Researching livelihoods and
services affected by conflict

How did social welfare provision (de-)legitimise the post-colonial state in Sri Lanka?

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Nayana Godamunne

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Written by
Nayana Godamunne

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Preface

The Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) aims to generate a stronger evidence base on state-building, service delivery and livelihood recovery in fragile and conflict-affected situations. It began in 2011 with funding from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), Irish Aid and the European Commission (EC).

Phase I: 2011 - 2017

SLRC's research can be separated into two phases. Our first phase was based on three research questions on state legitimacy, state capacity and livelihoods, developed over the course of an intensive one-year inception phase. Findings from the first phase of research were summarised in five synthesis reports produced in 2017 that draw out broad lessons for policy-makers, practitioners and researchers.

Phase II: 2017 - 2019

Guided by our original research questions on state legitimacy, state capacity, and livelihoods, the second phase of SLRC answers the questions that still remain, under three themes:

- Theme 1: What are the underlying reasons for continued livelihood instability in post-conflict recovery situations?
- Theme 2: How does the experience of conflict link to how people experience trust, fairness and expectations of the future as part of their recovery?
- Theme 3: How does service delivery influence the negotiation of state legitimacy?

Theme 3: Services and state legitimacy

This paper is one of three case studies conducted in Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Pakistan. Researchers from the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Pakistan, the Social Scientists Association (SSA) in Sri Lanka, Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in the UK and independent researchers collaborated to produce these case studies. The research lead was Aoife McCullough.

The case studies under this theme consider when and why services influence the negotiation of state legitimacy. Development donors and practitioners often assume that improving access to services will contribute to improving state legitimacy in post-conflict environments. Findings from SLRC I did not support this assumption; data from our panel survey indicated that access to, or improved satisfaction with basic services did not translate into improved perceptions of government. On the other hand, when people experienced a problem with a service, this translated into negative perceptions of government.

In SLRC II, we sought to understand why access to, or improved satisfaction with basic services had a limited effect on people's perception of government while experiencing problems with services had a much stronger effect. We broadened our research angle to examine processes of negotiating state legitimacy and located this negotiation within evolving political settlements. Using this broader approach, we sought to understand when certain aspects of service delivery become salient in the negotiation of state legitimacy. In addition to these country studies, a third round of the panel survey was carried out in 2018 in Uganda, Nepal and Pakistan. New questions were added to the survey that were designed to capture a range of opinions related to perceptions of state legitimacy. The findings from the survey are forthcoming.

For more information on who we are and what we do, visit: www.securelivelihoods.org/about-slrc

Acknowledgements

Acronyms
and glossary

CNC	Ceylon National Congress
FUTA	Federation of University Teachers' Association
HTHP	Hundred Thousand Houses Programme
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITAK	Illankai Tamil Arasu Katchchi
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna
LSSP	Lanka Sama Samaja Party
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MHDP	Million Houses Development Programme
PR	Proportional Representation
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLRC	Secure Livelihoods Restoration Consortium
TULF	Tamil United Liberation Front
UNP	United National Party

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Executive summary

How did expectations of state welfare become so entrenched in people's minds in Sri Lanka? And why did the country experience a protracted civil war and two insurrections despite its long history of social welfare provision? This study aims to reach a deeper understanding of the relationship between social welfare and violent conflict.

Social welfare in Sri Lanka is rooted in its colonial past and was therefore inherited at independence in 1948. Its defining values of justice and equity were part of the independence struggle and came to represent the post-independent state. Social welfare later expanded with universal provision of health and education services and special assistance for the poorest and most vulnerable sectors. From the 1950s, however, despite the multi-ethnic character of the Sri Lankan state, social justice was reinterpreted in a new language of Sinhala nationalism to privilege the material and political interests of the Sinhalese, illustrated by state policies such as the Sinhala Only Act of 1956. By the late 1970s neoliberal ideologies influenced new legitimacy claims in the language of 'development'. Veiling welfare spending cuts in promises of 'trickle-down' development enabled the government to pre-empt mass dissent and implement a programme of market reform in line with the prevailing neoliberal ideology. External aid for major development projects enabled patronage networks to mediate access to state resources, thereby creating new conditions of marginalisation and exclusion.

The Sri Lankan state's post-independence legitimacy was therefore maintained by including some social groups and excluding others in the distribution of state resources (Behuria et al., 2017). This inherently unstable situation ultimately found expression in violent anti-state conflict. The two JVP-led insurrections of 1971 and 1987–1990 and the LTTE-led war in the North and East between 1983 and 2009 illustrate that when a state is perceived to be acting on the basis of unfair and unjust rules, violent conflict erupts.

The Sri Lankan case offers compelling evidence that state legitimacy can be undermined when it is perceived to be acting on the basis of unfair rules and practices that contravene shared values (Mcloughlin, 2018b).

Introduction

Welfare means providing assistance for life. We want the government to offer this kind of assistance to poor people and to affected people continuously. (Tamil from Mallakam, Jaffna district, June 2013, cited in Godamunne, 2015)[1]

Sri Lanka has a long history of providing social welfare services. Universal health care and pensions for public-sector workers were established during the colonial era. Free education, agricultural subsidies, land grants and housing were also provided in the years following independence. The benefits of these early provisions contributed to the population's well-being, as evidenced in the country's relatively high ranking in the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI). Despite the state's commitment to these social welfare measures, Sri Lanka experienced violent conflict, most notably the two insurrections in 1971 and from 1987 to 1990 and a civil war from 1983 to 2009. As previous research has shown, these fissures illustrate challenges to state legitimacy (Mcloughlin, 2018b).

A study conducted in 2015 for the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) hypothesised that social protection programmes contribute to state legitimacy in the aftermath of protracted conflict. It found that citizens expect state services and that their provision was a key component of the social contract (Godamunne, 2015). Other studies argue that the ideological apparatus of Sinhala nationalism has strong ideas on the role of the state in society, articulated in its duty to provide a wide range of public services, protect peasant agriculture and commit to redistributive social justice (Jayasuriya 2004; Venugopal 2018; Mcloughlin 2018b). The present study explores why social welfare is so integral to the state–society relationship in Sri Lanka and examines the nexus between the state's promises and practices regarding social welfare and acts of dissent as signals of the state's lack of legitimacy. The broader aim is to provide insights on how values of fairness and inclusion – and, conversely unfairness and exclusion – played out in welfare provision.

This study hypothesises that Sri Lanka's political settlement at independence was exclusive and relied on appealing to its core constituency – the Sinhalese. Social welfare was important for maintaining the political settlement insofar as interventions could be integrated into politics by responding to Sinhalese expectations of rights and entitlements to cement its legitimacy.

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1   Godamunne, 2015.

Justice and fairness, which had been central values in the independence struggle, were later reinterpreted with state actions justified as redressing injustices suffered by the Sinhalese under colonial rule. Given that Sri Lanka is a plural, multi-ethnic society, state practices that privileged the interests of one social group compromised its legitimacy among those who were excluded.

The paper uses examples from social welfare programmes in education, housing, rural policy and 'development' interventions to illustrate how certain policies and practices affected state legitimacy by including specific social groups and excluding others from the right to welfare benefits. It assesses the role of political patronage in mediating access to and elite capture of state institutions in the distribution of state resources. Finally, it examines issues of group-based inequalities of class and ethnicity as factors that contributed to anti-state violence.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 1 reflects briefly on the theories of the 'state' to understand the links between welfare provision and state legitimacy. Section 2 traces the ideological, historical and cultural foundations of social welfare and how ideology and culture were used to establish stability and coherence in the formative years. Section 3 examines the role and significance of social welfare provision from the perspective of the new state's claim to legitimacy in the context of the shared need of the political order and the Sinhalese to redress colonial injustices. Section 4 explores how social welfare was politically re-engineered in response to changes in the global political economy. It examines how the original ideas and values of social justice were given new meaning in the language of 'development' in new legitimacy claims of returning Sri Lanka to its glorious agricultural past; and improving individual capabilities as opposed to extending public goods. Section 5 examines expressions of popular dissent as symbols of the demand for the state to uphold its moral commitment to the basic ideas and values of the welfare-based social contract. The study concludes that the state can simultaneously be legitimate and de-legitimate to different social groups.

Research questions and methodology

The main research question is: *How has social welfare provision (de-)legitimised the post-colonial state in Sri Lanka*? The ancillary question is: *why is social welfare provision an expected function of the state?* It is hoped that answering these questions might provide insights into why welfare provision was important for the legitimacy of the post-colonial state and how seeking legitimacy from its core constituency – the Sinhalese – resulted in losing legitimacy with other groups, most notably the Tamil community.

The paper is based mainly on an extensive literature review supplemented with key informant interviews to trace legitimacy claims and practices related to post-independence social welfare provision. The initial sources for the literature review were based on a snowballing sampling technique to identify all historical literature on social welfare in Sri Lanka, using Google Scholar, JSTOR and archival material such as sessional papers, parliamentary debates, newspaper archives and academic presentations. The reference sections of the initial sources were used to identify further books and articles. The literature review resulted in 89 online and physical sources spanning more than a century of social welfare provision. The research questions were then reformulated and 15 further written sources were reviewed.

Key informants included mainly retired senior bureaucrats, political leaders and researchers/academics. For the first two categories, respondents provided in-depth knowledge on the selected social welfare programmes, insights on the ideas, values and thinking behind the policy-making process, practical experiences of working with political elites, and in implementing programmes. Researchers and academics were interviewed to obtain an independent analysis of the social policies and their repercussions. Most the respondents were over 60 years of age, some retired and others now acting as development consultants (see Table 1).

1.1   Analysis

The analysis was guided by the SLRC Theme 3 Conceptual Framework, which draws on Beetham (1991) and Migdal (1997) to understand how state legitimacy is constructed and the role of public services in that process. Primary and secondary data was analysed broadly using a Political Settlements approach. Political settlements can be conceptualised as formal and informal agreements among elites and non-elites on the distribution of power, governance arrangements and distributive issues

Table 1: Profile of key informants

Category	Discipline
Retired senior bureaucrats	Agriculture policy and reform
	Public administration
	Social services and welfare programmes
	Accelerated Mahaweli Development Programme (AMDP)
Academics	Political science
	History
Head/research fellows of think tanks	Politics/public-sector reform
	Sociology
Political party leaders	Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP)[2]
	Community Party of Sri Lanka

Source: authors own.

that contribute to political stability and help to resolve disputes (Kelsall and Vom Hau, 2017). While often used to understand how the 'settlement' is maintained and conflict and violence are restrained, in this study it also helped explain the behaviour of social groups that accepted the 'settlement' at independence in 1948 and in whose interest its maintenance and reproduction lay; and to understand the power configurations, particularly the reproduction of power relations among political elites and non-elites, during the post-independence period.

As indicated, the paper draws on Beetham (1991) to understand how state power was legitimated by reference to shared beliefs between the state and citizens. The analysis looks at popular perceptions of state decision-making processes, assuming that when these are perceived to be fair and just towards social groups, their members feel valued and respected and are more likely to regard the state as legitimate (Fisk and Cherney, 2017). It also draws on the argument that state legitimacy depends on impartial governance processes (Rothstein, 2009). If the state is perceived to be withdrawing from or reducing its commitment to shared beliefs, its authority can be challenged, sometimes violently (Beetham, 1991). Finally, it examines the idea that legitimacy can be undermined when the state is perceived to be acting on the basis of unfair rules and practices which contravene shared values or procedural unfairness[3] (Mcloughlin, 2018b).

The analysis explores the state's commitment to upholding the core values of social justice, and the subsequent changes in its norms and values as a result of political, socioeconomic and conceptual changes (Alagappa, 1995:5) to offer a more nuanced understanding of the process of transformation and (de-) construction of state legitimacy in Sri Lanka.

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2   Trotskyist political party and oldest 'left' party in Sri Lanka.

3   Procedural unfairness is the antithesis of procedural fairness which is defined as fair decision-making and respectful treatment not only in respect of an individual but in terms of its application for a social group.

Section 1: Concepts and themes

1.2 Theories of state legitimacy

Conceptions of the state are derived mainly from European experience, influenced by Max Weber's idea that it is a spatially coherent entity and an autonomous bureaucratic apparatus, embodying popular sovereignty; and, Charles Tilly's notion that a state has a monopoly over using physical violence (Migdal and Schlichte, 2005; Hagman and Peclard, 2010). Other ways to conceptualise the state and political authority acknowledge that states have pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial histories, whose legacies affect state-building and legitimating processes. A deeper analysis suggests that the state is a dynamic field of power constituted by competing actors (Migdal and Schlichte, 2005; Hagman and Peclard, 2010), premised on social norms that connect citizens with the political order; but is historically and socially constructed and may therefore change (Algappa, 2005).

Broadly, the social contract is based on normative principles, moral orders and social imaginaries (Riley, Goldie and Wokler, 2008). It is concerned with the legitimate authority of the state through a reciprocal arrangement in which citizens surrender some freedoms and accept its authority in exchange for rights, entitlements, and moral and political obligations on the understanding that breaching this trust may engender collective disapproval in the form of mass demonstrations, elections, insurgencies and acts of violence (Taylor 2004; Venugopal 2018).

Chatterjee (2004:18) argues that political relations are conditioned by activities and functions which have become 'expected' of governments, at the heart of which lie contradictions between civic nationalism based on equal rights irrespective of religion, ethnicity, gender, language or culture and the demand of a specific social group for differential treatment based on cultural identity and the historical injustice it has suffered (Chatterjee 2004: 18). Privileging the rights and entitlements of a particular social group undermines the ideals of universal rights and equal citizenship (Chatterjee, 2004).

In sum, state-building and the construction of legitimacy are influenced by the particular historical trajectory of state–society relations and the ideologies, policies and practices of external forces to which a given community is exposed. Furthermore, perceptions of the state and its legitimacy reside not only in the realm of institutions, bureaucracies and policies but also in discourses, symbols and imaginaries of everyday life (Gupta, 1995). Hence, state institutions incorporate cultural and political

representations, discourses and practices that give meaning to their activities (Nagengast, 1994). In this sense, state-building is a process of accumulating levels of legitimacy by negotiation and contestation between local, national and transnational actors through which the state is forged and re-formed (Von Trotha, 2001; Hagman and Peclard, 2010). Basically, the concept of legitimacy follows the 'logic of appropriateness' (Easton, 1975; Mcloughlin, 2018a: 17), which means that for a given community to believe that a system is legitimate, it must be grounded on the belief that it is right and morally justifiable and respects rules that are morally and normatively appropriate and are enforced in a fair and just fashion (Beetham, 1991; Mcloughlin 2018a). Citizens assess state legitimacy on the basis of the rightfulness of its actions (Easton, 1975; Mcloughlin, 2018a).

1.3 Social contract, social welfare, social justice and nationalism in Sri Lanka

We now turn to the concepts of the social contract, social welfare, social justice, and nationalism in the Sri Lankan context.

The social contract that emerged in independent Ceylon in 1948 drew on a set of customary rights and entitlements grounded in the Buddhist principles of social justice and in Fabian socialist ideas. This 'contract' drew on Sinhala–Buddhist principles of *rata* (homeland)*, jathiya* (community)*,* and *agama* (faith) to form the moral basis on which the state–society relationship was established.[4]

Commonly, social welfare refers to government support to provide all citizens with a minimum level of well-being, whether free or subsidised, generally in the form of health and education services (Jayasuriya, 2004),[5] with social safety nets to protect basic human needs. In terms of the health, education and well-being of the poorest and most marginalised sectors, Sri Lanka has been a welfare state since the 1920s (ibid).[6] Universal health care and pensions for state-sector employees preceded independence, after which free education and subsidised housing and agricultural inputs, food rations and cash transfers were added.

Since the late 1970s 'development' interventions also had welfare overtones in that the Sinhala term

samvardhana or development refers both to production and also to the distribution of benefits (Tennekoon, 1988; Bastian, 2009). It is appropriate to explore events in Sri Lanka *'as …outcomes of inter-linked economic and political policies, implemented in a distinct but dynamically evolving historical-institutional setting'* (Dunham and Jayasuriya, 2001:1). Sri Lanka clearly shows that welfare policy is an inherently political process through controlling and manipulating benefits (Warnapala et al., 1987).

In colonial Ceylon, principles of social justice were imbued with Buddhist virtues such as *dana* (sharing), *metta* (giving), *Karuna* (compassion) and *upekkha* (stability) (Thambiah, 1992). These principles also resonated with the Fabian socialist principles of universal rights, fairness and justice, expressed in Sinhala as *sama samajaya* (righteous society), *dharmishta samajaya* (socialist society*)* and *samaja love* (equal society).

Socialist principles translated into equitable access to services and the distribution of wealth, while the Sinhalese terms portray the social order as one that recognises the responsibility of the state to ensure the welfare of ordinary people, particularly the peasantry (Brow, 1990:13). The use of historical images of an agricultural civilisation organised as a socialist welfare society were used by the post-colonial state to represent an egalitarian future social order based on *dhammic* principles (Thambiah, 1992: 106-107).

The long-standing commitment to social welfare suggests that its provision was integral to how legitimacy was constructed and collectively internalised as Sri Lanka became independent. But although Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic community, the post-independence political structure was highly centralised in ways that failed to reflect its plural society. Even though social welfare was expanded, the values of fairness and justice which underpinned it came to be reinterpreted through Sinhala nationalism. This political relationship between the Sinhalese and the state was justified in the claim that colonial rule had weakened the Sinhala community and that political independence could be meaningful only if historical injustices they suffered were redressed (Uyangoda, 2003: 3). This exclusionary discourse on the characteristics of the 'nation' state meant that the majority community could not accommodate the 'other'

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4   Interview with political science scholar, 24 September 2018.

5   interview with head of think tank Politics/Public Sector Reform, 10 September 2018

6   Ibid.

in its concept of statehood, and provided the moral framework for justifying exclusionary state policy and practice, legitimising what was tantamount to unfair and unjust state actions (Uyangoda, 2003) that informed the transformation of the state from the mid-1950s (Uyangoda, 2003).

The growth of Sinhala nationalism as a political ideology started in the 1950s and came eventually to include the political system, public institutions, economy, culture and territory. The pursuit of Sinhala nationalism was reflected in three forms. First, it was symbolically reflected in state policy and practice, illustrated by Sinhala Only Act of 1956, which made Sinhala the only official language; constitutionally entrenching Buddhism by giving it the 'foremost' place in the First Republican Constitution of 1972; and the practice of using quintessentially Sinhala imagery in development interventions in the 1980s.[7] Second, Sinhala nationalism's economic agenda was to prioritise the material interests and advancement of the Sinhala–Buddhists (Venugopal, 2018), for instance through using state resources to protect the Sinhala peasant community from the late 1950s and the education policies of 1972. Third, the control of land as a means to expand the territorial frontier of the Sinhala–Buddhist 'nation' was reflected in state land policy such as the 1949 Gal Oya[8] land-settlement scheme and the Mahaweli land settlements of the early 1980s. These state-led land settlements predominantly benefited the Sinhalese and were perceived by the Tamils as an invasion of what they consider the 'Traditional Tamil Homeland'.

This relationship between nationalism and political behaviour that privileged Sinhala–Buddhist interests was tantamount to a breach of customary rights, and was contested through mass demonstrations and acts of violence (Taylor, 2004).

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7   The chanting of Buddhist scriptures and versus by priests and reciting verses from ancient Sinhala chronicles at ceremonies associated with development projects.

8   Landless peasants, mostly Sinhalese from the Kandyan areas, were provided cleared land, irrigation and housing to redress a historical injustice enacted by the British in expropriating their ancestral lands. The settlement was contentious in that Tamil nationalists claimed Sinhalese were settled in 'traditional Tamil homelands'.

Section 2: Foundations of the social welfare state in Sri Lanka

As mentioned earlier, the introduction and widening of the scope of social welfare during the colonial period was driven by Fabian socialist principles, and a response to the demand for the right to fair and equitable provision of public services (Jayasuriya, 2010).[9] The idea that social welfare was a bottom-up 'demand' resonates with evidence from SLRC Phase I study of 2015,[10] which indicated that citizens view social welfare and social protection as an integral component of the state–society relationship.

Sri Lanka's history of welfare provision is rooted in its colonial heritage. The 1895 Temperance Campaign, a semi-political movement, was the first sign of Ceylonese national consciousness and liberal humanitarian attitudes towards the economic needs of the poor (Jayawardena, 1972: 202). It also coincided with the Buddhist Revival and the Hindu and Muslim nationalist resurgence led by middle-class Ceylonese, for whom it was a national duty to form organisations to pressure the government to address social and economic issues, and marked the beginning of the independence struggle. The virtues of *dana* (sharing), *metta* (giving) and *karuna* (compassion) resonated with the resurgence of Buddhist values articulated by Srimath Anagarika Dharmapala,[11] linking social welfare with political ideals for the first time. These virtues also resonated with Christianity, Hinduism and Islam, enabling faith-based movements to play a key role in using these principles to strengthen and reinforce the idea of social welfare in popular consciousness (Gunatillake, 2017: 26).

The emergence of social welfare in Britain also influenced its growth in Ceylon.[12] By the late nineteenth century, British social policies were influenced by the Fabian movement, and the idea of a moral obligation of the rich towards the poor (Bruce, 1991; Jayasuriya, 2010). These ideas also influenced how the colonies should be administered. In Ceylon, this meant a mutual recognition by the colonial government and the Ceylonese of the 'pastoral' functions of the state, meaning that the government was obliged to provide benefits to all sectors (Chatterjee, 2004), underpinned by the notion that the sphere of welfare and protection was important for the state–society relationship. The Colonial Office also came

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9   Interview with political science scholar 24 September 2018.

10   Referenced as Godamunne 2015.

11   Buddhist revivalist and writer and founding contributor of non-violent Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism.

12   The name that present-day Sri Lanka was known as during the British colonial period. In 1972, the country became a republic within the Commonwealth and changed its name to Sri Lanka.

to believe that ordinary citizens could prosper only with state intervention. Spurred by the recommendations of the Colebrook-Cameron Commission of 1832, radical changes included employing Ceylonese in public service based on the principles of merit and equity (Colebrook Commission Report, 1832: 29). The recommendations of the Reform Committee in 1833 also resulted in the introduction of new policies, including English-medium education,[13] enabling indigenous peoples to enter the public service (Yogasundaram, 2006: 270). By the late nineteenth century, rural elementary schools used local languages as the medium of instruction.

By the early 1900s a growing national movement was agitating for greater self-rule. The Ceylonese middle class, who had benefited from the education policy and economic prosperity, pressed for self-governance while the working class had also become a political force through trade unions (Jayawardena, 1972). The agitation was led by two political groups, those who had benefited from English-medium education[14] and those who had received their education in local languages. English-educated, left-leaning intellectuals joined in the 1930s and 1940s (Jayasuriya, 1979).

By 1915, health and medical relief for the poor were being provided by the Ceylon Social Service League, which advocated for mass education (including elementary education for poor children), medical relief, compulsory insurance and a minimum wage. The formation of the Ceylon National Congress (CNC) in 1919, made up of Sinhalese and Tamil organisations, launched the independence movement drawing on three main political groups: the westernised middle class, represented by groups such as the CNC; cultural nationalist movements, particularly the Sinhalese–Buddhist nationalists; and the left-wing movement comprising the radical wing of politically minded nationalists (Jayasuriya 2010). The CNC claimed it represented a nationalist voice and made proposals for constitutional reforms, which ultimately resulted in the Donoughmore Commission, set up by Sydney Webb in 1927.

The Commission was mandated to draft a new constitution to provide the political means for Ceylon's multi-ethnic community to enjoy fair and equal opportunities of access to political power and to achieve prosperity and well-being. The Donoughmore Constitution introduced in 1931 established a system of executive committees of members of the legislature, giving political representatives control over all government departments. With universal franchise in 1931, all parliamentarians could sit on government committees and control domestic affairs, a 'privilege' of semi-autonomous government available to few British colonies (Jayasuriya, 2004). For the first time, Ceylonese political leaders were elected and could gain government experience within a social democratic framework.

2.1 Expanding health and education: the struggle for social justice

During most of the colonial period, social welfare measures were provided to ensure stability and, to an extent, maintain goodwill between the British and the Ceylonese, and is illustrated by the priority given to health services. Up to the 1930s, health services were provided only for the colonial elite[15] and Indian plantation workers (Jayasuriya, 2010: 80-81). Health services and minimum wages were pursued to attract Indian migrants to work in the lucrative plantations (Jayasuriya, 2004). Essentially, health services were geared only to maintain the political and economic order.

The provision of health services to plantation workers resonated with those Ceylonese in the Legislative Council who also had a vested interest in the welfare of the plantation workers. Gradually, welfare services expanded to include improved housing and medical facilities and, as the demand for better and more services gained momentum, employers were forced to provide hospitals, schools, maternity arrangements, crèches and other amenities to resident workers (Alailima, 1995). Treatment was free in all health facilities, subject to an income limit, which was not enforced strictly. Indeed, the 1934 Wedderburn Report reported that 'the great majority of the citizens of Ceylon expect free medical assistance as a matter of right' (cited in Jennings Report, 1947: 2).

Education reform in the 1940s was partly driven by the increased demand for government services due to the rising population, thus requiring educated and skilled Ceylonese to run public services, but the political changes led to demands to extend education to all. The proposed reforms aimed to improve literacy and employment opportunities and thereby raise the socioeconomic

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13   Through state-assisted missionary schools which could only be accessed at the time by the urban middle class.

14   Comprising professionals and a fair number in the agricultural sector.

15   European settlers and the Ceylonese educated middle class.

status of the indigenous people (Jayasuriya, 2004). The strong push from the Ceylonese elite to uphold social justice values by broadening access to education was championed by C.W.W. Kannangara, the first Minister of Education in the State Council of Ceylon. The landmark Kannangara Report of 1943 recommended universal and compulsory free education from kindergarten to university (Dunham and Jayasuriya, 2000; Jayasuriya, 2004), and galvanised social and political pressure for radical changes to the prevailing education system. The far-reaching reforms included opening the University of Ceylon in 1942,[16] the Free Education Bill, the establishment of a state-run Central School system in all provincial towns, changes in the medium of instruction from English to Sinhala and Tamil, and denominational schools being brought under the aegis of the state (Jayasuriya, 2000: 9). The Ceylon University Ordinance No.20 of 1942 stated: *'The University shall be open to all persons of either sex and of whatever race, creed or class, and no test of religious belief or profession shall be adopted or imposed in order to entitle any person to be admitted as a teacher or student of the University...'* (Section 7, Ceylon University Ordinance No.20 of 1942). Free education was approved by the State Council in 1945, with the aim of expanding access to different levels of education (de Silva, 2010).

Kannangara's recommendations were not universally accepted. Local conservative elites allied with the colonial elite to resist any reforms that would bring about social change (Jayaweera 1990: 462; Jayasuriya 2010:79), again illustrating that social reform was acceptable only if it left the prevailing political and social order intact. Despite political opposition, reforms went ahead as part of a broader plan of modernisation. Free education was a legitimacy claim and ensuring that the reforms were implemented was important for colonial rule (Mcloughlin, 2018a).

The conditions in which health and education reforms were adopted illustrate the political struggles associated with their expansion. In some ways, these reforms served to legitimise colonial rule by appearing to be benevolent moves in the interests of improving the well-being of 'subjects' by modernising a crown colony, but also show elite Ceylonese resistance to any reforms that might undermine existing economic and social structures, and elite (British and Ceylonese) resistance to providing universal services.

2.2 Universal franchise

The granting of universal franchise in 1931 was significant in the history of Ceylon and for the British Empire. Drawing on principles of social justice and notions of righteousness from the revival of Buddhism, enfranchisement was meaningful in a context of heightened Ceylonese awareness of rights – and was to change both the nature of political competition and the character of politics in Ceylon (Venugopal 2015). The concept of universal franchise would disrupt prevailing class- and ethnic-based social structures in access to political power. Opposition from the Tamil politicians was on the grounds that the Tamils would become a minority in the legislature while the Ceylonese middle class, of all ethnicities, viewed enfranchisement as a tool to undermine their political power. The Donoughmore Commissioners, however, argued that it would enable disadvantaged sectors to demand a better standard of living, and access to education and welfare services, stressing that it was only when such people had the vote that their position would be improved by those who sought their support (Cooray, 1970).

Franchise had far-reaching impacts on the electoral system. The first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system introduced in 1931 gave greater weight to the rural vote, and required the ruling parties and governments to become more sensitive to popular needs and demands (Balakrishnan, 1985: 45; Bastian, 2009). Leading up to independence in 1948, the political elite was drawn from those who had accumulated wealth during the colonial period and were primarily from the westernised, English-speaking bourgeoisie (Bastian, 2009). Democracy and a multi-party system meant the rural political elite also became involved. This enabled the urban-based political elite in the post-independence period to develop a relationship with the majority rural Sinhalese, based on the notion that the rural areas had been most disadvantaged under colonialism and should be given priority in the country's development (Bastian, 2009).

2.3 Rise of the left movement

The left-leaning movement was vital in politically articulating the demand for welfare provision. The party manifesto of the Lanka Sama Samaja Pakshaya[17] (LSSP), established in 1935, was committed to abolishing

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socioeconomic inequity and oppression. The middle class had benefited from colonial 'Ceylonisation' because of their English-language education, but the working and peasant classes did not enjoy such benefits. Under the influence of the LSSP, the urban working class was politically mobilised and demanded redistributive measures to reduce social inequity (Jayasuriya, 2004). Education and health facilities had already expanded and the plantation workers were assured of a quantity of rice at a guaranteed price in the Minimum Wage Ordinance, but no corresponding policy changes had benefited urban workers. The LSSP filled this void by mobilising the trade unions to demand similar statutory benefits for urban workers (Roberts, 1979: 477). Upholding the ideals of an 'egalitarian society' gave Marxist-oriented political parties, led by the LSSP, popular appeal.[18] Sustained campaigns by the Left, espousing the principle of fairness, were instrumental in demanding better social conditions for indigenous peoples (Sanderatne, 2000). Further, as a major political force in the independence struggle, the Left movement, and the LSSP in particular, drew on social justice principles, thereby laying the founding ideas and values of the post-independence state. The period between the 1930s and 1940s witnessed increased welfare provision with a corresponding expansion in the role of the state. The state and its relationship with citizens were defined in a new language of rights and entitlements in the form of health, education and employment.

Many factors influenced the expansion of social welfare during the colonial period. Fabian socialism in Britain and its champions in the Colonial Office have been credited with the ideological shift, and universal franchise in 1931 and the competitive electoral system established in the 1930s enabled the middle-class political elite to mobilise the urban working class and the non-plantation rural sectors[19] to demand social welfare. Spurred by religious revival and Buddhist virtues in particular, people's demands were articulated by the Left movement. The Colonial Government also saw a potential political and economic opportunity in converting this bottom-up demand for social welfare into a legitimacy claim[20] to expand services in health, education, nutrition, housing and employment along with support for the poorest and more vulnerable sectors as a means of legitimising colonial rule in the guise of modernisation. Consequently, at independence the principles of the right to equal and fair access to state resources, and the role of the state as a dispenser of social justice, were already firmly embedded in the popular mindset.

18   Interview with LSSP leader, 12 September 2018.

19   Interview with a former head of think tank Politics/Public sector reform, 10 September 2018.

20   Interview with a former sociologist, 10 September 2018.

Section 3: Making promises and justifying legitimacy

Following independence in 1948, the Dominion of Ceylon inherited a highly centralised state structure. Political power was transferred to the centre-right United National Party (UNP) which formed an alliance with the nationalist-minded *Sinhala Maha Sabha* and the Tamil Congress to form its first government. The members of the alliance were all drawn from the western-educated middle class (Jayasuriya, 2000: 96). These political elites were strong advocates of social liberalism, and embraced the ideas, values and discourses that social welfare symbolised.

The 1947 constitution abolished communal representation, resulting in political elites having to compete for electoral power. The peasantry now constituted the largest number of voters, and so could be used to undermine the trade unions and the urban working-class vote (Wickramasinghe, 2006; Jayasundara-Smits, 2010). Social welfare provision enabled the political elite to forge a relationship with the peasantry and broaden its constituency by addressing rural socioeconomic issues (Bastian, 2009). The peasantry was largely Sinhala–Buddhist and interventions to address the rural issues therefore had, by default, an ethno-religious element, whose significance came to define post-colonial social welfare policy and practice.

At the time of Independence, the island was politically polarised between the conservative right and the Marxist-oriented left (Dunham, 2008). The UNP secured the most seats in the 1947 election but the influence of the Left, its anti-imperialism and strong support for liberal socialist values, had mass appeal. The ruling political elites thus recognised the potential to use social welfare provision as a political strategy to win and retain popular support (Marga Institute, 1974: 17), and to ward off attacks from the Left (Manor, 1989; Jayasuriya, 2004: 419).

The commodity boom in the 1950s and the rise in rubber prices enabled Senanayake's coalition government to fund public health and education and continue the food subsidies (Alailima, 1995). The new government's commitment to continue the investment in welfare was articulated by the Minister of Finance in his budget speech of 1948, in which he stated that almost 40% of total government expenditure was for social welfare, and that '*Free Ceylon may justly and proudly call itself a*

social service state' (Marga Institute, 1974: 6).[21] The food subsidies were the single largest component of social expenditure (20% of all spending) (Marga Institute, 1974). This redistributive measure was regarded as a symbol of the government's 'progressive character' by appealing to Buddhist virtues, liberal socialist values and discourses of the welfare state (ibid).

Welfare measures initiated during the colonial era were expanded. The Cumpston Report of 1950 outlined the rationale for an equitable and universal health service as a matter of right, and recommended the abolition of private medical practice, arguing that:

> *'Upon no principle of which I am aware can the government justify the expenditure of public funds to provide to a select group of doctors so that they can provide a private medical service to that exclusive group in a position to pay (sometimes large) fee.' (Session Papers III – 1950: 17).*

The Report, further argued:

> *'It does not need any inspired wisdom to know that the Government must give all its attention to the economically productive section of the community instead of spending the national income for the benefit of the privileged few' (Sessional Papers III – 1950: 16).*

The recommendations of the Report were supported by the Marxist opposition, and there was a rapid increase in the number of health institutions across the country (Sanderatne, 2000).

The commitment to continue investing in education were similar. The left politician Dr N. M. Perera stated that among its objectives was:

> *'the prevention of unemployment, the raising of the standard of living of the masses, increased production, a more equitable system of distribution, social security of cooperative enterprise, etc. But as none of these things can be fully realised without mass education we are of the opinion that free*

education must come first and foremost' (Perera, 1944: 5, cited in Jayasuriya, 2000: 9).

What encouraged free education during the colonial period was the need for educated Ceylonese to work in the expanded public service, which continued until the early 1950s, by when there were more educated youth than the public sector could absorb (Mcloughlin 2018a).[22] It was during this time that the over-representation of Tamils in public-sector jobs surfaced as an 'issue' for the Sinhalese, who felt that Tamils' purportedly superior economic position evidenced by their presence in the university system, urban professions and public employment aroused open hostility.

The belief that Tamils were advantaged was advanced to justify social policy changes after 1956. Several events immediately after independence illustrate the disjuncture between the core values of fairness and justice inherited from the colonial period and post-independence social welfare policy and practice. The Citizenship Act of 1948,[23] followed by the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949,[24] both of which denied citizenship to the Indian Tamil plantation population, were early examples. By rendering the Indian Tamil population stateless, these laws effectively denied them universal rights and entitlements, including social welfare. The exclusion of this community from citizenship rights was part of a broader political agenda which had roots in the colonial period. When universal franchise was introduced in 1931, elements of the Sinhala political elite raised concerns about the potential imbalance in the up-country representation of the Indian Tamil plantation population in a Sinhala Kandyan constituency. Similarly, the Tamil elite opposed extending franchise to the plantation population because it would undermine the economic and political status quo. From the perspective of the Sinhalese (and Tamil) elite, the citizenship acts were part of a strategic political plan to disenfranchise the Indian Tamil population both to reduce the influence of the Left parties, and to redress the potential ethnic and class imbalances in the political representation of the up-country in the legislature. It was the newly independent state's first use of procedural means to restrict access

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21 On development he states that 'We do not intend to stop or starve any of the progressive social and economic schemes of evelopment, such as free education, free milk feeding and free meals for children, subsidies on essential goods... While holding to these principles we shall further attempt to close from both ends the gap which separates the standard of living of the great mass of our fellow citizens from that of a small privileged minority' (Marga Institute 1974: 12).

22 Interview with head of think tank/sociologist, 10 September 2018.

23 More than 700,000 people of Indian Tamil descent, about 11% of the population, were denied citizenship and made stateless.

24 The outward purpose, again, was to provide means of obtaining citizenship for the Indian Tamils. But in reality the conditions imposed by the Act were such that they discriminated against the Indian Tamils.

to welfare benefits, in violation of its commitment to universal rights and fairness in the access to and distribution of state resources.

The disenfranchisement of the plantation working class polarised the Tamil political community. Some of the Tamil elite who were part of the government coalition through the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) supported it. Its opponents broke away and formed the Illankai Tamil Arasu Katchchi (ITAK), also known as the Federal Party, in 1949. The disenfranchisement acts were politically significant in two respects: they illustrated how ethnic and class dimensions shaped political decision-making processes and they marked the first cleavage in the centralised state structure articulated by the Federal Party.

3.1   Removal of food subsidies

The second fissure in the commitment to social welfare was the attempt to cut the rice subsidy in 1953. The price of imported rice increased during the Korean War, prompting the government to announce an end to subsidies (Alailima, 1995: 11). This would disproportionately affect the urban poor and provoked public indignation. The attempt to remove the rice subsidy followed the reduction and removal of other welfare benefits since 1952 which included ending the free mid-day meal and glass of milk for school children (Vitarana, 2013).

The proposed removal of the subsidy was countered by a general strike and several violent mass protests. The government failed to contain the protests, which ended with an announcement that it would restore the subsidy and increase the rice ration. The *Hartal*[25] had far-reaching political impacts, resulting in the resignation of the prime minister and the replacement of the finance minister (Dunham 2008: 100). In November 1954, the government increased the ration, doubling its cost to the government (Alailima, 1995: 11). The mass uprising included workers, villagers and students concentrated in areas with a strong left-wing presence, and was the first anti-government mass protest, including different ethnic, religious and caste groups (Vitarana, 2013). It showed that people were prepared to defend social welfare and the values it represented.

3.2   Renegotiating the welfare-based social contract

The immediate post-independence period was characterised by political contestation between the western-educated elite, the nationalist-minded elite and the left-wing movement, all vying to consolidate power with the majority Sinhala constituency. Building alliances became a political strategy as MPs courted voters, and extending new rights and protection to the Sinhala–Buddhists offered potential. The ruling elite needed a new political order to fill the void left after the colonial power had left. It is in this context that Bandaranaike broke away from the UNP and established the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). In the run-up to the 1956 general election, he wooed the Sinhala majority with fresh promises, laced in nationalist ideology and a new legitimacy claim of redressing injustices suffered by the Sinhalese during colonial rule (Mcloughlin, 2018a).

The 1956 election extended new rights and entitlements, based on the idea of shared values, to the Sinhalese, with economic redistributive justice to mobilise the community. The incentives favouring the Sinhalese resulted in a new notion of Ceylonese-ness with a distinctly Sinhala–Buddhist identity. The core values of social justice underpinned by socialist ideologies were embedded in a revitalised welfare-based social contract in the vocabulary of Sinhala nationalism. While political elites courted popular support, the ruling elite needed to ground political relevance in new legitimacy claims. The grand narrative of injustices suffered during the colonial period and the need to redress them resonated with the Sinhala–Buddhist nationalists and the peasantry, who had borne the brunt of injustices through land loss, and restricted access to education and off-farm employment. The claims to redress colonial injustices and inequity provided a powerful narrative to extend new rights and entitlements to the poor and marginalised Sinhalese in return for political support and consent to rule (Mcloughlin, 2018a).[26]

3.3   The grand narrative of colonial injustices

The grand narrative of injustices experienced by Sinhala peasant farmers became the pillar of the revised welfare-based social contract with a moral obligation on the state to offer redress. Doing so was thus a key legitimacy claim and 1956 was a major political watershed in giving

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25   Commonly used term in South Asia for strikes.

26   Interview with retired public official (Public Administration) 12September 2018.

a new interpretation to the values of justice and equity which drew on Sinhala–Buddhist nationalism to fulfil Bandaranaike's election campaign promises: to redress injustices suffered by peasants by reconnecting with their norms and values; to restore Sinhala its due place by replacing English as the official language; and prioritising Sinhalese access to university through district-based quotas and standardisation of marks in the qualifying exam.

3.4   Reconnecting with the rural peasantry

British agrarian policy helped promote private enterprise through commercial plantations and private smallholders growing cash crops. These policies badly affected the peasant economy. The land-tenure system, based on the principles of private property, disrupted traditional relationships; the shift to product specialisation led to the emergence of capitalist agricultural relations; and the peasants' tax burden was far higher than that of the more prosperous plantation economy.[27] Rural poverty and the disintegration of peasant society had been part of the political discourse from the early 1920s and preserving the peasant society and economy was ideologically important for governments seeking legitimacy in the post-colonial phase.

Following the 1956 election, the political narrative of redressing colonial injustices depended on reconnecting with the ruling authority's key legitimacy audience – the Sinhalese peasantry. This policy decision was premised on the idea that agriculture had been neglected during the colonial era and that self-sufficiency in rice should be a major thrust in the state's agriculture policy. The demand for land by the landless was identified as another 'injustice'. The Crown Lands Ordinance of 1840 and the Waste Lands Ordinance of 1897 resulted in private lands being annexed by the colonial government. The imagery of the Sinhala villager cultivating paddy was a symbol of Sinhala-ness. Thus, the ruling elite used it to make new promises to the Sinhala peasantry to introduce agrarian policies which would improve their socioeconomic conditions (Bastian, 2009).

Redressing colonial injustices therefore translated into allocating state land to landless peasants. Land settlements and land reforms sought to cement the relationship between the Sinhala peasantry and the government. The first land-settlement scheme preceded independence as landless, mostly Sinhalese, peasants were resettled on state lands in the Dry Zone under the Gal Oya scheme,[28] with the aim to make Ceylon self-sufficient in rice and address land hunger (Bastian, 2009). The revitalisation of the Dry Zone was a means for Sinhala nationalist politicians from the low country to appeal to the Kandyan Sinhalese who had lost lands under the British (Samaraweera, 1981; Peebles, 1990). A number of settlements were established between 1948 and 1953 (Sanderatne, 2004; Bastian, 2009), symbolising the return of the Sinhalese to the heartland of the ancient irrigation civilisation (Moore, 1985; Peebles, 1990) – although the Tamil political elite alleged that in doing so the state was confiscating Tamil 'traditional homelands' (Peebles, 1990).

The Bandaranaike government also introduced the 1958 Paddy Lands Act to support tenant rice farmers by regulating the landlord–tenant contract, controlling rents and ensuring security of tenure. Further, in order to prevent fragmentation of paddy lands it consolidated small landholdings (Bastian, 2009). These policies appealed to the peasantry who were thus integrated into existing socioeconomic structures and national politics (Moore, 1985) and also created a growing Sinhalese rural middle class, who became electorally powerful regional elites (Coomaraswamy, 1987; Bastian, 2007).

3.5   Rise of Sinhala–Buddhist nationalism

The growth of the Sinhala peasantry and the disenfranchisement of the Indian Tamil population skewed the ethnic composition of the legislature and protection of minorities provided under the 1947 constitution. Bandaranaike's coalition government of 1956 consisted of a political alliance of left-leaning parties and nationalist-minded communal organisations[29] with an ideological orientation towards Sinhala–Buddhist nationalism (de Silva, 2005). Alliance members had strong ethno-religious and socialist values, promoted indigenous cultural values, the spiritual philosophy of Buddhism and the primacy of Sinhala. Sinhala–Buddhist nationalism had its roots in the Citizenships Acts of 1948 and 1949 but took a

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27   Interview with retired public official (Agriculture) 12September 2018.

28   Land settlements will be discussed in more detail in Section 4 in a section on Mega Development Projects.

29   Consisting of the Sinhala Maha Sangamaya, a staunchly Sinhala nationalist movement, and the Bhikku Sangamaya, a political movement consisting of the Buddhist clergy.

decisive turn when the coalition government expressed the intention to establish Sinhala–Buddhist nationalism as a state ideology (Bastian, 2007).

The 1956 election institutionalised Sinhala nationalism in the national consciousness and was a defining moment for nationalism in post-colonial politics (Thambiah, 1992). Following the election, the Sinhala–Buddhists were poised to enjoy social welfare as a political, economic and ideological project to advance their nationalism, and the 1956 Sinhala Only Act, the 1958 Paddy Lands Act, the 1970 constitutional and the 1972 educational reforms are examples of claims that appealed to the SLFP's legitimacy audience – the rural Sinhalese.

The Sinhala Only Act

The Sinhala Only Act[30] aimed to redress colonial injustices by replacing English with Sinhala as the official language, to give it its 'due' place as the language of the majority community and enable the Sinhala majority to access public-sector jobs. The Act was a response to educated youth who had benefited from free education since the mid-1940s but could no longer obtain public-sector employment. These young people were predominantly from the new rural middle class, who had seen free education as a means to social mobility – as teachers or clerical workers in the public sector. They were educated in their mother tongue and lacked the social and economic connections to seek private-sector employment. They viewed the requirement of English as an impediment to their employment prospects. Bandaranaike's promise of making Sinhala the official language therefore appealed to them. The Act opened the doors to a previously excluded but electorally important group to obtain state jobs and to participate in national politics, thus marrying linguistic nationalism with material benefits for Sinhala speakers and laying the foundations for the legitimacy and stability of the post-independence state. [31]

At the same time, the Act alienated minorities, particularly the Tamils, who had seen English-medium education as an opportunity to obtain public-sector jobs – one Tamil politician lamented that the door to

government jobs was now closed to Tamils (*Ceylon Daily News,* 1956). The Tamil elite were not against replacing English with local languages as such, but vehemently opposed the Sinhala Only Act as an exclusionary state policy which ran counter to the principle of equity and to the state's multi-ethnic character. It was in every respect a discriminatory policy aimed at undermining the status of the Tamil people as equals in a democratic state and marking a critical fissure in their relationship with the state, while signalling to educated Sinhalese youth that they could 'expect' a job in the public sector.

Standardisation of marks for university admission

Standardisation of marks and university admission based on a district-based quota was part of the 1971 educational reforms to redress injustices suffered by the Sinhalese under colonial rule, when the Tamils were disproportionately represented at university, which allegedly contributed to their over-representation in the public sector. Sinhala ideologues alleged that in 1948, 10% of the population obtained 31% of university places and 30% of state jobs (Venugopal 2018). The belief that Jaffna Tamils in particular had benefited from expanded education and employment opportunities was evidenced in their visible presence at university, professions and state employment (Venugopal, 2018). Bandaranaike politically engineered university admission to benefit Sinhalese students at the expense of the minority Tamil students. The policy resulted in a marked drop in the number of Tamil students admitted to science degrees between 1971 and 1975 (de Silva, 1974: 131; Peiris, 2001). The reforms also benefited upper- and middle-class urban and semi-urban school students who were able to study science-based subjects (Bastian, 1985; Jayasundara-Smits, 2010). More importantly, the reforms undermined the principle of university places being allocated on merit. By masking the policy in the ideology of Sinhala nationalism it effectively rendered 'legitimate' an unfair state practice that contravened the right to fair and equal access to education (Mcloughlin, 2018a).[32] The policy was widely criticised as a 'short-sighted response to sectarian electoral pressure', which caused irreparable damage to Sinhalese–Tamil relations (de Silva, 1978: 92-93; Kalugalagedera and Kaushalya, 2017; Mcloughlin, 2018).

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30   Formally the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956, was an act passed in the parliament of Ceylon in 1956. For the Sinhalese asserting Sri Lanka's identity as a nation state, and for Tamils, it became a symbol of minority oppression.

31   Interview with political science scholar 24 September 2018.

32   University admission system involved the 'statistical standardisation' of marks scored by students of the two languages – Sinhala and Tamil – in each subject and aggregating the standard marks in order to determine admission priorities based on district quotas (which were in turn based on district population ratios).

Welfare reforms of 1972

1972 witnessed another landmark in the narrative of redressing colonial injustices. The 1970 general election saw the return of the SLFP in the United Front Alliance (UFA), with Ms Sirimavo Bandaranaike as prime minister. The UFA comprised the SLFP, the Communist Party and the Trotskyite LSSP. Despite achieving independence in 1948, Ceylon retained Dominion status.[33] The 1972 Republican Constitution established Ceylon[34] as an independent republic, severing ties with its colonial past and British influence. A fundamental failing of the new constitution was that in giving Buddhism the 'foremost place', it undermined minority rights and ignored the state's multi-ethnic character, as well as asserting that the state of Sri Lanka was symbolically Sinhala–Buddhist (de Silva K. M. 1978; Jayasuriya 2000: 100).

Several welfare reforms were introduced after the 1970 general election. The nationalisation of a million acres of land (which included about 25% of the country's agricultural land) was one of the regime's earliest policies. To address unemployment, jobs were provided in the plantations in the wet zone and collective agricultural schemes were established to address landlessness. By the early 1970s, despite the Sinhala Only Act of 1956, unemployment, particularly among educated youth, remained high. By 1971, a significant number of these youth were from rural backgrounds and had reached the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) level. Popularly referred to as the 'children of 1956', these were the children of smallholder peasants, wage workers, and small-scale entrepreneurs who sought employment in the public sector to move up the social and economic ladder. However, being 'essentially monolingual and culturally un-urbane were barriers' to obtaining work in the state bureaucracy and the corporate sector (Uyangoda, 2008:49).

The 1971 insurrection was largely a reaction by this social group, challenging the state's failure to fulfil the promises to increase employment and provide the material base for their social and economic advancement. They had embraced Sinhala nationalism in the expectation that it would entitle them to state resources as a matter of right (Venugopal, 2018).

The language of Sinhala nationalism and the nature of electoral politics had raised these people's aspirations

in ways the state did not, or could not, meet. After the violent quelling of the 1971 insurrection, the government rapidly embarked on redistributive programmes. The 1972 Land Reform Act limited private ownership of land with the intention of redistributing it. The Land Reform Act of 1975 took ownership of corporately owned land and plantations and thereby redressed the injustice arising from the Waste Lands Ordinance of 1897. While some Sinhala villagers in the Kandy district benefited from land redistribution, the state retained much of the recovered land. One positive outcome for the plantation workers was that housing and access to health and education services improved.

Political changes from 1972 onwards enabled political patronage to thrive and become embedded as a means for political parties to obtain electoral power and to build political alliances with the Sinhalese. Patronage was most visible in public-sector employment, which became a key arena for dispensing political patronage. While the public sector had become a refuge for political loyalists with jobs provided as a 'reward' for their support following independence, the 1971–1977 period witnessed an unprecedented increase in such dispensation of public-sector employment as a means to provide jobs to unemployed youth to address one of the causes of the 1971 insurrection (Uyangoda, 2008). The importance of patronage in the distribution of state resources exemplifies the changing nature of social welfare, undermining equitable access to state resources.

Under the 1970 coalition government the public sector expanded phenomenally. This was partly due to rapid nationalisation, underwritten by Soviet bloc donors, resulting in more state-owned entities which could employ political loyalists and unemployed graduates (Warnapala, 2009). The Paddy Marketing Board, the Coconut Development Authority, the Sri Lanka Transport Board and the Cooperative Wholesale Establishment were set up and absorbed many employees, often political appointees in exchange for their support (Jayasundara-Smits, 2013).

Alongside this was the capture of state institutions by the ruling elites, adding another dimension to political patronage; as patronage became entrenched political elites needed a bureaucratic structure to support it. For instance, the introduction of agricultural welfare-based services such as subsidies, extension services and

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33 Autonomous community within the British Empire later becoming known as an independent member within the British Commonwealth.

34 Henceforth renamed as Sri Lanka.

related institutions such as the Paddy Marketing Board allowed the ruling elite to capture local and regional institutions, extend patronage systems (Jayasundara-Smits, 2013) and create even more public-sector jobs. The elite capture of state institutions had expanded since the Ceylon Civil Service was abolished in 1963. Political appointments in state institutions became rife during the 1970s and illustrate how access to state resources was mediated by the political elite as a strategy to gain legitimacy.

3.6   Politics of exclusion and Tamil grievances

The Sinhala Only Act of 1956 sowed the seeds of an enduring political divide between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Further, the 1971 reform of university admission was specifically aimed at the Tamils and the competition for public-sector employment took a decisive turn when political patronage mediated access to state jobs. Since the abolition of the Civil Service in 1963, the Sinhalese had benefited from greater access to public-sector jobs and also from the educational reforms. The priority treatment of the Sinhalese and heightened forms of ethnic-based patronage contributed to the Tamils' growing alienation and frustration, which undoubtedly fed into the civil war that engulfed Sri Lanka for the next 30 years.

Section 4: welfare under threat

This section focuses on the period between 1977 and 1994 when social welfare was politically redefined from providing public goods to individually targeted assistance, new discourses of 'development' and improving people's capabilities. It also introduces the paradoxes of massive public-sector investment with the outbreak of violence against the state by the JVP in 1987 and the LTTE in 1983

4.1   Neoliberalism and a new economic order

By 1977, the centre-left coalition government of Sirimavo Bandaranaike had become unpopular. Widespread unemployment and Sinhala nationalist policies had created cleavages in Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic community, particularly among the Tamils in the north. The UNP's election promises of a devolution package to address Tamil issues, market reforms to revitalise the economy, and a proposal to replace the Westminster-style constitution with a presidential, appealed to many sectors that had suffered economic and social hardship under the Bandaranaike government. Further, J.R. Jayawardene, the UNP leader, promised an extra free ration of cereal to complement the existing 2 kg of rice, helping to secure the UNP a landslide victory in the 1977 general election.

Within two years, the government had liberalised foreign trade, removed import controls, reduced export duties and devalued the currency. It also reduced food and petrol subsidies and liberalised internal agricultural markets (Venugopal, 2015:6). In pursuing these policies, the government argued that the post-independence period had been characterised by electoral populism with unsustainable social spending, excessive state intervention and economic stagnation; and that electoral politics during this period created incentives for those aspiring to political power to hand out generous public welfare packages that taxed productive sectors of the economy to fund unproductive consumption subsidies (Venugopal, 2015: 4). Reducing or removing social welfare measures was politically contentious, as illustrated by two failed attempts to reduce the food subsidies in 1953 and 1962. There are two possible explanations. First, since the 1930s Sri Lanka's history of social welfare had laid the moral foundation for the welfare state. It hinged on the role of the state as a provider of social welfare for the poor and marginalised and also for the middle class, who viewed it as a vehicle for social mobility.[35] Second, a significant proportion of the population depended

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35   Interview with leader of LSSP 10 September 2018.

on the state for social and economic advancement. Arguably, welfare measures symbolised the state's commitment to social justice, and attempts to withdraw them, as illustrated during the *hartal* of 1953, were publicly resisted (Venugopal, 2015). Public opposition to attempts to remove the food subsidies illustrate that these had become welfare's 'sacred cow', which the government was reluctant to reverse for electoral reasons (Venugopal, 2015: 4; Kelegama, 1992). The UNP government, however, withdrew food subsidies in 1979 by making new promises, embellished in the language of development, drawing on Amartya Sen's Capability Approach which emphasises the role of the state in providing services, such as health and education, to enable people's human development to thrive. This new language of 'development' afforded a potential shift from dependence on the state to individuals for improving their capability to lead a good life, with the capability approach re-interpreted to focus on building individual human development in a new language of development. This vocabulary presented a contemporary legitimacy claim which upheld notions of improving individual capabilities over welfare hand-outs and the expansion of public services, hitherto pillars of the welfare state (Venugopal, 2018: 80).

The economic climate of 1977 was conducive to introducing these new ideologies. The UNP inherited a stagnant economy that had generated socio-political instability, democratic institutions undermined by the government's authoritarian leanings, and a proliferation of government regulations and extensive state intervention in all areas of economic life which stimulated rent-seeking and corruption (Dunham and Jayasuriya, 2001: 1). Jayawardena's conservative government used the economic crisis as a justification to dismantle the welfare state and start a process of economic liberalisation and an export-led economy (Jayasuriya, 2000: 18). The ideological and political motivations for the shift are perhaps best illustrated by the removal of the food subsidies, which Jayawardene had long opposed as a symbol of left-wing politics. Removing them was aimed at eroding the power of the trade unions,[36] as the main beneficiaries were urban workers, while also supporting the agricultural economy through higher prices (Venugopal, 2015).

From food subsidies to food stamps

The economic policy changes proposed by the UNP government were promoted by international financial organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which had been pushing for cuts in welfare subsidies since the early 1970s. The change in the policy mix from welfare and growth to one of market-oriented growth and safety nets was in accordance with the World Bank and IMF Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) (Jayasuriya, 2000: 18). The SAP resulted in the reduction of education expenditure to less than 2% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between 1981 and 1985 (Sanderatne, 2000: 114). The argument advanced by the World Bank and free marketeers was that this 'short trade-off' would allow for revenue, otherwise spent on welfare, to be allocated to investment (Jayasuriya, 2000: 179), and that welfare expenditure would compromise future growth and expenditure because there would be insufficient revenue to fund welfare (Ibid). Welfare cuts resonated with the ideological orientation of the Jayawardene regime.[37] While previous governments were reluctant to reduce or abolish subsidies for reasons of social stability and electoral success, the UNP's landslide victory and campaign promises made it possible to replace food subsidies with a means-tested food-stamp scheme. Political support for the removal of the subsidies was obtained on the promise of new rural policies to make Sri Lanka self-sufficient in rice (Jayasuriya, 2004).

The food-stamp scheme was introduced in 1979 as part of the government's new focus on targeted welfare measures, replacing 40 years of food subsidies.[38] The rationale was it would reduce the strain on the national budget and focus on the most needy, and was issued according to a 'poverty yardstick'[39] (Jayasuriya, 2000: 19). Supported by aid agencies that embraced neoliberalism, the Jayawardene government introduced far-reaching economic changes (Moore, 1990; Jayasuriya, 2000; Bastian, 2007). The concept and values of a just society were again reinterpreted, this time in the language of development, which translated into Sinhala as *sama samaja* (for the common people) and *dharmishta samaja* (righteous society). Liberal capitalism was justified on the basis that an open economy would replace

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36 Interview with the leader of the Communist Party 12 September 2018.

37 Ibid.

38 The subsidies introduced during the Second World War provided almost everybody with an income with in-kind rations amounting to 4% of the legal minimum wage.

39 People whose incomes were below a designated level.

social spending with large-scale investments in public infrastructure funded mainly by western donors.

4.2 From welfare hand-outs to mega development

The Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project

The government thus embarked on massive public investment, spearheaded in 1977 by the revised Mahaweli Development Programme initiated in 1964. The Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project (AMDP) was, and still is, the largest development project in the history of Sri Lanka, centred on its longest river, the *Mahaweli*. The project aimed to generate hydroelectric power, control riverine flooding, and provide irrigation for dry-zone agriculture, mainly paddy. A major component included land grants to settlements of landless peasants in the newly irrigated lands, as well as employment. Bilateral donors, including Canada, Japan, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, provided finance and technical expertise .[40] The project was conceptualised as a new way to redress colonial injustices, to reconnect with the peasantry by providing land for the landless and reach self-sufficiency in rice; and move away from fossil-fuel-based electricity to hydroelectric power.[41] Symbolically, the project underlined Sinhala nationalism by reviving the glories of Sri Lanka's ancient irrigation civilisation. The imagery of the village, the tank and the temple as symbols of Sinhala-ness was revitalised in the new settlements (Jayasundara-Smits, 2013). Often, their inauguration re-enacted past cultural practices (Tennekoon, 1988). Thus, development and nationalism were interlinked to recreate Sinhala-ness, from which the government hoped to reap political dividends.

Housing programmes: from a thousand to a million

There was a housing crisis in 1977, with 11.5 million of the population 15 million declared 'unofficially housed', living in shanty settlements or 'makeshift' housing (Redman, 2005: 13). Two massive public housing programmes were launched: the Hundred Thousand Houses Programme (HTHP) in 1983, followed by the Million Houses Development Programme (MHDP). Prime Minister Premadasa's interest in championing housing for the poor was inspired by his own low-caste and relatively poor urban background. In many ways, he

was an outsider among the UNP political elite and the housing programmes were an opportunity for him to build a constituency among urban and semi-urban low-income groups.

Celebrating national, albeit Sinhala, heritage through government-assisted housing projects was part of a broader government strategy to woo the majority Sinhala in its Village Reawakening or *Gam Udawe* programme. An impoverished low-caste village would be selected for concentrated development through new schools, houses and public buildings, and offering new employment opportunities. The village would be ceremonially opened on Premadasa's birthday, followed by a week-long exhibition.[42] These occasions were used to glorify national, namely Sinhala, heritage. Official speeches to commemorate the opening of a new housing scheme in the ancient city of Anuradhapura, for example, contained orations from past scriptures, recollections of the city's ancient civilisation and its devotion to Buddhism (Brow, 1990). Drawing parallels between an ancient culture and current state interventions to revive past glories and improve the well-being of the rural communities married development with welfare (Redman, 2005).

4.3 From universal to targeted assistance

In line with the government's commitment to shift from universal social welfare provision to 'safety nets', a programme of interventions aimed at the poorest and most marginalised social groups, was introduced. Benefits included houses for the homeless and cash transfers for the very poorest, the elderly and the disabled. While there was a pressing need to expand health and education to meet the needs of a growing population, there was no corresponding increase in state expenditure. Rather, targeted welfare programmes were justified as being a more efficient use of scarce state resources.

By 1991, the food-stamps programme was incorporated into a more broad-based poverty-reduction programme, *Janasaviya.* Drawing again on Amartya Sen's capability approach, the programme was designed as a 'safety net' to provide social assistance to the poor to enhance their living standards by improving their individual capabilities. It was the brainchild of Premadasa, as a means-tested intervention to reduce poverty. He challenged donors

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40   Interview with former Secretary General of Mahaweli Authority 13 September 2018.

41   Ibid.

42   Interview with former Secretary to Housing Ministry 12 September 2018.

that did not support the programme, defied the SAP conditions, and ignored his political advisers (Alailima, 1995: 14).

4.6   Public dissent

Criticism of the Jayewardene government's development–welfare approach eventually became audible. While the food stamps cost less than the food subsidies, there was no reduction in the number of beneficiaries, raising questions regarding their efficiency (Sharif, 2014). The welfare cuts and market reforms were widely opposed by left-wing political forces as a strategy to dismantle and bypass the social democratic values of the post-colonial welfare state (Venugopal, 2011:12). As the public demand to uphold the core values of social justice intensified, particularly in education, agencies such as the World Bank and IMF, which had initially supported welfare cuts, back-tracked. They sensed the potential social unrest and political instability, so the government increased education expenditure to 2.6% of GDP from 1986 to 1990, up from 2% in the previous years (Sanderatne, 2000).

4.5   Growth of patronage and elite capture os State institutions

As discussed, the Jayawardene era was characterised by steering the Sri Lankan economy towards free-market capitalism, in line with the dominant neoliberal discourse of the 1980s. The role of the state moved away from the commitment to social spending and expanded public investments. Investments were made possible by massive foreign aid for development programmes like the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Programme. The change in the role of the state and its practices was made possible through aspects of the Second Republican Constitution of 1978, namely the executive presidency and further centralisation of power.

Political patronage expanded massively, partly due to the centralisation of power and partly due to the introduction of the proportional representation[43] (PR) electoral system, which gave more weight to the rural vote (Bastian, 2009: 2). Local elites thus had to compete to consolidate political power with the rural constituency. Access to state resources as a tool for political alliance-building gained momentum as the nature of welfare changed to targeted

assistance. These two factors, coupled with political elites vying for votes, opened the door for political patronage to thrive in accessing scarce state resources. Being able to distribute state benefits such as public-sector jobs, entry to prestigious state schools, and a place on beneficiary lists on programmes like the S*amurdhi* poverty-alleviation programme, became an important means to dispense patronage benefits in return for electoral support (Wijeweera, 1989; Jayasundara-Smits, 2013). In practice this created winners and losers, including those who could access state resources through patronage networks, and excluding those with little or no access to them.

4.6   Role of external aid

Large volumes of official development assistance (ODA) to support liberal capitalism based on 'trickle-down' theories in the post-1977 era also opened new opportunities for patronage-based employment in the large development projects. Dunham and Kelegama (1994) show that public-sector employment maintained political stability by absorbing unemployed graduates and becoming a reward for political loyalists, epitomised in the following quote '*...overall objective was to reorient the economy – to alter the pattern of resource allocation and benefits, to ensure and entrench the party's political domination and settle many "old debts" in the process'* (Dunham and Jayasuriya, 2001: 3). The use of international aid as a source for patron–client relations cannot be underestimated (Spencer, 2008).

Mega development projects also enabled individual politicians to build patronage networks and enhance their political status. Inscriptions at the opening ceremonies of sub-projects in the Mahaweli programme, for instance, were in the first person (not the usual third person) and 'authored' personally by the Mahaweli minister, with his signature attached to the texts and the insignia of the Ministry of Mahaweli Development in place of the of the state insignia. '*These markers suggest that it is not just politics – or the legitimation of state power – which is at issue in these development rituals, but personal politics – legitimating the power of individuals who represent the state'* (Tennekoon, 1988: 304).

After the enactment of the 13th Amendment[44] to the constitution in 1987, some welfare services became

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43   An electoral system in which divisions into an electorate are reflected proportionately. If n% of the electorate support a particular political party, a proportionate n% of seats will be won by that party and represented in parliament.

44   Which established the Provisional Councils (PCs) and devolved limited powers to the PCs.

commodities for power struggles between the central and provincial governments. This was evident in the health sector, where central government legislators and ministers were viewed as unwilling to transfer patronage powers to local-level politicians (Hsiao and Li, 2000: 9). Patronage also enabled ordinary people to connect with local power centres (Uyangoda, 1997). For example, the *Grama Niladhari* (GN)[45] and *Samurdhi* Development Officers mediated between local communities and the local politicians and bureaucracy. The village GN's appointment is on the recommendation of the local MP. Likewise, *Samurdhi* Development Officers[46] are often political appointments. These lower-level public officials influence how welfare provisions are allocated. *Samurdh*i Development Officers can manipulate the selection of beneficiaries for targeted programmes and their implementation, and the GNs can influence who is included in beneficiary lists for welfare provisions such as *Pin Padi*[47] grants (Godamunne, 2015). Empirical evidence from SLRC Phase I indicates that in both the *Samurdh* and *Pin Padi* programmes there are entitlements based on ethnicity (Godamunne, 2015). Such practices suggest that state resources were being manipulated through procedural injustices, which benefit some social groups at the expense of others.

The large-scale development projects resulted in the establishment of new state institutions, such as the Mahaweli Authority and the National Housing Development Authority (NHDA), which again increased the potential for jobs in return for political loyalty. The prestige and magnitude of the projects also elevated the personal status of those who championed them. The Mahaweli Authority, for instance, was established to oversee projects under the AMDP and involved large-scale recruitment. The profile and status of the relevant government minister improved to the point of being a contender for UNP leadership. The same dynamic applied in the NHDA and the Urban Development Authority.[48]

The growth and expansion of patronage and elite capture of state institutions indicate that major development projects, like the Mahaweli and the housing projects, used the language of nationalism and symbols of Sinhala–Buddhism to legitimise state practices. Welfare reforms were presented in the rhetoric of development and of improving people's capabilities in order to avoid resistance to otherwise unpopular moves to gradually dismantle the welfare state. The key role of patronage in mediating access to and distribution of state resources undermined the principles of equity and justice. The resulting politics led to the advancement of a reform agenda that supported criticism of the welfare state and ideologically appealed to the UNP government.

4.7   Eruption of violent conflict

The period between 1977 and 1994 was characterised by extreme forms of anti-state violence: the separatist civil war led by the LTTE from 1983 and the JVP insurrection in 1987. These threats to the state from within both the Tamil and Sinhala populations symbolise a dual legitimacy crisis (Mcloughlin, 2018b). Some scholars argue that welfare subsidies were important for buying peace and stability, and that dismantling the welfare state unleashed latent tensions, resulting in instability and violence (Dunham and Jayasuirya, 2000); others argue that violence erupted in response to the government's market-reform programme and its increased authoritarianism and the unprecedented scale of patronage mediating access to state resources.[49] Although it is hard to establish a causal link between development and conflict , it is more likely that the outbreak of violence led by the JVP in 1987 was due to latent social and political tensions arising from the government's reform programme, electoral manipulation in the 1982 referendum[50] and increasing authoritarianism in its response to opposition. The outbreak of the civil war in 1983 was rooted in decades-long and more deep-seated political, economic and social dynamics. Both expressions of anti-state violence symbolise the state's loss of legitimacy.

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45   Public official appointed by the central government to carry out administrative duties at the village level.
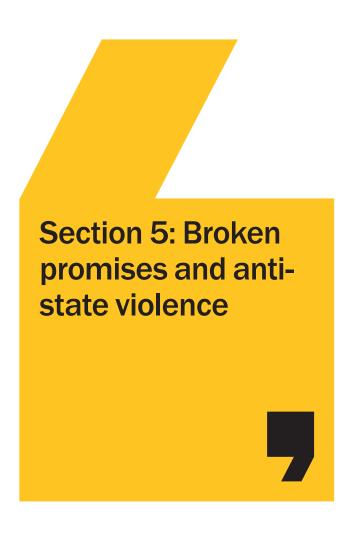
46   Village-level public officials implementing the *Samurdhi* poverty-reduction programme from 1995 onwards.

47   Programme providing small cash grants for the very poorest.

48   interview with leader of LSSP 12 September 2018.

49   Ibid.

50   The referendum gave the people the option to extend the life of parliament by six years. The referendum was unpopular as it was held to avoid holding a general election by August 1983 and to prevent the UNP from losing its two-thirds majority in parliament.

Section 5: Broken promises and anti-state violence

Attempts to reduce or withdraw welfare measures consistently met with public dissent. The 1953 *Hartal,* following the attempt to remove food subsidies, was the first symbol of mass anti-state protest for breaking its promises and welfare commitments. The *Hartal* symbolised the importance of the subsidies such that their removal would have adverse political implications (Kelegama, 2000). Education reforms led to recurrent dissent from the early years. The 1956 Sinhala Only Act was widely contested by the non-Sinhala-speaking communities, mainly Tamils, who bore the brunt of unequal access to education and public-sector jobs. The Higher Education Act of 1966, which centralised and increased state control over the universities as a way of reclaiming responsibility for education, met with resistance from university administrators who argued that it undermined their independence and freedom (Mcloughlin, 2018b). More recently, the demand to maintain free education within a framework of a right to education for all has been at the heart of the Federation of University Teachers' Associations (FUTA) 'Save State Education' campaign (Mcloughlin, 2018b). FUTA argues that declining investment in education demonstrates the state's neglect of its founding commitment to the welfare state. Indeed, its 'Education Under Attack' slogan suggests the state has failed to protect the rights and ideals embodied in the welfare contract (Mcloughlin, 2018b). Apart from these acts of mostly peaceful dissent Sri Lanka has also experienced violent conflict in the form two armed insurrections and a protracted ethnic-based civil war.

5.1   JVP insurrections

1971 witnessed the first act of violent political dissent in the form of an insurrection led by the JVP, or People's Liberation Front. The JVP represented nearly half a million youth who had become disenchanted with a state policy which provided free education but left them with no employment prospects. The widening disparity in opportunities between rural and urban youth, a pervasive sense of injustice, corruption and bureaucratic apathy, and the use of English by the urban elite as a *Kaduwe* or sword of oppression, mobilised youth to join a radicalised, militarised JVP unit (Kalugalagedera and Kaushalya, 2017: 20).

The JVP's ideological orientation was a form of Marxist nationalism used to mobilise class-based grievances of Sinhalese who had been excluded from the benefits of the welfare state. Under-privileged Sinhalese youth who depended on the state for their economic and

social advancement demanded respect for the ideals of fairness and justice underpinning the welfare state. The grievances were articulated as anti-capitalist expressions of class consciousness asserted through a radicalised form of Sinhala nationalism galvanised into symbolic acts of violence against a state that had failed to fulfil its promise to improve the lives and livelihoods of ordinary people.

The second JVP insurrection from 1987 to 1990 was also fuelled by a hybrid form of Marxist-oriented Sinhala nationalism (Venugopal, 2018). The violence which erupted in opposition to the 1987 Indo-Lanka Peace Accord symbolised opposition to the Jayawardene government's reform programme. The JVP opposed the pro-capitalist reforms, which they argued were counter to the interests of the Sinhala–Buddhist community. This second attempt by the JVP to challenge the legitimacy of the state was more sustained and violent, crippling the government for more than two years.

The two JVP challenges to the state's legitimacy ended violently, but ultimately strengthened it. The first insurrection was followed by redistributive programmes such as the two land reform acts, but the second was followed by intensified market reforms in a state characterised by repression.
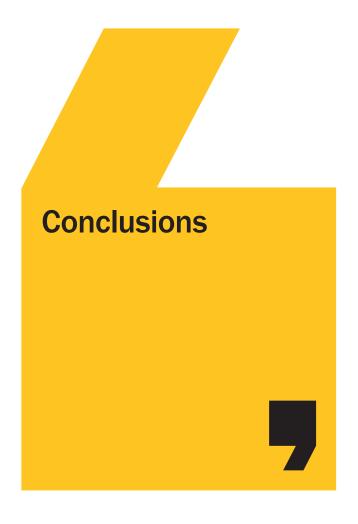
5.2   Armed separatism

At the same time, the Tamils posed another threat. As the two main political parties, the UNP and SLFP, promoted the Sinhala–Buddhist identity as the national identity, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) was formed in 1972 to pursue secession. Their challenge to welfare provision began with the land-settlement schemes mainly for

landless Sinhalese peasants on the Tamils' 'traditional homelands' in 1947 and the 1956 Sinhala Only Act, along with language and the education reforms of 1970s, aimed at cultivating the support of the Sinhala rural masses. For the Tamils, these reflected their social and political exclusion since independence (Mcloughlin, 2018). These grievances were championed by militarised Tamil youth calling for a separate Tamil state in the north of the island. The 30-year civil war that ensued symbolised the outright rejection of the state's legitimacy.

The separatist war, like the JVP insurrections, had roots in class-based inequalities but was also a response to the expansion of Sinhala nationalism and its associated claims to priority treatment. The war was thus based on multiple forms of exclusion based on class, socio-cultural, economic, ethnic and geographical factors and the denial of equal rights and entitlements. The end of the war in 2009 was followed by massive investments in public infrastructure justified as 'catching up for lost time' in relation to development. Similar to the second JVP insurrection, the state was empowered by its victory, illustrating the paradoxes of its legitimacy crises in Sri Lanka.

These challenges suggest that, within the narrow confines of social welfare, legitimacy is defined by a moral code in which ruptures, such as the *Hartal,* are forms of popular mobilisation to restore social justice. Anti-state violence is symptomatic of more complex issues in the state–society relationship, characterised by denying the universal rights of citizenship. If unfairly administered, social welfare policies can contribute to ruptures in the state–society relationship, from mass uprisings to violent conflict.

Conclusions

This study aimed to reach a deeper understanding of the relationship between social welfare and violent conflict in Sri Lanka. It asked: How did expectations of state welfare become so entrenched in people's minds in Sri Lanka? And why did the country experience a protracted civil war and two insurrections despite its long history of social welfare provision?

Through an analysis of literature and key informant interviews, this study shows that social welfare in Sri Lanka is rooted in its colonial past and came to represent the post-independence state in 1948. Its values of justice and equity informed the independence struggle, following which came the universal provision of health and education and special assistance for the poorest and most vulnerable sectors. From the 1950s, however, the original values of social justice were reinterpreted in a new language of Sinhala nationalism, ignoring the multi-ethnic character of the Sri Lankan state. By the late 1970s neoliberalism influenced new legitimacy claims in the language of 'development', and state policies drew on symbols of Sri Lanka's ancient irrigation-based civilisation to make new claims to make the country prosperous again. Veiling cutbacks in welfare spending in new promises enabled the government to pre-empt mass dissent and carry forward a programme of market reform. External aid for mega development projects enabled patronage networks to mediate access to state resources, creating new forms of marginalisation and exclusion.

The Sri Lankan state's post-independence legitimacy has been uneven, because the initial political settlement was maintained by including some social groups and excluding others in the distribution of state resources (Behuria et al., 2017), depending on which communities it needed to accommodate (Parks and Cole, 2010). By reinterpreting justice and equity as what was good and right for the Sinhalese (Beetham, 1991, 2013), policies such as the Sinhala Only Act of 1956, standardisation of examination marks and district-based quotas for university admission in 1972 illustrate how the state privileged the interests of the Sinhalese. These unfair and unjust state policies and practices were justified by needing to redress the injustices suffered by the Sinhalese during colonial times. This justification illustrates that legitimacy is a political process determined by political, social and economic forces (OECD/DAC, 2010). The grand narrative of redressing colonial injustices suffered by the Sinhalese underpinned their relationship with the political order, to the exclusion and marginalisation of others in the multi-ethnic Sri Lankan state – which ultimately found

expression in violent anti-state conflict. The two JVP-led insurrections of 1971 and 1987–1990 and the 1983–2009 LTTE-led war in the North and East illustrate that when a state is perceived to act on the basis of unfair and unjust rules that undermine its legitimacy (Mcloughlin, 2018b), violent conflict erupts.

How has social welfare provision (de-)legitimised the post-colonial state in Sri Lanka?

The study also provides insights into how legitimacy was constructed and deconstructed in post-colonial Sri Lanka. First, it highlights that responding to the Sinhalese expectations of rights and entitlements with state promises and claims was an important source of legitimacy. Social welfare was used to strengthen the state's relationship with the Sinhala people and by extension contributed to constructing legitimacy between the state and one social group. Second, it illustrates that legitimacy is a process of transformation (Alagappa, 1995), based on norms which are historically and socially constructed. The focus on establishing legitimacy with one social group in a multi-ethnic and plural community contributed to the state being legitimate and illegitimate at the same time. An inherently unstable political settlement led to mass dissent and anti-state violence. Third, it provides compelling evidence that when social interventions are integrated into politics they can be simultaneously legitimising and de-legitimising.

Limitations

As shown in studies from SLRC Phase I, legitimacy comes from different sources. This study was designed in line with SLRC Phase II and specifically with the Conceptual Framework for Theme 3, which focuses on the links between state legitimacy and service or welfare provision.

The study was mostly desk-based, building on empirical findings from the study undertaken in 2015 for SLRC Phase I and synthesises key arguments from the literature. It is not an exhaustive assessment of all social welfare programmes in Sri Lanka, using specific examples to illustrate that welfare provision was not fair or just and that some practices implicitly excluded some social groups from enjoying its full benefits.

Policy implications

The study illustrates the role of international funding for programmes that were imbued with specific socioeconomic ideologies, which implicitly contributed to the unequal and unjust distribution of public goods. From 1977 in particular, the donors' contribution to strengthening the role of powerful actors exercising exclusionary political settlements in the name of accelerating 'development' cannot be underestimated (Parks and Cole, 2010: 32). Evidence from the Jayawardene era suggests that development assistance created the conditions and new incentives for patronage and for powerful actors to emerge and thrive (Parks and Cole, 2010).

Sri Lanka offers a fascinating exploration of how state legitimacy is constructed and negotiated. The study suggests that the question of legitimacy in a plural society is highly complex and to focus only on its attainment masks the nuanced and differentiated consequences of state policy and practice.

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