 23 ha to a little over 600 ha. Below the RBMC, there are 4 'branch channels' (RB B1 to RB B4), two of which have been subdivided into 'distributary channels'. Some of the tracts are fed by a secondary or sub-secondary channel, some are fed straight off a main channel, but there are also tracts that share one channel.

Tertiary units are fed by 'field channels' (FC), which may branch off from the main channel, a distributary channel, or a branch channel. There are close to 400 tertiary units in the AES (not counting the *purana* lands irrigated by the Muthur channel, for which the channels do not have codes under the AES). The tertiary units vary in size from a little under 4 ha to about 30 ha; most however are in the range from 12 to 18 ha. The number of lots per tertiary unit varies from 3 to about 25, though the majority has about 10 to 12 lots per unit. In this variation, there is a problem. In Sri Lanka, channels with a capacity up to 25 cusec¹⁹² (700 l/s) are designed with a fixed longitudinal slope ($S=0.0004$) and sideslope (1:1.5), a limited range of bed widths (1', 1'6", 2', 2'6", 3', and so on), and standard depths.

The smallest channel cross-section has a capacity of 1 cusec (28.3 l/s). This design is used for all FCs with a command area up to 14 x 3 acres, or 17 ha. As the gates to the tertiary channels are normally either fully opened or fully closed, this means that the smaller tertiary units receive a disproportionate share of the water. As there are many smaller tertiary units in the head end of the scheme, tail-end water scarcity is inherent in the system's design.

The complexity of the lay-out of the AES underlines Farmer's observation that the early colony schemes were primarily designed to maximise the number of settlers, and that structured water management was only a secondary design criterion (Farmer 1957).

¹⁹² 1 cusec is 1 cubic foot per second, or about 28.3 l/s.



Map 6.2. Tracts and tanks in the AES (Source: Google Earth image and AES blocking-out plan)

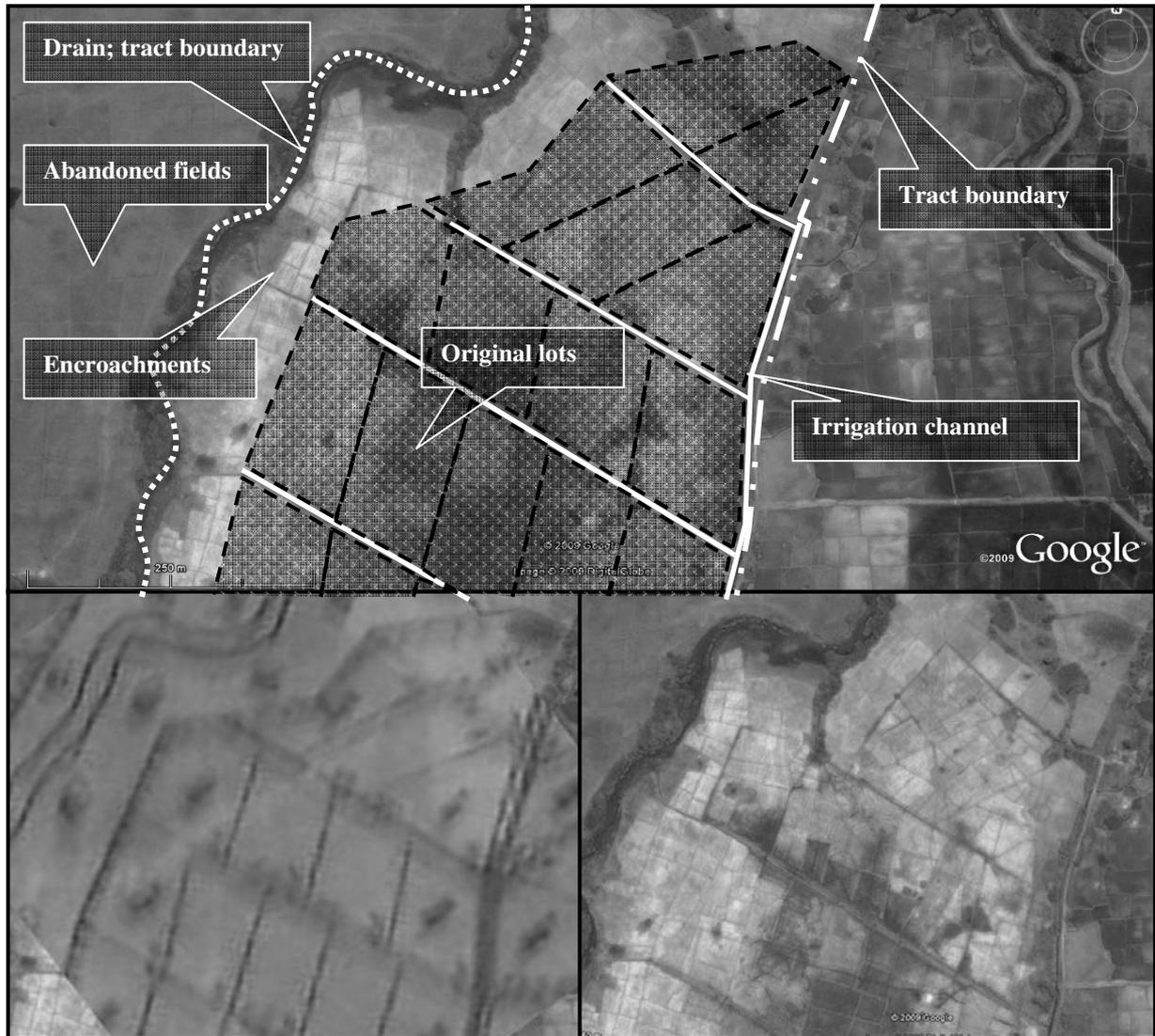
Command area

According to the blocking-out plan that can be found in the Irrigation Department office in Kallar, the Allai Extension Scheme has a command area of 17,803 acres, equivalent to 7,205 ha. Two thirds of the command area (4,841 ha) consists of 3,865 lots of 'colony land'; the remaining 2,364 ha is so-called '*purana* land', which was already in private property by the time the AES was built. The first 561 lots that were distributed have an extent of 4 acres (1.62 ha) each¹⁹³. The remaining lots are 3 acres (1.21 ha) each, with exception of 195 2-acre (0.81 ha) lots between Mahindapura and Poonagar that were developed in 1964.

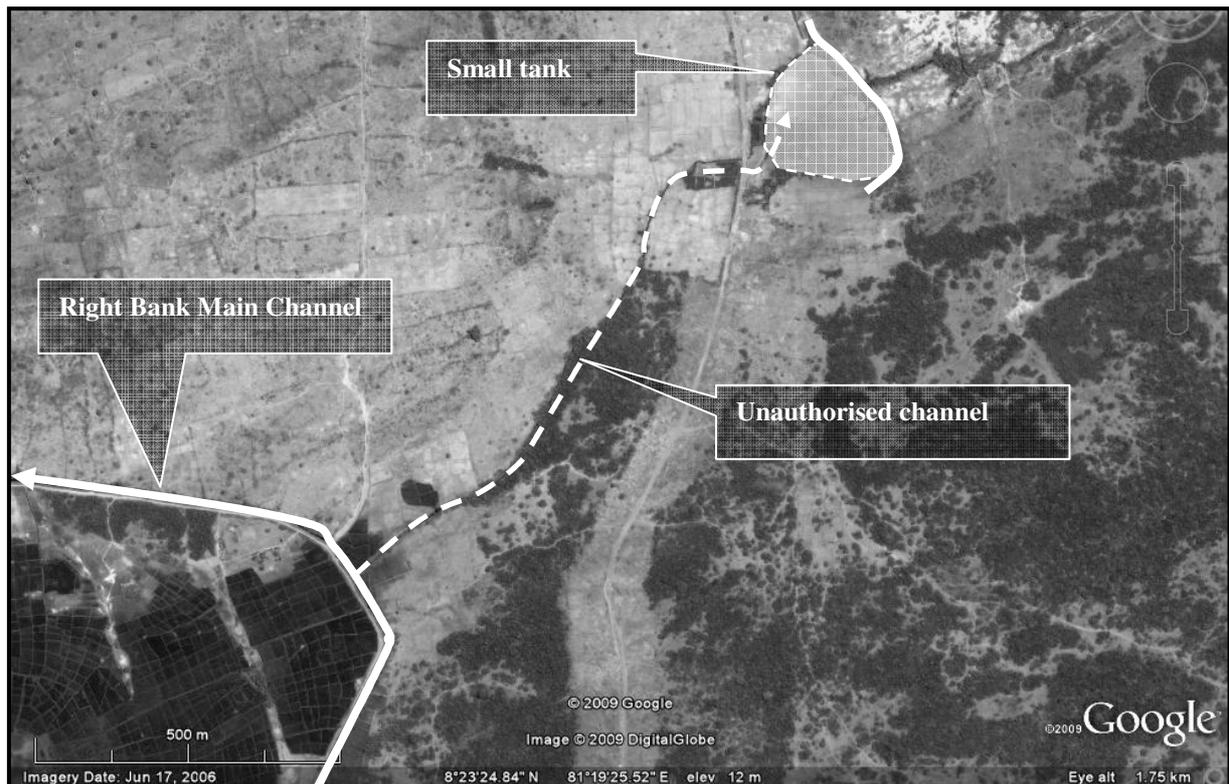
Outside the formal command area, about 2,000 ha is irrigated without authorisation. This is about 30% of the formal command area, placing the Allai Extension Scheme among the schemes with the worst problems in this regard in Sri Lanka (Dekker 2007: 56). Already before the war broke out in Kottiyar Pattu, Brewer (1984: 4) put the extent of "encroachments and illicit irrigation of highland holdings" at "even larger" than in the Parakrama Samudra Scheme (where it comes to 25% of the formal command area) and in the Minneriya scheme (where it comes to 40% of the formal command area). This may have been an over-estimate, but it indicates that the problem has been severe for a long time. Unauthorised cultivation comes in two forms: encroachment of reserved lands (for roads, drains etc.) that are by themselves irrigable (map 6.3), and and cultivation of lands that are too high for normal irrigation, and which require water levels in the channels to be raised beyond the normal design level (map 6.4).

Most of the AES has alluvial clay soils, which are among the best soils that Sri Lanka has for paddy cultivation. Some areas have sandy soil: an area near Manalchenai (part of LB tract 9A), and much of RB tract 5 and 6 near Poonagar. These areas have a higher water requirement and are more susceptible to drought damage. The secondary channel that takes water to the Eechchilampattu region (RB BC3) passes through the second sandy region at a critical location, right between the Sinhala colony of Mahindapura and the Tamil colony of Poonagar. Because this area has a higher elevation than the rest of the scheme, the channel had to be cut fairly deep. The channel banks were designed at a side slope of 1:1 ½, which is too steep for sandy soil. As a consequence, the banks slowly collapse, and the channel's capacity is reduced by sediment. Because precisely this area was a military frontline for many years, maintenance of the channel was difficult.

¹⁹³ These lots can be found in LB tracts 1-7 and 8A; they were settled between about 1951 and 1953.



Map 6.3. Example of encroachment. (Source: Google Earth image and AES blocking-out plan)



Map 6.4. Example of illegal cultivation (Source: Google Earth image)

6.2.2 The organisation of operation and maintenance

Because the AES gets its water from a river that crosses provincial boundaries, it is considered to be an interprovincial scheme (despite being located in its entirety within the Eastern Province). This means that it falls under the central, rather than under the provincial Irrigation Department (ID).

In Sri Lanka as in many other countries, the Irrigation Department has traditionally been responsible for operation and maintenance (O&M) of the headworks, main channels and secondary channels (including sub-secondary channels) of major irrigation schemes; within the tertiary unit, farmers are responsible for O&M. From the late 1970s however, there has been a trend towards increasing farmer participation in O&M at the secondary level and even at the system level. Increased farmer involvement in O&M was supposed to lead to increased irrigation efficiency, which in turn should lead to a reduction in tail-end water shortages, and ultimately to a higher food production for the country and higher income for farmers. Apart from lofty ideals of democratic and participative democratic involvement of farmers that tend to be stressed in the public discourse, a much more mundane reality has been at least equally important in the development of participative O&M systems across the world: after the massive surge in development of new irrigation systems between the 1950s and 1970s, it became clear that existing O&M systems were not going to be affordable. Giving farmers a bigger say in water management, combined

with the introduction of an O&M fee, was a significant cost-cutting exercise (Wickremaratne and Ekanayake 2002: 150)¹⁹⁴.

After a local initiative to improve O&M in the 6,000 ha Minipe Scheme with farmer participation proved successful, the government accepted the strategy and made it national policy. The first large-scale implementation was done in the Gal Oya (Left Bank) Scheme in Ampara District (Uphoff 1992; ARTI 1991). Initial results were so encouraging that the Integrated Management of Major Irrigation Schemes (INMAS) programme was set up to spread the new O&M method over a further 37 major irrigation schemes. For the management of the INMAS programme, a separate Irrigation Management Division (IMD) was set up within the Ministry of Irrigation (Dharmasena 2000: 168-169; De Silva 2000; Dekker 2007). In every scheme that falls under INMAS the IMD (which is mostly staffed by people with a social science background) has appointed a Resident Project Manager (RPM) who is responsible for the overall management of the scheme and for facilitating the work of Farmer Organisations (FOs), while the ID provides the technical expertise and implements the day-to-day O&M of irrigation infrastructure according to the plans made by the IMD.

The AES was included in the INMAS programme in 1985. However, after the RPM was shot dead within a few months, the introduction of INMAS was put on hold and the RPM's position remained vacant until 2003. During this time, the Irrigation Department remained responsible for O&M up to the tertiary outlets. In 2003, a new RPM was appointed, and a new start was made with the training of FOs. Frequent staff turnover (by the time I left in 2008, the third or fourth RPM in five years was in place) and the difficult security situation in the years 2005 and 2006 have however meant that progress has been slow.

As the proper introduction of INMAS in the AES did not start until 2003, the pre-existing system for O&M at the tertiary level remained in existence throughout most of the conflict. This system was centered around the post of the *wattai vidane* or irrigation headman¹⁹⁵, and was in many ways similar to the 'traditional' *wattai vidane* system that was (re)discovered and formalised during the tenure of Governor Sir Henry Ward (1855-1860):

¹⁹⁴ As Wickremaratne and Ekanayake (2002) indicate, the introduction of the O&M fee in 1984 saw only limited success. It was initially set at Rs. 100/= per acre per year (50% of the actually required fee), and was intended to be gradually increased to fully cover actual O&M expenses. However, as fee collection proved disappointing, it was decided to freeze the rate. Despite significant inflation, the fee was still Rs. 100/= per acre per year when I did my field research.

¹⁹⁵ According to Kasynathan and Manoharan, a more accurate translation would be something like 'tract headman'. A tract 'usually has an extent of 300-500 acres' (1986:1, footnote 1)

“Ward’s greatest contribution to irrigation was the revival of the ancient customs, relating to paddy cultivation for the purpose of regulating the use of water and setting up a communal machinery for the settling of disputes relating to its use [...] The suggestion of reviving these ancient customs was contained in [a] unique report, [that] dealt with the ancient irrigation system in Ceylon and enumerated the ancient customs connected with paddy cultivation and irrigation. These customs [...] were enforced by the ancient kings through the gansabhawas or village councils of elders in various districts. The powers and functions of these councils did not concern irrigation only but their jurisdiction extended to all aspects of the life of the village communities, subject to the final authority of the King. According to these customs, it was the duty of every cultivator of paddy lands, who drew his supply of water from a common irrigation work, to contribute his labour to the building, repair or maintenance of these works” (Balasingham 1968:66).

In practice, this system of customs meant that each farmer was responsible for a the maintenance of a stretch of irrigation channel proportionate to the acreage of paddy land that he commanded, ploughing and water allocation were co-ordinated in order to optimise water use, a system of water rotation was implemented during periods of scarcity, and a system was in place to solve conflict and to punish those who did not obey the rules (*ibid.*:66-67). Apparently, the old customs and the village councils had fallen into disuse under the British¹⁹⁶, and the British legal system was too cumbersome, slow and expensive for most farmers to be able to claim their rights (Balasingham 1968:67). The position of the *wattai vidane* was legally recognised in the Irrigation Ordinance no. 9 of 1856.

What is interesting in the discourse presented above, is that two things are left out. Firstly, it was very convenient for the British to come up with a revival of ‘traditional water management systems’, as this would greatly reduce the financial burden on the colonial government, which to a great extent would be able to disengage itself from operation, maintenance and conflict resolution regarding irrigation systems. Secondly, by re-creating the institution of ‘beneficiary contribution’, the *rajakariya* (compulsory unpaid labour as a service to the King) which had been abolished in 1832 could be re-introduced with a friendly face, thus greatly reducing the cost of constructing and rehabilitating irrigation systems, and reducing the pressure on a very tight labour market, where labour was quite structurally in short supply and competition between plantations and public works for the allocation of the available labourers was at times fierce¹⁹⁷. This was significant in a time when budgets were

¹⁹⁶ Note however that neither Balasingham nor Kasynathan and Manoharan give any details of how these customs had functioned before the British came.

¹⁹⁷ In a similar vein Mosse (1997), discussing the colonial construction of ‘traditional irrigation management’ in India, concluded that the so-called ‘traditional irrigation

tight, following an economic crisis in Britain in 1846¹⁹⁸. And there was another push factor behind irrigation development: as the number of plantations increased, more labourers were imported from India. Local paddy production was insufficient to feed this group of people, and large amounts of money had to be spent on the import of rice – during Wards tenure, annual rice imports increased from roughly 65,600 tonnes to 72,600 tonnes. “[The] [g]overnment would not necessarily incur loss of revenue if rice imports decreased but increased cultivation would lead to increasing land-sales and tithes in return for any advances made by the government” (*ibid.*:65). Ward and his successors enthusiastically promoted the *wattai vidane* system, and with success: the system was in use for almost a century.

Kasynathan and Manoharan summarise the tasks of the *Wattai Vidane* as “the management of irrigation water, the clearing and maintenance of channels, and other cultivation-related tasks such as the enforcement of fencing obligations, exclusion of stray cattle, etc” (1986:1). Farmers and *Wattai Vidanes* from Kottiyar Pattu gave me similar lists of tasks. Crucially however, the tasks were generally presented in a different order. Negotiating with the Irrigation Department office for water supply and for the allocation of maintenance funds was given as the most important task, closely followed by fencing and keeping stray animals out. Then came channel maintenance, and water management within the area under the *wattai vidane*'s responsibility came only in the last place. This was somewhat contrary to what I had expected: water management tends to be very limited. The Irrigation Department does its best to keep the main and secondary channels filled to – or over – capacity, and the field channels are opened at the beginning of the season and closed at the end. Within the tertiary units, there seems to be very minimal collaborative water management. Farmers simply cut a hole in the channel bund when they need water for their fields, and close it when they do not need any. Repeated questioning of *wattai vidanes* and farmers without exception drew the same answer: “we take water when we need it, and when we do not need water, we do not take it.” Nobody whom I spoke to ever mentioned any kind of system of water allocation or water sharing. In contrast to the elaborate literature that exists on

management' mechanisms (using unpaid community labour) were quite possibly invented by the colonial government as a way to cut the cost of operation and maintenance of irrigation infrastructure.

¹⁹⁸ I refer here, among others, to the following quote about Earl Grey, the Secretary of State at the time: “[Earl Grey] realised that restoration of these [irrigation] works could be undertaken only at considerable expense, which the Government could ill afford at a time of economic crisis. He favoured however a policy of making grants-in-aid, restricted to works in which a considerable amount of native labour could be engaged or which could produce a fair return for the capital invested by increasing the production powers of the Island” (Balasingham 1968:63).

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intricate systems of irrigation water management, the issue does not seem to be relevant to the farmers in Kottiyar Pattu. No intricacies there: field channels are opened at the beginning of the season and closed at the end, and there is no water level adjustment in between. When there is water, people take what passes their fields, and when there is not, they either do not take water or they block a channel somewhere to get water¹⁹⁹.

Despite the sturdiness of the *wattai vidane* system, it was not trouble-free. The *wattai vidanes* were generally among the larger landowners in their areas, and “derived their authority, and therefore their effectiveness, by holding a fairly high socio-economic position in the feudal hierarchy in the village” (Kasynathan and Manoharan, 1986:11). This meant that they had the power to deny people water, and that there was very little room for democratically correcting power abuse. In order to improve the lot of particularly tenant farmers and break through the feudalism, the government of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike introduced the Paddy Lands Act in 1958. The *wattai vidanes* were replaced by Cultivation Committees (CCs), composed of elected farmer representatives. These committees did not function very well however, because they were unable to muster the level of authority to organise contributions for maintenance and to punish farmers who did not stick to the rule that the *wattai vidanes* had had. Also, moneylenders and absentee landlords, who had been excluded from membership, undermined the functioning of the committees (De Silva 2000: 409).

When the Agrarian Services Act was introduced in 1979, the responsibilities of the Cultivation Committees were taken over by Cultivation Officers, who are civil servants falling under the Agrarian Services Department. The post of *wattai vidane* was re-instituted, but merely as an assistant to the Cultivation Officer. As with the Cultivation Committees, the restyled *wattai vidane* was supposed to an annually elected farmer representative.

Despite all these formal changes, Kasynathan and Manoharan found in the mid-eighties that in the Tamil-speaking area where they conducted their research, the *wattai vidane* system continued functioning much as it did prior to 1958. Although the land reforms and the subdivision of lands among the baby boom generation meant that *wattai vidanes* were generally no longer large landholders, most came from families which had occupied the post for several generations.

¹⁹⁹ Erik Dekker, who lived with a farmer’s family in Dehiwatte for a couple of weeks and spent much of his time looking at the channels around Dehiwatte, made similar observations: channels were opened at the beginning of the season and closed at the end, and barely touched in between. I never once saw anyone adjusting a gate setting over the years that I visited Kottiyar Pattu. That may have given me a distorted picture however, because farmers generally go to their fields in the cool early hours of the morning and of the late evening, while (partly as a security precaution) I generally did not leave Muthur before 8.30 am, and usually returned to work out my fieldnotes around 5 pm.

Under INMAS and its parallel programmes of irrigation management reform, Farmers' Organisations were introduced, which were not only responsible for O&M of the irrigated area under their responsibility, but also became the body through which farmers could access subsidised inputs, credit and crop insurance. Rather than per tract, farmer representatives are elected per tertiary unit, and the executive committee of the FO consists of the representatives of each tertiary unit in the area under control of the FO. The chairman of the FO then acts as liaison to the various government departments.

In the AES, a start had been made with the introduction of FOs in the colony areas in 1985, but as support under INMAS was put on hold within a few months, the FOs did not receive coaching and follow-up support. In practice, the FOs became dysfunctional, and their tasks were taken up by individual farmer representatives; elections rarely took place.

In the Tamil villages, the *wattai vidanes* remained in function in a way that is very much in line with Kasynathan and Manoharan's observations in the tail end of the Gal Oya Left Bank scheme, in the south of Batticaloa District. They documented that elections are seldom contested, and the *wattai vidane* generally inherits his position from a maternal uncle. Mark Whitaker, who conducted his PhD research in Mandoor, a village in Kasynathan and Manoharan's study area around the same time as they did, describes a case where there *was* an election (Whitaker 1999:96-98). This may not be contradictory: I found that in Muthur, *wattai vidanes* are formally elected, but just like Mark Whitaker has documented, candidates tend to get selected from certain key families, so that succession tends to take place from an uncle to his sister's son. The election that Whitaker documented ended in a unanimous vote. According to Whitaker, openly losing an election was considered a great loss of face, so that the actual – in this case fiercely contested – election was done informally and the final, formal vote was unanimous.

In Muslim villages, most *wattai vidanes* whom I spoke to had been in function for many years. Here, the system is again different: rather than through elections or inheritance, *wattai vidanes* are selected and appointed by the mosque committee, which is in charge of almost all community affairs in the village.

6.3 Trends affecting scheme performance, 1950-1985

In this section, I describe three trends that have affected the performance of the AES since it was developed: the spread of modern farming technologies, an increasing scarcity of land, and a decreasing availability of water.

6.3.1 The introduction of modern farming technologies

Throughout the second half of the 19th century, rice yields in Sri Lanka were very stable: between 20 and 30 bushels per acre (1.0-1.5 MT/ha) with irrigation, and

between 10 and 15 bushels per acre (0.5-0.8 MT/ha) without (Elliott 1911-1914, see particularly vol. XXXIX, no. III: 237). The total production did increase substantially, but this was primarily due to an increase in irrigated area. Despite numerous trials, it proved impossible to structurally increase yields beyond 1.5 MT/ha until well into the 20th century. The first so-called 'pure-line' rice seed was introduced in Trincomalee District in 1935 (AR 1936: E18). The spread of this seed peaked in 1961, when about one fifth of the cultivated area was sown with it. The first proper 'green revolution' rice variety, H-4, was introduced in the district in the *maha* season of 1960-61, when it was used on 100 acres. A year later, H-4 was used on 3,622 acres, about 10% of the total acreage sown in the district. The acreage of 'pure-line' seed dropped to 5,000 acres (AR 1961-2, part IV: C319). Between then and 1980, green revolution rice spread to about 75% of the sown acreage. By 1985, this had increased to about 90% (Henegedara 2002:17, figures 3 and 5).

The introduction of improved rice varieties also led to an increase in the use of chemical fertiliser. Demand for fertiliser increased so fast that the available logistical facilities could not handle it; in order to create buffer stocks, the Trincomalee GA proposed the construction of four fertiliser stores in the main paddy-producing areas in 1964, one of which was to be constructed in Kilivetti (AR 1964-5: A16). The seasonal fertiliser use for the district exceeded 1,000 MT for the first time in *yala* 1970 (AR 1969-70: A29); 4,771 MT was used in *maha* 2001-2, and 3,204 MT in *yala* 2002 (Trincomalee Kachcheri 2003: 41,42,50).

Farm mechanisation also made its appearance, and slowly but steadily spread throughout the district. The first tractor had been introduced in Kottiyar Pattu by 1948 (AR 1948: A85). In 1953, the use of tractors for ploughing in the district was "becoming very popular especially in Tampalakamam Pattu where there are 5 privately owned tractors" (AR 1953, vol. I: A148). Nine years later, demand had outstripped supply. A shortage of tractors was reported for the first time (AR 1962-3: A11).

These developments, combined with the expansion of irrigation facilities, contributed to a rapid increase in average yields for Trincomalee District, from about 1.6 MT/ha in the mid-1930s to almost 3.5 MT/ha in 1970 (AR 1936: E21, AR 1969-70: A29). The protectionist economic policies of the Sirimavo regime (1970-1977) saw a reduction of yields because the availability of imported inputs like fertiliser reduced²⁰⁰. The liberalisation of the economy by the UNP regime of J.R. Jayawardene brought a renewed increase in yields. Available data show that between 1979 and 1985, the average yield in Trincomalee District increased from 2.5 MT/ha to 3.5 MT/ha (ASD 2009).

²⁰⁰ Average yields for the whole of Sri Lanka declined from 2.6 MT/ha in 1970 to 2.3 MT/ha in 1976, before bouncing back to 3.6 MT/ha in 1983 and exceeding 4.0 MT/ha for the first time in 2004 (ASD 2009)

The introduction of new rice varieties had another advantage: because the new varieties had a shorter growth period than the traditional varieties, double-cropping became much easier than it had been. In the AES, the cropping intensity increased from around 0.95 in 1944 and 1945 (AR 1944: B44, AR 1945: B22) to about 1.78 in 1968 (Wickramasekara 1984: 29).

6.3.2 Increasing land scarcity, 1960-1985

After the AES was completed by the mid-1960s, no further expansions took place. Insufficient attention for drainage in the design of the scheme meant that part of the fields around Neelapola and about half of the fields that had been planned in the former tank bed of the Allai Tank suffered from annual flooding. In addition, the high sediment load of the water caused the silting up of channels and drains. Insufficient budget for maintenance meant that the AES started a slow but steady process of decay right from the moment it was completed.

Initially, this does not seem to have been a very big problem, as substantial amounts of reservation land were available. First the farmers whose original allotment was unusable, and then second-generation farmers started encroaching on these lands. Over the course of the 1970s, the introduction of green revolution rice varieties in combination with the rapid expansion of fertiliser use and farm mechanisation led to increased yields, which made it possible to partly compensate for the reducing per capita availability of paddy land. By the late 1970s however, there was hardly any more land available for encroachment²⁰¹, and land scarcity became a serious issue.

To indicate the severity of the problem, it is useful to look at data from the census of 1963 (just after the influx of new settlers had stopped), 1971 (just before the second generation of settlers started to get married) and 1981 (the last census data before the outbreak of violence).

Table 6.1 gives the estimated number of households (assuming an average of about 5 people per household) for these three years, as well as for 1985. I have extrapolated the figures for 1985 using the same population growth rates as for the period 1971-1981. Table 6.2 gives the increase in number of families in each time period.

²⁰¹ Brewer (1984: 4) noted the presence of very substantial extents of illicit cultivation in the AES in early 1984. Between then and now, the extent of encroachments does not seem to have changed much anymore.

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	1963	1971	1981	1985 (estimated)
Kottiyar Pattu (total)	6,600	8,500	12,000	13,800
Muthur DS Division	N/A	5,900	8,000	9,000
Seruwila DS Division (including Eechchilampattu DS Division)	N/A	2,600	4,000	4,800

Table 6.1. Estimated numbers of households in Kottiyar Pattu

	1963-1971	1971-1981	1981-1985 (estimated)	1971-1985 (estimated)	1963-1985 (estimated)
Kottiyar Pattu (total)	1,900	3,500	1,800	5,300	7,200
Muthur DS Division	N/A	2,100	1,000	3,100	N/A
Seruwila DS Division (including Eechchilampattu DS Division)	N/A	1,400	800	2,200	N/A

Table 6.2. Estimated periodical increases in the number of households in Kottiyar Pattu

In 1971, about 72% of the working population in Kottiyar Pattu was employed in agriculture. In the area covering Seruwila and Eechchilampattu DS Divisions this was 81%, while in the area covering Muthur DS Division (where there was also a substantial population of fishermen, and a small population of government servants and people working in the business sector) it was about 67% (Census 1971: 116-119, 124-125). Assuming that these ratios remained fairly stable until the outbreak of violence, this leads to the following numbers of agriculture-dependent families (table 6.3) and periodical increases (table 6.4):

	1963	1971	1981	1985 (estimated)
Kottiyar Pattu (total)	4,720	6,050	8,570	9,870
Muthur DS Division	N/A	3,950	5,350	6,000
Seruwila DS Division (including Eechchilampattu DS Division)	N/A	2,100	3,220	3,870

Table 6.3. Estimated numbers of agriculture-dependent households in Kottiyar Pattu

	1963-1971	1971-1981	1981-1985 (estimated)	1971-1985 (estimated)	1963-1985 (estimated)
Kottiyar Pattu (total)	1,330	2,520	1,300	3,820	5,150
Muthur DS Division	N/A	1,400	650	2,050	N/A
Seruwila DS Division (including Eechchilampattu DS Division)	N/A	1,120	650	1,770	N/A

Table 6.4. Estimated periodical increases in the number of agriculture-dependent households in Kottiyar Pattu

My estimate is that about 50% of the new agriculture-dependent families that were established between 1971 and 1981, and 75% of the new agriculture-dependent families that were established between 1981 and 1985, were unable to acquire (through inheritance, purchase or encroachment) sufficient land to live from, and became effectively landless. Over a period of a mere 14 years, these new landless families came to constitute almost 20% of all agriculture-dependent families in Muthur DS Division, and almost 30% of all agriculture-dependent families in Seruwila DS Division. This dramatically changed the socio-economic composition of the population. As mentioned in section 3.3, it is not surprising that it was from among this category of people that hundreds were recruited as home guards, who were to play a notorious role in the violence of 1985.

6.3.3 Decreasing water availability, 1976-1985

Many farmers whom I spoke to mentioned another problem that occurred around the same time that serious land shortages developed: water shortages caused by the diversion weir at Polgolla that was taken into use in 1976. This weir on the outskirts of Kandy diverts substantial amounts of water from the Mahaweli River in the direction of Anuradhapura. In figure 6.1, I have plotted average discharge at Manampitiya for the *maha* and *yala* seasons from 1954 to 2004, as well as the lowest recorded discharge for each *yala* season²⁰². For each of the three variables, I have included linear trendlines for the period 1954-1975 (before the Polgolla weir was taken into use) and for the period 1976-2004 (after it was taken into use). The gaps between the trendlines make it obvious that the Polgolla weir caused a substantial reduction in the Mahaweli's discharge downstream of the weir: the average *yala* discharge nearly halved, while the minimum discharge was reduced by 75%. While the Polgolla weir caused a shock reduction in discharge, there has also been a long-term, and equally dramatic, downward trend in discharge patterns at Manampitiya. Irrigation development and reducing rainfall (see figure 2.3) are presumably key factors behind it; a more in-depth analysis was outside the scope of my research.

In order to determine how severe the impact of both trends was on the AES, it is essential to establish a relationship between discharge at Manampitiya and inflow into the AES.

²⁰² Particularly with regard to minimum discharge values, it must be noted that I am not sure of the accuracy of the measured values. Since the discharge is not measured over a fixed profile, regular calibration of the rating curve is necessary, but I have no information on such calibration. Also, the profile of the river bed keeps changing, and water levels are very shallow in the dry season. This makes reliable measurement extremely difficult. Nevertheless, the trends are very clear.

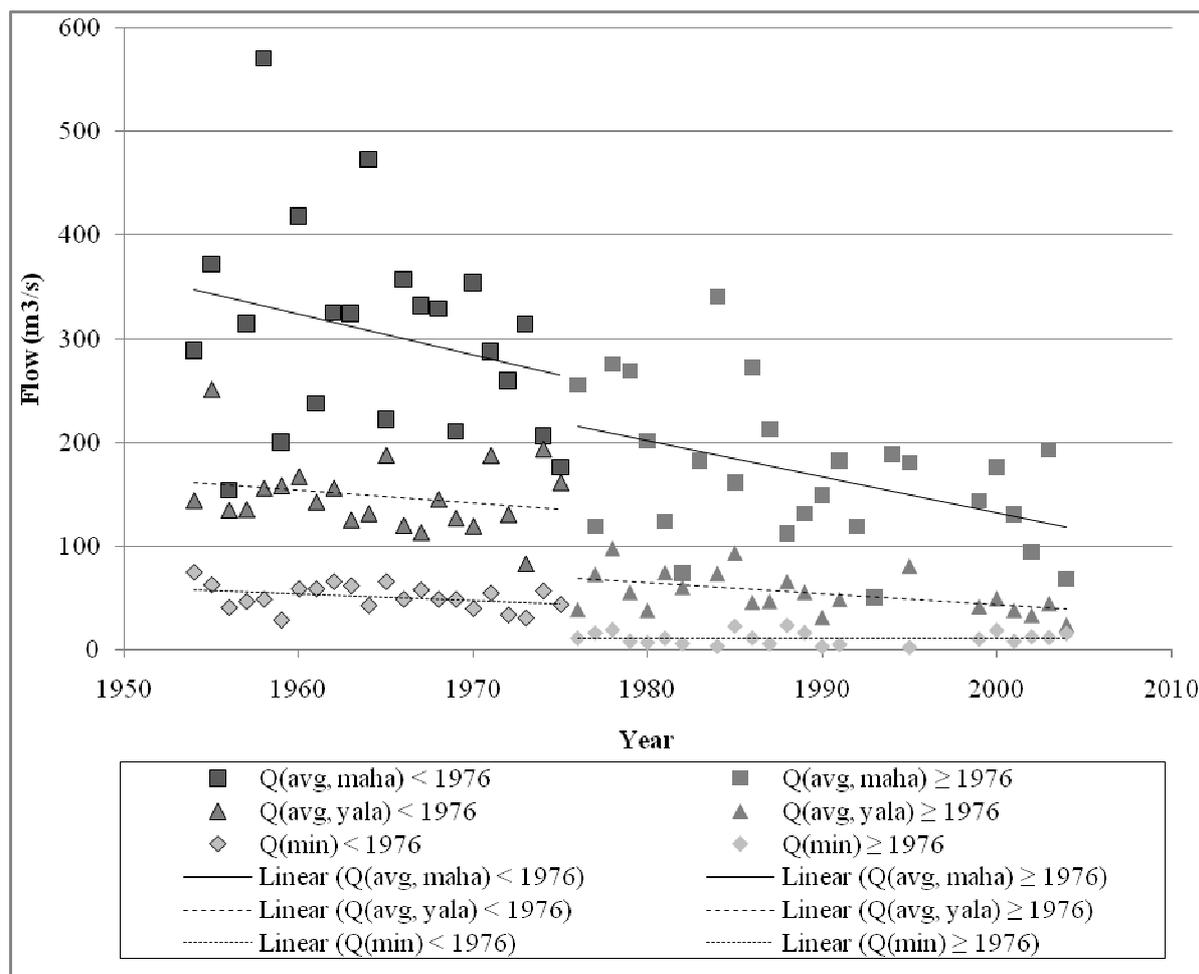


Figure 6.1. Discharge patterns at Manampitiya (Source: Irrigation Department)

Manampitiya, along the Polonnaruwa-Batticaloa road, is the most downstream point along the Mahaweli River where discharges are measured. Between Manampitiya and Kandakkadu, where the Verugal Aru and the Mavil Aru branch off from the Mahaweli River, there is no substantial inflow of drainage water, which means that the possibility of a reduced flow at the measuring station being compensated by a return flow of diverted water can be discounted. Even though the irrigation schemes at Polonnaruwa and Minneriya are located between Manampitiya and Kandakkadu, satellite imagery on Google Earth clearly shows that the drainage water from these two schemes flows parallel to the Mahaweli, separated by a ridge, until just downstream of the point where the Verugal River splits from the Mahaweli.

The problem that remains then is how much of the water in the Mahaweli flows straight on to the sea, and how much branches off towards the AES headworks. The only data that I have been able to find on this are from dry-season measurements that were conducted between 1938 and 1951 at three points: in the Verugal River, in the Mavil Aru, and in the Mahaweli River between the branching point of the

Verugal River and the sea²⁰³ (AR 1945: B59; AR 1946, part V: B57; AR 1947, part V: B67, AR 1951, part V: appendix F, table 3).

These limited data (seasonal average discharge, average discharge for the entire measurement period, and lowest measured discharge) give an indication of the way the water is divided over the branches for a discharge range from 0 to about 160 m³/s, as schematised in figure 6.2.

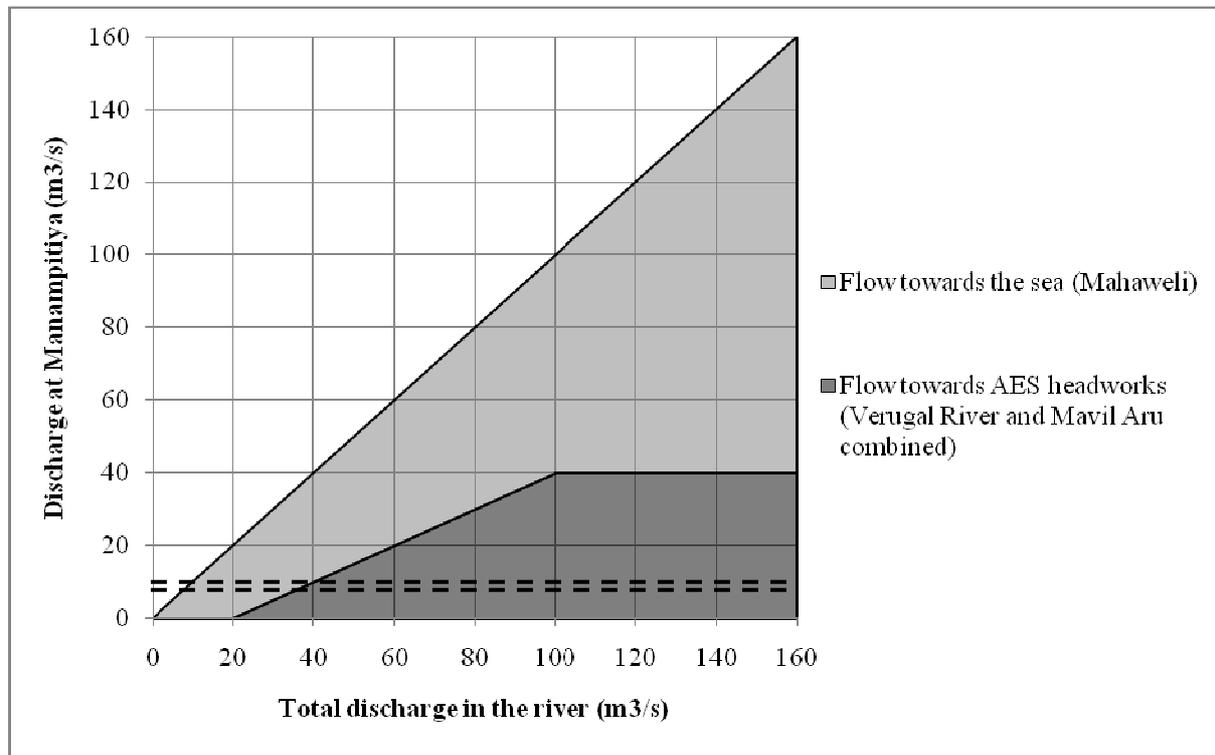


Figure 6.2. Estimated division of flow between the Mahaweli River and the Verugal Aru and Mavil Aru

If the fairly standard rates of 1.5 l/s/ha for pre-saturation and land preparation, and 1.0 l/s/ha for maintenance flow are used to estimate water requirements for the AES (Albinson and Perry 2002: 17), the total requirement for the full command area (7,000

²⁰³ Drainage flow from the irrigation schemes at Polonnaruwa, Minneriya, Giritale and Kaudulla does flow into the Mahaweli between the branch with the Verugal River and the downstream measuring point in the Mahaweli (at Chundakadu, not far from Kankuveli). While the area irrigated by these four schemes is substantial, the Kaudulla Scheme had not yet been developed by the time the measurements were taken and the Polonnaruwa Scheme was only partially developed. Also, a substantial part of the drainage water was re-used to irrigate encroachments. But even if all the drainage water does flow to the river, the total volume is limited. For the 1999 *yala* season, Bandara estimated total field losses in this cluster of irrigation schemes to be about 840 mm (2003:165), which comes to 0.6 l/s/ha. At least half of this will be seepage losses in fields and channels. With a total cultivated area at the time of about 10,000 ha (less in a very dry year) and an average return flow of say 0.3 l/s/ha, the total return flow will average only 3 m³/s.

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ha) comes to around 10.5 m³/s at the start of the season and 7.0 m³/s during the rest of the season (the dotted lines in the graph). This means that water shortages will start to occur roughly when the discharge at Manampitiya drops below 40 m³/s during the start of the season, and below 35 m³/s during the rest of the season.

While this is only a rough estimate, it fits with observations by farmers with whom I spoke: the earliest remembered episode of serious water shortages was in 1972, when the discharge at Manampitiya dropped to 34 m³/s. This was the first time it was below 40 m³/s since 1959 (when the scheme was still partly under development, and scheme requirements were still limited). In that year a temporary weir was built across the Mahaweli for the first time, with the objective of diverting more water towards the AES headworks. After 1976, the minimum discharge dropped dramatically, and the construction of a sandbag weir at Kandakadu became an annual event organised by the ID with the participation of a large number of Muslim, Tamil and Sinhala farmers. By 1983, the farmers were desperate; only about half of the fields could be cultivated in the *yala* season (Brewer 1984: 3). When the Irrigation Department started building another temporary weir,

“some farmers assaulted the work crew and TA [Technical Assistant] and eventually took the TA hostage in order to force the ID [Irrigation Department] to use a tractor that had been assigned to a different project so that the dam could be built more quickly. One result was severe damage to the tractor. From other comments, it appears that there is great hostility toward ID officers in Allai and little control by the ID of the situation. [...]

In Allai, the IE [Irrigation Engineer] has reportedly spent much of the last six months away from the scheme to recover from illness. From outside sources I have been told that some of the TAs do not even try to do their jobs there” (Brewer 1984: 5).

Brewer’s report was confirmed by several middle-aged and elderly farmers whom I spoke to in the course of my fieldwork. What is crucial here is that, while in other parts of the country (including around Trincomalee town!) ethnic tensions rapidly degenerated into violence over the summer of 1983, the farmers in the AES collaborated to increase the water supply, rather than that they competed with each other over what little water was available. At this point in time, the ‘enemy’ was the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project (and the Polgolla weir in particular), not the other farmers within the scheme.

6.4 *Paddy production in Trincomalee District, 1981-2009*

In order for me to say anything relevant about the performance of the AES during the years of conflict, data are required. Unfortunately, the data that are available specifically about the AES are sketchy and do not cover the entire conflict period. As a compromise, I therefore first present the longitudinal data that were available, namely at the level of Trincomalee District. In the next section, I merge the districtwide trends with specific data and information from interviews to reconstitute a picture of the performance of the AES during the years of conflict.

6.4.1 **Sown and harvested areas**

In this section, I present and analyse statistics on paddy production in Trincomalee Districts for the period October 1980 – September 2009²⁰⁴. The data were drawn from the website of the Agriculture Statistics Division (ASD) of the Department of Census & Statistics (ASD 2009).

As can be seen in figures 6.3 and 6.4, the area under paddy cultivation showed a rapid increase between 1981 and 1984. This was mainly due to the development of the Morawewa and Gomarankadawela irrigation schemes. After large-scale violence during the *maha* season of 1984-1985 and the *yala* season of 1985 caused thousands of people to flee from their villages²⁰⁵, large areas were abandoned. The failure of the Kantale reservoir bund at the start of the *yala* season of 1986 caused a further (temporary) drop in cultivated area. The arrival of the IPKF at the start of the 1987-1988 *maha* season brought the return of displaced Tamils and a slight increase in cultivated area, only to be outstripped by renewed displacement of Sinhala colonists. After the war of 1990, paddy cultivation bounced back. This upward trend was briefly interrupted after fighting broke out in the second half of 1995, and after fighting broke out in the middle of 2006.

An important detail in the data on paddy cultivation is the extent to which sown land was not harvested. I present these data in figures 6.5 and 6.6.

²⁰⁴ Agricultural years (which run from October to September) do not match calendar years. In this section, I follow the practice of the Department of Census & Statistics of indicating an agricultural year by one calendar year rather than two. So the agricultural year 2009 runs from October 2008 to September 2009. The *maha* (rainy) season runs from October to March; the *yala* (dry) season runs from April to September.

²⁰⁵ Mass violence around Trincomalee town started in 1983, but did not yet affect the main paddy producing areas so much. In late 1984, there was violence and displacement in the Tamil villages in the rural northern half of the district, but as these villages had comparatively small acreages under paddy, the impact on district-level figures was minor.

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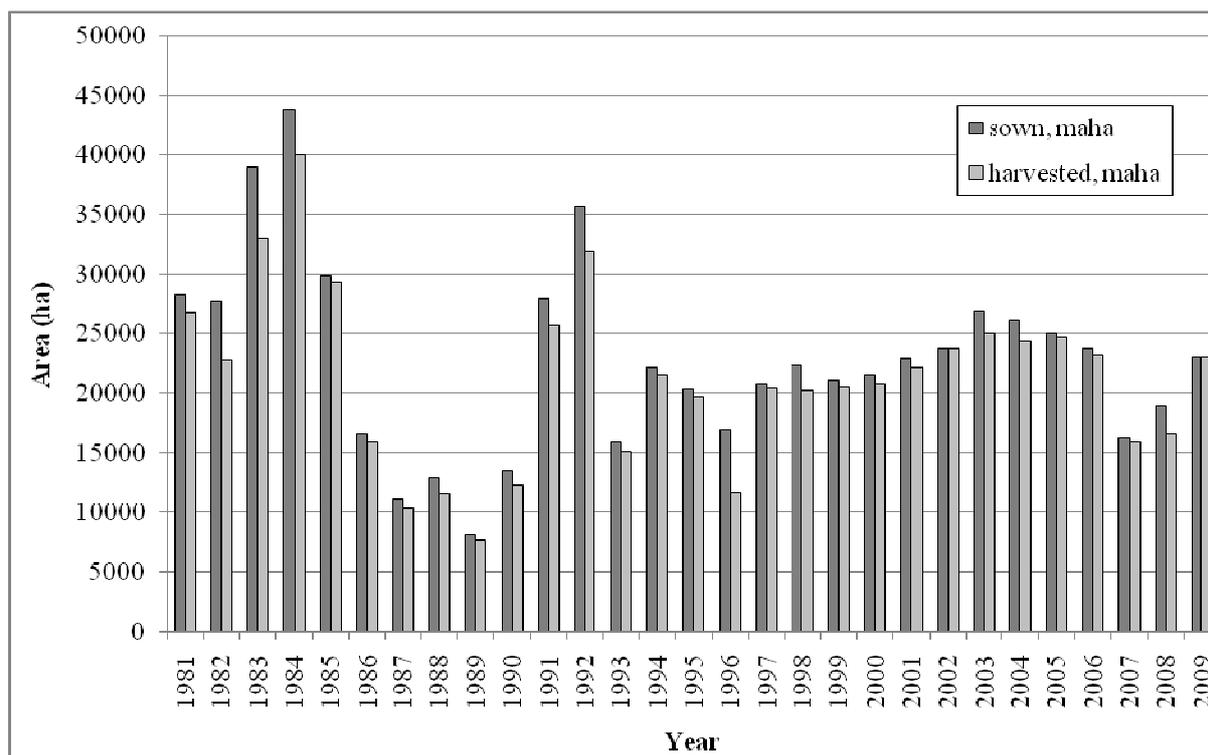


Figure 6.3. Extent under paddy in *maha* season, Trincomalee District, 1981-2009 (Source: ASD 2009)

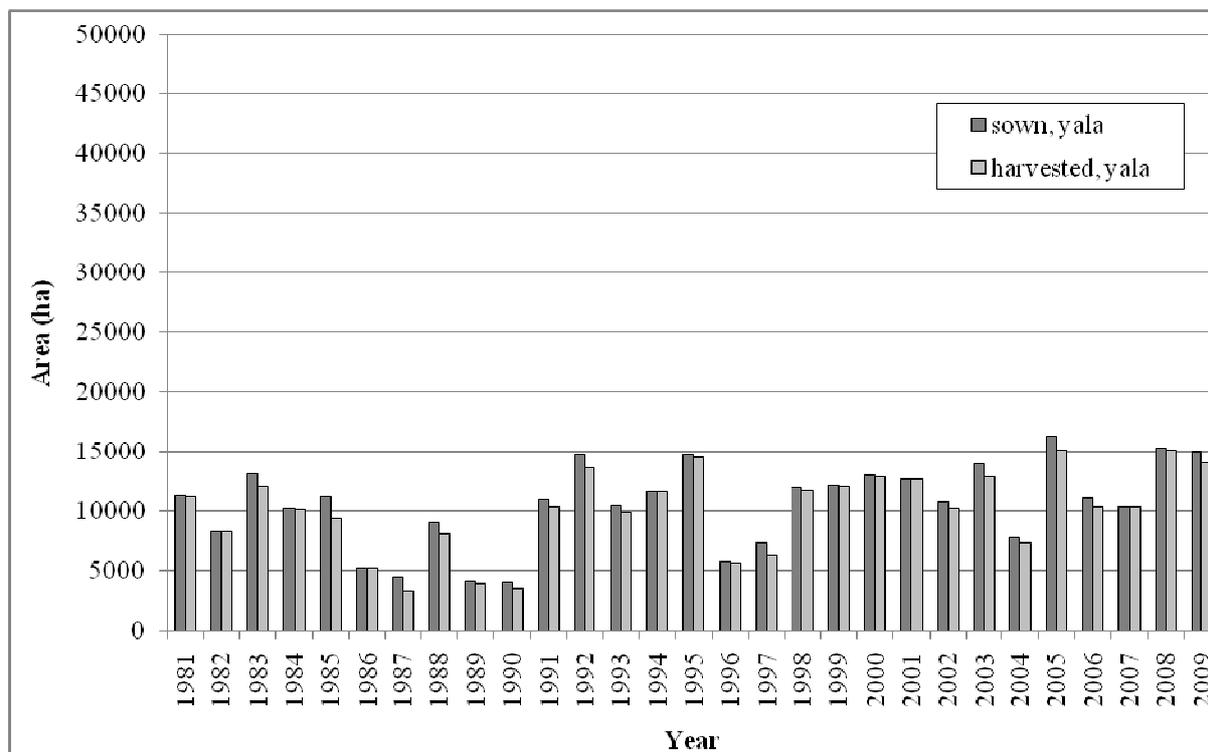


Figure 6.4. Extent under paddy in *yala* season, Trincomalee District, 1981-2009 (Source: ASD 2009)

Water: irrigation management in the Allai Extension Scheme

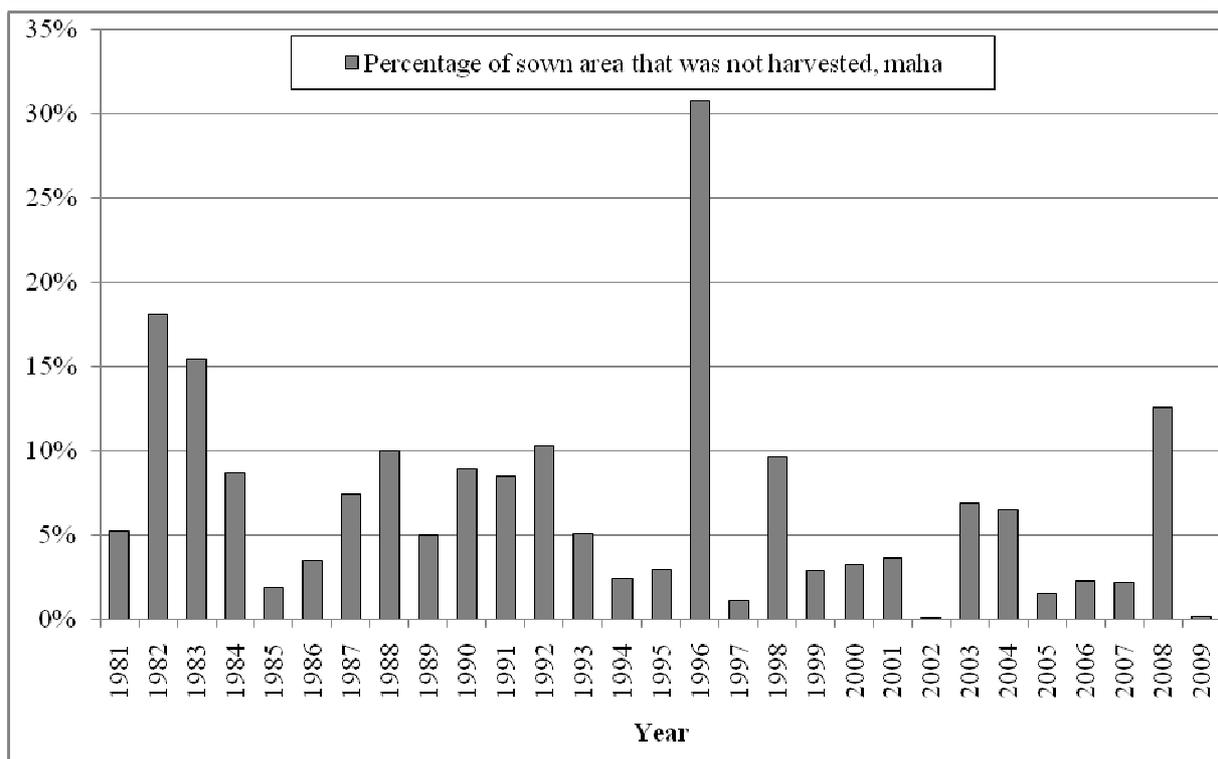


Figure 6.5. Percentage not harvested in *maha* season, Trincomalee District, 1981-2009 (Source: ASD 2009)

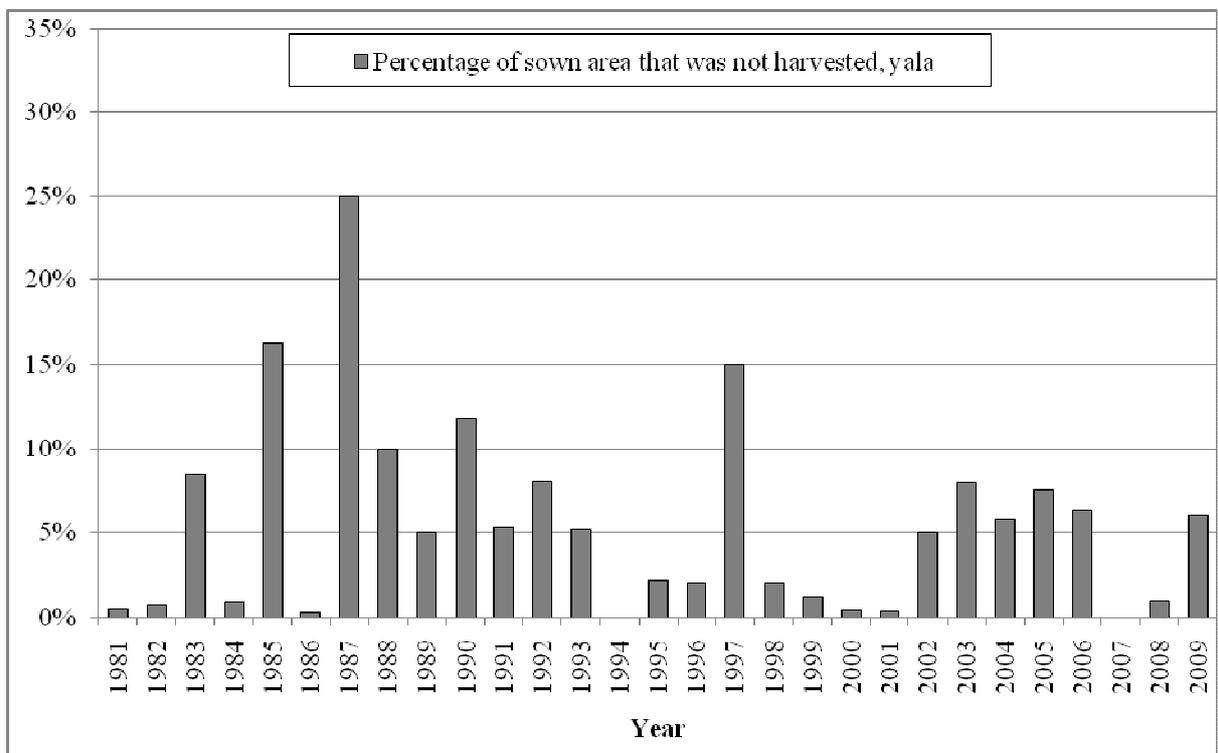


Figure 6.6. Percentage not harvested in *yala* season, Trincomalee District, 1981-2009 (Source: ASD 2009)

As can be seen, in almost two thirds of all seasons in the time series, the abandoned area was less than 5% of the sown area. Large-scale abandonment of paddy lands is primarily related to extreme weather: *maha* 1982 and 1996 saw drought, *maha* 1984, 2004 and 2008 saw floods, *yala* 1983, 1985, 1987 and 1991 saw drought. Large-scale violence and displacement only comes in second place as a reason why farmers abandoned their fields before the harvest – this was the case in the *yala* seasons of 1985, 1987, 1990 and 2006 and the *maha* season of 1987-1988. In almost 2/3 of the seasons in the time series however, less than 5% of the area that was sown was not harvested.

When taking figures 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6 together, two very important conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the amount of land that farmers cultivated is primarily related to the security situation and only secondarily to the weather. Secondly, with the exception of sudden outbreaks of large-scale violence, whether or not sown fields are harvested is primarily related to floods and droughts, and not to the security situation. In short: *farmers did everything they could to get a harvest from those fields that they started cultivating*. As I will show later on in this chapter, this involved actively working towards containing violence.

6.4.2 Yield

Paddy yields in Trincomalee District have been reasonably good despite the conflict. As can be seen in figures 6.7 and 6.8, yields increased substantially between 1981 and 1985 as a consequence of the liberalisation of the economy. This was followed by a decrease in yields from about 1985 to the mid-1990s, and a steady increase from about 1996 onwards.

Figure 6.9 shows the difference between district-level yields and countrywide average yields (as percentages of countrywide average yield). In the first half of the 1980s, *yala* yields in Trincomalee District were better than in the rest of the country, probably because the district had comparatively good irrigation facilities and good soil. I am not quite sure why, already before the war, *maha* yields were structurally lower than the countrywide average. It is however clear that the growth in yields in the district fell behind the national trend as the war progressed.

Four factors contributed to this: (1) the abandonment of irrigated areas (leading to a relative over-representation of rainfed areas); (2) the lack of maintenance of irrigation schemes (contributing to both tail-end water shortages and flooding); (3) difficulties with the distribution of newer rice varieties, and (4) restrictions on fertiliser usage for particularly Tamil farmers. From the late 1990s onwards, and particularly after the 2002 ceasefire, the trend in district-wide yields caught up again with the rest of the country after the four bottlenecks mentioned above were gradually addressed.

Water: irrigation management in the Allai Extension Scheme

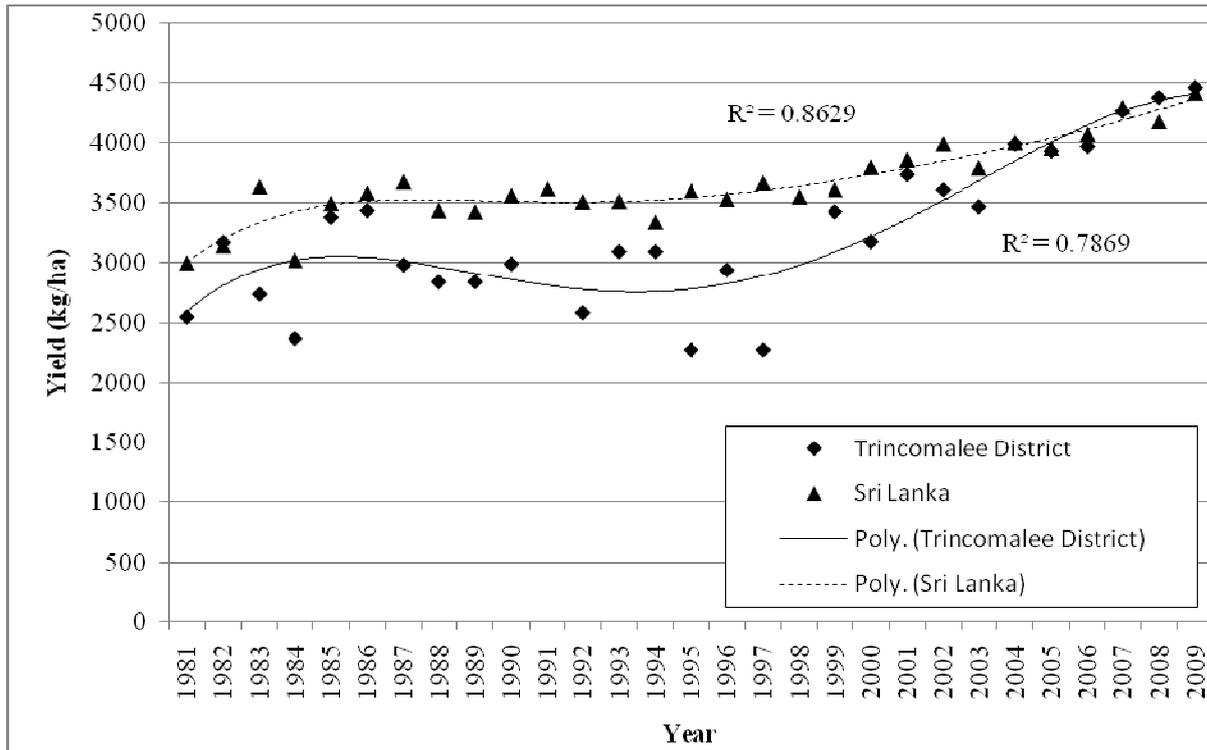


Figure 6.7. Maha paddy yields in Trincomalee District and Sri Lanka, 1981-2009 (Source: ASD 2009)

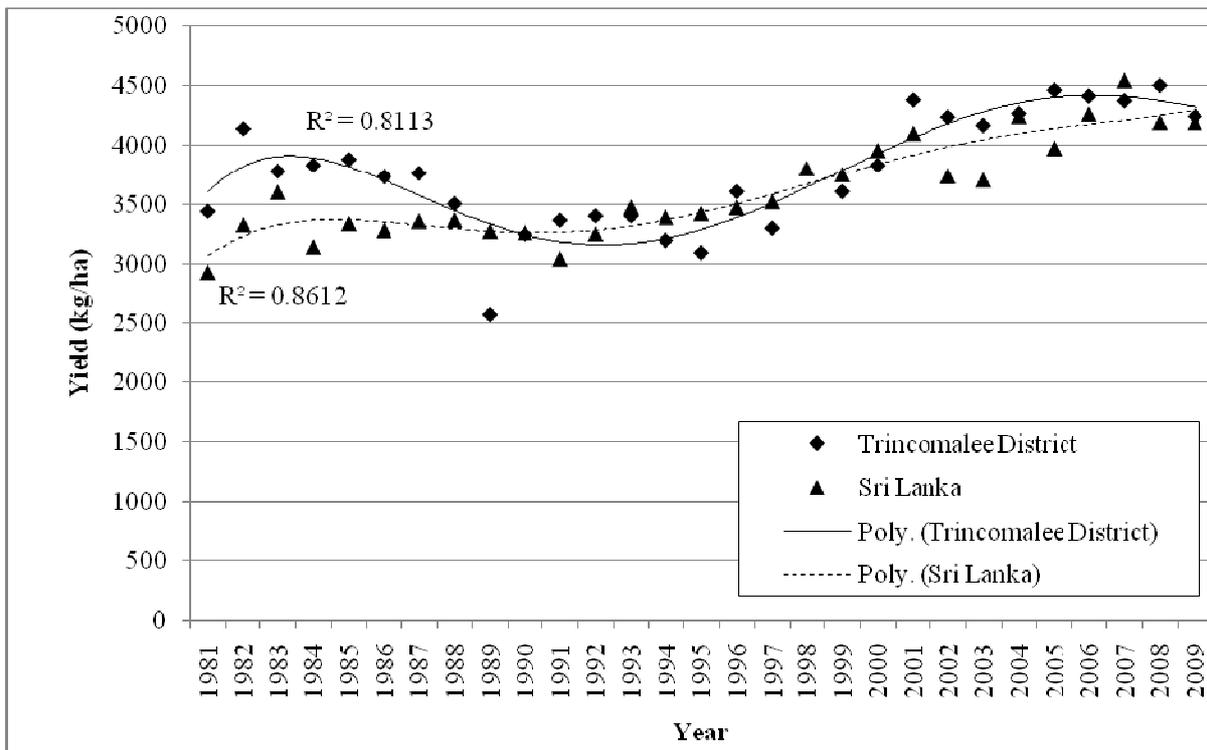


Figure 6.8. Yala paddy yields in Trincomalee District and Sri Lanka, 1981-2009 (Source: ASD 2009)

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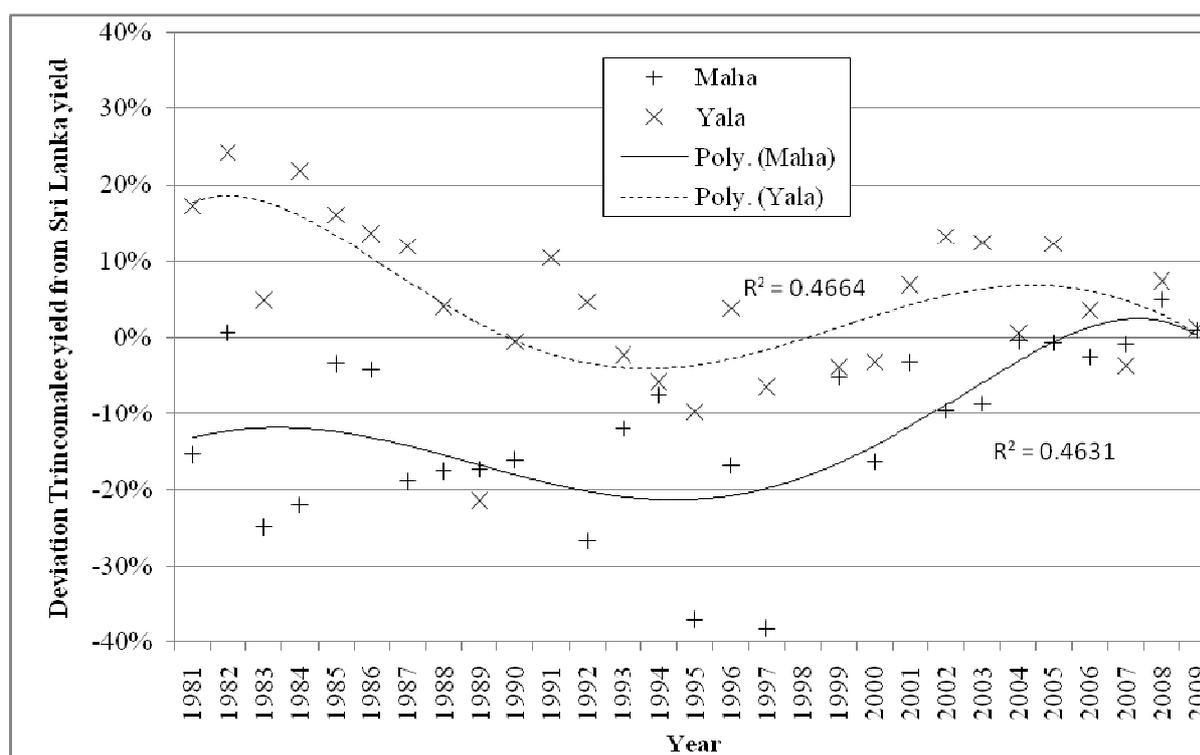


Figure 6.9. Comparison of paddy yields, Trincomalee District and Sri Lanka, 1981-2009 (Source: ASD 2009)

6.5 The performance of the Allai Extension Scheme, 1985-2009

Only very little specific information on the performance of the Allai Extension Scheme are available, and (with exception of rainfall and river flow data), none of it is available in proper time series. However, the available data in combination with the narratives of farmers and Irrigation Department officials do make it possible to describe the overall trends.

Up to *maha* 1984-1985, the only serious problem in the AES was water shortage in the dry season. The violence that broke out in *yala* 1985 caused a radical break. The displacement of most Tamils in the scheme meant that about a third of the command area was abandoned – some Tamil farmers claimed that at least part of their crop was harvested by Sinhalese. The Sinhalese and Muslim farmers who remained also had a problem however, as the sluice in the headworks had been closed, and could not be opened for a while due to the tensions²⁰⁶. Most displaced Tamils, as well as many Sinhalese who started fleeing in late 1985, were unable to cultivate during *maha* 1985-1986, which meant that probably half of the AES was not cultivated. From early 1986, some people started returning; *yala* 1986 still saw a very small crop, but in

²⁰⁶ Some people told me that the army had ultimately opened the sluice by firing a rocket into it from a helicopter. I am not sure whether this is true; others whom I asked about this claimed that at the time the army did not have helicopters from which a sufficiently large rocket could be fired.

maha 1986-1987 and *yala* 1987, things slowly picked up. *Maha* 1987-1988 saw the entry of the IPKF, which meant that many Tamils resettled and many Sinhalese displaced. The departure of over half of the Sinhala population did not structurally reduce the cropped area, as there were enough second-generation settlers who were willing to lease the land of the settlers who left. Muslim-Tamil violence at the time (and during later episodes) did not cause long-term displacement of Muslim farmers from the AES.

While the cultivated area increased again, yields reduced due to increasing difficulty for (particularly Tamil) farmers in accessing fertiliser, pesticides and improved rice seed. A further complication for the farmers in the area around Muthur and Thoppur was that in 1987 the stores of the Paddy Marketing Board in Muthur were destroyed. This meant that farmers became dependent on middlemen to sell their harvest, causing a reduction in income and an increase in indebtedness. Although the sale of colony land is prohibited, quite a few Sinhala farmers ended up either pawning or informally selling their land to local businessmen. One businessman in Serunuwara once offered to show me 50 acres of paddy land that he said he owned, and I was told of another businessman who controlled over 100 acres.

Around the fringes of the AES, hundreds of acres that were abandoned in the early years of the conflict remained uncultivated. RB tract 8, the RB 'new tract', and most of LB tracts 14, 15 and 18 (about 900 ha in total) were abandoned because they were unsafe, while lack of maintenance meant that most of RB tracts 4-7 (some 200 ha of what was still cultivated) were abandoned due to lack of water and an additional 400 ha spread out over the scheme were abandoned because they were flooded²⁰⁷. This meant a reduction in the formal command area by about 2,100 ha; about 300 ha of encroachments were also abandoned. The total (official and unofficial) area that could be cultivated thus reduced from about 8,400 ha at its peak in the early 1980s²⁰⁸ to about 6,700 ha around 1988; actual cultivation fluctuated with water availability.

From 1988 onwards the situation remained fairly stable until the 2002 ceasefire, which means that *throughout most of the war, the AES functioned at about 80% of its pre-war capacity*. Those involved in the AES found ways of continuing cultivation as best they could, and – though fear and violence ruled – there was no more large-scale displacement apart from that which occurred during *yala* 1990.

After the signing of the 2002 ceasefire agreement, some of the abandoned lands in LB tracts 14 and 15 and RB tracts 4-7 were taken into use again, bringing the cultivated area to about 7,200 ha. The situation remained like this until 2005, when severe tensions between Muslims and Tamils caused displacement and made it impossible for Muslims and Tamils alike to prepare their fields in parts of LB tracts 7-11 and the

²⁰⁷ About 200 ha around Eechchilampattu and 400 ha of flooded land had already been abandoned before 1985. Both the water shortages around Eechchilampattu and the flooding in low-lying areas were compounded by the further reduction in maintenance that followed the conflict, and the damage that was caused to the headworks in 1990.

²⁰⁸ 7,000 ha official command area + 2,000 ha unauthorised cultivation – 400 ha flooded land – 200 ha land with severe water shortages.

purana lands irrigated by the Allai Tank for the *maha* season of 2005-2006. This affected about 1,000 ha. *Yala* 2006 saw the closure of the sluiceway at the headworks, followed by large-scale fighting in Kottiyar Pattu and the displacement of virtually the entire population in August and September. Tamils and Muslims had already hardly sown any paddy, and most Sinhalese lost their crop due to the channel closure. By September, most people had returned, just in time for the *maha* cultivation season. However, as many people had lost assets and most people faced financial hardship due to the missed *yala* crop, not everybody was able to obtain sufficient seed paddy and fertiliser in time²⁰⁹. Normalcy started to return by year's end, and the 2008 *yala* cultivation was quite normal.

Because of the decline in cultivated area between 1985 and 1988, water availability for the remaining fields improved somewhat. Tail-end shortages did exist (particularly for about 500 ha near Muthur, Pallikudiyiruppu and Eechchilampattu and for about 200-300 ha of unauthorised fields that were too elevated for the channel system to handle under normal circumstances), but the rest of the scheme was pretty much double-cropped.

Yields roughly followed the overall pattern for Trincomalee District: decline between 1985 and 1990 due to restrictions on fertiliser and logistical hardships, stagnation until the late 1990s, and an increase as the situation improved. In most of the AES, yields are between 35 and 40 bags/acre²¹⁰ (5.7-6.5 MT/ha) if there is enough water and fertiliser; in more sandy areas around Eechchilampattu and Manalchenai, yields are around 30 bags/acre (4.9 MT/ha) in a normal year. For Muslims and Sinhalese who were able to cultivate, yields remained high and pretty much stable throughout the conflict. The decline in overall yields was primarily caused by the army not allowing fertiliser into Tamil areas. As a consequence, many Tamil farmers saw their yields drop to 20-25 bags/acre (3.3-4.1 MT/ha). Pests and diseases were a problem as normal, but their impact was sometimes reinforced by the conflict context: during *yala* 2005, when there was a period of tension between Muslims and Tamils and people could not go to their fields, a pest caused widespread damage.

6.6 *Why the Allai Extension Scheme kept functioning*

Given the extent of violence and tension that plagued Kottiyar Pattu over the last decades, the relatively good and stable performance of the AES is quite remarkable. While many people pointed towards the relatively good availability of water as a crucial factor, I believe it is not sufficient to explain the whole picture: water availability explains *potential*, not *actual* performance. Particularly in the aftermath of the 1985 violence, people had every reason to try to make life of the ethnic others impossible. Death and injury was common, as was – intermittently – widespread

²⁰⁹ NGOs did set up seed distribution programmes, but not all of these programmes were able to reach the farmers in time.

²¹⁰ A bag contains 67 kg of unhusked paddy.

damage to property. Even water was sometimes used as a weapon (through the blocking of irrigation channels), but – and that is very important – this rarely led to complete crop failures because the channel blocks were always resolved. In the many conversations that I had with farmers, *wattai vidanes*/farmer representatives and ID staff, it became clear that, each in their own way, a large number of people had worked towards maintaining a basic form of normalcy that enabled them to live comparatively normal lives given the circumstances, and in the process undermined a lot of the potential harm that could have come with the overall atmosphere of enmity and fear. I describe the strategies that were used in the next sections.

6.6.1 Irrigation Department staff

The staff of the Irrigation Department found themselves in a very difficult environment. In the AES, as in other schemes, they were surrounded, already before the conflict, by farmers who were quite hostile if they did not receive enough water (Brewer 1984). After the war broke out, the ID staff attached to the AES had a further problem: while most of the ID staff were Tamils, their office and quarters were located in the Sinhala village of Somapura (also known as Kallar). This meant that they needed to tread carefully so as not to risk being lynched for being Tamil. Because of this, pro-active intervention in conflicts over water was not a feasible option.

Benedikt Korf has studied this problem in detail for the case of the Menkamam Tank (Korf 2004: 97-144; Devarajah *et al.* 2001). This is a small reservoir with a command area of some 120 acres (49 ha), all of which is cultivated by Tamils. 8 ha is owned by a children's home in Trincomalee, and the remainder is owned by nearly fifty families from Menkamam.

In the 1950s, part of the catchment area was encroached upon by Tamils from Menkamam or from the adjoining village of Sivapuram, who subsequently sold the land to Sinhalese from the nearby village of Dehiwatte in 1954. Over time, the encroachments expanded, and by 2001 there were 40 Sinhala and 10 Tamil farmers cultivating this land. When the encroachments expanded into the tank itself, and a conflict arose over the water level that could be maintained in the reservoir. If the water level was to be maintained at its design level, the Menkamam fields could be irrigated but the encroachments (which totalled less than 10 ha and were cultivated by no more than 15 farmers) would be flooded. If, on the other hand, the water level was reduced, the encroachments could be cultivated but the Menkamam fields would suffer from water shortages. The encroachers prevailed: they broke the tank bund, and through patronage links with the army ensured that the people from Menkamam would not restore it permanently. While, from a legal perspective, the encroachers should have simply been evicted, it took until 2006 before the Menkamam tank was finally renovated. Korf, who studied this case in 2001 (before the ceasefire significantly relaxed tensions) used this as an example to show how deeply the situation had got stuck: according to many Tamil people whom Korf spoke to, the Menkamam tank was a signature example of "how the state would

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discriminate against them” (Korf 2004: 109). Neither the people from Dehiwatte nor the people from Menkamam could formalise their preferred version of reality, because any attempt to do so would guarantee violent retaliation by either the army or the LTTE. The situation was, in a sense, one of ‘mutually assured destruction’.

While there is no denying that the conflict over the Menkamam tank became deeply ethnicised in nature, and that the situation remained stuck for so long because of the mutual threats of violence, I believe that that is not the entire story. The ID staff *did* intervene, but in an indirect way: a new channel was cut which supplies 60% of the affected fields with water (Devarajah *et al.* 2001: 15). By doing so, a large part of the problem was made irrelevant.

This approach of minimising own exposure to (very dangerous) threats and managing the scheme in a way that minimised potential for conflict was characteristic, and proved useful. The most important choice that was made was to simplify water distribution to its extreme: in order to minimise conflicts over water shortages, the channels were filled to maximum capacity whenever enough water was available, even if this sometimes caused damage to the channel bunds and flooding in poorly drained areas. Basically, the gates were opened at the beginning of the season and closed at the end of the season; adjustments in between were minimised.



Figure 6.10. Channel filled over maximum capacity (own photograph)

Sometimes parts of the irrigation infrastructure itself were given up. Not far from the Menkamam tank, a regulator in the D6 channel used to get blocked regularly by Sinhalese who did not want water to go downstream. Being unable to police the

structure without putting themselves at risk, the ID staff found a simple yet effective solution: they simply removed one of the gates, making it impossible to regulate water flows, but also making it near impossible to block the channel (see figure 6.11). This is not a unique solution: Mollinga and Bolding (2006: 31-32) have documented how Irrigation Department officials in a South Indian irrigation scheme introduced outlet pipes without gates in a water-short distributary channel as a way to minimise conflict with farmers.



Figure 6.11. Evidence of tampering with a structure (picture taken by Prof. L. Vincent, September 2009)

The case of the Menkamam tank is interesting for another reason. When I asked around about the Menkamam tank issue in 2004 and 2005, people knew about the issue but unlike in 2001, nobody presented it as an exemplary case of inter-ethnic problems. Within Menkamam, some of the people I spoke to strongly framed it as an issue between original farmers and encroachers, and not as an ethnic issue: I was referred to the cases of the nearby Kankuveli tank, Kirankulam and Peruveli tank that all have the same unresolved problem of encroachment into the tank bed, but where downstream farmers and encroachments are all Tamils²¹¹.

²¹¹ One farmer whom I spoke to initially thought that I was Benedikt Korf, for whom he had been a key informant. I knew that this man had a reputation of being a smooth talker, so I was a little suspicious of what he was going to say. Indeed, he gave me a glowing (and

6.6.2 Farmer representatives and *wattai vidanes*

In their positions as intermediaries between farmers and the Irrigation Department, farmer representatives and *wattai vidanes* play a linking role between the water requirements of the farmers within their area of control and the O&M requirements of the scheme as a whole (Amarasinghe *et al.* 1998; Uphoff 1992). Particularly in schemes where water is limited and where the irrigation infrastructure is in sufficient condition to make detailed water management possible, it is important for farmers to have good representation in order to ensure day-to-day access to sufficient water. As mentioned above, the channels in the AES are run on (or over) full capacity whenever possible, and water management is not a very important task for the farmer representatives and *wattai vidanes*. What is important is ensuring that channels are not blocked unreasonably by farmers. This requires not only negotiation with the Irrigation Department, but also with farmer representatives and *wattai vidanes* who are responsible for adjoining areas. Channels were blocked for two reasons: to irrigate elevated fields on the edge of the scheme's command area²¹², and sometimes to deliberately deny water to downstream farmers as a form of "power politics" during periods of tension (Korf 2004: 106).

It is important to realise that the intermittent blocking of channels for irrigating high fields was a fairly common and accepted practice, and that the blocking of channels for ethno-political reasons was fairly rare²¹³. When I asked farmers across the scheme and Irrigation Department staff about recent incidents of the Muthur channel being blocked²¹⁴, they all described this as a justified short-term measure that farmers applied because they needed the water, and that it did not cause any disturbances to downstream farmers because of its temporary nature. Once, I came across a news article which stated that the Muthur channel was being blocked and that this was causing tensions. Since I had not heard of any tensions, I asked around about what

rather exaggerated) account of how good the ethnic relationships in the area now were, that the Menkamam tank had been a problem but never a serious one, and that he himself had played a crucial role in resolving the conflict. When I told him that I knew Benedikt but that I was a different person doing a different research, he was very considerate: "Good, I told him the story during the war, now I tell you the peace story so you can add to his research".

²¹² While the farmers who cultivate these areas and their *wattai vidanes* are vocal about this being due to poor channel maintenance by the Irrigation Department and lack of government interest to solve the problem, I have come to believe that the Irrigation Department staff are genuine when they say they cannot do too much about this: many of the fields concerned fall (just) outside the original command area of the Allai Extension Scheme, and are simply too elevated to be able to be irrigated under normal circumstances.

²¹³ One reason for this may have been the risk of retribution by armed actors on the side of affected farmers. Devarajah *et al.* (2001: 15) give an example of the farmer representative of Dehiwatte who was abducted by the LTTE, allegedly for organising the blocking of irrigation channels.

²¹⁴ I deliberately inquired about this in the broadest possible terms ("I heard the channel was blocked recently what happened?") to avoid 'expected answers'. The uniformity in the answers was striking.

was happening, only to find out that the journalist had been mistaken. On the other hand, it is also very easy for people to misinterpret such a regular practice in antagonistic terms during periods of acute tension (see section 7.5.2 for an example). That said, it is instructive to look at what a Tamil *wattai vidane* in charge of an area that is fed by the Muthur Channel told me one day:

“During the war, channels were sometimes blocked to prevent water from going to the downstream villages. Sometimes it was also people from my village who did not want water to go to the fields of the next village. If a channel was blocked, the DO [Divisional Officer of the Agrarian Services Department] would call a meeting of the *wattai vidanes* in the area, and we would talk about the problem. I know all of the *wattai vidanes* for a long time already, and we had good relations before the war.

Nobody else was present at the DO meeting, so we could safely interact and come to agreements with our fellow *wattai vidanes*. If I saw a Muslim *wattai vidane* on the market in Muthur, I could not speak to him because someone might think either of us was a traitor and get him or me killed. But in this meeting, there was no security risk. At night then, the *wattai vidane* of the area where the channel was blocked would open the channel, and close it again before morning. In this way, water would go to the other village, and nobody would know who did it. Had some people from this *wattai vidane's* village found out that he had done it, they would surely have attacked him, but now he could say ‘it was dark, somebody must have come from the next village and stolen the water’ ” (interview, Kottiyar Pattu, February 2005).

Just as much as the regulators and outlets are “signposts of struggle” (Mollinga and Bolding 1996), they are also ‘signposts of making do’. There is indeed struggle among farmers and between farmers and the Irrigation Department, but just as much there are people looking for pragmatic solutions.

Crucial for the co-operation between the *wattai vidanes* was the fact that they knew each other from before the war: there was a pre-existing level of trust that continued to exist despite the conflict. However, they were only able to interact in closed meetings, so that nobody outside a small ‘in-crowd’ could know what had been discussed and decided. Similarly, as it was considered dangerous to be outside after dark, the night provided a literal ‘grey space’ in which things could be done out of sight. The importance of this secrecy should not be underestimated. Just before Norman Uphoff revisited the Gal Oya Scheme in Ampara District in 1998, a Sinhala farmer representative had been assassinated because he had brokered an agreement with Tamil farmers downstream about how to share the water in the coming season (Uphoff 2001, Uphoff and Wijayarathna 2000). A crippled and nearly-deaf *wattai vidane* told me that he had been severely tortured by every imaginable armed group, both on the side of the government and that of the separatists, because they all suspected him of helping the wrong people.



Figure 6.12. Meeting between government officials and *wattai vidanes* (own photograph)

Since they occupy leadership positions that are not (directly) based on politics, the *wattai vidanes* and farmer representatives are sometimes also able to function as intermediaries for wider issues than only irrigation. Below, I give a narrative rendering of what a Tamil *wattai vidane* told me about how, following the 1985 violence, the people of his village and the Sinhalese people living the neighbouring village re-established their lives.

“In 1985, both we (Tamils) and the Sinhalese people in the neighbouring village were displaced due to the violence, and our villages were destroyed. We went east, the Sinhalese went west to Kantale. However, we could not keep living in camps like we were doing. *We all need to farm.* Therefore, we approached the LTTE and the Sinhalese approached the Army and Police, and convinced them that we needed to return, and that the LTTE should not harm the Sinhalese and the Army and Police should not harm the Tamils. It took some time, but in the end we were allowed to return and live in camps in our villages. We jointly negotiated for the safe delivery of dry rations to both the Sinhalese and the Tamils, and to a certain extent that was successful. This enabled us to continue farming and make our living” (Interview, Kottiyar Pattu, November 2005).

What is important in this narrative is the (socio-)economic imperative that generated the negotiations to allow food to be distributed to both sides. Pragmatism, rather than idealism was the driving force here. This narrative also indicates an inversion of

part of Korf's analysis of what happened around the Menkamam tank. Rather than Tamils using the LTTE and Sinhalese and Muslims using the army and police to pressurise the non-combatants on 'the other side' and keep the situation in a deadlock, this narrative hints of non-combatants putting combatant groups under pressure to give room to 'the other side', so that everybody may live in a basic form of normalcy. This was, in effect, a subversion of discourses that promoted ethnic animosity. This subversion was by no means ideological: right after telling me the story reproduced above, the *wattai vidane* eloquently expressed his support for the LTTE and its cause, and his confidence that the LTTE would be able to keep the newly reviving Sinhala-nationalist forces in check²¹⁵.

As mentioned earlier, the fact that people already knew each other and to some extent had established relations of trust was crucial. Had there not been something of an old boys' network among the *wattai vidanes* and farmer representatives, then it would have been much more difficult for them to find solutions. This has its bearings on debates on irrigation management transfer. The current move to belatedly pull the AES into the INMAS programme is likely to improve interaction between farmers and the Irrigation Department, but may undermine interaction between the different representatives if election cycles are too short. This in turn carries the risk that localised disagreements escalate because they cannot be amicably solved locally.

6.6.3 Farmers

Farmers found three ways to respond to the context of conflict and still continue cultivation: abandoning of fringe areas, ethnic segregation of cultivation, and ethnic cross-hiring of labour.

Abandoning fringe areas

Because of the presence of Tamil militants in the jungles of Kottiyar Pattu, those parts of the Allai Extension Scheme that bordered these jungles became risky places for Sinhala and Muslim farmers who could be attacked or kidnapped for ransom. These areas could also be dangerous for Tamil farmers, because government troops sometimes conducted patrols there, and might identify any Tamil they encountered as a militant. As a consequence, much of LB Tracts 14, 15 and 18 and RB Tract 8 were abandoned (see map 6.2). RB Tracts 4, 5, 6 and 7 were also largely abandoned, partly for security reasons, and partly because the channel that supplied them silted up and could not be maintained. While this reduced the cultivated area, it increased the amount of water that was available for the remaining fields, thus counterbalancing

²¹⁵ This interview took place around the time that Mahinda Rajapakse was elected president, and in a situation where both the LTTE and Sinhala nationalists became increasingly belligerent in their words and acts.

the reducing inflow at the headworks to a large extent. For Tamil farmers around Eechchilampattu, the abandoning of the fields meant significant hardship because they did not really have an alternative to turn to. For the remaining Sinhala farmers in the colony areas, the displacement of more than half of the Sinhala population in 1985 meant that there was enough alternative land available for lease.

Ethnic segregation of cultivation

In a sense, the possibility of problems arising between farmers of different ethnicity was reduced by the conflict itself. Since during tense periods it became difficult for people to move around in areas dominated by people of other ethnicity (and by the armed actors that claimed to represent them), ethnic segregation occurred in land use patterns. Particularly in the areas that were under cultivation before the Allai Extension Scheme was developed (between Mallikaithivu and Muthur, and between Thoppur and Pallikudiyiruppu), Muslim- and Tamil-owned fields used to be interspersed before the conflict (Korf 2004: 110). Some Muslim and Tamil farmers sold their lands that were located in areas that had become inaccessible to them. Around Mallikaithivu, this generated an interesting dynamic: around the 1960s, many Tamil farmers from Mallikaithivu sold their fields to Muslims to raise funds for their children's education, but from the late 1990s onward, they started buying the lands back with funds sent by relatives in Canada.

In the colony areas of the AES, ethnic segregation of lands due to the conflict was not an issue. In those areas, there was very little interspersing of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim fields to begin with. Since these areas were only developed some 30 years before violence started in Kottiyar Pattu, only a very small (and technically illegal) land market had developed. Because of this, there was very little new 'ethnic mixing' after the colonists were settled, and thus there was little to 'unmix'.

A second, and probably more common, strategy was for farmers to hold on to the ownership of their lands while leasing them out to people of the other ethnic group. As such, leasing out fields to tenants of other ethnicity is not a new thing; see for example the case of the elderly Muslim cultivator in section 3.3. In the context of conflict however, it became one of the only ways for farmers to still earn something from the fields that they could not access. This process of ethnic segregation has definitely not been a neutral exchange: there have been winners and losers on both sides. Owners who now have to lease out their fields see a loss in income, and owners who now need to become lease farmers since they cannot access their own fields incur extra expenses (although this may be balanced off to some extent if the own fields can be leased out to others). Which side has lost out most generally depends on who tells you the story. In that sense, I disagree with Korf's statement that the Muslim farmers were "those most affected" (Korf 2004: 110).

Given the restrictions on how long the same person can lease the same plot of land, farmers who lease out their land will need to find new tenants every two to three seasons, and tenants will need to find new land with the same frequency. Despite the fact that in the AES over a thousand matches of fields and tenants are made every

year, there is no open lease market. In almost all cases, but particularly if land is leased out to people of other ethnicity, tenants are selected on the basis of a level of trust: either tenants and owners are acquaintances, or there is a person known to the owner who can vouch for the trustworthiness of the tenant. Both owners and people seeking land to lease can approach the *wattai vidane* or farmer representative when they cannot find tenants or lands within their immediate networks; in other cases, temple or mosque committees function as an intermediary.

Cross-hiring of labour

Apart from leasing out land to people of other ethnicity, cross-hiring of labour also took place: Sinhala (and Muslim) farmers hired Tamils to cultivate fields in areas that were dangerous for Sinhalese (and Muslims) to go to but were accessible for Tamils (Devarajah *et al.* 2001: 11). As such, this was nothing new: during the harvest season, it had been common for decades to hire itinerant group of Tamil and Muslim labourers from Kinniya and from different parts of Batticaloa and Ampara Districts, irrespective of the ethnic background of the labourers or the farmers. As there were slight variations in the timing of harvests, it was possible for such itinerant groups to make a harvesting tour every season along the East Coast, move into Polonnaruwa District, and even go as far as the rice bowl around the Giant's Tank in Mannar District. Over the last two decades, this practice has reduced. On the one hand, the erection of numerous checkpoints made long-distance travel risky for young Tamil men (though not so for Muslims); on the other hand, the increasing availability of landless labourers within the AES (and other irrigation schemes) meant that demand for labourers from outside reduced.

Both in the case of the itinerant bands of labourers and of labourers from within the area, acquaintance was an important factor. As farmers and labourers depended on each other in precarious circumstances, a certain level of trust was required. This, again, gave rise to pragmatism. Particularly in the early years of the cease-fire, I heard many stories of home guards who, after completing their checkpoint or bunker duty for the day, would go home, change their uniform and gun for a shirt and sarong, and get to work in their fields together with a group of Tamil labourers.

6.7 *Inversion: the contribution of shared resources to violence*

In the 'greed' versus 'grievance' debate, unequal access to resources is identified as a key grievance, which may lead to violent conflict (Collier and Hoeffler 2001). This debate, which is largely based on a dataset with countries as the unit of analysis, has come in for substantial criticism for being too simplistic in its explanation of the onset of war²¹⁶. In his study of Trincomalee District, Benedikt Korf (2004) rightfully

²¹⁶ Apart from this, there is an important problem with the national-level, large-N dataset approach that has been used by Collier and Hoeffler's research. What the analysis of such data documents is the correlation between the onset of violent conflict and different kinds of

concluded that different kinds of greed and a range of grievances are at play all at the same time, and that a more detailed understanding of local dynamics is needed to come to a relevant level of understanding of the wider conflict. Local and supra-local conflict dynamics interact continuously, and in this interaction violence (or its absence) takes shape. The local resource conflicts that Korf has studied were clearly shaped by the context: entitlements became increasingly ethnicised, and thus the conflicts over these entitlements became increasingly ethnic in nature. However, not all conflicts are violent (Varshney 2002). A question that thus begs answering is *to what extent land and water scarcity has caused inter-ethnic violence in Kottiyar Pattu*.

When the chronology of violence as described in chapter 4 is put together with the data on land and water availability presented in sections 6.3 to 6.5, some patterns emerge. Firstly, it is clear that there was a chronic trend of increasing water and land scarcity in the years leading up to the onset of violence in 1985, and that particularly land scarcity had reached serious proportions. There were however no direct conflicts over land. Rather, the structural lack of livelihood opportunities for the younger generation generated frustration. In the ideologically charged years around 1983, the distribution of weapons and the spread of ethnonationalist propaganda were powerful factors in turning this frustration into violence. I therefore contend that the long-term trends of increasing scarcity at best only had an indirect relation to the occurrence of inter-ethnic violence. Secondly, there have been intermittent periods of acute water scarcity (though, admittedly, not as extreme as in other irrigation systems). Here, there is no correlation at all with violent episodes. In the years before 1985, acute water scarcity rather generated inter-ethnic collaboration among farmers who jointly built sandbag weirs across the Mahaweli River. In the years after 1985, such large-scale collaboration never re-occurred, but – while people did mention conflicts over water – the conflicts never turned violent on a large scale. This lends further credence to the view that large-scale violence only occurred when it was organised by outsiders with access to weapons. This was not necessarily because the people of Kottiyar Pattu were such strong pacifists, but because the vast majority had sufficient long-term interest in maintaining some form of stability.

6.8 Reflection: coexistence in the Allai Extension Scheme

What I have shown in the above paragraphs is that, despite the violence and tension, the Allai Extension Scheme has continued functioning to a considerable extent. The specific setting of the irrigation system shaped the interaction among and between Irrigation Department staff, farmer representatives and *wattai vidanes*, and farmers. At the same time, the interference of the different actors with channels and structures shaped the scheme's performance. The reason for the continued functioning of the AES is that many people have, each in their own way, found

public discourses about the causes of the conflict. Correlation and causation are however not the same thing; nor are public discourses about causes of conflict necessarily the same as the actual causes of conflict (Kalyvas 2006).

pragmatic solutions that were useful for themselves, and thereby useful for others. This did not involve organised inter-ethnic co-operation. Rather, there were a lot of individuals engaging in various forms of informal inter-ethnic interaction with known others that together kept people's livelihoods going and prevented the AES from collapsing. As long as these interactions remained invisible to the violent projects of ethno-nationalist actors, they could continue unpunished. This is radically different from the view that "when people cooperate, it is generally a conspiracy for aggression against others", and that this argument "bears substantial relevance for civil wars, where war entrepreneurs use social networks to exclude those who are not part of a clan, ethnic group etc." (Korf 2003: 6, referring to Hirschleifer). While Hirschleifer and Korf's arguments are valid in themselves, I contend that they are not valid for everybody, and quite possibly only for a minority of civilians who live in a context of conflict.

The findings presented in this chapter stress the importance of trust and pragmatism as factors that make inter-ethnic interaction possible. Trust is generated when people know each other. Friendship is not a prerequisite for this; acquaintance *is*. Trust is a precondition for inter-ethnic interaction because, in a context of violent ethnicised conflict, the consequences of being seen as a traitor are immense. The pragmatism among farmers in the AES is shaped by people's long-term interests in stable livelihoods; even if farmers subscribe to ethno-nationalist political convictions, they can still interact with other farmers because "they all need to farm". It is this pragmatism that makes it possible to swap from the ethnic category of identification (which stresses otherness) to another category of identification in which the similarity among farmers is stressed.

7 Troubles: inter-ethnic interaction during everyday riots and almost-riots

“You have to remember that this happens three times a year in Muthur, ever since 1985. Something happens, tension develops, we run to the churches, roads get blocked. After a few days people start talking, the problem gets sorted out, and we get back to normal. Until the next time” (interview with a Tamil man from Kottiyar Pattu, Trincomalee, April 2007).

7.1 Introduction

The second case study that I look at in this book concerns inter-ethnic interaction in situations of acute tension along ethnic lines. When mob violence occurs in such a context, one can speak of an “ethnic riot”: “an intense, sudden, though not necessarily wholly unplanned, [...] attack by civilian members of one ethnic group on civilian members of another ethnic group, the victims chosen because of their group membership” (Horowitz 2001: 1)²¹⁷. As Donald Horowitz makes clear in his elaborate study of riot patterns, what precisely constitutes a riot and what differentiates a riot from other forms of ethnically motivated violence is rather ambiguous. I will here stick to the presence of mobs as the key defining factor. The difference with a demonstration (which may degenerate into a riot) is the intention to inflict damage or bodily harm on an identified other party.

As documented in chapter 4, Sinhala-Tamil riots occurred in 1976 in Kilivetti, in 1983 in Neelapola and Kankuveli, and in 1985 in all areas where Sinhala colonists lived near Tamil villages. Tamil-Muslim riots occurred in 1985, 1987, 1990, 2001, 2002 and 2003; these riots were centered around Muthur town, but in some cases the violence fanned out into other areas of Kottiyar Pattu. Apart from these riots, there have been even more periods of acute tension between Sinhalese and Tamils and between Muslims and Tamils that never turned into riots. Despite the ultimate absence of mob violence in such ‘almost-riots’, the tension and fear (and regularly, the mass-displacement of people) that go with them is as real as in the case of actual riots.

Much has been written about theoretical aspects of riots and almost-riots²¹⁸. Despite this wealth of analysis, I contend that a number of aspects relating to both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic interaction during such episodes of tension have not received the attention they deserve: (1) the extent of continued inter-group interaction despite the tension and violence; (2) local-level patterns of social disintegration prior to violence; (3) the end of violence, when ‘civic life’ takes over again, and (4) the continued salience of other identifiers. In this chapter, I analyse what happened

²¹⁷ Apart from the English term ‘riot’ that is colloquially used to describe such periods of violence, the Tamil word *pirechchinai* and its Sinhala synonym *prashneak* are also used. Both terms mean “troubles”.

²¹⁸ See for example Horowitz (2001), Varshney (2002), Brass (1998), Tambiah (1996), Scott (1985 and 1990), and Kalyvas (2006).

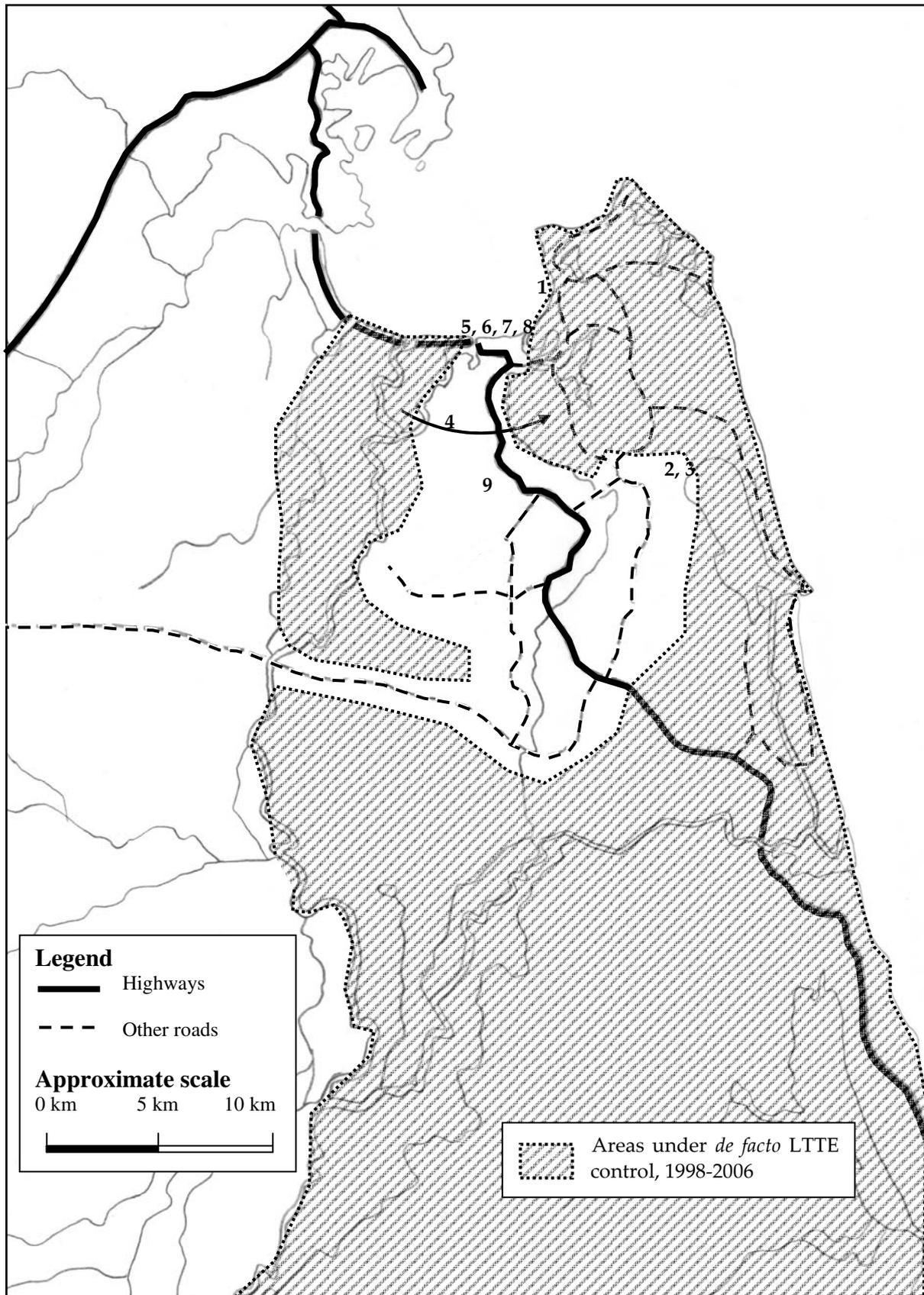
during the Muslim-Tamil riot of April 2003 (sections 7.2 to 7.4). In enrichment to this, I analyse tensions between Sinhalese and Tamils in the area around Serunuwara between June 2005 and April 2006 (sections 7.5 and 7.6). I studied this case, and a period of Muslim-Tamil tensions in December 2005 and January 2006, as part of an evaluation of the work of the Foundation for Co-Existence (FCE), one of the NGOs that is active in the peacebuilding sector in Sri Lanka (Bock, Lawrence and Gaasbeek 2006). Material from this evaluation is re-used with permission.

The 2003 riot pre-dates my research, which means a comment on methodology is required. My wife and I happened to be present in Kottiyar Pattu on a work-related visit for several days preceding the riots. During this period, we spent the nights in ZOA's office in Muthur. On the day the riot broke out on April 17th, we attended the second day of a peace sports meet that had been organised in Dehiwatte, and left to Colombo in the evening. On April 22nd, the day after the riot ended, I returned to Muthur in the morning. ZOA's (expatriate) programme manager for Trincomalee District had to catch a scheduled flight to the Netherlands, and I was requested to fill in for a week, to support ZOA's team in Muthur with the emergency relief operations that had been started up, and to provide 'protection by presence' to the staff. I was there as a humanitarian aid worker, not as an ethnographer. However, although I was not doing ethnographic fieldwork at the time, I definitely was doing a form of participatory observation together with my colleagues. Since the environment we were working in was threatening and a misinterpretation of the situation could potentially carry serious risks for the security of my Sri Lankan colleagues, we spent a lot of time talking about what was going on, and trying to gather information from trusted sources in the area. After everything had calmed down again, I have spent a lot of time reflecting on what I had seen, because witnessing the events generated so many questions. I have no field notes or recordings from this time, so I have had to base the parts of the text that deal with my observations at the time on memory (triangulated through interviews with other people who were present at the time), on photographs I took, on documents and notes (like distribution lists) that were generated during the relief operation (which were kindly provided by ZOA), and on some e-mails to friends and relatives (written in mid-2003) that I was able to recover.

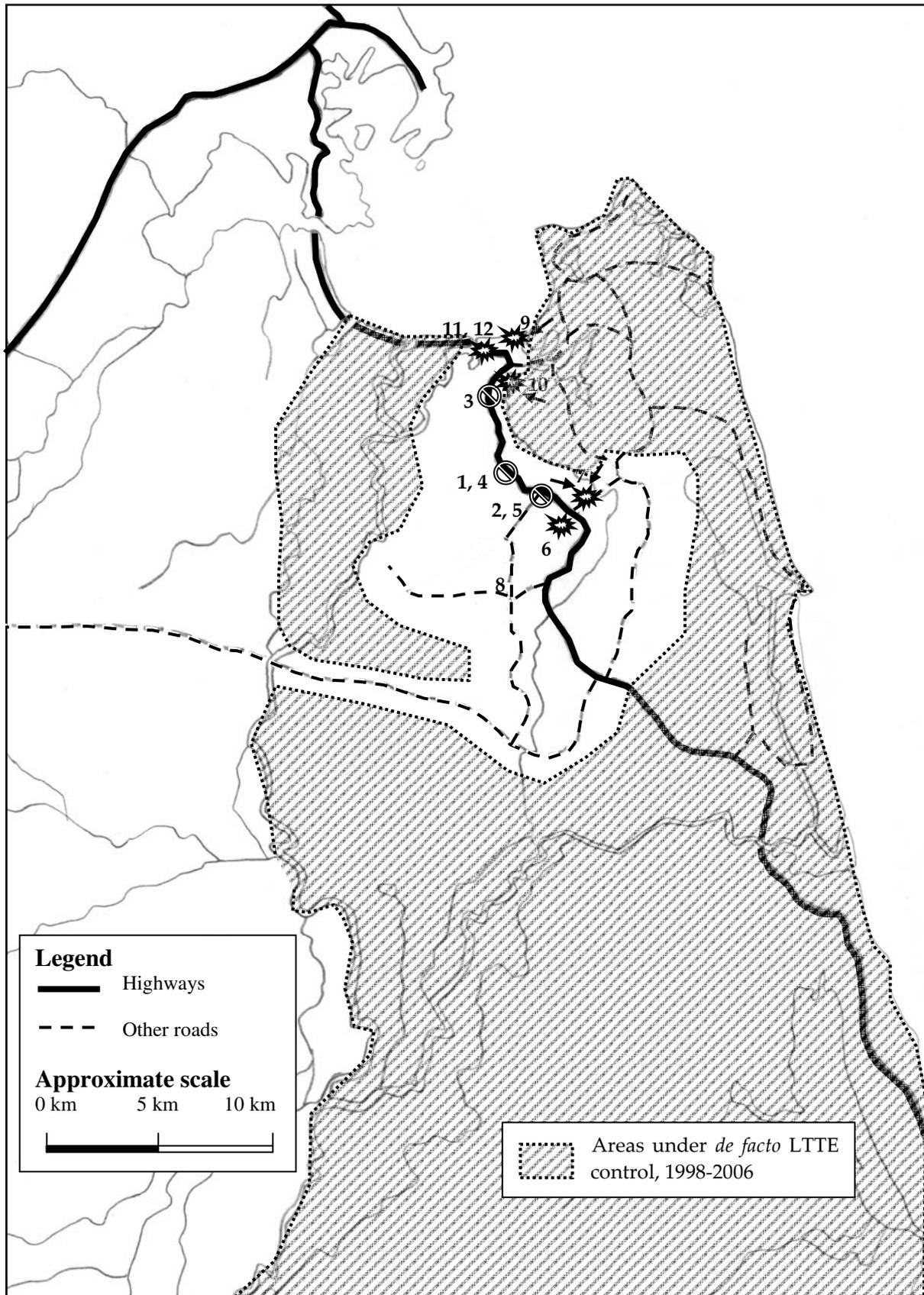
7.2 A riot in Muthur, 17-21 April 2003

April 2003 was a violent month in Kottiyar Pattu, despite a cease-fire being formally in place. Over a period of about a week, five people lost their lives, twenty-nine people were injured, 144 houses and shops were destroyed, 83 were damaged and 312 were reported to have been looted, and about 35,000 people sought refuge in schools, community halls, churches and mosques (MIC 2003:30-31).

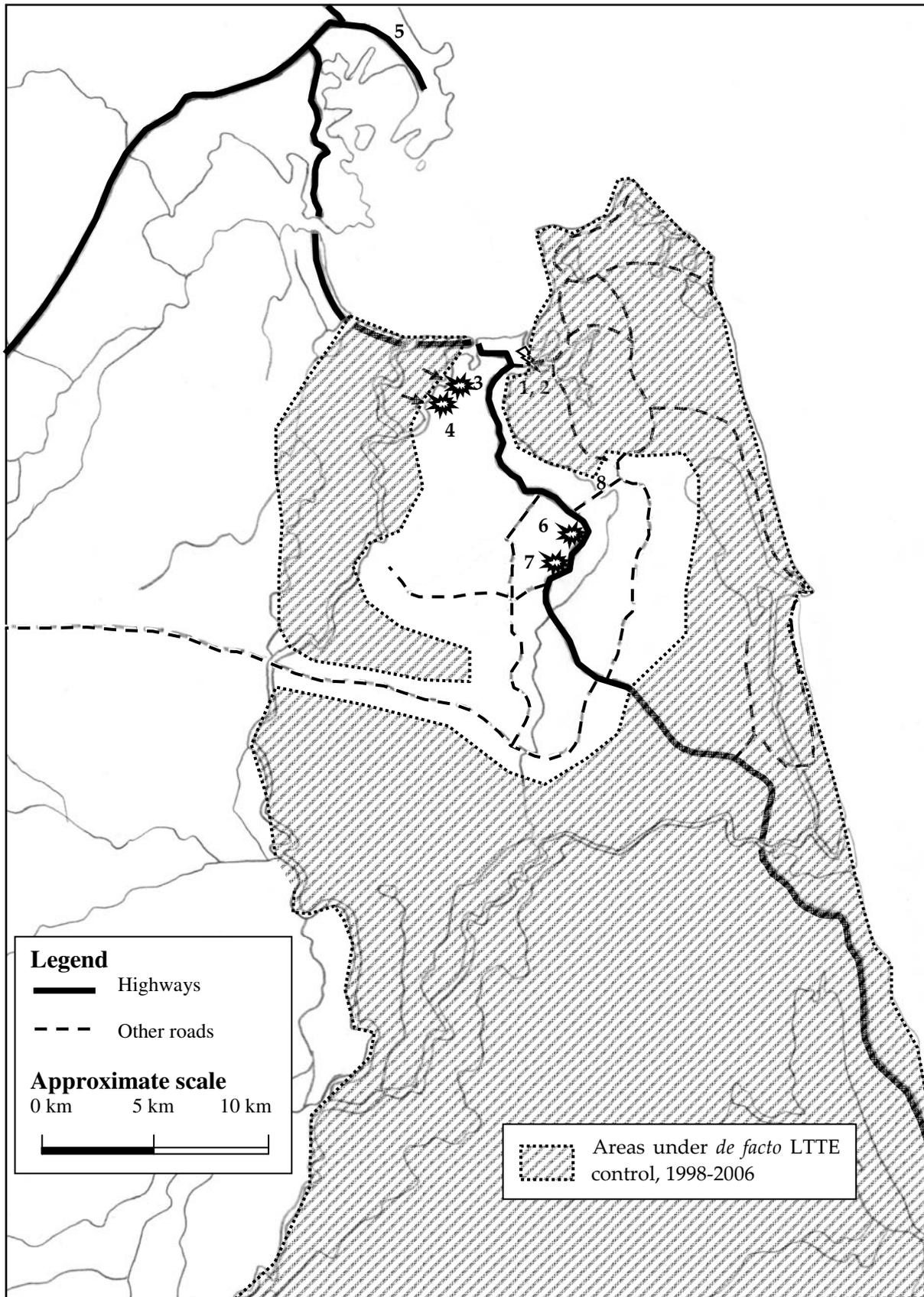
Though Muthur has seen periods of tension and violence both before and after the events described here, the events of April 2003 can to some extent be treated as a bounded case. There was a clearly identifiable trigger event, a period of tension and violence, and a clearly identified de-escalation, after which – at least on the surface – things remained fairly calm for several months. In the following sections, I describe the events in detail. As the geographical location of specific events is relevant, the incidents are marked (in chronological order) on maps 7.1-7.4.



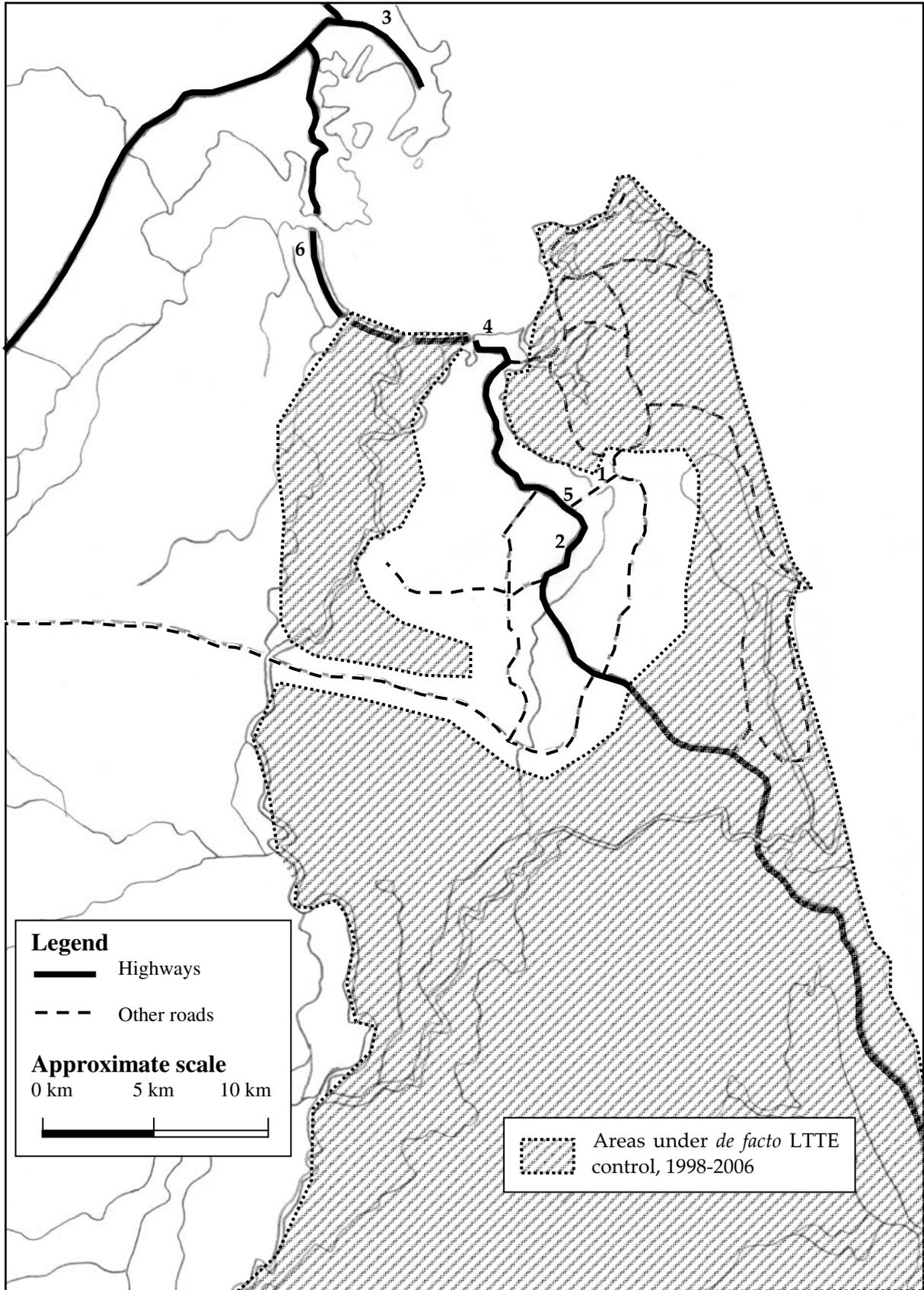
Map 7.1. Incidents leading up to the riot of April 2003



Map 7.2. Incidents that happened on April 17th, 2003



Map 7.3. Incidents that happened from April 18th to April 21st, 2003



Map 7.4. Incidents that happened in the aftermath of the riot of April 2003.

7.2.1 Setting the stage: March 30th to April 16th, 2003

The event that started the cycle of events took place in the night of March 30th to 31st, 2003²¹⁹. Two Muslim men went to the LTTE-controlled area near Sampoor, and did not return (1 on map 7.1). Why they went is not known for sure. Some say they went, on the invitation of a businessman from Sampoor, to sell or buy dry fish, others say they were involved in the *ganja* (marijuana) trade (MIC 2003:1), and the leader of PLOTE claimed that the men were tax collectors for the LTTE who had misappropriated funds and had been called for an inquiry ('Incidents in Muttur due to kidnapping of two Muslim youth', *Island*, 22-4-2003). Some people in Muthur told me that one of the men was involved in the 'Osama group', a group of armed Muslim thugs that will figure regularly in what follows. It looks like the men were taken into custody after they strayed into an area that the LTTE had declared as a High Security Zone (UTHR 2003a:16). The LTTE-controlled coastline east of Muthur was known to be dotted with military installations, meant to keep pressure on the Navy base in Trincomalee. An additional indication that the LTTE did not want outsiders in the area comes from an incident that happened on March 23rd. A three-wheeler owned by a Muslim was confiscated in Sampoor, because "the confiscated vehicle had illegally entered into the LTTE's High Security Zone" ('LTTE and its HSZ in Sampur', *EPDP news*, 3-4-2003). After negotiations, the vehicle was returned to its owner.²²⁰

In the weeks following the disappearance, relatives and community leaders actively tried to get the men released. The men's mothers frequently visited the LTTE office in Sampoor. At the time, Tamil friends from Muthur told me that they had heard from Muslim acquaintances that the two men were involved in drugs trade, and that at least part of the Muslims in Muthur did not mind the LTTE arresting and punishing them, as long as the LTTE took responsibility for it. The fact that the LTTE consistently denied having anything to do with the disappearance was what triggered tensions.

²¹⁹ Most of the analytical reports put the date of the disappearance in the night of March 31st, but since a complaint was lodged with the police on March 31st ('Two LTTE cadres surrender', *Island*, 5-4-2003), the disappearance quite likely happened the day before. Note that this event in itself barely received any attention in the press; the disappearance was first reported five days after it happened (*ibid.*). Apart from the very brief newspaper article mentioned above, the English-language newspapers and websites that I had access to made no mention of the abduction before April 16th, which is strange given the alleged tension that the disappearance caused. Some articles date the abduction around April 12th ('Tense situation prevails in Muttur [sic]', *Daily Mirror*, 16-4-2003, 'Two Muslim youths disappear, LTTE denies involvement', *TamilNet*, 16-4-2003).

²²⁰ In the years before the 2002 ceasefire, Muslims were generally unable to go into LTTE-controlled areas. Following the ceasefire, restrictions were relaxed, and for a while the lighthouse at Foul Point became a popular place for picnics.

Bridging troubled waters?

Seemingly unrelated to this issue, a string of incidents occurred near Thoppur on April 5th and 6th. On April 5th, two Muslim fishermen who were fishing in the Ullakkalli lagoon were attacked by a group of LTTE members and had their canoe confiscated; about two hours later, “a group of Muslim students that was picnicking in the area was attacked by the same LTTE members” (UTHR(J) 2003a: 16) (2 and 3 on map 7.1). The website of the Sri Lankan army reported that three, not two, fishermen were attacked, and that the attack took place at 8 PM, an hour after about 500 armed LTTE cadres were spotted crossing from the Ralkuli area into Sampoor, through the paddy fields south of Muthur (“Tigers beat Muslim fishermen’ *Island*, 9-4-2003)²²¹ (4 on map 7.1). The next day,

“the LTTE member Kanthan who was involved in the attack on the Muslim students was identified by the victims at Thoppur and badly beaten up. [...] [Kanthan,] who was attacked on his way home to Pattalipuram, spotted two Muslims while passing through Pallikudiyiruppu and detained them. On hearing of this, [...] 6 Tamil youths passing through Thoppur were detained by Muslims. Finally wiser counsels prevailed and both sides released their hostages” UTHR(J) (2003a: 17)²²².

The detention of the Muslims by Kanthan seems to have fired emotions in Muthur town, where Muslims staged a demonstration as tensions in the town increased (5 on map 7.1). SLMM spokesperson Teitur Torkelsson is quoted as saying:

“It was an extremely tense situation. However, police backed by troops succeeded in preventing the situation getting out of hand [...] the incident could have triggered a major confrontation in the area” (“Tit for Tat abductions in Muttur’, *Island*, 12-4-2003).

²²¹ Two other newspaper articles mention the LTTE troop movement, but make no mention of the beating up of Muslims (‘SLMM to discuss night crossings with LTTE’, *Daily News*, 7-4-2003, ‘SLMM-LTTE powwow today’, *Daily Mirror*, 8-4-2003)

²²² During my fieldwork, only one person I spoke to mentioned this incident. A young Tamil farmer from Pallikudiyiruppu, a village near Thoppur, placed this incident in a larger perspective as follows:

“There were ethnic tensions after the ceasefire as the army had abandoned Pallikudiyiruppu in 1998 and the LTTE took control. Earlier, army presence prevented things from getting bad, but now no such thing. Last year April (2003), a Tamil had been beaten up on the main road, so we went to Palathoppur to beat the Muslims up. But five days earlier, another Tamil had been beaten up in Thoppur, and that had been solved by talking” (Interview, Pallikudiyiruppu, October 2004).

On Tuesday, April 15th, the mother of one of the missing men died in the Trincomalee hospital after having taken poison the previous day (6 on map 7.1)²²³. As the news of her death spread in Muthur, shops closed and public life came to a standstill in protest. Minister Rauff Hakeem, leader of the SLMC, immediately went to Muthur in an attempt to defuse the tensions (“Tense situation prevails in Muttur [sic]”, *Daily Mirror*, 16-4-2003)²²⁴. He was joined by Minister A.H.M. Azwer (UNP) and MP A.R.M. Abdul Cader (UNP), and the Inspector-General of Police (IGP), T.E. Anandarajah. M.A.M. Mahroof (UNP MP for Trincomalee District) either was already present, or came separately from the other parliamentarians. Somewhere around this time, “police security was tightened at Mutur [sic] to prevent any untoward incident” (‘LTTE abducts youth: mother commits suicide’, *Island*, 16-4-2003)²²⁵. The presence of so many high-profile people raised the stakes rather than calming down the situation.

Right after the funeral rites were completed in the Akkaraichenai mosque, a row erupted between M.A.M. Mahroof and Rauff Hakeem (7 on map 7.1). Mahroof accused Hakeem that he had failed to ensure security for Muslims in the area, should take his responsibility and resign. Hakeem disagreed, and soon a fight erupted between supporters of both parliamentarians (‘Misunderstanding led to Muttur row – Cader’, *Island*, 18-4-2003). At this point in time, there was definitely Muslim anger against the LTTE, but on this day, the competition over local political dominance between SLMC and UNP was the dominant conflict.

A story that was persistent in Muthur at the time was that, while the fight between supporters of SLMC and UNP was going on, some Tamil passers-by were attacked, turning a SLMC-UNP fight into a Tamil-Muslim issue (8 on map 7.1). One of my sources remembered that two Tamil people who got off a bus that stopped near the Akkaraichenai mosque were abducted and killed. In his memory, this was what triggered the subsequent incidents (interview, Trincomalee, March 2008).

On Wednesday, April 16th, things seem to have been comparatively calm. The two Tamil MPs for Trincomalee District, R. Sampanthan and K. Thurairetnasingam of the TULF, addressed a meeting in Pattitidal (9 on map 7.1), and “appealed to Tamils of Muttur area [...] to work hard to safeguard and strengthen the support of Muslims in their areas”, and not give in to groups that are intent on bringing “a rift between Tamils and Muslims” (‘TNA appeals to strengthen Tamil-Muslim unity’, *TamilNet*, 17-4-2003, ‘Sampanthan preaching, LTTE shooting’, *EPDP News*, 19-4-2003). The geography of this meeting is important, as will become clear in a little while.

²²³ In CPA 2003:2, April 13th is given as the date on which the mother died, but this seems to be a mistake.

²²⁴ UTHR (2003a: 17) claims that Hakeem came before the mother died – possibly after she took poison.

²²⁵ It is not clear whether the tightening of security was ordered after the suicide, after the funeral, or after the UNP-SLMC fight (see below).

Bridging troubled waters?

Many newspaper articles, as well as the MIC report, state that there was a continuous *hartal* (a shut-down of public life in protest against a perceived injustice) on April 15th, 16th and 17th. While this would make sense, it is not true. Had there been a *hartal*, then we would never have stayed overnight in Muthur on April 16th and 17th, and the ZOA team from Trincomalee would never have returned to Muthur in the evening of the 17th, simply because the risk of getting stuck along the way or being attacked for violating the *hartal* would be too big.

An e-mail that I wrote from Muthur in the morning of April 17th makes no reference to any Muslim-Tamil tensions – which I definitely would have done had they been there²²⁶. Even if I myself had missed the tensions, my Sri Lankan colleagues would have definitely known and told me.

A colleague from ZOA whom I interviewed later told me that two colleagues who were living in Muthur had said something was fishy, but that they did not consider things to be threatening enough to stop ZOA staff from working in Kottiyar Pattu (interview, Trincomalee, May 2007). There had been a *hartal* after the two men disappeared, but partly because it was a festival period that usually sees a lot of sales, Muslim shop owners could not afford to keep their shops closed indefinitely. Many ordinary people also did not have enough provisions in their houses to be able to sit through a long *hartal*. According to one person I spoke to, a Muslim businessman who had re-opened his shop in the days before Sinhala-Tamil New Year (April 13-15) was beaten up by members of the ‘Osama group’ who were enforcing the shut-down. After the death of the mother of one of the disappeared men, shops closed again, but there was no full *hartal*.

This leads me to the conclusion that whatever happened on April 15th and 16th was not deeply communal in intent. There was understandable ill-feeling among Muslims against the LTTE, and there was a conflict among Muslim politicians over who was the real political leader of the Muslims, but there was neither explosive ill-feeling against Tamils among Muslims nor explosive ill-feeling against Muslims among Tamils.

Shops did close and public life did come to a standstill, but there was no enforcement of a general shut-down, and as we left for Dehiwatte on April 17th, we had no reason to be worried that anything might happen. However, things changed that afternoon.

²²⁶ The e-mail was written in a very relaxed style, and refers to me having spent April 16th working in the Muthur office of ZOA. The only problem was that there had been no electricity from the evening of April 16th and it was so hot that at night some colleagues had decided to sleep outside, and I had been working in the shade of a tree because being inside under the asbestos roof was very unpleasant (there was a small generator that I could use to keep my laptop running, but this was only used during the day).

7.2.2 Day 1: Thursday, April 17th, 2003

In the afternoon of April 17th, a few comparatively small incidents triggered off a wave of rumours, violence and destruction.

In the course of the day, angry Tamil youth blocked the main road at several places including Pattitidal and Mallikaithivu junction (1 and 2 on map 7.2). They did not let Muslims pass. This blockade continued over the following two days, and re-occurred intermittently over the following days. In response, Muslims blocked the main road as well in a few locations, notably at Periyapalam (3 on map 7.2).

None of the textual sources that I have give any explanation as to why Tamils were blocking the roads on April 17th. It may have been a spontaneous action, or it may have been instigated by the LTTE; I simply do not know. If one limits oneself to the textual sources, the blocking of the roads does not seem to make sense. It was the Muslims who were upset with the LTTE, and there was no obvious immediate grievance among Tamils yet. This is where the story of Tamils being caught up and killed in the clash between Muslim supporters of the SLMC and the UNP (mentioned above) becomes crucial. If my memory and the memory of one of my sources are correct, the death of the Tamil passers-by near the mosque fuelled Tamil emotions. The funeral thus became the turning point that transformed Muslim anger with the LTTE first into a political conflict between Muslim parties, and then into a generalized a Muslim-Tamil conflict.

At 3.30 in the afternoon, a bus that was on its way from Muthur to Thoppur was turned back by Tamil protesters at Pattitidal (4 on map 7.2). About an hour later, two Muslims coming from Palathoppur or Thoppur were refused passage at Mallikaithivu junction, returned, and vented their anger on two Tamils near the predominantly Tamil village of Bharatipuram (MIC 2003:5) (5 on map 7.2). The injured Tamils were admitted to the Kilivetti hospital (which is located in Bharatipuram, between Mallikaithivu junction and Palathoppur junction).

From this point onwards, two rather separate sequences of incidents took place, one in and around Palathoppur and one in and around Muthur. As by this time telephone lines had been cut and transport had trickled down to a minimum, the flow of information almost dried up, but rumours about what was happening in the other area kept going around and fueled the anger in both locations.

Around Palathoppur, the first thing that seems to have happened subsequently is that a crowd of Muslims burnt about 15 Tamil houses and shops in Bharatipuram (6 on map 7.2). In retaliation, a crowd of several hundred Tamils (and Sinhalese, I will come to that), including armed LTTE cadres, descended on Palathoppur from various directions and burnt about 35 Muslim houses and shops (7 on map 7.2). In the melee, at least nine Muslims were injured (MIC 2003:31), some with gunshot injuries ('Curfew imposed in Muttur town, suburbs', *TamilNet*, 17-4-2003). Three of the injured were taken to the Muthur hospital, while at least one man was admitted to the Kilivetti hospital. Tamils, hearing that a Muslim had been admitted to what they considered to be a Tamil hospital, protested forcefully, and in the end the man

was taken to the hospital at Serunuwara, where he died the next day ('Tamil civilian killed in SLA fire', *TamilNet*, 18-4-2003). Curiously, it took police and army "several hours" to get to the scene according to "security sources" ('Curfew in Muttur, three more killed', *Daily Mirror*, 19-4-2003). This was strange, since there were three substantial army camps (including a battalion headquarters) within a radius of two kilometers from Palathoppur and Bharatipuram, as well as two police posts, and all these camps were connected to Palathoppur by good roads. Once the soldiers and policemen established a presence, the attacking crowds melted away into the falling night. Neither the Muslim attackers nor the Tamil attackers seemed to be willing to risk their lives.

I was in Dehiwatte on this day, about 6 kilometers from Palathoppur and Bharatipuram (8 on map 7.2). With a group of ZOA colleagues, we had left Muthur by mid-morning²²⁷, and driven to Dehiwatte to attend the second day of a large peace sports meet that had been organized for the occasion of Sinhala/Tamil New Year by some Sinhala and Tamil women's groups with support of ZOA's psychosocial team. About two thousand people participated in the event – mostly Tamils and Sinhalese, and some Muslims. This was the first time since at least 1985 that such a large inter-ethnic event had been organized. Until the afternoon of April 17th, the developing tensions had no effect on the sports meet – a further hint that a lot of people did not consider the events until that moment to be very grave. From about 4 o'clock however, news that something was seriously wrong started coming in, and the atmosphere changed. In small groups, and talking in hushed tones, Tamil and Muslim participants left to their own villages to wait for what was to happen. Interestingly, the news of Muslim-Tamil clashes brought no tension between Muslims and Tamils who were present at the sports meet. By 5 o'clock, the sports meet ended as scheduled, and I joined ZOA's psychosocial team in a vehicle to Colombo. On our way out, we took an alternative route in order to avoid going through Tamil and Muslim areas. A group of (Tamil) colleagues from ZOA's team in Trincomalee, together with the expatriate programme manager, drove back to Muthur via back roads, and reached the ZOA office as dusk set in. a Muslim acquaintance helped them negotiate their way through some Muslim road blocks. Before the injured who were sent to the Muthur hospital arrived there, rumours started circulating in Muthur that a Muslim had been killed. This increased the tension among Muslims significantly. Among Tamils, a parallel rumour spread that Tamils had been killed, which further increased tensions on the Tamil side. As tensions escalated, a dusk-to-dawn curfew was called, but this did not seem to help much.

²²⁷ By this time the roads had not yet been blocked. A colleague who came from Muthur to Dehiwatte around 1.30 in the afternoon had to take an alternative route because the police warned him that roads had been blocked (interview, Trincomalee, March 2008).



Figure 7.1. Bicycle race on the 'Peace Sportsmeet', Dehiwatte, April 2003 (own photograph)

Not long after dark, Vattam, a neighbourhood of Muslim fishermen, was attacked (9 on map 7.2). Located between the Muthur jetty and the mouth of the Kattaiparichchan river, Vattam is a narrow peninsula bounded on three sides by water: the sea to the North, the rivermouth to the East, and a lagoon to the South. In order to assess the damage and to identify which families should receive some form of assistance, government officials and Muslim representatives visited the area soon after the violence had ended. ZOA had relief funds available and in coordination with the Divisional Secretary, we decided to do our own assessment. I visited Vattam in the week after the violence ended, and before the damage was cleared. To anybody who visited the area around this time, the geographical distribution of the damage proved beyond all doubt that the attackers were coming from the LTTE-controlled area²²⁸. Near the tip of the peninsula, many houses were burnt. Further towards the jetty, stocks of inflammable material ran out, and instead knives and axes were used. Particular attention had been given to the cutting up of

²²⁸ It would have been impossible for Tamils living in Muthur town itself to walk about two kilometers through densely populated Muslim area with machetes, axes, and petrol. Had they been identified as being directly involved in the attack, the reprisals would probably have been much more vicious.

fishing nets and the smashing up of kitchenware like cooking pots. One group of people must have run along the beach with the sole purpose of burning fishing canoes, because burnt canoes were found much further away from the rivermouth than the last burnt house. It was also evident that the attackers were in a hurry: where front doors were sturdy, there would be damage from blows with axes or machetes, but the attackers had not bothered to keep hacking until they could open the door. There also seemed to have been comparatively little looting, which is another hint of haste.

As had been the case in Palathoppur, there were armed troops nearby who did not interfere. The main camp of the navy in Kottiyar Pattu was located at the jetty, on the western boundary of Vattam. Apart from that, the navy had an outpost at the eastern tip of Vattam. The attackers walked past the outpost when they entered and left the village. Several of the fishing boats that were burnt along the beach were within two hundred metres from the camp at the jetty, and clearly within sight. Yet the only intervention by the navy was to use teargas against “people who came forward to protect their own village” (MIC 2003:27).

Around the same time that Vattam was attacked, another group of Tamils crossed over from LTTE-controlled area and attacked the Muslim part of the mixed village of Alimchenai, just south of Muthur (10 on map 7.2). About twenty houses and shops owned by Muslims were damaged and destroyed, and some more houses were looted. The inhabitants fled to Periyapalam, a nearby Muslim settlement on the main road.

Upset by the attack on Vattam and by the rumour that a Muslim had been killed at Palathoppur, gangs of angry Muslims attacked Tamil houses around the Muthur market and behind the Muthur hospital, set some houses on fire, and looted a few more (11 and 12 on map 7.2). When this attack started, the Tamils who lived in these areas ran to the Catholic and Methodist churches, their standard displacement sites in case of tension in the area. About thirty families gathered in the community centre in Palainagar, on the Eastern border of Muthur. The people of Vattam moved into schools, as did the people of Palathoppur. By the time the day ended, about 5,000 people had got displaced.

7.2.3 Day 2: Friday, April 18th, 2003

The day that broke, Friday, was a sensitive day in two respects. For Muslims, Friday is the day that they go to the mosque for *jumma* prayers. During periods of Muslim-Tamil tension, many Tamils tend to be particularly afraid of escalation right after the *jumma* prayers finish, as it is a time when Muslims gather and may get aroused by people with bad intentions.

For Christians, who form the majority of the Tamils living in Muthur, this Friday was Good Friday, a very important event in the Christian religious calendar. A day on which to visit a church for sure, but not as a refugee.



Figure 7.2. Burnt house, Muthur, April 2003 (own photograph)

Bridging troubled waters?

The first half of the morning was comparatively calm, with people on all sides taking stock of the situation after the overnight curfew was lifted. A high-powered delegation that had been sent on orders of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe himself arrived in Muthur to assess the situation. It was composed of Tilak Marapana (the Defense Secretary), the Army Commander, Navy Commander and Air Force Commander, the Inspector-General of Police, Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe (UNP) and UNP Chairman Malik Samarawickrema. In the Kattaiparichchan army camp, right on the border with the LTTE-controlled area east of Muthur, they held a meeting with Rauff Hakeem, the four other SLMC MPs, and with the two Tamil MPs for Trincomalee District (R. Sampanthan and K. Thurairathnasingham of the TULF). A number of Sri Lankan and foreign journalists had been flown in on the same helicopter to cover the event (1 on map 7.3). The idea of the meeting was to defuse tensions in the area and to discuss how the violence could be contained. One of the decisions that was taken was to deploy more troops ('LTTE-Muslim leaders meet to defuse Muttur tension', *Sunday Times*, 20-4-2003, 'Ministers, Service Chiefs visit Muttur', *Daily News*, 19-4-2003, 'Curfew reimposed after grenade attack kills civilian', *TamilNet*, 18-4-2003)²²⁹.

While this meeting was in progress, angry posturing between a group of Tamils on the eastern side of the Kattaiparichchan checkpoint and Muslims on the western side erupted into stone-throwing around 11.30 (2 on map 7.3). A little while later, a few shots were fired and handbombs or grenades were thrown²³⁰. As the situation got out of hand, the UNP ministers, service chiefs, IGP and TULF MPs hurriedly left the area and went back to Trincomalee by helicopter. The SLMC MPs remained, and

²²⁹ It is interesting to see what is and what is not mentioned by the different sources. The *Daily News* and its counterpart the *Sunday Observer* are government-run newspapers, and every single article in these papers that dealt with the Muthur incidents was written in a style that understated the extent of violence and fear, and stressed the (impending) return to normalcy. It is not for nothing that the first article in these newspapers was only published on April 19th, after the Muthur situation had received wide coverage in the news because journalists were present when the incident at the Kattaiparichchan checkpoint occurred. As the government was under pressure at the time, it was important to portray an image of proactive and effective intervention and detract attention from the political crisis.

²³⁰ According to the (Tamil) journalist S.S. Selvanayagam, who was present at the incident, the Tamil "marauders ... armed with three shotguns, swords, iron bars and other improvised weapons roamed around and fired shotguns and exploded bombs around 11.30 in the morning in the presence of the army personnel. The people from both sides of the border were also seen hurling stones" ('Top ministers in Muttur area to defuse tension', *Daily Mirror*, 19-4-2003). This description is the most detailed description available of what happened. Note that Selvanayagam presents the use of firearms very one-sidedly. He does not mention that the only victims in this fight fell when Muslims threw a hand grenade at the Tamils, and fired a few shots.

Rauff Hakeem gave a press conference in the Kattaiparichchan army camp, where he blamed the government (of which he himself was a part!) for not providing sufficient security to Muslims ('Muttur explodes', *Sunday Times*, 20-4-2003). After the incident, many Tamils in Chenaiyoor and neighbouring villages close to the Kattaiparichchan border fled to the Chenaiyoor school.

Since there were many journalists present at the conference, the incident received wide media coverage. On Saturday and Sunday, the newspapers ran big articles with photographs of stone-throwing, stick- and knife-wielding Tamils, and one photograph of a Tamil firing what looks like a home-made shotgun ('LTTE controls three fourth of its homeland – Balasinham, *Island*, 21-4-2003). Almost unanimously, the fight was represented as an attack by Tamil civilians and LTTE cadres against innocent Muslims, who do not appear in any of the photographs except for one in the *Sunday Times*, which shows what looks like a row of Muslim men patiently waiting behind barbed wire, with a soldier standing guard in front ('Muttur explodes', *Sunday Times*, 20-4-2003). This was a misrepresentation of fact.

The Kattaiparichchan checkpoint consists of a barbed-wire fence on both sides of the road and a few bunkers. To the east there is an open field with some shrubs that is bordered by the Kattaiparichchan River. To the northwest are the houses of Palainagar, and to the southwest there is the Kattaiparichchan army camp, which is the main army camp in Muthur. The only way to cross the border is by coming along the road and passing a barrier very close to the army camp. Any Tamil passing the barrier would get himself stuck between the Muslim crowd, the barbed wire and the Army soldiers. All the photographs that show armed Tamils show them on the other side of the barbed wire, but a group did indeed pass the barrier – only to find themselves trapped. In the melee, at least one grenade was thrown and shots were fired. Three Tamils died and sixteen others were injured. Two of the photographs published show injured Tamils being carried back towards the relative safety of the other side of the barrier.

Apart from the angry posturing and stone throwing, there never was any real fight between the Tamil and Muslim mobs. In that case, the numbers of injured (or even dead) people would have been much higher than was reported. And more significantly, the ethnic distribution of casualties was entirely one-sided. None of the newspaper articles or analysis reports that describe the incident mention any Muslims getting injured in this incident²³¹.

²³¹ The "Admission and Discharge Book" of the Muthur hospital, which a kind member of the hospital staff showed me, supports this. On April 18th, only four patients were admitted in total. One of them, a Sinhalese male in his late thirties, was admitted around lunch time by an officer attached to the Kattaiparichchan army camp. This man may have got injured in the clash. A Muslim man and a Muslim boy were admitted separately around 4 o'clock in the evening, and the last patient (a Muslim man) was admitted late at night. Had any of

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Because of the violence, the curfew that had been lifted in the morning was reinstated in the early afternoon. In Muthur, *jumma* prayers did take place, but because of the tension attendance was low. The curfew seems to have been enforced pretty well during the afternoon. In the evening however, the Muslim settlements of Shafinagar and Hairyanagar on the outskirts of Muthur were attacked and given the same treatment as Vattam had been given (3 and 4 on map 7.3). These settlements are located very close to the border with LTTE-controlled area to the southwest of Muthur, and the damage patterns were very similar to those in Vattam: a zone with burnt houses closest to the border, then a zone houses smashed up where it was possible to enter easily, then a zone where damage was limited as time ran out and the attackers had to return to where they came from. Hand grenades were thrown into several houses, which seemed rather strange. These are weapons intended for use against human targets, and can hardly cause significant damage to buildings. However, as it would be impossible for Tamils coming from LTTE-controlled areas to have hand grenades in their possession without explicit approval of the LTTE, I contend that the grenades were primarily used as a sort of signature. In the words of the movie *Apocalypse Now*, the grenades were thrown to “let Charlie know who did this”.

As in Vattam, the extent of looting seems to have been limited, though farming and household equipment was generally damaged whenever attackers had managed to get into houses. One of the more dramatic details of what happened was the burning of a collection of books in the house of an elderly Muslim man (MIC 2003:10, and personal observation). The poor man’s house had been left intact, but his bookshelf in an annex to the house was totally gutted, destroying a collection of Tamil, Arabic and English literature that the owner had collected over several decades.

These attacks significantly increased the number of Muslim IDPs, as several thousand people from all the western outskirts of Muthur also fled to schools and mosques further away from the border with LTTE-controlled territory.

7.2.4 Day 3: Saturday, April 19th, 2003

After two hectic days, Saturday was tense, but calm. The presence of police and army had increased significantly, and people generally stayed off the streets. Since Muthur was virtually isolated for the third straight day, a new problem developed as fresh food supplies were running out, and particularly those people who were economically dependent on daily wages were running out of money to buy whatever food was still available via the back doors of shops – which were officially all closed. During the day, most Muslims who had not lost their houses went back home to cook, and they only returned to their sites of displacement in the night. The

them been injured in the clash, they would have been admitted when the Muslim crowd was sent home and not hours later, during curfew.

Tamils who had fled to the churches in Muthur were unable to venture out from where they were and had no access to food, even if they had stocks in their houses. As the staff of ZOA was able to move around between the office and the two churches²³², some food could be distributed, but this was limited.

Around seven in the evening, a lorry owned by a fisherman from Jamaliya, a Muslim-dominated coastal suburb of Trincomalee, was attacked with a hand grenade, injuring six Muslims (5 on map 7.3). This triggered off tensions, and about six Tamils passing through Jamaliya were attacked ('Entire Trincomalee district under curfew', *TamilNet*, 20-4-2003). According to the abovementioned article and an article in the Daily Mirror, the police in Trincomalee was of the opinion that the reasons for the incident were not communal, but a conflict among fishermen over the use of illegal fishing methods by some of them ('Six injured in grenade blast', Daily Mirror, 21-4-2003)²³³. In response to the incidents, Trincomalee town and its suburbs were also put under a night curfew. As tensions did not ease on Sunday, the night curfew was widened to cover the entire district. We see here an example of an initially unrelated incident becoming reinterpreted in terms of an existing discourse of tension.

7.2.5 Day 4: Sunday, April 20th, 2003

Around midnight, the last major incident in the cycle occurred when a group of Tamils whom UTHR(J) identifies as LTTE cadres visited Jinnahnagar and Azathnagar (6 and 7 on map 7.3), a Muslim settlement about seven kilometers South of Muthur, and had some tea in a teashop²³⁴. I quote from UTHR(J):

"At about 1.00 AM the two agricultural settlements were raided by a crowd of 300 led by the same LTTEers, following the throwing of a petrol bomb. The Muslims began running to the nearest army camp. The attackers removed jewellery from several of the fleeing women. The raiders looted the place removing valuables, paddy and tractors.

About 650 gunny bags of paddy were burnt. The raiders also polluted the wells by throwing into it products of their destruction of shops and houses" (UTHR(J) 2003a:18).

²³² The Methodist Church compound borders the compound of the ZOA office; the Roman Catholic Church compound is about 200-300 metres away on the same road. No Muslims live along this stretch of the road, so the risk of getting attacked was limited.

²³³ Note that the Daily Mirror places the incident on Sunday instead of Saturday.

²³⁴ MIC (2003:6-7) places the incident in the night of April 17 to 18. Based on other sources available to me, I am fairly sure that the dating as given by UTHR(J) is the correct one. I do not know what explains the difference in dates.

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According to various people whom I spoke to, the attackers came both from the direction of Pallikudiyiruppu in LTTE-controlled area and from the direction of Mallikaithivu and Pattitidal in government-controlled area, and were both LTTE cadres and ordinary civilians. Note that the pattern of attack is very different here. While damage was definitely caused to some houses, what was burnt was primarily left-over paddy stocks from the previous harvest (and possibly seed paddy for the upcoming season). And, more importantly, this time there was looting, even to the extent of robbing fleeing women of their jewelry. In the earlier instances where Muslim settlements were attacked, the people were allowed to flee and looting was limited.

The inhabitants of Azathnagar, Jinnahnagar and the Muslims part of Bharatipuram fled to the army camp that is located between the two villages. It does of course beg a question why the soldiers in the camp were unable to do anything about the attack, but this issue is not dealt with in any of the available documents. The first two villages are basically long rows of houses along the main road, and are surrounded on all sides by wide swathes of paddy fields, while the third is a little off the main road, surrounded on two sides by a Tamil settlement and on two sides by paddy fields. Fearing a reprisal attack, Tamils from nearby settlements fled to the schools at Kilivetti, Mallikaithivu, Pattitidel and Iruthayapuram. However, no retaliation followed.

During the day, leaders of the Muslims and the LTTE met in the SLMM office in Trincomalee, and agreed to finalise an agreement on calming down the situation the next day. By 2 PM, the curfew that had been lifted to enable people to buy food was re-imposed in the Muthur region.

7.2.6 Day 5: Monday, April 21st, 2003

Monday was tense but quiet. School exams commenced, and the army provided security to school children traveling through areas of other ethnicity, so that they could reach the exam centres. During the day, a Muslim man was shot dead near Thoppur (8 on map 7.3), which increased fears, but did not lead to violent reprisal. In the evening, leaders of the Muslims and of the LTTE met again, and signed a sort of 'peace agreement', that contained six points:

'Tamil and Muslim peoples live together free of fear and suspicion and build mutual trust in each other.

To continue to be in close contact with each other in order to achieve and sustain the above.

To prevail upon the Tamil and Muslim peoples to terminate all acts of violence against each other and ensure that peace prevails.

To jointly request the law enforcement agencies in areas under government control to impartially enforce the maintenance of law and order.

In areas under the control of the LTTE, the LTTE will ensure the security of the Muslim people.

To seek the co-operation of all concerned to achieve the above' ('LTTE and Muslim leaders reach peace agreement', *TamilNet*, 21-4-2003).

Though the agreement was widely disseminated in the media the next day, CPA (2003:5) notes that it was not given much publicity in Muthur. Curfew was again imposed, but only from 6 PM onwards, and as a “precautionary measure” (‘Fisherman killed in Trincomalee’, *Daily Mirror*, 22-4-2003).



Figure 7.3. Displaced Muslims from Asathnagar and Jinnahnagar staying in the 59th Milepost Army Camp (own photograph)

7.2.7 Aftermath

The next day, one more Muslim man was killed, and a young Muslim woman was injured near Thoppur (1 on map 7.4). This seems to have been more like a theatrical act of violence aimed at instilling fear and making sure that all Muslims did not forget the message, because the victim was beheaded and not simply shot. Who killed the man was never officially established, but a lot of people at the time were pretty convinced that it was the LTTE. Beheading of victims was at the time seen as being a key ‘signature’ in the repertoire of theatrical violence that the LTTE used to instil fear into a large population without actually having to physically harm a lot of people, putting a lot of own cadres at risk or becoming forced to use a lot of cadres to enforce obedience from civilians in areas under their control. Other forms of theatrical violence, generally used by the LTTE and Tamil militant groups, are lamp-post killings and (in areas under militant control) public executions. The Sri Lankan armed forces seem to have resorted more to rape, and to random killings in public

places (such as the shooting of five students on the Trincomalee boulevard in January 2006 in front of 300 witnesses – see UTHR 2007a) as theatrical signatures.

The situation remained tense in the following weeks, but no further violent incidents happened.

The number of people who were registered as displaced peaked in the last days of April, *after* the ‘peace agreement’ had been signed. On April 22nd, the government announced that food rations were to be distributed to those who were displaced and that compensation would be given to those whose houses had been damaged. Since thousands of people who were dependent on daily wages had been unable to go for work and were out of stocks, registering as displaced was the easiest way of getting access to free food. Except for about 2,500 Tamils and about 4,500 Muslims who were unable to return to their homes²³⁵, there were another 25,000 Muslims who were in their homes during the daytime, and claimed to stay in the camps at night. Since it was difficult to venture out during the night, independent verification of IDP numbers was difficult, but when we visited some sites (like the Thahanagar community centre and the Nadutheevu Saddam Vidyalayam) early in the morning, there were hardly any people, there was no garbage, and the only proof of any presence of people consisted of a few places where three bricks had been arranged in the traditional way to make some fire for making tea. Of course, as soon as an NGO vehicle was seen near these sites, a crowd would mass and complain that no assistance had been received yet. Further evidence that cast serious doubt about the numbers of people actually staying in some sites was the fact that temporary toilets were either not requested for, or when they were requested and materials were delivered, it took many days before they were completed, and yet the sites did not show any signs of open defecation. In those places where people were staying day and night, like the 59th Milepost army camp where about 2,000 people were staying, this was very different: within two days, the place became one big mess, and open defecation did happen in the fields around the camp.

²³⁵ These were the Tamils who were staying day and night in the churches in Muthur and in a few Tamil schools in Kilivetti, Mallikaithivu, Pattitidal, Iruthayapuram and Chenaiyoor. The Muslims who were displaced day and night were those who had fled from border areas in Vattam, (part of) Thaqwanagar, Shafinagar, Hairiyannagar, Alimnagar, Asathnagar, Jinnahnagar, Bharatipuram and Palathoppur; they were staying in various schools and mosques, and in the 59th milepost army camp. Note that MIC (2003:8) claims that the displaced Tamils who stayed in the Kilivetti school had been forced to go there by the LTTE in order to create the impression that they had been chased away by the Muslims. The argument of a set-up by the LTTE is further strengthened by the claim that the LTTE media division filmed Tamils in front of burning Muslims houses and pretended that the Muslims had put Tamil houses on fire. I have not heard this from anyone else, and can neither prove nor disprove it. Though I judge the LTTE to be capable of doing this, I have no reason to believe that it did happen in this instance.

From about April 25th onwards, other humanitarian agencies started to return to Muthur to resume their work, followed – after a while – by a few groups of analysts. The ‘April violence’ (later termed the ‘2003 violence’) became a case that was discussed among a select few for a while, and then faded into irrelevance, overtaken by bigger and newer events: the LTTE stepping out of peace talks on April 21st, a debate on the rights of the LTTE to the sea, an impending crisis in the government, and severe floods in the South-West of Sri Lanka in mid-May. Even though in the week after the riot, both Muslims and Tamils from the area described it as the worst violence since 1990, nearly everybody whom I spoke to about it in 2007 had forgotten about it.

As the children sat for their exams and farmers ploughed their fields, life in Muthur slowly returned to normal. People started earning again and rations stopped, so only those genuinely displaced remained after two weeks. In late May, about a month after it all had started, the last camps closed and only those whose houses had been destroyed remained displaced until repairs were completed.

All was not well however. The LTTE instituted a boycott against Muslim shops, forbidding any Tamils living in LTTE-controlled areas to buy from or sell to Muslims from Muthur²³⁶. At the same time, civilians in LTTE-controlled areas received military training and were made members of the *maravar padaai*, a kind of uniform-less home guards. The message was clear: the LTTE was not going to let the Muslims have an easy time, but for three months there was no violence. On August 3rd, a Muslim who had been attached to the police intelligence unit was shot dead at Jinnahnagar as he was cycling to his restaurant (2 on map 7.4). In reprisal, a Tamil boy who had been active in the April violence was shot dead by Muslims the next day. Nine days after this, two Muslim youth were killed outside Trincomalee town (3 on map 7.4). They were allegedly on their way to buy a gun from the LTTE. Two hours later, another Tamil boy, Adrian Sellar, was kidnapped in Muthur (4 on map 7.4). Several days later his parents received a letter stating that the boy had died (Subramanian 2005:206-209, UTHR(J) 2003a:22-23). Again the Tamils in Muthur fled (but not the Muslims), and they stayed in the churches for about two weeks. On August 15th, a Muslim man was stabbed and injured at Palathoppur, and the next day two Muslim fishermen were abducted by the LTTE (5 on map 7.4). In response, a bus was stoned by Muslims, after which the police teargassed the crowd. Nine people were injured in the melee. Also, two Tamils were abducted by Muslims. Finally, sense prevailed and the four people who had been kidnapped were released. This time, there was very little property damage, but the fear among Tamils was much stronger: “earlier their properties were at risk, but now there was no guarantee for their life” (UTHR(J) 2003a:22).

²³⁶ This boycott was lifted in mid-August, under pressure from Tamil civilians who were finding it hard to get goods from elsewhere.

In October, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadhan, there was a string of attacks by the LTTE against Muslims in Kinniya (6 on map 7.4), which ended without reprisal attacks when school exams started (UTHR(J) 2003c).

7.3 *What happened in Muthur?*

In order to understand why the riot happened, it is important to look at wider context factors and at the roles that key actors played in the riot. In sections 7.3.1 to 7.3.3, I describe three context factors: changes in the way the LTTE dealt with the Muslims after the ceasefire, the struggle over the leadership of the Muslim polity, and the faltering peace process. In sections 7.3.4 to 7.3.6, I discuss the roles that three key types of actors had in the riot: the LTTE, Muslim thugs, and the armed forces.

7.3.1 The LTTE's attitude to the Muslims

As Horowitz (2001: 308-317) has made clear, many riots take place in a context where power balances change. The riot is then a tool for the aggressor to establish his dominance over the victims. Such a process was very much happening between the LTTE and the Muslims in eastern Sri Lanka from the signing of the ceasefire agreement in February 2002. Ever since the first Muslim-Tamil violence, the relations between Tamil militants and Muslims had been strained. The militants collected 'taxes' and otherwise put pressure on the Muslims, but this was kept in check somewhat by Muslim links with the armed forces. Since the ceasefire constrained the Sri Lankan armed forces in their possibilities to use violence, the Muslims lost a protective shield. 'Tax collection' by the LTTE became increasingly blatant, and kidnappings of Muslims for ransom escalated. Also, the LTTE continued to deny thousands of Muslim farmers access to their lands in LTTE-controlled territory, despite promises to the contrary. In June 2002, this pent-up frustration over continued harassment and provocation led to a riot in the town of Valaichchenai, but the LTTE did not change its attitude in the aftermath. The Muthur riot therefore did not take place in a vacuum. Muslim anger over the disappearance of the two men must be placed in a substratum of more general frustration and anger about the LTTE's unchecked arrogance. In return, the intensity of the attacks against Muslim villages is an indicator of the LTTE's intent to 'teach the Muslims a lesson' for daring to stand up against the LTTE.

7.3.2 The struggle over the leadership of the Muslim polity

A somewhat curious aspect of the Muthur riot is the determination with which Rauff Hakeem, leader of the SLMC, associated himself with the case of the disappeared Muslim men. In itself, the disappearance of two Muslims was a comparatively minor incident, and no obvious reason for a party leader and government minister to link his political fate to the resolution of the issue. To understand this, it is necessary to have a broader look at the Muslim politics at the time. From the time the SLMC was established until his death in 2000, M.H.M. Ashraff, the party's first leader, built up a

reputation for being the undisputed leader of Sri Lanka's Muslims. After Ashraff's death, a power struggle developed between Rauff Hakeem who had been Ashraff's deputy, and Ashraff's widow Ferial. Ultimately, Ferial Ashraff started her own party (with its power base centered around Kattankudy and Kalmunai, her late husband's home town), and Rauff Hakeem became the SLMC leader. His claim to be leader of Sri Lanka's Muslims remained fragile (Ameerdeen 2006). Just before the Muthur riot, Hakeem's authority was further undermined when Athaulla, another important parliamentarian in the SLMC who has a strong power base in Akkaraipattu, broke off and started his own party. The situation in Muthur provided Hakeem with an opportunity to reassert his leadership claims, and he seems to have jumped into it with vigour. Muthur provided a safe place for Hakeem to take the battle for supremacy public, because the Muslims of Muthur were predominantly behind Hakeem's faction, and neither Ferial Ashraff nor Athaulla, nor any of the majority parties had much support: it was like a soccer match on the 'home grounds'.

Some Tamils whom I spoke to went so far as to suggest that Hakeem himself instigated the tension in order to come in and save the day for the Muslims, in the process re-establishing his dominance. I have the impression that this is a case of 'reasoning after the fact'. While Hakeem definitely needed to reassert his dominance and seems to have used the opportunity that offered itself in Muthur, I have not found evidence for his direct involvement in instigating the riots. However, I do think that Hakeem's presence in Muthur seriously raised the stakes for both local Muslims and the LTTE, and significantly reduced chances for an early de-escalation. As soon as Hakeem arrived in Muthur, he was put in his place by MP Mahroof (UNP), who told him on the funeral on April 15th to give up his seat in parliament if he could not ensure the security of the Muslims. It was this attack on Hakeem's status as leader that triggered the fight around the Akkaraichchenai mosque that had such unintended disastrous consequences.

For the UNP of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe, this battle for political supremacy over the Muslim polity was a delicate issue. The UNP, which was in a coalition government with several other parties, among which the SLMC, could ill afford losing the SLMC's support, but neither could it afford the SLMC (personified in Rauff Hakeem) to lay claim to the leadership of all Muslims, since a fairly sizeable fraction of Sri Lanka's Muslims were part of the UNP voter base. This probably explains why Wickremasinghe sent such a high-powered delegation to Muthur on April 18th.

7.3.3 The faltering peace process

An additional reason why an early resolution of the problems in Muthur was important for the UNP government was that the peace process, which had made much progress in 2002, had started faltering by early 2003, and things like the Muthur riot provided further ammunition for opposition parties opposed to the peace process.

The LTTE's formal withdrawal from peace talks with the government on April 21st (over an unrelated issue) overshadowed the problems in Muthur, and suddenly Muthur was all but forgotten in the public discourse. This may have contributed to

the fact that tensions did not flare up again after the school exams were over: both the LTTE and the SLMC leadership had other, much more pressing issues on their minds.

7.3.4 The role of the LTTE in the riot

There can be little doubt that the LTTE was involved in the preparation and logistics of the attacks on Muslims that took place during the riot. If the patterns of damage in Vattam, Shafinagar and Hairyanagar are sufficient evidence that the attacks originated from LTTE-controlled territory, the use of hand grenades and theatrical violence served as symbolic signatures. Not only was the LTTE involved in the riot, it *wanted the Muslims to know who was behind the violence*. The attacks on Muslims were not just angry responses to the Muslim *hartal*. The intention was to force the Muslims of Muthur to accept their subservient position in the local hierarchy of power.

7.3.5 The role of Muslim thugs in the riot

On the side of the Muslims, a key player in the riot seems to have been an obscure group of men that was known among Tamils as the 'Jihad Group' or, after 9/11, as the 'Osama Group'. Tamils from Muthur whom I spoke to were able to identify key leaders in this group, and alleged that the 'Jihad Group' had also been involved in earlier incidents of anti-Tamil violence. But what *jihad* was there to fight in Muthur? Islam was not threatened in any way that warranted a violent defence. With the very possibility of the existence of a Muslim armed group being strongly contested by many Muslims, it took me several years before the pieces fell into place. I have little reason to doubt that the 'Jihad Group' existed. A friend from Muthur told me that he had personally witnessed how Muslim men were involved in firing practice, and the name of 'Butcher' Hakeem (the local market thug, not the SLMC leader) as their leader came up too often to be a mere coincidence. In addition, the fact that the LTTE organized a manhunt for (from its perspective) harmful Muslims after taking over the town in August 2006 indicates that the LTTE took this group very seriously. An acquaintance who was very familiar with the situation in Muthur and who had access to Tamil and Muslim community leaders even told me that there were three armed groups: apart from the 'Jihad Group' (which was the most prominent of the three), there were also the so-called 'Jetty Group' and the so-called 'Knox Road Group'. According to this person, the people in these groups were not islamists, but primarily petty criminals who were engaged in involved in the extortion of 'protection money' from Muslim businessmen in their respective territories: the 'Jetty Group' in the area around the Muthur jetty, the 'Knox Road Group' in the area around Knox Road and Jaya Road, and the 'Jihad Group' in the rest of Muthur, but centered around the market.

According to some of the people I spoke to, one of the men whose abduction triggered the riot was a member, or even an “area leader” of the ‘Jihad Group’ (interview with former resident of Muthur; see also MIC 2003 for a reference to the alleged membership of an armed group). This would explain the initial strong enforcement of the *hartal* by the ‘Jihad Group’ and the story of the beating up of a Muslim businessman who defied the orders to close his shop.

A long conversation on organized crime in Colombo with a talkative ex-policeman who had been friends with a local thug in his teenage years put things in perspective. He told me that criminal gangs exist all over Sri Lanka, and they generally have the same set-up: a clearly identified leadership (the *thugs*), surrounded by a group of lower-ranking members or *goondas*, exerting control over a defined territory. Businesses in the territory are forced to pay protection money to the gang, but in return the gang will defend the businesses under their patronage against unwanted interference by outsiders. In origin, this may not always have been a very criminal affair: in situations where the law and order apparatus of the state is not very strong, such gangs can function as a kind of local ‘neighbourhood watches’. As control over votes became increasingly important in the decades after independence, political parties gravitated towards the gangs and (particularly local) politics increasingly criminalized (Uyangoda 1997). In Muthur in 2003, the ‘Jihad Group’ was openly associated with the SLMC²³⁷. Another group of local toughs was associated with the UNP, though I have not been able to find any explicit links between the UNP and any of the armed groups.

The fact that the SLMC identified so strongly with the protest in Muthur lends further credence to the stories about the involvement of ‘Butcher’ Hakeem and his *goondas* in the *hartal* and in the demonstration at Kattaiparichchan on April 18th.

With the developing conflict in Sri Lanka, links were also established between the parties to the conflict and some of the gangs. Just like smugglers from Valvettithurai were recruited into the LTTE, Sinhalese and Muslims living on or over the edge of legality were sometimes among those who were recruited as home guards.

²³⁷ This link between the SLMC and a group using the term *Jihad* in its name may be more than a coincidence. In the aftermath of a massacre of Muslims in 1992 (and taking into account the larger context of a string of massacres of Muslims in mid-1990 and the expulsion of the Muslims from the Northern Province in October 1990), Ashraff stated in parliament:

“If the LTTE is killing us, if the LTTE is leaving us out of our homes, simply because we happen to be Muslims, simply because we say “La ilaha illallahu, Mammmdur-Rasoolullah [sic]” because of our belief in Allah and Prophet Muhammed (peace be on him) ... *if that is the only reason, it is the commandment of the Holy Quran that we should declare Jihad against them and kill every LTTEr. We shall now intend to slaughter every LTTEr including Mr. Prabhakaran. In a personal note, I will be the happiest if I can die in battle at the time of slitting the neck of this bloody Prabhakaran. These are my feelings*” (Ameerdeen 2006: 208, *emphasis mine*)

I have however found no indications that either Ashraff or any other prominent SLMC member ever followed up on this statement.

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According to local people and human rights activists whom I spoke to, the military also established links with some of the gangs, who provided intelligence and various other kinds of support. In Muthur, particularly 'Butcher' Hakeem had a reputation for being linked to the intelligence unit at the Kattaiparichchan army camp²³⁸. Some Tamil sources interpreted this link as the reason why the demonstrating Muslims at Kattaiparichchan were suddenly able to access a few hand grenades and guns, and use them with impunity in full sight of the military.

A final clue about the (lower-ranking) membership of the groups came in early 2006. At this time, some 1,600 youths from Muthur and Thoppur had been recruited as home guards. However, the vast majority quit when they realized that they would not be posted in their own hometowns, but be made part of a proposed Muslim regiment of the army. Suddenly, stories emerged about a number of armed groups that had come up in Thoppur. People who told me about this mentioned that these were neither criminal gangs nor militant Islamists. Rather, there were groups of bored youth who wanted some excitement, and found it by declaring that they were part of 'a group', and by getting themselves one or two guns. These groups had no particular political agenda, nor any particular enemies that they intended to defend themselves against; the main objective seemed to be to show off to other Muslim youths in Thoppur. While I am convinced that the three groups in Muthur were not simply bored youth who wanted to show off, the excitement factor must be an important reason for some youth to join.

As said, there is no *jihad* in Muthur, and the members of the three armed groups are not militant Islamists. Still, there does seem to have been an indirect link between the spread of reformist Islamic thought and the development of the armed groups in the first years of the millennium. Those who promote reformist Islam in Muthur are not militant Islamists. Throughout, their focus has been on how to make better Muslims, not on how to fight non-Muslims. In the process, the own (Muslim) identity has become an important issue for many youth. This is primarily in engagement with other Muslims, and revolves around how to practice Islam in the proper way. However, in the process of emphasizing own identity, differences with others will inevitably come to the fore. For the Muslim gangs, own identity is not a primary issue, but – particularly after the development of Tamil militant violence and after the development of links with the armed forces – the distinction from the 'enemy' is. In a situation where impressionable and enthusiastic youth are engaging with identity, it is not surprising if some make the jump from focusing on own identity to focusing on distinguishing the self from the antagonist other (the LTTE), and join one of the gangs. After the leader of the 'Jihad group' was killed, the group disintegrated, and while some of the members continued the gang, others turned their backs to the violence and focused on religious teaching.

²³⁸ This man was a butcher in day-to-day life, but his employment became a nickname ("the Butcher") with sinister meaning, based on acts of violence that he was alleged to have committed in collusion with the intelligence unit.

7.3.6 The role of the armed forces in the riot

As mentioned before, the armed forces largely stood by and watched as neighbourhood after neighbourhood was attacked. With the exception of one village (which I describe in section 7.4.2), effective patrolling only started after attacks had ended. Viewed positively, the security forces did not take part in the violence, unlike the cases that Paul Brass (1998) and Stanley Tambiah (1996) describe. This is not entirely surprising: the problems were between Muslims and Tamils, and the Sri Lankan armed forces are predominantly composed of Sinhalese who had no particular reason to choose sides in this riot. In 2003, the armed forces were constrained by the ceasefire agreement that the UNP government of the time seemed to take very seriously. Any attempt to stop the marauding mobs could have easily led to accusations of partiality that could easily escalate and derail the peace process. Nevertheless, given the fact that mobs melted away every time the troops did show up, one may wonder whether a quicker response by the armed forces could have reduced the damage.

In the period after the riot had ended, the forces acted commendably, particularly by providing security to people who had to travel through areas that were dominated by the other ethnicity. Particularly the Tamils whom I spoke to at the time were positively surprised by the behavior of the troops during this period.

7.4 *Lessons from Muthur*

A key reason why I re-analyse the events of April 2003 despite the availability of several elaborate analysis reports is the fact that, in my view, three key elements are missing from the available descriptions and analyses of what happened. These missing elements carry important lessons about the nature of inter-ethnic relations during periods of acute tension and violence. In this section, I start with an analysis of the process of de-escalation at the end of the 'riot cycle'. This is followed by an analysis of boundary crossing events. Lastly, I deal with intra-ethnic divisions.

7.4.1 De-escalation

Quite obviously, the violence (but not the tension) reduced after additional troupes were called in on April 18th, after the clash at Kattaiparichchan. This was however not enough to end the riot, as violence continued even after troops were deployed. Journalists and analysts alike have been unanimous in identifying the signing of an agreement between Muslim leaders and the local leadership of the LTTE on April 21 as the cause of the de-escalation after the riot. While I do agree that the agreement that was signed had symbolic value in formalizing the end of the riot, there is a fundamental flaw in the analysis: the chronology does not work. The agreement was signed on Monday night (April 21st), *after* Muthur had already calmed down

significantly on Sunday evening. On top of that, the peace agreement was not given prominence within Muthur (CPA 2003: 5)²³⁹.

I returned to Muthur on April 22nd around 9.30 in the morning. At the time, the situation was tense but calm, and the explanation that I was given was that (Advanced Level) school exams had started, and that because everyone wanted the children to be able to do their exams, a 'time-out' had been taken. In the subsequent days that I spent in Muthur, this view was repeated many times, often with a subsequent remark that people were sort of expecting things to flare up again after the exams were over. It was only after the exams ended and things stayed calm for a few days that people became convinced that the riot had really ended. I was strengthened in my opinion on the importance of the school exams as a key element in de-escalation when six months later a similar narrative (again similarly ignored by analysts) went around. This time the tensions were in Kinniya, and they were 'put on hold' because the (Ordinary Level) school exams had started²⁴⁰.

In the agricultural villages around Muthur, an additional argument was given: the cultivation season was starting, and farmers needed to get back to their fields before the time window for land preparation closed.

For the villagers whom I met at the time, the end of the violence was a practical necessity. Whether or not Tamils and Muslims felt like trusting each other, they needed to get on with their lives and in that line of thought, continued hostility did not fit. The suspicion remained until it became clear that the 'time-out' had ended and the 'other side' had not taken to violence again. When in early August there was another (brief) string of killings and counter-killings, no mass violence ensued, and though in October and November the anti-Muslim violence in Kinniya brought tension in Muthur, there was no violence. Over the course of 2004 and the first three quarters of 2005, people told me that Muslim-Tamil relations had improved significantly. During this period, not many provocations by either the LTTE or militant Muslims triggered tensions, and when things did happen that might get out of hand, the Muthur Peace Committee (MPC)²⁴¹, which had been reinvigorated after

²³⁹ This does not mean that I believe that formal calls to stay calm do not work, but the effect is in the dissemination, not in any formal agreement. One very clear case in which a public announcement helped calm things down was in Akkaraipattu, after six people had been killed when a hand grenade was lobbed into a mosque (Bock, Lawrence and Gaasbeek 2006: 24-30). Because the mosque leadership immediately intervened and urged the Muslims not to attack Tamils, there was no retaliatory violence. But even in this case, there was no peace agreement; the decision to broadcast the announcement was entirely one-sided.

²⁴⁰ I do find it very interesting that despite the stress that was put on allowing children to do their exams because exams are very important for their future, not much attention seemed to be given to the importance of allowing the children to prepare for their exams in peace so that they can actually have a fair chance to pass the exams.

²⁴¹ Peace Committees are formal structures that were set up in every DS Division in the conflict zone by the Sri Lankan government after the 2002 cease-fire agreement was signed. The idea of Peace Committees seems to have been older though; I have come across references to the existence of DS Division-level Peace Committees in newspaper articles

the 2003 riot, was capable of defusing the situation. Even when, triggered by a countrywide increase in violence, the situation escalated beyond control in December 2005 and January 2006, the MPC was capable of getting people out of harm's way a number of times²⁴².

7.4.2 Boundary crossings

A second missing element in the analyses of what happened in Muthur is the recognition of elements of 'positive' inter-ethnic interaction that did take place during the riot. I came across five examples, none of which were reported in the newspapers or documented by analysts:

from the late 1980s. Formally, the Officer-in-Charge of the local police station chairs the committee, which further has representation from the ethnic communities present in the DS Division, as well as people representing the local administration. In some DS Divisions, these committees did become quite efficient. My impression is that this generally was the case in places where the citizen's representatives were able to function as a sort of informal peace committee, beyond the formal meetings where police and local government were represented. The Peace Committee in Muthur (since mid-2003) and that in Seruwila (since mid-2005) were among the more effective ones. They received formal and informal support from various agencies with a mandate for promoting peace and reconciliation. Staff from these agencies were fairly open that this was very much a situation where every agency contributed its part, and the Peace Committee members really did the work. However, for reasons of reputation and possibly access to donor funding, a situation ensued where different agencies (some more than others) started laying claims to having been responsible for key feats of the Peace Committees. Unfortunately, both Peace Committees lost a lot of their effectiveness when key members vacated their positions in the second half of 2006.

²⁴² As tensions escalated, a large group of Tamil and Muslim students were jointly attending exam preparation classes in Muthur that were organized by the MPC. The first thing the MPC did was to negotiate safe passage for the Tamil students and the Muslim students from Thoppur to return home without being attacked on the way. A few weeks later, "[A] Muslim who passed through the village of Manalchenai was attacked by a group of drunk Tamils, who wanted to kill him. As soon as Mr. Elilan [the local head of the LTTE political wing] heard of this, he called two active senior members of the Muthur Peace Committee, one Muslim and one Tamil. Mr. Elilan told them what had happened and that it was a personal affair and not communal, and asked them to go and rescue the man and calm down the situation. They went together to [the Muslim village of] Periyapalam, where news had already filtered through about the attack, explained what had happened, and asked people to stay calm until they came back with the injured man. At the same time, a vehicle of NVPF was returning to Muthur from Colombo, and was stopped on the way. [One of the NVPF staff], who was in the vehicle, decided to go and have a look, and managed to get the attackers to stop (with the help of a group of soldiers who had come to check the situation), and let him take the injured man to the hospital in Muthur. This joint intervention prevented a new escalation of communal violence" (Bock, Lawrence and Gaasbeek 2006: 59).

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Example 1: securing access to relief aid

On the second day of the troubles (April 18th), two teachers and a retired government servant, all Muslims, got in touch with the staff of ZOA (who were, at the time, all Tamils), and asked them to help the displaced Muslims²⁴³. Over the next two weeks, these three men played key roles in negotiating access for ZOA to Muslim IDP camps. Particularly during the first days, they often accompanied ZOA staff as 'human shields', and literally talked their way into the camps. All three men knew ZOA through their work, and they all knew some of the ZOA staff personally. While based on personal contacts, this act of 'boundary crossing' was very much a pragmatic win-win situation for those involved.

G.S Division	Family	F/male	M/female	T/M
D Shaf nager	295	315	650	665
2 Periya palam	519	2117	1048	1099
3 Alm nager	197	770	402	368
Jinna nager	225	980	470	510
Jaya nager	642	2622	1412	210
	878	7834	4012	3852

Figure 7.4. Board with information on displaced people staying at the Arabic College, Muthur, April 2003 (own photograph)

The contact that was established gave the displaced Muslims access to relief aid – as mentioned earlier, there were no other NGOs active in Muthur in those first days, and it took until April 22nd before the government and local politicians started distributing food rations and tents respectively. For the ZOA staff, the contact with

²⁴³ In early 2006, the opposite happened, when a community leader requested humanitarian agencies *not* to provide food to displaced people in Muthur, because this would only prolong displacement and sustain the status quo that had developed. If no food was distributed, then people would be forced return home, sort out their differences, and pick up their lives again. The NGOs followed his advice, and indeed most people returned home and the situation significantly improved within days.

the Muslim men provided an opportunity to do the work that the organization is there for (meeting the needs of those affected by conflict and disaster), and it provided safety to the staff in a very risky situation.

The contact between ZOA and the three Muslim intermediaries was very strong for about a week and a half, and then it slowly faded away for two reasons. Firstly, the security situation had improved so much that it had become possible for the ZOA staff to visit the Muslim camps independently, and secondly, it was realized that the intermediaries came under increasing pressure from displaced Muslims to exaggerate the numbers of affected people, so that they would get access to more aid. Since resources were limited, priorities had to be set, and it became important to focus on those who were genuinely displaced.

Example 2: Sinhalese teaming up with Tamils against the Muslims of Palathoppur

Not at all positive in terms of the outcome, but still significant because of what it says Tamil-Sinhala relations, was an incident that happened in Palathoppur on the first day of the riot. I was told of this by a person who heard the story from several participants, both Tamils and Sinhalese, directly.

As mentioned earlier, a Muslim mob attacked and burned a few shops in Bharatipuram early in the evening on April 17th, and in response a Tamil mob led by armed LTTE cadres attacked shops and houses in Palathoppur. One of the shops that was burned in Bharatipuram was owned by a Tamil man who had a Sinhala wife, and as soon as Sinhala youth from Dehiwatte heard about this, they teamed up with Tamil youth from neighbouring villages and joined in the rampage at Palathoppur. This led to a bizarre situation where Sinhala youth and, among the Tamil mob, LTTE cadres were on the same side in a fight²⁴⁴.

Among the people in the mob were some of the same youth who had had a rather serious disagreement earlier in the day during the sports meet that I had attended. One of the contests at the sports meet was a typical Sinhala/Tamil New Year game, in which competing teams take turns in climbing into a tall wooden pole that has been covered in grease. The first team to reach the top can take the prize, which has been fixed to the top of the pole. The competition had started in the evening of April 16th, but since it was not possible for any of the teams to reach the top before nightfall, the contest was continued in the morning of April 17th. Overnight, part of the grease had been absorbed into the wood, and the first team that was to climb the tree (which happened to be a Sinhala team) won easily. This sparked off a heated

²⁴⁴ Two weeks after the tsunami, a friend of mine encountered something similarly strange when he was waiting to pass the LTTE checkpoint on the road to Eechchilampattu. There, lounging on the sandbags, were a group of Sinhala JVP supporters, on their way to distribute tsunami relief goods, casually chatting to a bunch of LTTE cadres manning the checkpoint.

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argument between Tamil and Sinhala youth, in which ethnicity was one of the key issues.

All this was forgotten when the shop started burning, and suddenly Tamil and Sinhala youth who had got to know each other through a project focused on bringing reconciliation to the area teamed up. The Tamil and Sinhala youth who were involved were acquaintances, not friends²⁴⁵. The key to the boundary-crossing in this case was the sudden emergence of a 'common enemy'. It only lasted as long as it took to burn Palathoppur.

Example 3. Police protecting Tamils

Another otherwise unreported episode happened around the same time, when the Officer-in-Charge of the Dehiwatte police station came to Sivapuram and posted his men around this Tamil village, to ensure that no harm would come to it. As part of the peacebuilding project mentioned above, contacts had been established with the police in order to build confidence between the police and the Tamil inhabitants of the area. This was probably one of the first times since at least 1985 that the people of Sivapuram felt positively protected by the police.

Since – as documented above – in many other places the police and armed forces simply stood by and watched, their hands tied by the cease-fire agreement²⁴⁶, there was no obvious reason for the police officer to pro-actively protect this one village. The crucial factor that made the difference was that the responsible officer had become friendly with some of the people in the village, and with NGO staff working in the village, and he wanted to make sure that his new acquaintances (or even friends) were not harmed.

Example 4. The non-attack on the Tamils in Palainagar

Possibly the most bizarre event in the entire riot episode happened on April 18th, in the aftermath of the clash at the Kattaiparichchan checkpoint. After the army had stepped in and ended the confrontation, the Tamil mob returned to Chenaiyoor and beyond, while the Muslim mob went back to their homes in Muthur. Less than 200 metres away from the checkpoint, the Muslim mob passed a small neighbourhood where about thirty Tamil families lived along the Palainagar Main Road, surrounded by Muslim families. Surprisingly, the mob did not attack these families who were

²⁴⁵ At least, not yet. Over the following years, inter-ethnic friendships did develop, even leading to a mixed marriage that – unusually – was attended by many Tamil and Sinhala villagers. Unfortunately, because the mother of the groom did not agree to the match, the marriage ended in disaster when the boy committed suicide because he could not deal with the pressure.

²⁴⁶ At least, to some extent. While it was true that there was much pressure on the armed forces and police to exercise restraint in dealing with the LTTE, this should not have been sufficient excuse to ignore the maintenance of law and order.

like sitting ducks, but walked straight past them. Later on, a few soldiers were posted in the area to protect the Tamil families.

This was strictly not a case of positive inter-ethnic interaction, but rather a case where expected negative inter-ethnic interaction did not take place. In May 2007, I interviewed several people from this small community, and they ensured me that – at least until 2006 – they had never been targeted for violence by anyone, despite the fact that the other Tamils have been attacked many times²⁴⁷. When I asked them why this was the case, the answer was unhesitating and very clear. The people in this particular community are the labourers of the *Pradeshiya Sabha* – they collect the garbage and sweep the roads, and thus keep Muthur clean. Whatever other tensions there may have been, this small community was highly useful for the Muslims throughout the conflict, so to attack them would be to cut into their own fingers. Apart from this, there may have been a class (or wealth) issue. The Tamils in Palainagar are desperately poor (as were many of the Muslims in the area), and had few if any assets worth stealing. Because of this, they were no threat to anyone.

The non-attack in Palainagar does beg a question with regard to the emotional state of the people who participated in the clash at the checkpoint that day. Even immediately after the climax of the clash, people were sufficiently rational to avoid attacking this small and defenceless group of people. There may have been anger, but there does not seem to have been blind rage. I see this as a further hint that the clash (though not necessarily its violent end) was not entirely spontaneous; it may have been orchestrated to impress the visiting delegation and the press.

Example 5. The bringing in of Sinhala traders

A fifth and last example that I want to give is the fact that both Muslims (in Muthur) and Tamils (in the outlying villages) got in touch with Sinhala traders in the aftermath of the riot, and asked them to bring in goods. In ordinary circumstances, this would mean inviting unwanted competition for 'own' businessmen. However, in this situation it was a very practical solution, as everyone knew that this was 'between Muslims and Tamils', and Sinhalese would be kept out of it. Inviting Sinhalese traders thus was the safest way of ensuring uninterrupted supply lines. This situation continued for several weeks. When the situation normalized, the Muslim and Tamil traders slowly started doing their own business again.

²⁴⁷ In 1990, several people of this community had been killed in an incident that was interpreted as indiscriminate violence; while in that case the community suffered badly, they did not feel targeted. This changed for the first time in May 2006, when a young man was shot dead, and the community interpreted this as an act of selective violence. In response, the entire community fled: some to Trincomalee, and others to the Methodist Church in Muthur (interview, Muthur, May 2007).

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The key aspect of this example is that the Sinhalese traders had suddenly become 'common non-enemies'. Because of their neutrality in the Tamil-Muslim issue, they were the ideal go-between.

7.4.3 Intra-group fissures

The days that I spent in Muthur from April 22nd onwards were spent conducting needs assessments and distributing relief goods. Every time information about new camps or new needs came in, it was added on a large map that was kept in the ZOA office. By the time I left Muthur, 22 sites had been identified where displaced people were staying.

By April 25th, the government machinery had come up to speed, and ZOA could stop distributing food. Shelter needs were also mitigated when 200 tents that had been donated to the Sri Lankan government by the Saudi government just a few weeks before the riots were distributed (only to Muslim camps, but then again they had the biggest shelter needs) by MP Thowfeek and his supporters. There were still big shortages where water supply, latrines, hurricane lanterns (for safety at night) and household items like mats and bedsheets were concerned, so the ZOA team focused its attention on meeting these needs. In parallel, one team was especially dedicated to go and visit each and every damaged house and assess the extent of damage, so that appropriate forms of assistance could be provided to the relevant families.

Although officially over 30,000 people were registered as displaced, we soon found out that the majority of these people went home during the daytime and only returned to the camp sites in the night, if they went there at all. People who were able to go home during the day could be expected to bring sleeping mats, bedsheets, and other relevant items with them in the evenings, which meant that there was no need for ZOA to provide these items. In addition, requirements for drinking water supply and sanitation facilities would be much smaller than was the case for people who were full-time displaced. As resources were limited, it was therefore very important to distinguish between 'night-time displaced' and 'full-time displaced'. This was not easy. Often when we let people know that we planned to do an assessment (for example when some people came to our office asking for assistance and ZOA staff told them that they would come to have a look), it happened that large crowds were drummed up to be present on our arrival. It was the lack of faeces (combined with the lack of interest for putting up emergency latrines), the lack of garbage, and the lack of remains of cooking fires in the camp sites that gave them away.

In order to solve this problem, we started making random visits separate from the announced assessments and distributions. If there were discrepancies in what we saw during announced and unannounced visits, they are discussed with community leaders and generally some level of agreement on the real needs was reached.

A third element that I found missing in analyses of the events of April 2003 concerns pre-existing intra-ethnic dynamics. In general, analyses of violent events in Sri Lanka

tend to treat those involved (either as participants or victims) as rather homogeneous blocks: Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, LTTE, and Sri Lankan Armed Forces. As the examples below make clear, such abstractions can be misleading, and does not take into account tensions that exist within groups. It also means that other boundaries than the standard ethnic ones remain valid and important, even in acute crisis situations where ethnicity seems to dominate everything.



Figure 7.5. Tea being made in a school occupied by displaced people, Kottiyar Pattu, April 2003 (own photograph)

Somewhere around April 25th, we were on our way to the Saddam school in Naduthivu, in the north-west of Muthur. In order to get there, you need to drive over a rather long road without many sidelanes and without any other schools or mosques nearby, so the moment people saw a ZOA vehicle they knew where it was going. As we drove along, we could see many people coming out of their houses and walking in the direction of the school. We had been here the day before, and had noticed that the compound of the school was much cleaner than you would expect if the entire neighbourhood was displaced. Before we got to the school this time, we were stopped by a man on the road. He told us that he was a fisherman from the coastal neighbourhood Thaqwanagar who had fled to the school in Naduthivu with the other people living near the beach. The LTTE had built new bunkers on the other side of the river mouth, and the people feared that their village would also be attacked. The previous day however, the people from Naduthivu had told them to find a place in their own neighbourhood. The Naduthivu people were farmers and

economically better off than the fishermen from Thaqwanagar, but they were jealous that the fishermen received assistance while they did not. We were then taken to a small mosque that was clearly overcrowded. There was not enough shelter, nor even shaded spaces, for everybody; men had had to sleep outside on the road. Interestingly, the requests for assistance were very modest: material to expand the shelter area, some kerosene lanterns to light the camp at night, and some temporary latrines. Because the fishermen had been unable to go fishing for quite a while, we requested the DS to include this group of people in the list for food distributions, which he did.

Something similar happened among the Tamils in Muthur. As mentioned earlier, not all the Tamils of Muthur fled to the Roman Catholic and Methodist churches. The small community that lived in Palainagar stayed where they were until after the violence was over. To get to the churches from Palainagar, one only needs to walk down one straight road. The distance is less than the distance that some Tamils staying behind the hospital needed to cover to get to the churches, and it is also less fraught with dangerous bends and corners where one could easily get cornered and attacked.

The Tamil community in Palainagar, which finds itself at the very bottom of Kottiyar Pattu's caste hierarchy, did not displace to the churches because of caste. The issue was however played out subtly. There was no explicit prohibition on them coming to the churches, and I am very sure that both the Catholic and the Methodist priest who were there at the time would accept people regardless of caste or creed. In May 2006 the Tamils from Palainagar did flee to the Methodist church, after a young man from their community had been shot dead. They ended up staying in the church compound for about a year, interrupted by the displacement during the battle for Muthur in August of that year. In 2003 however, the shame of being among high-caste Tamils was bigger than the fear of being attacked by Muslim mobs.

7.5 Tamil-Sinhala relations around Serunuwara, June 2005 to April 2006

7.5.1 Background to the case

The case that is dealt with in this section is about a series of incidents that took place in and around Serunuwara between June 2005 and April 2006 (Bock, Lawrence and Gaasbeek 2006: 43-52). Serunuwara (or Ali Oluwa, as it is also called) is a small market town on the junction of the road from Kantale to the ancient temple of Seruwila and the road from Muthur to Verugal and on to Batticaloa. The town was established in the early 1950s, with the development of the Allai Extension Scheme. Its location makes Serunuwara an important logistical and strategic node that serves the entire southern half of the Allai Extension Scheme: it has a weekly market, a petrol shed, banks, shops, a small hospital, a police office and a series of government

offices (including the Seruwila Divisional Secretariat and an Agrarian Services Centre).

Until the parliamentary elections of 2004, the dominant political parties in the Seruwila electorate (which covers all the colony schemes in Trincomalee District) were the UNP and the SLFP. In the run-up to the parliamentary elections in 2004 however, the colony schemes in the North-East became a major recruiting ground for the JVP, which was strongly opposed to the ceasefire that was in place at the time. Among Sinhala youth in the colonies, who were frustrated with the hardship caused by market liberalisation and increasing input prices and concerned about the increasing presence of the LTTE, the JVP built up a strong support base. The active presence of an anti-LTTE and anti-NGO political party in the area put Serunuwara on the map as a place where trouble could be expected.

In May 2005, a Buddha statue was put up overnight at the bus stand in the heart of Trincomalee town. This caused severe unrest, as many Tamils considered the setting up of the statue a way of claiming Trincomalee as Sinhala-Buddhist, and thus as distinctly non-Tamil. Its location (next to a fish market, where living beings are killed, and next to a bar, where people get drunk) was highly inappropriate for the placement of a Buddha statue. That strengthens the argument that the placing of the statue was for political, space-claiming reasons rather than for religious reasons. For several years, the statue was provided with security worthy of a VIP: barbed wire, road blocks, bunkers and a permanent detachment of about 10 soldiers and policemen.

With backing of the LTTE, groups of local Tamil nationalists organised protests, which in turn generated counter-protests by local Sinhala-nationalist groups with the backing of Sinhala-nationalist political parties such as the JVP and the JHU. As a result, Trincomalee town was paralysed by a near-continuous sequence of strikes and curfews for about two weeks, and remained tense for several months afterwards. After the campaigns of *hartals* and counter-*hartals* ended in late May, a string of hand grenade attacks against sentry points and army bunkers started that continued for months²⁴⁸. Almost every night after about 7 pm, one could hear a few hand grenades exploding, sometimes followed by retaliatory gunfire. The rest of the district remained comparatively calm, except for some acts of provocation by the LTTE. At this time, the LTTE had been seriously weakened by the breaking away of most of the cadres from Ampara and Batticaloa Districts under leadership of Karuna. Though the cadres from Trincomalee District had largely remained loyal to the LTTE leadership, the fact that the LTTE had lost about a quarter of its fighting cadre with

²⁴⁸ A Tamil friend from Trincomalee told me at the time that LTTE cadres had moved around Tamil neighbourhoods in the town with boxes full of hand grenades, and distributed the grenades to whoever wanted to take them. People were told to throw the grenades whenever a suitable opportunity offered itself. Given the sheer frequency of grenade attacks, I am inclined to believe the story was true.

the split meant that the remaining members had to be redistributed, and fewer cadres were available for posting in Trincomalee District. The LTTE, which could no longer use its impression of overwhelming presence, reverted to targeted small-scale provocations to assert its power.

The context changed dramatically from November 2005 onwards, when Mahinda Rajapakse won the presidency on a hardline Sinhala-nationalist ticket. Apart from a further increase in provocations by the LTTE, (para)military forces linked to the state became increasingly involved in attacks on Tamils, of which the pre-planned execution of five innocent students in Trincomalee town and the subsequent intimidation of witnesses and relatives was the most prominent (UTHR(J) 2007a and 2008). On April 12th, 2006, a bomb explosion on the Trincomalee market was followed within minutes by a rampage in which about twenty Tamil-owned businesses in the town were burnt. In the violence, about twenty people were killed and over forty were injured; most of the victims were Tamils (UTHR(J) 2006b, chapter 2; '19 killed, 45 wounded, 20 shops burned in Trincomalee', *TamilNet*, 12-4-2006). Two weeks later on April 25th, an LTTE suicide bomber tried to assassinate Sarath Fonseka, the Army Commander ('Who in Army HQ tipped off bomber?', *Sunday Times*, 30-4-2006). Within hours from this attack, an intermittent bombardment of the LTTE-controlled areas of Kottiyar Pattu by artillery, ships' guns and, initially, air strikes commenced that only ended after the LTTE was driven out of the district towards the end of the year²⁴⁹.

The string of incidents described in this section took place in this context of slowly escalating confrontation, up until the moment that open warfare started.

7.5.2 Chronology of events

Around 7.45 in the evening on June 17th, 2005, M. Muthubanda, a police sergeant attached to the Serunuwara police station, was shot and killed, allegedly by a member of an LTTE pistol gang, at Ali Oluwa Junction in Serunuwara ('Police Sergeant shot dead in Serunuwara', *TamilNet*, 17-6-2005). He was quite popular among the Sinhalese living in the area. As the news of his death spread, mobs of angry Sinhalese gathered on the roads in Serunuwara and the neighbouring village of Mahindapura, and attacked Tamil civilians passing through the area. Several lorries transporting *cadjans* (coconut fronds) and boats to tsunami-affected Tamil areas were attacked. A lorry of TRO transporting tsunami relief goods was attacked and damaged the following morning around 7.50. On hearing this news, a team of

²⁴⁹ On April 26th, air strikes on the area around Muthur were stopped temporarily after an Air Force jet accidentally dropped a bomb on a Navy outpost in Vattam, killing 4 sailors and 3 Muslim civilians, and injuring another 6 sailors and 9 Muslim civilians (SMS received from the 'Trincomalee humanitarian security tree', 26-4-2006, 13.58). Artillery fire and naval attacks continued.

SLMM went to the area to investigate. As they arrived in Serunuwara around forty minutes later, their vehicle was attacked, and the army had to be called in to provide security to the SLMM staff. Following these attacks, NGOs suspended their tsunami rehabilitation work in Eechchilampattu.

The next morning (June 19th), a home guard who had gone to collect firewood with his wife and mother was kidnapped, allegedly by a group of about 15 armed LTTE cadres. His decomposed body was found with cut injuries on June 27th.

On June 20th, a group of women from Mahindapura were chased away by suspected LTTE cadres when they went to collect water from a nearby irrigation channel. This area is on the border between government-controlled and LTTE-controlled territory. Subsequently, security forces were deployed into the area to provide additional security.

The next day, a large group of about 200 armed LTTE cadres was observed roaming around in government-controlled territory near Mahindapura, Neelapola and Dehiwatte after dark.

Around 9 in the morning after this incident, a bus traveling from Kantale to Muthur was stopped near the so-called 'CID bridge' at Dehiwatte (about 5 km from Serunuwara) by a group of Sinhalese people. Three Tamil women who were on board were assaulted. Three and a half hours later, a group of Sinhalese youth was attacked with a hand grenade. Three were injured, and taken to the Kantale hospital. During this period, another incident happened that contributed to fear among Tamils in Eechchilampattu DS Division. A number of fishermen who were catching fish near the headworks of the Allai Extension Scheme opened the radial gates in the Verugal *anicut* so that water would flow out and it would be easy to catch fish by keeping nets in the flow of water. Because of this, the water level in the main channels dropped, and the branch channel from Serunuwara to Eechchilampattu ran dry. Because of the tension, it was impossible for staff of the Irrigation Department to go to the head sluice and close the gates again. The Tamil farmers in Eechchilampattu DS Division did not know about the fishermen, and thought the channel had been blocked in Serunuwara by angry Sinhalese. A Tamil *wattai vidane* who went to check the sluice gates at the beginning of the branch channel was beaten up by a gang of Sinhalese people when he got to Serunuwara. It took until after the tensions were over before people found out the real reason why the irrigation water had stopped coming.

On June 23rd, a meeting of representatives of the Sinhala villages in the area was convened in Seruwila to discuss the situation. Those present decided that negotiations should be held with the LTTE and with leaders from the Tamil villages. A follow-up meeting was held the following afternoon in Serunuwara with ten community leaders each from ten villages and five Buddhist monks in attendance. Here, a meeting was planned to be held with the participation of ten community leaders (one from each village), five Buddhist monks and representatives of the LTTE.

Bridging troubled waters?

Because the LTTE leadership did not want to take the risk of coming to government-controlled territory, it was agreed that the proposed meeting would be held at the LTTE office in Sampoor on July 1st. In this meeting, both sides agreed to work on defusing the tensions. Importantly, direct telephone numbers were exchanged, so that the next time something happened, tensions could be defused immediately.

I should note that a Sinhala community leader indicated that it was primarily the policeman's family who was behind the angry reactions. Viewed from this perspective, the 'communal tension' was really a matter of relatives being upset, and non-relatives disengaged from the issue relatively quickly. The incident was however important because it was the first time since the 2002 ceasefire that serious Sinhala-Tamil tensions had come to the fore in the area. According to one source, this also marked the first time ever that Sinhala civil society in the area dealt directly with the LTTE. When the subsequent incidents occurred, contacts existed that could be activated immediately to help defusing the situation.

After the string of incidents described above, the situation calmed down again. From July to early October, there were several incidents of note in the area, none of which caused serious disturbances in Kottiyar Pattu. I describe these below.

On July 10th, three LTTE cadres and an LTTE supporter were assassinated in Trincomalee town by people who were suspected to be in collusion with the armed forces. A friend from the area told me that the killers had passed a checkpoint as they turned into the dead-end lane where the killings took place, and left through the same checkpoint undisturbed. This killing triggered a string of grenade attacks against security forces in and around Trincomalee over the next few days. Two of these attacks took place on the Muthur-Palathoppur road on July 13th. One officer and nine soldiers were injured in one attack, and in the other attack two soldiers and a child were injured at the Paddy Marketing Board tsunami-camp at Periyapalam. Over the next few days, the LTTE closed down its offices in government-controlled areas in the East of Sri Lanka. This led to further tensions. A one-day *hartal* was observed in Muthur on July 19th to protest the attack at the Paddy Marketing Board camp. No violence followed.

On July 22nd, a troop patrol was fired at near Iruthayapuram, causing no injuries. Three days later, in the morning of July 25th, a home guard was fired at by four LTTE cadres near the Seruwila Police station, but does not seem to have been injured²⁵⁰.

On August 11th, two Sinhala youth were shot and injured somewhere between Menkamam and Mallikaithivu as they were riding a motorbike. Initially, there was suspicion that they were shot by members of an LTTE pistol gang, but a very knowledgeable source who works in the region provided an important piece of additional information regarding this incident. There was some tension in Dehiwatte

²⁵⁰ The text of the FCE Daily Situation Report is not entirely clear, but it looks like the home guard escaped injuries. I have not found reference to this incident in any newspaper, nor on TamilNet.

after incident, but it subsided when the boys – from their hospital bed – told visiting relatives that they had been shot because of a personal dispute over cattle, and asked them to inform the people in the area that there was no communal violence involved. I visited the area within days of the incident happening, and observed with my own eyes that there was no tension.

On August 16th, a soldier was shot dead in the army camp near the ‘third mile hill’, south of Muthur, and three were injured by LTTE sniper fire. As if to underline how brief such incidents are, I passed through the line of fire about 15 minutes before the shooting and only realised I had been so close when I was told about the incident in the evening.

On September 21th, a home guard from Sirimangalapura went missing in Athiyammankerny. His body was found on October 5th.

By the end of September, though incidents continued to happen elsewhere in Trincomalee District, things seem to have really calmed down in the southern fringe.

On September 28th, the FCE Daily Situation Report made it a point to note that “[a]ccording to sources, the LTTE activities in Kantale, Thambalagamuwa and Seruwila areas have seemed to have declined during the recent past. Reportedly, violent incidents have not been reported for few days [sic]” (*FCE Daily Situation Report*, 28-9-2005: 2).

On October 4th, finally, suspected LTTE cadres waylaid a bus carrying prisoners to Muthur near Kilivetti, and freed two Tamil prisoners. One jailor was injured in the incident.

The next incident that generated potentially serious tension happened on October 5th, when a Sinhala tractor driver, R.P.B.R. Jayasiri, disappeared while he was transporting a load of stones for a tsunami project in the LTTE-controlled area between Eechchilampattu and Verugal. He never returned. Jayasiri’s disappearance became known the next day, when his assistant, who had escaped, returned to government-controlled area and told the people that Jayasiri had been taken by unknown armed men. As it was very unlikely that armed men who moved freely in LTTE-controlled territory were not LTTE cadres, the LTTE was immediately blamed for the disappearance.

This was not entirely surprising. Jayasiri had been a home guard until 1989, and while Sinhalese sources generally described Jayasiri as a do-no-wrong kind of man, Tamil sources made various allegations against him. Each of these can be interpreted as a possible explanation for his disappearance, which was seen as a punishment for past misdeeds. The most common allegation was that he had been involved in beating up Tamils in June 2005 (after the Muthubanda’s killing); a second allegation was that he had once arrested two girls and detained them in a house on request of a couple of soldiers who subsequently raped them. A third allegation (which a number of knowledgeable outside observers whom I spoke to considered to be true) was that Jayasiri had been involved in a massacre of Tamils at Mahindapura during his time as a home guard – he was said to have driven the tractor that took the killers

to the place of the massacre. In this case, the story was that an LTTE cadre whose father had died in this massacre recognised Jayasiri and killed him²⁵¹.

Almost immediately, several agencies (among them SLMM, ICRC, FCE and NVPF) got in touch with Jayasiri's relatives and the LTTE, and tried – in vain – to find information about Jayasiri's whereabouts²⁵². For some reason, it was only after a week that there was any kind of disturbance in the Sinhala areas of Seruwila DS Division. Quite possibly, the people who were close to Jayasiri had wanted to first wait and see whether he returned or not. When Jayasiri did not return, a *hartal* was planned for October 13th. People in Serunuwara told me that, as had been the case in June, people with links to the JVP were behind this. However, members of the Seruwila Peace Committee heard about it, and seem to have managed to convince the Seruwila Traders' Association not to back it. The shops remained open, and the *hartal* never materialised.

On the same day, FCE organised a meeting between Sinhalese members of the Seruwila Peace Committee and a group of Tamils from the area around Kilivetti. In this meeting, it was agreed to exchange information in order to prevent tensions, and “to put pressure on the LTTE (especially through the Tamils) to release [Jayasiri] and to prevent the spreading of rumors [sic]” (*FCE Daily Situation Report*, 13-10-2007: 2). Another meeting was held on October 17th, in which people from the Sinhala villages in Seruwila DS Division were able to express their grievances. By this time, the situation had calmed down. Less than a week later, JVP activists launched a door-to-door campaign in support of Mahinda Rajapakse's candidacy for the upcoming presidential elections (*FCE Daily Situation Report*, 24-20-2005: 1). Despite the flurry of pro-war propaganda, no communal tension followed. Harassment of Tamil civilians by soldiers of the army checkpoint at Mahindapura was reported twice (*FCE Daily Situation Report*, 11-11-2005 and 1-12-2005) and the LTTE killed several home guards around Serunuwara in the first four months of 2006, but the general situation stayed calm²⁵³.

²⁵¹ An interesting point that might have influenced the situation is the fact that Elilan, the local leader of the LTTE's Political Wing was not in the district at the time of Jayasiri's disappearance (he returned shortly afterwards). At the time, there was a lot of speculation about him having been shot by Sornam, the local military commander. People with whom I spoke during this period said that dealing with the LTTE was considerably more confusing than when Elilan was there. It is not unthinkable (though unverified) that with the temporary re-shuffles in the local LTTE leadership, an individual LTTE cadre took his chance to take matters into his own hands.

²⁵² I have spoken to representatives of all these four agencies about the case, and their interventions. For reasons of confidentiality, the ICRC delegate whom I spoke to was not able to tell me anything about ICRC's interventions, but several people in Serunuwara told me that ICRC had visited the area in connection with Jayasiri's disappearance.

²⁵³ While things were calm in Serunuwara, a string of attacks and abductions in December 2005 and January 2006 caused very serious tension between Muslims and Tamils in Muthur

The bomb attack and subsequent anti-Tamil rampage in Trincomalee town on April 12th led to a new string of attacks on isolated military targets throughout the district. On April 21st, a claymore mine killed a young homeguard from Dehiwatte who was patrolling the road along the Muthur channel. The same day, a Sinhala mob led by home guards and soldiers stormed into Menkamam and Bharatipuram, and burnt down at least five houses near the site of the attack (a local human rights activist who did an assessment afterwards told me that he counted as many as 45 houses that had been burnt). At least one Tamil was killed, and for the first time in quite a while, I heard allegations of Tamil women having been raped. After this, Sinhalese and Tamils living in the border areas fled to safer places. This time, a climate of fear persisted. Two months later, when people had just started to return home, the LTTE closed off the sluice gates of the Allai Extension Scheme main channel, and triggered off an offensive by the Sri Lankan military that ultimately ended with the annihilation of the LTTE. I end the story here, though there is undoubtedly more to say about what happened in subsequent months.

7.6 *Lessons from Serunuwara*

7.6.1 Triggers of tension

The string of incidents described in section 7.5 makes one thing very clear: provocations (in this case Sinhalese being killed by the LTTE) do not always trigger tension or violence. Three times (after the killing of Muthubanda in June 2005, after the disappearance of Jayasiri in October 2005, and after the killing of a young home guard in April 2006), tension was triggered, and only in the first and last instance violence followed. In between, half a dozen other home guards were killed in the area, and their deaths went virtually unnoticed. Were the relatives of these home guards less upset than those of Muthubanda, Jayasiri, and the young home guard from Dehiwatte? I seriously doubt it.

There was one key difference between those killings that did trigger tension and revenge violence and those that did not: external stimulus. In the first two cases, (some of the) relatives of the victims had active contacts with the JVP, which wanted to make an issue out of things to criticise the cease-fire, and to highlight the need for the government to treat the LTTE more harshly. In the third case, there was active support from the Sri Lankan military, which by this time had become openly hostile to the LTTE again, and was involved in a string of attacks against Tamil civilians in Trincomalee District aimed at striking terror in the Tamil community (UTHR 2006b). In the case of Jayasiri, the tension was contained because the dominant local interpretation of the case was successfully re-phrased from 'we, the Sinhalese being

DS Division, and led to the displacement of several thousand people (Bock, Lawrence and Gaasbeek 2006: 53-62).

angry', to 'Jayasiri's relatives being angry, and the JVP supporting them'. Because this was brought in the open, others (and notably the Seruwila Traders' Association) decided that they did not want to let things blow up, and to some extent distanced themselves from the affair.

So why was there no revenge violence in the majority of the cases? My hunch is that the Sinhalese in the area are not necessary supporters of nonviolence. Rather, I agree with Benedikt Korf's hypothesis that people were probably very well aware that revenge violence, if allowed, would breed more violence which would put their own community at risk (Korf 2004: 115-144).

In addition, most Sinhalese whom I spoke to in the area made a clear distinction (at least from the start of the ceasefire until early 2006) between the aggressor (the LTTE) and the Tamil population in general. Until violence really got out of hand in April 2006, many home guards would go home after their duty, change their uniform for a sarong and a shirt, and go to work in their paddy fields together with Tamil labourers, as if there was nothing wrong, and similarly, many Tamils whom I spoke to very strongly stated that they did not fear the Sinhalese people living in the area after the cease-fire.

A further detail that needs to be noted is that the mob that attacked Menkamam and Bharatipuram bypassed the Tamil village of Sivapuram that is located between Dehiwatte and Menkamam. Revenge was exacted on the site of the original attack, and not randomly against Tamils living in the area. The fact that, at the time, relations of the people of Dehiwatte with the people of Sivapuram were generally better than those with the people of Menkamam and Bharatipuram may have played a role, though I have never heard this being mentioned. Revenge did come to Sivapuram ultimately. When a young man from Sivapuram was shot dead in front of his house a year after the incident, I was told that this was because he was the brother of the LTTE cadre who was suspected to have placed the claymore mine.

7.6.2 Patterns of disintegration

The second lesson from this string of incidents came to me as things unravelled in the second half of April 2006. At the time, Erik Dekker, an MSc student from Wageningen University, was conducting research on irrigation water management in contribution to my own research. For his fieldwork, he was staying with a Sinhala family in Dehiwatte. After the bomb blast on the Trincomalee market and the subsequent anti-Tamil rampage on April 12th, there was tension in the district. However, since things remained calm in Kottiyar Pattu, neither of us expected things to flare up around Dehiwatte, nor did any of our contacts from the area give us the impression that something was up. On April 21st, Erik was measuring discharge in a field channel when he suddenly heard some gunshots in the distance – this was the retaliatory shooting after the claymore blast which killed the young home guard whom I wrote about above. Upon hearing the shooting, he decided to return to the

house where he was staying. When we got in touch by telephone late in the evening, I told him that he should come out of the area for his own safety. According to Erik however, everything was calm in Dehiwatte, and the only thing that was a little odd was that there were about forty people staying in the house of his landlord. Since being on the road was probably more dangerous than staying in the village, we decided that he would stay for another day, and come out on the first opportunity. The next day, things were calm, “except for some suspected LTTE cadres who were seen in the jungle outside Dehiwatte, but the home guards fired at them and they ran away” (telephone conversation with Erik Dekker, 22-4-2006). Erik went back to check the flow measurement devices that he had installed on April 22nd and 23rd, including one flume near Menkamam²⁵⁴. On his way, he visited an English-speaking acquaintance in Sivapuram who told him that the population was planning to move to the school in Kilivetti for safety. By lunchtime on April 23rd, Erik rode his bike to Kantale, where I picked him up.

My wife knew the wife of Erik’s landlord, as well as some Tamil women living in Sivapuram, from a number of trainings that she had conducted in Sivapuram and Dehiwatte in 2001 and 2002, as part of ZOA’s psychosocial pilot project. Since we knew that the women’s groups from Dehiwatte and Sivapuram had developed fairly strong ties over the past couple of years, my wife called the women she knew and spoke to them several times during the days after April 21st, to see how they were doing, but mainly to encourage the women to stay in touch with each other. We quickly discovered that this encouragement was not really necessary, because the women were already calling each other regularly, and reassured each other that their friendship still stood.

Both the Sinhala women and the Tamil women told my wife that something had fundamentally changed. Between the start of my research and April 2006, many people I interviewed told me spoke about Sinhala-Tamil relations in the area as if there had never been a conflict; talking about friendship, about visiting each other’s weddings “like we used to do before the war”, and even mentioning quite a few intermarriages. Now, for the first time since the cease-fire agreement had been signed in 2002, Sinhalese and Tamils were seriously afraid again. The women my wife spoke to stressed that there was no hatred against the other group²⁵⁵, but only a

²⁵⁴ Eriks field notes (of which he gave me a copy) make no reference to the attack on Menkamam that took place on April 21st. The flume that Erik visited was to the west of the village; the houses that were attacked were on the eastern side of Menkamam, and Erik cannot have seen these houses. It is also an indication that not the entire village participated in the revenge attack.

²⁵⁵ This was not mere words. Right throughout this period, a Tamil boy who worked as an apprentice with Erik’s (Sinhala) landlord stayed with the family. He was never harmed, and returned to his village when it became safe to travel on the road again.

deep-rooted fear of being attacked: the Sinhalese were afraid of the LTTE, and the Tamils were afraid of the Army and the home guards.

In the end, the links were broken. Group by group, the people in Sivapuram fled to safer areas further away from the border with Dehiwatte. One of our acquaintances literally 'turned off the light', making one last call from the village to inform us where she was going to, after which she packed the telephone and joined the last group of people to leave the village. As soon as she reached the school in Kilivetti, she called her Sinhala acquaintances and us again.

Not long afterwards, our Sinhala and Tamil acquaintances stopped calling each other. This was not because they no longer liked each other, but because people in their own communities were accusing them of being traitors, and informants of 'the other side'. I think this is key. Positive inter-ethnic interaction stopped when people in the own group started 'policing the boundaries' and declaring anyone who interacted with people outside the own group 'traitors'. As soon as the 'policing' reduced, contacts were re-established. To me, this is a hopeful sign. Absence of contact does not mean that people have started hating each other. It merely means that interaction has become too dangerous.

As things calmed down a little, contacts were again re-established, but the blockage of the main inlet channel of the Allai Extension Scheme by the LTTE in mid-July and the subsequent military offensive at Mavil Aru and Muthur caused mass displacement and massive disruption. After the fighting subsided and the displaced population of Kottiyar Pattu returned home, I was able to visit the area in the beginning of September. To my big surprise, we could see Tamil people doing their shopping in a Sinhala village without any problem. Tamil friends in Sivapuram told me that they were not sleeping at home, but this was not out of fear of their neighbours from Dehiwatte. The Army had set up a sentry point between the two villages, and the soldiers had threatened the Tamil villagers with a repeat of the 1996 Kumarapuram massacre if the LTTE were to attack the sentry post (see section 4.2.8).

7.7 Reflection: retaining normalcy, and the importance of looking at the local and the supra-local at the same time

In this chapter, I hope to have shown that what happened in Kottiyar Pattu in April 2003 (and later, in 2005 and 2006) was a lot more complicated than it has been represented to be in the media and in analysis reports, in line with what Paul Brass has written about his own research into riots in Uttar Pradesh:

"What we have, therefore, are beliefs, more or less justified, more or less fixed, subject to testing through logic and the logic of others who may detect flaws in our reasoning, on the one hand. On the other hand, more abstract, but more certainly, we have representations. We can chart the interpretations, the contextualisations, the discourses, of, by and about violence and communalism [...] and the interests served by different representations of them, but we cannot

certainly find the truth of events. It is a curious thing to have reached such a point, that the lies, the distortions, and the approximations to some truth have a greater reality – a verity that can be documented precisely – than the events themselves” (1998: 266).

Still, despite the gaps in understanding that inevitably remain, I follow Brass’ stance that the best way to draw lessons about social processes is to delve into it as deeply as possible before coming to conclusions that are then tested for generalisability (*idem*: 267, see also Kalyvas 2006). Any social theory that is not based on sound empirical evidence is a theory about (often external) representations, not about the day-to-day reality of the people it purports to speak about. What, then, are the conclusions that can be drawn from this chapter about particularly the more positive forms of inter-ethnic interaction during acute, ethnicised, violence and tension in Kottiyar Pattu (in a context of a long history of recurrent violence)?

First of all, inter-ethnic interaction, whether positive or negative, is comparatively scarce. Even during the worst part of the violence, not more than about 3% of the population of Kottiyar Pattu participated in attacks against others, and even during the ‘least worst’ part of the violence, a much smaller fraction of the population maintained positive contact across ethnic boundaries. The rest of the population just try to live their lives without getting hurt.

Secondly, positive forms of inter-ethnic interaction in a context of violence are extremely vulnerable. It takes but a single meaningful threat to force them underground. Whenever the threat of punitive violence towards those engaging in (positive) inter-ethnic interaction recedes however, the interaction bounces back. Tentatively and carefully, that’s for sure, but definitely. An important detail here is that the threats against positive forms of inter-ethnic interaction often originate from people’s own group, not from the ‘ethnic other’. To the ‘ethnic other’, people engaging in inter-ethnic interaction are themselves an ‘ethnic other’, and no different from co-ethnics who do not engage in inter-ethnic interaction. The general threat that emanates from the ethnic other prevents a lot of people from engaging with ‘the enemy’ in the first place. To co-ethnics however, those who engage in inter-ethnic interaction are traitors. Threats against ‘traitors’ are the most important factor in breaking up whatever inter-ethnic interaction develops despite the general inter-ethnic threat levels.

The third conclusion has to do with people’s struggles to maintain a form of normalcy despite surrounding violence. Even during acute ethnicised tensions and violence, other identifiers than ethnicity remain relevant and to some extent powerful. As I have shown, intra-ethnic divisions remained important during the

riot of April 2003. For me, this is a powerful (though negative from a social perspective) indicator that normal life continues even during a riot²⁵⁶.

Linked to this is a fourth point: except when outsiders move in and inflict indiscriminate violence on people because they belong to the ethnic group of the enemy (as happened in 1990), and except when individuals lose their minds in blind rage, violence is reasoned and to some extent restrained (at least where killing is concerned). This has little to do with people liking each other. Rather, people need to think of their own future. To risk an escalation of violence is to put one's own future (and that of relatives and friends) at risk. And sometimes there are even more mundane reasons: attacking the *Pradeshiya Sabha* labourers would have meant that Muthur would no longer be kept clean. I contend therefore that Kalyvas' claim (2006: 116) that in times of acute violence people shift to pure survival mode needs to be qualified. Except during the actual occurrence of violence itself, the survival that people seek to ensure is not mere physical survival, but the survival of a livable form of normality: though economic fortunes change, people keep marrying each other, people keep going to their temple, church or mosque, people keep making friends with some people and fighting with others (and sometimes with the same people). This is particularly the case if people already have gotten used to living with recurrent violence. The closing window of the land preparation period and the school exams that were respected are examples from Muthur where people let normalcy have the primacy over violence. Practical necessity here had a clear primacy over formal peace agreements. People's resilience shows not merely in the way they pick up the pieces after violence, but perhaps more importantly in the way the vast majority of people manage to maintain reasonably normal lives during violence and tension.

This has everything to do with (positive) inter-ethnic interaction. Though it must be said that a lot of people hardly engage in forms of inter-ethnic interaction, some of those who did explained it as (in part) a form of subverting the dominance of the ethnic that was being imposed by the violence around them. Maintaining inter-ethnic links is risky, and at odds with a focus on mere survival.

Fifthly, all of this has an important methodological consequence: to understand what happens during violence, it is fundamental to look at events in great detail, and to incorporate narratives of ordinary people as a core source of information. Representations in the press (and in a lot of analysis reports) miss out on the

²⁵⁶ More positive indicators of the struggle to maintain normalcy was pointed out by Becky Walker: during the height of the army offensive to flush the LTTE out of the jungles in Batticaloa, children in the town continued playing cricket, people continued going to the market, marriages continued to take place, and so on and so forth (personal communication, Batticaloa, January 2007)

ordinary activities of the ordinary people who form the majority of the population in violence-affected areas.

At the same time, any study of communal violence should take not only local dynamics but also wider regional or national dynamics into account. It is impossible to explain the Muthur riot only by looking at local competition and enmities, just as it is impossible to explain the riot only by looking at the sudden increase in the LTTE's self-assertion and the sudden surge in the struggle over the leadership of the Muslim polity. Local dynamics generate windows of opportunity in which wider dynamics are played out, just as much as wider dynamics generate windows of opportunity in which local dynamics are played out. Importantly however, local dynamics are rarely sufficient to trigger large-scale violence in a situation where neither side is in a position to decisively chase the other side out. If you are unable to chase your opponent out, the only way to enjoy a relatively peaceful life for yourself is to learn to live together. Local dynamics generate tensions, but wider dynamics are needed to escalate tensions into large-scale violence. At the same time, wider dynamics have little opportunity of generating violence if local tensions are managed well or if they are absent.

The sixth conclusion is that a lot depends on individual people and their personal relations. Inter-ethnic interaction in a context of ethnicised conflict is potentially dangerous, and requires trust. Most of the cases of inter-ethnic interaction that I have documented in this chapter took place because people had personal relationships. Institutional support for inter-ethnic interaction may play a facilitating role, but I disagree with Varshney's claim that inter-ethnic peace depends on inter-ethnic institutions (Varshney 2002). It is not the institutions themselves, but *the right people in the institutions* who make or break inter-ethnic interaction and inter-ethnic peace. The moment such people leave, the effectiveness of the institution in maintaining ethnic peace collapses if there is nobody else who takes up the challenge.

Lastly, I believe that it is important not to get too idealistic about positive forms of inter-ethnic interaction. Some of the people who engaged in positive inter-ethnic interaction in the cases described above did so for personal reasons: they had friends on the 'other side'. Others did so because they wanted to help their own community; the fact that others benefited as well was a side benefit, not a primary objective. The securing of aid can be seen from this perspective. The Sinhalese youth who teamed up with Tamils in Palathoppur (effectively creating the near unthinkable situation of a mob of Sinhalese joining up with the LTTE, which led the Tamil mobs²⁵⁷) were

²⁵⁷ This may be less unthinkable than it seems. A friend who was in Kottiyar Pattu in the weeks after the tsunami gave me another example of friendly interaction between Sinhala youth and LTTE cadres. On his way to visit some tsunami-affected villages near Eechchilampattu, my friend passed the LTTE checkpoint near Mahindapura. To his surprise, he saw a group of Sinhala youth who had been mobilised for tsunami relief work by the JVP

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attacking a shared enemy, and the Sinhala-Tamil collaboration in this case ended as soon as the army restored order.

I did come across cases where individuals really stuck out their necks and went out of their way to help people of other ethnicity without a direct benefit to their own community, and despite the risk to their own safety. Because the risk of being singled out for violent retribution still exists in Sri Lanka, I am unfortunately not able to include these examples in this dissertation.

lounging on the sandbags, and having very informal chats with the LTTE cadres (conversation, Colombo, 2005).

8 Bridging? Inter-ethnic marriages

“Where two persons love each other deeply neither custom, nor convention, nor law are great enough barriers to keep them apart.” (W.M. Ashby, in Golden 1959: 280)

8.1 Introduction

Sarajevo, May 1993. While crossing a bridge on the frontline between the Muslim-dominated town and its Serbian-dominated outskirts, the Bosnian Serb Bosko Brckic and Admira Ismic, his Bosnian Muslim girlfriend of eight years, are shot dead, just as they are on their way to leave the war behind them and start a new life in more peaceful surroundings. Bosko dies immediately; Admira crawls to her high-school sweetheart, and dies while hugging him. The situation is so tense that it takes days before anybody can recover their bodies (Schork 1993). Schork’s dispatch and the accompanying photographs of the dead couple become world news, and turn the couple into a tragic icon of inter-ethnic love caught up in violent conflict.

When looking at everyday inter-ethnic interaction, it is impossible to ignore the – at least ideally – most personal form that it can take: the inter-ethnic marriage. Where co-operation over resources (chapter 6) and acts of goodwill in times of acute crisis (chapter 7) can to some extent be kept distant from the self, the deliberate choice to marry someone from outside the own group brings the ethnic boundary within the threshold of the home, and renders its crossing permanent. It is therefore not surprising that intermarriage “has come to represent the surest index of assimilation” (Marcson 1950:75). Intermarriage has broader implications than only for the spouses involved:

“[m]ixed marriages not only link together two individuals, but also the larger groups to which these individuals belong. Such marriages form a bridge between these larger groups over which family members and friends of the partners may come into contact with each other and new – group-boundary-transcending – personal contacts and collaborations may come into existence. For this reason, intermarriage is expected to promote the social cohesion of societies in which different ethnic groups live together, or which consist of a number of smaller units, like clans” (Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits 2002: 419)

Because the boundary-crossing involved is a core element of mixed marriages, it is worth asking who get involved in mixed marriages, and what happens to those who step into such a marriage, particularly if the couple is surrounded by inter-ethnic tensions and violence. The key questions that I wanted to find an answer to are:

How have mixed-ethnic couples managed to live as a mixed couple in a context of ethnicised violent conflict?

To what extent do mixed couples, positioned as they are between two ethnic communities, perform a bridging function, especially given the violent context?

I base this chapter on detailed interviews with nine mixed couples in Kottiyar Pattu: four Tamil-Sinhala, four Muslim-Tamil, and one Sinhala-Muslim. Two interviews were with both husband and wife, four were only with the husband (in one case the wife was not at home but a daughter joined in the conversation, and in the other cases the wife and/or husband considered it inappropriate to speak with my research assistant and me), and three interviews were with only the wife (once because the husband had already passed away, once – with prior permission from the (Muslim) husband – because the husband was out of town, and once because we met the wife in the office where she worked and she just started talking to us²⁵⁸). Apart from these in-depth interviews, I twice discovered that a person whom I was talking with was in a mixed marriage. Unfortunately, in both cases I was unable to conduct an elaborate interview, and had to limit myself to a few questions.

In order to get an understanding of general trends in intermarriage in Kottiyar Pattu, I raised the topic of mixed marriages in about 25 chats and interviews with community leaders and elderly people.

Finally, broader reflection on inter-ethnic marriage was greatly stimulated by discussions with mixed-married colleagues and friends, and especially with my wife and her family: my wife and I form a mixed couple ourselves, as do her parents, all her siblings, a number of uncles and aunts, and at least one first cousin.

For ethical reasons, I did not do any extensive triangulation of the stories that the couples told me: I had no intention of digging into anybody's private life in public. Of course, sometimes specific couples were referred to in conversations with other people, as mixed marriages are rare enough for the exceptions to be fairly well known in their community. Whenever unprovoked comments were made, I have taken note. Also, in one case I interviewed a mother and her daughter, as both were in mixed marriages. As we were talking about their own marriages, a few things were said about the marriage of the mother (by the daughter and her husband) and that of the daughter (by the mother).

8.2 Prior research on mixed marriages

The topic of inter-group marriage has received some attention in the social sciences throughout the twentieth century, but the attention has been limited in focus and in methodology. Though it is acknowledged that mixed marriage is often not easy (many mixed couples face opposition from close relatives and divorce rates for

²⁵⁸ The interviews that I conducted for this chapter were the most formally organised interviews that I did during my fieldwork. All interviews were done after people (with a reputation for being favourable to inter-ethnic harmony) who personally knew the respective couples provided an introduction. When I explained that I myself was in a mixed marriage, and that my wife was from a very mixed family, that immediately made things a lot more informal because in a sense we were speaking about shared experiences.

mixed couples are higher than for homogamous couples), many authors do not seem to consider the deviance constituted by intermarriage as particularly negative: it is often described as a key indicator of inter-group integration, which is seen as a positive thing²⁵⁹.

The oldest articles on intermarriage that I have come across looked at marriages between Jews and gentiles in the United States and to some extent in Europe (Engelman 1928; Resnik 1933; Slotkin 1942a and b; Wolff 1946; Barron 1946), and at marriages between (offspring of) white immigrants of different national or ethnic origin in the United States (Panunzio 1942; Nelson 1943; Kennedy 1944; Kennedy 1952; Johnson 1946; Marcson 1950). The main question in both these strains of research was to what extent intermarrying people will retain their own identity, or assimilate into another identity group. It soon became clear that ethnic amalgamation did take place, but in three distinct “melting pots”: immigrants did intermarry with people of other ethnicity, but generally Jews, Catholics and Protestants married within their religion (Kennedy 1944 and 1952). This in turn triggered a string of research on inter-religious marriage (e.g. Croog and Teele 1967; Salisbury 1970; Greely 1970; Rosenthal 1970; Bahr 1981; McCutcheon 1988).

With the inter-racial emancipation of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, a new trend of intermarriage was observed that promptly became the topic of research: interracial marriages between whites and African Americans²⁶⁰, and to a lesser extent Asian Americans (e.g. Burma 1952; Golden 1953, 1954, 1958 and 1959; Hunt and Coller 1957; Annella 1967; Aldridge 1978; Saenz *et al.* 1995; Goldstein 1999).

From about 1970 onwards, the geographical spread of research on intermarriage slowly spread across the world, but it has remained heavily focused on the more developed countries with a recent history of immigration, such as Singapore, Australia, Israel, and a range of countries in the European Union²⁶¹. A notable exception has been research on inter-caste marriages in South Asia and places with substantial populations of Indian origin (e.g. Gist 1954; Corwin 1977; Caplan 1984; Hollup 1994; Barber 2004; Chowdhry 2004).

This focus on western countries is not entirely surprising: intermarriage as a topic of research has largely stayed within the domains of (western) sociology and

²⁵⁹ The wide range of articles that I have found on the topic leads me to disagree with the claim of Roer-Strier and Ben Ezra that “[t]he overriding impression among most writers is that intermarriage challenges norms about endogamy and creates problems both for families and for society as a whole” (2006: 41-2).

²⁶⁰ Note that in many states, interracial marriage was illegal until 1967 (Aldridge 1978: 356)

²⁶¹ I came across articles on mixed marriages in Singapore (Hassan and Benjamin 1973; Lee, Potvin and Verdick 1974; Kuo and Hassan 1976; Lee 1988), Australia (Mol 1970; Gray 1987; Jones 1991), Israel (anon. 1972; Yinon 1975; Weller and Rofé 1988; Okun 2004), France (Muñoz-Perez and Tribalat 1984; Neyrand and M’Sili 1998), Great Britain (Smith *et al.* 1996), Ireland (O’Leary 2000 and 2001), Latvia (Monden and Smits 2005), the Netherlands (Kalmijn 1998; Kalmijn, de Graaf and Janssen 2005) and Sweden (Dribe and Lundh 2008).

demography. This often involved statistical analysis requiring sufficiently large and reliable datasets, which are not available in many developing countries. Particularly the field of anthropology has for a long time tended to focus on bounded groups, rather than on people on the definitional margins of such groups, and while ethnicity is an increasingly important element in the study of development interventions and in the larger fields of economic and political science, intermarried people are largely irrelevant to these debates.

In the context of my own research, it is relevant to note that, while intermarriage has been observed to occur in conflict-prone countries such as Rwanda (Magnarella 2005) and the former Yugoslavia (Botev 1994; Oberschall 2000; Pickering 2006), I have been unable to find any research on how mixed couples cope in a context of violent conflict. On the other hand, a series of articles about a study of fifty interracial couples in the city of Philadelphia (Golden 1953, 1954, 1958 and 1959) proved valuable. Though the couples studied by Golden did not live in the midst of war, many did experience (sometimes severe) hostility over the line that they crossed by intermarrying.

In Sri Lanka, inter-ethnic marriage has hardly been studied as a separate topic. The only studies that I am aware of are Yalman's work on kinship in the mixed-ethnic village of Panama in the far south of the Eastern Province (1971: 310-324), and a follow-up study on the impact of the conflict on the same village (Abeyrathne 2003)²⁶². Yalman found that Panama had been a thoroughly ethnically merged community: "a halfway mark had been reached in kinship terms; in terms of caste the two systems had been merged without difficulty; and even in worship an excellent solution had been found" (1971: 319). Still, with the spread of ethno-religious discourses (visualised in for example the setting up of separate Tamil and Sinhala schools, forcing people to choose), a process of ethnic separation was visible when Yalman visited the village in 1955, which he expected "to be speeded up" after the Sinhala Only law of 1956, the riots of 1956 (which saw violence not far from Panama) and 1958, and the gathering momentum of Tamil protest in the early 1960s (*ibid*: 324, n.8). Abeyrathne observed that, particularly for the younger generation, this separation had become virtually complete: for all intents and purposes, Panama is now a Sinhala-Buddhist village with some Tamil families living in the margins.

Contentwise, research on intermarriage has largely focused in three elements. The first element deals with explaining why intermarriage occurs in a given marriage market. As Gray (1987) has pointed out, explanatory factors are arranged along two axes: opportunity and preferences. Opportunity is related to the relative share of a group in the total marriage market: if the proportion of in-group potential spouses is small, the chances of meeting a suitable in-group spouse are reduced, and opportunities for chance encounters with otherwise suitable out-group spouses

²⁶² Obeyesekere (1984: 385-394) also conducted research in Panama, but his description is limited to rituals relating to the worship of the goddess Pattini.

increase. Preference is related to “the combination of social barriers and social distance between groups” (*ibid.*: 368). Kalmijn (1998) has further refined the preference axis by distinguishing between individual preferences and preferences of third parties: the family, the surrounding (religious, ethnic, caste) community, and the state. Gray’s model is useful in understanding how many people intermarry, but it focuses on in-marriage: both opportunity and preference rates dictate to what extent people marry within their own group, and even in the explanatory model, intermarriage forms the left-over component for those unable or unwilling to marry within their own group. Blau, Blum and Schwartz (1982) have highlighted that heterogeneity within the (sub-)ethnic category leads to an increase in intermarriage because the in-group is comparatively small. Based on Simmel’s insight that “the social structure of complex societies and communities entails multiple group affiliations with intersecting boundaries”, Blau, Becker and Fitzpatrick (1984: 585) have stressed that intersecting group affiliations (of for example education and social status) contribute to intermarriage. Ethnicity is not the only factor that people look at when selecting a spouse: if there are many people in the same ethnic group but few of the same educational level or social status, the likelihood of someone looking for a spouse of the same educational or social status but a different ethnic group increases. Kalmijn turns the argument around: “[p]eople have a tendency to marry within their social group or to marry a person who is close to them in status” (1998: 395). If there are however intersecting group affiliations, homogamy along the lines of one group affiliation automatically causes intermarriage along the lines of other group affiliations. For some, ethnicity is the overriding identifier, for others religion, for others education, and for yet others it is social status.

The second element of research into intermarriage focuses on broader patterns of societal integration between groups. Results are varied: in some cases, intermarrying minority groups were found to assimilate into the majority group. In cases where there is no real dominant group, one may find one or several “melting pots”, in which differences are mitigated and a joint new identity is built. Thus, among white immigrants of highly varied ethno-national origin in the United States, three overarching groups formed: one Protestant, one Catholic, and one Jewish (Kennedy 1944, Kennedy 1952). In yet other cases, intermarriage does not fundamentally alter pre-existing group identities, because the group of intermarried people is not significant enough to pose a challenge to group identities (Okun 2004: 185). One conclusion that can be drawn is that the impact of intermarriage on larger society depends to a very large extent on the nature of society itself.

The third element of research into intermarriage is in a sense somewhat pathological in focus, looking at the question to what extent mixed couples and their children are more prone to trouble (divorce, marital unhappiness, marginalisation) than other couples.

It is striking to note how little research on intermarriage has been interested in mixed couples themselves and how they deal with being in a mixed marriage: among slightly over 80 articles that I found with intermarriage as the core topic, less than

one fifth are based on qualitative interviews with mixed couples. Four of these articles are by the same author (Joseph Golden) and deal with one research project, and another three articles use qualitative information primarily as anecdotes.

8.3 The occurrence of inter-ethnic marriages in Kottiyar Pattu

8.3.1 Current intermarriage rates

Even before the conflict broke out, inter-ethnic marriages were not very common in Sri Lanka. They “constituted about 3% of those registered each year during the period 1960-1975. In view of the pressures towards traditional behaviour in rural areas, it may be assumed that such marriages are rare in these areas and that the majority take place in urban centres” (Fernando 1980: 434). I doubt however that ideals of ethnic homogeneity are the sole, or even the primary reason for this low percentage. For the vast majority of people, it was (and still is) very important to marry within the own community as defined by language, religion, caste, class – and (to a lesser extent) even blood ties. Group homogeneity along these lines nearly automatically leads to ethnic homogeneity.

In Kottiyar Pattu, which – where marriage was concerned – was a very conservative rural area until at least the 1980s, the rate of intermarriage is low. This pattern seems consistent with most other parts of the Eastern Province. In the (Muslim-Tamil) mixed-ethnic region around Akkaraipattu, Dennis McGilvray rarely encountered mixed marriages during nearly forty years of intermittent ethnographic fieldwork: some Roman Catholic couples of Sinhala-Tamil background, and a very few Tamil women who had married Muslims, and who had converted to Islam (McGilvray 2008). There is one noteworthy difference between Akkaraipattu and Kottiyar Pattu, as one of my research assistants who originates from Akkaraipattu pointed out one day when we were discussing mixed marriages. In Akkaraipattu, intermarriage is generally considered a shameful topic that should not be discussed in public, while in Kottiyar Pattu many people spoke very freely, and neutrally, about it.

During the two years that I lived in Batticaloa, I encountered but a handful of mixed couples; I did hear of quite a few Sinhala-Tamil mixed couples in Kalmunai, and during work-related visits to the town after the tsunami I came across about four such couples without looking for them²⁶³. Another enclave of Sinhala-Tamil mixed

²⁶³ Two weeks after the tsunami, I met an intermarried Sinhala woman who was staying in a refugee camp in Kalmunai. On subsequent visits, I came across a few more mixed couples. In mid-2007 I visited Kalmunai for a project evaluation and had a long conversation with an intermarried Sinhala man whom I happened to stumble across. Unfortunately, I did not take notes of this conversation.

families exists near Valaichchenai. In this village I met quite a few Sinhalese who came to work in the Valaichchenai paper factory, intermarried and settled down²⁶⁴.

Based on the estimates that people have given me for their villages, I estimate that there are about 120 mixed-ethnic couples in total: about 60 in Muthur DS Division, 50 in Seruwila DS Division, and 10 in Eechchilampattu DS Division; about 0.4% of all marriages in Muthur and Eechchilampattu, and about 1.4% of all marriages in Seruwila. Importantly however, this low percentage does not mean that mixed couples are out of people’s sight: with exception of the (Tamil) villages that were LTTE-controlled between the late 1990s and 2006, every village in Kottiyar Pattu has between two and five mixed couples (and some even more), so it is almost impossible for people in the area not to know at least one mixed couple.

By classificatory ethnicity²⁶⁵ of the spouses, the estimated breakdown is as follows:

Ethnicity of husband	of	Ethnicity of wife	Number of couples
Muslim		Sinhala	< 5
Sinhala		Muslim	< 5
Muslim		Tamil	50-65
Tamil		Muslim	< 5
Sinhala		Tamil	50-65
Tamil		Sinhala	< 5
Total			120

Table 8.1. Estimated breakdown of mixed couples in Kottiyar Pattu by classificatory ethnicity of the spouses (source: own estimate, based on a range of interviews in Kottiyar Pattu)

Apart from this, about 25 mixed couples with one or both spouses originating from Kottiyar Pattu live outside the area. About ten of these couples are Roman Catholics with one Tamil and one Sinhala spouse; they used to live in and around Iruthayapuram, but moved to Trincomalee during the war. The rest either married an ‘outsider’ spouse (mostly Sinhala, in some cases Muslim) and moved to his or her home town, or moved to a new location altogether. As I lack sufficient details on these couples, I have excluded them from my analysis.

²⁶⁴ I visited this village a couple of times in 2000 and 2001, because one of the projects that I was managing involved some activities in the village. Unfortunately, I never took any notes of the few conversations that I had there about intermarriage.

²⁶⁵ By ‘classificatory ethnicity’ I refer to the emic categorisation of people’s ethnicity before marriage. Where parents are of mixed ethnic background, this is obviously problematic. In most cases, a person’s classificatory ethnicity is the ethnicity of the father. Thus a child of a Sinhala father and a Tamil mother is classified as a Sinhalese. If this person decides to marry a Sinhalese, the marriage will generally be considered to be mono-ethnic, but if this person decides to marry a Tamil, the marriage will be considered mixed-ethnic.

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When comparing the figures from table 8.1 with data on the number of families by ethnicity (extracted from CIRM 2004a, CIRM 2004b and CIRM 2004c, and corrected for the increased population reflected in table 2.2), it is possible to estimate the percentage of married Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim men and women who have intermarried. The results are presented in the table below.

Ethnicity	Estimated number of married men	Estimated number of married women	% men who have intermarried	% women who have intermarried
Tamil	11,360	11,460	< 0.1%	1.0%
Muslim	9,155	9,105	0.6%	< 0.1%
Sinhala	2,330	2,280	2.5%	0.2%

Table 8.2. Inter-marriage rates in Kottiyar Pattu by ethnicity and gender (source: own estimate)

From the table, it can be concluded that particularly Tamil men and Muslim women, and to a slightly lesser extent Sinhala women show extremely strong rates of ethnic homogeneity in marriage partner choice, while Sinhala men and to a lesser extent Tamil women and Muslim men have a much larger (though still small) tendency to marry outside their own ethnicity. As Alan Gray (1987) has made clear however, rates of intermarriage vary not just with preference, but also with opportunity. If a group is small, the options for selecting a spouse from within the own group will be limited, and even if there is a strong preference for homogenous marriage, some people will end up intermarrying anyway because they cannot find a spouse within their own group. Inversely, among a numerically dominant group, intermarriage rates will be low even if people have no problem with intermarrying, simply because there are not many candidates available to intermarry with. Using the formulas provided in Gray's article (*ibid*: 367-371), the calculated values for in-marriage rates²⁶⁶, shares in the marriage market²⁶⁷, and indices of social distance²⁶⁸ for men and women of all three ethnicities are as follows:

²⁶⁶ The in-marriage rate is the fraction of people who marry within their ethnicity. An in-marriage rate of 0.999 for Tamil men means that 99.9% of all Tamil men marry a Tamil wife

²⁶⁷ The share in the marriage market (of an ethnic group) is the fraction of married people of the same gender. A marriage market share of 0.399 for Muslim women means that 39.9% of all married women are Muslim.

²⁶⁸ The index of social distance indicates preference for marrying within the same ethnic group, corrected for the availability of spouses of the same ethnic group. An index value of 1 means that people of that particular gender and ethnic group will only marry within their ethnic group, while an index value of 0 means that people do not look at the ethnic background of their spouse at all.

Ethnicity	In-marriage rate (M)	In-marriage rate (F)	Marriage market share (M)	Marriage market share (F)	Index of social distance (M)	Index of social distance (F)
Tamil	0.999	0.990	0.497	0.502	0.942	0.822
Muslim	0.994	0.999	0.401	0.399	0.881	0.962
Sinhala	0.976	0.998	0.102	0.100	0.902	0.969

Table 8.3. In-marriage rates, marriage market shares and indices of social distance in Kottiyar Pattu by ethnicity and gender (source: own estimate)

As can be seen, the in-marriage rates are the inverse of the out-marriage rates presented above, and the shares in the marriage market closely follow the general distribution of the population over the three ethnic groups. The index of social distance, which shows how ‘approachable’ men and women of the different ethnic groups are²⁶⁹, gives a clear picture. For all six groups, the index of social distance is high, which means that it is not very easy for an outsider to marry them; this is not surprising. Among these six groups, Sinhala and Muslim women, and to a slightly lesser extent Tamil men, are virtually unapproachable by potential suitors of other ethnicity. Sinhala men are somewhat approachable, but less so than Muslim men. The higher rate of intermarriage among Sinhala men is entirely due to a smaller group size, and not to a higher approachability. Tamil women on the other hand have a lower intermarriage rate than Sinhala men, but are a lot more approachable. I will get back to why this is the case in section 8.4.1.

8.3.2 Historical trends in inter-ethnic marriages

In the first half of the 20th century, inter-ethnic marriages were very rare. There was a small increase in the 1950s, but only after the upheaval of the mid-1980s, and still more so after the 2002 ceasefire, did intermarriage rates increase to their current levels. I came across three remembered inter-ethnic marriages that took place in the first half of the twentieth century. The first marriage, which probably took place in the 1930s or 1940s, was between a Tamil woman from the area and a Sinhala man; I got no further details on this marriage (interview, Serunuwara, August 2007). The second marriage, which probably took place between 1910 and 1925, involved a British soldier who was based in Trincomalee. He lived with a Vedda woman from Ilakkanthai, and had two children with her. When he returned to Great Britain, he

²⁶⁹ Note that this is an index of *physical*, not of *moral* approachability. Obviously though, moral limitations (and related policing) have great impact on physical approachability. I will get to this point in section 8.3.2.

left his wife and one son behind, and took the other son with him²⁷⁰. The son who stayed behind was classified as European, and died in the area around 1990. He married a woman from the area (thus forming the third remembered inter-ethnic marriage), and their children were classified as 'mixed' (interview, Muthur, August 2005).

In this period, a group of Catholic fishermen from Negombo who used to come to the mouth of the Mahaweli River for seasonal fishing established a more permanent (but still largely seasonal) presence by building a church. As the Catholics of Muthur and this group actively participated in each other's church festivals, it is not unthinkable that some of the fishermen married local women (who were of the same caste and religion)²⁷¹. There were also some Sinhala traders who set up shop in Kottiyar Pattu, and some of them may have found a local wife as well. It must be remembered though that there were very few Sinhalese in Kottiyar Pattu at this time; even if some of them intermarried, this was unlikely to make a big dent in the total picture of marriages.

The reason why there were hardly any intermarriages between Muslims and Tamils was not ethnic enmity (which did not exist), and not just the refusal from religious leaders and relatives to accept spouses of the wrong religion. Until at least the mid-1980s, almost all marriages were arranged by the parents of the spouses or, if the parents had already passed away, by a maternal uncle. So-called 'love marriages' (even between spouses of the same ethnicity) were very rare, and nearly always resulted in elopement. In order to make sure that adolescent women did not get up to any mischief with unsuitable candidates, they were closely guarded from the time that they attained age until their wedding day (this time gap was rarely more than about five to seven years). The women were generally kept inside the cluster of compounds where the extended family lived (interview with middle-aged lady, LB3, August 2007). If they left this area, they were virtually always chaperoned, and if a girl happened to walk alone, she would do so cautiously: "earlier, when a Muslim girl walked on the road and a man came her way, she would go into the nearest house so that she would not be seen. Now they go on motorbikes" (interview with elderly lady, Muthur, May 2007). It was thus almost impossible for a girl to strike up a conversation with a stranger, let alone start a romantic relationship, *unless the stranger was so familiar that he could casually come to the compound*. The only strangers

²⁷⁰ This must have happened somewhere in the first or second decade of the twentieth century. I was told that the son who was left behind died in Kottiyar Pattu at a ripe old age, just a few years before I started my research.

²⁷¹ In terms of ethnicity, this is however little tricky. Many of the Catholics on the western shore of Sri Lanka trace their origins to the Paravar and Mukkuvar fishing communities along the southern coast of present-day Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and spoke Tamil until the mid-twentieth century. A process of Sinhalisation only gathered serious momentum after Sinhala became the language of education at many Catholic schools in the 1960s.

who could do so were members of migrant harvesting gangs (who often kept coming back to the same families at harvest time), and itinerant traders.

The only times when adolescents could really mingle without too much social control was during religious festivals and weddings; it often happened that future weddings were planned during someone else's wedding celebration (interview with middle-aged lady, LB3, August 2007). Particularly among some of the Tamil castes, spouses were sourced from same-caste villages that could be as far away as Pottuvil, in the extreme south of the Eastern Province, and Jaffna, in the extreme north of the Northern Province; a few Muslim families also had long-lasting marriage links with Muslim communities along the entire east coast. Initially, Sinhala settlers often sourced spouses for their children from their home areas. Weddings thus brought suitable people together who would normally not meet each other very often. Itinerant traders or labourers played a vital role in spreading information about available potential brides or grooms. Regional religious festivals (such as the *thiruvila* at Verugal, *kandooris* at Sufi shrines, or the festival at the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes at Palaiyoothu, near Trincomalee) brought comparatively large groups of people together who were not necessarily suitable marriage partners for reasons of caste, class or even religion. The festivals thus provided virtually the only opportunity for subversion of the mores about choosing a spouse.

After the development of the Allai Extension Scheme (AES) saw the influx of several thousand Sinhalese in the early 1950s, interaction between Sinhalese and particularly Tamils increased significantly. This did however not lead to many marriages, as all the settlers were married couples with children. With the settlers however came some itinerant traders, of whom at least one married a girl in a Tamil family with whom he did regular business.

Another Sinhala trader settled in Kilivetti with his Tamil wife (whom he had married before he came to the AES); in the same village, a few more Sinhalese settled of whom some found Tamil wives.

Intermarrying children of the original settlers formed the next round of mixed couples in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Some of these were themselves children of mixed couples. Around this time, a number of marriages between Sinhala and Tamil Catholics also took place in Iruthayapuram and LB3 (where there were concentrations of Tamil Catholics), and possibly also Somapura (where a number of Sinhala Catholic families had been settled). As stated before, all these mixed couples have left the area after the war broke out, and I have not been able to meet any of them. The earliest Muslim-Tamil intermarriages that I came across happened in the late 1980s, *after* Muslim-Tamil relations had become seriously strained following periods of Muslim-Tamil violence²⁷².

²⁷² There may have been earlier marriages on the periphery of Muthur town. I was told of Muslim-Tamil couples living in Periyapalam, but I have not been able to meet any of them.

Bridging troubled waters?

After the ceasefire of 2002, inter-ethnic interaction became a lot easier. Somewhat of a surge in mixed marriages followed, especially between (third-generation) Sinhalese and Tamils. While the trend in Sinhala-Tamil intermarriages seems to run parallel with (and thus be an indicator of) greater inter-group integration, the same is not true for Tamil-Muslim intermarriages. The bizarre thing with Tamil-Muslim intermarriages is that they started becoming more common at the same time that Tamil-Muslim relations degenerated, and thus the intermarriage trend is *inverse* to the trend of integration!

8.4 Love stories

8.4.1 Meeting each other

There is one single factor that enabled mixed couples to meet each other: mobility. Of the nine couples, two husbands were itinerant labourers at the time of courtship, one was an itinerant peddler, and one was a policeman; they met their wives in the course of their work. Mobility of the women was equally important: three were in secondary school (of whom two met their husbands in a shop near their school), one used to come to a town with her mother and met her husband in the grocery shop, and one was a teacher who met her husband at the house of her school's principal²⁷³. Another couple met while working in the same government institution. The ways in which couples met each other are summarised in table 8.4.

Way in which the couple met	Frequency of occurrence	Husband mobile?	Wife mobile?
Husband itinerant labourer or itinerant trader, regular (work-related) visits to wife's family	3	Yes	No
Wife going to school, met husband in nearby shop during school breaks	2	No	Yes
Husband policeman, met wife on the road when she was going for secondary school	1	Yes	Yes
Wife regularly going grocery shopping in town, met husband in shop	1	No	Yes
Wife teacher, met husband (colleague's wife's brother) in colleague's house	1	No	Yes
Husband and wife both working in the same government institution	1	Yes	Yes
Total	9	5	6

Table 8.4. Ways in which interviewed mixed couples met each other

²⁷³ The teacher became friends with the principal's wife and her sisters (who lived in a cluster of dowry houses around their parents' house), and thus visited these ladies regularly at their homes. Her future husband was a younger brother of the principal's wife; he lived with his parents.

Among other mixed couples whom I heard about, this pattern was similar: either the husband had a mobile job (quite often as home guard or soldier) and visited his wife's village, or the wife met her husband while she was in secondary school or while she went to town to do grocery shopping. After the 2002 ceasefire, mobility increased and chances for youth of different ethnic background to meet each other at markets or festivals increased significantly. Also, a number of peacebuilding projects were implemented in the area, some of which focused on bringing youth of different ethnicity together. In a few cases, this also led to mixed marriages²⁷⁴. What is very important to note here is the emancipating role that the war has played, particularly among Tamils and Sinhalese. The experience of displacement (for Tamils) as well as the experience of being posted in Tamil areas (for Sinhala soldiers) has torn people away from norms that traditionally bound them (Golden 1959: 273). Most of the time, this had devastating consequences, but for a few people, it proved to be an opportunity²⁷⁵. As mentioned in section 3.10, the high risk for Tamil men of getting arrested at checkpoints or in Muslim or Sinhala settlements also significantly increased the mobility of Tamil women (who suddenly became responsible for doing purchasing outside the own village). The gender differentiation in risks involved with this form of segregation (Golden 1958: 267) goes a long way in explaining the difference in intermarriage rates between Tamil women and Tamil men.

8.4.2 Getting married, and the reactions of others

Eight of the nine mixed couples whom I interviewed were in so-called 'love marriages', which means that the spouses selected each other, rather than the marriage being arranged by the parents. Only one marriage (in which both spouses were children from mixed parents) was "semi-arranged" (Corwin 1977: 827 n.6), much like how De Munck (1996) describes couples from the Muslim town where he did his research falling in love and then suggesting to their relatives to arrange the marriage. This pattern was the same for all the other mixed marriages that people told me about. In a context where arranged marriages are still the norm (though with more and more exceptions), this is significant.

²⁷⁴ Note the similarity with the list of facilitating factors found in Golden (1959:274): shared employment, interaction between customer/client and staff, meeting in schools, shared use of recreation facilities, meeting through mutual friends, and shared membership of an organisation.

²⁷⁵ Apart from inter-ethnic marriages, the incidence of inter-caste marriages also increased significantly during the war, as did the incidence of extramarital affairs, brothel visits and rape. In a sense, intermarriage and rape are morally opposite responses to the same fundamental problem of young men being away from their 'own category of women'.

Bridging troubled waters?

With exception of the one couple mentioned above, all the couples whom I spoke to got married against the wishes of immediate relatives on at least one side²⁷⁶. In order to get married without the approval of the immediate family, most had to run away and get married elsewhere. Courtships were typically brief: from two months to about half a year. This is in line with general practice in rural Sri Lanka. Being (young and) single and being married are auspicious states, but being in a relationship without being married is a state where people risk serious damage to their reputation due to gossip and character assassination. It is not for nothing that Sri Lankans use the English term 'affair' (with all the potentially negative connotations) to describe romantic relationships between people who are not married to each other, even those that are perfectly honourable. A number of the mixed couples had an extra reason to marry quickly. Some wanted to be married before their family found out, in order to prevent disagreeing relatives from physically ending the relationship²⁷⁷.

The disapproval by immediate relatives is often so strong that they disown their son, daughter or sibling (at least temporarily). Sometimes this goes very far. One lady whom I spoke to was not only disowned where dowry and inheritance are concerned, but was even not allowed to attend the funeral when her mother died years after the marriage had taken place, and after several children had been born (interview, Muthur, March 2008). In another case, a young mixed couple was widely accepted in both the husband's and the wife's village. Their wedding had been a very festive and very inter-ethnic celebration. The boy's mother however disapproved so strongly that he ended up committing suicide because he could not handle the pressure (conversation with a friend of the couple, August 2007).

Going ahead despite opposition by the family points to another important enabling factor for inter-ethnic marriages. In the interviews with mixed couples in Kottiyar Pattu, but also in conversations with mixed-married friends and in-laws, I was often struck by the strong-willed and independent character of particularly the wives²⁷⁸. The inter-ethnic relationships that I encountered were triggered by romantic love, not by deliberate reasoning (which fundamentally undermines claims at causal explanatory value of demographic models: proximity, similar status levels, similar education levels etc. are conditions under which people meet, not reasons why

²⁷⁶ This disapproval may not always have been caused by mere prejudice; Golden has pointed out that relatives may well be genuinely concerned about the welfare of the couple (1958: 268-9)

²⁷⁷ In one case where the courtship lasted longer, the wife's family packed her off to the Middle East for a year as soon as they found out about the relationship. When she returned, her future husband picked her up from the airport and eloped with her (interview, Thoppur, August 2008).

²⁷⁸ This comes close to what Golden (1959: 274) calls "weak endogamous attitudes".

people fall in love). Still, deciding to get intermarried in the face of opposition constitutes a clear act of defiance, and requires commitment and a strong will.

In the case of Muslim men marrying non-Muslim wives, the conversion of the wife to Islam is generally a precondition for acceptance in the wider Muslim community. The Muslims whom I spoke to about mixed marriages knew of two cases where they suspected that the wife had not converted, and of one or two cases where a Muslim girl had married a non-Muslim and given up her religion; the reaction was unanimously negative. Between Buddhists and Hindus, this is not such a big issue (most Sri Lankan Buddhists worship Hindu gods, and many Hindus have at least some respect for the Buddha). Among Catholics, marrying someone of another religion used to be as big an issue as it is for Muslims, but this seems to have changed over the last two decades.

While the opposition by relatives has caused a lot of suffering for the mixed couples, it was – to some extent – to be expected. What is more interesting is the fact that in the case of at least five of the nine couples whom I spoke to, one side of the family either did not enforce their disapproval of the marriage, or openly approved of it. This lack of disapproval (or rather quick acceptance of the marriage as a *fait accompli*) may have had something to do with something else: in seven of the nine cases, at least one of the parents of at least one of the spouses had passed away before the mixed marriage took place²⁷⁹. Since the authority of the remaining parent (if there was one) over the son or daughter was weakened, the eldest (male) sibling or a maternal uncle had to take over part of this responsibility. These relatives, being in a less direct position of authority, generally disapproved, but were not able to put as much negative pressure as a parent would have been able to. At the same time, an elopement relieved the uncle or brother of the responsibility to find a good spouse, and – in cases where the woman was orphaned – of the responsibility to collect a dowry.

8.4.3 Being married

After marriage, eight of the nine couples whom I spoke to lived neolocally; the teacher whom I mentioned earlier moved in with her husband, whose family had no problem with her. After a while, five of the neolocal couples ended up living in the husband's original village. Neolocal residence or residence in the husband's village seems to be a general pattern among mixed couples in Kottiyar Pattu. The only exceptions I came across are about five to ten Sinhala youth who married Tamil girls after about 2005, and who were living in their wife's village by the time I finished my fieldwork. Apart from the presence or absence of links with relatives, the place of residence of the couple was important for another reason: most villages in Kottiyar

²⁷⁹ In an eighth case, the wife's father was so conspicuously absent from the narrative that I suspect that he had either died or run away before the marriage of his daughter.

Pattu are largely mono-ethnic, and in many cases the choice of residence implies a choice of dominant ethnic self-representation of the couple.

In the cases where couples end up in the original village of either spouse, the defining element that brought about rapprochement with disapproving relatives was the birth of the first child. This is a standard pattern following elopement in Sri Lanka. The birth of the first child brings about child-rearing responsibilities, and thus the elopement has visibly become a relationship with long-term commitments. Since trying to break up the relationship no longer makes sense (a daughter or sister with child is very hard to marry off), the alternative is to make the best of it all (Baber (1937) observed a similar pattern among the mixed couples that he studied).

The habitation patterns of mixed couples are interesting. Among Muslims and Tamils in the East of Sri Lanka, it is customary for couples to live in the wife's native village. Land is generally divided among the daughters as dowry, and whenever possible the parents will try to build a dowry house for the daughters as well²⁸⁰. Moving out to the husband's village means that the couple will have to do without land and/or a house, and thus will have no resources to fall back on in case of emergencies. Also, when children are born, it means that the wife will be dependent on her mother-in-law rather than on her mother (and sisters) to help her with the baby. All this puts the mixed couples in a vulnerable position.

If living in the wife's village is so much more advantageous than living in the husband's village, then why this pattern of settlement? It seems to be linked to the couple's chances of getting accepted (or at least tolerated) in the wider ethnic community that they live in.

What happened is that the wives ended up *taking on the ethnicity of their husbands*, in the process critically undermining essentialist interpretations of the concept of ethnicity. Where there was a language difference, the wives took on their husband's language: I had an interview with a Tamil woman in Sinhala²⁸¹, and three interviews with Sinhala women in Tamil. As said earlier, most non-Muslim wives of Muslim men converted to Islam: two of the husbands told me that their wife was a better Muslim than they were. The women's choice of clothes also changed: one Tamil lady was wearing distinctly Sinhala dress, a Sinhala lady was wearing distinctly Tamil dress, and others (both Sinhala and Tamil) were wearing distinctly Muslim dress. Most dramatic of all, some of the women who converted to Islam formally changed their ethnicity by adopting a new name, and obtaining a new identity card.

²⁸⁰ Among Sinhalese settlers in Kottiyar Pattu, land is generally passed on to the youngest son as inheritance, and dowry is given more in terms of gold, cash or other movables than in the form of a house. Neolocal residence is therefore the norm.

²⁸¹ This lady's television gave her away: when we entered the house, she was watching Shakthi TV, a Tamil television channel.

For the husbands, changing ethnicity does not seem to be an option; the only thing that some of the husbands who married across the Sinhala-Tamil language divide did was to learn their wife's language.

There is a serious gender difference here: it is possible for a wife to take on her husband's ethnic identity, but it is impossible for a husband to take on his wife's ethnic identity. I am not sure why this is. It may have to do with male pride, it may have to do with status differences between the wife's ethnicity and the husband's ethnicity (but the examples of Sinhala women marrying Tamils and becoming Tamil undermine this), or it may be something entirely different.

8.4.4 Raising children

The arrival of children brings acknowledgement to an inter-ethnic marriage, but it also brings up a new problem: children need to be raised, and parents need to decide how much of both cultures they want to pass on.

The way in which mixed parents raise their children, and the extent to which they are willing to let their children marry someone of another ethnicity, are strong indicators of the extent to which the parents perceive themselves to be a multicultural couple.

The responses were interesting. With the exception of three Sinhala-Tamil couples, all couples indicated that they raise(d) their children according to the ethnicity of the village where the children grow up – and thus according to the ethnicity of the father. There where one of the spouses is Sinhala, the children are generally raised bi-lingually, but as the wife generally takes on the religion of the husband and (with exception of Christianity) religious affiliation is pretty much divided along ethnic lines, most children are taught one religion. The mono-ethnic child rearing practices go further: with exception of some of the (Hindu-Buddhist) Sinhala-Tamil couples, the wives by and large refrain from teaching their children songs, customs, games, stories, etcetera that are considered unique to their own culture.

With regard to the spouse choice of the children, the answers were again nearly uniform: with one exception, the fathers had a strong preference that the children marry someone of the same ethnicity. Some fathers did not want their children to have to go through the hardships that they themselves had gone through, and some insisted that their children maintain their father's religion. Sometimes, I got the impression that there was a more fundamental ambiguity: even though they themselves had engaged in a mixed marriage, that did not make it the preferred option. The exception was a man who identified himself as Tamil, whose father was Malayali, whose mother was Sinhala, whose ("Sinhala") wife's father was Sinhala and whose wife's mother was Tamil. This man was perfectly all-right with the children marrying whoever they chose.

The mothers were not as rigid. One woman who married a Muslim and adopted the Muslim faith gave a slightly embarrassed smile when I asked her, and then answered "as long as he or she is a Muslim". The smile betrayed more ambiguity

than she could express verbally. As soon as she said this, an elderly lady who evidently had been listening in to make sure she said the right things popped her head around the door of the back room. A Tamil lady who had married a Sinhalese and who had become very Sinhala in her demeanour said that her first child had married a Tamil against the father's wishes, but she was perfectly fine with it. Her other children all married Sinhalese.

8.5 Reflection: boundary jumping, but very little bridging

As I have shown in the above paragraphs, inter-ethnic marriages are comparatively rare in Kottiyar Pattu, but still so common that almost every village has a few mixed couples, and is thus linked to villages of other ethnicity through marriage.

Historically, the normative environment that people in Rural Sri Lanka grow up in prescribes the selection of spouses from within the same caste, religion and class; a derived consequence of this is that most marriages are mono-ethnic. The fact that inter-ethnic marriages occur despite this normative environment is intimately linked to three factors: above-average geographical mobility of at least one of the spouses, below-average moral surveillance of the adolescents involved, and (particularly among the wives) personalities that are strong-willed and independent.

While personality characteristics make individuals more or less likely to pursue a relationship (and marriage) that goes against the norm (and is therefore subversive), mobility (enabling, at some point, physical proximity between the spouses-to-be outside the surveillance of norm-enforcing relatives) is a factor that explains broader trends in intermarriage. In the latter part of the twentieth century, the development of secondary education infrastructure greatly contributed to the mobility of adolescent girls. Parallel to this, the conflict induced mobility for fleeing civilians, patrolling combatants, and Tamil women who had to take on the marketing role to protect the men in their families. At the same time, the conflict made making norm enforcement harder because bigger issues (primarily physical security and food security) demanded surveillance, and because it became more common for the surveyed to be physically separated from the surveying. Apart from this, I found a remarkably frequent occurrence of below-average moral surveillance caused by the death of one or both parents of one or both spouses.

This leads to the paradoxical conclusion that, apart from personal characteristics and general development, ethnicised conflict directly contributed to an *increase* in marriages across the very same boundaries that were the locus of so much violence²⁸².

²⁸² This conclusion is only valid in cases where intermarriage was rare and generally considered inappropriate. In situations like Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, where intergroup marriage was *not* considered inappropriate before conflict breaks out, and where pre-conflict intergroup marriage was fairly common, the general hardening of group boundaries will lead to a significant reduction in intergroup marriages. The same thing

The context of ethnicised conflict also had as a consequence that individual boundary crossing by mixed couples rarely led to a broader spreading of inter-ethnic understanding or interaction. The gun-enforced policing of ethnic boundaries by soldiers, home guards, rebels, ethno-nationalist politicians and local thugs forced the mixed couples to keep their multiculturalism 'below the radar', and remain irrelevant to macro-level concerns about ethnic purity by making sure that they were not identified as a distinct group (Golden 1958: 269, Okun 2004: 185). In practice, this almost always meant that the wives 'jumped the boundary' and adopted the ethnic identity of their husbands, while all but cutting off interaction with their own communities. By doing so, they assimilated, rather than culturally adapted (Roer-Strier and Ben Ezra 2006).

Rather than acting as a bridge between their communities, mixed couples (and their children) were faced with suspicion from both sides during most of the war. Most of the mixed households whom I spoke to had been faced with threats against their safety. At least two of these households had faced selective violence that they interpreted as almost a form of exorcism, aimed at driving out the elements that subverted claims to ethnic purity²⁸³.

In periods of comparative peace, some non-confrontational forms of bridging do take place. Two ladies whom I spoke to were or had been teaching Sinhala to children in their husbands' Tamil-speaking villages. A few people in Hindu (Tamil) - Buddhist (Sinhala) mixed marriages spoke of taking Hindu friends to Buddhist festivals, and of taking Buddhist friends to Hindu festivals. Finally, some mixed people living in Serunuwara and Muthur had a reputation of helping Tamils from outside gain access to public services in these places.

This leads me to the conclusion that, while mixed-ethnic families can contribute to broader inter-ethnic understanding in times that peace is the norm, the need to 'stay below the radar' of ethnonationalist forces makes it impossible for them to perform a conflict-mitigating role in times of crisis.

happened in the village of Panama, particularly after an army camp was placed in the village in the late 1980s (Yalman 1971: 310-324, Abeyrathne 2003)

²⁸³ My impression is that what was exorcised was a perceived (multicultural) subversive attitude of the targeted couples, and not the mixed marriage per se: even among ethnonationalist hardliners, some people have spouses of another ethnicity, without this being seen as a problem. A prominent example was Nadesan, the last head of the LTTE's Political Wing, who was married to a Sinhala woman. Similarly, the prominent anti-immigrant Dutch politician Geert Wilders is himself married to a foreign wife.

9 Everyday inter-ethnic interaction: discussion and conclusion

9.1 Introduction

In this book, I have documented and analysed everyday forms of inter-ethnic interaction in the area known as Kottiyar Pattu. In chapter 1, I have shown that Kottiyar Pattu sits in a wider Sri Lankan context of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim ethnic identifications, and within a wider context of ethno-nationalist discourses and two and a half decades of ethnicised politics and violence. An understanding of inter-ethnic interaction may lead to deeper understanding of what ethnicisation means in people's everyday lives, and offer insights for outsiders aiming at contributing to the area's peaceful development.

I have approached everyday inter-ethnic interaction from four viewpoints. The first viewpoint is that everyday life continues in and interacts with a context of conflict. Both everyday life and violent conflict deserve attention, but neither should be foregrounded. Focusing on everyday life alone when studying life in war risks ignoring the intense fear and suffering that people need to live with. At the same time, foregrounding violent conflict risks ignoring that a lot of aspects of everyday life go on despite the conflict and to quite an extent independent of the conflict (Richards 2005).

Secondly, inter-ethnic interaction involves the crossing of an ethnic boundary, and therefore draws attention to how people deal with sameness and otherness. As I have documented in chapter 3, the people whom I met in Kottiyar Pattu define sameness and otherness in a wide variety of ways. This means that for every person, there is a large group of people who can be defined either 'same' or 'other', depending on which category of identification is used. I have therefore taken the viewpoint that social life is about a lot more than just ethnicity, but rather that it is constituted by "multiple" and "intersecting" realities (Long 2001: 19).

My third viewpoint is that interaction involves individual people's agency: their capacity to interpret, negotiate, and at least partly shape their lives. In chapters 6, 7 and 8, I have described three situations in which people engage in and shape inter-ethnic interaction: the day-to-day pursuit of (agricultural) livelihoods, periods of acute tension and violence, and inter-ethnic marriages.

The last viewpoint is that interaction takes place in specific settings (or arenas), in which wider contexts are interpreted and negotiated. In chapters 2, 3 and 4, I have dealt at length with the geographical, historical, social and violent context within which everyday life and everyday inter-ethnic interaction take place. As exemplified by the narratives in chapter 5, this complex context has profound consequences for the way people perceive and represent themselves and others. Isolated from the wider history, key stories about Kottiyar Pattu have given rise to competing ethnic claims on supremacy. At the same time, the area has always been something of a

melting pot with many consecutive waves of people moving into the area and finding a space for themselves. As official interest waxed and waned with strategic (military and trading) interests in this region that is both on the frontier and the periphery of Sri Lanka, every new wave of immigrants has had to find ways to make do when the backing from the state that brought them into the area fell away. This has given rise to pragmatism and, as far as available documents show, a long history of fairly peaceful coexistence.

This coexistence has been seriously threatened since violence broke out in the area in 1985. As I have documented in chapter 4, ethnicity and otherness were not just abstract discourses that were fought over in Jaffna and Colombo and came to people through newspapers, radio and television. Though the extent to which people have been directly affected by the violence is not equally distributed across ethnicity, gun-toting ethnic others have been an everyday reality that everybody in Kottiyar Pattu has had to deal with for almost twenty-five years. What is important to realise is that, even though memories of past violence and the threat of future violence created a general situation of fear and intimidation, actual violence has been episodic. In between, there have been long periods of time in which most people were able to more or less pick up the pieces of their everyday lives. It is also important to realise that violence has rarely been spontaneous (as is illustrated by the differential responses to incidents around Serunuwara in section 7.6.1)

In the rest of this chapter, I will draw upon these case studies and return to the main research objective: *to come to an understanding of everyday inter-ethnic interaction in a context of violent ethnicised conflict, its implications for the everyday lives of those living with conflict, and its implications for peace-building interventions.*

Section 9.2 looks at how everyday inter-ethnic interaction can be understood: who engages in it, how they do it, and why they do so. Section 9.3 looks at the consequences of inter-ethnic interaction for people's everyday lives: how does the context influence inter-ethnic interaction, and what impact does inter-ethnic interaction have on the context? Section 9.4 deals with methodological implications that flow from my research, and section 9.5 discusses topics that are worthy of further study. Finally, section 9.6 looks at the wider implications of everyday inter-ethnic interaction for those who aim to work on issues of peace and reconciliation in conflict-affected areas.

9.2 *The practice of everyday inter-ethnic interaction*

9.2.1 **Those who engage in everyday forms of inter-ethnic interaction**

As will have become clear from the empirical data presented in this dissertation, those who engage in everyday forms of inter-ethnic interaction come from all walks of life, and most are otherwise quite ordinary people. Despite the violent ethnic "unmixing" that has taken place (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004: 46), the numbers of

people engaging in deliberate inter-ethnic interaction beyond random encounters are quite substantial. How many people this involves exactly is hard to guess, but based on what I have seen and heard I estimate that between a third and half of all households in Kottiyar Pattu have inter-ethnic links with others whom they meet in the pursuit of their everyday lives and livelihoods. Though comparatively rare, even mixed-ethnic marriages can be found in nearly every village that was not under LTTE control. Inter-ethnic interaction is thus pretty much in everybody's face. Of those who do not engage in non-random inter-ethnic interaction many have no need to do so; there is not necessarily a lack of willingness.

While the intense suffering that ethnicised violence has caused for so many people in Sri Lanka's war zone cannot be denied, the spread of inter-ethnic interaction fundamentally complicates any simple narrative of ethnic enmity and segregation.

As I have shown in chapters 4 and 7, violence in Kottiyar Pattu has been episodic in nature, with regular periods of acute tensions and (sometimes) intense violence separated by periods in which memories of past violence and expectations of potential future violence did cast a dark shadow over people's lives, but in which there was comparatively little actual violence. During peaks of tensions and violence, most of the 'ordinary' people put their cross-ethnic interactions on hold until things calmed down again. During such periods, a small group of people with social roles of intermediaries (like *wattai vidanes*, religious leaders, and teachers) continued their interactions with each other under the right circumstances.

9.2.2 How everyday inter-ethnic interaction is given shape

In chapters 6, 7 and 8, I have documented a range of inter-ethnic "tactics" (de Certeau 1988) that people engage in. In the AES, Irrigation Department staff adjusted water management practices (and sometimes the physical infrastructure of the scheme) to minimise potential for conflict. Farmer representatives and *wattai vidanes* were sometimes able to find ways to reduce the impact of channel blockages, and to frame such blockages as understandable attempts to get water to illegitimate paddy fields rather than as indicators of ethnic conflict. Farmers engaged in cross-ethnic hiring of labour and cross-ethnic leasing of land to keep cultivation going.

During the 2003 riot in and around Muthur, Muslim community leaders asked ZOA for help and negotiated safe passage for ZOA's Tamil staff members. A group of Sinhalese teamed up with Tamil youth to attack what had suddenly become a common enemy. A Sinhala police officer offered security to one Tamil village that he had special contacts with. A mob of angry Muslim youth did not attack a small and vulnerable group of Tamil road sweepers because otherwise the town would get messy. The riot ended because farmers needed to plough and because children needed to sit for their school exams. Finally, Muslims and Tamils both brought in Sinhala traders in the aftermath of the riot, because the Sinhala traders were able to safely pass through both Muslim and Tamil areas.

Despite the ethnic segregation, there are over 100 mixed-ethnic couples living in Kottiyar Pattu today who are somehow managing to live their lives.

An important characteristic of everyday inter-ethnic interaction is that it generally takes place between people who already know each other before they engage in inter-ethnic interaction. Trust is crucial: in a context where anyone might be a deadly enemy, it is simply too dangerous to engage in substantial interaction with unknown people. The same is true for intra-ethnic interaction, but there is a difference: since 1985, the opportunities for getting to know each other across ethnic lines have dramatically reduced. Because of this, inter-ethnic interaction tends to be concentrated among people who were already adolescents or older when the violence broke out. As I have mentioned in chapter 8, inter-ethnic marriages have followed an opposite trend, but this was for a very specific reason. Due to the conflict and the growth of secondary education, cross-ethnic gender segregation among adolescents and the moral policing of adolescent girls has weakened at the same time that overall ethnic segregation increased, thus creating new opportunities for mixed couples to meet and fall in love.

The prerequisite of trust points to another key aspect of everyday forms of inter-ethnic interaction: despite being fairly common, the links tend to be between individuals, not groups. Norman Uphoff (2001) was thus mistaken when he identified inter-ethnic interaction in Sri Lanka's conflict zone as a form of collective action. Because of the ever-present threat of violent retribution by those policing the ethnic boundary, it is extremely dangerous to have your head stick out above the grass, whether in the capital or at grass-roots level. The farmer representative whom Uphoff wrote about was shot dead for crossing the ethnic boundary. The *wattai vidane* whom I interviewed was tortured because he was suspected of helping the wrong people. And an activist friend from the area has had to leave the country for his own safety. Inter-ethnic interaction must therefore remain 'below the radar' of those policing the ethnic boundaries. The radar, in this case, has the shape of an AK-47.

Staying below the radar sometimes means that people restrict the number of others who know about the interaction, as was the case with the *wattai vidanes* who met in a closed room. A lot of interethnic interaction is however quite visible: there is little that is secretive about hiring labourers from another ethnicity to cultivate fields near the front line, or about mixed-ethnic marriages. What happens here is that the inter-ethnic interaction is presented as irrelevant to ethnonationalist discourses. This is done through a 'swapping trick', in which ethnic otherness is reframed into similarity in another category of identification. Farmers speak about being farmers who need to farm (and not about being Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim), parents speak about their children needing to sit for their exams, and mixed couples speak about married life, not about being of mixed ethnicity. In the case of most mixed couples, an additional process takes place: ethnic difference is eliminated because the wife adopts her husband's ethnic identity.

By more or less ignoring ethnic difference in situations of inter-ethnic interaction, people create a situation where ethnonationalist discourse (which they cannot do

much about) and inter-ethnic interaction exist in “amiable incoherence” (Whitaker 1999).

Particularly from chapters 3 and 7, another element comes forward: widespread ethnic segregation does not mean that there is intra-ethnic harmony. High-caste Tamil farmers still resent the rise to farmer status of low-caste Tamils. Original inhabitants resent settlers, irrespective of ethnicity, because they took up all remaining room for expansion. In April 2003, Muslim farmers did not want to have fleeing Muslim fishermen in their school, and low-caste Tamils did not flee to the churches to avoid the awkward situation of being among high-caste Tamils. Reformist and Sufi Muslims in Muthur are locked in an intense struggle over the shape that the Muslim religion should take. And so it goes on. This underlines that ethnicity should also not be foregrounded when studying a multi-ethnic setting.

9.2.3 Why people engage in everyday inter-ethnic interaction

Just like war is often waged for pragmatic rather than ideological reasons, so is peace. Even though everyday inter-ethnic interaction in a context of violent ethnicised conflict is fundamentally subversive in nature, I found that it is primarily pragmatic in intent. Most of the farmers engaging in the cross-ethnic hiring of labourers, the Muslim civil servants approaching my Tamil colleagues to access emergency relief for their community, and the many others whom I have described who engage in inter-ethnic interaction do so for very practical reasons. While some are clearly driven by ideological convictions and some are ‘ethnically blinded’ by love, most people simply want to live reasonably normal lives. In most cases, I would therefore consider everyday inter-ethnic interaction as a prosaic reality, not “poetics” (Ring 2006: 3). This yearning for normalcy goes beyond mere economic considerations. It is also about disengaging from the context of conflict and creating a mental breathing space, even if only to get through the day (Walker 2010).

9.3 *The consequences of everyday inter-ethnic interaction for people’s everyday lives*

Many people who told me about individual acts of inter-ethnic interaction considered these acts insignificant in the greater scheme of things. Viewed individually, acts of inter-ethnic interaction rarely had any impact on the fighting parties, on ethno-nationalist discourses, or on socio-economic well-being. Taken together though, inter-ethnic interaction had clear and substantial consequences.

While not undoing all the negative effects of conflict (such as access restrictions in some areas and constraints for getting inputs or selling produce), inter-ethnic interaction made it possible to keep most of the Allai Extension Scheme functioning throughout the war years, thus enabling thousands of farming families to sustain their livelihoods at least to some extent. Had there been no exchange of lands, cross-

hiring of labour, negotiations by *wattai vidanes*, and interventions by Irrigation Department staff, then cultivation would have been reduced even more, and people would have sunk into even greater depths of poverty and despair. On a much smaller scale, the same is true for the Tamil goldsmiths and Muslim jewellers mentioned in section 3.2.1.

While inter-ethnic interaction was rarely able to avoid tensions and outbreaks of violence, it did have clear mitigating effects. Sinhalese, who in May and June 1985 warned Tamil neighbours that something was up, were not able to stop the looting and burning, but probably did save a lot of lives, as did the Muslims who sheltered the fleeing Tamils at the time. Broad consensus (though hardly discussed openly) about the need to take a time-out from the violence in April 2003 allowed school children to sit for their exams and farmers to prepare their fields, and allowed the tensions to calm down somewhat.

Both in regular life and in situations of acute tensions and violence, inter-ethnic interaction thus contributed to the maintenance of a substratum of normalcy in which people could live their lives as normally as possible given the circumstances. Probably the form of inter-ethnic interaction with the least impact on wider society in Kottiyar Pattu is the inter-ethnic marriage. Although some mixed-married people do try to bridge ethnic differences and stimulate understanding between the different groups they represent, living normal lives requires most couples to keep their position of being inter-ethnic bridges away from the public eye. As I have shown, this goes to the extent of wives changing their ethnicity. As with other forms of inter-ethnic interaction however, there is quite a bit of tacit acceptance. Mixed couples who establish themselves as proper couples (generally symbolised by the generation of offspring) are generally accepted by the people in their village, though not always by their blood relatives.

9.4 Wider academic implications of this research

In the data that I have presented, I have shown that despite the constraining context of violence and ethnonationalist discourses, people find room for manoeuvre to exercise agency in the shaping of their everyday lives.

With my research, I have underlined a crucial premise of the actor-oriented approach: to understand any social reality, you need to understand alternative realities that are equally part of people's everyday lives. These alternative realities are spaces for reinterpretation, negotiation and disengagement, and it is in this ambiguity that people find room for manoeuvre, even in very oppressive circumstances. It is here that Mark Whitaker's notion of "amiable incoherence" (1999) comes to mind as particularly useful. While many realities intersect and interact, some realities can only exist precisely because they are invisible or irrelevant to dominating realities. Thus it is possible for Sinhala home guards to enforce the ideology of ethnic segregation when they are on duty, armed and in uniform, and to engage in inter-ethnic interaction when they come home, change

their uniform and gun for a shirt and sarong, and go to work in their fields together with Tamil labourers who have been working in their fields for years. This is not a deliberate act of bridging (ethnic) difference. Rather, people perform a 'mental swapping trick', and replace otherness in one category of identification by sameness in another: "we are all farmers", "we are both Catholics", or "he may be a Sinhalese / Muslim / Tamil, but he is still my friend". As I have said in section 1.3.2, this is the main reason why I have avoided the use of the term 'bridging social capital'. In individual people's everyday lives, inter-ethnic interaction is bridging and bonding at the same time, depending on which social reality you take as your starting point. While I see value in the use of the dichotomy between bridging and bonding for studies at higher social levels of abstraction (see for example Varshney 2002), the concept is unhelpful at the level of the individual or the household, because it imposes a hierarchy in social realities that does not exist.

The multiplicity of realities not only means that interaction and co-operation across ethnic lines is possible despite ethnicised conflict. It also means that not all conflicts are ethnic in nature. There are status conflicts between high-caste and low-caste Tamils over access to land and temples, conflicts between Muslim farmers and fishermen or between high-caste and low-caste Tamils over access to aid, conflicts between owner-cultivators and encroachers over access to irrigation water, and many other conflicts and disagreements in the area. While the deafening sound of fighting between the army and the LTTE regularly made other conflicts inaudible, these conflicts need to be understood in their own right.

The focus on arenas and sub-arenas has been useful to gain understanding of social interactions in their specific settings, as well as in a wider geographical, political and historical setting. It has made it possible to study what at first seem rather disparate forms of inter-ethnic interaction, and draw lessons from all these forms.

Methodologically, I want to make a case for what is almost a non-methodology: drinking endless cups of tea with people when studying conflict (or ethnicity) and talking about a million things other than conflict (or ethnicity) when doing so. This non-foregrounding (Richards 2005) then needs to be combined with a critical analysis of secondary sources about the conflict (or about ethnicity) and the 'million things other than conflict (or ethnicity)'. It is only so that one can gain a reasonable insight into the everyday realities of life in conflict while at the same time placing things in a wider context.

9.5 Topics for further study

From this research, a number of topics come up that are worthy of further exploration.

First of all, my research was conducted in just one area within one country. Repeat studies in other multi-ethnic parts of Sri Lanka (such as Ampara District, Puttalam District or Vavuniya District, but – outside the conflict zone – possibly also mixed-ethnic neighbourhoods in some of the big towns and the plantations in the middle of

the country), and in other parts of the world, will be useful to validate the outcomes of this research and further enrich conceptual understanding of everyday inter-ethnic interaction.

Within Kottiyar Pattu, an inquiry into other forms of inter-ethnic interaction will further enrich the picture. I have briefly mentioned the links between Tamil goldsmiths and Muslim jewellers, but I have ignored the fisheries sector almost entirely. Also, I have paid very little attention to inter-ethnic interaction on markets and in shops, and in public institutions like schools, hospitals and government offices. While I have mentioned their importance, I did not consider it safe enough for the people involved to delve in detail into the workings of local politics, of peace committees and of NGOs working on issues of peace and reconciliation. If ever the situation improves such that peace is no longer a sensitive topic, I am sure that a lot of valuable lessons can be learnt from the people involved.

From the different chapters in this book, a number of other topics arise that are not directly related to inter-ethnic interaction but are also worthy of investigation.

From chapter 2, the linkages between population movements and politics along the fringes of the Kandyan kingdom between 1505 (the arrival of the Portuguese) and 1815 (the end of the kingdom) arise as a gap in knowledge. Related to this, it would be interesting to investigate temple histories and chronicles all along the East Coast to see if patterns emerge relating to local politics, the role of the Kandyan kingdom, the role of the colonial powers, and pre-colonial social configurations.

From chapter 3, a wider investigation into the continued existence of *kudi* matrilineal groups and the changes to the system will complement Dennis McGilvray's work on Akkaraipattu. Another study worth doing in the context of small, formally endogamous Tamil caste groups, is a multi-generational inquiry into marriage patterns and trends in endogamy and exogamy.

From chapter 6 comes the topic of long-term rainfall fluctuation and its consequences for struggles over the allocation of irrigation water at the levels of politics, policy, and farmers and officials within irrigation schemes.

Another topic that warrants inquiry is what potential there is for further development to provide livelihoods for the expanding population of the AES (and other schemes) now that there is insufficient land for the next generation, and how this resource scarcity will fuel further complexities.

Lastly, there is the topic of farmer representatives and *wattai vidanes*. As I have shown, mutual acquaintance and trust are essential for the functioning of networks of farmer representatives, particularly in times of crisis. However, under current ideologies on participative irrigation management, old boys' networks are replaced by representatives who are to be elected annually. While this improves the accountability of farmer representatives to the farmers they represent, it breaks up networks of trust among the farmer representatives, and may thus be counterproductive when problems need to be sorted out at that level. Because of this, it would be interesting to critically review the effects of participatory irrigation management in its current form.

9.6 *Implications for interventions in conflict-affected areas*

Within the scene of humanitarian aid and development aid, peace-building has been a hot topic since at least the mid-1990s and it may be so for some time to come. Terms like 'Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment' and 'Building Local Capacities for Peace' have by now sunk into the day-to-day vocabulary of NGOs, and there is a lot of attention for the topic among academics and donors.

Particularly after the 2002 ceasefire, a large number of local and international civil society organisations in Sri Lanka got involved in activities related to peace-building (Orjuela 2004)²⁸⁴. The range of activities was enormous: it included seminars, trainings, advocacy, exchange visits, public rallies and festivals (including a kite festival that I once attended in Trincomalee), the setting up and support of local peace committees, tree planting campaigns, and even things like the construction of community centres and repair of irrigation channels. Apart from noting the obvious failure to prevent the vicious resurgence of ethno-chauvinism in public discourse from late 2005 onwards (which was very much encouraged by both the government and the LTTE and thus would have been hard to counter in any case), I am not in a position to make generic statements about the impact of all the peace-building work that has been done over the years. However, I do believe that what I learnt about everyday inter-ethnic interaction has strong implications for the effectiveness of grassroots-level peace-building work in a context of violent conflict.

First of all, to understand the everyday implications of ethnicised conflict, a thorough understanding of everyday life and its multiple realities (of which ethnicised conflict is only one) is essential. Conflict assessments that are too much focused on conflict risk missing out on the room for manoeuvre that people find in alternative realities.

As I have noted before, most forms of everyday inter-ethnic interaction in a context of present or expected violence stay 'below the radar', because the risk of retribution is too large. For the same reason, inter-ethnic interaction is largely a form of individual, not collective action – despite quite a lot of people engaging in it. In order to build peaceful relations across ethnic borders, it is essential that those engaging in these peaceful relations feel safe in doing so. This disqualifies any formal or public form of peace-building, because such activities pull the boundary-crossing 'above the radar' and into the full view of those engaged in the surveillance of ethnic boundaries. There is another reason to be careful with forms of peace-building that involve the explicit representation of ethnic groups in problem-solving platforms like for example peace committees. While I have met a number of people in such committees who were genuinely interested in the welfare of all, the risk is that – in the hands of people with the primary intention of defending their

²⁸⁴ The "Peacebuilding Directory" that was published by the Consortium for Humanitarian Agencies (CHA) in late 2005 contains details of as many as 123 organisations (CHA 2005).

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community against other communities – peace becomes an ethnic bargaining game. While talking peace, such “fire-tenders” (Brass 1998: 16-17) actually harden ethnic boundaries and set the stage for future conflicts. In situations of long-running violent conflict, it is very important to create opportunities where particularly the younger generation can meet and build up relations. However, to paraphrase and invert a famous line from the television series *Fawlty Towers*: “don’t mention peace”.

In closing, it is important to return one last time to what everyday inter-ethnic interaction means. Are the people in Kottiyar Pattu such peaceful people who just ignore the conflict and the ethno-nationalist rhetoric? By no means. Over the years, several thousand people from the area took up arms to defend their overlapping motherlands, and many of their friends and relatives quietly or openly supported them. Counter to what I originally expected, everyday inter-ethnic interaction is not necessarily proof that people do not subscribe to ethno-nationalist discourse. What it *is* proof of is that people are pragmatic enough to ignore the discourse when everyday life requires them to do so. In the long run, this can dull the sharp edges of what it is that separates people. To quote Amartya Sen,

“[i]n resisting the miniaturization of human beings [...], we can also open up the possibility of a world that can overcome the memory of its troubled past and subdue the insecurities of its difficult present” (2006: 185).

What Sri Lanka needs is more opportunities for such pragmatism. Ethnic peace is not merely a situation in which ethnicised problems are solved, but one in which ethnic boundaries become irrelevant.

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Summary

This book is the end result of a research into everyday forms of inter-ethnic interaction in a context of violent ethnicised conflict, which I conducted between 2003 and 2008 in Kottiyar Pattu, a multi-ethnic area in the war zone of North-East Sri Lanka. The objective of this research is *to come to an understanding of everyday inter-ethnic interaction in a context of violent ethnicised conflict, its implications for the everyday lives of those living with conflict, and its implications for peace-building interventions.*

Chapter 1 introduces the research. In Sri Lanka, ethnic identities are prominently part of everyday life. About three quarters of the Sri Lankans identify themselves as Sinhalese, a little under one fifth identify themselves as Tamils, and roughly seven percent identify themselves as Muslims; apart from these three groups there are several very small groups. During the twentieth century ethnicity increasingly became a source of conflict, particularly between Sinhalese and Tamils. In the course of time, Tamil nationalism and the response to it by Sinhala-nationalist governments reinforced each other. Although there were eruptions of violence earlier, the anti-Tamil riots of July 1983 are generally seen as the beginning of a war that lasted until 2009. In this war tens of thousands of people died or disappeared, and particularly in the (Tamil-dominated) north and east of the country the devastation has been immense. In this context that was dominated by ethno-nationalist discourses it was surprising to nevertheless come across everyday forms of inter-ethnic interaction. Since inter-ethnic interaction in a context of ethnicised conflict has hardly been studied (Ring 2006), this research has primarily been exploratory in nature. The research was conducted from a social constructionist perspective (Long 2001). Over the course of the research four conceptual notions became increasingly important as lenses to look at the research topic. The first is the notion that violence and everyday life are intricately interlinked. Despite the overwhelming presence of violence and the fear and suffering that this generates, everyday life more or less goes on. It is therefore not possible to understand the social reality of life in a context of violence by only looking at violence (Richards 2005). The second lens is the notion that life is played out in a wide spectrum of social realities that are not hierarchically organised. People define otherness and sameness not only by ethnicity, but also by caste, class, religion, and so on. This generates ambiguity: the other can be different according to one category of identification, but similar according to another. This ambiguity creates room for manoeuvre. Even though ethnicity is a dominant factor in everyday life and in public discourses, it is not possible to understand the social reality of everyday life by only looking at ethnicity. The third lens flows forth from the first two lenses: the notion that people are capable to more or less shape their own lives, and are not entirely determined by their contexts. Finally I consider the settings in which inter-ethnic forms of interaction take place. Here the notion comes up of the arena as a reality in itself, in which the wider context is reinterpreted and given a place. This research has primarily been ethnographic in nature, supported by elaborate literature study and archival research.

Chapter 2 is the first of three background chapters, which together sketch the context in which people in Kottiyar Pattu, the research area, live. In this chapter, the geography and history of the research area are described. Since time immemorial, the area has oscillated between a status of strategic frontier area (with related to this an influx of people and strategic investments by the rulers of the day) and a status of neglected hinterland (with related to this a reduction in population and a sinking into deep poverty). The rich history of the area (with ruins that are two thousand years old) and the influx of various groups of people in different periods of time has led to the development of very diverse climbs to the area, which are of great importance in current discourses.

Chapter 3 describes the social complexity in the area. Where the threefold ethnic division of the population into Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims has already been dealt with in chapter 1, this chapter discusses further subdivisions: caste, class, employment, religion, gender, age, length of stay in the area, political affiliation, and military dominance. This chapter is not concerned with a conceptual analysis of these subdivisions, but the description of which categories people themselves use to divide the world around them into groups. Nobody is merely Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim; there is also a whole range of other elements that form part of his or her identity. Having such a multi-faceted identity is very important: people can stress one identity at one time, and another identity at another time, and that enables them to get around ethnic difference if they want to.

Chapter 4 rounds off the contextualisation with a detailed chronological description of the violence that the area has gone through. From this description it becomes clear how much people have suffered: almost everybody has had to flee thrice or more; half of the people have lost their house on one or more occasions; and nearly five percent of the pre-war population has died due to the violence. It is however important to realise that the violence has been episodic in nature: between periods of intense violence there have also been long periods in which there were relatively few incidents, and in which people could pick up the pieces of their everyday lives as best as they could. On the other hand the experience of violence and threat involves a lot more than actual violence: remembered violence from the past and the expectation of possible violence in the future are very much part of it.

Chapter 5 forms an intermezzo, in which four narratives from the research area are presented. In so doing, I enable the reader to go beyond my observations, and gain insight into the intensely complex mixture of stories and opinions that can be found in the area. The fact that people have such different perspectives makes living together even more complex, and makes it all the more remarkable that inter-ethnic interaction takes place nevertheless.

In chapters 6, 7 and 8 three empirical case studies of inter-ethnic interaction are dealt with. Chapter 6 looks at how farmers cultivating paddy in the Allai Extension Scheme have, despite the violence, still been more or less able to keep cultivating their fields and to keep sharing irrigation water. During most of the war, the irrigated area remained about 80% of what it was before the war, despite a gradual reduction of water availability. Besides, the sown area varies with the security situation, but – with exception of a few periods of extreme violence and of drought –

farmers nearly always harvest what they sow. This points to the effectiveness of the methods that farmers, water masters and government officials used to more or less keep the irrigation system functioning. Irrigation Department staff avoided conflicts by letting the channels flow at or over full capacity, and in specific sites where conflicts over water existed by adjusting the infrastructure or making it altogether unmanageable. Water masters, who on behalf of the farmers are responsible for managing irrigation water in tertiary units, were sometimes capable to find solutions for blocked channels in closed meetings. Finally, farmers did their bit by an ethnic exchange of fields, by hiring labourers of other ethnicity to work fields that were inaccessible to themselves, and by abandoning fields that were inaccessible to everybody (which concentrated the available water on a smaller area). This was not a neutral exchange; on all sides there were winners and losers. The spread of winners and losers among Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims was however comparatively equal. The functioning of the Allai Extension Scheme was made possible by the individual pragmatism of a lot of people, and only to a very limited extent by collective action. Very little could be done in groups because the risk of being seen as a traitor and being punished for it was very real. The forms of coordination that did exist were closed in nature, which made it possible to keep outsiders out. Particularly for the water masters a hugely important factor in this was the fact that most already knew each other for years and trusted each other. The belated introduction of modernised forms of water management in the Allai Extension Scheme, with as important element the annual election of farmer representatives who are to replace the water masters, may seriously undermine this. When farmer representatives are only in function for short periods of time, this means that they will only to a limited extent be able to establish personal relations of trust with other farmer representatives. This may lead to quicker escalation of conflicts between farmers. Another important aspect of the inter-ethnic interaction surrounding the irrigation scheme is its framing. In many cases, inter-ethnic interaction is not explained as the bridging of ethnic differences, but as co-operation between equals: farmers or water masters. Finally, it is also important to note that non-ethnic conflicts continue despite the war and despite the dominance of ethnic discourses: there are conflicts between high-caste Tamil farmers and low-caste Tamils who have gained status when they got access to land, there are conflicts between farmers who already lived in the area and settlers (mostly Sinhalese, but also Tamils and Muslims) who moved into the area with the development of the Allai Extension Scheme, and so on. By viewing such conflicts as non-ethnic in nature it is possible to keep them outside the domain of ethno-nationalist discourses, and to keep them manageable to a certain extent.

Chapter 7 looks at what happens during periods of acute violence (using the example of riots between Muslims and Tamils in and around Muthur in April 2003) and during almost-riots, periods in which there is an acute threat of violence (using the example of a period of tensions between Sinhalese and Tamils in and around Serunuara between June 2005 and April 2006). In such periods inter-ethnic interaction is even more difficult than it normally is, because the risk of being punished for it is even bigger than normal. Still inter-ethnic interaction does take

place, and in some cases it plays an important role in the ultimate de-escalation. Both cases clearly show that violence only escalates when it is organised. The example of a small and vulnerable group of Tamils who were not attacked by a passing mob of furious Muslim youth is a further indication of pragmatism: these people were street sweepers, and the town would become a mess if they were attacked. Another important finding is that people find pragmatic solutions wherever possible to pick up their everyday lives again. The violence in April 2003 ended when people took a 'time out' to let their children sit for their school exams, and to let farmers plough their fields. Just like in chapter 6, attention is again drawn to the fact that ethnic groups are not homogeneous. Even in situations of acute tensions and violence intra-ethnic division continues to exist.

Chapter 8 looks at inter-ethnic marriages. Here, I was particularly interested in how mixed-ethnic couples manage, and to what extent they fulfil a bridging function between the two ethnicities that the spouses represent. Although mixed-ethnic marriages are fairly rare, mixed couples can nevertheless be found in almost every village, and they are therefore very much part of everyday life. Particularly the increasing mobility of people means that the chances of meeting each other increase; the number of inter-ethnic marriages therefore increases. Despite initial (and sometimes long-lasting) opposition from close relatives, most couples are able to lead reasonably normal lives. They do this primarily by presenting themselves as normal couples and by not drawing attention to the inter-ethnic nature of their marriage. Children reinforce this identification as a 'normal couple'. Most couples end up in the husband's village after a few years, and in most cases the wife adopts the ethnic identity of her husband. Particularly in situations of violence and tension, the couples fulfil no bridging function: the couples are sometimes viewed as traitors by both sides. However, when the situation is calm small bridges are sometimes built informally between the ethnic groups that the spouses originate from.

Chapter 9 rounds off the book by returning to the objective of the research and by looking at what the research has contributed to its objective.

First of all it is noteworthy that all sorts of people are involved in inter-ethnic interaction: my estimate is that between a third and half of all households in Kottiyar Pattu is involved in inter-ethnic relations in everyday life. Inter-ethnic interaction is everywhere, despite the violence and the ethno-nationalist discourses. This is made possible in two ways: sometimes it is kept secret, but more often it is presented as irrelevant for ethno-nationalist discourses. This is done by means of a 'swapping trick': people step over ethnic difference by swapping to another category of identification in which the other is similar. Discourses of ethnic segregation and practices of inter-ethnic interaction can thus co-exist in "amiable incoherence" (Whitaker 1999). Mutual trust is crucial, and this draws attention to the younger generation, which much less than their parents has been able to meet people of other ethnicity. The longer a conflict lasts, the harder it thus gets to keep inter-ethnic interaction going. This, and the importance of staying 'below the radar', means that interventions aimed contributing to peace-building can only be successful if they are focused on people meeting each other and on addressing practical problems, and not explicitly on bridging ethnic differences.

Samenvatting

Bruggen bouwen? Alledaagse inter-etnische interactie in een context van gewelddadig conflict in Kottiyar Pattu, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka

Dit boek is het eindprodukt van een onderzoek naar alledaagse vormen van inter-etnische interactie in een context van gewelddadig etnisch conflict dat ik van 2003 tot 2008 heb uitgevoerd in Kottiyar Pattu, een multi-etnisch gebied in de oorlogszone van noord-oost Sri Lanka. De doelstelling van het onderzoek is *het begrijpen van alledaagse vormen van inter-etnische interactie in een context van gewelddadig etnisch conflict, van de consequenties die dit heeft voor het dagelijkse leven van de betrokkenen, en van de implicaties die dit heeft voor interventies die gericht zijn op vredesopbouw.*

Hoofdstuk 1 leidt het onderzoek in. In Sri Lanka zijn etnische identiteiten prominent aanwezig in het leven van alledag. Ongeveer driekwart van de Sri Lankanen identificeert zich als Sinhalees, iets minder dan een vijfde identificeert zich als Tamil, en ongeveer zeven procent identificeert zich als Moslim; naast deze drie groepen zijn er nog enkele zeer kleine groepen. Gedurende de twintigste eeuw is etniciteit steeds sterker een bron van conflict geworden, met name tussen Sinhalezen en Tamils. In de loop der tijd versterkten Tamil-nationalisme en de reactie daarop van Sinhalees-nationalistische overheden elkaar. Hoewel er al eerder geweldsuitbarstingen hadden plaatsgevonden, worden de anti-Tamil rellen van juli 1983 vaak gezien als het begin van een oorlog die tot 2009 geduurd heeft. In deze oorlog zijn tienduizenden mensen omgekomen of verdwenen, en met name in het (door Tamils gedomineerde) noorden en oosten van het land is de verwoesting groot geweest. In deze door etno-nationalistische discoursen gedomineerde context was het verrassend om toch alledaagse vormen van inter-etnische interactie tegen te komen. Aangezien inter-etnische interactie in een context van etnisch conflict nauwelijks bestudeerd is (Ring 2006), is dit onderzoek primair exploratief van aard geweest. Het onderzoek is uitgevoerd vanuit een sociaal constructionistisch perspectief (Long 2001). In de loop van het onderzoek werden vier conceptuele noties steeds belangrijker als lenzen om naar het onderzoeksonderwerp te kijken. De eerste is de notie dat geweld en het leven van alledag niet los van elkaar staan. Ondanks de overweldigende aanwezigheid van geweld en de angst en het lijden die dat teweegbrengt, gaat het alledaagse leven min of meer door. Het is daarom niet mogelijk om de sociale realiteit van het leven in een context van geweld te begrijpen door alleen maar naar geweld te kijken (Richards 2005). De tweede lens is de notie dat het leven zich afspeelt in een breed scala aan sociale realiteiten die niet hiërarchisch geordend zijn. Mensen definiëren verschil en gelijkheid niet alleen naar etniciteit, maar ook naar kaste, klasse, religie, enzovoort. Dit levert ambiguïteit op: de ander kan anders zijn volgens één categorie van identificatie, maar gelijk volgens een andere. Deze ambiguïteit levert speelruimte op. Ook al is etniciteit een dominante factor in het alledaagse leven en in publieke discoursen, het is niet mogelijk om de sociale realiteit

van het alledaagse leven te begrijpen door alleen maar naar etniciteit te kijken. De derde lens vloeit hieruit voort: de notie dat mensen in staat zijn om hun eigen leven tot op zekere hoogte vorm te geven, en niet geheel bepaald worden door hun omstandigheden. Als laatste beschouw ik de settings waarin inter-etnische vormen van interactie plaatsvinden. Hier speelt de notie van de arena als een werkelijkheid op zichzelf, waarin de bredere context wordt geherinterpreteerd en een plaats wordt gegeven. Het onderzoek is primair etnografisch van aard geweest, ondersteund door uitgebreide literatuurstudie en archief-onderzoek.

Hoofdstuk 2 is het eerste van drie achtergrondhoofdstukken, die gezamenlijk de context schetsen waarin mensen in Kottiyar Pattu, het onderzoeksgebied, leven. In dit hoofdstuk worden de geografie en geschiedenis van het onderzoeksgebied beschreven. Door de eeuwen heen heeft het gebied geschipperd tussen een status als strategisch 'frontier-gebied' (met daaraan gelieerd een influx van personen en strategische investeringen door de toenmalige machthebbers), en een status als genegeerd achterland (met daaraan gelieerd krimp in de bevolking en wegzinken in diepe armoede). De rijke geschiedenis van het gebied (met ruïnes die twee millennia oud zijn) en de toestroom van verschillende groepen mensen in verschillende periodes heeft geleid tot de totstandkoming van heel diverse claims op het gebied, die in hedendaagse discoursen van groot belang zijn.

Hoofdstuk 3 beschrijft de sociale complexiteit in het gebied. Waar de etnische driedeling van de bevolking in Sinhalezen, Tamils en Moslims al is behandeld in hoofdstuk 1, worden hier verdere onderverdelingen besproken: kaste, klasse, werk, religie, gender, leeftijd, lengte van verblijf in het gebied, politieke affiliatie, en militaire dominantie. Het gaat hier niet om een conceptuele analyse van deze onderverdelingen, maar om een beschrijving van welke categorieën mensen zelf gebruiken om de wereld om hen heen onder te verdelen in groepen. Niemand is enkel Sinhalees, Tamil of Moslim; er is ook nog een hele reeks andere elementen die onderdeel uitmaken van zijn of haar identiteit. Het hebben van zo'n veelzijdige identiteit is van groot belang: mensen kunnen de ene keer de ene identiteit benadrukken en de andere keer de andere identiteit, en daarmee kunnen ze onder het etnisch onderscheid uitkomen als ze dat willen.

Hoofdstuk 4 rondt de contextualisering af met een gedetailleerde chronologische beschrijving van het geweld dat het gebied geteisterd heeft. Uit deze beschrijving wordt duidelijk hoe zeer mensen te lijden gehad hebben: bijna iedereen is drie of meer keer op de vlucht geweest; de helft van de mensen is hun huis een of meer keren kwijtgeraakt; en bijna vijf procent van de vooroorlogse bevolking is door geweld omgekomen. Het is echter belangrijk om te realiseren dat het geweld episodisch in natuur is geweest: tussen periodes van intens geweld zijn er ook lange periodes geweest waarin vrij weinig incidenten plaatsvonden, en waarin mensen de stukjes van hun alledaagse leven zo goed en zo kwaad als mogelijk weer konden oppakken. Aan de andere kant omvat de ervaring van geweld en dreiging meer dan het daadwerkelijke geweld: herinnerd geweld uit het verleden en de verwachting van mogelijk geweld in de toekomst maken er evenzeer deel van uit.

Hoofdstuk 5 vormt een *intermezzo*, waarin vier narratieven uit het onderzoeksgebied gepresenteerd worden. Hiermee geef ik de lezer de gelegenheid om voorbij mijn beschouwingen te kijken, en inzicht te krijgen in de intens complexe mengeling van verhalen en meningen die de ronde doen in het gebied. Het feit dat mensen zulke verschillende perspectieven hebben maakt samenleven nog complexer, en maakt het nog meer opmerkelijk dat er desondanks toch inter-etnische interactie plaatsvindt.

In de hoofdstukken 6, 7 en 8 komen drie empirische gevalstudies van inter-etnische interactie aan de orde. Hoofdstuk 6 kijkt naar hoe boeren die rijst verbouwen in het Allai Extension Scheme, ondanks het geweld, toch tot op zekere hoogte in staat zijn gebleven om hun rijstvelden te blijven bebouwen en irrigatiewater te blijven delen. Gedurende het grootste deel van de oorlog is het geïrrigeerde areaal ongeveer tachtig procent gebleven van wat het voor de oorlog was, ondanks een geleidelijke afname van waterbeschikbaarheid. Daarnaast varieert het ingezaaide areaal met de veiligheidssituatie, maar – met uitzondering van een paar perioden van extreem geweld en droogte – oogsten boeren vrijwel altijd wat ze zaaien. Dit wijst op de effectiviteit van de methoden die boeren, waterbeheerders en overheidsambtenaren toepasten om het irrigatiesysteem min of meer draaiend te houden. Personeel van het irrigatiedepartement omzeilde conflicten door meer water dan nodig was door de kanalen te laten stromen, en door op specifieke plaatsen waar conflicten over waterverdeling bestonden de infrastructuur aan te passen of onbeheerbaar te maken. Waterbeheerders, die namens de boeren verantwoordelijk zijn voor het waterbeheer in tertiaire vakken, waren soms in staat om in besloten vergaderingen oplossingen te bedenken voor de blokkade van kanalen. Boeren tenslotte droegen hun steentje bij door een etnische uitruil van akkers, door arbeiders van andere etniciteit voor henzelf ontoegankelijke akkers te laten bewerken, en door akkers die voor iedereen ontoegankelijk waren op te geven (waardoor het beschikbare water geconcentreerd werd over een kleiner areaal). Dit was geen neutrale uitruil; aan alle kanten waren winnaars en verliezers. De spreiding van winnaars en verliezers over Sinhalezen, Tamils en Moslims was echter relatief gelijkmatig. Het functioneren van het Allai Extension Scheme werd mogelijk gemaakt door het pragmatisme van een heleboel individuele personen, en maar zeer beperkt door collectieve actie. Er kon weinig overlegd worden omdat het risico van als verrader bestempeld worden levensgroot was. De vormen van overleg die wel bestonden waren besloten, waardoor het mogelijk was om buitenstaanders letterlijk buiten de deur te houden. Met name voor de waterbeheerders was het hierbij van groot belang dat de meesten elkaar al jaren kenden en elkaar vertrouwden. De verlate introductie van gemoderniseerde vormen van waterbeheer in het Allai Extension Scheme, met als belangrijk onderdeel jaarlijkse verkiezingen van boerenvertegenwoordigers die de waterbeheerders moeten vervangen, kan dit ernstig ondermijnen. Als boerenvertegenwoordigers hun rol maar kort vervullen, betekent dat dat zij maar beperkt in staat zullen zijn om persoonlijke relaties van vertrouwen op te bouwen met andere boerenvertegenwoordigers. Dit kan tot gevolg hebben dat conflicten tussen boeren

sneller zullen escaleren. Een ander belangrijk aspect van de inter-etnische interactie rondom het irrigatiesysteem is de *framing*. In veel gevallen wordt inter-etnische interactie niet uitgelegd als het overbruggen van etnische verschillen, maar als samenwerking tussen gelijken: boeren of waterbeheerders. Als laatste is het ook van belang dat niet-etnische geschillen gewoon doorgaan ondanks de oorlog en ondanks de dominantie van etnische discoursen: er zijn geschillen tussen Tamil-boeren van hoge kaste en Tamils van lage kaste die aan status gewonnen hebben toen ze land kregen, er zijn geschillen tussen boeren die al in het gebied woonden en nieuwe boeren (vooral Sinhalezen, maar ook Tamils en Moslims) die met de ontwikkeling van het Allai Extension Scheme in het gebied zijn komen wonen, enzovoort. Door zulke geschillen niet als etnisch te beschouwen is het mogelijk om ze buiten het domein van etno-nationalistische discoursen te houden, en ze tot op zekere hoogte beheersbaar te houden.

Hoofdstuk 7 kijkt naar wat er gebeurt tijdens perioden van acuut geweld (aan de hand van rellen in en om Muthur tussen Moslims en Tamils in april 2003) en tijdens bijna-rellen, perioden met een acute dreiging van geweld (aan de hand van een periode van spanningen tussen Sinhalezen en Tamils in en om Serunuwara tussen juni 2005 en april 2006). In zulke perioden is inter-etnische interactie nog lastiger dan het normaal al is, omdat het risico ervoor afgestraft te worden nog groter is dan normaal. Toch vindt inter-etnische interactie wel degelijk plaats, en speelt het soms een belangrijke rol in de uiteindelijke de-escalatie. Beide gevallen laten duidelijk zien dat geweld alleen escaleert als het georganiseerd is. Het voorbeeld van een kleine en kwetsbare groep Tamils die niet werd aangevallen door een langslopende menigte woedende Moslim-jongeren is een verdere indicatie van pragmatisme: deze mensen waren straatvegers, en de stad zou een puinhoop worden als ze aangevallen zouden worden. Een ander belangrijke bevinding is dat mensen waar het maar mogelijk is pragmatische oplossingen zoeken om hun alledaagse leven weer op te kunnen pakken. Het geweld in april 2003 eindigde toen burgers een 'time-out' in acht namen om kinderen hun schoolexamens te kunnen laten doen, en om boeren hun land te kunnen laten ploegen. Net als in hoofdstuk 6 wordt opnieuw duidelijk dat etnische groepen niet homogeen zijn. Zelfs in situaties van acute spanningen en geweld blijft intra-etnische verdeeldheid bestaan.

Hoofdstuk 8 kijkt naar gemengde huwelijken. Hierbij was ik vooral benieuwd naar wat gemengde stellen doen, en of ze al dan niet een brugfunctie vervullen tussen de twee etniciteiten die ze vertegenwoordigen. Hoewel gemengd-etnische huwelijken vrij zeldzaam zijn, is het toch zo dat in bijna ieder dorp wel een of meerdere gemengde stellen wonen. Met name de toenemende mobiliteit van mensen betekent dat de kansen om elkaar te ontmoeten toenemen; het aantal inter-etnische huwelijken neemt daardoor toe. De meeste stellen kunnen, ondanks initieel (en soms langdurig) verzet van naaste familieleden, een redelijk normaal leven leiden. Dat doen ze primair door zich als een normaal echtpaar te presenteren en geen aandacht te vestigen op het inter-etnische karakter van hun huwelijk. Kinderen versterken deze identificatie als 'normaal echtpaar'. De meeste stellen komen na een paar jaar in

het dorp van de man te wonen, en de vrouw neemt meestal de etniciteit van haar man over. Van een brugfunctie is, zeker in situaties van geweld en spanning, geen sprake: de stellen worden dan soms door beide kanten als verraders beschouwd. Echter, als de situatie kalm is worden soms op informele manier wel bruggetjes gebouwd tussen de etnische groepen waar de echtgenoten vandaan komen.

Hoofdstuk 9 rondt het boek af door terug te keren naar de doelstelling van het onderzoek en te zien wat het onderzoek aan de doelstelling heeft bijgedragen.

Allereerst valt op dat allerlei soorten mensen betrokken zijn bij inter-etnische interactie: mijn schatting is dat tussen een derde en de helft van alle huishoudens in Kottiyar Pattu inter-etnische relaties heeft in het alledaagse leven. Het is overal, ondanks het geweld en de etno-nationalistische discoursen. Dit wordt mogelijk gemaakt op twee manieren: soms wordt het geheim gehouden, maar vaker wordt het gepresenteerd als irrelevant voor etno-nationalistische discoursen. Dit gebeurt door een 'wisseltruc': mensen stappen over etnisch verschil heen, en benaderen elkaar als gelijken volgens een andere categorie van identificatie. Discoursen van etnische segregatie en praktijken van inter-etnische interactie kunnen zo bestaan in 'aimabele incoherentie' (Whitaker 1999). Wederzijds vertrouwen is cruciaal, en dit vestigt de aandacht op de jongere generatie, die veel minder dan hun ouders in staat zijn geweest om mensen van andere etniciteit te ontmoeten. Hoe langer een conflict dus duurt, hoe lastiger het wordt om inter-etnische interactie in stand te houden. Dit, en het belang om 'onder de radar' te blijven, betekent dat interventies die aan vredesopbouw willen bijdragen alleen succesvol kunnen zijn als ze gefocust zijn op ontmoeting en op praktische problemen, en niet op het overbruggen van etnische grensen op zich.

Curriculum Vitae

Timmo Gaasbeek was born in Schelluinen on August 27th, 1975. He studied Tropical Land Use at Wageningen University, specialising in irrigation, with additional topics in administrative science and the wider social sciences. He graduated in 1999 with an MSc thesis titled *'Dry season water allocation in the Ciujung and Cidurian river basins'*, based on research in West Java in Indonesia, and a second MSc thesis titled *'Broddelwerk, een onderzoek naar de invoering van de wet Modernisering Uniuersitaire Bestuursorganisatie bij de Nederlandse universiteiten'*, based on research in the Netherlands.

After graduation he found work with ZOA Refugee Care, a Dutch humanitarian NGO working with conflict-affected people. This took him first to Cambodia (1999-2000), and subsequently to Sri Lanka (where he stayed until 2008). From Sri Lanka, he conducted short missions to Cambodia, India, Liberia and Ethiopia.

In 2003 he began his PhD research on everyday inter-ethnic interaction in Kottiyar Pattu, a multi-ethnic part of Sri Lanka's conflict zone. Fieldwork for this research was conducted between 2004 and 2008. He has presented his work at several international conferences.

Currently, he works as policy development officer and internal consultant at the headquarters of ZOA Refugee Care in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands.

He is married and has three sons.



Completed Training and Supervision Plan Timmo Gaasbeek

Description	Department/Institute	Month/year	Credits
I. General			
CERES orientation programme	CERES, Utrecht	2004	5
CERES presentation tutorials	CERES, Utrecht	2004	5
II. Research Methods and Techniques and Domain Specific Theories			
DIS and IWE Advanced Research Seminars	Wageningen University	2009	4
III. Academic Skills			
Tamil language course		2003	5
IV. Presentations of research results			
Irrigation in conflict – cross-boundary water management in a context of violent conflict in East Sri Lanka	10 th International Conference on Sri Lanka Studies, Kelaniya (Sri Lanka)	2005	2
Irrigation in conflict	CERES Summer School, Wageningen	2006	3.5
Irrigation in conflict	35 th South Asia Conference, Madison	2006	2
Bridging troubled waters? Shared irrigation water in multi-ethnic Sri Lanka	Shared Seminar ‘Resource governance and conflict’, KNAW, Amsterdam	2009	2
Of radars, guns and peace – peace-building dilemmas in Sri Lanka’s war zone	CERES Summer School, Nijmegen	2009	3.5
Staying below the radar – everyday inter-ethnic interaction in Sri Lanka’s conflict zone	Association of Asian Studies Conference, Chicago	2009	2
Total			34

Bridging troubled waters?

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