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Kimberly Kolor
University of Pennsylvania

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Abstract

In post-conflict Sri Lanka, communal tensions continue to be negotiated, contested, and remade. Color codes virtually every aspect of daily life in salient local idioms. Scholars rarely focus on the lived visual semiotics of local, everyday exchanges from how women ornament their nails to how communities beautify their open—and sometimes contested—spaces. I draw on my ethnographic data from Eastern Sri Lanka and explore ‘color’ as negotiated through personal and public ornaments and notions of beauty with a material culture focus. I argue for a broad view of ‘public,’ which includes often marginalized and feminized public modalities. This view also explores how beauty and ornament are salient technologies of community and cultural authenticity that build on histories of ethnic imaginaries.

Disciplines

Asian History

Comments

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**Ornamenting Fingernails and Roads:
Beautification and the Embodiment of Authenticity in Post-War Eastern Sri Lanka**

**Kimberly Kolor 2014–2015
Andrew W. Mellon Undergraduate Fellow, Penn Humanities Forum
University of Pennsylvania
Advisor Justin McDaniel
A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Religious Studies
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Introduction

The motorbike sped forward unobstructed. It was a fairly straight shot south from Batticaloa town along the new, smooth road--courtesy of Japanese aid. Small general shops occasionally clustered along the road, and we passed two high schools and a large Ramakrishna Mission complex. As we drove along, the buildings became few and far between and one-story buildings replaced two-story ones.

Three towns and six dusty kilometers later, Kattankudy emerged. Its bustle and prosperity came into view with two--sometimes even three--story buildings. This wasn't the only thing that distinguished this town from its surroundings. A row of sculpted date-tree statues increased in height as they led up to a towering welcome sign spanning the width of the divided highway. Planted date palms adorned the median.

"See, this is what they have put. Trees only. That's it," Mr. Vignesh called back to me as he drove.

But the trees weren't actually the only thing that decorated the town. We passed three large roundabouts decorating the western side, and rows of neatly-kept shops interspersed with beautifully decorated mosques, a few municipal buildings with bulbous domes and minarets and Islamic schools with the names written in Arabic. Most women were wearing burqas with niqab in a sleek black color. Signs less grand than the welcome board continued to overarch the road, uniting the divided north and south paths. Bright green 'Etisalat'-sponsored bus stops speckled each side and occasionally there were political billboards with promises to develop the Muslim

community.¹ This place looked like nothing I had ever seen in Sri Lanka, or in South India for that matter--it felt like a different world.

Abruptly, a gold statue confronted us. It was Swami Vivekananda taking a step forward towards Kattankudy with a somber expression.² The trees had stopped, and I knew we must have reached Araiampathy. Mr. Vignesh immediately turned east along the boundary road between these two towns. He had been showing me infamous "border towns" throughout the day because these sites appear regularly in the news for land disputes.³

As we continued down this boundary road, he said, "That [northern] side is Muslim. This [southern] side is Tamil. See how they have constructed walls like this?"

I confess that at the time I thought that I had. Nonetheless, after spending the next four months living there--two of those on that very road--I soon realized that there was nothing peculiar about the "walls" of houses here. In fact, this boundary was in many ways constructed negatively. Empty lots, a bus stand, a dumping ground, and some abandoned army checkpoint buildings occupied a lot of this space. Many people had fled this area because of the war and some were just starting to move back in. Particularly on the northern (Muslim) side of this road where population pressures were greater, many had recently built their houses and moved there.

Fascinated by these trees, I found myself two months later engaged in an interesting discussion with Kattankudy political campaign worker, Mr. Ajmal.

¹ Etisalat is a multinational telecommunications corporation based in UAE. This is a popular choice for phone and internet plans among the Muslim community in Kattankudy.

² Swami Vivekananda is a renouncer, sage, and spiritual teacher from India who followed in the Sri Ramakrishna movement and supported spiritual and science education and travelled to the West to spread Vedanta philosophy.

³ Arun Tambimutthu, "Araiampathi pithesathil aththumeeri kaanikalai pidiththavarkalai janaathipathi peci veliyetruven," *Araiampathy News*, Oct. 8, 2013. <http://arayampathy.com/news.php?id=2910>. See also Bhavani Fonseka and Mirak Raheem, "Land in the Eastern Province: Politics, Policy, and Conflict," *Center for Policy Alternatives*, May (2010).

"We [planted the trees] to make the town seem more worthy (*aLavuvu*)," Mr. Ajmal said. "That, and also we cannot keep [things from] another culture here. We may keep [only things from] this one culture here."

"Another reason for the trees is that they don't have leaves that fall down [onto the road]. If we plant some other trees, the leaves [will be] falling and we [would] have to clean," Shibly Sir added in English.

"--Yes, yes, they won't fall," Mr. Ajmal interjected. "But now you are here and you are going around on this road and that road. It is like [you are] standing still without doing a single thing or seeing a single problem. But if you want to [learn about] cultural things for Muslims, at the start, Tamil people thought that Muslims don't have a culture. That is the problem. [Tamils think Muslims] speak [Tamil] language and repeat [Tamil] culture."⁴

At first, I chalked up this comment as yet another example of tension and "othering" tendencies between Tamils and Muslims, perhaps like how Mr. Vignesh saw walls that were not existent. But, as I listened to this recording many times over, I started to understand the significance of Mr. Ajmal's comment about Muslim culture--and of that jab at my research project. Throughout my fieldwork, I occasionally encountered evidence that supported his accusation that such a "problem"--a discrepancy as to what constitutes Muslim culture--persists even today. I met two or three (usually elderly) Tamil people who seemed to suggest that there was no cultural difference between Tamils and Muslims. One woman I met at a Kali Amman Temple said, "There is no big difference between the Tamils and Muslims. All is one."⁵ In doing so, she perhaps contributes subtly to Mr. Ajmal's problem. This thesis traces this "problem" of

⁴ Mr. Ajmal (teacher and former campaign worker) and Shibly Sir (teacher), recorded interview by author, May 24th, 2014.

⁵ "Muslimukkam, Tamilukkam periya vityasam onnum illai. Ella onnuthaan." personal conversation recollected in field notes, April 27, 2014.

Muslim and Tamil culture, contextualizing it historically and exploring its material negotiation in personal and public beautification as technologies of community and of cultural authenticity.

Reaching a Question

About a month after Mr. Vignesh introduced me to the area, my host family found out about my birthday, and I was obliged to throw a birthday party for my neighbors and friends. I held it at my house, which was right on the boundary road (Tamil side) at the time. Mr. Vignesh, his wife Ms. Priya, and their five-year-old daughter Sheshanki were among the thirty or so people who stopped by to have some snacks and wish me well.

When I visited Ms. Priya later that same week for *her* birthday, her face became very animated as she told me of her surprise at seeing life on the boundary road. "Politicians are always saying this and that. Vignesh and I couldn't believe how it was there. Everyone is always saying how border town people are suffering. We didn't know how they lived there. We were so shocked, Kem. Vignesh and I talked for an hour [about it] after we got back. Everyone was so friendly."⁶

Mr. Vignesh and Ms. Priya are both wealthy and educated lecturers at Eastern University who live with their daughter on an affluent street in Kallady, just south of the main Batticaloa town. Mr. Vignesh lectures in Management and Tourism while Ms. Priya lectures in Economics and Poverty. They wouldn't have had much occasion to visit the boundary road because they didn't have relatives in either village. As Ms. Priya noted above, they had a lot of preconceived notions about what locals sometimes refer to as "border towns," and these notions were fueled by local politicians who are popularly blamed for polarizing ethnic politics in order to secure specific vote banks.

⁶ Ms. Priya, personal conversation recollected in field notes, April 20, 2014.

So, without reflecting on the fact that the walls of his own large house were built much higher, Mr. Vignesh had made the assumption when showing me around that first day that 'boundary people' would be trying to shut the ethnic "other" out of their homes. Instead, what he and Ms. Priya saw at my birthday party was much different from this imagined ethnic isolation. For Ms. Priya and Mr. Vignesh, whose relatives and closest friends are Tamil, whose neighbors are Tamil, and whose high social status as wealthy professors that increases their access to often-polarizing political circles, Tamils had not only little incentive to socialize with Muslim people, but also little opportunity. Before visiting my Akka's house on the boundary road, they had assumed that ethnic differences would prevent even basic friendly neighborly interaction.

To their great surprise, Raji Akka, my host elder-sister, had many friends and acquaintances across the street. I had also made new friends on both sides of the street. As a result, Tamil Hindus, Tamil Christians, and Muslims all came to my party and shared the small space of my Akka's TV-room intermittently on that 16th of April. The celebration of a foreign lady's 21st birthday (called "Key Birthday") is by all accounts a peculiar event negotiated by my presence. However, when Raji Akka was showing me her photo albums, I saw that her son, Prajit, also had birthday parties with "diverse" crowds--meaning that they included neighbors from across the street.

In many ways, if I was "looking" for anything when I first came to live on boundary road, it was this: neighborly interaction overcoming the normative and now infamous Tamil-Muslim ethnic dichotomy. For an ethnographer, there should always be an evolution of objectives as her understanding of a place develops. Ethnographers tend to set out without many specific questions at all and 'stumble upon' new ones that ultimately challenge the assumptions that had brought her to a locality in the first place. Having heard ample rumors about Muslim-Tamil tensions, I

wanted to "prove" that these notions were wrong and explore how the agency in shared space and neighborliness could overcome ethnic stereotypes and long-term prejudices.

In retrospect, I recognize that such a project is clearly impossible to do in four months. However, in the two months I spent living directly on this boundary road and an additional two months living only two lanes away, I can say that any notion of a strict social binary as imagined by Mr. Vignesh and Ms. Priya--who are, significantly, not alone in this imagination--is false, if extremely complicated. Much like anywhere, it is neither a place of happy and carefree friends nor a place of cold and bitter enemies. I regularly witnessed people exchange friendly conversation while passing each other on the street and then in the same day participate in slanderous and ethnically-charged rumors. And, of course, residents sling similar gossips and rumors at people belonging to the same normative ethnic community. People negotiate ethnic difference and neighborliness in extremely complicated and often contradictory ways. I remember being bitterly shocked when a couple of my Muslim friends joined their neighbor in denouncing all Tamils as 'LTTE' after having just enjoyed my Akka's hospitality not even thirty minutes prior.

In this thesis, therefore, I hope to explore the tensions of everyday experiences to show that these same people often simultaneously participate in, contradict, reinforce, complicate, create, and imagine new ethnic stereotypes for complex reasons. I have chosen to focus on a study of ornament and beauty in border towns. In spite of Mr. Vignesh's stated indifference, then, this thesis focuses in some ways on those very "trees." I argue that the trees and similar material "ornaments" have a profound impact on negotiations of "cultural authenticity," and contiguously, notions of religious and ethnic otherness. Ultimately, beautification and ornamentation are entangled within and constitutive of the deeply intricate webs of daily life negotiated both

materially and immaterially. For the purposes of this paper, I am situating ornament and public beautification in local histories of population settlement and contested land in the light of post-war development, disparate distributions of economic and political power, and debates between and within local religious communities. I argue that these conditions foster a greater imperative to ornament, which, perhaps, sustains a tension of peaceful exchanges across certain communities and is rejected, sometimes violently, in others. I argue that beauty and ornament, therefore, must be contextualized in local negotiations of wider institutional and ideological developments, and I conceive of these developments as being in many ways inseparable from their material negotiations in ornament and beauty.

Methodology

I spent about four months living in the Batticaloa District in the two towns mentioned in the introduction: Araiampathy (a Tamil majority town) and Kattankudy (a 100% Muslim town). I lived on Araiampathy-Tamil side of the boundary road dividing these two towns for about 2 months, and I spent the next two months in Kattankudy--just a few lanes away from this boundary road. I was able to speak with some local elders, government officials, and other fairly prominent community members (*periya akkal*, "big people," in spoken form) within my network to gain a sense of the area and the interaction between these villages. These people most commonly were connections I made through my host families and friends. I also made some connections through University of Peradeniya and Eastern University Faculty. I also incorporate visual and translated written materials and from websites, flyers, posters, news articles, and local publications.

My "orientation" to living in these border towns provides a practical/expedient framework for understanding some of these lived negotiations of ethnic and religious

differentiation. On my very first day, an elderly neighbor came to meet me. I greeted her with what I considered to be a respectful and conventional--if a bit formal--greeting saying "Vannakkam, Amma."⁷ She warmly but sternly told me that she was not my 'Amma' but rather my 'Umma,' as 'Mother' is called in the Muslim dialect. She added that I should also address her saying "Assalamu Walaikum," not "Vannakkam." I could say the latter to Tamil people like my host Akka, who was smiling and nodding all the while. Like this, my Aunties, Uncles, U/Ammas, Akkas, friends, and even my 4-year-old little brother took it upon themselves to explain to me how life was there. When my friends would elaborate on some gossip or stereotype or the like, they often framed their discussion in light of the fact that I was often viewed as an innocent girl who didn't know about how things were. My new friends and family were unbelievably patient in explaining things and quick to forgive my oversights. Nonetheless, I often found myself swept up in the middle of these negotiations facing differing opinions as to when I was expected to participate and when I shouldn't.

This brings to the fore an imperative methodological point in ethnography: the extent of my presence negotiating interactions and responses. I make absolutely no pretenses to a "fly on the wall" methodology. I recognize that my presence as a foreigner was a crucial element negotiating the relationships that I participated in and witnessed. Moreover, the home I was staying in and the people I associated with also impacted my identity and subsequently people's comments to me and around me.⁸ I not only kept this fact ever-present in my mind, but I also embraced it. Being an "outsider" had some advantages. People often felt very free to explain

⁷ This literally means "Hello, Mother." "Vannakkam" is used in more traditional or formal situations and to convey respect. "Amma" can be used in the familiar and respectful sense of "Aunty."

⁸ Especially when I switched homestays for personal reasons from staying with a Tamil family to a Muslim family, I experienced a lot of confusion from my older friends and acquaintances. Some people restrained their conversation with me while others spoke more freely. Some were visibly much colder to me, while others saw this as a natural step towards Islam.

things to me since they often saw me as comparatively unconnected with people and places locally.⁹ Throughout the course of my stay, I also found my own body being a very real site where these negotiations were played out. How I wore my shawl was a political act, what I decorated my nails with had the potential to be fashion or even *haram*, and wearing saree could be praised as traditional or deemed inappropriate. For example, my Aunt and Muslim friends encouraged me to wear my shawl by spreading out so that it covered my arms. On one occasion when I forgot this, my Aunt stopped me and pulled my shawl down.

While a material culture approach has the advantage of grounding this paper in a more *visual* idiom, I also, recognize the central importance of language. Language limitations are, of course, a very real factor in this project. On a daily basis, I attempted to overcome language barriers by asking multiple and repetitive questions. Additionally, I have a sense that my friends and family often simplified the explanations they offered me, though they were very patient whenever I asked them to repeat something they said or to explain a word. At the beginning I tried using two translators, but I ultimately found it easier and more practical to conduct interviews without them.¹⁰ One of my close contacts, Shibly Sir, also regularly helped me by both arranging interviews with local politicians and offering translations on the spot. Whenever appropriate, I recorded formal interviews to refer back and listen to them.¹¹ I am also grateful to

⁹ When it came to global issues such as the then-current US-UN discussion to hold the Sri Lankan government accountable for war crimes, I found that my identity as an American more significantly impacted conversations. Also, on the few occasions when I was accompanied by a Tamil guide to Muslim places, they would change my nationality to “Australian” or “UK” when introducing me to Muslims because they foresaw my “Americanness” as a conversation-stopper. Ultimately I didn’t find this necessary or honest. I tried not to condone this, but sometimes I felt obliged to let it slide rather than contradict my contacts in public. Later I at least came to understand the rationale for this when I saw a local protest for Gaza where American and Israeli flags were burned.

¹⁰ The translators recommended to me were fantastic, and I loved spending time with them. However, there were ample problems coordinating times and sometimes they didn’t feel comfortable interviewing people of a different ethnicity. They also tended to interject with leading questions and sometimes drastically shaped responses.

¹¹ I also secured explicit permission for formal interviews and recordings either by reading verbatim from a consent form [see appendix], by summarizing it, or letting others read it.

Dr. Vasu Renganathan, who has helped me translate portions of these and revised some of my translations of written sources. Some interviews were in English.¹²

Public Modalities

When conceiving of 'public' in this thesis, I primarily borrow the metaphor of public "modalities" from Daniel Brouwer and Robert Asen. This has many advantages as an inclusive, fluid, process-oriented conception that "foregrounds productive arts of crafting publicity."¹³ Brouwer and Asen understand modality as the manner in which people engage with, construct, and understand the world, whether they be a subject or a scholar. "Modality's 'manner' implicates practice and theory, referring both to ways that social actors engage others publicly and to ways that scholars study processes of public engagement."¹⁴ Importantly, they underline how mode helps us "appreciate that how we proceed in an activity shapes the activity itself."¹⁵ Brouwer and Asen illustrate the critical potential for a concept of "modalities" by comparing it to the rhetorical tradition of "techne." Both, they explain, constitute "neither an inherently emancipatory process nor a reactionary process."¹⁶ By conceiving of the public in terms of modalities, we can focus on the public as constant *negotiation*. In doing so, things like social norms and values become tangible and inescapably rooted in everyday engagements rather than existing in an elevated and elusive realm. With this broad and fluid conception of the "public," I consider as 'public-constructing' many unconventional modes such as rumors and gossips, memory, emotion, imagination, media and the news, and aesthetics. Using the metaphor of modalities also encourages the use of overlapping and simultaneous public modes. Take for example, a Hindu

¹² I conducted 45 formal interviews, 35 of which are recorded, 26 of which are transcribed in English at least in part.

¹³ Daniel C. Brouwer and Robert Asen, *Public Modalities: Rhetoric, Culture, Media, and the Shape of Public Life* (University of Alabama Press, 2010), 16.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

temple festival. This involves the 'public space' of a temple itself; however, festivals--like in most places in South Asia--have a regular tendency to spill out and subsume the surrounding streets, temporarily expanding and/or making visible a community's space. The rituals at the temple itself are of course performed with large audiences. Many people gather before, during, and after the temple functions and chat, gossip, anticipate, and discuss the events together. They also appear on the news or in local gossips or personal photos if one doesn't physically go to a festival space. The metaphor of "modalities," therefore, permits these sorts of creative and salient conceptualizations of publics.

"Feminine" Modalities and the Everyday

Essentially, then, I conceive of a 'public' as inseparable from everyday life and the (especially local) practices that comprise it. Conceiving of a public as an amorphous and constantly-negotiated construction should not obscure the important fact that such constructions tend to, at a given time, exist in particular patterns, routines, and idioms. The everyday "spans consciousness and unconsciousness and grants people the opportunity to interact with one another in lives that are more or less effective."¹⁷ The everyday therefore involves differing levels of attention and different gazes that privilege certain means of performance over others. David Morgan extends this temporal conception of the everyday by highlighting that what everyday performances makes us *forget* is just as important as what they bring to our attention. Even if people choose to affirm or support "top-down" ideas and identities, they must then confront and construct--consciously or subconsciously--what those ideas and identities will look like when they wake up each morning and prepare breakfast, when they walk down the main road to the store, and when they interact with their neighbors, friends, and family. It is in daily

¹⁷ David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History of Theory and Popular Images*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 15.

life that people--individuals and communities--must negotiate their realities and personhood through practices, interactions, and relationships. I argue that understanding ethnicity necessitates the close appreciation of the mundane--food, clothes, and gossips. Interestingly, it is precisely these sorts of constructors of reality and personhood that are often conceived of as 'feminine.'

Recognizing the marginalization of feminized public modalities in popular discourse on the ground, I argue that 'public' should be broadened whenever possible to be inclusive of more people—namely, people who are typically considered 'apolitical,' especially women. To deny these sorts of modalities their due acknowledgment is to impose normative misogynist notions of power, politics, and religion onto vibrant, diverse, creative, and powerful agents of society. I do not mean to minimize the problem of women's exclusion from these more 'normative' types of publics. Rather, I seek to challenge the agency and scope of these exclusive publics and show how everyday actions negotiate and reconstruct these publics. I am not arguing for the significance of beauty and ornament *over* other technologies and modalities. I am simply calling for more attention to traditionally marginalized, though increasingly popular, academic exploration. Instead of focusing on politically and economically powerful elites—and in doing so replicating these hierarchies and structural inequalities in scholarship—scholars are in a position to pay attention to voices and technologies typically considered outside of traditionally hegemonic public modalities.

Beauty and Ornament: Contextualized Material Culture Approach

I use ethnographic methods with a primarily material culture approach to understand questions of Tamil and Muslim ethnicity in Eastern Sri Lanka and how individuals and communities embody their pasts and futures in the present. I use a material culture approach to

this subject to highlight beautification and ornamentation (1) as particular visual and spatial idioms with locally negotiated meanings and expectations and (2) to posture these idioms as local constructs that suggest 'dialogue' and 'exchange' rather than simply as 'othering.' I also find a materially and spatially-oriented approach to be extremely productive in illuminating salient memories of history and notions of authenticity.

With this approach, I admittedly have a broad conception of both "beauty" and "ornament" that spans from bodies to spaces. I do not mean "ornamentation" to suggest decoration, though the ornaments I discuss are importantly recognized as being decorative and beautiful, sometimes even as their sole function. Arthur Danto writes that "Theories of taste, however, are not matters of taste: they bring with them entire philosophies of conduct and of life....So, the absence or presence of ornament always transcends questions of aesthetics alone."¹⁸ In this thesis I show how "ornament" is a subtle yet significant former of place, person, and community. Some scholars describe similar conceptions as vernacular--or, I prefer, an embodied and emplaced idiom. Ornamentation is significantly not codified but fluid and under constant renegotiation. Nonetheless, ornamentation is salient. People use the idiom of ornamentation all the time. It is something wanted by many people here, whether individually or in aggregate. To quote Jordan Sand in *Tokyo Vernacular*:

Every city also has its own vernacular: a language of form, space, and sensation shaped by the local history of habitation. Newcomers encounter a city's vernacular in a torrent of signals demanding interpretation. Occupants, by contrast, apprehend the city's vernacular intuitively, navigating it without needing to bring it to consciousness. The landscape of the vernacular city is a fabric continually being woven. Threads of the past cross with new ones. The individual threads tend to be invisible, except at the margins or in the

¹⁸ Arthur Danto, "Beauty and Beautification," in *Beauty Matters*, Edited by Peg Zeglin Brand. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, 77.

interstices of the larger pattern. As a generative grammar rather than a fixed tradition, the vernacular incorporates modern buildings and products of mass culture.¹⁹

I argue that ornamentation in Eastern Sri Lanka can and should be considered in this sense of a "generative grammar" of visual idioms operating via road, ritual, architecture, home, and body. However, unlike Sand, I do not see this 'generative grammar' or 'vernacular' as necessarily "opposed" to a normative cosmopolitan standard. I see it is as, rather, a rejection of such a standard. It is an inevitable mediation by virtue of our fundamental embodiment.

Concerning the idioms of beautification and ornamentation, my fieldwork shows that what is at stake locally is not necessarily some strange and unique phenomena. In fact, ornamentation is subtle in spite of its frequent garishness. Whether it be nail polish or statues on government land, the people I spoke with about beautification projects more often than not expressed a nonchalant indifference towards them. They would often provide short and apparently self-evident answers or start talking about other subjects. I argue that this is significant: a paradox of a relative silence on what—by many accounts—is a loud visual presence. It is significant that people pay little attention to these participants in their communities, merely *assuming* them to be a part of their culture. Miller argues that the "less we are aware of [things], the more powerfully they can determine our expectations."²⁰ Take for example the trees and statues mentioned above. As locals take the bus to work in the morning or go shopping in the evening, these public beautification projects are ever-present in the periphery. It is, as Justin McDaniel puts it, quite literally "on-the-way" learning.²¹

In this way, I argue that beautification and ornamentation can be conceived of as 'technologies' in both an emic and etic sense with the power to construct and normalize a

¹⁹ Jordan Sand, *Tokyo Vernacular: Common Spaces, Local Histories, and Found Objects*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 2-3.

²⁰ Daniel Miller, *Stuff*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 50.

²¹ Forthcoming, *Buddhist Leisure*, 55.

particular rhetoric on ethnic heritage through experiential means such as embodiment and corporeality. I thus conceive of beauty and ornament as 'technologies' in this acknowledgment of their agency as actual objects that can shape human experience and in their susceptibility to be consciously manipulated and used. And, as Daniel Miller acknowledges, these technologies can be particularly powerful because we tend to ignore them, thereby permitting them to subtly frame our comportment and identity.²²

Technologies of Authenticity

In Eastern Sri Lanka, it becomes clear that beauty and ornamentation compose an increasingly salient rhetoric to continue century-old debates over ethnic heritage and cultural and religious "authenticity." This is significant in light of the fact that most scholars acknowledging the Muslim public beautification of this area see it as evidence of 'Arabization, Wahhabism, or-- more commonly and problematically--'Islamization.'²³ However, a close study of ornament situates these and other local customs and ways of performing Muslimness within wider idioms to defy normative uses of such terms like "Islamization" and "Arabization." When scholars claim that these are merely "Islamic" ways of culture, in addition to making judgments as to what constitutes normative culture based on a particularly configured imaginary, they are missing the fact that they are negotiated *against* a Tamil/Hindu other and are thus highly specific and local. This presentation of local identity through translocal means becomes much more significant when seen in an ethnically and religiously divided place like Sri Lanka. "Appropriation" here is a meaningless term that plays into notions of whole cultural imaginaries and privileges stasis as normative. Insinuations of top-down transnational "influences" often invisibilize not only actor agency but also the distinct local idioms in which such "influences" must be negotiated. Instead,

²² Miller, *Stuff*, 50-1.

²³ Bart Klem, "Islam, Politics and Violence in Eastern Sri Lanka." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70, no. 3 (2011): 744.

I find that people often strategically employ the agency of transnationalisms to negotiate everyday life, and they must negotiate it local idioms. With this understanding, ornamentation becomes an interesting way to explore the complex question of what "ethnicity" means in this context in Sri Lanka.

I argue beautification and ornamentation often appeal to foreign agency for power and legitimacy while also simultaneously defending a distinct pride in and claim to the local. These technologies are often used as groups and individuals seek to reposition their heritage both spatially and temporally with particular power if foreignness—often rumored and/or enhanced through rumor—is used to support the localized notions of authenticity. Ultimately I argue that people use ornament, and particularly transnationalized ornaments, as technologies of authenticity to claim power in ways that they cannot achieve from the State. This is both real (NGOs, international political support, doctrinal unity) and imagined (cultural homogeneity, ancestral/ethnic/biological purity). With a religious, political and ethnic view, these technologies of authenticity seek to deconstruct spatial and perhaps biological realities (especially on the part of Muslims, who claim Arab descent) and create new ones using what is perceived to be a foreign aesthetic. However, they are negotiating this transnationality in local idioms with many important local functions, which merits an understanding of the context.

A Brief Overview of Sri Lanka

I am now compelled to provide a brief and selective general history: Sri Lanka is an extremely diverse island nation entangled in Indian Ocean trade routes both historically and presently.²⁴

²⁴ For more extensive and complete accounts, see *The Sri Lanka Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. John Clifford Holt (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Nira Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006); Elizabeth Nissan and Roderick L. Stirrat, "The Generation of Communal Identities," in *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, ed. Jonathan

However, most scholars attribute heightened ethnic awareness--and to some extent even the current ethnic categories themselves--as predominantly catalyzed by the British colonial regime (1796-1948), though the Portuguese and Dutch had colonized the island in 1505-1658 and 1658-1796, respectively. During the medieval and renaissance periods, Thiranagama writes that Sri Lanka was "highly socially and religiously heterogeneous" and "ethnic/racial categories were not the basis of inclusion or exclusion." Rather, "A wide variety of social groups were asymmetrically clustered around monarchies in dissimilar ways."²⁵ When the British defeated the Kandyan kingdom in 1815 and united the island under a single administration for the first time, "racial" groups began to receive distinct entitlements.

Some scholars have called the British's strategy, both in Sri Lanka and elsewhere, "divide and rule." However, this perhaps more aptly describes the functions/consequences rather than the intentions of the British administration. In institutionalizing "racial" categories, colonial powers did not invent ethnic identities, but they supplied new and powerful channels for them to flourish.²⁶ Nissan and Stirrat write that the British colonial state had "misguided 'liberal' sentiments which sought to protect the different customs of different 'races.'"²⁷ There was still considerable cultural/ethnic diversity within these groups when the British came, but today, the nation is divided generally into three ethnic groups:²⁸ the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority (74.5%), the Tamil-Hindus (11.9%), and the Muslims (8.3%).²⁹ For example, although as late as the 19th century distinctions were still made between the 'native born' 'Ceylonese Moors' and "Indian

Spencer (New York: Routledge, 1990); Sujit Sivasundaram, *Islanded: Britain, Sri Lanka, and the Bounds of an Indian Ocean Colony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Sharika Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

²⁵ Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House*, 113.

²⁶ Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 44.

²⁷ Nissan and Stirrat, "The Generation of Communal Identities," 26.

²⁸ There are of course notable subdivisions within these (such as 'Indian' versus 'Sri Lankan' Tamils) and other ethnic groups such as Malay and Burgher. Christians are ethnically Sinhalese, Tamil, or Burgher. See in particular Nira Wickramasinghe's *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*.

²⁹ Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House*, 12-13. Sri Lankan Tamils have decreased from 12.7% before the war.

Coast Moors,³⁰ today Muslims of the Eastern Province tend to shed these cultural signifiers and go by simply 'Muslim.'³¹

There is an important spatialization of ethnic groups. The majority of Tamils are geographically concentrated in the northern and eastern parts of the country, Sinhalese dominate the southern and central provinces, and Muslims live scattered throughout. These regional distributions have a profound impact on politics of the area, with the southern and west-central areas being at present the most powerful. The Tamil-dominated areas of the North and East saw the vast majority of the conflict during the war, and politicians from these areas have sought (so far unsuccessfully) more self-determination through devolution of power to these provinces. There are significant populations of Muslims distributed throughout the island with diverse heritage, political, ethnic, and religious affiliations. Though Muslim political power pre- and post-independence was concentrated in south/western parts of the island, today, Muslim political power is increasingly concentrated in the Eastern and Southeastern regions.³²

In the 1970s, a number of militarized Tamil secessionist groups emerged out of complex political, ethnic, religious, and linguistic tensions between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority in Sri Lanka.³³ Violence intensified after riots broke out against Tamils across the island in 1983 in what became known as Black Friday. In the succeeding years, the LTTE fought for hegemony over all other groups while fighting viciously for an independent Tamil homeland in the north and east provinces (the 'Tamil Eelam,' the imagined historic homeland and proposed

³⁰ Samaraweera (1979) qtd in. Sharika Thiraganama. *In My Mother's House*. 112.; See also Nira Wickramasinghe, *Dressing the Colonized Body: Politics, Clothing and Identity in Colonial Sri Lanka*, (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2003).

³¹ Dennis B. McGilvray, "A Matrilineal Sufi Shaykh in Sri Lanka," *South Asian History and Culture*, (2014): 248.

³² The East is home to one-third of the total Muslim population. During the war, the first Muslim political parties, including the SLMC, were founded in the East. There are several important Muslim centers in this region such as Kattankudy and Kalmunai.

³³ Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 288-9.

independent state) as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).³⁴ Civil war ensued until the Sri Lankan forces handily defeated the LTTE in 2009 with a widely criticized final drive in which tens of thousands of civilians were murdered. On top of this, there has also been an alarming and fairly unchecked development of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism in the tense post-war climate. Radical groups such as the Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force) have been harassing and looting homes and shops of Christians and Muslims.³⁵ Given these events, many minorities feel unrepresented by the Sinhala-Buddhist state and powerless to do much about it. With the recent election of President Maithripala Sirisena, many have hope that this chauvinism has come to an end. It remains to be seen whether Maithripala Sirisena (often referred to simply as "My3") will keep these hopes alive and make real reforms. My fieldwork was conducted entirely during regime of the previous president, Mahinda Rajapakse (p.2005-2015).

Ramanathan-Azeez Debates: Muslimness as 'Not Tamil'

We now return to Mr. Ajmal, whose opening comment speaks most directly to a political exchange between Tamil politician Ponnambalam Ramanathan and Muslim politician I.L.M. Abdul Azeez in the late 19th century. The two centralized councils instituted in the 1833 Colebrook-Cambridge reforms played an important role in solidifying Muslim identity in particular: the Executive Council, which did most of the work, and the Legislative Council, which consisted of unofficial members and was intended to be more of a ceremonial gesture. Nonetheless, members saw it as a type of 'local Parliament'.³⁶ The governor nominated unofficial members from among the 'locals' to represent the different 'races'.³⁷ Indeed, most scholars trace

³⁴ Ibid., 288-9.

³⁵ Kalinga Tudor Silva, "The Politics and Anti-Politics of the Bodu Bala Sena." Guest lecture at the University of Pennsylvania, October 28, 2014.

³⁶ K.M. De Silva (1973) qtd. in Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House*, 116.

³⁷ Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House*, 116.

the crystallization of Muslim identity as a unified and distinct ethnic identity from that of Tamils to this exchange.³⁸

Ponnambalam Ramanathan was elected to the Legislative Council in 1883 as the Tamil and de facto Muslim representative because there was no separate representative for the Muslim communities at the time. He heard rumors that there would be a Muslim (and also a Kandyan Sinhalese) member added to the Legislative Council and saw this as a threat to Tamil political hegemony over other minorities. Ramanathan gave a famous and incendiary speech to the Council in 1885 saying that the "Moors" were not a separate race, but, in fact, were ethnically Tamils who converted to Islam. He claimed that the distinction of "Moors" as a racial category was a mistake made by the Portuguese, who "applied this term to this community, not because that was the name it went by in its own circle or among its neighbors, but because, like the Moors of North Africa, its religion was Muhammedan."³⁹ His thesis had four main points: "(1) the language they speak at home in connection with, (2) their history, (3) their customs and (4) physical features, the proof cumulatively leads to no other conclusion than that the Moors of Ceylon are ethnologically Tamils."⁴⁰ He published the speech in 1888 as "The Ethnology of the Moors of Ceylon" in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. Nuhman translates part of the following statement by Siddi Lebbe, a prominent Muslim leader based in Kandy, in the *Muslim Nesan* on May 7th, 1888 that illuminates some Muslim-elite reactions:

³⁸ See Ibid., 116-119; M.A. Nuhman, *Sri Lankan Muslims: Ethnic Identity within Cultural Diversity*, (Kandy: International Center for Ethnic Studies, 2007), 115-135; Dennis B. McGilvray and Mirak Raheem, "Muslim Perspectives on the Sri Lankan Conflict." *Policy Studies: Internal Conflicts and State-Building Challenges in Asia*. (Washington, D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007), 11.

³⁹ Ramanathan, translated by and qtd in Nuhman, *Sri Lankan Muslims*, 120. While Ramanathan's point that 'Moor' was a name misapplied by the Portuguese is generally accepted, there is, in fact, a Tamil word *Sonahar* that was used amongst Moors at the time. See Dennis McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict: Tamil and Muslim society on the east coast of Sri Lanka*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 10. See also Nuhman, *Sri Lankan Muslims*, 44-46.

⁴⁰ Ramanathan, translated by and qtd in Nuhman, *Sri Lankan Muslims*, 126.

The Muslims throughout the country are very angry and talk day and night about Mr. Ramanathan's speech at the Asiatic Society that the Sri Lankan Muslims are Tamil converts. I have received letters from various parts of the country, abusing Mr. Ramanathan and degrading the Tamils.⁴¹

The most famous Muslim response was in 1907 by Siddi Lebbe's disciple I.L.M. Abdul Azeez titled "A Criticism of Mr. Ramanathan's Ethnology of the Moors of Ceylon." Azeez pointed to the political motivations behind Ramanathan's argument to discredit it. He asserted that Muslims, are, in fact, a distinct race from Tamils because they are not from South India; rather, they descended from male Hashemite traders from Arabia who settled and married Tamil women.⁴² Nonetheless, while Azeez asserted the importance and predominance of Arab ancestry, he could not and did not deny their interconnectedness with Tamils. He writes:

"...of the Arab settlers some had their Arabian wives with them and others converted and married Tamil women as it was with the Tamils, who were then called Malabars, that the Arabs in contact. The entire cessation of intercourse with their own country, made the Arabs to adapt themselves to their surroundings, and they gradually adopted the language, customs, habits and manners of the people (Tamil) amongst whom they had settled...."⁴³

"...It is true that the Ceylon Moors have the customs of *Stridhanam*, *alati*, the tying of the *tali* etc, and my explanation is that these have been borrowed by them from the Tamils; to whose race their mothers, in most cases belonged, and among whom their fathers settled. Does the fact that these customs have been borrowed by the Moors from the Tamils prove in any degree that they are Tamils in descent and nationality?"⁴⁴

Thus in these accounts, Azeez explicitly acknowledges a significant degree of cultural similarity between Tamils and Muslims while simultaneously defending the community as a distinct "race" because he claims it is still Arab blood running through the veins of Muslims. The desire to be represented in an administrative system straight-jacketed by racial jargon led Azeez

⁴¹ Nuhman, *Sri Lankan Muslims*, 126.

⁴² Ismail (1995) qtd in Thiranagama. *In My Mother's House*, 112; McGilvray. *Crucible of Conflict*, 118.

⁴³ Azeez translated by and qtd. in Nuhman, *Sri Lankan Muslims*, 129.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

and others to over-argue their 'Arabness.' Of immense importance for this thesis, in order to secure racial representation, Muslim elites eventually had to downplay any cultural similarities they shared with Tamils, including even their shared Tamil language. Ramanathan and other Tamil nationalists, on the other hand, sought to use their linguistic and cultural similarities to absorb Muslims into their vote bank and maintain hegemony. Nuhman notes that "Ramanathan gives [more] importance to matrilineal descent while Azeez totally neglects the matrilineal descent and gives [more] importance to patrilineal descent since patriarchy was prevalent among the Arabs and the Muslims."⁴⁵

Race and Place

Sharika Thiranagama makes an important point when she observes that Azeez, though seeking to claim Arab ancestry, "found himself trying not to emphasize the 'foreignness' of Muslims against a Sinhala nationalist movement that had denounced Muslims and particularly Indian Muslim migrants, as outsiders and foreigners."⁴⁶ Indeed, certain Buddhist groups had been targeting Christians and Muslims and "reclaiming" lands and processional spaces, with the riots of 1915 pitting Buddhist groups against Muslims.⁴⁷ Thiranagama explains that even though the British ended up recognizing Muslims as a 'race,' "they had no specific place, thus were absent in the second mythical story, in which certain kinds of people are considered to emanate organically from certain kinds of places, and to have a legitimate 'voice' is to have 'a place of your own.'"⁴⁸ Because of this, Muslim elites like Azeez had to toe a fine line: they argued that they were a distinct Arab race, but they had to maintain legitimate claims to living in the homes they were born in.

⁴⁵ Nuhman, *Sri Lankan Muslims*, 131.

⁴⁶ Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House*, 118.

⁴⁷ Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 114-5.

⁴⁸ Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House*, 114.

It is also important to keep in mind the diameter of circles in which these debates took place. These were *elite* groups predominantly located in the politically powerful hubs in Colombo and the Southern Province. Thiranagama writes that "southern Muslim urban elite [attempted] to transform themselves from a *regional elite* to a *national elite*, speaking on behalf of all Muslims"⁴⁹ much like the Tamil and Sinhala nationalists had been doing. She points out significant regional differences in politics, especially in the East, addressed in Chapter One.

Nonetheless, this blanketed "Arabicized" heritage has had a profound impact on Muslim and Tamil political and cultural developments in the 20th century.⁵⁰ The impact can be summarized as twofold: (1) simplifying the complex and diverse heritage of Muslims across the island, and (2) minimizing the significance of on-the-ground village-level commonalities between Muslims and Tamils outside of these elite circles.⁵¹ Both of these effects, as I hope you will see, are significant for understanding my field site. Indeed, still today people rearticulate and extend these debates, which brings us back to the opening conversation with Mr. Ajmal. In the interview excerpt below, he essentially refutes Ramanathan's claims point-by-point:

Ajmal: [Tamils say] Muslim people speak full Tamil. Muslims people do not speak full Tamil. Tamil people's Tamil and Muslim people's Tamil are different. Now if I want to say the time, they will use the Arabic [terms]. Like that...other things they say...We will say "poddi" [for box]. They will say "peddi." We will say "poddi." Totally different.

Me: Yes, there are many differences.

Ajmal: Yes, totally different. Our Tamil and their Tamil are very different. Our Tamil is like Telugu--have you seen?--it is like Tamil, but not Tamil. Written is Tamil.

Shibly: Malayalam...

Ajmal: Malayalam is there. It is its own language, but it is Tamil that they will write. Like that if you say that in Sri Lanka Muslims speak Tamil...it is no special thing. They speak 100% Tamil.... They will say "pinneram." Here [in Kattankudy] we will say "isha." We will say "isha" for that time of the day. In the morning, they will say "kailai,"

⁴⁹ Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House*, 118.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

we say "suba". Like that, everything...We do not speak full Tamil. We speak about 40% Tamil. But they say, "No, you speak Tamil!"⁵²

Me: They also say that all religions are one, no?

Shibly: They told you? (repeats in Tamil) They told her that our religion and their religion are the same. [to me in English] It is different.

Ajmal: Just that. There are differences. They are totally Hindus--South Asian. South Asian at the start. Our origins are Arabic. The language, that is not a big deal. Also, the appearance [facial features] is totally different. We are very different from them. Also their clothes and our clothes are very different. But they say "no, no, no." So, [there is] a problem (*piraccanai*). They say Tamils and Muslims are the same. At the beginning they said [we were] "Islamiyya Tamilarkal" (Muslim Tamils). Like a small division (*pirivu*) within the Tamil group. They said we were Muslims Tamils. After, they changed [it] a little and said 'Tamil-speaking Muslims.' But that is also not correct. We are not speaking Tamil. 50-50 of Tamil is there [in our speech]. So, we are not Tamil-speaking Muslims. I am just 'Muslim'.⁵³

Mr. Ajmal refers to some former categories for Sri Lankan Muslims and rejects them all, concluding that he is only "Muslim"--religiously, ethnically, physically, and even linguistically. Sri Lankan Muslims reject the category of *Islaamiyyat Tamilarkal* (Muslim Tamils) although this name has been generally accepted by Muslims in Tamil Nadu.⁵⁴ It was primarily Tamil nationalists like Ramanathan and later LTTE recruiters who attempted to include Muslims as "Tamils" for particular political ends. Mr. Ajmal then goes on to reject the term "Tamil-speaking people" (*Thamil Peesum Makkal*), which was previously seen as more inclusive. Nuhman writes that from the 1950s to 1970s this term was used as linguistic rather than ethnic appeal, and he notes that North-East Muslims in particular were willing to accept this label in politics.⁵⁵ Now, Mr. Ajmal discounts it on the grounds that he is not only "just Muslim" but also that he does speak full Tamil. Given this history of ethnic identity, I argue that ornamentation—

⁵² "Ni Tamilthan pesuray! Enru solluvanga."

⁵³ Mr. Ajmal (teacher and former campaign worker) and Shibly Sir (teacher), recorded interview with author, May 24th, 2014.

⁵⁴ Nuhman, *Sri Lankan Muslims*, 13-4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

concomitantly with the gradual 'elimination' of other 'Hindu' practices—is significant as both an indication of ethnic identity and this identity's authentic construction.

Religious Revival

Moreover, with transnational religious revival movements, technological advances, and increasingly mobile capital and labor flows Sri Lankan Muslims have many technologies at their disposal to articulate and perform this racial claim. When Azeez published his response to Ramanathan, he maintained that these 'borrowed' customs did not negate Muslim identity or Arab decent. Even this has become unacceptable to many at my field site. M.A. Nuhman writes, "Most of the traditional and folk cultural practices have been gradually eliminated through this process of cultural purification from the early post-independence period."⁵⁶ From the eighteenth and particularly the second half of the nineteenth century, there were waves of Islamic reform movements sweeping throughout South and Southeast Asia such as the Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama'at, Deobandis, Tablighi Jama'at, and Jama'at-e Islami.⁵⁷ It was particularly after Sri Lanka's independence in 1948 that these movements came to Sri Lanka, and of these, Tablighi Jamaat was most significant. In Kattankudy, the most prominent reform movement has been Tawhid Jama'at, which came to the area in the 1980s.⁵⁸ Actors from this movement have been accused of committing acts of violence against Sufi groups in the area for 'Hindu' or 'folk' practices, discussed briefly in Chapter One.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 183.

⁵⁷ Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi and his Movement, 1870-1920* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996); Barbara Metcalf. "The Madrasa at Deoband: A Model for Religious Education in Modern India," *Modern Asian Studies* 12, no. 1 (1978): 111-134; Yoginder Sikand, "The Reformist Sufism of the Tablighi Jama'at: The Case of the Meos of Mewat, India," in *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam*, ed. Martin Van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell (I.B.Tauris, 2007): 129-148; Yoginder Sikand, "The Reformist Sufism of the Tablighi Jama'at: The Case of the Meos of Mewat, India," in *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam*, ed. Martin Van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell (I.B.Tauris, 2007): 129-148; "Sayyid Abu'l-A'la Mawdudi: *The Islamic Law*," in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden*. Edited by Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

"Traditional and folk cultural practices" is read as "Hindu/Tamil practices." Before the war and before increased connection to the Middle East, Muslims in the east still took Tamil names, covered their heads with sarees, performed in Hindu-esque dance-dramas,⁶² and even participated in a number of rituals like the ones above mentioned by Azeez. While portraits of blissful pre-war harmony are undoubtedly idealized, I would also suggest that the segregation of spaces due to conflict has an important role in negotiates these given the previously interconnected history of the East. McGilvray observes: "Until venturing outside of one's own ethnic neighborhood became a dangerous undertaking as the Eelam "problems" progressively worsened, some Moors would consult Tamil astrologers."⁵⁹ The war, though, coincides with many other currents developing simultaneously. Thus, it is important to note that such polarization is complicated by not only factors of spatial segregation and conflict, but also by particular 'revivalist' sentiments that denounce such "non-Islamic" practices in the name of "purification." This thesis in large part attempts to examine closely the customs of beautification and ornament as technologies that can illuminate these processes of constructing authenticity in light of these "purification" movements.

The Particularity of the East Coast

In the Eastern Province, there is a common pattern for towns to alternate Tamil-Muslim-Tamil-Muslim. Before the war, many towns in the East were organized under a unified village council. After conflict escalated, the number of councils has doubled to accommodate both a Tamil and Muslim one in light of ethnic tensions and pressures.⁶⁰ Dennis McGilvray also finds this at his site in Akkaraipattu, which formally divided into two separate municipal government (one for Tamils, one for Muslims) after ethnic clashes in the 1980s. However, he comments that

⁵⁸ Nuhman, *Sri Lankan Muslims*, 183; McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict*, 320.

⁵⁹ McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict*, 320.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

"Even before the outbreak of the Eelam Wars, the policy of the local government had been to adjust the boundaries of the Tamil and Moorish divisions whenever necessary to maintain a strict separation in local administration between Tamil and [Muslim] wards."⁶¹

Tamils and Muslims have shared a history that is distinct from communities in other parts of the island. The demography is 42% Tamil, 32% Muslim (about a third of total Muslim population), and 26% Sinhalese.⁶² In Batticaloa District where I conducted my fieldwork, a preliminary report (2007) estimates a distribution of 74% Tamil, 25% Moor (Muslim), and 0.5% Sinhalese.⁶³ The ancestry of the Sri Lankan Muslims and Tamils of the eastern coast of Sri Lanka is intimately connected with centuries of trade between South/east Asia and the Middle East (since pre-Islamic times), and between India and Sri Lanka. Dennis McGilvray's meticulous documentation of the kinship patterns of Tamils and Muslims in the Eastern province indicates that both these communities share matrilineal kinship patterns. In this, Muslims in the east are distinct from other Muslims on the island.⁶⁴ In *Crucible of Conflict*, McGilvray builds on decades of fieldwork to propose that cultural similarities between Mappilas of Kerala, the Marakkayars of Tamil Nadu, and the Moors of Sri Lanka suggest common origins. These groups themselves also have a history of intermarriage with Arab merchants.⁶⁵ 'Inter-marriage' and Tamil conversion, while less common today, are likely to have occurred regularly in the past. This, combined with the still-existing shared matrilineal clan system ("kudi"), similar kinship

⁶¹ Ibid., 267.

⁶² Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House*, 121; In 1981 (before the war) figures in the East were 40% Tamils, Moors 38% and Sinhalese 25%, See Spencer et. al., *Checkpoint, Temple, Church, and Mosque*, 20.

⁶³ These figures are admittedly very rough, as figures in general are likely to be given the war and conflict. "Basic Population Information on Batticaloa District 2007: Preliminary Report Based on Special Enumeration 2007." *Department of Census and Statistics*, October 2007, 17, <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/Preliminary%20Reports%20Special%20Enumeration%202007/Basic%20Population%20Information%20of%20Batticaloa%20District%202007.pdf>,

⁶⁴ McGilvray, "A Matrilineal Sufi Shaykh in Sri Lanka," 248.

⁶⁵ Dennis B. McGilvray, "Arabs, Moors, and Muslims: Sri Lankan Muslim Ethnicity in Regional Perspective." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 32, no. 2 (1998): 442.

terms, land tenure, and mosque and temple trust structures all point to a more muddled ancestry.⁶⁶

Politically, too, there has been significant ambiguity between Tamils and Muslims in the east as compared to other regions. Thiranagama, for example, points out, "In discussions surrounding the 1931 Donoughmore constitution instituting territorial representation, eastern Muslims supported territorial rather than communal representation in an attempt to wrestle control away from southern Muslim elites."⁶⁷ Moreover, unlike in other parts of the country, many Muslims in the Eastern Province had ambiguous political loyalties with the Tamil LTTE and even supported them for some time after the outbreak of war in 1983. For the first years of the war, Tamil nationalists sought to include Muslims within their fight for a homeland (though ultimately not as equals), and there were reports of LTTE support among young Muslim boys, of local Tamils being assisted by Muslims in 1985, and of Tamils seeking refuge in Muslim towns.⁶⁸ I was also told at least four times throughout the course of my fieldwork of a famous political declaration in 1976 by MHM Ashraff who said "If elder brother Amirthalingam [then Tamil leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front coalition in Parliament] failed to get a Tamil Eelam, the younger brother Ashraff will get it" (Ismail, Abdullah, and Fazil 2004b: 201).⁶⁹ Ashraff, however, then went on to establish the first Muslim political party (the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress or SLMC) in 1981.

A member of the Kattankudy Urban Council told me that many Muslims in the area had supported the LTTE before 1990. He himself had supported them while he was working in Qatar. He described Kattankudy after 1990 to me during those times as a "prison." No one could

⁶⁶ McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict*, 77; McGilvray, "A Matrilineal Sufi Shaikh," 247.

⁶⁷ Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House*, 119.

⁶⁸ McGilvray and Raheem, "Muslim Perspectives on the Sri Lankan Conflict."

⁶⁹ Thiranagama, *In My Mother's house*, 118.

come in or out. We were sitting in his large house near the beach in New Kattankudy at the time, and a servant came up to him, asked a quick question, and left. After he had gone, Uncle told me that that man was Tamil, and he had worked for him for over 10 years. He said that the man was like part of the family to him. The man lived across the lagoon in LTTE territory and continued to come to his house despite LTTE orders forbidding people to move between territories. While talking with a few other politically active people in Kattankudy, they also made it a point to tell me that the Kattankudy Federation of Mosques, a powerful local NGO and community-organizing group, had also gathered relief items and prepared food for the people in Araiampathy. From the stories I have heard, both towns were technically "cleared" areas--areas secured by the army--and the area across the lagoon was "uncleared"--LTTE territory. Nonetheless, this story paints a more murky picture.

In 1990 this relatively ambiguous climate became more divided when LTTE suddenly forced approximately 90,000 Muslims⁷⁰ to abandon their homes in the Northern Province in an act of ethnic cleansing. That same year, the LTTE massacred Muslims in the east in mosques during Jumma prayers, including a mosque in Kattankudy, the town I lived in. This violence and fear fostered the imperative for Tamils and Muslims to flee into spatially segregated communities, and this segregation remains today throughout much of the East. Moreover, the government sought to exploit the cracks between the Muslim and Tamil communities through such tactics as disseminating leaflets and organizing Muslim Home Guard forces.⁷¹ The idea that the government is intentionally trying to divide these communities persists today (discussed below in Chapter 3).

⁷⁰ Farah Mihar. "The State of Sri Lanka's Muslims." *Economic & Political Weekly* XLIV, no 38 (2009): 24.

⁷¹ McGilvray and Raheem, "Muslim Perspectives on the Sri Lankan Conflict," 21.

In the East, 2004 was another key year. Violence lessened after the tsunami, which itself devastated the East coast.⁷² Violence escalated again in 2005 in violation of a Ceasefire Agreement. In March 2004, an armed LTTE mutiny took place in the East, when former LTTE Colonel Karuna defected. The LTTE lost control of many of the areas it had occupied in the east, but people continued to be threatened now from three sides: the GoSL army, the LTTE, and the Karuna faction (TMVP). Dennis McGilvray and Mirak Raheem note that Muslims were particularly vulnerable, especially at the hands of Karuna's TMVP faction. They write that Muslims in Kattankudy were accusing the Karuna of harassment as late as January 2007,⁷³ International Crisis Group reports ongoing violence in 2008,⁷⁴ and it is likely to have continued after this date. The political wing of this faction--the TMVP--is the current ruling party of Araiampathy, Kattankudy's southern neighbor and the other place I lived.

Additionally, memories of violence live on in the decrepit buildings that remain untouched and in ruins that have intentionally been preserved. Of the latter, Meera Jumma Pallivassal was by far the most significant of my field site. It was the site of the infamous and tragic August 1990 'Kattankudy Mosque Massacre.' The LTTE open fired in the mosque during Friday Jumma prayers and murdered over 100 people. Most people believe it was the faction that is now known as TMVP, the current Tamil political party in power. It was this event in particular that seems to mark the start of the "problem times" in this area, and it was one of the first places that I was shown when I arrived. When some distant relatives of my Aunty who had fled to Switzerland returned to Kattankudy for the first time in five years, it was one of the things that

⁷² See *Tsunami Recovery in Sri Lanka: Ethnic and Regional Dimensions*, ed. Dennis B. McGilvray and Michelle R. Gamburd, (London: Routledge. 2010).

⁷³ McGilvray and Raheem, "Muslim Perspectives on the Sri Lankan Conflict," 45-48.

⁷⁴ "Sri Lanka's Eastern Province: Land, Development, Conflict," *International Crisis Group Asia Report 159*, (2008): 19. [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/159_sri_lanka_s_eastern_province_land_development_conflict.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/159_sri_lanka_s_eastern_province_land_development_conflict.pdf).

they wanted to see. The bullet holes have been left as an eerie and poignant reminder of this tragedy, and people recreate and grieve this tragedy even today (see Figure 1).⁷⁵



Figure 1, *Source: author.*

Organization

The first chapter lays out the specific context of the two towns concerned in this thesis: Kattankudy, a Muslim town, and Araiampathy, a predominantly Tamil town. I focus on rumors, origin stories, territory and land disputes, and relative political and economic power with emphasis on real and rumored transnational networks. I argue that, while memories of violence from the war times undoubtedly shape communities in ways I can never fathom, the primary source of dispute between Muslims and Tamils as such is land. I also discuss how the greatest concern within Kattankudy is directed "inward" between different sects of Islam. Rejecting the

⁷⁵ My Facebook friends still post about it and people are making and circulating documentaries. See Solvathellam Unmai, "LTTE Attacked mosque in Kattankudy, Batticaloa," YouTube video, 5:16 minutes, Aug 12, 2014.

theories of violence in scholarship on this region as 'normal politics,' I use Laura Ring's conception of peace as a sustained in tensions of exchanges, and posit (though I do not assert) that material exchanges when conceived in broad dialectical idioms may facilitate cultural exchanges at varying levels.

The second chapter takes seriously everyday bodily ornaments--those 'mere' decorative pieces--as constructors of public and as technologies accessible for women to embody and engage with polemics surrounding cultural authenticity, community, and personal piety. I look at beauty as a normative and axiomatic concept that negotiates community imaginaries and at ornaments as the technologies for these imaginaries to be embodied. I show how these material technologies are intertwined with rumors yet achieve such salience as embodiments of community, culture, and religion as to render a term like 'vernacular' useless. With a close analysis of tiny examples such as nose rings and nail polish, I illuminate how beauty and ornament embody processes of oppositional, dialectic and triangulated cultural construction rather than simplistic top-down or bottom-up conceptions of "authenticity."

The third chapter looks at public beautification as ornaments of landed "bodies" of community imaginaries. I illuminate the salience of this idiom while also linking it to other related landed idioms such as the construction of temples and mosques. I show how they are constructed by political elites for political reasons, including to appeal to and cohere their 'vote banks.' However, I also show that despite very specific intentions these works have multiple functions and operate polysemically at different levels. I also demonstrate how these works participate tangibly in land contestation and in appeals to globalizing markets. I extend the processes established in Chapter Two to illuminate how these beautification projects embody

dialectical and triangulated processes based on living imaginaries that negotiate communities and what they consider to be authentic.

Chapter One: Selected Context: Land, Politics, and Rumors

"One commonplace saying compares Tamil-Muslim relations to "puttu," a staple favored by both Tamils and Muslims, long steamed rolls of rice flour cakes glued together with alternating stripes of coconut. Tamils and Muslims are said to live together like rice and coconut, integral but separate."⁷⁶

"Even if some...content themselves with [the saying] 'Like puttu and coconut batter' as tasty imagery representing the Tamil-Muslim relationship, the truth based on these two ethnicities/races' relationship for some issues is that of 'water with oil.' Just like that [the] two will not join as one. This is situation that has come to be made reality."⁷⁷

Basic Demographics

In the "puttu and coconut" pattern, Kattankudy was made to be a separate administrative entity about twenty years ago and has an essentially 100% ethnically Muslim population.⁷⁸

Reflective of the attempt to create an ethnically homogeneous division, Kattankudy faces extreme population pressures with box-like area of only 2.56 square kilometers and the highest population density in Sri Lanka.⁷⁹ The cramped living spaces resulted in the pollution of private wells by sewage, which has forced the division secretariat to pipe in water.⁸⁰ In addition to high birth rates, displacement due to conflict contributes to this population pressure. Residents of smaller Muslim villages in the surrounding area fled to Kattankudy during the escalation of

⁷⁶ Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House*, 122.

⁷⁷ K. Sabaratna, *The Soil of Araiampathy*, 31. Original Tamil: "சிலர் இலக்கிய நயத்துடன் 'ஈரினமும், ஒருயிர் போல் வாழும் பூமி' என்றும் 'பிடும் தேங்காய்ப் பூவும் போல்' என்றும் சுவைபட உவமானங்கள் கூறி தமிழ், முஸ்லீம் உறவினை திருப்திப்பட்டுக் கொண்டாலும் உண்மையிலேயே இந்த இரு இனங்களின் உறவினடிப்படையில் அமைந்ததான சில விடயங்கள் 'எண்ணெய்யுடன் தண்ணீரை எப்படித்தான் கலந்தாலும் இரண்டும் ஒன்று சேராது' என்ற நிலையையே யதார்த்தமாக செயல்படுத்தி வருகிறது."

⁷⁸ Hasbullah and Korf, "Muslim geographies," 35.

⁷⁹ Hasbullah and Korf note that this seems to be a general trend among Muslims living throughout the Batticaloa District, where they live in 2% of the district's territory despite being 25% of the overall population, Shahul Hasbullah and Benedikt Korf, "Muslim geographies, violence and the antinomies of community in eastern Sri Lanka," *The Geographical Journal* 179, no.1 (2012): 34-5.

⁸⁰ Shibly Sir (teacher), recorded interview with author, May 1st, 2014.

violent conflict in the 80s and 90s.⁸¹ Migrants settled into frontier spaces and boundary areas between Tamils and Muslims (places that local Kattankudy residents did not want). Kattankudy now divides itself into 'Old Kattankudy' (lagoon side, west of the main road) and 'New Kattankudy' (beach side, east of the main road). In spite of considerable displacement and movement of peoples in the area--officially, at least--the territorial boundaries of Kattankudy have not changed.⁸² Like this, conflict has disturbed and redistributed populations while crystalizing political boundaries of territory on an increasingly ethnic basis. The migrants have also replaced some of the cheap wage labor from Tamils in neighboring settlements, which further restructures work relations.⁸³

The other place this thesis concerns is Araiampathy, which is actually—unlike Kattankudy—the largest *village* within the larger Manmunai Pattu *Division*. Araiampathy has a population of roughly 7,000-12,000 people who are predominantly Tamil.⁸⁴ Most people I have spoken with—and even official documents and website—conflate and use interchangeably 'Araiampathy' (village) for 'Manmunai Pattu' (division). I argue that this is more than mere semantics and, in fact, has a significant impact on local politics and community imaginaries. This is because the vast majority of people in Araiampathy are ethnic Tamils (including both Saivite Hindus and Christians) while the Manmunai Pattu Division, which is about one third Muslim, on

⁸¹ For example, I often visited a particular dargah (Sufi Muslim saint tomb-shrine, also *ziaram*) in Puunochchimunai (a town north of Kattankudy) and spoke on several occasions with a man who cares for the shrine. He told me that, while the land of the dargah itself was given by Tamils, there used to be about 40 or so Muslim families living in Poonochchimunai who are now living Nochchimunai. In those days there used to be a Jumma mosque, a burial ground, and a Muslim school, which has since become a school for handicapped children. Muslims still travel to this dargah—particularly for auspicious occasions—but Puunochchimunai has become a virtually 100% Tamil settlement. The government had promised to resettle the Muslim people. Shrine caretaker, recorded interview with author, April 30th, 2014.

⁸² Hasbullah and Korf, "Muslim geographies," 35.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁴ This is a very rough number I compiled from the GS division information on the *Manmunai Pattu Araippattai Divisional Secretariat* Website. However, "Araiampathy East," listed as having a population of 2181, encompasses the disputed Muslim settlement of Karbala, which would not be considered to be a part of Araiampathy on the ground. I don't know how much of the 2181 people would be counted as Muslim. K. Sabaratna claims that a 2010 Survey reports Araiampathy's population at 12,000, personal note to author, April 17th, 2014.

the whole has been home to both Tamils and Muslims long before the war. The conflation of Tamil village with a diverse division, if relatively subconscious, has significant functions. It gives an empty legitimacy to arguments that Muslims have encroached on what is 'rightfully' Tamil lands, which is what any land in the division--particularly government land--seems to have become. It also plays against Kattankudy as a 100% Muslim Division. When describing to me the towns or explaining something about culture, many people would say, "Kattankudy is Muslim village, and Araiampathy (more generally meaning Manmunai Pattu) is Tamil village." Araiampathy *is* mostly Tamil, but the Division on the whole is diverse and has been for generations.

Basic Demography	Kattankudy Division	Manmunai Pattu (Araipattai) Division
Area (km ²)	2.56	21.5
Total Population	47, 603	31,984
Sector	Urban	Rural
Occupation (from most to least prominent)	Business "Industry" Fishing	Labor (2354 families) Government (1462 families) Fishing (1015 families)

Figure 2: Source(s): Manmunai Pattu and Kattankudy Divisional Secretariat Websites

Population by Religion	Kattankudy Division	Manmunai Pattu (Araipattai) Division
Buddhist	38	63
Hindu	50	21,350
Muslim	40,254	7,565
Roman Catholic	13	1,075

Figure 3: Source(s): 2012 Population and Housing Census, with different (likely low) numbers for total population (Kattankudy: 40,356; Manmunai Pattu: 30,694)

Political and Economic Disparities

As many people pointed out to me, Kattankudy, in contrast to Araiampathy, is more aptly called a 'town' (in English) rather than a 'village' (*kirāmam*). Hasbullah and Korf write, "Besides being a religious powerhouse, Kattankudy is also an economically thriving trading hub in the east, with busy local markets and multiple networks to the national and international markets."⁸⁵ One Tamil man, Mr. Paamannan, put it this way:

If you take Kattankudy that is a big village there we go every day that is a small town if I want to buy textiles, I'll go to Kattankudy, if I want to buy medicine, I'll go to Kattankudy if I want to do building materials, I'll go to Kattankudy because we don't have those facilities in Araiampathy.⁸⁶

The overall effect is very ostentatious, and Kattankudy's visible economic prosperity (considering its having a large number of businessmen) looms ever larger when contrasted with Araiampathy (which has a large number of laborers). The main road in Kattankudy is completely filled with hundreds of fashionable and freshly-painted two-story shops while in Araiampathy there are a few scattered and overwhelmingly run-down one-story shops. These may seem like superficial points, but they function as persistent visual reminders of a stark economic disparity.

Economic power here is, of course, intimately linked with political; in this, also, Kattankudy dominates. Kattankudy has a very prominent politician and political advocate in

⁸⁵ Hasbullah and Korf, "Muslim geographies," 34.

⁸⁶ Mr. Paamannan (microfinance NGO worker), recorded interview with author, April 21, 2014.

Hizbullah, Deputy Minister of Economic Development.⁸⁷ Hizbullah has close connections to the then President Mahinda Rajapakse, and he plastered large posters of his face and of the two of them together so that everyone would know this.

These factors are again more dramatic considering the general loss of political agency that Tamils in the north and east face post-war. McGilvray notes that such disparity is common throughout the Eastern province. He observes that, "Today, in the wake of the 2009 defeat of the LTTE – and despite the disproportionately devastating impact of the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 upon the Muslim community– the Muslims today are visibly the most prosperous community on the east coast, and their educational achievements have caught up to those of the Tamils, who initially benefited from nineteenth-century Christian missionary schooling."⁸⁸ As noted in the introduction, there are also extensive beautification projects that contribute to a display of bustle, wealth, and development (discussed in detail in Chapter 3). I found that Tamils and Muslims often felt and acknowledged these disparities. During an interview with Mr. Ajmal, a school teacher and former campaign manager for Hizbullah, he said that Tamil people were "jealous" (*poṛāmai*) or "scared" (*payam*) of Muslims. He and Shibly Sir, my research associate who was present at the time, had a good laugh after that.

Mr. K. Sabaratnam explained to me his frustration with the relative "laziness" and lack of unity amongst Araiampathy people.⁸⁹ In *The Soil of Araiampathy*, he commends Kattankudy people's efforts writing, "Because of the people's hard work, motivation, perseverance, birth rates, and political factors, today [Kattankudy] has grown in astonishing beauty within a short

⁸⁷ With the recent regime in the election of President Maitripala Sirisena, the political status of the allies of the former president Mahinda Rajapakse is uncertain.

⁸⁸ McGilvray, "A Matrilineal Sufi Shaikh," 247.

⁸⁹ K. Sabaratna, second recorded interview, June 26, 2014.

period of time. One cannot help but appreciate their driven efforts."⁹⁰ I also heard much less generous (Tamil) explanations of Kattankudy's success. A wealthy Tamil businessman, Mr. Aadhesh, explained in detail how Muslim businesses smuggle foreign goods from the Middle East, becoming visibly agitated as he explained this to me. Mr. Aadhesh lamented that "In all present situations, they are the leaders. Muslims are the leaders. They have, this is the thing, they have the money in a crooked way. I am telling frankly."⁹¹

In Araiampathy, the leading politician is Poopalapillai Prasanthan. He is the local leader of the TMVP party, which had local power as an ally of the Rajapakse regime. However, there is also a strong TNA presence and support amongst Araiampathy people. Prasanthan is widely acknowledged as the most significant politician in Araiampathy, but he is also feared and disliked by many. My (Muslim) research associate and his friend urged me to speak with him so I could hear his "racist" opinions. My Tamil teacher warned me multiple times to stay away from him--"he is a dangerous fellow!" So, I asked a close contact arrange an interview with him. He, to my great dismay, failed to show up and ignored my subsequent calls and texts. (Hint eventually taken.) He is the man behind Araiampathy's public beautification projects mentioned briefly above and discussed at length in Chapter Three, but his power, wealth, and influence are relatively limited when compared to that of Minister Hizbullah.

Transnational Aid

In this brief overview of local political economies, it is imperative to highlight the role of transnational aid. Given this particular region's history as both a war-torn and tsunami-affected

⁹⁰ K. Sabaratna, *The Soil of Araiampathy*, 28. Original Tamil: மக்களின் உழைப்பு, ஊக்கம், விடாமுயற்சி, பிள்ளைப் பெருக்கம், அரசியல் செல்வாக்கு என்ற இன்னோரன்ன காரணிகளால் இக் குறுகிய கால எல்லைக்குள் வேகமாக வளர்ச்சி கண்டு இன்று பலரும் வியக்கத்தக்க நகரமாக மிளர்கிறது. இவர்களின் இந்த ஊக்க முயற்சியை பாராட்டாமல் இருந்துவிட முடியாது.

⁹² Mr. Aadesh, interview.

area, together with Sri Lanka's 'developing nation' status more generally, it hardly needs to be stated that foreign aid and NGOs have become in some ways normalized as a part of everyday life. I saw UNHCR tarps repurposed for funerals and often heard directions like "just past Oxfam." In this way, transnational connections are often tangible. Sometimes it was hard to distinguish if the foreign connections were real or imagined, but I maintain that even as rumor these connections are important. A detailed analysis of the foreign politics and positions of people in these towns is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is important to recognize that different groups not only make claims to different degrees of "pure" foreign origins (i.e. Indian or Arabian), they also have increasingly real connections in globalizing capitalist markets.

These may seem like self-evident and ordinary commentaries on political events, but I found it striking during my fieldwork how often people would refer to and appeal to foreign aid, foreign NGOs, and foreign political power. Remittances also play an extremely important role in the Sri Lankan economy and in discourse surrounding transnational connections and power. In 2012, Sri Lankans living abroad sent about \$6.1 billion dollars, which was about 8% of the total GDP.⁹³ In 2013, remittances grew by 13% at \$6.8 billion dollars. Remittance data is typically very rough, but it still serves to show the significant role that foreign and transnational connections--even amongst family members--play in sustaining the Sri Lankan economy. Additionally, Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake calls for scholars to pay more attention to the transnational aid networks in Sri Lanka and other conflict-affected nations. Though her larger

⁹³ Manjula Dissanayake, "Beyond Remittances: A Case of Diaspora Addressing Global Issues in Sri Lanka," *The Huffington Post*, Apr. 5, 2013. Accessed March, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/manjula-dissanayake/beyond-remittances-a-case_b_3011787.html? ; <http://www.dailynews.lk/?q=local/migrant-worker-remittances-top-us-7-billion>

argument is outside the scope of this thesis, she points out that transnational aid has been intimately linked to peace-processes and targeted certain communities at the expense of others.⁹⁴

I argue that it is significant for daily life that people are consistently turning to foreign aid and agency. I would suggest that this is especially salient because these two communities are nationally minorities in a state that seems perfectly content to keep them on the margins. With the government refusing to devolve any real power to the provinces, most people seemed to agree that Tamil and Muslim people didn't have much representation in the State. I noticed many Tamil people were grateful to the U.S. for calling for a UN investigation of GoSL war crimes, a couple people commenting on how India has abandoned the Tamil people, and many people mentioning how the Muslims were always getting help from Arabian countries. Many people at my site (except for a Sinhala police and a small group of government-supporting Tamils) felt the state was oppressing them. Though in this area Muslims were in general viewed as better connected to government resources, for Muslims, there was a threat--especially at the time of my fieldwork--from Buddhist extremists that were persecuting Muslims with rumored support from the (Sinhalese-Buddhist) State.⁹⁵ For Tamils it was continued oppression as losers of the secessionist conflict coupled with a sense of betrayal in light of Indian silence. A key Tamil informant told me,

"So our people are very helpless, are very helpless....The other thing is Indian government cannot also take any small step because the government is so friendly with China. To pursue their own interest India is keeping silent. India is keeping silent."⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake, "Transnational Peace Building and Conflict: Lessons from Aceh, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka," *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 24, no. 2 (2009): 220.

⁹⁵ The Buddhist extremist group, Bodu Bala Sena or "Buddhist Power Force," have been mobilizing support in the past three years for anti-Christian and particularly anti-Muslim political policies such as the banning of halal label and the banning of beef eating. This group has also engaged in a series of violent attacks on Muslim businesses and homes. During my fieldwork (June 15, 2014), mobs targeted Muslims with looting and arson.

⁹⁶ Mr. Paamannan (microfinance NGO worker), interview.

Much like certain stereotypes come to be particularly salient, so, too, were these conceptions of who had foreign connections and who did not. It was also more than idle gossip-- people feel real connections and cultivate their own. And these connections are frequently communally based. For example, after Eid prayers, a group of Muslims burned Israeli and American flags. On one occasion, a Tamil man complained to me that Muslims would have *hartal* (a sort of strike from all business) for Muslim deaths in Gaza, but not if a Tamil man next door died. The Muslim politician mentioned above, Mr. Ajmal, seemed to agree that Tamil Hindus didn't get a lot of help from international communities. Instead, according to him, Tamil Hindus would forward their complaints to Tamil Christians, who receive more aid from Western Christian organizations. He argued that Tamil Hindus have built 150 houses on Muslims lands in Manmunai Pattu with the help of NGOs internationally. He says that the Hindus are supposed to have converted to claim the lands, but he claims they do not. "They will keep a cross on the house, but inside they are keeping a [god] with lamps."⁹⁷

One prominent example of very tangible transnational connections and aid is the case of the widely controversial Saddam Hussein Nagar, located near the town of Eravur about 20 km north of the towns I lived in.⁹⁸ This town's construction was highly contested at the time of its construction and it remained unoccupied for some time before residents were able to settle there. A disputed area in Manmunai Pattu presents another local example that illustrates how these foreign connections translate in very real ways to land disputes like the ones described above. A tsunami resettlement program in Ollikulam has been the source of tension and Tamil worries.

⁹⁷ Mr. Ajmal and and Shibly Sir, second recorded interview with author, June 29, 2014.

⁹⁸ In 1978 floods in the area lead locals to approach the Iraqi embassy for assistance. Saddam Hussein responded by organizing the funds to construct the neighborhood of around 100 houses, a school, and its central mosque, Medina Mosque. People were reported to have kept his picture in their homes and named their children after him. After 2003, these picture apparently have been taken down, but people were reported in some media outlets as being highly critical of the U.S.'s involvement in Saddam's capture in 2003. "Gloom in Saddam's Sri Lanka Village," *BBC South Asia*, Dec. 16, 2003. Accessed Jan. 2015, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3323455.stm.

According to my uncle in the Kattankudy Urban Council, Muslim British Aid helped build about 100 houses: 70 for Muslims (who were disproportionately affected by the tsunami) and 30 for Tamils. A member of the Kattankudy Urban Council described this as a "peace community," though you may by now guess that it signifies quite the opposite at present. A key Tamil informant, Mr. Aadhesh offered another explanation of Ollikulam village saying, "Muslim governments Iran, Iraq, Saudi, Kuwait--they have given the money to the Muslim trustee. They have purchased that land and built Muslim houses and Muslim mosques."⁹⁹

A large number of Tamil people I spoke with (especially those politically active), would describe to me how Muslims are receiving tons of money and help from countries like Saudi Arabia to help develop the Muslim community. A former Catholic bishop told me that a couple of Muslim came to his doorstep asking to buy land. He said that they told him he could name any price because people from Saudi Arabia had given them a huge amount to buy lands and spread their religion. Again, the aim of this thesis is not to investigate the veracity of these claims, but instead to recognize these sorts of rumors and living conceptions as important constructors—modalities—of public space in the area. Transnational appeals fuel countless rumors and gossips. Moreover, I hope to show in the succeeding two chapters, inspires conceptions of beauty and choices of ornament.

Origin Stories: Araiampathy Pride

The origin legends of the towns function to legitimate claims to territory in contemporary land disputes and serve as source of cultural authenticity and pride, particularly on the part of politically active Tamil people. Araiampathy, I was often told, was a particularly special village

⁹⁹ Aadhesh (Araiampathy hotel owner), interview.

because of its rich and ancient history.¹⁰⁰ My literary Tamil teacher and research associate--who was a former government servant and had worked in the Russian embassy--told me that his book is the only attempt to record the village's history. He titled the book *The Soil of Araiampathy* (*Āraiampati maṇ*) because he says the people revere the soil like a god. He writes that members of this village descend from South Indian soldiers and navigators who had accompanied invading groups from South India: After Vijayan's time, in the period intermittently between 200 B.C. to 1224 A.D., the Tamils of the Chera, Chola, and Pandya people and the Kalinga Dynasty invaded the nation, ruled for some time, crowned some small kings, and then left and went back to South India.¹⁰¹ The South Indian rulers that governed here thought it was possible that the Sinhala people that they had fought and made disappear might again return with forces and carry out attacks. Fearing this and taking precaution, they established soldiers to protect the shores near the strip of land on both sides of the Batticaloa lagoon as permanent guards left to guard the river "forever."¹⁰²

According to his account, these soldiers were river guards and landed on Araiampathy's western side traveling along the lagoon in gondolas and other boats.¹⁰³ The first great ruler of Araiampathy was the Maha Rani (Great Queen) Ulaha Natchi (literally, "World Ruler") and she reportedly ruled from what is now the Muslim town of Sikaram (Literally, "Peak"). There is a statue of her on horseback wielding a sword along the median of the town's main road, discussed in Chapter 13. Another town elder, Mr. Tambimuttu, says that Ulaha Natchi came from the Kalinga [dynasty] in India. She brought with her a Siva lingam and built a temple with a huge

¹⁰⁰ 'Mr. Tambimuttu' (former Araiampathy government servant), recorded interview with author, April 13, 2014; 'M.K Master' (Araiampathy village elder), recorded interview with author, July 28th, 2014. 'Aadesh' (Araiampathy hotel owner), recorded interview with author, April 13, 2014.

¹⁰¹ K. Sabaratna, personal note to author, April 17th, 2014.

¹⁰² K. Sabaratna, *The Soil of Araiampathy*, 5.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 27.

gopuram (tower) in Koyilkullam that was later destroyed by the Portuguese. Mr Tambimuttu says that they have found a ruined pillar from this temple and installed it with Araiampathy's Pillaiyar (Ganesha) temple.¹⁰⁴

Origin Stories: Kattankudy

Kattankudy's history as told by my Tamil contacts is comparatively "recent" (beginning in the 1500s) and of course less grand.¹⁰⁵ Mr. Tambimuttu told the following story:

"The Muslims alone have come from Arabia. Having come from Arabia, in Kattankudy from the place of Puunochchimunai, a man named Kaththan came. He was a Vedan [hunter]. Kaththan came and was cooking for himself. He kept a stone and lit [the fire]. Then, the Arabians came [in ships] and saw this stone and light. Here there are people [they said]. We want to speak with them. They came just like that. Muslims are the people that have come from Arabia. The Arabians came and married Tamil women and will be there. Muslim women did not come. The men came alone and for business."¹⁰⁶

K. Sabaratna includes the following account in his book:

Then [in those times] Kattankudy and Araiampathy had been the same unnamed geographical area with a reduced population. Kaththan's own five girls married Turk Muslims in about the time of 1500 A.D. It is in that time that history tells [us] that Muslims came to Sri Lanka for business reasons. Ulaka Natchi's time was fourth century (312-331). Therefore, they both came at different times.¹⁰⁷

The Kattankudy Divisional Secretariat official website has only the following blurb on the history: "The History name of this Village is called as Kattankudy so that a Business man

¹⁰⁴ 'Mr. Tambimuttu' (former Araiampathy government servant), interview.

¹⁰⁵ K. Sabaratna, personal note.

¹⁰⁶ 'Mr. Tambimuttu', interview.

¹⁰⁷ K. Sabaratna, *The Soil of Araiampathy*, 114. Original Tamil: அப்போது இப்பிரதேசம் காத்தான்குடி, ஆரையம்பதி என்று பெயரிடப்படாது ஒரே நிலப்பரப்பாகவும் குடிசனச்செறிவு மிகக்குறைந்த இடமாகவும் இருந்திருக்கின்றது. காத்தான் தனது பெண்கள் ஐவரையும் துலுக்க முஸ்லீம்களுக்கு மனம் செய்து கொடுத்த காலம் கி.பி.1500ம் ஆண்டுகாலப் பகுதியாக இருக்கலாம். அக்காலப் பகுதியில்தான் முஸ்லீம்கள் வர்த்தகநோக்கில் இலங்கைக்கு வந்தார்கள் என்று வரலாறு கூறுகிறது. உலகநாச்சியின் காலம் கி.பி. 4ம் (312-331) ஆகவே, இருவரது காலமும் வேறுவேறானவை.

who named by "kaththan" from Arabia got married a woman and lived in this village."¹⁰⁸ So, in an interesting break from the previous account, the namesake of the town is here an Arabian man and not a Vedan (although 'Kaththan' is then perhaps a peculiar "Arab" name). The subject of Kattankudy's origins never came up in my discussions with Kattankudy people, and I hadn't thought to ask at the time. I would argue, though, that this is significant in illuminating a distinction in 'historical legitimacy' and pride in heritage. While Araiampathy elders boast of their ancient history and the great Ulah Natchi as one of the foremost specialties of Araiampathy, Kattankudy people do not seem as zealous about the story of their ancestors. As far as I could tell, the "historical fact" that was most important--and important it is--is that Kattankudy people and Muslims more generally descended from Arab traders (who, of course, married Tamil ladies).

I did find a history of another Muslim town, Eravur, about 20 kilometers north of Kattankudy, which echoes Mr. Tambimuttu's story. They write that the first people were a native fishing people, the "Timilars." He writes that Mukkuvars from Jaffna (who are also discussed in *The Soil of Araiampathy*) also came and were living in the area. He calls the Muslims that came "Paddaaniyar,"¹⁰⁹ and says that came by sea from either Afghanistan or North India, and spoke Urdu. He also claims that India's border state of Afghanistan had people called "Paddani" people.¹¹⁰ He writes that Paddani people came in a ship that wrecked near the shore of

¹⁰⁸ "About Us: Overview," *Kattankudy Divisional Secretariat*, website.

¹⁰⁹ He writes that they engaged in selling dried peas or *poṭṭani*. This seems perhaps an unlikely business to bring regular trade from the Middle East. Dr. Renganathan suggests that this name could roughly mean "foreign people" or "people from town." Interestingly, in addition to peoples of there N/W region of the subcontinent, there is also a Pattani region in Thailand with a Muslim community.

¹¹⁰ *Eravur History*. Eravur: Eravur Historical Research Centre, 2005, 2-4. Original Tamil: ஏனெனில் அவர்கள் எனப்படுவோர் இந்தியாவில் உருதுமொழி பேசுவர்களாவர். இந்தியாவின் எல்லைப்புற மாகாணம், ஆப்கானிஸ்தான் என்பவற்றில் வாழ்ந்த மக்களை 'அவர்கள்' என அழைப்பதுண்டு.

Puunochchimunai. In a similar manner to the story above, the--now "Arabs"--saw smoke rising from the land and knew people were living there. When the Paddani people arrived, the Mukkuvars sought their help to fight the Timilars. In exchange for their help, the Mukkuvars offered as a reward either women, or gold, or land. The Paddani people chose to marry Mukkuvar women because they wanted to make close blood ties with the Mukkuvars. They married seven women from seven clans, migrated to where these clans lived, and the Mukkuvars provided a number of different occupation workers for their service. These groups then were, the author writes, the first people of Eravur.¹¹¹

These histories exist here as narratives, traditions, and rumors, and I will argue throughout this thesis that they also exist and are embodied by individuals and communities through technologies of ornamentation.

Ethnicized Land

On the ground, many people have strong notions that Tamils should be under Tamil local governments and Muslims under Muslim local governments. In *The Soil of Araiampathy*, K. Sabaratnam even goes so far as to compare the present situation with that of the partition of India and Pakistan.¹¹² Much like people conflate 'Araiampathy' with 'Manmunai Pattu' as 'Tamil,' many people tend to think of Muslim settlements (within Manmunai Pattu) as 'Kattankudy.' People assume that Muslim neighborhoods in the Manmunai Pattu District actually follow Kattankudy's governance politics. These beliefs are not without substantial grounds. For example, one sign for a Muslim organization located in Manmunai Pattu reads: No. 26 Karbala Nagar, Kattankudy (Araiampathy). (Even GoogleMaps marks Karbala as a part of Kattankudy.) People regularly conceive of the Muslim neighborhoods in Araiampathy as "satellite settlements" of

¹¹¹ Ibid., 4-5.

¹¹² K. Sabaratna, *The Soil of Araiampathy*, 29.

Kattankudy, or inversely describe Kattankudy as the "mother settlement." These sorts of everyday confluences fuel Tamil anxieties over "encroachments." Spatially, this could look ominous because the Tamil-majority town of Araiampathy is now almost completely "encircled" by Muslim neighborhoods (see Figure 4). K. Sabaratnam writes with strong suspicion that:

All of these settlements--Kattankudy, concurrently with Karbala, which touches Palamunai, which is diagonally stretched to Sikaram, which bends to Ollikulam, and meets in Kankeyanodai--are linked as a series of points. In this method, these settlements will come to a formation that circles and engulfs Araiampathy village, and in this, it is meaningful to suspect a guilty inner motive.¹¹³

The new Muslim 'encroachments' have led some to reinterpret old Muslim neighbors as 'encroachers.' Karbala, in particular frequents the news.¹¹⁴ The village is located in the northeast corner of Manmunai Pattu and was established in 1977 as a Muslim settlement by Dr. Ahmed Fareed, with the help of Hizbullah's political influence.¹¹⁵ Because the area is at the boundary between Araiampathy and Kattankudy, and because it now seems to be home to many Muslim settlements, Sabaratna writes in his book that the establishment of "this settlement began to add oil to ignite flames of the Tamil-Muslim ethnic problem that were already existent then as small,

¹¹³ K. Sabaratna, *The Soil of Araiampathy*, இக்குடியேற்றங்களை நோக்குமிடத்து காத்தான்குடி; அதனோடிணைந்து கர்பாலர்; அ?தனை பாலமுனையோடு தொடுத்து குறுக்காக நீட்டி சிகரம், ஒல்லிக்குளம் என வளைத்து காங்க்கேயனோடையில் சங்கமிக்கும் ஒரு தொடர்புள்ளித் தொடுப்பு முறையில் அமைந்ததாக இக்குடியேற்றங்கள் இருப்பதனால் ஆரையம்பதிக் கிராமத்தைச் கிற்றச்சுமுந்து ஏற்படுத்தப்பட்டு வரும் இதில் பாரியதொரு உள்நோக்கம் இருப்பதாக சந்தேகிப்பதில் அர்த்தமுள்ளது.

¹¹⁴ Tambimutthu, "Araiampathi pithesathil aththumeeri kaanikalai pidithhavarkalai janaathipathi peci veliyetruven." *Araiampathy News*, Oct. 8, 2013.

¹¹⁵ K. Sabaratna, *The Soil of Araiampathy*, 29; Sabaratna, recorded interview with author, April 16, 2014.

minor conflicts."¹¹⁶ Conflict over this area was ongoing during my time there. After the war and resulting displacement, there is a

significant dispute over landownership in this area. While I was conducting my fieldwork, there was a heated controversy over a Hindu burial ground. A Muslim man claiming he had the deeds was filing the case in the courts during the time of my fieldwork. Mr. Ajmal brought me maps with records to show that Muslims had owned this land for at least three generations. This illuminates the ethnicization of territory and of beliefs in how governments should represent peoples.

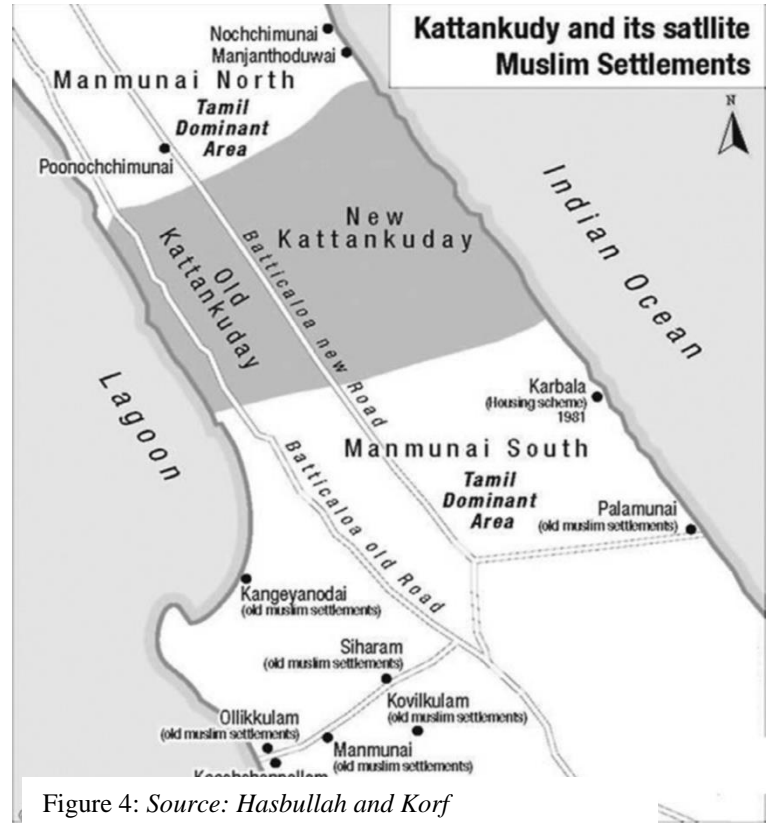


Figure 4: Source: Hasbullah and Korf

People also recreate and reinforce these spatial boundaries in rumor, defining and redefining where they should and shouldn't be. Hasbullah and Korf write of "cartographies of fear," and there is a certainly something of a geography of rumors that is in some ways informed by the violence of the past.¹¹⁷ The following examples shed some light on this dynamic:

"How much is this book?" I asked the (Kattankudy) shop owner.

"150 rupees," he said. "You are studying Tamil?" he added with a tone of surprise.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 29. Original Tamil: இந்தக் குடியேற்றம் ஆரம்பமானது தொடக்கம் ஏற்கனவே சிறுசிறு பூசல்களாக நிலவி வந்த தமிழ் - முஸ்லீம் இனப்பிரச்சினை எண்ணெய் வார்க்கப்பட்ட தீச்சவாலையாக எரிய ஆரம்பித்து விட்டது.

¹¹⁷ Grecoy and Pred (2007) qtd. in Shahul Hasbullah and Benedikt Korf, "Muslim geographies," 34.

"Yes, I have come to study," I said.

"You have come alone? Father, mother...?" he probed.

"They are in America. I have come here alone."

"Are you not scared?" he asked, concerned.

"No. Should I be scared?" I asked back.

"Here [in Kattankudy] it's ok. There is no problem. All people here are Muslims, no? Muslim people will not cause any problem." He told me that if I continued that way [pointing vaguely south] it is less safe.

"Araiampathy?" I pressed.

He nodded. "LTTE. They are all Tamils, no? It is not safe."¹¹⁸

On another occasion, I was scolded by a Tamil friend, Nirupama, for visiting Muslim friends after dark. At a loss for what to say, I commented on how my host-Akka was also angry with me.

"Yes. Muslims, no? You shouldn't go there. It's not safe." Nirupama warned.

Another neighbor interrupted, "Now there is no problem (*piraccanai*)."

Nirupama persisted. "We [*nama*," inclusive of me] don't go there after dark. You shouldn't go alone. Fear, no?" She added, "boys," in English. "They will get drugs from Saudi and those places."¹¹⁹

The spatial references in the rumors subtly construct spaces by drawing upon and reinforcing ethnic boundaries.

Present Tension as Primarily Based on Land

I, like many of the people I met, consciously--not for lack of importance or material--choose not to delve deeply into the war in this thesis. The war and the immense hardships that people in the area faced were not ever-present in people's minds, nor were these defining features of the people I met. Still, such memories inevitably shape the present. Whenever the subject of the war, or of Tamil-Muslim relations came up, people would almost always tell me that "Now, there is no problem" (*ippō piraccanai illai*). I at first was puzzled by this statement. It didn't

¹¹⁸ Shopowner, conversation recollected in field notes, April 19, 2014.

¹¹⁹ Nirupama Aunty, conversation recollected in field notes, April 27, 2014.

seem to always match up with the many communally charged rumors that I was hearing at the time. However, the statement "now there is no problem" is importantly relative. "Now" is—of course—better than then, the problem time (*piraccanai kalam*). And in this relativity, this acknowledgment that now things are better than the hardships of before, there is a tacit acknowledgment of violence as a shared experience for people irrespective of community.

A main source of tension between Tamils and Muslims today stems from land, and though the war aggravated this, such land disputes have existed long before. The issue of land affects people at different levels, with some taking great interest and others little interest at all. K. Sabaratnam writes in *The Soil of Araiampathy* that the disputed settlement of Karbala was established officially in 1977, when "The start of this colonization began to add oil to ignite the flames of the Tamil-Muslim ethnic conflict that had already prevailed before as small, minor conflicts."¹²⁰ Similarly, in the interview with Aadhesh, he dated the first encroachments to 1950s saying that "before 1947 [near independence] most of the area belongs to Tamils."¹²¹ In constructing my thesis this way, I want to reiterate that I do not mean to downplay the very real impact that the war had on re-imaginings and solidifications of ethnic relations. Rather, I seek to demystify and de-romanticize the Tamil-Muslim relationships that existed before it and use that history to better understand the present situation. While it would be naïve and outright false to suggest that war and the polarizations that it fostered are not extremely significant and relevant today, I seek to complicate this by highlighting some continuities. It is often Tamil nationalists who tend to evaluate the current tensions over land through a filter that preferences the war times

¹²⁰ K. Sabaratna, *The Soil of Araiampathy*, 29 Original Tamil: 1977ம் ஆண்டு அரசியல் தடம் பதிக்கும் நோக்கமாக டாக்டர் அகமது பரீத் மீராலெப்பை பா.உ. அவர்களால் முன்னெடுக்கப்பட்ட தொரு குறுகிய அரசியல் முயற்சியின் அவலச்சின்னம் இது. இந்தக் குடியேற்றம் ஆரம்பமானது தொடக்கம் ஏற்கனவே சிறுசிறு பூசல்களாக நிலவி வந்த தமிழ் - முஸ்லீம் இனப்பிரச்சினை எண்ணெய் வாரக்கப்பட்ட தீச்சவாலையாக எரிய ஆரம்பித்து விட்டது.

¹²¹ Mr. Aadhesh, interview.

as a key turning point. They are then able to cast Muslim politics today more nicely as a kind of a betrayal.

It is important to reiterate that most people I have talked to make the distinction that this problem is not of the same caliber as the tension during the war times. For example, I conducted an interview with a Tamil man who works at the nearby Ayyanar temple, Yaanujan, along with both translators Viccu and Chana. I asked a simple and general question: What are the difficulties for this village? He first responded with the deforestation caused by construction of houses. He said that it made it harder to live there because there was less shade, so people were more susceptible to the heat. As my translators were telling me that this was the only problem, he interrupted and added (with their prompting):

Yaanujan: Also, for Tamils and Muslims there is...

Translator: Fear?

Yaanujan: Yes.

Translator: Ah so that is the problem (*piraccanai*).

Yaanujan: It may be a problem, it may be a complication. (*piraccanai irukkō, cikkal irukkō*)

Translators describe the land disputes to me unprompted

This distinction between a "problem" (*piraccanai*) and something of relatively lesser magnitude (here: *cikkal*) also comes through directly in one of my interviews with my Tamil teacher K. Sabaratnam:

Me: So what are the biggest problems [for Araiampathy]?

Sabaratnam: Biggest?

Me: Piraccanai...

Sabaratnam: Piraccanai, piraccanai. Problems. In Araiampathy...we have problem. The Muslim problem. By this side, we are having Kattankudy. The whole Kattankudy is Muslim people. Full of Muslim. Here Araiampathy full of Hindus. But these people, the Kattankudy people, have an idea to capture this land. Capture in the sense, engorge, acquire--our land for their benefit. They wanted to change all the people into Muslim. Or the Muslim people should be colonized in this area. That is the main idea. That is not

obvious. Not obvious. Secret. They are doing the works according to this idea. So you would of heard some days back. We have a beach here. One kilometer. That is uh confined to our people. These people have now come and occupied that area and make it a Muslim town. Even the government is supporting them because we are Tamils and Tamils have no place in the government of Sri Lanka at present.

Me: So how are they colonizing it?

Sabaratnam: Colonizing means they are capturing the land. And they are putting they are building and bringing Muslim people and make them occupy the place.¹²²

Me: How did they get the land? That is state land. And some people are also selling their lands to Muslims.

Sabaratnam: That is the problem here. Because of money. If they ask for more money, they will give. That is our people's bad habit. This is the problem. *But as far as Arayampathy is concerned, we don't have national problem. Nothing problem. Because national wise, the language problem is there, the ethnic problem is there. That is the normal problem. But we don't have specialized problem in that.* Our important problem is Muslims. [emphasis added]

Unfortunately this interview was conducted in English, so I didn't get to hear a particular distinction in word choice like in Yaanujan's interview. However, it is evident in his explanation that he, like Yaanujan, views the present Tamil-Muslim relations as something less than a *piraccanai* like that of the extremely tense war times. Both men, like many others, also highlight this problem as that based on land disputes. Many Araiampathy people feel "surrounded" by Muslim settlements and pressured by Kattankudy's population growth.

Thus, by contextualizing the present tensions in disputes preceding the war--and by highlighting the important and widely-acknowledged relative harmony implicit in the affirmation that "now there is no problem"--I seek to highlight the *coexistence* implicit in the tension. While the increased segregation of spaces and ethnicization of district governments has played an

¹²² It is possible that this idea and word choice of "colonizing" the land comes from, not only the colonial legacy, but more recently the ramifications and suspicions surrounding the Gal Oya scheme in the early 1950s, which intended to improve Dry Zone irrigation projects. The displacement and resettlement that occurred as a result of this project had a considerable impact on the demography of the East. Sinhala settlements popped up around Ampara, and there was a reorganizing of district lines with the creation of the Ampara District such that Sinhalese constituted a significant proportion of the population (37%). These demographic developments were happening in a time where Tamil-speaking populations were facing considerable marginalization from the state with policies like the "Sinhala-only" act of 1956. The demography faced further change in the 70s and 80s with the Accelerated Mahaveli Scheme. See Spencer, et. al., *Checkpoint, Temple, Church, and Mosque*, 49-52.

important role in separating peoples and polarizing local politics, there also seems to be an important commitment to the relative peace of the present times. This coexistence, however, precludes notions of cultural/ethnic *coherence*, which seems to have been more prominent before the war more severely segregated people. Tamil people would often tell me that "now there is no problem" because Muslim people will "come and go."¹²³ Implicit in this is notion of 'coming and going' are notions of belonging and of otherness. Others are free to come and then go because there is peace, but they do not belong there.

In this way, the violence of the past can be importantly conceived as something of a shared experience for people living at this border. This is meant to complicate literature reducing histories of violence as primarily divisive and "othering" and to reject outright notions of violence as a continuation of everyday politics.¹²⁴ The latter view is highly problematic in its implication that violence is an innate quality that leads to "natural" fruition in violent acts. I build on Laura Ring's insightful ethnographic work on everyday peace-building in Karachi that argues that "peace is an outflow of our distinctly human capacity for sociality; that peace lies in a maintenance of tension, not in its discharge."¹²⁵ I argue for an approach that also understands violence as a shared experience that can build a conscious commitment to peaceful *coexistence*. My fieldwork on ornament and public beautification (Chapters Two and Three) shows, however, that such a history does not necessarily create *coherence*. A tacit precondition to any ideas of "coexistence" is that people are working with notions of distinct entities/imaginaries of "otherness." Nonetheless, without reifying "otherness," I suggest that it is not inherently

¹²³ Sabaratnam, interview; Aadhesh, comment recollected in field notes, April 18, 2014; Mr. Taambimuttu, interview; Shibly Sir, interview.

¹²⁴ Andreas Wimmer, "The making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries: a multilevel process theory." *American Journal of Sociology* 113, no. 4 (2008): 982; Bart Klem, "Islam, Politics and Violence in eastern Sri Lanka," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70 (2011): 740; Jonathan Spencer, *Anthropology, politics and the state: democracy and violence in South Asia*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 120.

¹²⁵ Laura Ring. *Zenana: Everyday Peace in a Karachi Apartment Building* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 80.

incompatible with peace. Ring quotes Briggs' point that "opposition and antagonism may coexist with and even help to construct systems of peace and nonviolence."¹²⁶ I often would notice that when people intentionally avoided discussing politics or conflict or tension, they would switch to talking about "cultural differences."¹²⁷ A subtle point that this thesis puts forward (albeit hesitantly, and with much room for development and critique) is that material exchanges play an important role in deflecting particular tensions over authenticity while engaging in peaceful dialectics.

Sufi-Tawheedi Disputes

This point--of cultural and ornamental dialectics maintaining fairly stable relationships of coexistence--is important in illustrating another important tension in these villages: a so-called 'intra-ethnic' tension between Sufis and primarily Towheedi groups. When I moved just a few lanes away from the boundary road, conversations about Tamil-Muslim relations rarely came up. I argue that this is more than coincidental. It illuminates the ground reality that Muslims aren't too concerned with Tamils (in spite of Tamil anxieties for Muslim political economic eminence and population expansion). Instead, there are other--more pressing--problems in Kattankudy that

¹²⁶ Briggs (1994, 155) qtd. in Ring, *Zenana*, 65.

¹²⁷ One especially notable example of this was a conversation with older Tamil friends after just having moved to a Muslim house. They were understandably confused and perhaps even felt slightly betrayed. We began to discuss the situation in what I initially saw as a roundabout way. Rani Akka and her daughter-in-law Rukshi complimented my henna and asked me if a Muslim girl did it. Yes, my new host-younger-sister Wasma had designed it. Then, Rani Akka asked me if I was eating well there—a conventional enough question. I said that I was. She offered politely that Muslims cook very well (a common stereotype based on the idea that Muslims eat meat all the time). She listed all of the spices that they would use, counting on her fingers as she went. Then she asked me, “They eat a lot of cow, no?” Her face cringed as I tried to be diplomatic in explaining “yes” in the least offensive way possible. It didn’t really matter—she, of course, already knew. She then asked me directly, “Do you eat cow?” I fidgeted as I pointlessly tried to deflect the question, “Many people in America eat cow.” “Ah,” she said, nodding. There was a brief awkward pause as I felt—or perhaps imagined—my local identity shifting right before my eyes. Then her younger brother GhannanAnnan (still a middle-aged man) jumped in, “That mosque will slaughter sixty cows for their festival. Sixty cows! And they will give out in bags raw (*paccai*).” From field notes June 19 He was referring to the feast held by the (Sufi) Badhriya Jumma Mosque. I had been to the feast and confirmed that, in fact, no cows had been slaughtered. The mosque gave out tamarind rice—completely vegetarian. He then back-tracked somewhat, but still convincingly and diplomatically offered that that mosque was a good (*nallam*) mosque. He said they would offer flowers as he mimicked a circular puja-esque motion—apparently a positive attribute in his book. Recollected from fieldnotes, June 19.

come to the fore. Namely, that many Towheedi and other Muslims deem certain Sufi practices and beliefs to be outside of Islam. To over-simplify a larger and theologically more complicated debate—and to emphasize why a material culture study is perhaps particularly productive in exploring it further—a few people have referred to this problem as an *uruvam piraccanai*, or a problem over form/shape.¹²⁸ This controversy extends to many Sufi beliefs and practices such as the keeping and venerating of tomb-shrines (*ziaram*), the making of vows, and the hosting of large kantoori feasts. While these Sufis in no sense conceive of themselves as 'Hindu' and defend these practices as in the tradition of the Prophet, opponents see these practices as similar or the same as Hindu practices. I would suggest that such perceived ambiguity threatens the balance of tension in cultural exchanges that many Muslims have historically worked to establish so as to secure a distinct racial identity from Tamils.

There is one major *ziaram* within the borders of Kattankudy inside the Badhriya Jumma Mosque that identifies as "Sunnat Wal Jamaat" and is led by Rauf Moulavi. Just south of Kattankudy's official border (though unofficially considered to be within Kattankudy) is the All Ceylon Thareekathul Mufliehen headquarters, meditation center, and founder's *ziaram*. Though these two groups are commonly lumped together as "Sufi" by scholars and as "kafr" by opposing Muslims--and despite the fact that these two groups have shared some connections and sympathies in the past--many people within these communities view the other as distinct. Members of the Thareekathul Mufliehen spoke strongly against the shrine veneration carried out in Badhriya while my major contact with Badhriya said of Thareekathul Mufliehen, "They were with us in the beginning, but now no."¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Shibly Sir, interview; M.K. Master, interview.

¹²⁹ This merits further attention and nuance than it has been given thus far in scholarship. These two Sufi groups are rarely distinguished in the literature, but they have some strong doctrinal and ritual disagreements that I encountered throughout my fieldwork. Moreover, there are publications on the Thareekathul Mufliehen website explicitly

Tensions between these two Sufi groups and other so-called reformist groups predominantly under the umbrella term of "Tawheed Jamaat" have escalated since the mid-1970s. Rauf Moulavi was excommunicated from Islam by the All Ceylon Jammiyathul Ulama in 1979¹³⁰ after giving a speech that others describe as saying that "God is in everything...everything is in God."¹³¹ One Badhriya member told me the debate intensified on the nature of the Prophet as embodied in the issue of whether the Prophet had wet dreams. Rauf Moulavi told that the Prophet did not have wet dreams because of his special nature. This dispute on the nature of the Prophet was the first official source of conflict in the Muslim community of the area, and this conflict festers very much so today. Before arriving in Kattankudy, Payilvan, too, was excommunicated by the local ulema in his hometown in Maruthamunai.¹³²

Badhriya supporters have faced violent persecution multiple times. Many Sufis suffered displacement into Araiampathy after the destruction of their homes, grenade attacks, and shootings.¹³³ Rauf Moulavi survived an attempted assassination in the office room opposite his mosque in 2006/7 in which there were bullet holes in the back the chair he was sitting in--a miracle and now a testament to his special nature as a *wali*. He fled to India near Ajmer Sharif and has cultivated important ties with this shrine. On December 12th, 2006, a crowd of people attacked the Thareekathul Mufliehen ziaram and meditation center of Sheihul Mufliehen M.S.M.

denouncing the Badhriya leader Rauf Moulavi. See *The Whiplash of Truth to Bid'ah* by Sultan ul Arifin Sheihul Mufliehen M.S.M Abdullah (Rah), <http://www.mufliehen.org/Content/Attachment/Book/Pdf/The-Whiplash-of-truth-to-BidAh.pdf>.

¹³⁰ Spencer, et al., *Checkpoint, Temple, Church and Mosque*, 96.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 96. However, this is grossly oversimplified. I have heard Rauf Moulavi say in a bayan posted on YouTube that this is not what he means.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 96.

¹³³ There are perhaps important connections to made, as yet unexplored, between these attacks and the militarization of parts of the Muslim population into Home Guards organized and supplied by the Sinhala state. One contact connected the distribution of special ID cards and illegal weapons to Muslims in Army Intelligence to attacks on the Badhriya Sufi leader (with machine guns and grenades). He described how in 2007 Rauf Moulavi survived an attack on his life in the very room where we had first spoken. There were 32 bullet holes including some in the chair that he was sitting in, but he escaped. He said that some people consider him to be a normal moulavi, but he is more than normal human, he is a wali. Abhiman Sir, recollected from field notes, July 14, 2014.

Abdullah(Rah) (also known as "Payilvan," or "wrestler")located at the southern Kattankudy border in Manmunai Pattu.¹³⁴ The attack was systematic, planned, and clearly intended for ends that extend beyond the act itself. People brought heavy-duty equipment to destroy the beautiful minaret, and they also brought video equipment. After the incident, the footage was even sold in Kattankudy on DVD.¹³⁵ The body of Abdul Payilvan was exhumed and burnt like, as one contact put it, "like a Hindu." These instances of violence are an important dynamic in Kattankudy, and they also illustrate how an important component of tension here is negotiated in polemic terms of being either kafr "Hindu" or "true" Muslim.

¹³⁴ Their website claims that they have over 15,000 members and summarizes the group's beliefs as follows: Members of this society follow Islam and hold the belief in "Tawheed" (Omnipresence of God or Oneness of the Being). This is perhaps interesting in light of the fact that most scholars (myself included for the time being) writing on this town describe as "Tawheed" the persecutors of this group.

¹³⁵ Spencer, et. al., *Checkpoint, Temple, Church, and Mosque*, 93.

Chapter Two: Personal Beautification

As soon I arrived home after a long walk from a friend's place on the other side of Kattankudy, I immediately removed the black shawl draped across my chest and arms and went to wash off the dust and sweat. Feeling refreshed, my host-sister Wasma and I relaxed and watched a new Bollywood film--the finicky internet connection and ignorance of Hindi notwithstanding.

At around 5:00, I spread out my green saree and started to quickly iron out some of the wrinkles. Wasma looked a little puzzled.

"You're going to tie a saree?" she asked me. She had never seen me wear one before.

"Yeah, there's a function at the temple, and my friends told me that I should wear a saree," I explained. The previous day they had gently rebuked me for wearing a relatively casual shalwar kameez.

It was the second week of June--here, part of a vibrant Hindu temple festival season. I had just moved out of Raji Akka's house on the boundary road and in with my new Muslim Auntie a couple lanes deep into Kattankudy. Just down the road in Araiampathy, the Kanagi Amman temple was celebrating the annual Door-Opening Grand Festival (*tirukkataavu tirattal tiruviḷā*) one of the biggest local festivals of the year.

I put on the underskirt and blouse. I tied a tiny knot in the corner that I then tucked into the underskirt. I was in the process of wrapping and tucking the appropriate length into the underskirt when my Auntie came home. I assured her I knew how to tie it--I had never seen her or her sisters ever wear a saree. I also, of course, had heard a lot of rumors that Muslims don't know how to tie sarees.

But, she came in to check on me again and looked interested, so I asked her if she wanted to tie it for me. She gladly agreed. I immediately noticed that she didn't have the speed or grace that comes with constant practice. She also didn't fold the pleats in the typical way using the finger trick, the pollu that hangs off of the left shoulder was much shorter than I had ever seen it before. Nonetheless, she knew what she was doing. All in all, the saree was on, and it looked pretty good, which is most of the battle. As I was leaving, she half-jokingly suggested I wear a bindi (pottu in Tamil), but then laughed and said that they would probably give me one when I got there.

I arrived at the Kannagi Amman temple a bit early. I waited in the sand until my friend Saratha Akka and her sister-in-law arrived. They approved of my saree. Did I tie it myself? they wondered. I explained that my Auntie tied it.

"A Muslim tied it?! It's not bad! It's neat. Muslims don't usually tie sarees," Saratha Akka exclaimed, a look of surprise dancing across her face. Then they noticed the pollu and commented how it was too short.

"But where are your bangles?" Saratha's sister-in-law asked suddenly.

"I usually don't wear them." I didn't really care for bangles. They can hurt and make a lot of noise.

You should really wear bangles. I am going to buy you some [from one of the many tiny shops selling just about everything]."

I assured her that wasn't necessary, and I had thoughtlessly brought just enough rupees to give to the woman watching over my shoes. Both Saratha Akka and her sister-in-law agreed that, if I had bangles, it would be perfect. I repeatedly assured them that I would wear bangles next time. But, when Saratha Akka went to buy snacks for her children, she came back with two light green plastic bangles in an attempt to match my green saree.

Aside from a few "key informant" interviews, most of my (especially female) friends and people I met in passing seemed reluctant to discuss these political matters directly. I also avoided asking directly as a methodological point. When issues did come up in conversation, people would often deflect any questions, shrug off any kind of tension, or stress that "You don't want to get involved in politics." But, when people wouldn't speak about ethnic tensions directly, they would almost always feel freer to discuss cultural differences such as ornament, ritual, and food. Raji Akka consistently and aggressively downplayed any ideas of tension between Tamils and Muslims. Because I lived with her and knew her better, I would ask her more direct questions. On one occasion while we were walking down the boundary road past a Pillaiyar (Ganesha) Temple, I asked her if there was ever any problem with Muslims complaining about the temple bells.¹³⁶ She immediately replied, "Chi! It is not like that!"¹³⁷ and I immediately felt ashamed for asking such a question. But she would discuss without hesitation the differences in diet, dress, and festivals. As I mentioned in the introduction, she even encouraged me to change my greetings and dress when speaking with her Muslim friends, though she didn't practice these changes herself.

I gradually began to understand that these cultural exchanges and explicit deflections of tension were in fact highly political themselves once we complicate misogynist notions of what

¹³⁶ I had heard from the Pillaiyar temple's Iyer (Brahmin) priest himself that there had been an incident where a few Muslims called the police and requested the puja be conducted later so that the instruments wouldn't wake people.

¹³⁷ "Chi! Appadi illaiyE!" Akka, recollected from field notes, April 26, 2014.

is "public." Laura Ring faces a similar realization in her work with women and neighborliness in a Karachi apartment. She writes that domestic spaces, far from being a private sphere 'restricted' to women, are "sites of political processes, not just of gendered and generational conflict but of class, ethnic, racial, and national struggles."¹³⁸ Ring conceives of the zenana as a public space and recovers the agency and politics behind her neighbors' actions in actively constructing 'peace' amid ethnic tension.

With a more material culture and corpothetics approach, I, too, am claiming the feminized 'space' of ornament and of beauty as important public modalities. It is perhaps distinctively evident in diverse boundary areas like this one that what you decide to wear in the morning and how you wear it is an intrinsically and simultaneously personal, social, political, religious, and ethnic act. Here, beauty and ornaments are both axiomatic technologies. Ornaments simultaneously construct and constitute 'authentic' identity. People use ornaments to cultivate certain identities while excluding others. This aspect of "beauty" is so integral, that I would suggest that the term, "beauty," itself has prescriptive and normalizing connotations.

Literature Review

Even though some scholars explicitly recognize common, everyday materials such as jewelry to be significant, the number of thorough studies on these is very few. Thus, I will be exploring personal beautification in this chapter. Arthur Danto notes that it is deceptively easy to view 'beautification' and 'cosmetics' in what he describes as a "Third Realm" of beauty that is in between the "natural" and the "artistic." It is concerned with *processes of beautification*. He notes that "Third Realm" beauty has been marginalized in philosophical discourse despite its predominance in everyday life. "In this realm, things are beautiful only because they were beautified--and beautification has perhaps seemed, to a puritanical philosophical consciousness,

¹³⁸ Ring, *Zenana*, 2.

to be—the term is Hegel's—*unworthy* of philosophical attention. Morality has always been of central philosophical concern, but discussions of manners, which Hobbes sneers at as "small morals," have been barely noticed.¹³⁹ He suggests that "perhaps nothing cosmetic is without meaning."¹⁴⁰ While Danto importantly urges us to look at beautification as not just "mere" beautification, Daniel Miller further complicates ideas of not just what beautification signifies, but how it is an important constructor of meaning with his critique of 'depth ontology.' He sees a problem with 'semiotics' theories in that they "presume a certain relationship between the interior and exterior."¹⁴¹ He challenges the assumption that "*being*--what we truly are--is located deep inside ourselves and is in direct opposition to the surface."¹⁴² Thus, the "self" is something constantly in flux, constantly changing, constantly *accumulating* via our surroundings.

David Morgan highlights that "The habitus is not situated above the clouds but in the memory, in the body of each social actor."¹⁴³ He sees the cultivating of individuals and collectives as continual processes of somatic engagement with two primary ways of seeing: (1) to be seen as a member of community, meaning similar appearance, and (2) to see others and the world in the way of the community.¹⁴⁴ Also drawing on by Bourdieu, Miller writes that "much of what we are exists not through our consciousness or body, but as an exterior environment that habituates and prompts us." He also notes the etic implications of an object's tendency to appear obscure; anthropologists have dismissed material culture studies as missing the point--missing humanity. Justin McDaniel states that "instead of studying images individually as symbols of Buddhist virtues, as vehicles or meaning, or representative of certain stylistic developments, I am

¹³⁹ Arthur Danto, "Beauty and Beautification," in *Beauty Matters*, eds. Peggy Brand (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 71.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁴¹ Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 16.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁴³ Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 205.

¹⁴⁴ David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 5.

interested in how images participate in the social construction of reality.¹⁴⁵ I also am interested in treating ornaments not in and of themselves, but as participants in society and as embodiments of constructed reality.

Speaking of affect theory, Melissa Gregg finds that "With affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself--webbed in its relations--until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter."¹⁴⁶ She notes that intersections between affect and aesthetics "not *what* something is, but *how* it is."¹⁴⁷ While affect theory only indirectly and tangentially applies to this thesis, in this chapter I am looking at *how* people negotiate what is "authentic" and what is "other" through ornaments. Without sinking into the dangerous trap of taking everything to be 'symbolic' and therein 'exotifying' the people concerned in this thesis, I argue with those suggesting that 'beauty' merits study in and of itself. This argument has merits in drawing attention to beauty as a salient value in society. However, it ultimately threatens to entrench the feminization-marginalization of beauty, ornament, decoration, etc. by compartmentalizing these as distinct from other, more 'practical' or 'political', concerns. I seek to combine feminist, material culture, and some affect theory to explore lived implications for a now widely popular approach of 'embodied' engagement with the world.

Conceptions of Beauty

At any given time, particular idioms of beauty are salient. However, there are important--and often multifaceted--dialogues between norms and individuality, society and self, structural and actor agency. Justin McDaniel moves away ever slightly from Bourdieu's habitus and uses the Ilana Sibler's idea of "repertoires" to emphasize individual actor agency in choosing from her

¹⁴⁵ Justin McDaniel, *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 165.

¹⁴⁶ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," *Affect Theory Reader*, eds Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

specific repertoire that is publicly informed, where "Culture in this sense is a dialogue between people who draw on different repertoires informed by often shared technologies as well as harder to define beliefs."¹⁴⁹ Individuals negotiate their own personal fashions within salient idioms--recreating beauty ideals by affirming or subverting them. People embody, perform, and negotiate this dialectic in everyday life. This chapter focuses on how personal, embodied ornaments from nose piercings to ways of drinking can negotiate particularly socio-ethnic pasts and presents.

Other works such as *The Grace of the Four Moons* and *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* illustrate the complexity of individual choices and rationales. Sukla and Tarlo (respectively) provide rich details and insights into the negotiation of these idioms from within particular communities with the explicit purpose to complicate idioms by emphasizing various personal choices. This thesis focuses slightly more generally on boundaries and their negotiation. This particular chapter looks at how individuals create beauty while embodying and negotiating fluid standards for their communities. Therefore, while this thesis privileges the negotiation of the communal, it is worth reiterating that something as fluid and salient as 'beauty' can never be accurately reduced to community imaginaries. While beauty plays an important role in constituting and negotiating oppositional and ethnic understandings, beauty also operates to express individual style, taste, and skill. For example, clothing here is very frequently custom-made with elements of artistic and creative expression. Wasma practiced sewing her own shalwar, and my friend Shani picked out beautiful fabrics and left very specific and unique instructions with the tailor. Many women in Kattankudy buy iron-on jewels and design their own abaya embellishments, and the choices of jewelry and other accessories is highly varied. There

¹⁴⁹ McDaniel, *Lovelorn Ghost*, 12.

are countless permutations, nuances, and contradictions to personal design outside the scope of this thesis.

There are also certain fluid yet sticky holistic conceptions of beauty and ornamentation in an appropriate sense. For example, on some occasions, I would ask friends if there was any particular color associated with their religion, and if so, what colors they associated with other religions. People tended to focus on a particular idiom of beauty/or ornament when responding. For example, my Aunty focused on architecture and told me that for Muslims green was important because a lot of the mosques were green (which is seen as "cooling" for eyes), Hindus used red and yellow in their temples, and Buddhist viharas were white. My friend Shani responded focusing on the wedding sarees: Hindus red, Christians white, and Sinhalese usually white, too. Another friend, Shalini, looked to the color of the clothing worn by lay devotees, suggesting that Hindus had no particular color, Buddhists and Christians were white, and Muslims preferred black.

These conceptions are not merely gossiped about--though gossip is extremely salient in its own right and intimately intertwined with ornaments and other public constructors. These conceptions are also frequently--both in the present and historically--codified through text, ordinance, and ritual. A famous example of this is the Indian Deoband figure Ashraf Ali Thanawi's book *Bhishti Zewar*, literally meaning "Heavenly Ornaments." In this, Thanawi identifies a number of customs in the public spaces of women, including adornment, warning that these customs have become like shariah and should be substituted with what he perceives to be the "True" shariah.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Perfecting Women, Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's Bishishti Zewar, A Partial Translation with Commentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

Beauty as Piety Embodied

Based on my brief fieldwork in both Madurai and in Sri Lanka, I would thus like to pose two main distinctions to notions of beauty that often operate simultaneously. One refers to a particular something that is beautiful, like a saree or pair of earrings or a skin tone. The other refers to a more general idea of beauty that is more conservative in nature and intimately connected to ideas of piety and community. For example, while women in Kattankudy are encouraged to dress modestly and avoid drawing attention to their beauty, people describe abayas--paradoxically intended at some levels to conceal beauty—as "beautiful." Similarly, my friend Subo was describing to me the word *maṅkaḷam*, which roughly translates to "auspiciousness," which in a Hindu context is associated with elaborate systems of dates, times, rituals, etc. Rather than give me a particular definition, she described it very specifically as an Indian girl wearing white jasmine flowers (*mallihai pū*) in her hair, a saffron-colored (*kāvi*) saree, gold bangles (*taṅka vaḷaiyal*), particular gold earrings (*jimikki*), a bindi (*pottu*), and silver anklets (*veḷḷi kolucu*). This is largely unachievable here because jasmine flowers are not common in this area. (Also interesting, in this conception, Subo positions the epitome of auspiciousness not in Sri Lanka, but in India.) Nonetheless it remains an important living conception of how things "should" be. Subo describes a traditional and conservative definition of beauty, as opposed to many of the trendier fashions that she herself wears such as silver jewelry and soft pastel colors.

I also discussed *maṅkaḷam* with an "expert" who worked for Sri Lanka's Department of Hindu and Cultural Affairs who explained to me in detail *maṅkaḷam* in a very similar way to Subo's image of it:

K: I have a doubt about *maṅkaḷam*. If you say '*maṅkaḷam*,' I don't think it translates well in English.

Another woman: [interjecting] With pottu, *maṅkaḷam*, without pottu, *amaṅkalam*. Cultural "expert": Having kept a pottu...if you want to say *maṅkaḷam* in the Saiva tradition, [it is] tying up/combing hair, putting a garland (*maalai*), keep a pottu, wear earrings, clothed in decorative saffron color clothes, flowers in hair; a *maṅkaḷa* girl needs to be complete (*niṛaiivāṇa*). This is *aitṭkam*. If you want to understand a complete girl, you should know this. [She] ties a saree, ties gold coins across forehead, puts a nose ring- this is all identity (*aṭaiyāḷam*) for girls.

Thus, when I first asked the Cultural Affairs expert, I could tell that she also didn't know a particular definition of *maṅkaḷam*. Rather, evident from the description she gave, she was speaking from a mental image that primarily consisted of ornamentation rather than any kind of memorized doctrine. Indeed, the other woman present also conceived of it ornamentally and described it in term of "pottu," Tamil for bindi. The Cultural Affairs expert also presented me a copy of a booklet about *maṅkaḷa tarma*, explaining to me examples of *maṅkaḷam* in rituals in the home and temples. In this, she elaborated on the nature of particular rituals. One example is that in Hindu ritual, curved lines like bananas and certain leaves should be presented so that they open downwards. If they curve upwards, they are *amaṅkalam*. So, when offering bananas on a plate to a deity, the bananas should curve downwards in the upside-down 'U' way. Nonetheless, this understanding of *maṅkaḷam* was not widely found amongst my friends. For example, on one occasion while preparing a table of offerings at Nisha Aunty's home for when the procession of Mari Amman came round. Though it was Nisha Aunty's home, she deferred the responsibility/honor of preparing the table to Teacher, another neighbor, who presumably had either greater knowledge or prestige and so was left to do the honors of preparing the table appropriately. Teacher prepared the table with a certain command, deftly and precisely arranging the elements of the *kumpam ālālam*. However, when looking back at photos from this event, I noticed the bananas were placed curve-up, *amaṅkalam*.

This brief discussion of *maṅkalam* illustrates how conceptions of "beautiful" can refer to fluid conceptions of standards of "correctness," in a general and normative sense. In Tamil there are a few other words describing what I have come to understand as ways people or deities "should" be. One is the word *ait̃kam*, which came up during my fieldwork on street temples in Madurai and above in the interview with the expert in the Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs Department.¹⁵¹ When I asked several people about this word, I realized that it had many different specific meanings; however, in aggregate I understand the word to mean generally a conception of "correctness," "traditional," "appropriate," or "standard." Ulo Valk says *ait̃kam* is a "synthetic concept" referring to "religious lore in the broadest sense" including "traditional stories, songs, beliefs about deities, and relevant customs and rights."¹⁵² It means a traditional way of seeing culture. Importantly, *ait̃kam* is not written. In the case of the street temples I encountered, this word was used mostly in reference to the manner of decoration, *alaṅkāram*, of deities as well as the manner in which rituals were done. Non-Brahmin pujaris were preparing the *alaṅkāram* of deities in ways that "looked right" and in a way that was "beautiful." A supporter of one street temples said of the *alaṅkāram* of the Vinayagar *murti* (deity in physical form), "According to *ait̃kam* there are a certain conditions/rules. We don't know a lot of that, so God accepts whichever way we do it. It looks good. Just like we do makeup. If we do it well there is satisfaction [manutirup̃ti] for the gods if we do *alaṅkāram* like we do for ourselves. Manutirup̃ti."¹⁵³ The pujari therefore ate breakfast before the puja, used everyday materials such as cooking turmeric and milk bought at the tiny corner shop, and applied an *alaṅkāram* according to the pujari's and his aesthetic tastes. They were recreating essentially what they

¹⁵¹ Nirupama (student translator), recorded interview with author, November 16, 2013.

¹⁵² Ulo Valk, "Village Deities of Tamil Nadu in Myths and Legends: The Narrated Experience," *Asian Folklore Studies* 66, no. 1/2 (2007): 181.

¹⁵³ Ganapathi (auto-driver) and Priya (temple musician's daughter), recorded interview with author, Nov. 6th, 2013.

thought Brahmin priests did, but, without Brahmanic training, ended up doing what seemed beautiful in the end.

When many of my Muslim friends used the word "beautiful" to describe dress and ornaments, there was a certain sense of "correctness" and certainly of "appropriateness" in dress that ties to beauty and is negotiated through ornament. One day I visited my close associate, Shibly Sir, and his family for Eid lunch wearing a full burqa with the common niqab. My associate's wife, Basmillah, was thrilled by the change in my dress and said I looked "beautiful" and "super." Then she said, "Now all you need to do is take out the nose ring--then it will be ok." This was not the first time I had heard of this, the implication being that nose rings were a Tamil/Hindu--therefore not a Muslim--custom. Shibly Sir quickly said that that wasn't necessary, and he assured me that in Islam it was okay to have one. This small discrepancy illuminates the "vernacular"--or perhaps better put, "embodied" or "lived"--aspect of ornament as well as continuing to show the everyday salience of these repertoires. Because, regardless of what Shibly Sir and others may assert is within the doctrine of Islam, I neither met nor saw a single Muslim woman in Kattankudy who had a nose piercing. On one occasion when chatting with an elderly woman, she commented on my nose-piercing and asked me if I pierced it in Sri Lanka. I told her that I had pierced it in Madurai. She told me matter-of-factly that she had once had a nose-piercing. But, when her would-be husband came to the *peṇ pārkka* (viewing-of-the-girl ceremony before engagement/marriage), he left instructions for her to remove it, which she did.

This brief discussion of ritual ornamentation, *alaṅkāram*, the *amaṅkalam kumpam ālālam*, and beauty (*aḷaku*) illuminate how in many ways beauty embodies and negotiates religiosity. In these instances, it is at many levels these fluid yet salient conceptions of 'beauty' in a normative sense that negotiate everyday realities and conceptions of identity. Religiosity

becomes simultaneously negotiated through and embodied by ornaments and 'mere appearances.' There is an 'openness' to idioms of beauty/ornament specifically, and materiality more generally, that permits them to embody and negotiate tensions of creation and destruction, affirmation and opposition, creativity and conformity in seemingly paradoxical meanings.

Kattankudy Transformations

With respect to the new 'Muslim' styles of dress, Kattakudy is--at least presently--distinguished from Muslim communities in other parts of the country. While living Kandy, I even knew a Muslim woman who regularly tied a saree in a traditional Tamil-style without using the pollu to cover her head. Many women in Kattankudy view expressions of beauty as a way to express personal piety. One friend who used to live in Colombo told me, "Here is very decent. Colombo it is not like that. In Colombo they will put their T-shirt and denim and a hijab. Are they Muslim? But they dress to show [off] to everyone. They will style their hair and color their lips. That is all not right. Here it is not like that. Compared to Colombo here is better."¹⁵⁴

As mentioned previously, many scholars of Sri Lanka's Muslims and locals alike have noted the changes in dress, ritual, eating, and other habits that many have undergone gradually in the Eastern Province since around the mid-late 1970s. Kattankudy in particular, which has a strong Tawhid Jamaat presence, is known for being a particularly strict and conservative place for dress--among other notable aspects such as the island's premier madrasas. Here, young women frequently wear niqab, a piece worn with abaya and hijab that covers the face except for an opening at the eye. My Aunty liked to show me photos of her going to grade school in a Catholic uniform with knees, arms, and hair exposed. She said that in those days that was simply how it was. Then, Muslims also used to wear sarees and tie them slightly differently so that they could cover their head with the pollu. Now, her daughter Wasma wears a white hijab uniform

¹⁵⁴ Shara (pharmacy worker), recorded interview with author, April 28, 2014.

covering everything except her face. When Wasma walks to school, she also wears a black niqab. Moreover, only the older generation regularly wears sarees, and—like in the chapter's opening anecdote—there are stereotypes about how Muslims don't know how to tie sarees.¹⁵⁵

Many Muslims describe the gradual and now popular understanding of Muslim dress to be a process of (re)discovery. While looking the wedding album of one of my friends, I noticed that guests were holding plates of flowers up to the couple as they sat in a manner very much reminiscent of the aarati plates at Hindu weddings. When I asked her what this ritual was, her face became noticeably embarrassed and quickly turned the page as she told me "We don't do like this anymore. In Islam it is wrong [*pilai*]." ¹⁵⁶ As the politician Azeez argued at the turn of the twentieth century, "...of the Arab settlers some had their Arabian wives with them and others converted and married Tamil women as it was with the Tamils, who were then called Malabars, that the Arabs came in contact. The entire cessation of intercourse with their own country, made the Arabs to adapt themselves to their surroundings, and they gradually adopted the language, customs, habits and manners of the people (Tamil) amongst whom they had settled...." ¹⁵⁷ Most people told me before that people simply "didn't know" about these customs while others assert that people had "forgotten" over time and were in a sense recovering these traditions. ¹⁵⁸

However, not all Muslims see all of these changes as a positive process of "rediscovery." Dr. Ameer Ali finds them polarizing and "unfortunate." "Muslims who went [to the Middle East] for job opportunities came back with a different mindset, influenced by the religious perception of the Saudis and other neighbouring countries. Unfortunately, this resulted in Muslims in this country isolating themselves from the mainstream society, in terms of their dress, their values

¹⁵⁵ There are exceptions to this. The most common are brides who wear sarees on their wedding day and some women who hold prominent positions, like a relative of my Aunt who was a doctor.

¹⁵⁶ Basmillah, recollected from field notes, May 24, 2014.

¹⁵⁷ Trans. by and qtd. in Nuhman, *Sri Lankan Muslims*, 129.

¹⁵⁸ Shibly Sir, field notes, May 24, 2014; Azeez, qtd. In Nuhman, *Sri Lanka's Muslims*, 133.

and their practices."¹⁵⁹ Indeed, supporters of the Sufi Badhriya Jumma Mosque (discussed above) also trace the introduction of "Wahhabism" to Sri Lanka to around the same time that people note these changes in dress, in the late 1970s. In one bayan, the leader of the Badhriya community, Rauf Moulavi, laments a particular chant/prayer called *talapāttiyam* during late pregnancy popular twenty-five or thirty years ago, which has since been eradicated because of the 'Wahhabis.' He defended this tradition as coming from the Prophet himself.¹⁶⁰ In terms of dress, though, the position of Sufi women is more ambiguous and merits further study. During the four months I was there, I did notice that women attending Badhriya Jumma Mosque were less likely to wear abaya even in highly public places today. On one occasion, I visited Kattankudy beach with my Aunty. The beach is a popular public place for holidays, so, like in the case of shopping on the main road, many women tend to wear abaya. I ran into a family I knew from Badhriya at the beach one day wearing brightly colored shalwars with the dupatta wrapped around their heads. Moreover, when I attended the mosque's 28th Annual Kwajajee Grand Feast, most of the women were wearing shalwars or even sarees. I mentioned this to my host-sister Wasma, who immediately responded "They [Badhriya-goers] are just like that. That is not our culture."¹⁶¹ Still, my main contact from Badhriya Jumma Mosque defended the more strict observance of fardah and encouraged me to observe it. Thus, this is likely widely negotiated in diverse ways and shifting in the current tension of the times; more evidence is needed to engage in any kind of productive analysis of Sufi personal adornment. Due to the

¹⁵⁹ Dr. Ameer Ali, interviewed by Ranga Jayasuriya, "Muslims in Sri Lanka are Self-alienating Themselves from the Mainstream Community." *D.B.S. Jeyaraj*, July 18, 2013. Accessed November 2014, <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/22932>.

¹⁶⁰ A. Abdur Rauf Moulavi, "tarkaavukkaakap payanam sellalaama?" YouTube video, 184:56 minutes, published by Bilaal Nif, July 8, 2013. Accessed March 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96FmSRslo_Q.

¹⁶¹ Wasma, recollected from field notes, June 22, 2014.

nature of my evidence and the scope of this chapter, I therefore must privilege the "reformist" Muslim perspectives to beauty and ornament.

Transnationalized Authenticity: Real and Rumored Political Economies of Beauty

The most obvious political economy is that of clothes and fabrics. When it comes to churidar and shalwar kameez, India is widely conceived of as the place of the highest quality fabrics and workwomanship.¹⁶² While traveling in public, going shopping, walking to school, or visiting friends, the vast majority of Muslims in Kattankudy will wear abayas in what they see as a Gulf style. They are sleek and black, which tends to contrast the vibrant colors of shalwars worn by others. Indeed, in "black" is considered by many Hindus to be *amanakalam*. When I went shopping for abayas, I was given two basic options for fabric type: (1) a thinner, lighter, more synthetic and expensive material advertised as "from Dubai," and (2) a thicker, heavier, clothier and cheaper material advertised as "from India." While I have had little success in tracking trade and business records retroactively.¹⁶³ I also heard from two key contacts that Kattankudy was a significant exporter of abayas to Dubai and other countries. One man jokingly told me that Kattankudy ships abayas to Dubai and then imports them back, marketing them as Arabian fashions.¹⁶⁴ This interestingly (1) acknowledges the salience of 'Arabness', (2) simultaneously calls into question this form of authenticity, and (3) positions Kattankudy as an important center (economically and as a center for Muslim garments and fashion) within a larger global Muslim imaginary.

¹⁶² Interestingly, I also heard on occasion rumors that Tamils were the best seamstresses. For example, when my Aunt bought Wasma her special Ramadan churidar fabric, she told me that she would take it to a Tamil seamstress in Batticaloa town because "Tamils will sew churidars well." I personally happened to know three Muslim seamstresses while I knew of only one Tamil seamstress in the area. But many women can sew basic repairs, sleeves, and simple gowns on their own.

¹⁶³ Alibaba, the new Chinese online retail and trade marketplace, lists a number of abayas listed as "Middle Eastern" region yet manufactured in Sri Lanka. More research is necessary.

¹⁶⁴ Shibly Sir, recollected from field notes May 24, 2014.

I would also often visit jewelry shops and ask to see particular designs. Just like clothing trends--while it may not be often spoken about directly--some designs are clearly 'Muslim,' some are 'Hindu,' some are 'Christian,' some are 'Buddhist,' and some are not group-specific.

Occasionally the shopkeepers would tell me that a particular ring or earring design was just in from Saudi Arabia. For example, one such design involved tiny, bead or chain-like strings that dangled from earrings or rings. This particular fashion was very common amongst many of my Muslim friends.

Embodying Opposition: The Space of Nails

The bodily space of nails is useful in illuminating the oppositional aspect of beauty. Women notice nails, and they frequently ornament them. This is perhaps not mind-blowing or context specific. However, I want to suggest that things get more interesting in this specific context, if it is but a subtle interchange. My ambiguous positioning amongst the residents of this area embodies and illuminates the role of nail polish in social interactions.

One day, when I was spending a lazy afternoon with my friends from Catholic church, "Maami" showed me how nice her nails looked with the fresh coat of pink that she had just given them. Wouldn't my nails look nice with that same shade? Sure, I said. She then had her daughter Shani apply it.

When I went to my (now Kattankudy) home after spending that afternoon with Maami and Shani, I started to realize that perhaps now my painted nails were a bit out of place. I had never seen anyone in this house with nail polish on before. It was Afia, the adorable two-year-old girl who lived next door, who first spotted them. She was staring intently at my fingernails while we were playing and showed Aunty the "colors."

"Ah, [Kim] has put cutex," Aunty noticed. She asked me when I painted them. I related the above story, now feeling somewhat sheepish.

"They really wanted to paint them," I lamely offered, almost as an excuse for a misdeed.

Later that night, as my host-sister Wasma and I were chatting before falling asleep, I learned that my suspicions constituted, in fact, a valid conception here. She told me that we shouldn't put nail polish because it was haram. Why? I asked. She said, "People say they put pig parts in the cutex."¹⁶⁵ She added that it would be especially bad if when you eat (with fingers painted with nail polish) you get pieces of it in your mouth. This last part is based on a common understanding of nail polish or henna that I had seen even amongst some of my Hindu friends in India who chose not to paint their right hands because the chemicals could be eaten. However, this idea of nail polish being 'haram', though new to me, didn't really surprise me at the time. I had long noticed that the Muslim women I had seen did not wear nail polish. In fact, in the entire six months I spent in Sri Lanka, I did not see one Muslim woman wear nail polish.

There is virtually no scholarship on Islam and nail polish. Instead, I turned to an admittedly limited survey of online forums and anecdotal data from friends and colleagues. Nonetheless, it becomes evident that 'nail polish as unconditionally haram' is not a widely conceived idea. The "typical Muslim" objection to nail polish is that it is not permeable and therefore prevents the ritual wudu washing before prayers.¹⁶⁶ So, many Muslim women in other

¹⁶⁵ Wasma, recollected from field notes, June 11, 2014.

¹⁶⁶ This issue is pervasive enough that a new brand of "breathable" halal nail polish, Inglot, was released into the market about two years ago and has had wide reception. Mustafa Umar, "UPDATED: Is Breathable Nail Polish Sufficient for Wudu?" *Virtual Mosque*, August 22, 2013, <http://www.virtualmosque.com/islam-studies/hot-topics/is-breathable-nail-polish-sufficient-for-wu%E1%B8%8Du/>; Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid, gen. supervisor, "Ruling on wearing nail polish and wiping over it in case of necessity," *Islam Question and Answer*, <http://islamqa.info/en/144045>; Monsura Sirajee, "Islam's great nail polish controversy," *New Religion*, Mar. 5, 2013, <http://www.newreligion.eu/2013/03/is-nail-polish-islams-greatest.html>; Chris Barker, "Breathable nail varnish enables Muslim women to pray without worry," *Cosmetics Design Europe*, July 24, 2013, <http://www.cosmeticsdesign-europe.com/Business-Financial/Breathable-nail-varnish-enables-Muslim-women-to-pray-without-worry>; "Is wudu acceptable when nail polish is on?" *Islam Helpline*,

countries viewing nail polish as preventing full wudu will either (1) wear nail polish for short periods of time like between the Isha'a and Fajr prayers, and/or (2) only wear nail polish when they are menstruating.¹⁶⁷ Some women disregard these notions altogether and wear nail polish regularly. Others reject nail polish unequivocally on grounds that adornment feeds vanity and/or is used to attract men. It is worth emphasizing that there are of course many different diverse and complex rationales for nail polish and other beauty practices that transcend these motivations. However, it is interesting to note that in this area, the choice to wear nail polish—something that ethnic Tamils, both Hindus and Christians, regularly do—has been taken away by being denounced as containing pork, which is universally problematic in Islam.

This abstinence from nail polish does not mean that Muslim women in Kattankudy necessarily prefer natural nails. Wasma told me that instead of nail polish, we could use henna (*maruthaani*) to dye our fingernails. In fact, she was a henna enthusiast and did henna for herself and others all the time. She was always saving newspaper clippings with different patterns and practicing new designs. One of her dream jobs, she said, was to work in a beauty shop as a henna artist. And she was not alone--many other Muslims girls our age that I knew were also budding henna artists. In an interesting parallel to the above story about the English teacher and the nail polish, a girl I met only once briefly

wanted to do henna for me so that I would remember her. As women did henna for more and more friends, they



<http://www.islamhelpline.net/node/5674>.; “How new ‘breathable’ nail polish for Muslim women is flying off shelves-but the death of its creator means he will never live to see its success,” *Daily Mail UK*, Feb. 27, 2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2285544/How-new-breathable-nail-polish-Muslim-women-flying-shelves--death-creator-means-live-success.html>.

¹⁶⁷ Personal conversations with colleagues; Shayla wearing nail polish and wiping over it in case of <http://islamqa.info/en/144045>

Figure 5, Source: author.

Isor, “Ruling on

could gain reputations as particularly skilled artists. Wasma was particularly enthusiastic about henna, and she often used the neighboring children mercilessly as her practice-dummies. Then, her neighbors would come to her if they wanted to have henna done for some occasion, or simply just because they wanted it.

In my whole time staying in the area, I only ever had my henna done by Muslim friends. I also never saw anyone who wasn't Muslim ever wearing henna, with one exception: when a Tamil friend from campus visited my home in Kattankudy and fell victim to Wasma's henna addiction. This is not to say that only Muslims wear henna here, but to suggest that it was an activity distinctly associated with cultivating 'Muslimness'. This is further supported by the fact that each time someone did my henna (at least 5 times), without fail one of my Tamil friends would ask me if it was a Muslim girl that had done it for me. Somehow, it seems, this particular ornamentation has become ethnically/religious coded, perhaps alongside nail polish. Perhaps incidentally--though I suspect not--all of the young girls and women who did maruthaani for me used a more expensive purple-dye version that came in plastic tubes with Arabic writing on them.¹⁶⁸

Black Abayas

In the local context, dress also is inescapably viewed in an oppositional light. The prevalence of black color abayas in Kattankudy is perhaps offset more dramatically by the often brightly colored sarees and shalwars that non-Muslims often wear.¹⁷² During my fieldwork, black was virtually the only color that women would wear for abaya, though colored sleeves seemed to be coming into style. I asked my host-sister Wasma why everyone always wore black, and she replied that black was "fashionable." All of her friends--and, indeed, most of

¹⁶⁸ This comes out brighter and is more convenient when saving the rest of the tube in between different uses, but the maruthaani itself lasts for much less time than more leaf-based cones.

¹⁶⁹ See Miller, *Stuff*, 34-38 for a brief discussion on the prevalence of black clothing in London.

Kattankudy--wore black abaya with black hijab and niqab. There is also a sense that wearing simple colors like black marks piety. For example, there was very recently (28.07.2014) an All Ceylon Jamiyaat Ulema (ACJU) fatwah, "The religious ruling on the wearing of coloured garments." The following is an excerpt from this ruling:¹⁷⁰

Acknowledging and adhering to the above conditions is termed as 'Hijab'. It is not necessary that the 'Hijab' be of a specific colour or appearance.

Yet many women prefer black coloured garments to coloured ones. The reasons being that black is simpler, conforms to the aforementioned conditions and is less decorative (*alankaram*); whilst these cannot be found so easily in other colours.

There are sufficient evidences that even the Sahaabiyaas (female companions) have worn black coloured garments as per the authentic Hadeeths quoted in records like Sunan Abi Dawood.

Even though it is not compulsory for women to wear black coloured garments, it has to be acknowledged that, such a dress code (which is simpler, less decorative, and confirms to the religious etiquettes) has been the preferred choice throughout history over other alternatives. However, there is no harm in choosing colours closely resembling black, like brown, grey, etc., which is not decorative and less alluring to the non Mahram opposite sex.

Thus, whereas black is commonly seen as *amangalam* for Hindus, here black is defended as in the tradition of the Prophet and his companions.

I have posited above that the oppositional and transnationalized aspects of dress and ornament such as stark black abayas have some important functions to establish Muslim identity as distinct. However, in recent years, Buddhist extremist groups such as the Boda Bala Sena see Muslims as a growing threat to their Buddhist national imaginary have persecuted them even violently.¹⁷¹ Now, some Muslim groups are seeking to make appeals to soften distinction. The Muslim Council of Sri Lanka (which is primarily based in the western region) having consulted the ACJU, is now starting a initiative "Bring your black abayas, we will give you coloured

¹⁷⁰ "The religious ruling on women wearing coloured garments," *All Ceylon Jamiyathul Ulema*. Aug. 8th, 2014.

DOI: <http://www.acju.lk/fatwa/coloured-garments/>.

¹⁷¹ Tudor Silva, "The Politics and Anti-Politics of the Bodu Bala Sena."

abayas."¹⁷² *New Indian Express* quotes Advisor to the All Ceylon Jamiyathul Ulama (ACJU), Mohammad Dahalan as stating, "The back abaya and the niqab, the face covering which is less commonly worn, have been creating negative feelings among the majority Sinhalese-Buddhists. When everybody is in black, it gives the impression that we are a uniformed force. And the niqab has raised security concerns."¹⁷³ This not only makes tangible these kinds of perceptions and notions to differentiate from "others" and "unify" within, but also shows that Muslims to this day are still negotiating their place in Sri Lanka as racially coherent and distinct, yet still belonging to Sri Lanka. This has strong echoes of the Azeez-Ramanathan debates where, to re-quote Thiranagama, Azeez "found himself trying not to emphasize the 'foreignness' of Muslims against a Sinhala nationalist movement."¹⁷⁴ Thus, many Muslims are caught between distinguishing their racial and religious 'authenticity' from Tamils by making appeals to the Gulf while simultaneously negotiating their heritage and home as "Sri Lankan" against Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism.

Negotiating Foreign Authenticity in the Local: Moving beyond Transnational 'Influences'

I will broaden the scope of 'ornament' slightly and conclude this section discussing a different kind of--but equally powerful and embedded in the everyday--ornament: the presentation of food. With the exception of who eats meats or beef, there aren't very many significant differences in what people eat in this area. However, the aesthetics of food

¹⁷² P.K. Balachandran, "Drive to Avoid Black Abayas in Sri Lanka," *The Indian Express*, July 4, 2014, Accessed Feb. 2015, <http://www.newindianexpress.com/world/Drive-to-Avoid-Black-Abayas-in-Sri-Lanka/2014/07/04/article2313648.ece>.

¹⁷³ "Sri Lanka: Muslim women persuaded to wear coloured abayas," *South Asian Media: A News and Views Website of South Asia*, July 8, 2014, Accessed Feb. 2015, <http://www.southasianmedia.net/stories/south-asia/sri-lanka-muslim-women-persuaded-to-wear-coloured-abayas-story>.; Ruwan Laknath Jayakody, "Burka/Abaya take a colourful twist," *Ceylon Today*, July 14, 2014, Accessed Feb. 2015, <http://ceylontoday.lk/51-68166-news-detail-burkaabaya-take-a-colourful-twist.html>.; "Bring Your Black Abayas, We Will Give You Coloured Abayas: New Campaign Started In Sri Lanka," *Colombo Telegraph*, July 9, 2014, Accessed Fe. 2015, <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/bring-your-black-abayas-we-will-give-you-coloured-abayas-new-campaign-started-in-sri-lanka/>.

¹⁷⁴ Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House*, 118.

presentation are distinct along communal lines. Moreover, the rumors and stereotypes around food abound and feed into these distinctions.

In most Tamil homes, it is common for the cook to serve others by herself placing food onto a plate and giving it out; or, people might come to the kitchen, put food onto their plates, and return to the dining area. In Muslim homes, it is common for food to be served 'family-style' in dishes laid out onto a table or on the floor. Then, people sit and take food from this central location. Particularly on special occasions like Fridays or ifthar ceremonies, the display and the spread are more dramatic. The drinking water in many Muslim households is particularly distinctive and adds an ornamental and ceremonial element to eating. While other families often drink water from individual glasses or from shared water bottles, many Muslims submerge two tiny cups within a larger glass bowl. This experience is particularly intimate because cups are then shared and also fingers must dip into the water in order to retrieve the cup. As an outsider, I admittedly struggled with this custom. Drinking water gracefully and effectively requires a basic level of knowledge or skill. Initially I was unsure how to grab the cups once submerged--should I use the fingers I was eating with on my right hand, or should I use my left hand, which is generally considered to be

dirty? I also was unsure if I should touch my lips to the edge of the cup, or if I should simply pour, like how people drink from shared water bottles.

These sorts of debates are



specific to my own experience, but also to an

extent generalizable to other 'outsiders.' Eating and especially drinking at Muslim functions and meals requires a distinct and highly embodied ritual. Moreover, it involves an entirely different aesthetic element to the presentation of the food (See Figure 6).

On one hot afternoon, I ate lunch at an 'Uncle' of mine's home, Abhiman Sir. Abhiman Sir was a very prominent member of the community known as one of the best English teachers who formerly had translated for international organizations like the Red Cross. Abhiman Sir was a very devout and pious Sufi who supports the above mentioned Badhriya Jumma mosque and its leader 'His Holiness' Abdul Rauf Moulavi. He was always explaining to me the spiritual meanings and justifications of particular practices and customs, noting that it was the Sufis who were aware of these sorts of deeper meanings while other Muslims simply performed certain actions blindly. So, while my other close contact simply told me that these eating customs had come from the Gulf, Abhiman Sir told me that there was a reason, too, for the ornamental and communal presentation of drinking cups. He explained that there is no disease that Allah has not given. So, there is no need to worry about contagious diseases spreading through this intimate water-drinking practice. Abhiman Sir also pointed out that Tamils will not participate in this practice, the implication being that caste rules often prevent the sharing of water.

When scholars pay any attention to these sorts of practices, they simply attribute these practices to global trends of spreading "influence" without paying much attention to the specificity of how these practices are negotiated in particular localities. Others attribute them to be signs or effects of "Islamicization," "Arabization," or even occasionally "Wahhabi influences." For example, Bart Klem writes that Tablighis in Akkaraipattu "shun theological debate and interpret purification in terms of doing everyday things--eating, praying, dressing and

so on--in an Islamic way."¹⁷⁵ Though more nuanced, McGilvray and Raheem write that, "As in other countries experiencing Islamic fundamentalism and reform, women's dress has recently become a public indicator of religiosity."¹⁷⁶ All of these notions are problematic and limiting in different ways. The terms "Islamicization" and "Arabization" are inescapably normalizing as "Islamic" a particular set of customs from within many other diverse customs, therein etically asserting an "authentic" origin and geography. Moreover, these conceptions of "influences" imply an "appropriation" of transnational practices and reforms. This is limiting in that it (1) plays into notions of cultural wholes rather than dialectics, (2) ignores the specificity of context, and (3) uncritically takes as a given that such practices are, indeed, "Islamic" and from "elsewhere."

The case of Kattankudy Muslims' ways of drinking are particularly useful in illuminating these tensions. Like in the case of jewelry and clothes, many people assume and assert that the practice of drinking water from a communal glass bowl has come from the Gulf. This is an important point that highlights a source of authenticity and piety for practitioners. However, based on (an admittedly very limited) though extensive survey of online photos and video as well as conversations with colleagues and mentors,¹⁷⁷ I have found virtually no basis for this claim. For example, while the 'family-style' serving may be common in Saudi Arabia, as far as I can tell there is no sign of drinking water in this particular way. Another explanation for this, then--like the examples of the nose piercing and the nail polish--is the oppositional nature of this practice as 'not Tamil.' In light of Abhiman Sir's explanation, this drinking custom is an embodiment of 'Muslimness' by directly speaking against the Tamil Hindu notion of caste. By giving the specificity of the local its due attention, we can move beyond reductionist notions of

¹⁷⁵ Klem, "Islam, Politics, and Violence," 744.

¹⁷⁶ McGilvray and Raheem, "Muslim Perspectives on Sri Lanka Conflict," 13.

¹⁷⁷ Further study and exploration is desperately needed to complete this argument in future.

"transnational influences" and "Arabization" to reveal a more complicated, contested, and negotiated reality.

Concluding Remarks

Thus, this material culture exploration of everyday personal ornaments complicates any simple notion of transnational "Arabization" or "Islamization" in that the process is, perhaps necessarily, roughly trigonal. There is a three-way dialectic between local and transnational and oppositional, such that the embodied reality is necessarily relationally embedded in local idioms.

Moreover, in light of the conceptions and contestations over ancestry--and thus in authenticity--(touched upon already in Chapter 1), ornaments, clothes, and more generalized beauty ideals are often an accessible way for women to negotiate and embody, articulate and assert, these claims. Indeed, it is through beauty that many women are most directly able to engage with these polemics on-the-ground, even if they act to affirm group expectations. This is particularly interesting since, given the above discussion, beauty means to at least some extent embodying otherness. In choosing to embody Saudi trends by wearing ornaments allegedly from or inspired by Saudi traditions, Muslim women are able to articulate claims to Arab authenticity in salient local idioms that distinguish them from Tamil 'others.'

Chapter Three: Public Beautification

Mr. Ajmal: In the beginning, we [planted the trees] for the sake of the beautiful style. But now, people think that [we] are representing their culture.¹⁷⁸

Dr. Ameer Ali: I have one observation. When I went to the Eastern Province, in Kattankudy, they have planted date palms to decorate the roadside. My question was, as to what is the connection between date palms and Kattankudy or date palms and Sri Lanka. Why do you spend millions of rupees to make it look like Arabia? I could see that already half of the trees had died. I told the Muslims to go to Tissamaharama and see

¹⁷⁸ Mr. Ajmal, recorded interview with author, May 24, 2014.

what has been planted there: Tamarind trees, which are shady and bearing fruit. Are we living in this country or are we living in Arabia?¹⁷⁹

The Idiom and Term

'Public beautification' refers to projects that ornament explicitly public spaces including trees, statues, roundabouts, and welcome boards. The term is partially my own construction and partially gathered from people I spoke with. The term didn't come up as such during interviews and conversations. However, when I asked people about the trees and statues on the road, they overwhelmingly described them in a word as for "beauty" and also for "culture." News articles on Araiampathy's statues refer to them as such—as *silai* or *uruvassilai* (literally "form statue"). Many articles refer to the projects on the whole as "beautification plans," "for decoration," a "street beautification plan" or "cultural road decoration statues."¹⁸³ Similarly in Kattankudy, news articles describe the date trees as "to beautify."¹⁸⁴ My use of the term "public" is not to suggest that the ornaments in the previous chapter are "private," but rather to emphasize that these are on government-owned land.

'Public Beautification' Literature

¹⁷⁹ Dr. Ameer Ali, "Muslims in Sri Lanka are Self-alienating Themselves from the Mainstream Community." July 18, 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Niroshan, "The Demolished Statue of Swami Vivekananda at the Border Area of the Araiampathy District Soon Re-Established at the same place," *Putiya Vidiyal*, Mar. 3, 2012. Accessed Oct. 2014, <http://puthiyavidiyal.com/news/1183>; Alaṅkarippataṅkāka (அலங்கரிப்பதற்காக), literally "for the sake of decorating" or "for the sake of ornamenting"; Suken, "The Cultural Beautifying Statues Atop Araiampathy's Main Road," *BattiNews*, Jan. 10, 2012. Accessed Oct. 2014, http://www.battinews.com/2012/01/blog-post_10.html; Vītiyaṅai alaṅka paṭuttum tiṭṭam (விதியினை அழகு படுத்தும் திட்டம்) and Vītiyaṅai alaṅkarikka paṅpāṭṭu (விதியினை அலங்கரிக்க பண்பாட்டு), respectively; Narosan, "The Cultural Statues Beautifying Araiampathy's Main Road," *Putiya Vidyal*, Jan. 10, 2012. Accessed Oct. 2014, <http://puthiyavidiyal.com/news/762/>

¹⁸⁴ Alaṅka paṭuttuvataṅkāka (அழகுபடுத்துவதற்காக) in M. S.M. Nurteen, "The Date Trees that have started ripening in Kattankudy," *Sri Lanka Muslims*, June 2, 2014. Doi:

<http://srilankamuslims.lk/%E0%AE%95%E0%AE%BE%E0%AE%A4%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%A4%E0%AE%BE%E0%AE%A9%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%95%E0%AF%81%E0%AE%9F%E0%AE%BF%E0%AE%AF%E0%AE%BF%E0%AE%B2%E0%AF%8D-%E0%AE%95%E0%AE%BE%E0%AE%AF%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%95%E0%AF%8D/>

The use of the term "public beautification" in scholarship tends to have particular connotations of policy-oriented or politician-orientated politics of improvement and progress in American discourse, and with these in mind I also find it appropriate to use here in both a general emic and etic sense.¹⁸⁵ Literature on 'public beautification' as such is perhaps limited to studies for improving urban planning, policy, and design.¹⁸⁶ Literature on "public art" is more useful here, and there has been a shift towards public reactions/interactions as a key focus in this field in the past twenty years. Though this thesis does not aim to provide a comprehensive literature of "public art," two notable works include *Public Art: Theory, Practice, and Populism* and the edited volume *Public Art in Canada: Critical Perspectives*.¹⁸⁷

While the works described here perhaps fit in terms of initial production into the fairly contemporary conception of "public beautification," my analysis tends to treat them more like material objects, monuments/memorials and, at times, like icons. I thus take the beautification of spaces very seriously. I see it much like Jamal Elias sees monumental epigraphy. While also functioning as beautification, it "flourishes in moments of compromised individual or social authority when there is a heightened need to project a complex set of religious and/or political messages to an outside group (such as members of another religion or sect) or a competing political force."¹⁸⁸ This understanding of monumental epigraphy is useful for understanding the public beautification projects here. Elias notes that monumental epigraphy must be understood to operate polysemically and indexically, and this is how I view public beautification. There are always multiple layers of meaning not constrained to a particular interpretation, and there are,

¹⁸⁵Thomas Munroe, "'Beautification' Reconsidered," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 1, no. 1 (1966): 85-100

¹⁸⁶Orhan Ozguner, "Saudi Urban Public Spaces and Beautification," *Mimar 29: Architecture and Development*, ed. Hasan-Uddin Khan (Singapore: Concept Media Ltd, 1988); Munroe, "'Beautification' Reconsidered"; Ella Chmielewska, "Framing Temporality: Montreal Graffiti in Photography."

¹⁸⁷Cher Krause Knight, *Public Art: Theory, Practice, and Populism*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

¹⁸⁸Jamal J. Elias, *Aisha's Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam*, (Harvard University Press, 2012), 9.

therefore, always multiple and simultaneous context-specific meanings. It functions at various levels as (1) denoted and connoted meanings, (2) as element of a larger ensemble, and (3) as an inseparable component of the sociopolitical and religious context.¹⁸⁹ In *Public Art: Theory, Practice, and Populism*, Knight builds on the work of James Young and productively emphasizes the interactions between formal work and public memory as "collected" not "collective" in the sense of "aggregate in construction, plural in meanings, and mutable in form and context. This 'collected memory' is comprised of diverse and competing responses...which shift with time, circumstance, and ideology as they converge at each site."¹⁹⁰ Young writes that monuments are "forever incomplete" and "fundamentally interactive."¹⁹¹

In "*I nostri grandi Padri...Heroic Nationalism and the Italians of Montreal: The Monument to Giovanni Caboto, 1935*," Anna Maria Carlevaris writes an excellent piece on the politics of community memory as negotiated through monuments before, during, and after construction. She situates the monument of Caboto within national political and popular debates over who first stood on Canadian soil (Cabot or Jacques Cartier) and within transnational Italian networks and imaginaries. She documents how the Italian consular staff actively participated in pushing the monument project forward and how this monument embodied a much larger project of Italian (trans)nationalism and cultural pride. Carlevaris argues that Cabot played a key role in "a process of collective identity-formation that mythologizes historical origins, the history of the monument is coloured by ethno-linguistic arguments of the day, debates that were grounded in a contest for social power and cultural legitimacy."¹⁹² She argues that though Cabot's heroic image

¹⁸⁹Ibid., 268.

¹⁹⁰Knight, *Public Art*, 24.

¹⁹¹James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, (Yale University Press, 1994) 192-3.

¹⁹²Anna Maria "I nostri grandi Padri...Heroic Nationalism and the Italians of Montreal: The Monument to Giovanni Caboto, 1935," in *Public art in Canada: Critical perspectives*. Eds. Gérin, Annie, and James S. McLean. (University of Toronto Press, 2009), 102.

and monument mean many things to different people, for Italians in Montreal, his presence embodied their cultural legitimacy as an Italian figure who had come to the 'New World.'

I argue that the beautification projects examined in this chapter play an insidious role in similar, as Carlevaris argues, “processes of collective identity-formation” and “contests for social power and cultural legitimacy.” I also use the work of James Young and Jamal Elias, recognizing that despite their material form, these beautification projects are far from constant and exist as fluid spaces enveloped in collected rumors and informed by layers of socio-political meaning. I discuss the political motivations and style inspirations, and then I explore the diverse responses and unintended consequences of these monuments. I highlight their functions to claim lands, their appeals to (re)make local and transnational histories, and their role in shaping community imaginaries engaged in polarizing dialectics.

Beginnings and Intentions

Kattankudy

In Kattankudy, while the official body approving these works is technically the collective body of the Kattankudy Urban Council, the man popularly attributed to these statues is the prominent Deputy Minister of Economic Development Hizbullah. Some articles note that it was both through Hizbullah's efforts and a part of Mahinda's "street beautification plan." These projects are a part "Dawn of the East" component of former president Rajapaksa's "Mahinda Chintana," or plan for development and propaganda. According to my research associate, A.L.A. Shibly, Kattankudy's trees and other ornaments were simply "the wish of our minister" and that it was all a part of his "dream" for Kattankudy that is yet to be realized.¹⁹³ I was unable to interview Hizbullah because of his busy schedule coupled with the fact that he lives permanently in Colombo. However, I conducted multiple in-depth interviews with one of his campaign

¹⁹³ Mr. Ajmal and Shibly Sir, recorded interview, May 24, 2014.

advisors of ten years, Mr. Ajmal, along with other politically active men in the town. Mr. Ajmal told me that what exists now is largely a part of the minister's political scheme to secure popular public opinion and votes in Kattankudy. He explained that the minister had traveled extensively abroad, taken photos, and was now trying to create in Kattankudy what he had seen in his travels. He told me repeatedly that they just wanted to beautify the area, which also would help Hizbullah maintain his popularity.

The connection between "beautification" and "popular opinion" becomes more striking when Mr. A. R. Jasif, who works at the Kattankudy Divisional Secretariat, said the project was supposed to be *kavarcci*, roughly "attractive" or "sexy." This suggests, literally, intentions of attracting the public that give greater weight to the denotative and connotative content of the projects (discussed below) because we may assume that Hizbullah anticipated a particular response. Shibly Sir and Mr. Ajmal themselves exuded a calculated indifference to these projects and intermittently would deny any larger meaning and would distance themselves from those who would attribute such meaning to them. In the interview excerpt at the beginning of Chapter One, Shibly even claims that they selected particularly date trees for utilitarian ends because these didn't have leaves that would fall all over the roads.

Araiampathy

The man directly responsible for the statues in Araiampathy is Poopalapillai Prasanthan, a local leader of the TMVP political party. While he and the TMVP party are currently in power, there is notable division in Araiampathy with opponents voting for TNA. Like in Kattankudy, Prasanthan also sought to build a large welcome board on the main road at the northern boundary. However, people in the area successfully opposed the project. You can still see metal poles left over from this just behind the first statue (see Figure 12). People I asked gave me one

of two different—though not necessarily contradictory—explanations. Some people said that the sign would have blocked access to the local gas station, and others said that TNA members opposed it as means for blocking political support for TMVP.

Because Prasanthan was unwilling to meet with me, I spoke with a few people in the office of the Divisional Secretariat. The Secretary confirmed that the statues were the project of a single local politician—though she wouldn't say particulars—who funded it himself at about 30,000 SLR per statue (this figure is very low and another community member estimates 65,000 SLR).¹⁹⁷ They were first put up in 2012. Now, though, the Pradesha Sabha maintains it as a local public works project. In the interview with the Division's Secretary, I asked "What is the reason for these statues?"¹⁹⁸ She and her clerk, Hari, who was also present, agreed that the statues were meant to teach about Tamil culture and also for beautification. M.K. Master, a prominent Tamil elder, added that they were for beauty and were painted gold to add "worth" (*allai* or *aLavvu*) to the space.

Median Space

Like the bodily space of nails discussed earlier, other spaces emerge as particularly salient places to ornament. For public beautification, the most salient space is the median (*piratāṇa vītiyiṅ naṭuvē* or *piratāṇa vītiyiṅ mattiyil*). This space is a very new space, as the roads were expanded and developed with the help of Japanese aid in 2008. Politicians with an interest in appealing to particular majorities have in a sense used their political and economic power to purchase this space and construct community through and in public beautification. The projects thus play an important role in legitimating political authority and establishing connections to

¹⁹⁷ MK. Master, recorded interview, July 28, 2014; Manmunai Pattu District Secretary, recollected from field notes, July 8, 2014.

¹⁹⁸ "intha silaikalukku kaaraNam enna?," recollected from field notes, July 8, 2014.

authentic cultural identity. However, it is important to emphasize these spaces speak to majority communities at the expense of what emerges as more complex and diverse populations.

This became especially evident to me when I attended the local St. Mary's Church (along the main road just across the Arayampathy border) celebration of Stations of the Cross (*Ciluvaippātai*). As we, the congregation-onlookers, watched from along the side of the road, the actors held practiced poses right on the median. There was a two-auto rickshaw-system to transport the sound system. One auto had the battery and speaker system and the other the mic; these were connected by some sketchy wires that ran between them. Because of the megaphone system, no one for quite a large radius had trouble hearing it. The whole procession paused, moved and repositioned, paused, and moved again in a loop up and back down this main road.

Once we had traveled south far enough to reach the main Araiampathy Market, the congregation crossed the road and turned north back towards the church. So, as others went about their typical morning routines, perhaps buying rotis or stopping by the town market, there were actor-soldiers violently beating actor-Jesus on the middle of the road. The cracks of the whips and sticks onto the ground were sharply juxtaposed against the common sounds of everyday traffic. Many people stopped and watched from the opposite side of the road--Muslims and Hindus alike.

The median thus became the stage for the reenactment of the Christ's crucifixion. Parts of the median even were incorporated into the stage as props to support a weakening Jesus. In addition to the presence of the actors, they would also place a small wooden cross down at each station to mark the next spot. They had to occasionally weave around the golden statues of significant Tamil (usually Hindu) figures in the center, and sometimes these would gaze over the drama scene (See Figure 7). The church members began in Araiampathy and, notably and

obviously, they did not go into Kattankudy. As the actors processed down the road, they ornamented the median with their bodies and legitimized a claim to this salient space for the Catholic Church.

People use the median space to highlight other occasions, too. For Eid (peru naal), lights spiraled up the trunks of the date trees, and my Aunty made sure that I had seen them lit before seeing me off on my journey back to America. On "May Day," a labor movement holiday celebrated by Socialists and Communists on the first of May, crossed red flags marked the light posts in Kattankudy as Araiampathy's TMVP processed down the main road. The median



Figure 7, *Source: author.*

therefore presents a theatre for communities and individual politicians to claim a stake in the achievements in "progress," to negotiate who development is for, and to (re)emphasize legitimate claims to identity. These places are also typically important places for traffic. The median of the road is not the only salient space people chose to ornament. People have in some manner ornamented other developed, developing, or otherwise significant spaces, too, which merit further research. There is a statue of Ganesha (Vinayagar or Pillaiyar) along the main road and in front of the main Araiampathy market. There was also a Vinayagar statue being reconstructed

near the brand new Palamunai bridge, which is also not coincidentally near disputed settlements such as Ollikulam, the site of the tsunami resettlement location.¹⁹⁹

Kattankudy Beautification Projects

Dates

As mentioned previously, by far, the most iconic and most important features of Kattankudy's public beautification are the fifty to seventy date trees planted on the median of the main road planted in early 2012 (See Figure 8).²⁰⁰ Though there are rumors that the trees have come from Saudi Arabia--even that they had been flown in on planes--Mr. Jasif, who works in Kattankudy Divisional Secretariat Office, told me that these trees have come from Puttalam, which is on the opposite west coast.²⁰¹ He did, however, tell me that they planted the trees to look like Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and sent me a video link with a driving tour so that I could see the comparison. Potted flowering plants also share the median with the palm trees, but these are hardly mentioned on the ground or in the news. In addition to the palm trees, there is also a new speaker system attached to the light posts on the median. These play a beautifully ethereal and loud adhan, ornamenting the road with sound five times a day. At the Kattankudy entrance, there are also statues of date trees with gold tops increasing in height up until the large welcome board. Somewhat ironically, no one seems to mention these as "statues" or find them particularly problematic.

¹⁹⁹ Refer to page 43 for a brief discussion.

²⁰⁰ See the following local news broadcasts: "Sri Lanka – Kattankudy Town at Batticaloa has developed into a beautiful city 3-8-2011," YouTube video, posted by manel08uk, Aug 4, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhuCXvxiDIY>; "Sri Lanka latest news – Date production started at Kattankudy," YouTube video, posted by manel08uk, July 7, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOw7QWeoyuo>.

²⁰¹ This article also reports that the trees are from Puttalam. "The Deputy Minister Beautifying Roads [with] Date Trees," Lanka Muslim.org, May 9, 2012. Accessed February 2015, <http://lankamuslim.org/2012/05/09/%E0%AE%AA%E0%AF%87%E0%AE%B0%E0%AF%80%E0%AE%A4%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%A4%E0%AE%AE%E0%AF%8D-%E0%AE%AE%E0%AE%B0%E0%AE%99%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%95%E0%AE%B3%E0%AE%BE%E0%AEB2%E0%AF%8D-%E0%AE%B5%E0%AF%80%E0%AE%A4%E0%AE%BF/>.



Figure 8, *Source: author.*



Figure 9, *Source: author.*

Roundabouts

Near Kattankudy's southern border with Araiampathy, there is a small roundabout (*curruvaṭṭam*) spelling "Allah" from all sides to symbolize that Allah is omnipresent. Its green

and yellow color scheme was selected presumably to match the mosque on the opposite side of the street. This is the smallest and least remarkable of the three roundabouts. It is perhaps reminiscent of the famous Deira Clocktower in Dubai,²⁰² but there was an exact lookalike with a white color in Karachi, Pakistan that has since been removed.²⁰³ The second roundabout reads "Basmallah" in a stylized Arabic calligraphy (see Figure 9). This roundabout occupies the space near a major bus stop and is more prominently featured in local news.

The northernmost roundabout is by far the most ornate and enjoys a strategic spot near the rapidly developing Beach Road, which houses important new mosques, madrasas, and the homes of wealthy and prominent community members (See Figure 10). It was still undergoing construction during the time of my fieldwork, but was completed in late November 2014.¹⁹² The roundabout is popularly called "Qur'an Square" (*Kur'ān catukka*) and features a rehal in the center. When discussing the design with Mr. Jasif, he described it as "Persian" and sent me a link to Pinterest tab with several miscellaneous "Iranian architecture" designs. This perhaps underscores a contradiction in the formation of Muslim ethnic identity on the basis of 'Arab' blood, when there have been historically mixed ties with a number of different groups including Persians.¹⁹⁴ During a regular workday, a handful of small vendors use this space to sell small goods like pots, fruits, and curd.

²⁰² "17 of the world's most beautiful clock towers," *Travel, Telegraph UK*, Accessed Nov. 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/11050517/17-of-the-worlds-most-beautiful-clock-towers.html?frame=3014455>,

²⁰³ Saad Hasan, "As Allah Walli Chowrangi is removed, new road paves over Karachi history," *Tribune*, Dec. 17, 2012. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/480633/as-allah-walli-chowrangi-is-removed-new-road-paves-over-karachi-history/>.

¹⁹² "Padangal" Mahinda Rajapaksevin vitiyai azhakupaduththum visheda velaitthiddaththin kizh kaaththaankudy—Qur'an sutruvaddaththin apiviruththip panikal," *Madawala News*, Nov. 29, 2014, <http://madawalanews.com/49223>; "Kāttāṅkuṭi – kur'ān catukka curruvaṭṭattin apiviruttip paṅikal: Piratiyamaiccar hispullāh kēṭṭarintu koṅṭār," *Your Kattankudy.Com*, Nov. 28, 2014, <http://yourkattankudy.com/2014/11/28/%E0%AE%95%E0%AE%BE%E0%AE%A4%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%A4%E0%AE%BE%E0%AE%A9%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%95%E0%AF%81%E0%AE%9F%E0%AE%BF-%E0%AE%95%E0%AF%81%E0%AE%B0%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%86%E0%AE%A9%E0%AF%8D-%E0%AE%9A%E0%AE%A4/>.

¹⁹⁴ THIRANAGAMA



Figure 10, Source: author.



Figure 11, Source: author.

Araiampathy Public Beautification

Vivekananda

The first statue that meets visitors entering Araiampathy's northern boundary is of Swami Vivekananda (see Figure 12). Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) is an internationally-known Hindu figure, monk, and disciple of Swami Ramakrishna. He also founded the famous international Ramakrishna Mission, a spiritual and humanitarian organization that is particularly active in this area. There is a local chapter in Araiampathy with a school and cultural center, and much larger complex just north in Kallady with homes for orphaned girls and boys. I was also reminded a couple of times throughout the course of my fieldwork that he traveled around the world and even gave a famous speech in the United States.¹⁹³ It is perhaps this—this

knowledge that

Vivekananda has a

kind of international

clout—that makes

Swami Vivekananda

the first statute within

Arayampathy. Swami

Vivekananda steps

forward towards the

end of the northern

border and towards Kattankudy.



Figure 12, *Source: author.*

¹⁹³ Vivekananda gave hundreds of talks and lectures in the West, but one of his most famous appearances was at the 1893 Parliament of World Religions in Chicago where he represented “India” and “Hindus.” He became a widely popular figure as a proponent of universality and tolerance with an emphasis on social works; K. Sabaratna, recorded interview, April 16, 2014. M.K. Master, recorded interview, July 28, 2014

Vipulananda

Swami Vipulananda (1892-1947) is the first statue to greet travelers from the southern boundary of Araiampathy village. He is a very prominent figure in the Batticaloa area with another statue in the main town. Vipulananda was born south of this village in Karativu and has a burial site



Figure 13, Source: author.

in Kallady, about six kilometers north. I was told that he was a very learned man who had received his education in Batticaloa town, but that he had become disenchanted with life and traveled to India to become an ascetic. He was known as a Hindu social reformer closely affiliated with the Ramakrishna Mission and as a Professor of Tamil in both India and Sri Lanka. He is the namesake for buildings and organizations throughout the area, including Eastern University's Swami Vipulananda School of Aesthetic Studies in Kallady.

Soldier

There wasn't much consensus on this figure (See Figure 13), but I would maintain that its menacing stance and identity as a traditional kind of warrior are perhaps most important. This statue is located near the Araiampathy Hospital, which was formerly called the "Kattankudy Hospital." "Araiampathy.com" describes this figure was Mahaveeran Pandara Vanniyan, who was the last Tamil King of Vanni (d.1803) and known for fighting the British.¹⁹⁵ On the other

¹⁹⁵ "Araya Vanniyan," *Arayampathy News*, accessed on March, 2015, <http://www.arayampathy.com/uploads/araya%20vanniyan.jpg>; S. Makenthiran, "Tamils in Independent Ceylon," *Ilankai Tmail Sangam: Association of Tamils of Sri Lanka in the USA*, Nov. 2004, Accessed Feb. 2015, <http://www.sangam.org/articles/view2/?uid=675>.

hand, M.K. Master told me very confidently that this was Kattabomman, a Tamil Nadu figure famous for fighting against the British in the late 18th century. He also told me that Kattabomman fought the Mughal Muslims, which has implications given the current tension over the boundaries.¹⁹⁶ This statue appears to have the details common to depictions of Pandara Vanniyar as opposed to Kattabomman, though both share similar features. Furthermore, there are reports of a Pandara Vanniyar statue constructed recently in Jaffna, which suggests the figure's popularity amongst Tamils even in the North.¹⁹⁷ Even as a generalized-traditional-warrior-type, this would have significance for a town that traces its origins to river soldiers of the Cera, Chola, and Pandya dynasties. Indeed the cover of *The Soil of Araiyanpathy* features two such river soldiers that are very much reminiscent of this statue. These figures were copied and pasted from internet photos of still another figure, the Tamil Nadu warrior Ondiveeran (d.1800).¹⁹⁸

Culture Girl

Like the previous statue, this one, too is the source of some dispute (see Figure 14). K. Sabaratna told me this figure was Mari Amman and another woman told me it was



Figure 14, Source: author.

¹⁹⁶ Kattabomman was dramatized as ‘freedom fighter’ in a widely popular Tamil film with superstar Sivaji Ganeshan, who erected statues of him and created him as a kind of universal Tamil hero. However, accounts I have checked thus do not indicate any connection to the Mughals. See M.S.S. Pandian, “Culture and Subaltern Consciousness: An Aspect of MGR Phenomenon” *Economic and Political Weekly* 24, no. 30 (1989):65. See also Anthony Good, “Maamul’ and Modernity in a South Indian Temple,” *Modern Asian Studies* 35, no 4 (2001): 863; Anand A. Yang, “Bandits and Kings: Moral Authority and Resistance in Early Colonial India,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 66, no 4 (2007): 881-896.

¹⁹⁷ “Great Warrior Pandaveeran Memorial Day,” *Battiwin: The News Corporation*, Aug. 26, 2013. Accessed Mar. 2015, <http://battiwin.com/news.php?id=2604#sthash.0JySeh23.WF2ZE0we.dpbs>.

¹⁹⁸ No one mentioned Ondiveeran in my fieldwork; rather, I was able to see based on the cover art a small label. Both of these images come up immediately under a google search of “Ondiveeran.” It is plausible that the illustrator has a particular image of a warrior in mind, and felt that Ondiveeran fit the expectations of the mental image.

Kanagi Amman, who are both mother goddesses though with divergent dispositions. However, when discussing a photo of this statue with M.K. Master and his daughter, there was some debate before M.K. Master said, "that is just a culture girl."¹⁹⁹

Bharathiyar

Subaramania Bharatiyar (1882-1921) is considered to be one of the greatest Tamil poets and was given the title of Maha Kavya with the support of Vipulananda (see Figure 15). Bharatiyar, too, was famous for resisting the British and was a key nationalistic figure in the independence movement.



Figure 15, *Source: author.*

Ulakanatchi

This statue is near the divisional secretariat (see Figure 16). As mentioned above, Ulaka Natchi ("World Ruler") plays a preeminent role in depictions of Araiampathy's grand past. She was from the Kalinga Dynasty and came with her brother, Ulaka Nathan, to rule in the 3rd or 4th century A.D. According to accounts citing the text *Maddakkalappu Maanmiyam*, the Sinhala king Gunasingan granted her the lands near what is today Manmunai. Ulaka Natchi brought with her a Siva lingam and established a special and grand temple at Kokkaddicholai,²⁰⁰ across the lagoon and west of Manmunai.²⁰¹ One article sites this statue as particularly significant because a great number of people in Batticaloa are the descendants of Ulaka Natchi.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ "Athu summa oru kalaachaaram pombale," M.K. Master, recorded interview, July 28, 2014

²⁰⁰ Navam Teacher, "History," *Arayampathy News*, accessed August, 2014, <http://www.arayampathy.com/history.php>; K. Sabaratna, *The Soil of Arayampathy*; Mr. Tambimuttu, recorded interview with author, April 16, 2014.

²⁰¹ The farms around this temple are yet another example of disputed territory today. Muslim landlords, or *podiyars*, were forced to flee during the years of the war as this area was uncleared and under LTTE control. There has since been dispute as to who owns these paddy fields.

²⁰² "After the breaking of Araiampathy statue, people want to know who [is responsible]," *BattiNews.Com*, Oct. 8, 2013. Accessed Oct. 014, http://www.battinews.com/2013/10/blog-post_7033.html



Figure 16, Source: author.

Thiruvalluvar

Thiruvalluvar is an extremely famous and widely celebrated 3rd-1st century Tamil poet. He authored the *Thirukkural*, which consists of a series of philosophical couplets on a variety of subjects from friendship to state-building. The *Thirukkural* is very frequently a standard part of school curriculum.

Transnational Appeals

Though it should be readily apparent considering the previous discussion of these projects, it is important to highlight that an extremely significant aspect of constructing and validating the authenticity of community culture are the transnational appeals made in these idioms. Thus, the idiom of public beautification exists as a constant space to appeal to and embody transnational agency for authenticity. These appeals are actively constructed in this local

context to legitimize claims to particular heritages and pasts by appealing to real or imagined connections to foreign powers. This is important in light of globalizing capitalist markets and the real and rumored transnational networks of aid mentioned in Chapter One.

Kattankudy town envisions itself as being a distinct node within a larger global *umma* not only doctrinally and culturally, but also economically. Recently, the town had all road signs also written in Arabic so that visitors who might come would be able to read them.²⁰³ On one occasion, a shop owner even explained that the reason they put the public beautification was so people visiting would find it beautiful. Thus, public beautification performs an important role in the advertising and cultivating of real current and future transnational economic and aid-based ties. This ostentatious display feeds community imaginaries as well-connected to the Middle East. In light of the migrant traffic between the Gulf nations and Kattankudy people as well as increased avenues of trade and multi-national corporations, these public beautification projects also serve a related and more practical function to cater to a new international audience. The large welcome board at the northern border also potentially indicates an increasing shift in orientation. The old entrance board pre-Japanese road 2008 welcomes visitors to "Kattankudy" in four languages: Tamil, Sinhala, English, and Arabic. The new, sleek entrance gate welcomes visitors in the same four languages, this time to "Batticaloa."²⁰⁴ The change from the town name to the district name could indicate a shift in target audience--from that of a local viewer with more exact knowledge of place to that of a more international viewer less attuned to the specificity of local places.

²⁰³ However, complaints were filed (according to Mr. Ajmal, by Tamil politicians) and the road signs were removed on the grounds that Arabic was not an official language of Sri Lanka. Name boards in Tamil saying "Vannakkam, Batticaloa Welcomes You" were also destroyed and rumors abounded as to why. Some rumors stated that it was Muslims who find "Vannakkam" to be haram, while other sources in Kattankudy claim that it was the Sri Lankan Government who is engineering rumors to divide Tamils and Muslims; Mr. Ajmal, recorded interview, May 24, 2014; "Tamil name boards removed along Batticaloa-Kalmunai Road," *TamilNet*, Sept. 23, 2011. Accessed Apr. 2015, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=34450>.

²⁰⁴ Hasbullah and Korf, "Muslim geographies," 33.

While Kattankudy has been criticized by some for its ostentatious appeals to 'Arab' aesthetic, few people consider that Araiampathy's and the Batticaloa's (about 7 kilometers north) make similar appeals to India. Many of Araiampathy's statues make direct appeals and references to Indian heritage that are less contested than those of Kattankudy. One man I spoke with even told me that the sculptor had come from India. In Batticaloa town there is another figure of Thiruvalluvar and perhaps more interestingly, a statue of Gandhi. Gandhi is perhaps a very peculiar statue for this area as his connections to Sri Lanka are less obvious (though he did visit the country in 1927), which could suggest that his statue is not so much intended to signify an existing connection so much as it is to negotiate present and future ones. He remains not wholly uncontested. In April 2012, the statue was destroyed. While I discuss statue destruction more below, it is important to mention here that this incidence represents a case where the transnational appeal actually reached the target nation and incited action. Indian Diplomats and the Indian High Commission made public statements and requested "urgent investigations" of the incident²⁰⁵ Thus in this case, while much is made of an "invasion" of Middle Eastern culture, it is actually the case that the Tamil Hindu community also makes similar appeals to India (though on arguably more reasonable claims to ancestry).

Creating Oppositional Beauty: The Dialectic of Ornamented Land

Furthermore, focusing on how public beautification is used as a technology of community that operates within local idioms also significantly tells us what the community is *not*. This is why Kattankudy's public beautification has come under fire: They are self-alienating-polarizing, even. And that is in many ways the point. As mentioned above when discussing Basimah's reaction to my nose piercing, what it means to be "Muslim" in this town is in many

²⁰⁵ R. K. Radhakrishnan. "Statue of Gandhi defaced in Sri Lanka," *The Hindu*. April 8, 2012, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/statue-of-gandhi-defaced-in-sri-lanka/article3291303.ece..>

ways determined as "not being Tamil." When considering the history of Muslim identity discussed in Chapter One, I argue that it is particularly significant that Hizbullah chose to, as Mr. Ajmal described, take photos and build here what he has seen abroad. On a very simple but powerful level, Tamil Hindus and Christians in this area simply do not relate to these beautification projects, particularly the roundabouts and prominent mosques. I argue that public beautification powerfully embodies this argument: most of the Tamil residents of Araiampathy that I spoke with buy into this rhetoric. When asking about either Kattankudy's or Araiampathy's public beautification, people often described one town in terms of the other. For example, a friend of mine told me, "The [Araiampathy] statues are our culture people, they reflect our culture. You can see especially in Kattankudy they are putting at the border trees it's like their culture, that's why they are putting these to reflect our culture."²⁰⁶ In one of my interviews, Mr. Ajmal--evidently exasperated by my repeated questions about Kattankudy's trees--told me defensively that Kattankudy has date trees but other communities have other trees. For example, he pointed out that Tamil Hindus value other trees like neem and aracu maram. This further underscores the relational and oppositional aspect to local discourse on the projects.

Similarly, some prominent Tamil community members I spoke with noted (evidently as an advantage) that the statues in Araiampathy would not be appealing to Muslims. One woman, Daarshana, told me matter-of-factly that they chose statues because "For [Muslims] there is a fear of shape/form [*uruvam*] no?"²⁰⁷ K. Sabaratna commented that they selected Swami Vivekananda at the border precisely because (in his view) Muslims would find it distasteful or even harmful. Significantly, the oppositional aspect of public beautification also has political implications in the sense that it contributes to Kattankudy's visible development vis a vis

²⁰⁶ My. Ajmal, recorded interview, June 29, 2014.

²⁰⁷ "avungalukku uruvam bayamthaanE." M.K. Master, recorded interview, July 28, 2014.

Araiampathy, and goes on to suggest that this development is for a particular community. It also contributes to the ethnicization of the district governments discussed in Chapter One by marking government land with the beauty and cultural appeals specific to a particular community.

Making Authentic Claims to Lands

This brings us to an even more contested function of public beautification: claiming lands. In this function, public beautification participates in a wider material and socio-spatially oriented community that negotiates and contests boundaries, along with new and old temples and mosques, in constituting and contesting lived and official borders between these towns. This is particularly important given the land disputes festering before and aggravated by the war (see Chapter One). In my interviews with prominent Tamil community members, this function of public beautification and temples was immediately and openly acknowledged. As noted previously, Araiampathy's northern boundary has been creeping south for several decades. Because of "Muslim encroachments" at this boundary, the main road itself has become a key point of contestation. There--on the median--Swami Vivekananda steps forward towards Kattankudy as Araiampathy's defender against Kattankudy's ominous 'Saudi' trees. The following interview excerpt with K. Sabaratna is revealing:

Me: Why did they put [the statues] there?

K. Sabaratna: Because of this Muslim--uh what we call that....they are capturing our land. They are ruined so many ...encroachments...

Me: So if you keep that there...

K. Sabaratna: --because they can't come back. Because of that we have put that man there. [laughs]²⁰⁸

Me: So are there other statues like that?

K. Sabaratna: No, no. Not like that. He is a sacred man no? So they won't have courage to even after this.

²⁰⁸ K. Sabaratna, recorded interview with author, Apr. 16, 2014.

And he makes a valid point: to some extent the physical existence of a statue prevents people from going there and physically marks the space as Tamil. The median stretches to about the southern border of Araiampathy, where it becomes an undivided road. There, the final two statues of Thiruvalluvar and Swami Vipulananda are reoriented to face south towards the town's other border.

Another highly contested space is the settlement Karbala, named after the famous 7th century battle and site of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn in modern-day Iraq, at Araiampathy's northeast seashore border with the Bay of Bengal. The Sufi All Ceylon Thareekathul Mufliheen has built a meditation center there that also holds the tomb of their founder, 'Payilvan.'²⁰⁹ In local perspective, this group occupies a liminal space both socio-religiously and spatially. This group is by most accounts marginalized and ostracized from greater Kattankudy society and was the victim of the widespread anti-Sufi violence in 2007 mentioned earlier. Araiampathy residents, too, find this group to be an encroaching threat to their lands. Despite the fact that Thareekathul Mufliheen is officially in the Manmunai Pattu Division, most Araiampathy residents view this area as "captured" by the Muslims and by extension Kattankudy town. To defend the border from further encroachment, on February 27, 2014,²¹⁰ District officials and politicians (with Prasanthan, of course, being most prominent) installed a fierce Siva statue on the beach in this area, gazing out over the ocean as Siva typically faces East.²¹¹ My interview with M.K. Master and his daughter, Darshana, reveal that people share similar sentiments about the function of this statue in relation to those on the road:

²⁰⁹ See their website "Mufliheen.org," <http://www.mufliheen.org>.

²¹⁰ Suresh, "A 21 Sivan Statue at Araiampathy Beach," *Battinewsfirst*, Accessed Jan, 2015, <http://www.battinewsfirst.com/2014/02/21.html>.

²¹¹ Charles Dillard Collins, *The Iconography and Ritual of Siva at Elephanta*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 24.

Me: So, why have they just kept the statue there?

Darshana: That, so the people that go--there is the sea shore no? For the sake of going for the 'hobby time.' And bakthi [devotion] will come. Additionally, for safety, that's all Muslims there, no? For them there is a fear of shape/form [*uruvam*] no? For the sake of that.

One article even refers to this statue as a "Boundary Sivan" (*ellaissivan*).²¹² This statue has some color detail on the face but is still in the conventional gold color like the ones on the main road (see Figure 17).²¹³ However, at twenty-one feet, this statue is much taller than the others ornamenting the median. News articles refer to this particular statue with the prefix "thiru" for additional respect, becoming "thiruvuvassilai," contrasted to "uruvassilai." The statue depicts Siva as Nataraj (Dancer) performing a Rudra Tandava, which is done in a violent mood and is the dance of destruction or death.²¹⁴



Figure 17, Source: author.

This function does not apply only to public beautification. M.K. Master and Darshana also implicate the construction of temples themselves as defenders of Araiampathy's borders. Near the Sivan statue is a Narasimha (Tamil: Narasingam) Temple built within the past ten years, also for the very purpose of securing Araiampathy's Northeast border from 'Muslim encroachments.' M.K. Master and his daughter laughed as they told me that temple was also for

²¹² "The opening of a 21 foot state at Batticaloa Araiampathy border," *KuruNews:Batticaloa*. Accessed March, 2015, <http://www.kurunews.com/2014/02/21.html>.

²¹³ This statue was designed by a "Ruben," who seems to be a prominent figure in the trade. <http://www.battinewsfirst.com/2014/02/21.html>.

²¹⁴ Namita Gokhale, *The Book of Shiva*, (Penguin Global, 2003), 29.

"border security."²¹⁵ This temple is now used to justify and claim the lands as rightfully Tamil in light of local land disputes as Muslims after the war seek to return to their land.²¹⁶

Another "security" temple guards the opposite northwest corner of Araiampathy near the lagoon side where I lived. The Sri Paramanayanar Temple is much older--allegedly over 300 years old—and in an area that has been long-settled and not contested.²¹⁷ Nonetheless, this temple, too, can be seen as a guard of Araiampathy's borders. M.K. Master told me it was also "for safety and security—like a bodyguard."²¹⁸ (Again, though perhaps he didn't intend it to be so, the use of the term 'bodyguard' reinforces these technologies as a constructing *bodies*.) Ayyanar temples are common Tamil village border guardians, and it is common for villages to have these kinds of temples guarding the peripheries.²¹⁹

Kattankudy's public beautification, too, negotiates its boundaries. Mr. Ajmal commented that before, when the LTTE still had sway in the area, people in Kattankudy were afraid to demarcate boundaries. When they were able to build the welcome board archway, they placed it inside the actual political border of the town, which has led to confusion as to where the northern boundary begins. He lamented that actually the border is much farther north, but now people assume the boundary begins where the large archway is built.

Kattankudy's mosques also function on this basic level to claim land and legitimate the Muslim communities in those areas. A few key Tamil informants that I spoke exclaimed how unnecessary it was to have so many mosques. While mosques being built in Manmunai Pattu attract particular attention from the Tamil community, there are also interesting new mosques

²¹⁵ MK. Master and daughter, recorded interview, July 28, 2014.

²¹⁶ Tambimuttu, "Araiampathi pithesathil aththumeeri kaanikalai pidiththavarkalai janaathipathi peci veliyetruven." *Araiampathy.com News*

²¹⁷ Temple Trust President, recorded interview, July 22, 2014.

²¹⁸ M.K. Master, recorded interview, July 28, 2014.

²¹⁹ Diane Mines, *Fierce Gods: Inequality, Ritual, and the Politics of Dignity in a South Indian Village*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 131.

being built within Kattankudy's borders including one modeled after Dome of the Rock and another prominent mosque and madrasa allegedly funded by Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Additionally, it is important to mention here--in light of the above discussion of the role of the Payilvan Meditation Center and Araiampathy temples in working with public beautification to negotiate space--that such Sufi groups must also negotiate their own place within Kattankudy's borders--through and between the beautification projects on the main road. Hasbullah and Korf (2012) argue that it was only by taking advantage of the ethnicized divisions and locating their center just outside of Kattankudy that Payilvan's followers were able to institutionalize and practice their faith in the first place.²²⁰

Though located within the boundaries of Kattankudy and not located on a political boundary, I argue that Badhriya Jumma Mosque also negotiates a similar liminal space. This community's leader, Rauf Moulavi, is constantly warning his followers of the "Wahhabis" in Kattankudy while defending his teaching and Badhriya Mosque as the true and straight path. He frames many of his teachings in this polemic, and he defends Badhriya essentially as an island of the true Sunnat Wal Jamaat in a sea of Wahhabis. Indeed, in a booklet titled "'Waseela' related to foreign 'Fatwa's" distributed at the 2014 Grand Khwajajee Feast, Rauf Moulavi appeals to his supporters with the following message:²²¹

The mosque we see above was established in 1960 by the followers of Jawad Al-Haj Abdul Alim Arif Billah Awliya Kamil (Rah). After that, his son Al-Haj Arif Fillaah Abdul Rauf Misbahee Thala Umruhee and those accompanying him have not changed that Badhriya Jumma Mosque and Madrasa. In this mosque the Sunnat Wal Jamaat policy and works are observed in the manner of Badr(?) Sahaba's monuments. Here people come day after day mobilize/flock/rely and come (to)the gone/past/dead God/Truth-

²²⁰ Hasbullah and Korf, "Muslim geographies," 38.

²²¹ This was the 28th Annual Khwajajee Grand Feast in honor of Hazrath Khwaja Muyeenuddheen Chisthee (Rali) and Hazrath Khwaja Fakhruddeen Chisthee (Rali). On the ground people referred to this is a kanthoori.

loving saints in the way of the Sufi tarigah. *In Sri Lanka, this mosque becomes the only and unique place of God (in which) people in the path of Sunnat Wal Jamaat Sufi tarigah are called and go in the path of Allah.* So, to finish building the huge mosque you see, given the huge amount that will be needed, we kindly ask that you wisely do funding/donate in/from the wealth Allah provided you, having switched the obtaining of wealth in this world for in the Paradise Hereafter.²²² [emphasis added]

In this passage, Rauf Moulavi cites importance of this mosque as a space for the 'true' way, or as many people told me, the "straight way," of the Sufi tarigah. The mosque becomes not only an important claim to the true Path, but also--given the previous violent attempts to "purify" Kattankudy's borders--important in defending and maintaining the right to the land and space within Kattankudy and within Sri Lanka at large. He also defends the decoration of this mosque and its *ziaram*, adamantly claiming that festival decorations (*alankāram*) are the symbols (*ciṅṅaṅkaḷ*) of Allah and the identity (*aṭaiyāḷam*) of Muslims.²²³ This community deserves much more close attention that is, alas, outside of the scope of this thesis. However, this brief discussion of Badhriya's giant mosque--together with the other mosques, temples, and public

²²² Abdur Rauf, "Waseela Related to Fatwah People," Kattankudy, June 18, 2014. மேலே நாம் காணும் பள்ளிவாயல் 1960ம் ஆண்டு அல்வலிய்யும் காமில் ஆறிப் பில்லாஹ் அல்ஹாஜ் அப்துல் ஜவாத் ஆலிம் (றஹ்) அன்னவர்களினால் பத்ரிய்யஹ் தைக்கிய்யாவாக ஸ்தாபித்து வைக்கப்பட்டது. அதன் பின் அவர்களின் மைந்தர் அல்ஹாஜ் அரிப் பில்லாஹ் அப்துர் றஹ் மிஸ்பாஹீ தாள உம்றுஹீ அன்னவர்களினால் அது பத்ரிய்யஹ் ஜும்அஹ் பள்ளியாக மாற்றாப்பட்டது. பத்ர் ஸஹாபாக்களின் நினைவுச்சின்னமாகத் திகழும் இப்பள்ளிவாயலில் சுன்னத் வல் ஜமாஅத் கொள்கையும் கிரியைகளுமே கடைப்பிடிக்கப்பட்டு வருகின்றது. இங்கு இறை நேசர்களான வலீமார்கள் சென்ற ஸுபிஸ தரீகத் வழியில் மக்கள் நாளுக்கு நாள் அணிதிரண்டு கொண்டே வருகின்றனர். இலங்கையில் இப்பல்லிவாயல்தான் சுன்னத் வல் ஜமாஅத் ஸுபித்துவ தரீகஹ் பாதையில் மக்களை அல்லாஹ்விற்பால் அழைத்துசெல்லும் ஒரேயொரு தனித்துவமிக்க இறையில்லமாகும். ஆகவே, நீங்கள் காணும் பாரிய பள்ளிவாயலை கட்டி முடிப்பதற்கு பெருந்தொகைப்பணம் தேவைப்படுவதால் அல்லாஹ் உங்களுக்கு வழங்கிய செல்வத்தில் இருந்து வாரி வழங்கி நிதியுதவி செய்து மறுமையில் தங்களுக்கான சொர்க்க மாளிகையை இவ்வுலகத்திலேயே பெற்றுகொள்ளுமாறு அன்புடன் கேட்டுக்கொள்கின்றோம்.

²²³ Abdur Rauf Moulavi, "The Awliya are Allah's Symbols," YouTube video posted by Shums Media Unit, 48:35 minutes, June 30, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0eSRBvXhUU>.

beautification projects--illustrates that, simultaneous with and defined by claims territory, each "monument" becomes "a point of reference amid other parts of the landscape, one node among others in a topographical matrix that orients the rememberer and creates meaning in both the land and our recollections."²²⁴ These modalities are thus worth considering alongside public beautification.

Iconoclasm

The meanings, perceptions, and purposes of public beautification are thus clearly contested in symbolic and tangible ways. This manifests most dramatically in what I am loosely calling here "iconoclasm." I refer to it as such in part because iconoclasm exists in many forms today, and in part because these projects, as instrumental ornaments of ethnicized lands, have in many ways become icons. At and near my field site, there were three instances of statue destruction within the past three years: two statues in Araiampathy and one in the main Batticaloa town. These cases are interesting because, unlike in the popularly discussed instances of iconoclasm in South Asia, the actual perpetrators remain largely unknown, anonymous or largely insignificant as individual actors. However, this anonymity permits rumors to flourish; and these rumors and reactions in turn--as we have seen throughout this thesis--shape understandings of icon, iconoclast, and, indeed, community.

I had first heard about the statue destruction when asking Mr. Ajmal if there were any popular stories about these statues, and he told me half-jokingly that Araiampathy's Vivekananda statue had lost its nose. A few other people I asked about it seemed less than interested and also downplayed the incident. Nonetheless, after this incident, army personnel came and enforced a curfew in anticipation of possible violence.²²⁵ The Tamil politician

²²⁴ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 7.

²²⁵ Abhiman Sir, recollected from field notes, July 14, 2014.

Prasanthan blamed Muslims for the destruction. He paid for a replacement and held a formal re-installation ceremony with Muslim politicians from Kattankudy present. Thus, these statues have a powerful impact negotiating local politics and can, at particular moments, function as charged *icons* of communal identity. Jamal Elias discusses "icon" as a "heuristic concept that delineates the distinction between supposedly 'good' and 'bad' images, the latter being referred to derogatorily as "idols."²²⁶ He writes that "One of the most enduring uses of the concept of idolatry lies in imagining a cultural other as distinct from oneself, a process that is simultaneously exoticizing in romantic or wondrous senses and a means of arguing for one's own religious and cultural superiority."²²⁷ With this dialectic understanding of idol and icon, I argue that in these intensified moments of "iconoclasm" that have consolidated to the public beautification's function as community icon.

The first statue destroyed was the Swami Vivekananda statue in Araiampathy January 9, 2012 by a "motorbike squad" late at night.²²⁸ The statue suffered damage to the nose and hands (see Figure 18). Though one man from Kattankudy was



Figure 18, Source: author.

jailed and then released on bail, on the ground everyone reported that the culprits have yet to be

²²⁶ Elias, *Aisha's Cushion*, 44.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 53-4.

²²⁸ "Vandalization of Mahatma Gandhi statue in Sri Lanka," *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses*, May 3, 2012, <http://idsa.in/resources/parliament/VandalisationofMahatmaGandhisstatueinSriLanka>; "TNA parliamentarian condemns desecration of Vivekananda statue in Batticaloa," *Tamil Net*, Jan. 13, 2012, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=34784>; "Motorbike squad destroys Swami Vivekananda statue in Batticaloa," *Tamil Net*, Jan 10, 2012, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=34777>.

caught. Nonetheless, rumors abound. While it is likely that we will never know who is responsible for this act, the rumors are very useful to help unpack perceptions of communal tension as well as perspectives on how these statues participate in this tension. For example, my Aunty (in Kattankudy) explained to me that there were political tensions amongst the two main Tamil political parties (TMVP and TNA) and that the opposing party had destroyed the statue. K. Sabaratnam told me that it was Muslims who destroyed the statue, pointing out that America also was fighting "those buggers." My Sufi contact, Abhiman Sir, told me that it was Wahhabi "bigots" because they feared that people would start praying to it because it was at the boundary.²²⁹ One Kattankudy Urban Council member even told me that it was the work of Sinhalese government secret forces who were trying to exacerbate tensions between Muslims and Tamils. These diverse accounts reveal diverse imaginings of community and understandings of politics that are largely mobilized in rumors.

The Batticaloa Gandhi statue mentioned earlier was destroyed on April 5, 2012. This was one of four statues vandalized in Batticaloa town at the time, and reports suggest that the height of some of the statues indicated that multiple people were involved. This particular incident received more press because, as a testament to the agency of the transnational appeals mentioned above, high-ranking Indian officials took an interest in the issue. For example, *The Hindu* reported on the "desecration," saying that the Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka "requested urgent investigation" and took up the issue with Sri Lanka's Foreign Secretary, the Chief Minister of the Eastern Province, and the Inspector General of Police.²³⁰ However, the few people I spoke with about this particular incident all suggested that it was, in fact, the police themselves who were responsible for this incident. Even as a 'mere' rumor, the implications of

²²⁹ Abhiman Sir, recollected from field notes, July 14, 2014.

²³⁰ Radhakrishnan. "Statue of Gandhi defaced in Sri Lanka," April 8, 2012.

this allegation are telling for community-State relations; indeed, they perhaps subtly redefine these relations.

The final instance of statue destruction that I encountered was the case of Araiampathy's Ulaka Natchi statue in the middle of the night on September 23rd, 2013. Unlike in the previous cases, two men were actually caught in the act and arrested. The two men were apparently "Muslims from Oddamavadi," a town 40 kilometers north of Araiampathy. Based on my discussions with community members, reactions to this incident were mixed. Officials in the Araiampathy Divisional Secretariat office played down the incident, K. Sabaratna felt frustration that Hisbullah had "covered the incident up nicely," other friends seemed to address the issue matter-of-factly, and my contact in the Kattankudy Urban Council again told me that the (Sinhalese) government is trying to instigate tensions. One local article goes so far as to say that this statue destruction cannot be seen as normal but rather could be seen as an attack on an entire people.²³¹ The article continues on to suggest the possibility of this act as a premeditated plan to divide the Tamil and Muslim people.

These acts therefore come to be seen as 'iconoclastic' attacks on the conventions of a town and even its people. While few, if any, know the perpetrator's real motivations behind these acts, the reactions to them have transformed the works themselves and, to at least some extent, shaped self-understanding of community. Regardless of one's suspicions and interest in the matter, iconoclastic acts force people to confront the fact that these public beautification works

²³¹ இந்தச் சிலை உடைப்பை சாதாரணமாகப் பார்க்க முடியாது. காரணம் ஓட்டமாவடியில் உள்ள ஒரு சகோதர இனத்தவர் ஆடையம்பதிக்கு வந்து உடைக்க வேண்டியதன் தேவை என்ன அவ்வாறாயின் காத்தான்குடி எல்லையில் உள்ள ஏனைய சிலைகளில் ஒன்றை அவர் அடைத்துவிட்டுச் சென்றிருக்கலாம் அனால் எல்லைப் பகுதியில் உள்ள ஏனைய சிலைகளை விட்டு உள்ளே வந்து உடைத்ததற்குக் காரணம் என்ன எனும் கேள்வி ஒட்டுமொத்த தேச மக்களுக்கும் ஏற்படுகின்றது; "After the breaking of Araiampathy statue, people want to know who [is responsible]." *BattiNews*, Oct. 8, 2013.

mediate disputes at different registers. Through their desecration, they become, as Finbar Flood has put it, synecdoches.²³² Regardless of who thinks who did what, people view--with more or less concern—the destruction of a statue as a defamatory act against what the statue represents (a single politician-patron, a political party, and/or a larger religious or ethnic community). Thus, these statues have become 'iconic' in the sense that they embody more than their material suggests in and of itself. Interestingly, some residents of Kattankudy find the trees to be too similar to the statues as both "icons" and "idols" of the Muslim imaginary and thus reject them as such. These people (like Mr. Ajmal and Shibly Sir) are paradoxically forced to compare these projects with their 'idolatrous' Hindu neighbors while simultaneously maintaining the superiority of *their* projects as 'merely' beautiful and not religious or cultural. These iconoclastic acts draw greater attention to these works as icons and more deeply entrenches them as conventions of community imaginaries.²³³ And they negotiate politics such that they are neither 'neutral' nor 'merely' beautiful.

(Re)installation

The attacks on Araiampathy's statues can be viewed at different levels, most obviously: (1) as against Prasanthan's efforts specifically, and/or (2) his political party (TMVP), and/or (3) as against the Tamil Hindu that he caters to more generally. Prasanthan took full advantage of the destruction of Swami Vivekananda to hold a grand ceremony to reinstate a new statue and reassert both his political hegemony and that of the larger TMVP/Tamil Hindu community. He hosted a sizable re-installation function to which a number of important politicians and community members from both Araiampathy and Kattankudy were obliged to attend. In

²³² Finbar Flood, "Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum," *The Art Bulletin* 84, no. 4 (2002): 651.

²³³ Jamal Elias, "Image, Impropriety, Iconoclasm," (lecture, *Islam and Image course*, Philadelphia, PA, Mar. 18, 2015).

addition to these prominent community members, school children also participated in the procession and event.

The function itself has very interesting implications for what this statue--and by extension, the collection of Arayampathy's statues—means as a technology of community. They processed the new statue in the bed of a truck from the large Murugan Temple, one of the most prominent temples in Araiyampathy, to the statue's former location at the border. Photos depict a pujari performing a type of *abishekam* ritual as well as many people (including Muslim community members) partaking in garlanding the statue, which is a common sign of respect in South Asia typically reserved for deities, politicians, and honored guests.²³⁴ The Secretary in Araiyampathy's Division Secretariat Office told me that "Muslim religious people" came to this function to ensure that it will not be broken again.²³⁵ The statue had therefore been re-consecrated with increased significance and authority with the (at least official) validation of the "other" community. My contact in the Kattankudy Urban Council was among the attendees. He downplayed the event, adding that everything went smoothly and that there was not a single problem.

For the installation of the Sivan statue on the beach, Prasanthan and other community leaders from the Manmunai Pattu District office and local temples held a large puja and ceremony. They processed the statue from Sri Veeramma Kali Amman Temple, along the main road and inner roads, and finally to the spot on the beach in the contested land. There, a crane lifted the statue onto a cement platform. Again, the presence of so many important people from the Manmunai Pattu District office sends a clear signal that this project had the support of the local government. Moreover, the rituals performed by pujaris and, indeed, the ceremony and

²³⁴ "The statue of Vivekananda damaged by a monster was established again today!" *Thinakkathir.com*, Apr. 4, 2012, <http://www.thinakkathir.com/?p=33883>.

²³⁵ Manmunai Pattu Division Secretary, recollected from field notes, July 8, 2014.

procession as a whole, consecrate the statue into its community function as "Boundary Siva" socially, politically, and religiously. It also continues to reaffirm this as a Tamil Hindu act, a Tamil Hindu community project, and—most importantly, Tamil Hindu land.

Date Harvest

While Hizbullah has not had the misfortune—or opportunity—to hold an event reinstating destroyed public works, he does, however, make a very public performance of date harvesting each year. He holds and presides over an annual ceremony to initiate the harvest, which is then carried out by the Kattankudy Urban Council.²³⁶ There are even photos of community members kissing the dates at this function.²³⁷ He uses this occasion as an opportunity to reconnect and contribute to a town that he no longer lives in, and ultimately as a political move to gain popular support. Some people dismissively perceive this event and the date tree beautification projects to be just that: 'frivolous' political tactics. (Indeed, some sarcastically see Hizbullah's main role as that of 'public beautifier.')

However, many others also see this as an important event for the Muslim community in Kattankudy and in Sri Lanka at large. News of Kattankudy's annually increasing date harvest spreads through Tamil language blogs and media outlets throughout the island such as *Srilanka Muslims*, *Jaffna Muslim*, *Virakesari*, and *Thinakaran*.²³⁸ One article states that the dates are of

²³⁶ “The date trees in Kattankudy are fruting in clusters,” *Thinakaran*, May, 28, 2012, <http://www.thinakaran.lk/2012/05/28/?fn=d1205282>.

²³⁷ M.D. Lucias, “The harvest of lots of date fruits in Kattankudy,” *Virakesari*, June 25, 2014, <http://www.virakesari.lk/articles/2014/06/25/%E0%AE%95%E0%AE%BE>.

²³⁸ M.S.M.Noorthen, “The Date Trees in Kattankudy Started Fruiting,” *Sri Lanka Muslims*, June 2, 2014, <http://srilankamuslims.lk/%E0%AE%95%E0%AE%BE%E0%AE%A4%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%A4%E0%AE%BE%E0%AE%A9%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%95%E0%AF%81%E0%AE%9F%E0%AE%BF%E0%AE%AF%E0%AE%BF%E0%AE%B2%E0%AF%8D-%E0%AE%95%E0%AE%BE%E0%AE%AF%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%95%E0%AF%8D/>; “Kattankudyil kaaytkkat todankum pereeththam marangal (piraththiyeka padangal),” *Jaffna Muslim*, Mar, 26, 2013, http://www.jaffnamuslim.com/2013/03/blog-post_6904.html; “The date trees in Kattankudy are fruting in clusters,” *Thinakaran*; Lucias, *Virakesari*.

"historic importance" for Muslims in Kattankudy.²³⁹ Another site's headline reads "These are the dates ripened in our country!"²⁴⁰ These statements negotiate these trees not as projects of political community, but as a testament to a thriving Muslim community. Abhiman Sir once told me that he stopped and picked up some dates that had fallen on the road while walking to my Aunty's home. He said that normally dates wouldn't be able to ripen in this weather, but people say that Allah has made Kattankudy hotter (from about 33 degrees Celsius to 37) in order to ripen them here. Anticipating possible skepticism on my part, he pointed out that it was possible. Allah could do anything that he willed, and in the Qur'an he promises to provide food for his people. While some people I mentioned this to laughed and brushed the story aside ("some people will think that! It is not like that!"), some news pages allude to this same understanding. For example, *Thainaadu* says "In Kattankudy it is currently very hot. The date palms have bloomed and the climate is more conducive to ripening."²⁴¹

Technologies of Cultural Authenticity

These ritualized ceremonies--whether they be statue-installations or date-harvests--highlight that public beautification starts to emerge as what I have argued throughout this chapter as an important technology for negotiating cultural authenticity. In Araiampathy, the statues function primarily for these purposes. They visually recreate the long and proud history of the town and literally root this history into the soil. The statues celebrate important figures with

²³⁹ "Kattankudyil kaaytkkat todankum pereeththam marangal (piraththiyeka padangal)," *Jaffna Muslim*.

²⁴⁰ "These are the dates ripened in our country!" *ThaayNaadu*, 2012, Accessed Mar. 2015, <http://www.thainaadu.com/read.php?nid=1364326268#.VQOI53sxv1B>).

²⁴¹ Ibid. கிழக்கில் தற்போது மிகவும் உஷ்ணம் நிலவி வருகின்றது. இது பேரீச்சை மரங்கள் பூத்து, காய்க்கின்றமைக்கு மிகவும் உகந்த கால நிலையாக இருக்கின்றது; Sammanthurai News, "The date trees fruiting in Kattankudy," *Sammanthurai Web*, http://sammanthuraiweb.blogspot.com/2013/03/photos_26.html. கிழக்கு மாகாணத்தில் தற்போது அதிகம் உஷ்ணம் நிலவுவதால் பிரதான வீதியிலுள்ள அதிகமான பேரீச்சம் மரங்கள் பூத்தும், காய்த்தும் வருவதை அவதானிக்கக் கூடியதாகவுள்ளது.

local, national, transnational, and Tamil cultural significance and in their selection negotiate local conceptions of local Tamil history. A local elementary school principal pointed out that children would see the cultural and learn about the culture.²⁴² My host Akka, Raji, described the statues to me as collectively "Hindu Saivite," saying that those statues represented the founders of Tamil culture.²⁴³ In Araiampathy, it is often explicitly acknowledged that the public beautification projects are not only for beauty, but also for "culture" and "history"—and keeping the Muslims from "encroaching." In light of the ongoing land disputes, public beautification presents a salient way for community leaders to articulate "authentic" claims to land by negotiating and remaking their history—literally making it a tangible participant in the present and rooting the past in contemporary soil.

In Kattankudy, too, people generally and tacitly assume that these public beautification projects are a part of the culture. Mr. Ajmal acknowledges that, "In the beginning, we did it like that for the sake of the beautiful 'style,' but other people didn't know the culture and said it was Saudi or something like that. But it is not more than that."²⁴⁴ He added that people thought Hizbullah was representing their culture and "that he is putting all these things here from Dubai, so he is looking after us." While he clearly was dismissive of this idea, he himself recognizes this inevitable function. In another interview, he contradicted these statements and (as mentioned in the opening of Ch.1) says, "We [planted the trees] to make the town seem more worthy (*aḷavu*). That, and also we cannot keep [things from] another culture here. We may keep [only things from] this one culture here."²⁴⁵ It is important to reiterate the distancing act that people like Shibly Sir employ in dismissing these as "merely" beautification or political projects. In its

²⁴² Subramanian Vidayalam Principal, recorded interview with author, Apr 22, 2014.

²⁴³ Akka, recorded interview, Apr. 16, 2014.

²⁴⁴ Mr. Ajmal and Shibly Sir, recorded interview, May 24, 201.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

blatant material mediation and ostensible "frivolity," it is perhaps not a proper "Islamic" practice in their eyes. Yet, people continue to make the connection consciously and subconsciously that Kattankudy's public beautification projects are "Muslim," if for no other reason than the obvious denotative and connotative content described above. For example, one man explained that dates were significant because Muslims are supposed to break the Ramzan fast with dates in the tradition of the Prophet. He also acknowledged that these trees were beautification, underscoring the very act of "beautification" as a polysemic technology of community. Even Shibly Sir contradicted himself and implicated the piety of the date trees when he contrasted Hizbullah's lack of beard with the fact that he has planted the trees.

Of immense importance, too, is that these beautification projects are seen as making Kattankudy more like Saudi Arabia. As noted in the previous chapter, these appeals are made in part in a spirit of religious revival and transformation. Kattankudy's Gulf-esque urban design is not only a statement of the present culture in an aspirational sense, but also ultimately a (re)articulation--or perhaps (re)fashioning--of Kattankudy's past. There is a very strong correlation between the narrative origin stories discussed in Chapter One and the visual/material constructions of authenticity negotiated in these public beautification projects--in conjunction with the personal adornments discussed in the previous section. The visible and public nature of Kattankudy's beautification projects, considered along with the salience of the idiom in general, has in many ways profoundly negotiated what Azeez had attempted. As the Manmunai Pattu Divisional Secretariat put it, "Muslims don't keep statues. They keep trees because that's how it looks like in Arabia. They have an Arabian culture."²⁴⁶

That Allah may have turned up the heat in Kattankudy to ripen the dates has even further implications for the cultivation of Muslimness in Kattankudy. The date trees in particular very

²⁴⁶ Manmunai Pattu Division Secretary, recollected from field notes, July 8, 2014.

literally root Arabness and Muslimness into the soil of the town. At least some people like my uncle mentioned above perceive the ripening of these dates as a type of divine validation for their community, and Hizbullah also emphasizes the significance of this with his annual date harvest functions. Thus these date trees--originally intended for "mere" beautification--contribute to the validation of this local Sri Lankan space--and, indeed, the island itself--as "authentically" Muslim. They act like an "Islamic" litmus test of the very soil in which they are planted, and their fruits both confirm and embody the "Muslimness" of the land and community.

Technologies of Community

These projects have simultaneously reconstructed and constituted frames of community conventions and expectations. Public beautification constructs community just as the community (particularly politicians) constructs public beautification. Young writes that "once created, memorials take on lives of their own, often stubbornly resistant to the state's original intentions. In some cases, memorials created in the image of a state's ideals actually turn around to recast these ideals in the memorial's own image."²⁴⁷ To push this further, in a similar analytic vein to that of the previous chapter, Kattankudy's public beautification projects then negotiate this "Arabness" trigonally in the local--somewhere in the liminal space between the local, the transnational, and the oppositional/"othering." David Morgan describes a comparable process with more theoretical sophistication:²⁴⁸

Public rites of piety remember the founding narratives that confer identity on the community by tracing its story from origin to present. The monument or memorial statue erected in the public square visually and spatially triangulates the viewer's relation to the hero and the people for whom the hero dedicated himself in some sacrificial form. Heroes are important to a social body because their presence allows a form of visibility otherwise unarticulated. By seeing the hero, people see themselves as a people belonging to and embodied in the hero. The totem is us.

²⁴⁷ Young, *Texture of Memory*, 3.

²⁴⁸ Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, 25.

As the often differing opinions and rumors indicate, the nature of community as mediated through individual somatic bodies also means important polysemy within larger 'social bodies.' In conceiving these public beautification projects as technologies of authenticity ornamenting the land as community imaginary embodied and emplaced, it is of course important to keep in mind that single politicians often create these projects for particular reasons. This has important implications for the levels at which this sort of community rhetoric is salient, most directly the upper-level elite ones. Prasanthan clearly seeks to appeal to his primary vote basis and majority community of Tamil Saivite Hindus. There is ample evidence for this in the content of the statues, the comments of my friends, and in the processions and rituals of the statue installation ceremonies. However, as hinted at above in the discussion of the Catholic community's Stations-of-the-Cross procession and implied in the fact that Muslims are "encroaching" and building mosques, Tamil Hindus are not the only 'community' in Araiampathy though they are the strong majority. As you travel south along the main road and pass Swami Vivekanada, you will immediately see Masjid Salamaath on your left side and St. Mary's Church on your right. There is also a small non-Catholic Christian community in Araiampathy. Indeed, as mentioned above, Tamil Hindus themselves have important divisions along political lines (ruling TMVP and TNA). As a technology of community, the statues are then the technology of a very particular community at the expense of others. As such, they help negotiate Araiampathy's identity—and the larger Manmunai Pattu District—as 'Tamil Hindu,' which aggravates land disputes. This also lends credence to claims that Araiampathy land is "Tamil" land when in fact Araiampathy village and the greater Manmunai Pattu have been home to Muslims and Christians for many generations.

In Kattankudy, there is perhaps a subtler process at work. Hizbullah's overall dream for Kattankudy is to unify it on the basis of appeals to Muslimness in no small part because he is a politician who benefits from rallying Kattankudy's diverse (Sufi-Tawheedi, to simplify) population behind him and around the one thing they share: a perhaps vague/general Muslim ethno-religious identity. Indeed, in addition to working to formally remove the fatwah against Badhriya Jumma mosque, there are other rumors circulating about how Hizbullah has secretly been helping the Sufi communities.²⁴⁹ An uninformed visitor might find it hard to believe that such a town had been the site of systematic violent acts committed by so-called fellow community members. The town has been ornamented with--apart from buildings with his name on it--symbols of ostensibly 'Muslim' identity and large overarching street signs that seem to visibly cohere and unify the town. As Thiranagama writes, "This Arabicized pedigree and image has left a profound and contradictory legacy. Still potent and powerful as a representation of Muslim difference and pedigree, acting to make the community cohere."²⁵⁰

Interestingly, while still affirming Kattankudy's beautification projects as icons of local Muslim identity, Sufi groups are able to reclaim these icons and negotiate them within their own communities. Take, for example, the use of these icons in a digitalized reconstruction by a supporter coordinating the groups media outreach. It depicts Badhriya Jumma Mosque's leader Rauf Moulavi for a large conference that he held at the mosque in October, 2015 in an attempt to convene, unify, and rally Muslims against 'Wahhabi' influence. In fact, the poster includes the title of his talk, "Sufis and Wahhabis," which brings to the forefront the contradiction that the depictions of the beautification projects in the background thinly conceal. The group's main

²⁴⁹ One of these involved an elaborate and expensive scheme to pay a Sufi candidate who had been elected into office to resign in exchange for donating 60 crore to help build Badhriya Jumma Mosque.

²⁵⁰ Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House*, 118. This paper has focused on the Muslim-Tamil relationship at the expense of Sufi-Tawheedi relationships that are arguably more salient at present, yet not as clearly negotiated in public beautification for precisely this reason that Thiranagama emphasizes.

website and media unit put this image together along with the heading, "Sunnat Wal Jamaat Conference [Happening] on Kattankudy's Soil 2014."²⁵¹ Again, we find the emphasis on the soil along with the date trees featured prominently in background (See Figure 18). They affirm and embody a sacredness special to Kattankudy through not only premier madrasas, mosques and other institutions, but now also 'indigenized' to the very soil. This underscores that, even as a top-down technology of ornament, public beautification is highly polysemic and operates at various levels amongst varying individuals.



Figure 19, Source: Shums Media Unit.

²⁵¹ "The Sunnat Wal Jamaat Ulema Conference Happening on Kattankudy Soil," *Shums Media Unit: Sufis, Sunnat Wal Jamaat True Voice*, http://www.shumsmedia.com/2014/11/2014_18.html. In the photo, the Basmallah roundabout also has central importance and has been photoshopped for reasons as yet undetermined.

A Conclusion: Constructing Ethnicity and Embodying Authenticity

I have contextualized materiality in everyday life in Kattankudy and Araiampathy to illuminate how these individuals and communities cultivate and embody ever-shifting and salient identities. I therefore came to understand that people in these villages frequently negotiate many complicated questions of identity and community through ornaments, both on their own bodies and on land that has become embodiments of community imaginary. In this way, I attempted to illuminate—though by no means resolve—a structure-agency debate concerning axioms of beauty and ornament.

With a broad conception of ‘public’ to include women as significant public actors, I argued that this cultivation of self and society is in important ways achieved through technologies of ornament and modalities of beauty. As Christopher Pinney puts it, "Rather than visual culture as a mirror of conclusions established elsewhere, by other means, I try to present it as an experimental zone where new possibilities and new identities are forged.¹⁹⁵" The axiomatic technologies of ornament simultaneously negotiate and constitute—embody—“cultural authenticity” such that analytic categories like ‘vernacular’ dissipate. Conceiving of the public as of fluid and shifting and modalities permits a more vivid and dynamic and complicated conception of publics that includes a wide range of non-traditional technologies like ornaments. I have also shown that, complicit with the embodiment of ornaments is, of course, the salience of rumors that surround and shape these ornaments. With this understanding, I have argued that ornamentation is a salient technology that people, especially though by no means exclusively women, use to engage politically with questions of heritage, piety, and cultural authenticity.

I situated these very ground-level negotiations of ‘Muslim’ and ‘Tamil’ ethnicity and culture within a selective account of elite political debates in the British colonial period, a regional history of

²⁵²Christophe Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*. (India: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8.

conflict and revival, and local origin narratives and land disputes. Particularly with respect to Muslim identity, “frivolous” ornaments are extremely salient ways to express piety as well as to distinguish Muslim ethnic heritage from that of Tamils, which Tamil nationalists have long argued is the same. Additionally, in light of globalizing markets, networks of foreign aid, and transnational ‘revivalist’ movements, people use ornaments to establish real and imagined connections and appeals to foreign agency and authenticity. Many people on the ground—and, indeed, many scholars—have overlooked the nuances of these everyday negotiations and often label them as “Islamic” or as parts of processes of “Arabization” and/or “Islamization.” In her field site in Tamil Nadu, Diane Mines also questions a local/global dichotomy and describes how “regional and national social movements prove in many cases to be a powerful set of contingent ideas and signs village residents draw upon to argue and contest the social and spatial parameters of the village itself.”¹⁹⁶ As a closer analysis of ornaments such as nail polish and nose rings shows, “Muslimness” emerges as dialectical and triangulated—not to mention plural and contested.

For many Muslims in this area, cultural authenticity is to a significant extent determined by what is “not Tamil” and it is also mediated in local idioms. Similarly, as the ornamentation of spaces illuminates, Tamilness becomes more and more what is not Muslim. In Kattankudy, many Muslims are negotiating claims of “Arab” authenticity by adorning themselves with “Arab” ornaments yet still must negotiate legitimate claims to the land that they live on in a tense post-war climate with threats of Buddhist chauvinism on a national level and Tamil nationalism at a local and regional level. Public beautification embodies this triangulation. In Kattankudy, it is (1) clearly inspired by and appealing to the “Middle-East,” (2) operating through locally salient idioms of community, and (3) embodying a new kind of Muslim authenticity that is ordained through fruiting date trees. The beautification projects in

²⁵³Mines, *Fierce Gods*, 23.

Araiampathy highlight even more explicitly the embodiment of history, authenticity, and land and show that these ornaments and “frivolous” political projects are real actors in community boundary-making and imaginary-making.

In exploring ornament as a technology of cultural authenticity and of community that is salient especially at boundaries, it also important to emphasize marginalized communities. This thesis is obviously limited by many factors, but one important limitation has been the exploration of minority communities—such as Catholics, non-Catholic Christians and especially the Sufi Sunnat Wal Jamaat and Thareekathul Mufliehen communities—as well as individual contestations and subversions of these idioms. I also had originally conceived of this these as much larger than was feasible for this particular project. As a result, certain concepts here find mention to illustrate complexity (particularly the mention of local Islams) but would ideally eventually be fleshed out in future, perhaps in a separate work. Additionally, further investigation of materials discussed here at their rumored origins (Saudi Arabia, etc.) is warranted. This thesis has also privileged the ‘everyday’ and unconventional public modalities of ornament, beauty, and rumor that are importantly accessible to more people. While this is worthwhile in theory, a populist focus presents analytic challenges of scope that merits the attention and refinement that may come with more data. This thesis is thus incomplete in itself, but will serve as the foundation for future research.

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