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Aragalaya –
Stories about unity and conflicts in a crisis-hit Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Sri Lanka battled a civil war for 26 years during a time when the majoritarian rule discriminated and marginalized Tamils from the rest of the society; the war ended in 2009 but numerous societal problems remained in the country. The Easter bombings in 2019 took the lives of 269 people, once again ethno-nationalistic powers and politics became of great importance within the country's political sphere. The Rajapaksa family convinced many Sri Lankans that they could fight tensions in the country and uphold national security and Gotabaya Rajapaksa won the presidential election in 2019. In 2022, Sri Lanka faced the worst economical crisis since gaining independence in 1948 and many thousands Sri Lankans took the streets to protest against corruption and the and disproportionate use and even misuse of the country's resources.

The aim of the thesis is to collect stories from Sri Lankans in Colombo from various religious, ethnic and cultural groups and to analyze their views on democracy, religious, ethnic and cultural identity and their views of possibly perceived unity. The overall aim of this study is to uncover the voices of those directly affected by the situation in Sri Lanka during the spring of 2022. Participatory observation and qualitative interviews were used to collect the empirical data of the study.

Massive protests (that came to be called 'Aragalaya' - the Sinhalese word for struggle) took place from March 2022 and transformations within the political sphere in the country due to the economical crisis during that time enabled deep insight and generated interesting perspectives from interviewees that participated in the research. The empirical data is analyzed through the theoretical perspectives of marginalization theory and theory on democracy and protests.

Keywords*: Sri Lanka, Aragalaya, unity, conflict, religion, ethnicity, culture, minorities, democracy, protests, economic crisis.*

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"Every citizen is entitled to the freedom of speech and expression including publication."[1]

"The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana, while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Articles 10 and 14(1)(e) in The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka."[2]

"The root cause of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka lies in the failure of successive Governments to address the genuine grievances of the Tamil people."[3]
Quote by a member of the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission, *Minority Rights Group International*, 2014

1. Introduction

The original plan for this study was to examine the politicization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and its affects on religious, ethnic and cultural minorities. After arriving in Sri Lanka in the middle of March 2022 it became clear that larger problems were occupying people's mind - the country was facing the worst economic crisis since gaining independence from the British in 1948.[4] 'Aragalaya' is the Sinhalese word for *struggle* and became the name of the nationwide protests that emerged during 2022.[5]

In this study, voices from the ones struggling on different levels in Sri Lanka will be presented and an examination of how individual's perceive unity, their views on democracy and the future relating to the social and economic crisis in the country. Previous and current problems in Sri Lanka are not exclusively religious, cultural or ethnic but a combination of them all and further combined with the social and economic crisis the country is facing making the matter highly complex.

The 26-year civil war between the Sinhalese and the Tamils ended in 2009 but numerous problems in the country exists with minorities being oppressed and the Government's disinclination of other religions' existence as well as the lack of reconciliation work in the country. However in 2022, in the wake of the deep economical crisis a 'new' unity among citizens could be dimly seen. Sri Lanka's constitution states that 'every person is entitled freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice'.[6]

[1] The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, chapter III, Article 14 (1)(a),
[2] The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, chapter II Article 9, Chapter III, 10,14 (1)(e), Revised Edition – 2021. Published by the Parliament Secretariat.
[3] Neil DeVotta, *Routledge Handbook of Autocratization of South Asia*, 2021:288
[4] *The Guardian* (2022-04-09) "'We're finished': Sri Lankans pushed to the brink by the financial crisis".
[5] *The Indian Express* (2022-07-20) "This Word Means, Aragalaya: Sinhalese word for 'struggle', now synonymous with the movement that led to the fall of the government of Sri Lanka".
[6] The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, chapter III, Article 14 (1)(e), Revised Edition – 2021. Published by the Parliament Secretariat.

Further, the constitution states fundamental rights to nondiscrimination on the basis of religion.[7]

Former president Mahithripala Sirisena, in power until 2019, before now also former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa attained office, affirmed this by saying that "the freedom to follow any religion is guaranteed in Sri Lanka, as religious philosophies help people live more virtuous and disciplined lives".[8] However, religious, ethnic and cultural minorities are being marginalized in society and the evident need of reconciliation as well as inclusion exists.[9]

Since the end of the civil war and the election win of Gotabaya Rajapaksa over Maithripala Sirisena in 2019, tensions in the country have been on the rise. Individuals from the Rajapaksa family held multiple top political positions in the government in 2022, Gotabaya's brother Mahinda Rajapaksa held the presidency before Maithripala Sirisena, and Gotabaya held political power before he took office as president. Numerous legal reforms have been implemented in order to undermine minorities' freedom, civic society and people's ability to express opinions.[10]

Covid-19 reportedly caused the government to enhance the use of discriminating policies and made it mandatory to cremate dead bodies - a violation of Islamic burial rules. Sri Lanka stands out as the only country in the world that implemented this controversial move during the pandemic, ignoring WHO guidelines that allowed both burial and cremation for Covid-19 victims. WHO stated that the act of cremation should not be state-imposed but actually a religious choice. Sinhala-Buddhist discipliners used their power within the government to get their anti-Muslim agenda through to suppress the Muslim community, sending the message that Muslims in Sri Lanka need to accept the majority's rule if they wish to live in the country.[11]

Multiple factors can be seen as contributing to the Sri Lankan economic crisis. Covid-19 and travel ban had a great impact because Sri Lanka's economy heavily relies on tourism, and when the war in Ukraine limited tourists from Ukraine and Russia from travelling as well as a deep decline in the two countries' importing end exporting of products. Prices increased globally heavily affecting the already troubled Sri Lankan economy. Tax cuts made by the Rajapaksa government in 2019 had impact too, not to mention the abolishment of all chemical fertilizers (which lasted for a year, ending early 2022, causing shortages in grows) and the devaluing of the Sri Lankan rupee in 2022 together with irresponsible money printing.[12] The foreign currency reserves were severely lowered while heavy loans had been taken from mainly China and India for years. Power cuts in the country were apparent; they extended by the week leading to scheduled blackouts for up to 13 hours.[13] In March 2022 the bad situation became worse and after months of protests even them escalated and protest could be seen throughout the country and many people, regardless of ethnicity or religion were to

[7] The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, chapter III, Article 12, Revised Edition – 2021. Published by the Parliament Secretariat.
[8] Neil Devotta (2018) "Religious intolerance in postcivil war Sri Lanka", *Asian Affairs*
[9] Minority Rights Group, "Sri Lanka – current issues"
[10] "Country – Sri Lanka". *Freedom House statistics*.
[11] Roshni Kapur (2020) "Covid-19 in India and Sri Lanka: New Forms of Islamophobia" *Middle East Institute*
[12] *The Economist* (2022-03-19) "Sri Lanka's government is stoking inflation and indignation"
[13] *Al Jazeera* (2022-03-31) "Sri Lanka: How is an economic crisis affecting people?"

some extent united in demanding President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his brother Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa to resign. The Sri Lankan rupee was in the beginning of April reported to be the worst performing currency in the world so far in 2022.[14]

1.1 Research questions

- How do Sri Lankans in Colombo view democracy in the country?
- How do Sri Lankans in Colombo perceive religious, ethnic and cultural identities in Sri Lanka?
- How do Sri Lankans in Colombo possibly trust that the current perceived unity would last after the crisis?

1.2 Aim and purpose

The overall aim of the study is to reveal the voices of individuals directly affected by the governance in the country, as much previous research does not allow for individuals' subjective perception of issues in the country to transpire. The aim is to examine how religious, ethnic and cultural identities may be re-formulated in the economic and social crisis that developed for years and to capture participants' perspectives on democracy. The ambition is to gain an in-depth understanding of how individuals in Sri Lanka are re-thinking their cultural, ethnic and religious identities due to the crisis in country.

By scrutinizing how the majoritarian governance in Sri Lanka causes religious minorities to be marginalized instigating further tensions and how the crisis of 2022 brought various groups closer to each other, a deeper understanding aims to be obtained. The analysis will be structured around the research questions. The study aims to look at contemporary issues and historical aspects while dealing with participants' information/stories, the long civil war's impact and the lack of successful reconciliation work. All of these aspects will be of importance for the analysis and conclusion.

1.3 Outline

The introduction aims to explain the intentions of the thesis as well as the research questions that the study will evolve around. After this, previous research is presented - divided into different sections aspiring to present an understanding of earlier events shaping Sri Lanka's history and present.

The next section concerns the theoretical framework, which is used to analyze the empirical data. Following the theoretical framework the method section is presented followed by the empirical data, consisting of interviews and the participatory observation. The following section is the analysis where the research questions are answered and the theoretical framework is used to analyze the empirical material. The next section is the discussion and the conclusion where the findings are discussed and elaborated. The final section concerns future research showing what next steps can be taken in order to understand further developments in the country.

[14] Financial Times (2022-04-06) "Sri Lanka's currency plunges to the world's worst-performing in economic meltdown"

1.4 Delimitations

Limitations were needed already in the section concerning previous research, this was difficult to decide upon because so many things have happened in the country that led the country to where it is today. Due to aiming for concreteness and because of the limit of text this had to be done and hopefully not too much space for unanswered questions exists because of this.

Due to the limitation and because of the importance of having the translator participating during some of the interviews, all participants were interviewed and the participatory observation was done in the capital of Sri Lanka, Colombo. Many of those I was in contact with during my stay in Sri Lanka emphasized the fact that lives look profoundly different in different geographical regions of the country, however due to the time frame of the study and because of the need to limit the study - all interviews were made in Colombo.

Some observations that were made in Sri Lanka are not included in the text but served to deepen the perspective of the situation in the country. After leaving Sri Lanka, political changes continued but because of the rapid changes and because of the lack of closeness to those developments and the closeness to individuals providing such information, detailed information of some recent events will be partly left out. A new president was instated after the 9th of July when Gotabaya Rajapaksa ultimately resigned, but information regarding this linked to political changes after this will not be included in this thesis.

2. Previous research

This section will provide background information about Sri Lanka on a wide range of levels, main focus being the political aspects. The protests in the country started by asking for better living standards and fair distribution of economical resources but evolved into pure political as the demands were ignored by the government. Hence, much focus lies on the country's political background in order to present information important for understanding what to a certain extent created the economic and social crisis in 2022 and to understand the empirical data.

2.1 Demography and ethno-nationalism in Sri Lanka

The Sri Lankan census by the Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka in 2011 showed that Sinhalese counts for 74,9% of the population, Sri Lankan Tamils 11,2%, Indian Tamils 4,1% and Muslims 9,3%. Religious affiliation counting showed that Buddhists are 70,1%, Hindus 12,6%, Christians 7,6% and Muslims 9,7%. Due to the country's demographics, necessary actions against majoritarianism should have been initiated but were not prioritized and instead politicians used Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism to attain office.[15]

Some anti-minority policies were instituted in 1973 when the Tamil culture originating from Tamil Nadu in India was prohibited, Tamil civil servants were forced to learn Sinhala in order to gain promotions, Sinhalese civil servants were appointed positions in Tamil areas and the two ethnic groups were forced to interact in Sinhala. The court systems in the country instituted 'Sinhala only' in all regions, including Tamil regions. Areas with a majority of Tamils were offered scarce development support and Tamils were required to score higher to be able to enter universities, and a system was initiated as a safeguard for rural Sinhalese students to get into universities more easily. The effort to relocate Sinhalese from the south to the north was done to modify the northern parts demographics.[16]

2.2 The political sphere

The political development in Sri Lanka is colored by many decades of the same families ruling the country. The Sinhala-Buddhist majority has always been most important in shaping the political landscape. A presentation of how the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna rose as a political party will be presented in order to explain background regarding the massive protests in the country in 2022.

2.2.1 Sinhalatva and majoritarianism

In Sri Lanka a certain type of political Buddhism is found which is defending the integrity and sovereignty of the state itself, also known as *Sinhalatva*. Central characteristics of the Sinhalatva are ethnic homogenization and political centralization. *Mahavamsa* is a sacred text that authorizes the Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism and has functioned to uphold the belief that the island and its government have traditionally been Sinhala-Buddhist.[17] John R. Hinnels and Richard King describe it as a totalitarian form of political Buddhism. These ideologues reverse

[15] Neil DeVotta, Routledge Handbook of Autocratization of South Asia, 2021:287
[16] DeVotta, 2021:287-288
[17] Tessa J. Bartholomeusz, Chandra R. de Silva. *Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka.* SUNY Press, 1998:5

civil values into military values in a given military context. According to Hinnels and King they operationalize ethnic values where religious values are included, in order to preserve, rather than to achieve, the definitive goal - to unify the country. The unitary state is essentially presented and emphasized in the Sri Lankan Constitution.[18] [19]

Buddhism and the Sinhala language merged as two forces to promote the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism and through governmental pressure using the language it was used to marginalize the Tamil minority. The ethnocentric language policies and the economic and cultural injustice posed threat to Tamils and added fuel to extremism. However, the civil war conflict was not considered a Buddhist versus Hindu matter even when Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists claimed that the Tamil separatism was threatening Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Ethnocentric policies embedded in linguistic nationalism contrived a privileged status of Buddhism and the Sinhalese side-incorporated religion as part of a just war-narrative.[20]
According to Neil DeVotta, Hindus are seen as rivals in Sri Lanka and Muslims are commonly marginalized as 'intruders' even though the vast majority converted to Islam a very long time ago an have co-existed with other religious believers for centuries. The ruling system that favor the majority group, the Sinhala Buddhists, are creating a rather depraved situation for Tamils and lately also for Muslims, which is at risk of getting worse due to recent development.[21]

Sinhalatva is understood as a form of Sinhala-Buddhism that is ethno-nationalist, a form of political Buddhism or Buddhist fundamentalism, originally with a strong base in the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). Sinhalatva requires the Sinhalese tradition to be monopolized by the state. A farther militant organization within the movement was established as a political party Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU, National Heritage Party) and gained nine seats in Parliament in 2004, all nine of these seats were taken up by monks, it is rather unconventional in regards of the *Vinaya* (Buddhist rules for life for nuns and monks) that monks take up seats as Members of Parliament.
The idea of Sinhalatva states that no other groups are included in power sharing and a multi-ethnic society is firmly rejected. The Sinhalatva has the support of the constitution to defend the concept supporting a unitary state.[22] Through the nationalistic perspective, the *Mahavamsa* understands Sri Lanka as the sacred island set apart to preserve Theravada Buddhism and according to the *Mahavamsa* the Sinhalese are assigned by the Buddha himself to preserve and defend the island from any foreign invaders who are threatening the sacredness. The state should be primarily concerned with this preservation and should be guided in the sacred mission by the *sangha* (the Buddhist monastic community).[23]

However the strength of the Sinhalatva does not come only from the number of public persons affiliated with the ideology but majorly from the silent consent of persons in civil life. The Sinhalatva and its ethno-nationalism focus on those who question these ideas and the sovereignty of a unitary state are seen as traitors and anti-national.

[18] Hinnels & Kings, 2007:134-136
[19] The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, chapter I (1), Revised Edition – 2021. Published by the Parliament Secretariat.
[20] Hinnels & Kings, 2007:135
[21] DeVotta (2019) "Secularism and the Islamophobia Zeitgeist in India and Sri Lanka", *Middle East Institute*
[22] Hinnels & King, 2007:135-137
[23] B. M, Shirley (April, 12, 2016). "The Bodu Bala Sena: Sinhalatva Origins and International Influences" *South Asia Journal.*

Significantly, Buddhism in Sri Lanka has been operationalized in a certain way in order to use it for political goals in a military context.[24]
Majoritarianism distinctly causes minorities to feel anger and in Sri Lanka it was merely a question of *when* the younger Tamil population felt the need to protest. A commission named the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission was established to analyze the civil war. A member of the Commission was quoted in the *Minority Rights Group International* from 2014 stated the following: "The root cause of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka lies in the failure of successive Governments to address the genuine grievances of the Tamil people". Neil DeVotta concludes that it is debatable whether calmer ethical conditions in Sri Lanka could have prevented certain leaders to promote authoritarian governance, but claims that it is indisputable that the ethnic conflict enabled such authority to transpire.[25]

Neil DeVotta also argues that former President J. R. Jayewardene who partisan changed the constitution 16 times between 1978 and 1988 designed it to allow the United National Party (UNP) to remain in power and enabled him to act arrogantly. Former president Mahinda Rajapaksa ended the war in 2009 and the success attitude allowed him to autocratize his leadership. These two presidents' power behavior pushed Sri Lanka towards autocratization, and president Gotabaya Rajapaksa (in office until July 2022) subsequently enhanced this development by expanding militarization and majoritarianism. Jayewardene used his power to assault the ones who disagreed with him and used criminals from the UNP's labor union to beat protesters and harass journalists and even Supreme Court justices. Political opponents were also under threat and Jayewardene aggravated riots focusing on anti-Tamil notions during 1977 and 1983, instigating the forthcoming civil war.[26] Ranasinghe Premadasa, Dingiri Banda Wijetunga, and Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga preceeded Jayewardene as elected presidents between 1989 and 2005. Wijetunga was assassinated in 1993 by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and therefore only held office for 18 months. According to DeVotta; Premadasa and Kumaratunga though abusing power, their governments can be considered to have been illiberal rather than autocratic - this came to change as Mahinda Rajapaksa took office after Kumaratunga.[27]

2.2.2 Political system

Sri Lanka's political system has been shaped by the history of being a British colonial possession, dating from 1801. The British attempted to develop a representative government in the country through an 1833 constitution that created a legislative council. This council was largely powerless, and resigned in 1864 when their disapproval of the British government was ignored. The British attempted several other constitutions to satisfy the public in 1910, 1920 and 1924 but they were unable to provide local governance by the native population. The 1931 Constitution was finally able to meet the needs of more authority to native elected representatives who gained power over domestic affairs. During the following forty years the British attempted to give more independence and authority to the island hoping to transfer it to dominion status within the British Empire. On February 4th in 1948, Sri Lanka

[24] Hinnels & King, 2007:135-137
[25] DeVotta, 2021:288
[26] DeVotta, 2021:288
[27] Devotta, 2021:289

declared independence from Britain but continued to remain a commonwealth of the Empire. Not until the 16th of May 1972 the nation was able to declare itself an independent republic.[28]

Under the British rule, Tamils from the northern parts of the country gained some influence through disproportionate access to education. The Tamils managed to influence the creation of a new constitution in 1978 aiming to equalize Tamil and Sinhala ethnic groups. Since then, the Constitution has been amended several times, the 17th amendment that was passed in 2001 was meant to ensure more transparency with the creation of a constitutional council with representation of both executive and legislative branches, the government, the political parties and the public - this came into effect after a constitutional failure in 2000. The constitution was designed to create a federal system, which would grant Tamil demands of a separate state. Hopes were evident that this constitution would end the civil war, however this was not the case, it would not happen until 2009. The president at this time, Mahinda Rajapaksa as mentioned before used the success attitude in order to introduce an 18th amendment designed to expand the already extensive executive powers overruling the 17th amendment. This proposal was adopted by the Parliament in September 2010 over a great popular opposition, giving the President the power of appointments.[29]

The 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka revolves around a president who carries broad executive powers. It has 172 articles and recognizes Buddhism as the state religion and it guarantees a broad range of fundamental rights. It further establishes the duties of the state and its citizens. It is the task of the state to establish a democratic socialist state, to ensure the distribution of wealth, oversee economic development and to raise educational and cultural standards. It must commit itself to the decentralization of the government and the promotion of national identity by eliminating discrimination. In return, citizens' duty is to foster national unity by abandoning their personal rights in order to achieve and ensure racial and religious harmony and protect the public health and morality.[30]

The political power in Sri Lanka is divided between the legislative, executive and judicial branches, the executive holds most power. The President is the Head of the State, the Government and the Armed Forces.[31] The legislature of Sri Lanka consists of one chamber with a Parliament of 225 members who are directly elected for a 5-year term. Members of the Parliament elect a Speaker, Deputy Speaker and a Chair of Committees. The President holds the power to at any time dissolve the Parliament and this naturally weakens their authority towards the Executive branch.[32] [33]
Sri Lanka's judicial branch is comprised of a Supreme Court, a Court of Appeals, a High Court and other courts created by law. The task of these courts is to enforce and protect the people's individual rights. The Chief Justice, members of the Supreme Court and Justices of the High Court are appointed by the President and may hold

[28] Constitutionnet, Sri Lanka
[29] Constitutionnet, Sri Lanka
[30] Constitutionnet, Sri Lanka
[31] The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, chapter VII, (30)(1) Revised Edition – 2021. Published by the Parliament Secretariat
[32] The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, chapter X, Revised Edition – 2021. Published by the Parliament Secretariat
[33] Constitutionnet, Sri Lanka

office for 65 years. The Supreme Court is the only institution in power to review the constitution and its jurisdiction extend to concerns of fundamental rights, final appeals and election issues. Additionally, it holds the power to review actions of members of Parliament and is authorized to advise the Parliament in the legislative process.[34] [35]

2.2.3 The rise of the SLPP and Gotabaya Rajapaksa

SLPP/SLPFA won majority in the 2019 election and was only founded the same year by the Rajapaksa brothers, previously affiliated with SLFP where Mahinda Rajapaksa had been politically active since 1970, as the youngest ever elected to parliament only 24 years old.[36] In the Ninth Parliament of D.S.R of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna, Sri Lanka People's Freedom Alliance (SLPP/SLPFA) holds 145 seats. [37]

After Sirisena Mathripala won the election in 2015, Mahinda Rajapaksa formed the Joint Opposition (JO) consisting of a group of members of Parliament and political parties - they introduced a new political party, the SLPP. The party contested during the 2018 Local Government Poll and won a landslide victory gaining 44.65% of the votes, 232 of 315 local government bodies winning over PM Ranil Wickeremsinghe's UNP (United National Party) (Ranil was appointed president in July 2022) and Sirisena Mathripala's SLFP (Sri Lanka Freedom Party). The party also took votes from the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), traditionally accepted as the third force in the country. SLPP's victory was a reflection of the people's frustration with the unity of UNP-SLFP and their failure to deliver what was promised. Mahinda Rajapaksa's role as a front figure for the SLPP contributed to its victory and his support gave confidence for the JO to break away from the SLFP. All this made it clear that the SLPP would present their own candidate in the upcoming president elections.

After Mahinda's previous defeat 2015 and the fact that he already held office for two-terms (the limit according to the 19th amendment), his brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa would instead be the nominee. At this time his son Namal Rajapaksa was an aspiring future candidate but did not hold the constitutionally required age. Gotabaya's position had been strengthened for years by groups of intellectuals and professionals not affiliated with political parties but rather with civil society and they had been lobbying for his candidacy. Gotabaya's background is in the military as an officer involved in the battles with the LTTE awarded him bravery awards for his service to the country. He did hold some political posts prior to his candidacy for president, as a Secretary of Defense and Urban Development and Planning between 2005 and 2015. His services in the military combined with his time serving as minister gained the people's confidence that he could handle both national security and economic development. The SLPP's election program was introduced in October 2019 at the Nelum Pokuna Mahinda Rajapaksa Theatre named 'The Ten Principles of Inclusive Governance' with years of consultation with public individuals, trade unions

[34] Constitutionnet, Sri Lanka
[35] The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, chapter XV, Revised Edition – 2021. Published by the Parliament Secretariat
[36] *Britannica* – "Mahinda Rajapaksa"
[37] Parliament of Sri Lanka, Party composition of the Parliament

and specialists from a variety of sectors.[38]

It was clear from the start that the SLPP was confident to take the lead in the political sphere in Sri Lanka, they early formed an alliance on their own terms with the SLFP which is one of the oldest parties in the country. Initially, Sirisena Maithripala was meant to be the common candidate and later the candidate for PM, however this was ignored by the party and instead Gotabaya was nominated as president and Mahinda as the PM.
The SLFP attempted to convince the party to change its political symbol 'the lotus bud', known as a trademark for Mahinda Rajapaksa and the party, but the SLPP managed to gain SLFP's support without agreeing to this. Since 1988 the president election has witnessed a tendency where most voters vote against the present government and therefore Mahinda was important as he was in opposition and Gotabaya's perceived ability to deliver was important too.
Criticism has been directed towards the UNP-led government as they promised to deliver good governance but failed to do so and bribery and corruption was able to continue along with poor economic development. In 2015, officers and politicians from the UNP were involved in fraud involving the Central Bank costing the country approximately US$11 million. The people's dissatisfaction was clearly reflected in the Local Government Polls in 2018 where Wickeremsinghe's UNP got only 34 of 315 of the local government bodies and Sirisena's SLFP got only nine. The government led by Sirisena Maithripala was also heavily criticized for not for understanding and using the information from foreign intelligence agencies regarding threats of the Easter bombings in 2019. That event made national security one of the most important issues within Sri Lankan politics.[39]

Early on as Gotabaya attained office, concerns were raised that he in fact was unable to distance himself from the rigid Sinhala-Buddhist base and many feared that his anti-liberal and nationalistic leadership would spark ethnic tensions and divisions, which it evidently did. Many Tamils accuse Gotabaya for war crimes and both domestic and international court cases were filed in order to prevent him from running for office. One filed in September 2019 actually challenged the validity of his Sri Lankan citizenship but was dismissed by the Appeal Court. Some cases filed against Gotabaya Rajapaksa has paradoxically led him to gain support as they have been seen as an undermining of those who liberated the country from the civil war.
Though Sri Lanka is a multi-party democracy, the country is still dominated by two parties. In the election of 2019 the SLPP simply replaced the SLFP as the main challenger. Rajapaksa's party's popularity should be seen as evolving from multiple factors, the poor performance of Sirisena's government leading to the downfall of the SLFP being one. His perceived ability to get things done as well as his connections with civil society groups and professionals from different sectors of society made

[38] Chulanee Attanayake & Roshni Kapur, (15/11-2019) "Sri Lanka's Presidential Election 2019: Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna a Key Contender", *Institute of South Asia Studies, National University of Singapore*

[39] Chulanee Attanayake & Roshni Kapur, (15/11-2019) "Sri Lanka's Presidential Election 2019: Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna a Key Contender", *Institute of South Asia Studies, National University of Singapore*

people believe that he was going to deliver a new political culture.[40] The 22nd of October 2020 the Parliament of Sri Lanka passed the 20th Amendment with 156 votes of 225 in favor. This came after a two-day debate, overruling the Opposition's request for a minimum of four days deliberation. The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) highlighted that the Amendment was going to reverse many of the reforms that were implemented in the 19th Amendment adopted in 2015 under Sirisena's governance. It introduced judicial appointment procedures, which are incompatible with principles of justice as the Parliamentary Council came to consist only of political actors. It functions under the 20th Amendment only to advise the President in appointments to the judicial branch and other key public institutions. It gives the President the autonomous power to appoint all judges of superior courts. According to international standards appointments should not be entrusted only with the executive. The ICJ expressed regret that the Government had suspended Standing Order 50 (2) which requires all bills to be referred to the relevant Sectorial Oversight Committee for consideration prior to being debated in Parliament and the group's Legal and Policy Director called it appalling that Constitutional Amendments which such far reaching consequences of the constitutional governance was rushed in the way it was.[41] The two term-limit for the President was restored 2015 in the 19th amendment after Mahinda Rajapaksa had it removed in 2010.[42] Though Gotabaya's intentions had been to once again remove this limit it was never done.[43]

2.2.4 Bodu Bala Sena (BBS, Buddhist Power Force)

The Bodu Bala Sena should be understood shortly in order to comprehend one heavy force close to the Rajapaksa brothers promoting Sinhalese nationalistic Buddhism in Sri Lanka creating division and religious, ethnic and cultural tensions. This group can be understood as an extreme nationalist organization, which broke away from the right-wing nationalistic organization Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), previously mentioned. BBS stands out as the most prominent group among the post-war, anti-Muslim Buddhist-nationalistic groups and is led by monks. It became important in 2014 when a rally near Aluthgama, in the southwest of Sri Lanka, turned violent leading to the death of several Muslims and Tamils. The BBS has not yet taken responsibility for the riot - they claimed to have been trying to calm the crowds, though evidence from videos and statements made by the group imply that they were encouraging hostility towards Muslims.

According to B. M, Shirley in his article in South Asia Journal, *The Bodu Bala Sena: Sinhalatva Origins and International Influences,* the BBS uses a rhetoric both adaptive and innovative that construct Muslims as a threat and they do not draw this construction merely on earlier Buddhist nationalist movements in the country. They use some parallels from previous threat to the country by the LTTE but are seemingly using global narratives of Muslim threat from both other Asian countries – Myanmar and India, and from the Western "War on Terror". Further, the article suggests that

[40] Chulanee Attanayake & Roshni Kapur, (15/11-2019) "Sri Lanka's Presidential Election 2019: Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna a Key Contender", *Institute of South Asia Studies, National University of Singapore*

[41] International Commissions of Jurists (ICJ). "Sri Lanka: newly adopted 20th Amendment to the Constitution is a blow to the rule of law".

[42] Britannica. "Recontruction of Sri Lanka"

[43] The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, chapter VII, (31)(2) Revised Edition – 2021. Published by the Parliament Secretariat

policymakers in the country should work actively to undermine BBS's production of the Muslim threat and to disassociate the Muslim population from these narratives.[44]

One exceptionally dangerous allegation made by the BBS is that the Muslim community in the country is that it provides an environment where jihadist movements can thrive. The BBS use bold rhetoric and extreme images to elucidate the threat that Muslims poses to the country. Gnanasara Thero, the BBS leader - as mentioned linked this threat to the previous threat of the LTTE and has stated: "Muslim extremism could be far worse than LLTE terrorism if authorities do not take necessary measures to prevent it from spreading". The organization draws on threat narratives from the Hindutva movement in India and the 969 movement in Myanmar. The BBS claims that Muslims are a demographic threat to Sri Lanka due to their higher birth rates, their unethical conversions of Sinhalese Buddhists and because of the fact that they practice polygamy, the latter is something that BBS has said will cause problems for Sinhalese men because it will simply not be enough women to marry. The article by Shirley summarily implies that the BBS are deliberate in their agenda of reconstructing the violent Buddhist nationalism seen during the civil war into a post-war era with the idea of a new posing threat to the country - the Muslims in Sri Lanka.[45]

2.3 The civil war and the necessity of reconciliation

Tamil Federalists replied to the Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarian development initiated by the SLFP and the first full scale ethnic riots in the country broke out lasting for five days in May 1958. An influential Buddhist monk who sought more political power but was turned down by Bandaranaike orchestrated the shooting of the Prime Minister, and the real soul of Sinhala-Buddhism emerged. The process of reversing civil peaceful values into military values is complex, both the Sinhalese and the Tamils are strong cultures who utilized violence in order to reach political goals. Both sides were originally strongly influenced by *Ghandism* with restrictions originating from these ideas - the attitude towards silent martyrdom of Christian tradition and the consistent distancing of all forms violence, including self-defense violence and the embracement of contemporary concepts of human rights. However, as the conflict unfolded during 26 years, the antiviolence philosophy seemed to have been forgotten on both sides.[46] During the following years multiple political reforms were implemented and conflicts transpired in the country, in 1972 the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) was born - the precursor of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).[47]

Throughout the 1980's the conflict became more complex, the LTTE grew into a violent organization and in 1989 *The Economist* described Sri Lanka as 'the bloodiest place on earth'. President Chandrika Kumaratunga who held office 1994-2005, tried negotiations through letters with the LTTE, but attacks on the Lankan Navy boats led to retaliation by Kumaratunga who launched an offensive that seized the LTTE's capital city Jaffna. Kumaratunga refused to give up the city and did

[44] B. M, Shirley (April, 12, 2016). "The Bodu Bala Sena: Sinhalatva Origins and International Influences" *South Asia Journal.*
[45] B. M, Shirley (April, 12, 2016). "The Bodu Bala Sena: Sinhalatva Origins and International Influences" *South Asia Journal.*
[46] Hinnels. R, John & Richard King, *Religion and Violence in South Asia: theory and practice,* 2007:133-134
[47] Jayatilleka, D. *Sri Lanka's North-South Crisis – Long War, Cold Peace*. Katuwana, Homagama, Sri Lanka: Karunaratne & Sons (Pvt) Ltd. 2014:13

everything in her power to hold the line. In 2000, Velupillai Prabhakaran, the LTTE leader, did win some ground but was eventually stopped by the Sri Lankan Army and Navy in a deadly battle. In 2001, when the conflict had ravaged the country for nearly 20 years the two major forces were the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. A new peace process, the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA), was initiated in 2002 with Wickremasinghe as PM at the time and idealists were cautiously optimistic whereas realists meant that this would merely grant the LTTE legitimacy.[48] LTTE attacked the sacred Bodhi-tree in Anuradhapura in 1984 and the Tooth Temple in Kandy in 2001 and by the ethno-nationalist ideology these acts were seen as an act against the pure teachings of Buddhism.[49]

When Mahinda Rajapaksa was elected President in 2005, the CFA was operational only in name, the LTTE assassinated Sri Lanka's foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar proving that peace talks between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE had ended in pure failure. Rajapaksa attempted another round of negotiations in Geneva in 2006 but the LTTE abandoned the negotiations. An attack on Gotabaya at that time serving as the Secretary of Defense made it clear that the CFA did no longer exist in Sri Lanka even though the West wanted to believe it still did. Final battles took place in 2009 and the LTTE was militarily defeated in May the same year and they ceased to exist as a military force for the first time since they were founded in 1976.[50]

2.4 Societal discrimination and governmental abuse of power

Sri Lanka's Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) has been used for over 40 years to enable prolonged arbitrary detention and to obtain false confessions through torture and for targeting minority communities and civil society groups. Criticism in the country as well as internationally caused President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to publish a bill to amend the act on the 27th of January 2022. According to Human Rights Watch and the EU, proposed amendments were not included therefore the act still violates international human rights.[51] [52]

The PTA was passed in 1979 as a temporary measure. It allows authorities to arrest civilians without a warrant for unspecified "unlawful activities" and it authorizes holding suspects in detention for up to 18 months without producing them in front of a court. Some have been held on remand for years awaiting trial and statistics shows that many have been tortured in custody and when convictions fall they often rely on confessions produced under torture.[53]

Since Gotabaya Rajapaksa attained office in 2019 the PTA has been used to target political opponents and members of Tamil and Muslim communities. Authorities have threatened the victims of past human rights violations, human rights

[48] Jayatilleka, 2014:15-18
[49] Hinnels & King, 2007: 137
[50] Jayatilleka, 2014:15-18-19
[51] "In a legal blackhole, Sri Lanka's Failure to Reform the Prevention of Terrorism Act", *Human Rights Watch.* 07/02/2022. https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/02/07/legal-black-hole/sri-lankas-failure-reform-prevention-terrorism-act
[52] EEAS. "EU-Sri Lanka Joint Commission: Joint Press Release", Brussels, 08/02/2022. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/110686/EU-Sri%20Lanka%20Joint%20Commission:%20Joint%20Press%20Release
[53] "In a legal blackhole, Sri Lanka's Failure to Reform the Prevention of Terrorism Act", *Human Rights Watch.* 07/02/2022. https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/02/07/legal-black-hole/sri-lankas-failure-reform-prevention-terrorism-act

activists and lawyers, journalists, and members of civil society groups under the pretenses of countering terrorism. According to a Human Rights activists operating in the Tamil community, the PTA is used to create fear among activists.
The previous administration of Maithripala Sirisena pledged to repeal the law but this has been rejected totally by the Rajapaksa administration who instead used it to target religious and ethnic minorities in line with the aims to further institutionalize Sinhala Buddhism nationalism. Gotabaya Rajapaksa has promised to strengthen the already abusive intelligence agencies and to protect the military commanders from war crimes prosecutions, an obvious threat to the much-needed reconciliation in the country after the civil war.
The amendment of the act could reduce the time of how long a suspect could be held in detention without judicial oversight from 18 to 12 months, but it still violates the prohibition against arbitrary detention. United Nations experts called for the Amendment Bill to provide a definition of terrorism due to the risk of misuse of the PTA. Authorities can arrest anyone believed to be causing or intending to cause "racial or communal disharmony or feelings of ill will or hostility between different communities or racial or religious groups". The Amendment Bill does not change the status of confessions given to the police as evidence, such evidence is inadmissible under other Sri Lankan laws but admissible under the PTA. Consequently, police enforcement has routinely used torture and other ill treatment to obtain confessions from prisoners held under the PTA. The bill did not remove the authority from officials to move and keep what is understood as "any place for the purpose of interrogation", this has repetitively been used to assist torture and increases the risk of enforced disappearances.

The Human Rights Watch report from February 2022 shows that despite promises made to international partners of a reformation of the Act, the proposed amendments actually leave the abusive framework of the PTA mainly intact. According to the report the administration appears to be committed to use the PTA to further undermine rights of minority and civil society groups and media by using the excuse that they are working to prevent terrorism.
According to a report from 2020 constitutionally assigned to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) as of September 2018, at least 29 PTA prisoners had five to ten years in pretrial detention, and 11 had spent between ten to fifteen years in pretrial detention. Fifteen years was the longest period a prisoner spent awaiting trial and the longest time a trial had been going on was for sixteen years. According to the report 84% of the PTA prisoners were tortured after being arrested and over 90% of them were forced to sign a document in Sinhala, which they could not understand and often these prisoners are not given proper access to legal rights.[54]

According to the Sri Lankan census by the Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka in 2011 Muslims make up for 9,7%.[55]
The Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (MMDA) is on debate in Sri Lanka and it is criticized for being highly disadvantageous for women. And the UN Human Rights Council addresses the problem of the act as it opposes international human rights

[54] "In a legal blackhole, Sri Lanka's Failure to Reform the Prevention of Terrorism Act", *Human Rights Watch.* 07/02/2022. https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/02/07/legal-black-hole/sri-lankas-failure-reform-prevention-terrorism-act
[55] Neil DeVotta, Routledge Handbook of Autocratization of South Asia, 2021:287

laws.[56] Against this background, the Special Rapporteur recommends that the Government of Sri Lanka: "Take concrete steps to address all of the identified root causes of religious intolerance and tensions, and to promote trust among different ethnic and religious communities in Sri Lanka". Further the report draws attention to the need of repealing the PTA. The Special Rapporteur also urges: "Religious leaders to speak out against hateful narratives and reject efforts to ostracize and stigmatize minority communities and persons in vulnerable situations, and to promote moderate voices and stress the need for sustainable inter-communal and interreligious dialogue for trust, peace-building and reconciliation."[57]

The One Country One Law task force initiated by Gotabaya Rajapaksa in November 2019 aims to remove laws as the ones mentioned above (MMDA) and the leader of the governmental task force is the leader of the Bodu Bala Sena, Gnanasara Thero.[58] However this initiative was put on hold during the first quarter of 2022 mainly known because of the economic crisis and the sparked protests.

Further as explained in the following section, numerous oversteps of people's freedom were seen, highly in violation of the Constitution. Both governmental and military abuse of power became common on the daily basis during 2022.

2.5 The Easter Bombings 2019

The Easter attacks in 2019 must be seen as contributing factors to the current situation in Sri Lanka. It led Gotabaya Rajapaksa to win the election; it caused further division in the Sri Lankan society, which was used to secure votes. Coordinated attacks on churches and hotels killed 269 people of them 45 foreigners. The Muslim community was blamed for what happened and became marginalized in the Sri Lankan society.[59] Once again ethno-nationalistic political forces became highly important in the country.

[56] United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, A/HRC/43/48/Add.2, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief on his visit to Sri Lanka". 25 August 2020.
[57] United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, A/HRC/43/48/Add.2, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief on his visit to Sri Lanka". 25 August 2020.
[58] Alan Keenan. (December 23, 2021). "One Country, One Law: The Sri Lankan State's Hostility toward Muslim Grows Deeper". *International Crisis Group*
[59] *Al Jazeera* (2022-04-21). "'A Curse': Three years since Easter Sunday Bombings in Sri Lanka"

3. The situation in the Sri Lanka 2022

People across the island of Sri Lanka faced difficulties getting hold of daily essentials due to the worst economic crisis since gaining independence in 1948. The Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuda-led coalition decided to devalue the Sri Lankan rupee at the same time as restriction of import of certain items caused prices to rise significantly.[60] The shortage of petrol, diesel, gas and kerosene was impacting all levels of life in the country heavily, multiple deaths were recorded due to people getting exhausted waiting in long queues for those items. Additionally, paper became a scarce item and schools had to withhold exams for approximately 4,5 million students, essential medicines were also of shortage and doctors nationwide urged the government to address the problem before unnecessary deaths would became reality.[61] During 2022, 13 hours power cuts became reality in Sri Lanka, prices on most items increased and the government chose not to address the public's worry about making day-to-day life bearable. Excessive economical struggles became normal in all Sri Lankans' lives. Streets lights were no longer in use and traffic lights were turned off and instead police officers were deployed with whistle blowers to coordinate traffic. Protests throughout the nation were held basically all days in the first months of 2022 and on the 31st of March a larger group of anti-government protestors made their way towards the President's private house in Mirihana. Protestors urging Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign started peacefully but turned fuming and a bus was set on fire, allegedly this was orchestrated by the President's own people - consequently army and police force used teargas and water canons on the crowd leading to the disruption of people's right to freedom of expression.[62] Two days later, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa imposed State of Emergency and a nationwide curfew for 36 hours. A nationwide anti-government protest was planned the 3rd of April, and the curfew was imposed partly to obstruct this plan. On the 3rd Sri Lankans woke up to a blockage of social media including WhatsApp where the protests had been coordinately planned in groups divided into regions. However as the government realized that VPN-services could be used to access social media the ban was lifted and the State of Emergency was lifted not long after. On the 3rd of April, all 26 ministers including Basil Rajapaksa, minister of Finance and Namal Rajapaksa, Sports and Youth Minister handed in their resignations and the political climate became very uncertain, though President Gotabaya and PM Mahinda did not resign. Protests were held every day after the 31st of March even on the 3rd by those who chose to disobey the curfew and footage was seen in media of police force *not* arresting people but let them hold peaceful protests in smaller scales nevertheless.[63]

On Saturday the 9th of April a massive crowd were protesting outside the Presidential Secretariat in Galle Face, Colombo. A sign on the ocean-side park Galle Face Green were put up prior to the protests, claiming that the area would be under maintenance - a useless try to stop the protest. Protestors, mostly young people exercising their fundamental and constitutional right to freedom of expression and freedom of engaging in a peaceful assembly decided to not give up though the two remaining

[60] *Al Jazeera* (2022-03-31) "Sri Lanka: How is an economic crisis affecting people?"
[61] *Al Jazeera* (2022-05-23) "'Death sentence': Doctors in Sri Lanka decry medicine shortage"
[62] *Al Jazeera* (2022-03-31). "Dozens arrested in Sri Lanka amid protests over worsening economy".
[63] *UN News* (2022-04-05) "Sri Lanka: Mishandling of economic crisis triggers alarms of rights violations"

Rajapaksa brothers refused to resign.[64] The protesters now occupied the area outside the 5-star Hotel Shangri-La in Galle Face and numerous tents were set up enabling people to stay all night. The shoutings "Go Home Gota" could now be heard all hours of the days. "Go Home Gota" draws on the fact that he holds a dual citizenship, American and Sri Lankan. The area in Galle Face grew into a village during the next couple of days named Gotagogama, Gota Go Village translated to English, and came to hold Red Cross of Sri Lanka medical tents with an ambulance parked, tents were protestors were able to charge their phones, a small library and numerous tents providing food and water. People from all levels of society stopped their vehicles next to the site providing water and food and other necessities in order to show support for the cause. The Sinhala and Tamil New Year traditionally celebrated with family and relatives at home turned out different in 2022. Massive crowds of people made their way to the Galle Face Green to engage in the protest and many people brought traditional New Year's food and sweets to the area to show support to the protest.[65] [66] [67] Some hope for unity across religions could be seen during the protests, unusual in a country that for so long battling marginalization of minorities.[68]

On the 9th of May, violent crowds shattering the Gotagogama site in Galle Face led to a military curfew in Colombo. People defied this curfew and set up roadblocks on roads from Colombo leading to Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA), checking all vehicles making sure that the resigning PM Mahinda Rajapaksa would not be able to leave the country.

On The 9th of July, protestors stormed the Presidential Secreteriat as well as the Presidential Residence, ultimately causing Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign a few days later. Protestors occupied numerous buildings, this became world-wide news and the people of Sri Lanka supporting the Aragalaya felt they had reached some of their goals.[69]

[64] The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, chapter III, Article 14 (1)(a)(b), Revised Edition – 2021. Published by the Parliament Secretariat.
[65] *BBC News* (2022-05-21) "Sri Lanka: Why is the country in an economic crisis?"
[66] *Newsfirst* (2022-04-11) "'GotaGoGama' protest village pops up as protestors occupy Galle Face"
[67] *Newsfirst* (2022-04-14) "Occupy Galle Face protest welcomes the New Year"
[68] *BBC News* (2022-05-04) "Sri Lanka: The divisions behind the country's united protest?"
[69] *CNN,* (2022-07-09) "Turmoil in Sri Lanka as thousands protest".

4. Theoretical frameworks

The theoretical framework that aims to be used in this study is theory on democracy and protests and marginalization theory.

4.1 Democracy and protests

According to Adam Przeworski democracy is defined as a political arrangement in which people select governments through elections and where the people hold the possibility to remove a government they do not like. Democracy constitutes that those who lose an election are required to leave.[70] Democracy is a mechanism for processing conflicts, political institutions manage conflicts by creating structures to politically organize social oppositions and engage in what could disrupt public order following certain rules. Democracy builds on political forces intended to follow political structures within the political institutions and to temporarily accept outcomes that some political forces oppose. Therefore democracy functions when conflicts in society follow the political institutional framework, elections are important but courts and public institutions need to be respected too. According to Przeworski democracy works when political conflicts are resolved though channels that uphold liberty and civil peace.[71]

Przeworski's starting point is that conflicts occur in all societies regarding individuals; when groups or organizations disagree on something. Often this regards how income, property, educational system and public services are distributed but it can also concern other issues such as views, often religiously motivated in terms of how others should act. Some antagonism is driven by the urge for power, ambition or narcissism. Even symbolic issues can cause passionate engagement and Przeworski draws an example concerning a government coalition breaking over the issue of the colors of the German flag.
Worth to keep in mind is that not all opinion disputes become political, they can simply remain private opinions. So when are they defined as political conflicts? Normally when they cause demand for changes of how the governmental concerns affect people in societies.[72]

Adam Przeworski writes in his book *Crises of Democracy* that conflicts can be easier or harder to resolve peacefully.[73]

One point is to what extent people are divided regarding what they want most of a particular issue. Simplified; whether some outcome is more sought for by more people than another outcome and depending on if people who support all other outcomes are distanced from the option that most people preferred and if that increases. In some cases supplies that satisfy both conditions are defined as "*unimodal*", when the option is preferred in most cases - but not on all terms.

Another point is to what extent outcomes differ from their ideal preference, people will likely disagree with outcomes more distant from what they want the most. However it must be regarded that 'loss' varies across certain issues and across individuals. If individuals experience the losses of advantages heavily and the distribution of ideal points is understood as *unimodal*, conflicts can be intense even during the slightest differ from the most preferred option.

[70] Przeworski, *Crises of Democracy.* 2019:5
[71] Przeworski, 2019:7-8
[72] A. Przeworski, 2019:145
[73] A. Przeworski, 2019:146

A third point to consider is how closely related positions on different issues are. Does opinions on different issues follow each other? If they supposedly do, they should be considered to be *superimposed* and if not, they are *crosscutting*. As an example, in OECD countries negative opinions on immigration correlate with homophobia and sexism. Cleavages tend to be superimposed when preferences are associated with other characteristics such as religion, income or education.[74]

Conflicts in democracies are processed in elections. However some restrictions consist, such as fixed dates, independent of a country's current political situation and are meant to determine political power relations within a specific time frame. According to Przeworski, political life itself never stops – the next election becomes important as soon as one has been held. Particular issues are constantly debated in political institutions and even though a majority elected a government, all proposed policies might not have majority support and political oppositions' functions are highly important in political life.[75]

Parliamentary oppositions can stop or adjust governmental actions and legislative approval is often needed in parliament to implement policies. It happens that opposition parties can work to make their voters change their minds.[76] Street demonstration and strikes are a standard process of democratic oppositions. Przeworski argues that as long as they are peaceful they can be seen as routine tactics for some groups that wants to show their disagreement for certain policies and their dissatisfaction with governments. It is likely that demonstrations initiates as peaceful; but they might be unnecessarily repressed, and might deteriorate into violent by some demonstrators.[77]

As demonstrations turn violent, occupation of important buildings, riot, civil disobedience and blockages of roads are examples of what might follow. Public order stops to exist and often when this happens the government face severe financial consequences.[78] When public order is disrupted it tends to spiral, and often even those in favor of the demonstrations tend to rather see government officers take control to maintain public order as normal life can no longer proceed as usual.[79]

Przeworski examines what differences can be seen between democracies that fell and those that continued to function though experiencing political and economic crises. According to him, the most striking difference is capita per income. He argues that it is known that democracies in economically developed countries are less vulnerable. Przeworski and Limongi (1997) made the observation that the survival of democracies tends to be more likely in countries where the income is higher. They exemplify this by writing that no democracy has collapsed in countries with an income per capita higher than that of Argentina in 1976 though Thailand's collapse in 2006 stands out as the only exception. Further the economic growth tended to be slower in democracies that fell than in those that survived, democracies that fell consequently had inactive economic development.

[74] A. Przeworski, 2019:146-148
[75] A. Przeworski, 2019:159
[76] A. Przeworski, 2019:165
[77] A. Przeworski, 2019:166
[78] A. Przeworski, 2019:167
[79] A. Przeworski ,2019:170

Przeworski also argues that data from earlier periods show that democracies that fell had more unequal distribution of income.[80]
As he puts the pattern together and look at comparisons of democracies that fell and those that survived, the conclusion is drawn that economy matters. Both the income aspect and the economic growth constitute the outcomes. Inequality is a contributing factor as well. Presidential democracies are according to Przeworski more vulnerable to political crises. Importantly it is understood that anti-government demonstrations do not weaken democracies even if strikes and riots do so.[81]

According to the authors of *World Protests – A Study of Key Protest Issues in the 21st Century*, 28% of protests globally between 2006-2020 demanded enhanced democracy, and can be understood to stem from people's desire to have a democratic society that work to respond to people's need. Normally people in these kinds of protests ask for their voice to be heard and for them to be able to participate directly in political life and that it will have an effect on the decisions that ultimately will affect their life. They ask for them to be given power in their society, as the representative democracy seemingly served the elites and the most powerful.[82]
Further Ortiz, Burke, Berrada and Cortés explains that demonstrations that oppose corruption constitute 20% of protests globally, again between 2006-2020. When health, transportation, education and security, public services expected to function no longer doing so and when the complaints do not seem to be heard by those in power, protests are generated.[83] Protest against corruption has increased over the period examined in the book and are present in all regions across the globe but are slightly more represented in Europe and Central Asia. The authors have defined corruption as something systemic and structural, political capture and inequality. The elites are using the political sphere for their own benefit at the expense of the majority. Democracy is no longer serving 99% of the population and the elites abuse their influence on how public policies are created.[84]

According to Przeworski the presidential democratic system is weaker than the parliamentary system and more vulnerable to crises. The chief executive is elected a fixed term and is entitled to appoint the cabinet. If the executive do not commit any crimes he or she stays in power until the next election regardless of the quality of the governance or if support for him or her is (or changes into) very low.[85]

When it comes to contemporary protests it is inevitable not to mention the Arabic Spring starting in 2011 and its effect on other countries' motivation to follow. Ortiz, Burke, Berrada and Cortés presents in their study that protests were common for a long time prior to the Arab Spring. In 2019 the Latin American Spring occurred and they had in common that people were protesting against bad living conditions. It is known that this was not a sudden change in the public opinion. Protests were seen years prior in many of those areas that later had mass demonstrations sometimes

[80] A. Przeworski, 2019:30-35
[81] A. Przeworski, 2019:38
[82] Isabel Ortiz, Sara Burke, Mohamed Berrada, Hernán Saenz Cortés. *World Protests – A Study of Key Protest Issues in the 21st Century.* 2022:21
[83] Ortiz, Burke, Berrada and Cortés, 2022:24
[84] Ortiz, Burke, Berrada and Cortés, 2022:95-96
[85] A. Przeworski 2019:35

evolving into armed insurrections. What caused the protests' dynamic to change into violence was the fact that the people's misery was simply ignored and frustration was set-in due to poor public services, lack of work, inadequate social protection among many things. The trend of seeing new waves of protests when some things were left ignored was seen in the Middle East, North Africa and in Latin America. In 2019, after the first protests in 2011 asked for justice in political representation outnumbering the protests calling for economic justice, a 'second' Arab Spring was seen according to some observers. Protests against political failure exceeded protests against economic justice and this trend can be seen globally whenever the economic demands are left unanswered. The lack of governments' willingness to respond to such demands may cause more difficulties and ultimately the demands for the resignation of governments.[86]
All healthy democracies can see peaceful protests as something natural existing and throughout history they have been used in order to achieve fundamental rights. Governments should listen to protestors and if they do not - public unrest is likely the outcome in which people can identify themselves to be heard.[87]

4.2 Marginalization theory

Social inclusion and social exclusion are seen as interrelated and interdependent processes. Messiou (2012) emphasizes the need of making the distinction between the experience of marginalization when it is construed by individuals or/and others and the recognition of it by individuals or/and others and that this distinction will be recognizing the subjective nature of the construct.[88] [89]

Razer defines social exclusion as a state in which individuals or groups lack effective participation in key activities or benefits of the society where they live. Consequently, to be socially excluded is to be marginalized from that society. Joan. G, Mowat emphasizes the importance to recognize that marginalization also contains feelings about the state individuals find themselves in. When being marginalized, an individual have a sense that one does not belong and feels that one is not a valued member of a community or able to a valuable contribution within the community and does not have access to services or opportunities that are open to others – thus the feeling of and to actually be excluded. Some experience marginalization as temporary and dependent of context while others experience it as global and forms part of their identity and lived experience.[90]

There is a distinction between being marginalized and being marginalized through identification with a specific group. The conceptualization of the notion of a 'marginalized group' is problematic because it associates marginalization with a global and unchanging state inherent within a given population, displaying people as almost unable to change their situation as the solution lies in the actions of the state and other people. It removes the subjective experience of an individual and they are

[86] Ortiz, Burke, Berrada and Cortés, 2022:99-100
[87] Ortiz, Burke, Berrada and Cortés, 2022:99-108
[88] Joan. G, Mowat. "Towards a new conceptualisation of marginalisation". *European Educational Research Journal.* 2015, Vol. 14(5): 456
[89] Messiou K (2012) "Collaborating with children in exploring marginalisation: An approach to inclusive education". *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 16(12): 1311–1322.
[90] Mowat, 2015:457

simply presented to accept the identity being the 'other'. Marginalization should be understood as arising from actions of others whether it is intentional or unintentional or individually or collectively. The responsibility towards other human beings should not be forgotten either.

Two assumptions present themselves within the concept of a marginalized group. The first is that there is a shared experience, which can be associated with people that share certain characteristics (as poverty) and the second that there is a shared conceptualization of what they are being marginalized from.
Importantly - how others are positioned as marginalized, which is what should be discussed. Assumptions are easily being made whether or not someone is regarded as being marginalized, and by using the categorization 'experienced by the individual and not recognized by others', therefore the question of 'marginalized from what?' becomes relevant. It holds the assumption of societal norms understood as collective expressions of our understandings and shaped through culture and is relative in time and place.[91]
There is a set of norms and values that are dominant and which are considered to be the ideal. If an individual falls short of these norms and values they may be considered to be marginalized, however everyone does not share the same values and therefore may not perceive themselves to be marginalized. This difference of how individuals perceive 'ideal' values is not always given attention to in the theories of marginalization.[92] Consequently, respecting the subjective perception of marginalization is what makes the concept marginalization itself extremely complex.

A. Petrou explains in the article *Beyond the difference: From the margins to inclusion* in the International Journal of Inclusive Education how marginalization can manifest itself in society and draws a distinction between groups that have been formally identified as marginalized according to governmental policies such as children living in poverty, and those who are marginalized because they fail to conform to the cultural norms and expectations which prevail within schools. Social capital theory indicates that people may be marginalized and disadvantaged through lack of social networks which others can habitually rely upon and the concept of cultural capital perceives marginalization through the lens of the status and power which people are able or unable to exercise through their knowledge, skills or material abilities. Poverty or the environment an individual is in, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, religion, perceived through personal circumstances i.e. being a child of a migrant of refugee are all examples of how marginalization can manifests itself in societies.[93] [94]

[91] Mowat, 2015:457
[92] Mowat, 2015:458
[93] Mowat, 2015:458
[94] Petrou A, Angelides P, Leigh J (2009) "Beyond the difference: From the margins to inclusion" *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 13(5): 439–448

5. Method

Participatory observation method combined with qualitative interviews

The research was done in Colombo, Sri Lanka with the aim of presenting perspectives from Tamil, Hindu, Muslim and Christian minorities as well as from individuals from the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority through qualitative semi-structured interviews. The aim was to gain deeper understanding of their perceptions of the tensions in the country and how the crisis and the political climate in the country affected their lives. The interviews allowed the participants' in-depth perspectives to be presented. The main idea within the qualitative method is for the researcher to learn about the issue from the participants' perspective. The aspect of reflexivity implicit the researcher to reflect on how personal background, culture and own experiences could possibly shape interpretations made and of the data's meaning. Further reflexivity signifies the understanding of how the researcher's background is influencing the direction of the study. The qualitative method aims to develop a complex picture of what is studied and will involve multiple perspectives and factors.[95]
After arriving in Sri Lanka, contacts were established with several international Sri Lankans, which enabled valuable conversations and guidance and further establishments of contacts. The need of broadening the understanding of the situation in the country became important and therefore participant observation was added as a method in the study.

Participant observation can be understood as characterized by actions as having an open attitude without any judgments - the researcher is interested in learning more about others and aware of the tendency of culture shock and for mistakes being made which are often manageable to overcome. Importance to maintain open to new impressions and the unexpected as well as being a good listener is emphasized within this method.

5.1 Method relevance

The ambition of using *participatory observation* as the method combined with *qualitative interviews* is to enable understanding of different perspectives. It was important to gather information from all minority groups as well as the majority group in the country. The aim was to find participants through a selection of varying gender and age. Sri Lanka is rather culturally divided geographically, a majority of Tamils and Muslims live in north and east of the country, however empirical data was gathered exclusively in Colombo.

Participant observation enables the researcher to experience nonverbal expressions of feelings and interactions and to obtain an understanding of how participants interact with each other. The observation allows the researcher to check definitions of terms that participants use in interviews and the researcher is able to observe events that informants may not want or cannot share, and situations that interviewees have described in interviews. This will assist the researcher to be aware of distortions or inaccuracy in descriptions provided through interviews.[96]

[95] John, W Creswell. *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed*, 2018:234-235
[96] Kawulich, Barbara B. (2005). Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method [81 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *6*(2), Art. 43

According to DeWalt & DeWalt (2002) "the goal for design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method".[97] They claim that the validity in a study can be increased through the participant observation as observations allow the researcher to improve understanding of the context and the phenomenon studied.[98] By being given the opportunity to take part in events relevant to the research the understanding of the participants' commitment and devotion to the protests and uprising in the country was made possible, which would have been difficult to comprehend otherwise.

In this study, the strategy of using qualitative interviews will also be used to further enhance the depth and validity. Because of the aim of uncover subjective perspectives and to collect stories of the ones affected by the crisis as well as the rapid societal changes qualitative semi-structured interviews served well to use. While using semi-structured interviews the participants set the structure of the interviews. It is a method usable when the research is interested in phenomena of the subjective character and is fruitful when the researcher does not know exactly what questions may be advantageous for the results. Such interviews are informal and questions are made up during the interview process. Themes are decided upon which the conversations are structured around, the strength of these types of the semi-structured interviews is that respondents are not decidedly led into any ways of thinking but are freely allowed to express and deepen their opinions.[99]

5.2 Access to the field and building trust

In order to establish contacts in Colombo and getting access to aspects profoundly important to the study, conversations and discussions were held with numerous people in different levels of society. The personal interest of the situation permeated those conversations and can be regarded to have functioned to build trust, as personal interest seemed highly appreciated by those individuals. The situation in the country changed (mostly negatively) daily and many individuals spoken to showed significant devotion to educate and share opinions. This was an immense advantage to the research process and for the ability to comprehend different elements of what occurred in Sri Lanka at the time. However, some of the interviewees asked repeatedly while talking about sensitive matters to not be mentioned by name in the thesis, which was assured multiple times to them. While participating in events and gatherings to observe it could be seen as an advantage being Sri Lankan-born with 'Sri Lankan features' as a researcher as the participants' comfort of being observed may have been enhanced. The majority language *Sinhala* is not spoken or understood, but this could have assisted understanding even more.

4.3 Ethical considerations

The ethical awareness will be incorporated in the research process in order to present an argument for undertaking the study. The participants in the study needed to be

[97] DeWalt, Kathleen M. & DeWalt, Billie R. *Participant observation: a guide for fieldworker*s. 2002:92
[98] Kawulich, Barbara B. (2005). Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method [81 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *6*(2), Art. 43
[99] Halvorsen, 2009:85-86

protected from misconduct and the purpose of the study was presented and described to the participants and it was important that the research followed the said purpose. Any participant was intended to fully consent to take part in the study without feeling pressured to do so and anonymity was guaranteed. Cultural norms were carefully considered while deciding on how to collect data and any differences regarding gender, culture and religion were aimed to be respected thoroughly.[100]
Uncovered cultural differences created a complex ethical dimension in the research process and careful consideration of the interpretation process had to be done. Some of the interviewees were traumatized and fuming by the consequences of the political situation in Sri Lanka and the protection of their privacy was explained to them. The participants shared sensitive and important information, however the ethical aspects were respected even if the ambition was to uncover such information.
Many of the participants upheld the importance of anonymity because of the information they shared and it was obvious that the fear of being targeted for speaking out very much exists in Sri Lanka.

Additional ethical consideration concerning personal safety had to be made while staying in Sri Lanka. Due to the crisis and all the problems in the country profound tensions were experienced, as well as heavy surveillance by police and military forces. Restrictions changed as civil unrest increased daily following development in different aspects of life in Sri Lanka. At times when people were arrested for protesting a lot of anger from the public made the situation very unstable. As the interviews were conducted, consideration had to be made whether or not to travel to certain areas of Colombo at the time due to safety precautions.

5.4 Collection and analyzing of data

While collecting data, the importance of respecting the site and to minimize disruption was of focus. As participant observation was done the attempt was to be respectful and careful of the event that was examined. The aim was to impact the participants as little as possible during the observation and the interviews. Participants were informed of their participation in a research study and were often reminded of the purpose of the study.[101]

In qualitative studies it is important to disregard data that disprove or prove any personal hypotheses and the full range of findings should be reported. The participants' anonymity was undertaken throughout the research process and the identities of all participants were protected.[102]

All interviews were held on places suitable for the participants and the main focus while deciding the place to hold the interview was the convenience for the participant as well as the safest place in regards of safety restrictions at the time. Further all interviews were recorded and transcribed, some interviewees asked for the results to be sent back to them to ensure being understood correctly, this was welcomed as it helped assure validity.

[100] Creswell, *Methods Approaches*. 2018:136
[101] Creswell, 2018:137
[102] Creswell, 2018:138

5.5 Validity and reflexivity

In this study using the qualitative approach and the participatory observation method the validity may be testable partly by member checking. As mentioned above, some text has been sent back to participants in order for them to approve being understood correctly. This contributed to a more secure collaboration and functioned to show gratitude to the participants for taking part in the study, many of the participants revealed very sensitive information. This process allowed them to feel involved and appreciated. To validate the findings was in some cases problematized by the linguistic aspect of necessary translations but with help of with the help of the translator it was made possible.

The use of rich descriptions of the data from the interviews helped to present the participants' varying perceptions to be included and understood.[103]

Due to personal ties to Sri Lanka and individuals in the country, thoughtful attention to how interpretations were done was required. Personal relations to the country as well as a partly biased picture of the political climate existed due to a long-life awareness of religious, ethnical, cultural and political problems in the country. The need of reflection on the subjective standing point of being from the country and at the same time a foreigner in terms of validity became important while experiencing a different socio-economic context. The aim was to stay in the country for a period of time and to obtain an in-depth perspective of the political climate and the crisis.

5.6 Translation

The linguistic issue concerning the language barrier in terms of reliability is present in the ethical aspect by how two of the participants' statements are presented and interpreted (P8 and P10). In the aim of overcoming the ethical issue of linguistic differences, a profound trust in the translator was preferred. The translation stage is highly important and a standardized way of expressing questions was used in order to be able to reach reliable conclusions.[104] Contact was established with two Sri Lankans with good English skills who offered assistance in translating interviews as well as assisting in finding individuals suitable for interviewing - this was crucial to the study. The assistance of translating P8's and P10's interviews was important because those interviews were needed in order to include all religious, ethnic and cultural perspectives in the study.

[103] Creswell, 2018:251-252

[104] Roger Few, Daniel McAvoy, Marcela Tarazona & Vivien Margaret Walden, *Contribution to change.* Practical Action Publishing Ltd. 2014:34

6. Empirical data

The empirical data of this study consists of participatory observations combined with interviews conducted with individuals in Sri Lanka; the aim has been to cover a broad variety of individuals and to let their voices be heard within their own context. Important for the study was to include all cultural, ethnic and religious groups with various ages and additionally important was to engage both men and women through the interviews.

6.1 Interviews

Nine interviews took place in the Colombo area and the last tenth one was concluded through a zoom call - they were all recorded, transcribed and used as the empirical data in this study.
7 of the 10 participants were women and the oldest participant (a woman) was 73 years old. All participants except one (the 73 year old woman) were highly interested in Sri Lankan politics and supported the protests immensely. This factor must not be seen as too surprising as many individuals in Colombo at the time were engaging in protests and the country's financial and political problems were widely discussed.

The interviewees were freely allowed to speak about their personal thoughts and experiences and some participants generated long answers, some extensively shorter. The length of the interviews varied highly depending on the participants' willingness to answer questions or whether or not they decided to share additional information. One essential goal consistent through all interviews was to not obtain any answers by force due to the sensitivity of the questions asked and therefore some answers are short, the participants were allowed to decide themselves upon the main focus of the discussions during the interviews. All participants' answers were analyzed equivalent regardless. Interviewees who shared longer answers or stories are not valued higher in terms of validity because all participants' answers were equally needed in order to fulfill the goal of attaining varied empiric data. Some of the participants, mainly those sharing a lot of sensitive information, also expressed the importance of anonymity expressing their fear of repercussions by the government if their identity was to ever be revealed. Because of this, a reminder of the importance of not forcing any answers appeared through the interviews.

6.1.1 Person 1 (P1)

P1 is a Sinhalese Christian Evangelical man, a father of two boys, 42 years old and born in Colombo. He is a former music producer and came back to Sri Lanka after spending 10 years in South Africa. He and his wife (P2) give young people guidance in life through a digital platform tied to the Evangelical Church. He believes that religious diversity in Sri Lanka is natural and emphasizes this by saying that it is common that a Church is geographically situated next to a Mosque. However, he adds that in some parts of Sri Lanka the acceptance of various religions is considerably lower. He says that he has experienced some discrimination for belonging to the Christian minority. He feels that Christianity affects his political life as his religious values are incorporated in all aspects of his life but at the same time he wishes that politics in Sri Lanka was not influenced by religion at all.

P1 voted for president Gotabaya Rajapaksa who according to him made promises of a better future for the country. He says that he believed in his heart that education,

businesses and entrepreneurship would be improved by Gotabaya Rajapaksa in power, however he now regret his choice deeply. During the time he grew up the majority leadership was important and not exceptionally questioned. He believes that the current government used both media and music in a clever way to secure votes. He took part in the Galle Face protests and wants the politicians to start listen to the people and see the struggles that people in the country are facing.
P1's opinion is that government made some bad political decisions shortly after attaining power, such as tax cuts and the ban of fertilization all of which were extremely bad for the country's economy.

When he is asked about his views of the Sri Lankan democracy, he says that he wonders whether there is any democracy existing at all in the country. Freedom of speech needs to be exercised farther, many people are afraid of speaking out even if the current crisis positively has made people more empowered to do so.
As the discussion of democracy continues, he explains that the cultural elites in villages in Sri Lanka are important to the people living there; they help people in day-to-day life, which has led them to come into power. It is a clear abusive power relationship as no one stands up against them simply because they are in need of their help. He says that the Parliament of Sri Lanka has very little true power, mostly because the executive power of the president is so excessive. When asked what changes of his personal and work life the crisis has brought he mentions that transportation as well as high prices has affected him a lot. In order to be able to save any money you need earn more than 500.000 LKR per month and only high-ranking CEOs earn that (27 April, 2022: 1 Sri Lankan rupee (LKR) = $0.0028). He feels that it is such a big difference in living standards compared to his life in South Africa were he was able to save up for his and his family's future.

His views of the civil war is that the country lost a lot of people that could have been an asset to Sri Lanka and that the people in the North and the East has not been served justice for what they went through. He is sad to say that many of his Tamil friends decided to leave because they lived in constant fear. He explains that Gotabaya Rajapaksa actually appointed some high ranked Tamils into Parliament to secure Tamils votes in the 2019 election. P1 says that some Tamils believe that their lives are better now compared to war times even though the lack of justice and accusations of war crimes are still considerably present. He resides in an area south of Colombo which host a vast Tamil community and he is happy to see that they are not in living in constant fear any more - but adds that they are still not generally accepted into the political sphere and that the Military forces and the Army Navy still do not accept Tamils to work for them.

According to P1, there is very little trust in the government in Sri Lanka. Bribery and government corruption is systematically existent on all levels of public administration. While he worked in the construction sector he explains that officers would directly ask him how much money they would get in order to permit documents to construction companies. He is firmly against that type of actions and had to tell them that that was not their policy. P1 says that he witnessed corruption closely during this time and exposes the known corruption in the country and says: "it's really a mess". He continues explaining that politicians bribe their way through everything and the mentality goes deep down in the public sector. He believes that the current crisis has identified many of the problems and that progress now hopefully

can be made. According to P1, this is the light in the dark; to some extent people have actually understood many of the problems in Sri Lanka.

6.1.2 Person 2 (P2)

P2 is a Sinhalese Christian Evangelical woman, mother of two and 36 years old. She is born in the Colombo area and works in advertising and graphic design as well as a voluntary project together with her husband (P1) educating young people about Christianity and providing religious guidance. P2 also spent ten years in South Africa and she and P1 came back to Sri Lanka in 2018 because of the required visa process in order to stay in South Africa or go somewhere else.

She sees religious diversity in Sri Lanka as something positive and something all Sri Lankans are familiar with. She did not vote for the current President partly because she felt that the people in the North and the East were never served justice, this is not just principally wrong but something she is truly sad about. She felt that no options in the election were good though. Further according to P2, it is not necessarily a bad thing when Sri Lankans go overseas to get new experiences and perspectives but with the Rajapaksa family and their connections abroad she feels that it is purely wrong.

P2 says that low-income families outside Colombo - many from the farming community voted for Gotabaya because of the promises he made. But claims that they were hurt the most, mainly by the ban of fertilization products.

When asked about Sri Lanka's democracy she says that it is questionable whether democracy exists at all and as a person taking part in the protests very dedicatedly she is happy that people are realizing the importance of exercising their fundamental rights to speak out. P2 feels that life in South Africa was a lot safer economically. As someone operating a business it is hard to charge clients sometimes, because costumers cannot afford higher prices either, "it's just very difficult right now," she adds.

When asked about the civil war she says that she personally lost a lot of friends moving abroad and sadly so much information concerning actions carried out by government military forces during the war have been hidden and covered, no one really knows the truth of what happened. She explains that many people who remained in Sri Lanka, Singhalese or not, feel that they lost many good people who left because of the war. Like her husband she mentions too that some Tamil friends decided to leave the country because they lived in constant fear.

P2 explains that the Easter bombings opened her eyes about the need of having the right people in the right places politically and she feels that the younger generation is more aware of current politics. According to P2; people started to 'read' again during the pandemic and became more educated and aware of the devious politics going on. Due to the long lockdowns and because of easy access of Internet people became more aware of contemporary issues and struggles. She says that prior to Covid-19, education concerning politics consisted mainly of information from family members and their subjective opinions.

According to P2, the current Government (April 2022) has killed journalists who uncovered the truth of the Easter attacks; the government's involvement is obvious to her. She wants me to understand: "they have hidden so much and silenced

so many," and she adds; "the Head of Justice is commonly established seen as participating in covering the attacks".

P2 says that there is very little trust in the Government in Sri Lanka, and she says that trust has never existed; perhaps it might come after the next election (September 2024). The education people are getting through the protests and she says that the unity witnessed is amazing for her to see. However, she wants to emphasize that corruption makes it impossible for Gotabaya to step down. The government is using Buddhist symbols and the Buddhist faith to show the majority that they are in fact the right people in power.
P2 has been very active in the protests trying to get women and in particular mothers to speak out about the difficulties that they are facing due to the depraved politics. She says that she is glad to see that Muslim girls have dared to go to the protests, normally they do not engage in (especially political) activities on their own. When we talk about unity, she says that religious leaders from various religious groups have been seen participating together in the protests and that according to her; they probably felt the need to come out to show their support for the people. P2 says that she has never seen more unity in Sri Lanka ever; in all the darkness a positive thing is seen.

According to P2, a drug addict admitted on camera that he and others were paid to support the Government and ordered to wear Muslim hats showing that the Muslim community is supporting them. Presence of and the coverage by international media give the protest hope and for her "there is hope for change". She says that educated and young people need to come into power combined with individuals who studied abroad being able to contribute with new fundamental democratic perspectives useable for contemporary Sri Lanka. One thing that bothers her about the future of Sri Lanka is that the farming community in Sri Lanka is not properly educated as in many other countries across the globe. This must be seen as an immense problem because they are such a big part of the poorer parts of the Sri Lankan society in great need of a reformation. According to P2, positive aspects can be seen in the crisis because people have learned about their rights and are looking for a change. Though she emphasizes that it is important to keep making an effort to engage young people into politics, *and* people without extreme funding which today is needed to be able to be let into the political sphere.

Students find it hard to get even scholarships for universities; young people are not really given a choice while pursuing their studies, so they leave the country. According to P2, individuals in Sri Lanka feel that they do not want to spend their time fighting for justice and a better life, she herself had so many friends from school going overseas and says that this fact created a mentality of it being normal and 'easy' to leave.

6.1.3 Person 3 (P3)

P3 is a Christian Tamil woman 73 years old, born in Jaffna who lived in Batticaola for a while and later settled in the Eastern parts of the Colombo area. She worked as an English teacher, her father was a police officer in Jaffna. P3's life was extremely difficult for a long period of time because of troubles simply because she was from a Tamil family. She got married in 1973 and had her first child, a son in 1974. In 1985 her husband was accused and charged for being a terrorist and held in prison for 29 months. She says though that he was treated okay but without a salary, which the

family was more or less dependent by. When her husband returned home, he was unemployed but later joined the Indian Peace keeping Security Council as a Chief Security Officer and was later reinstated as a police officer. He spent seven years in Saudi Arabia while P3 was at home with the children in Batticaola where she explains that she experienced countless problems.

She says that her first-born son disappeared when he was 15 years old. Three years later on the 25th of April 1992 she received a letter explaining that he had been killed. She says that she was devastated and that nobody in the community came to help her because everyone was scared, "It was God, I and my children". A few years later, her second son was taken too; she says that a little boy came to tell her that he was missing from school. She went to the police station where she was told that he was taken for being a terrorist, 15 years old - but because they knew her husband they gave her son security. He later told her that the police had handcuffed him and hit him with a pole, and further brought a bag full of petrol trying to suffocate him. This son was let go and survived.

She felt that she was living in great danger and was worried for her and her kids safety and therefore decided to leave for Colombo, she decided to go to an area with a known Tamil community. She sold everything they owned and paid the family's debts, with 10.000 LKR on her hands, they left by bus. She explains that the bus was checked several times on the way to Colombo and that they feared for their lives but finally made it there. The family had enough for a down payment of 7500 LKR for a one-bedroom apartment. She is happy to say that later in life all her remaining children got married and are all carrying on well life.

Although she suffered a lot in life she is proud of being Tamil and that she always has and always will pray for the *whole* country. Her husband was abusive to her and she later understood something was wrong with his health, in 2018 she took him for a check at the hospital where they informed the family that his kidneys had failed to function, he passed away soon after. P3 feels she did her duty as a wife despite the abuse and after he passed away her life completely changed. Today her children pay for everything she needs which is something she feels blessed of having. She adds that so many other Sri Lankans do not have someone to support them when they get older; she multiple times underlines how grateful she is for what her children do for her.

When asked about the current situation in the country, she says she is sad for people but is not involved in the protests, and she is of the opinion that a deeper aim must exist, rather than just speaking out asking for change. The current Government and Gotabaya Rajapaksa ended the war, and this must be seen as good thing, therefore she feels some positivity towards him. She prayed for a good leader in the 2019 elections, and this is who God gave them. She explains that one reason for not being involved or interested in politics is because she feels that she and her family struggled enough in life she does not want to keep fighting, she fought enough in life. She has very little interest discussing politics at all.

P3 says that she encountered immense struggles in life and the sorrow of never getting answers to what happened to her son will follow her forever. She was of course terrified during war times and was constantly afraid of her and her family possibly being targeted and their overall safety. She puts her trust in God; and says that all good things in her life are linked to her religiosity. She says that she thanks the Lord every day for what she has and today she finds great joy in singing Christian songs.

According to P3, Tamil discrimination was more evident prior in Sri Lanka and as a family originating from the northeast, they all experienced social discrimination in Colombo as well because of the majoritarian rule of the country. During the civil war they were all labeled as terrorists, P3 says that a lot of Tamil boys were abducted in the Colombo area during ongoing civil war because of the simple fact that they were Tamils.

When asked about unity in the regards of the current situation in Sri Lanka, she does not think that it will last, she feels that northern and eastern Tamils are not included in the unity. She says that all of her past experiences has caused her not to trust any of the new layers of societal unity that people talk about, she has experienced enough and she wishes to not be bothered with any problems at all.

6.1.4 Person 4 (P4)

P4 is a Sinhalese woman, 40 years old, her father is a Buddhist and her mother is a Catholic. She is enrolled in PhD studies in New Zeeland starting after the summer of 2022ö. Interesting to this study, she used to work as a researcher on the Reconciliation Mechanisms and therefore she has a lot of experience concerning minority groups (mainly Tamils. P4 says that she understood the minorities' struggles farther through her professional life when she first-hand heard their stories about what happened to them during the civil war. She says that she in a way was racist while growing up, highly impacted by her Sinhala-Buddhist relatives.

She informs that she became interested in religious studies because of her own religious background mentioned above, having parents of different religious background. During her bachelor studies, she wrote a thesis researching Christian evangelical Tamils' inclination to belong. She says that Jaffna Tamils (from the North) are actually less discriminated than hill-country (Central part of the country) Tamils (many of them are Christians - compared to the Northern Hindu majority).

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When P4 is asked about the current protests, she wants to elucidate that the Galle Face protests unfortunately are too middle-class focused, and to some extent disconnected from both minority issues and the farmer community's struggles. To ask for the abolishment of the executive powers and to focus on those problems are partly disconnected from the fact that other groups in Sri Lanka still are figuring out how to raise their voices and protest at all. P4 believes that the representation of minorities in the Galle Face protest is too low and adds that the huge attention that the war heroes are getting directly affects to what extent Tamil engage. She explains that according to her personal opinion, the protestors in Galle Face only represents a small suburban circle, not the true core of fighting for survival that exists in the country which also deserves to be represented. Too many people in Sri Lanka are still fighting to just live their life in peace. P4 says that many people/groups want to be in the center of the protests because it is an historical moment for the country. But she feels that protests are supposed to be organic, not driven by only politics - she says that "protests should have many layers and it should be messy". She says that the unity seen in the protests is sugar coded to some extent; Tamils as an example have spoken out about not feeling welcomed to the protests sites. On the contrary - she says that voices from the archeological scholars have said that the protest is seen as a disgrace to the Sinhala-Buddhist heritage. P4 says that is clear that people have different feelings about the protests but that she feels that the 'new' unity is deeply glorified. When this interview was held, the protest in Galle Face had been going on for 20 days.

She does not trust the democracy in Sri Lanka, saying that there is no real democracy. She exemplifies this by mentioning that the blockage of roads is obstructing fundamental rights of people's movements (this in fact created problems for the interview itself due to its location being close to the Galle Face site). The constant fear of being checked after posting on social media is very much evident in Sri Lanka, she has experience friend requests from random people on Facebook a lot, even more since the Aragalaya started and according to her, the citizens of Sri Lanka are used to living with the fear of being observed by the government. To explain further, she says that after the war, the military were idle, so the Government incorporated military forces into civilians' lives. The military personnel were recruited to among other things clean roads and parks and were able to surveillance people, though she says that her name shows that she does not originate from a minority group but that it might have been and still is much worse for others who must be cautious about the possibility of being targeted. She says that the citizens of Sri Lanka to some extent are used to being watched and targeted by the government because of the country's previous history. Governmental forces are still occupying some militarized zones in the North and many poor and scattered areas can further be seen in the North and the East in 2022 - people living in those areas are still confronted with the reality of being targeted that their sacred religious places are possibly being locked into a military zone. P4 heavily emphasizes that to attack civilians who are simply exercising their fundamental rights is according to her opinion just wasting governmental funds. P4 says that the Southern parts were previously glorifying how military activities were actually impacting people's lives, and they can now finally understand the struggles that the North and the East previously experienced.

P4 explains that throughout history, the Indian-Tamil and the Muslim historical presence in Sri Lanka has been erased, and that Buddhism has been glorified in history something that heavily affected the way of thinking in the Southern parts of Sri Lanka. P4 mentions that the Buddhist institutions and in particular the *Maha Sangha*, a high authority within the Buddhist community that among other things passed land through generations. Temples held land through monkhood and this mentality has impacted Sri Lanka's history as well as the present. P4 says that the Bodu Bala Sena who spoke very loudly before the deep crisis instigating racial and cultural tensions has actually kept quiet during the protests, unclear exactly for what reasons.

Social interaction with other religions in Sri Lanka is normal, sometimes P4 feels she does not belong because of her mixed religious background - but it also makes her easily blend in in different contexts.

When asked about her own experience of the war she says that her employment on the Reconciliation Mechanisms made her understand the civil war's impact on different groups of the Sri Lankan society. She remembers her childhood, while being a student in Colombo she had to bring books to school in transparent plastic bags instead of a backpack because of everyone's fear of potential bombs. To explain further she says that this was around 1996/1997 during a time when a few bombs per year exploded in Colombo. Her father worked as a police officer in the North during the war in the 90s and she remembers that in order to being able to keep in contact with him they hade to go to the post office in the area where they lived and wait for his calls. She explains that her father was scared of the LTTE but that he was actually

able to speak Tamil probably keeping him safe at times. P4 says that her father holds no anger towards LTTE or Tamils in general today despite all the hatred that flourished during war times. Her parents are according to her very open-minded, which is something she is happy about, she thinks that this has made her life easier at times and especially while pursuing her academic studies.

During P4's time as a researcher on the Reconciliation Mechanisms where the UN was partly involved, she operated in the Missing Persons Office. She encountered numerous military widows and women from the Tamil community who were then and still are - missing their sons, fathers and sons. She says that the things she heard were unforgettably shocking and sad. One memory in particular has stayed with her - a meeting with a mother who many years after what had happened to her son could never end her despair and sorrow. P4 said that the story she was told was that the woman at the time her son disappeared, went to the police office multiple times looking for her son, she was finally directed to a Navy Office and a camp room. One of the officers pointed to the walls of the room, covered in blood and actual flesh and said; "there, this is your son". As P4 understood it, during these times this was a normal way of treating Tamil women looking for their sons or relatives. She says that this is one of the saddest stories she has ever heard and she had troubles sleeping afterwards, she could never forget the woman's sorrow that she understood would follow her throughout the rest of her life.

The problems that the Tamils have faced are unreal she says, many of them are still looking for missing family members and many of them have because of this difficulties claiming family land. During war times, if Tamil women caused too many problems with authorities, they were sexually abused or killed. So many people went missing during these times that the mentality grew into being more or less careless. People from the Tamil community also testified to her about families that surrendered during the end of the war. LTTE hade recruited child soldiers and some Tamil parents brought their children to the Sinhalese military to openly surrender showing their children even surrender the LTTE. However, many of these children were never seen again and were killed or gone missing. She also came across stories from Sinhalese-Buddhist military widows going to the military camps looking for settlements of salary and pensions. According to P4's collected testimonies the Sinhalese military officers sexually abused some of these women inside the camps. Other people from border villages from where she mainly worked told her about how they were functioning as human shields not knowing which side the bombs came from, the LTTE side or the Sinhalese side. All of these stories and the aching sorrow and lack of justice that the Tamil community still feels was eye opening for her. She was recently in the North where heavy military presence still exists and scare tactics are common, she says she could still feel the fear in that area, probably a feeling impacted by her hearing all these stories during her employment as a researcher. Although she wishes that those stories were never in need of being told because she wishes they had never happened, she feels fortunate to have gotten the chance to understand some of the Tamil people's sorrow.

Regarding Sri Lanka's political future, she feels that progress can be made; relatives on her father's side (Sinhalese-Buddhists) have actually become less racist during the current crisis. However, the opposition disappoints her deeply, some members of Parliament say that they do not support the government but at the same time they do not say that they support an impeachment, she says that the opposition is not doing enough to push for change. She wants to add that sadly politicians have

created an image of Sri Lankans being violent in both domestic and foreign media and to foreign political actors simplifying imposing State of Emergency and civil and military curfews in order to control people.

6.1.5 Person 5 (P5)

P5 is a Sinhalese-Buddhist woman, 29 years old and works as a content writer. She was born in Colombo but lived in the USA from the age 14-25 and she says that she adapted well to the American culture.

She says that what she experienced in America as being Sri Lankan and minority made her understand how privileged she is in Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese-Buddhist. Her own experiences of living as a minority blended with the BLM movement opened her eyes and made her aware of the discrimination that minorities experience in Sri Lanka, although she considers the younger generation not as racist as the older.

When she is asked about the current crisis she says that she fully supports the demonstrations and that Sri Lanka definitely needs to enhance democratic values within its political institutions. She did not vote for the current government and she thinks that Gotabaya Rajapaksa act similarly to a dictator clinging on to power. She believes that it is time to break the dynasty of the Rajapaksas. She says that it is unacceptable for a country to have so few people holding most of the power in the country. Since she feels this way about the lack of power sharing she says that to her Sri Lanka cannot be seen as entirely democratic.

The current crisis has affected her life a lot and she tries her best to plan around all the obstacles that the crisis has created. She admits that she is sad in a way that the power cuts, the shortage of fuel and the daily price changes have become a common a part of life. The inflation which has increased prices has made everyone feel the need to earn more money and it is known to be advantageous to earn money in a foreign currency, this fact led her to recently change employment as she wanted to gain personal economic stability. P5 makes comparisons of the current crisis in Sri Lanka to Lebanon and their crisis, though she believes that discussions with the IMF should be seen as a positive development.

P5 has few own experiences of the civil war to share. She understood later in life what her privileged Sinhala-Buddhist background must have meant; she says that this is probably contributing to her having fewer earlier experiences from war times. She says she did not know anyone working in the military forces during the war but thought that the LTTE were the “bad guys”. Even though she and her family were not affected to any greater extent by the war she says that she today feels a lot of sympathy for those who were affected and targeted during that time.

The current protest in Sri Lanka makes her proud of people. She is moved by the fact that Sinhala-Tamil new year Avrudu was celebrated united in the protests. She does feel that other religious holidays were not given as much attention and she says that some racist traces can be observed. She wants a revolution but does not think that it will happen fast, even though some revolutionary thoughts seems to be prevalent within the protests people need to re-think their decisions thoroughly and wait for change to happen.

P5 believes that Sri Lanka can have democracy; she trusts that change can happen. What the country needs to see are educated people in power, she is sad to say that the country has an evident gap in education. There needs to be a new balance in order to prevent history from repeating itself.

6.1.6 Person 6 (P6)

P6 is a Sinhalese-Catholic man, 52 years old and born in Colombo. He has a PhD in Management and a Master in Human Resource Management.

Regarding religious diversity in Sri Lanka he explains that he went to school with Muslims, Hindus and Tamils. Various religions in Sri Lanka are natural and he feels that people did not identify religions as much earlier in history. He strongly feels that politicians made use of religious-related conflicts in order to gain political power. "Religious choices are not ones own but comes from parents and later on in life people do not tend to change religion because they have been brought up in that culture".

P6 shares his experience from when he spent a few months in Jaffna and that he then understood that many of the LTTE soldiers came from the East and were 'lower cast'. He thinks that the cast problems in the country made people forget that they all belong to the same country. The politicians created problems with the aim of dividing people in Sri Lanka and he says "dirty politics created conflicts between the people". He feels that the concept *"we are all Sri Lankans"* needs to be brought back. The country is rich in so many ways and all the positive things must be uplifted. His parents are involved in party politics and he believes that the current situation with the massive protests is positive. "The rules of the game have changed," he says. P6 thinks that it is a problem that politics run within families, they experience power and they appreciate the power and the benefits that come with it. He thinks that democracy exists in Sri Lanka and that the people in power can get things done though he does think that freedom to some extent has vanished.

When P6 is asked about how the current crisis has affected his life he says that the crisis became evident after the Easter attacks and new conflicts in the country were created. Corruption became more apparent and ordinary people now have difficulties coping with life. He says that things can change and that the crisis caused people to come together. He thinks that because people have felt the crisis emotionally and economically they called for a change, power cuts and the problems with educational aspects made people angry. He explains that not even during his childhood problems like these did not exist. H says that the present generation can bring change but believes that it will take years. He thinks that social media and the access to information at all times exposed the problems to the younger generation, again he reassures that there is a chance things can turn around. P6 however mentions that Sri Lankans are emotional people, kind but emotional and they do not like to hold grudges so they tend to forget easily, hopefully not this time.

6.1.7 Person 7 (P7)

P7 is a Sinhalese-Buddhist woman, 23 years old working with marketing. She is born and raised in Colombo and have attended the protests many times.

She believes that religious diversity permeates in Sri Lanka and that conflicts between the groups are not seen in the protests. She has seen massive crowds of Muslims and the feeling is that they all belong to one and the same country. She voted for the present government mainly because Gotabaya Rajapaksa ended the war, but she does not see any links with her political choice and her religiosity.

P7 does not think that the democratic values in the country today are uplifted and nourished. She does see some politicians in Parliament that she respects and that she

believes can bring change to the country, she mentions Harsha De Silva who according to her always has good argument and statistics ready to win debates. P7 thinks that it is important to encourage students to stay in Sri Lanka instead of going overseas to study. She says that some politicians in the country are so because they are famous, rather than because they are educated, and that this is a problem.

When she is asked about her own experiences of the civil war she says that she was well aware of people killing each other and that parents were afraid of sending them to school. Despite the current calls for Mahinda Rajapaksa to step down she feels that was a great leader and that he together with Sarath Fonseka did a good job bringing peace to the country and she highly respects the soldiers fighting to win the war. She thinks that the strength from fighting the war for so long is now brought into the protests.

As a woman from the young and educated generation she feels that she is obliged to demand their rights, the crisis made her realize she *had* to protest. Her generation collectively feels that they can do something if they have a proper plan. She has seen numerous good aspects of unity in Galle Face, which makes her happy. Religion are not causing division in the protests, but she says that she heard stories about girls being harassed in the protest site and many of her friends (girls) decided not to go there alone. However the feeling of everyone supporting each other is stronger than the problems that could be seen. P7 says that Sri Lankan people smile and help each other, "if you give a smile you get a smile back" she says. When attending the protest in Galle Face, she has seen religious leaders walking together and the entire Muslim community being supported by all Sri Lankans when breaking fast. She feels that this is a moment she will remember forever and something that cannot be expressed into words; it was such a proud moment for Sri Lanka.

She is the second child and has one older brother. They are both at an age where they need to take responsibility for the family; this has been difficult, as the prices have increased. Before the crisis peaked, she could buy groceries for 12.000 LKR but the same groceries now cost 20.000 LKR. To exemplify further she says that prior to the crisis she travelled by bus to work for 35 LKR, the same trip now costs 97 LKR. As this happened she began to calculate her and her family's economy and began to worry. She is fully aware that others have greater financial problems than her and that day-to-day workers can no longer make ends meet. She has really understood that they need to call for a change. She thinks that the political future in Sri Lanka can be bright if the right people come into power; she mentions that she always tries to stay positive and that she tries to see opportunities in everything. Her father is a restaurant owner and has lost a lot during the crisis. To her it is important to identify problems and but remain positive.

6.1.8 Person 8 (P8)

P8 is 28 years old, a Sinhalese-Muslim woman, born and raised in Colombo. She is married and lives with her family. She works as a Business Development Executive. She thinks that religious diversity in Sri Lanka is positive and that it allows people to have their own thoughts, during her time in school she felt that people were open minded. She has experienced some targeting for belonging to a minority group, especially after the Easter attacks in 2019. Many talked negatively about Muslims at this time, and her friends from other religious groups would say; "Muslims are causing problems, but not you." She feels that her religiosity is linked to her political thinking in the way that she aims to have good intentions and maintaining a righteous

way of thinking. She says that she voted for the current government and now regrets her choice. She feels that Gotabaya Rajapaksa made a lot of promises but that the economy is failing. P8 says that if as many people as now ask the leader to resign but he chooses to stay in power, perhaps the democracy is failing. She thinks that young people should be let into power, they have not been given the chance but her generation is ready to take action.

P8 believes that all Sri Lankans' lives have been affected by the crisis, one of the biggest issues has been the shortage of fuel – transportation is difficult every day.

Her thoughts on the civil war are that it was a disastrous thing for the country and that everyone was afraid to go out during that time. She says that Mahinda Rajapaksa ended the war and brought peace to the country, earlier Tamils were always at risk of being targeted but this problem does not exist anymore.

The current crisis have caused people to protest and provided a feeling of unity in the country. She says that seeing Singhalese and Tamil people celebrating Avrudu and Muslims celebrating Ramadan in Galle Face and to see how much various groups respected each other gives her goose bumps. P8 does see some light in the tunnel because of the protests and the way that people have come together. She mentions all the prosperous resources that Sri Lanka has and that they should use them to become a stable rich country. She hopes for help from the IMF of restructuring the country's loans and she is very happy to see Sri Lankans all over the world supporting the citizens of Sri Lanka. She would like to remain in the country to be close to her family and to help develop the economy again. Sadly she might need to move abroad because her husband works in the hotel industry and have problems at the moment coping financially. She says that this is a problem for the country; many younger people decide to leave instead of staying to rebuild the economy.

6.1.9 Person 9 (P9)

P9 is a Tamil-Hindu woman, 26 years old, born in Colombo. She has felt rather little discrimination since the war ended but has many memories of the fear they experienced during war times. She remembers stories that her uncle told her about the situation for Tamils in Jaffna during that time, all Tamils were checked at all times and they lived under total control of the Sinhalese military. The fear was constant and they had little freedom. Even though P9 did not live in the North she feels sad thinking about her people that had to go through all those things at that time.

According to P9, the crisis made everyone in Sri Lanka understand that something was wrong; P9 says that life is difficult now and that many people are sad. Her family has experienced troubles travelling to work at times due to the fuel shortage.
She has been active in the protests together with friends and she has felt safe and strong going to the protest as a Tamil woman. P9 says that she is happy to feel that women are welcomed and that the unity between both genders as well as various religious groups are seen in Galle Face. She trusts that the unity seen during the crisis will last and that it shows that new times are coming.

She explains that she was not interested in politics before but that all negative aspects of the crisis led her to understand that something needed to be done. The younger generation was not speaking out earlier, they now demand for a change and wants hope for a better country. P9 emphasizes that she has certain hope despite her Tamil background and despite her relatives not seeing the same hope; she thinks that many young people now see their chance to make a difference.

6.1.10 Person 10 (P10)

P10 is a Tamil-Muslim (Moor) man, 48 years old. He was born in Colombo and works as a tuk-tuk driver. He owns a house in the south of the country, which he at times rents out.

He has experienced a lot of discrimination because of his religiosity and believes that Muslims were politically targeted after the Easter attacks. He thinks that the religious diversity in Sri Lanka is good and that says that all Sri Lankans have friends within all religious groups, he says that this is natural and something no one spends much time thinking about.

He did not vote for the current Government and he thinks that the crisis in the country is awful, people have been affected deeply and life has become very hard to endure. As a tuk-tuk driver he has immense problems finding petrol and he spends many hours basically everyday in fuel queues. He never thought that this would be reality in Sri Lanka. The power cuts also creates problems and his children are having troubles studying. He is very sad and angry about the development and feel that the leaders of the country have betrayed the people.

He feels that before the Easter attacks, Muslims did not experience problems but the politicians intentionally caused division between them and the rest of the people of Sri Lanka. According to him, all Muslims were more or less blamed for the horrible attacks. His family could feel people's resentment against them because peace in the country had been disturbed once again. He says that he and all of his Muslim friends were just as devastated as the rest of the country when the attacks took place. The tourism sector was heavily impacted and his income was threatened. He strongly feels that the politicians created an atmosphere of hate towards Muslims, and even though many of his close friends from other religious groups did not show direct hate towards him in particular, he felt significant changes in attitudes towards Muslims in general.

He has not had time to attend the Galle Face protest as much as he would like but he feels that he contributes and supports the cause as often as he can. He took the streets in the suburb in south of Colombo where he lives before the Galle Face protest started. He adds that he definitely would have more time to protest if he did not have to spend as much time queuing for petrol in order to provide for his family.

P10 does no longer feel that Sri Lanka is democratic; he says that the politicians tries to control their life. He mentions that during Covid-19 they were held in military lockdowns with limited access to food. The leaders of Sri Lanka constantly use their power to control them. The recent curfews and declarations of State of Emergency are typical examples of their wrongful use of power, according to P10.

He says that the unity that has been seen during the crisis feels sincere but he is very cautious about trusting that it would last. Politics has been used in the past to cause division and succeeded, he is afraid that it might happen again even though a positive development has been seen recently. P10 feels very sad about the future of Sri Lanka, both his own and the country's. He hopes that the young generation can bring change and hopefully change will come in the next election. However, he is afraid that the corrupted politicians will not be replaced; Sri Lankans are used to see that the same people remain in power.

6.2 Participatory observation

The research was done in Colombo, Sri Lanka from the 17th of March until the 9th of May 2022. Participation in the protests was done and information was gathered

through interaction with Sri Lankans, which is reflected in the study extensively combined with the interview material in order to broaden the perspective and the channels of information. To fully understand Sri Lankans' motivation to protest and to understand the perceived unity many talked about, participation in the protests became crucial. To first-hand experience how the GotaGoGama protest village in Galle Face, Colombo emerged deepened the understanding of how Sri Lankans possibly perceived the aspects of the protests and the depth of the crisis. Stories of how various religious groups engaged and supported each other and of how various religious leaders walked side-by-side supporting the people and the cause were frequently heard and seen in media, through participatory observation this was experienced personally during involvement in the protests. It was clear during the time spent in Sri Lanka that people in all levels of society discussed the current crisis constantly. The personal perception is that everyone had something to say about the crisis and its effect on their lives.

On the 9th of May 2022, while proceeding to the airport, severe public unrest was witnessed and the anger of the people was experienced closely. People in the Colombo area defied the imposed military curfew and immense instability was observable. On this day all vehicles were checked in roadblocks from Colombo leading to Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA) set up by the people to make sure that the resigning Mahinda Rajapaksa, any family member or close supporter did not attempt to flee the country.[105] On the night of the 9th streets were crowded with angry people with sticks and poles, burning tires and broken glass filled the streets. The trip normally takes about 40 minutes but instead took over 3 hours. I managed to film some of it and was initially approached by angry people in one of the roadblocks yelling on me to delete it, but when I told them "I just want to show the world what the government of Sri Lanka has done to this country" they let us continue driving towards BIA. The events observed on the 9th of May helped to understand some of the following events that happened after leaving the country as well as the anger of many Sri Lankans that ultimately led to violence.

In order to monitor the political and public development in Sri Lanka while being there, media and social media were followed constantly. Invitations to different social media groups as well as friends' forwarded messages that were frequently shared at the time came to be of great importance for the progress of the study. The protests in Colombo during April and May 2022 were commonly organized through social media and the rapid sharing of information made the young generation of Sri Lanka the most important actors during the protests. When the village in Galle Face, Gotagogama was evolving, requests of items needed from the people on site came through social media and such requests were spreading fast.

Contact was established with individuals active in the group 'Yellow for democracy' who aimed to educate people about their fundamental rights and the political development in the country. This group had one of the first tents on the protest site in Galle Face and observations were made of how ordinary citizens on their way to work stopped their vehicles to donate water, food and medical supplies. The group's thankful small talk with donators stopping by where useful to witness in order to

[105] *The Guardian,* (2022-05-09). "Sri Lanka's PM resigns after weeks of protests over economic crisis".

understand how people from different groups of society supported the protest. It was clear that many stopped by to show their support to those who could use their time to protest day and night. Clearly this motivated the group to continue protesting and they explained that they felt grateful for the support from other Sri Lankans.

During interaction with Sri Lankans at the Galle Face protest site the story of Gnana Akka's attempt to change protestors mind in May 2022 was revealed. A woman called Gnana Akka works to give advice to the president by using black magic. In order to make people at the protest site support the president, known in the article as 'anti-Rajapaksas' they were given charmed water that according to her would make them give up their agitation against the president and his family. In a full-scale economic crisis, Gnana Akka flew in exotic flowers from India in order to perform the ritual to charm the water.[106] Other similar stories exist about her attempts to impact politics but this is the most recent one and linked to the protests taking place in Galle Face, Colombo at the time the research was done. This is included as a minor note in this study but serve to show how the government at the time reasoned thinking they could stop the protests and change peoples mind, it also shows how the government's money was spent during a full-scale economic crisis while families were sometimes unable to eat three full meals per day.

Another interesting observation made during the time spent in Sri Lanka was how "commonly known" it was that to assume that protests that turned violent that caused the government to violate fundamental rights and to declare both State of Emergency and curfews where in fact orchestrated by the government itself. The mentality at that time was that Sri Lankans collectively were upholding peaceful protests and when they occasionally turned violent, the government was to blame because they were enabled to undermine citizens' freedom.

[106] *Economynext,* (2022-05-05). "Sri Lanka seeks divine help to subdue anti-Rajapaksa protestors".

7. Analysis

This section starts with three subsections presenting answers of the research questions using the empirical data from the semi-structured interviews. Thereafter follows an analysis of the data regarding democracy and protests using a theoretical framework by Adam Przeworski and Ortiz, Burke, Berrada and Cortés. Thereafter an analysis of the data through the marginalization theory be is presented.

According to the empirical data it seems as if the trust in democracy, the views of unity or the thoughts whether the unity will last is not clearly linked to neither age nor religious, ethnic or cultural background.

P8 and P10 were the two participants that needed a translator present during the interviews. They had only little knowledge of English.

7.1 Research questions

7.1.1 How do Sri Lankan citizens in Colombo view democracy in the country?

During the interviews all participants were asked whether they trust the country's democracy. One trusted the democracy, five said they do not trust or see any democracy in Sri Lanka at all, and four answered that they believe that democracy in the country exists only to a certain extent.

The only one (P3) who answered that the democracy is trusted is also the only one that does not engage in politics or even discusses it, not even during the current crisis, but is also the person who suffered most by the government's actions. P3 is the oldest of the interviewees and Tamil-Christian and she is the person that mentions religiosity strikingly the most. She upheld the importance of anonymity during the interview, saying that some things she spoke about could cause troubles for her.

Three of the five who fully rejects the existence of democratic values in Sri Lanka are highly involved in the protests in Colombo. The other two fully supports them. Four out of the five in this group are Sinhalese (2 Christian, 2 Buddhist), and one is Tamil (Muslim).

Four participants trust the democracy in Sri Lanka to a certain extent but all of them agree that some problems exist when it comes to their fundamental rights to speak out against the government. All except P6 who is 52 years old are between 23-28 years old and three are Sinhalese (1 Catholic, 1 Buddhist, 1 Muslim) and one is Tamil (Hindu).

P4 gave vivid descriptions of her time working as a reconciliation researcher where war crimes were revealed to her and that was when she truly understood how Tamils had lived their lives during the war. She encountered numerous individuals telling her about the military officers cruelty towards them. She spoke about government surveillance and about restrictions of fundamental rights and she revealed this information while reminding of the importance of anonymity, this made it obvious that she does not trust the democracy or feels safe.

7.1.2 How do Sri Lankans in Colombo perceive religious, ethnic and cultural identities in Sri Lanka?

All participants except one were deeply reflecting on the unity seen in the crisis and P3 (Tamil Christian woman, 73 years old) is the only one who did not see unity. P4 (Sinhala-Buddhist/Catholic woman, 40 years old) said that the unity is 'sugar coded' and that minorities were not properly represented in the protests. 8 of 10 do believe that religious, ethnic and cultural identities are re-shaped to some extent in the crisis. Both P7 and P8 shared stories of unity that they had never seen before and they emphasized that they were proud of their country while experiencing this. P2 (Sinhalese-Christian) also talked about how encouraged and proud she was to see Tamil and Muslim women taking part in the protests.

The fact that P3 did not see unity could perhaps be explained by the fact that she was heavily targeted basically all her life because of belonging to a religious and ethnic minority. She believed that her religious, ethnic and cultural identity was perceived as something unchangeable in Sri Lanka.

By the participatory observation and by the information gathered through the interviews it was shown that unity emerged that the country had not witnessed before and to some extent it seems to be clear that religious, ethnic and cultural identities in fact have been re-shaped in the crisis in Sri Lanka during 2022.

7.1.3 How do Sri Lankans in Colombo possibly trust that the current perceived unity would last after the crisis?

P3 (Tamil Christian, 73 years old) is the only one who does not think that the unity will last, she also does not perceive religious, ethnic and cultural identities to have been re-shaped at all during 2022. P10, also Tamil (Muslim), 48 years old think that there is a high risk that the unity will not last. The rest of the participants (8 of 10) believed that the unity would last to some extent after the crisis. Many mentioned that the rest of the country could now experience what the people in the north experienced during wartimes.

Through the participatory observation, information by many people was collected and many hoped for times that would no longer marginalize minorities and that the power of the people would come before politicians' urge for power while creating division between groups to gain power. However, by the information gathered and by discussions held, older individuals seemed less trusting of unity in the country.

Since the protests have been more or less led by the younger generation it seems natural that they are the ones who also trust the change that they now perceive to exist and work towards and a greater part of their adulthood comprises of a life in peace in Sri Lanka.

7.2 Analysis regarding democracy and protests

Adam Przeworski defines democracy in a way that Sri Lanka's political system follow to some extent – it is defined by political arrangements where the people can select the government and holds the power to remove it if they do not like it. He argues that democracy functions when conflicts in society follow the politically institutional framework, elections are important but courts and public institutions need to be respected too. This must be understood as not entirely respected by the government of Sri Lanka, numerous allegations of fraud and corruption has been

reported and the lack of transparency is evident.[107] Court systems have been used in favor of the president and his family and those close to them have been pardoned even despite being sentenced to life imprisonment.[108] Through analysis using the theoretical framework and the empirical data collected through the interviews combined with the participatory observation it becomes rather obvious that the democratic values in the country are failing.

In the Sri Lankan context it seems as if political opinions were superimposed by experienced fear prior to the crisis, many voted in favor of Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the SLPP because Gotabaya was and still is seen as the one who ended the war and could bring national security back after the Easter attacks. As the crisis worsened, the first point in which most people are in favor of a certain outcome is more than those not in favor of it. The outcome sought for is that the country will find its way out of the economic crisis and most importantly to the majority of the people protesting was that president Gotabaya Rajapaksa would resign.

According to Pzreworski's argumentation, a peaceful solving of the issue could be possible due to the unity of peoples' opinions. One point is to what extent people are divided regarding what they want most of a particular issue. This is understood as to whether some outcome is more sought for by more people than another outcome and depending on if people who support all other outcomes are distanced from the option that most people preferred and if that most sought for outcome increases in regards of the number of people who wants it. How is this applicable in the Sri Lankan context and how was this reflected in the empirical data? Regarding the views of possible perceived unity that was examined in the study it is clear that the feeling of unity is linked to the commitment to the protests and stems from the idea that everyone asked for the same things. They ask for the president to resign and for new political reforms and *the greater majority* wants this. The only person interviewed who was not engaged in the protests or in fact inclined to discuss politics was also the only person who saw no real aim of the protests or any unity. But the ones who did engage felt unity to some extent and they felt that they were asking for the same things.
What seems to stand in the way is the government's urge to stay in power - in spite of massive protests leaving the people's requests unanswered. However, the Parliament's power and its disinclination of pleasing the public should not be disregarded. Impeaching the president is possible with 2/3-majority support in the Parliament, something not yet seen in Sri Lanka. However, after the events that took place on the 9th of July, president Gotabaya Rajapaksa finally let the Speaker announce his resignation.

Przeworski argues that conflicts in democracies are resolved in elections, but as seen world wide, these may not always be fair ones. The time aspect is relevant too, sometimes people might not want to wait until a new election is held.[109] The presidential election in 2019 in Sri Lanka is considered to have been legitimate and during the interviews many participants explained why they had voted for Gotabaya Rajapaksa, though aftewards regretting this. However in the Sri Lankan context, it is the question of time that makes people protesting, people are not interested in waiting for a new election though some participants mentioned hopes of change for the next

[107] *Newsfirst,* (2018-02-03). "Bond Scam: Expose of the largest financial scam in the history of SL"
[108] A. Przeworski 2019:5-8
[109] A. Przeworski 2019:159

election in 2024. The economical crisis in the country has created a decline in living standards for basically all Sri Lankans; this is of course also a factor extremely important to why people decided to engage in the protests.
According to Przeworski the presidential democratic system is weaker than the parliamentary system and more vulnerable to crises. The chief executive is elected for a fixed term and is entitled to appoint the cabinet. If the executive do not commit any crimes he or she stays in power until the next election regardless of the quality of the governance or if support for him or her is very low.[110] This is applicable to the situation in Sri Lanka and Gotabaya Rajapaksa has in fact been accused of numerous crimes, but not convicted.[111]

Przeworski claims that political life never stops; this is a thought also highly relevant in Sri Lanka in 2022.[112] During the participant observation it became clear that the political and economic crisis was debated at all times in Colombo during in late March, April and the beginning of May. Every person encountered with during the time spent in Sri Lanka had something to say about the situation in the country. Of course those who perhaps still supported the government or did not have anything to say was not given any real attention because of the fact that they stayed silent.

The fact that parliamentary opposition is given the space in the political sphere in a crisis like the one in Sri Lanka, hoping to change people's minds and gain votes seem to not have been utilized to any greater extent. A 2/3-majority in parliament could have caused an impeachment of the president but as P4 mentioned during her interview, the opposition did not seize this opportunity. It is understood that the opposition did engage in protests and supported the people but never seized the chance to act in parliament.[113]

Street demonstration and strikes are a standard process of democratic oppositions. Przeworski argues that t is likely that demonstrations do not always remain peaceful; they might be unnecessarily repressed, and might deteriorate into violence by some demonstrators.[114] This is what happened numerous times during the protests in the country especially on the 9th of May when PM Mahinda Rajapaksa's resignation letter was accepted and on the days following the 9th of July when Gotabaya Rajapaksa announced his resignation. According to one interviewee, the government bribed individuals to act as pro-government supporters and to destroy the protest site in Galle Face on the 9th of May. Independent of who led those acts to destroy the site, it created immense anger and things turned violent, a military curfew was imposed in Colombo. But people did not obey the curfew and public unrest was seen throughout the country and even cost at least five lives including on MP's.[115] [116] Przeworski writes about blockages of roads and riot, which is what happened in Colombo and other areas of the country on the 9th of May.[117] However he further writes that when public order is disrupted it tends to spiral, and often even those in favor of the

[110] A. Przeworski 2019:35
[111] *Newsfirst,* (2018-02-03). "Bond Scam: Expose of the largest financial scam in the history of SL"
[112] A. Przeworski 2019:159
[113] A. Przeworski 2019:165
[114] A. Przeworski 2019:166
[115] *The Guardian,* (2022-05-09)."Sri Lanka's PM resigns after weeks of protests over economic crisis".
[116] *Al Jazeera* (2022-07-09). "Sri Lanka MP among five killed as violence escalates".
[117] A. Przeworski 2019:167

demonstrations tend to rather see government officers take control to maintain public order, as normal life can no longer proceed as usual.[118] On May 10th, military forces took control over the situation and order was reinstated but the anger remained and became even more evident in Sri Lanka. As revealed in the interviews, citizens of the country are used to being controlled by the government and the fear of forceful repression is understood to have contributed to the de-escalation of the situation the following days. What happened on the 9th of July can be seen as the evidence showing that ultimately violence escalates and important buildings were occupied for days as Przeworski explained might be seen when the government does not address certain demands.[119]

The protests in Sri Lanka started sporadically in the beginning of 2022 and became daily organized on the 9th of April. They can be understood as asking for enhanced democracy, the resignation of the Government and opposing corruption. When public services were no longer efficient, the citizens of Sri Lanka became angry and felt the need to try to change the situation.[120] The authors of *World Protests – A Study of Key Protest Issues in the 21st Century*, defines corruption as something systemic and structural, political capture and inequality. The elites uses the political sphere for their own benefit at the expense of the majority. Democracy is no longer serving 99% of the population and the elites abuse their influence in how public policies are created.[121] Two years prior to the massive protests in Sri Lanka, experts warned about the economical situation in the country calling for the people in power to reach out to the IMF, however this was not done until the end of April.[122] People understood it as the clear corruption caused them not to do so in time because of the IMF's demands of transparency of the country's financial situation.
Many people in Sri Lanka had been angry for a long time and as the participants in the interviews exposed, they found it difficult to cope with daily life activities in the beginning of March and therefore decided to take the streets and protest.

Further Ortiz, Burke, Berrada and Cortés explains that demonstrations that oppose corruption constitute 20% of protests globally, again between 2006-2020. When health, transportation, education and security, public services expected to function no longer do so and when the complaints do not seem to be heard by those in power, protests are generated.[123] Revealed through the interviews all of the aspects just mentioned above ceased to function correctly in Sri Lanka during the beginning of 2022 and ultimately protests were generated.

Drawing on similarities from the Arabic Spring, the public unrest in Sri Lanka, which as of yet peaking on the 9th of July did not start then, nor on the 9th of April when the protests site in Galle Face, Colombo emerged. Just like in the Middle East, North Africa and in Latin America protests were common for a long period of time were protestors demanded economic justice and when demands were left unanswered, they shifted to political demands asking the government to resign. Early in March protests

[118] A. Przeworski 2019:170
[119] A. Przeworski, 2019:167
[120] *The Wall Street Journal,* (2022-04-03) "Anger Rises in Sri Lanka as Economic Crises Worsens"
[121] Ortiz, Burke, Berrada and Cortés, 2022:95-96
[122] *CNBC* (2022-04-18) "Sri Lanka's reluctance to tap IMF helped push it into an economic abyss"
[123] Ortiz, Burke, Berrada and Cortés, 2022:24

on the streets of suburban areas of Colombo were filled with people asking for better living conditions, this went on throughout March until the last day of the month when massive protests in Mirihana near the President's private residence erupted.[124] This became the first uncivilized protest in Sri Lanka in 2022 but the starting point to many more. State of Emergency was declared and when the government realized that more coordinated nationwide protests were planned within the next days, curfew was imposed. The demands for economic stability and justice were left unanswered and protests rapidly became focused on asking for the president to resign.
As Ortiz, Burke, Berrada and Cortés writes, peaceful protests are natural features of healthy democracies and therefore should not be repressed by any government.

7.3 Analysis on marginalization

In Sri Lanka the marginalization of minorities has been present for a long time and has affected all participants in various ways. The current crisis in Sri Lanka seem to have shown those in the Sinhalese majority group what the marginalized group previously experienced in the country and 9 of 10 participants reflected on the unity seen in the crisis. The marginalization in Sri Lanka historically affected all groups who did not belong to the Sinhala-Buddhist majority, however more or less all citizens have been aware of it. The people in power have used marginalization to secure power but most of the participants said that religious diversity was something seen as normal in Sri Lanka. The uses of majoritarian politics seem to have worked politically but not emotionally regarding individuals' feelings about others that they know from various religious, ethnic and cultural minorities.

Social exclusion as a state in which individuals or groups lack effective participation in key activities or benefits of the society where they live was highly relevant before the massive protests started.[125] When the Galle Face protests started in Colombo, many minorities who were afraid to speak out before were now confident to do so because they were asking for the same things as the majority group. Many of the participants spoke about proudness regarding the unity seen. However in regards of marginalization, one participant (P4) spoke about the importance of understanding that not all groups of society took part in the protests. She emphasized the fact that the protests should be seen as middle-class focused and disconnected from minority struggles as well as the struggles seen in different parts of society. The political demands in the Galle Face protests are not of such great importance for all Sri Lankans as some of them struggle with coping with life on the daily basis. The immense presence of war hero as P4 talks about was personally observed in the Galle Face protests site, this could be understood to have impacted Tamils' engagement in the protests. To some extent the marginalization seen in Sri Lanka for so long also permeates the protests in 2022, despite some signs of perceived unity.

Mowat asks the question; "marginalized from what?" and in Sri Lanka as shown in the section on previous research it was widely accepted to not let Tamils have the same opportunities in life as the Sinhalese. Later, Muslims were also experienced being marginalized.[126] The fear created by the majoritarian politics caused the Tamil community to stay quiet for a long time although ultimately fighting against the

[124] *Al Jazeera* (2022-03-31). "Dozens arrested in Sri Lanka amid protests over worsening economy".
[125] Mowat, 2015:457
[126] DeVotta, 2021:287-288

government leading up to the civil war. During the civil war all Sri Lankans experienced fear and stories of terrible war crimes were revealed in the interviews. The lack of reconciliation in Sri Lanka led Tamils to continuously be marginalized and therefore still live in distress. The Easter Bombings 2019 are another recent example of how marginalization was used to gain political power, the Muslim community was blamed for the bombings and Gotabaya Rajapaksa won the 2019 election promising to restore national security. Many of the participants in this study agree that subjectively they have no problems with diversity in Sri Lanka but that marginalization is something that the politicians desire and they use it to create conflicts between the people. Mowat argues that some experience marginalization as global and forms part of their identity and lived experience. This is to a certain extent accurate when it comes to Tamils in Sri Lanka and was seen in the interview results.[127]

Something that also became clear from the interviews is the fact that so many have experienced and still experience fear. It seems as if Sri Lankans are so used to being oppressed and controlled by the government that they are not surprised by any restrictions of fundamental rights. All participants witnessed seeing marginalization in society and they all agreed that marginalization, whether they experienced it themselves or understood others' struggle was wrong. Many spoke about it as something created by politicians to gain political power. The younger generation seems to be less scared and much trust is now put on them to solve the current political situation. As in many parts of the world, students are leading protests and in Sri Lanka they are aiming to change the foundations of the ruling system.

The stories from the interviews revealing sensitive information about marginalization in Sri Lanka were crucial to the study because they showed how depraved the situation was for Tamils in the north and showed that the lack of reconciliation still causes problems. Participants and others engaging in the protests in 2022 talked about how the rest of the country now experienced governmental and military control that the Northern parts battled for decades. According to some of the participants, the government at that time committed numerous war crimes. These allegations have been presented before to various international organizations but have not yet led to any repercussions for the ones who carried out those acts. The information that was revealed shows that the reconciliation work has functioned poorly and that justice is still requested on several levels.

[127] Mowat, 2015:457

8. Discussion and conclusion

According to the results of this study, Sri Lankans in Colombo have seemingly little trust in the country's democracy, which in itself is rather alarming for a country calling itself 'The democratic socialist republic of Sri Lanka'. In order to make citizens work towards the same goals as the government and to enable them to feel motivated to actually engage democratically in the country's political sphere, trust in the democracy ought to exist entirely or at least the trust in the democracy.

If religious, ethnic and cultural identities are seen as partly re-shaped, which the empiric data showed that they to some extent were perceived as, this could be understood as something positive for a country as Sri Lanka that has gone through significant problems with marginalization of minorities. To let everyone in a society feel that they are equally worth and to give them the same abilities as the majority group of the society is a development that should be welcomed. Since many participants agreed that politicians in Sri Lanka contributed in creating division in order to control power, some politicians themselves will most likely not welcome this development completely. Previous research as well as the collected data shows that marginalization has been used to hold and gain power. As shown in the results from the interviews the rest of the country are to some extent experiencing the same oppression tactics as the Northeast went through for decades. During the time spent in Sri Lanka, observations were made first-hand and it was understood through discussions with others as well as from media and social media that when some events unfolded in a questionable way, rumors quickly emerged that the government was to blame. The stories of how the government paid people to support them and cause violence, creating space for the government to oppress the violence while violating citizens' fundamental rights were stories commonly heard of in Sri Lanka at the time. As such rumors kept spreading it seemed as if the lack of people's trust in the government increased.

Regarding whether or not individuals trust that the perceived unity will last, it draws back to *if* religious, ethnic and cultural identities are seen as re-shaped and *if* individuals trust the democracy, and even if identities are re-shaped – the lack of trust in the democracy may imply that individuals are aware of that the government may use different tactics to destroy any perceived unity.

In a way the ruling system in Sri Lanka has created a mentality for the citizens of the country to not even being able to trust positive progress created by themselves. Sri Lankans are to some extent indoctrinated to not trust society; therefore it is extremely hard to apprehend how the country's future can progress positively. Almost all participants in the study talked about giving the right people access to power and this is most likely the real change that has to come before the suspiciousness in society can disappear.

The theoretical framework explains that oppressing demonstrations is incorrect and that it will not enhance any political stability or willingness to cooperate with the ones in power. Even though the government managed to control some of the protests during the beginning of 2022, protests did not stop and people became more determined than ever to contest the existing political system and ultimately the protests turned violent and led to the loss of lives. As people felt that they were not heard, massive crowds stormed significant political buildings on the 9th of July –

showing that this is what might happen when the people in power do not meet people's demands.

During the interviews many participants were very emotional about what they had experienced as citizens of Sri Lanka, and some of them expressed fear of the Government. According to the empirical data it seems as if the trust in democracy, the views of whether or not religious, ethnic or cultural identities were re-shaped or the thoughts on whether or not the unity would last is not properly linked to neither age or religious, ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

Drawing on the information that was provided in two of the interviews it is understood that war crimes were committed. The participants presented information about abduction, murder and sexual violence. This information was sensitive to attain and the participants were clearly still tormented excessively by their experiences. The participant that had others testify to her about the crimes committed and the one that had her son being abducted during the war cried during the interview. A question that arose during this time and because of the information that was provided was *why* the reconciliation mechanisms working to serve the Tamils justice had been put into place when yet no one has been charged for the crimes. International organizations have been pushing to investigate such allegations but as long as individuals that experienced the crimes committed are heard, it is compatible to understand that justice will not be served. If the standing point is that democracy is sought for, Sri Lanka has failed - drawing from the events that took place in 2022 combined with the collected data.

Information regarding the situation in the country after the 9th of July is not included in the thesis but marked here merely as a note, on the 23rd of September the current president Ranil Wickremasinghe instated High Security Zones in Colombo, something not seen in Sri Lanka since war times. This might be seen to show that democratic values are further declining even though the Aragalaya's demands that Gotabaya Rajapaksa should resign had been met.[128]

[128] Newsfirst (2022-09-23) "High Security Zones declared in Colombo".

9. Future research

Much of previous research on Sri Lanka focus on oppression towards minorities in the country as well as the majoritarian rule, a problem that has existed for a long time. As many of the participants in this study said; Sri Lankans are 'used' to being controlled by the government but this control now consists of an extra layer of complexity due to the united front of people asking for better living conditions in regards of the economic crisis. With more time in Sri Lanka, additional interviewees could have been acquired and this could naturally have enhanced the validity and depth of the research. Throughout the research process, the desire to do a deeper research existed, mainly due to the fact that some contemporary issues were difficult to examine through existing research.

Future research should be focused further on how marginalization is promoted by the government in Sri Lanka and to what extent this affects the dynamics of politics in the country. The lack of trust in the country's democracy should further be researched in order to find solutions for the betterment of the country. Due to the rapid development in the Sri Lankan context in 2022, future research should focus on capturing various perspectives that might be of importance to understand future political and societal development.

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Interview questions used in the semi-structured interviews

Please state your age, profession, education, and city of residence and birth city.

1. What ethnic group do you consider yourself to belong to?
2. What is your religious affiliation?
3. Do you believe that religious diversity in Sri Lanka is positive or negative? Explain.
4. Is your religiosity linked to your political opinions?
5. How is your social interaction with other religious groups?
6. What is your political affiliation? Has it changed over the years?
7. Are you considering voting differently in the next election?
8. What is your opinion of Sri Lanka's democracy and the current Government in Sri Lanka?
9. Has your private life been affected by the current Sri Lankan politics, how?
10. Has your work life been affected by the current Sri Lankan politics, how?
11. What is your opinion of the conflict from 1983-2009? Your personal views/experiences.
12. Do you feel that the crisis has affected how various groups in society interact with each other? Explain your thoughts linked to the crisis and persons' interactions with each other.
13. What do you think about the political future of Sri Lanka?
14. What do you think about your own future?