

## Chapter 1

# Buddhist Fundamentalism and Identity in Sri Lanka<sup>1</sup>

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### *Why We Speak of Sinhala-Buddhist Fundamentalism*

In the pages that follow, several scholars investigate Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism in regard to Sri Lanka's ethnic and religious minorities—namely, Tamils, Muslims,<sup>2</sup> Burghers and other Christians, and how it shapes the identities of these non-Buddhist peoples. In other words, we examine Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism from the vantage of minorities who are affected by it in a variety of ways.

But before we turn to those minority views, we need to discuss why, among the various designations for the phenomenon under discussion here, we choose “Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism.” We do so, partly following the practice of writers who have isolated phenomena elsewhere in the world similar to the phenomenon explored in this volume. Thus, to speak of certain trends within Sinhala Buddhism as “fundamentalist” helps to place those trends on a larger map of movements analyzed by scholars of religion and politics. In particular, this designation enables comparisons with the wide-ranging set of phenomena analyzed by Martin E. Marty, R. Scott Appleby, and others, under the umbrella of the Fundamentalism Project. In turn, such comparisons help to draw out certain features of Sinhala Buddhism that we consider important.

In their Fundamentalism Project, Marty, Appleby, and a host of scholars explore the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism from North America to Iran to Japan. As they point out, it is difficult to find an essence of the phenomenon, especially given its manifestations worldwide. After all, it seems unlikely that religious fundamentalism among Sikhs in India and

among Roman Catholics in the United States would have much in common. Yet similarities exist between movements that do not share a common history, culture, language, or worldview. In fact, Marty and Appleby describe a variety of “family resemblances” of religious fundamentalism that appear in widely divergent cultures.<sup>3</sup> They include, in particular, a reliance on religion as a source for identity; boundary setting that determines who belongs and who does not; dramatic eschatologies; and the dramatization and mythologization of enemies.<sup>4</sup>

Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism shares many of these characteristics to one degree or another. Like most fundamentalist movements, Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism relies on religion—namely, Buddhism—as a foundation for identity. In their reading of Buddhism, Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists identify Buddhist Sinhalese as the people who have been charged by the Buddha himself to maintain and protect Buddhism. In addition, they identify the island of Sri Lanka as *dharmadipa*, the island (*dipa*) of the *dhamma*, the Buddhist teachings. The identity between the Sinhala people and the *dhamma*, based on a reading of the fifth century Sri Lankan “mythohistory,”<sup>5</sup> the *Mahavamsa*, has contributed to the notion that Sri Lanka, destined to be the island of the *dhamma*, should be dominated by Buddhists.

Variations of this view occupy one end of the spectrum of Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism and exert considerable pressure in contemporary politics. In his essay on Sarvodaya, George Bond, following S.J. Tambiah, refers to political interpretations of the *Mahavamsa* as “political Buddhism,” which he considers a manifestation of Buddhist fundamentalism. In its most strident form, political Buddhism has been deadly. As E. Valentine Daniel has noted, “Sinhalese do die and do kill because of and for their history, and especially when such a history contradicts the lived experience of myth.”<sup>6</sup> The middle of the spectrum has been occupied by a variety of people whose relationship to Sri Lanka has been shaped by mythohistory, especially by readings of their own role in Sri Lanka’s destiny. Among them are former President J.R. Jayewardene, who drew inspiration from the *Mahavamsa* as he enacted his own heroic career.<sup>7</sup> The other end of the spectrum of Buddhist fundamentalism, the more moderate view, is instantiated by the Mahanayakas’ (leading monks’) decision early in 1997 to withdraw from the Supreme Advisory Council to the president because, as they argued, President Kumaranatunga’s plan for devolution of power compromised the integrity of the Buddhist island.<sup>8</sup>

Like the other types of fundamentalism Marty and Appleby have explored, Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism is concerned with boundaries, in this case, with who is a rightful heir to the island (*dharmadipa*) and who should dominate it. There is a variety of opinions on this issue. A fundamentalist minority opinion argues that only Sinhala Buddhists are the true inheri-

tors of the island. Though this view, especially appealing in the immediate postindependence period, has never been attractive to more than a minority, it drones in the background like the *tambura*, threatening to elongate Sri Lanka's already protracted Sinhala-Tamil ethnic crisis.

The majority among fundamentalists argues that anyone can live in Sri Lanka as long as Sinhala Buddhists can enjoy cultural, religious, economic, and linguistic hegemony. Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism is thus inextricably linked to ethnic chauvinism, which privileges the Sinhala people above all others of the island. Like other fundamentalists, and like their counterparts in late nineteenth-century Sri Lanka—the period which gives rise to Buddhist fundamentalism<sup>9</sup>—Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists “retrieve, privilege, and sanction” fundamentals “as a means of protecting or forging anew an ethnic or national identity seeking validation in the postcolonial era.”<sup>10</sup>

This boundary setting (fueled by ethnic chauvinism) over who is rightful heir to *dhammadipa* is tied to ideas about purity, another facet of cross-cultural fundamentalism to which Marty and Appleby have called our attention. For Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists, their religion, and hence their island, are vulnerable to corruption by impure forces deemed hostile to Buddhism, whether internal or external. The protection of the *dhamma* thus means a focus upon purity, on only the righteous having sovereignty over *dhammadipa*. The unrighteous, whether other Sinhalas, or non-Sinhala peoples, are cast as the enemy of the island and of Buddhism. In their dependence upon religion and ethnicity as their basis for identity (for “Self” and “Other”), which includes awesome roles as defenders of Buddhism, Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists share many of the “family resemblances” of cross-cultural fundamentalism that Marty and Appleby have isolated.

While there are resemblances, however, there are also important differences. For instance, many of the world's fundamentalist movements share a missionary zeal that is, for the most part, absent in Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, unlike Christian or Muslim fundamentalism, for instance, there is no insistence on strict behavioral standards in Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism, though there have been moments in history when such standards have been imposed.<sup>12</sup>

More important, however, unlike many of the fundamentalist movements that Marty and Appleby have explored, Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists do not form a coherent, readily identifiable group. Indeed, the term “fundamentalist” is not used by Sinhala-Buddhists in contemporary Sri Lanka as a self-designation, nor has it ever been.<sup>13</sup> Rather, there are a variety of interpretations of the destiny of Sri Lanka, and the role of the Sinhala-Buddhist people in that destiny (which we consider fundamentalist in nature), that drive some Buddhist groups and individuals to respond in specific ways to events in Sri Lanka, most of which are political in nature. While many Sinhala-Bud-

dhist leaders condemn extreme fundamentalist views, and indeed are criticized for being “disloyal” to Buddhism, they nevertheless share the idea that Sri Lanka has been, and should be, a predominately Sinhala-Buddhist country.

Finally, among the major differences, we must note that there is no “sacred” text or scripture for Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists that serves as a blueprint for society as is often the case in fundamentalist movements. Yet there is a mythohistorical text—namely, the *Mahavamsa*—which, we argue, carries similar weight. Indeed, while the *Mahavamsa* is not a canonical text, it nonetheless has canonical authority. From a reading of it, Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists construe standards for an orthodox ideology about the nature and destiny of the Sinhala people and Sri Lanka. From a reading of it fundamentalists hone a dramatic eschatology about the destiny of the Sinhala people and their enemies that informs action in the present. Moreover, Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists find enshrined in the *Mahavamsa* a symbol system that they decode as having sacrosanct and authoritative status.

In her provocative comparative analysis of the Veda and the Torah, Barbara A. Holdrege contends that the category of “sacred text” needs to be reexamined. Though Holdrege focuses on the limiting nature of a definition of text that precludes text as a cosmological principle, ideas irrelevant to this study, her study of the relationship between texts and society is of import here. Like William A. Graham, Holdrege argues that scripture, broadly defined, is a “relational category, which refers not simply to a text but to a text in its relationship to a religious community for whom it is sacred and authoritative.”<sup>14</sup> Citing Graham’s work on scripture, Holdrege further contends that the study of scripture is concerned with:

The “history of effects,” which encompasses the ongoing roles that a sacred text has assumed in the cumulative tradition of a religious community both as a normative source of authority and as a prodigious living force.<sup>15</sup>

While the *Mahavamsa* is not a “sacred” scripture in the narrowest sense of the term inasmuch as it is not an embodiment of the Word (as in Hinduism or Judaism),<sup>16</sup> it nonetheless serves as a cloak of authority to wrap around contemporary views in Buddhist Sri Lanka. In regard to the meaning of scripture, then, we agree with Graham, who argues that:

No text, written or oral or both is sacred or authoritative in isolation from a community . . . A book is only “scripture” insofar as a group of persons perceive it to be sacred or holy, powerful and portentous, possessed of an exalted authority.<sup>17</sup>

Liberalizing the definition of “sacred” to mean “authoritative” (and following Graham) we maintain that sacred texts remain symbols of authoritative power only because believers position themselves in relation to them. In Buddhist Sri Lanka, the most authoritative text for the formulation of religious and political attitudes is not a canonical Pali *sutta*, but rather the *Mahavamsa*, the meaning of which may be contested by an array of Buddhist fundamentalists, but which is “powerful and portentous” for all of them. Most Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists agree that it contains fundamentals for a righteous society and world order. Along these lines, though Gananath Obeyesekere may be correct when he states that the *soteriology* of Buddhism (embodied by the Pali canon) does not possess a conception of a world order that the believer must live by,<sup>18</sup> he is also correct in asserting that Buddhist history, or, more precisely, the *Mahavamsa*, does.

Indeed, the *Mahavamsa*, functioning as a sacred text, authorizes Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism. From readings of it, Sinhala Buddhists can boast an illustrious pedigree with a prestigious history and a portentous future. Thus, while there may not be a sacred text that serves as a license for Buddhist fundamentalism in Sri Lanka, there is nonetheless a text—namely, the *Mahavamsa*—that is deemed “sacred” by those who are embraced by its living authority.

That the *Mahavamsa* redounds with political significance in contemporary Sri Lanka has not been lost on contemporary scholars of Sri Lanka. Steven Kemper’s work on the *Mahavamsa* reminds us that the past encoded in the *Mahavamsa* is a political resource in the present and that, like the authors of the *Mahavamsa*, contemporary Sinhala people “have every reason to look for continuity in the past.”<sup>19</sup> For the monk-authors of the *Mahavamsa*, drawing a connection between their school of Buddhism and the Buddha’s alleged visits to the island of Sri Lanka legitimated a particular type of orthodoxy. In the present, connection with the past authorizes a connection between religion and state. But, as Kemper has remarked, the monk-authors’ “compilation of traditions imposes on the Sri Lankan past a single and continuous point of view that is Sinhala and Theravada Buddhist, however much more complicated that past may have been in actuality.”<sup>20</sup> Locating the presence of the past in contemporary political discourse, Kemper reminds us that “the *Mahavamsa* has become the warrant for the interlocked beliefs that the island and its government have traditionally been Sinhala and Buddhist.”<sup>21</sup>

The Buddhist history contained within the *Mahavamsa* is certainly complex. Though it alleges that Tamils, along with Sinhalas, are co-founders of the island,<sup>22</sup> some modern readings of the *Mahavamsa* construe Tamils, the large majority of whom are Hindu, as the enemy. They allege Tamils are nothing but interlopers on a sacred Buddhist island. The complexity of the *Mahavamsa* is now commonplace in contemporary scholarship on Sri Lanka,

due to the work of Jonathan Spencer, R.A.L.H. Gunawardena, and others.<sup>23</sup> As they remind us, despite distortions in the fundamentalist construction of the *Mahavamsa*, the fusion of the past with the present stimulates and reinforces Sinhala-Buddhist feelings about non-Buddhist peoples.

The ramifications of these sentiments are far reaching: "this Sinhala historical consciousness that equate[s] the mythical Demale [Tamil] enemies with the Tamils in the North [has] seemed to squeeze out and deny the Tamils their right to the country."<sup>24</sup> Despite centuries of mixing between the predominantly Buddhist majority—the Sinhalas—and the largest minority—the Tamils<sup>25</sup>—Buddhists with fundamentalist ideas about history have constructed Tamils as the "Other," as threatening and dangerous to the prosperity of Buddhism and Sri Lanka. In their competition for the most glorious history, Sinhala and Tamils compete for political status and privilege.<sup>26</sup> In Sri Lanka, ideas about the past thus shape ideas about the present, and Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists set the tone.

Though E. Valentine Daniel has argued persuasively that *history* constitutes a *Sinhala* disposition toward the past and *heritage* a *Tamil* disposition toward the past,<sup>27</sup> both Sinhala and Tamils are guided by a past that is at once transformed and determined by the present. In his study of violence in Sri Lanka, Daniel notes that in one instance Tamil "militants claimed that the TULF [Tamil United Liberation Front] and its ilk only recently found it expedient to recall the existence of a Jaffna kingdom merely in reaction to Sinhala hyperbole about the ancient kingdoms."<sup>28</sup> In short, echoing Tamils before them and thus seeing the power of the Sinhala past to consolidate identity in the present, some Tamils in the present continue to respond to marginalization by finding and making their own glorious history. It is not at all coincidental that Tamil "histories" have developed in the same period that has witnessed the rise of Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism—namely, the period spanning the late nineteenth century to the present.

Here, it is worth remembering that in the latter decades of the nineteenth century—when, as Gananath Obeyesekere has argued, contemporary Sinhala-Buddhist identity was forged,<sup>29</sup> the very foundation of Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism—we find the first attempts to write a history of the Jaffna kingdom (considered by Tamils to be the highpoint of Tamil culture in Sri Lanka).<sup>30</sup> Moreover, it is not a coincidence that "the 50 years between roughly 1880–1930 . . . the critical period when Tamil ethnic consciousness was shaped and the need for history was becoming virulent,"<sup>31</sup> that a Sinhala-Buddhist identity was fashioned. Dagmar-Hellmann Rajanayagam, in a study of the meaning of history for Tamils in Sri Lanka, argues that late nineteenth-century Tamils used history, such as the history of the Jaffna kingdom, to prove that they, like the Sinhala people, had "a right to be" in Sri Lanka.<sup>32</sup> Until that time, Tamils confirmed their identity not by means of history, but by other

means, “namely religion, cultural, literary, and social.”<sup>33</sup> That is, to use Daniel’s terms, by means of “heritage.” Indeed, as late nineteenth-century Tamils in Sri Lanka responded to the force of Sinhala-Buddhist identity, they also constructed the idea of a Sri Lankan Tamil community, distinct from the Tamil community in India.

To be sure, until the late nineteenth century, Tamils did not feel the need to compile a history perhaps “because . . . they felt a common bond with Tamils in the southern Indian state, Tamil Nadu. Yet, the late nineteenth-century belief that India and Jaffna belonged together vanished with the emergence of the rediscovery of the kingdom of Jaffna.”<sup>34</sup> Tamils had to prove, in the face of burgeoning Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism, that they had a right to be in Ceylon, that they were not Indian, and that they had a right to exist as Tamils. These forces, while enraging Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists who claimed that they are the only group with an inherent birthright to the island, doubtless have fueled Tamil chauvinism in contemporary Sri Lanka.<sup>35</sup> In the case of the Tamils of Sri Lanka, we thus have a clear example of the ways in which identity and “history” can be formed in relation to people construed as a closely related Other (the Indian Tamil) and a less proximate Other (the Sinhala Buddhist), an often repeated theme in this volume. The Sinhala people, on the other hand, have used history to claim that they—rather than Tamils—are the rightful heirs to the island. For the Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalist, the Tamil is cast as an enemy in the island’s dramatic history and destiny.

To a lesser degree, Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists perceive the other minorities, including Muslims, and Burghers (descendants of European colonists and hence largely Christian), as alien and thus threatening. George Bond, in his essay in this volume, explores the ways in which the mythohistory of *dhammadipa* is used differently by majority Buddhist fundamentalists, on the one hand, and “engaged Buddhists,” on the other, as he narrates the history of the Sarvodaya movement in Sri Lanka. As Bond points out, Sarvodaya’s view of Sri Lanka’s history, unlike the majority Buddhist fundamentalist view, easily embraces the Tamil. Bond’s analysis provides an interesting lens through which to view contemporary historiography in Sri Lanka, and the way in which Buddhists compete for valid interpretations of “history.”

The fundamentalist interpretation of the *Mahavamsa*, a volume penned by a Buddhist monk or monks, is the history of the island that the *sangha*, the order of Buddhist monks, usually considers normative. In other words, the *sangha* is the repository of the history, although the laity, as much as the *sangha*, keeps this version of the *Mahavamsa*’s history alive. In fact, the ideology of Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalist factions in the *sangha* is shaped by this view of history because such a history is expedient for the laity. This is most striking in political circumstances. Bond’s essay reminds us that, just as

in other areas of the world, in Buddhist Sri Lanka fundamentalists “arise and come to prominence in times of crisis, actual or perceived.”<sup>36</sup> These crises are usually fueled by politics and center on the relationship of the Sinhala polity to the island of Sri Lanka (*dhammadipa*), as Bond’s look at Sarvodaya suggests.

Bond’s essay brings into focus another feature of Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism: it is determined not only by historical tradition and ideology, but by politics as well. In other words, Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism has political overtones, not unlike, for instance, Christian fundamentalism in the United States, though the content of the politics is different. As R.L. Stirrat has argued, the distinction between “religion” and “politics” in most contexts is “scarcely tenable,”<sup>37</sup> and such is the case with Sri Lanka generally. Stirrat points out that the distinction is “fragile,” mainly because “both religion and politics are centrally concerned with the nature and practice of power and authority despite all attempts to limit the religious to matters of spirituality, theology, soteriology or whatever.”<sup>38</sup>

As our essayists argue, Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism, used as a platform for politicians and patriots since the late nineteenth century, is concerned directly with power and dominance, especially dominance by the ethnic majority, the Sinhalas. Along these lines, Donald Swearer has argued that Sinhala ethnic chauvinism, or Sinhala dominance, is wedded to an ideology of a politicized Buddhism and a dangerously simplified racism, which foreshadows “fundamentalistic Sinhalese Buddhism.”<sup>39</sup> The relationship between ethnicity, religion, and politics that Swearer charts was so striking in the 1980s and early 1990s that today it makes more sense to talk about “Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism” than to talk about “fundamentalistic Sinhalese Buddhism.”

While characterizing fundamentalism in South Asia by focusing upon the relationship between ethnicity and religion, George Matthew argues that all types of fundamentalism—Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist—“mixing with political power, veers around homogenisation, and racial superiority.”<sup>40</sup> As we shall see in the essays here, Matthew’s ideas are illustrated by ethnic chauvinism in Sri Lanka, especially the brand that views “Sinhala” and “Tamil” as monolithic categories, and connects them to a variety of fundamental political and economic “rights.”

This homogenizing tendency has helped to guide Sri Lanka’s most recent history, especially as it manifests itself in discourses on Sinhala unity and Tamil unity. Regarding the former, as Stanley J. Tambiah rightly has pointed out, in Sri Lanka “the need for and benefits of Sinhala national unity has been an ever recurring theme in Sinhala political discourse for over a century.”<sup>41</sup> Many of the essays here suggest that the goal of this unity has been the “protection of Buddhism and the recovery of the entire island” for the Sinhala



people.<sup>42</sup> As Oddvar Hollup argues, Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists, shaped by the mythic traditions of the *Mahavamsa*, see themselves in opposition to a monolithic Tamil community, bound together in a cosmic drama that essentializes both “Sinhala” and “Tamil” identity.

Rajan Hoole has noted that, even though there is diversity among Tamils in Sri Lanka, some Tamils, especially the separatist LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), perceive a uniform Tamil identity. We find this tendency among mainstream Tamils, as well, especially in the political views of such great Tamil leaders of the past like Ponnambalam Ramanathan, and also G.G. Ponnambalam, who helped to foster a Tamil nationalism.<sup>43</sup> According to Hoole, such a view “may be safe and politically correct, but utterly sterile. To maintain this position, diversity has to be ignored, and the South [or the Sinhala government] characterized as essentially and permanently demonic.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, Hoole warns against essentializing Tamil, and, for that matter, Sinhala, identity. Hollup makes a similar point. He argues that Sinhala Buddhists, who tend to lump Tamils into one group—the enemy—are undermining the separate identity of the Plantation or Estate Tamil. Echoing Hoole’s warnings, Hollup’s research suggests that Sri Lankan Tamil extremists, like Buddhist fundamentalists, tend to deny the plurality of the Tamils of Sri Lanka. Instead, they are inclined to speak for all Tamils, despite the fact that Plantation (Estate) Tamils do not identify themselves with the larger Tamil community, and have remained geographically distinct from it. As E. Valentine Daniel has argued, “Estate Tamils think of themselves as an ancient people belonging to an ancient civilization, with an ancient heritage. However, these Tamils see their claim to this great heritage as being openly monopolized by Jaffna [Sri Lankan; Ceylon] Tamils.”<sup>45</sup>

In other words, as Hollup’s essay alleges, many Plantation Tamils are comfortable remaining at the margins of the Tamil community, especially if it would ensure preserving their cultural, linguistic, and social distinctiveness. Thus, some Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalist ideas about Sri Lanka’s largest ethnic minority ironically are shared by Sri Lankan Tamils, who, as Hollup suggests, have political and economic reasons for creating a monolithic Tamil identity and pushing for unity. In its insistence upon a unified identity, much like fundamentalist movements elsewhere, Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism (and Tamil ethnic chauvinism, for that matter) “manifests itself as a strategy, or set of strategies, by which the beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group.”<sup>46</sup>

Completing his definition, Matthew adds that “fundamentalism of the majority breeds fundamentalism of the minority and vice versa.” Victor de Munck dilates on this theme as he recounts the development of Muslim fundamentalism in Sri Lanka. As de Munck argues, some Muslims have responded to Muslim assimilation of Buddhist practices—itsself a reaction to

Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism—by forging a larger, transnational identity that has fundamentalist overtones. And as the history of the past few decades in Sri Lanka suggests, such competing fundamentalisms often result “in strife between communities and even civil war.”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, since 1983, Sri Lanka has experienced civil unrest that is unparalleled in its recent history. Pradeep Jeganathan’s essay plays on these themes while exploring an alternative Tamil response to Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism—namely, assimilation.

Thus, while some Tamils in contemporary Sri Lanka, in response to Sinhala “claims,” have constructed a political discourse based on “rights,” and some have actually fought and died for those rights, others have found optional ways of coping with marginalization. Jeganathan’s poignant essay on violence suggests that the 1983 riots in Sri Lanka against Tamils have forced some Tamils to assimilate Buddhist sociocultural practices, practices linked to the idea of *dharmadipa*. Not all Tamils have responded to violence in this way. Yet, Jeganathan’s essay reminds us of the power of Sinhala political discourse, linked as it has been with Buddhist fundamentalism, especially in the 1980s and early 1990s. The variety of Tamil responses to Sinhala claims warns us that today in Sri Lanka there is no such thing as a singular, monolithic Tamil identity, nor does history suggest that there ever has been.

Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism (though not always identified as such) has captured the attention of many scholars in Sri Lanka and elsewhere in recent years.<sup>48</sup> Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism has yet to be explored, however, from the vantage of the Buddhist fundamentalist’s Other—that is, the minority communities of Sri Lanka—and a number of nonfundamentalist, or traditional, Buddhists. In this volume, an ensemble of scholars from a variety of disciplines addresses what it means to be (1) a non-Buddhist, and a non-fundamentalist Buddhist, in contemporary Sri Lanka, and (2) the ways and extent to which minority identities are fashioned by Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism.

### *Sinhala-Buddhist Fundamentalism and Alterity*

Though all minority religious and ethnic communities are the Other for the Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalist, they are not all the same in regard to their Otherness. Some of them, including a large population of Buddhists, and Tamils who are predominantly Hindu, are what we call the “near Other—” that is, people who Buddhist fundamentalists would agree share a common origin—both groups hail from India—yet nonetheless pose a threat to purity and order. In these cases, as well as in others, we shall see that circumstances tend to determine who is a near Other, and who is less proximate.

Some Sri Lankan minorities, such as the Muslims, are, for Buddhist

fundamentalists, the “far Other—” that is, people who are perceived, and who perceive themselves, as being from a totally different cultural tradition. Some, such as Buddhist Burghers, are the “Other’s Other,” or people alienated from their own community, which itself has been a constant far Other for Buddhists since the inception of the nearly exclusively Christian Burgher, or Eurasian, community in the early 1500s. Moreover, in the same way that Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists perceive minority groups as alien and threatening, each minority group likewise sees Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists as the Other. To illustrate, Stirrat here calls our attention to the ways in which global and local forces in the late nineteenth century created a significant Other for Sri Lankan Catholics: the Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalist. In addition, Sri Lanka’s minorities note gradations of Otherness among themselves: for instance, Plantation Tamils regard Sri Lankan Tamils as their near Other, similar in some ways, yet distinctive enough to warrant boundaries, as Hollup argues in his essay.

Jonathan Z. Smith has remarked recently that issues of Otherness, and similarity,<sup>49</sup> for that matter, “are particularly prevalent in religious discourse and imagination.”<sup>50</sup> His observations provide a useful starting point for our study of Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism in Sri Lanka. Like the essayists in this volume, Smith locates in religious conflicts the language of similarity and alienation and, more importantly, “moments when proximity becomes more a matter of territoriality than of thought.”<sup>51</sup> One does not have to search too far into Sri Lanka’s Buddhist history to find this notion exemplified—namely, in some ideas about the Sri Lankan Tamil, a relatively near Other of the Buddhist fundamentalist. As some Sinhala people “recover” the entire island for their own, and Tamil separatists fight in the north for their homeland, Eelam, both spurred on by (quasi-religious) texts, blood is spilled and territories are claimed.

As Chandra R. de Silva points out, however, some Buddhists—even fundamentalists—feel solidarity with Sri Lankan Hindus, whose religion they construe, like their own, as having been disenfranchised during the colonial era. The Hindus’ Tamil ethnicity, however, evoked quite a different response from de Silva’s informants. In this case, religion is one thing and ethnicity quite another. In de Silva’s study we are reminded once again of the tension between religion and ethnicity in Sri Lanka, especially its perilous results.

Smith might refer to the Tamil as the Buddhist fundamentalist’s “proximate,” rather than near, Other.<sup>52</sup> The implication, however, is the same: people who are thought of as being “near neighbors or descendants,”<sup>53</sup> or near, even in terms of power relationships, are more troublesome than a far Other.<sup>54</sup> In the case of the Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalist, Tamils, who, like themselves, are cultural heirs of India, are more troublesome than a far Other, such as a Burgher or a Muslim. In other words, people who are entirely different

pose a lesser threat than people who are similar. Put differently, theories of difference are really theories of Self, and the less different a people are—the more recognizable they are—the more easily they can be “projected internally.”<sup>55</sup> This projection then becomes a critique of the Self, and ultimately locates Otherness within. Along these lines, as Smith argues, “The deepest intellectual issues are not based upon perceptions of alterity, but, rather, of similarity, at times, even, of identity.”<sup>56</sup> As de Silva suggests in his essay on monks, Buddhist fundamentalists in Sri Lanka often construe themselves in terms of their most proximate Other—the traditional Buddhist of the golden age of the *Mahavamsa*'s past—exposing their deepest vulnerabilities.

In regard to the idea of the near Other, the relationship between Tamils and Muslims in Sri Lanka warrants further investigation. As K.M. de Silva reminds us,<sup>57</sup> most Muslims and Tamils have much more in common than Tamil, the language they share. For example, the 1920s and 1930s witnessed an alliance between the Muslims and Tamils “based . . . on Muslim fears of Sinhala domination.”<sup>58</sup> One spokesperson (among many) in those decades was not a Muslim, but rather a Tamil, Ponnambalam Ramanathan. Indeed, “Ramanathan as representative of the Tamil community was often inclined to talk expansively on behalf of the Tamil speaking peoples of Sri Lanka, a categorization which enabled him to place Muslims within the scope of his tutelage as legislator.”<sup>59</sup> Yet, Ramanathan held views about Muslims in Sri Lanka that many Sri Lankan Muslims considered unorthodox. He argued that the Moors of Ceylon were Tamils in “nationality” and “Mohammedans” in religion, which offended Muslims and resulted in a refusal of his leadership,<sup>60</sup> especially because, as Victor de Munck argues here, Muslims have usually invoked religion as the primary identity referent.

At other times, Muslims have pitted themselves against Tamils in no uncertain terms. Perhaps the most notable incident revolved around the language debate of the 1940s, when A.R.A. Razik, a Muslim legislator, voted with Sinhala legislators to make Sinhala the sole national language.<sup>61</sup> No longer could the Tamils take Muslim support for granted in their political campaigns. This cycle of rejection and affirmation of Tamil leadership created a pattern that continues to the present. Remarks made (prior to the 1994 presidential election) by Mr. A.H.M. Ashraff, leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, suggest as much.

In a letter to V. Prabakaran, head of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Ashraff suggested that “If the Tamils and the Muslims could work some sort of an agreement at a time when the presidential and general elections are around the corner, it would . . . definitely create a headache for majority community chauvinism.”<sup>62</sup> In short, Ashraff urged Prabakaran to unite with Muslims to create a minority identity powerful enough to battle Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism, echoing S.J.V. Chelvanayakam's Tamil Federal Party's

platform in the 1940s and 1950s to “promote the unity of the Tamil speaking peoples regardless of region.”<sup>63</sup> In urging for unity, Ashraff clearly identified with Tamils—whom he perceives as his most proximate Other in terms of identity—rather than one of the other minority communities.

Though similarities between Self and Other can be disastrous, just as ethnic strife between Tamils and Sinhala indicates, Ashraff’s agenda suggests that they can also be used to unite rather than to divide. In fact, the idea of uniting the non-Sinhala minorities and using such a union as a counterpoise to Sinhala Buddhism has had a continuous history since the late nineteenth century. This is clearly seen in G.G. Ponnambalam’s 1938 “50–50” campaign which, in many ways, was a reaction to universal suffrage, that guaranteed “the permanent Sinhalese domination in politics.”<sup>64</sup> In his “50–50” campaign, Ponnambalam argued that half of the legislature should be represented by Sinhala, while the remaining half should be comprised of the other communities of the island.<sup>65</sup> Making himself spokesperson for all minority interests, Ponnambalam sought solidarity in Otherness, among communities that traditionally maintained separate identities.

Victor de Munck explores further Ponnambalam’s attitudes about minority identity and the way that it has affected Muslim self-perception. De Munck uses Ponnambalam’s ideas as a springboard for understanding contemporary Sri Lankan Muslim attitudes on what constitutes a “true” Muslim. On the one hand, as de Munck suggests, some Muslims, in response to Buddhist fundamentalism and Sinhala claims, have assimilated obvious Sinhala-Buddhist sociocultural practices as a strategy for survival in a Sinhala-Buddhist “nation.” Using “Tactics of anticipation [of violence],” or Jeganathan’s description of a similar phenomenon among Tamils, some in the Muslim minority community of Sri Lanka assimilate to survive. Others, however, have responded by purging their religion of alien accretions and identifying with a pan-Arabic Islamic fundamentalism, unsullied by Buddhism and even “unorthodox” Muslim traditions, including Sufism.

De Munck’s essay, much like Jeganathan’s, points out that there has been a variety of responses to being considered the Other: some hinge on assimilation; others, on alienation. Yet, as both de Munck and Jeganathan suggest, while the responses differ, the origin is the same: Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism and its power to shape minority identities in Sri Lanka. In de Munck’s essay, the local and global forces that shape identity in Sri Lanka come to the fore in a narrative that focuses on an often overlooked group of Sri Lankans—namely, Sinhala-speaking Muslims. Due in part to the exclusive image of a Sinhala-Buddhist nation that has been forged by Buddhist fundamentalists, some Muslims in Sri Lanka have developed a pan-Arabic identity, while others have done the opposite: they have forged an identity that has accommodated obvious Sinhala-Buddhist features. Despite these differences,

both types of Muslims have internalized the status of Other that Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists have deemed for them.

In his survey of the way in which the Other is used as an intellectual tool in shaping identity, Smith finds three distinct models. They are: 1) the metonymical model; 2) the model of center and periphery; and 3) the model of unintelligibility.<sup>66</sup> The first two models have special relevance for our study. According to Smith, the metonymical model critiques the Self via the “naming” of differences, and, thus, similarities, between Self and Other. In this model, then, the group makes statements about itself while naming and discerning alterity. In short, it claims: “I am [or have; or can do] what you are not [or do not have; or cannot do].” De Silva’s essay on monks’ ideas about Buddhism exemplifies the metonymical model of alterity; de Silva explores the ways in which monks with fundamentalist concerns discern who is a good Buddhist (monk) and who is not. Implicit in their often conflicting attitudes about who is an authentic Buddhist, and thus an authentic Sri Lankan, is a concern for naming—that is, for identifying what is distinctive about Self and Other, and what might be similar. In other words, in analyzing the Other—that is, monks and Buddhist laypersons they deem unrighteous—these monks say much about themselves.

We see this same tendency also among the contemporary Sinhala-Anglican community, which continues the process of indigenization that it began in the late 1800s. As Tessa Bartholomeusz argues, Sinhala Anglicans today, more so than their counterparts at the turn of the twentieth century, find more that is similar in the wider Sinhala, and thus Buddhist, community than they see that is different. This self-critique is shared by some Catholics of Sri Lanka, who also have been indigenizing for several decades.

Much like Sinhala Anglicans, Sinhala Catholics (often consciously so) conflate religious and ethnic identity in their search for indigenous idioms to represent their faith. To illustrate, in an address at the 1994 Seminar of Inculcation organized by the Catholic National Commission for Liturgy and Culture, a Sinhala priest linked Catholicism to “Sinhala culture” via Theravada Buddhism. Referring to a historian who addressed the seminar earlier on, the Catholic priest praised the historian and reiterated the latter’s claims:

He [the historian] vividly presented the simple and serene features of the Sinhala Culture (sic) that has been guided and molded by the Theravada Buddhism. Religion is a powerful force in the formation and development of culture. We see that Christian culture is very close to our Sinhala culture.<sup>67</sup>

In other words, the Catholic speaker argued that there are striking similarities between Catholicism (a religion) and the Sinhala people (a linguistic/ethnic

group), who have been guided by Buddhism. He continued by linking Buddhism to nationalism and, finally, to Catholicism. In the process, he praised the most famous Buddhist revivalists in Sri Lanka's modern history:

At the beginning of the 20th century patriots like Anagarika Dharmapala, Valisinghe Harischandra and Piyadasa Sirisena brought about a national renaissance. This national awakening [had] its effect on the Catholic Church as well.<sup>68</sup>

Indeed, as Bartholomeusz argues, the "national" and Buddhist awakening has stimulated Christians to rethink their position in Sri Lanka. Stirrat explores this theme further as he addresses, among other things, the controversy over the "Voice of America" in Sri Lanka. As Stirrat makes clear, Catholics in Sri Lanka, like other religious minorities on the island, constantly negotiate their identity depending on the context. In the present context, where being Sinhala means being empowered, Sinhala Catholics have responded to Sinhala nationalism and Buddhist fundamentalism by asking what it means to be an "authentic" Sri Lankan and an "authentic" Catholic.

In the process of their naming, moreover, contemporary Sinhala Catholics, and Anglicans, for that matter, assess their own values while they assess the values of Buddhists; in other words, their naming, or discovering who is Other, is in fact a reflexive process. In these specific cases of Catholic and Anglican indigenization, the similarities are not perceived of as threatening, even though, as Stirrat has pointed out elsewhere, there are notable exceptions.<sup>69</sup> Rather, for the indigenizing Sinhala Anglican and Catholic, both of whom have construed a shared cultural heritage between Christians and Buddhists, the similarities often can be empowering. Regarding the former, it is ironic that indigenizing Sinhala Anglicans allege that they, rather than a Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalist group, first used the phrase "Jathika Chinthanaya" to describe the process of preserving Sinhala culture.<sup>70</sup> This recalls Tamil-Christian attempts to define and preserve Tamil culture long before Tamil Hindus took the initiative.

As Rajanayagam points out, nineteenth-century Tamil Christians could not rely for their identity on their religion or on a sacred text.<sup>71</sup> Like Sinhala Anglicans, Tamil Christians have had to rely on secular or cultural institutions for their identity, no matter how much those institutions have been linked to another religion. For the Sinhala Anglican, the preservation of Sinhala culture includes the incarnation of Christ among the Sinhalas, while for the Buddhist fundamentalist group, the Jathika Chinthanaya, it means the opposite. In fact chances are that fundamentalist Buddhists such as the Jathika Chinthanaya will continue to consider Anglicans, and Catholics, for that matter, peripheral Sri Lankans, at best.

In the most usual manifestation of the model of center and periphery, inhabitants of cities are contrasted with the hinterlands.<sup>72</sup> The center/periphery model can be viewed more generally to include contrasts between “a thickness of cultural similarity in the center, relative to the observer, [and] a thinness, an alienation, at the margins.”<sup>73</sup> This observation can be meaningfully expanded to include the Eurasians, or Burghers, of Sri Lanka. Buddhist Burghers and Christian Burghers illustrate the duality of center/periphery inasmuch as the latter have placed their renegade relatives at the margins of their community. From the point of view of the Christian Burgher, the margins of the Burgher community, where Sinhala and Burgher meet, are chaotic, weak, and have the possibility of corrupting bloodlines, of polluting.

Yet, while Sinhala Buddhists normally view the Burgher community, on the whole, as being peripheral to Sri Lankan culture, they have accommodated Buddhist Burghers, who have moved to the center of Sinhala-Buddhist life. In fact, the margin that the Christian Burgher fears is projected positively by the Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalist. There, the Burgher convert to Buddhism represents all the positive features of his or her new religion. Because converts have been culturally separated from popular Buddhism, they have the ability to represent true Buddhism, unaffected by the corruptions of rituals and other accretions deemed unauthentic. The battle over what constitutes authentic Buddhism continues to the present day.

Buddhists themselves have been aware that critics of Buddhism might be suspicious of converts and of the authenticity of their faith. In the late nineteenth century, one writer addressed this problem and advised his readers that Buddhists should “not be misled by the enemies of Buddhism who wished to sow disunion (sic) by spreading about the false statement that European [and, by extension, Burgher] Buddhism was distinct and opposed to Ceylon Buddhism.”<sup>74</sup> Rather, according to him, the religion of the convert, created at the margins, was the most unadulterated form of Buddhism. The margin between Sinhalas and Burghers indeed has been viewed differently by Buddhist Sinhalas and Christian Burghers: while it is a powerful place for both, for the former it has the potential to be positive and strong, while for the latter, it can be negative, weak, dangerous, and chaotic. Christian Burghers’ notions about the periphery of their community recalls Harjot Oberoi’s ideas about the construction of religious boundaries. Reflecting on religious identity in India, Oberoi reminds us that while groups negotiate identities, “a norm is constructed, and the world outside the norm is viewed as deviant, marginal, threatening or unimportant.”<sup>75</sup> Bartholomeusz ferrets out these themes as she explores what it means for Burghers to live on the margins of Sinhala-Buddhist society.

Recalling Mary Douglas’s insights about the agents of pollution,<sup>76</sup> the margin is safe for the Buddhist fundamentalist only if it can be contained.



Generally, what Buddhism in Sri Lanka has been able to integrate, domesticate, and thus contain and make its own, it does not distinguish as polluting. In other words, Sinhala Buddhism defends against disorder through containment.<sup>77</sup> Gananath Obeyesekere and Richard Gombrich, in their 1988 study of Buddhism in Sri Lanka,<sup>78</sup> provide numerous examples of the ways in which Sinhala Buddhism has integrated, or “contained,” elements of Tamil-Hindu culture, normally considered dangerous. Among these is the domestication of Hindu devotionalism or, more specifically, *bhakti*. In its assimilation (and eventual transformation) of *bhakti*, Buddhism has contained, tamed, and purified it; it has removed its threat of danger, of pollution. Of course, pollution—ritual, cultural, or otherwise—is relative. Regardless of the type of pollution, however, its transformation (or avoidance) “is a creative moment, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience.”<sup>79</sup>

Sinhala Buddhism creates and re-creates itself each time it integrates aspects of the Other, which, left uncontained, would pollute. As the 1994 ordination of a Tamil as a Buddhist monk indicates,<sup>80</sup> Sinhala Buddhism can contain Tamils themselves. Once domesticated, even the Tamil loses his or her impurity. Sinhala Buddhism thus creates order out of disorder and, as the essays in this study suggest, is richly organized by “purity and contagion.”<sup>81</sup> In regard to this, Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism, then, is the dimension of Sinhala Buddhism that locates disorder, impurity, and contagion, and attempts to remedy it.

Though Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism has clear ideas about who belongs, and who does not, and thus is heavily safeguarded, these ideas are not rigid. In short, Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism provides a scope for change in its process of containing, or avoiding, the Other. Its ideas about pollution thus say something about social life in Sri Lanka. Indeed, its reflections upon danger and purity are also reflections upon the Other, and thus what is Other within. Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists are not unique in their polarization of the world as pure/dangerous and Self/Other, or even center/periphery. As the essays in this study indicate, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, and the other minorities of Sri Lanka too employ these dualisms to assess themselves and those around them. Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists, however, set the tone, which began to resonate loud and clear in the late nineteenth century under the British.

### *Sinhala-Buddhist Fundamentalism: History and Destiny*

As John D. Rogers in a recent study cautions, we should be wary of interpretations of ethnic studies that place great importance on the role of the

British in the construction of new identities in South Asia.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, colonial identities and boundaries between a variety of groups in Sri Lanka began to form long before the advent of the British.<sup>83</sup> Doubtless, this process continued well into the British period. Yet it nevertheless is the case that in the late nineteenth century (the zenith of the British colonial period), Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalist ideology, which perhaps had been brimming in the pre-British period, sharpened the process of identity formation.

Living, as many fundamentalists do, in an “increasingly alien world,”<sup>84</sup> a number of Sri Lankans in the late nineteenth-century empowered themselves to fight against what they perceived to be the dissolution of traditions and orthodoxies. As Bartholomeusz has argued,<sup>85</sup> however, those Sri Lankans who challenged disruption were not limited to Sinhala who were Buddhist. Rather, the sources reveal that Tamil Hindus and even Burghers, as well as a few Sinhala Christians,<sup>86</sup> mobilized their support with Buddhists. In other words, the late nineteenth century exemplifies the fluid nature of Sinhala-Buddhism’s politics. At that time, Buddhists actively united with non-Buddhist Sri Lankans in their struggles against Christian proselytization. In short, in the late nineteenth century, though there are clear exceptions, there was at least some interpenetration and overlapping of religious identities. Put differently, under the British, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims shared a similar identity: they were all non-Christians. A Buddhist Burgher, whom we shall meet again later in this volume, provides in his writings a description of this late nineteenth-century religious solidarity:

Buddhist, Hindu and Mohammedan have united in one common purpose, and soon the missionaries will have to pack up their trunks, and go for converts to the slums of London and Liverpool, or to the desert of Africa.<sup>87</sup>

Such rhetoric suggests that in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, Otherness was determined by religion. At the same time, the polarities of colonial/colonizer and native/alien—or, center (colonial; native)/periphery (colonizer; alien)—determined Buddhist revivalists’ sympathies. In this way, colonialism generated religious solidarity. For instance, in commenting upon the control of a large number of English schools by Christian missions, one Buddhist writer identified with his Hindu neighbor: “By this act the Christian clergy received a tremendous accession of power, and the national freedom of the Buddhists and Hindus has since been threatened to be destroyed.”<sup>88</sup> In short, Buddhists perceived that non-Christians shared their grievances. But, as our discussion on alterity thus far suggests, identity can have perilous results. Indeed, in the twentieth century, it has. While colonization generated solidarity in Sri Lanka, it nevertheless sharpened divisions.

In resisting Christian conversion, late nineteenth-century Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims began to articulate religious identities that would soon be conflated with national, or ethnic, identities and nationalisms. In an extremely complex process, religion—as a mode of identity—became linked to “being Sinhala,” “being Tamil,” “being Moor,” and “being Burgher.” The newspaper and magazine articles of the period abound with examples of this conflation. For instance, in an article that praised Tamils for their work in the Buddhist education program, a Buddhist writer nonetheless highlighted the Otherness of the Tamil, especially his or her “nationality”:

While thanking those two gentlemen above-mentioned, who, though of quite distinct faith and nationality, have come to the assistance of the school, I hope Mr. Tudor Rajepakse, of *our faith and nationality*, will also cheerfully come forward.<sup>89</sup>

In this way, Buddhists consciously began to push for a distinct and separate religious and cultural identity. And it was in their schools that Buddhists with fundamentalist ideas, like religious fundamentalists elsewhere, propagated their fundamentalist faith and worldview.<sup>90</sup> In the wedding of religious and cultural identity, ethnicity and its relationship to the nation were brought to the fore. To illustrate, in a description of an English-medium journal of Buddhism launched in 1889, the journal’s editor linked ideas concerning the territoriality of religion to ethnicity and the island. He explained that the journal’s purpose was “to be the exponent of the views of the Sinhalese people with regard to matters which concern their national religion.”<sup>91</sup> The Buddhist revival that these ideas helped spawn has been documented amply.<sup>92</sup> Here, it is worth remembering that in the late nineteenth century the *Mahavamsa*—the charter for Buddhist fundamentalists—(once again) entered Sri Lankan consciousness, helping to shape views about Buddhism, the Sinhala people, and their link to Sri Lanka.

Turner’s 1837 translation of the Pali *Mahavamsa* into English, republished in 1889, supplied Sinhala Buddhists with what they needed to argue that, like the British, they too were Aryan, and like the British, they could vaunt an incredibly sophisticated history.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, if the publications of the period are any indication, some Buddhists perceived Christians to be a most pernicious enemy. Buddhists argued that Christianity was responsible for corrupting the Buddhist culture of the island. One writer summed up the problem thus:

Many Buddhists in this Island, especially in our towns, have fallen victims to the demon of intemperance—the most terrible of the curses for which we have to thank our European conquerors.<sup>94</sup>

Yet, as Buddhists began to boast against Europeans a superior cultural and religious heritage, non-Buddhists—even if they had worked for the elevation of Buddhism—moved from the center, to the periphery, of who was “alien” and who was not. Though a few Tamils, such as the Honorable P. Ramanathan, a Tamil judge who extolled the work of Buddhists, were extolled by Buddhists,<sup>95</sup> ideas that non-Buddhists threatened the Buddhist order were beginning to be honed.<sup>96</sup> Non-Buddhist Sinhala people were not exempted from this critique. In fact, one 1889 writer, scandalized that a Christian Sinhala represented the Sinhala people in the Legislative Council, voiced his criticism of Christian Sinhala in no uncertain terms:

At present two-thirds of the inhabitants are *entirely unrepresented*; for the so-called representative of the Sinhalese “community” is a member of a hostile faith, and by that very fact . . . is unfitted to act for the Buddhists.<sup>97</sup>

For the 1889 Buddhist, “Christian Sinhala” was an oxymoron. In his world-view, Buddhism and Sinhala were inextricably linked; even a Christian who claimed to be Sinhala was regarded as alien, as Other.

The 1889 correspondent’s ideas were based loosely on an interpretation of the *Mahavamsa* as a record of the exploits of Buddhist kings, who in a glorious age had protected the island from alien forces, including Tamils, which contributed to fundamentalism. So did visions of Sri Lanka as a sacred isle. Tamil “historians” at the same time argued that the “Sinhalese are a mixture of indigenous tribes, Aryans and Dravidians, more Tamil than anything else.” In fact, “[one work] openly suggest[ed] that Sinhalese and Tamil are in reality one, viz. Dravidian.”<sup>98</sup> Thus, much like other religious fundamentalist movements, in Sri Lanka they began as an ideological battle for control over the way Sri Lankans would view not only their past, but their future, as well.<sup>99</sup> As de Silva’s contribution to this volume suggests, the past that fundamentalist Buddhist monks “imagine,” doubtless based on readings of the *Mahavamsa*, reminds us once again how this process has continued to the present.

Unlike other religious fundamentalisms, however, Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism in Sri Lanka did not begin as a reaction to the challenges of modern science, or modernity, per se.<sup>100</sup> In fact, in the late nineteenth century, those who planted the seeds for contemporary Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism argued that Buddhism, unlike Christianity, for instance, is congruent with science.<sup>101</sup> In her discussion of Christian fundamentalism in America, Nancy Ammerman points out that one of the greatest challenges nineteenth-century Christians faced was science.<sup>102</sup> How to reconcile the “word of God” and the findings of science became a preeminent concern of laity and clergy,