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Reclaiming reconciliation through community education for the Muslims and Tamils of post-war Jaffna, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This paper explores the possibilities and challenges for ethno-religious reconciliation through secondary school education in post-war Sri Lanka, with a specific focus on the Muslim and Tamil communities in the Northern city of Jaffna. In doing so, we position our paper within the growing field of 'education, conflict and emergencies' of which there has been a growing body of literature discussing this contentious relationship. The paper draws from an interdisciplinary and critical theoretical framework that aims to analyse the role of education for peacebuilding, through a multi-scalar application of four interconnected dimensions of social justice: redistribution, recognition, representation and reconciliation (or 4 R's, Novelli, Lopes Cardozo and Smith, 2015). We apply this framework to interpret primary data collected through an ethnographic study of two under-studied communities that have been disproportionately affected by the 1983 to 2009 civil war and displacement: the Northern Sri Lankan Muslims and Northern Sri Lankan Tamils. We find that structural inequalities in society are replicated in formal secondary school education and are perceived to be perpetuating ethno-religious conflict between Muslim and Tamil; second, through a multi-scalar analysis, formal peace education is perceived by respondents not to be meeting the needs of communities; and third, we observe how in response to failings of state peace education, an 'unofficial' Tamil–Muslim community education incorporating a social justice-based approach has emerged. This has facilitated a process of cross-community reconciliation between Muslim and Tamil through individual (teachers, students) and community (Muslim–Tamil community based organisations) agency. The paper concludes by offering suggestions for peace education policy and future research.

Keywords

conflict, education, social justice, reconciliation, peacebuilding

Introduction

> It is important not to forget . . . and make the same mistakes as our parents' generation. To prevent this [war] from happening again, it begins with the schools… the children must not be poisoned. Yet, we are not prepared to stop this [war] from happening again. (Muslim secondary school student)

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This paper positions itself within the emerging field of 'education, conflict and emergencies' which has been receiving increased attention internationally from the media, practitioners, policymakers and from within academia where there has been a proliferation of literature exploring this contentious and contradictory relationship (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2005; Lopes Cardozo, 2008; Novelli and Smith, 2011; Smith, 2005; UNESCO, 2011; Winthrop and Matsui 2013). From these literature debates it follows that both the formal education system and non-formal forms of schooling can have a significant role to play in processes of peacebuilding and human development. However, many children miss out on such schooling opportunities, even more so in conflict-prone societies. Considering that children in conflict-affected and low-income countries account for 42% of those out of school globally, it is crucial to ensure equal educational opportunities and attainment for those children who are disproportionately affected by armed conflicts (UNESCO 2011). For this study, it is important to recognise that the relationship between education and violent conflict is highly complex and that education systems can be both 'victim' and 'perpetrator' of war and conflict (Novelli & Lopes Cardozo, 2008: 478), a contention that was articulated through Bush and Saltarelli's (2000) influential thinking in *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict*.

Sri Lanka is one of many low-income countries stricken by intra-state warfare, which has increased in prevalence throughout the second half of the 20th century (Novelli & Lopes Cardozo, 2008). This paper builds on former studies on the role of education in fostering peace in Sri Lanka (Lopes Cardozo, 2008, 2014; Davies, 2011; Hoeks, 2012). What is specific to this paper is its unique concern with research on the implementation, perceptions and experience of peace education of ethno-religious minorities in the north of the country. More specifically, the aim of this paper is to explore the possibilities and challenges for ethno-religious reconciliation through secondary school education in post-war Sri Lanka, with a specific focus on the Muslim and Tamil communities in the northern city of Jaffna. In doing so, this paper aims to fill a gap in the academic literature, specifically on the plight of the 'forgotten minority' of northern Muslims and their struggle for redistribution, recognition, representation of social development within a framework of post-war reconciliation and rebuilding in Sri Lanka, while focusing primarily on the educational sphere. Building on the work of Dale (2005, see also Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks, 2014), we pursue a multi-disciplinary methodology and multi-scalar analysis, by broadening the debate on education for peace towards political, cultural and social contexts, acknowledging the inter-connected relationship between the individual, school, community and society. Our main analytical framework is inspired by the work on social justice of Fraser (1995, 2005), yet further developed to study the role of social sectors in sustainable peacebuilding (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo and Smith, 2015).

The argumentation of this paper is primarily informed by research findings from a micro-scale field study in the city of Jaffna, conducted by Duncan (2014) between 26 January and 8 April 2013, almost four years since the culmination of the ethnic civil war in May 2009. This paper is based on an ethnographic study of predominantly two groups, the northern Sri Lankan Tamils (religiously Hindu and Catholic) and the Sri Lankan Moors (religiously Islamic), both of which communities have been disproportionately affected by war and displacement. The concepts of ethnicity and religion, and the identity which is attached to these notions, are central to this paper. Identity as a concept is complex consisting of myriad factors including ethnicity, religion, nationality, geography, class, etc., yet through freedom of choice, or lack of, a singular identity is commonly attributed to individuals, whole groups or communities (consisting mostly of ethnicity or religion) (Sen, 2006). The fundamental role of religion in the identity formation of Sri Lankan Muslims is the subject of much misunderstanding with ethnic Tamils, as acknowledged within academic literature (McGilvray and Raheem, 2007; Mahroof, 1995; Mohan, 1987). The decision of Muslims to identify themselves religiously, rather than to align themselves ethnically, continues to be a source of conflict between Tamil and Sinhalese ethnic groups. Ethnographic research was conducted in three neighbouring state secondary schools situated less than a square mile apart within the city of Jaffna:

a Muslim school, a Tamil-Catholic school and a proportionately Tamil-Hindu school which is considered non-denominational.

Due to the ethnographic nature of research, a mixed-methods approach to data collection was the most suitable, which included a range of qualitative techniques such as interviews, focus groups and participant observation, and quantitative techniques, including student questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate and primary method of attaining in-depth and reliable information. In total, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted, of which 15 were conducted with either practitioners of education such as principals, teachers and non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff, and participants in education such as secondary school students. There was a total of 40 respondents from these semi-structured interviews, of which other participants included community activists, religious leaders, NGO staff, parents and academics. Furthermore, focus groups were conducted with students and teachers separately on different occasions. In terms of quantitative fieldwork, 34 questionnaires were distributed and completed by schoolchildren born between 1994 and 1997 attending the three secondary schools, predominantly studying at Advanced Level and Ordinary Level.

This article will now be divided into a number of sections, the first of which will provide a brief overview of the post-war socio-political context of Sri Lanka, focusing on the plight of the Muslim minority, the context of post-war secondary school education and the role of formal peace education in Sri Lanka. Second, we share the theoretical foundations on which this paper is based. In the following sections the potential of education for sustainable peacebuilding is analysed through reflecting on the data collected for this study. In the first data section, we provide analysis of the (re)production of structural economic, social and political injustices in/through education in the specific context of Jaffna. Following a 4Rs theoretical framework (discussed below), we most directly engage with the analytical dimensions of redistribution, recognition and representation, and how these are played out within educational discourses and practices. In the following two data sections, we continue to engage with these three dimensions, but turn our attention to the fourth R that is reconciliation. Applying a multi-scalar approach, we first illustrate how respondents perceived that formal forms of peace education through secondary schooling hardly address issues of reconciliation. In the final data section, we demonstrate how non-formal educational community initiatives do seem to carry the potential for reconciliation, yet lack a strategy to address the structural inequalities and root causes of conflict. To conclude, we provide some suggestions for peace education policy, practice and future research.

The Research Context

Demographically, Sri Lanka is ethnically diverse consisting of four major groups: firstly, Sinhalese (74.9%), residing mostly in the south; secondly, Sri Lankan Tamil (11.2%) inhabiting mostly in the north; thirdly, Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka, known as Hill Country Tamils or Up-Country Tamils, also residing in Colombo (4.2%); and lastly, Sri Lankan Moors, commonly referred to as Muslims, who reside country-wide (9.2%) (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2012). We recognise that due to people's hybrid and often complex identities, these lines are in reality often more porous than represented in census data. One example is that the country is religiously heterogeneous, with the Sinhalese predominantly (but not exclusively) Buddhist, with Tamils predominantly Hindu, and with Christianity being represented within both Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups. Sri Lanka endured ethnic conflict and civil war between the years of 1983 and 2009, which has had a major impact upon the socio-economic development of the country and exacerbated endemic political, economic and educational inequalities (Lopes Cardozo 2008: 19).

The 26-year civil war has often been portrayed as a power struggle of competing ethnonationalisms between the central Sinhalese government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil

Eelam (LTTE) – commonly known in Western mainstream media as the 'Tamil Tigers' – a separatist rebel insurgency with the objective of securing independence for a Tamil homeland in the northern and eastern parts of the country (Lopes Cardozo & Hoeks, 2014). Yet, the role of the Muslim minority continues to be largely forgotten and excluded from academic and public discourse in a post-war landscape characterised by militarisation and a culture of fear. The civil war came to a brutal conclusion in May 2009 when government forces crushed the LTTE's near 30-year battle for independence, amid large civilian casualties and allegations of war crimes perpetrated by both sides, for which those responsible are yet to face justice. Approximately 100,000 people were killed during the conflict, including over 70,000 civilians in its final months (United Nations, 2012). Now in the post-war period, the north, and specifically the Jaffna Peninsula, continues to endure militarisation and enforced disappearances according to respondents. However, following the unexpected election victory of President Sirisena in January 2015 on rhetoric of anti-corruption and reconciliation between an increasingly ethically Sinhalese controlled state with Muslim and Tamil minorities, there is much hope of a new post-war settlement departing from the divisive and authoritarian 10-year presidency of his predecessor Mahinda Rajapaksa (Channel 4 News, 2015).

In the northern city of Jaffna, the primary research location where data for this study was gathered, the everyday lives of Tamils and Tamil-speaking Muslims are defined by ethno-religious segregation and violence. The northern Muslims are an ethno-religious group which has received limited attention from academics and policymakers. Although research has been conducted on Muslim internally displaced peoples (IDPs) in the Puttalam district (Brun, 2009; McGilvray and Raheem, 2007), academic literature regarding the Muslim community in Jaffna is rare (Thiranagama 2008, 2011). There is an absence of literature specifically regarding the role, position and relationship of Muslims in post-war ethnic reconciliation and secondary school education.

It is in this post-war context that education in Sri Lanka plays a crucial role in creating a culture of peace and healing the wounds of war, and it is important to investigate what role education can play in such post-war reconciliation and peacebuilding that is inclusive and socially just. Education has been a long-standing priority of the government of Sri Lanka since independence in 1948 (Perera, 2004: 1), yet it has been highly politicised and a source of much conflict, particularly between Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups. There have been many challenges confronting the Sri Lankan education system which has been widely regarded as failing in terms of providing equal opportunities.

The segregated secondary school education system reflects an ethnically divided society which was established during British colonialism and has since deepened ethnic division (Davies, 2011). The secondary school system is divided into 'language' streams, that is, the 'mother tongue' of Sinhala or Tamil, but there are also religiously segregated schools, such as Muslim-only schools, with mainly Tamil medium (Perera, 2004, in Davies, 2011). Colenso (2005) identified an unequal distribution of educational resources, rigidity of the curriculum and segregation of the school structure as problematic in delivering good quality education, with northern areas principally the scene of educational deprivation. This ethnic segregation and divide through schooling, and the promotion of linguistic nationalism, has exacerbated misrecognition and unequal opportunities for Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious population, and calls for a more inclusive form of education addressing these immediate concerns in a post-war context (Lopes Cardozo, 2008).

The need to primarily address ethnic conflict and facilitate reconciliation between Tamil and Sinhalese groups led to the introduction of official peace education in secondary schools in 1991. Bilingual teaching and learning was introduced in the 1997 general education reforms, which specified pupils should learn both Sinhala and Tamil languages. Within this reform a new emphasis was placed upon teacher training to educate in terms of human and gender rights, connected values and notions of democracy (Lopes Cardozo, 2008; Davies 2011). To facilitate this process, a Ministry

for National Languages and Social Integration has been created, the first of its kind in the world (Davies, 2011). The formulation of the Social Cohesion and Peace Education umbrella programme in 2008 by the Ministry of Education (MoE) was viewed largely as a positive advancement for peace education in Sri Lanka. This placed new emphasis upon teaching the values of democracy and citizenship and sought to instil the virtues of peace, equality and respect among its participants, the students, and create a desired model Sri Lankan citizen. The policy identifies seven key strategic areas through which social cohesion, a greater peace between ethno-religious groups, can be developed. The strategic areas are the following: curriculum; teacher education; second national language; whole school culture; integrated schools; co-curricular activities; and research (Aturupane and Wikramanayake, 2011: 5). For the purposes of this paper we will refer to 'formal peace education' which includes these strategic areas and its objective of creating greater social cohesion within Sri Lankan society. 'Formal peace education' will therefore be used inter-changeably with the term 'social cohesion'. Formal peace education is (meant to be) integrated into every subject within the secondary school curriculum, particularly civic education, history, language and the social studies curricula, ensuring that peace education is all-encompassing, rather than to be taught through only one subject. Furthermore, the policy discourse has a focus on increasing inter-cultural understanding and tolerance through inter-ethnic and inter-religious integrated schooling, yet implementation has been fragmented (Duncan, 2014; Hoeks, 2012; Metheuver, 2016).

Theoretical Foundations

Our paper employs a meta-theoretical epistemological approach incorporating Dale's work on the politics of education, which entails a broader critique of mainstream educational research (Dale, 2005: 139–141). This approach envisages education and society as intrinsically linked, stating how education systems are embedded and inherent within local, regional, national and global processes of politics, history, culture and economy. Through a multi-scalar, historical and interdisciplinary approach, Dale's theory (1999, 2000, 2005) seeks to uncover the submerged realities and underlying discourse of the politics of education. This enables us to view education inherently as a political process in how it is conceived, formulated, implemented, experienced and perceived from the macro-level to micro-level. This critical theoretical approach allows us to address questions that move beyond the education sector and affords a broadened framing of research problems towards cultural, political and economic inequalities and root causes of conflict. Furthermore, we build on the work of Novelli and Smith (2011) on the relationship between the education system and the core issues of conflict. In doing so, our analysis endeavours to capture the potential of education for peacebuilding processes, by paying significant attention to religious, social, ethnic, class and geographical dynamics and their relationship in enabling or undermining peacebuilding activities (Novelli and Smith, 2011: 8).

The analytical framework we employ in this paper is inspired by the work on social justice of Fraser (1995, 2005) on the 'three Rs of redistribution, recognition and representation', and its further application to studying the role of social sectors in sustainable peacebuilding by adding the fourth analytical dimension of reconciliation (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo and Smith, 2015). This '4R' framework, as developed by (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo and Smith, 2015), argues that the key post-conflict transformations necessary to produce sustainable peace – or positive peace, as Galtung (1969) refers to it – involve redistribution, recognition and representation, to bring about greater social justice as suggested by the work of Fraser (2005), together with post-conflict issues of reconciliation. As argued above, we position education's potential transformative role as inherently connected to and embedded within processes of social justice and societal transformation. Fraser, from a critical feminist perspective, asserts that a socially just society would entail 'participation

on par with others, as full partners in social interaction' (Fraser, 2005: 73). Hence, economic solutions of *redistribution* of resources and opportunities alone will not suffice, but need to be combined with socio-cultural remedies for better *recognition* and political *representation*. In addition, we argue that for conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts, there is a need for processes of *reconciliation*, so that historic and present tensions, grievances and injustices are dealt with to build a more sustainable peaceful society.

While these four Rs are separated for analytical purposes, in reality these are very much interlinked in either reinforcing or conflicting ways. For example, as *recognition* of formerly excluded ethnic languages in education, combined with a *redistribution* of resources to train teachers and develop material to enhance this process, could potentially lead to better *representation* of ethnic minority graduates in decision-making positions (at school governance level, or later on in political positions), this opening up of a diversity of languages might (depending on the context) potentially hinder processes of *reconciliation* as in reality some minority languages might be included as a language of instruction, while others might not make it, creating resentment among various groups of students. In that sense, we might see this arena where various (powerful and less powerful, informed and less-informed) actors operate as a 'politics of redistribution-recognition-representation-reconciliation', in which processes related to the four Rs are played out and understood in relation to the broader peacebuilding goals, and where the rules of the game set limits on what is possible and desirable in society. This term 'politics of the 4 Rs' is loosely inspired by Dale's work on the politics of education (2005) and brings together our theoretical foundations set out at the start of this section.

Reproduction of structural socio-cultural, political and economic injustices through education

Importantly, in the discussion that follows we have separated the three dimensions of social justice (recognition, representation and redistribution) for analytical reasons, yet we emphasise the interconnected nature of these dimensions. The first dimension of Fraser's framework to be explored is recognition, mostly connected to socio-cultural (in-)justices. There are significant historical grievances originating from the eviction and subsequent displacement of the 10,000-strong Muslim population from Jaffna by the LTTE on 30 October 1990; an event which is increasingly perceived as a central source of continuing conflict between Muslim and Tamil, perpetuating segregation and the entrenchment of singular ethno-religious identities. Muslim displacement is often judged to have been a form of ethnic cleansing completing a Tamil homogenisation of the north of Sri Lanka (Thiranagama, 2007). Upon eviction, the Muslim community were forced to congregate at the Muslim secondary school in the city, the site of which has consequently developed a historical importance for the Jaffna Muslim community. Since the end of the war in 2009, only 600 Muslim families living in the IDP camps of Puttalam District have permanently resettled in Jaffna due to a series of inter-related problems regarding housing, political representation and educational facilities. Those who have resettled in Jaffna have experienced a relationship of mistrust with the Tamil people, as is illustrated by a quote from a Muslim teacher: 'Tamils' relationship with Muslims is one of bitterness, forged in the past … the seal of hatred is still here. The war is over, yet the conflict still remains'. The lives of young Muslims continue to be influenced through their parents' recollections of displacement, maintaining a cycle of ethno-religious prejudice from one generation to the next. Of those Muslim students interviewed, 13 out of 18 stated they currently feel discriminated against by Tamils. Nevertheless, evidence discovered through this research suggests there are generational differences in attitudes and prejudices between the younger generation of school leaving age and middle-aged adults, with all 34 students surveyed stating that they had close friends of other religions and ethnicities.

The segregation between Tamils and Muslims is replicated in secondary school education in the research area. Schools are segregated on the basis of religion which is identified as a 'negative face of education' (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000), potentially exacerbating conflict between groups. Religious customs and practices of minority groups are not accommodated at the Muslim school and the Tamil-Catholic school. The Muslim school excludes schoolchildren on the basis of ethno-religious identity and is almost ethno-religiously homogeneous with 98.4% of the student population being Muslim. Meanwhile, the Tamil-Catholic school is ethnically segregated, pursuing a policy of only admitting non-Muslim Tamil students despite the school's location being only 50 metres from the Muslim residential area. Student enrolment at the Tamil-Catholic school stands currently at 84.7% Catholic, 15.3% Hindu and no Muslim students. The Tamil-Hindu school is a non-denominational school which is widely viewed as a 'school of inclusion' and does not discriminate on the basis of ethnicity, religion or caste, which is seen as a source of pride within the community. For the purposes of this paper and for ease of reference this school will hereafter be referred to as the 'Tamil-Hindu school'. However, the student population is predominantly Hindu (83.1%); Tamil-Catholics account for 12.7%, and 20 Muslim schoolchildren comprise 4.2% of the student population. A Muslim student attending the Tamil-Hindu school claimed that the school does very well to accommodate Muslim religious practices, such as allowing students to leave class at 12pm on Fridays to attend the mosque.

Almost half of teachers interviewed explicitly defended the current segregated structures between local secondary schools and suggested this should be maintained. A teacher justified the current arrangements as they are seen to preserve Islamic culture and safeguard the existence of Islamic schools, which as a minority religion in Sri Lanka are already perceived to be under threat. The majority of student respondents (27 out of 34) were against the current secondary school structure enforcing religious segregation, with a number of them suggesting that a lack of inter-religious schooling leads to communities moving further apart, thus deepening rifts between them. As illustrated earlier, there is an observable difference between the majority of views of older and younger generations.

Second, the analytical dimension of representation, connected to the political sphere, advocates the importance of addressing unequal power relations at a multitude of social, ethnic and political levels to ensure groups are equally represented. Our analysis discovered an identity-based conflict regarding an absence of political representation of the Muslim minority leading to claims that Jaffna Muslims are a 'forgotten community' (teacher at the Muslim school). For many respondents, the social development of the Muslim community is thwarted; first, by a political landscape at the municipal and provincial level of corruption and demagoguery, with some prominent local politicians accused of 'tearing the Muslim and Tamil communities apart' (Tamil-Catholic religious leader); second, the divided internal politics of the Muslim community is hindering their ability to speak with a united voice; and third, the absence of educated leaders and an illiterate population is exacerbating problems in terms of meeting the community's needs, for example in administrative matters such as completing official government forms for housing applications.

Secondary schools have also been the venue for struggles for political power. This became specifically clear within the Muslim school, where religious-based conflict was reported between Muslim actors, such as the mosque and Muslim teachers, and Tamil actors, notably individuals within the northern province's Provincial Department of Education and Tamil individuals teaching at the Muslim school. A Muslim teacher claimed that decision-making power within the Muslim school is held solely by Muslim teachers and Muslim community elders from the local mosque. Tamil teachers are allegedly excluded from decision-making within the school, because the school is perceived to be a religiously homogenous institution, which is claimed as Muslim territory for the purpose of the Muslim community. Tamil teachers are increasingly marginalised which,

according to Fraser (1995: 71), can be deemed as a form of both cultural injustice (recognition), as well as political misrepresentation.

The third dimension we discuss here is redistribution, defined by Fraser (1995: 70) as 'injustice which is rooted in the political-economic structure of society'. Housing throughout the city of Jaffna, particularly in the Muslim community, has been decimated by war, with many returnees living under canvas and without adequate sanitation and running water, acting as a deterrent to many Muslims who choose not to return due to poor living conditions, considered by some as worse than IDP settlements. The government have acknowledged that assistance for the resettlement of displaced Muslims has essentially been non-existent: 'the treatment given to the Muslim community of the Northern Province has led them to believe that they are at the bottom of the list of priorities of the government, INGOs [international NGOs] and NGOs and the donor community'(Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, 2011). Furthermore, there have been claims that Tamils actively obstruct Muslim resettlement through land disputes and the boycotting of Muslim businesses, which has compounded the sense of being 'unwelcome in a place once called home' and injustices felt among recent Muslim returnees (teacher at the Muslim school).

There are parallels between the absence of redistribution of resources for housing and for secondary school education in the Muslim community. Our analysis shows how educational inequality and uneven distribution of resources between schools are perceived to be exacerbating rather than mitigating tensions and conflict between students. Muslim students feel a sense of unfairness that educational facilities at the Muslim school are perceived to be worse than those at neighbouring Tamil schools. The Muslim school is currently in a state of disrepair and lacks the facilities and equipment which the other schools in this study currently possess, such as a library, science equipment and computers. In light of this, all of the teachers interviewed at the Muslim school explicitly asserted that due to the associated problems and greater needs of the school in comparison with surrounding schools, there is desperate need of additional and specialist assistance, with one teacher claiming 'the school has not returned to normal functioning following Muslim resettlement'. It is widely acknowledged by Tamils and Muslims in this study that the educational levels of students at the Muslim school are drastically below the level of neighbouring students at the Tamil-Catholic and Tamil-Hindu schools due to displacement resulting in illiteracy and limited personal development. Moreover, the Muslim school has the highest teacher student ratio in this study at 1:18, although this figure remains below the national average (World Bank, 2014).

The Tamil-Hindu school is the only school in this study to have the facilities to teach Advanced Level, resulting in a flow of students from the Muslim school wishing to continue with their studies, which has both positive and negative outcomes. According to the principal of the Tamil-Hindu school, this 'system makes this school attractive and an alternative for poor underachieving students', as it allows 'failed Ordinary Level students, those that would have dropped out of school otherwise, are deserving of a second chance, despite negative repercussions for the school's reputation'. This flow of students has become a tradition, developing links between the Hindu and Muslim community and contributing to de-segregation between Muslim and Tamil schoolchildren. Students at the Muslim school feel it is unfair that their school is under-resourced when in comparison with neighbouring schools such as the Tamil-Hindu school which teaches Advanced Level. Some teachers explicitly assert that inequality between schools in different areas is deepening divisions between young Muslims and Tamils, particularly the absence of Advanced Level at the Muslim school and the perceived lower quality of teaching and funding for facilities.

Based on our analysis, formal peace education is the only component of secondary school education which can be said to be appropriately redistributed towards the Muslim community. As one of the few Islamic schools in the Northern Province, the Muslim school receives greater attention in terms of formal peace education than the Tamil-Catholic and Tamil-Hindu schools in this study.

The Muslim school has been selected for increased support from Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), one of the main non-governmental actors involved in formal peace education in secondary schools in Sri Lanka. This is one of 200 pilot schools in disadvantaged areas receiving support and is considered a positive development by those within the Muslim community. Yet, conflict-affected vulnerable schoolchildren at neighbouring Tamil schools are not included in this programme. The implementation of peace education as developed in discourse is perceived by teachers to be weak in the Tamil-Catholic and Tamil-Hindu schools and is plagued by shortages in training, funding and resources. Only four out of 14 teachers interviewed stated they had attended formal peace education training; yet they are expected to possess the appropriate skills to deliver peace education and incorporate it into all aspects of the school curriculum. One of those teachers who has attended such a training seminar explained that implementation of peace education is 'minimal', adding that 'there has been no training, no interest, and no assistance from the Ministry of Education'. Formal peace education is generally not perceived by key actors to be having an observable influence on further conflict between Muslim and Tamil groups, as the following section will illustrate.

The fourth R of multi-scalar reconciliation

Recalling here our earlier claim for the need to conduct a multi-scalar analysis and moving on now to focus our attention on the fourth R of reconciliation, we found that formal (peace) education is perceived by respondents *not* to be addressing the post-war needs for reconciliation within and between communities at the supra-community, inter-community and intra-community levels, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

First, analysis at the supra-community level examines the relationship between society and the state, and national issues of history, language policy and free speech in the context of continued aspects of militarisation and ethnicisation of education. Building on existing writings on the challenges of reconciliation at the national level within and beyond educational reform by a number of authors (Balasooriya et al. 2004; Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Perera 1997, 2004; Lopes Cardozo, 2008), our study contributes by showing how Tamil and Muslim teachers were united in their criticism of a 'biased' history curriculum which is seen as portraying Sinhalese Buddhism domination and cultural hegemony; and exercising the negative face of education. Four teachers were highly critical of the history curriculum stating that it does not accurately represent Tamil and Muslim minority culture, with many strongly contending this as an act of purposeful discrimination. Some teachers commented the history text is heavily structured in favour of the Sinhalese ethnic group and adherence to Buddhism. Teaching centres on Buddhist texts, for example on the *Mahavamsa*, an important text in Theravada Buddhism that covers the early history of religion in Sri Lanka, which according to one teacher has 'no relevance or benefit for Tamil and Muslim students'.

Less than half (16 out of 34) of students explicitly asserted they thought that history teaching is biased, with Muslim students less likely than Tamil students to acknowledge this perceived bias. These teacher and student views confirm findings from earlier studies on the biased nature of history teaching in Sri Lanka (Lopes Cardozo, 2008, 2014) and confirm this is a continuing issue of concern. Although acknowledging that Muslims are one of the smallest ethno-religious groups in Sri Lanka, there is certainly an underlying conviction among young Muslims that they should learn each culture – Muslim, Tamil and Sinhalese – in equal measure and not at the expense of the erosion of their own culture in a history curriculum, which should seek to promote inclusive identities and diversity.

The teaching of the second national language, in this case Sinhala language, in Tamil-speaking schools, is generally considered a potential positive tool for peace and reconciliation by teachers and students, yet there is a lack of implementation due to inadequate Sinhala language skills, lack

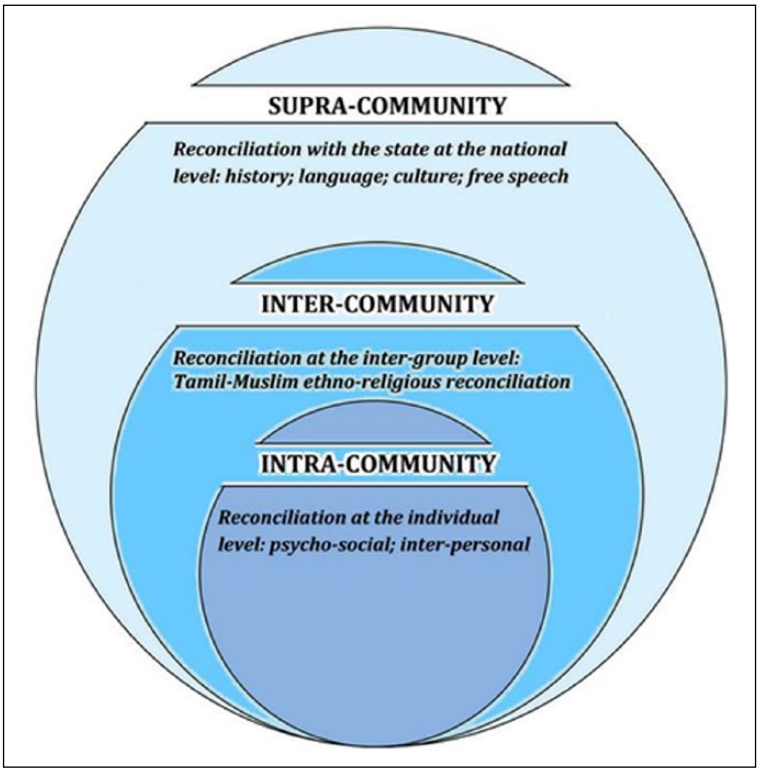

Figure 1. Multi-scalar reconciliation conceptual diagram (adapted from Duncan, 2014).

of teacher training and no appointment of Sinhala language teachers within the three Tamil-medium secondary schools. Of the 14 teachers interviewed, three could speak Sinhala fluently, of whom two were Muslim having learnt Sinhala whilst displaced from Jaffna. Of 18 Muslim students, six can speak Sinhala, of whom two are fluent, and 4 can speak conversational Sinhala. This compares with a mere three out of 16 Tamil students capable of speaking limited Sinhala. In general, Tamil-speaking teachers want to teach Sinhala and Tamil-speaking students want to learn Sinhala in order to improve understanding and reconciliation between disparate communities and participate in Sri Lankan civic life, with only one teacher voicing concerns that Sinhala is a threat to the identity of northern Tamil language and culture. The limited basic teaching of Sinhala is exacerbating ethnic inequality and preventing many young mono-lingual Tamil-speaking students from realising their potential and participating in society, as expressed by a Tamil teacher: 'Without Sinhala language skills, students cannot locally benefit from communication with the army, police and government officials, or when they go outside the Tamil North'. There exists a perception that Tamil-speaking people, including northern Tamils and Muslims, feel as though they are subjugated at the national-level and persistently marginalised through language policies.

Second, at the inter-community level we explore the state of post-war ethno-religious reconciliation between Tamil and Muslim communities in Jaffna, through analysing changing perceptions and attitudes facilitating greater understanding, integration and inclusion between these groups. In this section on reconciliation we discuss inter-group grievances in relation to the interconnected issues of misdistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation alluded to above. The importance of reconciliation at the inter-group level has been recognised by a number of scholars (Bush and

Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2011; Page, 2004;). Our data show there is a general consensus among teachers and NGO staff involved in education practice that formal peace education does not address unresolved religious identity-driven conflict and instead focuses on the ethnic Tamil-Sinhalese problem. A central contention of this paper is that peace education must give more leaning towards tensions and grievances between different religious groups and re-address religious misunderstandings and intolerance, as this is identified as a central driver of conflict. Davies (2014) argues for the need to critically question the role of religion in schooling, and how it potentially can exacerbate rather than mitigate conflict, through processes of segregation, narrowing of views and ring-fencing religion as something above critique. According to Davies, secular and state-funded schools should encourage and allow for critical religious education across a wide range of student backgrounds. While these arguments might hold in certain contexts, we do acknowledge that such a secular approach might not be context-appropriate in every conflict-affected location. In the context of Sri Lanka, and based on the voices of teachers and students represented in this study, the teaching of values, ethics and morals can be crucial to attaining religious tolerance and understanding between these rival ethno-religious groups.

For example, a campaign for cultural and religious tolerance was launched in 2012, which is based on ethics of mutual respect, multiculturalism and equality. A banner with the phrase 'Respect Others' is displayed prominently within all secondary schools in the Northern Province, including the schools in this study, and is a crucial message of this campaign. In addition, there are teacher training seminars on creating a 'culture of peace' within schools with an emphasis on 'positivity'. Teachers are expected to maintain a positive state of mind and impart this philosophy to their students to develop a positive attitude towards others. However, there are a number of teachers deeply critical of these initiatives, describing them as superficial and shallow which can be viewed as merely a point of departure and not as a substitute for more rigorous and in-depth teaching. This is primarily because this does not address societal and educational inequalities which the majority of educators ascertain as the root causes of ethnic conflict, but instead asserts a one-size-fits-all approach of individual happiness and positivity to a plethora of underlying complex factors.

Moreover, an absence of trust and knowledge of one another's religion and culture is a key problem identified by teachers, students and community members that is perceived to reinforce the divide between them. This has led to calls for an increase in inter-ethnic and inter-religious participation events which allow a space for students to de-alienate those who identify themselves differently in society and to discover the many commonalities among them. The implementation of this through bottom-up agency of community groups and teachers will be discussed later in this paper.

Third, analysis at the intra-community level is concerned with post-war reconciliation within groups, on an inter-personal and intra-personal basis, specifically related to psycho-social care and overall wellbeing. Internal conflict has afflicted Muslim, Tamil-Catholic and Tamil-Hindu communities, framed by complex social problems (poverty; displacement; religious, gender and caste-based discrimination; and violence). An important, although often repudiated component of peace education should be to address the psychological wellbeing of children and teachers affected by war. Former studies have aptly highlighted the need for greater focus on the psychological wellbeing of students in the aftermath of ethnic conflict (Davies, 2013; Hoeks, 2012; Page, 2004; Lopes Cardozo, 2008). According to the views of the majority of respondents, the existing problem of youth engagement in violent conflict, ignited by the psycho-social trauma of experiencing war, is continuing to curse communities and is a substantial challenge which cannot be ignored. Although all aspects of peace education require actions at the individual level, analysis at the 'intra-community' level illustrated the psychological and social stresses of schoolchildren and young adults blighted by the past of a post-war and post-displacement society.

Government authorities have been accused of neglecting the psycho-social needs of young people after the war (Helbardt et al., 2010) however this need is gradually being met through a GIZ-implemented counselling programme, extra assistance for teachers and creating a supportive environment for vulnerable students (Davies, 2011). For selected secondary schools, resources have been provided by GIZ such as the appointment of specialist teachers and increased counselling for secondary school students targeting those who have been subjected to abuse, violence and displacement. According to GIZ staff, 160 war-affected schoolchildren throughout Jaffna have been selected for counselling sponsored by GIZ. These claims are disputed by teachers: the number of students receiving counselling and teachers receiving counselling training in the researched schools has been minimal, yet all schools in this study are said to require psycho-social counselling. A Hindu teacher and trained counsellor at the Muslim school explained that the school in fact obtained more funding for counsellor training and student welfare before the end of the war in 2009, but funding for these programmes has since been reduced. In the few GIZ-implemented conflict resolution classes which are held in schools, there is an emphasis upon developing peace at an individual level, concentrating on inter-personal relationships, behavioural change and the 'predisposition to fight', which Bush and Saltarelli (2000: 28) refer to as 'de-militarisation of the mind'. 'Peace should start with the individual', stated a teacher at the Muslim school, while another stated, 'if there is to be peace throughout the country, it begins through the individual and the family'.

Furthermore, the presence of the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) is said to be negatively affecting students by creating an atmosphere of mistrust and fear. Out of 34 students, 25 stated that the military presence in Jaffna makes them fearful and negatively affects their studies. Without the involvement of GIZ, extra assistance for the most vulnerable conflict-affected students delivered through the MoE is minimal. In addition to the crucial recognition of the need to address trauma and provide psycho-social support to students, we would like to emphasise the simultaneous need to also acknowledge the trauma and need for support for teachers.

Teacher, student and community agency for ethno-religious reconciliation

A minority of teachers interviewed explicitly asserted that they actively pursued a personal strategy to deviate from the curriculum with which they disagreed, and instead teach with input from their own beliefs, culture and history, challenging the barriers of identity and prejudice between Muslims and Tamils in Jaffna, and beyond to the relationship with the Sinhalese. This form of teacher agency follows an educational objective advocated by Davies (2005: 32) to challenge exclusionary nationalist subjectivities and pre-conceived notions of identity and difference through an open dialogue. Teachers of this persuasion believe that to ignore the 'problem of indoctrination' is more damaging long-term to the sustainability of peace than to allow the truth to be told in a balanced and objective manner. One teacher commented: 'the danger of not teaching the truth is perhaps greater than the danger of teaching the truth'.

To inculcate the 'correct' (more peaceful) values in their students, the Tamil-Catholic school has begun to introduce and distribute a series of books to students that are not part of the formal curriculum and not certified by the MoE. Although these texts are not included in the national curriculum, teachers decide to teach this due to their own personal convictions and desire to place emphasis upon their own culture as the Principal of the school allows teachers a certain degree of autonomy. For example, one such text is entitled 'The Art of Joyful Living', regarding the potential of religious reconciliation through making other religions integral to one's way of living, and its central concept suggests Sri Lanka is a family of a diversity of religions, creeds and colours; another of these books

(taught in Grade 8 and 9) is entitled 'Enlighten students and inculcating the right values in them', a text for those affected by the war and deep-rooted prejudices. This justification for introducing alternative teaching materials is reinforced through a desire to instil values of equality and tolerance between religions, ethnicities and races in their students, an important theme which is present throughout these selected texts.

Disagreements between teachers persist regarding the need or possibility to discuss with students the 1983 to 2009 civil war, human rights abuses committed by the SLA and LTTE, forced evictions and the presence of the SLA in the Northern Province, a conversation officially forbidden in schools and therefore unlikely to be discussed (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2011; Hoeks, 2012). In this study a minority of teachers actively pursued a pedagogy of interaction and the valuing of shared experiences, stimulating classroom debate questioning the state's narrative of war crimes, human rights abuses and discrimination of minorities. For instance, a teacher at the Tamil-Catholic school considered it to be a teacher's 'responsibility to tell the truth, not the distorted truth by government', and to challenge pre-existing power relations and government control through education. A minority of teachers actively sought to discuss these issues with students. A teacher explained that during a regular 20-minute period towards the end of the class allocated for discussion, Advanced Level students are encouraged to debate current issues in the media: 'We discussed an article…which stated in the final days of the war in Mullaitivu, a mother, father and children were shot. We discussed in class whether our army could have done it … whether they could have murdered these innocent people'. There are other teachers who insist that a teacher's role should not be to incite hatred in young people, and must be aware of the sensitivities and risks associated with these types of discussions. Although some respondents claim that it might be too early to have such conversations, what becomes clear is that teachers face a difficult situation with no guidance or support when such issues arise in a learning setting.

Interestingly, students in the three secondary schools have begun to exert agency for free speech, critical thinking and political debate through student projects and unions. Through these extra-curricular Tamil student unions and student debating clubs, a space for debate has been established where students actively set the agenda and argue for and against motions, for example on militarisation of the north, devolution for Tamil areas and the discrimination of minorities. The vast majority of students surveyed (28 out of 34) participate in these extra-curricular student forums and debates, as they provide an opportunity to openly debate issues of war and human rights abuses which they are officially unable to do within the confines of formal education in the school classroom.

The agency of students through individual projects in attempting to redefine the contested relationship between the Muslim and Tamil communities is of particular interest. For example, a Muslim pupil studying Advanced Level is conducting a project regarding Muslim displacement, investigating the justification for such an eviction and the subsequent trauma experienced by Muslims, so he can inform young people of his age not aware of these issues. The student stated his desire to conduct this research project 'in order to learn from this and to stop this from happening again'. Like many young Muslims, he learnt about displacement from his parents, but recognises their views can be subjective and carry prejudicial attitudes; yet he seeks to challenge these inherited assumptions of the Tamil-Muslim relationship. This example can be viewed as representative of many young people we spoke to as they expressed their aspirations to positively change their communities. Although we recognise that we draw from a relatively small sample of respondents, it is interesting to note that especially Muslim teachers and students express an inner desire to address issues of the recent past, and re-examine the social and historical context of education in Jaffna and their position in relation to it.

Agency has also emanated from individuals and community-based organisations in both Muslim and Tamil communities who have begun to take it upon themselves to re-define the role of education in the community for ethno-religious reconciliation. According to respondents, the perpetuation of ethnic inequalities and conflict has motivated local groups into action and increased involvement within the education system. However, there is a reluctance and fear to engage in such activities because of recent cases whereby activists have endured intimidation from the SLA and have disappeared following engagement in Muslim-Tamil reconciliation. Based on these circumstances it seems that agency for ethno-religious reconciliation through community activities that are 'underground' is the only viable alternative in an environment of silence.

As part of a shift towards educational democratisation, the School Development Society is perceived as the official channel of interaction between community and school, and is driven by students' parents becoming involved in the politics and extra-funding for a school. Throughout the three secondary schools, this form of local participation is said not to be encouraged by Government and MoE officials, which could be viewed as preventing and stifling local agency, initiative and a sense of local ownership of education. Despite this, the School Development Society at the Muslim school, which consists of predominantly Muslim parents, has recently funded a conflict mediation seminar and counselling for individual students, run in conjunction with an alumni organization, the 'Old Boys Association' and local community-based organisations. There are a number of Muslim parents and local activists working with Tamil individuals who assist the school in terms of campaigning for better quality education and fundraising for extra classes for students.

A select number of Tamil individuals, who are generally professional, well-educated and recent returnees to Jaffna, have been instrumental in activating this change of direction for education towards the means of reconciliation. One such individual is a Tamil teacher at the Muslim school, who has assisted greatly in the reopening of the school, helping the Muslim community and battling teacher and funding shortages; meanwhile, another Tamil respondent has recently become a community coordinator, organising free after-school classes for schoolchildren in the Muslim school to improve literacy and numeracy. Community assistance in secondary school education has begun to establish itself in the research location, as a Tamil individual explained: 'In early 2010, our community centre began to host study nights, allowing schoolchildren who didn't have electricity, lights or desks to study at the community centre. Students from any school and area are welcome here.' Furthermore, due to the poverty and lack of facilities within the Muslim community, Muslim schoolchildren have been welcomed into the homes of Tamils where joint study groups have been arranged for students from the Muslim school and Tamil-Catholic school. This has provided students with different ethno-religious identities an opportunity to study together and to build relationships and friendships with one another, promoting reconciliation – and addressing issues of misdistribution of access and resources – between formerly opposing groups.

Inter-religious reconciliation through cross-community engagement, collaboration and participation is identified as a priority area by both Muslim and Tamil communities to improve relations between them. Opportunities for inter-religious events within and between schools are limited through formal peace education channels, however there have been events organized through the community. External community-based organisations have initiated efforts to improve relations, particularly through inter-religious and inter-cultural events structured to develop religious tolerance and understanding between Muslim, Hindu and Catholic schoolchildren. For example, some school principals, community representatives and religious leaders have facilitated inter-religious participation days whereby Tamil schoolchildren of Hindu or Catholic faith will participate in celebrating religious festivals such as Muharram (the Islamic new year) and Mawlid al-Nabi (Prophet Muhammad's birthday), and vice versa. A teacher explained religious festivals held between secondary schools organised by civil society on a voluntary basis:

Muslim students wear traditional Tamil dress to foster respect at a festival of religion which occurs annually in the month of May. This festival promotes understanding between religions. Similar festivals revolve around schools, for example a Catholic festival in Hindu school, Hindu festival in Muslim school, and Muslim festival in Catholic school.

Likewise, language competitions facilitate inter-religious participation, for example Sinhala language competitions between Tamil-speaking Hindus, Catholics, and Muslims organised by Muslim parents in Killinochi and Jaffna.

Many students believe peace education should be implemented through another avenue of informal extra-curricular education, in which communities can play a larger part in construction of curricula and alternative learning spaces. When students were questioned on whether they believe inter-ethnic and inter-religious meetings can change negative attitudes and stereotypes of people from other religions, all students answered yes, further reinforcing the widespread opinion of the Jaffna student community for enabling greater integration. Through these findings it can be concluded that despite the recognised prejudice of their parents' generation, schoolchildren themselves acknowledge that through socialisation with other ethno-religious groups, prejudice can eventually be overcome. Through this form of inter-ethnic interaction, schoolchildren can increasingly develop what Davies refers to as 'hybrid identities' (Davies, 2011). Not only opportunities for students, these events allow members of each community to interact and engage with one another's culture as parents of pupils, prominent community representatives, and religious leaders are invited. This convergence of a disparate civil society, the vehicle of secondary school education, and the uniting cause of Tamil–Muslim reconciliation is having lasting success in facilitating shared understanding and tolerance of one another's culture.

Conclusions and possible ways forward

Research on the implementation, perceptions and experiences of education and its potential for reconciliation in the Tamil north has been limited and it is hoped this paper will start to fill a void in the literature. In moving away from a narrow educational analysis, this paper has pursued a methodological broadening of the role of education for building peace towards political, cultural and social contexts, in line with the work of Novelli and Smith (2011). Following the holistic approach offered by Dale (1999, 2000, 2005) and the theoretical 4 Rs model developed by (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo and Smith, 2015), we applied an interdisciplinary and multi-scalar framework that analysed the interconnected analytical dimensions of redistribution, recognition, representation and reconciliation.

The three data analysis sections of this paper engaged, first, with an analysis of the (re)production of structural economic, social and political injustices in education, engaging most directly with the analytical dimensions of redistribution, recognition and representation, and how these are played within educational discourses and practices. We have utilised Bush and Saltarelli's (2000) conceptualisation of the 'two faces of education' to demonstrate that formal education is perceived to be the embodiment of the negative face of education through enforced segregation, manipulation and ethnic bias of the curriculum, and repression of critical thinking and debate, driving further conflict between Muslim and Tamil communities in Jaffna. Simultaneously, the agency of individuals (teachers and students) and external actors (community members and organisations) can be viewed as a concerted effort to implement the positive face of education and mitigate the negative impacts of formal schooling, through the desegregation of ethno-religious groups, the teaching and enactment of democratic principles, seeking a more sustainable solution to ethno-religious conflict through educational means.

Our analysis of the fourth R of reconciliation, in relation to the other three Rs, illustrated how respondents perceived formal forms of peace education through secondary schooling as inadequate in addressing the central issues of reconciliation. Extra-curricular or non-formal education, as conducted through teachers' adaptation of the official curriculum or additional student-led or community initiatives, in contrast did seem to carry the potential of reconciliation. However, although the latter non-formal community-driven initiatives were perceived as more successful in fostering reconciliation amongst the various communities, they have difficulties in addressing the structural inequalities and root causes of conflict that are being reproduced and institutionalised through the formal education system, and hence, expansive reforms of the formal education system are needed to better respond to continuing underlying tensions and potential new conflict triggers to build a more positive and sustainable peace.

Our analysis furthermore demonstrated how (formal) peace education is criticised by key Muslim and Tamil actors as highly politicised as it is too narrowly focused on the ethnic problem at the national level. Our analysis of a 'politics of the 4 Rs through education' showed that in addition to ethnic identity, religious identity is a major source of conflict within education, and so peace education could benefit from shifting the paradigm of ethnic reconciliation to one that also includes religious reconciliation, reflecting increasing conflict between the four main religious groups of Sri Lanka. Hence, we suggest that in order to reach the full potential of education for building peace in the post-war context, an engagement is needed with all four interconnected Rs, not only within the education sector, but importantly with education integrated into a broader, inter-sectoral, multi-scalar approach to building a more sustainable peace. Although we recognise that in the highly complex, politicised and volatile context of Sri Lanka, and as 'outside researchers', this is easier said than done, we build our arguments on the accounts of those who live these unequal educational and societal realities on a day to day basis. It is with the intention of providing a voice to those people that we make these arguments and offer some suggestions for policymaking and future researchers working in a similar area.

In terms of the implementation of an education for peace, our data reveal greater support is needed from the government of Sri Lanka to implement peace education and to expand the policy country-wide. There is a more general need to increase investment in the education system, ensuring the equitable distribution of resources as a requirement of a sustainable approach to peacebuilding in this post-war context. Furthermore, de-segregation of ethno-religious groups through a (more) integrated system of schooling seems necessary to prevent a sense of injustice and perception that peace education is not genuine and lacks political will. Formal (peace) education, as it is experienced in its current form, seems to be reinforcing the perception among Tamil-speaking northern minorities (both Muslim and Tamil) that they are continuing to be persecuted for the actions of the LTTE. Therefore, it is believed that a greater local involvement in education reform, and peace education policy more specifically, through a consultation process (including teachers and students) might allow for a more just representation and voice in decision-making processes. In addition, community groups should be incentivised to participate in this process by the state, rather than discouraged as is currently the case. We acknowledge that participatory consultation processes are naturally not fully inclusive due to practical concerns. Therefore, we recommend that the next steps towards more inclusive, contextualised and meaningful implementation of education that serves social cohesion and peace would benefit from a thorough, accessible system of teacher training and teacher support (including equitable financial compensation, optional social-emotional counselling and authority and autonomy to contextualise teaching content).

Based on the reflections of our respondents, further exploration of the creation of a comparative religion subject seems worth exploring further. This would entail discussing religion in a critical

yet respectful way, which are seen by respondents as practical steps which could be implemented in order for genuine post-war reconciliation to take place. Our final thought presented in this paper acknowledges that peace education cannot succeed unilaterally, without political consensus for structural reform, a conclusion similarly expressed elsewhere (Lopes Cardozo, 2008, 2014; Davies, 2011). Jaffna Muslims and Tamils (Hindu and Catholic) are two minority groups struggling to assert their claim to religious and cultural distinctiveness, civic rights and participation in an inclusive democracy; however, there exists a wider problem affecting all Sri Lankan citizens subjected to a disruptive history and continuation of tense and conflictual state-society relations with levels of mistrust. Peace-inclined education alone can assist in the creation of less violent, more equitable and inclusive societies (Gupta et al., 2015), yet it cannot fundamentally alter the structural inequalities at the macro-level and micro-level of Sri Lankan society by itself.

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