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## **Sri Lanka – Buddhist Fundamentalism as One Cause of Genocide**

### ABSTRACT

Sri Lankan Buddhism, despite official declarations, is vastly different from the pure form of Theravada originating from Buddha Shakyamuni and revealed in his sutras. The Sri Lankan constitution affords Buddhism a leading role in the country and orders its citizens to protect it. As a result, everyone is discriminated, not only religious minorities. However, the group that suffer the most are the Tamils, whom the government considers to be separatists and terrorists. In 2009, after 25 years of civil war, the authorities declared the end of the conflict and their final victory over the Tamil minority. Sadly, the current situation resembles what occurred during the war: the aim of the government is ethnic cleansing that would make the entire island for the habitation of Sinhala Buddhists exclusively. The following article explains the causes of the Sinhala-Tamil conflict, the history of religious influence over politics and mentions current events as well as a possible future solution for the existing problems.

### KEY WORDS

Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism, Tamils, *Mahavamsa*, Rajapaksa

According to Lemkin's definition of genocide, it is the "destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group" and includes a coordinated plan aimed at the destruction of the essential foundations of particular groups<sup>1</sup>. In fact, in every single aspect,

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<sup>1</sup> R. Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation – Analysis of Government – Proposals for Redress*, Washington 1944, p. 75.

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genocide means a crisis of humanity. No matter how the perpetrators try to justify it, human tragedies emerge with suffering and heavy losses brought to the masses. Such has been the situation in Sri Lanka. Here, I intend to concentrate on the causes of this conflict which already evolved into a full-scale civil war.

## INTRODUCTION

According to the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority who began this conflict, Sri Lanka is originally a Buddhist country with no space for other religious groups<sup>2</sup>. The *Buddhist-Sinhala-only* policy does not grant other communities of different origin and/or religion the right to live there. Its aim is, literally, a “cleansing”, which would produce a fully homogenous country. This motivation is justified by the intentions of the historical personality of Buddha Shakyamuni, who is said to have chosen Sri Lanka as a repository for Theravada Buddhism. As a result, the minorities, particularly the Tamils, are openly discriminated. Such a view taken by the authorities is based on false assumptions, since the Tamils have the same right to call themselves “sons of the Sinhalese land” (in its present borders). It is estimated that their presence on the island dates back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC<sup>3</sup>. The Sinhalese people, for their part, claim to be the indigenous population. According to a legend, they came to the island in the 5–6<sup>th</sup> century BC, with their king Vijaya, on the day of Buddha’s *parinibbana*<sup>4</sup>. The Tamils are mainly Hindus (except for a small Christian minority, a remnant of the colonial period and Christian missionary activities of that time), while the Sinhalese are Theravada Buddhists<sup>5</sup>.

The Tamils’ long-term struggle for an independent state (Eelam) could not be reconciled with the authorities’ policy. In 1983, a civil war erupted after a series of riots. It was to last up to 2009 and cost 135 000 Tamil lives<sup>6</sup> and 35 000 casualties in 2009 only<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> N. DeVotta, *Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalist Ideology: Implications for Politics and Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka*, “Policy Studies” 2007, Vol. 40, [online] <http://www.east-westcenter.org/fileadmin/stored/pdfs/ps040.pdf> [accessed: 22.10.2013].

<sup>3</sup> M. Chandrakumar, *The History of the Tamils in Ealam and The Jaffna Kingdom*, [online] [http://www.sangam.org/ANALYSIS/ChKumar12\\_00.htm](http://www.sangam.org/ANALYSIS/ChKumar12_00.htm) [accessed: 22.10.2013].

<sup>4</sup> *Sinhalese vs. Tamil*, [online] [http://www.diffen.com/difference/Sinhalese\\_vs\\_Tamil](http://www.diffen.com/difference/Sinhalese_vs_Tamil) [accessed: 22.10.2013].

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> R. Griffin, *Terrorist’s Creed: Fanatical Violence and the Human Need for Meaning*, Oxford 2012, p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> *Genocide In Sri Lanka – Act now!*, [online] <http://voiceagainstgenocide.org/vag/-node/65> [accessed: 22.10.2013].

Although the war has formally ended, the Tamils are still a discriminated and persecuted group. Many states and organisations – mainly the UN – keep demanding an international inquiry to bring to justice the culprits of the recent tragic events and ensure the Sri Lankan minorities proper living conditions. In March 2014, a resolution calling for such actions was voted.

In this paper, I shall show concisely the historical background of the conflict (mainly the period of British colonisation), its causes and circumstances. I also intend to present a reflection on Sri Lanka's nearest future and possible solutions to a situation that is still extremely tense. I am going to concentrate on the social and cultural aspects of the civil war, in order to show its impact on the society. I shall also demonstrate how Buddhism, as a tool, has been used to gain political power and how this eventually led to the ethnic-religious conflict.

## THE BACKGROUND OF THE CIVIL WAR

The civil war in Sri Lanka, which officially lasted from 1983 to 2009, cannot just be analysed in the given timeframe, since both the beginning and end are merely symbolic. The conflict which led to the 1983 riots and later the bloody events had been brewing long before 1983. Now, unlike official governmental statements, it keeps festering. The war may be therefore called the tip of an iceberg. Unfortunately, the ice has not melted much.

A conflict analysis always begins with an attempt to find its root causes – what made enemies out of the parties involved? Why did a misunderstanding lead to violence that made thousands suffer? In the Sri Lankan case, two sources are usually indicated: ethnicity and religion, but both have their own roots too. Ethnicity and language as its representative, along with religion (Buddhism in this case) are pieces taken from set of values and then coloured with emotions. They should not be separated; it would be much more profitable for this research to analyse them together. Furthermore, the religious factor (Buddhist) plays a decisive role. The religious history of Sri Lanka helps to understand the present situation, which may be defined as “copying the *Mahavamsa* mentality”.

## SRI LANKAN BUDDHISM AND ITS CONNECTION WITH POLITICS

Sri Lanka's dominant religion is Southern Buddhism, to be exact – Theravada, the “teaching of the elders”. This current in Buddhism is the most closely related to Buddha Shakyamuni; it aims to keep his teaching, the *Dhamma*, in an unchanged form. *Dhamma* is rooted in the *Tipitaka*, or the

“Three Baskets”: *Sutta* (the words of Buddha), *Vinaja* (the discipline), *Abhidhamma* (the philosophical treatises). However, the *Tipitaka* – a canonical text – is not attractive for policy-makers. This is why the nationalists use another text – *Mahavamsa*, “The Great Chronicle”. *Mahavamsa* is a mythologized account of Sri Lankan history, portraying the island as a traditionally Sinhalese and Buddhist land<sup>8</sup>.

*Mahavamsa* is a perfect explanation for the authorities and their policy. It supports their propaganda by stating that Sri Lanka is a sacred Buddhist land, a sort of repository for Theravada, chosen by Shakyamuni himself. The Sinhalese were the first on the island, while the later arrivals are subhumans and a threat to Buddhism. Therefore, the holy land must be defended, even by violent means, if necessary<sup>9</sup>.

Sieradzan argues that Buddhist fundamentalism emerged as soon as Buddhism became a state religion<sup>10</sup>.

DeVotta points out that Buddhism had enjoyed a period of rapid growth before the colonisation of Sri Lanka, mainly because of the support it had been receiving from the authorities. Each ruler identified himself with the ideal *dharma* *raja*, “Lord of religions”. Thus, politics and proselytism were unified, while the peaceful foundations of Buddhism were completely deformed. “A unique history of Sri Lankan Buddhism has been reinterpreted and manipulated in order to satisfy temporary aspirations of the rulers”<sup>11</sup>.

Colonisation also contributed to the development of the modern forms of “engaged Buddhism” (in the negative sense of the word). Portuguese rule (1505–1658) was one of the worst periods in Sri Lankan history. “The chronicles describe them [Portuguese] as inhuman, rapacious, bigoted and savage persecutors of Buddhism in their endeavour to impose their own faith – Roman Catholicism”<sup>12</sup>. The British, who came to the island in 1815, did not make a better impression. They initially vowed to protect Buddhism, but later on decided that it brought no profit to them and so they intended to make Sri Lanka a “fortress of Christianity”<sup>13</sup>. The Buddhists once again began to suffer discrimination in all spheres of life (economic, social, etc). In such circum-

<sup>8</sup> J. Sieradzan, *Buddyzm a fundamentalizm i przemoc*, [online] <http://religie.wiara.pl/doc/471891.Buddyzm-a-fundamentalizm-i-przemoc> [accessed: 22.10.2013].

<sup>9</sup> N. DeVotta, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> J. Sieradzan op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> N. DeVotta, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> H. R. Perera, *Buddhism in Sri Lanka: A short history*, [online] <http://www.access-toinsight.org/lib/authors/perera/wheel100.html> [accessed: 22.10.2013].

<sup>13</sup> N. DeVotta, op. cit., p. 16.

stances it comes as no surprise that the native faith regained – and strengthened – its power.

However, the British also left something else – the ballot box and its sacredness. By implementing Westminster democracy and all interconnected European inventions, they made Ceylonese elites dependent on ballot boxes<sup>14</sup>. Consequently, instead of the traditional institution of – for example – *devaraja*, there was a candidate, a voter and his vote. To get votes most of candidates decided to use religious and ethnic arguments<sup>15</sup>. Buddhism, as a religion of the majority and Sinhalese, as the majority's language, have become the most prominent tools for getting as many votes as necessary. This process could be one of the starting points for the later development of so-called Buddhist-Sinhalese fundamentalism or nationalism<sup>16</sup>. Both movements (not ideologies) rely strictly on emotions, which makes them non-negotiable, irrational and completely opposite to Buddhist doctrine.

Nowadays Buddhist monks and religious leaders have no doubts or hesitations about being involved in political life and do not consider it a violation of *Vinaya* rules. Rahula, a monk (who died in 1997) who founded the nationalist organisation *Bodu Bala Sena* (Buddhist Power Force) may be a fine example. Rahula came up with the idea of *bhikkhu-politic*, which justifies the political activism of the clergy, claiming that they have involved in this from Buddha's times, for instance, by serving as advisors to the kings. He also believed that "if religion is to be saved, it is not a great fault to destroy human lives"<sup>17</sup>.

*Bodu Bala Sena* argues that a wide range of steps must be taken in order to defend the Buddhist-Sinhalese nature of the state. During numerous demonstrations, members of this organisation chant racist slogans, claiming that Sri Lanka has always been an exclusively Sinhalese-Buddhist state.

Politics have been intertwined with religion in Sri Lanka for nearly seventy years, that is, from the first years of independence (obtained in 1948). This has been an effect of the aforementioned "ballot box worship"<sup>18</sup>. It is crucial to take into consideration the circumstances of the past (for example

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<sup>14</sup> J. A. Wilson, *The Break-Up of Sri Lanka: The Sinhalese-Tamil Conflict*, Honolulu 1988, p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> See more: *ibidem*, pp. 35–36. Buddhism has been recognised as a sole religion of the Sinhalese majority; Tamils and other ethnic minorities did not have their equal representation in the Parliament.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> J. Sieradzan, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> N. DeVotta, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

colonialism) as a base for further analysis of the subject. 1948, the year of independence, is just the tip of the historical iceberg and – as such – remains until now as a symbol. Since 1948 we can observe an intensification of political-ethnic-religious activity.

As an example, I can mention the words of Emmanuel, president of the Global Tamil Forum, an organisation of the Tamil Diaspora which point to Bandaraikē, Prime Minister from 1956 to 1959. Bandaraikē began to look for support from highly influential and respected members of the Buddhist clergy. In this way it was easier for him to impose the *Mahāvamsa* worldview on the citizens. Father Emmanuel claims that “All successive Governments used the *Mahāvamsa*-mentality and the consequent Sinhala Buddhist extremism for their political success. Governments changed hands by whipping up false-nationalism and fears of the others – the Tamils and the Muslims!”<sup>19</sup>. The President of the Global Tamil Forum affirms convincingly that the Sri Lankan conflict has been created by Sinhalese-Buddhist fundamentalists who “cover their hatred for the non-Buddhists under the cover of a *Mahāvamsa*-promoted patriotism”. Later, he claims that “practicing it [the hatred] as Sinhala Buddhism spells a disaster for the future of this island”<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, Buddhist monks, whose social position is strong and who enjoy considerable respect use this to manipulate the masses and spread anti-Tamil ideas among the citizens<sup>21</sup>.

Taking into account the religious background and Buddhist influence, one could believe that the Sri Lankan conflict has an exclusively religious nature, replacing the scheme of “holy war” (in which, usually, Christians and Muslims are the antagonists). Nevertheless, Sieradzan says that divisions in the island do not have a religious, but an ethnic nature (for example Sinhalese Buddhists fight with Buddhists who are Tamils)<sup>22</sup>.

It is virtually impossible to discover the ultimate essence of the conflict due to its complex interconnectivity – both, ethnicity and religion are somehow dependent on emotions.

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<sup>19</sup> N. Ilangamuwa, *Exclusive: An Interview with Rev. S. J. Emmanuel*, [online] <http://www.srilankaguardian.org/2014/04/exclusive-interview-with-rev-s-j.html> [accessed: 8.04.2014].

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> *The Unspeakable Truth*, [online] [http://tamilsforum.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/unspeakable\\_truth.pdf](http://tamilsforum.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/unspeakable_truth.pdf) [accessed: 22.10.2013], p. 70.

<sup>22</sup> J. Sieradzan, op. cit.

## AN ETHNIC CONFLICT – THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD AND THE CIVIL WAR

Let us therefore examine the ethnic questions which, apparently, play a more crucial role than religion in the growth of national tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamil peoples. The two nations were so strongly polarised that the period of independence, particularly the years after 1983, has been labeled the “new colonisation” period<sup>23</sup> (the 400 years of Portuguese, Dutch and British rule being the “old one”) or – according to Hechter – “internal colonialism”<sup>24</sup>. Lee Kuan Yew, the “founding father” of Singapore, stated that “this country [Sri Lanka] will never be united”<sup>25</sup>. Why? Some basic facts from the past give a clear picture of the complicated reality:

The Tamil people have been living in Ceylon (now: Sri Lanka) from over 2500 years. Under Portuguese rule (from 1505) there existed two kingdoms – Sinhalese and Tamil. The Dutch (1658–1796) maintained this *status quo*. Only the British, whose rule began in 1796, 37 years later decided to unite the two nations – Tamil and Sinhalese – in one entity, in one nation, in order to rule easier the island<sup>26</sup>.

Moreover, the Tamils did not feel equal and rightful participants of socio-political life (asked in 1945 by Sinhalese politician, Senanayake, if they want to be governed by the Ceylonese elite or by London, the Tamils chose – surprisingly for Senanayake – the latter<sup>27</sup>).

When Sri Lanka regained independence, the British left the island (at that time officially called Ceylon<sup>28</sup>), leaving behind the Westminster representation model which meant that the Tamils (30% of the population) were qualified as a meaningless minority, and not only in the parliament, despite protests from their side. From a political point of view this move may be identified as “sowing the seeds of nowadays conflict”<sup>29</sup>. As Sir Cleghorn, one of the British colonial secretaries, noticed in 1799, it is impossible to unite by force and

<sup>23</sup> *The Unspeakable...*, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> M. Hechter, *Michael Hechter's Internal Colonial Thesis: Some Theoretical and Methodological Problems*, “European Journal of Political Research” 1978, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 295–297.

<sup>25</sup> *The Unspeakable...*, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 48.

<sup>27</sup> M. Thirunavukkarasu, *Broken Promises of Sinhala Leaders. An Historical Record of How Sinhala Leaders Make and Break*, London 1995, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Sri Lanka: One Island, Two Nations*, [online] <http://www.slideshare.net/slidesharenow/history-of-tamils-in-ceylon-sri-lanka> [accessed: 20.10.2013], p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> *The Unspeakable...*, op. cit., p. 48.

for the sake of administrative conveniences two nations who differ entirely in terms of their religion, language and customs<sup>30</sup>. At this point we can also pose an open question: what could a “Ceylonese/Sinhalese nationality” be? Legislative and social steps initiated by the Sinhalese majority after 1948 were not aimed at an actual national unity, but at strengthening the differences and Sinhalese domination. The following acts confirm this conclusion:

1. 1948: the *Citizenship Act* deprived around 1 million Tamil people of Indian citizenship<sup>31</sup> (this group of Indian Tamils was forcibly transferred to Sri Lanka in 1834 by the British). It was an open violation of Article 15 of the UDHR: “No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality”<sup>32</sup>. The *Citizenship Act* virtually turned the Tamils into subhumans<sup>33</sup>.
2. 1949: the Sinhalese colonisation of traditionally Tamil areas, which aimed at breaking up the geographical continuity of the Tamil areas<sup>34</sup>. This happened in the Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts, where 95% of all Tamils lived up to the fourth decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This policy, still followed by the authorities, should be openly termed as nothing else than ethnic cleansing<sup>35</sup>. The aforementioned monks take part in such actions<sup>36</sup>.
3. 1956: Bandaraikē’s government introduced the *Sinhala-Only Act*, according to which Sinhalese was proclaimed the only official language, while Tamil and English were pushed into a secondary role<sup>37</sup>. Bandaraikē’s slogan was *Sinhala-only in twenty-four hours*<sup>38</sup>. While he had initially argued to maintain the coexistence of two languages, he eventually succumbed

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, p. 49.

<sup>31</sup> Terms “citizenship” and “nationality” can be understood as equal. In Part I of *Citizenship Act* one can read: “A citizen of Ceylon may, for any purpose in Ceylon, describe his nationality by the use of the expression *Citizen of Ceylon*”. See more: Legal Services and Laws of Sri Lanka, [online] [http://www.kapruka.com/Sri\\_Lanka/law/view\\_legal\\_document.jsp?type=text&key1=laws&key2=Citizenship%20Act&key3=1948&key4=Citizen](http://www.kapruka.com/Sri_Lanka/law/view_legal_document.jsp?type=text&key1=laws&key2=Citizenship%20Act&key3=1948&key4=Citizen) [accessed: 14.07.2015].

<sup>32</sup> *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 15, [online], <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/php> [accessed: 14.07.2015].

<sup>33</sup> *The Unspeakable...*, op.cit., p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, pp. 8–9.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 70.

<sup>37</sup> Tamil was claimed as an official language in 1988 which was already too late for any positive change. See more: R. B. Kaplan, R. B. Baldauf, *Language Planning in the Asia Pacific: Hong Kong, Timor-Leste and Sri Lanka*, Oxford 2011, p. 171.

<sup>38</sup> N. DeVotta, op. cit., p. 19.

to pressure, mainly from the Buddhist monks. Nevertheless, he paid with his life for his intentions of co-operating with the Tamils – in 1959 he was shot dead by a Buddhist monk<sup>39</sup>. A full-scale *Sinhala-only* campaign followed as a consequence of the act. The fact that the Tamils were favoured by the British helped to fuel the anti-Tamil sentiments. The *Sinhala-only* principles were observed in the official legal system, thus penalising those who did not follow them. Tamils were forced to learn Sinhalese and their representation in state institutions was kept at a very low level<sup>40</sup>.

4. 1970: “ethnic standardisation”, which limited Tamil educational perspectives. In order to pursue studies, they had to pass the same exam as Sinhalese candidates, but they needed a 30% better result<sup>41</sup>.
5. 1972: the new constitution was adopted. The name of the island was changed from “Ceylon” to “Sri Lanka”, without taking into account the Tamil position. Sri Lanka was officially called a republic and, significantly, Buddhism was named as the state’s religion<sup>42</sup>. DeVotta calls the 1956–1972 period a “transition from liberal democracy to illiberal ethnocracy”<sup>43</sup>.
6. 1977: *Prevention of Terrorism Act* – after anti-Tamil, state-sponsored riots in 1956, 1958, 1961 and 1974<sup>44</sup> the government labeled all the Tamils as “terrorists”, which provided a convenient excuse to suppress all the protests under the banner of “anti-terrorist activity”<sup>45</sup>.

It is important to bear in mind that these acts were not originally taken from the thought of Sinhalese elites. It is a colonial heritage taken from past experiences and European inventions, like elections, the idea of a nation, nationalist emotions etc.

Given the above key actions of the ruling majority, the Tamils became outcasts or even entirely excluded from the society. The society became more and more polarised year by year. The Sinhalese army emerged as the main executive force<sup>46</sup>:

[After *Sinhala-Only Act of 1956*] the Tamil leaders staged a Gandhi-styled protest: a non-violent sitting known as Satyagraha. This peaceful expression of protest was dispersed by Sinhalese crowds and the violence against Tamils spread into the other

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, p. 18.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, p. 19.

<sup>41</sup> *Sri Lanka: One...*, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>43</sup> N. DeVotta, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>44</sup> *Sri Lanka: One...*, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> N. Ilangamuwa, op. cit.

<sup>46</sup> *The Unspeakable...*, op. cit., p. 14.

parts of the island. Hundreds of Tamils were expelled from their homes, which were then robbed and burned down. [What did the authorities do?] They remained passive, thus consenting to the racist attacks<sup>47</sup>.

The above applies not only to the 1956 protests. Until 1976, every time their rights were violated, the Tamils reacted in a similar way – by marches and demonstrations, still sticking to the rules of democracy which was formally the political system of the state. However, as soon as they realised that they bore no fruit, or rather worsened the situation which had already been difficult, they saw no other solution than to resort to violent means<sup>48</sup>. The desire for an independent state was born after 30 years of peaceful and dramatic appeals for equal rights and freedom. The Tamils wanted to preserve and promote their ethnic, cultural and religious heritage in their own homeland. Violation of their basic rights by the authorities forced them to fight for Eelam. The army and state behaviour and the steps they had taken assured them that only an independent country would guarantee them a life in safety<sup>49</sup>.

In 1976 (in fact, in 1972), the organisation known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam began to operate, under the leadership of Prabhakaran<sup>50</sup>, and was proclaimed the only representative of the Tamil nation<sup>51</sup>. (“This organization was a natural answer to constant repression”<sup>52</sup>).

Contrary to the common view heavily influenced by the Sri Lankan propaganda which portrays LTTE as a terrorist organisation, they did a lot in order to ensure the welfare of their supporters. They organised an administrative system with all relevant state functions (judicial system, the police, the central bank, industry, infrastructure etc.), intended to fight corruption and bribery as well as eliminate violence, mainly against women etc. “Certain Western parliamentarians and researchers, who had an opportunity to visit Tamils, praised efficiency of the LTTE, its ethos and its secular dimension of administration”<sup>53</sup>.

But still, since it is hard to find the truth in between Sinhalese and Tamil sources, one should take into account the brutal, violent and bloody activity of LTTE. The issue of LTTE is not so easy and straightforward. Their deeds

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> N. Ilangamuwa, op. cit.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>50</sup> *Tamils New Tigers*, [online] <http://www.padippakam.com/document/info/info0047.pdf> [accessed: 20.10.2013].

<sup>51</sup> *Sri Lanka: One...*, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>52</sup> N. Ilangamuwa, op. cit.

<sup>53</sup> *The Unspeakable...*, op. cit., p. 62.

cannot be just simply explained and justified as a natural reaction of a united Tamil nation. Certainly, this topic is complex and does deserve boarder analysis and investigation.

It is usually stated that the civil war began after a LTTE attack in the northern part of the country, when 13 Sri Lankan soldiers were killed (“the Black July”, 1983)<sup>54</sup>. “The President, speaking to the nation, stated that a pogrom was a natural reaction of the Sinhalese on the death of some of their soldiers”<sup>55</sup>. So, with the complete support of the authorities, the army massacred the Tamils. “The Sinhalese fighters did not even try to conceal their faces; they were sure, that they would bear no responsibility for their deeds”<sup>56</sup>.

The civil war began with momentum. Statistics show that every year a large number of acts of violence took place and many victims lost their lives – for instance, one of the reports documents 115 cases of Sri Lankan massacres perpetrated on Tamils (between 1956 and 2001)<sup>57</sup>. These attacks were clearly connected to the overall discriminative, ethnic cleansing policy, and their common aim was one: to destroy, as meticulously as possible, all the non-Sinhalese and non-Buddhist elements. Apart from savage murder and rape, the government moved onwards, ordering the physical elimination of Tamil leaders and key activists of the resistance movement and “silencing” those who dared to seek the truth on the conflict<sup>58</sup>. At the same time, infrastructure and cultural heritage was destroyed, particularly in Jaffna, formerly the second largest city of the Tamil Kingdom and its cultural capital<sup>59</sup>. Furthermore, the army imposed an embargo on the Tamils, which forced many of them to escape from their homeland<sup>60</sup>.

As a result of all these actions, the Tamils could not feel like they were citizens with equal rights. They did not even have the status of habitants of the island, but were referred to as a “plague and parasites of the Sinhalese population”<sup>61</sup>.

Every aspect of normal life was affected and became a nightmare for civilians. They had to obtain passes in order to be able to move from one area to another within the Tamil homeland. Shortages of food and medical supplies had become commonplace, while aid organisations had been barred<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> *Tamil New Tigers*, op. cit.

<sup>55</sup> *The Unspeakable...*, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 16.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 25.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 29–30.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 36.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 40.

<sup>61</sup> N. Ilangamuwa, op. cit.

<sup>62</sup> *The Unspeakable...*, op. cit., p. 44.

Taking all these facts into accounts, it is worth examining how the international community reacted. The first event that merits mention were the bilateral talks in Thimpu (1985), between the Sri Lankan government and all the principal Tamil organisations, including the LTTE. The meeting was arranged by the government of India. The Tamil delegation suggested four basic rules<sup>63</sup> upon which the future solution of the conflict and the statehood question must be based (for example, the recognition of the Tamils of Ceylon as a nation)<sup>64</sup>.

However, the talks ended in fiasco for a very simple reason – the uncompromising approach of the Sri Lankan government<sup>65</sup>. Emmanuel's quote may be a perfect comment on this outcome. He stated that “the final resolution of the conflict towards a peaceful Sri Lanka depends on the horse, you may take to the water, but will it drink?”<sup>66</sup>.

Another hope for peace, quite a long time after the failed Thimpu talks, emerged in 2002, when – thank to Norwegian mediation efforts – a Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) was signed. It was the LTTE which invited the government to peace talks<sup>67</sup>. The hopes for peace were, however, soon extinguished – in 2005 M. Rajapaksa, the incumbent head of Sri Lankan state, won the presidential election. His policies – non-recognition of the Tamil homeland and their right to self-determination, lack of federal solutions, rejection of international mediation efforts – were contrary to those which had been announced in the CFA<sup>68</sup>.

## THE POST-WAR PERIOD

In 2009, the civil war officially came to an end. According to the Voice Against Genocide report, over 135 000 Tamils had been killed and 1,1 million people had been forced to flee the country. Orphans, widows and other casualties were also in their hundreds<sup>69</sup>. Nevertheless, in May 2009, president Rajapaksa<sup>70</sup>, alongside crowds assembled in Colombo, celebrated victory. Who,

<sup>63</sup> *Sri Lanka: One...*, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>64</sup> N. Ilangamuwa, op. cit.

<sup>65</sup> *The Unspeakable...*, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>66</sup> N. Ilangamuwa, op. cit.

<sup>67</sup> *The Unspeakable...*, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>68</sup> *Sri Lanka: One...*, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>69</sup> *Genocide In Sri Lanka –Act now!*, op. cit.

<sup>70</sup> Mahinda Rajapaksa is no longer the President of Sri Lanka. The presidential elections, which took place on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2015, have yielded surprising results – people have

then, had been defeated? Since the Tamil Tigers were labeled “terrorists” and “dangerous separatists”, the war – from the point of view of the state propaganda, widely accepted worldwide – was, consequently, considered to be an anti-terrorist struggle<sup>71</sup>. Thanks to such an approach, Sri Lanka gained international financial and military support. Only now do the states which once stood with “the Rajapaksa clan” begin to understand that the support was not a particularly fortunate idea and that the “struggle against Tamil terrorists” was actually a massacre of the civilian population<sup>72</sup>. In 1996, the United States put the LTTE on the list of Foreign Terrorist Organisations (FTO), which clearly contradicts their official statements declaring support for the Tamils, who mainly accepted the LTTE as their national leaders<sup>73</sup>.

Therefore, as soon as Rajapaksa assumed presidential duties, we observe a re-escalation of violence, which is confirmed by military expenses that continue to grow. Emmanuel argues that the international community misunderstood the reasons behind the war. After 9/11 the attitude of global authorities dramatically changed and terrorism has become one of the major issues to contend with. That was beneficial for the Sri Lankan government – the LTTE received the “terrorism” label which was sufficient to obtain tools for the purpose of stopping this danger<sup>74</sup>.

## AN OPEN QUESTION ABOUT THE FUTURE

How does the present situation look five years after the civil war officially finished?<sup>75</sup> In fact, the conflict remains unresolved and the government has not ceased resorting to the following discrimination means: keeping a dictatorial regime unreformed, rape, burglaries, setting up military bases in the places where the cemeteries of fallen LTTE fighters had been located, forcing the Tamils to sing the Sinhala anthem. Every external suggestion of changing this policy is immediately dismissed as an unwanted “intervention against the

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chosen Maithripala Sirisena as a new head of the state. See more: <http://www.hirunews.lk/-presidential-election-2015/1-colombo-district>.

<sup>71</sup> N. Ilangamuwa, op. cit.

<sup>72</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>73</sup> *Sri Lanka: One...*, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>74</sup> N. Ilangamuwa, op. cit.

<sup>75</sup> The question was posed by author in 2014. Now (2015) the situation – since Mahinda Rajapaksa is no longer the head of the state – is slightly different.

state's sovereignty"<sup>76</sup>. There can be no other conclusion than the following – all the official declarations about ending the war have nothing to do with the reality. In fact, the authorities, headed by president Rajapaksa, have rejected neither “sinhalisation” nor “buddhisisation” – the two main ideas that led to utopian ethnic-religious cleansing<sup>77</sup>. According to Emmanuel, what we see now in Sri Lanka may be defined as the final phase of de-rooting the Tamil existence.

Another problem is the social situation, which is currently favourable for the further development of the brutal dictatorship. First of all, it would be difficult to notice any significant resistance movement which would constitute a serious opposition force. The society is passive and does not express a creative initiative aimed at any significant transformation. Emmanuel claims that the passive masses are to a great extent guilty of what is happening; the regime can flourish due to their selfishness. He says that politicians come to power not because of their skills, but due to people's ignorance, which consequently leads the country to ruin<sup>78</sup>.

The other question is the lack of genuine support for the Tamils on the part of the great powers who at the moment prefer not to intervene, being occupied only by their own particular business. The United States labeled the Tamils “terrorists” and “separatists”, while Europe followed suit. China and India prefer not to take sides in the conflict, fearing that it may open up other disputes and even riots concerning some of their own territories.

Is there any hope for reconciliation in the future? Emmanuel offers an answer, pointing out three potential pillars of change: a realistic way of thinking (taken from the international community), a rise in powerful and authoritative leaders from the South, and a liberation from the *Mahavamsa*-mentality<sup>79</sup>.

At the moment, these points seem nothing but utopian dreams. Nevertheless, it is not pointless to observe current events concerning Sri Lanka. On 27 March 2014, a resolution calling for an international inquiry concerning war crimes committed by both sides during the Sri Lankan war has been voted for at the Human Rights Council of the United Nations in Geneva<sup>80</sup>; this may be

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<sup>76</sup> T. Gunasekara, *National Sovereignty Or Rajapaksa Sovereignty?*, [online] <http://www.the-sundayleader.lk/2010/07/04/national-sovereignty-or-rajapaksa-sovereignty> [accessed: 20.10.2013].

<sup>77</sup> N. Ilangamuwa, op. cit.

<sup>78</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>79</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>80</sup> See more: *Resolution Adopted by the Human Rights Council*, [online] <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/132/86/PDF/G1413286.pdf?OpenElement> [accessed: 14.07.2015].

considered a certain step forward. It is, however, difficult to estimate whether the document would in any way influence the Sri Lanka government, or to establish to what extent the particular interests of the member states led them to vote on the resolution. Nevertheless, no matter what these circumstances would be, this bloody conflict has once again attracted the international community's attention (perhaps, it is still attracting it).

Given the impact of globalisation on world politics, different institutions, organisations and units ought to share responsibility. Otherwise, one day we may see Niemoller's words come true again:

First they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the communists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a communist. Then they came for the capitalists, and I did not speak neither – because I was not a capitalist neither. Finally they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me<sup>81</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The topic of Sri Lanka (Ceylon), its ages of colonialism, the colonisers' socio-political impact, the post-independence transition and the further civil war is vast and complex. However, it does deserve a thorough examination. I have presented just a brief outline, pointing out the historical and religious background which is crucial to understand this complexity. The post-war period in the island is still observable (the war finished just six years ago) and Sri Lanka is trying to develop in many fields<sup>82</sup>. Therefore it is not so easy to judge what is happening now in the country. What we can do is to examine the past and draw conclusions for the purpose of avoiding similar experiences in the future.

It is important to know that the aforementioned genocide, as the result of the ethnic-religious conflict between the majority of Sri Lanka and other minorities, had its reasons and fundaments. It did not occur suddenly out of the blue. One of the less obvious reasons I have listed is Buddhism. However, this does not mean that Buddhism itself should be condemned. The point is that it was simply misused.

Buddhism, despite its peaceful and non-violent nature, may be considered as one of the indirect causes of the genocide and the civil war on the island. Buddhism, with the help of past experiences (including colonisation, the socio-political British impact, European political inventions), became a signif-

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<sup>81</sup> *The Unspeakable...*, op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>82</sup> See more: <http://www.development.lk/> [accessed: 14.07.2015].

icant tool for gaining power and winning in the area of the precious ballot box. Buddhism, as a religion of the majority and as a construct built on strong emotions, is also a brilliant tool for convincing the masses that a particular worldview is the only one. At this point, proclaiming that one particular group are the chosen people to the discard of another is straightforward enough, but is hardly Buddhist.

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