

1 INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, is a tear-shaped island off the coast of India that was under British colonial rule from 1815 to 1948 (see Figure 1.1). The transition to independence was relatively peaceful, but ethnic conflict soon developed. The nation was ravaged by a civil war from 1983 to 2009 between the Sri Lankan government and a northern Tamil insurgency group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The war is over now, but the position of the nation's Tamil-speaking minorities remains precarious because a political solution to the ethnic conflict is yet to be reached. Postindependence language and education policies were part of the complex and multifaceted causes of the ethnic conflict and the subsequent war. However, in the last two decades, the Sri Lankan government has sought to promote interethnic integration and national cohesion by instituting trilingual language policies in the nation's co-official languages, Sinhala and Tamil, as well as English, in state schools. But there is a significant gap between the aims of the programs and their implementation in the classroom.

This book is about the tension between the ethnic conflict and multilingual education policy in the linguistic and social practices of Tamil and Muslim girls in Kandy, a multiethnic city in central Sri Lanka. I integrate ethnographic and linguistic research among youth inside and outside government schools in Kandy during the last phase of the civil war (2007–2008) and afterward (2011). By focusing on students, teachers, and principals affiliated with two schools, a small mixed-gender Tamil-medium school and a large girls' multilingual school, I ask: To what extent can trilingual education policies mitigate ethnic conflict, and how do the experiences of Tamil-speaking girls in Kandy demonstrate the limits of this vision? This book argues that the efficacy of the trilingual reforms is imperiled by the reinforcing of language-based models of ethnicity in everyday interactions in classrooms, homes, buses, and streets. Contrary to the ideas underlying the national policies, minority girls do not view themselves as integrated



FIGURE 1.1 Map of Sri Lanka

into a united Kandy or wider Sri Lanka but associate the city with the potential for upward social mobility. My analysis of the role of civic education strategies in conflict amelioration is timely given the high incidence of ethnic and religious violence in South Asia and elsewhere.

Categories of identity were fluid in the precolonial period (Wickramasinghe 2006), but in the nineteenth century ethnicity—which is alternatively described as race, community, or nationality—emerged as a primary category of difference.¹ It subsumes other categories, including language, religion, region, and caste (Rogers 1994). Divisions within and between ethnic groups have been differently defined at different historical moments and for different social and political purposes (Daniel 1996; Thiranagama 2011). Throughout this book, I refer to local categories of difference to discuss ongoing processes of social, linguistic, and political differentiation.

Sinhalas (Buddhist or Christian) make up the majority of Sri Lanka's population (74.9 percent) (see Table 1.1). They speak Sinhala, an Indo-Aryan language related to the languages of North India.² There are several Tamil-speaking minority groups. North and East Tamils (11.2 percent), alternately referred to as Sri Lankan Tamils, have lived on the island for centuries, primarily in the North and East, but also in urban areas like Colombo and Kandy.³ Up-country Tamils (4.2 percent), who are also referred to as *malaiyaha* (hill region/area), *malainaaTTu* (hill country), or Indian Tamils, are descendants of migrants who arrived from South India during

Table 1.1 Sri Lankan Ethnic Groups

| Ethnicity | Religion | Predominant language |
|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Sinhala | Buddhism or Christianity | Sinhala |
| North and East Tamil | Hinduism or Christianity | Tamil |
| Up-country Tamil | Hinduism or Christianity | Tamil |
| Muslim | Islam | Tamil |

the British period to work as plantation laborers in the central highlands (Daniel 1996).⁴ Members of both Tamil groups are predominantly Hindu, with a significant Christian minority. Muslims (or Moors) make up 9.2 percent of the population.⁵ They can be traced back to pre-Islamic seafaring trade between South and Southeast Asia and the Middle East, as well as Arab Muslim mercantile trade in the first part of the seventh century. Muslims live in the North and East and in scattered pockets throughout the South. The majority of Sri Lankan Muslims speak Tamil as a first language, but the government classifies them as an ethnic minority group on the basis of their religion (McGilvray and Raheem 2007; Thiranagama 2011).

Language and education policies in Sri Lanka are widely blamed for increasing tensions around ethnic relations. Following independence, the Sinhala-Buddhist-majority Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) government instituted discriminatory policies against Tamils and Muslims, who they believed had received preferential treatment under British colonial rule (Thiranagama 2011). One of the most significant of these policies was the Sinhala-Only Act of 1956, which declared Sinhala to be a sole official language of the nation (Tamil was declared a co-official language in 1987). This act negatively impacted all Tamil-speaking groups, but it was particularly detrimental to English-educated Jaffna (North) Tamils who relied on professional employment in the South (Tambiah 1986). In 1971, the SLFP government passed new policies regulating university admissions on the basis of language. This meant Tamil students had to acquire higher marks to obtain admission. A year later, a district quota system was adopted to compensate for children in rural areas who did not have access to high-quality schools. These policies hurt Jaffna Tamils' status and prospects, although they benefited other Tamil-speaking groups (Sørensen 2008). Postindependence education policies contributed to the creation of a mass education system where all school-aged children were guaranteed a free education in their first language, Sinhala or Tamil (Little 2003). The segregation of students by language of instruction and religion (Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, or Islam), however, heightened feelings of interethnic difference and mistrust (Tambiah 1986).

National education reforms were introduced in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In addition to curriculum changes designed to promote peace and unity, the National Education Commission passed a language policy that required secondary-level students (grades 6–10) to study the other official language (whether Sinhala or Tamil). The study of English was also re-emphasized. The government believed that ethnic integration would increase if Sri Lankan youth could learn to communicate in all three languages. Echoing the intent of the education programs, in 2005 the Official Language Commission and other government bodies started Sinhala-as-a-second-language (SSL) and Tamil-as-a-second-language (TSL) training programs for state employees (administrators and police officers) throughout the island (Government of Sri Lanka 2012).

A city with a population of 98,828, Kandy sits in a mountainous region of the Central Province, one of nine provinces in Sri Lanka.⁶ The former capital of the last independent Sinhala-Buddhist kingdom, which the British took over in 1815, the city has complex associations. It is a symbolic center for Sinhala Buddhism and the Buddhist state, but it is also a commercial and administrative center, where Sinhalas, Tamils, and Muslims live “cheek by jowl” in the same residential neighborhoods (Tambiah 1986, 11) (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3). The Kandyan Kingdom from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries is described as cosmopolitan by



FIGURE 1.2 Dalida Maligawa and Kandy Lake



FIGURE 1.3 Sinhala, Tamil, and English signs in Kandy
Canaan Albright

virtue of its incorporation of various religious groups (Obeyesekere 2013). A bustling, diverse urban center that is home to a multiethnic middle class and bilingual educational institutions, colonial and postcolonial Kandy has continued to invite cosmopolitan imaginings (Roberts 1979).⁷ Today, historically influenced conceptions of the city are in dialogue with notions of the multiethnic Sri Lanka promoted in the national-level education initiatives.

Schools have long been identified as important locations for the reproduction and transformation of social identities, structures, beliefs, and practices. State education systems and their curricula, as key sites for the promotion of standardized

languages (Bourdieu 1991), play a prominent role in nation-building and conflict amelioration processes. In my study of the enactment of language and education policies in Sri Lanka, I treat schools as dynamic landscapes where multiple norms for the use of language are reinforced and their implicit hierarchies are contested. Central to my inquiry is the concept of “language ideologies”—beliefs and ideas about language that participants employ to rationalize their understandings of linguistic variation and its role in relation to the social world (see Irvine 1989; Silverstein 1979). Plural in any society, language ideologies are not limited to misconceptions about language because they may be consistent with scholars’ views on language (e.g., “Tamil grammar is very different from English grammar”). Language ideologies are both incomplete (there are always other perspectives) and interested, as they privilege certain social positions and groups. They can be explicit (e.g., “You need to learn English to get a good job” and “Jaffna Tamil is the best Tamil”), or they can include more tacit assumptions about language structure and use (Irvine 2011, 2018). Schools, as places where people are evaluated for their ability to produce standard or legitimate linguistic varieties, are crucial sites for the production of language ideologies (LaDousa 2014; Wortham 2003, 2008).

This study stands out from work on bilingual education and peacebuilding initiatives in that I show how youth and adults interpret and realign national and local education policies and practice in their talk inside and outside schools (also see Hornberger and Johnson 2007; Jaffe 1999; McCarty 2011). My approach builds on seminal studies in the ethnography of education that explore educational inequalities in relation to children’s lives beyond the classroom (Goodwin 1990; Heath 1977, 1983; Philips 1972), as well as more recent work on youth culture and racial, ethnic, and class identities in North America and Europe.⁸ Current literature in the anthropology of youth no longer frames young people as unfinished human beings but looks at the social and cultural practices by which they shape their social worlds (Bucholtz 2002; Eckert 2000; Garrett and Lopez 2002). Attention to young people’s everyday linguistic practices is crucial to understanding the processes by which ethnic, racial, religious, gender, and class differences are reproduced and contested (Fader 2009). The students in my study were not geographically mobile, but they were influenced by processes of migration and globalization (via education, mass media, consumerism, etc.), as well as their own metropolitan aspirations.⁹ Most viewed migration (whether for education or employment) as a tenable option. I consider how ethnic minority girls drew on local and global ideologies in their interactions inside and outside school to challenge ethnicity-based models of identity and to imagine their futures.¹⁰

The chapters of this book progressively move from the schools into the larger public sphere. First, I discuss the segregation of Sri Lankan students in

the national education system and the reinforcing of linguistic, ethnic, and religious differences in education policies and practices. I analyze whether the trilingual language programs at Hindu College, a Tamil-medium Hindu school, and Girls' College, a multilingual Buddhist school, bolstered interethnic integration or simply instantiated ethnic divisions as mobilized around language.¹¹ Second, I demonstrate how teachers and students at Girls' College drew on Tamil, Sinhala, and English to challenge sociolinguistic inequalities in their talk in school and at home, as well as to situate themselves in relation to a multilingual and multiethnic Kandy and Sri Lanka. I consider relations among different Tamil-speaking groups and between these groups and the Sinhala majority. Third, I investigate how Hindu College students managed different forms of monitoring and the reproducing of ethnicity in their linguistic practices in school, on buses, in shops, and on the street. I also look at the significance of speaking Tamil (by Tamils, Muslims, and Sinhalas) in various public spaces in Kandy and the nearby capital city of Colombo in relation to power inequalities in society at large.

My central argument is that, despite the national trilingual reforms, language and education policies and practices at Hindu College and Girls' College reproduced language-based models of ethnic difference. In reaction, the Girls' College Tamil and Muslim girls aspired to fit into a cosmopolitan notion of Kandy. However, they did not see themselves as incorporated into a larger society, but rather associated the city with the possibility for economic or spatial mobility, whether in Sri Lanka or abroad. The lower-class Hindu College girls and boys, as they faced difficulties just to get through their education, find jobs, and live their everyday lives, did not see the multilingual and multiethnic city as a source of inspiration, but something they had to adapt to if they hoped to survive. The effectiveness of the language policies is further hindered by linguistic practices in Sinhala-majority public spaces that reinforce ethnic divisions and power inequalities. Sinhala schoolchildren and state employees spoke some Tamil in the TSL classroom, but they refrained from speaking it elsewhere because of the negative ideological association of the Tamil language with the Tamil people and the LTTE. Additionally, Sinhalas often viewed the use of Tamil in public spaces in Kandy and Colombo as a threat to the dominance of Sinhala. This book thus demonstrates the difficulties of using language policy to ameliorate conflict if it does not also address how that conflict is produced and reproduced in everyday interactions.

Ethnic Minority Girls and the Experience of Conflict

Following the outbreak of the civil war, ethnicity became a gatekeeping concept in Sri Lankan studies (Appadurai 1986). However, Jonathan Spencer observed

that for all the mention of ethnicity and ethnic conflict, there has been little focus on the “everyday work of ethnicity: the working through of issues of similarity and difference in work on economy, kinship, or religious practices” (2007, 163). Recent studies have enriched ethnographic understandings of Sri Lanka by looking at how various social groups constructed their identities during the war (Bass 2013; McGilvray 2008; Thiranagama 2011). This book offers something new in its focus on ethnic conflict and education policy in relation to the lived experiences of minority youth. While many studies of Sri Lanka focus on a single ethnic group, this is one of the few ethnographies to look at the intricate relations among different ethnic, religious, and sociolinguistic groups in an urban center (also see Thiranagama 2011).

In contrast to certain prominent anthropological works on violence, this book is not an account of the ways people cope with direct incidents of violence.¹² Rather, I look at how minority youth deal with more nuanced manifestations of ethnic conflict and the “enshrouding fears” that war produces (Obeyesekere 2011, xii). The Tamil and Muslim youth in my study lived alongside the war their entire lives. To illustrate this mentality, in the early months of my fieldwork, I heard about a bombing in a Colombo suburb. I immediately called an Up-country Tamil Hindu university student who had recently traveled to that city. When I asked if she was okay, she laughed and said in English, “We are used to these things, dear.” But while war was a normal part of their everyday lives, Sri Lankans readily contrasted the period from 2006 to 2009 with the ceasefire period that preceded it (Thiranagama 2011). During my fieldwork, school programs and events were canceled when they had rarely been before, and youth and adults discussed Tamil people they knew who had been arrested. The near complete silence on public buses in Colombo and Kandy was an indication of the overall tension and fear (see chapters 5 and 6).

Most of the book focuses on girls, but in chapter 5 I also look at the experiences of boys. Instead of considering gender alone, I explore it in relation to ethnicity, religion, and class.¹³ All ethnic minority youth faced challenges during this tense moment in the conflict, but the experience of girls was unique. While Tamil-medium teachers often spoke about the importance of learning Sinhala and English to “manage” in Kandy and advance their careers, these attitudes did not transfer to their teaching practices, in that they prescribed students’ speech to be mostly Tamil only. When Tamil students left school, their Tamil speech, which indexed or “pointed to” a Tamil ethnic identity, put them at potential risk in Sinhala-dominant public spaces. In addition to closely monitoring their behavior in relation to possible security threats, girls also had to be careful about their conduct because it was considered inappropriate for them to spend time

around the city. Girls with fewer financial resources, who could not, for example, afford to take autorickshaws to school, often faced a precarious commute by bus or on foot.

It was common for families to invest more money in the education of their sons. However, as single-income households were becoming rarer (Watt et al. 2014), the girls in my study (ages fourteen to seventeen) were expected to pursue jobs or careers after they finished their schooling. They did not talk as much about marriage as girls in their late teens and early twenties, but they knew that they would face difficulties balancing their careers with their family lives. Some had quite ambitious career goals (to be doctors, lawyers, or bankers), but they were nevertheless aware that their ethnicity, gender, class, and other factors could limit what would be possible for them.

The Sri Lankan Civil War

The civil war—in which the LTTE fought the Sri Lankan government to establish a separate state (Eelam) in the North and East of the island—has been thoroughly studied.¹⁴ I conducted the primary research for this project in January 2007 and from June 2007 to August 2008, during the last phase of the war. After a period of relative calm resulting from the 2002 Norwegian-brokered ceasefire, hostilities broke out following Mahinda Rajapaksa's presidential election victory in 2005 (Wickramasinghe 2009).¹⁵ The Eastern Province was declared a liberated zone in July 2007. Following this, the army made an aggressive push to gain control of the last LTTE-held territories in the northern Vanni region (Spencer et al. 2015). Though people living in the South were far from the battle zones, they lived in anticipation of suicide, bus, and roadside bombings. Large numbers of Sinhala men were employed in the army, causing hardship for families throughout the island. In President Rajapaksa's majoritarian regime, citizens—journalists in particular—were regularly arrested or disappeared for criticizing the government (Devotta 2009).

From January to May 2009, the Sri Lankan army heavily bombed the LTTE leaders, its cadres, and more than 330,000 civilians in a narrowing coastal strip in the northeast Vanni region. As the Sri Lankan soldiers advanced toward them, the LTTE retreated to bunkers, taking civilians with them, which they used as human shields (Spencer et al. 2015; Thiranagama 2011). On May 19, 2009, the army, after killing the leader of the LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran, declared an end to the war. The United Nations conservatively estimated that seven thousand civilians were killed in this final period of fighting (Polgreen 2010). The government held approximately 265,000 Tamil inhabitants of the area in internment

camps, which they argued was necessary to separate the rebels from the civilians (Thiranagama 2011).

The years following the end of the war saw the continued militarization of public life and the proliferation of Sinhala Buddhist nationalist rhetoric. In addition, the government turned its attention to the development of the North and East rather than the effort to find a political solution to the conflict (see Figure 1.4) (Goodhand 2012). President Maithripala Sirisena's surprise win over Mahinda Rajapaksa in January 2015 brought a stop to some of the postwar abuses, but reconciliation will be a long and complicated process (Amarasingam



FIGURE 1.4 Dambakola Patuna Sri Sangamitta Viharaya Temple in Jaffna
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and Bass 2016). In the next section, I frame my treatment of contemporary Sri Lanka by examining shifting identities among Sri Lankan social groups from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. I then look at the history of Kandy in the precolonial and colonial periods and how it came to be considered both a place of retreat and a cosmopolitan center.

Shifting Identities from the Colonial Period to the Present

Historians and anthropologists have taken “primordialist” and “modernist” approaches to understanding the origin of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict (see Rogers 1994). Today, scholars agree that the conflict was not the result of an ancient rivalry between Sinhala and Tamils. Rather, it grew out of the decidedly modern attaching of ethnic categories to more fluid identities (Rogers 1994, 2004; Sivasundaram 2013; Thiranagama 2011). The British themselves did not “imagine identities or construct them” (Wickramasinghe 2006, 44); rather, race/ethnicity was solidified as a social category when it was connected to political structures in the early decades of British rule (Thiranagama 2011).

Racial categories were first used as a basis for political representation in the Legislative Council (a governing body comprised of nonofficial members who represented distinct “racial” groups) in 1833 and 1888. The religious and cultural revivals among Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims in the middle and late nineteenth century were also critical in the consolidation of racial/ethnic and political identities (Nissan and Stirrat 1990).¹⁶ While the British did not initially emphasize language, it became an important category in colonial discourse after the development of the field of comparative linguistics (Trautmann 1997). The discovery that Sinhala was an Indo-Aryan language related to Sanskrit and that Tamil was a Dravidian language “was used to confirm and accentuate ethnic differences” (Rogers 1994, 16). In the first half of the twentieth century, increasingly consolidated Sinhala and Tamil identities interacted with political and economic processes to bring about ethnonationalism and Sinhala/Tamil polarization (Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Rogers 1994). From this process ethnic conflict emerged in the mid-1950s (Spencer 1990).

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Sinhala defined themselves as Kandyans, who came under British rule relatively late, or Low-country, who lived in the southwest coastal region and had more sustained contact with colonial rulers. In the 1930s Sinhala de-emphasized these regional differences in favor of the language-based Sinhala ethnic identity, although sociocultural, linguistic, caste, and class differences among these groups remained relevant.

Differences among the various Tamil-speaking groups have been much more openly articulated. Tamils recognize significant regional and ethnic differences between people in the North, East, and Up-country regions, related to caste, class, religion, and language. Throughout the twentieth century, the Sri Lankan government wavered in the way it represented Tamils. When the government was faced with the Tamil separatist threat in the early 1970s, it emphasized differences between geographically defined Tamil groups to demonstrate that there was no common Tamil interest (Daniel 1996). However, the state has also sought to sustain the widely held view that Tamils “constitute the monolithic Other against whom the Sinhala people, along with the Sinhala state, can define its identity” (1996, 17).

While it is argued that caste is less significant and visible in Sri Lanka than in India, an overwhelming majority of Sinhalas and Tamils recognize caste for some social and political purposes (Silva et al. 2009). Caste, however, functions very differently across these principal groups (McGilvray 2008). The Sinhala caste structure does not include the top and bottom rungs of the Hindu caste system. Most Sinhalas are members of the *Goyigama* caste (a dominant landowning caste), who have maintained a rivalry with the *Karaava* fishing caste. In Jaffna, where there are very few Brahmins, a parallel rivalry exists between the upper-caste non-Brahmin *VeLLaLar* caste and the *Karaiyaar* (also a fishing group) caste (Pfaffenberger 1982). The overwhelming majority of Up-country Tamils belong to low castes, though there are some upper-caste families (Daniel 1996).

There are significant sociocultural, linguistic, political, and economic differences between Muslims in the war-ravaged North and East and the South.¹⁷ In the late nineteenth century, southern Muslim leaders situated themselves as a racial group distinct from Tamils in order to obtain separate political representation in the Legislative Council.¹⁸ In the twentieth century, southern Muslim leaders gradually constructed a pan-Islamic identity, which allowed them to distance themselves from the Sinhala-Tamil conflict (McGilvray and Raheem 2007). Although most Sri Lankan Muslims speak Tamil and attend Tamil-medium schools, they ethnically distinguish themselves from Tamils on religious grounds.¹⁹ This sharply contrasts with Muslims in Tamil Nadu, India, who accept both linguistic (Tamil) and religious (Muslim) identities (McGilvray 2008; Ramaswamy 1997).

Southern Muslims' vulnerability vis-à-vis Sinhalas and Tamils largely shaped their participation in Sri Lankan politics. The Sinhala-Muslim riots of 1915, which started in Kandy and spread to Colombo, caused Muslims to seek the protection of the British government (Thiranagama 2011). Political issues related to the riots turned Muslims against Tamil leaders and the possibility of “Tamil-speaking” ethnic solidarity (McGilvray and Raheem 2007).²⁰ After Muslim candidates were defeated in elections in 1948, southern Muslims switched to a policy of

accommodation with the Sinhala-majority government, a strategy that brought them valuable economic and educational concessions. This policy was solidified when Muslims grew fearful for their safety in the aftermath of the 1983 riots (Thiranagama 2011). Eastern Muslims' ethnic and political interests merged with the formation of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress in 1981, but southern Muslims have continued to support mainstream political parties (McGilvray 2008).

Kandy: A Brief History

During the Anuradhapura period (third century BC to tenth century AC), a significant Sinhala Buddhist civilization took shape in Sri Lanka. But pressure from Tamil-speaking Hindus moving in from South India eventually forced the kingdom to retreat southward, first to Polonnaruwa, then to various other capitals, until the last phase of Sinhala independence, which centered on Kandy. Before the Kandyan kingdom, the central mountainous region of Sri Lanka had not been much developed, highly populated, or considered a civilizational center (de Silva 2008). As K. M. de Silva states, "The region, known as Malayarata, was important only as an occasional centre of resistance against foreign invasions and as a haven for insurrectionists and outlaws" (2008, 134). Initially a client region to the Kingdom of Kotte, Kandy established itself as an independent entity only in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (2008).

From the seventeenth century onward, the Kandyan kingdom was the only region able to fully escape Portuguese (1505–1658) and Dutch colonial rule (1658–1796) (Rogers 2004). The Dutch were highly intolerant of Buddhism, and from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries, Kandy became the most important seat of Buddhism on the island (Duncan 1990). Kandy's Dalida Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth), which was erected to house a precious tooth relic of the Buddha, was the most famous Buddhist institution on the island (Arasaratnam 1964).²¹ Muslims living on the coast faced persecution from the Dutch and the Portuguese because of their religion and because they threatened the European monopoly on coastal trade (Dewaraja 1986; McGilvray and Raheem 2007). Kandy also became a place of retreat for Muslims. Those who fled the coast advised the kingdom on issues of trade and found work in the king's bullock carriage department, among other occupations (Sivasundaram 2013).

In a recent lecture, Gananath Obeyesekere (2013) contrasted the long period of Catholic proselytizing and religious intolerance in Ceylon's maritime regions with the "open cosmopolitanism" of the Kandyan Kingdom from 1580 to 1731. He suggested that although it is not apparent in Buddhist texts of the period, the kings during this time frame maintained a generous

outlook evident in their acceptance of people of all religious backgrounds, as well as their welcoming of Dutch, Portuguese, and Muslim immigrants. King Vimaladharmasuriya, who ruled from 1590 to 1604, adopted Portuguese fashion and architectural styles, and shook the hands of European visitors in the Western style (2013).

The Nayakkar dynasty (1739 to 1815) provides another window onto the plurality and fluidity of identity in this Kandyan period. When King Narendrasimha died without an heir in 1739, the throne passed to his adopted son who was the brother of one of his queens (Rogers 2004). The next five kings were all members of the Nayakkar community in Kandy. They were Tamil speakers who traced their family's origin to Telugu-speaking areas of South India (Arasaratnam 1964). The fact that Nayakkars could hold the Kandyan throne does not necessarily present a contradiction. Kandyan monarchs were expected to uphold the Buddhist order, but it was more important that they be of royal lineage than be Sinhala (Rogers 1994).

By the end of the eighteenth century, the strain of fighting off both the Portuguese and the Dutch had taken its toll. Tensions between the Dravidian court and the Sinhala nobility led to such serious disputes that the British were able to take over the kingdom in 1815 (Arasaratnam 1964). Though multifaceted and open in the precolonial era, Kandy took on the important features of its contemporary character as a multiethnic and multilingual urban center only with the arrival of the plantation economy during the British period (Roberts 1979). British rule also brought significant changes in technology and transportation: the first road from Colombo to Kandy was built in 1831, and the first railway in 1867 (Wickramasinghe 2006). In addition, in the late nineteenth century Western-style educational institutions proliferated in Kandy, Colombo, Galle, and Jaffna (Roberts 1997).

The changes brought about by British rule made the Kandyan Sinhals look inward. The substitution of British for Nayakkar rule “had the effect of reinforcing and deepening the commitment to the old society, and to institutions, secular and religious, associated with it” (de Silva 2008, 231–232). The plantation economy (coffee and later tea) in the mid-nineteenth century brought an influx of new social groups—British planters and missionaries; Muslim and Chetty traders; Low-country Sinhala traders, laborers, settlers, clerks; and Indian plantation laborers. The arrival of these groups created resentment among the local Sinhals, who, by the early twentieth century, had a “firm conviction that they were the survivors, so to speak, of a patrimony lost—a perception that had considerable foundation in fact” (Roberts 1979, 44). Kandyan Sinhals not only resented the British, but also the Low-country Sinhals. They feared that this population would dominate the new electoral constituencies in their district

(1979). However, Kandyan nationalism gradually dwindled with the rise of pan-Sinhala nationalism in the early to mid-twentieth century (Daniel 1996; Tambiah 1986).²²

Postcolonial Kandy has been associated with the potential for conflict. Stanley Tambiah (1986), in his well-known treatise on the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, notes that nearly half of Sri Lanka's Tamil population lives in areas of Sinhala dominance (in the South). He correlates the copresence of Sinhalas and Tamils in certain geographic areas with the potential for violence. He designates these sensitive areas as Colombo and its suburbs, the Central Province (including Kandy), and the eastern districts. In the 2012 census the Kandy District (total population of 1,375,382) was 74.4 percent Sinhala, 5.2 percent North and East Tamil, 6.1 percent Up-country Tamil, and 13.9 percent Muslim (Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka 2012).²³ Some of my research participants in Kandy discussed the possibility of a riot, but I do not primarily equate the city's ethnically mixed population with the potential for bloodshed. Rather, the presence of a significant population of Tamils and Muslims in a Sinhala-dominant social milieu makes the city a crucial location to study ethnic relations (see Figures 1.5 and 1.6). Kandy is part of the Sinhala



FIGURE 1.5 King Street Jumma Mosque in Kandy
Canaan Albright



FIGURE 1.6 Lord Kataragama Temple in Kandy

Buddhist nation-state, but it also has a unique historical identity as the former Kandyan Kingdom and a bustling urban center that has long incorporated distinct social groups.

Language Ideologies

Language ideologies are a central theoretical framework in the field of linguistic anthropology. Scholars of language ideologies analyze how linguistic varieties are conceptualized and mapped onto individuals, groups, activities, physical settings,

and institutions (Irvine and Gal 2000).²⁴ These processes are infused with political and moral interests.²⁵

Linguistic anthropologists have studied the role of language in ethnic, religious, and national group formation and identification.²⁶ Language is conceived as a “cultural site through which ‘communities’ are conceived and membership in them is assigned or denied” (Eisenlohr 2004, 63). The language ideological framework has exposed the dynamics of locally situated processes of identity formation and differentiation. Studies in this field focus not only on the structure of language ideologies, but also on their effects on people’s ways of thinking, feeling, and acting (Duranti 2011). Language ideologies impact sociolinguistic practices and are involved in processes of linguistic, social, and political change.

The concept of language ideologies has been particularly useful for my project since it provides a way to explore the meanings of linguistic signs (languages or features of speech) in use in relation to widely circulating ways of making sense of ethnic, religious, and class differences. Moving beyond a simple “micro-macro” approach in relating local linguistic events to larger-scale processes, Stanton Wortham (2012) argues that emergent patterns are generally not reducible to individual events but are impacted by processes at longer and broader temporal and spatial scales. Throughout this book I look at discrete ethnographic moments—in which configurations of difference are often subtly realigned—in relation to more established interactional norms and patterns.

There is a significant body of literature on language ideologies in relation to schools and other institutions (see Kroskrity 2000; Wortham 2008). Many of these studies focus only on the content of explicit language ideologies or discourses and their relevance for power hierarchies and political processes (Philips 1998). Recently there has been a push to connect language ideologies to individuals, groups, institutions, and practices, in time and space.²⁷ I seek to ground language ideologies in specific institutions and discourses, which allows me to chart how ideologies move from one setting to another and are possibly changed in the process (1998).

This book points to the role of education policies and practices and everyday interactions in the processes by which language is attached to ethnic, religious, regional, and class identities. To do so, I investigate the enactment of language ideologies across different spheres of practice. I define “spheres of practice” as social spaces characterized by physical setting, activity, participants, and other factors. For example, different ideologies that connect linguistic varieties with ethnic differences may come to the fore in an exchange between a teacher and student in the classroom (sphere of practice) as opposed to a conversation among students after the teacher leaves. In addition, the implications of a Sinhala person speaking Tamil in a TSL class are quite different from those of a conversation on a Kandy

street. Using the sphere-of-practice concept and other related terms allows me to integrate the study of talk in institutional and noninstitutional settings, which enables a more nuanced and precise account of language ideological processes.

Consistent with my focus on the more or less overt aspects of language ideological processes, I attend to people's explicit talk *about* language (metadiscourse) and language use.²⁸ For example, I look at how teachers evaluate different varieties of Tamil and employ those varieties. I avoid sharply differentiating talk about language from language use but explore the complexities within and across these aspects of communication (see Jaffe 1999). By focusing on the enactment of ideologies across different spheres of practice and which ideologies are involved in talk about language and language use, I examine the processes by which language-based models of ethnicity are instantiated and perpetuated. I particularly focus on how linguistic varieties or features of speech index speakers, groups (defined by ethnicity, religion, region, class, etc.), and social spheres (Agha 2007; Irvine and Gal 2000; Silverstein 1976).²⁹

Hindu College and Girls' College

Before discussing Hindu College and Girls' College in more detail, it is necessary to situate them with respect to the Sri Lankan national education system. There are private schools in Sri Lanka, including a category of English-medium schools called international schools, but the overwhelming majority of children attend government schools, which are controlled by the central government and the provincial councils. The education system is organized into five levels: primary (grades 1–5), junior secondary (grades 6–9), senior secondary (grades 10–11), collegiate (grades 12–13), and tertiary (university). Students take three national exams: the grade 5 scholarship exam; the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary-level (O level) exam, which determines their entrance to the collegiate level; and the GCE Advanced-level (A level) exam, which is a university entrance exam.

Schools are organized by their language of instruction and religious affiliations. Sinhala study in the Sinhala medium and Tamils study in the Tamil medium. Southern Muslims, who claim that Arabic is their mother tongue or that they do not have one, are variously placed into Sinhala- and Tamil-medium programs, but the majority study in the Tamil medium (Nuhman 2007).³⁰ There are some bilingual schools in cities, but throughout the island most Sinhala, Tamils, and Muslims study in separate schools.

Hindu College is a small Tamil-medium Hindu provincial school administered by the provincial councils. It is attended by both girls and boys. All the

students are ethnically Tamil and include both Hindus and Christians. Girls' College, formerly a Christian missionary school started in the late nineteenth century, is now a national Buddhist school administered by the Ministry of Education. It is one of the leading girls' educational institutions on the island. By offering Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams and an English bilingual program, it accommodates students from all ethnic and religious backgrounds. While Hindu College students are lower to lower middle class, Girls' College students are lower middle to middle class. These schools do not fully represent Kandy's educational landscape—which would necessarily include a Sinhala-medium provincial school—but a focus on these institutions nonetheless enables me to demonstrate how youths' experiences vary with regard to the type of school (provincial vs. national), the language of instruction, and the ethnicity, religion, gender, and class of the students.

My Place in Kandy

As a foreigner conducting research on politically contentious issues, I was careful to behave in a balanced and sympathetic manner toward Sri Lankans of all social backgrounds. However, my status as a white American and my language skills impacted what I was able to observe. I began fieldwork with a high level of proficiency in Tamil from over a decade of language study in the United States and at different universities and language institutes in Tamil Nadu, India. My proficiency helped me develop an easy rapport with Tamil and Muslim administrators, educators, parents, and students in Kandy and Colombo. My research collaborators were accustomed to seeing and interacting with tourists, NGO workers, journalists, students, and academics, but told me it was rare to meet a foreigner who could speak Tamil well. My skills were particularly appreciated because of Tamil's status as a minority language. Within a day of my arrival in Colombo in January 2007, the Tamil Christian housekeeper at my guest house invited me to visit her son's former Tamil-medium school. Tamil speakers were interested in my research on what I described as *mozhi kalaachchaaram* (language culture). Many of my participants seemed to immediately understand my focus on Tamil sociolinguistic variation and educational inequalities.

I began my research at Hindu College and Girls' College after conducting a preliminary survey of public and private schools in Kandy and Colombo. I observed and recorded students, teachers, and principals at Hindu College from September 2007 to January 2008. I focused on the girls and boys in the grade 11 class (ages fifteen to seventeen), who were preparing to take their O-level exam that January. I also recorded students' speech in nonschool settings such as

homes, shops, in the street, and on the bus. After I started my research at Girls' College, I regularly visited Hindu College and stayed in touch with many of the students from the 2007 grade 11 class.

I conducted research at Girls' College from February to August 2008. The principal and I agreed that to give back to the school I would supplement my research by teaching English to grades 9 and 10 English-medium classes. I focused my research on the grade 10 Tamil-medium class (ages fourteen to sixteen), since the principal did not want me to disturb the grade 11 students' O-level exam preparation. I observed and recorded these students in the classroom and other spaces at the school. My role at Girls' College was slightly different than at Hindu College because I was a teacher in addition to a researcher. However, because I did not teach the students in the grade 10 Tamil-medium class, they treated me more like an older friend than a teacher. I observed other Tamil-, Sinhala-, and English-medium classes (grades 6–13), with a focus on the SSL and TSL subjects. I observed and recorded the teachers in the Tamil-medium staffroom and attended school events and activities. I visited the homes of numerous Girls' College students and teachers after school and on weekends.

The places where I lived gave me a sense of Kandy's sociocultural and linguistic landscape while also exposing me to different ethnic and religious groups. During the first month of my research, I stayed with a Sinhala family in an ethnically mixed upper-middle-class neighborhood near the Dalida Maligawa. For the next seven months, I stayed with a Tamil Hindu family in a predominantly Sinhala and Muslim neighborhood perched on a hillside halfway between the center of Kandy and the University of Peradeniya. Their daughter, Kavitha, was a grade 10 Tamil-medium student at Girls' College. Although I maintained a good relationship with the family, I decided to move out in February 2008 because I felt unsafe when they went out of town on weekends. For the next six months, I lived in an annex on Peradeniya Road, in an ethnically mixed middle-class neighborhood. While living in this annex, I spent almost every evening with a Muslim family across the street whose four daughters all attended Girls' College.

I enhanced my understanding of multilingual language programs and inter-ethnic relations by observing TSL classes taught to Sinhala police officers and administrators in Kandy and Colombo. I also observed TSL practices among youth at a multiethnic international NGO in Kandy (Peace International) and at the University of Peradeniya. When I returned to Sri Lanka from June to August 2011, I met with staff and students at Hindu College and Girls' College and attended additional TSL classes in Kandy and Colombo. I also stayed in touch with principals, teachers, and students through phone, email, and social media.

Consistent with theories of transcription as ethnography (Briggs 1986; Schieffelin 2005; Urban 1996), my analysis of linguistic interactions is informed

not just by the events themselves, but by the subsequent circulation of the recordings and transcripts to my research informants. As a second-language learner of Tamil and Sinhala, my ability to analyze the subtleties of some of the linguistic material is limited. In addition, multiple perspectives are also essential to contextualize and understand complex conversations (Davis 2014). I worked with two paid assistants, Kausalya and Uma, who were both Up-country Tamil Hindus. Partly due to the professional and personal difficulties she faced, Kausalya had a particularly astute awareness of sociolinguistic inequalities. Uma, who had completed her A levels in the Tamil medium at Girls' College, had a strong knowledge of Tamil, Sinhala, and English. I met with Kausalya and Uma once a week to listen to selected recordings I had made that week. When there was a segment that one of us found interesting, we would stop the recorder and discuss it at length. Several other colleagues and friends—including my Sinhala teacher (a Sinhala Buddhist) and a young man living in Kandy (an Up-country Tamil Christian)—also helped me interpret my recordings.

Overview of Chapters

Building on the contextual information provided here, chapter 2 demonstrates the persistent segregation of Sinhala- and Tamil-medium students and how linguistic, ethnic, and religious divisions at different levels are reinforced, from national and local education policies to everyday practices. I investigate the implementation of the recent trilingual policies at Hindu College and Girls' College in relation to the regimenting of language of instruction, ethnicity, and religion in school-based practices. At Hindu College, pedagogical practices and the school's orientation as a Tamil-speaking sphere of practice prevented students from improving their skills in SSL and English. Students gained proficiency in English at Girls' College, but the SSL and TSL programs were unevenly implemented, with Sinhala-medium students writing Tamil but refraining from speaking it. I suggest that while the trilingual policies were enacted to create interethnic harmony, national and local education policies and practices continue to use languages as a basis for ethnic difference, the results of which play out far beyond educational settings.

Chapters 3 and 4 investigate how the Girls' College teachers and students negotiated and contested inequalities among Tamil-speaking groups and between these groups and the Sinhala majority in their interactions in school and at home. Chapter 3 focuses on discussions and debates among the Tamil-medium teachers about which varieties of Tamil are the best in relation to shifting hierarchies between North and East Tamils, Up-country Tamils, and Muslims. I show

how the incongruities within and across the teachers' ideological assertions and evaluative practices reveal subtle shifts in the configuration of social inequalities. Chapter 4 considers the complex role of English in how the Girls' College grade 10 Tamil-medium students navigated inequalities in the school as a whole and the Tamil-medium stream and claimed status as cosmopolitan Kandy or Sri Lankan girls. The use of full English in the classroom risked making them seem snobbish, but the girls skillfully used English-inflected Tamil to articulate desired identities and stake claims in the future. Despite their multilingualism, the girls' identities as predominantly Tamil speakers shaped how they interacted in school and in their home and neighborhood settings. I argue that while their representation of themselves as Kandy girls avoided ethnicity-based models of identity, inconsistent with ideologies present in the national language and education reforms, they did not see Kandy as ethnically integrated so much as associate the city with their potential for upward mobility.

In chapter 5 I examine how the Hindu College girls and boys—Tamils, both Hindu and Christian—managed different forms of monitoring and the reproducing of ethnicity inside and outside school. In school their ethnic identities were continually reproduced in relation to language of instruction and linguistic practices. Outside school they navigated a Sinhala-majority urban setting, where the very act of speaking Tamil could be considered inappropriate or offensive, or might even be seen as a security threat. Drawing on literature on participant roles, I show how the youth moved through and created different kinds of interactional spaces to which others were not privy—in classrooms, outside school, in groups, and traveling alone. I suggest that studies of youth interactions look beyond more obvious school/nonschool comparisons to investigate how participant frameworks dynamically mediate linguistic and social behavior. I also discuss how the Hindu College youth managed their status as lower-class ethnic minorities by building Tamil cocoons around themselves to insulate them in Sinhala-majority public spaces.

Chapter 6 integrates diverse data from Kandy and the nearby capital city of Colombo to investigate the performative force of speaking Tamil in public spaces. I look at the centrality of language—namely the use of Sinhala and the avoidance of Tamil—in the strategies Tamils employed to conceal or mitigate their ethnic identity at checkpoints and on the street. I further analyze the ideological weight of Tamil by exploring Sinhala's TSL practices at training programs for administrators and police officers, as well as at a peacebuilding NGO that promotes trilingual communication. I demonstrate that TSL classes provide a sphere of practice in which Sinhala could comfortably speak Tamil, but on the street their use of Tamil was fraught because of its ideological association with Tamil ethnic identity. When Sinhala members of the NGO spoke Tamil, they

used a mocking variety that reinforced negative stereotypes about Tamil people (Hill 1995, 2008). I show how ideologies and practices around speaking Tamil reflect and produce ethnic divisions.

Chapter 7 discusses the processes by which language-based models of ethnic identity in Sri Lanka spread across institutional and noninstitutional settings. Tamil and Muslim students' identity as ethnic minorities was foregrounded in their schooling experience, but it was in the public sphere that ethnic differences around language were the most consequential. Tamil-speaking girls' imagining of a cosmopolitan Kandy enabled them to cope with the ethnic conflict as well as to aim for a comfortable future and be open to opportunities. I conclude by discussing Sri Lanka's political landscape since the end of the war in May 2009 and the importance of language rights to the reconciliation process. I argue that despite the fluidity of Sri Lankans' identifications, the very act of speaking Tamil, Sinhala, or English in public spaces enacts and preserves power relations and historically produced inequalities.