Becoming ‘Good’ Women: Schooling, Aspirations and Imagining the Future Among Sinhalese Youth

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Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which female Sinhalese youth form ideas of who they want to become. I examine processes of becoming as interlinked to young people's aspirations and visions of the future, which are formed within two educational sites: the school and private tuition. Drawing from the narratives of female students who attend a national school in Kandy, located in the Central Province of Sri Lanka, this thesis analyses everyday experiences of schooling and the production of identities, aspirations and futures.

My focus of study is a cohort of 18-year-old students in Grade 13, in their final year of schooling. The students share many social characteristics; they are largely Sinhalese Buddhist, come from middle class backgrounds and live in the outskirts of Kandy. They also share similar aspirations, dreams and visions of the future. Situating my research within two educational sites, I conceptualise the process of 'becoming' amongst this group of youths within complex social and local landscapes.

Anthropology as a discipline has offered much insight into formal schooling and youth experiences of such across the Global South. Social reproduction (Rival, 2002), cultural transmission and production of citizens (Levinson *et al.*, 1996; Froerer, 2007) have been important contributions towards understanding the function of schooling. Despite this, tuition - and young people's engagement with formalised tuition spaces - remains an unobserved field which offers valuable insight into how youth engage in formal education.

Framing my thesis on theories of social reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), I present the school and private tuition as important sites of influence on how young people come to form ideas about their identity, aspirations and future. My findings reveal that the school serves as a significant base for cultural production, particularly in reproducing ethno-religious hegemony under the guise of 'good' Buddhist children. In contrast, the tuition space allows young people to play out their own cosmopolitan aspirations, by granting them freedoms away from the school and home. Through my thesis, I demonstrate the important interplay between the school and tuition in how youths engage in the intricacy of 'figuring out' who they want to become.

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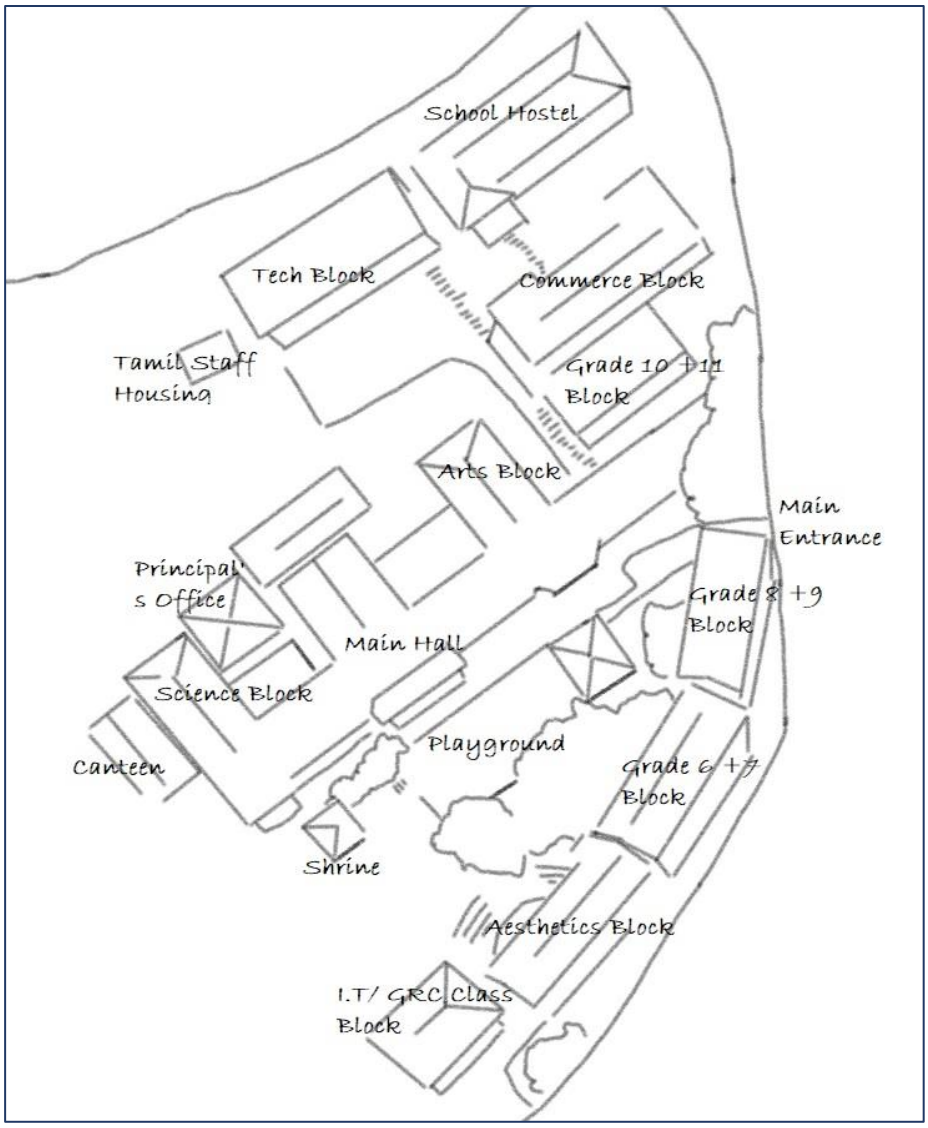
Map 1: Sri Lanka[1]

[1] Source: https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/sri_lanka_map.htm

Map 2: Mayadevi Balika Vidyalaya



Chapter One: Introduction

> *'We are Sri-Lankan, and we have a very important heritage to maintain. We shouldn't just remember to speak English, but also keep speaking Sinhala which is our language. We are in the last kingdom of Sri Lanka, and we should keep our heritage'* (Mr Wijetunga, January 2018).

Following the Independence Day celebrations held across Sri Lanka on the 4th of February 2018, the school announcement - ironically made by Mr Wijetunga, in charge of teaching Greek and Roman Civilisation (GRC) - served as a reminder of the importance of maintaining a national heritage. For the students of Mayadevi Balika Vidyalaya,[2] a secondary school for girls located in Kandy, a city in the Central Province of Sri Lanka, the words of wisdom granted by their GRC teacher had little effect. They sat in a hot and muggy classroom, slouched on small wooden desks, playing with each other's plaits and waiting for the announcement to end so that they could commence their English Literature lesson. For the students in 13B, Independence Day had been like any other day, as Chaturi, an eighteen-year-old A-Level student told me: "My family didn't celebrate. It's not a big celebration here. We put the [Sri Lankan] flag in our garden and we have to put flags on our cars. That is all."

In counterpoint to the GRC teacher's announcement, the students' response was to react as though the event was nothing out of the ordinary, and something to which they paid little attention. The emphasis on commemorating independence by the teacher and the school was not replicated by the students, who used the day to rest, catch up with homework, or go on family outings. The significance of attaining independence and maintaining their heritage was not at the forefront of their minds. Instead, their immediate focus was on studying and passing their exams in order to be able to secure a place at a

[2] The name of the school has been anonymised to preserve the privacy of the school, its faculty and student body. All names affiliated with the school are herein pseudonyms.

government university. Their hopes were that after their A-Level exams in August, they would be free to do what they pleased, away from the routines and stresses of school life.

Over the course of fieldwork that took place from July 2017 to April 2018, I was regularly reminded of the stark differences between what the school viewed as important and how youth perceived and responded to this. Amongst my interlocutors in 13B, conversations centred around their struggles, whether it was the amount of studying they had to do, or the lack of freedoms afforded to them by their parents, who restricted the time students spent away from studying. The girls I spent time with would willingly share their worries about their present and future, with the backdrop of the constant pressure from their families and the school to do well. Getting good grades to enrol at a university, securing a government job and getting married were things that girls were expected to achieve in order to become someone. Through the course of my time at Mayadevi, I became aware of the tension that young people are required to navigate in order to maintain a balance between the expectations placed by parents and their communities and their aspirations for a cosmopolitan lifestyle.

The anecdote presented at the beginning of this introduction is useful in illustrating two central themes explored in this thesis. The first is the everyday tensions caused by nation-building processes within the school in its attempt to shape a sense of *Sri Lankanness*[3] amongst its student body. The second is to highlight how notions of aspiring to and imagining their futures are formed by a group of female students at Mayadevi. Both themes are central to this thesis, which explores the tensions within and outside of the schooling space in order to understand how youth come to form ideas of 'becoming,' a term which emerged in the course of my fieldwork. What was initially a way for young people to explain what they wanted to be in the future, the concept of *becoming* (or '*wenawa'* in Sinhala) developed into an important ethnographic theme, useful in engaging in discussions surrounding identity, aspirations and futures.

Within this work I extend theoretical debates on youth transitions (Vigh, 2009a; Camfield, 2011), identity (Hall & Du Gay, 1996; Valentine, 2000), cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) and futures (Jeffrey *et al.*, 2005; Worth,

[3] It is important to note that this idea of Sri Lankanness is highly politicised term, often invoked by public institutions which call for a Sri Lankan identity (under the premise of speaking to a Sinhalese Buddhist audience). This will be discussed in depth in chapter four.

2009; Gilbertson, 2016) to argue that 'becoming' is a process which encompasses a person's lived experiences and social environment. In doing so, I link these somewhat 'loose' notions within a framework rather than looking at them distinctly and in isolation.

1.1 Principal Argument

This thesis is about the ways in which a group of 17 and 18-year-old female youth in Kandy, Sri Lanka, develop identities that speak to the narrative of the nation state through schooling. I argue that in doing so, they come to form aspirations and imaginations of the future: a future that is underpinned by Sinhala Buddhist values. These notions of being, however, are disrupted by the tuition space, which offers these young people opportunities to imagine cosmopolitan futures that cause conflicts in how they think about their identities, aspirations and visions of the future.

I have established three research questions which frame the scope of the thesis. The first asks how the school becomes a hub in which ethnic, gender and religious identities are promoted, under the guise of producing 'good' women. The second raises the question of the extent to which national education and the privatised tuition systems function in parallel to one another, and in doing so, provide youths with opportunities to realise their aspirations. The final research question asks how young people both reproduce and transgress values, beliefs and lifestyles in pursuit of figuring out who they might become.

My research seeks to contribute to existing scholarly work on youth, education and schooling by providing insight into the lives of young people at a national school in Kandy. In examining their experiences of schooling, I seek to redirect focus on how practices of cultural transmission are appropriated by youth contributing to processes of becoming. To draw on Apple, who critiques the visualisation of the school as a 'black box' (1979: 26), my research interest stems from unpacking what happens in this space and the implications of this for young people's sense of becoming. Through this, I challenge how education and schooling are portrayed by global educational initiatives, to argue that education, in all its facets, must be understood to be both regressive - in its potential to embed and further social inequalities, and transformative - through its potential to improve livelihoods.

With international donors such as the World Bank and the United Nations appeased by high enrolment of primary school-age children and high literacy rates amongst adults in Sri Lanka, other important elements surrounding the quality and governance of education in the country have been minimised. The introduction of the Free Education Act (FEA) in 1948 gave the right to education to all children and young people from primary to tertiary levels (Ministry of Education, 2013). New educational reforms in 1997 provided free textbooks, uniforms and school transport, making Sri Lanka's educational structure one of the most accessible in South Asia (Little, 2011). In some cases, the state continues to provide bursaries at primary and secondary levels, which have enabled even the poorest households to send their children to school (Little & Green, 2009).

Educational policies have been established to encourage the successful development of the individual by attempting to identify and respond to barriers that families may face. The realities of growing up in a highly politicised post-conflict setting, however, are often masked by such discourses. I will argue that this results in a population that increasingly harbours and reproduces the narrative of the dominant hegemony, under the guise of becoming good Sri Lankan citizens.

In attempting to provide an understanding of the role of schooling in shaping a Sri Lankan identity amongst youth, I intend to highlight the tensions between the processes by which cultural and religious beliefs and practices are transmitted through schooling and how young people accept - or in some cases reject - these in pursuit of more cosmopolitan ideals, both of which come to shape ideas of 'becoming.'

1.2 The Need for This Line of Enquiry

There has been extensive research into the role of the school in producing 'identities' amongst youth. Some studies have explored the formation of 'cosmopolitan identities' which mirror trends in globalisation and consumer culture (Crivello, 2011; Ames, 2013; Gilbertson, 2016), whilst others have examined the role that schooling plays in shaping a cultural identity (Levinson, 1996; Rival, 2002; Froerer, 2007). The relationship between schooling and the production of knowledge has come under much attention from anthropologists, geographers and sociologists alike, who have contributed greatly to our understanding of the functions of schooling.

Though it is important to recognise Sri Lanka's educational system as providing free education for all up to university level, it is just as pivotal to critically question the type of education youth receive. In recent years, there have been increased efforts from the Ministry of Education to create better training for teachers, more resources and changes to the curriculum. Its focus has consequently centred around an 'education system which enables students to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to be future citizens who will perform their roles efficiently and effectively in a modern, globalised, knowledge-driven economy' (Ministry of Education, 2013). Since post-independence Sri Lanka has striven for economic mobility, and the educational system has come to facilitate progress and economic growth through an educated workforce (Little & Hettige, 2015). As Minister of Education Bandula Gunawardana explained in a policy briefing at the time of the presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa:

> The country is progressing rapidly on the path to make Sri Lanka the Wonder of Asia by developing five major hubs in the areas of naval, aviation, commercial, energy and knowledge. In pursuing this ideal the education sector has to play a key role in developing the knowledge hub. The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the other relevant ministries is working relentlessly to achieve this goal. Our slogan 'Education First' indicates the priority given to education (Ministry of Education, 2013: vii).

Gunawardana's statement reflects how education remains a core element in the successful development of the country. Education continues to be an important tool for social and economic development, leading to policies promoting primary school enrolment and access to education for all (Little & Green, 2009). However, in an increasingly globalised and competitive world, educational policies in Sri Lanka fail to equip young people with the skills and knowledge to compete in the global economy (Hettige, Mayer & Salih, 2004).

In the course of my fieldwork, I witnessed the frustrations of female youth, their parents, teachers and wider networks with the failure of the state to establish better routes for upward social mobility. At the same time, international educational initiatives continue to focus on raising the aspirations of youth in the Global South. Listening to the narratives

of young people at Mayadevi, and their everyday experiences of schooling,[4] emphasised the need to bring to light the complex landscapes in which these girls begin to think about who they want to become.

The framing of my research prior to fieldwork was very much based on understanding how youth aspirations are formed within a social, cultural and political framework. However, during fieldwork I uncovered a need to extend how aspirations are theorised beyond education to more banal, everyday realms. My observations revealed that this concept was overshadowed by re-emerging topics around identity and ideas of the future, which came to shape the line of enquiry. I also found myself grappling with this perceived idea of a 'post-war' landscape, which went on to mask the increasingly volatile and politicised environment that resulted in national calls to preserve Sinhala Buddhist identity from the threats of minority groups. What became evident over the course of my fieldwork was a need to understand the role that schooling, and the education system more generally, plays in shaping a 'Sri Lankan' identity amongst youth, and in turn how young people come to both reject and reproduce this.

Despite having experienced schooling directly whilst growing up in Sri Lanka during my youth, I found myself taken aback by the explicit ways in which schooling instils a national identity through processes of Othering, and in turn shapes how young people come to form ideas of becoming. Understanding the ways in which cultural and religious beliefs and practices are transmitted, and how these are appropriated by youth and contribute to their processes of becoming, became my principal line of enquiry.

Notions of becoming are very much set in the future, and for the young people I befriended in Kandy, they must grapple with forming ideas for their futures whilst attempting to hold on to the national identity and heritage taught to them from a very young age. 'Becoming' for these youth is not envisioned through their education or career alone, but rather through the lens of the type of people they want to embody, the lifestyles they hope for and the dreams they form and discard on a day-to-day basis. It is important to caveat that the group of youth I spent time with are amongst the comparatively more privileged middle classes[5]. Their social context then comes to form the foundation of how

[4] I want to outline that experiences of schooling are not within the school alone, but extend into young people's engagement with tuition and extra-curricular activities.
[5] This thesis will make reference to class differentiations throughout, however my primary analytical focus is on the middle class students who attend Mayadevi.

they realise their becoming. What I want to bring to light is how young people form and negotiate these ideas in spaces where continuous nation-building processes take place in the background, but are nonetheless intrinsically carved into the very 'essence' of Sri Lankan society.

There are, of course, implications in the educational structure in Sri Lanka, largely influenced by the politicised role of education. Chapter Three will touch on the important role that education in Sri Lanka plays, and argue that although free, it continues to operate along restrictive ethnic, linguistic and geographical lines.[6]

1.3 Thesis Structure

Having introduced the key themes and the principal argument of this thesis (1.2) and considered the tensions between the instrumental and politicised role of education in Sri Lanka (1.3), this chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis structure.

Chapter Two provides a theoretical framework for my thesis argument, which explores how processes of 'becoming' take place amongst youth at Mayadevi Balika Vidyalaya. By engaging with prominent literature on youth transitions, aspirations and the future, I bridge a gap in how we think about young people's processes of figuring out who they want to become. The chapter begins by examining the theorisation of youth in relation to global changes that have shaped the landscape that young people grow up in (2.1). I move on to examine a shift in how futures have been theorised, in light of youth transition (2.2) and aspirations (2.3). Section 2.4 introduces the concept of 'becoming' as an alternative way of thinking about how youth connect to the future. In the final part of the chapter, I draw on theories of education and social reproduction (2.5) to assess the factors governing processes of becoming.

Chapter Three provides a brief introduction to the Sri Lankan context, before discussing the research methodology. I begin by presenting the layers of Sri Lankan society, and examining the politicisation of education in Sri Lanka (3.1.1). Following this, I

[6] It is important to state that gender inequality is prevalent in Sri Lanka. However, statistics indicate that school enrolment for male and female students is equal, suggesting that access to education for female students is not a barrier (UNESCO, 2019). This also highlights why agents such as UNESCO and the World Bank have continued to applaud the GOSL for good access to education.

summarise the schooling structure on the island (3.1.2), in order to situate my research. I discuss my connection and interest in the field (3.2) and the insider/outsider conundrum as a result (3.4). Following this, I present the way in which I attempted to find the 'right' field site (3.4) and introduce Mayadevi Balika school (3.5). Section 3.6 directs attention to the methodological approaches and my engagement with young people outside of the schooling space (3.7). The final section serves to reflect on methodological barriers faced (3.8).

Chapter Four marks the beginning of my ethnographic chapters. The focus of this chapter is to examine the ways in which young people come to internalise and replicate nation-building practices that influence their pursuit of figuring out who they want to become. I argue that some of these nation-building practices have origins in national educational policies, reflected in the school curriculum, whilst others reflect and speak to regional practices. The chapter begins by providing an insight into Mayadevi (4.1), the schooling structure (4.2), school functions and extra-curricular activities (4.3 and 4.4). I then examine young people's engagement in nation-building practices in the school (4.5) and how this influences their process of becoming (4.6).

Continuing the exploration of the ways in which ethnic, gender and religious identities are promoted within the school, Chapter Five extends the focus into the ways in which young people come to think about their becoming within the schooling space. I argue that the aspirations of youth are embedded in how they think about their futures, framing how young people come to form ideas about who they want to become. I begin by presenting the ways in which young people articulated their plans for the future and how the concept of becoming is linked to this (5.1). I examine how the school is an important site that encourages certain 'types' of becoming (5.2) and how this results in the production of good Buddhist children (5.3). I then provide accounts of young people's education and employment-centred aspirations (5.4), and the role that cultural and social capital plays in facilitating these.

Chapter Six marks a shift into examining private tuition and young people's experiences of this parallel education system. In doing so, I explore the importance of different sites on how young people think about processes of becoming. I begin by introducing the shadow education system, arguing that tuition becomes an intrinsic part of young people's schooling experiences. I challenge the notion of 'free education' in Sri Lanka

(6.1) and why young people engage with tuition (6.2). I move on to examine why tuition is considered an important investment by young people and their parents (6.3).

This chapter addresses the research question asking how national education and the privatised tuition system function in parallel to one another and, in doing so, provide youth with opportunities to realise and form their aspirations. It also brings to light two important observations: the first is the question of the purpose of schooling, and the second is how young people respond to the tensions caused by engaging with these two parallel education systems. I consider the latter question by illustrating young people's engagement with private tuition (6.4) and bring to light how they come to perceive it as 'worthy' (6.5). I then present the differences in how teaching takes place (6.6), and also the tensions that arise as a result. The final section (6.7) brings together young people's engagement with tuition and my own theoretical conceptualisation of their becoming.

Continuing the exploration of young people's engagement with tuition, Chapter Seven delves into the 'symbolic' importance of the tuition space. I introduce tuition as a youth-centred space (7.1) that allows young people to reclaim small freedoms. I will examine the semi-formal nature of tuition (7.2) and how this enables youth to transgress rules and boundaries imposed by the school (7.3). Section 7.4 focuses on how the tuition space allows youth to gain freedom and how the girls use the tuition space to act out certain tendencies that allow them to play out their own identities (7.5).

In examining the 'symbolic' importance of the tuition site, I highlight the significance of this space in allowing young people to form new friendships and experience their first romantic relationships. It also becomes an important space in which young people can acquire the capacity to reproduce those elements of cosmopolitan culture they deem to be aspirational. In contrast to the school, which places emphasis on the production of 'good children,' I demonstrate how the tuition space allows youth to transgress boundaries and challenge the very notion of being a '*honde lamai*' (good child).

With educational sites such as the school and tuition encompassing a young person's life, what happens when they leave school? How do young people form ideas about who they want to be and what they want to do once they've left school? The final ethnographic chapter moves beyond the school and tuition and deals with the themes of aspirations, futures and identity. I explore how young people collectively imagine their futures in

light of the possibilities for social mobility (8.2), and move on to present the three post-schooling options available (8.3). I link these to social stratification in Sri Lanka (8.4), arguing that young people's social position shapes how they aspire and imagine their future. In the final part of the chapter (8.5), I examine how post-schooling routes and social position shape young people's capacity to aspire. Drawing on the choices of three participants, I demonstrate how such capacities reflect the lived experiences of youth, and in doing so, highlight how these experiences are inherently shaped by a young person's social world.

I conclude the thesis with a discussion on how female youth at Mayadevi form ideas about who they want to become through the lens of social reproduction. Drawing on previous chapters discussing the roles of the school, educational system and private tuition, I illustrate how the state and wider social systems become key factors in the type of identities formed by the youth, which speak to young people's ethno-religious upbringing. I conclude Chapter Nine by calling on further research to be conducted into understanding young people's experiences of growing up, and examining these processes in sites such as the tuition space, which offer invaluable insights into young people's 'becomings.'

Chapter Two: Theorising Aspirations, Youth Transition and Processes of Becoming

The aim of this chapter is to provide a theoretical framework for my thesis argument, which examines how processes of 'becoming' take place amongst youth at Mayadevi Balika Vidyalaya. By engaging with prominent literature on youth transitions, aspirations and the future, I bridge a gap in how we think about young people's processes of figuring out who they want to become. As I will demonstrate in the course of this thesis, young people's current and future lives are emergent; they are firmly embedded in the present but also part of an ongoing process. How young people come to imagine their future selves is not formed in isolation but rather amid their social environments and through lived experiences.

The chapter begins by examining the theorisation of youth in relation to global changes that have shaped the landscape in which young people grow up (2.1). Here, I address key themes that have emerged in recent youth studies, and how these have contributed to discourses on youth. I examine a shift in how futures have been theorised, in light of youth transition (2.2) and aspirations (2.3).

In the section titled Exploring Youth Becomings (2.4), I introduce the concept 'becoming' as an alternative way of thinking about how young people connect to the future. I examine how this concept contributes to the literature on youth and how it emerged as a phrase that young people themselves used in relation to their futures. Having provided a framework in which to extend our understanding of youth transitions, aspirations and the future, I provide an argument for why processes of becoming need to be examined more closely.

The final section of the chapter explores the factors that govern processes of becoming by presenting literature on education and social reproduction (2.5). Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, I examine how schools become important sites in cultivating specific values and ideals, resulting in the reproduction of inequalities and

difference through education. This leads me to explore the link between schooling and nation-building in the production of citizens (2.5) and how these systems shape gendered ideals of citizenship (2.5.1).

2.1 Theorising Youth in an Age of Globalisation

The emergence of an anthropology of youth has contributed greatly to understanding young people's experiences of growing up in an age of globalisation. Edelman & Haugerud (2005) define globalisation as a historical process marked by the rise of economic neoliberalism, whilst others attribute globalisation to changes in political economies and cultures (Escobar, 1997). The effects of globalisation on youth have been examined by several anthropologists. Some have placed focus on understanding shifts in traditional livelihood patterns (Froerer & Portisch, 2012), whilst others have examined young people as consumers (Nisbett, 2007) and the tensions between modernity and tradition (Lukose, 2005; Sancho, 2012).

Prominent themes across this literature are the changes to the socio-economic landscape through processes of globalisation, marked by a shift in consumer patterns, mass media and market liberalization. As Bénéï (2008) notes in discussing the relationship between cinema and nationalism, globalisation 'opens windows beyond the restrictive framework of the nation-state' into a multicultural and transnational space. The studies cited thus far accentuated how young people in the Global South adjust to these changes, and, in doing so, carve out opportunities for themselves.

Studies on youth have since examined how Western concepts of transition have influenced the ways in which youth transitions are theorised globally. In turn, these transitions have often been recounted through a Western lens, leading to localised transitional stages either being exoticised or overlooked for not fitting into Western models (Camfield, 2011). According to Camfield, this results in a disjuncture in how youth from the Global South come to experience globalisation. Citing Jeffrey and McDowell (2004), Camfield highlights the link between globalisation and youth transition discourses, and how these come to shape young people's experiences of growing up in a globalised world. As Jeffrey and McDowell state 'while Western ideals of youth transition to adulthood through the grasping of new social and economic opportunities have been exported outside Euro-America, it has become increasingly

difficult for young people in Third World settings to emulate these ideas' (Camfield, 2011: 669).

As I will discuss in Section 2.2, youth transitions are both 'slowing down' - in the sense that young people remain in education for longer as a result of unemployment (Jeffrey, 2010) - and accelerating, due to shifts in traditional family structures, migratory patterns and with early entry into labour markets (Camfield, 2011). Before examining this, it is important to situate how youth, as a term, is defined within anthropology and interrelated disciplines.

Early anthropological studies on young people were informed by physical and psychological models of adolescence, which led to the theorisation of youth as 'not-yet-finished human beings' (Bucholtz, 2002: 529). In such instances, youth has been theorised from the perspective of adults, with adulthood forming the final stage of transition, which young people are required to achieve in order to assume a specific social position in their social environment. Outside of the anthropology arena, youth cultural studies, which arose from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Lave *et al.*, 1992), examined youth as an age category, without placing great importance on exploring what 'makes' a youth and under which conditions. Though this discipline has resulted in some engaging and important ethnographies, such as Willis' *Learning to Labour* (1977), cultural studies have tended to focus on the study of youth through patterns of consumerism and within a specific age category. Though important, focus on social transition between stages, often determined by age, results in youth being defined as a concept only in relation to adulthood (Sancho, 2012).

In contrast, anthropologists such as Durham (2004) and Bucholtz (2002) have argued that youth, much like the concept of childhood and adolescence, is a historically contingent category. Mary Bucholtz (2002: 532) calls for continued interrogation into the concept of youth as an identity rather than a trajectory, making the concept flexible and fluid to interpretation. Deborah Durham (2004) also proposes an alternative lens through which to theorise youth, with her proposal to examine youth as 'shape shifters.' According to Durham, conceptualising this requires the unpacking of the 'social configurations' in which shape shifting takes place (2004: 592). This highlights the importance of acknowledging the interplay between the individual and their social world in how youth come to occupy multiple positions in a specific time, and how these positions change

depending on the context. As Durham explains, 'to call someone a youth is to position him or her in terms of a variety of social attributes, including not only age but also independence–dependence, authority, rights, abilities, knowledge, [and] responsibilities' (2004: 593). Theorising youth, then, requires acknowledging the interplay between individuals and their engagement with their social environment.

With the increased criticism of how youth and adolescence have been theorised thus far, understanding what defines a youth is important. Central to this is unpacking the context in which young people grow up, especially if we are to gain a true understanding into their lived experiences. With young people in the Global South immersed in processes of globalisation, it is vital that we re-evaluate how we come to define youth in this age. The following section will focus on understanding youth transitions as a process in which young people 'become.'

2.2 Youth Transition and the Future

A prominent theme within youth studies is the framing of the future. Whether this is post-schooling transitions (Valentine, 2003; Jeffrey, 2010; Crivello, 2011) or rites of passage (Mead, 1961), young people's transitions have been a central focus in youth discourses - and rightly so, since these provide valuable insights into how young people navigate the uncertainties of their status, particularly against the backdrop of a complex globalised world (Lukose, 2005; Igarashi & Saito, 2014). Exploring young people's experiences of 'transitioning' from one social status to another brings to light the varied possibilities of who one might *become*. Tied to this is the role of the future in how youth come to imagine their older selves.

As suggested earlier, children and young people have been considered as lacking capacity to make decisions, rendering them as not fully established 'beings' (Bucholtz, 2002). Uprichard (2008: 303) too takes issue with theorisation of children and youth, particularly since both have been considered as 'adults in the making,' and therefore not yet complete. While the historical view of children and youth considers them incapable of mastering their futures, contemporary discourses on transitions have grown to dispel these ideas of children and youth as lacking in certain qualities that would enable them to make sense of the world around them (Degnen, 2018).

Uprichard introduces the concept of 'being and becoming' in examining the temporality of childhood. She explains that understanding children and young people as both being (in the present) and becoming (in the future) allows for recognition of the agency that the individual possesses (Uprichard, 2008). Situating transitions as temporal stages allows for interaction between the present and future and places the child/young person at the centre of this process. This, as Uprichard argues, situates the child/young person as a social actor in their own right, who actively constructs their future (ibid).

Despite proving a useful reference point in which to position youth transitions, the concept of 'being and becoming' can also be problematic. As Uprichard observes, framing youth transitions through temporal stages implies a hierarchical status. She explains that the being and becoming discourse 'reinforces and sustains the hierarchical adult/child dualism' (Uprichard, 2008: 305). It therefore upholds the child/adult dichotomy that has historically prevented children and young people from being recognised as having agency or capacity. It is also important to note that connotations of 'being' neglect the future experiences of children in becoming adults. Children do not transform into adults, and neither do they recognise this process, as demonstrated through the example of Joseph, who explains 'I'll also be me when I'm old but just older, like I'll just be an older me' (ibid: 366).

With youth transitions examined in light of the future orientations, the importance is often placed on who the child/young person will be rather than the process by which they become. It is this focus on the processes of becoming that is central to my thesis; that is, understanding the social and cultural conditions in the present in which young people themselves figure out who they want to become in the future. This process involves unpacking the young person's present and lived experiences, to then understand the nuanced projections of future selves.

2.2.1 Transition as Life Stage

Transition theories have brought to attention the processes in which youth pass through life (Skelton, 2002: 100). I have presented how transition discourses have placed the child or young person as a passive subject in the processes of growing up. According to Skelton, this has narrowed our understanding of youth experiences since transitions have

been theorised through stages. In the Global North, these have been marked by the end of schooling, entry into work, leaving the parental home, marriage and parenthood (Skelton, 2002; Sennott & Mojola, 2017). Johnson-Hanks (2002: 865) echoes this view by explaining that these stages reflect 'institutionally authorised transformations' marked by key achievements. She illustrates this through the example of eighteen-year-old boys in the US, who upon having finished school and acquired employment are considered to have completed institutionalised stages of transition.

Like Skelton (2002) and others (Bucholtz, 2002; Bénéï, 2009; Sancho, 2012), Johnson-Hanks (2002) provides a critique of the life cycle model, which has moved beyond the attention of anthropologists into intersecting disciplines. The life cycle model presents transitional stages as universal, implying that all members of every society go through them. Johnson-Hanks argues that attributing youth transitions as universal assumes that all individuals go through stages in the same sequence and with similar attributes (Johnson-Hanks, 2002). Leaving school, entering employment and pursuing marriage are stages that have come to shape the *type* of transitions seen as successful. Perceiving transitions as fixed and ridged stages implies this is a process of order and synchronisation, rather than identifying youth transitions as being changeable and created through a 'variety of temporal frames' (ibid: 867).

Transitions to adulthood then are not only processual but also 'nonsynchronous' (Johnson-Hanks, 2002:867). Focusing on motherhood amongst *Beti* women in Southern Cameroon, Johnson-Hanks demonstrates how we need to look beyond the 'life cycle' in which transitions have been traditionally examined. Instead, she proposes examining the ways in which 'vital conjunctures' are formed through social analysis based on aspiration rather than staged events. As Johnson-Hanks demonstrates, motherhood comes to constitute a temporary status in Cameroon, which must be played out through a specific role. She explains that 'life stages emerge only as the result of institutional projects; their coherence should be an object, rather than an assumption, of ethnographic inquiry' (ibid: 866). This highlights that the *Beti* identity cannot be inherited through birth alone, but rather once children come into being - that is, they must demonstrate their claim of being *Beti* through social action (ibid: 867). The status of *Beti*, explains Johnson-Hanks, is socially contingent and thereby under 'constant revision.'

Youth trajectories are therefore neither linear nor cyclical, but rather form part of a wider social contract (for example, through the expectation of successfully completing institutionalised stages) and social possibilities that make certain transformations possible. These are what Johnson-Hanks identifies as vital conjunctures; that is a 'socially structured zone of possibilities around specific periods of potential transformation' (2002: 871). Transitions then become temporal configurations, wherein future orientations are possible yet uncertain. In this light, the notion of vital conjunctures may present an alternative lens through which to examine youth transitions, since 'identities can shift from adult to youth to adult within the course of a day, depending on the context' (Camfield, 2011: 671).

Johnson-Hanks illustrates this through Yvette, a 14-year-old girl on the 'cusp' of adulthood. Through Yvette's example, we see how agency and navigational capacity can both play into ideas of what it means to behave in an adult way. Johnson-Hanks notes this through how youth act on their 'sense,' or *mfefeg*, as exemplified by Yvette and reinforce either their (im)maturity or incapacity to become an adult. Such examples demonstrate how the concept of 'growing up' is played out by different actors and the ways in which transitions vary. As Johnson-Hanks explains 'rather than a clear trajectory toward adulthood, there are multiple, variable, and often hidden paths' (2002: 868).

Presenting transitions as linear processes implies a sense of 'progression and development' which may not reflect the experiences of young people across the world (Skelton, 2002: 101). Discourses on youth transition portraying these as fixed stages that are universally experienced reflects the focus of youth studies thus far. By attempting to examine young people's experiences, such discourses have often marginalised the very voices they have attempted to 'study,' and, in doing so, have turned youth into objects of study rather than active subjects. With youth transitions being presented as achievable through completion of fixed stages, what happens to young people who do not complete these? More importantly, how are such approaches limiting our understanding of young people's own experiences of growing up?

2.2.2 Youth Transitions as Social Navigation

In considering how youth transitions can be theorised to encompass the experiences of young people, this section will examine how transition theories have recently developed to explore this concept as a process of social navigation. Social navigation, according to Vigh (2009), is not just about temporality, but about the ways in which individual trajectories encompass experiences of moving towards social goals and positions. As social navigation is related to the social movement of individuals, it provides a more nuanced understanding of youth as active agents in their transitions.

Though Vigh's (2009) focus is on migrant imaginaries, his concept of social navigation speaks to the movement of the present towards the future. This in turn disrupts the idea of linear temporality, because it becomes a process of moving 'back and forth,' requiring individuals to renegotiate and reimagine their navigations of the future (ibid: 423). Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of praxis, Vigh situates the role of agency in how individuals navigate social structures to provide a deeper understanding into the conditions and ways in which navigation takes place. As Vigh states, 'when navigating, we have to direct our attention towards immediate social flows and shifts, as well as to how these influence our positions and possibilities, where and how these move and affect us and the point we are moving towards' (ibid: 426).

The concept of navigation suggests a sense of motion, of moving between two fields, or indeed spaces, in a 'fluid and changeable matter' (Vigh, 2009: 420). In contrast to youth transition being discussed as linear processes that youth are required to complete in stages, the concept of navigation allows us to see the intersections between the two fields. In turn, this creates new perspectives on individual agency and how social navigation becomes an important theme in young people acquiring social status. Social navigation, as Vigh argues, holds theoretical value as well as empirical insight into how people interact and navigate the experiences of this process.

Returning to Uprichard's (2008) theorisation of *being* and *becoming* is useful here, as it lends to the discourse on social navigation. Uprichard places the child or young person at the centre of the process of being or becoming, recognising that they are social actors within it. The concept of navigation is therefore tied to the practices of moving across environments and social structures. Being and becoming, then, is constructed within the

social and physical world, and involves the interaction of the present and the future together in the course of everyday life (Uprichard, 2008).

In the context of Guinea-Bissau, social navigation is understood as '*dubria'* – a physical embodiment of the motion of navigation (Vigh, 2009: 423). As Vigh explains, *dubria* is the process by which 'we organize [sic] ourselves and act in relation to the interplay of the social forces and pressures that surround us…social navigation designates the practice of moving within a moving environment' (ibid: 425). Social navigation thus grants focus to people's movements within their social environment and acknowledges the complexities of moving from one space to another. In doing so, it allows for understanding into positioning and individual trajectories which can be 'attuned and adjusted' (ibid). Ansell (2004) also alludes (though not explicitly) to social navigation as a process of becoming an adult, where young people cross (and re-cross) boundaries. As Uprichard and the authors discuss, these boundaries are often marked by 'stages' represented as a series of 'parallel transitions' (2004: 184).

As suggested, youth transitions are often depicted through the lens of a life cycle, where young people move through stages: childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age. Such discourses tend to focus on how transitions are marked through specific stages, such as employment, marriage and so forth. However, I argue that such linear conceptualisations prevent an understanding of the 'in-between' stages where processes of transition take place.

The rigid conceptualisations of life stages have been rightfully critiqued for failing to account for the varying non-linear and flexible ways in which these occur. More importantly, new perspectives on youth transition have come to recognise that youth may never achieve the stage of 'adulthood' based on these criteria. Instead, growing literature focuses on the social navigation in which transitions take place rather than the completion of a stage. For example, Jeffrey's (2010) research on unemployed young men in Northern India exemplifies prospects of failure attached to the incompletion of specific sets of expectations tied to successful transition into adulthood. Skelton also attributes a sense of incompleteness experienced by youth due to their failure to achieve certain stages. As she explains, 'a young person is said to have become an adult when these shifts have taken place' (Skelton, 2002: 101).

It is important to note, however, that for such shifts to take place, the young person's habitus and their social and cultural capital become key factors in facilitating such navigations. As I will discuss in the course of this chapter, cultural capital plays an important role in how and what young people aspire to do and be. Their habitus, too, becomes a central part in how their transitions take place. In aligning social navigation to habitus, one can argue that the ability to navigate is situated within a young person's social world.

As Bourdieu (1990) argues, habitus is shaped by interconnected dispositions acquired over time, which become embedded in our social worlds, thereby influencing our tastes, views and behaviours. Habitus is thus formed through negotiations within the social world, which come to grant or indeed deny the capacity to navigate depending on one's social positioning. In light of this, the following section will draw on the notion of capital in order to examine the link between youth transition and aspirations, to argue that both have been framed with the ideal of upward mobility in mind. I move on to examine how, like social navigation, aspiring requires individuals to form and exercise a certain capacity.

2.3 Theorising Youth Aspirations

In the previous section, I highlighted how debates on youth transitions have historically placed the young person on the periphery of their transitions. Examining youth transitions as a linear and universal experience has raised important concerns, which emergent literature has attempted to tackle (Bucholtz, 2002; Uprichard, 2008; Camfield, 2011). I also examined how youth transitions have been theorised through life stages and as processes of social navigation (Ansell, 2004; Vigh, 2009a), and in doing so, emphasis has been placed on why there is a greater need to bring to light young people's experiences of growing up.

I will now direct focus to the ways in which youth transitions and the wider aspirations discourse are interlinked. I argue that the future remains a central theme in both youth transition and aspiration debates. Aspirations are linked to discourses on the future and young people's interpretations of what their future will hold. Underpinning these is the

notion of aspiring, whether this refers to aspirations to complete school, secure reputable employment or indeed marriage.

Central to discourses on aspirations is Appadurai's theorisation of what it means to aspire. In 'The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition,' Appadurai defines aspirations as 'wants, preferences, choices, and calculations...formed in interaction and in the thick of social life' (2004: 67). Appadurai argues that all individuals possess the capacity to aspire, which is shaped through people's subscriptions to cultural 'norms.' He describes how slum dwellers in Mumbai become 'bearers' of culture through education and discipline specific to their social grouping (ibid). It is by conforming to social norms that the slum dwellers come to form a capacity to aspire within a specific cultural space. By building on a network in the form of a coalition, slum dwellers acquire the cultural capacity to transform into 'housing activists' (ibid:70).

In light of discourses on aspirations, the capacity to aspire is dependent on how individuals subscribe to a 'system of ideas.' By building on a collective, the slum dwellers expand their social networks and in doing so create opportunities to form aspirations outside of their lived realities (Appadurai, 2004). In forming this capacity, individuals develop abilities, or indeed potentialities in imagining certain futures (Stambach, 2017). The capacity to aspire then becomes a navigational capacity, where individuals mobilise by exercising their collective cultural capital.

One can thus understand the aspirations as a collective acquisition of capacity, which individuals exercise. It is helpful to examine this in light of Bourdieu's (1986; 1990) study of capital, which, much like the capacity to which Appadurai refers, is based on existing social and structural hierarchies. Like cultural capital, the capacity to aspire, as Appadurai explains, is situated in a social framework, where norms are formed within a dominant cultural sphere, which predetermines one's capacity to aspire. Appadurai states that 'the better off you are (in terms of power, dignity, and material resources), the more likely you are to be conscious of the links between the more and less immediate objects of aspiration' (2004: 11). Consequently, possessing this capacity enables individuals to forge and realise their dreams, goals and hopes.

The capacity to aspire to certain things is thus determined by one's social positioning, which can facilitate the ways in which these aspirations are formed. It is this notion that

I will be drawing on in the course of my thesis, to argue that to define aspirations in isolation from their socio-cultural and political context neglects the roles of these factors in what becomes aspirational.

Though influential, Appadurai's theorisation of the capacity to aspire does not address the wider socio-political structures that pre-determine how cultural capital plays a part in forming aspirations and defining what this capacity looks like (particularly when looking at capacity to aspire amongst the poor). His theory is nonetheless instrumental in understanding how individuals come to map out their aspirational opportunities. It should be noted that Appadurai's assumptions of what capacity and aspirations are very much in line with the neoliberal perspective of success being achieved through economic betterment. Appadurai's notion of the capacity to aspire reflects Sen's capabilities approach, which Sen defines as 'socially dependent individual capabilities' (Sen, 2002: 85).

Much like the capacity to aspire, capabilities cannot be exercised in isolation, as they are shaped by social norms, traditions and institutions. With such discourses, what becomes apparent is the way in which aspirations have been framed as economic and status-based realisations. As Stahl (2016) highlights, the onus of failing to realise one's aspirations is placed on the individual, rather than being presented as a more complex structural issue. This is an important consideration which has often been side-lined by calls to raise aspirations of youth. The following section will examine how global discourses have centred around the very notion of raising aspirations as a means to achieve social mobility.

2.3.1 Global Discourses on Youth Aspirations

Whilst Appadurai has been an influential voice in the aspiration discourse, there has been a plethora of academic and policy discourse linking education and aspiration. International educational initiatives have focused on raising the aspirations of children and young people (particularly in the Global South) to facilitate engagement with formal schooling (Ansell, 2015; Sugden & Punch, 2016; UNICEF, 2018). As a result, raising the academic aspirations of children and young people has become a key outcome in educational initiatives (Ansell, 2015; Stahl, 2016; UNICEF, 2018).

Increasingly, the role of education and formal schooling has shifted from producing aspirations that are aligned to nation-building processes (and thus localised) to producing aspirations that are more globalised in outlook. This has resulted in formal education being considered an important tool to climb out of poverty. A report by the World Bank succinctly highlights this: it states that 'given that today's students will be tomorrow's citizens, leaders, workers, and parents, a good education is an investment with enduring benefits' (World Bank, 2018: xi). However, some scholars have criticised the way in which education has been constructed as a self-efficacy tool in achieving upward mobility, since such assumptions create pressure to 'get more children educated' (Crivello, 2011: 395).

In examining the role of key players such as the World Bank and UNICEF, scholars have addressed the ways in which educational agendas are driven by globalisation, dispensing neoliberal agendas targeting the Global South with opportunities for development and progress, through governance and policy (Escobar, 1997; Lewis, 2005; Ansell, 2016). Sugden and Punch (2016) provide insight into the link between aspiration and social mobility and the role of formal education in achieving this. They explain that 'the desire to invest in education is also led by the cultural ideologies driven by capitalist globalization…changing aspirations of youth' (2016: 489).

Rao (2010) and Crivello (2011) are among a large group of scholars who have highlighted how aspirations are presented in line with ideas of social progress. Crivello (2011) presents the ways in which education is perceived by individuals in disrupting intergenerational transfer of poverty, whilst others, like Rao (2010), explore how decisions surrounding educational and migration choices contribute towards the process of economic and social mobility.

Rao's paper reflects the universalising conceptualisation of aspiration resonating across development literature, stating that 'people aspire to social mobility and status enhancement' (2010: 138). In assuming that aspirations are always formed on the basis of education and economic betterment, such arguments ignore localised hopes that individuals may form for themselves. As I will discuss over the course of this section, these become important and contentious issues within the aspirations discourse. These are not limited to Rao alone, since Crivello (2011) also touches on this theme of social mobility, drawing on the Young Lives Project conducted in Ethiopia, India, Peru and

Vietnam. In her paper, Crivello explores youth perspectives on education as a chance to strive for a 'better life,' which becomes synonymous with a higher social status. The process of aspiring, as Crivello suggests, is often presented as a linear process, framed through career or educational options. She further argues that despite international attention on facilitating young people's access to schooling, structural inequalities threaten children's chances of achieving their aspirations and climbing out of poverty (2011).

Rao's and Crivello's analyses raise some important points that are instrumental in understanding how aspirations are conceptualised and, in turn, how these are formed by young people themselves. First is the idea of educational statuses being linked to social value, where youth perceive the benefits of having an education as a means of gaining a recognised social status (Crivello, 2011). The second is how aspirations are driven through interactions with the socio-cultural context, and the roles that the school, family and peer groups play in nurturing particular drives. In attempting to theorise aspiration, it is important to view these as relative constructs, which are neither 'fixed or ascribed, but rather emerging out of and through people's social relationships' (Evans, 2006: 110).

It is useful to link this to the ways in which youth transitions have been theorised thus far, since both concepts share similarities in their presentation of how young people's experiences have been overlooked. Children and young people are active participants in their transitions and in imagining their futures, as demonstrated through Valentine (2003), Skelton (2002), and Stambach (2017). Formal education then reshapes transition into adulthood, as it ties youth transitions to aspirations through securing pathways to upward mobility.

As Ansell (2004: 198) explains, schooling presents an 'alternative version of adulthood in which paid employment is central.' Ansell's focus on youth transition is on how education shifts the ways in which transitions have been imagined through the lens of employment or prospects of upward mobility. Expectations placed on young people about their post-schooling decisions come to shape the types of future that they hope for. As suggested thus far, my own interest lies in the processual ways in which young people figure out what they want to do and become. Rather than adding to an already extensive debate on youth transitions and aspirations, I want to redirect focus to young people's own understanding and engagement *within* the process of figuring out who to become. In

doing so, I present the concept of 'becoming' as an alternative way of thinking about how young people connect to the future, bringing together youth transitions, aspirations and the future.

2.4 Exploring Youth 'Becomings'

The intention of this chapter has been to unpack the theoretical concepts central to my research, to bring to light new ways in which we, as anthropologists and social scientists, understand how young people connect to the future through the processes of becoming. Having provided an analysis of literature on youth transitions, aspirations and the future, I now want to shift focus to introducing a concept: the idea of youth *becoming*. Though an ethnographic term, which emerged in the course of fieldwork through conversations with my interlocuters, I feel it important to theorise it, particularly when alluding to identity, futures and aspiration in the context of youth studies.

Becoming, or *wenawa* in Sinhala, as mentioned in the Introduction, is a concept that is rarely used by youth in everyday conversations, but signifies a process formed in the present and linked to an imagined future. The concept of becoming, then, encompasses young people's discussions of the future, which connects with their present lives. When speaking to youth at Mayadevi about their aspirations, the girls would speak to me about who - or what - they wanted to become in the future. As I will present in the course of this thesis, the concept of becoming allows for a less linear, more emergent and multivalent set of processes.

As explored thus far, there is an assumption that formal education aids youth in developing higher aspirations, hinting at possibilities of climbing out of poverty (Crivello, 2011; World Bank, 2018). Consequently, aspirations are almost always referred to as having been constructed within formal spaces, like schools, focusing on normative aspirations that align to the life cycle model (as discussed in the section on youth transitions). Within such assumptions, young people are encouraged to aspire to finish school, enter secure employment - which may also involve migration - and pursue marriage. Such focus on normative aspirations neglects the informal or 'personal' aspirations that young people form for themselves. In the chapters that follow, I argue that it is important to address this gap, as it is at this point that youth come to grapple

with the tensions of maintaining traditional aspirations whilst attempting to achieve cosmopolitan hopes and dreams.

The theorisation of identity as collective and national is at the forefront of the national education and schooling agenda, with increasing attention being paid to carving out a collective identity under the guise of educating young people on their social and cultural history (Hall & Du Gay, 1996; Rival, 2002; Caddell, 2005). In the context of Sri Lanka, subjects in schools like my own field site cover this extensively: whether through recounting the history of the great Kandyan kingdoms through folk songs or reciting the *Mahavamsa*, the Pali chronicle of Buddhist history and source of Sinhala Buddhist ideology (Sørensen, 2008; Seoighe, 2017), the school becomes a site in which collective national identity and heritage are harboured and reproduced through banal, everyday activities.

The history of the education system in Sri Lanka shows that schooling has been a key site of ethnic segregation and divide, through different linguistic and religious streams (Colenso, 2005; Davies, 2005). In a post-war context, this continues to be intensified, despite the Social Cohesion and Peace Education programme launched in 2008 by the Ministry of Education (Duncan & Cardozo, 2017). In many aspects, then, education and schooling shape conceptualisations of self and collective identities. Bourdieu (1990) presents this as cultural transmission, where an individual's beliefs, values and dispositions are, in part, shaped by their habitus. Rival (2002) also demonstrates how reshaping of individual and collective identity takes place through processes of modernisation amongst Huaorani villagers. Other scholars have explored how education results in imagining oneself differently based on one's educational capital.

Clemensen (2015) and Crivello (2011) demonstrate this through young people's reflection of their social positioning. For Clemensen's research participants, their *educatedness* grants them the power of negotiation by staging their 'school-related knowledge' (2015: 252). For Crivello, schooling provides some youth with the sense that they can become 'someone in life' (2011: 404). Education, then, comes to be a process of differentiation, wherein notions of wellbeing imagined through a better life are embedded in becoming somebody of 'value' (ibid: 402).

My own research will examine how youth come to form ideas of 'selfhood.' It will also demonstrate how ideas of becoming are linked not only to the kind of social mobility and social positioning discussed by Crivello (2011) and Clemensen (2015), but also to the idea of becoming good Buddhist women and therein good Sri Lankans. These themes will be discussed in depth in Chapters Four and Eight, I examine how young people negotiate who they want to become by maintaining national values and heritage whilst attempting to replicate cosmopolitan lifestyles. For my research participants, figuring out who to become results in tensions that they are required to navigate. On one hand, they grapple with wanting a global identity, and attempt to actualise this by replicating Western lifestyles (discussed in Chapter Seven). On the other, they are faced with preserving their national identity and heritage, which they see as entrenched in tradition.

2.4.1 Processes of Identification and Becoming

Identity construction, as I will demonstrate through my findings, is an important element of the process of becoming, whereby young people figure out their futures. They engage in identity construction by playing with different versions of themselves, which speak to their personal aspirations. Rather than a static process, my theorisation of becoming provides a more nuanced and flexible approach to understanding how aspirations and identities are formed amongst young people in Mayadevi school.

Stuart Hall (1996: 2) defines identity as shaped out of recognition of 'common origin or shared characteristic.' This positions identity as a collective construct as well as an individual one, where solidarity and allegiances come to form an important part of how individuals identify themselves. According to Hall, in other words, identification is a process of 'articulating, a suturing, an over determination, not a subsumption' (ibid: 3).

The concept of identity is therefore not fixed, but, as Hall observes, 'strategic and positional,' which challenges the notion of a 'core self' unfolding over time without change. Nor is it the case that there is a 'true' self, 'hiding inside the many others' (1996: 4). To conceptualise identity is to recognise that it constitutes the representation of oneself. As identity is constructed in different ways across diverse and intersecting spaces, discourses, practices and positions, it is intrinsically linked to the past and future (Hall & Du Gay, 1996). Identities, then, are part of a process that individuals must

navigate and experience, and therefore cannot be predictable, since this process is varying, unstable and in constant flux.

Processes of identification are therefore formed within representation, not outside of it. Because of this, it is important to recognise that such processes are produced within specific institutional and historic sites and within discursive formations and practices (Hall, 1996). This is particularly useful in reference to nation-building and national identity, because institutions such as schools become sites in which national and collective identities are nurtured and cultivated. These identities are further formed within specific modes of power, and are therefore products of 'making difference and exclusion' rather than unity (Hall & Du Gay, 1996: 4). Identity, then, is constructed through difference rather than despite it.

Returning to my own theorisation of becoming, I situate this as a process by which young people 'figure out' and perform who they want to become. In doing so, I want to reframe how discourses on youth, encompassing transition, aspirations and the future, reflect their lived experiences to understand the complex and intricate ways in which identity, aspirations and the young person's social world come to influence the *type* of people they aspire to become. Consequently, understanding social reproduction, gender norms and the role of schooling are central theoretical frameworks in examining processes of becoming.

The following section shifts focus into factors that govern processes of becoming. Drawing on Bourdieu, I demonstrate how the school becomes an important site for social reproduction. I also present how nation-building processes are embedded in formal schooling, which shapes what youth are taught to become.

2.5 Schooling and Social Reproduction

Education has been recognised as a process in which appropriate knowledge, behaviour and skills are learnt to enable children to participate as functioning members of society (Froerer, 2007). The World Bank and UNESCO have been instrumental in how this cultural transmission is achieved globally, taking on a central role in shaping international educational agendas. With focus on ensuring every child has access to formal education,

the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been instrumental in rolling out global policies to ensure that access to education is a priority across all countries in the Global South (World Bank, 2018).

Educational reforms initiated by the World Bank have sought to provide 'learning for all' with the aim of enhancing the knowledge and skills that individuals acquire in order to move out of poverty (Ansell, 2015: 12). Bodies such as the World Bank have come to define education systems as learning opportunities, not just within formal pedagogy, but also through informal learning programmes. With the educational agenda being set by international donors, schools have been key agents in delivering global educational initiatives by providing opportunities for learning.

Here, the role of schooling is twofold: schools have been instrumental in supporting students to develop 'particular behaviours and attitudes' that speak to global shifts; however, they have also been central in inculcating specific types of citizens through day-to-day activities (Ansell, 2015: 12). As I will demonstrate through my findings, the school becomes an important site where certain types of becoming are both encouraged and imagined. Drawing on Bourdieu, I will demonstrate how state institutions such as the school come to reproduce a 'social order' resulting in heightening inequalities.

In light of this, cultural transmission has come under considerable critical attention from social theorists, most prevalently seen in the works of Pierre Bourdieu. In *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1990), Bourdieu presents an important analysis of social reproduction through education, in which he argues that pedagogic action (PA) operates through a system of power relations that take place within education systems. These, argues Bourdieu, come to reinforce social differences amongst classes. According to Bourdieu, PA is a tool through which the cultural arbitrary, formed through systems of power, encompasses all aspects of society. In doing so, it reflects and reproduces social stratification and the reproduction of power.

Education, then, becomes a vehicle for the cultural transmission of knowledge that is reproduced through the habitus, which Bourdieu defines as the 'internalisation of principles of the cultural arbitrary' (1990: 30). According to him, the home, school and one's everyday social world come to shape the types of ideas, beliefs, values and mannerisms that individuals form. As Mills (2008: 80) explains, habitus comes to

represent a ‘system of durable, transposable dispositions which function as generative basis of structured, objective and unified practices.’ Importantly, social reproduction takes place in the thick of everyday life.

A central focus of Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction is the idea that cultural transmission is facilitated through inculcation of principles as natural processes that are normalised over time. Our thoughts, ideals and behaviours are shaped by our social surrounding and the institutions in which we engage (inadvertently or not). This is particularly important when examining how young people come to form ideas about who they want to become in the future.

Consequently, what is considered to be a natural point of view is what Bourdieu describes as the processes of social reproduction. He argues that through processes of normalisation, the very institutions in which we engage in our day-to-day life perform acts of symbolic violence, since they conceal the act of cultural transmission, and therein the type of cultural knowledge disseminated (1990). The concealment of intentions in transmitting a certain type of cultural knowledge favours those possessing a certain type of capital.

In *Forms of Capital* (1986), Bourdieu defines capital as the accumulation of resources which are socially reproduced over time. These are identified in three distinct forms. The first is economic capital, which is manifested through material assets and includes investment of ‘economic resources’ in cultural assets (Moore, 2004: 446). The second is cultural capital, which can be measured through forms of educational qualifications, ways of speaking and consumption patterns embedded within one’s habitus (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The third form is social capital, which is formed out of social networks, granting ‘connections’ to membership of a specific group (Bourdieu, 1986; Moore, 2004).

Returning to cultural capital, Bourdieu explains that this is manifested in three states. The *embodied* state is presented through personal dispositions of the ‘mind and body’ and reflects one’s tastes and desires. The *objectified* state takes the form of ‘goods’ such as books, paintings and material possessions, which hold (transmissible) economic and cultural value. Lastly, Bourdieu identifies the *institutionalized* state, seen through

educational qualifications, which 'confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee' (1986: 47).

Bourdieu's analysis of social reproduction and the role of education in facilitating this is particularly relevant to my own research context of Sri Lanka, where the reproduction of ideologies takes place within everyday schooling activities. I will demonstrate how young people are taught to uphold certain values in hope of leading them to become good Buddhist women. Though Bourdieu does not explicitly refer to the reproduction of state ideologies, in the case of Sri Lanka, social and cultural capital are transferred across generations through family and caste lines. Applying Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction reveals that learning becomes an irreversible process, where the primary habitus (of the home) and the secondary habitus (of the school) become central sites for social reproduction. The educational system has the characteristic of structure and functioning in 'produc[ing] and reproduc[ing] the institutional conditions necessary to exercise its function of inculcation of the cultural arbitrary,' resulting in the reproduction of social relations between groups or classes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990: 54).

Like Bourdieu, Levinson (1996) argues that education and the schooling space become sites of intense cultural politics. In *The Cultural Production of the Educated Person* (1996), Levinson extends the analysis of social reproduction, and in doing so provides a critique of Bourdieu's original conceptualisation. According to Levinson, Bourdieu's approach does not pay enough attention to gender or race, which come to constitute important areas of social reproduction, particularly in contexts outside the Global North. A further criticism is Bourdieu's deterministic model of culture and structures of schooling as instruments of control.

What perhaps distinguishes Levinson's interpretation of cultural and social reproduction is the argument that although schools are perceived to produce social difference, they are also a basis for new forms of reproductions to be produced. These can vary from new social relations to new forms of knowledge and identities and should not be seen only as repressive sites, but also transformative (Levinson, 1996). Theorising cultural production becomes a process by which individuals 'creatively occupy the space of education and schooling' (ibid: 15).

2.5.1 Nation-building and Social Reproduction Through Schooling

In this section, I examine in more depth how nation-building, through schooling, becomes an important factor that shape young people's aspirations and imagining their futures. As discussed, formal schooling comes to reproduce a social order, which results in furthering inequalities.

For some time, scholars have examined the role of schooling as a political project aimed at constructing a certain kind of citizen (Caddell, 2005; Bénéï, 2008). Schooling has been envisaged as a 'potent' state institution, which penetrates everyday life to produce law-abiding and patriotic citizens of a nation state (Mohammed-Arif, 2005; Bénéï, 2009). With increased scholarly focus on the relationship between education and nation-building, there is an urgent need to explore the role that formal schooling plays in such processes. As Froerer (2007) argues, schools are not void of responsibility when it comes to being sites of cultural transmission; instead, they come to play a central role in how and when reproductions of discipline and conformity are enforced for the purpose of maintaining a nation state.

In her examination of social reproduction through education, Froerer (2007) focuses on the relationship between religion and nationalism and illustrates how national identity is reinforced through the identification and distinction of the 'threatening Other.' This process of Othering occurs with the assertion of the hegemony of a Hindu national identity, distancing those who do not conform to this cultural arbitrary, to borrow Bourdieu's term (2007: 1034). Drawing on her research in a Hindu nationalist school, Froerer illustrates how '*Hindutva'* is perpetuated through social institutions which seek to maintain an 'inculcation of (Hindu) discipline and values', preserve national (Hindu) identity and prevent a sense of 'cultural pollution' (ibid: 1035).

Despite recognising the transformative potential of formal schooling, Froerer also illustrates the role that education plays in marginalising already marginalised communities, which fall outside of the state sponsored Hindu '*rashtra'* (nation) (ibid: 1035). In light of the discussion on social reproduction, both Froerer (2007) and Bourdieu (1990) demonstrate the ways in which cultural inculcation is assimilated into formal schooling, and how this in turn heightens social order.

In contrast to Froerer's research, which examines how nation-building practices reinforce Othering through religious ideology, Clemensen's (2015) paper examines how children in a rural Zambian community attempt to negotiate their social positioning through their educational status. Clemensen demonstrates how Hang'ombe children's use of language and behavioural traits becomes a method through which they come to dominate or subordinate themselves to others. The children do so by asserting their status as 'educated or learned persons' by counting or spelling loudly (2015: 245). Describing these actions, Clemensen reveals how children use their cultural capital to position themselves within the social hierarchy.

Clemensen's ethnography highlights how children come to negotiate peer relations and knowledge learnt at school to establish a clear distinction between 'them' and 'us' (2015). If, as Bourdieu theorised, habitus stems from understanding how individuals are moulded by a social structure, two things need to be taken into account. The first is in understanding what these social structures look like and how they come to play out. Secondly, how do individuals navigate these social structures to get what they want?

It is important to return to the ideal of the school as being a politicised project that seeks to produce a specific type of citizen (Caddell, 2005; Bénéï, 2009). In this role, the school as a state institution seeks to create a distinction between those who align to the political project of citizenship and those who move away from it. These elements come to be of central importance in understanding how children and young people relate to the nation state and its ideology, and in doing so actively come to reproduce a dominant social order, as demonstrated through the example of Hang'ombe children.

A key point that needs to be considered when engaging in such debates is how youth actively engage in the creation of their social worlds. This is also true when examining the gendered ways in which youth are taught to 'become.' As I will demonstrate, for the female students of Mayadevi, a central part of 'becoming' is centred around developing into good Buddhist women. The school becomes an important site in how young people come to imagine their future selves, and in turn, this supports the production of a specific type of citizen.

2.5.2 Gender and Notions of Becoming

As discussed, nation-building through schooling is geared towards producing citizens. Whether this is the production of a skilled labour force which is economically dynamic (Yeoh, 2004), or indeed a populous that harbours the ideals of the nation state (Caddell, 2005; Froerer, 2007; Bénéï, 2008), the role of the school is central in inculcating future generations with the dispositions, ideals and values to bring the nation into 'being.' This is also true of how schooling in the South Asian context can reproduce gender biases through moralistic discourses. An example of this is the idea of women being vehicles to maintaining tradition (De Alwis, 2002), wherein they are reconstructed in social discourses as reproducing culture, community and nation. This strand is of particular interest to my own research, which seeks to examine how young people at Mayadevi reproduce these values, whilst attempting to carve out more 'modern' aspirations.

In relation to this issue on gender and formal education, it is useful to consider the work of Ames (2013) and Purewal & Hashmi (2015), who examine the tensions that arise for female youth through schooling. They examine how girls in Peru and rural Pakistan, respectively, come to form aspirations for the future and the tensions this may cause. Though the focus of both ethnographies is how girls form aspirations, they present very different findings, emphasising the importance of the socio-cultural setting in relation to how female adolescents come to see their future and develop hopes and aspirations.

The authors present very different accounts of how female youth perceive and experience education, although they both highlight the critical role of familial influences in how girls go on to imagine their futures. Perhaps more significantly, both Ames and Purewal & Hashmi reveal how girls go on to engage in formal learning processes. It is useful to compare the two papers as Ames (2013) reveals that in Peru, girls and their mothers actively engage in educational processes to nurture educational aspirations. To take the example of Eva, Ames illustrates how her mother is a source of influence in her child's engagement with education. Through Eva's determination to pursue education and her mother's encouragement to become 'professional,' Ames illustrates the mutual agreement between mother and daughter in pursuing and achieving chosen educational goals (2013: 273).

In contrast, Purewal and Hashmi (2015) demonstrate how traditional gender roles in rural Pakistan come to limit access to educational opportunities for girls. Due to localised

gender expectations and cultural values, educational investment by parents is devalued, as daughters would go on to become the 'wealth of others' (2015: 989). However, to assume that girls in such settings have no aspirations is inaccurate, since Purewal and Hashmi's study highlights how aspirations vary; girls come to aspire to be heads within their household rather than to form educational or career led aspirations. Purewal and Hashmi reveal the importance of carving out a space in which to examine non-normative aspirations that fall outside of education and employment (2015).

An important aspect that is relevant to discourses on the gendering of aspiration is how girls manage their agency in education. Ames discusses how girls in her study choose to engage with certain aspects of formal education and learning as a way to 'resist, reject, (and) appropriate school credentials' and change their social status (2013: 270). In doing so, girls come to negotiate the conditions of their social situations through a process of mirroring.

As Ames argues, the girls here identify themselves in binary opposite to others, for example, through notions of 'well-being and ill-being,' indicating their social positioning as educated or uneducated. Young girls therefore come to reproduce social distinctions and inequalities founded on the notion of *educatedness* (2013: 271). In doing so, they challenge stereotypes of rural and indigenous femininities as being 'uneducated.' Girls then come to negotiate who they want to become in light of prospects of social mobility, whilst attempting to maintain their indigenous identities.

The literature presented highlights two examples in which young people engage in education in different ways. For Ames' (2013) participants, becoming educated was deemed to be aspirational, whilst for those in Purewal and Hashimi's (2015) setting, girls aspire to become female heads of the household. Such contrasting perspectives, then, bring into question the value of formal schooling, and how this differs depending on the social context. Female youth in both studies have aspirations of what they want to achieve, and how they imagine their future selves, albeit these differ greatly.

Underpinning these ideas, though, is how gendered ideals have been constructed by the nation state, and in turn how these speak to young people's own experiences. It is then important to recognise the factors which shape the types of becoming that young people form for themselves. It is only by acknowledging the role of schooling and the

environment that young people grow up in that we can gain understanding of the complex processes by which young people form aspirations and ideas about who they want to become.

2.6 Conclusion

As demonstrated over the course of this chapter, aspirations are not always linked to educational attainment, but are formed with the idea of the future in mind. Consequently, the crux of our understanding of aspirations should be in questioning whether aspiring for the future is intrinsically tied into becoming somebody. What seems to emerge from the literature is that youth transitions and aspirations should not be looked at in isolation, but against a wider framework that encompasses development, economics, education and cultural relativism.

As discussed in the introduction, the scope of this thesis is to re-examine current debates surrounding youth transitions, aspirations and futures, bridging these concepts together as both formed through a process within the present and on to the future. I have demonstrated how youth transitions, like discourses on aspiration, should not be examined as linear, or as a set of stages, but rather as something that takes place in the young person's social world. Consequently, the role of the school and social institutions become central in *who* young people aspire to become.

To this end, I want to introduce a new lens through which to examine such conceptualisations, by challenging certain notions of aspiring and transitions whilst extending understanding of nation-building practices that take place through formal education. In doing so, I intend to bring together ideas surrounding cultural transmission, identity and aspirations with my own conceptualisation of becoming.

Chapter Three: The Sri Lankan Context and Research Methodology

As anthropologists, our research approach allows us to deconstruct the illuminative everyday and present accounts of social life and culture in a given context. Our disciplinary approach becomes a rite of passage (Mills & Ratcliffe, 2012). It grants us the privilege of understanding social life that other methods do not; the insight that we, as anthropologists gain to local perspectives has been instrumental in furthering theoretical debates. As Mills and Ratcliffe note, 'ethnography is not simply a research tool, but rather a commitment to an open-ended, iterative, non-prescriptive vision for social research, where the researcher is encouraged to acknowledge the complexity and unpredictability of the research encounter' (2012: 155). Reflecting on my own fieldwork experience, it was through my disciplinary approach that I was able to gain insight into young people's everyday lives. Importantly, ethnography allowed me to conduct research *with* rather than *on* young people (Allerton, 2016), providing me with a deeper understanding on how children's interactions and cultural forms are produced in the present.

This chapter will present an account into the research methodology. I begin by providing a brief overview of the Sri Lankan context (3.1), placing focus on the politicisation of education (3.1.1) and schooling structure in Sri Lanka (3.1.2) in order to situate my research field. I move on to discuss my interest in the field and how this links to my own positionality (3.2), and the insider/outsider conundrum that arises as a result (3.4). Following this, I present the way in which I attempted to find the 'right' field site (3.4) and introduce Mayadevi Balika school (3.5). Section 3.6 directs attention to the methodological approaches and my engagement with young people outside of the schooling space (3.7). The final section serves to reflect on methodological barriers faced during this research (3.8).

3.1 The Sri Lankan Context

With a population of over 20 million, Sri Lanka is often referred to as the 'pearl' of the Indian Ocean (Department of Census & Statistics, 2012a). On a Google search of Sri Lanka, a 'Destinations' tab emerges, calling tourists to visit important sites such as Sigiriya, Dambulla and Sri Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic), as well as the popular beaches of the Southern Coast. It is these exoticised images that positioned Sri Lanka as the top country to visit in 2019 by the Lonely Planet (Wilson, 2018). On closer examination, however, these sites inviting tourists to discover Sri Lanka serve to portray a specific part of the island with Buddhism at its core.

In contrast to how the island is portrayed to outsiders, Sri Lanka's history has been marked by violence. Three hundred years of colonisation, by the Portuguese (1505–1658), Dutch (1658–1796) and British (1796–1948), have heightened the importance of maintaining a ethno-religious identity (Wickramasinghe, 2006). The civil war between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil insurgency group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), from 1983 to 2009, amplified the state's response in presenting a unified Sri Lanka. Although the civil war has ended, tensions among ethnic groups are still present and have been marked by a shift in nationalist rhetoric, often targeting the Muslim community. The bomb attacks in April 2019 further fuelled nationalist discourses, resulting in violence perpetrated on largely Muslim communities by a sect of Sinhala Buddhist nationalists (Gunasekara, 2020).

Society in Sri Lanka is made up of three main ethnic groups: Sinhalese, who constitute the majority ethnic group and largely practice Buddhism; Sri Lankan Tamils, or Eelam Tamils;[7] and Muslim Moors (Department of Census & Statistics, 2012a). Sri Lanka is also home to Indian Tamils, who were brought by the British to work on tea plantations, Burghers (descendants of the Dutch), and Malay communities. The indigenous Veddahs - though few in numbers - can be found in Mahiyangana, a town in the Uva province.

Forms of identification in Sri Lanka are developed along linguistic, ethnic and religious lines and language, where these come to operate through a social order, much like class

[7] I have made a conscious effort to move away from grouping Eelam Tamils as Sri Lankans. This is in part due to the politicisation of the national identity of being Sri Lankan, as will be discussed in the course of this thesis. My reason for this has also been due to conversations with Tamil Diaspora in London and France, who refuse to identify with the state identity following the violence perpetrated on the Tamil population by the state during the civil war.

in Britain (Sivanandan, 1987; Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2017). While conducting my fieldwork, I became acutely aware of just how entrenched this social order is, and how it functions on a day-to day basis. Ethnicity is the primary social order, where people identify themselves according to their ethnic group first, and then by class and religion. This has been observed by Spencer *et al.* (1990) as a form of cultural consciousness - a sort of binding - which brings a collective imagining into play. Social hierarchy in Sri Lanka is therefore shaped by one's ethnic background, religion and class - all of which come to act as forms of cultural capital.

In order to understand how Sri Lankan society functions, it is important to provide an overview of the context in which identities are formed. This is particularly relevant to my research area, which seeks to examine how young people come to imagine their future selves in the present. Though nationalism and ethnic identity are not the focus of my thesis, they are important points of consideration in examining young people's experiences of growing up on the island.

Through the lens of Sinhalese Buddhist youth, I have seen how majoritarian discourses calling for the preservation of Sinhala Buddhist values have been taught, and in turn how young people themselves come to reproduce these narratives. A recent example of this can be found in the number of murals that have cropped up across cities in the island (see Figures 3.1a & 3.1b). Often, these are created by students at local schools, and form part of a visual storytelling, where important religious figures feature heavily. These examples highlight the ways in which young people engage in processes of nation-building.

Before describing my research methods, I will provide an overview of the education system and structure in Sri Lanka, in order to position my field site. Following this, I discuss my research interest and positionality before introducing the field site and research methods adopted over the course of this fieldwork.

Figure 3.1a: Mural outside of a school in Kandy[8]

Figure 3.1b: Mural outside of Kathugastota Junction[9]

Source: Batatota, L (2020)

[8] Painted by a local boys' school, it depicts a Buddhist emblem, a Sinhala lion (symbolising the Sinhalese people), Kandyan dancers and King Sri Vikrama Rajasinha on an elephant during Perahera.

[9] This mural depicts the Tooth Relic Temple, which is an importance religious site for Buddhists. It is thought that the last relic of the Buddha is preserved in the stupa displayed. The figures represent Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe (the last king of Sri Lanka), Wariyapola Sri Sumangala, a Buddhist monk who hoisted down the British flag as a sign of resistance to replace with the Sinhalese lion flag, and Anagarika Dharmapala, a prominent figure in Buddhist revivalism (Obeyesekere, 2017).

3.1.1 Educational Systems and the Politicisation of Education in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's educational history is firmly rooted in its colonial past. The arrival of the Portuguese and Dutch resulted in Christian missionary schools being established across some parts of the island, where scriptures were taught in the 'native' language. Following this, the arrival of the British brought about the consolidation of a mass education system during the 19th Century, seeking to address the need to 'educate the natives' (Ministry of Education, 2013: 13). The Enactment of Education Ordinance, or the Free Education Act, was introduced in 1939, leading to the state assuming responsibility for government schools and consequently implementing free education across the island (Wickramasinghe, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2013).

The Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) continues to provide free universal education across the island from primary to tertiary levels. The educational reforms of 1997 support the ongoing provision of free textbooks, uniforms and school transport, making Sri Lanka's educational structure one of the most accessible in South Asia (Little, 2011). The state continues to provide bursaries at secondary and tertiary levels, which have enabled even the poorest households to send their children to school (ibid). Educational policies have historically centred on encouraging successful development by attempting to identify and respond to barriers that families may face.

However, high literacy rates and educational enrolment often masks the politicised nature of education. Since independence, access to education has been 'ethnicised,' preventing rather than assisting access to education and employment for certain groups (Davies, 2005; Sørensen, 2008). Affirmative action policies, such as the Standardisation Act introduced in 1971, sought to redistribute university places based on ethnic group identity. Since Tamil youth had at one point been the majority at universities, the act re-established new quotas dependent on region and provinces, disadvantaging Tamil students across the country (Tambiah, 1992; Wickramasinghe, 2006). In contrast, the enrolment rates for Sinhalese students grew, since the policy redressed the 'imbalance' created by the colonial and missionary education systems.

Despite these inequalities, legislations such as the Free Education Act have been recognised for providing education to children and young people across the island, though such acts often mask the youth unrest that has come about due to a lack of educational opportunities and unmet aspirations.

From 1987–89, Sri Lanka experienced one of the most turbulent university student unrests of its time, from both Sinhalese and Tamil youths following punitive legislations. These unrests served two very different purposes: for the Tamils in the North, legislations such as the Standardisation Act, as stated, served to restrict access to educational opportunities. For rural Sinhalese youth, the riots represented a demand for greater employment opportunities, as historically, Tamils had received better educational opportunities, as a result of the Christian missionary schools established in the northern parts of the island (De Silva & De Silva, 1990; Tambiah, 1992; Wickramasinghe, 2006).

Bowden and Binns (2016) argue that youth unemployment in Sri Lanka is a structural issue resulting from 'historic and contemporary social, political and economic issues' (2016: 197). Their research suggests that youth engagement is central to the country's economic development - and yet with a third of the country's unemployed made up of people who have completed schooling, questions surrounding the quality of education and employment opportunities for graduates are lacking. With this high unemployment, and a low number of universities across the island (only 15 in total), tertiary education becomes an option for only a limited number of young people. Despite this, university entrance is extremely competitive and school graduates typically must wait two years, as was the case with my own participants, before securing a university place (Hettige, Mayer & Salih, 2004; Bowden & Binns, 2016).

Having presented a brief overview of Sri Lankan society, and education from a macro level, the following section will provide a synopsis of the schooling structure. This will be particularly useful to outline here, prior to the discussion on methodological approaches.

3.1.2 Schooling Structure in Sri Lanka

There are 10,194 government schools in Sri Lanka, comprising both national and provincial schools (Ministry of Education, 2017).[10] The latter make up 96% of government schools and are managed by the local provincial council (see Appendix 3.1.2a & 3.1.2b for school structure). National schools are managed centrally by the

[10]There are also private schools, pirivenas (monastic college) and international schools across the island. For the scope of my research, however, these will not be a focus.

Ministry of Education and make up just 4% of all government schools, despite being used by almost 20% of the student population (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Historically, national schools have been considered to be elite institutions that provide different mediums of instruction[11] and boast better facilities and more highly trained teachers. However, the 'function' of a school may also determine whether it is approved as a national school. 91% of all national schools are 1AB type, which requires a school to have classes up to GCE A-Level in all subject streams (Arts, Commerce, Science and Technology), with or without primary sections. Provincial schools, in contrast, are largely Type 3 Schools, which offer schooling up to Grade 5, though some go up to Grade 8 (Ministry of Education, 2013, 2017). The table below summaries the school functions:

Table 3.1.2c Indicating School Functional Type

Type	***School Function***
1AB	Schools that offer A-Level Arts, Commerce, Science and Technology streams
1C	Schools that offer A-Level Arts and/or Commerce streams but no science
Type 2	Schools that have classes up to Grade 11 (exclude A-Levels)
Type 3	Schools that have classes from Grades 1 to 5 or 1 to 8

Source: Ministry of Education (2017)

The Sri Lankan educational system comprises four phases across national and provincial schools. Children begin their education from age six, when they are enrolled into primary school, followed by four years in junior secondary, covering Grades 6 to 9. At the end of each academic year, children are required to pass the end-of-year exam to progress to the next year. Grade 5 is a significant school year for pupils, because they face the highly competitive Grade 5 scholarship examination, which enables many from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter highly ranked national schools via scholarships (this will be discussed in Chapter Five).

Unlike the primary schooling structure, teaching at secondary level, which lasts for two years, is geared towards passing O-Levels (GCSE equivalent) in Grade 11, where the

[11]National schools offer instruction in Sinhala, Tamil and/or English. Many Provincial schools, however, teach in the vernacular language, depending on their geographical location.

majority of pupils take up to 10 subjects (Ministry of Education, 2013). However, it is at this stage of the scholastic system that a large percentage of youth fail to go on to upper secondary, with a 26% dropout rate (Bandara, 2017). Upper secondary level is marked by the importance of GCE A-Level exams, after which a small cohort of students (just 16% of young people who receive a pass level) are admitted to university (University Grants Commission, 2017b). The table below outlines the structure of schooling.

3.1.2d Grades and Key Educational Stages

Level	***Grades***	***Age***	***Years***	***Key Educational Milestones***
Primary	1–5	6–11	5	Grade 5 Scholarship exam, which allows children to be shortlisted for a place at a national school.
Junior Secondary	6–9	12–14	4	No key exams
Senior Secondary	10–11	15–16	2	General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level (O/Ls) (Grades 10–11). Students must sit this exam to pursue A-Levels
	12–13	17–18	2	General Certificate of Education (GCE) A/Ls is the university entrance exam in Sri Lanka.

Source: Selvanayagam (2012)

Having provided a contextual overview of the socio-political and educational landscape in Sri Lanka, the following section will shift focus towards methodological approaches. I begin by presenting a short analysis on my own positioning, which facilitated my access to the field, before discussing the methodological approaches adopted over the course of my fieldwork.

3.2 Research Interest and Positionality

My PhD journey began after receiving a scholarship as part of a wider ESRC-DFID-funded project on education systems, aspiration and learning in remote rural settings at Brunel. My initial research aim sought to examine how youth aspirations are formed in relation to the economic, political and socio-cultural contexts of Sri Lanka, in hope of contributing to the findings of the wider project. With this in mind, I left for Sri Lanka in

July 2017 with a plan of conducting fieldwork in a national school in Kandy, located in the Central Province.

My initial investigation into how youth from rural backgrounds form aspirations turned out to be side-lined by far more pressing themes which emerged in the course of my fieldwork. Observing the social landscape that young people grow up in led me to explore how youth come to imagine themselves 'becoming.' In the previous chapter, I proposed the notion of becoming as an ethnographic theorisation, which seeks to interlink aspirations, youth transitions and ideas of the future. Important, for me, was understanding how young people 'figure out' what and who they wanted to be.

As per my anecdote, I let the field and my participants lead my research. Anthropologists acknowledge that ethnographic research takes a turn of its own and it is the interaction between anthropologist and participant that produces ethnography (Geertz, 1988; Hastrup, 1992). It is often the setting and research participants[12] themselves that prompt important themes requiring further exploration, rather than the researcher hunting these out. In attempting to produce research to reflect the lived experiences of our participants, the researcher is required to reflect on their positioning and influence for the data to emerge and begin to tell a story.

As Okely explains, 'the autobiography of fieldwork is about lived interactions, participatory experience and embodied knowledge; whose aspects ethnographers have not fully theorised' (1992:2). Being half-Sinhalese and having moved to Sri Lanka from Rome, where I was born, meant that a large part of my early childhood was spent growing up in a small town approximately 50km from Colombo. Like many of my participants, I went to a Sinhala-Buddhist national school, practised Buddhism, had Sinhalese friends and accessed private tuition classes in preparation for the Grade 5 scholarship examination.

When my parents made the decision to move to London in 1996, aspiring for a 'good life' marked by the prospect of better education and employment opportunities, I was immersed in a new environment, where I battled with questions of identity and belonging

[12]I want to highlight a move away from perceiving informants as passive in the research process, towards a view of them as rather active participants that inform what the research becomes. It is through their experiences, stories and lives that we, as anthropologists, gain insight into their worlds, and as such a call for redefining how we classify 'informants' is urgently needed.

throughout my adolescence. It is important to note, however, that my experiences reflect my privileges of being Sinhalese and Italian, since this gave me the cultural and social capital to stand out against my peers. My parents' motivation to migrate to the UK in the hope of achieving social mobility was facilitated by our Italian citizenship, which granted us access to establish ourselves in the UK. For many Eelam Tamils, who share a similar trajectory to myself in migrating to Europe, this movement was not for social mobility alone, but to escape the threat of the war. This is in contrast to many Sinhalese, who were considered economic migrants.[13]

It is upon reflection of my childhood and schooling experiences that questions of identity and belonging came to play an important part in why I chose Sri Lanka as my field. These reflections, combined with a sense of 'duty' to investigate the role of schooling in shaping a national identity, were further embedded whilst witnessing ethnic violence during my stay in Kandy. The field presented an opportunity to return to my own experience, but also brought to light emerging issues within and beyond the schooling space which shed insight into life for youth in a post-conflict setting. This sense of duty has been discussed by Cohen, who explains that 'many anthropologists are motivated by a personal problematic as well as mere intellectual curiosity' (1992: 223). It was recognising my positionality, and indeed the partiality that came with my positioning, that shaped how I observed the field around me.

3.2.1 The Inside/Outsider Conundrum

I was, in many ways an insider, which granted me 'membership' to the field (Powell, 2017). My position in the school was facilitated by my own background, gender and appearance. It helped that I look South Asian and appearing younger than I am meant I was able to find a position within the school much more easily than had I been a Caucasian researcher. Though initially, I heard whispers from students about the *sudu nona* (white lady) sitting in their class, these quickly diminished once students realised that I spoke enough Sinhala to make me an insider.

[13]The influx of Tamil migrants, though not a focus of my thesis, has shaped the configuration of Tamil diasporic communities that we now find in the UK, France, and Germany, as well as further afield (for further reading, see Wayland, 2004; Ranganathan, 2009; Orjuela, 2017; Pande, 2017).

Powell (2017) provides a useful reflection on how perceived *insiderness* by others results in being granted the privilege of becoming part of a collective. My ability to converse and pick up social cues meant that over a relative short space of time, I went from being perceived as *sudu nona* to just *sudu,*[14] or Shamali, my Sinhalese name.

My own experiences of having lived in Sri Lanka as a child meant that I was able to relate to students and teachers, and to the context in which I was immersed. I was aware of and familiar with traditions and customs, which gave me a perceived advantage as I entered the field. Hastrup (1992) highlights the importance of the anthropologist's position as not only physical, but also about their lived experience, which, she explains, 'enables or inhibits particular kinds of insight' (1992: 118).

Though I had acquired such insights into the dos and don'ts, my foreignness came through on a number of occasions, despite my attempts at shedding this label within the schooling space. One such occasion was during my first few days at the school, where I had been invited by the principal to observe a seminar being conducted by a *hamuduruwo* (monk) from the Sri Dalada Maligawa (Tooth Relic Temple). At the end of the event, the audience stood for the national anthem to be played, as is customary. Distracted by what was happening around me, and furiously making notes in my book, I had not realised one was required to stand up. As I sat, watching the girls stand to the anthem, it dawned on me that I too should be doing this. However, too conscious that I would be exposed for my *foreignness*, I remained seated, fidgeting with my notebook with my head down, hoping that the teachers, students and the *hamuduruwo* did not take my error as an insult. Such anecdotes serve to illustrate the complexities of being in the field: despite having a form of membership to a community, my Otherness was at times very apparent.

3.3 Finding a Field Site: Challenges and Opportunities

Selecting a field site took some time to accomplish. Despite having completed my primary education in Sri Lanka, I had underestimated the extent of ethnic segregation in schools. It was only when I began fieldwork that I became aware quite how much

[14]*Sudu* was a term of endearment used by the girls. When interrogating this, I was informed by students that to be called *sudu* (which translates to 'white' in Sinhala) is to be told one is pretty. This has significance importance in light of colourism, which remains an important issue in south Asian culture (see Hussein, 2010, for further reading on colourism).

language, ethnicity and religion operate invisibly in contemporary, post-conflict Sri Lankan society. For friends, family and people I spoke with, there were topics of conversation that should not be broached; ethnic segregation in schooling was one of these.

Members of my family and close acquaintances warned me that certain topics, such as the conflict, segregation in school and emerging ethnic tensions, should not be discussed. Witnessing attacks on a number of Muslim communities by a sect of the Sinhalese Buddhist population during my stay in Kandy further highlighted the importance of bringing such issues to light (Gunaratna, 2018; Tamil Guardian, 2018).

Unpacking these tensions was made possible through the nature of ethnography, which allowed me to observe and document occurrences, such as this violence, that were not spoken of. As Staples (2019: 1128) explains, an ethnographic approach 'helps us to separate (and potentially challenge) rhetoric from the more complex realities.' Importantly, ethnography allowed me to explore how young people come to process events like communal riots and, in turn, reproduce nationalistic sentiments inside and outside of the schooling space.

In order to narrow down my field site, I conducted extensive analysis of the national census in order to understand which province would be best for my research focus. I discovered that of the nine provinces, the district of Kandy, located in the Central Province, presented a relatively mixed ethnic composition with a high youth population.

Figure 3.4a Ethnic Breakdown in the District of Kandy

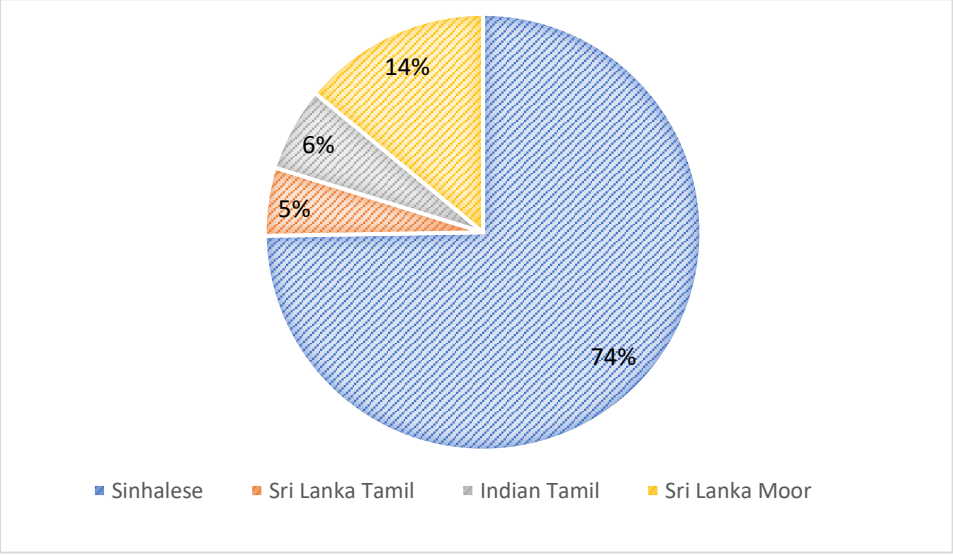
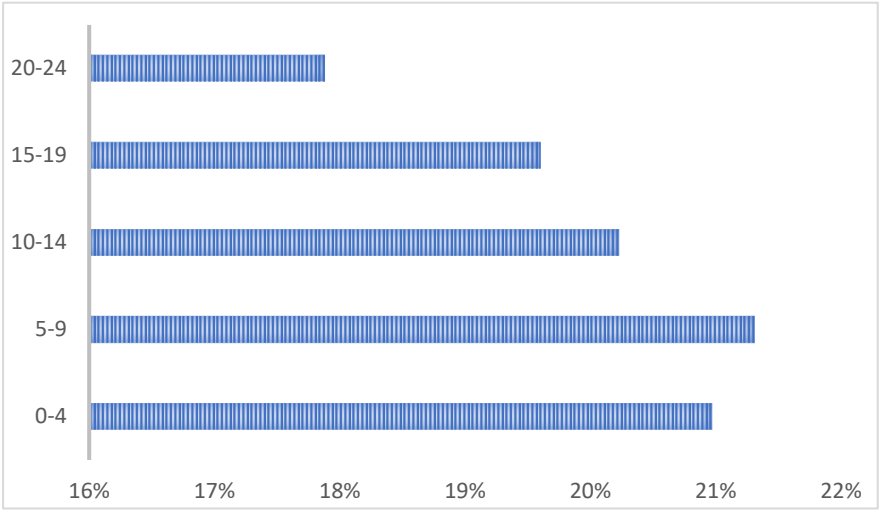


Figure 3.4b Under 25 Age Group in the District of Kandy



Source: Department of Census & Statistics (2012)

Further analysis of school census data and visits to potential sites provided me with a better idea of where best to situate myself so that I would have access to young people from all ethnic groups. I decided to base my research in Kandy as it provided me with more opportunities to engage with different communities than had I remained in a suburb of Colombo (where the population is largely Sinhalese Buddhist; see Appendix Figures 3.4c & 3.4d for ethnicity by province and population density). It also gave me the assurance that I could converse in Sinhala (albeit poorly in the initial stages of my fieldwork) with my participants rather than rely on a translator.[15]

Having decided on an area, the process of gaining authorisation from the Government of Sri Lanka became an arduous task. Following several emails and telephone calls, I decided to conduct a pre-field visit in March 2017, which resulted in my making contact with a senior official within the Ministry of Education (MoE). It was through this official that I was given access to Mayadevi Balika Vidyalaya, an all-girls Sinhala Buddhist school located in the heart of Kandy. I spent the months following my pre-fieldwork visit affiliating myself to a Sri Lankan university in order to qualify as an overseas student. The bureaucracy involved in making this happen meant that a large amount of my time

[15]It is important to note here that Sinhala and Tamil are recognised as the national languages, though many Tamil-speaking communities are fluent in Sinhala. Many Sinhalese, however, do not speak Tamil. My reluctance to appoint a translator was also due to having had difficulties of using a translator in the past during my MSc in South India. These issues were largely centred around what the translator felt needed translating, leaving gaps in informal interviews and focus groups. Having already had difficulty gaining access to the school, inviting a translator would have been a further barrier, and on reflection would have negatively impacted my integration into the school.

was spent communicating with different officials at the Open University, the MoE and the Sri Lankan Consulate in London.

The following section will introduce the school site, methodological approaches before turning attention to limitations of conducting research with female youth at Mayadevi. I will also provide a discussion on the barriers faced whilst in the field.

3.4 The Main Field Site: Mayadevi Balika Vidyalaya

Mayadevi Balika Vidyalaya is located in a highly populated urban area. As young people from rural parts of the country attended the school, I was able to explore the crossover between urban and rural boundaries that students would experience as part of their schooling life. Prior to commencing my fieldwork, I was informed by both the MoE official and the Principal of Mayadevi, Madam Lalitha, that while it was a Buddhist school, the student body was mixed and consisted of Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim students and teachers. Despite my ideal choice of a co-educational school, the mixed ethnic demographics of students outweighed the gender disparity, as this was something that I wanted to explore in detail.

What I had not realised until my first day of fieldwork was the extent to which Mayadevi was a Sinhala Buddhist School. I had been told by Madam Lalitha that the student demographics were mixed; however, it was only when speaking to the Tamil office orderly and a few teachers that I discovered that the students and teachers were almost all Sinhalese. The implications of waiting for a government-approved school led me to consider whether continuing my search for a co-educational and ethnically mixed school was viable. I had already spent several months finding a point of contact and had been warned off explicitly requesting an ethnically mixed school, since this may have aroused suspicion amongst officials at the MoE.[16]

The reality of being granted access to Mayadevi, a Buddhist national school in the heart of the country's last Sinhalese Kingdom, raised questions for me as to what kind of school the MoE *wanted* me to research. Mayadevi was a model school. It had a renowned

[16] During my pre-fieldwork visit, I was warned by a number of gatekeepers not to mention my focus on identifying disparity amongst the majority and minority ethnic groups in addition to the conflict, since this could negatively impact my access.

reputation for maintaining tradition and Kandyan heritage, high pass rates and, importantly, attending Mayadevi was seen as aspirational. Though concerned about the methodological implications of conducting fieldwork in an all-girls Sinhala Buddhist school, I soon realised that this setting raised important questions that needed to be explored, particularly around the themes of nation-building, identity and access to good-quality education.

3.5 Methodological Approaches

Whilst at Mayadevi, I immersed myself into school life. In the classroom, I sat next to students, did exercises set by the teacher and helped tidy the classroom at the end of each lesson. This prompted curiosity from the girls, who asked questions about what I was noting down, leading to conversations. I shared my fieldnotes with them, explaining to them in Sinhala what I found interesting and what I learnt. This act was reciprocated, particularly by the younger students, who wrote their names and drawings in my notebook (see Figure 3.6a) so that I could remember them when I left for the UK. On a number of occasions, students took it upon themselves to correct me in my writing of words in Sinhala, marking the corrections in red biro and approving when I had copied a sentence down correctly.

Figure 3.6a: Drawings from students in class 7D

My initial idea of approaching the field as a classroom assistant or helper did not materialise due to the way in which teaching takes place. I had planned to act as a volunteer or an assistant to the teacher in order to facilitate access. However, the impracticalities of 'assisting' a classroom of 45 students were soon highlighted in my first few days of observation in Grades 6 and 7. This, combined with suspicion of my presence by the teachers, who initially thought I was a government official, made observation the best methodological approach, since it was less intrusive and disruptive to the day-to-day routines that teachers and students were used to.

To get an overview of the schooling experience, I decided to conduct observations across different grades in the first two months. From mid-September to the end of October, I observed specific form groups from Grades 6 to 10, which gave me insight into the upper primary and lower secondary stages of schooling, leading up to O-Levels (GCSE equivalent). Once my presence was somewhat normalised through everyday interactions with young people in the lower secondary stages, I chose to access the A-Level Arts stream, to try and get an understanding of how young people who were at the end stages of their schooling were preparing for their final exams.

It is this cohort of young people with whom I became very familiar, befriending them and thus gaining access to the private tuition classes that were part of their schooling experience. Approaching fieldwork in this way enabled me to pinpoint the significant milestones that many students go through as part of their schooling, which gave me insight into their experiences of formal education. It also meant that I was able to note changes in behaviours, priorities and aspirations of young people in this particular school.

Methodologically, participant observation and informal conversations were best suited to my setting and participants. Although I tried to introduce more interactive activities, the school timetable and structure led me to have very little time and capacity to organise them. With the younger students, I spent time during the break or 'interval' accompanying them to the canteen to gain insight into their schooling experiences and life outside of school.

Following them as 'friends' led girls to confide in me more quickly than I had anticipated. They spoke to me in Sinhala of their villages, their parents' hardships and of their hopes for the future, giving me insight into their lives and things dear to them. During the

interval, the younger students played games that I was invited to join, although I often failed as I did not properly understand the rules.

In contrast to the younger cohort of students, the older girls were far harder to engage with. On a number of occasions, I felt like an outsider, intruding into their highly preserved space. During intervals, I found myself sitting on the periphery, trying to find a way to break in. This sense of rejection has been noted by Sim (2016: 76) while conducting ethnography at a school in London. As she describes, the desire to be accepted (by participants) led her to 'worry…about whether I will have anyone to sit next to at lunchtime, whether I am included in games, conversations, and secrets, and whether I am counted as a friend.' These become real conundrums that we as researchers must face, the anxiety of which is heightened at the prospect of being left in the periphery looking in.

After observing a number of Science, Tech and Arts Streams, I found an A-Level group that felt more 'open' in speaking to me about their experiences of schooling, which was facilitated by their ability to speak English. A group of 18-year-old students in 13B became my 'core group', and it was this group that I followed up until the end of my time at Mayadevi.[17] My decision to focus on this group was also influenced by the fact that they were studying in English, facilitating our conversations, particularly when exploring themes of identity, aspirations and the future. I was also interested in the unconventional stream that these students had chosen, since the subjects they took for their A-Levels were ground-breaking in many aspects.[18]

As suggested, informal interviews and focus groups did not work, as these formats formalised my positioning and undermined my attempt to be 'one of them.' This would have shifted the dynamics within the group and placed me at risk of being seen as an outsider by my group. Ultimately, I discovered that I got the best material when speaking to students on the level of a peer, rather than in assuming different roles, such as that of an older sister, classroom helper or teacher-like figure. By the end of my time at Mayadevi, I felt like I was a student, and this sense of belonging was reaffirmed a number

[17]My 'core group' consisted of Thilini, Gayatri, Chaturi, Yani, Dilki and Nadika.
[18]Mayadevi is one of the few schools offering the Arts Stream in the Kandy district. As such, the A-Level cohort consisted of a large number of girls who had applied to get into the school because they wanted to specialise in Languages. The cohort was also considerably smaller (60 students) than more traditional streams such as Science or Tech, which can include up to 200 students.

of times when teachers berated me in front of the class for whispering to girls sat next to me. While embarrassed at being told off by a teacher in front of the class, I also felt a pang of excitement at the realisation that I, too, could pass off as a *Mayadevian*.

3.6 Outside of the Schooling Space

Over time, my fieldwork extended beyond the schooling space, where I gained access to a few voluntary organisations focusing on educational initiatives as well as tuition classes, which came to form a large part of my ethnographic experience, particularly as young people's lives are dominated by schooling and private tuition. Where possible, I visited local shopping malls and bakeries, and attended cricket matches and dancing and singing events with the students as well as my host family and friends, to try and understand what young people do and how they behave in their spare time. I frequented spaces such as Kidsreach (a church-run centre for young people) and Jade College (a Muslim girls' school in Digana, located on the outskirts of Kandy), as well as on several occasions visiting boys' schools such as Christchurch College, St. Sylvester's and St. Thomas', to gain insight into all-boys schools and young people from different backgrounds.[19]

My access to events in Kandy was also facilitated by my host family, with whom I lived for half of my fieldwork. I was able to learn about the dynamics within the nuclear family, while understanding the role that the family plays in youth transitions. Unfortunately, access to parents of students at Mayadevi remained a barrier, largely because the students travelled to and from school by school vans. It was only on my return visit to Kandy in 2019 that I met with my core group's parents.

Accessing the informal space outside of school became invaluable to me, particularly in getting to know the girls on a personal level. It was through our interactions at the tuition class that I was able to note differences in their behaviours and mannerisms. I was able to see how the tuition space became a site of symbolic importance for the girls, where

[19] Christchurch and St. Thomas' College are semi-private, and charge fees on a termly basis. St. Sylvester's is a provincial school, managed by the Provincial Department for Education. All of the schools provide teaching from Grade 1 to Grade 13, in Sinhala, English and Tamil. Jade College is also privately run, and provides short courses on IT, English, Cooking and Crafts for Muslim girls. Unlike the others, Jade College runs courses every term, and girls are admitted from across the country. All of the schools, bar St. Sylvester's (provincial schools do not offer this facility), have boarding facilities.

they were able to exercise their freedoms away from the school. It was also where I met students from other local schools and gained insight into the extended social network that the students at Mayadevi formed for themselves. I had the opportunity to see blossoming romances, rifts and new friendships form within this space.

3.7 Methodological Barriers and Research Limitations

The challenges I faced were largely related to access, whether this was accessing girls outside of the school, male youth or indeed youth from different ethnic groups. As my fieldwork was conducted in an urban area, I had limited opportunities to speak to young people from more rural parts of the district. My primary research site being Mayadevi also meant that I did not have access to young people from working-class backgrounds, as the majority of my participants were from middle-income households.

In respect to students at Mayadevi, access was limited due to the strict schedules dominating the young people's lives, which largely revolved around schooling and tuition. I did have access to boys' schools, though while visiting these (mentioned above), I noted that boys were less willing to speak to me as a female researcher. This combined, with the difficulties in gaining permission to conduct research at a boys' school, led me to continue my focus with girls at Mayadevi[20].

What I had not anticipated, however, was the lack of access I would have to young people from specifically Tamil and Muslim backgrounds. Early on in my fieldwork, I realised that accessing minority ethnic group communities would be difficult, since the schooling received by young people from these backgrounds was invariably in a different medium (language) than those in Mayadevi. I did gain access to female students at Jade College through a Mayadevi alumna who teaches at the school. Despite my frustration at attempting to access more inclusive spaces, I found that this lack of access to young people from minority ethnic groups nonetheless highlighted the extent to which segregation is created by the educational system itself. This came to inform a key line of enquiry in my research.

[20]I recognise the limitations of my study in its focus on female Sinhalese Buddhist youth. My thesis, therefore, is not a wide-scale representative sample, but is rather formed out of engagement with a small number of participants, with whom I spent time in and outside of school.

Above all, my biggest methodological concern remained Mayadevi and its *Sinhalanness*. I was concerned that I would not do justice to my research focus because of the lack of students from Tamil and Muslim backgrounds. I was acutely aware that I did not want to solely focus on the experiences of largely middle class Sinhalese students, who hold a more privileged position in contemporary Sri Lankan society than other groups. It was this internal battle that I had to come to terms with, particularly since Mayadevi made me aware of the limited access of educational opportunities for students who are not Sinhala Buddhist. Over the course of my fieldwork, however, I began to realise that this in itself is worthy of investigation, particularly in light of understanding young people's aspirations and plans for the future and the role of the school in facilitating certain types of 'becoming.'

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to present my own experiences in the field by touching on the autobiographical elements involved in ethnography. I began this chapter by providing important contextual information to frame my field site and demonstrate the opportunities and challenges that arose from conducting ethnography at a school in Sri Lanka. In doing so I have sought to position my own fieldwork experience in the context of the wider educational system, bringing to light the often-contradictory nature of education in Sri Lanka. On the one hand, education can be described as a marker for upward mobility, and on the other, education has resulted in violent youth uprisings.

It is by paying attention to my own familiarity with the research setting that I have been able to manage the insider/outsider complexities that are faced by anthropologists when conducting ethnography. This returns to the notion that our personal experiences shape how we see the world around us. Despite my initial attempts at exploring how aspirations are formed among young people, what I discovered through my participants extended well beyond my initial aims. What emerged was something that spoke to young people's lived experiences of growing up in Sri Lanka. In the following chapters, I explore how young people come to form ideas of who they want to become.

Chapter Four: Schooling, Nation-Building and the Construction of a National Identity

'We gift to our mother land intelligent,
Creative and Honourable young women,
who while they value and safeguard our National identity,
yet possess at the same time, the
flexibility to adapt themselves
to the demands of our changing modern world our
Daughters of Mayadevi, who have been moulded,
with the help and guidance of a devoted Teaching Staff.'

The quote above is taken from the school motto. Laminated and in bold italicised letters, it rests nailed to the front wall of every classroom in Mayadevi Balika Vidyalaya. It is significant as it not only represents the values that the school attempts to instil in its students, but also highlights the need for the students to preserve their national and cultural identity, whilst adapting to the needs of a modern world. Since its establishment in 1942, Mayadevi has retained its roots of being a Sinhala Buddhist school. Its goal of becoming an institution of learning for Buddhist girls continues to be embedded in the school's ideology. The school prides itself for inculcating its students to honour their ethnic and cultural heritage, whether by reminding students to uphold and preserve their Kandyan heritage, or expecting them to behave according to traditional Buddhist teachings. Nation-building is firmly embedded in all aspects of schooling, and students learn to abide by these expectations throughout their 13 years of attending Mayadevi.

Through the course of my fieldwork, I observed how youth identities are formed and shaped within the schooling space, which has led me to pay special attention to how the school has become a hub in which ethnic, gender and religious identities are promoted, under the guise of producing 'good' Sinhala Buddhist women. In light of the current

hyper-politicised context of Sri Lanka, where ethnic and religious identities are being used as tools to assert Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism (Riza, 2018; Safi & Perera, 2018), the school can be seen as an important and overlooked site that perpetuates Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate how young people come to internalise and replicate nation-building practices that influence their pursuits of figuring out who they want to become. I argue that some of these nation-building practices have origins in national educational policies, reflected in the school curriculum, whilst others reflect and speak to customs. In doing so, I illustrate how these practices contribute to a sense of 'Sri Lankanness' that young people come to form.

The chapter begins with an introduction into Mayadevi (4.1), the schooling structure (4.2), school functions and extra-curricular activities (4.3 and 4.4). These sections serve to establish the background and context of schooling in Sri Lanka. This is necessary in order to proceed to a substantive and theoretical understanding of how nation-building takes place through everyday normative practices, discussed in the subsequent section (4.5). Section 4.6 then examines how students at Mayadevi come to process this collective Sri Lankan identity, and how this influences their process of *becoming*.

Here I will argue that the school plays a central role in the construction of habitus for youth at Mayadevi. In doing so, I propose some important questions for consideration through this chapter. The first of these is to what extent does schooling normalise Sinhala centrism amongst its student population? Secondly, I consider why there is a need to forge such a strong connection to the nation state. Examining how identity, ideas of becoming and the schooling space are interlinked with how students at Mayadevi come to see their future is a central focus of this thesis. Who they are, what they learn and what they want to become, in other words, operates within a framework that encompasses their social and educational environment.

4.1 Introducing Mayadevi Balika Vidyalaya

Mayadevi is a national school for girls, founded in 1942 as an 'Institution of Learning' for Buddhist girls in the Hill country.[21] In 1961, the school was absorbed by the district-run Educational Ministry and became a provincial school. The introduction of A-Level Science stream in 1969 resulted in the school reducing its admissions in 1971 from Grade 1 to Grade 6, eliminating the primary stages of education.[22] The school achieved its status as a national school in 1993[23] following the establishment of a Past Pupil Association.

The schooling structure is one of the remnants of the British colonial period, with key educational milestones reflecting those of contemporary British education: O-Levels (GCSE equivalent) and A-Level examinations take place in Grades 10 and 13, respectively. In 2002, the school introduced instruction in English medium, as well as IT lessons, to students from Grade 6. Despite the development in the number of subjects taught, the introduction of English medium to the A-Level Arts and Commerce streams only began in 2007, enabling students to choose between Sinhala or English mediums.

The ongoing significance of Buddhism at Mayadevi is apparent as one approaches the school gates.[24] The school entrance, located on a steep incline, boasts a large board with the school's name in bold golden letters and the *dhamma-chakka* - the wheel of law in Theravada Buddhism (Karunaratne, 2008). The large and imposing metal gate leads to a space surrounded by two-storey blocks painted beige, which house students in Grades 9 and 10 (see Map 2 for an illustration of the school grounds). A little further up the cemented path lies the 'playground,' where the main school building, a large colonial style structure, is located. This building hosts the main hall and science classrooms for Grades 11 to 13, and the Arts stream on the second floor.

Enclosed within a small garden area is the school shrine, in which a white Buddha statue receives attention from students who, upon entering the school premises in the morning, make their way to recite a short prayer or leave some flowers. The maintenance of this

[21] The 'Hill country' is often used to describe the central region of Sri Lanka, known for its mountainous terrain and tea plantations.
[22]Mayadevi now offers schooling from Grades 6 to 13.
[23]These are requirements that need to be met for a provincial school to be upgraded to a national school. With the rising student population, by 1972 the school gained permission to build an onsite hostel for students who live beyond the district.
[24]Pictures of the school have not been included to maintain anonymity. Instead, I have illustrated a school map (Map 2).

important space lies with the school prefects, who tend to it every morning, laying new flowers, lighting incense sticks and sweeping fallen leaves.

The school office is located in the centre of this complex, facing a small well-maintained garden with native flowers and a small pond. From the office, one can see the new Technical building located on top of a small hill, which was erected recently after the school received additional funding from the MoE for having achieved high A-Level pass grades. A new IT block was opened in 2010, having received funding from the Asian Development Bank. This has made Mayadevi one of the only national schools with new IT equipment, and has led to the school hosting several IT-related functions.

4.1.1 Student Body, Faculty and Hierarchies

As a national school, Mayadevi provides education to 2,600 female students.[25] Its students come from different parts of the country, with some children living as far as Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura, Kegalle and Badulla.[26] During my fieldwork, there were just over 200 teachers across the seven year groups, the majority being female, with a handful of male teachers who taught across the school.[27] The faculty is divided into a clear hierarchy, in which senior members of staff, including the Principal and two Deputy Principals, responsible for managing the administrative system of the school are at the top. Three Assistant Deputy Principals are responsible for looking after Grades 6 to 9, 10 to 11, and 12 to 13. Under them lie the sectional heads for the A-Level streams in Commerce, Technical subjects, Science and Art, in addition to tutorial staff, a games teacher and subject teachers. Madam Lalitha, the Principal, has been overseeing the school since 2009 and manages the entire staff team. Though no set supervisory system is in place, she provides guidance to teaching staff on an ad-hoc basis.

The structure of the school can be divided into three main bodies: the first consisting of the faculty; the second, the student body; and finally the third, consisting of largely Tamil

[25]There are seven national schools in Kandy, all of which, aside from Mayadevi, offer learning from Grades 1 to 13. The average student population across these schools is 3,693. (See Appendix Figure 4.1.2a for a summary of national schools in the Kandy district).
[26]The distance of these areas varies greatly: from Kandy, Polonnaruwa is located 142km, Anuradhapura 137km, Kegalle 40km and Badulla 117km.
[27]According to the school census data from the MoE, 121 teachers were listed in Mayadevi, with 79 unaccounted for. Of the 121 teachers, 97 were female and 24 male. Of these, 99 teachers taught in Sinhala, 21 in English and just one teacher was responsible for teaching Tamil to students from Grades 6 to 11.

non-academic staff (known as orderlies),[28] who are responsible for cleaning the school grounds, tending to the garden, and for the male orderlies, driving the Principal in the school van and senior members of staff to various appointments. It is important to highlight these categories because there is a clear distinction in the hierarchy of the ethnic groups within the school site, with all Sinhalese members of staff being employed as teachers. This reflects, on a macro level, the hierarchy of government institutions, where the majority of employees and state officials are individuals from the Sinhalese majority ethnic group.

The students at Mayadevi are almost all Sinhalese Buddhists, with a few exceptions of Tamil and Moor students, who tend to join the senior secondary stage (Grades 12 to 13) to complete their A-Levels. This is also the case for the teachers at the school, though as noted, the majority of non-academic staff employed are Tamil. This distinction in the hierarchy of the school staff along ethnic lines is an important indicator that speaks to social stratification through ethnicity. This is not something limited to Mayadevi alone, but a theme that is reflected in the history of Sri Lanka, where links between education and ethnicity have been contentious issues (Bass, 2008).

Ethnic stratification within the school is also emphasised spatially; the school office, staff and classrooms are located at the heart of the school. In contrast, Tamil staff members are firmly placed at the periphery of Mayadevi, with no dedicated space apart from a few small homes built out of plywood and corrugated iron on the edge of the school border. Such processes of spatial distancing have been highlighted by Spencer and Amarasuriya (2015) in their analysis of urban politics in Colombo. They reveal how plans for redevelopment have created the potential threat of the displacement of long-standing dwellings occupied by low-income Muslim communities. These examples bring to light the processes in which authorities who hold power (in this case the Sinhala state) marginalise minority groups (Muslim communities) by placing them at the spatial periphery of the core.

[28] It is important here to include the caveat that when inferring to Tamils, I specifically mean Hindu Tamils rather than Muslims. This separation is important because Tamils see themselves as belonging to the Tamil ethnic group, unlike Muslims, who speak Tamil but consider themselves to be Moors (Little & Sabates, 2008).

Symbolically, the faculty look different to the Tamil staff employed by the school. Female teachers are required to wear Osariya sari.[29] In contrast, the Tamil staff are found wearing long skirts and blouses and often walk around school barefoot. This symbolic, spatial and class distancing serves to further emphasise the process of Othering.

4.2 Schooling Structure

Like all government schools across Sri Lanka, schooling at Mayadevi begins at 7:30 am and finishes at 1:30 pm, with teaching interrupted by a break at 10.30 am. Students begin to arrive at school as early as 6:30 am, some due to extra-curricular commitments such as band practice, whilst prefects arrive early to begin their morning duties.[30] A transformation takes place over a few minutes as students begin to arrive into school. The relatively empty playground becomes a sea of white dresses.[31] This timetable is also the same for teachers, the majority of whom arrive at school at 7:30 am and hurriedly leave at 1:30 pm, since many are responsible for collecting their own children from neighbouring schools.

The interval forms a respite period from the intensity of lessons. At 10:30 am, the bell rings and a Sinhala song plays on a tannoy system located in each classroom, signalling the break to the students. For twenty minutes, students have the opportunity to eat, play in their classrooms or catch up on homework before the bell rings again, which signals the resumption of teaching.

Bénéï (2008) presents how everyday schooling practices result in the reproduction of 'banal nationalism' within schools in Western India. Drawing on examples of *Bhakthi* worshipping through hymns and songs, Bénéï highlights how such nation-building

[29]The Osariya sari is the national garment of Sri Lanka. Its origins are traced to the Kandyan kingdom, and women are required to wear it in all government or official posts of employment. Kandyan women also have a specific way of wearing their hair involving a low bun, which for special functions is adorned with jewellery or long pins. Male faculty members are required to wear trousers with shirts. In contrast, male Tamil orderlies and drivers often wear sarongs and a shirt.

[30]The role of prefects will be discussed in the following chapter.

[31]The school uniform consists of a white dress with a collar and a belt around the pleated skirt. Students and parents are informed that this should be no shorter than knee-length and must be starched white. The students are also required to wear their House badge, pinned to the collar of their dress. Students with hair shorter than jaw-length should pin a bow made of black ribbons to their hair. Students with longer hair should arrange their hair in two plaits, with a black ribbon tied to the end of each plait. They must also wear brown shoes with white socks.

practices take place. As she explains, the 'intertwining of ordinary children's songs together with explicitly patriotically devotional ones…enables naturalization of banal nationalism' (2008: 58). Froerer (2007) also demonstrates how collective recitals of prayers and songs become central in disseminating nationalist values amongst children. She reveals how such rituals begin from the early stages of education, where kindergarteners are taught 'teaching songs' about good comportment and respectful behaviour (ibid: 1048).

Similarly, even during break times, students at Mayadevi are exposed to the subtle mechanisms of cultural transmission. These instances reveal how young people's engagement with practices of banal nationalism brings both nation and girls into being - that is, both are 'becoming' through schooling. As I will discuss over the course of this chapter, replicating these practices becomes part of young people's identity as Sinhalese Buddhist children and, over time, women. In turn, they continue the reproduction of ethno-religious practise as a way of maintaining tradition and therein the 'nation.'

Very rarely do the students at Mayadevi venture out into the playground to play, and if they do, they are told not to run around or misbehave by the prefects. Through these acts of policing, prefects come to reinforce the social order within the school (Foucault, 1991). In doing so, they emphasise the need to behave in a way that maintains the school's expectation of its students. Such instances, as will be discussed in the latter part of this chapter, go on to influence how young people at Mayadevi imagine a certain type of becoming. It is by learning what constitutes a good student, or indeed child, that girls come to emulate this 'good' behaviour.

The teaching structure at Mayadevi varies depending on the grades. For the junior secondary sections of the school (Grades 6 to 9), students have eight subjects a day, of which five are core subjects that students are taught every day, each lasting 40 minutes. Teachers in the senior secondary section (Grades 10 and 11) are required to teach up to eight classes a day, and navigate the complicated timetable drafted by the deputy principals. The class sizes in this cohort are denser, with up to 40 students in a small classroom packed with single wooden desks and chairs.

For students pursing their A-Levels, the number of lessons is fewer, but each lasts an hour and a half. These groups, depending on the subject stream, can be considerably

smaller than the junior levels.[32] The lessons are led by the subject teacher and require the students to copy down what is being dictated. Copying forms a large part of the learning process in Sri Lankan schools. Very rarely do students have the opportunity to work in groups, and such occasions are often confined to subjects such as aesthetics (dance, music and art) or practical skill classes such as physical education.

For the junior secondary section of the school, students remain in their form groups for the duration of the schooling day, with teachers rotating their teaching schedules. It is only at senior secondary stage that students are given the freedom to travel to lessons themselves, and the girls take this as an opportunity to lazily make their way to classes, while chatting to friends, stopping at the canteen or in corridors.

4.3 Extra-Curricular Activities

An important part of the Mayadevi schooling experience is the variety of extra-curricular activities available to students. In my first week of fieldwork, I was informed by the Deputy Principal in charge of the development of co-curricular activities that students at Mayadevi were required to excel in their studies, but also expected to take part in extra-curricular activities. The MoE has designed the school curriculum to enhance the development of personal attributes such as good mental health and wellbeing through extra-curricular activities (Ministry of Education, 2013). The leadership at Mayadevi has wholly adopted this into their curricula and now provides young people with an array of activities.

In speaking to the Deputy Principal, I was informed that providing extra-curricular activities is a responsibility of the school, in order to grant young people opportunities for personal and academic development. These opportunities can lead to young people acquiring assets, in the form of cultural capital, which facilitate their aspirations for higher education and employment. Consequently, engaging in extra-curricular activities positions young people to acquire capital to facilitate their aspirations for the future.

[32]Of the four main A-Level streams, there are a total of 130 students studying in the Arts stream, 150 in Science, 90 in Commerce and 132 in Technology stream. Science and Commerce are the most popular, though Mayadevi has a larger proportion of Arts students than other national schools in Kandy.

As discussed in Chapter Two, assumptions surrounding education as a path towards achieving social mobility have come to dominate educational discourses (Crivello, 2011). Young people themselves recognise the need to stand out against their peers to facilitate their hopes of becoming someone in the future.

In *Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu presents self-improvement as a form of capital in its embodied state, which he refers to as a process of 'cultivation' (1986: 48). Through extra-curricular activities, young people gain a *head start,* which Bourdieu argues leads to the 'symbolic logic of distinction' (ibid: 49). Skills or assets accumulated through extra-curricular activities, whether they be improved English or a specific skill in professions such as cadetting, grant youth the capital to stand out against their peers. Embodied capital acquired through extra-curricular activities can be instrumental when applying for the competitive government university entrance process or employment. Mayadevi and its students recognise this, and one of the two Deputy Principals is responsible for ensuring that girls access the different societies and sporting activities available.

The importance of engaging in non-academic activities is further emphasised by teachers, who encourage students to join societies or sports clubs from Grade 6 (though the latter have a strict selection process that requires students to try out). A diagram of the different societies is found in the school office, which shows a range of activities from art club, Buddhist society, and Cadet Corp to drama, literature, Girl Guides, Lalitha Kala (a group for fine arts, such as traditional dancing or singing), and the popular Eastern and Western bands. Extra-curricular activities normally take place after school finishes at 1:30 pm and last a couple of hours.

For the Eastern and Western bands, the school has scheduled specific times for practice. Mr Bandara, the Band Master, has been managing the Western band at Mayadevi for over 20 years and is responsible for training the students every morning before school commences. Walking into school in the morning, students, teachers and visitors are welcomed by the sound of trumpets, trombones, violins and various brass instruments. In the lower part of the school, the traditional Kandyan drumming can be heard. Part of the reason for these practices is that the Western band in particular has been recognised across all the schools in Sri Lanka, gaining first prize in the Junior Band segment and second prize for the Senior Brass Band at the All Island Western Music & Dance Competition organised by the MoE in 2016.

Due to their popularity, students try and join the bands as early as Grade 6, in hope of being able to compete and gain recognition for their talents. They begin by going to auditions, held by the Band Captain and music teachers. As they progress through the ranks, they have the opportunity to compete for the position of Band Captain, something which many girls aspire to, largely because of its reputation, but also because of the value of this position as they go on to compete for university entrance.

The Eastern band receives less attention, because it is deemed more 'traditional' and more entrenched in Sinhalese culture. Students favour the Western band because of the novelty of playing brass instruments and renditions of popular hits - during my time in the field, the favourite among the students was to play various renditions of Ed Sheeran's *Shape of You*.[33] Due to the traditional elements of the Eastern band, these students must settle for customary Sinhala songs, often accompanied by *nettun* (traditional Kandyan dancing).

Despite this, girls still eagerly participate in Eastern bands, often practising during lesson times by the aesthetics block. The band remains an important activity that young people engage in, particularly since it speaks to the localised pride that many Kandyans feel about their heritage. Its importance in school performances is central, particularly in functions, where the Eastern band is called on to play the national anthem and provide entertainment for guests. On such occasions a member of the band announces the start of the ceremony by blowing into a *hakgediya*, a large conch shell,[34] three times, followed by an eruption of *geta bera* drums.

These instruments are an important part of ritualised performances among the Sinhalese. As such, though the Eastern band may be seen as more traditional and therefore limiting for some youth (in as far as replicating some pop music may be difficult), it plays an important part in how the school 'showcases' its Sinhalese and more, specifically Kandyan, identity, particularly at school functions. In returning to Bénéï's discussion of *bhakti* worship, the music played by the Eastern band becomes a 'doctrine of embodiment' which encourages active participation in the maintenance and retelling of Sinhalese tradition and history (2008: 56).

[33]At the time of fieldwork, Ed Sheeran was a successful pop music artist. The song had been a pop hit in Sri Lanka and across the world and had been at the top of the UK singles chart for 13 consecutive weeks.
[34]This is a quintessential musical instrument in traditional Sinhalese culture and forms an important part of performance rituals.

To return to my theorisation of becoming, these instances result in young people harnessing the cultural identity that shapes their sense of *Sri Lankanne*ss. By taking part in such activities, girls forge a stronger bond to their regional as well as national identity. This supports my hypothesis of the school bringing the nation into being through cultural transmission. For the girls in the bands, being part of something that represents and speaks to their regional heritage is important. It is just as important, however, to replicate the songs they listen to on the radio with their peers. These examples bring to light how both play key roles in young people's experiences of schooling, but, more importantly, the tensions that youth are required to navigate while upholding their tradition and fulfilling their personal aspirations. Such examples emphasise the intricacies involved in figuring out who to become.

Aside from co-curricular activities as described above, sport plays a large part in the schooling experience at Mayadevi. Whether it's basketball, swimming, volleyball or hockey, students are given the opportunity to partake in these. As a way of encouraging friendly competition among its student body, the school adopted the house system from elite British schools (Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan, 1996). This system divides students from all age groups into several houses and serves as a peer-led body, where students become responsible for coordinating functions, act out prefect duties (discussed in depth in subsequent chapters) and form in-school sporting competitions. In line with the school motto of preserving national and ethnic identity, the four house names are derived from Buddhist history.[35] Such instances reinforce the propagation of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism within the schooling space. Like the Western and Eastern bands, the house system presents a dichotomy of tradition and modernity.

What emerges are the ways in which schooling and nation-building are intertwined - the school attempts to trace its Sinhala Buddhist heritage in all parts of schooling, extending beyond teaching. Observing extra-curricular activities reveals how the projection of a

[35] As suggested, the names of the houses are significant, particularly as they are rooted in Buddhism. *Sangamiththa* House, represented by the colour red, is the name of King Ashoka's daughter, who introduced Buddhism to Sri Lanka. Sangamiththa became a prominent female figure in Buddhism after establishing the first order of nuns and bringing a sapling of the sacred *Bodhi* tree to Sri Lanka. *Yasodhara* House is also named after a prominent Buddhist figure: the wife of Gautama Buddha, who later joined the order of nuns. This house is represented by the colour purple. The third house, represented by blue, is named after Queen *Chithra*. The Mahavamsa (the Buddhist chronicle) places importance on her for giving life to a king who came to rule Anuradhapura, the first Sinhala kingdom. The final house is named after the Buddha's stepmother, *Gothami*, who joined the order of nuns and followed the Buddha's teachings in establishing Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The *Gothami* House colour is yellow.

particular identity is instilled among the student body. Reflective of the school motto, which calls on students to preserve their heritage while meeting the demands of the modern world, extra-curricular activities present a glimpse in how the school facilitates this by both emphasising the history and providing young people with the skills and knowledge to realise their post-schooling aspirations.

4.4 School Functions

School functions, *Uthsavaya*, are informed by the array of extra-curricular activities that take place at Mayadevi throughout the academic year. According to the Principal, these come to enrich the students' experiences of schooling by giving them an opportunity to showcase their talents, whether through singing, dancing or sporting competitions. From the students' perspective, school functions provide them with a break from the stresses of school life and studying, and the girls at Mayadevi eagerly take these as opportunities for respite.

Importantly, such functions reveal how the 'hidden curriculum' operates through informal activities within the school. Under the guise of showcasing the student body through functions, the school demonstrates how students have learnt 'techniques' for leadership, manners and disposition (Margolis *et al.*, 2001: 3). Such practices reveal how dispositions are cultivated (through teaching and learning) in the name of producing 'good' students. This then heightens the social reproduction of good children (discussed in the following chapter), so that the learned skills and attributes become part of the young person's habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Margolis *et al.*, 2001).

In my time at the school, I observed at least a dozen functions in the first term of school, which ranged from subject days, such as IT and Japanese, to more formal events. Each term is marked by a school function. In January 2018, for example, students in A-Level streams held a small conference, inviting students from neighbouring schools and subject specialists from Peradeniya University, and presented their annual projects. There were also small *ad hoc* events, such as a book launch for the Grade 7 students and a poetry contest for Grade 9. In addition to this, annual events such as the *Kallawila* (Arts Day) and Sports Meet gave students and teachers the opportunity to showcase their best talents.

Official functions, such as the anniversary of the school, play an important role in maintaining school identity. In the year that I conducted fieldwork, the school celebrated its 75th anniversary. To commemorate the occasion, Madam Lalitha made a special invitation to the President of Sri Lanka, Maithripala Sirisena to attend the annual Prize-Giving Ceremony[36] in November 2017. In the lead-up to the Prize-Giving celebration at Mayadevi, I observed Madam Lalitha and senior members of staff organise the content, prizes for the students and entertainment for the special guests. The school grounds were transformed to accommodate the President of Sri Lanka and on the day of the event, the school and the surrounding area of Kandy were overwhelmed by police presence as well as that of the Sri Lankan Army.

The information I was given about the Prize-Giving mainly came from the teachers' perspective. For the Principal and teachers involved, school functions are a way of showcasing how good their school is, and in doing so, enhancing its reputation as a traditional Sinhala Buddhist school that 'builds character through strength.' Whether it's by showing how well behaved their *lameai* (children) are (following instructions, conducting traditional religious observances and behaving well), or the high grades achieved at O-Levels, the process of hosting such events becomes a ritual that the school performs to maintain its social standing. The emphasis placed on presenting an emblematic traditional Sinhala Buddhist school by the faculty contrasted many of the students' experiences of the event.

The girls' response to the Prize-Giving however was mixed. The school prefects had deeper involvement in the organisation, as they were required to assist the Principal and teachers, which meant that many missed classes at the request of senior teachers in the run-up to the event. Those who were not involved in the planning were nonetheless looking forward to the event, with girls informing me in the run-up to November that "our president [would be] visiting the school."

For many of the girls, the Prize Giving was an occasion to miss classes, and despite the president's visit, they remained somewhat underwhelmed by the function itself. This brings to light the juxtaposition of what the school perceives to be important (that is, to

[36]Prize-Giving functions take place across all schools. Such events are tradition, and an opportunity for students to be rewarded for their achievements in sports and extra-curricular activities, as well as the end-of-year results.

maintain one's heritage) and the students, who were far more interested in spotting 'esteemed' guests and judging which teacher dressed best.

Through the lens of nation-building, the Prize-Giving function was an opportunity to reinforce the need to reproduce Sinhala Buddhist values. In a speech to the school, President Sirisena touched on the importance of bringing up *well-to-do* children, who follow rules and behave piously, and praised the school for nurturing Buddhist values and urging the students at Mayadevi to follow the guidance of their teachers. Such examples illustrate how explicit forms of nationalism are propagated within the schooling space, and also through education.

Froerer's (2007: 1049) paper is a useful reference point here, as she demonstrates how kindergarteners are perceived as 'blank canvases' on which to imprint ideological values and academic training. Froerer further argues that perceiving children as malleable forms part of the Hindu Nationalist rhetoric, which is geared towards producing 'proper' Hindus (ibid: 1049). Similarly, in the context of Mayadevi, school functions are ways in which the school can demonstrate its role in cultivating Sinhala-Buddhist values in its students.

Whether it is through school functions, extra-curricular activities or the curriculum, nation-building is manifested and presented at the core of schooling activities at Mayadevi. Spencer *et al.* (1990) identify this as a new form of state power and politics based on mass participation, where the reproduction and control of a culture is facilitated through formal education. Bourdieu (1990) has also written extensively on the role of education in transmitting cultural knowledge. Consequently, it is useful to position Sri Lankan education within the context of Bourdieu's framework, particularly when exploring the links between pedagogy and nation-building. His notions of reproduction, habitus and symbolic violence are particularly relevant because such practices, as demonstrated continue to be prominent within the Sri Lankan education system.

There has been extensive literature examining the school site as a space in which dominant ideology is transmitted (Rival, 2002; Caddell, 2005; Froerer, 2007). It is also well acknowledged by scholars that this forms the habitus where dispositions and skills are instilled and normalised. Bourdieu assesses the symbolic violence perpetrated by the state through the educational system, where a notion of 'truth' is reproduced and contributes to the reproduction of power relations (1990: 31). Such truths are

disseminated through formal schooling under the guise of legitimised knowledge, which shapes the habitus through a 'process of internalization of the principles of a cultural arbitrary' (ibid: 31). Observing school functions reveals how students at Mayadevi themselves replicate the cultural arbitrary, in the form of Sinhala Buddhist values, by holding these important to their upbringing as good women.

Some of my most memorable time at Mayadevi took place during school events, where I got to hang out with girls outside of the classroom. In these moments, I was able to experience the excitement of students eagerly organising events, and the importance of showing other schools how "good ours is." Much like the faculty, many of the students sought to represent the school in good light, and they did so by acting like dutiful daughters of Mayadevi.

The girls led on organising functions, from the planning of equipment, content and structure of the programme to the delivery, which included entertainment in the form of dance routines, live music, and quizzes. They took time to practise various routines, short dramas and songs, often staying behind after school to get the sequences right. The girls also took care to provide catering to guests after functions, by carrying trays around the room filled with tea, *kiri bath*,[37] cakes or 'short eats,' a popular savoury snack. This form of 'performance' became a way for the girls to show what they had learnt from the school, and in doing so reinforcing their own identity as *Mayadevian* as well as good children.

For the students, school functions provide a space they often refer to as 'fun.' Such events enable the girls to be creative and produce something that they can be proud of. One of the things I was struck by during such events was the ways in which girls expressed their creativity - whether it was by redesigning the traditional brass lamp used during the oil lighting ceremony at the beginning of every event, or producing presentations using PowerPoint and other software. Schooling events provide the students at Mayadevi with an opportunity to reclaim the formal schooling space by doing things that they enjoy, and by and large, the teachers recognise and support the students to take the lead in such events. An excerpt from fieldnotes taken at one school event illustrates the importance of school functions for students:

[37]*Kiri Bath* is a traditional dish served during auspicious occasions, such as the Sinhala New Year. It is rice boiled with coconut milk which when set, is cut into diamond shapes and served with *Hakuru* (jaggery) or *Seeni Sambol* (spicy chilli and onion chutney).

> *The function ZUERST'17, which took place today as part of the Tech society, invited students from different schools. The dance number was the most interesting thing to see. The girls from the Tech stream had dressed in jeans and shirts with vests underneath. In contrast to the previous entertainment (traditional* nettun*), this was by far much more sexualised (though I am unsure how much the girls intended on making this come through their dance routine). The students on the stage were evidently enjoying showing off their dance routines and gaining the attention of their peers. There was a lot of moving of the hips, hands on hips and tilted heads, and they actually received the most claps from the audience. This was also interesting to see as it touches on the paradox of tradition and modernity. Through this dance, the girls have been able to in a way transcend the strict and structured behaviour expected at Mayadevi by being fun and 'modern.' They had the audience's attention not for being academically high achievers, but because they were modern and were dancing to Ed Sheeran's hit, popular with the students* (Fieldnotes, September 2017).

It is also important to note that not all students have a central role in such functions. While the majority of students choose to play a part in the organising of low-level[38] events such as subject days, for those that don't, the function is a way to have a chat, gossip, mess around with friends or take naps. For many of the girls, these events are mainly a chance to escape the 'boring' classroom environment. It was in such spaces that I had the opportunity to have conversations with the girls and learn about their lives outside of Mayadevi. Importantly for me, these events provided a space away from the teacher's gaze[39] and meant that I was able to assert my position within different peer groups and become one of the girls by sharing interest in photos they showed me, talking about fashion trends and boys.

I have so far provided some background into Mayadevi to illustrate how the school structure, functions and teaching that take place. As outlined in the introduction to this

[38] Low-level events are localised within grades and are subject-related, such as the book publishing event. High-level events involve the entire school and during my time at Mayadevi, these were *kallawila*, sports meets and the school anniversary.

[39] I will discuss this aspect in depth in Chapters Seven and Eight, which examine how young people behave within the tuition space.

chapter, it is important to contextualise the school in order to demonstrate how nation-building practices are tied into everyday schooling practices. Whether it is how the school itself reiterates its Sinhala-Buddhist identity (as demonstrated through the house system) or indeed how students act in a certain way in front of guests as a way of reinforcing their schooling identity, the school becomes an important site in which young people come to form ideas about who they are.

The school also places emphasis in preparing its students for a changing world by granting them opportunities to acquire important forms of symbolic capital and stand out against their peers. Paradoxically, it also places an expectation on students to value and uphold their ethnic and religious upbringing. Mayadevi is not only a place for formal learning, but also an important site where youth are taught about the 'type' of people they should aspire to become in the future. As reflected in the school motto, students at Mayadevi are required to develop the skills and attributes to meet the demands of a modern world.

The school addresses this by providing young people with opportunities to develop these skills, whether it is through taking part in extra-curricular activities or experiences. At the same time, the school expects young people to uphold traditional Sinhala values, therein highlighting the paradox of how and what youth are expected to aspire to and become. The next section will examine the link between education and nation-building in Sri Lanka and how this comes to influence young people's constructs of identity.

4.5 Education and Producing Citizens

In 2013, the MoE, responsible for all national schools and establishing the educational agenda in Sri Lanka, published a manual titled Education First. The publication, funded by the World Bank,[40] provides an overview of the education system in Sri Lanka, from its history to current developments in the national educational agenda. It also serves to outline the ministry's mission to equip the future generations of Sri Lankan citizens with

[40]Part of the Transforming the School Education System as the Foundation of a Knowledge Hub Project (TSEP).

the ‘competencies to meet the challenges of a changing, globalised, knowledge-driven economy’ (Ministry of Education, 2013: 4).

In order to achieve its mission, the MoE has established a set of goals which have been embedded into the national curriculum. Some of these speak of improving the mental and physical wellbeing of young people through extra-curricular activities, while others focus on fostering positive attitudes and interpersonal skills and developing critical thinking among students, geared towards aiding the production of good citizens (Ministry of Education, 2013: 4). The national goals also place importance on nation-building and the establishment of a ‘Sri Lankan identity’ in achieving citizenship.

As such, nation-building in and through education, according to the MoE, has become integral to the facilitation of ‘national unity, harmony and peace’ by recognising cultural diversity in Sri Lanka (Ministry of Education, 2013: 19). Like Mayadevi, the ministry openly reinforces the importance of preserving and recognising national heritage, particularly in responding to the potential challenges of a ‘changing world’ (ibid). Against this backdrop, a Social Cohesion & Peace Education Unit (SCPEU) was established within the MoE in 2008, alongside a new curriculum for Life Competencies & Civics Education for the lower secondary school stages and Citizenship Education & Governance for upper secondary stages (World Bank, 2011). These led to changes in the curriculum towards promoting elements of social integration, seen in Civics and Geography handbooks, which call for national unity through a unified Sri Lankan identity.

Following the end of the civil war in 2009, the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL), alongside the MoE, began to exert considerable effort to ensure that schools deliver on these goals. The reality however, is that many schools, like Mayadevi, are unable to create an environment for social integration due to segregation along linguistic and ethnic lines. Instead, I discovered that schools endeavour to promote a unified national identity that is reflective of the Sinhala Buddhist state. The MoE and the National Institute of Education (NIE), responsible for developing the curriculum, have further attempted to forge this national identity (in itself problematic, as I will go on to discuss) through subjects such as Civic Education, which seek to promote cultural diversity and present Sri Lanka as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious country. In truth, the state and state actors such as schools, construct ideas of national identity in a way that reinforces Sinhala Buddhist identity.

The disjuncture between the central government's calls for the facilitation of social cohesion and how this takes place within the school is an important observation that requires attention. Though this is central to the construction of citizens, and in turn young people's becomings, this is an important issue which extends beyond the scope of this thesis. Consequently, I direct my focus on understanding the schooling landscape in which youth grow up, to understand the factors that shape their processes of becoming.

The barriers to social cohesion in Sri Lanka are historic and to break them down would require serious structural and ideological changes, in order to position ethnic minority groups in the same light (and with the same rights) as the Sinhalese Buddhist majority. Calls for schools to promote social cohesion therefore become redundant because of the macro-politics that subordinate minority ethnic groups like Tamil and Muslim communities. Davies (2005) and Sørensen (2008) have demonstrated how national citizenship through schooling results in further marginalisation of these ethnic minority communities. Furthermore, the very structure of schooling, offering learning through different mediums of instruction, prevents young people of different ethno-religious backgrounds from sharing schooling experiences. For instance, many young people at Mayadevi do not have the opportunity to meet students who are of different faith and ethnic groups.

On several occasions during my fieldwork, I observed how young people are taught about 'truths' that serve to uphold the state narrative. In most cases, this centred around the notion of belonging to the Sinhala population over minority ethnic groups on the basis that the Sinhalese were the 'first' inhabitants of the island - a disputed and highly politicised argument which has made a re-emergence in recent years (Tambiah, 1992; Morland, 2014).

A couple of weeks into my fieldwork, for example, I attended a Greek & Roman Civilization (GRC) class with my core group[41] from 13B. The teacher, Mr Wijetunga,[42] a small man with large spectacles, began to tell students about the history of Plebeians and Patricians in Ancient Rome. He explained that the majority were put at risk by the overpopulation of the lower class. In attempting to contemporise this anecdote, Mr

[41]As outlined in the Methods chapter, my core group consisted of Thilini, Chaturi, Nadika, Gayatri, Dilki and Yani in 13B.
[42]Introduced in the first chapter of this thesis, in his call for students to protect their national heritage.

Wijetunga began to make a comparison between Buddhists and Muslims in Sri Lanka. While doing so, he turned to the only Muslim student in 13B, Shifna, and began to say, "Well your people like having kids, no, so now the Sinhalese are becoming a minority because you keep having kids," to which the class started laughing, including Shifna herself, who responded by saying, "No sir you can't say that; not every Muslim family has loads of kids. I come from a small family and there are only two of us." The teacher went on to say, "See your friends (pointing at each girl sitting on the row), they're going to have one, one, one, maybe two, one, one [child/ren]. You will end up having five…ha ha ha".

Though this incident was incredibly unpleasant to witness, it did reveal a great deal about the way in which ethnic and religious identities have become politicised stereotypes. For Mr. Wijetunga, a way of making the topic of the lesson relevant to students was by relating it back to the concerns that many Sinhalese expressed. What the teacher revealed was a fear of being made a minority and through this, the erosion of the national identity. Such sentiments have been examined by a number of scholars, who have paid close attention to the 'minority complex' suffered by the Sinhala majority (de Silva, 1997; Morland, 2014).[43] As a response to anxieties surrounding the erosion of the majority ethnic group, 'Buddhist conception of righteous rule' has been allowed to take place, which asserts the right to claim Sri Lanka a Buddhist country (Tambiah, 1992: 125). In light of the comment made by Mr. Wijetunga, the moral of the GRC lesson served as a reminder to students that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country, and requires young people to replicate and uphold their traditions to ensure its preservation.

Such instances highlight two important things. The first is how processes of internalised 'truths' take place through everyday interactions among state actors (the school and teachers) and students. In turn, young people come to internalise these sentiments and through pedagogic action, come to reproduce arbitrary 'truths' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Secondly, this incident revealed the positionality of Tamil and Muslim ethnic minorities. Sørensen provides an important analysis of how Tamil and Muslim communities in the North and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka are placed in a position of 'partial citizenship' (2008: 437). Students like Shifna, who are expected to follow the

[43]Though this is not the focus of my research, it is important to understand the origins of this minority complex. Morland (2014) presents a succinct account that examines its emergence, which is tied to the country's pre- and post-colonial history.

expectations placed by the school in preserving Sinhalese-Buddhist identity and heritage, are excluded from the nation-state narrative of being Sri Lankan. This form of partial citizenship thus excludes minority ethnic groups from a sense of belonging by placing them on the periphery of nation-building projects, thereby problematising calls for unity under a Sri Lankan identity.

Hall's (1996) notion of collective identity is also a useful reference point on which to position the Sri Lankan schooling context. In light of the question proposed in the introduction of this chapter, asking why there is a need to forge such a strong connection to the nation state, national culture becomes a source of meaning of culture, which reproduces a collective identity and representation (Hall & du Gay, 1996). A decade earlier, Anderson (2006[1983]) introduced the concept of an 'imagined community' as central to discourses on Nationalism. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson defines the creation of a national community rooted in a 'territorial and social space' inherited from the past (ibid: 2). Where, historically, a sense of collectiveness was maintained through kinship and clientship, postmodern collectiveness is manifested through the creation of an 'imagined political community' (ibid: 6). In answering the proposed question, the need to forge a connection to the nation state results in the reproduction of memories, which go on to shape a collective sense of identity, bound by the past.

The creation of a collective community or culture attempts to unify other social factors, such as gender, ethnicity, and class, as one, thereby undermining cultural difference. As illustrated through the anecdote of Mr Wijetunga, a national culture, in all its glory, becomes a 'structure of cultural power' (Hall, 1996: 616), which constructs meaning and influences conceptions of the *self*. Part of this is building on 'meanings about the nation,' aiding how people identify with these meanings through collective memories, narratives and connecting the past with the present (ibid: 613). In thinking about how this narrative of culture is told, Hall outlines key points below as methods by which the cultural identity is disseminated by the state.

To return to my ethnographic anecdote presented above, the 'narrative of the nation' is recounted through cultural forms such as literature, history, media and popular culture. For Mr Wijetunga, his concerns about the Sinhalese population becoming a threatened minority have not been formed in isolation, but rather as part of a wider rhetoric rooted in the past. These 'insecurities' have resulted in an increasingly volatile social landscape

today, which threatens the very nature of a unified Sri Lanka (International Crisis Group, 2019). Underlying this is the notion of belonging and origins, which is a contestable issue in Sri Lanka, with accounts from the Mahavamsa (the Pali chronicle) historicising the arrival of the Sinhalese and claiming their right to the island. This notion is combined with the formation of a contemporary cultural identity linked with the past, whereby a 'return' to the way things were is manifested by emphasis of this origin history. In such cases, this restoration of past identities becomes a way in which masses 'purify their ranks to expel "Others" who threaten their identity' (Hall & du Gay, 1996: 615).

Such examples reveal how history and the present shape notions of collective identity through a 'set of stories', which reinforce the state narrative (Hall & du Gay, 1996). In turn, these are replicated and retold by state actors such as the school, through, for example the naming of the school's house system, rooted in Buddhism. As schools are sites of cultural transmission, under nation states they become 'arenas for competing ideologies over the process of the construction of national narratives' (Nasser, 2018: 154). The school thus continues to be a site for social and cultural reproduction, where the narrative aims to construct a collective consciousness. In the context of Sri Lanka, the history taught is Sinhala-centric and pious, and in tune with the state narrative, which has attempted to carve out a Sinhala Buddhist national identity under the guise of a post-conflict state identity.

With the school serving as a primary agent of social and political socialisation, it implements tools (through the school curriculum) with which to disseminate 'truths' in the hope of strengthening citizenship and national identities (Nasser, 2018: 8). The following section examines how forms of cultural transmission are disseminated through the school curriculum, and in turn how these, as well as the school activities described in the beginning of this chapter, result in the production of 'good children.'

4.6 School Curriculum and Nation-Building

The school curriculum is an important tool that teaches young people about the importance of recognising and preserving their cultural identity. The state rhetoric of forging a national identity and preserving national heritage, however, is problematic when seen in relation to Sri Lanka's violent history. This, combined with an ethnically

unrepresentative government (which, as described, is predominantly comprised of the Sinhalese ethnic majority) means that the state continues to promote a Sinhala-centric notion of identity and identification to the nation state (Ahmed, 1996; Sørensen, 2008).

The idea of becoming Sri Lankan is thus embedded in presenting a Sinhala social imagery. While conducting fieldwork, I was acutely aware of the presence of Buddhism and Sinhala social imagery and history in textbooks. Whether in Civic or History textbooks - which covers the Mahavamsa[44] - the focus was placed on presenting a glorified narrative of past Sinhalese kingdoms and kings, omitting the histories from the Tamil and Moor groups. An analysis of a Grade 6 History syllabus in Sinhala and Tamil illustrates this point. In a chapter titled 'Ancient Kings,' the syllabus traces the emergence of the kingdom of Anuradhapura and the establishment of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. However, there is little acknowledgement of the Tamil kingdom that existed in Anuradhapura, or the Chola Kingdom that ruled the northern part of Sri Lanka (Ahmed, 1996). Instead, children are presented with narratives and images that recount only the arrival of Buddhism and the establishment of Sinhalese kingdoms.

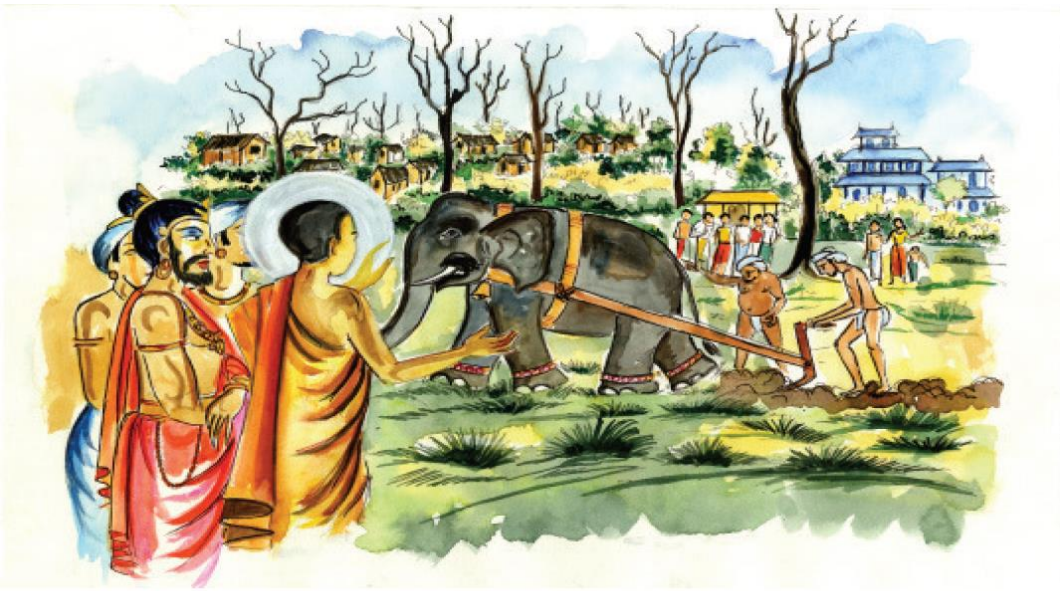
Concerns surrounding representation are echoed by scholars who have conducted research in Sri Lanka. Ahmed examines the traces of Sinhala Buddhist cultural identity, highlighting the rhetoric that alludes to the 'glorified mythical Sinhalese past' (Ahmed, 1996: 288). It is important to note, however, that this is not limited to Sri Lanka alone. There are strong parallels between Sri Lanka and India, where, as discussed, education is geared towards maintaining *Hindutva* (Froerer, 2007). Taking into account the involvement of the Indian state in foreign investment in Sri Lanka, it becomes apparent that both nation states are increasingly attempting to establish an ethno-religious presence through schooling. Bénéï (2008) and others (Froerer, 2006; Sørensen, 2008) have brought these important observations to light.

The need to forge a collective identity along Sinhala-centric lines is a common thread that runs through the schooling experiences for many young people at Mayadevi. Such attempts of nation-building can also present themselves subtly within the classroom, as well as in the syllabus, with youth being taught Civil Education, Citizenship and History

[44]The Mahavamsa, also known as the 'Great Chronicle' is a historical record that recalls the history of Sri Lanka, according to the Sinhalese population. It is reported reputed? to have been written in the 5th Century CE.

(see Image 4.6a & 4.6b as examples). While observing a Grade 6 Sinhala class one day, I noted how the teacher followed up on homework set from the previous day. The students were left with the task of finding a song about 'Mother Lanka' and important Buddhist values that they had covered in the previous lesson. Without needing to urge anyone to come up, the teacher sat in her chair as students began forming a line to recite their chosen song or passage. Students began singing songs about the importance of respecting their elders, doing good deeds such as not harming anyone, and living according to the *dhamma* (the Buddha's teachings). The class responded by listening quietly, and by the end of each girl's singing everyone would clap and the teacher would provide a brief summary of the song and its importance to the topic discussed.

Image 4.6a: Textbook depicting the arrival of the Buddha.



உரு 5.2 தேவநம்பியதீச மன்னன் அநுராதபுர எல்லையை அடையாளப்படுத்தியமை

Image 4.6b: A picture depicting the arrival of the sapling of the sacred Sri Maha Bodhi, under which the Buddha attained enlightenment.

உரு 5.3 பிக்குணி சங்கமித்தையால் புனித வெள்ளரசுக்கிளை மன்னன் தேவநம்பியதிசனது காலத்தில் இலங்கைக்குக் கொண்டு வரப்பட்டது.

Source: National Institute of Education (2005)

As I sat among these students, it became evident that school values had become part of their own habitus. Through their own selection of songs and passages, students brought the nation into 'being' and in doing so replicated the teachings of the school. As alluded to earlier on, Bénéï's chapter 'Singing the Nation into Existence' echoes my own ethnographic findings. Bénéï examines 'pedagogic techniques' adopted by teachers at a school in Maharashtra, which involve singing or taking part in ritualised practices (2008: 40). These practices become powerful tools in heightening a collective sense of belonging through emotional investment on the part of the young people. Following the *dhamma* requires young people to alter their behaviour to meet the expectations placed by the school. In doing so, students come to inherit 'good' values and comportments, thereby gaining a sense of accomplishment in becoming good Buddhist children.

Such forms of inculcation are not limited to textbooks alone, but extend beyond the classroom. For example, school trips organised by heads of subjects at Mayadevi also reinforce the hegemonic narratives, with students being taken on day trips to Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura and Sri Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic) - all of which are important cultural and religious sites for Sinhalese and Buddhists. On one of these occasions, I travelled with students from the Arts stream to the Uva province, located in the South-Eastern part of the island, to visit Yudaganawa stupa. After five hours on the road, the students stepped out of the minivan and found themselves in a large open area with old ruins scattered around them. Though many were thankful to be away from the school, they expressed disappointment at not being able to choose where they wanted to visit.

Anesha, a 17-year-old in her final year of A-Levels from Gampola, told me "Appo, why are we here?! This is our last trip, and this is the place they have chosen for us to be. We're not interested in this. Why did [the teachers] choose here?" Anesha's response reveals the disjuncture between the school's need to centre trips for educational as well as religious purposes and the pupils' desires. Despite the students' hopes of having a day of respite from schooling, the trip served to remind them of their cultural heritage and identity. Such examples present how nation-building activities form part of the schooling agenda in different ways. As discussed, Bénéï illustrates such practices through the daily chanting, assemblies and flag-raising rituals that form part of a 'theological project' that function to instil existing religious doctrines and principles (2008: 39).

Girls like Anesha, who were initially annoyed at having to visit old ruins, eventually stood in admiration of the stature of the stupa when we arrived at the site. While following the students, I realised that their initial hesitancy upon arrival changed as they made their way, unguided, to the small *kadais* (stall) to buy lotus flowers, oil lamps and candles to lay near the stupa and temple as offerings. I followed the students as they silently made their way around the stupa, laying flowers at different shrines that surrounded it and quietly praying for their families, their looming exams and, importantly, their futures. Observing the students, I realised that they were replicating the comportments and rituals that they carry out in the school.

Observances of these nation-building practices are not limited to Sri Lanka alone, but extend to neighbouring contexts such as India (Froerer, 2006, 2007; Bénéï, 2008; Staples,

2019), Pakistan (Ahmed, 1996) and Nepal (Caddell, 2005). Chun (2005) also provides an analysis of the process of citizenship and identity in a Taiwanese context. His research, carried out in a middle school in the city of Hsinchu, raised questions around the normalisation of nationalist values through schooling. Chun's research is particularly relevant to my own analysis of social reproduction, as he identifies education as a 'regime' in which citizenship is taught and practised (2005: 59).

Caddell's (2005) ethnography at a Nepalese school similarly illustrates how schooling attempts to reproduce nation-building practices. Caddell reveals that schooling in Nepal is presented as a 'means of transcending cultural differences, of leaving constraints of local and traditional behind' (2005: 14). She argues that 'unity and sameness' become important aspects of the schooling experience, which are employed to create an affiliation with the nation state and culture (ibid). Mohammed-Arif (2005) also discusses the link between postcolonial nation states and the function of education. She posits that in such societies, nation-building becomes a crucial element in forging a national unity or 'communalism,' which carries with it the exclusion of the 'other'(ibid: 144).

Similarly, the faculty at Mayadevi organised this field trip as a way of reminding students about their history and heritage. In doing so, they unconsciously helped forge a connection to the 'imaginary community' through collective memories (Anderson, 2006). Importantly, young people will come to treasure memories of field trips like the one at Yudaganawa as some of their 'best' times at Mayadevi.

The ethnographic examples presented so far illustrate the nation-building practices that take place within and beyond the classroom. Youth are taught about their heritage and come to appreciate these sites, which also enable them to assume pride about their 'origin.' On several visits to the Sri Dalada Maligawa[45] with the school, students took me by the hand to show me the main shrine and proudly told me that this is where the last relic of the Buddha is held. Many went on to tell me about the *Perahera*, an annual procession that pays homage to the tooth relic of the Buddha. For the students, showing me around the grounds of the temple and informing me of important religious functions

[45]The Maligawa is perhaps one of the most important religious sites for Buddhists in Sri Lanka. The temple is located in the royal palace complex of the former Kandyan kingdom. Importantly, it houses the relic of the tooth of the lord Buddha.

was a way of educating me about the significance of this site, and how it remains an important space for Buddhists as well as Kandyans.

Anthropologists like Birgitte Sørensen (2008) have shed light on educational systems and nation-building. Her paper *Citizenship and Education in Sri Lanka* (2008) is a useful reference point because it provides an ethnographic analysis of how education and nation-building take place in Tamil schools located in the North and Eastern parts of the country. In contrast to my own research, Sørensen highlights that despite being presented with the idea of a unified national identity, the experiences of youth and teachers in these schools were far different to their Sinhalese peers, who received greater attention from ministry officials.

As alluded to, there is a tendency for the state to place Tamil and Muslim communities in a position of 'partial citizenship,' where they are told to harness social values and customs which make up a collective identity, but are placed in the periphery of nation-building process through the lack of access to educational provisions (2008). As Sørensen explains, '[this] function[s] as a tactic for claiming a position… [of] Sri Lankan citizens and an attempt to compel the state to recognize its moral obligation to deliver welfare and take proper care of all its citizens' (2008: 434).

Pertinently, the children in Sørensen's study themselves expressed their own Othering by state actors. The children's evaluation of their own schools as lacking in resources compared to Sinhalese provincial and national schools reveals that many recognised this as a result of political preferences (2008). Sørensen reveals that the lack of attention from the state bears testimony of the exclusion of the Tamil population from the national community. Such acts of state-based discrimination are further emphasised when the nation state is presented as a symbolic imagery in textbooks, but also in how these textbooks present social values and customs.

The state's call to present a unified sense of *Sri Lankanness* among its population forms a stark contrast to how non-Sinhalese citizens are placed at the periphery of this social imaginary. Under the guise of promoting a curriculum that harnesses a 'new social imagination', where Sinhalese cultural values are substituted with a multi-ethnic national identity, lies the pretence of building on a culture of tolerance (Sørensen, 2008). As I have demonstrated through my own ethnography, there is a clear disjuncture between the

state's calls to facilitate this unified identity and how such practices go on to reinforce ethnonationalism through schooling.

I observed how non-Sinhalese Buddhist students, though a minority within Mayadevi, respond and appropriate nation-building practices within the school as a way of assimilating into Sri Lankan culture. They pay respect while the morning prayer is being played by placing their hands together. They also engage in school functions, extra-curricular activities and attend school outings, which reinforce nation-building processes, and forge a sense of loyalty to the nation state (Levinson, 1996; Chun, 2005). In doing so, they succeed in manufacturing a sense of belonging.

With the assumption that collectiveness among people can be built through education, the school becomes a fundamental site for cultural transmission. It is here that young people learn about virtuous behaviour and maintaining cultural and national identity and heritage. As I have argued, what becomes problematic in this situation is the marginalisation of ethnic minorities across the island, who are kept at the periphery of a 'national community' that is culturally and ideologically Sinhalese (Sørensen, 2008: 433). In the context of Sri Lanka, the school site then becomes a state instrument in the construction of a national identity, and a site in which social hierarchies are formed. In turn, the question of what kind of person is being created is an important one that needs special attention, particularly in post-war Sri Lanka.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided insight into how identity and nation-building practices contribute towards processes of becoming. Through detailed ethnographic accounts of the school, its functions and forms of inculcation of Sinhala Buddhist values, I have demonstrated how nation-building takes place through schooling practices. In doing so, I described young people's engagement within the school, and how Sinhala Buddhist values are inculcated and become normalised. Through this, I have indicated the importance of exploring the construction of citizenship, drawing on the socio-political context of education and the role that the state and its actors play in inculcating a Sinhala Buddhist identity. I have presented how the construction of a unified sense of Sri

Lankanness serves to further heighten ethno-religious identity, which marginalises ethnic minority communities.

It is safe to conclude that in a post-conflict setting, the state continues to promote a Sinhala-centric notion of being Sri Lankan, which excludes ethnic minorities and grants privilege to the Sinhala Buddhist majority. My research attempts to show how national identity is constructed in a way that reinforces the privileged places of Sinhala Buddhists. This is an important area of research which requires urgent attention, and this thesis seeks to contribute to the understanding of how socio-political landscapes in Sri Lanka are increasingly shaped through identity politics.

In such contexts, the production of citizenship becomes a problematic notion, particularly for the youth at Mayadevi, who are exposed to one 'truth.' It is through this that the state is able to maintain control over its populous, by rejecting any history or narrative that falls outside of the state's account. As such, the production of citizenship in schools becomes a process by which ethnic divides are furthered, as illustrated through Sørensen's (2008) own research of Tamil student's experiences in the North. The issue of citizenship should not be limited to this alone. Through examples of practices of ethno-religious inculcation at Mayadevi, I argue that the construct of citizenship extends to the need to preserve purity among Sri Lankan youth. In an increasingly globalised context, young people are inculcated to continue following tradition and social practices which conflict with their own aspirations for 'modern' lifestyles, described previously.

As explored over the course of this chapter, the school becomes a site where such tensions arise. It also is a site at which youth gain the opportunity to display their talents, thus granting them the symbolic and social capital to stand out against their peers. For all its implications, the school remains a site in which opportunities can be realised. Whether this is through extra-curricular activities, or through recognition of being a model student, for many young people, being a *Mayadevian* is an achievement. It is this that becomes paradoxical; despite its regressive elements particularly in heightening social differentiation among ethnic groups, the school provides youth with opportunities to gain credentials in the form of capital, as demonstrated through extra-curricular activities. Consequently, the production of 'good' children, which will be discussed in depth in the following chapter, results in a tension for the young people themselves, where they become participants in this nation-building process.

Despite wanting to pursue cosmopolitan lifestyles, young people are acutely aware of the need to preserve their heritage, resulting in tensions within the ways in which they come to aspire. The next chapter will explore how capital acquired through Mayadevi will help youth with schooling, because of the reputation that the school has cultivated for being a traditional Sinhala Buddhist school. The capital acquired is an important element that students can use to further their own aspirations, whether these are personal or academically driven.

Chapter Five: Becoming and Ways of Aspiring Among Female Sinhalese Youth

In the previous chapter, I presented how formal schooling plays an important role in the construction of a 'Sri Lankan' identity. I argued that the inculcation of ethno-nationalist values through schooling shapes how individuals form a sense of belonging to an imagined community and a collective sense of identity (Anderson, 2006). Young people's engagement with schooling therefore results in the reproduction of Sinhala Buddhist values, which go on to shape how they construct their own identity. This particular area has received significant attention from scholars, who have addressed the relationship between education and the inculcation of national identity (Reay, 1995; Levinson, 1996; Rival, 2002; Mills, 2008). The school, however, is not only a site for the cultural transmission of nationalist values, as demonstrated in Chapter Four, but also an important space where young people begin to think about their future - about *who* they want to become. Continuing the exploration of the role of school in the production of identities, this chapter examines how aspirations are formed within the school, and how these in turn contribute to processes of becoming.

This chapter serves two purposes: the first is exploring the ways in which youth aspire as part of processes of becoming. I explain that amongst my interlocutors, aspirations are deeply embedded in how young people think about their futures. I examine how ideas of becoming are verbalised by young people themselves to argue that concepts like aspirations and the future are interlinked with ideas of becoming. It is by examining these in relation to one another and highlighting the social conditions under which such ideas are formed that we gain further understanding of young people's experiences of growing up. The second focus of this chapter is to provide an alternative lens through which to deconstruct current debates surrounding aspirations - I want to present a layered analysis of what it means to aspire among young people like those I spent time with, be it to become good children, gain entry into national school, or even to aspire to certain positions within the school.

I begin the chapter by linking aspirations to process of becoming by presenting how young people speak of their futures, and how the concept of becoming is linked to this (5.1). Following this, I examine how the school becomes an important site which encourages certain types of 'becomings' (5.2). I present how young people are encouraged to become good Buddhist women, resulting in the production of good children or *honde lamai* (5.3). Lastly, I challenge current debates surrounding aspirations by presenting how aspirations go beyond schooling and employment (5.4) and, importantly, serve young people with the cultural and social capital to facilitate their ideas of the future.

5.1 Situating Aspirations as a Process of Becoming

Within the first week at Mayadevi, I became aware of the challenges of articulating what aspirations meant to my participants. This was due to the difficulty in translating the term so that it resonated with young people. The meaning of *aspiration*, framed within Western discourses, was alien to my participants, leading to numerous blank stares when I attempted to localise the term. To situate the concept, I approached the teachers, who informed me that words like *aspirations* or indeed *to aspire* were 'foreign' terms, rarely used by young people. Instead, teachers and students spoke of goals and plans for the future, frequently revolving around the word 'becoming.' Many young people would simply tell me they wanted to become (or *wenna ona*) a teacher, doctor, or simply a 'good' person in the future.

In the introduction to this thesis, I introduced the concept of becoming, or *wenawa* in Sinhala, for young people explaining what they wanted to be in the future. Though not used in everyday conversations among my participants, the word 'becoming' revealed the process by which the girls imagined their future selves. I noted that in speaking about who they wanted to become, the girls at Mayadevi were inadvertently linking the future to their present lives. As I will demonstrate over the course of this chapter, how the girls imagined their future selves was formed out of their present experiences and aspirations. Importantly, these processes were formed in the thick of everyday life (Appadurai, 2004).

Returning to Uprichard's (2008) theorisation of children as 'being and becoming' (discussed in Chapter Two) is useful here, particularly in unpacking the temporality of

childhood. Uprichard notes that the concept of being and becoming relies on the interaction of the present and the future together (Uprichard, 2008). The theorisation of transitions as temporal stages (Uprichard, 2008; Camfield, 2011), recognised as fluid and malleable, allows for interactions between the present and future, and places youth at the centre of these processes. In unpacking what it means to become someone, interrogating young people's ideas of the future and aspirations is a central element. As I will demonstrate in this section, it is by interlinking the concepts of the future, transitions and aspirations that I was able to understand the processes in which young people come to think of their future selves.

The term *aspiration* is synonymous to *abhilaashayan* in Sinhala and *apilaaṣaikaḷai* in Tamil, though both are rarely used. I discovered that in Sinhala, words such as hope (*balaaporottuva*) and dream (*sihina*) provided more nuanced insights into how aspirations are locally situated. While interrogating ideas of becoming with the students of Mayadevi, I placed emphasis on the future and how young people visualised their trajectory. Instigating discussions with students began by unpacking their goals for the future, what they wanted to do post-schooling and whether this was the same as what their parents expected of them.

Conversations about what young people wanted for themselves - their goals or hopes - revealed how they framed the idea of 'becoming' in the future. Almost always, the students told me they wanted to 'become' someone. Whether this was to become a teacher, a businesswoman or a government worker, their hopes for the future very much revolved around the idea of who they might become. Imagining a version of oneself in the future, however, was not fixed, since girls expressed becoming different versions of themselves. For example, a conversation with a student in 7B emphasised the fluid ways in which futures are imagined by youth. When we first met, the student informed me that she wanted to work in her father's business when she finished university. What struck me about our conversation was her certainty that she wanted to take over her father's business, despite being encouraged to pursue government employment by her parents.

Several months later, when I returned to the topic of her plans for the future, I discovered that she had since changed her mind, and now wanted to become a chemistry teacher because she enjoyed the subject at school. Such examples echo the possibilities of imagining future selves, where future orientations are possible yet uncertain (Camfield,

2011). They also highlight the importance of the temporality in which futures are imagined.

My own theorisation of how young people articulate their becoming arose through such conversations. It was by exploring how students responded to my questionings about what they wanted to do that I was able to interrogate how they saw themselves in the future. The concept of becoming, which was locally situated and widely used, allowed me to interlink young people's personal hopes as well as educational and career aspirations to how they imagined their future selves, thus allowing for an in-depth understanding into their ideas of who they wanted to become. Importantly, it provided insight into how young people's lived experiences in the present shapes their ideas about how they see themselves in the future.

Aspiring, as I discovered, operated on two levels for the girls I spent time with. On one hand, aspirations were formed in relation to education and employment. On the other, young people also expressed what I have classified as more 'personal' aspirations - that is, nuanced interpretations of their personal hopes, the lifestyles they wanted to pursue and the types of people they wanted to become.

The latter point became an important area of focus, as discourses focusing on personal aspirations have been side-lined by international development agencies. Instead, these bodies, who remain key players in influencing global educational agendas, continue to place focus on raising aspirations for young people (especially from the Global South) (World Bank, 2011; 2018). With global targets such as Sustainable Development Goals calling for education as a pathway towards a better livelihood, the focus of such programmes aligns to the neoliberal agenda of heightening 'opportunities' through development and progress (Escobar, 1997; Lewis, 2005). This has led to education being perceived as a vehicle through which to achieve upward mobility and alleviate poverty (Ansell, 2015; Zipin *et al.*, 2015).

These discourses have led to extensive studies within social sciences, with scholars unpacking how aspiring 'highly' shapes young people's engagement with formal schooling (Crivello, 2011; Froerer, 2012; Rao & Hossain, 2012). Despite no set definition of what it means to aspire by international donors such as UNESCO and the World Bank, a key feature presented is that youth come to have 'high aspirations' through education.

A report by the World Bank titled *Transforming School Education in Sri Lanka: From Cut Stones to Polished Jewels* (2011) highlights the perceived transformative power of schooling. The document reveals the focus placed on the 'transformative' nature of formal education, required for economic advancement, which turns children from uneducated 'cut stones' to aspirational 'polished jewels' (ibid). With educational initiatives focusing on 'growth, development and poverty reduction,' young people are taught to aspire to achieve those very things.

In light of this, I want to propose two important questions pertinent to this chapter; what is the purpose of trying to understand or explore how youth aspirations are formed, if we only want to examine one aspect? Is it not just as important to understand how youth come to aspire to things like fitting into a peer group, wanting to pursue a certain lifestyle or even replicate traditional rituals?

To return to my own field site, the aspirations of the young people that I spoke with were formed out of their own experiences and within a wider social network that includes parents, extended family, teachers and peers. Their aspirations were not formed in isolation, but rather, as Appadurai (2004) argues, in the thick of everyday life. Importantly, students framed their hopes and goals as being far away in the distant future, and indeed centred around their own as well as familial aspirations. An aspiration to become, for example, a journalist, pilot or teacher, was something students felt they had little control over, except to study hard and secure a place at a government university. The capacity to aspire, which Appadurai argues is shaped by subscribing to social norms, meant these young people placed importance on fate - an important element in Theravada Buddhism - which they felt would determine the types of future they would have.

For the students at Mayadevi, aspiring is shaped by a collective recognition of *saṃsara* and rebirth. This collective recognition is reflective of the capacity to carve out a social position, as demonstrated by Appadurai through the slum dwellers who are transformed into housing activists (2004). Importantly, it reveals how young people become the 'bearers' of cultural norms. It is by becoming 'good' Buddhist children and following religious teachings and the *dharma* that young people acquire merit (*pin*), which positions them in a better form in this life and the next (Simpson, 2004). Supporting their families and doing 'good' for society become ways in which some young people envision acquiring merit through acts of selflessness (Azzopardi, 2010; Pemaratana, 2013).

Both within and outside of the school, I observed young people doing 'good deeds' so that they would acquire merit. Whether it was visiting the Sri Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic) during Poya days[46] or organising collections at school for local orphanages, girls would take part in these activities as a means of acquiring good karma. Such examples highlight why it is important to consider the context in which aspirations are formed. Many of my participants expressed that their aspirations were not simply set on their education or careers, but, as demonstrated, also around personal goals that spoke to their ethno-religious upbringing.

As I discovered, students placed great focus on the importance of being happy in life, suggesting that their aspirations for the future were rooted in the idea of doing well and becoming somebody. Becoming somebody, for the young people I spent time with, is marked by the idea of completing university, securing reputable jobs and supporting their parents into old age. As I discovered, young people are taught to take these ideas into consideration when imagining the future by elders. I overheard several (almost always female) relatives or teachers tell female students that they 'must look after parents in their old age.'

These insights suggest that for the young people that I spent time with, forming ideas of their future takes place within a framework that encompasses their own idea of social mobility, but is also embedded in the notion of living a 'good' life according to Buddhist teachings. As I will examine in the following section, the schooling space is an important site in which such imaginings of the future are encouraged, under the premise of producing good Buddhist children.

5.2 Schooling and Ways of Becoming

In the previous chapter, I examined the ways in which schooling produces specific types of citizens, and in turn how young people come to reproduce the values and practices upheld by the school. This is particularly important in understanding the type of aspirations, and indeed the futures, that young people come to imagine for themselves. Scholars like Jeffrey (2010), Rival (2002) and Froerer (2007) have examined the nuanced

[46]Poya is a Buddhist holiday, marked by the full moon. During this day, Buddhists are required to follow the five precepts of Buddhism.

ways in which formal schooling becomes a vehicle for transmitting cultural and social forms. Expanded through such examinations, our understanding of the production of habitus and how this goes on to influence how youth come to acquire capital (be it social or cultural) has been central in interrogating important themes in the field of education and youth (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

However, there is further scope to unpack the role that schooling plays in influencing the types of aspiration, and indeed 'becomings,' that youth come to form. As I will demonstrate, the school is an important site for the inculcation of what I have classed as more 'personal' aspirations. Subsequently, the school's values are replicated by young people who aspire to be good Buddhist children. In considering this, it is also important to note that school is also an important space that upholds neoliberal ideals of progress and development under the guise of upward social mobility. This will be discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

In the previous chapter, I highlighted the ways in which nation-building practices come to serve as a way in which students distinguish themselves from others. The incident which took place during the Greek & Roman Civilization class, where Shifna, the only Muslim student in 13B, was mocked by her teacher, is demonstrative of the ways in which processes of Othering take place. With identity construction influenced by ritualised daily practices, students are encouraged to aspire to certain expectations, which speak to religious and ethno-cultural values.

Mayadevi, then, is not just a site in which nation-building takes place, but also where youth are taught to aspire to be good Buddhist women. This inculcation takes different forms - for example through the expectations that the school places on students in acting out certain behaviours, or, as demonstrated, in the content of the syllabus that youth are taught. As Bourdieu (1990) argues, learning becomes an irreversible process, where the habitus acquired within the home comes to form a basis on which the assimilation of the principles of the schooling space are introduced. These are in turn reproduced within the schooling environment. The educational system then 'produces and reproduce(s) the institutional conditions necessary to exercise its function of inculcation of the cultural arbitrary' (ibid: 54). Lighting the pooja lamp and laying flowers in front of the Buddha statue are some examples of how female students' responsibilities within the home transcend into the schooling space. Within the school, students come to reproduce

‘dutiful’ behaviour, under the guise of being good children. Such acts are embedded in what Lynch (1999: 58) calls ‘morally pure’ traits in Sinhala Buddhist culture.

For the female students at Mayadevi, their school habitus is influenced through everyday occurrences of schooling practices embedded with ideals of gender norms and nation-building. For example, girls are discouraged from engaging in sports during play time (apart from when practising), hanging around classrooms, and talking too loudly, since these behaviours, considered as boisterous, conflict with the idealised image of a schoolgirl as being quiet and respectful. Students are encouraged to live up to these images, which come hand-in-hand with nation-building practices - that is, in producing specific types of citizens (Bénéï, 2005). Schools, then, come to shape the type of ‘becomings’ young people imagine.

An example that I observed early in my fieldwork related to the morning routines. The school bell would ring at 7:20 am every day, signalling the beginning of the school day. As far as rituals are concerned, this was perhaps one of the more prominent and visible practices of ‘banal nationalism’ that took place every day (Froerer, 2007; Bénéï, 2008). Much like the children in Bénéï’s ethnograhy, who are required to take part in the daily chanting of the national anthem, the students at Mayadevi are required to take part in the morning ritual of a morning prayer sung by one of the junior prefects, followed by the school pledge, song and national anthem, whether they are in the classroom or in the playground. By paying their respects to ‘Mother Lanka’ through prayers, girls were acting like dutiful daughters of Mayadevi. Such instances reveal the extent to which banal forms of nationalism operate across different social contexts. In the context of Maharashtra, as discussed by Bénéï, singing the national anthem symbolically results in the unification of the ‘nation’ (2008). Similarily, the morning rituals at Mayadevi are ways in which moral education is disseminated in a palpable and structured manner.

Moral teaching at Mayadevi begins in the classroom, with class monitors - nominated by the form tutor each term - lighting the oil lamp and incense located by the shrine on the wall. This mark of respect for Lord Buddha is an act that students replicate without being explicitly told to do so. They see it as their duty as class monitors to ensure that these important rituals are maintained, as a means of starting the day in the ‘right’ way. The remaining students stand behind their wooden desks to wait for the prayer to commence, at which point they press their hands together with fingers pointed up and bow their heads.

For the handful of students who are not Buddhist, following the ritual is expected, and as such they stand alongside their Buddhist peers and replicate the daily routine. I suspected during my time at the school that this was in part an attempt to fit in, or diminish their positions as outsiders. In speaking to Priya, the only Tamil student in 13B, I was informed that though she did not say the prayer, taking part was a way in which she showed her respect to the school. Students are not given the opportunity to refuse to take part in religious rituals, since above all they are considered daughters of Mayadevi who must respect the rules and practices of the school.

The morning routine ends with the recital of the national anthem, for which everyone in the school, including the teachers, non-academic staff and Principal, stops what they are doing, stands upright with clenched fists by the side of their body and sings, bowing their heads once this has finished. The bell rings once again, signalling the beginning of the morning exercises. An excerpt from my fieldnotes below details this occurrence.

> *Once the national anthem is read, the exercise music is played. The morning exercise is something that I love watching - mainly because it's so obvious to see that girls hate it (as they often express to me about how boring and 'useless' it is). Observing it today was no different - the girls sitting next to me stood behind their desks and did the 'exercises' with minimum effort, and almost lethargically, while the military style instrumental music played in the background. Observing these is interesting, not only because of the students' despondency but also as it's almost like a time warp; listening to the music and watching the students, I can imagine the same exercises taking place 75 years ago (when the school was founded). The girls are open to berating the exercises and telling me how much they hate doing this every morning. From the pointing of fingers to toes, to the circular shoulder movements and the one step - two step - three step - skip movement, it appears to be archaic, but students nonetheless carry out their duties - even though some do so with minimal effort. The exercises finish with a series of claps, which reverberate throughout the class block* (Fieldnotes, October 2017).

These examples of daily rituals reveal the expectation of students to perform these duties. Students do not have the choice of opting out, and I suspect that if they did, it is not something that they would choose to do because of the consequences that would arise as a result. By following the path the school has laid, students are reproducing these rites and presenting themselves as dutiful daughters of Mayadevi. In doing so, students inadvertently reproduce the 'social order' of the school, since these acts are seen to be normal and expected of them. Froerer (2007) articulates the reproduction of schooling values as a means through which children and young people facilitate their prospects of educational success. She argues that by appearing to align to the school's teachings, students interpret these as a means to get ahead, rather than carving out cultural or religious 'superiority' (ibid: 1036).

For the students I met during fieldwork, replicating rituals that transcended the boundaries between the home and school became part of their daily routine, and something they were expected to follow as they grew up. Learning of the importance in maintaining religious rituals at home as well as in Dhamma classes they attended every Sunday morning[47] became part of their 'becoming' into good Sinhala Buddhist women. Irrespective of whether students completed these rites out of belief or duty, they spoke to me of the expectations from teachers and parents that made them inclined to follow these.

Similar notions of obligation are highlighted in Purewal and Hashmi's (2015) paper on young girls' education in the Punjab, Pakistan. Under the guise of becoming 'respectable,' Purewal and Hashmi examine how girls aspire to this through modest behaviour, marked by wearing the veil and withdrawing from school so as to focus on household duties (ibid: 981). This obligation to uphold parental expectations, however, has implications for the young girls' access to higher education. This notion of obligation is central to understanding not only the barriers to education, but also how young people come to police themselves in order to become respectful: a construct shaped by their social world.

[47]Dhamma schools take place every Sunday morning for a few hours. These classes are often held in the temple grounds, or in the case of Mayadevi, at the school itself. Young people are required to wear white; female children wear white blouse and a long white skirt. Female students often wear a Frangipani flower in their hair. Male students are required to wear a white shirt and a long white sarong. Children and young people attend Dhamma classes to learn about the Buddhist teachings. Students are also given the option of completing the *Dhammacharya* examination, managed by the Department of Examination.

5.3 Becoming *Honde Lamai*

Thus far, this chapter has pieced together processes of becoming, by aligning how young people's aspirations and their ideas of the future are shaped by their schooling experiences. I have demonstrated how Mayadevi becomes an important site in the inculcation of ethno-nationalist identities through 'cultural training' (Levinson, 1996: 2). For students completing their A-Levels and on the cusp of 'transitioning' into adulthood, Mayadevi provides guidance for their post-schooling life. The schooling space promotes ideas of particular types of becoming, which over time shape how young people come to imagine themselves and their futures. Despite the school reproducing a national identity, the agency of students is not negated; as I will demonstrate, they actively accept, appropriate and in some cases reject values and notions being promoted by the school.

The production of good children is a theme that recurred throughout my time at Mayadevi. From the school's perspective, as reflected in the school motto presented in Chapter Four, preservation of one's cultural and national identity is very much a part of becoming good Buddhist children. In turn, students assume the responsibility of preserving their national identity as they transition into adulthood. As previously alluded to, notions of becoming within the school centre on how Sinhala national identity is constructed, in a way that reinforces the privileges of Sinhalese Buddhists. As such, when looking at processes of becoming, I argue that focus needs to be placed on understanding the role that the school and the wider educational system play in how such conceptualisations are made.

With this in mind, the school becomes an important site in the production of 'good children' or *honde lamai* in Sinhala. Becoming a *honde lamea* requires young people to be respectful of elders, follow instructions, reproduce traditions and maintain purity - by abstaining from bad practices and harnessing 'good' qualities that make up a dutiful daughter. Becoming a 'good child' is thus a foundation from which to become a good woman, who replicates and reproduces Sinhala Buddhist traditions. This process is something that will, over time transcend the schooling space, as young people come to aspire to live up to these expectations.

The notion of becoming reflects the process of social navigation between two fields, where individual trajectories are geared towards moving towards social goals and positions. (Vigh, 2009a). This is useful to consider in how young people acquire a status

(Uprichard, 2008; Vigh, 2009a), for example, being seen as a good child, which they come to perceive as an important milestone in their transition to adulthood. Understanding how young people take part in processes of transition reveals the ways in which they have been taught to *become* within the school. They realise and accept their roles as important in carrying on the traditions taught within the home and in the school.

Becoming 'good,' however, is a status that young people are required to work towards. It is only after meeting the school's expectations that a student is deemed to be a *honde lamea*. This is reflective of Johnson-Hanks' (2002) study of motherhood in Cameroon. As she demonstrates, children are not granted the *Beti* status, but rather, must demonstrate their claim of being *Beti* through their actions. Similarly, the status of being a good child is socially contingent, made possible by external actors who may pose a risk to the status of a good child (ibid).

On numerous occasions during fieldwork, I observed teachers telling students of their responsibilities and expectations as daughters of Mayadevi. This was also the case for the Principal, who in a school assembly that took place on the first day of school in January 2018, delivered a speech for her students that touched on topics such pious behaviour, living up to responsibilities and upholding the school's reputation. Madam Lalitha began by informing students about setting up personal goals for the new year, such as refraining from using Facebook and social media, which will lead them into '*karadere'* (trouble). She went on to urge students to recognise the importance of coming to school and being active in their classrooms by helping their teachers and making sure their responsibilities were met.

Madam Lalitha ended the assembly by reminding her students that they had a duty to uphold the values of the school, and to behave accordingly, as they represented Mayadevi even when outside of school. Speaking to boys, dressing in a way that was revealing or behaving uncouthly was not an acceptable way of being. Instead, pupils were encouraged to focus on their studies and futures, rather than being distracted by things that the Principal foresaw as detrimental to them. Madam Lalitha used the assembly as an opportunity to remind her students about the expectations of the school. She explained that part of their responsibility was to ensure they maintained their appearance by keeping their uniforms and shoes clean, and having their hair 'nice and long' and plaited according

to the school rules. She went on to explain that these were all important things that the girls should be aware of and that they should replicate outside of the school as well.

Importantly, such examples illustrate the gendered expectations placed on youth by figures of authority. Being instructed to behave like 'good' children gives the girls a clear indication of what was expected of them. Dressing and behaving inappropriately, whether this is promiscuously or indeed too boisterously, is highly discouraged, because it tarnishes the image of who a 'good' girl should be. Instead, students are taught to have 'control' of themselves in order to be respectable.

A paper by Lynch (1999) examines what constitutes a 'good' girl in the Sri Lankan context. Lynch examines the links between moral behaviour and industrial productivity among a group of garment factory workers in a village on the outskirts of Colombo. According to Lynch, a good girl comes to represent an amalgamation of nationalist and capitalist gender ideals (ibid). Being a good girl therefore connotes a morally 'pure Sinhala Buddhist woman,' who conserves and passes on the traditions but is also hard working and productive (ibid: 58). In addition to this, a 'good' girl should exercise self-control, which Lynch explains brings to light the important behavioural concept of '*lejja bayai*' (meaning shame-fear) in Sinhala Buddhist culture (ibid: 68).

To return to the earlier example, teachers at Mayadevi place great importance on the role of the school in instilling good values and morals in its students. Students are taught about the lessening of respectability that results from transgressing the school's teachings, leading to a sense of *lejja bayai*. The values inculcated and encouraged are thus not limited to moral behaviour, but are geared around creating diligent and hardworking women.

As suggested, transitioning from being a good child to becoming a good citizen is a process that young female students are required to work through. They do so by replicating schooling practices that lean towards gendered nation-building processes, while also carving out opportunities for themselves, for example by actively participating in extra-curricular activities (as discussed in the previous chapter). Ideals surrounding a particular type of citizen speak to the creation of an economically 'competent' populous (Levinson, 2005: 329). The study of citizenship, then, should be an examination into

various processes of identity formation - through cultural transmission of moral values, but also through neoliberal ideals of productive citizenship (ibid).

As illustrated over the course of this chapter, some of these processes of inculcation are overtly Sinhala Buddhist-centric, as seen through the example of the morning ritual at Mayadevi, while others focus on more subtle 'characteristics,' such as the ability to follow instructions, work hard and exercise 'control,' which feed into the narrative of what constitutes a good citizen. By embodying the school's teachings, young people come to inherit social and cultural capital, which grants them the capacity to aspire to become 'good' women and model citizens.

Returning to Appadurai (2004) is useful here, since the adoption of cultural attributes results in a heightened capacity to aspire within a specific cultural space. Applying Appadurai's concept of the capacity to aspire to my own ethnographic observations demonstrates how the inculcation of students by the school results in them gaining a certain level of this capacity. This is exemplified by observing the hierarchy of the student body at Mayadevi, where prefects occupy the highest position. Becoming a prefect is a sought-after position with many benefits, according to the students. The duties of senior prefects often involve being called out of class to support a Head of Department, running errands on behalf of teachers and policing student behaviour (for example monitoring corridors, toilet areas and the school entrance). Prefects like Nadika and Yani from my core group are emblematic of what Mayadevi represents - that is, exemplary manifestations of model behaviour.

As I have suggested over the course of this chapter, the types of aspiration young people are encouraged to form are embedded in ethno-religious and cultural values that determine who a 'good' woman is. Importantly, the capacity to aspire to be *honde lamai* results in young people becoming part of a 'system of ideas' relative to their social environment (Appadurai, 2004: 67). This process of aspiring, then, requires young people to adopt values and ways of being that are encouraged by the school. For example, for the prefects, their capacity to aspire to and establish a status within the school (and thereby acquire certain privileges) is made possible through their behaviour. It is by presenting oneself as a 'model' student that prefects can exercise their capacity and social capital. Such observations reveal the importance of adopting the school's teachings and values as a means of 'getting ahead' (Jakimow, 2016).

It is also important to note that the production of *honde lamai* is a responsibility of teachers at Mayadevi. For the teachers, the school serves to ensure that its students grow up to become well-brought-up Sinhalese Buddhist women, and their role in this is to guide students in this achievement. For instance, there is an expectation that students will thank their teacher for each lesson. At the end of the lesson, students stand behind their desks and say (in unison), "Thank you madam, good day madam, *subh dhavasak* [blessed day] madam.". Such examples of ritualised devotion to their teachers reveal how youth are taught to form allegiances (albeit compulsory) to the school and to their teachers. In thanking the teacher for the lesson delivered, students display gratitude and, in doing so, live up to the image of the 'good' child as a model and disciplined body (Bénéï, 2008). As Bénéï explains, such practics reveal 'proper feminine behaviour,' encouraged within the classroom space (ibid: 120), which Mayadevi students are encouraged to reproduce and re-enact outside of the school.

In turn, teachers facilitate the encouragement of good behaviour by using the position of prefects as role models. With this they present the benefits of becoming true Mayadevians. For example, Nadika and Yani, both prefects in 13B, had access to workshops to enhance their leadership skills, granting them with the cultural capital to stand out against their peers. Madam Muditha, the head of IT at Mayadevi (who was also responsible for the prefects) explained of the workshop;

> *This is a very good opportunity that is only for prefects at schools in Kandy. The prefects are part of a union, an organisation that gives them these workshops to improve their leadership skills, and employability. It's very good for them, and these girls are very special* no, *because they work hard. They have these opportunities, and I have to help and be there no. I have to go this weekend and make sure they're okay. Normally last week Mahamaya and Dharmaraja went. This weekend its Mayadevi and Vidyartha College. They will go and do a workshop together in Colombo* (Fieldnotes, October 2017).

These workshops highlight how the school provides opportunities to students it deems to have the most potential[48] - acknowledgement that arises from students living up to the ideal of being good Buddhist children, who follow the school's values but also maintain them outside of the schooling space. Consequently, teachers place great emphasis on what constitutes 'good' children. The teacher's position of authority within the classroom serves to further instil certain dispositions and ways of being, as for many young girls their teacher acts as a role model.

Teachers, then, are key agents in maintaining the 'nation state' goals of the school, which centre on reproducing a Sri Lankan identity, as discussed in Chapter Four. However, it is important to note that teachers have acquired 'pedagogic principles' through 'prologue frequentation of [their] masters' (Bourdieu, & Passeron, 1990: 61). As Bourdieu explains, teachers are agents responsible for the inculcation of pedagogic principles in which they themselves have been inculcated, resulting in an 'unbroken chain of self-producing models' (ibid: 61). The production of a specific type of citizen, therefore, results in the replication of role models, such as teachers.

As I observed over the course of my fieldwork at Mayadevi, teachers hold a position of authority and moral guardianship that they exercise unconsciously. On several occasions, I witnessed how teachers reminded their students of the expectations placed on them (that is, to behave in a certain manner that is reflecting of the school's Buddhist values). Among the older cohort of students, teachers would openly berate students they had seen speaking to boys in town. As a way of warning their peers, teachers would refer openly to such examples in their classes, and in doing so bring to light the concept of *lejja bayai*, the sense of shame and fear, discussed by Lynch (1999).

The construction of what constitutes a good child is not limited to comportment alone. I have alluded to how becoming a good child requires students to engage in all aspects of school life at Mayadevi. Whether this is joining the Western band, or the prefect or cadetting groups, these are requirements that students need to fulfil if they are to meet the teachers' and the Principal's approval.

[48]As I will discuss in Chapters Six and Seven, prefects do not necessarily excel in their exams. However, they are favourites among the faculty because they behave according to the school's teaching, leading them to access certain opportunities.

For young people, the reminder that behaving and becoming 'good' are goals that they should aspire to results in their committing to these ideals as a way of standing out. Many girls believe that good behaviour will position them favourably within the school, through the acquisition of both social and cultural capital. This is to some extent true, since students who embody the school's teachings and replicate them in daily schooling life receive recognition from teachers and the Principal as being model students. As a reward, they are granted opportunities to 'climb' the student body hierarchy by becoming prefects. During my time at the school, the best-behaved students would be given the opportunity to become prefects. This meant that they would be assigned the task of singing the morning prayer and reading the school pledge, a duty that this select group of students took seriously.

Becoming a *honde lamai,* then, is both politicised (in the sense of creating particular types of citizens) and a personal aspiration for many young people. As illustrated through Lynch's ethnography of factory workers in Sri Lanka, being a 'good' woman alludes to morality and purity, which are preserved. As Lynch explains, 'women are valorized both as mothers who heroically sacrifice their sons for the nation without complaint and as traditional women who maintain ethnic purity through their heightened morality' (1999: 72). In light of my own participants, who are required to follow traditions, rituals and cultural practices, students become vehicles through which *Sinhalanness* is reproduced. As long as nation-building processes are replicated by students, the threat of diminishing traditional values and lifestyles is reduced.

Many of the young people at Mayadevi come to aspire to become good children and, in the long term, good Buddhist women. The values taught by the school, from respecting elders to living life according to the dhamma, were important aspects for the young people that I spoke with. However, for the older students at the school, this creates a tension between wanting to be 'modern' while attempting to maintain the image of a well-rounded Sinhalese woman. As one student from 13B, Thilini, explained to me, these experiences create a conflict of being at Mayadevi and having to deal with the reality of being 18.

As Thilini explained, "When we are in our uniforms, we're not even allowed to talk to our brothers. How is that normal? We're 18. Isn't it normal that we like boys and want to talk to them?" For Thilini, the pressure of conforming to this label meant that she was not

able to befriend peers of the opposite sex. Her frustrations at the school inhibiting this came across frequently, and she openly spoke to me about the 'oppressive' nature of the school, going on to vent "We're oppressed here. We can't do anything that we like." It is important to note that despite these frustrations, Thilini (and students like her) valued her schooling, and more specifically valued being a *Mayadevian*. This identity allowed her to distinguish herself from other students from local schools, and came to act as a form of cultural capital due to the reputability of Mayadevi across the country.

This example also serves to highlight the differences in how young people experience schooling. On the one hand, students like Nadika and Thilini value their schooling, as it grants them the social and cultural capital required to facilitate their aspirations. At the same time, they also speak of its oppressive nature, particularly when it means they are not able to exercise small freedoms like befriending boys.

It is these tensions with which young people battle in the process of forming their own ideas of self. Whether this is manifested through the aspirations that they form, or explorations about who they want to be in the future, young people at Mayadevi are required to negotiate their own positioning between the school and their social worlds against the backdrop of a highly politicised learning environment, with nation-building at its centre.

Many of the girls at Mayadevi spoke of the importance of maintaining their national identity and heritage as something central to how they saw their own becoming. Among the prefects for example, recalling of *Kavis* (Buddhist proverbs) during the morning ritual was something that girls expressed enjoyment in, informing me that they liked to sing these old proverbs because it gave them a sense of fulfilment.

In contrast, some students also expressed a desire to realise their personal aspirations, such as going out and speaking to boys, which conflicted with what they had been taught about good behaviour. Such examples result in a tension between traditional and more modern processes of becoming for many young people. Mayadevi is not only a place for formal learning, but also an important site where students are taught about the 'type' of people they should aspire to become in the future.

Findings such as these are not limited to my research alone, but have been highlighted by scholars such as Caddell. In her article 'Discipline Makes the Nation Great' (2005),

Caddell not only demonstrates the disciplinary dimensions of schooling in Nepal, but presents how Nepali citizenship is constructed as an aspirational model. This echoes my own observations about how young people, through schooling practices, come to internalise the construction of *honde lamai*.

Thus far, I have argued that the notion of 'becoming' presents an important point of analysis to further unpack how aspirations and the future contribute towards the processes in which young people figure out who they want to become. My findings, which have examined the links between aspirations and processes of becoming and the production of good Buddhist children, reflect what social scientists such as Caddell (2005), Appadurai (2004) and Bourdieu (1990) have argued: that is, aspirations are not formed by the individual alone, but are influenced by a framework of social relations. The following section will present the ways in which young people form aspirations within the school, in light of schooling and employment. I present how aspiring 'rightly,' as advocated by the school, grants young people with the capital (both social and cultural) to carve out opportunities for their futures.

5.4 Ways of Aspiring Among Young People in 13B

In light of theorising processes of becoming as fluid and shaped by a young person's social world, how can we understand the relationship between aspiration and the acquisition of different forms of capital - be it cultural, symbolic or economic? I have demonstrated how the capacity to aspire is acquired through processes involving the individual's social surroundings. At the same time, to aspire requires individuals to inherit, or indeed develop, the 'capital' to be able to exercise this capacity, as demonstrated through the example of Yani and Nadika at Mayadevi, who acquire social and cultural capital as a result of their model behaviour.

Aside from learning how to become good Buddhist women, young people are taught to aspire to do well in their academic and professional career by studying hard for exams, attending school and taking part in lessons. This in part leads young people to become productive members of society through prospects of secure employment. The school places great importance on its students achieving good grades in order to attend university, as government jobs require young people to have completed an undergraduate

degree. The framework on which aspiring for education and employment is positioned works along habituated aspirations that are formed through lived experiences, social relations and practices in- and outside of school. These form the cultural conditions in which processes of aspiring takes place. As Zipin *et al.* (2015: 234) explain:

> Habituated aspirations [are] based in the dispositional structures of habitus, embody the possibilities-within-limits of given social–structural positions. This dispositional sense of self-limiting possibility abides as deeply internalized, latently felt estimations of probable futures, unlike doxic aspirations that channel a skin-deep intake of ideologically articulated messages.

For the students I met at Mayadevi, educational milestones were largely set on passing O-Level and A-Level exams, getting good grades and getting into a government university. If the latter was not an option, many explained to me about their plans to apply to privately run universities, which require the payment of fees.

For these young people, figuring out who they wanted to become in the future resulted in considering the career options available to them. It was when speaking to the students in 13B that I discovered how students ranked the various employment options. I was informed by my core group that government employment was an aspiration for many young people and their families because of the array of benefits it would lead to. The benefits highlighted by the students were not entirely associated with earning power, but also the acquisition of social and cultural capital. As Chaturi, the daughter of a primary school teacher and post office clerk, explained, “If you are a government worker, then your child will be fast-tracked to good government schools like Mayadevi, which means that you don’t need to pass the scholarship.” In other words, the possession of certain forms of capital, whether cultural or social, leads to opportunities to acquire further forms of capital, which would otherwise be limited (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The example from Chaturi highlights the exchange of capital (from cultural to educational) and how this positions individuals (Bourdieu, 1986).

For the students in the Arts stream who had selected to study languages and humanities A-Level subjects, considering career options was still an area that caused much anxiety. Many explained that the Arts stream is not as reputable as traditionally academic streams

such as Science or Commerce. They explained their choice of subject areas stemmed from enjoyment, as many expressed little interest in Maths or Science, feeling that such subjects were already very popular and would lead to further competition, particularly in securing a university space. Speaking to students in 13B, almost all of whom had selected languages and humanities, it became apparent that some were hoping to pursue careers within consulates,[49] while others expressed wanting to secure public sector jobs.

In discussing career aspirations among the older cohort, strategies of choosing specific courses to aid their career aspirations became an important element of consideration for the girls. Many students in the Commerce stream had hopes to do well at A-levels so that they could continue specialising in a related field at university. For Nadika, a prefect who was studying A-Level Economics, IT and Japanese, the goal was to set up a television channel that regulates advertisements, to ensure that "They're not false advertising or advertising with a political agenda." This aspiration to establish her own television channel was founded on the political context of the time, wherein political uncertainty and highly influential political figures had resulted what students called 'fake news.'

Seeking out alternative employment options was a rare occurrence among the student body at Mayadevi. The majority of students aspired in some way to 'good' government jobs. The reputation and benefits of government employment, such as a regular salary or a secure pension, meant that it figured as a top option in many young people's employment trajectories. This idea of securing government employment is a collective aspiration. This became apparent when I spoke to the girls during my fieldwork, when they informed me that their parents and family elders encouraged them to pursue a government job. This is reflective of the wider Sri Lankan populous, who continue to perceive government employment as highly aspirational. This collective recognition of the respectability of government employment has been in place since the colonial period, when 'natives' were recruited for low-level positions within the government sector (Little & Hettige, 2015: 24). With the British colonial administration extending its authority into state education and the hierarchy of government positions, the idea of getting a 'good' job has been embedded into young people's aspirations for some time. Little and Hettige (ibid: 24) explain that 'for those who aspired to government jobs, access to education

[49]Learning Japanese was a strategic decision that many of the students in the Arts stream opted for. This was partly due to the increased investment in Sri Lanka by Japanese companies, which many young people thought would lead to opportunities within the Tourism industry.

became an important consideration.' Securing government employment and passing the key national exams continue to be aspirations advocated to young people by kin groups.

Insecure employment in the private sector has further contributed to why government employment is seen as a direct path to social mobility. The notion of educational status being linked to social value is not unique to Sri Lanka; it has also been observed by Crivello (2011) in the context of educational migration among children in Peru. Crivello's research, which forms part of a wider project called Young Lives, reveals that young people perceive having an education as a means of gaining a reputable social status (ibid).

Interestingly, the students at Mayadevi have little experience and knowledge of post-university employment; however, they seek the advice of parents, teachers and senior family members when thinking about their employment prospects. Parents and family members of these girls advocate aspiring to government employment due to the precarious nature of private sector employment.

This is not limited to students at Mayadevi alone, but is reflective of the wider populous in Sri Lanka (Little & Hettige, 2015). The perceived security in government employment becomes a defining factor that young people should consider when making decisions about their future employment. Government employment not only provides individuals with security but is the only sector that offers public servants a comfortable pension, something that was emphasised to me by my interlocuters in 13B. This, combined with the historical reputability of working for the government sector, has meant that many young people and their parents continue to aspire to government employment (Gunatilaka, Mayer & Vodopivec, 2010).

However, young people's aspirations for their future are not always situated in Sri Lanka. Among the A-Level students, several imagined their career paths involving migration, often to Australia and New Zealand. For many, pursuing a government university place in Sri Lanka simply was not a possibility due to the extremely competitive entry;[50] as such, studying abroad in Australia, New Zealand or Canada was an option that they sought to explore.

[50]This will be discussed in depth in Chapter Eight.

In addition to the uncertainty of securing a space at a government university, the long wait for such a space was a further deterrent for many young people. As Gayani, a Grade 13 student and Head of Prefects, explained to me: of the 15 government universities, only one, Jayewardenepura University (located in Nugegoda, a suburb of Colombo), had a course on Taxation. Limited university options and a potentially long wait[51] had led Gayani to consider migrating to pursue further education. As she explained one afternoon, "I need to get the top ranking [at A-Level] because only then I can study at the university. If I don't get this, I will have to find a course in New Zealand or Canada."[52]

Examples like this present the conflicting nature of free education in Sri Lanka. On one hand, the state provides education from primary to tertiary levels, thereby making education accessible. However, the structural systems in place, particularly surrounding tertiary level education, mean that students who have completed A-Levels often have to wait up to two years to begin studying at a government university. Though the private university sector is growing, many young people simply cannot afford to pay for the fees and costs involved in studying for an undergraduate degree, rendering this option inaccessible. Owing to such conflicts, the educational plans of students like Gayani have come to reflect the strategies that young people are required to adopt in order to facilitate their aspirations.

In light of this, it is important to unpack how young people come to consider their education and career prospects. Understanding why young people aspire to certain things often reveals more about the social conditions in which they come to form these aspirations or ideas for their future. Sugden and Punch (2016) illustrate how youth come to see attractive possibilities outside of their local context and therefore reject 'agroecological knowledge' by pursuing formal education. In their case study of China, Sugden and Punch highlight the decline in young people's engagement with indigenous livelihood skills, as a result of their parents pursing formal education in hope of shaping a path towards 'salaried work' in the future (ibid).

[51]Students in Grade 13 at the time of my fieldwork sat their A-Level exams in August 2018. On a visit to the field site in January 2020, I discovered that the girls had received their university confirmation letters, though they had not yet been informed when they could start their course.

[52]This is a ranking system that acknowledges students who have gained high marks in their A-Levels across the country. Each district has a ranking in the different subject areas: Commerce, Arts, Science and Technology. The district results are compared across the different provinces and the 'brightest' students receive a guaranteed place at a government university of their choice.

It is important to note that Sugden and Punch's (2016) case studies how formal education comes to take precedence over rural livelihood methods, as the former presents the possibility of a better standard of living. This extends to an examination of how local knowledge becomes replaced by a legitimised form, which also alludes to opportunities that local knowledge no longer presents. Students in Sri Lanka such as Gayani reject the prospect of investing their futures in outdated methods of livelihood. Instead, migration has become a reality that young people consider pursuing as a means of securing upward mobility.

As suggested thus far, the schooling site is a significant space where 'figuring out the future' take place. Teachers and academic staff are important agents in depicting what is worth aspiring to and why. Whether this is through imagining the future, or indeed career prospects considered 'worthy,' these factors are embedded in the collective aspirations for a place at a government university and subsequently a government job. Thilini, a student with whom I became close, summed up what she had been told about the type of job to aspire to: "[Government workers] get to have good holidays, and some can finish work at 1:30 pm! If you work in the private sector, you have to work long hours and even until late at night. The government sector gives you a pension, and the private sector doesn't".

Examples like this highlight, on a macro scale, the precarity of non-government positions, and the lack of stability in non-government employment. Securing a government job continues to be aspirational because of the historical context that situates government employment along class lines, where historically government employment has been secured by elite groups. The capital acquired is thus simultaneously social, economic and cultural.

Young people, however, are not only taught to aspire through the lens of employment. Within their schooling, students are encouraged to accumulate social and cultural capital through opportunities provided by the school. The build-up to university is an important time for young people, with the potential of social mobility being realised through education and then secure employment. However, as mentioned, young people are also taught to aspire to things that would make such prospects feasible. Gaining entry into a national school is one such example. The following section will present how young

people aspire to certain positions within the school and how this results in the acquisition of cultural and social capital.

5.4.1 Aspirations, Positionality and Acquisition of Cultural Capital

Mayadevi, like many national schools in Sri Lanka presents young people with opportunities that would otherwise limited at a provincial school. While in the field, I noted children in Grade 5 discussing the scholarship exam, which, if they performed well, would give them the opportunity to attend a national school like Mayadevi. Entering a national school is an important stage of the educational journey for many children. In the context of Sri Lanka, access to a national school is a vehicle that either grants opportunities or limits them. This is not only because government schools are managed directly by the Ministry of Education and therefore have better facilities and more highly trained teachers compared to provincial schools - the status of national schools becomes significant when young people attempt to secure a place at a government university.

Securing a place at Mayadevi is therefore aspirational for many young people and their families. Getting into a national school enables students to acquire social and cultural capital, which will facilitate their post-schooling opportunities. For the Grade 6 students, who began their first year at Mayadevi when I started fieldwork, they recognised the benefits of attending a reputable school and explained to me their pride in qualifying for entry at Mayadevi. Many of them informed me that their parents would also benefit from their schooling, as this would lead them to receive a good education, which would in turn lead them to good jobs.

As capital, according to Bourdieu (1990), comes in two forms - cultural and social - young people who can secure a space at a school like Mayadevi not only gain access to good education, but also a wider social network that could lead to further opportunities. However, there are implications in how straightforward these trajectories are imagined to be, since they also reveal emerging inequalities relating to who is able to access what type of education (Lindberg, 2010; Zipin *et al.*, 2015).

Disparities in access to educational opportunities continue to be apparent once students enter national schools. As I suggested earlier in the chapter, prefects at Mayadevi are

allowed certain privileges limited for their peers, whether this is access to workshops enhancing leadership skills or even the social connections that prefects are able to make as a result of their status. I have indicated that prefects are selected based partly on their academic prowess, but also their engagement with the school. Taking part in school functions, extra-curricular activities and the like are ways in which young girls stand out against their peers. Acting according to the school principles, studying hard and getting good grades becomes a way that girls carve out opportunities for themselves. They are then seen to possess the 'potential' of becoming successful by teachers, through their commitment to upholding the school's Sinhala Buddhist teachings.

In performing these actions, girls tap into their 'potential' and establish themselves within the school. Zipin *et al.* (2015: 230) note that through educational acquisition, young people come to form the 'right kind' of human capital which results in 'gainful knowledge.' It is important to acknowledge, however, that the prefects often come from 'well-to-do' families who seek to be involved in the running of the school. Many already possess important forms of capital, whether economic or social, which aid their own positioning within the school.

What distinguishes prefects from the rest of the student body is the perceived *potential* they hold. During my fieldwork, teachers frequently spoke of prefects as hard-working and reflecting the school's ethos, which led them to provide them with one-to-one guidance and opportunities to ensure they continued to do well in their schooling life. The perception that these students have a brighter future is something that was echoed across my conversations with numerous staff members. Returning to the conversation with Madam Muditha, who arranged a leadership-training workshop for the prefects, presents an example of how teachers facilitate opportunities for further learning for this select group.

Many of the prefects realise these opportunities and conform to the expectations that teachers have as a way of further facilitating them. On several occasions, for example, I witnessed prefects like Yani and Nadika cajoling their form tutor to let them out of class by offering to help various teachers with tasks. The reality, however, was that the prefects would often congregate in corridors and wander around school, using the opportunity to gossip and catch up with their fellow prefects. This was only made possible through their symbolic status as model students, which led many teachers to trust that the prefects

would not transgress what is expected of them. The prefects recognised that the faculty by and large had entrusted them with small freedoms within the schooling space, and as such they were able to break certain rules under the pretence of being dutiful.

5.5 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been to examine how processes of becoming take place within the school context. I have presented how aspirations and ideas of the future are interlinked with how young people figure out who they want to become. I have situated both concepts locally, to bring to light how young people at Mayadevi think about their becoming. As illustrated over the course of this chapter, there are very clear differences in how young people aspire: some aspirations are firmly embedded in nation-building processes, which result in young people aspiring to become *honde lamai*, while others are framed in line with aspiring to achieve social mobility.

I have also demonstrated how young people's personal and career-oriented aspirations differ, with some having clear ideas about wanting to go on to university and others still considering their aspirations for the future. The students at Mayadevi, however, nonetheless share the common goal of passing their exams and becoming good Buddhist women.

In understanding how aspirations are formed, this chapter has attempted to tie together how young people discuss the future, aspirations and notions of becoming. Its scope has been to explore and challenge the one-dimensional interpretation of what it means to aspire. I have argued that aspiring is part of a larger process embedded in young people's social worlds, where cultural transmission, kinships and capital play a role in how they consider who they want to become in the future.

Through ethnographic evidence, I have sought to challenge conceptualisations of aspiring, and call for more nuanced and banal aspirations to be explored, as presented in Sections 5.3 and 5.4. If we are to truly understand young people's experiences of transitioning into adulthood, it is just as important to understand aspiring as a process by which young people become. As shown over the course of this chapter, aspirations are not always linked to educational attainment, but are also formed with the idea of a further

future in mind. Consequently, the crux of our understanding of aspirations should be in questioning whether aspiring for the future is intrinsically tied into becoming somebody.

Providing a backdrop of Appadurai's (2004) theorisation of aspiration as a capacity with which to navigate the social world, my aim has been to bring together young people's experiences of thinking about their future selves. Similarly, drawing on Bourdieu (1986; 1990), I have illustrated how various forms of capital come to play an important role in influencing the kind of aspirations that youth come to form. It is through their habitus and the cultural capital acquired within and beyond the school that students are able to aspire to certain things. It is also important to recognise how some students appropriate and reproduce these social conditions in order to be able to achieve their aspirations.

Finally, this chapter has attempted to expose the neglect in the development literature in defining aspiration so narrowly. In looking at how young people come to shape and act out their aspirations, I have attempted to bring to light the importance of granting further attention to nonnormative aspirations, which often fall outside of the development discourse. It is through an awareness of how young people speak about their futures, goals and hopes that we can gain a deeper understanding into the type of people they wish to become.

The following chapter shifts away from the school site and introduces the tuition space in order to address the question of how national education and the privatised tuition systems function in parallel to one another and, in doing so, provide youth with opportunities to realise their aspirations.

Chapter Six: School Is Where You Should Be Learning; Tuition Is Something Extra

The anthropology of education and learning has historically examined how educational and learning processes shape cultural production and identity formation (Willis, 1977; Froerer, 2007; Bénéï, 2008), and how culture, in turn, shapes learning processes (Levinson, 1996; Rival, 2002). The school has often been *the* primary site in which such explorations take place. However, as Levinson (1999: 595) reminds us, there is a need to 'broaden our vision of education to extend our analytic tools well beyond the schools.'

Levinson is not alone in calling for anthropologists to extend their analytical gaze into other important sites for learning. In 'Confronting Anthropology, Education, and Inner-City Apartheid', Bourgois (1996) urges anthropologists to move beyond the 'safeness' of conducting ethnographic research within the school and into alternative spaces in order to further our understanding of class, racial and gender oppression. This chapter seeks to do just this, by introducing the tuition site as an important space that shapes young people's schooling experiences and learning processes. The tuition space, as we shall see, is not only an important educational tool, but also provides young people with a space in which to experiment with ideas of the 'self.'

The previous chapters situated my research within Mayadevi. I presented how formal schooling plays an important role in the construction of a 'Sri Lankan' identity through practices of banal nationalism. In Chapter Four, I argued that for the young people at Mayadevi, becoming someone is embedded in ethnonationalist ideals. In Chapter Five, I extended the analysis of 'becoming' by examining the role of the school in producing specific aspirations and exploring how young people, in turn, aspire to different things during their time at the school in pursuit of figuring out who they want to become.

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that aspiring becomes a localised process, driven by the social networks and capital that young people possess and acquire. I have also demonstrated how students at Mayadevi exercise the capacity to aspire to different things,

be it securing a space at a reputable national school, or attaining a prefect position that would position them higher up in the student hierarchy. Underlying this capacity, however, is the school's role in advocating and indeed reproducing notions of what youth should aspire to - that is, to become socially mobile, but also to retain and uphold their Sinhala Buddhist values in pursuit of becoming '*honde lamai'* (good children).

The purpose of this chapter is to present how young people's experiences of schooling in Sri Lanka encompass private tuition (herein referred to as 'tuition'), which becomes an important functional and symbolic space. More specifically, I present how the tuition site grants young people both the opportunity and space for additional learning to meet the demands of schooling, in pursuit of their aspirations for further education and employment. With a focus on 'becoming' within two key educational sites, this chapter addresses the broader research question of how national education and the privatised tuition systems function in parallel to one another, thereby providing youth with opportunities to both form and realise their aspirations.

Throughout this chapter, I want to bring to light two important ethnographic observations: the first is the question of the purpose of schooling, and the second is how young people respond to the tensions caused by engaging with two parallel education systems. To do so, I explore the 'symbolic' value of tuition in granting young people both the educational capital and the freedom to negotiate the type of learning they deem beneficial to them. I then highlight how tuition serves as an important site for young people to play out different versions of themselves.

This chapter begins with an introduction to the tuition space (6.1). In the subsequent section (6.2), I consider tuition as an important part of young people's schooling experiences, along with the historical role of tuition in Sri Lanka. This leads me to explore the functional purpose of tuition (6.3), and to examine parents' willingness to invest financially in this parallel education system. Through this I demonstrate how tuition becomes an important tool in acquiring symbolic capital, which facilitates the aspirations of both youth and their parents.

I move on to examine how young people's engagement with this parallel education system creates tensions in how they experience schooling. I present how tuition breaks the boundaries placed through formal schooling (6.4), which allows young people to

engage with learning processes differently. I then examine how the difference in teaching leads young people to identify the type of education they deem beneficial (6.5), in order to perform better in exams. Following this, I examine the differences in how teaching takes place (6.6), along with the tensions that arise as a result of this. The final section (6.7) focuses on why young people continue to engage with tuition and how this plays into my theoretical conceptualisation of their becoming.

6.1 Introducing the Tuition Space

On a hot and muggy Thursday afternoon, three months into fieldwork, I made it to my first tuition class in over twenty years.[53] Gaining access to the tuition space was facilitated by my gatekeeper Thilini, who had taken the necessary steps to arrange with the tutor a suitable date for me to come in and observe their class. I had approached the topic of attending one of their classes some months before, but the girls in my core group were initially reluctant to ask their tutor as they were unsure about my intentions. Over time, however, as we began to hang out outside of school, I was invited to attend the class held by Mr Herath. We arranged a date for me to attend on a shared WhatsApp[54] group, once Thilini had been given the go-ahead by 'Sir.'[55]

Although I had had several conversations with my gatekeepers about wanting to re-explore the schooling experience, the students in 13B were bemused by my keenness to come along to their tuition class. Nadika, the joker of the group, called out saying, *"Appo, me ḷamea diha balanna, apite one escole iverevann passe eate iscole enno one*" ("Look at this child [a term of endearment students use with one another]; we want to finish school and she wants to come back") causing a rupture of giggles from the group. Throughout my fieldwork, my core group remained surprised by my eagerness to experience schooling in Sri Lanka.

[53]As discussed in Chapter Three, I attended tuition classes while growing up in Sri Lanka, much like the students at Mayadevi.
[54]WhatsApp was a preferred method of communication by the students, who had created a group titled 'Mayadevi Girls.' This became an important way of maintaining contact, particularly towards the end of the academic year, when the majority of my core group stopped coming to school to attend tuition classes held during the day.
[55]When speaking to or about the tutors, students refer to them as tuition master or madam and call them Sir or Madam (as they would with schoolteachers).

As we began to make our way to tuition, the girls got into a conversation in Sinhala about love interests, sharing recent updates and gossip about their own and those of others, carefully whispering so that they would not be overheard by teachers and their peers. Manoeuvring against the tide of students, some of whom were attempting to avoid the infamous Kandy roadblock[56] in order to get home, we travelled to the tuition centre.

The tuition centre that the students in 13B attend is a two-minute walk from Mayadevi. Unlike the school, an imposing building that has become a landmark for locals, the tuition centre itself is completely inconspicuous. Located down a small alleyway, the building is signposted by a large poster beside the main door, which has subject names written in bold red Sinhala (see figure 6.1a). Next to it, the trendy *Buono Café*, frequented by tourists and university students, is the only conspicuous landmark.

Figure 6.1a: A picture of the tuition centre

Source: Batatota, L (2020)

[56]The roadblock was a major inconvenience for many students and teachers across schools in Kandy. The large number of schools located in the city centre, which all finished at 1:30 pm, resulted in heavy traffic jams that meant travelling between 1 pm and 2:30 pm was almost impossible.

The girls follow a ritual when going to classes after school, which involves visiting a popular bakery located on the old Peradeniya Road. Since private classes commence at 2 pm, students have half an hour of respite. Tuition classes in Kandy almost always take place after school and on weekends, though in the run-up to important exams (O-Level and A-Levels) they also take place during school hours. This pattern is not limited to Sri Lanka, as studies on tuition in South Korea (Kim & Lee, 2010) Japan (Dang & Rogers, 2008) and India (Azam, 2016) suggest that in these locations, tuition also operates parallel to formal schooling by strategically conducting classes after school. This is further echoed by Foondun (2002: 487), who defines tuition in Mauritius as 'extra coaching in academic and examinable subjects that is given to students outside school hours for remuneration.'

Weekly pre-tuition visits to the bakery provide young people in Kandy with the important opportunity to 'hang out' in a space outside the school context. During these times, I observed a marked difference in how the students of 13B behaved outside of school. During their visits, they ordered *short eats*,[57] sweet cold coffee or juice, and some treated themselves to ice cream or *bakes*, depending on how much pocket money they had received on the day. I was informed by the girls that their parents allocated a sum every week - revealing that parents were aware and supportive of their children's pre-tuition practices.

During this time, the girls' conversations revolved around school, homework and plans for the evening or weekend. At times, I witnessed my interlocutors discuss politics and the state of affairs in Sri Lanka, an occurrence that was rare when students were in school, as they were not given the opportunity to engage in such discussions. These conversations revealed young people's perspectives on politics and their political allegiances, providing me with important insights into the role that the girls' social network plays in how they form opinions on these subjects.

Unlike their schooled behaviour, where they refrained from speaking openly about contentious political issues, within the bakery the girls interacted differently; they were

[57]*Short eats* are a popular savoury snack that comes in different forms. They are normally filled with spicy vegetables, fish, meat, and egg and deep-fried. Their history can be traced to the Portuguese (patties and cutlets) as well as influences from China (rolls) and India (vadai) (Deepak, 2019).

louder, brash and uninhibited.[58] Valentine (2003) provides useful insight into how different spaces are connected to young people's transition from childhood to adulthood. Valentine argues that young people's lives are constrained by spaces that allow them to 'act' in different ways (2003: 38). Informal spaces such as the bakery become areas of respite where young people can discuss issues and act differently to how they would within the school.[59] The bakery provided a short break between school and tuition and allowed students the capacity to cultivate their own space.

The tuition centre in Kandy is a narrow three-storey building, marked by a large sign reading *Sipma Education*; under it are several large posters offering tuition in several subjects. Aside from the board, there is no other visible sign alluding to the building being a place of learning. Before making their way to class, students' hand small business-like cards to the reception desk, located on the first floor. The cards hold records on the number of classes students are enrolled in and whether payment has been made for each class. On this occasion, Dilki explained that they would have to pay a little extra since they were going to the extra revision class that the tutor would be providing to get the girls ready for the end-of-term exams, due to take place in March 2018.

The layout of the tuition classroom presents a stark contrast to the school. From the way in which each tuition class is self-contained (in that there are no semi-partition walls dividing classrooms) to the low bench like-desks and stools stacked ready to be shared by the young people - a sense of informality can be noted in the way the classroom space is designed (see Figure 6.1b below). Unlike the classrooms in Mayadevi, the room at Sipma Education is sparse, containing no teacher's desk, religious posters, shrines or cleaning charts.

These subtle differences reinforce the position of the school as not only an institute for learning, but also (as discussed in Chapter Four) a space where young people are required to take part in ritualised nation building practices. In contrast, the tuition centre appears to be void of such intentions, presenting itself as an 'inclusive' space where young people

[58]I will discuss shifts in behaviour in the following chapter, which examines how tuition becomes a site of 'symbolic' importance.
[59]This will be elaborated on in Chapter Seven, which examines the importance of peer-led spaces for youth in Kandy.

from different ethnic and religious backgrounds are able to access educational opportunities equally.[60]

Figure 6.1b: An image of a tuition classroom

Source: Research participant's photo (2018)

6.2 Insights Into Tuition in Kandy

This section provides an introduction of the tuition industry in Sri Lanka and the Global South, so as to situate my ethnographic findings. Across Sri Lanka, tuition spills into public spaces, and I became aware of the extent of this through my daily observations, whether it was noticing walls plastered with advertisements for tuition classes on main roads as I made my way to school, or seeing crowds of young people hanging outside tuition 'academies' (see Figures 6.3.1a, b and c) - public spaces were occupied daily by young people making their way to and from tuition classes, contributing to the infamous roadblocks across Kandy.

The presence of various tuition academies across Kandy is perhaps most noticeable through advertising. With a large number of tuition academies operating in the heart of

[60] I will discuss in -depth concerns related to tuition increasing social inequalities in the latter part of this chapter.

the small city, public spaces are often used as advertising boards. This is notably visible en route through the Kandy–Jaffna highway, where colourful posters of various tutors call the attention of young people and parents. The larger academies - which presumably have higher advertisement budgets, as they charge considerably more and have a wider enrolment of students - have more strategically placed advertisements on the highway. The posters often include an accreditation in the form of having had a past pupil who attained an all-island rank in a subject, bolstering the tutor's reputability. Such tactics are adopted as a way of selling the tuition centre, and indeed the masters, to students.

These advertising strategies provide nuanced insights into how tuition operates across different scales in Sri Lanka, which tend to differ in terms of the location as well as the amount that parents can afford to pay. Through conversations with young people, I discovered that individual sessions are the most expensive, as the student receives the full attention of the tutor. However, smaller classes were the most popular amongst youth at Mayadevi, as these accommodated a form group whilst providing some support on an individual basis.

Many of the students in form group 13B, studying in the Arts stream, attended the same tuition class. As I discovered, these smaller classes are considerably cheaper than individual sessions.[61] In urban centres, however, larger tuition classes are more common, with some case studies (Foondun, 2002; Pallegedara, 2011) suggesting that up to a thousand students attend. In these instances, the tutor delivers the lesson in a large hall over a microphone and with a projector - sometimes, as Bray (2009: 27) observes, with overflow rooms supported by video links. The quality of learning in such environments is a concern continually raised by scholars and educationalists (Pallegedara, 2012; Azam, 2016), who have questioned the impact on educational outcomes and student wellbeing.

Further criticism of the tuition industry has centred largely on the idea that it heightens social inequality by providing learning opportunities at an additional cost, excluding many young people from poorer backgrounds (Bray & Kwok, 2003). This, combined with the fact that many reputable tuition centres are located in urban areas, heightens social inequality in terms of access to quality education. A study of the tuition industry

[61]In speaking to young people, I discovered that on average, a private one-to-one tuition class costs between 4,000 and 7,000 rupees (£40-20) per month, depending on the tutor's experience. Smaller group classes cost in the region of 2,000-4,000 rupees (£10-20) per month.

in Sri Lanka by Pallegedara (2012: 382) reveals that almost 41% of urban households have invested in tuition classes, compared with just over 19% of rural households. Despite tuition forming a large part of young people's schooling experiences in Sri Lanka, many young people in rural areas or lower-income households simply do not have the option of accessing additional learning tools to aid them with the increasingly competitive exams.

Image 6.3.1a: Young people in Kandy leaving a tuition academy

Source: Batatota, L (2018)

Image 6.3.1b: A small kadai (shop) in Kandy with tuition advertising

Image 6.3.1c: Image of tuition advertisements on Kandy–Jaffna Highway

Source: Batatota, L (2018)

As I will discuss in detail over the course of this chapter, tuition provides young people with additional educational capital to facilitate their aspirations. Financial investment by parents, combined with young people's time spent in tuition, results in the 'domestic transmission of cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986: 48). Bourdieu argues that cultural capital and the opportunities for 'cultural consumption' are further amplified through unequal spatial distribution (1984: 105). This is apparent when examining the difference in how easily urban youth are able to access tuition in Sri Lanka compared to their rurally situated peers, emphasising the social imbalance of access to education and learning opportunities along geographical lines as well as through social stratification. As discussed in Chapter Four, there are already clear inequalities surrounding state education, with national schools being better funded and resourced than provincial schools (Pallegedara, 2012). Tuition, then, adds an additional layer of structural inequality, resulting in already privileged youth receiving further learning opportunities.

Understanding issues surrounding the accessibility of tuition in Sri Lanka is critical, as the tuition industry has come to operate in parallel to formal schooling. With scholars like Lindberg (2010) calling for further analysis into understanding the type of schools children in Sri Lanka end up in and why, there is an urgent need to extend this analysis to also cover the tuition industry. The types of tuition that young people and parents in Kandy opt for provides useful insight into the range of educational opportunities that are available. This offers a deeper understanding into the structural inequalities that arise through education. Exploring the type and size of tuition classes provides a basis from which to extend this analysis.

For many of the young people accessing tuition in Kandy, the size of classes largely differs depending on the subjects taught, as well as the year group. For traditionally 'academic' subjects such as the sciences, maths and economics, the demand is higher, particularly at A-Level. As such, one may find that these lessons take place in larger halls. Pallegedara's (2012) analysis of tuition in Sri Lanka reveals that hall tuition classes tend to cover senior secondary stages of schooling. He explains that this type of tuition is often most popular amongst O-Level and A-Level students, with university lecturers delivering classes (ibid).

During a conversation with a student of a reputable Christian school at Sipma Education, I was informed that many of the larger tuition centres employ novelists and politicians as

well as civil servants, as these attract more students on the assumption that tutors are indeed 'experts.' The student explained that in her English Literature class at Sipma, there were around 30 students, which she explained "[This is] nothing…in the Science stream there are like 1,000 students per class. We are lucky!" The student went on to inform me that she had attended the hall tuition in her first year of A-Levels, after finding out that a prominent Sri Lankan poet and writer delivered the classes. However, due to the reputability of the tutor, the fees were too high for her parents to cover the costs of tuition. She then settled for her current tutor, who had a portfolio of students with high pass rates but charged considerably less. In an analysis of educational reforms in Sri Lanka, Little (2011) briefly discusses the notability of tuition masters. Like the anecdote provided by the student at Sipma, Little reveals that some tutors hold positions within government departments, such as textbook writers, while others are politicians. As tutors already possess social capital, whether through their networks or cultural capital through their occupation, selecting the right tutor can serve young people favourably.

Like the student at Sipma, many young people and their parents have to employ strategies in the hope of facilitating educational success, depending on how much they are willing or able to invest in tuition. My own field observations highlighted the extent to which tuition has become an intrinsic part of young people's schooling experience. As I will demonstrate in the following section, tuition becomes a tool for 'extending learning' which operates in parallel to formal schooling across the Global South, and increasingly in the Global North (Bray, 2007).

Pallegedara (2011) explains the growth of and need for tuition in Sri Lanka as a result of the difficulty of passing the Grade 5 scholarship, O-Level and A-Level examinations. As he describes, national school examinations are highly competitive, leading many parents to resort to tuition in the hope of securing their child a good grade. With a new space being carved out by this need to compete for high results, further implications have arisen surrounding tuition in Sri Lanka (ibid). This is largely due to tuition classes and centres operating independently across urban settings, with no affiliation or link to government departments. Much like tuition in Mauritius (Foondun, 2002), Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan (Bray & Kwok, 2003) and Singapore (Kwan-Terry, 1991), the response of the Sri Lankan state has largely been to enable these institutions to operate in parallel to public education.

In 2003, the National Education Commission incorporated into the Educational Policy a proposal prohibiting students and teachers from attending or delivering tuition during school hours. It states:

> As the demand for private tuition has been fuelled by the competitive examination ethos and the poor quality of teaching, resulting also in the conduct of private classes during school time, it is necessary not only to ensure qualitative improvement in teaching in schools but also to introduce and enforce regulations to prohibit:
>
> (i) students in the formal school system participating in private tuition classes during school hours, and
>
> (ii) teachers conducting private tuition classes during school hours (National Education Commission, 2003: 19).

Despite the state theoretically addressing the increased presence of tuition, and the implications for young people's school attendance in particular, it became evident during my fieldwork that the onus for upholding this ban on attending or delivering tuition classes was placed firmly on students and teachers. This was manifested by schools banning young people from tuition classes.

From the school's perspective, this strategy was a way to manage poor student attendance through punitive measures. Paradoxically, the state's response to the crisis of tuition led to an amendment in the New Education Act for General Education in 2009 that identified tuition as a 'private partnership.' This suggested that through collaboration between formal schooling and tuition, both parties could facilitate the achievement of national educational goals (those of high literacy and pass rates) as well as achieving the 'core curriculum and maintaining national standards' (National Education Commission, 2009: 14).

The National Education Committee (NEC), however, recognises the implications of private tuition operating freely, particularly around the drop in attendance in schools. A report by the NEC states that 'it is well known that there is an alarming drop of attendance in Grade 13 classes in many parts of the island, especially in the latter part of the year'

(2009: 123). However, these concerns have not led to any significant changes in regulation of the tuition industry.

The state, however, has implemented various strategies to manage the increased absence of students from school due to tuition, particularly in the run-up to exams. In November 2018, prior to the national O-Level exams, which were due to take place in December, the Department of Examinations (DoE) placed a blanket ban on tuition classes, seminars and workshops for O-Level students, from 27th November until 12th December (News 1st, 2018). The premise of this ban was to address the absenteeism of students who would skip school to go to last-minute privately-run revision classes. Despite the ban being in place, in reality such policies had little effect on the ground.

It became increasingly obvious through conversations with Madam Lalitha, the Principal and teachers at Mayadevi that tuition was responsible for the high absence of students during school time. Despite students needing an attendance of 80% in order to sit national exams, absence, particularly during exam time, remained an endemic issue, which the MoE attempted to address (Liyanage, 2018). One student in the Science stream, who was due to sit her A-Level exams in August of 2018, told me, "There should be an attendance of 80%, but [the school] don't take it into account. That must be because most of the students are not coming to school in the final year, mostly due to tuition classes. So, if they consider that attendance thing, there'll be no students to sit for the exam."

The ban put in place by the DoE sought to address frustrations expressed by Principals and schools at this absenteeism. As the student alluded, however, the ban did not serve as a deterrent for missing school, despite extensive media coverage - the reality was that young people continued to attend tuition. The two-week ban addressed the concerns expressed by schools around student absence and attempted to placate the schools experiencing the largest inconvenience. However, neither the schools nor the DoE were able to successfully implement or police the ban, due to tuition operating as private educational enterprises. Students would continue to access these classes, with the backing of their parents.

A Grade 11 student at Mayadevi informed me that her tutor had resorted to conducting lessons in his home during the ban. She explained that her parents knew that she would be missing school, but this was justified because she was able to receive one-on-one

attention by the tutor, which outweighed the implications of her missing school. Since lessons had finished for the term, and revision was taking place, students preferred attending private classes to revise for the upcoming exams.

Such examples reveal that tuition, in some cases, overrides the role of the school, with students openly missing school for last-minute tuition classes. The following section will examine the need for tuition among young people in Kandy. I argue that tuition is not a new phenomenon, but rather a traditional part of young people's schooling experience.

6.3 Tuition as Tradition: The Need for Supplementary Education

My own recollections of schooling in Sri Lanka in the 1990s involve tuition. My tutor, a woman in her late 50s, would come to our home every week to help me with maths and Sinhala, my weakest subjects, when I was in Grade Four. My parents were aware that my knowledge of Sinhala was not enough to pass the competitive scholarship to secure a place at a national school. They therefore found a tutor, who - unbeknownst to them - put the fear of god in me. I recall sitting at our dining table after school, attempting to do the math calculations she had set me and being afraid of being struck on the knuckles with a wooden ruler if I made a mistake. Having revisited how schooling works in relation to my PhD fieldwork, I came to realise that many other children and young people had similar experiences.

Eight months after having left Sri Lanka, in January 2019, I returned to my field site in Kandy, where I revisited the host family that I had stayed with during the start of my fieldwork. As I arrived at their home, I was greeted by 15-year-old Osha, who had started Grade 10 that month - an important educational stage in the Sri Lanka educational system. Next year, he would undertake his General Certificate of Education (GCE) O-Levels exam, which, depending on his mark, would enable him to pursue A-Levels and then university. Osha's hopes of becoming an engineer were already being set in motion by the subjects he and his parents had elected for him to study. His parents' involvement in his chosen subjects reflects the experiences of many of the students at Mayadevi.

Parents in Sri Lanka place great importance on education and its promise, which translates to investment of time and money, but also personal involvement in their

children's education. In turn, young people rely on the guidance of parents and teachers (Hettige, Mayer & Salih, 2004). This parental investment is often formed out a desire for a better life for their children, away from the hardships they themselves experienced when growing up. Jakimow's (2016) study of educational aspirations amongst youth in Telangana, South India, similarly reveals that parents' aspirations for their children are based on their own lived experiences. As one of Jakimow's respondents explained, 'all we know is how to do agriculture. You asked me why am I sending my children to school and I told you they should not have to work as hard as I am' (ibid: 15). Much like Jakimow's participants, Osha's parents perceived education as central in their aspiration for a better life. Their involvement in Osha's education becomes a way in which they could facilitate the 'pathway' to ensuring the best possible chances of educational success, and thereby success in life, for their son.

Selecting subjects with (or, as is often the case, on behalf of) their children is governed by parents' aspirations for those children's future careers. Often, parents are unable to directly assist young people with their schoolwork, particularly if the child is enrolled in the English medium. Crivello (2011) touches on how illiteracy creates a cultural divide which prevents parents from supporting their children in their schooling. This is reflective of the experiences of young people like Osha, whose parents find it difficult to help him with schoolwork. As akka[62] explained to me, "Laura, his homework is very difficult for me to understand. The other day I was seeing the questions [of a sample term paper] and I didn't know how to help Osha".

Instances like this reinforce tuition as a necessary measure from parents' perspectives. For akka, her inability to help Osha was ameliorated by her and her husband's investment in tuition.[63] This demonstrates how parents exchange different forms of capital (financial into educational) as a way to facilitate their children's educational aspirations. Bourdieu identifies the malleable ways in which capital can be transformed into its different forms. As he explains, 'most material types of capital, those which are economic…can present themselves in the immaterial form of cultural capital or social capital and vice versa'

[62] *Akka* translates to older sister in Sinhala. I will be using this when referring to Osha's mother, Manik. The term is often used for individuals who are older and marks a sign of respect.
[63] It is important include the caveat that Osha's parents had the financial capital to be able to invest in his tuition.

(1986: 46). This exchange, then, produces symbolic profits in the form of different types of capital (ibid).

During my return visit to Kandy, I became aware of the shift in schoolwork for Osha. Where he used to spend his afternoons playing with his younger siblings in the garden, flying kites with friends in the hazy afternoons after school and going to his daily cricket practice, much of his time was now spent between school and tuition classes. Often, I would return home in the evening, having spent the day visiting Mayadevi and its alumni, to find that Osha was still in tuition. Some evenings, this would be as late as 9:30 pm. For akka, tuition was necessary. As noted in my fieldnotes:

> *One evening, while akka and I were preparing dinner, I realised Osha hadn't been home from school yet and it was approaching six in the evening. When I asked akka where he was, she explained that he had back-to-back tuition classes, beginning with Commerce at 2:30 in the afternoon until 4:00 and then English from 4:30 to 6:30. Akka explained that since I left last April, Osha's grades had fallen quite dramatically. Adding to the pressure was that he had just begun Grade 10 and would be sitting his O-Level exams in December 2020, which, according to her, did not leave Osha with much time to get good grades. She and Imesh had now agreed to send him to tuition classes in English, Maths, Commerce and Sinhala - Osha's weakest subjects. Akka went on to explain that although this would be costly for the family, she was reassured that the tuition would be enough to ensure that Osha did well in his exams* (Fieldnotes, January 2019).

Osha's increased workload and schedule echoed the experiences of the students at Mayadevi I had spent time with during my fieldwork eight months earlier. Like them, Osha was expected (by his parents) to study as much as he could, and beyond school hours. This was not a priority set by Osha, but rather his parents, who had begun worrying about the amount of 'catching up' that he needed in order to do well in his O-Level exams. Their expectations meant Osha was now required to dedicate his free time to studying. For Osha, however, prioritising studying outside of school was overridden by his desire to continue the cricket practice that took place after school every day. The fact that Osha did not do well in his term test was a further reason why his parents felt like he needed

tuition. For akka and Imesh, like the parents of the students at Mayadevi, tuition was a necessity, especially if Osha was going to do well in his O-Level exams and be able to pursue A-Levels.

Osha's experience serves to highlight two key things. The first is how tuition becomes an intrinsic part of a young person's schooling experience, which I have demonstrated in previous sections. The second is why tuition becomes a necessity for many young people in Sri Lanka. With the state's lacklustre response to regulating the tuition industry, it is no surprise that the demand for tuition remains widespread, with many young people and their parents seeing this educational 'tool' as necessary. Whether in conversation with akka, who saw tuition as a solution to her son's poor grades, or Amila, a local tuk tuk driver who informed me that his daughter needed private classes to pass her Grade 5 scholarship exam, parental concerns surrounding competitive examinations were a popular talking point during my fieldwork.

As discussed in Chapter Five, young people's aspirations for educational success rely on good exam results. To obtain a place at a reputable school and then a government university are common aspirations among young people in Sri Lanka (Gunatilaka, Mayer & Vodopivec, 2010). In order to meet these aspirations, many parents look to tuition as a vehicle by which to secure good pass grades.

Statistics collected by the DoE reveal that 8% of students who sat their A-Level exams in 2017 failed. Closer examination of this data reveals that half failed mathematics (50%),[64] 60% failed General English, and 31% failed Information Communication Technology (National Evaluation & Testing Service, 2017). These findings raise important questions around the very nature of examinations in Sri Lanka: why do so many young people fail their examinations, despite attending schooling and private tuition?

As I discovered in speaking to young people and teachers, exam questions have been rendered difficult by the DoE as a way of preventing too many young people from getting good marks, which would undermine the All-Island Ranking system currently operating across the country (which will be discussed in Chapter Eight). The reality, however, is that many of the students do not learn the entire syllabus in school, leaving them with

[64]To pass O-Levels, students are required to obtain pass grades in core subjects: Maths, Science, History, Religion and Languages (Sinhala or Tamil and English).

gaps in their knowledge. This, combined with young people choosing to study in English, has made passing exams incredibly difficult.

Consequently, the prospect of failure is too high a risk for parents like Osha's to ignore. During my fieldwork, parents and teachers all too often criticised the unrealistic threshold of pass grades set by the DoE, lamenting that their children were forced to go to tuitions to make sure they had more chance of passing the highly competitive examinations. Expressions of these concerns were not confined to the home and school, however. A popular topic of conversation by parents at family gatherings or events that I attended revolved around the pressures of schooling and exams. I realised that many mothers in particular, often involved in managing their children's education, bonded over sharing stories of their children's exam results, increased workload and the 'head stress' that all of this brought on both the young people and themselves.

The tuition network is a complex system which, as demonstrated by the limited studies conducted across the Global South, operates in the 'shadow' of formal schooling (Bray, 2007, 2009). The nature of a decentralised educational institution suggests that it continues to operate independently of state structures. With tuition perceived as a 'private partnership' by the state, its exponential growth, resulting in a highly lucrative industry, is not surprising. A World Bank report reveals that 36% of a household's educational budget in Sri Lanka is spent on private tutoring alone (Dundar *et al.*, 2017: 113).

Returning to Sri Lanka as an adult to discover the extent to which tuition had become part of the schooling experience was something that I had not considered prior to fieldwork. Parents, teachers and young people themselves saw tuition as a *necessity*. Parents that I spoke with recollected their own experiences of going to tuition classes when they were in school. My father, who was born in Colombo in the 50s, told me how he and his siblings went to tuition almost every day. When I asked him how my *acchiamma* and *sia*[65] could afford to pay for tuition for nine children, he simply shrugged and told me that as parents, they felt it was their duty to make sure their children got a good education. Working overtime, taking out loans and saving where possible were strategies that my own grandparents adopted to facilitate the prospect of educational

[65] *Acchiamma* is the paternal grandmother in Sinhala and *sia* is grandfather.

success. Underpinning these efforts is the notion that a better education will result a better future for young people and their parents.

6.4 Decision Making and Parental Investment in Private Tuition

For reasons outlined in the previous section, parents of students at Mayadevi were happy to invest in tuition classes for their children. This was reflective of the student body at Mayadevi, who largely came from middle-income households, and whose families could therefore afford to invest surplus amounts in tuition. Almost all of the girls who were completing their A-Levels during my fieldwork attended classes, explaining that their parents allowed them to choose which tutor they preferred to go to.

My core group in 13B informed me that their parents had allowed them to find out about which tutor was 'best,' which meant students had the agency to choose a tutor based on their level of expertise. Unlike Osha's parents, who were involved in all aspects of schooling, parents of the students in 13B, who were at a different and later stage of their educational journey, were quite happy for their children to determine the suitability of their own tutors. This spoke to the capacity that young people had acquired in making decisions surrounding their education, now that they were approaching adulthood.

This capacity to make decisions surrounding an important educational stage was facilitated by the students upholding the ideal of a *honde lamai* (good child), discussed in Chapter Five. As Thilini informed me, she had acquired the ability to make choices about the tuition master because her parents trusted her judgement, which in turn granted her the capacity to make decisions on the type of education she perceived to be beneficial. She explained, "They are fine as long as I'm happy with the teachings. In my case they don't interfere much in my [school] life as they completely trust me." These small choices importantly contributed to Thilini's process of 'becoming,' wherein she was beginning to make certain choices for herself, without the aid of her parents.

As a result of this agency, the girls paid great attention to finding the right tutor. They began by informing themselves, speaking to peers who had gone to tutors already and looking into who had the highest pass rates. Indeed, many of the students in Grade 13 chose their tuition class through recommendations by their peers, bringing to light the

role that social networks play in the choices that young people come to make. Importantly, these instances provide young people with opportunities for decision-making, which grant them the experience of determining the type of education they see as valuable. However, these occurrences are an exception, in comparison with other observations, as young people at Mayadevi are often not considered to be 'adult' enough to make choices that may impact their future.

For younger students such as Osha, introduced earlier in this chapter, parental involvement in determining a suitable tutor is often the norm. Speaking to akka, I was informed that her choice of Osha's English tutor was based on his employment with the British Council in Kandy. As akka explained, "He knew very well how to make sure the children learnt about elocution. This is important for us, Laura." The tutor's credentials meant that akka was happy to pay a surplus amount for the added benefit of the cultural capital that he possessed. As suggested by Little (2011), the notability of the tutor can facilitate the type of capital that it is presumed youth will inherit. Selecting the tutor for Osha on the basis of his affiliation to the British Council was a tactical choice, or 'cultural investment' by akka and her husband (Bourdieu, 1984: 104).

Such forms of investment also reveal that for parents, sending their children to tuition holds a form of social pressure. Bray (2009) illustrates how investment in tuition by parents is increased through a sense of anxiety shaped by social pressure on parents to do the best for their children. To return to akka's example, investment in a reputable tutor with high credentials serves to reassure her and her husband that they are doing the best for their child. Importantly, investment in education in the context of Sri Lanka also becomes a way in which parents like akka and Imesh assert their social positioning, demonstrating that they are able to pay for a reputable tutor.

At the forefront of akka's mind, tuition is a way of ensuring that Osha does well in his exams, but also a way of preparing him for employment through acquiring a working knowledge of English. For akka and the parents of students at Mayadevi, tuition is viewed as an investment worth making for their children's futures. Many parents recognise the competitive post-schooling landscape and the challenges that young people face. The increased competition at entrance exams and the continued poor quality of education in

government schools have therefore fuelled the tuition business for a number of decades, as those parents who can afford to pay for tuition willingly do so.[66]

Private tuition, then, is reflective of the socio-economic stratification that permeates educational institutions in Sri Lanka. There is a clear disparity between those who can afford tuition and those who cannot. The economic capital required to be able to make such investments has led to concerns raised across the limited literature on private tuition. Jeffrey *et al.* (2004) and Corbett (2016), for example, both cite the costs of tuition as a factor affecting young people's participation in formal schooling, though neither study examines tuition in depth. The prospect of investing money into additional educational tools is often perceived to be a burden amongst economically disadvantaged families, especially since this may not guarantee occupational success (Jeffrey *et al.*, 2004). Froerer (2012: 344) has also extensively discussed the barriers to schooling amongst female youth in Chhattisgarh in an attempt to challenge discourses alluding to education as a 'liberating force.'

As suggested earlier in this chapter, young people from rural areas have greater difficulty in accessing tuition. This is in part due to the geographical locations in which tuition centres are situated, but also because many families in rural areas may not have the economic capital to make investments in their children's education, particularly as access to regular employment is far more limited in these areas than it is in urban areas (Lindberg, 2010). For students like Dilki, Thilini and Osha, tuition was possible because of their parents' social or economic positioning, which granted them the option of being able to invest in tuition.

In relation to this observation, Lindberg's study on educational opportunities in Southern Sri Lanka provides much-needed ethnographic evidence of the role played by economic status in parents' investment in tuition. He states that 38% of households send their children to tuition classes (2010), explaining that 'in the 45 households visited, 16% send some children but not all they would want to send. In 29% of the households they do not send any children to private tuition, although they would like to' (ibid: 144). It is clear that, as Lindberg demonstrates, the scale of tuition young people receive is based on

[66]It is important to reiterate that while class plays an important factor in access to education and learning opportunities, this did not affect the young people that I spent time with, who are among the more privileged middle classes. It is nonetheless important to acknowledge the educational inequity that arises through schooling.

parents' willingness and ability to pay. For young people from families who have the additional economic capital, private tuition may extend beyond just the subjects in which the young person is not doing so well.

Investment in tuition requires parents to consider the academic areas in which their child requires the most support. I initially found out about the cost of such classes when speaking to Osha's mother, who informed me that because Osha now required tuition for three lessons, this cost the household approximately 13,000 rupees a month (the equivalent of £54). To put this into context, the average household income for a family in Kandy is 54,000 rupees a month. The Household Income and Expenditure survey (Department of Census & Statistics of Sri Lanka, 2016) reveals that almost 6% of all non-food expenditure is spent on education, suggesting that aside from housing, transport and communication, education is one of the highest areas of expenditure[67] in Sri Lankan households.

The students at Mayadevi who were pursuing their A-Levels in three subjects spent, on average, 2,000 rupees per subject per month. Though this was far lower than the amount that Osha's parents were required to pay for one-to-one tuition, it did highlight that the tutor would be making a considerable monthly earning, receiving that amount for each of the approximately 20 students in his class. This level of income fuelled the disdain of schoolteachers, who considered tutors to be part of the 'tuition mafia.'

As suggested, for many of the young people I met at Mayadevi, who came from middle class backgrounds, access to tuition was not a barrier. This spoke to the social positioning of the student body at Mayadevi, who had the privileges of belonging to an ethno-religious majority group, but also possessed the capital associated with belonging to middle class households. Throughout the course of my fieldwork, however, I met several young people living in Kandy who were unable to access tuition.

While volunteering at a local charity in Kandy called Kids Reach, I met a group of young people who went to local provincial schools. I began delivering English 'tuition' lessons once a week, following a request from the founder of the charity, who explained that many of the young people accessing Kids Reach went to provincial schools and needed

[67]It is important to acknowledge that the survey does not stipulate whether this educational expenditure is for tuition or mainstream or private schooling. However, considering the free education across the island, one can safely assume that the expenditure represents tuition.

some additional support surrounding their studies. For the five young people who came to the centre every Tuesday afternoon, the majority of the lesson revolved around recapping what should have been covered in school.

I discovered, in speaking to Nimal and Shantha, two 14-year-old boys in Grade 9, that frequent teacher absence meant they did not cover a large part of the syllabus. In addition to this, large classroom sizes meant neither Nimal nor Shantha, who went to the same provincial school, was able to gain support from their schoolteachers. Both of the boys' fathers worked as day labourers, and their mothers as part-time *Dumbara* weavers,[68] which provided additional income that went to cover household expenses. Since neither family earned enough to send their children to tuition classes, the hour-long tuition sessions at Kids Reach allowed both boys to spend some time working through their textbooks and homework. These examples bring to light why tuition is, in part, a condition of the economic system in Sri Lanka.

The subsequent section will examine the symbolic importance of tuition in the eyes of young people and their parents. I then go on to discuss young people's engagement with tuition and the tensions that arise as a result of this.

6.5 The 'Symbolic' Value of Tuition

With poor-quality education at school level owing to exam-focused learning, teacher absenteeism and large syllabus, some young people resort to tuition as a way of gaining extra learning. Through this emerges different forms of distinction, founded on the possession of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). As I have demonstrated through the examples of Nimal and Shantha, young people from low-income households do not have the financial capital to enhance their educational capital through tuition. In contrast, youth from Mayadevi, as well as young people like Osha, possess the resources to access tuition and further their educational endeavours. This distinction speaks to the reproduction of

[68]*Dumbara* weaving is a community-based activity, linked to caste (through occupational lineage). The weaving of *hana* (a type of hemp) contributes to small collective enterprises formed of weavers from lower class backgrounds. The results are often the popular *padura* (mats), bags or purses, as well as art pieces (Samara, 2016).

social classes, where access to educational opportunities (or lack thereof) reproduces existing social hierarchies.

To draw on Bourdieu, educational capital 'expresses' the economic and social level of the family (1984: 105). Parents then utilise tuition as a marker of their own social positioning; those like akka, who can afford to invest in a reputable tutor, demonstrate their capacity as parents to select the best tutor available. In turn, they use this to bolster their own positioning amongst their peers, often boasting of their children's improved grades as a result of attending a particular tuition centre. Pallegedara (2012) echoes this in his paper by highlighting that increased income of households and intense social competition are drivers of private tutoring. If the system encourages such competitiveness from an early stage, it is no surprise that tuition exists, as it therefore seeks to capitalise on the 'needs' of students who are able and willing to pay. In an exam-focused education system, tuition inevitably becomes part of the process of social differentiation.

Access to tuition, then, involves exercising capital (financial or cultural) in order to pursue educational opportunities outside of schooling. In doing so, young people and their parents reproduce structural inequalities by buying into a shadow educational system (Bray, 2007) built on reproducing the distinction between social classes. Young people who cannot afford private classes are left at a disadvantage, despite having to navigate the same educational playing field as their tuition-going peers. What becomes evident in looking at the education system in Sri Lanka is that educational success is measured through the passing of exams, which becomes a benchmark that is perceived to indicate one's intelligence.

These processes marking success through attainment further heighten educational inequalities, and in turn reproduce the social order (Béteille, 1991). This, combined with calls for rising aspirations among youth, has further heightened the need for tuition: where schooling fails, tuition may suffice (Bray, 2009; Pallegedara, 2011). The reality, however, is that supplementary learning tools such as tuition are limited to young people who possess the cultural capital and finances to be able to engage in such activities, in order to increase their 'value' and consequently be better prepared to compete in an increasingly competitive employment market.

The symbolic value of tuition thus rests on how it facilitates the acquisition of educational capital, which results in the 'symbolic exchange' of different forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986: 51). With the scarcity of youth organisations like Kids Reach, which provide 'underprivileged' youth with additional learning opportunities and skill development, combined with expectations of achieving social mobility through education, young people in Kandy experience increasing pressure to carve out their aspirations in pursuit of becoming someone, with or without the support of their circumstances.

So far, I have examined where tuition fits into a young person's schooling experience. I have argued that for the young people at Mayadevi, tuition becomes a way to acquire additional learning, which in turn results in the acquisition of symbolic capital. Private tuition therefore not only shapes their schooling experience but also grants young people perceived educational capital, resulting in parents' monetary investment.

In addition to its symbolic value, scholars have also highlighted the adverse effects of private tuition. As noted above, one form that these negative effects take is in the focus of students and teachers on exam preparation, which creates 'perverse' incentives for teachers to teach less during the school day (Bray & Kwok, 2003). In Sri Lanka as well as other countries in South Asia and Africa, income-generating opportunities for teachers arise as a result of poor pay and employment benefits. Bray (2009) highlights the link between poor salary and incentives to teach privately in former Soviet countries and in Eastern Europe. He demonstrates how the economic decline of the 1990s led many teachers to earn extra income through tutoring as a way of staying above the poverty line.

Such issues became apparent to me while conducting fieldwork at Mayadevi. Though the majority of teachers at Mayadevi do not openly admit to giving private classes - as this is officially prohibited by the MoE - some, such as Anoji and Muditha among others, confided in me that they give classes to students as a way of subsiding their low salary. Indeed, many teachers at Mayadevi have to subsidise low pay with alternative employment options that provide them with the flexibility of earning as well as being able to look after their children at home.

During a conversation with Muditha, she explained that when she does deliver private classes in her home, she selects the students she deems the 'brightest.' Through this

selection process, Muditha can dedicate her time to students she believes are worthy of the extra lessons, and uses this time to cover lesson plans from school and give students additional notes that are not covered in the teacher's manual. Of course, these practices have considerable ethical implications on a number of levels, particularly the way that teachers 'cherry pick' students from their class based on their educational competency, leaving students who may need further support from teachers at a disadvantage. Such instances of the role of teachers in heightening social inequality through private tutoring have been examined by Bray (2003, 2007), Pallegedara (2011), Dang & Rogers (2008) and Foondun (2002), who identify how tuition de-incentivises teachers.

As intimated above, tuition has a danger of leading to social stratification by heightening inequalities among students. In her examination of tuition in Sri Lanka, Cole (2017) suggests a clear relationship between young people from 'educated' and 'less-educated' households and the number of hours each household invests in sending their children to private classes. She explains:

> Advantaged students are likely to be tutored for more hours per week, in more expensive and smaller classes, and the class is more likely to be offered by a private tutor instead of a schoolteacher. All of these characteristics are typically associated with higher academic performance in education research, which could suggest advantaged students' exam scores benefit more from tutoring than disadvantaged students' scores, causing educational stratification (Cole, 2017: 145).

For many of the students of Mayadevi, who possess higher social and cultural capital than young people who attend provincial schools, concerns around access to tuition did not arise in discussions. Their social and ethnic background, combined with attendance of one of the most prestigious girls' schools in Kandy, suggested they possessed certain privileges that enabled them with ready access to tuition. When speaking about tuition across the different grades, I rarely came across students who did not go to tuition classes. Those that were selected to attend the school on the basis of disadvantaged backgrounds received special grants from the Ministry of Education and from organisations such as Educate Lanka to enable them to access tuition.

With tuition forming an important part of a young person's schooling experience, I have demonstrated how young people and their parents come to perceive tuition as a necessary measure in order to do better in their schooling. As discussed, parents adopt strategies to facilitate access to tuition, whether this is by working overtime or finding local charities that provide free tuition classes.

The next section shifts focus to young people's engagement within these two parallel education systems, in order to understand the tensions that arise as a result. I discuss how tuition breaks the boundaries put into place by formal schooling, allowing young people to engage with different learning processes. I also discuss how youth respond to this by granting 'expertise' to tutors over their schoolteachers.

6.6 Navigating Tensions Between Tuition and Schooling

Thus far, this chapter has examined the implications surrounding tuition - largely the heightening of social inequality through education and further distinction between those who can afford tuition and those who cannot (Bourdieu, 1984). I have examined how, through tuition, youth gain the opportunity to acquire additional educational capital to facilitate their aspirations. This, then, speaks to the myth of free education in Sri Lanka.

I discussed in the Introduction to this thesis how the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) has historically attempted to eradicate structural barriers hindering access to education for all (Little, 2011). In recent times, however, education has become a politicised state apparatus that reproduces structural and social inequalities (Levinson & Holland, 1996; Althusser, 2001). This can be noted through the governance of provincial and national schools, or through the highly selective government university criteria, which will be discussed in Chapter Eight. Through these processes, the notion of free education has been undermined by the growth of the tuition industry.

Despite legitimate concerns raised about the tuition industry, it is nonetheless an important tool that many young people across the island want to access. During my fieldwork, I realised that students themselves do not value school-based exam preparation. Among the older students at Mayadevi, schooling did not provide them with sufficient learning, leading many to rely on their tuition classes. Because of this, students

must negotiate whether to engage in schooling or tuition, depending on which they perceive to be more valuable with respect to their exam success and future aspirations. As I will demonstrate, perceived poor-quality education in schools, combined with increasingly difficult examination processes, has led youth to resort to tuition (Bray & Kwok, 2003; Lindberg, 2010; Pallegedara, 2012). This has resulted in the value of formal schooling also being increasingly undermined by tuition.

The negotiation of the right to education was an important observation I made in the build-up to the A-Level exams at Mayadevi. Fieldnotes recorded in February 2018 reveal the extent of student absence, which, according to many young people, is a result of poor schooling:

> *This school term has been marked by the absence of A-Level students. Though Grades 6 to 11 continue to come to school, there have been only a handful of occasions where I have been in a full classroom with Grade 13s. Thinking back to a few months ago, I remember having conversations with girls in Grade 13 when I first joined, where they told me that they wouldn't be coming to school in the new year because they had tuition classes to attend. As with the previous month, low attendance is accepted by teachers within Mayadevi, but also by higher educational administrators. In speaking to form tutors, subject teachers and parents, there is almost a shrug-off approach, implying that this is just the way that it is. Almost on a daily basis, I have found that absence continues to be a key theme, with girls now going to revision classes and skipping school entirely for up to three days in a row. From the start of February, girls maybe come in two or three days a week. For those in the Arts stream, this means that Tuesdays and Fridays are for all-day tuition classes, where they do revision of poems on the Tuesday and practice papers on the Friday, where they are allotted three hours to write a paper and then go through answers with the tutor.*

Teachers at Mayadevi also seem to take advantage of the lack of attendance and often suspend classes if there are only a handful of students. Many consider that teaching to a half-empty classroom is a waste of their time, as it would require them to revisit the lesson

later for the rest of the class. As one Science teacher explained to me, “I can’t repeat [the lesson] for everyone so they must learn to come. I will only teach a select few then.” On some days, I found teachers spending the day in the teachers’ room, occasionally popping into their classes to assess whether more students had joined.

For the students who are present, the loss of a lesson is not something they mourn; rather, they use this time to catch up on outstanding homework, nap or hang out with their friends. Discussing student absence with teachers, it became apparent that they know that students miss school to go to private classes, but tell me, “What can we do? These students don’t want to come to school” (A-Level Japanese teacher). Despite lamenting the inconvenience of a ‘wasted’ lesson, rarely did I find a teacher acknowledging that student absence may be a result of the way that the educational system is structured in Sri Lanka, or indeed how teaching is conducted at Mayadevi. Many instead explained that students were led to believe that tuition offered them a greater chance of passing their exams.

Senior members of staff and the Principal also acknowledged the demand for tuition by students and used assemblies as a way of warning students against going to ‘classes’ during school hours. While I was conducting fieldwork, the Principal called for a special assembly, following a particularly bad bout of student absence. Madam Lalitha used this occasion to remind students about their duties of attending school: “School is where you should be learning from. Tuition should be something extra, but not your main source of learning.”

From the student’s perspectives, however, I discovered that going to tuition classes was a way for them to choose the type of education they wanted to receive. With many of the older students perceiving schooling as no longer sufficient, their engagement with tuition results in negotiating the type of education they deem to be beneficial. This in turn creates tensions between schoolteachers and students. One key area of contention was due to teachers often discovering that students had covered the syllabus ahead of the schooling schedule. This resulted in students being disengaged in class as they had already covered the material in tuition. I also observed that students frequently did not read the material in their handbook prior to their school lessons, and later found out that this was because they had covered it the previous week in tuition. Such instances echo concerns highlighted by scholars such as Bray (2009) and Foondun (2002) who highlight how tuition can de-incentivise young people’s engagement with schooling.

Importantly, discussions with students at Mayadevi about the difference in teaching styles revealed that students capitalise on both sets of expertise as a way of acquiring knowledge, albeit taught from different perspectives and in different contexts. While students recognise that both their schoolteachers and private tutors rely on dictating, often through rote memorisation techniques - requiring students to memorise facts and definitions in order to be able to recite these when needed (Marambe *et al.*, 2012; Manan *et al.*, 2015) - they also see that tuition allows flexibility in how they learn, as it provides them with opportunities to interrupt teaching to ask questions and present their own understanding of a topic.[69] Muditha, the Head of IT at Mayadevi, explained her frustrations surrounding the teaching and learning culture in schooling:

> *It's like they don't know how to think. We spoon-feed them and spoon-feed them [so] that they just come, sit there and wait for us to tell them what to write. They memorise that and learn that and that's how they learn. They don't know how to think. You ask them a question and they just stare* (Muditha, recorded in Fieldnotes, January 2018)

For many young people, learning, whether through their teachers or tutors, involves writing down statements from a person of authority. Rote memorisation through dictation forms a large part of the learning process across many schools in Sri Lanka (Marambe *et al.*, 2012).

This learning phenomenon is not limited to Sri Lanka alone. Jayadeva (2019) examines the ways in which teaching takes place in English medium schools in urban India. She highlights that the teaching methods there, which involve multiple choice exercises, rewriting of sections of a text and dictation, speak of a culture in which teaching reflects 'pedagogical authoritarianism' (2019: 162). As Jayadeva explains, 'most subjects [are] taught, tested, and learned,' revealing that teaching is structured in a rigid format requiring students to follow a formula (ibid: 162). The sense of pedagogical authoritarianism in Sri Lanka, therefore, creates conflict between teachers and tutors regarding whose knowledge is 'worthier,' resulting in students having to select differing answers to write depending on whom they are writing for.

[69]It is important to highlight that students are taught to learn through dictation. Very rarely do teachers and private tutors engage in group work or even discussions. This is an endemic issue across public education in Sri Lanka, a subject deserving of its own dedicated thesis.

The following excerpt from my fieldnotes exemplifies these tensions between school and tuition:

> *I asked Nadika what would happen if Madam (schoolteacher) found out what Sir taught them in that [tuition] class. Nadika responded by saying, 'In the beginning I used Sir's answer and [Madam] asked me where I got this answer from, telling me, "This isn't my answer. Where did you get this answer from?" so from there I only describe nature in her essays because she doesn't give marks otherwise.' The girls, then, have to manage these different expectations and pick and choose what will benefit them. This means having to constantly be aware about what they learn to make sure they replicate this in their homework or tests for the right people* (Fieldnotes, February 2018).

Examples like this highlight the precariousness of engaging in two parallel educational systems, wherein students are required to manage the expectations of their schoolteachers and tutors while capitalising on both sets of knowledge. I became aware of this tension when speaking to Priya, who warned me of the 'war' between her tutor and teacher. She explained, "They don't like each other. Sir says he wants to accept only his answers and Madam wants to accept only her answers."

Such instances reveal how students exercise their negotiating capacity by being selective in their answers in order to appease both their teachers and tutors. For example, students like Nadika and Priya gauge answers they use when writing essays or homework for school, because they are penalised for not using the 'right' answer given by that teacher. If they accidentally quote the private tutor, as was the case in a term test paper, the teacher will scold them for not giving the correct answer. Despite the girls navigating and choosing the type of education they think is best, they are penalised in the long run for not adhering to one teacher or the other. Negotiating between the types of learning requires students to be strategic, learning to compartmentalise sets of knowledge and information and apply them depending on who they are learning from at a given time. Underpinning such strategies lies their dissatisfaction with the teaching at the school, which indicates why young people and their parents decide to pursue tuition.

Tutors also become agents of conflict by asserting their positionality as 'experts' in a subject area. I observed how tutors challenge things that schoolteachers have taught students, on a number of occasions dismissing things that girls had been asked to remember. Also in contrast to the schoolteachers, the tutors speak openly about sex, relationships and other subjects considered taboo in the schooling environment, adding to their perceived 'expertise.'

In contrast, I became aware that in many cases, teachers at Mayadevi did not prepare for their classes. Instead, they would consult the syllabus, which provided a sample lesson plan, including exercises for students to complete. Since many students in 13B were at an important milestone in their educational journey, the lack of preparation by some of their teachers led students to choose to miss school, which they perceived as unworthy of their time. This created a tension between the school's expectation that students would attend school and the students' disillusionment with the reality of the poor-quality teaching that took place.

As learning in the school requires students to recite, there is little chance to interrogate or even ask questions, as such opportunities are not made available by their schoolteacher. Teachers recognise this, and many are becoming increasingly frustrated by the learning styles that students have adopted, as demonstrated through the example of Muditha. Though dictation and recitation are also features of the tuition classes, the difference lies in that students are given the freedom to ask questions and propose answers in their tuition classes.

The focus nonetheless remains memorising answers in order to be able to reproduce these in the exam, although tutors do engage in informal discussions when delivering their lessons. For the students, this becomes an important element of why they value the tutors' lessons, since they are able to interrogate and engage in group discussions, which is rare in the school setting.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, students' dissatisfaction, particularly among the cohort who were due to complete their A-Levels in August 2018, was amplified. For the girls in the Arts stream, the lack of revision classes and opportunities to practise test papers during school became a frequent topic of conversation. This perceived added value of tuition has also been noted by Foondun (2002), who has observed that tuition in Mauritius

provides young people with added assignments and teaching materials. As Foondun highlights, tutors have pressure to maintain student satisfaction in order to keep regular tutees. Providing additional material and test papers as well as creating an open learning environment where students are able to interrupt and ask questions are important for maintaining a high satisfaction rate among their 'clients.'

Accompanying Mayadevi students to their classes at school as well as tuition, I became aware of the gaps in their learning. On numerous occasions I observed that sections of the syllabus had been missed at school but were covered in tuition. On one occasion, Nadika told me:

> *[The English teacher at school] loves nature, so she only talks about nature to us. She even skipped a part [in the book] where there was* [sic] *poachers because she didn't like that. She's very good at describing nature but when it's to do with relationships, she misses this out* (Nadika, recorded in Fieldnotes, February 2018).

Nadika went on to inform me that she and her friends had discovered scenes from the book that the school teacher had omitted from her own text because she felt they were inappropriate, leaving students to flick back and forth in an attempt to follow what was being read. Thilini added, "There was a part in the book where the characters kiss, and Madam just missed two pages from that. We didn't even know until Sir [the private tutor] told us".

Instances like this reveal the subtle processes of censorship within the classroom. With content deemed inappropriate by the teacher, students' learning can be limited to what is considered acceptable and relevant. The teacher then assumes a moral responsibility where censoring becomes an important aspect of maintaining the image of 'good children,' as discussed in Chapters Four and Five. With young people being taught to exercise self-control and behave appropriately, love scenes in novels are perceived as detrimental in upholding the image of purity and respectability.

Such elements of censorship also form part of the reason that the girls go to private classes. As Nadika explained, "Sir talks about relationships. He's good with analysing and telling us about relationships. Parts that the teacher doesn't cover". The censoring

within the schooling space becomes another factor affecting where young people choose to learn. In doing so, they accord expertise to the tutors over teachers.

However, such incidents also reveal the limitations of what the school is able to provide for students. With teachers censoring material they feel to be too contentious or morally corrupting, students miss out on important elements that are covered in the syllabus and possibly in their final exams. On a personal level, it also prevents young people from being able to access information that may expose them to things that the school is attempting to safeguard them from.

This returns to the notion of preservation of purity that the school attempts to instil in its students. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, banal forms of nation-building are embedded in the functions of schooling, whether this is through reproduction of morning rituals, or being taught to aspire to certain things in life. For Bénéï, Pratingar military school is an exemplary *Hindutva* political project, as it secures the 'construction and preservation' of the nation (2008: 219). With Mayadevi's ethos to reproduce good Buddhist women, such passages in texts as described by Nadika and Thilini may lead to a transgression of values that must be censored by teachers.

Tuition, then, can be regarded as an important site which disrupts the teachings of the school by providing youth with alterative pedagogic insights (Jayadeva, 2019). As discussed, it also becomes a space where the acquisition of educational capital takes place. With such tensions, young people must therefore navigate an educational landscape that requires them to manage the expectations of two opposing actors. They are required to negotiate the type of learning they deem useful in order to meet their own aspirations.

The following section examines this tension in more detail, to argue that the tuition site disrupts the inculcation of good Sinhala Buddhist behaviour upheld by the school. I then argue that in navigating these tensions, young people acquire opportunities to transgress boundaries placed by the school. For them, tuition does not only provide them with extra learning opportunities, allowing them to acquire educational capital, but also provides them with opportunities to gain life experiences.

6.7 Schooled Behaviour and Tuition as a Site of Freedom

As I suggested in the introduction to this chapter, tuition serves two purposes for young people. The first of these is the functional aspect of tuition, which grants young people with opportunities to supplement schooling. The second purpose - granting young people freedoms, which I argue holds symbolic importance - will be examined in depth in the following chapter.

As I have described in the previous section, there are clear differences in how teaching takes place within schools and tuition, which influence why young people come to consider tuition an important tool. I have presented how, for young people on the cusp of finishing secondary education, schooling becomes redundant because it fails to prepare them for the important A-Level exams. This section presents how tuition breaks the boundaries placed by formal schooling, allowing young people to engage with learning processes differently.

There is a distinct difference between the role of teachers within the school and the role of tutors within the tuition space. The former, as explored in Chapter Five, become agents of inculcation of ethnonationalist values, while the interests of tutors are to ensure their students do well in exams, which will enhance their reputation. As I demonstrated earlier in the chapter, private tutors rely on previous students' recommendations to their peers. Consequently, their interest lies in maintaining a steady flow of students, rather than the production of citizens. As Foondun notes, 'the students are there for attention and he [the tutor] must not disappoint them. His reputation as a tuition teacher is at stake' (2002: 499).

Mr Herath - who conducted the English Literature classes and whose tuition classes I attended - like many of his colleagues, relies on his students to do well in their exams as well as reiterating their satisfaction with the teaching as a way of maintaining a good reputation, which in turn results in young people recommending his classes to their friends. As Mr Herath explained, the tutors "Will try to do their best…One thing is they want to attract the students. To attract the students, you must show very good results. Then only will the word go from one batch into the other. So, they will do the best, maximum to get the best results." The reality, however, is that Mr Herath, like many other private tuition masters, makes a modest income from teaching privately, heightening the disdain of this profession amongst the schoolteachers at Mayadevi. As I discovered while

speaking to a senior teacher at Mayadevi, many tuition masters earn more than Principals in national schools, leading to many teachers to criticise those who were part of the 'tuition mafia.'

Since school teachers hold the responsibility of being producers of 'structure', their focus is on ensuring that students learn the curriculum as well as 'ways of being' (Bourdieu, 1990: 203). In contrast, tutors do not hold the position of shaping citizens, as they are not bound to the educational system responsible for producing them. It is important to draw on Bourdieu (1990) here to highlight why both agents hold different positions, despite both being educators. Teachers are 'socially conditioned' to be agents of inculcation because of the position they occupy within the school as a state institution (ibid: 202). In contrast, tutors belong to a private industry, which as Bray (2007) has observed, operates independently and in the shadow of schooling. Their position, then, does not involve the overt reproduction of an ideology; nor do they attempt to instil particular dispositions or values.

In his paper, Foondun (2002) briefly touches on how tuition becomes an important space for socialisation. He explains that unlike the 'conservative setting' of most secondary schools, tuition grants youth with opportunities for 'social interaction' (ibid: 505). The gap in the literature on the socialising effects of tuition and the role that tutors play as facilitators of this often depicts them as agents of the shadow education system. However, through my observations of the tuition space and interactions between young people and their tutors, I witnessed a very distinct relationship.

Students do behave differently in the private tuition classes. The unstructured and semi-formal environment means that young people can be somewhat lax in their behaviour compared with the overly structured classroom environment in the school. There are no formal 'rules' that young people have to follow in the tuition classes, nor are there any expectations placed on them about how they should behave. Students are allowed to wear their own clothes, style their hair however they choose and bring their phones to class.

For the girls at Mayadevi, these were small but important freedoms they were able to exercise. In contrast, the school attempts to bridge any heterogeneity by ensuring its students look and behave in a similar way. In Foucault's (1991: 178) words, transgressions of behaviour, activity, sexuality and body resulted in 'micro-penalties'

through punishment. I have demonstrated how students who fail to act according to the school's expectation are reprimanded by prefects, or indeed are scolded by teachers in the classrooms. Whether it is behaving too boisterously or looking unkempt, the school serves to police students to meet the expectation of their alma mater. These forms of micro-penalties then remind students of the types of behaviours - and indeed becomings - that they should attempt to achieve.

Having already explored the role of the school in promoting a particular way of being in Chapter Five, it is important to emphasise that the school's principles and values centre around the production of *honde lamai* (good children). For many of the students at Mayadevi, this behaviour has become part of their habitus, wherein they conform to the school's expectations. As discussed in Chapter Four, the school becomes an important site of social reproduction, wherein an individual's habitus is shaped by their surroundings. At Mayadevi, students are instilled with the belief that good or virtuous behaviour goes on to shape a strong moral character, and in turn these dispositions become 'habits' (Bourdieu, 1990; Green, 2013).

In contrast to the school, I argue that the tuition space becomes a field that forms a third habitus for the students at Mayadevi. It is here that young people can transgress the behaviours and values inculcated within the school. The students enact these transgressions while remaining within boundaries that have been shaped by their primary and secondary habitus - the home and school. These transgressions are therefore performed through small reclamations of freedom that allow young people the capacity to pursue more cosmopolitan tendencies. Many students discussed what these notions of freedom were, which I will explore in the subsequent chapter. However, it is important to highlight that such freedoms are only realised due to tutors granting young people the opportunity to carve out a space for themselves.

My own awareness of the role of tuition in facilitating this space came about through observations of interactions between students and tutors. I became aware that unlike schoolteachers, the majority of the tutors did not assert their position within the classroom. Instead, they appeared to be personable and interested in what young people had been up to over the week, their personal lives, and in some cases requested gossip on any romantic attachments that were being formed by students within the tuition centre.

This led to students being able to joke with them, and tutors freely mocking students in return.

Mr Herath in particular had a very open relationship with his students. Having taught at a private secondary school in Oman for over 20 years as well as schools in Bhutan and India, Mr Herath returned to Sri Lanka after his retirement and began teaching as a private tutor. His reasoning was that he needed to keep busy, and this was one way of doing so while earning a decent income. He was open with me about the 'downfall' of the education system in Sri Lanka, which, according to him, centred around the lack of quality teaching and syllabus. He also cited the emphasis placed by schools on extra-curricular activities, which detracted from teaching time. Tuition, according to him, allowed students to succeed in exams. He explained, "All these [extra-curricular activities] hinder their academic side or the educational side. So, this affects the children, so…they know it, the students can understand that, so they opt [for] tuition classes."

Within the tuition space, students are able to express their individuality and start forming ideas about who they are, and what they can do. The space becomes one of liberation, where they are not watched, and their behaviour remains unscrutinised. As suggested, part of this is due to the role of the tutor, since they are not bound by the sense of responsibility that schoolteachers have. This is not solely because tutors want to be agents of 'freedom;' rather, they have little investment in protecting the students from becoming 'bad' children while maintaining a school identity and reputation. Instead, the focus of many tutors like Mr Herath is on ensuring that the students do well in their exams and then recommend him to the year below. His act of enabling youth to form spaces where they can transgress is not an altruistic act, but a strategic decision that combines formal learning (which will lead to good exam results) and a space for socialising.

To apply Foucault, the knowledge that youth gain is 'transformed into [political] investment' (1991: 185). Knowledge, according to Foucault, is interlinked with new forms of power and domination, where power relations come to constitute new forms of knowledge (ibid). In the context of tuition, then, the knowledge formed within the school is reorganised within the tuition space. This leads to a shift in ideas of power and domination, which ironically come to undermine the institutionalised power that the school holds. This is relevant when examining how the values and notions of becoming

that are advocated and inculcated within the school are undermined through this parallel system of shadow education.

In short, the role of the tutor is very different to that of the schoolteacher, who acts as the moral gatekeeper. With a lack of regulation within the tuition industry, tutors hold little accountability, unlike teachers. They by and large answer to parents, who, as long as their children are happy and do well in exams, have little involvement with the tutors themselves, demonstrated through the example of Thilini earlier in this chapter. In contrast, schoolteachers are held responsible by the state as well as parents. Their position remains that of the moral guardian, who is responsible for ensuring that children grow up to be good Sinhala Buddhist citizens.

Unlike the form teacher of 13B, who takes her role of moral guardianship seriously, Mr Herath breaks the rigid teacher-pupil relationship by presenting students with opportunities to speak up in class, continue conversations while he is speaking and behave differently. In this way, the tutor becomes a figure of respect. He has the young people's respect because he gives them the freedom to do things they are not allowed to do in the school. Through this process, young people gain the capacity to negotiate the type of learning they deem to be beneficial, while also carving out a space in which to experiment with ideas of the self.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the phenomenon of private tuition, which has largely remained unexplored ethnographically. Drawing on Bray (2007, 2009) and Foondun *et al.* (2002), I highlighted two things. The first is the nature of tuition in Sri Lanka and its growing demand. Secondly, through weaving together survey data collected by scholars and my own ethnographic insights, I highlighted why young people and their parents choose to access tuition, in the hope of facilitating their aspirations for the future. Part of this was in exploring the role that tuition plays in a young person's educational journey, to understand the wider factors that make tuition a necessity. Increasingly competitive examinations and harsh university entrance quota become drivers for why supplementary learning or 'shadow education' is necessary. Tuition then becomes a way in which young people can acquire the educational capital to bring them closer to achieving their

educational aspirations; as discussed in Chapter Five, it also enables young people to aspire to a good life.

Drawing on Bourdieu (1986), I then examined the strategies that parents adopt to facilitate their own and their children's aspirations through the exchange of capital: economic to educational. Such processes of exchange highlight the core issues surrounding tuition, largely that the shadow education system exacerbates social inequality. I have demonstrated through the examples of Osha, Dilki and Thilini how tuition can become a vehicle towards achieving their educational aspirations. However, for young people like Nimal and Shantha, who have neither the cultural nor social capital to access tuition, prospects of aspiring highly are limited because of their social and economic positioning. Despite free education across Sri Lanka, schooling is not perceived to be a sufficient tool for achieving upward mobility. Young people who are unable to exercise capital are excluded from being able to access private supplementary learning.

Is it then right to understate or indeed overlook the role of private tuition in facilitating additional learning while also enabling youth to carve a space for themselves? And when will the international educational agenda and policy makers begin to take seriously and act upon the impact of tuition on formal educational provision? Whether it is pressure to excel in exams (Pallegedara, 2012), competition to enlist in prestigious schools (Foondun, 2002) or a vehicle to enhance distinction and difference (Bourdieu, 1986; Bray & Kwok, 2003), the multifaceted nature of tuition and the role it plays in how young people experience schooling must be explored in depth.

In this chapter, I have attempted to do just this, by also exploring how the tuition space enables youth to exercise agency in the type of learning they undertake and how these tie into the types of future they aspire to. As demonstrated through the example of the students at Mayadevi, tuition enables them to pick and choose knowledge from different sources, so that when the time comes for them to sit their exams, they *feel* better prepared. This insight into the functional value of tuition allows us to understand how the site becomes a space where young people begin to negotiate the type of learning they deem to be beneficial to them, while managing the tensions between the school and tuition space.

By drawing on the paradoxical nature of the school (which seeks to reproduce citizens) and tuition (which challenges the institutionalised structures of the school), I have argued that tuition holds important significance for youth, particularly in their transition to adulthood. Tuition becomes an important space where young people are given the freedom to think about their aspirations beyond academia but also begin to investigate ideas of freedom, which is the subject of the following chapter.

With tuition operating globally across South Asia, the UK, Japan, the USA and New Zealand, in the form of large-scale education industries that continue to be unregulated and independent from the state, the implications of its impact remain largely ignored because of the lack of interest by policymakers and educationalists. Data around who accesses such educational initiatives, reasons for doing so, the financial implications and the increased social and economic stratification that this causes all continue to be under-reported. This gap in policy and research leads us to ask why this phenomenon has gone unnoticed, particularly when research thus far alludes to an increase in social inequalities, privatisation of education and the impact on young people's wellbeing.

The following chapter presents the ways in which tuition becomes an important site where young people begin to experiment with their own identity formation, agency and notions of becoming, away from the school and the home.

Chapter Seven: Interrogating Ideas of Freedom and Becoming Within the Tuition Space

In the previous chapter, I introduced private tuition, highlighting its intrinsic role in how young people experience schooling in Sri Lanka. I examined how the tuition industry operates in parallel to public education to argue that its impact (economic and social) continues to be under-studied, with scholarly focus directed towards schooling and formal education. Literature on tuition, though survey-based, touches on important issues surrounding shadow education that has the potential to increase social inequality (Cole, 2017; Pallegedara, 2018), add pressure on youth's own experiences of schooling (Foondun, 2002) and, in some cases, result in teachers abusing their powers (Bray & Kwok, 2003; Pallegedara, 2018).

As demonstrated through my own ethnographic data, tuition is perceived as a necessity by young people and their parents. Without it, they face the prospect of missing out on learning and potentially impacting their future educational endeavours, and in turn their educational and career aspirations. Over the course of this thesis, I have demonstrated how a young person's social environment shapes their aspirations and visions of the future. Their aspirations speak to the personal hopes that youth have for themselves, and are also framed by the idea of a good life, achieved through prospects of social mobility.

In Chapter Six, I introduced the tuition space to highlight the functional value it holds for young people and parents. I presented how tuition operates in parallel to formal schooling, providing young people with better learning, and facilitating their educational and career aspirations. In light of this, I also discussed how the value of schooling is increasingly being undermined. As Illich observed (1970: 24), the demand for education can never be satisfied with the 'school [pushing] the pupil up to the level of competitive curricular consumption.' This has led scholars to examine how schooling is no longer a sufficient learning tool to achieve social mobility (Jeffrey *et al.*, 2005; Froerer, 2012). Competitive examinations and the growing demands that formal education places on

young people in Sri Lanka, as well as the competition for a limited number of government jobs, call into question the role of the school in enabling aspirations to be fulfilled. Tuition, for those who can afford it, becomes a necessity to improve their chances of achieving their goals.

In line with theorising 'becoming,' I have argued in Chapter Six that tuition becomes an important space wherein young people negotiate the type of learning they deem to be beneficial to them, while managing the tensions between this space and the school. While I have examined the reasons why young people choose tuition to aid them academically, what has remained unexplored is why tuition becomes an important site for youth in their processes of *becoming*. This chapter will focus on just this, to ask what it is about the tuition site that becomes 'symbolic' for youth in forming ideas about who they want to become.

This chapter aims to draw a comparison in how young people experience schooling and tuition, resulting in conflicts in how they come to conceptualise their identity, aspirations and visions of the future. I begin by examining the tuition site as a youth-centred space, to argue that despite its formal nature, it also provides young people with opportunities to make it their own (7.1). Subsequently, I examine how tuition becomes a semi-informal space (7.2), by presenting ethnographic examples of how young people transgress rules and boundaries within it (7.3). Following this, I interrogate how tuition becomes an important symbolic space by allowing young people to play out cosmopolitan aspirations under the guise of being good children (7.4). The final section of the chapter (7.5) provides ethnographic insights into how young people use the tuition space to explore their own identity within three distinct fields.

7.1 Tuition as a Youth-Centred Space

> *Aside from school not providing enough for the students, in that they are only taught one aspect, which varies from teacher to teacher, the tuition space is where these young girls can make connections, hang out and dress how they want. As I observed, tuition becomes a space in which girls can assume autonomy, from asserting their identity by choosing what to wear, to using this space as a way of meeting potential*

> *lovers, which is a very important thing for the girls that I met* (Field notes, February 2018).

While accessing tuition classes, I realised that they provided young people with a space for socialising with peers in addition to holding a functional value academically. On reflection of schooling experiences in Sri Lanka, the school is a space in which such opportunities are limited, in as far as schooling is segregated by ethno-linguistic, gender and religious streams. Such forms of segregation in schooling are manifested in how these are structured and governed differently, with national and provincial schools revealing geographical disparity (Davies, 2005; Sørensen, 2008). Further separation through mediums of instruction and the single-sex nature of schooling heighten processes of atomisation.

I have previously discussed (Chapter Four) how schools like Mayadevi failed to create an environment for social integration, despite the state presenting schools as hubs for social cohesion and integration (Ministry of Education, 2013). Many of the girls at Mayadevi were vocal about the lack of opportunities to socialise within the school, classing the school environment as 'oppressive.' In contrast, girls who had joined Mayadevi only to pursue their A-Levels would share with their school friends' differences of their previous schooling experiences. Chaturi, who went to a coeducational school in Nuwara Eliya[70] prior to joining Mayadevi, informed the core group that in her old school, boys and girls would often hang out together. As Chaturi explained to us one afternoon:

> *We had boys sit on one side and girls sit on the other. It was fun. I really liked my old school; I think because having boys made it fun. But here it's all girls and we can't even have boy friends* [platonic friendships] *because we will get expelled.*

Chaturi's experiences before joining Mayadevi revealed to her peers the possibilities of widening their social networks. Since the school did not provide opportunities to extend one's social network, tuition was an important space where such possibilities could be realised. For the young people I met and hung out with, tuition not only provided extra

[70]Nuwara Eliya is located approximately 75km from Kandy.

formal learning opportunities, but was also an important space to gain life experiences and socialise with other young people they may otherwise never meet.

The tuition space remains one of formal learning: learning takes place on a strict timetable, it follows a curriculum, and young people's progress is measured through termly tests. Students are made aware of the knowledge and the skills they are expected to learn and the tuition master's role is formally defined (Bowlby *et al.*, 2014: 125). However, there are instances where this is disrupted by young people, who come to dominate this space and, in doing so, carve out opportunities that are limited within the schooling site. In this way, the tuition space becomes a platform for both learning and socialising with peers that would otherwise be inaccessible within the schooling system. Kiilakoski and Kivijärvi (2015: 47) define such socialising spaces as 'venues of social processes' which enable youth to make certain interactions possible.

In addition to its educational function, then, tuition becomes an important symbolic site for young people. It becomes part of a restructuring process where young people contribute to the 'place making' (Ravn and Demant, 2017; Fataar and Rinquest, 2018) of the tuition site. As argued by Massey (2005), place making is a process, underpinned by relations and interconnections, in which meaning and value is ascribed to a location. For many young people at Mayadevi, how relations and connections are formed in the tuition space, transforms its symbolic importance. Not only did they choose tuition over schooling to aid them in achieving their educational aspirations, but they perceived tuition as a space in which they could forge new relationships and transgress the boundaries of what they were allowed to do in school. In assigning meaning to a place, young people carved out their own social space to play out different versions of themselves. The tuition space, then, had subjective meanings attached to it, resulting in 'structuring and forming youth cultures' which go on to shape youth subjectivities (Ravn & Demant, 2017: 254).

This chapter aims to develop an understanding of how the tuition space becomes a site of symbolic importance for many young people, one that allows them to exercise agency, disrupt rigid structures and come to form ideas about who they want to become. Before delving into this, I want to draw on literature that explores what youth-centred spaces look like and, more importantly, what they come to symbolise for young people.

7.2 Exploring Youth-Centred Spaces

As I discussed in the previous chapter, anthropologists such as Bourgois (1996) and Levinson (1999) challenged 'college-educated intellectuals' who shield themselves in the 'safe white public space of campus libraries, colonial archives, museums, cyberspace, theatres, popular media, and suburban highway vistas' rather than engage with individuals constrained within urban apartheid (1996: 250). Bourgois' critique raises important questions, particularly for anthropologists like myself, who have conducted fieldwork largely within a school setting. The school as a site is far less daunting than a street corner, youth club, or even a tuition centre. Within the school, parameters exist that provide some reassurances for the researcher. They also provide opportunities to encounter research participants over prolonged periods of time. Schools, by and large, present an element of what Bourgois calls a 'safe niche for intellectuals to see and talk to the socially marginal' (1996: 250).

Limiting the field to the school site, though useful in understanding schooling experiences, can reduce insight into other aspects of young people's lives. As I discussed in Chapter Four, young people at Mayadevi are required to behave in a particular way within the school. Behaving loudly, speaking out of turn and transgressing values that undermine the ideal of a 'good child' were strictly prohibited. Conducting research solely in the school would have limited my access to these nuanced but important acts of transgression.

Recently, within educational research there has been a shift, particularly in the fields of geography and anthropology, that has begun to explore youth-led spaces that fall outside of formal learning institutes (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2001; Massey, 2005; Ravn & Demant, 2017). Youth-led spaces became important sites of analysis to explore how young people renegotiate their agency outside of formal school settings. Anthropologists like Bourgois (2003) have dedicated their research to street culture, and in doing so have provided some important insights into urban apartheid, racism and social marginalization, and how individuals are *played by* and *play the* system.

Emerging literature has revealed the importance of such spaces, particularly in providing young people with 'adult-free' spaces. For instance, Lægran (2002), drawing from ethnography conducted in two rural villages in Norway, explored the importance of

technospaces[71] for its young inhabitants: the internet café and petrol station. These technospaces allowed Lægran's participants to establish important meeting areas where they were able to 'hang out' and, in doing so, disrupt the image of the 'rural idyll' (2002: 161). Groups of young people in Barcelona carving out spaces for themselves have been presented by Rodó-de-Zárate and Baylina (2014) in their examination of the feminist group *Acció Lila.* In the context of South Asia, Jeffrey (2010) examined how young men in North India spent their free time on street corners, while considering strategies for employment.

Youth-centred spaces, then, present a distinct break, or respite, from adult hegemony. Some, like *Acció Lila,* serve a specific purpose - in their case, to dismantle oppression and fight patriarchy (Rodó-de-Zárate and Baylina, 2014). Others, such as those outlined in Lægran's (2002) and Jeffrey's (2010) papers, centred around the very notion of doing nothing at all. As this literature demonstrates, youth-centred spaces can have functional purposes, but also symbolic importance for young people, allowing them to determine their own agenda and create their own subculture and space away from the adult gaze.

My core group in 13B behaved in a markedly different way outside of school. Recalling the example of their behaviour and conversations in the bakery provided me with insight into young people's personal views about politics or other issues that were important to them. Without frequenting such informal spaces, my understanding of their schooling experiences would have not captured these nuanced and important insights.

For the young people in my field site, youth-centred spaces are limited. In addition to the bakery, the Kandy City Centre (KCC) is one of the few spaces that young people frequent. The shopping mall, with its selection of trendy clothing stores, cafés and a rooftop restaurant, catered for the emerging cosmopolitan middle classes. For the girls, it was the cosmopolitanism of the KCC which drew them to the mall, where they would hang out with friends, meet up with boyfriends or do some window shopping. Much like the petrol station in Lægran's (2002) study, the KCC became a youth-centred space presenting young people with the possibility of replicating elements of cosmopolitan culture. Frequenting the KCC, however, required young people to make their way into town, which many did not do unless they had tuition or were already visiting town with family.

[71]Lægran defines technospaces as sites where technology and human interaction intersect.

Consequently, attending tuition not only served students with further learning, but also provided them with opportunities to visit youth-centred spaces that were otherwise limited. The tuition site itself presented young people with further opportunities to carve out their own space. Though there were several youth-led organisations, such as Kids Reach (discussed in Chapter Five), youth-centred spaces were limited. Free time, as alluded to over the course of this thesis, was often spent at the young person's home.

For almost all my participants, hanging out unsupervised in the streets, cafés or simply outside, was not an option. Many of the girls (and their parents) were wary of the risks (specifically around sexual harassment) that this could pose. Even while hanging out at the KCC, the prospect of facing sexual harassment from boys and men served as a deterrent for many of the girls and became something they learnt to guard themselves against. Instances of physical harassment have been detailed by Osella and Osella (1998) who, in their study of friendship and flirting in Kerala, South India, revealed the tactics that young men adopted to make 'passes' at girls. Unlike the girls in Osella and Osella's study, who used safety-pins to jab gropers, my research participants did not resort to active methods of protection. While their brothers and male peers had the ability to go out unsupervised, the girls simply did not find it safe.

I discussed in Chapter Two how localised gender expectations and cultural values positioned female youth differently to their male peers. This was largely linked to the notion of the preservation of purity, as women were perceived to be vehicles of the maintenance of tradition (De Alwis, 2002). My own participants expressed this during conversations, explaining to me the reason why boys had more 'freedom.' The responsibility of keeping safe and out of trouble was at the forefront of my participants' minds, regardless of whether they were indeed acting in a risky manner.

A trip to the KCC with Thilini and her friends, one afternoon after tuition, highlighted the prevalence of the everyday sexual harassment that girls faced. While walking together, Thilini whispered to me that a young man had been following us for some time. She explained, "Sometimes it's very scary, especially if it is a big group because I don't know what they want." She and her friends went on to tell me that they frequently experienced unwanted attention, whether it was travelling on public transport or even making their way to school. The girls had adopted strategies, through their experiences,

which included ignoring prospective perpetrators, as any acknowledgement or reprimand from the girls would lead to dialogue and, in some cases, confrontation.

Although places like the KCC presented young people with possibilities to play out cosmopolitan ideals, it did pose a threat to many girls' safety. Parental concerns surrounding safety also heightened the girls' anxiety in dealing with the 'sexually objectifying male adult gaze' (Hyams, 2003: 545). The fear of being 'stared at' for many girls was an everyday reality and a constant reminder of their fragility in 'heteropatriarchal spaces.' As it was in Hyams' (2003) study that for children and young people, public spaces were perceived as a threat when occupied by 'heterosexual male(s).'

As young people like the girls from 13B sought to explore public spaces like the KCC in an attempt to experience urban life and become consumers of global trends and lifestyles, the discomfort caused by the male gaze led many female youth to reflect on the dangers of these urban spaces. In turn, they came to praise the 'safeness' they felt in their homes or hometowns. In dealing with the unease of being objectified, many girls adopted strategies to avoid the gaze of those they considered to be the threatening Other. They travelled in pairs, dressed 'sensibly' (by ensuring that their clothing was not revealing) and frequented spaces where such threats were limited. Interestingly, many of the girls I spoke to placed the onus on themselves - that is, they took accountability for their own safety. This sense of self-regulation (Foucault, 1991) was a way in which the girls felt they were preserving their 'purity.' These ideas of preservation of honour and self-regulation, moreover, were firmly embedded and inculcated into young female adolescents from a young age.[72]

Underpinning this is the gendered notion of respectability, which required girls to maintain their purity in order to live up to the norms of social acceptability. Purewal and Hashmi (2015) framed notions of respectability and honour as something that extended beyond the girl and was tied to familiar networks. The preservation of honour and respect, as I have discussed in Chapters Four and Five, was intrinsic to the production of good Sinhalese Buddhist women. Combined with the expectation of being a good daughter,

[72]Preservation of a girl's purity has been discussed at length in literature on South Asia (Lynch, 1999; Mishra, 2017).

this meant that the girls at Mayadevi spent their afternoons and weekends either attending tuition classes, helping around the house or looking after siblings.

The tuition space, then, became an important and safe space for the girls to hang out, away both from the home and school. With tutors being somewhat lax in their approach to teaching, the girls were able to make the most of this time by using it as a social space for themselves. Socialising within the private tuition was therefore an important field to examine, as it was there that young people were able to explore, adapt and transgress social and cultural values and their related behaviour.

7.3 Tuition: A Safe Space

As demonstrated, with the lack of youth-centred spaces in Kandy, the tuition space became an important site that allowed young people opportunities to be away from adults while being in a place of relative safety. These elements, I argue, contributed towards making the tuition space a site of symbolic importance for many of my research participants. In tuition spaces, they were able to disrupt the hierarchies found in the school and transgress boundaries that were often off-limits.

Before I begin the exploration of such transgressions and the symbolic significance of the tuition space, it is important to define what the space represents. Conceptualising the tuition space has been challenging in that it primarily represents a functional and formal space, with elements of informality. The tuition class, centre or academy, as they are sometimes referred to in Sri Lanka, operates parallel to schooling. Learning is central to the scope of such institutions, and the tuition space provides a formal schedule for teaching and learning (Holloway *et al.*, 2010). Consequently, students must still follow certain rules and expectations set by their tuition masters. However, these are far more relaxed than those of the school, and students are able to transgress some boundaries placed by the tuition space, and in some cases break rules.

My attempt to deconstruct the significance of this space arose from witnessing how youth interpreted the tuition classroom as a space where they were able to gain some freedom. For the young people I encountered, tuition presented them with opportunities to behave and act freely, without fearing the repercussions from the school or teachers. As such,

they very much saw it as a space that they were able to dominate. Kiilakoski and Kivijärvi (2015) usefully highlighted the difference between formal and informal spaces by defining these as 'tight' and 'loose' spaces respectively. According to Kiilakoski and Kivijärvi (2015: 49), the tightness 'refers to spaces that presuppose homogeneity and functionality.' The school is an example of this kind of space, where tightness is upheld through hierarchical structures and planned schedules that leave little room for transgression. For instance, at Mayadevi, youth are required to assimilate to the school's principles and ways of being. Not only are students required to take part in schooling rituals (singing the anthem or taking part in the morning exercises), but also to look the same (through their uniform).

In contrast, Kiilakoski and Kivijärvi described 'looseness' as a non-formal learning environment, organised outside of formal learning sites. In the tuition space, the conceptualisation of this looseness was most noticeably evident in the breakdown of the student hierarchy. Prefects like Nadika, who in the classroom held a higher position to her peers, no longer had the power to surveil students who misbehave. Their position of privilege was eradicated in the tuition space, as students there were not given preferential treatments based on their social positioning. In losing their prefect position, students like Nadika also temporarily lost their privileges, as they were unable to exercise their school-based social status within the tuition space.

Before I discuss how transgressions unfold during tuition, it is important to point out that anthropologists who have conducted fieldwork in schools (Willis, 1977; Amit & Wulff, 1995; Winkler-Reid, 2011) also identified the importance of 'informal' spaces within the school site, where youth come to dominate. They recognised that informal spaces within and beyond the school presented important sites for youth experiences, where young people carved spaces for themselves to experiment and play with notions of presenting themselves as 'particular kinds of people' (Winkler-Reid, 2011: 11).

Scholars have highlighted that there continues to be little ethnographic research exploring informal sites, and the importance that such sites play in youth's experiences. Fataar and Rinquest (2018: 2) raise the importance of observing interactions between youth outside of formal spaces to understand how young people 'influence, negotiate and manage…interaction'. Drawing on Lefebvre (1991), Fataar and Rinquest present how space is conceptualised and thus understood by scholars and youth themselves. They

argued that space should be understood as physical, social and mental units. The physical space, presented through the school's buildings, surroundings and environment, could be seen as a site one could 'experience with [their] senses' (Fataar and Rinquest, 2018: 3). Social space, in contrast, refers to a site marked by 'symbolism and meaning,' where both shifted and changed through time.

In the context of Sri Lanka, the tuition space presented a case where the notions of physical and social spaces, and their significance could be explored. It is also useful to interpret such spaces in light of 'tightness and looseness' as presented by Kiilakoski and Kivijärvi (2015). On the one hand, the format of tuition focused on formal learning methods and, as such, the space became semi-formal. On the other, it also presented a case where young people could disentangle the rigidity found in more formal learning spaces, such as the school, by taking control and transforming it into a space for socialising. Consequently, the tuition space becomes an important site, which I have called symbolic, because of the erasure of the rigid power relations found within the school.

In examining the symbolic value of the tuition space, I have demonstrated how the capital acquired through tuition was not solely educational, but also important to youth on a personal level. Within the tuition space, young people were able to express their individuality, adopting and experimenting with different ways of being; from speaking to tutors in an informal tone to engaging with different groups of young people, who they may not be able to speak with outside of the tuition centre. It granted them with the opportunity to transgressing certain behaviours that contribute towards the idealised image of a good child, which will be discussed in Section 7.5.3. The following section examines how young people reclaim small freedoms within the tuition space.

7.4 Interrogating Ideas of Freedom Within the Tuition Site

The notion of freedom (*nidahasa*) was a theme that arose in almost every conversation I had with the students at Mayadevi. This varied from the freedom to play instead of studying (for the younger students) to the freedom to be able to live life freely, as explained by the older girls at the school. Investigating this notion was ethnographically challenging, as students came up with different interpretations depending on their past

and present experiences. This meant that conceptualisations of freedom spanned from not having household responsibilities, being able to go out without parental consent and dress how they want and speak to boys, to having freedom from 'head stress.'

My first meeting with the students in 13B led me to explore this reoccurring theme of freedom, when I was told that they felt oppressed by the school and their parents because both prevented them from living a 'free' life. The girls explained that they wanted to be able to act like 18-year-olds without having to request permission to dress up, or go out, backing up their frustrations by telling me, "In your country you can do whatever you want, ne. It's hard for us because we have our parents and our teachers telling us what to do."

Such conversations revealed the tensions between tradition and modernity that youth were required to navigate. On the one hand, students aspired to become good Buddhist women within the home and at school, which was embodied through habitus over time (Zipin *et al.*, 2015). The temptation to replicate more cosmopolitan or Western lifestyles sold to students through social media, television shows and music videos, however, also served as a reminder of the limitations of their capacity to engage with such lifestyles. Unlike their Western peers, the girls at Mayadevi did not have the capacity to 'do what they want' because they were bound by their gendered, class-conscious and ethno-religious habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Rao & Hossain, 2012; Mishra, 2017). Consequently, students used the capacity they had to select elements of Western culture that they deemed 'cool' and necessary for them to embody, in order to figure out who they wanted to become.

Gilbertson's (2016) analysis of Hyderabadi students echoed the experiences of my own research participants attempting to play out their cosmopolitan aspirations. Gilbertson revealed that students were selective in their replication of Western trends. They chose not to emulate 'crazes or addictions' through fashion, beliefs and lifestyles, but rather preferred to use certain elements of what they perceived to be 'plus points' of Western culture (2016: 304). For the young people in Gilbertson's study, these were formed around young people's desires in relation to dating and relationships. Gilbertson's ethnography highlights how elements of Western culture have been adopted to fulfil young people's personal aspirations. Underpinning the embodiment of specific aspects

of Western culture in order to become cosmopolitan, then, is the 'selectiveness' by which these trends and ideas are adopted.

Throughout fieldwork, and in hearing the girls discuss what constituted this freedom for them in the present, I began to theorise this as an act that would enable the girls to exercise their agency in some capacity. Whether it was making decisions about what they could do or choose to wear, or who they could socialise with, the girls desperately sought to find a space in which they would be able to do this away from the gaze of their parents and the school. For example, towards the end of their schooling, the students would message each other on their WhatsApp group to inform each other that they would not be coming into school, but would be attending private classes organised by the tutors instead.[73] These conversations focused on what the girls would wear and plans for after tuition classes, whether these were to visit the KCC or meet their love interests.

Under the guise of being 'good' by appearing (to their parents and, in some cases, teachers) to want to go to tuition classes in order to better their learning, the girls created opportunities for themselves to engage with peers, both male and female, outside of a strict environment. Often, these plans would involve visiting the KCC or going for coffee in *Bueno Café*, located a few doors down from the tuition centre. Important, for the girls, was to find a safe space in which to be able to transgress the idealised image of a good girl, as alluded to earlier.

On my return to the field in January 2019, I met up with my core group, consisting of Thilini, Chaturi, Gayatri, Nadika and Dilki. While basking in the afternoon sun, eating ice cream by Kandy Lake, we began having a conversation about my own hypothesis of the importance of the tuition space. From this, the girls and I spoke about the expectations placed on young people, which they said could prevent them from realising the freedoms they craved. On reflection, however, this conversation demonstrates how expectations set by the girls' parents and the school about what was good and bad, went on to influence their judgement. For example, girls had been taught to behave piously and refrain from behaving badly, to avoid getting into trouble.

To recall Madam Lalitha's speech during the assembly (in Chapter Five), the expectation was placed on girls to behave well as a way of avoiding getting into '*karadere'* (trouble).

[73]This WhatsApp group included myself, Thilini, Gayatri, Chaturi, Nadika, Dilki and Yani.

Such instances reinforced how, despite transgressing certain aspects of what they had been taught to uphold, the girls maintained the ideal of what it meant to be a good woman. While their habitus guided their actions, as suggested by girls policing their own behaviour, it did not determine them, allowing the girls to retain the capacity to exercise certain freedoms (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2001).

This is particularly pertinent considering that friendship takes on special importance in adolescence (Amit-Talai, 2002). For my core group, as suggested earlier in this chapter, tuition provided a space in which to nurture friendships outside of school. Once again, the symbolic importance of tuition was further amplified for many of the students at Mayadevi. Amit-Talai usefully echoes this in her research in a Quebec high school, where she explains 'home and friends did not easily mix' (2002: 239). Friendship in adolescence comes to represent the formation of a new kind of family and social network (2002: 236).

Similarly, in the context of Sri Lanka, the tuition space is where such interactions take place, away from the gaze of the school and parents. The distance between each other's homes, and the expectation that girls would stay home during their free time, meant that opportunities to hang out outside of school and tuition were limited. Tuition classes therefore presented many of the girls with their only opportunities to cultivate their friendships outside of school. It was while attending tuition classes that I saw girls forge new friendships with peers from neighbouring schools, leading them to expand their social networks.

The tuition space also provided an opportunity to speak to fellow Mayadevian students with whom the girls did not necessarily hang out with while at school, resulting in a form of re-organisation of existing friendship groups. The possibility to carve out new friendships bolsters the symbolic importance of the tuition space for many of the girls in 13B. My own theorisation of this has so far revealed that it was related to the meaning assigned to a space. As Kiilakoski and Kivijärvi (2015) observed, it is the memories and emotions of people that make a place a 'symbolic space.' They also explained that a space can limit certain interactions or, conversely, make them possible (ibid: 49). In attempting to gain further insight into conceptualising the tuition space as a symbolic site, I approached the topic with several informants, some of whom were parents of young people with whom I had grown quite close.

The value of tuition was recognised by both the young people and adults in providing youth with opportunities on both academic and personal levels. For example, Padma, the mother of a young person I met at a tuition class, explained that for her, a liberal single mother who allowed her children to go out unsupervised, private tuition classes primarily helped her daughters squeeze in extra learning after school. She had enrolled her daughters during their O-Levels, beginning with Maths, and then made sure that the girls went to tuition for all three of their subjects at A-Level stage. Advice from family members and friends regarding the benefits of accessing certain tuition masters only cemented the 'need' to send her children to tuition classes.

However, Padma also recognised that her own expectations of tuition were different to her daughters', and knew children went there for other reasons than just to study. She explained that she knew her daughters used the classes as places to meet up with friends and acquaintances, and that they liked going to classes because they had the option of dressing how they wanted.[74] She also explained that her daughter met her current boyfriend at a tuition centre.

In speaking to Padma, it transpired that she too attended tuition for much of her schooling. Having gone to a reputable, semi-private school in Kandy in the 1970s, Padma recounted to me her experiences of her schooling and tuition. She told me, "We had *so* much fun, Laura. We would get up to no good and have so many jokes when we went to [tuition] classes. It was good, because back then it was even harder to meet with friends, not like now with Shenuki and Mina" (her two daughters). For parents like Padma, tuition became part of the schooling experience because they themselves went through the process. Padma's positive experiences of hanging out with friends during and after tuition left happy memories that she gladly shared with me.

From a functional perspective, for Padma, sending her daughters to tuition was not only her responsibility as a mother to facilitate educational successes, but also a way for her to assert her social status as a single mother to two daughters, who was able to afford to send her children to tuition. In doing so, Padma was able to exhibit her own social capital, living up to the idea of being an independent working woman and the breadwinner.

[74]As detailed earlier in the chapter, young people who are completing their O-Level and A-Levels often miss school to attend classes. This grants them the possibility of dressing in their own clothes rather than the school uniform.

Padma's capacity was heightened by her job as an editor working for a policy think tank in Kandy. As I discussed in the previous chapter, tuition creates further economic stratification within society, as it differentiates those who can afford from those who cannot. Padma's daughters benefitted from belonging to a middle-income household and therefore having access to educational opportunities that were limited for many young people from low-income households.

This example of Padma highlights the inversion of gender roles; Padma exemplifies how a 'traditional' role and a 'modern' one worked hand-in-hand (Patel, 2017). Importantly, she was seen as a role model by her daughters, as she broke the traditional image of a stay-at-home mother (Gamage, 2018). As demonstrated with this example, parents continued to invest in tuition classes, despite the risks that such an investment might pose to young people. As I detailed in Chapter Six, most students from Mayadevi were from middle-income households, and while many of the parents worked overtime to pay for their child's tuition classes, investment in tuition was not considered to be a problem by my participants, who spoke openly to me about their parent's willingness and ability to pay.

For those who could not afford tuition, like the parents of Shantha and Nimal (mentioned in Chapter Six), organisations like Kids Reach provided after-school classes where children and young people were able to recap on lessons, complete homework and revise for exams. Parents of these households, however, often found the means to pay for tuition classes, despite this resulting in financial hardship. Citing a study by Kim (2007), Bray discusses the example of a Korean mother, who claimed that people would think she was 'crazy or poor' if she did not send her child to tuition class (2009: 32). This example highlights the importance of maintaining one's social status by being able to fund educational opportunities. It also reveals how parental aspirations for their children to 'do well' are further motivated by their social network. Finally, it shows how funding tuition classes becomes a way for parents to display their willingness to make sacrifices for their children's education.

So far, I have alluded to the symbolic importance that tuition plays in young people's lives, in that it provides them with a safe space in which to form friendships and push boundaries that they were not able to do within the school. The following section explore the importance of tuition for the girls in granting them with small freedoms.

7.5 Tuition as a Site of Symbolic Freedom

> *Today, Gayatri, Chaturi and Dilki were sitting on the front bench in their tuition class. Behind them were a few of their classmates from Mayadevi, and the rest were a mix of students from neighbouring schools. Sitting here watching the girls, it became even more obvious how the girls claim this space as their own. This isn't only through their behaviour, where they become far more outspoken and boisterous, but also in the way they present themselves. I was surprised to see that the students who normally speak quietly were now talking standing up or leaning on tables chatting to each other, laughing among themselves and occasionally slapping each other jokingly—this is in contrast to the school, where they huddle around each other or whisper during school times. Today, however, I got to see them in full bloom. Sitting on the tables and playing with each other's hair, the girls were sharing updates with each other, from what was going on at home to new love interests. Gayatri and Dilki were joking about Nadika not coming in because she was too busy with her social life* (Field notes, April 2018).

In previous sections, I examined how the tuition space is a site for learning, but also a place where young people can 'hang out.' It is this 'hanging out' that I will now explore, because of the lack of ethnographic attention that such sites have received. I have argued that tuition becomes a space where youth can let go of the fear of being observed and where they are able to exercise their own agency. The tuition space becomes a creative learning environment where young people can interrogate, ask questions and joke with the tuition master. It is in this way, I suggest, that young people become active agents in learning processes, although it is important to emphasise that the tuition site cannot be an entirely 'loose' space because it parallels the role of school, so structures and power hierarchy continue to exist, albeit diluted (Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi, 2015).

The following section examines how youth discuss or indeed conceptualise freedom though the tuition space within three distinct fields. I begin by examining how young people used this space to interact with peers. The second field brings to light the importance of exercising agency through the freedom to dress how one wants, and the third draws attention to the tuition space as a site for facilitating romance.

7.5.1 Carving Out a Space for Interaction

The significance of observing the same students in this 'new' space became apparent as I uncovered how friendships were nurtured outside of the schooling environment, and where peer group dynamics shifted. Whereas in the classroom, the core group spent all their free time together, in the tuition space, the girls sat with girls who they did not interact with in the school classroom. When I asked Shifna about this, she explained that the schoolteachers did not like some of them sitting together because they would chat instead of paying attention to the lesson. However, *Sir* did not mind, and so they were able to get together and catch up on the latest bit of gossip, which often involved an unsuspecting classmate.

Similarly, students from different ethnic groups could also come together and spend time with their friends, something that did not take place at Mayadevi due to the Sinhala-centric demographic of the student population. As I have discussed at length, with schools being segregated through mediums of instruction and gender, there are limited opportunities for young people to meet each other. This is particularly important in considering that young people from different ethnic groups may not always share a space.

The tuition space provides young people like Priya (the only Tamil student in 13B), who felt isolated from her peers at Mayadevi, with opportunities to meet up with old friends. As Priya explained, she looked forward to classes as she would be able to see her friend, who went to a local provincial school. One afternoon, as I sat next to Priya and her friend, I realised that this was the first time that I had heard her speak in Tamil, since she would converse in Sinhala with her peers at Mayadevi. Owing to the 'tightly compressed structures of the school,' students like Priya were unable to converse in their mother tongue (Tamil), and only able to display their Otherness in an ethnically neutral environment during tuition (Amit-Talai, 2002: 240).[75]

These spaces, then, provided students with opportunities to maintain friendships, particularly at a stage where all their spare time was spent between the school, tuition and the home. In addition to the tuition space, youth often ventured out to the local shopping mall, market or for a walk around the lake after class had finished. On some days during

[75]As examined in Chapter Six, tuition is a space where young people from different ethnic groups share a learning environment, unlike Mayadevi, which has a largely Sinhalese Buddhist student population, as alluded to earlier in this section.

my fieldwork, I went along with the students to clothes shops to try and experience the life of a young person. Though the girls could capitalise on spending time outside of these sites, the reality was that they could only afford to be out for an hour or so before heading back home. This was often due to the long journeys that students faced, but also the expectation from parents that the girls would return home soon after their classes.

With the looming A-Level exams, parental expectation was that young people would dedicate their free time to studying, leaving little opportunity for breaks away from the school and tuition. Nonetheless, post-tuition excursions were something that the girls capitalised on, particularly if they had succeeded in persuading the tuition master to end the lessons early. With limitations on how much time girls could spend freely after tuition, they would often resort to having some snacks at a local bakery and walk to the bus stand together to go their separate ways.

Though small freedoms, these enabled young people to experience and explore what they envisioned their adult life to look like. Walking around the shopping mall, stopping off at small jewellery shops and going to modern coffee shops provided girls with opportunities to experiment with the kind of things they enjoyed doing. Though these may appear to be banal occurrences, in that youth in the West and some parts of the Global South are routinely seen to occupy such public spaces, it was still a 'big deal' for the girls that I hung out with as they were able to get away from an adult authority figure. In doing so, they could enact being an adult by exercising their agency when making choices about where to go and what to do at that point in time.

Such small freedoms should thus not be neglected, particularly among the literature on youth and education, which seems to neglect such small and nuanced observations. Such instances are pertinent in literature on shadow education, which largely overlooks the socialising aspects of the tuition space. An exception can be traced to Foondun's (2002) paper, which briefly outlines the social aspect of tuition. Foondun recognises the socialising effects of tuition in facilitating social interaction and allowing young people to develop 'healthy sexual attitude towards life' through a coeducational setting (2002: 504).

7.5.2 'I Want to Look This Way'

Attending tuition classes on the weekend became one of my favourite points of observation. Dressed in skinny jeans, t-shirts or blouses, with sparkling earrings, bracelets and necklaces, the girls from Mayadevi clearly made an effort with what they were wearing. The girls in my core group spoke of their parents' concerns about how much importance the girls placed on their outfits, though parents recognised that this, in many ways is a rite of passage into 'adulthood'. The efforts that young people made to dress up, however, was not limited to Mayadevians alone, but resonated across many female students who attended tuition classes. Even the boys who attended classes made an effort in their appearance, wearing shirts with an open collar and styled their hair up, to resemble a soft quiff. In fact, while attending tuition classes, I was berated for wearing long tops or shalwars, which the girls deemed unsuitable and conservative, particularly since I was from the 'West' and could get away with wearing more cosmopolitan clothing. In an attempt to fit in, I also began to wear jeans and t-shirts, consulting with the girls about what would be appropriate the day before.

Importantly, the wearing of skinny jeans and blouses was a push to be non-traditional, to assert their cosmopolitanism by replicating the look of the girls on large billboards or social media that surrounds them. The girls were creating their own identities by dressing in a particular way, an act that allowed them to play out their individuality. Some girls chose to wear their hair in high ponytails, while others chose to have their hair down. This may seem banal, but the fact that the girls were able to style their hair was a *choice*.

Within the school, as discussed earlier, girls were required to adhere to the uniform, including wearing hair in plaits, which they could not accessorise. With teachers as authority figures within the school, the girls' freedom s curtailed during the week, since they were required to represent Mayadevi and, by extension, a 'good child.' Recall the school assembly discussed in Chapter Five: Madam Lalitha reminded students to behave and present themselves as daughters of Mayadevi even when outside of the school, demonstrating that students had little opportunity to experiment with different looks or behaviour.

Though such instances could be regarded as banal aspirations, the opportunity to wear what they pleased was something that the girls had repeatedly told me they desired. Often

bemused, I watched the girls transgress the invisible lines that separated their school from tuition to play out different versions of themselves. Thilini, for example, who was an exemplary daughter of Mayadevi in that she did well in school, and followed the school's rules and expectations, transformed in the tuition space. She was louder, interrupted teaching to ask questions and paid little attention to the tutors when they told her off for speaking to her friends during lessons. Thilini expressed the value in attending tuition to me when we met again in January 2019, by telling me that tuition allowed her to do 'fun things' instead of suffering from the 'head stress' of studying.

As we can see with these examples, within the tuition space, young people like Thilini and her friends did not have to be careful about how loudly they spoke, how they appeared and acted. Instead, they appeared to be having fun, despite tuition masters walking by, sometimes checking in on the classes to ensure that the students were not getting up to anything.

The tuition centre therefore became a place of respite for the students. It represented more than just a space where they learned about poetry or science. It was a space in which young people could navigate and transgress openly, and more importantly, a space in which they were able to embrace their individuality, speak back to the teachers and form connections with peers and, in particular, boys. For many of the young people who accessed this space, transgression became part of them figuring out who they wanted to become. It provided them with opportunities to break the mould of being a 'good child' and instead make choices that may jeopardise their very reputation.

Such opportunities, however, were dependent on parents' ongoing approval. As Lynch (1999) demonstrates in her study of garment factory workers in Sri Lanka, erosion of trust can result in parents prohibiting their daughters from pursing work as a way of safeguarding their purity. Similarly, on several occasions, I witnessed girls discuss plans to meet boyfriends after class, sharing tips about inconspicuous places that they could meet so as not to be discovered by family members or family friends. These strategies, as I discovered, allowed girls to breach rules set by their parents that banned them from dating until they had finished schooling. With their reputation at stake, and in order not to be 'found out,' this required careful planning from the girls' side.

7.5.3 Flirting, Dating and Prospects of Romance

Having discussed at length the different forms of socialising and how young people reclaim small freedoms, I now turn to the opportunities that the tuition space presented in forming relationships. In *Friendship and Flirting: Micro-Politics in Kerala, South India* (1998), Osella and Osella explored how personal interactions take place among youth in rural Kerala, South India. Their ethnographic exploration presented elements also found in my own field site in Kandy, where peer relationships were explored outside of the home and school. As Osella and Osella explained, 'against families' best efforts, young men and women do find opportunities to talk to each other: at weddings, festivals, bus-stops, temples, at choir practice, or college - whenever girls feel confident of being either unobserved or safe from gossips' (1998: 193).

Similar opportunities resonated throughout my own observations of the tuition space, where young people were safe from the gazing eye of authority. I began to see how romance blossomed within my core group, how girls themselves responded to these developments and how such developments went on to shape how the girls envisioned their futures with their new beaux.

I was first made aware of such developments when I saw the girls huddled together in a corner of the Japanese class whispering. Unaware of the reason, I approached them to ask what they were talking about. Thilini began to tell me that she had just got 'together' with a boy who went to a nearby boys' school, who was doing A-Levels in Maths, Physics and Chemistry. When I asked her how they met, Dilki interrupted to inform me that she had the most 'experience,' as she had had a boyfriend before all of the others. Dilki then began to tell me about Thilini's boyfriend, with Thilini smiling shyly in the background.

Later in the day, on our way home from tuition, Thilini and I got a chance to speak about this new beau, how they met and how they managed to be boyfriend and girlfriend when they were not allowed to go out together in public. As we sat on the bus, wary that we could be overheard, Thilini began to tell me that she met him in a private class, and that he messaged her on Instagram on New Year's Eve. What followed was an exchange of messages, and then numbers. Since they went to the same tuition class, Thilini said that the next time they met, they decided to begin dating. She explained, "I had no idea he

liked me. All my friends knew and apparently he liked me for a long time, but I didn't know."

When I asked her how they meet, I was informed that they maintained contact mostly through messaging, except for the rare occasion where he would meet her outside of her class, which she found worrying in case a teacher would see.

Despite being 18, girls like Thilini were very much protected by their parents, teachers and the wider public. This protection was not necessarily tied to their safety, but rather with shame, as a girl who had a boyfriend and was openly engaged in a consensual relationship (even a nonsexual one) was viewed to be shameful. As alluded to earlier, perceptions surrounding respectability are entrenched in Sinhala Buddhist culture (Lynch, 1999). Parents grant freedoms to their children under the assumption that they spent their time studying, and breach of this could result in parents taking away the very allowances that young people sought to exploit. Furthermore, such instances could damage the ideal of 'good Sinhala Buddhist women' that young people aspire to.

Threats to respectability arose when female youth did not adhere to the traditional gender roles expected of them (Purewal & Hashmi, 2015). As Purewal and Hashmi demonstrated in their study, such transgressions resulted in parents placing great importance on girls' modesty, over their education. Similarly Mishra (2017), who wrote on young women's experiences of working in transnational call centres in Bangalore, also demonstrated how 'gendered habitus' became entrenched and was embodied by women in the workplace. Chastity and purity, then, constitute respectability for middle-class female youth (Lynch, 1999; Mishra, 2017).

The end of A-Levels would mark a crucial step for these girls and a bridge between childhood and adulthood. As Thilini explained, after her A-Levels, she would be less likely to get in trouble speaking to boys, or going to the mall, since she would have completed an important educational stage in her transition to adulthood. As finishing school was seen as a rite of passage that every successful young person should undertake and complete, it meant that for the time being, Thilini would have to date in secret.

Thilini explained that she needed to be careful as if her parents found out, as they would interpret the secrecy and the new romance as a sign of her neglecting her studies, damaging her image as a good daughter. Consequently, the only time she had to see her

boyfriend was after tuition classes, where she would leave and meet him at the bottom of the stairs, where they would stay and talk for a short while. On some occasions, if the class finished early, they would have the opportunity to visit the local mall, before they had to hurry back home to study.

Through interactions with boys, the girls also had the opportunity to negotiate what they did and did not like in a potential love interest. I took part in many conversations where the girls would show me messages from male students at the tuition centre who had contacted them, asking if they were single. The girls had a list of criteria, deeming the 'worthiness' of potential love interests, which would determine their chances of success. Nadika, one of the more 'popular' girls, was one who would openly critique the requests from potential boyfriends, showing us their display pictures and often criticising their style or look.

On several occasions, the girls would advise each other on which boy had the best 'credentials.' These were based on the school they went to, the subjects they were studying at A-Level and if they or any of their friends knew people in common. Their criteria revealed that potential love matches had to be kind, romantic and not a 'goon.'[76] Without these, there would be limited opportunity for interaction, since they needed to ensure that the boy came from a good family. This highlighted that though not pursuing marriage at this stage in their lives, girls nonetheless made choices about potential boyfriends with marriage in mind. As Nadika once told me, "We need to make sure that they are of good stock."

Assessing such credentials and scoping out opportunities for romance constituted much of the gossip that the girls engaged in. Their selectiveness enabled them to assess who was suitable but also who would be accepted by their families, should their romance last until the end of their schooling. Exercising their agency by declining offers and accepting those that they deemed worthy meant that the girls were also able to establish themselves against their peers, who had perhaps made different choices. It also reflected how girls reproduced social hierarchies that stemmed from their own positions of privilege. For example, their focus on boys who had gone to reputable schools spoke to the girls own

[76]A 'goon' referred to a man who was frequently in trouble with the authorities. As I discovered, this also spoke of social ranking, with boys from working class backgrounds being referred to as 'goons,' or those who were often found loitering the streets and 'making trouble.'

social positioning of having acquired the cultural capital of going to a national school. Dating a boy who was socially positioned 'below' them meant the girls would be settling for someone who has less 'attributes' than they did. I observed how girls would place judgement on classmates (both inside and outside of the school) who had dated boys from poorer backgrounds or those that had not finished school, or indeed girls who had "gone too far" by engaging in pre-marital sex, which continued to be taboo in Sri Lanka.

These judgments were made based on what the girls had been taught about being 'good children' from their school, but also from their home environment. This led the girls to shun students who had transgressed the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The line between respectability and shame was determined by the feeling of *lejja baya* (shame-fear; Lynch, 1999), but also by core values surrounding purity, which prevented pre-marital sex. Mishra (2017) demonstrated through Vidya, a single middle-class young woman who worked at a call centre, how the relationship between respectability and being 'cosmopolitan' could be balanced. Vidya abstained from sexual relations with her boyfriend, yet identified herself as 'modern' by dating him. For the girls I spent time with, protecting their 'sexual morality' was something that they had been taught to uphold from a young age. This had become a core value that girls had learnt, in order to become 'good women.'

Aside from distinguishing one another based on their relationships, girls also used their dating histories to assume places of hierarchy within their own peer group. Consequently, there appeared to be a ranking that the girls assigned themselves based on their experiences in having a boyfriend. For instance, among the group in 13B, Gayatri was 'top,' since she had had a few boyfriends, and Dilki was second, with Thilini coming in third as she had just begun dating.

Dilki, despite being younger than her friends, already had a love story to tell me. It was about her last boyfriend, whom she said she loved, but he left her and got engaged to another girl because his mother wanted him to. When I asked how old he was, she said that he was 25, and 'a little older' than her, which surprised me, since her peer group generally dated boys in the same age range. Instances like this brought to light how girls made decisions, irrespective of how immature and even risky these may seem, to assert a particular social positing. Having an older boyfriend gave Dilki more leverage than Thilini, which meant that she could assume the position of a confidante, and counselled

Thilini about the different strategies in organising a meeting with the boy, a time to speak to him and how to be a 'good girlfriend.'

These examples highlighted why and how tuition became an important and 'symbolic' space for young people. As demonstrated above, the tuition site presented young people with opportunities to play out and become different versions of themselves. Whether this was negotiating the type of learning they deemed useful to their educational aspirations, or being able to dress and act in a different way, the tuition space became a place where young people were able to exercise their capacity and freedom, within what was considered to be a safe and acceptable environment by parents. It also provided insight into the constant tensions that youth were required to navigate - that was, the tensions between upholding the ideal of a 'good woman' and seeking to replicate elements of 'Western' culture. It was within these spaces that I was able to gain insight into how young people experiment with processes of becoming.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter began with theorising formal and informal spaces, both in terms of what these looked like culturally and what they came to represent to young people. I also explored how such spaces became sites for socialising, within which young people carved out a space for themselves. This chapter has also brought to light why tuition was an important aspect of a young person's life, arguing that it acted as a symbolic space, where young people were able to break away from the strict regime of schooling. On the other hand, tuition also provided important opportunities for learning. In line with theorising 'becoming,' I have attempted to construct ethnographic material to argue that it was in the tuition space that young people began to experiment about who they were and what they liked. The site therefore became a space for transgression.

The second part of this chapter examined how youth came to define 'freedoms' and how these could be actualised within three distinct spheres. I first demonstrated how young people use tuition to carve out a space for interaction, by providing them with important opportunities to expand their social network, as demonstrated through the example of Priya. The second field examined the importance of exercising agency through appearance, particularly for youth who are required to adhere to a strict uniform within

the school. Finally, I examined the importance of the tuition space in facilitating prospects of romance for a group of 18-year-old girls.

This chapter demonstrates that while the tuition space remains instrumental to young people's learning, it is also important in relation to their personal experiences, where they can exercise agency and begin to think about themselves becoming adults. Befriending boys and dating were not things that girls did lightly. In engaging with the opposite sex, they risked their reputation, particularly if their parents, teachers, or peers found out. This was nonetheless a risk that many girls were willing to take in pursuit of facilitating their personal aspirations for romance. Having presented young people's experiences of schooling in Chapter Four, and their aspirations to become good women, discussed in Chapter Five, this chapter highlights the rupture caused by the 'looser' tuition site, in terms of disrupting the rigidity and 'tightness' of the school site (Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi, 2015).

The scope of this chapter was to provide new insight into the role of tuition and how it enables young people to experiment with agency and notions of identity. By exploring how tuition contributes to young people's processes of becoming, I have presented how this space provides young people with opportunities to realise personal aspirations. In engaging with literature on space and place making (Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi, 2015; Fataar & Rinquest, 2018), I demonstrated how personal experiences came to determine the symbolic value of the tuition space, which was formed through its potential to allow young people to reclaim small freedoms, granting them opportunities to exercise agency and aspirations of becoming. In doing so, I have also shown how the tuition space is an important and overlooked site that allows us to understand how young people transgress values, beliefs and lifestyles presented within the school, in pursuit of figuring out who they want to become.

The following chapter continues the examination of 'becoming' among students at Mayadevi by examining their post-schooling experiences. I consider how young people make choices about their futures and the complexities that arise as a result of this.

Chapter Eight: Future Imaginings, Social Possibilities and Becoming Someone

Recollecting my time at Mayadevi, I vividly remember girls speaking about what their lives would be like once they finished school. Many in the final stages of schooling were looking forward to a break from their intense study schedules and spoke about being free from the stresses of schoolwork. This notion of freedom, as I explored in the previous chapter in relation to the symbolic value of tuition, was something that young people reiterated when speaking of their experiences of schooling. For my participants, the freedoms they alluded to were around the idea of being away from school and not having to go to tuition classes or study: in other words, doing what *they* wanted to do, without having to worry, or indeed feel guilty about doing things unrelated to their schooling. Once they had finished their A-Level exams and received their results, a new journey awaited them, one which would require them to make decisions impacting their immediate future.

This thesis has so far explored young people's experiences of schooling and tuition, and how these educational sites shape their sense of self. I argue that through schooling, young people come to form identities in line with the narrative of the nation state (Chapter Four). The aspirations they form and the futures they have in mind are consequently underpinned by Sinhala Buddhist values (Chapter Five). I have demonstrated how the tuition space provides young people with the additional knowledge and educational capital to achieve their aspirations (Chapter Six) and offers them opportunities to imagine cosmopolitan futures (Chapter Seven). Over the course of this thesis, I have examined how students at Mayadevi have many privileges, owing to their status as Sinhalese Buddhists from middle class households. The girls' socio-ethnic 'connectedness' also means they share similar aspirations and dreams about the future.

The purpose of the thesis has been to examine how young people's engagement within these two educational sites causes conflicts in how they come to construct their identity,

aspirations and visions of the future. With educational sites such as the school and tuition becoming all-encompassing in a young person's life, what happens when they leave school and venture into the world beyond it? How do they form ideas about what they want to do? This chapter brings together the themes explored throughout the course of this thesis to examine the post-school transition and how young people engage in this important period of their lives. More specifically, this chapter presents how they frame their futures, to examine that this process encompasses their positionality (gender, ethnicity and class) within their social world. I argue that imagining the future results in the reproduction of dominant Sinhala Buddhist values, discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

This chapter deals with the themes of aspirations, futures and identity. I begin by examining how futures are collectively imagined by youth, in light of possibilities for upward social mobility (8.1). I argue that social mobility becomes both an individual and collective aspiration framing the types of decision that young people come to make while thinking of their future. This will tie into the next section, which examines how young people's social and cultural capital becomes a capacity that youth exercise to secure livelihood strategies.

In section 8.2, I present options available to young people post-schooling (8.2), including government university entrance processes (8.2.1), vocational training, and employment (8.2.2). I argue that post-schooling routes are important in understanding how social positioning comes to facilitate or hinder aspirations. I go on to focus on the link between post-schooling options and how these come to reflect social stratification in Sri Lanka (8.3). Drawing on my participants' post-schooling experiences, I present how positionality shapes options for education and employment to argue that in the case of Sri Lanka, this heightens social inequality along ethno-religious, geographical and gender lines.

The concluding section (8.4) brings together my conceptualisation of 'becoming,' which combines youth's aspirations, their sense of identity and their visions of the future. I discuss post-schooling routes and positionality to argue how they shape young people's capacity to aspire. Drawing on the examples of three participants (8.5), I demonstrate how such capacities reflect the lived experiences of young people but also create tensions in how they come to aspire and imagine who they want to become. Through such

examples, I seek to highlight how post-schooling expectations are inherently shaped by a young person's social world.

8.1 Future Orientations and Attempting to Achieve Upward Social Mobility

This section begins by examining how futures are collectively imagined by young people, in light of possibilities for upward social mobility, marked through secure government employment. I argue that social mobility becomes both an individual and collective aspiration that frames the types of decision that young people come to make while thinking of their future.

Literature on youth and post-schooling experiences tends to frame discussions of futures through prospects for social mobility. Often, this literature links education to upward social mobility which comes to frame how futures are imagined. In the context of Sri Lanka, for example, free education is presented as a tool to facilitate the upward social mobility of individuals, irrespective of their class, religion and ethnicity (Hettige, 2000). Other scholars examine the complex relationship between aspiration and education, to argue that 'the desire to invest in education is…led by the cultural ideologies driven by capitalist globalization' (Sugden & Punch, 2016: 489). Still others, like Rao (2010), examine the processes through which education and migration shape livelihood strategies. Froerer and Portisch (2012), Davies (2005) and Crivello (2011) are among a large group of scholars who have conceptualised aspirations as linked to ideas of social progress. Specifically, they present how livelihood choices and aspirations for economic stability underpin conceptions of upward social mobility.

Drawing on my own ethnography, I have demonstrated over the course of this thesis how education is presented as a vehicle for achieving a better life. In Chapter Five, I introduced how aspirations for a 'good life' are marked by economic security and status enhancement, which leads many young people and parents to turn to tuition as a means of facilitating such goals. With the process of aspiring formed out of lived experiences and social relations, the school and tuition become important sites where youth come to conceptualise who they want to become. As suggested, literature on youth demonstrates how education is often cited as a tool for social and economic empowerment (Sugden & Punch, 2016). Sugden and Punch illustrate this by drawing on their research among rural

youth in China, India and Vietnam, to argue that the goal of raising the aspirations of young people continues to dominate global educational agendas. Other scholars have illustrated how education becomes a measure of a good childhood or a successful transition into adulthood (Crivello, 2011), while some have focused on the necessity of education, which leads to a sense of respectability, by giving young people the opportunities to contribute towards household expenses (Rao & Hossain, 2012).

In her paper, which seeks to unpack the processes by which youth make the transition from childhood to adulthood, Valentine (2003) explains how education and success are presented in youth discourses as individual achievements, focusing on Human Capital Theory and underplaying external factors that shape notions of 'success.' Valentine argues that approaching conceptualisations of the future through economic success comes to influence individuals' understandings of the links between education, employment and the wider economic system. When implying that investment by parents and youth in education will lead to employment and economic stability, the onus to achieve upward social mobility becomes a personal responsibility (Valentine, 2003). This echoes the experiences of many of my research participants, who felt that studying hard and doing well at school were strategies in securing livelihoods they deemed aspirational. To return to the example of Gayani, the Head of Prefects discussed in Chapter Five, achieving top ranking at A-Levels would permit her to secure a place at Jayewardenepura University. Should she be unsuccessful in this endeavour, Gayani considered alternative routes involving migrating to Canada or New Zealand to pursue tertiary education.

Parents with whom I spoke also assumed personal responsibility for facilitating prospects of upward mobility. Akka, Osha's mother, did so by sending her son to reputable private tuition classes. As discussed in Chapter Six, for akka, the cost of tuition was worth the sacrifice if it meant that her son would do better in his exams. Underpinning this reasoning was the prospect of educational and economic success.

With young people - with support from their parents - seeking to secure a place at a government university and a government job, long-term job security and stability become household aspirations. Such pathways are presented by many middle class parents as a natural trajectory for their children to follow. A conversation with akka demonstrates just this:

> *You see Laura, we have worked very hard to build this new house. Osha has to learn and study hard so that he can then help his siblings. Poor malli* [younger brother] *and nangi* [younger sister]. *They're small no. [Osha] has to study hard and find a good job so that he can help his little brother and sister study also. We've worked hard no, so he has to do this* (Fieldnotes, October 2017).

Akka's hopes for Osha,[77] revealed how aspirations become collective and take root in the family. Her aspiration for Osha to do well was not for him alone, but also for her other children, who would benefit from Osha's success in securing social mobility. As demonstrated by her statement, Osha going to university and securing employment would encourage his younger siblings to do the same. For akka, the long-term goal was to ensure that all of her three children successfully completed schooling and university and gained respectable employment. This, for her, would be the ultimate repayment for the sacrifices that she and her husband had made.

The collective aspiration of Osha's household also reveals how reciprocity takes place. The expectations on Osha to do well are a result of the investment of his parents, demonstrated through their commitment to pay for education as a way of facilitating success - whether this is sending him to a fee-paying school or paying for tuition classes - despite this placing financial pressure on the household. Consequently, the household aspiration for Osha to do 'well' reveals a process of exchange where he is expected to 'repay' his parents by supporting them and his siblings in the future. This expectation, however, is not forced on Osha, as he recognises this with a sense of duty towards his parents. Ames identifies this reciprocity among her research participants as 'shared responsibilities' as they are considered to be part of a family network (2013: 278). This idea of shared responsibility underpins Osha's example, as social mobility becomes an individual and collective aspiration that extends beyond the young person.

The inculcation of such visions of the future are not limited to the home, as school and schoolteachers also encourage young people to follow the trajectory. As discussed in Chapter Five, the school begins this by cementing what young people should aspire to. It is within the school space that young female students are taught to reproduce certain

[77] Discussed in chapters Six and Seven.

behaviours and dispositions in order to become good Buddhist women. The school's role extends beyond personal aspirations by encouraging students to aspire for good grades, university and government jobs before settling down to start a family. For many of the students at Mayadevi, going to university is presented as a natural path to follow having completed school.

Such expectations are placed on young people while they are at school and involve the input of teachers as well as family members. Young people like Thilini, Chaturi (presented in Chapters Five and Six) and Osha have their parents, who make decisions on behalf of their children throughout their formal schooling. This continues into post-schooling, with parents often telling young people about what they should do in terms of tertiary education, employment and training (Hettige *et al.*, 2004). This is not to dismiss young people's agency in making decisions, but to recognise how the capacity to make decisions is influenced by parental and familial ties. Valuing parental guidance and advice reflects the Buddhist values that youth are taught to respect. Aspiring and imagining the future then becomes a collective process involving the young person's social network, which informs and influences the choices they make.

Imagining the future, then, requires youth to work within a framework that encompasses their own wishes and hopes in relation to the expectations of their families and social and local networks. However, it also requires them to exercise their capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004), through opportunities shaped by their individual capital (be it social or cultural), which enables them to make certain choices. I have demonstrated that young people acquire cultural and educational capital through schooling and tuition, which present them with better chances of livelihood options and opportunities for social mobility. It is important, however, to look beyond futures framed around social mobility, which is an increasingly saturated trope in the field of youth studies, and instead focus on personal aspirations that may reveal the types of lifestyle that youth pursue and why.

With this in mind, education results in the collective aspiration for a 'good life,' constituted by material possessions and social status (Calestani, 2009; Jakimow, 2016). Calestani (2009) examines the construction of the 'good life' among Bolivians in relation to well-being, and argues that these ideas are formed through social and cultural systems that come to define what the good life is. For her participants, well-being is connected to ethics and morality, for example forming strong values and living life according to these.

Similarly, among my own participants, accounts of the 'good life' (Jakimow, 2016) are envisioned in a framework that encompasses morality (living according to the dharma), gendered comportment (by becoming good women) and the idea of social mobility (through secure employment). These elements bring together historical and contemporary experiences to reflect the collective aspiration of a 'good life.'

As I have argued previously (see Chapter Five), the reputability tied to government employment is one of the many remnants of British colonialism. Government employment continues to be associated with a higher social status, with elite groups having privileged access, following independence from Great Britain (Little & Hettige, 2015). Historically, the colonial education system was founded to create a workforce ready for government sector employment, and in return offered incentives such as pension and social reputability as a way of appeasing government sector workers (Fernando, 2013). The reputability of such jobs, manifested through social capital, combined with the long-term security and pension, has meant that the postcolonial legacy of government employment has become part of the collective aspiration of the population - including many young people, who fear the precarity of private sector employment.

Aspiring for a good life becomes an important element in imagining the future, marked by the ability to support one's family, facilitated through secure government employment. In the context of Sri Lanka, a post-war nation state, imagining the future becomes highly politicised, since this ties into how the future is presented through an ethno-nationalist vision. Young people are taught within the school to imagine their futures as dutiful citizens of Sri Lanka. With the national education system calling for the establishment of a 'Sri Lankan identity' through promoting 'national integrity, unity harmony and peace,' everyday schooling practices come to uphold this (Ministry of Education, 2013). Whether it is singing the national anthem every morning or taking part in a *Danē* (alms giving),[78] young people are expected to engage in nation-building activities within and outside of

[78]A *Danē* is a Buddhist ceremony often held to mark the anniversary of someone's death. Family members, friends and acquaintances are invited to attend a sermon, often within the deceased's home, conducted by monks, who are then served food by the family. Donations (often in form of new robes and bowls as well as money) are also made to the monks. The premise is that a *Danē* becomes a way in which to acquire good Karma. Increasingly, these functions have begun to take place at orphanages, old people's homes and hospitals as a way to help the less fortunate. There is much to be analysed in what such functions signify symbolically, but also socially, particularly in how they come to be reflections of one's wealth.

school. Bénéï (2008), through her research in an Indian school, presents such forms of 'devotional' rituals as ways in which to reconnect with the imagined ideal of the nation.

In context of Sri Lanka, I have demonstrated how the ethnic, religious and linguistic capital that young people inherit serves to further heighten structural inequalities. With the school's ethos and values centred around the preservation of its ethnic and religious identity, young people who do not belong to this social group are subject to processes of Othering within the school. We saw this in the examples of Shifna and Priya (in Chapter Four), where ethnic and religious identities are politicised to uphold the narrative of the nation state. As I also explained, underpinning Mr Wijetunga's biases was the fear of the Sinhalese population becoming a minority. This helps us to understand why he felt it necessary to call on female students to fight for its preservation.

As I have argued over the course of this thesis, students at Mayadevi are expected to replicate and reproduce practices that uphold their heritage and tradition. Imagining the future and who they want to become therefore reflects the inculcation of ethno-nationalist values.

Imagining a future is encouraged where it relates to and indeed reproduces state narratives. Among Sinhalese Buddhist young people, who I argue possess certain privileges (which arise from belonging to the majority ethnic group), some imagined futures are easier to achieve due to the social and cultural capital they have inherited. The capacity to aspire, or in this case, to imagine one's future, is therefore framed within the young person's social context.

Returning to Appadurai's (2004) discussion of aspirations is useful here. He argues that capacity is formed by subscribing to dominant cultural 'norms.' For students of Mayadevi, many of whom come from urban middle-class backgrounds, their inherited social and cultural capital allows them to position themselves favourably in relation to peers who may be from different social-economic, ethnic and geographical backgrounds. As presented in Chapter Five, the social capital acquired through going to a national school places young people in a better social position, particularly when applying for university. I discussed how entry to a national school becomes an aspiration for many children and their parents, because of this reputability.

Similarly, the acquisition of cultural capital through extracurricular activities, such as cadetting or becoming a prefect, further facilitates opportunities that would otherwise be limited. Through the acquisition of such capital, young people are able to assert their capacity to aspire by carving out opportunities for educational success as demonstrated, for example, through their engagement with the tuition industry. I argue that for many Mayadevians, their plans for the future are carefully considered and aligned to their aspirations. The next section will bring to light how young people plan for their futures by focusing on post-schooling options, where I will present a backdrop of the university entrance process and vocational training routes available to young people at the end of their schooling.

8.2 Post-Schooling Routes: Expectations and Realities

With the idea of social mobility tied to education locally as well as transnationally, a government university qualification is perceived to be an important asset in securing employment in Sri Lanka (Hettige *et al.*, 2004; Little & Hettige, 2015). Despite young people's aspirations to gain entry to a government university, the limited number of university spaces leads many of them to consider alternative options. Statistics released by the University Grants Commission and the Department for Statistics indicate that of the 191,179 students who attained the minimum requirements at A-Levels for university admission, only 30,662 (16%) were selected for an undergraduate course (University Grants Commission, 2017b).[79] These statistics reveal the comparatively low proportion of youth who attain the university entrance requirements and, importantly, how the university system selects students based on their ranking (this will be discussed in section 8.2.1).

Though the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) recognises the competition and difficulty in securing a government university space, it has failed to provide alternative pathways that involve vocational training and employment. The high number of failures have therefore contributed to increased rates of unemployment, which have been a longstanding concern among the population in Sri Lanka. Hettige *et al.* (2004: 9), for

[79]The minimum requirements for university entry are three 'S' passes in selected subjects and a minimum of 30% in the Common General Paper (University Grants Commission, 2018: 9).

example, have argued that unemployment has been a 'chronic recurring problem since the early 1950s'. The Annual Labour Survey in 2017 cites four percent of the population as being unemployed[80], with female unemployment (six percent) being twice as high as male unemployment (almost three percent). Urban, rural and Estate sectors[81] are relatively similar[82] (Department of Census and Statistics, 2017: 24). Young people's aspirations for upward social mobility, reflected in their pursuit of university, have not been curtailed by prospects of longstanding high unemployment rates.

In Chapter Five, I argued against global educational initiatives that call to raise the aspirations of young people in the Global South. I demonstrated through my own ethnography that youth in the Global South do indeed aspire highly, despite the lack of state structures to facilitate these aspirations and against the backdrop of a competitive tertiary education that will lead many young people to experience failure.

The GOSL's failure to provide young people with educational and employment opportunities to meet their personal as well as collective aspirations for social mobility has been recognised as the root cause of a number of youth-led insurrections (De Silva & De Silva, 1990; Tambiah, 1992; Wickramasinghe, 2006). For example, the rise of Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a Marxist-Leninist political party, was related to the struggles of educated rural Sinhalese youth and the lack of employment opportunities, which resulted in a violent uprising in 1971 (Ahmed, 1996). Ethnic underrepresentation and discriminatory policies such as the Sinhala Only Act (1956) and Standardisation Act (1971), which caused a demise in educational and employment opportunities for Tamils, served as the catalyst to the birth of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.[83] The LTTE's stance of fighting for the rights of Eelam Tamils and an independent state, was marked by decades of state oppression (Tambiah, 1992; Ahmed, 1996).

In short, with the idea of upward social mobility linked to education and education-related opportunities, failure by the state to provide opportunities for youth to realise their

[80]Unemployment has been defined by the Department of Census & Statistics as 'persons available and/or looking for work, and who did not work and take steps to find a job during last four weeks and ready to accept a job given a work opportunity within next two weeks …' (Department of Census & Statistics, 2017: 23).
[81]The Estate sector is plantations of tea, rubber and coconut and makes up 4% of the population (Department of Census & Statistics, 2012).
[82]4.4, 4.2 and 3.7% respectively.
[83]I have discussed at length the politicised role of education in Sri Lanka in Chapter Three (see 3.1).

aspirations has historically led to conflict. This is a critical point to consider, particularly in line with international and national calls for creating a socially mobile populous. With young people expected to attend university post-schooling, there is little evidence which brings to light the complexities of realising these aspirations.

Considering this, the post-schooling stage becomes an important period of transition for many young people. In the following section, I identify three main routes post-schooling: university, vocational training and employment. Since university remains a key aspiration for the majority of my participants, I will place more focus on this option. Following this, I will examine the vocational training options available to young people, and finally the option of working post-schooling. These steps are important to identify as they reveal a great deal about what is considered reputable, which feeds into the collective aspirations of a nation, as discussed earlier in this chapter. They also provide a nexus within which to rethink global educational initiatives that call to raise the aspirations of youth across the Global South. I demonstrate that in order to 'become someone,' youth in Sri Lanka are encouraged to follow the traditional trajectory of school-university-government employment. In turn, this reproduces social inequalities along class, ethnic and gendered lines.

8.2.1 Getting into University: Navigating a New Realm

Eligibility for university is determined by a set of criteria established by the University Grants Commission (UGC). The UGC was established in 1978 under the University Act No.16 and has since operated independently of the Ministry of Education. The UGC is responsible for the planning and coordination of government universities and Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), maintaining academic standards, and regulating the admission of students to HEIs (University Grants Commission, 2018). It oversees the 14 government universities across the island, considered more prestigious than private educational institutes and colleges, as well as Higher Educational Institutions (see Figure 8.3.1).

Despite its importance and comparative power in determining young people's futures, I discovered that up until the stages that they were required to apply for university, young people at Mayadevi were largely unaware of the purpose of the UGC. Over the course of

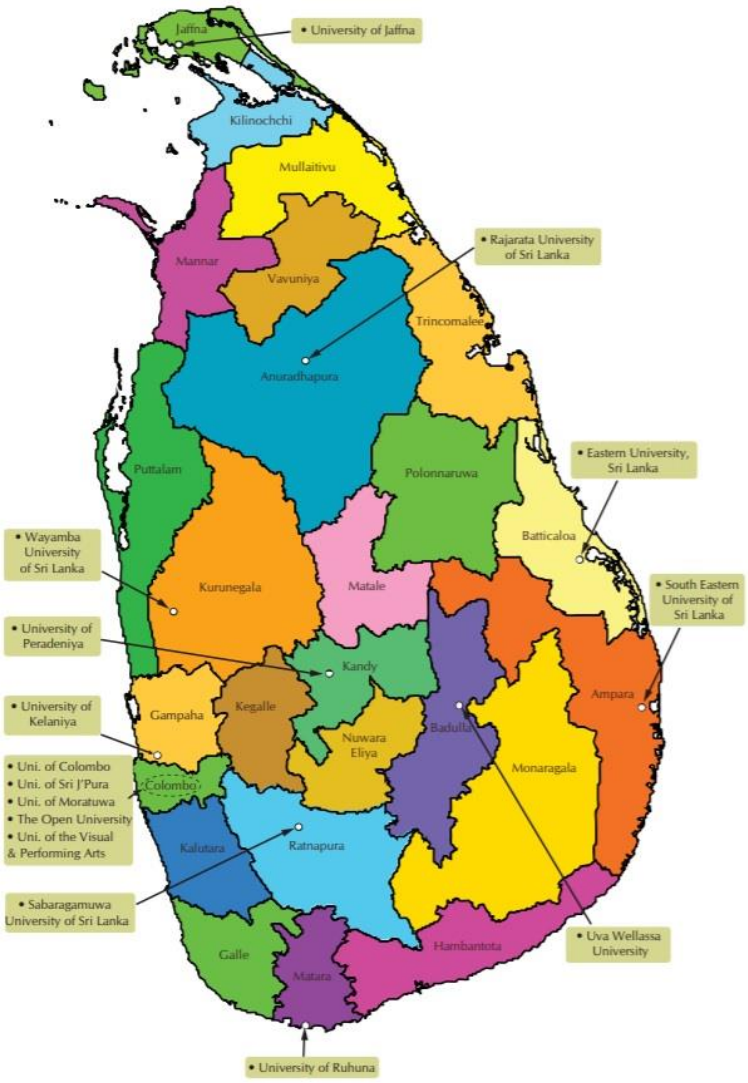
the school year I had heard buzzwords from students around ‘S-passes,’ ‘Z scores’ and ‘Common General Paper,’ which had by and large gone unexplained. I explain these further below, but as I discovered, the haziness in defining these terms was because students themselves did not have a clear idea about what these meant while at school.

The Common General Paper, an important English exam that students are required to complete in order to be eligible for university, was also overlooked by young people, who preferred to study for their ‘actual’ A-Level exams. It was only once young people finished school and began the process of applying for university that they began to understand the significance of the various terms.

The UGC website states that government universities offer 216 courses at undergraduate level. In order to do a course within the Arts stream, which includes humanities, languages and the social sciences, students are required to have qualified for the All Island Merit, which is based on the order of Z scores ranked across the island.[84] The All Island Merit makes up 40% of the total university entrance quota; as such it becomes incredibly important for students across the country to secure good Z scores to pursue their chosen course. From my own understanding, young people are given a selection of subjects from which to choose, depending on their Z score. This means that though some might have a first choice of subject, it may not always be possible to enrol in it.

[84]See table 8.2.1b in Appendix for Z score cut-off marks for university.

Figure 8.2.1a: Map of Government Universities



Source: University Grants Commission (2017a).

On the 29th December 2018, I was informed by Thilini that the UGC had released A-Level results. The results were released after some delay, because the supervisory board that was responsible for marking the exam papers was lacking sufficient teachers to serve as markers.[85] The delay had caused some anxiety for students, who had waited four months for their results. On the day of the release, Thilini informed me that she had attained A grades in Greek & Roman Civilization and Japanese, and a C in English Literature, despite having felt she 'messed up' on her paper, as she had run out of time. Over the following days, I began to receive messages from several Mayadevi alumni informing me of their results. The majority of students in my core group (Thilini, Chaturi, Nadika, Gayatri, Yani and Dilki) had received good results, consisting of As and Bs and some simple passes[86] (see Figure 8.2.1d in the Appendix for a summary of A-Level results among my core group).

When registering for A-Level exams in the final term of school, students are given an index number which they can use to access their results and university application on the UGC website. In addition to this, students can view their Z score, their All Island ranking for their stream, and their District Rank. Combined, these results give the student an indication of how well they have done and whether they meet the cut-off marks for university entrance. University selection is based on all of these results, depending on the stream chosen, for example, Arts, Technology, Bio Science or Medicine, to name a few. Securing a government university place, however, does not simply rely on the Z score, as district quotas further complicate the process.

Many of the students at Mayadevi resorted to seeking guidance to help interpret scores and rankings from their form teachers as well as subject specialists. It was only when speaking to Padma (introduced in the previous chapter), that I was able to probe in detail about how young people apply to government universities. She explained that the Z score indicates a candidate's ranking in their stream (Commerce, Art, Technology or Sciences). This is calculated by subtracting the 'raw marks' of a subject by the mean mark and

[85]Pagnasekera Thera the Chairman of the All Ceylon United Teachers Union explained 'lower payments paid to teachers on the supervisory boards, failure to inform in advance about holding the boards on regional basis and dejection among teachers have resulted in the fewer number of teachers' (Liyanage, 2018)
[86] If compared to the standard UK results, S pass (Simple Pass) is the equivalent to a grade D. See table 8.2.1c in the Appendix for grading scales.

dividing the result by the standard deviation of the marks per subject (Kottahachchi, 2012; University Grants Commission, 2018).

As an example, students from Kandy who are following the Arts stream may face higher competition to secure a space at Peradeniya university, due to their district and subject quotas. The Z score attempts to balance the scores between subjects based on their value. Take the case of Chaturi, who received A for English Literature and Japanese and C for Greek & Roman Civilization (GRC), and who wanted to pursue English Literature at university. The value per subject would mean that GRC would bring her overall Z score down, as GRC holds less value according to the Department of Examinations and the UGC. The purpose of implementing the Z score was to reduce the advantage that may result from the selection of subjects at A-Level. A Sunday Times article explains:

> Examination papers in all subjects are not of the same level of difficulty. In short, some subjects are considered easier than others. It has also been observed that students score high marks in some subjects than in others. As a result some students have more of an advantage over others (Fernandopulle, 2001).

In speaking to Padma, she explained that her youngest daughter, Mina, who also studied subjects in the Arts stream, had only secured a place at Peradeniya University to study Classics in September 2017, a year after receiving her results. Padma explained;

> *Mina's subjects were Drama, English Literature and Greek & Roman Civilization (GRC). Z score is high for English Literature but very low for GRC and Drama, according to the rank that she gets she gets given in the district, in this case Kandy district* (Fieldnotes, April 2018).

The long wait to secure a place at university is due to delays in being granted a subject to study, since the UGC determine which subjects' students may be enrolled in, depending on the subjects identified during the application process. On a field visit to Kandy in January 2020, many of the students at Mayadevi were still waiting on confirmation of their university place, meaning they had waited almost two years to secure university admission. The delay results from the limited number of university spaces for those who have followed particular streams. For the girls, many of whom were frustrated by the long

delay and uncertainty about their futures at university, the past two years were a period of time pass (Jeffrey, 2010).

An analysis of statistics of national undergraduate admissions by academic programme reveals that 28% of the 2017 admission was for the arts, 16% for management and 19% for the science programmes.[87] The Arts stream is considered to be the most popular among undergraduates, resulting in the enrolment timeframe being longer, and further resulting in many young people having to wait over a year to begin university (Hettige *et al.*, 2004).

At the time of receiving their results, my core group, however, were largely unaware of the waiting period that they would face to find out what university and course they would be allocated. Furthermore, prospects of unemployment were not an immediate concern for the girls, who were preoccupied with the university application process. For them, the subjects chosen at A-Level granted them new opportunities that went against the traditionally reputable occupations they had been taught to aspire to. As I discussed in Chapter Five, for the girls in the Arts stream, their choice in subject areas stemmed not only from interest, but also from recognising the competitive nature of traditionally academic subjects such as Commerce, Science or Maths.

8.2.2 Employment and Vocational Training Options

Of the cohort of students that I spent my time with, almost all had planned to apply for university. This echoed the choices of many middle class young people across Sri Lanka, where university, as discussed, remains a central aspiration. Discourses in the global North and South almost always position post-schooling life as a period of transition into adulthood, of which university becomes a central marker (Hyams, 2003; McGinnis, 2009; Jeffrey, 2010; Gilbertson, 2016). There are several ethnographies that explore other post-schooling strategies and trajectories employed by young people, often highlighting a period of waiting (Jeffrey, 2010), failure to secure employment (Masquelier, 2013) and migration (Crivello, 2011). In the case of Sri Lanka, alternative options are limited.

[87]See Table 8.2.1e in the Appendix for breakdown of university entrance by subject course.

Aside from overseeing the university entrance process, the UGC provides students with a list of recommended non-government institutions that they can apply for.[88] These can charge substantial fees, depending on the course type and the reputability of the institute.[89] As neither the Ministry of Education nor the UGC collects robust data on the number of young people accessing alternative higher education options, it is difficult to assess how popular these options are.

Students who do not have the means to pay for private university and are ineligible for government universities due to their results have limited choices in accessing tertiary education. For young people like Nimal and Shanta, two young boys I met while volunteering for Kids Reach[90] and who attend provincial schools in the periphery of Kandy, the prospect of going to university is far slimmer than for their peers who attend national schools. Their social positioning, in terms of both class and cultural capital, hinders their chances of receiving good Z-scores to qualify for university. With both of their fathers working in the informal economy as carpenters and *basuns* (builders), neither Nimal nor Shanta's parents have the capacity to pay for private education. The likelihood of both students being eligible for government university therefore depends on their ability to access tuition to excel in their exams or alternatively secure scholarships, funded by the state.

Although the state has ringfenced 5% of university entrance places for young people from 'disadvantaged' districts (mainly reserved for rural areas, as well as parts of the North and the East, which were heavily impacted by the civil war) and scholarships offered to young people from poor households, these remain limited. In the case of Nimal and Shantha, who are from working class Sinhalese Buddhist backgrounds, such initiatives are redundant, since the boys are considered to be neither underprivileged nor academically exceptional enough to receive the state's attention.

[88]Some Higher Educational Institutions operate as private limited companies and as such charge considerable amounts. There are also government-run institutes that place focus on vocational training - in the field of agriculture, for example. The list of government-supported institutions can be found at the following links: https://www.ugc.ac.lk/en/universities-and-institutes/other-government-universities http://www.mohe.gov.lk/index.php/universities-and-institutes/otherrecognizedinstitutesdegrees

[89]During my first visit to Sri Lanka, the news was dominated by a story involving SAITM (South Asian Institute of Technology and Medicine)-where students were able to gain medical degrees and begin practicing medicine. The story raised concerns around how well-equipped these students were and also questioned the implications for social stratification.

[90]Discussed in Chapter Six.

Despite their aspirations to pursue white-collar jobs (Nimal wanted to study Veterinary Medicine and Shantha wanted to study Engineering), the reality may be that these boys will have to opt for low-skilled employment within the services sector, such as working in retail. Nimal and Shantha's situations are not uncommon; rather they represent an example of what many young people who are in the bracket of low- to middle-income earners face. Though lacking the reputability of a government job, blue-collar employment is often an option that many young people have to resort to, particularly those who may have low A-Level results.

Another trend that was voiced by participants was the option of enlisting in vocational training in the field of agriculture, manufacturing and tourism, though it is not clear how many of such opportunities are available for young people in Sri Lanka. A UN report conducted on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Sri Lanka revealed that almost 6% of young people access ISCED Level 5.[91]

High unemployment rates and a history of youth insurrection as a consequence of unmet career aspirations have led the government of Sri Lanka to recognise vocational training as an important element of 'human resource development' (Gunatilaka, Mayer & Vodopivec, 2010: 92). As a result, the state has established a set of institutions providing vocational training in a range of areas, including hospitality and tourism or telecommunications, targeting school leavers (see Table 8.2.2 in Appendix for TVET institutions).

While these vocational training courses are becoming more available across Sri Lanka, many of the young people that I spent time with dismissed these as feasible options. Many of the A-Level students at Mayadevi associate TVET with manual and low-paid labour, which do not provide a sense of upward social mobility. It is often young people from poorer backgrounds who access such schemes, and for the students at Mayadevi, who have been taught to aspire for university from a young age, such initiatives were not something worth considering.

Despite the state increasing awareness of TVET programmes and the importance of traditional employment routes, then, there is a sense of resistance among middle class

[91]The UN defines International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Level 5 as short-cycle tertiary education. These are designed to enhance professional knowledge, skills and competencies and prepare young people to enter the labour market.

youth in engaging with these options. Instead, youth who have connections, through family or acquaintances, may decide to pursue private employment. For many of my research participants, this was not an intended outcome, since university was very much at the forefront of their priorities. While waiting for confirmation of a university space, many of the students at Mayadevi, like Dilki and Nadika, enrolled at private colleges to complete additional qualifications in IT, while others opted to become private tutors for children studying for their scholarship exam. This was a way to pass time, but also to gain work experience to facilitate employment opportunities in the future. Such instances of acquiring additional educational capital have been observed by Jeffrey (2010), who examines strategies adopted by young men in Meerut, North India, to increase their prospects of employability.

During my time at Mayadevi, I only met two girls studying for their A-Levels who had the capital (social and cultural) to be able to go directly into private employment instead of pursing university. One student had a brother who worked for Dialog, a mobile phone provider based in Colombo, who could get his sister an entry-level position within the company. The other had spoken to me about taking over her father's successful photocopy business, located in the heart of Kandy. Both students represented a small cohort who had parents and family members in secure private sector employment, enabling girls to pursue more reputable careers in the private sector.

The importance of social contacts in accessing employment opportunities is not limited to Sri Lanka alone. In her paper on *fadas* (youth clubs) in Niger, Masquelier (2013) also describes the importance of connections in finding permanent work, which lead her participants to explain that the lack of social capital will lead them to 'one day…end up eating our diplomas' (2013: 471). Like Masquelier's research informants, many young people in Sri Lanka attempt to tap into networks to facilitate prospects of upward mobility. For those who have family connections in Colombo, access to private employment or educational institutes is made easier because of the social connections they have acquired through familial links.

By and large, the majority of the students I spoke with at Mayadevi had plans to attend government universities close to their hometowns. A minority of young people, like Gayani, considered the option of educational migration to countries like Australia, New Zealand and the United States, should they be unsuccessful in securing a government

university place in Sri Lanka. Of the young people I met, for example, only one had considered migrating to Australia to pursue an undergraduate degree.[92] Young people adopt various strategies in pursuit of determining what they want to do in the future. Some have plans of attending university, while others use the capital acquired through family networks to carve out new opportunities for themselves.

This section has examined the options available to young people post-schooling. As mentioned, I have placed greater focus on the university entrance process, as this was the option that many of my research participants were pursuing. The second option, vocational training, is more unusual for my middle class participants, though it provides young people from often rural and poor backgrounds the opportunity to attain additional qualifications that may result in employment. The final option, post-school employment, is explored by some young people who may have the existing social capital to tap into employment opportunities. These cases are uncommon, since, as discussed, they rely on youth carving out these opportunities through their social networks. Having presented the post-schooling routes, I demonstrate the limited options that young people have, particularly for those who may not have the capital of having attended a reputable national school. The next section will provide an analysis of the options available to young people. I will discuss how these are reflective of wider social stratification processes in Sri Lanka.

8.3 Social Stratification and Positionality

As demonstrated so far, young people in Sri Lanka have three main options post-schooling, although government university often plays a central part in young people's visions of the future. These imaginings vary, however, depending on the young person's social positioning, but also on the complex network that is comprised of family, teachers and kin groups. Over the course of the thesis, I have argued that these elements become key in the options that female youth at Mayadevi eventually pursue. This section focuses on the link between post-schooling options and how these come to reflect social stratification in Sri Lanka. Drawing on my ethnography of the post-schooling routes that some students I met at Mayadevi chose to pursue, I argue that young people's social

[92]Though uncommon among young people at Mayadevi, educational migration is growing in Sri Lanka, with just over 19,000 young people migrating out of Sri Lanka yearly to pursue tertiary education (Institute of Statistics, 2019).

positioning shapes the options available to them. In turn, this heightens social inequality along ethno-religious, geographical and gender lines.

I further ague that there are tensions between how youth come to imagine their future and the expectations they face to uphold their ethno-religious traditions. On the one hand, young people's imaginings of their future are centred around becoming socially mobile and pursuing cosmopolitan lifestyles. In contrast, their aspirations for the future are bound by expectations of becoming 'good' women. This tension will be explored in the final section of this chapter.

In 'What Makes a Social Class', Bourdieu (1987) introduces the notion of class as an analytical construct. According to Bourdieu, *classmaking* is part of a political schema that portrays classes as collectives that share elements of social and cultural capital. To understand class, one must recognise how classes are presented as reality through the 'a representation of the divisions' (Bourdieu, 1987: 8). He further explains:

> The individual and collective representation that agents may acquire of the social world and of their place in it may well be constructed according to completely different categories, even if, in their everyday practices, these agents follow the laws immanent in that universe through the mediation of their sense of place (1987: 8).

The idea of class, then, is formed through a process of inculcation of difference that takes place within an individual's social world, and involves state apparatuses such as the school (Althusser, 2001). In turn, shared characteristics further heighten this notion of belonging to a group and a shared ideology. With the conceptualisation of class being defined by shared ideologies, struggles and identity, what emerges is a process of Othering of those who do not share these characteristics. Here, by extending Bourdieu's (1987) definition of class to social positioning, and, importantly, by acknowledging the influence of ethnicity, religion and language, we can see how postcolonial social stratification can be understood in contemporary Sri Lanka.

I have already presented a discussion on the rise of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka, resulting in communal violence perpetrated on Muslim communities across the island. Such instances reflect the ethno-religious mobilization which take place as a means to preserve ideals of nationhood. Froerer (2006) presents how incidents involving

Hindu and Christians from an *adivasi* village reflect common perceptions of the 'threatening Other' who are positioned outside of the community (2006: 40).

Davis (2015) also presents an important example of how Othering takes place through language at a girls' college in Kandy, Sri Lanka. Through Herath, a Tamil-speaking Sinhalese young man, Davis discusses how the perceived safeness of a private space is undermined when she and Herath venture out into a public area. As Davis explains, by speaking Tamil, Herath invites unwanted attention from strangers, as this could be interpreted as a 'political stance in relation to…the ethnic conflict' (2015: 106). Through this, Herath's social positioning shifts into ambiguity, since his ability to speak Tamil 'Others' him from the majority non-Tamil speaking Sinhalese. Returning to Bourdieu's notion of class, formed out of principles of differentiation (Bourdieu, 1987) is useful in understanding Herath's positioning. Here, then, we see how an application of Bourdieu's notion of class can be applied to other forms of postcolonial social stratification in Sri Lanka (namely ethnicity, religion and language).

I have discussed how the post-schooling options available to young people reflect the social hierarchy of Sri Lankan society by demonstrating the pathways that young people opt for, depending on their social positioning. Social stratification is mirrored through the options available for young people to pursue. Although youth are taught to aspire highly, often towards university and government employment, the underlying structural barriers which maintain social hierarchies often prevent such aspirations from being achieved. This can be seen in the example of Nimal and Shantha, who are unable to realise their employment aspirations. Consequently, many young people come to realise for the first time their own position within such hierarchies.

As demonstrated throughout this thesis, my core participants from Mayadevi possessed certain privileges which move beyond class and extend into ethnicity and religion. With literature on social stratification privileging class (Willis, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), race, gender and religion are often important elements that are overshadowed (Strand & Winston, 2008; Sterling, 2015). Exceptions include Evans (2006), whose study of street children in Tanzania pays close attention to the interplay of age, gender and class in how inequalities are played out and how these shape young people's experiences of the 'street' (Evans, 2006). Such studies highlight the importance of intersectionality in relation to lived experiences, which, according to Yuval-Davis, are shaped within an

individual's 'local, ethnic, religious, national, regional, transnational and international political communities' (2007: 562).

For the students of Mayadevi, who come from middle class households and belong to the ethnoreligious majority, perception of social stratification is not as evident. Consequently, many of the girls I spent time with did not perceive themselves to be 'higher up' the social hierarchy in relation to their non-Sinhalese Buddhist peers. At the same time, they see themselves as distinctly separate to those who did not share the characteristics of their social positioning, for example, young people who went to less reputable schools. Young people's life experiences, therefore, further heighten their inability to recognise structural inequalities, which goes on to reproduce further social hierarchies.

In contrast, for young people who do not possess the necessary social capital to successfully pursue their aspirations, post-schooling options further heighten social distinctions, leading some youth to experience a sense of failure. Jeffrey *et al.* (2005) detail sentiments surrounding failure or a sense of 'emptiness' in their research on education among young men from the Chamar caste in North India, many of whom resorted to low skilled labour despite having higher education degrees.

With the education system heightening existing forms of social stratification, for example through the governance of national and provincial schools, I became more aware of the 'banal' privileges of the students at Mayadevi, who, as I have argued, already possess certain privileges compared with youth from minority ethnic groups.[93] I became acutely aware of this during the ethnic riots that took place in the Kandy district in March 2018. The riots erupted following a road incident between a Muslim driver and a Sinhalese tuk tuk driver, which resulted in the death of the Sinhalese driver. What followed was ten days of curfews, with heavy armed forces presence (Riza, 2018; Tamil Guardian, 2018). The unrest, which lasted two weeks and resulted in the closure of schools and many businesses as well as the vandalisation of mosques and Muslim homes, revealed the

[93]I borrow Benei's (2008) use of 'banal nationalism' produced through everyday schooling, to argue that the privileges of Sinhalese Buddhist majority come to be 'normalised' through everyday practices and the culture in which these are exercised. In turn, privileges are normalised through everyday lived experiences by the ethnic majority to the extent that these become invisible.

undercurrent of continuing ethnonationalist tensions which were manifest through sporadic violent incidents.

In relation to my own research, this incident brought to light the stark differences in how youth of the same age experience such events. For my Muslim participants, the riots left them fearing for their community's wellbeing. Many spoke to me about their worries of their communities being targeted, their families' businesses being burnt down and their concern for what the future would be like for Muslims. In contrast, for my Sinhalese participants, the events, although concerning, had little impact on their day-to-day life. They spoke to me about inconveniences that this had caused, but very few recognised the link between Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and the violence that had erupted and caused great distress to an already marginalised community.

Such incidents not only provided me with insights into the 'social reality' of Sri Lanka, but also highlight how ethnic divides come to shape young people's experiences of growing up in a highly politicised landscape. In turn, this reflects the social stratification on a macro level, whether it be through schooling or employment options. Importantly, such incidents also represent the present-day symbolic violence permeating schooling experiences, reflected through the students' 'banal' privileges.

For the students that I spent time with, the myth of free and good quality education was indeed true, since many resorted to (sometimes expensive forms of) tuition to subsidise their schooling. Not only did they gain a place at a reputable national school, but through this, they were able to aspire for a university place and, in the long term, pursue government employment. By highlighting the symbolic violence (and very real ethno-religious violence), I do not mean to dismiss the students' work ethic and sense of drive for educational success; rather, the intention is to call attention to the fact that young people's social positioning, either as privileged Sinhalese Buddhist or indeed marginalised Tamil and Muslim youths, facilitates or hinders the achievement of such aspirations.

The following section will focus further on how one's social positioning facilitates the capacity to aspire and imagine one's future. I will extend the argument, introduced above, that we need to move beyond class and focus on the role that intersectionality plays in the process of becoming.

8.4 Prospects of Becoming Someone: A Landscape of Social Possibilities

My return visits to Kandy in January 2019 and 2020 gave me the opportunity to catch up with my core group in 13B and understand how they were engaging with the post-schooling transition. In 2019, the group, having waited five months for their results, were now busy making plans for their future. The girls had already told me of their aspirations, and upward social mobility, marked by the prospect of securing well-paid employment, was firmly at the centre. As touched on in the previous section, the students at Mayadevi possess certain 'social advantages,' or to borrow Appadurai's (2004) term, capacities, acquired through social and cultural capital, that enable certain opportunities to be realised (Bourdieu, 1987).

In Chapter Five, I discussed how the capacity to aspire 'highly' arises from capital, whether cultural, economic or social, that individuals acquire through their social relations. This capacity also manifests itself through a sense of confidence that stems from having opportunities available. For my core group, higher education and government employment were plans they had long factored into their visions of the future, assuming (given their positions of privilege) that these options were available to them. Pursuing employment or indeed vocational training were not alternatives to be considered, since the students perceived these to be 'below' their own social position. To go into employment without a university qualification would be to call into question the reputability of the family. Post-schooling employment was therefore not an option they had considered, nor was it something that their middle class parents would be willing to support.

As I demonstrated through the examples of my core group, as well as young people like Nimal and Shantha, university provides young people with what is perceived to be the 'best chance' of achieving stable future livelihoods. Here again, it is useful to draw on Bourdieu (1984), who examines how forms of capital are instrumental in maintaining a bourgeois, middle class lifestyle. Social capital is useful in preserving connections as well as respectability, which, Bourdieu argues, is 'essential in winning and keeping the confidence of high society' (ibid: 122). Vocational training therefore undermines the acquisition of social and cultural capital, since it would lead to skilled labour, which,

though increasingly needed in Sri Lanka, would not satisfy the expectations of young people and their families, nor their aspirations for social mobility (Hettige *et al.*, 2004).

Opportunities to pursue vocational or technical training also raise questions around gender disparity, with availability and access being highlighted as barriers (Hettige *et al.*, 2004). Gender expectations further heighten the undesirability of pursing vocational training, which often leads to casual labour. In her paper 'The "Good Girls" of Sri Lankan Modernity: Moral Orders of Nationalism and Capitalism', for example, Lynch (1999) provides a glimpse into the social and gendered hierarchy of the garment industry. As Lynch reveals, the garment factory workers are village girls who migrate to Colombo in pursuit of employment, unlike the management, who are largely middle class Sinhalese men.

For my own research participants, such employment routes would be considered to be beneath them, suggesting that class and reputability play an important factor in how youth come to negotiate what they want to do in the future. Engaging in manual labour contradicts what the girls have been taught to be and to aspire to; that is, to embody and become 'good women.' In contrast to Lynch's study of the 'good girl' identity of the factory workers, who embody 'Sinhala traditions [as] efficient and productive factory worker(s)' (1999: 59), my students rejected this by presenting themselves as 'educated.'

Rather than engaging in skilled work like Lynch's participants, Mayadevi students position themselves away from 'lower class' employment activities. For my students, 'proper behaviour' was characterised through gendered comportments, but also with a sense of reputability in mind (Lynch, 1999). Engaging in what they consider to be low-skilled work, then, suggests that students have failed in achieving academic success and thus have resorted to waged labour. This distinction is important because it not only highlights intersectionality, in terms of gender, class and ethnicity, but also because it reinforces the importance of the production of the 'right' kind of citizens, who contribute towards the nation through white-collar employment rather than low-skilled labour (Jeffrey *et al*., 2005; Ames, 2013).

With the majority of my participants passing three A-Level subjects to qualify for government university, their capacity to pursue university over vocational training reinforces the importance of social positioning in imagining a certain future. Despite the

competitive nature of securing a government university space, in other words, the students at Mayadevi have a greater chance of success than young people who have studied at provincial or rural schools due to the cultural capital acquired through schooling. Pursing reputable employment, then, speaks to their own aspirations as well as the aspirations of a socially mobile nation.

Thilini, who had turned 19 when I returned to the field, was initially unsure about the direction she was going. In this regard, she provided a good example of the importance of exploring the role of positionality in relation to notions of becoming. University, as discussed earlier, was something that Thilini firmly aspired to. She knew she enjoyed languages and had played with the idea of pursuing Japanese or Chinese at a government university to potentially work within the tourism sector. Conversations with Thilini and my other core interlocutors on my return visit, however, revealed common a sense of uncertainty about their futures. It became apparent that the decision process was unnerving for many young people, who experienced important decision-making for the first time. On a number of occasions, Thilini asked me about what she should do: "What do you think love? Can you advise on what to do? Or do you have any contacts that can help me?" I was happy to be considered a close confidant and advisor, but, aware of my influence, made it clear that she should decide and that it was important to do something that she enjoyed.[94]

My advice was of little help, since Thilini had been advised by her parents and teachers to make strategic decisions about the subjects that she would pursue at university. For her family, selecting languages would mean that she would find it more difficult to find a secure job, due to high numbers of undergraduates in the Arts stream (Hettige *et al.*, 2004; University Grants Commission, 2017b). In January 2020, Thilini had been advised by her parents to select International Relations and a language option for her undergraduate degree, as they believed this would give Thilini a better chance at finding a job once she graduates.

As intimated above in Section 8.2.1, and according to Hettige *et al.* (2004), the faculty of Arts is perceived to be the stream worst affected by graduate unemployment, owing to

[94]It is important to acknowledge that my advice reflects my own Western predisposition, which prioritises enjoyment of a subject over practicality. Though students like Thilini valued my advice, it highlighted my position as the Other, who despite having known the girls for a year, still had little understanding about the weight of such decisions.

many young people selecting this subject area. However, increased investment as a result of the continued partnership between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Japanese state has led to an increased demand for Sinhala-Japanese speaking individuals. On seeking advice from my family friend, who runs a successful tourism business in Sri Lanka, this was reaffirmed. Thilini's repeated questioning of whether I had any relevant 'contacts' reaffirmed that finding employment through social contacts was often a popular avenue for young people in their pursuit of employment.[95]

Social capital therefore becomes an important instrument in facilitating employment opportunities. For young people like Thilini and her friends, having the right contacts gives them a greater capacity to showcase themselves apart from the unemployed masses who share the same qualifications. With high unemployment, university qualifications alone are no longer sufficient. For youth who possess the cultural capital (of having gone to a good national school and government university), employment prospects are better than for their peers who do not share the same privileges.

Despite this, young people like Thilini still face the prospect of being unemployable due to lack of work experience, and also lack of knowledge of English, which is an important factor in securing government employment, discussed in Chapters Five and Six (Hettige *et al.*, 2004; Jeffrey, 2010). Her privileges of having received a good education are important, but not always sufficient, due to the increased difficulty of securing a job, which highlights the crisis of education in Sri Lanka. Leaning on one's social capital becomes one way in which youth from privileged urban schools exercise their capacity to find employment.

In the space of the few months since finishing school, there was a clear shift in how Thilini came to perceive her future. Now that she had received her results, her concerns for exams and finishing school were over, and she faced the important step of choosing the right course, which required special attention. For Thilini, selecting Languages would enable her to carve a path in the tourism sector, one of the fastest growing sectors in Sri Lanka. She had planned on either securing an official job within the Ministry of Tourism

[95]Hettige *et al.* (2004: 39) identify barriers to employment among youth in the Monaragala district of Sri Lanka. The report reveals that 20% of youth perceive lack of 'influential contacts' as a key obstacle in securing employment.

Development & Christian Religious Affairs, or within a consulate, though was still unsure about the type of job she would want to pursue. Thilini, like many young people in her position, played to her strengths, telling me that she did the best in Japanese and that she enjoyed studying it, giving her little reason to want to consider something else. Her major hesitancy, as she explained, was not knowing what the job market was like in the field of languages.

This revealed that despite students like Thilini knowing where they are positioned educationally, they have little information surrounding access to employment opportunities. Not knowing which path to take was an anxious time because of the lack of insight that she had about what to do after schooling. Thilini's case was reflected among her peer group, who, having had some idea about what they wanted to achieve, did not know how to go about it, or indeed the options available to them. As such, the students tended to base their course selections on advice from parents (primarily) as well as teachers, family friends and acquaintances who had some insight or knowledge in the field that the young person wanted to pursue.

I have discussed how young people's decision-making is a collective process involving their parents, teachers as well as peers. Social networks possess the experience, expertise, insight and authority to be able to guide students on their future choices. Crivello importantly highlights that parents' experiences of hardship become a motivator for their children to lead 'better lives' (Crivello, 2011). Consequently, their expertise in advising their children stems from lived experiences of harder times. With education being perceived as 'central to disrupting the intergenerational transfer of poverty,' making decisions for the future involves shared responsibility (Crivello, 2011: 408). In this way, the future is imagined and forged with this social network in mind and comes to extend beyond the young person. Framing the future for youth at Mayadevi, in other words, is not done in isolation, but rather requires the involvement of multiple actors. The impact of young people's decisions and choices therefore contributes towards the collective aspirations of the family.

Shortly before I concluded my final visit, Thilini had decided on the subjects International Relations and Chinese, which she was recommended to select because "Chinese offers more opportunities than Japanese." Her reason for selecting International Relations came down to being recommended to study combined subjects to ensure she has the 'appeal'

and thus gain access to future employment opportunities. As Thilini explained to me, International Relations was a "Popular subject [it seems] and many people have gone abroad or have gotten good [government] jobs from doing it." Thilini was in a good position to negotiate what she wanted to do for university because of the grades she had received, but also because of the educational capital acquired by going to Mayadevi, well recognised for its Arts stream. Thilini's determination in pursing traditionally weak subjects also speaks to the confidence that she has in herself, which has stemmed from the social positioning of having attended a national school and gained good A-Level results. Her recognition of her own capacity to aspire further highlights the link between social positioning and the opportunities that young people perceive to be available to them.

8.5 Tensions in Aspiring and Becoming

The focus of this thesis has been to demonstrate how young people's conceptualisations of the future are inherently influenced by their social world and their position within it. Figuring out who to become can cause tensions in how young people aspire. Consequently, how young people come to imagine their futures varies depending on their capacity to aspire, which enables them to or hinders them in becoming someone. For some, like Osha, the notion of becoming centres around the achievement of upward social mobility. Whereas for others, like Chaturi, it is achieving the goal of being able to support their families and in turn live up to the expectation of becoming 'good women' through motherhood. In spite of the apparent gendered variance between these two, the broader point of aspiring for a good life through upward mobility can be applied to both male and female young people.

Presenting the example of Chaturi, who has a clear vision about who she will become, it becomes evident that for her, getting married, becoming a mother and raising children in a Buddhist household are very important. She also, however, sees herself working full-time and placing children in childcare so that she can pursue a successful career. According to Chaturi, this creates a tension where she hopes to follow in her mother's footstep by raising children and a happy family, on the one hand, while pursuing her own aspiration to carve out a successful career, on the other. Chaturi, like many young people across Sri Lanka, does not see herself reliving the hardships that her parents have faced.

As such, gaining independence by having a successful career is an important element that she seeks to pursue. At the same time, she recognises the expectations that have been taught to her - so much so that these become fundamental 'values' in figuring out her future.

The notion of becoming, as I have theorised, combines youth aspirations, their sense of identity and visions of the future. What is important is recognising how the capacity to 'become someone' impinges on one's social place in the world. Literature on youth and futures has touched on the links between how futures are imagined and an individual's positioning within society (Crivello, 2011; Patel, 2017). Social positioning can shift, depending on one's capital, which can 'confine or move you' (Vigh, 2009: 97).

Vigh's (2009) analysis of young men's imaginaries in Bissau provides a useful insight into how imagining oneself in relation to social spaces shapes one's ability to access opportunities. As Vigh explains, social navigation requires individuals to '[move] tactically in relation to social forces' in as far as it illustrates tactics and actions of how individuals move through uncertainty (ibid: 97). Moving tactically requires one to exercise the capacity to making certain futures possible. This is an important consideration when examining the post-schooling options that the female students at Mayadevi pursue. For the majority of my participants, opportunities to meet their own aspirations were facilitated because of their ethnoreligious status as well as the social and cultural capital acquired through their class status.

Among my core group, Yani's experiences post-schooling perhaps reflect this the most. On my return to the field, I discovered that she had received the lowest results in her class, despite her position as a prefect.[96] Through my interlocutors, I also learnt that Yani would be returning to Mayadevi to retake her A-Levels in September 2019.[97]

Prior to sitting her exams, Yani, like her friends, aspired to pursue university. However, she did not have to apply for government university because she had the option of pursing higher education by enrolling in Kotelawala Defence University (KDU), through her

[96]This was discussed in Chapter Five.

[97]Students who fail their exams - that is, gain less than three standards passes - can retake A-Levels up to three times. This is not uncommon, due to the difficulty in passing A-Levels. The Government of Sri Lanka does not have statistics available to highlight the number of retakes. However, cross-analysis of pass grades could indicate the numbers of young people who go on to retake their A-Levels, though this may not hold statistical significance.

cadetting. The KDU, a reputable institution which trains the armed forces, has a strict criterion that limits entry to only those who have had cadetting experience like Yani. During my time at Mayadevi, Yani appeared to be the least engaged in her schoolwork, often missing days in a row and copying her peers' homework. In conversation with the group about post-schooling plans, though, Yani appeared to be the most confident, explaining that she planned to apply for KDU.

It transpired that part of the reason for her pursuing cadetting and putting this above her schooling was that Yani was almost guaranteed a place in KDU because of her cadet training. Unlike her peers, she did not need to face the same wait or pressure of getting good results because her engagement with the programme meant that she was almost sure to get a place at KDU if she achieved simple passes. Yani explained to me prior to completing her A-Level exams, "I still have to get A-levels, but I don't need a high Z-score; even [an] S-pass would do." Unlike her classmates, Yani did not have a specific subject or career route in mind, and instead explained that she wanted to work in the Navy. She explained that she was happy to take up whatever subject the university offered her because part of the benefit was that post-university, she would be 'guaranteed' a job within the defence sector, considered reputable government jobs.[98] Though such livelihood routes are considered to guarantee an enviable future, Yani was the only young person in her class to rely on cadetting for future employment.

Though Yani's plan of going to KDU would be delayed due to her retakes, unlike her peers at Mayadevi, she was able to mitigate the prospect of failure though her retained capacity to pursue university at KDU. Her connections, both social (through her cadet instructor and teachers) and cultural (through going to a national school), meant that her aspiration to work in the Navy could still be achieved. What further enabled Yani to pursue this was her own background. As a young Sinhalese Buddhist girl, working for the Navy was something that she had been taught to aspire to. With jobs within the Armed forces glorified in Sri Lanka, Yani's social positioning meant that this was an option available to her, unlike Tamil or Muslim female peers. Despite falling behind her peers, Yani nonetheless possessed the capital to be able to resort to retakes as an option. Her reputation as a 'good girl' at school, who happened to have done badly, meant that she was given a second chance by the Principal, and Yani used this to her advantage, telling

[98] The benefits include accommodation, pension, and travel costs reserved for civil servants.

me that since she had covered the syllabus, she could use this next year to go to revision classes rather than school.

In contrast to Yani, Priya, the only Tamil student in 13B, presents another example of where tensions arise in how young people aspire and imagine their futures. Unlike her school friends, who saw themselves as daughters of Mayadevi and dutiful Sri Lankan citizens, Priya vehemently rejected this. Instead, she was one of the few students who resisted the school and state narrative surrounding citizenship, by vocalising her desire to leave Sri Lanka.

In this way, Priya's example represents how tensions between traditional and cosmopolitan imaginings are central to how youth come to imagine their futures. She saw herself escaping Sri Lanka to pursue a successful career in the television industry in South India. In her own words, Priya was 'obsessed' with South Indian culture, telling me several times that she couldn't wait to finish school so that she could go to India, because, "This place [Sri Lanka] [didn't] feel like home." I recollect being surprised that she had such strong views about her love for India, considering she had not visited the country. It was also interesting to see her align herself to an Indian identity more than a Sri Lankan one, which, as discussed in Chapter Four, is a central part of schooling at Mayadevi. Because of her Tamil status, and her lack of shared identity, Priya rejected the narrative of the nation state, which is centred around Sinhala Buddhist ideology.

This speaks to what Sørensen (2008) has highlighted as partial citizenship, which creates experiences of inclusion and exclusion through ethnic distinctions. In contrast to Chaturi, Thilini and other students, Priya also rejected the idea of becoming the kind of 'good woman' embedded in Sinhalese Buddhist values. In contrast to her classmates, who reproduced dominant Buddhist religious and cultural values within and outside of the school, Priya rejected these, along with her own Hindu upbringing. She told me one day while we were hanging out in the IT block at Mayadevi, "[Religion is] rubbish and I don't believe in it. I used to pray and pray and pray and lots of bad things have happened to me, so I don't bother going to the *Kovil* [temple] anymore."

Such examples reveal the tensions that young people experience in figuring out who to become. For Priya, taking part in nation-building practices, such as singing the national anthem and behaving according to the school's expectation, was a strategy to acquire

educational capital. She had little interest and investment in upholding the school's teachings. Instead, Priya was far more willing to discuss South Indian culture with me, asking me if I knew of different South Indian film directors and movies. She saw herself living in South India, post-schooling, pursuing an unconventional employment route that many of her peers did not perceive to be viable because it went against what they had been taught to aspire to. Unlike Chaturi, who saw herself remaining in Sri Lanka, Priya saw herself being a successful presenter on Indian Tamil TV channels such as *Zee TV*.

To pursue this, she had planned to start a media course in Colombo, which, once finished, would enable her to travel to India and pursue links that she hoped to have built up while studying. When asked how her parents saw her aspirations, Priya shrugged and once again reinforced why leaving Sri Lanka was important to her. She explained, "I don't like it here. I like India because I can speak my language [Tamil]. Here, it's either English or Sinhala. I don't like English. It is not my language. I want to speak my language. And I like the clothes, the music, I like everything in India." Priya's wishes to speak her own language, dress differently to how she could in Kandy and engage in popular South Indian culture set her apart from her peers. She was in pursuit of carving out her future, fearless and unfazed by the potentiality of not being allowed to do this by her family, owing to concerns for her safety.

In the context of schooling in Sri Lanka, Priya's Otherness, manifested through her resistance to engage and uphold Sinhala Buddhist values made her unpopular among her classmates because she openly defied what the students had been taught to inherently *become*. Her continued attempts to break away from the traditional role of being a 'good woman' made her a problematic figure among her peers, who sought to embody and reproduce the school's teachings in their aspirations for the future.

I have presented three distinct examples of young people's experiences post-schooling, by discussing Chaturi's plans for post schooling, followed by Yani and Priya. In doing so, I have examined different routes that young people pursue, shaped by their positionality as well as their lived experiences. Through this, I have attempted to reveal the tensions in how young people aspire and come to imagine their futures.

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the notion of 'becoming,' which links ideas of the future together with aspiration and identity. Through ethnographic findings, it has explored the tensions and processes by which cultural and religious beliefs and practices are transmitted through schooling, and how young people accept or, in some cases, reject these in pursuit of their aspirations.

The future, regardless of what it entails for young people across Sri Lanka and beyond, presents a landscape of social possibilities, whether this is through achieving upward spatial and social mobility, as demonstrated through Thilini and Chaturi, or indeed certain specific lifestyles that they want to pursue, as illustrated through Priya's experiences. For many young people in Sri Lanka, particularly the girls that I hung out with, imagining the array of social possibilities provokes a tension between the cultural expectation of pursuing traditional lifestyles which confine them to become 'good women,' and their own cosmopolitan aspirations, which range from migration to pursuing unconventional employment options. As such, young people are required to navigate and negotiate the array of possibilities they can pursue in order to conceptualise their futures.

The purpose of this chapter was to provide insight into the experiences of students at Mayadevi once they had completed schooling. I have argued that for many of the young people, this new phase presents them with social possibilities in imagining their futures, bound by their social positioning. I have also argued that imagining the future results in the reproduction of the state hegemony, since for many of my research participants, their aspirations for the future were shaped by their Sinhalese Buddhist upbringing, which is disrupted by students as they attempt to figure out who they want to become.

Through a detailed exploration of post-schooling options that include tertiary education, vocational training and employment, I have not only highlighted the challenges in deciding what to do next, but also argued that many of the young people's options depend heavily on the social and cultural capital that they have acquired. This speaks to my research focus, which has examined how processes of becoming are formed out of young people's lived experiences and their visions of the future.

Through the examples of Thilini, Chaturi and Priya, among several others, I have also described how young people's imaginings of their futures are influenced by their social

surroundings. Young people come to bridge the tensions between traditional and cosmopolitan ideals of the future to carve out new opportunities, enabling them to incorporate their personal as well as career-led aspirations into their conceptualisations of the future.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

This thesis has examined how young female students at a national school in Kandy, Sri Lanka, come to form ideas of who they want to become. This process of *becoming*, shaped by young people's lived experiences, their aspirations and visions of the future, takes place in two contrasting educational sites: the school and private tuition. In the course of the thesis, I have presented how both sites encompass a young person's schooling experience and provide them with the possibilities of acquiring social and cultural capital to facilitate their aspirations for the future. This, in turn, causes tensions that young people must navigate in order to fulfil these futures.

My focus throughout this thesis has been to understand and analyse the social processes that contribute to young people's 'becoming', by bridging educational discourses with discussions of nation-building, aspirations and futures. I have structured the thesis to reflect young people's schooling journey, beginning with the school and moving on to the tuition space, which forms an important part of young people's schooling experiences, before examining post-schooling transitions.

To recapitulate, I presented three research questions in the Introduction. The first of these sought to address how the school becomes a hub in promoting specific types of ethnic, gender and religious identities, under the guise of producing 'good' women. This formed the focus of Chapter Four, which introduced Mayadevi Balika Vidyalaya and the nation-building practices that take place within the school. I demonstrated how young people at Mayadevi reproduce practices of 'banal nationalism' (Bénéï, 2008) in everyday schooling, in hope of facilitating their educational aspirations. Chapter Five extended the analysis of becoming within the schooling space. Here, I argued that some aspirations are embedded in nation-building processes, while others are framed in line with prospects of upward social mobility.

The second research question focused on how the national education system and privatised tuition operate in parallel to one another. I introduced tuition and highlighted

the two-fold value of this parallel education system, discussed in Chapters Six and Seven. I presented the importance of tuition as an educational tool, but also as a space providing youth with opportunities for 'place-making' (Massey, 2005; Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi, 2015), while also acquiring the educational capital to facilitate their aspirations for the future.

This contributes toward the final research question, examined in Chapter Eight, which analysed how young people at Mayadevi navigate these two educational fields, and in doing so both reproduce nation-building values harnessed by the school and transgress these in pursuit of replicating cosmopolitan lifestyles. I also demonstrated how post-schooling life presents young people with extended social possibilities in relation to the type of futures they imagine, bound by their social positioning. This aligns with my research focus, which examined how young people's lived experiences shape processes of becoming.

My ethnographic findings reveal that understanding how young people come to form ideas of self, aspirations and their futures cannot fully be understood without piecing together their context and lived experiences. As I have demonstrated, schooling results in the production of 'good children,' which speaks to the role of the school as a state institution. It is through daily schooling practices that young people come to harness values and ideals that align to the Sinhala Buddhist state narrative. In this way, female students at Mayadevi become products of the schooling system, coming to see themselves as vehicles of tradition. Many find importance in this, as demonstrated through Chaturi, particularly in achieving their personal aspirations of becoming good Buddhist women.

The school also comes to shape how female students see themselves as distinctly *Mayadevian,* an identity that comes to serve young people with the social and symbolic capital of having accessed one of the most prestigious national schools in the province (Bourdieu, 1986). This label also serves to reinforce students' social position as a well-educated, middle class Sinhalese Buddhist woman.

My research also revealed how the construction of a national identity takes place both within and beyond the school, in a way that reinforces the privileged position of Sinhalese Buddhists. How young people come to perceive their positioning within their social world is increasingly important because of the role that identity politics plays in contemporary

Sri Lanka. For the students at Mayadevi, gaining a good education forms one part of their wider aspirations for the 'good life,' marked by prospects of upward mobility; however, it also forms part of their personal aspirations centred around their ethno-religious upbringing.

Issues surrounding identity politics arise because of the fractured socio-political landscape that youth in Sri Lanka grow up in. Here, we saw how the state and its actors, such as formal schooling, call for the preservation of a Sinhala-Buddhist identity, and those who do not identify or belong to this group are treated as outsiders. I have demonstrated this through various examples of Othering that occur within the schooling space, seen through the instances of Shifna and Priya. Consequently, many Sinhalese Buddhist youth grow up unaffected by these processes of Othering because of their ethno-religious positioning. Instead, they continue to reproduce existing social hierarchies, under the guise of preserving their heritage.

In Chapters Six and Seven, I shifted attention to the tuition space, to discuss the importance of this site in providing the girls at Mayadevi with opportunities for socialisation outside of the schooling space. Tuition, despite its implications in heightening social inequality, provides young people with a common space for interaction. It is here that youth from different ethnic groups, sexes and social classes are able to socialise. With the lack of ethnographic focus on the tuition space, this thesis has sought to introduce the importance of this site. Not only does tuition provide youth with opportunities for learning, but importantly, it brings to light the myth of free education in Sri Lanka. This raises the important question: is schooling really sufficient for young people?

I have examined this through the two-fold value of tuition, which serves as a learning tool for those who can afford it, but also as an important site for experimenting with ideas of future selves. For the majority of students at Mayadevi, who largely belong to middle class households, tuition forms part of their schooling experience, which enables them to further acquire educational capital and places them in a better position to do well in their exams. I have demonstrated how, for parents of students at Mayadevi, tuition is considered a natural part of a young person's schooling.

While the school site has received attention from anthropologists examining its role in social reproduction (Rival, 2002; Froerer, 2007; Bénéï, 2008), in addition to education being presented as a vehicle towards upward social mobility (Rao, 2010; Crivello, 2011), tuition remains an unobserved field. Framing my thesis in context of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, and drawing on Appadurai's work on aspiration, I have examined the varying roles that capital and the capacity to aspire play in relation to the types of futures young people imagine for themselves, within and beyond the school. In doing so, I have presented a new landscape - through the tuition site - in which to conduct ethnographic research.

I have examined why young people access tuition, to argue that such sites become important spaces for 'place making' (Massey, 2005; Fataar & Rinquest, 2018). It is here that I demonstrated how young people transgress the values and ideals of what it means to be a 'good woman' upheld by the school. Such transgressions result in female youth being able play out different versions of themselves. As discussed in Chapter Seven, the tuition space provides students at Mayadevi with the opportunity to experiment with different versions of themselves and to test boundaries, for example by meeting boys. The rupture that is created by the tuition space tests the values related to tradition and purity that are inculcated within the school by presenting young people with opportunities to transgress such dispositions. In turn, my female participants navigate a landscape which reinforces their ethno-religious upbringing while challenging these very values in pursuit of becoming a modern woman.

My research also suggests that as social scientists, we have a duty to investigate global educational discourses that present the very notion of aspirations as a linear and one-dimensional concept. It is through my ethnographic findings that I have been able to challenge such Western conceptualisations of what it means to aspire by presenting the narratives of the young people I spent time with. For the girls at Mayadevi, as I have discussed, aspiring is not an isolated process that only involves their educational and career goals. Instead, it is complex and fluid, encompassing every aspect of a young person's life. To aspire is to imagine a future formed out of an individual's lived experiences and their social surroundings, which makes the process malleable and varying. It is also formed as part of a collective kinship, where family, peers and social networks influence what is worth aspiring for.

If we are to truly understand young people's experiences of transitioning into adulthood, it is important to understand how aspiring becomes a process by which young people figure out who to become. With this, understanding the social landscape in which such conceptualisations take place is particularly important in the context of Sri Lanka, as discussed above.

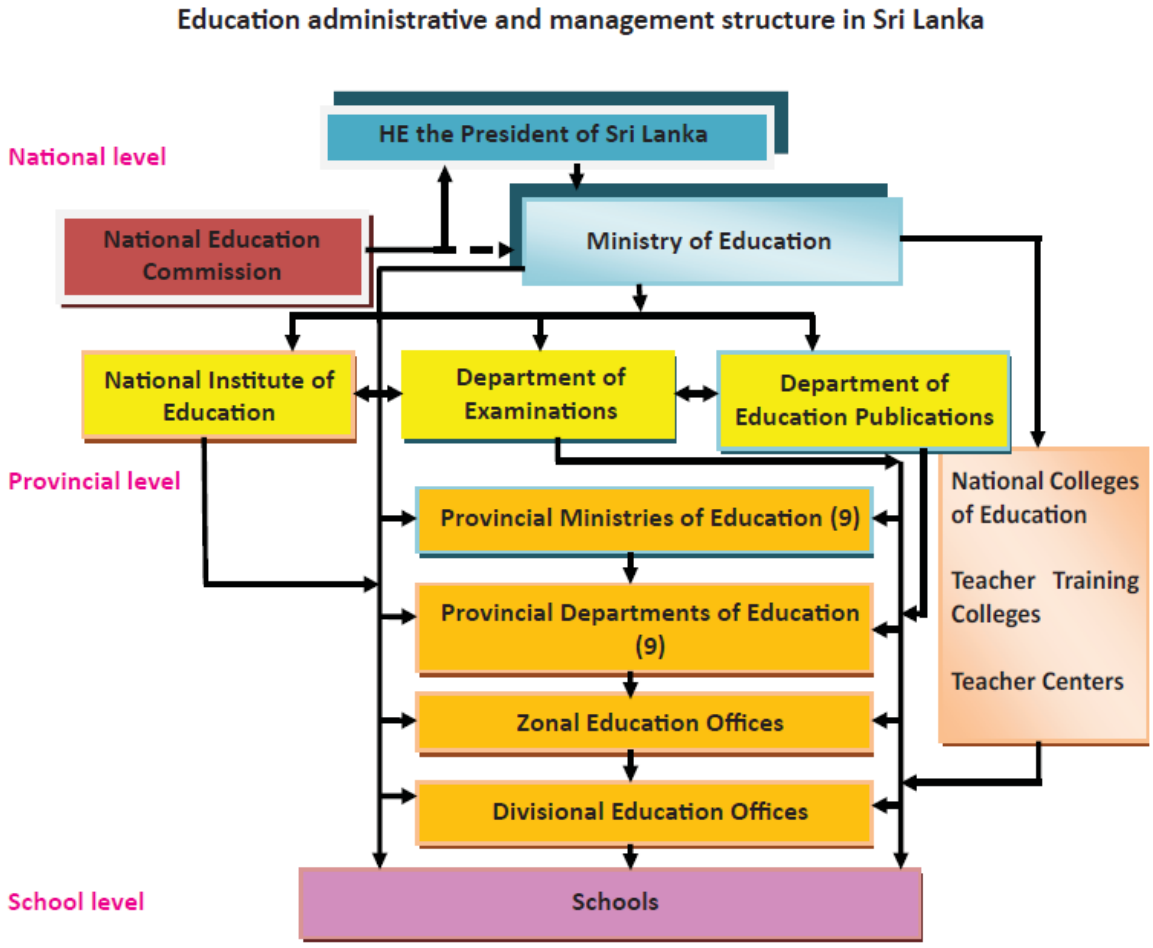
As stated, my findings are not only relevant to the anthropology of schooling, but also to broader educational and international development discourses, since there is further need to conduct research on young people's experiences of schooling. To this end, I have sought to redirect attention to global educational initiatives in order to ask whether these hold any validity in improving the livelihoods of young people while they fail to grant importance to the socio-cultural and economic barriers at play.

I began this PhD with the intent of understanding how global initiatives that advocate for raising aspirations of young people are relevant to youth in Sri Lanka. My findings led me to conclude that placing focus on this aspect alone did not do justice to the situation in Sri Lanka. With international donors monitoring and overlooking the island following the end of the civil conflict, and against the backdrop of the emergence of Sri Lanka as a middle-income country, deep-rooted social issues are minimised. We find that some young people not only experience poor-quality education based on their social positioning, but that the education received further heightens ethnic tensions.

In framing young people's becoming, it is important, then, to demystify these global targets and bring to light the precarity in how young people come to imagine their future selves. This thesis, which examines the production of 'good women,' should be a starting point from which to generate further interest in conceptualising how different versions of *becoming* take place.

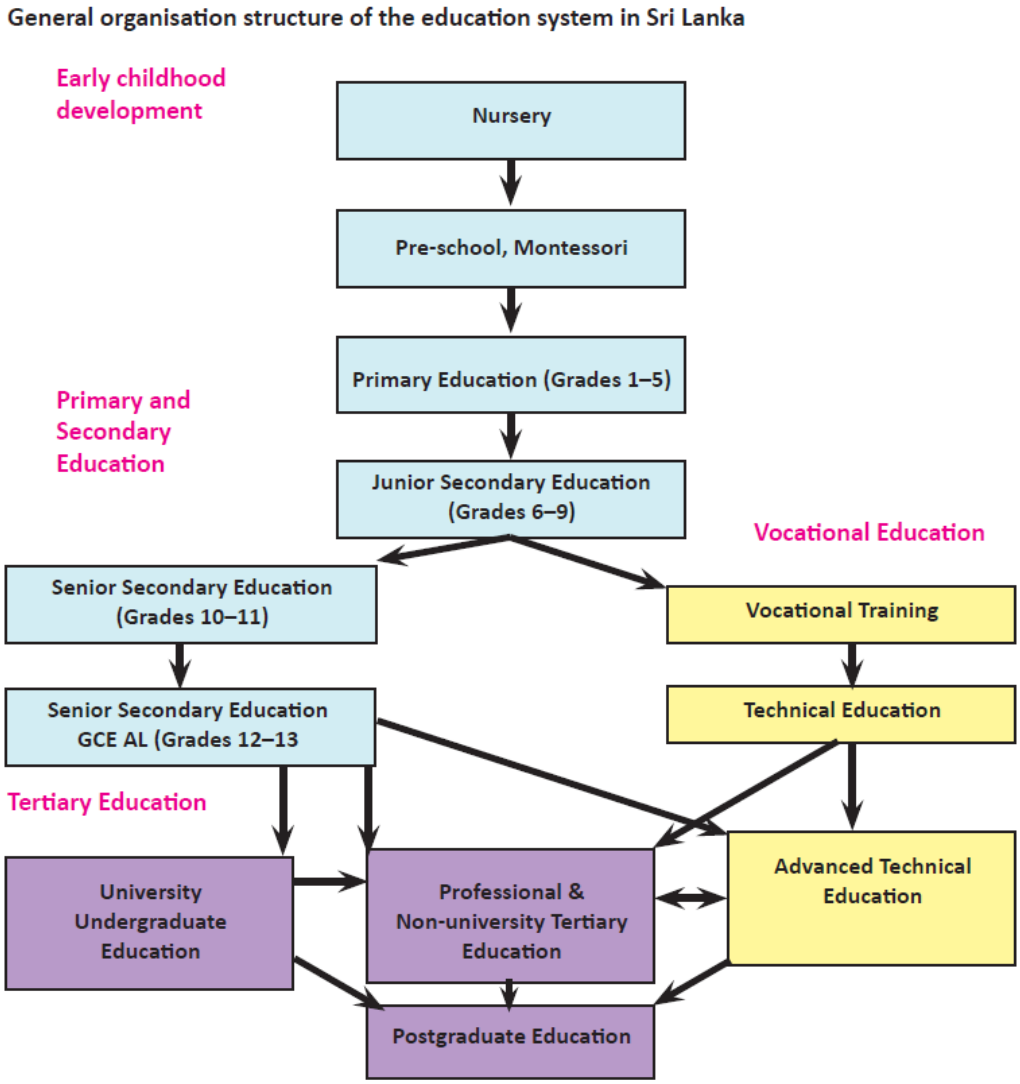
Appendix 1

Figure 3.1.2a: Educational System Structure in Sri Lanka



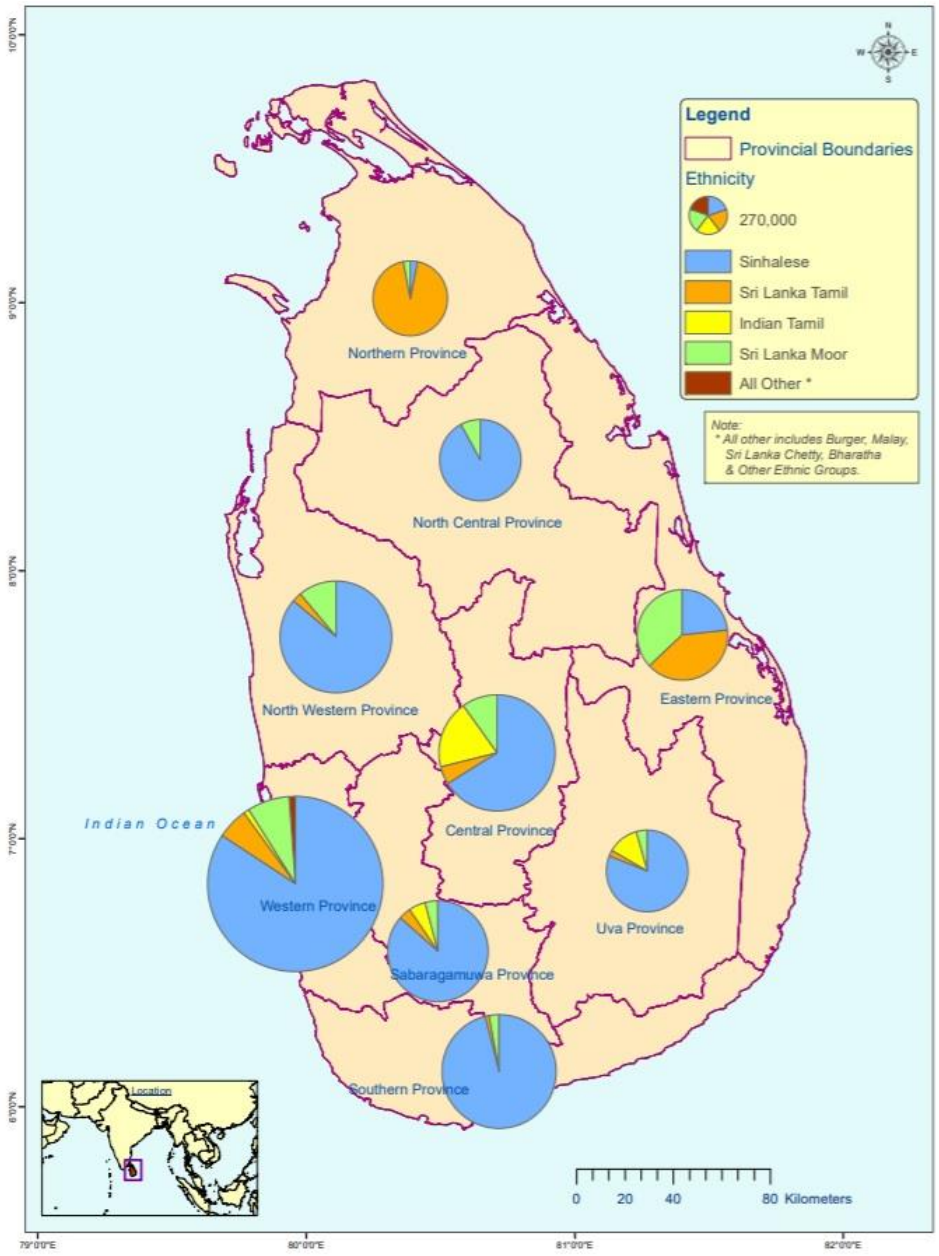
Source: Ministry of Education (2013)

Figure 3.1.2b: Government School Structure



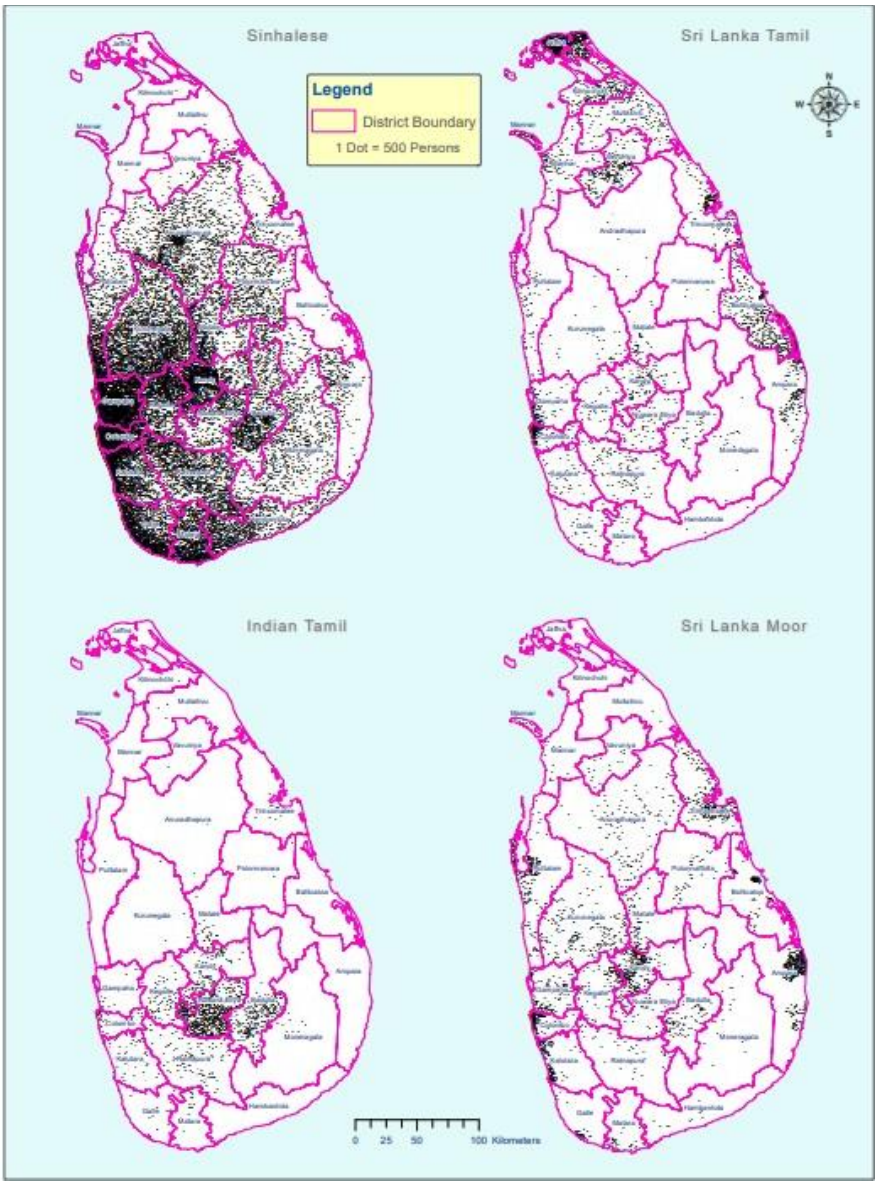
Source: Ministry of Education (2013)

Figure 3.4c: Population of Sri Lanka by Ethnicity and Province



Source: Department of Census and Statistics (2012)

Figure 3.4d: Population Density of Sri Lanka



Source: Department of Census and Statistics (2012)

Appendix 2

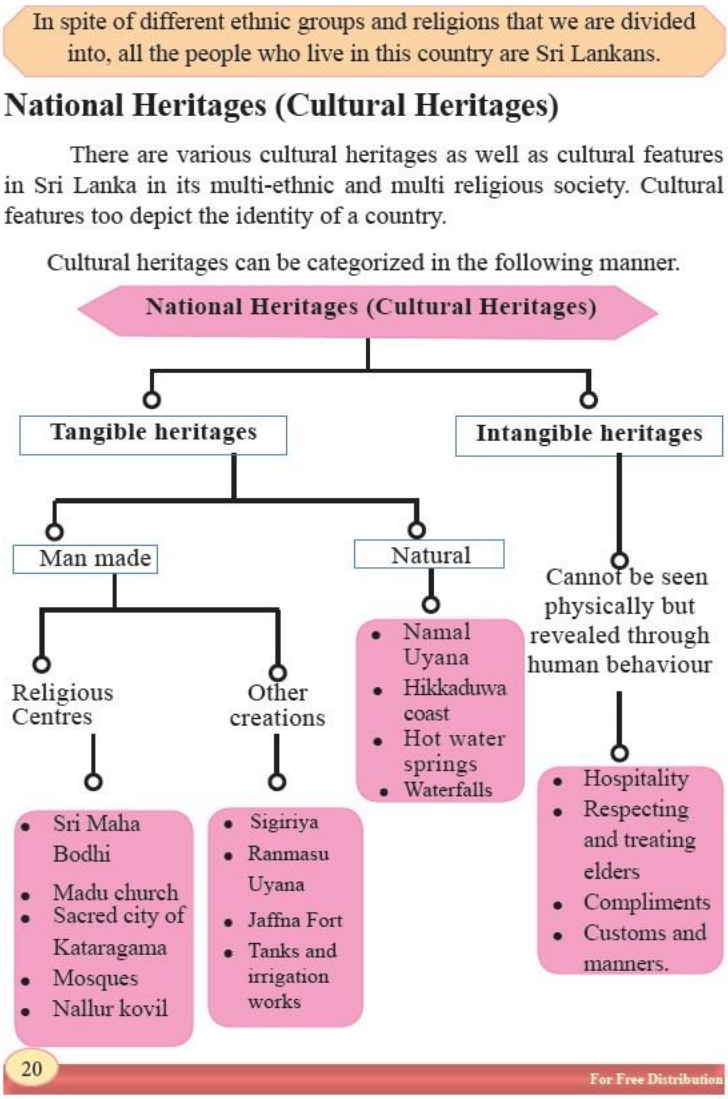
4.1.2a National Schools in Kandy District

School Name	*Year*	*Medium*	*Sex*	*Grade Span*	*Male*	*Female*	*Sinhala*	*Tamil*	*Students*	*Teachers*
A	1887	S & E	M	1–13	4788	0	4788	0	4788	196
B	1932	S & E	F	1–13	0	4532	4532	0	4532	209
C	1879	S, T & E	F	1–13	0	5837	5077	760	5837	210
D	1891	S & E	M	1–13	3699	0	3699	0	3699	155
E*	1942	S & E	F	6–13	0	2648	2648	0	2648	121
F	1890	S & E	M/F	1–13	1459	886	2345	0	2345	136
G	1956	S, T & E	F	1–13	0	2008	1055	953	2008	136

** School E is Mayadevi*

Source: School Census (Ministry of Education, 2017)

Figure 4.5a – Constructing a National Heritage



Source: National Institute of Education (2008)

Appendix 3

Table 8.2.1b: Z-Scores

UNIVERSITY ADMISSION - ACADEMIC YEAR 2017/2018
[Based on the results of the G.C.E. (Advanced Level) Examination held in August, 2017]
Minimum "Z" Scores for selection to various Courses of Study of Universities, in respect of each district

DISTRICT / COURSE OF STUDY	ARTS * (University of Peradeniya)	ARTS * (University of Sri Jayewardenepura)	ARTS * (University of Kelaniya)	ARTS * (University of Jaffna)	ARTS * (University of Ruhuna)	ARTS * (Eastern University, Sri Lanka)	ARTS * (South Eastern University of Sri Lanka)	ARTS * (Rajarata University of Sri Lanka)	ARTS (SP) / MASS MEDIA * # (University of Colombo - Sri Palee Campus)	ARTS (SP) / PERFORMING ARTS * # (University of Colombo - Sri Palee Campus)	ARTS (SAB) - A * [Arts Stream] (Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka)	ARTS (SAB) - B * [Commerce Stream] (Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka)	MANAGEMENT STUDIES (TV) - A [Commerce Stream] (University of Jaffna - Vavuniya Campus)	MANAGEMENT STUDIES (TV) - A [Commerce Stream] (Eastern University -Trincomalee Campus)	MANAGEMENT STUDIES (TV) - B [Arts Stream] (University of Jaffna - Vavuniya Campus)	MANAGEMENT STUDIES (TV) - B [All Stream] (Eastern University -Trincomalee Campus)	COMMUNICATION STUDIES * (Eastern University -Trincomalee Campus)	PEACE & CONFLICT RESOLUTION * (University of Kelaniya)	ISLAMIC STUDIES * (South Eastern University of Sri Lanka)	ARABIC LANGUAGE * (South Eastern University of Sri Lanka)	ARCHITECTURE # (University of Moratuwa)	DESIGN # (University of Moratuwa)	LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE # (University of Moratuwa)	TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING (University of Moratuwa)	FASHION DESIGN & PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT # (University of Moratuwa)	INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (University of Moratuwa)
COLOMBO	1.5473	1.4623	1.3891	1.1590	1.3402	1.0944	1.3049	1.3117	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.2971	1.3144	1.2978	1.2969	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	1.2407	0.7792	0.4302	1.5999	0.8990	1.6315
GAMPAHA	1.5286	1.4707	1.3890	1.1876	1.3398	1.0640	1.2545	1.3177	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.3248	1.3127	1.2994	1.3013	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	1.0563	0.4864	0.4463	1.5750	0.7819	1.5470
KALUTARA	1.5279	1.4650	1.3896	1.1821	1.3397	1.0822	1.2335	1.3119	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.3939	1.3198	1.3188	1.3143	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	0.8542	1.3380	NQC	1.6361	0.8095	1.6166
MATALE	1.5348	1.4619	1.3997	1.1459	1.3665	1.0702	1.2473	1.3172	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.2419	NQC	1.2946	1.3050	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	1.2473	NQC	NQC	1.4022	1.1457	1.4459
KANDY	1.5278	1.4673	1.3905	1.1412	1.3459	1.0624	1.2376	1.3133	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.2894	1.3191	NQC	1.2922	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	1.2357	0.5289	0.4642	1.5070	0.9603	1.5567
NUWARA ELIYA	1.5319	1.4713	1.3929	1.1436	1.3469	1.0665	1.2856	1.3127	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.2429	NQC	1.3051	1.2970	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	1.0782	0.2491	0.9293	1.3594	0.3164	1.2178
GALLE	1.5326	1.4621	1.3893	1.1593	1.3404	1.0835	1.2612	1.3121	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	NQC	1.3143	NQC	1.3006	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	0.9839	0.2106	0.5621	1.5795	1.0726	1.6371
MATARA	1.5276	1.4695	1.3897	1.3132	1.3409	1.0705	1.3381	1.3118	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.2921	1.3188	NQC	1.3036	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	0.9266	0.6350	0.8226	1.5976	1.0680	1.6342
HAMBANTOTA	1.5273	1.4618	1.3893	NQC	1.3400	NQC	NQC	1.3122	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.2170	NQC	NQC	1.2847	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	NQC	NQC	NQC	1.4401	NQC	1.6315
JAFFNA	1.5375	NQC	NQC	1.1376	NQC	1.0617	NQC	NQC	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.1654	NQC	1.1644	1.1670	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	1.3332	0.4005	0.7863	1.6291	NQC	1.6410
KILINOCHCHI	1.6194	NQC	NQC	1.1420	NQC	1.0662	NQC	NQC	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.1102	NQC	NQC	1.2943	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	NQC	1.3684	NQC	0.7154	NQC	1.4319
MANNAR	1.5681	NQC	NQC	1.1400	NQC	1.0634	1.2590	NQC	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.1185	NQC	1.1738	NQC	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	1.1894	NQC	NQC	0.8995	NQC	1.2202
MULLAITIVU	1.5272	NQC	NQC	1.1745	NQC	1.0907	NQC	NQC	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.2239	NQC	NQC	1.2198	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	NQC	NQC	NQC	1.0773	NQC	0.9990
VAVUNIYA	1.5372	NQC	1.3985	1.1553	NQC	1.0638	1.4464	1.3824	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.1797	NQC	1.3753	1.1851	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	NQC	0.5687	NQC	1.4607	NQC	1.6586
TRINCOMALEE	1.5699	NQC	1.4434	1.1380	NQC	1.0624	1.2556	1.3449	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.1283	NQC	1.3460	1.3081	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	NQC	NQC	NQC	1.2999	0.6651	1.4740
BATTICALOA	1.5541	NQC	NQC	1.1416	NQC	1.0621	1.2606	NQC	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.1008	NQC	1.3430	1.2362	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	NQC	0.6536	NQC	1.3339	NQC	1.5100
AMPARA	1.5295	1.4660	1.3920	1.2158	1.3406	1.0686	1.2302	1.3164	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.1630	NQC	1.3094	1.2922	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	1.4027	1.2398	NQC	1.1994	NQC	1.3901
PUTTALAM	1.5333	1.4626	1.3886	1.1421	1.3403	1.0630	1.2500	1.3129	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.2469	NQC	1.3015	1.3029	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	1.8809	0.7548	0.7228	1.3015	1.0554	1.2867
KURUNEGALA	1.5288	1.4664	1.3890	1.1386	1.3407	1.0639	1.2472	1.3119	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.3324	1.3288	1.3105	1.3154	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	0.6075	0.4489	0.7241	1.6102	0.5262	1.5523
ANURADHAPURA	1.5283	1.4617	1.3886	1.1461	1.3404	1.0718	1.2585	1.3117	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.2214	NQC	1.3011	1.3011	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	0.3563	NQC	NQC	1.3330	0.5482	1.4421
POLONNARUWA	1.5283	1.4643	1.4047	1.2344	1.3407	1.0763	1.2341	1.3165	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.1154	NQC	1.2937	1.3353	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	NQC	NQC	NQC	1.3354	0.5193	1.1313
BADULLA	1.5325	1.4629	1.3915	1.1388	1.3397	1.0621	1.2475	1.3125	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.2932	1.3182	1.3639	1.2917	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	1.1012	1.4245	0.5716	1.6314	-0.3566	1.4603
MONARAGALA	1.5344	1.4722	1.3914	NQC	1.3401	NQC	1.3191	1.3143	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.2634	NQC	NQC	1.3013	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	NQC	NQC	NQC	1.3723	1.4377	1.3218
KEGALLE	1.5274	1.4647	1.3886	1.1733	1.3456	1.0745	1.2528	1.3121	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.2936	NQC	1.3049	1.3005	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	0.7216	0.0565	0.4923	1.5010	0.7362	1.6142
RATNAPURA	1.5274	1.4617	1.3886	1.1412	1.3397	1.0743	1.2475	1.3121	1.2586	1.1447	1.3470	1.3438	1.2670	1.3110	1.2837	1.2767	1.2501	1.6372	0.9809	0.6078	0.4607	0.3484	NQC	1.6146	0.6377	1.5245

*** Selection 100% on an all Island Merit Basis** **# Courses of Study for which the subject oriented Practical Tests / Aptitude Tests were conducted.**

NQC - No Qualified Candidates. This may be due to the following reasons.

1. District quota for a given course of study in a given district has already been filled by the students of that district.
2. Number of places in a given course of study in a given university has already been filled by the students with higher Z-scores from other districts.
3. No candidates who have satisfied the minimum requirements for admission for a given course of study from that district.

Note :
Certain courses of study are not conducted in all three languages. Therefore some students may not get selected to such courses of study in some universities, even though they have obtained the minimum Z-score required to get selected.

4

UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION
26.07.2018

Source: University Grants Commission (2017)

Table 8.2.1c: A-Level Results Grading Scale

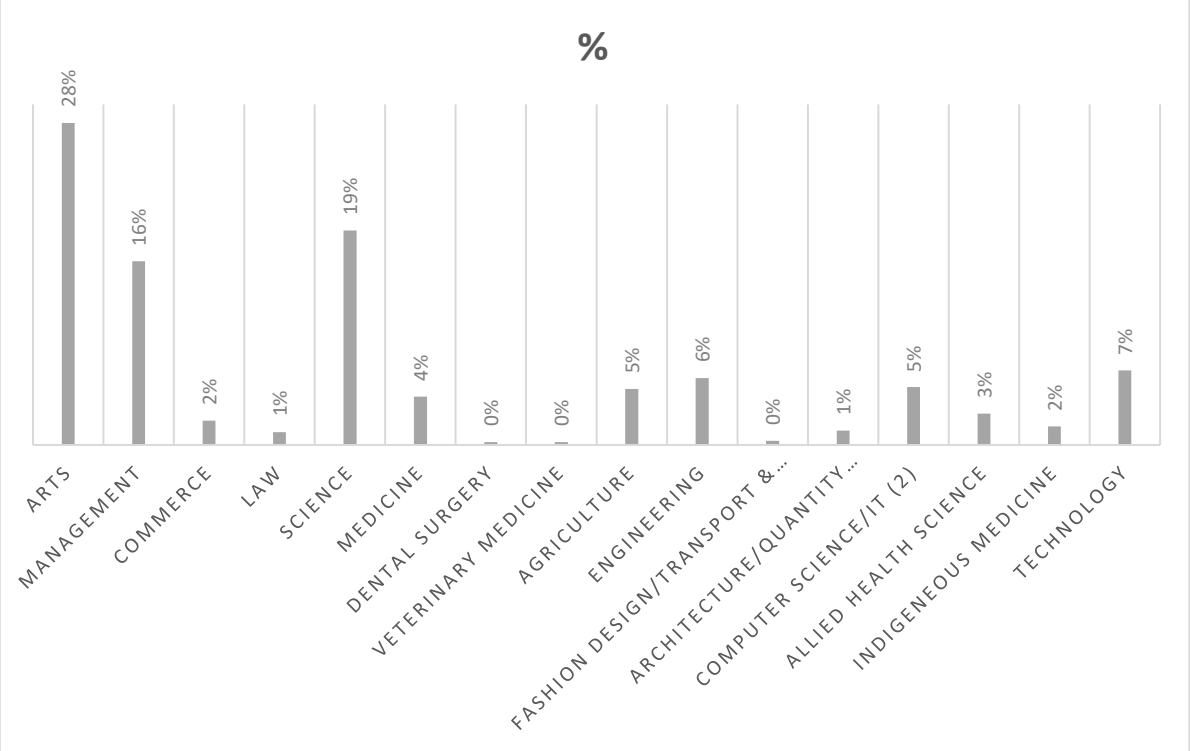
Grade	Marks	Grade Description	UK Equivalent
A	100 - 75	Distinction	A
B	74 - 65	Very Good Pass	B
C	64 - 55	Credit Pass	C
S	54 - 40	Simple Pass	D
W	39 - 0	Fail	F

Source: https://www.scholaro.com/pro/countries/sri-lanka/grading-system

8.2.1d: A-Level Results Among My Core Group.

Name	A-Level Subjects & Results
Chaturi	English Literature (A), Japanese (A), Greek & Roman Civilization (C)
Dilki	English Literature (S), Economics (C), Greek & Roman Civilization (B)
Gayatri	English Literature (S), Japanese (B), Greek & Roman Civilization (C)
Nadika	English Literature (C), Japanese (C), IT (C)
Thilini	English Literature (A), Japanese (A), Greek & Roman Civilization (C)
Yani	English Literature (F), Japanese (F), IT (C)

Table 8.2.1e: Undergraduate Entrance by Subject Stream



Source: University Grants Commission, (2017)

Table 8.2.2: TVET Institutions

Type of institution	Education level	Ministry/Institute responsible	Number of institutions
University of Vocational Technology (UNIVOTEC)	Degree (ISCED 5)	Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational Training	1
Colleges of Technology (CoTs)	Diploma (ISCED 5)	Department of Technical Education and Training (DTET)	9
University Colleges	Diploma (ISCED 5)	University of Vocational Technology (UNIVOTEC)	6
Technical Colleges (TCs)	Certificate	Department of Technical Education and Training (DTET)	30
Vocational Training Centers	Certificate	Vocational Training Authority (VTA)	250
Apprenticeship Training Institutes	Certificate	National Industrial and Apprenticeship Training Authority	68
Vocational Training Centers	Certificate	National Youth Services Council (NYSC)	40
Private and NGO sector Training Centres	Certificate/Diploma	Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission	400

Source: UN and UNEVOC (2018).

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