UNDER THE GIANT’S TANK
VILLAGE, CASTE, AND CATHOLICISM
IN POSTWAR SRI LANKA

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I, Dominic Esler, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.
ABSTRACT

This thesis is an investigation of the relationship between the village, caste, and Catholicism in northern Sri Lanka. Drawing on almost two years of ethnographic fieldwork in Mannar District, as well as subsequent archival research, it provides a detailed analysis not only of the postwar context but also of prewar history, with a particular focus on the nineteenth century. In this thesis, I analyse three overlapping topics. First, I problematise ‘village’ through an examination of ‘cultural’ and ‘state’ village concepts, before arguing that within the complex social diversity of the village of Marudankandal there is a numerically dominant Tamil caste group, the Kadaiyars, whose prominence is reflected both rhetorically and through the control of institutions such as the Catholic village church. From this, I turn to two central dimensions of local caste praxis. First, I offer a historical explanation for the regional prevalence of village churches controlled by single castes, which remains a key characteristic of local Catholicism today. Second, I argue that despite the lessening of certain kinds of hierarchical caste relationships in recent decades, caste identities continue to be mobilised and expressed through regional communities, some of which maintain caste associations. In the absence of the LTTE, expressions of caste have become more visible, the most notable example of which is the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization. Created after the war by the Catholic Kadaiyars, the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization articulates the caste’s identification with the earliest Catholic converts in the district. It is unusual in the public nature of its activities and in the way that it has catalysed a stronger Kadaiyar identity throughout Mannar and beyond.
IMPACT STATEMENT

This thesis provides a wide range of insights into Mannar District, a region that was in the epicentre of Sri Lanka’s long civil war. Its mixture of ethnographic fieldwork and historical research offers new directions for those trying to understand the postwar context of Sri Lanka, especially for those who may be working in the region in whatever capacity. It also contributes to academic discussions on village societies, caste, religion, everyday ethno-religious interaction, and agriculture and irrigation.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This thesis is an investigation of the relationship between the village, caste, and Catholicism in northern Sri Lanka, centring on Marudankandal, a small village in an area of Mannar District that lies within the territory formerly controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) during the Sri Lankan civil war.

The thesis has four main goals. The first is to foreground and problematise the category of ‘village’ by emphasising the multiple factors in its construction, such as the ecological reality of tank irrigation, state policy, and local notions of belonging and home. Focusing particularly on the last of these, I demonstrate that although social ties bridge ethnicity, religion, and caste in Marudankandal and the wider rice-farming region of Matottam, the village population is demographically dominated by a Tamil Kadaiyar caste group whose prominence is reflected both rhetorically and through the control of institutions such as, in the case of Marudankandal, the Catholic village church.

Second, the thesis argues that local caste praxis must be understood through two particular dynamics. On the one hand, through an analysis of the history of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka I demonstrate how village churches came primarily to be controlled by single castes, unlike the multi-caste temples and churches found elsewhere in Sri Lanka and South India. Although the Catholic castes in Matottam were once brought together through shared feasts in a similar but not identical manner, this stopped in the second half of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, I argue that despite the lessening of certain kinds of hierarchical caste relationships in recent decades, caste identities continue to be mobilised and expressed through regional communities, some of which maintain caste associations. In the absence of the LTTE, expressions of caste have become more visible, the most notable example of which is the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization. Created after the war by the Catholic Kadaiyars, the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization articulates the caste’s identification with the earliest Catholic converts in the district. It is unusual in the public nature of its activities and in the way that it has catalysed a stronger Kadaiyar identity throughout Mannar and beyond.

Third, by drawing on fieldwork conducted between August 2013 and July 2015, the thesis investigates how these issues have played out in the transformed context of the postwar period. I also consider what the postwar context means for anthropology. Following other recent
ethnographers working in northern Sri Lanka, my research does not engage with the war directly as a subject but rather with topics that have received little attention over the past three decades. The new, if still limited, freedom of movement in the former warzones permitted a far greater level of embedded fieldwork, participant observation, and thick description than was possible during the conflict, which I have employed to expand our ethnographic understanding of this understudied area of Sri Lanka.

Finally, this thesis draws on primary and secondary materials from a range of sources in order to develop a historical anthropology that looks beyond the war and contextualises the society within which the war occurred. Besides historicising each of the three main themes – village, caste, and Catholicism – I establish a broader history of Mannar District. This kind of deep historical perspective is also significant for the villagers of Marudankandal, as will be evident in the ongoing debate around the Mannar Martyrs.

ANTHROPOLOGY AFTER THE WAR

‘Before the war people didn’t even have basic facilities. The houses were made of mud. During the war many houses were destroyed, and people have got new houses through the housing scheme. The roads are now more developed, whereas before they were mud and impassable when it rained. Before the war people mostly did paddy but couldn’t market it because there were no facilities and a controlled price. And transport was minimal. Now there are buses, bikes, etc. And this makes a difference for hospital visits. Before, even if you had money, you couldn’t get to the facilities. There was no electricity at that time, although there were generators for events and solar lamps.’

‘Do people want the same things in life as before the war?’ I asked.

‘People want to totally forget about their lives before the war. People are worried about their personal development, their family, and wealth – more than rights and freedom. Earlier the same desires were there but not the facilities. During the war, recruiting into the movement [the LTTE] was a big problem, so people couldn't concentrate on their other wishes.’

On an afternoon in November 2013 I sat talking to Daniel in the shade of the trees in his compound, which lay just below the tank bund, as the embankment is known in South Asia, and had an excellent view of the village church across a brief stretch of vegetable garden and paddy. The buildings around us reflected the impact of the war on the village. Daniel lived with his wife Teresa and their two young children in a new blue house, built after the war, in front of which was a large concrete basin used for washing and therefore partly surrounded by a palm-leaf screen which blocked the view from the path. Daniel’s parents, who were in their late sixties, lived towards the back of the compound in a temporary building of wood and corrugated iron with a single room and an enclosed veranda used for cooking. A third house, the largest and oldest, had lost its roof during the war and fallen into disuse, although Daniel and Teresa used it to store potted plants that they intended to sell.
The experiences of the family also bore witness to the profound impact of the civil war, which is conventionally considered to have begun in 1983 and came to an end in 2009 with the defeat of the LTTE. Daniel was the youngest of five siblings, and the only one to remain in Marudankandal. A charismatic and popular man in his late thirties, he had been a member of the LTTE during the 1990s and early 2000s before working for an international humanitarian organisation, and he was now a night ‘watcher’, or security guard, at a government office in Alayankulam. His elder brothers had had unusual and highly successful careers. One occupied a senior position in a local government institution, the highest such role of anyone in the village. The other, who had worked in private and non-government organisations, accepted a post with an international NGO working in an African country during 2014 and returned every few months to visit his family. While both men spoke fluent English, Daniel knew only a few words, which he explained was because he had not been able to study while in the LTTE. While the two brothers both lived in Mannar Town, their two sisters had lived in Europe for many years. They had asked him to come there, he said, but unlike many local people he had no interest in going abroad. Both he and Teresa – who held a university degree and worked in Samurddhi, the national welfare programme – had government jobs, which were prized for their reliable, relatively high wages. If he had a chance to earn at home, he said, why should he be separated from his family?

Because my Tamil was rudimentary at that stage, I had come to speak to Daniel with Vincent, a local Catholic seminarian who was on leave and able to give me a couple of weeks of his time to interpret, and who also happened to be a relative of Teresa. In these early interviews I had wanted to understand the main changes that the villagers perceived in their lives today in comparison with before the war. When I had asked other people they had tended to point to the disintegration of relationships in the village after the war, the increase in competition and lack of solidarity. Instead, Daniel’s initial response focussed on material improvements. His following comments could be understood in part as a critique of the political apathy he saw in his fellow villagers after the defeat of the LTTE in 2009. Daniel himself was a strong supporter of the Tamil National Alliance – the group of four parties that dominates politics in the Northern Province – and had played an active role in the TNA’s Provincial Council election campaign a month earlier. But he was also revealing the way in which the villagers were now able to turn towards desires beyond the political and armed struggle, which they had not relinquished during the war even if practical circumstances had made them much harder to achieve.
Daniel’s remarks resonate with a broader anthropological discussion about the relationship between war, violence and society and how these topics are framed anthropologically. Thiranagama (2011: 10), for example, writes that Sri Lankan Tamils have a distinct sense of the specificity of war and its influence on individual subjectivities:

In Sri Lanka people make qualifications and differentiations between forms of violence and its impact, from insurrections, riots, state violence, and internal violence directed by the LTTE against Tamils or by the state against Sinhalese. In fact, macro-political stories do have considerable purchase… I see war not as along a continuum with other forms of social life, but as a powerful and distinct force, period, and subjectivity, a making on a site of unmaking.

Conversely, Lubkemann (2008) suggests that anthropologists of societies experiencing war should be wary of conceptualising their research largely with regard to the macropolitical terms of conflict and therefore framing war as an ‘event’ that suspends social processes. He notes that those who live through war in fact continue to orientate their lives primarily with regard to ‘gendered, generational, and other micropolitical forms of social struggle’ (2008: 14), and encourages anthropologists to pay greater attention to ‘the realization and transformation of social relations and cultural practices throughout conflict’ (2008: 1). Similarly, Richards has argued that violence is always ‘one social project among many competing social projects’, and that ‘[f]oregrounding war risks disabling precisely the strategies and tools of social organisation, culture and politics through which violence can be reduced and its adverse effects mitigated’ (2005: 3).

If this is less a theoretical disagreement than a shift of focus, it is nonetheless representative of a distinct divide within the anthropology of Sri Lanka. As others (e.g., Heslop 2014: 27, 49; Kadirgamar 2017: 11) have noted, the civil war catalysed a broad shift in research priorities, with earlier discussions of topics such as kinship, class, caste, land, and agrarian relations being largely replaced by those of ethnicity, nationalism, and violence. Kadirgamar (2017: 11) notes that ethnicity became the primary concern ‘as it became linked to donor funded research and internationalized discourses of conflict and peace, and drastically altered the development of scholarship on Sri Lanka’. Although this change reverberated throughout Sri Lankan anthropology, it can most clearly be seen in the study of Sri Lankan Tamil society between 1990 and 2009, which has examined subjectivities and identities transformed by conflict (Daniel 1996; Thiranagama 2011), violence and suffering (Daniel 1996; Walker 2013), life within or near the warzones (Derges 2008; Hatsumi 2012; Lawrence 1997; Trawick 2007; Walker 2013), and the LTTE (Sangarasivam 2000, 2003; Thiranagama 2010, 2011). Other than work on religious transformations by Derges (2008) and Lawrence (1997, 2000) and research
conducted in Jaffna during the 2002-2006 ceasefire (Derges 2008; Jeeweshwara Räsänen 2015; Madavan 2011), the ethnographic work conducted with Tamils during this period demonstrates very little active engagement with the topics of earlier study. While earlier anthropologists have been criticised for missing the growing signs of violence and paying too little attention to national politics (Jeganathan 1998: 23; Lawrence 1997: 8-10), the increasing prominence of war as subject was accompanied by a narrowing ethnographic understanding of the context within which the war took place.

An example of this can be seen in the contrasting perspectives of two anthropologists who worked in neighbouring areas of the east coast, several decades apart. Acknowledging the transformations of the field site in which he has worked since 1969, McGilvray has noted the limitations of his earlier ethnographic interests, writing that by the early 1990s he ‘felt a bit sheepish to have been so absorbed in a matrilineal kinship system while a struggle for national liberation was hatching under my nose’ (2008: 337). Trawick, who worked not far away in an area under the control of the LTTE in the 1990s, wrote that that she was surprised that people were able to live their lives between attacks in a more or less normal fashion (2007: 129), writing that ‘Celebration in the midst of warfare once seemed incongruous for me’ (2007: 122).

The effects of the war on research were not only thematic but methodological, revealing intense practical and personal difficulties (Hatsumi 2012; Thiranagama 2011; Trawick 2007; Walker 2013). In the north, the war made ethnographic research almost impossible, although it was able to continue in the east. Even there, though, fieldwork moved away from a broader participant observation towards interview-based data such as oral narratives, life histories, and descriptive accounts (Hatsumi 2012; Trawick 2007), often accompanied by an emphasis on the ethical or political responsibilities of the researcher, particularly the duty to ‘bear witness’. Both the war, and the approaches taken by researchers, militated against ethnographic thick description.

Evidence from Latin America (Rojas Pérez 2008: 254) and elsewhere demonstrates the need to be wary about assumptions of radical disjuncture after war. Postwar does not necessarily mean postconflict, as was already evident in Sri Lanka before the events of 2018 and 2019 (Venugopal 2018: 2). However, although contemporary Sri Lanka remains politically unsettled and unpredictable, the transformations in the country since the end of the war have also been reflected in research over the past decade, particularly with regard to fieldwork in the former warzones. Although still circumscribed, the possibilities of research in these regions have dramatically widened.

Other than Kadirgamar’s (2017) recent thesis on postwar reconstruction in Jaffna, which
offers a political economy critique of neoliberal development, Sri Lankan postwar anthropology has only slowly begun to move towards the growing field of post-conflict studies, which centres on the management of post-conflict emotions, consideration of the effective arrangements for transitional justice, and post-conflict institution and state-building (Brewer and Hayes 2011). It may be that not enough time has passed for this kind of research, as was seen in research into the aftermath of the JVP uprising (Argenti-Pillen 2003; Hughes 2013). Instead, anthropology conducted in the north and east since the end of the war, although limited in extent, has demonstrated a renewed attention to earlier topics, most obviously caste (Bruland 2015; Kadirgamar 2017; Thanges 2018a, 2018b). This represents not just a reconnection with the pre-war literature but also the need to develop a better ethnographic understanding of the quotidian through which to understand the impact of the war, rather than approaching it directly. Political and national issues, as well as investigations of society under the LTTE, have primarily been addressed by scholars from other social scientific disciplines (Caron 2016; Klem and Kelegama 2019; McFarlane 2016; Scholtens 2016; Terpstra and Frerks 2017). Postwar anthropology also reflects a renewal of participation observation and thick description.

I want to highlight three broad, interrelated issues in Sri Lankan postwar anthropology to which my thesis contributes beyond its three main themes. The first is a reinvigoration of ‘place’, a recentering of localities rather than broadly conceived ‘identities’, as called for by Heslop (2014: 41-43). The movement towards place has been reflected recently not only in Heslop’s ‘small town’ study of Dambulla, but, following local civil society research (e.g., Nagaraj 2016; I. Perera et al. 2017), in the growing anthropology of Colombo, which looms large in size, economy, and administrative power over the rest of the country (Amarasuriya and Spencer 2015; Radicati 2017; Thiranagama 2011). In contrast, this thesis turns to the countryside to offer insight into Sri Lanka’s rural society and predominantly agricultural economy. In contrast to exaggerated predictions of ‘the end of the village’ in general (Sorge and Padwe 2015: 236), Sri Lanka stood out among developing countries during the twentieth century for its low levels of rural-urban migration (Groves 1996: 44; Pfaffenberger 1990b: 386). I will demonstrate that the village remains sociologically salient.

Second, and in keeping with Obeyesekere’s (2016) similar plea to study regions smaller than the nation, this thesis is invested in a historical approach, evident throughout the chapters, that looks beyond the civil war to explore the longue durée of Mannar’s history. As very little published history or historiography exist for the district, I have drawn on a range of primary and secondary sources. The clearest period that emerges from these with regard to the themes of the thesis is the second half of the nineteenth century, which offers a key point of historical
comparison for Chapters Five and Six. The Catholic missionary documents from this time are predominantly in French, and although a number of these were translated by Perniola for his series *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka*, I was also able to work with a native French speaker to translate parts of a manuscript called *Report on the churches in Mantotta* (BL EAP700/1/1/19), written in the 1870s. The *Report*, as I will henceforth refer to it, is the most detailed historical description of local culture and society that I have come across.

Third, the thesis works against the notable absence in Sri Lankan anthropology during the war of research on the ‘everyday work of ethnicity… the working through of issues of similarity and difference in work and the economy, kinship, or religious practice’ (Spencer 2007: 163-164; also see Gaasbeek 2010: 13-14). The focus on ethnicity has been manifest primarily in studies of isolated ethnic groups and narratives of identity, and ‘anthropologists have hardly started to understand how Sri Lanka works (and doesn’t work) as a plural society’ (Spencer 2007: 164). It is therefore ironic that it is the earlier prewar scholars, as Spencer (2007: 163 n. 1) notes, who have attempted to deal with this crucial topic, although since the end of the war other scholars have begun to engage with it (e.g., Davis 2011, 2012, 2015; Gaasbeek 2010; Piyarathne 2018).

My thesis contributes to this field by demonstrating how an ethnically segregated perspective of Sri Lankan society has become an orthodoxy within the study of caste; describing the everyday reality of multi-ethnic, multi-religious Mannar; and drawing different bodies of literature on Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims into contact with each other throughout the thesis. Additionally, while the conflation of northern Tamils and their interests with all Tamils has already been noted (Bastin 1997: 385; Thiranagama 2011: 15), this thesis works against the less-noted conflation of northern Tamils with Jaffna (e.g., Cowley-Sathiakumar 2008: 14-15).
Figure 1.1 Sri Lanka’s Northern Province. © Centre for Information Resources Management.
Figure 1.2 Mannar District, with Matottam falling within the black line. © UN OCHA.
Figure 1.3 The Giant’s Tank System. A detail from a Mannar District map produced by the Survey Department, Government of Sri Lanka.
Figure 1.4 Map of Marudankandal.
VILLAGE

Marudankandal is a small village in the Manthai West Division of Mannar District, on the northwest coast of Sri Lanka. (Figures 1.1-2) The district takes its name from Mannar Island, a curve of arid land whose inhabitants depend heavily on fishing, an occupation with which Mannar is often associated in other parts of the country.\(^1\) On the mainland, however, beyond an inhospitable shoreline of salt, sand and scrub, lies a fertile alluvial plain dominated by rice cultivation and irrigation systems that rely on lake-like reservoirs known across South Asia as ‘tanks’ (from the Portuguese ‘tanque’). Tank irrigation is a distinctive characteristic of the Dry Zone, one of Sri Lanka’s two main climatic zones, within which Mannar is located. The largest irrigation system in the district is the Giant’s Tank System (henceforth GTS), which comprises the Giant’s Tank and 162 smaller downstream tanks. (Figure 1.3) The GTS is roughly coterminous with a region known historically as Matottam, which is bordered in the south by the Aruvi Aru, Sri Lanka’s second longest river (known in Sinhala as the Malwathu Oya). Although Matottam is rarely used in everyday conversation today, I employ it throughout my thesis to define this particular region. It is also sometimes, and loosely, referred to as the ‘rice bowl’.

Most of Marudankandal falls within the right angle between one of Matottam’s busier roads and the perpendicular bund of the village tank. (Figure 1.4) In the northwestern corner of Marudankandal Junction, as this intersection is called, is a large compound within which sits the church of St Anthony. The irregular distribution of houses beyond the church, and lack of named paths and areas, mean that the village’s geography defies neat description. A cluster of around three dozen compounds to the north, pressed against the bund on one side but otherwise surrounded by paddy fields, is the most densely populated part of Marudankandal, and the area within which I spent the majority of my fieldwork. Most of the other compounds are further from the tank, scattered loosely along paths closer to the main road or beyond the western edge of the fields in a scrubby area still being domesticated. In recent years a handful of families have also settled on a strip of land reclaimed from the southern flank of the tank bed, at some distance from the rest of the village. These houses are separated from the adjacent village of Pallivasalpuram by a tank supply channel across which a concrete slab has been installed as a bridge.

\(^1\) It has sometimes been suggested (e.g., Boake 1888: 1; Ribeiro 1847: 50) that Mannar (mannār) derives from ‘dirt river’ (manāṟu), although the latter uses a different form of ‘n’ in Tamil.
An old government bus rushes back and forth between Mannar Town and the eastern edge of Matottam where the paddy lands meet dense forest. To the east of Marudankandal Junction the road passes directly through the centre of the tank, dividing it into two halves connected by a culvert beside the bund. People travelling along this route sometimes take a break in the shade of the trees lining the road, where a cool breeze blows across the water. (Figure 1.5) Less than a kilometre to the west of Marudankandal Junction is Alayankulam Junction, named after another tank village. Alayankulam is the site of St Mary’s, the central church of Alayankulam Parish, within which St Anthony’s is a secondary ‘substation’.

From around the end of the nineteenth century the main road between Marudankandal and Alayankulam grew into a commercial and administrative centre, and was being rebuilt once more during the period of my fieldwork, although its unprepossessing appearance belied its local importance. (Figure 1.6) The stretch of approximately 700 metres of road between the two junctions sits somewhat apart from the principal residential areas of both villages, and, in conjunction with the changing borders of the Alayankulam and Marudankandal Grama Niladharis – the smallest administrative units in Sri Lanka – this interstitial location has led to some contention about which village the road belongs to. Although some people within Marudankandal considered it part of their village, beyond Marundankandal it was referred to as Alayankulam. In acknowledgement of this dispute, and also to distinguish it from the other areas of both villages, I refer to it as Main Road.
Although village ethnography played a central role in Sri Lankan anthropology in the decades after Independence in 1948, it began to disappear in the 1980s at the same time as the village fell out of favour in the discipline more broadly.  

In 1990, with regard to India, Fuller and Spencer suggested that the disappearance of the village was largely the result of a shift away from ‘[p]redominantly synchronic studies’ that were incompatible with increasingly historical frameworks (1990: 86). Over the past decade, however, a number of anthropologists have begun to reevaluate the reasons for this change. Some have argued that the valorisation of innovative research topics and multi-sited methodologies at the expense of the village relies on a rhetorical and ultimately artificial dichotomy (Gallo 2015: 249; Mines and Yazgi 2010; Sorge and Padwe 2015: 240-241). Mines and Yazgi have suggested that the mythologised and misconstrued ‘traditional village study’ has played a key role in a ‘charter myth’ about anthropology’s evolution (2010a: 7) whose proponents ‘let an ontology slip into the

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construction of its object, and as a consequence tossed out the village instead of tossing out certain constructions of it’ (ibid.: 6). Additionally, Sorge and Padwe (2015) have proposed that a general disinterest in villages is related to a broader cosmopolitan outlook that disdains small-scale and rural societies.

This discussion is only partly applicable to Sri Lanka, where the disappearance of the village was related mainly to the research transformations motivated by the war. This is demonstrated not only by the lack of discussion around the village itself, but also by the absence of agrarian and peasant studies such as emerged in India (Fuller and Spencer 1990: 86) and, until very recently, the study of the urban. Although the village has begun to reappear in Sri Lanka anthropology (Bruland 2015; Douglas 2017; Kadirgamar 2017; Van Daele 2013b; Widger 2009), other than Winslow (2003-2004) there has been little discussion about the village as an object in itself (*pace* Geertz 1973: 22). It is my intention, then, to reignite a discussion about the Sri Lankan village, one which can be linked to the broader discussion of the village in South Asia often dominated by studies from India (Schneiderman 2015: 320).

Mines and Yazgi (2010: 10; similarly Spencer 1992) write that the village ‘should not be assumed *a priori* as a particular kind of ground’, but rather approached as ‘a social and multiplex construct that will vary from case to case, depending not only on the history of the place in question, but also on what is investigated and by whom’. Some of my own assumptions about villages were revealed to me through the initial, ill-defined discomfort I felt at the beginning of my fieldwork when trying to conceive of Marudankandal as a ‘village’. This was mostly to do with the non-nucleated dispersal of compounds and lack of an obvious public centre, although later I came to understand that Main Road and St Anthony’s came closest to this role. Other anthropologists of Sri Lanka have recorded similar experiences (de Munck 1993: 5; Spencer 1992: 367-368; Winslow 2003-2004: 15-16; Yalman 1971: 10). Winslow (2003-2004) has suggested that researchers have often approached Sri Lankan villages with preconceptions of autonomy, self-sufficiency, and hierarchical integration derived from colonial and ethnographic accounts of Indian villages. However, having had little familiarity with the Indian literature before my fieldwork, and, like the scholars in a recent collection of village studies (Sorge and Padwe 2015: 244), no initial intention to study the village *per se*, I suggest that such preconceptions derived as much from my own cultural background.

In a rare discussion of the physicality of Sri Lankan villages, Moore (1985: 123-126) emphasised the rural preference for homesteads (*vīṭṭu valavu*) – which I refer to as compounds – that contain one or more houses, an external toilet, trees to serve the kitchen, and a small house-garden. As noted by Morrison, Moore, and Lebbe (1979: 24), Sri Lankan compounds
tend to be less densely nucleated than housing in Indian villages (e.g., Mines 2005; Mosse 2012). Although this has been described as a characteristic of villages in Sinhalese-majority areas (Morrison, Moore, and Lebbe 1979: 24; Spencer 1992: 364), it is also found in other parts of Sri Lanka such as Jaffna (Banks 1957: 467; K. David 1973: 22) and Mannar. The framework of ethnicised village spatiality suggested by some writers has not been empirically demonstrated, although de Munck (1993: 8-9) notes that the distinct geographical boundaries in the Muslim village of Kotabowa in Moneragala District, where he did his fieldwork, were a result of ‘the geo-social centrality of the mosque in Muslim communities and that historically villagers feared the possibility of communal violence, thus erecting their dwellings in proximity to one another for security’.

Moore further describes the Sri Lankan village as ‘a somewhat arbitrary, flexible and amorphous unit’ (1985: 125), and suggests that where rural nucleation does exist it reflects a broader Sri Lankan rural preference for roadside homestead sites. This restrictive perspective misses not only significant factors of ‘social nucleation’, which I will return to later, but also the obvious centrality, throughout much of the Dry Zone at least, of the village tank. Used for irrigation and washing, and in the past for drinking water, the tank has often been a necessary condition for life in the Dry Zone. As an Assistant Government Agent of Mannar observed at the end of the nineteenth century, before the reconstruction of the Giant’s Tank: ‘The tank means the village, for without the tank the village would not exist’ (AR 1896). In Matottam, as in other tank-irrigated landscapes in Sri Lanka (Ragupathy 1987: 212-214) and India (Mosse 2003: 31), the importance of tanks is reflected in village names, which commonly build upon the suffix kuḷam, the regionally predominant word for tank, or kaṇḍal, an even more local term variously understood by villagers to mean tank, hill, or copse, although its precise meaning has been forgotten.3 Like most of the other village names in this thesis, Marudankandal is a pseudonym, and refers both to the maruda tree (English arjun, Sinhala kumbuk) that grows in the area, and to marudam, the agricultural landscape that is one of the five tinais of Tamil Sangam poetry.

Village tanks within the GTS generally have a wide but shallow tank bed and a curving bottom – the deepest part of the tank beside the bund – thick with water lilies and used for bathing, swimming, washing clothes, submerging bags of paddy to germinate the grains, cleaning mud from tractors, and watering cows. Villagers also sometimes fish in tanks, which

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3 Lewis (1896: 210) translates kaṇḍal as ‘low scrub’, while the Tamil Lexicon (University of Madras 1982) gives ‘mangrove’.
is one reason for a local disinclination to buy freshwater fish. The defining characteristic of the GTS is that tank beds are also drained and used for rice cultivation, which involves a seasonal rotation between *kamam*, the paddy land beneath the tank, and *pulavu*, the cultivable part of the tank bed itself. Marudankandal’s tank is one of the largest in the GTS, irrigating approximately 300 acres of *kamam*, and providing 200 acres of *pulavu* when drained. (Figure 1.7)

![Figure 1.7 Marudankandal tank and pulavu.](image)

Within the predominantly flat landscape of Matottam, the practical realities of irrigation and the threat of flooding, which occurred in parts of the district in 2013 and 2015, make the villagers keenly aware of the relative height of land. All land (*kāṇi*) is either high (*puṭṭi*) or low (*paḷḷam*). Lowland is preferred for paddy, while highland is prioritised for houses and crops other than rice. Within this topography the residential areas of villages take a variety of forms, perhaps the most notable of which is a single file of compounds between bund and *kamam*. In some villages, individual paddy fields have been filled to create highland for a single fenced compound that rises above the rice. Between the villages, tanks, and *kamam* are stretches of scrubby wilderness (*kāḍu*) that become more prominent in the drier and less densely populated

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4 The use of both terms reflects specific local practice. *Kamam* more commonly refers to agriculture in general, while *pulavu* is a derivation of *pulam*, a term for field (Ragupathy 1987: 213).
areas on the edges of the GTS.

Fuller and Spencer (1990: 85) noted that Indian village ethnographies usually fell into two types: those which offered a ‘more or less complete picture of village society’, even though caste often emerged as central; and those with a more specific focus on caste (often in relation to kinship). Sri Lankan ethnographies have generally differed from this picture in two respects. First, ‘holistic’ ethnographies of the village in its entirety have been relatively rare (although Brow 2011a, de Munck 1993, and Spencer 1990 stand out in this regard). Second, the central focus of village ethnographies has depended largely on the predominant ethnicity of the villagers in question. Apart from Yalman’s unusual comparative work, which draws its main material from a Sinhalese village and contrasts this with research among Tamils on the east coast, caste has played a more prominent role in ethnographies of Tamil villages, reflecting its broader significance in studies of Sri Lankan Tamil society (Banks 1957; Bruland 2015; K. David 1973; McGilvray 1983; Skjonsberg 1982; Whitaker 1999). In contrast, early studies of Sinhalese villages focussed on the relationship between land tenure and kinship (Leach 1961; Obeyesekere 1967) – the former being almost unrepresented among studies of Tamils – while later studies turned towards village politics (Brow 1996; Robinson 1975; Spencer 1990). Brow’s two monographs (1996, 2011a) on village life in Anuradhapura District are illustrative of this change. Sri Lankan Muslims, who are considered to be a distinct ethnic group – although the broader religious sense of ‘Muslim’ includes other local ethnic identities, such as the Malays – have played the smallest role in these discussions. Smith’s investigation of the relationship between the mosque, village identity, and an ideology of egalitarianism offers an insightful direction for village studies that has not yet been picked up by other scholars (1997).

In this thesis, I attempt to draw together different strands of village ethnography. Rice is a way of life in Marudankandal, and most families cultivate it, although I am not able to explore this at the level of detail shown in Leach (1961) and Obeyesekere (1967). Many village tanks in Sri Lanka, including those described in village studies by Brow (2011a), Leach (1961), and Van Daele (2013b), operate as independent systems. Marudankandal Tank was similarly independent until the turn of the twentieth century, when the Giant’s Tank, an ancient precolonial structure that had lain unused for several centuries, was restored and the GTS was developed. Today the villages in the GTS coordinate their cultivation and irrigation work with each other and with the government bodies that oversee the system in its entirety. My

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5 Although nominally describing South Asian anthropology in general, the section on village studies refers exclusively to India.
discussion of this adds to the sparse literature on major irrigation systems in Sri Lanka, which has rarely been anthropological in nature (Gaasbeek 2010; Stanbury 1996; Uphoff 1996) and is relatively underdeveloped in contrast to other rice-growing countries (e.g., Mosse 2003; Lansing 2007; Wade 1994).

However, my main interest with regard to the village is to demonstrate that it remains a site laden with meaning on multiple levels (Sorge and Padwe 2015: 241). A helpful way of approaching this is through the multiplicity of what Holly High (2006: 25) calls ‘village formation processes’, the means by which the village ‘emerges through everyday representations, ranging from state policies to personal mobilization in a process that is inherently mutable and incomplete’. Due to the influence of Daniel’s discussion of the ‘authentic’ village, the role of the state in studies of Tamil ethnographies has been little attended to, with anthropologists resorting to a purely ‘cultural’, ahistorical concept. At the same time, although ‘relatedness’ (Winslow 2003-2004) sits at the heart of village society thanks to the network of kin and caste ties, I will demonstrate that Marudankandal is a place of social diversity within which differences in caste, religious, and ethnic identities are both negotiated and contested (Gallo 2015: 251; Mines 2005).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Families</th>
<th>Houses</th>
<th>Total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>circa 1875</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.8 Population of Marudankandal, 1827-1911.

In 2014 the Marudankandal Grama Niladhari Division – officially encompassing a single village although, as noted above, the local understanding of the village borders meant that some people considered themselves residents of Alayankulam – recorded a population of 467, divided between 148 families. Most of the families were Tamil, around 100 of which were Christian (mainly Catholic) and around 35 Hindu, and less than ten were Muslim. The Tamils represented a mix of castes, but the clear majority – around half of the families – were considered to be Kadaiyar, although the relationship between caste and kin, and the fact that
Caste is considered to come from the father, make this blurry on an individual level. Figure 1.8 displays the population of the village until 1911, after which population data was no longer provided on a village basis.

T. B. Hansen (2001: 17) writes that ‘the task of the social scientist is to produce knowledge and writing that defies ethnic closures by documenting and exploring the richness, diversity, and multivocality of the social world of even the smallest of localities.’ In this thesis, I argue that Marudankandal represents a complex multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-caste social world that cannot be reduced to either any individual identity or the village itself. At the same time, the demographic dominance of specific, often close-kin caste communities is reflected rhetorically and through control of key institutions, in this case the control of the Catholic Tamil Kadaiyars over St Anthony’s, the village church.

Although the thesis centres on Marudankandal, it does not attempt to impose artificial boundaries to maintain the village as its sole focus. This is not to repeat the self-evident and hackneyed claim that the village is not an ‘isolated unit’ (Mines and Yazgi 2010: 6), which will be abundantly clear from future chapters that demonstrate Marudankandal’s entanglement within wider regional, national, and international contexts. Instead, from the beginning my research adopted a broader thematic and methodological approach that considered, like Brow (2011a; also see Gottschalk’s 2000 discussion of the ‘nexus’), connections and commonalities between Marudankandal and other villages in Matottam.

CASTE

Despite a number of broad studies (Hocart 1950; McGilvray 2008; Ryan 1953; Yalman 1971), caste has never played as central a role in Sri Lankan anthropology as it has in India (Nissan 1987: 5). In common with the village, it received even less attention during the war as research became increasingly dominated by ethnicity and religion. In consequence, while Indian scholarship has worked to dethrone caste as the central problematic of Indian society in recent decades (Daniel 1984: 1; Dirks 2001; Mosse 2012: 98), the anthropology of Sri Lanka has suffered from the opposite problem, offering relatively little insight into the contemporary role of caste in politics, religion, kinship and marriage practices, and socio-economic inequality and marginalisation. Since the end of the war, however, a renewed interest in caste has been demonstrated by several theses that have explored it as either their central or secondary focus (Bruland 2015; Douglas 2017; Gaasbeek 2010; Jeeweshwara Räsänen 2015; Kadirgamar 2017; Thanges 2018b; Widger 2009), a small number of published articles (Bremner 2013;
Kuganathan 2014; Thanges 2018a), and a conference on caste held at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Colombo in November 2016. Although some of this research has concentrated on caste among the Sinhalese, overall it reflects the longstanding greater prominence of the study of caste among Tamils.

In 1990, Spencer wrote that the ‘early clarity’ of Sri Lankan caste research ‘has been steadily replaced by confusion and obscurity’ (1990: 187). The current moment offers an opportunity to assess and renew the field, and I suggest that we start with two issues of particular importance. The first, towards which Rogers (2004a: 51-52) first pointed, is an overarching framework found in much Sri Lankan caste research, which I call the discourse of ‘real caste’.

In this discourse – usually only briefly sketched in introductions – ‘real caste’ is primarily understood to be a Hindu phenomenon expressed through hierarchy, Brahminical superiority, and notions of ritual purity and pollution. Although this Dumontian framework has long been critiqued in Indian research, in Sri Lanka it has taken a particular shape with regard to the ethno-religious context.

To begin with, Buddhism is held, in contrast to Hinduism, as inherently antithetical to the hierarchical ideology of caste, and as Sri Lanka is a majority Buddhist country, so caste in Sri Lanka as a whole is generalised as non-religious and weak in comparison to the strong, religious caste of ‘Hindu India’. This religious differentiation is sometimes connected to the absence of a Brahmin-like caste among the Sinhalese, and the relatively small number of Brahmins among the Tamils (Rogers 2004a: 52), emulating Dumont’s claim that Sri Lanka has ‘quasi-caste rather than caste proper’ (1980: 216) in a reversal of Hocart’s earlier deployment of Sri Lanka as an example of a broader Indian culture (1950). The religious binary is then extended metonymically to Sinhalese and Tamils. Caste is held to be strongest among Tamils, a perspective reinforced by descriptions of Jaffna as the most caste conscious area in the country (Pfaffenberger 1990a: 79).

I argue that the unquestioned orthodoxy of real caste is revealed by the notable absences in Sri Lankan caste studies. Most striking is the lack of engagement with Indian caste scholarship (notable exceptions being McGilvray 2008; Stirrat 1982; Winslow 1994; Yalman 1971) and the historical approach that has transformed Indian caste research in recent decades (e.g., Bayly.

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Instead, we find frequent unreferenced generalisations about the ‘Indian’ or ‘Hindu caste system’. At the same time, there has been little interest in the role of caste in interreligious and/or interethnic relationships, or in caste identities that bridge ethnicities, religions or regions. Despite historical studies of caste in Sri Lanka which have drawn upon developments in Indian scholarship (Meyer 2014; Roberts 1982; Rogers 2004a, 2004b), anthropology and the social sciences (apart from McGilvray 2008) have tended to privilege ahistorical religious interpretations.\footnote{This tension is seen most clearly in the contrast between Pfaffenberger’s 1982 monograph, which prioritises a Hindu theological exegesis in order to explain the basis of Vellalar dominance in Jaffna according to Hindu principles, and his 1990 analysis of the relationship between caste conflict and Tamil nationalism in Jaffna, which emphasises the historical contingency of contemporary caste.}

Although this is only one instance of the broader division of Sri Lankan anthropological research by ethnicity, it is buttressed explicitly by the deployment of parallel ethno-religious ‘caste systems’ in which static structures of hierarchical relationships are predisposed by the system itself. The assumption of the existence of such systems is evident in observations that individual villages never contain enough castes to see the total system (Banks 1957; Perinbanayagam 1965; Ryan 1953), and in attempts to abstract ‘rankings’ of caste (Kuganathan 2014; and see Douglas’ critique [2017: 31]), in contrast to McGilvray’s (2008) methodologically subtle approach to gather local views on caste status in Akkaraipattu. The fragmentation of ‘ethnic caste systems’ into ‘regional caste systems’ at any higher level of detail reveals their lack of utility.\footnote{Caste systems in Sri Lanka have been variously described as Sinhala and Tamil (Ryan 1953: 4); Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamil, and Indian Tamil (Silva et al. 2009: xiv); and Low-Country Sinhalese, Kandyan Sinhalese, Northern Tamil (Jaffna), Eastern Province, Plantation (Estate), and the ‘urban scavenging workers’ (Mahroof 2000). Winslow writes that the Sri Lankan ‘caste system has come to be seen less as a watered-down version of the Indian system and increasingly as a distinct system in its own right’ (1994: 24-25), but nevertheless conflates caste in Sri Lanka with a Sinhalese caste system in which hierarchy is not religiously sanctioned.}

The discourse of real caste is strongly relevant to the second issue, which is the framing of caste primarily as ‘a structure of discrimination’ (e.g., Kadirgamar 2017; Kuganathan 2014; Silva et al. 2009). The uninterrogated deployment of the framework of real caste, in conjunction with a lack of reflexivity about anthropological positionality, has led this research to an overly narrow focus that has dwelt on socio-economic hierarchy while ignoring other intracaste forms of identity construction and maintenance. Crucially, this form of boundary maintenance is found across all castes (Douglas 2017: 9; Jeeweshwara Räsänen 2015).

My research breaks away from these two issues in a number of ways. To begin with, in my fieldwork I approached caste neither as the sole or primary research topic, nor as a social factor...
to be noted in a list of other elements of identity but otherwise ignored, but rather as a part of everyday life that emerged through my experiences of the village. As such, I encountered it in contact with other issues, rather than as an autonomous domain, which will be apparent throughout the thesis. In addition to encountering caste in a more embedded sense than most other researchers, I found people to be far more willing to discuss caste, which was also at least partly to do with the fact that I was not motivated by a political programme. I bring Mannar into the ethnographic literature on caste in Sri Lanka, arguing for an understanding of caste praxis that emphasises the importance of both national and local contexts. I investigate the way that caste is dramatised and contested through village churches that tend to be controlled by single castes, unlike temples and churches in other parts of Sri Lanka and South India, and demonstrate the significance of regional caste communities that have traditionally relied on intracaste marriages and today maintain various kinds of caste associations. I also show that although certain forms of hierarchical caste interdependence have diminished in recent decades, the absence of the LTTE has led to a more public articulation of other forms of caste practice.

Amongst my broader analysis of caste emerge the Kadaiyars, who are the largest caste group in Marudankandal. The Kadaiyars are a small caste found in South India and Sri Lanka, where the largest populations are in Mannar and the coastal districts of Tamil Nadu on the opposite side of Palk Bay. Unlike India, where Vincent has suggested around 75% of Kadaiyars are Hindus (1998: 46-47), the Sri Lankan Kadaiyars are predominantly Christian: mainly Roman Catholic in Mannar and Jaffna, although with a larger population of Methodists in the east. The thesis investigates the Kadaiyar dominance of St Anthony’s in Marudankandal as well as the two caste associations of which the Marudankandal Kadaiyars are part, one of which is confined to four village communities on the mainland and organises a funeral fund besides an annual Passion Play, while the other is a district-wide organisation which promotes devotion to the Mannar Martyrs while publicising the Kadaiyars’ claim to their identity.

CATHOLICISM

Although it has been suggested that Christianity was practised in Sri Lanka in the precolonial period, its modern history began with the arrival of Portuguese Roman Catholic missionaries during the sixteenth century. Today Catholicism is the fourth largest religion in the country:

9 There is evidence that the Kadaiyars in Batticaloa were converting to Methodism as early as 1842 (K. M. de Silva 1965: 191).
according to the 2011 census, of the twenty and a half million people in Sri Lanka, 1,261,194 were Catholic, while 290,967 belonged to other Christian denominations. Mannar is Sri Lanka’s only majority-Catholic district, with 52.6% of the population Catholic according to the same census, and the rest primarily Hindus and Muslims. (Figures 1.9-10) Mannar and Vavuniya together comprise Mannar Diocese, which was created in 1981, and the difference in the proportion of Catholics in the two districts – Catholics comprise 8.9% of the population in Vavuniya – reflects the historical concentration of Catholicism along Sri Lanka’s west coast. As the location of some of the first Catholic converts in Sri Lanka and the site of Madhu, Sri Lanka’s most significant Catholic shrine, Catholicism has played a central role in Mannar over the last few centuries.

The study of religion, but particularly Buddhism, has long been a foundational pillar of Sri Lankan anthropology. Unlike the village and caste, this continued during the war, particularly due to the connection between religion and politics, ethnicity, and nationalism (e.g., Kapferer 1988). Although the picture today is not as bleak as in the mid 2000s (Rogers 2005), less attention continues to be paid to Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. Stirrat’s numerous publications on Sinhalese Catholics have, until recently, comprised almost the entirety of the anthropology of Sri Lankan Catholicism, and his 1992 monograph, which discusses the loss of authority of the Church in the immediate decades after Independence, has been the central text in this field.

However, since the end of the war there has appeared a small but growing body of work on Catholicism in Sri Lanka (Bastin 2012; Brown 2014, 2015; Bruland 2013; Hatsumi 2012, 2017; Johnson 2012; McFarlane 2016; Spencer et al. 2015). The Catholic Tamils of Mannar (and to a lesser extent Jaffna) play a prominent role in this scholarship, which is a particularly welcome change from earlier studies that – probably to maintain the orthodoxy of real caste, and no doubt surprisingly to anyone who has observed the numerous prominent churches of the district – portrayed Jaffna as an entirely Hindu environment (e.g., K. David 1973, 1977; Perinbanayagam 1965 and 1982; Skjønsberg 1982: 15). Much of the recent literature focuses on the role and authority, often political, of the priest (Brown 2015; Johnson 2012; McFarlane 2016; Spencer et al. 2015; Stirrat 1992). McFarlane (2016) has argued that, in contrast to Stirrat’s account of the Church in the south, Tamil priests have actually gained authority in the north during the course of the war.
Figure 1.9 Religion in Mannar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total pop.</th>
<th>Catholics</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Buddhists</th>
<th>Other Christians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
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<td>43,633</td>
<td>28,885</td>
<td>29,161</td>
<td>1,809</td>
<td>4,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>99,570</td>
<td>52,415</td>
<td>24,027</td>
<td>16,512</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.10 Ethnicity in Mannar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>1981</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>106,235</td>
<td>99,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lankan Tamil</td>
<td>54,106</td>
<td>80,962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Tamil</td>
<td>14,072</td>
<td>692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>28,464</td>
<td>16,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinhalese</td>
<td>8,710</td>
<td>1,961</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This thesis considers Catholicism from rather different directions. It expands the ethnographic literature by investigating the culture of everyday Catholicism at the levels of the village and the diocese. By exploring the history of Catholicism I explain not only the role played by historical narratives in the local Church today but also the relationship between villages and the unusual proliferation of small churches throughout the district. I also discuss the way in which Catholic Tamils conceptualise a ‘Tamil culture’ that they share with Tamil Hindus, and describe the popularity of the kūttu Catholic art form in the postwar period.

A central part of this wider topic is the relationship between caste and Catholicism. In contrast to the voluminous scholarship on caste and Christianity in India, the Sri Lankan literature has been limited to K.M. de Silva’s (1965) and Saveri’s (1993) historical studies of caste in mid-nineteenth-century Protestant and early-twentieth-century Catholic missionary work respectively, and Stirrat’s (1982) anthropological discussion of caste in the southern village of Wellagoda (although Stirrat emphasises that his findings are about caste within Wellagoda rather than about caste and Catholicism per se). Mosse (2012: 96) has described caste as lying at the centre of the relationship between Christianity and culture in South India, and, if much less prominent in the affairs of the contemporary Sri Lankan Church, history similarly proves it to have been crucial, even if much less is known about the centuries before the arrival of the British.

In his recent monograph on caste and Catholicism in Tamil Nadu, Mosse criticises existing understandings of Catholic caste as ‘a cultural residuum undissolved by Christian conversion’ and instead proposes to consider ‘how Christian ritual contexts have become part of the way
in which an indigenous social order is produced and changed’ (2012: 98). To show this, Mosse describes how the church of St James in the village of Alapuram has been a site for the contestation and dramatisation of caste. In this thesis, I will show that village churches in Mannar have played a similar role, although they have tended to articulate the dominance of single rather than multiple castes. Although castes across Matottam were integrated within Catholic feasts until the second half of the nineteenth century, this came to an end during the jurisdictional transformations that brought the Goan Oratorian missionaries into conflict with their newly-arrived European peers. Today caste is still important in the control over church administration, as has been demonstrated by a number of conflicts that have occurred since the end of the war in villages that experienced demographic changes, and in the communal activities of caste associations such as the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization.

OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

In the next chapter I provide the reader with a broad historical context for Mannar, Matottam and Marudankandal, from the precolonial period to the present, which also incorporates a discussion of regional ecology, agriculture and irrigation. In Chapter Three, I turn specifically to Marudankandal, analysing the village itself as well as the experiences of the villagers in the postwar period, and the ways in which I conducted my fieldwork. Chapter Four continues my discussion of Marudankandal by exploring the ways in which the village is constructed through state interventions and local concepts of home and belonging, while also investigating the complex field of kin, caste, religious, and ethnic ties. Chapter Five describes Catholic culture in Mannar Diocese and Marudankandal, before explaining how the peripatetic activities of the Goan Oratorian missionaries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led to the proliferation of small village churches that remains key to the form of local Catholicism today. Chapter Six considers caste in Mannar, historically and in the present, before finishing with an investigation of caste associations and the Mannar Martyrs.
CHAPTER TWO

Mannar and Matottam
The research setting

Like Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, and Vavuniya – the other Northern Province districts to the south of Jaffna – Mannar falls within Sri Lanka’s ‘extreme periphery’ according to ‘relative access to the central political, administrative and commercial institutions located in the metropolis’ (Moore 1985: 134). For the Tamils of the district, the two most important urban centres are Jaffna, three hours to the north, and Colombo, six hours to the south, while Mannar’s Muslims have a third orientation to Puttalam, where many were resettled during the war. Mannar has also been peripheral within academic research. Despite a small but growing body of scholarship that focuses on contemporary Catholicism and the historical Pearl Fishery, the social and historical context of Mannar remains largely unknown. For this reason, Chapter Two takes a broad approach that addresses this gap and establishes the context for the rest of this thesis. Beginning with a discussion of the core factors in Mannar’s geographical location – on the coast, at the closest point to India, and in the Dry Zone – the chapter explores the history of the district from the precolonial period to the present, including a discussion of the war and its aftermath. The transformations of the colonial period are essential for contextualising the historical explanations given in Chapters Four, Five and Six regarding the village, caste and Catholicism. However, although this chapter does discuss ethnicity and religion in Mannar, a more specific discussion of caste in history does not appear until Chapter Six. Having discussed tank irrigation and Matottam in the first half of the chapter, the second half of the chapter is a discussion of rice cultivation that focuses on transformations of labour, land and water use, and institutions in the GTS.

MANNAR, INDIA, AND THE INDIAN OCEAN

Mannar is the closest point between Sri Lanka and India. The two countries are separated by only eighteen miles, between Talaimannar at the far tip of Mannar Island and Dhanushkodi, and Adam’s Bridge, the chain of shoals and sandbanks stretching across this distance, has long been invested with myths of prehistory. For some, Adam’s Bridge is the ruins of a bridge built by Rama (Tamil irāmar pālam, Sanskrit rāmasedu) in order to lead an army to rescue his wife Sita from Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, while its English name comes from a Muslim
belief that it is the path taken by Adam after arriving in Sri Lanka from paradise. Its imaginative significance continues today in occasional expressions of interest by the Indian government in building a modern bridge, while stories claiming that NASA satellite imagery has proven the existence of an ancient bridge circulate online.

The ruins of first-millenium Manthai, the coastal trading city that I return to below, indicate Mannar’s previous importance in the societies of the Indian Ocean. Meyer (2003) has also emphasised the ease of movement between the India and Sri Lanka, noting that ‘for certain castes the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Bay were a kind of inner sea’. More recently, the countries have been in conflict over the question of Indian trawler fishing in Sri Lankan waters (Scholtens 2016). The Gulf of Mannar was also one of the main sources of pearls in the world for more than two millenia (Ostroff 2016), the pearl diving done mainly by – at least during the colonial period – divers from other parts of the Indian Ocean. The Pearl Fishery was a central part of Mannar’s revenue contribution during successive colonial states.

Meyer (2003) has noted that migration between India and Sri Lanka has been constant over the centuries, despite the perception of ‘waves’. Mannar has been a central transit point for this migration, as the missionaries, migrant labourers, and Tamil refugees who appear in this chapter will indicate. However, it is notable that although by Independence there were a number of Indian Tamils living in Mannar, despite its location it nevertheless has been, and remains, one of the least densely populated districts in Sri Lanka. Its perception as primarily a thoroughfare during the colonial period may be at least partly responsible for the lack of scholarly interest in the history of the district after the arrival of the Portuguese.

THE DRY ZONE AND TANK IRRIGATION

Mannar must also be considered as part of the Dry Zone. Sri Lanka’s ecology is conventionally divided into two climatic zones that are differentiated primarily by the amount and timing of annual rainfall. The Dry Zone covers around three quarters of the country, stretching from Jaffna to Puttalam in the west and down to Hambantota in the east, while the Wet Zone roughly covers the southwest quadrant of Sri Lanka, including Colombo and the Hill Country. Although there is no formally agreed boundary between the two zones (Axelsen 1983: 203-204), the most common is the 75 inch annual isohyet (the line connecting places of equal

10 For general studies of the Dry Zone see Farmer (1957) and Axelsen (1983).
rainfall). As Axelsen (ibid.) has noted, the use of ‘dry’ and ‘wet’ in this context reflects local perceptions and convention, and in global terms the Dry Zone is not particularly dry.\footnote{Some classificatory schemes (e.g., UNESCO 1951) draw an additional distinction between the Dry Zone and those areas on the northwest and southeast coasts that receive a mean average of less than 50 inches of annual rainfall, which are referred to as the Arid Zone. According to this scheme Mannar would also fall within the Arid Zone: between 2009 and 2012, the average rainfall in Mannar was 41 inches (Department of Census and Statistics \textit{Statistical Abstract 2013}: 47), and in years of drought it has been far lower.}

The Dry Zone receives most of its rain during Sri Lanka’s north-east monsoon, which usually occurs between November and January, but very little during the south-west monsoon which supplies the Wet Zone with most of its annual rain between June and August. The monsoons determine the timing of Sri Lanka’s two main agricultural seasons, which are known in the Tamil of the Northern Province as \textit{perumbōham} or \textit{kālabōham} (‘big’ or ‘regular crop’) and \textit{sirubōham} (‘small crop’).\footnote{A third cultivation, called the \textit{idaibōham} (‘middle crop’), sometimes takes place between the \textit{perumbōham} and the \textit{sirubōham}, generally because the \textit{perumbōham} has failed. In Sinhala the two main seasons are known as \textit{mahā (kanne)} and \textit{yala (kanne)}, and it is by these names that they are usually referred to in Sri Lankan English and academic scholarship. Among Tamil speakers on the east coast, however, they are called \textit{munmāri} and \textit{pinmāri} (the latter also known as \textit{kālavelāmai} or \textit{kālabōham}), and a third dry (rainfed) season is called \textit{edalai} (Canagaratnam 1921: 60-62; Whitaker 1999: 7).} The two zones are further distinguished by a broad difference in predominant commercial crops and methods of irrigation. Fruit, vegetables, spices, and tea – the cash crops that received the greatest attention from the three European colonial states – are focused in the Wet Zone, while most of Sri Lanka’s surplus rice production comes from seven Dry Zone districts: Vavuniya, Batticaloa, Ampara, Trincomalee, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, and Mannar. Although a variety of irrigation methods are found across Sri Lanka, rice cultivation in much of the Dry Zone relies largely on tank irrigation, although supplemental rainfall also remains critical.

As in southern India (Mosse 2003), tank irrigation has been central to the social and political orders of the Dry Zone. Tanks have a long historical provenance in Sri Lanka, and archaeological work suggests that the first tanks were built as early as the second century BCE (Kingwell-Banham and Fuller 2012: 92). During the following millenium, tanks played a critical role in the development and maintenance of the northern Dry Zone kingdoms of Anuradhapura (circa third century BCE to tenth century CE) and Polonnaruwa (eleventh to thirteenth centuries CE). Many of the ancient major tanks were repaired from the late nineteenth century onwards, and there are 340 major tanks today, mainly found in the Dry Zone. Much is unknown about their operation and relationship to each other in the precolonial period. Minor (or village) tanks, of which there are more than 11,250 today (Imbulana et al. \textit{et al.})
functioning independently or as part of major systems, have attracted even less historical attention. Unlike major tanks, the construction of minor tanks was not recorded in the historical chronicles, despite an oral tradition describing an unbroken continuity of tank villages from the tenth to the nineteenth centuries CE (Panabokke 2009: 36). Leach (1959) suggested that the small tanks saved villagers from needing to rely on the centrally-controlled major tanks in times of trouble. Unlike southern India (Mosse 2003), in Sri Lanka the tank system is not considered to be in decline.

The kingdoms of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa – an area referred to as the Rajarata, or irāsaraṭṭai in Tamil (K. M. de Silva 2005: 18-108; Leach 1959; Peebles 1990) – are thought to have been the most densely populated area of Sri Lanka during the first millennium CE, in contrast to today’s demographic distribution (Bertolacci 1817: 10). The reasons for the decline of the Rajarata kingdoms by the thirteenth century are not precisely understood, although scholars have pointed to the role of invasions, administrative collapse, the disintegration of the irrigation system, malaria, and perhaps climatic change (K. M. de Silva 2005: 109; Peebles 1990). During this period, Sinhalese political power drifted to the south-western parts of Ceylon, where the two kingdoms of Kotte and Kandy (under which came the east coast) emerged, while a third kingdom was established in Jaffna. However, Farmer (1957) argued that it is wrong to assume that the Dry Zone societies collapsed immediately after Polonnaruwa, and Gaasbeek has more recently noted that some of the Polonnaruwa-era major tanks in Trincomalee were still in use into the period of European colonisation (2010: 66).

Popular, political, and academic interest in the Dry Zone kingdoms has focussed largely on the ancient (Sinhalese) settlements of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Sigiriya, as well as Buddhist shrines such as Dambulla (Heslop 2014), and historical and archaeological work on other areas is extremely sparse. Three mainland sites, however, indicate the significance of Mannar during this period: the buried remains of Manthai (pronounced māndai), the Giant’s Tank, and smaller Akattimurippu Tank on the southern side of Matottam. Of these, only Manthai has been the subject of published research (Carswell et al. 2013; Kingwell-Banham et al. 2018; Shinde 1987). Known in the historical sources as Mahātittha (Pali), Matota (Sinhala), and Matottam (Tamil) (Indrapala 2013: 61-72), Manthai is generally considered to have been the principal port not only of the kingdom of Anuradhapura but of Sri Lanka itself (Carswell et al. 2013; K. M. de Silva 2005: 44-46; B. J. Perera 1992/1993; Shinde 1987), flourishing into the second millenium (Kingwell-Banham et al. 2018: 1568), although Darley (2017: 61-63) has recently suggested that Manthai was less significant than previously thought. Although the ruins of Manthai were visible at the start of the nineteenth century (Bertolacci 1817: 11), and
locals were described digging up artifacts eighty years later (AR 1886), there is little left to see of Manthai today other than an old excavation pit overgrown with trees behind the Thiruketheeswaram temple complex.13

Some archaeologists have suggested that Manthai was provided with water and communications by a now-extinct river (Nicholas 1963). Equally speculative, although not impossible, are suggestions that Manthai’s water supply came from the Giant’s Tank (Carswell 2013: 24; Kiribamune 2013: 49; Shinde 1987: 333). The dates of the construction and abandonment of the Giant’s Tank, known in Tamil as Kaṭṭukarai or Kaṭṭukaraikulam, as well as its method of operation, remain uncertain. Previously thought to have been built during the reign of King Parākramabāhu I (1153-1186 CE), or at least no earlier than the tenth century CE (Brohier 1935 III: 23; Parker 1880), it is now held – although not definitively proven – by the Irrigation Department and scholars (Carswell 2013: 24; Gunawardana 1971: 8; Kiribamune 2013: 49) to be the Mānamatta of the Sinhalese chronicles, part of a major phase of large irrigation works during the reign of King Dhātusena (459-477 CE). Nicholas (1963: 81) suggested that the Giant’s Tank was built by Dhātusena and restored by Parākramabāhu I.

The Dry Zone has played a crucial role in modern imaginaries of Sri Lanka. The British increasingly viewed its sparsely populated rural areas as marginal, backwards, and underdeveloped – often referring to the perceived population decline (Loos 1868; Peebles 1982: 26; Peebles 1990) – in contrast to the previously flourishing civilisation suggested by the untapped productive potential of the ancient ruined tanks. De Butts (1841: 98-99) described Mannar Town as ‘a wretched cluster of huts’ in a ‘sequestered and barren site [with] an appearance of desolation and an absence of animation’, and as late as the 1950s Farmer referred to Mannar’s places of ‘desolation and decay’ (1957: 10). By the twentieth century Mannar had a reputation of being one of the least healthy districts (Denham 1912a: 73). This was a change from the more positive perspective of the Portuguese and Dutch: a Dutch author wrote in 1791 that the Dutch had always considered the provinces of Matottam and Nanaddan two of the ‘most salubrious’ places in the island (Anonymous 1843: 11).

The British initiated two schemes in order to develop the Dry Zone. The first was the restoration of the tanks, which began in the 1850s (Roberts 1972: 50-53). This work focused first on village tanks, although the Northern Province received little financial support until the mid 1880s (Roberts 1972: 63), and was accompanied by the establishment and enforcement of

13 Thiruketheeswaram is one of the five most significant Saivite temples in Sri Lanka (Bastin 2002). It is believed to have been demolished by the Portuguese, who used its materials to build Mannar Fort (AR 1886), and was rebuilt in the early twentieth century.
new irrigation rules, beginning with the 1856 Paddy Lands Irrigation Ordinance. The restoration of major tanks began towards the end of the century.

The second scheme was the attempt to attract people from elsewhere in Sri Lanka to settle on the expanded agricultural land. However, although this began in the late nineteenth century, targeting not only Sri Lankan but Indian settlers (Moore 1985: 34), it became increasingly important after Independence (Amerasinghe 1976; Pfaffenberger 1990b). As later allottees were largely Sinhalese rice farmers from the Wet Zone, and the settlements were often in majority Tamil and Muslim Dry Zone districts, this became a central political issue in the growing ethnic conflict. Mannar, however, was not heavily affected by the colonisation schemes. None were established in the district between 1928 and 1953, the early years of the project (Farmer 1957: 146), and the settlers of the three major colonisation schemes established between 1953 and 1980 in the forest areas to the north and east of Matottam numbered only 587, the smallest number of any of the Dry Zone districts (Panditharatna 1996: 27). Shastri (1990: 63) notes that the official records say that there were no Sinhalese allottees in the districts of Mannar, Mullaitivu, Jaffna and Batticaloa, although Tamil allegations differ.

After Independence the colonisation schemes played a central role in the politicisation of the Dry Zone. The burgeoning ideology of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, which drew partly on British historical interpretations (Coningham et al. 2017), promoted an ethnicised view of Sri Lanka that revolved around historical narratives of the fall of the Sinhalese Rajarata, dependent on rice agriculture and tank irrigation, to Tamils who were depicted as recent outsiders and invaders (Moore 1985: 87). Other scholars have written about the projection of contemporary ethnic identities and conflict into the past, and assumptions about the ethnic composition of the Dry Zone kingdoms (Coningham et al. 2017: 24; Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Peebles 1990: 33). Similarly claimed by the LTTE as part of Tamil Eelam, their independent territory, the Dry Zone became the focus of the war.

MANNAR, MATOTTAM, AND THE PORTUGUESE AND DUTCH PERIODS

When the Portuguese arrived in Colombo in 1506 (Strathern 2010: 3) there were three kingdoms on the island – Kandy, Kotte, and Jaffna – and Portuguese control was largely focussed on the latter two. The Portuguese intervention in Mannar preceded that in Jaffna, and was connected to the activities of Jesuit missionaries working on India’s Fishery Coast (Bayly 1989). In 1544, St Francis Xavier sent one or more missionaries from India to Mannar Island
(VP PPI: 5 n. 3), where they appear to have made a large number of conversions.\textsuperscript{14} At this time Mannar fell within the domain of the kingdom of Jaffna (Queyroz 1992 I: 51; VP PPI: 395), which was ruled by King Sangili I (1519-1561).\textsuperscript{15} Believing that the converts might join the Portuguese (Boudens 1957), within a couple of months of the baptisms the king sent soldiers, said to have numbered 5,000, to Mannar, where they executed several hundred people. These became known as the Mannar Martyrs (\textit{maṇraisācihal} or \textit{vēdasācihal}), and the story of their deaths is the foundational narrative of Catholicism in Mannar today.

The swift retribution called for by St Francis Xavier (VP PPI: 51) did not occur, although the Portuguese had built a fort on Mannar Island by 1560. By 1591 they established themselves in Jaffna, having defeated an attempted invasion of Mannar Island by King Puvirāja Pandāram of Jaffna (1561-1565, 1582-1591) in the same year (VP PPII: 135), although they continued to face opposition until Jaffna’s formal annexation in 1619 (K. M. de Silva 2005: 148-149, 171). While the Jaffna Peninsula was strategically important for control over the sea between India and Sri Lanka, the Portuguese also raised revenue from the Mannar Pearl Fishery (Ostroff 2016), and the sale of elephants (Pieris 1995). Another significant industry was the digging of chaya (\textit{oldenlandia umbellata}), a root used to produce an important red dye, which grew in large quantity in Mannar. Being heavily invested in the propagation of Catholicism, the Portuguese destroyed temples throughout the Sri Lanka (Ribeiro 1847: 50) – Mannar Fort was said to have built with stone from the temple at Manthai – and missionaries from a number of congregations (Jesuits, Franciscans, and Dominicans) worked in Mannar.

From the Portuguese onwards the mainland was administered from Mannar Fort (Ribeiro 1847: 48), although during this period the name Mannar was given only to Mannar Island, and travel from Mannar Island (and Jaffna) to the mainland was described as ‘going to Ceylon’ (VP PIII: 92 n. 1). The Portuguese adopted the local usage of Matottam, as explained in Chapter One (Queyroz 1992 I: 51; Tennent 1860 II: 5). This was maintained by the Dutch at the beginning of their rule (Baldaeus 1703: 793), although they subsequently divided historical Matottam into two provinces – ‘Matottam’ to the north of the Mannar-Medawachchiya road, and Nanaddan to the south (Schreuder 1946: 57) – a system continued by the British and preserved to a large degree in contemporary Nanaddan and Manthai West Divisions (although the latter extends far to the north of historical Matottam).

Although the \textit{General Description and History of the Mannar District} (no author, circa

\textsuperscript{14} By tradition this missionary was also called Francis Xavier, as a result of which Catholics today sometimes say that the saint visited the district.

\textsuperscript{15} Also known as Chekarasa Sekaram I and Sangilian.
1891, NASL 31/447), henceforth the Description, recorded the use of the older meaning of Matottam throughout the nineteenth century, today Matottam is increasingly restricted to literary and historical contexts (e.g., Anpurasa 2007) and rarely used in everyday conversation or government sports ground. I found that villagers had very different ideas of the geography of Matottam, with greater corroboration and certainty among the elders, who were more likely to use the older definition. Nesaraja, a farmer with whose family I lived towards the beginning of my fieldwork, described Matottam as a *vivāsiyam iḍam* (‘farming place’), which excluded Vidattaltivu but not Vangalai – the two largest mainland fishing towns – because some of Vangalai residents also farmed. Marcus, another older villager, thought that Matottam did include Vidattaltivu, as well as stretching inland as far as Madhu.

Although Matottam appears to have been referred to as Manthai in the Tamil Sangam literature (Indrapala 2013: 61-62), the etymological relationship between the two names is uncertain. Indrapala (ibid.; similarly Gunasena 2018: 152) described Matottam and Matota as cognates derived from the Pali ‘Mahātittha’, or ‘great harbour’. While Matota means ‘great harbour’ in contemporary Sinhala, and Manthai is sometimes referred to in the Tamil sources as Perunturai (‘great harbour’) (Indrapala 2013: 61-62), the inhabitants of Matottam have for the past two centuries at least (Casie Chitty 1834: 158) understood Matottam to be a contraction of *mahā* and *tōṭṭam*. While *mahā*, a Sanskrit root, means ‘great’ as in the other translations, *tōṭṭam* does not mean harbour but rather encompasses a range of agricultural concepts that include highland crops, plantations, and house-gardens. The author of the Report (4) translated Matottam into French as *grand jardin*, or ‘great garden’.

Our understanding of the mainland under the Portuguese is limited by the fact that the Mannar thombos – the registers of land ownership, family, and caste compiled by the Portuguese and the Dutch – have been lost, while the archives of the Franciscans responsible for Matottam were destroyed in a fire (VP PPI: xvii; VP PPII: 105 n. 2). However, we do know that by the end of the Portuguese period there were four Catholic churches in Matottam (Boudens 1957), one of which, Our Lady of Health, was founded by Friar Pedro de Betancor.

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16 However, Marcus once explained that it meant ‘mango garden’, *mā* being the root of ‘mango’ in Tamil.

17 Additional confusion is found in the fact that, until the end of the nineteenth century, foreign colonial and missionary observers appear to have inconsistently used Matottam (or Mantotte) to refer both to today’s Manthai village – which consisted of a paddy tithe store room and a rest house during the British period (Casie Chitty 1834: 158; VP DP III: 390) – and to another village further inland (e.g., VP DPII: 119) which appears to have been Adampan village, whose local hospital was also once referred as Mantota Hospital.
at what was then called Mantota, today’s Manthai village (Queyroz 1992 II: 663-665). These churches appear to have been supported by the arrack and ferry rents (VP PPIII: 274), as well as by the rent of villages in Matottam owned by the Portuguese living in Mannar Fort (VP PPIII: 271).

Figure 2.1 Detail from a large series of Dutch maps that depicted the areas of Matottam and Nanaddan that could be irrigated by the Giant’s Tank. 1790. Public domain, held at the National Archives of the Netherlands. 4.VEL934B-F.

Matottam should be distinguished from the Vanni to the north and east, another northern region about which relatively more has been written. The Vanni encompassed northern, north-central, and/or eastern parts of Sri Lanka, according to different historical chronicles (Arasaratnam 1966; Gaasbeek 2010: 61-69; Indrapala 1970; McGilvray 2008: 59). After the fall of the Dry Zone kingdoms, the Vanniyar feudal chieftains were ‘the only political authorities in the major part of the ancient Rajarattha about whom we hear from our sources’ (Indrapala 1970: 111), although their identity remains unclear. Whether or not it was the case

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18 The other mainland churches were found at Arippu, Nanaddan, and Perungali (Queyroz 1992 II: 664).
19 The term Vanniyar appears ‘to have embraced a wide category of persons ranging from appointees of the kings of Kotte, who administered outlying districts, to autonomous rulers of large though
that mainland Mannar was considered part of the Vanni in the precolonial period (as described by Indrapala 1970; Navaratnam 1960; Somasundaram 2010: 4), successive European colonial states defined the Vanni as the area covering today’s Vavuniya and Mullaitivu districts, part of Kilinochchi, the northernmost part of Mannar, and (for a while) part of Polonnaruwa. The Vanniyar chieftains maintained a limited autonomy until the end of the Dutch period, and the Vanni was known as a hideout for fugitives; in contrast, the mainland areas of Mannar ‘are not under the subaltern rule of any native chief, but are ruled directly by the Company through officers paid by the Company’ (Zwaardecroon 1911: 9). Nevertheless, Portuguese and Dutch control over Matottam appears to have had its limits, as shown by the incursions of Kandyan forces under the Portuguese (VP PP II: 320) and the ability of the Goan Oratorian missionaries to travel through the region under the Dutch.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, when the British built the northern ‘trunk road’ (today’s A9) straight through the centre of the Northern Province, the road to Jaffna (today’s A32) passed through Mannar and skirted the western edge of what were once the Vanni territories. Today the term ‘Vanni’ is used in three main ways, to refer to (1) the four Northern Province districts below Jaffna (Stokke 2006; Terpstra and Frerks 2017: 302 n. 10); (2) the Vanni Electoral District, created in 1978, which comprises Mannar, Mullaitivu, and Vavuniya; and (3) the mainland areas of the Northern Province formerly under the control of the LTTE (Bruland 2015; Hatsumi 2017). The Vanni is used in the final sense by villagers living within the formerly army-controlled part of Matottam to the south of the Mannar-Medawachchiya road, who sometimes refer to the north as vanni pakkam (the ‘Vanni side’).

In 1658, two years after capturing Colombo, the Dutch took Mannar Fort before conquering Jaffna, the last Portuguese stronghold in the island. The Dutch considered Mannar an important defensive and economic location, and continued to draw revenue from chaya, elephants, and pearls (Vink 2016; Zwaardecroon 1911: 9, 120-121). Although the Dutch Mannar thombos were also lost, the Catholic missionaries of this period left many records. The Dutch were very hostile to Catholics, particularly because of their perceived political connection to the Portuguese (K. M. de Silva 2005: 258). However, despite the expulsion of Portuguese somewhat undeveloped and sparsely populated areas’ (K. M. de Silva 2005:145). Vanniyar is also the name of a caste in southern India that is not found in contemporary Sri Lanka, although it does appear in earlier records. Bastiaampillai has suggested, noting that the Vanniyars intermarried with Jaffna Vellalars, that the Vanniyars were a subgroup of that caste (1988: 55). On the east coast, the term Vanniah was given to the colonial district headmen until the 1930s (McGilvray 2008: 63). There have also been numerous debates and legends about the origins and etymology of the Vanni (Indrapala 1970; Lewis 1895; Navaratnam 1960; Somasundaram 2010).
missionaries and the persecution of local Catholics (VP DPII: 454), there occurred under the Dutch a Catholic revival driven by Oratorian missionaries native to Goa, who – beginning in 1687 with Joseph Vaz, who was canonised Sri Lanka’s first saint in 2015 – entered Sri Lanka covertly, often through Mannar and Matottam. To evade the Dutch, the Oratorians moved constantly throughout Sri Lanka, although they periodically returned to Parappankandal, a Matottam village beside the Giant’s Tank in which they established a headquarters. However, Dutch hostility towards the Catholics waned throughout the eighteenth century, and in the 1770s a change of policy allowed the Oratorians greater but still limited freedom.

FROM THE BRITISH PERIOD TO THE CIVIL WAR

In 1796 the Dutch surrendered to the British, who brought the whole of Ceylon under a single rule after conquering Kandy in 1815. Mannar subsequently lost its defensive role, the fort eventually becoming a prison, and the district was viewed as increasingly marginal despite its commercial importance (De Butts 1841: 98-99). In addition to maintaining the existing industries, the British Collectors (later Assistant Government Agents) had two significant responsibilities that reflected changes in the district during the nineteenth century. The first was to oversee the passage of migrant labourers travelling between Sri Lanka and India via Mannar and the Mannar-Medawachchiya Road, which became one of the main thoroughfares. The second was to oversee rice cultivation, which was very important for the district’s revenue (NASL 31/1; NAUK CO416/28). This involved government assistance in times of drought and, during the second half of the century, supervision of the new irrigation works.

Beginning in the British period we find detailed information on the size and composition of Mannar’s population. Although the dates and methods of enumeration in the earliest censuses (1814 and 1827) are unknown, and the initial 1871 and 1881 all-island censuses suffered from serious under-enumeration (Peebles 1982: 26), these provide the main quantitative data for the nineteenth century. When they are brought together with other historical sources, I suggest that they can be useful at a broad and provisional level, which will be necessary with regard to

20 The 1814 census of the British territories appears to the first attempt, and the 1827 census (compiled in 1824) was larger although still incomplete. Northern Province Governor Percival Dyke made a survey of the province in 1839, although only part of its results have survived (Banks 1957: 445-446; NASL 31/447).

21 Problems of under-enumeration were apparent at the time. In his plans for the restoration of the Giant’s Tank, Parker noted that the population of the paddy lands beneath the tank was 4,172, with another 367 within the Giant’s Tank itself (1881: 37), and added that these numbers appeared to have been considerably underestimated (ibid.: 28).

51
caste in Chapter Six. From the early nineteenth century until today Mannar’s population has been mainly Tamil, the second largest ethnicity being Muslim. Over this same period Catholicism has been predominant, although this has not been reflected in every part of the district. In the nineteenth century, Catholics formed a majority in Mannar Island and in Matottam, Muslims in Musali, and Hindus in the coastal villages to the north of Matottam. In 1860 a Catholic missionary claimed that there were only a hundred Hindus on Mannar Island, and none in Matottam (VP BP IV: 147), and the author of the Description wrote that Hindus living outside the northern area of the district were immigrants from India and other parts of Sri Lanka. The censuses also do not support the belief that the population fell throughout the nineteenth century, although it did not begin to grow until well into the next.

The first half of the twentieth century was marked by economic changes. While the chaya, pearl, and elephant industries came to an end, rice cultivation and fishing (Scholtens 2016) were expanded and strengthened by the completion of the Giant’s Tank and other irrigation works, including Akattimurippu in the 1920s, and the opening of the Talaimannar-Colombo railway line in 1914. In 1931 Mannar had the lowest population (25,137) of any district in the country, but during that decade, in common with Vavuniya, Batticaloa, and Ampara – the other previously underdeveloped rice-surplus districts without a Sinhalese majority – Mannar’s population began to grow significantly. Mannar went from having one of the lowest national rates of population increase between 1946 and 1953 to one of the highest between 1963 and 1971 (Shastri 1990: 61), and by the final prewar census in 1981 the population had risen to 106,235. This mid-century population increase was due to government health, welfare and development programmes (Balasundarampillai 1972: 60; Shastri 1990: 61), and, particularly between 1931 and 1946, inwards migration from other parts of Sri Lanka and India (Department of Census and Statistics, Census of Ceylon, 1946: 109). By 1963, 29.1% of the population had been born outside the district, in comparison with 43.4% in Vavuniya and only 5.4% in Jaffna (Balasundarampillai 1972: 64-65, citing the Department of Census and Statistics, Census of Ceylon, 1963).

Of that 29.1%, however, 8.4% had also been born outside Sri Lanka, against 4.1% in Vavuniya and 1.5% in Jaffna. Little has been written about Indian migration to parts of Sri Lanka other than the Hill Country, partly because the only reliable statistics from before 1911 are for estate workers (Peebles 1982: 59-60). Yet Indian labour was also crucial for government

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22 The last Pearl Fishery was held in 1925 (Sivalingam 1961). Although elephant hunting is now illegal, elephants are rarely seen outside the forests on the edges of the district. The distinctive watch huts used by farmers to ward off elephants in other parts of Sri Lanka are not found in the fields of the GTS.
projects in Mannar, such as the Giant’s Tank and the railway, and for farming and fishing labour. During my fieldwork I met a number of elderly people who had come to Mannar from southern India (mainly Tamil Nadu), sometimes as children, for reasons such as work, family, and marriage. Such connections appeared to be particularly prominent in Kadaiyar family histories. The distinction between these Indian migrants and Hill Country Tamils has been obscured by categories such as ‘Indian Tamils’ or ‘Estate Tamils’. Shastri’s (1990: 65) population statistics, for example, record that the proportion of ‘Estate Tamils’ in Mannar grew from 11% in 1946 to 17% in 1971, before reducing to 13% in 1981. The 1946 numbers were probably Indians who came directly to Mannar, rather than via the Hill Country. By the 2012 census they had almost disappeared.

Internal migration to Mannar was bolstered by two groups. The first were Hill Country Tamils displaced by the anti-Tamil riots in the decades before the war, some of whom resettled in the Northern Province. The second were Tamils leaving the overpopulated villages of Jaffna in search of land and work opportunities, particularly agricultural, in the mainland districts of the Northern Province (Arasaratnam 1982: 1-3; Balasundarampillai 1972: 61; Groves 1996: 64; Moore 1985: 133, citing the Department of Census and Statistics, Census of Ceylon, 1971). Several families in Marudankandal and Alayankulam had migrated like this from Jaffna after Independence. The internal migration of these two groups would appear largely to explain the relative increase of Hindus in Mannar, who are now found throughout the district.

Sri Lanka gained Independence from the UK in 1948, although it was not properly celebrated in Mannar until a year later (AR 1949). Also in 1949 was held the first festival of the newly restored Thiruketheeswaram temple near Manthai, where today the Sivarattiri festival probably comes second in size only to Madhu feast. The years immediately following Independence were characterised by an end to easy movement between India and Sri Lanka, one of the consequences of which, to the chagrin of local sammattis (fishing boat owners), was the deportation of Indians working in the fishing industry (AR 1953). In 1978 the mainland borders of Mannar District took their contemporary form, having expanded and contracted to the north and east more than once over the previous century and a half. Madhu AGA became the fifth of the district’s divisions when it was created in 1990, joining Mannar, Manthai West,

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23 This appears to have been reflected in the employed population, which in 1963 was 31% in Mannar, 33% in Vavuniya, and 25% in Jaffna; and in the lower proportion of women to men in Mannar (83 to every 100) and Vavuniya (75 to every 100) than in Jaffna (99 to every 100) (Balasundarampillai 1972: 29).
Nanaddan, and Musali.24

THE CIVIL WAR

The origins of Sri Lanka’s civil war have been examined in great depth by other scholars (e.g., Thiranagama 2011), and it is not possible to explore them to a similar degree here. Its roots lay in the increasing importance of ethnicity as a political category during the British period and after Independence in 1948. The increasing ethnic division, the rising power of Sinhalese majoritarian nationalism, discriminatory policies such as the 1956 Sinhala Only Act, the university standardisation system, and the major colonisation schemes in the north and east all played a part, as did anti-Tamil riots that occurred in the south in 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981, and 1983.

In the Tamil-majority north and east the political response to Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism was superseded by the emergence of several competing insurgent groups in the 1970s, of which the LTTE had become dominant by the end of the 1980s (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1994; Thiranagama 2011; Vaitheespara 2006), although some of the others still exist in political coalitions today. The ultimate goal of the LTTE was to establish a separate state called Tamil Eelam – Īḷam being an older Tamil name for Sri Lanka, which is otherwise called ilangai – in the north and east. Although there had been already been fighting between Tamil militants and government forces, the civil war is conventionally understood to have begun with the killing of thirteen army soldiers in Jaffna in July 1983, which was followed by anti-Tamil rioting in the south and east and mass displacement of Tamils within Sri Lanka and abroad.25 The war was characterised by its length, brutality, and the targeting of civilians by all sides, often accompanied by uncertainty as to the perpetrators (Lawrence 1997).

Despite some anti-police violence in Mannar in the late 50s and early 60s, Mannar was a relatively peaceful district before the war. Mannar did not experience the 1983 riots, but in December 1984 an army jeep was destroyed by a landmine near Manthai, in response to which the army responded with violence, killing many civilians. As a result, many people fled the district for India in 1985, travelling in fishing boats because the ferry had been suspended in 1983 (Ramnath 2019). By 1987, apart from the navy base at Talaimannar (Clarence 2007: 113, 24 Manthai East is a now an AGA division in Mullaitivu District.
25 The war is sometimes further divided into four ‘Eelam Wars’ separated by failed peace initiatives: Eelam War I, from July 1983 to July 1987; Eelam War II, from June 1990 to November 1994; Eelam War III, from April 1995 to December 2001, followed by a ceasefire agreement between February 2002 and 2006; and Eelam War IV, from July 2006 to May 2009.
153-154), the LTTE had taken control of Mannar Island, destroying the railway line and bridge at around the same time. The main roads to Vavuniya and Puttalam were also destroyed during the 1980s, which, combined with government restrictions, made the district almost inaccessible (Holt 2011). Nevertheless, Mannar became a principal route by which refugees and Tamil militants travelled to India (Holt 2011: 109). On some days in 1990, one thousand people were making the trip from the Mannar Island town of Pesalai to Tamil Nadu (Clarance 2007: 126). Madhu became an important camp for internally displaced people (Clarance 2007; G. Hansen 2003), and Marudankandal villagers remembered going back and forth to Madhu when it was necessary. During the 2002-2006 ceasefire Mannar became slightly more accessible, and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) returned to homes, including Muslims.

In October 1990 the LTTE gave all Muslims in Mannar, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu and Jaffna forty-eight hours to leave, resulting in a mass exodus to the south, with the majority settling in Puttalam District (Citizens Commission 2011; Clarance 2007; Thiranagama 2011). The largest population of Muslims in the north were found in Mannar. In 1991 the Sri Lankan Army recaptured Mannar Island and the LTTE focussed on maintaining their mainland territories, which became even more important when the LTTE were driven from Jaffna in 1995 and Kilinochchi became their new headquarters. The LTTE controlled most of mainland Mannar between 1990 and 1996 (Hatsumi 2012). After this period, the A14 Mannar-Medawachchiya road marked the border between LTTE and government territories, passage between which was limited to a small number of checkpoints. From the early 1990s, the LTTE operated an independent system of governance within their territories, although the government continued to pay the salaries of certain civil servants (Brun and Van Hear 2012; Stokke 2006; Terpstra and Frerks 2017).

Despite their initial successes, the power of the LTTE began to weaken in the 2000s, and in particular during the 2002-2006 ceasefire, for reasons such as the breakaway of the LTTE commander in the east, Colonel Karuna Amman, who aligned with the government forces; disputes around tsunami relief funds from abroad, which quickened the breakdown in relations between the LTTE and the government; and the LTTE’s order for Tamils not to vote in the 2005 presidential election, which resulted in the election of the hardline Sinhalese nationalist Mahinda Rajapaksa (Brun and Van Hear 2012: 64), who significantly expanded the size of the armed forces. When fighting began again in 2006 the LTTE faced a more determined and better funded government assault which drove them upwards through the Vanni to the coast of Mullaitivu, where they were defeated on 19 May 2009. During this final period many civilians, including Marudankandal villagers, were trapped within the warzone as the front shifted, and
allegations of both LTTE and government atrocities have been a central element in disputes about this period.

AFTER THE WAR

Most of the civilians who were caught in the warzone spent the next year in Menik Farm, a large camp for IDPs in Vavuniya District, before they were allowed to return to their homes in 2010. People who had left the district during the war, particularly the Muslim population, also began to return. The 2012 national census was the first to include the Northern Province since 1981, and recorded a population of 99,570 in Mannar District. Of the total population, 80% were Sri Lankan Tamils and 16.5% Muslims, while the religions were Catholicism (52.6%), Hinduism (24.1%), and Islam (16.4%). The reduced proportion of Muslims was a result of their southwards migration during the war, although the increase in Catholics since 1981 is harder to explain. In 2011 it became possible for foreign citizens to travel throughout the Northern Province, other than within certain government High Security Zones, some of which remain closed today. Around 10,000 LTTE cadres entered a ‘rehabilitation programme’ required to avoid terrorism charges, and most had been released by 2012; other cadres had received jail sentences, and some were the subjects of ongoing court cases (The Guardian 2012).

By the time I began my fieldwork Mannar had been largely demined, and the last international NGOs working in the district were in the process of closing their offices. The district remained heavily militarised, although the army was consolidating itself within a small number of large bases (Anonymous 2012), and controversies around ongoing land-use by the armed forces were focussed mainly on the coastal Musali village of Mullikulam. A number of shops and restaurants in Mannar were also run by the military. The government’s much-feted communications-focussed ‘reconstruction as reconciliation’ programme was underway (Venugopal 2018), with the district’s main roads, the A14 (Mannar-Medawachchiya) and the A32 (Mannar-Jaffna) under repair between 2013 and 2015. The Mannar trainline reopened in 2015, although I rarely met anyone who preferred the train over the nightbus to Colombo. Many believed that the ferry to Tamil Nadu would begin again soon, although this remains very unlikely. One villager in Marudankandal, who had only recently returned from India, told me that his relatives did not want to come back until the ferry began, so that they could bring their furniture and other possessions with them. By this time there had also begun a large-scale reconstruction of houses.
Provincial Council elections were held in 2013, the first in the north since the start of the war. The surprise election of Maithripala Sirisena as president in 2015 was followed by the dismantling of checkpoints on the main roads leading north to Jaffna. However, in the years since then the initial optimism surrounding the Sirisena government has diminished, particularly due to Sirisena’s failure to abolish the executive presidency as promised, and questions of wartime disappearances and land rights have been protested in the north. Two mass graves were discovered in Mannar, one at Manthai in 2013 (of disputed origin), and another, much larger grave in Mannar Town (subsequently dated to the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries CE). The 2018 parliamentary coup, which was prevented by the Supreme Court, was followed by the unexpected suicide bombings of several churches across Sri Lanka by ISIS-inspired terrorists, leading to sharp intensification of new checkpoints in the north and rising, often overt prejudice towards Muslims, now held by some Sinhalese Buddhists as the new outsider invaders (The Hindu 2019).

CULTIVATION AND IRRIGATION

As in rice-growing countries such as Japan (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: 116-117) and Malaysia (Carsten 1997), in Sri Lanka rice is considered food *per se*, and the primary component of a proper meal. The question ‘what did you eat?’ (*enna sāppittiṅa?*) is understood to refer exclusively to rice or its substitutes, while other dishes, which ‘orbit’ the rice (Van Daele 2013b: 453), are only named in response to specific questions about curry (*kari*). Ritual meals such as māyakka sōṟu, selavu sōṟu, and āṭṭamākkal sōṟu – respectively, the food given to those who attend a funeral, on the first and eighth days after the death, and that served by local Catholics at the church to commemorate All Souls’ Day – reflect the significance of rice in their names, sōṟu being the Tamil for ‘cooked rice’.26 Rice plays a central role in other Sinhalese (Van Daele 2008 and 2013b) and Tamil rituals. The most visible in the north is Thaipongal, the mid-January festival of abundance that is celebrated with a sweet dish made by boiling un-parboiled red rice until it overflows the pot.

However, Van Daele’s (2013b: 453) observation that rice ‘occupies a central position in the three daily meals… except in larger towns where wheat in the form of bread nibbles at this dominant position’, overlooks a greater diversity of preferences that index ethnicity, religion, and region. Within these the only certainty is that lunch – considered the main meal of the day

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26 *Kūṭṭāncōru* is an informal communal event at which friends cook together.
– always involves rice. In Marudankandal rice is not always eaten at dinner, and very rarely at breakfast, on which occasions it is replaced with string hoppers, hoppers, pittu or dosai (all made from rice flour), or roti or bread. Rice is always served during large (lunch and dinner) celebrations.

Despite its centrality as a staple food today, rice was being imported before the arrival of the Portuguese. While both the Dutch and the British recognised the importance of rice as food and revenue, state intervention to improve cultivation only properly began in the 1860s with the irrigation works, although by Independence only 40% of locally consumed rice was grown in Sri Lanka (Pain 1986: 758). However, by then a number of economic and political concerns had catalysed a greater interest in local rice production and domestic self-sufficiency (Pain 1985: 761, 770). Today Sri Lanka is almost entirely self-sufficient, although it continues to import popular varieties (particularly from India and Pakistan). The intervention of successive Sri Lankan governments in rice cultivation has resulted in an extensive network of state organisations and support systems that involve insurance, loans, subsidies, and irrigation.

Despite the preeminence of rice in both academic and popular narratives of Sri Lankan history (Moore 1985: 243-247; Morrison, Moore, and Lebbe 1979: 17), some scholars have suggested that it is a more significant crop today than it was considered to be in the past (Moore 1985: 87; Spencer 1990: 107). While this may be true for some parts of Sri Lanka, in Matottam rice has been the agricultural mainstay for several hundred years at least. In 1671 the Dutch minister Baldaeus described Matottam and the neighbouring areas of Musali and Chettikulam as ‘very fertile, especially in rice, which is produced a hundred fold’ (1703: 793-794). In Matottam the predominance of rice was accompanied by the relative absence of chena, the practice of rotating forest swidden cultivation found in some parts of Sri Lanka (Farmer 1957: 47-51; Kingwell-Banwell and Fuller 2012: 91-92; Spencer 1990), and of other crops, notably vegetables (which are collectively referred to as tōṭṭam). The latter fact was observed by a number of British Assistant Government Agents into the twentieth century (e.g., AR 1912-13),

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27 This diversification appears to be a twentieth century development, as the Assistant Government Agent of Mannar observed in 1902 that the mainland farmers ate rice three times a day, breakfast being a cold dish made by soaking the previous night’s rice in water (AR 1902). This dish, known as kāṇji, continued to be eaten until recently during periods of wartime scarcity, although during my fieldwork the only kāṇji that I encountered was a rather different kind: a particular mix of rice, vegetables, and occasionally meat that was made by local Muslims every day during Ramadan and eaten in the evening as iftar.

28 In contrast, barely any rice has ever been grown on the island, and at times the island’s rice supply was ‘entirely dependent upon import from India’ (AR 1903). In times of extreme scarcity the islanders relied on fish and palm products (AR 1892).
and continues to be the case today. Although households often grow some fruit in their house-gardens (mainly bananas, mangoes and coconuts), only a few cultivate cash crops (predominantly red chillies and peanuts).

For most families in Marudankandal, rice was the keystone of their household economy, and those who had no land at all often had to look elsewhere for work. Farmers (kamakkāran or vivasāiyi) usually cultivated their own land as well as providing day labour to others, for cash or payment in kind. Although rice cultivation was not necessarily a lucrative occupation, particularly for those who had little land, it held a prestige similarly observed elsewhere (Spencer 1990: 103). This prestige was strongly associated with notions of self-sufficiency, as families were usually able to save enough of their harvest to feed themselves for the entire season. The Periyakulam son-in-law of Jeyabalan, my landlord during the second year of my fieldwork, explained to me after their village feast that this was the first time in his forty-eight years that they had had to buy rice to eat. Banks (1957: 378) recorded that living off one’s own rice was also a boast in 1950s Jaffna, which he argued was due to the fact that fifty years earlier rice had been a luxury rather than a staple for most.

Nevertheless, farmers had ambivalent views about their livelihood. As in Kiribathgoda (Van Daele 2013b: 114), parents preferred their children to enter other professions, although rice cultivation is also something that people with other work can participate in irregularly, if not fully (Moore 1985). Although people enjoyed the communal side of cultivation, it was also often described as difficult (kashḍam), in reference both to physical hardship and risk. People spoke openly about their sadness (kavalai) when the crops failed. In 2017 a drought (varatci) prevented the sirubōham season entirely, and many of the men looked for other kinds of work, such as day labour in the ongoing construction of houses.

Recent technological developments had also proved to be a mixed blessing. Although improvements to roads and access had made it easier to sell their rice, the growing number of tractors and combine harvesters has had both social and economic repercussions. Nesaraja, who said that he had been the first person in Marudankandal to acquire a tractor (on lease), was annoyed that there were now so many, reducing the available work. Suresh, a poor farmer in Periyakulam, told me that nobody helped each other in the way they had done before the tractors came. In that system there had been ‘many good things’ (neraya nanmaiha), he said, but now it was all competition.
Land tenure and livelihood

Although historical research has demonstrated the complexity of land tenure in the Kotte and Kandyan kingdoms, far less is known about northern Sri Lanka. In the Sinhalese villages studied by Leach (1961), Obeyesekere (1967), and Spencer (1992: 368), cultivable land and water was held in common by kinship groups and shared according to a rotation system called *taṭṭumāru.*

In contrast, although the Marudankandal Kadaiyars sometimes spoke of the *kamam* as ‘our land’, it was not held communally. Around two thirds of the *kamam* was in fact owned by people from other villages, some but not all of whom were related to the Marudankandal Kadaiyars, while some people in Marudankandal also owned land in other village *kamams.* This is not a contemporary phenomenon; in the 1870s it was observed that half of Marudankandal’s *kamam* – which was probably smaller before the restoration of the Giant’s Tank – belonged to people from other villages. Paddy land in Matottam was either privately owned (*sonda kāṇi*) or leasehold tenancy (*kuttahai kāṇi*), and between 2013 and 2015, *kuttahai kāṇi* was rented for Rs 10,000-15,000 per acre according to quality and location.

Unlike in the Wet Zone, sharecropping, known in Sinhala as *ande* (Brow 1980), is rare, although later I will return to a defunct form of sharecropping which was once prevalent in Mannar and the Vanni.

On the other hand, there are historical signs of shared ownership of water, if not land, in the nineteenth century sources. Colonial administrators observed, for example, that the village tanks of the Vanni were held in common by several shareholders (Lewis 1895: 147). There were also *tāvadis* (or *tāvadi ĕrs*), tanks without permanent populations that were used, in addition to the village tank, for irregular paddy cultivation in exceptionally favourable circumstances (Parker 1880: 4, 22-23). Although I have not discovered how *tāvadi ĕrs* were acquired and controlled, they were owned by existing villages, undermining the notion that villages had a single tank in the Dry Zone (Pfaffengerber 1990a: 371). In 1876, 91 tank villages owned 114 *tāvadi ĕrs* beneath the Giant’s Tank, while an uncertain but much smaller number of *tāvadi ĕrs* existed within the Giant’s Tank itself (Parker 1881: 8). Although *tāvadi ĕrs* were also listed in the two Mannar Gazetteers published after the restoration of the Giant’s Tank (Denham 1906; Horsburgh 1916), they appear to have disappeared – or become sites for permanent villages – in the subsequent decades.

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29 This word has a similar meaning in Sinhala and Tamil, *taṭṭu* meaning ‘tray’ or ‘plot of land’, *māru* meaning ‘change’.

A detailed statistical analysis of land ownership and its relationship to identity in Matottam, today and in the past, must await future research, although in Chapter Six I will investigate nineteenth century evidence that cultivable land was owned by all castes, unlike in Jaffna. The 1946 census recorded that 11.1% of agricultural families in Mannar were landless, the lowest of any of the Dry Zone districts, but this data has been criticised for generalising from a single village in each District Revenue Officer Division (now Divisional Secretariat Division) (Farmer 1957: 66). Although deserving fuller investigation, I heard a number of remarks about the fact that people who moved to the district during the twentieth century began with very little or no paddy land and have slowly been buying plots over the decades.

The *kama vidâne* ('agriculture officer') of a majority Hindu village on the far side of Pallivasalpuram told me that the families owned between 0.25 and 0.5 acres. In contrast, I estimated from conversations in Marudankandal that the average (mode) extent of private paddy land was probably between two and three acres, which broadly reflects land ownership at the national level: in 2002, 70% of paddy-farming families owned less than one hectare (approximately 2.47 acres). This was considered a satisfactory amount, although the acreage cultivated by any individual family did not necessarily reflect this, nor remain constant from year to year, because land was often leased to and from others (sometimes both at the same time) according to a range of considerations: for instance, the distance to travel to the fields and the availability of family members to do the core work. In 2014, Nesaraja and Selva were cultivating eight acres beyond Periyakulam that was owned by relatives who now live in the UK. In the village, the largest landowners were Calistus and his wife Sonia, who owned twenty acres, much of it in a prime location immediately to the north of the main residential cluster.
Figure 2.2 provides a rough breakdown of the costs of farming. The most optimistic profit estimates I was given by farmers were between Rs 35,000 an acre for land owned outright, and Rs 20,000 for land rented. The most pessimistic was a maximum of Rs 10,000 for an acre of privately-owned land, which would make it impossible to make a profit from leased land. According to the numbers which I collected, it did seem as if the realistic profit expected from an acre of land was quite small, especially if the land was rented rather than owned outright. However, the question of profit was also complicated. Until its abolition in 1892, a ‘paddy tithe’ (or ‘grain tax’) of 10% was imposed on the harvest, which (assuming accurate accounting) produced a detailed record of the yield. Today farmers register their intended acreage in advance with the local Agricultural Service Centres, paying an acre tax of Rs 40 per acre. In this system the harvest is not recorded, and national yields are estimated by government agricultural scientists from sample cuttings in each district in combination with the total registered acreage and available water. In general, people could be vague and contradictory when I asked about their acreage, or sceptical about numbers given by others; Selva once said to me that if people claimed not to make a profit from rice cultivation they were lying.

A senior agricultural administrator in Mannar District said that the farmers did not like to reveal their acreage because it might reveal how much income tax they should be paying, although another argued that this had nothing to do with income tax because most farmers would not even enter the eligible bracket (annual income exceeding Rs 500,000, approximately £2,500 at that time). Both agreed, though, that the disinclination of farmers to declare their harvest was the reason it was not possible to measure the national production other than in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regular costs</th>
<th>Extras</th>
<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>Ploughing</td>
<td>Land rent</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutting bunds</td>
<td>Extra paddy seed</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sowing costs</td>
<td>Pesticide</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pesticides</td>
<td>Pesticide labour</td>
<td>2,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fertiliser</td>
<td>Transplanting</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvest costs</td>
<td>Harvest transport (depending on distance of field from nearest road)</td>
<td>up to 1,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>7-8,000 machine</td>
<td>2,000 labour</td>
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<tr>
<td>1,350</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Rs 27,450</td>
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<tr>
<td>8,000</td>
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<td>Rs 25,500</td>
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Figure 2.2 Average cultivation costs, per acre.
way that it was currently done. Some people’s hesitancy may have also been connected to the illegal cultivation of land that was unregistered or of the wrong type for the season (kamam rather than pulavu, or vice versa).

The Giant’s Tank System

The individual components of Kaṭṭukarai, the Tamil name for the Giant’s Tank, are easily understood: kaṭṭu means ‘bund’, and karai ‘bank’ or ‘shore’. No one, however, including the Irrigation Engineer at the Giant’s Tank, was able to explain to me what they meant in this combination. Is it possible that the bund of the Giant’s Tank was so large that it was thought of as a shore? The Dutch referred to the Giant’s Tank as Kaṭṭukarai, De Reusetank (‘the Giant Tank’), and De Reusewerk (‘the Giant Work’), which appear to be the origin of its contemporary English and Sinhalese names (Yoda Wewa also meaning ‘giant tank’). The British used both Kaṭṭukarai and Giant’s Tank until the middle of the nineteenth century (Tennent 1860b: 625 n. 3), at which point the latter use, subsequently known as ‘the Giant’s Tank’, began to take prominence.

However, an apparently false etymology, still in circulation today (Arumugam 1969: 333), arose in the nineteenth century after the government engineer and mapmaker Schneider recorded in 1807 that villagers claimed to have been told that the Giant’s Tank was constructed by sodien, or ‘giants’ (Schneider 1887). Kaṭṭukarai was explained as a contraction of Sodayan Kaṭṭu Karai, which was translated as the ‘Giant-built bund’ (Brohier 1935 III: 23; Parker 1881: 1). However, Sodayan Kaṭṭu Karai did not appear on any map, while the word sodayan was unknown to the people in Mannar during my fieldwork. The author of the 1870s Report (6) also notes that the Giant’s Tank did not derive its name from being built by giants. More significantly, this translation misunderstands both the local Tamil for ‘bund’ (kaṭṭu not karai), and ‘built’ (which would be kaṭṭina in this context). In 1739 Gustaaf Willem Baron van Imhoff, the Governor of Dutch Ceylon (1736-1739), reported a local claim that the Giant’s Tank had been built four hundred years earlier by a king called Syoliaan, who had died before its completion (van Imhoff 1843). During my fieldwork I heard a story that the Giant’s Tank was built by pūdam (a kind of powerful ghost or spirit).

Rice cultivation in contemporary Matottam relies heavily on the Giant’s Tank, which is able to irrigate between 25,000 and 31,500 acres (with some uncertainty due to wartime expansion). When the Aruvi Aru enters Mannar from the south-east it meets the Tekkam Anicut (aṇaikaṭṭu), an ancient stone weir built across the valley. (Figure 2.3) Some of the water is
turned into a channel leading west to the Giant’s Tank, and some into another channel leading south to Akattimurippu Tank. The Giant’s Tank is a roughly circular reservoir with a tall, seven-kilometre bund, a surface area of 7.75 square kilometres, and a relatively shallow capacity of 31,500 acre-feet. The paddy lands lie to the south and west, and forest to the north and east. The Giant’s Tank was designated an official wildlife sanctuary in 1954, in particular for its birdlife, although some of the villages close to the tank depend on it for commercial freshwater fishing.

The 162 downstream village tanks within the GTS receive water via a network of channels that eventually turns into a cascade, a type of irrigation in which water passes from tank to tank (Pannabokke 2009: 24). A small number of villages do not have a tank, and their inhabitants either irrigate their kamam directly from a channel or cultivate within the kamam of other villages. Before the construction of the GTS, village tanks were independent of each other,
and, because they relied exclusively on rainfall, could usually store only enough water for the *perumbōham*. Matottam also experienced numerous famines (*panjam*) and droughts or (*vargaṭci*) (Boake 1888: 40; VP DPI: 438; VP DPIII: 84;), although these did not end with the establishment of the GTS: a drought in the 1970s lasted for a number of years, and older villagers remembered harvesting and eating wild *pañdi nel* (literally ‘pig paddy’). Despite Matottam’s fertile soil, before the restoration of the Giant’s Tank the rice yield was therefore insufficient to feed the district’s population, and, like the Mannar Islanders, the mainland population relied on more expensive rice from other parts of Sri Lanka and abroad, as well as government relief and their own paddy tithes, which they bought back from local government stores.

The Assistant Government Agents of the nineteenth century complained regularly about the lack of water and the need for irrigation works (e.g., AR 1886: 125-126; Keane 1905: 19), focussing their attention on the Giant’s Tank (Bertolacci 1817: 11). The bund of the Giant’s Tank was still clearly visible after several centuries of disuse (Figures 2.4-5), while the dry bed, which was inhabited by several villages at the end of the nineteenth century, was described by Collector Sneyd in 1813 in this way: ‘The soil bears all the appearance of having been once covered with water consisting of a black [stiff] clay such as is generally found at the bottom of tanks’ (NASL 31/1). The British proposals to restore the Giant’s Tank were not the first. An attempt by Governor van Imhoff was abandoned due to a lack of labour (Brohier 1935 III: 23; van Imhoff 1843), and Governor Willem Jacob van de Graaff (1785-1794) was unable to finance a later plan through the Dutch East India Company or private investment (Anonymous 1843; Schrikker 2007: 79).

The reconstruction of the Giant’s Tank took place between 1896 and 1902, several years after work had begun to improve the local village tanks (AR 1898), and was the first major irrigation work in the Northern Province (Keane 1905: 28).\(^{31}\) The inhabitants of the villages on the tank bed were resettled elsewhere in Matottam, an event that was mentioned numerous times during my fieldwork. By 1903 the paddy yield was already large enough to feed the whole district, and the cost of rice had dropped to its lowest point in fifteen years (AR 1903); by 1905 the cultivable land had grown from 7,000 to 11,000 acres and the restoration had been declared a success, despite costing far more than expected (Keane 1905: 19). However, because the plan to restore the Giant’s Tank had not, for some reason, included the rest of the downstream system, the channels took another two decades to be completed.

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\(^{31}\) The final proposals were produced by government engineer Henry Parker (1880, 1882, 1893).
Despite having greatly expanded rice cultivation in Matottam, the GTS has its own drawbacks, chief of which is the risk of flooding. This is partly due to the absence of drainage channels, although the problem has been reduced by the widening of the Giant’s Tank’s own spillway (vān) in 2014. Despite the local proverb ‘when the sky cries, the land smiles’ (vānam aļudāl būmi sirikkum), an excess of rainfall at the wrong time can ruin the crops, and the water in downstream tanks can overflow upstream kamam in the flat landscape. (Figure 2.6) In 2014,
for example, the farmers in the village immediately downstream of Marudankandal did not open their spillway (which was made of sandbags after being destroyed in the war) because the tank water would ruin their kamam. When the water began to flood the Marudankandal kamam, the villagers, who had already cut the Marudankandal tank bund to let the water out, dismantled the sandbag dam during the middle of the night. More dangerously, excess rain in Mannar and further upstream occasionally breaches the Giant’s Tank bund, as happened during the 2012 perumbōham, flooding fields and villages and forcing people to flee to higher land.

Two further significant changes in local irrigation practices occurred during the development of the GTS. The first, most likely due to the expanding population establishing new villages, was the disappearance of the tāvadi ūrs, which are no longer remembered by this name today. The second was the development of a seasonal rotation system to manage the fact that the volume of water in the GTS during the sirubōham was still insufficient to cultivate the entirety of the kamam. The new system drew on an existing practice of pulavu (‘tank bed’) cultivation that historically existed in Mannar (Boake 1888: 38) and other parts of Sri Lanka (e.g., the Vanni [Lewis 1895: 171] and Anuradhapura [Leach 1961: 53]). Although tank bed cultivation was increasingly discouraged elsewhere (Leach 1961: 53), it was adopted in an altered form within the GTS as a method of restricting water usage: during the perumbōham only the kamam is cultivated, and during the sirubōham only the pulavu, which is approximately 3,000 acres of the total cultivable land in the GTS. I return to the organisation of this system below.

**Labour**

The informal labour economy of rice cultivation operates largely outside the purview of the state. In Marudankandal the responsibility for rice cultivation was held primarily by men, either the father of the family or, in his absence, adult sons. I was aware of only one woman who managed her own fields in this way, a middle-aged Hindu from a neighbouring village who had lost her husband in the war and cultivated on rented land with the help of her youngest child, a 13-year-old son. However, although regular tasks – such as monitoring the rice and the water level, spreading pesticides and fertiliser, and bureaucratic work – can generally be handled by a single person, extra labour was usually necessary for constructing the dirt walls between the fields (varambus or varappus), ploughing, weeding, transplanting, and harvesting.
The groups that performed these jobs usually consisted of four to five men, plus plough, tractor and combine harvester drivers when they were needed.

These men were preferably drawn from the extended family, and otherwise from unrelated but known people. They were paid in cash or sometimes in kind, the latter being more common with relatives. During my fieldwork a day’s labour (nāḷ kūḷi) was worth Rs 1,000. Some men occasionally worked in small, organised groups paid by the acre, a system known as *porattum*. Another form of reciprocal group labour exchange, similar to *attam*, a southern practice said to be under increasing pressure (Obeyesekere 1967: 8; Spencer 1990: 110-111; Van Daele 2013b: 126 and 328), was practised by families during the war, since when it appeared to have stopped.

Women were also involved in cultivation, although in more restricted roles. Women cooked for the men, sometimes carrying lunch parcels out to the fields if they were close enough from home, and they were also largely responsible for weeding and transplanting. Many Marudankandal women had participated in paid and unpaid agricultural labour in the past, but this had declined in recent decades. Some middle-aged women continued to work on their own land, but generally not for others, even kin. On the other hand, almost no younger unmarried women played a role in farming other than with regard to meals, and they made no secret of finding field labour unappealing. In this respect Marudankandal was different to many other nearby villages whose women did take part in wage labour, including for the Marudankandal
villagers themselves. Women were paid less than men: a day’s wage was between Rs 600-700. When I brought this up with people from other villages, it was suggested that Marudankandal women did not need to work because their families owned relatively more land and could support themselves without it. The Marudankandal villagers gave different (but not contradictory) reasons: that a man should be able to support his family by himself, that there is too much housework for women to spend time in the fields, and that women are too busy today with their studies and other types of work. One woman said that there is more shame (vekkam) about coolie work today because there is more civilisation (nāhariham).

The way in which cultivation labour is organised today is relatively recent. Until at least the end of the nineteenth century, a form of sharecropping was widely practised in Mannar and other parts of the Northern Province in which a labourer known as a vāra ḅuḍi was contracted to work for a farmer (kamakkāran) for a fixed period of time that could last for several years (Report 13; Boake 1888: 39-40; Lewis 1895: 197-205).32 The vāra ḅuḍi was responsible for the seed paddy and tax, the farmer for the cattle and farming equipment, and the harvest was divided equally between them. Some colonial officials criticised this system for heavily disadvantaged the vāra ḅuḍis, who lived on advances of rice and money and were therefore sometimes indebted to the farmers, who preferred to postpone the rice threshing from the April harvest to September to retain the vāra ḅuḍi’s labour (AR 1872; Boake 1888: 39; Lewis 1895). As Leach (1961) noted with regard to ande, it would be a mistake to call these sharecroppers ‘tenants’, because they were understood to work for the farmer. The end of the vāra ḅuḍi system is uncertain. According to the Census of Ceylon, 1946 (vol. 1, part 2: 391), only 0.1% of the cultivated paddy area of Mannar was ande, although this data suffers from the same caveat about the sample size mentioned above. If ande was used in the census as a generic term that covered vāra ḅuḍi, the latter must have ceased before this time. Today the term vāra ḅuḍi is known only by some of the oldest villagers.

The vāra ḅuḍis did not get rid of the need for extra labour, which was even more necessary in the past when transplanting was more common and the harvest was threshed by buffalo and hand. The historical sources reveal a moral economy within which farmers disliked doing manual labour in their own fields, and even more so in others’ fields. This also encompassed compulsory government labour, such as irrigation work in the tanks (AR 1890); the farmers were able to commute this labour with cash, which was often used by the government to pay

32 The Tamil Lexicon (University of Madras 1982) gives vāra ḅuḍi as a term from West Tamil Nadu that means ‘Tenant or cultivator who receives a fixed share of the produce’.
for labour from elsewhere. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, British administrators noted a lack of manual labourers in the district (e.g., AR 1891; AR 1902; Boake 1888: 35), with one AGA remarking that Mannar was ‘singularly devoid of any cooly class amongst its population’ (AR 1898).

Many coolies came from outside the district. Some were seasonal migrant labourers from India, Jaffna and the islands (Boake 1888: 35), and the east coast (AR 1953; Farmer 1957: 62). The labour on the Giant’s Tank, for example, appears to have been done mainly by coolies from India (AR 1898; AR 1908). Not all labourers came from outside the district. The Administrative Report of 1929 mentions Muslims from Musali, and some villagers remembered decades previously when Tamils of the Paraiyar caste came from the northern part of Mannar. Most recently, seasonal labourers came from the east coast and Mullaitivu (within LTTE territory), even during the ceasefire (SACC 2008: 4). Between 2013 and 2015 there were very few migrant labourers.

Migrant labour appears to have been increasingly supplemented during the past century by groups of local men and women organised by kangānis (supervisors), an institution more commonly associated with the hill country plantations (Bass 2013) but which appears to have endured for longer in Matottam. Although people of all castes were said to have participated in kangāni groups, the Marudankandal villagers sometimes pointed to the inhabitants of two nearby Hindu villages when discussing the best labourers of the past. At least some of these villagers had come to Mannar from other parts of Sri Lanka during the twentieth century, and a lack of paddy land seems to have been the key reason for their heavy participation in day labour. In recent years kangāni labour had almost entirely disappeared, which the villagers attributed to a scarcity of workers due to death and emigration during the war, the high cost of wage labour, and the reduction of labour-intensive transplanting. However, near Marudankandal a group of around fifteen, mainly Hindu women continued to work as a group, although the woman in her sixties (also a Hindu) who led them told me that this was not kangāni work per se because she was not responsible for them.

Another change of note, which has been occurring at different speeds throughout Sri Lanka (Van Daele 2013b: 299), is the adoption of combine harvesters and tractors for ploughing (as well as an immobile thresher called a ‘tsunami’). The number of tractors in Matottam is growing, and a handful of families in Marudankandal had their own. Owning and driving a tractor was an opportunity for extra income at both the beginning and end of the season, and those who did were often very busy; when no Marudankandal tractor was available farmers would usually hire one from a larger, neighbouring, mainly Muslim village. Getting hold of a
combine harvester at the end of season was a harder task. There were very few combines in Matottam, and those near Marudankandal were owned by three closely related Muslim families in Pallivasalpuram. Not only did all of the combine mechanics come from some distance away to work the season, but the lack of combines nationally was enough for the owners to transport the machines across the country and find work during harvests falling at other times of the year.

**Water**

Mosse writes that water is ‘a productive and symbolic resource’ that is ‘integral to the historical making of regionally-specific institutions’ (2003: 4). In this chapter I have already discussed the role of tank irrigation in the precolonial Dry Zone kingdoms, as well as the way that changes occurred in Matottam after the establishment of the GTS. In this final section of the chapter I describe the institutions, village and state, through which water is distributed in the system today.

As in Ramnad (Mosse 2003: 5), temples do not play a direct role in water management. At the level of the village, irrigation works are managed by Farmers Organizations (*vivasāyi amaippu*). The origins of the Farmers Organizations are complex, and because they are related to state intervention in caste I will return to them again in Chapter Six. What is most important is that the Farmers Organizations are the legacy of the government response to the perceived decline in village irrigation works caused by the abolition in 1832 of ‘compulsory service’ – known as *rājakāriya* (‘service to the king’) in Sinhalese and in Tamil as *ūlliyan* (‘service to god, king’; Cre-A 2011: 243) – labour performed for the state on the basis of caste and (particularly in the south) land tenure (Brow 2011b: 128-129; Roberts 1972: 57). The Paddy Lands Irrigation Ordinance (no. 9) of 1856 and successive legislation (see for example Brow 2011b) was intended to renew and formalise ‘traditional’ institutions and customs that had fallen out of use, although in reality the views of villagers were not sought (Samaraweera 1978b: 1999, referenced in Spencer 1992: 363) and Government Agents retained the power to create rules themselves (Roberts 1972: 57-58). The ordinance drew heavily on Maine’s contemporary writings on the Indian ‘village community’, which was understood to be self-sufficient and self-governing (Samaraweera 1978a and 1978b).

The core of the ordinance was the creation of the *gansabhava* (Sinhala for ‘village council’), which was elected on an ad hoc basis and settled disputes, and the application of sanctions under the chairmanship of the Government Agent or his nominee (Roberts 1972). After 1867, irrigation headmen were also able to enforce the rules. The Irrigation Ordinances, however,
were not applied universally throughout Sri Lanka, and appear to have been enforced in Mannar relatively late. The first irrigation headmen, known in Mannar as the kama vidâne, or ‘agriculture officer’, and as the vel vidâne or wattai vidâne in other parts of Sri Lanka, were only elected in 1896.\textsuperscript{33}

Sri Lanka’s Irrigation Department was formed at the start of the twentieth century. The GTS is overseen by the Giant’s Tank Irrigation Engineer. (However, the Irrigation Department does not oversee all irrigation systems, which are split between central and provisional governments.) The most significant state intercession into local farming, as in other parts of Sri Lanka, is the Cultivation Meeting (or Kanne Meeting), which takes place before each of the two seasons and is attended by Farmers Organization members from across Matottam, the highest civil servants in the district, and the local heads of government bodies such as Irrigation, Agriculture, Agrarian Services, and more. These meetings are used to establish a tailored set of rules for the coming season, such as the dates between which water will be released from the Giant’s Tank and the total acreage that can be cultivated during the sirubōham.

The Farmers Organizations have immediate responsibility for both kamam and pulavu. Anyone can own or rent village land, but those who cultivate must pay Rs 400 per acre to the Farmers Organization. The Organization’s committee is annually elected and is unpaid apart from the kama vidâne, who receives Rs 400 for each acre he oversees (which was formerly paid in rice). The Farmers Organizations organise works such as the clearing of irrigation channels that have become blocked with reeds by the start of the season. This is a communal responsibility, and farmers who do not attend are fined Rs 500. Perhaps most importantly, the Farmers Organizations manage the final allocation of pulavu during the sirubōham. Pulavu is owned by the government, and each farmer receives without charge a ‘quota’ (īvu) of around 10% of the kamam area that they cultivated during the preceding perumbōham. Under the LTTE, however, pulavu was allocated differently: all families, not just those who had cultivated kamam, were given an acre to cultivate.

The Irrigation Engineer manages the total cultivable acreage for the sirubōham by limiting pulavu cultivation to specific tanks, and individual farmers are assigned to tanks by the Agrarian Service Centres. The īvu granted to a farmer depends on the kamam acreage registered at the Centres before the perumbōham, and farmers submit a list of three preferred pulavu sites, with preference given to people in their own village. In 2014, for example, it was said that

\textsuperscript{33} The kama vidâne was also occasionally referred to as the nîrpâsenai sêvaiyâlar (‘water turning servant’).
farmers from eighteen other villages were also cultivating the Marudankandal *pulavu*. Finally, the Farmers Organization is responsible for matching īvus to specific plots. This takes place during a meeting at the start of the *sirubōham*, during which farmers draw numbered lots before walking, en masse and along a customary path, through the *pulavu* while the committee members assign fields with an extensive discussion about correct acreage. In Marudankandal the northern half of the *pulavu* is reserved for larger īvus, and the fields are larger and more regularly shaped, while the southern half is used for smaller plots. One area is also reserved for the Marudankandal villagers themselves. (Figures 2.7-8)

Figure 2.7 The īvu lottery.
CONCLUSION

This chapter has analysed Mannar from a broad geographical, ecological, and historical perspective, laying the necessary foundations for a contextualisation of contemporary society in the rest of this thesis as well as in other research. It has also assessed the significance and practice of rice cultivation in Matottam, to which I will return in Chapter Six. This broad approach, however, has said little about Marudankandal itself, and in the next chapter I look specifically at the village in the transformed context of the postwar period, as well as the position of myself and my fieldwork.

Figure 2.8 Allocating the īvu in the pulavu.
CHAPTER THREE

Village, ethnography, and the postwar period

In this chapter the focus of the thesis narrows, turning from Mannar across the centuries to Marudankandal in the postwar period. The chapter has two intertwined purposes. First, it enters into the village through its spaces and forms of social distinction, while also describing the experiences of villagers in the postwar period. Second, it locates my experiences and research within this context, as reflected in methods, position, and challenges. If ethnography is ‘a form of publicly displayed learning’ (Whitaker 1996: 8), then ethnographers working with people and places undergoing ‘uncertain transitions’ (Burawoy and Verdery 1999) have an even greater responsibility to contextualise their research and interpretations.

ORIENTATION

As one of the first researchers to conduct long-term ethnographic fieldwork in the Northern Province after the war, I began my fieldwork in a context of multiple uncertainties regarding security, mobility, and the large gaps in the ethnographic literature. Although I had been to Sri Lanka twice before my fieldwork, having volunteered as an English teacher for several months in Kegalle District in 2003-2004 and for a shorter period in Batticaloa in 2005, I first visited the Northern Province in the summer of 2012, before returning in October to spend six months in Jaffna learning Tamil and planning my fieldwork. My initial contacts in the Northern Province, established through personal and academic connections, were Catholic priests, and the local Church continued to play an important role throughout my fieldwork, which was aided by being Catholic myself. During this initial six months I also applied to join Colombo University’s sociology department as a visiting student, which was necessary for my residence visa and research permission, and by the time I had returned to Sri Lanka in July 2013 my application had been accepted. From then until July 2015 I spent most of my time in Mannar, and after returning to the UK I made three further trips, each of less than a month, in 2015, 2017, and 2018.

During the initial six months my initial research plan morphed from a study of postwar

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34 As far as I am aware, the first was Stine Bruland (2013, 2015), who worked in Jaffna throughout 2012.
reconstruction to questions of Catholicism and caste. After visiting a number of Catholic parishes in the Northern Province, I decided to conduct my fieldwork in mainland Mannar, motivated by a mix of personal attraction towards the countryside, the prominence of Catholicism, and a feeling that most academic attention was focussed on Jaffna. Moreover, Mannar was perhaps the least politically sensitive of the former warzones in the north (in part because the controversy around the war’s end focussed largely on events in Mullaitivu, while Jaffna was still the centre of political controversy). A number of Masters and PhD students worked in Mannar before and after my arrival (e.g., Borner 2017; Hatumi 2012, 2017; Johnson 2012; McFarlane 2016; Scholtens 2016).35 Mannar’s tiny tourism industry, and the reduction of the international NGO presence after the war, meant that foreigners were unusual and conspicuous, something I felt particularly as I travelled throughout the district and attended large Catholic events. My presence aroused suspicion among local Tamils and Muslims as well as the predominantly Sinhalese police and armed forces, with consequences that I will describe in more detail below. However, there was a stark difference between Hatumi’s (2012) descriptions of the restrictions in place in Mannar between 2008 and 2010 and my experiences from 2012 onward (also see SACC 2008). Although this attention circumscribed the kind of research I felt it was possible to do, I was not limited with regard to where I lived and with whom I associated.

Within a couple of weeks of arriving in Mannar in 2013 I had met two priests, each overseeing large farming parishes, who invited me to do my research with them. Of these, I chose Alayankulam parish partly because it was situated in the former warzone, and partly because I had learnt a lot about it from John, the middle-aged manager of a guesthouse in Mannar Town where I stayed initially and intermittently over the next two years. John was from Alayankulam itself, and I discussed many aspects of my fieldwork with him. However, although I did not know it then, one of the villages in the southern parish – which I have called Tenkulam – was the location of one of the four Kadaiyar village communities on the mainland. They had close kin ties to Marudankandal, and I visited a number of times. This was not the only coincidence. The Catholic area of Jaffna city that I had visited often during my first six months also turned out to be home to one of Jaffna District’s few Kadaiyar groups. Through the Kadaiyars in Marudankandal I also got to know new people there in Jaffna.

Because many families were still living in temporary houses in 2013, John organised a room for me with a small Catholic congregation living in Marudankandal, whom I refer to as the

35 Some of these were students of Maarten Bavinck at the University of Amsterdam.
Brothers, who ran extracurricular classes for the local school children while sustaining themselves through farming. When I arrived, my initial contacts in the area were the Alayankulam parish priest, the Brothers, and a couple of John’s friends. Parish priests in Sri Lanka tend to be transferred every several years, and the priest was soon replaced by another, Fr Lawrence, who remained throughout my fieldwork. Before he left, however, the initial parish priest, after the first Sunday Mass, introduced me to a group of male elders who came from a number of villages in the parish. Otherwise, I got to know people by myself, through village and church events and by spending time on Main Road.

My accommodation with the Brothers was always intended to be a temporary solution, partly because I wanted to improve my Tamil and I spoke only English with Catholic clergy throughout my fieldwork. After a couple of months I began to stay with Nesaraja and Selva, first mentioned in Chapter Two, who lived with their two children (aged seven and ten), and two teenage boarders who were studying at Alayankulam MMV, the local secondary school, in a relatively isolated house (a tani vīḍu) that was however beside the road that led from Marudankandal Junction to Pallivasalpuram. The house was often busy with both sets of parents, between whose houses the two children shuttled back and forth, and with various people from different villages who worked with Nesaraja. They offered me a tiny ‘temporary house’ (tarkāliha vīḍu) beside the newly constructed building in which they lived with the boarders, but because the temporary house did not have electricity when I arrived I spent the first month sleeping on a mattress in their hall (as the living rooms are known). This temporary house turned out to be a difficult work environment, sweltering inside during the day and, as this was the perumbōham, or rainy season, cold at night, but through Nesaraja and Selva I got to know many people in Alayankulam parish and other neighbouring villages, particularly Pallivasalpuram.

The duration of my fieldwork was characterised by frequent invitations to homes, life-cycle celebrations, and religious events (Christian, Hindu and Muslim). Many of these took me to other villages, travel made easier by a motorbike that I bought in Vavuniya at the beginning, and without which I would have had a very different experience. Although I spent more and more of my time in Marudankandal, I was initially uncertain about whether this was the ‘right’ location for my fieldwork, and at the start of 2014, feeling unsettled by the constant moving around and my language ability, and struggling to define the focus of my research – that sense of indeterminacy Candea describes as the result of the tyranny of choice (2007: 173-174) – I returned to Jaffna for another two months. During this period, however, I made a couple of trips to Mannar, and returned permanently at the end of February. Throughout the rest of my
fieldwork I returned to Jaffna for short visits every several weeks, and also made a number of visits to Colombo and the east coast.

By the time I returned to Mannar at the end of February 2014, Nesaraja and Selva’s temporary house had been taken by a third boarder. As there was no other room available in Marudankandal at the time, I spent the following two months back at the guesthouse in Mannar, riding the journey to the village by bike on most days. In May 2014 I found a room in a house just behind the Brothers’ compound, which I rented until I left Sri Lanka in the middle of 2015. This was a new building owned by Jeyabalan and Magdalena, a couple who lived in a village a little beyond Pallivasalpuram and had seven children between the ages of 20 and 45, and it was occupied only by their son Nicholas. He was an unmarried man in his late 20s who taught at Alayankulam MMV and was keen for some company, although he was transferred to Jaffna only a couple months later for a government teacher training programme. Nicholas usually stayed with his parents when he returned at the weekend, and in his place there were a succession of temporary lodgers: two female teachers from Jaffna who decided it was inappropriate to stay with me and left after the first night; a pregnant teacher from Mannar Town who had been told not to travel, and was accompanied by her mother and three-year-old niece, and occasionally her husband at the weekend; and lastly, three male Tamil construction workers from the east coast.

METHODS

Although I had intended to live in a village when I arrived in Mannar, I had only a loosely conceived idea of what this would mean in practice, viewing the village primarily as a place of residence and convenient location to investigate issues operating at a higher regional level (a la Geertz 1973: 22). My increasing focus on Marudankandal in itself was catalysed by my direct experiences, in particular my growing understanding of the way that village populations were characterised by densely networked kin-caste groups, and frequent participation in a variety of types of events. I want to set this last point against a common critique of the village study: that it attempts an artificial ‘holism’. For example, in a recent volume on ethnographic methods, Kelly (2014: 6-7) argues that it is unviable to simply study everything in the village (whether that was ever actually possible in the past). Similarly, a recently graduated UCL classmate of mine contrasted his fieldwork in urban America against the idea that a village vantage point allows the anthropologist to see almost everything in the society in question (Knuutila 2015: 77). These positions misunderstand the nature of participant observation in a
village, or at least one in Mannar, both in the idea that the anthropologist sees (or wants to see) everything and that they are aiming for ‘holistic representation’. Rather than arriving with the intention of ‘studying everything’, I found that being open to the variation of everyday life, instead of strictly determining and following a research plan, was itself a skill that had to be developed. Participant observation in this context involved following the villagers in being part of village life, in which receiving invitations (*anbalippu*) was a significant cultural phenomenon and opting out was viewed negatively. (People would rather not turn up than say they will not come.) This does not mean that I did not take regular decisions about the direction of my research, in the short and long term, but that these were constantly complicated by social necessities that demanded flexibility. Weddings could take several days, and everything was dropped for a funeral. Increasingly I tried to prioritise these things within Marudankandal, where things were more connected to people I knew better.

If this resulted in a certain shapelessness, it also had numerous benefits. Taking a slower, more flexible approach was necessary to meet the rhythm of life in a rice farming village. Unlike the fixed nature of government and private work, the farming schedule was unpredictable, both individually (GTS farmers do not work at the same time as in other parts of Sri Lanka [e.g., Gaasbeek 2010]) and regionally (due to the rain). Partly because of this, and the fact that I was pursuing topics beyond rice cultivation, I decided not to focus on a single family and their farmwork. Men were highly mobile when not in the fields, which often made it hard to make concrete plans to meet. The fact that I did not live with a family during the second year aided my ability to control my own schedule, although it made me less aware of household rhythms.

The act of *knowing* played an important role in my relationships. Not only was it viewed positively that I had invested in learning about the village, particularly with regard to people’s families, but it was essential in understanding talk about people and villages throughout Matottam. Stories circulated and were in no way restricted to the village. The villagers often assumed knowledge that I did not have and were bemused when I did not know. Awareness of local contexts – such as knowing which castes lived in which villages – was a valuable skill, and usually not looked upon with suspicion, and I will return to this point in later chapters. Connecting with expanding networks of people had its downside, as the number of people whom I needed to remember began to get out of control.

I always carried a notebook with me, and often wrote openly in public, as well as carrying a large camera to many events. I also frequently made audio recordings of public events such as Mass and, with permission, less public events such as the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare
Organization meetings and two annual caste meetings. Heslop (2014: 52) talks about the difficulty of asking about controversial topics, specifically with regard to caste. In Mannar as will be emphasised later, controversial has a more dangerous meaning with regard to the war. Sometimes I was wary of having formal discussions with people in public. In conversations at home with villagers, however, I made much less use of my recorder and instead made written notes, preferring to maintain a more relaxed atmosphere and defuse suspicions about my work. For this reason, my notes featured rather less direct speech than I had expected. In general, I found that the formal interview was a rather inappropriate method for everyday life in the village, grating against the informal relationships which I had already developed. I often wrote brief notes of topics that I would try to follow up with individuals, often at their homes. More targeted research involved visiting government offices to talk about farming and irrigation. When I had insufficient time to write up my notes, I would keep a daily log book as a minimum.

Village life could be physically challenging. On rare occasions when it was necessary I found it very difficult to sleep on a mat on the floor, like most people; I struggled to wake up at around 5am when staying with a family and to sleep in the hot afternoon. Although I was rarely sick, I fell off my motorbike several times, suffered from heat rash throughout, and spent a couple of weeks near the end hobbling after knocking off my big toenail with a manvetṭi. But the most challenging experience was participating in a 100 km pilgrimage in 2014, from St Mary’s in Alayankulam to a shrine in Vavuniya District. Having unwisely brought a camera and small bag with me, by the end of the first day we had covered almost half the distance and I could barely walk, having been left far behind by the other men from the village. (The competitive speed shown by many pilgrims on these occasions was complained about by others. While walking to Parappukadandandan, John’s teenage sister asked, sarcastically: ‘Is this a foot [walking] pilgrimage or a running pilgrimage?’ [pāda yāṭṭiraiyā ōḍi yāṭṭiraiyā?]) Thanks to Nesaraja’s brother Joseph, a bus driver, I was able to sleep on the back seat of the bus which I was later to sit on, and for the next day I had to travel in the same bus with the elderly and invalids at the end of the line. Others were unsympathetic, many in pain themselves and experiencing dehydration that made it hard to urinate. One of the organising priests said ‘They have so many problems, but they are still walking.’ On the second night, Joseph told me that although he found it very difficult, it made him think about Jesus’ worse sufferings.

The political sensitivities of the postwar context made me reluctant to collect two kinds of data. First, like Jegathesan in her fieldwork with Hill Country Tamils (2013: 24), I did not engage in the sustained collection of statistical household data (financial, land ownership, etc.). Although I did collect some of this kind of data in bits and pieces across various conversations,
I am not able to make a range of quantitative claims about the village population. Kadirgamar has also recently observed the reluctance of many villagers to be recorded and participate in surveys in Jaffna (2017: 131). Second, from the very beginning I was conscious that, even if it arose naturally in conversation, the war could not be actively pursued as a research topic without risking the safety of my informants and jeopardising my fieldwork. These kinds of research avenues may become more viable in the future if political sensitivities diminish, but for now they will be more successful through other kinds of shorter, more anonymous, interview-based research (e.g., Terpstra and Frerks 2017).

It is important to note the role of language in my fieldwork, particularly in light of the paucity of linguistic or even linguistically-inclined anthropology in Sri Lanka, Argenti-Pillen (2003) and Davis being notable exceptions. When I arrived in Marudankandal I found myself still with a very basic level of Tamil. Despite my six months in Jaffna, I had largely taught myself from the few materials available, although I also brought daily questions to a retired, English-speaking maths teacher called Augustine whom I visited regularly. I have written elsewhere about my experience of learning Tamil, and the complexities of diglossia (Esler 2019). In Mannar I considered employing an interpreter, at least to work with me during the initial months, but this turned out to be more difficult than I anticipated, mainly because it was quickly clear to me that this would hinder my open-ended and irregularly-timed approach to fieldwork, but also because the political/village sensibilities militated against bringing someone from the outside in a way that was different from my own experience. As a result, other than two weeks in November 2013, when Vincent – previously encountered in Daniel’s yard – was able to spend time with me, I conducted my research independently. Although this would eventually mean I had a good sense of local colloquial vocabulary, it inevitably had an impact on the lines of research I pursued, particularly in the early months, forcing me to develop language dealing with all the everyday things. However, my fieldwork was not all conducted in Tamil, as a number of people I knew in Marudankandal and elsewhere spoke English. This gave me the opportunity to clarify language matters from time to time, and meant that my research was conducted in two languages. As my initial contacts were the older generations of men, and some of the younger men were also rather shy about their English skills, it was not until my second year that this became fully apparent to me.
VILLAGE PLACES

I began to describe Marudankandal-as-place in Chapter One, and will continue to do so in Chapter Three. In this section I attempt to convey a phenomenological sense of the physicality of the village through four places that played a dominant role in my fieldwork and the ways in which they were used: Main Road, St Anthony’s, the paddy fields, and people’s homes.

Main Road

Main Road exemplified Moore’s loose concept (1985: 125-126) of the ‘central place’ in rural Sri Lanka, serving transport, administrative, and commercial functions, but, as I described in Chapter One, set somewhat apart from the residential areas of the villages. Although a small number of shopkeepers lived in houses immediately behind (and in one case above) their shops, most lived in other villages. The land beyond the road itself was largely empty. There were a number of government offices and institutions, including Alayankulam MMV (whose sports ground was sometimes used for political events), the Marudankandal GN office, public library, and police station. By the middle of 2015 there were also around fifty shops, many of which had opened during the previous two years, which included hardware stores, barber saloons, tea shops, restaurants, one chicken stall (open daily), one beef stall (open on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays), general stores (pala sarakku kadai), a pharmacy, mens’ and womens’ tailors, two vegetable shops, ‘fancy shops’ selling miscellaneous objects such as household implements and children’s toys, bicycle repair shops, a garage, and a shop selling concrete pillars for house construction. Some of these businesses occupied stalls in a recently-built government marketplace (bajar). During the harvest, Main Road was also a collection point for rice vendors and their lorries, although these also came directly to the fields.

The majority of the shops on Main Road were run by Muslims, whose importance to local business was indicated by the mosque, which was rebuilt and reopened in 2015. Despite their proximity to Main Road, the Marudankandal families were not particularly well represented, with Das’ tea kadai in the bajar and two general stores facing each other near Alayankulam Junction being among the few examples. One of these general stores was run by Nirmala, the eldest child in a large family also known for owning the largest herd of cattle in Marudankandal. The other, larger and busier, was run by Vasanthan, a hard-working middle-aged English speaker who opened a hardware store in the adjacent building in 2014, and was
an old schoolfriend of John. His younger brother Allan, who was in his mid-twenties, also worked in the shop, and slept there every night as a security guard.

There were two tiny family-run shops in Marudankandal’s main residential cluster, selling imperishable foods such as sugar and sweets and other basic household items like soap and matches. Very few households had a fridge, and so bought fresh food daily. At mid morning I often saw men cycling home with the ingredients for lunch. Only fish, which was eaten more regularly than meat, came directly to the village, brought from the coastal villages by bicycle and sold from battered polystyrene boxes. The late arrival of the fish vendor was an occasional problem for women trying to cook lunch. In this context, visiting Main Road, sometimes multiple times, was part of the daily routine of many people in the surrounding villages, whether to shop, visit the government offices, or catch the bus to Mannar Town.

Although Main Road was a good place to meet and talk, this was mainly the case for men rather than women. In general, women came to Main Road less often and returned home after their purchases without lingering to talk. Men behaved much more freely, frequently meeting at Main Road to chat, and dividing generationally between their favourite tea shops (older) and barber saloons (younger). Although women’s beauty parlours are becoming more popular, with several in Mannar Town, adult women in the villages rarely cut their hair, and saloons are visited only by men, boys, and pre-adolescent girls. As in other most parts of Sri Lanka, sunset marked a ‘de facto curfew for women’ Gamburd (2008: 66; also Derges 2008: 99), and after dark usually only men were found on Main Road, although even they were very few.

**St Anthony’s**

St Anthony’s church (kōyil) was painted yellow and brown, the colours of the saint (antōniyār), and its silver dome, decorated with coloured glass and statues of white angels looking out in four directions, rose above a roof of red tiles. Inside, other than statues (surubam) of St Anthony and Mary the design was simple, although the church was decorated with flowers and banners during feasts. Like most local Catholic churches there were no pews, only a handful of plastic chairs used by some of the oldest parishioners, special guests, and local religious members during Mass. Everyone else sat and knelt on the red, cracking, concrete floor. White wooden pillars supported the roof of the nave, and the transept crossed at the altar, one side occupied by the altar boys, the other by the choir and sound set. Above the altar, on the inside of the dome, were painted scenes from the life of St Anthony and the holy spirit in the form of a dove. The dove also represented the Kadaiyars’ identification with the feast of Pentecost, which was
said to have been given to them by the Church in honour of the Mannar Martyrs.

After Main Road, the church compound was perhaps the next closest thing to a public space in Marudankandal, and one that was more acceptable for women. It sat beside the junction at the entrance into the main residential cluster, clearly visible from the road. There was a bus stop on the opposite corner of the junction, although the shady portico was just too far away to be able to run for the Mannar bus when it made its brief stop. Most Catholic villagers in Marudankandal went to at least two weekly Masses: Tuesday afternoon Mass was at St Anthony’s, while Sunday morning Mass alternated between St Anthony’s and St Mary’s in Alayankulam. At other times people were often kōyilaḍi, ‘by the church’, to pray, prepare the church for Mass, or meet people. In the days before the annual feast men would come for siramadāṇam, communal voluntary labour, to clean the ground of weeds and bring fresh dirt where needed. The compound was also used for other gatherings, such as farmers’ meetings, and occasional events such as a performance by a visiting drama troupe. At the end of my fieldwork, I organised a thanksgiving Mass in the church, which was followed by a lunch on the portico.

**In the fields**

From the northern bund it was possible to look out across a broad swathe of kamam. The individual fields (vayal) were rough squares and rectangles, usually around a quarter of an acre in size, separated by thin mud walls (varambu or varappu) a little over a foot high. People took off their slippers before nimbly walking along the varambus without sinking into the mud, a skill that I was never able to fully acquire. Sluices in the bund allowed water to pass into small channels and from there via temporary holes into the fields. As the paddy sheafs grew it became hotter among the fields, and splashes signalled the movement of hidden snakes, frogs, freshwater turtles, and crabs. More threatening to the crops, although only at certain parts of the cycle, were birds and pigs, which were scared off at night with shouts and firecrackers. When fallow, the empty kamam became dry and overgrown with weeds, and was used to graze cows.

After sowing it was necessary to visit the fields regularly. A Tamil man in Alayankulam explained: ‘You need to come to the fields every day, twice a day, to look for insects. Even when you are eating you will worry about it.’ Apart from Good Friday, when it was bad luck to work, they could be found in the fields on any day of the week. Farmers often visited their fields early in the morning, around dawn, which gave them time to do other things, such as
work for other farmers – day labour usually lasted from eight or nine am until sunset – during the rest of the day. Kiruba, who was studying at Jaffna University, said that he was able to sleep for much longer in his rented room than at home, because his father Mariyadas always got up at five o’clock, regardless of the time he had gone to sleep, and expected the rest of the family to rise at the same time. Sometimes they heard Mariyadas alone outside in the darkness, scolding the sun to rise so that he could get to work. On some occasions, to protect the crop from pigs or birds or when the combine harvesters were in such demand that they ran throughout the night, the men would spend the night in the fields.

I often walked across the kamam, talking briefly to whomever was out there. I also spent the occasional full day helping with group tasks as far as I was able, although I was inadequate to the most physical man vēlai (dirt work). This involved using the manvetṭṭi (literally ‘cutting earth’, known in Sri Lankan English as a mamotty), the ubiquitous heavy hoe with a wide sharp blade and a thick wooden shaft around three feet long. Although manvetṭṭis were often used as a scraping tool, to flatten the ridged surface of a field after ploughing or to clear the weeds from the yard, its primary function was to swiftly cut and move large chunks of dirt. This was a precision task which took great experience, strength and dexterity. The men held the shaft with both hands together at the end and cut down, then lifted and twisted the blade at the same time while sliding one hand down towards it, keeping the slab of wet earth caught within it. Maintaining this motion, they could turn the manvetṭṭi in any direction and send the earth flying. When I tried this myself, my hands were soon blistered and bleeding.

**Homes and hospitality**

A rare closed front door was a sign that nobody was home. House visits were a daily activity for villagers, and came to be central to my fieldwork, because in general people preferred to talk at home (although I often dropped in unannounced). In a practical sense, this was the easiest way of meeting people in the absence of a universal public space, particularly for women. Although younger women were increasingly looking for jobs outside, middle-aged and older women spent most of their time at home, much of which was dedicated to cooking three meals a day. But men also returned home frequently as they went back and forth between the fields and Main Road. House-visiting was always a good opportunity to learn – or to be reminded – about family, particularly from the photos hung on the walls of the hall and the photo albums (usually of weddings and puberty ceremonies) offered to guests to view.
The Tamil term for family, *kuḍumbam*, can be used in both a general and a more common nuclear sense (contra Bruland 2015: 9; and Sivathamby 1995: 23). As nuclear family, *kuḍumbam* refers primarily to a couple and their children, although it can also include additional members such as an elderly parent or the child of a close relative or friend being raised by the *kuḍumbam* (known as a *valarppu piḷḷai*, or ‘adopted child’). Despite this flexibility, the *kuḍumbam* is an important unit for enumerating and organising of groups of people: the size of a village, church congregation, or caste association would usually be given according to the number of families, rather than individuals, while payments to institutions such as churches or caste associations were also usually made on a family basis.

Like the Catholic Sinhalese fishers with whom Stirrat did fieldwork in the 1980s (1988: 87), and the Sinhalese Buddhist farmers described by Ryan et al. in the 1950s (1958: 13), in Marudankandal the nuclear family was associated with concepts of separation and self-sufficiency. Although married couples often lived with one set of parents, the ideal was to own a house of their own, and dowries (*sīdanam*) often consisted of property or land for this purpose. When a new couple did not own a house, it was generally considered preferrable to
live with the husband’s parents. A man who lived with his wife’s parents after marriage was sometimes called a viṭṭoda māppillai (‘bridegroom with a house’) which could pose a ‘prestige problem’ (gauruvam piraccinai). However, these different practices appeared to be less overtly defined than among the Sinhalese, who possess specific terms for uxorilocal (binna) and virilocal (dīga) forms of marriage residence.

The tendency towards separate households was evident when more than one family were living together, as was the case in a few homes, in which case the younger family had their own room in the house. Nesaraja’s younger brother Joseph, the bus driver, occupied the second of two bedrooms in Mariyadas’ house with his wife Jeya (Kiruba’s older sister) and two young children, while slowly building their own house nearby on a plot of reclaimed kamam. Similarly, Marcus and Josephine’s son Dileepan and his wife Niro (the younger sister of Mariyadas’ wife Christina) – who were of similar ages to Joseph and Jeya, and also had two daughters of similar ages – occupied their own room. When I was visiting one day, Marcus, wanting to retrieve Dileepan and Niro’s wedding album from their locked room during one of my visits, called out to Josephine, who was cooking, ‘Where’s the key for Dileepan’s house?’ (Dileepanda viṭṭa engē turappu?). Cooking often replicated this separation, with wives tending to work on separate meals (even if they were shared).

Most houses in the area had been destroyed during the war, sometimes multiple times. Marcus said that they had lost three houses, and they had built the new one in a slightly different part of the compound to avoid bad luck. When the villagers returned to Marudankandal after the war they lived mainly in temporary houses made of wood, plywood, uncovered brick, and corrugated iron, which were often paid for by local and international NGOs. Over the following years these were dismantled as permanent houses were built, a process that was nearing its end in 2017. The funding for these came from donors including international NGOs, the Sri Lankan government and, during my fieldwork, the Indian government. Money was allocated to individual families, and donees selected one of a number of basic house designs, although they were able to elaborate upon the designs according to their own wishes if they could afford it.

The money was released in stages to groups of families according to a hierarchy of needs, and villagers often grumbled about delays. The total amount given was given Rs 550,000 (worth approximately £2,750 during my fieldwork), which covered around two thirds of the minimum cost of a house, and the remaining third had to be raised independently. In addition, each family received its allowance not all at once but in portions in order for the Grama Niladhari and housing scheme staff to inspect the work and confirm that the money was not being misused. There were many construction workers in the area, many of whom, like my
brief housemates, had come from the east coast in search of work, although many men in Marudankandal also had knowledge of construction work at different levels. The staggered release of the money, and the financial inability of some families to complete their house, meant that buildings were often unfinished for long periods. In particular, the kitchen was often postponed and cooking took place instead in temporary houses left standing for this purpose. (Figure 3.1)

Compounds were usually separated by barbed wire or palmyrah-branch fences, with loose wooden gates usually closed only at night. A very small number of prewar mud houses (*maṇṭīḍu*) with thatched roofs, and brick houses (*kal ṭīḍu*) built in older styles, had survived the war and were still in use. The housing scheme designs were different to older houses in a number of ways. These were one-storey buildings with a main room (the *hall*) entered immediately through the front door, to which were attached two or three bedrooms and a kitchen. Unlike earlier houses, they had a high tiled roof, and in most the absence of ceilings during my fieldwork allowing sound to travel easily between the rooms. They were also often built above ground level to protect against flooding. A couple of houses now had indoor toilets, although all compounds also had outhouses.

Those who could afford to, built their houses in different styles. In the main cluster, one compound stood out by virtue of its brick walls, tall metal gate, and larger than average house. This was owned by Calistus and his wife Sonia, now in their seventies, who were the wealthiest family in the village. Owners of around twenty acres of paddy, and land and buildings on Main Road, they had managed to send six of their seven adult children to the UK during the war.

Water was found in different ways. Some families washed in the tank and drew drinking water by hand from the small number of public wells, while others pumped water by motor into large open-topped concrete basins (*vakku*). During my time there the government began to install pipes to deliver chlorinated water, monitored by water meter, although only a couple of houses were paying for it at that time.

Besides casual visiting, the house played a pre-eminent role in more formal kinds of sociality and hospitality. This was evident in the circulation of visiting friends and relatives from house to house after the saint’s day feast, and in the location of life-cycle events. Unlike Mannar Town, where these celebrations were increasingly held in halls with hired catering, in Marudankandal they continued to occur in the compound itself, with the wider family gathering to prepare and cook. Idiomatically, people talked about the ‘wedding house’ *kaliyāṇa ṭīḍu*, the ‘puberty ceremony house’ *sāmattiya ṭīḍu*, and the *settu ṭīḍu*, the house of the deceased
(literally ‘dead house’). (Unlike marriages and puberty ceremonies, there was no colloquial noun referring to funerals other than *settu vīdu*.)

The connection between home and hospitality was perhaps mostly strongly expressed through food. In part, this reflected a prominent association between a full stomach and personal well-being. Bruland has observed (2015: 41; see also Ferro-Luzzi 1990: 84) that the question ‘have you eaten?’ plays a role comparable to that of ‘how are you?’, although it is far less of a rhetorical pleasantry than this implies and is usually followed by further questions and persistent offers of food. Giving food is a way to express respect (*mariyādai*), as is eating what is given and appreciating it. Thiranagama (2011: 77-195) has highlighted the importance of food in familial intimacy, and Van Daele (2013a, 2013b) has shown how the complex social relations forged between those who make and those who accept food extend beyond kin. (And often noted is the way that food can be offered just as a guest leaves, in order to encourage them to stay, something that Selva was very good at.) A Catholic man from Mannar Island, who ran a bike repair shack on Main Road and had married into a local family he had got to know as an LTTE cadre, joked that his wife’s parents had kept giving him meals until they had finally given him their daughter.

**SOCIAL DISTINCTION AND THE ETHNOGRAPHER**

Although Chapter Four will focus on relationships within Marudankandal, in this section I talk specifically about a small number of dimensions of sociality in the village and how they related to me and the fieldwork that I am describing. A great deal has been written about forms of social distinction in Tamil culture, although its most commonly analysed elements – *gauravam* and *mariyādai* – have usually been treated in isolation rather than as components of a broader idiom.36 Whitaker (1999: 85 and 81) has described *gauravam* as ‘a mutable personal quality, the socio-psychological substance of social standing’ emerging at the intersection of ‘personal standing, caste standing, village pride, and political importance’. The closest English translations are ‘honour’ or ‘prestige’, the latter being commonly used in local English. Two

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36 Among the existing studies are Mines (2005), Nakassis (2010), and Whitaker (1999). The definitions which I give of these nouns are complicated when they take adjectival and verbal forms and are translated into English. *Gauravamānāḷ* can be translated as ‘prestigious person’, and *mariyādaiyānāḷ* as ‘respectable person’. *Gauravam* forms the verb *gauravikka*, which is a stronger action than ‘giving *mariyādai*’ and means honouring rather than showing respect or distinction. A third term, *madippu* (‘respect’), is also used regularly, and as a noun means something similar to *gauravam*, and as a verb something like *mariyādai*. E.g., ‘Our people don’t respect the time,’ that is, are always late (*namadu ākkāḷ nērattai madikka māṭṭānga*).
adult sisters from Marudankandal, for example, had been arguing for some time over a plot of land. The younger sister told me that she had been unfairly cheated of it; her family already had a house in Periyakulam, she said, but this was about gauravam. In Pallivasalpuram a newly married Hindu couple began to argue about the dowry, which had already been given, and the husband left to live with his family in Mannar Town. The wife said that she had no more interest in him but she still had to preserve her reputation: if they were divorced, she would lose gauravam, which would be a problem for her at public events such as weddings (particularly as divorced women and widows are often prohibited from taking a central role in Hindu ritual).

If gauravam is a quality that an individual is perceived to have, mariyādai is something that is demonstrated through interactions, a ‘relational product’ which people ‘produce when they give and receive’ (Mines 2005: 81). Mines has argued that mariyādai translates more accurately as ‘distinction’ than ‘respect’ or ‘honour’. One of the most public examples of giving mariyādai was the way in which formal events usually began with the most important guests being called to light the ceremonial oil lamp. These moments also indicated the way in which mariyādai may also be given to an individual because of their existing gauravam. Although gauravam is something that hopefully/ideally accrues with age, whether or not one’s elders have gauravam it remains important to give them mariyādai. Perhaps the primary forum of expressing social distinction was intergenerational. The primary division was between periyākkal and sinnākkal, literally ‘big people’ and ‘small people’, which also bear connotations of relative levels of prestige (gauravam) or power (similarly in Sinhalese, e.g., Spencer 1990), although they were most commonly used in reference to age.\(^{37}\) The terms are not exact, but the small people are usually those who are unmarried, not piḷḷaiyal (children), but sometimes called yūt (‘youth’) or ilanyarhal, podiyan (‘boy’) and yuvādi (‘young woman’). Elderly people were also called vayasapōnākkal.

One way in which mariyādai was commonly expressed was through respectful speech. On the one hand, this meant the ability to engage without antagonism: sometimes it was said that some ‘didn’t know how to talk’ (kadaikka teriyādu); Spencer (1990: 182) talks about Sinhalese villagers who are unpopular because they scold. On the other hand, it required the navigation of respectful forms of address in a context where the use of proper names, particularly with people older than oneself, is avoided and replaced with kinship terms for family, friends, and

\(^{37}\) Seeing adults approaching the house, for example, a child might shout ‘periyākkal vāṟāṅga!’ (‘the big people are coming!’). This idiomatic practice is also found in Tamil kinship terms. Father’s elder brother, for example, is periyappā (literally ‘big father’), while father’s young brother is sittappā (‘little father’).
strangers. Other forms of relationship sometimes trumped the age-based premise of kin terms: for example, some men who were older than me, if not by a great deal, sometimes called me anṇā (‘older brother’). Family customs also led to less predictable destinations. At home, Nesaraja sometimes addressed Selva, as well as their two children, as appā (‘father’). Those who accrued honorific titles from their occupations – further evidence of gauravam – such as GS (Gram Sevaka), Teacher, Sister, and Manager, were also often addressed as such, and even close relatives tended to use them in the third person.38

Like Derges (2008: 101), I fell somewhat outside gender norms and was able to speak to women fairly freely, although at public events such as feasts it was sometimes noticed if I had been talking to someone. However, I spent more time with men in a wider variety of settings, and was more aware of the dynamics between the generations. Beyond the general division between married and unmarried men, there was a second between younger and older unmarried men, roughly approximating to three generations: unmarried men, in their early to late twenties; married men between thirty and fifty; and their fathers. At the beginning of my fieldwork I engaged more with the older (middle-aged and up) men in Marudankandal and the surrounding villages. This was partly related to those people I had been introduced to initially, through John and the priests, although throughout my fieldwork I was often directed towards older men who were considered particularly knowledgeable about local issues such as kinship, history, caste, and so on. Another reason was that I attended numerous meetings for different institutions, which brought me into contact with them.

Not everyone of the same generation were friends with each other. There were different friendship groups that generally did not come together. Among the older men, it appeared that close friends were more likely to be relatives, while younger men’s groups were looser. Two people were particularly important during my fieldwork. The first was Mariyadas’ son Kiruba, who was one of the first people I got to know in Marudankandal after he gave me a lift to Sunday Mass on the back of his bicycle. At that time, Kiruba was a geography student at Jaffna University who was often needed by his family for farmwork and so had to balance his studies with frequent trips back and forth from Mannar. The second was Devaraj, a close friend and cousin of Kiruba who lived in Vaikkalkulam to the east of Pallivasalpuram. Devaraj had been

38 Although not strictly related to questions of distinction, another naming practice was the everyday use of ‘house names’ (vīṭṭu pēr) by friends and family rather than the official names used in government documents and other formal circumstances. Learning two sets of names, and navigating the frequent preference for kin terms rather than names at all, were elements of the process of trying to connect an ever-growing number of people, often related to each other through multiple kin ties.
sent to stay with relatives in an African country during the war, and was one of the village’s best English speakers. He had worked for an NGO for a couple of years until they had begun to shut down their local programmes at about the time I arrived in Mannar, and was for now, against his hopes, a full-time farmer. Through Kiruba and Devaraj I became part of a group of male friends, Catholic and Hindu, from several local villages. Often in the evenings they would meet at one of the barber’s saloons on Main Road.

These generational differences were also evident in village institutions such as the church committee (ālaya sabai) and the Farmers Organization (vivasāyi amaippu), which were dominated by older men. Among these were some with relatively greater eminence and influence, often having previously had a government job, and sometimes on multiple local committees. Unless they were the head of their household, young men usually did not attend the meetings of these kinds of institutions. For example, Benedict, Kiruba and Devaraj’s similarly-aged relative and good friend from Periyakulam, began to attend the meetings of the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization when his father, a senior committee member, died suddenly of a heart attack. In English, these men were sometimes referred to as ‘local leaders’. Calistus, for instance, was both the church committee secretary, probably the most powerful position, as well as the head of the Farmers Organization. Although these positions often related to control of resources, they were usually unpaid, and were sometimes described as a ‘social service’ (samudāya sēvai).

Writing about youth culture in Tamil Nadu, Nakassis (2010: 30-31) says that youth are free from duties and responsibilities. The young men with whom I spent most time, who were usually in their late 20s to early 30s, were moving out of this state, often thinking about work and also about marriage. Men and women usually start thinking about marriage in their twenties. I was once told that the best age for women to get married is twenty-five; men feel a similar pressure, but are given more time. (On the gendered expectations and pressures of marriage, see Kapadia 1995.) There are some common reasons that a marriage might be delayed: for example, sisters usually marry before brothers. There is often an expectation that unmarried men must be pursuing some kind of secret relationship, and incredulity if they deny it. ‘When are you getting married?’ (eppa kaliyāṇam?) was a frequent question posed to those of the right age, and marriage was a regular topic of conversation. The intricacies of marriage, particularly with relatives (as I explain in Chapter Four), meant that there was a lot to discuss.

A central aspect of relationships between many men was alcohol. Drinking was a strongly gendered activity in Marudankandal, as it was in Naeagama (Gamburd 2008), and it was
almost unheard of for women to drink. Drinking occurred at private parties, large celebrations, and during paddy work (particularly when several men worked together), although it was not an element of Catholic ritual in the way that Gamburd (2008: 91-99) describes for Buddhist rituals. When drinks were hard to purchase under the LTTE, villagers bought locally-made vāḍi, the illegal spirit known in Sinhala as kasippu (Gamburd 2008: 131-155 and passim), which I encountered only in 2018 when the government had increased the price of other drinks. Different generations of men would usually not drink together; the group of young men with whom I spent most time were old enough to hold small drinks parties in their own homes, although for larger parties they would find an isolated place away from the villages. Not drinking was itself a form of social separation, because teetotallers, rather than attend parties without drinking, simply did not come at all.

Drinking was a contentious topic. On the one hand, people often joked about stories of drinking and what men got up to, and among the Kadaiyar families of Marudankandal there was a more relaxed attitude. During weddings older male family members and friends were often offered a large slug of arrack immediately upon joining the pandi – the collective term for the guests eating together at any single moment – and before they received their meal. (This was referred to as pandi sārāyam, ‘pandi arrack’). On the other hand, hostility towards drinking was common in other contexts, and public drinking was heavily frowned upon, particularly for men with greater gauravam. Nesaraja, who himself did not drink, advised me not to take part in drinking with the other men. It was considered a waste of money – a bottle of arrack cost

![Figure 3.2 This image, which circulated on Facebook in 2016, contrasts the threats to Tamil society before and after the war.](image)

39 A national discussion around women and drinking came to prominence recently with regard to laws prohibiting women from buying alcoholic drinks or working in bars (The Guardian 2018).
more than a day’s paddy labour – and also blamed for fighting and domestic abuse (as similarly reported by Gamburd 2008: 118-127; Sørensen et al. 2017; Spencer 1990: 182-183). Opposition to drinking sometimes manifested itself on a communal level. In 2014, a middle-aged friend of mine from another village told me that his caste – the Kollars – had decided at their annual meeting that they would not have drinks at their celebrations. The Catholic Church is also highly critical of drinking and in the past has opposed the opening of new bars in the district; although many priests drink, they do so in privacy and usually among themselves. More broadly, it was also often claimed that alcohol (and drugs) are being deliberately encouraged in the Northern Province by the government as a way to undermine Tamil society. (Figure 3.2)

Some men were quite critical of opposition to drinking. Nesaraja’s brother Joseph said firmly that drinks must be given at a celebration. During the nāḷam caḍāngu – ‘fourth (day) event’ or ‘homecoming’ – of Lavaniya’s wedding in 2014, which I describe later in the chapter, a woman from Marudankandal married a man from a different caste in a village on the south side. Drinks were given at Lavaniya’s house, but none several days later at the man’s. Discovering this upon arrival, a number of the older men from Marudankandal, who had themselves hosted the party in Marudankandal, immediately left.

Although unmarried at thirty – resulting in much friendly advice on the need to quickly get married, and on one occasion being told that ‘a man without a wife is not a whole man’ (muḷu manisan illai) – I was considered to have relatively high prestige (gauravam), partly by virtue of the fact that I was a foreign PhD student, as well as my willingness to join in (particularly with physical activities) and to endure rural facilities (vasadi), and my desire to learn Tamil. I was also the beneficiary of various positive stereotypes about white people (veḷḷaikkārakkal), for example that they are reliable, particularly with regard to time, and truthful. Although certainly not an important person in the local context – I was not, for example, a candidate for lighting the oil lamp (kuttuvilakku) at the annual Christmas Oli Vila (‘festival of lights’) cultural program at St Mary’s – I was often treated as a special guest. At church feasts, for example, I was always invited to eat with the priests and other VIPs.

As I got to know the people in Marudankandal better I was also referred to by kin terms, and occasionally referred to as ‘like kin’ (sondam mādiri). In many ways, I was in an anomalous position with regard to gender and generation. Being male and an outsider helped my social and physical mobility, and I often travelled alone late at night. Unlike local men of my own age I was able to move more freely with the older men, who invited me to their drinks parties. Drinking with local men also set me apart from the priests, with whom I was associated.
at the beginning. I was offered *pandi sārāyam*, while Kiruba and Devaraj sitting beside me, were not. This kind of treatment did not go unnoticed among my peers, and at one wedding in Periyakulam my neighbour Johnson called me a *sella piḷḷai*.40 I was also treated leniently with regard to my lack of knowledge of practices of respect. Although less as time went on, it took me time to learn the correct kinship terms to replace names, and I was sometimes told by the older men that I should address them by their proper names. Sometimes when I addressed someone like this people found it funny and would repeat what I had said with a laugh.

The fact that I was seen as very wealthy complicated my relationship with some people who wanted loans, as did my determination not to teach English, despite being asked on several occasions. Another complication was the question of food. Like researchers in other parts of Sri Lanka (Bruland 2015; Gaasbeek 2010; Heslop 2014; 72; Van Daele 2013b: 106), when visiting a house I was usually offered at the very least tea, coffee, or a soft drink, often with biscuits. I was also often invited for lunch, the main meal of the day, as a way of establishing a more formal intimacy, and the fact that some villagers had not offered me lunch was sometimes commented on. Even without an invitation, however, I was often offered a meal if I visited around lunch, and less often around dinner. While staying with the Brothers, and then with Nesaraja and Selva, I was provided with meals, but after moving to Jeyabalan’s house I found myself in a more awkward situation for the first couple of months. Partly because I did not cook, and partly because I felt uncomfortable about my inability to reciprocate when offered meals, I sometimes ate in the restaurants on Main Road, but I found that people were annoyed if I ate out rather than with them, criticising both the waste of money and the lower quality of the food. Eventually I established an arrangement with the Brothers’ cook for lunch and dinner, which I would eat at home, while usually eating breakfast at one of the Main Road *kaḍais*, which was a good way of talking to people and finding out what was happening during the day. Yet I was still burdened by the question of transactionality throughout, such as on the occasions that I hosted a birthday party for the older men and the women did the cooking. While the men enjoyed drinks, the women would joke that I should bring something for them, but when I asked what they would like they could never think of anything other than cake and soft drinks.

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40 Clark-Decès (2014) translated *sella piḷḷai* as ‘spoilt child’, but it does not necessarily have this negative connotation. Parents frequently address their children as *cellam* (‘special one’).
ETHNOGRAPHY AFTER THE WAR

Why did you come here?
*Nīnga inga vandu enna nōkkam?*

What I have described above must be located specifically within the context of the postwar period. In a discussion of dangerous field sites, Kovats-Bernat (2002: 217) argues that the ethnographer ‘is obligated to demonstrate how the pervasion of violence modifies her or his own field relations and how similar modifications extend to those ordinary relations of the local community as well’. Although the situation had changed a lot since the end of the war, people still lived in fear of the government born of long and bitter experience. This was reinforced by the presence of the army, police, and intelligence operatives, who continued to pay close attention to former LTTE cadres as well as to public support for the LTTE. In this context, I was less concerned for my own safety (I experienced nothing like Trawick and Walker) than for the people around me, for whom I was a source of uncertainty.

My presence provoked speculation and suspicion, and sometimes it was suggested that I was a journalist or a spy. People asked whether I was going to give information about them to the government, although they were uncertain whether it would be theirs or mine. A man in a neighbouring village, whom I would get to know over time because his compound was used as a rice depot by a Muslim vendor from Pallivasalpuram, told me on our first meeting that he was scared to talk to me. At a party in Marudankandal, Gnam, the *kama vidāne* at that time, said that he didn’t understand why I was staying in this village in particular, and that there must be things I was not telling people. Although people generally appreciated my knowledge of everyday matters, occasionally someone would raise the idea that these kinds of things were not important enough to pay attention to.

Nevertheless, these issues did not have a significant impact on my access or my relationships. As I have already made clear, most people were extremely welcoming and supportive. It was also very common for strangers to want to talk to me about what I was doing in Mannar, particularly if they heard me speaking Tamil. There were some things that stood in my favour (which I know because they were mentioned often), other than the points mentioned above with regard to *gauravam*. Being there itself was considered a form of solidarity, but my Tamil competence was vocally appreciated by many and an important element of my relationships. Another thing that was often raised, in a positive light, was my willingness to accept all kinds of invitations, particularly to Hindu and Muslim events. In contrast with Heslop’s experience of being constantly told not to associate with everyone in Dambulla (2014:
on many occasions I was described as someone who ‘goes to everything’. Catholics were also particularly surprised that I regularly visited the mosque in neighbouring Pallivasalpuram, believing that only Muslims were permitted.

This was also partly due to the fact that I positioned myself as neither a war researcher nor an activist with an explicit political program. Although some people asked for my views on the LTTE, its leader Prabhakaran, or the government in Colombo, on the whole these did not prove to be difficult issues, and villagers themselves expressed a range of positions. Taking an impartial view was particularly relevant with caste, which I return to in Chapter Six. However, in general the things that I wanted to talk about were not particularly controversial. This can be demonstrated by a comment made by a middle-aged Hindu shopkeeper and former LTTE cadre, after she had been questioned by intelligence about what I was doing (which I return to below). Describing this weeks after the event, she told me that she had told the officers questioning her that I seemed more interested in cattle brands than anything else. At the end of my fieldwork I began to talk to villagers about pseudonyms, and found that the general response was one of bemusement that this would be necessary. Selva’s uncle, Rajaratnam, asked why it would be necessary to conceal names if I was not going to be writing anything bad about anyone. In the same conversation, another villager said that if I did not put their real names, in the future they might have similar trouble to the controversy around the Mannar Martyrs, whose claim to sainthood and identity has been rendered controversial due to a lack of recorded names. However, I have used pseudonyms in the thesis, for Marudankandal and the surrounding villages as well as all of the people named.

My attempt to maintain a level of impartiality did not always pay off. On one occasion, during the wedding of Jeyabalan’s youngest daughter, at the very end of my fieldwork, a Kadaiyar man from Periyakulam with whom I had become friends told me that people had a ‘doubt’ (sandēham) about me. I had attended too many celebrations, he said, and people were concerned that I would write only about the good things and not the many troubles in their lives. Similarly, some priests engaged with human rights work were keen that I use my research to bring attention to the sufferings of the Tamil people.

Importantly, my research was backed by three institutions. First, the sociology department of Colombo University, who supported my position as a visiting student for the purpose of my residence visa, which was necessary for my security in the north. Second, I arrived with the backing of the local Church, which was important to people’s perception of me and played a role in my security. In Mannar I was told by the priests to ask Bishop Rayappu Joseph for permission to conduct my research in Alayankulam parish, which I did. The villagers therefore
initially associated me with the Church – some people thought I was a priest at first – although this wore off as time went on. Having initially worked through Church contacts, with legitimation from Colombo University, it was not until I had started my fieldwork that I learnt about the government structure and its local representatives. Over time I built up a good rapport with the Divisional Secretary within whose remit Marudankandal fell, as well as a number of other civil servants, and the only difficulty I experienced was when I tried to attend the seasonal cultivation meeting – a gathering of the top district administrators as well as representatives from the Farmers Organizations – and was ejected by the District Secretary, the most senior civil servant in Mannar, for coming without permission.

My relationship with the police and intelligence services was more complicated. If my ubiquity and language competence were seen positively by local Tamils and Muslims, they were exactly the reason, as John suggested, that I was deemed suspicious by the state. In contrast to short-term researchers working through interpreters, being ‘with the people’ made me unpredictable. There was a police station at Alayankulam, and although the local army bases were a couple of miles in either direction, a number of intelligence agents in plain clothes would hang around in Alayankulam, picking up information. More than once in the villages I bumped into police and intelligence agents who were surprised to see me and wanted to know more about my research. To avoid additional suspicion, I stayed away from a couple of particularly controversial political rallies in the district.

Two periods of heightened political tension occurred during my fieldwork. The first was in October 2013, when local elections were held for the Northern Provincial Council for the first time since 1981. During my travels I met a number of the local candidates, one of whom – who was later elected – unexpectedly put a grainy photograph of me on his campaign flier. When this happened, a senior priest took me to meet the then-Brigadier, the head of the local army and intelligence agencies – who was a Sinhalese Catholic and on good terms with some of the priests – so that I could explain that I was not in fact connected to any of the campaigns. He helpfully gave me his card in case I had any problems. Over the following year, it seemed as if these problems had gone away.

At the end of 2014, however, in the run up to the presidential elections of January 2015, in which the incumbent Mahinda Rajapaksa was defeated by Maithripala Sirisena, foreign visitors to the north came under increasing suspicion. For a short time it became necessary again to apply for a permit to visit parts of the Northern Province, although the border was further north than the area around Marudankandal. At times like this former LTTE cadres, of whom there were many in Marudankandal, as in all of the local villages, would also receive particular
attention. In September, after a bout of illness bad enough to keep me in bed for a week, I came to know that five people in Marudankandal and the surrounding villages, all of whom had previously been in the LTTE, and all but one of whom were my acquaintances, had been summonsed to a camp run by one of the government’s intelligence agencies. When they arrived they had no idea why they had been called, and after a meandering series of questions it became clear that the agents wanted to know what I was doing.

When I discovered this I spoke to Fr Lawrence and the Divisional Secretary. Both turned out to have known before me, and told me not to worry about it any more. Nothing further came of it. Some months later I learnt that the intelligence agents had also at that time visited Colombo University, where the head of sociology had explained what I was doing and that I had university permission. I had one more interaction with intelligence, at the very end of my fieldwork, when I received a call asking me to visit the same camp to explain to them what I was doing. My supervisor in Sri Lanka, Malathi de Alwis, advised me not to attend without a formal request and to ask them to meet me at a place of my choosing in Mannar. They agreed, and told me that they would come in the near future, after which I did not hear from them again. However, when I visited for less than a month in 2017, I found out that some of the villagers had been approached to ask what my plans were.

Figure 3.3 A wartime bomb container repurposed for use in the paddy fields.
MARUDANKANDAL AFTER THE WAR

One of the Brothers had come to Alayankulam soon after the end of the war, and remembered it as ‘a ghost town’. But by the time I began my fieldwork only a few years later the material evidence of the war was quickly disappearing, as Kadirgamar (2017: 130) also observed in Jaffna. By 2013 the dwindling number of ruined houses were the most obvious sign of the conflict. The villagers had also lost, sold, or abandoned many of their possessions, particularly during the last years of the war. People often remarked that they had arrived at IDP camps in 2009 wearing only a shirt and a sarong, with all of their remaining belongings filling a single plastic bag. It was rare to see a black and white family photo on somebody’s wall.

The army, with help from demining INGOs, had also cleared the former LTTE territories while their inhabitants had been in Menik Farm and elsewhere. In 2013 this was most visible on the road between Kilinochchi to Mullaitivu, where hundreds of rusting bicycles had been lined up beside buses and other vehicles. The material culture of the LTTE had almost disappeared. I heard stories of the army stealing from the LTTE territories. In 2014, in the run up to the presidential election, the government returned to Tamils jewellery that they had pawned to LTTE banks at the end of the war, allegedly having recently uncovered it. In Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, sites such as an underground LTTE bunker and a museum of LTTE weapons and vehicles were briefly open to the public, then closed. As they had done after expelling the LTTE from Jaffna in 1995, government forces also razed the tuyilum illam, the cadre graveyards which were the LTTE’s most important sites for memorialisation and the creation of communal Tamil identity (Natali 2008). In Jaffna, a military headquarters was built on top of one of these in 2011 (BBC News 2011). In that area of the Northern Province the government constructed triumphantly jingoistic memorials, but there was nothing of this kind in Mannar.

One of the ways in which the war arose in conversation was in reference to specific places, illustrating what Gaasbeek (2010: 131) has called ‘topographies of violence’, and other anthropologists of post-conflict environments ‘imaginative geographies’ or ‘landscapes of fear’ (Clouser 2009; Yavaro-Nashin 2012). This is where a family lived before they went to India. This is the junction where a bomb fell. This used to be an army bunker. This is what happened at the checkpoint. Some places were considered particularly dangerous. Many of these memories related to wartime movement: ‘This is the direction in which we walked during the final years of the war.’ During the pilgrimage to Komarasankulam in 2014, Nesaraja’s brother Joseph recalled that they were always running during the war, without knowing what
One afternoon, while I was standing on the path beside my house and talking to a middle-aged man who lived two houses away, a group of the male teachers from Alayankulam MMV approached, on their way to Koyilkulam. As they came towards us, my neighbour commented that the LTTE had moved through the countryside in groups like this. The shopowner Vasanthan, who lived with his family in Mannar Town although he was building a new house in Marudankandal, would arrive on Main Road early in the morning and leave after dark. Once he said that he would like to cycle to and from town for exercise, but was too scared to do so at night because he remembered the dangers of the road to Mannar Town in the past.

The war’s human impact was visible in the injuries that many had suffered, and in the absence of the dead, whom people often mentioned to me without describing how they died. Nesaraja and Joseph’s younger brother was an LTTE cadre who was killed in the war, and his photograph hung on the wall of his parents’ house. Sometimes when drinking, their father would say that he was ‘the best child in the world’ (ulahattila nalla piḷḷai). The dead were commemorated with ornately framed pictures, and at All Souls’ Day, although the graves of the LTTE cadres had been destroyed by the government. The many who had disappeared during the war – the kānāmal pōṅakkal, literally ‘people who have gone without being seen’ – could not be commemorated, and were the source of ongoing anguish for family members. In 2017, families of many of the disappeared, led largely by mothers, began to stage an ongoing roadside protest in Kilinochchi to bring attention to the continued failure of the government to provide information or access to justice.

People sometimes talked about the positive side of life under the LTTE: discipline and control, and no crime. It was said that women could walk around safely at night, while now they had to stay at home after dark. Pro-LTTE material circulates freely on Facebook today. Some people, both men and women, were particularly strong supporters of the LTTE, as were some priests. However, there was often ambivalence. As Brun and Van Hear (2012) have also observed, LTTE support waned at the end of the war, particularly because of their practice of taking children to fight with them. Some families had sent their children to other parts of the country to avoid this, as Hatsumi has similarly noticed (2012: 52). The end of the LTTE had also relaxed the strict martial laws under which they had lived for many years. This was, for example, a reason that caste associations were now publicly operating in Mannar.

People lived under the surveillance of the army. This was felt particularly around November 27th, which under the LTTE was celebrated as Great Heroes Day (māvīrar nāḷ) and was the day on which the fallen cadres were commemorated at the tuyilum illam. Although the
government has more recently taken a slightly more relaxed attitude to this, during my fieldwork it was accompanied by an increased army presence and stories of Tamils being arrested for their commemorations. In 2013, Nesaraja was incensed that the army had entered St Anthony’s churchyard to stop them ringing the bell. Former cadres, some of whom had only just returned from detention in 2013, felt most oppressed by the government, particularly as they were often treated as the first suspects in local crimes. One man was the subject of an ongoing court case related to the war, for which he had to travel to Colombo every couple of weeks. He compared himself to a cow restrained in a field beside his house. The shopkeeper who had told intelligence that I was interested in cattle brands said that she was left ‘very disturbed’ after the army had visited her shop.

Figure 3.4 A Facebook meme from 2017.

RAISING MONEY

Kadirgamar (2017: 14) has observed a crisis of indebtedness in the north. One of the villagers’ central preoccupations after the war was money. Farming had gone on throughout the war when possible, and people returned to it immediately after returning, although some had defaulted on their government rice loans during the final years. The two rice harvests a year left little available household cash at other times. (Devaraj gave this as an explanation for why the farmers did not often eat at the Main Road restaurants, unlike people in private work.) Many of the small local businesses felt obliged to implement a loan system which undercut their
already slim profits. Ahmed, who with his wife ran the most popular restaurant on Main Road, once showed me his loan book, resignedly flicking through hundreds of pages of tabs which he thought would never get paid. Nirmala, whose general store sat opposite Vasanthan’s, said that she admired the other for never granting loans, something she was unable to do herself. On a number of occasions I was asked if I could provide loans for people, and the 2014 kama vidāne Gnanam, who was fond of proverbs (palamoli), once said to me ‘paṇam irukku, manam illai’ (‘you have money, but no heart’). In another village in the parish someone told me another proverb: uravukku pahai kaḍan (‘a loan among kin causes anger’). One of the Brothers said that people judged each other according to whether they give or do not give money.

Although some families had little or no land, and the Kadaiyars were considered a deprived caste – which I return to later – Marudankandal was considered a slightly wealthier village than many, which people from other villages sometimes explained by the fact that the Marudankandal families had more land. One sign of its relative wealth was, as I observed in Chapter Two, the fact that the Kadaiyar women in the village were rarely, if ever, employed to do paddy work for others. Similarly, very few had left to find work in the Middle East, although at least one women outside the Kadaiyar kin group was working there during my fieldwork; her husband and young children lived beside Main Road. However, apart from the staggered building, which occurred at a village as well as family level, and the occasional very large house like Calistus’ (of which there was usually only one per village) the economic differences across the villages were not particularly visible during my fieldwork. There were almost no cars, although motorbikes and scooters were common, and most families had at least one bicycle. When people travelled to events in large groups they did so sitting within – or perched on the walls of – a tractor trailer.

Among the local Tamils, farming was one element of a tripartite moral economy alongside government work (arasāngu vēlai) and private work (private vēlai, business). As noted by other scholars (Hettige 2004), government work – the civil service, and jobs in government institutions such as hospitals or schools – is strongly preferred among Tamils in the Northern Province, due to its reliable and relatively high salary, eventual pension, relatively short working hours, and occasional perks. (For example, in the months before the 2015 presidential election, the incumbent government offered government workers the opportunity to purchase half-price scooters.) One day, while we were discussing the fact that in a number of local villages was found a single house that was considerably larger and more expensive than the others, Devaraj said that such houses were definitely paid for by a government job or foreign money. In contrast, private work was sometimes thought to be less remunerative; it was
considered unreliable in the short term, and in the long term it held no promise of a pension. (Figure 3.4)

Formal education was valued predominantly as the route to government work. Not only was a university degree a mandatory requirement for many government jobs, but it was firmly held that the government had a duty to provide degree-holders with work. In Jaffna, for example, unemployed graduates (vēlai illāda paṭṭadāris) have in recent years staged protests for this very reason. This context was reflected in two questions I was regularly asked: ‘Why are you still studying when you are so old?’ and ‘What job will the government give you when you are finished?’ Teaching was probably the most popular government profession, and working in another part of the north for the first few years, as was the norm for newly qualified teachers, was considered a necessary evil. The desirability of government work motivated an intense focus on primary and secondary education, with children, from a young age, often spending a large amount of time in extra tuition classes run by government teachers before and after school. Children rarely had any involvement in farmwork until their late teens, although I was told that this had not been the case in the past.

While the older generations of men were predominantly focussed on cultivation or government work, the younger men were interested in other kinds of jobs, although they were still able to join in the farming when necessary. Two things stood out. The first was that although some of the young Tamil men had gone to Malaysia, they were not interested in other ‘small countries’ (more below), and neither did they look for jobs elsewhere in Sri Lanka. Someone suggested that this was because parents were afraid of letting their children go elsewhere. Many also did not speak good Sinhala. They also disliked the idea of service business, particularly restaurants, which were sometimes associated with Muslims. Devaraj and Kiruba said they were too shy to do this work.

Young women wanted to work outside the home but were much more limited in terms of what was considered socially acceptable. Government work was fine, but private work was disreputable, and often young women spent most of their time at home waiting for something to turn up. Some had trained in local government-sponsored tailoring classes, but there was only enough work for a limited number to make a living from this. A large garments factory opened on Mannar Island in 2013, the first of its kind in the district. Many women worked there, although some people were outspokenly critical, commenting on women’s morality similar to the situation described by Hewamanne (2008) and Lynch (2007). By the end of my fieldwork one unmarried woman, an ex-cadre in her later twenties, was working at the factory.
When I visited their house one day her mother denied that this was the case, until she found out that I knew about it and was not critical.

Other than rebuilding, the biggest expenses were life-cycle events, which people often celebrated lavishly. Even small parties such as children’s birthdays were accompanied by bigger celebrations than I expected. The cost of weddings and puberty ceremonies was partly offset by gifts in the form of cash, to be given by the guests. Research in Dambulla (Heslop 2014: 170) and Jaffna (Bruland 2015) has highlighted the importance across Sri Lanka that money plays as gift. Although close relatives were expected to pay more, guests who had a less intimate connection usually talked about giving Rs 1,000. Locally this was a day’s wage for casual farm labour, and quite a lot of money, and so the cash gift obligation was considered a burden by many families (particularly when several such events occurred in succession). This money was recorded and expected to be repaid over the long term. Weddings were also partly funded by dowries (siadanam), although some couples rejected these. The dowry was given by the wife’s family, while the kurai (the red wedding sari) and tāli (the ornament tied to the gold chain around a married woman’s neck) by the husband’s.

There were other ways of raising money in the village, besides loans from friends and family: commercial leasing, often for vehicles; smaller loans given in the village shops; and informal lenders in the village (about whom I heard much less). Another method of raising money was the sittu credit group (de Munck 1993: 77; Kadirgamar 2017: 232; Southwold-Llewellyn 2004), a kind of monthly draw into which participants paid monthly installments for a fixed period of time, two of which were in operation among the Kadaiyar families in Marudankandal. The Kadaiyar families in Marudankandal and the other three mainland villages also maintained a funeral fund (maraṇa sahāya nidi), which I will return to later.

BIG COUNTRIES AND SMALL COUNTRIES

Tamil emigration from Sri Lanka has a long history. Jaffna Tamils famously played a significant role as civil servants in colonial Malaysia, and Daniel and Thangarajah (1995) have charted the phases of emigration to England after Independence. Displacement due to the war created a large diaspora across multiple countries, which has been the subject of a large volume of research, much of it focussing on political mobilisation and long-distance connections to
Tamil nationalism and the LTTE. Some people told stories of failed attempts to leave during the war, and others showed me more recent their citizenship rejection letters, usually written in English.

Many Marudankandal families had close relatives living abroad. Despite fears of persecution by the government, by 2013 many Tamils, and a smaller number of Sri Lankan Muslims, had begun to return to Sri Lanka, sometimes for the first time in many years, and often accompanied by their foreign-born children. In August 2014, during the European and North American summer holidays, several families visited Marudankandal at once. Kin ties were also renewed through digital forms of communication that became possible in the years after the war (Bruland 2015). My fieldwork coincided with a boom in smart phones and Facebook, Skype and Viber. 3G data services arrived in Marudankandal in August 2014.

Foreign countries (*velināduhaḷ*) were sometimes referred to generally as *forin*, and at other times divided into ‘big countries’ (*periya nāḍus*) and ‘small countries’ (*sinna nāḍus*). Big countries were Western countries such as the UK (almost invariably referred to as *London*), Canada, Australia, France, Germany, and so on, which were associated with wealth and considered highly desirable sites of eventual permanent residence. While the majority of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora is found in ‘big’ countries, there also remain in India many Tamils who fled during the war, although some of these families returned during the ceasefire, some after the war’s end.

Small countries were those associated with temporary work opportunities (which could last for several years), particularly Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia. A number of Marudankandal men had worked, or were working, in ‘small’ countries during my fieldwork. Selva’s uncle, Rajaratnam, had gone to Kuwait at the beginning of the 1990s but had returned after the start of the Gulf War. Daniel’s close friend and neighbour Peter, who had four teenage children and no paddy land, worked on and off in Qatar as a heavy vehicle driver, and would spend months at a time in Marudankandal while awaiting a new visa. Several men were also working in Malaysia, although this appeared to offer a more precarious and unreliable work experience than the Middle East.

I was frequently asked, both seriously and jokingly, whether I could take people or their children to the UK with me. Big countries were seen as places of prosperity. Some families were receiving money from relatives abroad, although others were not always certain about

this. Expensive smart phones and tablets invariably came from abroad, although sometimes these were models which needed wifi or second-hand items missing passwords. Money was a point of contention for some. In 2014 one of the Hindu families down the road from Jeyabalan’s house hosted a family of relatives who had moved to Switzerland during the war. The couple, who had two young children, told me that they no longer spoke to their relatives in Jaffna because they demanded more money than they were able to give. More than once, Tamils visiting from abroad complained about the boredom and lack of social life in their new homes, adding that their friends and relatives did not realise how much time they had to spend working. Big countries were also strongly associated with safety and freedom. Sometimes people said that they were still expecting ‘the international community’ to help resolve the question of Tamil independence. Many people, particularly former LTTE cadres (often young and unmarried), expressed a strong desire to leave Sri Lanka. However, the routes had become harder and friends and family abroad were less able or willing to support them. Some young women married men who had settled in Europe, then waited until they received their visa (Sidharthan Maunaguru 2009). Kadirgamar (2017: 15) has noted the desire of households for women to marry abroad, arguing that the lower and middle classes, particularly in Jaffna Peninsula towns, consider the future of the next generation to be connected to the Tamil diaspora in the big countries.

At the same time, big countries were considered places of ambiguous, if not negative, morality, which was a frequent topic of conversation. Sometimes I heard comments about a lack of religious devotion. One woman said to me that people abroad think ‘I am my own God’ (enakkunānē kadavu). During a New Year midnight Mass sermon, Fr Lawrence remarked that in countries such as mine people would be partying at this time. The countries of white people, as they were generally referred to, treated animals better than children, people said, while they let their children leave home at a very young age. Most common were references to female morality and the perceived ubiquity of divorce: ‘In your country,’ someone said to me, ‘You can get divorced if your wife leaves the cap off the tooth paste.’ In Alayankulam I had a conversation with a married woman around thirty who was planning to join her husband in Europe and had multiple questions for me. Do kids leave their parents after the age of eighteen, and does this mean that there is no pāsam (‘affection’) between them? Will I give advice to my sister regarding her marriage? Are women allowed to wear the clothes they want without being scolded? In Alayankulam people would talk about her if she wore jeans, she added, although her own husband was not like that.
Some, mainly men, continued to make attempts to leave Sri Lanka illegally. During this period the Australian government’s increasingly hostile approach to refugees and asylum seekers arriving by boat was also often mentioned. At the till in Ahmed’s restaurant was a pile of cards, distributed by the Australian government, which warned people not to come by this route. The villager who told me that he was scared of talking to me had lost touch with ten relatives who had tried to make the trip by sea. When people tried to leave Sri Lanka they did so secretly, simply disappearing one day. This happened in the case of Samuel. In April 2014 I attended the feast of Christ on the Cross at Parappukadandan, an important shrine on the edge of the forest that had been destroyed during the war and subsequently restored by a Sinhalese family from the south who also provided food for the pilgrims. In the churchyard was a small brick hut in which were sold, or more accurately loaned, nētti sāmān. These were flat, small pieces of metal in the shape of objects such as houses, eyes, hearts, or children, each representing a conventional nētti, something desired from God, often in exchange for a vow (Mosse 2012: 73). In exchange for a donation it was possible to take one of these to pray with inside the church, after which it would return to the stall. As I was stirring the nētti sāmān the shopkeeper asked me if I could take his younger sister, who was around twenty and standing in the hut with him, back with me to the UK. ‘Won’t you be sad?’ I asked. ‘No,’ answered another man working in the shop, ‘We’re happy if someone goes abroad.’

Earlier that day, when Mass had finished, I had accompanied Samuel, a local young man, into the back of the church. Samuel knelt and prayed before the statue, then stood and prayed again, touching the glass with his fingertips. Afterwards, as we walked along the line of temporary shops erected along the bund of Parappukadandan tank, I asked Samuel whether he had a nētti, and if so what it was. Making a motion with his hand like a plane taking off, Samuel told me that his nētti was to go abroad. He and his family had suffered intensely under both the Sri Lankan Army and the LTTE, and one of his elder siblings, who had previously been an LTTE cadre, now lived in Europe.

In August of that year I came down to Main Road to meet Samuel. Over the past year I had discovered that, unlike most of the Catholics in the village, Samuel had an active interest in Hindu rituals, believing that these offered him a chance to overturn the sufferings of his life. Earlier in the year I had accompanied him to Thiruketheeswaram, where he had participated in the daily puja (‘prayers’) for several consecutive Thursdays in a row, and we had also attended a couple of the other major local festivals, where we watched Mannar Hindus walk on burning coals and dance, possessed. This day was Navarattiri, on which a procession passed through several Hindu villages to the west of Marudankandal. We had agreed to go together, but when
I arrived at Main Road I discovered that he was not there. Taking the wages which he had carefully saved over the past several years working, he had left Sri Lanka and travelled to Europe. I did not find out how he managed the trip, or what happened after he left. Only a small number of his closest family members were aware of his plan.
CHAPTER FOUR

People and place
*Who and what is the village?*

In Chapters One and Two, Marudankandal appeared primarily as a locus for rice cultivation in the Dry Zone, and in Chapter Three I expanded my description of the village’s phenomenological, spatial, and social dimensions. In this chapter I develop a broader analysis of the Sri Lankan village itself, from two perspectives. The first considers what we mean when we talk about the village. The chapter’s title was inspired by ‘Who Is the ūr?’, the second chapter of Mines’ study of Yanaimangalam, a village in Tamil Nadu (2005). Mines locates the meaning of village in the practices of its residences, particularly as these emerge through caste-based sociospatial relations of dominance. Although the discussion that follows also looks at the questions of caste dominance, I expand this overly narrow meaning of village by also investigating local village concepts and state constructions of the village. Second, I turn to an exploration of the ways in which relationships between kin and non-kin, and different ethnic and religious identities, are negotiated, pointing in particular to funerals as an example of inclusive sociality.

DISENTANGLING ŪR, KIRĀMAM, AND VILLAGE

In Sri Lanka, discussions of the village have been ethnically divided. Winslow (2003-2004: 22) argues that there have been three stages in the conceptualisation of the Sinhalese village by anthropologists. In the first, researchers drew on their own preconceptions, applying ‘village’ to ‘clusters of caste-based hamlets’ which were themselves locally known as *gamas* (Sinh. ‘village’). In the second stage, researchers ‘paid more attention to Sinhalese usage and recognized that local ideas of community simply did not conform to either scholarly or governmental preconceptions’. In the third they uncritically adopted a deproblematised idea of the ‘traditional village’.

The study of Tamil villages in Sri Lanka has taken a different trajectory, which can be divided into two broad stages. During the first, researchers were interested in the village as a socio-spatial entity, and appear to have generally followed local usage, although without serious sociolinguistic analysis of Tamil terms for ‘village’ (Banks 1957; K. David 1973; McGilvray 1983; Skjønsberg 1982). The second stage comprises those researchers who have
worked primarily within Daniel’s (1984) influential framework of the distinction between ār and kirāmam. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in Tamil Nadu in the 1980s, Daniel describes these terms as *prima facie* equivalents for ‘village’ (1984: 64; 2010: 318). According to Daniel, ār is borderless, person-centric, contextually understood and difficult to define, its closest definitions being

> a named territory that is (1) inhabited by human beings who are believed to share in the substance of the soil of that territory, and (2) a territory to which a Tamil cognitively orients himself at any given time. (1984: 63)

Depending on context, ār can be a village, urban district, city, or country. Kirāmam, on the other hand, is a bounded, universally accepted and constant spatial unit that refers to ‘the revenue village and thus to a political unit created for the purpose of taxation and the organization of local government’ (1984: 69). Daniel argues that the ār is ‘the culturally more significant and indigenous concept of territory’, and one of great affective importance (ibid.: 78), while the kirāmam is ‘abstract and distant’ (ibid.: 69). Some villagers in his field site of Kalappur, he observed, did not know what the word kirāmam meant.

Daniel’s observations on the affective significance of the ār have been attested by other scholars in Sri Lanka (Bass 2013: 83-84; Bruland 2015; Jegathesan 2018, 2019: 100-125; Thanges 2018a and 2018b; Thiranagama 2011: 151-155). Scholars in both Sri Lanka and India have expanded our understanding of ār. One of the most important developments has been Mines’ discussion of ār as a rhetoric of ‘asymmetrical inclusion’ in the prosperity brought by the goddess-temple of the ‘whole ār’ (2005: 33). In Yanaimangalam, the three most politically and economically dominant of the fourteen castes are known as the ārmakkal (‘ār-people’), in contrast with the kuṭimakkal, a term which encompasses both Scheduled Caste labourers and those castes which provide service and live in hamlets (kuḍi). Kuṭimakkal is a little used concept in Mannar today, but it plays an important role in the history of caste and I will engage with it more thoroughly in Chapter Six. Similarly, Viswanath (2014: 31) has emphasised the fact that ār is ‘segmentary in meaning’, and that while everyone ‘might be said to belong to an ār… ār can also stand in opposition to the cēri [segregated ghetto], with the ār understood as the habitation of caste people alone’.

Although less attentive linguistically, recent work in Jaffna has shown similar practices. Bruland’s doctoral research in Korte, a neighbourhood in Jaffna city, whose majority Siviyar caste residents consider Korte their ār and have little to do with other residents, argues that Tamils are born into the ‘social wholeness’ of sondam (‘kin’), caste, and ār (2015: 91), which
she describes as a ‘unity’ or an ‘enmeshment’. Thanges (2018a: 62) has shown a similarly exclusive manifestation of ār in ‘ār associations’ among the Tamil diaspora in London that, despite being named after multi-caste settlements in Sri Lanka, are all populated and administered by people of a single caste.

However, I depart from Daniel’s analysis in three different ways. To begin with, I suggest that Daniel’s semiological juxtaposition of ār against kirāmam is an artifice that relies on incorrect interpretations of both terms. In a more recent essay, Daniel defines kirāmam as

A patch of peopled territory that has a recognized boundary and a name, bequeathed upon it, within recent memory, by the authority and approval of some extension of state power, and is inhabited by a people who cultivate its land, and live in houses built within the limits of its boundary. (2010: 318)

I will return to the question of the state below, but here I want to propose that this rather forced definition has the effect of obscuring elements of size and the rural in kirāmam-as-village. Compare this to the definitions given in the prominent Cre-A Tamil dictionary, which defines ār as ‘a place defined by borders, where people live’, and kirāmam as ‘an ār, small in area and population, and without the facilities of city life (and where occupations such as farming and weaving are followed by tradition)’. On the other hand, naharam (or nahar), which can be translated into English as either ‘town’ or ‘city’, is ‘a large ār with a large population and many facilities’. In this sense, kirāmam is not opposed to but rather a type of ār, and one that approximates to the sense of ‘village’ as a small rural settlement that informs the anthropological concept in Sri Lankan village studies. It is notable that despite its preoccupations with borders and belonging, Daniel’s work has had little to say about the village per se, including his field site Kalappur, of which we gain only a hazy impression. It is true that Daniel’s more recent discussion of ār acknowledges a dichotomy between kirāmam and city (2010: 327), but even in this case kirāmam continues to stand as a hollow foil for the ār. In contrast, Marudankandal is both kirāmam and ār, without contradiction.

To translate ār directly as village (e.g., Mines 2005) obscures a broader and more complex meaning. A more accurate translation of ār, and one which Daniel partially acknowledges (1984: 67; 2010), is ‘home’, ‘homeplace’, or ‘native place’ (Viswanath 2014: 31). ‘Home’

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preserves the contextual and affective qualities of ūr, but only if understood in this context to refer minimally to ‘a place defined by borders, where people live’, rather than an individual household as in English.\textsuperscript{43} Some recent scholarship has begun to move away from the predominant association of ūr with village (Jegathesan 2019: 101; Thanges 2018a: 58), although nothing has yet been written, for example, about the urban ūr.

A broader critique of ūr and kirāmam entails a sociolinguistic analysis. The variety of ways of asking ‘What is your ūr?’ approximate most closely to the English ‘Where are you from?’ (Bruland 2015: 54), with all of the complexities and ambiguities that this question entails, rather than the awkward ‘what is your village?’. Meanwhile, kirāmam and naharam are employed more flexibly than their closest English equivalents. Named areas within urban settings are sometimes called kirāmam, but the same is also true of nahar, as can be seen in the adjacent urban districts of Gurunagar and Thirunagar in Jaffna.\textsuperscript{44} Ūr is also often used in placenames, while kirāmam appears, as far as I know, only in the recent Mannar village of Mathakiramam (‘Mary’s village’). The question of the tāvadi ūr must wait until it has been accurately translated. During the feast of St Anthony, Marudankandal was referred to as a kirāmam, but during one of the hymns (kavi) the church was also called the ‘city church’ (nahar ālayam). This situation is further complicated by the use of English terms within Tamil, for example Mannar Town or Jaffna Town, and the use of village in Sri Lankan English in a way that approximates the urban use of kirāmam.

Despite the continued appraisal of ūr, there has been no corollary reassessment of kirāmam, which has been overlooked largely by researchers in India (Mines 2005; Mosse 2012) and Sri Lanka (Bass 2013: 83-84; Bruland 2015; Jegathesan 2013: 183-185; Thiranagama 2011). My second aim is therefore to dispel the idea that kirāmam is not used by villagers, or that it is a term only used by government. Whatever the case in Tamil Nadu, Daniel’s argument that the kirāmam is defined by government in the form of the ‘revenue village’ does not apply to contemporary Sri Lanka for the simple reason that no such institution exists, although the situation was different before the British period. Neither are villages necessarily ‘administrative’ units (contra Bruland 2015: 11), as I will demonstrate in the next section. As I have already indicated, kirāmam was not an unknown or alien term in Marudankandal. During

\textsuperscript{43} Ūr cannot be used, as in English, to refer to one’s house. ‘Are you at home?’ is phrased in Tamil as ‘are you in [your] house?’ (viṭṭila nikkirīngalā?), rather than ‘are you in the ūr?’ (ūrila nikkirīngalā?). Another idiomatic difference is seen in the Sri Lankan English ‘come home’, meaning an invitation to visit, which in British English would be phrased ‘come to my house/place’.

\textsuperscript{44} Gama, the Sinhalese equivalent for village, can be used for areas within cities (Bremner 2004: 137).
the feast, St Anthony was referred to as the *kirāma pādukāvalan* (‘village guardian’), while Hindus elsewhere in Mannar referred to *kirāma dēvangaḷ* (‘village gods’). Overlooked evidence from Tamil Nadu itself reflects this usage. While the ‘village goddess’ of Mines’ field-site Yanaimangalam was called the *ūramman* (Mines 2005: 30), St James was known in Alapuram as the *kirāma dēvam* (‘village god’) (Mosse 2012: 107). Nevertheless, Mosse adheres to Daniel’s formula in proposing that St James thus turns the administrative village (*kirāmam*) into the *ūr*.

Finally, the idea of an authentic Tamil concept of the ‘borderless’ village obscures the reality of other factors that play important roles for the villagers in practice and in rhetoric. While Mines’ analysis reveals the role of boundary maintenance with regard to *ūrmakkaḷ* and *kuḍimakkaḷ* and their relationship to the *ūr* goddess, in the tank-dominated landscape of Matottam I found that similar issues of social dominance and ownership were very much related to borders determined by both ecological reality and state intervention. Obeyesekere’s explication of *gama*, the Sinhalese equivalent for ‘village’, emphasised the associations between people, land and ownership missing in recent discussions of the ‘Tamil village’ (1967: 12-15). Rather than arguing for the ‘cultural’ importance of borders, it would be more accurate to say that borders become more or less important according to context. Banks, for example, argued that village boundaries are of no interest because they have no significance to property or the village as a corporate entity (1957: 464-465). Marudankandal’s borders were, in three directions at least, fairly unambiguous: to the east the *pulavu*, to the north the channel that ran along the far edge of the *kamam*, and to the west a road which divided Marudankandal from neighbouring Koyilkulam. Lacking an obvious geographical factor, and complicated by the proximity of Alayankulam and the question of Main Road, the village’s southern border was more ambiguous. While it was sometimes said that the village extended to an irrigation channel to the south of Main Road, this was in fact the southern border of the Marudankandal GN division. This demonstrates the way that local borders are not always coterminous with those defined by the state, as I show in the next section.

**VILLAGE AND STATE**

Villages act as administrative units in contemporary Sri Lanka only when they coincide with institutions such as the Farmers Organization or the Grama Niladhari Division. Historically, the village has played a rather different role. Following precolonial practice, the Portuguese and the Dutch treated villages as a source of revenue, recording them in great detail in the
thombos (van den Belt et al. 2011). Villages were also granted to Europeans as well as native headmen in lieu of a cash salary (Serrão and Rodrigues 2015). In Matottam, the ‘much depopulated’ villages were given to the Portuguese settlers on Mannar Island for this purpose, with the majority of the rent going to support the local Church (VP PPIII: 274). While sources from the south indicate a complex variety of types of villages and land tenure (Dewasiri 2008: 108), far less is known about land ownership in the north, although Dutch and British sources commented that land was, in contrast to the south, primarily owned outright rather than held according to service tenure or cash rent (Arasaratnam 1982: 3-4). Although the British did not compile thombos, and abolished most service tenures in the first decades of their rule, they treated villages as the smallest units of enumeration in the 1827 census and in the all-island censuses of 1881, 1901, and 1911, although not in the first census in 1871, nor in 1891 (these censuses named villages but grouped them together with regard to statistical data). A very small number of government publications, such as the Mannar Gazetteers of Denham (1906) and Horsburgh (1916), provided a range of information about individual villages (including majority caste and religion).

By the 1911 census, the last to be organised by village, the state had begun to differentiate villages and towns as settlement types. Towns were distinguished by the presence of a Municipality or Local Board, or were ‘the seat of a Government Agent or Assistant Government Agent, or of a District Court, or… brought under the operation of the special system of deaths registration’ (Denham 1912a: 23). The official designation of urban areas continues in contemporary Sri Lanka, and they come under the jurisdiction of municipal and urban councils with regard to certain public services. Rural areas nominally fall under the Pradeshiya Sabhas (variously translated as divisional, rural or village councils), although some of the areas that they cover could otherwise be considered urban. Moore (1985: 121-140) has observed that Sri Lankan settlement patterns often make it hard to visually distinguish between urban and rural settlements. As scholars have noted (Balasundarampillai 1972: 75; Moore 1985: 123; Panditharatna 1996: 19), there are no formal criteria – e.g., size of population or prevalence of non-agricultural occupations – against which these decisions are made, and they are influenced by various factors that include ‘the play of political interests’ (Moore 1985: 123).

The above-mentioned councils fall under local government, one of the three overlapping structures of the Sri Lankan state, the others being central government and provincial government. Central government has the closest relationship with the village, through the Grama Niladhari Divisions – formerly Grama Sevaka or GS, by which they are still referred to
in Mannar today – the smallest administrative units in Sri Lanka (Figure 4.1). The role of the Grama Sevaka, which is recruited by examination, was created in 1956 to replace the Village Headman, a more powerful role criticised as a corrupt and feudal remnant of the colonial administration (Banks 1957: 451-459; Moore 1985: 59-60; Robinson 1975). Village Headmen were known by different regional names: in Mannar the Village Headman was the Udayar [udaiyär], while the district’s Chief Headmen were called Adigars [adigär].) Among other responsibilities, the GN maintains census lists, provides character assessments and references, acts as an intermediary in matters such as the provision of INGO funds for postwar housing, and plays a role in the other divisional organisations, which in Marudankandal GN are the Rural Development Society, the Women’s Rural Development Society, the Cooperative Society, the Society for the Elderly, the Sports Association, and the Farmers Organization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Administrator</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Governor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District (e.g., Mannar)</td>
<td>District Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divisional Secretariat (Manthai West)</td>
<td>Divisional Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grama Niladhari (Marudankandal)</td>
<td>Grama Niladhari, or Village Officer</td>
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Figure 4.1 The structure of central government administration.

GN Divisions are determined by administrative convenience and political forces, and change over time. A GN Division may align with the existing territory of a single village, but there is no formal reason for this, and they will often cover more than one village or parts of larger settlements. Within Manthai West DS Division, Marudankandal GN Division is one of 36, which administer a total of 126 villages. Despite no longer being a discrete administrative entity in the eyes of the state, villages continue to exist in practice, as with the earlier Village Headmen: ‘villages retain their identity through the vicissitudes of different divisions’ (Banks 1957: 452). Also similar to the Village Headman (Leach 1961: 29), the terms Grama Sevaka and Grama Niladhari (which translate from Sinhala as Village Headman and Village Officer) are therefore misleading. This confusion is compounded by the fact that GN Divisions exist in

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45 These titles were formerly Government Agent, Assistant Government Agent, and Grama Sevaka, and these remain more commonly used in practice.
urban settlements as well as rural ones. While some anthropologists have made a sharp distinction between GN Divisions/Village Headmanships and the village (e.g., Banks 1957; Robinson 1975), others have referred to the GN Division as the village (as Winslow [2003-2004: 18-19] notes of Yalman [1971]) or to the village as an administrative unit in itself (Brow 2011a: 58; Obeyesekere 1967: 12-14).

Studies of Sinhalese villages have shown not only that state-imposed boundaries can be generative (Obeyesekere 1967: 12), but that villagers continue to differentiate between these and older local territories (Gunasinghe 2007: Spencer 1992: 367-368). In my fieldwork there was no sense that Tamils do not see or recognise state borders, as is evident with regard to the border ambiguity between Alayankulam and Marudankandal, in which Marudankandal villagers were able to point to the southern GN border as evidence of the extent of the village itself. A couple of Alayankulam villagers complained to me that people from Marudankandal had been expanding the border during the war, and on Main Road some shopfronts bore the word Alayankulam, others Marudankandal. Those who considered it part of Alayankulam were bemused, noting that the school was named Alayankulam, not Marudankandal, MMV.

VILLAGE AND CASTE

The real grounds for decision in the preparation of the village lists were the existence of a separate name, and the fact that the place bearing the name was inhabited. Where a separate name was preserved, and where there was any population, the place has been included as a village, and it is undoubtedly regarded as such by the people of the country. […] There is very strong feeling in regard to the preservation of village names, and the name of a hamlet which has been completely over-shadowed by the growth of a large adjoining village is carefully preserved by the inhabitants, who regard it as the record of their past history, of their caste, and their rights to their lands. (Denham 1912a: 23-24)

The British were aware that state and local understandings of the village were not coterminous, as Denham explained in his analysis of the 1911 census. Denham’s comment is significant because it foregrounds identity and ownership in the local concept of the village, particularly with relation to caste (Tamil sādi). Having already considered cultural and state perspectives on the village, I now begin to discuss caste in the village, and the Kadaiyar majority.

The main residential area of Marudankandal, the cluster of compounds by the bund, was also the centre of the Kadaiyar families. The formal entrance into the cluster was a winding cul-de-sac leading down from the bund, although some of the outermost compounds – which once backed directly onto the kamam, but were now bordered by a dirt path built by the Sri Lankan Army during the latter stages of the war – were also used as thoroughfares by villagers.
This part of Marudankandal was more densely populated than most local villages, and the pressure of increasing land fragmentation was evident not only in the irregular sizes and shapes of the plots but the fact that some could be reached only by passing through others. As Peter said to me one day: ‘We live here because this is where the land is.’ A couple of families had also begun to move onto the _kamam_ itself, filling in paddy fields to raise the ground level. A few overgrown compounds belonged to families who had not yet returned after the war.

Although trees—palmyrah, coconut, banana, mango, guava, and others—blocked most lines of sight, the compounds were very permeable to sound, and, as Argenti-Pillen (2003) and Derges (2008: 101) have observed in other parts of Sri Lanka, the acoustic dimension of Marudankandal was an important way in which it was experienced. Villagers often paused to listen to noises and conversations from other compounds, or the church bell ringing the thrice-daily angelus (tirundādi), which would usually be followed by the sign of the cross. Deaths were also communicated by sound, with St Anthony’s church bell heralding a death among its members (the _tūkku maṇi_, or ‘sorrow bell’), and further details were broadcast from scratchy loudspeakers in threewheels slowly winding their way between the villages.

The cluster was as dense socially as it was physically, the families entwined within a complex network of kin and caste ties, and the path into the midst of the compounds sometimes felt like a private road. Indeed, the Kadaiyars sometimes talked about Marudankandal as if it was their own, which was reflected in their numerical preponderance and control over the administration of St Anthony’s and the Farmers Organization. In relation to the village and its other inhabitants, I refer to the Kadaiyars as a ‘village caste community’, a phenomenon seen throughout the other villages I visited during my fieldwork. However, although it is necessary to talk about caste in this sense, I want to emphasise the fact that this terminology obscures people of other castes who have married into the Kadaiyars. Strictly speaking, caste is considered to pass from father to children, which means that the children of women who marry out are not Kadaiyars, although mothers retain their caste. This means that reference to caste alone does not necessarily reflect kinship, as I will discuss further below.

Village caste communities are not ‘subcastes’, a term that has been inconsistently applied in Sri Lankan scholarship. McGilvray (2008: 100) has argued that subcastes, defined as territorially identified, contrastively defined populations within a larger occupational category, do not exist in the Batticaloa region, and others have made a similar case among the Sinhalese (Ryan 1953: 15; Stirrat 1982: 24; Widger 2009: 112), although other kinds of intra-caste divisions have been observed, such as ‘microcastes’ (Yalman 1971) and exogamous matrilineal _kuḍis_ (McGilvray 2008) or _varigas_ (Robinson 1975: 39). Some scholars have used the term
subcaste in discussions of Jaffna, although without defining its precise meaning (Bruland 2015: 65-66; Lebbe 1979: 154; Thanges and Silva 2009: 53). Others have noted status divisions within the Jaffna Vellalars that are sometimes referred to as pahudis (‘side, section’) (Derges 2008: 94; Jeeweshwara Räsänen 2015: 129, 145; Perinbanayagam 1982: 25; Sivathamby 1995: 23). In Mannar, the word pahudi (pronounced like padi) was occasionally used to refer to caste itself, for example karaiyam padi (Karaiyar) and vēḻāmai padi (Vellalars).

Banks (1957) argued that castes in Jaffna are internally divided into unnamed, fictively endogamous, hierarchically ranked groups, for which he created the term ‘sondakāra castes’ (literally ‘kinspeople castes’). According to Banks, sondakāra castes are nucleated within ‘wards’ that are the minimal units of political life in the village (1957: 474), and some villages contain separate wards of the same caste. Although Tambiah (1973: 125-127) noted in passing that Banks was correct about sondakāra castes, K. David (1973: 24 n. 6) rejected the concept of the sondakāra caste while continuing to talk about nucleated wards (kuricci), which he argued are identified with particular kin ‘units’ (sandadi) and founding ‘ancestors’ (vari). As with subcastes, this requires further research, although both Banks’ and K. David’s arguments suggest a reification of kinship and status that I did not encounter in Mannar.

The other Tamils in Marudankandal, who resided further from the tank, were a mix of other castes, among them Ambattar, Karaiyar, Kollar, Maravar, Paraiyar, Sandar, Timilar, Vannar, and Vellalar. As elsewhere in Sri Lanka (Gaasbeek 2010; McGilvray 2008; Smith 1997), the Muslims in Mannar emphasised that they do not observe caste, and sometimes, exploiting the broader meaning of sādi (‘kind or species’), joked that the only real castes were men and women (āncādiyum pencādiyum, ‘man-kind and woman-kind’). Other researchers have observed caste-like groups among Muslim communities while arguing that Muslims do not have caste per se (McGilvray 2008: 308-310; Smith 1997: 278-186), although Muslims have historically been reliant on Tamil service castes (Gaasbeek 2010: 108; McGilvray 2008: 304). Unfortunately, these were not issues that I could investigate during my fieldwork.

Because of the sensitivities around caste, which I return to in Chapter Six, I did not conduct a survey of castes in the village, although other than the Kadaiyars, there was no caste larger than a handful of families. My knowledge about caste identities grew in a piecemeal fashion, often dependent on learning family ties to other villages inhabited by caste communities I was aware of, rather than through Thanges’ method of investigating the churches or temples that individuals attended (2018b: 32). Thanges (ibid.) has also noted that it is not possible to know the caste identity of everyone, and few of the villagers themselves would claim to do so, particularly, as in Tenna (Spencer 1990: 39), with regard to people who have arrived recently.
In his recent doctoral study of caste in Jaffna and the UK, Thanges writes that ‘The everyday interaction between different caste groups in public or face-to-face settings does not provide a better understanding on caste-related discourses and practises’ (2018b: 30-31). In Chapter Six I will argue that caste should be understood as a form of learned private knowledge, an ‘off-stage story’ as Thanges puts it (2018b: 31), although I will also suggest that it is not invisible and has become more public since the end of the war. Although he perhaps overstates his case, Thanges correctly argues that caste is not clear from ‘everyday interaction’, and this was also true in Marudankandal. One reason for this, as I will discuss later, is that single caste churches such as St Anthony’s do not offer a symbolic arena for representation and contestation in the way that multi-caste churches and temples do. In contrast to the Tamil Nadu villages described by Mines (2005) and Mosse (2012), caste was also less evident in a socio-spatial sense. Although the Kadaiyar families were concentrated in the main cluster, there were no other areas or streets named after, or associated with, specific castes. ‘Traditional’ caste occupations were also limited, although the barber saloons on Main Road belonged to Catholic Ambattars and the laundry to the south of Main Road was run by a Hindu Vannar family who came from Jaffna in 1995. Neither Ambattars nor Vannars visited homes, as they had done in the past. In Marudankandal there was also a Hindu Kollar blacksmith, who was married to a Catholic relative of the teacher who rented the room in Jeyabalan’s house.

Ritual caste service, a significant historical element of caste relations across Sri Lanka and India, had almost entirely disappeared. As I explain in Chapter Six, amongst the Catholic Tamils of Matottam the service castes, or kudimakkaḷ, had been the Ambattars and Vannars. Today the use of kudimakkaḷ in this sense is almost unknown. I attended one mixed Kadaiyar wedding at which the bridegroom was ritually shaved by a local barber, but this was a low-key event that went strictly against the Barbers Sangam (Association), and a Kadaiyar bridegroom in another village told me that his local barbers had been unwilling to do this. It was also particularly unusual that a Vannar man in his late seventies, Michael, continued to provide the Kadaiyar families on the mainland with white cloths for church feasts and life-cycle celebrations. Before the war, Michael and his family had lived amongst the Kadaiyars within the main cluster, providing the Kadaiyar families with secular and ritual services. During the war they had moved to Mannar Town, and after his surviving children had gone to India and his wife had passed away, Michael had remained there with his daughter-in-law and her children. Still active and cycling, and always wearing a distinctive blue towel (tuvāi) around his neck, he divided his time between Mannar and Marudankandal, where he stayed with a
middle-aged Kadaiyar couple who ran a tea shop on Main Road often frequented by Michael
and other older men.

In his study of a Jaffna village in the 1970s, Lebbe (1979: 155) observed that ‘Intra-caste
relationships are characterized by social and kinship ties which often extend beyond the
boundaries of the village. Each caste has matrimonial and thus social ties with a different group
of villages’. This was also the case in Matottam, and, as I have mentioned above, tracing kin
ties was one of the main ways that I learned about caste identities. I refer to these networks of
village caste communities as ‘regional caste communities’, which will comprise a central
element of Chapter Six. The regional Mannar Kadaiyar community was composed of four
castes in Matottam, the others being Periyakulam, Tenkulam, and Vaikkalkandal
(which lay just on the other side of Pallivasalpuram), with another eighteen on Mannar Island.
Some regional caste communities, including the Kadaiyars, had also formed associations that
attempted to regulate the increasingly divergent ties of caste and kin through their membership
rules.

CASTE AND KIN

As others have observed (Spencer 1990: 39; Thanges 2018b: 32), intercaste marriages mean
that to describe the villagers in terms of caste means obscuring kinship ties, while the reverse
is also true. In order to elaborate on this it is necessary to turn to what has been called, not
uncontroversially (Good 1996), ‘Dravidian kinship’. This is the broad commonality of kinship
practices and values found across Sri Lanka, where it is shared broadly by Tamil, Muslim and
Sinhalese communities, and South India. The literature on this topic is vast, and I only intend
to draw out some of the key points here.

Family or kin of all kinds are referred to in Tamil as sōndam, which more generally refers
to things that belong to oneself, such as one’s native place (sonda ūr) or private land (sonda
kāṇi). In terms of kinship, sōndam encompasses a distinction between parallel and cross kin –
between the children of siblings of the same sex (parallel cousins), and the children of siblings
of different sexes (cross cousins). Parallel cousins (e.g., mother’s sister’s children) are treated
as one’s own siblings and addressed as such, although the distinction between consanguineal
and classificatory siblings can be made with the prefixes kāḍappiranda (‘born of the same
parents’) and oṇduvittu (‘once removed’), while male and female cross cousins (e.g., mother’s
brother’s children) are called maccān and maccāḷ respectively. The distinction between parallel and cross kin operates not only between first cousins but also between cousins at further removes. If mother’s sister’s children are one’s cross-cousins, so are maternal grandmother’s sister’s grandchildren, and so on. This is also complicated by the lack of a ‘family name’, as individual names comprise a personal name as well as the father’s personal name. Working out the precise nature of a relationship (murai) in this context can be complicated, and Bruland (2015: 80) notes that people often do not know about their vertical relatives beyond their grandparents’ generation. I also found that younger villagers often had to ask their parents about connections to more distant villages.

Crucially, first cross-cousins of the appropriate age are not only marriageable but in many contexts the preferred spouse, while parallel cousins are completely out of bounds. Much has been written about the way in which Dravidian kinship terminology itself appears to posit cross-cousin marriages: mother’s brother and father-in-law are both māmā, father’s sister and mother-in-law are māmī, and cross-nephews and nieces take the same terms as son and daughter-in-law (marumahal and marumahan). This approach has been criticised by scholars who have shown that kinship practices often follow other, less-studied customs. For example, Clark-Decés has shown that in some Tamil Nadu contexts patrilateral and matrilateral cross-cousins are treated differently; that marriage rules often apply differently across siblings; and that the anthropological focus on cross-cousin marriage has obscured the fact that it is often more common, in India at least, for a man to marry his elder sister’s daughter (2014: 174 n. 9).

First-cousin marriages are practised in Sri Lanka. First-cousin marriage poses a more significant problem for Roman Catholics because it falls within the prohibited degrees of kinship according to canon law, and is therefore considered invalid due to what is known as the ‘impediment of consanguinity’. Local Catholics were aware of the Church’s official view, and shared a wider concern for illnesses in children potentially caused through the marriage of blood relatives (retta uṟavu). However, in practice such marriages may be permitted by means

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46 In local English, the terms ‘cousin brother’ and ‘cousin sister’ have been adopted to refer to cross cousins, as Banks also observed in the 1950s (1957: 54).
47 There is some regional variation in this. In some villages, such as Vangalai, individuals often inherit a ‘title’ (patnam), one of several Portuguese names (such as Croos) that have survived since the Portuguese period. However, these are not used as a ‘family’ name.
48 Good (1996: 6) incorrectly states that this is also the case in Sri Lanka.
49 The extent to which cross-cousin marriages occur across Sri Lanka is unknown. In 1971 McGilvray (2014) suggested that 17-20% of marriages among Muslims and high-caste Tamils in Akkaraipattu occurred between first cross-cousins.
of a special dispensation given by a Bishop, rather than being entirely prohibited (contra Kapadia 1995: 16). According to priests in the diocese, there are less than ten of such marriages each year. They are celebrated like other marriages, in contrast to a Sinhalese view that cross-cousin marriages require little to no ritual or public performance because they reaffirm existing kinship bonds (Heslop 2014: 80).

Without further research, I am not able to comment on how common cross-cousin marriages were in the past, or how this practice was constrained by factors of caste endogamy and smaller caste populations. However, among the Kadayars many marriages continued to occur between more distant relatives. Between 2013 and 2017 there were between one and three weddings among the Kadayar Catholics every year: all were arranged marriages rather than love marriages, in every case the spouse was from another village, and in all but one both parties were Kadayar and kin at various removes. However, the marriages during this particular period did not reflect a wider decrease of caste endogamy, which has been undermined by factors such as ‘material benefits, educational achievement, migration, notion of love and intimate relationships, mutual supports in the time of crisis/emergency, and geographical proximity in the repeated displacements caused by war’ (Thanges 2018b: 77).

These can be condensed into two connected trends. The first is the growing acceptability of love marriages (kādal kaliyāṇam) as an alternative to proposed marriages (pēccu kaliyāṇam), although whether or not love is necessary and desirable before, or even within, a marriage is a topic of frequent discussion. It is also important to note, however, that love marriages often continue to rely on family approval, and that love (kādal) is still to be considered a threat to parental control. The word ‘elopement’ is used in local English for situations where an unmarried man and woman have begun to act as if already husband and wife, either by running away or living together. The Catholic marriages held on these occasions are known as ‘rectifications’ and not celebrated. It should not be assumed that love marriages occur exclusively between non-kin. Among the Kadayars in Marudankandal several marriages that had begun with love were opposed by relatives for different reasons. Among Mannar Catholics marriages are usually arranged through friends and relatives rather than through brokers, which are considered more popular among Hindus (although I cannot say whether this is actually the case in the district).

The second trend is the growing number of intercaste marriages. Although Banks’ (1957) claim that marriages in 1950s Jaffna were ‘strictly endogamous’ may have been an overstatement, memories of past opposition to such marriages in Marudankandal indicated the extent that opposition to them had reduced in the last few decades. The father of the shopowner
Vasanthan had been a Maravar from Tamil Nadu who had come to Mannar as a child and eventually married a Kadaiyar from Marudankandal. This had been a particular point of contention for the Kadaiyars, who would not let his father join the church, nor would they ring the church bell when he died. Vasanthan said that now that he was successful they had asked him to join, but he was not interested. Today intercaste marriages, both love and arranged, are often held up as key evidence of the transformation in local caste attitudes. At a wedding in Marudankandal in 2014, which had been arranged between a Kadaiyar woman and a Maravar man from another village, the bride’s mother told me cheerfully that they would never have married ‘outsiders’ (veliyākkal) in the past. The war was a major factor in the increase in intercaste marriages. One reason often given was that people had been mixed together, particularly in the IDP camps. Another was the influence of the LTTE, not just through its support of intercaste marriages, but its threat of punishment for families who opposed them. Another reason, which was given by Daniel for his marriage to Teresa, who was a Maravar, was that the fear of the LTTE’s policy of forcibly conscripting the unmarried overrode family opposition.

Having gathered information on 116 intercaste marriages in his two field sites in Jaffna, Thanges (2018b: 171) showed that the highest number occurred between 2005 and 2010. I do not have comparable statistical data for Marudankandal, but there were a number of younger intercaste couples. In 2015, for example, my landlord Jeyabalan’s youngest daughter married a Catholic Karaiyar man from Alayankulam. Two years later, Kiruba married a Hindu Vellalar from Jaffna District, whom he had got to know in the camp at Madhu. Their relationship had initially been opposed by both families, but his parents had softened in the couple of years before the wedding. Thanges discusses the experiences of a number of intercaste couples, and concludes that such marriages do not ‘necessarily imply that there is an acceptance of equality among the two caste groups, individuals, or families’ (2018b: 167-188). Instead, he suggests that intercaste marriages imply that other factors ‘have over-ridden caste taboos’, and notes that these marriages sometimes have conditions imposed upon them. Although this might be partly true in Mannar, in my experience intercaste marriages were viewed more positively, with many people being outspokenly critical of opposition towards them. On the other hand, the borders between kinship and caste continue to be monitored by caste associations, which I will return to in Chapter Six.

If practices of cross-cousin marriage and caste endogamy were followed rigidly, kin and caste ties would be coterminous, and castes entirely separate. Instead, the existence of intercaste marriages means that talking exclusively about caste obscures certain types of
kinship, and vice versa. This has not rendered caste unimportant, although it becomes relevant at different times in different contexts, and working out the relationship between caste and kin is an ongoing process. Kinship is also an idiom used to refer to caste. Marcus, for example, once said that all of the Kadaiyars in Mannar were *sondam* (‘kin’), although others disagreed. Rajesh, the Hindu owner of Marudankandal’s small mill, told me that the Marudankandal Catholics were all ‘one family’ (*orē kuḍumbam*).

THE ‘SINGLE CASTE’ VILLAGE

Marudankandal was sometimes referred to, by people from other villagers and the Kadaiyars themselves, as a Kadaiyar village. Although I have demonstrated that it is not, it is worth pursuing this, as the idea of single caste (or ‘monocaste’) villages, or those with populated almost entirely by a single caste, resonates throughout Sri Lankan caste studies. Studies of villages inhabited entirely, or almost entirely, by a single caste have been prominent in Sri Lankan anthropology (Brow 2011a; Douglas 2017: 67; Leach 1961; Robinson 1975; Van Daele 2013b; Winslow 1994). Multicaste village studies also exist (K. David 1973; T. Gunasekera 1994; Kendrick 1992; Thanges 2018b; Spencer 1990), although ethnographic questions of intercaste dynamics are highly underdeveloped in contrast to parallel Indian literature (from Tamil Nadu alone see Betelle 1965; Daniel 1984; Gough 1989; Kapadia 1995; Mines 2005; Mosse 2012). If multicaste villages have been central to caste studies in India, single caste villages have played the dominant role in the conceptualisation of Sri Lankan caste. In the 1870s, the *Report* (14) observed of Matottam that ‘Usually every caste lives in a different village, cultivates different rice paddy, etc.’, and the prominence of single caste villages elsewhere in Sri Lanka has been often noted.50 The concept of the single caste village has also played a role in conceptualising a historical ‘egalitarian village ideology’ (Pfaffenberger 1990b: 371) that has been employed in modern models of village irrigation (Stanbury 1996: 216).

Some attempts have been made to explain the prevalence of single caste villages, particularly in comparison with India. Meyer argues that the few multicaste caste villages in central Sri Lanka ‘must have been imported by kings and nobles of South Indian origin’ (2014: 42-43). Gunasinghe (2007: 115) and Moore (1985: 172-173) have argued that the state’s

dependence on caste-based labour in the south, and relative lack of intercaste service, meant that the division of labour was realised at the level of the region not the village, while Banks wrote that there was a ‘significant lack of corporateness and a sense of unity’ in villages in Jaffna (1957: 467). Ryan (1953: 160) wrote that village homogeneity protected the home from intercaste contacts. One objection to these arguments is that the topic of caste service relationships, particularly among the Sinhalese, is extremely understudied, despite brief mentions of their existence (U. A. Gunasekera 1965; Meyer 2014; Roberts 1982: 47; Ryan 1953).

The framing of single caste villages as a receding historical phenomenon (Gunasinghe 2007: 115; Spencer 1990: 188), which presumes total endogamy, accords with local narratives of historical ownership that describe the original villagers as a single caste-kin group (e.g., Obeyesekere 1967: 18; Robinson 1975: 72). Among the Kadaiyar villagers in Marudankandal it was said that the kamam had originally been divided into five shares (pangu), each owned by a separate Kadaiyar family. The Report described Marudankandal as a Kadaiyar village, adding that there were twelve Kadaiyar families. However, although the true extent of historical endogamy is a question that I am unable to answer, two facts complicate this picture of Marudankandal at the end of the nineteenth century. First, as mentioned in Chapter Two, in the 1870s half of the village lands had been sold to people of other villages and castes. Second, although we do not have a breakdown of population statistics for the initial censuses, the 1911 census recorded that while fifty-nine of the sixty-four people in Marudankandal at that time were Ceylon Tamils, four were Indian Tamils, and one was a Ceylon Moor (Denham 1912b). Fifty-seven were Christian, six Hindu, and one Muslim. Although it seems reasonable to suggest that not all of these were Kadaiyars, it is impossible to determine the identity of those who were not; they may have been natives of Marudankandal, recent settlers from elsewhere, or seasonal labourers.

Beyond historical questions, there are two important dimensions to this issue to which anthropologists should be attentive. The first is the role of rhetoric in the association between caste and village. Like caste and kin, caste and village are often conflated. For example, when Nesaraja helped me to draw a map of Marudankandal in December 2013, the sixty-five households that we recorded were almost entirely the Kadaiyar families. On another occasion, Nesaraja told me that Vasanthan was not able to talk about Marudankandal because he was from ‘another lineage’ (vēra pārambarai). This is not a novel observation (see Banks 1957: 475), although in the Sri Lankan context it has been overshadowed by an assumed association between caste and place that overlooks other caste inhabitants. As described at the beginning
of the chapter, Mines’ study of Yanaimangalam emphasises the exclusionary rhetoric of caste dominance (2005). Similarly, Gottschalk noted that the economically and politically dominant Rājputs and Pathāns in his north Indian field site often refer to the multi-caste villages in which they live as though they are the sole inhabitants, a narrative that ‘reflects their sense of appropriation and ownership of the villages’ (2000: 6).

Some villages were perceived of as single or majority caste villages, with a strong caste identity. Other villages with a number of known caste groups were referred to as ‘mixed’, which could refer to questions of power as well as indeterminacy. One morning I was eating in a kaḍai and trying to establish the origins of another diner who lived just nearby with his family. Both he and his wife were from local villages, and had moved to Main Road in recent years. The restaurant owner joined in to say that as this was a ‘town’ everyone was mixed up, and it was difficult to assign village identities like that. Of course, the difference between places that are perceived as single or mixed caste is a relative one, and largely to do with numbers. For example, despite the different castes in Marudankandal, Peter once said that it was better than Tenkulam, a more evidently mixed-caste village – as I will show in Chapter Five – because the same people (i.e., caste) were together. John observed that when there was a single or majority caste in a village it was difficult to bring in people from outside.

The second issue is how a caste majority arises in the control of institutions and resources. In his recent research in Jaffna, Kadirgamar has highlighted temples, schools, and sana samūha nilaiyams (‘community centres’) as particular sites of caste exclusion (2017: 238-239). Mosse (2003: 5) has observed that in agricultural villages the tank and the church together define a public domain and shared set of material and symbolic resources ‘through which authority and social order have been articulated at different levels in Tamil society’. The question of caste dynamics in cultivation and irrigation was not part of my fieldwork, and it would take more research to disentangle the intercaste relations within the village from issues in which the rice cultivators act as a common community vis-à-vis other tanks in the system. More obvious, however, is the nature of control over the village church. A majority caste is often reflected in sole control over the administration of the church, which will be known as a ‘caste church’ (sādi kōyil), and in mixed villages there are ‘common churches’ (podu kōyil), although these are far from the complexity described in Alapuram by Mosse (2012). As in Jaffna (Kadirgamar 2017: 196), some villages experienced changes in the relative populations of castes during the war, and this was a key reason for recent conflicts over church control. St Anthony’s is thought of as a single caste church, despite the fact that other people have married into the Kadaiyar families, and I turn to this in Chapter Five.
KIN AND OTHERS

At this point I turn away from caste, which will be a key element of Chapters Five and Six, and investigate other forms of relationship in Marudankandal, starting with kin. The closely-knit kinship context of Marudankandal resonates with other research that has emphasised kinship (sondam) as the closest and primary form of sociality (Bruland 2015: 12 and passim; Clark-Decés 2014; Fuglerud 1999: 146; Kapadia 1995: 40). Bruland (2015) has shown that Tamil kinship is invested in continuous active practice rather than merely the awareness of kin ties (cf. Carsten 2000). Her descriptions of the maintenance of kinship reflect my experiences in Mannar, and the comments of Tamils in the diaspora about the loneliness of their lifestyle echo remarks made to me by UK Tamils about the inability to visit others because people work all the time and are never at home. This kind of quotidian kin sociality was also catalysed by major church feasts and life-cycle events that drew large numbers of kin from within the village and beyond and demonstrated familial responsibilities (poruppu) that were idiomatically expressed through the possession of rights (urimai) in kin (sondam) (Clark-Decés 2014: 39-40). These responsibilities were invested not only in financial support (Bruland 2015; Kapadia 1995: 40) but also shared labour.

Weddings were perhaps the most spectacular example of this. Most Catholic weddings took place between July and September, between the end of the sirubōham and the start of the perumbōham rains, although some took place after the perumbōham harvest in February or March. Weddings occurred across two key days, several days apart. The wedding Mass was said on the first, usually at the bride’s own church if the couple came from different places, followed by a celebration at her house, which would continue into the next day if the number of guests was large enough. Several days later was the nāḻam caḻangu – the ‘fourth (day) event’, although the actual timing was flexible, and sometimes called the ‘homecoming’ in English – on which the new couple travelled to the house of the groom, whose family hosted a second but similar celebration.

Unlike Mannar Town, where such events were often held in the town hall with caterers providing the food, in Marudankandal they took place in the family’s compound. Preparations lasted for several days before the wedding, beginning with the ritual installation of the kaṇṇi kāl by the older male relatives, led by the bride’s mother’s brother (tāi māmā), in the ground in front of the house. The kaṇṇi kāl was a branch of the banyan tree, said to represent the hope that the new family would grow similarly large and strong, although elsewhere other kinds of
wood were used for differing symbolic reasons. Over the following days many people came and went. In general, the women cooked constantly while the men constructed pandals (a temporary pavilion or gazebo erected for shade), repaired and decorated the house and compound, and collected hundreds of plastic chairs. Working together like this, Selva’s father Stanley said during a wedding in 2014, was sandōsam (‘happiness’).

Having been made of wood collected in the forest in the past, pandals are now rented structures of metal rods and corrugated iron roofs. At weddings (and puberty ceremonies) there were always two. The first, constructed around the kaṇṇi kāl and ornately decorated, was used to take photographs of the bride and groom with the guests. The second, its ceiling decorated with white paper or, in the case of a Kadaiyar wedding, white sheets brought by Michael, was devoted to the meal. After their photo had been taken, guests were directed towards an available seat and immediately served their meal. This was heavily invested with communal pride, not only with regard to the food, which was cooked by the villagers themselves, but also with regard to the service, which was usually performed by younger or middle-aged men who would urge each other to work quickly and attentively. Guests were sometimes asked not only ‘how is the food?’ (sāppāḍu eppidi?) but ‘how is the hospitality?’ (kavanippu eppidi?).

If events such as wedding reveal the responsibilities of kin to each other, they also shine light on the relationships between kin and non-kin. Before this, I want to highlight what I suggest is a misunderstanding of non-kin found in two recent ethnographies. Both Clark-Decés (2014) and Bruland (2015) conflate non-kin with strangers, an elision that obscures the multiple types of relationships that people maintain beyond kin. The English word ‘stranger’ (someone who is not known) is also a mistranslation of the two Tamil terms that these scholars provide: sondam illai (‘not kin’, Bruland 2015: 12); and anniyam (‘other or something not one’s own’, Clark-Decés 2014: 39). In Tamil, stranger is usually expressed as teriyādāl (‘unknown person’), in contrast to terinjāl (‘known person’), while ‘known person’ is a construction used in local English. Maṟṟākkāḷ (‘other people’) and veliyākkāḷ (‘outside people’) can also be used in this context, although because they can also refer to those outside of a particular group (caste, village, etc.), they do not mean stranger per se.

Writing in the 1950s of caste in Sri Lanka, Ryan wrote that sociality occurred mainly with kin or people of the same caste, and people primarily visited their neighbours (1953: 160). Much more recently, Bruland wrote that the people of the Siviyar caste in Korte, who considered themselves the original inhabitants and comprised Bruland’s informants, rarely socialised beyond the immediate family. They viewed the other inhabitants as ‘strangers’ who moved there during the war, and who did not, from the perspective of the Siviyars, contribute
to the creation of the ūr (2015: 30, 117). Bruland’s description raises unanswered questions about the identity of the strangers and their relationship with the Siviyars. This atomised society does not reflect my own fieldwork in Marudankandal. To begin with, social knowledge was not limited to kin, caste, or the village, and there was a strong desire to place others in relation to oneself and transform them from unknown people into known people. The obvious way in which this was done was through ubiquitous questions about homeplace. The association between caste and place has been widely noticed (Kadirgamar 2017: 195; Thanges 2018), and it has become a truism in anthropology that questions about origins are covert inquiries about caste identity (Mosse 2012: 99; Thanges 2018b; Thiranagama 2011). However, the assumption of hostility has obscured the fact that this question is ambiguous, and may lead to the discovery of positive social connections that cross caste, religious, ethnic differences.

While the domestic world may revolve primarily around kin, beyond the home there were a multitude of spheres – church, parish, agriculture, Main Road – in which people frequently mixed. Although people did often visit their closest neighbours, in many places these were neither kin nor people of the same caste. There were also many durable friendships that had formed among school ‘batchmates’, which Nakassis has also observed in Tamil Nadu (2010: 31). Also significant was the fact that Catholic godparents (toṭṭappā and toṭṭammā), usually a married couple or a pair of siblings, were often chosen from close friends rather than kin. Parents and godparents referred to each other as kumbā and children often visited their godparents at New Year.51 Although the most encompassing instance of local community occurred at funerals, which I return to later, the necessarily restricted attendance at life-cycle celebrations reflected the diversity of people’s social worlds, attended by friends and connections that crossed caste, religious, and ethnic boundaries. In some cases this was experienced as an obligation, particularly with regard to work colleagues. Allan’s younger sister, who was in her mid twenties and worked in a large government institution, said that it would be difficult for her to invite everyone if and when she married.

The pandal and the pandi, the gathering of people seated for eating, are a particularly resonant site for the negotiation and articulation of different identities. In a later section I will describe how the plurality of religiously-determined food preferences were catered for. The pandi has traditionally had strong connotations of caste segregation. Older Tamils remembered the way in which the pandi had once consisted of lines of guests eating from banana leaves at the same time. The meal would begin only when the Vannar confirmed that nobody from

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51 Kumbo in Sinhala (Stirrat 1975: 594).
another caste was also sitting with them. Although this is no longer the case, it was often said that when a wedding meal lasted for two days people of the same caste were invited on the first and others on the second. In practice, at the Kadaiyar weddings that I attended this was only loosely observed, and close friends and colleagues often attended on the first day too. However, the night-time entertainment, usually dancing by all apart from women, usually began only when most of the outsiders (ve‘iyākkal) had left.

The normative importance of kinship, with its corollary ideal of unity (orrumai) in village and regional caste communities, should also not obscure inevitable conflict. When I conducted loose interviews at the beginning of my fieldwork, a number of villagers identified social division as one of the biggest problems after the war, complaining that competition had risen and that people no longer helped each other. Daniel said that he did not agree with the compulsion to always attend Mass or take communion, because people were not worthy of it: people say ‘peace be with you’ (samādāṇam) during Mass without practising it; in the morning there is peace, in the evening fighting. At the beginning of my fieldwork I was surprised by the frequency with which people would tell me about fights (sandai) and their origins, some of which had been running for many years, and the matter-of-fact way in which they did so. It was also common for people to acknowledge their anger (kōvam). People who were particularly unhappy with events in their lives sometimes said that they were ‘angry with God’ (kaḍavulōda kōvam), for which reason they might not come to Mass.

Despite the local political divisions, the fights described to me – unlike those in Tenna around the 1982 election, when the ‘usually gentle accord’ was shattered (Spencer 1990: 181) – had little to do with politics and more to do with family disputes over weddings and land, participation in the church committee, access to irrigation and other resources, and the financial management of village and GN institutions. Nesara and Selva, who were second cousins and had had a love marriage around 2005, had not received the land they had expected as a dowry, after Selva’s father’s younger brother, Rajaratnam, refused to sign the deed at the last moment. The land on which they had eventually built their house was filled-in paddy land given by Nesara’s father, who still continued to avoid Selva’s uncle if he could. Nesara himself had fallen out with his brother, Joseph, because he disapproved of the latter’s love marriage to Mariyadas’ elder daughter. Joseph told me that he had no friends in Marudankandal, but only relatives. Sometimes fights surfaced in emotional public arguments, although not in violence (something I never witnessed in Marudankandal, although I did elsewhere between usually drunk men). More commonly, as in Tenna (Spencer 1990), when people were fighting they
stopped talking and tried to avoid each other if they could, which sometimes spread to other members of the families.

THE EVERYDAY WORK OF RELIGION AND ETHNICITY

It could be surprisingly noisy in the countryside, as sound travelled easily not just within the villages but across the flat landscape between them. Over the course of a couple of mornings in December 2013, while I was living in Nesaraja and Selva’s temporary house, the St Anthony’s tirundādi, muezzins of the Main Road and Pallivasalpuram mosques, and music accompanying a Hindu temple festival at Koyilkulam all overlapped at around 5am, an acoustic reminder of the ethno-religious plurality of Matottam.

One of the contributions of recent studies of interethnic interaction in the social sciences (Davis 2011, 2012, 2015; Gaasbeek 2010; Lokuge 2017; Piyarathe 2018; Siriwardane-de Zoysa 2018) has been to shift the focus away from diversity being a quality of particular places, which is often how ethno-religious plurality has often been conceptualised in Sri Lankan scholarship. As Siriwardane-de Zoysa (2018: 4) has observed, the Eastern Province has often been considered the most diverse region in this respect, although Thiranagama has also stressed the ‘ethnic density’ of Colombo (2011: 231-232). However, when diversity has been framed as a quality of place it has depended largely on demographic statistics and borders, without exploring the multifaceted relationships between individuals and groups. As Siriwardane-de Zoysa (2018: 4) notes of the east coast: ‘[I]ts socially heterogeneous spaces, from Amparai to the northern fringes of Mullaitivu have often run the risk of being metaphorically imagined as ethno-religious patchworks or mosaics of Tamil-Muslim-Sinhala enclaves.’

This enumerative understanding of diversity, with its constant tallying of majorities and minorities, is also employed by government, as attested by the prominent boards in GN and AGA offices that count the families of each ethnicity. Such a notion of diverse places also runs the risk of reflecting existing political debates. For example, McGilvray’s observation that ‘Jaffna will always remain a monocultural Tamil bastion, but the east coast is a site of complex multicultural contestation and deep ethnic division’ (2008: 6), overlooks the fact that the Muslims of the Northern Province were expelled precisely for this purpose.

In a numerical sense, Mannar is also a diverse place, with significant populations of Catholics, Hindus, and Muslims. More important, though, is the ‘everyday’ articulation and negotiation of difference, which I began to point towards earlier in this chapter. In the aftermath of the war, some villagers were keen to stress the importance of unity (ərtunat) and their peaceful prewar coexistence. Nevertheless, religion and ethnicity are constantly viewed
through the prism of national politics, while minor territorial conflicts are seen in the occasional night-time destruction of a saint’s statue, and the disturbance in 2019 when the Catholics of Manthai village destroyed an arch erected for a Thiruketeeswaram temple festival immediately beside the Catholic church. I am not able to offer detailed insight into the balance of conflict and peaceful coexistence in the district. Before I arrived I had considered developing my research into a more comparative study of Catholic and Muslim village communities, taking as a starting point the local interreligious dialogues that were being held at that time (Vanniasinkam et al. 2018). By the time I began my fieldwork, however, the dialogues had come to an end, and it was soon clear to me that this was beyond the scope of my project. My insights into social diversity were instead developed organically through the course of my fieldwork. Below I offer three perspectives.

**Catholics, Hindus, and Tamil culture**

Numerous studies of Tamil society, in Sri Lanka and the diaspora, have described a particular closeness between Catholics and Hindus, who comprise the largest religions among Tamils (Bradley 2018: 105; Bruland 2013: 423-4). Bradley suggests that the greater interaction in Canada between Sri Lankan Tamil Catholics and Hindus than between Sri Lankan Tamil Hindus and Indian Tamil Hindus is due to the shared suffering of the war (2018: 105), a point which was similarly made by people in Mannar about the overcoming of caste differences, although in both cases other factors connected to the conflict have also influenced the development of a more unified Tamil identity, as I will show below.

In Chapter Two, I noted that the successes of Catholic missionary efforts between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries left most of Mannar with a very small Hindu population, which increased in the twentieth century largely due to internal migration. The social dynamics during this demographic change have yet to be investigated. Today there are many friends between Catholic and Hindu Tamils, although Catholics remembered a different situation in the past. Within Alayankulam parish, one small village with a mixed-caste, Catholic-Hindu population was known for having close connections and supporting each other’s religious endeavours. Cowley-Sathiakumar (2008) has suggested that the role of religion in interreligious marriage is more of a concern for Sri Lankan Tamil Christians than Hindus, and I found that interreligious marriages were perhaps less common than intercaste. As with caste, children usually take the religion of the father, although in contrast the mother may also convert.
Mosse has observed that in South India Christianity ‘failed to engender separate social-political identities except among coastal fishing communities’, and that cross-religious marriages were not uncommon between the ‘Hindu’ and ‘Christian’ subgroups that existed within specific castes that lived side by side ‘within villages integrated through the ritual-material exchanges of caste’ (2012: 98). In Mannar, however, a large number of castes, such as the Kadaiyars, were almost entirely Christian. Although I do not have encompassing data on this topic, the only caste that stood out in this respect during my fieldwork was the Kollars, who explicitly claimed an identity that crossed the religious divide. One Kollar man in another village told me that there is a custom of local Catholic Kollar men marrying Hindu Kollar women from Jaffna, while the Kollar caste association was renamed after the war to signal its inclusion of Hindus (more in Chapter Six).

Catholic and Hindu participation in each other’s rituals and institutions is asymmetrical, as others have noted (Jacobsen 2009: 194-195; Ponceaud 2018: 133). Catholics in Marudankandal did not usually attend rituals in the small Amman temple in Koyilkulam, although they did sometimes come to Main Road at night to watch the Navarattiri and occasional hook hanging (paravāy kāvaḍi) processions, or attend larger, more spectacular local events such as the huge Sivarattiri festival at Thiruketheeswaram, the largest Hindu event in the district. Catholics usually described these occasions as ‘social’ events (Bruland 2013: 423), without participating, and some emphasised that they came to Sivarattiri only for the large annual market and did not enter the inner temple itself. A handful of Marudankandal Catholics also attended an annual festival at a rural temple towards the northern border of the district, in a village where they had been displaced during the war and developed relationships. Individual, private participation by Catholics in Hindu practice was rare during my fieldwork, and less prominent than that described by Mosse in Tamil Nadu (2012: 74), although its lack of visibility makes me hesitant to generalise about its extent. A year or so before my fieldwork, the priest of neighbouring parish had removed an image of Hanuman from the flagpole of one of the Kollar-controlled churches. In contrast, Hindu attendance at Catholic churches and shrines, particularly those dedicated to St Anthony and St Mary, is much more visible, although Hindus usually do not attend the Mass itself. In August, small groups of Hindu pilgrims walk the A32 from Jaffna to Manthai, then turn inland to reach Madhu via the forest path in time for the feast. The presence of Jesus and the saints among the images of Hindu gods found in local Hindu-run shops, but not vice versa (as in India [Mosse 2012: 14]), is another obvious sign of differently drawn religious borders.
Besides practices that Catholics consider ‘properly Hindu’ are those that fall into a middle category, such as the application of poṭṭu and garlands (mālai), the performance of ārātti, the lighting of ceremonial oil lamps (kuttuvilakku), and Bharatanatyam, which occur at a range of Catholic events. These practices were often explained by means of what Stewart has called a ‘metasyncretic discourse… the commentary and registered perceptions of actors as to whether amalgamation has occurred and whether this is good or bad’ (1999: 58). They were described by Catholics as part of a shared Tamil culture (tamil kalāccāram), although it was acknowledged that they had been considered Hindu until recently and were still considered so by Tamils belonging to some other Christian denominations. Bruland argues that this repertoire of material culture and sensorial practices is shared by Tamil Catholics and Hindus because they produce the desired emotions and experiences, although she acknowledges that an alternative historical analysis would consider ‘the integration of customs and cultural practices regarded as Hindu’ (2013: 423-425). A historical focus is also necessary to understand why other Catholic and Hindu practices and contexts are phenomenologically very different, nor why Tamils of other Christian denominations do not consider these practices ‘Tamil’.

As I will further demonstrate in the next chapter with regard to caste, the Catholic Church has grappled with the boundaries between Catholicism, Hinduism, and the domain of the ‘social’ from its arrival in South Asia (Busby 2006; Henn 2014; Mosse 2012). Although it is not possible to talk about this in the earlier centuries, these issues came particularly to light in the nineteenth century, which was a significant period for all Sri Lankan religions. Catholic opposition to Hinduism in Jaffna was met by the Hindu revival associated with Arumugam Navalar, which emphasised an association between Saivism and Tamil identity (Bastin 1997: 427 and passim; Pfaffenberger 1990a). This conflict continued into the first quarter of the twentieth century, a period of intensified missionary work and Church expansion in Jaffna, particularly through the efforts of the scholar-priest Fr Gnana Prakasar, who converted many low caste Hindu Tamils, evangelised directly to Hindus at Madhu and through several-day-long series of dialogic sermons within which Catholic theology was pitted against Hinduism, and engaged with local Hindus in a number of theological debates (Saveri 1993: 29).

Some Hindus continue to perceive Tamilness as dependent upon Hinduism. One legacy of earlier divisions is the fact that although Hindus in the north are usually called saivakkārākkal (‘Saiva people’), and Catholics vēdakkārākkal (‘Veda people’), Hindus occasionally referred to themselves as ‘Tamil people’ (tamilākkal), a phenomenon that Suseendirarajah previously
observed in Jaffna (1980: 347). However, the fact that Catholics did think of themselves as Tamil throughout the twentieth century was demonstrated by Catholic priests such as Fr Gnana Prakasar and Fr Thani Nayaham, who were important proponents of what Sumathi Ramaswamy has called ‘counter-orientalist classicism’ (1997: 36-38), a discursive regime that emphasises the uniqueness and classical nature of Tamil, as well as its vast literary tradition, rather than its divine nature.

However, an important change in Catholic perception occurred after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which was intended as a major reappraisal and renewal of the Church on multiple fronts. One of the core concepts to emerge from Vatican II was that the Church could, and should, communicate the message of Christianity in culturally acceptable ways. From this came the notion of ‘inculturation’, the idea that Catholicism could to some extent take local cultural forms without either Catholicism or the culture in question losing their autonomous identities. In India and Sri Lanka a number of changes were made to the liturgy and other practices over the next couple of decades, although often in the face of both lay and religious opposition. In Sri Lanka, the new focus on culture cultivated within Vatican II coincided with the intensification of ethnic identities after Independence.

While some practices formerly considered ‘Buddhist’ by Sinhalese Catholics were now newly appraised as ‘Sinhala culture’ (Stirrat 1992: 51), practices once considered ‘Hindu’ were now considered ‘Tamil’. Today older generations of Tamil Catholics recall a much stricter religious environment. A music teacher in Periyakulam recalled her father-in-law being completely opposed to what were previously considered Hindu customs such as ārātti and poṭṭu. While Catholics were once told not to attend temple events, they were then allowed to go if they did not eat the food (which was considered to be an offering [paḍaiyal]), and are now allowed to do so on the understanding that participating in the meal is not an act of worship. Fr Philip, the paternal uncle of my neighbour Jansi, was a priest in his seventies who had worked throughout his life in churches on the east coast. He remembered being told as a child not to look at the local Hindu school while passing. Another priest recalled being instructed to make the sign of the cross or even spit in front of Hindu temples. Preaching against Hinduism is also less common.

The separation of form from content is one way in which such practices are explained by priests, although it is not always clear whether the new content is ‘Catholic’ or ‘Tamil’. This

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52 Another possible hint of this can be seen in the 1827 census, the Mannar District section of which records Hindus as ‘Malabars Tamuls’ under religion, although they are recorded as ‘heathens’ in Jaffna, Batticaloa, and Trincomalee.
discourse is further complicated by the fact that Catholics sometimes say that the meanings of these practices must be understood through Hinduism. Hinduism is positioned as historically prior to Catholicism in Tamil identity, and more than once priests said that Tamils ‘were all Hindus once’. One Mannar priest said that ‘to understand Catholic Tamils you have to understand Hindu Tamils’. Another explained that after Vatican II ‘they had brought the old things back’. A senior priest in Jaffna suggested that, from one perspective, the Martyrs can be considered traitors to Tamil culture for their conversion. The importance of a shared ethnic identity in Catholic perceptions of Hinduism can be highlighted in contrast to the divergent trajectories of Sinhala Buddhist and Tamil Hindu devotees of Kannaki-Pattini (de Alwis 2018). The Catholic concept of Tamil culture also reveals the way in which ethnic identity itself can be perceived differently ‘from the inside’. Not only were these practices rejected by some Tamils of other Christian denominations as Hindu rather than Tamil, but some priests were aware of Hindus’ discomfort with the way that Catholics had adopted what they considered to be Hindu practices, for instance the reinterpretation of Dībāvalī (Deepawali) through the association between Jesus and light.

Although today inculturation is less a movement than a position held by individual (and usually older) priests, the domain of ‘Tamil culture’ is inevitably incomplete and continues to be contested and negotiated. One priest told me that people are confused about where the border between Tamil culture and Hinduism lies, giving the popularity of astrology as evidence. An unusual and particularly striking example of an ambivalent central position is seen in the hiring of a Hindu temple band to lead the procession from church to home after a newly-ordained priest’s First Mass, a practice that is also described as cultural despite being only performed by Hindus.

**Muslims and Tamils**

Thiranagama (2011: 126) has noted the lack of attention to Muslims in the north, the largest population of whom are found in Mannar, among the broader literature on Muslim culture and society in Sri Lanka (de Munck 1993; Gaasbeek 2010; McGilvray 2008; Smith 1997). Although there is a slowly growing body of writing on Muslim experiences during and after the war (Citizen’s Commission 2011; Hatsumi 2012; Thiranagama 2011), prewar Muslim history, culture and society has yet to be examined. In the historical sources that I have used Muslims appear only sporadically, and mainly in the nineteenth century. I cannot describe the historical relationships between Muslims, and Catholics, although in the 1890s the Description
recorded that entire villages sometimes converted from Catholicism to Islam to escape caste, and noted elsewhere that Muslims ‘are worst off in regard to education, as they have no regular schools of their own, and are not admitted into the Roman Catholic schools’. (At this time there were no government schools in the district.)

In the nineteenth century, as I noted in Chapter Two, the Muslim population was particularly focussed in Musali, where they were known for elephant hunting (AR 1872) and their connection with the Pearl Fishery (Smith 1997: 47). Muslims were more generally connected with trade, such as the *tavalam* bullock cart caravans that travelled around Sri Lanka (Lewis 1895: 259), and the Tamil association of Muslims with ‘business’ or ‘private work’ continues to be extremely strong today. There are also signs of an unexplored historical relationship between Muslims and land ownership in Mannar. In 1813, for example, Collector Sneyd wrote that Moormen held two-thirds of the districts land by mortgage despite being less than one-third of the population (NASL 31/1). A large area of the western side of the main Marudankandal *kamam* had until recent decades been owned by a Muslim landowner, and during my fieldwork was still sometimes referred to as *kākā tarai*, literally ‘(Muslim) elder brother land’.

After being expelled by the LTTE in 1990, a small number of Muslims returned to Mannar during the 1990s (Citizens’ Commission 2011: 31), and more during the 2002-2006 ceasefire. The much larger population of Muslims who have returned since the end of the war continues to maintain close ties with those who have remained in Puttalam. Thiranagama (2011) has discussed the differences in outlook between Muslims who grew up in Mannar before being displaced and those who grew up in the south. When I travelled to a Muslim wedding in Puttalam by hired bus with villagers from Pallivasalpuram, the round trip took most of the day, with only an hour’s stop for lunch; the homecoming took place in Pallivasalpuram the next day. During the 2019 presidential election, buses carrying Muslim voters still registered in Mannar via the same Wilpattu route were fired upon (The Guardian 2019). A much smaller number of Mannar Muslims were settled in Anuradhapura District during the war. Many men and women from Pallivasalpuram had also worked in the Middle East.

As on the east coast (McGilvray 2008), Muslims were usually called *muslimākkal* (‘Muslim people’), rather than other terms such as Moors or *sonahar* that were in greater use in the past. Muslims speak a dialectal version of Tamil, and *kākā* and *rāttā*, the equivalents for *ānṇā* (‘older brother’) and *akkā* (‘older sister’), were the polite terms used by Tamils to address older Muslim men and women. My initial connections with local Muslims arose through the businesses on Main Road. Four of the five larger restaurants were run by Muslims (although
not the few smaller tea kaḍais), as were the chicken and beef stalls, hardware stores, and a number of other shops. I later got to know others through Nesaraja and Selva, who had a number of friends in Pallivasalpuram and whose house was prominently located on the otherwise uninhabited stretch of road between the two villages. On many Fridays, particularly in my second year, I attended the midday sermon (kottubā), after which I often ate lunch with one of a small number of families I had become friends with. I also attended Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha (known as hāj perunāḷ), as well as some of the iftars held at different government institutions on Main Road.

Pallivasalpuram was one of the largest villages in Matottam, with around two hundred families. 85% of the population was Muslim, and the rest mainly Hindu Tamils. Like Tamils – although without, to my knowledge, the additional element of caste – the Muslims of Pallivasalpuram were connected by kin ties to a number of other Muslim-majority villages in the area. Unlike Main Road, Pallivasalpuram had only a couple of shops, although it did have a primary school whose pupils graduated to Alayankulam MMV. Its origin as a majority Muslim village began in the 1960s, when several families were displaced from the northern edge of Matottam by a cyclone. Prior to that there had been a small number of Tamil families, although at the turn of the century it was recorded as a tāvaḍi ūr and had a tank that has since disappeared. At that time the village also had a different name, one that indicated a low caste connection, although today the villagers offered a different etymology. Today’s farmers irrigate the adjacent kamam directly from the canal which led to Marudankandal tank. Unlike Marudankandal, the compounds in Pallivasalpuram were organised along a grid-like arrangement of paths, with few trees and quite a lot of open space, that may have been at least in part the result of postwar reconstruction planning. Some of the compounds revealed a preference for building dowry-houses for daughters within a shared compound that McGilvray (2014) has also observed on the east coast. Near the centre of the village was a recently built two-storey mosque (paḷḷivāsal, paḷḷi, or masjid), beside it sat an older, single-storey mosque now used for tuition and storage.

The structure of authority around Pallivasalpuram mosque was different from the local Catholic churches. Parish priests were in general more authoritative figures than maulavis, of whom there were several in Pallivasalpuram, who were not necessarily public representatives of the mosque in the way that the priest was of the church. Although they tended to employ a rather loud and strident form of performative speech during the Friday sermons, maulavis were often shy and softly-spoken in person. Smith (1997) has offered greater insight into the mosque as an egalitarian community of Muslim males. During every day of Ramadan (nōmbu kālam,
‘fasting season’), a large quantity of iftar kanji was sponsored and prepared by one family, and distributed among anyone who came to the mosque (mainly Muslims, although the children of local non-Muslim families sometimes arrived with a bucket). Similarly, wealthy families sometimes paid for beef to be distributed on Eid al-Adha, although in 2014 a Middle Eastern country made a large donation for this purpose.

My relationships with Muslims in Pallivasalpuram were different to those in Marudankandal, due not only to the fact that I spent less time there but also due to my arrival through occasional personal contacts rather than through a formal introduction, the different forms of authority around the mosque, and the existing political divisions in Sri Lanka (particularly the fact I was living in a ‘Tamil’ village). I also had less interaction with the older men, who did not approach me nor were recommended to me as leaders. Like McGilvray (2008: 319), I found that Muslims were more protective of their sacred spaces and eager to begin theological discussions than Catholics and Hindus, saying that they considered Īsā (Jesus) a prophet (nabbi) and shared the Old Testament with Catholics (a point that Nesaraja made separately). Sometimes I was asked directly whether I thought Islam was a good thing, or to confirm rumours that I was ‘coming to Islam’, or whether I liked the village. At the same time, Catholics expressed surprise that I was allowed into the mosque at all. The Muslims in Pallivasalpuram did not appear to attend Catholic or Hindu events, although small numbers of Muslims from other parts of Sri Lanka visit Madhu, where a chapel was built by a Colombo Muslim family in the 1980s.

The growing ethnic divide, and the greater interaction with Muslim populations in the south after the 1990 expulsion, had catalysed broader cultural changes among the Mannar Muslims. One of these was a growing number of maulavis – it seemed that before the war there was only a lebbe in Pallivasalpuram – while groups of men from Jamaats based in the south sometimes visited the village, walking from house to house. There was also a declining interest in Sufism, and a greater divergence from what Muslims increasingly viewed as ‘Tamil culture’. Weddings were celebrated on a smaller scale, and with fewer decorations (instead of a wedding pandal, the hall of the house was decorated with saris), and according to one maulavi they had also formerly celebrated puberty ceremonies. Another prominent change was the popularity of sahans, large metal plates used to serve four or five people at once during life-cycle and mosque feasts (Smith 1997: 172). Although some younger Muslims who had grown up elsewhere during the war told me that this was the traditional local culture, older villagers said that they had not begun to adopt the sahan until they had been displaced in 1990. Another change was evident in Tamil and Muslim women’s clothes. While older Tamil and Muslim women
regularly wore saris (McGilvray 2008), younger Muslim women usually wore salwars, and Tamils skirts and blouses. Women usually wore abayas only when they left the village, and otherwise only occasionally and loosely pulled their shawl or sari over the back of their head.

In the year or two before I arrived there had been some prominent conflicts over land and fishing rights, and in and around Pallivasalpuram there were a few ongoing disputes over Muslim land that had been settled by Tamils during the war. However, I was wary of probing wartime Tamil-Muslim divisions and did not actively pursue the topic. In contrast to the east coast, a number of scholars have emphasised the good relations between Tamils and Muslims until 1990, offering as evidence the fact that the expulsion was enforced by LTTE cadres brought from Batticaloa (Citizens Commission 2012: 31; Clarance 2007: 151; Thiranagama 2011: 129, 142-143). Some Muslims said that they had been together with Tamils in everything but marriage in the past, a sentiment also recorded by Hatumi (2012: 37). Marriage between Tamils and Muslims was a controversial and uncommon occurrence, far more so than between Catholics and Hindus, although I doubt there were as few Muslim-Tamil marriages as McGilvray describes in Akkaraipattu (2008: 375 n. 15). A couple of Catholic women in Marudankandal had ‘eloped’ without their families’ permission, both under scandalous circumstances. However, in the predominantly Hindu village neighbouring Pallivasalpuram, love had led to a Hindu brother and sister converting to marry Muslim siblings, with the agreement of their parents. Gaasbeek has written more about this (2010).

Although I did not record negative Muslim perceptions of Tamils, I did encounter numerous Tamil criticisms of Muslims. These often involved complaints about unfair political patronage by Rishad Bathiudeen, a native of Mannar Island who was Minister of Industry and Commerce during both Mahinda Rajapaksa’s and Maithripala Sirisena’s governments; allegations of untrustworthiness; and condemnations of the perceived Muslim over-interest in money and business. For example, a Hindu teacher told me that Sri Lankan Muslims do not need a homeland, unlike Sri Lankan Tamils, because the most important thing to Muslims is profit (lābam). Another widespread stereotype, which I heard in both Jaffna and Mannar, was that Muslims were responsible for importing drugs into the Northern Province.

However, many Tamils had strong personal connections with Muslims. The context was quite different from McGilvray’s observations of Akkaraipattu, where he perceived a lack of opportunities for interaction (2008: 320-321). One difference was that in Matottam, unlike Akkaraipattu, the school system was not bifurcated into Tamil and Muslim institutions. Rice farming also necessitated connections between the villages, and in this respect Muslims often worked with Tamils as day labourers, tractor drivers, owners of much-needed combine
harvesters, and rice traders. Catholic Tamils also viewed Muslims as the best cooks, and Muslim chefs were often involved in Catholic life-cycle feasts, as I explain below. Unlike McGilvray (2008: 321), I also observed house visits, particularly around the two Eid festivals, although mainly between neighbours. However, it may have been the case that Tamil-Muslim friendships were less common between those who had grown up apart during the war. The group of Tamil (Catholic and Hindu) young men I spent most time with did not appear to have strong connections with similarly-aged Muslim men. This may also have been partly because of the importance of drinking in Tamil male sociality, although at a couple of parties we were joined by Muslim men from elsewhere who did drink. There were also some drinking relations among the elder Tamil and Muslim men.

**Food, commensality, and identity**

Although only appearing briefly in the previous two sections, a central way in which religious and ethnic identities are expressed and negotiated – as well as caste, which I will turn to in Chapter Six – is through food. The anthropology of food in Sri Lanka is almost entirely limited to the work of Van Daele (2008, 2013a, 2013b, 2017), who has focussed on the mutual transformations between food and those who eat it. In this section I restrict my intervention to observations on three aspects of food, commensality, and identity in Marudankandal and Matottam.

First, different varieties of rice are intertwined with issues of agricultural economy, health, and taste that index ethno-religious identities. The general stores in Alayankulam sold around ten varieties of rice from large heavy bags with open tops rolled down at the sides. Vasanthan bought all of his rice from traders in Vavuniya and Anuradhapura, where most had been milled, including rice harvested in Mannar. He did not expect to make a profit on rice because the prices were so low, and also attempted to gain a competitive edge by offering small discounts on multiple kilos to those who brought their own bags. Vasanthan said that red rice was bought mostly by people originally from Jaffna, especially Hindus who preferred it with a diet of fish and vegetables. The predominantly Sinhalese local army and police staff, Catholic Tamils and Muslims mainly bought white rice, although each group had different tastes for particular varieties. Catholics preferred the white varieties called *sambā* and *kīri sambā*, because they went better with meat. Anthony, an English-speaking Kadaiyar nurse from Marudankandal, told me that they preferred white *kīri sambā* because they preferred to eat ‘quickly and easily’, and it was ‘easy to handle’. *Kīri sambā* was the most widely cultivated variety in the village.
Vasanthan’s description broadly agreed with the views of other Catholics and Muslims I spoke to. Red rice was predominantly considered by them to be a ‘Hindu’ food, associated in particular with pongal as well as the vegetarian meals eaten at temple ceremonies. Jaffna, strongly associated with Hinduism, was the main red rice market for local brokers. On the other hand, red rice was increasingly viewed as an important health food, particularly for those suffering from diabetes. In my own fieldwork I did not spend enough time with local Hindu families to discover how accurate Catholic perceptions were. Certainly, very few Hindus I knew were strict vegetarians of the kind found in Jaffna, and ate chicken and goat, but not beef. Yogeswari, who owned Marudankandal’s mill with her husband Rajesh, rejected this generalisation and said that everyone in the area preferred white. Nevertheless, she said that while Rajesh and their children preferred white, she and her mother preferred red, particularly because of the health benefits, and cultivated an acre and a half for their own kitchen. Mayurin, the Irrigation Engineer at the Giant’s Tank and a Jaffna Hindu, told me that health was the primary reason that red rice was preferred in Jaffna.

Although obscured by other agricultural priorities, taste plays a hidden role in the development of hybrid rice varieties. At the Rice Research Development Institute in Bathalagoda, part of the process of creating a new variety is the evaluation of its taste qualities – taste, aroma, cohesiveness, tenderness, and appearance – by Institute staff on two or three occasions throughout the year. Although this is seen as a minor component of the Institute’s work, taste has a clear impact on the kinds of rice cultivated across Sri Lanka. For example, Sri Lankans generally dislike sticky rice, and so it is unlikely that varieties of sticky rice from other Asian countries will be grown in Sri Lanka, even in hybrid form.

Like rice, food preferences with regard to meat and fish (collectively known as maccam) are differentiated according to ethno-religious identities. Unlike Tamil Nadu (Caplan 2008: 125), Mannar is ‘normatively meat-eating’, a description that can be extended to Sri Lanka as a whole. Although there are traditions of ‘pure’ vegetarianism, for instance among the Hindu Vellalars of Jaffna (Jeeweshwara Räsänen 2015: 147), the relationship between vegetarianism and discourses of religious or caste status is much looser than in India (e.g., Caplan 2008; Chigateri 2008; Staples 2008). While acknowledging the greater diversity of individual preferences, it is possible to state that the Catholic Tamil diet was broader than that of Muslims and Hindus, and incorporated locally available seafood and meats that were generally avoided by the others. All groups relied heavily on fish. Among local Hindus full vegetarianism was uncommon. The one Hindu-owned restaurant on Main Road sold chicken curry, and Selva commented on the difficulty facing a Jaffna Hindu teacher working at Alayankulam MMV
who had to cook all of her own food.

Chicken and beef were sold on Main Road by Muslims, and goat directly by local herders. Although not on public display, hunters from villagers further inland sometimes sold black market meats such as deer, wild boar, and freshwater turtle. Older men recalled hunting with guns, made by local blacksmiths in the forest before the war, returning days later with large quantities of smoked meat (*vattal*). In Alayankulam, a man in his eighties recalled an Italian pilot who ended up in Mannar and joined their hunting trip. In Matottam, many families owned small numbers of chickens, and a smaller number owned one or two cows. The largest herd in Marudankandal numbered around thirty, although this was significantly more than most families possessed. A handful of families in the area, but none in Marudankandal, raised goats or buffaloes.

The role of cows in the local economy was similar to a description made by a Mannar AGA over a century ago (AR 1903): ‘Cattle are regarded as household goods, property which can be realized if required, and only to be parted with if absolutely necessary.’ Cows were only occasionally sold for meat or slaughtered; fresh milk was drunk at home but also sold to the government to be turned into powdered milk. Unlike in India, wood rather than cow dung was used for cooking fuel. Some cattle were raced in the popular bullock cart *savāri* that took place a couple of times a year on a nearby strip of open land. Cattle often roamed freely, although during the *perumbōham* owners of herds are now asked to move their animals to areas of wilderness (*kaḍu*) to the north of the Giant’s Tank system to stop them ruining the crop. Despite a new government-mandated system of ear tags, cattle continued to be branded with the initials of the owner and their village, as well as a symbol (*maravu*) that indicated caste and/or religious identity.

Beef consumption has grown in the past century (AR 1890; AR 1903; AR 1904); and some of the elders remembered having eaten less of it in their youth. Despite a recent anti-beef protest that drew on a political Hindu discourse prevalent in India and appeared to be an attempt to consolidate Hindu and Buddhist Sri Lankans in opposition to Muslims, beef is not considered particularly controversial in Sri Lanka, as evident by its availability at *kaḍais* throughout the island (The Hindu 2018). When Catholics avoided beef it was usually for health reasons, commonly young women who told me that gave it them a rash and older people who said that it affected their blood pressure.

Beef has a special significance for Muslims as well as Catholics. In Pallivasalpuram, those who could afford it added beef to their iftar *kanji* contribution, and beef was also donated on Eid-al-Adha, as I have mentioned above. Among Catholics beef was not avoided by any castes,
although people recognised that this had not been the case in the past, and some valued it more highly than others. One Kadaiyar family, who had spent some time in Tamil Nadu during the war, recalled the way in which beef was locally frowned upon by Indian Tamils. Beef was usually served at major mainland Kadaiyar celebrations, often as a curry called māṭṭu rōst that they considered their special dish. On the other hand, the Kollars, who emphasised their earlier Hindu identity, expressed a preference for goat at major celebrations, although I cannot confirm the extent to which this was realised in practice.

Finally, food preferences were accommodated differently at communal events. If beef curry was served, it was always accompanied by chicken and vegetable curries. While meat bought from local butchers was halal, at large Catholic events chickens and cows were slaughtered during the preparation by a Muslim. The Muslim who did this work also always helped to cook the meal, either by himself or with other Muslims (sometimes women), usually preparing specific fried meats and meat curries alongside the Tamil men and women who cooked other dishes. A Muslim cook told me that he had cooked for Tamils on the mainland throughout the war, travelling into LTTE territory by bus from Mannar Town. The widespread perception of the high quality of Muslim cooking was shown in the fact that even at events to which no Muslims had been invited, such as a wedding I attended at the fishing town of Vangalai, there may be a Muslim cook.

During a Tamil meal, all guests sat within the pandal and ate from bowls. Muslim life-cycle celebrations were rather different. Although local Catholic Tamils were not as averse to saliva (eccil) as McGilvray (2008: 324) notes in Akkaraipattu, they nevertheless disliked eating from shared sahans. To accommodate this, the Muslim wedding meals that I attended in Pallivasalpuram were split between different pandals and/or rooms within the wedding house. Muslim men and women ate separately from each other from sahans, while non-Muslim guests sat on chairs in a third area and ate from bowls.

FUNERALS

Although the ringing of the tūkku maṇi is an old custom, the practice of hiring a three-wheeler to announce the time and place of a funeral and the names and residences of the surviving relatives appeared to be relatively recent. Before the 1990s, relatives of the deceased would cycle to other villages to spread the news, although some families also paid for an announcement on Radio Ceylon. However, I was also told that the use of the three-wheeler was a Tamil practice and that Muslims announced a death in a more restricted manner via the mosque loudspeaker,
although I neither heard this nor attended a funeral in Pallivasalpuram. Pallivasalpuram also had its own Muslim graveyard (*savakālai*). Catholics from the villages around Alayankulam, and some Hindus, were buried in a field on the far side of the canal marking the western edge of Marudankandal. During the war, Catholic graves had been marked with small wooden crosses, painted blue and with the name of the deceased in white, which were now being superseded by more expensive permanent gravestones.

Death announcements reflected the overtly public, communal nature of Tamil funerals. No other event was more revealing of the extent of social ties running throughout the district, bridging kinship, caste, ethnicity, and religion. A funeral usually occurred on the day after the death, and as soon as it was announced people began to share the news among themselves and reorder their schedule for the next day in order to visit the *settu vīdu* and, less often, the church. As in Jaffna (Banks 1957: 471), it was considered important to attend funerals if possible, even if there was only a loose personal connection with the deceased. In 2015, for example, the large Komarasankulam pilgrimage was postponed for the funeral of a Mannar priest. Attending many funerals was sometimes given as evidence that a person had a good relationship with and showed respect for many people. In the same way, as Bruland has showed (2015: 216-217), a good funeral was one with many mourners. In 2014 an 89-year-old Hindu grandfather in Alayankulam boasted to me that he had so many friends across so many villages that three *latshams* (‘lakhs’) of people (300,000) would come to his funeral.

The pressure to attend increased for more prestigious (*gauravamāna*) mourners, particularly those from government and the Church. Allan told me that local government ministers had a responsibility to go to every funeral in the district, and a senior civil servant described the constraints that funerals placed on his time. In Koyilkulam a young father said that he had been praying since his wedding for his son to be a priest. He had noted all of the priests and sisters at a recent funeral in Alayankulam, and if his own son became a priest then the family’s future funerals would be similarly attended, bringing a greater blessing for the dead people. The seminarian Vincent, who was translating for me at the time, later commented that the living also feel honoured by this. Similarly, Hatsumi observed that mourners described a Catholic funeral elsewhere in Mannar as good because five priests came (2012: 175). During a monthly parish meeting at St Mary’s, a middle-aged Alayankulam man complained angrily that the local religious brothers and sisters were not visiting *settu vīḍus* in the village, although they did so

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53 *Settu vīḍu* and *savam eḻukka* (‘taking the body’ – i.e., to the graveyard) are the colloquial ways of referring to a funeral in Tamil.
in Mannar Town. One of the brothers who was present at the time responded that his duty (pani) was not to visit settu vīḍus but to teach in the school, which took up all of his time. Fr Lawrence added that if they were doing this in Mannar Town it was probably because they had a personal connection with the deceased.

I attended a large number of funerals during my fieldwork, and the largest was that of Daniel, who died in April 2014. Only days after the episode with which I began Chapter One, during the preparations for the All Souls’ meal at St Anthony’s in November 2013, he had said that he was not feeling well and that the pharmacist thought he might have diabetes. His health rapidly deteriorated in the following months, and speculation about his illness circled the village until it was confirmed that he had terminal lung cancer. He was moved between hospitals, and died at Mannar General. On this occasion the body was in the hospital for two days, during which time some of Daniel’s siblings were able to travel from abroad.

On the day of the funeral both sides of the road had been decorated from Marudankandal to the compound with tōranum, palm leaves folded into a line of three downwards-pointing arrows that signified a funeral. Inside, undecorated pandals had been erected and the concrete water tank that had previously stood in front of the house had been moved to the side of the compound by a JCB. In the compound was a huge crowd, pressing in upon the open coffin. Daniel was dressed in a black suit, Teresa’s kūrai and tāli on his chest, and the flag of the INGO for which he used to work was draped across his feet. The number of mourners reflected Daniel’s popularity in the area. Unusually, men from one of the fishing villages in Mannar had stayed at the house overnight to sing oppāri, a form of lament not found in the farming villages.54 A sound system had been set up, and some of Daniel’s friends and relatives made short speeches while his close family gathered around the head of the coffin. One of Daniel’s brothers was holding his smart phone in the air so that a relative abroad could view the body, as is customary, over Skype, an example of the increasing use of live video to incorporate global families into life-cycle events that Bruland has noted (2015: 210). When the speeches came to an end, Daniel’s male relatives moved forward to close the coffin and carry it to the church, urgently pushing away other family members who began to scream and wail and grasp the coffin.

In the church the coffin was reopened, and after the service Daniel’s family were again pushed aside so that it could be closed. The outpouring of grief from the women at this moment

54 Hatsumi (2012: 161-162 and 199-200) mentions oppāri sung by the Catholic fishers in Mannar. Oppāri is more common in Tamil Nadu, where it is performed by women and often considered to be a low caste practice (Clark-Decës 2005).
reflected the fact that women do not usually go to the graveyard. The coffin was placed in a wooden bier (pāḍai) decorated with white paper, which had been made by the Marudankandal men during the night, when they had also dug the grave and erected the pandals. The bier was carried on the shoulders of men, each of whom would swap with someone else in the crowd after a short time – a practice also seen in the procession of the saint at church feasts – along Main Road and to the graveyard. The coffin was placed beside the grave and opened for the last time, Daniel’s body shielded from the hot sun by a white sheet. Not only women but also priests tend not to come to the graveyard unless the deceased is a relative, and the final prayers were said by older male relatives. We all threw in a handful of dirt after the coffin had been lifted into the grave, and immediately returned to the settu vīḍu, where we were served a lunch of dried fish (karuvāḍu) curry, which was the custom.

Funerals continue on or around the eighth and thirty-first days after the death. On the eighth day, although sometimes occurring earlier than that, a large meal called the etṭām cōrũ (‘eighth [day] rice’) is served; the particular curries are usually said to be the favourites of the deceased. Daniel’s etṭām cōrũ was held only four days after the funeral, and a large group of men, mainly his relatives, but also a couple of Muslim men from Pallivasalpuram, spent the previous night cutting meat and preparing for the huge crowd. In contrast to the initial public announcement of a death, these events were not publicly announced, nor did the family of the deceased formally invite anyone, as it was considered inappropriate to do so.

Mourners made public their intimacy with and respect for the dead not just through visiting the settu vīḍu but also through memorialising objects such as prayer books, bookmarks, and kaṇṇīr anjalis (‘tearful homage to the dead’) in the shape of A4 sheets handed out during the funeral or large banners (kodī). A kaṇṇīr anjali featured a photo of the deceased, their name and dates of birth and death, and the name of the person or group who had organised and paid for it. At Daniel’s funeral several kaṇṇīr anjali banners had been erected along Main Road by his colleagues, the people of St Anthony’s church, and a close friend. At Daniel’s eighth day remembrance, a small book of prayers was handed out by his family, with one page listing his outstanding achievements (siṟuppukkal):

As the day brightens, night will come  
As flowers bloom, they wither.  
Every morning you served society.  
We long to see your face.

A great football player in the sports club.  
At the church feasts, you quenched your thirst at the taṇṇi pandal.  
A great comedian at wedding houses.
You gave your service to the ār.  
We long to see you.

Your kind speech, cultured attitude,  
disciplined dialogue,  
and funny jokes.  
Will you come again one more time?  
We long to see your face.

CONCLUSION

Chapter Four has developed a complex discussion of the Sri Lankan village. It began with an investigation of village concepts, noting that ‘cultural’ and state understandings cannot be separated. Next, it considered the relationship between the village and caste, noting the association between the majority Kadaiyars and Marudankandal, but also demonstrating that caste, which would be coterminous with kin in a state of total endogamy, becomes a more porous identity as intercaste marriages increase. The second half of the chapter explored how other relations between non-kin, and ethnic and religious identities, are articulated and negotiated within village sociality.
CHAPTER FIVE

Catholicism, caste, and the village

Chapter Four contrasted social diversity in Marudankandal with the way in which the village, like many others in Matottam, is numerically dominated by a single caste community, which is reflected not only in rhetoric but in control of the village church. Although the role of religious institutions in the articulation and contestation of caste has been widely acknowledged in Sri Lanka and India, research on village institutions has focussed mainly on Hindu and Buddhist temples (Kendrick 1992; McGilvray 2008; Mines 2005; Samuels 2007; Uyangoda 2012; Whitaker 1999). Despite the numerous studies of caste and Catholicism (e.g., Ram 1991; Stirrat 1992; Subramanian 2009), Mosse’s historical anthropological account of Alapuram stands out for its specific focus on the village church (2012).

The central aim of this chapter is to contribute to this discussion, and in order to do so I begin by locating St Anthony’s and the Marudankandal Catholics within the wider context of Catholicism in Mannar and Sri Lanka. In the first third of the chapter I investigate the history of the Catholic Church in the district, then describe some of the central elements of diocesan culture and the relationship between priests and parishioners. Next, I look at St Anthony’s, and the way in which it is managed. Having noted the relative independence of the village church, and the control that the Kadaiyar families have over the administration and membership, I offer an explanation of this through the historical relationship between Catholicism and caste in Sri Lanka, in particular the manner in which the Oratorian missionaries operated under the Dutch. The chapter ends with a description of the feast of St Anthony at Marudankandal.

CATHOLICISM IN MANNAR

While Catholicism was entwined with nation-building and conquest under the Portuguese, during most of the Dutch rule it was a fugitive religion. Despite this, the Oratorians were remarkably successful in a number of regions, including the north, as noted by the Dutch Commander of Jaffna:

There are also found here a great number of inhabitants who yet adhere to the Roman Catholic religion, which was introduced among them by the Portuguese. This has been secretly kept up by some vagabonds who pretend to these poor people to be ordained priests of the Catholic Church. (Mooyaart 1910: 7-8)
In 1721 the Christian community in Matottam and the Vanni was described as ‘the most numerous and fervent in Ceylon’ (VP DPII: 87). Precise details of the Catholic population under the Dutch are not known, because in order to protect the Catholics the missionaries did not keep records (VP DPIII: 408). A Matottam baptism book from 1775, written in Tamil and Portuguese and held in the Jaffna Bishop’s House archive, is currently being digitised by Alliance Française Jaffna for the British Library’s Endangered Archives project.

The shape of Catholicism was quite different under the Oratorians. In contrast to the Portuguese missionaries, who focussed their attention on a handful of larger churches, the Oratorians moved constantly between small village churches and chapels where they celebrated feasts and trained catechists to instruct others in their absence (VP DPII: 87; VP DPIII: 468). In combination with the desire for village caste communities to have their own churches, this peripatetic lifestyle, which continued throughout the nineteenth century, led to the proliferation of churches that remains one of the distinctive characteristics of Catholicism in Mannar today. In 1873 it was recorded that there were seven churches and thirty-seven chapels in Matottam (VP BPV: 504). In 1887 Bishop Bonjean of Jaffna wrote that the majority of small village churches of Mannar, Matottam and the Vanni were ‘nothing but a poor shed covered with straw and open to all winds, with no doors or windows, and often with walls made of mud and not higher than the hand’ (VP BPVIII: 84).

A shift in authority occurred within the Sri Lankan Church in the nineteenth century. The Oratorian Mission in Sri Lanka was part of the Diocese of Cochin, which was not under the jurisdiction of Propaganda Fide, the missionary arm of the Vatican, but that of the Padroado Rial (Portuguese for ‘royal patronage’), the territories and churches controlled by the Portuguese monarchy from the sixteenth century onwards (Frykenberg 2008: 127). This changed after the establishment of freedom of religion by the British at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which led to an influx of European and American missionaries from a variety of Christian denominations. Sri Lanka was brought within Propaganda Fide in 1834, beginning as an Apostolic Vicariate, a provisional ecclesiastical territory established in missionary regions prior to a diocese. The Apostolic Vicariate of Ceylon was further divided in 1845 into the Apostolic Vicariates of Colombo and Jaffna (which incorporated Kurunegala, Chilaw, and the east coast), while the formal establishment of dioceses and bishops occurred in 1886. The number of missionaries remained very low throughout the century. In 1860, for example, two European priests were responsible for the 4,529 Catholics of Mannar Island, and another two for the 4,682 in Matottam (VP BPIV: 143; VP BPV: 489-490).
A small number of Oratorians remained in Sri Lanka throughout the nineteenth century, and some attempted to maintain rival jurisdictions. As in South India, these jurisdictional conflicts often revolved around questions of caste (Ballhatchet 1998: 5-6; Subramanian 2009: 47-49). In the 1850s, a number of Oratorian missionaries refused to submit to the recently installed Vicars Apostolic, and were followed by their congregations. This schism took place in a number of churches in Colombo, Negombo, Jaffna, and Mannar, but by the 1880s the greatest population of ‘schismatics’ were found in the villages of Matottam (VP BPVIII: 66), where Roman and Goan missionaries administered separate congregations. A new element to the schism occurred in 1872 with regard to Madhu, a Marian forest shrine on the mainland, which the Kadaiyars claimed to be under their control (Report 19; VP BPVI: 75-78).

The schism came to a conclusive end only in 1902 and was symbolically inaugurated by the visit of Bishop Henri Joulain of Jaffna to the village of Parappankandal by the Giant’s Tank (VP DPIII: 111; VP DPIII: 342), whose church had been not only the most important in Matottam but also one of the headquarters of the Oratorians in Sri Lanka (VP BPVIII: 18; VP BPXII: 167). In Jaffna the first decades of the twentieth century witnessed a period of energetic evangelisation spearheaded by Fr Gnana Prakasar (Saveri 1993), as I mentioned in Chapter Four. I am unable to say whether similar activities took place in Mannar, but it appears that otherwise the Church experienced a period of relative peace, during which the most significant development was the growing national importance of Madhu.

The most influential discussion of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century has been Stirrat’s 1992 monograph. Stirrat argues that after Independence the Church lost a great deal of the political power it had accrued during the British period. Locating the Church within the transformed power structures of postcolonial Sri Lanka (in which Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism was the dominant political force) and the impact of inculturation encouraged by the Second Vatican Council, Stirrat describes the processes through which Sinhalese identity began to predominate over Catholic identity and there developed a growing divide between Tamil and Sinhalese Catholics. At the same time, Catholic priests, now almost all indigenous, became increasingly involved in secular ‘social work’ as their spiritual authority dwindled and Sinhalese Catholics turned away from parish institutions and towards other forms of religiosity.

Although a fuller appraisal of Stirrat’s description of the Sinhalese Church ‘in crisis’ in the twenty-seven years since its publication is not possible here, recent research in Mannar (MacFarlane 2016) and the east coast (Brown 2015; Spencer et al. 2015) has argued that the Tamil Catholic Church, which Stirrat expressly excluded from his analysis (1992: 6), has in fact increased its social and political power in recent decades in contrast to local Hindu leaders.
and institutions.

These scholars have contrasted the highly public involvement of the Catholic Church in the war to the distance maintained by Hindu institutions, although the opposite appears to have been true of temples in the Tamil diaspora (A. David 2007; Maunaguru and Spencer 2013). Tamil priests advocated for the rights of Tamils throughout the war, publicising and criticising the activities of the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE and negotiating with both sides. One of the most prominent and controversial religious figures was Rayappu Joseph, Bishop of Mannar from 1992 to 2015 (McFarlane 2016), when he was left incapacitated by a severe stroke soon after his 75th birthday. Like the Catholic Tamil laity, the clergy had a complex relationship with the LTTE, through shared Tamil ethnicity and having had relatives among the movement (McFarlane 2016: 153). Some were strong supporters of the LTTE, and one priest who grew up during the war told me that his ambition had been either to join the Church or the LTTE. The clergy were not isolated from the conflict. A number of Tamil priests were killed (Brown 2015; McFarlane 2016), and others stayed with the people in the warzone during the final stages (McFarlane 2016: 154). Churches were also attacked in Jaffna and Mannar, including Madhu (Hyndman 2003; McFarlane 2016; SACC 2008). Since 2009, a number of Catholic priests have been involved in international efforts to bring the Sri Lankan government to account over alleged wartime atrocities. Within the Church the political leanings of bishops and senior priests are keenly observed, and they are criticised if considered too close to the government, although the Church hierarchy supersedes these divisions. Madhu feast, which is attended by large numbers of Sinhalese as well as Tamil Catholics, has become a particular political hotspot. In the run up to the presidential election in 2014, then-president Mahinda Rajapaksa visited Madhu, and his greeting by the senior priest in charge of the shrine – who kissed him on the hand – was widely discussed and criticised.

While recent scholarship in the north and east has foregrounded questions about the relationship between the Church, politics, and the civil war, it has had less to say about everyday practice in comparison with parallel research on Hinduism (de Alwis 2018: 170-171; Derges 2008; Lawrence 1997 and 2000). Hatsumi’s research (2012, 2017), which argues that Catholic ritual devotion has offered a therapeutic benefit for those who suffered during the conflict, stands out in this context. Although the number of Protestant churches in Mannar has been growing, the Catholic Church remains by far the largest Christian denomination in the district. One indication of the momentum of the Church has been the significant expansion of the clergy within Mannar Diocese over the last three decades. Between 1990 and 2016 the number of parishes doubled, the number of diocesan priests tripled, and the number of
Catholics per priest fell by two thirds. (Figure 5.1) The increasing number of parishes primarily reflects not the creation of new churches but a process of division of large inland parishes, as the fishing settlements tend to have fewer churches and larger congregations. After the end of my fieldwork proper in 2015, Alayankulam parish was divided in two, dropping from eleven churches to six.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Catholics</th>
<th>As % of diocese population</th>
<th>Diocesan priests</th>
<th>Religious priests</th>
<th>Catholics per priest</th>
<th>Male religious</th>
<th>Female religious</th>
<th>Parishes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>66,968</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2,575</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>68,221</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1,624</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>84,376</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>843</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.1 Mannar Diocese statistics.55

Natural deterioration, war, and the deliberate destruction of undamaged or otherwise repairable buildings during the postwar construction boom have left few colonial-era churches in the diocese.56 (Figures 5.2-3) As with houses, the construction of churches has moved in fits and starts according to the money available. In most churches this has come from the membership and the Church itself, although some of the major shrines have also been supported by donations from Sinhalese Catholics in the south. In this way, Our Lady of Lourdes at Manthai was redecorated only a couple of years after its initial reconstruction. Many other church artifacts, such as statues, were destroyed or lost during the war, although I also heard that some had been sold to collectors from the south after its end. Those that survived revealed older craft traditions and networks. The treatment of these objects showed a similar preference for replacement rather than repair.

**Catholic culture in Mannar Diocese**

Mannar Diocese (*mannār maṟaimāvaṭṭam*), one of twelve dioceses in Sri Lanka today, was subdivided from Jaffna Diocese in 1981. Although Catholic dioceses are similar in terms of Church structures and institutions, I suggest that it is possible to talk about a Mannar diocesan culture and identity that arises from familiarity with the local priests and their characters and reputations; the figure of Bishop Rayappu Joseph; *Manna*, the monthly Catholic newspaper;

55 http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dmann.html

56 An architectural dissertation by I. Perera discusses a Mannar Island church thought to have been built during the Portuguese period (2012: 52).
the major shrines, feasts and pilgrimages (particularly Madhu, Manthai, Olatoduvai, Parappukadandan, and Totavely); traditions of musical devotion; and the story of Mannar Martyrs, which plays a central role in locating Mannar Diocese within a teleological narrative of Catholic progress. In 1627, a missionary in Goa wrote:

If the kingdom of Jafanapatao is becoming wholly Christian, it is due to the prayers of those six hundred martyrs of the island of Manar, which is now being called the island of martyrs. They were subjects of the King of Jafanapatao, martyred in the days when our saintly Father Francis was on the Fishery Coast. (VP PPIII: 132)
Local Catholics continue to believe that the martyrdom inspired subsequent Catholic devotion across the island, as reflected in the phrase ‘the Martyrs’ blood is the seed of faith’ (vēdasācihaśin irattam visuvāsattin vittu). Told time and again, the continuing significance of the Martyrs narrative is further demonstrated by the fact that the annual diocesan feast is held at Our Lady Queen of Martyrs church in Totavely, generally (although not unanimously) believed to be the place of the martyrdom, and by more recent activities such as the creation of the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization, a kūttu performance of the Martyrs narrative held at several locations in 2013, and a day-long public conference on the Martyrs that was held at Totavely in 2015. After one of the kūttu performances, two nuns told me that it was because Mannar is ‘a land of martyrs’ that no one was killed during the tsunami and the island was protected during the war. Among clergy and laity there is a widely-held hope that the Martyrs will be canonised, which was frequently expressed during the tenure of Bishop Rayappu Joseph and is receiving renewed energy under Bishop Emmanuel Fernando (2017–).

The diocese is promoting popular devotion to the Martyrs while collecting information on the Martyrs to submit to the Vatican. It is often said that the canonisation is made more difficult by the fact that the Church does not know the names of any individual Martyrs.

Despite the significance of the Martyrs within the diocese, Mannar is more famous nationally for Madhu shrine (Antoninus 1979), drawing huge numbers of Tamil and Sinhalese Catholics as well as members of other religions. Madhu is associated with another narrative of religious persecution, as the sacred statue of Mary is said to have been carried to Madhu from Manthai in the seventeenth century by Catholics fleeing Dutch persecution. The Kadaiyars said that they had been the people who carried the statue. De Alwis (2018: 168) has noted a widespread belief among Buddhist and Hindu devotees that Madhu was originally a Kannaki-Pattini shrine. Whatever the truth of this, the first church at Silena Marutha Madhu, to give it its full name, was built in 1701 (VP DPI: 213). Madhu grew in importance during the nineteenth century and became a valuable source of income for the Church, which played a role in a debate between the new Apostolic Vicariates of Jaffna and Colombo as to its jurisdiction as well as in the Kadaiyar claim during the schism (VP BPVI: 507). Madhu became a refuge once more during the war, as the site of a large IDP camp (Hyndman 2003: 178-181; McFarlane 2016: 146-152). In November 1999 more than thirty-five civilians were killed by shelling inside the church grounds, although both the LTTE and the government denied responsibility (Hyndman 2003: 181). An indication of Madhu’s importance, as well as the transformed context of the postwar period, was the visit of Pope Francis in February 2015, at the time of the canonisation of Joseph Vaz.
The number of pilgrims attending the main August feast has grown from 40,000 in 1914 (AR 1914) to an estimated 400,000 today. By the final day of the feast itself most of the priests in the district are present, as well as many from Jaffna and elsewhere. They are responsible for overseeing not just the Masses but also the city of tents and the other facilities that serve it, such as the market and temporary courtroom, that begin to grow two or three weeks before the feast. The Catholics who stay for that length of time are predominantly from Jaffna and Negombo, for whom the feast is a major holiday, while those from closer villages such as Marudankandal usually only come for the final Mass. Like certain other shrines (Lewis 1895: 263-264; Stirrat 1992: 33), the dirt from Madhu (known as kōyl marundu, ‘church medicine’) has historically been believed to cure snake bites if swallowed. This practice was recorded as early as 1721 (VP DPII: 98), and still occurred within the lifespan of older villagers in Matottam. Kōyl marundu is also poured into the ground as part of the ritual that accompanies the laying of foundation stones, and into graves during funerals. Madhu also shares with other shrines the miracle (pudumai) of rain, which is expected to fall immediately after the feast. If rain precedes the feast, however, it may be taken as a sign that Mary is unhappy. In 2017, after heavy flooding in the camp, a young priest from Jaffna suggested to me that Mary was sending a sign that the Church had recreated the social structure of the secular world in the hierarchical organisation of different kinds of accommodation around the shrine.

Besides the feasts at the main shrines, although often occurring in conjunction with them, foot pilgrimages (pāda yāttirai) play an important role in the diocese. These occur during Lent (tavakālam), alongside shorter Stations of the Cross (siluvai pādai) processions which might also be considered a form of pilgrimage; the longer pilgrimages themselves also end with the Stations of the Cross. (Figure 5.4) According to the Report (9), in the 1870s the main pilgrimages were to Madhu and Nanaddan (in the centre of Matottam). There is no pilgrimage to Nanaddan today, and the foot pilgrimage to Madhu is generally undertaken by small numbers of people from Jaffna. In 2014 and 2015 the main pilgrimages were to Parappukadandan by the Giant’s Tank, Olatoduvaí on Mannar Island, and Komarasankulam in Vavuniya District. The first two took a few hours, while the third was a distance of 100 km split over three days, with meals and basic accommodation provided at churches along the way. Both feasts and pilgrimages are occasions for the enactment of vows (nētti or nēttikadan; Mosse 2012: 73), and also offer an opportunity to meet old friends and make new ones, although in this they carry the risk of unruly behaviour and unmonitored sociality, particularly of unmarried men and women (as Stirrat observed of shrines in the south [1992: 64]).
Music, Passion Plays, and kūttu

Another key element of Mannar’s Catholic culture, and particularly with regard to its phenomenological dimensions, is music. In Marudankandal the villagers commanded a complex musical vocabulary of rāhams (melodies) and tālams (metres), alongside genres such as bajanai, kavi, mukamāri, oppāri, pulambal, pirāttanai, tālisai, and vāltupān. Readings were often sung, and some priests continued to sing the Gospel. Masses and church feasts incorporated local and European influences: an electronic keyboard accompanied the church choir with programmed beats quite different to local tālams, while melodies were taken from Western songs and reused in Christmas carols. At one diocesan event the priest incorporated the refrain from Leonard Cohen’s Hallelujah. Mass always ended with a short hymn called the nittiya stuti led by the church sangīttam. There were no hymnbooks in the church, although the choir used school notebooks in which the lyrics had been handwritten. Beyond Mass, other traditions of musical performance, such as Passion Plays (pasān or pās), the annual diocesan villupāṭṭu (bow song) competition, and kūttu, are sustained by lay performance and composition, with different genres broadly indexing the gender and age of the performers.
Two of these are worth describing in greater depth. The first is the Passion Play, of which there are several traditions in Sri Lanka. In contrast to Jaffna, where the dominant version is the popular naturalistic dramatisation staged annually by the Catholic Centre for Performing Arts, in Mannar local representations of the Passion primarily draw upon the Viyāhula Prasangam – known in Sinhala as the Dukprapthi Prasangaya – a composition of nine ‘sermons’ (pirasangam) written by Fr Jacome Gonsalves, an Oratorian missionary who lived in Sri Lanka between 1705 and his death in 1742, and who played an instrumental role in the development of local devotional literature in both Sinhala and Tamil (Fernandopulle 1999: 132-148 and passim). The Viyākula Prasangam is sung to a deceptively simple melody, and is referred to as oppāri, the name given to funeral laments (Fernando pulle 1999: 180-181. Like laments, it addresses the listeners as co-witnesses, in this case to the suffering and death of Jesus, and is punctuated by cries of aiyō! (‘alas!’). The full text takes several hours to sing, and for half an hour every evening throughout Lent the sound of the Viyāhula Prasangam, either live or recorded, is heard from many churches. On Good Friday (periya vellī, ‘big Friday’) a longer stretch of the Viyāhula Prasangam, although still not its entirety, forms the foundation of Passion Plays at a small number of churches throughout the district. The most famous of these is held every three years on the island at Pesalai, using life-size puppets (pommai) (Sarachchandra 1966: 124-128). Another Passion Play, which I will return to in Chapter Six, is performed annually by mainland Kadaiyars at the church in Periyakulam.

The second genre is kūttu, perhaps the most venerated public form of Catholic culture in Mannar. Kūttu refers to a broad genre of devotional performance that unites song, dance, and drama in the ritual enactment of religious narratives. The name is given to a variety of traditions throughout Tamil communities in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu, as well as elsewhere in South India. In the social sciences, limited English-language studies have been made of kūttu in the Hill Country (Bass 2013: 153-163; Jayaraman 1966) and on the east coast (Sykes 2011; Thompson 2005), although not of kūttu in the north. There are, however, Tamil accounts of kūttu in the north (Anpurasa 2007; Benjamin 1978) and elsewhere (S. Maunaguru 1992), and kūttu appears briefly in scholarship on Catholic religious dramas (Fernandopulle 2014: 539-540; Peiris 1953; Peiris 1974: 30-31; Shanmugalingam 2012: 71-74) and Sinhalese nāḍagama, which is thought to have been modelled on kūttu (Peiris 1974: 32-33; Sarachchandra 1966: 116; Sykes 2013: 480-481).

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Among Mannar Catholics, kūttu is sometimes referred to generically as nāṭṭukūttu, (‘country kūttu’), although nāṭṭukūttu is also used for short kūttu performances which might last for only a couple of hours or less. Nāṭṭukūttus such as these are performed at cultural events such as Oli Vila (oli vilā), the ‘festival of light’ held in Catholic schools in the weeks before Christmas, and the above-mentioned nāṭṭukūttu performances of the Mannar Martyrs narrative in 2013. However, the major forms of kūttu are vāsāppu, which lasts for an entire night, and nāḍaham, which lasts for two or even three nights. These are large and elaborate communal events staged by a church, village, or larger entity such as a parish, usually in August or September before the perumbōham rain. (Hindu kūttus are also sometimes staged in Mannar, but the Kāttavaraiyan kūttu which I travelled to see in the forest near Madhu in September 2014 was cancelled due to heavy rain.) In the early 2000s, for example, Alayankulam and two other adjacent parishes jointly staged a kūttu. In contrast to the east coast, these larger kūttus occur only once every one or two decades, rather than annually. There was an increase in kūttus after the war, and in 2013 and 2014 three or four vāsāppus and nāḍahams were staged each year in the district. Marudankandal did not perform a kūttu during this time, the last performance having occurred in the mid 1990s, but I was able to attend two vāsāppus, which were both a performance of the same Santōmiyār (St Thomas) narrative, by neighbouring Maravar village communities, and a two-night Emmanuel nāḍaham performed collectively by eight Kollar village communities. As in Batticaloa (Sykes 2011: 515), but unlike the Hill Country (Jayaraman 1966), kūttu is not considered to be a low caste custom.

Unlike those on the east coast (2013: 516), Catholic kūttus in Mannar do not use the theatre-in-the-round (vaṭṭakalari) but are staged on a prosenium arch stage erected on open ground, usually near the village church, from wood, rope, canvas, and white sheets. The audience sit before the stage on mats and blankets. To the left of the stage, hidden from view, is a space where the chorus (piṭṭuṭṭu) stands with the drummers, a compere (arivippālar), and a seated director (aṇṇaviyar) who has the responsibility of following the kūttu from a manuscript (ēdu).

58 The terms vāsāppu and nāḍaham were also used in Jaffna (Gnana Prakasar 2011). In his eighteenth-century analysis of Tamil literature, Constanzo Beschi, a Jesuit missionary who worked in Tamil Nadu and is famous for his contributions to Tamil literature, wrote about three kinds of ‘dramatic representations’ accompanied by singing and dancing: short comedies called kūttu, tragedies or tragi-comedies called nāḍaham, and, on the coast, vāsakkapā (1917: 149). Beschi was not an admirer, and wrote that these ‘display no higher degree of skill or contrivance than is sufficient to please the vulgar and to excite mirth; to search for art in them, would, therefore, be a useless attempt’.
Manuscripts were traditionally inscribed on palm-leaves (ōlai), but are now usually written in notebooks. (Figure 5.5) Many were lost during the war. Kūttus start at sunset, following a ritualised beginning that involves inviting special guests and local elders to the stage, gift-giving, the lighting of the oil lamp, speeches, prayers, a brief summary of the plot of the kūttu, the tying of rope to stakes to create a temporary fence before the stage, and the introduction of the musicians.

![Figure 5.5 Ōlai kūtu ēdu.](image)

The performance itself is divided into scenes, each of which begins with the announcement of the names and home villages of the imminent performers, along with the roles which they will play, the importance of each signalled by the relative number of firecrackers (paṭṭas). The chorus begins to sing, and the performers, almost unrecognisable in makeup and exuberant costumes, enter the stage and move around it in a figure of eight. Particular generic motions are associated with character types. Following this, each scene generally consists of a mixture of sections of prose speech (addressed by the performers to the audience or to each other), more periods of dancing, and a distinctive form of singing in which the performer begins each line alone and is then joined by the chorus. This continues, without pause, throughout the night, and ends around dawn with a final hymn called the mangalam, sung by all the performers together. The main performers then walk, still in costume, to the nearby church to say prayers, and when they return a Mass is said in front of the stage. The performers celebrate after
everything has finished. In 2014 I stayed on after one of the Santōmiyār vāsāppus and accompanied the performers as they walked between their houses, starting with the most minor role and finishing with the most important. At each they were given snacks and arrack.

The Catholic kūṭṭu of Mannar is popularly believed to date back to the sixteenth century, when Portuguese missionaries drew upon and transformed the existing Hindu tradition for the purpose of evangelisation. The creation of the local tradition is specifically attributed to a poet called Lorenz (or Lorenzo) Pulavar, who is also said to have taught other kūṭṭu composers from different castes. Lorenzo Pulavar is colloquially said to have lived in the sixteenth century, although Casie Chitty’s overview of Tamil poets places him in the middle of the eighteenth (1859: 50-51). Although Sykes (2013: 480-481, 512) has suggested that the kūṭṭu was adopted by northern Tamil Catholics to be used for Passion Plays, in Mannar the original Catholic kūṭṭu narratives are said to have been drawn from the Flos Sanctorum, a Portuguese account of the saints published in South India in 1586 after being translated into Tamil by the Jesuit missionary Henrique Henriques.

Kūṭṭu narratives are lengthy, with numerous characters who speak in prose and song. Some manuscripts are owned by a particular church or community, while others have none of their own and have to borrow from elsewhere. Hagiography continues to be a popular topic, along with foundational narratives of Sri Lankan Catholicism (such as those of the Martyrs and Joseph Vaz) and didactic fantasies with a focus on conversion from Hinduism to Catholicism. (Figure 5.6) Kūṭṭu authors are given the honorary title pulavar rather than kavinyar, the more prosaic term for poet. Writing a kūṭṭu is considered a social and religious service, although some are created on commission. The language used in kūṭṭus is a particular kind of literary Tamil that many claim not to understand, and the term Saraswathi pulavar – after the Hindu goddess of education – is given to pulavars who compose kūṭṭu without education or formal training.

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59 Confusingly, Casie Chitty also does not describe him as a kūṭṭu composer, and in fact writes that ‘he did not write any large poems’.
Santōmiyar (St Thomas) vāsāppu

During the reign of Kandapūr, king of Sindunāḍu in India, the king’s brother Kāḍu and his friend Tūdu plan to build a Roman church. The king wants it to be a beautiful [stage], but for this they must bring an architect from Rome. An ambassador is sent to Rome, and he meets St Thomas working as a sculptor. St Thomas comes to Sindunadu and meets the king. [...] But Tōmiyappar [St Thomas] gives all of the things for the building of the church to poor people as alms. The palace is not built. Sāḍaikkāran comes to know about this and tells the king. The king is angry and asks the guru [St Thomas], but he says, ‘I have built a much better palace than you wanted by changing the minds of the people.’ The king is very angry and puts the priest in prison. Ambassador Abaanis is called. Advice is requested from him. Tōmiyappar is sent for torture. But Kāḍu sees the palace in a dream. Therefore there is a change of mind and the guru is summoned. The king asks ‘what is this wonder?’, and the high religion [is realised]. The true Christianity is spread. Tōmiyappar, who was imprisoned, is released. Including the king, everybody becomes Christian.

Emmanuel nāḍaham

The King and Queen of Italy are Hindus, and following any other religion is a punishable offence. But the prince discovers a Christian church and priest while travelling around the country, is baptised and takes the name Emmanuel. After being imprisoned by the king and queen, the prince is saved from execution by an angel who sends him to Greece. In Greece he is welcomed and made leader of the army. In the meantime, the princess also comes across a church, this time in a garden, and is baptised and takes the name Gnanasōdi. Like the prince, she is taken for execution, but is rescued by King Emberador of Sicily, who comes across her in the forest and takes her back to his country. In time they are married. King Emberador, however, becomes enraged by the fact that the king of Greece has not paid his due tribute for a whole year. Trusting Emmanuel’s ability, the king of Greece wages war with Sicily, and loses. But King Emberador realises that Emmanuel resembles his wife and spares him and Greece. Emberador returns to Sicily with Emmanuel, and invites the king and queen of Italy to visit, explaining that their son and daughter are with him. King Magrittu had already dreamt that their children were still alive, and they come to Sicily and give Emberador an appropriate dowry for the wedding. They know that their daughter and son were in the true religion (sattiya vēdam) and, realising that it is not good for them to be alone in their old age, are also baptised. Then they take Emmanuel and return to Italy, where he is crowned king.

Figure 5.6 Kūttu summaries, narrated before the performances.

Frasca’s observation (1990: 1-2) that aesthetic considerations are subordinate to ritual in Tamil Nadu kūttus misses the fact that, at least in Mannar, many aesthetic considerations are considered mandatory parts of the ritual. For example, other than lack of manuscripts, the main reason people gave me for not being able to perform a kūttu was lack of money. A kūttu must include all elements or not be performed at all. The amount of work and the expenses involved in staging a kūttu are the main reasons for its infrequency. A one-night performance can cost several lakhs, money which pays for, amongst other things, the stage, sound system, lighting, makeup and costumes (which are rented from a small number of designers in the district), and refreshments for the performers over the months of weekly rehearsals. This money is collected.
in two ways. To begin with, each family from the village in question is expected to contribute a set amount, regardless of their involvement. Second, those who perform must pay an amount that varies according to the importance of the character in question. Characters at the top end of the scale, for example a king, can be worth Rs 10,000 or more, and usually go to the older men. Apart from a small number of professional musicians, kūtu performers are villagers who may only take part in one or two kūtus during their lifetimes. Although it is sometimes said that mistakes will bring a curse (savan) upon the performance, in reality performers often forget their lines and have to be prompted.

The scale, significance, and rarity of kūtu makes it a key element in the collective memory of the villagers. Songs from kūtus sometimes appear in other contexts, such as during processions during the church feast (pavani) or homewards from the church after a wedding. Describing kūtus performed in the Hill Country, Jayaraman (1966) has suggested that kūttus foster unity by bringing all on the estate together as one in opposition to neighbouring estates. But if there is a sense of competitive pride in Mannar, kūtu performances are still considered to be for everyone. They also play a particular role in male identity and sociality. Kūtu performers are almost always men, although this was a matter of ongoing discussion, and increasingly the younger female roles are being taken by unmarried women. During my fieldwork I was invited to drinks parties with older men who would often entertain each other by leaping from their chairs, adopting the iconic positions of a character, and singing lyrics from kūtus in which they had performed years or even decades earlier. But Catholics are also explicit about the fact that the meanings given to a kūtu performance have always been multiple. For the individual performer, participation in a kūtu may be connected to a nētti. At the level of the village, a kūtu might be staged to thank God for an abundant harvest, or as an entreaty during times of drought or disease. One of Selva’s uncles told me that beside reasons such as these, the purpose of kūtu was to bring everyone together as a peaceful community. In the aftermath of the war, kūtu has taken on new meanings. The speeches made at the beginning of the Emmanuel nāḍaham in 2015 articulated very clearly that this performance was a reaffirmation of shared Tamil culture that had survived the ravages of war.

**Priest and parish**

In contrast to the growing discussion regarding the relationship between the Sri Lankan Catholic Church and the political domain, existing scholarship has had less to say about either the nature of authority within the Church hierarchy or between the clergy and the laity. In this
section I expand my description of ‘everyday’ Catholicism with some observations about the second of these issues, based on my relationship with a number of Tamil priests in the north and east as well as with Fr Lawrence, or Lawrence Father, as he was known.

Fr Lawrence was in his early 30s, and kept his beard and hair fashionably styled. He was cheerful and quick to laugh, and his sermons, which sometimes adopted the dramatic forms of charismatic preaching, were appreciated by people in the parish. Often to be found on his veranda before lunch and his afternoon nap, he had also begun to cycle for exercise in the evenings by the time I left. Like other priests I knew, Fr Lawrence was extremely busy. In farming parishes such as Alayankulam the parish priest (pangu tandai, ‘parish father’) was responsible for a large number of churches, in contrast to the fishing towns and villages, which tend to have fewer churches and larger congregations. Fr Lawrence’s time was occupied with Masses and feasts throughout the parish (as well as in others to which he had been invited), village rituals such as house openings and laying foundation stones, and the mediation of tensions within the parish. Like other priests, Fr Lawrence rose early for the first Mass and often stayed up late. (Priests develop a firm post-lunch nap in the seminary.)

Priests were respected (gauravamāna) public figures, and were often invited to local events as special guests. At the 2013 Oli Vila in Alayankulam MMV, Fr Lawrence made the pupils laugh with his collection of animal impressions. Among the Marudankandal Catholics, several villagers were members of the clergy and religious orders, or training to join them. The lavish celebrations accompanying a priest’s First Mass were one sign of the importance given to the vocation, and priests sometimes said that the grand scale of this event was to make up for the wedding that they had forgone. Silver (twenty-fifth year) jubilees were also celebrated as a significant milestone, and accompanied by cultural programmes and books collecting personal reflections and memories.

Parishioners also knew priests as people, not as abstract forces (McFarlane 2016: 154), which was also influenced by the fact that diocesan priests were mainly natives of Mannar and Vavuniya. Personal relationships between priests and parishioners were not similar to Ram’s description of the way that Mukkuvar Catholics in coastal Tamil Nadu treated their priests as outsiders, often alienated from their congregations (1991: 36), nor to Stirrat’s account of a growing disconnection among Sinhalese Catholics. The fact that parish priests were usually transferred every five years or so meant that they got to know many people in the diocese and continuously developed new relationships, and priests’ offices and private quarters were usually decorated with commemorative plaques (vāḷṭṭu maḍal) given as gifts by parishioners. A newly-transferred priest in a mainland parish near to Alayankulam told me that he had
managed to visit all five hundred families in his first couple of weeks by visiting each for a maximum of five minutes and refusing offers of food and drink. Conversely, Vasanthan’s eldest sister told me that she was not able to talk easily to Fr Lawrence because she did not know him as well as the previous Alayankulam priest. Diocesan events and feasts were an opportunity for lay Catholics to reconnect with known priests.

Priests relied on parishioners for various kinds of support, both financial and labour (for example, preparing and decorating the church before the Mass). However, the priest’s authority was also dependent on his own reputation. This was partly to do with their ‘professional’ qualities, and I heard criticisms of priests’ organisational and time management skills, strictness, and the quality of their sermons, but it was more a question of morality. Priests were closely observed, and the villagers had strong opinions of what correct behaviour should be, as Stirrat has also observed in the south (1992: 50-54). Drinking alcohol was kept out of the public, and occurred only privately with other priests or close friends. More serious were rumours about relationships with women. Teresa’s brother-in-law, who lived in another parish, told me that Muslim maulavis are right to get married, because trouble always comes to the Catholic priests. Besides questions of morality, parishioners were also alert to evidence of partiality in everyday lay matters and with regard to national politics. A senior priest told me that if priests become involved in party politics they isolate parts of their congregation. Despite generalised comments about the relative levels of the support they received, I found that priests were always hesitant to voice personal preferences about individual parishes, and more than once the proverb ‘bloom where you are planted’ was shared with me as a philosophy for their vocation.

In this context, reputation relied on maintaining a particular kind of social distance from the laity. In contrast to the importance of being ‘close to the people’, which referred to empathy as well as an ease of social engagement, there was a level of personal intimacy beyond which it became inappropriate or suspicious. It was a risk to become too personally involved in interpersonal issues within the parish. For these reasons, priests largely avoided house visits for anything other than religious purposes, and an Indian Brother visiting the parish was relatively unusual for taking an evening walk (out of cassock) and sometimes dropping in for a chat with the villagers. Priests’ personal quarters were also out of sight within their houses, accessible only to other priests or male friends particularly close to them.

The priests’ distinctive white cassock also played a prominent role in distinguishing priests from the laity, and was associated with power and safety during the war (McFarlane 2016: 145). The rule that priests must wear a cassock in public was a diocesan one, and firmly held.
Although Fr Lawrence wore sports clothes for occasional jogging and cycling, as well as sometimes while sitting on his veranda, the priests who took part in the sweltering Komarasankulam pilgrimage wore their cassocks. During my fieldwork I met some Indian priests who said that this was a stricter practice than they were used to. The wearing of the cassock was also monitored by the people. In 2015, a day or so after the Marudankandal GN football club had won a local tournament, a small celebratory meal was cooked by a family for the club members and a small number of guests. A couple of the Brothers had also been invited. Coming from elsewhere in Sri Lanka with a more relaxed view of clothing, they arrived without cassocks. As we were eating, Jeyabalan remarked to me that it was wrong for them to do this, because other people might not realise they were priests and therefore act inappropriately.

Most priests had been working towards their vocation from a young age, and I found that they were very conscious of the social life that they had sacrificed for their vocation. Among themselves, they had their own private society and were able to enjoy themselves and drink, although their lay male friends might have to purchase it for them. One young priest told me that drinking was their recompense for not getting married, and because they needed something for themselves. During my time in Jaffna, and at the start of my Mannar fieldwork, I spent much time with priests, whose advice and connections proved very important over the next couple of years. In that initial period I was able to enter this private space, but as time went on in Marudankandal I found myself spending more time with the villagers.

The authority of priests in Mannar does not reside in the ability to exercise unilateral power within the parish, but is rather co-created with the laity. There are also areas of Catholic practice which fall outside the clergy, such as the way in which priests generally do not attend burials, where the final prayers are said by the parishioners, or the organisation of kūttus. Most significant, however, is the way in which churches are considered the possession of their memberships, an issue that arises particularly through caste conflicts. This issue will be the main topic of the following sections.

**ST ANTHONY’S, MARUDANKANDAL**

There has been a church in Marudankandal since at least the middle of the nineteenth century, although the current building was constructed in the 1940s and a portico was added for extra shade at the beginning of the 1960s. Other than needing a fresh coat of paint, St Anthony’s appeared to be in good condition, having survived the war unscathed unlike St Mary’s and many other churches in the area, but I was told on several occasions that the church was
damaged and would be rebuilt if the money was available. In the meantime, the church members made other improvements: between 2013 and 2015 a brick wall was built along Main Road, a new statue of St Anthony was installed at the junction, and the small ruined building behind the church, which had been used by the parish priest as accommodation for part of the war when St Mary’s was destroyed, was repaired. The church was knocked down in 2017, after church members finally decided to rebuild, and Mass currently takes place beneath a large, semi-permanent pandal erected in front of the smaller building.

Its central location meant that St Anthony’s was effectively the second church of the parish. After the destruction of St Mary’s, St Anthony’s had become the acting parish church, and during my fieldwork the main 7.30 am Sunday Mass alternated between them, as happened in a couple of other nearby parishes. The congregation was generally divided according to age and sex, children closest to the altar, women behind them, and men at the very back spilling onto the portico, where the rising sun heated their napes during morning Mass. Mass was also an occasion to dress smartly: married women in saris, often wearing a white veil embroidered with the word ‘Lourdes’; young and middle-aged men in trousers and shirts (the former with the backs of their collars turned fashionably upwards); and older men in shirts and vēṭṭis. Slippers were left outside on the edge the portico.

Not everyone in the parish attended the Sunday morning Mass, because some of the more distant churches celebrated their own weekly Masses at other times. There was a higher level of parish attendance at Easter, Christmas, and New Year, which were also divided between St Mary’s and St Anthony’s, with midnight Mass held in one and morning Mass in the other. Many people attended both. Since the end of the war, though, the Church had been attempting to consolidate Mass within parish churches according to Church custom. During my fieldwork, Marudankandal villagers were sometimes unhappy about the idea that village weddings might be held at St Mary’s in the future rather than St Anthony’s. As in other Sri Lankan churches dedicated to St Anthony, another weekly Mass was held on Tuesday afternoons. Although the Mass itself was attended mainly by the Marudankandal Catholics, other people, including local Hindus, visited the church during the rest of the day to pray.

There were two levels of organisation within the parish. The parish council (pangu sabai) organised parish-level activities, such as Christmas, processions, carol singing, All Souls’ Day, Oli Vila, the elders group, and so on. Each church also had its own separate council (ālaya sabai). Unlike Alapuram (Mosse 2012), the single-caste nature of St Anthony’s meant that the church council was not a multi-caste, village-wide institution, although this was changing. Unlike in the past, they now accepted other castes. These were usually only people who had
married into the Kadaiyar families, although Vasanthan told me that they had asked him to join since he had become a successful businessman. Importantly, it was the church members who controlled who could join the church, rather than the parish priest, although this was against the rules of the Church and a matter of ongoing dispute. Being unable to join St Anthony’s, some Catholics in the village were members of other churches in the parish. Of the eighty-five or so families registered at St Anthony’s during my fieldwork, not all lived in Marudankandal itself, such as Jeyabalan’s family. The church members and the congregation for regular Mass were not identical. Everyone could participate in Mass, but only members had rights (urimai) in the church administration, which included participating formally in the liturgy (valipādu), giving the readings (vāsaham), and so on. The tūkku maṇi was usually rung only when church members died. Unlike in the coastal Kanyakumari villages described by Subramanian (2009: 2), the village and the church were not the same, nor did the parish council act as village governance. While the saint’s feast procession did not travel around the village, the Stations of the Cross during Lent travelled counterclockwise around the main residential cluster – stopping outside a different selection of houses every year – before crossing Main Road and arriving at St Mary’s. Although this clearly circled the focus of the Kadaiyar families, it had only a loose caste symbolism, as it stopped outside non-Kadaiyar households and did not incorporate the other Kadaiyars who lived to the west of the kamam. (Figure 5.7)
The main responsibility for the organisation and finances of St Anthony’s fell to the church committee, which held a meeting on the portico every one or two months that was attended mainly by the older men of the village. Until the end of the twentieth century the head of the committee and the church itself was known as the mūppar or mūppu, a role that originated in the early days of the Oratorian mission (Boudens 1957: 174; Stirrat 1992: 15-16). To better bring individual churches within Church authority, the role of mūppar is now taken by the parish priest himself, the other chief positions being the secretary and the treasurer. Subsequently the most powerful lay position on the committee became the secretary, which role was occupied by Calistus (who was sometimes jokingly referred to as the village mūppar).

The other important positions were the treasurer; the sangītam, who was responsible for the hymns with which Mass began and ended; the perusandi, who was responsible for organising the meals at church events; and the melinji, the church caretaker, who had a particular responsibility for ringing the church bell that hung within a tall concrete frame. Melinji appears to derive from the Portuguese meirinho, originally meaning ‘mariner’ (Rumpf 2015: 58 n. 69), but under the Portuguese referring to an officer trusted with the duty of apprehending criminals and malefactors (VP PPI:170) or to a church official who made sure all were present for Sunday worship (VP PPIII: 102). Under the Dutch the merinji called the local people to compulsory service (ūḷiyam) (Rumpf 2015: 58). The current melinji, Nesaraja’s uncle, lived in a temporary house in the churchyard with his wife, and was the only member of the church committee to be paid for his work, although he said that it was hard to collect the money from people on a family basis. Nesaraja was often in the church as he was both supervisor of the sound system and events compere during my fieldwork. The church committee changed significantly after elections in the middle of 2017, which was one of main pieces of village news when I visited a month or so later. Fr Lawrence told me that the change was a big deal for the villagers.

Member families had a number of responsibilities to the church. The first was their role in the liturgy, which was organised according to small groups called anbiyams, the Tamil name for the concept of ‘basic Christian communities’ that came from the Philippines in the early 1990s (Mosse 2012: 240). Each anbiyan comprised around ten families, and the regular responsibilities of the liturgy were fulfilled by individual anbiyams on a rotating basis, as were duties such as leading the rosary and cooking during the feast (the latter a subject of mild
competition). Second, member families had a financial responsibility to St Anthony’s: an annual contribution of Rs 1,000 towards the priest. Families were also asked to contribute other amounts for specific projects. In 2017, for example, it was decided that each family must give Rs 30,000, and five bags of cement, for the construction of the new church. The final responsibility was that of labour. Although a number of people were routinely involved in decorating the inside of the church for Mass, rituals such as the feast involved larger periods of physical labour – performed by men – such as construction work, clearing the compound of weeds, or cutting dirt from a field to spread on the verge beside the compound for the sake of a temporary cycle park. The members of St Anthony’s were also involved in parish level siramadānām, communal voluntary labour, such as work on St Mary’s and looking after the common graveyard.

The church raised money by other means, such as the common collections during Mass and other cash offerings (kāṇikkai) given by those who joined the offertory procession. St Anthony’s was also able to raise money through the annual auction of twenty acres of kamam that the church owned in a neighbouring village. On a dark afternoon in late 2013, the auction took place among around twenty men sitting under the church portico, and the winner – whose final bid was Rs 300,000, around £1,500 – was a retired Grama Niladhari from a large fishing town. The GN had not come in person, but was represented by a local man who was also the church sangīttam. The latter would later manage the farmwork himself, while the GN visited periodically to see how things were going. (Alayankulam MMV also had several acres of kamam which they would auction in a similar manner.) This money was used to replace the church’s sound system when it was stolen one night in 2015 during a number of similar church robberies in the area.

CATHOLICISM AND CASTE

To understand the way in which the Kadaiyars controlled St Anthony’s, we need to look in greater depth at how caste has been at the centre of the relationship between Christianity and culture in Sri Lanka, as in South India (Mosse 2012: 96). Although Christian understandings of and responses to caste have varied widely, not just between Christian denominations but within them (Bugge 1998; K. M. de Silva 1965: 186-205; Mosse 2012), since the arrival of Catholic missionaries in South Asia they have revolved around the question of whether caste

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60 A priest from a large fishing village on Mannar Island recalled that before the arrival of the anbiyams the readings had been dominated by ‘big men’. 
is a ‘religious’, Hindu phenomenon, theologically opposed to Christianity, or whether it is a ‘social’ matter, permissible among Christians and perhaps even playing a practical role in the project of conversion (Ballhatchet 1998: 7).

Viswanath (2014: 11) has noted that the records of missionaries in India reveal a much deeper understanding of rural society and caste than colonial officials. This is doubly true in Sri Lanka, thanks to the government-mandated lack of attention to caste after 1832, which I will explain in Chapter Six. Although the all-island censuses from 1871 excluded caste, the Catholic Church routinely recorded caste information in marriage until the middle of the twentieth century. (Figure 5.8) However, in contrast to India, the multi-lingual archives of the Sri Lankan missionaries have yet to be adequately researched with regard to caste, and what has been translated in the Perniola volumes provides only sporadic references. It is clear that in the Portuguese period at least four castes controlled churches on Mannar Island: the Paravars, Vellalars (VP PII: 129 and 139), Pallivilis (VP PPI: 398), and the Careas, whose disputed identity I will return to in Chapter Six with regard to the Mannar Martyrs. This evidence of caste identities undermines Stirrat’s suggestion that ‘a new substantiality’ was given to the previously ‘highly fluid’ entity of caste (and of village) by nineteenth century missionaries (1992: 16).

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<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>Paravar, approximately 300</td>
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<td>Karaiyar, 240</td>
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<td>Vellalar, 200</td>
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<td>Kadaiyar, 105</td>
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<td>Sandar, 95</td>
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<td>Maravar, 85</td>
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<td>Kollar, 65</td>
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<td>Valaiyar, 55</td>
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<td>Timilar, 35</td>
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<td>Vannar, 30</td>
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<td>Barber, 15</td>
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<td>Paraiyar, 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kannadiyar, 5</td>
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Figure 5.8 Number of Catholic families per caste in Matottam in the 1870s, according to the Report (13).

Despite the claims to the Mannar Martyrs, I did not encounter a contemporary association between particular castes in Mannar and Catholicism per se, in contrast to Jaffna, where some associate Catholicism with low caste status (e.g., Bruland 2013: 424; Kadirgamar 1979: 154). As I will explain in the next chapter, the identity of the early Christians in Mannar, frequently
described by the Portuguese as ‘Careas’ – in 1567 a Jesuit wrote that Carea is ‘the name for the Christians of Mannar’ (VP PPII: 19) – has been disputed, with some interpreting Carea as Karaiyar and others as Kadaiyar. Nevertheless, later missionaries frequently named the Karaiyars as perhaps the main population of Catholics. Between the early Oratorians in 1701 (VP DPI: 214) and Bishop Bonjean in 1873 (Quéré no date: 85), the majority of Catholics in the Vanni and Mannar were described as being Karaiyar fishers who gave a tenth of their catch as tithe to the church: ‘Thus the Kareyars, or fishermen, have the most beautiful churches.’ These remarks are complicated by the fact that in both cases the authors appear to conflate Karaiyars with other fishing castes, such as the Paravars, particularly as in Mannar the majority of Karaiyar churches are in agricultural Matottam and not on the coast. On the other hand, although some historians have emphasised the propensity of fishing castes to convert during the Portuguese period, it appears that there was also a significant population of Vellalar Catholics in Mannar (VP PPIII: 274).

The nature of Portuguese conceptualisations of caste in Sri Lanka, and the influence of the contemporary debates in India (Mosse 2012), are beyond the limits of this thesis. However, we know more about the perspectives of the Oratorians, whose letters reflect debates around caste within the Church at the time. Despite the centrality of caste in church ownership and feasts, the Oratorians described themselves as opposed to caste in the religious domain, if not in the secular. A 1746 report on the Ceylon Mission stated that, unlike other ‘regions [in the East] far from Goa’, in Ceylon the Oratorians opposed ‘all signs of caste difference within the church’, such as segregated seating and ‘the obligation for women of low caste and for slaves to uncover their heads in presence of their mistresses and of high caste women’ (VP DPII: 461-2) Different castes also drank from the same cup ‘without complaint’ (VP DPII: 476-7; also see VP DPII: 420; VP DPIII: 462-3).

In 1843 Orazio Bettacchini, Vicar Apostolic of Ceylon, wrote to Propaganda Fide about the ‘evil’ of caste, noting opposition to intercaste marriage and discrimination towards an unnamed caste ‘whose members are considered almost like animals and every time they meet those of other castes, they are obliged to step to the side of the road and to crawl on the ground’. Bettacchini concluded that ‘This seems to be against the spirit of Jesus Christ who wants us to look upon each other as brothers’ (VP BPI: 174). Bettacchini’s perspective may have been more prevalent during the early experiences of the European missionaries in Sri Lanka, as this level of criticism was unusual among the Perniola volumes. Although the European missionaries of the nineteenth century sometimes blamed the persistence of caste among
Catholics on the Oratorians, they themselves erred on the side of pragmatism, for example continuing to support single caste churches despite criticism from the Vatican.

An 1860 report from the Colombo Vicariate played down the importance of caste, stating that ‘in the ordinary daily life the differences of caste are scarcely felt’, and that even in marriage ‘[caste] distinctions are overlooked without any serious consequence’ (VP BPIV: 58). In contrast, a report from the Jaffna Vicariate a year later observed that caste was a severe impediment to the work of the Church:

The divisions into castes which exist both among the pagans and the Catholics in this vicariate is often an obstacle to union among the Catholics and to the quick spread of the faith. If I may say so, these people live in the caste, with the caste, through the caste and according to the caste; they contract marriages only with persons of the same caste; they generally exercise only the occupation of their caste, etc. Therefore it is very difficult to lead the pagans to embrace the faith, unless many of the same caste are converted at the same time or unless many of the same caste are already Christians. The missionaries of this island, however, do not meet with as many difficulties as the missionaries of the continent of India on account of the caste system. (VP BPIV: 698)

The Protestants also found caste a particular challenge for conversion (K. M. de Silva 1965; 186 n. 4, 187-188). However, opposition to conversion did not always depend on intra-caste communal forces. Gnana Prakasar’s diary describes numerous incidents of Hindu castes opposing the conversion of other castes to Catholicism (2011; see also Bastin 1997: 425-426).

According to Saveri (1993: 283-287), by the turn of the twentieth century there were three broad, overlapping views of caste in the northern Catholic Church. The first and ‘official’ attitude was that caste was purely a social phenomenon, with advantages and disadvantages, and even one which could be used to propagate Catholicism itself; as in India, some priests actively supported the hierarchy of caste. Second, then-Bishop Joulain and many European missionaries viewed caste as an annoying fact of life; not a serious threat to Catholicism, but something that it would be better to do without. Third was the attitude of Fr Gnana Prakasar, which Saveri suggests may have also been the view of his Tamil peers, that Catholicism was not hostile to caste, although the low caste converts deserved better treatment. In some circumstances Gnana Prakasar promoted caste separation. All three views shared two principles: ‘that caste was only a social institution and not sanctioned by religion… and that caste could be accommodated within the pattern of Catholic life.’

Caste is still held to have no religious sanction today, although the clergy, like the laity, hold a range of views. One priest told me that he had no interest in the topic, and would not participate in caste feasts (one of which was held in his parish that year). Another said that he hated caste, and that he would tell parishioners not to come to him if they want to talk about it.
Conflicts around church administrations could also be lengthy and extremely stressful for parish priests. Nevertheless, the Church continues to take a pragmatic attitude to caste issues, and is often wary of causing greater conflict. Bishop Rayappu Joseph told me that although people still follow caste, which he called ‘an evil’, they will abandon it if the priests lead them. However, he added, ‘when you drive a man away from a church you are driving away God too’. The aforementioned priest who rejected caste feasts acknowledged that the Church has to take a long-term perspective. In contrast, a senior priest in Jaffna described his fierce opposition to caste as a parish priest in the 1960s and 1970s, and said that today’s priests simply want to avoid trouble.

However, some priests hold an ambivalence towards caste that is not necessarily the result of diplomatic pragmatism. Priests themselves of course, as natives of Mannar, are enmeshed in networks of kin and friendships that often have a strong caste dimension. Within the Church itself the election of a new bishop remains a central point of contention, revealing caste factions among the clergy. In Jaffna Diocese it was sometimes said by Karaiyars that there was an arrangement among other castes to prevent a Karaiyar ever becoming a bishop. Many priests make a distinction between caste as a form of exclusion or hierarchy, and caste as community. In the latter sense, some believe that caste can play a positive social role that benefits the many rather than the individual, emphasising the importance of unity (oṟṟumai) and its potential to push back against other pressures. In 2014, at the annual feast organised at Totavely by the Kadaiyar-administered Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization, a Kadaiyar priest said that caste per se was not a problem and that he always encouraged his people to do things as a group. As Mosse (2012: 97) writes: ‘Caste is both a mode of domination and means of challenging that domination; a discourse of rank but also of rights.’ The paradox is whether it is possible to maintain caste boundaries without inevitably leading to hierarchy and conflict.

Recently, this ambivalence has been demonstrated in the controversy around the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization. Bishop Rayappu’s support for the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization after the war was understood as an attempt to help the Kadaiyars, who were considered a deprived community; a senior priest told me that the Bishop had not supported the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization ‘to foster caste consciousness but to develop them in all spheres’. One response that Kadaiyar supporters of the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization made to its critics was that other caste associations exist without challenge, so why is the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization opposed? Nevertheless, the Organization has been heavily criticised by some members of the clergy with regard to the way that the Organization stakes a claim to a shared religious narrative, while other caste
associations do not. This shared aspect of the Martyrs was emphasised to me in various ways: that the Martyrs are for the diocese, or for all Catholics; that they died for Christ. Indeed, several priests said that they had no problem with a caste association, as long as it was not dedicated to the Martyrs. Another issue raised was whether it was possible to say definitively who the Martyrs were. Finally, there was a concern that the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization might affect the canonisation attempt, by making people of other castes less interested in the Martyrs – very few people of other castes attend the new feast – or by causing future conflict in the diocese.

**Churches, feasts, and conflicts**

Mines’ description of the central role Hindu temples have played in ‘asserting control over territories, garnering social constituencies, and articulating and contesting relations of rank within communities’ (2005: 29) applies equally to Catholic churches, as Mosse (2012) has shown. However, the predominance of single castes within church administrations in Mannar reveals a different historical context to Tamil Nadu. Although the Portuguese recorded churches on Mannar Island that were described as single caste, it is not known how these were organised, or how and to what extent they included or excluded other castes. Nor do we yet know anything about Portuguese churches on the mainland. On the other hand, during the Dutch period there occurred an expansion of single-caste village churches, which I propose was largely the result of both the very small, largely endogamous village populations and the mobile lifestyle adopted by the Oratorians. This village-level fragmentation was noted in a report of the Jaffna Vicariate from 1860: ‘Each caste, in fact each fraction of a caste builds its own chapel’ (VP BPIV: 654-655). Today single caste churches (sādi kōyil) continue to be more common than mixed caste churches (podu kōyil), the latter often being parish churches.

It is important to emphasise that during the Dutch period at least, as today, Catholics were able to and did attend Mass at any church (although at least some had caste-segregated seating). There were common Masses for all of Matottam, which I will return to below. Moreover, sacraments such as baptism and marriage were also given in other churches according to the priest’s schedule. Nevertheless, village caste communities sustained a desire for their own church, in which they would at the minimum celebrate their feast; this was a right that they would not give up (VP BPV: 433; VP BPVIII: 18). In 1861, a report of the Jaffna Vicariate (VP BPIV: 679) noted that the strength of attachment to caste churches made it difficult to establish geographically-defined missions: ‘Therefore, to forestall difficulties, quarrels, etc.
among Christians of different castes, the missionaries of old seem to have been very prudent in assigning to each church the Christians of this or that caste rather than a definite territorial boundary.’ The Church was also aware of the strong sense of ownership, still seen today, with which Catholics viewed their churches: ‘As the Christians have generally built their churches with their money and their labour, they often act as masters with respect to them and in them, and when the missionary visits their churches, they usually consider him as their guest’ (VP BPIV: 692). Similarly, the Assistant Government Agent of Mannar noted in his diary for 1914 that

Every village in the Mannar District, whether Christian or Sivite, has its church or temple, though in the one case the Priest may only visit it once a year and in the other case there may be only one family in the village. These villages have a certain independence which I should say was unusual in other Roman Catholic districts and countries. (NASL 31/43)

The proliferation of small caste churches had a number of consequences. It was very difficult for the missionary to get to know the people and provide sufficient religious teaching, although the situation was somewhat improved in the middle of the nineteenth century when the practice of transferring missionaries to a new mission every year, which had exacerbated these problems, was brought to an end (VP BPIII: 20-23; VP BPIV: 117). Additionally, village funds that could otherwise have been pooled for the sake of larger and more attractive mixed-caste churches were sometimes insufficient to maintain even a small church (VP BPIV: 655). Also significant was the danger that caste churches posed during conflicts in which communal caste loyalties played a prime role, particularly the schism. Sometimes these cases came to court because the churches were not legally owned by the Church. The Roman Catholic hierarchy acknowledged that individual churches remained the property of the villagers who had built them, but maintained that the Vicar Apostolic and (later Bishop) of Jaffna was the lawful trustee (VP BPVIII: 18).

In 1869 Propaganda Fide instructed Christopher Bonjean, the Vicar Apostolic of Jaffna, to reduce the number of churches because ‘they are superfluous for the needs of those people, they are also an obstacle to the splendour of divine worship and an occasion of many quarrels’ (VP BPV: 428). In response, Bonjean acknowledged that these churches did cause ‘jealousy and discord’, but asserted that there would be greater trouble if it was suspected that he wanted to close them (VP BPV: 433-435). Two church conflicts were particularly significant during the schism. The first, in the 1870s, involved Madhu, which was then beginning to develop its reputation as an important pilgrimage destination. Madhu was claimed by the Kadaiyars, who, apparently in coordination with a schismatic Goan missionary, filed a lawsuit and declared that
they had left the Roman Catholic Church en masse (VP BPV: 169, 170, 173, 522; Antoninus 1979). According to Bonjean, the core of the dispute was control over offerings given to the shrine by pilgrims, which the Kadaiyars wanted to use to rebuild their caste church at a village called Adembeymottai (VP BPV: 169). The Church won the case at the Supreme Court in 1875, and the Kadaiyars began to return (VP BPV: 186). The second, towards the very end of the schism in the 1890s, involved Parappankandal.

More recent caste conflicts around churches have not in general concerned questions of access per se, unlike conflicts around Hindu and Buddhist temples (Bastin 1997: 426; Maunaguru and Spencer 2013: 170; Pfaffenberger 1990a; Uyangoda 2012: 47-49), but rather membership, control over church administration, and participation in the liturgy. This distinction has been overlooked, and so, for example, it is not clear whether Kadirgamar’s observation that Catholic Vellalars in Jaffna have excluded oppressed castes from their church refers to regular or administrative participation (2017: 195). There were a number of caste conflicts involving churches in the diocese after the war. Generally, these arose from changes in the village population, with new or enlarged caste groups demanding membership and thus a role in the administration. These conflicts were expressed not just between castes but also with the local Church hierarchy, and in the most extreme circumstances the priest stopped saying Mass. In practice, the two possible outcomes were either to come to an accommodation with the existing castes attending the church, or build a new caste church. Both have occurred over the last few years.

Two of the recent caste conflicts occurred in connection with Kadaiyar-controlled churches. One involved an island church whose congregation had expanded after a number of Catholic Paraiyar families had been resettled from a fishing village in the north of the district. The new families demanded a right in church membership, but the Kadaiyar families opposed this on the grounds that they would become a minority in their own church. After ongoing disruption to Masses and feasts, the Church agreed to establish a separate church for the Paraiyar families. The second conflict took place in Tenkulum, where Kadaiyar control of the church had been increasingly challenged in recent years by other castes in the village. The Kadaiyar families were no longer a clear majority, and the other castes had pushed for a role in the church administration, backed by the Church. The issue was forced by the Bishop’s plan to build a new, larger church to be shared by all, which the Kadaiyars villagers opposed, preventing the construction work. The discussions went on for some time, and were often fractious, but in the end, and with the intervention of the Church and the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization, the Kadaiyars finally agreed to allow the other castes to join the administration.
This was formalised by the Kadaiyars signing an agreement which stated that they would allow Catholic families who had lived in the parish for three months full and equal rights in the church. It also stated that each Kadaiyar family would contribute Rs 5,000 towards the demolition of the church, while Kadaiyars from the other mainland churches would contribute physical labour. The final act of the old church in early 2014, attended by Bishop Rayappu, was its demolition by around sixty Kadaiyar men and women from both the mainland and the island who took the building apart from the roof tiles downwards. (Figure 5.9)

Figure 5.9 Dismantling the church at Tenkulam.

As Mosse has observed, church feasts have historically ‘provided the most important moments in the public manufacture of caste’ (2012: 128), although as I emphasise in this chapter, in a single-caste controlled church such as St Anthony’s the feast does not articulate intra-village caste dynamics in the same way. In 1887 Bishop Bonjean wrote that if local Catholics were unable to celebrate the annual feast of their church’s patron saint ‘they feel that they are hardly Christians’ (VP BPVIII: 86). In the 1870s the Report (43-44) recorded that among the local church feasts there were seven caste feasts, which it carefully defined as ‘feasts to which all of the caste contributes to, in a fixed place, either by paying a tax or by doing repair jobs on the pandal [and contributing to the] passu’. Passu referred to statues that
represented scenes from the Passion and were carried in procession after a sermon had been preached (VP BPV: 485 n. 1). It seems that this practice was not confined to Easter, and it is also unclear whether passu always referred to the specific representation carried by a caste, or the entirety of the Passion itself. This may have been similar to the way in which different castes’ patron saints were carried in procession on the nights preceding the feast in Alapuram (Mosse 2012: 143). Passu no longer exists today, although it was remembered to have occurred before the war.

In the 1870s the seven caste feasts were Pentecost (Kadaiyars), the Ascension (Valaiyars), the Trinity (Maravars), Corpus Christi (Sandars), the feast of St James (Vannars), the Nativity of Mary (no caste named, but perhaps the Vellalars?), and Easter (Karaiyars). The Report (43) adds that the Paravars’ feasts of St Anne and the Purification were not ‘properly speaking caste feasts, because not all of the caste gather there for them and not all of the caste contribute to it’. Some Karaiyars recalled having a large caste feast for their regional community, which they called the mahā sabai, but this ended before the war. Caste feasts are less common today, and the feast of Pentecost at Marudankandal and the revolving Maravar caste association feast (Chapter Six), although associated with particular castes, do not incorporate all of the members of those castes. However, a couple of smaller castes continue to gather for what are effectively caste feasts.

Not all churches were single castes, nor were feasts celebrated only by village or regional caste communities. There were also mixed caste churches, such as the Mannar Cathedral, where ‘seven castes or sections of the Roman Catholic community… have a separate day during the week previous to the festival for novenas’:

Each caste or section makes the most of its opportunity and unless stopped by the authorities has tom-tomming from dawn till midnight together with fireworks and firing of cannon. These demonstrations are not merely at the Church but also in processions along the streets. (AGA Diary 1914, NASL 31/43)

However, in some churches belonging to a single caste the feast was still divided between a number of castes (e.g., Gnana Prakasar 2011: 46). In Mannar this occurred most prominently at Parappankandal, the headquarters of the Oratorians. The church at Parappankandal was common to all local Catholics, although it belonged to the Karaiyars (Boudens 1979: 88; Saveri 1993: 11; VP BPXII: 3; VP BPXII: 34). Some of the older Catholics in other villagers described a time in the past when eighteen castes worshipped together at Parappankandal, and this appeared to come to an end during the schism in the second half of the nineteenth century. Today there continues to be a conflict around this church in Parappankandal.
Easter and the Assumption were both celebrated in common at Parappankandal. Although Easter was considered to be the feast of the Karaiyars, the Oratorians divided the passu representations among the other castes, saving the most significant for the Karaiyars (Report 47). By the 1870s it appears that those who followed the Oratorians during the schism continued to celebrate Easter at Parappankandal, while Easter rotated among the castes who followed the Roman priests, with the Paravars of Vangalai celebrating it every three years as reward ‘for their inviolable attachment to the Roman communion’. Similarly, after the schism the Assumption continued to be celebrated at Parappankandal by those loyal to the Goans, while a parallel Mass rotated annually between the caste churches of the Vellalars, Maravars, Valaiyars, Paravars, Sandars, and Kadaiyars. The Report (44) adds that ‘The slightest alteration of the aforementioned order can occasion great troubles’.

THE FEAST OF ST ANTHONY

Early in my fieldwork, while I was living with Nesaraja and Selva, I asked Nesaraja what was special about Marudankandal. Their marriages, he replied, which last for several days, and their feast. While the saint’s feast, colloquially called the perunāḷ or ‘great day’, might be theologically less significant than other Catholic rituals such as Easter and Christmas, it is the most important event for the church membership, the day on which the church represents itself to others in the rest of the parish and beyond. The importance of the saint’s feast in Matottam is in part a legacy of the historical independence of churches, which were sometimes visited only once a year on this day. But it is also a reflection of the broader importance of saints (punidar) in local Catholicism, as exemplars, intercessional forces, and miracle workers (Mosse 2012; Stirrat 1992). Different saints are associated with different powers, and sometimes a person’s favourite saint relates to their particular service. In Sri Lanka, the most prominent saints are St Anthony of Padua (antōniyār) and various incarnations of St Mary (mādā), such as Madhu Mary and Velankanni Mary (Meibohm 2002). St Sebastian, St James, and St Anne are also prominent in Sri Lankan Catholicism. One characteristic of local Catholicism, observed by the Oratorians, was that local Catholics were more likely to entreat St Anthony or St Mary than Jesus. My Tamil teacher in Jaffna emphasised this with a comic

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61 The feasts of All Souls’ and Christmas were also considered common to all Matottam. In this case this appears to mean that they could be sponsored by any individual Catholics, although the Report’s explanation that both ‘fall to the first descendant’ is unclear (Report 45-46).

62 The perunāḷ is less commonly referred to as tirunāḷ (‘holy day’), and sometimes as tiruvilā, the latter being the term also used for Hindu temple festivals.
anecdote about an old lady who was so moved by Jesus’ suffering during a Passion Play that she cried ‘Save him, Anthony!’ Shrines to these saints are also, as I have mentioned previously, particularly popular with members of other religions.

St Anthony seems to have grown in significance under the Dutch, as only four of the 166 churches in Sri Lanka at the end of the Portuguese period were dedicated to him (Boudens 1957: 254-258). Local attitudes to St Anthony resonated with Mosse’s observation that the popular male saints, in contrast with Mary, are associated with ‘the particularly violent and dangerous aspects of divine power’ (1994: 310-311). Marudankandal Catholics did not keep statues of St Anthony in their houses, as he was known both for his righteous anger and his desire for things to be neat (‘clean’, ‘orderly’). For the same reason, his churches were said to be better placed in the kādu (‘wilderness’) than in the ār (although there were many urban churches dedicated to St Anthony). According to Nesaraja and Selva, an earlier church had been built in Marudankandal’s central residential cluster, but that site had been judged inadequate for the saint and a new church had been built further from the people. Further evidence of the saint’s anger was seen in the fact that an outdoors statue of St Anthony was knocked over by the wind and rain and also moved elsewhere. St Anthony’s renown for granting miracles was also connected to the higher level of donations given to his churches, and one priest joked that there should be one church to St Anthony in every parish for this reason.

Preparations began several weeks in advance of the feast, which occurred on July 13. Schedules allocating duties among the anbiyams were printed, the choir began to practise, the men engaged in several days’ worth of siramadānam, and the inside and outside of the church was decorated. Like Catholic and Hindu feasts and festivals elsewhere in India and Sri Lanka, the feast of St Anthony in Marudankandal was inaugurated with the installation of the flagpole (kođimaram, literally ‘flag tree’) and the raising of the flag (kođiyēṟṟam). The saint’s feast took place immediately after Pentecost, and different flags and flagpoles were used for both. The flag for Pentecost depicted a blue dove against a white background, and was hung from a simple metal pole inserted into the sandy ground of the compound. The flagpole for St Anthony, installed in a red concrete base, was taller, made of wood, painted in horizontal stripes of yellow and brown (the colours of the saint), and topped with a crucifix with lightbulbs that were lit at night.

Novenas were held on four evenings before the feast, and at the start of the first the statue of St Anthony, dressed in bright new clothes, was brought by Fr Lawrence into the church from the portico. Other priests were invited to give sermons at all of the Masses during the feast, and
on the last evening, during vespers, Fr Lawrence gave an extended, emotional sermon that drew on charismatic styles of preaching. The climax was the procession of the saint (*pavani, or suṟṟu pirahāram* in literary Tamil) after Mass on the final morning. The congregation formed a counterclockwise line along one side of the churchyard, divided into children, women and men, before the statue of the saint was carried from the altar to the portico by Fr Lawrence and placed upon a decorated wooden palanquin (*kūḍu*). The palanquin was then carried, slowly and solemnly, behind the priest at the end of the procession, on the shoulders of men who, as in a funeral procession, were frequently replaced by others from the line. Speakers broadcast singing from two choirs within the church, one comprised of the younger men and women of the regular choir, and the other of older men. When the statue reached each corner of the compound the procession stood still for a short time, and everyone turned to face the statue.

When the statue had returned to the front of the church and was still being held aloft, some people touched the feet of the statue and then crouched and passed beneath it and between the legs of the bearers on either side. This practice, called *puhundu pōṟadu*, was considered a form of *nētti*. Fr Lawrence then brought the flag down from the flagpole, folded and placed it on the base of the statue, which he returned to the altar. Fr Lawrence and a representative of the church committee thanked the organisers and participants, then Fr Lawrence sang the church’s hymn to St Anthony before holding the statue aloft to the ringing of the church bell, fire crackers, and applause. After the feast people shook hands with one another, saying ‘happy feast’ or ‘*perunāḷ vāltukkal*’. A breakfast was served to the special guests, while everyone else was given sweet buns and a drink from the *tāṇṇi pandal*, which literally means ‘water pandal’ although today a sugary drink such as *sārbat* is served instead. As in the serving of food to guests at life-cycle events, the *tāṇṇi pandal* was run by the younger and middle-aged men of the church.

Saints’ feasts in the other farming villages of Matottam followed the same structure, and there were only small differences between these and other feasts that I attended in Mannar Island, Jaffna, and Batticaloa. Perhaps the most significant difference was that some large churches in more urban parishes carried the saint within a chariot (*tēr*) in procession through the streets around the church, symbolically indicating the territory of the saint and the church members. In Marudankandal, by contrast, it was said that the statue paused at the four corners of the churchyard in order that the saint could look out across the whole village. However, during my fieldwork the procession also passed through a gate and travelled a short distance along Main Road before re-entering the compound. Pointing this out to me, Fr Lawrence noted that this showed that the villagers were ‘big people’, although Nesaraja later suggested more
prosaically that it had happened only because there was not enough space in the compound for the procession. Nesaraja also recalled that on the fiftieth anniversary of the church in the mid 1990s the *pavani* had travelled a little way into the village.

In her discussion of Hindu *kodai* (‘gift’) festivals in Yanaimangalam, Mines (2005: 163) has highlighted the role of ‘density’, which is the relative quantity ‘of people as well as reduplicated materials… assembled at a particular place and time’. Mines writes that density is converted by worshippers into a sense of ‘relative bigness’ (*perumai*), which might be translated more conventionally as ‘pride’ or ‘renown’, and ‘demonstrates the productive capacity of the god, the temple, the event, the place, and the community.’ Similarly, Mosse (2012: 136-138) has described the density of the Catholic feast at Alapuram:

the repeated devotions and multiplied offerings, the rising piles of grain and chilies, flower garlands or the skins of sacrificed goats before the altar and statues, the moving colourful forest of flags and crosses, the decorated cattle, the piercingly amplified devotional songs and prayers, the intense light and brilliant color of decorations, candles, and incense, and the crush and heat of the crowd…

The role of density in the feast of St Anthony, and other Catholic events in Mannar, was not as prominent as it appears to be in Tamil Nadu. Although the size of the congregation on that day is important, material offerings of the kind described above by Mosse are not a mainstream element of contemporary Catholic culture in Mannar. By way of comparison, at the opening of another rebuilt church in the parish, in the village whose Catholics were known to have a strong connection to the Hindus, Fr Lawrence alerted me to a bound cockerel that had been left for him beside the altar, remarking that this had been given by a Hindu rather than a Catholic. Nor were individual ‘public displays of donorship or devotion’ (Mosse 2012: 138) as central, although singing, cooking, and carrying the palanquin did fall into this category. However, what was emphasised were elements such as the decorations, the neatness of the church and compound, and the quality of food and hospitality. The importance of these qualities is also demonstrated in the new churches built since the end of the war.

As I have explained in this chapter, many Catholic churches in Matottam are controlled by a single caste, although this is changing as people of other castes marry in. This means that a feast such as that of St Anthony is not a domain within which caste identities are represented and contested, such as described by Mines (2005) and Mosse (2012). Instead, the articulation of identity and ‘relative bigness’ through the feast occurs on a regional level, in the sense that St Anthony’s is viewed in comparison with other village churches. However, as I will further explain in Chapter Six, local knowledge of caste is highly contextual, and is usually not represented explicitly during saint’s feasts. For example, the highly visible Mannar Martyrs
Social Welfare Organization flags that are exhibited at Kadaiyar funerals are not displayed at feasts in the Kadaiyar-controlled churches. However, there was a relatively unusual situation in one of the other churches in the parish, which had been controlled by Maravars before the war, but had more recently accepted some Vellalars who had moved to the village. Despite this change, the Maravar members continued to sing a version of the church hymn that included the older name of the village that made its majority caste explicit.

Although people within the parish, particularly the older men on the committee and their wives, attended feasts at the other churches, feasts were also attended by family and friends from other parts of the district. In this way feasts were, outside of life-cycle events, one of the key instances for the sustaining of social ties. For the Marudankandal Kadaiyars, feasts were a particularly important way of maintaining ties with relatives in the three other Matottam villages, particularly more distant Tenkulam. The rest of the day was a holiday, and after Mass the families returned to their homes, where the women began to prepare lunch. Throughout the day guests visited the houses of known people in the village, sometimes visiting a multitude. At each house they were offered sweets and savoury snacks (palahāram), bought or prepared in advance, as well as tea and other sugary drinks, and sometimes the older men were offered arrack. Guests usually ate lunch at a house agreed in advance, although as they moved through the village other families would try to persuade them to stay and eat. Groups of men also tended to gather at particular houses for drinks parties before a (late) lunch.

CONCLUSION

Unlike many of the churches and temples that are often the subject of caste research, St Anthony’s is controlled by a single caste, although Catholics of other castes have become members as they have married into the Kadaiyar families. The church itself does not encompass the village population, and the feast of St Anthony’s is not a site of caste contestation among the villagers, and, although its ‘bigness’ can be compared to those of other churches in the area, the caste identity of the Kadaiyars is not necessarily apparent to outsiders. The situation at St Anthony’s is characteristic of a wider trend across Matottam, which finds its origins in the small village caste communities and the manner in which the Goan Oratorians re-established Catholicism in Sri Lanka under the Dutch. In the Mannar Catholic Church caste plays an ambiguous role, denied religious authority but sometimes valued as a source of communal solidarity. Caste has also been an area within which lay Catholics have opposed the authority of the Catholic Church, and a number of conflicts around individual churches have occurred.
since the end of the war. The sense of ownership that the members have over their churches indicates the way in which authority is co-created between the clergy and the laity, which adds another dimension to recent research on Sri Lankan Catholicism that has focussed on the Church’s political influence during the war.
CHAPTER SIX

Caste in Mannar
Communities, associations, and the Kadaiyars

Beyond the network of kin present at Kadaiyar settu vidus (‘funeral houses’) in the four Matottam villages, there were two indications of caste. The first, and more prominent, was a shiny banner (kodi) a couple of metres wide, depicting eighteen objects against a sky-blue background beneath the sentence ‘The eighteen gifts of the Kadaiyar Pattamkatty called the great Kamandalar Kulam’. (Figure 6.1) The banner had been created by the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization after the war and distributed to each of the Kadaiyar village communities in the district. Second, and less obvious, was a collection for the funeral fund (marança sahāya nidi) administered by a separate association restricted to the mainland Kadaiyars. During my fieldwork the secretary of the association was Selva’s father, who moved among the people, a bag slung over one shoulder, recording those who had paid in a notebook and distributing receipts.

Although caste has already appeared in a number of forms in the previous two chapters, particularly in relation to kinship, the village, and Catholicism, the decision to address it as a topic in its own right as the last chapter of the thesis was a conscious one, intended to demonstrate how caste is an ‘everyday habit of thought’ (Mines 2005: 16) while avoiding positioning it as the preeminent aspect of Tamil identity. In this chapter, however, I expand the frame and provide a much wider investigation of caste in Mannar. In light of the highly normative discourse around caste in Sri Lanka, the chapter begins with a reflection on the need for a methodological and political reappraisal of caste research. I then investigate caste on two levels, that of Sri Lanka as a whole and then Mannar District, for the purpose of which I also differentiate between caste culture in Mannar and two other regions, Jaffna and Batticaloa. I historicise the Mannar Kadaiyars and their association with the labour of lime burning and chaya root digging.

Text: 63 The use of eighteen recurs in different forms throughout caste narratives in India and in Sri Lanka (Gaasbeek 2010: 92 n. 78). In Mannar it was said that eighteen castes had lived in the Giant’s Tank before its reconstruction, and that eighteen castes had once worshipped together at Parappankandal. Vellalar narratives in Jaffna (Pfaffenberger 1982: 35), Batticaloa (McGilvray 2008: 82) and Tamil Nadu (Dirks 1987: 139-143) claim that the Vellalars historically presided over eighteen hereditarily bound service castes. Mines (2005: 58) notes that the Tamil Lexicon (University of Madras 1982) lists eighteen castes under kudimakkal.
The latter part of the chapter investigates caste in the present day. Having indicated in Chapters Four and Five that caste is not ‘integrated’ in Marudankandal through the institution of the church, in this chapter I suggest that while certain forms of caste separation and hierarchical interdependence appear to have diminished during and after the war, intracaste ties are sustained beyond the village by regional caste communities that sometimes operate caste associations, evidence of which can be seen in the Matottam Kadaiyars’ funeral fund and the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization flag. Both of these associations, although most prominently the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization, also reveal the complex relationship between caste and Catholicism.

PUBLICS, POLITICS, AND CASTE RESEARCH

For those familiar with the research on caste in Sri Lanka, the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization flag will appear highly unusual. Recurring throughout the caste scholarship are references to a widespread emic view of caste as an unsuitable or even taboo topic for public discussion and display, from the level of the family to national political debate.\(^{64}\) This normative disapproval is expressed through ‘the ardent denial of the significance of caste’

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(Heslop 2014: 52-53; Samuels 2007: 788), one of the manifestations of which is the ‘refusal to acknowledge in the public discourse the fact that social interests of intermediate and subordinate caste communities have been present in electoral as well as extra-parliamentary politics’ (Uyangoda 2000: 68-69). It is also apparent in what Douglas (2017: 16-29) has called the ‘myth of perpetual demise’, the claim that caste is less important today than in the past and will continue to decline in the future. Uyangoda has argued that

Conceptualizing caste-centric social and political exclusion in Sri Lanka, particularly in relation to Sinhala society, is a somewhat difficult task because caste-centric social exclusion is covered by a veil of democratic egalitarian ideology. (2012: 38)

Thanges has observed that his conversations about caste were characterised by a fear on his part about causing offence, and a fear on the part of his interlocutors as to what he might think of them (2018b: 48-49). Elsewhere he notes that he was warned that he would be beaten if he asked about caste (2018b: 28). Other researchers have recorded similar methodological challenges for studying caste within this context (Douglas 2017: 61-66; Heslop 2014: 50; Jeeweshwara Räsänen 2015: 3 and 16; Kadirgamar 2017: 193; Uyangoda 2012: 38). However, until recently, in the doctoral research of Douglas (2017) and Thanges (2018b), there has been little nuanced analysis of the origins of this context nor the position of anthropologists with regard to it. For example, although other scholars have observed that the perpetuation of caste relations is facilitated by the refusal to recognise their existence (Kadirgamar 2017: 25; Uyangoda 2012: 36-37), Douglas actively argues that anthropologists themselves play a role in this by avoiding research on caste (2017: 313).

To expand this discussion, I suggest that anthropologists need to re-examine other assumptions around the methodology of caste research, and in particular how it is perceived locally. These issues are gaining importance with regard to the increasing prominence of research that approaches caste from a position of political or moral critique, conceptualising it primarily as a structure of discrimination (Bremner 2013; Kadirgamar 2017; Kuganathan 2014; Silva et al. 2009). Researchers who focus on the ethical and political dimensions of caste should be reflexive about their presumptions and about the relationship between caste research and existing social divisions and discourses. They might also adopt a broader research agenda that engages with overlooked but central questions of caste formation, mobilisation, and ideology.

My approach to these questions comes from a rather different experience. Although I did hear comments downplaying the role of caste, I did not experience a strong reluctance to talk about it in general, and attended numerous caste meetings and events. This was no doubt due
to a mix of factors, such as the conditions of the postwar period, the particularities of the social context of Mannar, the castes I most commonly engaged with, the fact that I was a non-Sri Lankan outsider, and the way in which caste was not the central focus of my research agenda and often arose in relation to other topics. Caste also arose in conversations amongst others. For example, at the Main Road restaurant where I usually had breakfast, I once heard a discussion between men of different castes about Pentecost, soon to be celebrated at St Anthony’s, which was laughingly referred to as the villagers’ caste feast (sādi perunāḷ). Around the same time, while having dinner at Mariyadas’ house with some local religious brothers (from other castes), one asked him whether his sādi perunāḷ would take place soon. However, this certainly did not mean that caste was a suitable topic in all contexts, and it was also the case that caste was often referred to using terms such as ākkaḷ (‘people’), samūham (‘society’), samudāyam (‘society’), and pārambarai (‘tradition’ or ‘lineage’), as others have observed (Kadirgamar 2017: 195; McGilvray 2008: 100; Thanges 2018b: 48-49).

Caste did not arise only in conversation. Although Mannar has followed broader national trends with regard to the erosion of caste distinctions in areas of life such as dwelling and clothing (Uyangoda 2012: 39-40, 43), personal names (M. W. A. de Silva 2009; Heslop 2015: 7-9; Rogers 2004a: 74) and place names (Uyangoda 2012: 43), caste continued to appear in a variety of other forms. These were rarely as explicit as the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization flag, but were manifest in the organisation of feasts and kūttus, caste symbols decorating churches, the white sheets hung to dry on village fences by Michael, cattle brands (maravu), and publications such as booklets of village history and, at the feast organised by the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization in 2014, hymnals. (Figure 6.2)
To recognise the role of caste in these contexts, and in conversation when it is referred to obliquely, requires both linguistic and highly local knowledge. However, while Jeeweshwara Räsänen is correct when she observes that caste may be invisible to the outsider (2015: 142 and 210), ‘outsider’ must be understood as a contextually-determined position and not simply coterminous with the foreign anthropologist. Similar to Widger’s experience in Puttalam (2009: 107-109), I found that many people had a low practical knowledge of caste, across a range of issues. For example, villagers were sometimes uncertain of the caste of others in Marudankandal or nearby villages, and in my conversations with priests they would sometimes have to call upon parishioners for greater detail. Few people had a broad knowledge of caste cattle brands, and non-Kadaiyars attending Kadaiyar funerals were confused by the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization flag. At Daniel’s funeral, Vincent did not know whether the right to carry the bier to the cemetery was restricted to Kadaiyars, or if others could also participate.

Mosse (2012: 128) has described caste in India as ‘a kind of public knowledge’. In Sri Lanka, by contrast, where caste is considered unfit for the ‘general’ public, caste manifests as a kind of knowledge acquired within much smaller contexts circumscribed by factors such as language, location, generation, and so on. Figure 6.3 shows a striking example, discovered by Aimée Douglas during her doctoral fieldwork in 2014, of a Sinhalese bank sign that omits the
word ‘caste’ in its English translation. According to Thanges, ‘[f]unctions of caste are hidden, unspoken about and carefully handled by the members of all caste groups irrespective of their age, class, gender, and religious backgrounds’ (2018b 30). Nevertheless, this does not mean that all share an equal knowledge of caste.

In her study of the legacy of violence in a southern, Argenti-Pillen (2003) argues that linguistic practices such as euphemism and zero anaphora have helped to preserve ‘local contexts’, at the cost of fragmenting the village community. Similarly, Thanges (2018b: 31) has noted that as a reaction to the prohibition on public caste discourse ‘[e]ach caste group systematically creates a boundary by including their caste group and excluding the other castes using knowledge garnered through indirect inquiries about one’s caste as well as inquiring about the location of their residence in their homeland’. However, as I show in this chapter, in Mannar I found a movement away from the preservation of caste contexts in the postwar period, leading to an increasingly public demonstration of caste.

Although anthropologists should continue to approach caste carefully, they should consider the challenges or difficulties of caste research not just as impediments per se but as fundamental elements of Sri Lankan caste culture that should also be studied. I suggest that three key points should be taken into account. First, as an ‘outsider’, gaining knowledge of caste should not automatically be assumed a transgression. I found that knowledge about caste, particularly in the form of kin connections and socio-geographical awareness, was appreciated as a form of a social intimacy, while the organisers of caste meetings were generally relaxed about my participation. Similarly, Thanges (2018b: 29) notes that people were comforted by the mere fact he was able to spell their caste names correctly. Second, the sensitivities around caste research make it more appropriate for long-term ethnographic fieldwork that emphasises participant observation and a wider research agenda, rather than a narrow approach reliant on interviews and surveys.

Third, anthropologists must pay greater attention to local perceptions of the purpose and outcomes of their research. Thanges (2018b: 48-49) writes that he was often asked ‘Why do you ask about caste and what are you going to do with the information?’ Jeeweshwara Räsänen has emphasised that caste research is not easier for ‘insiders’ (2015: 210), and Jiggins suggested that it might be easier for a foreigner to pursue caste research because there is less perceived bias (1979: 7-8). Additionally, having an explicit political position on caste may be perceived negatively, regardless of the caste in question, due to the ambivalent role that caste often plays (Douglas 2017). Similarly, Uyangoda (2012: 46) describes the negative effects of a newspaper article revealing a temple conflict involving Sinhalese Kinnara in Kurunegala:
‘Paradoxically, exposing and highlighting caste discrimination in the public domain, in the media, created new problems for them, rather than resolving their grievances.’

CASTE IN SRI LANKA

In Chapter One I discussed the discourse of ‘real caste’, which assumes the existence of separate and parallel ethno-religious caste systems in Sri Lanka. One counterpoint to this discourse is to approach caste from a regional perspective, which I will turn to in the following section. Another is to consider caste in Sri Lanka per se, a comparative exercise that has so far received very little attention. In this section I give an overview of caste in Sri Lanka, emphasising, following Bayly (1999: 25-26), ‘a multidimensional array of themes, ideals and principles’.

As I have indicated, caste in Sri Lanka has often been characterised in negative terms. Besides assumptions of caste ‘strength’, in contrast to India Sri Lankan anthropology has demonstrated the lesser importance of varna in the conceptualisation of caste (Kannangara 1993; McGilvray 2008; Roberts 1982; Rogers 2004a: 69) as well as the lower prominence of Brahmins. However, studies from Sri Lanka also demonstrate many similarities with those from India. Like Indian caste research (e.g., Raheja 1988; Srinivas 1955 and 1959), Sri Lankan caste research has emphasised a form of dominance dependent upon numerical preponderance and economic and political power, deriving from land ownership, particularly paddy land (Jayanntha 1992: 4; Kadirgamar 2017: passim; McGilvray 2008: 43). The Tamil Vellalars and Sinhalese Govigamas, large castes which are often described as dominant, are particularly associated with agriculture, which is commonly held to be the origin of their respective names, a point that I will return to later in the chapter.65 As in India (Ram 1991; Subramanian 2009), fishers have been shown to maintain a second locus of power outside of the intercaste exchange and dependence of agricultural villages (Kadirgamar 2017: 184). In contrast, low-status castes with relatively little or no land have, historically, often been dependent on asymmetrical hierarchical relationships revolving around secular and ritual labour. Very little has been done

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65 Meyer (2014: 25-26) has noted that both the Dutch and the British, during the nineteenth century, also used the term Vellalar to refer to Govigama: ‘It may be that the British were just following a loose Dutch categorisation which underlined similarities between Tamil and Sinhala caste structures, or that the Kandyans were already using the term at the time of the Nayakkar dynasty... A systematic study of the occurrence of the term could shed light on the consolidation of the caste, and on the affirmation of Sinhala consciousness versus the Tamil.’
on this latter topic among the Sinhalese, despite mentions of its existence (U. A. Gunasekera 1965; Meyer 2014: 29, 48; Ryan 1953: 141; Uyangoda 2012: 46).

Historical research has focussed primarily on state intervention in caste, through the enforcement of caste distinctions, the monopolisation of government positions by more powerful castes, caste-based taxes, compulsory service, and slavery. While a growing body of research looks at the relationship between caste and slavery in Jaffna (Balmforth 2018; Wickramasinghe and Schrikker 2019), compulsory service has been investigated primarily with regard to the south (although see Banks 1957: 432-434). Compulsory service was labour that people were obliged to perform for the state on the basis of caste identity (although the Moors were also incorporated into this system [Wickremeratne 1971]). Compulsory service began in the precolonial period (K. M. de Silva 2005: 57, 201; Yalman 1989), and was used by successive colonial states throughout Sri Lanka until its abolition by the British in 1832. Its long history helps to explain the fact that caste continues to be connected to collective memories of royally-imposed duties (Bruland 2015: 64; Kendrick 1992: 192; Meyer 2014: 31; Spencer 1990: 187; Tanaka 1997: 27).

In Sinhalese, compulsory service was called rājakāriya, or ‘duty to the king’, although this appears to have had a wider meaning in the precolonial period, when it also referred to other kinds of caste-based taxes and labour (M. U. De Silva 1992/1993: 5). What stands out about rājakāriya in the southern kingdoms is the way in which it was performed at least in part as a form of service tenure (Kendrick 1992; Pfaffenberger 1990a: 371). In the north, compulsory service broadly covered two types of labour, neither of which appears to have been strongly connected to service tenure. The first was āliyam, which means service due to a superior, whether human or god.66 Although the situation in precolonial Jaffna is unclear, the Portuguese were enforcing āliyam labour in the first half of the seventeenth century (VP PIII: 365; VP PIII: 370; VP PIII: 403). Āliyam was unpaid manual labour.67 Oelieaars or oeliyammers, as the Dutch called them, were men between the ages of 16 and 60 who were usually required to give twelve days a year (van Rhee 1915: 7).68 They were sometimes referred to as coolies, and their service was used by the Dutch to avoid paying coolie wages (Zwaardecroon 1911: 75)

66 Under the Dutch āliyam also referred to the services imposed specifically on Chetties and Moors in the south, as well as the Paravars, all of whom were considered to be ‘foreigners’ in Sri Lanka (Rupesinghe 2015: 78). In 1802 this was changed to a duty that could be paid to commute the service every six months (Mendis 1956 II: 288), although after 1830 they were called to service like other castes.
67 However, āliyam labourers do appear to have been paid on occasion (Mooyaart 1910: 9).
68 For a period, Karaiyars had to perform 1.5 days of āliyam at the start (van Goens 1932: 25). The Dutch also sometimes imposed a double āliyam of 24 days a year (Mooyaart 1910: 3).
and purchasing more slaves (Zwaardecroon 1911: 78). Ūliyam labour was used for a variety of public works, and on the Company boats (van Goens Jun. 1910: 19; Mooyaart 1910: 9; Zwaardecroon 1911: 37, 76, 103). The castes that performed ūliyam generally appear to have been the larger and more powerful castes more associated with land ownership and fishing, not those connected to specific artisanal or service occupations.69

The second kind of compulsory service comprised other types of labour that were compulsory but for which the labourers received a set payment.70 These included some artisanal crafts as well as particular types of manual labour not included within ūliyam. Under the Dutch, some of these castes had to pay an additional tax called the officie geld, which was said to be an exemption from ūliyam, despite the fact that they might still have been doing compulsory service. The customs and laws enacted with regard to this second broad category of labour were imposed on a case-by-case basis. Both forms of labour were met with various kinds of resistance, which most often took the form of escape to another part of the country. The Dutch tried to prevent this by restricting movement (M. U. De Silva 1992/1993: 32; van Goens Jun. 1910: 22).

The initial decades of British rule saw significant changes in the state’s relationship with caste. The British were divided in their view of caste and compulsory service, with some officials strongly opposed to both. After a number of changes to the operation of compulsory service in the initial decades of the nineteenth century, and in recognition of widespread local opposition, the Commission of Eastern Inquiry recommended its abolition, which occurred in 1832 (Casinader et al. 2018; Samaraweera 1969), other than in royal villages, villages granted to an individual, and temple villages in the Hill Country (Kendrick 1992: 194-195). As mentioned in Chapter Two, the government irrigation ordinances of the mid-nineteenth century were enacted to counter the decline of tank management that some considered to have been caused by the end of compulsory service (Brow 2011b).

The abolition of compulsory service was accompanied by a perception that caste ‘was not a legitimate form of social identification’ (Rogers 2004a: 53), but rather ‘an obstacle to progress and prosperity’ (Rogers 2004b: 640). Not only did the practice of appointing caste headmen come to an end (Roberts 1982: 146), but in 1845 a government circular ordered that no official should mention caste in any public proceedings (Rogers 2004b: 640). The all-island censuses

69 Pieris (1995: 6) was therefore wrong to describe ūliyam as the ‘The personal labour which according to Sinhalese tenure was generally exacted from the lower castes’.  
70 It is possible that the term ūliyam was applied less strictly than I have suggested. For example, the chaya-digging labour of the Mannar Kadaiyars was also described as ūliyam (Vink 2016: 278).
from 1871 onwards did not include caste, while caste information in the colonial monographs was almost entirely statistical (e.g., Boake 1888). The British also never collected any information on the subject of service castes (Rogers 2004a: 60). Rogers locates the historical origins of contemporary attitudes to caste firmly in state practices after 1832:

In the second half of the nineteenth century, race or nationality was understood as the fundamental social division, religion was acknowledged as a secondary identity, and caste was left shadowy. Despite many challenges, this scheme has never been dislodged, and its basic outline has survived into the twenty-first century. (2004b: 645)

The outcomes of British interventions in caste were strikingly different to those in India, as evident in the absence of national quantitative data and caste legislation other than the 1957 Prevention of Social Disabilities Act, which was never used in Jaffna (Kadirgamar 2017: 190). There is no counterpart in Sri Lanka to India’s affirmative action caste reservation system, with its official classification of castes according to socio-economic disadvantage (Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backwards Classes). As the political identity of the low castes has not been similarly consolidated (Kadirgamar 2017: 8-9), there is also no comparable popular shared political terminology (e.g., ‘Dalit’) (Kadirgamar 2017: 183; Kuganathan 2014).

Nevertheless, caste did not disappear after 1832, as the British themselves were aware (Denham 1912a: 178; Tennent 1860 II: 157-168, 189), and it appears that British officials actually became more conservative in the second half of the nineteenth century (Rogers 2004a: 71). From the 1860s onwards caste elites employed print culture to make points about status with regard to political representation (Kannangara 1993; Rogers 2004a: 68 and 72). Bastiampillai (1988: 47) has argued that the secondary local level of caste relations in Jaffna remained the same or was even strengthened after 1832. Caste conflicts and violence, occurring mainly between ‘service castes and castes that sought to keep them in their place’ (Rogers 2004a: 74), were recorded throughout the country, but were more common in Jaffna, up to the beginning of the war (see the Administration Reports for Jaffna; Gnana Prakasar 2011: passim; Pfaffenerberger 1990; Rogers 2004a: 775).

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71 According to the Act: ‘Any person who imposes any social disability on any other person by reason of such other person’s caste shall be guilty of an offence and shall, on conviction after summary trial before a Magistrate, be liable to imprisonment of either description for a term not exceeding three years with or without a fine not exceeding three thousand rupees.’
Despite anti-caste struggles in politics from the 1920s onwards (Jeeweshwara Räsänen 2015: 162; Kadirgamar 2017: 188-190; Pfaffenberger 1990a), neither in Jaffna nor elsewhere did caste consciousness lead to the formation of political parties or explicitly political caste associations as in India (Meyer 2014: 50; Rogers 2004a: 73). Instead, caste has played a ‘hidden’ role in politics (Uyangoda 2000: 68-69). However, in contrast to Jiggins’ emphasis on the importance of caste in politics (1979), Jayantha (1992: 206) has argued that caste has only been significant when it is ‘congruent with a patronage network’. Uyangoda (2012: 35-36, 39 has observed that the exclusion experienced by extremely marginalised caste communities, particularly outside the coastal and urban areas ‘where processes of capitalist penetration and class formation have not affected the salience of caste distinctions’, is both social and political, and their attitude to political democracy is one of ambivalence.

Uyangoda (2000 and 2012) and Douglas (2017) have argued that caste is today considered an unfortunate anachronism within a discourse of modernity that privileges social egalitarianism within the democratic nation-state. This analysis, however, should be widened to attend to the construction of caste discourse within the opposing ethno-nationalist projects of post-Independence Sri Lanka. Both Sinhalese and Tamil nationalisms have downplayed caste in different ways. Caste was also used by Sinhalese politicians in the 1950s and 1960s as criticism of Tamils per se to justify opposition to regional autonomy (Bastin 1997: 426; Pfaffenberger 1990: 86-87). An example of this occurred in 2017, when the English-language Daily Mirror ran a story, later retracted, alleging that caste differences in Jaffna had led to a shortage of blood donations, which were therefore being supplied by Sinhalese soldiers (Colombo Telegraph 2017).

In the north, the growing post-Independence anti-caste movement was suppressed by Tamil politicians through a ‘politics of defensive unity’ (Pfaffenberger 1990a: 80). Subsequently, within their territories the LTTE enforced explicitly anti-caste policies that they held up as part of their emancipatory project. Caste relations came under ‘strong surveillance’, and discrimination on the basis of caste became a crime (Terpstra and Frerks 2017: 299). In this context, Kadirgamar’s (2017: 179) claim that the LTTE ‘neither reinforced nor attempted to dissolve caste relations’, but rather ‘suppressed any struggles or discussions of caste’, seems to overstate the case. There were a number of practical consequences of the LTTE’s hostility towards caste, notably the encouragement of intercaste marriages (with the threat of

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72 However, other analyses have described the role of caste in hostilities between the various Tamil militant groups (e.g., Kadirgamar 2017: 190, 197).
punishment for relatives who opposed them), support for Vannar (washer) and Ambattar (barber) associations to prevent their members practising house rituals (Jeeweshwara Räsänen 2015: 182; Thanges 2018b: 104), and significant representation of lower castes across the different wings of the LTTE (Manoharan 2015: 177, cited in Terpstra and Frerks 2017: 299). However, as I will show later, some caste practices did continue during the war, although sometimes in altered forms.

CASTE IN MANNAR

In this section I expand the historical and ethnographic literature on caste in Sri Lanka by investigating caste in Mannar for the first time, with a focus on Matottam. Before I turn to Mannar, however, and in order to emphasise the significance of regional differences of caste, I begin with a discussion of some of the main issues that have arisen in caste research in Jaffna and Batticaloa, the two areas for which there have been strong regional contextualisations of caste. Jaffna and Batticaloa also happen to be the locations of the main Kadaiyar populations outside Mannar.

The literature on Jaffna and Batticaloa has focussed in particular on dominant castes. In Jaffna, which has been the subject of more caste research than any other part of Sri Lanka, the Vellalars have long been considered dominant. The largest caste and main landowners, the Vellalars also dominated administrative positions throughout the colonial period (Jeeweshwara Räsänen 2015; Rogers 2004a: 67; VP DPIII: 118; Wickremeratne 1971; Wickramasinghe and Schrikker 2019), although the next largest caste, the Karaiyar fishers, maintained a second locus of power (Arasaratnam 1981: 383; Pfaffenberger 1990a: 81). Vellalar dominance was strengthened by the Dutch for purpose of revenue collection (Pfaffenberger 1990a: 81) and the 1707 Thesawalamai (or Jaffna customary law), which established that four castes (Pallars, Nalavars, Koviyyars, and Sandars) could be owned as slaves (adimakka) (Banks 1957: 442;


In the 1950s, Banks estimated that Vellalars comprised around 50% of the population of the forty or so castes in Jaffna (1957: 411). The Vellalars comprised 37% of the population in the 1827 census, and it has been suggested that they have increased by absorbing other castes, perhaps after the latter claimed Vellalar identity (Arasaratnam 1981: 385). Ragupathy has a 1790s figure. Sivathamby (1995: 20) proposed the term ‘mega caste’ to describe this process and suggested that the Karaiyars and the Kollars are also mega castes. This has become an orthodoxy, although nobody has given details for the mechanism, and the saying that accompanies it seems to have come from India.
Schrikker and Ekama 2017: 188-191), although the Vellalars were not the only slave-owning caste (Tambiah 2004: 94-95). While the Koviyars were known as ‘domestic’ workers, the Nalavars and Pallars were responsible for manual labour. Vellalar power survived the abolition of slavery and the erosion of kuḍimai relationships, which I turn to below, and is considered to be a key dynamic in local caste relations to this day (Kadirgamar 2017; Pfaffenberger 1990a; Thanges and Silva 2009).

McGilvray’s work on caste in the east portrays a different regional perspective. McGilvray argues that the Mukkuvars, a caste originating in the Malabar Coast of Kerala, became politically and economically dominant in the thirteenth century, maintaining their power into the twentieth. According to McGilvray, Mukkuvar chiefs maintained a ‘strict, feudal-style monopoly of paddy lands’ as late as the mid-nineteenth century, delegating farming to subordinate castes such as the Vellalars (2008: 68-70). In contrast to Jaffna, McGilvray (1982: 43) observes that there is no tradition of distinct ‘bound’ agrestic labour castes, such as the adimakkal in Jaffna. Today the Mukkuvar maintain a cross-caste marriage alliance with the Vellalars and Kurukkals in the district. McGilvray pays particular attention to the cultural influence which the Mukkuvars have had on other castes. According to McGilvray, the exogamous matrilineal matriclans (kuḍi) which the Mukkuvars brought from Kerala have been adopted not only by Hindu castes but even by the Muslim population (also Whitaker 1999; Yalman 1971: 325-331). Kuḍis play a significant role beyond marriage strategy, and ‘in many instances… distinctive political or religious offices, status privileges, and honorific titles’ are attached to them (McGilvray 2008: 40).

In Jaffna and Batticaloa caste must also be understood with relation to the form of hierarchical service relationship known as kuḍimai, which referred to the secular and ritual labour performed by certain castes in exchange for food (particularly rice) and/or the use of land (Banks 1957; K. David 1977; Hocart 1950: 7; Pfaffenberger 1982: 38-46; Raghavan 1971: 166-193). In contrast to the research from Tamil Nadu (Mines 2005: 56-80; Mosse 2012: 74) Although research on slavery in Jaffna has focussed on the Dutch and British periods, historians have yet to grapple with the fact that Portuguese missionaries of the seventeenth century described the Pallars and Nalavars as slaves of the Vellalars (e.g., VP PPIII: 416). Kadirgamar (2017: 186) suggests that the Thesawalamai actually improved legal rights for some slaves.

75 Chandos was the Dutch name for the Sandar caste. There appear to have been very few slaves from this caste.

76 This term derives from the polyvalent kuḍi, which can mean citizen, subject, family, clan, tenant, labourer, house, hut, and hamlet. Kuḍi appears in many contexts, some of which are mentioned elsewhere in this thesis. For example, kuḍi is the name for the exogenous matriclans found among Tamils and Muslims on the east coast, while vārakkudi (‘the kuḍi who comes’) was the name for the sharecropping ‘tenants’ in the Northern Province. Among Hill Country Tamils, kuḍiyānavarhaḷ is the
(116-117), ethnographic description of kudimai in practice is sparse. According to McGilvray, on the east coast there are three kudimai service castes: the Vannar Washermen, Navituar Barbers, and Paraiyar Drummers. Access to their services was prized by the higher castes and a matter of ongoing debate in the 1970s (2008: 163-164). The situation in Jaffna is less clear, and both the historical and contemporary understandings of adimai and kudimai in Tamil discourse need extensive research.77 Instead of thick descriptions of kudimai relations, scholars have uncritically replicated a Vellalar-centric historical narrative of decreasing control over an ever-dwindling number of kudimai castes (AR 1883; Banks 1957: 447; Pfaffenberger 1990a: 81). In 1956, for example, Antoninus (2005: 13) claimed that the last wedding with a full attendance of kudimakkal was in 1922. In the 1960s Perinbanayagam (1965: 225) named the kudimakkal as Koviyars, Pallars, Nalavars, Paraiyars, Washermen (Vannars) and Barbers (Ambattars), and in 1980s Jaffna Holmes observed Paraiyars, Vannars and Ambattars being called to Hindu funerals (1997: 209-210).

I suggest that one further clarification should be made with regard to the fact that, although only certain castes could become kudimakkal, individuals were not referred to as such unless they were in fact part of a kudimai relationship. For this reason, K. David’s schema of ‘bound’ and ‘unbound’ castes (1977) is overly reductive, as it presumes relationships that might not exist. Additionally, although the kudimakkal have frequently been associated with Vellalar dominance, evidence from Mannar, Jaffna (Banks 1957: 439-440), and Mines’ Indian field site (2005) shows that kudimai relationships also existed between other castes. Gnana Prakasar, for example, recorded that a wealthy Nalavar family brought a Thurumbar family to serve as their kudimakkal during a famine at the end of the 1870s (2011: 6).

Mannar shares many castes with the north and the east, and with the opposite coast. During my fieldwork I met people from, or heard mention of, around twenty castes in the district today: Ahammadiyar, Ambattar, Brahmín, Kadaiyar, Kannadiyar, Karaiyar, Kollar, Kusavar, Maravar, collective name for the high castes; Pandian (2009) talks at length about the meaning of this term in Tamil Nadu, translating it as ‘agrarian citizen’. Finally, kudi pōha (‘to go to the kudi’) is an idiomatic phrase meaning ‘to move into a new house’.

77 Some researchers have adopted ‘Panchamar’ to refer collectively to the Vannar, Ambattar, Pallar, Nalavar, and Paraiyar castes (Kuganathan 2014: 79), although this term also needs to be contextualised. Panchama, a Sanskrit term meaning ‘of the fifth’, refers to those outside the four-fold classical system of varna (Viswanath 2014: 268 n. 48). In Tamil Nadu, Panchama began to be used to refer to Paraiyars in the early 1890s, although Paraiyar itself was a generic term given by the British to untouchable agrestic labourers (Viswanath 2014). Additionally, while Panchamar has been adopted as a political means to draw attention to the shared experiences of deprived castes, it is not clear to me that it comprehensively represents the caste context of Jaffna. For example, the proponents of Panchamar overlook the ‘unseeable’ Thurumbars, who were described as washing clothes for the lowest castes (Banks 1957: 400, and 1960: 65-66; Holmes 1997: 251).
Mukkuvar, Nalavar, Ottar, Pallar, Paraiyar, Paravar, Sakkiliyar, Sandar (also known as Nadar), Tattar, Timilar, Valaiyar, Vannar, and Vellalar. I cannot claim that this list is exhaustive, both because I did not conduct a thorough survey and because the largely Catholic Tamil focus of my research meant that I learnt much less about caste among Hindus.

Despite the absence of contemporary quantitative data, it is possible to draw on popular perception as well as the location of known village communities to make some remarks about the relative size and general distribution of the larger Catholic castes in Mannar. The two castes usually considered to be the largest in Mannar are the Paravars and the Karaiyars. The Paravars live predominantly in fishing towns on the island, as well as Vangalai on the mainland coast, while the Karaiyars live in Mannar Town and around three dozen mainland farming villages that are most densely clustered in central Matottam around the Mannar-Medawachchiya Road. The next largest caste is probably the Vellalars, who are also focussed in Mannar Town and a large number of mainland villages that are similarly focussed in the middle of Matottam. Smaller but still prominent Catholic castes are the Maravars, Kollars and Sandars, all of whom are focussed in Matottam, and the Kadaiyars (four mainland villages and another eighteen on the island), the Kannadiyars (who live in Pallimunai, beside Mannar Town), and the Mukkuvars (who live in two villages on the mainland coast and a new settlement on the island).

References to caste in the historical sources on Mannar are sporadic. The earliest appear in the letters of the Portuguese missionaries, although these only mention Mannar Island and (at least in Perniola’s volumes) decrease throughout the period, particularly after 1600. In the Portuguese sources the most prominent castes are the Vellalars, Paravars, and ‘Careas’. The conversion of the Paravars in India in the 1520s and 1530s has been well documented (Bayly 1989: 321-378), although their connection with Sri Lanka is yet to receive serious attention despite a proliferation of mentions in missionary texts. In contrast, the identity of the Careas is contentious, as Carea has been interpreted as either Karaiyar or Kadaiyar. Portuguese sources did not refer to two separate castes, and the numerous references to ‘Carea villages’

78 During the Portuguese period the Paravars moved back and forth between the Fishery Coast and Mannar for a number of reasons, such as to flee from the aggression of local Indian rulers (VP PPI: 369), participate in the Pearl Fishery (VP PPI: 134-135; VP PPI: 432), and escape famine (VP PPI: 310) and epidemic (VP PPI: 427). It also appears that some may have lived in Mannar before the arrival of the Portuguese (VP PPI: 346). In 1610 King Philip II of Portugal ordered that the Paravars be encouraged to move from India to Negombo and Chilaw to aid the Portuguese conquest of Ceylon, although they appear to have been unwilling to do so (VP PPI: 341, 373-375; VP PPII: 505). In the 1720s the missionaries also noted an oppressive Paravar chief on Mannar Island who drove ‘all or almost all the inhabitants of Mannar’ to the Fishery Coast or the Kandyan Kingdom (VP DPII: 166).

79 The Karaiyars are a large caste in Jaffna and are also found in the east (Gaasbeek 2010; McGilvray 2008) and west coasts (Tanaka 1997).
without providing names have become a source of ambiguity in a context where historical caste claims are made on the basis of the locations of contemporary village caste communities. However, the dispute is mainly linguistic. Perniola (VP PPI: 50 n. C-D; VP PPI: 370, 375) argued that the Tamil retroflex ḍ, as found in Kadiayar, was customarily transliterated by the Portuguese as ‘r’, evidence of which is found in other Portuguese names. This issue is central to the debate around the caste identity of the Mannar Martyrs, described by the Portuguese as Careas and claimed by both the Kadaiyars and the Karaiyars in the twentieth century (Antoninus 1983). Although more work needs to be done to understand the question of caste identities in Mannar during this period, it seems likely that the Portuguese unintentionally used Carea to refer to both castes. Certainly the Dutch differentiated between them, as seen in the allocation of ūḷiyam duties (Vink 2016: 277-278).

References to caste in Mannar under the Dutch were primarily related to compulsory service and slavery, which appears to have existed on a much smaller scale than Jaffna. As in Jaffna, compulsory service and slavery were used for public works, such as the construction of the Pearl Fishery (Rumpf 2015: 59; van Rhee 1915: 21; Zwaardacreoon 1911: 70). Four castes were mentioned with regard to other specific services. The Paravars and the Karaiyars performed their ūḷiyam service on government sea vessels (Mooyaart 1910: 6; Rumpf 2015: 59, 140-141; Zwaardacreoon 1911: 66). The Valaiyars, who were referred to by the Dutch as woodcutters or lumberjacks, worked alongside the Company’s slaves to build the coastal road to Puttalam, as well as churches and schools (de Heere 1914: 30; Rumpf 2015: 65; Zwaardacreoon 1911: 127). The fourth caste were the Kadaiyars, who were divided into two by the Dutch, with those living on Mannar Island compelled to perform the arduous task of digging chaya for eight months of the year under the supervision of special overseas (Schreuder 1946: 79; Vink 2016: 272-278).

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80 This practice continued throughout the Portuguese period: VP PPI: 49; VP PPI: 398; VP PPI: 408; VP PPI: 428; VP PPII: 44; VP PPI: 54-55; VP PPII: 128; VP PPII: 198; VP PPII: 495; VP PPIII: 358.
81 Similarly, Queyroz (1992 I: 21) names the Sinhalese rodiya caste ‘Roriz’.
82 The Paravars also dived for chanks (van Rhee 1915: 20). In 1719 Governor Rumpf noted that the Paravars’ ūḷiyam had been changed by the local Company officials from sea-ūḷiyam to land-ūḷiyam. According to Rumpf, the Paravars increasingly desired to work as merchants rather than fishers, which had resulted in an insufficient supply of fish for the Company, and to avoid the sea-ūḷiyam Paravars had fled to Puttalam and the Vanni (Rumpf 2015: 140-141).
Vellalas: To drag timber from forests.
Chetties: Do.
Carreas: Do.
Chandas: Do.
Mammullie Cadeas: Do.
Marawas: To drag timber from forests and attending on Government elephants
Cammaler: Blacksmith and carpenters’ work.
Valleas: Felling timber, clearing roads, supplying chules to resthouses and tappal stations. They were also referred to as “coolies.”
Kosaver: Supplying resthouses with chatties and pots. There were fourteen families at Adamben. Ten years later they had disappeared; for in 1822 the Collector writes: “Obliged to purchase chatties, as all the potters who used to supply them have died of cholera.”
Wannan: Dhobies. Decorating resthouses with white cloths on occasion of His Excellency the Governor and Judges of Supreme Court passing on circuit.
Weankally Caddeas: Digging choya-root. They were exempt from the toddy-tax. A deduction was annually made from the amount of the arrack farm on this account on a statement made by Mr. Mooyaart, who rented the choya farm.
Parawas: Without exception Roman Catholics, implicitly under the control of the priests, who, you will soon discover, have no small weight in the district.
Canareens (descendants of Portuguese slaves): Such services as are required at sea.
Timmielas (only thirty or forty in number): Such services as are required at sea; but recently required by Mr. Orr to carry palanquins.
Moors: Weaving, diving for chanks, elephant hunting, and making salt.

Figure 6.4 List of compulsory services in Mannar in the early nineteenth century, compiled by Boake in the 1880s.

It is less clear how compulsory service was organised by the British before it was abolished. According to Boake’s retrospective list of compulsory services in the 1810s (1888: 19-20; Figure 6.4), at that time the Karaiyars were responsible for dragging timber, along with a number of other castes, while the Valaiyars (now referred to as ‘coolies’; see also NASL 31/1) and the island Kadaiyars both appeared to be performing the same labour as under the Dutch. Compulsory service was also still used to support the Pearl Fishery (NAUK CO54/145). On the other hand, despite the British focus on employing compulsory service for roadbuilding after 1808 (NAUK CO54/145) and especially after 1818 (Kendrick 1992: 194), Mannar Collector Backhouse argued that the district was too thinly populated for this work, and that only the Kadaiyar chaya diggers could work the roads without harming the revenue (NAUK CO416/28). In the first decades of the nineteenth century it is also clear that people in Mannar, as elsewhere in Sri Lanka, continued to flee to other districts to avoid compulsory service.
Among those mentioned in this regard were those called to work at the Pearl Fishery (NAUK CO54/145); the Valaiyars (Boake 1888: 41); and the inhabitants of a particular mainland village, probably Paraiyars, who were always called to Mannar Island to play drums for distinguished visitors (Boake 1888: 71).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>1827 census (from the Description)</th>
<th>1886 survey of AGA Boake</th>
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<td>Paravar</td>
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<td>3505</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paravar</td>
<td>Vellalar</td>
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<td>2498</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kadaiyar</td>
<td>Kadaiyar</td>
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<td>Karaiyar</td>
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<td>Valaiyar</td>
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<td>Sandar</td>
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<td>Maravar</td>
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<td>327</td>
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<td>Vannar (washers)</td>
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<td>Carpenter</td>
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<td>Vaniyar</td>
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<td>Painters</td>
<td>Vaniper</td>
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<td>Mukkuvar</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Koviyar</td>
<td>Painter</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>76</td>
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<td>Potters</td>
<td>Potter</td>
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<td>Nalavar</td>
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<td>Paraiyar</td>
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<td>Pallar</td>
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<td>Pallivilli</td>
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<td>Paniyakam</td>
<td>Goldsmith</td>
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Figure 6.5 Caste in Mannar district according to the 1827 census and Boake’s 1886 survey. The statistics given for 1827 are not taken from the census itself but from the Description (NASL 31/447), the author of which subtracted those regions which were no longer part of Mannar District by the 1890s, which means that both sets of statistics refer to the same geographical area.

Only in the nineteenth century sources do descriptions of intercaste relationships begin to emerge. Although an early description of the district, written in 1810 by Collector Sneyd (NASL 31/1), stated that the local population consisted of Vellalars, Valaiyars, Paravas, Kadaiyars, and Moormen, the larger lists of castes found in Boake’s overview of compulsory service and the 1827 census indicate that local government officers had a broader albeit still
limited knowledge. The district’s Administration Reports, published from 1867 onwards, barely refer to caste at all, unlike those from Jaffna, and neither Boake’s monograph nor the unpublished *Description* (circa 1891) provide more than cursory comments and statistics. The most important sources remain the Catholic sources, and those which are currently available provide more information on Matottam than Mannar Island.

Despite caveats, the caste statistics found in the 1827 census and Boake’s 1886 survey provide important data to work with.\(^83\) (Figure 6.5) First, not only were Vellalars not the largest caste, as in Jaffna and the Vanni (Lewis 1895), but during this period the number of Vellalars dropped by almost half while most of the large castes maintained similar sizes. It is not possible for me to explain why this happened, although it may have been related to the manner in which the census was taken, or to socio-political developments after the changes to caste policy in the 1830s. Also in contrast to Jaffna and the Vanni, the Pallars, Nalavars, and Koviyars – the castes owned as slaves by the Vellalars for the purpose of labour – were found only in very small numbers. Other sources suggest a change in the status of the Vellalars during the nineteenth century. The Vellalars on the island were described as early as 1588 as ‘the noblest [caste] in these parts’ (VP PPII: 129), and in 1810 Collector Sneyd (NASL 31/1) wrote that ‘nearly the whole of the Headmen of the interior of the District’ were Vellalar, as in Jaffna.\(^84\) Sixty years later, however, the author of the *Report* described a different situation:

> In Mantotte the castes enjoy varying degrees of prestige, not so much from their rank in the Indian catalogue of castes… than from their wealth and from the union between people of the same caste. As a result, the Vellalars of Mantotte are almost less considered than the Carears because the former don’t have among themselves the same union as the latter… the Indian poets are putting the Vellalars a hundred feet above the Carears. No servitude of the castes that are inferior to those superior; the varakudis are almost always from the same caste. The Kadhayers have their Vannars and Nassivers apart. But all of the other castes are shaved and cleaned by the same individuals. The castes don’t marry among each other, don’t eat together… here is more or less the only difference that we observe among them. Therefore the caste, however low it is in itself, if it is… hardworking and numerous, never lacks in having a civil [government] chief. Even the Timilars of Arippu have a vidane. At the moment it is the caste of the Carears which has the most government employees thanks to the Adigar of Musaly from this caste.\(^85\) Then comes the caste of Vellalars. Except for the rivalries that the schism has brought forth, there are no other differences between the 13 castes of Mantote. Usually every caste lives in a different village, cultivates different rice paddy, etc. *(Report 13-14)*

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\(^83\) To clarify, the numbers given for 1827 are taken from the *Description*, the author of which removed the Vanni pattus to bring the borders of the district in line with those used by Boake.

\(^84\) ‘Interior’ presumably refers to the mainland. In 1723 an Oratorian missionary recorded that all or almost all the inhabitants of Mannar migrated to the Fishery Coast or the Kandyan kingdom to escape the oppression of a Paravar chief (VP DPII: 166).

\(^85\) The missionary use of Matottam covered Musali too.
This passage, which is the most significant description of caste in Mannar that I have come across during my research, suggests four points to be developed with regard to caste in Mannar. First, it reveals a conscious distinction between different concepts of caste power and status. On the one hand, the author is aware of a concept of caste hierarchy apparently derived from perceptions of caste traditions in India. On the other, he recognises as more important a secular power manifest in wealth, government positions, and the strength of communal organisation. Second, it acknowledges the significance of relative numerical caste size, which, despite not being explicitly stated here, must also be connected to the prominence of the Karaiyars and the Paravars in nineteenth-century Catholic rituals.

Third, the passage emphasises a lack of caste interdependence. Although forms of explicit hierarchy exist, as evident by comments about asymmetrical food-giving elsewhere in the Report (45), in contrast to Jaffna and Batticaloa manual agricultural labour, referred to as ‘servitude’, was mainly found within the caste (ibid.: 13). This should be qualified by the reference to castes evidently providing kudimai service, the Nassivers (barbers, usually called Ambattars; see McGilvray [2008: 156]) and the Vannars (washers). The priests do not mention Paraiyar drummers, although some Paraiyars lived in the Matottam area. Similarly, the question of why the Kadaiyars alone had separate kudimakkaḷ cannot be answered here.

The fourth point is the observation that different castes cultivated different paddy land, which must be developed further. Other scholars (e.g., Leach 1959: 19; Moore 1985: 172-173, 181-182; Ryan 1953: 92) have demonstrated that in Sri Lanka many castes have historically cultivated rice, rather than simply being occupied with their ‘traditional’ occupations, although in some cases these occupations were performed as service tenure in exchange for paddy land. The Report and the Description both observed that rice cultivation was prevalent across the castes living in the paddy areas of Matottam. The Report (13) named ten castes that lived on rice or commerce: Ambattar, Kadaiyar, Karaiyar, Kollar, Maravar, Paraiyar, Sandar, Valaiyar, Vannar, and Vellalar. The Paravar, Timilar, and Kannadiyar castes, which lived predominantly by the sea, relied mainly on fishing. Nevertheless, the association between rice and specific castes has been a strong force in the conceptualisation of caste, and rice cultivation in the present can always be framed as a deviation from other historical caste occupations. For example, the Description noted in the 1890s that some castes, such as the Kollars, Valaiyars

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86 In 1810 the Mannar Collector wrote that drummers (‘tom-tom men’) who lived in Ootapiḍḍi, a village within the Giant’s Tank, had fled to the Kandyan kingdom because they found it ‘a great hardship’ to always be called to Mannar ‘when any great personage arrived… This often puts me to the necessity of sending to the Coast for tom-toms’ (Boake 1888: 71).
and Maravars, ‘have entirely abandoned their original caste occupation and taken to agriculture’, adding that ‘[in] many castes agriculture is combined with other pursuits such as fishing and trading’. Such claims should not necessarily be taken at face value, although they may reflect changes after the abolition of compulsory service.

The name Vellalar is popularly believed to derive from vēḷāmai, ‘agriculture’. McGilvray (2008: 84) has argued that this etymology is spurious, although in Mannar Vellalars are referred to even more explicitly as vēḷāmai pahudi (‘the agriculture side’) or vēḷāmai seyyirākkal (‘the people who do agriculture’). Banks (1957: 377) observed that Vellalar landowners in Jaffna were honorifically referred to as kamakkāran (‘farmer’). One Vellalar man whom I visited in another village in Alayankulam parish insisted that rice cultivation was traditional Vellalar work, and when I pointed out that many other local castes had also been farming for many generations, replied that the Vellalars had been the ones doing it first. Nevertheless, although the Marudankandal Kadaiyars also colloquially referred to the Vellalars with regard to vēḷāmai, they believed that they too had always been farmers, unlike Kadaiyars in other places. Selva’s father, Stanley, made a comment to this end while we were flattening Nesaraja and Selva’s fields after ploughing at the end of 2014. In response to my question about whether everyone used to farm in the past, he said that Barbers, Dhobis, and Paraiyars had not, while Kusavars (‘potters’) and Kollars (‘blacksmiths’) had, at least a little.

The relationship between rice cultivation and caste status can be broken down into two parts. First, if caste status is rhetorically articulated with regard to rice cultivation as an occupation, the material source of this difference is differential ownership of land, as Spencer (1990: 103) has observed:

> control of paddy land is never simply an economic proposition based on criteria of profitability; it connotes potential control over people (or, at the minimum, personal autonomy from the control of others) which in turn is the clearest available index of position.

More recently, Viswanath (2014: 8) has argued that whereas the notion of caste systems ‘assumes that differences among various castes would be assumed to be of the same basic nature, distinct only in magnitude’, the fundamental difference between Dalits and other castes in Tamil Nadu is ‘a massive social hiatus rooted fundamentally in the political economy of agrarian production’. The nineteenth century sources suggest that in Matottam, unlike in Jaffna and Batticaloa, no caste was dominant with regard to paddy land. The picture is more complicated today, because despite the absence of an obvious trend between caste, size of paddy acreage, and wealth, Hindu Tamils who arrived during the twentieth century appear to
have started with far less land than the other inhabitants, for which reason they were particularly prominent in casual labour.

This leads into my second point, which concerns the relationship between caste, land ownership, and particular forms of cultivation labour. Although the Report (14) says that the different castes cultivated their own fields, other sources paint a more complicated picture. In Chapter Two I provided evidence of a local moral economy in which landowners preferred not to perform cultivation and irrigation labour themselves. Banks (1957: 377-378) observed that Vellalar farmers in 1950s Jaffna were ‘gentleman farmers’ who would not use a manvetti or weed paddy fields (which was done exclusively by Pallar and Nalavar women), and who considered working in other people’s fields a form of subordination. I am not able to say the extent to which the latter point applies to different castes in Matottam, although I have noted that the women in Marudankandal were not keen on working for others. The former point, however, did not reflect my experience, as people usually worked in their own fields if they were able. Nevertheless, the use of vārakkudis, who are only remembered by older villagers (and sometimes conflated with kuḍimakkal), is quite unlike today’s labour practices.

Thirty years before the Report (13) recorded that vārakkudis ‘are almost always from the same caste [as the landowners]’, Percival Dyke, Government Agent of the Northern Province, observed that vārakkudis did not come from any particular castes and that they sometimes married into the families of the farmers, after which their debts were generally cancelled (Lewis 1895: 199). Taking this into account, and considering the tendency towards endogamous cross-cousin marriage, it may be the case that the vārakkudi-kamakkāran relationship was generally established between kin. Perhaps vārakkudis were younger male kin without land and resources of their own? However, as noted in Chapter Two, the lack of local labourers for other tasks during the cultivation cycle meant that farmers relied on migrant workers from India and elsewhere in Sri Lanka. The relationship between these migrant workers and local landowners may have been inflected by caste dynamics.

THE KADAIYARS

I began to situate the Kadaiyars in the history of Mannar in this and the previous chapter, with regard to the dispute around the Careas and the conflict involving Madhu during the Oratorian schism. In this section I discuss the Kadaiyars with regard to historical labour and the question of ‘traditional occupation’. Besides the controversy around the Martyrs, the Kadaiyars have played a relatively prominent role in the local historical sources. According to the family list
maintained by the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization, there are around 550 families on the island and a little more than 200 on the mainland. This appears to be around three times the number of families in the 1870s.  

I have also already noted that they are in other parts of Sri Lanka and the opposite coast of India.  

In Sri Lanka, the Kadaiyars have been associated in particular with two ‘traditional occupations’, the digging of chaya and the production of lime (sunāmbu). Only the latter has been prominently discussed (Boake 1888: 21; McGilvray 2008; Ragupathy 1987: 209; Yalman 1971: 329), and it was also often raised in my conversations with people in the north. The name Kadaiyar is usually derived from the verb kadaïya (to churn, mash, grind, stir), and sometimes the caste is referred to as ‘sunāmbu Kadaiyar’. In Mannar it was also explained to me that the caste’s in-group name, Kamandalar, referred to the vessel (kamandalam) in which the Kadaiyars had given lime to the kings of the past.  

Amongst the Sinhalese, lime has also been associated with a particular caste, the Hunus or Hunu Minissu, literally ‘lime’ or ‘lime people’ (Cooray and Vitanage 1955: 75), although there does not appear to have been any connection between the Hunus and the Kadaiyars. The Hunus had a direct relationship with the Dutch to provide lime (Rogers 2004a: 55), which does not appear to have played a role in compulsory service. An overview of compulsory services in the south described ‘Hunu or Chunam Burners’ as ‘servants of the Fishermen’ whose obligatory

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87 The Report (13) recorded that there were 105 Catholic Kadaiyar families in Matottam, its author remarking elsewhere that those Kadaiyars who lived on Mannar Island were ‘almost half more numerous’ than those of Matottam (ibid.: 20). If accurate, this suggests that there were around 250 families at that time. In 1888, Boake recorded 1,572 Kadaiyars in Mannar, almost the same as the 1827 census (1888: 21). The 1871 census records an average of just under five people per family in Sri Lanka, and if we apply this to the numbers derived from the Report the missionary records appear close to the state surveys.

88 According to the 1827 census of Sri Lanka, the main Kadaiyar populations were found in Mannar (1,542), Jaffna (970), Trincomalee (63), Batticaloa (82), and Chilaw (197). In the Manual of the Vanni, Lewis (1895: 82) recorded that there were 47 Kadaiyars in Vavuniya District in 1817, which had dropped to 10 by 1890. According to the Socio-economic and Caste Census 2011, the first national survey of caste in India since 1931, there were 11,650 Kadaiyars in Tamil Nadu in 2011, the majority living in the coastal districts of Ramanathapuram (72%) and Pudukottai (20%). The 2001 census also recorded a population of 1,844 Kadaiyars in Kerala, more than half of whom lived in Palakkad District. I am unable to say whether these have any connection with the Kadaiyars in Tamil Nadu. Although they were briefly mentioned in Thurston and Rangachari’s 1909 overview of ‘castes and tribes’, the Kadaiyars did not appear in the censuses for some decades, and Vincent’s 1998 MPhil thesis is the only contemporary social scientific discussion that I have come across.

89 Vincent (1998: 50) notes a connection between the Kadaiyars and lime production in Tamil Nadu, although he states that they are mostly fishers. In his Report on the Indian Pearl Fisheries, Hornell records a Kadeiyan Par (oyster bank) off the Madurai Coast (1905: 31): ‘The Kadaiyar caste is that of the lime-burners; it however furnishes a contingent of men who work as divers at the pearl and chank fisheries.’
service was ‘to perform all inferior services’ (de Saram 1888: 6). In Dutch Jaffna, where they were described as one of twelve fishing castes, the Kadaiyars were required to serve as sailors on Company vessels for twelve days a year (van Rhee 1697: 8).

In Sri Lanka, lime was historically produced from limestone, shells or coral (Charpentier 1977: 111). Today’s lime industry is concentrated in the south-west and the Hill Country (Practical Action 2006: 2), while local production in other parts of the country has dwindled. On the east coast a small number of Kadaiyar families continue to produce lime, which I witnessed during a visit in August 2014. The Matottam Kadaiyars have marriage ties with a Kadaiyar group of around sixty families, divided between Catholics and Methodists, in a coastal town near Batticaloa. This was the birth place of Calistus’ wife Sonia. Sonia’s younger brother, who was in his mid fifties, lived in Tenkulam with his wife – also from the same Batticaloa town – and two adult children. They had lived in Batticaloa during the war, but moved to Tenkulam in 2009. Every year they returned to Batticaloa for their church feast, and this year I was able to stay with them there and spend a couple of days talking to the other Kadaiyar families. Although many families had been involved in lime production in the past, today only two continued to do so. The lime is made by burning mussel shells with charcoal in a small kiln. The powder created in this way has various uses, and is also mixed with water to produce the paste used with chewing betel. The other families gave various reasons for giving up lime production, such as that the smoke was unhealthy and that as an occupation it did not make much money. It was also seen as a low-status occupation, which I will return to below.

Kannangara (2011: 119) noted that the Hunus have had connections to related industries such as construction. Jayanntha (1992) wrote about Hunu potters, and Cooray and Vitanage (1955: 76) observed that most of the lime burners of Kegalle District were semi-professional masons, adding that few owned land or did cultivation. Similarly, while the Jaffna Kadaiyar community who were connected to Marudankandal no longer produced lime, many were painters and a small number made religious statues: they had been responsible for the statues

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90 Denham (1912a: 190) noted that Hunus may be addressed as ‘messenger’ in Sinhala, which he suggested might have come from a historical role or may ‘simply denote a minor headman’.
91 Although the process usually involved kilns, Robert Knox described a method of making lime by spinning freshwater shells within a sling made of paddy straw and containing burning charcoal (Knox 1958: 260).
92 Cooray and Vitanage (1955: 68) described the main areas of lime production as the south-west coast, certain areas of the Central Highlands, and the Jaffna Peninsula.
on the dome of St Anthony’s and the paintings within it, and were also said to have made āsandī models of Jesus in the past.\footnote{The Jaffna Kadaiyars, who have at least three churches in different parts of the district, receive passing mentions in writings related to Catholicism (Boudens 1957: 163; Gnana Prakasar 2011: 27 and 291; VP DPII: 207). The last of these sources dates from 1729.}

The association between the Kadaiyars and lime production suffers from the same ahistorical and normative generalisations that often accompany the idea of ‘traditional caste occupations’. Although I was told that a very small number of Kadaiyar families produced lime in Mannar Town until around 1990, when it was supposedly banned by the police because of the smoke it produced, this appears to have been a relatively modern phenomenon. The available historical evidence shows no evidence of lime production in Mannar before the nineteenth century. The Dutch Governor Zwaardecroon (1911: 116), for example, noted that lime \textit{should} be burnt at Mannar. There was no mention in the 1871 census of lime production in Mannar, in contrast with Jaffna (23 men, 22 women) and Batticaloa (51 men, 8 women). In the 1890s the Description noted that ‘with the exception of a few oil mills in Mannar, there are no manufacturers in the district’, and commented that while the Kadaiyars had been either lime burners and chaya root diggers in the past they were now either cultivators or coolies. (This does not seem to be entirely correct, because chaya digging lasted into the next century.) Similarly, Boake refers to those Kadaiyars who did not collect chaya as ‘originally lime burners’ (1888: 21). Despite being aware of the association between Kadaiyars and lime burning elsewhere, the Marudankandal Kadaiyars argued that this was not their historical occupation, which was rice cultivation.

In contrast, the connection between chaya and the Mannar Kadaiyars lasted from at least the Dutch period to the start of the twentieth century. Relatively unimportant in economic terms, chaya played a significant political role in the relations between the Dutch and the Tevar of Ramnad in Tamil Nadu at the end of the seventeenth century (Vink 2016: 272-274). Under the Dutch, chaya roots were divided into three qualities that were found variously in Mannar Island, Jaffna, the Vanni, and the islands between India and Sri Lanka. Although only of the middle quality, the greatest quantity was found on Mannar Island. In Jaffna, this work was performed by enslaved Pallars (van Rhee 1915: 9-10, 15). A caste-wise census for the purpose of collecting poll tax from 1790 shows that chaya was also dug by other castes (Ragupathy 1987: 167, 208-210). In Mannar, this work was enforced upon one part of the Kadaiyar population, which would appear to have comprised those living on Mannar Island. From the
Dutch period until the abolition of compulsory service under the British, the Mannar Kadaiyars were divided into two groups.94

The Dutch sources say that the chaya-digging Kadaiyars in Mannar were also ‘considered slaves’ (Vink 2016: 278), being subject to four laws that prevented them from performing other kinds of labour or working for anyone else but the Company, and ensuring that any children born of marriages between the island Kadaiyars and the Kadaiyars of the mainland – who were probably rice-farmers as today – were not able to escape this servitude (Balmforth 2018; Becker 1914: 11; Mutukisna 1862: 690-691). The Kadaiyars were forced to provide this service for eight months of the year, and many escaped to the Vanni, the male population decreasing from 186 in 1686 to 163 in 1690 and 137 in 1693 (Vink 2016: 278). The hardship of chaya digging can also be seen in Governor Schreuder’s 1757 observation that although chaya was found in northern locations other than Mannar and Jaffna, it was impossible to persuade the inhabitants of those places to do this work because they were afraid of it becoming an ‘absolute duty’ (Schreuder 1946: 78).

Chaya digging remained a compulsory service in the first decades of British control, while the 1810 list of services records that the second group of Kadaiyars had to ‘drag timber from forests’ (Boake 1888: 19; NASL 1810: 31/1). There were 385 Kadaiyars digging chaya in 1812 (Denham 1912a: 464), and Casie Chitty wrote that Mannar chaya was exclusively collected by the Kadaiyars (1834: 153). In 1820 Collector Backhouse described the Kadaiyars as living in ‘a state little less than slavery’ (NAUK CO416/28). The government chaya monopoly was abolished in 1831, following a sharp reduction of sales due to industrially manufactured dyes, but the local industry survived this as well as the abolition of obligatory service in 1832. There were one hundred men digging chaya in 1874 (AR 1874), eighty diggers and fourteen sellers in 1901 (Denham 1912a: 464), and only seven diggers in 1911 (ibid.).

In places where they have historically been associated with either lime or chaya, the Kadaiyars have been a socioeconomically deprived caste and also considered low-status, which was sometimes noted explicitly with regard to lime burning by mainland Kadaiyars who cultivate rice. In India, the Kadaiyars are a designated Scheduled Caste, officially recognised as historically disadvantaged and able to benefit from affirmative action, although this policy

94 Boake’s compulsory service list refers to the two groups as Mammullie Kadaiyars and Weankally Kadaiyars, the latter being responsible for digging chaya. The Description gives both manulli and veerkallu as names for the chaya diggers. I have not come across these elsewhere but it is possible that manulli derives from man (‘dirt’) úfiyam and that veerkallu is related to vēr (‘root’).
only applies to those who are Hindu. According to McGilvray (2008: 156), in Akkaraipattu on Sri Lanka’s east coast, the Kadaiyars were considered to rank equally with the low-caste Paraiyars, although in contrast they are not shareholding members in the local Hindu caste system, ‘having arrived recently as Christians from the outside’ (2008: 42-43). K. M. de Silva notes an occasion in Batticaloa Town in the 1840s when Kadaiyars were prevented from entering a Methodist chapel by men of higher caste because they were ‘the lowest caste’ (1965: 191). In Batticaloa the name Kadaiyar was also sometimes said to derive from ‘last’ (kaḍaisi) rather than ‘stir’. 95 Within Mannar, the Kadaiyars were also viewed as a deprived caste that had experienced discrimination in the past, particularly islanders without paddy land. The Bishop’s support of the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization in recent years was partly a response to this context. It is also worth noting that the Kadaiyars have not historically had a kuḍimai ritual role attached to their labour as either lime burners or chaya diggers. Ryan (1953: 114-115) wrote that the Hunus never had a ritual role attached to their service, although U. A. Gunasekera (1965: 298) recorded a village in Sabaragamuwa in which a Hunu lime burner was involved in an intercaste service relationship.

CASTE AFTER THE WAR

Passing through Alayankulam one evening, I met a retired Grama Sevaka bringing his cows home along the road. Our discussion about cattle brands led to caste, and he recalled that in the past the people would ask unknown visitors where they were from while they were at the gate before deciding to let them in or not. This was not the case today, he said. This remark, which I heard in other forms during my fieldwork, resonated with the wider discourse of the diminishing presence of caste in contemporary Sri Lanka, as I discussed at the beginning of the chapter. In the north, however, this discourse has been linked specifically to the war, and is often connected to the LTTE’s opposition to caste, the shared experience of suffering, and the ‘mixing’ that occurred in the IDP camps and at other stages of the conflict. In everyday interaction, caste seemed to be of little importance. However, despite this and the fact, as mentioned at the start of this chapter, people discussed caste more openly than might be

95 Thurston and Rangachari (1909 III: 6) note the same for India: ‘The name, Kadaian, meaning last or lowest, occurs as a sub-division of the Pallans. The Kadaiyans are described as being lime (shell) gatherers and burners of Rāmēsvaram and the neighbourhood, from whose ranks the pearl-divers are in part recruited at the present day. On the coasts of Madura and Tinnevelly they are mainly Christians, and are said, like the Paravas, to have been converted through the work of St. Francis Xavier.’
expected, caste continued to be a source of occasional, if muted, controversy and hostility. This was the case with the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization flag as well as the appearance of the older caste-based village name in the saint’s day hymn, which I mentioned at the end of Chapter Five. I also heard stories of older animosities and negative caste stereotypes that arose in jokes and criticisms.

However, as Thanges (2018b: 24) has observed, alongside the view that caste is decreasing there exists another view that holds that caste has grown in strength since the end of the war, particularly due to the defeat of the LTTE and ‘the absence of a collective mobility against casteism’. One senior priest described caste as ‘fire under the ashes’. A similar perspective was recorded during the ceasefire (Derges 2008: 119), while Thanges and Silva predicted that after the war caste ‘is likely to reappear in the political and social agendas of the new regimes whoever they may be’ (2009: 52). In fact, Thanges and Silva (2009) demonstrated that caste discrimination continued to affect IDPs in Jaffna during the war. Within their field site they also found that the majority of IDPs were in fact from deprived castes. In the aftermath of the war, the absence of the LTTE and their feared punishments has been the main factor in the ‘return to caste’ in the north. This is particularly evident in the greater visibility of caste associations, which I will turn to in the next section. In his doctoral research in Jaffna, Kadirgamar has observed that although older forms of caste hierarchy based on land and labour have been disrupted, caste-based discrimination is realised through forms of social exclusion such as access to schools, temples, and other facilities, and the refusal to sell land to the low castes; the low castes respond with ‘a strategy of non-confrontation and educational progress’ (2017: 237 and passim). Kadirgamar (2017: 238-239) has also observed that there are fewer temple entry conflicts today, as the low castes prefer to have their own, and Samuels (2007) has observed that poor treatment of low castes has also led to the creation of new temples among Sinhalese Buddhists.

As Kadirgamar (2017: 236) acknowledges, this is a period of uncertainty. According to Thanges (2018b: 205-206), the relatively higher emigration of Vellalars means that they are now a numerical minority in Jaffna, although this change has not been reflected in electoral politics. As I have shown in Mannar, changing populations in the village have led to challenges to church rights. The diversity of opinions on caste must also be acknowledged. I found that interest in caste affairs was highly individual, with some people and families completely opposed to caste in its totality. Among the younger and middle-aged Catholic Tamils I spoke to there was a general consensus that caste should not prevent a marriage. On the other hand, Thanges (2018b: 48-49) has observed that people who deny that caste plays a role for them
individually may nevertheless believe that caste is a ‘social matter’ that relates to the caste as a whole as a community. This reflects the more ambivalent position with regard to the positive benefits of caste communities, as explained in Chapter Five.

Marriage is also an area of ambivalence. Selva’s father pointed to intercaste marriages as evidence of the reduction of caste problems, highlighting that intercaste marriages are even being arranged. In contrast, an elderly former civil servant who was also an esteemed leader among the local Kollar community told me that while caste is present in Mannar they are all friends: they attend each other’s weddings although they only marry among themselves. It may be that opposition to intercaste marriages varies across castes, although I have no data to make any claim about this. As I noted in Chapter Three, among the Marudankandal Kadayars there were numerous intercaste marriages. I did find that when opposition to such marriages was expressed, it was usually not about specific caste identities, but about marrying out per se. For example, a senior priest told me that marrying outside the caste can be very bad for the woman, because it often ends in divorce. The same argument is made against interreligious marriages. Another senior priest told me that although he supports intercaste marriages, when someone from his own caste marries out he feels that he is losing them.

Some changes are less ambiguous, according to comparison with the past. The first is the decrease in caste practices around food and commensality, which were certainly once a stronger force. Describing the rotating feast of the Assumption, for example, the Report (45) recorded that one of the factors influencing the size of the offertory was the caste hosting it in that particular year: ‘people frequent more the Assumption of the higher castes, because everyone can eat, drink, etc. in their houses.’ These restrictions were in place much more recently. One middle-aged Kadaiyar woman recalled the argument about whether the Kadaiyar families could eat the food at the wedding of Michael’s daughter, several decades earlier. However, during my fieldwork in Mannar, although I heard many criticisms of the cooking of specific people, I did not encounter this attitude with regard to caste. During an interview, a local Kollar teacher positively contrasted Mannar to Jaffna in this respect, recalling an unhappy experience from his time studying at Jaffna University a decade or so earlier. Having invited a friend from another caste to a relative’s puberty ceremony, neither had been given any food, and he had later been told not to bring anyone from other castes to these events. He had been surprised by this because he had not experienced it in Mannar.

Another sign of this can be seen in the way that a small number of disposable plastic ‘one-day’ cups are shared at the tanni pandal after a feast, only being doused in a large bucket of water before being passed to someone else. Similarly, when eating in a pandal there is usually
a limited number of glasses of water for guests, kept on a table in the centre of the *pandal*, which are simply refilled when necessary. Finally, as I have already explained in Chapter Four, different castes generally do invite each other to celebration meals, unlike older observations from Jaffna (Banks 1957: 351) and the east coast (McGilvray 2008: 161). However, it is also possible that this issue too is dependent on caste identity. On one of my shorter trips to Mannar since 2015, I heard about a Kadaiyar woman who had married a Vellalar man whose family had asked for an extremely high dowry and had not invited all of the Kadaiyar relatives as is usually expected.

The second change was found with regard to the roles of the *kuḍimakkal*, the Vannars and Ambattars. These castes had in the past visited families every couple of weeks to offer their services and, as in Jaffna, were paid mainly in rice. Vannars and Ambattars also had particular ritual roles. Barbers performed ritual shaving and hair cutting at life-cycle events. Vannars brought symbolic white cloths which were used on occasions such as weddings (covering the new couple’s chairs at the altar during the wedding, and wrapped around the *kaṇṇi kāl*), *pandal* meals (tied beneath the *pandal* ceiling), and saint’s feasts (wrapped around the wooden beams used to carry the palanquin). The Marudankandal Kadaiyars mentioned that in the past Michael had also been responsible for delivering invitations to puberty ceremonies by visiting the guests at their homes. As in the east (McGilvray 2008), Vannars and Ambattars had also eaten within the *pandi* alongside those with whom they had a *kudimai* relationship.

I am not able to explain why, as observed by the Report (13), the Kadaiyars alone had separate *kuḍimakkal* to serve them, nor whether this remained the case over the next century and a half. The older Marudankandal Kadaiyars had conflicting memories about this. For example, although Selva’s father Stanley told me that in the past each caste had had their own Vannar and Ambattar, Nesaraja’s father Kumaran said that the Kadaiyars had not had their own specific barber. Additionally, the word *kuḍimakkal* seemed to be fading from use, and I heard it used in a concrete sense only with regard to Michael, who was once described to me as the Kadaiyar’s *kuḍimahan*. In 2014, when a barber shaved a bridegroom on the fourth day of his wedding, Nesaraja told me that he was not *kuḍimahan*, which I understood to mean that he did not have a specific long-term relationship with the Kadaiyars, unlike Michael.

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96 While anthropologists have recorded the declining prominence of funeral drumming by Paraiyars elsewhere (McGilvray 2008; Sykes 2011), I did not encounter this practice at any Catholic funeral in Mannar. Although there are a few villages around the northern border of Mannar populated by Catholic Paraiyars, these are mainly fishers who have no association with drumming.
The older ritual roles of Vannars and Ambattars had largely ceased to be practised, at least among Catholic Tamils. Although supported by the LTTE, according to one of the barbers on Main Road the opposition to house visiting had begun before the war, when the district’s Barbers Association had been formed in the 1970s. As indicated by the description above, barbers are still sometimes asked to perform ritual services, although the extent of these requests, and acceptance of them, is unclear. Jeeweshwara Räsänen (2015) has noted that the erosion of ritual interdependence does not necessarily mean material socio-economic transformation, as low caste people often continue to do low caste jobs. However, ‘saloon work’ continued to be a popular occupation among the barbers, being considered profitable and strongly supported by the Barbers Association.

In contrast, I heard, although anecdotally, that washing clothes was not popular among the Vannars. The donkeys that now roam Mannar Town, once used by the Vannars to carry clothing, are evidence of this trend. During my fieldwork there were three barber saloons in Alayankulam and a single laundry, which was run by a Hindu family who had come from Jaffna in the mid 1990s. While Michael continued to contribute white cloths for Matottam Kadaiyar events, this custom otherwise appeared to have come to an end. The Marudankandal Kadaiyars told me that after Michael died the custom would either end or they would do it themselves. Two weddings that I attended, both occurring among Maravar families, demonstrated changes to the custom. At the first wedding, a white cloth, brought by the male elders themselves, was used only for wrapping the kannikāḷ. At the second, both the kanni kāḷ and the underneath of the dining pandal’s roof were decorated, but this had been done by the families with shredded white paper rather than with cloth. When Michael died in 2017, the tūkku mani was rung for him in the three Matottam churches in his honour.

COMMUNITIES AND ASSOCIATIONS

Kiruba once said to me that people from other villages are scared of the Marudankandal Kadaiyars because they are ‘rowdies’, fighters (saṇḍaiyar): they will come together to fight, and earlier there used to be problems at football matches. ‘We have unity,’ he emphasised. To understand caste it is necessary to investigate not just issues of intercaste socioeconomic dependence and exclusion between castes, but also the internal forces that drive the centripetal construction and consolidation of identity within individual castes themselves. In this section I am particularly interested in the regional caste communities, first referred to in Chapter Four, which are perhaps one of the least considered topics in caste research in Sri Lanka. The use of
‘region’ in this context is of course a flexible one, so it is better not to be too reductive, but a number of castes demonstrate a greater level of connection within the district despite ties that lead elsewhere.

Chapters Four, Five and Six have provided evidence of the historical existence of regional caste communities. The Report, as I noted earlier, even emphasised the role of unity in caste power (13). This was particularly evident in the schism, which occurred to a certain extent along caste lines, with different castes, or clear divisions within castes (VP BPV: 389), aligning with either the Goan or Roman priests. Writings from the time of the schism reveal substantial evidence of the way in which the Kadaiyars worked together. The Report, for example, observed that the island Kadaiyars ‘only mingle in the affairs of Madhu to please their other co-religious in Matottam’ (20), although the island Kadaiyars returned to the Church earlier than those in Matottam (VP BPV: 582-583). The two Kadaiyar communities maintained separate but parallel ritual traditions of celebrating Pentecost, one at Totavely, and another at a mainland village which no longer exists (Report 43).

How did regional caste communities remain aware of and in contact with each other? The most obvious explanation must be endogamy, which is demonstrated by the Kadaiyar marriage ties that connect the Mannar Kadaiyars to small Kadaiyar groups in Jaffna, Batticaloa, and even Tamil Nadu. With regard to Kottiayar Pattu in Trincomalee District in the 1870s, Gaasbeek (2010: 90) rightly asks how and to what extent castes were able to maintain endogamy given the small population sizes, of which he estimates the largest caste to have comprised 200 families. However, the Mannar Kadaiyars indicate the ability to bridge large distances in order to maintain endogamy. They also suggest that such practices have been largely overlooked. For example, McGilvray argues for a restricted ‘kinship praxis of the Batticaloa region’, adding that ‘The only marriages recorded in my low-caste household surveys involving spouses from outside the Batticaloa region were among the Barbers’ (2008: 101). It might be the case that small castes are more likely to forge and maintain such long-distance connections. In Marudankandal the main reason I was given for these ties was the need to find wives, particularly in past times when the number of women were fewer due to the dangers of childbirth. However, while Mannar, Jaffna and Tamil Nadu are relatively close to each other, and were accessible by road and sea, it is harder to explain when and how the connections between Mannar and Batticaloa began and were maintained, particularly as the Kadaiyars in the east appear to have become Christians later than those in the north. At the same time, the Mannar Kadaiyars were also aware of other groups in Jaffna and Kilinochchi with whom they had no connection.
The extent to which long-distance endogamous marriages encouraged the transmission of forms of caste identity, corporate mobilisation and other cultural practices is also difficult to answer without further research, although I have discovered some fragmentary evidence of these kinds of connections between Mannar and Jaffna. Gnana Prakasar noted in 1945 that the Jaffna Kadaiyars were also invested in the Kadaiyar claim to the Martyrs (2011: 291-292), and in 1912 and 1945 he recorded Kadaiyar churches in Jaffna celebrating Pentecost (2011: 27, 291-292). This connection became particularly visible in 2017, when three buses of Kadaiyars from Jaffna arrived at Totavely for the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization feast. While examining marriage records in parishes in Jaffna, I also discovered that in the 1940s Kadaiyars were sometimes recorded as Markulakamandalar, the name that appears today on the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization flag: mahākula kamaṇḍalar (‘the great Kamandalar Kulam’). Caste symbols also indicate a mobile shared culture. The cattle brand used by the Mannar Tattars, a kuraḍu (tongs), is found in Akkaraiapattu (McGilvray 2008: 217), and the Timilar lotus flower is shared by Mannar and Trincomalee Timilars (Gaasbeek 2010: 98-99). The Makara fish symbol, known as the mīn makkaram in Tamil, is prominent among Jaffna and Mannar Karaiyars (who use it as a cattle brand) and among the Sinhalese Karava (Raghavan 1961), and is a sign of an older shared caste identity that preceded today’s ethnic division.

However, we need to be alert to other dynamics that have encouraged regional communities. First, Mosse (2012: 271) has observed that Catholicism itself has historically influenced ‘widening kinship circles and more universal forms of caste belonging through regional associations, inclusive church institutions, or saints’ festivals, which also meant losing touch with territorial and clan-based identities’. The extent to which this has historically been the case in Mannar is hard to address without further research. Second, although there appears to be little evidence of panchayat-style caste councils in Sri Lanka other than on the northern periphery of the Kandyan kingdom (Rogers 2004a: 58; Ryan 1953: 245-251), there is ample evidence of headmen within many castes (Banks 1957: 424, 428-429; Dewasiri 2008: 214; Meyer 2014: 49). Headmen often occupied government positions and were sometimes responsible for the organisation of compulsory service. However, if caste headmen were at least partially the result of precolonial and colonial intervention in caste, they survived the changes of the 1830s, after which their activities become less clear.97

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97 Caste headmen were also abolished and then quickly restored at the very beginning of British rule (Wickremeratne 1971).
Headmen appear to have played a dominant role in the schism. In 1887 the Vicar General of Jaffna wrote that the ‘recalcitrants’ were ‘the heads of the castes or of the churches. They threaten with fines or with the expulsion from the caste those who would be ready to submit’ (VP BPVIII: 66). In 1888 a missionary wrote that ‘caste leaders’ prevented him from administering the last sacraments to ‘schismatics’ during a cholera epidemic:

The fact was that, during the night, an order had arrived from the chief of their caste declaring that all the inhabitants of the village would be deprived of all their privileges if they submitted to the Bishop of Jaffna. It is good to note here that it is by threats of this type that some leaders (there cannot be more than a dozen) were able up-to-now to hold in the entire schismatic population of the two castes, the fisher caste [Karaiyars] and the smith caste [Kollars]. The binding of the caste, as they call it, is so strong among them that they would not hesitate to risk the salvation of their souls rather than run the risk of losing their rights according to their caste. Whatever they might have been told, their invariable reply was: “What can I do, Father; I am bound by the caste tie.” (VP BPXII: 14)

Distinct from regional caste communities, and from caste councils, are caste associations. Caste associations are defined by the fact that membership is voluntary and conditional, which means that they are never coterminous with the caste itself (Shah 2007: 114). Caste associations have been the subject of concerted academic discussion in the study of caste in India (Carroll 1978; Dushkin 1980; Rudolph and Rudolph 1960; Washbrook 1975), but have received very limited attention in Sri Lanka, making only brief appearances in the literature on history and political science (Roberts 1982; Rogers 2004a: 73; Uyangoda 2000), and even briefer appearances in anthropology (McGilvray 2008: 212; Thanges 2018a). In contrast to India, Sri Lanka has largely lacked explicit caste associations, although other kinds of associations have often operated on a caste basis. Roberts (1982: 170-171) argues that caste associations were generally not needed in the nineteenth century, as ‘Notables from each caste took upon themselves the role of caste spokesmen; and the relatively good communication network in Sri Lanka encouraged caste lobbies to operate on an ad hoc basis’. However, Rogers (2004a: 73) observes that certain village associations of the second half of the nineteenth century were known to be caste associations, while Roberts notes that there were ‘several local and national associations in which caste lobbies had either a controlling interest or a strong voice’ (1982 171). Uyangoda made a similar observation two decades ago when he wrote that ‘Although there are large numbers of caste associations, almost as a rule they are not publicly identified with caste loyalty… caste demands in electoral politics are negotiated at a level of acknowledged silence’ (2000: 68-69).

However, the conceptualisation of caste associations as primarily political lobbies obscures a wider range of institutions that have largely been overlooked. One of these is the All-Ceylon
Kshatriya Maha Sabai, apparently based in Colombo. Although it now appears to be dedicated to Sinhalese Karawas, this association had historical links with Tamil Karaiyars (Roberts 1982: 26) that were maintained until at least the 1980s. Fr Antoninus’ book on the Mannar Martyrs, which argued for the Karaiyar claim, was republished in 1983 by the All-Ceylon Kshatriya Maha Sabai. This second edition collected letters sent to Sri Lankan Catholic newspapers by Tamil Karaiyars in Mannar and Jaffna as well as Sinhalese Karawas in Colombo.

Associations in Matottam

In Mannar I encountered three different types of caste associations, all of which restricted their membership and interests to the district, and none of which were political in an explicit sense. One was the Barbers Association, which as in Jaffna (Thanges 2018b: 104) supported Ambattar barbers – like the associations below, it had a funeral fund – while also standardising and regulating the practice throughout the district. Another was the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization, which was designed to promote devotion to the Martyrs while unifying and supporting the Kadaiyars, as I will describe in the next section. The third, and most common, were associations that both supported their members through funeral expenses and organised regular or occasional religious events. I came across three of these in Matottam, although certainly there were other castes that held shared events.

One such association was administered by the four Matottam Kadaiyar village communities. It did not have a specific name, but was simply the association of the three Kadaiyar-controlled churches. The association maintained a funeral fund (marana sahāya nidi) in which every mainland Kadaiyar family was eligible to participate. From the funeral fund, Rs 20,000 (approximately £200 between 2013 and 2015) was given to the family of the deceased immediately after the death to pay for the funeral expenses. All of the other families were then expected to contribute Rs 200 to the fund, which the treasurer would begin to collect at the settu vūdu, as I described at the beginning of this chapter. Families that missed three payments were barred from receiving any funds until they cleared the balance. The funeral fund had been in operation since 1979, and Selva’s father let me look at the meticulously kept records, which had survived the war. Between 1979 and 2013, 179 funerals had taken place among the mainland Kadaiyar families, including in the final years of the war. Like other organisations,

98 http://www.karava.org
it had a committee with an elected head (talaivar), treasurer, secretary, and so on. The association held its annual meeting, mainly attended by older men, soon after Good Friday. During this meeting they discussed the Passion Play and the process of collecting money for the funeral fund.

The Kollars and the Maravars had similar associations. Both of these had been named after saints during the war, although in the case of the Kollar association this had been a conscious decision to avoid the hostility of the LTTE to caste. During my fieldwork this association, which was named the St Joseph Death Donation Association, after their patron saint, made the decision to restore its earlier name, Vishvakulam. The Kollars, who are associated with blacksmithing, consider themselves to be part of a group of five artisan castes, although only the Kollars and the Tattars (goldsmiths) are found in Mannar today, and they are referred to collectively as Kollars.99 However, the Kollars had two names for the larger grouping. One was Kammalar (kammāḷar), while the other was Vishvakulam, found elsewhere as Vishvakarma (McGilvray 2008: 212).100 The name Vishvakulam indicated their connection to Hinduism, which I mentioned in Chapter Four, and it was explained to me that one of the reasons that they had returned to this was that the Catholic name was not appropriate if Hindus were also to be part of the association.101

The Vishvakulam association, perhaps the biggest of the three I describe here, incorporated eight village communities in Matottam and other Kollars elsewhere in the district and in Vavuniya. It too celebrated a saint’s feast – the feast of St Joseph, to which people sometimes brought farming vehicles to be blessed – and operated a funeral fund. Its membership rules were more elaborate than the others, and had been formalised in a written constitution (vāppu) several pages long. In this association, the family and children of a man who married out could join, but a woman who did so would not pass the opportunity to her children even though she herself could still participate in the annual meetings. These meetings were large, communal events, and when I attended in 2014 members of the association gave speeches on issues of morality, faith and hard work, and on how they could act as role models in these respects for other castes. More than the Maravar and Kadaiyar associations, the Vishvakulam association

99 Similarly, McGilvray observed that in Akkaraipattu the name Tattar referred to both blacksmiths and goldsmiths, although there was no separate Kollar caste (2008: 211).
100 Thanges (2018b: 153), who notes the participation of people from across the country in a caste-run Hindu temple in Jaffna, says that an alternative form of Vishvakulam is actually vishvakula kamāḷar.
101 The Vishvakulam trace their origins to ancient Manthai (Casie Chitty 1834: 158).
was explicitly conceived of as a didactic force for good, which was also expressed in the constitution.

The Maravar association, like that of the Kadaiyars, was not open to all same-caste people in the district. It was restricted to five of the eleven Maravar village communities in Matottam, which meant only those to the north of the Mannar-Medawachchiya road. Its membership rules prohibited membership of anyone who had married out of the five villages, even if the marriage was to a Maravar in the village communities in south Matottam. Besides administering the funeral fund, the association’s main activity was to organise an annual feast for its patron saint, which revolved between the five villages on an annual basis. After the feast, the older men would participate in the association’s annual meeting, during which outstanding funeral payments would be collected and letters regarding membership – e.g., newly-married couples putting themselves forwards as a new family, or elderly individuals unable to support themselves and desiring to join with their children’s families for the sake of membership – would be read aloud and considered.

Despite small differences, all three associations provided their members with economic support as well as activities which encouraged a shared identity through an idiom of religious piety. The three funeral funds all seemed to have begun in the 1970s or 1980s. If the associations had grown from existing regional caste communities, their membership rules meant that they were not necessarily contiguous with those communities. As Shah (2007: 114) noted of caste associations in India, although these had no punitive power, they did try to facilitate endogamous marriages. Whether this actually discouraged people from marrying out of caste was another matter. However, the funeral funds that these associations maintain are an example of the way in which caste-as-community is considered a positive, as described in Chapter Five: the same person might object to caste activities which demean others, but approve of the benefits caste brings as a form of social and economic support. But not everybody would agree with this. In Koyilkulam, which was a mixed, caste village, I spoke to a young Catholic father who was aware of the Kadaiyar funeral fund and thought that they needed to establish one through the village church – although not based on caste. Even a good thing based on caste would divide people, he said.

Although none of these associations use a flag like the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization, their religious events publicise their caste identities to different extents. The Maravar feast, to which other people generally would not come, is perhaps the least public. In contrast, in 2014 the Vishvakulam association created a temporary secondary organisation which was responsible for overseeing the Emmanuel nāḍaham (mentioned in Chapter Five),
which was held across two nights a year later. The performers were drawn from the association, with one slot given to every family, who were also responsible for contributing to the expenses; government employees were asked to contribute more than others. For the Kadaiyars, who have not celebrated Pentecost as a caste feast since perhaps the nineteenth century, the annual Passion Play at Periyakulam stands as their central activity. People of other castes in Periyakulam parish do attend, although the singers are drawn only from the mainland Kadaiyars. These are primarily the older men of the four villages, although in 2013 and 2014 several women of different ages, all from Periyakulam, also took part. One evening I came to St Anthony’s to hear the half-hour excerpt being sung, and spoke to Jeyabalan, who was interchanging with Stanley that day. Jeyabalan thought that the reason that the younger men did not participate was because they were afraid of making mistakes in front of their elders. A couple of days later I was talking about it with Rajaratnam at his house. Now in his late fifties, he said that he had only started singing the Viyāhula Prasangam around ten years ago. He had a different reason for why the younger men were not involved: he said that men did not usually start until they had got married, because then they had more to pray for, such as work and family.

After a day of events in Alayankulam parish on Good Friday, including a long Stations of the Cross, groups from the different churches alternating prayers in St Mary’s, and the evening Mass, many of the Kadaiyar villagers travelled to the church at Periyakulam. Soon to be demolished for the sake of a new church, this was one of the oldest buildings in Matottam (an inscription on a wooden roof beam said that it had been built in the 1890s), and it contained a number of old wooden decorations, such as a painted diorama behind the altar. In Periyakulam, a crowd listened to the Viyāhula Prasangam while watching a life-sized, articulated, wooden model (pommai) of Jesus on the cross, which moved and even opened its eyes according to the manipulation of men beneath a screen. (Figure 6.6) At the end of the Viyāhula Prasangam, Jesus was taken down from the cross and carried in a wooden bier around the churchyard in procession. Although called āsandī rather than pavani, this procession stopped at the four corners like a saint’s feast, while everyone carried lit candles. Inside the church, the bier was positioned in front of a large wooden candelabrum newly installed at the front of the church before the altar. People lit candles on the candelabrum and measured sections of white string.

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102 On Good Friday, which was dedicated to expressions of sorrow (tūkam), people said that they were scared to work, believing that wounds that occurred during work on this day would not heal. Almost all of the Catholic-owned shops in Alayankulam were closed, and there was nobody in the fields. Fr Lawrence said that those who did not come to Mass during the rest of the year would come today.
from the foot to the head of the sculpture, which they then tied around their wrists. Some people who were not able to return to their homes easily at that time – now after midnight – slept in the church itself.

Figure 6.6 The Passion at Periyakulam.

The Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization

The Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization (mannār maṛaisāṭcihaḷ samūhanala amaippu), which is rather different to the associations described above, originates in the Kadayars’ claim that the Martyrs belonged to their caste.103 This claim has a long historical provenance, and was recorded by Casie Chitty as early as 1834 (1834: 153-154). During my fieldwork I was told on a number of occasions that the Kadayars had always known that the Martyrs had belonged to their caste, but that they had only recently discovered proof of it. It was also said that the mainland Kadayars were the descendants of those who had fled the island after the martyrdom, an event that, whatever the Martyrs’ identity, is recorded in the

103 I have also written about the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization elsewhere (Esler forthcoming).
Portuguese missionary letters (VP PPI: 398). Further evidence given for the claim is the fact that the church at Totavely, commonly believed to be the site of the martyrdom, is under Kadaiyar control. The feast of Pentecost, which the Kadaiyars say was given to them by the Church in honour of the martyrdom, was celebrated lavishly during the nineteenth century at Totavely (Casie Chitty 1834: 212; VP BPV: 165) and separately on the mainland (Report 43). As I noted in Chapter Five, it continues to be celebrated in Marundankandal St Anthony’s, although other local Kadaiyars do not participate in it formally. Although the Kadaiyars in the east do not seem to be aware of the claim to the Martyrs, those in Jaffna are, and Pentecost was celebrated in at least two Kadaiyar churches there during the first half of the twentieth century (Gnana Prakasar 2011: 27, 291-292).

The Kadaiyars’ claim to the Martyrs has not gone uncontested. In 1944 a Karaiyar priest from Jaffna called Fr Antoninus, who was stationed on Mannar Island, published a short work in which he claimed that the Martyrs had not been Kadaiyars, but rather Karaiyars. His argument hinged on the use of Carea in the historical texts, as well as a rejection of the conventional belief that the martyrdom occurred at Totavely. I cannot confirm whether, and if so to what extent, this claim was held by Mannar Karaiyars before Fr Antoninus’ publication, although Fr Gnana Prakasar wrote in 1945 that no Karaiyars had ever made this claim, whereas the Kadaiyars had always done so (2011: 291). The 1983 second edition of Fr Antoninus’ book, however, which was published by a Colombo-based caste association incorporating Tamil Karaiyars and Sinhala Karavas, collected in its appendices letters in support of the argument from across the country. Today the claim is not articulated publicly by Mannar Karaiyars, and one priest suggested to me that if it was indeed held deeply then the Karaiyar priests would be in uproar over the Organization.

In the following decades the debate continued in the Sri Lankan Catholic press, but the creation of the Organization in 2011 was made possible by the end of the war. Each Mannar Kadaiyar family was asked to pay Rs 300 to the Organization every year. During my fieldwork the Organization held a meeting every two to three months, most often in Totavely, which besides its connection to the martyrdom was considered a roughly central point for islanders and mainlanders. The Organization has an elected committee, and every Kadaiyar village community has organisers (amaippāḷar) and an advisor (ālōsahar) who are expected to attend. There were usually around two dozen older men at the meetings, although there was usually some wrangling about insufficient attendance. I was also permitted to attend, sometimes giving one of the Marundankandal men a lift on my motorbike. The driving force of the Organization was their researcher (āyvāḷar) Antonympitchai, a middle-aged English teacher with a passion for
charismatic preaching who began to explore the history of the Martyrs while studying for a Masters in Tamil Nadu in 2003. It was Antonypitchai, I was told on a number of occasions, who had provided the evidence to show that the Kadaiyar claim was correct. (He had published several articles in Mannaa and the national English-language Catholic newspaper The Messenger.) It was also Antonypitchai who had visited the different Kadaiyar communities after the war, begun the work of compiling a list of all of the families in the district, and designed the Organization’s flag, which he said depicted eighteen objects that had been given to the Kadaiyars by the kings of the past.

The Organization had two stated purposes. Its first, more public purpose was to promote devotion in the Martyrs, chiefly through a new annual feast held in Totavely in July. The second was to improve the socio-economic condition of the Kadaiyars. Its other activities were often directed to that end: organising an annual football tournament after the feast, interceding in caste conflicts such as at Tenkulam, and planning to raise money to help children from poorer families to study. For Antonypitchai, the promotion of faith in the Martyrs was indivisible from the Organization’s aim of improving the lot of the Kadaiyars, many of whom, he said himself, were relatively poor and uneducated. This was why former Bishop Rayappu Joseph had supported the creation of the Organization, several people told me, although I was not able to discuss this with the Bishop during my fieldwork. Talking in his house in a Mannar fishing town – which was not one of the Kadaiyar villages, for he himself had had a mixed marriage – Antonypitchai told me that he saw the work as a ‘spiritual service’. If the Martyrs’ ‘blood relations’ don’t have faith in the Martyrs, he asked, how can other people? More broadly, the Organization aimed to strengthen communal sentiment and activity among the Kadaiyars, through such things as the feast, the banners, and the annual football match. ‘Unity is a must for any society,’ Antonypitchai said. In 2014, the Organization also printed a wall calendar which collected the dates of all of the feasts of the Kadaiyar churches.

The Organization organisers were aware that not everyone welcomed their goals, and were also sensitive when the Organization was referred to as a caste association and the feast as a caste feast, although members sometimes slipped into that language themselves. In 2014 there were few people at the feast who were not Kadaiyar, although some of the organisers put this down to the fact this was only the third year it had taken place. It was known that some priests in the diocese were unhappy about the Organization. Several weeks before the feast in 2015, at the Martyrs conference which I referred to in Chapter Five (which was also held in Totavely), a senior priest from Jaffna had stressed that the caste of the Martyrs was not important.
The Kadaiyars themselves had a variety of perspectives. After the 2014 feast I visited a number of families in Totavely. Following the usual post-feast custom, their houses were busy with friends and relatives from the other Kadaiyar villages. In one house I spoke to a couple from the mainland whom I knew. I asked the wife, an English-speaking teacher, whether there are any problems with this kind of caste activity. She was adamant that because the Kadaiyars had been ‘crushed’ in the past, and were still being crushed in other parts of Sri Lanka – where they were given less respect partially because they did not cultivate paddy – they now needed to stick together and be strong. This is a good thing, she said, because they need to raise themselves up. A Catholic priest from the Kadaiyar community made a similar observation, saying that the Kadaiyars had previously not been accepted or respected. But despite supporting the Organization, his views were mixed. Although he thought that the Church should not be caste-orientated, and that the Martyrs were for all, he also said that the true history should be known, and that it is hypocritical for priests not to oppose other similar caste associations.

In my conversations in Marudankandal I found that others often acknowledged an unresolved tension in their support for the Organization and their acceptance that caste can cause problems. Nesaraja’s father said that he thought the Organization was a good thing, and that it was his mistake not to attend the meetings, although he still paid his membership fee. Towards the end of our conversation, however, he acknowledged that the Church does not accept caste – ‘real Christians’ can’t speak about it, he said – and that the Organization may cause problems in the future. Other castes are trying to own the same position, he added, so it is better to gather all Catholics under the umbrella of the Organization. A respected retired government servant, who regularly attended the meetings, made a similar case, arguing that the Organization should be opened to everyone. During the civil war, he explained, people of all castes had suffered to the same extent. In 2013, Daniel said that the Organization had not properly become an organisation yet, so the people could not get anything out of it. He did not like referring to it as a caste, and preferred to talk about ‘related people’, although when I queried the consistency of his later remark that not everyone in a caste is related, he replied, wryly: ‘It’s a big problem!’ (periya piraccinai dān). If the Organization does good things it will be better, he said, but not if it causes divisions.

There are three key differences between the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization and the others I have described above. The first, as I noted in Chapter Five, is the way in which the Organization makes a caste claim to what is considered a shared Catholic tradition. The second difference is that while the other associations had developed within existing caste communities, the Organization seemed to be catalysing the creation of a new, wider caste...
community. Despite the language of caste as *sondam*, Marcus pointed out that before the Organization there had been contacts across the district but no shared events at which the Kadaiyars gathered en masse. At Calistus and Sonia’s lavish fiftieth wedding anniversary jubilee in Marudankandal in 2014, I spoke to a man from one of the island villages whom I had previously met at the Organization meetings. He told me that he was not related to Calistus and had not known of him until they met through the Organization. The Organization was also rekindling ties to Kadaiyars outside the district. Although only Mannar Kadaiyars could be members of the Organization, during my fieldwork special guests of the same caste, particularly the clergy and members of religious orders, were also invited to the feast from other parts of the north and east. In 2017, three busloads of Jaffna Kadaiyars came to the feast. Perhaps even more significantly, that feast was attended by several Catholic priests, invited directly by Antonypitchai, from a Kadaiyar community in Tamil Nadu with longstanding kin and caste ties to Mannar.

![Figure 6.7 The Mannar Martyrs monument near Totavely, with plaque.](image)

Third, the Organization made caste public to an unusual extent. Besides the Organization funeral flag and the feast, in 2018 a monument, funded by the Indian priests who visited the previous year, was erected on the main Mannar Island road beside the turnoff to Totavely. (Figure 6.7) This monument has a plaque with a lengthy description of the Martyrs narrative, written by Antonypitchai, which states that the Kadaiyars were the Martyrs. It remains to be seen whether the explicitly public caste identity displayed through the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization will encourage greater visibility among other associations. On a number
of occasions during my fieldwork I heard people make remarks about what other castes were doing – by referring to a specific association, metonymically representing the caste itself – before commenting that they would like to do something similar. The Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization flag was an example of this. Towards the end of my fieldwork a Karaiyar researcher and historian living in Parappankandal remarked that he would like to create a new flag like that of the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization. Ironically, the main inspiration for the Organization flag itself seems to have been an old, handpainted flag that was still occasionally used at some Karaiyar funerals in the district.

CONCLUSION

In Chapter One, I offered a critique of two key conceptualisations of Sri Lankan caste found in social scientific scholarship today: the ethno-religious systems of ‘real caste’, and caste as discrimination. In contrast, in this chapter I have offered a number of different perspectives on caste that emphasise the importance of situating caste within both national and regional contexts. Drawing on archival research, I have suggested that in nineteenth-century Matottam caste was characterised by a relative lack of hierarchical interdependence, due in part to the fact that land ownership was not restricted to specific castes. Despite evidence of a hierarchical ideology involving typical notions of food, commensality, and endogamy, caste strength was also connected to size and intracaste solidarity. Unlike Jaffna or Batticaloa, caste identities were not invested in labour relations, at least locally, as this kind of work was performed by seasonal workers from outside the district. However, Vannars and Ambattars did perform both ritual and secular service. The chapter also examined the history of the Kadaiyars with regard to labour, indicating that their low status and, for those on the island at least, socioeconomic deprivation is the legacy of colonial labour exploitation stretching back to the Dutch period.

While Chapters Four and Five emphasised the importance of village caste communities, Chapter Six has argued that these are located within broader regional caste communities that continue to be salient today, particularly as some of these maintain formal caste associations. With regard to caste, the postwar period is one of uncertainty, and caste practices appear to be diminishing in some areas and growing in others. While caste service relationships and everyday social prohibitions seem to have almost disappeared, conflicts have occurred with regard to church rights in Mannar, and research from Jaffna suggests that caste discrimination now takes the shape of exclusion from public services and institutions. The destruction of the LTTE has also given greater confidence to public displays of caste, the most notable example
of which is the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization. Other regional caste associations, which continued throughout the war, continue to provide support for their members through funeral funds that are dependent on the observation of intracaste endogamy. Like intercaste marriage, caste associations are acknowledged to be both a benefit and a risk.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

After the war, the villagers of Marudankandal returned to their land and began to rebuild their homes and lives. Within the transformations of postwar Sri Lanka they were increasingly able to focus on their ‘other wishes’, as Daniel said in Chapter One, which had been much more difficult to pursue during the conflict. The end of the war was also a time of new possibilities for anthropology, permitting far greater freedom of movement and association and a transformation of methodological practice in the former warzones, although the Sri Lankan government remained wary of these activities. Within this context, my own research developed in two main directions. To begin with, it had always been my intention to conduct long-term fieldwork, through the Tamil language, in the Northern Province. This became the centre of my doctoral research. But the questions of social and cultural change raised by the war, and the scarcity of ethnographic and historical scholarship on Mannar, led me to develop both a general history of the district and, due to the sources available, a particular focus on the nineteenth century.

Like most of the anthropological research conducted in the Northern Province over the past decade, my research has investigated society and culture in the context of the postwar period, rather than the war itself and the political questions and claims that accompany it. The emergent body of ethnographic thick description of the Northern Province has helped to puncture what Thiranagama (2011: 15) has called the ‘assumed knowability’ of Jaffna, a description that equally applies to Mannar. In my case, I have endeavoured to bring together three topics: village, caste, and Catholicism. Having developed each of these overlapping contexts earlier in the thesis, I summarise my main points in this concluding chapter.

My initial aim was to provide a reappraisal of the Sri Lankan village, a topic that has had little attention since the 1980s, although for reasons other than those that motivated its lesser popularity in anthropology as a whole. In Chapters One and Two I explained the way in which villages in the Dry Zone are often dependent on tanks and tank irrigation, and described the process by which the Giant’s Tank System was created. When I turned specifically to Marudankandal, the majority-Tamil village in which I conducted the majority of my fieldwork, I investigated the village through three frameworks. To begin with, I responded to (1984, 2010) discussion (1984, 2010) of the distinction between the ‘cultural’ ūr and the ‘state-level’
Kirāmam, which has played a key role in the way villages in Tamil culture have been anthropologically understood. Drawing on evidence from Marudankandal, I argued that although Daniel’s discussion of ūr resonates with villages in Mannar, his secondary point about the abstract kirāmam and the insignificance of borders does not. In fact, villagers perceive kirāmam despite the fact that in contemporary Sri Lanka the village is not an administrative entity at all, and various kinds of borders play a role in the concept of the village. However, the true centre of my investigation of the village focussed on the nature of village caste communities. I argued that although caste boundaries have become less clear as intercaste marriages have increased – whether or not total endogamy ever truly existed – the numerical dominance of the Kadaiyars is expressed not only rhetorically but in their control over St Anthony’s, the village church. At the same time, I emphasised that the village was socially diverse, not only with regard to caste but also ethnicity and religion, and described some of the ways in which different identities are articulated and negotiated. Funerals, I suggested, reveal the density and complexity of sociality in the village.

From the village I turned to the village church, and analysed the way in which the Kadaiyars maintain control over the administration and membership of St Anthony’s, although people from all other castes attend Masses and other church events. Because such single-caste churches are a characteristic of Catholicism in Mannar, I offered a historical explanation for their prevalence that took into account both the small, generally single or majority-caste populations of the tank villages, and the peripatetic manner in which the Goan Oratorian missionaries returned Catholicism to Sri Lanka during the period of Dutch hostility. I argued that although the authority of the priest is co-created between the priest and the parish, caste control of churches is an area of particularly strong sentiment for the membership. A number of church conflicts, usually deriving from changes in relative caste populations during the war, have occurred since 2009. I also addressed the relationship between caste and Catholicism more broadly, noting that although the Church is officially opposed to caste, and considers it not to have any religious sanction, some members of the clergy recognise a positive benefit to communal aspects of caste that makes their perspective more ambivalent.

Finally, having already explored certain aspects of caste, I investigated caste from a number of other directions. In contrast to the separate ethno-religious systems of the discourse of ‘real caste’ and research that conceptualises caste primarily as a form of discrimination, I provided a historical overview of caste in Sri Lanka before contrasting the regional caste context of Mannar with research from Jaffna and the east coast. I argued that evidence from nineteenth century Matottam suggests a context in which the availability of land meant less local labour
interdependence, although seasonal workers fulfilled this role. I also pointed to the continuing importance of regional caste communities in the maintenance and articulation of caste identities, particularly through caste associations.

Having noted certain forms of caste were practised more explicitly in Mannar than would be expected from existing caste literature, I argued that the absence of the LTTE has opened a public space within which the most prominent development has been the Kadaiyars’ creation of the Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization. Although the Organization has been criticised by some within the church for making a claim to a shared Catholic tradition, the Organization was supported by the previous Bishop, Rayappu Joseph, on the grounds that it would help the Kadaiyars, particularly those on Mannar Island, to advance socioeconomically. The roots of this deprivation lie, as I demonstrated, in the legacy of enforced labour under the Dutch and the British. The Mannar Martyrs Social Welfare Organization is also unusual in the way that it has not only brought Kadaiyars across Mannar together, but has strengthened ties between Kadaiyars in Mannar, Jaffna, and Tamil Nadu.
REFERENCES

Abbreviations

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