

Jaffna Tamils Ethnic Identity Formation in Colombo:

A Study on Identity Perception through Motivated Identity Construction

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Abstract

The Sri Lankan Tamils have been a part of complex history within Sri Lanka in regard to their ethnic Identity, which is mostly associated with the civil war that went on for almost 30 years. More than a decade after the end of the conflict, this thesis work analyzed how today's Jaffna Tamils view their own identity in Colombo. As a cosmopolitan melting pot, it brings in different groups and cultures of the island as well as international influences. For the methodology of this research a qualitative study design was used based on interviews with Jaffna Tamils, which was analyzed in accordance with the motivated identity construction theory created by Vignoles et al (2002; 2006). That is based on the six different identity motivation principles: '*Self-esteem*', '*Efficacy*', '*Distinctiveness*', '*Belonging*', '*Continuity*' and '*Meaning*'. The results showed that *self-esteem*, *efficacy*, and *belonging* were strong motivational principles for the Tamil ethnic group. And that the *pure*, *ancient* and *unique* aspects associated with their traditional Jaffna identity and culture made up some of the strongest identity fragments for their perceived identity.

Keywords: Post-conflict society, Jaffna Tamils, Colombo, Ethnic identity, Identity-perception, Motivated Identity Construction Theory

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Notes on Definitions

In this thesis work the ‘Sri Lankan Tamils’ will mostly refer to ‘Jaffna Tamils’, that are from the Hindu/Christian communities in the Jaffna Peninsula. And should not be confused with the ‘Indian’/’Plantagen Tamils’ in Sri Lanka, that arrived in Sri Lanka in the 18th century and consider themselves their own distinct group.

Abbreviations

- LTTE: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
- MICT: Motivated Identity Construction Theory
- SCT: Self-Categorization Theory
- SIT: Social Identity Theory

ABSTRACT	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	2
NOTES ON DEFINITIONS	3
ABBREVIATIONS	3
1.INTRODUCTION & RESEARCH QUESTION	5
1.1 Thesis Disposition	6
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	6
2.1 Background	7
2.2 The Six Identity Motives for Ethnic Identity	10
2.3 Social Context & Ethnic Identity	12
2.3.1 Sri Lankas Social Context.....	13
2.4 Study Contribution	16
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	17
3.1 Motivated Identity Construction Theory	17
3.1.1 Self-esteem.....	19
3.1.2 Efficacy	19
3.1.3 Belonging.....	20
3.1.4 Distinctiveness.....	20
3.1.5 Continuity	21
3.1.6 Meaning	21
4. METHODOLOGY	22
4.1 Fieldwork & Data Analysis	22
4.2 Ethical Considerations	27
5. FINDINGS & ANALYSIS	28
5.1 Urban Identity vis-à-vis Jaffna Identity	28
5.2 Self-esteem	32
5.3 Efficacy	33
5.4 Distinctiveness	33
5.5 Belonging	35
5.6 Continuity	36
5.7 Meaning	37
6. CONCLUSION	37
REFERENCES	39

1. Introduction & Research Question

The focus of ethnic identity among Tamils in Sri Lanka has been directly tied to the conflict and most often conflated with ‘*the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*’ and identity politics. And has not been examined in much further depth in post-war times. It has been seen that often minorities in strained relations to the majority through identity formation tries to regain dignity and purity towards their own community. Therefore identity formation of minority groups is especially important for social cohesion (Ball & Branscombe 2019: 75). Social context is an important factor within social identity theory and therefore this study focuses on examining Jaffna Tamils self-perception of their common Tamil identity in the metropolitan capital of Colombo (Jaffna Tamils are from the Jaffna peninsula and are distinct from Plantagen/Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka). This commercial capital has led to an intermix of the country’s different ethnic groups as well as international/western influences. So, in a fast paste metropolitan city where many different cultural influences are a daily factor, identity formation dynamics may become more malleable. Within social psychology this study uses the recent theory of the six motivated identity construction theory proposed by Vignoles et al in 2006 (see also; 2008) in order to find and examine the different identity fragments importance for Sri Lankan Tamils perceived identity. Based on the six identity motivational principles of: ‘*Self-esteem*’, ‘*Efficacy*’, ‘*Distinctiveness*’, ‘*Belonging*’, ‘*Continuity*’ and ‘*Meaning*’. These motivational needs show the focus of the identity aspects centrality for positive identity formation. The thesis thereby attempts to answer the following research question:

General question: *How do Jaffna Tamils in Colombo perceive their ethnic identity?*

Focused question: *Using the six-identity motivation theory, what identity fragments and underlying themes are at the perceived centrality of their common identity?*

1.1 Thesis Disposition

This first chapter (1) introduces the thesis topic and presents the main research questions. The thesis is then divided into six further chapters. The second chapter (2) discusses some of the previous literature on the thesis topic. The first section of this chapter (2.1) gives the overview background of Sri Lankan ethnic identity history before and after the conflict. The second section (2.2) dives into the previous research and findings on motivated identity construction theory on different ethnic groups. The third section (2.3) examines the research on identity motives and social context and assesses the findings of one identity motive study in the social context of Sri Lanka (2.3.1). The chapter ends with acknowledging the research gap which is being assessed in this thesis (2.4). The third chapter (3) explains the theory and theoretical terms used in this study. It starts by explaining the six motivated identity construction theory in the first section (3.1). Then goes into explaining each classification of the different identity motives (3.1.1–3.1.6). The fourth chapter (4) goes through the demarcations and limitations of the information and in the way it has been assessed and collected through fieldwork. And of the analyzing of the data as well as all the ethical considerations regarding this research and how it complies with ethical guideline of Lund University. The fifth chapter (5) presents the results of the finding together with the analysis. It starts off with the first section (5.1) examining the overall themes of the findings and then it goes into examining the findings of each identity motive (5.1–5.7). The final chapter (6) concludes the overall findings and analysis of this research.

2. Literature Review

The literature review will facilitate in answering the question *'How do Jaffna Tamils view their ethnic identity in Colombo?'* The first section (2.1) will give some background on the complexities of the Sri Lankan Tamil identity history and today's climate. The next section (2.2) goes through the previous research and findings on the different identity motives within different ethnic groups (2.2). The third section (2.3) brings in the social context on identity and identity motives and also assess the social context of Sri Lanka.

2.1 Background

In Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese are the dominant ethnic group that make up around 75 percent of the population. The second largest group are the Sri Lankan Tamils that stand for approximately 11 percent of the population making them a minority group (not including 'Muslim Tamils' or 'Indian Tamils') (Perinpanayagam 2010: 9). The Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils have very clear distinctions from each other such as language and religion. The Sinhalese are mainly Buddhist and speak Sinhala, an Indo-European language that is spoken solitarily in Sri Lanka. While the Sri Lankan Tamils are mainly Hindus and speak Tamil a Dravidian language that's also spoken in southern parts of India (ibid.). The Sri Lankan Tamil population reside mostly in the East and the Northern peninsula of the island. There are several categorizations of Tamils in Sri Lanka. Including the Muslim Tamils that consider themselves distinct from the Sri Lankan Hindu Tamil community. Another Tamil group are the Indian Tamils that were brought from India to work on the tea plantation during the 18th century. Even though most of them are Hindus they consider themselves as well distinct from the other groups and are referred to as either 'Indian Tamils', 'Up-Country Tamils' or 'Plantation Tamils' (Thurairajah 2020: 567). Then there is the Christian Tamils that even though they have their differences in for e.g., conversion and socio-economic history they do not differentiate themselves from the Hindu Tamils to the same extent as the "Muslim Tamils" and "Indian Tamils" do (Thurairajah 2020: 568). Feith (2010: 347) explains how Sri Lanka's history is contested and it's difficult to know for certainty who came first to the island. But it's clear that there has been contact between Sri Lanka and India for thousands of years. Tamil and Sinhalese have their own versions of history which have often been used as ammunition to strengthen one's own national identity and invalidating the others. Feith (2010: 346) explains how some historical claims by nationalist Sinhalese have framed the Tamils as the 'invaders' at the start of the 6th century to undermine their connection to island, as they themselves claim to be the first settlers. Tamils also have their own nationalistic historical view that draws on their ancient language, religion and culture. Most likely none of these nationalist historical claims are fully accurate and the truth lies somewhere in the middle. As the first settlers wouldn't even have identified as either Tamil or Sinhalese at time and there was long periods of intermarriage of trade, communities and shared costumes and religious believes. Consequently Feith (2010:346) claims that both the Tamil and Sinhalese ancestry has traces and influences from each other.

Gunasingam (2014: 127,173, 223) divides the European colonization into three different waves: First by the Portuguese (1505–1658 h.) then by the Dutch (1658–1796 h.) and lastly by the British (1833–1948 h.). And according with Gunasingam (2014: 273) and Feith (2010: 347) the awakening of Tamil self-consciousness was formed between 1850-1900 hundred. This development can be traced towards the British colonial administration which characterized and rigidified the distinctions between the different ethnic groups. There where hence a revival movement of looking back at one's own ethnic history and culture. This is when they developed a sense of religious-cultural, linguistic, social and economic aspects to their identity. After Sri Lanka's independence in 1948 there was an attempt to bring an equal representation for both the minority groups and the Sinhalese into a parliament system. But after the rise of SLFP (Sri Lankan Freedom Party) a Sinhalese nationalistic campaign had begun that promoted anti-Western, anti-Christian, and, increasingly, anti-Tamil policies. And the "Sinhala Only" act in 1956 fueled the Sinhalese-Tamil animosity (Perinpanayagam 2010:11–12). Tamils felt that the government was denying them their cultural identity and increasing the difficulty for and them to take up government employment (Feith 2010: 348). As the tension grew communal violence outbreak and rioting started to break out threw out the country, civilians were attacked, raped and killed and many thousands had to flee their homes. Eventually the ferocity towards the marginalization of Tamils led to the formation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) led by Velupillai Prabhakaran in 1976 (ibid.: 16–17). The LTTE provided a new depiction of the Tamil identity which was shaped by ideological, political and economic circumstances (Perinpanayagam 2010:17). The LTTE fought for an independent nation in the Northern area of Sri Lanka and claimed supreme loyalty of their people. The LTTE and the Sinhalese government went into an ethnic war between the period 1983-2009 (Gunasingam 2008: 532–533). Many Tamils fled to the north province to seek protection from the LTTE or to join the fight against the governments armed forces (Feith 2010:349). Which led to an increase polarization between the Tamil East and North and the Sinhalese South. There was also a massive out migration of Tamil refugees, most fled to neighboring Tamil Nadu while others sought refuge in Western countries (ibid.:350). In May 2009, President Mahinda Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka declared military victory over the LTTE, and a war that had cost the lives of over 100,000 people had ended (Human Rights watch Report 2010). Since the end of the war questions have been raised about the future for the majority groups of Sri Lanka, as the consequences of marginalization of

minority groups have shown its devastating effects. As seen in the above historical overview the ethnic war highly politicized the Tamil identity. The LTTE was an extreme nationalistic organization that provided their own definition of what it meant to be a Tamil. Many Tamils did not sympathize with the LTTE, but many also saw the Tamil Eelam as their only source of protection at the time.

The last elections in 2019 were won by prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa with a large majority it confirmed his popularity amongst the Sinhalese as the leader who defeated the LTTE (Feith 2010: 346). And together with his political alliance is continuing on the nationalistic rhetoric of a Sinhalese Buddhist state. The undermining of Tamils cultural heritage is viewed today especially through the non- inclusion of Tamil language in important governmental document, signboards and speeches and press releases (Diplomat, 2021). In 2019 a huge social media outbreak was sparked due to displayed of a sign in a café in Colombo that demand all staff to speak in only Sinhala or English. This re-ignited the emotions from the historical linguistic discrimination of the “Sinhala Only” act. There have been some attempts from the government to accommodate for the Tamil Culture. In 2018 Sri Lanka’s national television network opened a new channel the “*Reconciliation Channel*” which is dedicated to broadcast programs in Tamil about the national, religious and cultural identity of the Tamil population ‘Reconciliation Channel’ (Daily News 2021). The goal with this initiative has been to support national unity and reconciliation after the civil war. Journalist Melani Manel Perera captured some opinions and doubt amongst the Tamils viewers in the ‘*AsianNews*’ (An official an official press agency of the Roman Catholic Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions). Many felt that it did not meet its goal and that ‘justice’ and ‘equality’ had to be the first step before reconciliation. According to some viewers it should have been casted in both Tamil and Sinhala as “*those who do not speak the Tamil language cannot understand and value the Tamil culture*” and “*if the government wants to create a peaceful and just society for the whole nation, we must know each other and value our national, religious and cultural identities*” (*AsianNews* 2018). There was also the opinion that it was a “*positive effort (...) because today's Tamils have forgotten our culture. They follow Western styles.*” (ibid.:2018)

2.2 The Six Identity Motives for Ethnic Identity

There have been several studies that show how people are drawn to social groups to fulfill the need for either *Self-esteem*, *Distinctiveness*, *Meaning*, *Efficacy*, *Continuity* or *Belonging*. Most of these studies look into one or two of these identity motives. The first and most recognized identity motive is the *self-esteem* motive. Which was developed by Abraham and Hogg (1988) and explains the need to fulfill one's need for self-esteem through social groups (Rubin & Hewstone 1998). The self-esteem motive along with the other identity motivational principles was first developed based on Tajfel and Turner's contribution to social psychology. As Tajfel and Turner developed within social psychology, the *social identity theory* in 1979 (see also: Tajfel & Turner 2014). Which in this paper and many other discussions commonly encompasses the related *social categorization theory*, that focuses on group and intergroup processes and relations. The SIT explains how individuals associate with certain social groups and how that plays an important part for one's sense of self. A social group shares a set of characteristics with its members that then impact the individual's self-image, thoughts, emotions and behavior. There is an in- and outgroup comparison of social groups to bring positivity towards one's in-group. SIT proposes that people are motivated by the need for self-esteem to protect and enhance the positivity within their social group, which is also referred to as the *self-esteem hypothesis* (Martiny & Rubin 2016). Self-esteem has been used as an identity motivational principle in ethnic research. But the empirical evidence for any of the six identity motivational theories are scarce and limited. And therefore, it is important to examine the generality of for e.g., self-esteem motive by focusing on both ethnic majority and minority groups (see; Rubin & Hewstone 1998). Verkuyten (2007) study acknowledged the *self-esteem hypothesis* within both the majority group of Dutch adolescents and the minority group of Turkish adolescents in Holland. The SIT explains that based on how much an individual identifies with a social group the more it will favorize the social group. This research also concluded that the *self-esteem* motive was the most effective amongst the participants that highly associated with their ethnic identity. Rubin & Hewstone (1989: 42) points out that the research done on relation between intergroup favoritism and how that enhances the group's collective state of self-esteem is limited but also that it could be the result of global self-esteem, as a third factor rather than just group evolutions. And that controlling statistically for global self-esteem would allow us to test whether in-group favoritism indeed has a self-enhancing effect.

Within social psychology several other underlying motives for the positive enhancement of social groups have been discussed. Such as the *distinctiveness* motive which was developed in Brewer's (1991) *optimal distinctiveness theory* where he explained that that people's motivation to associate with a certain social groups for positive self enhancement is based on both the need of *belonging* and the need for *distinctiveness* (Vignoles *et al* 2000: 834). The need for *belonging* and the need for *distinctiveness* work at opposition and is used separately in different social context. Brewer (1991) & Tajfel (1982) discusses more of the universal importance of the *distinctness* motive within social psychology theory of social identity construction. The *continuity* motive was developed within the *self-verification theory* by Swann (1983; see also Swan *et al.* 2012). The *Self-verification theory* in social psychology explains how people prefer others to see them as they see themselves. Self-verification is a social psychological theory that asserts that peoples want to be known and understood by others according to their beliefs and feelings about themselves. Jaspal (2013: 227) carried out a study on the relationship between *distinctiveness* and *continuity* as motivational principles amongst Sikhs in Britain. Which confirmed the *distinctiveness* motive for social identify construction and argued that outgroup 'homogenization' of British South Asians could be threatening for the *continuity* of their identity. As there is a need for internal and external 'validation' of one's distinctive social identity. Jaspal claimed that threats to group *continuity* can result in cultural 'fossilization', whereby a more regressive version of the group's norms and values is expressed by group members. Jaspal stressed the importance of the inter-relations between the motivational principles of identity as also suggested by Breakwell (1986). As the *distinctiveness* principle may acquire salience at the psychological level in order to enhance the group continuity (Jaspal 2013: 237). Accordingly, identification with a particular ethnic groups will affect the principled operation of identity processes to varying degrees. It has been argued that the ethnic category 'South Asian' may be adopted in order to enhance *continuity* and *self-esteem*. It has also been suggested that a sense of *continuity* or *distinctiveness* is unlikely to be sufficient for the development of a positive ethnic identity (Jaspal & Cinnirella 2012: 18). The *belonging* motive was developed as previously mention in the *optimal distinctiveness theory* by Brewer in 1991 together with the *distinctiveness* motive. The *belonging* motive have been researched in Neville *et al* (2014) study on ethnic identity among of indigenous Australians. Neville confirmed with his findings the theoretical conceptualizations of *belonging* motive as an important component of ethnic identity. Neville et al (2014: 422) found in his results that the history and physical space and peoplehood, interconnections,

shared language and culture, acceptance and pride and lastly a sense of community were important fragments expressed through the need for *belonging*. Thereby making the *barriers of belonging model* included all five listed elements. The belonging motive was confirmed to have an especially important effect on identity construction. The physical space was especially expressed by the participants for the sense of *belonging*. However there haven't been much empirical founding that connect ones need for *belonging* to a physical space. The *meaning* motive was suggested in the *uncertainty reduction theory* by Hogg (2000) as an important motive for social identity construction (see also; Hogg 2007; Hogg 2012). Which explains how people are motivated to reduce feelings of uncertainty about themselves including perceptions, attitudes and behaviors. Less research has been conducted on the sense of *efficacy* and *meaning* as motivational principles within ethnic groups. Jaspal and Cinnirella (2012) researched into the identity motivational theory on ethnic identity. They observed that specific motivational principles may be more or less associated with specific identities. They stated that *efficacy* has been said to be less associated with for e.g., gay identity among British Muslims (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012). Jaspal and Cinnirella (2012:18) proposes both a qualitative and quantitatively methodology needed for research into motivated identity construction for ethnic identity. There is a need for experimental and more correlational approaches to research on ethnic identity construction. Especially on the correlation between identity motivational principles. Similarly, there is clear value in qualitative approaches to ethnic identity. Through e.g., in-depth interviewes that would give more dimensions to the nature of the largely rhetorical 'facts' which are provided by group members in order to validate ethnic identity.

2.3 Social Context & Ethnic Identity

Social psychology explains how human identity is constantly created in relation to their social worlds. More specifically the SIT together with SCT explains how the way we identify with certain social groups shapes our social actions and is flexible depending on the categories to which we belong, the others with whom we compare ourselves and through the dimensions which our comparisons occur. Social identity is also dynamic in nature, meaning that there is past, present and future progression. It's influenced by its social-cultural environment and collective memory (Reicher 2004: 921). As we live in constantly changing social world we have to adapt and adjust our identities and actions, with for e.g. the advances in science, technology, multi-culturalism, political and economic development. That

contribute to social change that can have a major impact upon how we live our lives and how we view ourselves and others. And depending on the social context, one's social identity may be more or less salient (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). The SIT highlights the importance of numeric minority–majority status within a particular context when examining ethnic identity in both minority and majority individuals (Xu *et al.* 2014: 74). Xu *et al.* (2014) analyzed three studies, which investigated the impact of being a majority or minority in Hawaii and U.S. mainland on ethnic identity and self-esteem of Asian and European Americans. The results of the study showed that Asian Americans who grew up in the U.S. where they are a numeric minority associated more highly with their ethnic identity than the Asian Americans who grew up in Hawaii and were a numeric majority. It was also shown that ethnic identity was significantly associated with self-esteem for Asian Americans from the U.S. mainland and European Americans from Hawaii who were the numeric minority. This hence showed the significant relations between ethnic identity and self-esteem, especially in minority groups (Xu *et al.* 2014:62). Quiro (2000) also found that social construction theories on identity supported her study on racial and ethnic identity among women of color in the U.S. Seeing that ethnic identity construction within social identity is a fluid process that develops within social contexts. Within this study it was shown that women of color in the U.S. received the foundation for their understanding of what it means to be a multiethnic and multiracial woman of color in the United States through the social context, regardless of their specific ethno-racial ancestry. They also reported that their identity and self-identification is situational, meaning identity and self-identification is flexible, dynamic and influenced by social, cultural, and institutional forces and social contexts. The example, within the category of the sources of social construction in this study had the following subcategories of a) the family b) dominant society d) mischaracterizations e) stereotypes which influenced the construction of identity for these women (Quiro 2000: 97)

2.3.1 Sri Lankas Social Context

Freeman (2001) did a study linking social structure in Sri Lanka to social identity. He explained how one's social identity is to a large extent subjectively defined and people have considerable agency in constructing their social identities. But there are also process at the social structural level that are not subjective to individual interpretation. One's social identity is also based on some objective descriptions such as social structure for e.g., class, occupation, and ethnicity which then has to be inlayed and perceived in different ways for one's self-

conception. This study examined four different hypotheses the social identity of the Sinhalese ethnic identity based on nation, social class, age, religion, caste, occupation, race, gender, educational level, town or village of residence, and political party within the social structure of Sri Lanka (ibid.: 291). To test the salience of these different social identities' questionnaires were used for individuals to assess their perceived identity. The hypothesis and some of the main conclusions:

Hypothesis 1 (self-esteem): The salience of a social identity correlates with one's status ranking of social group within the social structure.

- i. The self-esteem hypothesis was confirmed by all the different status-ranked identities in the study. Showing the positive relationship between the salience of an identity and how it ranks in a social structural status hierarchy. Favorable or unfavorable social comparisons, depending on whether one's own rank is high or low: class, occupation, educational level, caste, gender, and town of residence (ibid.: 293)
- ii. It was also proposed that culture determines the social norms and context for constructions of social identity when it came to the self-esteem motivational principle and social identity construction. There was a positive correlation between the salience of social identity based on self-esteem in a culture with a strong hierarchical status. Which in accordance with Hofstede (1991) Sri Lanka would be classified as a strong hierarchical society (ibid.: 303).

Hypothesis 2 (distinctiveness): The minority status within a category of social identity will be more positively correlated with the salience of once identity.

- i. The salience of political correlated to the distinctiveness hypothesis. The ones that associated with the smaller political party showed a more salient identity than those supporting the majority parties. However, the hypothesis didn't work when it came to the salience of minority religious identity. The minority of Sinhalese Christians associated less with their religious identity than the majority Sinhalese Buddhist (ibid.: 294)
- ii. Critical to the identity construction theory is the extent a culture emphasizes multiculturalism. If a very multicultural society with many ethnic, religious, or political minorities would be more likely to emphasize with their minority group identification.

In a politically tumultuous environments like Sri Lanka, it can be hard to draw these conclusions (ibid.:304–305).

Hypothesis 3 (social change): Ascribed identities will be less salient than achieved identities within rapidly industrializing urban areas as compared to rural based areas.

- i. Sri Lanka has been through a lot of structural changes over the past several decades with an overall economic growth in the country. With an expansion of the private sector and of industrial production and the opening of the economy to international markets. Which has increased the role of modern or achieved status systems.
- ii. The results from this study indicated that the salience of ascribed traditional identities (for e.g., the caste system) were reduced among urban respondents. But among rural respondents were the salience of achieved modern identities not enhanced (ibid.:295)
- iii. Freeman claimed that a reduced identification with one social group did not necessarily imply an increased identification with another to compensate. And that another intriguing possibility, in response to reduced identification with traditional social categories in urban areas may create more individualistic identities instead (ibid.: 305)

Hypothesis 4 (intergroup contact): Superficial intergroup contact will show a positive correlation with the salience of one's ethnic identity while intimate intergroup contact will have a negatively correlation with the salience of one's ethnic identity.

- i. According to the hypothesis the racial and religious identity would be more salient in racially and religiously diverse locales with superficial intergroup contact, and less salience in diverse locales with intimate intergroup contact. This was measure in the districts of Gampola, Amparai, and Kantale (ibid.:294)
- ii. The results for the contact hypothesis were shown to be correlational. And stated that, the relationship between social contact and identity salience is probably reciprocal. Intimate intergroup contact experiences served to diminish the psychological salience of a group boundary (ibid.: 305)

2.4 Study Contribution

Most research on the ethnic identity among Sri Lanka Tamils have been directly tied to the end of the conflict and conflated with the LTTE and identity politics and has therefore not been examined in much further depth. This thesis focuses on the positive identity formation among Jaffna Tamils through social psychology. By focusing on contemporary everyday lives and values of Jaffna Tamils in Colombo. Since the civil war led to a large outmigration of Sri Lankan Tamils, the diasporic community has become widespread around the world. Which in turn have made them more easily accessible for research, especially when conducting interviews and questionnaires. This diasporic research focuses mostly on homeland politics and ethnic identity association among second generations Sri Lankan Tamil for e.g. '*Role of diasporas in homeland conflicts, conflict resolution, and post-war reconstruction: the case of Tamil diaspora and Sri Lanka*' (Pande 2017), '*The Case of the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora and Homeland: A Shared Ethnic Identity*' (Thurairajah 2017) and '*Who are we without the war?': The evolution of the Tamil ethnic identity in post-conflict Sri Lanka*' (Thurairajah 2020) ". This paper therefore wants to contribute towards research on Sri Lankan Tamil identity formation in the homeland. Within social psychology there is a need to examine the generality of identity motivational theories in more non-Western cultures. There is limited research on the usage of multiple identity motives within minority groups. Since the multiple MICT is quite new, there is therefore an important task for future research to explore implications of the different ways in which people can construct their identity based on the need for *self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, belonging, efficacy, and meaning*. Quantitative research on MICT can show regression correlations between different motivational principles and variables. But qualitative research is also needed that can through in-depth interviews analyze important dimensions to identity motives, instead of focusing on just quantitative superficial information. That's why this study used semi-structured interviews to discover underlying themes within MICT among Jaffna Tamils. Social identities are dynamic even though ethnic identity may be more persevering in its form. But times are changing faster than ever. This research therefore focuses on Jaffna Tamils identity within Colombo the commercial capital and a cosmopolitan city in Sri Lanka. Taking into account the effect of globalization, urbanization and increasing multi-cultural influences on social identities. Ethnic minority group's identity is especially important when it comes to a person sense of self. It has been seen that often minorities in strained relations to the majority through identity formation tries to regain dignity and purity towards their own community.

Therefore, ethnic identity formation of minority groups is especially important for social cohesion and should be given continues attention within research.

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter examines the theoretical applications and terms used in this paper. The first part (3.1) goes through Vignoles *et al.* (2002; 2006) development of the multiple motivated identity construction theory. And the following subsections goes into each of the six main identity motivation classifications (3.1.1–3.1.6)

3.1 Motivated Identity Construction Theory

Within social psychology, several studies and research suggest that other identity motivators besides the *self-esteem* motive serve a key role for the importance of one's social identity construction. The importance of *self-esteem* was determined early within SIT by Tajfel and Turner in 1979. Abrams & Hogg later developed on the *self-esteem* motive in the *self-esteem hypothesis* in 1988. The *distinctiveness* and *belonging*, motives have also been recognizing in for instance the *optimal distinctiveness theory* by Brewer in 1991. And in the *subjective uncertainty reduction theory* by Hogg in 2000, the *meaning* motive was suggested as an important motive for social identity. The *continuity* motive was acknowledged in the *self-verification theory* by Swann in 1983. On the individual perspective of identity has also the *efficacy* motive been recognized in the *self-determination theory* by Deci & Ryan (2000).

The report on *identity process theory* by Breakwell in 1993 expressed the importance of multiple motivation identity processes for predicting the perceived centrality of identity (Vignoles *et al.* 2002: 202). This inspired Vignoles *et al.* in 2002 to do a study on the importance of the multiple motivational principles of maintaining *self-esteem*, *distinctiveness*, *continuity*, and *efficacy* for an individual sense of self through associations with particular social groups. The conclusion of the study stated that *distinctiveness*, *continuity*, and *efficacy* should be given equal consideration to that of *self-esteem* as motives for importance of one's sense of self. The use of multiple identity motives for identity construction became known as the *motivated identity construction theory*, and was later developed by Vignoles *et al.* in 2006. Which extended these perspectives by comparing four different studies and using a multilevel regression design. Six different identity motivations were analyzed for their effect on identity construction, including this time the enhancing and maintaining of the *meaning*

and *belonging* motive. The conclusion of the study showed that these motivations were used both for individual identity, social identity, and a cross group identity. While the *self-esteem*, *continuity*, *distinctiveness* and *meaning* motives showed a direct influence on identity construction. The motives for *belonging* and *efficacy* had an indirect influence on identity construction through its effect on *self-esteem* or in identity enactment (Vignoles *et al.*: 308). These identity motives are defined as pressures or needs for a construction towards specific identity states, on both individual and group level of identity. These forces may be experienced on a conscious or subconscious level in the individual (Vignoles *et al.* 2006: 309). Results from this study further showed that how important a certain identity aspect was to one's sense of self, was determined by the level of maintenance and enchantment through the different identity motives. For e.g., if a certain identity aspect brought high amount of *self-esteem* to an individual that person was more likely to associate with that particular identity trait. Thus, goes that the identity traits that are most guided by a particular set of motives are then perceived as most central to one's identity. Even if an identity trait may not bring for instance self-esteem to an individual, it may still fulfill the needs of distinctiveness and meaning for e.g., that may be the case of a struggling artist trying to fulfill its creative dreams in life. It is then believed that by rating the different identity elements by how they satisfy each set of identity motive one could measure the perceived centrality of those elements on identity. Which also validates the different identity motives influences on identity construction (*ibid.*: 312). Thereby making those set of identity aspects the most significant parts of one's perceived identity, as shown by the below by the conceptual model of motivational influences on perceived centrality (Vignoles *et al.* 2006: 311).

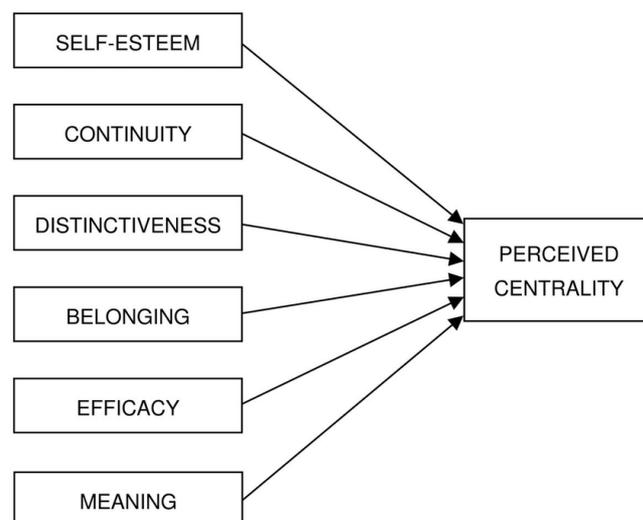


Figure 1. 'Conceptual model of motivational influences on perceived centrality' by Vignoles *et al.* (2006).

3.1.1 Self-esteem

The *self-esteem* motive is the need to maintain and enhance a positive self-image. Festinger (1954) first explain the drive to maintain a high self-esteem through social comparison as a primary motive in the process of self-construction. It is one of the most claimed motives for individual and social identity formation. Tajfel and Turner (1997) explain the need maintaining of self-esteem in the SIT which together with the SCT developed the understanding of the self-esteem motivation for social groups. Abrams & Hogg (1988) developed the *self-esteem hypothesis*. The self-esteem motive explains that individuals usually pay more attention and give more importance to things that provides a positive identity enforcement in the form of self-esteem. And through social comparison people generally see themselves and members of their groups as ‘better’ than the outer groups or at least better than average (Vignoles *et al.* 2002: 203) It has also been shown that any threat towards once self-esteem may lead negative outcomes such as hostility towards the threat, intergroup discrimination or an internal crisis like depression (Hoyle *et al.* 1999; Sedikides & Gregg 2003). Which in turn might lead to overcompensation in self-evolutions or behavior. Various studies have examined the effect of in-group favoritism on self-esteem (Aberson *et al.* 2000; Bettencourt *et al.* 1999; Rubin & Hewstone 1998). There have also been studies that insinuate that people strive for self-enhancement towards their identity in all types of cultures, but that the source and strategy vary according to cultural believes and values (Heine *et al.* 2001). The supremacy of the self-esteem motive in theories of self and identity has long been questioned (Abrams & Hogg 1988). While some point towards that other motives may be contributing to self-esteem rather than having an equal status (see: Sedikides & Strube 1997).

3.1.2 Efficacy

The efficacy motive is the need to maintain or enhance feelings of competence and control of manage and direct one’s life, as well as the ability to influence it’s surrounding environment (Breakwell 1993; Vignoles *et al.* 2006). On the individual perspective of identity has the *efficacy* motive been recognized in the *self-determination theory* by Deci & Ryan in 2000. And there have been a few studies on the efficacy motive for identity construction

(see: Amiot *et al.* 2010; Bettencourt & Sheldon 2001). Even though the feeling of competence might be seen as a part of self-esteem there is a clear distinction between the two. Studies have shown that self-liking and self-competence are empirically distinguishable dimensions (see: Tafarodi & Swann 2001). The sense of competence brings many positive feelings towards the individuals and therefore most people tend to overestimate their own efficiency and control over situations. Incongruity in an individual's sense of self-efficacy may cause negative emotions such as depression or anorexia (Vignoles *et al.* 2006: 311).

3.1.3 Belonging

The *belonging* motive is the need to maintain or enhance feelings of closeness to, or acceptance by other people in a group or in a dyadic relationship. The *belonging* motive was recognized in the *optimal distinctiveness theory* by Brewer in 1991. And according to Leary & Baumeister (2000) does the need for belonging subsume the need for self-esteem. As the underlying reason for negative outcomes of a low self-esteem like depression is really a reaction towards a sense of rejection by others. Any threats towards a person's feelings of belonging will have negative emotional effects. This may also lead to attraction towards more extreme and inclusive in-groups (Pickett *et al.* 2002) Another good study on the need for belong has been done by Bettencourt and Sheldon (2001).

3.1.4 Distinctiveness

The *distinctiveness* motive is the need to establish and maintain a sense of differentiation from others. As it's necessary for any useful identity to have clear boundaries and distinct characteristics (Vignoles *et al.* 2006: 310) The *optimal distinctiveness theory* developed by Brewer 1991 suggests that people identify with social group to satisfy opposing motives for *distinctiveness* and *belonging* (Lynn & Snyder 2002). The *distinctiveness* motive has been used to describe a great variety of preferences and stereotyping's both on individual and group level. And it has shown that threats towards an individual or groups distinctiveness may lead to increased distinctions and boundaries between individuals or intergroups (Brewer & Pickett 1999). The distinctiveness motives have been used in research of cultural contexts, which showed that distinctiveness motive was more frequently used within more individualistic cultures. And was associated more closely with social position in more collectivistic cultures than with individual's own beliefs and values (see: Becker *et al.* 2012).

3.1.5 Continuity

The *continuity* motive is the need to maintain a sense of connection or consistency of identity across time and situations. The *continuity* motive was acknowledged *self-verification theory* by Swann in 1983. And research have shown that people often try to find verifying contexts or create social context for their sense identity which is consistent with their self- conceptions and verifies their identity (Swan 1983). This doesn't mean that change is necessary negative, as people can maintain continuity through the construction of life stories that involve change and progression. If any consistency or continuity can't be established with an individual or group that would to negative effects such as reduction in group and personal negative emotions such as depression (Chandler *et al.* 2003). Some research found that people can gain self-continuity from their social identities and that this may lead to positive psychological effects (see: Sani *et al.* 2007; Iyver & Jenette 2011).

3.1.6 Meaning

The *meaning* motive is the need to find purpose and significance for once existence and actions in the world. This is the idea that from philosophers to ordinary people all have a search for meaning in one's existence. The need for meaning also serves as the understanding for one's life story. The *subjective uncertainty reduction theory* by Hogg (2000) proposes that intergroup is motivated by a need for meaning. And in the *self-affirmation theory* by Steele in 1988 it is suggested that people are motivated to preserve self-integrity, which mas motivated by self-esteem and meaning. In a study by Batory (2015) showed that losing identity aspects most connected with sense of meaning and self-esteem appeared especially distressing. The results indicated a predominant role of *meaning* motive and unexpected reaction to continuity threat. More research has been done on the *meaning* motive and its importance in identity construction by instillin a sense of meaning in life (e.g, Sparks & Schenk 2001; Johnson *et al.* 2006)

4. Methodology

This chapter examines the methodological approach used in this paper. In order to gather and analyze the relative information to answer the research question. The chapter is divided into two sections, where the first section (4.1) discusses how the fieldwork and participant selection was carried out. And how the data required from fieldwork was analyzed. The last section (4.2) discusses the ethical considerations involved in this particular research.

4.1 Fieldwork & Data Analysis

This thesis used a qualitative methodical approach in order to interpret the main focus of this thesis, which were the participants self-perception of their social identity. This approach was chosen as the most suitable since it allowed for a more open and dimensional evolution of the participants feelings and thoughts. The information was gathered through semi-structured interviews which allowed for more detailed information that could later on be coded (Bryman 2012: 470–471). By using semi-structured interviews, broader and more open question were giving the participant a better chance to speak more freely and naturally on the topic. It let them steer the conversation into new directions which allowed for unacknowledged themes and informational details to be discovered. The approach also helped with fighting any assumptions or biases within the research and to engage the author more with the environment. The participants were chosen through snowball sampling which allowed the author to gain the trust of the participant by being introduced by someone they knew. And since the author didn't have any contacts with the target group on beforehand it would have been difficult to locate this minority group in a big city. This method was therefore used as the best way to provide the required participants (Taherdoost 2016: 22). The sample group was conducted in a small scale and does not represent the whole group, hence the findings in this thesis may not be generalized. In following Table 1. the informant sample can be viewed for this research.

Table 1. Informant Sample

Participants	Sex	Age	Religion	Occupation	Jaffna relation
					1=Born and raised in Colombo 2=Born in Jaffna and moved to Colombo before 2010 3= Born in Jaffna and moved to Colombo after 2010
Jasinth	Female	43	Christian	Retail	2
Santhi	Female	18	Christian	College student	1
Mohan	Male	55	Christian	IT	2
Saitha	Female	31	Christian	Lawyer	1
Vasantha	Female	34	Christian	Doctor	2
Sneha	Female	51	Hindu	Professor	2
Selvam	Male	23	Hindu	College student	1
Chulani	Female	23	Hindu	College student	3
Umay	Male	30	Christian	Engineer	1
Sanooj	Male	36	Christian	Lawyer	2

To protect the identity of the participants pseudo names were used in this paper. All the participants had or were involved in higher education. They all had a connection to Jaffna either from their family roots, from being born there and then moving to Colombo or being born and raised there and later moving to Colombo. Because of the time frame for the fieldwork a practice sample group from Sweden and a practice interview guide had been tested. In order to understand if the sample group and interview question would be appropriate for the research question. The interviews were all conducted in English as all of the participants were fluent in the English language. All the participants had given their consent for the interviews and to being recorded. After all the interviews had been carried out the tapes were transcribed, processed and coded using the qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer software package NVivo, to provide clear themes and basis for analysis. The interview guide was based on different aspects and characteristics that is said to make up an ethnic group. The exact list of classifications used here were derived from the defined report of the 1986 Population Census Ethnicity Committee (published in ABS cat. no. 2172.0 - The Measurement of Ethnicity in the Australian Census of Population and Housing).

This clear list of identifications includes:

- 1 A long-shared history, the memory of which is kept alive.
- 2 A cultural tradition, including family and social customs, sometimes religiously based.
- 3 A common geographic origin.

- 4 A common language (but not necessarily limited to that group).
- 5 A common literature (written or oral).
- 6 A common religion.
- 7 Being a minority (often with a sense of being oppressed).
- 8 Being racially conspicuous.

(Pires and Stanton 2005: 63)

In order to make a good interview, the questions and structure of the interview have been carefully assessed. The interview guide has been structured in such a way that it will require the information needed to assist in answering the research question. As understanding the self-perception of the participants ethnic identity was the main objective, the questions has been structured around a definition of ethnic identity. The way ethnic identity has been defined and categorized is contested. This thesis guide based the interview questions on the list of classifications used and defined in the report of the 1986 Population Census Ethnicity Committee. (Piers 2015). Which provides a wide spectrum for identity classifications associated to ethnic identity. Using these topics as inspiration the question were formatted to fit the specific context of the research. The first headline topic was the introduction part to warm up the participants and get some background information on their profile which were added into 'Table 1'. The interview guide was semi-structured so that the question assisted more as a basis for the conversation. The goal was the keep the conversation natural and flowing.

Introduction

What's your name?

What's your age?

Where are you from?

Where do you live?

Which languages you speak?

The second part of the interview was

The introduction part of the interview facilitated in warming up the participants for the coming questions and gaining some basic facts about their profile such as age and where they were born.

A long-shared history

Do you feel connected to Tamil history?

For e.g., do you much about your family history?

The second part of the interview guide was based on a shared history. This part facilitated in examine the historical associations of participants ethnic identity.

A cultural tradition

Do you celebrate any Tamil traditions at home?

What cultural aspect are a part of your daily life?

What do they mean to you?

What food do you usually cook at home?

Who taught you how to cook?

Where do you buy your food?

What do you usually wear for clothes?

Where do you buy your clothes?

Do you eat out? Eat street food? What food you like to eat?

What's your favorite food?

Do you like to cook?

The third part examined the cultural traditions of the participants. Therefore, questions about food, the way the dress and celebrate traditions were formed to capture that aspect.

A common geographic origin.

Which places you like to go in Sri Lanka?

What you like about them?

Which place feels most like home?

Have you always lived here?

What made you decide to move here?

The fourth part of the interview guide was based on a common geographic origin. Therefore, the questions were formed in order to examine the participants associations of home. And how different places and areas are emotionally significant for them.

A common language (but not necessarily limited to that group).

Do you speak mostly. Tamil? When do you speak other languages?

Do you listen mostly to Tamil songs?

Do you watch Tamil movies?

Do you read the newspaper in Tamil?

What was the language in your school?

Which languages do you speak?

Which languages can you read and write in?

The fifth part facilitated in in examine the associations between ethnic identity and a common language. The questions were formed to understand the usage of their mother tongue ‘Tamil’ in their day-to-day life.

A common literature (written or oral).

Do you like to read books in Tamil?

What stories have you heard of when it comes to your family history?

The sixth part of the interview guide was dedicated to examining the common literature of their ethnic identity. The questions were made to understands how they connect to their written and oral literature in their mother tongue.

A common religion

What religion do you practice?

Do you go to the temple/church?

Which place?

How often do you go?

What do you do there?

This seventh part of the interview addresses the topic on how they perceive their ‘common’ religion. The question was based on their association towards their religious practices and were asked to both Hindus and Christians.

Being a minority (often with a sense of being oppressed).

Are there mostly Tamils or Sinhalese in your school/work/area of home?

Do you feel different from them?

The eight part discusses the topic of being a minority. The questions were formed to answer the feelings associated with being a minority group.

Being racially conspicuous

Is it easy for you to identify who is Sinhalese or Tamil? How? Is it important?

The last part of the interview guide examined the participants on the topic of being racially conspicuous. The question was focused on how they are able to distinct themselves as a group from others.

4.2 Ethical Considerations

In this thesis the positionality of the author was considered. The definition of positionality according to Crawford *et al.* (2017: 9) is an awareness of the researcher's identity including gender, class, race, age, relationship with participants and how these social positions might have an effect on a research process and data collection. The author has therefore consider her positionality as a Western educated woman has an effect on how information is perceived and gathered. This study was conducted according to the ethical guidelines of the Swedish Research Council (CODEX, 2019). The participants were informed that the interviews are for study purposes only and that information provided by the interviewees is only used for Master thesis. Consent of all participants was obtained prior to the interview sessions. All participants were also informed that the participation in the interview sessions can be terminated by the respondent at any time and with no consequences. The collected data was treated as confidentiality and stored safely. Therefore, all names of the participants have been altered to protect the participants' anonymity. To protect the identity of the participants pseudo names were used. And because of the time frame for the fieldwork a practice sample group and a practice interview guide which provided extra self-reflexivity and ethical considerations regarding the procedure of the interviews. Scott's Four Criteria's have been considered to reflect on the source providing the information. This includes the analysing the information provided through the source based on the source credibility, authenticity, representativeness and meaning (Bryman 2016: 544). When it comes to the information gathered by the participatory interviews, there many ethical considerations regarding research with human participants. According to the ethical guidelines of 'Vetenskapsrådet' no harm should be inflicted on the participants. This involves many different aspects such as the objectivity of the researcher and the handling of the information and protection of the participants identity (Vetenskapsrådet 2017: 26–29). The awareness to this has brought consideration regarding the research process and data collection as it is affected by the positionality of the researcher. By having conducted semi-structured interviews it helped in avoiding the Western bias by letting the people speak for themselves rather than to speak for them (Sultana 2007: 375). The history of the ethical group from pre-colonial times to present-

day has been considered as carefully as possible during the fieldwork to avoid exploitative or perpetuation of relations of domination and control (Sultana 2007: 375). The group of participants differ widely in age, educational levels, sex, socio-economic level, religion. Which all are independent social factors that may affect the perception of one's ethnic identity and therefore the findings of this study should not be generalized.

5. Findings & Analysis

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of this thesis work. The first section (5.1) presents the overlying themes discovered during the fieldwork. And the next sections go through the findings within each of the six motivated identity classifications (5.2–5.8)

5.1 Urban Identity vis-à-vis Jaffna Identity

During the conducting of the interviews and in the later analysis of the transcripts, two clear themes were discovered. The first one was the '*Jaffna identity*' which referred to ones Jaffna roots and the image of Jaffna as the conservation and blueprint of their Tamil identity. The second theme discovered was the '*Urban identity*' which referred to more of a city identity with a mixture of different influences from other cultures such as western influences. These overlying themes were used intermixed during the interviews when describing their identity in their day-to-day life in Colombo as Jaffna Tamils. Both themes were therefore used to show different aspects of their identity. As Freeman (2001:295) had mentioned that Sri Lanka have been through a lot of structural changes over the past several decades with an overall economic growth in the country. This could be seen especially in Colombo with an expansion of the private sector and of the industrial production and the opening of the economy to international markets. The following findings indicated also the reduction of traditional identities amongst most of the participants. This was expressed in the usage of one's mother tongue, dress codes and view of the future development for their ethnic identity. Freeman mentioned in his research, that an intriguing possibility in response to reduced identification with traditional social categories in urban areas may result in creating more individualistic identities instead (2001:305). And each of these participants showed different levels of traditional associations with their identities. These different levels could equal more individualistic identities that is based on a more eclectic nature to one's ethnic/social identity

with a mixture of urban/wester influences and traditional Jaffna aspects into one's identity. When asking one of the participants about how he felt living in Colombo since moving from Jaffna, he expressed that he found that citizens of Colombo were ignorant about the other cultures of Sri Lanka as well of their own cultural identities. He showed a strong dislike towards people that had forgotten or wouldn't acknowledge their own mother tongue.

'So, at the beginning when I came and started mingling with the Colombo circle, it was a very different, a rather privileged community of Sri Lanka. There were times when I felt that I were not a part of that community. Some of my friends didn't even know there were schools in Jaffna, as there was that much of ignorance. For them there was only Colombo and nothing else in Sri Lanka than Colombo. So that's a prejudice I still fight against. (...)Yes, it's still prevailing but in the beginning, it was a huge deal for me. I was offended and I would get upset and annoyed and speak back to them. Now I just ignore that basically, people are the way they are. They don't get to know others and understand that Sri Lanka is not just Colombo and that there is more to Sri Lanka. And I find that a lot of Tamils that were born in Colombo and are now living in Colombo, have very different values. Even the Singhalese I find that way. I find them only speaking in English rather than any local language. For me it's very shallow and if you don't respect your own identity and your own mother tongue, then there is something wrong. A lot of people even say that they can't speak in my old language, my own mother tongue. Both the Tamil and Singhalese in Colombo, most of them. That's something that I don't tolerate or will be part of.' (Sanooj)

Since I have been living in Colombo for a while, when I go back to Jaffna or Tamil areas and speak in Tamil, I find it a bit difficult. Because in Colombo you mostly speak in English. Since we are used to that it's very difficult for me to go back and speak in Tamil. So, it takes about one to two days to familiarize myself with my mother tongue and then I get used to speaking to them. Even my friends in Jaffna say 'oh' now that you are in Colombo, it's difficult for you to speak in Tamil. 'No', I say, when you get used to speaking in English, it gets difficult to talk to you in another language even if it's your mother tongue. (Sanooj)

As Colombo has become a multicultural city with many international influences as well, English has become one of the main mediums of communications. The younger generations seem to become increasingly connected to the English language. One of the participants mentioned how her children are becoming more used to the English language and seem to prefer it as medium of communication amongst friends and family.

'Mostly Tamil, but our children they are used to speaking in English, because they are studying in English, their friends speak English, so sometimes at home we speak a little English with them. But me and my husband speak in Tamil mostly. They also can understand very well but they don't speak much. They are learning Tamil, but they don't speak much.' (Jasintha)

‘I think so yes. Very rarely, I speak to them in Tamil * hinting at his children that are doing homework in the same room*. But we talk sometimes in Tamil I think * hinting at his wife, also sitting in the same room*, but with them most of the time in English.’ (Mohan)

‘Okay now there maybe people thinking that language is something like a medium of communication, that’s how I look at it, right? And okay let me put it this way now. When I came to Colombo, I found I need to talk in English. So, even with Tamil people I started talking in English, so that I will learn. So that kind of I can say have become my habit. (...)if you want me to read a book or something, I think I read in Tamil. If you have both versions, I read in Tamil. Unless you say this is the original translation and it carry the full meaning.’ (Mohan)

The youngest participant in this study had exceptional English-speaking skills. She explained that she could read in Tamil if she had to, as it was not the preferred option.

I actually prefer reading in English, because I got used to reading in English. But I can read Tamil if I have to (...) I usually go online and read the English newspaper, but like my dad sometimes brings home the Tamil one as well. So, I read them. (Santhi)

There were different feelings towards Jaffna as their homeplace even among the participants that were born there. For instance, one of the participants associated Colombo more as her home than Jaffna. She also showed her children’s lack of interest for Jaffna.

‘Yes, but now I’m used to Colombo, so yes, I do miss Jaffna because I was born there and our relatives are there but now most of them have left Jaffna. But we still visit Jaffna, but our children are used to Colombo. For them Jaffna is not interesting, unless they have something to see there like for e.g., sightings or something. There are few relatives, so we go and visit them. We have our friends there too, so we go and see them but for the children its boring. So now we got used to Colombo, Colombo is our hometown (...) It’s comfortable for us living here, we prefer Colombo, because we got used to it.’ (Jasinth)

Even though some of the participants that were also born in Jaffna and had move to Colombo before 2010, showed a stronger connection to their birthplace.

‘Jaffna will always be my home. My dad lives there now, and my brother lives in Jaffna so at least every month I go there. (...) and the peace and comfort you get there, you don’t get in Colombo. So, in that way, anytime Jaffna is my home.’ (Sanooj)

‘Jaffna is where I’m emotionally connected to. (...) I feel like it’s mine, like were we played and things like that. So the emotional connection is there.’ (Mohan)

The multi-cultural influences on identity in their urban area, had been acknowledged by all participants in this study. The views on this varied from seeing it as threatening to their traditional ethnic identity and as providing a new convenient way of living in a modern/urban society.

‘It's their preference. To be frank, even if you take for example some of the food. You can't say it's really authentic ‘Jaffna’ food, since some of the things we even saw when we went to India, as they have the same food. So basically, we have taken it from them, right? So, things like that you know, every culture grows with the mixture of other cultures, we learned it from others. There is a practical aspect of it as well, you can't hang on to the tradition and forget about how to live your daily life. For example, jeans came from the European culture or Americans. Now if you think ‘no we have to wear traditional (clothes) daily’ I don't think half of the crowd could go in the buses now with the crowd and everything. Every culture grows with the mixture of other cultures (Mohan)

‘Does the differentiations matter? For me as a Christian, grown up in a different environment it is not really authentic, it's more mixed with the westernized culture and we do not follow all of it.’ (Umayya)

One of the participants explained how English and Tamil was used intermixed depending on the context in their daily life.

‘At home it's seventy-five percent Tamil and twenty-five percent English, or a mix like that. But with my mother-in-law and her sister it's more Tamil. Even though she can speak English, she is more comfortable in Tamil, so we often speak more Tamil. With my husband cousin it's more in English because she grew up in Colombo. The Tamil isn't that great in vocabulary and number of words. We know it's mostly Tamil for, jokes are funnier if we say them in Tamil.’ (Sneha)

A participant explained the way she would mix east and Western influences in the way she dressed. She also expressed a preference for western cooking as it was easier and more convenient to make than following complicated Sri Lankan recipes.

East and Western mix, I would wear pants that's Western with an Indian ‘kurti’ (a short tunic), so it's mixed. Now you see guests for wedding do not always wear ‘sari’ (an Indian traditional dress) but I still do. Since I don't think these Western gowns suit my body. If I'm cooking, I tend to cook like Western as I find it easier, like pasta and with pesto sauce or something like that. I find it easier to cook than our Sri Lankan food because we add so many spices. If I tend to cook any Sri Lankan dish there are some easy things like ‘curd’ (coagulated milk) and rice, where you can never make a mistake (Sneha).

5.2 Self-esteem

The *self-esteem* motive is the need to maintain and enhance a positive self-image. The findings from the interviews showed that the most common used identity aspects for the self-esteem motive was connected to their Jaffna culture. Which was described as for instance ‘ancient’, ‘pure’ and ‘unique’. Self-esteem was one of the strongest motivational principles for Tamil identity which was shown by its clear and frequent source for pride and confidence. The strong need for self-esteem motive within social groups in Sri Lanka can be due to its hierarchical cultural context in Sri Lanka (Freeman 2001: 293). The strongest identity fragments within the need for self-esteem was shown to be the ‘pure’, ‘ancient and ‘unique’ aspects of one’s traditional Jaffna identity which were described by several of the participants. These aspects were found in the cultural traditions such as food, history, arts and in the language.

‘I’m super proud of culture, traditions and my Tamil history (...) I arguably speak the oldest language in the world, ‘Tamil’. And culture vice there are things that I like and things that I would like to change depending on how things have progressed in the twenty-first century. Especially when it comes to some of the very curable things about Tamil culture especially in the North. There are things I really want to change. But at the same time there are so many things that are my unique identity as well, as a Tamil.’ (Sanooj)

‘For me Colombo is home for me, but I have strong connection to Jaffna. It’s something I won’t ignore. I say I’m a Sri Lankan, but I don’t look at myself as a minority, that’s why I just say I’m a Sri Lankan. I don’t want to differentiate myself from Sinhalese or Tamil and take pride for it for me it doesn’t make any difference.’ (Umayya)

‘Old traditions, it’s very unique. Our culture is more unique than the Indian Tamil people. You can see only Sri Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka.’ (Selvam)

‘There are things I still be proud of like especially coming from Jaffna. There are things that are still followed as traditions, the way the follow food, the culture and the art. All of this is very much prevalent, and it has not changed much. It’s really unique to the north. The accent we speak is very different from others. So, the accent is a very unique part of Jaffna. You can immediately say he is a Jaffna or not when you hear him speaking. So, things like that it is very difficult to change. Even the immigrant when I was in London, I met a lot of Tamils. And from the way they speak I know where they come from in Sri Lanka. So, things like that, the identity you get through that. Which is a huge issue in Sri Lanka, having your own Tamil identity. So, coming from that background it gives you a lot of pride.’ (Sanooj)

‘Yes, it is the main area for me coming from the north, we eat a lot of spicy food. Colombo food is not spicy, so I will tell my maid to make it spicier. In Jaffna we use a lot of coconut milk whereas in Colombo they don’t use much, they use tomatoes. Not

as spicy as you find it in Jaffna. Even certain curries like crab curry, they call Jaffna crab curry. So, we mention okay today we make Jaffna crab curry ... And also at home quiet a lot, when my friends come, they specially ask for this particular crab curry, Jaffna curry. Things like that.' (Sanooj)

'Old, traditions, very unique, more unique than the Indian Tamil people. You can only see Sri Lankan Tamil people in Sri Lanka.' (Selvam)

5.3 Efficacy

The *efficacy* motive is the need to maintain or enhance feelings of competence and control. To manage and direct one's life, as well as the ability to influence one's surrounding environment. This motive was more difficult to find from the interviews. The motives for *belonging* and *efficacy* had an indirect influence on identity construction through its effect on *self-esteem* or in identity enactment (Vignoles *et al.*: 308). As according to SIT, social group comparison is used in order to gain self-esteem through favoring ones in group. This can be seen as the participant compares the Sinhala language to the Tamil language to the size of the languages across the world. To understand this vast-reaching language could be seen as an efficacy motivational principle. As it brings a sense of competence to be able to communicate around the world with a large number of people, which not everyone shares.

It's very authentic, it's a pride and you feel big. Especially living in Sri Lanka knowing you have so many people around the world speaking in the same language (...) Tamil is not a language that is only spoken in Sri Lanka. There is Malaysia, Singapore and lot of other countries you find people speaking in Tamil. I also tell my friends that when you talk about the conservation of Sri Lanka. One of the biggest problems for Sinhalese are that they are insecure about how the language is only spoken in Sri Lanka but for Tamils it's a little more. The reach is vast, and you find Tamil Nadu in India with six hundred 'crore' (1 crore=ten million) Tamils there, then Malaysians and Singaporeans all these people around the world. So, you are bigger, so you don't have to be insecure about that your language, is the only language. So, I sort of understand why Sinhalese are very protective of their language. Which is not good but it's an insecurity in some ways.' (Sanooj)

5.4 Distinctiveness

The *distinctiveness* motive was explained as the need to maintain or enhance feelings of closeness to, or acceptance by other people in a group or in a dyadic relationship. And as according to the SIT theory and also supported by Freemans (2001) study within the Sri Lankan social context. So should the minority status within a category of social identity will

be more positively correlated with the salience of once identity. The Sri Lankan Christians make out a smaller social group than that of the Sri Lankan Tamils. So, in accordance with the distinctiveness motive and SIT, the Sri Lankan Christians will have greater associations with their social group, as its smaller and more distinctive than that of the Sri Lankan Tamils. It was shown amongst most Christian participants in this study that they had greater associations with their Christian identity than that of their Tamil identity (Xu *et al.* 2014: 74). The distinctiveness motive was used mostly among Christian Tamils to highlight their religious identity, which was seen as more important for many than their ethnic identity. The Jaffna identity has been used too within distinctiveness motivation principle to show their unique Tamil identity. One of participants clearly stated that he wanted to be known as a Christian Tamil, empathizing the Christian religious social group. Instead of being referred to as a Tamil Christian which would empathizes the Tamil ethnic identity as more important than the Christian identity.

‘I remember this question when I joined a company twenty years back. I was the first Tamil to join the company and maybe the first Christian as well. I think maybe only one or two were catholic. They ask me, ‘so are you a Tamil Christian?’ And I said no, I’m a Christian Tamil. That’s how I want to identify myself.’ (Mohan)

One participant showed that the Christian religious identity was a more important distinction, than the ethnic identity distinction.

‘As Christians we don’t see that difference. It doesn’t make a big difference if you are Sinhalese or Tamil as long as you praise the same god. Because Hindus can’t be Sinhalese, the religion in itself is all Tamil based. Sinhalese means Buddhist Sinhalese. But only Christians in that sense unite. You have Sinhalese Christians, and Tamil Christians and Muslims. They have their religion, and they are on their own.’ (Vasantha 34)

The Christian identity among the Jaffna Tamils were also explained as more open to other cultures and influences than that of the Hindu community.

‘Christians are normally very open when it comes to culture and issues like cast. Those are very less when it comes to Christian. Whereas Hindus are more traditional and cultured, you know they are very strict about the cast and other traditions. So, you find a lot of difference in Tamil Christians and Tamil Hindus. It was not an easy ride when I was young, my mum being Christian and my dad being Hindu. Cultural vice there is a difficulty there. Excepting each other’s traditions and excepting each other’s values.’ (Sanooj)

‘For me both matters. I mean I’m very proud to be Christian, as well as I’m very proud to be Tamil. So, it’s very different with very different perspectives.’ (Sanooj)

‘I have invited them home. Meals, they like ‘hoppers’ especially ‘milk hoppers’ because Singhalese don’t have milk hoppers. We make ‘milk hoppers’ (Jaffna traditional dish), so we have that.’ (Sneha)

‘If I go home, I will be like that. Even I have my ankle wear also. But I’m not wearing it here. But if I go home, I will wear it and I will feel complete.’ (Chulani)

"An appearance of a girl like that, a girl wearing sari, salwar, with flowers in her hair, long hair braided hair (...) jeweler in the nose, gold chains and then that's it. I don't want to feel that I have lost myself completely. I want to feel that I'm still a Jaffna girl'(Chulani)

‘I’m not traditional like they are. They wear traditional clothes at their home, I’m not like that.’ (Selvam)

5.5 Belonging

The *belonging* motive is the need to maintain or enhance feelings of closeness to, or acceptance by other people in a group or in a dyadic relationship. The motives for ‘*belonging*’ had an indirect influence on identity construction through its effect on *self-esteem* or in identity enactment (Vignoles *et al.*: 308). The results from the interviews showed that the belonging motive was a strong motivational principle among the Jaffna Tamils and had an indirect effect on their self-esteem. The small community of Jaffna Tamils showed a strong need for belonging. Important identity fragments within the belonging motive were the language, food culture and physical space of Jaffna.

A participant showed the need for belonging in how it brought him confidence from being around family and friends from the same ethnic culture.

‘Even though I try to ramble out (exploring other cultures), I think originally you are very much part of your own culture. It gives you a lot of confidence as well when you are there with your own colleagues, friends, relatives, and your family. Who all have the same values, which you hardly see in Colombo.’ (Sanooj)

‘I mostly miss my language and our people who are in this area (talking about Jaffna). It’s okay they have to speak in English when they are surrounded with Singhalese people (...) I can hear Tamil when we are alone in a canteen like lunch time only, I’m hearing Tamil. Otherwise, my boarding place is full of Sinhala and English. Even if someone is mocking me in Tamil, I’m happy for that because I can hear Tamil words.’ (Chulani)

‘So, I miss the garden and the neighborhood. We were so closed, like even though we have a neighborhood here we don’t know what’s happening in the next house. But there we were not like that; we were like a family. The whole village is like a family. We knew who is living in which house, and as we are walking on the road, we talk to them.’ (Jasintha)

‘Yeah, we connect with Tamils, because in this flat most of them are Tamils. But we don’t have that close connection, we just know who is living where. And there are no Sinhalese in this flat and in the shops close by, all are Tamils, and they speak in Tamil.’ (Jasintha)

A participant also expressed how associations and festivals were important to fulfill his need for belonging in Colombo. It let him connect with others from his ethnic group and share their culture and traditions together.

‘So, I am part of my schools all boy association which has a branch in Colombo as well. A lot of my colleagues are in Colombo. My all boys, my guys are in Colombo. I have interactions with them, and they are even within my law faculty. I’m in Colombo law faculty and there are people from Jaffna and from the Tamil community. We gather sometimes and then I also speak with my community people quite often. That’s another thing that keeps my traditions. And when there are festivals, there are times I would definitely engage in that even though I’m a Christian.’ (Sanooj)

‘Food is a really close connection, that makes me very close to my culture. Food culture, and there are festivals in Colombo. Like some hotels they have this Jaffna food festival, and I go for that.’ (Sanooj).

‘Usually no, but yeah when there are festivals, we male wear this thing called "devi/bevi", which is very much similar to sarong but is also very different as well. When we wear that, it's very traditional but also nice. Whenever there is an opportunity, I do wear. Work vice sometimes when I go for events. If it’s a Tamil event, something where you want to wear cultural then I prefer to wear that.’ (Sanooj)

5.6 Continuity

The *continuity* motive is the need to maintain a sense of connection or consistency of identity across time and situations. For the continuity motive it was shown that concern for coming generations was the most important. In Jaspal (2013: 227) it was argued also that a threat towards the distinctiveness of a social group, could lead to the failure of continuity for that group. This could explain the previously seen disliking towards the failure of keeping up with traditions and especially when it comes to using the mother tongue. As this consequently could harm the continuity motive of this ethnic identity. The generational concern was mentioned and that one’s culture could be lost within coming generations.

‘In future their child will not know that they are Tamils. I know that they can't maintain are culture that's okay but still they can maintain our identity, that we are Tamils. We are not born in those area. We are born in Sri Lanka and we went there.’ (Chulani)

‘I want to maintain this culture till my grandchild or someone. They should know that there were Tamils like this, and this is our identity. If I also change like them, my grandchild will know we were like that. I want to carry to our generation.’ (Chulani)

5.7 Meaning

The *meaning* motive is the need to find purpose and significance for once existence and actions in the world. The meaning motive was not shown so openly during the interviews but could be seen as giving purpose to help one's own community. Fulfilling a traditional role within ones given culture and to help assuring that future generations won't forget their Tamil identity.

‘I normally put ‘pottu’ (a religious/cultural mark worn at the forehead) here, but it fell down in the evening. In the morning I had pottu, that's also, for me it's my identity. I wouldn't lose it for someone.’ (Chulani 23)

‘So, in regard to Tamil issues more than culture, it's the law that I'm dealing with. Now when the war is over my concern is that Tamils should get their land back.’ (Saitha)

‘My future generation shouldn't lose that identity as a Tamil. It's something that should be cherished.’ (Selvam)

6. Conclusion

Ethnic identity is one of many social identities but can be consider one of the most prominent. In social identity theory it has been claimed that people associative with certain groups, try to enhance and maintain a positive image towards their ingroup. This occurs for via in and out group comparison, where one favors their ingroup in order bring self-esteem to oneself (Tajfel & Turner 2004). The overlying themes of the Tamils ethnic identity was the ‘Urban identity’ vis-à-vis ‘Jaffna identity’. The participants seemed to associate on various degrees between an urban Tamil ethnic identity and a traditional Jaffna identity. The opinions on the usage of one's mother tongue vs the English language varied among the participants. English was seen for instance as a more convenient medium of communication in the urban society.

The self-esteem motive was one of the strongest motivational principle used in this study. It was used often to derive positive feelings from the participants Jaffna culture and heritage rather than from their modern and urban identities. The use of the self-esteem motive could be related to Sri Lankas Hierarchal society structure (Hofsted 1991). As it has been shown that in more equalitarian countries the *self-esteem* motive is not achieved as easily from the positive associations of a certain social group. Instead, it is more related to once achievements and involvements in a social group (Freeman 2001: 303). The fragments that made up the self-esteem motive was indicated through these interviews as for instance the ‘purity’, ‘ancientness’ and ‘uniqueness’ of ones Jaffna cultural traditions from art, food, traditional wear to language. The *belonging* motive was also a strong motivational principle for this minority group. And through being around people from the same community, it consequently resulted in positive sense of self-esteem. The identity aspects most used within the belonging motive was Jaffna, as a physical common home and origin, the Tamil language and shared cultural traditions such as food. Some of the participants searched out Tamil communities in Colombo to celebrate festivals, where shared cultural traditions could be experienced together. The *efficacy* motive was more difficult to locate amongst the participants. But it could for instance be shown through ones understanding of the Tamil language, which in turn gives them a feeling of confidence to communicate with a large world-wide population. As stated by Vignoles et al (2006) the efficacy motive together with the belonging motive have an indirect influence on identity construction through its effect on *self-esteem* or in identity enactment. The *distinctiveness* motive was used most within the Christian Tamil community. Where their religious identity amongst most of them were more important than their ethnic identity. The distinctiveness motive was also used when expressing the uniqueness of ones Jaffna Tamil identity. The *continuity* motive can be seen used in keeping future generation aware of their common and traditional Jaffna identity. The *meaning* motive was difficult to assess. As one sense of meaning could be seen through ones pursue to bring justice towards their Tamil community. It could also be seen through the idea of fulling a traditional role within one’s culture in being for instance a ‘Jaffna girl’. Which was seen as something very beautiful and meaningful. As this was a qualitative study the perceived centrality of the identity fragments could not be measured well in relations to each other.

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