

Lund University  
Centre for Theology and Religious Studies  
Master's Thesis, Islamology  
Author: Andreas Johansson  
Tutor: Rickard Lagervall  
Autumn 2007

# **A Third Way**

**The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress  
discourse struggle between  
Islamism and Nationalism**

## **Abstract**

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) has been a part of the Sri Lankan parliament since 1989 and in recent year scholars have noticed ‘the Muslim factor’ in Sri Lankan politics. Earlier research has concentrated on the conflict in Sri Lanka and its effects on the Muslim community. The present thesis focuses on the SLMC’s organization and speeches in parliament. The aim of this thesis is to analyze the construction of the politics of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress and the constructions of their organization and the guidelines. The second aim it to see if there is a discursive struggle between Sri Lankan nationalism and Islamism. To analyze this I have used Ernesto Laclau’s and Chantal Mouffe’s Discourse Theory. To complement this I have used Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis. The construction of SLMC’s politics arises from an antagonism between different nationalistic discourses and Islamism. I can not see that a state of hegemony would appear in SLMC’s politics because of the contradictions between the different discourses. My study shows that, like many other Islamist parties, SLMC tends to fall within the frame of the nation state. Therefore, before further studies are done, I would like to call SLMC politics ‘a third way’ in the antagonism between discourses of nationalism and Islamism, namely that SLMC bases its politics on the discourse of Islamism and then constructs its identity from Sri Lankan nationalism. This construction is continuously constituted and reconstituted as a discourse in SLMC’s speeches, organization and guidelines.

Keywords: Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Islamism, Nationalism, Discourse Analysis, Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe, Norman Fairclough

# Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>3</b>
List of Figures.....	4
Glossary .....	4
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Previous research on SLMC and Muslim Politics in Sri Lanka .....	6
<i>The Conflict as a factor</i> .....	6
<i>SLMC as a regional party</i> .....	9
<i>Minority Politics</i> .....	10
Aim of this study .....	13
Material and fieldwork .....	13
Disposition.....	18
<b>Discourse Analysis .....</b>	<b>19</b>
Discourses and Orders of Discourses .....	20
Discourse Theory.....	22
<i>Hegemony and antagonism</i> .....	23
Critical Discourse Analysis .....	24
Nationalism .....	25
Islamism.....	27
<b>Contextualizing Sri Lanka Muslim Congress .....</b>	<b>29</b>
Post independence: the left-wing movements, Tamil separatism and Buddhist ‘just war thinking’.....	29
A short introduction to Muslims in Sri Lanka.....	32
<i>The change in Muslim Politics and the development of SLMC</i> .....	35
<b>Sri Lanka Muslim Congress’ construction of politics.....</b>	<b>36</b>
Sri Lanka Muslim Congress organization and the guidelines of the party.....	36
‘Muslim issues’ in the parliament 1989-1992 .....	43
Nationalism in parliament speeches 1989-1992.....	55
<b>Concluding analysis .....</b>	<b>66</b>
Thoughts for further studies .....	71
<b>Sources .....</b>	<b>73</b>
Interviews .....	73
Academic publications.....	73
Internet sources .....	76

## *List of Figures*

**Figure 3: SLMC construction of politics.....69**

## *Glossary*

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
IPKP	Indian Peace Keeping Force
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLMC	Sri Lanka Muslim Congress
UNP	United National Party

## Introduction

The international communities today are very keen about the Muslim politics in Sri Lanka and the dimension it has created in our local society. International leaders must see what is happening to the Muslims in Sri Lanka. And a lot of things have happened to Sri Lanka Muslims especially in the emergence of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, there are now a larger focus of Muslim politics and the reason of this I believe is that we never denied or have been against the rights of other communities and we always embraced others in our political struggle (...) and one important thing is that the Muslim community has never taken up arms in our political struggle and we have always had a moderate model for our party and this should be a model for Muslims all over the world.<sup>1</sup>

This speech was held by the current leader Rauf Hakeem on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) becoming a political party. SLMC has made an impact on Sri Lankan politics over the last decades and have since 1989 been a part of the parliament and at times the government. There are two interesting points made in this speech, one is the mentioning that Muslims have not been a part of the ongoing conflict in Sri Lanka and the other one is that Hakeem sees his party as a model for other Muslim parties around the world. These words from Hakeem made me curious about the construction of their political identity. Sri Lanka is a country that has suffered civil war since 1983. The conflict is between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the armed Tamil groups called Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).<sup>2</sup> The Muslim community is nearly 8% of the population<sup>3</sup> and cannot be ignored when it comes to domestic politics. In Sri Lanka the majority of the population is Buddhists (69%) and other religious minority groups are Hindus (7%) and Christians (6%).<sup>4</sup> Sri Lanka's religious divide is an interesting topic which has been treated in some earlier research. My goal with my visit to Sri Lanka was to collect such material on the topic Muslims in Sri Lanka. This resulted in my Bachelor thesis *What has been written - A study of literature on the Muslim community in Sri Lanka*, an overview of the earlier research that has been done on Muslims in Sri Lanka.<sup>5</sup> That thesis is a survey of various topics of earlier research, here I will present topics that are relevant for this study. Because of the conflict, a lot of academic research

<sup>1</sup> Rauf Hakeem's speech on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of SLMC 2006-11-17

<sup>2</sup> This and will be discussed further in the chapter *Contextualising Sri Lanka Muslim Congress*.

<sup>3</sup> Ameerdeen 2006:23

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ce.html> (2007-10-11)

<sup>5</sup> See Johansson 2007

has been produced about Sri Lanka and politics, but my experience is that the Muslims have been left out in many of these studies. I will present the current stages of research on Muslim politics and how this has influenced the purpose of the present thesis.

### ***Previous research on SLMC and Muslim Politics in Sri Lanka***

Many studies have focused on the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, though most of them do not include the Muslim community.<sup>6</sup> One reason is of course that the Muslim community is not a part of the civil war, or ethnic conflict, but on the other hand it is affected by it. There are mainly three categories in the earlier research. The first category is studies about how the conflict united Muslims and how this led to the success of the SLMC. The second category is studies that define SLMC as a regional party for Muslims living in the east. The third category I have read on SLMC tries to answer questions such as why SLMC has become so successful in the national elections and why they emerged as a political party. These questions are answered by analyzing SLMC as a minority party.

### **The Conflict as a factor**

I found books that have one chapter or more about the Muslim “factor” in the conflict between the GoSL and the LTTE. The fact that Muslims have not been a part of the conflict is often explained with the fact that they are considered a third part. Most Muslims have Tamil as their primary language, though some Muslim groups speak only Sinhalese, but have not felt the urge to fight along the LTTE. According to Devanesan Nesiah (2006)<sup>7</sup> Muslims have their own community, referring to themselves as Muslims, even though they are divided in different ethnicities and languages.<sup>8</sup> This Muslim identity started after the Muslim-Sinhalese riots in 1915 and has developed over time.<sup>9</sup> When the conflict between the LTTE and GoSL, escalated in violence in 1983, most of the Muslim did not participate. According to Nesiah they did not feel a connection to the Tamils, even though they had the same language and was equally discriminated in the educational sector.<sup>10</sup>

The anthology *Dealing with Diversity* contains two chapters about how Muslims are affected in the ethnic conflict. The aim is to bring out the conflict’s “forgotten” problems, like

---

<sup>6</sup> For some examples see: Wicramasinghe, Nira *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*. C Hurst & Co, London 2006  
Warnapala, Wiswa W.A. *Politics in Sri Lanka*. S.Godage & Brothers, Colombo 2001. Meyer, Eric *Sri Lanka: Biography of an Island*. Viator Publications, Negombo 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately I have not found any information about this author, but the chapter is from the book *Sri Lanka: Peace whiteout Process* (2006). This book is overviewed by S.D. Muni and sponsored by Observer Research Foundation.

<sup>8</sup> Nesiah 2006:65

<sup>9</sup> See the chapter “Contextualizing Sri Lanka Muslim Congress” for further information about this event

<sup>10</sup> Nesiah 2006:67

the Muslim community and let themselves give their view of the conflict. Exactly how the editors chose the authors is not clear. The first chapter, *Muslim Perspective from the East*, is looking at how the relationship between the Tamils and the Muslims has changed since the conflict started. Before 1983 Muslims and Tamils shared a lot of things, besides the language there were also for example a religious connection. Although Tamils are both Hindus and Muslims they shared religious temples and religious festivals. Since 1983 it has become a Tamil-Muslim ethnic conflict and the society has changed in the east. E.g. the educational sector, for both Muslims and Tamils, used to have Tamil teachers but after 1983 Muslim schools started to develop.<sup>11</sup> Before the conflict there was a relative ethnic harmony, according to Rameez Abdullah's chapter, *Ethnic Harmony in Eastern Sri Lanka*. Abdullah has interviewed people of different ethnicities (he does not write how many people he interviews) about how they felt towards each other before the conflict. His conclusions showed that Muslims and Hindu Tamils lived together and shared the same rituals.<sup>12</sup>

*Understanding Sri Lanka Muslim identity* by M.A. Nuhman<sup>13</sup> is a study on how to understand the Muslim factor in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. Nuhman wants to understand why Muslims seek a separate ethnic identity based on religion instead of language, and why the Muslims have become a vulnerable target to the Sinhala and Tamil nationalism.<sup>14</sup> The papers in this book are concentrating on the political changes among Muslims in Sri Lanka.

In conclusion Nuhman writes that we can say that Muslim identity is a reactive politico-cultural ideology that has been constructed and developed in relation to and as a response to Sinhala and Tamil ethno-nationalistic ideologies. According to Nuhman Sri Lankan Muslims are basically a heterogeneous community like other ethnic communities, although there is a growing homogenizing tendency among Muslims, SLMC being an example of this. However, SLMC has its internal diversity and confrontations, especially between members from the south and the east. The homogenizing tendency is something that Nuhman explains as a global consequence of the Islamization in the 1970s. Organizations like Jamaate Islami and Tablegh Jamaat are important factors in Sri Lanka according to Nuhman. These organizations had a great impact on the process of Islamization during the last few decades.

The Islamization of Sri Lanka can be seen in different ways. One example is that there are more mosques and sharia schools built during the last decades. From the 1980's, Muslim women started to wear hijab, which most of them had not done before. In Nuhman's analysis

---

<sup>11</sup> Ismail, Abdullah, Fazil 2004:163

<sup>12</sup> Abdullah 2004:196

<sup>13</sup> Nuhman is a professor in Tamil at the University of Peradeniya

<sup>14</sup> Nuhman 2002:2

this is an ideology of ethnic identity which has its roots in a particular sociopolitical condition, local as well as global, that activates and intensifies ethnic tension in a plural society.<sup>15</sup>

Meghan O’Sullivan<sup>16</sup> writes about Muslim Politics as a mechanism in the conflict in her article *Conflict as a Catalyst: The Changing Politics of the Sri Lankan Muslims*. She examines how ethnic identities are shaped by conflict in the economic and political spheres. O’Sullivan writes that it is important to study the Muslims. As a third party of the conflict they have been transformed under the influence of the conflict. Using old studies and government documents from employment bureaus O’Sullivan wants to show a different view of Muslim politics. According to her this focus enables us to explore how ethnicity can emerge as the consequence rather than the cause of ethnic strife and to examine how a once peripheral ethnic group can become mobilized within a context of ethnic tension.<sup>17</sup> The conflict between GoSL and the LTTE has developed a Muslim middle class in the south-west of Sri Lanka after the independence. Muslims were forced out from government jobs and started their own companies, for example in trade.<sup>18</sup> The middle class, in the context of ethnic competition, developed into a political force whose demands for “Muslim Rights” and Muslim development, both in their substance and in the rationale behind them, conflicted with the conciliatory strategies and rhetoric of earlier Muslim elites working in the Sinhalese parties.<sup>19</sup> The rights that they demanded were for example the right for Muslim schools. The sentiment of Muslim Rights and the invigorated Muslim religious identity are both indirect creations of the ethnic conflict, from the basis of what O’Sullivan calls a composite of Islamic identity.<sup>20</sup> O’Sullivan writes that this composite embraces not only a desire for the promotion and protection of Muslim cultural and religious life, but also envelopes a passion for socio-economic advancement and social recognition.<sup>21</sup> According to O’Sullivan this explains SLMC’s successes in the elections in the 1990’s. Although the SLMC was a party that concentrated on the Muslim situation in the east they got support from the middle class Muslims in the south-west.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Nuhman 2002:29 ff

<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately I have not found any information about this author

<sup>17</sup> O’Sullivan 1999:253 ff

<sup>18</sup> O’Sullivan 1999:256-7

<sup>19</sup> O’Sullivan 1999:277

<sup>20</sup> O’Sullivan 1999:277

<sup>21</sup> O’Sullivan 1999:277

<sup>22</sup> O’Sullivan 1999:278

### **SLMC as a regional party**

In the book *Culture and Politics of Identity in Sri Lanka*, (1998), Shari Knoezer<sup>23</sup> writes about SLMC. Knoezer's hypothesis is that SLMC has organized and amplified the Muslim voice but it has not successfully unified the Muslim community, it works best on the Eastern part of Sri Lanka.<sup>24</sup> Knoezer also means that Muslim politics before SLMC was not based on the Koran, but had a regional base. For example, issues of the Muslims in the east were handled separately and Knoezer states that SLMC was a Muslim party for the east.<sup>25</sup>

Knoezer points out three levels on which SLMC became a successful political party. On the *local level* SLMC made it clear that it was a party for the Muslims on the east side of the island. SLMC wanted to lift the problems of the poor Muslims in the eastern areas. According to Knoezer the development of education for Muslims in the east is very important for the support of the SLMC. People started to be aware of their situation and became more politically active in the 1980's. This combined with the situation at the *national level* in the 1980's when the conflict arose and the Muslims were affected by the civil war. The Muslims in the east were affected in many ways and SLMC argued that there was an urgent need for putting Muslims in security because of the war. Knoezer's opinion is that the ethnic conflict in the country forced the Muslims to organize themselves in politics. When the indo-lanka accord<sup>26</sup> was formed in 1987 the Muslim community was completely neglected and, according to Knoezer, this made Muslims vote for the SLMC. The third and final level that Knoezer points out is the *international level*. Here she argues that the global trend of Islamic revivalism, developing in the 1970's and onwards, affected Sri Lankan Muslim politics.

In Knoezer's analysis she claims that her hypothesis was right and that the SLMC is a party for the eastern part of Sri Lanka. She points at statistics showing how voters in the east voted for the SLMC in the elections in the 1980's. Her observation is also that SLMC is constantly working for the Muslim voice in the east to be heard. Knoezer also argues that the voters will turn their back on SLMC if the party leaves its regional base in the east and become a national party. This is because the east coast Muslims are very poor comparing to the west coast Muslims and have different interests.

---

<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately I have not found any information about this author, but the chapter is from the book *Culture and Politics of Identity in Sri Lanka* (1998). This book arose out of a symposium held at the International Center for Ethnic Studies where researchers and scholars presented some of their recent research interests.

<sup>24</sup> Knoezer: 1998:137

<sup>25</sup> Knoezer: 1998:141

<sup>26</sup> A peace agreement between the GoSL, LTTE and India, see the chapter contextualizing SLMC for more information

## Minority Politics

In the book *Questions of Sri Lanka's Minority Rights* (2001)<sup>27</sup> Jayadeva Uyangoda<sup>28</sup> has a chapter about Muslim community and minority rights politics. According to Uyangoda, Tamils have dominated minority politics in Sri Lanka for decades. But this changed in 1986 when SLMC became a political party and started to gain votes. Earlier, Muslims had tended to work within major Sinhalese parties like the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). But when the civil war broke out in 1983, there were a lot of clashes between all three ethnic groups and Muslims, especially in the east, felt left out from the big Sinhalese parties.<sup>29</sup> The creation of the SLMC was a means of distancing themselves – from Tamils as well. Some Tamil groups wanted the Muslims to join their side in the conflict and referred to the Muslims as “Islamic Tamils”. Uyangoda writes that this is not the first time Muslims try to dissociate themselves from Tamils in the political discourse. In the 1880’s a Muslim minister claimed that Tamils and Muslims should not be treated as equals in various ethnic demands, such as recognitions of their own laws.<sup>30</sup>

According to Uyangoda, SLMC was formed because Muslims felt that they wanted to distance themselves from fighting Tamil groups. This worked successfully because they used the same political strategy as the Ceylon Workers Congress Movement discussed by Kumari Jaywardena.<sup>31</sup> SLMC took a clear stand in their ethnic agenda but the party did not distance itself from the major Sinhalese parties. Instead it collaborated with them and has over the years had some influence in the government. Uyangoda writes that SLMC are today (2001) even more distanced from the Tamils because of the Tamil-Muslim conflicts in the east and north. This made SLMC a typical minority party in the Uyangoda’s view.

Some of the most recent research on Muslim politics is a Ph.D. thesis written by Vellaithamby Ameerdeen.<sup>32</sup> When I meet him in Colombo 2006 he said that the thesis was a pioneer work, that no one had done such a large study on Muslim politics.<sup>33</sup> It is called *Ethnic Politics of Muslims in Sri Lanka* and was published in 2006. His research is based on material from the SLMC and interviews with leaders surrounding the party and a lot of data from the parliament’s archive. Ameerdeens part on Muslim history in Sri Lanka is based on earlier

---

<sup>27</sup> The book discusses the minorities in Sri Lanka, i.e. not only Muslims. The book was published in a series called Minority protection in South Asia.

<sup>28</sup> Uyangoda is a Senior Lecture at the Department of History and Political Science at the University of Colombo. His study is published by the International centre for ethnic studies.

<sup>29</sup> Uyangoda 2001:119

<sup>30</sup> Uyangoda 2001:120

<sup>31</sup> Uyangoda 2001:123

<sup>32</sup> Ameerdeens Ph.D is in Political Science from the University of Peradeniya in Kandy Sri Lanka

<sup>33</sup> Meeting with Ameerdeen in the American institute for Sri Lankan studies Colombo 2006-11-27

research. The study covers a period of 20 years (1981-2001), although Ameerdeen also includes some history of Muslim politics in his work. Ameerdeen points out that the study is important because that the political profile of the Muslim community reflects the political strategy and pragmatism of its leaders and various Muslim organizations. Even though the Muslims in Sri Lanka form only 8% of the population, they are present in almost all electoral constituencies. Due to this geographical distribution, they have become a powerful factor in deciding the political fortunes of the major parties like the United National Party and Sri Lanka Freedom Party.<sup>34</sup>

The SLMC's emergence was perceived as an attempt by the Muslims to assert their identity, according to Ameerdeen. The emergence of the party challenged and changed the conventional leadership and shifted the center of Muslim politics from Colombo and the south to the rural east, which led to a dramatic change in balance for Muslim politics.<sup>35</sup> The SLMC encouraged Muslim nationalism through religion, while other ethnic communities did it by language. The political strategy and pragmatism of the SLMC leaders played a vital role in securing a place for the party in the national politics. Muslim support began to mingle periodically with the major political parties in Sri Lanka.

In conclusion, Ameerdeen writes about the clash between the Tamil and Muslim communities in the 90's. These events are very important to understand why SLMC became so successful. This led to growing tensions between the two communities and consequently the SLMC emerged to protect the rights of the Muslims.<sup>36</sup> Later on SLMC demanded a separate Muslim provincial council in the south eastern province, something that can be identified as an outcome of the manifestation of Muslim nationalism in Sri Lanka. However, the Muslim community faces the challenge of seizing the moment, sorting out all internal differences, bringing about unity among the SLMC's memberships.<sup>37</sup>

Muslims in Sri Lanka is an interesting topic for many reasons. I personally find it intriguing how the Muslim community is not involved in the ethnic conflict but is still very affected by it, and how they emphasize this position in their politics. Another appealing topic is the SLMC, and as I see it there is a big gap in the research on SLMC's rhetoric and organization. Even though Ameerdeen writes about it, his conclusions are focused on why SLMC has become so successful in the elections. Ameerdeen concludes that SLMC's politics stands for Muslim nationalism. This is something I want to question. Ameerdeen's answers are

---

<sup>34</sup> Ameerdeen 2006:1

<sup>35</sup> Ameerdeen 2006:234

<sup>36</sup> Ameerdeen 2006:236

<sup>37</sup> Ameerdeen 2006:242

focused on the ethnic conflict and the SLMC as an ethnic minority party. I think it would be interesting to look at SLMC's rhetoric in the parliament because of the party's situation in the country. A Muslim party in a Sinhalese Buddhist majority country and with Tamil Hindu groups that want their own country is a unique situation. What is the position of SLMC when it comes to nationalism and 'Muslim issues' in the country?

Oliver Roy is a political scientist that is famous for his work on political Islam and he has written many books on the topic. In *The Failure of Political Islam* (1994) he argues that the conceptual framework of Islamist parties was unable to provide an effective blueprint for an Islamic state. Roy states that the Islamist movements fit into the molds of the nation-states and that (...) Islamo-nationalism wins out over pan-Islamism.<sup>38</sup> Roy also concludes that Islamist movements were running out of steam as a revolutionary force and were at the crossroads. They could either opt for political normalization within the framework of the modern nation-state, or evolve towards what Roy termed as neofundamentalism; a closed, scripturalist and conservative view of Islam that rejects the national and statist dimension in favor of the Ummah (the universal community of all Muslims) based on sharia (Islamic Law).<sup>39</sup> Further, Roy also states in *Global Islam* (2004) that most of the Islamist movements have become more nationalist than Islamist (...). This nationalism, according to Roy, goes along with a very important element: Islamists have had to abandon the claim that they were the only legitimate movement to represent Islam in the political sphere.<sup>40</sup> However, Roy's study focus mainly on countries like Egypt, Algeria, Iran and Afghanistan where Islam is a majority religion. It would be interesting to apply his arguments on a different context, like Sri Lanka.

Mattias Gardell, a Professor in History of Religions at Uppsala University, also discusses Islamism and nationalism in *Bin Ladin i Våra Hjärtan* (2005). He defines Islamo-nationalism as when Islamism tries to make a nation's society administrated by Islam or to form an independent state. This would appear in two ways, it could mean that Islamist parties want to reunite the Islamic *Ummah* under a Caliph, or to formulate a separatist movement and create a new Islamic state.<sup>41</sup>

I will argue that SLMC as an Islamist party create their politics from a nationalist view of the nation-state of Sri Lanka i.e. the Muslim party SLMC's identity is built on nationalism of a non-Islamic state.<sup>42</sup> I will also argue that the SLMC will not fight for a new Muslim state within

---

<sup>38</sup> Roy 1994:201

<sup>39</sup> This is summarized in Oliver Roys *Global Islam* (2004) that is a sequel to Roys *The Failure of Political Islam*.

<sup>40</sup> Roy 2004:83 This is one part of Roys concept for Post-Islamism there are of course other criteria's but they will be mention later in my analyze of SLMC.

<sup>41</sup> Gardell 2005:287

<sup>42</sup> These conceptions, Islamism and Nationalism will be defined in the chapter *Discourse Analysis*

Sri Lanka nor will the Muslim Ummah be in focus. SLMC and Muslims in Sri Lanka are a minority in population and there is an armed struggle between the GoSL and the LTTE, hence the situation for SLMC and Muslim politics in Sri Lanka is unique and relevant to study.

### ***Aim of this study***

I will study SLMC guidelines and parliament speeches of the former leader M.H.M. Ashraff from the years 1989-1992. However, I see this study as part of a bigger study that would cover more years. In this thesis my analysis will be organized in a thematic order in which parliament speeches and the organization are separated from this.

*The aim of this thesis is to analyze the construction of the politics of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress and the constructions of their organization and the guidelines. The second aim it to see if there is discursive struggle between nationalism and Islamism.* This raises a number of sub-questions: In which “folder” could SLMC be defined as an Islamist party? What role does nationalism play in SLMC’s construction of its politics? Is there a specific theme when nationalism is used in their politics?

In order to analyze the above aim and questions I will be using Discourse analysis theories and methods. To my knowledge this has not been used to analyze SLMC rhetorics and organization and this will be explained further in the chapter *Discourse Analysis*.

### ***Material and fieldwork***

When I began searching for data on Muslims in Sri Lanka I used Lund University’s database, ELIN. I did not find much there so I contacted experts on Sri Lanka in Sweden. I first contacted Dr Peter Schalk who is a professor in History of Religions at Uppsala University. Professor Schalk is an expert on Tamils in Sri Lanka and have written numerous books on the subject. He provided me with articles and a list of references. I then contacted Camilla Orjuela, a senior lecturer at the Institute of Global Studies at Gothenburg University, she also provided me with articles and references. Dr Orjuela has written her PhD on Sri Lanka and the ethnic conflict. However, finally I saw only one option to get more material and that was to travel to Sri Lanka. I began to establish contacts in Colombo, especially with the American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies (AISLS). It was important for me to get as much material as possible on earlier research done on the topic Muslims in Sri Lanka, so that I could get an overview of what had been done.

In November 2006 I traveled to Sri Lanka and AISLS in Colombo became my home for a month.<sup>43</sup> Colombo is the capital of Sri Lanka and most of the large institutes and universities are

---

<sup>43</sup> I would like to thank ”99-klubben” scholarship committee for giving me financial support for my material collection in Sri Lanka.

located here. In my visit to Sri Lanka in November 2006 I did not expect to encounter as much Muslim culture as I did, e.g. in Colombo alone there are 99 mosques (and over 1,500 in the whole country)<sup>44</sup>. At the time I was in Sri Lanka the conflict between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and LTTE was very infected. I was advised by the Swedish ministry for foreign affairs not to travel to the north and the east of Sri Lanka, because of the disturbances. They also gave advice to be careful in Colombo and avoid big crowds, because of the risk of terror attacks. In my month in Colombo two terror attacks occurred, first there was the assassination of the pro-Tamil parliamentarian Nadarajah Raviraj in 10<sup>th</sup> of November. Then, in December 2, a suicide bomber tried to kill the president's brother Gothabaya Rajapakse. The attack failed but a lot of civilians were injured.

AISLS is located in the south of Colombo. Colombo is not a very big city with approximately 600,000 inhabitants. It was no problem for me to get around to different institutes. AISLS was established in 1995 to foster excellence in American research and teaching on Sri Lanka and to promote the exchange of scholars and scholarly information between the United States and Sri Lanka<sup>45</sup>. The Institute serves as the professional association for US-based scholars and other professionals who are interested in Sri Lanka but the institute is not exclusively for Americans but open for international scholars as well. The institute is also for scholars from various disciplines such as political science and religious studies. The institute has a library with over 1,500 books about Sri Lanka in English, Sinhalese, and Tamil. At the institute library I got access to the *Journal of Asian Studies* (1965-2002) and an online database containing articles from JSTOR files.<sup>46</sup> At AISLS I got a lot of data and I started to contact other institutes with the help of the staff at AISLS. Through AISLS I got in contact with institutes like International Center for Ethnic Studies and Marga Institute. Here I also found a lot of the previous research material.<sup>47</sup>.

After my visit to the different institutes and my collection of earlier research I started to focus on collecting material from SLMC. Here I stumbled over some problems. When I was visiting Sri Lanka I had a tourist visa and it is strictly forbidden to do any research with such a visa. Therefore, I had no possibility to go to the parliament archives and collect data. My chance to interview leaders and parliament members was also limited because of security

---

<sup>44</sup> Muhsin 2006:1

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.aisls.org/about.html> (2006-12-08)

<sup>46</sup> This is a big database with articles from many scholarly journals

<sup>47</sup> ICES was established in 1982 on the initiative of Sri Lankan scholars. It functions like an international center with the aim to develop research in the fields of ethnicity, pluralism and the prevention and management of conflicts. Marga Institute was established in 1972 by scholars from different Universities in the country. The principal activity of the Marga Institute is the study and critical evaluation of past and ongoing development processes in Sri Lanka.

reasons. When I was visiting there were threats towards members in SLMC because of the current budget negotiation with the government and this led to that some of the members did not want to plan any interviews. These situations did limit my research area and I was forced to choose certain data. However, if I would write a Ph.D thesis it would be easier for me to get access to archives and other material. The SLMC is however an appreciative party to study because of their massive production of material in English, some of which will be presented below.

There are two primary foundations that I am going to analyze. The first is the organization and the guidelines of the party and the second is the party's rhetoric during the period of 1989-1992. There is of course a gap between the time when the interviews were made and the parliament speeches from 1989-1992. However, I do not see a conflict in this because it will be two different analyses and the constitution of the party has been the same since 1986, with a few minor changes in 2000, such as the membership fee.

In analyzing the party's organization I use original documents from SLMC. These are *The Constitution of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress* and *The Code of Conduct*. The former is a 26 page document on how the SLMC is organized, from top to bottom. This document also explains how members are organized, the guidelines of the party and different roles of the party members. It also contains some rules and it presents affiliated bodies and their work. *The Code of Conduct* can be described as a guideline of how members of the SLMC are expected to behave in different situations. It is eleven pages, and contains 'moral rules' for both leaders and "ordinary" members. Both of these documents are available in English and therefore I could use them in my thesis.

Besides looking at the SLMC organization, I want to analyze the political rhetoric between 1989 and 1992. In doing this I will use four books containing parliament speeches from the years 1989-1992 by SLMC's former leader Marhoom M.H.M. Ashraff (1948–2000). These books are called *Ashraff in Parliament Volume I-IV* and they are edited by the current leader Rauff Hakeem.<sup>48</sup> The SLMC itself has published these books and they contain 193 speeches. Ashraff was the first leader and the founder of SLMC. He had an education as a lawyer and is described as a charismatic leader. Before he formed SLMC (1981) he was part of the Muslim United Liberation Front (MULF) which was in a coalition with a Tamil party in 1977, but he soon left this organization and formed SLMC. He was married to Ferial Ashraff

---

<sup>48</sup> Vellaithamby Ameerdeen uses parliament speeches in his work, but these books have not been used in any study that I know of.

who after his death formed a new party called the National Unity Alliance (NUA). Ashraff died in a helicopter crash in the year 2000 and the books are a celebration to his leadership.

Eighteen of these speeches are in Tamil and will not be analyzed. The book present data about every speech: its date, topic and where the speech is collected from. This will also be mentioned in my thesis. These speeches contain various topics and are of various sorts, most of them are Appropriation Bills in different areas but there are also debates of different kinds. This collection only contains speeches held in the parliament but the parliament provides a valuable and readymade insight to SLMC politics. The collection does not mark emphasizes done by Ashraff or others but any interruptions are marked in the text. If someone in the parliament debates with Ashraff his or her words are also included. In some cases Ashraff quotes the Koran, however it is unclear if Ashraff himself translates the Koran into English or if he is reading an English Koran.

During this four-year period the relation between LTTE and GoSL was very fragile and the violence was increasing in the country. These years were also the first ones during which SLMC held a place in the parliament. It is also important to remember India's intervention in Sri Lanka during this period. According to K.M. de Silva, India's intervention in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict caused a lot of change in Sri Lanka's politics.<sup>49</sup> However, this will be discussed more in the chapter *Contextualizing the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress*. It is important to remember that I see this material as the opinion of the leader of the party and not of its members. However, the leader is the spokesman for the party, i.e. he represents the party's official representation in the political debate. The different quotations that I will be doing should also be considered as political rhetoric and not facts. I have no intention to investigate every quote, I rather want to see them as political expressions and in this way analyze the SLMC's identity.

To complement these sources I also did three interviews with some of the leading members of the party. These informants will be used only to complement the other sources and to give examples of how SLMC is organized. When you make interviews there are things that can affect the situation: an old professor may get different answers than a young student in certain questions.<sup>50</sup> When I made my interviews I also thought that it was important to wear proper clothes to make a good impression on my informants. Before I traveled to Sri Lanka I contacted the SLMC headquarter and presented myself and said that I was interested in interviewing some of the party members. This way they already knew who I was when I got to

---

<sup>49</sup> de Silva 2005:695–702

<sup>50</sup> This example is from *Esaiasson* (2004)

Sri Lanka, and this made it easier to get information. In Sri Lanka there was no problem for me to get in contact with the Secretary General Hasen Ali, and he said I was welcome to his office. In some cases there is a need for test interviews. However, in my case I did not feel that this was necessary because I did not have to structure my interviews. In the beginning of the interviews I tried to create trust in these conversational interviews by stressing that I just wanted to get to know the informants and that I was not after their political stand in any question. This is important because in the current situation in Sri Lanka, with the violent conflict in general, people are careful with what they say in political matters. I chose to record these conversions because English is my own and my informants' second language, their first language being Tamil. The language issue may seem like a problem but all my three informants spoke very good English. However, I first asked the informants' permission to use the recorder. Under the interviews I also took notes of what was said and there are two good reasons to do this, firstly it is a good way to scribble down reflections of the interview and secondly it is a good way to not make the informant feel uncomfortable when it is quiet.<sup>51</sup> These recordings were then transcribed and sent to the informants that I had interviewed, so that they could approve them.

Before the interviews I read the *Constitution of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress* so I would be more prepared in my questions. However, it is significant to point out that I did not have a mold for my questions. I explained to the informants that I was only interested in how SLMC is organized and my general questions revolved around this subject. However, I tried to get some "follow-up" questions, meaning that I sometimes wanted the informant to develop some facts, with questions like "can you give me an example of that?" Though, the goal of these interviews was to bring forward spontaneous examples and not to make the informant feel like it was a pop-quiz.

Now it is time to present my three informants more closely. Before I traveled to Colombo I wanted to interview a "centrally placed source" within the party. My first contact also became my first informant, namely the Secretary General Hasen Ali. Ali also invited me to participate in two events connected to the anniversary of SLMC 20<sup>th</sup> year as a party celebration. One of these events was linked to the party's welfare program and was held at the SLMC headquarters in the 17<sup>th</sup> November 2006. The other meeting was the official celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary held at the "Pasha Villa", Colombo in 29<sup>th</sup> November 2006.

Hasen Ali was one of the first members of the party. Ali is in his late fifties and has a wife and children. Besides being the Secretary General Ali is also a member of the parliament and is a well known face in Sri Lankan politics. He has a Master Degree in Engineering, which he

---

<sup>51</sup> Esaiasson 2004:294

studied for in Saudi Arabia, but work fulltime in the organization of SLMC. As the Secretary General of SLMC Ali has access to all documents within the party, Ali also provided me with *The Constitution of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress* and the *Code of Conduct* before I did my interview with him. In my meeting, which took place at the SLMC headquarter, I wanted him to suggest other persons that I could interview. This method is called in methodological terms “snowballing”. To get a better view of SLMC organization Ali gave me two names that I could talk to, namely Shafeek Rajabdeen and Sithy Refaya Ifthie.

Shafeek Rajabdeen is a member of the Western Province – Provincial Council and the Colombo Chief Organizer of SLMC. Rajabdeen has been in the Western Province – Provincial Council from 1999 to present time. Before he joined politics he and his father had a construction company where he worked for 30 years. He is also the current president of the Moors Sports Club which is one of the oldest Muslim Sports Clubs in the country. My interview with Rajabdeen also took place here. He is now in his fifties and he has a wife and children.

The last of my informants is Sithy Refaya, the leader of the Ladies Congress which is one of the affiliated bodies in the party. Refaya is in her late fifties and married, she has also been in politics for a long time. Before she joined SLMC she was a part of the United National Party (UNP) until 2001. She also used to work in the Ministry of Labor from 1968 to 1981. Here she worked mostly with questions regarding trade. Then she worked at the Direction of Muslim Affairs and she represented Sri Lanka at the first convention for Muslim women that was held in the Philippines. According to herself she joined SLMC after being disappointed at the UNP for not letting her be part of the leadership. This made her want to join SLMC, but she was also affected by how SLMC was being attacked by media and other parties. She is now a Managing Director of her family company Confidence Travels, which helps people from Sri Lanka to work in the Middle East.

### ***Disposition***

In the first chapter I gave a short introduction to my thesis and I also explained my aims and presented my material. The first chapter also contains a presentation of earlier research done on Muslim politics in Sri Lanka. In the following chapter I will present my Theoretical and methodological framework. After that, the SLMC organization and rhetoric will be analyzed. In the final chapter I will make a closing retrospect and conclusions.

## Discourse Analysis

First of all I would like to give an introduction to the theoretical and methodological framework that will be used in my thesis. This is a hybrid consisting of two theories and methods of discourse analysis: *Discourse Theory* and Norman Fairclough's *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA). This should not be confused with the field critical discourse analysis within Discourse Analysis.<sup>52</sup> Combining two discourse analyses is an advantage. The Discourse Theory gives a good theoretical framework for a Discourse Analysis and CDA complements this with some theoretical and methodological frameworks. Discourse Analysis is not only a theory, it is also a method i.e. they are linked together, Discourse Analysis consists of theories and philosophical (ontological and epistemological<sup>53</sup>) premises, about language's role in the construction of the world. It contains a methodological framework for approaching a research area as well as specific techniques on language analysis.<sup>54</sup>

Discourse Analysis is a *Social Constructionism* theory meaning that the reality we experience – in this context the construction of politics and norms – is not a reality that is independent of us but, on the contrary, something that is constructed socially and cannot be reached other than with the social construction.<sup>55</sup> This social construction changes in battles of what is true or false. Discourse Analysis and the theories I will use also falls into the term *Post-Structuralism* which, as opposed to *Structuralism*<sup>56</sup>, states that language is inconstant. It is also important to remember that the starting point for *Post-Structuralism* is that our entrance to reality always goes through language. With language we create a representation of reality. This not only mirror reflections of the already existing reality – the representations contribute to it as well.<sup>57</sup>

The main reason for the choice of Discourse Analysis is that it is an effective tool for analyzing mentalities and ideas. The focus lies on how words can get different meanings in different discourses. My material is based on parliament speeches, official party documents and interviews with the party members, and Discourse Analysis provides a good methodological

---

<sup>52</sup> Winther, Jørgensen, Phillips (2000) discusses three of the most developed forms of discourse analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse Theory and Discursive Psychology the last one will not be used in this thesis because of it is contents it do not fit with this study. This book helps me to combine and modify the theories that I will use.

<sup>53</sup> *Epistemology* or *theory of knowledge* studies methods and limitations of knowledge. *Ontology* is the study of being or existence.

<sup>54</sup> Winther, Jørgensen & Phillips 2000:10

<sup>55</sup> Winther, Jørgensen & Phillips 2000:11–12

<sup>56</sup> Structuralism was developed by Ferdinand de Saussures see Jørgensen, Winther & Phillips 2000:15–17. Also see Saussures: 1970

<sup>57</sup> Winther, Jørgensen & Phillips 2000:15

framework for analyzing this. It also allows me to build a multi-perspective theoretical frame to analyze Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), which I will present below. Finally, a quote from Norman Fairclough describing why Discourse Analysis is a good framework for my study:

Political differences have always been constituted as differences in language, political struggles have always been partly struggles over the dominant language, and both the theory and practice of political rhetoric go back to ancient times. Language has therefore always been a relevant consideration in political analysis.<sup>58</sup>

It is important to Fairclough to have a method for the study of rhetorics and politics. Therefore, I agree with Fairclough and I think that Discourse Analysis will be suitable to analyze the rhetorics and construction of politics.

### ***Discourses and Orders of Discourses***

The philosopher Michel Foucault developed theories and conceptions for Discourse Analysis.<sup>59</sup> Foucault's thoughts about discourses are followed by most of the Discourse Analysis disciplines.<sup>60</sup> I will also follow Foucault's conception of Discourse. However, in this thesis *Discourses* will be defined by the British culture rhetoric Stuart Hall's definitions:

Discourses are ways of talking, thinking or representing a particular subject or topic. They produce meaningful knowledge about that subject. This knowledge influences social practices, and so has real consequences and effects. Discourses are not reducible to class-interests, but always operate in relation to power – they are part of the way power circulates and is contested. The question whether a discourse is true or false is less important than whether it is effective in practice.<sup>61</sup>

Discourses can be stable with fixed boundaries around its contents. But discourses are more than static systems of thoughts, they structure and represent different themes and subjects and this affects people's acting and thoughts. A discourse contributes to the creation of the subject that we are and the objects that we can know something about. In this thesis there are two theories, and what separates them is that Discourse Theory sees every practise as discursive. CDA, on the other hand, sees language as an important tool for creating social reality but stresses the necessity to also consider the opposite, i.e. that there are other phenomena that contribute to the

---

<sup>58</sup> Fairclough 2000:3

<sup>59</sup> See Foucault Michel, 1972

<sup>60</sup> Winther, Jørgensen & Phillips 2000:19

<sup>61</sup> Stuart Hall quoted from Skodo 2006

construction of language. In these statements I will take the same positions as CDA has, saying that you cannot limit your theories to the study of language. I do not see a conflict in this because my aim is to see SLMC's construction of its politics in a descriptive and interpretational way.

When it comes to the conception of the *Order of Discourses* I will follow the conception of Norman Fairclough, a British linguist and media researcher.<sup>62</sup> Fairclough applies Foucault's ideas<sup>63</sup> and states that:

What applies for boundaries between subject positions and associated discursive conventions applies generally for elements of order of discourses. It applies also for boundaries between distinct orders of discourses. The school and its order of discourses may be experienced as being in a complementary and non-overlapping relationship with adjacent domains such as home and neighbourhood (...)<sup>64</sup>

As you can see in the example above Fairclough states that the school can be one example of an Order of Discourses. Under an Order of Discourse like school you would have Discourses such as economy and so on. In order to shape a discourse or an Order of Discourses you need to have a solid foundation of which area you like to study. However, the choice of discourse and Order of Discourses is arbitrary and the Orders of Discourses do not need to be an institution like school. It is important to see Discourses and Orders of Discourses as theoretical tools. With these tools you can see, like in this case, the construction of politics, i.e. it is the demarcation of the study that decides which discourse and orders of discourses that is going to be used.

In this study the Orders of Discourses that are in focus are *Muslim Politics in Sri Lanka*, in this thesis represented by SLMC, and *Nationalism*. I have argued that SLMC may construct their politics from both Islamism and various discourses of nationalism.<sup>65</sup> That is why the concept of Orders of Discourses makes a good theoretical framework with connection to earlier research.<sup>66</sup> So the two Orders of Discourses I am going to use in my analysis is Islamism and Nationalism. For example under nationalism there are a lot of Discourses such as, the political, language, cultural and so on. It is important to stress that in the Order of Discourses the discourses 'cut' through each other and that the Order of Discourses itself cuts through other Orders of Discourses. In this case I analyze parliament speeches and the organisation of SLMC, i.e. the

---

<sup>62</sup> Fairclough advocates one of my theories, namely Critical Discourse Analyze, se below

<sup>63</sup> To see how Foucault uses the term see Foucault, Michel, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*. Pantheon Books, New York 1972

<sup>64</sup> Fairclough 1992:69

<sup>65</sup> These concepts will be defined below

<sup>66</sup> i.e. SLMC in this case study

parliament discourse and the organisation discourse. But the reader should remember that focus is on how SLMC constructs its politics.

### ***Discourse Theory***

Behind the concept of Discourse Theory is the political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Their main work is *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985).<sup>67</sup> In Laclau & Mouffe's theory there are concepts that need to be explained before using a Discourse Analysis. Laclau & Mouffe states the following arguments when it comes to the process of mapping out processes of words' meanings in different discourses:

In the context of this discussion, we will call *articulation* any practice establishing a relation among elements such as that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call *discourse*. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse we will call *moments*. By contrast, we will call *element* any difference that is not discursively articulated.<sup>68</sup>

*Discourses* can be understood as words or symbols that are fixated under a common domain. These words and symbols in a discourse are called *moments*. The *articulation elements* become moments when they are fixated within the discourse. The parliament speeches and written documents from SLMC, which I will analyze, are articulations. When the articulation puts elements in relation to each other, this forms a discourse. When this happens Laclau & Mouffe talks about the *closure* of the discourse. These closures are always temporary because the elements are *floating significant*s and are "free", meaning that there is no given discourse and that they can always affect other discourses.<sup>69</sup> These floating significant>s are important to identify because most of the struggle between discourses take place around these. This goes back to the foundation of Discourse Analysis: the impossibility of closures, i.e. all moments are also potential elements.<sup>70</sup> However, in the temporary closures Laclau & Mouffe states that:

---

<sup>67</sup> Laclau and Mouffe do not have a name for their theoretical frameworks but Jørgensen, Winther & Phillips, (2000) choose to call it Discourse theory and so will I. However, Laclau & Mouffe call themselves Post-Marxists but this should not be confused by the term Marxist when they criticise and develop this and the theory of structuralism. In discussing Laclau & Mouffe three works will be used: Laclau, Ernesto, Mouffe & Mouffe, Chantal, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London 1985. Laclau, Ernesto, "Power and Representation", *Theory and Contemporary Culture*, red. Poster, Mark, New York 1993.

<sup>68</sup> Laclau & Mouffe 1985:105

<sup>69</sup> Laclau 1990:28

<sup>70</sup> Laclau & Mouffe 1985:122

Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of difference, to construct a centre. We will call the privileged discourse points of this partial fixation, *nodal points*.<sup>71</sup>

When a discourse closes there should be a core within the discourse, this is the *nodal points*. These nodal points are also floating significant but the term nodal point is a core in a given discourse and floating significant is the conception of the struggle that some symbols are part of in different discourses. One example of a nodal point in a political discourse is democracy and in the national discourse it would be the “people” of the state.<sup>72</sup>

The argument above means that the discourse practice is to construct social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief. The discourse practice also reproduces and transforms the society.<sup>73</sup>

### **Hegemony and antagonism**

In order to explain these conflicts among discourses that happen between for example social groups, Laclau & Mouffe use the conceptions *antagonism* and *hegemony*. When a social group closes their orders of discourse or discourses Laclau & Mouffe talk about hegemony. They use the Italian philosopher and Marxist Antonio Gramsci’s (d.1937) thoughts to develop this.<sup>74</sup> Laclau & Mouffe defines the struggle of hegemony in this way:

Thus, the two conditions of a hegemonic articulation are the presence of antagonistic forces and the instability of the frontiers which separate them. Only the presence of a vast area of floating elements and the possibility of their articulation to opposite camps – which implies a constant redefinition of the latter – is what constitutes the terrain permitting us to define a practice as hegemonic. Without equivalence and without frontiers, it is impossible to speak strictly of hegemony.<sup>75</sup>

According to this the goal of all discourse struggle is to reach hegemony. The discourse struggle for hegemony is called *antagonism* and is possible since the elements and moments are flexible to be part of another discourse. This occurs because we have to give meaning and understanding to create conceptions. Antagonism between different discourses disappears when a *hegemonic intervention* occurs. This happens, according to Laclau, when the discourse with a *force*

---

<sup>71</sup> Laclau & Mouffe 1985:112

<sup>72</sup> This example is taken from Winther, Jørgensen & Phillips 2000:33

<sup>73</sup> Laclau & Mouffe 1985:113–114

<sup>74</sup> See Gramsci, 1971

<sup>75</sup> Laclau & Mouffe 1985:136

reconstructs its original meaning.<sup>76</sup> This happens between discourses that are in conflict. Hegemony is the construction of elements in an unidentified domain and the discourse is the result of this new fixation. This hegemonic status can also be *deconstructed* because it is instable as a discourse.<sup>77</sup> The definition of hegemony is connected to the antagonism because moments can become elements and vice versa.

Here it is necessary to describe Laclau & Mouffe's concept of power. They build their thoughts around Foucault i.e. that the struggle of power goes through discourses and this determines what knowledge we have, our identities and our relations.<sup>78</sup> In this thesis the power perspective is represented by the discourse orders *Muslim politics in Sri Lanka* and *Nationalism* in the construction of SLMC's politics.

### ***Critical Discourse Analysis***

Fairclough's vision of discourse, hegemony etc. applies well to Laclau & Mouffe's positions above.<sup>79</sup> Fairclough has his own model for this as well, but I find Laclau & Mouffe more useful in my study because their model is more concrete. There are differences but I have argued above that this will not affect this thesis. CDA and discourse theory both agree on that the subject could have more identities than one. Although Norman Fairclough and his conception of CDA has the same opinion as Laclau & Mouffe on the conceptions hegemony and antagonism, I would like to complement this part with two things. Fairclough states that:

Hegemony is about constructing alliances, and integrating rather than simply dominating subordinate classes, through concessions or through ideological means, to win their consent. Hegemony is a focus on constant struggle around points of greatest instability between classes and blocs (...)<sup>80</sup>

Fairclough states that text analysis/Discourse Analysis are complicated and that you need a good method for doing this kind of study. Fairclough organizes text analysis under four main headings, vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and text structure.<sup>81</sup> He states that vocabulary deals mainly with individual words, grammar deals with how words are combined into clauses and

---

<sup>76</sup> Laclau 1993:282 ff

<sup>77</sup> The term *deconstruct* is from the French philosopher Jacques Derrida to see his use of the term see Derrida, 1970

<sup>78</sup> See Foucault, Michel *Diskursens ordning*. 1993 Symposium Stehag

<sup>79</sup> In discussing Norman Fairclough two works will be used; Fairclough, Norman *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge 1992 and Fairclough, Norman, *Critical Discourse Analysis the Critical study of language*. London 1995

<sup>80</sup> Fairclough 1995:76

<sup>81</sup> Fairclough 1992:75

sentences, cohesion deals with how clauses and sentences are linked together and text structure deals with large scale organizational properties of the text. Together, these headings constitute a framework for analysing texts which cover aspects of their production and interpretation as well as formal properties of text.<sup>82</sup> To give one example the words *terrorist* and *freedom fighter* could have a different meaning both individually (vocabulary) and in a sentence (grammar).

Discursive practice is according to Fairclough processes of text production, distribution and consumption of texts and this is also important to discuss. For examples, Fairclough would see a problem with the choice of my texts because of its producer (an editor). However these books are published by the party itself and would therefore be a part of their identity. For example, texts are produced in specific ways in specific social contexts. To relate this to my study I have texts from parliament speeches by a Muslim politician in the context of Sri Lanka, therefore it is necessary to contextualize them.

### ***Nationalism***

Benedict Anderson discusses nationalism and its growth throughout centuries in his book *Imagined Communities* (1983). The concept of 'Imagined' is developed by the idea of that a nation is a imagined political community because the inhabitants will never know or hear of the majority of the other inhabitants.<sup>83</sup> The nation is limited because no nation-state is considered to gain all of mankind. The nation-states reproduce their imaginations with cultural roots for example monuments and museums. In states like Sri Lanka, with a history of being colonized, there are two things except from museums that are important for the *imagined community*: census and maps.<sup>84</sup> These foundations are one explanation to why ex-colonial states have national fundamentals today. Census became important after 1870 because of its systematic quantification. The goal was for the colonial powers to get an effective tax system. The new demographic topography put down deep social and institutional roots as the colonial state multiplied its size and functions. They organized new education and juridical systems in the country and this created a network of habits among the citizens. According to Anderson the introduction of the map had a huge impact on nationalism in colonial states. It contributed in creating neighboring countries and rivers, mountains and other symbols of the imagined community. The census and the map together created Sri Lanka and Sri Lankan. Museums that the colonial powers had established could often be related to the map and the inhabitants got a

---

<sup>82</sup> Fairclough 1992:75

<sup>83</sup> Anderson: 2006 (1983):6 This concept has its foundation in an anthropological view

<sup>84</sup> Anderson 2006 (1983):163f

view of where monuments and archeological excavations took place. The excavations also reminded people of the common heritage of holy places etc.<sup>85</sup>

Michael Billig develops Anderson's ideas of imagined communities and discusses nationalism and nations-states in his book *Banal Nationalism* (1995). According to Billig the nation-states are strong institutions and the death of a nation may be felt as the ultimate tragedy. Billig states that the conception of nationalism is often connected with those who want to create a new state or with the extreme right-wing politics.<sup>86</sup> However, Billig finds this view misleading and states that there is a daily nationalism in countries worldwide.<sup>87</sup> Billig states that only if people believe that they have national identities, will such homelands, and the world of nations be reproduced. National anthems and flags are just some example of nation-states being reproduced in our daily lives:

In so many ways, the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations. However, this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding. The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building.<sup>88</sup>

The term banal nationalism is introduced to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations to be reproduced. According to Billig, nationalism is an ideology which permits states to exist. The concept of banal nationalism should not be seen as benign and it tends to reproduce institutions which possess vast armaments.<sup>89</sup> Here it is crucial to distinguish between those who want to create a state within a nation and banal nationalism. Billig states that nationalism embraces ways of thinking – patterns of common-sense discourse – which make this boundedness and monopolization of violence seem natural to 'us', who inhabit the world of nation-states. This makes the nationalism an international ideology and the nation-state system abhors a territorial vacuum and every space must fall into official national boundaries.<sup>90</sup>

According to Billig there are a 'hotchpotch' of states in the world and these are not exclusively divided by for example language or religions, there are monoglot states and

---

<sup>85</sup> Anderson 2006 (1983):163f

<sup>86</sup> Billig 1995:5

<sup>87</sup> In Billig's book *Banal Nationalism* the main focus is the so called "western states" meaning Europe and USA, however I will argue that there is no problem in adapting his theories to a country like Sri Lanka. Even though Sri Lanka is a multicultural society it still fully feels the criterion of a nation-state.

<sup>88</sup> Billig 1995:8

<sup>89</sup> Billig 1995:7

<sup>90</sup> Billig 1995:22

polyglot states. These states can have internal struggles when it comes to language or religion. This issue could be linked to Sri Lanka where it is a civil war between the LTTE and GoSL. But the LTTE's struggle for its own country should not be confused with the conception of nationalism presented here. Here, the nation-state of Sri Lanka is in focus and it may contain different languages and religions but it is still a nation-state. If the nation-state is an imagined community it can not be explained in terms of different languages, because languages themselves have to be imagined as distinct entities.<sup>91</sup> Billig has a concluding discussion in his book about the global changes in the world. Billig states that our world is constantly becoming a more global place, but the nation-states have no means to disappear. The ideal of nationhood continues to exert its hold over the political imagination. It continues to be reproduced as a cause worth more than individual life, through flags, sports etc. according to Billig. Sri Lanka is a complex society with Sinhalese nationalism and Tamil nationalism but the reader should note that I will argue that SLMC construct their politics from the nation-state Sri Lanka, i.e. all ethnicities and religions should be included here.

### ***Islamism***

Many words have been used to describe political Islam, among them, Islamism, revivalism, fundamentalism and Islamic resurgence.<sup>92</sup> Most of the scholars use the term Islamism and this is the term that I think is most suitable for my thesis. Islamism is a conception that is difficult to determine but one foundation is an ideology based on Islam as a political action i.e. religion as an ideology. Islamism started in the 19th century as a reaction against the modern and 'western' societies. The common idea is to read the Koran and the sunna (the learning of the prophet Muhammed) to find the answer to a problem. The thought that Islam is the answer to the society's problem is central. The Islamist movements developed the thought that not only the religiously learned could interpret the Koran, but ordinary laymen as well. Some of the prominent figures of these movements are Sayyid Abu'l-A'la Mawdudi, Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and Khomeini.<sup>93</sup> The term *din wa dawla* (religion and state) is here crucial and some of these movements state that the prophet Muhammed was a political leader and there are also quotes in the Koran.<sup>94</sup>

It is important that religion could have different meanings for rules, rituals text etc. depending on time and place.<sup>95</sup> However, Islamism should not be confused with Islam as a

---

<sup>91</sup> Billig 1995:36

<sup>92</sup> Jonasson, 2004:10

<sup>93</sup> See Rahnema: 1994

<sup>94</sup> Eickelman & Piscatori 1996:46

<sup>95</sup> Stenberg 1996:17

religion but as a way of incorporating religion into politics. There are numerous of Islamist movements but according to Jonasson (2004) scholars usually distinguish between two ways of approaching the interpretation of Islam when it is used politically. There are *neofundamentalist* or *conservatives* and *pragmatists* or *modernists*.<sup>96</sup> For neofundamentalists the sharia laws must be applied and there is no room for interpretation. For modernists sharia laws could be used to handle day-to-day issues and according to them, Islamic values and principles should inspire the present day society.<sup>97</sup> In addition to this I would state that Islamists also could be democratic or anti-democrats.

According to Jonasson there is also a second kind of categorisation based on what political actions the Islamist parties have. There are *radicals* or *revolutionaries* whose aim is to overthrow the current systems. Then there are *moderates* or *reformists* that wants to participate in parliaments.<sup>98</sup> Earlier research states that SLMC is an Islamist party<sup>99</sup>. As an Islamist party it is rather unclear which folder they belong to, but they are a part of the parliament so it can be ruled out that they are revolutionaries.

However, Salwa Ismail is in his book *Rethinking Islamist Politics* (2003) says that it is important to consider the multiplicity and diversity characterising Islamist politics and Islamism.<sup>100</sup> He also claims that the invocation of repertoires and frames of reference developed in Islamic traditions involves a process of reworking these traditions, meaning that different contexts can be have different outcomes for a political party. Ismail therefore means that there are no inherent meanings or persistent ideas continuing into the present and guaranteeing the unity of a totality called Islam.

---

<sup>96</sup> This one definition of Islamist parties, however, here we can also mention revolutionary Islamist groups like Front Islamique du Salut (FIS). Though the earlier research do not mention that SLMC is a revolutionary group. To read more about this see Stenberg 1996 b.

<sup>97</sup> Jonasson, 2004:11

<sup>98</sup> Jonasson, 2004:11

<sup>99</sup> See Ameerdeen 2006:114

<sup>100</sup> Ismail 2003:26 ff

## Contextualizing Sri Lanka Muslim Congress

This chapter is a short introduction the history of Sri Lanka. The focus is on Muslim history and some political movements that are relevant in the years of 1989-1992, but I will start with some important political events throughout the history of Sri Lanka. In the following chapters many cities will be mentioned so I will include a map in this part:



Figure 1: Map over Sri Lanka <sup>101</sup>

### ***Post independence: the left-wing movements, Tamil separatism and Buddhist ‘just war thinking’***

Sri Lanka became independent from the British in 1948. The Sinhalese government that was dominated by the United National Party (UNP) from the independence in 1947 to 1977 started a nationalistic “agenda”. The first Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake emphasized the common interests of the island’s various ethnic and religious groups. It had as its basis an acceptance of the reality of a plural society and sought the reconciliation of the legitimate interests of the majority and minority within the context of an all-island policy.<sup>102</sup> This view of nationalism seemed to be a viable alternative to the narrower sectionalism that was beginning to develop in the country. One important group felt left out in this politics, namely the Buddhist monks. According to the Buddhist activists, UNP was unsympathetic to the religious, linguistic and

<sup>101</sup> [http://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri\\_Lanka](http://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lanka) 2006-12-05

<sup>102</sup> De Silva K.M. 2005:609

cultural ideas of Buddhism and this was one of the reasons why the elections of 1956 had a different outcome than the elections right after the independence.

In the election of 1956, Solomon Bandaranaike of the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) became Prime Minister of Sri Lanka and a new nationalistic era began. The “Sinhala only” project started, a project which wanted to make Sinhalese the only language in the country.<sup>103</sup> The project had a linguistic nationalist agenda and was a reaction to the colonial time and the Sinhalese wanted to distance themselves from the colonial powers.<sup>104</sup> There were other focal points in the project: the new government wanted to emphasize the uniqueness of the Sinhalese past and focus on Sri Lanka as the land of the Sinhalese and the country in which Buddhism was in its purest form.<sup>105</sup> At the same time, the focus continued to be an all-island one. The majority of the Tamil population is Hindu, and the reaction from the Tamil part of the country was massive and protest erupted.

In the 1970’s the Tamils and the Sinhalese were on a collision course with each other. The two major points was language and religious issues. These issues began with a new constitution that said: “The republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place. Accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism while assuring to all religions the rights secured(...).”<sup>106</sup> There was also a development in the left-wing movements in the country, and the Sinhalese movement called Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) started a militant movement against the Tamils in 1970’s. JVP fostered an ideology that has been described as a caricature of Marxism, or by less severe commentators as an indigenous variant of Marxism-patriotism. The idea that Ruhuna, a southern part of the island, is the historical center of Sri Lanka is in focus.<sup>107</sup> The adopted idea of Ruhuna was founded on a historical event that took place when the king Rhuna was fighting the king of Tamils and this spirit should live on today.<sup>108</sup> But Tamils were not the only target for JVP. It also tried to overthrow the government in 1971 because of, as JVP stated, the lack of good reforms and not treasuring the Sinhalese tradition. This attempt failed but the JVP did not disappear.<sup>109</sup>

Tamil groups claimed that this new constitution of 1972 gave verification that Tamils were classed as a second-class citizen. Tamil groups started to organize themselves and the biggest Tamil political party in the parliament was, and still is, the Tamil United Liberation

---

<sup>103</sup> De Silva K.M. 2005:628

<sup>104</sup> De Silva K.M. 2005:629

<sup>105</sup> De Silva K.M. 2005:673

<sup>106</sup> De Silva K.M. 2005:674

<sup>107</sup> Wickramasinghe 2006:244

<sup>108</sup> Wickramasinghe 2006:244

<sup>109</sup> Wickramasinghe 2006:234

Front (TULF). In the election of 1977 TULF won a major victory in the northern parts of the country and this demonstrated that Tamils in general were not happy with the situation in the country.<sup>110</sup> This was a reaction towards the Buddhist nationalism that was spreading in the country, and Tamils also started to identify themselves with old Hindu traditions. There were also more violent groups that wanted a separate state among the Tamil community and which demonstrated their capabilities within the 1970's. There were attacks on military and on politicians, mainly in the north.

The Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were one of these militant groups. LTTE sprung out from a student group called Tamil Students Federation and they took their name LTTE in 1975. LTTE has a strict Tamil-nationalistic ideology and the goal is to create a separate Tamil state. LTTE was banned to proscribe in the parliament by the government in 1978.<sup>111</sup> In 1983 one of LTTE attacks on militaries led to the biggest anti-Tamil riots in recent history. These riots spread all over the island and many innocent Tamils were killed. This event triggered the ethnic conflict which is still ongoing in the country. In 1987 the LTTE, after an internal struggle between different Tamil groups, were dominated in the north.

As the extreme Sinhalese left and the separatists were fighting against the Tamils, many Buddhist monks began to justify the war. There were of course many opinions for and against war among the Tamils, but in this period there was according to Bartholomeusz (2002) a tendency of Buddhist monks trying to justify the war. For example the Buddhist monk J.P. Pathirana wrote the following statement in the Sri Lankan newspaper *Daily News* in 1988:

That Buddhism is a religion of ardent aspirations for the highest good of man is not surprising. It springs out the mind of the Buddha a man of martial spirit and high aims. Buddhism is made by a warrior spirit for warriors.<sup>112</sup>

This is only one of many examples that Bartholomeusz gives and according to her there was a just-war thinking despite Buddhist doctrine that urged pacifism<sup>113</sup>. These justifications often appeared in the media and were often aimed at the LTTE.

When the anti-Tamil riots broke out, India intervened in Sri Lankan politics and had a clear agenda to support the Tamil interest in the country. India's government supported the Tamils because of the province Tamil Nadu's<sup>114</sup> influence on politics in India. The Indian

---

<sup>110</sup>De Silva K.M. 2005:692

<sup>111</sup> Wickramasinghe 2006:2284

<sup>112</sup> J.P. Pathirana re-quoted in Bartholomeusz 2002:84

<sup>113</sup> Bartholomeusz 2002:167

<sup>114</sup> Tamil Nadu is a province in the south of India and the majority of the inhabitants are Tamil

support for the Tamils led to the signing of the Indo-Lankan accord in 1987.<sup>115</sup> The signing came after threats from the Indian government to invade Sri Lanka if the killing of Tamils did not stop. This accord was not popular among Sinhalese groups and JVP performed attacks against the government as a protest.<sup>116</sup> These attacks were carried out against those who supported the Indo-Lanka accord and did not stop until 1990.

This accord included an agreement, added on the initiative of the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, that Indian troops would be stationed in the north-eastern part of Sri Lanka. This force was called the Indian Peace Keeping force (IPKF) and ironically these peacekeepers became involved in fights against the LTTE. These fightings were the result of Indian governments policy to not support the LTTE mission to create a separate state. In 1990 the IPKF left Sri Lanka because of changes in both countries' governments. New parties took a leading role and therefore a conflict could be avoided. In 1991 Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by the LTTE because of his involvement in the project of IPKF. When the withdrawal of the IPKF took place, LTTE regained the control of the northern part of the island. In the early 1990's many large battles were fought in the northern, LTTE-controlled areas. There were also many civilians death from all ethnic backgrounds during this period. The conflict between the LTTE and GoSL has continued to present time.

### ***A short introduction to Muslims in Sri Lanka***

To gain a better view of the empirical data the reader needs to get a brief introduction to the most important historical events that has happened in the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. As mentioned earlier, the Muslim community is approximately about 8% of the total population of Sri Lanka.

The origins of the Muslim community lie in the trade between South and South-East Asia and the Middle East. The Arabs first had commercial interest in the south of India in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and this interest also spread to Sri Lanka.<sup>117</sup> The Arab travelers started to marry Tamil women who converted to Islam, and most of them settled in the East around the area of Batticaloa and Ampara. The commerce with Arabs increased as Sri Lanka got the name "the island of Rubies".<sup>118</sup> The Buddhist and Hindu Kingdoms in Sri Lanka allowed the Muslims to continue their trading and soon they assumed a powerful role as an international trading

---

<sup>115</sup> De Silva 2005:698

<sup>116</sup> Wickramasinghe 2006:239

<sup>117</sup> Shukri 1986:337

<sup>118</sup> Shukri 1986:337

community. It was first in the 9<sup>th</sup> century that Muslims established themselves in form of communities in Sri Lanka and most of them came with the trading business.<sup>119</sup>

In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century the Portuguese colonized the island and they controlled the island from 1502 to 1638. At this time Muslims were dominating the trading business, both in the international area and the trading within Sri Lanka. The Portuguese wanted to end the Muslim domination in the trading area because of their own interest in this profit-making business. Though the Portuguese did not monopolize the trading in Sri Lanka, they restricted it for Muslims.<sup>120</sup> Muslims lost their trading position in South-Asia and the main reason for this was the inability of the Muslims to respond to the Portuguese naval power. This weakness was also one of the key factors which enabled other European powers, especially the Dutch and the English, to further encroach areas that had been in Muslims hands.<sup>121</sup> When the Dutch, in power 1638–1796, started to colonize the island they treated the Muslims as the Portuguese had done. This led to that Muslims were forced to move from the east coast to other places in the country. These resettlements were assisted by the Sinhalese kings.<sup>122</sup> Muslims started to get new occupations such as fishermen and weavers and were accepted in Sinhalese kingdoms.<sup>123</sup>

The British came to power in 1796 and they ruled until 1948. Muslims would find themselves in a different role than before. The trade policy of the British towards the Muslims was different from that of earlier colonizers. The British were more tolerant to the Muslim community's involvement in trading.<sup>124</sup> It was not only in the trading business Muslims changed their appearance, they also became more active in politics. They established shari'a courts and Muslims in Sri Lanka are under the Shafi'i-school.<sup>125</sup> There were Muslim representation in the all-island council from the year 1880 and that meant that Muslims had a voice in the politics. However, all British changes were not to the better. Under the British, the Sinhalese leader Ponnambalam Ramanathan made a famous speech in 1887 in which he said that all Muslims are Tamils (Tamil by race) because of the Tamil language they had in common. This led to the Muslim elite making a first claim stating that the Muslims was a separated ethnic group with a traditions different from the Tamils'. The Muslim elite called themselves Ceylon Moors and started to promote their unique identity.<sup>126</sup> However, Sri Lankan Muslims are not a homogenous group and can traditionally be defined in five different groups, Sri Lankan Moors, Indian

---

<sup>119</sup> De Silva K.M 2005:47

<sup>120</sup> De Silva C.R. 1986:159

<sup>121</sup> De Silva C.R. 1986:160

<sup>122</sup> Nuhman 2002:33

<sup>123</sup> Goonewardena 1986:225

<sup>124</sup> Ali 1986:236

<sup>125</sup> For an introduction to the different sunni law schools see Hallaq: 1997

<sup>126</sup> Brune: 2003:111

Muslims, Malays, Borahs and Memons. The last two groups are connected to the shia sect. The classification of Muslims as Tamils affected among other things the area of education. In Tamil and/or Muslim areas there were only Hindu and Christian schools.<sup>127</sup> This led to a boycott from Muslims and the education level among Muslims youth dropped. This event triggered another occasion that would ethnically distance the Muslims even more from other ethnic groups. The Muslim-Sinhalese riot in 1915 is an important event which further worsened the relations between Muslims and Tamils, as well as distinguishing Muslims from Sinhalese. Exactly why the riots started is unclear and there are many theories about it, but it seems that it was organized by Sinhalese who attacked Muslims. However, the event did bring the British and the Muslims closer together and the Sinhalese anti-colonization movement therefore considered the Muslim community to be British supporters.<sup>128</sup>

During the first years of the post-colonial era, Muslim issues were totally left out in the Sinhalese governance. This affected the Muslim community because most of them speak Tamil and clashes followed between Sinhalese groups and Muslims in the 1970's.<sup>129</sup>

In the 1970's the Muslim community consolidated their group identity in many ways. These developments were due to several factors related to educational reforms, business development, economic prosperity and the international Islamic revival.<sup>130</sup> The educational reform was a success for Muslims, but the GoSL relations with Tamil groups got worse. They thought that the GoSL was favoring the Muslims over Tamils. The Tamil rage among some youth groups led to major conflicts in the 1970's. The events in 1983 changed the conflict between the LTTE and GoSL and a civil war began. However, the Muslim question was not the major reason behind the conflict. Yet, the agreement in the Indo-Lanka accord left out the Muslim population and the north and east provinces merged.<sup>131</sup>

Muslims, not being a part of the conflict, developed various businesses especially in areas like trading and commerce, primarily after 1977 when the GoSL lifted the hard trading restrictions for international trading. In the 1970's Muslims as well as Sinhalese and Tamils got the opportunity to work in the Middle East. The increase of educated Muslims and their rising economic status strengthened the common Muslim identity.<sup>132</sup> Hence, a Muslim middle class started to emerge in the south-west of Sri Lanka.<sup>133</sup> The Islamic revival that reached Sri Lanka

---

<sup>127</sup> Wimalartne 1986:428

<sup>128</sup> De Silva K.M. 1986:457

<sup>129</sup> De Silva K.M. 2005:628

<sup>130</sup> Konerzer 1998:141

<sup>131</sup> Knoerzer 1998:144

<sup>132</sup> O'Sullivan 1999:256

<sup>133</sup> O'Sullivan 1999:256

in the 1970's was especially in the form of da'wa groups like Jamaat-e-Islami and Tablighi Jamaat. This was a factor that changed the number of mosques and Muslim schools in the 1970's.<sup>134</sup>

### **The change in Muslim Politics and the development of SLMC**

In the late 70's and early 80's Muslims started to organize themselves in political movements. Two of the biggest Muslim organizations were the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and Muslim United Liberation Front (MULF) SLMC started out as a social movement in 1981, but in 1986 it became a political party. The leader of SLMC, the late Muhammad H.M. Ashraff, did not believe that the Tamil struggle for an independent state was an issue for Muslims.<sup>135</sup> MULF on the other had joined the TULF and supported their politics. But it was SLMC that became a more successful party and in 1996 MULF joined the SLMC. Because of shortage of organization, SLMC did not gain recognition as a political party from the election commissions until 1988.

At the beginning SLMC had a focus on questions regarding Muslims in the eastern part of the country.<sup>136</sup> The conflict strengthened the Muslim identity and created a need for ethnic polarization.<sup>137</sup> The SLMC started to gain a lot of sympathies and in 1988 they won 29 seats in the provincial elections and 4 seats in the parliament elections.<sup>138</sup> The parliament during 1989-1992 was dominated by the UNP with a majority of over 50%. SLMC and its leader Ashraff supported the UNP and Ashraff received the Portfolio of Minister of Port development, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction. The SLMC's success led to violence between LTTE and Muslim groups. Riots between these groups were common in the late 1980's.<sup>139</sup>

The Tamil-Muslim riots reached a critical point in 1990 when approximately 100 000 Muslims from the north were forced by the LTTE to leave their homes.<sup>140</sup> Exactly why the people were forced to leave their homes is unclear but around 1990 a number of conflicts between Tamils and Muslims were played out.<sup>141</sup> Some of these Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) still live in livelihood camps in other parts of the country while some of them have returned.

---

<sup>134</sup> Ali 2001:7

<sup>135</sup> O'Sullivan 1999:257

<sup>136</sup> Knoerzer 1998:143

<sup>137</sup> Knoerzer 1998:144

<sup>138</sup> Knoerzer 1998:144

<sup>139</sup> Hasbullah 2004:224

<sup>140</sup> Brune 2003:119

<sup>141</sup> Brune 2003:120

## **Sri Lanka Muslim Congress' construction of politics**

In the first part of my analysis I will look at the SLMC's organization and guidelines. This part will focus on their constitution, interviews and other documents from the party. I have preferred to divide the parliament speeches into segments, one part will deal with what Ashraff states is 'Muslim Issues'. This is e.g. references to the Koran and how Ashraff talks about Muslims in relation to the conflict, i.e. issues that would fall into an Islamist discourse. The other part will deal with speeches that have direct nationalistic features. This chapter will consist of many and lengthy quotes from the empirical data. The reason for this is that I believe that my theory is easier to adapt when I'm analysing how SLMC alters between different discourses.

### ***Sri Lanka Muslim Congress organization and the guidelines of the party***

The first chapter of the constitution states that 'The Holy Qur'aan and the Traditions of the Holy Prophet shall be the supreme guidelines of the Party'.<sup>142</sup> The first chapter also contains the party's symbols, the party flag with the words 'La-ilaha-illallaah Muhammadur-Rasoolullaah' (there is only one God and Muhammad is his messenger), i.e. the muslim profession of faith, and an uncrossed crescent with a five-cornered star.<sup>143</sup> These are all symbols that are connected to Islam. The flag also has a tree as a symbol. This was given to the party by the election committee in 1988 when SLMC was recognized as a political party. The party anthem is 'Bismillaah hir-Rahmanir-Raheem' (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful). Moreover, the headquarter is referred to as Dharussalaam.<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> The Constitution of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress 2000 (1986) Chapter 1 n.p.

<sup>143</sup> The Constitution of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress 2000 (1986) Chapter 1 n.p.

<sup>144</sup> The Constitution of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress 2000 (1986) Chapter 1 n.p.



Figure 2: The party flag <sup>145</sup>

The first chapter of SLMC's constitution shows no antagonism between nationalism and Islamism. It seems clear that this is an Islamist party with guidelines from the Koran. The second chapter contains the objectives of the party and says that SLMC's duty is to foster and to safeguard the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.<sup>146</sup> To safeguard Sri Lanka there are other principles that the party and its members should live up to, namely:

- To uphold and honour the principles of democracy and fundamental human rights of the people of Sri Lanka.
- To strive to recognise and respect the distinct linguistic, cultural ethnic, and religious identities of the communities of Sri Lanka and promote friendship, peace and harmony amongst them.
- To work towards the re-establishment and the preservation of the rule of Law.
- To preserve and ensure the Independence of the Judiciary.
- To preserve and promote the sharia laws and to encourage the members of the Party and others to adopt the entire Code of sharia laws in their private and community life.

<sup>147</sup>

The second chapter of the constitution have segments of nationalism and it is obvious here that the constitution aims at seeing the unity of all people of Sri Lanka. 'The people' have different linguistic, cultural, ethnic and religious belongings but they are all Sri Lankans. The objectives of the party are to strive for peace and harmony among the different communities in the

<sup>145</sup> The Constitution of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress 2000 (1986) Schedule n.p.

<sup>146</sup> The Constitution of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress 2000 (1986) Chapter 2 n.p

<sup>147</sup> The Constitution of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress 2000 (1986) Chapter 2 n.p

country, i.e. national unity is here a nodal point from the nationalistic discourse of politics which is incorporated in SLMC politics. The SLMC does not state that they want to have a separate state, instead the fixation is on the current state of Sri Lanka.

The constitution also stresses the importance of preserving the independence of the judiciary in Sri Lanka but in the same chapter it also points out that members of the party should adopt the entire code of sharia laws. It becomes rather unclear what the SLMC's view of jurisprudence is. They want to adopt the laws of the country but they also want to preserve the entire law of sharia. This leads to an antagonism between the discourses of Islamism and nationalistic discourse of jurisprudence.

However, the party objective which says that members should preserve and promote sharia does not exclude members from other religious backgrounds. In the script *The code of conduct*, the SLMC have a chapter for their Muslim members while other members should endeavour to fulfil their religious obligations, follow the rules and regulations and the ethical code of their religious discipline.<sup>148</sup> However, the Muslim members of the party have more directives than the ones stressed by the code of conduct. Besides the five pillars of Islam there are twenty-six directives on how Muslim members should live. For example, members are recommended to eat Halal meat, not to drink alcohol, to respect the elders, to guard against jealousy, pride and superstition.<sup>149</sup> The party's decisions in different issues will be made by the High Command. However, the leader has special powers within the party, for example he can dismiss members and he is also the spokesman for the party.<sup>150</sup> The High Command is a council that is inhabited by the party leadership and by the majlis-i-shura. The majlis-i-shura contains members from the All Ceylon Jaamiyathul Ulema (one of the councils of the religious learned Muslims in Sri Lanka). This means that every decision is made by the conception of consensus and that an Alim can give guidelines for a certain question. The religious scholar and religion (Islam) has a central role in the construction of SLMC's foundation of the party's outlines. The General Secretary of the party Hassan Ali explains the outlines of the party:

In our high command meetings we do not take decisions by raising the hands, we follow the majlis-i-shura concept. We also have the code of conduct that every member needs to follow, it is based only on Islamic values, so every meeting is followed by Islamic traditions. (...) and we have a permanent member of the Ulema Congress, and the president and the secretary will always be a member of

---

<sup>148</sup> The Code of Conduct No year : 3

<sup>149</sup> The Code of Conduct No year : 9–11

<sup>150</sup> The Constitution of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress 2000 (1986) Chapter 3 n.p

the high command. If there is a question we talk about it with the Ulema Congress and they will advise us and guide us to the right answer<sup>151</sup>

Ali here stresses the importance of ‘Islamic values’ and ‘Islamic Traditions’ in the outlines of the party and that the Ulema Congress has a special position within the party. The Islamic principles that Ali stresses as important neutralise the SLMC’s nationalist discourse to the discourse of Islamism

The Islamist identity is also shown in a physical way with the flag and the name of the headquarter. So when it comes to the question of members, SLMC’s articulations are in principle fixed to a discourse of Islamism with moments like ‘Halal’, Koran and ‘the five pillars of Islam’. The Muslim values are seen as dominant with special rules and the supreme guideline for the party.

The organization throughout the country is ordered on different levels. Every village and district should have a chief organizer and the basic organization of the party should be on village level.<sup>152</sup> There are also affiliated bodies within the district and village organizations. These are in turn organized by a national organizer and the high command. I met the chief organizer, Shafeek Rajabdeen, of the Colombo district in November 2006 and he explained to me how he works on a grass root level:

We have lot of poverty programs and programs for underprivileged people. As soon as a mother is pregnant we start a milk program that provides this mother with food and so on. When the child grows up to certain age they are given free education, free books, free uniforms, free school and when the Child reach the teens they earn free scholarship by the government. These programs also look after streetlights and waterlines and so on. Also when you’re dead we take care of the burial ground free of charge and to all these services are given to the poor Muslims.<sup>153</sup>

Rajabdeen here speaks about ‘people, ‘mothers’ child, ‘poor’ and these are all referred to as Muslims. These programmes are marked towards the Muslim community and Rajabdeen continues by saying:

---

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Hassan Ali General secretary of SLMC 2006-11-14

<sup>152</sup> The Constitution of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress 2000 (1986) Chapter 6 n.p

<sup>153</sup> Interview with Shafeek Rajabdeen 2006-11-20 15.30-16.12

SLMC was formed for a cause and today we have achieved some of this cause. On the road we see that we want to lead our people to freedom, education and above poverty limits. We are sent into this world to guide people in the correct path. (...) what is the benefit of being a SLMC member so if you became a member and serve under me I will take care for you. I will give you all the benefits like machines and the whole thing, we give you footballs, we give you cricket material and educational programs<sup>154</sup>

Rajabdeen here states an interesting thing, to get these benefits you have to be a member of SLMC and to be a member you have to recognize the party guidelines. This is common among Islamist groups, e.g. Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt have a similar programme. Islamist organisations all over the world have the same ideas with similar programmes and they take the role of the state if the state cannot provide these things. These programmes are activated in different unions in Egypt and are like SLMC's programs connected to the alliance of the party.<sup>155</sup> On the question why the benefits are restricted to Muslim Rajabdeen answers:

(...) we are not in the position to guide ourselves, we are dependent on the majority and we are unemployed, we are poor, we are not in the army, we are not in the navy we are the community that has no tomorrow. We have to be loud because we are not sure about tomorrow so we live for today.<sup>156</sup>

Rajabdeen uses the word 'we' and are referring to Muslims and the quote above is the reason why SLMC should take care of its 'own' community, namely the Muslims. Rajabdeen stresses the difference between Muslims and the other communities in the country and Rajabdeen states that this way of organizing and helping people is why SLMC has become a successful party:

(...) we have won over Muslim voters from the UNP, Today we are proud to say that we have political grass root level backing of about 40000 SLMC supporters within the district of Colombo. Also because we come from the grass roots levels families, and we have a social program that from the time that you are in your mother's stomach to the time that you are dead this program looks after you, and we are very humorous when we talk about this program. We say from the time you have an urge to the time you resurrect, we look after you.<sup>157</sup>

---

<sup>154</sup> Interview with Shafeek Rajabdeen 2006-11-20 15.30-16.12

<sup>155</sup> Gardell 2006:150

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Shafeek Rajabdeen 2006-11-20 15.30-16.12

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Shafeek Rajabdeen 2006-11-20 15.30-16.12

Rajabdeen here states that the Muslim voters are the primary target for SLMC and that the organization also have won over many Muslim voter because of these programmes. There are also affiliated bodies, the Ulema Congress was mentioned earlier, which are a part of the SLMC and work all over the country:

The affiliated bodies are:

- The Ulema Congress
- The Undergraduates Congress
- The Youth Congress
- The Ladies Congress
- The Teachers Congress
- The Farmers Congress
- The Liberation Workers Congress
- The Port Workers Congress
- The Traders Congress
- The Professionals Congress

I met the leader of the Ladies Congress in Colombo Shifty Refiya in Colombo 2006. Refiya used to be a part of the UNP and she explains that there is a difference to work with all communities and only Muslims, which she does with the SLMC.<sup>158</sup> Refiya states that the Ladies Congress is more active during election time.<sup>159</sup> She also describes poor Muslim women as very supportive of the SLMC.<sup>160</sup> I had the privilege of being a part of one of the Ladies Congress meetings. The meeting was held at the SLMC headquarter and it was a charity for poor Muslim women who were given sowing machines. Refiya states that:

From time to time I summon women for meeting and I do a little bit of counselling and we try to show them the benefit of this. To reach the poor you sometimes have to hand them something and they will come. In the end of our meeting it is like an open forum for questions it could be a personal issue, sometimes it could be that someone wants

<sup>158</sup> Interview with Shity Refiya 20061124

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Shity Refiya 20061124

<sup>160</sup> Interview with Shity Refiya 20061124

their child admitted to a school or another woman says that I want a job for my family.

There are basic requirement in lives that pushes them to take a step into politics.<sup>161</sup>

Refiya's statement above is clearly an articulation that will fit within the discourse of Islamism, 'women', 'poor' and 'family' are in Refiyas words Muslims. Refiya states that she used to work with all communities earlier, but now with the SLMC she works only with Muslims. This means that the Ladies Congress is focused on Muslim people and Muslim issues. The examples I give here in their organization towards voters/people are clearly focused on Muslims. Poverty programs and meetings are dedicated to Muslims

In my example above I have looked at SLMC organization and the articulation most of the time fits under the discourse of Islamism. SLMC wants to be seen as a Muslim party for Muslim voters. The ideology of the party is based on the Koran and the prophetic sunna, this also has physical articulations that would fit in the discourse of Islamism, e.g. the Muslim profession of faith on the party flag. One interesting thing is chapter two in the constitution where the SLMC rearticulates 'laws' and 'the people' from different discourses within nationalism. The SLMC states that it is important to embrace the laws of the country. These are the only examples in the organization in which a discourse of nationalism is rearticulated. In the same chapter the SLMC tries to neutralise the discourse of nationalism when it states that the members of the party should adopt the entire concept of the sharia laws. Here we can talk about antagonism between the discourses Islamism and different discourses of nationalism.

The supreme guidelines of the party, i.e. the Koran and the sunna, fit well into what scholars define as Islamist parties.<sup>162</sup> The Koran and sunna can also be fitted as nodal points within the discourse of Islamism. Furthermore, SLMC can be considered a political party, because they intervened directly in political life. Oliver Roy (1994) states that Islamist movements are not led by clerics, however, moderate Islamists have gained ground within the recruit of ulamas, and this is adaptable to the SLMC. The leaders of the party are not religiously learned, but they sometimes have meetings with the ulama congress.<sup>163</sup> According to Roy there are three elements that are good criteria for distinguishing radical Islamists and conservative fundamentalists. These three elements are the place of politics, women and sharia. Islamist movements generally tend to favour women's education and often have a women's associations group within the party. As we have seen above SLMC have a women's organization. The place for politics for SLMC is in the parliament, i.e. SLMC is not a revolutionary force, and the sharia

---

<sup>161</sup>Interview with Shity Refiya 20061124

<sup>162</sup> Cf. Roy 1994:35

<sup>163</sup> Roy 1994:36-7

laws are interpreted by laymen. Other typical Islamist features are the role of the leader and the majilis-i-shura'. The leader have special powers within the SLMC and is not a religiously learned in the sense that he is an alim. The members should not questions his role but pledge him allegiance. This is also something that is described as typical for an Islamist party. The majilis-i-shura', working as a consultative council, in SLMC consists of the ulamas and high command of the party. According to Roy there are also three different kinds of models for Islamist parties.<sup>164</sup> SLMC would fall into what Roy describes as a western-style political party, seeking within an electoralist and mulitiparty framework to get the maximal number of elements in its program adopted. However, in the party's constitution there are also moments that could be well-fitted in the nationalist Order of Discourses. Members are urged to preserve the nation's laws and to work for the unity of the country. Here we see an antagonism between the discourses of Islamism and the Nationalistic Jurisprudence because, at the same time, members are also urged to follow the sharia laws.

When we look at the SLMC organization we can see that for example Yoginder Sikand's (2002) research about the Islamist party Jama'at-i-Islami (JII) shows that SLMC and the JII have a lot in common.<sup>165</sup> They are both based on the principle of the Koran and Sunna. JII and SLMC both follow the concept of majlis-i-shura.<sup>166</sup> The constitution of JII like SLMC stresses the importance of the adoption of sharia laws for the members of the party.<sup>167</sup> SLMC and JII have a similar organization, with the special sections covering professional sectors like workers, farmers, and students. In the case of SLMC these sections are called congresses but SLMC, like the JII, also has village branches and propagandists working for the party.<sup>168</sup> However, so far the material has been too narrow to draw any conclusions so I need to widen my field and in the next part I will look at parliament speeches between 1989-1992 held by the former leader of the party M.H.M Ashraff.

### ***'Muslim issues' in the parliament 1989-1992***

One of the foundations for an Islamist party is the use of the Koran and the prophetic Sunna for solutions of problems. Ashraff stresses the importance of Islam in a speech were he tries to explain the outlines of SLMC:

---

<sup>164</sup> See Roy 1994:46

<sup>165</sup> Sikand is in his article writing about the Jama'at-i-Islami's branch in Kashmir the Jama'at-i-Islami of Jammu and Kashmir

<sup>166</sup> Compare Sikand 2002:707-8

<sup>167</sup> Sikand 2002:708

<sup>168</sup> Compare Sikand 2002:710-11

The Holy Koran (...) and the supreme life of the Holy Prophet are the guidelines of our party. We are not compelling anyone who does not accept the policies of our party to join our party. (...) no one can stop the Muslim community from accepting the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress as its sole spokesman in the near future. (...) we believe that Islam is a complete way of life (...) the difference between Islam and with the respect to other religions, is that Islam shows to us how an orderly and a disciplined society can be built up.<sup>169</sup>

In this articulation we can locate a number of nodal points that would fit within the moments in the discourse Islamism. ‘The Koran’ and ‘the supreme life of the Holy Prophet’ would fit as nodal points in the discourse of Islamism, because they are moments that temporally could close the discourse of Islamism. Ashraff also states that SLMC is the ‘spokesman of the Muslim Community’ and he points out that you have to accept the guidelines to join the party. As in the organization, we can establish that SLMC wants to be seen as Muslim party for all Muslim voters.

Ashraff refers to the Koran in a series of speeches. One concern that Ashraff has is the growth of male prostitution and this leads to what he refers to as ‘bad tourism’ in the country and he stresses that:

According to the holy Koran, Allah destroyed nations that were involved in homosexuality (...) this is what the Koran say in this matter: And (we sent) Lut, who said to his people. Will you persist in these indecent acts which no other nation has committed before you? You lust after men instead if women, truly you are a degenerate people (chapter 7, verse 80).<sup>170</sup>

In the same speech Ashraff also states that this kind of ‘bad tourism’ is a threat to the nation since it increases drug use and diseases like AIDS in the country. He stresses that ‘homosexuality’ is a threat to the nation. Ashraff also wants to ban every tourist that has AIDS for the safety of the nation.<sup>171</sup> Here Ashraff turns against what he sees as a western globalisation process, and he believes that Islam has the solution. According to Gardell Islamism groups tends to think that globalisation is a homogenising process in ways of living and in economic matters. AIDS is something Ashraff comes back to when he wants to defend the right to polygamous marriages as a Muslim:

---

<sup>169</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:20 Appropriation Bill 23/3 1989

<sup>170</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:111 Appropriation Bill to the Ministry of Tourism 11/4 1989

<sup>171</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:110 Appropriation Bill to the Ministry of Tourism 11/4 1989

That shows the gravity of the illness and to what extent Sri Lanka as a nation today is vulnerable. Why not make polygamous legal (...) every male member is going to support my proposal. Female members will also like it because today it is not only the AIDS problem. (...) a more serious problem that is prevailing in the North and East. That is the problem of young girls that are unable to find partners for a married life.<sup>172</sup>

AIDS is, according to Ashraff, a threat to the nation and Islam has the answers: prohibit tourists with AIDS and homosexual tourist that seeks prostitutes to enter the country and allow polygamous marriages. According to Ashraff this will subdue people's urge for unnecessary sexual contact.<sup>173</sup> He is referring to and seeking answers in the Koran and therefore this would fit into the discourse of Islamism. However, Ashraff also refers to the 'nation's best interest' and 'the threat of bad tourism'. These are moments that would fit under the Order of Discourse nationalism. Here, Ashraff tries to rationalize Islamic law for the benefit of the nation and in this way he could get support from non-Muslim politicians. This could also be connected to Islamist movement's vision of the western society and the cultural imperialism and its effects on Muslim communities.

In several speeches, Ashraff is promoting an Islamic economy with interest-free banks. In one of the speeches he quotes four verses from the Koran (2:275–276, 2:278 and 3:130) where he stresses that:

We seriously believe that an interest-free economy is the solution – and the only solution – to the economic problems that we are facing today. Very recently I read an article where a researcher has said that the higher the rate of interest the higher the rate of unemployment, and the lower the rate of interest the lower the rate of unemployment. (...) A good moral society cannot be established in Sri Lanka, a Buddhist nation where Lord Buddha himself has prohibited the taking of usury.<sup>174</sup>

Ashraff here states that Islamic economy, i.e. 'the interest-free economy', is the solution for the country's financial problems. Ashraff is not only founding his arguments on the Koran, he is also referring to an article (title unknown) that he had read and he also refers to 'Lord Buddha'. Here Ashraff first uses two sources – the Koran and science – to uplift his arguments. He also states

---

<sup>172</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1992:230 Appropriation Bill to the Ministry of Health 14/12 1992

<sup>173</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1992:230 Appropriation Bill to the Ministry of Health 14/12 1992

<sup>174</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1990:25–27 Debt Recovery Bill 24/1 1990. For an other example see Ashraff in Parliament 1991:119–124 Supplementary Supply: Agriculture Productivity Villages 11/7 1991

that Sri Lanka, as a Buddhist nation, should follow Buddha's way. Here Ashraff is trying to neutralize his 'own' discourse by using and comparing other moments from nationalism. He is saying that Buddha preached the same basic ideas and Ashraff is here rearticulating moments from the cultural discourse of Nationalism. Here we can talk about a discourse struggle or an antagonism between the discourse of Islamism and the discourse of cultural nationalism, since Ashraff uses the Koran, science and Buddha to strengthen his arguments.

In many speeches Ashraff also promotes Zakat (charity; one of the five pillars of Islam) which he explains as a compulsory tax with a rate of 2.5%. It is not only a tax for your income but also for your wealth itself.<sup>175</sup> Ashraff states that the Koran stresses that a poor man has a right in the wealth of the rich man and talks about the following quotes from the Koran:

And in their property is the right of the beggar and those devoid of riches (i.e. poor). Chapter 7, verse 156. And spend in the path of Allah and do not throw yourselves with your own hands into destruction. Chapter 2 verse 191. O you, who are believers, spend from the pure things that you have earned. Chapter 30 verse 38.<sup>176</sup>

Here Ashraff uses the Koran to legitimise his vision of a Zakat system in Sri Lanka, i.e. fully adoptable in the discourse of Islamism. But then Ashraff continues to quote Buddha and compares his teachings with Islamic values. In the following speech Ashraff uses the constitution which states that '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 (teachings from Buddha)'.<sup>177</sup> In the same speech he declares what SLMC politics stand for:

Islam promises a way out which is the middle path, a path which is advocated by the most respected Buddha himself. Buddha himself had advocated the middle path. He advocated the concept of Nirvana as opposed to the various sufferings of human beings. As to how human soul can liberate itself has been doctrine of Buddha himself. (...) Capitalism and communism are the two extremes. Both these are wrong, Islam advocates the middle path. (...) the middle path is that you allow, give the human being all encouragement so that he can develop himself morally, materially and spiritually.<sup>178</sup>

---

<sup>175</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1992:41 Finance Amendment Bill 4/3 1992

<sup>176</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:20 Appropriation Bill 23/3 1989

<sup>177</sup> The constitution of Sri Lanka quoted by Ashraff in Ashraff in Parliament 1990:196 Excise Amendment Bill 5/9 1990

<sup>178</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1991:163 Government Policy of Privatization Peoplization State Establishment and Corporation 9/8 1991. For an other example see Ashraff in Parliament 1992:115–121 Local Treasury Amendment Bill 21/7 1992

Here Ashraff states that Islam is the ‘middle path’ between capitalism and communism, a common position among Islamist parties.<sup>179</sup> According to Ashraff this path is also represented by the Buddhist religion and encourages people to develop themselves, ‘morally, materially and spiritually’. Ashraff criticizes the western way of thinking when it comes to politics. Ashraff rearticulates moments from Sri Lanka’s constitution which also fit in his view of Islam. The lessons from Buddha also play a part in Ashraff’s view on alcohol:

I am a great admirer of Lord Buddha. Lord Buddha had taught good ways of life to humanity. Lord Buddha had stated that human society can be clean. It can be free of corruption if it can keep away from evil, and one of the great evils identified by Lord Buddha is Liquor (...) Islam prohibits it (...) and we must tell the nation that we cannot any longer continue to preach as guardians of the Buddha Sasana and at the same time depend on these distilleries to generate income for our country<sup>180</sup>

Here Ashraff states that Islam forbids alcohol just as Buddha did. He stresses that we can no longer preach as guardians of Buddha if alcohol is permitted. So Ashraff rearticulates Buddha’s lessons to promote his own Islamic ideas. ‘Liquor’ is according to Ashraff prohibited both by Islam and Buddhism and therefore it should not be allowed in Sri Lanka. Ashraff rearticulates Buddha’s learnings to strengthen his arguments to state ‘Sri Lanka as a Buddhist nation’. In this case the primary goal is to reach out to the Buddhist majority in the parliament. We can see here how different moments are cutting through different discourses. There are also other examples where Ashraff only speaks about Buddha and the tolerance he preached.<sup>181</sup>

Leaving Ashraff’s interpretation of Buddha and Islam, we can see that there are many different topics that he considers important for the Muslim Community. In a Private notice to the Foreign Minister Ashraff states that the newspaper *Newsweek* published a picture of the prophet Muhammad and stresses that:

(...) there it seems to be a pattern universally in insulting the religion of Islam and the Prophet whom we hold dear to us. (...) the particular issue of the NewsWeek should not be allowed to be circulated in Sri Lanka (...) because this hurts the religious susceptibility of the Muslim community.<sup>182</sup>

---

<sup>179</sup> For example see Mitchell 1969 chapter VIII

<sup>180</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1990:196–7 Excise Amendment Bill 5/9 1990

<sup>181</sup> See: Ashraff in Parliament 1992:87–91 Public Security Proclamation 23/4 1992

<sup>182</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:62 Question by private notice 5/4 1989

In the same speech he also states ‘that it is forbidden to make a portrait of Muhammad’.<sup>183</sup> Ashraff here takes the role to defend the Muslim honour. The moment ‘we’ is here Muslims and the ‘insulting of Islam’ is here the primary statement i.e. not a moment. In a similar topic Ashraff states the importance of the weekly Friday prayer and stresses:

Sir, I rose and brought to your notice that on Fridays arrangements have to be made to make it convenient for Muslim members of parliament and the Muslim staff of the Parliament to attend Jum’ah Prayers.<sup>184</sup>

Here Ashraff states that the ‘Muslim members and staff of the parliament’ should have the chance to visit the Friday prayers. The articulation elements falls into moments without an antagonism under the discourse Islamism. In the speeches I have gone through there are few comments on the world politics. However, in 1991 Ashraff made a statement about the Gulf War in Iraq:

Already our holiest mosque al-Aqsa is in the hands of the Jews, in the hands of the Zionists, in the hands of the American CIA agents. There is a direct threat to the two holiest of holy places to the Muslim community, namely, holy Mecca and holy Medina Al Sherif where our beloved Prophet is buried.<sup>185</sup>

Ashraff made some comments on the American troops in Saudi Arabia and here ‘we’ once more becomes Muslims in a universal meaning. Ashraff also points out threats against Muslims all over the world namely ‘Jews’, ‘Zionists’ and ‘CIA agents’.

In the educational sector, which is important for Ashraff, he stresses the concern of the lack of Muslim schools and Muslim teachers:

Now there are Muslim students studying in non-Muslim schools. We have had a lot of problems in the Galle district where Muslim girls were not permitted to observe their dress sense.<sup>186</sup>

---

<sup>183</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:62 Question by private notice 5/4 1989

<sup>184</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:6 Personal explanation by MR. M.H.M. Ashraff, 22/3 1989

<sup>185</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1991:12 Adjournment Motion: Gulf War 24/1 1991

<sup>186</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:71 Appropriation Bill to the Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Information 6/4 1989

Ashraff sees the fact that Muslims need to go into ‘non-Muslim schools’ as a problem and stresses that more Muslims schools and teachers are needed.<sup>187</sup> Later on he stresses the importance of separate schools for Muslim boys and girls:

(...) he has to select one school for the male Muslim students and one for the female Muslim students and he must concentrate on them. The Government must take it upon itself as its duty to provide everything possible, all assistance possible, to these schools (...)<sup>188</sup>

Ashraff states that it is up to ‘The Government’ to provide these schools with the necessary assistance. In the two quotes above Ashraff speaks about what he considers ‘Muslim problems’, i.e. these are moments that would fit under the discourse of Islamism. A different, equally important topic for Ashraff is the possibility of sharia courts in the country:

(...) Today we have our Constitution and we are proud of that as Sri Lankans. Sri Lanka allows every community to believe in a practice his own faith. We have the Quazi courts, but their functions are confined only to marriage and divorce and personal matters. Why not (...) think of setting up the sharia courts so that not only those aspects but even the other legal aspects (...) can be brought into play.<sup>189</sup>

Ashraff here uses the constitution of Sri Lanka to stress that ‘every community’ has a right to practice its faith, and therefore Muslims should to have to deal with legal aspects other than family matters in the ‘sharia courts’. Ashraff’s statement here means that he wants the Muslim community to be ruled under sharia courts. However, he does not specify which laws he wants to extend to the sharia courts, except for the statement that the sharia courts should increase its area of competence. Ashraff refers to the constitution in other speeches:

(...) every Muslim woman, every Muslim citizen, is entitled to freedom under the Constitutions of our country. As you know every member of Parliament have taken an oath under this Constitution I will quote chapter three; every citizen is entitled to the freedom<sup>190</sup>

---

<sup>187</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:71 Appropriation Bill to the Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Information 6/4 1989

<sup>188</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1990:138 Supplementary Supply: Mid-Day Meal to School Children 23/5 1990

<sup>189</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1992: Appropriation Bill: Ministry of Justice 8/9 1992. For another example see Ashraff in Parliament 1990:1–12 No Confidence in Government 12/1 1990

<sup>190</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1992:150 Private Members Motion: Muslim Female Nurse Uniforms 7/8 1992

In addition to more Muslim schools and powerful sharia courts Ashraff wants to change the age of majority from 18 to 15 because of two major reasons. One is that there are youth groups in Sri Lanka that cause a lot of problems and by making the legal age 15 there are bigger chances that the youth becomes a part of the democratic process.<sup>191</sup> Here Ashraff tries to use, what he sees as, rational arguments to support his ideas of Muslim law. The change of age would also be compatible with Islamic law, according to Ashraff:

(...) There again it shows the influence of the Muslim personal law on this subject. The Muslim Personal law influencing the other systems of law in our country is not a new phenomenon<sup>192</sup>

For Ashraff, the Muslim personal law is thus the solution to the problems of the country. The youth would be incorporated in the democratic process earlier in their lives. It is not the last time that Ashraff uses Islamic laws in trying to solve the nation's problems. In one speech Ashraff is talking to the parliament on the need for peace:

I think it is my duty to support this concept for these three main reasons. As Muslims we believe in the Holy Koran and in the Holy Koran, almighty Allah enjoins the unity of not only the Muslim community, but the unity of the whole human race<sup>193</sup>

In Ashraff's view of the Koran there should be unity among the whole human race, in this case Sri Lanka. One year later, on the same topic, Ashraff once again uses the Koran to make his point that Sri Lanka needs unity:

Everything in the earth, everything in the heaven belongs to Allah the only God. Why I am quoting this is to say that languages has no exception to this universal concept. In the name of languages we shall not differ, in the name of languages will shall not fight (...) In the Holy Koran Allah has stated that he had created people, societies and communities not with the purpose that they fight among themselves but that they understand each other.<sup>194</sup>

---

<sup>191</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:247–254 Age of Majority Amendment Bill 9/11 1989

<sup>192</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:247–254 Age of Majority Amendment Bill 9/11 1989

<sup>193</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1991:119 Supplementary Supply: Agriculture Productivity Villages 11/7 1991

<sup>194</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1992:139 Implementation of the Official Language Policy 4/8 1992

With a reference to the Koran Ashraff explains why there should be unity in the country, and he says that people should not fight because of having different languages. In a question regarding adoption of children, Ashraff, again with his view of Islam, tries to solve problems for the nation:

We are dealing with the newly born Sri Lankan citizens. There will be a time if every Sri Lankan baby is adopted in any of the foreign countries, when they reach the age of majority, when they start thinking on their own (...) As a party, the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress has a duty on this occasion to put forward the Islamic aspect of it. According to Islam, adoption is permitted but when adopting, the child must know who his true, natural parents are<sup>195</sup>

Ashraff states that Islam does not prohibit the adoption of a child, however the child should know his or her roots. It is important for Ashraff that the child knows that it is a Sri Lankan child and who his or her real parents are. Therefore he suggest that it should not be allowed to adopt children that are infants. Ashraff also states, in the same speech, that ‘it is a loss for the country when Sri Lankan children are adopted to foreign countries.’<sup>196</sup>

One of the most frequent themes in Ashraff’s parliamentary speeches is how the civil war has affected the Muslim community. There are a number of speeches in which Ashraff talks about the number of Muslims killed in different situations.<sup>197</sup> He also refers to earlier events:

There was total indifference to the sufferings of the Muslim community. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, 1987 at 9.30 in the morning the Kalmunai Bazaar was on fire. There was violence unleashed against the Kalmunai Muslims. That happened within 50 yards of the Kalmunai Police Station<sup>198</sup>

The speech refers to an incident where Tamils attacked Muslims and the fact that the police in the east was helpless in face of the violence.<sup>199</sup> The Muslim refugee situation in 1990 is also something that Ashraff speaks about on several occasions<sup>200</sup>:

---

<sup>195</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1992:30–3 Adoption of Children Amendment Bill 21/2 1992

<sup>196</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1992:32 Adoption of Children Amendment Bill 21/2 1992

<sup>197</sup> For examples see Ashraff in Parliament 1990:56–77 Security Situation in Ampara and Batticaloa Districts 8/2 1990, Ashraff in Parliament 1989:182–188 Security of Muslims in the Eastern Province 25/8 1989

<sup>198</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:152 Situation in Sammanthurai 25/5 1989

<sup>199</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:152 Situation in Sammanthurai 25/5 1989

<sup>200</sup> For example see: Ashraff in Parliament 1990:263 Public Security Proclamation 22/11 1990

We know what happened to the Muslims; we know that more than 90,000 Muslim refugees (...) were driven out from their homes. They are suffering in more than 100 refugee camps; their conditions are worse than the conditions of animals.<sup>201</sup>

In the same speech Ashraff stresses the importance of a Civil Volunteer Force which should give protection to the Muslims. His opinion is that this Force should only contain Muslims. He also stresses the importance of training Muslims in weapon training so that they can defend themselves.<sup>202</sup> Ashraff develops these thoughts and later he wants to see a Home Guard force with Muslims soldiers protecting Muslim villages.<sup>203</sup> According to Ashraff, LTTE was killing Muslims in the east and the government did nothing about it, this happened after the withdrawal of the IPKF.<sup>204</sup> In 1989 and the beginning of 1990 Ashraff first took a neutral position towards the LTTE and was welcoming them into the democratic process.<sup>205</sup> But after the killings of several Muslims in Kattankudi's grand Mosque, Ashraff made a speech in the parliament and he stated that jihad against the LTTE may be an option for the Muslims:

After the Kattankudi massacre the blood of every Muslim is boiling today. We should be thankful to the Muslim community for their patience. (...) Muslims are no longer interested in development at the moment. The only issue is our right to defend our lives. (...) The prophet (...) said that patience is the greatest form of Jihad or Holy War. But the Holy Koran enjoins on every Muslim the right to fight against the oppressors, against the oppression, it is the duty of every Muslim to fight. (...) is the LTTE giving a message to the Muslim Community that we cannot freely practice our faith? Is it a message from the LTTE that the Muslims cannot have their mosques and cannot pray? (...) The circumstances are sufficient, the circumstances justify a situation in which a Jihad can be declared today in this country. Our ulamas will accept it. But nevertheless we follow the Prophet, who taught us that patience is the greatest form of Jihad and we will remain patient<sup>206</sup>

Ashraff here stresses that he considers the possibility of declaring jihad against the LTTE and that 'our ulamas' would accept it. He here takes the role of a spokesman for the Muslim community

---

<sup>201</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1992:108 Defence Levy Amendment Bill 7/7 1992

<sup>202</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1990:163 General Sir John Kotalawela Defence Academy Amendment Bill 7/8 1990

<sup>203</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1990:220 Public Security Proclamation 20/9 1990. Also see: Ashraff in Parliament 1990:317 Propriation Bill Ministry of Defence 3/12 1990

<sup>204</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1990:41 Question by Private Notice Security Situation in Ampara District 30/1 1990

<sup>205</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1990:117 Public Security Proclamation 26/4 1990

<sup>206</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1990:169–171 Security Situation in the Eastern Province 10/8 1990

and stresses the importance that the Muslim community should remain patient. In a speech two years later Ashraff is less patient:

If we are being killed because of the simple reason that we are Muslims it is the commandment of the Holy Koran that we should declare Jihad against them and kill every LTTE. (...) I will be the happiest if I can die in battle at the time of slitting the neck of this bloody Prabhakaran. These are our feelings.<sup>207</sup>

Here Ashraff states that according to the Koran it is just to declare 'jihad' when the LTTE is killing Muslims just for being Muslims. Ashraff also states that he himself would participate and that he would slit the neck of the LTTE leader Prabhakaran. This can also be seen as a nationalistic jihad against a group that wants to break free from Sri Lanka. In the two quotes above Ashraff supports his arguments with references to the Koran and declares that he as a Muslim would join the jihad. These are all fitted within the discourse of Islamism.

Apart from jihad, Ashraff also saw another solution to the problem:

As far as the view of the SLMC is concerned, the solution to the problems faced by the Eastern Province Muslims is nothing but the creation of a Muslim-majority Province Council. I said that the conference should pass a resolution supporting the creation of a Muslim majority Provincial Council.<sup>208</sup>

Ashraff wanted to established a Muslim majority Council for the eastern part of Sri Lanka, where most of the Muslim population lives. However, Ashraff did not want to have an All Muslim Council, but it would include all communities in the country:

(...) we identify that unit as a Muslim Provincial Council or a Muslim Majority Provincial Council, let this House not understand that unit to be a 100 percent Muslim unit (...) When we talk about Sri Lanka although 74 per cent of the people are of the Sinhala majority we do not call it a Sinhala nation.<sup>209</sup>

In a Public Security Proclamation, Ashraff is interrupted and accused by other members of the parliament for being friends with the Libyan government and making bounds with a foreign

---

<sup>207</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1992:129 Public Security Proclamation 23/7 1992

<sup>208</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:236 Provincial Council Election Petition rules 8/11 1989

The district that Ashraff wanted to make this council in was the Ampara, Pottuvill and Batticaloa

<sup>209</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1990:223 Public Security Proclamation 20/9 1990

Muslim country to interfere in Sri Lanka. According to the accuser this was why Ashraff wanted a Muslim majority council. Ashraff's response was:

If my country is not prepared to listen to me I am prepared to go out of my country for what I want. That is my position. If my country, the country which I was born, my Sri Lanka, is not prepared to listen to my voice I will go outside my country and raise my voice (...) but I am first a Sri Lankan, second a Sri Lankan and third a Sri Lankan<sup>210</sup>

Ashraff stressed that this was in the best interest for the country, but he also wanted more power for the army and therefore he wanted to see more Muslims in the army. In a speech to the Minister of Defence he thanks him for making this happen:

(...) 70 of them were Muslim youths and I must thank the Hon. Minister for having recruiting them. This is the first batch of Muslims who have been trained and who have passed out as army officers<sup>211</sup>

At this point in the study we can see that different 'Muslim issues' have been in focus, and that Ashraff quotes the Koran on several occasions. The Koran, the sunna and Muslim personal laws are here used in trying to solve the nation's problems. Ashraff also refers to a jihad against the LTTE because, as he sees it, they are killing the Muslims of the nation. Ashraff in addition advocates the use of Islamic economy, and he makes three important points, the zakat, the forbidding of usury and Islam as the middle path between capitalism and Marxism. Roy (1994) also points out these three Islamic economic 'values' and describes them as typical for an Islamist party.<sup>212</sup> However, in some occasions an antagonism has occurred between Islamism and the Order of discourse of nationalism. Ashraff quotes from the Koran in many cases, but he also refers to the constitution and to the teachings of Buddha and to Sri Lanka as a Buddhist state. This clearly conflicts with Roy's statement 'the Islamists regularly make distinction between their thought on the one side, on the other, not other religions, but the major ideologies of the twentieth century (Marxism, fascism and capitalism).'<sup>213</sup> Roy also state that 'For Islamists, it is a matter of showing not that Islam perfectly realizes universal values, but on the contrary that Islam is the universal value and need not be compared with other religions or political systems.'<sup>214</sup> But this is

---

<sup>210</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:214 Public Security Proclamation 19/10 1989

<sup>211</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1991:14 Public Security Proclamation 25/1 1991

<sup>212</sup> See Roy 1994:132-146

<sup>213</sup> Roy 1994:39

<sup>214</sup> Roy 1994:40

exactly what Ashraff is doing when he is comparing Islam with Buddhism. This is something that I will come back to in the concluding analysis.

### ***Nationalism in parliament speeches 1989-1992***

In an appropriation bill Ashraff tries to explain that SLMC has been misunderstood as a political party and he states that the Koran and the supreme life of the Holy Prophet is the party guidelines. In the same speech, however, Ashraff also stresses the importance of national unity in the country:

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual plural society in which the Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslims, Burghers and others live side by side, yet they are lacking in understanding of one another. Fear of domination, prejudice, discrimination and suspicion bedevils communal harmony. The way that the 40 years of political independence has been managed has compounded the issue rather than promote peace and harmony among the communities. It seems to have driven certain sections of our people to demand separation.<sup>215</sup>

Ashraff points out that Sri Lanka is divided by different religions, languages and ethnicities, but that the desirable goal is 'peace' and 'harmony' among the communities. Here Ashraff rearticulates moments from the political discourse of nationalism: the nation Sri Lanka is portrayed equally as important as the supreme guidelines of the party, and in the same speech Ashraff also states that:

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, however, is pledged to preserve the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and committed to build a Sri Lankan identity. Above all, the moral and spiritual development of our people is a sine qua non for peace and development to which the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress stands firmly committed.<sup>216</sup>

Here Ashraff states that he is committed to build a 'Sri Lankan identity' and that the SLMC stands for 'peace' and 'development for the 'people.' Here, moments are rearticulated from the political nationalist discourse into the Islamist discourse. The Sri Lankan identity is something Ashraff returns to several times. In an amendment bill from 1991 he states that Sri Lankan

---

<sup>215</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:20 Appropriation Bill 23/3 1989

<sup>216</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:20 Appropriation Bill 23/3 1989

identity can not be built as long as there are ‘dangers’ in the country.<sup>217</sup> These dangers, which Ashraff calls ‘cancerous’ for the country, are the participants in the war i.e. the LTTE and the government. In another speech he focuses on the problems of the Indian population which has been part of the country for several decades. He states that:

(...) we should as Sri Lankans remember that this Indian Labour community did not come into our country like the Portuguese, the Dutch or the British to conquer or rule us (...) The very objective of this Bill is to enable the registration of electors. It shows that we are taking the right step in the direction of building up the nation and in building up a national integration<sup>218</sup>

Ashraff was in favor of this bill and he welcomed the Indian population into the democratic process. He stated that this was a step in the right direction toward building a better nation. Ashraff later states that it is important for the citizens of Sri Lanka to think as Sri Lankans and he makes allegations against the former health minister Nimal Siripala de Silva:

He was speaking about safeguarding and saving the Sinhala Buddhists of this country. This attitude only destroys this nation. We cannot think of saving the Sinhala Buddhists or saving only the Tamils etc. All of us as Sri Lankans have a duty to think as Sri Lankans and ask the question as to how we are going to save this nation as one unity.<sup>219</sup>

He states that de Silva’s attitude destroys the nation and that Sri Lankans have a duty to think of themselves as Sri Lankans. However, remember that Ashraff himself talked about the safeguarding of the Muslim community of the country. According to Ashraff the SLMC’s role in Sri Lanka is to set an example for other minority groups:

We are here not with the purpose of capturing power; nor is the leader of the SLMC aspiring or scheming to become the President or the Prime minister of this country. No. We are here as responsible citizens of this country. We are conscious of the fact that we are minorities. But the fact that we are minorities does not mean that we should not

---

<sup>217</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1991:161 Tea Small Holding Development Amendment Bill. Also see: Ashraff in Parliament 1989:134–147 Provincial Councils Bill 11/5 1989 and Ashraff in Parliament 1992:61–8 No Confidence in Government 19/3 1992

<sup>218</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:121 Registration of Electors Amendment Bill 25/4 1989

<sup>219</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:108 Appropriation Bill to the Ministry of Public Administration, Provincial Councils and Home Affairs 10/4 1989

play our role in helping this nation which is my nation as well to build up, and the SLMC will do everything possible to give the necessary co operation<sup>220</sup>

Ashraff denies that he has aspirations to the power of the country. He wants to ‘help the nation and build up the nation.’ One of his concrete suggestions for the nation-building is that ‘a national consensus must emerge at the All Party Conference to resolve the present crisis that we are having (...).’<sup>221</sup> At the All Party Conference, Ashraff stated that it was important that all Democratic Parties were present, including the LTTE.<sup>222</sup> But this was not enough. Ashraff also wanted to change the structure of the parliament:

As far as we are concerned, we have always taken up the position that this Parliament does not represent the majority will of the nation. This has been our consistent position. (...) We, as responsible political parties, all of us, have a duty to examine whether there is a cancer that has set in to the democratic framework of our country. (...) at the presidential elections only 55 percent of the people went to the polls. Therefore, one does not know what is the majority will of the nation<sup>223</sup>

Ashraff stated that there is a ‘cancer’ running in the country’s democratic framework. In this speech the cancer was the fact that a lot of people would not vote, since they were afraid to go to the polls because of the military arms in the country.<sup>224</sup> The solution was, according to Ashraff, a coalition government representing Tamils Muslims and Sinhalese. At this point Ashraff rearticulates, once again, moments like ‘democratic framework of our country’ and ‘majority will of the nation’ from the nationalistic political discourse. Ashraff often claims that he defends democracy:

But the fact remains that the vast majority of people in this country are fast losing confidence in the democracy together. It is therefore, Sir that I said let us go on the footing that there are four separate distinct communities in this country with varying aspirations and we have a duty to accommodate those aspirations<sup>225</sup>

---

<sup>220</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1991:166 Government Policy of Privatization Peoplization State Establishment and Corporation

<sup>221</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:201 Public Security Proclamation 21/9 1989

<sup>222</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:201 Public Security Proclamation 21/9 1989

<sup>223</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1990:3 No Confidence in Government 1/12 1990

<sup>224</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1990:5 No Confidence in Government 1/12

<sup>225</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:213 Public Security Proclamation 19/10 1989. See also Ashraff in Parliament 1992:1–9 Co-Operative Societies Amendment Bill 6/2 1992

Ashraff stresses the importance of the country's communities to have their various aspirations fulfilled, and this is also something that a coalition government would fit well for. From time to time during the 1990's a state of emergency was in force in the north-east and Ashraff wanted an end to this so that the people of this part could vote:

Democracy does not mean allowing the Assistant Government Agents to run the show. Democracy means allowing the democratic institutions to be manned by the elected representatives of the people. You have deprived this opportunity to the North and the East.<sup>226</sup>

In an earlier speech to the Minister of Policy Planning and Implementation, Ashraff stated that:

At the moment we have a state of Emergency and a perpetual state of Emergency, we are in other words suspending the operation of the fundamental of our own Constitution. Therefore, I wish to remind the Government that we are walking away from the rule of law. Furthermore, when one talks about of democracy in essence it means the will of the majority<sup>227</sup>

Ashraff did not only adduce the sake of the democracy as an example but also referred to the sake of the 'constitution' and the 'rule of law' of the country. These are moments that are rearticulated from the nationalistic jurisprudence discourse. The question of the north-east was vital for Ashraff who wanted to lift the state of emergency so that the provincial council would function:

(...) we will be faithful and loyal to the Constitution and it is our duty to uphold and protect the Constitution. The Constitution does not provide for a political vacuum in the North and the East. The Constitution says that if there is no Provincial Council there must be another election<sup>228</sup>

Ashraff stresses that it is important to uphold and protect the nation's constitution for the safety of the nation. In a later speech he also states that:

---

<sup>226</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1991:4 Adjournment Motion Provincial Council Personal Explanation 23/1 1991

<sup>227</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1990:305 Appropriation Bill 1991 Minister of Policy Planning & Implementation 30/11 1990

<sup>228</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1991:56 Public Security Proclamation 20/3 1991

Thereby we will be able to restore the ordinary law, we will be able to restore dignity and respect the fundamental provisions, the fundamental chapters, the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. I believe that is the greatest service that we can do to this nation <sup>229</sup>

Except for the rearticulating moments like ‘constitution’ and the ‘ordinary law’ from nationalistic discourse, Ashraff stressed that the education was important for national unity:

Why do we have higher educational institutions such as the universities and the technical colleagues, if the education provided in these institutions is not going to build a national unity in this country? Today communities are getting divided because they do not understand the feelings and aspirations of the other communities. Language barriers have set in. In the implementation of higher education policy too we find that segregational policies are accentuated and underlined.<sup>230</sup>

Ashraff stresses that the higher education in the country should not discriminate because of language. He develops these thoughts, in an appropriation bill for the Ministry of Education of education, as a bridge for national unity:

National unity could be achieved (...) only if all citizens know all the languages spoken by all communities in this country. I suggest a 15 year plan (...) so that if the children who enter the primary grade and over a 15 year period are exposed to all the three languages, Sinhalese, Tamil and English we could produce in the year 2005 a new generation of Sri Lankan citizens.<sup>231</sup>

As a complement to this education programme, Ashraff presents four suggestions to make Sri Lanka more peaceful:

1. The establishment of a National Code of Ethics. It has to be compiled and students given all encouragement to follow it.
2. Facilities should be provided in all schools for a comparative study of religion.
3. Seminars should be organized for teachers and upper grade students with a view to re-awakening their sense of responsibility by

---

<sup>229</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1992:89 Public Security Proclamation 23/4 1992

<sup>230</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:63 Appropriation Bill to the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology 5/4 1989

<sup>231</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:71 Appropriation Bill to the Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Information 6/4 1989

focusing attention on religious tenets and moral values. 4. An Advisory Committee composed of religious dignitaries of all religions should be set up to advise the Hon. Minister and Ministry of Education in all matters connected with the restructuring of society on a moral base.<sup>232</sup>

According to Ashraff the language bridge is important in building a national unity. In the speech above he talks about a 'new generation' that should be exposed to all three languages and all three religions in the country as a step towards national unity. When it comes to religion it should be taught by religious authorities. He here rearticulates the moments 'education' and all the three 'languages' from the nationalistic political discourse for national unity. Ashraff returns to the languages when he talks about jurisprudence in the country:

After all, the Tamil language has become one of the official languages today. Therefore it is time that the Ministry of Justice concentrates on the question that the judges become trilingualist. (...) Our constitution talks about the independence of the judiciary about the judicial functions, judicial power of the people which is exercised by this Parliament through the established courts of law (...) therefore it is important that judges learn the languages of this country.<sup>233</sup>

The judicial system of the country should also provide education in all three languages, according to Ashraff. Here, he refers to the constitution and makes his statement on its foundation. He rearticulates the moments 'judicial functions', 'judicial power' and the 'independence of the judiciary' from the nationalistic jurisprudence discourse when he talks about the importance of the languages. The language question is important for Ashraff. He often uses the expression 'If you have one language in this country you will have two countries, but if we have two languages we will have one country'.<sup>234</sup>

In addition to this, Ashraff also located 'external' threats towards Sri Lanka's national unity: he saw the Indo-Lankan accord and the Indian Peace Keeping Force as a threat to the nation's unity. One of the most important reasons behind this was that, according to Ashraff, the Indo-Lankan accord treats the Sri Lankan people as a homogenous group.<sup>235</sup> He wanted to renegotiate the accord because he felt that the Muslim community was totally left out of it. At one point he

---

<sup>232</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1990:327 Proriation Bill Ministry of Education & Higher Education 6/12 1990

<sup>233</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1991:23-4 Civil Procedure Code Amendment Bill 31/1 1991

<sup>234</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:107 Appropriation Bill to the Ministry of Public Administration, Provincial Councils and Home Affairs 10/4 1989. This speech was originally held by one of Ashraff's mentors through colleges and Ashraff uses this speech in a lot of his speeches for example see Ashraff in parliament 1989:132

<sup>235</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:138 Provincial Councils Bill 11/5 1989

called the accord a ‘betrayal of the Muslim community’.<sup>236</sup> He also states that the accord does not recognize the existence of the Muslim community as a religious community.<sup>237</sup> Concerning a renegotiation, Ashraff stressed that:

I am confident that when they renegotiate the Indo-Lanka Accord, even the Sri Lanka Freedom party will not hesitate to co-operate in this matter to the best of its intentions an in the interest of the nation.<sup>238</sup>

According to Ashraff the SLFP has no intention to be a part of the renegotiation of the accord. In an appropriation bill to the ministry of defense Ashraff gives the government and the SLFP suggestions on how to maintain peace in the eastern part of the country:

The appointment of a three member commission of inquiry to inquire into the circumstances that had lead to the out-break of violence in the Eastern Province since the signing of the peace accord. We would suggest the commission consist of members of all communities. The appointment of one Tamil superintendent of Police and another Muslim superintend to function directly under the Eastern Range.<sup>239</sup>

According to Ashraff the Indo-Lankan accord is a threat to the nation because it does not see the Sri Lankans as a heterogeneous group. However, in the same year he also states that it is important that Sri Lankans speak about themselves as Sri Lankans and not as different communities. Ashraff also sees the accord as a ‘betrayal’ of the Muslim community and the suggestion is to renegotiate the accord, so that all communities would be represented in a commission. It should also give superintendent position to Tamil and Muslim ethnicities. Ashraff here wanted to strengthen the Muslim influence for the sake of the nation. In the same speech Ashraff stresses that in addition to the Indo-Lanka Accord, the nation is also threatened by the Israeli military (The Israeli interest section) which was giving advice to the government:

The Israeli interest section was opened up in order to curb the militant activities for which we wanted assistance. (...) the Israeli interests section was opened up in order to limited purpose of giving military advice to the Sri Lanka Government. (...) even after

---

<sup>236</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:324 Police Commission Bill 9/12 1989

<sup>237</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:46 Appropriation Bill to the Ministry of Foreign Affaris 3/4 1989

<sup>238</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:20 Appropriation Bill 23/3 1989

<sup>239</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:21–2 Appropriation Bill 23/3 1989

this section was opened the problems remained unresolved. (...) there is no justification for keeping the Israeli Interests Section any longer in Sri Lanka.<sup>240</sup>

Ashraff clearly wants the Israelis out of the country, he states that the problems are unsolved and therefore the Israelis should leave. Ashraff later accuses the Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad, to have links to the LTTE and he stresses his concern that this would destabilize the country.<sup>241</sup> Ashraff's opinion on foreign forces, in this case the Israeli Interests Section and the IPK, in Sri Lanka is clear. In a speech to the Ministry of Defence he state that 'we have had the bitter experience of foreign forces (...) the forces should be within us so Sri Lanka as a nation will be stabilized'<sup>242</sup> Ashraff here stresses the importance that the Sri Lankans themselves solve their own problems since foreign forces did not succeed. These arguments are used by many Islamist parties.<sup>243</sup> Once again Ashraff rearticulates moments, 'like the best interest for the country' and 'that the forces should be within us.' from the Nationalistic political discourse. Ashraff also identified 'internal' threats against the national unity. First the threats came from the government and its army, which Ashraff described as cancerous and harming.<sup>244</sup> He also accused the government of discriminating ethnic groups:

But while doing such things, please do not discriminate among the people. The Government's intention in giving these special teaching appointments is to help the families of terrorist victims, but not a single appointment has been given either to the Muslims or the Tamils<sup>245</sup>

The speech concerns the question of helping relatives of victims of terrorist acts. Ashraff stressed that not only Tamil groups committed terrorist acts. The Sinhalese political group JVP committed terrorist attacks against Tamils, and he referred to the JVP as a terrorist group and a threat to the nation.<sup>246</sup> Ashraff still wanted to bring the JVP into the democratic process:

JVP represents the sentiments of the frustrated lot of this country and that frustrated lot has the capacity to bring to a halt the administration of this nation, then we have to bow

---

<sup>240</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:46 Appropriation Bill to the Ministry of Foreign Affaris 3/4 1989

<sup>241</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1990:261 Public Security Proclamation 22/11 1990. See also Ashraff in Parliament 1991:216 Public Security Proclamation 24/

<sup>242</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1990:313 Propriation Bill Ministry of Defence 3/12 1990

<sup>243</sup> For example see Roy: 2004:63

<sup>244</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1991:137 Teaching Appointment to Digamadulla Districts 24/7 1991

<sup>245</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1991:138 Teaching Appointment to Digamadulla Districts 24/7 1991

<sup>246</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:138 Provincial Councils Bill 11/5 1989

down to that voice and be ready to speak to them (...) Whether we like it or not, we have to bring the JVP into the democratic process.<sup>247</sup>

Ashraff's answers to the 'threat' from the JVP is that they should be a part of the democratic process. This is a view that Ashraff also had of the different armed Tamil groups that were developing in the country. Ashraff stressed that 'All Tamil Militants political parties must be united. Otherwise all the efforts that we are taking in the All Party Conference to resolve the crisis will become meaningless.'<sup>248</sup> Later on, from the late 1990's, only the LTTE is in focus in Ashraff's speeches. Concerning the LTTE's demands to create an independent country, Ashraff stresses that:

If the government has abdicated its powers, please tell us and we shall honourably tender our resignations and go back to the state that the LTTE wants to establish. We cannot be having one of our legs in this country with the prospect of putting the other leg in another country. We believe in the unity of this country.<sup>249</sup>

Here, Ashraff clearly takes the stand of not supporting the division of the country into two states. In this speech he stresses that the Muslim community would find themselves between both countries and this is nothing that he wants. Ashraff believes that the LTTE could only be stopped by reaching out to the people and that 'The LTTE is an anti-national force, the LTTE is against all peace-loving people (...) but we must remember that the innocent Tamil people are not the LTTE.'<sup>250</sup> He also congratulates the nation's army for chasing the LTTE away.<sup>251</sup> Ashraff states that the LTTE is the biggest threat to the nation and that they are terrorists who want to eliminate as many Muslims and Sinhalese as possible.<sup>252</sup> The theme of threats against the nation is in reality nationalistic itself, he continuously rearticulates moments from the discourses of Nationalism. In the economic sector Ashraff's responses to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and he means that Sri Lanka should become more independent:

(...) we must ensure that the foreigners bring their own money. It is pointless saying that the foreigners can come and invest and our state banks are going to subsidize them,

---

<sup>247</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:177-8 Public Security Proclamation 24/7 1989

<sup>248</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1989:201 Public Security Proclamation 21/9 1989

<sup>249</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1990:50 Agrarian Services Amendment Bill 30/1 1990

<sup>250</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1991:216 Public Security Proclamation 24/10 1991

<sup>251</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1991:87 Appropriations Act – Resolution 5/6 1991

<sup>252</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1992:158 Appropriations Bill: Second Reading 17/11 1992

that our state banks are going to give them loans and financial facilities. (...) we need more restrictions against foreign investors.<sup>253</sup>

Ashraff marks out the moment unidentified ‘foreigners’ and the global trend as a threat to the economy, here we can talk about the “global threat” that Islamist parties feel from the “Western” cultures and economics.<sup>254</sup> Ashraff sums up his view of Sri Lanka’s integrity and his own identity when he speaks about the national cricket team:

(...) and you deserve to be congratulated for the elaborate arrangements that you are making, and let me pray that Sri Lankan sports men and sports women will show their colours and through that keep the flag of Sri Lankans flying all over the South Asian region. (...) ‘When you are playing you also inculcate in the young minds certain basic values that would constitute a very disciplined and healthy nation, at least a nation in which people will learn to accept defeat’<sup>255</sup>

Ashraff sees sports, and in this case cricket, as a bridge builder for different communities in the country, just like education and languages. Esposito & Voll (1996) talks about the democratization of the Muslim world and state that political boundaries are established by the politics of imperialism and nationalism.<sup>256</sup> They continue to state that ‘the borders of nation-states are remarkably significant in defining the identity, leadership and field of activities of new Islamic movements.’<sup>257</sup> Ashraff identifies himself as a Sri Lankan and a defender of Sri Lankan democracy. At number of times he defends and refers to the Sri Lankan constitution. This relationship between different religious groups and nationalism is not unique in any way. Esposito & Voll (1996) give an example of the Muslim Brotherhood in Sudan, who rearticulated Islamic positions on non-Muslims living within an Islamic society to legitimize them as Sudanese citizens.<sup>258</sup> Roy (2004) states that Islamist parties themselves are the product of a given political culture and society, and they are shaped by national particularities.<sup>259</sup> Roy stresses that sooner or later they tend to express national interest, even under the pretext of Islamist ideology – this corresponds quite well with the SLMC. Ashraff points out several threats to the nation like the LTTE, JVP and foreign investors. Roy gives an example of how the Hezbollah, during the

---

<sup>253</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1992:35 Bretton Woods Amendment Bill 3/3 1992

<sup>254</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1992:36 Bretton Woods Amendment Bill 3/3 1992

<sup>255</sup> Ashraff in Parliament 1991:363 Appropriation Bill: Ministry of Sports 18/12 1991

<sup>256</sup> Esposito & Voll 1996:7

<sup>257</sup> Esposito & Voll 1996:7

<sup>258</sup> See Esposito & Voll 1996:97

<sup>259</sup> Roy 2004:62

Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, stressed the defence of the ‘Lebanese nation’ and how they established a working relationship with many Christian circles.<sup>260</sup> Likewise, Ashraff talks about the SLMC as a defender of the country and he does not want to divide it.

Without going deeper into a discussion about Islam and democracy (that is not the purpose of this thesis) I have to comment on the fact that SLMC sees itself as part of the national democratic process. Ashraff talks about defending democracy and he wants to invite ‘threats’ into the democratic process. However, even though Ashraff does not speak about democracy as an Islamic ideal, he accepts it and defends it – and as we remember, the supreme guidelines of the party were the Koran and sunna. According to Gardell (2005) and others there are Islamists that state that democracy is an ideal Islamic society model. Gardell writes about Rachid Ghannouchi and his views about democracy and Islam. Islam, according to Ghannouchi, is based on social justice and all citizens’ equal rights under the rule of law independent of race, ethnicity, gender and religion.<sup>261</sup> This is something that Ashraff also continuously refers to.

---

<sup>260</sup> Roy also gives other examples similar to the Hezbollah. See Roy 2004:62–5

<sup>261</sup> Gardell 2005:181

## Concluding analysis

The aim of this study was to analyze the construction of the politics of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress and the constructions of their organization and their guidelines. Therefore I wanted to test Oliver Roy's and Mattias Gardell's conceptions of Islam and nationalism on the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress. Roy stated that Islamist parties have a tendency to fit into the molds of the nation-state and adopt its way of politics for example. I processed the aim by reading earlier research about Muslims in Sri Lanka and, in particular, Muslim politics.

Earlier research has tried to explain why the SLMC has become a successful party in the national elections.<sup>262</sup> I found that three explanations are used. The first is that SLMC has gained votes because of the conflict, the second that the SLMC orientates its politics towards Muslims in the east, and the third is that SLMC gained votes because it portrays itself as a minority party. One of the most recent research on SLMC is Vellaithamby Ameerdeen's Ph.D. thesis *Ethnic Politics of Muslims in Sri Lanka*. His conclusion is that SLMC tends to stand for Muslim nationalism and that is why it has become so successful. In my hypothesis I state that SLMC has constructed its politics on Islamism and Sri Lankan nationalism.

The study object has been the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress, parliament speeches from 1989-1992, interviews and documents about the organisation and its guidelines. This material was analyzed to see if the SLMC constructed their politics from Islamism and nationalism.

My theoretical framework uses a combination of two theories of discourse analysis, discourse theory and CDA. I think that the combination of these two theories has given me an effective tool in analyzing the SLMC. I have tried to analyze how SLMC uses nationalism in its politics and how it rearticulates moments from a given nationalistic discourse into the discourse of Islamism. To create this theoretical framework I also used different analytic concepts, namely nationalism and Islamism.

SLMC's starting points in its politics is within the discourse of Islamism. The guidelines of the party is the Koran, the sunna of the Prophet Muhammad and the Shari'a laws. These do all function as nodal points within the discourse of Islamism. The most basic question is in which 'folder' of Islamists we should put the SLMC. It is not easy to answer, but as we have seen the SLMC has adopted democracy as an ideology and the parliament to practice its politics. Consequently, SLMC could be put in the category 'moderate'. SLMC uses the Koran as a solution the nation's problems and day-by-day issues, and it also participates in the nation's parliament, therefore they could also be defined as modernists. But in the SLMC organization

---

<sup>262</sup> Most of the research is from Sri Lanka and none that I have found has been from Europe.

we can see that the SLMC wants members of the party to embrace the whole code of shari‘a laws. Exactly how members should do that is rather unclear. In the SLMC organization there is also a majils-i-shura council, where the SLMC can consult with ulamas in different questions. This also constitutes moments within the discourse of Islamism. The SLMC organization on the field seems to be directly connected with the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. Both SLMC Ladies Congress and their welfare program are aimed towards Muslims, because they are potential voters.

In Ashraffs speeches we can discern that he refers to the Koran on just a few occasions. He tries to promote ‘Islamic economy’ (forbids usury) and the ‘Zakat’. He mentions that ‘Islam forbids alcohol’ and that SLMC stands for the ‘middle path’ (between capitalism and Marxism). He also refers to the Koran, regarding ‘homosexuality’ and its threats towards the nation. It is not uncommon for Islamism parties to rule out homosexuals in their discourse. However, the main focus for Ashraff in his speeches when it comes to ‘Muslim issues’ is the safety of the Muslim community, especially in the north-east. Ashraff sees two solutions to the violence towards Muslims, the first was the ‘jihad’ against the LTTE, the second is the emergence of a ‘Muslim Majority Council’ in the east. Esposito & Voll (1996) states that different national contexts give rise to differences in agendas and methods among new Islamic movements.<sup>263</sup> In the Sri Lankan context there is a war which has affected more or less every citizen. SLMC seems to take the role of lifting up the Muslims affected by the war rather than solving the nation’s problems with ‘Islamic Values’.

The construction of SLMC’s politics is not only based on Islamist values but SLMC rearticulates moments from different sub-discourses of nationalism. SLMC rearticulates moments from three nationalistic discourses. From the nationalistic political discourse we find two nodal points, ‘Threats towards Sri Lanka’ and ‘Solutions of the nation’s problems’. Different moments can be found here: ‘LTTE,’ ‘JVP’, ‘IPKF/Indo-Lankan Accord’, ‘Government’, ‘Mossad’, ‘Homosexuals’, ‘Foreign Investors’, ‘IMF’, ‘World Bank’ and ‘AIDS’ are all related to threats towards the nation. Some of these threats Ashraff also describes as threats towards the Muslim community, especially the LTTE. In finding a solution for the nation’s problems, moments like ‘education’, ‘languages’, ‘coalition government’, ‘Sri Lankan identity’ and ‘democracy’ are rearticulated by Ashraff from the nationalistic political discourse. This indicates that Ashraff wants to keep the Sri Lankan nation intact and the most important thing is that people of the country understand each other so that a ‘Sri Lankan identity’ can be created. These moments are all rearticulated in the parliament discourse.

---

<sup>263</sup> Esposito & Voll 1996:8

Ashraff also rearticulates moments from the Sri Lankan nationalistic cultural discourse. The nodal points here are Sri Lanka as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-linguistic society. Here Ashraff rearticulates moments, from the nationalist discourse like ‘Buddha (forbids alcohol and usury)’, ‘Buddha Sasana’, ‘Middle path’ and ‘Cricket’, the biggest sport in Sri Lanka. Ashraff rearticulates moments of Buddha’s learning’s in order to strengthen his own arguments, and he tries to neutralize both discourses. He also compares Islamic politics with the vision of Buddha’s ‘Middle Path’ and the country’s guidance that should protect the Buddha Sasana. Ashraff sees cricket as a good tool for the implement of national unity, because here youths from all communities in the country could meet.

The third discourse within Nationalism, from which Ashraff rearticulates moments is the Jurisprudence discourse. Here the nodal points can be identified as ‘the constitution of Sri Lanka’ and the ‘Rule of law’. Ashraff echoes the constitution at several times in stressing the importance of preserving the ‘Independence of jurisprudence’, ‘Juridical functions’, Juridical functions (i.e. courts and so forth), ‘Juridical Powers’, and the constitution’s words that people should develop, ‘Morally, Materially, and Spiritually’. However, Ashraff and the SLMC’s constitution are ambivalent, they both speak about promoting shari‘a laws, but on the other hand they want to preserve the current jurisdiction in the country.

To get a view of how the SLMC constructs its politics I have constructed a figure (see below) on how SLMC rearticulates moments and nodal points from the different discourses. The big squares represent the order of discourse, and the sub-discourses within them. The arrows show how moments are rearticulated from different discourses of nationalism into the discourse of Islamism and vice versa. The words in italic are floating significant. This figure is a summary of both the parliament and organisation discourses.

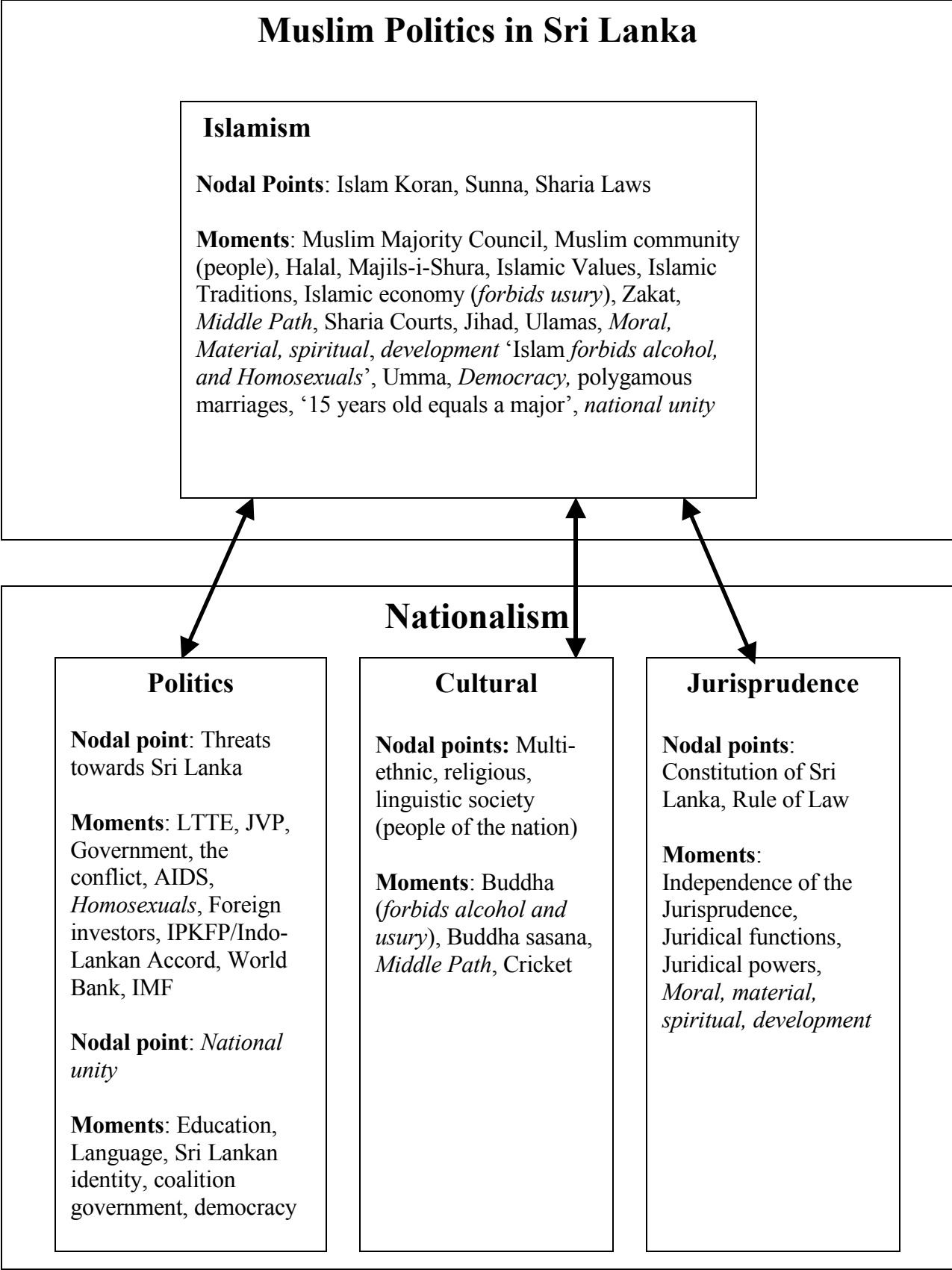


Figure 3: SLMC construction of politics

Figure 3, which is a summary of my analysis, partly confirms my hypothesis. SLMC constructs its politics from both Islamism and Nationalism, thus it falls within the framework of the nation-state. I have identified some floating significant, i.e. moments that are ordered both under Islamism and under different sub-discourses of nationalism. SLMC has tried to neutralize the Islamist discourse by comparing its Islamist values with e.g. the teachings of Buddha. Nationalism is used in SLMC politics to find national unity among the people and to locate different threats towards the country. Ashraff repeatedly returns to three things, the first one is the Koran, the second is science and the third is religion in general, which he speaks about in the sense that it can solve problems for the country.

This contradiction is also notable in Ashraff's speeches. He sometimes refers to the Koran in seeking solutions to the nation's problems, but he also refers to the constitution. Another contradiction is the SLMC's view of the people of Sri Lanka. Ashraff states that citizens of Sri Lanka should not think in ethnic or religious terms but should think of themselves as Sri Lankans. However, the SLMC themselves favour the Muslim community in many questions. For example, Ashraff often target the Muslim community in his speeches but he does not mention the other communities. I can also see an interesting pattern that most of the rearticulations of moments in nationalism appear in the parliament and not in the organisation. In the parliament the political decisions are made for the country, and this is a forum for SLMC to carry out their politics in the country. Here Ashraff also speaks to non-Muslims. I want to refer once again to Roy (2004) and his example of Hezbollah and their reference to the Lebanese state as both Muslim and Christian.<sup>264</sup> In the context of Sri Lanka, Muslims are in a minority and if a Muslim party wants to see itself as Sri Lankan then nationalism comes naturally in their politics. Robert W. Hefner (2000) writes about political Islamic movements in Indonesia. Hefner writes about what he calls Civil Islam and he describes it as a middle path between liberalism's privatization and conservative Islam's bully state.<sup>265</sup> Hefner states that the path passes by way of a public religion that makes itself heard through independent associations, spirited public dialog and the demonstrated decency of believers.<sup>266</sup> Civil Islam has its origins in pluralistic, nationalistic and democratic values, something that SLMC also stands for.

Earlier research on SLMC has stated that they are an example of a growing Muslim nationalism and that its politics can be seen as that. In this study I can see that SLMC wants to have a Majority Muslim Council in the east and that SLMC has a concern for the Muslim community. However, one cannot ignore that SLMC has a Sri Lankan nationalistic agenda when

---

<sup>264</sup> Roy 2004:63

<sup>265</sup> Hefner 2000:218

<sup>266</sup> Hefner 2000:218

it comes to its construction of its party politics. Like Billig stated, nationalism is reproduced in everyday activity such as sports etc and there is no doubt that SLMC identifies itself as a Sri Lankan party. Not once have I read the request of a separate state and even if they want a Muslim Majority Council, 2/3 of the country's Muslim do not live in the east and therefore would not be affected by the council. Besides this, the council would still contain all communities of the country as a form of consensus coalition. Instead, the national unity of the country is in focus and suggestions how to solve these problems is a priority in the documents that I have researched.

The construction of SLMC politics arises from an antagonism between different nationalistic discourses and Islamism. Because of the contradictions between the different discourses, I cannot see that a state of hegemony would appear in SLMC politics. The context of Sri Lanka is very different from those exemplified by Roy and Gardell. My study shows that the hypothesis was correct, but I want to be cautious in my conclusions because the empirical study of the parliament only covers four years. Therefore, before further studies are made I would like to call SLMC politics 'a third way' that stands for the antagonism between discourses of nationalism and Islamism. In my thesis, 'a third way' means that SLMC starts its politics from the discourse of Islamism and then it constructs its identity from nationalism. This is continuously constituted and reconstituted as a discourse in its speeches and organization and guidelines.

### ***Thoughts for further studies***

Muslim politics in Sri Lanka is a relatively new phenomenon and this is probably why there is so little research about it. The research so far has concentrated on why SLMC has become so successful, but material such as their organization and parliament speeches has not been looked at. As I emphasised earlier, I see this thesis as part of a bigger study. This study will have to have larger empirical foundation, especially when it comes to the parliament speeches. I want to do a study that covers a longer period from 1989 to the present time. How the party portrays itself in other sources like web sites could also be a complement for further studies. SLMC is running two web sites: [www.slmc.org.uk](http://www.slmc.org.uk) and [www.lankamuslim.com](http://www.lankamuslim.com).

Another variable is to study the members' view of the party. The present study has concentrated on the views of the leaders and people with 'high positions'. To study ordinary members or voters of Muslim parties could give another angle to the research. It would be appealing to answer questions like 'who are the Muslim voters?', 'how do they identify themselves?' and 'how does nationalism and Islamist values matters in their views of politics?'.

I also want to compare SLMC with other Muslim parties in Sri Lanka, the second largest party is the Muslim National Unity Alliance. A comparative study of them and SLMC would be most satisfying with the same theoretical frameworks and hypotheses. It would also be interesting to add some other variables to the research. For example it would be interesting to analyze if the discourse struggle between Islamism and nationalism changes depending on which government runs the country and what consequences participation of Muslim parties in the government would have. As I stressed in the introduction I think that Sri Lanka is a unique context for Muslim parties. The civil war between the armed Tamil groups and the government is still a burning topic for much research. However, many forget the effects on the Muslim community and therefore such a study is highly relevant.

## Sources

- Ashraff in Parliament Volume I–1989*. (2005) Dahrussalam Publication, Colombo
- Ashraff in Parliament Volume II–1990*. (2005) Dahrussalam Publication, Colombo
- Ashraff in Parliament Volume III – Year 1991*. (2006) Dahrussalam Publication, Colombo
- Ashraff in Parliament Volume IV – Year 1992*. (2006) Dahrussalam Publication, Colombo
- Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, *The Constitution of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress*. Dahrussalam Publication, n.d. Colombo
- Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, *The Code of Conduct*. . Dahrussalam Publication, n.d. Colombo

## Interviews

- Interview with Shity Refiya in Colombo 24 November 2006
- Interview with Shafeek Rahaabdeen in Colombo 20 November 2006
- Interview with Hassan Ali in Colombo 14 November, 2006

## Academic publications

- Abdullah, Rameez (2004) "Ethnic Harmony in Eastern Sri Lanka" in *Dealing with Diversity* Edited by Freks George and Bart Klem. Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Hague
- Ali, Ameer (1986) "Muslim Participation in the Export Sector of Sri Lanka 1800-1915" In *Muslims of Sri Lanka* Edit Shukri Muhammad, A.M. Aitken Spence Printing. Colombo
- Ali, Ameer (2001) *Plural Identities and Political Choices of the Muslim Community*. Marga Institute. Colombo
- Ameerdeen, Vellaithamby (2006) *Ethnic Politics of Muslims in Sri Lanka*. Center for Minority Studies, Kribs Printers. Kandy.
- Anderson, Benedict (2006) *Imagined Communities*. Verso London. First Edition 1983
- Bartholomeuz Tessa J. (2002) In *Defense of Dharma Just-war ideology in Buddhist Sri Lanka*. RoutledgeCurzon, London
- Billig, Michael (1995) *Banal Nationalism*. Sage Publications, London
- Brune, Cathrine (2003) *Finding a place*. Department of Geographic Faculty of Social Science and Technology Management. Trondheim.
- De Silva C.R. (1986) "Muslim Traders in the Indian Ocean in the Sixteenth Century and the Portuguese Imapcts" In *Muslims of Sri Lanka* Edit Shukri Muhammad, A.M. Aitken Spence Printing. Colombo

- De Silva Kingsley M. (1986) "Muslim Leaders and The Nationalist Movement" *In Muslims of Sri Lanka* Edit Shukri Muhammad, A.M. Aitken Spence Printing. Colombo
- De Silva Kingsley M. (2005) *A History of Sri Lanka*. Penguin Books, India. New Delhi
- Derrida, Jacques, (1970) *Om grammatologi*. Arena Viborg
- Eickelman, Dale F & Piscatori, James (1996) *Muslim Politics*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Esaiasson, Peter, Gilljam, Mikael, Oscarsson Henrik, Wängnerud Lena (2004) *Metodpraktikan*. Norstedts Juridik AB, Stockholm.
- Esposito, John L. & John O. Voll (1996) *Islam and Democracy*. Oxford University Press, New York
- Fairclough, Norman, (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*, Polity Press, Cambridge
- Fairclough, Norman, (1995) *Critical Discourse Analysis. The Critical Study of Language*. Longman Group London
- Fairclough, Norman, (2000) *New Labour, New Language*. Routledge, London
- Filosofi lexikonet* (2004), ed. Poul Lübcke, Stockholm
- Foucault, Michel (1972 ) *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*. Pantheon Books, New York
- Foucault, Michel, (1993) *Diskursens ordning*. Symposion Stehag
- Gardell, Mattias (2005) *Bin Ladin i Våra Hjärtan*. Leopard Förlag. Stockholm
- Goonewardena, K.W. (1986) "Muslims under Dutch rule up to the Mid-Eighteenth century" *In Muslims of Sri Lanka* Edit Shukri Muhammad, A.M. Aitken Spence Printing. Colombo
- Gramsci, Antonio, (1971) *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, London
- Hallaq, Wael B. (1997) *A History of Islamic Legal Theories*. Cambridge University Press, New York
- Hasbullah, S.H. (2004) "Justice for the Dispossessed: The case of A Forgotten Minority in Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict" in *Sri Lankan Society in a Era of Globalization*. Edit by S.H. Hisbullah and Barrie M. Morrison. Sage Publications, New Delhi
- Hefner, Robert W. (2000) *Civil Islam. Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*. Princeton University Press, Princeton
- Ismail, Mohamed, Rameez Abdullah, Mohamed Fazil (2004) "Muslim Perspective from the East" in *Dealing with Diversity* Edit by Freks George and Bart Klem. Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Hague
- Ismail, Salwa (2003) *Rethinking Islamist Politics Culture, the State and Islamism*. I.B. Tauris London

- Janson, Torsten (2003) *Your Cradle is Green*. Dep. of Sociology, Lund
- Johansson, Andreas (2007) *What has been written - A study of literature on the Muslim community in Sri Lanka*. Unpublished Bachelors thesis, Lund
- Jonasson, Ann-Karin (2004) *At the command of God? On the Political Linkage of Islamist Parties*. Kompendiet Aidla Trading Göteborg
- Knoerzer, Shari (1998) "Transformation of Muslim Political identity" in *Culture and politics of Identity in Sri Lanka*. Edit by Tiruchelcam, Mithran & C.S. Dattathreya. International Center for Ethnic Studies. Colombo
- Laclau, Ernestor (1990) *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. Verso London
- Laclau, Ernesto, (1993) "Power and Representation", *Theory and Contemporary Culture*, red. Poster, Mark, New York
- Laclau, Ernesto, & Mouffe, Chantal, (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London
- Meyer, Eric (2001) *Sri Lanka: Biography of an Island*. Viator Publications, Negombo
- Mitchell, R.P. (1969). *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*. Oxford University Press, London.
- Muhsin, Intiaz (2006) *Muslim Community Issues Awareness Guide & Mosques of Sri Lanka*. Own Publication, Colombo
- Nesiah, Devanesan (2006) "Sri Lankan Nationalism, Ethnic Identity and Community" in *Sri Lanka: Peace whiteout Process*. Edit by S.D. Muni. Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi
- Nuhman, M..A. (2002) *Understanding Sri Lankan Muslim Identity*. International Center for Ethnic Studies. Colombo
- O'Sullivan, Meghan (1999) "Conflict as a Catalyst: The Changing Politics of the Sri Lankan Muslims" in *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka*. Edit by Gamas, Siri and I.B. Watson. Sage Publications, New Delhi
- Rahnema, Ali (1994) Edt. *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*. Zed Books. London
- Roy, Oliver (1994) *The Failure of Political Islam*. I.B. Tauris & Co, London
- Roy, Olivier (2004) *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*. Hurst & Company, London.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de, (1970) *Kurs i allmän lingvistik*, Staffanstorp
- Skodo, Admir (2005) "I världen, men icke av världen" *Konstruktionen av kristen manlighet i Skånes Missionsällskap ca1939-1945*. Unpublished Bachelors thesis, Lund
- Sikand, Yoginder (2002) "The Emergence and Development of the Jama\_ at-i-Islami of Jammu and Kashmir(1940s–1990)" In *Modern Asian Studies*. Cambridge University Press.

Stenberg, Leif (1996 a) *The Islamization of Science. Four Muslim Positions Developing an Islamic Modernity*. Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm.

Stenberg, Leif. (1996 b). "The Revealed Word and the Struggle for Authority: Interpretation and Use of Islamic Terminology among Algerian Islamists, i D. Westerlund (ed.), *Questioning the Secular State. The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics*. C. Hurst & Co. Ltd, London

Shukri, Muhammad A.M. (1986) *Muslims of Sri Lanka*. Aitken Spence Printing. Colombo

Uyangoda, Jayadeva (2001) *Question of Sri Lankas's Minority Rights*. International Center for Ethnic Studies. Colombo

Warnapala, Wiswa W.A. (2001) *Politics in Sri Lanka*. S.Godage & Brothers, Colombo

Wickramasinghe, Nira (2006) *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*. C. Hurst & Co. London

Wimalratne, K.D.G (1986) "Muslims under British Rule in Ceylon" in *Muslims in Sri Lanka* Edit Shukri Muhammad, A.M. Aitken Spence Printing. Colombo

Winther, Jørgensen, Marianne & Louise Phillips (2000) *Diskursanalys som teori och metod*. Studentlitteratur, Lund

### ***Internet sources***

<http://www.ices.lk/>

<http://www.margasrilanka.org/>

[http://nias.ku.dk/about\\_nias/](http://nias.ku.dk/about_nias/) (2007-03-29)

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ce.html> (2007-10-11)

[http://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri\\_Lanka](http://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lanka) (2006-12-05)