The politics of a second largest minority

-or the fragmentation of Sri Lankan Muslim Politics after year 2000

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“Muslims and Tamils in the North-East have the same problem. But Tamils have taken to the bullet. We have rejected the bullet and gone for the ballot, and by making the ballot the bullet, we have been accommodated!

..But in solving the north-eastern problem, the Government and Norway have supported the bullet. Had we also taken to the bullet, we would have been an equal partner in these negotiations!”

SLMC-member, June 2006
PREFACE

First of all, I would like to thank all Sri Lankans, particularly the many Muslims, who have shared their political visions and understanding of what is going on in Sri Lankan politics with me. As a newcomer to the study of Sri Lanka I have had much to learn, and I am glad to have done so helped by Sri Lankans from different walks of life in addition to what I have read in books, reports and news articles. A large amount of foreigners have come to Sri Lanka the latest years in relation to the peace process and the tsunami, and it must be challenging at times for Sri Lankans to explain local complexities to all of us.

Thanks also to my two supervisors Wenche Hauge, PRIO and Kristian Stokke (both V05-H07), University of Oslo who both have been patient with me in the development of this thesis. I took a break from studies after the fieldwork to work one year, and in this period the conflict landscape in Sri Lanka changed slightly. I would also like to thank the Institute for Political Science at the University of Oslo for its grant support without which my field visit to Sri Lanka in 2006 would not have been possible. Thanks also to the Nordic Centre for Asian Studies (NIAS) in Copenhagen, that in March 2007 granted me a two week stay with their institute with its solid Asian library. I am also very grateful to my parents who provided me with support of various sorts all along the way. Thanks also to my friend Ashti who is a living example of that ethnic identities are not so clear-cut for all Sri Lankans.
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**Acronyms:**

ACMA: All Ceylon Moors’ Association
ACMC: All Ceylon Muslim Congress
ACML: All Ceylon Muslim League
DUA: Democratic Unity Alliance
EPDP: Eelam People’s Democratic Party
FP: Federal Party
ISGA: Internal Self-Government Administration
JHU: Jatika Hela Urumaya
JVP: Janata Vimukti Peramuna (People’s Liberation Front)
LTTE: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MULF: Muslim United Liberation Front
MNA: Muslim National Alliance
MP: Member of Parliament
NEPC: North-Eastern Provincial Council
NMC: National Muslim Congress
NUA: National Unity Alliance
PA: People’s Alliance (lead by SLFP)
PSM: Peace Secretariat for Muslims
PSNM: Peace Secretariat for Northern Muslims
P-TOMS: Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure
SLFP: Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLMC: Sri Lanka Muslim Congress
TNA: Tamil National Alliance
TULF: Tamil United Liberation Front
UNP: United National Party
UPFA: United People’s Freedom Alliance
INTRODUCTION

How do political leaders of a second largest minority ethnic group, in a country where political leaders mainly representing the two larger ethnic groups are in conflict, formulate and structure the political campaigning on behalf of their group? What political issues are of concern for the group and what strategies do their political leaders use to forward the group’s interests?

Muslims, comprising 8% of the country’s population is the third largest ethnic group in Sri Lanka. Many Muslims, however, do also fall under the largest Sri Lankan minority category of persons for whom Tamil is the mother tongue (approximately 23% of the national population, DCS, 1981) in relation to the majority group (approximately 73% of the national population, ibid.) for whom Sinhala is the mother tongue. A Muslim political ethnic identity has never the less survived in spite of attempts by Tamil politicians and LTTE to try to cover Tamil-speaking Muslims under a political agenda for the Tamil speaking people of Sri Lanka. The strongest expression of this forged Muslim political identity is the political party named Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC).

The aim of this study is to analyse contemporary Muslim politics in Sri Lanka. I explain why the Muslim political voice since 2000 has fragmented into several Muslim-lead and Sinhala-lead parties by analysing Muslims’ intra-group and inter-group relations with regard to ethnic ideologies, organisational forms and political strategies used by Muslim political leaders who say they represent Muslims’ political interests.

My intention here is not to claim that all Muslims in Sri Lanka think that only Muslim political leaders rightfully can represent them, or that there is a cluster of political interests that unproblematically may be termed Muslims’ interests. Neither do I wish to make any such claims regarding how many Tamils and Sinhalese persons think that political allegiance and interests should or do follow ethnic lines. Indeed, a considerable amount of Muslims seem to support political parties in which the majority of politicians are non-Muslim. The study is, however, based on an understanding that a considerable amount of political leaders in Sri Lanka with considerable popular support to some extent think that political representation should follow ethnic lines. Some Muslim political leaders are among these. Ethnicity therefore remains a considerable factor in Sri Lankan politics and society both for political campaigning, policy formulation and policy implementation.

The context of Muslim politics is one of a protracted 25 year old civil war between the Tamil militants and particularly the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that claims to be the
sole representative of Tamil speakers, and the Sri Lankan Government lead by politicians elected by a largely Sinhalese electorate. Along with other factors, the Muslim community complicates the conflict context, and has been described as a community that is “caught in the crossfire” (De Silva, 1998).

Muslims have been represented in Sri Lankan parliamentary politics since the country’s independence in 1947 in the country’s two largest and Sinhala-dominated parties UNP and SLFP. The first Muslim ethnic party, the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC), emerged in the early 1980s simultaneously with the radicalisation of Tamil secessionism. SLMC developed into a strong tool for voicing Muslims’ political interests. After the death of its charismatic founding leader in 2000, SLMC has however split into several parties. Muslim politicians are also still elected to Parliament through larger Sinhalese-lead parties. Muslim parliamentary politics is therefore at present fragmented into about seven parties.

If Muslims in Sri Lanka do have a set of common political interests that may be termed “Muslims’ interests”, a term that is commonly used by Muslim politicians, then why are Muslim politicians split into different parties? Are these present organisational splits between Muslim politicians merely results of elite rivalry or do the splits reflect severe more profound differences between different groups of Muslims with conflicting political interests? This study aims to analyse these questions.

In chapter one, the research question of the study is explained, and central concepts and the methodology are introduced. In chapter two I will briefly describe Sri Lankan politics and who the Sri Lankan Muslims are. In chapter three the theoretical foundations for the study, in terms of ethnic political mobilisation, economic constellations of ethnic communities, and possible strategies for coalition building in multiethic contexts, are described. I also present the structure of the empirical analysis of Sri Lankan Muslim politics. In the first part of chapter four I will analyse the community level of Muslim politics. I will analyse what sorts of politically relevant unity and division is to be found among different Muslims in Sri Lanka, not the least in Muslims relations to members of other ethnic groups on the island. In the second part of chapter four I will present Muslim politicians, the parties they are members of, and what these see as Muslims’ political interests. In the third part of chapter four I will briefly sum up the findings from the empirical analysis to identify the core causes for why Muslim politics today is fragmented in about seven parties represented in Parliament.
1.1 The Research Question and Operationalisation of Central Concepts

A handful of writers have earlier addressed Sri Lankan Muslim politics. K. M. de Silva (f.ex. 1998) has for example written about how Muslims, as opposed to the assertive Tamils, politically behaved as a “good minority” by choosing to align with the majority Sinhala political forces and thereby secured cultural protection. Ameer Ali (f.ex. 2004) has written about how Muslims in Sri Lanka, motivated by the pan-national values of Islam, have failed to develop or support nationalism in Sri Lanka. Some (for example Knoerzer, 1998 or Ismail, 1995) have described SLMC and Sri Lankan Muslim politics as identity politics. Newer reports (f.ex. ICG, 2007) have described grievances of Muslims in the Eastern Province in relation to the conflict.

Few have, however, yet written academically about Muslim politics after the many splits in the SLMC-movement since year 2000 and possible explanations for these splits. Is the organisational fragmentation of Muslim politics a symbol of that the common Muslim ethnic-political identity that developed from 1986 is splitting into pieces? Or, on the contrary, is the common Muslim political identity further harnessing itself, and only at present disturbed by elite rivalry engaged in competition for Muslims’ support?

To analyse this topic, the guiding research question for this study is: Why is the Muslim political voice in Sri Lankan politics at national level today organisationally divided into seven political parties, when it in year 2000 was divided on only three parties? Three supporting research questions are: What is the community basis of the Muslim politics in terms of intra-group and inter-group relations? What is seen as the core political interests of Muslims and why? and: What political strategies are used by the Muslim political leaders to forward Muslims’ political interests and why? These three questions, formulated in basis of theories of ethnic political mobilisation, guide the empirical analysis of the study.

By Muslim politics I mean the political campaigning on behalf of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka by Muslim politicians, political parties and organisations who claim to represent what they term “Muslims’ political interests”. I will here focus on Muslim MPs as the main actors of Muslim politics. More broadly, Muslim politics involve the Muslim community in Sri Lanka who may vote for these politicians, and whose interests are thought to be promoted by the Muslim politicians. I refer to the Muslims in Sri Lanka as an ethnic-political group not because I believe they, or for that sake any other ethnic group, form a once and for all fixed socio-cultural group whose political interests are uniform, but as a working definition to shape the study. To present Muslims in Sri Lanka as an ethnic group
with common political interests lends legitimacy from politicians and political movements in Sri Lanka, such as SLMC, that do campaign for Muslims’ political interests and have gained considerable electoral support by Muslim voters.

By political interests I understand the interests and issues that the political actors are mobilising for. Political interests may for example be about particular types of distribution of state resources or other goods under the control of a government such as public sector jobs. Such interests may be termed economic interests. These may be about economic policies, natural management or other types of regulations that may be seen as not directly related to persons’ ethnic identities. Outcomes of various such policies, though, often affect members of different groups differently. The ethnic groups’ political interests will accordingly be that policies are shaped in a way that will affect them positively. Policy for devolution of power is for example a much discussed issue in contemporary Sri Lankan politics. Different schemes for devolution of power will affect different ethnic communities, as well as otherwise defined groups, differently. Other political interests may be termed cultural, and involve policies of identity that may also include ethnic markers such as language, religion and cultural traditional practices.

By political strategies I understand the avenues the political actors use to campaign for their political goals or to influence political decision-making. Strategies may for example be to form new parties to voice the political interests of the group, while joining an already existing party to influence it is another strategy. Parties also have to make strategic choices in building coalitions with other parties or actors claiming to represent other groups. In the strategy making, politicians also have to choose what political interests he or she should focus on promoting, and what issues he or she may be willing to compromise on. The main aim for political movements is to obtain power over policies and their implementation.

The period I mainly will focus on here is from year 2000 to present. SLMC’s former leader, Mr. Ashraff, died this year. His departure from Muslim politics created a leadership vacuum that had its effects on Muslim politics. I have included his tenure in the analysis to capture more of the background for how and why Muslim politics has changed. Year 2002 represents another critical moment for Muslim politics, since the ceasefire introduced between the government and LTTE in February that year paved the way for changed ground-level conditions in areas where many Muslims of the Eastern Province live. The negotiations that followed were given considerable attention in Muslim politics.
1.2 Methodology

This case study of Muslim politics is designed as a theoretically interpretative case study. Theories of ethnic political mobilisation and ethnic political parties are used to explain the base for Muslim politics in Sri Lanka and the choices of Muslim MPs given the contextual situation for the Muslim community. The study is based on information on Sri Lankan society and politics as well as on Muslim Politicians in Sri Lanka’s explanation of their political choices.

The empirical material of the study is partly based on a field study in Sri Lanka in May and June 2006 during which semi-structured interviews were made with several Muslim politicians and civil society actors. The interview method was applied since I have desired to represent Muslim politics in Sri Lanka as it is seen from the viewpoint of Muslim political actors themselves. However, in an interview situation, the information obtained will be influenced by how the informant views the interviewer. Coming as a Norwegian to Sri Lanka in a period where there was at least some trust in the post-2002 Norwegian-mediated peace talks may have made most of my informants focus on political issues related to the peace negotiations. Many of my informants thought that Muslims were not given fair representation and attention in the peace talks, and several thought that the Norwegians should push harder for Muslim participation. Some expressed satisfaction with that the “Muslim factor” in Sri Lankan politics was finally given attention to by Norwegians. “Go home and talk to Solheim\(^1\) about us”, one informant joked, albeit possibly with a latent hope that I could play such an advocacy role towards the mediators in the peace process. Several informants warmly welcomed me and helped me to get in touch with other persons of relevance to my study.

A few of the interviewed found it peculiar that I, as a non-Muslim person, was interested in studying Muslim politics. International alignment patterns were seen by some to imply that the western world supports Tamils as Christians, while Muslims could primarily expect sympathy from Muslim countries. I generally informed the informants that I wanted to study Muslim politics in the perspective of minority politics. Some top-level politicians were difficult to meet, possibly partly because they fear being reached by the wrong persons. Not few Sri Lankan politicians have been assassinated.

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\(^1\) The former Norwegian Special Envoy to the Sri Lankan peace process and Norway’s present Minister of International Development.
In order to be able to quote the words of my informants correctly, most interviews were recorded by use of a video camera. Where informants did not like this, I instead took notes from the interviews. Several persons liked to be interviewed in front of a camera, and my use of a video camera did not prevent several informants from freely taking about issues of concern to them. Interviews were conducted in English since all informants except some persons in Puttalam were able to express themselves well in English. In Puttalam two local Muslim NGO-workers were interpreting from Tamil to English for me.

In my sample of informants I have attempted to cover Muslim Parliamentarians from all parties, along with persons from the Muslim civil society. I therefore interviewed Muslim Parliamentarians of all political parties except the two Muslim MPs in JVP that I did not reach. It may be argued that the JVPers should anyhow not be included in a study of Muslim politics since the Sinhala Marxist JVP attempts to be ethnically blind in its policies. Muslim politicians in the Sinhala majority parties UNP and SLFP do sometimes speak up on behalf of Muslims’ political interests. The Muslims in JVP anyhow constitutes a small percentage (8%) of the 24 Muslim Parliamentarians after the 2004 election. I have also interviewed a few Muslim party members who are not represented in Parliament, as well as several members of Muslim civil society organisations, academics and normal persons in locations such as Colombo, Ampara, Kandy and Puttalam. Several of the Muslims I talked to in Colombo were originally from other parts of the country. Only two women were formally interviewed for the study. This was a result of how strikingly under-represented women are in Sri Lankan Muslim politics and Sri Lankan politics in general. Only 11, or 4.9% of Sri Lanka’s 225 MPs are women, and 2 of the 24 Muslim MPs are women.

The Sri Lankan context has slightly changed since I made my interviews in Sri Lanka in the summer of 2006. Information obtained through interviews may reflect informants’ opinions by mid-2006 and may now, by autumn 2007, have changed. However, a considerable amount of information on Muslim politics and its context is drawn from other primary and secondary sources such as academic works, newspapers and web-sites of Muslim organisations. This has allowed the information obtained through interviews to be balanced with opinions and realities from other time periods, along with perspectives of non-Muslim authors. Internet versions of newspapers such as the South Asian Media Net, Muslim Guardian, Sunday Times, TamilNet and other have been used. Reporting in Sri Lankan media sources is often biased in favour of different political actors and the ethnic ideologies these promote. TamilNet is for example commonly seen as an LTTE-friendly news site while several Government-owned newspapers are inclined to report in favour of Government policies, particularly under emergency rule. The web site of the Peace Secretariat for
Muslims (PSM) and Muslim Guardian are web-based news services tailored for the Sri Lankan Muslim community.

The complexity of the conflict context in the north-east, where presently several Tamil paramilitary outfits operates along with different politicians with varying hidden or open ethnic agendas, at times makes verification of who are behind different incidents for what political agendas quite difficult. TamilNet may for example report on incidents and murders where it seems likely that LTTE is behind simply by vaguely stating that “unidentified gunmen”, possibly acting on behalf of a “third force” committed the crimes. Sometimes, however, it seems quite likely that “third forces” actually are behind attacks. Army spokespersons may similarly claim that LTTE is behind atrocities that may have been committed by the Government army. The conflict landscape in the north-east is complex and intransparent, and Sri Lankan journalists do not work under easy conditions. According to Journalists Without Borders (JWB, 2007), reporters reporting on Government links with paramilitaries have been killed, and Government control over media has increased as the warfare escalated in late 2006. Hate-campaigns have been launched in the Sinhala-extremist press, and independent media were in 2006 regularly threatened by supporters or opponents of the Tamil Tigers (ibid.). I have anyhow used information from Sri Lankan news to learn about different events under the understanding that the analysis of events in the reports may not be commonly agreed.

I have also included information of election results and similar in order to describe how much support the Muslim political leaders have. Surveys are not available over how many Muslims support the different Sinhala-majority parties such as UNP, SLFP or JVP, and whether Muslim support to these parties should be taken as particular support to the Muslim MPs elected in through these. The representations of these as practitioners of Muslim politics in this study is however justified by that they sometimes speak up for Muslims’ political interests, and that their opinions correspond to opinions that I have also found among Muslims who told me they support UNP or SLFP.

Not much statistical material on the socioeconomic conditions of ethnic groups in Sri Lanka is available either, so such information has had to rely largely on people’s assumptions or analysis of data per district. It must be remembered that if information was to be gathered on socioeconomic conditions of Sri Lankans on basis of ethnic group memberships, it could make ethnic group memberships to be seen as even more politically relevant than they are today. On the other hand, information on socioeconomic conditions gathered on ethnic group basis could make claims of ethnic discrimination more substantiated and possibly make visible real patterns of ethnic discrimination. A possible source of error in the
information I have obtained on socio-economic conditions is therefore that much of it has been presented to me by Muslims, and thus rest on their possibly biased perceptions. I have, however, to a considerable extent also used written sources by non-Muslim writers and available statistical material published for example by the Sri Lankan Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) in my presentation of conditions.

The information obtained from the mentioned sources will be used to conduct a form of ethnic-ideological analysis of the Sri Lankan Muslim community and Sri Lankan Muslim politicians' viewpoints, based on theories over ethnic political mobilisation described in the theoretical chapter.
2. CONTEXT

Figure 2.1: Map showing population density per district, Sri Lanka, 2005
Sinhalese (73.9% of the total population)  Sri Lanka Tamils (12.7%)

Figure 2.2: Habitation pattern of the four largest ethnic groups in Sri Lanka as in percentage of the total population in each district by 1981 for the Northern and Eastern Provinces and by 2001 for the rest of the country. (Source: Wikipedia/DCS, 2001).
2.1 Ethnic Groups and their Habitation Patterns in Sri Lanka

Providing census figures for persons’ identity factors such as language and religion is problematic as a person may for example learn to speak several languages, follow practices of several religions or have a mixed ethnic identity because of intermarriages in the family. Accounts of how many persons that belong to ethnic categories have anyhow been and are still made in Sri Lanka since the 19th century.

The distribution of members of the four largest ethnic groups in Sri Lanka, that together make up about 99% of Sri Lanka’s population, are presented in figure 1. The Sinhalese speak Sinhala while the two groups of Tamils speak Tamil as their mother tongue. Many Muslims speak Tamil, but an increasing amount of Muslims also speak Sinhala as their first or second language. English is spoken by well-educated members of all communities. Most Sinhalese are Buddhists (69.3% of the national population, DCS, 1981), and many Tamils are Hindus (15.5% of the national population, ibid). A considerable amount of Tamils and a smaller group of Sinhalese are Christians (7.6% of the total population, ibid). Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils both trace their history in Sri Lanka 2000-2500 years back to pre-colonial kingdoms. The Indian Sri Lankan Tamils were brought to Sri Lanka by British colonial masters to work in the tea gardens of the hill country, or entered at other times for other reasons. Among the Sinhala a distinction has earlier been drawn between Kandyan and lowland-Sinhalese. Traditionally there are caste divisions internally in the Sinhala and Tamil communities. Other small minorities in Sri Lanka are the indigenous group Veddhas and descendants of Europeans called Burghers.

Moors are Muslims. About 8% of Sri Lanka’s national population are Muslims (DCS, 2001). The term “Moor” itself is an English version of the word “Mauri” that the Portuguese colonialists gave Muslims worldwide. There is also a group of Muslims of Malay origins (ca. 0.3% of the total population, ibid.) that came to Sri Lanka after having been expelled from Java by the Dutch colonial masters there.
2. 2. Sri Lankan Politics

Sri Lanka\(^2\) was in pre-colonial time and largely under Portuguese, Dutch and British colonisers (1505-1947) ruled by regionally based kings. Moves towards democratic governance in Europe made the British introduce a legislative council in Ceylon in 1820, and the island became an experimental ground for representational engineering. Representation of Ceylonese persons to the legislature was introduced on communal basis. Sinhalese, Tamil and Burghers were initially allowed representation, while up-country Sinhalese and Muslims got one representative each in 1888. The further gradual increase of communally defined representatives led to competition between Colombo elite members wishing to represent variously defined groups. (Wijesinha, 2005: 56-66). At the same time, ethnic and religious revivalist movements were created on behalf of Sinhala Buddhist ethnicity geographically centred in the south, while Tamil ethnicity was focussed on the north, where most inhabitants were Tamils. Sri Lankan liberation movement was thus divided between these two groups’ rivalling nationalisms.

The last British-made constitution for Ceylon before its independence in 1948 did, however, not include any ethnic concerns or minority safeguards in spite of Tamils’ campaigning for it. The new constitution created a Parliamentary system much like the majoritarian British system with a first-past-the-post electoral system. Ethnicity was however not that easy to wipe out of politics. The first political parties formed after Ceylon’s independence were the United National Party (UNP) and the All Tamil Ceylon Congress (ACTC). These were both Colombo-based conservative elite parties. The Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) and the Federal Party (FP) soon evolved as representatives for the wider masses of the Sinhalese and Tamils respectively. These both were in favour of welfare policies and an expansive state. SLFP appealed to the masses of the Sinhala populace while the FP represented the assertive north-eastern Tamil middle class.

North-eastern Tamil regionalist nationalism grew stronger as the welfare- and redistributional policies under the nation building project came to favour Sinhalese interests. UNP and SLFP, who regularly shifted between government and opposition, both found the core of their support among Sinhalese voters and were eager to be seen as the truest representatives of these. The first thing the Sinhala-lead government did to increase the strength of the Sinhalese in Ceylon after independence was to disenfranchise Tamils and

\(^2\) until 1972 called Ceylon
Muslims of Indian origins. In 1956 Sinhala made the only official language on the island, replacing English and excluding Tamil. This was detrimental to Tamils who had been the favoured community by the British to serve in the colonial administration. Change in the university admission system adversely impacted on admissions of Tamils who used to be the best educated community, and Buddhism was made the state religion. (DeVotta, 2004). Sinhalese persons were settled in the north-east in state colonisation programmes to alter the ethnic dominance of Tamils there. UNP and SLFP used their power over the expansive welfare state to widen their patronage networks with party followers during their rule mostly to the detriment of the minorities. This fostered corruption and politicisation of the state apparatus that became prey to the major Sinhala parties (Wagner, 2003). The policies were, however, not beneficial to all Sinhalese. In the early 1970s Sri Lanka experienced an economic crisis caused by rising oil prices, population growth and high unemployment. Frustrated unemployed Sinhalese youth turned against the country’s establishment through the Marxist organisation Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP).

In 1978 a new constitution introduced a French-American styled mixed Presidential-Parliamentary system. Proportional representation was introduced as an electoral principle to facilitate the entrance of smaller parties to the Parliament to diversify the opposition. The principle was also established that Sri Lanka was a unitary state (Wijesinha, 2005:91-99) The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) was established in 1976 as the daughter party for FP as a non-violent struggler for Tamil self-rule in the North-East. More assertive youths, however, felt that Parliamentary politics had given Tamils nothing and established militant groups on behalf of Tamil nationalism. These started to show aggression towards Sinhalese settlers and Sri Lankan military personnel posted in the North. This again triggered anti-Tamil riots organised by Sinhala politicians. Democracy in Sri Lanka faced a critical period in the 1980s and early 1990s under illiberal governments that banned parties calling for secession, cancelled elections, controlled the media, introduced strict security laws and used brutal methods in its warfare against the militants. Fighting did also take place between rival Tamil militant groups that were trying to control the society in the north-east that engaged in ethnic outbidding for Tamils’ support by disfavoring other groups (Bush, 2003). The population in the north-east experienced much hardship because of the brutal operations and human rights abuses by both Tamil militants and the Sri Lankan army. SLMC was formed in the east to disassociate Muslims from militant Tamil nationalism.

In 1987 India was invited in by the President (SLFP) to curb Tamil militarism. In the Indo-Lankan accord power was devolved to the North-Eastern Provincial Council (NEPC). The Northern and Eastern Provinces were merged to gather Tamil-speaking areas under one
administration. Several Tamil militant groups lay down their arms and contested for elections in the NEPC, but the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) upheld its struggle. The Tamil parties in NEPC, however, soon demanded stronger devolution of powers to the NEPC. The new UNP President Premadasa in 1989 therefore dissolved the NEPC and entered into negotiations with LTTE and strengthened them to fight other groups in the north-east. These soon broke down and war resumed. LTTE thereafter was the strongest Tamil militant movement, and came to rule over pockets of territory in the north-east.

In 1995 there was a new peace initiative by the new multi-ethnically-minded SLFP President, Mrs. Kumaratunga, allied to SLMC. However, negotiations soon broke down and Mrs. Kumaratunga lead her “war for peace” strategy of trying to weaken LTTE militarily while holding talks with them (Uyangoda, 2006). Proposals for devolution of power were drafted but were not supported by UNP. The President therefore held elections in 2000 to alter the Parliamentary balance. New elections had, however, again to be held in 2001 after SLMC withdrew their support for the Government. This time, UNP won the elections allied to SLMC. In the election campaign, UNP had promised to enter into negotiations with LTTE. A ceasefire between the UNP-led Government and LTTE was thus signed in 2002, followed by a negotiation process aiming at gradual introduction of interim arrangements of devolution of power in the north-east. Most Tamil parties in Parliament gathered as TNA and aligned with LTTE. SLFP and JVP, however, opposed the negotiations that they saw to appease LTTE.

Norway had been invited in as a facilitator to the negotiations, and the talks were structured to take place between the Government and LTTE. Norwegians were criticised by various local actors for being biased in favour of LTTE, but in fact zealously guarded their interpretation of the “parity of status between two negotiators” principle that was based on the 2001 military power balance and liberal negotiation theories, and did not take into account several other relevant local actors. This parity status was continuously challenged over the next years by changes in military strength, the amount of violations against the ceasefire and in terms of their different status as democratic or military political actors.

Seven sessions of talks were held between the UNP-led government and LTTE in 2002-2003. In the Oslo agreement (2003), LTTE agreed to leave their quest for secession and instead work for maximal federalism. However, LTTE soon forwarded an expansive proposal for an Interim Self-Government Administration (ISGA) for the North-Eastern province. This was criticised by JVP and JHU that claimed that LTTE used negotiations strategically to secede an LTTE-state. In an interview with TamilNet in 2004, LTTE’s chief ideologue A. Balasingham told directly that a number of fighters had been recruited in the
east during the ceasefire “for the cause of liberating the Tamil Homeland constituting the north-east” (TamilNet, 17.03.2004). In 2003, LTTE unilaterally suspended the formal negotiations.

A new parliamentary election held in 2004 brought SLFP back into the Government, allied to the now 40 MP strong JVP. According to polls, economic issues were equally important to the voters as peace negotiations (Jayasuriya, 2005). The broader population had seen little economic improvement during UNP’s rule, and this may explain the emerging importance of the socialist JVP with its core support base in poor Sinhala rural areas. JVP’s anti-devolution stance, however, entailed a challenge for the peace negotiations. The recently established Buddhist-Sinhala-Nationalist party Jatika Hela Urumaya (JHU), that promotes Sinhala business interests, won 9 seats. According to Frydenlund (2005), the nine JHU-ers have gained considerable influence on Government policies under their agenda to re-establish “Buddhist rule” in Sri Lanka, informed by their ideology that Sri Lankan Buddhism is under threat by “foreign” Hindu, Christian and Muslim influences. In addition there were several smaller Muslim and Tamil parties in Parliament. The 2004 elections thus made it necessary for UNP and SLFP to seek support among several smaller parties representing a variety of ideologies or interests.

2004 also brought with it changes in LTTE: Karuna, LTTE’s eastern commando split from LTTE and formed his own political-military movement that became an ally to the Government against LTTE. This considerably questioned LTTE’s real strength in the east.

In December 2004 a Tsunami hit Sri Lanka that severely damaged the coastline of the already war-torn North-East. Much of the international aid pledged for the catastrophe was tied to the peace process in a Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS). This was thought to lay foundations for future negotiations on devolution. Even though Muslims were the most Tsunami-affected community and almost 50% of the killed by the tsunami were Muslims (Raheem and Haniffa, 2005), the P-TOMS structure was negotiated over exclusively by the negotiation partners and foreign donors. This angered un-consulted local political forces such as SLMC and JVP. The P-TOMS was by the summer of 2005 declared unconstitutional, and JVP left their alliance with SLFP to protest against it. SLFP thus had to look for new allies. In 2007 several MPs from UNP, JHU and SLMC joined the government.

In October 2006 the Northern and Eastern provinces were de-merged by a Supreme Court ruling. During the spring 2007 Government troops also re-took control over the Eastern Province, and is by autumn 2007 working to re-claim its power in the “liberated” east.
Warfare against LTTE continues in the north, while the Karuna group and other paramilitary units allied to the Government operate in the east.

2.3 The Sri Lankan Muslims

Islam was brought to Sri Lanka by Arab sea traders from the 6th century. These first settled along the coast and married local women, but were forced to Ceylon’s interior by the Portuguese colonisers in the 15th century. Muslims were, though, allowed to settle along the east coast that belonged to the Sinhala Kandyan kingdom. The British colonial masters that entered in the 1800s allowed Muslims to settle all over the island again and resume their trade activities. According to the census of 1911 approximately 22% of the Muslims earned their income from commerce, transport and storage, while about 35.5% were involved in pasture and agriculture (Mohideen, 2002). Muslims have since British times had their own Muslim private legal system managed by Muslim courts.

Most Muslims spoke Tamil as their first language. On basis of this the Tamil politician Ponnarballam Ramanathan in 1888 claimed that Muslims belonged to the Tamil racial group. If Muslims were counted as Tamils, Ramanathan would gain political leverage for himself as a representative for Tamils in the legislature. For Muslims who wanted to be Muslim representatives it therefore was necessitated to consolidate an independent Muslim racial identity. Muslims’ Arab origins were emphasised in the “Moor” identity that was constructed along with similarly constructed racial identities for Sinhalese and Tamils. The All Ceylon Moors’ Association (ACMA), lead by Razik Fareed, was established in 1935 to work for the well-being of the Moors (Marikar et.al. 1976:7).

Muslims were by Tamils and Sinhalese sometimes viewed as an exploitative foreign trading community similarly to how Jews have been viewed in Europe. In 1915 anti-Muslim sentiments boiled over in the country’s first communal riot where Mosques and Muslims’ properties were destroyed. Anti-foreign sentiments, however, also created differences between Muslims. Muslims of Malay and Indian background were focusing their organisational energy on the All Ceylon Muslim League (ACML) lead by the Malay politician T. B. Jayah. ACMA, however, were strongly against uniting different Muslim groups under ACML (ibid.), since they feared it would make all Muslims be seen as “foreigners”. Political rivalry between ACMA and ACML took place internally in UNP where both organisations originally were represented. The Moor-Muslim controversies slowly died out after
independence, but Mr. Fareed early decided to withdraw ACMA’s support for UNP. ACMA’s members thereafter ran for elections as independent candidates or from SLFP, UNP or minor communist parties (ibid.). Several Muslim leaders were also elected to Parliament from the Tamil FP in the 1950s-60s but left that party in disgust after having received stepmotherly treatment from the party leadership (Ali, 2004). ACMA had already in 1965 gone against federalism, and Mr. Fareed had warned that regional councils would put Moors “at the mercy of the Tamils” (Marikar et. Al, 1976:375).

As a community well represented in trade, many Muslims were strongly affected by the inward-looking socialist economic policies of the SLFP-led governments in the 1960s-70s. Muslim traders significantly lost their share in the country’s import-export trade, gem businesses, retail enterprises and agricultural land holdings (Ali, 2004). Muslims responded to this by turning towards secular education and public sector employment, and Muslims got Muslim government schools by a Muslim minister of education in the 1960s.

Muslims in the North-East are, however, said to have sympathised with Tamils’ regionalist aspirations in the 1970s. Tamil militant groups therefore initially also had Muslim members. The Muslim United Liberation Front (MULF), an ally to TULF, was also established to support Tamil militants by a businessman from Akkaraipattu in 1977 (Knoerzer, 1998:143). The Tamil militants, however, started to extort and attack Muslims in the east since Muslims were seen as supportive of the Government. The Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC) was accordingly formed in 1981 by a group discussing how to protect Muslims from Tamil militants. MHM Ashraff, a former MULF-member and constitutional lawyer, became the Party’s eloquent leader. In 1986 the party was acknowledged as a national party. In 1988 SLMC won 12 seats in the West-Central Provincial Council and 17 seats in the NEPC elections. In the following 1989 Parliamentary elections SLMC won 4 seats. In Ampara and Batticaloa SLMC won almost 70% of the votes cast for Muslim candidates for the 1989 election (ibid.:144). After the 1989-elections, SLMC supported president Premadasa (UNP) who entered into negotiations with LTTE.

The merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces in 1987 had made Muslims a provincial minority of only 17%, while Muslims in the Eastern Province (39%) were a relative majority to the other two communities. MULF had in 1988 signed an agreement with LTTE that stated that Muslims should get 30% representation in the NEPC (Bazeer, 2002). Two years later, however, LTTE ethnically cleansed the Northern Province for Muslims. In October 1990 Muslims were given between 2 and 48 hours to leave the Province without bringing any belongings. Many of these 75,000 refugees still live in camps in Puttalam district.
Warfare between LTTE, other Tamil militants and the Government army continued in the north-east throughout the 1990s to the detriment of the local population. Muslims have increasingly feared for their security. SLMC have therefore suggested that a Muslim Province should be created for Muslim majority areas. President Kumaratunga allegedly promised SLMC in the late 1990s that such a Province would be created.

Since 1980, Muslims have mainly been elected to Parliament from UNP and SLMC and to a less extent from SLFP and JVP, as shown in table 4.

Table 2.3: Number of Muslim MPs from different parties since independence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>UNP</th>
<th>SLFP/PA/UPFA</th>
<th>FP/TULF</th>
<th>SLMC+daughter parties</th>
<th>LSSP/CP/LPP</th>
<th>JVP</th>
<th>Indep. or nominated</th>
<th>Sum**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1947-1952</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952-1956</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956-1960</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-1965</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-1970</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1977</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-1986</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-1994</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-1999</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4 (-1)*</td>
<td>6 (+1)*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5 (-4)*</td>
<td>6 (+4)*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2004</td>
<td>12 (-3)*</td>
<td>3 (-2)*</td>
<td>10 (+5)*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-</td>
<td>11 (-3)*</td>
<td>3 (-2)*</td>
<td>7 (+5)*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Where a number is set in brackets with a minus in front, it implies that this number of candidates that are members of other parties have been elected in through the party under an electoral alliance between the two parties. Where a number has a plus in front, it implies that this number of candidates from this party were additionally elected in from other parties. ** The total number of MPs have gradually increased.

SLMC members and members of SLMC’s daughter parties have been elected to Parliament both from their own parties and through their alliances with UNP or SLFP. SLMC was for example in such an electoral alliance with SLFP between 1994-2000. SLMC and its daughter parties have since 1986 gradually gained electoral strength and served as a solid vehicle for Muslim politicians to enter Parliament.

Still a considerable number of Muslims have continued to be elected in from other parties. SLMC has also split into four or more separate political parties since year 2000 when SLMC’s leader MHM Ashraff died in a helicopter crash. He did so just after having founded National Unity Alliance (NUA), a party that had meant to overlap with SLMC. What followed was that Rauff Hakeem, who became SLMC/NUA’s leader, in 2000 withdrew his and five other NUA/SLMC MPs support for the sitting Government. Mrs. Ferial Ashraff, the wife of the late SLMC leader M.H.M. Ashraff, however, remained with the Government with another fraction. New elections were held in 2001. This time NUA, under Mrs. Ashraff, and SLMC, under Mr. Hakeem ran for elections as two separate parties.

SLMC was in 2001 allied to UNP that won the election. Three SLMCers also entered Parliament under SLMCs electoral alliance with UNP. Mrs. Ashraff and another NUA member became MPs through their electoral alliance with SLFP and joined the opposition benches. Hakeem was made a minister in the UNP-Government and took part in peace negotiations as a part of the Government delegation. For this he was strongly criticised by NUA and members of SLMC, who felt that Muslims’ interests were sacrificed in the negotiations. In December 2003, a group of SLMC members lead by minister Athaullah were expelled from SLMC. They later formed the National Muslim Congress (NMC) and won three seats in the election under the UPFA-alliance lead by SLFP in 2004.

NUA was also part of the UPFA alliance that won in 2004. Mrs. Ashraff took part in the Government delegations that met LTTE in 2006, and was made a minister. Disagreements arose again in SLMC that remained allied to UNP in opposition and by the end of 2004 four SLMC MPs were expelled from the party by Hakeem. These formed the party All Ceylon Muslim Congress (ACMC) and joined the SLFP-led Government to be ministers. Finally, in January 2007, SLMC followed them. Although now members of the same Government the ex-SLMC parties give no signs of planning to re-unite.
Table 2.4: The splits in SLMC since year 2000 and the alliances sought by the daughter parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>SLFP</th>
<th>UNP</th>
<th>SLFP</th>
<th>SLFP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By summer 2007, 24 of the totally 225 Members of the Sri Lankan Parliament are Muslims. These represent 7 different political parties, and of these 11 are ministers and 6 deputy ministers. Sri Lanka presently has as many as 87 ministers, since it has become common for the Government to offer ministry posts for members of the opposition willing to cross over to the Government. Presently 12% of the ministers are Muslim. Thus 9.3% of the Parliament’s members are Muslim, implying that Muslims are slightly over-represented in Parliament in proportion to the size of their 8% share of the population.
3. THEORY

Research (for example Horowitz, 1985) has shown that in ethnically heterogeneous societies like in Sri Lanka, peoples’ political alignment often, but not always, follow the lines of ethnic group membership. How politically unitary or divided an ethnic community is, depends on how unitary the group is, but also on how unitary the community behaves in its relations to other communities in the context. Choices made by political leaders affect whether members of a community will mobilise politically as one front or participate in many different movements where unity with members of other ethnic groups may also be sought for. Such choices by politicians are about what is presented as the community’s core political interests, and what alliances are built with members of other ethnic groups.

In the following I will present theories to guide the analysis of how politically unitary or divided an ethnic community in a plural society can be expected to be given both intra-group relationships and inter-group relationships.

3.1 What is an ethnic group?

Ethnicity may be defined as “the tendency of human beings to associate with one another around shared religion, sect, language, cultural tradition, belief in common ancestry and a host of other particularist ties” (Ahmed, 1996:26). Ethnicity “involves feelings of solidarity and loyalty towards fellow members and, by that token, of detachment and indifference if not hostility towards others” (ibid). Ethnicity thus makes one a member of one or more ethnic groups, based on one or more of the above mentioned common characteristics.

In the theory of ethnicity a distinction is often drawn between a primordial view where any person’s ethnic belonging is thought to be given once and for all, and a situational view that emphasises the changeability and multi-dimensionality of ethnicity. Primordialists think that any person’s place in society largely will remained fixed based on his or her identity markers such as skin colour, caste, language, religion or other such factors that one cannot easily change, and the social histories that these bring with them (ibid). Another primordialist argument is that those who are culturally similar naturally will organise themselves together, because interaction is easier between individuals holding the same ideas, religious
beliefs or language. These may also depend economically on each other because of common family bonds or solidarity.

Situationalists would, however, point to the fact that people’s ethnic identity can be changed over time as result of their interactions with other groups, for example by intermarriage, conversions and migration. Since the basis of group formation may be any identity marker and different constellations of these, the concept is fluid and easily lends itself to adjustment to varying situations and contexts. The anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1969) has described how a group may change its definition of its group membership over time because of changed interaction patterns with different neighbouring groups in its context. Groups can change their ethnic identity by assimilating it into a larger identity through adjusting their differentials to that of the larger group and pointing at similarities between them, or by differentiating themselves by emphasising differences between themselves and neighbouring ethnic groups.

3.2 What Makes Ethnic Groups Mobilise Politically?

Groups of persons sometimes decide to organise themselves politically based on identity markers. Paul Brass (1991) distinguishes ethnic groups, communities and nations after their varying level of conciousness. An ethnic group is an objectively distinct group, but its members do not necessarily attach political importance to that fact. A community is an ethnic group whose members have developed a sense of common identity and have sought to draw boundaries around their group. A community becomes a nation when it mobilises for political action and becomes political significant. Some groups, however, instead merge into the larger society and disintegrate. What I term an ethnic-political group equates a mild form of Brass’ nationalism, since the phenomenon of Muslim politics that I seek to describe does not match the stronger form of nationalism of for example Sri Lankan Tamils.

Two common views exist in the academic literature about why ethnic groups decide to mobilise themselves politically: Instrumentalism and primordialism. Instrumentalists think that political mobilisation of ethnic groups happen because elite members of ethnic communities with political leadership aspirations see the political use of ethnicity as an easy way of obtaining popular support. Simply by the virtue of being members of an ethnic group, elite members of the ethnic group get support from members of their ethnic group by claiming to represent the group’s specific interests. Instrumentally motivated ethnic
politicians are therefore seen to not truly represent the interests of the ethnic groups they claim to represent. Instead they actually work for their own elite interests that are not beneficial for many of the members of the group they claim to represent. Primordialists, on the other hand, claim that it is natural for ethnic groups to mobilise politically together because members of one ethnic group are seen to naturally have a range of common political interests by being part of the specific ethnic community.

3.3 Ethnic Political Mobilisation: Greed or Grievance Driven?

According to Ted Robert Gurr (1993), ethnic minority groups that mobilise politically often do so because there is a difference between them and other groups in the society that is the basis of their government’s discrimination of them: “treat a group differently, by denial or privilege, and its members become more self–conscious about their common bonds and interests. Minimise differences, and communal identification becomes less significant as a unifying principle” (ibid.:3-4). His analysis is based on a large number of minority groups for which he finds that cultural differences are linked with economic disadvantages, and that economic disadvantages lead groups to political protest. At the same time, the strength of a group’s identity will also determine a group’s cohesion, and thus the level of political mobilisation it can be expected to generate. According to Gurr, “the strength of a group’s identity depends on inter-group disadvantages, cultural differentials, and the intensity of past and ongoing conflict with other groups and the state” (ibid.:127). The common identity has to be strong enough to supersede perhaps contradicting group loyalties such as for example classes or clans.

In general, Gurr’s sample of minorities mobilise to demand more rights for themselves, both for political participation, better economic conditions and for rights to cultural freedom. Groups that live concentrated in regions may aim to secede a separate state for themselves while groups that live dispersed in a country generally will try to obtain power at the centre, or overthrow the sitting Government that discriminates them. What goals minority groups opt for is, according to Gurr, a function of the state’s policy of inclusion or exclusion of them. A state can therefore moderate minorities’ political mobilisation, or so to speak “satisfy” it, to some extent, by meeting the demands they mobilise for. Continued discrimination of a group from the government’s side will on the other hand only make its political mobilisation stronger.
A problem with Gurr’s study is that it is only about a sample of minorities that have mobilised politically. One can therefore only imagine how many discriminated minorities that exist in this world that have not mobilised politically, possibly because they are too poor, illiterate or otherwise unable or unwilling to find strategies for political mobilisation. Another problem is that Gurr sees discrimination, or grievance, as the basis for minorities to mobilise politically. Economists studying conflicts suggests that many “liberation movements” may primarily be driven by greed and desire for personal gain. Collier et. al.(2003), for example, have written about how certain ethnic military groups may wish to sustain wars because it is giving them good positions from where to extract resources such as diamonds, expensive timber or funding from national-romantic diasporas. In terms of normal politics, such quest for resources may be take place in a more compromising manner between political parties over states’ resources. Politicians that see themselves as representatives of segments of the society instead of the wider nation may be thought to desire to get hold of as much as possible for their own groups to deserve to be re-elected by them.

Both greed and grievances may therefore lead to political mobilisation and demand for resources. However, groups that mobilise politically on the basis of a perception of having been discriminated may do so with what we may judge as morally stronger legitimacy. The greed-grievance dichotomy is related to the primordialism - instrumentalism debate. According to Gurr discrimination namely makes group cohesion stronger. Discrimination may therefore bolster primordial views of group memberships as a community of persons with a common destiny, even as God-willed, as in the case of the Jews, or early Christians motivated to meet martyrdom. Seen from an instrumentalist perspective, however, the forging of primordial group identities may be used as a tool by political leaders to unite people as a stable support group under their leadership.

### 3.4 Political Parties and Ethnic Political Mobilisation: the Interplay Between Instrumentalism and Primordialism

Political mobilisation for ethnic groups may take various forms. Ethnic groups may forward political demands through independent organisations, social movements or even militant organisations that aim to secede from the state and form their own country or influence the policies of the state in which they live. More moderate groups may feel that their interests can be satisfied by forming political parties.
Politicians and parties are often seen to represent certain sections or groups of the population or one ideological direction. According to Fenno (1978), a distinction has been made in political science between the “trustee” type of politician who follows his or her independent judgement in formulating policies and the “delegate” who follows the wishes of the constituency he or she is elected from. Delegates may see the core constituency they represent in a wide or narrow way, as the geographic area he or she is from, as his or her voters, or for example as one or another socioeconomic or ethnic group membership or similar factor that provides a common identity for sections of the population in any given country. What politicians see as their core constituency will influence how they frame the ideology of their political ideology to suit the interests of their constituency.

What makes politicians define their constituencies on an ethnic basis? Kanchan Chandra (2004) has in her studies of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and other group-based parties in India developed a theory about when and why voters and political elites in patronage democracies prioritise ethnic identity in their voting and vote-seeking strategies, or definition of constituency. Applying an instrumentalist understanding of politicised ethnicity, she describes ethnic voters and politicians as “instrumental actors who invest in identity because it offers them the best available means by which to obtain desired benefits, and not because such identification is valuable in itself” (Chandra 2004:11). One of the main reasons Chandra finds for ethnic group members to vote for politicians from their own ethnic group is that the voter knows better the ethnic background of the politician than his or her ideology or other political preferences, and expect that the politicians will benefit his or her own group. The politician is thus expected to enter into a contract-like relation for future clientelism with the voters. Sri Lanka can be termed a patronage democracy, not the least because of the size of the public sector in the country. The larger the state is, the more public resources are available for redistribution by politicians.

Benedikt Korff (2003) explains the propensity of ethnic group members to support leaders from their own ethnic community by use of Pierre Bordieu’s concept of social capital: A person’s social capital is the “potential and actual resources associated with networks and relations an individual can mobilise for his or her benefit” (ibid: 6). He sees ethnicity as “a resource for political mobilization that can determine the bargaining resources of political actors” (ibid.). Voting for political leaders from one’s own community may thus be seen as a way to extend the power of a whole ethnic group linked by social capital, by making one of the group members more powerful. Politicians’ ethnicity is thus important in terms of the social capital networks that politicians are parts of. These define who the politician can be expected to favour of through their office.
Social networks do, however, not necessarily follow clear ethnic patterns. Chandra accordingly argues that ethnic group membership for ethnic parties need not be fixed once and for all. Since the expected benefit from patron-client relations motivates voters, it is important for them to feel secure that the politician from their group will win the election. For the politician it is also important to win as many votes as possible to win maximum strength. This makes, as Chandra argues, political leaders define the ethnicity of the voter group as broadly as possible. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) literally translated means “the majority party”, comprises several Indian low caste groups as well as religious minorities such as Muslims. In line with the situationalist view of ethnicity, the importance of group boundaries, in this instance the boundaries between different Indian caste groups and Muslims, are downplayed for the sake of convenience. By conducting ethnic headcount over the individuals in each group included in the wider ethnic identity defined for the purpose of political campaigning, the ethnic politician may to some extent predict how many votes he or she will get. Chandra has accordingly found that an ethnic party is likely to succeed in a patronage democracy when the size of the ethnic group(s) it seeks to mobilise in one party exceeds the threshold of winning or leverage imposed by the electoral system.

One built-in assumption in Chandra’s reasoning, that seems to stem from her theoretical devotedness to rational choice theory, is that politicians along with voters are actors that will always prefer maximum benefit strategies. The rational choice theory was developed within the field of economics and has been applied enthusiastically particularly by American scholars of political science. Within economic theory, however, the relevance of the rational choice theory has become increasingly questioned since economists have learnt from behavioural psychologists that humans quite often make choices that are not so rational. The rational tendency Chandra points at for how ethnic parties define ethnic group memberships as widely as possible for electoral benefit leaves the question unanswered of why small ethnic parties are formed. Some such small ethnic parties clearly have little chance of gaining much power, and their leaders choose not to merge the ethnic political movement into broader identities. The primordial (and perhaps irrational?) perspective may perhaps better explain the emergence of such parties: Such parties may pop up as self-expressions for groups who feel that their identity is being wiped out by cultural transformations in the society. Small ethnic parties may also be formed to present a perspective that has been neglected by larger political formations, and smaller sub-groups whose grievances have been neglected by larger political movements. According to Gurr’s rationale of grievance-based mobilisation, smaller ethnic parties may be seen as driven by more genuinely felt grievances of perhaps more primordially self-defined ethnic groups.
Donald Horowitz (1985) has observed that political mobilisation on ethnic basis often is infectious. In many instances where ethnicity as an issue enters political life, “incentives for ethnic voting are strong. When voters of one group choose to give their vote predictably on an ethnic basis to an ethnically defined party, they put voters of the other groups who do choose among parties at a collective disadvantage. Such voters will seek to reduce their disadvantage by concentrating their votes in a comparable ethnic party” (ibid:323). In the terms of political theory, voters are put in a prisoner’s dilemma: If they apply the “soft” strategy of voting for multi-ethnic parties, they risk to loose more in terms of redistribution of resources to members of other ethnic groups than if they vote for a party of their own ethnic group. This tendency often encourages the creation of one ethnic party per ethnic group by voters who are anxious to get their share of the cake. This tendency will usually benefit the largest ethnic group that because of its electoral strength will gain parliamentary majority.

However, certain factors may lead to the creation of more than one political party per ethnic group. Here, the tendency is the opposite of the one Chandra describes for the merging of ethnic groups to gain electoral strength. Horowitz has found five types of intra-group differences that may spur creation of more parties per group:

1) the existence of strong social divisions within the ethnic group.
2) the collective sense of how many parties one group can afford without weakening itself in the ethnic conflict landscape in the society
3) the existence of strong differences in opinion regarding the appropriate group posture towards the other ethnic groups
4) leadership rivalries within the ethnic group, and
5) the effect of the formal incentive structure on party proliferation. (see ibid.: 349).

One problem with Horowitz’ list of determining factors for how many parties will emerge per ethnic group is that it seems to imply some form of “natural” bonds between fixed “natural” communities with once and for all fixed borders and their ethnic parties. Interpreted strictly, Horowitz does not leave any openings for multiethnic parties to be created by members of the community or for community members to support any pre-existing multi-ethnic parties. He therefore seems to base his theory here on a stronger primordial view of ethnic communities than what I have found to be the case in Sri Lanka. The two first points on Horowitz’ list do, however, open up for political mobilisation that cross-cuts ethnic group membership. Social divisions do for example establish a basis for
solidarity along economic class lines, and these may provide platforms for multi-ethnic political mobilisation.

### 3.6 Ethnicity and Class Struggle

A basic idea in Marxist thinking is that economic groups, or classes, represent the core interest groups in society (see f. ex. Brass, 1991). Class conflict is therefore basic to politics and classes to political mobilisation and organisation of interests. From a Marxist point of view ethnic political mobilisation may therefore be seen as based on people’s “false conciousness” about their core political interests and group memberships, as ethnic groups unite ethnic members of different economic classes contrary to people’s true political interests. This view is based on the consideration that the economic and material conditions that define class memberships to a stronger extent may be controlled through policies than the sometimes spiritual conditions of ethnic identities such as the historic or religious traditions. However, with the expansion of the modern state also ethnic factors have become more politically controllable. Examples are language policies and history curriculum in Government schools.

According to Horowitz (1985) Marxism itself also contains a “bridge” from class to ethnic mobilisation in politics: “The key is Marx’ belief that class identity is ascriptive, that a person’s class position is “inherited and inescapable fate”. One’s position in society is determined by one’s parents’ position” (ibid.:90). It is thus the fixedness of class relations in Marx’ thinking that makes him see class as the strongest conflict potential in any society. Ethnic membership is, however, also “generally given by birth. The ethnic group has a certain “position” in society...For this “Marxian reason, ethnic affiliations have considerable power to generate conflict” (ibid.: 92).

Different class-ethnicity constellations may therefore yield different conflict outcomes in society. Different members of one ethnic group may for example belong to different class levels, as shown in table 3.1. They will therefore belong to the same class as members of other groups, whom they may join politically with. Another constellation occurs where most or all members of one ethnic group also belong to one class. This is pictured in table 3.2. In this case the relation between the ethnic group and other ethnic groups will also be influenced by the fact that the relation is also one between different class backgrounds. This
ethnically ranked class structure may be termed ethnic division of labour. The idealised caste society in pre–modern India envisaged in the book of Manu follows this structure.

Contrary to the Marxist view that conflict is stronger between different economic groups, Horowitz claims that in ethnically divided societies, conflict levels are higher when ethnic groups have members from different classes, as in figure 3. This is because members of different ethnic groups in such situations compete for the same economic interests, such as civil servants competing for the same government jobs or business people for the same customers or input resources. The existence of strong ethnic identities for internally ranked ethnic groups may generate high conflict levels. For example, the rising literacy of Muslims in Sri Lanka in the 1970s created a stronger competition between Tamils and Muslims for positions as Tamil medium teachers.

In situations where ethnic groups are ethic classes, competition and conflict is different. In these situations, ethnic groups depend on each other as different classes, and this creates incentives for compromise making when the groups are in conflict. One can thus generally expect the political mobilisation of class-wise internally ranked group to be structured different from that of economic classes. The creation of more than one political party per group may for example signal that the different parties for the same group represent different class interests. Different such sub-ethno-class-parties may accordingly also form different alliances with members of other ethnic groups and ethnic classes. The creation of a range of such parties may from varying conflict triggering or moderating factors to a political system where ethnicity has become a source for political alignment.
3.7 The Polarising Tendency in Ethnic Conflicts

In most societies political alignment is defined by a core fault line that cuts through the polity. In modern North-European democracies, this fault line is based on economic issues. The core fault line is drawn between an economic-liberal extreme and a communist, state control extreme, and parties place themselves along this. Political conflict has been moderate in the Northern European democracies since parties and voters have come to agree more on economic policies. According to Stein Rokkan (1968) political compromising is easier on economic policies than on policies over identity issues. According to him, policymaking on identity issues often takes place as a zero sum game. In democracies where parties are defined on ethnic identities above economic ideologies, therefore, conflict levels may be predicted to be higher.

According to Horowitz, the core fault line is in societies where political mobilisation is based on ethnicity usually drawn between the two largest ethnic groups. All political parties and actors will align themselves according to this line, as more or less supportive of one group or the other of the two main groups. This puts any third ethnic group in the context in an awkward situation: “The third group, often politically weaker or less cohesive to begin with, increasingly becomes a marginal participant in the struggle and is ultimately pressed to take sides...two competing parties of the less cohesive group are likely to be mutually hostile, and so it is natural that each of them will link up with the party of one of the other two groups. Hence, the third group ends up on both sides...the two largest groups will compete for the adherence of the third” (Horowitz, 1985:362). Muslims are by some (f.ex. Wagner, 2006) considered to be a third party to the conflict in Sri Lanka, and have been exposed to the alliance-building dilemmas described here.

The tendency for several parties to form per ethnic group described above may further strengthen the polarisation of identity politics. Ethnic politicians aiming to represent the same group may for example engage in “ethnic outbidding”, where the parties aiming to represent the same group try to outbid each other in policies benefiting members of the group above members of other ethnic groups. This has been the general story of the competition between UNP and SLFP after Sri Lanka’s independence, according to DeVotta (2004). When intraethnic competition is strong, centrifugal forces in the political system thus make different representatives of ethnic groups take more and more extreme stances towards other ethnic groups. Since about 73% of Sri Lanka’s population is Sinhalese it has been a secure electoral strategy for parties to campaign politically in a way that is seen to be of advantage to the Sinhalese community. This Sinhalese ethnic outbidding is generally seen as the reason that Tamil political mobilisation has become radicalised and aiming at
secession. Tamils have also had their intra-group rivalries until LTTE took the upper-hand by violent means in 1990. The level of intra-group fighting between Tamil militants appear to have been elevated with the split of the Karuna fraction from LTTE in 2004.

The only way to break the extremising tendency of ethnic outbidding, Horowitz says, is the formation of “intraethnic competition that is not wholly centrifugal, so that ethnic parties can find rewards in taking moderate positions on matters of interethnic relations, hence making themselves available for coalitions of commitment” (Horowitz, 1985:379). By other words, some middle ground or compromise between ethnic groups has to be found at the political level. The claims of different ethnic groups need to be seen as compatible. Interestingly enough, writing in 1985 Horowitz judged the ethnic conflict levels in Sri Lankan politics to be relatively moderate compared to in other countries, because party competition between UNP and SLFP had made it necessary for them to attract Tamil votes. UNP and SLFP also portrayed themselves as more multiethnic than earlier after 1994. This, however, might have caused the rise of the Sinhala anti-negotiation parties JVP and JHU in the 2004 election.

Where multiethnic cooperation has not developed, however, Horowitz has found an opposite tendency: The development of one-party systems. These are typically accompanied by military intervention, where one of the earlier largest parties becomes the major party. With Horowitz’ own words, “this means the end of public accountability and absence of electoral brakes on the spiral of ethnic exclusiveness” (ibid:437). Sri Lanka’s illiberal governments of the 1980s, may be a weak example of this that has left deep wounds in Sri Lanka.

3.8 Ethnic Party Coalitions and Their Consequences

Horowitz (1985) has also analysed different types of coalitions between ethnic parties and consequences of these. Coalitions of convenience are formed after the parties involved have campaigned independently, while parties in coalitions of commitment have run for election on the same platform. Political parties that enter into coalition with each other will engage in “horse trading”, meaning the bargaining process where some of one of the party’s goals are put aside or adjusted to reach a compromise with the coalition partners. This process will be more difficult in coalitions of convenience, as the involved parties here will be less willing to compromise on their goals, since they in the elections have campaigned
independently. In coalitions of commitment, however, policy compromises may be seen as more reliable since they have been agreed on before the election. In multiethnic parties the horse trading between the different ethnic groups’ perceived interests will already have been decided internally in the party. Alliances they enter into with other ethnic parties may, however, alter the internal balance between interests of different ethnic groups.

Coalitions of convenience tend to be short-lived and conflict-ridden, and the policy outcomes of such coalitions may be expected to be unpredictable. They may also prove costly to the involved parties as the exercise may be viewed to decrease their credibility. Politicians in such parties can be accused of “horse trading” away the political interests it is supposed to promote.

Whether an ethnic party chooses to enter into a coalition of convenience or one of commitment may therefore depend on its willingness to compromise on its goals, or how close the economic interests of the group as a whole are to those of the possible coalition partners. Any party’s willingness to engage in horse trading or compromise making may therefore be critically interpreted as an indication that the political party is built on the party leaders’ instrumentalist use of ethnicity as a means to stay in power. Contrary, a party that chooses to not join alliances or only join coalitions of convenience may be seen as parties that take a non-compromising stance on behalf of the group’s interests. However, the dilemma is present that staying out of power by not joining coalitions may make the party less powerful. In patronage democracies politicians that are not powerful have no resources to redistribute to their clientel, and may therefore be judged as betraying their groups’ claims to state resources.

The closest alliance of ethnic groups in party politics is the multiethnic party. According to Horowitz, there is usually room for only one multiethnic party or alliance in an environment of ethnic conflict. After one such party establishes itself, all the electoral opportunities are located on the ethnic flanks. Attempts to form competing multiethnic parties typically end by recognising that the party really represents one or the other group in the ethnic conflict. Parties that in such situations instead place themselves on ethnic flanks, on the other hand, gain power by criticising the multiethnic party’s inter-ethnically compromising stances, and take extreme positions simply because the ethnically extreme space in politics is unoccupied by others.

Horowitz’ predictions of these party constellations follow a stringent instrumentalist logic, but they are well fit to explain recent events in Sri Lankan politics: The UNP government formed in 2001 can be seen to involve a slightly stronger form of multi-ethnicity than the former SLFP government, since the UNP-led government was the one to enter into a
ceasefire with LTTE. This opened a space on the Sinhalese extremist flank for JVP and JHU who could criticise the UNP-led government for selling out Sinhalese ethnic interests. This made JVP and JHU good coalition partners for the following SLFP-led government.

3.9 The Structure of the Analysis

Based on the theoretical reasoning above, one may assume that the political mobilisation of an ethnic minority group will be shaped both by the group’s intra-group relations and inter-group relations, and not the least by political choices made by political leaders that claim to represent Muslims.

The Intra-group and inter-relations of the group may be seen as the “objective” basis of political interests of the community. The positions within the society that group members possess, such as belonging to certain economic classes, language groups or living in particular areas, will give the group members of the ethnic group certain political grievances or interests. However, at the political levels such interests from the “objective” basis of the community may be viewed differently by politicians at a “subjective” level that see themselves as representatives of the community. The politicians may focus on the grievances or interests of sections of the community and describe these as the grievances or interests of the community as a whole. Politicians may also propose different solutions to satisfy the grievances or interests of the members of the ethnic group. Further, the political solutions the politicians campaign for on behalf of the community may be based of different views of inter-ethnic relations. I will here describe such views as “ethnic ideologies”.

Based on this distinction I will present my analysis of the politics of the Muslim community in two parts. The first part will describe the “objective base” of Muslims in Sri Lanka as a group with its political interests and grievances. I will describe what unity or division may be found in intra-group and inter-group relations for the community, and suggest what political alignment patterns may be found in this “objective base”, or at community level of the Muslim group in Sri Lanka.

In the second “subjective” part of the analysis I will present my analysis of my sample of Muslim politicians from different parties and how these choose to present Muslims’ political interests. What they see as Muslims’ political interests may be assumed to be partially pre-
determined by the “objective basis” of Muslims’ intra- and inter-group relations. However, in spite of the unity or division found among Muslims at the community level, politicians may choose to work to integrate or disintegrate community members with each other to forge political unity or division in the community. Ethnic group members of different classes may for example come together in one party, or politicians claiming to represent the same community may for example do so on behalf of two different groups within the community that possibly may have contradicting interests.

On the “subjective level” of politicians’ presentations of the community’s political interests, therefore, community members’ political interests may be presented as harmonious and compromisable in one block. Disagreeing politicians may on the contrary present the political interests of different sections of group members, or different constituencies, as uncompromisable, thus justifying being in different political parties although members of the same ethnic group.

Disagreements between politicians claiming to represent the same community may also stem from issues of less direct relevance to the “objective level” of the community’s political interests and grievances. Politicians may for example very well agree about what are the political grievances of a community, but disagree on what are the right political solutions to solve the problems of the community, what ideologies should guide these solutions and what coalition strategies should be sought to obtain policy goals. Disagreement between politicians may even limit itself to questions over who is to be the leader. Such disagreement, which is the least serious form of disagreement between politicians representing the same community, is what I here describe as elite rivalry. Disagreement between political leaders may therefore be of more or less serious nature, and to different extent involve differences within the community itself. However, disagreements that initially are elite disagreements may sometimes also lead to—or increase the importance of—disagreements or divisions at policy, ideology or community level as well.

In the analysis of Sri Lankan Muslim politicians I explain why the Muslim politicians at present are spread in several Muslim-lead and non-Muslim-lead parties by explaining what sorts of disagreements are to be found among them in terms of what they see as Muslims’ political interests and why. I present different explanations of why SLMC has split into four or more parties, as to finally analyse in what way the Muslim community in Sri Lanka at present is more politically divided or united than it was in year 2000.

The “objective” and the “subjective” levels of Muslim politics are of course not isolatable, and mutually influence each other, as will be shown.
EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

4. THE COMMUNITY BASE OF SRI LANKAN MUSLIM POLITICS

I will here present information on different aspects of the unity and division of the Muslim group in Sri Lanka. Intra-group relations of the community will be treated in chapter 4.1.1, while the inter-group relations of the community and its different sub-groups will be described in chapter 4.1.2.

4.1 Are the Sri Lankan Muslims a Homogenous Group?

In this chapter I will present information intra-group relations of the Muslim group in Sri Lanka, as to analyse what sorts of unity and disunity may be found at the “objective level” of Muslim politics for politicians to elaborate on.

4.1.1 Economic class diversity

Many Muslims in Sri Lanka have traditionally and are still involved in trade activities of various types, both in small and large scales, all over the island. Some of these traders, for example some gem traders, are rich, while others run small shops that don’t generate too much income. Approximately 8% of the population in Colombo are Muslims (DCS, 2001), and these are living in both rich and poor neighbourhoods from the not-so-well-off area of Pettah to the more upper-class Cinnamon Garden area, or Tamil-dominated Bambalapitiya. In the rest of the south-west Muslims are living dispersed but often close to other Muslim families. Some Muslims along the east coast and in Puttalam are fishermen, while a considerable amount of Muslims along the east coast are rice farmers. These may be better-off landowners, while poorer Muslims may work as labourers on the paddy fields.

Muslims were by independence not a group that had pursued higher education, since in the colonial times the education system was associated with Christian missionaries. Since then, however, Muslims have increasingly been pursuing higher education. Some of the educated Muslims have also started to pursue public sector jobs. Muslim women have traditionally not been working outside their homes, but nowadays some Muslim women may for example
become teachers in government-run Muslim schools. Many Muslims in rural areas are quite poor, but earn income from sending their daughters to work as housemaids or similar in the Middle East. A certain amount of Muslims are also still living as refugees in camps in Puttalam and other northern Sinhala areas after LTTE’s ethnic cleansing of the Northern Province in 1990.

From these facts one can draw the conclusion that the Muslim community at Sri Lanka is fairly diverse when it comes to economic class memberships. Several persons I talked to in or close to SLMC, however, emphasised that the social solidarity of Muslims at Sri Lanka was strong enough for Muslims to override possible class-based disagreements between them. A common view among these was that the political interests of Muslims from different economic groups were not contrary to each other. One SLMC member for example told me that "both rich and poor Muslims in Colombo support SLMC. No economic disagreements are to be found within SLMC" (interview, May-06).

On the other hand, one UNP and one NUA member agreed with the statement that different Muslims at Sri Lanka do have different class interests. Many Muslim traders seem to vote for UNP, the traditional “business party”, that is working for a more open economy. One Muslim businessman in Colombo also told me that “poor Muslims in Colombo may support SLMC because of a sentimental feeling towards Muslims in the east” (interview, May-06).

To some extent, SLMC and UNP may be seen as representing different class groups within the Muslim community. In the words of one politician: "UNP, although with many Muslim members, is not so sensitive to Muslims’ issues. Many Muslims will still vote for the UNP because it protects business interests" (Interview, May-06). This indicates that class-based economic interests for some Muslims override group solidarity with other Muslims when it comes to political support. It may, however, also indicate that some Muslims believe that UNP or the national parties are the best party at protecting Muslims’ political interests, and that Muslims’ core political interests are business interests. However, the question of what “Muslims’ interests” actually is according to different views remains unanswered. Simply the fact that several persons use the term “Muslims’ interests” seems to indicate that there is a cluster of political interests that may be termed Muslim, and that therefore is common to all Muslims.
4.1.2 Mother tongue differences
As explained earlier, there is a certain division between Muslims in terms of what constitutes their mother tongue. Most Muslims speak Tamil as their mother tongue but many are bilingual and speak Sinhala fluently. Some speak Sinhala or English as their first language. English is gaining importance through the English medium schools that parents who can afford to pay the entrance fee send their children to. Members of the Muslim elite and middle class are among these. There is also a small group of Malay speaking Muslims. The language divide between Muslims into these three or four mother tongue groups has not in itself represented a basis for any political divide between Muslims in recent times.

4.1.3 Regional differences
Regional differences, though, is a politically relevant dividing factor between Muslims. A common complaint towards certain Muslim political leaders is that “he is from Colombo” or “he is from Kandy, so he does not understand the problems of Muslims in the east”. Muslims in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka have their own political concerns since they are living in an area delineated by the ceasefire as LTTE-controlled area. More than 25 years of fighting between Tamil militants and the Government army in the area has made the conditions for economic activities difficult and different than in other parts of Sri Lanka, and the concern for security is strong. This makes the immediate political interests of Muslim traders in the east slightly different from those of traders in the south. The work of NEPC’s work has for example been hampered by warfare since the early 1990s. A certain centre-periphery fault line therefore exists within the Muslim group in Sri Lanka.

However, another important factor may be identified in the quote above: the problem with Muslim politicians from outside the east is that they do not understand the problems of Muslims in the east. This may indicate that they could be made to understand and also promote the interests of these, or at least that they are not considered to represent political interests that are in direct conflict with political interests of Muslims in the east. This leaves an opening for unity in political mobilisation of Muslims despite class- and region based intra-group differences. Recent splits within SLMC, however, indicate that some SLMC-voters think that eastern Muslims have to be represented by eastern Muslims. SLMCs former leader, Mr. Ashraff, was from the Muslim majority town Kalmunai in the Eastern province, while Hakeem, the new leader, is from Kandy.

Mr. Ashraff was, however, respected for more than representing eastern Muslims’ interests adequately. In the words of an SLMC member, SLMC “were able to develop a policy
framework that was able to satisfy the aspirations of different sections of Muslims living all over Sri Lanka”. SLMC’s leader Mr. Hakeem also sees himself as representative of Muslims’ interests as a harmonious group. In his own words: “Muslims feel a strong common bond by their faith, brotherhood, they have reached out beyond the regional differences and the petty language differences, and managed to identify themselves as one group throughout. This is a strength that has helped this identity to harness into a political force”(Interview, June-06). Hakeem here presents a view of ethnicity that may be seen as both instrumental and primordial: Muslims may have reached beyond their differences motivated by a desire to become a stronger political force, or the primordially strong faith bonds may be seen as so important to group members that other loyalties become less important.

Exactly how the Muslim identity may become strengthened as a political identity prevailing over other possible loyalties of Muslims is explained in the following example by an SLMC member: “Say, in Galle, if there is a communal problem, for example Sinhala people attacking Muslims, Muslims will look to SLMC to talk for them.” (Interview, June-06). Also, an SLMC city council member from Puttalam district told me that Muslim fishermen had faced problems when certain fishing equipments that they used had been forbidden through central regulations. Local-level SLMC members had contacted SLMC members at national level. The national-level SLMC members had then worked to lift the equipment restrictions and succeeded in this. These examples imply that Muslims at various locations and living under various social and economic conditions may get their various interests satisfied through the SLMC or similar ethnic parties.

SLMC, as an ethnic party, may be seen as providing a platform for a “class alliance” of Muslims from various social levels with different economic interests that may be harmonised within the party. The basis of the class alliance is solidarity based on a common primordial bond of belonging to the same religious group.

The Muslim inter-class and inter-regional alliance is, though, sometimes challenged. In September 2007 a conflict between different groups of Muslims broke loose in Puttalam represented by two Muslim politicians from two different Muslim parties, namely ACMC and SLMC. The conflict was over the distribution of housing granted through a World Bank project that mainly aimed to benefit the Muslim refugees living in Puttalam who were expelled from the Northern Province by LTTE in 1990. The SLMC MP elected in from Puttalam talked on behalf of the original Muslim population in Puttalam were claiming that more should be given under the project to local Muslims, since the presence of the Muslim refugees from the North had created pressure on local resources and public goods (Muslim
Guardian, 01.10.07). Minister Badhuideen (ACMC), who is an MP for Vanni district in the north, talked for the refugees. Contradictions between different groups of Muslims were here available to be elevated to political level by those politicians.

4.1.4 Religious differences

Religiously Muslims in Sri Lanka is a slightly diverse group. The large majority traditionally belongs to the Sunni group guided by the Al-Shafi Sharia school. Disagreement between a sufı-oriented Islam and a more “purified” version of Islam has, however, recently emerged. In the spring of 2007 the conflict between persons promoting these two versions of Islam turned violent and led to damage of properties in Kathankudi in Batticaloa district. Individuals in possession of arms have threatened other Muslims to follow their ideological line. A Muslim armed group is also reported to have used violence against gamblers or drug traders in the same area (TamilNet, 04.02.2006). Intra-Muslim violence is also reported to have taken place in several villages in the east, sometimes allegedly by a Muslim criminal gang operating to extort Muslim businessmen (f.ex. TamilNet 30.09.2005 or 08.11.2005).

Some researchers (f.ex. Ali, 2004) say that Muslims at Sri Lanka have become more conscious about their religion first after the Iranian revolution, and then again after the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks in New York. The following US policies are seen by some as anti-Muslim. This has for example made people more enthusiastic in following Islamic laws. Muslim women in Sri Lanka have traditionally not dressed very different from women from the other communities at the island, but female students, particularly at the South Eastern University in Ampara, and other women several place in the south have recently started to wear the long black abaya-cloak and a scarf knit on their head. The influence of Islamic organisations such as Jamaat-i-Islamiya and Tabligh Jamaat, aiming at improving the religious performance and understanding of Muslims, has increased since the late 1980s. An Islamic college inspired by wahabism is run in Kurunegala (ICG, 2007:22-23). Fara Haniffa (conversation, February-07) has suggested that many Sri Lankan Muslims lately increasingly has turned to religion to differentiate themselves from the nationalisms of the two larger groups in conflict.

However, this recent religious divide between Muslims is not related to any political division between Muslims. Among Sri Lankan Muslims a common understanding seems to be that religion and politics should be kept apart. In the words of one politician, “if you want to practice your religion, please go to the mosque” (interview, June-06). This view seems to be based both on a common opinion that Muslims as a minority religious group should not
propagate Islamic ideas towards the majority, and that Muslims feel that they have achieved a good degree of freedom to practice their religion in Sri Lanka. Some told me that Muslims in Sri Lanka were much better off in this respect than Muslims in India. Separate institutions such as courts and councils are operative within the Islamic religious field to take care of the maintenance of Muslim marriage laws. Possible religious intra-group disagreements may be handled by mosque boards separately from politics. Definitions of Muslims “primordial” identity in Sri Lanka therefore at present seem to take place outside the political realm. In Ashraff’s time, however, imams advised Muslims to support SLMC. Nowadays I was told that imams advice Muslims to support Muslim politicians in general.

Another socio-religiously unifying factor seems to bring Muslims together politically. Muslim girls are according to traditional interpretations of Islam only allowed to marry Muslim men, while Muslim men who marry non-Muslims generally encourage their wives to convert to Islam. A Buddhist three-wheeler driver in Kandi complained to me that it was impossible for non-Muslims to marry any Muslims, while intermarriages often took place between members of the other religious groups. According to McGilvray (2001), it is nowadays quite uncommon for Muslims also in the east to marry someone from another ethnic community. Marriages between Muslims from different parts of Sri Lanka seem more common, and by marriages economic bonds between different Muslim families in different parts of the country are forged. This may also facilitate the development of a common political identity for Muslims.

To sum up, certain economic and regional differences are to be found internally in the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. These appear to be a part of the explanation for why there is a split in the present political mobilisation of Muslims. However, some intra-group differences, such as differences in mother tongue and in religious sub-streams, do not cause political divides. Some class-based and regional differences are also seen as non-conflicting and therefore possible to combine in a common political identity for the group.
4.2 Muslims’ Group Postures Towards Other Groups

Relations between parts of the Muslim community with parts of the Tamil and Sinhala communities may be relations of conflict or cooperation that may or may not affect the political mobilisation of Muslims. I will here present information on Muslims intra-group relations with sections of other communities to see whether and how these relations cause political unity or division between Muslims in their political mobilisation.

A clear politically dividing factor for the Muslim community is the one between Muslims living within the Tamil speaking majority area in the north-east, and Muslims living in the Sinhala speaking majority area in the south-west. The differences in Muslims’ inter-group relations in these two respective areas are not the least influenced by that Muslims form a community of considerable size in the Eastern Province (approximately 32%, DCS, 1981). Although approximately two thirds of the Muslims live in the Sinhala-language southern area, they constitute only a minority community of approximately 6.6% of the total population there (DCS, 2001). Muslims living in the eastern district Ampara, however, is the largest ethnic community in their district (41.3%, ibid.). Maps showing the ethnic composition of municipalities in the Eastern Province are added in appendix 2.

Politically this implies that Muslims in the south as a small minority think they should keep a low profile in terms of ethnicity and opt for common political mobilisation with other groups. Muslims in the east, however, feel that as a community of considerable regional size they should stand up as an independent political force vis-à-vis other communities. Muslims eastern numerical strength has made it possible to vote in Muslim politicians from Muslim majority constituencies. The presence of other groups and political and military forces in the context does however, strongly form political concerns of Muslims.

4.2.1 Tamil-Muslim Relations in the North-East

The relation between Tamils and Muslims in the north-east has been strongly affected by the presence of Tamil militant groups. According to Muslims’ Rights Organisation (MRO) Muslims as a group came to be seen as Government collaborators when some Muslims opposed Tamil militants’ extortion drives and formed SLMC. Tamil-Muslim clashes took place in the east from 1985 (Mohideen, undated:12), along with brutal military operations of the Sri Lankan army in the same area that alienated the local population. For example, in 1989 Tamil militants killed 41 Muslim policemen at the Karativu police station but not even...
touched any of the Tamil policemen (Ameerdeen, 2006:11). Some claim that army soldiers have entered Tamil areas dressed up as Muslims (interviews, June-06). According to McGilvray (2001) serving in the army has not been a popular profession among Muslims. Some Muslims have, though, been armed as home guards by the Government army to protect themselves. Some were on the other hand members of Tamil military groups.

When LTTE in 1990 gained the upper-hand in the north-east, Muslims were expelled from the Northern Province, and massacres were made against Muslims in villages and Mosques in the Eastern Province by LTTE. LTTE’s spokesman Yogi in a speech in 1990 justified the ethnic cleansing of Muslims as a “punishment” for their “ethnic betrayal” in failing to identify themselves as Tamil converts to Islam (ibid.:21). Tamil militants of different groups have also eliminated a number of prominent Muslims, and LTTE banned SLMC (Hakeem, undated). Muslims have also chased out lower-caste Tamils from certain villages in northern Ampara district (McGilvray, 2001:19). The level of inter-ethnic violence allegedly decreased when Mr. Ashraff (SLMC) became a minister in 1994 and Muslims regained faith in the government for safeguarding their security (Ismail et.al., 2005). Tamil militants’ mistreatment of Muslims has thus become a frightening symbol for how Government collaborators or promoters of alternative political agendas or ethnic ideologies to Tamil nationalism in the north-east would be treated. Group boundaries have thus been drawn between Tamils and Muslims both by Tamil militants and by SLMC.

Soon after the 2002 ceasefire an LTTE-SLMC pact was signed in which LTTE ensures Muslims’ security in the north-east and allows for the re-settlement of Muslims in the north. However, already in June the same year inter-communal violence again erupted when Muslims in Batticaloa had staged a protest against LTTE’s illegal extortion, followed by an intercommunal clash in Vallaichennai (Batticaloa), where LTTE abducted and killed 12 Muslims. More than 100 Muslims were injured and 238 Muslim shops were burnt and destroyed (Ameerdeen, 2006:19-20). LTTE appear to either have been unable or unwilling to secure Muslims’ security as promised in the SLMC-LTTE pact.

In 2002:(19), UTHR(J) argued that the leaders of LTTE in the east “more or less function as warlords whose dealings with people have no semblance of legality”. It may for example have been difficult for Muslim businessmen in Vallaichennai to see how the burning of their shops would benefit the peace negotiations or Tamil nationalism. After the Karuna group defected from LTTE in 2004 to promote eastern regionalism allied to the Government, and other Tamil militant groups have stepped up their activities, it has become increasingly difficult for the local population to know what violent acts are done on behalf of which political agendas and groups to benefit whom.
Tamil administrative discrimination of Muslims

Muslims claim to have been treated as second-class citizens in the north-east not only by LTTE, but also by the Tamil-dominated public administration. In the words of an SLMC member: “Our experience of having been under Tamil domination has been a very bitter one, and particularly under the North Eastern Provincial Council (...) even with bureaucrats running the council since the early 1990s Muslims have felt that their issues have not been addressed properly. In sharing of resources for Muslim areas there is ample grievance” (interview, June-06). Muslims claim to have been discriminated in recruitment to public sector jobs and in the general distribution of state resources. The policy implementation under NEPC has generally been experienced to be biased in favour of Tamils and against Muslims. Further, police stations have failed to follow up on complaints registered involving Tamil militants, and even passed on information to the militants on who has filed complaints against them. This has led to reprisals by the militants on those who have complained against them to the police.

A Muslim academic also claim that the ceasefire allowed LTTE to increase its influence on the public administration: “the withdrawal of the government army from public buildings had made Muslims vulnerable to LTTE attacks. At the same time, the government instructed all police and army units in the Eastern Province not to entertain any complaints regarding crimes by the LTTE cadres” (Ameerdeen, 2006:21). The ceasefire thus gave LTTE free access to expand their totalitarian control also in Government-controlled areas in the Eastern Province.

Muslims in the east were also administratively discriminated after the 2004 tsunami. The Tamil-dominated administration in Batticaloa did not, according to Minister Ali (ACMC), allow displaced Muslims to move into unoccupied government lands. The Tsunami was badly hitting densely populated coastal areas in Batticaloa such as Kattankudi where many poor Muslim families had lived. The Government had decided that no people were allowed to re-settle within 200 meters from the sea as a protective measure against new tsunamis, leaving many poor Muslims without land for resettlement.

Muslims’ experiences of having been administratively discriminated by Tamils informed their critical stance towards the P-TOMS agreement. In any joint management structure where LTTE, or Tamils, are given more power than Muslims, Muslims fear being discriminated. The Tamil civil service discrimination of Muslims has also made them want a separate Muslim administration for Muslim majority areas that could not be overruled by
Tamils at higher levels of the administration. The idea of a Muslim south-eastern Province was promoted by SLMC in the 1990s to counter the Tamil majority domination created in the NEPC, and to allow Muslims some political space to rule their own affairs without being overruled by bodies that were seen to be biased in favour of Tamils or Sinhalese. Muslims’ political requests for this towards LTTE and others has, however, largely been ignored. To eastern Muslims, the LTTE-led Tamil majority rule was experienced as less sensitive to minority issues than the Sinhala-led government.

Muslims have, however, also at times been helped by organisations headed by Tamils or cooperated politically in local level bodies. In Kalmunai in Ampara, for example, TNA and SLMC representatives seem to be cooperating constructively. After the tsunami, the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO), an LTTE-controlled NGO, distributed relief materials also to Muslims, and for example coordinated their aid efforts with members of the Mosque boards in Ampara and the Ulema Council in Kinniya (TamilNet, 11.01.2005). If such reports are not manipulated by TamiNet to give an impression of Tamil-Muslim harmony to cover up LTTE’s atrocities against local Muslims, good political relations appear to have been built between Tamils and Muslims in Kinniya (Trincomalee). Here a Muslim candidate, Sahul Hameed, ran for elections for TULF/TNA in 2004 on a personal platform of Tamil-Muslim equality. Tamil TNA-politicians in Trincomalee have also eagerly appealed to Muslim voters on this platform. Similarly, Mosque welfare organisations have helped also Tamil tsunami victims. Mosque organisations, helped by peace NGOs, appear to many places have worked tirelessly to improve Tamil-Muslim relations several places in the east.

Conflict themes still remain available on ground level for political actors to elaborate on.

**Tamil-Muslim Class Relations and Resource conflicts**

By the late 1990s, almost one third of the population in the Eastern Province had been internally displaced because of the warfare in the area. The migration process has created a tendency towards spatial segregation of people along ethnic lines. Many Muslims have for example moved towards the densely populated coastline of Ampara district, while Tamils have migrated into Batticaloa (Hasbullah, 2000). Attempts have also been made through the delineation of *pradeshyya sabhas* (municipalities) to create units where one community is in majority, giving administrative maps for the Eastern Province a peculiar look.
Tamil-Muslim relations in the east are affected by conflicts over land ownership. In addition to the difficult ownership-questions for earlier displaced persons that are now being resettled under patronage of NGOs, politicians and militants according to varying ethic-ideological agendas, there is also a shortage of land due to population increase. There is therefore tension between the communities because of fear for expansion and expropriation. Rules have therefore evolved in both communities that forbid ethnic group members to sell land to members of other ethnic communities (Mohideen, undated:11).

The growing wealth of Muslims has placed them in a condition where they are able to buy land from Tamils suffering from the war (ibid.). LTTE has, on their hand, violently taken over Muslims’ land. According to Muslim Guardian (17.10.07): “Paddy fields harvested by the Muslims were burned down. Farmers were gunned down in their fields and there have been outbreaks of ethnic violence during harvest time. As a result thousands of acres of cultivation lands were dominantly cultivated by the LTTE. The Muthur Muslims lost thousands of cattle and acres of grasslands to the LTTE”. There has been a significant loss of rural Muslim land to Tamils (ICG, 2007:14). LTTE has made Tamils unlawfully occupy large amounts of land belonging to Muslims. Such violent takeover of Muslim land appear to
be planned by LTTE as a means to alter the ethnic composition of Muslim majority areas, such as around Kinnya and Muthur, Trincomalee (UTHR(J), 2003,2), or to simply benefit Tamils at the expense of Muslims. The Karuna group and members of the Tamil-dominated civil service in parts of the east also presently follow this ethnic chauvinist agenda (PSM, 05.10.2007).

Tamil-Muslim land conflicts are inter-group conflicts between two internally ranked groups, where Tamils and Muslims occupy the same economic groups. Land is a vital resource to agriculturalists, and thus becomes an object for competing ethnic claims. Tamils have the armed support of militant Tamil groups and the Tamil-dominated civil service in some areas to enforce their claims (Korf, 2003). Muslims, on the other hand, have the land laws of Sri Lanka and the vague hope of their fair implementation under a Tamil-biased administration, or the possible interference by any powerful interested Muslim politician. Tamil militants’ robbery of Muslim businesses and theft of Muslim fishermen’s fishing equipment are examples of the same conflict pattern.

However, Tamils and Muslims in the east are also sometimes seen as ethno-classes. One businessman from the East described to me the relation between Tamil militants and Muslims as inter-class jealousy: “In the armed groups there are many low-class people. You know Muslims are traders, hard-working people. So in the east you see Muslims have nice houses and good clothes, so the washermen, barbers, low class Tamils were jealous. When they joined the militants they wanted to do something against these Muslims. The LTTE and the armed groups failed to control these elements. They don’t have proper management. Maybe the militant leadership think that we should not harm the Muslims but the lower-level fighters are attacking Muslims themselves.” (Interview, June-06).

According to McGilvray (2001:15), eastern Tamils have traditionally looked down upon Muslims for being less educated than them. Muslims have, however, after independence climbed on the “social ladder” to bypass also higher caste Tamils in the east.

The conflict between Tamils and Muslims is here appears as a class conflict, where LTTE members preying on Muslims may perceive themselves as a revolutionary movement against a Muslim capitalist class. However, a considerable amount of Muslims in the east are poor farmers and fishermen. Tamil-Muslim relations in the east may therefore not be fully explained as one between ethnic classes. LTTE’s extortion of Muslims may anyhow be interpreted as fitting into a class struggle pattern. The extortion and occupation of Muslim properties may be seen as a way LTTE tries to force what they see as a Muslim “selfish” upper-class to share its wealth with poor Tamils. Much of the resources LTTE acquires are however needed to pay fighters and buy military equipment. Tamils are also extorted by the
militants. Interpreted this way, Tamil militants’ view of Muslims is to transform, or submit, them into a (Tamil) community obedient to LTTE’s agenda. Many Muslims on their hand appear to support a vision of Tamil-Muslim brotherhood, but frown upon the idea that LTTE, or northern Tamils, shall dominate them. So may also many eastern Tamils.

Some eastern Muslims speak of an eastern regional identity with a harmonious relationship between Tamils and Muslims. An Akkaraipattu-inhabitant described to me the relation as “puttu”, a local breakfast dish of rice mixed with coconut. The dish symbolised how Muslims and Tamils are economically interdependent. Muslim shopkeepers depend on Tamil customers and Muslim landowners often depend on Tamil field labourers, or vice versa. The puttu of Sri Lanka’s east coast therefore represents a harmonious relation between Muslims and Tamils of different, or also same, classes. This view of inter-ethnic class harmony contrasts the revolutionary idea of Tamil-Muslim class struggle that seems to be promoted by LTTE. This indicates a difference between Tamils in the east and the LTTE leadership in what is seen as their political-economic interests in their relations with Muslims. Some eastern Muslims suggested to me that not all Tamils in the east support LTTE’s visions and strategies, but that Tamils don’t dare to talk against LTTE in fear of reprisals. Tamil-Muslim hostility may be promoted by Tamil militants to take away Tamils’ attention from the hardship the separatist struggle is bringing upon them.

The political loyalty patterns among eastern Tamils are therefore unclear. A man in Ampara district told me: “I don’t know who supports who here. Tamils here can’t speak because they risk being killed. They are being suppressed, it seems like a Hitler group is here. They cannot speak independently. Always there might be somebody listening. So nobody actually knows who supports who. Sometimes I can hear somebody say that Karuna’s idea is good, but openly they cannot express that idea. Sometimes someone say Prabhakaran’s plan is not a future plan but a narrow-minded plan.” (interview, June-06). In such a context it may be difficult for Muslims and Tamils to trust each other, despite common interests. By incidents of inter-ethnic violence Muslims now often don’t know who to blame. A Muslim man for example told me: “We had many communal fights, on and off, starting with some personal thing. For example it could start by someone being kidnapped by LTTE. Then what they do is to catch somebody and kill them. Then the families become enemies. Sometimes some youths get together and attack a whole area, so there is always suspicion. Tamils who have suffered at the hands of Muslims think that all Muslims are

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3 LTTE’s military leader
bad and want to take revenge, likewise the other way” (interview, June-06). The dynamics of retaliation thus forge ethnic alignment patterns.

One may expect that the Muslim refugees that were expelled from the Northern Province in 1990 would have hostile feelings towards Tamils. A group of persons of this category that I met in Puttalam district, however, told me that they felt they had a good relation with Tamils. Many also expressed a wish to go back to the Northern Province and live there as they used to among Tamils. They feared, however, what they experienced as the unpredictability and hostility of the LTTE leadership on allowing Muslim refugees to live safely and re-claim their properties in the Northern Province (interviews, June-06).

A sense of brotherhood is also to be found among several Muslims and Tamils in the east because of their common experiences of minority discrimination by the Sinhala-dominated Government. A Muslim in Ampara for example thought that the political divide between Muslims and Tamils had been manipulated by Sinhala politicians, inspired by Mossad’s strategies against Palestinian movements, as a strategy to divide and rule. Sinhalese chauvinist moves in the east may therefore forge stronger Tamil-Muslim unity. However, at times Muslims or Tamils in the east instead align with Sinhalese forces against each other.

### 4.2.2 Sinhala-Muslim Relations in the North-East

In the Eastern Province, Sinhalese form considerable communities in Ampara and Trincomalee. Sinhalese in the Eastern Province mainly live in the inland of Trincomalee or in Trincomalee town, or inland in areas earlier attached to Ampara district to ethnically balance the electorate. Also, Ampara and Batticaloa districts were divided in 1961. SLMC and other Muslim think these administrative moves were made by Sinhala-lead Governments to hinder Muslims from becoming an absolute majority in any district.
Table 4.2: Percentage proportions of ethnic groups in the districts in the Eastern Province in 1981

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Sinhalese</th>
<th>Tamils</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trincomalee</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batticaloa</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ampara</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(DCS, 1981)

The ethnic composition has also changed since independence because of state colonisation schemes where Sinhala persons from the south-west were settled in the east. According to a Muslim in Ampara, the ethnic balance had therefore been altered considerably in the district between 1961 and 2001.

Table 4.3: Percentage of the population from different communities in Ampara in 1961 and 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinhalese</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamils</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Muslim man in Ampara)

The same person claimed that only 23% of the land in Ampara is owned by Tamils and Muslims, even though they jointly form the ethnic majority in the district. Ampara district also has a largely Sinhalese administration, and the Government Agent\(^4\) is Sinhalese. Land conflicts involving Muslims in Ampara, therefore, are usually against the Sinhalese administration, seen to be influenced by Sinhala-biased forces. Muslims in Ampara still remember how Government colonisation schemes were implemented in favour of Sinhala farmers moving in from the south without the government keeping the initial plan of giving

\(^4\) head of the province appointed by the central government
50% of the land to local Tamil and Muslim farmers (Mohideen, undated). Colonisation schemes were also implemented in Trincomalee. As with Tamils in Tamil majority areas, in Muslims’ land conflicts with Sinhalese interests in Ampara Muslims are in a weaker position since the other ethnic community controls the administration, that is seen to implement policies in an ethnically biased manner.

Incidents have also recently taken place where the ethnic balance of areas is altered against Muslims’ interests. Attempts have for example been made by members of the local council of the Sinhala majority unit Lahugala to annex three neighbouring Muslim majority subdivisions under it.

Table 4.4: The Lahugala – Polluvil area in Ampara district

In such processes place names are also often changed from Tamil or Muslim names to Sinhala names (CMTPC, 2007). According to one Tamil-Muslim blog spot (ibid.), it was also in July 2006 decided that 1531 hectares of land in Ampara district will be declared a national park. Local Muslims felt that this was an attempt by the government to take over land that had been the means of livelihood for many local Muslims and Tamils. 90% of the local population depends on agriculture (ibid), so land is a core resource for inhabitants.

After the Tsunami, a buffer zone along the coast was also established where people were not allowed to settle. Land within the buffer zone, however, was offered to tourist business
interests. In the surfer’s paradise and Muslim majority town Pottuvil this has been suspected to be new moves from central government actors to grab land from Muslims.

To Muslims and Tamils the Government apparatus appear to act in favour of a Buddhist primordial ideology when dealing with land conflicts in Ampara. Land used for decades by Tamils and Muslims is taken over for purposes such as protection of nature and Buddhist heritage. In one instance land was taken over by the central government to create a High Security Zone. The Zone was never established, and the land was instead declared to be Buddhist temple lands. In 2005 official inquiries had also been made for identifying all the places of Buddhist worship in Ampara district. Seven such places alone were found in the Muslim majority (78.11% of the population, ibid.) Pottuvil area. The erection of Buddha statues in Puttalam only two days after the tsunami had also created irritation. Such moves are seen as attempts by the JHU minister for Environment and Natural Resources to strengthen Sinhala Buddhist influence in Muslim majority areas, according to their ideological view that the whole of Sri Lanka is primarily a Sinhalese Buddhist land.

Local persons have reported that the Karuna fraction also “has been threatening people of the area with eviction orders from the “sacred Buddhist lands” that they were “occupying” (ibid.). This new coalition of convenience between the unnatural allies JHU and Karuna, both allied to the government, pose political challenges for the Muslim politicians that are also allied to the government.

From JVPs, or a Sinhala point of view, however, the settlement schemes in the Eastern Province are seen as poverty reduction moves to help poor Sinhalese. The population density in the Eastern Province (162 persons per km², (CBSL, 2005),) is approximately half of that in the Southern Province (432 persons per km², ibid.), or one tenth of that in the western district Gampaha (1558 persons per km² (ibid.), so to move Sinhala families here may also be seen as means to correct social injustice in a nation-wide perspective. From a Sinhalese point of view Muslims again appear to be understood unitarily as a rich and selfish ethnic class. This was indicated by that tsunami-unaFFECTed Sinhalese villagers in Ampara have demanded that some of the houses build for Muslim tsunami victims should be given to them also. State-driven expansion of Sinhalese/ Buddhist low-class interests in Ampara is therefore seen as a threat to local Muslims’ interests.

Muslims in Trincomalee also face increased Government discrimination after the “liberation” of the east. According to Muslim Guardian (17.10.07), Sinhalese families unaffected by the Tsunami are here with the help of the army acquiring land allocated for
Muslim tsunami victims. An area used by local people for stone breaking was suddenly closed off because Buddhist archeological evidences had been found there. Deep sea fishing had been allowed by the president but again disallowed for Muslims, but not for Sinhalese, by local army commanders. Muslims are instead told to use Tamil fishing areas. According to Muslim Guardian (ibid.) “Sinhalese Home Guards with the support of the Army grab the tractors owned by Muslim farmers and use for cultivation in their own fields”. Sinhala Government control thus appears to be equally insensitive to Muslims’ interests in Trincomalee as the LTTE rue.

4.2.3  Muslim-Sinhala relations in the South-West

Among Muslims in the south-west, however, the relation between Muslims and Sinhalese is generally understood to be good. One politician from a large party told me that “Muslims have always had very high positions in Sri Lanka. Muslims get along very well in Sinhala villages, in many places Muslims are there in joint leadership roles. Muslim politicians have been voted in from Sinhala majority constituencies” (interview, June-06). This implies that Sinhalese and Muslims many places see their political interests as harmonious, since there is sufficient trust between communities for common political representation. Muslims and Sinhalese interests are largely seen to be harmonisable in multi-ethnic parties.

However, incidents of Sinhala-Muslim violence also sometimes take place in the south. In Colombo a few years ago some Muslims had been shot in a mosque when they objected to the use of Mosque loudspeakers for un-Islamic activities (Mohideen, undated). In January 2006 goons in the presence of policemen set fire to a number of Muslim shops during a curfew in Dharga Nagar in the Southern Province. Residents alleged that also policemen had been involved in looting the attacked shops (TamilNet, 02.02.2006). The triggering factor for the attack had been that a police officer had spread a false rumour that a Sinhalese person had been killed by a Muslim and that Muslim people were preparing inside a mosque to attack Sinhalese. Ethnic prejudice and fears among civil servicemen do therefore at times disturb the inter-ethnic harmony between Muslims and Sinhalese in the south. Proponents of Buddhist nationalism spread anti-Muslim fear for example by pointing to Muslim dominance over “originally” Buddhist countries such as Bangladesh (see f.ex. SinhalaNet, 2006).
Government discrimination of Muslims

Muslims also resent the language laws after independence that created discrimination in government sector jobs for Tamil speaking Muslims. These provisions particularly affected the Muslim middle class seeking Government jobs. The removal of minority safeguards in the constitution of 1972 and the minority-discriminating provisions for demarcation of electoral districts in the 1978 constitution is also not forgotten (see f. ex. Mohideen, undated). These examples of Government discrimination are shared by Tamils and Muslims. However, certain Government policies have been particularly detrimental to interests of sections of the Muslim community. Since many Muslims by independence were traders, the introduction of the State-owned cooperative wholesale establishment and subsequent State Monopolies, Muslim traders nation-wide faced occupational difficulties. By independence, Muslims were for example in a clear majority in gem trade. The introduction of state cooperative movement in this field was particularly felt by Muslims (ibid.). Muslim businessmen are also sometimes being kidnapped or extorted in the south-west.

However, also in the South the Muslims can not be considered a capitalist ethno-class. According to the Muslim’s Rights Organisation (ibid.), Muslims are the largest group of public assistance recipients at Sri Lanka, and the Muslim rural community have the lowest per capita income of the ethnic communities in Sri Lanka. Muslims also remain ethnically proportionally underrepresented in government sector jobs, according to Mr. Hakeem (SLMC)(interview, June-06). This gives lower-class Muslims common economic interests with the low-class of other ethnic communities that also depend on state resources. As described by Horowitz, however, it also opens up for inter-ethnic competition between members of the same economic class but different ethnic groups. It may also open for the promotion of inter-ethnic class interests. As a multiethnic party SLFP provides an arena for interethnic cooperation for the Muslim middle-class. UNP may similarly be seen as an arena for interethnic cooperation for the Muslims working in the private sector. However, SLMC has shown to be an arena for Muslim political inter-class cooperation.

Some Muslims in the south told me that the creation of SLMC as a Muslim party had made Sinhalese people more suspicious of Muslims. SLMC is perceived by some to only work for the interests of Muslims (interviews, June-06). This focus on an ethnic divide between communities may have made people from both communities become more aware of possible conflicting interests between members of the different communities but same class. It may also have forged a Muslim intra-ethic alliance between members of different economic classes in the south similar to the Muslim inter-class coalition forged in the east.
Muslims’ relations to Sinhalese in the south-west seem, however, to be generally more easy-going than their relations to Tamils in the north-east: “In Colombo Muslims are free to go everywhere, to do business, to own property, to go to prayers. But if you take the context of the north-east what the Tamils want is total domination. So while Tamils are also living happily here in Colombo, they are controlling business and owning land in a way which a Sinhalese or a Muslim cannot do in Jaffna! ..What we fear is if power is given to LTTE, we cannot live under that set-up”, a Muslim businessman told me (interview, June-06). A Muslim student further told me that: “Before Muslims were going either to Jaffna or Colombo to put up business and for study and similar. After 1990 Muslims go only to Colombo.” (Interview, June-06). The Tamil majority domination in the north-east is seen as more suppressive of Muslims than the majority rule of the Sinhalese in the south-west.

4.2.4 Tamil-Muslim relations in the South-West

Since Muslims have been exposed to the same type of minority discrimination as Tamils by language laws and Buddhist assertiveness, Muslims in the south-west may also feel solidarity with the Tamil resentment against the Sinhala-lead Government. Muslims and Tamils in the south-west do also not always appear to be natural allies partly because of their differing loyalties in the north-eastern conflict. Muslims were also not targeted in the grotesque 1983 pogrom against Tamils (interviews, June-06). However, Muslims and Tamils have some common interests on issues that may be termed “minority rights”. However, different minorities may have different interests and re-distribution of state resources also implies re-distribution to particular areas or to institutions for or dominated by members of particular communities. Minorities may find it hard to cooperate politically, except on specific common issues. On the other hand, southern Muslims and Tamils co-operate politically within UNP that also has Tamil members, and southern Tamils may vote for Sinhala lead parties.

The relations between Sinhalese, Muslims and Tamils vary between the south and the north-east, but also internally in the Eastern Province. In ethnic ideologies, Muslims appear to continue to be perceived as an ethnic upper-class that should be made to share with others. As described, this old stereotype of Muslims does not at all catch the whole reality.
4.2.5 Partial Conclusion

Muslims in Sri Lanka share a religion and most also share a possible common racial history in terms of being descendants from Arab sailors to Sri Lanka from different time periods. Most also share the Tamil language as mother tongue. However, there are differences between Muslims in how they practice their religion. There are also large differences in the economic position of different Muslims, and different Muslims belong to different economic groups both in the east and south-west. At the same time there are regional differences between different Muslims that may be described as a centre-periphery relation between the south-west and the east. The relation between Muslims in these two areas may also be described as differences related to the different inter-ethnic relations in the two areas. While Muslims in the south-west largely are seen to live in harmony with other communities in the Sinhala majority areas in the south-west, Muslims in the Eastern Problems face various challenges in their relations with Tamil militants, a Tamil dominated bureaucracy and expansionist Sinhalese interests. Both Sinhalese and Tamil political forces act in disfavour of the interests of Muslims in the north-east. A possible reason for this seems to be that both some Sinhalese and Tamil forces operate under the understanding that Muslims are a rich ethnic business- or landholder-class.
## THE PARLIAMENTARY LEVEL OF MUSLIM POLITICS

Table 5.1: The 24 Muslim MPs by 2007 (2004-).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Ministry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AHM Fowzie</td>
<td>SLFP (UPFA)</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
<td>Minister of Petroleum Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anjan Ummah</td>
<td>JVP (UPFA)</td>
<td>Gampaha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohamed Mussamil</td>
<td>JVP (UPFA)</td>
<td>Kandy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferial Ashraff</td>
<td>NUA (UPFA)</td>
<td>Digamadulla</td>
<td>Minister of Housing and Common Amenities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cegu Issadeen</td>
<td>NUA (UPFA)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Minister of Export Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSS Ameer Ali</td>
<td>ACMC (ex-SLMC)</td>
<td>Digamadulla</td>
<td>Minister of Disaster Relief Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdul Majeed</td>
<td>ACMC (ex-SLMC)</td>
<td>Trincomalee</td>
<td>Minister of Cooperatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rishad Badhuideen</td>
<td>ACMC (UNP /ex-SLMC)</td>
<td>Vanni</td>
<td>Minister of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hussain Ahamed Bhalia</td>
<td>ACMC (UNP/ ex-SLMC)</td>
<td>National List</td>
<td>Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.R.M. Abdul Cader</td>
<td>NMC (ex-SLMC/UNP)</td>
<td>Mahanuwara</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moh. Anwer Ismail</td>
<td>NMC (UPFA, ex-SLMC)</td>
<td>National List</td>
<td>Minister of Irrigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALM Athaullah</td>
<td>NMC (UPFA, ex-SLMC)</td>
<td>Digamadulla</td>
<td>Minister of Water Supply and Drainage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rauff Hakeem</td>
<td>SLMC</td>
<td>Digamadulla</td>
<td>Minister of Post and Telecommunication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moh. Faizal Cassim</td>
<td>SLMC</td>
<td>Digamadulla</td>
<td>Deputy Minister of Scientific Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasan Ali</td>
<td>SLMC</td>
<td>National List</td>
<td>Deputy Minister of Supplementary Plantation Crops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basheer Segu Dawood</td>
<td>SLMC (UNP)</td>
<td>National List</td>
<td>Minister of Local Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdul Haleem</td>
<td>UNP</td>
<td>Kandy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kabeer Hashim</td>
<td>UNP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abdul Baiz Kamerdeen</td>
<td>UNP</td>
<td>Puttalam</td>
<td>Deputy Minister of Provincial Councils</td>
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<td>Mohamed Mahroof</td>
<td>UNP</td>
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<td>Minister of Parliamentary Affairs</td>
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<td>M.H. Mohamed</td>
<td>UNP</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
<td>Deputy Minister of Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mohammed Mustaffa</td>
<td>UNP</td>
<td>National List</td>
<td>Deputy Minister of Tourism</td>
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<td>Faiszer Mustapha</td>
<td>UNP</td>
<td>Mahanuwara</td>
<td>Deputy Minister of Public Estate Management</td>
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<td>Sihabdeen Nijamudeen</td>
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<td>Rajagirja</td>
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(Source: The web site of the Parliament of Sri Lanka, August 2007 ([www.parliament.lk](http://www.parliament.lk)) and other sources)
5.1 SLMC

5.1.1 Ashraff’s SLMC

Muslim politics is in Sri Lanka commonly associated with SLMC in the 1980s and 1990s. As a party defined on the basis of religion, appeal to Islam was initially important in SLMC’s ideological campaigning. It was for example claimed that “a vote for SLMC was a vote for the Koran” (Knoerzer, 1998:144). Ashraff had also in his 1989 election manifesto given a fatwa (religious judgement) that it was haram (forbidden for Muslims) to vote for the UNP presidential candidate Premadasa (ibid.). When Premadasa won the elections, however, Ashraff shifted to support Premadasa and his negotiations with LTTE that followed. It was thus not as much to support UNP, but rather to follow a different political path than Mr. Ashraff that would be anti-Islamic.

The constitution of SLMC also appeals to Islam for policy definition. It is stated that SLMC shall “seek solutions to the socio-economic and ethnic problems of Sri Lanka based on the tenets of Islam”, and “to preserve and promote the Shariah Laws and to encourage the members of Party and others to adopt the entire Code of Shariah Laws in their private and community life”. Ashraff and SLMC thus took on the role of interpreting and promoting Shariah-based policies within the Sinhala-Buddhist ruled Sri Lanka. Ashraff actively engaged Muslim Scholars (Ulema), who were seen to only care for otherworldly issues, in discussions of how Muslims should live in the Sri Lankan society. The Sri Lankan Ulema on their hand preached in favour of SLMC in the mosques. Protest demonstrations were also sometimes held on Fridays after prayers (interviews, June-06).

This political strategy of engaging the pre-existing religious organisational network and religious-ideological terminology of Muslims served to forge a common ideological-political identity for Muslims. Funds for party activities were given by Muslim countries. Other groups had earlier tried to create Muslim political parties, such as the Islamic Socialist Front (Hakeem, undated:290) or the Ceylon Islamic United Front by Ashraff’s uncle Mr. Kariapper (ibid.:288) in the 1960s, but without much success. One of the reasons why no Muslim party was successful before SLMC is that Ashraff, as a constitutional lawyer, payed attention to electoral laws. SLMC made in 1989 an agreement with President Premadasa (UNP) that the threshold for to enter Parliament should be lowered from 12,5% to 5%, for them to support him. This facilitated the entry of small parties, like SLMC, to Parliament.
Although a Muslim party, the political issues focussed on by SLMC were only to a small extent directly related to religion. Ashraff had spoken for the introduction of interest-free (“Islamic”) banking in Sri Lanka (ibid.:21). As a religious minority, however, Muslims in Sri Lanka had already achieved a larger amount of religious freedom than Muslims in most other countries. Family law shariah courts had freely operated since British times. Muslim politicians in UNP or SLFP had also given considerable attention to Muslims’ political interests for religious practice. Religious discrimination could therefore not become a strong campaigning issue. SLMC instead focussed on promoting socio-economic interests of Muslims, particularly those of north-eastern Muslims. Ashraff worked for increased security as well as improved infrastructure for Muslim majority areas in the east. Before the 1989 elections SLMC strongly campaigned in the north-east for the creation of a separate province for north-eastern Muslims (Knoerzer, 1998:144).

SLMC’s appeal to Islam was instrumental in bolstering a primordial sense of community feeling among Muslims for Muslims to become a stable vote base for SLMC. LTTE’s brutal 1990 ethnic cleansing of Muslims from the Northern Province also contributed to forging such a Muslim political identity, since Muslims thereafter would feel insecure of Tamil political leadership. The event was critical since SLMC first was formed as a party for north-eastern Muslims. The Islamic base was here used to make Muslims in the north-east see themselves as a group distanced from Tamil militarism. SLMC promoted the idea that Muslims in Sri Lanka cannot achieve their rights as a minority through an armed struggle. In the words of an SLMC member in Puttalam: “Great leader Ashraff motivated Muslims for politics instead of weapons” (interview, June-06). Muslims were portrayed as a democratic ethnic group, and Islam as a peace-loving religion. SLMC spelled out that Muslims are not against the creation of Tamil Eelam, but that they did not want to use violence to achieve it. Being a former TULF-member, Ashraff resented the violent turn of the Tamil national movement.

Since SLMC first was a north-eastern Muslim party, Ashraff acted contrary to the patterns described by Chandra. Chandra proposed that opportunist ethnic politicians wish to obtain as many votes as possible and therefore define their ethnic constituency as widely as possible. Ashraff instead narrowed his electoral chances by focusing on not only a minority group but also a group that constituted a religious minority within a (Tamil) language minority in the promotion of the idea of a Muslim province. Because of this he may be seen as being driven by primordial-ideological motivations or true concerns for the group he aimed to represent.
He is, however, seen by some to have been as an opportunist by politically dividing Muslims from the Tamils with the hardship they endured, in order to benefit his constituency by building an ethnic-ideological alliance with Sinhalese political leaders. This actualises Horowitz’ description of how three groups in ethnic conflicts easily reduce themselves into two groups, as Ashraff on behalf of Muslims was seen to choose to sympathise with Sinhalese or Tamils in an either-or manner.

Ashraff also seem to have chosen to accentuate the Muslim-ness above the north-easterliness in SLMC since the political space in the north-east already was filled by a range of political movements claiming to represent north-eastern Tamils. The ideological choice to concentrate on Muslims may also have been used as a support-maximising strategy. In Hakeem’s words, “we felt that Muslims should not confine themselves to a regional party. The real strength of Muslims is numerously in the east, but 2/3 of Muslims live outside the North-East. To neglect that would be a disadvantage to Muslims in the North East. If SLMC was to be looked at as a north-eastern party, other political forces could see that as a chance to exploit, to build up a separate Muslim political force in opposition to SLMC. The Muslim vote base outside North-East is large.” (interview, June-06). SLMCs ethnic ideology had accordingly to be shaped in a way that Muslims all over the country could identify with it, to forge intra-group cohesion. Appeal to primordial ties of “Muslim brotherhood” was made for this purpose. In SLMCs ethnic ideology language issues were “conveniently forgotten”. “So if I learn French, does it make me a Frenchman?” an SLMC-supporter rhetorically asked me. In Parliament, Ashraff advocated for that all persons in Sri Lanka should learn both Sinhala, Tamil and English, since for Muslims it would be the same what language they spoke as long as they were Muslims (Hakeem, undated). This ideological strategy conflicts with Tamil nationalism for which language has been the core ethnicity-defining factor.

SLMC became a party that spoke up for Muslims all over the country on various issues such as fishing restrictions in Puttalam and for improving conditions for poor Muslims in Colombo. SLMC also became important at provincial and local political level in different parts of Sri Lanka. SLMC seems to have focussed on the interests of lower-class Muslims. UNP seem to have remained the party for economically strong Muslims. More specifically, perhaps, SLMC became the party for middle- And lower class Muslims in the north-east, and southern Muslims support were appealed for to protect the interests of these. Ashraff’s Parliamentary energy, and his power as a minister after 1994, was mainly spent on appealing for security of the north-eastern Muslims, and on the issue of providing roads, land and schools to eastern Muslims (Hakeem, undated). Ampara district, which is also
Ashraff’s home area, was therefore the main constituency of Ashraff’s SLMC. The very idea of a South-Eastern Muslim Province of his late days indicates this. President Kumaratunga (SLFP) had allegedly promised Mr. Ashraff that such a South-Eastern Muslim province would be created. SLFP and SLMC were in a tight alliance between 1994 and 2000, and this may have affected both parties to become more multi-ethnic.

SLMC and Ashraff anyhow gathered a considerable amount of Muslims nation-wide. A student from Kalmunai told me that “Ashraff was a great speaker, still today all Muslim houses in the east listen to his cassettes” (interviews, June-06). Ashraff’s political thinking thus still influences Muslims. Other criticise Ashraff for his authoritarian leadership style, and for running the party like a “one man party” (interviews, June-06). His sudden death therefore left the community with questions of who would be his rightful follower.

5.1.2 Hakeem’s SLMC

Rauf Hakeem, the new leader of SLMC, thus inherited a party which had its core constituency in the east. A common complaint against Hakeem accordingly became that he was not from the east himself, and that he could not understand eastern Muslims’ political problems. Since Sri Lankan politicians often favour their home region, SLMC’s policies may have been benefited southern Muslims stronger under Hakeem. In Hakeem’s words, “Muslims (…) have reached beyond the regional differences (…) we look at the common good to minimise the harm for Muslims living in different parts of the country” (interview, June-06). Hakeem may have found it necessary to tone down the assertiveness of north-eastern Muslims as a part of his alliance with the “businessman party” UNP. This was considered an unsuitable strategy by eastern Muslims in a period when negotiations on the future of the north-east were going on.

Hakeem, however, also points to discrimination of north-eastern Muslims as the raison d’être for the Muslim party: “After the North-Eastern problem emerged, there was a problem that Muslims’ interests were overlooked when one tried to solve the Tamil problem. In particular in the 1980s after the Indo-Lankan accord, where Muslims’ interests were totally overlooked in the east, Muslims strongly felt that they needed a party on their own, since all the larger parties had failed them in this regard” (interview, June-06). Hakeem initiated his SLMC-leadership with a strong bid for the interests of Eastern Muslims: Soon after having been made a Minister in the SLFP-lead government in 2000, he demanded that the South-Eastern Province for Muslims promised to Ashraff by President
Kumaratunga be created within 100 days (interview, June-06). When President Kumaratunga could not satisfy this demand, Hakeem protested by crossing over to the opposition together with five other SLMC MPs.

Figure 5.2: SLMC election campaign leaflet from 2004.
Indicating SLMC's aim to represent all Muslims in the north-east

As a promoter of mono-ethnic devolution of power, SLMC is a principal ally to LTTE and Tamil nationalists more than to multi-ethnic parties. The senior TNA-politician Sampanthan has for example recently said that “Mr. Ashraff understood the principles of minorities’ rights for internal self determination” (PSM, 17.09.2007). In parliament in 1990, Ashraff had said that “whatever devolution we give should not be on a region-oriented basis but on a community-oriented basis” (Hakeem, undated:8). SLMC therefore tried its best during the peace negotiations to design a devolution model for Muslims that
would be compromisable with devolution proposals by LTTE for the same areas. Tamil self-rule is seen as a stepping stone towards self-rule for north-eastern Muslims. SLMC has also attempted to keep a good relation with LTTE, as the 2002 SLMC-LTTE agreement exemplify. In the agreement SLMC also tried to parallel LTTE by claiming to be the “sole representative of Muslims”. In the idea of devolution to a Muslim unit itself SLMC has paralleled Tamil nationalism, although the idea of establishing a political self-rule unit for Moors had been suggested in the Moor's association already in the 1960s (Marikar et.al., 1976). SLMCs’ quest for Muslim self-government became formulated in opposition to Tamil majority domination in the north-east that itself was formulated in opposition to Sinhala majority domination in the South.

The Muslim quest for self-government has therefore been portrayed by SLMC as a “liberation” struggle against being made a minority within a minority. In the words of Hakeem: “I cannot see why the LTTE is demanding a federal formula from the centre while they are not ready to allow the same federal formula in the North-East. Tamils want unitary system to be dismantled from the central Government, they must be willing to dismantle central power in the North-East as well!” (interview, June-06). A central claim of SLMC is that Tamils have treated minorities in north-east worse than minorities have been treated by the Sinhala-dominated state. SLMC’s fear of Tamil domination in the East was aired as opposition to the Tamil ISGA-proposals and the P-TOMS proposals for sharing of Tsunami aid. Both proposals are criticised for giving LTTE and Tamils a majoritarian position from which they may uncompromisingly dominate dissenting minorities. SLMC’s persistent claim is that Muslims should be treated as a separate community on par with the Tamil community.

LTTE’s lacking follow-up of the SLMC-LTTE treaty of 2002 was detrimental to Muslims’ faith in Hakeem as their leader and his ability to give SLMC a “parity” status to LTTE. Hakeem is as a southerner accused of having being fooled by LTTE in the SLMC-LTTE agreement. According to an eastern Muslim student, “some Tamils had written something in that agreement that Muslims themselves had chosen to leave Jaffna. Still Hakeem signed that agreement. So after that people were thinking: Why should we vote for Hakeem?” (interview, June-06). By some he was seen to appease LTTE in the treaty.

SLMC’s ethnic exclusivism was anyhow moderated by Hakeem’s alliance with UNP and the peace negotiations where Muslims were not allowed a “parity status” and was given a separate representative only in the minutes from the 2003-meetings. In 2006, Hakeem himself told me that “Muslims’ issues cannot be addressed properly when we try to be a
part of another delegation. This was my own experience when I participated for the Government in the talks. The very structures of the talks became an impediment to properly advance our own issues, and that was why we felt that a separate Muslim representation was an essential prerequisite for us to reach an acceptable solution. (...) we felt that the two-party formula would lead to a solution that would be structured by that two-party formula (...) The Norwegian facilitators had overlooked the Muslim dimension from the very outset.” (Interview, June-06). The path-dependency created by the structures of the peace process thus marginalised the Muslims and SLMC both in the peace process and in the eyes of many Muslims in Sri Lanka.

A Muslim Peace Secretariat (MPS) was also set up by SLMC and NUA jointly to parallel the Government’s and the LTTE’s peace secretariats. The MPS was intended work for consensus-making on the Muslim intra-group arena for Muslims’ positions in the peace process, and was supposed to accommodate interests of all Muslim politicians. Jaweed Yusuf, (SLFP member), was appointed as its leader. Some criticised also him for not being from the east. Yusuf, however, resigned from the leadership in June 2006 as he felt that SLMC tried to overrule other parties in the MPS. In some Muslims’ eyes, SLMC here again paralleled LTTE in its attempt to portray itself as “the sole representative” of the Muslim People despite Muslim politicians from other parties having alternative opinions on the peace process. The MPS, however, appear to later have become more inclusive, and is since November 2006 lead by Mr. Mohideen, the former Secretary General of MULF.

Hakeem’s coalition of commitment with UNP during the peace talks were thus seen to imply a “sell-out” of Muslims’ interests. When Hakeem even after the 2004 Parliamentary elections, when SLFP took over the Government, chose to remain allied to UNP, this was too much to bear for other SLMCers who defected and formed another party. Hakeem, however, chose to remain with UNP in order to uphold central SLMC-aims. In his own words: “SLMC left SLFP because SLFP had moved away from the original position of supporting Muslim autonomy. But I believe SLFP and UNP are not so different when it comes to Muslims’ issues at day, had it not been for SLFP’s alliance with JVP” (interview, June-06). Within the Muslim community, he may anyhow have been seen as the wrong person to promote north-eastern Muslim self-rule, himself being from Kandi. Hakeem’s personal regional identity thus partly changed the identity of the party, showing that the intra-group solidarity within the Muslim community was weakened when there was no charismatic leader to uphold the party’s eastern “soul”. In this situation, other Muslim leaders felt called to step forth on behalf of Muslim’s political interests.
The Oluvil Declaration

On January 29th 2003 maybe 40,000 Muslim students and others gathered in front of the South-Eastern University in Oluvil in Ampara district. The demonstration was staged for the issuing of the Oluvil declaration which declares that: “north-eastern Muslims are a separate political community, nationality or nation. By nationality or nation we mean a group of people who are bound together by a common political agenda and who possess a separate cultural identity” (quoted in Frerks and Klem, 2005:193). The north-eastern region is described as the traditional homeland of north-eastern Muslims, and it is stated that these should have the right of self-determination in their majority areas.

The Oluvil declaration’s Muslim nationalism reflects similar declarations of Tamil nationalism, and came at a time when it seemed likely that Tamils would obtain Tamil self-rule in the north east. The protest was staged to gain the influence of the Muslim political agenda that seemed to be ignored because of problems in the Muslim political leadership at the time.

5.2 SLMC breakaway parties

Two groups of SLMC members were expelled from the party by Hakeem for opposing his leadership in 2002 and 2004. Several persons described the splits as resulting from elite rivalry. A member of one of the new parties for example told me that: “we have a problem within the Muslim community that everybody wants to be the leader”. Another person told also told me that in the SLMC-infighting, the involved “do not disagree on issues, they disagree on who is going to become a minister. You know, to poor Muslims, if you’re a minister, everybody will flock around you. If you’re not a minister, or not even an MP, not even a dog will wag its tail in front of you” (interviews, June-06).

It is when a politician is a minister that he or she gets control over public resources that may be distributed to the constituency. The Muslim politicians that have been most eager to join the Government to become Ministers, and thus to enter into coalitions of convenience, may therefore be seen as more oriented towards patronage politics than politicians that choose to remain in opposition until central political interests are accommodated by the Government. The harder-to-get parties wait for coalitions of commitment. Hakeem (SLMC) told me that “Simple portefolios are not our aim. A certain understanding of delivering certain agreement has to be there for us to join the Government. We have come with a certain
mandate from the people.” (Interview, June-06). SLMC and Hakeem has zealously held on to the demand of devolution to a Muslim unit. SLMC may therefore be seen as more policy-oriented party than the breakaway SLMCers that has joined the Government. These may, however, think that they could achieve more on policy issues by joining the Government and affecting it from within.

Both elite rivalry and of eagerness to become minister explain the splits in the Muslim parties since 2000. However, “deeper” disagreements on issues also played a role. Ideological and regional differences were also nurtured in the splinter movements from SLMC since year 2000, not the least as a result of alliance strategies sought by the splinter parties. These were anyhow too small to be able to survive in the political scenery as independent players.

5.2.1. NMC: Eastern Province Muslim Regionalism

The 2002-breakaway group from SLMC, that first operated as SLMC(A), then named itself “Ashraff Congress” and then later “National Muslim Congress” seems to fit the elite-quarrel explanation for splits of parties. The group was lead by Athaullah, an expelled member of SLMCs politbureau, who seriously questioned Hakeem’s leadership role and criticised him for compromising too much on eastern Muslims’ interests in the peace negotiations and of being too soft towards LTTE. In 2003, Hakeem had to leave peace negotiations in Oslo since Athaullah’s fraction had tried to remove Hakeem from the leadership position in his absence.

NMC was initially a stronger bidder for eastern Muslims’ interests than SLMC. In the group’s first national gathering, 2000 delegates had unanimously adopted a resolution stating that an independent self-rule unit should be devolved to Muslims with no less power than to any such Tamil unit, and that all forcibly evicted Muslims should be given the right to return to their lands. The group also said that members of the Muslim intelligentsia should represent Muslims in the peace talks, and expressed solidarity with the people of Palestine and Iraq (TamilNet, 25.12.2002). That Athaullah initially went further than Hakeem on Muslims’ issues may be seen as “ethnic outbidding” for Muslims’ interests, but also as an ideological protest against that SLMC’s alliance with UNP had been too ideological costly for Muslims. The Athaullah group anyhow chose to remain in Government with UNP where Mr. Athaullah served as the Minister of Highways.
In 2004, the group ran for elections as National Muslim Congress (NMC) under the UPFA ticket in an alliance with SLFP and JVP, and won 3 seats in Parliament. This alliance increased NMC’s ideological distance to SLMC. NMC joined in March 2006 with persons from JVP, SLFP, the Karuna Group and a splinter group from EPDP in the “Patriotic National Movement” for de-merging the Northern and the Eastern Province and thus to “safeguard the rights of the people in the Eastern Sri Lanka” (TamilNet, 22.03.2006). They could build on the un-implemented Bandaranaike (SLFP)-Chelvanayakam (FP) pact from the 1960s that had stated that that “The Northern Province is to form one regional area whilst the Eastern Province is to be divided into two or more regional areas” (quoted in Hakeem, undated:295). In November 2006 a Supreme Court ruling declared that the Northern and Eastern Provinces were de-merged. Several Muslims have criticised the merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces in the Indo-Lankan accord as the event that made Eastern Muslims a “minority within a minority” under Tamil rule, and as the mobilising factor that made SLMC strong in the first place. NMC thus took a different stance than SLMC and Tamil nationalists on devolution issues, and instead promoted eastern regionalism.

“There is no “Tamil Homeland” in the Eastern Province”, Central advisors to Athaullah told me in June 2006, and resented what they saw as dominance of Jaffna Tamils in Trincomalee. The Karuna group and NMC were initially natural allies in promoting eastern regionalism. The Karuna Group’s order on loudspeakers that all persons of northern origin should leave the district in March 2004(TamilNet, 04.03.2004), strongly echoes LTTE’s expulsion of Muslims from the north in 1990 and appears as a bid for Muslim support. The Karuna group has, however, increasingly targeted Muslims, also in Akkaraipattu (Ampara) (ICG, 2007:17), which is Athaullah’s home town. NMC also appear to not have gained too much following in the east, and remains centred around Akkaraipattu. Party members of NMC told me that NMC has Muslim and Sinhalese, but no Tamil members. As one of the party’s advisors told me: “It is very difficult to know who Tamils support” (interview, june-06).

Akkaraipattu is a small Muslim majority area placed in the middle of the Muslim-Tamil coastal pittu-belt. NMC holds almost all seats in the Akkaraipattu municipal council. Throughout the ceasefire period there have been a considerable number of reports of people, both Muslims and Tamils, being shot by “unidentified gunmen” riding into town on motorbikes. LTTEers have also been killed in Akkaraipattu. Because of NMC’s anti-Tamil nationalist policies, party members fear to be attacked by LTTE, and Athaullah is claimed to range high on LTTE’s hit list. NMC therefore appears as a natural ally to the minor anti-
LTTE Tamil parties/ military groups such as EPDP. EPDP has its small core constituency in Jaffna, but EPDPers have also been killed in Akkaraipattu the latest years (see f.ex. TamilNet, 20.04.2003). NMCs party members also think that LTTE cannot be trusted as a negotiation partner or for any form of political cooperation. As a consequence of this, NMC in 2006 saw no need for any separate Muslim representative to the peace talks. According to party members, Muslims’ interests were adequately represented by the Government delegation (interviews, June-06). NMC has thus increasingly aligned itself with anti-devolution forces in the south and Tamil anti-LTTE-forces. Its opposition to LTTE seems to have become more important for NMC than its stance on devolution to a Muslim unit.

Party members do, however, claim that the need for Muslim ethnic parties has emerged from discrimination against Muslims by Sinhalese-dominated parties. NMC wants Muslim areas to be developed, particularly in the east, where Muslims’ economic conditions have been badly affected by Tamil militarism. NMC further thinks that devolution of power to existing provinces is an important issue. NMC has thus opted for multi-ethnic devolution of powers above SLMC’s mono-ethnic devolution of power, and thus diverged ethnically-ideologically from the mother party.

To voters in Sri Lanka, politicians’ ideological views may not be as important as that the Politicians are from their area and deliver resources to them. NMC Minister of Irrigation Anver Ismail, was by his death in September-07 honoured in Muslim Guardian for having “done a great service to Sammanthurai people as a Minister of Irrigation especially in supply of water and developing the infrastructure system for paddy cultivation in the area” (14.09.2007). Sammanthurai is a neighbouring village to Akkaraipattu and Ismail’s home town. Similar things are said about other NMCers: “Athaullah is very popular in Akkaraipattu because he has done a lot of work for his people as a minister”, I was told (interviews, June-06). The patronage-oriented contract-like relation of resource delivery between Athaullah and his voters in Akkaraipattu seems to explain much of his support. Such narrow constituency-based policies do, however, have negative impacts on both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic relations. According to a businessman from the east “these politicians may be good at delivering something for their own areas. But they badly ignore neighbouring villages. So this is the most selfish style of politics that some of these Muslim leaders like Athaullah are doing. They only care about their own electorate and how they can win the next election.” (interview, June-06). NMC’s ethnical exclusive resource delivery parallels how Sinhalese and Tamil political leaders have been favouring their home areas. Athaullah’s attempts to move administrative bodies to Akkalaipattu from the neighbouring
village Kalmunai, Ashraff’s home town, had created contradictions with Muslims in Kalmunai.

5.2.2 ACMC: The Voice of Muslims in Tamil Majority Areas
The All Ceylon Muslim Congress (ACMC) was formed by the SLMC members that were expelled by Hakeem from the party in 2004 for disagreeing with his alliance strategy to remain with UNP in 2004. Three ACMC-members were made ministers when they crossed over to the SLFP-led Government, and one became the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The four ACMC-MPs are all from areas where Muslims are in minority in relation to Tamils. The political problems of these Muslims are different than the problems of the more assertive and ethnic-proportionally strong Ampara Muslims. Rishard Bathuideen is from Vanni, which is also his electorate, and he is the Minister for re-settlement. Many of his voters live in refugee camps in Puttalam since their voting rights have not been transferred to Puttalam after their expulsion from the north in 1990. Muslims wishing to return to the north are anxious to keep good relations with Tamils, but also to get their properties back from LTTE. The 75,000 Northern Muslim refugees have despite their 16 years long provincial exile received little attention from politicians and peace-talkers. Continued warfare and LTTE-control in the north has disallowed them from returning. Badhuideen and a group of Northern Muslim academics therefore in August 2007 decided to set up a Peace Secretariat for Northern Muslims (PSNM). The need for the PSNM had according to Badhuideen resulted from how the MPS primarily focussed on eastern Muslims’ issues. Another release factor is how the de-merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces in a new way since 1987 separated the destiny of northern Muslims from eastern Muslims. TNA has expressed that they agree that northern Muslims should be re-settled (Muslim Guardian, 24.10.2007).

The creation of the PSNM was disliked by the PSM that tries to build consensus within the Muslim community. In October 2007 a conflict also arose in a public meeting for a World Bank housing scheme in Puttalam arranged by Badhuidoen for Muslim refugees. An SLMC-politician representing Puttalam Muslims entered the meeting and threatened Badhuidoen to leave “his” area (Muslim Guardian, 24.09.2007). SLMC may now feel less interested to work for northern Muslims since this representational space is filled by ACMC. Inter-party co-operation seems to be hindered by personal- and party- rivalries.
Ali, the leader of the ACMC, however, meant that the disagreement with SLMC’s leadership was deeper-felt within the community. SLMC had according to Ali “lost people’s confidence since they have not managed to get separate Muslim representative in the peace talks (...) The people are the kings of politics, so we have to obey what they are saying!” (interview, June-06).

Ali is from Batticaloa, the only eastern district where Tamils is the relatively largest ethnic community. Muslims in Batticaloa also own a percentage of the land that is less than their ethnic proportion, but their attempts of obtaining more land have been hindered by Tamil militants. Muslims that own land in LTTE controlled areas have also not been allowed to build houses there. Muslims in Batticaloa therefore felt the increased LTTE-rule in the ceasefire period strongly, and may therefore have resented SLMC’s and UNP’s alleged compromising attitude towards LTTE (interviews, June-06). The land scarcity for Muslims in Batticaloa became particularly acute after the 2004 Tsunami. Ali has therefore worked to help coastal tsunami-affected Muslims to obtain land in Batticaloa: “we are a lot of people living in a small place, we do not want a separate state, we are not against Tamils’ demands, so why do they refuse to give some piece of land?” he told me (interview, June-06). Ali does not seem very keen on pushing for Muslim self-government.

Ali perceives members of other communities to belong to his constituency, and believes in inter-ethnic harmonious cohabitation: “My district has Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims, there are all community people in my district, so we need to give good education to all” (interview, June-06). In Ali’s view it is only the Tamil militants that are disturbing the intercommunal harmony: “As a politician I think Tamils and Muslims should live happily together. But militants won’t allow”, he claimed (ibid.). Ali’s distinction between the interests of Tamils and Tamil militants diverge from how Hakeem has accepted LTTE as the representative of Tamils. Ali has also increasingly had to cope with the Karuna group’s anti-Muslim activities in Batticaloa that presently settles Tamil refugees in Muslim villages (PSM, 05.10.2007).

Ali did in June 2006 as SLMC think that there should be a separate Muslim representative in the peace negotiations. A Muslim representative should secure that Muslims’ interests are also looked after in the talks even if any final solution to the conflict lays far ahead. To try to engage Tamil militants in talks directly outside any formal process appeared to him in June 2006 as fruitless: “We could call and say something that this has happened, for example that someone has been kidnapped. They will say ‘we will look into this’, they will say ‘no, we are not aware of this’, but still people are being killed. SLMC has signed agreements
with them so we have had talks, but after that how many massacres have taken place? What is the meaning of these agreements?” (Interview, June-06). Issues were allegedly handled better before the emergence of the Karuna group, when persons on lower levels had talks and solved issues between Tamils and Muslims.

The ACMC breakaway group of SLMC may thus be seen as a pragmatic proponent of the interests of north-eastern Muslims living in Tamil majority areas. Dealing with Tamil political/military forces in Tamil majority areas is a task the ACMC politicians may be well prepared to, themselves being from those areas. However, their power and influence at higher level depends on their ability to make other politicians agree with them. Acting without SLMC’s earlier power base, its influence seem limited to what individual ACMCers can do as ministers. However, had the ACMC- and NMC-politicians not splitted from SLMC they would not have held these minister posts from where they could benefit their constituents. Remaining in opposition since 2004 could have been detrimental for the protection of north-eastern Muslims’ interests in a situation where the Government is reconstructing the Eastern Province.

ACMC thus is a more pragmatically oriented party than SLMC, and may be bending more in favour of inter-ethnic eastern regionalism than community-based devolution. Although the split of NMC and ACMC from SLMC both were caused by disagreements on the leadership of SLMC and coalition strategies, the daughter parties came to pursue slightly different policies than SLMC.

5.2.3 Muslim-led Multi-Ethnic Parties: NUA and DUA

NUA was the first splinter party from SLMC. The party’s ethnic ideology is to accommodate interests of other ethnic groups on an equal footing with Muslims’ interests on a multi-ethnic platform for equal rights for members of all communities. A close friend of late Mr. Ashraff told me how this ideology for the party was conceived: “Around 1998 we thought that there was a limit for Muslim political parties to go, and we thought that there was no use of going further only on the communal basis. Because being only with a Muslim party would not serve the community or bring any fruitful solution to the community (...) in August 2000 Ashraff and me went on umrah (pilgrimage) to Saudi Arabia. While we were
wearing umrah clothes, we made so many decisions, we undertook so many changes in political thinking, party reforms, policy reforms” (interview, June-06). SLMC went to elections in 2000 as the multi-ethnic NUA in an electoral alliance with SLFP under PA. By NUA, Muslims’ political interests are seen to be best preserved in a multiethnic party. As history has proven, however, many SLMC’ers went back to Muslim mono-ethnic political thinking in SLMC.

Ashraff’s ideological transformation to multi-ethnicity is by his friend portrayed as taking place during the performance of a Muslim religious ritual. The context of a meeting place for Muslims from the whole world gathered for a common cause in Mekkah may have stimulated such new-thinking. In the words of Ashraff’s wife Ferial who is now leading NUA: “Ashraff’s idea was to develop a national identity, because this was the only way to get peace (...) a space should be created where all communities would come together. If a Muslim is affected, it should not be that a Muslim only can stand up and speak for him. It should be that if a person is affected, the nation should stand up and speak for him. Ashraff felt, specially by going through the facts of the north-east, that it would not be good just to be one minority group working for its particular rights. Members of other ethnic groups should also be involved.” (Interview, May-06). Ashraff thus in the late 1990s did an opposite ideological move of what he did in the early 1980s.

Ashraff’s late ideas also inform what Ferial sees as Muslims’ interests in a final solution to the ethnic conflict: “We have to work out a model where Muslims can cooperate with other groups in the area”, she told me in June 2006. Her vision is based on the need for inter-ethnic cohabitation instead of mono-ethnic self-rule. The “self” to be given “self-rule is for Mrs. Ashraff not Muslims or Tamils, but Sri Lankans. However, she does not overlook the fact that there is a lot of community-based suspicion in Sri Lanka that hinders the development of a common sense of nationhood. Her understanding is, though, that some form of devolution would ease the inter-ethnic suspicion and satisfy the different groups’ appeal for self determination.

Some think that Mrs. Ashraff’s multiethnic ideology results from her Ampara electorate being multiethnic, so that she needed to bring in Tamils and Sinhalese to gain electoral strength. NUA’s ideology may therefore be portrayed as an Eastern Province ideology that must be multiethnic since there is approximately the same amount of Muslims, Tamils and Sinhalese living in the Eastern Province. According to Ferial her vote base is approximately 50-50 Muslim and Sinhala, but the party also works to bring in Tamils. If this is the full explanation of NUA’s multiethnic ideology, Chandra’s reasoning around how ethnic
politicians opportunistically shape their ideologies is exemplified by NUA. However, NUA may also have a deeper felt ideological vision for inter-ethnic co-habitation. Since Ampara is the heartland for Muslim nationalism, Ferial could have opted for Muslim nationalism if she was purely motivated to obtain maximum electoral support.

When asked if she felt that she as a Muslim should focus on Muslims’ issues, Ferial answered: “I do. But my job is not to talk for Muslims alone. Wherever there is injustice, I should raise my voice.” (interview, June-06). Her vision of her religion is that “Islam always talks about tolerating others’ points of views and respecting others’ religion”. Based in this, Ferial advocates for integration between communities. Ferial for example thinks that children from different communities should go to the same schools: “At now, all religions are promoted very much in the different schools. Then when children go to University they are like fish out of water to meet people from other communities!” (interview, June-06).

Ferial is also Sri Lanka’s first female cabinet minister and wants to work for making women more active in societal life, despite being criticised by conservative Muslims who think women should not engage in politics. Ferial has challenged both ethnic exclusivist and traditional religious views.

Ferial’s desire to tone down Muslim exclusivism implied that she did not see any need for a separate Muslim representative in the peace negotiations: “I personally think that it will always be easier for us to first work with the Government and have our concerns incorporated in any proposal the Government hopes to present rather than sitting there and having to convince two parties about your viewpoints” (interview, June-06). Her choice of first working with the Government was based on considerations of who were most likely to take Muslims’ point of view into consideration: “I don’t think we have so far come to an agreement with LTTE, and that LTTE has at any time shown any interest in taking into account Muslims’ standpoint” (interview, June-06). Comparatively, the Sri Lankan Government is seen to be more willing to allow Muslims political space than LTTE.

Another un-ideological explanation for the creation of NUA was presented to me: "There was a new elite group coming up that could not be accommodated within SLMC. That is why Ashraff formed NUA" (interviews, June-06). The following splinter with SLMC moved NUA towards Sinhala-Muslim inter-ethnic cooperation, since it could not have survived as an independent Muslim party. NUA has been in a coalition of commitment with SLFP since 2000. Ferial is seen to have been the preferred Muslim politician by Kumaratunga (President from 1995-2005). According to some, Kumaratunga was also instrumental in splitting SLMC and NUA. Allied to Kumaratunga’s SLFP, NUA became a part of the
opposition after the 2001 elections, and participated in anti-ceasefire protests together with JVP and Buddhist politicians in 2002 (TamilNet, 27.04.2002). Ferial criticised the ceasefire for not properly addressing security concerns of Muslims. Her multiethnic ideology did therefore not stop her from speaking up on “Muslims’ issues”.

As a minister of Housing and Common Amenities since 2004, Ferial has been instrumental for Tsunami re-construction work in Ampara. Her religious background may have been important in securing funds from Saudi Arabia. In March 2006, it was for example agreed that the Saudi Arabian Government would fund a housing project in Ampara for tsunami victims that would be named “King Abdullah Model City” (Muslim Guardian, 24.04.2007). Although the aid was given by a Muslim Government to a Muslim minister, the project would benefit all communities. The Muslim-ness of the project, however, appears to have created the impression among some Tamils and Sinhalese that the projects are exclusively for Muslims. So even if Mrs. Ashraff talks in a multi-ethnic language, her ethnic identity is at times taken to imply that she will favour Muslims. Hisbullah, a NUA member from Kattankudi, on the other hand, protested against what he saw as neglect of Muslims’ interests in the P-TOMS, that was negotiated on by the UPFA alliance that NUA was part of in 2005, by resigning from his post as Chairman of the Civil Aviation Services Board. He later re-joined SLMC. NUA may have become too inter-ethnically accommodative for him.

DUA and MNA

Mr. Hafiz Nazeer Ahamed, a former NUA and SLMC(A) member, also promotes a multi-ethnic ideology. He is currently the leader of Muslim National Alliance (MNA) that gathers seven smaller Muslim parties and the Democratic Unity Alliance (DUA) that has won a number of seats in Colombo municipality council. Ahamed also is a presidential advisor. The reason he gave me for starting the MNA was that “I want to start from somewhere within the Muslim community and try to take them away from communal politics.” (Interview, June-06). Ahamed is critical to the ideology of SLMC that he thinks is creating enmity, and accuse SLMC of using the political “trick” of claiming that group-based discrimination of Muslims is taking place in order to raise Muslim support for SLMC. Ahamed himself also claim that Muslims are discriminated, for example in land issues. He, however, emphasises that claims of discrimination should be based on evidences in facts and figures in order to be credible for people of other communities. Ahamed wish to bring in members of other ethnic communities in DUA in order to “make them understand our communal grievances, and try to reach a common solution.” (Ibid.).
DUA and MNA wish to promote truly inter-ethnic politics as opposed to UNP and SLFP that are by many seen to be biased in favour of Sinhalese interests.

5.3 Muslims in Sinhala-led Multiethnic Parties

Finally, the ideology of Muslim politicians in SLFP, UNP and JVP may also be seen as multiethnic, since these parties have party members represented in Parliament with varying ethnic backgrounds. The ideological views of these three parties may also more easily be placed along the left-right economic fault line. Several Muslim politicians in SLFP and UNP also point to the fact that they should be seen not only as representatives for the Muslim community since they are voted in from Sinhala-dominated electorates in the south. This argument would probably also be made by the Muslim JVPers who are both elected in from the south (Gampaha and Kandi).

It could be argued that Muslims in JVP should not directly be seen as representatives of the Muslim community since their party is based on a secular Marxist agenda. However, both of the two Muslim MPs elected in from JVP appear on their pictures on their party’s web site with Muslim religious headgears. This indicates that their strong religious identity does not hinder them from supporting leftist political movements lead by non-Muslims. Indeed, attempts had also been made in the 1970s to build up a Marxist Muslim movement, but was worked against by an UNP-politician that established the “Anti-Marxist front” who saw Marxism to be un-Islamic (Hakeem, undated:289).

Although all three parties have a record of promoting Sinhala ethnic chauvinism, at least UNP and SLFP have also, since they are the main parties in the country, showed attempts of inter-ethnic accommodation. UNP and SLFP have since independence shown willingness to accommodate political interests of Muslims, such as giving separate public schools and courts for Muslims. Muslim politicians in UNP and SLFP do sometimes talk on behalf of Muslims’ political interests. Minister of Oil Resources Development, Mr. Fowzie, who is the only Muslim MP from SLFP, exemplifies this. In September 2007, he criticised newly made noise regulations for public areas because they would disallow early morning azan (prayer) calls from Mosques. Fowzie also told me that he had taken up Muslim issues such as “educational matters...we try to help the Muslim schools, try to develop Muslim areas, roads, infrastructure” (interview, June-06). What he here sees as Muslim issues are issues that are not only religious issues but also socio-economic issues for Muslims. Internally in
SLFP there is also a federation of Muslim politicians that visits Muslim areas and talks to people and find out what issues concern them.

Since SLFP and UNP have entered into alliances with SLMC and NUA for the latest general elections, seats won for the alliances from the Muslim dominated constituencies in the east have been filled by the allies from SLMC and NUA. This has, according to some, made SLFP and UNP focus less on the political interests of Muslims from those areas, since they perhaps would expect the Muslim politicians from the Muslim-dominated parties to cover the area of Muslims’ political interests. In Fowzie’s view, however, the presence of Muslim ethnic parties may instead have made Muslim SLFP or UNP members focus more on Muslims’ issues: “Before 1977 Muslim candidates got multiethnic support. But after SLMC came, the national parties also had to campaign in a communal manner to compete with SLMC’s demands for Muslims’ vote, even though their constituencies were multiethnic” (interview, June-06). In this way, the creation of SLMC appears to also have engaged Sinhala-lead parties in “ethnic outbidding” for Muslims’ support. Since SLFP in 1994 when in alliance with SLMC appeared as more multi-ethnic than earlier, the creation of SLMC may be seen to have made SLFP and UNP more multi-ethnic. Fowzie was also in 1999 strongly critical to how the electoral alliances between SLMC and SLFP gave SLMC a considerably stronger presence in politics than they would have achieved alone.

The Muslim interests that SLFP and UNP have promoted are by several Muslims seen to be the interests of southern Muslims. A common criticism of UNP and SLFP Muslim politicians has therefore been that “he is from Colombo. He does not understand the issues of Muslims in the east” (interviews, May/June-06).

Some of the Muslim UNP and SLFP politicians that I interviewed did not agree with the Muslim quest for devolution of power to a Muslim unit. Some were worried that these claims may create suspicion towards Muslims from members of other communities. One Muslim SLFP-member from Colombo also told that he thought devolution to a Muslim unit was not in the true interest of the Muslim community themselves, since such devolution could possibly seclude Muslims from economic opportunities in other areas. Many Muslims from the Eastern Province are for example attending University in Kandy or Colombo. It would also not be in the interest of Muslims living outside the Muslim-governed area, since members of other communities could use the existence of an ethnic Province for Muslims as an excuse to discriminate Muslims in other parts of Sri Lanka. He believed that a multiethnic vision or interethnic co-habitation would be the best solution for Muslims: “I believe that in this country to develop a solution you need models to make ethnic groups
interdependent with other communities, without this they cannot survive” (Interview, June-06). National integration of minorities is thus the model sought by this SLFP-politician. The same person also thought that the Eastern and Northern Provinces should be de-merged. The Northern Province would then be almost 95% Tamil, and the Tamil quest for self-determination may at least partially be satisfied through the Northern Provincial Administration. The Eastern Province, on the other hand, could serve as a model of multiethnic co-habitation for the rest of the country.

Muslim members of UNP and SLFP also appear to think that the Muslim community as a whole has not been discriminated in relation to members of other communities. In the words of an SLFP member: “Muslims have always had high positions in Sri Lanka. Muslims got along very well in Sinhala villages, in many places Muslims have joint leadership roles. Muslims have not been very discriminated. There have been pockets of discrimination but no policies of discrimination.” (Interview, June-06). According to him, it is SLMC’s policies itself that has made Sinhalese suspicious of Muslims: “Sinhalese now think that Muslims are trying to do what the Tamils did”. Similarly, SLMC is seen to have made Tamils suspicious of them: “When Muslims were chased out of the North-East, they were told by LTTE: Go and get your rights from Mr. Ashraff..it gave LTTE an excuse!” (ibid.). The emergence of a communal Muslim party is thus seen by members of the national parties to have worsened conditions and inter-ethnic relations for Muslims.

An UNP-er, however, saw the emergence of SLMC as an unfortunate consequence of the tendency among all communities in Sri Lanka to only look after their own interests. This tendency was seen to particularly cause problems for a particular Muslim economic group: “Muslims were one time a trusted community. In the south 98% of the population is Sinhala but there are so many Muslim shops and mosques. Muslims were trusted traders. But now this trust is not there, gradually they feel, why are we giving our money to the Muslims? In the course of the Tamil struggle, politicians have nurtured this. In the elections they say: Don’t vote for the Sinhalese, vote for one of your own!” (Interview, June-06). The interests of southern Muslim businessmen are here seen as the interests of all Muslims.

The same person also thought that the idea of ‘ethnic political interests’ had gained influence as a result of smaller ethnic parties coming up: “Earlier most politicians were from the large parties so politicians had a natural limitation to talk about their own community” (ibid.). In contrast, an SLMC-er told me that being a Muslim in a Sinhalese-lead party would be like serving as a bite for a Sinhalese fisherman. The Muslim bite would only serve the
purpose of attracting Muslim fishes (votes) while the Sinhalese fisherman would control everything according to Sinhalese interests. The fact that political parties in South Asia often are strongly top-led with little intra-party democracy leaves party members with few mechanisms through which to affect the party’s policies (Suri, 2007). The most attractive way to air alternative viewpoints may in such situations be to form new parties. “In our own party, we can control our own affairs”, the SLMC-er told me (interview, May-06). In a Muslim political party, Muslims may define their own policies and what issues to work for, while Muslims in Sinhala-lead parties at times were seen to be given muzzle against addressing Muslims’ interests. An UNP MP confirmed this view: “since giving something to minorities means giving less to the majority many of the promises towards minorities have not been fulfilled after election, because it would affect the majority vote base. This made minority community leaders suspicious of the national parties. Look at the public service that is supposed to be worked out on an ethnic ratio, Muslims are around 8% of the population, but in public sector employment Muslims are about 3-4%” (Interview, June-06).

Ranil Wickremasinghe’s (UNP Prime Minister 2001-2004) alleged lack of care for Muslims’ interests was as mentioned the reason given by several Muslim UNP MPs for joining the SLFP-lead Government in January 2007 (PSM, 07.02.2007). The issue that Prime Minister Wickremasinghe (UNP) in UN had expressed his support of the US invasion of Iraq, and that UNPers in Parliament in 2000 had tore to pieces the draft constitution presented by Mr. Ashraff and President Kumaratunga (SLFP), was also used against him. UNP has lately tried to improve Muslims’ image of the party. In a statement in October 2007 UNP states that the 2002 ceasefire should be amended to “provide space to Muslims as a party to the negotiations on devolution of powers” (PSM, 09.10.2007). SLMC and Muslim UNPers leaving UNP may have increased UNPs willingness bid for eastern Muslims’ support. Muslim UNPers remaining in opposition do also appeal to business interests for how to challenge the sitting Government. UNP MP Kabir Hashim for example in June urged Muslim ministers to leave the Government because of a growing trend of abductions of Muslim businessmen. (PSM, 15.06.2007).

The Muslim Parliamentarians’ Forum
Muslim MPs of all parties do in spite of rivalries and disagreements take part in the Muslim Peace Forum in Parliament under the leadership of Fowzie (SLFP) who is the Muslim politician with longest Parliamentary experience. “Every time something happens to Muslims we take it up in the Muslim parliamentary group or at party level”, Fowzie told me. According to some, however, the Muslim Peace Forum has been ineffective in creating
common Muslim standpoints on the North-Eastern problem since different Muslim parliamentarians sometimes are unwilling to share information because of the competition between different Muslim MPs and opposition politics. According to Fowzie (SLFP), SLMC have also at times desired to present things on their own in order to capitalise on Muslims’ issues when Fowzie has offered to take up the issue internally in the Government.

Different visions of what constitutes Muslims’ political interests in relation to the North-Eastern issues also appear to hinder the formation of consensus in the forum: “We think that before we should demand a separate representation in the peace talks let’s sit together and make one proposal....but unfortunately we are still not there”, Fowzie told me in relation to Muslims’ view of the peace process (interview, June-06). Also the PSM, the Muslim Council and other civil society or donor initiated initiatives have arranged meetings for consensus building among Muslim politicians. Civil society groups of Muslims have issued their own proposals for devolution schemes. Muslim politicians do, however, agree on several substantial issues: Most Muslim MPs agree that power should be devolved to some unit akin to the provincial level in Sri Lanka. They do also agree that Muslims in the north and east face a cluster of problems in relation to ethnically assertive political or military leaders of the two other communities.

5.4 Partial Conclusion

UNP and to a less extent SLFP have continued to speak on behalf of Muslims’ political interests as earlier since year 2000. UNP have continued to primarily see Muslims’ interests as the interests of Muslim businessmen. SLMC, the first party to be lead by a Muslim and to be formed primarily to protect the interests of north-eastern Muslims has on the other hand split to pieces because of elite rivalry within the party after the death of its founding leader Ashraff in year 2000. The elite rivalry between the different politicians that left SLMC were, however, motivated by a desire to stronger address the concerns of eastern Muslims in relation to the ceasefire that was thought to give legal powers to LTTE in the north-east. Hakeem’s leadership over SLMC also de-stabilised the party’s identity that under Ashraff had been a party allied to SLFP that had eastern Muslims as its core constituency. Hakeem was himself not from the east and locked the party into a coalition of commitment with UNP between 2001-2007, something that slightly changed the party’s image and what was seen as the party’s core constituency.
NUA was first separated from SLMC in 2001 and continued Mr. Ashraff’s coalition of commitment with SLFP and his late ideological multi-ethnic thinking. The Athaullah group was the second party to break away from SLMC. His “Ashraff Congress” was initially a stronger bidder for the creation of an eastern Muslim unit than SLMC and Muslims’ interests in the peace process. After he became allied to SLFP after 2004, however, his party NMC became a promoter of eastern regionalism that was instrumental in the de-merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces in 2006. ACMC also split away from SLMC after the 2004-election to become ministers in the SLFP-lead Government. The ACMC politicians may be seen as more pragmatically oriented promoter of Muslims’ interests than SLMC. Their main Muslim constituencies are in Tamil majority areas, and ACMC-Minister Badhuideen presently works to re-settle the Muslims expelled from the Northern Province by LTTE in 1990.
5.5 **Analytical Discussion**

As described in chapter 3.5, a number of core factors affects how many political parties may be formed to represent one ethnic group in an ethnically divided society, or whether community members instead choose to promote the community’s interests in multi-ethnic parties. Issues within the community itself such as the unity or division within the community and its agreement or disagreement in terms of its relation to other groups are important. Although these community-level issues are themselves influenced by Government policies, as described for example by Gurr, they may be seen as the “objective base” that politicians may elaborate on when they are to represent the community politically.

Political leaders that claim to represent the group may, of course, also choose to stand together or united. Some types of disagreement between politicians may merely be elite rivalry, where the involved politicians agree on what is the community’s political interests but disagree on who should be the leader to promote these interests. Disagreement between politicians may, however, also be of more profound nature and involve differences in ethnic ideologies in terms of what policies on inter-ethnic relations are sought to solve the problems of the community or even what are the true political interests of the community. Such “deeper” disagreement between politicians may relate to divisions at community level, and indicate that the group “objectively” does not have unitary or harmonisable political interests.

I have here found both elite rivalry and policy differences between Muslim politicians from different political parties in Sri Lanka at present. The tendency since 2000 is that what was initially elite rivalry between different politicians within SLMC after the death of its founding leader Mr. Ashraff has lead to splits in the party. Initially the parties engaged in “ethnic outbidding” on behalf of Muslim exclusivism aiming at gaining influence in the Norwegian-mediated peace talks. The daughter parties, however, have later abandoned the quest for a Muslim province and opted for integration with other ethnic groups. Their choices were influenced by inter-ethnic relations at ground level for different Muslims in the east, but also by dissatisfaction with SLMC’s new leader, who anyhow could not be blamed for gaining as little access for the Muslims as a separate group in the peace talks as he did. Regional differences between different Muslims living in the north-east were also made visible and gained importance by the emergence of the Karuna group after 2004, the different coalition strategies sought by different ex-SLMC politicians and the 2006 de-
merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Both contextual factors and choices made by Muslim politicians have thus caused the splits in SLMC.

In a broader historical picture, a causal pattern may be found for Sri Lankan Muslim politics in that SLMC in a new way gathered north-eastern Muslims as a politically united group allied to middle-class Muslims in the south-west from the late 1980s. UNP and SLFP had earlier represented the interests of the Muslim business-group and middle class, although they largely reflected southern Muslims’ interests or only the Muslim interests that were compromisable with Sinhalese interests at the same class levels. Muslim politics as practiced by Muslim politicians through UNP and SLFP thus contributed to political integration of Muslims with the Sinhalese, and to tone down of Muslim exclusivism and airing of grievances felt by Muslims. SLMC in a new way thus became the proponent of north-eastern lower-class Muslims’ interests, boosted by a primordial group ideology of having been neglected by both the south-western Sinhala-lead political leadership and the northern Tamil political/military leadership in the NEPC. SLMC’s Muslim nationalism was also forged by that Muslims were numerically strong in the east.

Ashraff could also appeal to a constituency in the north-east with a partly independent periphery-regional identity based on different inter-ethnic realities in the north-east than in the rest of the country. A rather clear-cut division of constituents among Muslim politicians were in place as long as UNP could represent Muslim businessmen, mainly in the south-west, and SLMC could represent Muslim farmers and fishermen and members of the middle and lower classes, mainly in the north-east. SLMC also became a strong party at provincial in the south-west. The quarrel between Mr. Ashraff (SLMC) and Mr. Fowzie (SLFP) in the late 1990s may be seen as an elite quarrel for representing the same middle-class constituency of Muslims by two politicians with slightly different views on ethnic policies that were coming ideologically closer in the alliance between the two parties. SLMC and SLFP may be seen to have represented the same classes of Muslims but mainly in different regions.

Mr. Hakeem’s southern origins and lack of charismatic appeal, however, de-stabilised SLMC’s north-eastern and lower-to-middle class profile as it had been built up by Mr. Ashraff. Hakeem’s willingness to enter into a coalition of commitment with UNP after having been expelled from the SLFP-led Government in 2000 also proved ideologically costly. UNP was seen to appease LTTE that on its side did not undergo the hoped-for transformation to a more democratically-minded actor. Anti-devolution parties in the south also did their job in making the Tigers loose faith in the negotiations, helped by Hakeem’s
rivals in NUA and NMC. NUA’s and NMC’s criticism of the peace process was not only a result of their alliance with SLFP, JVP and JHU. It was also caused by grievances and fear felt by eastern Muslims that had been and continued to be extorted and attacked by LTTE, and seriously feared for their position in a possible future “LTTE-state”. In this situation several persons saw themselves more fit than Mr. Hakeem to take over SLMC to represent eastern Muslims’ interests.

Both elite rivalry and real-felt grievances within the community thus motivated the splits from SLMC in 2001 (NUA), 2002 (NMC) and 2004 (ACMC). Mrs. Ashraff (NUA) continued the multi-ethnic line and SLFP-alliance established by her late husband. Mr. Athaullah (NMC) was from Mr. Ashraff’s neighbouring hometown in Ampara district, and paralleled Mr. Ashraff in his eagerness to tenure eastern Muslims in his patronage policies. Mr. Ali and Mr. Badhuideen (ACMC) followed Ashraff in his initiatives to help northern Muslim refugees and to negotiate with LTTE and Tamil political forces in areas where Muslims to a larger extent were “at the mercy” of Tamils. The SLMC-splinter parties have also increasingly diverged in ethnic ideologies. The ex-SLMC parties’ participation in the UPFA-alliance after year 2000 contributed to them toning down the parties’ Muslim exclusivism, and made it more of a “little sister” community to the Sinhalese than an independent third ethnic group. NUA’s multi-ethnic ideology has meant further integration between Muslims and Sinhalese in Amparai, the heartland of Muslim nationalism. NMC may still support the idea of Muslim self-government, but has become a sub-group patronage-oriented party for Muslims in Akkaraipattu.

SLMC, though, has held steadfastly on to its claims of devolution to a Muslim unit and its alliance with UNP until 2007. This seems to have been costly to it in terms of support among some north-eastern Muslims. Perhaps SLMC’s middle to lower class base may favour SLFP’s left-of-centre policies above UNP’s open economy policies. Maybe Hakeem did not well enough analyse the consequences of UNP’s economic policies and Tamil-nationalist-friendly devolution policies to see that SLMCs alliance with UNP was not seen as beneficial by the Muslim middle-class and eastern SLMC supporters. SLFP was perhaps also the favoured alliance partner of eastern Muslim leaders since SLFP has been more accommodative to eastern provincialism.

The ex-SLMC parties focus on distributing resources and protecting the interests of their electorates or home areas in order to be re-elected. This is a common political phenomenon in Sri Lanka and in other developing countries. When Government members favour their home district in centralised majoritarian and political systems with ethnic and regional
divides, minorities tend to be neglected. Devolution of power in such countries may secure more even distribution of resources between regions, and politicians will have to bargain for resources for their villages at regional level instead of at national level. Strikingly, all the Sri Lankan Muslim politicians I spoke to agree that power should be devolved to a unit akin to the provincial level in the north and east. This would improve Muslims’ ability to be elected to powerful positions since they could be elected in from villages where Muslims form majorities. Devolution of power may therefore also increase mono-ethnic political allegiance.

However, if the unit of devolution is the merged North-Eastern Province from the Indo-Lankan accord, Muslims are made a (religious) minority within a (language) minority. This repeats the minority problems that Tamils have faced at national level for Muslims at regional level, that has been SLMC’s core campaigning issue since 1987. The context of north-eastern Muslim politics were therefore considerably changed by the de-merger of the North-Eastern Province in 2006 and the Government’s subsequent “liberation” of the Eastern Province from LTTE. The ex-SLMC parties have left the demand for a Muslim province and instead attempt to accommodate Muslims’ interests in the new de-merged north-eastern reality. Only SLMC upholds the quest for a non-contiguous Muslim Province in the north-east, ironically by a leader who is not from the area himself.

Although all the Muslim parties have aligned with the sitting Government, eastern Muslims’ interests are not always necessarily accommodated by the Government forces that presently works to re-claim its authority and bolster Sinhalese influences in the east. This may make eastern Muslims align itself with eastern of north-eastern Tamil forces. However, Tamil-Muslim conflicts at community level the north-east manipulated by Tamil militants, the Government, or any possible “third force” hinders such political cooperation. If the present nation-building project in the east at large is felt to disadvantage Muslims, a strong Muslim political identity may again emerge. However, it will always be difficult for a second largest minority group constituting around 8% of a country’s population to pursue unilateral strategies. Coalitions with other communities will therefore remain important.
6. CONCLUSION

Muslims in Sri Lanka share a religion and most also share a common racial history in terms of being descendants from Arab sailors to Sri Lanka from different time periods. Most also share the Tamil language as mother tongue. However, there are differences between Muslims in how they practice their religion. There are also large differences in the economic position of different Muslims, and different Muslims belong to different economic groups.

At the same time there are regional differences between different Muslims that may be described as a centre-periphery relation between the south-west and the north-east. The ethnic compositions of these two areas also differ. While Muslims in the south-west largely are seen to live in harmony with other communities in the Sinhala majority areas in the south-west, Muslims in the north-east face various challenges in their relations with Tamil militants, a Tamil-dominated bureaucracy, with Tamils in terms of land rights and expansionist Sinhalese interests promoted by Government actors. Both Sinhalese and Tamil political/militant forces act in disfavour of the interests of Muslims in the north-east. A possible reason for this seems to be that both some Sinhalese and Tamil forces operate under the understanding that Muslims are a rich ethnic business- or landholder-class.

Muslim politicians have continuously been elected to Parliament through both UNP and to a less extent SLFP from Sri Lanka’s independence. In UNP Muslims political interests have continuously been seen as the interests of Muslim businessmen, while Muslim SLFP may be seen to represent interests of the Muslim middle class. Both there parties, however, appear to see “Muslims’ interests” as the interests of Muslims in the south-west, and to only promote Muslim interests that are compromisable with the interests of the Sinhalese. SLMC that emerged in the 1980s, was the first party to be lead by a Muslim and to be formed primarily to protect the interests of north-eastern Muslims and secondarily of Muslim middle and lower class interests nationally by appeal to Muslim brotherhood. Its central campaigning issue has been the protection of Muslims’ interests in the merged Northern and Eastern Provinces (1987-2007), in which Muslims have felt discriminated.

SLMC, however, has split into four or more parties after the death of its founding leader Mr. Ashraff in year 2000. The causes for these splits have been elite rivalry within the party over who would take over as the party’s leader after year 2000, and their wish to promote Muslims’ interests in relation to the post-2002 negotiations between the Government and LTTE that were thought to give substantial self-rule to the north-east. Hakeem’s leadership
over SLMC also de-stabilised the party’s identity. Hakeem was himself not from the east and locked the party into a coalition of commitment with UNP between 2001-2007, something that slightly changed the party’s image. The “businessman party” UNP is, although with many Muslim MPs, accused of not really understanding the problems of Muslims in the war-affected eastern periphery. SLMC’s Muslim primodialism was therefore not strong enough to forge a united political identity in the complex landscape.

NUA was separated from SLMC in 2001 and continued Mr. Ashraff’s coalition of commitment with SLFP and his late ideological multi-ethnic thinking. The Athaullah group was the second party to break away from SLMC. His “Ashraff Congress” was initially a stronger promoter of Muslim demands in the peace process than SLMC. After he became allied to SLFP after 2004 his party NMC became a promoter of eastern regionalism that was instrumental in the de-merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces in 2006. A group of SLMC-MPs also formed ACMC after the 2004-election to become ministers in the SLFP-lead Government. Their main Muslim constituencies are in Tamil majority areas, and ACMC-Minister Badhuideen presently works to re-settle the Muslims expelled from the Northern Province by LTTE in 1990.

The splits in SLMC since 2000 were also partly caused by contextual factors that strongly affected the basis for Muslims’ political grievances. LTTE’s and other Tamil militants’ continued harassment of eastern Muslims created resentment at Muslim community level that Muslim politicians were urged to act on behalf of. The ISGA and P-TOMS proposals that were presented in the course of negotiations further increased Muslims’ fear of being politically neglected. Finally, the de-merger of the North-Eastern Province in 2006 and the Government’s “liberation” of the Eastern Province in 2007 took away some of the basis for SLMC’s political campaigning for Muslim nationalism. SLMC and its splinter parties are all at present in Government with SLFP but this does not seem to secure that Muslims’ political interests in the east are always taken into account. Now splintered into several parties, no Muslim political leader may bargain on behalf of the support of a body that credibly can claim to talk on behalf of the whole north-eastern Muslim population. Muslim politicians have thus increasingly aligned themselves with Sinhalese political forces, although these also presently partly behave contrary to Muslims’ interests in the Eastern Province. It is difficult for a regionally dispersed second largest minority group to pursue unilateral strategies. The political division between Muslim politicians with slightly differing inter-ethnic views should however, not be used as an excuse to overlook north-eastern Muslims community-based grievances in attempts to solve the ethnic conflict.
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- 09.12.2005: “Colombo to build naval base in Batticaloa”
- 02.02.2006: “SLMC blames police partiality for Dharga Nagar violence”
- 04.02.2006: “Kattankudy teen injured in gunfire”
- 22.03.2006: “PNM Alliance aims to split East from NEP”

Secondary Literature:


List of persons interviewed (titles by June-06):
Rauff Hakeem, leader of SLMC

Three other SLMC politicians in Colombo, Kandy and Kalpitiya

Ferial Ashraff, leader of NUA, Minister

Ameer Ali, leader of ACMC, Minister

W.L.A. Hameed, Party Secretary of ACMC

Three advisors to Minister Athaullah (NMC)

Mr. Fowzie, SLFP, Minister

Yavid Yusuf, former leader of MPS

Kabir Hashim, UNP, MP

Myown Mustapha, UNP, MP

Haifz Nazeer Ahamed, leader of DUA and MNA

M.I.M. Mohideen, leader of MRO

Mr. Ameen, leader of MC

Two student co-organisers of the Oluvil Declaration

A group of refugees and one imam in Kalpitiya, Puttalam

Two lecturers by the South Eastern University, Oluvil

Information has also been obtained through conversations with a number of other Sri Lankan Muslims
### Demography

**By Ethnicity**

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### District: Trincomalee

#### Population Details in Trincomalee District - 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>DS Division</th>
<th>Total Hectares</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Sinhalese</th>
<th>Tamil</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Others</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Trincomalee</td>
<td>21,800</td>
<td>23,740</td>
<td>13,462</td>
<td>9,198</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>21,800</td>
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<td>12,462</td>
<td>9,198</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Batticaloa</td>
<td>21,800</td>
<td>23,740</td>
<td>13,462</td>
<td>9,198</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Map Number:** DHK/2007/006

- **District Planning Secretariat, Trincomalee**
- **Map Date:** 2006
- **Projection/Datum:** Transverse Mercator Kandywara
- **SLIDE number:** TS 2004-001479LKA
- **Admin boundaries provided by:** Survey Department, Govt. of Sri Lanka

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**Data Source:**

- **District Planning Secretariat, Trincomalee**

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**Legend**

- **District Boundary**
- **DS Boundary**

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**Total Population**

- 7164 - 25000
- 25001 - 35000
- 35001 - 50000
- 50001 - 75000
- 75001 - 115002

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**In Pie Chart**

- Sinhalese
- Tamil
- Muslims
- Others

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**Note:**

The boundaries, names and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.