Where are you from?
Where are you going?

Ethnic identity formation among the plantation
community of Shannon Estate in Sri Lanka

28-6-2013

J.M. Saat & L.A.Wouters

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Bachelor thesis Cultural Anthropology

Utrecht University

Where are you from? Where are you going?

5 | T h e s i s

Tea Pluckers

My bronze bodied men

Noose the morning light;

From dell to dale

From uplands and inclines

Echoes rise and fall

To the rhythm of pickaxe

Mammoty, fork and crowbar

Forkers and pruners

Ferners and sprayers

Each skilled in the task;

They enter the field.

Distributed beehives their hearts

Drip warm with the sweat,

Eight hours in a day

Seven times in a week;

Thus their life blood flows

To fashion this land

A paradise for some.

- C. V. Velupillai –[1]

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[1] The Tea Plantation Workers' Museum & Archive, New Peacock Estate, Sri Lanka.

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Maps

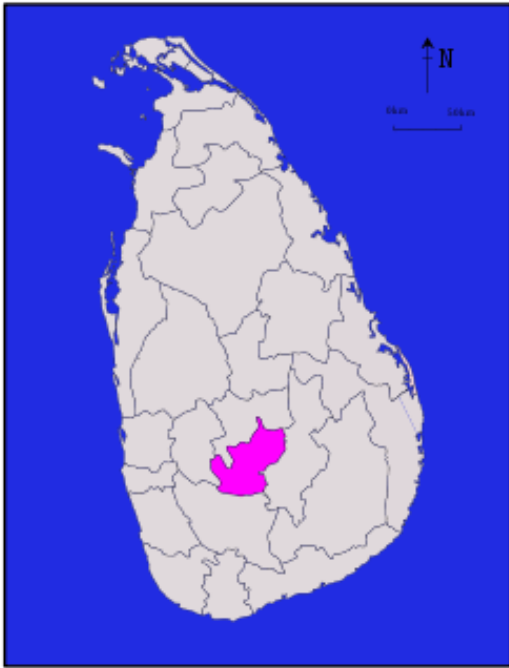i **Image 1 Geographical map of Sri Lanka**
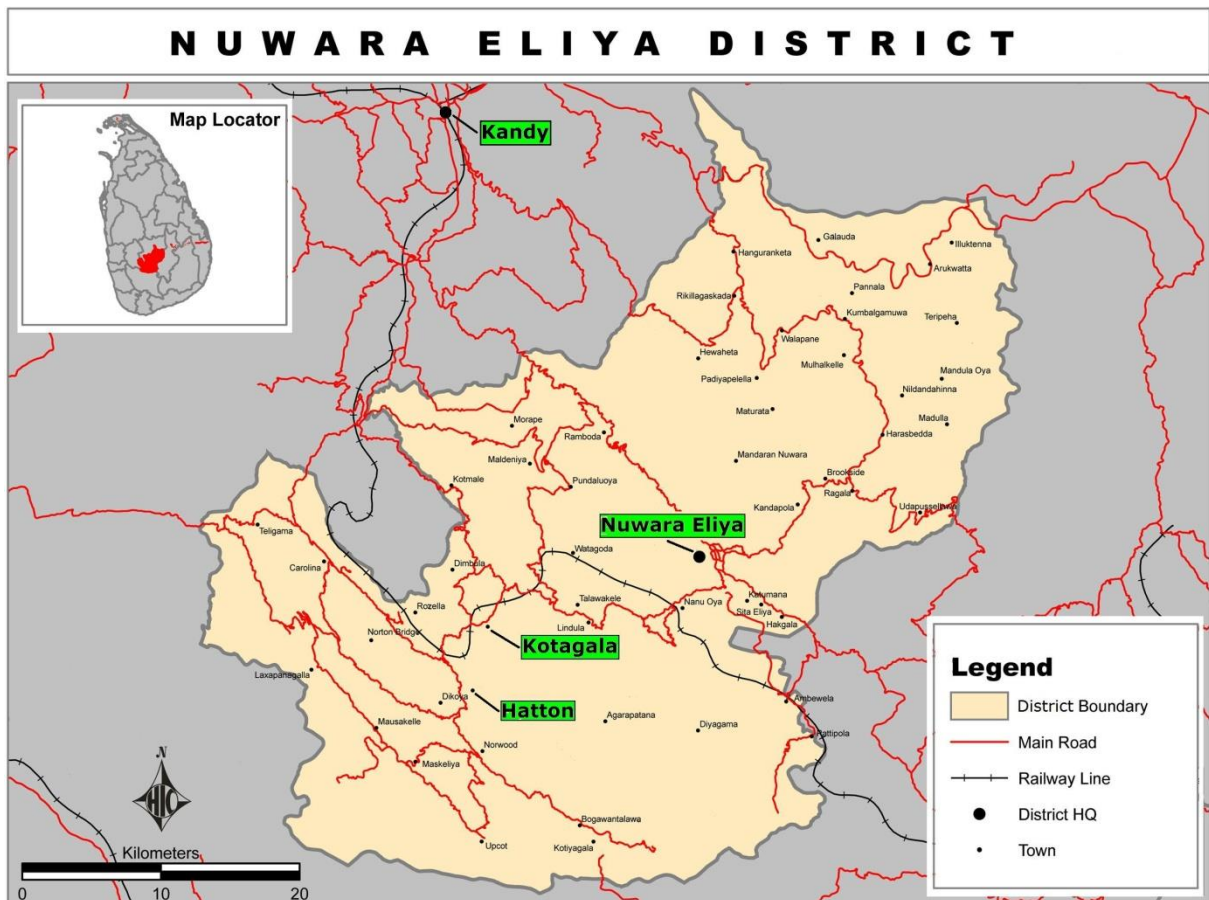
Image 2 Location Nuwara Eliya District[ii]

Image 3 Map of Nuwara Eliya District[iii]

Foreword

After two-and-a-half months of fieldwork between the fresh green tea leaves and two months of struggling with the data we present you our findings. Despite all the theory we learned, we did not consider ourselves as real anthropologists. Now that we have the experience of doing fieldwork, we consider ourselves as more mature anthropologists. Now we finally know what a real anthropologist actually does.

This 'rite de passage' could not have taken place without the support of some very important persons. In the first place we want to thank Rani Singarajah of the organization SWEAT in Hatton. Without her our fieldwork would have been impossible. Next to the fact that she gave us a temporary home, she also took care of the translation, brought us to our informants and provided us a lot of background information. This strong woman gave us access to our research population.

Furthermore we are also very thankful for the kind collaboration of all our informants and the management of the Shannon estate in Sri Lanka.

Finally we want to thank Nandu Radhakrishna Menon for his support and feedback during the whole research project. He gave us the freedom to develop our own writing style and way of researching. Without all these people this thesis could not be presented to the reader as it is now.

Image 4 Shannon Estate (Own Archive 2013)

1. Introduction

By J.M. Saat & L.A. Wouters

"Where are you from? Where are you going*?"…* everybody asked us. But were this not the questions we wanted to ask them? People confronted us with our own identity, while our goal was to find out more about their identity.

"A passionate debate is on among the 'Indian Tamils' in Sri Lanka about the need for the community to assert its separate identity and to achieve for itself a respectable place as an integral part of Sri Lankan society." (Suryanarayan 2001). The discussion about ethnic identity among Indian Tamils is a hot topic. The Sri Lankan government registers this community as Indian Tamil. But what do they think about this name themselves? We had many discussions about this during our fieldwork. They do not like the word Indian Tamil. Most people argue that plantation community is a better name for their community. Everybody we spoke to is agreeing with this plantation community name. Because we are doing research among this community and want to hear the stories from people of the community themselves, we decided to mention them as plantation community and not as Indian Tamil. Because we are looking through their eyes, we decided it is better to mention them in the same way as they mention themselves. However in the existing literature they are often called Indian Tamils. Therefore we will sometimes also refer to this name. When we use the word Indian Tamil we refer to the same group. The discussion about their name, ethnic identity and their place in the Sri Lankan society is still going on. In our research we want go deeper on the discussion of '*How does ethnic identity formation of the plantation community on Shannon estate in Sri Lanka take place?'* The focus will be on ethnic identity formation through the eyes of the plantation community. The aim of our research is to find out how ethnic identity is formed within the plantation community. We want to find out which social powers are influencing ethnic identity formation. We divided the research in two parts. One of us focused on the insider's perspective (emic) on ethnic identity and the other on the outsider's perspective (etic) on ethnic identity. These etic and emic perspectives will be explained later. We asked the same group of people about both perspectives. The etic and emic perspectives are researched using two sub-questions:

- What are emic perceptions on ethnic identity formation of the plantation community as seen from perspectives of members of the plantation community?

- What are etic perceptions on ethnic identity formation of the plantation community as seen from perspectives of members of the plantation community and how do people react to the perspectives of outsiders?

"...to grasp what a particular ethnic identity is about, the anthropologist must attend to the experiences through which it is formed..." (Vermeulen and Govers 1994:14). Experiencing is one of the most important skills of an anthropologist Therefore we thought there is a role for us in researching ethnic identity formation. There is a lot of discussion about this concept.

During our fieldwork we wanted to show the complexity of ethnic identity formation in the field. Ethnic identity is not a static concept. Ethnic communities are imagined (Vermeulen and Govers 1994:3). "Some take as criterion the notion of, or the belief in, a shared culture; others consider an ideology of common descent, substance and/or history as the main differentiating characteristics" (Vermeulen and Govers 1994:3). This leaves a lot of space for interpretation and discussion for both insiders and outsiders. For us, as anthropologists, a fascinating topic.

We do not invent identity ourselves, we can only develop it by acting in the world and interacting with others (Vermeulen and Govers 1994:14). Outsiders have influence on ethnic identity formation of a particular group through the views they have about that particular group. At the same time insiders have a view on what their ethnic identity involves. We will focus on how perceptions from outsiders and insiders together form ethnic identity. Therefore we will look at emic and etic perceptions and how they intertwine.

We carried out our research among the plantation community of Shannon Estate in the Nuwara Eliya District of the Central Province in Sri Lanka. We executed our research from 31 January till 15 April 2013. We started our research from an organisation called Society for Welfare Educational and Awareness Training (SWEAT). This organisation focuses on development activities in the form of trainings and projects to build up self-reliance and self-confidence of the plantation communities.

Our research is relevant in two ways. In the first place it has a scientific relevance. We will expand existing theories about identity and ethnicity. We will add a broader empirical support to existing theories with our research results. We will also integrate the theories concerning etic and emic to the theories regarding ethnicity and identity. Our research will thus mainly be a complementation of existing literature. There is not so much information about these theories, certainly not about our case. "The plantation sector or the estates as

generally called used to be a popular area for the local and foreign researchers, until peace and conflict took the front seat" (Mohammed Mahuruf, postal communication 01-09-2012). From then research was more focused on the conflict zones, and on the actors in the conflict. The Indian Tamils were a little 'forgotten'.

Secondly, our research has a practical relevance. Organisations, like SWEAT and Home for Human Rights, can use our information to create awareness about the situation of the plantation sector community in Sri Lanka, but also in the rest of the world. Many people from organisations argued that there is not enough knowledge and literature about the plantation sector community. They hope they will get more support for the plantation community from outsiders, once they know about the situation.

Our research is also useful because identity changes over time and in the last few years many changes took place. Therefore it was useful to research the current situation.

Our research is qualitative in nature. This made it possible to study this sensitive subject. We will mainly focus on description and comparing. We will describe how ethnic identity formation takes place among the plantation community. First we will describe how ethnic identity formation takes place regarding emic perceptions and subsequently we will describe how ethnic identity formation takes place regarding etic perceptions. Our research will also be comparative. We will compare the etic and emic perspectives and then describe how perspectives intertwine, and how this relates to ethnic identity formation.

For our research we interviewed fifty informants. In this thesis the names of our informants are fictive, because some information is sensitive and can have negative consequences for our informants. One informant told us after telling a lot about the Sinhalese and Tamil problem: "There is one program on TV called Minnal (Tamil TV) they are discussing Tamil problems. When people there told the truth they were shot. Don't tell I told this to you. I don't want to be shot" (Sarasvati, L.A.Wouters/J.M.Saat, 21-02-2013).

<u>Methods and techniques</u>

The data for this thesis were gathered over two-and-a-half month of fieldwork. To collect the data in the field we used different methods and techniques. The most important methods for us are narratives, hanging out, participant observation and interviews. The techniques we used to collect data are self-reflection, photos, jot notes and field notes, diary and logbook.

To construct the ideas of etic and emic viewpoints, we used narratives. Narratives are not the stories themselves but rather the telling of the stories. Every individual has his own

narrative and has his own experiences. You can argue that social life is storied. We did not research an objective truth, because every story or experience of a person is a subjective narrative and therefore a subjective truth. Every person has his own definition of identity or identifies him- or herself with different identities.

Participant observation gave deeper insight for us in local daily life and reduced the distance between us and the research population. Identity is a sensitive issue for the people. We could not just ask anything we wanted to. We did not want to create distance between our research population and us or create a notion of distrust among the people. We wanted to avoid the risk that people gave us socially acceptable answers. When our population trusted us and we trusted the population, people continued with daily life. People had to get used to us so we could execute our research more freely because at first people did not behave like they would normally do when we were around. During participant observation and being there, we got a better understanding of their culture and could give meaning to specific customs, habits, norms and values. By giving meanings to things, we could observe better. And when we understood the meanings of specific things, we could also participate better because we know better how things work within a culture.

We also used different kinds of interviews. We had conversations with our population during our whole fieldwork. Conversations are unstructured and we had no or little control on it but this gave space to the people to tell their own stories and showed what is important to them. We held interviews from open to semi-structured. Open interviews gave us more stories; semi-structured interviews gave us more specific information about unclear topics. Because there is a big debate going on regarding our subject, we discussed this debate in focus groups. Here we could see the debate going on in real life between people. We got to know how people argue about their viewpoint. We also made use of mind mapping. This made people think about connotations with 'I am....' (See attachment 1). This led to interesting information about what is important for people regarding ethnic identity formation.

One of the most important techniques was to remember was that we, ourselves, are the measuring instrument. Therefore it is important to reflect on the influence we had on the field, but also the influence of our own personal background on our observations and interpretations in the field. Our personal background consists of appearances, norms and values, prejudices, gender etc. We reflected on these things every day. This helped us approaching our subjectivity and to strife for as much objectivity as possible.

Structure

Our theoretical framework discusses how etic and emic perceptions are related to ethnic identity. It is important to start with the main discussion of identity by explaining and defining the concept of identity within the anthropology. Our focus will be on ethnic identity; therefore we will explain ethnicity and combine the two concepts in ´ethnic identity´. We will discuss three different approaches in describing ethnic identity. In the second paragraph we will discuss etic and emic perspectives. We will argue what we mean by those concepts and how we will use them in our research. In the context chapter we will connect the theoretical framework with the situation of the plantation community in Sri Lanka. In this chapter we will describe the position of the plantation community in Sri Lankan society, now and in the past.

After discussing the existing theories, the chapters four, five and six will cover the empirical part of our research. Chapter 4 will elaborate emic or insider's perspective on ethnic identity formation of the plantation community. In this chapter important aspects of ethnic identity formation will be highlighted and this chapter will also discuss how these aspects are reflected in daily life. How do plantation community people see themselves? What are important aspects for them in life and how do these aspects influence their ethnic identity formation?

Subsequently chapter 5 will elaborate etic or outsider's perspective on ethnic identity formation of the plantation community. The perceived outsider's perspectives on ethnic identity of plantation community will be discussed. What are the existing etic perspectives according to the plantation community itself? What do the plantation community people think outsiders think about them? There will also be discussed how the plantation community reacts to outsider´s perspectives. How do the etic perspectives of outsiders on ethnic identity influence the process of ethnic identity formation?

Finally we will bring the etic and emic perceptions on ethnic identity of the plantation community together. In the conclusion we will explain the complexity regarding the ethnic identity formation process. We try to give an answer to the question of how ethnic identity formation of the plantation community on Shannon estate in Sri Lanka takes place.

Image 5 Plantation community during Thirivizha (Own archive 2013)

2. Theoretical Framework

By J.M. Saat & L.A. Wouters

This theoretical framework deals with concepts to scientifically substantiate our research. Our research stems from a major debate within anthropology, namely the debates about identity and ethnicity and the combination of these two to ethnic identity. In our theoretical framework we will give further justification to these subjects. Different anthropologists have different views about ethnicity and identity. Within these subjects we will clarify a few important concepts. Finally we will mention which approaches we used in the field.

Identity

Identity is a powerful organizing presence in social life today (Leve 2011). This can be seen in the amount of energy individuals expend in claiming, cultivating and expressing identity, or bemoaning the lack of identity. There is also a lot of attention devoted to identity by institutions that profess to address or are said to reflect popular interests and issues (Leve 2011).

Lauren Leve (2011: 1) states that "it is clear that being, in the sense of belonging—to ethnic, national, religious, racial, indigenous, sexual, or any of a range of otherwise affectively charged, socially recognizable corporate groups—is among the most compelling of contemporary concerns." Identity however is not a stable and fixed concept. According to Baumann "all identities are identifications, all identifications are dialogical" (Eriksen 1994: 93). You can have different identifications with a particular identity, and identifications are formed in dialogue with 'others'. In other words, identity is relational and situational. The relational character of identity means that identity is constructed in contact with 'others'. Identity gives structure to the relationships between the groups (Van Gaalen 1998: 4). Eriksen (1994) argues that "group identities must always be defined in relation to what they are not – in other words, in relation to non-members of the group".

Identity is also situational. In different situations, different aspects of identity can be emphasized. Identity is dependent on time and place. It can be influenced by historical, political and economical situations. It does not always play a role in the same form and to the same extent in the lives of individuals and communities (Van Gaalen 1998: 4). Because identity changes with time and context, it is essential to take a process approach to understanding the construct (Phinney and Ong 2007: 273-274). This means that we will look at the process of identity formation, in different contexts.

Identity can be divided in personal identity and group identity. "A social identity is one kind of answer to the question 'Who am I'? that is based on membership in a social group or category, together with its evaluative and affective connotations" (Henri Tajfel 1981: 255). The basic element of group identity is, according to Ashmore et al (2004), self-categorization. This means identifying oneself as a member of a particular social grouping (Phinney and Ong 2007: 273-274). This means that our research had to start with verifying whether the individuals in fact self-identify as members of a particular group, in our case, the 'plantation community'.

According to Ton Robben (2012) an individual has a collection of identities with personal identity at its centre. It is possible to build a personal identity out of several social group identities. Different individuals produce a shared culture and within this culture there is room for different individual creativity based on the economic, symbolic and political resources that are available (Van Meijl 2008: 173). So although there is a shared culture, people have their own personal identities. It is possible to have different personal identities within a culture, a shared, overarching identity. Not everyone who belongs to a particular group identity has the same personal identity. One person can attach different value to a particular group identity then someone else. In our case it is also interesting to see how important ethnic group identity is in the formation of personal identity.

At the same time individuals can also have different identifications with the same identity. In our case all members of the plantation community have different identifications with the plantation community identity. With all these different personal identifications we will say something about the overarching plantation community identity.

From the foregoing piece, it should be clear that there is a close but variable relationship between social processes and personal identities (Eriksen 1994: 70).

Ethnicity

We chose to focus on ethnic identity in our research. Therefore we first need to explain the concept of ethnicity, because ethnic identity means the use of ethnicity to define identity. Just like identity, ethnicity is relational. Eriksen (1994) states that ethnicity refers to aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others as being culturally distinctive (Eriksen 1994:5).

There are three different approaches in defining ethnic identity. There are the primordial, the constructivist and the instrumentalist approach. The primordialist position

considers identity as a communal bond given by nature, something that is not changeable (Jolle Demmers 2012). Primordialists assume ethnic group identity is fixed, based on kinship, blood, race, language, religion, social practices and culture. They see ethnicity as a personal property acquired by birth; it is not something you choose. Primordialist state that ethnic bond comes before social interaction, meaning that primordial bonds do not have social sources/origins (Demmers 2012).

An opposite approach is the constructivist approach. Constructivists argue that an ethnic group is an imagined, constructed community, created through social interaction. Ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification, and these change over time, individuals can cross ethnic boundaries and change ethnic identity (Demmers 2012). Frederik Barth changed his point of view slightly from primordialism to constructivism. Barth (1969) argued that primordialism does not really make sense because 'cultural stuff' very often shows as much overlap with neighbouring groups as it shows variety with the boundaries. There is thus not such a thing as an objective distinction between one ethnic group and the other. Gerd Baumann (cited in Eriksen 1994:63) agrees with Barth. He said: "What makes ethnic identity 'ethnic' is to be sought in the social processes of maintaining boundaries that people themselves recognize as ethnic".

The idea of Barth was that membership of an ethnic group is not based on whether someone meets the right, objective criteria. Rather it is an active, subjective process, in which one places oneself in relation to others. Identification with the ethnic group makes that this categorization is socially effective and structures interaction (van Gaalen 1998:3). Barth considered a shared culture as a result of ethnic organization rather than something given. From many aspects, those characteristics considered relevant are chosen as a measure to look at and categorize themselves and others (Van Gaalen 1998:4). The last point Barth made is that the critical feature of ethnic groups is the characteristic of self-ascription and ascription by others (Vermeulen en Govers 1994: 1). Ethnic identity is thus not only produced by your own idea about your ethnic identity but also ascribed and imposed on individuals and groups by others. Nowadays constructivism is the common approach in the academic world to approach ethnicity. However, in everyday experience, people may actually feel their identity is primordial.

A third approach is instrumentalism. Instrumentalists understand ethnicity as an instrument to pursue own interests (Van Gaalen 1998: 4). Cohen defines ethnicity "simply as a particular form of informal political organisation where cultural boundaries are invoked so that the group's resources or 'symbolic capital' can be secured" (cited in Eriksen 1994:63).

A. Cohen argued that ethnicity "arises entirely from contemporary social conditions" (cited in Eriksen 1994:64). Instrumentalists argue that ethnicity can be used to mobilize and manipulate to achieve certain goals.

In our research we will consider all three approaches. As academics, we see ethnic identity as fluid and changeable, so a constructivist approach. We are aware that ethnic identity is used in the situation of conflict to pursue own interests, and so we will consider the instrumentalist approach. And we also know that for local people ethnic identity may not be as fluid and changeable, so it is also important to consider primordialism. In people's experience ethnic identity may be something that you cannot choose. They may see it as impossible to change their ethnicity.

The constructivist and instrumentalist approach both assume something like a free will to choose ethnicity. But that the basis of ethnicity is subjective does not mean that it is mainly a matter of free choice (Van Gaalen 1998:8). Ethnic identity is the result of a process in which people classify and identify themselves with an ethnic category and are classified by other people. The first part is related to the individual and the second part is related to structural frames that are imposed by society to the ethnic classification (Van Gaalen 1998:8).

According to Eriksen (1994:5) ethnicity has also something to do with the classification of people and group relationships. Classification involves power relations. "Ethnic classifications are also social and cultural products related to the requirements of the classifiers" (Eriksen 1994: 72). Classifiers decide who belongs to which category. "...There is a close relationship between identities and external circumstances, including pressure and often coercion from powerful groups which are socially dominant" (Eriksen 1994: 73). "Systems of social classification and principles of inclusion and exclusion always create order, but the kind of order created is related to aspects of the wider social system, including relations of power and possibilities of social mobility"(Eriksen 1994: 73).

Ethnic identity

As said earlier, ethnic identity means the use of ethnicity to define and form one's identity. Also ethnic identity is relational and situational. Frederik Barth mentioned the variability of social importance of particular identities. The idea of Barth was further explored in the direction of ethnic identity by Don Handelman (cited in Eriksen 1994:49). He constructed a typology of degrees of ethnic incorporation. Handelman distinguished four categories: ethnic category, ethnic network, ethnic association and ethnic community (cited in Eriksen 1994: 49-50).

The ethnic category is the least incorporated form of ethnicity. It is constituted through the consistent application of mutually exclusive identity labels (Eriksen 1994: 49). Ethnic category membership teaches the individual appropriate behaviour vis-à-vis others. It also passes on knowledge about his or her (imputed) origins (Eriksen 1994:49). The second level of ethnic incorporation is the ethnic network. This concept suggests that people will regularly interact with one another in terms of an ethnic membership. It creates enduring interpersonal ties between members of the same category and can also serve to organize contacts between strangers (Eriksen 1994:50). You can speak of an ethnic association when members of an ethnic category or ethnic network feel that they have shared interests, and develop an organizational apparatus to express them (Eriksen 1994:50). An ethnic community is the highest degree of ethnic incorporation. This kind of collectivity has, in addition to ethnic networks and shared political organization, a territory with more or less physical boundaries (Eriksen 1994:50). We will take the four categories into account in our research. We will try to find out how the plantation community define themselves regarding these levels.

Ethnic identity consists of several components. We will mention here the different components that influence the formation of ethnic identities. We will discuss commitment and attachment, exploration, behavioural involvement, evaluation and ethnic values and beliefs. According to Ashmore et al (cited in Phinney and Ong 2007: 273-274) "a commitment, or sense of belonging, is perhaps the most important component of ethnic identity". With commitment he refers to a strong attachment and a personal investment in a group. The strength of commitment is however, not necessarily related to the content of the identity (Phinney and Ong 2007: 273-274). The individual does not necessarily have to agree with specific attitudes or worldviews held by the group (Phinney and Ong 2007: 273-274). Commitment may be a result from identifications with one's parents or other role models that have not been fully internalized by the individual (Phinney and Ong 2007: 273-274). If a commitment is the result of these identifications, it is called a foreclosed commitment. People who have a foreclosed commitment usually do not have a clear understanding of the meaning and implications of their commitment.

A second component of ethnic identity formation is exploration. Phinney and Ong (2007: 273-274) define exploration as seeking information and experiences relevant to one's ethnicity. This can involve reading, talking to people, learning cultural practices and attending cultural events (Phinney and Ong 2007: 273-274).

Exploration provides a more stable commitment that is less subject to change (Phinney and Ong 2007: 273-274). After exploration people have a clearer understanding what their commitment to a specific ethnic identity means.

Sometimes ethnic behaviour is regarded as the third component of ethnic identity. Examples of ethnic behaviour are speaking a language and eating a particular kind of food (Phinney and Ong 2007: 273-274). There was however some resistance to this conception. Opponents argued that ethnic identity is an internal structure that can exist without behaviour (Phinney and Ong 2007). According to them ethnic behaviour does not form identity, but can express identity (Phinney and Ong 2007: 273-274). We will use the last viewpoint in our research. This means that we will not look at the influence of ethnic behaviour on identity formation. But we will consider ethnic behaviour as an expression. We will look at how, and how often ethnicity is expressed. We hope we can draw a conclusion about the role of ethnicity in daily life and daily behaviour.

Another component of ethnic identity formation is evaluation of identity. It is especially important for minority groups to have positive attitudes about one's group because they are often subject to discrimination (Phinney and Ong 2007: 273-274). For a specific ethnic group to continue to exist these positive attitudes are necessary. Most minority groups have sometimes to deal with negative feelings as a result of discrimination. Sometimes this even means that some members have the desire to belong to the dominant group (Phinney and Ong 2007: 273-274).

Other components of ethnic identity are values and beliefs. "Values are important indicators to one's closeness to the group" (Phinney and Ong 2007: 273-274). There is however within a group not always consensus on what values and beliefs are typical for a specific ethnic group.

In our research we will consider all components ethnic identity formation mentioned.

Etic and Emic ascription

You can argue that ethnic identity can be formed and viewed through the way people define themselves and the way people are defined by others. We will mention here the etic and emic points of view. Etic and emic ascription are two different ways to approach ethnic identity. You can equate emic and etic with the insider versus outsider point of view (Headland 1990: 51).

"Emic refers to the concept of 'insider perspective' that is having personal experience of a culture or society. Emic as a concept means that it is named by the native participants in a culture" (Headland 1990: 29). Emic constructs are accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the native members of the culture whose beliefs and behaviours are being studies (Headland 1990: 130). "The emic viewpoint results from studying behaviour as from inside the system" (Headland 1990: 85). In short, the emic point of view is how a particular culture or society sees itself through its own eyes. This is the view that people have from inside a particular culture or society.

Etic refers to the idea of "outsider perspective, which is the perspective of a person who has not had a personal or 'lived' experience of a particular culture or society" (Young 2005: 125). The etic viewpoint studies behaviour as from the outside of a particular system (Headland 1990: 84). Etic descriptions or analyses are alien with the criteria external to the system (Headland 1990: 85). "Etic denotes an approach by an outsider to an inside system, in which the outsider brings his own structure, his own emics, and partly superimposes his observations on the inside view, interpreting the inside in reference to his outside starting point" (Headland 1990: 49). Summarized, the etic point of view is how a particular culture or society is seen through the eyes of people outside that culture or society.

In our research we will use both perceptions of etic and emic to consider different views of how people of the plantation community in Central Sri Lanka identify their ethnic identity. Etic and emic can be seen as two different approaches of how ethnic identity can be formed. "Emic and etic refer respectively to the situation of one's self within or without a group, experience and/or community. It also involves an interaction between this self-definition and how others perceive one's self" (Young 2005: 125).

We will use the emic point of view to receive more information about how people from the plantation community see themselves and how they define their own 'ethnic' identity. We will research which aspects of ethnic identity are important for them and how they identify themselves within different situations and contexts.

We will also consider the etic point of view. In this case we will not consider the outsiders perspective, like perspectives of the government and other ethnic groups, from their point of view, but we will look at how the plantation community people themselves think they are seen by people from outside their community or society. In our case it is not the view from 'the outsiders' directly, but how insiders themselves think they are seen by 'outsiders'. How do the plantation community people experience these etic points of view? We will research

how the plantation community thinks that people from outside their community define their ethnic identity. We also want to know if the plantation community uses these 'etic' views from outside to construct ethnic identity or if they use these 'etic' views on their own emic view of ethnic identity.

In our research we will also consider the intertwining of etic and emic perspectives. Emic perspectives could be influenced by what outsiders think. In the same way etic perspectives can be influenced by what insiders say about themselves. "The label one uses is influenced to some extent by the context and by how one is seen by others. People cannot easily use labels that are at variance with their appearance." (Phinney and Ong 2007: 273-274).

Image 6 Weighing tealeaf GT Division (Own archive 2013)

3. Context

By J.M. Saat & L.A. Wouters

Sri Lanka is an island nation located off India´s southeast coast and has a population of 21,481,334 (CIA 2012). The Sri Lankan population is differentiated across ethnic, religious and linguistic lines. If you look at the different ethnic groups, you can make a distinction between Sinhalese (73.8 per cent of the population), Muslims or Sri Lankan Moors (7.2 per cent), Sri Lankan Tamil (3.9 per cent) and Indian Tamil (4.6 per cent) (CIA 2012). There is also a variety of languages namely Sinhala, Tamil and English. Sri Lankan people are also divided on the basis of religion. Most people (69.1 per cent of the population) are Buddhist, 7.6 per cent of the population is Muslim, 7.1 per cent of the population is Hindu and 6.2 per cent is Christian (CIA 2012). Sinhalese are mainly Buddhist. Tamils are mainly Hindu[2].

The focus in our research is on the plantation community. Most people of the plantation community were brought to Sri Lanka from southern India in the 19th and early 20th centuries by the British who needed a cheap supply of labour for the plantations (UNHCR 2003). Therefore the Sri Lankan government still defines the community as Indian Tamil. Indian refers to the Indian origin of these people. The focus will be on the rural area of the Nuwara Eliya district and more specific the tea plantation of Shannon Estate in Hatton. Shannon Estate consists of 205 hectares tea plants spread over a green hilly area (SWEAT 2001). The labourers live together with their families within the boundaries of the estate. They live in line-rooms which were created by the British colonialists.

Image 7 Line rooms GT Division – Lake Line (Own archive 2013)

[2]Actually Muslims also speak Tamil and could in that sense belong to the group of Tamils. But usually they are not included in this Tamil group. Their religious identity seems to be more important.

The houses are owned by the estate. The management provides facilities like water, development trainings, transportation to hospitals and firewood, which are free. You can use the houses and facilities as long as you live on the estate.

The female labourers are mainly responsible for plucking the tealeaves. Men are responsible for maintaining and cleaning the fields. The estate consists of three divisions, namely Shannon Division, Glenataffe Division(GT) and Kurungumalai Division (KM). Shannon estate counts a population of 1807 people. Shannon Division counts 788 people, GT Division 644 people and KM division 375 people (SWEAT 2001). Not everybody living on the estate is actually working for the estate. Some went working outside the estate but are still living on the estate. Also children and pensioned people still live on the estate. The estate is owned by a private company. The direct leadership of the estate comes down to the management. The superintendent also lives on the estate, but in his own luxurious bungalow.

"The Indian Tamils do share the common bonds of the Hindu religion and the Tamil language with the Sri Lankan Tamils" (Suryanarayan 2001). According to Suryanarayan (2001) they still consider themselves as a separate ethnic group. The explanation has to be sought in their geographical location, political aspirations, social divisions and conflicting interests (Suryanarayan 2001). But ethnic identification is also based on language, religion, ancestral territory, memories of a unique history and other cultural attributes (Kearney 1978). Ethnic identifications in Sri Lanka are very strong. According to Kearney (1978) every permanent inhabitant belongs to one and only one of the ethnic compartments into which the population is divided. Sri Lanka experienced a war for 24 years. "Ethnic identity becomes crucially important at the moment it is perceived as being under threat" (Eriksen 1994: 92). The Sri Lankan war sharpened the focus on ethnic identifications.

Since Sri Lanka's independence in 1948, Sri Lanka has experienced tensions and conflicts across ethnic lines. The Sinhalese ethnic group was the largest group in Sri Lanka and therefore much of the power was placed in hands of Sinhalese government (Insight on Conflict: 03-01-13). The new constitution with new policies created greater differences between Sinhalese and Tamils. These new policies of the dominant Sinhalese government also created feelings of discrimination and inequality among the Tamils. Finally these tensions created violent riots between the two groups which later escalated to civil war in 1983. The Tamils were represented by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). They

started to fight against the government. In 2009 the government declared its victory and ended the war after twenty-four years (Insight on Conflict 03-01-13).

"In the ethnic conflict, the interests and aspirations of smaller groups, such as Indian Tamils and Muslims, are generally ignored" (Suryanarayan 2001). According to Suryanarayan (2001) the two conflicting sides of Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils, for their own reasons, clubbed together all Tamil-speaking people as one homogeneous entity. The Sinhalese government did this in order to justify their privileged position (Suryanarayan 2001). The Sri Lankan government argues that the Tamil minority enjoyed a privileged position under British rule. They argued that the achievement-oriented Tamils dominated the field of education and the bureaucracy, and that they had considerable influence in the country's economic life. The government said that it was only trying to redress the relative deprivation of the majority group. The Indian Tamils, however, point out that this reality was applicable only to Sri Lankan Tamils. The Sri Lanka Tamils had better positions and higher functions in society. But the Indian Tamils are concerned about the fact that they are after 53 years of independence at the bottom of the ladder in every sector of life (Suryanarayan 2001). Indian Tamils felt frustrated about the fact that they were called 'Tamil' which refers to a homogenous Tamil group in which they were seen as dominant. But in reality they were at the bottom of society but everybody ignored these unsatisfied feelings of Indian Tamils (Suryanarayan 2001). There are now several organisations that support the plantation community. One of these organisations is the organization Society for Welfare Educational and Awareness Training (SWEAT) in Hatton. This is a non - profitable, non-politico-ethnic-religious organization focusing its developmental activities in community developments of disadvantaged Plantation Communities. This organization gives Indian Tamils hope for a better future.

Also the Sri Lankan Tamils clubbed all Tamil speakers together. This was in order to mobilise international support, especially Indian support (UNCHR 2003). The leaders of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), a party that resisted the reforms of the government, and various militant organisations portrayed Sri Lanka's Tamil population as a homogenous group. TULF expected that when Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils were seen as one group, they would be more powerful in the conflict (UNCHR 2003). Also because they supposed that Indian Tamils are connected with India, they expected support from India as well (UNCHR 2003).

Through this instrumentalist approach ethnicity can be understood as an instrument to pursue own interest. Although the attempts of the TULF to create one group, "the Indian Tamils have not participated in the Sri Lankan Tamil campaign for independence, however, violence between the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sinhalese has occasionally spilled over to impact the Estate Tamils." (UNCHR 2003).

"With the rise of militancy among Sri Lankan Tamils, the dominant Sinhalese view was, and still is, that the Sri Lankan Tamils are an integral part of the Sri Lankan nation. However, the Indian Tamils were told that they were not Sri Lankans; they should be repatriated to India as Indian citizens, at a time when they were striving to become an integral part of the country" (Suryanarayan 2001). In 1964 the Indo-Ceylon agreement or Sirima Shastri Pact was signed between the government of Sri Lanka and the government of India. They decided that of all the persons of Indian origin 300.000 persons would be granted Sri Lankan citizenship and 525,000 persons would be granted Indian citizenship and repatriated to India. In 1974 again a group of Indian Tamils were repatriated to India (Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1987). Jenapriyan (L.A.Wouters/J.M.Saat, 13-03-2013) argued that because of this history people still have a certain fear. This act is still not resolved he explains. "…here we are afraid of telling what we are because we are afraid that we will be taken back to India. Still this fear is there. Indian Tamils on the estate fear that town people will send them back. Sinhalese do not like us to live here. Sinhalese will always see us as separate." (Vany, L.A.Wouters/J.M.Saat, 01-03-2013).

During the time of repatriation Indian Tamils were aliens in Sri Lanka and also unwelcome in India. "Sri Lankans called them Indians and Indians call them Sri Lankans." (Daniel 1996:109).

However, "in 2003, the Indian Tamils have been granted Sri Lankan citizenship. But most experts believe that much more has to be done for the economic and social upliftment of the community, which has significant lower income and literacy levels than the national average"(UNHCR 2003). "While Indian Tamils have been granted citizenship, remedial measures might be necessary to compensate for the historical exclusion faced by them" (UNHCR 2003). "The country's population is most often differentiated, through both official ascription and collective self-identification along ethnic or communal lines" (Sriskandarajah 2005: 344). Officially all groups are registered as Sri Lankan citizens; however there are different identifications along ethnic lines. An identity debate is also among Indian Tamils, which is "about the need for the community to assert its separate identity and to achieve for itself a respectable place as an integral part of Sri Lankan society" (Suryanarayan 2001).

Indian Tamil plantation communities today are all called Sri Lankan citizens. Anyway they are still identified as Indian Tamil. But everybody has a different opinion about this. (Rajani, postal communication 15-12-2012). This discussion will be covered in our research. Different etic and emic perceptions on ethnic identity can feed the discussion.

Image 8 Parade during Thirivizha festival (Own archive 2013)

4. Who am I?

By J.M. Saat

The red public bus stops. The bus is completely packed with people who go to work and children who go to school. I jump out of the bus, and the high hills full of fresh green tea plants of which the tea leaves are still humid from the morning dew, are forming natural boundaries around me. Boundaries of who or what? A new day in the field has started. Without opening a gate, I can cross these natural boundaries. Within the boundaries the day has also started. On this tea plantation, women, with plastic skirts tied with a rope around their waist and their heads wrapped with a cloth on which they carry big bags, are entering the field to pluck the tea leaf. Men in old trousers and shirts, which are covered with mud, are cleaning the field with hoes and sickles. Children in white uniforms are walking down the hills to start their day at the school that is located on the estate. Boys are walking in white trousers and white shirts with a blue tie and girls in white dresses and a blue tie. Probably some parents washed the uniforms together with the tie because some uniforms which were meant to be white, have a violet glow. The sense of white uniforms can be seen as unclear on the estate, because of the muddy roads on the estate all uniforms are covered with brown spots. All these people are living and working on the estate. But how would they describe their community within the natural boundaries? One boy told me that "people on the estate are going to their work, getting their salary and spending their salary. They are not thinking about their community." (Jayaraman, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 05-03-13). But during conversations people were talking about their community:

"We would like to identify as Indian Tamil because earlier generations came from India. Our language is based on the Tamil language from India. We do not know any people in India. But generations ago we came from India. Therefore I still like to be called Indian Tamil." (Piranavan, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 08-03-13)

"But I don't like to be called Indian Tamil because I am born in Sri Lanka and also my father is born in Sri Lanka. I would prefer to be called Sri Lankan Tamil. There are some differences with Sri Lankan Tamils from North and East." (Anthavan, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 01-03-13).

"I do not feel the same as Sri Lankan Tamils form North and East, I am an estate Tamil." (T. Yagapriya, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 12-03-13).

"I prefer to be identified as Tamil. Not Indian Tamil, not Sri Lankan Tamil. I want all Tamils to become one group, united." (A. Sripriya, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 08-03-13).

"I want to live in a separate community. I describe my community as plantation people and up-country people." (R. Muruhan, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 14-03-13).

"Hill-country community." (Arpana, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 15-03-13).

Walking down the improvised steps on the estate that lead back to the road where the bus stops, something became clear about this community. Describing this community that lives within the natural boundaries of tea plants is complex. There is not one word in which you can describe this community. All people from the community describe the same community in different ways, all with their own reasons. You hear Indian Tamil, Sri Lankan Tamil, Tamil, Up-country Tamil, Hill-country community, Estate Tamil etc. Although all these variations, you cannot deny that it is one group. There is no doubt about the fact that all those people are living on the tea plantation.

You can see ethnic identity however is not a stable and fixed concept within the plantation community. According to Baumann (1999) "all identities are identifications, all identifications are dialogical" (Cited in Eriksen 1994: 93). Therefore it is possible for people to have different identifications with the same community. Identifications are formed in dialogue with 'others' and is therefore situational and relational (Van Gaalen 1998: 4). Ethnic identity can differ according to time and place. It is important to see how people are committed or attached to the community, what behaviour they have like speaking a specific language or following a specific religion, and what norms and values they have. All those components are important in forming ethnic identity (Phinney and Ong 2007). Ethnic identity formation can be based on different social aspects like language, religion, ancestral territory, and memories of a unique history or other cultural attributes (Kearney 1978). Therefore different social aspects and components will be used to explain and clarify more about ethnic identity formation of the plantation community. How do plantation community people see themselves? What are important aspects for them in life and how do these aspects influence their ethnic identity formation?

<u>Religion</u>

It is ten o'clock in the morning and more and more people from the plantation are moving to one specific area on the estate. The sun is slowly coming up above the green hills so that a strong colour contrast arises between the bright blue sky and the hilly environment with fresh green tea leaf. It looks like today will be a hot day again. The sound of bells, drums, prayers and songs echoes from the speakers which are spread all over the estate. At eleven o'clock the *Thiruvizha* festival starts. People are telling that they celebrate this four-day long festival to pray to god for rain, good harvest, health and other good things people want. This day, the third day of the festival, is according to the people the most important day of the festival. Eleven people from the estate participate voluntarily in this festival because they believe that they got a sign from god to do it. The participants, five women, four men and two children are kneeling and the Hindu priest pours coconut milk and water over their heads. All people around them are screaming 'God be with us'. The participants are dancing and their faces look like they are hypnotized. A group of four priests push the participants one by one to the ground and press hooks into their backs, legs and/or mouths. The hooks are fastened with ropes on which four participants are hanging on a pole above the ground. The poles are fastened on a trailer behind a tractor and they drive around on the estate. All people on the estate are following the procession with offers like coconut, coconut milk, bananas, flour, rice, and incense to worship one of the female Hindu gods Mariamman which is the only god you can find in the little temple on the estate. Compared with bigger temples with multiple gods outside the estate, on the estate they have only a little temple with one god to which they worship for everything they want. After two or three hours, all participants need to walk over hot coals and after that the hooks are removed. You can see it like a contract between god and the human, one participant explains. They believe the human gives his body to god on the assumption that he or she gets something back from god like support in their lives or other favours. The participants of this festival argue that they do not feel pain. They believe that god comes into them and takes over their body. Those people are willing to give their whole body to god.

Image 2 Participants in *Thiruvizha* festival

That religion is important in the lives of the people from the plantation community is clear. Most of the people on the estate are Hindu and some are Christian. In term of religion the plantation community has connections with India. The roots of Hindu religion lie in India. The way of worshipping is coming from India and also the specific festivals they celebrate have their origins in India. In the first place being Hindu or Christian distinguishes the community from the majority of Buddhist people in Sri Lanka and Muslim minorities. They distinguish themselves also from other religious groups through the fact that they are taking religious rules in rituals and ceremonies not as serious as other groups in Sri Lanka do. Because of this they distinguish themselves also from other Hindu groups like the Sri Lankan Tamils from North and East Sri Lanka. Because priests, also living on the estate, are not educated well they do not know whole religious systems, but only parts of the systems.

> The way of celebration is different. Sri Lankan Tamils have a more proper way for celebrating ceremonies and rituals. Indian Tamils take ceremonies, rituals and the religious system not very serious. They are not going deep inside the systems. This is because priests go not deep into the systems because they usually are not educated well. Some parts of ceremonies they do, but they do not know everything and every system (Sariya, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 28-02-13).

Within the plantation community Christians also go to Hindu temples and Hindus also go to Church. On the estate you can only find Hindu temples and churches, but usually no Mosques and Buddhist temples. This is because most people on the estate are mainly Hindu and some are Christian and only a few and sometimes none are Buddhist or Muslims. Hinduism is coming out of India because generations ago these plantation families were brought out of India by the British colonists to work on the estates. The plantation community shares therefore a common descent. They all know that generations ago their families came from India. Therefore you can argue their roots lie in India. They also share the same history of the colonial period in which they were slaves during the British rule. Christianity was brought by the British colonialists who tried to convert people to the religion (Bala 2013).

Plantation community people have respect for other religions and are open to attend festivals and ceremonies of other religions and visit other churches, temples or mosques. It is usually not the case that they worship other gods of other religions. They usually share the food that they prepare for specific ceremonies or festivals because sharing food is seen as an important way to show respect for each other. Attending each other's marriages and funerals is also important in showing respect. Some people from the plantation community told that other groups in Sri Lanka like Sinhalese (mainly Buddhist), Christians, North and East Tamils (mainly Hindu) and Muslims are praying and worshipping only their own god. Those people only go to their own temples and mosques. Because of the mutual religious respect on the estate, harmony exists between Hindu's, Christians, Buddhists and Muslims who are living on the estate.

> I have respect for other religions and I think other people will respect my religion too. I also go to a Christian church and there I worship Jesus. And in the Hindu temple I worship Hindu gods. I am respecting god in general. They are all god (M. Ramanisha, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 15-02-13).

The roots of this religious tolerance can be related to India. Hinduism in India had necessarily to be constructed as "tolerant". In the first place India wanted to be a more nationalist state. There was a strong tendency of religious nationalism or communalism in which a common religion is imagined as the basis of group identity (Veer 1994: 22). Different communities populate the Indian state and have to be represented in the state. The Gandhian legacy in India imagines a common ethnic culture of India in terms of religious pluralism. This legal system

has to acknowledge pluralism. "The state must promote religious tolerance in a pluralist society, which it can only do by emphasizing the commonality of spiritual pursuits." (Veer 1994: 23). But on the other side when conflicts arises between groups with different ethnic or religious identities, the state is seen to represent a superior common interest to stand above the conflicting parties, so that it is able to arbitrate (Veer 1994: 23). You can argue that "the different religions in India are only refractions of one great Indian spirituality, which the state provides equally for in its system" (Veer 1994: 23). "Both radical Hindus and their opponents claim that the Indian culture is basically tolerant, because it is pluralistic." (Stewart 1994: 197). But often it has a distinctively Hindu flavor (Stewart 1994: 197). So you can argue that religious tolerance is more a necessity because different religious communities need to live together. The people within the plantation community also need to live and work together.

They have respect for each other's religion, but you cannot deny that there is maybe an overtone of Hinduism on the estate. Probably because the majority on the estate is Hindu, there are more Hindu temples than churches or mosques and most festivals celebrated on the estate are Hindu festivals. During for example the *Thiruvizha* festival, Christians, Buddhists and Muslims are attending the Hindu ceremonies and rituals and they eat the prepared food. They are only not worshipping the Hindu god and they also do not participate in the ceremonies.

You can argue that all people on the estate need to coexist because they need to live and work next to each other. You can argue that all people on the estate with different religious affiliations have mutual respect for each other. This 'necessary' commitment to religious tolerance can be seen as important aspects of the plantation community. In spite of everything, Hinduism often predominates within the plantation community.

Caste

Within the plantation community harmony or respect for each other is not only focused on religion. You can also recognize a sense of respect is focused on the caste system. Although the caste system from origin automatically means the creation of a hierarchy, the plantation community has a different view on the caste system. "We all are human beings, when we cut ourselves we all get red blood, what is the necessity of caste system?" (Chandana Murugan, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 18-02-13).

The fact that the caste system exists is clear. In Sri Lanka there are different caste systems. In the first place you have Tamil caste system and Sinhalese caste system. The people from the plantation community use the Tamil caste system which also has its origins in

India. But you can divide three different Tamil caste systems, namely the Northern Tamil (Jaffna) system which is most similar to Sinhalese caste system, Eastern province system and the Plantation (estate) system (Mahroof 2000: 41). "The caste system of the plantation Tamils occupies a different physical, economic and mental space. They are 'the Indian Tamils who work on the plantations as laborers, most of whom belong to low castes and come from the poverty-stricken parts of India." (Mahroof 2000: 41). "These workers were kept in mostly insanitary line rooms in the hill country, where the plantations were situated. The low pay and the indifferent working conditions could not induce the upper-caste persons of South India to come." (Mahroof 2000: 41). Caste-wise the plantation community belongs to a concise pyramid of mainly low castes. These low castes are describes as Pallas, Parayas and Chanas (Mahroof 2000: 41). There are differences in hierarchy between these castes, but they are all 'low' castes. The plantation community as 'low' castes separate themselves from other 'higher' castes in Sri Lanka (Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas) (Mahroof 2000: 42). The plantation community was seen as conglomerates of different (low) castes but because of the semi-industrialized and agri-business community, they were expected to create non-caste relationships (Mahroof 2000: 42) or unity within the community because they all do the same work and equality will facilitate the work and production. You can argue that the creation of non-caste relationships or unity is working, but in some cases caste is still important.

"We are not seeing differences in caste. We go to the same festivals. Only for a wedding we see caste." (Ramana, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 28-02-13). People from the plantation community do not have a unified opinion about the importance of the caste system. You can argue that the caste system is definitely there and the people from the plantation community describe themselves to be in the lowest castes. The importance of caste differs between older and younger generations. For older generations the caste system is often still important, especially for a wedding they see the castes. "It is generally agreed that caste is characterized by the obligation to marry within the group" (Dumont 1970: 109). If we go back in the time, caste is bound up with the history of the division of labor. At the top were the priests because they were seen as powerful and at the bottom you can find agricultural workers (Dumont 1970: 24). Despite this, the link between caste and profession is weak (Dumont 1970: 107), because it is possible to change profession. The distinctive mark of caste is birth (Dumont 1970: 22). People are born in a specific caste and cannot change cast during life. You cannot eat and drink in the house from someone who is higher or lower castes than you are. As told earlier it is also not allowed to marry someone from another caste. Often the older generations still follow these traditional ideas about the caste system. Some people are

also telling that talking about caste is very sensitive because they feel ashamed to tell that they are from 'low' caste. They are afraid that people are looking down on them.

But within the plantation community also a lot of people tell that the caste system is not important for them. They are moving friendly with everybody and they do not see the caste. Especially the younger generation tries more to let the caste system go, because it is not important for them anymore. Because younger generation are educated better, have more new technologies and take 'the West' as example, they tend to let the caste system go. Mixed and allowed (choose your own partner) marriages between different castes take place more and more.

Son: Caste is now less important than earlier. But it is still there, for example in temple rituals. People know themselves how they should behave in temple rituals, according to their caste.
I heard from other caste is important. I first did not know about caste. One day at school our teacher told us that we had to make a theatre piece on the caste system. All people started talking but I went to the side. People asked me why and I said: 'I don't know about the caste system'. When I came home, I asked my parents about it.
Caste is like AIDS, if it is coming you cannot cure it. It is very hard to let it disappear. Caste also make that people do not form a unity. If we all form a unity we can solve problems better. We can do the work better if we don't see differences in caste. Caste should not be important. If I marry I will not look at the caste.
Mother: We will.
Son: That is your wish, but I do not care. I think there are only two castes, namely man and woman or rich and poor.
(Vainavan and Ramani, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 04-03-13)

For some people within the plantation community the caste is still important and for other people it is not. The plantation community is not very unified about the importance of the caste system. This can be related to generation differences. The only thing you can argue is that the caste system is still there, but people are moving friendly and respectful with each other on the estate as if there are no castes. The characteristic of a non-caste community is important for identifying the plantation community. Usually the caste only shows up in

contact with the outside world but not within the plantation community. Although caste sometimes is still seen as important in marriage, you can argue that this idea is disappearing during the time, because younger generations often do not look at the caste anymore. "Because of education caste became less important. Everybody is changing. Everybody goes with each other very well. Caste is still their but not important anymore. Youth will probably forget caste." (Shivapriya, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 03-03-13).

Language

Language can also be seen as important in ethnic identity formation of the plantation community. Within the plantation community all people speak Tamil, which is also brought out of India. By speaking Tamil the plantation community separates themselves from non-Tamil speaking people in Sri Lanka. But they also separate themselves from other Tamils in the country like the Sri Lankan Tamils from North and East. The plantation community has different ways of pronunciations of their Tamil language. Next to having different way of pronunciation, they also use a lot of English words in their Tamil language probably because of the British rule in Sri Lanka in which the British colonists brought families from India to the plantation in Sri Lanka to work for them as slaves. You can argue that the plantation community can separate themselves along linguistic lines. But within the plantation community you can find interesting dynamics.

All families on the estate are Tamil speaking families. Sometimes you can find some Sinhalese families. Next to Sinhala they also speak Tamil. Conversely, not many Tamils on the estate speak Sinhala. Ethnicity in Sri Lanka can be based along linguistic lines namely Sinhala versus Tamil. On the estate there is a different dynamic. You can argue that all people who live and work on the estate speak Tamil. The main language outside the estate is overall Sinhala because of the Sinhalese majority in Sri Lanka, but there also exist Tamil speaking minorities. On the estate there is only one spoken language, namely Tamil. Important to notice is that this is especially for public interaction on the estate. You can argue that when people are at home, Sinhalese families most like talk Sinhala in their own home. Although people on the estate speak different languages at home, you can still argue that the whole plantation community can distinguish themselves from the outside world by speaking only Tamil in public interactions with also specific pronunciations of the Tamil language.

"I speak Sinhala and Tamil fluently. Generation wise I am Sinhalese, but I live on the estate. I feel like a member of Tamil community. I live among Tamils and move well with them." (Nevinka, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 01-03-13). On the estate Tamils are in the majority

and therefore non-Tamils who move to the estate need to talk Tamil if they want to communicate and coexist with the other people of the community and integrate in the plantation community of Tamil speaking people. If a Tamil from the estate moves outside the estate, he or she often needs to talk Sinhala to avoid problems. Language problems are one of the main problems for the plantation community. People from outside the estate speak often only Sinhala, like people working in shops, government offices, hospitals and also the management of the estate. Tamils from the plantation community usually cannot speak, read or understand Sinhala most of the time because they are low educated and therefore they face lots of problems when they get in contact with people from outside the estate.

> When I go to town I feel very bad because I can't speak the language. I faced problems when I was admitted in the hospital. Nurses could not understand me and I could not understand the nurses (K. Thanapriya, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 18-02-13).

> The Sinhala language is a problem. The management wanted us to fill in forms about milk and children. The forms were send by the government are written in Sinhala. People faced reading problems and couldn't fill in the forms (Vany, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 01-03-13).

It is clear that the plantation community is based on Tamil speaking people with usually a specific pronunciation of the language. People on the estate also share the same language problems when they come outside the estate. Inside the estate they do not face language problems. But outside the estate they do because of the often Sinhala only speaking majority and their own inability to speak Sinhala.

In contrast to all this, for some people other social aspects are more important in the formation of plantation community identity. This is because there are also exceptions related to the importance language. Some Sinhalese people who live outside the estate can also speak Tamil. Those people do not directly belong to the community despite they speak Tamil. But if this person for example lives or works on the estate, he or she probably belongs to the community. And the other way around you can also find exceptions of Tamil speaking people on the estate who can also speak Sinhala. They do belong to the community, but are not always facing the same problems as some other people of the community. For these exceptions other social aspects are maybe more important in forming a plantation community

identity. For example living, working and/or coming from the estate or not creates unity and can be important in forming ethnic identity of the plantation community.

<u>Work and living conditions</u>

Some people define that the community is based on work. But it is also not only work that the plantation community shares. Living and/or born on the estate are also important aspects.

> People, who work on the estate, belong to the community. People who live on the estate but work outside the estate can also belong to the plantation community. People who are born on the estate and are now living and working in town, can also belong to the community (Periyasamy, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 12-03-13).

Because of this the plantation community distinguish themselves by the fact that they are concentrated on the tea plantations in Sri Lanka. Some people call themselves plantation Tamil, Estate Tamil, Hill-country community or Up-country Tamil, which refers to the fact that they are coming from tea plantations. Important in their ethnic identity formation is that the plantation community face their own specific problems. The way people live in line-rooms and the work people do creates that they are seen as lower in the society. They need to work hard and their work is often seen as 'low' work, working conditions are sometimes bad because of the weather or insects like leeches, payments are low and prices become higher. Because of poverty, more problems arise. Parents sometimes cannot pay their children's education and clothes. People on the estate told me that alcoholism is a problem that can emerge from poverty and sometimes leads to incest and abuse problems. All facilities on the estate, like houses, firewood, water, electricity, trainings etc., are arranged by the estate management. This means that for example that a house is not their property but from the estate management. If they want to move somewhere else, they have no house to sell and therefore usually also no money to buy another house. Leaving the estate is therefore very difficult.

Although people of the plantation community have a lot of problems and live in specific circumstances, these problems and circumstances also create unity within the community.

> Here we are living in unity. If one family has a problem we all will come to help. Also with a funeral, nobody is going to work. When we know one boy passed his A-level at

school, we all collect money together to let the boy go to higher studies. (T. Yagapriya, J.M.Saat/ L.A.Wouters, 12-03-13)

Town people have a better situation, but I prefer estate people because people are taking care of each other. It is more one community (K. Vishnupriyan, J.M.Saat/L.A.Wouters, 17-02-13).

The feelings of unity can also be related to a shared history. The fact that the community has been fighting for its rights since they arrived in Sri Lanka as slaves, created a certain form of unity. People understand each other because they shared and still share the same problems. They know where everybody has been through.

Conclusion

There is no fixed description of the ethnic identity formation of the plantation community. The plantation community describe themselves in various ways like Indian Tamil, Sri Lankan Tamil, Tamil, Hill-country community, estate Tamil, plantation community and Up-country Tamil. All individuals within the community have their own reasons and own affiliations with the community. It is possible to have different personal identities within a culture, a shared, overarching ethnic identity.

Generations ago people came from India. Some people on the estate are proud of their ancestors who came from India and therefore still want to be pointed as Indian Tamil. But the people, who are living on the plantation now, are born and raised in Sri Lanka. Therefore some people want to be called Sri Lankan Tamil and not Indian Tamil. Some people who want to be called Sri Lankan Tamil want to be the same as all other Tamils in Sri Lanka and form one Tamil group with them. There are also people who want to be called only Sri Lankan Tamil, but still feel different than the other Tamils in Sri Lanka. They only do not want to be confronted with the word Indian because they are born in Sri Lanka.

Next to the discussion between being Indian Tamil or Sri Lankan Tamil, there are also people who want to name their community as Hill country community, Up-country Tamil, plantation community and estate Tamil. These names are related to their specific community that is living on the tea plantations in the high lands of Sri Lanka. They do not want to reflect on their Indian origin, but also want to be a different group within Sri Lanka, different from Sri Lankan Tamils.

Different social aspects like religion, caste system, language, work, living conditions etc. can be seen as important in the ethnic identity formation of the plantation community. The importance of each factor can differ per individual. But although every person of the plantation community has his or her own important social aspects and describes the community in different ways, they often still believe in a shared culture or community. They feel unity with the people they live with and work with. They share things like the language, idea of religious tolerance, belonging to 'low' caste, and having the same problems.

As Vermeulen and Govers (1994: 3) say that for some people common descent and a shared history are also important factors in defining ethnicity. The common descent and shared history of the plantation community have still effect on their lives right now. Social factors like religion, caste and language have their roots in India. Most people from the plantation community also share the same history. They share the same history of the colonial period in which they were slaves during the British rule. They know each other's family histories. They do not feel ashamed about their history because they share it together. They had to fight for their rights for a long time and still experience the same problems that are specific for the plantation community.

A point you can make is that there are also Sinhalese people who moved to the estate and do not share the common descent and shared history, but they probably feel connected because they share other aspects like for example work and living conditions. "A social identity is one kind of answer to the question 'Who am I?' that is based on membership in a social group or category…" (Henri Tajfel 1981: 255). The plantation community people have all different views about what important aspects are and how their ethnic identity is formed. Still you can argue that they see themselves as a united group. But next to how they see themselves, it is also important to look at how they think they are seen by the outside world. The views from outside are not always the same as the plantation community has from the inside. The outside viewpoint seen through the eyes of the plantation community people will be clarified in the next chapter.

Image 9 Shannon School (Own Archive 2013)

5. Who do others think I am and what do I do with their perspectives?

By L.A.Wouters

After a few days in the field, sitting in the bus on my way to a small village to interview a NGOs spokesperson, I observe the people surrounding us. Immediately recognizing who is from where and where they could be going. Although I had not been in the field for a long time, I already got a picture of stereotypes. A woman with a sari with glittery and golden details gets into the bus. That must be a teacher or someone from the management, I thought. She moves to some other women with a groomed appearance. Trying to catch what they are saying I hear them talking in English about the newest books they use in school. My thoughts are confirmed. Meanwhile the bus becomes crowded. Schoolchildren jump in and out, men with bags of at least twenty kilos of rice get in, and mothers try to keep their children inside the bus. Driving through the green hilly area of all the different estates, three elderly women get into the bus. Now it is so full that they have to push themselves through the crowd. Wearing saris with a thick plastic layer around their waste, the women are trying to hide their teeth. Their pottu gives away that they are probably Tamil. Rajani taps on my shoulder. "Those women over there, they are from the estate. They probably asked for their Employees Provident Fund (EPF) and spent it all. Now they have to go outside to work on other estates." I could not have missed that. All their teeth were affected with a red glow, a sign that they had been chewing beatle leaf, a very common addiction on the estates. Rajani whispers in my ear: "The problem with the EPF, the pension money, is that they get it all at once and then they spend it immediately, and do not save money for the future." Their faces expressed their everyday worries; they look exactly like the stereotype of elderly estate women.

Like Rajani and I did, all outsiders do categorize. It is even possible to categorize on the basis of appearances. People are ascribed certain identities by other people. These ascribed identities do however not always correspond to the ideas people have about themselves. People that belong to the same group categorize, but in this chapter I will mainly focus on the perspectives of outsiders on ethnic identity of the plantation community. What do the plantation community people think outsiders think about them? How do perceived outsiders' perspectives on ethnic identity influence ethnic identity formation of the plantation community? First the existing etic perspectives according to the plantation community itself will be discussed. Different groups of outsiders were distinguished by the plantation community. The differences between the groups are recognizable through different ethnic

behaviour. They speak different languages, practice other religions and wear their clothes differently. These forms of ethnic behaviour create different groups and also keep them separate because this ethnic behaviour complicates communication and integration. The different groups have different perspectives on the plantation community identity, but also many similar views.

Speaking to a boy who went to work in Colombo, it became clear that differentiating between different groups could be a sensitive topic. "I do not want to tell about a group because there have been many problems with groups. But I will stay Tamil and Hindu." So at one hand people do not like to speak about groups, but on the other hand, it is clear that everyone belongs to one. According to van Gaalen (1998:4) identity gives structure to the relationships between groups. Perceptions of one group about the plantation community's identity structures relationships between the plantation community and that group. After a few interviews and conversations it became clear that five important groups can be distinguished: Sinhalese people, the government, Muslims, Sri Lankan Tamils and the plantation community.

Sinhalese people

 "Sinhalese people are different from us dress wise, differences in the face, the pottu, and the language." There are however different opinions about which perceptions Sinhalese people have on the plantation community. Some of the informants told that they move friendly with Sinhalese people and that there are no problems between them.

A third rank field officer, who is responsible for the coordination of the tea pickers in the field and also member of the plantation community, told that "after the war the problem became less because Sinhalese and Tamil live together also outside the estate. For example when I had to buy something for my shop, but I did not have money, they understood me and helped me. Sinhalese are more helpful than Tamil people". Having good contacts with Sinhalese people seems to create a more positive opinion about the Sinhalese population. This subsequently makes that they also argue that Sinhalese people do not have wrong ideas about the plantation community.

Some tea pickers and estate workers almost never had contact with Sinhalese people. Some of them argue that the relationship is good now because the war has ended. An important fact is that many people are fed up with war. Some people therefore do not like to mention differences between groups and they do not like to talk about problems with other groups. They want to avoid that new riots break out and tensions rise again.

But although they do not like to talk about it many people mentioned after a while that there are certainly some issues between the two 'communities'. Anuvana argues:

> After the war finished they treated us even more badly. During the war the Sinhalese had fear for Tamils. Now when we show we are Tamil, they look down on us. They are not afraid anymore. Now they want to give trouble to us. I think we can now say that Tamils are afraid of Sinhalese. Most Tamils want to move out of the country because they are afraid and don't get their rights. There are less and less workers on the plantation (Anuvana, L.A.Wouters and J.M. Saat, 18-02-13).

Anuvana was not the only one who had a rather negative idea about how Sinhalese people see them. A lot of informants argued that Sinhalese people look down on them. Feelings of frustration about the idea that the community is forced to have respect for Sinhalese, while Sinhalese do not show respect to their community are all around. Everywhere different explanations for the attitudes of Sinhalese people are given. The most common explanations heard are: They look down on us because …"we are Tamil and we are doing 'low' work and have bad living conditions".

Especially in the past, but sometimes still, the plantation community is named *Thotakaataa.* This word creates a lot of frustration among the people living on the estate. It is a 'low word' for the community. It means something like gardener, cheap countrymen or forest people. It implies that someone is stupid and knows nothing. The word is also used by other groups in the country, but is always used to call the plantation community.

The plantation community is frustrated because this word is an expression of inequality. Sarasvati (L.A. Wouters and J.M. Saat 21-02-13) argues: "I, myself do not think people are higher, everyone is equal. If Sinhalese people would feel the same there would not be problems."

The feeling that this community is wanted out of the country by other communities is clearly there. A very hospitable young woman expressed her anxiety and frustration:

> In the future I think Tamil people won't get any chances. In Colombo Tamil people are not speaking Tamil; they speak Sinhalese because otherwise they feel that they don't get respect or chances. Sinhalese people think it is their country, with their language and their religion. In about fifty to sixty years they want to have the Tamil people out of this country (Sarasvati, L.A. Wouters/J.M. Saat 21-02-13).

That Sinhalese people want them out is also expressed, two schoolboys told me:

> On one estate they burnt shops. Sometimes, once a year or so, things like that happen. Sometimes pregnant Tamil woman have to stand up for Sinhalese people in the bus. In some areas also the boards on buses are only written in Sinhalese, so that is very hard for people that do not speak Sinhalese (Jayaraman and Arivann, L.A. Wouters and J.M. Saat, 05-03-13).

There are not only Sinhalese outside the plantation community. The Sinhalese people that are living on the estate however do belong to the plantation community. "We celebrate the same celebrations like Tamil and Sinhala new year. The relations in towns like Colombo and Kandy are less good. The reason is that they do not have contact with each other. They do not come close. On the estate we are closer to each other" (Kothravn, L.A.Wouters/J.M. Saat 21-02-13). According to the plantation community you could argue that Sinhalese people that do belong to their community have different views on the plantation community. They have the same habitat and they are doing the same 'low' work. There are friendships among Sinhalese and Tamils on the estate, they go to each other's houses and help each other in times of need. Mixed marriages however do not take place very often because the difference in religion makes it difficult.

<u>The government</u>

The government is usually mentioned in one breath with the Sinhalese community. Because the ruling party is a Sinhalese party, the government is seen as favouring the Sinhalese. Therefore the government is also seen as an outsider's group. Also political parties and unions are seen as outsiders.

Although for most of my informants ethnicity was a difficult word, one boy of nineteen year old had a very clear definition of ethnicity for himself: "Ethnicity is a problem created by the government. For example the government created a separation between groups by building for every Hindu Temple also a Buddhist Temple. People reacted to this with: 'What they are showing for us, we are showing to them.' The government creates it, but that is also the reason why we are acting like this" (Navajeevan, L.A. Wouters/J.M. Saat, 15-02-13). The division between groups is obviously still clearly present.

The government of the democratic republic still names the plantation community Indian Tamils. There are seven different names they use to describe themselves as

has been told in chapter four. The name Indian Tamil is not appreciated by everyone. We saw in the previous chapter that some people have another idea about themselves. People are still caught in a fear. The past of repatriation of 'Indian Tamils' to India is still vivid in their minds. This makes that the perceptions of the government about them and the way the community thinks they show their attitude is very confronting. In 2003 finally everybody in Sri Lanka got citizenship and voting rights. But it took 190 years to get that citizenship. It is argued that the current government still wants them out of the country to get more power. According to the plantation community, several strategies are created to ensure they have enough power. When we were looking for a shelter for the rain, we met two boys who just came back from school. I introduced my research and a bit shy, they expressed their feelings:

Anton: The outsiders see us as slaves and they like to keep us like that. The majority in the government does not want to give us rights. The majority wants to settle here and to move us out. They think it is their country. Earlier they sent us back to India; maybe they will do the same in the future.

Me: But now you have Sri Lankan citizenship, so why are you thinking like that?

John: Their mind still wants us out. They are afraid that our community will stand up, like the LTTE. We would like to have a strong leader. We want a guide for the community, someone that looks after the community and speak about it in the government. Now when they are in the government they forget about that. Only to the outside world they say they stand up for us.

Me: What about you as political leaders? Why do you not become a political leader?

John: They will bribe us.

Me: Do you think they can bribe you?

John: I don't like the political situation. Some youth are willing to do good things for the community in politics. They have the strong feeling but they did not have the chance. Poverty is an obstacle to go into politics. People prefer to just do their work.

If people want to have me as politician I will do. Bringing unity is one of the main responsibilities of politicians from our community.

We feel unity but the government does not like that. They want to prevent that.

The boys mentioned that the government settles Sinhalese people in Tamil majority towns, to get more power over that area. This makes them feel oppressed.

This feeling is reinforced by the fact that all government offices are Sinhalese, and do not understand Tamil. Many people that have to go to government offices in Hatton town first have to save money to be able to pay a bus transfer to town. Secondly they have to find as much (informal) papers as possible that can confirm who they are, and they have to find the time to go there. When they finally make it to arrange everything, the government officers label them as Indian Tamil, whatever they prefer to be called themselves. They feel that these are all expressions of the 'fact' that the government does not like them.

As already became clear earlier, the plantation community itself does not like the name Indian Tamil. M. Shivanyan, who has his own NGO that supports the plantation community, explains that "in the census you can see that the amount of Indian Tamils is going down. That is because for the census they ask people themselves from what race they are. Most Indian Tamils then say that they are Sri Lankan Tamils" (M. Shivanyan, L.A.Wouters/J.M. Saat, 03-03-2013).

Whether this community should identify as Indian Tamil or not, is still a big debate. "If we identify as Indian Tamil we can get specific scholarships and more, according to quota the government uses. So if we identify as Indian Tamil we can get more support" (Jenapriyan, L.A.Wouters/J.M. Saat, 13-03-2013). While telling his story, Jenapriyan got caught up in a debate with himself:

But on the other side the government thinks that if they keep Indian Tamil, India should take care of us because we are coming from India. But the government says: 'you are from India and therefore they should take care of you. We do not need to give you land rights, India should do that, that is where you came from.' But also India is not giving support, because we are Sri Lankan citizens, and also the Sri Lankan government is not giving support, because we are Indian Tamils and therefore part of India. So finally Indian Tamils do not get any support and therefore the best solution is to identify as Sri Lankan Tamil so that we belong clearly to Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan government will give us support too (Jenapriyan, L.A.Wouters/J.M. Saat, 13-03-2013).

The plantation community thus falls in between. Both India and Sri Lanka do not feel responsible to take care of their needs. Victor Turner (1967:95-106) would probably argue that they are in a liminal condition. They are still trying to make a transition to a respected place in society. Although it is already a long time ago that they emigrated from India, the transition to a respectable place in the Sri Lankan society did not happen.

He pointed out another reason from the government to keep calling them Indian Tamil.

> In 1956 the Indian Tamils had no citizenship. At this time there was the agreement about Indian Tamils that need to go back to India. Still this agreement is not resolved, actually it still exists. This rule is still in the constitution. Therefore the government has still a reason to tell they are not Sri Lankan Tamil. In the future they still can send people back to India (Jenapriyan, L.A.Wouters/J.M. Saat, 13-03-2013).

Although the plantation people usually assume that the government is Sinhalese, there are more parties in government than just Sinhalese parties. There are even some parties who claim to represent the plantation community, like for example the Ceylon Worker's Congress. All our informants however unanimously agree that these parties do not represent them well. It is an expression of their perception of the plantation community. They think political parties do not take them seriously, because they also think they are low.

> If they would represent the community well, the community would have come up. But they only come to get votes. They use the unions to get more votes. They go in car and it is all workers' money. They do not do anything back. People are still suffering because the wages are low (Rajani, L.A.Wouters/J.M. Saat 27-03-13).

They say another reason for misrepresentation is the high level of corruption in the government. People are only loyal to the people that can give them the highest profit. When there is someone else that can make someone achieving more, the person will switch and serve the highest bidder. This makes that the parties claiming to represent the plantation community forget the issues they won votes with and choose to change their issues according to ruling parties wishes. Political parties are entangled with unions.

"Unions are coming up for the rights and problems of the workers. Problems like problems with work, family problems, developments, police problems etc. They try to

involve and try to help the workers solving their problems. Every union has its own policy and constitution. When people face problems they go to the union leaders in the estate (also living estate). Union leaders go to the management and discuss it with the management of the estate" (K. Sivakumar, L.A.Wouters/J.M. Saat, 02-03-13).

According to Biyanwila however (2006: 3) "the plantation union strategies are shaped by party politics that are intertwined with ethnonationalist identity politics. In terms of party politics, the two main parties, the United National Party and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party are elite, top down, market-driven parties, entrenched in Sinhala Buddhist nationalism." So although the unions were set up to help the plantation people, the plantation community people have the feeling that no one is standing up for them, because when someone comes higher in hierarchy they will be bribed by the two main parties to proclaim the views of these two parties.

So the plantation community has the idea that the government, parties and unions included, do see them as low and do not take them seriously. This idea is based on the fact that they feel that the government is not representing them well and is not standing up for their rights.

The idea people have about the way politics works in Sri Lanka makes that some people do feel that fighting for their issues is useless. They have the feeling that the government, the unions and the parties are not taking them seriously. People feel that they are also not achieving anything for them.

There is a group of people in the community who think that there is no use of fighting outsider's perspectives at all because the outsiders are the majority in the country. They think that they will never achieve anything because of the situation in the country and the dominating perspectives of the outsiders. They do not agree with the outsider's views, but they are afraid to express that. Two schoolboys explained me their calm response to outsider's views on their ethnic identity: "Sometimes we are worried about the situation and sometimes angry. But if we speak against them we will create the Sinhala-Tamil problem again. So therefore we stay very calm" (Jayaraman and Arivann, L.A.Wouters/J.M. Saat, 05-03-13). The past situation of war affects them too. Most people are really fed up with the situation of war and definitely do not want to create another one.

According to people of the plantation community, the government also thinks that the plantation community could be a threat to them. K. Sivakumar said: "the government does not

want to mix plantation parties with parties from the North and East. If they mix they will get strong and they will be a threat for the government. If they are in the ruling party they cannot speak. They will fail to form a unity. The North and East Tamils have different problems than the plantation sector. But they also have common problems" (K. Sivakumar, L.A.Wouters/ J.M. Saat 02-03-13). This young man, who is really interested in politics, believes it is a deliberate tactic of the government to bribe political parties to shift the ideas of smaller parties into the ideas of the leading Sinhalese parties. In this way they cannot put pressure on the government. They want to keep the Sri Lankan Tamil groups and the plantation community groups separate. Jenapriyan underwrites his ideas. "The government does not want us to have our own separate group and specific culture, because it can be dangerous for the government when they will come up for their rights" (Jenapriyan, L.A.Wouters/J.M. Saat, 13-03-2013).

Because of this perceived threat of the government, the government acts like this. They favour one group over others, although in the constitution is written that everyone should be treated equally. Therefore one man argued "We totally want to change the constitution. In the constitutions we have 29 rights. There they say that all religion, language and ethnicity groups should be treated all the same. But there is one last rule: When a new government is there they can make changes according their wishes" (Vellavan, L.A.Wouters/ J.M. Saat, 07-03-13).

Many people of the plantation community think the government is negative about them as a group and therefore they dislike the government. But it is not fair to forget to reflect the opinion of people who think the government is treating them well and they think the government is not seeing them differently as other groups. "The government looks after people, they are making roads and building fish tanks" (T. Yagapriya, L.A.Wouters/J.M. Saat 12-03-13). They do not feel the government is negative towards them or their ethnic group. Many people of the plantation are not much involved in politics and they are not much thinking about other issues than their day to day life.

But overall you could argue that according to the plantation community the government sees them as low, but at the same time as a possible threat.

Muslim community

The Muslim community is another community that people distinguished from their own community. There is usually not much contact between Muslims and the plantation community people.

Although there is not much contact, there is also the idea that also Muslims look down on the community. "Muslims also think Tamils are very low. They don't like to stay with Tamils, although they are Tamils themselves. They want to show they are differently" (Sarasvati, L.A.Wouters/ J.M Saat). Muslims form their own community. "The Muslim community people want to develop themselves in their own way, but they do not like to involve other minorities" (Vellavan, L.A.Wouters/J.M. Saat. 07-03-13). There is a certain amount of jealousy among the plantation community about the Muslim community. They are jealous on their unity. Unity seems to be important for identity formation. More than once people argued that "Muslims are coming forward and ask their rights. Muslims are stronger in unity and ask their rights. Muslim people have good leadership. If there are any rights they want to secure, they just get together and fight for it" (Anuvana, L.A.Wouters/J.M. Saat, 20-02-13). The unity among people of the plantation community is a discussion point. As mentioned earlier, they do help each other and live like a family, but not everyone agrees that the unity is high. Navajeevan is very worried about the situation of the plantation community. He wants to stand up for his community. He compares himself with a former prime minister of India, who said: "When 100 people are standing behind me, I can change India." He translated this to himself. "When 100 people are standing behind me, I can change the plantation community." Rajani, our translator could not resist responding: "I worked for a long time in the plantation sector. Still I didn't find that 100 people." Navajeevan answered sure of his ground: "If we search for them, we can find them". But many people tell that there is not enough unity to stand up for the rights of the plantation community people. "In some issues they have common views, for example regarding salary. But they do not really feel a unity. Also the government wants to keep them divided. If they think of themselves as all workers they will feel more unity. All workers, also Sinhalese, could get together for their rights" (M. Shivanyan, L.A.Wouters/J.M. Saat, 03-03-2013). People argued that this unity is needed to respond to the wrong perceptions of outsiders, to change these perceptions.

Sri Lankan Tamils

The fourth group that people see as distinct from their own community is the Sri Lankan Tamils. They do speak the same language and are also Hindu in general, but there are separating issues. The Sri Lankan Tamils are seen as higher class, having better jobs and better developed houses. The plantation people perceive that the Sri Lankan Tamils look down on them too. But often on the plantations there is argued that they would love to be called in the same way, Sri Lankan Tamil. There is however a fierce discussion about this.

Some have a very constructivist view on ethnic identity and see ethnic identity as something that can be changed. Some consider it possible to change their ethnic identity to Sri Lankan Tamil identity. Others have a rather primordialist view. "If the Indian Tamils would change their name to Sri Lankan Tamils, they are still not seen as equal. We cannot come to equal stages" (Issaipriyan, L.A. Wouters/ J.M. Saat, 19-03-13). Issaipriyan argues that whatever they do, they will always stay Indian Tamils or plantation community people.

The reason for the argument of people that want to be called Sri Lankan Tamil is usually that they are born and raised in Sri Lanka and that they want to have the same status as Sri Lankan Tamils. "The danger of being Indian Tamil is that they are seen as lower" (Radha, L.A. Wouters/ J.M. Saat, 06-03-13). "My wish is that all are Sri Lankan Tamil. We all come under one community. All educated youth can try to change the system, than it will happen that we form unity. We can all come together. Our culture is coming down." (Kanmani, L.A. Wouters/ J.M. Saat, 15-03-13).

Several questions automatically come to mind: Why do you want to have the same name as people that are now looking down on you? What about the different culture then? Rajani answers these questions as the following: "Sri Lankan Tamils have a separate community. Plantation Tamils also should have a separate community. We want to see all the communities as Sri Lankan. But they have different cultures, and in that way they should stay separate. But all communities should have the same rights. Culture should be the only separating issue." Others however argue that forming a unity with the Sri Lankan Tamils will not help solving the problems. Jenapriyan does not see the use of changing to Sri Lankan Tamil. "If they would have got more support they did not need to start the war". Also Rabesh thinks it is not a good idea to form a unity with the Sri Lankan Tamils: "We want to distinguish from Sri Lankan Tamils because of the ethnicity problem between Tamils and Sinhalese. We want to emphasize those Tamils were Sri Lankan Tamils. We also faced problems, but different" (Rabesh, L.A.Wouters/ JM. Saat, 15-03-13).

Conclusion

What has been clear is that according to the plantation sector itself in general other communities in Sri Lanka have a negative attitude to the plantation sector. They have the feeling that they are looked down on by several groups and organizations. The reasons for that could be that they are Tamil, doing 'low' work and have their history in India.

The plantation community faces a lot of difficulties and frustrations because of perceived discrimination by several groups of outsiders. Although there are many different groups that

have ideas about the plantation community, the reactions of the plantation community are actually reactions to the sum of all attitudes of outsiders from all different groups. They react to the fact that many outsiders look down on them.

For example as a reaction to the dissatisfaction with the current perceptions on ethnic identity people start to explore their ethnic identity. One boy started searching on the Internet and in books about the history of his community. This made him also more aware of the problems his community experienced in the past, but also the problems the community is still experiencing. This made him a kind of activist. He wants to do something against the way his ethnic group is seen and treated. In the last week of our research, Navajeevan came to us, "I want to give you a letter I wrote after I thought about all the questions you asked me (see attachment 2)" "I love my people. They are my soul. They are my heart. They are everything to me. But I don't know how to help them but I must help them. It's my future."

Many plantation community people have the feeling that they need to educate better and develop their lifestyle and houses better to become more equal with other groups. As was already mentioned earlier for a specific ethnic group to continue to exist positive attitudes are necessary. The plantation community has to deal with negative attitudes of outsiders. According to Phinney and Ong (2007:273) sometimes this means that some members have the desire to belong to the dominant group. This is indeed the case regarding the plantation community. But not all people see this as the best option. They want to emphasize that their community also has good aspects. They try to make the outsiders aware of these positive aspects. They want to develop and educate to show that they deserve respect and want to be treated equal. They feel that they need to make changes, to change outsider's perspectives. Another way to emphasize the positive aspects of plantation community identity is the fact that they are very important to the country because the tea industry is producing the highest income of the country and without them there would not be a tea industry. Unless the positive aspects at this moment the community still did not achieve a respectable place in society. "Commonly people are not telling proudly that they come from the estate. For example they say that they are from Hatton instead of Shannon estate. They should not be shy because they earn the main income in Sri Lanka" (Navajeevan, L.A. Wouters/J.M. Saat, 15-02-13).

Navajeevan also tells that people do not like telling where they are from. They are afraid if they tell, people will not show respect to them. They are afraid it will minimize their chances for a good job. Within the estate this need to compete with the outsiders, and most often the Sinhalese people, is not there. This makes that the relationships with Sinhalese on

the estate are different. This makes that on the estate people feel freer to express their ethnic identity than outside. The fact that they are living on the estate is thus more important than the fact that they are Sinhalese. They do not feel ashamed among each other about their origins, or about their work and they do not have to boast against each other.

Expressing ethnic identity, by expressions of cultural backgrounds, has become something people think about before they actually do it. Not everyone wants to show from which community they are because of anxiety for discrimination against them. Someone told us: "In the bus some Tamils remove their pottu, the red dot on the forehead, because they do not want to show their ethnic identity. If they keep it, they will not be treated equally. For example a Tamil pregnant lady who comes into the bus does not get a seat because people recognize she is Tamil. A Sinhalese lady will get the seat. Also Buddhist priest get a seat and Hindu priests not."(Jenapriyan, L.A.Wouters/J.M. Saat, 13-03-13)

You can argue that according the situation some people of the plantation community change the expression of their ethnic identity. They change their ethnic behaviour, one of the components of ethnic identity. According to Jenapriyan, "...they want to fulfil their needs and therefore they need to change there is need to keep their identity but because of the situation they do not realize that. They will not promote their culture and they also get no support to promote their culture from for example government for religious activities. Without giving support they cannot practice their identity, if they will get support they can keep their identity."

There are more and more expressions of ethnic identity people stop doing. Some blame the government for that: "The government changes the community by giving indirect ideas about what is modern or not and what is good or not" (Jenapriyan, L.A.Wouters/J.M. Saat, 13-03-13). So it is clear that outsiders' perspectives and behaviour influences the expressions of ethnic identity. The government and other outsiders have ideas about the community and this influence the community in not doing specific things or doing specific things differently. "They show somehow that some cultural events are not modern or good. Therefore people stop doing it."

Ethnic identity and expressions of ethnic identity are thus much debated. There are however also people that do not spend time thinking about their ethnic identity and the way they are labeled by outsiders. They do not spend time on arguing with outsiders about their ethnic identity. Before I walked in their houses, many house wives and elderly people never thought about their ethnic identity. Ethnic identity might not be the most important personal

identity to all members of the plantation community. Because these people do not have much contact with outsiders, ethnicity does not become very important, because they spend most of the time just among people of their own ethnicity and personal identity is the outcome of interaction with others. One housewife was very clear to me: "I think it is not important to keep our history alive. We are working here now, that is important, that I get my salary" (Divani, L.A.Wouters/J.M. Saat, 07-03-13). This hardworking woman was not spending time on thinking and promoting her ethnic identity, her identity as worker was more important to her. For some people their identity as mother or salary-earner is more important than ethnic identity.

The influence of outsider's perspective on ethnic identity is thus different for every particular person. Some fight the perspectives of outsiders and want to change their view, others change their ethnic behaviour and others react calm and want to avoid tensions and discussions with outsiders and others consider it as something that is not important.

Image 10 Teapickers Shannon Estate (Own archive 2013)

6. Conclusion: A tug of war

By J.M. Saat & L.A. Wouters

Not a day goes by without knowing what others think about you and how you would describe yourself. This does not mean that everyone is always thinking about his or her ethnic identity. We actually assumed that everybody is aware of his or her identity and actually has an identity. We should not forget that our presence as researchers actually made the plantation community think about their ethnic identity. They realized that they became subject of study and that their ethnic identity is a debatable issue. We asked them to describe their ethnic identity. Something that to some people might never have been an issue was now something to think about. Being there made them think about their identity but at the same time also made us think about our identity. *"Where are you from? Where are you going?"* were the questions that confronted us as researchers as well as the plantation community with our identities. In the first place we were at the Sri Lankan tea plantations to research the ethnic identity formation process of the plantation community. Indirectly we asked them where their ethnic identity is coming from, what their ethnic identity is based upon. We also asked them how their ethnic identity formation will take place in future. But they also made us think about our identity. We as white skinned, blond haired, tall, female anthropological students from the Netherlands could not hide our origins. It was clear that we were not Sri Lankans. Although we want to represent their story, we could not go native. The confrontation with our whiteness made us always outsiders. Sometimes we had the feeling they labelled us the wrong way. They associated our whiteness with wealth and expected us to give financial support. This was however not the case and gave us an uncomfortable feeling. Looking back this feeling might have contributed to a better understanding of the feelings of the plantation community.

Some of them also have the feeling that they are labelled in the wrong way. It should be clear that ethnic identity formation is a difficult process because it is dependent on many influences. Despite all complexities related to ethnic identity formation, we tried to find an answer to the question of how ethnic identity formation of the plantation community on Shannon estate in Sri Lanka takes place. We approached ethnic identity formation using etic and emic perspectives. Both etic and emic perceptions influence ethnic identity formation. The two concepts etic and emic are however in daily life not something that can be split. In practice the two concepts are interwoven. The answer to the question 'Who am I?' is the result of both insiders' and outsiders' perspectives.

Ethnic identity formation of the plantation community is influenced by several factors. These factors can be seen as social powers because they influence the individual and groups in different degrees. You can see every individual in the middle of many social powers that are attracting you. There is however never one social power that pulls you to its side. All powers are there every minute. You always stay in the web of all social powers but move little steps in the web, closer to the power that is more important to you at that moment. In chapter four we approached ethnic identity formation from inside the community. Different factors like work and residence, religion, language and caste, influence ethnic identity formation of the plantation community. These factors are important when identifying one's own community. Not for everyone all aspects are important to the same degree.

In chapter five we showed that also outsider's perspectives have an influence on ethnic identity formation. We researched the perceived outsider's perspectives of the plantation community. So we looked at how the plantation community experiences the outsider's perspectives and how they deal with these perspectives. There are different factors from outside the community that influence the ethnic identity formation of the plantation community. In the case of the plantation community important factors are the government, Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamils, and Muslims. Also these factors do not have the same degree of influence on everyone.

All factors together influence the ethnic identity formation of the plantation community of Shannon Estate (see figure 1).
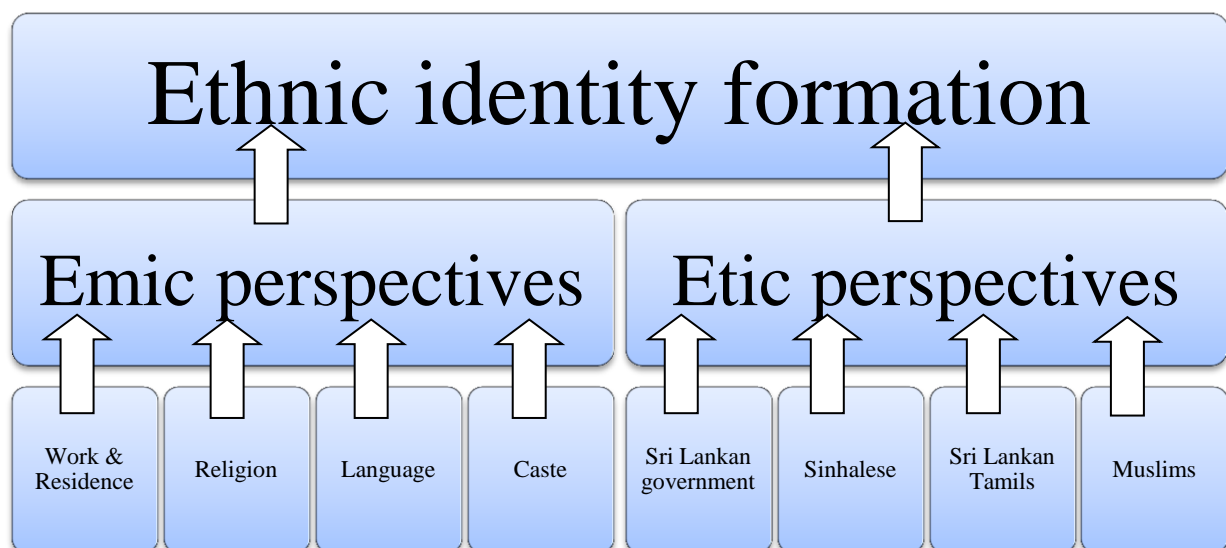

Figure 1 Schematic representation of ethnic identity formation among the plantation community of Shannon Estate[3]

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[3] The arrows shown in the figure represent influences

All mentioned social powers simultaneously exert different degrees of forces on individuals and groups. This produces an extremely complex process because individuals are forced to make choices and it always hard to decide what the right thing to do is. All choices you make bring along certain consequences. You need to consider all the consequences of your choices to make a right choice. However, it is not always the case that every person makes the choice about which factor has the strongest power over him or her consciously. People not always think about the choices they made. They just did it, and when we asked about it they started to think why they actually made that choice. At that moment people became conscious about their choices and the causes and consequences of that choice. Also sometimes choices are not really choices. They are more forced upon you or essential to survive. For example you speak Dutch or English, are you always aware of the fact that you speak this language? And are you aware of the consequences? Probably you did not before you read this. If it is your mother tongue, this language is probably forced upon you and also necessary to communicate with the people surrounding you.

The tug of war between social powers and the individual becomes complicated within a community. Not every individual attaches the same value to different social powers. One social power may be stronger for one person than another person. When everyone attaches a different value to all these different social powers can there be a form of unity? Is it then actually possible to speak of an ethnic community?

On the one hand, the insider's perspectives indicate a certain form of unity. Despite differences between people in the community, people feel a certain form of unity. Through different social aspects, like religion, caste and language, the plantation community can distinguish themselves from other groups in the Sri Lankan society. The fact that they are different from outsiders can create a certain form of unity, but this is not necessarily always the case. Next to the ways of distinguishing themselves from other groups, maybe more important in creating unity is the fact that people are living and working together and are coming from the estate. On the other hand, outsider's perspectives create division among the plantation community. All members of the plantation community react differently to the views of outsiders. They do not have an unambiguous vision on how to evaluate their ethnic identity and how to deal with these outsider's perspectives. So because of outsider's perspectives, different individuals of the plantation community have different identifications with their community.

From our research it became clear that identity formation of the plantation community takes place differently for every person. In this thesis we used the word community for our

research population. Can we actually speak of an ethnic community when identity formation is so various? It is debatable whether you can really see this population as an ethnic community. The importance of ethnicity is variable. "At one extreme, ethnicity can function merely as categorical ascriptions or labels used to classify people… At the other extreme, ethnic organization may structure crucial aspects of the individual's life and have great importance at the level of society."(Eriksen 1994: 49). Handelman (cited in Eriksen 1994: 50) distinguishes four degrees of ethnic incorporation, namely the ethnic category, the ethnic network, the ethnic association and the ethnic community (See table 1).

"The ethnic category is constituted by the fact that contrastive categories are used to identify members and outsiders" (cited in Eriksen 1994: 49). You can argue that the plantation community teaches the individual appropriate behaviour vis-à-vis others and passes on knowledge about its origins. They all know that their origins lay in India and they know the common norms and values. Thus in any case you can speak of an ethnic category as Handelman (cited in Eriksen 1994:49) describes.

The next degree of ethnic incorporation is the ethnic network. "This concept suggests that people will regularly interact with one another in terms of an ethnic membership set" (cited in Eriksen 1994: 50). In the case of the plantation community you can also speak of interaction along ethnic lines. They distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups through language, religion, work, and caste etc. This also organizes the contact with outsiders; it can make contacts more difficult or easier. For example because the plantation community is speaking Tamil, it makes the contact with Sinhala speakers more difficult. The research population can thus also be seen as an ethnic network as Handelman (cited in Eriksen 1994:50) describes it.

Whether our research population can also be seen as an ethnic association is however debatable. For a group to be an ethnic association it needs to feel that they have shared interests, and develop an organizational apparatus to express them (Eriksen 1994:50). There are political parties that claim to represent our research population, but the people on the plantations are divided about whether this political organization is representing them well. There are some individuals within the research population that would like to develop a new, shared political organization so that they can stand up for the rights of the population. Others however do not like to organize in political ways. There is no like-mindedness about the political organizations. Political organizations are there, but there are not really shared interests. They are not united to stand up for their rights.

The research population does however meet the extra requirement of Handelman (Eriksen 1994:50) to form an ethnic community, because they do have a territory with more or less physical boundaries. Their territory is marked by the boundaries of the estate. Whether you can truly speak of an ethnic community is thus debatable (See table 1).

Table 1 degrees of Ethnic incorporation among the plantation community. After Handelman (cited in Eriksen 1994: 51).

	Category	Network	Association	Community
Contrastive categories used to identify members and outsiders	X	X	X	X
Regular interaction in terms of ethnic membership		X	X	X
Shared political interests and political apparatus			X	X
Territorial boundaries				X

Another reason why it is debatable if our research population forms an ethnic community is because they do not agree about one name for the group. When we asked in a focus group of eight students how they would name their community three different answers were given. We heard the names Indian Tamil, Sri Lankan Tamil and Tamil. After many interviews we found out that which name someone uses for his or her community also depends on with which name someone can get the highest profits as discussed earlier in chapter five. Sometimes people call themselves Indian Tamil, when they think they will get more support of India then or more opportunities for jobs and scholarships from the Sri Lankan government because of ethnic quota. On the other hand, they sometimes call themselves Sri Lankan Tamil, because they think they can get equal rights more easily then, because then it is emphasized that they are Sri Lankan. It is clearer then that Sri Lanka is responsible for taking care of them. Many people of the plantation community thus have an instrumentalist approach of the expression of ethnic identity.

It does not necessarily mean that changing the name also changes ethnic identity. This can be applied to all expressions of ethnic identity.

That emic and etic perceptions influence ethnic identity formation should be clear but emic and etic perceptions also influence the expression of ethnic identity. Ethnic identity

formation and the expression of ethnic identity are different because it is possible to change the expression of ethnic identity without necessarily changing ethnic identity.
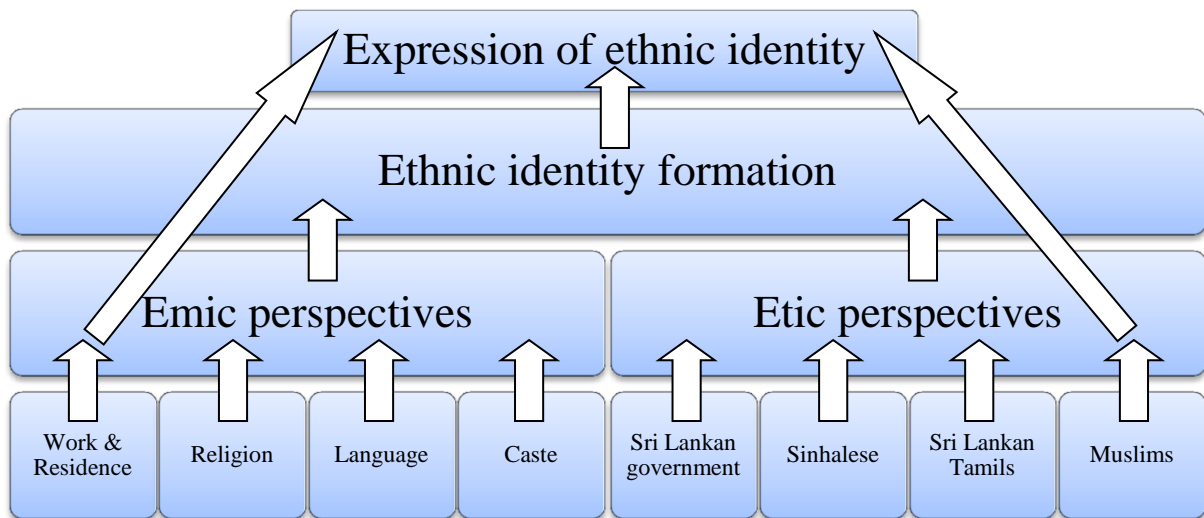

Figure 2 Schematic representation of ethnic identity formation among the plantation community of Shannon Estate[4]

For example seen from emic perspectives, wearing a *pottu* expresses Tamil culture. Some Tamils remove their *pottu* from their forehead in the public busses. They do not want to show or express that they are Tamil. At that moment, outsider's perspectives have a stronger influence on ethnic identity. The Tamils that remove their *pottu* do this because when they keep it they feel that they will not be treated equally by other ethnic groups. The fact that some people decide to stop wearing the pottu in public buses, does not automatically change their ethnic identity. Emic and etic perspectives thus produce a discussion relating the expression of ethnic identity. Finally every individual makes his or her own choice in which social power dominates.

Ethnic identity formation of the plantation community of Shannon Estate is thus an extremely complex ongoing process. The degree of influence of emic or etic perspectives change all the time, differently for every individual. It is a constant dialogue between emic powers and etic powers. This dialogue often takes places after someone has been confronted with his or her ethnic identity. Then the discussion about which factor should be leading starts again. We were the triggers of thinking about identity. People started analyzing their identity and evaluating their identity. We are however not the only ones that confront people with their ethnic identity. Also daily interactions with the nation state force people to feel conscious about ethnic identity. The plantation community people have to register for birth certificates are confronted with the language spoken in government offices, experience

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[4] The arrows shown in the figure represent influences

problems with the language in hospitals. As Cohn (1987: 224-254) argued, the government wants to categorize people into identity groups, which also make people aware of their ethnic identity. The Sri Lankan government names the plantation community Indian Tamil. Through a census identity becomes something that is registered and hard to change. The process of translating the fluid local dynamics of identity into a finite number of standardized quantitative census categories hardens identity (Cohn 1987: 224-254). Also other outsiders make people aware of their ethnic identity by ascribing them certain characteristics and treating them in a certain way because they ascribe them a certain 'ethnic identity.' As seen in the example above people that are wearing a pottu are ascribed the Tamil identity and therefore are treated in a certain way.

There is thus not one answer to the question what forms ethnic identity. There are many factors that influence the process of ethnic identity formation. It is a dialogue between all factors that influence ethnic identity formation. A real tug of war!

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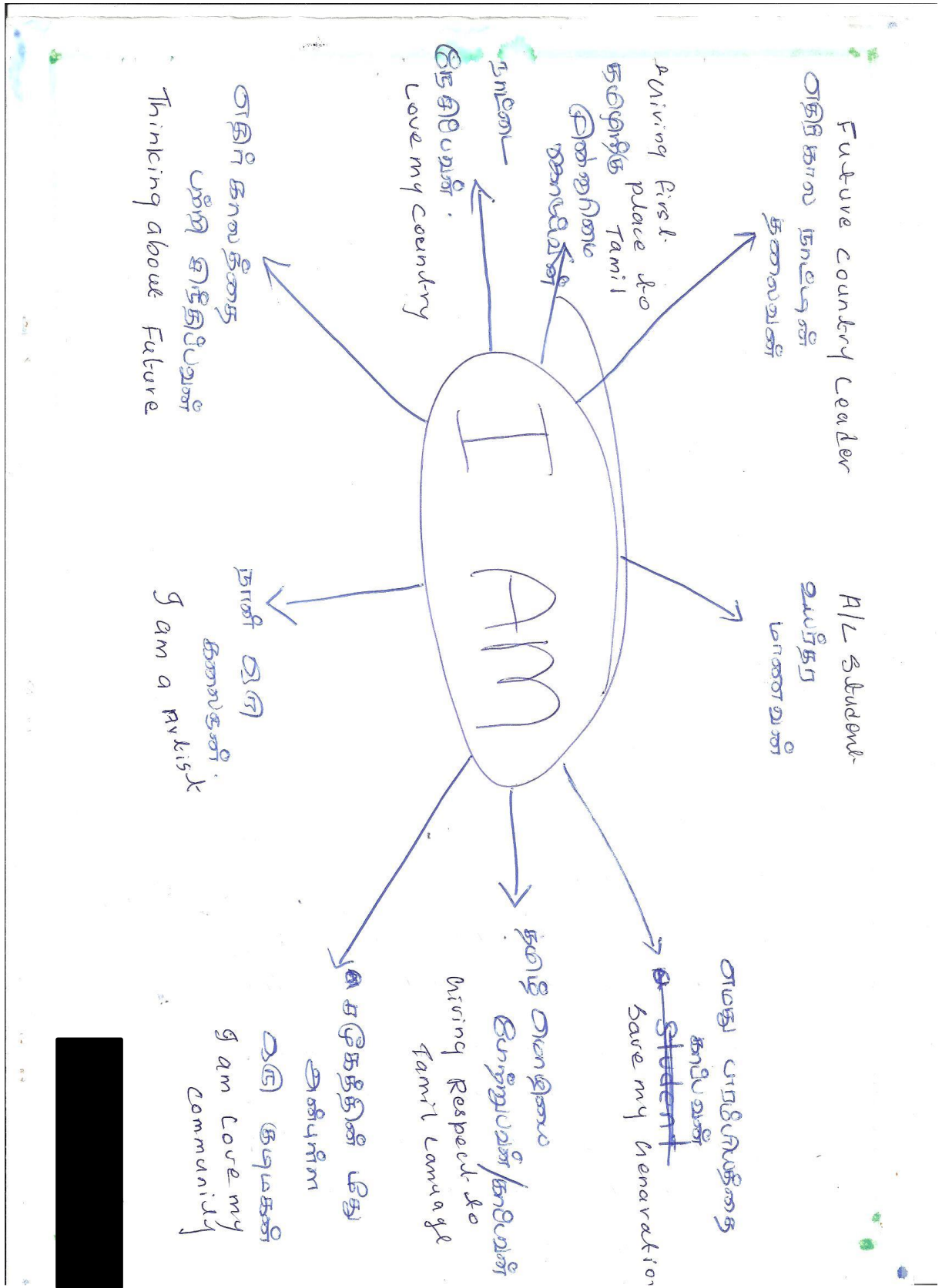
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Attachment 1: I am…

Handwritten mind map centred on "I Am" with the following branches:

- Future country Leader — எதிர் கால நாட்டின் தலைவன்
- A living first. place to Tamil — நாடுஇதில் நிலைத்திருந்து வாழ்வதற்கு
- நான் தமிழன் — Love my country
- Thinking about Future — எதிர் காலத்தை பற்றி சிந்திப்பவன்
- நான் ஒரு கலைஞன் — I am a Artist
- A/L Student — உயர்தர மாணவன்
- Student — எனது எதிர்காலத்துக்கு … Save my Generation
- தமிழ் மொழியை போற்றுபவன்/காப்பவன் — Living Respect to Tamil Language
- இந பகுதியை நான் காதல் … — I am Love my community

Attachment 2: Letter Navajeevan
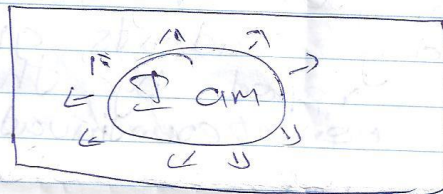
No :...................

Date: ..../....../............

" Hai dear Sister's!

First I am going to say a sorry for you. Beacause I dont know how to write a formal letter, and my mother tounge is tamil so I cand write pure english. I am 19 years old student. and this is my learning period. So please understand my Siduation.

dear sister. you astrryed me a one question. that how do Idendify your self this country.

I wrode my opinion. I am nothing here. this is not a peacefull country. here not peace, not humanidy not impartiality. and not democrys. our goverment is looking for our selfe, "THOTA KAATHA" ids meaning is "Coundry men" cheep coundry men" I dont know, why this govermand looking for that? my mother working in estade (Tea estade.) bud she also told that "I am not like do stay here" "because the estade work is not good" "othar community looking us bad people. first we word do, we must do love our place, id make a proved for us. am I correct sisters? but id will be never done! because our leaders are not duke any action do thatproblems.

Atlas

our leader are selfish. They are never work soul full. that is a main resan. sisder, I love my "up coundry" (my place). but my soul is india. because my generadion are in there. my relijion, my temple, my people are in thatre. so I Love my india. as specily tamil nadu.

☆ I saying "this is not a Coundry", this is a burial ground. yes this is a burial ground. you know the LTTE problams. our many tamil enirls, ladys, and many sdudends, girls sdudends are raped by the animals, sinhalis! 23 men coundiauad reped 1 girl. She is 17 years old. dell me sisder, how I feel I am sri lankan. a Sri Lankan person? This is jusd one event. here many events sdill goinyon here. that the resan, I never love this country. I am saying again this is not a coundry, this a burial ground. we dond know how do we protect our girls and ladys. we havent weapons but the sinhala animals have a weapons. that is main resan. our panic.

Our school (shannon. T.M.V.) student, that girl told. "my birth is here, I am eating here, I stay here". so I am a Sri Lankan. Tamil. food and sday place are give a respect for us? never. she dont know. whads the present sidaudion

No :.................... Date: ....../....../............

going on here.

and my heart feelings are many sister. but I cand delling. because I don'd know howe do write down thad. The singhala dogs are want "this is a singhala country" "only singhalis live here," "this is a puddish" coundry. one day it will be done. but I'd will be done our death!!! sinhalish pover is only weapons. They havent a many soldier in dhere arry. They are only 7,5000 – 100,000 only. but our ygoudhs are 200,000. I hope If we got weapons thad prutale animals sdory is closed. we need another LTTE Team. The sinhala dogs are never give us full respect, we must dake weapons.

and I thanking you dor coming my home. my hore line is build London people, I love my people. there are my soul. There are my heart There are everything me. but I dont know howe do I an going do help there. but I must do help thon. Ids my seaurter.
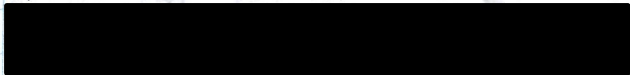I love your coundry. nod only thad, U.S.A German, I Love German because I love leader Mr. Hittler born thad country. So I Love German.

One day I want to see your country, and your culture. but I'd will be never done. because we havent enughe many, and economicle problem OR. bye. and dont forged me. I am your ~~st~~ ~~~~ brother.

e-mail.

Atlas
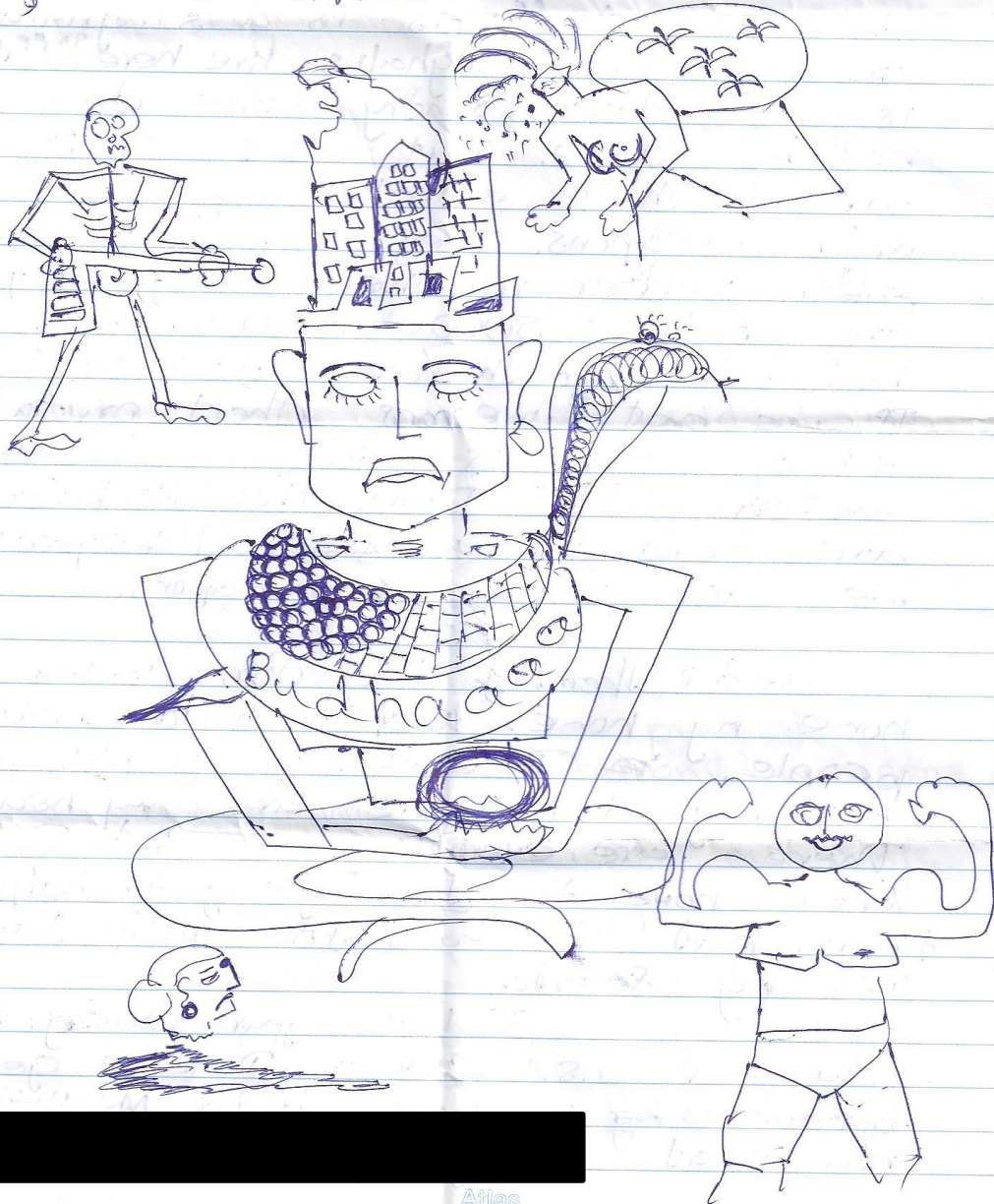
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