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The Battleground of Sri Lankan History Education: Barriers to Teaching Inclusive Histories



Natasha Karunaratne

**The Battleground of Sri Lanka
History Education**

The Battleground of Sri Lankan History Education: Barriers to Teaching Inclusive Histories, 2021

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Acronyms

A-Levels	General Certificate of Education Advanced Level
EPD	Educational Publications Department
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CTTU	Ceylon Tamil Teachers Union
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ICES	International Centre for Ethnic Studies
ISA	In Service Advisors
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna Political Party
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MoE	Ministry of Education
O-Levels	General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level
ONUR	Office for National Unity and Reconciliation
NEC	National Education Commission
NGOs	non-governmental organizations
NIE	National Institute of Education
NIPU	National Integration Programme Unit
PERU	Peace Education and Reconciliation Unit

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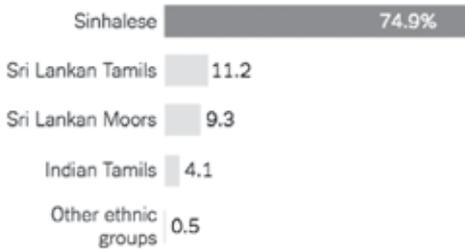
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1. Introduction

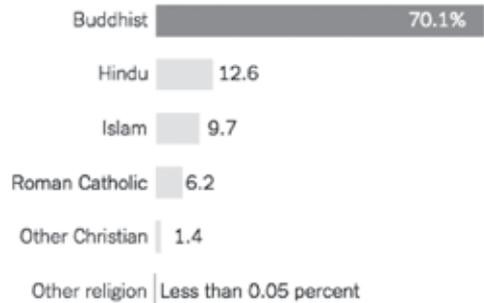
As time passes between a generation with lived experience of an event and a generation who only hears stories of the event, history education holds the responsibility of passing on the complexities of multiple points of view to future generations. In Sri Lanka – a diverse country made up of Sinhalese (75%), Tamils (11%), Muslims (9%), and Up-Country Tamils (4%) – a civil war devastated the country for a quarter of a century, as members of the Tamil ethnic minority, particularly those who alligned themselves with the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE), fought for a separate state against a government mostly comprised of the Sinhala ethnic majority.

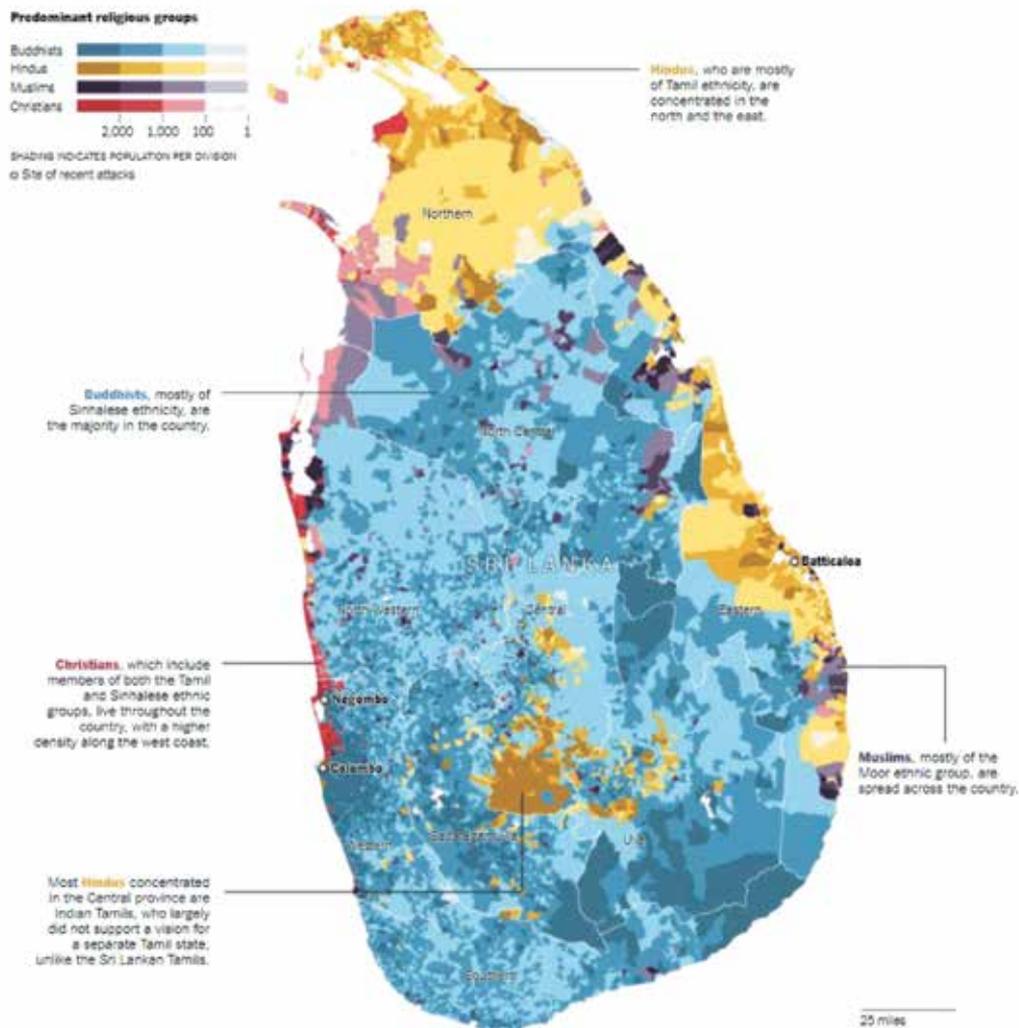
An Ethno-Religious Breakdown & Map of Sri Lanka

Population by ethnicity



Population by religion





(The New York Times 2019)

A decade after the war’s end, despite numerous attempts at reform, the war is excluded from history curricula, as many consider it politics rather than history. However, as time passes generations grow separate from the lived experience of the war, and as trauma transforms into silence, the taboo nature of war erodes the existence of an informal oral history. As ethnic tensions persist and with Buddhism extremism on the rise in Sri Lanka, we are in need of an informed future generation who can work towards practical and sustainable reconciliation. The history education structure is made up of a complex web of barriers that has caused inclusive history reforms to fall short.

This paper attempts to answer the question:

Why, in a society burdened with ethno-religious tensions and a lack of shared history, does history education continue to exclude marginalized histories and silo communities over ethno-religious divides? When history education has so much potential to give future generations shared understanding, why has Sri Lanka's history education largely not changed?

Throughout this paper, the term 'reforms' refers to attempted changes to history education structure and curriculum. From government monopolized textbooks to a lack of teacher trainings, the inadequacies of translation, and the prevalence of a competitive exam culture, the state of history education in Sri Lanka is in dire need of informed and strategic reforms that do not repeat what's already been done, but rather multiply and combine various efforts. In this paper, I will map the multiple facets of Sri Lanka's history education structure, explore why tried reforms have and have not gained momentum, and theorize as to how multiple stakeholders can strategize together based on lessons learned.

02. Why History Education?

While schools aim to be the best structural way to build peace through promoting understanding and critical thinking, the way the system exists now tends to do the opposite – creating “religious and ethnic citizens who are allowed to think in exclusive terms” (Lopes Cardozo 2008, 9). Sri Lanka has schools divided by language and gender, which then uniquely creates an education system predominantly segregated by religion and ethnicity, as those who go to Sinhala-medium schools are predominantly Buddhist and Sinhalese and those who go to Tamil-medium schools are predominantly Hindu and Tamil (Bloemer 2018). The most stark example of this segregation is the structure in which religion is taught. It is compulsory for students to take classes about their own religion rather than comparative religions until O-Levels (at approximately the age of 16), creating a structure where students are separated by religion and learn “absolutely nothing about the other” (S. Jayawardena 2018; Wickramasinghe 2018). With much of Sri Lankan society broken into enclaves based on religion and ethnicity and with ethno-religious violence being taboo in formal education and instead passed down through informal avenues like familial oral histories, communities’ perceptions of the past are very much in isolation of each other. The distinction between the use of history to teach the past versus to maintain heritage is very rarely made clear, insinuating that history is “as much about the production of the present as it is about the reproduction of a past” (Wickramasinghe 2012, 1). Through such processes, ethno-religious communities are developing mutually exclusive historical narratives that define and further construct their ethno-religious self-identity for their future generations (Dewasiri 2013). Throughout the war and in its aftermath, the subject of history education has been contentious, as opposing socio-political forces recognize the significant role history plays in the future generations’ understanding of ethnicity, religion, and nationalism (Gaul 2014).

In this context, “we must be wary of the tendency for narratives taught as part of school curricula to eventually become accepted as historical fact” as this “further entrenches distorted interpretations of Sri Lanka’s past, and hardens interracial mistrust” (Wettimuny 2016). This concept that subjective perception eventually becomes accepted as objective historical fact is at the core of historiography, the study of how history is written (Vann 2018). While the concept of critical historiography contends that history is constructed from subjective perceptions,

the current state of history education presents history as singular, factual truth. In her article *The Danger in Distorted Education: Sri Lanka's History Curriculum*, Shamara Wettimuny (2016) questions: "if reconciliation is ever to be meaningful, should we not start with schools and curricula, and prevent the propagation of a history that is designed to mislead and divide?" Sadly in the Sri Lankan education system's exam-focused structure, "a clear majority of Sri Lankans move from one education level to another without an opportunity to critically interrogate how their sense of nationhood, derived from an understanding of national history and culture, is complicit with racist violence against minorities" (J. Fernando 2018). With society segregated into opposing groups that are each learning their own version of history that they are taught to never question, there are bound to be ethnic and religious clashes in society, bringing a sense of urgency to history education reform.

With Buddhist extremism on the rise and things as seemingly harmless as historical tele-dramas becoming more popular, we now have to look far beyond what we think of as formal history teaching. Reforming history must not only tackle the content of textbooks, but also the biases that enter through the way history is taught. To Wickramasinghe's (2012) point, "the purpose is not to idealize history as the true, pure method of inquiry and exposition of the past. Records of the past are indeed filtered by time and what is bequeathed to us are only a few traces. Few would contest the fact that there is no objective history where the voice of the author does not haunt the narrative" (1). While bias is inherent to all historical knowledge, the danger lies in the false pretense interpreted by youth and their adult selves that these biases are absolute truth – as clashes are bound to occur between two sects of society who insist their own competing understanding of the past is the truth. Without acknowledging the biases that seep in through a given history production process and without an attempt to offer varying biases, we are using history education to arm our youth for these ethno-religious clashes rather than to de-escalate them.

03. Why Now?

With a decade having passed since the end of Sri Lanka's ethnic civil war, there will be a growing number of generations of Sri Lankans who have not lived through the war themselves. In Sri Lanka's current education structure, we are "relying on memories of war, and as generations go we can't do that" (Dewasiri 2018). In a context where many who survived the war have been traumatized into silence, history must fill a gap in society's knowledge of the past. This silence has already proved to be damaging, as one researcher notes that the "lack of knowledge of youth, even youth in war zones, is astoundingly wrong" (Warnasuriya 2018). As the separation between those who lived the war and those who come to learn about the war grows, future generations will only know what is taught to them and the line between our understanding of the war and the war itself will grow thinner and thinner. The future generations' understanding of the war becomes the war itself – all factual truth diminishes and makes room for one generation's perception to be passed down to the next. What is key here is that there is no singular perception of an event, but rather competing perceptions – and these perceptions compete in the space of history production.

The taboo nature of Sri Lanka's ethnic war, paired with the prevalent trend of this war being taught to future generations through siloed and competing oral histories, creates a context in which Sri Lanka risks the cliched danger of repeating the past. As Sri Lanka comes out of its Easter bombings, spurring anti-Muslim sentiment in backlash, the Sri Lankan collective conscious is triggered to the trauma of the targeted burnings, suicide bombs, and civilian attacks that raided the country during its twenty-five years of war. Mihiri Warnasuriya (2018), a researcher of identity politics in post-war history education, argues that the Sinhalese attacks towards Muslims directly after attacking Tamils suggests "we don't even want peace," and that it also "speaks volumes about not knowing the past." These 2019 attacks on Muslims are nowhere near the first strike on this marginalized community, as the "anti-Muslim riots in six villages scattered throughout the Kandy district, and its aftermath is remarkably like anti-minority riots since 1915" (J. Fernando 2018). However, if youth do not know about the anti-minority riots of 1915 and are unable to draw connections between patterns of ethno-religious violence, they will not be able to bring an end to the violence, until it's too late. In his article, "Racism in Education,

Religion and Neoliberalism: Empowering the Anti-Minority Extremists?”, Jude Fernando (2018) asserts that “within the post-riots discourse among the Muslims, alongside concerns over rebuilding are those about explaining the violence to young children who have been living among Sinhalese and Tamils and witnessed the burning of their homes, businesses, and books, and refusing to go to school.” In not “explaining the violence to young children who have been living among Sinhalese and Tamil” tensions, we not only poorly prepare the next generation to recognize patterns of violence, but we also fail to intervene in the generational trauma they experience, placing them in a position where they’re far more likely to repeat history (J. Fernando 2018).

While reforming history should be a process that is continuously undertaken, now seems like a historical moment more important than ever to make our interventions sustainable and effective. One of the most respected history professors in the country, Nirmal Dewasiri (2013), poses that “historical consciousness has acquired new significance for Sinhala-Buddhists after the end of the war. This renewed significance is due to the need to redefine in the post-war context the *raison d’être* of the Sinhala-Buddhist claims vis-a-vis Tamil nationalist claims” (4). “In a context where extreme Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism is unprecedentedly strong and ideologically aggressive” and there’s so much pressure on a post-war nation to reconcile, the teaching of history is crucial to nation building and therefore requires multiple points of view (Dewasiri 2012). As we share these multiple points of view and call for history education reforms, we must remind ourselves that “the need to build an alternative discourse of history becomes more than a naïve academic pursuit. It is a profound political and ideological task that has to be given a high priority” (Dewasiri 2012). In response to a participant’s complaint that we “cannot bring about reconciliation under these conditions,” I question, ‘if not now, then when?’ And ‘if not us, then who?’ (Bloemer 2018).

04. Methodology: Why This Framework?

When reflecting on how I came to this work, I am reminded to address my positionality. I am of Sinhala-Buddhist and Burgher-Catholic descent and of the Sri Lankan diaspora. Growing up outside of Sri Lanka, always peering in, I found myself continuously seeking knowledge on Sri Lankan history as answers to the questions I saw – like why was my Sinhala diaspora purposefully segregated from Tami Sri Lankans and Muslim Sri Lankans? After studying Peace and Justice Studies and Education, I gained more and more curiosity of how youth in Sri Lanka learned about the country’s ethno-religious history, in hopes to pass on this knowledge to my community of youth – many of whom grew up never learning how their ethno-religious identity as Sinhala-Buddhists afforded them a sense of belonging to the Sri Lankan nation that was stripped away from our diasporic, Tamil peers. However, when exploring the question ‘how are youth in Sri Lanka taught about the war and the building of ethno-religious tensions?’ I was told time and again the shocking answer ‘It isn’t!’ and so I dived into this work to answer my own naiveté: *why?* The paper strives to answer the following research problem and the proceeding questions within this problem:

01. Why, in a society burdened with ethno-religious tensions and a lack of shared history, does history education continue to exclude marginalized histories and silo communities over ethno-religious divides? When history education has so much potential to give future generations a shared understanding, why has Sri Lanka’s history education largely not changed?
 1. What would a reimagined framework for history education look like?
 2. Why have reformists not seen many of their reforms come to fruition?
 3. What are the barriers to successful reforms?
 4. How do these barriers interact with each other?

I came into this work knowing I was by far not the first one to ask or answer these questions. In the United States, available academia pointed to foreigners who specialized in peace education, using Sri Lanka as a case study, such as Anne Gaul and Mieke T.A. Lopes Cardozo. However, once in Sri Lanka, my research was quickly directed to the researchers I had been hoping to find throughout my

exploration – those who had made it their life’s work to study and develop critical historiography from a Sri Lankan lens, rather than merely using the country as a case study – those like Nirmal Dewasiri and Nira Wickramasinghe. As I dove in further, I realized I would be nowhere near the last non-native Sri Lankan, nor the last non-historiographer, to dive into Sri Lankan history education. I not only wanted to construct a mapping of the historical context of Sri Lanka’s history education reforms for those who would come freshly to this discipline, but I also wanted to discover which kinds of reforms had succeeded over others, to avoid repeating tried methods.

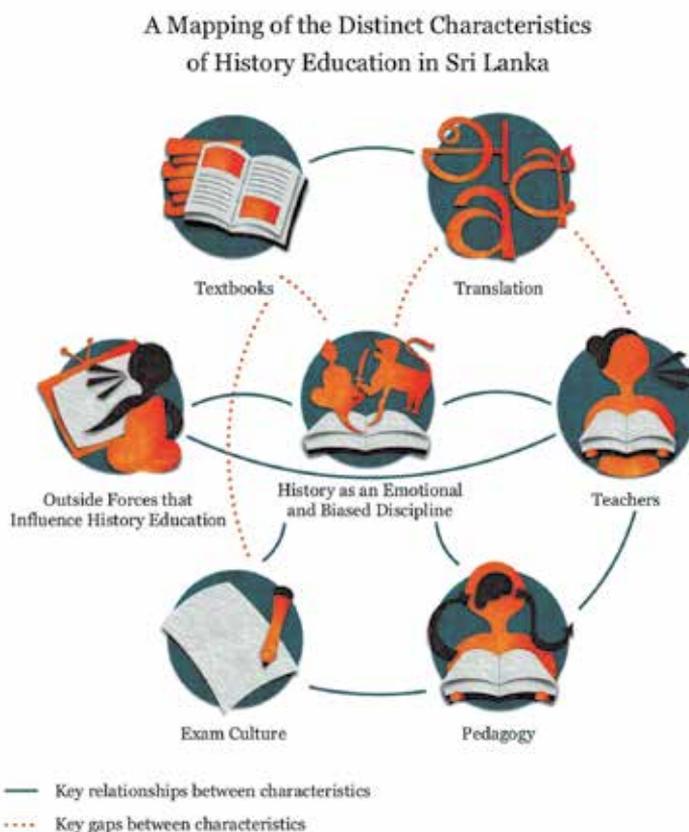
While much research has been done on why and how history education should be used as a tool for peace education, few have explored why after such research, Sri Lankan history education continues to exclude marginalized histories and silo communities over ethno-religious divides. In order to explore why Sri Lankan history education has remained greatly unchanged even with countless attempts at reform, I interviewed professors, policy makers, and NGO workers who have worked on the frontlines of these reforms, inquiring about the barriers they faced. In addition, I interviewed scholars who have written on the issue of Sri Lankan history education for decades, as well as teachers and students themselves, to understand their take on where history education stands today. I observed and interviewed the organizers of peace education camps – one-off workshops that take place outside of the formal education structure – to see how some history education interventions take shape. Finally, I spoke with activists who have had success in other fields of education, such as health education, to discern how they circumvented similar barriers that history educators face. After conducting 20 interviews with these various groups of stakeholders and key players, I returned to my notes and to the literature on history education, critical historiography, and peace education in Sri Lanka to make sense of it all.

Through this process, I was not only given the opportunity to record the institutional memory of these policy makers, historians, educators, and organizers, but I was also able to document some of the history of Sri Lanka’s history education reforms. While taking a closer look at the concurrent work that has been conducted on history education, I strived to unearth the gaps that could have been filled and the redundancies that could have been avoided had there been more collaboration. By mapping and evaluating reforms, I began

to understand that like many others', Sri Lanka's education structure and its multifaceted characteristics have a way of siloing academics, organizers, policy makers, and educators. Due to this siloing, each group lacks a full picture of who is working on what and how they could work together, to strategize in shared efforts and in solidarity. While the first section of this paper is structured to facilitate a general understanding of the distinct characteristics prohibiting effective history education and the second is to evaluate tried methods of history education reform, the third section looks at lessons learned, in hopes of identifying where future and existing reform efforts can collaborate.

05. Barriers to History Education Reform

Before diving into the specifics of tried history education reforms, it is helpful to first understand the multiple areas of influence that shape history education in Sri Lanka and how they work together to maintain the status quo and limit reforms. In mapping the distinct characteristics of history education in Sri Lanka, one will find an interconnected web of systems, dynamics, and tensions prohibiting effective history education:



In this section, I will delve into each of these seven identified characteristics that impact Sri Lankan history education and its reforms: history as an emotional and biased discipline, textbooks, translation, teachers, exam culture, pedagogy, and outside factors influencing history education. These characteristics are in no way unique to history education, but are more indicative of Sri Lankan education overall, as well as global patterns of education. It is within this web of educational structures that we must situate Sri Lankan history education to fully understand past, present, and future reforms.

A. History as an Emotional and Biased Discipline

When one of Sri Lanka's most renowned history education scholars was asked what made history such an emotional and particularly biased subject as compared to others, Nirmal Dewasiri shared that "geographical knowledge isn't part of your worldview; when talking about soil you're not emotionally attached to it, but Dutugamunu [the narrative of a Sinhalese king that is cited as a cornerstone for Sinhala ethnocentrism], written in a neutral manner – you're emotionally attached." Here, Dewasiri articulates that the nature of the subject matter in history class, as compared to any other class, is going to be much more emotional for a student, particularly in a post-war setting, with the foundations for ethno-religious identity being intertwined throughout history. History is often trivialized as dates and names of people long gone, but the reality is that "history isn't just facts of things happening in order, but ideologies behind why things happened: particular aspects of 20th century: religious change, communalism, Sinhala nationalism, Tamil separatism" (Wickramasinghe 2006, x). For this reason, history in its nature cannot be devoid of emotion nor bias, as the people, stories, and concepts we choose to demarcate as 'history' will always prioritize some and exclude others.



Bias affects history at every level of its production – from the writing of textbooks, to their translation; from how teachers interpret the text, to how curriculum is taught; from what gets prioritized in exam questions, to what students learn outside of the classroom. The biases youth learn through history are particularly important in Sri Lanka's postwar context, as much of these historical biases relate to ethnicity and religion and have the potential to further ethno-religious divides. Through her research on "Building the 'Sri Lankan Nation' through Education: The Identity Politics of Teaching History in a Multicultural Post-War Society," Mihiri Warnasuriya (2018) finds that "in relation to the question 'what nation is being built?' it's the Sinhala-Buddhist nation under the guise of the 'Sri Lankan' nation, as there's a tendency for those two things to be synonymous." Warnasuriya (2018) finds that even history curriculum developers used the concepts 'Sri Lankan' and 'Sinhala-Buddhist' interchangeably without realizing it. This bias not only places Sinhala-Buddhist history on a pedestal, but it also

marginalizes the history of Tamils, Muslims, and Sri Lanka's other ethno-religious minorities. When evaluating how diversity is dealt with in history curricula, Warnasuriya (2018) concludes that "minorities are side lined: Tamils are portrayed as invaders, and Muslims are nonexistent." She notes that Muslims are not even mentioned with any prominence until Sri Lanka's colonial years, leaving Muslim students to wonder what the lives of Muslim Sri Lankans were like before then (Warnasuriya 2018). When we centre marginalized students and consider how they experience this biased history curricula, we see the frustration and confusion that their omission can create.

The markers of what is considered history are biased and personal, with a group or event's omission often being purposeful and strategic. For example, students learn precolonial history for many years without learning very much colonial or modern history, as "there's an idea that colonial history is not Sri Lankan history but rather history of a subjugated society" (J. Jayawardena 2018). Modern history is excluded in its entirety, as it is considered 'too recent' or 'too political' to be history (S. Jayawardena 2018). In disagreement, historian Leslie Gunawardana points to "the 'role the study of the 'remote past' has played in shaping mass consciousness, and thereby in the moulding of the present'" (Wettimuny 2016). He argues that for this reason, "historical narratives are integral to many Sri Lankan identities and the understanding of their positions in society" and are thereby inherently personal and emotional (Wettimuny 2016). He expounds that "moreover, such interpretations of history are often used to support incorrect political claims and justify injudicious political decisions" – hence the close tie between history's prevalence of emotion and its nature to be biased (Wettimuny 2016).

Perhaps the most stark example of history's emotion and bias is the fact that of the seventy-one years Sri Lanka has had its independence, we have spent exactly half that time suffering from the violence and aftershock of ethnic civil war – yet, history curricula strategically omits this incredibly significant time in the country's past. When people in favour of this omission are asked for their reasoning, "generally the barrage was they could say we don't want you to talk about the ethnic conflict – they could say this isn't part of the discipline of history. This is part of social studies" (Wickramasinghe 2018). While other supporters argue that "omitting the civil war is a method of reducing depictions

of dyad conflict,” “this omission does not facilitate more positive depictions of the Sinhala-Tamil relationship – it merely ignores this controversial aspect of it” (S. Jayawardena 2017, 64). However, those who attempt to ignore the controversial parts of history fail to understand that what is demarcated as history is already biased, emotional, and controversial. Even though curriculum developers have decided that colonial history is not truly Sri Lankan and modern history is not history at all, we still find bias, emotion, and controversy in ancient, pre-colonial Sri Lankan history. For example, “to the Sinhala-Buddhist mind the ‘North’ is very much part of the Sinhala-Buddhist territory. [From their perspective] this territory has long been illegitimately occupied by Tamils” (Dewasiri 2012). The stories of ancient kings, invaders, and legendary battles that are pillars to pre-colonial Sri Lankan history are predicated on the ideology that the North is wrongfully occupied by Tamils and in fact belongs to Sinhala-Buddhists. As we consider how all of Sri Lankan history intertwines such ideologies into its telling of the past, we must centre marginalized students and empathize with their feelings of exclusion and distrust of a past that disrespects their communities.

With attempts to make history sterile of emotion and bias, students of marginalized communities find themselves excluded from the past or painted as foreigners or invaders. With Muslim students excluded, Tamil students distrustful, and Sinhala students finding history to be boring, we see a shrinking interest in the discipline of history. In an interview with a history professor from the University of Colombo, he nostalgically recalled a time when the department was flooded with students – but he also recalled the shift when the department became empty – only serving a few majors a year (Dewasiri 2018). While many factors influenced the shrinkage of students, from school reforms deprioritizing the subject to students and lectures moving to newer subjects, the role minority marginalization plays is not one to take lightly. An interview with LTTE members found that “The ‘Sinhala-Buddhist bias’ in the history taught in the mainstream syllabus, the Tigers say, has resulted in Tamil students losing interest in the subject. According to the LTTE, “only 65 Tamil students appeared for the examination in history in 1998, compared to 5,335 Sinhalese students” – only one percent of the total students were Tamil, compared to them being about eleven percent of the population (Sambandan 2004). Therefore, the shrinkage in student interest we see in the discipline of history not only affects the current

generation of minority students, but it will also affect generations of students to come, as there will be less minority students who continue with history and become curriculum developers. The current trajectory of emotion and bias in history will cause there to be less curriculum that includes and empathizes with minority students. We must strategize collaboratively to develop interventions that centre marginalized students and break this cyclical effect.

B. Textbooks

Textbooks are thought of as the most significant pathway through which history gets transferred from one generation to another, while in actuality they are the pathway that transfers one generation's *perception* of history to another. Moreover, history textbooks are thought to be a particularly useful tool for social reform, as they are "powerful tools with which the hearts and minds of young generations may be shaped" (Gaul 2014, 88). Anne Gaul (2014), a scholar of peace education, notes that "the narratives contained within history textbooks tell readers how we got to be who we are...and how 'we' have related to 'others' of many kinds throughout history" (91). However, as much as education can be used as a tool for liberation, it can also be used as a tool for domination (McLaren 2009). According to Policy Paper 28 of the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2016), Sri Lankan history textbooks have long fostered enmity between Sinhalese and Tamils by excluding Tamil stories, culture, and religion, and by providing Sinhalese-centric views to the nation's youth. Many have criticized Sri Lankan history textbooks for portraying the Sinhalese as the dominant ethnic group and Tamils and Muslims as inferior and unimportant, with the terms 'Sri Lankan' and 'Sinhalese' being virtually indistinguishable (S. Jayawardena 2017; Gaul 2014). As we dive deeper into the factors that have caused Sri Lanka's history textbooks to be sites of domination rather than liberation, we will consider their production process, their prioritization of heritage and foundational folk stories, and their use for indoctrination.



The production process of history textbooks has long been centralized by the Sri Lankan government, creating a system in which the predominantly Sinhala government writes, publishes, and distributes all syllabi and textbooks per grade for the entire country (S. Jayawardena 2017). This places history textbooks in the unique role of summarizing and distilling Sri Lankan history to the entire nation's youth – thus textbooks are critical to shaping future generations' understandings of the country's past and the ethnic groups that make up the national fabric (S. Jayawardena 2017). With the government's monopoly over textbook production, "the production process has been denounced for being dominated by the Sinhalese and for not including Tamils as authors or members

of evaluation boards” (Gaul 2014, 89). In her thesis, “Conflicted Curricula: The Politics of Civil War and Ethnicity in Sri Lanka’s History Textbooks” Sarani Jayawardena (2017) explains that:

“In a country with a centralized curriculum, a government-issued history textbook becomes a state-sanctioned version of a country’s past and identity, transmitted as a body of facts to all students in the public school system (Apple, 1993). Yet multi-ethnic countries have a multiplicity of versions of the nation’s story. In countries with a history rocked by civil war over ethnic differences, constructing an official narrative during and after the wartime era is a staggering task. In nations recovering from such conflict, it is a vital component of reconciliation” (4).

With “constructing an official narrative during and after the wartime era” being “a staggering task” and yet “a vital component of reconciliation,” curriculum developers are placed in a tough spot with a guarantee that history textbooks will never please everyone. And yet, it is imperative that textbooks consist of multiple viewpoints, in order to give Sri Lankan youth an honest look at our current – multi-faceted and at times contradicting – understanding of the country’s past.

While history textbooks are tasked with being a vehicle of our understanding of the country’s past, and by some tasked with being a tool towards a reconciled future, many others task history textbooks with being a vehicle for the country’s heritage and foundational stories. In the syllabi sanctioned by the Sri Lankan government – on which students are tested in national exams, foundational folk stories are intertwined throughout and presented as fact. Textbooks offer youth “a narrative of the glorious days before invaders from India and colonial powers shattered the equilibrium of society ushering in modernity” (Wickramasinghe 2012, 9-10). The textbooks incorporate a number of stories from the Mahavamsa, the ‘great chronicles’ of Sri Lankan history, which included the most prominent foundational story of Vijaya – the grandson of a lion and an Indian princess and the child of Sinhabahu and Sinhaseevali, who are said to be the first Sinhalese people (S. Jayawardena 2017). This story is incredibly significant to the foundations of Sinhala ethnicity as the Sanskrit term ‘Sinhala’ translates to ‘lion’s blood’ (S. Jayawardena 2017). Up until four years ago when the folklore story

was removed, “the textbooks explicitly construct[ed] the arrival of Vijaya and his fellow Sinhalese as the starting point of history in Sri Lanka, marking the birth of the Sri Lankan nation; this perspective actively excludes other communities from this decisive moment in history” (Gaul 2014, 94). While the Sinhalese, who often claim they are ethnically tied to those of the Aryan race, are painted as the start of history, other communities are labeled as invaders: “the Aryans were the first to arrive in Sri Lanka to establish their settlements. In later years Sri Lanka experienced a number of South Indian invasions [...] These ‘invaders’ include the Tamils, who originated from South India; this narrative thus establishes them as foreigners who have no part in the myth of Sri Lankan origin” (Gaul 2014, 94). While the Vijaya story has been removed from textbooks, there was nothing to take its place granting Tamils belonging, and so its legacy lives on.

On top of excluding Tamils from Sri Lanka’s founding, Sinhala-Tamil tensions continue to be antagonized by history textbooks’ prevalence of royal battles between Sinhala and Tamil kings. The most prominent example of this is that of the Dutugamunu-Elara battle, as it can be considered the foundational myth of the Sinhala-Buddhist state, built on the exclusion of Tamils (Dewasiri 2013). The Mahāvamsa suggests “a long and bloody tradition” between the Sinhalese and Tamil, claiming that “the Sinhalese King Dutugamunu defeated the Tamil, ‘foreign’ ruler Elara in a war to protect Buddhism, to ‘reunite the country’ and ‘liberate the country from foreign rule’.” (Wettimuny 2016). After much push back against this depiction, reforms were accepted so that “the Tamil Grade 6 history syllabus cites Elara as a leader that ruled ‘with justice’” (Wettimuny 2016). However, this fundamental disagreement in the understanding of the past between different ethnicities points to history production’s cyclical nature, as curriculum writers learn biased history and then write biased history. Moreover, the inconsistencies in the painting of Dutugamunu and Elara between Sinhalese and Tamil textbooks highlight the hard truth that Sri Lanka is a divided country, down to who knows which tellings of the past – building kinetic energy towards ethno-religious tensions.

Frustrated by the bias, inconsistencies, and history production process that time and again elevated a Sinhala narrative, the LTTE produced their own history textbooks during the civil war, centring the Tamil narrative. The LTTE introduced a “Social Sciences and History” text to history classrooms with the

intent to increase popular interest in the subject (Sambandan 2004). For several years the text was used as supplementary material for Tamil schoolchildren in the rebel-controlled Vanni region, after which the text was introduced to government-controlled areas – particularly Jaffna, the northern peninsula highly concentrated with Tamils – as ‘corrected history,’ bringing the document into the spotlight (Sambandan 2004). The foreword of the textbook explained the motivation for a separate text from that which was government-issued:

“The history textbooks by the Sri Lankan government that are taught in the schools are not based on true history, but have exaggerated the Sinhalese community, concealed the greatness of the Tamils and has been twisted in a manner to demean the Tamils... . By teaching Tamil translations of Sinhala works, written by and for the Sinhalese, the Tamil students are taught Sinhalese history, which says that this Sinhala-Buddhist country is only for them and that their history is the history of Eelam” (Sambandan 2004).

Once it was public that the LTTE had produced and distributed their own history textbooks, newspapers called for the government to “take swift action to stop the attempted invasion of young minds by the LTTE” (Sambandan 2004). However, while the Tamil-centred text was labeled as indoctrination, the government-issued text that prioritizes the Sinhalese and their mythical foundation is never thought of as invasion of young minds.

C. Translation

While bias in Sri Lankan history textbooks has been well studied and has seen small wins in reform, the role that translation plays in history production is one that has been given little attention and has seen few changes since the conception of national history textbooks. After Sri Lanka gained independence from Britain in 1948, education reform was recognized as a high priority. The newly-formed national government went about making school more accessible to larger populations of Sri Lankans by reintroducing education in Sri Lanka's mother tongues of both Sinhala and Tamil, to replace the English-medium (Hoeks 2012). However, this change in language of instruction and curriculum gradually formed an "ethnically and religiously segregated school system, wherein different ethnic groups were educated in separate schools in their own language of instruction" (Hoeks 2012, 33). During a time when Sinhala and Tamil curricula were developed separately, "fears arose among some Sinhalese that the authors of Tamil-language history textbooks were emphasizing links with South India instead of Sri Lanka," thereby betraying Sri Lankan nationalism and prioritizing their shared ethno-linguist identity as Tamils (S. Jayawardena 2017, 38). Therefore, in 1980 the predominantly Sinhala government mandated that all curricula be produced, standardized, and distributed by them while solely operating in Sinhala, with textbooks only being translated to Tamil and English after the fact (Gaul 2014, 89). The National Institute of Education (NIE) and the Educational Publications Department (EPD)'s use of Sinhala as their working language "prevents Tamils – or at least, most Tamils, who do not write fluent Sinhalese – from directly authoring the history curricula" (S. Jayawardena 2017, 42). By greatly excluding Tamils and Muslims from the production process, something as looked-over as the translation process plays a role in creating history textbooks biased towards the Sinhala.



Despite the translation process's mandate to develop the curriculum in Sinhala and translate it to Tamil and English after the fact, Tamil and Sinhala textbooks are of different levels of quality and even have variances in their content. Chandima Danapala (2018), one of two NIE employees who specifically works on history education, shared that the department of publishing chose people

who could translate well, but often did not have a history background, leading to Tamil textbooks that were translated word by word rather than by meaning. While the wording of the Sinhala textbooks is often openly discussed and chosen after much debate, the wording of the Tamil textbooks are often left to the individual discretion of the translators (Danapala 2018). For this reason, sometimes changes in the text can go unnoticed without much discern – take for example the fact that the grade six Tamil textbook labels Elara as a leader that ruled ‘with justice’ despite the Sinhala textbook saying otherwise (Wettimuny 2016). Moreover, often the translators that are hired to translate the texts from Sinhala to Tamil are Muslims, who use a different dialect of Tamil for particular words, leaving the Tamil textbooks indecipherable at times to a sub-sect of Tamil students (Danapala 2018). While Danapala (2018) called for the NIE to employ more translators with a background in history, her team of two is equally devoid of a Tamil voice, and they too operate in Sinhala and employ an outside translator to translate all their work after the fact. Many point to not only the lack of Tamil voice in textbook production, but the lack of Tamil translations for teachers’ guides and outside resources for them to use to educate themselves on any given topic of Sri Lankan history (Dewasiri 2018). Similar to the cyclical nature of many characteristics of Sri Lankan history education, the inability of Tamil and Muslim teachers to access educational resources for themselves contribute to the inaccessibility to comprehensive history education for their students.

D. Teachers

Of all the issues in education that stem from the onus placed on teachers, perhaps the most damaging to history education is the assumption that anyone can teach history. There is a generalization that everyone has some amount of history knowledge and has the ability to interpret and teach a textbook, at least on a superficial level (Dewasiri 2018). For this reason, there is an unspoken, yet prevalent, trend of placing teachers that don't have any training in the discipline of history – whether they be music or math teachers – in history classrooms to teach history in their free periods (Danapala 2018). As many as half of history teachers at the grade school level do not have a formal background in history (Danapala 2018). We have to recognize that there's a key difference between history and other disciplines, as historical truth is completely different from other truths – “your fantasy plays a role” (Dewasiri 2018). History professor Nirmal Dewasiri (2018) points to the trend he's seen with history teachers he's observed: students can ask all types of questions and teachers can answer with perhaps biased knowledge they've picked up from their own schooling or more often than not from popular historical teledramas. While teaching history incorrectly is never taken as seriously as teaching the hard sciences incorrectly for example, this sharing of incorrect history with future generations proves to be very dangerous for Sri Lanka's future – particularly in a postwar context with ethno-religious tensions running high (Dewasiri 2018).



While many scholars who value the importance of history education in postwar reconciliation point to textbooks as the site for necessary reform, history professor and academic Nira Wickramasinghe (2018) argues that the problem is not textbooks but the teaching of them. There is a prevalent claim that teaching history is as simple as teaching the textbook, but “you can't just teach the textbook, especially with a subject like this,” (Wickramasinghe 2018). Teachers, like anyone else, are not devoid of prejudice themselves, but they might not be completely aware of the ways they project their own biases onto their students when they interpret the textbook prior to and as they teach it (Dewasiri 2018). Because teachers don't know their views are biased, the textbook becomes “a framework just to mix in with prejudices” (Dewasiri 2018). These biases have

been ingrained into the discourse of their entire lives, from their own education to the religious services they attend and the teledramas they watch, so they cannot be blamed for their bias. However, we must all recognize the harmful consequences of this precautionary education structure in which teachers' role in interpreting curriculum is ignored. Nirmal Dewasiri (2018) argues that by focusing on textbooks, policy makers are able to pacify peace educationists while still avoiding actual reform, as teachers inevitably teach widely known stories, even if they are redacted from textbooks, and thereby maintain the status quo.

Moreover, the repercussions that teachers face for teaching outside the mandated curriculum unequally falls on teachers who teach inclusive histories, particularly if they discuss the history of the war. Tamil teachers reported getting in trouble for covering things not on the syllabus, not only because they're viewed as jeopardizing students' exam scores by not teaching the curriculum they'll be tested on, but also because they're viewed as having ties with the LTTE and spreading terrorism (Figurado 2018). Another Tamil teacher shared that "We don't really talk about politics. Peace is also a sensitive issue. We can't talk! That is why this society is so polarised, even this staff is polarised. Peace and politics, you just can't separate. People can't open their mouths. The freedom of speech is seriously under threat." (Lopes Cardozo 2008). However, if a Sinhala teacher was to teach the story of Vijaya even after it was removed from the textbook, they would be viewed as appropriately supplementing the curriculum rather than indoctrinating their students with non-mandated lessons. These unfair repercussions create a system in which teachers' biases are given room to flourish as they project onto their students, if and only if those biases are in favour of the Sinhala majority and do not expose the atrocities of the war.

To claim that teachers are at fault for the biased history students are learning is neither accurate nor just – we must rather view teachers as playing a key role in a larger education structure and explore how they are trained to fit into this structure. Currently there are no standardized requirements for teachers to have necessary subject knowledge – while the National Colleges of Education recruit and train teachers for each subject and only consider history education students for their history training program, other teachers find themselves teaching history as an add-on to the course they're trained to teach (Danapala 2018). Chandima Danapala (2018) of the NIE estimated that roughly half of history teachers in the

country have a background in history. With such a lack of historical knowledge among many history teachers, there is much more of a reliance on textbooks, with some rural areas having only textbooks without a history teacher at all (Dewasiri 2018; Danapala 2018). For those who are trained, the structure is such that Danapala trains grade twelve and thirteen teachers, about three hundred teachers island wide, who are then certified as In-Service Advisors (ISA) and can train other teachers. Because the NIE does not have enough funding to train all teachers, the ISAs are the only teachers to receive direct training, and even then that training is typically a two-day program in which teachers are taught the small revisions that have been made to the curriculum, such as the inclusion of newly-found archaeological sites (Danapala 2018). This structure creates a trend where nearly half of history teachers in Sri Lanka are not given the basics of teaching history but are rather given tidbits of historical knowledge that are only peripheral, leaving much more room for teachers' biases to be integrated within the teaching of an already biased textbook.

While teachers aren't being trained adequately in the actual content of history, perhaps the most dangerous part of this education structure is that teachers lack the training necessary to facilitate learning in a subject as sensitive as history in an ethno-religiously tense, post-war Sri Lanka. Scholars, educators, and policy makers alike identified the need for history teachers to be trained to handle sensitive subjects, particularly as it relates to ethno-religious relations (Dewasiri 2018, Figurado 2018, Danapala 2018). Moreover, teachers especially need to be trained to question historical narratives themselves, not only to interrogate their own biases but to teach their students the valuable skills of skepticism and critical thinking (Daniels 2018, J. Jayawardena 2018). Instead, teachers admit to skipping sections of the curriculum in fear of catalyzing a sensitive or political conversation (Warnasuriya 2018). In one case, an English-medium teacher in a classroom of students from mixed ethnicities skipped a passage in the textbook as its tone blamed Muslims for a certain historical event and she did not want to offend her Muslim students (Warnasuriya 2018). Very rarely are teachers given the skills to facilitate discussion of such topics or to present their students with multiple perspectives of a single event. In order to take on such a feat, teachers need the training of what to say and not say in relation to sensitive topics (Dewasiri 2018). Teachers need the skills to combat the multiple pressures –

that of parents, school administrators, monks, and politicians – being placed on them as they decide what to teach and not teach in history classrooms (S. Jayawardena 2018).

E. Pedagogy

Sometimes the most important factor in learning is not the content nor the teacher, but how the content is taught. Pedagogy in its simplest terms is the method through which one teaches or something is taught. Not only in Sri Lanka but globally, there is a pedagogical emphasis on memorization and what critical pedagogue Paulo Freire (2000) calls the ‘banking method’ – the idea that students are empty vessels ready to be filled with objective knowledge rather than individuals who bring their own subjective knowledge and experience to the classroom. Wickrema and Colenso (2003) argue that



“in spite of current educational reforms which emphasize a student-centred and activity-based approach to teaching and learning, teaching is still for the most part heavily teacher-centred, relying on traditional ‘chalk and talk’ techniques. The textbook is very much the central component of the teaching-learning process, with teachers making little reference to the syllabus, to broader pedagogical resources, and to the development of broader competencies beyond the remit and content areas of textbooks” (3).

For example, when a teacher only has forty-five minutes to teach forty-five students, lecturing in reference to a lesson in the textbook will be much easier than facilitating an interactive method of teaching to question a lesson in the textbook (Daniels 2018). For this reason, the pedagogy of lecturing within the banking method is prioritized over methods of critical pedagogy, such as discussion, critical thinking, and questioning, with the recognition that all knowledge is biased, political, and personal. However, teachers are not the only agents pushing the Sri Lankan education system to value certain pedagogies over others, but rather teachers are placed in an environment in which the pedagogies of memorization and banking are more efficient and easier to measure given their lack of time and resources (Warnasuriya 2018).

The most damaging part of this pedagogy is that students are taught that historical knowledge consists of right and wrong answers rather than of critical questioning.

At a peace camp I observed in Hikkaduwa, students were asked if they faced push back when presenting their communities with alternative perceptions of historical events, to which they answered ‘no’ because they perceived ‘yes’ as the wrong answer – that admitting to having received pushback would equate to them having carried out the assignment incorrectly. Another study done in Sri Lanka noted that “a concern with such results is always whether they are capturing actual changes in attitudes and behaviors or whether respondents to the questionnaires were simply providing the kinds of answers that they thought the experimenters might want to see” (Malhotra and Liyanage 2005, 919). To this point, while peace camps are attempting to provide students with alternative viewpoints to the biased history taught in schools, without combatting the deeply ingrained pedagogical practices students learn, these biases are only tackled on a surface level.

Of all disciplines, history is perhaps the most dangerous to humanity to teach in pedagogical methods that do not teach youth the subjectivity of knowledge and the ability to question what is taught. In the current pedagogical structure, students learn that the written word is truth and should never be questioned, but rather should be memorized and regurgitated. Very rarely are students faced with the reality that their textbooks are written by humans just as flawed as them, who made choices to include and exclude certain parts of history. Moreover, students are sheltered from the fact that history can be perceived in many ways and all those ways are made up of varying biases (Daniels 2018). Compared to the other subjects taught in school, such as math or science, history is the most important discipline to understand from multiple perspectives, as history in its nature is perspectives. The failure to recognize history as biased and questionable allows for the history mandated by the predominantly Sinhala government to be accepted as fact and for all varying perceptions of history to be invalidated. In order to combat these normative biases in history education, one must get to the crux of history’s pedagogy and offer varying, yet coexisting perspectives, presenting history as knowledge meant to be questioned.

F. Over-Emphasis of Exams

While Sri Lanka has seen relative success in reforming textbooks to exclude a number of lessons that demonstrate Sinhala-centric bias, some argue that these reforms have not successfully removed these lessons from the curriculum, as national exams still include such stories. With the British having colonised Sri Lanka for some 150 years, one of the many colonial legacies that remain is that of the exam-oriented structure of A-Levels and O-Levels – a structure in which students compete against each other for very few university slots. In an environment that’s so highly competitive, where exam scores serve as a gateway ticket to university admissions and career opportunities afterwards, youth are coerced into an exam-oriented culture, with a large number of primary students and a majority of secondary students taking part in tuition – private tutoring outside of school (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). Because national exams have not been reformed to reflect the reforms that history textbooks have undergone to reduce Sinhala-centric bias, teachers are forced to teach and students are forced to learn these same lessons solely to pass their exams (Wickramasinghe 2018). Lopes Cardozo (2008) argues that “in a situation where teachers feel pressure to just live up to the exam standards, without time and space for other peace-related activities, there tends to be a lack of reflective and critical dialogue in the classroom. Both teachers and principals complained that the exam-oriented system does not leave enough room for the integration of peace education into the regular subjects” (17). Not only are teachers’ course loads too heavy to include peace education, but the structure is so exam-oriented that teachers – Sinhalese and Tamil alike – must make room to teach the Sinhala-centric lessons that will appear on national exams (Danapala 2018).



The prevalence of private tuition in Sri Lanka’s education structure encourages a system in which the pedagogy of rote memorization is emphasized and the supplementary teaching of Sinhala bias is monetized. Tuition has become so prevalent and so highly profitable that I once heard in passing that only two types of people own a Ferrari in Sri Lanka – drug dealers and tuition masters. Professor and academic Nirmal Dewasiri (2018) warns that the “education system is vested in the narrow interests of O-level, A-level, and fifth grade scholarships, based on

tuition masters – not in schools.” The education system is dependent on tuition so much so that sending one’s child to tuition is seen as a social obligation and not doing so is perceived as not doing the most for that child (Bloemer 2018). The most prominent tuition masters in the country teach in grand lecture halls after school and on weekends, lecturing to as many as a thousand students at a time (Bloemer 2018). Pedagogically, “tuition classes teach answers – not to ask questions,” as their one intention is to have students succeed on their exams, not to teach critical thinking skills or question the biases being taught (J. Jayawardena 2018). The supplementary materials that tuition classes teach consist of materials not covered in the classroom that could show up on the exam. Because the NIE removed many Sinhala-centric lessons from history textbooks, but the MoE (Ministry of Education) failed to implement these same changes in the national exams, these Sinhala-centric lessons are still taught in tuition, in the name of preparing students for their exams. In comparison, Tamil teachers are pressured by the use of exam scores to measure success so much so that they must teach their students Sinhala-centric lessons regardless of their own values, “openly telling students that this is not a real history but this is what you need to learn to pass the exam, but if you want to learn the real history we’ll teach it on the side” (Warnasuriya 2018). In this structure, teaching supplementary Sinhala-centric lessons is highly profitable, while teaching Tamil-centric lessons are provided as a free service by already overworked teachers.

G. Outside Forces that Influence History Education

The way professor and scholar Nira Wickramasinghe (2018) frames it, people are being constantly assaulted with messaging regarding the country's history, from cinema to the tabloids, that what is learned in school is merely a minute part of what is actually absorbed. Wickramasinghe (2018) notes that even after history textbooks saw certain reforms, for years to come her university students continued to hold the same misconceptions that glorified the nation. For this reason, she qualifies that while textbook reform is worthwhile, there is still a whole different battle to be fought in the public realm about history (Wickramasinghe 2018). While there are many outside forces influencing how Sri Lanka's youth learn the country's history, there are two forces that play a particularly underestimated role in the interworking of history education – televised media and religious schooling.



One of the most powerful yet overlooked tools through which Sri Lankan history is reimagined and, at times, reinvented is via television. Popular culture has always drawn from accounts of history – particularly from those “that have drawn from the chronicles, myths, and Jataka tales, and portrayed heroes and gods as the motors of history rather than in terms of social forces or class conflict” (Wickramasinghe 2012, 14). Professor Dewasiri (2018) recalls the first cartoon film produced in Sinhala, from 1979 – *Dutugamunu*, a pseudo-historical film depicting the story of the famous Sinhala king who according to this account defeated the Tamil king, Elara. The film aired for one day and was then banned for being too sensitive and spurring ethnic tensions (Dewasiri 2018). However, in more recent years much more ethnically charged media has been allowed to air, including the 2008 film *Aba* depicting the life of King Pandukabhaya – the first king of Anuradhapura some 2,400 years ago (Wickramasinghe 2012, 14). *Aba* was seen by roughly 10% of the island and its success paved the way for other historical media. For example, a film to follow, *Mahindagamanaya*, depicts one of the Sinhalese collective memory's founding myths of the nation – that of Mahinda, a son of Emperor Asoka who is said to have sent an emissary to Sri Lanka to spread Buddhism (Wickramasinghe 2012, 14). Among the most popular pseudo-historical media was the prime time show *Maha Sinhale Vansa Kathava*

(The Great Sinhala Chronicle), on which a panel of ‘experts’ discussed an event of Sri Lanka’s past, often drowning out an academic’s historical perspective with “the dominant narrative of praise for the great feats of the kings and people of the past” (Wickramasinghe 2012, 15). The underestimated, yet extremely damaging consequence of such pseudo-historical media is that it allows immense Sinhala and Buddhist-centric bias to be interwoven into history education, as teachers may watch such media and ad-lib such biases when interpreting and teaching a textbook.

The other prominent force that influences how youth and even their teachers learn Sri Lankan history is the teachings of religious schooling. At Daham Pasala (Buddhist Sunday school), children learn about Sinhala-Buddhist heritage in a way that can be counterintuitive to recent history education reforms. For example, the textbooks used in Daham Pasala take on a narrative framework similar to that of history textbooks – “the history of Buddhism appears as one peppered with glorious deeds and exceptional individuals. It is a history full of omissions and chosen emphases, one which resembles the heritage/mythic mode of recounting the past rather than modern historiography” (Wickramasinghe 2012, 10). Moreover, with Buddhist monks having some of the most powerful influence in the country, religious schooling is not even isolated from formal history education, as organizations of Buddhist monks have been advocates of continuing an inherently biased history in schools (S. Jayawardena 2017, 46). At a time where Buddhist extremist groups like Bodu Bala Sena are at a height in Sri Lanka, the influence that religious schooling has on our next generation’s understanding of the past, and thereby the present, can no longer be underestimated nor ignored.

06. The History of History Reforms in Sri Lanka

With a mapping of the distinct factors that shape Sri Lanka's history education – the emotion and bias of the discipline, the textbooks, the translation, the teachers, the pedagogy, the exam culture, and the external influences – one begins to see an interconnected web of systems, dynamics, and tensions limiting history education reforms. Ten years after the war's end and just a few months after yet another ethno-religiously motivated attack – the Easter bombings, Sri Lanka is in dire need of reforms towards history education that do not repeat what's already been done, but rather multiply and combine various efforts. To measure the success of tried reforms in addressing multiple barriers within history education, each of the following sections will induce a grid of history education's areas of influence – colored to indicate whether the area has been addressed. For example, if one is to revise textbooks without also revising exams within Sri Lanka's highly exam-oriented environment, there lacks an actual shift in curriculum as teachers and tuition masters will first and foremost teach to the test. Or if one is to reimagine teacher trainings they must firstly understand the sensitivity required to confront the emotion and bias of the discipline, the barriers to practically implementing a pedagogy other than rote memorization, and the influence of pseudo-historical media on teachers' perceptions of the past. In order for us to approach history education reform using informed and strategic methods, we must understand what types of reforms and interventions have been tried, what worked, what failed, and what we can learn from one another's efforts.

A. How History as a Subject has Changed



History as a subject has undergone many iterations in the past decades, impacting the prioritization it has been given in youths' education and the framework through which educators approach it. After the 1971 Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) youth insurrections, many reforms to curricula were taken, including the decrease in prioritization of subjects like literature and history (Dewasiri 2018). History became part of the subject of 'social studies' in schools and history as a subject took a large blow at both the grade school and university level (Dewasiri 2018). Many history lecturers left the country or went on to teach other subjects, leaving university history departments deserted, less students specializing in history, and thereby less teachers today having formal training in history education (Dewasiri 2018). It is out of this context that the Sri Lankan History Association was born and campaigned for history to be a core subject – a concession that was eventually won from the government in the early 2000s (Dewasiri 2018). As history took on a renewed prominence in education, those of very different ideologies found themselves advocating for the same thing – both Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists and those sympathizing with minorities' oppression saw history education as a potential tool to impact the next generation, inadvertently linking these distinct movements (Dewasiri 2018). With more openness regarding the political influence of history education, for the first time there was state level awareness of the controversy and sensitivity of history – such as the story of Dutugamunu and Elara – and of the need to de-escalate tensions between ethnicities (Dewasiri 2018).

Not only has the prominence and intention of history education moulded over generations, but the framework through which we understand and teach history has seen great innovation. A shift in the discourse of history education was catalyzed by Amal Jayawardena's article "Problems Teaching History in

Ethnically Divided Societies: The Case of Sri Lanka.” Through his work, the institutional manifestation of using history education for ethnic reconciliation was born: the National Integration Programme Unit (NIPU) (Dewasiri 2018). Decades later during a governmental regime that hoped to build off of this work, professor and historian Nira Wickramasinghe was placed on President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga’s team to revise the history curriculum and went about reframing the lens through which we view history. Rather than centring the narrative around kings and other politically prominent individuals, she wanted history to be taught less as a story and more in terms of questions and multiple interpretations (Wickramasinghe 2018). Around the same time she was on this revision team, she was also writing her groundbreaking work “Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities” in which she uses events traditionally explored in history curricula with this new framework, taking a different reference point or dwelling at length on what was once merely a footnote of history (Wickramasinghe 2006). She reframes history “with the knowledge and regret that if history is indeed the record of men/women in time, most men and women have never appeared in the written histories of Sri Lanka. Rectifying this bias would mean writing a history from the grassroots” (Wickramasinghe 2006, xi). While Sri Lanka’s mainstream history curricula has not been reformed to mirror Wickramasinghe’s innovative framing of history, her time on the curriculum revisory team planted seeds that have yet to grow.

B. Beyond the Sinhala-Tamil Binary



Often when we recount history, we wish to package our understanding of the past neatly, with simplified answers as to why a war began or why tensions between groups of people continue. However, this oversimplification bars us from understanding the past as dynamic, organic, and nuanced human interactions which never have one answer to such questions. Since the war's end in 2009, political and academic discussion of the leading factors of the war have pointed to a Sinhala-Tamil binary, ignoring the other ethnic groups on the island (Bass and Skanthakumar 2019). While Sri Lankan history education marginalizes and vilifies Tamil history, it largely ignores the histories and political presence of Muslims, Up-Country Tamils, and Christians. The erasure of these other minorities in Sri Lanka not only diminishes societies' understanding of the violence and oppression these groups have faced, but it also prioritizes the framing of historical violence in Sri Lanka as occurring only across ethnic lines. An inclusion of the history of Muslims, Up-Country Tamils, and Christians, in not only formal history education but also the informal historical narrative, would expose historical tensions across religious, class, and caste divides.

Take one overlooked community, the Up-Country Tamils, for example:

Up-Country Tamils are the descendants of migrant workers from South India, who travelled to Ceylon between the 1830s and the 1930s, to work on coffee, tea, and rubber plantations in the island's central highlands, loosely identified as the Up-country. At Independence in 1948, the population of Up-Country Tamils formed a majority of the Tamil population of Sri Lanka, but other communities often saw them as Indians insufficiently rooted in the country. This perception became a reality with the passage of the Citizenship Acts in 1948

and 1949, and repatriation of approximately 40 per cent of the community, starting in 1967. The outbreak of the war in 1983 ended repatriation, but led to further problems, as violence engulfed much of the island (Bass and Skanthakumar 2019, xiv).

Since their ancestors arrived in Sri Lanka over a hundred years ago, Up-Country Tamils have been integral to the country's import-export economy, and yet they have been forgotten in history education, legally barred from citizenship, and often framed as outsiders. The Sri Lankan government continues to label Up-Country Tamils as "Indian Tamils" a term that "explicitly refers to their historical origin [and] implies that the community is non-indigenous, and, therefore, not truly Sri Lankan" (Bass and Skanthakumar 2019, xv). By attempting to understand history only across ethnic divides, we fail to recognize the fight Up-Country Tamils face for repatriation and the class struggle they have long faced as plantation workers. By limiting Sri Lankan history to the Sinhala-Tamil binary, the history and plight of Up-Country Tamils is erased.

This erasure is also true for Sri Lanka's Muslims, the country's third largest ethno-religious group and the one that has most recently been under attack. Violence against Muslims has long been "overshadowed by the armed conflict and extreme polarization precipitated by Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms," causing Muslims to be a largely invisible player throughout the recording of formal history education (Nagaraj and Haniffa 2017, 1). While the collective memory of Sri Lankan society would most often associate violence against Muslims with the most recent attacks we saw in the aftermath of the Easter bombing, violence against Muslims has been occurring in Sri Lanka for generations. The anti-Muslim riots of 1915 are often referred to as the beginning of the episodic violence Muslims have faced. However, the popular memory of Muslims themselves recount "a much more frequent and widespread set of instances during which ethnic tensions have led to targeted violence" (Nagaraj and Haniffa 2017, 2). These attacks included massacres in the North and East of Sri Lanka, in Eravur and Kattankudy, with the most prominent violence occurring in the mass expulsion of Muslims from the North (Nagaraj and Haniffa 2017). While these attacks of the 1990s occurred primarily over ethnic divides, the violence against Muslims that preceded these attacks, violence of the 1970s and 80s in Puttalam, Galle, and Mawanella, were fought over Muslims' growing control of the political-economic landscape of

these towns (Nagaraj and Haniffa 2017). Many credit Sri Lanka's surge in anti-Muslim violence to the rise of Buddhist-extremism and key actors like the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), but we need to see the violence carried out against Muslims in a more nuanced way to understand the ways ethnicity, religion, and class, intersect. In their report, *Towards Recovering Histories of Anti-Muslim Violence in the Context of Sinhala–Muslim Tensions in Sri Lanka*, Vijay Nagaraj and Farzana Haniffa explained this intersection:

One way to understand the instances of anti-Muslim violence is to see it as being driven by the ethnicisation of the vertical conflict between working class poor Sinhalese and the Muslim bourgeoisie that simultaneously induces horizontal conflict on ethnic lines within the working class poor and vertical alignment between classes on the lines of ethno-religious identity (Nagaraj and Haniffa 2017, 42).

Only when we intersect ethno-religious identity and class identity do we see that the Sinhalese working class resents the Muslim bourgeoisie for their political and economic power despite their lack of power along the dimension of ethnicity. Looking beyond the binary not only exposes the hidden histories of Sri Lanka's other minorities, but it also uncovers the nuanced dynamics that beget violence, beyond ethnicity alone.

C. Reforms to Textbooks



Since 1972 when Sri Lanka’s MoE produced the first history textbook taught nation-wide, several key stakeholders have critiqued the text and called for reform. One of them is the Ceylon Tamil Teachers Union (CTTU), who are “perhaps the strongest critics of the NIE and the MoE, and the most persistent advocates for change” (Wickrema and Colenso 2003, 8). Among their concerns are the distortion of history and fact, the inclusion of material offensive to Hindus, and the dominance of Sinhalese Buddhist culture in the textbook (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). They also raised concern regarding the textbook’s production process, highlighting the use of Sinhala as the drafting language and the lack of Tamil involvement in the drafting process (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). A 1999 study by Yoga Rasanayagam and V. Palaniappan found that while the textbook’s narrative is confined to a few Sinhala kings, there are no chapters allocated to Tamils, Hinduism, and the Jaffna Kingdoms – in fact Tamil and Hindu culture and history are largely absent and Tamil terminology is often not accurate (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). That same year a study done by Nira Wickramasinghe and Sasanka Perera showed that the history represented is the history of the Sinhala Buddhist nation state, and that “myth and scientific evidence are amalgamated” (Wickrema and Colenso 2003, 10). Moreover, they highlighted the textbook’s use of a framework that posed history as event-centred truth rather than issue-centred interpretations and its positioning of cultural identity as a fixed essence, rather than as dynamic and changing over time (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). Even the MoE has criticized the NIE and EPD who produce all textbooks for their use of outdated content in history textbooks (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). Wickrema and Colenso (2003) argue that “this is linked to the fact that there is no established cycle for curriculum development or an efficient mechanism for relating reforms in the school curricula into new,

improved textbooks” (7). While “compared to the social studies texts in the 1970s and early 1980s, biases and negative portrayals are considerably less [...] the difficult issues of ethnicity and history are more or less avoided” and continue to be today (Wickrema and Colenso 2003, 10).

While the many studies that cite textbooks as history education’s singular catalysis have highlighted various calls for reform, few have explored which reforms were met and which continue to plague the history education system. Over the last three decades, government-issued history textbooks have seen three revision cycles: in 1991/92, 2006/07, and 2014/15 (S. Jayawardena 2017). With the 1991/92 revision taking place at the height of Tamil guerilla groups’ rise and the 2006/07 revision following the breaking of a four-year ceasefire, the 2014/15 cycle has had the only revision that have come after the war’s end in 2009. Even though these revisions have not included the history of the civil war itself, some have called this a period where “ambitious educational reforms are being implemented that envision textbooks as a tool for the creation of a new generation of citizens in a postwar society” with many pointing to a great deal of progress in decreased bias (Gaul 2014, 87; Wickramasinghe 2018). For example, history has moved away from solely using storytelling and is now more so framed as a science focused on evidence (S. Jayawardena 2018). There has also been reform to the production process of textbooks, with the MoE at one point implementing a Multiple-Book Option, to bring private authors and publishing companies back to textbook publishing (Wickrema and Colenso, 2003). The government even assembled a multicultural team of historians and sociologists to implement EPD Sensitivity guidelines that attempted to objectively and professionally assess the sensitivity of textbook content in terms ethno-cultural bias, gender, geography, etc. and make recommendations for improvement (Wickrema and Colenso 2003, 15). Most notably, the story of Vijaya – the foundational story of Sinhala supremacy – was redacted from textbooks, along with the language of ‘invaders’ to describe Tamils (S. Jayawardena 2018). Although this is merely one of many instances of Sinhala bias in history textbooks, its redaction – in light of its position as one of the most foundational myths of Sinhala identity – is a sign of progress and hopefully future success for other revisions.

As much as these reforms have been long awaited and may be promising, they are still criticized for being inadequate and falling into the same patterns of

Sinhala prominence and the marginalization of Tamils, Muslims, and other ethno-religious minorities. Under Prime Minister Kumaratunga, a number of progressive historians were brought together to reform history textbooks, but under Prime Minister Rajapaksa's government many of these revisions never came to fruition (S. Jayawardena 2017). The Multiple-Book Option policy soon came to an end with this turn in power, as is true of many envisioned reforms (S. Jayawardena 2017, Wickramasinghe 2018). Moreover, revisions that were put in place often fell short. For instance, "even though the textbook is describing a multi-ethnic society and goes on to provide positive information about Tamil arrival, it nevertheless highlights that the Sinhalese are 'native' and were in Sri Lanka before the Tamils" (S. Jayawardena 2017, 79). Even history textbooks' new bend towards scientific evidence was used to give prominence to archeological digs done by one of the textbook's main writers, Raj Somadeva, rather than to framing history as a human-constructed study worth being questioned (S. Jayawardena 2018). Sarani Jayawardena (2018) points out that despite so-called progressive reforms, the textbooks only mention the infamous act passed to give prominence to Sinhala over Tamil as the national language, the 'Sinhala Only Act,' once – thereby highlighting the continued shying away from ethno-religious history. In regards to reforms falling short, it should also be noted that none of these reforms to history textbooks were accompanied by changes to exam content, pedagogy, the methodology of teacher trainings, nor a change in the use of the Sinhala language in textbooks' production process. Despite the prevalent perception that reform to history textbooks is the panacea to the problems we see in Sri Lanka's history education, textbook reforms must be held in unison with reforms to these other areas of influence in order to see changes to textbooks that are both impactful and sustained.

D. Interventions in Teacher Trainings



In a landscape where the mandated curriculum is often the most scrutinized structure within history education, crucial reforms must take place to address not just the curriculum but how it is taught – as the role of teachers is too often overlooked. As explained previously, as many as half of grade school history teachers in Sri Lanka have not received formal training in history education, with many teachers trained in other disciplines spread thin to teach history in free periods. For the other half of teachers who are trained in the discipline of history, much of this training occurs in universities at the undergraduate level and at specialized institutions like the National Colleges of Education. While the decrease in teachers with formal history training can be due to a number of factors, one of them is undoubtedly the shift seen in university teacher trainings. In the 1970s, university history departments were rationalized to be part of the social sciences, many professors moved to newer departments, and in result history departments saw a stark decrease in their number of students (Desawiri 2018; A. Jayawardena 2018). Today only nine of the seventeen universities in Sri Lanka teach history, with each university having a distinct belief system for which they are known (Rogers and Wahab-Salman 2018). For example, the Universities of Kelaniya and Sri Jayawardenapura were both originally established as institutions of higher learning for Buddhist monks and today are known for dominating the process of producing history syllabi and textbooks while maintaining ideological links to their Sinhalese-Buddhist origins (S. Jayawardena 2017). In comparison, the University of Colombo has moved away from teaching history chronologically and towards teaching it thematically, highlighting the history of capitalism, for example (J. Jayawardena 2018). Similarly, Jaffna University is categorized for promoting regional history – advancing Tamil historical narratives that are often otherwise excluded (J. Jayawardena 2018). For this reason, filling the NIE

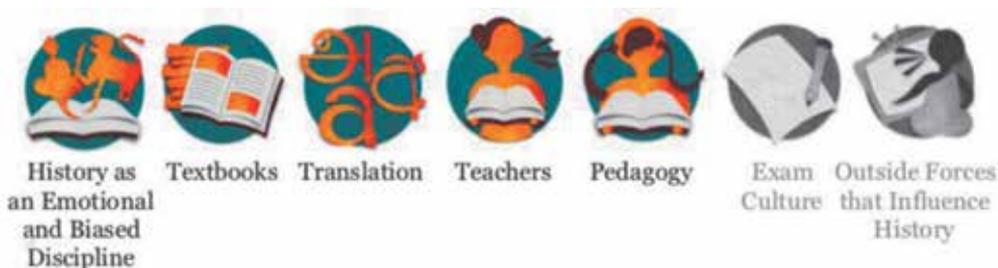
Council with professors from one university rather than from another can vastly influence the history syllabi as an end product (S. Jayawardena 2018).

Knowing how isolated universities are in their pedagogical and ideological methods of teaching history, professors and activists worked together to establish “History and Community” – a program to unite students from different history departments across Sri Lanka’s universities to explore how their multiple interpretations of history fit together. In 2008, Hasini Haputhanthri, a researcher at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), came to Professor Janaki Jayawardena and Professor Nirmal Dewasiri at the University of Colombo with the idea of bringing university history students, as future history teachers, together in an effort to allow for the multiple interpretations of Sri Lanka’s history to coexist in future history classrooms (Dewasiri 2018). This was more easily done than other attempts at reform, as universities have more room for reform when compared to the rigid and exam-oriented nature of grade school (J. Jayawardena 2018). Despite facing criticism of carrying out foreign interests, they sought funding from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ), a German aid agency that continues to work on the frontlines of history education reform. They began working with students from the University of Colombo, Eastern University, and the University of Jaffna, but from the beginning of the war and in its aftermath, it became increasingly hard to work with several universities (J. Jayawardena 2018). More recently, they’ve worked solely with the University of Jaffna and the University of Colombo, bringing Tamil and Sinhala students together to understand how their varying understandings of history fit together, particularly as it relates to histories that are no longer understood as shared across ethno-religious lines (J. Jayawardena 2018). The program was structured by bringing the two cohorts together to one historical site, for a half day of lecture and a half day of activities (J. Jayawardena 2018). They asked the students what they already knew about the subject and unpacked the differences and similarities in their respective interpretations (J. Jayawardena 2018). After having faced the challenge of the language barrier between these Sinhala and Tamil students, they brought language specialists to class discussions to show the students how to read text without having to understand every word (J. Jayawardena 2018).

While the students and professors who took part in the program commend it for its innovation and success, GIZ staff point to the challenge future teachers face of not being able to implement teaching multiple interpretations of history within a highly scrutinized and exam-oriented curriculum (de Mel and Feyen 2018).

While this intervention targets university history students as future history teachers, one of the most successful interventions to teacher trainings is one that GIZ has established for current grade school history teachers. Recognizing that students in particular regions of post-war Sri Lanka often have trauma that goes unacknowledged, GIZ implemented an intervention in which teachers and guidance counselors are trained in psychosocial counseling – through the lens of both their psychological tendencies and their social environment (Daniels 2018). The program began in the north and east of Sri Lanka with ten groups of teachers, seven of which were trained in the Tamil-medium and three of which were trained in the Sinhala-medium (Daniels 2018). This training is offered to two education professionals from each partnering school, often consisting of a guidance counselor and another teacher to act as a support to the counselor, as “taking these outside context trainings doesn’t always work in school contexts and cultures where conformity is rewarded” (Daniels 2018). The model was structured so that these two trained professionals can return to their schools and carry out trainings for more teachers, promoting psychosocial education and problem-solving skills among their students (Daniels 2018). Given this, the methodology is not only centred around the content of social and psychosocial counseling, but also around training trainers in pedagogy and facilitation skills (Daniels 2018). Moreover, teachers must be equipped with tools to question their own bias and name that of those around them before returning to an environment where no one is challenging stereotypes – as Daniels (2018) put it, “one side is to see that there’s my perception and there’s others’ and the other side is to see that my perception might be biased.” However, because teachers are so often transferred to other departments or schools, very few schools have retained their original trained professionals (Daniels 2018). Today, roughly nineteen professionals are still part of the school system and continue to grow the program within their own schools (Daniels 2018). Beginning with just five school zones in 2009, the MoE intends to take over this intervention from GIZ and replicate it across the country (Daniels 2018).

E. The Impact of Government Agencies and Laws



Throughout the landscape of history education reforms – be it changes to history’s framing as a subject, to textbooks, or to teacher trainings – the most lasting of changes have been made through government agencies and laws. In 1987, the 13th Amendment was added to the constitution, leaving a bulk of the responsibility for primary and secondary education to the provincial level. Since then, Sri Lanka’s nine provinces have been tasked with hiring, training, and deploying teachers while the national-level MoE is primarily responsible for policy development, planning and monitoring, national examinations, and the management of about 200 ‘national schools’ (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). In partnership with the MoE, the NIE develops the national curriculum, consisting of syllabi and teachers’ guides (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). Currently, the NIE history department, being in charge of curricula and teacher training for all grades and all schools in the country, only consists of two employees, both of whom are Sinhala (Danapala 2018). Part of the role of the NIE is to put checks and balances in place to develop a culturally sensitive and well-informed history curriculum. Because the definition of what is culturally sensitive and well informed is constantly changing, the department is expected to hear suggested revisions and make reforms every eight to ten years (Danapala 2018). Chandima Danapala (2018), one of the two NIE history department staff, notes that often parents, people in media, and even students send in revisions, but the NIE has the job of producing “only actual history, not people’s ideas.” In 2020, Danapala (2018) and her team will consider revisions that have been suggested in the past years and work to introduce a new textbook in 2023. With the government having the immense power to establish the curriculum for the entire country – for classrooms of varying ethnicities, languages, and religions – national history curriculum becomes the foundation on which they are attempting to build a cohesive national narrative.

In 1990, the Report of the Presidential Youth Commission established a lasting framework in history education reform – connecting education and social cohesion. This report “attributed the youth unrest of the late eighties in large part to the inadequacies of the existing education system,” catalyzing then President R. Premadasa to create the National Education Commission (NEC), as the new policy-making body for education, to spearhead a new cycle of reforms (Wickrema and Colenso 2003, 6). In its first attempts at reform, the NEC set nine national goals for education – the first of which continues to be a key pillar: “The achievement of a functioning sense of National Cohesion, National Integrity, National Unity” (Wickrema and Colenso 2003, 6). Since then, many of the government policy documents governing the structure and content of the education system have strongly positioned the role of education in promoting diversity and peace building:

Table 1: GoSL Policy Framework for addressing Social Cohesion in Education (selected)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Goals of Education: "The achievement of a functioning sense of National Cohesion, National Integrity, National Unity" (Goal 1) <u>The First Report of the National Education Commission, 1992</u> • "The educational process should seek to engender in impressionable minds the conviction that no ideology or approach constitutes the sole repository of truth. In a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society there must be recognition of the inherent value of diversity." <u>The First Report of the National Education Commission, 1992</u> • "Concepts relating to stabilisation of morals, inculcation of values, appreciation of other social groups and cultures, and living in harmony will run as unifying threads through all three Key Stages [of primary education]." <u>General Education Reforms, 1997</u> • "The broad curriculum framework should serve the needs of...a multi-cultural, pluralistic but nationally integrated society" <u>Curriculum Policy & Process Plan, June 1999</u> • "Even if good schools and textbooks exist, they are unlikely to play a positive role if teachers are not properly trained to take into account the country's multi-ethnic and multi-religious reality...trainees should also be given the necessary teaching skills for serving in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious socio-political environment." <u>National Framework for Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka, June 2002</u> • "Concept of social harmony, conflict resolution and democratic living will be integrated into secondary and tertiary curriculum" <u>Regaining Sri Lanka¹⁰ – Action Plan, 2002</u> • "The school curriculum will be opened to scrutiny by multicultural textbook review panels" <u>Regaining Sri Lanka – Action Plan, 2002</u>

(Wickrema and Colenso 2003, 6)

Along the same lines of these policies, national education reform was named a priority in 1997, followed by the National Curriculum Policy and Process document in 2000 (Gaul 2014). Reforms included a new system for textbook evaluation boards, a multiple-book option program, and a new curriculum issued in 2007 – all with the objective of utilizing education to foster a “multicultural,

pluralistic, but nationally integrated society” (Gaul 2014, 90). Within this framework it was stipulated that curriculum be free of bias against ethnicity or religion and include balanced representations of the different cultural heritages present in Sri Lanka (Gaul 2014). In 2008, the MoE’s creation of the Social Cohesion and Peace Education umbrella program established seven strategic areas of focus: curriculum; teacher education; second national language; whole school culture; integrated schools; co-curricular activities; and research. Many additional initiatives were born out of this program, including the Ministry for National Languages and Social Integration which is now lauded as the first of its kind in the world (Duncan and Lopes Cardozo 2017).

While Sri Lankan education policy has succeeded in establishing social cohesion as a named priority, impactful reform to materialize social cohesion has been barred time and again, as reforms are overly dependent on the political party in power and political regimes are continuously in flux. From 1994 to 2005, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was in the presidential seat and catalyzed many initiatives lauded for their forward thinking and remembered for their disruption of the status quo (A. Jayawardena 2018). For example, she was “the first mainstream political leader who publicly acknowledged that Tamils in Sri Lanka had real grievances and that they had been subjected to various forms of discrimination under all postcolonial Sri Lankan governments” (Malhotra and Liyanage 2005, 914). Kumaratunga appointed Tara De Mel as Secretary to the MoE and together they brought new voices into the history production process (Wickramasinghe 2018). With their leadership, the World Bank was brought in to give the NIE more direction in developing history curricula in a post-war country and a new team of educators was brought together to rethink the curriculum alongside the NIE (Wickramasinghe 2018). They called for the removal of concepts of biological race such as of the ‘Aryan race,’ and instead called for the reframing of history as structures of social and economic forces, not just political history (Wickramasinghe 2018). However, they also wanted to ensure that their proposal would pass so it was proposed in a way that did not appear to challenge the entire structure, but instead work within it (Wickramasinghe 2018). By working together with the NIE, it was actually accepted by the ministry, but as soon as Kumaratunga’s time was over, the proposal was put away and never implemented.

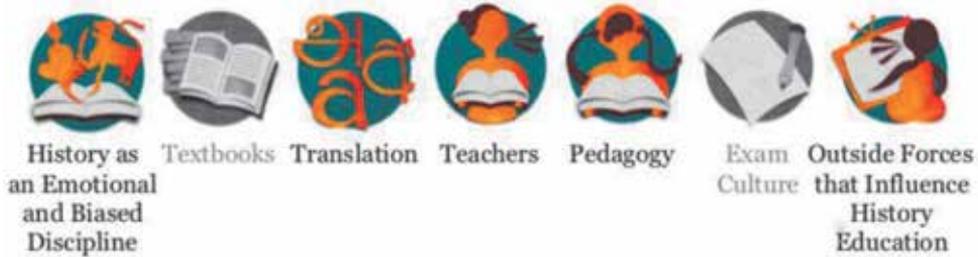
Wickramasinghe was not the only interviewee to recount a tried reform being thrown away due to a change in government or resources and a lack of national policy. In fact, almost all of the academics, organizers, policy makers, and educators I spoke to had experienced this in one way or another. Perhaps the most stark example of this two-steps-forward-one-step-back pattern was the removal of Nirmal Dewasiri and Jayadeva Uyangoda from the NIE Council. After being sacked from the Council along with a few other professors due to internal politics, Professor Dewasiri and Professor Uyangoda wrote a letter to then Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, urging him to take a closer look at the NIE and establish foundations to pave the way for lasting reform. They argued that as the primary institutional link between the country's schools and the government, the NIE does not have sufficient resources to fulfill its far-reaching mandate ("NIE Crisis: Members Sacked" 2018). Dewasiri and Uyangoda suggested that the NIE's review committee include an international expert knowledgeable in educational reforms in post-civil war and multi-ethnic societies and Sri Lankan experts "who have sensitivity to the challenges and role of school education in a multi-ethnic society in transition to peace and reconciliation after decades of civil war and violence" ("NIE Crisis: Members Sacked, " 2018). Above all else, they highlighted the urgency needed for the NIE to break out of the chains of their fixed curriculum and embrace current reform:

(a) most of the syllabi and teachers' guides [...] need fundamental revisions in order to update their objectives, orientations, content and outcomes; (b) most of the syllabi and teachers' guides — particularly in the fields of social studies, political science, history, religious education, and literature — need their content adjusted to reflect the needs of the multi-ethnic and pluralistic character of Sri Lankan society; and (c) preparation, revision and updating of syllabi and teachers' guides are controlled by groups within and outside the NIE with vested interests; they have successfully resisted any serious and innovative re-thinking; our observation is that these vital functions of the NIE are driven primarily by the limited perspectives and narrow agendas of these vested interests, some of which are located at the NIE itself.

By writing this letter upon their removal from the Council, Uyangoda and Dewasiri were able to use the backlash against their reforms to bring the government and public's attention back to the issue at hand: the education of Sri Lanka's future generations.

While the ideologies of “national cohesion, national integrity, and national unity” and fostering a “multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society” seem to be synonymous, they are often at odds with each other. In Sri Lanka's one-for-all curriculum structure, such policies call for the representation of multiple perspectives while arguing for one textbook, which often – contradictory to itself – prioritizes the predominantly Sinhala government's point of view. Now, nearly three decades after reforms for multiculturalism were put into place, Sri Lankan history curricula continues to teach a monocultural story by excluding the civil war, an event that has fundamentally changed the country and its multicultural communities. President Kumaratunga established the Peace Education and Reconciliation Unit (PERU) for this exact purpose, under which the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) was born. ONUR is a network of open-minded educators with access to resources so that they can bring about actual reforms (de Mel and Feyen 2018). However, since the founding of this Office and its umbrella unit, reforms have still not been implemented to address the past forty years in Sri Lanka's history. When commenting on why this might be the case, scholar Sarani Jayawardena (2018) questioned “why would we choose the most upsetting and difficult thing to tackle first?” To Jayawardena's point, one could argue that giving the predominantly Sinhala government the task of taking the first stab at including the civil war in history education could do more harm than good, as reforming existing curriculum might be more bureaucratically challenging than writing new curriculum. Therefore, reform cannot only come from within the government, but must be in partnership with non-governmental organizations.

F. The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations



To implement feasible and impactful reform, you have to break the mould, be innovative in your solutions, and join forces with diverse partners to create a multi-pronged intervention. With the bureaucracy and red tape of governmental agencies, the instability of ever-changing regimes, and the limitations of internal politics, Sri Lanka has often turned to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to take on bold reforms. GIZ has been at the front lines of many reforms to Sri Lanka’s history education in the past few decades, often partnering with governmental agencies, NGOs, scholars, activists, and community organizers to materialize innovative ideas into implementable interventions. With experience in developing history curricula in postwar societies like that of Germany and Palestine, GIZ began working in Sri Lanka in the late 1980s, supporting the MoE in advancing teacher education and establishing a teachers’ college in plantation areas (Bloemer 2018). After the war’s end, GIZ was asked to assist in developing a new policy for social cohesion, working in partnership with UNICEF and with funding from the World Bank (Bloemer 2018). The program had four components: promoting peace and value education, establishing student parliaments, coordinating student exchange programs, and helping the NIE with curriculum and teacher trainings (Bloemer 2018). In addition to this program, GIZ began two other initiatives: to further the teaching of a second national language to both Sinhala and Tamil speakers and to provide psychosocial care in schools (Daniels 2018). Additionally, the organization started historicaldialogue.lk, a digital platform meant to bring together “researchers, organizations, journalists, students and anyone with an open and questioning mind interested in issues relating to memorialization and the post-war situation in Sri Lanka” with a vision of establishing a more formal museum on Sri Lanka’s conflict and war and post-war history. GIZ’s success in history education reform has come from their ability to take on a variety of systematic and direct service interventions

simultaneously, creating a multi-pronged and multi-level approach and its respective network of governmental agencies, NGOs, scholars, activists, and community organizers working in partnership.

Even with all the foundation GIZ has built to create successful reform, they too experience challenges characteristic to NGOs. Compared to other NGOs, GIZ is in a unique position, in that their established relationship with the government grants them much more access and resources to reform than less trusted NGOs. All of GIZ's proposals require approval from both the German and Sri Lankan government, proceeding many negotiations between all three parties (de Mel 2018). For example, the government is reluctant to publicly make changes to *history* education as it would likely instigate criticism that they are favouring one ethno-religious identity over another, but there is much less risk for criticism in reforming *civic* education, leading civic education to be one of GIZ's focuses (de Mel and Feyen 2018). While this negotiation process can be tireless and serve as a barrier to many proposals, after a proposal is approved and taken up as interventions, GIZ already has the backing of the government and does not experience as many governmental barriers down the line. GIZ has rooted itself in the MoE for this exact reason – establishing a new governmental unit, PERU, in order to grant each of their interventions inherent governmental backing (Bloemer 2018). However, because they also require backing by the German government, GIZ often receives the criticism that they are too tied up with western influences – a risk that their partner organizations run by working with them (de Mel and Feyen 2018). To combat this, GIZ encourages their partners to find additional sources of funding, not only to diversify their influence but also to establish themselves as a sustainable intervention, far past GIZ alone (Bloemer 2018). For instance, “if a school puts social cohesion in their plans, the funding comes from zonal funds, from provisional funds, from the World Bank, and from GIZ” and the school is encouraged to establish school networks in service training programs so that they have others going through the same process to consult (Bloemer 2018). Through being adaptive and taking strategic measures to combat the shortcomings of NGO and governmental partnerships, GIZ has managed to overcome such barriers and still put change into place.

One of GIZ's partners that has seen success in history education reform is the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) – using arts and

culture as a vector for teaching youth about Sri Lanka's past. In collaboration with the British Council, CARE launched 'Youth Create,' a program that fostered deep discussions about peace and reconciliation among Sinhala and Tamil youth through multi-linguistically teaching dying art forms (Rislan 2018). From 2014 to 2016, CARE brought together two hundred well-established artists and two hundred beginner artists, teaching youth creative writing, dance, short film production, and stage play acting (Rislan 2018). In one initiative of the program, partnering with the Centre for Performing Arts in Jaffna both during and after the war, they were able to train 180 young people on folk arts, develop folk products, and hold regional plays and performances (Rislan 2018). The audience members were included in the initiative and were allowed to change the narrative, making use of pedagogies radically different to that of classroom settings (Rislan 2018). In another phase of the program, participants created stage dramas that addressed everything from displacement to the trauma of families of missing persons, going so far as to address majority Buddhist communities in the South after riots were carried out against minorities (Rislan 2018). Other phases comprised of the famous Chitrasena dance group teaching dance forms across ethno-religious lines, from Kandyan to Bharatanatyam, and of the British Council conducting writing programs where participants could publish stories not yet well documented in writing (Rislan 2018). In the last component of the program, CARE trained cultural officers and conducted training modules on the meaning of tradition, helping participants go to the roots of traditions and see connections, framing culture not as something that can be 'pure' but rather that cultural mixing is how culture persists through adaptation (Rislan 2018).

For youth heavily affected by the war, CARE offered a program in which they could process their trauma through art, while for those from less heavily-affected areas, the program was a way to learn more about what those who were affected experienced, with all youth involved learning more about their shared culture. The program not only greatly benefited the youth who were able to work together across ethno-religious lines and despite linguistic barriers, but the multi-lingual productions centred around peace reconciliation also engaged as many as 80,000 audience members in its two years of running (Rislan 2018). Hosting 240 forums in Ampara, Kilinochchi, and Mannar, CARE was able to develop modules framing culture as a site for reconciliation, engaging youth in conversations

about the meaning of reconciliation, peace building, gender, and diversity (Rislan 2018). In a conference called 'WINGS' hosted collaboratively between CARE, GIZ, ONUR, and the Ministry of Culture and Heritage, the work produced throughout 'Youth Create' was showcased all over the country, introducing a diverse set of audiences to the multi-lingual and multi-cultural arts (Rislan 2018). Their success inspired a part two of 'Youth Create,' in which three schools in predominantly Tamil Kilinochchi and three schools in predominantly Sinhala Anuradhapura came together with the Centre for Performing Arts to produce a bilingual drama (Rislan 2018). It was key that CARE had built relationships with ONUR and the MoE, as CARE required their help to get the program approved by the regional education departments and established at the provisional school level. Though even with these endorsements, any school principal could have opted out of the program should they have not seen value in a cross-cultural and bilingual partnership (Rislan 2018). Parents and teachers accompanied students as they traveled throughout the country visiting each others' communities, with the adults simultaneously building their own relationships and learning each other's languages while fostering these values for the children (Rislan 2018).

G. The Influence of Peace Camps



With one danger of Sri Lanka's segregated structure being that Tamil and Sinhala youth grow up in isolation of one another, reformists have turned to peace camps as a way to foster relationship-building and reconciliation among Sri Lanka's youth. In 1998, NIPU started a four-day peace camp program for A-Level students, where "Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim students, who were seen as leaders in their own communities, participated in camp activities that included mini-lectures, peace workshops, creative activities, a cultural show, and tours of multiethnic villages" (Malhotra and Liyanage 2005, 915). In their study, *Long-Term Effects of Peace Workshops in Protracted Conflicts*, authors Deepak Malhotra and Sumanasiri Liyanage (2005) evaluated whether such peace camps have any long-term impact – "specifically, are participants any different from nonparticipants in their attitudes and behaviours months or years after they have attended the peace camps?" (909). While participants live together for these four days, discussing topics such as conflict resolution and diversity together, it is very bold to expect behaviours and attitude changes from this short-lived experience, particularly because many youth "returned to a community in which they had [little to] no interactions with the other ethnicity" (Malhotra and Liyanage 2005, 918). However, a comparative study done with Israeli and Palestinian youth who attended peace camps showed that Palestinian participants did not have increased negative attitudes towards Israelis as compared to their nonparticipant peers and Israelis who had fostered intergroup friendships from the camp were more likely to see legitimacy in Palestinian perspectives (Malhotra and Liyanage 2005). While long-term effects weren't as dramatic as one could have hoped, slight attitudinal shifts were seen, and in Sri Lanka's case, participants showed a stronger feeling of empathy towards their peers of another ethnicity (Malhotra and Liyanage 2005).

Some twenty years after NIPU's 1998 inaugural peace camp, Sri Lanka continues to make use of peace workshops and student exchanges as an intervention to the country's ethno-religious divides. Today, activist Ruki Fernando leads many peace camps around the country, often with multiple schools from different ethno-religious backgrounds and geographic locations of the island coming together to share in their learning. Fernando (2018) has now facilitated about ten of these workshops, talking to youth about their understanding of the war with hopes of bringing forth different views and having students learn from one another. At one of Fernando's peace camps held on the outskirts of Negombo, students watched 'Walkout,' a movie about Mexican students in the U.S. walking out from school to protest under-resourced and segregated schools. After watching the film, the students were asked to identify issues important enough to them that they would plan a protest. At another peace camp, students had the opportunity to visit the tea estates and learn more about the history of Tamil migration within Sri Lanka, discuss the vulnerability of internally displaced people, as well as hear from a guest speaker from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. During other parts of the camp, students were able to engage in hands-on activities without needing to communicate in order to strengthen their relationship-building and problem-solving skills across lingual lines. Through these conversations, he hopes to build on what students already know of the war, rejecting Freire's (2000) infamous 'banking method' that students are merely empty vessels to be filled with knowledge. Moreover, this out-of-school experience is often students' first time engaging with Sri Lanka's more recent history outside of their community and across ethno-religious divides.

While the positioning of peace camps as an out-of-school activity allows for the peace education curriculum to circumvent some bureaucratic barriers and break the status quo, peace camp organizers experience unique challenges that also require collaborative strategizing. When working with schools on an individual basis rather on a provincial level, organizers must get approval directly from principals, which can prove to be challenging when these influential individuals don't see peace education as a priority (R. Fernando 2018). Even when principals allow their students to partake in peace camps, very little time is dedicated to topics that require time and must be handled with care (R. Fernando 2018). For example, peace camp organizers are often given just half a day to talk to

students about the entire history of Sri Lanka's civil war, with the school having an expectation that a one-off workshop like this will provide learning and attitudinal shifts to their students (R. Fernando 2018). There is also a concern that because these one-off workshops are presented to students within the greater context of Sri Lankan schooling, students will naturally replicate the pedagogies they are used to, and will thereby reject a reframing of knowledge as subjective and able to be questioned. As mentioned, the students I observed at a peace camp in Hikkaduwa were asked if they faced push back when presenting their communities with alternative perceptions of historical events. Rather than answering this question honestly and sharing the difficulties they would have been up against trying to change their elders' minds, the students answered 'no' – that they did not receive push back. This dishonestly highlights a key gap between the content that is being taught and the pedagogy through which it is being taught, as students are so scared to answer a question *wrong*, that they are not cracking the surface to get to the deeper critical thinking that are being asked of them. Peace camp educators need to explicitly reframe the pedagogy of history education for their students before jumping into the lesson so that students can fully comprehend and appreciate what they're being presented outside of the traditional classroom setting. For this to be accomplished, schools need to dedicate more time to such crucial workshops and educators need foundational teacher trainings in order to discuss pedagogy and such sensitive topics as ethno-religious history and identity with their students.

07. Lessons Learned

A. Building a Network of Multi-Pronged Approaches

After mapping the distinct characteristics prohibiting effective history education reforms and evaluating the tried methods of reform, there are many lessons learned for how we can avoid repeating what has already been done and instead combine various efforts into a multi-pronged approach. You will notice from the diagrams that accompany each tried method of reform that not a single method touched on all seven characteristics of Sri Lanka's history education. For instance, reforms to textbooks have only taken into consideration the barriers that we face due to history being an emotional and biased discipline and due to Sri Lanka's textbook production process, without considering the challenges of the translation process, teacher trainings, predominant pedagogies, the prevalence of exam culture, or the outside forces that influence history education. A true multi-pronged approach should attempt to address all of these characteristics that intertwine to shape Sri Lanka's history education, as addressing one without the others is very much like trying to topple a seven legged stool by removing just one leg – the challenges facing history education will remain standing.

B. Reframing Historiography and Pedagogy

Going hand in hand with the many tried attempts to change the content of Sri Lanka's history education, we need more research and reforms in reframing the historiography and pedagogy of history education. While the current state of history education presents history as a singular, factual truth, the concept of critical historiography contends that history is not fact, but subjective; not truth, but perception; and not singular, but capable of holding multiple perceptions. For this reason, a common thread among many of the scholars, educators, government workers, and community organizers I spoke with was the need for a shift in the understanding of historiography: for history to not be viewed as objective – as mere facts that happened on certain dates – but as an interpretive subject that holds many truths (Warnasuriya 2018; Dewasiri 2018; Wickramasinghe 2018; J. Jayawardena 2018; R. Fernando 2018). In order to change the status quo and break the tendency for history education in Sri Lanka to prioritize Sinhala-Buddhist narratives and throw marginalized narratives

under the rug, we must fight for history to be presented as multiple truths and teach these coexisting narratives (Dewasiri 2018). Through this reframing, reformists hope to reengage students from being passive consumers of history to being individuals who utilize critical thinking to question what they are being presented.

Moreover, this shift in the understanding of historiography can also lead to a shift in pedagogy, as educators can make use of more innovative pedagogies that promote critical historiography. For example, religion in Sri Lanka could be taught comparatively rather than only teaching students their respective religion, with a hope of fostering empathy by having future generations learn the values of Sri Lankans with varying ethno-religious backgrounds to themselves. Similarly, Janaki Jayawardena (2018) encourages taking students outside of the classroom “to showcase that history belongs to community” and to teach them to “read a historical site as a construction,” as even a cultural site like a temple has a subjective story that is constructed from someone’s understanding of the past. With the potential to push the bounds of traditional pedagogies through outside-the-classroom peace workshops, Ruki Fernando (2018) hopes to teach in more participatory ways of learning history rather than through lectures and to draw on what the students already know, urging them to learn from each other and reflect critically on what they’ve been told. Others hope to promote community-based museums or mobile exhibits as avenues of memorializing marginalized histories, as passing down art and culture greatly intertwines with the passing down of history (de Mel 2018; R. Fernando 2018; Rislan 2018). Interwoven in all these examples is the pursuit to use history education to teach students the stories of the past that are rarely documented – from the history of influential women in Sri Lanka, to communities like the Burghers and the Veddas; from to the changing landscape of the environment, to the impact class and caste systems have had throughout history (S. Jayawardena 2018; R. Fernando 2018). History education must be expanded to be comprehensive of the wide scope of Sri Lankan identities and the richness of the past.

C. Learning from Success Stories: Grassrooted Trust

With Sri Lanka’s government having such a high level of bureaucracy, turnover, and gatekeeper tactics in a context where history production needs to be

approved by the state, we must learn from other reforms that have managed to circumvent these obstacles. Having similar challenges to that of history education reform, health education reform in Sri Lanka has passed great milestones, earning itself the approval of many school administrations, teachers, parents, and students, without needing to appease the state. Grassrooted Trust, an organization that is lauded for successfully implementing health education reforms, began their journey with little success, providing HIV prevention and gender identity workshops (Billimoria 2018). Things kicked off for Grassrooted Trust when they began offering workshops on how youth can protect themselves from cyber exploitation – a topic that parents and schools were eager to teach their students (Billimoria 2018). Of the schools they worked with at the time, two schools allowed them to go beyond cyber exploitation and develop a more comprehensive, age-specific curriculum on sexuality, gender, and relationships for health science teachers to incorporate into the curriculum (Billimoria 2018). By starting with topics the public already cared about, like cyber exploitation, they succeeded at building relationships with decision makers – in this case parents and school administrators – to move forward a more wrap-around-approach that required a great deal of trust to implement. Today, Grassrooted Trust works with sixty schools in Batticaloa and fifty schools in Colombo in long-term engagements, providing schools with a wrap-around-approach of teacher trainings, pedagogy and exam reforms, and knowledge sharing sessions among various schools (Billimoria 2018). Their goal is to build a foundation so that they can one day be taken out of the equation, but they would have already provided schools with all the tools they need for sustainable reform (Billimoria 2018).

D. Being Practical While Dreaming Big

As we explore the interconnected web of systems limiting history education and what reforms have and have not gained momentum, it is imperative for us as collaborators to strike a balance between implementing calculated and feasible strategies of reform while also dreaming big and believing that we can change the status quo. History education reforms “run a high risk of discontent, with so many vested interests and moving pieces running in contradiction of each other,” and yet every time we put it off or convince ourselves that it’s not worth the effort, future generations of Sri Lankans are learning a singular narrative of history that prioritizes Sinhala-Buddhism and further divides our society

(Bloemer 2018). Another reform process will begin again this year, in 2020, with an estimated curriculum integration date of 2023, so there is a dire need that we understand the value of wholistic reform in order to enact sustained change in time (Danapala 2018). With the discipline, the textbooks, the translation, the teachers, the pedagogy, the exam culture, and the external influences of history education being so deeply rooted and working in unison against having coexisting narratives of history, we must develop reforms that works within the system and simultaneously attempt to dismantle the system entirely. Scholar Nira Wickramasinghe (2018) explains this contradiction: “ideally you’d want a completely different way of teaching history, but if you want to implement something quickly, which is what we wanted to do, then you can’t completely challenge what exists; you have to implement things within a given structure.” For example, we may not be able to change the history production process from being developed in Sinhala and then translated to Tamil, but we can encourage the government to at least hire translators that have a background in history. Similarly, we may not be able to change the fact that as many as half of history teachers at the grade school level do not having a formal background in history, but we can at least provide them with simplified, technology-driven resources in both Sinhala and Tamil that can teach them and their students coexisting narratives of history using multimedia audio-visuals (R. Fernando 2018). It is most important for us to remember that reforming history education is “a task that never ends and need people’s energy. We cannot expect it to be easy, as we only learn in practice” (Bloemer 2018).

08. Conclusion

After hearing from those on the frontlines of history education reform – educators, policy makers, academics, and NGO workers – the answer to the following questions became more clear: *Why, in a society burdened with ethno-religious tensions and a lack of shared history, does history education continue to exclude marginalized histories and silo communities over ethno-religious divides? When history education has so much potential to give future generations a shared understanding, why has Sri Lanka's history education largely not changed?* Just as the pedagogy of critical historiography teaches us, there is no one right answer to this question. However, there are multiple systems working simultaneously to shape our existing structure of history education – the emotion and bias of the discipline, the textbooks, the translation, the teachers, the pedagogy, the exam culture, and the external influences. In unison, these systems make it incredibly hard to pose reforms, because when one reforms textbooks for example, there is still the issue of how national exams, teachers, and outside media will depict this same moment in history. Despite the prevalent perception that reform to history textbooks is the panacea to the problems we see in Sri Lanka's history education, textbook reforms must be held in unison with reforms to these other areas of influence in order to see changes that are both impactful and sustained. Addressing one factor without addressing the others is very much like trying to topple a seven-legged stool by removing just one leg – the challenges facing history education will remain standing. One must take a multi-pronged approach to address these seven factors, but the good news is no one needs to do it alone. From activists working with international peace camps, to NGOs working on teacher trainings, and policy makers working on textbooks, the structure of reform efforts has a way of siloing key stakeholders and because of this siloing, we lack a full picture of who is working on what and how we can work together. We hope that this project serves as a catalyst to frontline reformists working together to combine their efforts in tackling the complex web of challenges facing history education.

As we reimagine the framework through which we teach history, we return to the sentiment that scholars, educators, government workers, and community organizers alike shared – a push for history to not be viewed as objective – as mere facts that happened on certain dates – but as an interpretive subject that

holds many truths (Warnasuriya 2018; Dewasiri 2018; Wickramasinghe 2018; J. Jayawardena 2018; R. Fernando 2018). We must prioritize critical historiography – doing away with a competitive exam cultures that calls for the pedagogy of rote memorization and every question having one right answer. We instead stive to teach history from multiple perspectives, as the “History and Community” project intended, bringing Tamil and Sinhala students together to understand how they’re varying understandings of history fit together, particularly as it relates to histories that are no longer understood as shared across ethno-religious lines (J. Jayawardena 2018). Because history is an emotional and biased discipline, there will always be ways we can improve, centring the most marginalized communities and portraying coexisting narratives of the past that we have yet to unearth. As we take on this ever-going task of doing better for the future of society, generation after generation, we must continuously remind ourselves of Paulo Freire’s (2000) wise words: “There’s no such thing as neutral education. Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom” (34). It is up to us to choose.

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Appendix A - Interview Participants

Participants	Description	Date
Sulakshana de Mel & Christoph Feyen	Technical Advisor and Programme Manager at GIZ respectively	October 12, 2018
Sarani Jayawardena	Author of “Conflicted Curricula: The Politics of Civil War and Ethnicity in Sri Lanka’s History Textbooks”	October 15, 2018
Ruki Fernando	Activist and Organizer of Student Exchange Peace Camps	October 24, 2018
Chandima Danapala	One of two Staff in the NIE History Department	November 1, 2018
Ahamed Rislana	Member of CARE’s “Youth Create” Team	November 27, 2018
Sulakshana de Mel	Technical Advisor at GIZ	November 5, 2018
Nirmal Dewasiri	Professor at the University of Colombo and Former Member of the NIE Council	November 12, 2018
Janaki Jayawardena	History Professor at the University of Colombo	November 12, 2018
Marsha Daniels	Technical Advisor of Psychosocial Care at GIZ	November 13, 2018
Nira Wickramasinghe	Former Professor at the University of Colombo, Curriculum Reformist under President Bandaranaike, and Author of “Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities”	November 25, 2018
Amal Jayawardena	Author of “Problems Teaching History in Ethnically Divided Societies: The Case of Sri Lanka” and one of the founding members of NIPU	November 28, 2018
Hans Billimoria	Director of Grassrooted Trust	November 29, 2018
John Rogers & Ramla Wahab-Salman	Members of the American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies Team	November 30, 2018
Anne Figurado	Teacher from Mannar, interviewed at a Student Exchange Peace Camp	December 3, 2018
Ruediger Bloemer	Programme Coordinator at GIZ on the Education for Social Cohesion Project	December 11, 2018
Mihiri Warnasuriya	Author of “Building the ‘Sri Lankan Nation’ through Education: The Identity Politics of Teaching History in a Multicultural Post-War Society”	December 13, 2018

International Centre for Ethnic Studies

Since 1982, the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) has contributed to the world of ideas and has informed policy and practice through research, dialogue, the creative arts and other interventions. The ICES has been an important player in the areas of reconciliation, justice, gender and human rights and has been particularly influential in shaping policy and public imagination on issues of gender equality, ethnic diversity, religious coexistence, and constitutional reform in Sri Lanka. The institution's goal is to contribute towards relevant rigorous intellectual traditions that recognize our common humanity, promote diverse identities, and generate ideas that inform and guide policies and institutions in order to promote justice, equity and peaceful coexistence.

Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) is a Germany-based foundation working in South Asia as in other parts of the world on the subjects of critical social analysis and civic education. It promotes a sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic social order, and aims to present alternative approaches to society and decision-makers. Research organizations, groups for self-emancipation and social activists are supported in their initiatives to develop models which have the potential to deliver greater social and economic justice.

The Battleground of Sri Lankan History Education: Barriers to Teaching Inclusive Histories

Natasha Karunaratne

As the separation between those who lived through Sri Lanka's civil war and those who come to learn about the war grows, future generations' understanding of the war becomes the war itself - all factual truth diminishes and makes room for one generation's perception to be passed down to the next. What is key here is that there is no singular perception of an event, but rather competing perceptions - and these perceptions compete in the space of history production.

The teaching of history education is made up of a complex web of barriers that have caused history reforms to fall short. While much research has been done on why and how history education should be used as a tool for peace education, few have explored why after such research, Sri Lankan history education continues to exclude marginalized histories and silo communities over ethno-religious divides. The structure of reform efforts has a way of siloing academics, organizers, policy makers, and educators and because of this siloing, we lack a full picture of who is working on what and how we can work together, to strategize in shared efforts and in solidarity. This paper serves to map the multiple facets of Sri Lanka's history education structure, explore why tried reforms have and have not gained momentum, and theorize as to how multiple stakeholders can strategize together based on lessons learned.

Natasha Karunaratne specializes in educational studies and conflict studies, with an interest in post-conflict education.



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