PERPETUATING THE DIVIDE:
History Teaching and Reconciliation in Post-War
Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.

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(Previous page - photo my own, a memorial banknote celebrating the army’s victory in the civil war)

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Abstract

This thesis explores the role of history teaching, and specifically history teachers, in reconciliation in post-civil war Trincomalee, Sri Lanka. Seven years after the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka, education is still segregated along linguistic/ethnic lines. Based on both much of the literature, and the data from this study, this article shows how history has been written either to paint the Tamil minority in a negative light, or to promote a Sinhala version of the history of Sri Lanka, which diminishes or ignores the influence and role of the Tamil minority. By building on the work of Bush and Saltarelli (2000), and their two faces of education analysis, and the four R’s framework posited by Novelli et al (2015), this thesis positions itself in the debates on education and conflict, by asking the question what impact do history teachers, their agency, and teaching of history in secondary schools have on reconciliation in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka?

Three distinct thematic areas are explored; education and conflict; reconciliation; and teacher agency. The findings argue that due to a lack of representation for the Tamil people in the history curriculum, a deep distrust of politicians and government, and a frustration over a lack of agency, history teaching is perpetuating, and even furthering, the divide between the Tamil and the Sinhala. This presents a barrier to reconciliation efforts in Trincomalee, and potentially for the country as a whole. The outcomes of how the teachers exercise their agency may be having a negative impact on reconciliation, particularly with regard to the teaching of the civil war. Teachers end up telling their own stories, with all the subjectivity and bias which comes with that, without the training and support necessary.

These findings have a number of implications for policy. Chief amongst these is the need to alter the curriculum to better incorporate Tamil perspectives and stories, and provide support for teachers dealing with these issues, if it wishes to foster social cohesion and a national identity in the country. Further research on the Muslim Sri Lankans’ views on this issue deserves further exploration, as does a more in depth look at the dominant Sinhala perspective, including the government position and motivation.

Key words: History, education, conflict, teacher agency, reconciliation, identity, Sri Lanka.
Chapter One - Introduction

History is written by the victor. Some variation of this saying has been attributed to numerous historical figures overtime. Some say Walter Benjamin, others Winston Churchill. Regardless of who first said the actual words, it has become an axiomatic saying; one which needs no further discussion or elaboration. What happens however when the history in question is the history of conflict, civil war and deeply divided societies? What of when it is taught in schools segregated along the lines of “the victor” and “the loser,” where ethnic divisions and antagonism towards “the other” maintains a negative peace, which has addressed none of the underlying grievances which fuelled the conflict? This is the case in Sri Lanka, the site of the research for this thesis. Deeply divided societies which have experienced conflict have a litany of problems to address post-conflict. Healing and reconciliation is made so much harder when it was your compatriots, your neighbours and colleagues who are “the other,” those responsible in your eyes for the suffering and destruction. Normality, if such a thing can exist, is even harder to return to.

The issue of reconciliation is extremely contentious in Sri Lanka, in part due to the manner in which the conflict came to a conclusion in late May 2009; a total military victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) by the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) and government. Since the cessation of hostilities, concerns over grave human rights abuses and war crimes by both sides have been raised by many, both in Sri Lanka and in the wider international community (UN Human Rights Council report, 2015). Despite these unresolved issues, which this thesis will not go into in depth, reconciliation is vital if Sri Lanka is going to move from its conflicted past, and the negative peace that currently exists, to a sustainable, equitable, and positive peace.

1.1 Problem Statement

Seven years after the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka, education is still segregated along linguistic/ethnic lines. The National Institute of Education in Sri Lanka which is responsible for writing all government curricula used in schools, has been seen as a bastion of the majority Sinhala identity. Traditionally history has been written either to
paint the Tamil minority in a negative light, or more often to promote a Sinhala version of the history of Sri Lanka, which diminishes or ignores the influence and role of the Tamil minority (Ramanathapillai 2012). This version of history is then taught in Tamil schools, by Tamil teachers. It is hypothesized that this is having a negative impact on reconciliation efforts, as it builds resentment and damages any sense of a unified national identity.

The research examined one aspect of the reconciliation process, namely the impact of history education in the post-war context of Sri Lanka. This will build on Novelli, Lopes Cardozo and Smith’s work on education and peacebuilding, and their 4 Rs framework, specifically looking at the role of history teaching, and teachers, on reconciliation efforts (Novelli \textit{et al}, 2015). As mentioned above, education has been largely segregated in Sri Lanka since before the conflict between the Tamil minority and the Sinhalese majority broke out. This segregation of education will form the backdrop for an investigation into how history is taught in these schools, and what its purpose is. The actors involved in the teaching of history, namely history teachers and school principals form part of the analysis into the role of history education in Sri Lanka, with the hope of understanding both the positive and negative aspects of this education, as developed by Bush and Saltarelli (2000), and what impact it might have on reconciliation in the country.

\section*{1.2 Historical Context}

This section will begin by briefly outlining the history of education and ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, up to the modern day, followed by the justification for why Sri Lanka and specifically Trincomalee were suitable for this research, finally finishing with the contemporary empirical context, from the time of the research. This will include a detailed discussion of the sites of research in Trincomalee, namely the secondary schools.

The Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups had existed more or less peacefully for a millennium, from before colonisation, throughout the colonial history of the Portuguese, Dutch and British, until independence in 1948 (DeVotta, 2005: 142).
The colonial history of Sri Lanka, and particularly the British colonial policies in favour of the Tamil minority, is extremely important in understanding the causes of the civil war to come decades later. DeVotta argues that “Tamils benefited disproportionately under British colonialism,” and that much of what came after was as a result of this (DeVotta, 2005: 148). The Tamil experience under colonialism, where Tamil embrace of the English language, and the British colonial tactic of divide and rule, led to the Tamils being overly represented, both in government and civil service, but also in university, where in 1946 Tamils accounted for thirty-one percent of the university population (DeVotta, 2005: 148).

Ethnic outbidding with regards to language policies and education is seen as especially important in understanding the root causes of the conflict (Devotta, 2005). Ethnic and religious nationalism, religious divisions between the mainly Buddhist Sinhala and the mainly Hindu Tamil’s, caste discrimination, institutional decay and attempts to readjust the imbalances that existed between the Tamil and Sinhala communities all played a role (Ramanathapillai, 2012; Shankar, 2008; Silva, Sivapragasam, and Tanges, 2009; DeVotta, 2005 and 2011). The conflict had been building for some time, but it truly began in July 1983, following sustained anti-Tamil rioting and the coalescence of various Tamil militant groups around, and assertion of dominance by, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or LTTE. During the war, the LTTE managed to run a de facto state, governing large swathes of territory in the north and east of Sri Lanka. They ran a functioning civil service, judiciary and police force, and provided services including health and education, which often worked in conjunction with official government services (Stokke, 2006).

Education policy must be viewed through this lens. Since independence, education has been expanded and prioritised by successive governments, and is free up to post-secondary school level. Nevertheless, as a result of the conflict and possibly other policies, education provision in the largely Tamil populated north and east has been poorer than in the rest of the country, adversely affecting the Tamil community (Lopes Cardozo, 2008: 20).
The conflict lasted until 2009, with periods of calm and ceasefire in between, when the Sri Lankan government militarily defeated the LTTE, who formally conceded defeat in May 2009.¹

1.3 Justification as Research Location
The justification for Sri Lanka as a suitable location for research will now be laid out. Firstly, education in the country has more or less been segregated since independence. In 2013, four years after the civil war officially ended, only in 0.6% of schools is the language of instruction Tamil and Sinhala, with a further 0.4% in Tamil, Sinhala, and English. 68% is in Sinhala or Sinhala and English only, while 31.1% is in Tamil or Tamil and English only (Ministry of Education Sri Lanka, 2013). As discussed in the theoretical framework, segregation of education promotes or preserves distinct, separate identities; something which this thesis is hypothesising has a negative impact on reconciliation between the Tamil and the Sinhala. Secondly, as mentioned above, the civil war only officially ended in 2009. Therefore the memories of the conflict are still fresh, while discussion of how the story of the civil war is told in schools must take place soon. The ethnic and largely dichotomous nature of the conflict is another reason it is a suitable location for this specific research. Furthermore, the peace that exists in Sri Lanka can be described as a negative peace, where there is an absence of active physical violence, but the problems underlining the conflict remain. It is a concept posited by Johan Galtung, and is in contrast with positive peace, where these issues have been resolved and a just and harmonious society exists (Galtung, 1996). This will all be discussed in greater depth below, in the theoretical framework. How education can be used to move towards a more positive peace will form part of the analysis of this thesis. Finally, and linked with the second point, enough time has passed that reconciliation efforts can be seen, and discussed. Reconciliation is still a very contentious term, as there are still many unresolved issues, particularly with regard to people who were ‘disappeared’ during the war, amongst other unresolved problems and raw emotions.

¹ This is an extremely brief overview of the relevant history of Sri Lanka, and as such is very simplistic. For a deeper understanding of the causes and events of the conflict, see This Divided Island by Samanth Subramanian, recently published by Atlantic.
These will be discussed throughout the thesis. Nevertheless, there have been moves towards healing, with particularly the new government pushing to begin the process. The Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission, which released its report in December 2011, is seen by many as a government supported whitewash, which has been set up to clear the government and the army of any wrongdoing, while failing to take into account grievances of the Tamil population. The majority of Tamils have no faith in the institution. The country is still deeply divided, so research on approaches to reconciliation and cohesion has a tangible, practical relevance (International Crisis Group, 2011).

On a theoretical level the choice for the specific location of Trincomalee is suitable for two main reasons; it is an historical centre for the Tamil people and language, meaning issues of Tamil identity are particularly pertinent there; and because it is an ethnically mixed city, with many Tamil and Sinhala residents, encouraging interaction between ethnic groups, but also potentially leading to the parallel lives phenomena mentioned below. It has been the site of ethnic tension, particularly with regard to Buddhist nationalists who erected a statue of Buddha near the bus station in Trincomalee, which resulted in much consternation, leading, some argue, to the collapse of the last cease fire in 2006, and the resumption of hostilities which ultimately officially ended the war in 2009. (Ramanathapillai, 2012)
1.4 Contemporary Empirical Context and Scope of Study

Sri Lanka is currently going through somewhat of a transition period. The immediate post-war phase was marked by increasingly autocratic moves by the wartime president Rajapaksa. Many observers and commentators saw Sri Lanka slipping into an illiberal political model dominated by Rakapaksa and his family, pushing a populist Buddhist nationalist agenda which had no interest in healing or reconciling the deep wounds and differences between the Sinhala and the Tamil in the country after the military victory which ended the civil war (DeVotta, 2011). A surprise loss by Rajapaksa in early 2015 elections, to a coalition led by one of his ex-ministers Maithripala Sirisena, has changed all this, and potentially set the country on a new course. The coalition won on a platform promising greater transparency and healing, and is seen in a positive light by many Tamils, although certainly not by all.²

Throughout my time in Sri Lanka, and specifically in many of my interviews, there was a tangible sense of hope and optimism for the future. For the first time in some time, the Tamil minority feel they might have a president and a government which, while not necessarily on their side, is at least concerned with issues of reconciliation, representation and fairness. The singing of the national anthem in both Sinhala and Tamil at the Independence Day celebrations in early February of 2016 was mentioned repeatedly by many of my respondents as a positive example of the change to come.

It is with this context in mind that my research was conducted; a country emerging from a dark and tumultuous period, with a myriad of problems which one election, while positive, cannot possibly fix. Whether real change will filter down to the education system and specifically the history curriculum remains to be seen.

While this is an overview of the country context, I conducted my primary research in Trincomalee in North East Sri Lanka. Trincomalee is the largest city in the Trincomalee district in the Eastern province, with a population of 97,487 for the greater area, including 42 nearby villages. The ethnic makeup is as follows; 21,200 Sinhalese, 61,282 Sri Lankan Tamil, 731 Indian Tamil, 13,039 Sri Lankan Moor, 863 Burgher, 324 Malay, and 31 Other (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012).

²The Guardian, February 2015
What can be seen with these demographics is that while Trincomalee is an ethnically mixed town, with a large population from the main ethnic groups, it is a predominantly Tamil town, with a large majority of the population speaking Tamil and identifying as Tamil.

Trincomalee is an area deeply affected by the civil war, and where the LTTE had a heavy presence. Throughout my time there locations which the LTTE used to control were regularly pointed out to me, including a beach resort now run by the air force. There is a very visible military presence, with a large army base in the centre of town, and an air force base and navy base in the vicinity. The military is almost omnipresent. I stayed a short drive north of Trincomalee in Uppuveli, a predominantly Tamil area. What influence this had on my findings and methods will be reflected on further in the methodology chapter.

I visited eight schools in total, all within the town limits of Trincomalee. One school refused to talk with me, and with one I didn’t manage to arrange an interview. As far as I can tell there are ten secondary schools within Trincomalee, meaning I talked with at least one history teacher in eight out of the ten secondary schools in Trincomalee. All of these schools had a religious component and history; four were Christian, two Hindu, one Muslim, and one Buddhist. All of the schools were government national schools though, meaning they all taught the same curriculum, and religious classes taught multiple faiths, depending on the makeup of the students. The Christian, Muslim and Hindu schools were all through the Tamil medium, while in the Buddhist school classes were in Sinhala. According to the principals of the Tamil medium schools, all of their students were Tamil, while there was a mix of religions; Christian, Muslim, and Hindu. In the Sinhala medium school the principal said they had a number of Tamil students, and that this is quite common in Sinhala schools, but not in Tamil schools. The school which refused to speak with me was Hindu and through Tamil medium, and the one with which I failed to arrange an interview was Buddhist and taught through the Sinhala medium. As they were secondary schools they taught grades six to eleven, and in some cases taught up to A-Levels. The A-Levels are the final exams students sit before leaving school, and are the most important exams for university admission.
A number of the schools in which I conducted interviews had previously been directly impacted by the civil war, either being used by the SLA or the LTTE. This immediate imposition and impact of the civil war has gone, along with most of the barbed wire and the machine gun and sniper posts I was told were positioned on the roofs of many of the schools, as they are some of the tallest buildings in Trincomalee. Reminders remain however, in the form of some of this barbed wire and the tall concrete walls. This recent history is never far from anyone’s mind, as evidenced by how often it was mentioned. This is important to understand the context of Trincomalee; this is not somewhere where the civil war is somewhat abstract or academic. Everyone, and all the schools, was affected to some degree, the trauma is real and present, and the divide between the people of this one town is still far from bridged. This makes reconciliation that much harder, but also that much more important.

**1.5 Research Aims, Questions and Outline of Thesis**

The central research question for this paper is **what impact do history teachers, their agency, and the teaching of history in secondary schools have on reconciliation in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.** A number of sub-questions will also be discussed below. To help provide some further context for these questions, the exact research aims of this thesis will be outlined now, along with defining any terms which might be ambiguous.

Reconciliation is a broad church, with even the experts disagreeing on what exactly it entails. Reconciliation is always a two way street, and requires forgiveness and healing on both sides. This research is interested in just one aspect *from one of those sides*. The research hopes to understand how the teaching of history helps or hurts reconciliation within the Tamil community in Trincomalee. Despite being interested in the Tamil side, the reconciliation concerned is reconciliation between the Tamil and the Sinhala. This means it is interested in understanding how the teaching of history affects attitudes and opinions towards “the other”, others in the Tamil community, the Sinhalese, the government, and Sri Lanka as a nation. These attitudes and opinions are what need to change for reconciliation to be achieved.
Ultimately reconciliation takes place first within; it is attitudes and opinions, emotions and perceptions, a sense of belonging and trust. This is not to say there aren’t tangible steps which can show progress, structural inequalities, and concrete actions which would help in the reconciliation process, but is rather to say that at the end of the day, reconciliation is about relations between humans, and that the human cannot be taken out of this equation. For this reason, it is important to first understand how those at the sharp end of history teaching, the teachers themselves, perceive their role, their jobs, and the difficulties they face. As such, the first sub-question is **how do history teachers perceive their role, and the role of history, in the post-war context of Trincomalee?** Tied with this is the second sub-question **how do history teachers view the government curriculum?** Taken together, these two questions should give a strong sense of the opinions of the history teachers themselves, and help understand the day-to-day reality and experiences of the history teachers in Trincomalee. These two questions will make up the first data analysis chapter of this thesis.

The third sub-question, divided into two parts, is concerned with the issue of agency, and whether or not the history teachers have the “capacity to influence their conflict-driven surroundings.” (Sayed, 2015: 11) These questions are **(a) What agency do teachers have over the curriculum, and (b) what agency do they have to promote views and/or histories different from the government one?** These questions are trying to understand whether history teachers actually have any impact on reconciliation; whether they can act, take on new roles, and importantly whether they actually do act, to promote or hinder reconciliation. This is important as it gives insight into how teachers can be agents of change, but also potentially into the dangers of both granting and restricting that agency. The final sub-question asks to **what extent can teachers discuss the civil war in the classroom?** How the civil war is dealt with in schools is of utmost importance to the future of the country, and the thoughts of the history teachers in that regard are invaluable.

The final chapter will deal most explicitly with reconciliation, and issues of national unity and belonging, still within the frame of history teaching, in summing up the findings of the research and giving recommendations for the future. This final chapter will examine the answers to the sub-questions, and discuss the implications of these
answers for reconciliation in the country and use that which was learned and discussed in the previous chapters in an attempt to satisfactorily answer the main question of this research. The questions will be summated below.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Main Research Question</th>
<th>Sub-Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>What impact do history teachers, their agency, and the teaching of history in secondary schools have on reconciliation in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka?</td>
<td>1. How do history teachers perceive their role, and the role of history, in the post-war context of Trincomalee?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. How do history teachers view the government curriculum?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. (a) What agency do teachers have over the curriculum, and (b) what agency do they have to promote views and/or histories different from the government one?</td>
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<td>4. To what extent can teachers discuss the civil war in the classroom?</td>
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Chapter Two - Methodology, Epistemology, and Ethics

Before moving onto the theoretical framework in the next chapter, a discussion of the epistemological and ontological assumptions throughout the research must be had. This is based on much of the theory, as will be seen later. As an extension of this, the methodology used in the research are also addressed and justified, along with a discussion on some of the ethical considerations for this research.

2.1 Epistemology

The starting point epistemologically is post-positivism, and specifically a critical realist approach. Critical realism argues that while there is a reality independent of the human mind, “our knowledge of reality always has a chance of being proved wrong” (Sommerville, 2012: 291). It is important to recognize that while I have experience dealing with issues and theories of conflict, from my undergraduate degree in Belfast, work with UNICEF, and through extensive readings on the topic, there are limits of my knowledge and experience, and that my observations and analysis are not only fallible, but also influenced by my own biases and experiences. The subjects of analysis are people with vastly different experiences and cultures to my own, and this will affect how data is collected and interpreted. Nevertheless, being inspired by a critical realist ontology and perspective, I argue that it is possible to approach a version of a truth, specifically the teachers’ truth, as they see and perceive their own lives and positions.

One of the problems with this specific kind of social science research is the fact that it was conducted by a researcher who had never been to Sri Lanka, did not speak the language and who only had a relatively cursory understanding of the context and history of Trincomalee and Sri Lanka. For this reason, building on the epistemological assumptions of critical realism discussed above, it was of utmost importance that the voices of those actually involved in the phenomena studied were heard, and formed the basis for the investigation. Their thoughts and opinions informed the rest of the research, directing me towards the pertinent issues. Only by talking with the people on the ground would this have been possible.
2.2 Methodology

The primary source of data was collected through semi-structured interviews, normally with one or two teachers, and with a translator present. The reason for using this method is twofold; it allowed me to gather the best possible data; and it helped fulfil my ethical obligations to the participants.

Interviews allowed me to explore quite controversial and difficult topics, as I could guarantee anonymity (as the only people present were myself, and a translator), something many of the respondents insisted upon. Sometimes the respondent provided their own translator if they preferred, while the rest of the time I provided my own translator. He didn’t record any names, and I asked all of the respondents if they were comfortable with him being there, and they all immediately confirmed it was fine. This built up a level of trust, granting me good access, while reassuring the respondents. This also allowed me to delve quite deeply into these topics, following up interesting aspects, something which a survey, and even to a lesser extent a focus group, would not allow me to do. As it was a conversation, I could ask questions as they came up, without interrupting the natural flow of the discussion.

This meant I could gather much richer, deeper data, as the respondents were more likely to open up and give honest responses in small groups, where they know everything is anonymous and that I, as an outsider, will not judge or contradict what they are saying.

Conducting my research through interviews also had ethical implications. As Cohen puts it, interviews allow researchers to move away from viewing human respondents as merely sources of data, and towards “regarding knowledge as generated between humans” (Cohen, 2012: 409). Understanding this allows interviews to be seen not as subjective or objective exercises, but rather intersubjective, where participants can “discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live” (Cohen, 2012: 409). How they interpret their roles as history teachers, how they perceive the curriculum, how they view “the other” is the reality which this research is trying to understand.

Interviews are a suitable tool with which to do this.

Government history textbooks also form part of this research, to both give the official government position but also to better understand the context teachers are working
in, and to better understand some of the structures involved in the agency/structure interplay talked about below in the section on agency.

I had a total of twenty-five primary respondents, who were history teachers, school administrators, university lecturers, and a vice-chancellor of a university. Secondary interviews were conducted with religious and social leaders in Trincomalee, with a total of six respondents. These numbers are sufficient for qualitative research (Bryman 2008).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position of Respondent</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History Teacher</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History Teacher</td>
<td>Sinhala</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Administrators</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Principal, vice-principal etc)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Administrators</td>
<td>Sinhala</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Principal, vice-principal etc)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior University Lecturer</td>
<td>Sinhala</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Chancellor</td>
<td>Sinhala</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regards to reliability, externally, the study should be reasonably easy to replicate, and I am confident the results would be broadly the same. I interviewed teachers in eight secondary schools in Trincomalee, totalling seventeen history teachers. There were two schools in Trincomalee where I was not able to interview anyone, but I do not see their answers being particularly different to the others, considering how similar all the responses were from the teachers. So long as any other researcher is able to get the access which I did, which should not be a problem, I believe the study could be replicated with relatively similar results. Internally, the research is reliable in so far as the answers I got from the different teachers were very similar. As I was the only researcher, all of the observations were my own. However, after every interview I did always have in-depth conversations.
with my translator, himself a retired lawyer and someone with a strong understanding of the context, and he had very similar thoughts as me on what was meant and what was said (and not said). I also had discussions with other teachers and university academics from Sri Lanka, who all agreed with my findings, and were unsurprised by some of the things which really surprised me.

Validity must also be looked at both externally and internally. Externally, there is a difficulty in applying the findings across social settings. The findings are very context-dependent. Nevertheless, they do provide insights for any society with similar post-war, multi-ethnic social conditions. All countries teach history in school, and the positive and negative roles this can play, as explored by the research, is relevant as a result.

Internally, the research is valid as it adheres very closely to what I thought would be the case based on the literature, particularly with regard to theories of positive and negative peace, the two faces of education and reconciliation. On reconciliation, it was clear that without addressing underlying grievances, true reconciliation was impossible under current conditions, with many of the respondents explicitly saying as much. The findings backed up the literature, and provide an interesting example of the potential negative face of education.

Some of the challenges and limitations of this research will be briefly discussed now. The fact that I was the only researcher, and a foreigner who didn’t speak the language, meant that I surely missed a lot of subtlety and nuance. My own ideas and preconceptions may also have influenced how I interpreted the data. Nevertheless, I am confident enough was done to consciously overcome my own biases, and I had many conversations with different people to help inform myself of a reality of the situation. Another limitation is the fact that I primarily spoke with Tamil teachers, which resulted in me gaining less of an understanding of the government position, or of Sinhala teachers’ opinions more generally.
2.3 Ethics

There are many ethical considerations one must bear in mind when conducting any social science research, and these are amplified when working in a post-conflict situation, including the issue of informed consent. I originally planned on getting written consent, but this proved impractical and in fact counterproductive. As such, verbal consent was obtained. This formed part of the conversation which took place before any data collection, where the objectives of the research, and the uses it will be put to, were explained to the participants clearly in their own language. Before every interview I made clear that the participants could leave whenever they wanted, that all information would be entirely anonymous, and that if they did not want to answer a question, that was absolutely fine. All of this was explained by my translator, so there was never any fear of something being lost in translation. I also tried to collect contact details for all the participants, so that I could contact them after the fieldwork, and share with them the outcome of my research and the thesis itself. I also always gave them my card with my contact details on it, in case they wanted to contact me, or if they object to anything contained in the thesis. I recognise many of my respondents may not be able, or wish, to read my entire thesis in English. For this reason I intend to develop a summary of the key findings and recommendations, to be translated into both Sinhala and Tamil, which I will email to all of the schools in which I interviewed a teacher.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, every attempt was made to avoid raising tension unnecessarily, or upsetting the respondents with insensitive or difficult questions. This was particularly the case when I discussed the civil war, and I was careful not to push the respondents. Some of the respondents did get upset when talking about their personal experiences, and I always offered to change the subject or end the interview. All responded that they wanted to continue, as they felt it is an important topic to be talking about.

A further ethical question which must be considered is my role as a researcher, and particularly my role as a white, western, middle-class male researcher. I am immediately seen as an outsider, which has implications for both the quality of the
data collected, but also importantly the power relations that will have existed in any interaction I had with a participant. The issue of positionality must be raised here. The key point to get across in any interaction is that I am there to understand, not judge or promote a particular point of view. While I clearly cannot be fully objective, and my own history and understanding of conflict, particularly in Northern Ireland, will play a role in my interpretation of the data, this should not affect how I interact with the participants and the wider community. My own view is largely irrelevant, and not necessarily useful. I must be respectful of all opinions I encountered, and I endeavoured to treat all participants with equal respect, regardless of my own personal opinions.
Chapter Three - Theoretical Framework - Debates in the Literature, Debates on the Literature.

The theoretical framework for this thesis will be outlined now. This will include an examination of the literature, and the gaps in the literature, that exists on this topic, as well as a discussion of some of the key terms that are used throughout. There are three central debates which will be discussed in this theoretical framework; the role of education in conflict, particularly with regard to history teaching; what reconciliation is and how it can be achieved; and theories of teacher agency. These debates will be broken down, and tied together to allow a clear understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis.

3.1. Education and conflict.

The nexus between conflict and education is a central aspect of this research. Education is increasingly being seen as having implications for conflict, potentially playing an important role throughout the timeline of the conflict (Smith, 2010: 1-2). This section explores the different roles that education can play, the positive and negative faces of education, and the differences between these roles pre-conflict, in-conflict, and post-conflict. In the discussion of education post-conflict, the debates on education and peacebuilding are specifically explored. The section concludes with a discussion of the importance of history in these debates.

3.1.1 Positive and Negative Faces

It has been said that there are two faces to education when it comes to conflict; one positive; the other negative (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000). Education is traditionally seen as a social good, as evidenced by its inclusion in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights\(^3\), and in the Sustainable Development Goals\(^4\) to name but two major international declarations affirming education’s importance. However, particularly in the context of conflict, it can also play a negative role. In such contexts, it can be used to generate understanding and foster peace, but far too

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often it is used to divide and perpetuate old, divisive and outdated ideas. The content of lessons, and who is taught what, always has a political dimension. In cases of conflict, this dimension is very often a negative, raising tensions further. For this reason, Bush and Saltarelli argue that education may have a “socially destructive or constructive impact” (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000: ix). It is very rarely as clear and dichotomous as simply positive or negative however, rather an amalgamation of the two (Smith, 2010: 3). Bush and Saltarelli explore many different dimensions of this positive and negative face of education, one of which will be discussed in-depth below, while others are included in the section on the temporal aspects of education and conflict, and others still are left out for brevity.

3.1.1.2 Segregated Education
The interplay between the positive and the negative aspects of education can be extended to the form education takes, and whether it is segregated or integrated. The tension between the desire to preserve minority identity and culture and the need for cohesion, equal education and peacebuilding is hard to reconcile. The segregation of education in Sri Lanka has been raised as a potential barrier to reconciliation, contributing to the polarisation of society (Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks, 2015: 59). The teaching of history is extremely important in segregated education, as it may be one of the few opportunities for learning about “the other,” the causes of war and the actual events that took place during the war. As such, how this history is taught, by whom, through what frame and with what intention, is central to this research. As an aside, `schools are seen as a space where interaction with the other, and discussion of these issues, could take place in a safe environment. The extent to which this takes place must also be considered for this research (Elmersjö, 2015; Orjuela, 2003).

Much of what has been written on the topic of segregated education, conflict and its impacts have focused on the context of the low intensity conflict in Northern Ireland, while there is literature based elsewhere (Tanović, 2013 for example from Bosnia and Herzegovina). Knox (2011) argues that segregation in education has an impact throughout society, and that it perpetuates the sense of “the other,” maintaining and
passing on the parallel lives from parents to children. He also cites Flint (2007) in arguing that minorities struggle to identify with the idea of a “cohesive national identity,” but that segregated faith based education allows “cultural identities to flourish and be protected” (Flint, quoted in Knox 2011: 553). This research builds on this assertion in the Sri Lankan context, where segregation isn’t explicitly on religious lines, rather ethno-linguistic. The concepts of othering and struggling with a cohesive national identity are certainly relevant to the case of Sri Lanka, and were issues which repeatedly came up in the interviews I conducted.

3.1.2 Temporal Aspects of Education and Conflict
Beyond but directly related to the concept of the positive and negative faces, the role of education in conflict can be broken down temporally into pre-conflict, in-conflict and post-conflict. While post-war is the focus of this proposal, the previous two are still relevant, as it is impossible to truly detach or separate the three. That which took place before the conflict broke out, and the influences this had, makes a difference to the current reality of education on the ground in Sri Lanka. A brief note must be made here on the difference between conflict and war. While Sri Lanka is no longer at war, as the civil war is officially over, it can certainly be argued that it is still in conflict. This is related to the theory of positive and negative peace discussed below, where while there is no longer active physical violence, there are still structural inequalities, grievances and barriers to a sustainable peace.

3.1.2.1 Education Pre-Conflict
Positively, education can be used in divided societies before conflict breaks out to create a sense of national, rather than ethnic, identity. Civics education, particularly in post-colonial states which are dealing with the legacy of colonialism and the divisions which were often (artificially) created by colonial powers as a means of rule, can be used in a process of nation building. This may prevent grievances taking hold or growing, foster understanding and deal with issues arising from colonial history before they lead to greater conflict or violence (Davies, 2010).

Much more has been written on the inverse of this; of the negative role education can play pre-conflict. Education, specifically the teaching of history, can be used to
enforce (or reinforce) otherness, and eventually “hatred or depersonalisation” (Davies, 2005: 360). This may be through creating or emphasising historical differences, negative stereotypes and conflicts, or through the framing of history in a particular place as inherently antagonistic, where different ethnic groups have always, and must always, compete for limited land or resources. Another means by which education can be negatively used pre-conflict is through the denial or restriction of education, particularly against a specific (ethnic) group. This then has long term impacts on the capabilities and opportunities of those affected, and should be seen as “an indicator of deteriorating relations between groups” (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000: 9). Related to this is the idea that education can used as a means of cultural repression, by denying a particular group the opportunity to learn about their culture, language and history. Bush and Saltarelli state that the most extreme version of this may be termed ethnocide (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000: 10). Such policies very often play a role in fostering the conditions for conflict to take place, and as such, education in-conflict will be discussed now.

### 3.1.2.2 Education In-Conflict

Education provision is very often one of the first casualties of conflict, with the destruction of infrastructure, the reduction of capacity, and the recruitment of children (and teachers) to fight all having a negative impact (Smith, 2010: 7). Education in-conflict is an under explored field, but there is a growing body of work which argues that education in conflict may be crucial for successful recovery and reconciliation once the conflict ends, as part of the broader recognition of the importance of education for development and as a “vital part of humanitarian response in conflict situations in particular” (Novelli and Lopes Cardozo, 2012: 224). On top of this, due to the increase in the protracted nature of many conflicts, education provision is important to avoid issues of lost generations, again vital for post-conflict recovery, as more and more children are being forced from their homes and schools, preventing any kind of continuous schooling (Barakat, Connolly, Hardman and Sundaram, 2013). On the negative face, it is possible that education which built resentment and anger pre-conflict could well help fuel and perpetuate the conflict once it is underway. The denial of education can also be used directly as weapon of war, with
the destruction of schools being used to punish or erode support for a particular group, a tactic referred to as “intellectual starvation” (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000: 11). The Global Campaign to Protect Education Under Attack addresses these issues of education being attacked during conflict, stating that these attacks can take the form of “killings, disappearance, abduction, forced exile, imprisonment, torture, and maiming, military use of schools and universities, laying of landmines around schools, and destruction of educational buildings and materials… sexual violence and recruitment and use of child soldiers.”

3.1.2.3 Education Post-Conflict

With regards to post-war education, many of the same issues related to education and conflict before the outbreak of hostilities are applicable. The teaching of history can be particularly pertinent here, with the same potential problems mentioned above, while also potentially offering a means to help create an environment for reconciliation, where war and conflict is shown as such a destructive force. At the same time, the history teaching can help foster a sense of one nation or people, facing the future of the country together, something discussed further below. In a fragile and unstable post-conflict situation, conflict is never far away. Education which exacerbates, or inversely soothes, tensions can play a large role in the success or otherwise of the peace (Smith, 2010: 1).

Education in Sri Lanka is seen by peace activists in the country as a means by which reconciliation can take place, both through explicit peacebuilding education, but also in allowing encounters with “the other,” as the parallel lives phenomenon mentioned below is particularly evident in Sri Lanka as a result of the war (Orjuela, 2003; 202-203). It is important to make a distinction here between peacebuilding education, which is specifically dealing with issues of peace and social cohesion, and broader education which may have a role, positive or negative, in promoting or hindering peace and social cohesion, as a secondary effect. It is very often not as clear cut as this however, as Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks argue, “there is little consensus in the literature on a clear conceptualisation of ‘peace education,’” going on to argue that

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5 Protecting Education under Attack. (http://www.protectingeducation.org/problem)
this is perhaps necessary and favourable, as local contexts should influence any definition of what is peace education (Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks, 2015: 61).

Examples of peace education could be civics classes specifically talking about unity and peace, or school exchanges, or classes which are solely there to engage with issues from the conflict, in an attempt to teach multiculturalism and harmony (Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks, 2015: 61-62). This approach has been labelled as “reductionist” as it focuses on “changing minds and behaviour, rather than focusing on more structural issues of governance, access, quality and provision” (Novelli et al, 2015: 6). Dealing with these more structural issues are vital for sustainable and positive peace. Education which has a role in peace could be history or geography classes, for example, which talk about controversial topics which might have an effect on peacebuilding efforts. This latter form of education is what this research is exploring. What can be seen from the literature is the need for a move from specific peace education, which is generally at the micro, school level, to a more multiscalar approach, which shows “how teaching and learning processes and outcomes reproduce certain (socio-economic, cultural and political) inequalities... and can therefore either stand in the way or reinforce processes of reconciliation” (Novelli et al, 2015: 15). This is tied to the discussion on reconciliation below, where a more holistic, structural grievances based reconciliation is promoted, rather than a changing of attitudes on the individual level.

3.1.3 History and Conflict
The final aspect of the education and conflict theoretical space which is relevant for this thesis is the role that history education plays in such contexts; why history is important to learn; what are some of the dangers or benefits of learning and teaching history post-conflict; what is the relationship between history and identity in such post-conflict contexts? The specific role of history has been touched on in different areas of this theoretical framework, but will all be brought together here. Graham-Brown, quoted in Bush and Saltarelli (2000) says that in post-conflict or deeply divided societies, one can often see “the construction of a version of history ... which
heightens the role of [the dominant] group at the expense of the others” (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000: 11).

History can be used to divide communities, marginalise certain groups, and promote “unfounded assumptions about the “other” who are believed to have supported and given reason for ethnic hatreds” (Freedman, Weinstein, Murphy, and Longman, 2008: 666). Post-conflict, or post-war, there is often a concerted effort to address some of these issues with the teaching of history, as governments move to heal and develop past the conflict. As Freedman et al argue, “as countries seek social repair, many believe that a new and more truthful history must be transmitted to the next generation through revised history curricula in schools” (Freedman et al, 2008: 663). More often than not this involves editing textbooks, and removing potentially offensive and divisive material. This is inevitably a deeply political process, requiring political will as well as a consensus on what is offensive. The politics of these decisions will be discussed later in the analysis chapter with regard to the case in Sri Lanka. Just what should be taught post-war, whether the violence and actions of the war should be addressed, is a contentious issue. For example, there was a moratorium on teaching history in Rwanda after the genocide there in 1994, which lasted for over a decade. Despite this, most of the stakeholders in Rwanda felt that “teaching history was essential to social reconstruction” (Freedman et al, 2008: 664).

It can be argued that “teaching the violent past... in the aftermath of mass violence is a crucial step toward shaping a democratic citizenry that can contribute to peace and violence prevention” (Bellino, 2015: 59). Bellino goes on however to make the point that much of the violent past in post-war contexts is not truly “past” as it spans generations and “continues to shape life opportunities for diverse groups, while remaining a divisive issue in the public sphere” (Bellino, 2015: 60). Furthermore, it is not just what is written in the texts which matters, but also how it is taught, and by whom. As Metro puts it, “texts alone can neither create reconciliation nor perpetuate conflict, because it is the context in which they are used that gives them meaning” (Metro, 2012: 147). This is why how teachers engage with the textbooks is so important, as discussed below in the section on teacher agency.
Something which must be cleared up here is just why history has such an impact, why it is important to address in post-conflict situations. Rosalie Metro claims that “it is widely recognized that extremist history curricula can fuel hatred and legitimize violence in situations of ethnic conflict” (Metro, 2012: 145). Freedman et al state “historical narratives are key to shaping how communities understand themselves” (Freedman et al, 2008: 666). History informs both individual and community identities, and these identities are intricately tied with both conflict and reconciliation. To quote Barton and McCully,

“history plays an important role in the formation of individual and community identity, and when groups with differing historical experiences come into conflict, the past can be used to justify and perpetuate discord.” (Barton and McCully, 2005: 85).

History has an impact on identity, and identity has an impact on conflict. Therefore it can logically be reasoned that the teaching of history has an impact, or at least a role, in both conflict and in reconciliation. With regard to reconciliation and identity, which is discussed in much more depth below, history can also be used positively to create new identities, potentially national identities. “A new collective national identity is often placed in opposition to group identities that were central during violent conflict, with national priorities taking precedence” (Freedman et al, 2008: 666). The idea of creating a national identity through history education will be explored throughout the data analysis. However, if it is true that history can positively shape a (national) identity, then it must equally be true that it can have a role in enforcing or creating distinct identities as well; it can unite and it can divide.

3.2 Reconciliation
Reconciliation is a term which can be defined any number of ways, but for this thesis it means “that historic and present tensions, grievances and injustices are dealt with to build a more sustainable, peaceful society” (Novelli et al, 2015: 10). Clarke (2009) argues, in his work on Bosnia and Hercegovina, that there are two core components to reconciliation in the literature. Firstly, there is a need to repair and restore
relationships between groups, a changing of attitudes towards the other. The second component “involves dealing with the past, taking responsibility, and acknowledging wrongdoing” (Clarke, 2009: 361). This research does not suggest education is the key to addressing all of this, nor is that what this thesis hopes to explore. Rather, one step towards this reconciliation is looking at these historic and present tensions, and how these are addressed (or not) through history education in segregated education in Sri Lanka. One way historic and present tensions can be dealt with is in understanding how these tensions are tied up with inclusive/exclusive identity, and how they impact the perception of “the other.” This will be discussed below, as identity, and how one positions oneself in the national context, is highly relevant to issues of reconciliation and peacebuilding.

The 4 R’s framework of redistribution, recognition, representation and reconciliation (Novelli et al, 2015) builds on Nancy Fraser’s theory of social justice and the conditions necessary for achieving it. The addition of the last “R” of reconciliation is what will be explored in most depth by this research, while recognising the importance of all four, and their interplay, in achieving stable and lasting peace. The reason reconciliation is being focused on is that it goes deeper than the theories discussed below on contact and the liberal peace, addressing the causes of conflict in a much more holistic way. Reconciliation involves “dealing with the past and historical memory, truth and reparations, transitional justice processes, issues related to bringing communities together, processes of forgiving and healing and the broader processes of social and psycho-social healing” (Novelli et al, 2015: 12).

Recognition is something which comes up throughout the thesis. Recognition involves “status equality, equitable interaction in institutionalised cultural hierarchies, and space for cultural/ethnic diversity” (Novelli, et al, 2015: 13). These are all important for a move to positive peace, as discussed below. It is the space for cultural/ethnic diversity which is of most interest for this thesis, and how and whether this diversity is embraced through the education system and the history curriculum.
Representation is concerned with “the (absence of) transformative politics of framing at multiple scales (global, national, local), and leading to this the (un)equal participation in decision-making or claim-making processes of all citizens” (Novelli et al, 2015: 12). The decision-making and politics of what is included in the history curriculum is of particular importance in this regard.

The fourth ‘R’ of redistribution is examined less in this thesis. While redistribution is often equated with purely economic issues, and these are important, it goes beyond this. It is concerned with “unequal distribution of resources, exclusive systems of participation in economic structures and a lack of equal (educational, health, employment etc.) opportunities” (Novelli et al, 2015: 12. It is the latter part of this definition which is of most relevance to this thesis, looking at the potential relationship between history education and the opportunities this may or may not offer students.

The 4 Rs, while defined separately, are in fact intrinsically linked, linkages which will be explored later in the thesis. The language used in the 4 Rs framework is towards peacebuilding. Peacebuilding, reconciliation, and social cohesion are all phrases which were used throughout the research, and will likewise be used throughout the data analysis chapters.

Galtung’s hugely influential work on positive and negative peace informs much of the analysis on reconciliation and peacebuilding below. There can be four dimensions to negative and positive peace; political, military, economic, and cultural (Galtung, 1996). Moving from conflict, to a negative peace and then to a positive peace is by no means a linear and inevitable process, and is a difficult and contentious path. Negative peace can broadly be defined as an absence of violence, which is pessimistic, curative, and not always achieved through peaceful means, which is certainly the case in Sri Lanka (Galtung, 1996). Positive peace in contrast is a peace which is largely optimistic, structurally solid and based on justice, and achieved peacefully (Galtung, 1996: 2-8). While there are other theories on peacebuilding, perhaps most notably the liberal peace thesis, which places much more emphasis on
security, and all else being contingent on first establishing a militaristic security, this paper is building on the work of Novelli et al (2015), and as such will follow their theorising on Galtung’s positive and negative peace theory. The primary reason for moving beyond the liberal peace thesis is that it has little to say once security has been established, assuming that democracy and market forces will fix any of the underlying problems, leading to “trickle-down peace” (Castendea 2009, quoted in Novelli and Higgins, 2016: 4). Novelli and Higgins argue that this is not a “sufficiently robust development model to address the marginalised majority” and “it is not a sufficient condition to reach positive peace” and as such I would argue it is not a robust enough model for the context of Sri Lanka and for this thesis, which is focusing on the move to positive peace (Novelli and Higgins, 2015: 4 and Novelli et al, 2015: 5). Much of the peacebuilding and reconciliation work being done in Sri Lanka, since before the end of the civil war, has focused on this liberal security/economy model (Stokke, 2011). The deeper issues of grievances, inequalities and tensions have not been dealt with through this approach, so this thesis will focus on a more holistic, reconciliation based understanding.

A separate theory on reconciliation and peacebuilding more generally is the so called “contact theory”, also known as “Allport’s Contact Hypothesis,” after the Gordon W. Allport, who devised it with regard to racial prejudice in the United States (Steinburg, 2013:39). This theory maintains that through contact and interaction, negative stereotypes and perceptions may be changed and replaced with a greater understanding and respect for “the other” in the context of ethnic conflict (Steinburg, 2013:39-40). There is much debate in the literature on the role and importance of contact in peacebuilding, but much of the argumentation can be summed up by Rachel Ben-Ari and Yehuda Amir, quoted in Gawerc’s 2006 article, that contact “should be regarded as a necessary but not sufficient condition for producing a positive change in ethnic attitudes and relations” (Gawerc, 2006: 447-448). Clarke (2009) expands on this, in his understanding of reconciliation as the repair and restoration of relationships, arguing that one of the key components of this reconciliation is building mutual trust, something which can be achieved through contact. He goes on to say that it is in the areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina where
the people have the least contact with “the other” that one finds the most uncompromising and hard-line views towards them (Clarke, 2009: 365). This still seems insufficient, for while there is anecdotal evidence of good relations between people of different ethnic groups when they live side by side, there remain deep, systemic problems and tensions, which go beyond individual relations. These issues cannot be solved purely by interacting with “the other.” To say they can is to suggest that conflict is not driven by structural inequalities or grievances, but rather individual, personal animosity only.

3.2.1 Reconciliation and Identity
Naomi Levy (2014), writing on peacebuilding and the politics of identity in Bosnia, argues that peacebuilding is inherently an exercise in identity building, and that various sources of identity, and their strengths, must be understood in order to achieve sustainable peace. How identity is formed and maintained, and what impact this may have on reconciliation, is another theoretical space which must be explored. The broader debate of what is identity, and where it comes from, cannot be sufficiently addressed here. Glenn Bowman argues that “identity, in everyday civil life, is a relatively unfixed orientation which shifts according to the social setting” (Bowman, 2014: 152). Therefore arguing there is a unitary, singular identity for anyone is problematic. Bowman goes on to argue however that political identity, particularly when confronted with a (perceived) threat, will “force to the fore a specific sense of self and community mobilized against that threat” (Bowman, 2014: 152-153). This sense of community is contrasted with “the other,” the people posing the perceived threat mentioned above. “The other” both unites intra-community, and divides inter communities. By defining identity in binary terms, of “us” and “them,” “the other” has an important role to play in reconciliation. By moving from a perception of “the other” as a threat to a situation of mere difference, reconciliation is more likely. When considering segregated education and the teaching of history therein, reconciliation is only possible when an identity is built which is not inherently antagonistic towards “the other,” but is rather able to understand the other point of view. The teaching of history in a respectful and pluralistic way is vital if this is to be successful. Levy discusses the role that education can play in this, and the negative
spaces schools can become if issues of identity, and particularly multiple identities, are not taken into account (Levy, 2014).

It is important to make the distinction here between identity and ethnicity. This is a pivotal distinction for this research; ethnicity is a part of one’s identity, but not an inherent or essential one. This builds on Coleman and Johnson’s work on the construction of national identity, and the roles “othering” and territoriality play in building and maintaining this identity (Johnson and Coleman, 2012). National identity is “defined first and foremost territorially.” As such, “consolidating internal differences” into a unified identity, can lead to conflict between competing notions of identity” (Johnson and Coleman, 2012: 867). This can be seen in the case of Sri Lanka. They go on to argue that a unified national identity is a normative project, with an “integrated national identity [being a] symbolic, discursive, even moral, center” (Johnson and Coleman, 2012: 875).

The above two sections give an outline as to the debates on education, history and reconciliation. There is one concept left to unpick, which is central to this research and is integral to any discussion about education and its role in reconciliation; teachers and their agency. Teachers are the conduit through which most education policy flows, and their potential impact must be examined before moving on to the data analysis chapters.

3.3 Teacher Agency
Teachers are at the centre of this research. They are the key respondents, and it is their opinions and perspectives which informs much of this thesis. Teachers are key to the education process, as curriculum is always channelled through them. This means that any influence or role that the curriculum has, for this research the history curriculum, is dependent on the actions of the teachers. They have a powerful role, a job which “is a political and highly responsible one… [with a] potential positive or negative influence on processes of peace/conflict” (Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks, 2015: 57).
The extent to which these teachers have the capacity to affect their conditions, what exactly is meant by agency and what can be done with it, are all explored now. Much like with the positive and negative faces of education discussed above, the outcomes of how agency is employed and restricted can have a positive and a negative impact, particularly when it comes to conflict affected situations. Furthermore, and again similarly to the faces of education analysis, there is not always a clear divide between positive and negative actors, as “the same teacher may play out both roles simultaneously in different moments and contexts” (Sayed, 2015: 11).

Agency is a broad, much debated and, at times, misunderstood concept. Theories from across the fields of sociology, philosophy and politics have their own definitions and ideas. Following from the epistemological assumptions outlined above, this thesis agrees with Lasky (2005) when she argues that “what individuals believe, and how individuals think and act is always shaped by cultural, historical, and social structures” (Lasky, 2005: 900). As such, “teacher agency is part of a complex dynamic; it shapes and is shaped by the structural and cultural features of society and school cultures” (Lasky, 2005: 900). This interplay between the identity of the teacher, and their agency and how they exercise it, is explored more in the data analysis. Agency can be described as when (in this case) an individual has space to manoeuvre, to challenge or contest that which happens to them, and that which they do. Vongalis-Macrow (2007) unpacks agency a little more, down to three interconnected aspects; obligations; authority; and autonomy. Teachers’ obligations “define their boundaries and limitations to their positions.” A teacher’s authority lies in their role as knowledge specialists, and being able to pursue this role with freedom and passion. The autonomy a teacher has refers to their capability to “determine and pursue their own interests and make effective their demands” (Vongalis-Macrow, 2008: 431, 433, 434). She builds here on Archer (1984) for this definition of agency (Vongalis-Macrow, 2007: 428). These three aspects must be taken together in any reassembling of agency, as it responds to different structures. These three aspects of agency are all linked, and different forces can influence each individually, each in different ways or all together in the same way. That is to say that the agency
described is complex, with at times contradictory outcomes depending on the forces and structures influencing it.

When this understanding of agency is applied to teachers, the structures of both the school environment and curriculum, as well as the wider societal structures, are important to analyse in order to get a clear understanding of what agency there is and where it lies. Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks discuss this, in their work on teachers and the strategic relational approach (SRA). They see action as “framed by constant engagements of actors within their environment, [which] can lead to the pursuit of different strategies and tactics in different circumstances (Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks, 2015: 60). The interplay between structure and agency, and the fact that neither are unitary or fixed concepts but rather in a dialectic discourse together, is explored by the aforementioned Vongalis-Macrow (2007). Vongalis-Macrow defines structure as “systematic ways of organizing resources (human and capital) (Vongalis-Macrow, 2007: 427). This is then applied to the school environment, where the structures are both societal and political, and have an impact on one or more of the aspects of agency as expressed above. As Vongalis-Macrow puts it, “the structural form of education creates the architecture for teachers’ agency” (Vongalis-Macrow, 2007: 430). Under specific conditions, structures “can selectively reinforce the action, tactics, activities and strategies of actors, and discourage others” (Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks, 2015: 60).

The above discussion on agency is rather abstract, dealing not in concrete examples of what a teacher’s agency for peacebuilding would actually look like. When considering teacher agency as peacebuilders, this can be defined as a teacher’s “capacity to influence their conflict-driven surroundings” (Sayed, 2015: 11). This involves their ability to harbour and promote “values and attitudes that offer a basis for transforming conflict itself” (Novelli and Smith, 2011: 7, quoted in Sayed, 2015: 11). It is important to stress here again that teachers are not automatically in favour of peacebuilding and reconciliation; teachers’ actions are not always benevolent, as they are as susceptible as anyone else to the forces driving conflict and division. As Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks put it, teachers can be “critical, complex, and perhaps
troublesome agents of transformation” (Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks, 2015: 61). Positively, they could act “by promoting harmony between pupils including respect, justice and inclusiveness” (Sayed, 2015: 11). Negatively, they may “use pedagogy and curricula to perpetuate inequity and conflict between opposing ethnic, religious or socioeconomic groups” (Sayed, 2015: 11).

Agency is complex, and responds to, remakes, and is shaped by, the structures which confine it. What these structures are and how they impact on teacher agency in the specific context of this research, will be unpacked further in later chapters. In the conflict context, the role of the teacher takes on an extra dimension. They may be in the contradictory position as both agents of change and drivers of division. The reality of this, taken from the perspective of the teachers themselves, will be explored in the next two chapters, after the conceptual scheme tying the above theory together is presented.
3.4 Conceptual Scheme

This conceptual scheme should be read from the top down. First the thoughts of the teachers are examined. This is then followed by an analysis of the actions of these teachers, to understand the complex nature of agency, how it empowers and limits the teachers actions, and to show the structures limiting that agency. The relationship between the teachers and how they act, and the structures of the curriculum is understood to be dialectical in nature, so the strategies these teachers deploy, and the forces influencing and limiting their actions, are discussed. Together, these relationships are analysed through their interactions with history and the history curriculum. A new role that these teachers take on, as a result of the gaps left in the structures of the curriculum, is also explored. Finally the implications for reconciliation will be discussed, through the lens of the 4 R’s framework and the positive and negative faces of education.
Chapter Four - Teachers’ Thoughts - Optimistic, Pessimistic, Realistic?

This chapter deals with the first two research questions posed earlier; how do history teachers perceive their role, and the role of history, in the post-war context of Trincomalee; and how do history teachers view the government curriculum? These questions are examined in turn, building on the interviews conducted with history teachers in secondary schools in Trincomalee from February 2016 to April 2016. Their responses will be analysed through the lens created by the theoretical framework above, to study what the implications of their answers are.

4.1 Role of History - Sub-Question One

The first question can be divided into two parts; the first dealing with the role of the teachers; and the second on the importance of teaching history in the curriculum. There is inevitably a lot of overlap between the two. The teachers’ responses will be outlined first, followed by the government line on the role of teachers and history. These two, potentially different understandings, will then be discussed together with regard to the implications for reconciliation.

The first question I asked in every interview, after opening pleasantries and a discussion on my research and background, was why the teachers thought it was important to teach, and learn, history. Put simply, why is history important? There were a range of views expressed, all following a very similar line of argument. All of the teachers and principals interviewed were very positive and enthusiastic about the role that history can play. They all saw history as an important subject to learn, for a variety of reasons. Most talked of the importance of learning about the past in order to understand the present and plan for the future. “Without the past, we cannot have a future,” as one teacher put it.6 Virtually all of the respondents had this argument to make in some shape or another. A common refrain was that we must learn from our mistakes; use what we now know in order to prepare for a brighter future. One teacher discussed how history can show how society has evolved, and importantly how it can evolve, showing that things can change for the better, that

6 Interview #8 - Trincomalee.
situations are not intractable. None of the teachers went into specifics in this regard however, suggesting that this was somewhat of a formulaic answer, one that sounds good, but without having much practical relevance. Nevertheless, there was a general belief that by understanding, analysing and teaching about the past, it is possible to build a better future. This will be discussed further in later chapters, where this response can be tied with the discussions on teaching about the civil war.

A second common response was much more revealing; most of the respondents talked of how history can be used to create a sense of pride in the nation, foster patriotism, and teach respect and awe for the ancestors. To quote one teacher, “we can learn the greatness of our ancestors, and this allows us to be proud of our ancestors.” This idea of history as a source of pride, as something tangible which the students (and teachers) can use as part of their identity, came up again and again. Through teaching history “we can understand the nature of who we are, our identity.” It is directly tied with culture by many of the teachers, discussing history and culture in the same breath. One teacher talked of how teaching history can show “our part in history” and that by doing so, it was possible to “set an example for the students, and promote and show our culture to the students.” Another teacher talked about how it was important to “know where we came from,” which is again linked with culture and identity, and goes to quite a fundamental depth. It is clearly important to these teachers for history to represent their culture, so the students can learn about themselves, their ancestry. The teachers all placed great value in this, and presented it as something which did not need further explaining; it was obvious that history is part of your identity, and students should, or even must, learn about and know about this. It is the student's' right and the teacher's' duty. Following from the discussion on history and identity in the theoretical framework, it can be seen that the teachers agree with the argument that the teaching of history has a strong impact on identity.

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7 Interview #7 - Trincomalee.
8 Interview #6 - Trincomalee.
9 Interview #4 - Trincomalee.
10 Interview #7 - Trincomalee.
11 Interview #7 - Trincomalee.
12 Interview #9 - Trincomalee.
As discussed above, one of the limitations of this research is that I did not discuss the questions of the research in depth with anyone from the government, or from within the N.I.E, choosing instead to focus on the Tamil perspective. Nevertheless, it is possible to get a sense of the government line, from the government issued textbooks themselves. The belief in the importance of learning history is very similar to the above. At the start of the history textbooks is a message from the Educational Publications Departments, stating the belief that students should learn history in order to deal with present challenges and prepare for the future. That “the sources of some of the socio-political issues which we face at present can be found in our immediate past” and that “the history helps us to gain the experiences needed to solve them.” (History Grade 6, 2015: vii) Furthermore, the government also recognises the important role that history plays in one’s identity, that “understanding one’s own identity properly is a necessary factor to live in the society as individuals and work towards a common goal” and that “it is essential that a student learns the nature of their contribution in the history” (History Grade 6, 2015: vii and History Grade 10, 2015: viii) This is where the convergence of the beliefs of the government and of the Tamil teachers ends.

4.2 Perception of the Curriculum - Sub-Question Two

The interviews discussed above were all with Tamil teachers, and the culture and identity they talked about was always Tamil, not Sri Lankan. This is a key point, and is extremely important in the following discussion on the second sub-question, of how do history teachers view the government curriculum?

In many ways, the answer to this second sub-question is the most important of the thesis, getting to the crux of the issue of how the teachers view history, the government, and their place in modern Sri Lanka. The answer to this question will inform the rest of this thesis. It is in reality a two-part question. Firstly the teachers’ views on the content of the curriculum must be examined. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the perception of why the content is the way it is must be explored. Teachers’ views on the curriculum will be laid out first, before being compared with
the answer to the first question to see if there is any disconnect between what they think the role of history is and the actual history which they teach.

When I asked the teachers for their thoughts on the history curriculum, I was generally treated to a laugh, or sometimes a chuckle and a shake of the head. Two teachers made sure once again that all of their answers were anonymous, laughing and saying “no names?” in English.\textsuperscript{13} The reason for this mirth, and wariness, soon became clear. All of the Tamil teachers I talked to were scathing with their opinions of the curriculum, and they all had the same complaint; that the history being taught in the government curriculum was either incorrect, or more often, incomplete, dealing only with positive, Sinhala aspects of Sri Lankan history. Furthermore, the focus on Sinhala history is at the expense of the Tamil, sometimes to the extent that Tamil names and people have been changed in the textbooks to be Sinhala.

One such issue which was brought up by every single teacher was that of the Kantalai Tank, an old man-made reservoir or lake which provides water to much of the Trincomalee district. Firstly it is interesting that there is so much pride in, and so much importance placed on, this tank. It was described as “internationally known”\textsuperscript{14}, and that it was “built by our (Tamil) king”.\textsuperscript{15} They said that it was well established that it was made by a Tamil King, and that this used to be in textbooks, but this has recently been changed, to say it was built by a Sinhala king. There was a lot of resentment around this, and this will be discussed further in the second data analysis chapter, dealing with teacher agency. The most striking aspect of this example is the fact that every single Tamil teacher interviewed, all seventeen, raised this, sometimes when discussing the curriculum, other times together with broader complaints about Sinhala/Tamil relations. Another similar example, raised by most of the teachers, is that of the last king of Anuradhapura, a sacred temple city, and one of modern Sri Lanka’s most visited tourist sites. The teachers claim that this king was Tamil, and that this always used to be in the history books, but in recent updates this has been changed to show him to be a Sinhala king.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{13} Interview #8 - Trincomalee.
\textsuperscript{14} Interview #9 - Trincomalee.
\textsuperscript{15} Interview #8 - Trincomalee.
\end{footnotesize}
It was presented throughout the interviews as almost axiomatic that the curriculum does not represent Tamil culture and history, and that it was written in such a way as to marginalise the role of the Tamil people in the history of Sri Lanka. This is to show Sri Lanka as being, and as always having been, a Sinhalese, Buddhist country. As one teacher put it, “history written now... deliberately focuses on Buddhist narrative.”\textsuperscript{16} Tamil history is deliberately neglected, or even prohibited, in the eyes of the Tamil teachers. Every single Tamil teacher I talked to, along with all of the principals and other administrators, clearly and openly stated that they did not think that the history curriculum represented them, or the Tamil people, in any real way. Tamil history is “not allowed”\textsuperscript{17} or when it is, there are only one or two small points on Tamil history, while the rest is focused on Sinhala history. In the textbooks, the vast majority will be dealing with Sinhala (or Buddhist) history, with “half a page for Tamil history, half a page for Muslim”.\textsuperscript{18} The vast majority of the Sri Lankan history they teach is the history of the Sinhala people.

There was no ambiguity on behalf of the teachers themselves that the curriculum did not represent them or the Tamil people. While this is troubling in its own right, and something which will be examined further later in the thesis, the reasons they see for this Sinhala focus, and Tamil neglect, has the potential to be much more troublesome. One teacher, when I asked the question of why she thought the curriculum is so neglectful of Tamil history, she laughed and said, in English, “Everyone knows it!”\textsuperscript{19} This was something which really struck me throughout the research; the fact that these teachers see this as obvious, and inevitable.

The reasons given by the teachers can be largely divided into two camps; benevolent reasons and malevolent reasons. Under the former, most of the teachers accepted that the majority of the people in Sri Lanka are Sinhala, so there will be a focus on their history and culture. None of the teachers were begrudging about this,

\textsuperscript{16} Interview #8 - Trincomalee.
\textsuperscript{17} Interview #4 - Trincomalee.
\textsuperscript{18} Interview #8 - Trincomalee.
\textsuperscript{19} Interview #8 - Trincomalee.
accepting this as fair and inevitable. As one teacher put it, most of the people of Sri Lanka are Sinhala, so “of course most of the talk is about their history.” None of the teachers felt that Sinhala history shouldn’t be taught to Tamil students. There was a broad recognition that all sides should be taught, and that the history of Sri Lanka should be framed as the history of a multi-ethnic country, inhabited by the Tamil and the Sinhala. This brings us to the second camp of reasons given; the malevolent ones.

While most of the teachers accepted the above, that both Tamil and Sinhala history should be taught, a majority also stated that they thought there was a concerted, deliberate effort to marginalise, or even erase, the Tamil history in Sri Lanka. The general argument went that they (the Sinhala) are “not willing, never accept” a multi-ethnic identity for Sri Lanka, and they use history for this. Some of the language used was quite alarming. The belief in the degree and manner of this effort varied, with one teacher saying there are “events that are deliberately neglected,” while another said “they are trying to force their history and culture on us.” Quite a few went as far as to say that the Sinhala are trying to “wipe out the Tamil history” or some variation of this phrase. There was a belief that this is part of an effort to lessen or remove Tamil historical claims to the land and the area. One teacher likened it to the burning of the Jaffna library in 1981, an event which is seen as a precursor to the civil war, and a devastating loss of Tamil history and culture. “It is all the same thing, trying to erase.” This sense of a government which is actively trying to suppress and even destroy the Tamil history, and therefore in a sense culture and identity with it, was ubiquitous amongst the teachers I talked with. If this is true, it is a clear example of “the construction of a version of history ... which heightens the role of [the dominant] group at the expense of the others” (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000: 11).

The teachers see history being constructed in a way which lessens their cultural and historical attachment and identity in Sri Lanka.

20 Interview #1 - Trincomalee.
21 Interview #3 - Trincomalee.
22 Interview #6 - Trincomalee.
23 Interview #7 - Trincomalee.
24 Interview #7 - Trincomalee.
25 Interview #8 - Trincomalee.
One teacher compared the situation in Sri Lanka with the history of the Native Americans in North America. She says that now “America belongs to the whites; they are the rightful owners, but that this ignores the other people from history.” According to her, no one learns about Native American history, even if there is an understanding that these people were living in America first. She said that this lessens their sense of belonging, and their ownership of the land. She says this is the same issue all over the world, and in some places people recognise and talk about this, and in others they do not. It was clear she felt Sri Lanka fell into the latter category.

The above represents a potentially dangerous divide between the Sinhala and the Tamil parts of the population, where the Tamil not only see a division between “us” and “them” but they see “them,” “the other” as actively trying to suppress or attack their own group. The emotive language used, of “wiping out” the Tamil culture and identity, is existential in its nature. As seen in the theoretical framework, this kind of “othering” is often related to a (perceived) threat, which is clearly the case here with the language being used. This results in stronger Tamil identity, rather than Sri Lankan, as it creates “a specific sense of self and community mobilized against [the] threat” (Bowman, 2014: 152-153). The fact that peace does exist, even in a negative sense, is therefore somewhat surprising, in a town where the Sinhala and the Tamil people are continuously in contact. The reason for this can be understood however, when we look a little deeper at just who they feel are responsible for the suppression, or the attacks; at who exactly is “the threat.”

The National Institute for Education (N.I.E), which decides the curriculum and writes the textbooks, was described as “a bastion of Sinhala culture.” Many of the teachers discussed the N.I.E, saying some variation that it is “absolutely run by the majority” and that they want to promote a single, Sinhala centric identity onto Sri Lanka. The N.I.E is a political institution, as part of the government, and is connected to a broader issue, where the problem arises from the government and politicians

26 Interview #8 - Trincomalee.
27 Interview #10 - Colombo.
28 Interview #3 - Trincomalee.
more generally, who use the teaching of history to promote “their own Sinhala Buddhist agenda.”

“They (the Sinhala politicians) want to show this is a Sinhalese country,” as one teacher phrased it, and they use the history books to do this. One respondent, a senior history lecturer at one of the top universities in Sri Lanka discussed this in depth, stating that at the moment, the dominant discourse in both the government and in the N.I.E is this one of Sinhala, Buddhist nationalism. “The government” was often referred to throughout the interviews. Exactly what is meant by the government was never really clarified, but I took it to mean all of those involved in governing at the national level, along with any institutions which are politically appointed, such as the N.I.E. The military was also often conflated with the government, which makes sense considering the number of ex-military officials now in the ruling government, for example Sarath Fonseka, a senior member of Sirisena’s cabinet and ex-commander of the army.

According to this academic the history curriculum serves a broader purpose than “educational, pedagogical, or academic,” instead serving a “political and ideological purpose.” They were quick to point out that the problem with the textbooks is not with how the Tamil people are portrayed, something which used to be an issue, he says, and something which a number of teachers did in fact bring up. Rather the problem is in the way the Tamil role is framed; as minimal at best in the history of Sri Lanka. The books are written to marginalise, alter or ignore Tamil contributions. He said this is much subtler, but in a sense more dangerous, as it is insidious rather than blatant. Textbooks which paint the “other” in an antagonistic light, which promotes “unfounded assumptions about the “other”” (Freedman et al, 2008: 663) were discussed in the theoretical framework. This academic is not saying this is the case now in Sri Lanka. Rather what is evident here once again is constructing history in a particular way to serve an agenda; it is the political decision to include one (Sinhala) thing at the expense of another (Tamil).

29 Interview #7 - Trincomalee.
30 Interview #3 - Trincomalee.
31 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/20/cluster-bombs-used-sri-lanka-civil-war-leaked-photos-suggest
32 Interview #10 - Colombo.
Many of the teachers backed up what this respondent said, saying that there is a certain agenda being served by this Buddhist nationalist discourse, promoted by politicians, who are using history for their own purposes. “Politicians arose this maliciousness.” There was an understanding that the blame lay at the feet of these (mostly Sinhalese) politicians, who stoke tensions to further their own ends. While ordinary Sinhala people may have internalised this, they are not at fault. Tensions are still extremely high between the two groups in many respects, but there is recognition that it is the policy makers who are creating and furthering these problems. The language used about the ordinary Sinhala people was generally reconciliatory, with most, but not all, of the teachers saying they felt the Sinhala were being manipulated by the government, by stoking such tensions with the Tamil. It is important to raise the recent election of Maithripala Sirisena to the presidency here. Most of the teachers felt that the new government offered the chance of change, and held much more favourable views towards it compared with the Rajapaksa regime, which was in all instances derided by the teachers. Nevertheless, this optimism was very cautious, with some feeling nothing substantive will change other than a tempering of some of the rhetoric. “Most of the officials and ministers [in the new government] used to be in the Rajapaksa regime, and so many Tamils do not have trust in these people.”

The anger was primarily directed at Sinhala politicians, trying to play to their base, and push a Buddhist nationalist agenda. Nevertheless, some of the teachers also took issue with the Tamil politicians, saying not enough is being done by them to raise these concerns, and protect their identity and culture. One teacher was so blunt as to say “the problem is Tamil politicians. No one is willing to stand up for these things,” these things being the changing of history to marginalise the Tamil role. The Tamil politicians in Trincomalee and Jaffna are seen as opportunistic, discussing issues like history, LTTE and others important to many Tamils only around election time, because they “do not want to alienate voters.” The anger was directed at the

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33 Interview #3 - Trincomalee.
34 Interview #3 - Trincomalee.
35 Interview #9 - Trincomalee.
36 Interview #4 - Trincomalee.
government in Colombo, and Tamil politicians “playing games in Colombo.”\textsuperscript{37} This is a sign of a problem with representation, as discussed in the theoretical framework. It is understandable, if regrettable, that these Tamils do not believe that the Sinhala politicians represent them, something perhaps to be expected in deeply divided societies. The larger issue is that they also do not have faith in the politicians who are “meant” to be representing them, the Tamil politicians. This is combined with a lack a faith in the N.I.E, which should be writing the curricula for all Sri Lankans, but is seen to be representing only the Sinhala.

In order to gain a more complete understanding of the situation in Trincomalee, I also interviewed a number of Sinhala teachers, asking them similar questions. The tone used was very reconciliatory, with no ill will expressed towards the Tamil from the teachers in Trincomalee. This was not necessarily the case with the teachers I talked to in Colombo. The answers as to the purpose of history were broadly the same as those of the Tamil teachers; the importance of knowing one’s roots and culture, and of being able to learn from the mistakes of the past and to “go beyond these mistakes.”\textsuperscript{38} There was also an acknowledgement that the curriculum did not necessarily represent the Tamil people, with one teacher saying there were “problems with Tamil and Sinhala things”\textsuperscript{39} and that the curriculum is mostly based on Sinhala history. They went on to say that this may be difficult for some Tamils, but that “history cannot be changed.”\textsuperscript{40} There was a sense that while they could sympathise with the Tamil perspective, it was the fault of the Tamil’s for feeling aggrieved, and not any real problem with the curriculum or with what was taught. Their views on the civil war are discussed in depth later in the next chapter. What can be seen from these opinions is that there is no recognition that history can be biased, that it is subjective and there is no one “correct” version of history. That the Tamils may feel aggrieved not through any fault of their own, but due to the fact history is being altered and misrepresented seems to pass these teachers by. Acknowledging the fact that the curriculum does not represent the Tamil people,

\textsuperscript{37} Interview #9 - Trincomalee.  
\textsuperscript{38} Interview #5 - Trincomalee.  
\textsuperscript{39} Interview #5 - Trincomalee.  
\textsuperscript{40} Interview #5 - Trincomalee.
without believing something should be done about this, does nothing for reconciliation. Furthermore, the fact that these teachers acknowledge that history is important for one's roots and identity, while having no problem with the Tamil people not being properly represented, is a sign that they do not see the Tamil identity as important for the wider Sri Lankan identity. Equating Sinhala history with Sri Lankan history is a further barrier to reconciliation. Why these teachers feel this way deserves further exploration. However, as they are following the government line, teaching what they are told to, these teachers should certainly not be judged for these views. It should not be up to individual teachers to critique the government position.

These findings suggest there is a massive gap between what Tamil history teachers think the role of history is, and why it is important, and their thoughts on the actual curriculum. Almost all of the teachers I talked to, Tamil and Sinhala alike, had a strong belief in the importance of history, and how it can play a positive role in understanding the present and preparing for the future. However, when the Tamil teachers discussed what they actually taught, it became clear that this is undermined by the fact that their people’s history is ignored, misinterpreted, or even changed. They feel there is a concerted effort to marginalise, or erase, the role of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka. There is an anger and resentment, directly felt from the teachers, but also reported from parents and others, about this curriculum, with most of the blame being directed at the government and politicians more generally. The following chapter will build from this finding, and investigate what the Tamil teachers can do about this, and what actions they actually take. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of civil war, and how, if, and when this is discussed in the classrooms.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One - Role of History</td>
<td>There was a broad consensus amongst the teachers that it is important to learn about history to both understand and be proud of one’s culture and ancestors, and that by learning history one can learn lessons for the present and for the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two - Perception of the Curriculum</td>
<td>There is also a consensus amongst the Tamil teachers that the curriculum purposely neglects and marginalises the Tamil role in the history of Sri Lanka. According to them, this is primarily as a result of Sinhala politicians pushing their own Buddhist nationalist agenda.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Five - Damned if They Do, Damned if They Don’t - Teachers, Agency, Structures.

As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a serious issue of a lack of representation in the history curriculum, resulting in Tamil students and teachers feeling like the government and the majority Sinhala population are trying to marginalise and even erase their place in both the history of Sri Lanka, and as a result, modern Sri Lanka. This chapter deals with the how the Tamil teachers engage with this situation, and the strategies and actions they can take to overcome this. This chapter answers three questions, two directly linked; (a) What agency do teachers have over the curriculum, and (b) what agency do they have to express their own opinions in the classroom, and then separately, to what extent can teachers discuss the civil war in the classroom? The first third of the chapter will broadly deal with the agency that teachers feel they have and don’t have over what they teach, the actual content of the lessons. The second third will deal more with the ways and means by which teachers exercise their agency in the classroom, despite the restraints placed by the curriculum and other structures. The structures and obstacles which restrict or affect how this agency is utilised, and how far it can go, will form part of both of these sections. The final question will then be answered, building on the previous two answers, with the specific focus on the civil war, with a view to understanding the agency the teachers have to discuss the civil war, and also their thoughts on how it may be addressed in the future.

5.1 Agency over curriculum – Sub-Question Three (a)

From the interviews, it soon became clear that the teachers did not feel like they had any control or agency to affect the history curriculum, with all of them resigned to the fact that the government sets the agenda, and that this is then translated into the textbooks. History is seen as a political tool, which is used by successive governments to promote their views and agendas. “Politics and education are hand-in-hand.”41 As Tamils, these teachers said they will never have the same priorities as the government, and so history will always be framed against them and their interests. The history will always be biased against them, and a tool of the

41 Interview #4 - Trincomalee.
government. “The government rules all our past, up to the A-levels.”⁴² There wasn’t any sense that these teachers could do anything about this, and acquiesced to the fact that they do not have any control. This is a sign of a lack of agency on all three aspects of agency as laid out by Vongalis-Macrow in the theoretical framework.

Some of the teachers had in fact been invited to government workshops, aimed at improving the curriculum. On the face of things, this seems like a positive development, an attempt at representation and recognition of Tamil perspectives, as mentioned in the theoretical framework. When asked about what actually took place at these workshops, it became clear that the Tamils invited were largely tokenistic, and that their views were generally discounted. Anything which is seen to be promoting a Tamil perspective is “ignored, neglected”⁴³ and that there was clearly an unspoken rule that everything had to show and promote the Sinhala perspective. Oftentimes these meetings took place after the curriculum had been written, and the teachers were merely invited to comment on it, without having any influence over the content. The curriculum is rewritten every five years, and on the latest change, one teacher said simply “they have strengthened their grip on it.”⁴⁴ The teacher strongly believed that the government was still using the curriculum to further its own agenda. This follows from what was discussed in the previous chapter, about the Sinhala dominance in the N.I.E, and the issues this raises for representation and reconciliation.

Tamil people are engaged with the history curriculum being written at some level, but in the end, it is still always a Sinhala perspective which ends up being served, again and again. At the local level in Trincomalee, the Tamil teachers did not feel like they had any agency to affect what was included in the textbooks, and what they had to teach, nor did they feel that someone representing them was promoting their interests in this regard. While they had little control over the official content, at the individual level, in the classroom, there was an interesting interplay between agency and structure, which will be discussed now.

⁴² Interview #4 - Trincomalee.
⁴³ Interview #6 - Trincomalee.
⁴⁴ Interview #6 - Trincomalee.
5.2 Agency in the classroom – Sub-Question Three (b)

As discussed in the previous chapter, all of the Tamil teachers interviewed felt that what they were teaching was very often a misrepresentation of the Tamil role, or at times was simply wrong. The most common complaint was about the Kantalai Tank, which was seen as a clear and obvious example of the problem. I asked the teachers how they taught this topic, when they know (or perhaps strongly believe) that which is in the textbooks is incorrect. This question usually elicited laughs. I asked all of the teachers this and all but two said they first teach what is in the textbooks to the best of their ability. They then, as an aside to the students, “tell the truth.”

They teach as it is written in the textbooks for the simple reason that this is what is required for the exams that the students sit. They understand that for students, exams are the most important, so they have to be very clear with them to write what is written in the textbooks, as this is the only answer “government people who correct the exams” will accept, even though these are “fake stories.” The exams are written in such a way, inevitably, that there is a right and a wrong answer, with no room for interpretation or alternate viewpoints, or nuanced arguments.

The exam system was something many of the teachers complained about for a number of reasons, perhaps not directly relevant to this research; stress for students, difficulty, having to rote learn facts. The fact that they also have to tell the students to write answers they know to be incorrect was just another problem of many. This problem with the exam focus is something which has been written about by authors before, with Lopes Cardozo saying “the pressure of examinations create a sense of fear and lowered self-esteem” and can “contribute to the negative face of education” (Lopes Cardozo, 2008: 26).

The teachers try to overcome this by then explaining to the students “the real history” or the truth as they see it. They will directly contradict what is written in the textbooks, to promote what they see as the truth. This was a tension which all the teachers said they felt; wanting to do right by their students by helping them pass

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45 Interview #3 - Trincomalee.
46 Interview #4 - Trincomalee.
47 Interview #6 - Trincomalee.
their exams, while at the same time feeling conflicted as what they are teaching them is wrong in their eyes. Some teachers said they try to explain to the students why the history is written like this, why “the truth” is not what they write in the exams. This is a role which these teachers take on themselves, a sign of agency as autonomy in the classroom, as discussed by Vongalis-Macrow (2007).

This presents a problem for both the students and the teachers. For the students, it puts them at a disadvantage compared with their Sinhala peers, as they are learning two things, with a confused situation as to what is correct. In one sense it is good that the students get the opportunity to learn about their own history, even if it is contradicting the textbooks and potentially confusing them. The fact that this can be difficult for students to grasp was brought up by many of the teachers, clearly aware of the unjust nature of this reality. One teacher, visibly angry at this, said she is “pulled back from telling the truth to the kids, Buddhist kids don’t have this problem.”

This can be taken as an example of a problem of educational opportunity. Furthermore as discussed in the theoretical framework, ideally history should be pluralistic, showing multiple perspectives. As such, Buddhist children do have a similar problem, as they are missing out on learning an important aspect of Sri Lanka’s history as well; the Tamil story.

As mentioned above, having two versions of history can make it harder for the students to achieve good grades, as they either have no interest in history because of the confusion, or they just find it hard to remember the extra information. Further to this, much of the academic history is written in old Sinhala, something many Tamils find very difficult to understand and engage with. More often than not, this results in students losing interest in the subject, or struggling with their grades. One teacher gave the example of her own daughter, who she said gets A’s in all of her subjects, apart from history where she got a C. This is despite her mother being a history teacher. She said that this was because her daughter “realises that it is not the truth,” so has no interest. She said this at times makes her sad and other times extremely angry. This is where this situation is a problem for teachers; it is deeply

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48 Interview #8 - Trincomalee.
49 Interview #9 - Trincomalee.
frustrating, exasperating, or simply upsetting. Having to teach something which they know to be incorrect, to students that they care about, is an unfair situation to place a teacher in.

The teachers use what means and strategies they have to effect this situation, explaining as best they can the history as they see it, the history of the Tamil people, and countering any narratives which they see as unfair or untrue in their treatment of the Tamil people. Most of these teachers seem to voluntary take on this role, feeling obligated not to the government, but to their students.

While the majority of the teachers said they teach two versions of history when they disagreed with what was written in the textbooks, one school, where I interviewed four teachers, insisted they did not do this. Interestingly, this was the school where I got the strongest impression of Tamil nationalism, something which will be returned to later when dealing explicitly with the issue of the civil war. The reason for this was again exam results, with one teachers saying “in order to gain good results, we have to say what the texts says, so we don’t tell the truth.” They felt that having to learn different versions of history was just too confusing for the students, as they already struggle having to learn the Sinhala names used so often in the textbooks. Nevertheless, these teachers acknowledged the fact that most of the students realised what they were learning was not necessarily correct, having been told by parents, other students or even some teachers. This was not always the case however, with one teacher saying that the students “don’t complain, because they don’t know!” Another teacher, who was also a senior administrator in the school, said he encouraged teachers not to discuss anything not in the textbooks with their students. He went on to say however that despite (or perhaps because of) this, he had parents regularly coming in and complaining that what their children are learning is incorrect. He said he agrees, and explains that “it is forced on the teachers, and then in turn forced on the students,” and that they “have to just swallow it.”

50 Interview #7 - Trincomalee.
51 Interview #8 - Trincomalee.
52 Interview #7 - Trincomalee.
This kind of self-censorship was also evident in the other schools, to varying degrees. Fear was a prevailing factor in this self-censorship, when the concern was not over exam results. When many of the teachers first talked about discussing a different version of history from the official government, they first clarified that what they were saying was confidential. Many went on to say that they were really treading on dangerous ground when they do so in the classroom, that they “have to be careful.”

“As far as Tamil people are concerned, we barely can talk about or know what happened after 2009 (end of the civil war) let alone our own past and what happened before this.”

This is quoted as I feel it succinctly captures the frustration and fears many of these teachers feel, and shows how even when teachers are able to promote their own perspective, fear (and many other factors) influence what they say and how, limiting their agency. Much of the fear, and some of the strongest emotions in general, were expressed when we discussed the civil war. The final section of this chapter will deal with the teachers’ thoughts on teaching the civil war, to what degree they feel they can promote different perspectives in this regard, and the obstacles and structures which influence this.

5.3 The Civil War – Sub-Question Four

This answers the question of to what extent can teachers discuss the civil war in the classroom? This question is really dealing with two distinct temporal spaces; what they can, and do, say now, and what they believe will be the case in the future. While the former clearly deals with agency, the latter deals more with perceptions and opinions, particularly of the government. This is linked with the first data analysis chapter, while still dealing with structures, making it relevant to this chapter. This can also be tied with the temporal aspects of education and conflict discussed in the theoretical framework, where the temporal distance from the conflict, and whether the conflict is truly over, greatly affects the outcomes on reconciliation.

53 Interview #8 - Two history teachers, 31/03/2016. Trincomalee.
54 Interview #8 - Two history teachers, 31/03/2016. Trincomalee.
As this thesis is ultimately dealing with reconciliation after the brutal civil war which Sri Lanka was subjected to for thirty years, the issue of how this civil war is dealt with in schools is of utmost importance. I discussed the civil war in all of the interviews, with mixed results. The first point to make, and something which should not be forgotten throughout reading this thesis, is just how fresh the civil war is for these teachers. Some were uncomfortable discussing it at all, some were clearly upset talking about it, and some were highly political and angry still. This had an ethical implication, discussed further below, practical implications for what they were willing to talk about, and theoretical implications for what should be taught and how.

The first part of this question deals with how the civil war is actually addressed in the classrooms of Trincomalee. The simple answer to this is that it is not. This was striking for me, as I perhaps naively thought that it was something which would be unavoidable when discussing the post-independence history of Sri Lanka, at the very least. At the most basic level, this is because the civil war is not a topic in any of the textbooks. This is a choice of the government and the N.I.E, and any discussion of why this is would be speculation. As discussed in the final chapter, this is an area which needs more research, to understand the motivations and perspectives of the majority Sinhala, particularly those in the government and the N.I.E.

Beyond textbooks, the teachers I interviewed did not feel like they could discuss the civil war in their classrooms, once again for fear of government reprisal or recrimination. “We have a fear of saying too much.”55 One teacher said were he to do so, he “would be locked up.”56 Another said that there had been a police inquiry into him “for talking about the LTTE in the classroom,”57 refusing to go into more detail, beyond that he (or anyone else) is not allowed to talk about the civil war, even if they wanted to. Another interview with two teachers led to an illuminating exchange. When I asked about the civil war, one teacher said that they are not allowed to talk about it, to which the other teacher responded that they “were not

55 Interview #7 - Trincomalee.
56 Interview #6 - Trincomalee.
57 Interview #4 - Trincomalee.
allowed to *think* about it.” This was the same story again and again. None of the teachers said they felt like they could comfortably discuss the causes, events, outcomes or anything at all really related to the civil war, even if they wanted to. As the textbooks do not discuss the civil war, and the teachers do not feel like they are able to discuss it now, the interviews inevitably shifted to a focus on the future; to how, and if, it will be dealt with in the years to come. The general consensus seemed to be that it will be at least ten to fifteen years before it can be discussed in schools.

The answers given by the respondents on their views as to how the civil war will be dealt with in the future follow a similar pattern, a similar theme, as the answers to the previous questions. They can be divided into two camps; those who feel that any history of the civil war will only represent the government (and so Sinhala) view on the conflict; and those who insisted it must be taught anyway, for only by learning the horror of the war can one be sure to avoid another war. These two answers will be discussed in turn. It must be stressed early that there was a lot of overlap between these camps, with many teachers believing the government will misrepresent the war, but that it is still important to teach to avoid a repetition of the past.

A common refrain for why wars must be studied, and remembered, is to ensure that it never happens again. “Never forget” in other words. A number of teachers brought this up when asked whether they think the civil war will, or should, be taught in history classes. One teacher put it very clearly; that it must be taught, for one simple reason; “so pupils learn why there shouldn’t be another war.” Another teacher said that if it is left to history teachers to deal with the civil war “we must explain the worst about the war,” to show to the students just how bad it was, and that it must never be repeated. Teaching about the civil war is the “only way we can enlighten students, so it is not again.”

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58 Interview #8 - Trincomalee.
59 Interview #9 - Trincomalee.
60 Interview #1 - Trincomalee.
61 Interview #3 - Trincomalee.
Similar to this argument, is the belief that the war must be taught, and taught correctly, to show “what really happened to us.”\textsuperscript{62} This is subtly different from the reason given above. Both make the case that we must never forget, and that students must learn about the history of the conflict, but for two very distinct reasons; the former hopes to avoid further conflict in the future; while the latter is more concerned with students understanding what the Sinhala did to the Tamil people, potentially increasingly the likelihood of future tensions and even conflict.

Perhaps the most common response dealt with the deep mistrust of how the government will deal with the topic. This makes sense, considering the answers given previously; these Tamil teachers have very little faith in the objectivity of the Sinhala dominated central government of Sri Lanka. There is a deep pessimism, with the majority of the teachers resigned to the fact that any teaching about the civil war in the future will always represent the government line, and as such will not do justice to the causes or events of the war. There was reticence on behalf of many of the teachers to delve too deeply into this topic, for fearing of saying something seen to be in favour of the LTTE, according to my translator. There seemed to be an almost desperate hope for the “true history (of the war) to come out,”\textsuperscript{63} to represent both sides, to show perhaps the positive intentions, and certainly the myriad of negatives which came from the war, for all involved. But with this hope was always the despondent line that this will never be the case; that “it has to (only) be the Sinhala side, always.”\textsuperscript{64} Another said if it is taught, they must mention or teach the actual reasons for the conflict, but is very doubtful this will be the case. The stories and memories are already being lost, as it is a topic which is not discussed, “it will disappear, the truth will be lost.”\textsuperscript{65} The government, and to an even greater extent the military, will get their way, and their narrative of the war will be the only version. This version simplistically paints the LTTE as ruthless terrorists, who were crushed by the military.

\textsuperscript{62} Interview #7 - Trincomalee.
\textsuperscript{63} Interview #8 - Trincomalee.
\textsuperscript{64} Interview #8 - Trincomalee.
\textsuperscript{65} Interview #9 - Trincomalee.
“The LTTE will always be portrayed as just terrorists, Prabhakaran as a terrorist. He is not a terrorist, he is a king of the Tamil people.”

This quote shows both the belief that the government will always present the war in simplistic, dichotomous terms, but also the strength of feeling that this is unfair. The teacher who said this quote said “he is a king of the Tamil people” in a semi-serious tone. I did not get the impression that he truly believed everything the LTTE stood for, but rather that at least they were fighting for the Tamil people. This is something which came up a number of times throughout the interviews, and will form part of this analysis for why some of the teachers do not feel the war will ever be taught fairly and correctly.

The Sinhala teachers I interviewed had varying opinions on the civil war and on whether it should be taught. One of the teachers I talked with in Colombo went so far as to say that “the war is now solved” and so should not be taught, that “nothing good happened during the war, so it shouldn’t be taught.” It was “only thirty years” and “not important.” This was tied to the idea of how history should be taught to promote patriotism, as something students should be proud of, discussed in the first data analysis chapter. As there was nothing to be proud of with “The Prabhakaran Issue,” it should not be addressed. Another teacher I talked with in Colombo agreed that it shouldn’t be taught, and that “the Tamil and the Sinhala are very friendly, and that they always were” and that the civil war was the fault of “greedy politicians in the North.” This is contrasted with the views of the Sinhala teachers I interviewed in Trincomalee, who all agreed that the civil war must be taught, as it “was 30 years of our history, that this cannot be erased or ignored, so in the future it will be taught.” They were very clear that it “should not be taught with hate” and should be shown that only a few wanted war, that “there were innocent people too.”

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66 Interview #4 - Trincomalee.  
67 Interview #12 - Colombo.  
68 Interview #12 - Colombo.  
69 Interview #12 - Colombo.  
70 Interview #11 - Colombo.  
71 Interview #11 - Colombo.  
72 Interview #5 - Trincomalee.  
73 Interview #5 - Trincomalee.
The Sinhala teachers in Trincomalee seemed much more aware of the importance of teaching the civil war, particularly for those most affected in the North and East of the country, which is in direct contrast to the dismissive views held by the few teachers I interviewed in Colombo. When looked at through the lens of reconciliation as laid out in the theoretical framework, this has a number of implications. Clarke says that reconciliation “involves dealing with the past, taking responsibility, and acknowledging wrongdoing.” (Clarke, 2009: 361) The fact that these Sinhala teachers see either the civil war as not worth dealing with or important to deal with but without acknowledging wrongdoing is a barrier to reconciliation. Why these teachers feel this way deserves further exploration. The geographical component, of the difference of views between those living in Colombo and those in Trincomalee would have to form part of this analysis.

Teachers are a group of people like anyone other, with the differences between them as between any people of the same profession. They are not a homogenous group, and do not necessarily have the same views, priorities nor politics. The issue of politics is extremely pertinent here, and the strength of opinion with regard to Tamil nationalism inevitably makes a difference in responses, especially with regard to the civil war and the actions of the LTTE. I purposely did not ask any of the teachers for their own political opinions towards the LTTE and the civil war, as I did not feel this would be appropriate, and I may well not have received any adequate responses. Nevertheless, some of the teachers interviewed offered their own thoughts and politics, or made it easier to ascertain their beliefs.

A number of the teachers interviewed expressed beliefs supportive of, or at least sympathetic to, the ends of the LTTE, if not the means deployed to that end. This includes the above quote on Prabhakaran, who as mentioned earlier was the unquestioned leader of the LTTE, and further thoughts on the legitimacy of the secessionist war of the LTTE. This same teacher talked about how the whole issue started with a demand for human rights, equating the early manifestations of the LTTE as “in the tradition of Gandhi,” and that the LTTE turned to violence because

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74 Interview #4 - Trincomalee.
of the government response; “they were forced to by the government.”  

People were driven to the LTTE because of government treatment of the Tamil people, and that they had no other choice. “The Tamil people were all seen as the enemy.” He then recounted a very sad story about his own father, who he insisted was not involved in the LTTE, as being disappeared by the government while working on his farm. This was in 1987, he was four years old, and his sister only fifteen days old. He said they never found out what happened. He was visibly upset telling this story, but did so unprompted, saying it was important that these things are talked about. A number of other teachers recounted similar stories, of close family and loved ones being killed or disappeared. Because the issue of the disappeared has never been resolved, it is kept alive, fresh, in people’s minds. It is impossible to move on with that uncertainty hanging over so many people’s heads. This is linked with the point that Bellino makes, that very often history is not truly “past,” as it spans generations, “remaining a divisive issue in the public sphere.” (Bellino, 2015: 60) This is very much the case with the civil war here, and these teachers suggest that the issue of the disappeared is being passed on to the next generations, as there has been no action to address the issue.

This issue of mourning was brought up by many of the teachers, both for their own loved ones, but also for those who died fighting for the LTTE. The graves of dead LTTE fighters is an extremely contentious issue in Sri Lanka at the moment, and this was evident in the thoughts of certain teachers. One teacher, who I mentioned earlier as being the most hard-line Tamil nationalist that I interviewed, said that “we can’t show our cemeteries” referring to LTTE cemeteries, and that “ours are meant to be honoured, they should be, but they aren’t allowed to be.” Another talked of how there has been “no chance given to people who died in war,” and that most Tamils, even if they do not support the LTTE, believe they were fighting for their independence. These people are not allowed to be mourned, “let alone

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75 Interview #4 - Trincomalee.
76 Interview #4 - Trincomalee.
77 Interview #2 - Batticaloa.
78 Interview #7 - Trincomalee.
celebrated.”

The idea of moving beyond mourning, to celebrating, is even more contentious, but one a number of the teachers openly discussed. The two issues are with regard to graves, as mentioned above, and “national heroes.” The government policy of demolishing LTTE graves and tombs has created much anger and resentment, beyond those who are grieving for lost loved ones. Some feel that these graves should be respected, and celebrated for the sacrifice they made.

Linked to this is the second point, on “national heroes.” In one interview, with four different teachers, the topic of national heroes came up, as there was a section in the history textbook dealing with national heroes. One teacher talked of how when he is teaching this section to his students, he is often asked about Tamil national heroes. He says this always upsets him, as he is not allowed to mention any Tamils as national heroes of Sri Lanka. Says there are some scientists and lawyers mentioned in the text, but “no freedom fighters, who fought for the Tamil people.”

The other teachers all agreed on this point, and felt they should be able to celebrate and teach about Tamils who fought for their freedom. This came up in a number of other interviews, where there was a clear sense that these people, the LTTE (although no one ever explicitly said it was the LTTE they were talking about) should be at least commemorated, as they were fighting for the rights of all Tamil people, even if they do not necessarily agree with the means by which they went about doing this.

The simple matter of language here from the Tamil teachers, saying “ours,” instead of “their” or “the LTTE” is important; it shows a sense of belonging and affinity with the LTTE. This is a key point for this section. These teachers are entirely entitled to their own opinions, but the fact remains that many of these teachers have opinions which are divisive or supportive of the LTTE, from their own experiences or politics. The civil war is not dealt with in any way through government textbooks, and these teachers are willing, and able, to include their own beliefs in lessons. Therefore, when the civil war is discussed, it seems natural that these teachers will express their own beliefs, right or wrong, in the classroom. With no counter narrative from the

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79 Interview #3 - Trincomalee.
80 Interview #7 - Trincomalee.
government, or a counter narrative one which these teachers and students already distrust, the opinions of teachers become all the more powerful. In this sense the teachers are empowered, and may behave it such ways as to promote certain political opinions. By having a government which is seen to be entirely neglectful of the Tamil story, it greatly increases the chance that someone will step into this gap and tell this story as they see fit. When the aspects of agency as discussed in the theoretical framework are applied to this, it can be argued that teachers have quite a lot of agency in some senses, and very little in others. The three components of agency detailed by Vongalis-Macrow are obligations, authority, and autonomy. The teachers are obliged not to talk about the civil war, legally they are not meant to, which “defines their boundaries”. They do however have the authority, as knowledge specialists in the classroom, and the autonomy, “the capability to pursue their own interests and make effective their demands”, to discuss these issues. (Vongalis-Macrow, 2008: 428-434) This agency, this space to manoeuvre, while not officially sanctioned, has the potential to be quite impactful, as they are the only “official” source of information about the civil war for the students. There are many differing and opposing forces (including fear) which influence how these teachers are able to act, even (or perhaps particularly) when they do have a certain capacity to decide what they teach.

What can be seen from this chapter on teacher agency is that it is not necessarily the granting or limiting of agency which is having the greatest effect on reconciliation, but rather the interplay between the structures of the curriculum and the actions of the teachers themselves. The teachers interact with the curriculum, and then act as a result of these structures. As Vongalis-Macow puts it, it is the “structural form of education [which] creates the architecture for teachers’ agency” (Vongalis-Macrow, 2007: 430). The teachers engage with this environment, resulting in them using “different strategies and tactics in different circumstances” (Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks, 2015: 60). This results in these teachers not being able to act when they should, such as when deciding on the content of the curriculum, and being able to when they perhaps should not, such as when discussing the civil war or their own perspectives. While these teachers have the capacity to influence what is taught in
their classrooms, it is not as simple as to say they are free to behave and say as they wish. Agency is not a binary, tangible thing, where one has it or not. The way teachers promote their own perspectives, and the fact they feel obligated in a slightly abstract sense to teach the Tamil perspective, shows that the structures of the curriculum, along with societal pressures, are always restraining, influencing and directing how they act. On the point that the teachers said that they feel they have a duty to give the Tamil perspective, the teachers are being hindered in what they teach by the structures of the curriculum, while at the same time they are pushed to teach the opposite, through this sense of obligation to their students. This is an example, as discussed in the theoretical framework, of the complex and at times contradictory nature of the teachers’ agency. As a result of the limiting structures of the curriculum, the gaps left by these structures, and government involvement, the role teachers have been forced (or have chosen) to take on is to represent the Tamil story, the Tamil perspective, by themselves. They do not have the support, or the training, or the resources, to deal with such complex and complicated issues. This can have a number of outcomes, as discussed in the next chapter.

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<th>Question</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tr>
<td>3. (a) Agency over curriculum</td>
<td>The Tamil teachers do not feel like they have any meaningful control of content or curriculum, and there was a general belief that the curriculum is written to serve the dominant Sinhala Buddhist nationalist agenda.</td>
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<td>3. (b) Agency in the classroom</td>
<td>While officially they are obligated to follow the government curriculum, they do have a degree of autonomy and authority in the classroom, to promote their own views. Nevertheless, they are forced (or choose) to take on the role of promoting the Tamil story due to the gaps left in the curriculum, a sign that they are directed by structures beyond just those set by the government.</td>
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<td>4. The Civil War</td>
<td>The Tamil teachers generally felt the civil war must be dealt with, not now but in the future, but have very little faith that it will be framed fairly or in a balanced way. Combined with this is the personal and</td>
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recent history of the civil war, and the influence this may have on how the teachers deal with this.
Chapter Six - Conclusion - Answers, Questions, Further Thoughts

This final chapter recaps some of the theory from the theoretical framework, using the findings from the previous two chapters. The answers to the sub-questions are laid out, with the theory, to answer the main research question. The chapter has three sections; firstly, the findings related to the sub-questions are presented. Secondly, whether reconciliation is being promoted or hindered by these findings, along with why this is the case is analysed. This is broken down into two areas; problems from the top down, and problems from the bottom up. Finally what can be done about this, the recommendations for both future research and policy, are discussed.

6.1 Sub-Questions

First the findings as they relate to the sub-questions will be laid out, to provide the foundations for the rest of this chapter. For sub-question one, the answers on the importance of history, both from the perspective of the government and the Sinhala and Tamil teachers, were fairly consistently the same. It is important to learn lessons for the present and the future; and to understand and promote one’s culture and identity.

With regard to the second sub-question, the Tamil teachers interviewed all had withering, and deeply pessimistic views of the curriculum, which they felt purposely neglected the Tamil history, at times purposely changing it to marginalise, or even erase, the Tamil people from the history of Sri Lanka. It does not fulfil the role of history discussed above, rather building resentment and anger towards the Sri Lankan state and the Sinhala people. These teachers saw (predominantly Sinhala) politicians, in an attempt to further their own Buddhist nationalist agenda, as most responsible for this situation. The Sinhala teachers interviewed in Trincomalee recognised the Sinhala focus, but felt nothing could be done about it, as history cannot be changed.

The questions on the agency of the teachers were slightly more ambiguous. Teachers did not feel like they had the ability to change what was in the actual government curriculum, nor that there was anyone representing them to do so. They
see the curriculum as a political tool, which always has to serve a Sinhala perspective.
In the classroom however, most of the teachers exercised their agency by teaching both the official government line, for exams, and then what they saw as “the truth,” giving the Tamil version of events, and pointing out when the government line is wrong. Nevertheless, as evidenced by the fact there are still many things they feel they cannot talk about, and the obligation they feel to teach a certain way to their students, there are still many structures which these teachers have to work around, and are restrained by.
Finally, the civil war is not a topic which currently teachers feel like they are able to broach, primarily for fear of the government response but also due to the fact that the history is too recent, upsetting, and raw. The majority of the teachers feel it must be dealt with in the future, but there is little faith that this will be done in a fair or balanced way. Rather they believe that the true causes and events will be suppressed, to instead show the conflict in simple dichotomous terms as a fight between the government and the irredeemable terrorists of the LTTE.

6.2 Impact on Reconciliation – A Return to the 4 Rs
As discussed in the theoretical framework, there are many sides to reconciliation, but for this thesis the focus is “that historic and present tensions, grievances and injustices are dealt with to build a more sustainable, peaceful society” (Novelli et al, 2015: 10). Many post-war countries have tried to address this, believing that “a new and more truthful history must be transmitted to the next generation through revised history curricula in schools” (Freedman et al, 2008: 663). We can see that from the findings of the first data analysis chapter this has not been the case. Textbooks have been revised, and are revised every five years. When I discussed the latest revision with the Tamil teachers, there was a broad consensus that there has been no improvement in the portrayal and representation of the Tamils; rather “they have strengthened their grip on it.”81 None of the teachers interviewed felt positive about the history curriculum, with many speaking of anger, a sense of injustice at the way the Tamils are treated and at the lies they as teachers have to

81 Interview #6 - Trincomalee.
teach. However, as discussed in the theoretical framework “texts alone can neither create reconciliation nor perpetuate conflict” (Metro, 2012: 147). It is how they are engaged with, and the context in which they are used, that has the greatest impact. The role of the teachers, as agents of change or drivers of division, is what really answers this question.

This thesis argues, in answering the research question of what impact do the teachers and teaching of history have on reconciliation, that the teaching of history is having a negative impact on reconciliation, perpetuating and furthering the divide between the Tamil and Sinhala people.

The four aspects of the 4 Rs framework have been mentioned and touched on separately throughout the previous two data analysis chapters. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, all of these are intrinsically linked and together work towards peacebuilding. From the lack of representation and misrepresentation the Tamil teachers felt, in the N.I.E and amongst politicians in Colombo, to the lack of recognition of the Tamil perspective in the curriculum, to the need for redistribution of educational opportunities in exams, the first three Rs as they relate to social justice are all problematic. Together, and combined with the last R of reconciliation, which is not being promoted through the teaching of the curriculum, the teaching of history is currently a barrier to peacebuilding.

It would be unwise to try to understand who is “to blame” for this. These kinds of issues are never as straightforward as a single, identifiable fault. Rather, it is a nuanced, at times complex combination of factors which together have led to this situation. As will be seen, there is a problem from the top down, and a problem from the bottom up, creating this situation where reconciliation is being made more difficult through the teaching of history. This is an example of a potential negative face of education, as posited by Bush and Saltarelli (2000). The gap which has been identified is showing how the problem is a combination of both government policy from the top down, and of the situation for teachers in the classroom itself, of the
limitations and expectations, from the bottom up. Together this is dividing the Sinhala and the Tamil groups, limiting any sense of unity and national identity.

**6.2.1 Top Down**

From the top down, there is a problem with the curriculum. Tamil history is not fairly represented, with the vast majority of the content focus on positive Sinhala aspects of Sri Lanka’s history. Certain topics have been changed to show a Tamil person or action as being Sinhala, with the construction of the Kantalai Tank most mentioned, along with the last king of Anuradhapura. Other important Tamil contributions are also ignored, according to the teachers. The government is being seen, rightly or wrongly, as purposely misrepresenting and intentionally destroying Tamil history. The respondents felt that they were doing this to homogenise the history of Sri Lanka, to show the inherent, vital and solitary role of the Sinhala people, and as an extension of Buddhism, in the country. This is not addressing historical or present grievances, but rather cementing them in the history textbooks. When looking at the curriculum, three of the four Rs, of representation, recognition and reconciliation, are not being dealt with in a manner conducive to peacebuilding. Rather, it is a barrier.

Marginalising and erasing the role of the Tamil people through the history curriculum erodes any sense of belonging to the Sri Lankan state in the Tamil people. It is seen as part of a wider effort to portray the Tamil people as less Sri Lankan than the Sinhala. This is an inherently political and intentional act to serve an agenda, as raised by the teachers, academics and even the vice-chancellor. As discussed in the theoretical framework, history has a strong impact on identity. The national identity being promoted by the history curriculum now excludes the Tamil people from any meaningful role in the country’s history, so that the Tamil people will feel excluded from this national identity. This may have a number of impacts; chief amongst them is that this is making the Tamil more inward looking, to their own group, rather than outward to any broader national identity. Moving towards a national identity is an important step towards reconciliation. Just what this national identity would look like is difficult to say. As discussed in the theoretical framework, reconciliation involves “building” a society which is more just and peaceful. Equally a national identity is
“built” to go along with this new society. An identity which embraces the multi ethnic nature of modern and historical Sri Lanka, recognising the importance of all the peoples of Sri Lanka, would fit a new positive peace in Sri Lanka. As seen in the theoretical framework in the work of Coleman and Johnson (2012), a new national identity is a normative thing, which strives to be a “symbolic [and] moral centre” (Coleman and Johnson, 2012: 875).

The act of telling a student what the government is teaching them is incorrect erodes trust and any sense of belonging with the Sri Lankan state. The divisive mentality of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is furthered. The current situation first limits any sense of trust and belonging to Sri Lanka, or to a national identity, while also building resentment across the Tamil community. As one teacher said, they have parents coming in and complaining that what is being taught is incorrect. There are students who are not interested in learning history because they know it to be lies. This resentment with the government and the curriculum seemed to be across the board, and is unsustainable. The importance of teachers, and the outcomes of teacher agency will be discussed below, looking at this problem from the bottom up.

Before this moving on to this, it would be unfair not to mention the fact that the government is making moves towards social cohesion, towards resolving some these problems. The fact that the history curriculum is rewritten every five years is a positive sign, showing there is an understanding of the need to update, and over time hopefully take in more Tamil perspectives. Furthermore, a number of my secondary respondents, mainly community and religious leaders, talked about peace initiatives, involving school and religious exchanges run by the government. I was unable to delve into these programmes in any great depth, and this is an area which deserves much more research.

6.2.2 Bottom Up

It is the role and actions of teachers which is the most important aspect of the findings of this research. A curriculum which does not represent a particular group, while certainly not a positive, may maintain the status quo. All else being equal, then
this history becomes accepted, if resented. History is written by the victor and the Sri Lankan government was the victor of the civil war. The historical and present (or recent past, namely the civil war itself, which is discussed more below) grievances are not dealt with but the history curriculum will not necessarily have an effect. All else is not equal however. Teachers have an important and impactful position. They are aggrieved at not being represented by the history they teach, they resent having to “lie” to their students, and they have no faith in their politicians to change this. They are also open to putting their own point of view across, to directly contradict what the textbooks say, and are able to promote opinions which are far from conducive to social cohesion. It must be mentioned that many of these teachers talked positively of social cohesion, and the importance of promoting peace and tolerance to their students. It is the dual nature of the agency that these teachers have, to transform and to divide, which will be discussed now.

As discussed in the theoretical framework, there can be positive and negative outcomes of agency, just as there can be positive and negative education, and positive and negative peace. From the findings, the agency that teachers exercise can be seen to be exercised in both positive and negative ways, often simultaneously, depending on the position one views it from. On the one hand, the teachers are using their capability as educators and experts to teach students about their own history and culture, something which is neglected in the history textbooks. As seen in the theory, and convergent with both the government and the teachers’ opinions, history is important to understand one’s identity and culture. It “plays an important role in the formation of individual and community identity” (Barton and McCully, 2005: 85). If the textbooks are failing to do this for the Tamil people, it must be seen as a positive that teachers are taking it upon themselves to inform their students about important and neglected elements of their history.

On the other hand, this is assuming that everything these teachers are telling their students is correct, and is not motivated by their own experiences, of violence, trauma and politics; their own personal biases. This becomes particularly troublesome when the issue of the civil war is raised. The teachers have absolutely
no faith that it will be addressed fairly and in a balanced way. Therefore it can be argued that if the civil war is taught, the teachers will once again teach the official government line for exams, and then their own perspective as they see it, countering the government position. It can certainly be reasoned that leaving such important and difficult matters up to the discretion of individual teachers leaves the potential for serious issues and misrepresentation. As seen in the previous two chapters, many, if not all, of the teachers interviewed were directly affected by the civil war, having lost family and friends, very often at the hands of the government. This personal history means it would be almost impossible for the teachers to be subjective. Training and support for teachers on how to overcome or address this is needed.

The structures of the curriculum, and the gaps left by the lack of Tamil representation, allows other voices, potentially positive as seems to be the case with most of the teachers interviewed, but also potentially negative, to flourish, with no official line to counter this. This situation is vulnerable to exploitation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, teachers are not a homogeneous group. For every teacher which tells this story in a balanced, fair way, there may be another who puts across their own particular political perspective. Regardless of whether the Tamil perspective promoted by these teachers is positive or negative, the very fact that students are being told that the government does not care about their identity, history and culture, is having a negative impact on reconciliation. Historical grievances are ignored or rewritten, trust in the government is eroded, and any sense of national identity or belonging is limited. This is leaving a gap, which teachers can and may choose to fill.

This thesis argues that the root of the problem lies at the top, not solely with the government, but also the structures which have been created for the teachers. While teachers may be contributing to the problem, by promoting their own views, potentially sowing discontent and division, it is the fact that there are these gaps which need filling to begin with which is causing the problem. As one teacher put it “if history was written in the way it should be written, we wouldn’t be where we are
today. Freedman et al argued that history can be used to create a new, national identity post-conflict, beyond “us” and “them”. This thesis argues that the findings from the previous two chapters show that there have been no real attempts to include the Tamil story in this new Sri Lankan identity, and that the Tamil teachers are instead pushing against the structures of the curriculum to promote Tamil history to their students. It is not necessarily the agency of teachers which is of most importance here, but rather the strategies which the teachers employ, and the roles taken on (willingly or not), to promote this Tamil perspective.

Some of my own thoughts for what could be done about this situation are laid out below. It is important to recognise here that I am an outside researcher, and these suggestions are purely based on my own observations and conversations from my time in Sri Lanka, and so should be read accordingly. Much of this is based directly on what the teachers suggested, giving them, in whatever minor way, a voice on the issue.

6.3 Policy Ideas

The first suggestion is the simplest, but is still important to include; rewrite the curriculum to make it more representative of the makeup of Sri Lanka. Rather than having “half a page on Tamil, half a page on Muslim,” the curriculum should include much more history of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka, and also of the Muslim minority, reflecting the reality of modern Sri Lanka. This would get to the root of many, but certainly not all, of the problems the Tamil teachers have with the history curriculum. If the Tamil story was effectively represented, and done in a fair, accurate and balanced way, then the teachers wouldn’t need to promote their own views, wouldn’t be forced (as they see it) to lie to their students, and as such wouldn’t be so resentful and angry. This would be a start towards building a post-conflict, post-ethnic identity for Sri Lanka, recognising the role of peoples other than the Sinhala in the history of the country. This in turn would help build a new national identity of the kind Freedman et al discussed, one which is “placed in opposition to group identities that

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were central during violent conflict, with national priorities taking precedence” (Freedman et al, 2008: 666).

A linked suggestion is perhaps more important but more difficult; rewrite the curriculum not as *the* history of Sri Lanka, but rather the *histories* of Sri Lanka. This would mean having a history which gives the Sinhala perspective of the issue, the Tamil perspective, perhaps the Muslim perspective. This would require somewhat of a paradigm shift in how history is seen, with an embrace of the subjectivity, recognising and celebrating the differences between the different people of Sri Lanka, while maintaining all as Sri Lankans. A number of the academics I talked with, and some of the teachers and community leaders I interviewed, suggested this is the eventual shift which needs to take place to fix the underlying problems with the history curriculum. Simply by accepting that there are different perspectives, and that the Tamil people are an inherent and ever present part of both modern Sri Lanka, and in the history of Sri Lanka, would make a huge difference. It would be important to recognise that these kinds of issues are not a zero-sum game; it doesn’t belittle or marginalise the importance of the Sinhala people, or of Buddhism, by accepting the Tamil role. It is simply acknowledging the reality, and expanding the tent, extending a sense of belonging to the Tamil minority.

A second idea revolves around the issue of how the civil war is, and will be, dealt with. When the civil war is addressed in the history curriculum, and it will have to be addressed, it *must* be done in a balanced way. This requires recognising that the Tamils had legitimate grievances, even if the LTTE were not legitimate and their actions unacceptable, often reprehensible. Furthermore, although this is unlikely, it should present the actors on both sides as having committed (war) crimes, that the actions of both were illegitimate at times. This would placate many of the fears which the teachers I interviewed had on the teaching of the civil war, that the suffering and cruelty felt by many ordinary Tamils will be forgotten. Failing to do so would further divide the Tamil and the Sinhala, perpetuating the problems between the two groups. Many of the teachers feared that by failing to do so would result in greater tensions, and even violence. There was a common belief that the LTTE (or some new
manifestation thereof) could return, that the conditions are still present for violence to break out once again. Most of the teachers stressed the importance of learning about the civil war in order to impart onto their students the futility and dangers of war. If the history curriculum once again ignores the Tamil perspective on the last war, this will be much harder to do. Just when the time is right for these discussion remains to be seen. All of the teachers interviewed felt the civil war cannot, and should not, be dealt with at the present time; it is still too fresh, unresolved. As seen from the literature, and specifically with the case of Rwanda (Freedman et al, 2008), delaying such discussions is possible and can be advisable. Nevertheless, eventually talking about these things is a “crucial step” and is “essential to social reconstruction” (Bellino, 2015: 59 and Freedman et al, 2008: 664).

6.4 Further Research

The topic of education and peacebuilding in Sri Lanka is a vast one, with many different themes and areas worthy of further research and exploration. Reflecting on further research allows me to consider the research I did, and what could have contributed to my own research. There are two areas which I feel would contribute greatly here, to provide a fuller picture of the role of history teaching in Sri Lanka. These deal with the Muslim and the Sinhala perspectives respectively. Firstly, the Muslim story is a greatly under examined one. They have been marginalised, maligned, under represented, and attacked for much of the history of Sri Lanka. Their role, and suffering, in the civil war must not be underestimated or ignored. The intersection between their history, Tamil history, and the identities promoted by the two, deserves further research. Their marginalisation in the history curriculum is almost certainly even greater than that of the Tamils, with the one Muslim history teacher interviewed saying that the history of the Muslim people in Sri Lanka is “sitting in darkness” and that the Muslims “are never shown as part of the country.” Whether this is having the same problems over belonging and (mis)representation as in the wider Tamil community must be examined. Further the sense of belonging and identity which Muslims feel towards both Sri Lanka, but also as Tamils, should be explored. While the one Muslim I did interview equated Muslims and Tamils, with

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the Muslims a sub-group, this may well not be the case more broadly. The questions and issues this throws up with regard to identity, intersectionality, and history would be valuable to research.

A second area which requires further research is the Sinhala perspective. While I interviewed six Sinhala teachers, this was not sufficient to properly represent the Sinhala perspective. Exploring the degree to which the Sinhala teachers recognise and understand the problems the Tamils have with the history curriculum, and the rationale they give for this remaining the same, would be of great interest. Additionally, it is possible that they do recognise the problem, and believe that it is untenable and must be changed.

The motivations and reasoning behind keeping the curriculum as so Sinhala/Buddhist focused is also worth exploring. This would require engagement with those in the N.I.E and the government, to understand the official line, and why it is the way it is. In my conversations with many Sinhala people throughout my time in Sri Lanka a certain siege mentality was evident, that while they are the majority in the country, they are still under threat of being overrun, of their role as defenders of Buddhism in the region being destroyed. Examining this in the context of the teaching of history would be interesting, insightful, and worthwhile.

**Conclusion**

The civil war is over in Sri Lanka. The state of conflict between the Tamil and the Sinhala still exists however, with the clashes between the two moving beyond physical violence, to a struggle over identity, belonging, and the right to be represented. This thesis argues that the teaching of history is playing a negative role in trying to move beyond this state of conflict in Trincomalee specifically; it is maintaining and furthering the divisions already in the society, creating resentment and anger, and limiting the possibility for true reconciliation. Whether this is the case in Sri Lanka more broadly deserves further research. By having a history curriculum which neglects the role of such a large part of the population, and in which this group has no faith, the teaching of history is a barrier to reconciliation and a positive peace. All post-war countries must strive towards this positive peace, where all people feel
like they belong, have faith in the institutions of the state, and where the underlying grievances which fuelled the war are addressed. In Sri Lanka, in 2016, much is being done to set the country down this path. Nevertheless, a great deal more must be done. The teaching of history in a more pluralistic, representative way would do much in this regard. The current situation is divisive, unsustainable, and avoidable; a clear example of a negative face of education. The curriculum itself, the teaching of this curriculum, and the simultaneous limiting and granting of agency of the teachers involved, are all part of this negative face. Until something is done about this, conflict will remain in Sri Lanka. Reconciliation, and a unifying national identity, will be impossible. The teaching of history in its current form will continue to perpetuate the divide.
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