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Maintaining presence: Catholic aid agencies in Sri Lanka's civil war
–towards a socio-theoretical perspective to humanitarian access and power.

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Abbreviations

ACTC - All Ceylon Tamil Congress
CHA – Consortium for Humanitarian Agencies in Sri Lanka
CRS – Catholic Relief Services
DA – District Agent (same as GA)
GA – Government Agent
GoSL – Government of Sri Lanka
HRW – Human Rights Watch
HUDEC –Human Development Center (Caritas Jaffna and Caritas Vanni)
ICG – International Crisis Group
ICRC - The International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC - The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
JRS – Jesuit Refugee Service
LTTE – The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NFZ - No Fire Zone
OHCHR - UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PTF – Presidential Task Force
SEDEC –Social and Economic Development Centre (the national center of Caritas in Colombo)
SLA – Sri Lanka Army
SLFP - Sri Lanka Freedom Party
TNA – Tamil National Alliance
TULF - The Tamil United Liberation Front
UN – United Nations
WFP – World Food Programme

Map 1. Sri Lanka. Source: UN Cartographic Section - public domain/reproduced with permission.



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Introduction

Sri Lanka's civil war (1983-2009) ended with a self-declared military victory of the Sri Lankan Government (GoSL) forces over the separatist Liberation of Tamil Tigers Eelam (LTTE). The military operations in the final stage of the war created a humanitarian crisis exasperated by an embargo of aid agencies and international media, which left at least 40 000, even 70 000 civilians dead (see, for example, UN 2011; OHCHR 2015a; OHCHR 2015b; HRW 2008). In April 2008, the GoSL denounced a demarcated safe zone in Vanni, the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, claiming it was providing a haven (No Fire Zone, NFZ) for civilians but instead from September 2008 onwards, prohibited humanitarian agencies accessing the area. However, few aid agencies were authorised to remain or to pay short visits to the restricted area to assist tens of thousands of civilians suffering from severe malnutrition and several health issues. Those agencies were the ICRC, the Red Cross Sri Lanka and some members of the UN's national staff. Moreover, Catholic agencies had a considerable presence inside and just outside the borders of the NFZs: Caritas Sri Lanka¹ (a member of international Catholic charity Caritas Internationalis, working in cooperation with other Catholic actors) and finally, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), which is an international NGOs of the Society of Jesus (the religious order of the Jesuits). Nonetheless, the military operation invaded the safe zone, and the SLA targeted the zone during the last month of the battle. A report of the OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka (OISL) (2015a, 18) sums up the situation as follows: "The departure of most international observers from the Vanni effectively undermined protection responses and humanitarian assistance programmes for civilians [...] United Nations national staff and their families, like many other civilians, were refused permission by the LTTE to leave but continued their humanitarian work in a deteriorating humanitarian situation."

The GoSL's prohibition of humanitarian agencies to the NFZ, as well as a failure of the international humanitarian community in their responsibility to protect (R2P), raise a question of legitimacy and politicisation of humanitarian agencies. While the actions of the UN and ICRC have received much attention, this thesis focuses on the role of Catholic actors as humanitarians. A recent discussion regarding humanitarian access raised the rationale for a research of such organisation-specific features. A discussant said:

¹ Caritas Sri Lanka is part of Caritas International - Catholic Agency for International Aid and Development; also the Social Arm of Catholic Church. The national office in Sri Lanka was called Social and Economic Development Centre (SEDEC) until 2005 when it started to use a name of Caritas Sri Lanka. A name SEDEC still appears in their communications and the terms are used interchangeably in this thesis. Further, the diocesan centres of Caritas are called by other names. The centres focal for this thesis are Caritas EHED, which is the social arm of the Catholic Diocese of Batticaloa and is affiliated to Caritas Sri Lanka (SEDEC) and Caritas Internationalis and Caritas HUDEC (Human Development Centre), which has offices in Jaffna and Kilinochchi.

We often analyse access from the point of view of international humanitarian agencies, or the UN. What we don't yet understand fully is how other organisations function, so whether they are diaspora organisations, local NGOs, or even other individuals, who provide assistance, not in the same way perhaps the organisations we know would do it, but they have access, but how did they get that sort of access [...] There is not much information on that aspect. (Eva Svoboda 2015)

The purpose of this thesis is thus to identify, describe and analyse the kinds of historical, political and institutional² aspects which contributed to the presence of Caritas, JRS and other Catholic actors inside and nearby the NZF. Doing this, I attempt to introduce the Church-specific networks and structures that the Catholic Church can employ in a humanitarian response.

At the same time, this thesis is a practice in a field of an inter-disciplinary social science. I will problematise conventional notions of humanitarian presence and humanitarian actors and ask, through which discourses or processes (historical, semiotic, political, institutional) the Catholic Church and its aid bodies have become (and may have failed to become) legitimate and neutral humanitarian actors. Here, I adopt Alex Golub's (2014) theory of feasibility, in turn, based on Callon & Latour's (1981) theorisation of social processes. In sum, Golub describes how collective actors become powerful social and political actors, "leviathans". Overall, Golub examines the complex social, political and symbolic processes through which the agency and existence of these groups constitute. For this thesis, the specific concepts of leviathan, feasibility and black-boxing will serve as analytical tools which will help to analyse a range of elements that characterise the Church as a leviathan. I will ask, how the Church employs this leviathan nature for the feasibility of the Church's humanitarian efforts in Sri Lanka. The purpose of this thesis is thus to identify and analyse the elements (such as, governance, networks and social networks) found within the Church that are relevant for understanding the power of the Church, and how these elements come to construct the feasibility of the Church as a humanitarian actor.

Background

In 2012, I was listening to a sermon given by a visiting Sri Lankan preacher in an Anglican community in Finland. He smiled, greeted and assured that all is well in Sri Lanka. Peace finally prevails, he affirmed.³

Almost two years later in 2014, a Jesuit priest was describing me an event of commemoration and started by saying: *"this year is the fifth year of what the government calls the end of the war, which I don't agree."*

² I will use the terms organisational, structural and institutional interchangeably.

³ Quote simplified for the sake of clarity.

Did the civil war ever actually end in Sri Lanka? In an auto-ethnography of Northern Tamils in Sri Lanka, Thiraganama (2011) suggests that while the boundary which delineates direct violence from structural violence may be elusive, in Sri Lanka people do make “differentiations between forms of violence” (ibid. 10) and describe “distinct feelings of *yuttam*, war, and notes enormous differences after *yuttam* from years before” (ibid. 9). The feelings of continuity of war even after the end of violent military operations are dependent on the war-time experiences:

Violence in wartime obfuscates the very real kinds of structural and physical violence people live with even when, not at war (see Richards 2005b), and that for those studied there is little difference at times between war and peace.” (Thiranagama 2011, 7)

Based on a nuanced understanding of these different forms of violence, Thiranagama concludes that “the military war may have ended, but not the political one: the place of minorities in Sri Lanka still remains unsure” (ibid. 4). While the visiting priest was sharing a typical victor’s narration, for the Tamils the war did not end with the unilateral government declaration in 2009 and the structural violence continues. After the war, human rights organisations have reported of various human rights violations targeted at the minorities including forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, intimidation of journalists, human rights activists, women and Muslims, arbitrary detentions. A major criticism concerns the accountability for alleged war crimes (OHCHR 2015a; ICG 2010; ICG 2012; ICG 2013a; ICG 2013b). For those who have lived and seen the terror, these violations might only prove that the state continues a majoritarian rule, changing the demographics of Sri Lanka and, to cite my respondent’s striking statement, to “destroy the Tamils”.⁴

This argumentation introduces us to the causes of the conflict. The conflict dynamics have shaped the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (formerly known as Ceylon until 1972)⁵ since the 1948 independence. The conflict is often portrayed in binary terms involving the two ethnic groups. First, the Sinhalese (constituting the majority of the population), and secondly, the Sri Lankan Tamils (constituting the largest ethnic minority with 12%⁶), but especially inhabiting the North and the East of the island so offering “the basis of separatist claims to an independent Tamil homeland” (Thiranagama 2011, 12-13). Nonetheless, the binary description of the conflict hardly portrays the conflict in all its complexity. In Sri Lanka, the inter-ethnic violence is interwoven with the dynamics

⁴ As was put by this interviewee: “*I would say always be disappearances, be human rights violations, this is always a bigger political project of the government, which is to eliminate the Tamils. Which is basically the genocide, right? Of course many people don’t want to say ‘the genocide’ because it has to be technically proven but of course they also have difficulties proving the intentions of the government [...] As I said earlier, whatever is [...] land grabbing, be it enforced disappearances, be it sexual violence, whatever it is, this is part of the bigger political project of the government, since independence, which is to say that the elimination of the Tamils.*”

⁵ Until 1972, the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka) was known as Ceylon. Nonetheless, the term Sri Lanka is utilised throughout the paper for reasons of consistency and clarity.

⁶ The percentage was “down from 12.7 percent as a result of major outmigration and deaths caused by the war” (Thiranagama 2011, 13). Thiranagama also reminds of the discrimination of Hill Country Tamils, the descendants of South Indian plantation labour, constituting 4.6 percent of the population (ibid. 12-13).

of the intra-ethnic violence (Thiranagama 2011) and other ethnic minorities of Moor and Malay Muslims have both suffered and been involved in the conflict (see, for example, Hasbullah 2001).

Thus, the root cause of the conflict is irreducible to any single issue such as ethnicity, religion, language, land-ownership, nor are they in a clear history-linear relationship (Perera 2001). Rather, war can be seen as an “intensification of particular social life and process. (Thiranagama 2011, 5). For the interest of clarity, I will nonetheless follow Perera’s (2001) suggestion and lay out the central traits which help to understand the overall development to the conflict, and also the longevity of it.

Most importantly, one must understand the inherent power asymmetry between the Sinhalese majority and the minorities.⁷ It was the Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalist ideology that shaped the postcolonial state and incorporated the unitary model based on cultural and religious heritage to the state ideology. Since the 1950s, the Sinhala-Buddhists nationalists⁸ (here understood as those supporting conceptions of racial superiority of the Sinhalese people and religious heritage) have had the political power to preserve the purity of Theravada Buddhism and Sinhala culture. They justify their power with historical claims of land ownership and cultural homogeneity (for historical accounts, see Tambiah 1982; Rogers 1994; Spencer 1990; Nissan & Stirrat 1990). Thus, the violent eruption of the conflict can be seen as a “culmination of the growing tensions between the consecutive Sinhala-dominated governments and increasingly radicalising Tamil groups that started to fight for an independent state for the Tamil population, called Tamil Eelam, from the mid-1970s onwards” (Frerks 2013, 22).

Further, understanding the current-day political identities involves describing the legacy of British and Christian colonialism for the state formation after 1946. In the following section, I will give a brief overview of the colonial and post-colonial history of Sri Lanka and the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka as follows. I will begin by presenting the kinds of structures that were created during the first decades of independence and never fundamentally changed. I will then go on to describe the formation of the unitary state. First, how federalism was rejected by the subsequent government and how the Tamil parties responded to this. I will describe how the Tamil separatism emerged⁹ as a result of legal and political developments that led to a sense of ethnic segregation of the Tamils in the polity and the emerging of the civil war. The remaining part is concerned with the history of the Catholic

⁷ Other minorities such as Burgers and the aboriginal Veddas are not “involved in the ethnic conflict on grounds of language or ethnicity” (Thiranagama 2011, 12).

⁸ In this thesis, terms Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism and Sinhalese nationalism are used interchangeably. Having said that, I will mainly deploy the term “Sinhalese nationalism” as the conflict is mainly characterised along ethnic, and less along religious lines. Especially in case of my research on Catholics of the country, it is the ethnic, not the religious identity that plays the divisive role. This notion of ethnic division and religious unison is important as will be argued later, one of the sources of power for the Catholic Church is the Sinhalese faction within the Church.

⁹ This is an especially relevant question in connection with the paradigm of “just war”. Many people regard the reason for taking up the arms as a legitimate war, although would agree that the means which the LTTE used in order to promote their agenda were unjust. “Leading politicians in Sri Lanka today acknowledge that the Tamils have been wronged, and that the malpractice of successive governments is responsible for the ethnic conflict. ‘The Tamils tired peaceful protest [...] the reality became the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.’” (DeVotta 2004, 193; quote Prime Minister Ramil Wickremesinghe).

Church in Sri Lanka in the context of political power and ethnic division. In sum, the same historical and institutional developments that explain the power (or a lack of it) of the Church in Sri Lanka also account for the competence of the Church as a humanitarian actor.

Birth of identities: the political history of Sri Lanka

Colonialism, intertwined with Western racial ideology, changed the frame of reference for existing communal identities in a way that persists in Sri Lankan society. My account is mostly narrowed down to post-colonial developments since “pre-colonial, and most of colonial Sri Lankan history does not conform to the model of two opposed nations imposed upon it by present day Sinhala and Tamil rhetoricians” (Nissan & Stirrat 1990, 24). However, the formation of the present-day Tamil and Sinhala identities¹⁰ as *political identities* started to evolve during the colonial era in a way that impacted the creation of a nation-state profoundly (Nissan & Stirrat 1990, 19). True, ethnic identities as such are not solely a colonial invention (Spencer 1990, 4), rather, identity formation needs to be understood as a process with complex intersections of actors, histories, and their interpretations in political terms (Nissan & Stirrat 1990, 30). Nonetheless, “there is clear evidence that groups have categorised others in various forms over the centuries — identities assumed more solid and ‘ethnic’ form as they became linked to concrete political structures” (Wickramasinghe 2006, 44; quoted in Thiranagama 2011, 21). The basis for categorisation was laid out during the 19th and 20th century when the British created a centralised governance (Thiranagama 2011, 21). The colonial government consisting of the Executive and Legislative Commissions and the Governor, who in turn had a right to choose unofficial members to the Commissions, was based on an idea of communal representation. Here, language and religion started to emerge as markers of “race” (Nissan & Stirrat 1990, 27).¹¹ The political significance of “Sinheleness” and “Tamilness” started to increase when “racial categories earlier recognised by the British as separate entities “were subsumed into the Tamil-Sinhala divide” (ibid. 30). Significant in this institutional development was a move from heterogeneous racial representation to a binary racial representation. While the 1931 Donoughmore Constitution replaced the system with communal representation and universal (one man one vote) suffrage and “territorial electorates” (ibid. 29), the idea of binary cultures was already reinforced by the “scholarly work on philology, ancient history, and archaeology, all of which premised clearcut categories of difference” (Thiranagama 2011, 21).

¹⁰ There is little evidence for a clearly defined Sinhalese identity dating back to the pre-colonial discourse (Rogers 1994, 17). It can be suggested that ‘Sinhalese’ was not an ethnic identity, but a culturally broad and politically narrow label with fluid interpretations of who was considered Sinhalese (ibid.).

¹¹ According to Rogers, distinct identities existed in Sri Lanka before the arrival of the first European colonialists and “were often constructed and reconstructed, both by power holders and aspirants to power” (Rogers 1994, 19). However, they did not exist as they did in the contemporary political conflict.

On a political level, the British Soulbury Commission nonetheless rejected the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC)'s demand for reserving half of the seats in Parliament for non-Sinhalese groups. As Nissan & Stirrat explain, in this way, the British came to create a unitary state in which the interests of a Sinhala majority were secured at the expense of minority rights. The situation encouraged Tamils to plead for federalism based on the previous system of communal representation. Overall, the constitutional negotiations reinforced a language of distinct races and cultures for the sake of securing minority rights. (Nissan & Stirrat 1990, 33). Thus, the effect of unifying the nation of British wished to gain by creating a unitary state did the opposite (*ibid.*). Instead of dissipating in the Sinhala mindset, the Tamils came to represent "the dangerous other" with in a way so replacing the British (*ibid.* 32).

With the independence, the British handed power to the new government, which continued the legacy of the colonial administration (Nissan & Stirrat 1990, 34). The 1950s was a defining decade for incorporating Sinhala nationalism in the unitary governance when the power was shared mainly between two political parties that have held power ever since. The United National Party (UNP), formed by the English-speaking, British-educated elite class of Sri Lanka, to whom power was handed over in the independence process, is a conservative pro-Western party, envisioning a secular, pluralist country (Rogers 2001, 798). The party acknowledged the importance of the Sinhala culture while refraining from quick reforms of the British order (Bartholomeuz 1999, 181). On the other hand, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) established by the Buddhist scholar monk S.W.R.E. Bandaranaike in 1951 (Rogers 1987, 95; Tambiah 1992, 42–44) was the main party amongst the many new revivalist groups. It called for a nationalist scheme, in order to revitalise Buddhism and the Sinhala culture. Dissatisfied with the UNP, it urged a different response to the British colonial legacy, demanding a unitary state-policy that would base exclusively on Sinhala-Buddhism (Bond 1988, 91). Before the 1956 parliamentary elections, the SLFP started a strong campaign with the support of like-minded groups involving the Buddhist clergy, leading to the presidential victory of Bandaranaike. The parliamentary election year 1956 was a turning point for politicisation of Sinhala nationalism in many ways (Tambiah 1992, 42–43). First, the election of Bandaranaike as the president of Sri Lanka established a link between the government and Buddhism (Bond 1988, 90–92). Then, the supporters of Bandaranaike, in turn, responded to the British colonial legacy in the powerful writings of the Buddhist monks (*bhikkhus*) and laymen, leading to a political adoption of their ideas (Tambiah 1992, Chapter 7). Finally, the claims of Sri Lanka's right and duty to nourish Sinhala-Buddhism were thus institutionalised, "turning [it] into an unquestioned assumption that formed an integral part of the political worldview of the Sinhalese" (Rogers 1987, 596).

After the 1956 elections, the government's language and education policies started to have discriminative forms (the literature usually identifies three areas around which the conflict evolves: language, education and development policies, see Perera 2001). The most notable development was

the Sinhala Only Act. Although never reinforced as such in the new republican constitutions of 1972 and 1976¹², the Act became a symbol of majoritarian discrimination aimed to annihilate Tamil influence from the state (DeVotta 2004, 54). The Act contributed to the antagonism and “influenced much other ethnocentric legislation that sought to empower the majority community” (DeVotta 2004, preface, unnumbered page). Moreover, the new constitutions left out any minority guarantees of the Soulbury Constitution (Art. 29[2]) but included “a two-thirds majority rule in the parliament for any future constitutional changes” (ibid. 128). According to Raghavan (2015, 128), “this amounted to a Machiavellian act to suppress Tamil aspirations for all time, even if the Tamils were to become part of any ruling government. This, in effect, has become a major political entrapment for the divided Sinhala politics of modern Lanka.”

Emerging of the radicalisation and violence

The tensions arising from the implementation of the SLFP’s agenda first culminated in anti-Tamil riots 1956 and 1958 (Rogers 1987, 584, 596). During the riots, Bandaranaike engaged in negotiations with the Tamil Federal Freedom Party (from here onwards, the Federal Party), and first showed willingness to grant some autonomy to the Tamil areas.¹³ The pact that included these provisions was, however, abandoned in 1958. The dispute around the provisions increased communal tensions, and eventually Bandaranaike was assassinated by a Buddhist monk in 1959 on the grounds of having failed to impose the “Sinhala only” policy and entering into negotiations with the Tamils during the riots. His murder indicates that Sinhalese extremist had started to perceive any cooperation with moderate groups as a political threat to Sri Lanka, and were ready to use violence to promote their agenda (Bond 1988, 91).

Concerned that the *Sinhala Only* bill and other political initiatives would radically diminish Tamils’¹⁴ access to employment, education and other opportunities (DeVotta 2004, 100), various Tamil political parties merged into the Tamil United Liberation Front (Raghavan 2015, 127; DeVotta 2004, 80-81). Given the rejection of federalism by the successive Sinhala-dominated governments, TUFL started campaigning for an independent Tamil land, *Tamil Eelam* from the 1970s onwards

¹² According to the 1972 Constitution, “Sinhala language and Buddhism will hold ‘the foremost’ place” (Raghavan 2015, 127). The language politics became tightly interwoven with other developments and emerging ethnic violence (Tambiah 1992, 47), such as the politics of land and trade. Important for the development of the conflict was that the state provided farming land for poor and landless Sinhala peasants in the North and East, which has been seen as an act “undermining Tamils’ claims to the Northern and Eastern Province as their homeland.” (ICG 2007, 8; Thiranagama 2011, 22)

¹³ Formed in 1949 with a departure from the ACTC and later changed to Tamil United Liberation Front TUFL in 1976.

¹⁴ According to Thiranagama (2011, 23), the radicalisation was accelerated by the failure of the Tamil parliamentary parties “to provide material and political resources for young Tamils.” This was because “patronage networks that brought state resources to rural areas were inaccessible to Tamil parliamentary parties and thus to northern and eastern areas.”

(Spencer 1990, 2). The turn implies an overall change in Tamil nationalism.¹⁵ While before the meaning of *Thamil arasu* was ambiguous regarding whether referring to “sovereignty [...] or [...] a Tamil State within a federal arrangement” (DeVotta 2004, 97), the interpretations now started to lean more towards communalism and separatism (ibid). Even moderate politicians joined the demand, and finally, it became the official policy of TUFL (Raghavan 2015, 129; Spencer 1990, 2). Consequently, by the end of the 1970s “the Sinhalaes were committed to a unitary state and the Tamil were now seeking to create a separate state, if necessary, by means of violence” (Raghavan 2015, 129).

Following, both Sinhala and Tamil radicalisation started to assume new forms. One of the new radical Sinhalese factions was Janatha Vimukthi Perumuna (JVP), a group of university students and rural peasants, who made an unsuccessful revolt against the government in 1971. The LTTE, in turn, was one of the many radical Tamil groups that started emerging and operating in the northern Tamil homelands. The secretive and disciplined LTTE (as expressed by Thiranagama 2011, 24) managed to absorb other militant Tamil groups. It directed its attacks to “the representatives of the state in the north” but also to Tamil militants and families, who they saw as “traitors to the Tamil nation” (as formulated by Thiranagama 2011, 24. See also Nissan & Stirrat 1990, 37).

In 1983, the year which marks the beginning of the civil war with the eruption of Eelam War I, “thousands of Tamils were killed in rioting [sic] in the Sinhala-dominated south after a massacre of government soldiers in the north” (Spencer 1990, 2). The violence spread in the east and gradually the LTTE established a *de facto* state to the areas under its control. In 1986, the LTTE declared itself as the “sole representative of the Tamil people”. 1987 was then an attempt of the government to end the war in Jaffna.¹⁶ The attacks resulted in the government’s military response (including an implementation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act granting the army extensively wide rights, including extra-judicial executions) and to the gradual militarisation of the North (Nissan & Stirrat 1990, 37, 39).

Thiranagama describes Eelam I as follows: “it was a full war footing, involving aerial bombardment, a counterinsurgency campaign, and curfews, boycotts, and restrictions on the supply of food and goods to these areas” (ibid.) leaving “the south in a state of terror and chaos with around 60,000 reported missing in two short years” (ibid.). After Eelam I, the conflict was active in three Eelam Wars (1990-1995; 1995-2002, and finally, in 2006-2009.) Although each armed struggle and efforts to their resolution were different from each other in their complexity, it can be suggested that

¹⁵ Some “leading politicians” in Sri Lanka have rightly attributed the emergence of the LTTE the GoSL’s failure to build an inclusive state (DeVotta 2004, 193). Tamil nationalism, however, should not be seen merely as a reaction to the unitary Sinhala politics, but has its distinctive feature that set it aside from Sinhala nationalism.

¹⁶ That is, with the support of India, who had earlier supported the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka, changed its position towards the Tamil uprising, and became involved in the conflict. The role of India in the conflict will not be discussed in this thesis for the restricted scope of this paper.

the forms of violence and strategies that characterised the Vanni embargo during the last phase of the war were already in place in its early phases in the following way. First, the Government's military response (involving the police, the army and party members) indicates that it had started to regard violence as a political resource. It was ready to a military response as the 1987-1989 conflict "between a resurgent JVP and the state" led to "the state's incursions into the north and east" (Thiranagama 2011, 23). Secondly, the civilian communities of the North and East were now unable to escape the fighting as the LTTE and SLA surrounded and targeted them. The civilian population becoming increasingly a target of the attacks indicate that the government had started to see ethnic Sri Lankan Tamils as a threat to the state and that it was ready to ignore the international law that regulates the rules of war, as it did in the NFZ in 2009.

I have reviewed this history explained to describe the permanent patterns of violence and the highly politicised context in which Church and its aid agencies have to construct their legitimacy as providers of humanitarian aid. Implications of the colonial and post-colonial history for the institutional, religious and political power of the Catholic Church is essential for understanding the Church's involvement. Thus, I will next discuss the history of the Catholic Church basing the account on earlier literature (Stirrat 1992; Spencer et al. 2015; Johnson 2012; Johnson 2016; Gerharz 2014; Tambiah 1982, etc.).¹⁷ Also, I will describe the history of church institutions and NGOs later in this thesis in more detail as they, on their part, explain the role of the Church as a relief and development actor.

History of the Church in Sri Lanka

Historically the issue is [...] the majority being the Buddhist and the non-Catholic, non-Christians always link the church to negative past, to negative history. Because during the colonialisation, during the colonial power, particularly the Portuguese and the Spanish to some extent, who were very aggressive in their evangelisation [...] so people say that those times they were possibly converting our people, and they did the same thing the Church is doing now, and the Church must apologise the atrocities committed that time [...] So there is always a connection between the history of our colonial times as church being the negative impact. (Staff member of Caritas Sri Lanka)

The Catholicism was the faith of the Portuguese who colonised the island in the 16th century (Stirrat 1992, 6-7). As this Caritas member indicates, the colonial history still affects the negative perception of the Church. Undeniably the Church enjoyed certain privileges and authority for a long time.

¹⁷ Also, Flanigan's (2009) research on FBOs in Sri Lanka will be utilised for their explicit references to the Catholic Church and Caritas alike. Ethnography by Hatsumi (2011) has provided this thesis with information including its war-time account of a displaced Catholic Tamil community and the priests alike.

Although later the relation of the Church to the state radically changed, some features of the Church can be traced back to this relationship. First historical development to highlight here is the close connection between the state and the Catholic Church during the later British rule (1802-1948). The mutually reinforcing paternalistic relationship shaped both institutions and augmented the Church's access to resources and positions marking a significant change for Catholics after a period of persecution under the Dutch rule (1640-1796) (Stirrat 1992, 18; Johnson 2012, 79-80). During the colonial era, Catholic priests, missionaries and lay leaders assumed the role as the caretakers of the administration, gaining an authority comparable to Government Agents (in whose authority was the granting of permissions for aid deliveries during the war). Priests gained a position as middlemen who settled "local disputes not just between Catholics but also between Catholic and non-Catholics" (Stirrat 1992, 17). The influence of Catholics was further strengthened by a new, denominational education system (ibid.). English-speaking Sri Lankan students graduated from the schools established by the Church and were thus advantageously qualified for various jobs in the colonial administration and elsewhere (ibid. 18-19). In Jaffna, "Christian missionaries reinforced educational progress among Jaffna Tamils and the establishment of other social services" (Gerharz 2014, 88) and later "as a colonial asset, Christian institutions have been indigenized as prototype social service providers in Jaffna society." (ibid.). Although the schools were finally nationalised during the post-independence decades, especially the Jesuits' contribution to the educational system is still significant today (see Brown 2015). As is observed in Spencer et al. (2015, 124), "since the nineteenth century, the Jesuit presence has been especially important in the east. French Jesuits established a presence at the end of the nineteenth century, and they were followed by a large number of American Jesuits from New Orleans who arrived around the time of Independence".

Second crucial development for the institutional presence of the Church was "the formation of the parish system" (ibid.) which was established by the mid-19th century. The parish system in itself was based on the village structure, which in turn customarily followed caste boundaries. In Catholic areas, village affiliation was closely linked with church membership (ibid. 16), and in this way, the Church formed a "state within a state" (Johnson 2012, 80). Similar to the effect of the British administration in solidifying ethnic identities, the parish system substantialised entities such as the village and caste, and the hierarchy was further strengthened by the competition between the parishes as well as castes (ibid. 16).

The establishment of parish system characterises the hierarchy of the church which to some extent is still recognisable today. In the system different territories and people formed a structure in which "the family was only the smallest unit in the totality of the Church, a totality which ultimately focuses on Rome" (ibid. 16). Here, priests stood as a kind of middlemen for the laity towards both the colonial state and religious superiors. As a result, it was the "loose-knit network of contacts which

developed within the small community” (ibid. 19) that also aided church representatives to gain influential positions. It can be derived that the integral role of the priest in the village life had preserved the influence of the church even when the church was later dismantled from its former power in the South, as described here by Stirrat.

As a precedence of the changes to come, the relations between the religious communities started to crumble from the 1870s onwards (Stirrat 1992, 18-19).¹⁸ The details of these attacks, performed both by Catholics and Buddhists, are examined by Stirrat (ibid. 20) and are the scope of this study. The conflict was mostly related to conversions, material wealth, integrating also an element of caste difference and fuelled by the rising of the Buddhist militants (ibid. 19). The outcome for the Catholics was a social isolation and victimisation (ibid. 44-5). A portrayal of hostile Buddhists was actively disseminated in Catholic communications (ibid. 17, 41) thereby contributing to the growing distance between the religious groups.

The alliance between the state and Church was finally profoundly questioned from the 1930s onwards. The reasons for its contestation resemble those of today. The Catholic minority was seen as enjoying unjustified privileges in the form of education and employment (Stirrat 1992, 39). Secondly, the Church was seen as inherently anti-nationalist, an executor of the Western imperial ideology both in terms of the British rule and obedience to Rome (ibid. 22). Finally, the first post-independence 1956 election result is described by Stirrat as “the end of the Church as an effective force in Sri Lankan political life” (ibid. 40). Schools were nationalised, the quota of Catholics working in the government jobs was controlled and even nuns expelled from the state hospitals (ibid. 41). Sinhala Catholics found themselves at the crossroads: on the one hand, they were a part Catholic colonial influence that went beyond national identity. On the other hand, “there were always close connection between Sinhala Catholics and members of the majority community[...] even if they did have some autonomy under colonial rule, with Independence, they were pulled more and more in the mainstreams of political and economic developments in Sri Lanka” (Stirrat 1992, 7-8).

Before making any conclusion about the Church’s crisis during the time of political change, it is important to understand the difference between the churches in the South and the Church in the North. Spencer et al. (2015) point out that Stirrat’s study on Catholics excludes the Tamil Catholics, and so his conclusions do not apply universally. They argue that while Tamil Catholic Church of the North also faced challenges it never lost its authority vis-à-vis to local communities (Spencer et al. 2015, 138). As they argue: “the local administration (both the state and the shadow LTTE administration) and the lay population (Catholic and non-Catholic) still viewed the Church as an important force politically and socially.” (Ibid.)

¹⁸ However, this shape of inter-communal relations should not be seen as a matter of linear development, nor applicable to the whole island.

It was nevertheless the response of the Catholics in the South which mirrored the emerging division between the Sinhalese and the Tamils in the wake of Sinhala nationalism. By the 70s, most of the Sinhala Catholics started to perceive the situation in new ways and looked alterable ways to explain ethnicity and religion. The reasons for the move may be related to the fact that after the independence the Church was no longer protected by any external power (ibid. 38), was subordinated to the majority and finally, this led Catholics to seek “some sort of accommodation with the dominant Buddhist majority.” (Stirrat 1992, 21) The Church’s attempt to unlink connection between religion, nationality and ethnicity was not enough: although the Church “straddled the ethnic divide [...] the stress on ethnicity involved religious identity [...] Sinhala Catholics, became exposed to the criticism that they were not ‘really’ Sinhalese” (ibid.).

The Church’s response to the new situation was multiform. The 1931 Universal Franchise had already given Catholics an incentive to influence politicians and to follow, by the 1960s, Catholics were involved in the politics through the organic networks that were born in the process of indigenisation of priesthood, education and social services. Secondly, the majority of Sinhala Catholics started to identify with the Sinhalese nation, and this further led to an unsettled division of the Church along ethnic and linguistic lines, to the division of the South and North. While before “religious identity united Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics against religiously defined ‘others’, the division contributed on its own part to the conflict to arise. Johnson (2012, 80) summarises the meaning of this fundamental change as follows: “By the time of 1983, riots (sic) some of the worst violence against Tamil speakers took place on the west coast in predominantly Catholic areas where Catholics had once been majority Tamil speaking. In a matter of 100 years, the Catholic community turned from conflict with members of their own ethnicity in the name of religion to conflict with other Catholics in the name of ethnicity (Rogers 1987). Church remains ‘divided’ and some Tamil Catholic leaders report feeling fundamentally betrayed and abandoned” (Johnson 2012, 80).

Finally, one response by the Church to the new political climate remains to be explored. It was to attempt to restore its internal and external issues of legitimacy with theological and institutional reforms. The response was supported by the reforms introduced by the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican (from hereafter Vatican II) in the 1960s. The importance of Vatican II deserves its own treatment and its full meaning for this research will be elaborated in Chapter 2. Overall, the birth of Caritas is closely connected to the reforms. Caritas may be seen as one of the institutional reforms through which the Church was able to maintain some of its legitimacy in the South and to legitimate its political involvement in the Tamil areas (Stirrat 1992, 46; Spencer et al. 2015, 126).

To conclude, the most important division in the society is not on religious, but on ethnic lines, which the Church both mirrors and overcomes as I will explain later. Partly explained by the kinds

of social and theological reforms mentioned above, the Church's relation to other mainline religious groups is generally speaking peaceful. At the same time, more extremist Buddhists continue to politicise and contest the Church (see Chapter 3) and allegations regarding proselytisation are used by the opponents against all Christians alike (see Matthew 2007). On some other level, all religious groups are engaged with at least some bridge-building activities (see Chapter 2).

Previous research

This study combines two partially researched topics in the context of Sri Lanka: humanitarian access and Catholic aid agencies. First, the humanitarian aspect of Sri Lanka's conflict is less studied in the academic writings, as marked by Guneratne (2008, 385). One of the comprehensive accounts is by Clarence (2008) – a former head of the UNHCR in Sri Lanka who studied the humanitarian situation all the way to the year 2006. His perspective is limited by its focus on the UN but his study of “the protection-orientated relief programme of UNHCR” mentions EHED as one of the implementation partners.¹⁹ Also, a strand of research is dedicated to the politics of disaster response in the context of the tsunami, and the development and politics nexus in Sri Lanka. The most comprehensive account in the latter group is by Gerharz (2014) on development in Sri Lanka.¹ The study sheds light on the history of development in Northern Sri Lanka in relation to the Catholic Church and these findings are articulated in Chapters 1 and 2. Overall, there is a common recognition that uncoordinated international humanitarian response failed to take into account the political context, thus contributing to a re-escalation of the conflict in 2006 (see for example Silva 2009 in a dedicated issue of *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 2009). These accounts suggest regarding the embargo of humanitarian agencies in 2008 as part of a continuum.

Second, there is a growing body of literature on the Catholic engagement in Sri Lanka. The analysis of this thesis is indebted to the recent research by Johnson (2012, 2016), Spencer et al. (2015), Goodhand et al. (2009). Their findings on politics, religion and legitimacy of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka form a significant academic contribution researching religious civil society in the Tamil areas.

First, Goodhand et al. (2009) provide two case studies which describe the Catholic Church's involvement in the fields of conflict mediation and humanitarian aid, as well as their relation to other religious agencies in the region of Batticaloa. Illustrating the complexity of the humanitarian and political landscape of post-tsunami aid, they notice that EHED exhibited a strong need to portray itself as a non-partisan, professional humanitarian organisation in a highly politicised context. Pertaining to the thematic of humanitarian access, legitimacy and neutrality, they indicate that EHED

¹⁹ In addition, some later policy analysis exists but in this thesis they will not play a central role. See Keen (2009); Niland, Holmes & Bradley (2014) and Gowrinathan & Mampilly (2009).

employed a terminology and discourses of humanitarianism aiming “to separate the delivery of aid from political struggles and violent confrontations” (ibid.).²⁰ The theoretical conclusion of Goodhand et al. (2009, 683) is that humanitarian agencies such as EHED “are able to cut across prevalent mental maps and checkpoints, whether imagined or real, because they conceive themselves as ‘neutral’.”

Hence, the second theme prominent in the literature, which has relevance for the construction of humanitarian access and humanitarian legitimacy, is the relation between religion (here, the Church) and politics. As Johnson (2016, 312) claims, “religious purity is central to notions of legitimacy underscoring religious public authority.” Further, Goodhand et al. (2009) argue that religious actors have an ability to operate across ethnic and political boundaries for their perceived distance from the politics. A common recognition then is that they should avoid intervening with the political realm to maintain their legitimacy. Although this self-understanding is shared by some priests, the clergy shares a long tradition of involvement in the domain of politics (Spencer et al. 2009, 18). The more recent ethnography confirms that while Catholic actors and other religious figures have been trying to “maintain the clear line between the Church and the dirty world of politics” (ibid.) they have also “often failed – to navigate, affirm and negotiate different kinds borders” (ibid. 119). Overall, there is a consensus in the literature indicating that the carefully maintained boundary between the categories of politics and religion is not absolute, but relational, circumstantial and constructed (Johnson 2016; Goodhand et al. 2009, 683).

Henceforth, the third theme that emerges from the literature reviewed here is “brokerage” – an ability to cross ethnic, spatial and religious boundaries. According to Spencer et al. (2015, 123) not only are there “few figures beyond the Church who have been able and willing to cross communal and political boundaries without losing their legitimacy” but also “in fact boundary-crossing has increased the legitimacy of church figures”. The most relevant findings in this regard for their explicit reference to Caritas during the war are presented briefly in Johnson (2012). In connection to a notion of brokerage of the priests she notes that “the Church has been able to ‘deliver’ through CARITAS served needy Sri Lankans of all faiths and ethnicities” (Johnson 2012, 84). Further, “the only agency initially allowed to enter the area and assist civilians was the Church's aid organization CARITAS, which was permitted to pass goods and assistance through networks of priests, within strict limits set by the government” (ibid. 85). Johnson maintains that clergy's negotiations with the officials at the NFZ borders and detention centres demonstrates the capacity they had. What is of specific importance is an observation presented by Johnson concerning different forms of power, from explicit to implicit forms. Ordinary priests were able to cross the boundaries, while the Bishops and other prominent religious figures were not.

²⁰ Another major theoretical discussion in Goodhand et al. 2009 concerns a differentiation of boundary crossing from boundary transgression as “the work of politics” (ibid. 693). This theoretical discussion is out of scope of my thesis.

Fourth, these studies cited in this literature review suggest that the power of the Catholic Church (more specifically, for public action during the war, Spencer et al. 2015, 127) is shaped by various factors. If one is to explore the Church as a humanitarian actor, they all require careful attention.

The most significant factor then relates to an institutional set up of the Church as “an organisational structure that has historical depth, transnational capacities and no small amount of material wealth” (ibid.). Similarly, Johnson (2012, 87) draws attention to this institutional matrix. She concludes that “the diverse stories outlined in this paper are united through the actors in them and the broader institution of the Catholic Church” (ibid.). Altogether the abovementioned set up produces dynamics that on hand unifies different factions of the Church. To put this in authors’ terms:

Although what Stirrat describes as ‘indigenisation’ (1992: 45-6) and the ethnic conflict have accentuated Tamil-Sinhala divisions within the Church, the fact remains that networks and linkages under the institutional umbrella of the Church continue to span the divide. And these networks and relationships constitute a significant source of social capital that can be drawn upon for mediation and peace-building at both the macro and micro levels.” (Spencer et al. 2015, 123)

Institutional basis of the Church (its network, international links and financial resources) [...] facilitates such brokerage, that is, ability to cross boundaries [...] Different priests brokering different situations drew on various kinds of capital, including institutional, aesthetic and moral (Johnson 2012, 84)

On that account, the implications of this review for the research are as follows. First, the notion of circumstantiality of the boundary between politics and religion forms an implicit, yet central premise for an analysis of the feasibility of Church as a neutral actor. I will give examples of both failed and succeeded attempts to draw this line in Chapter 3. Second, the notion of the Church as a broader institution connecting and consolidating a diversity actors forms the most central premise of this thesis. In accordance with the theoretical framework of Church as a “leviathan” (Golub 2014, see p. 31), attention to the broader institutional framework helps to understand how the Church can connect different actors and networks for the feasibility of its humanitarian work (Chapter 2). Third, Johnson’s findings suggest paying careful attention to more hidden forms of power, legitimacy and factors. Given the centrality of the theme of brokerage to (humanitarian) access and border crossing, the findings presented here are premised in the analysis of institutional and individual politicisation and neutralisation (Chapter 3).

In conclusion, in this thesis, I approach humanitarian aid as a particular form of Church’s public action. This form has been mentioned in studies above but has not been fully described. As

Spencer et al. (2015, 129-130) maintain, religious leaders were often less concerned with delivering goods and services than acting as brokers, communicators and protectors. For those who have studied the Church's role during the war, the implications of this thesis are hardly surprising. The added value my thesis, nevertheless, has is the contextualisation of previous research for the topic of humanitarian practice. Secondly, the theoretical framework of leviathans of this study provides a new understanding of how the dimensions above may construct institutional competencies of the Church and its aid agencies. Thirdly, prior research on Sri Lanka's Catholics confirms a significant spatial and ethnic divisions within the Catholic Church (see also Fernando 2013) but also acknowledges the bridge-building activities. So, while the previous literature focuses on particular ethnic and geographical contexts, my research question requires an understanding of the interplay of both in the process of legitimation and construction of feasibility.

The context and data collection

No Fire Zone

In 2016, I sat in a Caritas office in Jaffna. I had a meeting with two local Caritas staff members who had accompanied civilians trapped in the war zone during the war. Pictures of former staff members of Caritas Jaffna circulated on the walls. Having read about the deaths of the priests and being mindful of the personal losses and trauma the staff may have experienced (coupled with a feeling of uncertainty in terms of how to handle the situation), I proceeded formally with the list of questions I had asked other priests on previous days. It was, nonetheless, either the way of formulating my questions or my English pronunciation, which posed serious challenges to communications (neither of us spoke English as our first language). Eventually, as the meeting unfolded the men then took a liberty for a free word and started sharing scenes they had witnessed during the war. The purpose of sharing this is still not entirely clear to me but the stories did convey an emotion of pain and loss related to the NFZ events (*“the mother is feeding, the mother dies, but even after the child is still sucking”*). Pointing a photo on the wall, the other priest said. *“That priest – that father there – he was coming from Mannar to Vanni, to give something to the people [...] some food item [...] on the way there was an [aerial] bomb. He died on the spot”*, he explains. Then he points his finger to a photo of another priest. *“Also the same.”*

In the next section, I will first explain the context in which Caritas and other aid agencies operated, namely, the No Fire Zone (NFZ, also referred to as the demarcated safe zone, civilian safety zone and so forth, but ultimately a war zone). I will then point out the implications that will be premised in the research. The establishment of the NFZ was a strategy of the government’s Northern Campaign, a military operation framed as a humanitarian operation. In theory, the establishment “asserted that military planning was designed to avoid civilian casualties” (OHCHR 2015a, 17) and so three successive NFZs were unilaterally announced by the GoSL. All the three NFZs were located in Vanni, covering areas that were at that point still controlled by the LTTE (OHCHR 2015a). The LTTE was forced to withdraw and so gradually, the NFZs covered smaller and smaller geographical regions. While the second so-called Civilian Safety Zone was an area “covering some 15 kilometres along the coast from Putumattalan in the north to Vellamullivaikkal in the south” (ibid. 20), the third safe zone comprised only a tiny strip of land between the lagoon and ocean. (ibid). Regardless of SLA’s attempt to stage the operation as a humanitarian mission, SLA restricted humanitarian assistance in the North, because the SLA feared that humanitarian aid would in one way or another benefit the LTTE. Thus security measures to “restrict the transportation of goods and materials” (ibid. 227) were put in place. Food, medicine and other supply convoys were allowed to enter the area until January 2009. From February onwards, only ICRC ships carrying food by the World Food

Programme were allowed to visit the coast (ibid.), which further deepened the embargo of humanitarians and other civilians in the area by restricting their movement. As soon became apparent for those who stayed in them, indiscriminate SLA aerial bombings targeted the zones. (OHCHR 2015a; 2015b; UN 2011). Denying humanitarian assistance was also used as a weapon by the SLA. As a Jesuit priest affiliated with the JRS pointed out to me in an interview: *“They say the conducted humanitarian operation, but then they also admitted that they did not permit the food and medicine for the people who were held in the NFZ [...] The zero casualty campaign is unacceptable. You can’t expect zero casualties during the war.”* The UN documented various obstacles “which humanitarian organisations faced in getting supplies into LTTE controlled territory during the last few months of the conflict” (OHCHR 2015b) along with other human rights violations and brutalities. For example, the SLA constantly relocated civilians and aid facilities as part of their military operations and targeted churches where civilians were seeking refuge with shelling. In sum, the SLA’s military operations constantly relocated the civilians and aid facilities: various accounts give a witness to a day-to-day survival of both civilians and humanitarians as civilians. Also churches become a target of SLAs indiscriminate aerial shelling when people were seeking refugee within the churches (TamilNet April 23 2009; Catholic News Services 27 April 2009; Hatsumi 2011).

Finally, also the media was prohibited from entering the area. In addition to purposefully making the documentation of the conflict difficult, the GoSL also published claims that were in stark contrast to NGO reports and eye-witness accounts. For this reason, spokesmen of Caritas and HRW emphasised that their information on grave violations of human rights is hard to verify, but came “from the ground” (UN Press Conference, 22 April 2009). Especially the amount of food and medicine within the NFZ and the number of civilians trapped there was open to debate. The government’s estimates were smaller than those of eyewitnesses (UN 2012, 9), which created obvious confusion in those press briefings and reporting I researched for the topic of this thesis.

Implications of the context for research

Data collection formed a major part of my research. More than that, the process of data collection for the research question and analysis has been so significant that I find it important to explicate the process here. Thus, my first notion is epistemological and concerns what is possible to know of the Catholic actors inside the NFZ when researched from an outsider’s perspective. The answer is that the data is limited or at least fragmental. Catholic actors are hardly recognised in the UN reporting. One participant in the press conference noted that the humanitarian catastrophe in Vanni was extremely difficult to get attention to and organising a humanitarian briefing, in general, seemed to be a struggle. Specifically, in regard to Caritas and the Church, they keep a low profile, which is related to their approach to deriving the legitimacy of the work *“from the ground”* as I mentioned

above. As a spokesman of Caritas Internationalis said when introduced at a press conference (UN Press Conference, 22 April 2009), “*we don’t normally talk in briefings like these*”, referring to the ethos of Caritas as a grassroots network. My second notion concerns the ambiguous categorisation of international and national humanitarian actors and their presence. While discussing these propositions may seem trivial at first, they help to categorise and moreover to problematise assumptions about the international presence or humanitarian agencies thereby making the humanitarian work of the Church more recognisable and thus, more “researchable”.

Turning to the question of context, it is hard to ascertain all actors who had a presence inside the NFZ overall. The UN reporting does not specify other humanitarian agencies and actors besides the UN and ICRC. UN had reliable information primarily regarding its staff and convoys, and even this information was limited. For example, the UN agencies in Sri Lanka did not monitor death and injuries until few Colombo-based individuals started compiling information on humanitarian concerns (UN 2012, 10). Second, the exclusion of humanitarian agencies from the NFZ was not absolute, which complicates a notion of international presence. For example, some nationals (including but not limited Northern locals) were allowed or forced to stay behind by the LTTE and decided to continue humanitarian work. Despite the exclusion of international staff, some international representatives of the ICRC and the UN were able to pay brief visits to the area. Further, although most of the (international) humanitarian agencies were excluded from Kilinochi (around 50 kilometers from Mullaitivu north of which the final battle took place) to Vavuniya (only around 80 kilometers to the south from Mullaitivu), the UN staff was authorised to work in IDP camps (UN, 24 April 2009). To add to the confusion, whether there was an international presence inside NFZ then depends on the use of the term. A notion of “international presence” usually refers to the UN and ICRC presence. Moreover, there seems to be certain inaccuracy even in the UN reporting. The conclusion of the OHCHR and UN reports first seems to be that there was no international presence in the NFZ from September 2008 onwards.²¹ After that, its international representatives still visited the Vanni for short periods, when accompanying the ICRC ships (ibid.). However, the same report documents an aerial shelling that took place on 24 January 2009 in the NFZ. It explains that “the Government never gave an explanation for its shelling of the United Nation’s hub, which was the *only international presence in the NFZ*” (ibid. 24, italics by the present writer), thereby implying that national staff would constitute international presence. The confusion around the type of presence is illustrated well in a dialogue between a media and the UN representatives and in a press briefing held at the UN headquarters in New York, only four weeks before the GoSL forces declared a military victory over the LTTE:

²¹ Excluding the ICRC who had “international representatives in the Vanni until they were evacuated on the first ICRC ship on 10 February” (UN 2011, 21, note 31).

Media representative: Yesterday²² the Sri Lankan ambassador said that it is not true that there hasn't been any presence in the conflict zone, I think he denied that, and he talked about the ICRC and Caritas [...] just wanted to put out that out for your reaction.

[....]

C.B: There has not been UN presence in there. In terms of whether there has been international presence there or not, my understanding is that the ICRC has been able to use supply ships to supply in to the area but would immediately had to leave. They would not been able [sic] to do any need assessments nor were they able to have contact with the people who are inside the area.

I don't know of Caritas.

(The Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Catherine Bragg. Press briefing on the humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka. 23 April 2009.)

Regardless, the presence of Caritas, JRS and Catholic actors can be confirmed based on their accounts²³, various news reports (especially of Catholic sources) and maybe surprisingly, GoSL's account on the war crimes (LLCR 2011). While LLCR report can be correctly criticised for its partiality in terms of highlighting the violations performed by the LTTE rather than of SLA, the report contains important references to Caritas and Church bodies. In some cases, the report includes an explicit reference to "a priest from Caritas" through which civilians surrendered to the army,²⁴ or to "workers from the NGO Caritas"²⁵. In other occasions report refers to "a priest"²⁶ or "a member of

²² The primary source of this reference is unknown. The same issue is, nevertheless, indicated in VOA news reports as follows: "Sri Lanka's U.N. envoy, Hewa Palihakkara, said U.N. agencies are allowed access to areas outside the zone and that the International Committee of the Red Cross and Caritas both have staff inside the zone." (*VOA News* 2 November 2009 (note that the news item must have been dated wrongly). In addition, Palihakkara mentions Refers on to "the "international organisations like the ICRC" with no mention of Caritas. (*CNN*, April 22, 2009)

²³ "For many years, Caritas Sri Lanka along with the Red Cross have been the only humanitarian agencies permitted to operate in the conflict area. In the last months of intense fighting, Caritas staff themselves suffered casualties, reflecting their commitment to be there for the people. In April, Fr Vansanthaseelan, director of the Caritas office in Vanni had a leg amputated after being injured in crossfire. In May, Caritas suffered another loss when driver "Raj" Anthonipillai Uthayaraj was killed in Mullivaikal in the so-called "No Fire" zone where civilians were seeking safety from fighting between government forces and Tamil Tiger rebels (Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand 2009). "In Sri Lanka, the war continued and brought great suffering. In October, the government ordered all humanitarian agencies to move out of the Vanni, the northern region controlled by the militant Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). JRS and Caritas remained to accompany the people in Vanni even as civilian space shrank with the army advance." (JSR 2008)

²⁴ "During its sittings in Tellipalai on 12th November 2010, the Commission heard representations from a civilian who stated that her son in law had said that he, his wife and children had decided to surrender to the Army at Mullaivaikkal through a priest from Caritas." (LLRC 2011, 112)

²⁵ "A representation made before the Commission by a member of the clergy from Mankulam revealed that a large number of children were forcibly conscripted by the LTTE during the final stage of the conflict. According to this representation, by April 2009, as the conflict intensified, approximately a large number of civilians, including those LTTE fighters who escaped, workers from the NGO Caritas, and some doctors had taken shelter in the compound which belonged to the St. Mary's Church at Valayanmadam." (Ibid. 176).

²⁶ A priest who was interviewed by the Commission stated that due to the intensification of the conflict, the food supply mechanism had broken down and after February 2009 the situation had worsened – people had not had enough food and

clergy.” True, there is no method to verify whether the priests and clergy member mentioned in GoSL report are real but these references, nevertheless, reveal the hidden network through which the Church was able to gain access and maintain the presence in the conflict zone.

A major conclusion of this goes as follows. Understanding Catholic actors inside and just outside the borders of NFZ requires first researching the role of individuals as priests, nuns and other players for the feasibility of the Church’s humanitarian activities. Where institutional acknowledgements referring to Caritas, JRS and other church bodies may be missing in reporting, references to individual priests indicate a strong humanitarian presence of Catholic Church. These people also reveal the structural flexibility hidden in the Church and this is an immense advantage in maintaining the presence in the conflict zone. Besides an institutional setting, the individuals affiliated with the church play a major role in constructing access and presence. Altogether, the references to Catholic actors open a whole new discussion of the work of the Church. The interplay of the Church, Caritas and individual priests and unknown actors, that is, the totality of individual and collective agencies that form the feasibility of the Church’s humanitarian work. The theme will be thus examined in Chapter 2.

My key findings regarding the context and its implications for research on Caritas and other Church bodies goes as follows. In order to understand the presence of Catholic aid agencies on the battlefield, one needs to move from a confined understanding of “Caritas” or “Jesuit Refugee Service” as NGOs or international NGOs to a broader understanding of the Church’s networks, structure and ideology. Only then will one be able to recognise their work amongst victims of the war. At the same time, it is the involvement of the international confederation Caritas Internationalis which played the role of making the work of Church actors inside the NFZ known in the international humanitarian community.

To sum up, I have problematised the issue of recognition first by explaining the context of humanitarian assistance in Vanni during the final phase of the war NFZ as documented in NFZ (UN 2011; UN 2012, OHCHR 2015a 2015b). I observed that while the UN reports form the primary source for gaining an overall picture of the events at the NFZ, some contextual factors related “the intensity of the conflict and multiple displacements” (OHCHR 2015b) put limits on what was possible to know about the situation within the NFZ. I further proposed that a notion of “international presence” further complicates the issues. Further, I argued that (UN) reporting does not capture the characteristics of the church-affiliated organisation. I have explained this to point out its implications for research from hereafter. My conclusion is that an under-reported nature of Caritas and the Church relates first to the issue of recognisability of *Catholic* networks and structures, and second, their way of working on a

had to share food among themselves. He further stated that even storage had become a problem as the stores had been damaged and the quantities sent had been inadequate. (Ibid. 94).

low profile in conflict, which includes implications for this study. Therefore, I argue that it is these networks contained in the Catholic Church that makes the work of Church's aid agencies first feasible, as I will explain in the following Chapters. Before the discussion regarding Caritas as a local Church institution in Sri Lanka (Chapters 2 and 3) is to be moved forward, a better understanding of its profile also as an international relief and development giant needs to be developed (Chapter 1).

The data collection methods and process

This thesis is a qualitative and descriptive case study: I aim to a close reading of the phenomena with a combination of data from various sources. Data was collected by interviews, by qualitative surveys (questionnaires) as well as humanitarian reports by aid and development organisations (years 2007-2009) and online news articles. In the beginning, in February 2014, I made one pilot interview with two workers from a Finnish faith based organisation (FBO) involved in tsunami work in Sri Lanka from 2004 to 2009. Between September 2014 and October 2015, I sent more than 20 requests to participate in research to various individuals and organisations working in Caritas, JRS, other NGOs and governmental bodies. In the end, I received three completed questionnaires by three respondents; with two of them I conducted an open-ended interview by Skype. I audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews. For the data collection, the long distance and cyber security issues proposed challenges. After promising e-mail exchanges with some respondents, I never received their completed questionnaires regardless of several attempts to reconnect with them. I then decided to adjust my research plan accordingly to available written sources. I examined public Caritas Internationalis, Caritas Sri Lanka (formerly known as SEDEC), JRS's news and reports concerning Sri Lanka during the year 2007, 2008 and 2009. I read carefully through official reports by the governmental LLRC, the UN and other reports. Additionally, I searched through all the humanitarian reports available on the ReliefWeb portal related to Sri Lanka during 2006-2009. I also researched Sri Lankan English-speaking news portals. The portals included news from pro-government, Tamil-nationalistic and other websites (key words such as "Caritas", "Jesuit", "SEDEC", "church", "Catholic", "priest", "Christian", "clergy", "bishop", "NGO" and so on). During the process, I learned that although seemingly marginal, the Catholic media sources were offering a fruitful coverage on the events of NFZ (such as UCA News) and addressed the special role the church bodies had throughout the war.

The whole research process had a significant impact on the research question. During the process, I had to reconsider what my research was about. My original research idea was to explore negotiations around humanitarian access, but due to methodological restrictions regarding data availability and access, I started to look for wider explanatory factors for understanding not only Caritas' and but also other agencies' ability to gain and maintain access to the NFZ. Here, I came

across the suitable framework for understanding institutional durability – “leviathaness” (Golub 2014, see p. 31 of this thesis). In the end, the theoretical approach came to support my research process. At first, my research criteria was unsuccessful due to narrow research criteria (“Caritas”). It was only after having understood the close connection between the Catholic Church, its aid agencies and communities that I finally understood to widen the research criteria to encompass the Catholic Church at large. To paraphrase Golub’s (2014) adaptation of Callon & Latour (1981), this opened for me the Pandora’s Box that would explain the complexity of the humanitarian work of Caritas Sri Lanka and the JRS. The theoretical framework also guided my analysis and pointed to a direction of doing more online research on certain church-related individuals.

Finally, in August 2016, I was able to travel to Sri Lanka and to meet with Sri Lankan Jesuits and Caritas members. I conducted interviews in four dioceses: Negombo and Colombo (South), Jaffna and Kilinochchi (North) and in Batticaloa (East) Batticaloa (altogether seven interviews, two of them involving a group of people). Also, I had various informal discussions with Jesuits and other church representatives. In terms of issues that felt either too sensitive or difficult to address, the secondary sources consisting of ethnographies (Hatsumi 2012; Thiranagama 2011; Goodhand et al. 2009; Spencer et. al 2015) have been critical in my efforts to understand the everyday life and grassroots politics in the midst of the conflict in Sri Lanka.

This thesis has been written over two years of time, which undoubtedly has shaped the heuristic process. I started with little understanding, which I exhibited in the interviews. I am particularly grateful for observations made by my interviewees. One such interview was with a JRS priest (being particularly difficult one for me and left me with feelings of inadequacy and shame for trying to research in a way that could not be less relevant for those individuals, whom the study concerned). I sent him my research proposal and remember being particularly careful of avoiding expressions that may have questionable political connotations. Yet, I failed. His very polite response illustrated the moments of learning I had:

I have my reservations about the synopsis that you sent me, but still, that is your proposal, right? Because if I remember right, it was a quite a while ago, probably I am also getting old so [...] The narration I find is very generic in a sense that [...] I mean the narration you sent me is based on [...] is very popular narration that is popular no, which can be like victorious-based narrative, right? Because that is what I find it there. So apart from I think [...] because you see when media projects and media sets their own agenda, so probably I think if you – from a different angle, you will definitely have a different perspective.

In the end, my learning concerned an understanding that my age, occupation, cultural background, ethnicity, sex, the limits of my English and verbal interaction did, after all, determine largely what

informants believed of me, and so determined what they entrusted to share with me. My thesis remains far from the reality my informants live, and I am painfully aware of these deficiencies. However, from a social sciences point of view, I feel I have been able to open a Pandora's Box. Although my thesis is not a policy study, I am now able to link my findings to a broader contemporary discussion and research on humanitarian presence, proximity and access.

Analytical framework

Description of the method for analysis

This thesis is a small-scale qualitative research, and its method for analysis is two-part, even though these two parts intermingle. The first part consists of discourse and content analysis of the news sources, reports and interviews. Another part is composed of a theoretical framework that guides the analysis of semiotics and political discourses to particular themes and will be explained on pages 31–34. Thus, there was no mechanical method for analysis.

First, the discourse analysis is essentially rooted in the speech-act theory developed by J. L. Austin (1962). By definition, statements may be regarded as performative value statements as opposite to propositional statements. In other words, they aim to construct the state of affairs they describe but do not primarily describe an actual state of affairs.²⁷ In this thesis, this approach is especially relevant in an analysis concerning the Church's relation to politics. Rather than determining whether the Church constitutes as a political actor or whether allegations concerning priests involvement with the LTTE are true, the analysis will focus on the discursive acts that legitimate or delegitimize, politicise or depoliticise (or even constitute them) Catholic actors in Sri Lanka. Here, this thesis also resembles the approach of the critical discourse analysis (CDA). Although not aiming at a societal change, my thesis analyses constructions of power that are "enacted by members of social groups but also by institutions (van Dijk 1993, 255). CDA assumes that speech acts "may be used to enact power, and hence also to reproduce dominance" (van Dijk 1993, 250) and that discursive strategy are used to legitimate power (van Dijk 1993, 254). These discourses as manifestations of power may, on the one hand, be "subtle, routine, everyday forms of text and talk that appear natural and quite acceptable" (ibid. 254) and on the other, be a cognitive of direct "force to directly control action" (ibid.). Finally, my approach resembles CDA in that it assumes that power is a property "of relations between social groups [...] jointly produced by intricate forms of social interaction, communication and discourse" (ibid. 254, 255). This notion of relation power coincides with the second component of my methodology, namely the theoretical framework adopted from an anthropologist Alex Golub (2014) presented on pages 31–34.

²⁷ Today, there are different definitions for a discourse analysis starting from the study of the language (semantics, intonation, and typology) to the study of "non-linguistic social practices and ideological assumptions" (Schiffrin et al. 2001, 1). Discourse analysis may use critical, narrative/stylistic, comparative, media, practice-focuses or cognitive methods (Cotter in Schiffrin et al. 2001, 418-9). The benefit of discourse analysis in general is that one is able to do social research based on written sources without field work – which may sometimes be unfeasible - and yet is able to perform a deep description of a given phenomenon.

Critical approach

So far I have not discussed many studies from the fields of crisis management, logistic studies, and humanitarian policy that usually are credited for the research on humanitarian issues. The main reason for choosing this approach is my personal interest to social theories over other fields of study. Further, while these areas have an undeniable significance for a kind of practical humanitarian knowledge, on a general level, it can be suggested that such analysis does not take into account the social processes that shape the responses and policies. Any technical or policy orientated humanitarian study may fail to take the critical distance phenomena at hand if it only repeats domineering discourses without problematising them. One of the limitations with “technical” explanation is that it does not explain the powers that restrict and even target humanitarian actors on the field, which has increasingly become a challenge for the humanitarian community.

The problems arising from the negligence of power issues in aid provision has been identified in development studies and anthropology in a way that is still relevant to the study of humanitarianism today. In an important ethnographical study James Ferguson (1990) argued that international development cooperation projects depoliticise developmental policies and practices and doing so disregard the socio-political context in which they operate with unintentionally strengthening such political structures.²⁸ This criticism of so-called “anti-politics machine” of development apparatus has been premised in the standards of development and other disciplinary studies. Addressing a need for an anthropological research of humanitarianism, an anthropologist Minn (2007) criticises Terry (2002) (the former head of the French section of MSF cited in this thesis) arguing that “like many other writers who focus on humanitarian policy [...] neglects macro-level” politics and forces that “contribute to humanitarian catastrophes or shape its response”.

Most importantly, even the analytical aftermath of the failings of the humanitarian community in Sri Lanka echoes Ferguson’s criticism. On the WFP’s conference report concerning the humanitarian assistance in Sri Lanka during the final phase of the war, David Keen (London School of Economics) noted that “even in complex conflict environments, humanitarian assistance continues to be approached in many cases as a technical problem following a natural disaster model that calculates needs and shortfalls — but neglects their socio-political roots” (Keen 2009, 4). The UN’s Internal Panel of Expert of United Nations Action in Sri Lanka (2012) also identified the issue. It concludes that some UN actors misunderstood the meaning of “political” in separation from “humanitarian” in a way that led them to avoid a broad spectrum of crucial issues that were regarded

²⁸Ferguson’s excessive emphasis on the importance of social structures was soon criticised and balanced with an emphasis on concepts of intentionality and agency in forming of development practices and policies (for discussion, see Chhotray 2012).

too “political”.²⁹ The case of Sri Lanka proposes a serious challenge for the humanitarian community to debate (again) on the boundaries of the political and humanitarian diplomacy.

Further, although humanitarianism is based on a universal ideology of “well-doing”, the humanitarian principles were developed in the Western context which history associates with a number of questions about dominance, hegemony, legitimacy and power. As is explained elsewhere in this thesis, the colonial history has a significant role in legitimating and delegitimising humanitarian and development agencies in Sri Lanka. These notions suggest to carefully contextualise any humanitarian issue in the political context (here, of Sri Lanka) and to examine politicising and depoliticising discourses around them.

Following from this, I have made two methodological choices. In this study, the entity I call “humanitarian jargon” represents the emic-perspective, by which I mean the phenomena described from a perspective of the members or insiders of a given culture. In this case, the emic-perspective includes the normative humanitarian discourse, humanitarian concepts, humanitarian policies, technical vocabulary and such language. Second, the etic-approach helps to build a broader analytic framework that can support a coherence of thought and incorporate various elements into one single approach. The starting point for the following analysis regards “humanitarian access” as a social ability that is constructed in a relationship between various macro-groups (the Church, the state, the humanitarian community), without neglecting the political and social context. From there I will introduce a theoretical framework adapted from an anthropologist’s Alex Golub’s (2014) ethnography.³⁰ My reason for choosing this framework is Golub’s focus on how abstract actors are constructed and made *feasible* and powerful (namely, leviathans). The focus is highly relevant for my thesis on how the work of religious aid agencies was legitimated, justified and made possible during the final phase of the war. Golub’s theorisation as “a framework that can subsume [...] topics that are normally treated separately” (ibid. 3-4) simply resonates with my analytic needs for answering the research question.

²⁹ The original quote in (UN 2012, 18) goes as follows. “‘Political’: Throughout the conflict, some UNCT and UNHQ actors sought to separate the humanitarian response from what they termed “political” issues. While it can be helpful to distinguish between humanitarian, political and other matters, in Sri Lanka the UN’s reference to what was ‘political’ seemed to encompass everything related to the root causes of the crisis and aspects of the conduct of the war. Issues appear to have been defined as political not because they had a political aspect but rather because UN action to address them would have provoked criticism from the Government. Thus, raising concern over who was killing civilians, how many civilians were being killed, or how many civilians were actually in the Wanni were all, at various times, described as political issues. The distinction was used by some senior UN staff as an argument against additional UN action or full reporting on these issues, and even to exclude them from the purview of UN monitoring or response.

³⁰ I thank Tuomas Tammisto bringing Golub’s research to my attention.

Theoretical framework: Catholic Church as a leviathan

Studying the ways in which leviathans become powerful thus involves analysing the deep cultural structures which enable their pretensions for power.” (Golub 2014, 16)

I attempt to answer these questions by analysing two topics that are normally treated separately: the creation and maintenance of a large corporation [...] and the creation and maintenance of an ethnic group [...] Each topic has its own massive body of literature [...] Although these literatures do not always talk to one another, I hope to develop a framework that can subsume them all. (Ibid. 3-4)

Once abstracted from the original context, Golub’s concepts help to build a theoretical framework for explaining the competence factors and the viableness of the Catholic aid agencies in Sri Lanka. In a nutshell, Golub’s ethnography presents the history of the mining industry in Porgera Valley, Papua New Guinea. It describes the relationship of two “leviathans”: “the mine” and “the Ipili”, the indigenous people of the Valley by focusing on the negotiations and political processes that occurred with a creation of a mine on Ipili land. In the beginning, it was unclear what or who should constitute “the Ipili”, to whom the mine should compensate the operations on their land according to the land legislation of Papua New Guinea (Golub 2014, 15-16). This results in Golub’s theoretical focus, i.e., the formation of a collective agency. The instrumental research questions for exploring this are: under which circumstances do individuals come to represent the abstractions called “the Ipili” and “the mine” and how do these abstract collectives become so powerful (Ibid. 3.), or in other words, how collective agencies become feasible? Instrumental in understanding this are the semiotic and political processes through which these actors are formed in the given context.

The first central concept to explain here is *leviathan*, which refers to abstract or collective actors, such as states, organisations, or corporations of any sorts.³¹ The second concept is *feasibility*, which admittedly embodies a multitude of concepts which lend a meaning to the central concepts used in this study (such as competence, capability and in this case, related notions concerning legitimacy and neutrality of humanitarian actors). From here opens the full meaning of Golub’s “feasibility”, which is a heuristic or a metaphorical term to point out what is normally understood as viable, plausible, durable or powerful.³² Absolutely central in Golub’s theorisation is that this

³¹ A concept “Leviathan” (with capital L) originates from Thomas Hobbes’ book *Leviathan* (1651) that presents a theory of state formation. In contemporary social sciences, the concept of the leviathan is especially adapted by Callon & Latour (1981) on whose work Golub bases his study (Golub 2014, 13-17).

³² Golub describes feasibility as “a term that features felicitous overlap between the jargon of the mining industry and theories of communicative practice”. “In linguistic anthropology, ‘feasibility’ refers to the ways in which cultural categories are deployed in practice ‘A judgement of practical feasibility’, William Hanks writes, ‘is anything but timeless. Not only does it connect with changing circumstance, but involves timing, knowing when to act, how long (18, 19) to

construction of the abstract collectives is to a large extent same as them becoming “feasible”. Secondly, feasibility as “a result of a complex network of variables” (ibid. 18) is essentially context-dependent: different triggers are needed for different actors to become socially, technically and politically recognisable and sustainable. (In a case of the mine, feasibility may refer to the technical competencies: geology, technical expertise of mine and company legislations, ibid.).

Third premise is that in addition to technical skills, the key to feasibility for collective actors is recognition as such (as social actors) by other people and actors. A specific feature in Golub’s theorisation is that this becoming “recognisable” and “feasible” involves a leviathan’s ability to be personated by the individuals and similarly, “the feasibility of individual actors hinges on their ability to successfully personate leviathans” (ibid. 25) within the legitimating framework. (In a case of the Ipili as an ethnic and political group, it was “identified as a collective whose will can be personified” by measures such as “authorization of spokespeople”, see ibid. 19).³³

Fourth, central in this analysis is an abstract notion of a black box, or “Pandora’s box”.³⁴ For Golub, a black box is another metaphor for a complex, collective (in case of Golub, the Ipili or the mine). They seem to work as “unproblematically as actors” (ibid. 3) (as the Ipili as a group) but actually encompass a diversity of actors, “thoughts and habits” (ibid. 13), which as such may not be recognisable as an actor (in this case, the Ipili). In other words, the working of such collectives is obscure, and it is in this sense a leviathan may be called a black box. In a black box, various separate elements come together and are subsumed in a way that those individual elements give rise to a collective that is more than its individual elements alone. According to Golub, the theorisation suggests to “open the black box” (Golub 2014, 25) of durable institutions to understand the elements of their power (“modes of thought, habits, forces and objects”, ibid. 13).

maintain engagement, the rhythm with which to process, and how to deal with successive outcome’ (1996, 231)” (Golub 2014, 18-19)

³³ For the Ipili, the particular aspects of feasibility Golub describes are as follows: authorization of spokespeople, the disambiguation of kinship and ethnicity, pacification and political agency” (Golub 2014, 19).

³⁴ Black-boxing is a term that has its origins in a mechanical studies and was adopted to social studies through the actor-network theory (ANT) and the sociology of associations developed by Bruno Latour (1999; 2005) and Latour and Callon (1981). Drawing a metaphor from the mechanics, Latour (1999) explains black boxing as “the way scientific and technical work is made invisible by its own success [...] the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become.” (The quote from Wikipedia.) The idea is then to dissect and simplify a work of complex macro-actor by looking into the so called “inputs” and “outputs” in order to understand the working of the black box, of which work in itself is hidden. In social studies, black-boxing appears as an analytical device for understanding the sustainability of macro-institutions through paying attention to individual elements. The rather complex theory is adopted as a loose metaphor or an analogy by Golub as an analytical device for approaching complex collective systems While the original ANT would claim that an internal working that sustain the given system is hidden, Golub encourages to “open the Pandora’s box” to see what leviathan’s are made of. The complexity of ANT does not scale with my purposes, but Golub’s simplified adaptation of it will help to form one core idea of my thesis, namely, calling leviathan as a black-boxed entity.

In other words, the argument here then is that, one central way for the collective to become a feasible, recognisable and powerful political actor is “black-boxing” by making many elements to act as one. The more elements, the broader is the leviathan.

For Callon and Latour, a leviathan becomes a potent actor by “making many elements as one” (Callon & Latour 181, Latour 1987) within a black box. “The more elements one can place in black boxes – modes of thought, habits, forces and objects – the broader construction one can raise” (Callon and Latour 1981: 285). As Larry Stucki (2009) points out, this sort of black boxing is central to the projects of large –scale companies in frontier situations – creating ultra-durable institutions requires routinization of this sort ‘placing elements into black-boxes.’ (Golub 2014, 13)

My core premise here is that the Catholic Church is such a leviathan, which black-boxes a considerable range of elements, and this also is the potent that constructs it as a humanitarian actor.

On that account, even though the context and the purpose of this study are different, Golub’s focus resonates with the purpose of my thesis: he describes the relationship of collectives, a construction of the power of these collectives and how they organise themselves when necessary, as political (or apolitical) actors. While my data does not support an examination of “deep cultural structures”, it still allows a discourse analysis by assuming that feasibility is inseparable from the political and semiotic processes. Thus, my analysis utilises a suggestion of the feasibility of religious aid agencies by exploring the semiotic and political processes that recognise or contest collectives (“leviathans”) as neutral humanitarian actors.

Given this, implications of Golub’s theorisation for my topic are as follows. First, I will utilise the metaphors of “leviathan” and “black-boxing” loosely and so frame the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka as a kind of black-boxed entity, a “leviathan”, whose power is constructed in mutual relations and by a power of association. This approach has two major implications. First, the idea of black-boxing moves the emphasis from the Catholic aid agencies (Caritas, Jesuit Refugee Service and others) to the *Catholic Church* as a black-boxed institution which subsumes in itself those aid agencies. Further, using a conceptual idea of black-boxing, I am able to take into account the aspects of the Catholic Church’s relief organisations that may be less evident or irrelevant for the established humanitarian discourse and disciplines, but may be relevant and central in explaining the competence of humanitarian actors in this particular case. As Golub writes: “As Patchan Marklee (2003) points out, when we assume that we have a finished, fixed identity, we foreclose other possibilities and suppress the recognition of our fundamental existential openness” (Golub 2014, 116). For my research question, this means that the aspects that fall outside the boundaries of the “humanitarian”

may provide a possible explanation for the exceptional presence of Catholic agencies with the civilians trapped in between the battles within and by the NFZ.

Third, “leviathans always leak” (Golub 2014, 16), which implies that non-totality is an organic part of the social construction of feasibility, recognition and legitimacy. In other words, power is always a relational construction and therefore “seldom absolute” (paraphrase van Dijk 2001, 355). Golub’s remark on the limitations of leviathans is especially relevant regarding border-crossing and humanitarian access. While an authorisation by the government enables the work of aid agencies to some extent, they still need to engage in negotiations with different actors from which follows that there is always some contingent factors that contribute the humanitarian work.³⁵ These contingents should be then included in the analysis.

In the end, the theoretical approach presented above may also be justified by primary data and previous research. A Review by Goyder, Dutton & Abhayaratna (2004, hereinafter referred to as Review 2004) of Caritas Sri Lanka notes that to assess the humanitarian programmes of Caritas, a wider perspective is needed because the humanitarian work is usually a component of the Church’s other programmes (ibid. 8-9). The review also suggests that the international NGOs may make an error in focusing on programmatic cooperation instead of strengthening the institutional capacity of Caritas (ibid. 4) and that one of the strengths of Caritas has been the comprehensiveness and continuity of its programmes in the Northern war-affected areas (ibid.). For my analysis of the feasibility of Caritas this suggest that I should also complement the analysis with implications of other activities of the Church (such as development programmes) when necessary for explaining the competence of the Church as a humanitarian actor. Finally, the overall approach reflects the Church’s self-understanding. The “view that it needs to meet the needs of the ‘whole person’ and cannot be too selective” (Review 2004, 38). As one of the interviewees said, *“the understanding that is there is that church has a mission for the poor, for those who are vulnerable, particularly coming from the social teachings of the Church. There is already existing understanding that our mission is also partly to look after more vulnerable communities and the people. And a known fact is that we are not working on just one aspect of people or community needs in community needs or human development, but the total person.”*

³⁵ See for example Jackson 2016a; 2016b.

Chapter 1: Constructions of recognition and legitimacy

Introduction: A problem of recognition?

The key issue was to review and highlight the Church's response to the crisis, which within the international arena has often been overlooked and this in turn has been immensely frustrating for SEDEC and the Sri Lanka Catholic Church [...] The review would for the first time help to show how the Sri Lanka Church responds in complex emergencies and highlight the added value that local civil society/Church bodies have in delivering humanitarian programmes. (Review 2004, 38-39)

*Caritas*³⁶ is the biggest Catholic charity³⁷ in the world. Its influence is reflected on various levels. It has a centralised structure (Chapter 2) in a way that *Caritas Internationalis* is “a confederation of Catholic relief, development, and social service organisations present in 200 countries and territories” in Caritas has more than 160 members (paraphrasing Caritas web page). The confederation is in well-represented humanitarian and development community with the Caritas General Secretariat having its international delegation at the United Nations. Caritas has sponsored and cooperated in projects of basic humanitarian guidelines.³⁸ All in all, a number of studies have examined the role of the Christian Churches in the history of development and Caritas has been instrumental in this (see pp. 16–19; 38–39).

In case of Sri Lanka, on a wider level “there is a long history of religious and non-religious public action, especially in the spheres of humanitarian action, development and peace-building” (Spencer et al. 2015, 127). Furthermore, churches became safe havens for the people throughout the war (UN 2011; UN 2012; Thiranagama 2011; Johnson 2012, Spencer et al. 2015). The Catholic Churches were also important means of mediation and religious figures had, as Spencer et al. (2015) note, a “comparative advantage in relation to other local organisations was their ability to mediate between the national and local levels – to gain access to actors in the international and national spheres, to cross frontlines and to make connections with the local level“ (ibid. 129-130). Besides

³⁶ In this thesis, the name Caritas can refer to the Caritas Internationalis, or to an abstraction of Caritas depending on the context.

³⁷ The definition Caritas as a charity, NGO or as an INGO will be discussed throughout the thesis.

³⁸ Such as, “The Sphere Project. Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response” and “The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief”. The sponsors and member-organisations of the Humanitarian Steering Committee included other notable institutions such as Catholic Relief Services, The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, International Save the Children Alliance, Lutheran World Federation, Oxfam, The World Council of Churches and The International Committee of the Red Cross members of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response”

Caritas Sri Lanka, the Jesuit Refugee Service³⁹, an international organisation operating in Sri Lanka under the Bishop Conference throughout the conflict, has supported war-affected communities in northern Sri Lanka from 1983 to 2016.⁴⁰ As the Annual Reports of these organisations observe, they had an important position and humanitarian role in being two of those few organisations, which were authorised to work in the North.

Despite the considerable advantages and efforts, the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka struggled to be recognised for its humanitarian efforts in the international arena, as noted an internal Review of SEDEC's Humanitarian programmes (2004, 38-39). The issue recognition was also indicated in a press briefing held at the UN headquarters in New York, where the UN representative, when asked, had no information about the humanitarian presence of Caritas inside the NFZ (see p. 23). An overlooking of Church's crisis response "has been immensely frustrating for SEDEC and the Sri Lanka Catholic Church", as Review (2004, 38-39) observes. A member of Caritas in Colombo shared the feeling in an interview. *"This reporting we do ourselves is mostly unseen. The government doesn't give any prominence to work we are doing. Even if you want to publish something in the papers [...] Catholic Messenger paper captures a lot, but it is not enough."*

In this context, I define "recognition" as seeing Caritas and other Church bodies as entrusted, *legitimate* humanitarian actors in relation to other collectives: not only to governmental and military bodies but also to humanitarian institutions, namely, the international humanitarian and development community. From the beginning, I will approach the topic from the viewpoint of the leviathan theory, which necessitates that one of the very first conditions for a feasibility of a leviathan is the ability to be recognised as such (Golub 2014, 28). In this case, recognition is an important and practical component of humanitarian access and presence. Without formal recognition by the government and informal acknowledgement by various groups and individuals on the field, the Church's attempt to function as a humanitarian agency would not be feasible. Moreover, Golub notes that the power of a leviathan is never absolute and same applies to recognition. Recognition as an aspect of feasibility is always an interplay of two or more actors: a leviathan's deliberate attempt to appear and construct itself as such and the recognition or unrecognition of another agency. Alternatively, as the studies on organisational legitimacy propose, legitimacy only occurs within some legitimating framework from which follows a defining question "legitimacy to *whom*" (Lister 2003, 178). The definition of this relation determines the socially constructed system within which the organisation is perceived legitimate (ibid.).

³⁹ Other sources confirming JRS's presence inside the NFZ see *Asia News* 27 May 2009 amongst others.

⁴⁰ During the time of conducting interviews in Sri Lanka, JRS had made decision to end their programmes there, and was focusing on the exit strategy and handing over the remaining duties to the Jesuit Provinciality and other Jesuit bodies who will continue the work on the sector of education (personal communication with Provincial Superior of Jesuits' Sri Lankan Province).

I suggest that if the discussion regarding a recognition of Caritas as a local Church institution in Sri Lanka (Chapters 2 and 3) is to be moved forward, a better understanding of Caritas's profile as an international relief and development giant needs to be developed. First because "the local Christian organisations, such as Caritas, therefore act as part of the global organisational system", as Gerharz (2014, 87) points out. Second, this international level has not been fully discussed in the earlier literature. Most relevant studies cited in this thesis focus on Catholics and the Church's public engagement in Sri Lanka. True, in the case of an issue of legitimacy of civil society actors in Sri Lanka, a reputation as a national institution has a comparative advantage, as I will explain in Chapters 2 and 3. At the same time, I base this thesis on the assumption that feasibility of a leviathan is a result of the interplay of various legitimating frameworks, those emerging in the interplay "local" actors but also between "international" actors. This forms the third reason for including the international level in the analysis. In the case of institutions such as the Catholic Church, Caritas and JRS contain in itself all levels from "local" to national, and from regional to international levels and that all these levels are employed in their crisis response. Moreover, my approach is supported by a critical remark by MSF (Schenkenberg, 2016) on the oversimplifying terminology concerning "local" and "international" humanitarian actors. I argue that a normative categorisation to national and international levels can be unnecessarily restricting for an analysis of Catholic Church as a leviathan because it fails to recognise how the Church is able to utilise its leviathaness for making its humanitarian work feasible. In the process of legitimation and humanitarian practice, these layers must be seen overlapping.

Having said that, in this Chapter my purpose is to demonstrate the construction of legitimacy and recognition of Caritas as an international relief and development institution. The plan of the Chapter is as follows. First, I will describe the formation of Caritas network in relation to the wider development within the Catholic Church and development institution (Gerharz 2014). Then, I will introduce one example of legitimating semiotic processes, namely, the public online communication of Caritas Internationalis. While the importance of online communications for a topic recognition is admittedly limited, I suggest that it mirrors the fundamental characteristics of Caritas. Any discourse can be seen as a form of social action, doing ideological work and constituting power relation and social life (Van Dijk in Schiffrin et al. 2001, 353). Similarly, feasibility is a result of both political and semiotic processes (Golub 2014, 12). Thus, to understand Caritas' profile as a professional aid agency, I will utilise Lister's (2003) conceptualisation on the topic legitimacy of (Northern) NGOs. The basic argument is that NGOs utilise discursive strategies in order to construct and enhance their legitimacy. I argue that this forms also an important point for their recognition. Accordingly, I will identify and analyse the symbols and indicators which are by and large regarded as a sources of legitimacy for any international development and relief institutions. By so doing I will also introduce

the ethos and norms of Caritas' as an organisation, to be revisited later in this thesis. An overall conclusion is that the analysis demonstrates that Caritas utilises semiotic strategies emerging from the secular development community for constructing its legitimacy and recognition as such institution. I conclude by returning the theoretical framework of a leviathan.

The birth of Caritas

In order to understand Caritas and other Catholic agencies in Sri Lanka, their work must be contextualised within the overall developments within the global Catholic Church globally. The first national Caritas was founded in Germany already in 1897, where it gained its role as the national “social arm of the Catholic Church”. Nonetheless, the subsequent birth of the *Caritas Internationalis* confederation in 1951 is closely linked with the theological developments in the Catholic Church in the 20th century (Spencer et al. 2015, 35-36; Gerharz 2014, 88). 1951, the International Caritas Conference was held in Rome, and soon Caritas Internationalis gained its status as the Church's “official voice in relation to its teachings in the area of charity work globally” (paraphrasing the Caritas webpage).

The establishment of Caritas anticipated the spirit of the Vatican II held during 1962 and 1966 marking the most momentous event for the Church in the modern era. Vatican II promoted an indigenisation of priesthood and introduced to the Catholic Church significant reforms in its relation to the so-called modern world and other religions as a path to salvation. It also gave a new emphasis on matters of social justice. A re-formulation of the social teaching of the Church was outlined in *Populorum Progressio* (1967) “On the development of the peoples” – being a fundamental document by the Vatican paving the way “for the integral approach to development (Heidtmann 1994: 38)” (Gerharz 2014, 87).⁴¹ The document comprehends a broad range of topics that comment on the development ideologies of that time, such as economic equality, aid to developing nations and social justice and doing so articulate the Church's official stance on new, emerging global issues and changes.

These developments within the Church may seem trivial for humanitarian praxis today, but they reinforced two other concurring institutional and ideological processes. The first one was a new Western conceptualisation of development. The United Nation's had launched the 1960s as the Decade of Development marking so also an establishment of specialised UN institutions. While the UN has thereby gained a certain degree of hegemony in the international community, according to Gerharz it was “the Catholic conception of attaining social equality [which] was one of the guiding

⁴¹ Gerharz (2014, 87) points out that in “the Protestant churches agreed with the congregation of the World Church Council on foundations for development work in 1968, but always emphasized, in contrast to the initial statements of the Catholic Church, a bottom-up strategy.”

principles that reinforced the establishment of independent, professional development institutions worldwide, from the time of the development of the social question in Europe (Heidtmann 1994: 19)” (Gerharz, 2014, 87). Against this background, the Church did not only incorporate secular development ideology to its social teachings, but the mainstream ideology of development has been interwoven in the fabric of the Church doctrinally and institutionally over the decades. Moreover, the religiously-motivated ideology of social justice also informed the secular development norms alike (ibid.). Gerharz (ibid.) summarises the implications of the interplay of secular and religious development ideologies as follows:

The cross-references between the secular and the sacred realms show that churches have become important actors in the global development project. The institutional and organizational features of Christian churches have contributed to the process of incorporating the development paradigm. This relationship is characterized by concrete complementarities and interactions with Western development cooperation. The local Christian organizations, such as Caritas, therefore act as part of the global organizational system. In this respect, these organizations are professionalized development institutions, which follow, in contrast to South Asian Hindu institutions, Western development logic.

In conclusion, historical processes are needed for leviathans to become feasible as Golub claims. Similarly, the parallel histories of the Catholicism and international institutions show that objectively speaking, Caritas is hardly a marginal institution. In the section to come, I will scrutinise one exemplary present-day discourse through which ways Caritas identifies with the international humanitarian and development arena today. More than that, the analysis shows some particular discursive ways in which Caritas legitimises itself in this context.

Case study: discourse analysis on institutional identity

The webpage of Caritas Internationalis (www.caritas.org), the confederation of Catholic charities, is a professional online communications product, produced by the public communication officers of the organisation at the main headquarters in the Vatican. It reflects the official voice of the confederation, also promoting a public image to respond to the kinds of challenges the development organisation face today on the areas of legitimacy through managerial requirements for accountability and funding. *Who are we* section presents Caritas through the topics such as *Church, Mission, Vision, History, Governance* and an internal policy document *Management Standards* (hereafter ‘Standards’). As an example of policy documents, the Standards “reveal a degree of consensus around values” and further, “are concerned with identifying and promoting aspirations and ideals, rather than with acknowledging practicalities” (Commonwealth of Learning 2003, 45). In the same way the Standards evoke the core mission of Caritas “to serve the poor and to promote charity and justice throughout

the world” and are there as explained on the webpage, “*to improve our work to alleviate suffering and restore hope for our brothers and sisters in need.*”

Overall, the portrayal of Caritas fulfils the characteristics of a Western conceptualisation of international relief and development organisations. It justifies itself as a humanitarian institution through identifying with domineering humanitarian and development discourses. The theoretical basis of my argument is by Lister who proposes that “organizational legitimacy can be considered to depend on conformity with dominant [development] discourses” (Lister 2003, 188) and those organisations that discord with the so-called traditional approaches to development are perceived illegitimate. Further, according to Lister “legitimacy is implicit in the concept of discourse and is a mechanism through which discourses shape organizational practices” (ibid.) and so “legitimacy is the ‘reward’ for activity which conforms to dominant discourses, and illegitimacy is the sanction” (ibid.). More specifically, in the field of development, the discursive legitimization by the NNGOs involves the use of “legitimated vocabulary (Meyer and Rowan, 1977)” (Lister 2003, 184).

First such indicator of a use of legitimated vocabulary is the accountability to “the poor” as the beneficiaries of Caritas, in other words, the “downward accountability” (Edwards and Hulme, 1995; Saxby, 1996; quoted in Lister 2003, 177). Second, the above-mentioned Standards take a form of managerial language; they are said to be “based on existing good practice and accepted global principles within the humanitarian and international development community, and safeguard our professional competence and efficacy in serving our neighbors.” Reflecting the managerialism of the NGO sector, the Standards are further explained to consist of four areas (Laws and Ethical Codes, Governance and Organisation, Finance and Accountability and Stakeholder Involvement). Caritas thus adheres to the symbols that are proposed in the literature concerning NGO legitimacy: financial accountability and appropriate governance structures (Edwards and Hulme, 1995; Saxby, 1996; quoted in Lister 2003, 188) and legal compliance (Edwards, 1999b; quoted in Lister 2003, 176). Further, the online communications sends a strong message about the internal authority (Edwards, 1999b; Saxby, 1996; quoted in Lister 2003, 176). In the “Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct for Staff”, Caritas explains that “in addition to the Statutes and Internal Rules which provide the canonical legal framework for Caritas Internationalis, several standards and guidelines have been developed for the work of the Confederation”.⁴²

In terms of the specific framework of humanitarian norms and related discourses, Caritas communications exhibits same consistency. As Vairel & Zaki note (2011), human rights (in this case,

⁴² These rules include partnership Guiding Principles (2003), Child Protection Policy Framework (2004), Guidelines on Relations with the Military (2006), Guidelines on Environmental Justice (2006), Emergency Guidelines (2007) and Management Standards (2013), which then all form the fabric of Caritas’ normative framework.

international humanitarian law and the humanitarian principles that emanate from them) form a significant legitimating framework for the civil society actors. On a normative level, an adherence to humanitarian principles (neutrality, impartiality, independence and humanity) defines whether the humanitarian response is carried out legitimately. Accordingly, Caritas Internationalis is a signatory to “The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Nongovernmental Organisations” and “The Sphere Project’s Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response.”⁴³ On an organisational level, Caritas declares its commitment to the humanitarian principles in the Standards under the section Management Standard Laws and Ethical Codes (ibid. 2). Under the section concerning humanitarian ethics, it is told that member organisations must uphold the SPHERE as well as to CI’s Child Protection Policy (ibid.). While it is important to observe the overall discussion and generalisations regarding the humanitarian principle, the meaning of neutrality, humanity, impartiality and independence for humanitarian agencies needs to be contextualised in each humanitarian crisis and complex emergency. Thus, the topic will be revisited in Chapter 3.

Finally, the importance of the Standards for Caritas is further reinforced by using a spokesperson, the Pope Francis himself. In a quote on the webpage by the Pope, a discourse exhibiting “consistency between professed mission (values) and actual behaviour” (as proposed by Edwards, 1999b; Saxby, 1996; quoted in Lister 2003, 176) takes a unique expression in the language of the Catholic faith, illustrating the interplay of religious and managerial discourses in the process legitimisation of Caritas work.

I thank the Lord for Caritas and its valuable service in the world. I also congratulate the governance bodies and the General Secretariat of Caritas Internationalis for developing and approving the Management Standards and Code of Conduct for the member organisations. These instruments must now be applied to strengthen the transparency and credibility of Caritas. Let us remember that we are accountable to God, to the Church, to the donors and in particular, to the poor with whom the Lord identifies Himself. By serving them with humility, dedication, self-denial and professionalism, we promote the Church’s mission of forming one human family, caring for creation.

⁴³ In addition, the foundational legal instruments for the Sphere, and thus for Caritas, are as listed: “Humanitarian Charter and the Minimum Standards in Disaster Response: Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination 1969. The four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their two Additional Protocols of 1977. Convention relating to the Status of Refugees 1951 and the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees 1967. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment 1984. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide 1948. Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979. Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons 1960. Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement 1998.

In sum, I have identified two main legitimating discourses. The first one includes the humanitarian principles, law, ethics and jargon, as I have described above. Like any development and aid organisation today, the Caritas presents an organisational narrative that aims to respond the expectations and demands of the public, governments and donors by legitimating itself by way of reporting results, accountability and such issues. Doing so, it presents the humanitarian and development work of the Church in recognisable terms by way of highlighting aspects that are commonly accepted and viewed as features of a professional development institution. While Lister is right in her criticism regarding categories above of legitimacy as insufficient, “technical” explanations for legitimacy, I claim that using the same language enhances a perception of legitimacy.

The second source and point for identification in Caritas’ communications is the Catholic Church: the body of social teachings of the Catholic Church that are emphasised in the communications by Caritas. Admittedly, these two points of identification are inseparable since they are black-boxed in the history of the Catholic Church and development institutions, as I have explained. The example suggests that Caritas does not only identify itself as a professional actor on the aid sector but also reproduces⁴⁴ a legitimated discourse by fusing other, characteristically Catholic elements into the otherwise secular discourse.

Conclusions

What exactly is Caritas? What does a notion of Caritas contain? I now return to the question of recognition and feasibility I posed at the beginning of this Chapter. The Caritas International communications reflect little the fluidity of the Caritas actors described earlier (see pp. 21–25), which make the work of Church bodies difficult to recognise, as I suggested. On the contrary, it does the opposite by condensing the ethos and complex networks of Caritas in the form of a reader-friendly online product. Adopting Lister’s categorisations concerning legitimated symbols and vocabulary, I suggested that Caritas so identifies with current development and humanitarian narratives so to appear as a recognisable as a development and humanitarian organisation itself. More than that, Caritas enhances its legitimacy by using legitimated language and even reproduces and defines such legitimated discourse with assimilating Catholic nuances with development jargon. This embedded nature of secular and religious realms has a long institutional history, as explained here by Gerharz (2014). My argument here is that the historical relationship between Christian and development institutions allows Caritas not only to reproduce but to define legitimate humanitarian discourse, which as such is an indicator of its power.

⁴⁴ “By accepting the ‘mental maps’ of political players and by withdrawing from tsunami aid as something ‘too political’ – they reproduce those boundaries as well.” (Goodhand et al. 2009, 695)

What is the purpose of organisational narratives as discourses and what do they tell us? In terms of the theoretical framework of a leviathan, the analysis above illustrates the nature of Caritas and the Church as a “leviathan as a bureaucracy” (Golub 2014, 14), which here refers to a set of norms and policies, which construct the leviathan. In the words of Golub, “professional, dedicated, and disciplined people acting in accordance with predetermined rules and regulation. Belief in the structuring force of rules makes such bureaucratically-organised macro actors feasible” (ibid.) (In this case, people acting professionally according to external and internal regulations is, of course, limited to creating a perception and reputation of them as such).

Regarding the theoretical framework of a leviathan, my basic premise in this thesis is that understanding the feasibility of the work Catholic aid agencies requires including in the analysis also discourses that are outside the secular humanitarian realm. I have pointed out that this premise is also visible in Caritas communications: it utilises both the managerial language of the NGO sector and religious language. An utilisation of both religious and secular development discourses indicates the leviathan nature of Caritas as a black-boxed entity, and in this case, black-boxing involves “the religious beliefs themselves” (Gerharz 2014, 87) so that religious, humanitarian values and praxis intertwine in the process of legitimisation. At the same time, for me it seems that the aforementioned divergent discourses (in style and ethos) remain visible in Caritas communications. I suggest that for the interest of legitimacy and recognition in relation to the secular realm, the fusion of black-boxing is not complete.

Finally, in this Chapter, I have discussed Caritas exclusively as an abstraction of development and relief organisation in a context of international relief and development community. I suggested that Caritas Sri Lanka has until recently struggled to get international attention and recognition. However, this view presented in Review 2004 and elsewhere has been recently challenged by a MSF paper (2016), which concerns one of the most significant current discussion in humanitarian assistance overall, the theme of localisation. In connection with the re-emerging of the concept, MSF discusses ideology and problems of the conceptualisation and so exhibits a more nuanced recognition of Caritas as follows:

The localisation agenda has mostly been driven by organisations that are “multi-mandate”, i.e. whose focus is not limited to purely humanitarian work, but who embrace a larger scope of action. They form the majority of organisations involved in humanitarian aid. Seen from their perspective, localisation makes good sense, as it fits well with societal transformation, sustainable aid and other long-term goals. Other localisation advocates, overlapping with the group of multi-mandate organisations, are church-based NGO networks. For the Western members of these networks (such as Action by Churches Together or Caritas Internationalis), their logical counterparts in the developing world are the local parishes and church communities. (Schenkenberg 2016, 8)

Although the paper brings up some critical notions regarding a prevailing conceptualisation of localisation as put forward by organisations such as Caritas, it confirms the importance of the findings proposed in this study for the feasibility of humanitarian action, namely, Caritas and Church agencies being multi-mandate and carrying the work through Church networks. I will next turn to these and other distinct features of church aid's leviathan nature.

Chapter 2: The Church as a leviathan

I have argued that understanding the feasibility of Catholic aid agencies requires completing the analysis with the discourses that are outside the conventional humanitarian realm and mandate.⁴⁵ The relevance of this approach is supported by earlier research as well as the chosen theoretical framework (see pp. 31–34). As I described in the previous Chapter, Caritas and JRS are not only professional development agencies but also characteristically Catholic aid agencies. In Chapter 1 I suggested that Caritas communications exhibits Catholic ideology regarding well-doing and their belief system, which is institutionalised in the global structure of the Church. From this follows that the feasibility of the work Caritas and other Church bodies is not solely defined by the multi-dimensional history and politics of INGOs and NGOs in Sri Lanka, but also of the global Catholic Church. In this Chapter, I will address the specific nature of Caritas and other Church bodies. I will begin the section by outlining the historical and ideological reasons for the formation of Caritas in Sri Lanka and globally. I will then explain the governance of Church bodies, and review some specific aspects of the work of Caritas in Sri Lanka as they are indicated in a programme review of Caritas Sri Lanka 2004, with the help of secondary literature. In the final part of the analysis, I will tie these various strands together to demonstrate how these dimension combine to constitute the feasibility of Church as a humanitarian actor. The conclusions are based on my theoretical premise of the Church as a leviathan, which makes many elements “act as one” (Golub 2014, 13).

The birth of Caritas in Sri Lanka

“Because the war is more kind an ethnic based, [one] could not find the real non-political leaders to give a voice for the voiceless [...] The Church became the voice of the voiceless.” (A member of Caritas, Colombo)

If expressing an interest in the work of Caritas in Sri Lanka, one is likely to hear the legend of its founder father. In a sense, the ethos of Caritas is personified in the story of Joe Fernando, a priest from a fishing community in the west coast who started the work of supporting the livelihood of the local fishermen. An interviewee explained that Joe Fernando was a pioneer motivated by the new kind of social teaching of the Church and so started *“to work and study with the fishermen to see that without the middlemen's manipulation how they can be on their own. He succeeded in empowering the fishermen, so that is how the whole thing started like a small cell”* (a member of Caritas Sri Lanka in Colombo). Caritas Sri Lanka was thus founded in 1968 and gradually *“institutionalised”* (as an

⁴⁵ In practice, these different types are often merged in one discursive process of legitimation and in the lived life of Church, although I have treated them separately for analytic purposes.

interviewee put it) through the diocesan system. In the northern areas of Sri Lanka, Caritas' operation started in 1972 from an initiative of the Bishop and another priest, who designed "*more constructive rehabilitation programmes [...] so he shifted from fishermen empowerment to other sectors, that's how the whole thing evolved and been called Caritas Internationalis*" (ibid.). Caritas Sri Lanka was registered as a charity organisation by the Act No. 17 of Parliament in 1983 when "*the war also started in the Northeast, so the work started among the Tamils as well*" (ibid.). From that onwards, Caritas Sri Lanka was thus "*accepted by the government*".

In order to understand the full meaning of activities by these pioneers, their work must be contextualised in the overall developments within the Catholic Church both in Sri Lanka and globally as I have described in Chapter 1. The 1960s and 1970s mark the change brought by Vatican II. Similar to the institutionalisation of the secular development ideology of that time, the expansion of the global Caritas network (including Caritas Sri Lanka) is an institutionalisation of the new kind of social teachings emphasising social and economic development as introduced by Vatican II (Stirrat 1992, 46-47). "*That does not mean that before 1960 there were no social activities, but they were called charitable activities*", as a Caritas priest from Colombo clarified.

In Sri Lanka, Vatican II came soon after the political developments which had questioned the legitimacy of the Church (see pp.14–15). In South, the Sinhala laity increasingly felt Catholics were pushed to the marginal as a result of the clergy's failure to mediate between the Church and the state (Stirrat 1992, 42). Adopting reforms introduced by Vatican II, the Church was able to respond to the challenges and to find new justifications for its role in the society. First, the theology introduced by Vatican II allowed the Church in Sri Lanka to adopt a more tolerant stance towards Buddhism (Stirrat 1992, 43). This meant the Church in the South was able to move from an identity shaped by an isolation and "martyr ideology" (ibid. 44) to a more inclusive approach. It was now able to play with the blurred line between religion and culture and celebrated festivities formerly denoted to Buddhism as cultural festivities (ibid. 44-45), thus opening the doors to an influence of the majority culture. Second, Vatican II altered the role of the priest alike from the called priest of the Lord to the "servant of the parish" (ibid. 46). Together with a new type of systemic approach to laity's social issues (which shifted the focus of priesthood from spiritual to this-worldly realm), the clergy of the South now had theological and institutional incentive to renew its relationship with the laity. Parish priests assumed responsibilities in carrying out development and social activities of Caritas and other specialised institutions (ibid. 47).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ On the other hand, while a role of a parish priest grew, "the development of specialised institutions such as SEDEC meant that less weight was put on parish organisation" (Stirrat 1992, 47). For priests, "involvement in diocesan or national institutions meant access to scarce assets" so that "[...] during the 1970s, tensions grew between the parish priests on the one hand and clergy in the specialised institution on the other" (ibid.).

Vatican II also speeded the process of an indigenisation of priesthood which increased the clergy's involvement in political, social and financial issues. In this way, the Church was able to influence secular sectors of society and therefore to increase its institutional capacities (ibid. 36, 52, 53). On the other hand, it contributed to division and politicisation of the Church along geographic-ethnic lines. Commenting on priests' political involvement, Stirrat describes this paradox:

Any priest who entertained ambitions for development projects in his parish had to become involved in the political process. The result was that within the priesthood divisions emerged in terms of political alignments, different sets of priests supporting different parties or factions within parties[...]this affected not only the allocation of resources to particular parishes but also appointment within the Church. (Stirrat 1992, 48)

In the Tamil areas, the Church never experienced a similar type of legitimacy crisis in its relation to the laity (Spencer et al. 2015, 138). From the beginning, the issues of legitimacy were of different kind in the Tamil areas, as implied by Spencer et al. While in the South, the new institutional socio-political involvement may have increased the legitimacy of the Church, the socio-political participation of the Church in the North was likely to question its role in relation to the Sinhala nationalism, which a certain Sinhala Catholic faction was now adopting. In the northern and eastern Tamil areas, the new emerging liberation theology, influenced by socialist views as the liberation of the oppressed or the marginalised echoed with the emerging the emerging Tamil cause (Spencer et al. 2015, 121, 125). It offered a theological and moral justification for priests' political involvement. Through new, strong institutions such as Caritas the Church grew to represent Tamils across different faiths (ibid. 126, 120-121). As a member of northern Caritas said, "*the Church started to give the voices against the government and for the people, and for the Tamil people*". Spencer et al. argue that Vatican II even radicalised northern priests and "this accentuated tensions between politically careful and risk-averse centre and a radicalised, politically more engaged and exposed periphery (ibid. 125-6)." The division may have deepened due to some priests' resistance to the reforms and modernism (Stirrat 1992, 50).

In conclusion, over time times the Church found ways to adapt to societal and political changes in a manner to preserve some religious and political authority in Sri Lanka. At the same time, these reforms institutionalised the legitimacy of the Church in new ways relevant for the Church's position in the international development and humanitarian arena. The contemporary theological and institutional reforms described here were hardly enough to turn the wheel of overall secularisation and individualisation of religion in which the authority of the Church and a priest was irrelative for an ordinary Catholic (ibid. 56). A new type of institutionalisation of charitable activities and the

establishment of Caritas and other specialised institutions did enhance the legitimacy of the Church, but they also reinforced the emerging political division between the Tamil minority of the North and East and the Sinhala majority of the South. However, despite the fractionalisation, Vatican II built the overall competence of the Church for development and humanitarian activities to come by renewing the institutional potential and creating new networks across the country. First by spanning the ethnic divide (paraphrase Spencer et al. 2015, 123) and second, constituting “a significant source of social capital that can be drawn upon for mediation and peace-building at both the macro and micro levels” (ibid.). Hence, the fact that the Church in the North was able to maintain its power through the new institutions and the specialised clergy has implications for the feasibility of humanitarian action during the war. As is pointed out in previous research on the Church’s prominent role in the East in social and peacebuilding activities: “Playing a mediation role has involved a fine balance, as conflict dynamics and political shifts redefine what is considered to be legitimate political action, and institutional structures have a limited capacity to protect.” (Spencer et al. 2015, 123)

Before proceeding to examine the implications of such relationship-improving institutionalisation for humanitarian work, I find it necessary note that what has been written here concerning Caritas, also pertains to JRS regarding networks and the overall history of the Church. However, JRS differs from Caritas from being founded only in 1983 as a response to the conflict notwithstanding Jesuits are known for their work on the education sector throughout the centuries (Brown 2015). The way I have clustered different Catholic actors together for the benefit of the analysis of this thesis does not do justice to their theological and social diversity. Religious orders and their priests (such as the Jesuits, the Dominican, the Franciscans and the Priests of the Sacred Heart) have distinct religious identities, theological emphasis and variant lifestyles. These differences are evident to themselves, and some Jesuits informants shared a certain feeling of self-respect attached to this distinct religious identity. On a discursive level, it even appeared that some rivalry between the religious orders exists, which should not be understood as a conflict. That said, a limitation of this study is its focus on Caritas and Catholic Church as a whole, and a lack of focus on less prominent JRS. However, the interviews held in Sri Lanka and the times spent with the Jesuits are not necessarily quoted but have been immensely helpful in forming an overall picture of the work of the Church, and those bodies operating under the auspice of the Bishops Conference. Notwithstanding these limitations, I will outline next the Catholic Church and implications for aid agencies and their work.

[Institutional framework, hierarchy and its implications](#)

“And also, it is also faith-based organization Catholicism as a whole is centralised, so in that way for us to work also.” (A priest from JRS)

As I have explained in Chapter 1, it is clear that recognising the work of Caritas and other Catholic actors requires understanding their nature as an extension of the Catholic Church. The main purpose of this section is to develop an understanding of the kind of actors, networks and structures which the hierarchy of the Church employs in crisis response so to make them more recognisable, and to develop an understanding of how they for their own part construct the feasibility of humanitarian work and access.

In regard to the hierarchy, a global Catholic agency such as Caritas Internationalis is coordinated in the Vatican City by the General Secretariat of the confederation. The confederation is composed of seven regions of which Caritas Asia Secretariat was founded in 1999. National Caritas organisations are each “autonomous under their bishops, but they combine as part of the Caritas Internationalis confederation, which is a body of the Universal Church. All National Caritas organisation are linked with the bishops’ conference which is the official national assembly of bishops”, as formulated on the webpage of Caritas. The Bishop’s Conference is formed by the Bishops from each 13 dioceses thereby making it “the primary decision-making body” (Spencer et al 2015, 124). In Sri Lanka, each diocese has a Caritas centre but the national centre is located in the archdiocese of Colombo. The relationship between the centres is explicated by Review (2004, 34):

As regards the relationship between SEDEC and the Diocesan Centres the DC’s normally implement programmes and projects, while SEDEC supports their efforts by mobilising and accounting for resources, offering technical support and training, assisting with purchasing of supplies and logistics, and co-ordinating the church’s relief, rehabilitation, peace-building, and animation programmes at the national level. In practice the distinction is less clear cut as most dioceses have their own direct relationships with funding agencies, and as a result have taken on responsibilities for resource mobilisation and reporting to donors as well as implementation.

Besides these local organisations, each diocesan centre employs a range of national and international networks which include other Caritas members around the world, other Catholic agencies (such as JRS in Sri Lanka and CRS), as well as secular national and international NGOs. As a Review notes, Caritas “has fulfilled a wide range of roles at the national level including being a founder member of the Committee of Humanitarian Agencies, a co-ordinating group of humanitarian agencies in Sri Lanka, and being a lead agency for the Sphere project. Its staff have served on a Presidential Task Force on Disasters”, which was the body granting permissions to the war-affected areas (ibid. 35).

Before proceeding to examine the implications of this hierarchy for the work of Caritas Sri Lanka, I will briefly explain the work of JRS although the research on Catholic relief agencies apart from Caritas is not complete in this regard. The aforementioned hierarchy applies also to JRS although its work is less researched here despite its role during the war time emergency response.

That said, the central office of JRS in Sri Lanka was located in Negombo which hosts a significant Catholic community. Similar to Caritas, JRS works under the sponsorship and authority of the Society of Jesus (the religious order of the Jesuits) and the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Sri Lanka. As Caritas is "the social arm of the Church", JRS forms the "apostolic work of society of Jesus" (paraphrase JRS webpage). Similar to Caritas, JRS comprises global and regional offices of which JRS South Asia serves IDPs and refugees in India, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Like Caritas, JRS has a wide portfolio and runs programmes on various sector from emergency assistance to education. JRS is characterised by the strong input by volunteers and refugees supporting JRS work. As is described in UCA News (10 May 2010) "more than 1,400 workers contribute to the work of JRS, the majority of whom work on a voluntary basis, including about 78 Jesuit priests, brothers and scholastics, 66 religious from other congregations, and more than 1,000 lay people" (ibid.). In addition to these figures, migrants themselves support the JRS programmes.

Localisation

I now return to the assumption presented at the beginning of Chapter. One of my main conclusions is that the church-based hierarchy has practical and political implications for the feasibility of humanitarian response performed by Catholic actors, also for their international involvement. First, the pragmatic implication. Through the Churches in the North Caritas Sri Lanka has a "*unique access*" to communities (paraphrasing *Catholic Review* 12 January, 2012) The durable, centuries old Church structures mean that by the final phase of war, Catholic aid agencies "*had localised the whole structure*", as a priest from JRS formulated. The notion is affirmed by Review: "through the dioceses, parishes and religious congregations, the Church has a strong network of parish priests and religious throughout the country, and during the conflict this proved a vital source of information about how people were affected [...] proved invaluable as a means of distributing relief supplies and running community-oriented development programmes" (ibid. 10). More than that, Caritas Sri Lanka has a reputation of a strong national organisation, which must be seen as strength in a country where Catholics form only a minority (6%) within the Christian minority (ibid.).

To put these observations in the terms of humanitarian jargon (also utilised by an interviewee above), the aforementioned set up of the Church facilitates a *localisation* of international development, relief and other institutions and programmes. As I suggested, localisation does not only have a practical dimension but in the case of Sri Lanka, it is likely to enhance the legitimacy while an international involvement is usually marked with unpatriotic connotations. Talking about the exclusion of aid agencies in September 2008, the JRS priest alluded the pragmatic and political issue of localisation for the legitimacy.

All INGOS were asked to leave immediately because of the threat to life they had, and of course because of security and other things, and of course, Sinhala NGOs were not under the control of the LTTE. Of course, what JRS and Caritas did, we localized the whole mechanism. That means that what we do in organizations [...] officially, we don't get foreign nationals. We also have the people, the staff from the affected areas and affected families. So that is how we localized the whole administration. And due to which I think we in way had an acceptance and acknowledgement from the people. Perhaps that helps us, or helped us in the last phase of war, to continue to work for the people under the last month.

A full discussion of localisation lies beyond the scope of this study but these observations offer some insight into its dynamic in Sri Lanka for future research. Here it is important to point out that the so-called localisation in the quote above explicitly refers to the role of individuals in constructing the feasibility of access and aid. First, Review confirms that parish priests form a considerable resource for the diocesan centres. This group includes not only priests working in specialised institutions such as Caritas, but also parish and diocesan priests who implement the work in their own communities. The relation is mutually reinforcing since through a multitude of grassroots organisations such as EHED and JRS parish priests have “a strong organisational base in society” (what is written here of Batticaloa in Spencer et al. 2015, 125 concerns other Tamil areas as well). This competence should not be understood as absolute. In contrast to stories of the heroic role played by the priests in the war (see Johnson 2012, 85 here on p. 77), Review includes in the organisational weaknesses of Caritas issues related to the clergy, such as, the ageing of the staff and a lack of qualified staff (ibid. 35-66).⁴⁷

Thus the competence of this clergy might be more related to the position within the communities than to their objective qualifications which, nevertheless, are considerable in a form of education, skills and leadership, as asserted by Johnson (2012, 84). The quote by a JRS priest above refers explicitly to humanitarians, who themselves have been affected by the war in the North, and in that way are a part of the social fabric of the communities they aim to serve (see also Johnson 2012, 84). In the construction of feasibility, the Church then plays a role in restricting the incoming of not just individuals from international staff, but also of “foreign nationals”. As one interviewee put it: *“our presence in the North, is, in the conflict-areas longer than any other organisation because other international NGOs have sometimes allowed to go, sometimes allowed but not permitted to work [...]*

⁴⁷ It is important to note here that this observation of the priests does not necessarily reflect the profile of those priests and staff researched in the academic studies cited in this thesis. For instance, Johnson's research was conducted among the clergy, who characterised as being highly educated, English-speaking men with an international experience as well as spiritual and pragmatic skills while also having first-hand experience being affected by the war through displacement (Johnson 2012, 84). The relation of these two contrasting observations may remain unresolved here, nevertheless it suffices to note that those individuals' research reported in the academic literature form a critical resource for the Church. The results may look different when approached from a different viewpoint of informants.

but we had continuous presence. That is an advantage we had.” Further, *“the church works throughout the country, so parish priests work in both (government-controlled and rebel-controlled) areas”*, as a CRS country director emphasised in a news report (*Catholic Review*, 19 January 2012). It should be added that the theme came up in discussions with the interviewees when I explicitly asked their opinion of why Caritas and others were allowed to stay within the war zone. Thus, I will cover the topic of importance of southern and northern contexts in the construction of Church’s feasibility of aid in Chapter 3.

Systemic strengths and political obstacles

The fashion in which Caritas is administered in Sri Lanka creates a complex web of donors, implementing partners and cooperation partners. Besides church-based networks in the country, the Church and Caritas have wide networks with secular and other organisations in the sectors of aid, peace and development. My suggestion is that this diversity of the networks offers Caritas a kind of safety net in case one actor and/or material link fails in any way and makes it more competent during the times of change or crisis. This systemic strength is illustrated in the area of funding and cooperation partners. In terms of financial independence, Caritas adheres to *The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*, which obligates NGOs “to avoid dependence upon a single funding source” for protection of their independence, as also noted in Review (2004, 46). Respectively, the Church has a certain degree of financial independence, and may even be characterised as “wealthy institutions, and they have a strong organisational base at the international, regional, national and local levels” (Spencer et al. 2015, 124). The dioceses raise funds locally including individual donors but also get each year an allowance from Rome (ibid. 125). In addition, dioceses and parishes receive financial and other types of resources from various cooperation partners.⁴⁸ Gerharz implies that the stronger the religious organisation’s ties (financial) with the Western (secular or religious) development institutions, the more financially resourced they are (Gerharz 2014, 88). However, the role of the cooperation partners in constructing the institutional basis is not restricted to funding. Gerharz shows further ways these institutional affiliations have built the competence of northern Jaffna parishes through NGO-specific training activities such as community approaches, mobilisation and such activities (ibid). Thus, the

⁴⁸ The complexity is exemplified in an ended cooperation programme between Caritas and German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) in the mid-2000s researched and described here by Gerharz. “The Catholic organization, formally a non-governmental organization (NGO), cooperated with the GTZ JRP and implemented a shelter programme funded by the European Community and the French government. Two professionals were based in Jaffna to supervise the implementation of this programme on behalf of French Caritas, which was the official partner of the project. These Caritas expatriates were integrated into the international community of Jaffna development experts and NGO workers. Direct linkages existed not only with European national Caritas organizations, but also with the Sri Lankan national Caritas.” (Gerharz 2014, 88)

various donors and cooperation partners do not only provide financial security to the Church and its aid agencies but also construct their competence in precise NGO-like manner, and moreover in other more indirect ways. As Gerharz indicates, one indirect result of the cooperation between European partners and Caritas in the North is an adoption of the Western concept of development. Although Western conceptualisation of development has no intrinsic value as such, returning to the topic of recognition (see Chapter 1) I hold that the interaction with Western development institutions enhances the recognition of those NGOs whose work would otherwise go much more underreported.

Having said that, funding and cooperation always have a political dimension that can supersede a managerial approach to NGO resourcing. In regard to well-researched topic of politics of tsunami aid, Goodhand et al. (2009, 691) remark that “the apolitical space of charity (as religious service), could not be maintained when international humanitarian agencies came to Maruthamunai and brought large amounts of relief items, aid money and job opportunities for development workers.” Funding continued to be a politicised issue during the final phase of the war and beyond. In the case of Caritas and JRS, political constraints have introduced obstacles to their work on regional, national and international levels. During the meetings in the northern areas, I sensed some frustration among the few priests and staff members I spoke with. As one interviewee said, the government resources directed to post-war programmes in Jaffna and Vanni were insufficient to meet the needs of the area, urgency of which he was well aware of. Seen against the background of the overall economic development of the country during the past few years, this scarcity is easy to perceive as a lack of political will to support those areas, as well as an indication of their ongoing militarisation. Further, a lack of resources for the North and political division is reflected within the Church itself. Already in 1983 in the wake of the war, “the bishops and priests in the North felt that the Church in Colombo was not in a position to give them sufficient support, and some Sinhalese Catholics were unhappy about the amount of aid being given to the Tamils in the North. At that time SEDEC in Colombo thought that the acceptance of funding for the North would damage its national reputation” (Review 2004, 11). The situation has continued all the way till today as documented by Spencer et al. (2015, 126): “The Church feels isolated from Colombo. ‘We are not getting enough support as Colombo identifies with the Sinhala community and Batticaloa with the Tamil community’”.

Finally, on an international level, the political obstacles can be briefly illustrated by the UN press briefing (on 22 April) where a representative from US Aid explained they “were not allowed to work” in the northern and eastern region for the reason of receiving funding from the US government⁴⁹. Same financial limitations concerned the CRS, whose Sri Lanka country director said *2007 CRS’ work ‘gets complicated’ because funds it receives from the U.S. government cannot be*

⁴⁹ The LTTE was listed as a terrorist organisation at the time both by the USA and EU.

used in rebel-controlled zones.” (Catholic Review, 19 January 2012) However, there were fewer restrictions on private funds and core funding, as she explained.⁵⁰

Multiple mandates and non-discrimination

I now turn to explore the broad spectrum of programmes as reviewed in Review (2004). As the diversity of cooperation partners and donors described above implies, Caritas and JRS have taken up activities not confined to relief operations. For example, Review notes that the Church has assumed a variety of roles during the war. First, the Church has offered protection for the civilians and served their basic needs as well as of rehabilitation and income generation. During the 1980s, the Church was involved in the bridge-building activities that aimed at overcoming the ethnic division of the country. The work then progressed into a peace advocacy on national and international levels resulting to bishop’s contribution to 2002 MOU and their involvement in mediating the disputes between factions of the LTTE.

Based on the Review, my argument here is that such multi-sector profile must be seen as an institutional and political strength of the Church. The multi-sector participation has a twofold effect. On the one hand it builds the competence of the Church’s aid agencies by way of building the Church’s influence in the society. My opinion is that mandates on various sectors (even if limited) has allowed the Church to construct its institutional capacity and influence by taking up wide-range initiatives in the region, which makes the Church distinct from other institutions. Second, the way the great diversity of programmes has worked for the favour of the Church and Caritas alike is that they have been instrumental in building Church’s reputation as an impartial institution.

Caritas has been one those organisations through which the Church has deliberately engaged in building its reputation as an impartial institution that is based on principles of non-discrimination and alike (Review 2004, 30). As Review describes, central in this has been the Church’s active engagement in inter-religious and inter-ethnic activities, as well as targeting programmes also to southern dioceses and Buddhist communities. The need to address needs of the whole nation and so to enhance the legitimacy of Caritas was identified in the late 1980s marked by the JVP uprising. At first, an idea to respond to the needs arising from the conflict seemed risky for Caritas in Colombo. It was afraid the government and the public would so perceive the Church as being involved in the uprising itself. The programme started regardless, and the support to Buddhist population affected by the JVP violence continued during the 1990s. Although the programmes were faced with some issues in management and financing, the Review (2004) assesses that “through this work SEDEC was able

⁵⁰ “‘Everything we do here is through the church. We’re here as advisers to their program. If they need resources or technical support, we help them,’ she said. ‘They may need educational supplies, uniforms or books for kids who are displaced in order for them to continue their schooling. We can support them with our resources, but not with U.S. government resources.’”

to show that it had a national commitment to humanitarian work that went beyond the conflict in the North” (ibid. 11-12). As one of my interviewees said, *“the very fact that the Tamils were the most affected in those areas we were concerned of the Tamil people. But if we take Trincomalee in the East, you also find out there two other communities: the Sinhala and the Muslim. Our message or our advocacy would then be to them as well [...] So there is lot work going on which is irrespective of caste, religion and nationality”* (A Caritas member in Colombo).

Nevertheless, the concern of biased perception of Caritas exists as is exemplified by an interviewee here. *“In the South, even recently I saw some articles which say that the Church always supported the Tamil and that it has not done anything for them majority community in the Southeast. This is not true because the dioceses have been doing a lot of Caritas work in plantation sector in the southern areas.”* The staff member also reiterated the Review’s (2004, 5) conclusion that the Church *“needs to back this up with a communications strategy so that leaders of other faiths, the wider public, and the media are all clear about its position.”* *“I think on our behalf we need to maximise our profile by telling what we do and I think we are talking about a weak area here. We have not been very forthcoming with writing [...] there’re a lot of local organisations who are unknown - we need to do extra effort in telling who we are and what we do.”*

Finally, I argue that it is equally important to understand the Church’s rationale for involvement in multiple sectors. The comprehensive approach of the Church is based on an idea of a comprehensive service of the humankind (Review 2004, 18). It is this type of theological argumentation from which also follows an institutionalisation of them in the form of development and relief programmes. More specifically, the humanitarian component of any programme executed by Caritas, JRS or other agencies is usually a part of a wider Church programme (Review 2004, 18). I maintain that this integrated approach is closely connected with the sustainability of Church’s humanitarian presence.

The combination of observations presented above provides insights to a conceptual premise that the Church as a leviathan, as an ultra-durable institution contains various elements that build the feasibility of Church’s humanitarian mission. In the next section, I will exemplify how the diversity of networks and actors gathered under the umbrella of the Catholic Church operate in practice. The analysis will so utilise one dimension of construction of humanitarian access, namely, individuals. On the whole, the notion of a broad spectrum of the Church’ programmes, networks and actors takes us back to the theoretical framework of this thesis regarding the construction of durable institutions as routinised, black-boxed entities (see pp. 32–33). I will explain and exemplify the meaning of this claim below.

Case study: black-boxing in action

In the section at hand, I will take the scenario of access and presence in Sri Lanka under scrutiny. In the forthcoming analysis I will also finally return to the theoretical framework of black-boxing. I will build my analysis on the observations I have made in previous sections. I have maintained that a recognition of actors affiliated with the Catholic Church and its aid agencies in the war zones requires an understanding of the networks and structures of those institutions. Accordingly, I have laid out the Church networks and governance as well as the types activities with which Caritas and other agencies have supported the communities. Resembling the core idea of the theorisation of black boxing, I have broken the totality of the Church into smaller factors and mostly illustrated these layers as independent elements without paying too much attention to their mutual interconnectedness. However, the analytic concept of the leviathan as a black-boxed entity suggests that the Church's power derives from an ability to subsume various elements "into one" (Golub 2014, 13). Hence, what remains to be examined is the coming together of all those dimensions for explaining the feasibility of Church's humanitarian work. My argument is that this coming together is a leviathan as a black box in work: in practise, a diversity of Catholic collective and individual actors work as a seemingly unified whole. Thus, I will explore the kind of flexibility of structures and actors that characterise the Church. Further, I have referred to the role of the individuals (diversity of Catholics priests, nuns, staff members and volunteers explicitly and implicitly associated with the networks) in constructing access without examining the topic more closely. This is the other aim of the following analysis.

The purpose of the section is as follows. By way of highlighting the diversity of players within one institutional framework, I aim to describe the black-box –like nature of the Catholic Church. More specifically, my analysis will demonstrate the ways international, national, local dimensions intermix in the totality of the Church and how the network of the Catholic Church allows the members to assume different roles for the feasibility of the humanitarian work. I further assert that through the overlapping structures of the Church these various actors, individual actors are – when needed – able assume humanitarian roles in different institutions under the Catholic Church. With its focus on an individual agency, my analysis shows how individuals play different roles offered to them through the networks but in the end, contribute to the feasibility of humanitarian assistance by the Church.

In the following analysis, I will utilise an approach "explaining by showing", instead of explaining by explaining. Given this orientation, I base the following discussion on an interview with an international female member of staff from Catholic Relief Services (CRS), an international Catholic aid agency. She worked in one of the many tsunami response projects that were active from the immediate start of the tsunami recovery efforts until the conflict started escalating again in 2006 (the close-down of the project happened according to the original plan after a finalisation of the project). In addition to manifold working experiences with Catholic aid agencies, this U.S. based staff

member had also worked in a partnership “*very much hand in hand*”, with both Caritas Sri Lanka and JRS in Sri Lanka. More specifically, with the Dioceses of Galle and Batticaloa as well as Caritas National in responding to the tsunami and then the war. As the war started to heat up again in 2006, CRS began working closely with the Diocese of Mannar as well where the local Church in Galle, Hambantota, Batticaloa and Kalmunai were their implementing partners with playing “*a very key role in identifying the most needy and getting the work done*” as she explained. The continuation of the CRS aid continued after the office close-down in a way that the local staff hired by CRS that used to work for Caritas, stayed. (This relationship between the national staff working with Caritas and the presence of CRS after the office close-down was ambiguous to me but all the same, it reflects the flexibility of the staffing between national and international Catholic agencies).

She was the first person explaining to me that in comparison with other member organisations of Caritas confederation, Caritas Sri Lanka was different in the way it managed the cooperation with the non-Sri Lankan Catholic organisations. Usually, CRS comes to work upon the invitation of the Catholic Church in the country with whom a host country agreement is made, she explained. She saw this as a great advantage of the Catholic organisations compared to other NGOs and organisations who first need to negotiate with the hosting country government for registration, a factor mentioned by other Caritas members researched in this thesis. Where non-governmental organisations also usually need to start from finding the community and cooperation or implementing partners even prior to the registration in the country, she noted that Catholic aid agencies are able to contact the local Church directly. They were then able to talk to them about their needs and because of the already-existing presence and knowledge of the area and communities, and also able to move quickly with their response to disasters and crisis (although she noted that same applies to Protestant and other Churches as well.)

However, on this round, CRS found another way to collaborate in the country. Interestingly, Sri Lanka after the tsunami and during the war, CRS or other Catholic organisations working with Caritas never registered in the country nor formally signed the partnership agreement. Usually, the CRS Country Representative is the legal representative to act on behalf of CRS in the given country. However, in Sri Lanka, the Caritas National Director, the Diocesan Directors, or the Bishop of the Diocese were the ones who most often spoke about the tsunami recovery program or the war. She explained the reasons for me as follows:

They don't want all the organizations getting registered in the country because then they don't have any control and it is their Catholic identity they worry about and they don't want people spoiling that [...] it meant that you're answerable to the Church, that, you know you don't go out to speak on the

behalf of your organization, you're speaking as a part of the Church. When you go to a meeting you always go as a Caritas person [...] part of it being capacity building.

In this way, “CRS was seconded to Caritas Sri Lanka”, as she expressed. Another level of management was added later when the tsunami struck Sri Lanka. Caritas Sri Lanka then prepared and submitted an emergency appeal to Caritas Internationalis, the international confederation of Caritas. That document was the premise to the emergency but each Catholic agency had their own, more specific strategy, based on areas it was working and funding available, that fed into the overall emergency appeal, as she explained.

The meaning of these administrative arrangements was that during her time and the war CRS worked with the local Caritas and JSR, CRS's funds was directed to the local organisations (including Caritas Sri Lanka). CRS was responsible for monitoring and evaluating the quality of programming, but as she explained, the actual relief and development work was not carried out under the name of CRS, but under Caritas Sri Lanka. When any agreement or papers needed to be signed, the local members of Caritas Sri Lanka took the responsibility. The interviewee demonstrated how this arrangement worked on formal occasions as follows: ⁵¹

You could draft something but you wouldn't sign it. The father, the priest would sign the official thing and you know, sometimes I think that is important because they maintain the integrity of their organization and you can get. Yyou know what well call a sort of cowboys in the emergency responses, and sometimes they have other motives. This way the Church could sure the integrity of the Church. It is really important they handled the thing and it was when they were organizing all this it high level with Caritas Internationalis at the very beginning of the tsunami and that just continued on even in to the war time because we were already on the ground.

Regarding the access for international members of staff, Caritas Sri Lanka secured the yearly work visas for CRS international staff and other Catholic partner institutions. Working under the name of Caritas was not always enough for CRS to get access to the area. The project monitoring, which was a responsibility of CRS as a donor, required visits and entries to the area where the work took place. Although there was a short period of cooperation that crossed the lines of usually opposed groups, the restricted access became an issue anew as the war started heating up again towards 2006. The situation also affected CRS staff's access to the project sites. The recognisably European or Western-looking member or members of the delegation were not allowed to pass the checkpoint with no exact

⁵¹ Another Catholic organisation had the responsibility for coordination because of their long-term presence in the country and project sites, as she mentioned.

reason given – *“they did not want just anybody moving around”*. Therefore, should there have been cases when international CRS had not been allowed to visit the affected areas where the project was taking place (this she did not specify), the local organisations were allowed to visit the sites. In this case, the access concerned the staff from JRS. *“JRS people had a presence in that area for a long long time so they knew everybody”*, as she said.

In other occasions, before the peak of the war in around 2005, other sorts of arduous arrangements were made to get the international staff of the CRS to the project site in Mannar. The respondent explained how CRS staff would drive and leave the car on one side of the check point and continue walking through. On the other side of the security checks, there was the staff from the hosting Church, waiting with a car and the journey would continue with them. This caused extra work for the partner Church but in this way security checks for the car were avoided in these highly securitised areas, and the staff was even allowed to go back and forth.

In regard to LTTE and local authorities in the East and North, during the time of tsunami efforts, the staff member interviewed here indicated that Caritas had good working relationships that also enabled the access of the CRS staff to the areas.

Interviewee: *When I was there we were able to go to the LTTE areas, you just go to their checkpoint and tell you're trying to from here to here, can we pass through, and you know I was always with the Church and they knew the Church and they would say, ok you may go. So that was probably a period when there was a little more hope you know that there wouldn't be a return to the war and tsunami, response to tsunami would provide equal distribution of everything so that you know all interests would be met and in the end we all know there were some, it didn't quite go that way and things started to heat up again so during the time we needed to get from places across the areas. I find it fine, we could talk to the officials at the checkpoint and tell them what your plan was and they knew the driver, they knew the Caritas driver, and they let us through.*

Me: *So it [access] comes almost to the individuals so that they have good trustful relations and trust really.*

Interviewee: *Exactly. That is I would say 99% of it.*

Related to a notion of trust, the clergy of the Church and Caritas in Sri Lanka have a great concern for their reputation, and the institutional structures of Catholic agencies were flexible enough to facilitate to the management of the public image. As she said: *“CRS had a long established relationship with the Church in Sri Lanka and like any relationship that is based on trust, CRS agreed not to do anything that might compromise the local Church's status in the country and thus CRS took the Church's lead on things and did not overstep its welcome.”*

This brings us to another trait of argumentation. On one hand, the differences between Catholic organisations are clear, yet the lines are blurred in a quest for legitimacy. Illustrating this, the CRS worker described: *“We were not seen as big players in the field as everything we did was done in the name of Caritas or JRS, for example. We did attend CHA meetings, but always with our Caritas Sri Lanka counterpart. Just as important is that Caritas is always a “social arm of the Catholic Church” and anyone representing Caritas also represents the Catholic faith community. The interviewee gave an obvious example: “You’re answerable to the Church, that you know you don’t go out to speak on the behalf of your organisation, you’re speaking as a part of the Church and when you go to a meeting you always go as a Caritas person”.* I argue that different actors from different Catholic organisations speaking in the name of the Church and feeling ultimately being responsible to the Church, may indeed be character unique to a Christian FBO.

We kept pretty low profile and let the Caritas Sri Lanka be completely out in front and that was done purposely. Again, because we were not registered, and it is their programme, their country, their everything, and we had to be super respectful. That’s very different for many of our organisations. You know, where you come to other countries, see the CRS sign, and you know that’s where our office is, and that we work with the National Caritas. But there is a bit more autonomy, it was a different way of working, just staying low the radar and in terms of our names and I guess, we were just an extension of Caritas Sri Lanka.

As a last note, she understood that Caritas had certain advantages compared to other organisations as a local, integral player in the regions and their presence in Vanni during the final phase of the war after 2008 might be seen as a result of this position. *“They are part of the fabric of the country and they have a long term presence in the North as well as other areas of the country. Agencies that maybe did not have a long term presence or were seen as carrying out a temporary response and were not part of the fabric of the country might have been seen as aids to the conflict”,* as my respondent very clearly put it.

To sum up, I have described the work of individual actors associated with different Catholic organisations and programmes. It is worthwhile to notice that the way in which different Catholic networks, administration and individuals were subordinated to Caritas Sri Lanka. In this case, the reasons for such manoeuvre were connected to maintaining Caritas’ reputation as a local Catholic organisation and ensuring the best possible execution of the project activities. In connection to this, another finding is that Caritas Sri Lanka displays institutional arrangements that allow individuals from other Catholic agencies to work under its name thereby building the capacity as a Caritas body. In this case of the CRS tsunami reconstruction project, working under the disguise of Caritas enabled CRS’s participation in coordination meetings, and at the same time, the arrangement protected Caritas

Sri Lanka's autonomy and reputation. One implication such structuring has for humanitarian practice is that it accommodates a certain degree of "resilience" – an ability to adapt to rapid changes in the face of crisis. In this case, resilience exhibits as structures enabling individual actors to 'assume' different roles depending on what is needed and what is feasible. For the question of international presence in the NFZ, these arrangements suggest that while there may not have been a continuous international presence within the NFZ, the potential for such presence exists and that the resources and presence of international organisations may take a hidden form. Finally, what is demonstrated here are the ways Caritas has been able to maintain its legitimacy and further the specific nature of Caritas as a Catholic agency that makes the work in the North politically and socially feasible. This may seem surprising in Sri Lanka where the religious identity is charged with political connotations. Nonetheless, this suggests that the religion hardly alone plays a legitimating and delegitimizing role. I will explore these dynamics of politicisation in Chapter 3. Before that, I will discuss the significance of these findings in a wider context of the theoretical framework of a leviathan.

Conclusions

This Chapter was divided into two parts. First part reviewed the birth of Caritas as an institutionalisation of ideology formed by the social teachings of the Church and development ethos. I then reviewed basic aspects of the Church's governance, networks, programmes and finances. As a conclusion of the first part, I argued that the fashion in which Caritas and JRS are organised under the umbrella of the Catholic Church allows their continuous presence through the diocesan centres. As a result of the networks, a wide variety of programmes and a sense of community established over the centuries, the Church was able to "mobilise" these networks for a humanitarian response, as well as had access to information and the areas.

In the second part of this Chapter, I have described these networks in action, and further, the organisational and personal arrangements that took place in Catholic tsunami response. Although the case concerned was the context of a tsunami response, I concluded that the response revealed the durable yet flexible institutional structures which have protected the reputation (legitimacy) of Caritas Sri Lanka in the volatile political context overall and allowed different Catholic organisations to work in the country. The detailed description of the secondment of CRS to Caritas Sri Lanka and as an extension of the Catholic Church above thus suggests to consider a theorisation of a leviathan. I argue that one indicator of the Catholic Church as a kind of leviathan is that individual priests and humanitarians are able to navigate through different institutional networks and to assume roles in them depending on the situation. My basic argument is that the Church exhibits such dynamics by subordinating or even merging actors together and thereby resembles an idea of the kind of ultra-

endurable institutions as a leviathan “making many elements working as one” (Callon & Latour 1981, 213; quoted in Golub 2014, 13).

This happens circumstantially for ensuring the feasibility of the institution (here Caritas Sri Lanka). One of the results of such black-boxing is that individual actors are able to “assume” different organisational roles (here, the CRS worker claiming to represent Caritas in a situation where it was needed for the reputation), as is pointed out. This kind of transferability may be characteristic for leviathans.⁵²

A further suggestion related to the role of the Church as a leviathan relates to a relationship between the individual and the collective. As Golub proposes, the “feasibility of individual actors hinges on their ability to successfully personate leviathans, just as the feasibility of leviathans hinges on their ability to be successfully personated” (Golub 2014, 25). In the case explained in this Chapter above, the personification concerns the Catholic faith, based on the observation about the ways these individuals felt when they were accountable to Caritas and beyond that, to the Catholic Church. Here an international CRS worker was able to represent Caritas Sri Lanka through a medium of Catholic identity. To put this in another way, given that different individuals can assume different roles cross-institutionally for the interest of feasibility, there must be something that ties these institutions together. It is my belief here that this ability to connect and merge different individual and collective actors is a “leviathan as sovereign” at work, which points to the importance of an abstract, informal contract. “It was the organisational superiority of the leviathan-sovereign that was important for Hobbes: at the center of his theory of social contract lies the ability of people to act in concert across space and time with greater efficacy” (Golub 2014, 13). The shared identity (here, Catholicism) constructed by semiotic and social processes enables different individuals to appear and function quite unproblematically as actors (“by what semiotic and political processes are these abstraction made to appear unproblematically as actors”, *ibid.* 3). Further, Golub’s idea on the personification of leviathans by individuals acknowledges the importance of every actor. In the cases given above, a person’s legitimacy can construct the legitimacy of the leviathan (such as, the CRS interviewee aware of their mutual Catholic identity) or can make it practically feasible (such as, the car-driver who may need operate through checkpoints).

To be sure, not all actors matter in the same way (as Johnson [2012, 84] notes, neither all priests are brokers). Notwithstanding what has just been said, it is important to keep in mind that “leviathans leak” (Golub 2014, 16). In the case of Sri Lanka, the authority of the Church has been contested throughout the time. While the faith-based networks and institutional affiliation with the

⁵² As Golub (2014, 12-13) draws from Callon & Latour: “Such unscrewing reveals a macro actors ability to “translate” ‘all negotiation, intrigues, calculation, acts of persuasion and violence, thanks to which an actor of force takes, or causes to be conferred on itself authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force’ (Callon and Latour 1981, 279).”

Church give Caritas and other Church bodies certain authority, the nature of this power is profoundly controversial due to colonial history. The same history that makes the Church powerful also offers a strong delegitimising argument against the representatives of the Catholic Church even today. In light of this, the networks and structure described earlier also involve a political dimension. Hence, in the next Chapter, I will focus on the dynamics of legitimisation and delegitimation, more specifically, politicisation and depoliticisation of the Church and its institutions as it occurs today.

Chapter 3: Maintaining neutrality

- *“Staying on one side is no problem...but walking in the middle is always dangerous.”*
(A priest from Caritas in Jaffna)

Conceptualising politicisation and depoliticisation

A central aspect of feasibility and legitimacy of the Church’s humanitarian work concerns the relation between the Church and politics which has all to do with perceptions of neutrality and independence – the defining standards of humanitarian assistance. Accordingly, I dedicate this Chapter to the topic.

The issue of neutrality, impartiality and independence of religious aid agencies has been briefly addressed by Goodhand et al. 2009. Drawing together narratives of post-tsunami humanitarian activities of Muslim, Methodist and Catholic (EHED) in the East, they (2009, 693) “underline the difficult work to preserve religious boundaries and purities at a time of radical social and political change.” They further suggest (2009, 684) that “actors and agencies attempting to manage conflict and build peace, rather than provide humanitarian assistance, find it much harder to maintain the image that they are apolitical”. However, the maintenance of a neutral humanitarian institution is equally complicated as the quote above by a northern Tamil priest from Caritas indicate. The effort is illustrated by the overall complexity formed by the hybrid administration of the LTTE controlled areas during the conflict. On the government’s side, GAs responsible for each district form the focal points for the civil society and international institutions regarding bureaucratic state work. According to Gowrinathan & Mampilly (2009) and Klem (2012), GAs continued to play the role throughout the war under the shadow administration of the LTTE. Usually, the security would be the domain of the LTTE, while public state services (health, education) would still be the responsibility of the government. “Indeed, the insurgency modelled its own civil administration on the government’s bureaucratic framework, creating a structure that could both control and fill gaps in government provision” (Gowrinathan & Mampilly 2009).

Neither do the issues emerge only during times of exception. I argue that in the prolonged crisis in Sri Lanka, the difficulty of preserving this boundary is not a problem during the periods of societal change only, but is a more or less permanent state of affairs for humanitarians. On the one hand, aid agencies must cooperate with and influence political and military actors, on the other, they need to maintain the delicate balance between the humanitarian imperatives of neutrality, independence and impartiality so to avoid a stigma of politicisation.⁵³ However, religious individual

⁵³ Politicisation is here understood as a voluntary or coerced process or a reaction which redefines human suffering (such as, serious human rights violations) as a political issue (the definition adopted from Vairel & Zaki 2011). Further, politicisation can emerge in relation to the institutional political but also extensively, “beyond this conventional definition of politics to [...] ‘politicised’ interests, attitudes and practices unconnected with this institutional space (Aït-Aoudiaa et al 2011, 33).

and collective actors are not detached from disputes and issues of the society (Johnson 2012, 77). In terms of the political involvement of the Catholic Church overall, the Church is, as Johnson (ibid. 84) notes “always involved in geopolitics, having inherited a concern with imperial territoriality. Indeed, there are many local conflicts that are inflammatory, involving land, religious authority, militarisation, political rights and sacred symbols.” (ibid.) True, as I have explained, this involvement must be seen as one of the ways the Church has been able to retain some of the power in the post-colonial society (see p. 15). As an institution, the Church has nonetheless preserved neutrality (Stirrat 1992, 47, 48, 49). The official leadership has made repeated attempts to clarify the Church’s stance to any political involvement, whether in the left or the right (ibid. 49), whether concerning the Tamil priests of the North support for the LTTE (ibid.). My purpose is hardly to confirm or deny these allegations, however, that being said, one of my most outspoken informants clarified the relationship as follows: *“We always stood by the people but it doesn’t mean we really support the LTTE. Of course, the priests in the Northern East support the Tamil cause, which is entirely different from the LTTE”*.

It must be thereof seen as a notable attainment that while the Catholic Church in the North operated changeably under the administration of the government and the LTTE alike, it found a pragmatic working relationship with both (Johnson 2012, 84).

While the cooperation with all sides has been a significant advantage for the Catholic aid agencies in the North, the Church’s reputation as a neutral institution has also been affected by the close working relationship with the LTTE. Paradoxically, when the Church made a choice and then was also allowed to stay inside the war zone with the war-affected Tamils, it was exposed to dangers of politicisation. This presence, as well as the pragmatic relationship with the LTTE, compromised the perception of impartiality. As Johnson (2016, 310) explains, “sometimes referred to by critics as ‘white tigers’ [...] identified with an ethnically defined political cause, to the detriment of ethnic cohesion within the broader religious institution to which they belonged.”

From my point of view it can be suggested that in the context of ethnoreligious politics of Sri Lanka, the attempts to politicise and so delegitimise the Tamil priests constitute a major concern for Caritas and other dedicated development and relief institutions. Given the Vatican II tradition, these parties are always perceived to represent the interests of the government critics (Spencer et al. 2015, 124). What here remains relevant is the prevailing perceptions of the Church as a neutral or political institution, and ways the Church can protect itself from the restraints of politicisation by way of formulating its relation to the government, politics, the Tamil cause through its self-understanding as a Christian church.

Hence, in the following section, I will explore the dynamics of politicisation and depoliticisation, which both enable and restrain the humanitarian work of the Church. The key concept (politicisation, neutralisation or interchangeably “depoliticisation”) are from Ait-Aoudia et

al. (2011) and Vairel and Zaki (2011),⁵⁴ who propose that individual competencies, provisions and privileges in interdependence with a wider social context determine the politicisation or neutralisation of individuals. Although their theorisation is developed to explain the politicisation of individuals, “the politicisation of individuals is not only an individual politicisation”⁵⁵ (Vairel & Zaki 2011, 96) but operates through the collective dimension, which in turn is always relational and context-dependent. More specifically, Aït-Aoudia et al. propose (2011, 16) three main ways that shape politicisation: the role of the context, the entrepreneurs themselves and the role of competencies, skills and provision. Besides that, one possibility is that no absolute “vectors” or “indicators” (Aït-Aoudia et al. 2011) for politicisation or legitimacy exist, but “the argumentation that can give the broadest possible base for legitimisation [...] is circumstantial” (Vairel & Zaki 2011, 107). Related, as other researchers (see pp. 16–18) have argued, the feasibility of the Church’s public engagement, and respectively, humanitarian work, is composed of various factors: its historical and institutional development and its capacities to grassroots work as well as to high-level diplomacy. The theorisation of Aït-Aoudia et al. and Vairel & Zaki suggests that these same dimensions may also be regarded here as dimensions of politicisation and neutralisation.

In the forthcoming analysis, I will adopt this theorisation of individuals’ politicisation and apply to a discussion of politicisation and neutralisation of collective agencies, namely, the Church and Catholic aid organisations. First, I will offer and analyse a discursive example of on the dynamics of politicisation concerning Caritas and the Church. Then, I will illustrate the dynamics of neutralisation by looking into the kinds of circumstances, competencies and privileges which have protected Caritas from political stigmatisation and allowed it to have certain political leeway. Finally, I will pick up a specific aspect from the classifications of politicisation put forward by Vairel & Zaki (2011, 92) as a “subjective (in terms of labelling both individually and collectively by the actors)” politicisation. Thus, I argue that an important mode of political neutralisation for the Church and Caritas is a kind of subjective reframing of issues considered political by the actors themselves (Aït-Aoudia et al. 2011, 11). The wider theoretical approach regarding constructions of the feasibility of Caritas as a humanitarian agency is premised in the analysis. Following Golub (2014 3), I ask through what semiotic and political processes Caritas construct itself as a neutral institution. How the relation to politics, the LTTE and government is construed in the interviews, reports and news sources? In the heart of all analysis remains the question of the recognition of Caritas/Church/JRS as a neutral and so legitimate humanitarian organisation.

⁵⁴ I thank Bruno Lefort for pointing out these studies for me. A full discussion of the studies is beyond the scope of this thesis, nor does this analysis do full justice to all aspects discussed in these articles.

⁵⁵ Translations mine.

Overview of the humanitarian principles and debates

Human rights (or in this case, international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles) form a significant legitimating framework (Vairel & Zaki 2011, 100) for the work of the Church, priests and NGOs. On a normative level, adherence to humanitarian principles defines whether the humanitarian response is carried out legitimately. Caritas International's commitment to the principles and their institutionalisation of them is explained on 40–43. In addition to this, principles of neutrality and non-discrimination were frequently mentioned by the respondents from Caritas and JRS as being the core principles of work. While these principles have a fundamental meaning for aid agencies, it should be kept in mind that the SLA and LTTE did little to uphold the humanitarian law and principles, as we have learned from Chapter 1. This imbalance was implied by a priest from JRS when I asked him about the statement that humanitarian aid should be neutral and non-political.

I felt that humanitarian aid was used as a means to, how do you call it...make people surrender. It was used as means during the warfare and during the last phase of war. Which is unacceptable completely, because you cannot really prevent food, or medicine and other things reaching the people which internationally, according to the international law, it is a violation.

According to IHL, to provide and to receive aid during this *a right*. In light of the legal justification, humanitarian assistance is in principle apolitical (Kleinfeld 2007, 173)⁵⁶ – independent from the political interests of any party. According to Terry, humanitarian principles are aimed “to create ‘a humanitarian space’” which is an operational space detached from the political stakes of the conflict (Terry 2002, 19). As Warner (1999) postulates, “one acts within the humanitarian space in the midst of, but separate from, the political”. However, the relationship of the humanitarian and the political realms, or more specifically, *the meaning* of the apolitical nature of humanitarian aid, is a topic of ongoing debate between different humanitarian practitioners and policymakers (for discussion, see Kleinfeld 2007, 173-175). Indeed the misunderstanding of the meaning “political” contributed to the UN's failure in Sri Lanka. As a result some are looking for more integration of the politics and humanitarian work, which introduces a concern whether that would mean compromising the principle of independence as a freedom to “formulate and implement [their] own policies” “independently from governments” and being neutral and impartial and not being “used to further a particular political or religious standpoint (ICRC 1994, 3).

According to this kind of normative understanding, the legitimacy of humanitarian aid and those providing it is essentially derived from the humanitarian principles. Politicisation of aid providers is seldom unique in Sri Lanka, on the contrary, there is a large volume of published studies

⁵⁶ The purpose of this thesis is not to conclude whether humanitarian aid is essentially political or apolitical but rather to explore the attempts to portray it as such.

describing the relationship between humanitarian assistance and politics. For example, Terry concludes that the humanitarian space as a separate space from the political “is seldom possible in practice” (Terry 2002, 19). Illustrating this, she abstracts ways (international) humanitarian actors may have to engage with the politics of humanitarian aid and with so doing may borrow legitimacy to the sides of the conflict. Although Terry studies mainly international actors, the arguments apply to local organisations. First, the mere “presence of an international organisation in itself can accord legitimacy to a faction or regime, whether it publicly comments on humanitarian concerns or remains discreet” (ibid. 45). Further, organisations and actors need to engage in formal and informal negotiations with authorities, and while these negotiations in themselves are not political, they may be perceived as a political recognition of those parties. Finally, belligerents may aim actively seek out to aid agencies in order influence the public opinion of them as legitimate authorities and humanitarian assistance in may sustain their authority by way of providing health and services. Kleinfeld (2007, 170) claims that this was the case with Sri Lanka post-tsunami reconstruction where “humanitarian action becomes part of an actor’s strategic calculations”.

So far I have assumed a positive correlation between humanitarian access and humanitarian principles. In theory, the principles create and protect humanitarian space where both the right to provide aid and receive aid is fulfilled. However, whether access is gained through political alliances dismissing the neutrality of aid (prioritising the provision aid over the neutrality and impartiality of aid) has introduced as a point of consideration. Jackson (2016b), who studies armed non-state actors (and whose points have relevance for discussing humanitarian access in general), argues that

Though the two principles are sometimes conflated, neutrality and impartiality are integral to the acceptance of aid work by these groups. Independence is important as well, but ANSAs [a non-state actor] recognize that geopolitical concerns, funding, and other factors challenge the ability of humanitarian actors to be independent in practice. With all of the principles, the focus is on observed behaviour (rather than, for example, where an agency’s funding comes from). Although, at times, ANSAs have sought to co-opt humanitarian aid or undermine humanitarian principles (much like States sometimes do), there is also a strong expectation that humanitarians should keep to their principles. (Jackson 2016b, 5)⁵⁷

Summarising the discussion about the normative framework overall, while it is important to observe the whole discussion and generalisations regarding the humanitarian principles, the meaning of neutrality, humanity, impartiality and independence for humanitarian agencies needs to be

⁵⁷ Jackson (2016a) also said that an idea of neutrality plays a lesser role in the ANSAs perceptions of humanitarian aid agencies.

contextualised in each humanitarian crisis and complex emergency. In the case of Sri Lanka, Goodhand et al. (2009, 683-684) make a valuable argument regarding the relationship between humanitarian principles and humanitarian practice. “The claim to be ‘independent’, ‘impartial’ and ‘neutral’ (ICRC/IFRC, 1994), enables them to cross boundaries without challenging them. The assumed dichotomy between humanitarianism and politics – like the division between religion and politics – is, of course, problematic (for example, Studer, 2001; Leader, 2002; Stoddard, 2003), and can be understood as part of the discursive logic of negotiating access”. A close examination of such discursive logic is the purpose of the following analysis.

“Caritas wants anarchy” – a problem of contagion

“In a news item telecast over ITN at 9.30 pm on 23rd March 2012”, the Health Minister of the SLFP’s General Secretary Maithripala Sirisena of accused Caritas “as an NGO” for an “involvement in a major conspiracy to create anarchy within the country.” (*Lanka Web*, 28 March 2012).⁵⁸ An incentive for this was given by farmers’ protests and the politicised question of credibility and accountability of war crime investigations. According to Sirisena, Caritas members had organised the protests, provided protesters buses and food. Further, Sirisena alleged that Caritas had participated in the 19th Session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva “to speak against the government ahead of the war crimes resolution” (ibid.) that ended up approving “a US-backed resolution on war crimes committed by Sri Lankan soldiers in 2009” (*Asia News IT*, 22 March 2012). Five days after Sirisena’s statement, Caritas Sri Lanka in Colombo published a statement signed by its Chairman. He claimed the accusation to be “baseless, unfounded and without even a semblance of truth” (Caritas Sri Lanka 29 March 2012). According to UCA News (27 March 2012), farmers’ groups dismissed Caritas’s role organising protest. “The protests were organized by the Joint National Program for farmers, fisheries and labor organizations, said Nihal Winadhipathi, a farmer’s representative. ‘Caritas or any other organization did not provide buses or meals. Many priests and Buddhist monks came to offer moral support’” (ibid.)

These kinds of allegations against civil society activists, politicians and those involved in political processes are commonplace in Sri Lanka.⁵⁹ Similarly, Caritas, NGOs and the Church are regularly accused of anti-nationalist interests or involvement in opposition politics.⁶⁰ Exceptional in

⁵⁸ According to UCA News, Sirisena had also spoken in another public meeting of the matter. I was not able to verify, whether the ITN broadcast was from the meeting, or whether accusations were voiced in two separate occasions.

⁵⁹ For example, Sri Lanka Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe accused president Kumaratunga “of seeking to plunge the country “into chaos and anarchy” and endangering Sri Lanka's peace process.” (*Independent* 4 November 2003).

⁶⁰ There are various examples of such writing on LankaWeb. See for example *LankaWeb* 11 November 2010. “Catholic Church has always been an ardent supporter of the LTTE in the North and East and there was no secret about it. The brutalities LTTE committed on the innocent civilians in the NCP and the South were never heard or seen by the Catholic Church and they continue to keep mum when hundreds of innocent villagers (all Buddhists) were brutally killed by the LTTE terrorist (in fact, speculation is that Prabhakaran was a born Catholic or a converted Catholic). The Bishop of

this case was that accusations were presented by a high-level politician, a senior cabinet minister who later came to replace the war-time President Rajapaksa. Compared to Rajapaksa, Sirisena represented the more moderate kind of Buddhist leadership, differentiated by the Caritas members and Jesuits I spoke with from “*more nationalistic, more Buddhist [...] more extreme people [...] The ones that are talking*” that Caritas is biased towards the LTTE. “*In general, modern Buddhist leadership, government leaders by and large, have not said that. That’s where we have recognition*” (Caritas priest). It is perhaps for this reason that the spokesperson for Caritas Sri Lanka in Colombo responded to Sirisena’s allegations with a public statement. The statement recollects the cordial relationship between Caritas, government and State and Military officials. “*The records will show that our commitment to serve the people of Sri Lanka received the recognition of the highest authorities in the land [...] activities are carried out with the approval of the Presidential Task Force (PTF).*” However, what seems even more surprising is that Caritas so willingly disassociated itself from any criticism presented against the government of the war crimes. Seen against the background that that Mannar and Jaffna bishop have voiced a need for the international involvement in the war crime investigations⁶¹, the spokesperson's claim for allegations being “without even a semblance of truth” can only illustrate the risks for the Church of losing the legitimacy as a politically neutral institution. My notion is in accordance with Goodhand et al. (2009, 694) who argue that “the political field is so overdetermined” that “both Islamic and Christian organisations and leaders have deployed deliberate discursive strategies to distance themselves from everyday Sri Lankan politics.”

Hence, the incident indicates that Church and its aid agencies are faced with the need to reconcile themselves with the world of politics. The way this is done involves some degree of ambivalence: the fashion in which Caritas formed its response shows, even contradictorily, some logic that relates to phenomena of politicisation (Vairel & Zaki 2011, 93). First, politicisation as such is not necessarily a restraint. In this case, the certain political influence of the Church allowed the statement of Caritas to be noted by the public. The second indicator of the ambivalence behind politicisation is the fluidity regarding the legal and administrative status of Caritas. The way statement redefined Caritas “*Caritas SEDEC Sri Lanka is not an NGO*”, has significant political connotations in the case of Sri Lanka. Although Caritas is in many occasions treated as a NGO, and in some countries is even registered as such, in Sri Lanka Caritas is, in fact, registered as a charitable organisation. This status gives it a comparable advantage in many occasion but does not protect it

Vavuniya Rasayappu Joseph and Jaffna Bishop T. Soundranayagam have been right throughout molly coddling the LTTE and we know that. Whilst Rev Joseph was calling the LTTE terrorists as *My Boyss* Rev Soundranayagam was preaching that the LTTE is the sole representative of the Tamils. Then comes the Rev. Emanuel in London who is the brain behind the Global Tamil Forum (GTF) who once equated Prabhakaran to Jesus Christ.”

⁶¹ In 2014, two Catholic human rights activist priests were arrested under the Terrorism Prevention Act (NCR, 1 April 2014). Bishops also pleaded the government for the civilians various times (see for example, *Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne* 2 December 2009).

from being affected by the restrictions imposed on NGOs. Such restriction on the civil society organisations are a typical feature of authoritarian states and in Sri Lanka, a result of a biased perception of NGOs and FBOs as corrupt entities and the Church as a “Christian mafia” (Spencer et al. 2015, 12). The perception is rooted in colonialism: Christian organisations dominated the provision of social services during the colonial period, and only later they were followed by NGOs established by Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims. Soon after the independence, Christian FBOs in Sri Lanka established their connections with international donors who wanted to support the development of the country. International donors found a way to bypass the risk for corruption prevalent in the government by making the NGOs themselves recipients of the finance. Therefore foreign development and relief aid concentrated in the hands of the NGO instead of the government creating tensions even today (Flanigan 2009, 64-66).

This perception of those NGOs operating in the North is especially biased. The government has accused them working for the LTTE, or merely regards them as representing the kind of Western involvement in the country that threatens the sovereignty of the state and being involved “in issues of democratisation, human rights, and assisting victims of the Tamil separatist conflict” (Flannigan 2009, 67). It was in the early 1990s the Sri Lankan government began to view NGOs as overtly political and, as such as a potential threat to the state (ibid.). Along with the NGO sector and the civil society, Caritas experienced the consequences of the securitisation of relief and human rights work. In 1995, two priests working for Caritas in Vanni (HUDEC) were imprisoned on the grounds for aiding the Tamil cause (Review 2004, 3). Even today, the organisations working in the Tamil areas are subjected to political stigma through phenomena that Vairel & Zaki (2011, 95) call social contamination. The logic behind a politicisation through contagion was illustrated in the response I got when I asked the reasons for the government to criticise Caritas publicly as it did in 2012. Crying out loud a JRS priest immediately but patiently explained to me:

It is because we stood by the people! See, the logic behind is that, say, JRS and Caritas work until the last moment, probably until the people fled from the area, so for the government, for the Sinhala-government who were there until the last moment, were the terrorist, and associates of terrorists, so the priests who are working for these people are in a way, according to the government, supporting the LTTE. So this is how they play the game.

I mean, we always stood by the people, it doesn't mean we really support the LTTE, but of course, the priests in the Northern East support the Tamil cause, which is entirely different from the LTTE.

In conclusion, to cite scholars “the politicisation does not necessarily suppose a frontal opposition to power” (Vairel & Zaki 2011, 106) but Caritas is subjected to politicisation by the state by merely

carrying out its humanitarian work in the war-affected areas. An overall politicisation of the Tamil cause proposed serious challenges for humanitarian action: while the northern Tamils were the most severely affected population, helping them was also perceived as a politicised act. Thereof, the Bishop's restatement of Caritas' cooperation with the governmental bodies may be seen as a strategy to shake off the political stigma attached to Caritas by way of discursively demonstrating it has no interest to oppose the governmental authority. The statement can further be seen as an act aimed to preserve the credibility of Caritas by drawing boundaries to the kinds of groups and "isms" with which an association would be politicising, and further, delegitimising for a humanitarian organisation. In Sri Lanka, this legitimisation and neutralisation may paradoxically require the Church to distance oneself from other NGOs and international humanitarian institutions even when it is treated as an NGO on many other occasions.

However, while the politicisation of NGOs, Caritas and JRS follows from the close connection between the Churches in the North with the Tamil population, it would be against the principles of the Church to abandon "the people" for the sake of avoiding politicisation through a kind of social contagion. Instead, the Church has been able to derive legitimacy from other sources. These sources involve the institutional base of the Church and discursive acts. Interestingly, these dimensions are not only listed by Vairel & Zaki and Aït-Aoudia et al. but also implicated in research concerning post-tsunami aid in Sri Lanka. Goodhand et al. (2009, 693) argue that "some people manage to travel across ethnic and other boundaries to resolve pressing problems. This, however, requires particular discursive strategies. A common theme from the case studies is that certain religious actors may have the institutional base and legitimacy to cross boundaries, but they can only do so, at least in the public sphere, when they explicitly present themselves as apolitical." I will hence upon describe these two dimensions in more detail under the next two subtopics.

[Institutional competence as political neutralisation](#)

The logic of politicisation described by Vairel & Zaki (2011) and Aït-Aoudia et al. (2011) imply that under right circumstances, the effect of politicisation is reversible. However, this reversibility is only a possibility for those actors who own capabilities for it. Vairel & Zaki (2011, 106) and Aït-Aoudia et al. (2011, 16-18) propose that the competence to neutralisation can be seen as a social endowment or a capacity or a practical skill. Those endowed with social, educational and cultural capital can be protected from the restraining forms of politicisation. Even under authoritarian regime, social and educational capital makes it possible to isolate oneself from the constraints of politicisation (Aït-Aoudia et al. 2011, 18). Respectively, "those who do not have these resources cannot get away from it and are therefore deprived of the capacity or even the privilege of remaining apolitical or depoliticised" (ibid.).

It is fair to say that the Church has been endowed with such capacity, certainly through its institutional and cultural history as described in the previous Chapters. There is no need to go into details regarding historical reinforcements here, but it is not excluded that certain privileges have followed from this historical closeness with the state administration. Here it is sufficient to point out that the capacities and privileges accumulated throughout the centuries also have a (de)politicising dimension. They make the work of a minority Church socially acceptable and thus feasible in a Buddhist-majority society, and have helped the Church to re-establish its influence in the society. As of today, I gather that the relationship between the Church and governmental bodies also forms a pragmatic competence in terms of developing certain institutional capacity and knowledge in the context of the crisis. One of the competencies the Church has is the long history of dealing and cooperation with the GoSL and the Ministry of Defence. Following the overall securitisation of humanitarian assistance in the 1990s, the government created a burdensome bureaucracy for NGOs which fearing that “humanitarian relief might be used as a cover for sending essential supplies to the LTTE” and “so moving relief supplies from the south to the North became a major logistical challenge, not just because of the conflict but because of the tortuous procedures required by the GoSL” (Review 2004, 13). Depicting the complexity, the review describes the procedures as follows:

The procedure was that SEDEC first had to apply to the Ministry of Relief & Rehabilitation for permission to distribute certain items; next approval had to be sought from a Commissioner General of Essential Services, & finally the MOD had to issue the permit to allow the goods to move. Even then goods could not be transported directly into the war zone, but they had to be offloaded at the edge of the designated zone and reloaded on to authorised trucks. This meant that many supplies going to the north had to be unloaded up to four times for security checks, and some consignments took three weeks to get through. Once cleared the supplies had to be moved to stores under the administration of the local GA, and after 1997 the GA had a greater say in co-ordinating distribution.” (Review 2004, 13)

The types of bureaucratic constraints took different forms during the ceasefire. For example, in connection with the post-tsunami activities, HUDEC Caritas Jaffna director complained that the government’s inefficient bureaucracy had delayed NGO-led relief operations (*Asia News*, 28 January 2005). One possibility is that while the Church has enjoyed certain social or institutional endowments compared to some other Churches or religious groups, it equally had to develop a way to meet these challenges. However, processes of restrictive politicisation and neutralisation as a capacity building are not exclusive processes. The knowledge of procedures and logistic can be suggested to have contributed the feasibility of the Church’s work during the final phase of the war in 2008 and 2009.

Furthermore, I presuppose that the Church's institutional structure (see Chapter 2) works as a further neutralising factor in terms facilitating inter-group exchange between Sinhalese and Tamils, thus playing a part in neutralising a politicised notion of ethnicity. The same networks which make Caritas a subject to political allegations, also make any political neutralisation possible. As the theorisations above concerning politicisation entail, the effect of so-called social contamination is reversible. In this case, while the pragmatic cooperation with the LTTE has contributed to a politicisation and delegitimisation of Caritas, the Church's networks also allow Caritas to be in a legitimating association with individuals and groups that are perceived legit and acceptable to governmental actors, such as the military personnel and governmental authorities.

Thus, another major neutralising factor concerns the identity politics in Sri Lanka, where the legitimacy of a public actor usually involves a dimension of ethnicity. Basing my argument on the primary and secondary data, I may say that the Catholic Church enjoys some level of legitimacy in society for the Sinhalese presence in the Church. As Goodhand et al. (2009, 694) says the Church "cuts across" ethnic constituencies. I hence deduce that the greater the involvement of southern dioceses, the better are chances of feasibility of the humanitarian efforts carried out by the northern dioceses. A priest from JRS implied to the influence of Caritas in Colombo as follows.

I was not directly working [there] that time, that difficult time but I remember that Caritas had quite a lot of negotiations with the government. The advantage like Caritas Jaffna has [is] they had an office in Colombo, so that for the people who are in Colombo it is easy to obtain permission.

I think Caritas had quite difficult time in negotiating with the government and getting this down for the people. However, probably, I would say, during the last phase of war there was a single Jesuit who was coordinating. Probably it was easiest for him to negotiate with the government than single Tamil priest.

The neutralising effect of the ethnic dimension is, nevertheless, ambiguous. It should be noted that in case of Caritas and other Church bodies, the same factor which is used to question the political legitimacy (the closeness with the Tamil population) of Caritas can in some occasions serve the feasibility of it when approached from a different viewpoint. In fact, the Church's prominence in the North has created even some dependence of governmental bodies from Caritas as a provider of humanitarian assistance, as I was told. "*Many other organisations like ours, the cooperation with the government has meant to provide certain humanitarians needs, which the government could not really address. So they had some level of dependence on us*" (a member of Caritas in Colombo). This dependency is a direct result of the ethnic division of the country where some borders have been

impermeable for governmental actors, while the Church has a significant competence for brokerage of such borders (Jonson 2012, 2015; Spencer et al. 2015, 125). Altogether, the Church has more influence in the North than in the South (Spencer et al. 2015) and it has had access to the communities and war affected areas for decades. The Church was present even when the presence of the state authority was minimal during the LTTE's *de facto state* rule.

The implications of this brokerage (to adopt the term from Johnson 2012⁶²) for humanitarian work is that in this way the Church agencies accumulated knowledge of the northern and eastern networks and regions more than the GAs who then had to turn towards the members of staff and the Church. Hatsumi illustrates this dependency with documenting a dialogue between an injured priest and GA and an army officer taking place in Padayaia Hospital during the final phase of the war (Hatsumi 2011, 107-108). Wounded, the priest was recovered in a hospital when two men, Anuradhapura GA and “a high-ranking army officer (ibid.107) came to visit him. The GA then asked the priest the number of civilians remaining in Vanni. Astonished of GAs ignorance, the priest explained to Hatsumi later. “The GA was asking me that question because the government appointed him to be in charge of the government’s humanitarian assistance for the Vanni IDPs in that area. The government did not choose the Kilinochchi GA or the Vavuniya GA, who would have known the ground situation better, but chose the Anuradhapura GA, a Sinhalese, to be responsible for the humanitarian operation in the Tamil area” (ibid.). The priest, nevertheless, responded to GA and shared his estimation of the number of civilians remaining and rescued. The GA received the information with disbelief for the number being so high. Finally, the priest urged the GA to provide the humanitarian necessities for those people there and warned of the humanitarian disaster that would fold if that was not done. “The GA said that he would discuss it in a meeting that was scheduled for that afternoon or the next day (Father Augustine, pers. comm. August 5, 2008)” (ibid.).

Similar stories reflecting the clergy’s influence over the GAs and army officers were also shared with me. One priest was describing me the times when the last battle started and there was a block in the logistics of the food items from the South to the North. WFP only provided dry rations (dahl, rice, flour, sugar) for the refugees staying in the government-maintained refugee/detention camps. He told he was at that time personally at a district meeting where the District Agency (DA; an official term for GA) had asked him about the food ration situation. DA then mentioned “the government is not going to provide anything other than dahl and rice”, and wished to know whether any other agency would be able to provide additional food items for those refugees. The priest

⁶² See also Goodhand et al. 2009, 683. “Tilly deploys the term ‘brokerage’ as a relational mechanism that connects two social sites more than they were previously. Brokerage activates certain boundaries by connecting two social sites and inadvertently de-activates others.”

contacted their director in the area, who purchased the additional food items and delivered them to the refugee camps in Vanni. This in turn allowed them to talk with the military personnel daily.

The power as an everyday relation (Johnson 2012, 87) materialising according to the examples given above can be seen as an accumulative, reinforcing competence and an indicator of neutralisation. As Goodhand et al. (2009, 683) maintain, the boundary crossing enhances the legitimacy of humanitarian agencies, and so the daily interaction with the military personnel of the government improved the legitimacy of Caritas in a way that carried Caritas even later. In 2010, when NGOs experienced an increasing control by the GoSL Caritas remained outside those restrictions, as a member from Caritas explained me.

The Rajapaksa government banned all NGOs having workshops and meetings because they had a fear that we were promoting anti-srilankan discussions in those groups. So they banned these workshops and media conferences in hotels or in places where we meet. Some of the NGOs were clarifying to the government and when Caritas approached they were told “no, in Caritas you don't have an issue, you are not impacted by this one”.

*Of course now with the government changed we don't have those restrictions but at that time there was a different secretary, the NGO secretary became under the defence ministry. The defence secretary clearly said “Caritas doesn't have to worry, you know you're not part of the group we are looking at.” So there is a special consideration I think.*⁶³

*We never had access issues, we never had to withdraw staff or the offices.*⁶⁴

Finally, another dimension of institutional neutralisation pertains not only to institutional structures but also to individuals representing them, people who have been able to contribute to a neutralisation of the Church and its agencies. “*The current archbishop is very close with the government level so that credibility is actually helpful to us because we are a direct church organisation*” (a Caritas member). As Golub says leviathans need “spokesmen who can represent them (Golub 2014, 27) in the world of politics but the spokesperson’s influence is here helped by a fact that religious figure regardless of their religious denomination share a certain degree of respect in the society. From this follows one response to my question whether government would even have been able to exclude Catholic agencies from the NFZ, which illustrates the importance of the networks, power and religious respect alike.

⁶³ In comparison, some meetings held by the Jesuits seemed to be affected by the policy (personal communication).

⁶⁴ It is unclear whether this meant during, or after the war.

The government wouldn't do that because they don't usually fiddle with the Catholic agencies. The network they have is quite wide-spread and also quite strong. And they also respect [the Church]. They wouldn't really like a priest to get involved directly against the government, and they really respect religious priests. But then they also know that usually priests work in the human rights issues [...] So, I would say it is because of the networking that we have.

In conclusion, seen against the background fact that many priests also work for human rights in the Tamil areas, this competence consisting of overall respect for the religious figures indicated above has had a significant counterbalancing effect on the Church as a whole. In the case of the Church and its institutions, an objective competence related to institutional dimension has been a neutralising factor for the Church has a humanitarian actor. These competencies include an experience dealing with the governmental agents and procedures, a knowledge of the war-affected region together with nation-wide programmes.

Henceforth, in the next subsection I will analyse the ways this close connection with the Tamil population is portrayed as an apolitical relationship. As I have mentioned, the need to portray Caritas agencies as apolitical, professional humanitarian organisation has been addressed in previous literature regarding EHED (Goodhand et al. 2009). They argue that “both Islamic and Christian organisations and leaders have deployed deliberate discursive strategies to distance themselves from everyday Sri Lankan politics.” My analysis regarding northern Church bodies and actors employs this notion but I will distance myself from a concept of “deliberative strategy”. Rather, I will illustrate the dynamics of apoliticising discourses as emerging from the theological, social and ethical self-understanding of the Church and priesthood.

Subjective reframing⁶⁵: depoliticising solidarity

I now return to the meeting with two members of Caritas in Jaffna, described at the beginning of this thesis (p. 20). As it was clear, neither metaphorically nor literally did we speak the same language. Despite significant problems in our mutual communication throughout the meeting (making me feel ashamed of my inquiries) one thing became clear. It was the profound dedication of the local priests to serve and suffer alongside the war-affected population within the NFZ. Although Johnson (2012, 85) notes that certain war stories have “become emblematic of the heroism of clergy in the theatre of war”, they are not told to impress but rather to be a testimony of the solidarity. Be that as it may, the following analysis will utilise dialogues with those informants who were affected by the NFZ. The relevance of war stories, solidarity and priesthood for the analysis of the construction of humanitarian access and (de)politicisation are indicated by Johnson who suggests that “perhaps, essentially, war

⁶⁵ The term “*labellisation [...] individuelle et [...] collective*” adapted from Vairel & Zaki (2011, 92).

stories are about regular marginal figures enabling ‘politics’ and affecting important outcomes” (ibid. 85).

Hence, one last dimension of depoliticisation is selected as a topic for its recurrence in the interviews, news reports and previous literature, a resource here called a depoliticising solidarity of the Church (Alava 2017).⁶⁶ Solidarity here is linked with Catholic morality, which obligates and justifies the clergy, nuns and anyone holding a similar position in the Church to serve and suffer alongside those who suffer (here, the war-affected Tamils). This mentality is reflected in the quotes by Caritas priests.

Another thing also: we have a strong faith that gives us strength. Because whenever, during the shelling, getting people out was not an easy task. (A member of Caritas Jaffna)

During and after [the war] and even now we are doing the humanitarian work as a church, as Caritas. We are doing the humanitarian work being a charity organisation. Not just giving this or that or money. We also touch the heart of the people. We give some consolation for the people, for those coming towards us. (A priest, Caritas Jaffna)

Solidarity with the war-affected population is a major part of the clergy’s self-understanding and an organic component of the social priesthood. The implications of social priesthood for the public role of the Church in the East and North is scrutinised in (Johnson 2012; Spencer et al. 2015). In liberation theology, a stream of theology that has had a strong influence also on the northern priests (Spencer et al. 2015, 125-126), an idea of solidarity closely connected with ideas of the Church as a body that “gives voice to the voiceless”, “stands by the people”, “speaks out for the people” (as priests interviewed here put it). At the same time, there is the strong identification of the Christ and the Church as his body and presence on the Earth with “the poor”.

I have argued earlier in this thesis that the prominence of the Church in the North has worked into two directions, by first demonstrating the kinds of institutional capacities as a competence of neutralisation and having, for its part, enabled humanitarian logistics or the Church’s access. In another way it (presence of the priests and Church in the North) politicises the Church by associating it with the Tamil population (Johnson 2016, 310). In the case of Sri Lanka’s conflict, “to stand by the people” has a political connotation and can as such be regarded as politicised act.

The threat of being politicised makes it even more important to look at those grounds on which the Church may depoliticise the authority it holds in the Tamil areas, at least circumstantially. As Ait-

⁶⁶ This notion is presented by Alava, who studies the Churches role in society and politics in post-war Uganda and mentions “utterly depoliticising solidarity with those living in the midst of the war” (2017, 188, footnote 36).

Aoudia et al. (2011, 16) suggest, the coercively politicised actors “can only advance their cause only by the ‘deconflictualising’ and by depoliticising it” (ibid.) The notion is similar to the one proposed by Goodhand et al. (2009, 683) of those lacking political power needing to distance themselves from political actors and that in the case of religious actors in Sri Lanka, one of major way is a reproduction of humanitarian terminology and discourse. However, based on my personal and Johnson’s (2012) observations, I propose that another major way the Church depoliticises itself is a kind of internalised idea of down-up legitimacy deriving essentially from accountability to the people, as I have described in connection to the normative framework of Caritas family (see pp. 39–44). This kind of power is qualitatively different from the top-down power of the high-level figures and institution because it derives from a different source, as Johnson (2012, 86) points out. Power as a construction of everyday relations shifts the focus from prominent figures to those whose power has more implicit forms (ibid.). Johnson observes how the priests’ power during the war in the North took mundane and relational forms, as a form of sidelined power, power being “dispersed through everyday networks, allowing actors to negotiate multiple boundaries.” (Johnson 2012, 85-86). She further suggests that sidelined power is a hybrid tactic of the powerless especially in situations where “actors find themselves stuck between the logics and spatialities established by powerful actors” (Johnson 2012, 85-86).

Johnson takes us back to a matter of the balancing act between humanitarian imperative and politics by suggesting that “the ability of religious leaders to cross violent or politicised borders in times of contestation and conflict” should be regarded as a *religious* practice (ibid. 77). According to her, the practice of the priesthood as an everyday relation accommodates a use of power in a way that is intrinsically apolitical by way of making the service of the people primarily as a religious practice. The way the legitimacy of such form of authority relates to the topic of depoliticisation is that it is intrinsically motivated by the religious beliefs rather than of politics: by definition, the Catholic standard of authority and legitimacy always involves an element of faith. Thus, staging the work in the war zone and beyond as an act of faith has relevance for an analysis of (de)politics of aid agencies by illustrating one of the discursive ways the Church comes to depoliticise its presence in the North and its support to the Tamils. Identification with “the people” is a significant way to position and define oneself as an apolitical actor although the risk of politicisation is always present as I have indicated.

Some of the issues emerging from this analysis relate specifically to humanitarian neutrality. The way the Church depoliticises its presence amongst the victims shares strong similarities with the humanitarian imperative and the ethos of the humanitarianism. In the case of Caritas, JRS and the Church, “supporting its people” is at the same time a religious practice but also takes a form of humanitarian aid by abiding to humanitarian principles, norms and guidelines, which are adapted and contextualised in a broader perspective of religious belief. This integral approach is illustrated in a

news report, which on the one hand makes explicit reference to the apolitical nature of the humanitarian aid, but also indicates the close bond of the community and priests helping “their people”.

“For us it’s not about the warring factions, but about the civilians who are caught up in the conflict,” she said. Ms. Bousquet said CRS disregards the politics of who gets what “in order to look just at the humanitarian side of things.”

She said CRS focuses on getting resources to the priests and other church workers on the ground who are doing what is often dangerous work. “We may not be able to get there, I may not be able to travel there personally, but we know the work of the church here and we support its work. And they’re risking their lives. We’ve seen priests get killed while doing what they can to help their people. And we’re there to support them,” Ms. Bousquet said. (*Catholic Review* 12 January, 2012)⁶⁷

Admittedly some ambiguities remain here in the analysis of religion and politics, as Johnson also concludes. To me they only “show how these two processes [neutralisation and politicisation] exist so synchronically” (Vairel & Zaki 2011, 104). For example, I have argued here that religious justification functions in this case as a depoliticising factor although elsewhere in this thesis it has been argued that religion in Sri Lanka remains as a politicised domain. However, while religion pertains to politics, religious differences should not be understood as a restrictive factor as such. Goodhand et al. (2009, 684) contend that “although religion is an important boundary marker, it also cuts across some boundaries. This is most obviously the case for the Catholic and Methodist Churches whose constituencies are both Sinhalese and Tamil.” My research supports this observation. As I have brought up earlier, religious figures enjoy a certain degree of legitimacy regardless of their denomination. The respect is visible even in regard to the bishops, who usually are more subjected to allegations because of the explicit power they have. Another Caritas priest described how the religious power figures together were able to utilise in regards to IDP camps close to the NFZ.

Caritas in Vanni as well the priests and nuns, when they came to Mullaitivu [during the] final battle, a lot of priests they came out with the people and surrendered to the military....Then with the negotiation of the Bishops Conference they visited the camps [in Vavuniya] talking to the priest there, not only to priests but also to other religious leaders like Hindu priest. Moreover, also, [they] organised some inter-religious visits with other religious priests from the south [...] and [...] made [...] An appeal to the president to release at least the priests and nuns and infants and also the elders.

⁶⁷ The date of the article on the webpage here is misleading since according to the article, it was published 2007 or 2008.

Most of all, the firm decision “to stay with the people” motivated on religious grounds, did, in fact, contribute to Caritas’ access to the NFZ more than restricted it. A father from Caritas described the situation to as follows.

During the history, whenever there is an incident, then people would run to a safe place. Church and the religious institution became a kind of safety for those people during the time of confrontation - not only in the North but also in the East, border villages. The church would continue this and the last battle the government thought that it could continue [...] They wanted a kind of [...] Declare the final battles [...] and they requested who wants to come out, the humanitarian agencies, to safeguard their staff, their vehicles [...]

But we said - not in that meeting but personally – to the authorities we said “we the local church have been with the people, we want to be with the people.” This is why [...] our priests, nuns, our operation [could] to continue with the people. Then the government said “we understand, Father your mission, your stand and different forces given to you”. We said “we are with the people and we will continue this.” So as a result we had to move with the people.

I will end this section by summing up Johnson critical observations on the nature of brokerage. First, it is s circumstantial, relational and specific (Johnson 2012, 85). As above, the Church was able to stay with the civilians within the war zone, but it was subjected to same violence the civilians experienced. Johnson exemplifies these features by pointing out that in a situation researched, a priest in charge of a group of orphans was able to negotiate only himself out from the camp and only leverage the help for the orphans outside the camps, from different spatiality. Johnson argues that “though the priest had leverage inscribed in his professional and spiritual persona”, the changes the broker can produce were “small and personal, not structural” (ibid.). Johnson’s observation confirms the core argument of this thesis. Humanitarian access understood as feasibility is seldom absolute. While Caritas had an authorisation by the PTF, the individual had to renegotiate with the actors on the field constantly. However, the institutional framework of the Church is then in a crucial role in supporting the work (ibid. 87). I will discuss these remarks on the individual and collective agency in the next Chapter, namely, the conclusions.

Conclusions

Caritas has managed the relationship with different political factions in a way that facilitated humanitarian access and also work during the final phase of the war. In this Chapter, I have looked

into various reasons for this and exemplified the dynamics depoliticisation and politicisation, including their ambiguities. I began this Chapter by exemplifying a politicising discourse concerning the Church's social work and addressed the need of the Church to position itself as an influential, yet an apolitical actor. I have utilised theories on brokerage (Johnson 2012) and politicisation (Zaki & Vairel 2011; Aït-Aoudia et al. 2011) to analyse the effects of politicisation on the one hand, and the ability to neutralise and operate despite the restrictions on the other. In the cases presented in this Chapter, on most occasions, any association with the Tamil cause is regarded in Sri Lanka as a highly politicised act and is a thereof delegitimising factor. However, the very fact that the Church is so integrated into the northern society of the Tamil areas, it is a competence which has enabled humanitarian work in the North. In connection to this, I analysed the dimensions of the subjective and objective competencies that have protected Catholic aid agencies from restrictions of politicisation. The features of depoliticisation include the Church networks built over the times that go beyond the Tamil-Sinhala divide and a long history working with the governmental authorities and a pragmatic relationship with the Tamil separatist groups. Another dimension of the Church's use of power in an apolitical manner consists of individual figures whose authority may take explicit forms on a level of politics, but also those individuals whose power is hidden in the everyday, non-political relationships. Finally, I argued that the religious belief system of the Church justifies the support to the war-affected people regardless of their ethnicity in a way that transcends the politics.

These features are introduced in previous research although within a different wider context of the Church's public action and so the purpose of this Chapter was to explore the significance of these findings for the feasibility of one sort of civil action, namely, humanitarian work. I will discuss my findings in relation to the previous literature in the next Chapter of my final conclusions.

Conclusions

The purpose of this work was to explain the reasons for the exceptional access and presence of the Catholic aid agencies during the final phase of the war in Vanni at a point of time when most of the other aid agencies were evacuated. Hence, I mapped out historical, political and institutional aspects that I suggest contributed to the presence of Caritas, JRS and other Catholic actors inside and nearby the NZF. By incorporating the findings of previous research on the public engagement of the Catholic Church, I attempted to articulate their significance in a context of research on humanitarianism during the time of crisis. To understand the power of such institutions as the Catholic Church, I adopted Alex Golub's (2014) theory of feasibility and described, through a political and semiotic process, what can be seen to constitute a social and political actor, a "leviathan". My basic presumption was that the Church employs this leviathan nature for the feasibility of the Church's humanitarian efforts in Sri Lanka. I so identified various areas that are relevant for understanding the power of the Church, and how these elements come to together (are black-boxed) in order to construct the feasibility of the Church as a humanitarian actor.

In these conclusions, I attempt to articulate the relevance of this study for the research of humanitarian practice, previous literature and finally, also for the theorisation of leviathans.

In Chapter 1 introduced a question of the recognition of Catholic aid agencies. I proposed that the topic of recognition is interwoven with a notion of being perceived as a legitimate actor in the given sector. More specifically, I explored the aspect of recognition of Caritas (and other Church bodies) in the context international development and the humanitarian arena. The Chapter was based on the assumption that the key to feasibility is a recognition by the others (as Golub suggests). Thus the analysis looked at the ways Caritas legitimates itself vis-à-vis the international humanitarian community through discursive acts. The conclusion of Chapter 1 is that part of the assumed under-reportedness of Catholic actors is a subjective notion because, by and large, Caritas is characterised by notable networks, history and influence on the development ideology and its institutionalisation. Thus, Chapter 2 looked into the specific apparatus of the Catholic Church and its aid agencies in Sri Lanka. I described the institutional structures and history of the Church in Sri Lanka, which both play their major part in explaining the competencies and network of the Church's aid agencies. As proposed by my theoretical approach, I paid special attention to the kind of aspects of individual identification, which Golub claims to make a leviathan powerful. I pointed out how individuals assume their role as *Catholic* humanitarians, an identity that circumstantially superseded agencies governmental boundaries for the benefit of the overall humanitarian or development mission of the Church. I argued that this provides an angle to understand the political and /humanitarian competence of the Catholic aid agencies because it reveals their flexible social structures and resilience in response to crises. In Chapter 3, I tackled the question of humanitarian legitimacy (namely, neutrality) further

by way of exploring the dynamics of politicisation and neutralisation of Catholic actors. I asked how the delicate balance between the assumed separate realms of “the political” and “the humanitarian” is constructed by actors themselves and how the adherence to humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality is expressed in a highly politicised society. My conclusion was that this boundary is managed by institutional competencies as political neutralization, as well by depoliticising, faith-based solidarity to the victims of the war.

I

To begin with, I seek to articulate the implications of my findings for research on humanitarian practise in general. The question my research proposes for the topic of humanitarian work and presence is what constitutes humanitarian presence. In this case of Caritas and other bodies, answering the questions of *humanitarian* presence required understanding *the presence* of the Church in the society and communities overall. Thus, the Catholic agencies work through the local Catholic Church so that the leadership and governance of the Catholic Church is also the leadership of Catholic aid agencies. The fashion in which Caritas and JRS are organised under the umbrella of the Catholic Church allows their continuous presence through the diocesan centres. As a result, networks, a wide variety of programmes and a sense of community established over the centuries, the Church is able to “mobilise” these networks for a humanitarian response, as well as had access to information and the areas. Programmatically speaking, the humanitarian component is part of the wider Church programmes.

To me it seems that there is qualitative difference to the types of presences different institutions have. I pointed out that the Church’s presence cannot be undone in a similar vein than the presence of some other institutions. This is simply because the clergy and other staff and Catholics overall in Sri Lanka are part of the social fabric of that area, and also exhibit leadership roles in their communities. A spokesman for Caritas alluded to the notion of ultra-durableness by saying that it is “not possible to get the Church out of the North” and its staff would remain (Tamil Guardian, 24 September 2008). Further, the decision to stay in the area was not only dependent on the government’s authorisation but also motivated by their Catholic vocation.

Further, the strength of these networks derives from a process called localisation not just in terms of national-international, but also in terms of “foreign nationals” as one interviewee said. This does not mean that the work of “outsiders” is meaningless. In the case of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka and globally, they played a crucial role in negotiating official access and engaging in advocacy, as well as borrowing political legitimacy to those restricted by politicisation due to the Tamil cause.

In terms of the research on humanitarianism, my analysis then demonstrates the benefits of problematising conventional notions of humanitarian presence and actors (such as, the UN agencies

and ICRC). As a discussant pointed out earlier, there are under-researched or under-reported organisations or even individuals who gain access and have presence during the conflict. Thus, by broadening the perspective to other actors and then identifying the extended networks that go beyond humanitarian programming enables to see the presence and influence of the side-lined actors, as paraphrased by Johnson 2016. Further, I have pointed out that a strict categorisation of humanitarian work in difference to wider programmes or non-programmatic work within the affected communities is not only restrictive for research, but limits the practical understanding of how these actors work, and what makes them successful. Lastly, I repeat the Fergusonian criticism of regarding development projects (here, humanitarian work) as technical issues. Throughout the study I have indicated that ideological principles behind or constructing corporations might play a major part in making an institutions durable in terms of working as a shared motivations for those individuals who construct the institutions in everyday work. In the case of the Church, any activity is doctrinally or ideologically reasoned and maintained. It would be, nonetheless, a misconception to assume that only faith-based organisations are markedly ideological organisations who need to deal with the issues of neutrality and impartiality, as perhaps sometimes is assumed.

II

Returning to the theoretical assumption proposed at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to consider a theorisation of a leviathan and its characteristics as an explanation for the feasibility of Church's humanitarian aid. For the sake of clarity, I will repeat Golub's (2014, 13) assumption that "a leviathan becomes a potent actor by "making many elements as one" (Callon & Latour 1981; Latour 1987)" and "the more elements [...] modes of thought, habits, forces and objects – the broader construction one can raise (Callon and Latour 1981: 285)." Another word used for this process of "making many elements as one" has here been 'black-boxing', which refers to a leviathan's ability to translate separate elements to act as an unproblematic actor (ibid. 3), regardless of the complexity hidden in them.

I maintain that while these findings have important implications for understanding the Church as an aid provider, they also reveal the ways the Church as a leviathan allows and constructs humanitarian assistance. The history of the Church can thus be seen as an entity which is constructed by "routinisation" (ibid. 13) of practices, ideologies and everyday politics or non-politics. As such the Church may not be a humanitarian actor but when these networks are employed for the purpose of Caritas and other relief agencies to carry out the humanitarian work, the Church translates into a humanitarian leviathan. Part of this is that the individual members of the clergy assume a role in connection to relief organisations as Caritas. When approached from a theoretical framework of a leviathan, the parish networks (encompassing individual priests and networks that go beyond Catholic

agencies) outside the realm of Caritas can be then seen as “a potent actors” for emergency response. The Church as an institutional backdrop enables certain flexibility within itself, as I explained in Chapter 2.

Throughout the analysis I have tried to show that the power of the Church is related to its totality and diversity. I have maintained that this means the analysis needs to take into account factors that determine the work of these humanitarian actors, even when these factors are not used to be approached from a humanitarian perspective. Here, Golub’s (2014, 13) classification of “leviathan as a bureaucracy” and “leviathan as a cosmology” deepens and complicates the notion of a “humanitarian” presence in a way that goes beyond humanitarian discourse. Not only can the Churches be physically removed but also theologically speaking, “the Church” cannot be undone in the minds of the priests and staff because, besides material and physical manifestation, ultimately the presence of the Church is invisible and transcendental. This takes us back to the doctrinal dimension that indirectly also shapes the Church work as a humanitarian actor. For believers, the Church represents the body of Christ on the Earth and so it is more than a mere building or a large community. To draw an allegory from the Church’s own dogma, “for where two or three gather together in My name, there am I with them.” (Matt. 18: 20). In the case of priests, it is the vocation of priesthood and promises the priest has made in the ordination that necessitate the presence with the community. The practical indication of these beliefs is that Caritas offices may shut down but the institution and their purpose are present through the individuals who represent them, and this is reflected in the way they frame their work and presence in the middle of the war, as well as in their motivation to work.

The actualisation of such potent networks needs, of course, always to be understood as circumstantial. As pointed out by (Johnson 2012), sometimes actors failed in negotiating access. As black-boxing suggests, we don’t always know how the black box works internally: we are not sure which the definite triggers for the feasibility are.⁶⁸ Each context introduces new variants. One of these variants in the political profile and context.

Although I have researched the relation between the Church and politics, the Church is also a political institution. As I have explained, it mirrors the political division of the country. As I also mentioned, few remarks were made of the conflict between religious orders during my stay in Sri Lanka. I was surprised how seldom my informants mentioned other aid bodies, even when my

⁶⁸ Final critical remark: although Golub’s approach has been useful in pointing out the role of individuals representing the institutions since their actions are also an indication of the feasibility of a leviathan. He argues that “feasibility is not solely assuming a pre-existing role as the representative of a leviathan” and “how people attempt to personify pre-existing leviathans and how people empower themselves by creating new leviathans that they claim to represent” (ibid. 19). In this regard, no new types of leviathan can be said to have emerged during the final phase of the war but rather, the legitimacy and neutrality of Church bodies were reproduced in each case.

questions concerned the work of both JRS and Caritas. I am still not sure if this is an indication of a problematic factionalisation or a mere specialisation.

In retrospect, my “institutional narrative of unity composed by the Church”⁶⁹ may give an impression that I take the unity of the Church for granted. While this reaction may be encouraged by my theoretical approach of an institution subsuming many elements to act as one (as paraphrased by Golub, Callon and Latour), it is important to restate the difference between assuming the unity of the Church and the construction of unity. I seek not to argue that the Church is a unified entity, but that the institutionalisation of the Church produces unification of heterogeneity when necessary.

The notion of “necessary” here refers to the question of humanitarian presence. My research question mainly focused on the issue of humanitarian access as an achievement. As a result, I proposed my interview questions from this viewpoint. This, in turn, encouraged the respondents to share success stories instead of shortcomings. Further, I assume that there is a common tendency to uphold an image of harmony and refrain from discussing internal disputes and politics with a stranger. I presume that hearing those stories would have required more resources than I had when visiting Sri Lanka. Also, a criticism that can be proposed to my research is that I have not been critical towards the Church as an institution. One of the central legitimacy crisis the Church faces globally is related to the prohibition of contraceptives and condoms. One of my respondents exhibited a concern for the corruption of so-called tradition family values, and saw their work as an important way to support “broken families”. This did not quite fit to my research purposes, nonetheless aspects like this should be taken seriously because they also contest the legitimacy of Catholic agencies within the broader development community.

Furthermore, at the beginning of this work, I also adopted Golub’s stance and proposed that a leviathan may fail, which speaks for not taking institutionalisation for granted. A part of the theoretical premise of a leviathan is to understand the circumstances under which they fail. While I may have fallen short in documenting the relation between internal politics and feasibility of the agencies’ work on the ground, there are implications of this in the earlier literature.

Also, the relation between the Church’s internal struggles and the work on the ground was implicit in some cases I documented. For example, we know that the SLA indiscriminately targeted Caritas or other Catholic humanitarians. It cannot be ignored that these victims were mainly Tamils, who had a less prominent role in the Church than for example some Sinhala bishops. I am unsure whether such issues cause resentment within the Church, but it can be said that the political stances regarding the Tamil cause still divide the Church and the society. This reflected in the work of the Caritas in the war-affected areas. As was mentioned by respondents interviewed by Spencer et al. and

⁶⁹ I thank Bruno Lefort for this remark.

me, some northern members of Caritas felt like they were not getting enough support from Colombo (p. 52). The feeling of the work of northern Caritas offices of being under-budgeted suggests that the politico-regional line may affect the feasibility work of Caritas on the ground in the war-affected areas.

All in all, the political and social heterogeneity of the Church is reflected on various levels. Internal power struggles between ordinary and religious priests, the discussion around a newly appointed bishop and such power dynamics are all part of it. There are probably several cases where the Church fails to act as a humanitarian institution because of this, but my research does not encompass them.

III

It is now apparent that Caritas (perhaps other Catholic actors as well) managed the relationship with different political factions in a way that facilitated humanitarian presence when it experienced a rapid challenge in September 2008. One conclusion might be that individual and institutional competence have protected the Church so that the stigma of politicisation has never fundamentally managed to delegitimise the Church as a political actor. I introduced the reasons for this in Chapter 3 based on previous research (Spencer et al. 2015; 2009, Johnson 2012; Johnson 2016). I will end with flagging up some divergences in discussion with this body of previous literature.

According to Goodhand et al. (2009, 694), “the paradox of adopting an apolitical posture in order to engage in politically sensitive activities exposes the limitations of religious actors in addressing and transforming the underlying structures of the problems they try to resolve. Religious organizations can travel across boundaries, thus spanning political divides, but by doing so they also risk losing their perceived legitimacy and authority.” However, from my point of view, Catholic actors acted in this manner already over a long period of time, and this has never completely made the Church lose its overall legitimacy despite the occasions of contestation. Thus, the institutional nature as a leviathan has carried the Church agencies over the situations in which its neutrality has been publicly questioned. One of those occasions was described at the beginning of Chapter 3 and showed that the Caritas spokesperson was able to justify Caritas’s neutrality by recalling its history as an impartial institution.

Another conclusion of Chapter 3 concerned the notion put forward by Goodhand et al. (2009) regarding humanitarian agencies (including EHED). They propose that “those who do not have such military and political power thus need to distance themselves from these entrepreneurs to cross boundaries” (ibid. 683) by “deliberate discursive strategies to distance themselves from everyday Sri Lankan politics.” (ibid. 684). True, I have demonstrated that the Church distances itself from the political realm through discursive acts. At the same time, the Catholic Church holds some political

power ('political power' here understood as beyond the traditional political institutions as postulated by Aït-Auodi et al. 2011, 11). While this distance is necessary for maintaining a neutral reputation, it should not be understood as a compelled need but rather arising from the self-understanding of the Church. Further, a concept of "discursive strategy" mentioned by Goodhand et al. should here be applied to with certain reservations. From my point of view, the depoliticising solidarity as a discursive act described is an organic part of the larger self-understanding of the Church itself, and cannot be solely reduced to an act of managing the boundary between the politics and religion.

My another comment on previous research relates to a relationship of priests as individuals and the Church as an institution in the process of the Church's public role. I first present the findings I have in this regard. To return to Golub again, "in particular, the feasibility of individual actors hinges on their ability to successfully personate leviathans, just as the feasibility of leviathans hinges on their ability to be successfully personated" (Golub 2014, 25). According to this argument, the individuals have power to portray and reproduce issues in a way that constructs the Church as a neutral actor, but on the other hand in order for this attempt to be feasible, the Church needs to institutionalise these issues in the form of dogmas, policies and practises. When approached from the viewpoint of black-boxing, individuals are not only "self-subsistent and retain autonomy outside of the assemblage"⁷⁰ in which they exist", but their independence influences also the assemblage itself (here the Church, Caritas or JRS depending on the occasion). The value of this theorisation for maintaining humanitarian neutrality is that a significant part of constructing legitimacy pertains to maintaining boundaries and making a difference to those individual actors and groups with whom an association may be a delegitimising while maintaining a pragmatic relationship to them. As humanitarian access is constructed in the mundane relations (as described by Johnson 2012), the trust between the different actors can overweight even the institutional background.

Regarding the theoretical framework of leviathans, I have argued elsewhere in this thesis that black-boxing of various actors and elements under the umbrella of the Catholic Church is an indicator of the source of the Church's power. The black-boxing allows power and legitimacy to be "lent" and "borrowed" between different institutions working within one institutional structure. Here noteworthy is that the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka accommodates a diversity of priests and actors who may be even actively engaged in politics or outspoken Tamil rights activist and that the Church has, regardless, been accepted as a neutral institution by the moderate Buddhist. My suggestion then is that the "leviathaness" of the Church can be here consolidating factor since it enables diverse voices to exist.

⁷⁰ It should be noted that a concept of assemblage and theory of assemblage is an ontological framework for the school of thought encompassing scholars such as DeLanda, Latour, Deleuze and Guattari. It has not been purposeful for my thesis to use assemblage theory in all its complexity and connotations.

However, the theoretical literature introduced in this Chapter proposes more nuances, more specifically, to the relation of institutions and individual agency. Johnson (Johnson 2012, 87) presents a critical observation regarding individual and collective agency by arguing that “some of the ambiguities of this brokerage function of priests have been raised, including the fact that institutional power does not lead to a simple increase in brokerage power and that ‘hidden’ figures are often important in stories of brokerage.” This proposition as adopted from Johnson highlights that the nature of black-boxing and personification is even more circumstantial than I have previously suggested. The observations regarding the circumstantiality of humanitarian neutrality suggest that no common ways to socially engineer humanitarian access may exist because it is always context-dependent and sometimes the role of invisible actors is not recognised. Nonetheless, regarding the dynamics of neutralisation and construction of humanitarian neutrality, it is this type more implicit, non-confrontational power that may contribute to positive outcomes.

Johnson’s notion of implicit forms of power leads us to the final critical remark, which concern the limitations of my study and markers for future research. The humanitarian presence explored here is predominantly male, and focused on the clergy mostly as a highly educated class. It was nevertheless implied in the news sources and in my informal meetings that the nuns assumed roles as humanitarians in a way that exhibits brokerage (the theme researched by Johnson 2012). One individual shared her experiences with me but asked to keep the discussion confidential. It is implied that there is power invisible to outsiders that is more diverse than researched here.

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