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Divine Embodiment and Women's Resistance in Sri Lanka: Opposing the Ideologies of Nation and Empire

Olivia Dure
Pomona College

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**2017
Claremont Colleges Library
Undergraduate Research Award**

Senior Award Winner

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Pomona College**

Reflective Essay

Reflective Essay

Throughout my time at Pomona, I've been able to gain so much from the process of research and writing. The classes I remember the most are the ones where I felt so passionate about my topic, and so full of wonder at the independence of expression possible through writing. However, it wasn't until I began research on divine possession in Sri Lanka, a topic that would go on to consume most of my thoughts for the better part of a year, that I truly began to grasp the privilege of doing research and the responsibility that comes with having access to source material from so many spheres of life crossing through time and space. While studying abroad in Sri Lanka, I spent a month traveling to various religious sites interviewing practitioners and worshippers about divine possession, and while compiling my final research paper for the semester I started to feel the responsibility that comes with having these personal narratives entrusted to me. I felt the need to make visible stories that were being actively concealed by state-sanctioned terror and nationalism, and I felt like my other sources, the academic journals and books, began to hold a new significance as they were contextualized within the lived experiences of the present.

Coming back from Sri Lanka, I started to utilize the library far more than before. Through ASPC I was heading up a subcommittee leading student focus groups on the library renovations, and through one of my classes I visited the library's Special Collections section. I was surprised to feel the same sense of reverence I felt for the personal narratives in my research when paging through the colonial records of Sri Lanka. Visiting Special Collections encouraged me to seek out sources that could contextualize by research, and I still remember the first time I held Samuel Baker's *8 Years in Ceylon*, sitting on the second floor of the Mudd side of the library and just reveling in the magic of holding a book first penned centuries ago. This book, and the knowledge contained in its pages, held a life of its own that traversed oceans. The information relayed by Baker and other colonial-era travelers and administrators like Robert Knox or John D'Oyly began to hold a sense of urgency in my research—despite the years dividing their accounts and the present I feel the same sense of responsibility to them that I do the other facets of my research.

For me, research makes time flexible, it bends the distance between past accounts and the

present, and the ability to see how the ongoing remnants of colonial rule or nationalist conflict forced me to think about how I center certain voices in my work, and how the predominant or hegemonic narratives can be countered by unearthing hidden histories within what remains. Because my thesis focuses on the voices and forms of resistance carried forth by women, my respect and reverence for colonial-era or state-centric sources is tempered by the lack of space accorded to women. Research, and the library sources that I've been able to utilize, has felt like a constant negotiation between sources born out of the same contexts with radically different intents and information. This negotiation, this space of ambiguity, has pushed me to examine my source material not only for what they offer, but also for what they conceal.

Because of the breadth of the library (the Inter Library Loan program especially), I've been able to explore those moments of ambiguity and contestation in my thesis. I've been able to place works like Baker's and Knox's in conversation with critical scholars like James Duncan, whose work *In the Shadows of the Tropics* highlights the absence of women in colonial accounts except as victims of planter violence on tea plantations. Because of ILL I've been able to place nationalist speeches by former President Premadasa and former President Rajapaksa alongside the moving poems of Tamil scholar and activist Sumathy Sivamohan. Most importantly, I've been able to trace the regulation of women's bodies and the contestation of physical space that has generated circumstances ripe for women's resistance in ritual formations from the colonial era to the present. Through the books I've accessed at the library, tutorials by library staff on how to utilize Asian Studies databases and the ATLA Religious Studies database, and the repositories of invaluable texts and documents, the research process has pushed me to be more expansive, to be critical, and treat the sources I use, whether they are snippets of the Sri Lankan constitution, pictures of temples from the colonial era to the present, or academic narratives, with both an investigative outlook as well as the respect that should be accorded to them.

My research has taken me from books on South Asian feminisms to the ruminations of British missionaries on temple space. It has vacillated between the ancient Sri Lankan epic the Mahavamsa to critical feminist theory on displacement and disappearance by Sri Lankan academics like Malathi de Alwis and Kumari Jayawardena. The privilege of access to these materials has allowed me to look at works born from moments, from snapshots of circumstance, and trace how those moments impact women and women's resistance in the present. This

research project has completely changed my outlook on academia and research, and has propelled me toward research fellowships like Fulbright for post-graduate studies. Because of my research and the wealth of knowledge I've been able to access through library resources, I'm considering applying to graduate school to continue research on religion in South Asia. The research process has also encouraged me to balance criticality with reverence, to weigh understanding with contestation. I feel bound to my source material, bound to produce something that does my sources justice, but also compelled to challenge and complicate dominant narratives, even as I utilize those narratives within my

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Research Project

“Divine Embodiment and Women’s Resistance
in Sri Lanka: Opposing the Ideologies of
Nation and Empire”

**Opposing the Ideologies of Nation and Empire:
Divine Embodiment and Women's Resistance in Sri Lanka**

by
Olivia Dure

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Bachelor of Arts degree in Religious Studies
Pomona College
Spring 2017

Professor Erin Runions
Professor Arash Khazeni
Professor Daniel Michon

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It is of and by women who dared and will dare again and
again to recast the contours of the nation, redraw the
borders and fight hard for the space of the everyday within
the masters of narratology, history, nation, mass and
movement

-- Sumathy Sivamohan, *Thin Veils*

PREFACE

This thesis is born out of an attempt to write about women's resistance to the imposition of empire without simultaneously imposing the same threads of neo/colonial regulation present in frameworks of western academia. Throughout this writing process, I've been stuck thinking about how to write about women and women's resistance, how to describe articulations of the body without participating in a consumption or sensationalization of those bodies, how to talk about ritual practice in a way that affirms its legitimacy and power, how to engage in 'research' in a post/colonial space coming from the whiteness of academia—and I wish I could say I'm fully certain that this work does not replicate the same regulations I seek to challenge.

At its core, this thesis aims to center the lived experiences of women who find ways to survive and counter both the visceral violence of outright conflict and the subtle, insidious ways in which state/empire/nation project violence onto the bodies of women. Far too often, the accounts and experiences of women are not given due discourse. This absence, this lost space, is ever present in what is privileged by history—and what is privileged in continuously male/white/western-centric academic spaces.

For me, thinking and writing (and thinking about writing) are processes filled with an inseparable combination of intense frustration and forceful hope. I am angry at this continued erasure, filled with fury at the absence of women and women's perspectives from the prominent discourses of history and nation. I'm also continuously conflicted—looking to the countless times that academic research has reduced the agency of religious women or utilized women's 'oppression' in religion to justify imperialism. I am hopeful, however, because I feel there is so much power to women's ritual practice, even if it is not seen as a typical formation of resistance.

The power of resistance so often seems tied to how it is vocalized—it is portrayed as large moments where strength and commitment are displayed. But resistance also lies within the everyday—it can be embodied and engaged with as a lived practice. In her work on the partitioning of India, Veena Das writes in order to make evident how the violence of nationhood and conflict is inflicted onto women in often-subtle formations. She states about those who endured such violence, "rather than bearing witness to the disorder that they had been subjected to, the metaphor that they used was of a woman drinking the poison and keeping it within her."¹ Women are 'drinking this poison' as a matter of circumstance—whether it is the poison of enduring outright conflict, of being complicit or entangled in systems of capitalism that commodify women's bodies, of living in a world where we are told to take up less space, to need less, to absorb the pain and emotions of others as well as our own. However, amidst this poison, women are challenging and remaking the institutions of our world—changing even how resistance itself is conceptualized. This thesis is an attempt to articulate one instance of such resistance—and I can only hope that it does justice to the narratives and experiences of the women engaged in it.

¹ Veena Das. "Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain." *Daedalus*. 125(1996). 85

INTRODUCTION

She stood in front of the main shrine room at the Kataragama temple complex in Southern Sri Lanka, her hair shifting with the rushing wind and the sudden, sharp movements of her body. She cried out in a piercing shriek, her body moving faster, caught in the power of a divine grasp. The crowd of the morning puja ceremony circled loosely around her, keeping their distance with watchful eyes. Many of the people I had interviewed were amongst the bystanders, and while not all of them believed wholeheartedly in divine possession, all stood with quiet respect, for the oracle had caught their attention just as she was caught by the divine. Words poured from her mouth quicker than I could hear, and mere minutes later she dropped to the ground, her consciousness returned. Instantly after she fell people rushed forwards, helping her rise and bringing her fresh water and fruit leftover from the ceremony. This was one instance of divine possession I witnessed during the time of my research in December 2015. This thesis is an attempt to contextualize both this moment and the practice of divine possession in Sri Lanka in a way that recognizes the agency of women engaged in ritual practice, the history of embodied violence carried forth against women by the frameworks of nation and empire, and the countless formations of women's resistance to the hegemonies imposed upon them.

The act of ritual divine possession in Sri Lanka² has existed as a marginalized religious practice since pre-colonial times, taking place far from the sacred centers in liminal religious spaces under the fluctuating control of nation and empire. Similar to other practices that involve lesser deities in the Sinhalese Buddhist or Tamil Hindu pantheons, divine possession is centered amongst communities and village practitioners, and up until recently was restricted to men. For women, engaging with ritual space is fraught with regulations imposed onto bodies and spaces, for the supposed impurity of women's bodies creates a barrier to interacting with the divine. However, the rise of divine possession and oracular revelation through the bodies of women began during the height of the conflict between the Sri Lankan state and the separatist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The dissolution of social services and

² While under colonial rule the island of Sri Lanka was termed 'Ceylon', I will be using Sri Lanka regardless of the time period.

frameworks of community through the violence of conflict destabilized the norms and ideologies barring women from engaging with the divine. In the wake of the conflict, divine possession has remained a prevalent practice for women seeking to remake their worlds in the wake of violence and amidst processes of migration, globalization, the state's attempts at peace-building.³ The rapidly changing socio-political spheres of post/colonial Sri Lanka are tied to ritual practice and physical space, and the shifts in ritual access for women as well as the practice of oracular revelation through divine possession is both impacted by society as well as enacts transformation onto society.

Divine possession involves women calling forth deities into their bodies. The body itself becomes a vessel for divine power and relays truth through oracular revelation. Women who embody the divine typically engage in the practice within religious space in a structured ritual process, although there are women who are 'caught' by the divine unexpectedly. Through divine possession, other community members or supplicants can ask questions about their lost ones, truth is revealed about the fate of family members who have disappeared, and, to some extent, the god or goddess can provide protection amidst the violence of conflict. These women hold power and increased mobility because of their status as oracles, or *maniyo*. This association with the power of the divine disrupts the set hierarchies of the world, where demons and women are marked by impurity and set far from pristine divinity. Through this practice, the female body becomes the text upon which truth and dissent are written, where the lived reality of these women is encapsulated and embodied through the very bodies the nation seeks to control, consume, and make invisible.

I argue that the subversive engagement of women in religious space as manifested by divine possession directly counters deep-set norms regarding women's agency and power, reclaims marginal and contested spaces, creates a space for women's resistance that extends outside of the ritual sphere, and in doing so actively resists both the imposition of the state and colonial narratives. Colonialism and nationalism both involve consuming the body for the sake of governance or the nation, and both also involve contesting marginal religious spaces located on the edges of power. This work aims to

³ Rohan Bastin. "Sorcerous Technologies and Religious Innovation in Sri Lanka." *Social Analysis* 46, no. 3 (2002).165

show how divine possession counters both colonialism and nationalism through the discursive and agential framing of bodies and marginal spaces, and creating an avenue of powerful dissent.

The divine possession of women is still a burgeoning practice amidst a strong history of demon possession and long-standing beliefs regarding the inherent impurity of demons and women. The possessions of women are often first considered as demonic. They are forced to find male priests to legitimize their experience as divine possession. When women's experiences are understood as demonic possession, the ritual of exorcism from these possessions relies upon a reinstating of social hierarchies instead of a disruption of them. As Bruce Kapferer notes in his extensive work on demon possession in Sri Lanka, women are seen as much more likely to be possessed by demons than men, and because of this perception the association of women with impure elements and mental weakness is strengthened.⁴

While demon possession and exorcism may allow communities, especially those marginalized by the state, to exert control over hierarchies of being, they also reinforce the cosmic hierarchy through the suppression of elements seen as 'impure' and 'demonic'. Kapferer writes that "[d]emon exorcisms are one practical means whereby Sinhalese can act directly upon their world of meaning and experience and can alleviate some of its inherent possibilities for suffering and illness."⁵ Kapferer recalls the pre-colonial tale of Queen Manikpala, whose exorcism ritual represents the failure of the state to protect those seen as vulnerable as well as the power of ritual process to step into that protective capacity. Queen Manikpala is considered the first victim of demon possession. Because of the absence of her husband, the king, she falls prey to demonic forces. The famed sorcerer Prince Oddisa is called forth to banish the demon, and the hierarchy of the world is returned to its natural order. Manikpala is thought to have fallen victim to demons because her husband, the figure of the state, left her side. While during the possession individuals have a demonic power and agency, that power always come to a close through the forcible exorcism, which often erases the very bodies of women. During the

⁴ Bruce Kapferer. "Mind, Self, and Other in Demonic Illness: The Negation and Reconstruction of Self." *American Ethnologist*: 114

⁵ Bruce Kapferer. *A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983. 2

exorcism, the interaction is solely between the male exorcist and the typically male demon—erasing the bodies of possessed women. The power of demonic possession is limited by this bodily erasure and focus on male interaction and male power. As shown through the tale of Manikpala and Odissa, exorcism rituals do allow individuals to step in temporarily for the state or for entities higher up on the cosmic hierarchy. However, while exorcisms do allow rituals to protect individuals and communities, the exorcism rituals reduce the agency of those possessed while restoring the world to its hierarchy.⁶ While the state fails to protect its subjects (particularly marginalized subjects such as women), exorcisms fill the place of the state without looking at the hierarchy itself as a source of failure.

Divine possession as a practice stands against norms regarding women's bodies and women's access to ritual space. While men have acted as divine oracles in Sri Lanka for centuries, it was not until the middle of the conflict that other ritual practitioners and worshippers legitimated women's experiences as embodying the divine. Obeyesekere writes in his work interviewing women oracles (*maniyo*) at the Kataragama temple complex that out of the 22 women he interviewed, 20 were first identified as victims of demonic possession and had to find a male priest who would declare their possessions as divine before they were treated as legitimate.⁷ Elsewhere he argues, "[v]illage exorcists ... are reluctant to concede that a woman, an impure being, could be a receptacle for divine power."⁸ Not only is there little historical precedent for women as vessels of divine power, but women's very bodies are considered impure and unfit to host divinity. The very processes that cause the state to valorize women—childbirth, fertility,

⁶ Kapferer writes in his work on emotion and comedy in exorcism rituals (See Kapferer, "Emotion and Feeling in Sinhalese Healing Rites") that if the patient, the individual undergoing the exorcism, does not laugh during the ritual the exorcism is seen as failed. The point of this facet of ritual is to reduce the power of demonic entities within the human world, allowing humans to exert control over demonic forces to banish them back to their lower status in the hierarchy. The use of comedy allows this exertion of human agency and ability to protect against the chaotic demonic forces. However, once again this relies upon a reformation of existing hierarchies. Even as it is ritual and not state forces that protects individuals against chaos and demonic forces, the hierarchy itself is restored. This ritual is powerful and lends space for community agency, but does not consider what happens when the demonic forces or chaotic forces are in the form of the state, which is already at the top of the hierarchy. While demon possession and exorcism center communities and allow space to voice vulnerability and trauma, it is always with the end-game of returning to the hierarchy, whereas divine possession upsets the foundations of that hierarchy.

⁷ Gananath Obeyesekere. "The Fire-Walkers of Kataragama: The Rise of Bhakti Religiosity in Buddhist Sri Lanka." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 37, no. 03 (1978)

⁸ Gananath Obeyesekere. *Medusa's Hair* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981. 59

motherhood—are used to mark women as unfit to inhabit ritual space because of the supposed impurity of such processes.

Religious rituals, exorcisms, and divine possession are situated within a complex landscape of religious practice in Sri Lanka that is inherently plural in nature. Because of the transnational threads of migration and labor as well as the physical boundedness of the land itself, the cosmic pantheons within Sri Lanka are subject to change, and often deities will have origin stories of being brought to the land. These gods or goddesses are typically from Tamil Nadu and undergo some test of their divinity that precludes inclusion to the Buddhist pantheon. Many deities that nowadays are seen as central to Sinhalese Buddhist practices have origin stories where they are tamed by the Sri Lankan goddess Pattini. One example of this is Devol Deviyo, a sorcery deity primarily worshipped in Southern Sri Lanka. Devol Deviyo is said to have traveled across the sea to Sri Lanka as a fierce demon, until the Goddess Pattini erected seven walls of fire. When he passed through these walls to the land, he transformed from a demon into a god. Devol Deviyo most likely arrived in Sri Lanka alongside migrant communities, and his origin story both ties him to his roots elsewhere as well as grounds him to Sri Lanka.

The cosmic pantheon is not the only site of plurality, for religious spaces and prominent religious practices are also seen as sites of pluralism. Jonathan Spencer and his colleagues write in their ethnographic work in the Eastern coast of Sri Lanka, “Sri Lanka is a complex religious field, with Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Buddhists living in a tapestry of communities of settlements. ... [E]ach ‘religion’ is plural in itself: we find Sinhala Buddhist monks who are strong advocates of a militant Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, but we also find those who distance themselves from this and engage in projects of inter-ethnic coexistence.”⁹ Within this context, the religious practices referenced in this work and the spaces of worship are all themselves embedded within plurality. The practice of divine possession, as well as other forms of religiosity such as fire-walking, are practiced by Tamil Hindus and Sinhalese Buddhists alike. Certain geographic areas of Sri Lanka with more ethnic and religious homogeneity will be

⁹ Jonathan Spencer, Jonathan Goodhand, S. H. Hasbullah, Bart Klem, Benedikt Korf, and Kalinga Tudor Silva. *Checkpoint, temple, church and mosque: a collaborative ethnography of war and peace*. London: Pluto Press, 2015. 7

inherently less pluralistic, but in places far from sacred and ethnic centers, worship is typically marked by this plurality.

Not only is there a plurality of worship embedded into institutions in Sri Lanka, divine possession also exists within a sphere where violence has a long history. The imposition of colonial empire is an enterprise that holds impact in the present, one that relies upon violence enacted against bodies in the search for profit, violence against spaces in attempts to assert hegemony, and violence against the entirety of society through the creation of structures of regulation that are enacted onto women's bodies. The violence in the wake of independence is equally as ubiquitous, both in the form of constant physical violence through the multi-decade conflict between the Tamil Tigers and the Sinhalese state, as well as the more subtle forms of violence imposed onto women's bodies and marginal spaces. Kapferer calls for a greater examination of how violence is not just a product of society but a force to be reckoned with, stating "a central question concerns the extent to which ethnic and religious identities and forms and, too, the violence which flows in their name, are structuring of social and political processes or, rather, the expressions of it."¹⁰ Violence is not merely built into events or singular moments of physical terror, but instead is a force that impacts and inscribes the lives of those living amidst violent processes. This violence is also deeply tied to the formation of empire and state, extending outwards through the imposition of the nation itself and embedded into physical territories. It shapes society, identity, ritual process, and even physical space. The gendering of violence and conflict further imposes restriction and regulation of women's bodies. Thus, the practice of divine possession has radical potential: it not only stands against prescribed gender roles, but against a context of violence as well.

This violence and the restrictions it creates impacts the agency of communities and individuals. Through violence, the forces of terror hold a monopoly on mobility, knowledge, and safety. However, through the ritual practice of divine possession, agency can be reclaimed and recreated. The notion of agency is complicated in the act of possession itself, for possession involves external and immeasurable forces that claim

¹⁰ Bruce Kapferer. "Ethnic Nationalism and the Discourses of Violence in Sri Lanka." *Communal/Plural: Journal of Transnational & Cross-Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (2001): 40

consciousness and power through the bodies of women. Patricia Jeffrey notes, “how women’s agency is read, of course, depends on who is reading.”¹¹ Reading agency across time, amidst the contexts of colonial rule and postcoloniality, and embedded within horrific and destructive violence is a complicated task, made only more complicated by the dynamic of possession itself, where the body is consumed and overtaken by an immeasurable external power. However, by extending concepts of agency to encompass this complexity, divine possession can be seen as an act of incredible resistance, one that is not limited by the bounds of time or ritual space, but instead enacts dissent across numerous fields and stands against not only the regulations embedded into the post/colonial nation, but the ongoing remnants of colonial regulation as well.

To represent the act of divine possession and the spaces where divine possession occurs in the wake of the peace process (starting in 2009), I will be drawing from my own field notes from research conducted between September 2015 and December 2015 in Kataragama, Batticaloa, Kandy, and Colombo. All diagrams of temple complexes come from these field notes. The other primary sources utilized in this thesis come from a variety of different contexts. To analyze the regulations imposed during and after colonial rule, I will be examining the journals written by colonial administrators, British travelers, and missionaries who were based in Sri Lanka. To interrogate the nationalist ideologies and frameworks that impose regulations onto bodies and spaces, I will look to speeches by prominent Sri Lankan politicians as well as the famed epic the *Mahāvamsa*, which is continuously replicated within Sinhalese nationalist ideology. I will be weaving together these primary accounts and secondary sources to trace the themes of regulation throughout specific periods in Sri Lankan history. To counter these narratives, I will look to the works of activists and scholars outspoken about the violence and terror imposed by the state, such as the poems and play by Sumathy Sivamohan and accounts of women’s mobilization by the leaders of the Mother’s Fronts.

The methodology used throughout this thesis is a post-colonial feminist approach, looking to recontextualize the experience and agency of women while still ensuring and defending the validity of women’s religious practices. While the content of this thesis

¹¹ Patricia Jeffrey and Amrita Basu. *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*. New York: Routledge, 1998. 223

spans throughout a great deal of Sri Lankan history, this work aims to articulate how historical elements are continued into the present as an active process rather than make statements regarding certain historical moments. That is to say, the practice of divine possession and its formation of dissent cannot be considered without looking to the intersecting threads of power and control that defy the bounds of time. Nira Wickramasinghe writes, “understanding the fractured state of the Sri Lankan polity today and evolving reconciliation in any form is not possible without a rhizomatic approach to history—a situation where the future and past are constantly in the process of becoming each other.”¹² Along these lines, this thesis is motivated by the need to view women’s divine embodiment as implicated and impacted in histories that play into the present. This “rhizomatic approach” centers an analysis of power and hierarchy not limited by specific moments. Instead, this approach disrupts the linearity of historical accounts, rendering events of the past crucial to understanding ritual processes in the present. The past, whether it is events recorded by the ledgers of colonial rule or the mythic histories of the *Mahāvamsa*, is continuously replicated and reimagined in the present. Not only has colonial ideology coalesced with nationalism to create and continue forms of regulation imposed onto bodies and spaces, but the past is frequently evoked through the constructions of Sinhalese and Tamil nationalisms in the creation of idealized visions of the motherland, even amidst their geographic impossibilities.

This thesis is composed of three chapters, focused respectively on divine possession in relation to bodies, spaces, and forms of dissent. The first chapter focuses on how the bodies of women have been consumed by the empire and the nation in the pursuit of profit and hegemony. This consumption occurs through the imposition of British ideals of respectability, the continued invisibility of women’s labor, and the violence of conflict that consumes bodies for war. Divine possession counters such forms of consumption by first rendering the body overwhelmingly visible and agential through ritual practice, and then through making visible the violence conducted by hegemonic institutions of statehood. Chapter two explores how certain religious sites where divine possession occurs sit atop the margins of colonial histories and nationalist politics. These

¹² Nira Wickramasinghe. “Sri Lanka’s Conflict: Culture and Lineages of the Past.” *Journal of International Affairs*. 60, no. 1 (2006). 107

spaces are constantly contested, existing under the oversight of fluctuating forms of control, and thus hold a power stemming from their liminality that furthers the resistant potential of divine possession. These spaces hold power from the margins, and building off of their collective histories as sites of resistance, extend the power of ritual possession outside of ritual space. The final chapter looks to the history of women engaging with ritual space and innovative practice to stand against nation and empire, situating divine possession within those practices as well as theorizing the specific power that stems from the disruption of hierarchies and norms within the ritual space of divine possession.

CHAPTER ONE

(In)visible Bodies: Re-theorizing the Consumption of Bodies in Colonial Ideologies, Nationalist Mythologies, and Divine Possession

“People’s bodies are perhaps the finest
scale of political space”¹³

“A critical site, which continues to be conquered and
colonized in struggles of community, is the female body,
the naturalized, gendered body of modernity”¹⁴

Throughout 443 years of colonial involvement, 26 years of a bloody and brutal civil war, and the current uncertainty of the present, women’s bodies in Sri Lanka have been contested sites where traditions are born and broken, where the nation is produced and carried, and where resistance can be enacted. The body itself has been regulated and discursively framed for the benefit of colonial empire and nationalist politics. In contrast to how the nation and empire regulate and consume women’s bodies, the act of divine possession involves and implicates the body as powerful and agential. Through divine possession, the body is a key vessel of communication. It is present in the power being enacted and transferred, and undeniably visible. In a world where bodies are forcefully consumed by the production of colonial empire and the regulation inherent to the nation, divine possession makes legible instances of violence that would otherwise remain hidden. Divine possession directly counters the regulatory discourses and ideologies regarding the body that are perpetrated by colonial rulers and nationalist figures. Instead of being erased into the fold of labor, empire, or nation, through divine possession the body renders visible hidden traumas, experiences, and forms of femininity that are suppressed by colonial and nationalist hierarchies of power. The body is consumed and overtaken, but powerful and visible.

The subversive strength found through divine possession is tied to the idea of consumption and the complex ways in which nation and empire utilize (in)visibility to further their ideologies. The consumption of bodies refers to how bodies are subsumed

¹³ Jennifer Hyndman and Malathi de Alwis. “Bodies, Shrines, and Roads: Violence, (Im)mobility and Displacement in Sri Lanka”. *Gender, Place & Culture* 11, no 4 (2007): 549.

¹⁴ Mangalika de Silva. “The Other Body and the Body Politic: Contingency and Dissonance in Narratives of Violence.” In *Women and the Contested State: Religion, Violence, and Agency in South and Southeast Asia*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. 140.

into the nation or the empire, how bodies become the maps upon which culture is inscribed, how the body is churned into lines of production for the sake of economic growth or colonial profit, and, in a visceral way, how the body is overtaken by an external force during the act of divine possession. The consumption of the body engages with a simultaneous visibility and invisibility. Bodies can be consumed through invisible formations, such as the consumption of laboring bodies, which are erased in discourses on trade, capital, and legislature. However, sometimes this consumption is visible through the production of specific images of visible femininity that serve to erase all bodies outside of such frameworks. There is a hidden violence to much of this consumption—the nation and the empire use the bodies of women in a calculated construction, so even when the body is presented as visible it is a vessel of bolstering power or ideology. This visibility conceals anything that deviating from the ideology of the state. The state thus embodies contradiction—simultaneously creating certain images of ideal femininity through colonial norms of respectability or nationalist depictions of Sinhalese women yet condoning extensive violence that lies written and hidden on the bodies of women. In contrast to this, divine possession is a forceful visage to behold; it is undeniably powerful, impossible to ignore, and above all relies on an external power separate from the state. Divine possession consumes the body, rendering visible the terror inflicted by the state and the pain of enduring nation and empire by retaining a bodily agency not present in colonial or nationalist consumption of women's bodies.

The violent consumption of bodies perpetrated by nation and empire impacts every facet of women's lives in the present. Malathi de Alwis writes, "[w]omen's lives today continue to be imbricated in the contours of war while they simultaneously bear the scars—both physical and psychical—from previous events and processes of violence."¹⁵ In order to resist the constant and forceful imposition of nation and empire, women must find ways to engage with bodies that counter this violent consumption. Divine possession does this by reclaiming bodily agency within ritual space. Alex Argenti-Pillen notes in her research on sorcery worship in Southern Sri Lanka, an area heavily impacted by political insurrections in the 1970s and 1980s, "Women in Udahenagama should not be

¹⁵ Malathi de Alwis. "Interrogating the 'Political': Feminist Peace Activism in Sri Lanka". *Feminist Review* 91 (2009): 83

seen as retreating into a remote shamanic past or as prey to an essentialized transhistorical consciousness but as successfully maintaining the fabric of their communities in the aftermath of devastating state violence.”¹⁶ Divine possession fits Argenti-Pillen’s description, for it is certainly a crucial way that women embedded in a world of violence maintain the existence of their communities. However, divine possession goes even further to engage in a countering of violence itself. By seeing divine possession within its complex and brutal landscape, we bear witness to its transformative and resistant power that allows everyday women to reclaim the body.

This chapter will articulate how the empire and the nation consume bodies and manipulate (in)visibility to impose hegemonic control. First I will examine the narratives of colonial rulers for regulatory policies aimed at restricting women’s movements, the focus of colonial power on land and production, and the commodification of women’s bodies. Next, this chapter will look to how nationalist rhetoric (re)produces the *Mahāvamsa*, a Sri Lankan epic, and continues discursive frameworks that build certain conceptions of Sri Lankan femininity that are imbued with nationalist sentiments. Finally, I will look at the current practice of divine possession as a site where the body is consumed, but is still agential. To do so, I will re-theorize the agency of possessed bodies to articulate the power wielded by those embodying the divine in resistance to the violent regulation and consumption perpetrated by the state. In the historical narrative that follows, I refer to primary documents of traveler’s accounts, diaries of colonial administrators, and secondary sources to weave together the historical context in which divine possession is situated.

I. Colonial Narratives: Land, Labor, and Bodily Regulation

Colonial rule and the construction of the empire rely upon domination and hegemonic control over territory, trade, communities, and physical bodies. The colonial project of regulation, which simultaneously shrouds and consumes the body, is as integral to the creation of the empire as claiming physical territory and space. This section will articulate how the British colonizers of Sri Lanka aimed to control the physical bodies of

¹⁶ Alex Argenti-Pillen. “Mothers and Wives of the Disappeared in Southern Sri Lanka: Fragmented Geographies of Moral Discomfort.” In *Women and the Contested State: Religion, Violence, and Agency in South and Southeast Asia*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.132

indigenous populations in order to align those communities with British goals of profit and production. This results in the interrelation of preexisting patriarchies and British norms of body and respectability. The imposition of colonial rule onto bodies and the subsequent consumption of the body for the sake of the empire position the body as a central site of power.

Consumption in the colonial context relates both to bodies themselves as space and how bodies enact power in society and economy. The British utilized layered systems of control to regulate the body. These included Land Ordinances, the system of Christian missionary education, and the construction of divisive identities—all of which engage in a certain consumption of the body. The body is consumed because it is overtaken, for the empire consumes the needs of individuals, and the body is subsumed and overpowered into a system of colonial rule. The bodies of indigenous Sri Lankans, especially the bodies of women, are simultaneously consumed and erased through the prescription of modes of femininity that obscure womanhood outside of British norms. Elements of colonial control, sometimes subtle, sometimes overt, result in the regulation and subsequent consumption of the body for the continuance of the empire. These threads are not always evident, and at times the absence of women from colonial accounts speaks to the invisible consumption of women's bodies during the colonial era. Despite the necessity of women for colonial tea and coffee production, for the embodiment of norms of colonial respectability, and as a justification for colonial involvement, looking for the lives of women in colonial accounts is at times akin to looking for lost space. The erasure of women's narratives articulates how the bodies of Sri Lankan women are consumed and made invisible through the past and ongoing remnants of colonial rule.

What follows is by no means an exhaustive or inclusive documentation of the myriad forms of regulation that resulted in the simultaneous invisibility and consumption of women's bodies during the colonial era. Instead, this is a representation of moments, snapshots where we can reveal pieces of the constant and ongoing consumption of women's bodies. While British rule was a lengthy and tumultuous process, I hope to interrogate the formation and continuation of specific ideologies born out of the interaction of colonial rule and a shifting web of indigenous traditions. The colonial-era sources examined in this chapter span across British rule and come from many varying

accounts and perspectives. This work will touch on the diaries of missionaries, the tales of travelers, the accounts by British administrators and surveyors, and even a scattering of British colonial-era legislation. While this broad survey and lack of specificity does not do this source material justice, it does illustrate the hegemonic forms of regulation and control resulting in the consumption of women's bodies for the sake of empire.

When the British forced the Dutch out of Sri Lanka in 1796, they took control of the margins of the island, which were previously held by the Portuguese and the Dutch. While the Portuguese and Dutch combined occupied these lands for over a century,¹⁷ their focus on trade and the geographies of production resulted in a smaller impact than the British on the future politics of Sri Lanka. In contrast to the former, the British colonized Sri Lanka for reasons other than just trade and profit. When the British first expelled the Dutch from the Island, they placed the East India Company in control.¹⁸ However, in 1802, Sri Lanka became an official colony governed by colonial administrators. This extended the reach of British power out of the economic sphere and into every space of life and existence in Sri Lanka.

The distinction between British rule and that of the Dutch and Portuguese is evident in accounts of colonial rule. Robert Percival, who traveled to Sri Lanka after the British gained control of the coasts, noted "[t]he mismanagement of the Portuguese and Dutch, and their impolitic conduct toward the natives, prevented them from at all reaping from this valuable colony the advantages which it was calculated by nature to afford."¹⁹ By exerting power over the entirety of Sri Lanka, geographically, politically, and physically, the British were able to increase the profits of their exploitation, ensure their military safety in the Indian Ocean, and encourage Christian missionary ideologies throughout South Asia.

British control involved the perpetuation of certain ideas of respectability that imposed limitations on women and women's bodies. These ideologies were continued and produced through the British-created education system, customs of dress and

¹⁷ The Portuguese arrived in Ceylon in 1505. The Dutch (with the help of the Kandyan Kingdom) forced the Portuguese out in 1658, and were defeated by the British in 1796.

¹⁸ Manisha Perera. "Capitalism in Sri Lanka: The Scion of Colonialism." *Essays in Economic and Business History*. N.d.

¹⁹ Robert Percival. *An Account of the Island of Ceylon: Containing Its History, Geography, Natural History, with the Manners and Customs of Its Various Inhabitants ; to Which Added, The Journal of an Embassy to the Court of Candy*. London: Baldwin, 1803. 29

behavior for women, and constructed hierarchies between Sri Lankan women and the mostly-male British colonizers. The creation of certain ideas about the respectable woman and the respectable body resulted in a consumption of the body through the imposition of these norms, and facilitated a subsumption of Sri Lankan bodies into British rule. The construction of empire included laws restricting women's mobility and encouraged a focus on 'respectability', both in colonial and indigenous formations. These ideas of respectability are marked upon the bodies of women, and thus women's bodies are regulated and consumed for the sake of this construction. To give an example, Robert Knox, who was held captive in the Kandyan Kingdom during the period of Dutch control of the coasts of Sri Lanka, noted the norms of dress in the Kandyan area when he stated, "one end of which Cloth the Women fling over their shoulders, and with the very end carelessly cover their Breasts; whereas the other sort of Women must go naked from the waist upwards, and their Cloaths not hang down much below their knees."²⁰ This standard of dress is markedly different from what was considered appropriate by the British missionaries who would go on to set standards of dress for Sri Lankan schoolgirls. Knox also takes note of the ease at which women could divorce and remarry in the pre-colonial Kandyan Kingdom.²¹ Likewise, Percival stated that "the infringement of chastity scarcely subjects a woman either married or unmarried to the slightest reproach."²² These observations show a split between British and indigenous traditions, a divide that would be carefully navigated as the British sought to impose their ideals onto colonized populations. British colonial control shifted the norms of society through the construction of varied systems of regulation, which resulted in the restriction and consumption of the body for the sake of the ordered empire.

The patronizing rigidity imposed by British rulers and missionaries markedly differs from the indigenous norms described by colonial travelers. In contrast to Knox and Percival's accounts of Ceylonese practices, Malathi de Alwis notes that the missionary Reverend Spence Hardy, who lived in Sri Lanka from 1862-1864, believed

²⁰ Robert Knox. *An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon, in the East Indies: Together, with an Account of the Detaining in Captivity the Author and Divers Other Englishmen Now Living There, and of the Author's Miraculous Escape: Illustrated with Figures and a Map of the Island*. London: Printed by Richard Chiswell, 1681. 106

²¹ *Ibid.*, 149

²² Percival. *An Account of the Island of Ceylon*. 195

that “the abasement of the native women by their men and their religion was perceived as being enough qualification to ‘initiate a mission against paganism’ and once such a ‘mission’ was initiated, it was soon discovered that ‘whatever Christianity may do for the man, for the woman it does more.’”²³ Indigenous practices and traditions, specifically those regarding women’s behavior and women’s bodies, became sites where colonial power was transacted. The norms of femininity in pre-colonial society became a justification for colonial involvement, resulting in the consumption of women’s bodies to solidify and extend the control of the British Empire. Alwis notes in her work on the creation of specific norms of respectability in Christian education, “these women’s morality, we can then surmise, was clearly signposted through a transformation of their minds and their bodies.”²⁴ Alwis articulates how every minute element of the Christian missionary schools was aimed at regulating all aspects of womanhood. She turns to the detailed schedules, the particular uniforms, and even the needlepointing coursework that required rigid postures as part of this enforcement of respectability throughout the colonial encounter. In this way, the body is seen as a site of the ‘Other’, the indigenous, the non-British, and thus the bodies of women are consumed by the British Empire and remade within certain frameworks of respectability and propriety. The British simultaneously used the bodies of women to distinguish themselves from indigenous populations as well as reinforce this mission of civility.

The constructed separation between colonizers and colonized is articulated by James Duncan in his work on colonial-era labor when he states, “In many ways South Asian women stood as the constitutive Other for British women. Progress was measured in part by the nobility and morality of the women. The higher the civilization, the more private, pure and domestic the women.”²⁵ The British emphasized their supposed purity and this constructed impurity of indigenous populations in order to justify colonial rule, their ideals of respectability dominating the colonial project. Kumari Jayawardena and Alwis add that “during colonial times, there was a particular notion of ‘respectability;’ rules for ‘respectable’ women were laid down, traditions were invented, and the

²³ Malathi de Alwis. *Maternalist Politics in Sri Lanka: A Historical Anthropology of its Conditions of Possibility*, PhD Dissertation in Anthropology. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1998. 110

²⁴ Ibid., 110

²⁵ James S Duncan. *In the Shadows of the Tropics: Climate, Race and Biopower in Nineteenth Century Ceylon*. Ashgate Publishing Group, 2007.62

reconstructed ideal woman of the ethnic/religious middle class group was represented as a symbol of its purity.”²⁶ The British imposed these regulations on bodily respectability because of their construction of moral binaries between colonized populations and colonizers. The bodies of women are the spaces where these notions of respectability are formed, where the body is simultaneously consumed and (re)produced, contested and discursively shaped to suit the interests of those in power.

This assertion of the politics surrounding respectability is most clearly seen in accounts of British missionaries who established education centers focused on proselytizing their religion and norms regarding acceptable feminine behavior. The Reverend J.W. Balding of the Church Missionary Society in Ceylon notes that the history of enforced missionary education began during Dutch rule, where students were required to attend and the subject matter was mostly focused on religious instruction.²⁷ Under the British, these schools not only aimed at religious tutelage, but also focused on producing individuals qualified for certain trades to support the lives of upper-class British colonials. Balding notes that by 1915 there were 39 ‘industrial schools’, where boys would learn carpentry and girls would learn lace-making and domestic duties.²⁸ This Christian mission was conveyed through education—education that not only included the spread of Christianity, but also enveloped educated Sri Lankans into the colonial hierarchy. Reverend James Selkirk, also of the Church Missionary Society, described those educated at a missionary school in Baddagama, “[m]any of them are married, and have families, and the contrast between them and other females is very great, as they far exceed them in propriety of moral conduct and in religious knowledge; and on account of their honesty, diligence, activity, *cleanliness*, and ability to sew and read, they are much sought after as female servants in English families.”²⁹ Selkirk’s orientalist observation articulates how Christianization in colonial Sri Lanka was tied to the imposition of respectability onto indigenous Sri Lankans. This facilitated the incorporation of educated

²⁶ Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi De. Alwis. *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia*. London: Zed Books, 1996. xii

²⁷ John William Balding. *One Hundred Years in Ceylon; or, The centenary volume of the Church Missionary Society in Ceylon, 1818-1918*. Madras: Printed at the Diocesan Press, 1922. 49

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 50

²⁹ James Selkirk. *Recollections of Ceylon, after a residence of nearly thirteen years: with an account of the Church Missionary Society's operations in the island: and extracts from a journal. By the Rev. James Selkirk*. London: J. Hatchard and Son, 187, Piccadilly, 1844. 254

Sri Lankans into the machine of labor sustaining British colonial rule. The British utilized proselytization and respectability to create a social hierarchy that supported their norms and way of life through the consumption of women.

In addition to the imposition of missionary education, the British also extended their control and subsequent consumption of bodies through a focus on labor and social positioning. In his research on Sri Lankan nationalism(s), Bruce Kapferer notes, “[t]he British fixed the hierarchy and interpreted it in socio-economic stratification terms (with direct relevance to the colonial organization of labor) and not in accordance with ritual conceptions.”³⁰ In other words, the British delineated identity and shaped post-colonial society through their co-opting of caste boundaries for administrative offices and labor organization. The British utilized large numbers of Western-educated Jaffna Tamils to man the majority of low-level administrative positions. Tamil populations in Jaffna had access to missionary education long before other populations in Sri Lanka because of the history of colonial control on the edges of the island and the close proximity to South India, which already held great numbers of British missionaries. The staffing of British administrative positions created hierarchies of labor and the production of the empire. Bastin describes how the Tamils who worked in Colombo would change from Western clothes into Tamil ones as their train neared their homes in Jaffna.³¹ The body, and the performed respectability of the body, becomes a manifestation of colonially imposed identities. The hegemonic control of the British is seen in every essence of this interaction: British missionaries educate Jaffna Tamils, focusing not only on religious instruction but also on creating a workforce needed to continue British rule. Even with instances of resistance and mediation as shown by Tamil workers shedding their colonial garb, there is still a prevalent consumption of bodies that arises from the intense and omnipresent control exerted by the empire.

Alongside a focus on labor came the creation of regulations regarding property and inheritance, which served to further restrict women’s bodies and mobility during colonial rule. Structures of inheritance place women’s bodies as vessels of transaction for

³⁰ Bruce Kapferer. "Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Culture of the State." *Suomen Antropologi* 27, no. 2 (2002): 11

³¹ Rohan Bastin. "The Authentic Inner Life: Complicity and Resistance in the Tamil Hindu Revival". In *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited*, ed by Michael Roberts. Colombo: Marga Institute, 1997. 414

commodities like land and property, rendering the body transparent, invisible, and necessary for the continuation of the family and the nation. Jean Grossholtz, in her work on the capitalist focus of colonial Sri Lanka, notes that colonial regimes created property laws and inheritance laws to further their own claim on physical space for economic gain.³² Carla Risseauw traces this out when she states, “the overall land policy of the British entailed alienation of land on a large scale from its original (multiple) owners in order to facilitate the economic exploitation of land in the form of plantations (Waste Land Act, Ordinance no 12: 1840).”³³ This ordinance placed the regulation and ownership of land in the hands of the British, forcing indigenous Sri Lankans to formally acquire the rights to land and then pass these land rights down through their family. This shift in transfer of property is important to note because of the resulting implications for women. Before the creation of strict regulations on private property, the existence of communal property facilitated women’s movement within their communities and between relationships because there was no need for intergenerational control of property and wealth.

The privatization of property contributed to the need to control women’s bodies, as families had to ensure the legitimacy and purity of their family line in order to continue holding land and social capital. In this way, the British configuration of land is directly related to the regulation of bodies. Norms of bodily purity collude with British law, policy, and priority, as the regulation of land and the focus on commodities result in the commodification of bodies themselves, bodies that are necessary to maintain the land and the commerce crucial to the empire. Risseauw recounts the collusion of British respectability politics and indigenous patriarchies when addressing the creation of the Marriage Ordinance of 1859, which made monogamy the only legal form of marriage, reinforcing a certain model of inheritance that bolstered British hegemony. In 1846, the Kandyan elites penned a letter to the British asking them to ban bigamy, a precursor to the Ordinance of 1859. It is important to note that it was not bigamy itself the Kandyan elites took issue with, but the ability of women to return to their families if a marriage fails. The British Governor at the time called this ordinance, “a novel, and curious

³² Jean Grossholtz. *Forging Capitalist Patriarchy*. Durham; Duke University Press, 1984. 56

³³ Carla Risseauw. *The Fish Don't Talk About the Water: Gender Transformation, Power, and Resistance among Women in Sri Lanka*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988. 29

experiment in Eastern legislation and the outcome of a spontaneous attempt on the part of the Kandyan to elevate and purify their institution of marriage.”³⁴ This regulation benefitted the British by aligning with their norms in regards to marriage and allowed the accumulation of land both by the British as well as Kandyan elites by preventing women from inheriting capital or leaving a marriage. Women are consumed — by British regulations that restrict mobility in marriages and inheritance, as well as by indigenous attempts to preserve land rights and centralize that power within patriarchy.

The absence of the body, but the existence of bodily control, is tied to land and land distribution, conceptions of private property, and the insidious usage of labor as a system that contains the body, conceals the body, and is used to then justify abuses to Sri Lankan communities. There is no better place to look for these nuanced interactions than the invisible consumption of women workers on coffee and tea plantations. Young British men would travel to Sri Lanka to oversee the massive coffee and tea plantations. While at first the British attempted to utilize Sri Lankan populations for tea-plucking and production, they soon found it was more economically advantageous to take advantage of British control over South India as well, conscripting thousands of South Indian Tamil workers to migrate to Sri Lanka.³⁵ Women were tasked with the grueling labor of plucking thousands of pounds of tea leaves, while men dealt with the leaf fermentation and tea production process. The reality is that little has changed from systems of colonial labor where “women workers formed the lowest rung of the estate hierarchy, directly under the command of men at every level.”³⁶ Nowadays, companies claim that women are needed for the burdensome labor of plucking the tea leaves because of their ‘delicate fingers.’ Despite the importance of women tea pluckers to the colonial project, the vastness of this niche labor force, and the violence of plantation life, there are few sources with insight into their lives during the colonial era or even in current times.

³⁴ Ibid., 35

³⁵ Indian Tamil populations in Sri Lanka are considered distinct from Sri Lankan Tamil communities, and actually the Indian Tamil laborers were refused citizenship by the Sri Lankan government for decades. These workers were stateless, denied rights by the country they migrated from centuries before and by the country they consider home. The community distinctions between Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils, interestingly enough, is seen most clearly when it comes to cricket. Indian Tamil communities are fervent supporters of India’s cricket team, and Sri Lankan Tamils support Sri Lanka’s team.

³⁶ Rachel Kurian. “Labor, Race, and Gender on the Coffee Plantations in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), 1834-1880.” In *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia and Latin America, 1500-1989*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge, 2006. 185

Women are scarcely mentioned in the accounts of colonial administrators or plantation owners. Not only did women make up an enormous part of the plantation workforce, Sinhalese women often performed intimate labor as mistresses of British plantation managers. The invisibility of women from economic records or traveler's accounts is violent in that despite their importance to the economy, women are erased from accounts of economic production. As James Duncan notes, the only accounts of women workers from this area and time are in the police reports recording the violence they endured. He states,

“During the period of which I write, it was common to have a Sinhalese concubine in the bungalow, often with a room of her own. But little or nothing was written of such mistresses who were thoroughly erased from the literature of the bungalow appearing nowhere in the planters accounts. They appear only in police blotters as a victim of planter violence or as the cause of violence between planter and a household servant.”³⁷

The absence of women from colonial records other than as subjects of violence speaks volumes. No space is accorded to women despite the importance of their labor to the British economy. No room is given to the countless women who toiled away to produce an export that the British monopolized for profit. Women are consumed as labor, consumed as part of the British empire of production, necessary to that system. But the centrality of women's labor and women's bodies is not evident in what is left behind, or what is continuing from colonial rule. The bodies of women are rendered absent and invisible through an undeniably violent manifestation of consumption and colonial control.

The body was simultaneously consumed and made invisible by the emphasis on labor and production throughout the colonial empire. Duncan articulates these contrasting threads of (in)visibility and consumption when he states about colonial plantations,

“The plantations were constructed as what Henri Lefebvre has termed abstract space, purified space in which everyday life is thoroughly commodified and bureaucratized. As an ideal, abstract space requires the construction of ‘abstract bodies’ which conform to it. Abstract bodies are bodies that are made docile, useful, disciplined, rationalized, normalized, and controlled sexually; such bodies are seen as economic resources to be rationally managed and utilized to capacity.”³⁸

³⁷ Duncan. *In the Shadows of the Tropics*. 53

³⁸ Ibid., 69

The plantation is one example of an abstract space—but an example that can be extrapolated to look at the entirety of colonial Sri Lanka. The bodies within that space, especially the bodies of women, are overtaken for labor, utilized to enforce colonial norms of respectability, pushed into workforces needed for the sustenance of the empire, and regulated both by the colonial empire and continuing indigenous patriarchies. Duncan's analysis articulates how that control played out on the plantation, and it is equally as pertinent for examining British hegemonic control over all of Sri Lanka. The British imposed this ideal of abstract space to facilitate their dominance, and this control plays out viscerally onto the bodies of women occupying such space.

While hegemonic notions of British 'respectability' are a central part of their empire, existing patriarchies served to limit women's bodies and social mobility before colonial times. These preexisting regulations combined and colluded with British norms, which resulted in the formation of layered systems of restriction involving colonial ideas of respectability as well as indigenous social norms that continue to this day. Edward Upham, in his colonial era research on Sri Lankan Buddhism, notes one motivation for a King to follow the Buddhist precepts, "that they shall not be born a female, or be subject to the falling-sickness, frenzy, want of speech, deafness, deformity, or to eruptions or other complaints, but be made like a golden image with tiger's teeth."³⁹ Here, the female is depicted as the unwanted, as bad as sickness or physical deformity. The underlying assumption is that women are farther from enlightenment than men,⁴⁰ and these norms stem from pre-colonial Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition. Sandra Bell notes that "the justification for women's exclusion centres on concepts of pollution and danger, embodied in female sexuality, that oppose and threaten the ritual purity and moral authority that are the source of the Sangha's sacred power."⁴¹ As Bell articulates, conceptualizations of women's impurity or immorality is not singular to British

³⁹ Edward Upham. *The History and Doctrine of Buddhism, Popularly Illustrated: With Notices of the Kappooism, or Demon Worship, and of the Bali, or Planetary Incantations, of Ceylon*. London: R. Ackermann, 1829. 23

⁴⁰ This is bolstered by the fact that in the Jataka stories of the Buddha's past lives, he is never reincarnated as a woman. In modern Sri Lanka even, the Goddess Pattini, who is considered an emblem of purity and ideal womanhood, still must be reborn as a man before she can ascend to enlightenment.

⁴¹ Sandra Bell. "Nature and Gender in Theravada Buddhism." In *Women as Sacred Custodians of the Earth*, edited by Alaine Low and Soraya Tremayne. Berghahn Books: New York, 2001. 182

missionaries, and these threads of religiously-motivated regulation of women's bodies continued throughout the colonial era and interacted with colonial norms to create new systems of regulation imposed upon women and women's bodies.

Colonial rule did not erase or merely replace existing norms, but instead worked together with preexisting forms of hierarchy that consume women's bodies through locating them within the space of tradition and (re)production of tradition. Jayawardena remarks, "The concept of racial purity/impurity, already established by colonial rulers, as well as the local caste-based concepts of 'high' and 'low', 'pure' and 'polluted', defined attitudes to those locals with European antecedents."⁴² These systems worked parallel to each other but never separate. Instead they created and constructed new modes of regulation drawn from conceptions of identity in pre-colonial times and the construction of indigeneity. This context informed how the British utilized preexisting differences in caste or social positioning to staff their colonial administration and sites of economic production. Alwis remarks in her work on colonial 'respectability', "[i]t is not my argument here that 'respectability' is 'invented' in the colonial context, rather it is my suggestion that the valence of this category—its location in a moral and normative order—is remade in this encounter."⁴³ As Alwis notes, while colonial rule definitely imposed certain ideas and constructions about bodies and respectability, these worked by combining with preexisting regulations on women's bodies and movements. These powerful collusions were marked onto the bodies of women, played out on the bodies of women, simultaneously directed at the regulation of women and (re)purposed to control inheritance, land, and production. The entirety and hegemony of this control cannot be understated, and truly was both built upon and resulting in the subsuming and consuming of women's bodies.

These overlaid systems resulted in the creation of general law, built from an overarching system of Roman Dutch law (a lingering impact of Dutch colonization) and British laws. This general law was born during colonial rule and then transferred to the laws of independent Sri Lanka. Parallel to this runs Kandyan Law, which governs over communities in the former Kandyan Kingdom, Thesavalamai Law, which governs Tamil

⁴² Kumari Jayawardena. *Erasure of the Euro-Asian: Recovering Early Radicalism and Feminism in South Asia*. Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2007. 240

⁴³ Alwis. *Maternalist Politics in Sri Lanka*. 106

Hindu communities, and Muslim Law, which governs Muslim communities. These three laws stem from pre-colonial systems of rule but have continued to exist through the present day. The three systems are only for the 'private' sphere, which result in the regulation of women's behavior. They inhibit women's attempts at divorce, prevent women from seeking justice for domestic violence, and encompass anything that occurs within the domestic sphere of the home or the family. This collusion of various patriarchies and the overlay of British constructions of labor, identity and production with preexisting norms regarding women and women's bodies has greatly impacted the lives of women, as exemplified by the creation of a complicated legal code that imposes a certain degree of British regulation while still maintaining male-centric community governance and law. This has resulted in dual forms of regulation on women's bodies: the overarching commodification of bodies, land, and marriage by the British governing laws, as well as the microregulations regarding the body within community law. These legal codes aided the development of British control and hegemony, and articulate an instance of local and colonial patriarchies working in tandem. Ramini Muttettuwegama notes about community laws,

"The laws are supposedly a codification of the customs of one's community. To agitate for reform from within is impossible: the leadership of the community is content with the status quo. To agitate for reform from outside, in the context of an internal war whose roots are found in the non-acceptance by the majority of a minority's language, is equally impossible."⁴⁴

The legal context in Sri Lanka is thus drawn from multiple frameworks of regulation, all of which impact women and women's bodies. Women are again sacrificed and consumed for others—whether it be the nation or their own community—through the creation of 'personal' regulations that in actuality regulate women's bodies, relationships and sexuality.

Colonial threads of regulation, alongside indigenous patriarchies, resulted in a consumption of the body that continued throughout the colonial era and extended far beyond it. The bodies of Sri Lankans were moved, at times forcibly, towards the production of certain commodities and into a brutal system of exploitative labor that

⁴⁴ Ramini Muttettuwegama. "'But I Am Both' Sri Lankan Women under Parallel Legal Systems." *Lines Magazine*, 2001. 174

continues to this day. Victorian ideologies, working in conjunction with existing threads of regulation, created certain standards of behavior and dress through which women were forced to conform. This was then codified into law through the production of 'personal' law, essentially sacrificing women and women's voice for the sake of the collective body. Women are tasked with embodying respectability, and thus upholding the tradition and culture of the nation. This embodiment is reliant on an entirety of consumption of the body; there is little space for irregularity or resistance within this paradigm. These systems of regulation did not end with the closure of colonial rule, but extended throughout an era of conflict and nationalism, inspiring the creation of new forms of regulation and norms regarding women's bodies that aimed to counter colonial ideologies while still perpetuating singularized conceptions about women's bodies.

II. Conflict Era Nationalism(s): Women and the Production of the Nation

Soon after Sri Lanka gained independence from the British in 1948, tensions between Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus rose as Solomon Bandaranaike⁴⁵ was elected Prime Minister on a platform of Sinhalese nationalism in 1956. Anti-Tamil riots that same year resulted in the deaths of hundreds. Amidst these increased tensions and near-constant violence being perpetrated by the state against Tamils, a terrorist-separatist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), gained popularity in predominantly Tamil areas of the island. The growth of Sinhalese nationalism and the subsequent response from the LTTE resulted in the generation and sustainment of a brutal and bloody conflict lasting multiple decades.⁴⁶

Nationalism initially arose as anti-colonial resistance, but soon after independence the inter-ethnic coalitions between Tamils and Sinhalese splintered, opening a power vacuum for right-wing Sinhalese nationalists to rise to power. Sinhalese nationalist

⁴⁵ Solomon Bandaranaike's rule was bolstered by nationalist Buddhist monks. After his assassination (by one of the same monks who supported him), Solomon was succeeded by his wife, Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Sirimavo was the first woman elected Prime Minister in the world, and she continued his nationalist sentiments and policies.

⁴⁶ Simultaneous to this, the state was waging a war against the communities from which many of their Sinhalese soldiers were from in the brutal repression of the JVP insurrections. The Janatha Vimukthi Party (JVP), comprised mostly of rural educated youth, rose up in 1971 and again in 1988-90. Both times the state embarked upon a reign of terror in Southern Sri Lanka in order to consolidate and maintain the image of the 'Sinhala Buddhist' nation.

ideologies were propagated through the replication of ethnic difference and conflict by reenacting Sinhalese Buddhist mythology and history to justify and continue violence for the sake of the nation. The stories of Prince Vijaya, Dutugemunu, and Vihara Maha Devi have been replicated through speeches given by Presidents Premadasa and Rajapaksa, as well as the famed Buddhist revivalist Anagarika Dharmapala. The continued enactment of this conflict relies upon the construction of specific narratives of the motherland. These place women as the producers of the nation and create singularized conceptions of womanhood. Nationalist ideology results in the consumption of women for the existence of the sacred nation, and while nationalist movements initially arose to counter colonial ones, in actuality they served to continue such forms of bodily regulation imposed upon women.

This consumption occurs foremost through the creation and replication of certain constructions of Sinhalese femininity upon which the nation is built. Women are considered the strongholds of culture by Buddhist reformers like Anagarika Dhammapala who called upon women to dress in the ‘traditional’ Kandyan sari as an act of domestic and feminized resistance to colonial rule. Nationalist leaders continuously urge women to raise strong sons to fight the wars for ‘Mother Lanka’. These mythologies about the idealized Sinhalese nationalist woman result in the social regulation of women and women’s bodies. This also ties women’s social positioning and ability to conform directly to the conflict with the LTTE—and to the success or failure of the Sinhalese nation. Women become not only a part of the nation, but crucial to the survival of the nation. In this vision, the state needs the dutiful Sinhalese woman in order to sustain itself, and thus must consume women, specifically women’s bodies, through the perpetration of continued forms of bodily regulation and the mythic association of nationalist women to the existence of the nation.

These mythic ideas regarding the conflict and conceptions of nationalist women stem from the *Mahāvamsa*, a famed Sri Lankan epic. The *Mahāvamsa* details the birth of Sri Lanka as a repository of sacred Buddhism through the travels of Prince Vijaya, the battles of Prince Dutugemunu, and the consecration of various kings leading up to the colonial era. It is referenced and redrawn by nationalist leaders in order to engage in an ideological replication of mythology and history. Kapferer states,

“Through their imaginaries of the past, Sinhala nationalists were instrumental in the reontologization of political space, which in the context of the ontologies of the self and other, created in the modern inventions of the bureaucratic state (no less a dynamic of the constitutive imaginary), became vitally explosive as critical forces fuelling the directions of the ethnic war.”⁴⁷

Kapferer articulates how nationalism is a project involving both the construction of a certain vision of the past as well as the evocation of that past into the present. The very essence of the state is thus imbued with mythic elements.⁴⁸ The association of nationalism with mythologies such as the *Mahāvamsa* lends authority and legitimacy to the project of the state. It also associates this nationalist rhetoric with a sense of intense urgency and importance, as the continuation of the state is associated with the safety and security of the only true repository of Sinhalese Buddhism and Sinhalese identity. In this way, the tales of Vijaya and Dutugemunu are central to the creation and sustainment of Sinhalese nationalism and conflict.

The idea of women as producers and mothers of the nation has been used by the state and by nationalist ideologies to shore up national identity. This form of regulation of women and women’s bodies in particular stems from the birth of nationalist resistance to colonial rule. Jayawardena writes, “Sinhala-Buddhist womanhood thus became a key focus of the Buddhist revival. This involved two strategies: preservation of the ‘purity’ of local women and glorifying their beauty, while insisting on the immorality and unattractiveness of European and Euro-Asian women, whose looks and clothes became popular targets of vituperative comment.”⁴⁹ While at first this nationalist construction valorizing pure Sinhalese womanhood was aimed at resisting colonialism, these threads of regulation then manifested in anti-Tamil nationalist sentiment. By tying women’s identity as the bastions of nationhood to the myths of Vihara Maha Devi and Dutugemunu, these threads of regulation imposed onto women’s bodies are portrayed as crucial for the continuance of the nation in the presence of a supposed threat—Tamil sovereignty.

⁴⁷ Kapferer. *Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Culture of the State*. 15

⁴⁸ Ibid., 18

⁴⁹ Jayawardena. *Erasure of the Euro-Asian*. 254

The deep ties between mytho-history and the sustained civil war existed before the conflict itself. Anagarika Dharmapala, who is credited with the birth of Sinhalese Buddhist revivalism and nationalism, stated in his call to action, “Enter into the realms of our King Dutugamunu in spirit and try to identify yourself with the thoughts of that great king who rescued Buddhism and our nationalism from oblivion.”⁵⁰ Dharmapala calls for the direct association of Sinhalese Buddhists in his present to the defenders of Buddhism of the past. Dharmapala positions these defenders of Buddhism against the evils of colonial invaders. This dynamic then shifts to place the Sinhalese once again as defenders of Buddhism and the sacred island, but this time against Tamils who also call Sri Lanka home.

The close association of nationalism and the *Mahāvamsa* is evident in the President Mahinda Rajapaksa’s speeches. In 2005, Rajapaksa was elected on a platform of Sinhalese nationalism, and he is known for perpetrating numerous human rights violations during his rule. He also was the president of Sri Lanka at the end of the war, and his speech on the defeat of the LTTE in 2009 is a crucial site of analysis. His speech is rife with allusions to figures in the *Mahāvamsa*, articulating the pervasive nature of this historicized religio-nationalist discourse. He proclaimed to Parliament, “We are a country with a long history where we saw the reign of 182 kings who ruled with pride and honor which extended more than 2,500 years. This is a country where kings such as Dutugemunu, Valagamba, Dhatuśena, and Vijayabahu defeated enemy invasions and ensured our freedom.”⁵¹ Here he ties the ethnic conflict to the battles of Dutugemunu and Vijaya, both of whom defeated those who would try and claim sacred Sinhalese Buddhist land. The evocation of these heroes directly relates the conflict between the state and the LTTE to the sacred and victorious struggles of the *Mahāvamsa*, legitimizing state terror to protect the nation.

The story of Dutugemunu is especially important to note, as Rajapaksa continuously revives him in the political imaginary. Dutugemunu’s story is focused on his battle and subsequent triumph against the Tamil King Elara. This tale is especially

⁵⁰ Anagarika Dharmapala. *Return to Righteousness, a Collection of Speeches, Essays, and Letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala*. Edited by Ananda W. P. Guruge. Colombo: Anagarika Dharmapala Birth Centenary Committee, 1965.

⁵¹ President Rajapaksa. “President Rajapaksa’s Speech to Parliament on the Defeat of the LTTE.” Speech, Parliament, Colombo, May 19, 2009.

potent for Sinhalese nationalism because of the clear connection between mythic battles of the past and a present where the Sinhalese state is locked in constant combat with Tamil insurgents. Dutugemenu's victory is summarized in the epic *Raja Ratnacari* here:

“The King Dootoogameny hearing of all these outrages which were committed by the Malabars, determined on revenge; and accordingly, having taken into his service ten great and powerful giants, and many other powerful people, attacked the Malabars in the same place where they had committed such abominations, and put no less than eight millions of them to death, and amongst the rest the King Elalla; took their country, and brought the whole island of Ceylon under one banner.”⁵²

Here Dutugemenu's violence is justified because of the supposed 'abominations' being committed by the other side. Rajapaksa's evocation and connection between his war and Dutugemenu's allows him to condone Sinhalese state violence for the sake of the nation. Again, state terror is not only permitted but marked as necessary to the survival of the Sinhalese people and Sinhalese Buddhism, placed into a one-sided history of virtuous Sinhalese Buddhist victors.

The continued allusions to the *Mahāvamsa* places the tensions and violence between the state and the Tigers within a long history of war, conflict, and resistance in order to legitimize violence, and are reliant upon certain constructions of womanhood to do so. Rajapaksa stated in his victory address, “As much as Mother Lanka fought against invaders such as Ditiya, Pitiya, Palayamara, Siva and Elara in the past, we have the experience of having fought the Portuguese, Dutch and British who established empires in the world.”⁵³ Here, Sinhalese nationalist ideologies are presented in the context not only of the brutal battles fought by Vijaya and Dutugemenu for the sake of Sri Lanka, but also aligned with the creation of an independent Sri Lanka, a 'Motherland'. This constructed mythology of history cannot be contested without standing against the state itself.

Throughout this continuation of the *Mahāvamsa*, Rajapaksa associates women with the nation, the 'Mother Lanka', and continues this gendered association of the nation

⁵² Mahānāma, and Abhayarāja. *The Mahāvamsi, the Rājā-ratnācari, and the Rājā-vali: Forming the Sacred and Historical Books of Ceylon ; Also, a Collection of Tracts Illustrative of the Doctrines and Literature of Buddhism*. Edited by Edward Upham and William Buckley Fox. London: Parbury, Allen, and, 1833. 38

⁵³ President Rajapaksa. “President Rajapaksa's Speech to Parliament on the Defeat of the LTTE.” Speech, Parliament, Colombo, May 19, 2009.

when he critiques Tamil communities for their inability to protect their daughters, and subsequently the nation. He states, “The Tamil people who have a great history are today in a tragic and helpless state due to the terrorists of the LTTE. When did it ever happen in the history of the Tamil people that parents forced their young daughters to get pregnant to save them from being dragged into war?”⁵⁴ Rajapaksa here is referencing the title of the LTTE, where they would require families (mostly those in Eastern Sri Lanka) to send one of their children to fight for them. Families who did not comply could lose the protection of the Tigers against state forces, or in extreme cases face forced displacement. The protection of women is associated with the ability of the family, and the assumedly male head of the family, to protect women as well as create and safeguard the nation (ergo (pro)create the nation). Rajapaksa dictates a failure on the part of the Tamil people to protect their daughters and continue their nation, justifying Sinhalese state violence through the bodies of women.

Rajapaksa’s words place women as the vessel through which the nation is continued, born, and reenacted. He goes on to state, “The immense gratitude of our nation goes out on this occasion to all parents who brought forth the heroic troops who sacrificed their lives, and to their wives who gave them strength to serve the motherland.”⁵⁵ The troops, like Dutugemunu and his warriors, are crucial to the nation. However, they are also reliant on mothers who raise warrior sons and wives who support their soldier husbands. The motherland is built upon the idea of the nationalist woman, the dutiful wife, the strong Sinhalese mother. It is through this construction that the motherland is continued. Women are consumed for the sake of the nation, folded into these composite parts of duty, respectability, and motherhood, and erased when they do not fit those folds.

Rajapaksa’s mythic musings do not go unnoticed in the public sphere, as the leader of the LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran, comments in his 2006 Heroes Day speech that “the Sinhala nation remains misled by the mythical ideology of the *Mahāvamsa* and remains trapped in the chauvinistic sentiments thus created.”⁵⁶ This chauvinism, this

⁵⁴ President Rajapaksa. “President Rajapaksa’s Speech to Parliament on the Defeat of the LTTE.” Speech, Parliament, Colombo, May 19, 2009.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Velupillai Prabhakaran. “Heroes’ Day Speech.” Sri Lanka, November 27, 2006.

overt patriotism, dominates the discourses of the nation. Prabakharan is calling attention to how the entirety of the conflict is framed by the state as part of a history of resistance to external invaders. Tamil communities are thus placed outside of the nation and outside of the protection the nation is supposed to provide to its people. This framing of the war places it alongside the moral justifications for conflict, linking the survival of the state to the survival of Buddhism, justifying violence and the destruction of those who stand in the way.

Not only are these evocations to the *Mahāvamsa* evident, they are also ubiquitous. Even schoolchildren read about the stories of Dutugemunu, parents name their children after him, and society at large is imbued with the continued replication of nationalistic ideologies. The conflict is then given a degree of religious and cultural importance that places the existence of the Sinhalese people at stake. This association permits violence to ‘protect’ the nation, and places women both as repositories of nationhood and justifications for violence.

The motherland evokes the birth of Sri Lanka as the motherland of Sinhalese Buddhism, and Rajapaksa’s words as well as the prominence of this discourse in the popular imaginary tie to the mythic history of the *Mahāvamsa*. This time, the story of Vijaya is retold, a tale of a rebellious prince credited with bringing Buddhism to Sri Lanka. Vijaya arrived on the Island of Lanka, only to lose hundreds of his men to the brutal Yakkhini Kuvanna.⁵⁷ He suspects she is a demon, but “lays with her”, and then she says “I will bestow kingship on my lord and all the yakkhas must be slain, for (else) the yakkhas will slay me, for it was through me that men have taken up their dwelling (in Lanka).”⁵⁸ It is through her that the nation is claimed, it is through Kuvanna that Vijaya asserts his control over the island. Despite her power as a demoness, she becomes a vessel through which Vijaya claims the island. Nationalist ideologies rely upon consuming women, constructing them as vessels to bear and produce the nation both in terms of lineage and marriage as well as in the creation of tropes of feminine nationhood.

⁵⁷ Kuvanna is a Yakkhini, a head demoness. The word Yakkha is synonymous with Yaksha, the modern terminology for demon

⁵⁸ Mahānāma. *The Mahāvamsa: Or, The Great Chronicle of Ceylon*. Edited by Wilhelm Geiger and Mabel Haynes Bode. London: Luzac &, 1964. (VII, 30)

Not only is the nation gendered as the 'motherland', women are also consumed and rendered invisible in order to create the very idea of the motherland.

In both Rajapaksa's speeches and the wider cultural context, the subtext of this motherland discourse is always a Sinhalese motherland and Sinhalese country, erasing the bodies of women outside of Sinhalese womanhood. This contributes to Rajapaksa's assumption of the failure of Tamil communities: both the failure of women to create the motherland and the failure of Tamil men to protect the motherland.⁵⁹ Jayawardena notes that "women are seen to be the repository of tradition and their 'inviolability' has been a powerful tool of cultural defence against modernization and westernization."⁶⁰ Women become representations of the nation, of culture itself, and thus must maintain cultural purity for the continuance of the nation. In this way, the bodies of women are consumed by the nation to create the motherland and coopted by the state to carry out violence, the resulting brutality of which is inscribed upon the bodies of women living under conflict.

This results in what Alwis has termed the 'Moral Mother Syndrome', which is the construction of a certain norm of Sinhalese femininity inspired by Vihara Maha Devi, Dutugemunu's mother. In the construction of the sacred Sinhalese Buddhist nation, Vihara Maha Devi protects the nation by providing guidance during Dutugemunu's war against the Tamil king Elara and by performing her maternal duty of raising a good Sinhalese nationalist-warrior son. While she is given a place as a military counselor during Dutugemunu's war, she is mostly credited with raising Dutugemunu, creating a certain vision of the nationalist-driven woman who protect the nation through reproducing and rearing of good Sinhalese boys. Alwis quotes from a newspaper article (*Sithumina*, 25 January 1936) on Vihara Maha Devi when stating "For it was she who

⁵⁹ The rhetoric of the 'motherland' is commonly used, both by the state and the LTTE, to justify their violence through the exceptions of the ethnic 'Other'. This dynamic is best articulated by President Rajapaksa, who presided over the end of the conflict, who continuously placed the LTTE as an external enemy, as a threat to the existence of the nation itself (see President Rajapaksa's Victory Speech). The Tigers and other entities fighting for Tamil rights and Tamil sovereignty are seen as external to the very nation itself. The nation demands control over the entirety of space, enveloping and erasing communities that diverge from the homogenous construction of the Sinhalese Buddhist state. The State not only views the 'ethnic other', in this case Tamil communities, as a threat to the existence of the nation, but also allows for violent exceptions in order to carry forth the state itself (See Korf, Benedikt. "Who is the rogue? Discourse, power and spatial politics in post-war Sri Lanka." *Political Geography* 25, no. 3 (2006): 279-97.) This violence becomes justified by law, rhetoric, and governance itself, for the state is tied not solely to territory but to ethnic exceptionalism and the governing of land, bodies, and ideologies.

⁶⁰ Jayawardena and Alwis. *Embodied Violence*. xv

embedded [*nidan kale*] lofty ideas [*udara adahas*] in her son when nursing him at her breast [*akayehi kiri ura bona kalhi*].⁶¹ Here, Devi's virtue lies with her ability to raise a son with the 'right' values, something that is transmitted through the physical acts of nurturing. Her reputation is written on the body, for it is her role in reproducing and sustaining both her son and the nation that bring her to prominence.

Vihara Maha Devi, like Dutugemenu, is still ever visible in Sri Lankan society. In the 1950s, the state renamed Queen Victoria Park to Vihara Maha Devi Park. In another example, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who became the first female Prime Minister in the world after succeeding her husband, Solomon Bandaranaike, has been compared to Vihara Maha Devi on various occasions. Continuing the same Sinhalese-nationalist rhetoric espoused by her husband during his rule, she garlanded the statue as part of her campaign to make Sinhala the only national language.⁶² She "used that occasion to berate the women of Sri Lanka for not taking sufficient interest in the affairs of the country unlike their counterparts in India."⁶³ Bandaranaike, Rajapaksa, and the machine of popular culture⁶⁴ all engaged in a replication of Vihara Maha Devi (primarily through her connection to Dutugemenu), constructing an idealized image of the nationalist woman who dutifully births sons and supports the nation in times of conflict while still remaining within the constraints of their feminine identity.

This idea of the mother is inherently tied to the body and utilized for the continuous (re)production of the nation. Neloufer de Mel states, "[i]n such constructs of ethno-national identity and culture, the role of Woman has been, paradoxically, fundamental. Despite her continuing marginalization in patriarchal society, her biological and historically social function of nurturing Mother for instance, has imbued woman with the notion of authenticity, permitting her to be used as a channel of culture and nation-building."⁶⁵ Here, motherhood is seen as tied to the future of the nation, and thus mothers and rhetorics of motherhood are essential to the existence of the nation itself. However,

⁶¹ Malathi de Alwis. "The Moral Mother Syndrome". *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 11, no 1 (2004)

⁶² This nationalist political move is especially insidious, as it was the fight for recognition of Sinhala and Tamil that unified resistance to colonial rule in Sri Lanka

⁶³ Alwis. "The Moral Mother Syndrome". 68

⁶⁴ Neloufer De Mel. "Static Signifiers? Metaphors of Woman in Contemporary Sri Lankan War Poetry." In *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia*, edited by Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi De Alwis, 168-89. London: Zed Books, 1996. 170

⁶⁵ Ibid., 169

embodied within this construction is an inherent contradiction. The figure of the mother has a contingent agency that allows her exert the power of the nation, but only in relation to her procreation or raising of nationalist children. This limited sphere of agency permits Vihara Maha Devi to become Dutugemunu's advisor during a time of war, and also lends authority to Sirimavo Bandaranaike's rule. Because the authority stems so directly from this assumption of motherhood, and the mother of the nation no less, they engage in the constant and continuous (re)construction of the nation, propagating the ideologies of nationalism. The singularized concept of 'motherhood' stems into the creation of women as sites where the nation is continuously produced.

The association of women with the sanctity of the nation places a focus on the cultural purity of Sinhalese women and the need to maintain that purity. Although never successful, the nationalist campaigns in the 1920s to ban mixed marriages are indicative of the centrality of ethnic and gendered purity. Kumari Jayawardena, in her work on mixed identity in Sri Lanka, has written of her personal experiences having a Sinhalese father and a Burgher mother. Despite her mixed heritage, she is considered Sinhalese because of her father's lineage.⁶⁶ In regards to post-colonial hierarchy and inheritance, women are effectively erased. The male lineage is the one carried on, through the vessel of a woman. Mixed identities and women with non-Sinhalese partners become a threat to nationalism because they involve the erasure of Sinhalese identity. When women are placed as the carriers and producers of culture through the 'moral mother' discourse, they are under constant scrutiny because if they stray from prescribed ideas about normative nationalist femininity, they contribute to the perceived erasure of the Sinhalese community and state.

The state called upon Sinhalese women to raise good nationalist sons like Vihara Maha Devi and maintain respectability and purity even as the conflicting armies assaulted women to claim territory and dominance. Activist women, unmarried women, childless women, women who promoted peace; all of these became the targets of nationalism.⁶⁷ Alwis writes that "the escalating desire of Sinhala nationalists as well as the Sri Lankan state, particularly since the rise of Tamil liberation movement in the early 1980s, to

⁶⁶ Kumari Jayawardena. *Erasure of the Euro-Asian: Recovering Early Radicalism and Feminism in South Asia*. Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2007.

⁶⁷ This will be articulated further in Chapter Three

encourage the patriotism of Sinhala women has not only extended to the surveillance, disciplining, ridiculing, and de-legitimising of those who are perceived to be ‘traitors’, but has also included a concerted effort to promote nationalist female role models as appropriate alternatives.”⁶⁸ Women who defy the norms of motherhood are automatically othered, and even considered the enemy of the nation itself. Women are tasked with the constant production and even protection of the nation, but are also held hostage by the nation through the bodily regulation inherent to nationalist schemes.

This dynamic is not singular to Sinhalese nationalists, and Sumathy Sivamohan, a Tamil activist and artist, wrote “within the Tamil national liberation movement, the figure of the ‘woman’ and her strengths have been actively deployed to mobilize people.”⁶⁹ Tamil nationalism in this regard mirrored Sinhalese nationalism, as both involved the rhetoric of protecting women, and thus protecting the nation. Even as Prabhakaran called attention to the chauvinism of Sinhalese nationalism, the state-less nationalism of the LTTE held a similar destructive patriotism. In fact, the LTTE was known for drawing murals urging Tamil women to have children to combat the Sinhalese state’s supposed Tamil sterilization program (which Tamil anti-nationalist activists assert was fabricated by the Tigers to stir up anti-state sentiment and fear).⁷⁰ Not only did this involve the valorization of certain conceptions of womanhood, namely the pure and devout mother figure, it also resulted in the stigmatization of women who strayed from those narrow boundaries.

These specific conceptions of respectable womanhood, which are resultant from the nation/land/motherhood ascriptions, create impossible paradoxes from which women are forbidden from straying. Women must conform, and be consumed by the great nation, or risk being killed for their dissent. Despite the fact that women are considered too far removed from enlightenment in Sinhalese Buddhism and too impure to host the divine, women are also viewed as the vessels of reproducing tradition. Women are told to emulate the Goddess Pattini, who despite her divinity cannot ascend to enlightenment because of the impurity of her gender. While praising Vihara Maha Devi, Sirimavo

⁶⁸ Alwis. “The Moral Mother Syndrome”. 66

⁶⁹ Sumathy Sivamohan. *Thin Veils: In the Shadow of the Gun & the Wicked Witch (performing Act/ivism)*. Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2003.10

⁷⁰ Kumudini Samuel, ed. *Women Transforming Peace Activism in a Fierce New World: South and Southeast Asia*. Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), March 2012.101

Bandaranaike criticized the women of Sri Lanka for not upholding these impossible ideals of femininity. President Rajapaksa called upon women to raise good nationalist sons as the state simultaneously committed countless acts of violence against women, Sinhalese and Tamils alike. Scholar Mangalika de Silva articulates one of these instances of paradox when she recounts the story of Sriyalatha. Sriyalatha was the widow of a state soldier killed in the conflict and a sex worker. She was strip searched in 2000 by soldiers after exiting a high-class neighborhood dressed in traditionally Tamil clothes (shalwar kameez). Silva states,

“The strip searches served to strip the veil of feminine modesty, disciplinary femininity, keeping loose, defiant, stubborn women in their ‘rightful’ place, the place of the hearth, the ideological means by which (gender) power is produced and sustained in patriarchal cultures of shame. But more important, the act of stripping unveiled the postcolonial state’s war of sexual terror and violence waged against its female ‘citizens’.”⁷¹

This instance highlights the hypocrisy of the state—for Sriyalatha is part of the narrative the nation espouses regarding the wives of Sinhalese soldiers. However, unlike that narrative, she cannot fully fit the impossible framework of Devi or other nationalist women with economic means. Sriyalatha inhabits the ambiguous space created by these paradoxes of the nation and femininity. She was married to a soldier, she was the mother of a Sinhalese baby, but because she didn’t have a formal marriage license and practiced sex work, she was not considered within the structures of the nation. She would not be included amongst the women that President Rajapaksa would go on to recognize when he thanked the countless women who raised and supported the soldiers of the state. Not only is she not recognized amongst their ranks, she is also more likely to be considered an element of failure, a problem with no solution. Because she does not embody the doctrines of nationalist femininity, she is not a bastion of the nation but instead a casualty in a hidden war of violence and consumption.

Women are both the perpetrators of the failure of the nation as well as the vessel through which the nation is carried forth. This contributes to the creation of such specific and singular notions of femininity. While women are permitted to engage in certain

⁷¹ Mangalika de Silva. “The Other Body and the Body Politic: Contingency and Dissonance in Narratives of Violence.” In *Women and the Contested State: Religion, Violence, and Agency in South and Southeast Asia*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. 141.

behaviors, as Vihara Maha Devi did when counseling Dutugemunu during the war, these behaviors are always marked as necessary for the production of the nation, a production that is written on the body through the prescription of behavior and the physicality of literal reproduction. Hyndman and Alwis state, “[w]hile nationalism may seek to homogenize differences through the unifying discourses of nationhood, it nonetheless generates contradictory positions for women as symbols of cultural purity, agents of resistance against western domination, and ‘role models’ for the new nationalist patriarchal family.”⁷² While there are many roles and manifestations that the ‘moral mother’ can take on, such as advising the militant son or raising the nationalist leader or even maintaining the domestic sphere as an act of claiming tradition in resistance against westernization and colonialism, these roles are still contained through the regulation of the body itself and the regulatory contradictions women are forced to navigate.

The hegemonic imposition of ideas of womanhood and motherhood have been staunchly criticized and resisted by countless women activists. Sumathy Sivamohan heavily critiques these notions of womanhood throughout her play “In the Shadow of the Gun”. Her one-woman performance explores the various experiences of women, all of whom are necessary to the creation and existence of the state yet subject to state violence, in order to highlight the paradoxical nature of prescribed femininity. The narrator, who is loosely based on Rajani Thiranagama, a well-known activist who was murdered by the LTTE for speaking out against them, first calls out her father who is trying to stop her from going outside when she is also tasked with the protection of her daughters and the nation itself. She states, “I am the mother of the nation! Do not stop me!”⁷³ Here Sivamohan speaks to the discordance between calling upon women to safeguard the nation but stigmatizing behavior that would allow women to actually protect themselves. Women are expected to be these vessels of purity and continuity, and are blamed for the loss of that purity, but are not supposed to engage in resistance or violence against the enemy for the protection of the nation/self, instead forced to rely upon the male actors of the nation for that protection.

⁷² Hyndman and Alwis. “Bodies, Shrines, and Roads”. 541

⁷³ Sivamohan. *Thin Veils*. 16

Women only fall under the protection of the nation's agents when they conforms to the dictates of cultural purity, and those who do not fit such criteria are tossed aside, further casualties in a war where violence is manifested in every sphere of life. Sivamohan's narrator goes on to give voice to a prostitute who lives outside of an army camp. "They shot me through the belly—the womb that gave birth to the sons of this soil. I carry the seeds of this nation here. The murderer too was born out of this gaping wound. And you stare horrified at it."⁷⁴ Here a woman, a producer of the nation and the soldiers of the nation, is cast aside by the state for not conforming to ideal Sinhalese womanhood. Women and women's bodies are described by the state and the LTTE as singularized, as necessary for the nation, but only within certain roles (the fertile mother, the defender of tradition, even the virgin militant). Any other enactment is tantamount to dissent.

This simultaneous co-opting of women's bodies as well as erasure of the non-normative or non-nationalist results in the continued sacrifice of women for the sake of the nation, a sacrifice that depends on the constant consumption of women's bodies. This consumption as sacrifice is enacted in the *Mahāvamsa* in the story of the ultimate nationalist woman, Vihara Maha Devi. Devi's father, who discovered his wife was unfaithful and cast the messenger of this news into the sea, sacrificed her as penance for his actions. "Wroth at this the sea-gods made the sea overflow the land; but the king with all speed caused his pious and beautiful daughter named Devi to be placed in a golden vessel, whereon was written 'a king's daughter', and to be launched upon that same sea."⁷⁵ She is subsumed by the sea so her father can remain alive, king, and ruler of his nation, effectively sacrificing her for the good of the nation. Within the conflict, continued by nationalist ideologies, women are continuously sacrificed. This manifests in the erasure of women for the sake of the nation and the motherland, the placement of culture and cultural purity onto women's bodies, and the subsummation of women into the nationalist creation of the nation. Sivamohan writes in an untitled poem, "the woman forgot all about the footprints. She felt alone and scared. Don't leave me behind! I am mother courage. I am here only for you, for you, for you. The plains chanted back in

⁷⁴ Ibid., 19

⁷⁵ Mahānāma. *The Mahāvamsa*. (XXII, 20)

return. She went mish mash in the sand—mother earth, mother land, mother tongue.”⁷⁶ Women are dictated as these composite parts, as the mother, the daughter, the pure repository, and the embodiment of culture or land. Women are tasked with the constant reproduction and continuity of the nation, and are blamed for the failure of the nation to persist. But to pull from Sivamohan’s book title,⁷⁷ despite these varied forms of regulation impressed onto the body, women are more than myth, and more than mother.

III. Post-Conflict Divine Possession and Agential Consumption

Amidst the intersecting and hegemonic forms of regulation that impact women’s bodies and mobility spanning across empire and nation, I theorize that the practice of divine possession directly counters colonial and nationalist forms of bodily regulation, instead making visible the bodies of women and providing a powerful site of agency and voice in a world that seeks to silence. The practice of divine possession and the complicated nature of women’s agency within the sphere of possession is important to engage because of its potential for expanding conceptions of agency. Because women’s movement and political mobilization is confined by gendered regulations, looking to agency within spaces typically limited to women such as the ritual space of divine possession is a crucial endeavor, as it makes legible instances of resistance that would otherwise remain concealed. Analyses of divine possession, and even ones on demonic possession that consider the possessed body to be agential, still do not adequately investigate women’s continued bodily agency. In this section, I will examine previous theorizations on agency and possession, focusing specifically on Mary Keller’s concept of instrumental agency as a starting point to articulate a theorization of the possessed body as powerful and agential. This allows a perception of possessed bodies as powerful not solely within ritual space, but instead as a site of analysis themselves where the possessed body makes visible state terror and community grief. This power extends the threads of agency from within the sphere of ritual to create a unique articulation of resistance. This resistance is born through the body itself, for when the body makes visible that which cannot be spoken, hidden traumas and discontents are brought forth

⁷⁶ Sumathy Sivamohan. *Like myth and mother: a political autobiography in poetry and prose*. Colombo, Sirahuni; 2008. 9

⁷⁷ Reference to compilation of poems cited above, *Like Myth and Mother*

without the violent bodily repercussions of speaking out against state terror. Next, this chapter will trace instances of possession as recounted by colonial writers, academics during the war, and experiences of the present to see how divine possession has continuously countered state violence and bodily regulation. Both colonial rule and state nationalism consume women's bodies as sites of control, culture, purity, and territory. While women are continuously erased, subsumed for the sake of the nation, constructed and limited by the discourses perpetrated by those in power, they are also made visible, powerful, and agential through the practice of divine possession.

Scholars such as Bruce Kapferer, Gananath Obeyesekere, and Isabelle Nabokov have all theorized possession as moments of temporary resistance or agency. Their analyses downplay the reality of possession as well as conceptions of agency exerted by the possessed body. Kapferer and Nabokov both focus on demon possession, through which they articulate a vision of possession that offers limited agency for women. They view possession as a temporary vessel through which women articulate dissatisfaction with the status quo, their social standing, or their relationships. While this analysis does focus on women's agency, that agency does not extend from the ritual space—it is confined and bounded instead. Kapferer articulates this limited agency when he refers to demonic possession as a place for women to “air their grievances” against their husbands.⁷⁸ Nabokov considers women's resistance and agency as more central to her analysis than Kapferer, although it is still within confined space. She concludes that “the diagnosis of demonic possession and subsequent exorcisms allow close relatives of the possessed person to reassert their authority within the domestic unit.”⁷⁹ She is referring specifically to exorcism rituals, which result in drawing the possessed individual back into a set hierarchy and placing them firmly within their prescribed social positioning (which for many women is the domestic unit). Again, there is finality to the resistance; closure to a moment of agency instead of a continued enactment of power.

Divine possession has the potential to expand notions of agency and possession because there is no exorcism ceremony, unlike in the practices written about by Kapferer

⁷⁸ Bruce Kapferer. *A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983. 94

⁷⁹ Isabelle Nabokov. "Expel the Lover, Recover the Wife: Symbolic Analysis of a South Indian Exorcism." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*: 297.

and Nabokov. However, Gananath Obeyesekere's prominent analysis of divine possession in Sri Lanka continues interpretations with limited agential scope. His work on women oracles who are possessed by divine beings at the Kataragama temple complex in South-Central Sri Lanka views divine possession through a psychoanalytic lens. He asserts that divine possession is "a culturally constituted idiom available to women for expressing and managing their personal problems."⁸⁰ This statement downplays the validity of possessions and the importance of women's ritual practice, for women's 'personal problems' vocalized through divine possession deserve to be treated with respect and intentionality. He suggests that women who engage in divine possession merely shift their alliance from their husbands to the divine being that possessed them, implying an explicitly sexual nature to women's possessions, which is not assumed in the divine possession of men. He states, "The woman renounces sex with her husband. She then transfers her allegiance to a god. This must be associated with her renunciation of sex with her husband. But she does make a vow of fidelity to another and nobler lord, to a divine being."⁸¹ This framework serves to limit women's agency by assuming they still must be under the domain of a male authority figure. This authority is also inherently tied to women's sexuality, or in reality their willingness, or lack thereof, to submit the control of that sexuality to the male authority. Arguably, Obeyesekere's framework utilizes the same limiting ideologies perpetrated by colonialism and nationalism by relying on a regulation of women and women's bodies.

Mary Keller's extensive work on instrumental agency provides an important alternate source of analysis in thinking about possessed bodies. Her work articulates how possession challenges a great number of preexisting frameworks because of the complicated question of agency when the subject in question may not be conscious or 'in control' of their body. She describes possession as "consciousness is overcome, and the body is used like a hammer or played like a flute or mounted like a horse so that the possessed body is an *instrumental agent* in the possession."⁸² Despite the fact that the body may not retain consciousness and is in the sway of an unknowable power or force,

⁸⁰ Gananath Obeyesekere. *Medusa's Hair* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

⁸¹ Ibid., 65

⁸² Mary Keller. *The Hammer and the Flute: Women, Power, and Spirit Possession*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.74

the body, the vessel of power, is still accorded agency. The body is *instrumental* in action, resistance, the transfer or usage of power, and as such is rendered agential by the process and presence of divine possession.

Keller takes into consideration as a crucial element of her analysis the legitimacy of possession and the experiences of possessed bodies. Her work places the existence and the consideration of the possessing entity at the forefront of the conversation, and she states “the possessed body becomes a place for doing business for another, the ancestor, deity, or spirit, who is usually at a distance.”⁸³ Keller balances both the assertion of agency for the possessed body while still acknowledging the existence of the possessing entity as a force and a power that must be considered when discussing agency. This facet of her theory is important to consider, for it does more than just acknowledge the legitimacy of a practice in the eyes of the practitioner. By acknowledging and centering the existence of invisible forces in divine possession, Keller expands conceptions of agency through her recognition of how agency is impacted by the power of the possessing entity.

Keller’s theorization is possible because of the way that she frames subjectivity in relation to agency. She states, “Agency does not reside in individual subjectivities; it resides in the interrelationships of bodies with systems of power such as economic systems and religious systems with their regimes of *discipline*.”⁸⁴ In this way the body is positioned in its relationship to the community, to the individual, to the power implicated in the existence and enactment of possessed bodies. The agency of possessed bodies is also deeply and directly tied to systems of regulation, such as those perpetrated by colonial rule and nationalist ideologies. The agency of women who embody the divine in modern Sri Lanka, then, must be considered both within ritual moments as well as embedded in a context of hundreds of years of complicated and layered forms of patriarchy and nationhood that serve to simultaneously consume, erase, and utilize women’s bodies for the sake of nation and empire.

Using Keller’s concept of instrumental agency as a starting point and asserting that women who embody the divine are agential in the possession, I posit that not only

⁸³ Ibid., 78

⁸⁴ Ibid., 73

does the body hold instrumental agency, but this agency extends outward from the space of possession to directly counter the myriad ways in which the state and the empire rely upon the consumption of women's bodies for their existence and sustainment. Because the possessed body has instrumental agency, the body is simultaneously consumed and overtaken, but still powerful and agential. While through colonial and nationalist regimes the consumption of the body is often more subtle, relying on an intentional invisibility for consumption and continuance of the nation/empire, in divine possession the body is viscerally and visibly consumed, overtaken by a deity. The body becomes a vessel for another force, another power outside the realm of the individual.

Divine possession involves a powerful (re)consumption of the body through making visible the experiences, trauma, and fates of family members and community members who have disappeared. This particular facet of divine possession began during the war, but continues to this day as many women still seek answers about the fate of the missing. Both throughout the multi-decade civil war and the overlapping JVP insurrection in South-Central Sri Lanka, the state would simply kidnap anyone who could possibly dissent. For the JVP insurrection, which was the dissent of a political party comprised of mostly young, unemployed, educated men; the state kidnapped or killed almost every young man who graduated from high school. In the areas most affected by the conflict with the LTTE, anyone who could have any connection to the Tigers was taken. They were snatched up for 'questioning' by the police, and even now, decades after the loss, families still refer to their loved ones as 'disappeared' and not deceased. This enactment of violence, of disappearing a body, is especially horrific. It prolongs grief; it extends the control and the tyranny of state power. Alwis states, "forced 'disappearance' is one of the most insidious forms of violence as it seeks to obliterate the body and indefinitely extends and exacerbates the grief of those left behind".⁸⁵ These disappearances consume bodies in the most literal sense, and extinguish them from existence. This is the most visceral representation of state terror as played out upon bodies taken and made invisible in the public sphere.

⁸⁵ Malathi de Alwis. "'Disappearance' and 'Displacement' in Sri Lanka". *Journal of Refugee Studies* 22, no 3 (2009): 378

Divine possession, and the truth embedded in oracular revelation about the fate of those disappeared, makes visible pain and makes visible those who have disappeared in a radical use of the body. By embodying and inhabiting situations of violence but making them visible instead of invisible, the existence of state terror is acknowledged and challenged. Malathi de Alwis writes in her work on the Mother's Fronts that women would often have little or no physical evidence of those they had lost. She writes, "The 'disappeared' who are denied names or identities by the state, who are assumed to 'occupy no space', now 'have a place' upon the bodies that birthed them and 'mothered' them."⁸⁶ The 'having a place' or claiming of space that she refers to is how women would carry their son's clothes and wear photos of them pinned to their saris. These remnants of someone's life were often the only physical remains of their existence. The state, by 'disappearing' these bodies continuously throughout the war created a situation of ambiguity, where without the body communities cannot effectively mourn or move forward and instead become 'chronic mourner's'.⁸⁷ Just as women would hold on to the physical remains of their son's existence, divine possession also involves evidence on the body, creating traces of others where little or no proof exists. In a setting where the state will offer no certainty about the fate of those lost, divine possession and oracular revelation provide certainty written onto the same bodies made victims of state violence. In the wake of years of colonial rule and conflict bolstered by nationalism, divine possession makes visible the lives of those who are shrouded from public perception, countering the state's attempts to erase the bodies of women and the bodies of those who dissent from the public sphere.

Divine possession counters these disappearances by placing the body as a site where the fate of the lost is rendered visible. In times of state terror when grief is seen as a threat to the state, divine possession and specifically the physical bodies of the possessed provide a space for emotion in the face of extreme violence. Patricia Lawrence, in her unparalleled accounts of violence and divine possession along the Eastern coast of Sri Lanka during the height of the conflict, recorded numerous instances where oracles would embody the divine and reveal truths about the disappeared. Her interlocutor

⁸⁶ Malathi De Alwis. "'Disappearance' and 'Displacement' in Sri Lanka". *Journal of Refugee Studies* 22, no 3 (2009): 384

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 379

Saktirani, an oracle in Batticaloa, exemplifies the power of the body in resisting violent hegemonies. Lawrence describes one instance of Saktirani's oracular revelation where a father comes to ask about the fate of his missing son,

“In response, the oracle uses both body and voice as an instrument for re-enacting the son's experience of torture, experiencing his pain, calling out incoherently for approximately fifteen minutes, sometimes voicing the word *erivu* ('burning'), then vomiting. She returns his *vettlaipakku* offering, and lapses into an unconscious state lying on the sand. She then stands half bent as though being beaten, and vomits again. She holds her head, arms, neck, back, and legs—saying that she feels pain all over.”⁸⁸

Here, Saktirani's body itself is a stand-in for the body of the lost individual—her body crossing the bounds of space and time. By representing the body of a lost community member, her body acts out the processes of torture and death—she cries out in emotion at the feeling of violence. This violence is not solely in the sphere of the ritual, but is considered a mirror of the torture suffered by the disappeared. This visible and evident violence within the space of ritual enacts power differently than the actual violence of torture. Through torture, the body experiencing violence is completely at the mercy of those inflicting terror. Through divine possession, the body is situated within the sacred and communal space of the temple, surrounded not by enemy soldiers but by community members. By taking these violent moments and placing them into a context where people can grieve and gain closure and where bodies themselves hold an instrumental agency, oracles reclaim these moments and break the state's control over knowledge regarding the fate of the disappeared.

Through divine possession, the same bodies consumed by nation and empire are used to stand against the hegemony of state violence. Bodies bearing the marks of histories of violence are overtaken by divine forces far more powerful than the state—and these deities then break the hold of the state by making visible state terror. Lawrence writes about Saktirani, “At the end of language, her body became the agent, a site where truth is made public.”⁸⁹ Because the bodies of oracles show, on the body itself, the pain suffered by the disappeared, the invisibility of state violence is countered. By making

⁸⁸ Patricia Lawrence. "Grief on the Body: The Work of Oracles in Eastern Sri Lanka." In *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited*, edited by Michael Roberts, 271-94. Vol. II. Colombo: Marga Institute. 279

⁸⁹ Patricia Lawrence. "The Watch of Tamil Women." In *Women and the Contested State*, edited by Monique Skidmore. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. 107

visible this trauma, the state can longer justify violence in abstract forms or claim it is for the good of the nation. Through divine possession, oracles allow communities to make sense of the violence they are embedded in through the same bodies that the state attempts to dominate and consume. As divine possession conveys the last moments of someone's life or the experiences of the disappeared, families can gain closure about those who are dead and disappeared, or maintain hope about the lost and the living. By conveying these moments of state torture or violence at the hands of the LTTE, women, through their embodiment of the divine, legitimize these experiences, bring them to the forefront of the community, and resist the exceptionalist violence perpetrated on all sides. The body becomes a site of power and resistance because it actively challenges imposed hegemony by forcefully making visible the state's violent consumption of communities.

Divine possession thus becomes a way for everyday individuals embedded in a landscape of terror to reclaim some essence of their lives. The state acts to conceal their constant onslaught of torture and terror, portraying the war as necessary for the survival of the state and for the survival of Sinhalese and the apparently unprotected Tamil women referenced in Rajapaksa's speech. In order for the state to keep up this façade, they must conceal not only the extant threads of torture and terror, but also the expression of grief by those impacted. Lawrence notes that along the conflict-affected Eastern coast, "There is an island in this sea of silence: the emotional outpourings at local temples."⁹⁰ This emotional outpouring that Lawrence notes is the expression of grief and trauma within the sacred space of the temple, where individuals seek solace through ritual practices in a time where they have no other place to turn. Even now at temples, it is not uncommon to see people struck by emotion and grieving for themselves and those they have lost.⁹¹ This forceful and agential visibility counters regulation; it counters the imposition of the British and the Sinhalese state, and in doing so creates a powerful mode of women's resistance and an alternative to the violence perpetrated by those in positions of power.

In the world outside the temple, emotions are regulated not only through cultural norms but also the real threat of state violence. Jane Derges notes in her fieldwork in

⁹⁰ Ibid., 274

⁹¹ This will be expanded upon in Chapter Three when discussing the recent acts of women's mobilization at Nallur temple

2005 that people view Jaffna as an ‘open prison.’⁹² Her interlocutors were so cautious about speaking of terror and violence that any strangers they encountered in the home or on the street are automatically considered suspect. The space of the temple and the ritual of divine possession provide a momentary pause in the imposition of fear, terror, and violence ever-present in the outside world. Women can express grief, they can cry out for their loved ones, they can embody the divine within supposedly impure bodies, and do so without threat of the state. The temple, and divine possession within the temple, becomes a space where grief is actualized and made forcibly visible. It is where lost ones are mourned, where loss is realized and made visible to the community at large. The visibility of grief through divine possession flips the narrative, as it involves using the body, that same vessel where terror is enacted, as the site where grief can be shown.

This outpouring is reliant on bodies themselves, the same bodies that are mercilessly regulated by nation and empire. Lawrence ties the oracular revelation she witnesses to a reclaiming and re-articulation of the body when she states, “intense devotional enactments involving the body in resurgent Amman cult rituals entail dissolution of the prior sense of the body and self—in a local world altered by terror—and give back a renewed and reaffirmed body-self imbued with locally meaningful social identity.”⁹³ By making visible the violence carried forth by the state, the bodies of oracles take state violence out of the control of the state—remaking the body as a powerful entity and not defenseless or anonymous. By embodying the violence suffered by community members, they hold agency over terror. Outside of the sphere of ritual, women hold little power against violent state formations. However, within these ritual moments, this violence is not only visible but can be controlled, limited, and countered. The body is so often the site where terror, like nationalism and colonialism, is mapped out. The pain of torture and the remnants of conflict exist to this day on the bodies of those impacted. Divine possession simultaneously consumes the body but also reshapes its perception—the body is no longer something solely marked by war, but is an agential power that can channel the divine. Divine possession is visibility, it is agency, it defies the continuous destruction and regulation perpetrated by colonialism and nationalism.

⁹² Jane Derges. *Ritual and Recovery in Post-Conflict Sri Lanka*. London: Routledge, 2013.

⁹³ Patricia Lawrence. "The Changing Amman: Notes on the Injury of War in Eastern Sri Lanka." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 20, no. Sup001 (1997): 223

During the conflict, divine possession filled a community need so great it was not held suspect by community leaders. The body itself became overwhelmingly political; a site of conflict in a war so focused on bodies themselves as space and tradition, as religion and culture. Both the civil war between the state and the Tigers as well as the reign of terror the state engaged in during the JVP insurrection in the south impacted women to an enormous degree. Women were implicated in the terror of the conflicts, forced to watch as their sons were dragged off by the state or the LTTE. They were marked with the remnants of the state's attempt to exert control, made invisible by dialogues that construct the ideal nationalist women. Through a conflict where ethnic dominance was central to the nationalist ideologies perpetrating violence, the bodies of women are both consumed and forever scarred. However, divine possession counters that consumption by overtaking the body as a form of agential resistance instead of forced complicity.

Divine possession highlights the hypocrisy of the state in calling upon women to be the 'moral mother' and raise good nationalist sons, only to take those sons away for the supposed good of the state. This project of visibility ruptures the constructed mythology of the state, as "such chronicles of loss and absence reassert the presence of the disappeared and *publicly* break the state's monopoly over memory."⁹⁴ Divine possession thus counters the ideologies of the nation-state without replicating the same threads of regulation that arose in the nationalism that countered colonialism. By breaking this constructed memory and mythology, possession makes something visible. It directly counters the disappearance of bodies; it reveals the existence of grief, and centers the enactment of trauma. The body is consumed and overtaken, yet still radical, revolutionary, and agential. The possessed body gives voice and space to those who have disappeared, they tell the stories of those who have been lost, and so they effectively counter this disappearance, the disappearance of their own body as well as the collective body.

The formation of womanhood by the nation or the state-less LTTE excludes and marginalizes all who fall outside the narrow boundaries of respectable femininity. Sivamohan writes, "History is a fraught place for many of us. When we were small we

⁹⁴ Ibid., 384

did not see ourselves figured emphatically in any history, in the Vijaya-Kuveni story. We occupied a negative space.”⁹⁵ This negative space, this invisibility, is inherent to the regulation imposed by colonial rule and nationalist regimes. It is created by simultaneous constructions of invisibility and consumption, creating certain images of women who are continuously sacrificed and consumed for the nation, while erasing all those outside of the folds. Divine possession counters that by claiming the body as an agential space of power. The body is consumed, but it is also reclaimed, refigured as powerful, reconsidered as revolutionary. By viewing the body as holding instrumental agency in divine possession, the body is created as visible, as agential. The body is also relational, imbued with the grief and trauma of the disappeared and lost, engaging not only in a project of visibility for the individual body but also a site where the hypocrisy and terror of the state is held as evident. Alwis notes (referencing Judith Butler), “Thus, at the same time as we struggle for autonomy over our bodies, we are also confronted by the fact that we carry the ‘enigmatic traces of others’.”⁹⁶ The possessed body is complicated, as the body is not solely autonomous, for there is an external and immeasurable power at play that is written and held on the body itself. The body is a site of community grief; it is a place where the lives of others, those who have been taken and disappeared, are made visible. The body is consumed, it is not entirely independent, but yet the body is also transformed into a site where women are visible, where women’s pain is visible. Divine possession makes apparent trauma, pain, torture, and disappearance. It does so through the forced visibility and instrumental agency of possessed bodies. This visibility and agency then directly counters how bodies have been coopted and used by colonial rulers and nationalist regimes. Divine possession, the physical presence of divine beings within the bodies of women, is powerful not only in its singular moments, but because it stands against ideologies that have dominated Sri Lanka for hundreds of years.

⁹⁵ Sivamohan. *Thin Veils*. 2

⁹⁶ Alwis. “Interrogating the ‘Political’”. 90

CHAPTER TWO

Contested Space: Dynamics of Exception, Sovereignty, and Liminality

I. The Kataragama Temple Complex

“The very fabric of space itself has been authored, which urges us to question the very form of the nation-state, its naturalizations, and taken-for-granted topographies”⁹⁷

The Valli Amma shrine at the Kataragama Temple Complex in Southern Sri Lanka opens its doors only for special pujas and the yearly temple festival. It is situated at the main exit to the complex, far down the path from the central shrines, next to a beautiful but often overlooked tamarind tree. On the inside, the room is sparser than most, with a single priest and a few places to light incense or leave an offering. While the shrine is for the Goddess Valli Amma, perhaps most importantly it lies at the spot where the deity Kataragama first arrived in Sri Lanka and became bound to the land.

Kataragama,⁹⁸ also known as Skanda or Murugan, flew to Sri Lanka after losing a bet with his brother, Ganesh. Upon landing in the dense forest of Southern Sri Lanka, Kataragama saw a beautiful young woman and through his trickery bound himself to her in marriage.⁹⁹ This bond drew Kataragama, a God worshipped primarily in South India as Murugan, into the sacred homeland of Buddhism and within the hierarchy of Sinhalese Buddhist deities. Even in times of great conflict, Kataragama is worshipped by Sinhalese and Tamils alike. The sacred geography of the temple itself is a crucial site of analysis, for it (re)creates the story of Kataragama’s arrival. The temple complex is embedded within this mythic history, and it embodies the pluralistic foundation of religious space amidst entanglement within the violent geopolitics of Sri Lanka.

⁹⁷ Catherine Brun and Tariq Jazeel. *Spatialising Politics: Culture and Geography in Postcolonial Sri Lanka*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2009.18

⁹⁸ Kataragama is one of the four warrant Gods in Sri Lankan Buddhism. He is worshipped by Hindus and Buddhists alike, and is referred to as Kataragama, Murugan, and Skanda. While his South Indian roots are made apparent in his origin mythology, he is a crucial part of the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon, and his worshippers have risen enormously in recent years (see Obeyesekere, *Social Change and the Deities*).

⁹⁹ Kataragama approached Valli, the young woman, in the guise of an elderly man. While at first she refused his offer of marriage, Ganesh, eager to make amends to his brother, disguised himself as an elephant and charged at Valli. She agreed to marry Kataragama for protection against the element, and was happily surprised that he was not an old man but a handsome (albeit philandering) deity.

Kataragama is not only a place where women engage in the ritual practice of divine possession, but also a site where women can go to have their divine experiences validated as the power of the divine and not demonic illness. Kataragama, in all its complexities, is a site of plural expression and agential possession. It is also a battlefield in political and mythological contestations of religious space. Kataragama is one instance of a marginal location that provides a space for the radical embodiment of the divine through women's bodies. I posit that by examining spaces like Kataragama through their layered histories of colonial control and contrasting hegemonies that seek to capture space, we can see how the specific formations of liminal and marginal religious spaces create a place where dominance is contested, where hierarchies are subverted, and where the world and the body are reimagined.

The temple complex engages and produces contested space on varying levels. Kataragama has been a site of resistance and revolt against empire and state, and the contestation of space and production of hierarchy exist both within the complex itself and in its relation to the geopolitics outside the site. The temple complex has been marginal to centers of religious and political power—creating a space of fluctuating control throughout colonial rule, throughout the conflict between the state and the Tigers, and even in the present. The complex embodies plural worship—for it is a site Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims all frequent—while also existing far from the religious centers of predominantly Tamil Jaffna and the seat of Sinhalese Buddhist power, Kandy. Kataragama has been worshipped by Buddhists and Hindus alike since the 15th century, and even through the rises and falls in worship since then, the temple complex and its internal dynamics have persisted.¹⁰⁰ The temple complex itself is centered on the shrine to Kataragama, which stands in a central square bracketed by large gates on all sides.¹⁰¹ Outside this first set of gates and to the north of the main shrine lies the stupa Kiri Vehera—rumored to be built by Dutugemunu's father. To the south of the gates lies Valli Amma's temple, outside of the inner complex itself but always within Kataragama's line of sight. Next to her shrine is a Sufi shrine frequented by worshippers from all ethnicities

¹⁰⁰ Gananath Obeyesekere. "Myth and Political Legitimization at the Sacred Centre in Kataragama, Sri Lanka." In *The Renewal of Priesthood: Modernity and Traditionalism in a South Indian Temple*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. 219

¹⁰¹ See following figure

and religions in Sri Lanka and considered a place of peace and plurality.¹⁰² Within the inner gates and closest to the main shrine are a few smaller shrines for lesser deities such as Kali and Huniyam, as well as a shrine directly to the east of Kataragama, the shrine of Teyvani Amma. Teyvani is Kataragama's first wife, and due to her Tamil heritage she is primarily visited by Tamil women seeking help for marital troubles.

Despite his unfaithful ways, Kataragama and his two wives are all worshipped at this singular temple complex. While Valli Amma is marginal through her status outside the main gates, it is she who is always in Kataragama's sight. At the yearly festival, worshippers from all ethnicities and social classes in Sri Lanka recreate Kataragama's journey to Sri Lanka by processing from his shrine to Valli's, bypassing Teyvani Amma in the process. This festival, and the inherent landscape of the complex, subvert Teyvani's position in the hierarchy and, even temporarily, place her below Valli. As the procession happens from the Kataragama shrine to Valli Amma and then the river, the emblem of Sinhalese Buddhism, the Kiri Vehera, looms to the north.

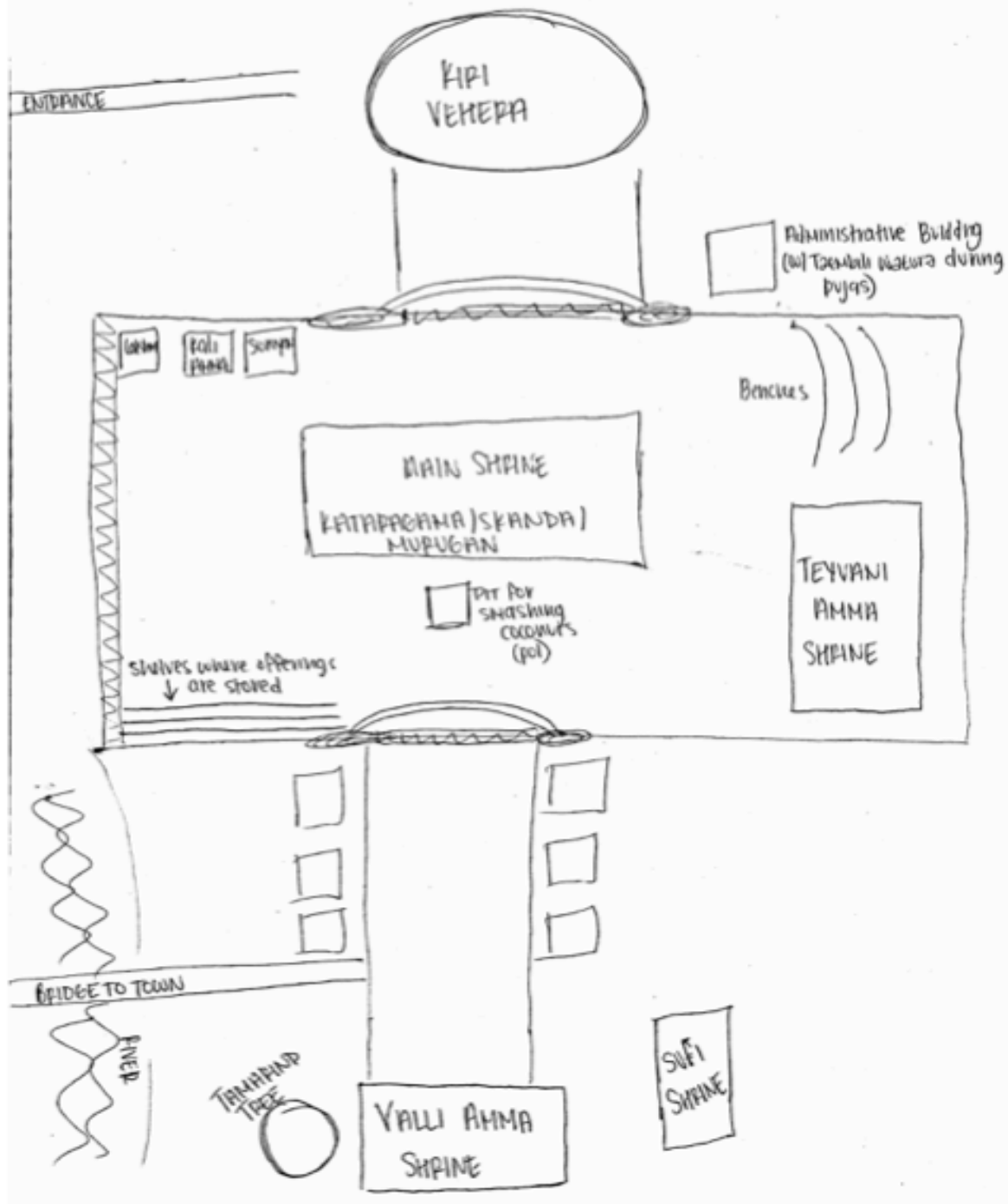
The temple complex of Kataragama arose as a site of plural worship, and remains a place where Sinhalese Buddhists, Tamil Hindus, and Sri Lankan Muslims all visit as a pilgrimage site. Obeyesekere posits that the Kataragama shrine rose in popularity when the Kingdom of Kandy fell into the hands of the Nayakkars of Madurai. Despite their South Indian identity, the Nayakkar Kings became Buddhists and spoke Sinhala, simultaneously incorporating some of their worship into existing Sinhalese Buddhism.¹⁰³ They are credited with starting the Pada Yatra, a pilgrimage route from Northern Sri Lanka all the way to the temple complex. This procession continued throughout much of the war even in dangerous conditions and terrain. This pilgrimage involves individuals from varying religious traditions and embodies the inextricable plural nature of worship at Kataragama, for all of the practices discussed at Kataragama defy the bounds of religious difference within a space simultaneously shared and contested. This pluralistic history has carried forth to the present, even throughout a conflict that emphasized ethnic difference and religious mythologies of exception and violence.

¹⁰² A state soldier stationed at Kataragama to protect the temple complex relayed this information to me during the time of my fieldwork.

¹⁰³ Obeyesekere. "Myth and Political Legitimization at the Sacred Centre."

KATARAGAMA TEMPLE COMPLEX

map not drawn to scale



The dynamics of contestation extend outwards from the shrine, as Sinhalese politicians have continuously attempted to assert the hegemony of Buddhism over the temple space by drawing connections between Kataragama and Dutugemunu. Kataragama was a crucial site of resistance during the onset of British rule in 1815, with the most notable rebellion credited to a man who began the revolt “after being blessed with the lance of Skanda himself by the priests of the shrine.”¹⁰⁴ This site continued to resist hegemony, both in the form of colonial rule as well as state imposition. The complex was a part of various JVP insurrections against the state in the 1970 and mid 80s, as well as a continued site of pilgrimage during the height of the conflict. Amidst these failed revolts and the latent destruction of colonial rule, the temple complex fell into disarray until Prime Minister Premadasa held a *gam uduva*¹⁰⁵ at Kataragama before the annual procession in 1987.¹⁰⁶ Kataragama grew in part because of this publicity, and was no longer a small jungle temple but a pilgrimage center built by government planners.

The story of the Kataragama temple complex is one of contestation both within the sacred geography of the complex and continued attempts by those at the centers of power to exert control while those at the margins articulate and engage in an equally powerful resistance. The hegemony of colonial rule was resisted at Kataragama, and while in the wake of independence the state attempted to assert hegemony through the production of nationalism, continued resistance was born from the same space as anti-colonial sentiment. There are pockets of peace as well as resistance, as seen in the perception of the Sufi shrine next to Valli Amma’s shrine. However, this peace is imbued with complicated dynamics of space and power: while the temple can be seen as a place of peace free from conflict, it remains a space where state soldiers are posted to protect assumedly Sinhalese sites of worship from terrorism or violence at the hands of those ‘othered’ by the state. Visually, the state is exerting control by placing these Sinhalese state soldiers at sites of worship that fall at the margins of Sinhalese Buddhist practice. Kataragama draws people from all across Sri Lanka, crossing the bounds of difference that the state aids in constructing. However, the power dynamics of the space and the imposition of the state cannot be ignored. There is the gendered dynamic of power

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 224

¹⁰⁵ Village awakening ceremony

¹⁰⁶ Obeyesekere. “Myth and Political Legitimization at the Sacred Centre.” 220

between Kataragama, Valli Amma, and Teyvani Amma as carried forth in the physical location of their shrines. Amidst these shrines exist ever-present remains of state power and hegemony, in the form of the looming stupa and the state soldiers guarding the site. Interwoven with these transactions of power, the plurality and marginality of this temple site act to subvert hierarchies outside of the complex.

This chapter will argue that the marginality and plurality of sites like Kataragama facilitate ritual processes where women can counter hegemony and remake their worlds. First, I will examine how religious spaces in Sri Lanka like Kataragama have been contested sites where resistance is formed and nation and empire are continuously imposed by looking to concepts like Ann Stoler's imperial debris, Stanley Tambiah's galactic polity, and Rohan Bastin's exposition of capture and control at temple complexes in Sri Lanka. Next, this chapter will look to spaces that exist on geopolitical margins and host instances of divine possession. After looking at the history and dynamics of individual temple complexes, these relationships will be contextualized within a broader analysis of how colonial rule created impositions on space—both emphasizing the history of contestation over religious space as well as articulating how these spaces engage in continued resistance against a colonial past that seeps into the present. In addition to looking at the impact of colonial rule, the role of these temple complexes during the conflict will also be examined to articulate the continued fluctuation of control at liminal religious sites where divine possession occurs. Finally, this chapter will shift back to divine possession itself, analyzing what it means for this practice to occur at marginal spaces in a rapidly shifting map of geopolitical power. The inherent liminality of these spaces and their histories of contestation are not only conducive, but actually necessary to the articulation of divine possession. Just as the body is a political site of analysis, physical space is imbued with political and mythic connotations. This chapter aims to focus on physical spaces themselves, the places populated by bodies, the spaces where bodies are rendered absent or made visible through divine possession.

Many of the primary sources used in this chapter are continuous throughout this thesis, such as the diaries of British administrators and travelers, speeches by political leaders, and poetry by academics and activists. However, the physical spaces discussed in this chapter are their own form of primary accounts. My knowledge of these spaces

comes from fieldwork conducted in Batticaloa, Colombo, Kandy, Jaffna, and Kataragama from September 2015 through December 2015. The specific temples I will be examining are Kataragama, Munneswaram (a temple complex north of Colombo), and in Batticaloa the Punnaicholai Kali Amman Kovil and Kothukulathu Mari Amman Kovil. All of these sites are host to instances of divine possession and exist on the margins of state control. While I do not have first-hand accounts of Munneswaram, I do have my own diagrams and images from other temple complexes referenced in this work.¹⁰⁷ My accounts of these spaces are only moments, snapshots of physical spaces that hold enormous histories. My own knowledge of these spaces in the present combined with colonial and conflict-era accounts of the space work together to trace the continued threads of regulation and power that impact not solely bodies, but physical space itself.

II. The Construction of Space: Imperial Legacies and Violent Hegemonies

Just as the body exists both as a physical entity as well as something constructed, defined, and limited by the work of colonial powers and nationalist rulers, space too both exists in the physical as well as created in the collective imaginary of the hegemony. It is important to note how space is constructed and created, bound in threads of what constitutes remembered histories. E. Valentine Daniel notes in his work during the conflict, “When I use the term ‘place’ in contradistinction to space, I do so to connote essentially what *ūr* connotes in Tamil Nadu. A ‘space’, by contrast, is an epistemic unit, marked by primarily non-ontic sentiments, be they those of the revenue officer, the archaeologist, the museologist, or the historian.”¹⁰⁸ Daniel references the Tamil word *ūr*, which is associated with the idea of home. Home does not always have a physical representation, but relies instead upon the idea of home as tied to humanity, to those inhabiting home. While Daniel advocates for the use of ‘place’ to disrupt the hegemonic remnants of colonial rule as a force that created ‘space’, this thesis intentionally uses ‘space’ because of how the sites discussed in this work are not always constructed through concepts of personhood or community, but instead are sculpted by the violent process of hegemonic control. The very idea of ‘space’ relies upon construction and

¹⁰⁷ All figure of temple spaces from personal field notes

¹⁰⁸ E. Valentine Daniel. *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996. 57

separation, for the locations remarked upon in this work are not always sites of the embodiment of humanity but instead a reckoning of absence, an acknowledgement of lost space, contested space, abstracted space, and above all space formed in a crucible of violent formations that, despite bearing the scars of terror and remnants of colonial rule, create potential for liminal and powerful expressions of religiosity that shake the foundations of gendered, religious, and nationalist hierarchies.

When looking at spaces in Sri Lanka, especially religious spaces, it is impossible to consider their present potentiality without first seeing what Ann Stoler terms ‘Imperial Debris’. Her work on the remnants of colonial rule not as solely remnants but an active agent in a continuation of regulation inscribed by a colonial past is useful when looking to the physical spaces of worship in Sri Lanka, spaces impacted by the brutality of colonialism as well as the co-opting of such sites by nationalist rule. Stoler states,

“At least one challenge is not to imagine either ‘the postcolony’ or the postcolonial imperium as replicas of earlier degradations or as the inadvertent, inactive leftovers of more violent colonial relations. It is rather to track how new de-formations and new forms of debris work on matter and mind to eat through people’s resources and resiliencies as they embolden new political actors with indignant refusal, forging unanticipated, entangled, and empowered alliances.”¹⁰⁹

This statement articulates how the ‘remnants’ of colonial rule are not passive, nor are they static reminders of colonial times. Instead, those remains actively play into the spheres of politics and space, embedded in prominent nationalist ideologies and continue to shape physical space. Stoler’s work references more than just the physical embodiments of a continued colonial past. The impact of colonialism on religious space is not a mere legacy, but instead a continued formation that resounds and impacts individuals engaging with space in the present.

By looking at spaces as carrying not only the physical remnants of destruction or colonialism, but also the continued engagement and impact of those processes, it is possible to see how religious spaces in Sri Lanka sit atop complex interrelations of colonial rule, nationalist polity, and current ritual dynamics. The remains of colonial rule are not solely remnants; they are not bound by time, but instead create systems that require constant negotiation by those living under such active legacies. Religious spaces

¹⁰⁹ Ann Laura Stoler. *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013. 29

specifically hold the physical debris of colonial rule, the broken pillars of temples destroyed by the Portuguese, the construction of British missionary churches across from Buddhist temples, and the less physical attributes of debris such as how Buddhist and Hindu practices changed during nationalist revivalism as a part of anti-colonial resistance. Debris can be material, but it is also carried forth in the perpetration of nationalist ideologies and regulations centered at the physical space of religious sites. The understanding and articulation of what constitutes these religious spaces serves to highlight the margins at which many of them reside, and how these margins create spaces where religious hierarchies as well as hierarchies outside of ritual are placed into flux.

Certain religious spaces have become sites of contestation throughout Sri Lanka's history, with this contestation creating a situation of shifting control. These sites never fully reside within the umbrella of power of religious centers or axes of control by the nation or state(less) forces. The nation and the empire are reliant upon the control of spaces, for space is not only powerful in itself, but is also used to exert power over individuals inhabiting space. The control of territory was instrumental to the hegemony of British rule, and during the conflict between the state and the Tigers, space was continuously contested as the boundaries of each constituency's 'motherland' was challenged. In both instances, wars of intense importance to identity, the right to self-determination, and the hold on physical land were imbued with mythic proportions and fought on tangible space for power and intangible ideals of control and domination. Even as territory itself takes on a meaning as abstract as it is physical, even as the physical boundaries of Tamil Eelam and Tamil sovereignty would not encompass where most Tamils in Sri Lanka live, control of territory lies at the heart of past and present tensions in Sri Lanka.

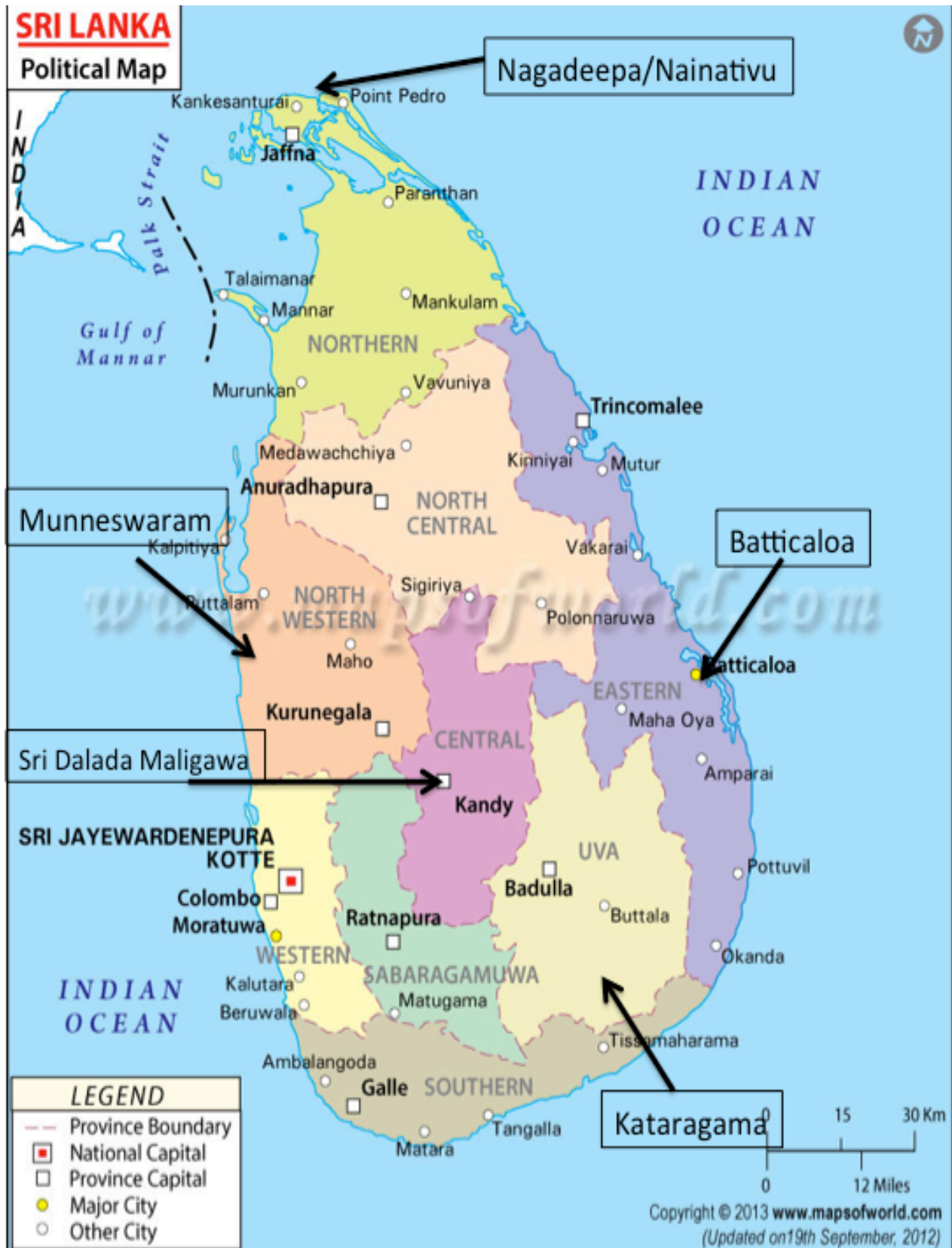
The centrality of space, even when that space is abstract rather than tangible in nature, must be considered when looking to Sri Lanka's history and current practices of resistance in religious space. Cathrine Brun states, "[s]pace acts, and therefore, must be imbued with some kind of agency in Sri Lanka's contested politics of ethnicity."¹¹⁰ Space is not merely a landscape upon which other events occur, but lends power to those in control and situates rituals and rites within specific contexts that generate their external

¹¹⁰ Brun and Jazeel. *Spatialising Politics*. 2

power. Brun goes on to say that space is “far more than a contested stage, or a container, that is so easily carved into territories or compartments, and instead, [space is] the very fabric through which nationhood, identity, and violence are produced.”¹¹¹ Space is crucial and instrumental to the creation of the empire and the state—it is not merely a location or an empty slate, but inherently political, potent, and never neutral. While space is not the only entity wielded by the nation or the empire in search of hegemony, it holds importance due to its instrumentality in forming resistance. Space, physical space, is necessary to community, to coalitions, to ritual, to the creation of new formations or ideas. Like the body, space operates as a site where power can be claimed, where hegemony can be contested, and where resistance can take on new and innovative forms.

I suggest that sites like Kataragama, Munneswaram, and temples in Batticaloa are places of power and agency through the practice of divine possession because of the interaction and negotiation between their marginality and the continued imposition of aspects of nation and empire. This imposition is resisted through liminal physical positioning and liminal religious practices. The religious sites and temples remarked upon in this work are all marginal; they are all situated far from the religious centers of the Sinhalese state and the Tamil Tigers. For the state, the Sri Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth) in Kandy is considered the sacred center of Sinhalese Buddhism. The Maligawa holds a sacred tooth of the Buddha, and is also located within the former Kandyan Kingdom. The Nainativu temple lies at the northernmost point of Sri Lanka, close to Tamil Nadu. This temple complex is in the top of the almost entirely Tamil Jaffna, again far from the religious center of the state, but creating its own center amidst the desired Tamil Eelam. Far from this center and away from the control previously exerted by the King and continuously exerted by the state lie sites like Kataragama, Munneswaram, and Batticaloa. The religious sites analyzed in this work exist at the fault lines between these two centers, acting as fluctuating moments, instances, and spaces of control.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 2



The fluidity of control inherent to these spaces relates to Stanley Tambiah's concept of galactic polity. Tambiah remarks upon the complex interrelations between Buddhist kingdoms in Thailand when he states,

“We see the dynamics of polities that were modulated by pulsating alliances, shifting territorial control, and frequent rebellions and succession disputes. The shifting capitals and palaces were not so much centers with defined surrounding circumferences as areas of diminishing or increasing control analogous to a field of radiation or light or of heat from a source.”¹¹²

This analysis can be applied to the centers of control in Sri Lanka and their outward extensions of power, for the sacred centers continuously attempt to impose central religious practices, such as kingship rituals, onto the outward spheres of religious space. These centers of control exert a limited and fluctuating influence on their margins, and those margins can also lie upon the edges of another sphere of influence. Thus is the case for Kataragama, Munneswaram, and Batticaloa, which historically were fought over during colonial rule and the conflict between the state and the Tigers. To borrow from Tambiah, “On the one hand, there is a faithful reproduction on a reduced scale of the center in its outlying components; on the other, the satellites pose the constant threat of fission and incorporation in another sphere of influence.”¹¹³ In this same way, the rituals and processes at these marginal temples are often similar to ones conducted at the center and can contain the same hierarchies of existence as the centers. By inhabiting spaces of contestation and limited control, these sites allow for and assist in the subversion of those same hierarchies because of the liminal positioning and fluidity of control.

These attributes of space, despite the continuing and active legacies of colonial rule and violent nationalism, lend space to resistance and to a remaking of the world. Tambiah notes “the rhetoric and ritual display of the exemplary center and divine kingship is frequently deflated by perennial rebellions and sordid succession disputes at the capital and defections and secessions at the periphery.”¹¹⁴ These rebellions at the margins can be physical rebellions and acts of resistance as well as the creation of

¹¹² Stanley J. Tambiah. *World conqueror and world renouncer: a study of Buddhism and polity in Thailand against a historical background*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.123

¹¹³ Stanley J. Tambiah. “The Galactic Polity: The Structure of Traditional Kingdoms in Southeast Asia.” *Annals New York Academy of Sciences*. Section of Anthropology (1976): 75

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 92

resistant practices that differ from the religious ideologies of the centers, such as the practice of divine possession. In the same way that the center extends power out towards the margins, the margins can also replicate and reverse those threads of control—subverting not only the hierarchies at the margins, but also propelling that resistance towards the centers.

Temples and religious sites provide a space for resistant and marginal religious practice like women's divine embodiment. The spaces remarked on in this work are far from the sacred centers on all sides, and embody a liminality unique to their positioning. They are not under the domain of the state, they are not under the domain of the empire, but instead operate in the in/between where individuals can claim agency through divine power. As Bastin states, "the temple represented more than the state; its divinity was not the permanence around and toward which the flux of history moved, but was more chaotic, in according with the chaos that temples could create."¹¹⁵ Despite holding within the boundaries of its spatialities the reenacted remains of colonial rule and the imposition of nationalism, marginal temples are spaces of subversion and power, where religious rituals that disrupt and reinvent hierarchies are enacted. These sites not only refuse the imposition of nation and empire, but actively create and transact power through marginal religious practices like divine possession. Veena Das remarks about the power of ritual that "the strangeness of the world revealed by death, by its non-inhabitability, can be transformed into a world in which one can dwell again."¹¹⁶ The individuals who worship at these temples have seen a world 'revealed by death' through the violent histories surrounding them, and turn to ritual space and the physical space of the temple to find the safety, agency, and ritual power to remake their worlds.

III. Far from the Sacred Centers: The Temple as a Site of Exception

While Kataragama is one of the most prevalent sites of divine possession in modern Sri Lanka, sites such as the Munneswaram temple complex on the Western coast of Sri Lanka and numerous Amman Kovils along the eastern coast (Batticaloa,

¹¹⁵ Rohan Bastin. "Hindu Temples in the Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict: Capture and Excess." *Social Analysis* 49, no. 1 (2005). 46

¹¹⁶ Veena Das in Lawrence. "Grief on the Body: The Work of Oracles in Eastern Sri Lanka." In *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited*, edited by Michael Roberts, 271-94. Vol. II. Colombo: Marga Institute. 278

Trincomalee, and Ampara district) are all important sites of analysis that exist on geopolitical margins, have survived centuries of contested control, and currently are places where women embody the divine. Since colonial times, marginal religious practices have existed at the aforementioned sites, with Edward Upham remarking in his colonial account of Buddhist practices, “The reverence of demons is most extensively present in Ceylon: it has temples, established deities, and a direct worship, part of which is recognized by the Buddha faith, and a portion forbidden.”¹¹⁷ Upham articulates that marginal forms of worship, often termed ‘sorcery,’ have continued to exist since pre-colonial times. The forms of worship and ritual practices that stray from nationalized conceptions of Sinhalese Buddhism or exist in non-Agamic Hindu temples have always been marginal and subversive, and in Sri Lanka have also continually existed in marginal locations. The sites of what researchers such as Bastin and Kapferer term ‘sorcery’ lie far from the central power of Nainativu or Sri Dalada Maligawa. This distance, the geographical marginality, allows for the actualization of rituals that subvert or challenge hierarchies.

These sites of subversion are thus spaces of exception, lying outside of the violence of reality even in times of intense conflict or amidst the imposition of hegemony. In their work on the fractured geographies of the Eastern coast, Jonathan Spencer et al. note, “[j]ust as the temples were able at times to stand outside the logic of colonial rule, so too they provided a place outside the logic of friend-and-enemy that fuelled the war.”¹¹⁸ These temples, existing on the edges of colonial control, were places where resistance was articulated and religion protected, engaging with a reclaiming of the space and reterritorialization of the temple itself. The resistant potential of these sites continued through the conflict—for amidst divisive rhetoric that exploited ethnic difference, these sites continued to be places of plural worship and divine possession frequented by individuals from both sides of the conflict. The geographical marginality

¹¹⁷ Edward Upham. *The History and Doctrine of Buddhism, Popularly Illustrated: With Notices of the Kappooism, or Demon Worship, and of the Bali, or Planetary Incantations, of Ceylon*. London: R. Ackermann, 1829. 113

¹¹⁸ Jonathan Spencer, Jonathan Goodhand, S. H. Hasbullah, Bart Klem, Benedikt Korf, and Kalinga Tudor Silva. *Checkpoint, temple, church and mosque: a collaborative ethnography of war and peace*. London: Pluto Press, 2015. 30

and positioning of subversive practices allows these spaces to articulate moments where the current state of the world is escaped and norms are shifted.

Both the Tigers and the state reinforced the marginality and exceptionality of religious spaces by simultaneously seeking to control these sites as well as ceding control to religious space. The Tigers were militantly secular, mostly in an attempt to build coalitions between Tamil Hindus and Tamil-speaking Muslim populations in Sri Lanka. As such, they did not interfere with religious space and nor engage in religious rituals to further their cause, and did not attempt to quash the utilization of religious space by Tamil communities. In contrast, the state perpetuated specific notions of 'pure' Sinhalese Buddhist religiosity to further their nationalist idea of the state as the repository of Buddhism. This prevalent conception of Buddhism does not include the marginal practices that occur at liminal sites, thus excluding certain temples from the narrative of the state. Hasbullah and Korf, in their work on Muslim communities in the highly contested Eastern coast during the war, remark "enclave spaces are marked by a specific territoriality, which makes them spaces of exception."¹¹⁹ Spaces of plural worship are outside of the territoriality of the conflict, and as Hasbullah and Korf note, embody a different kind of territoriality. The conflict relies upon gaining control over physical space and also demarcating space as according to the constructions of ethnic difference. Spaces of plural worship refute this easy categorization, instead occupying a marginality that disrupts the attempts of the state or the LTTE to carve out borders of nationhood. Religious sites like Kataragama, Munneswaram, and the temples in Batticaloa become these enclaves and exceptions of safety and religiosity by refuting the territorial hegemony of warring forces.

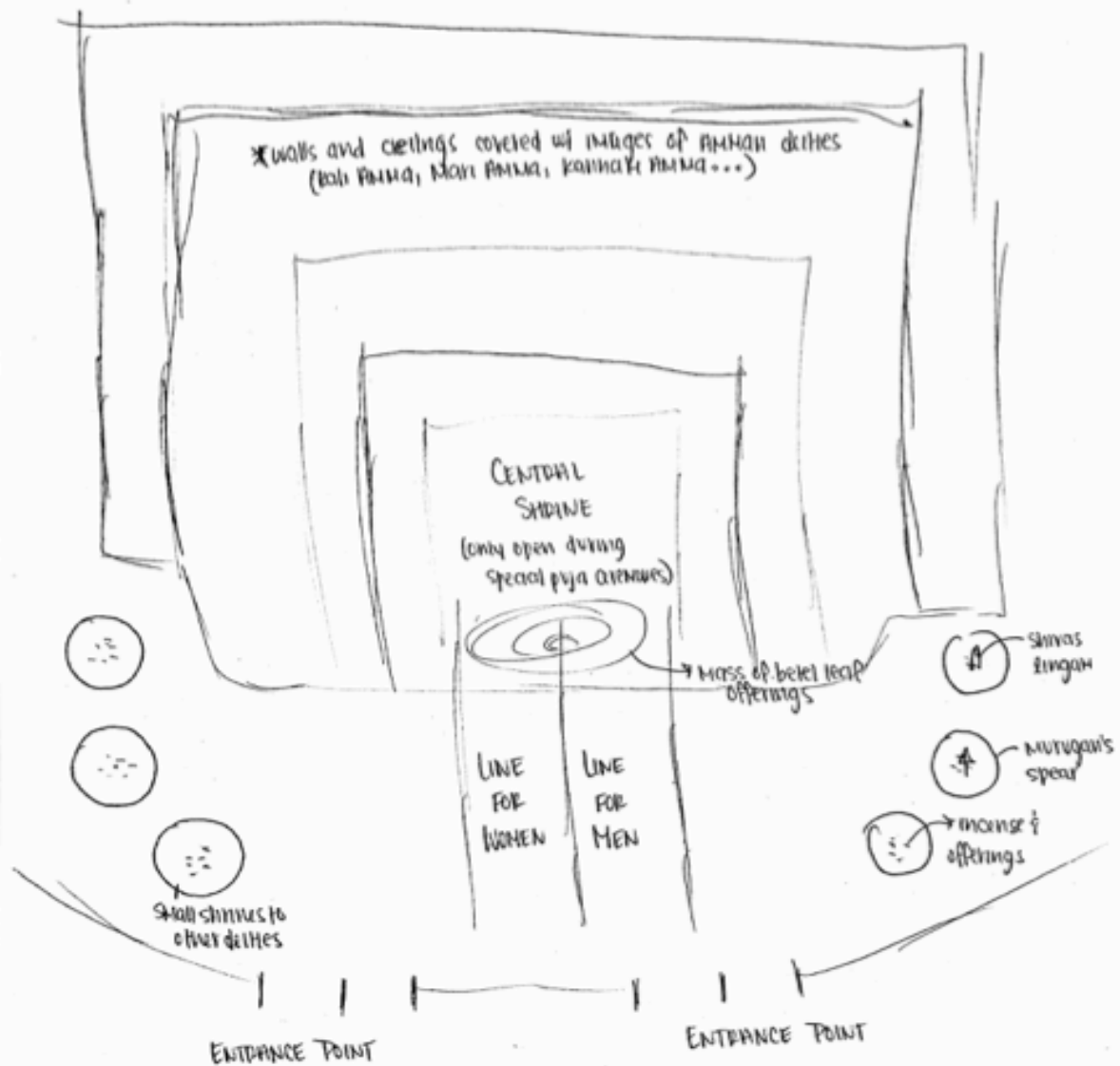
¹¹⁹ Shahul Hasbullah and Benedikt Korf. "Muslim geographies, violence and the antinomies of community in eastern Sri Lanka." *The Geographical Journal* 179, no. 1 (2012). Hasbullah and Korf are referring specifically to Kattankudy, a Muslim enclave on the Eastern coast of Sri Lanka. There is a complex navigation of identity and geography in and around Kattankudy, surrounded on all sides by Tamil communities (some of which such as Arayampathy staunchly supported the Tigers and in fact continues to raise memorials to lost Tamil fighters). Despite the attempts at linguistic solidarity by the Tigers to encourage Muslim communities to join their fight for a Tamil homeland, Muslim populations in Sri Lanka were very much marginalized both by the state and the Tigers. The state viewed them with extreme suspicion because Muslim communities are predominantly Tamil-speaking, while the Tigers evicted thousands of Muslims from their homes in the North, and the Tigers in the East were the perpetrators of the mosque massacre in Eravur, near Kattankudy.

Kataragama is one such site of exception, located at the margins of power and host to marginal practice. Another site is the Punnaicholai Amman Kovil, located in Batticaloa and only open for full moon pujas. These ceremonies draw families from all around the paddy fields and the lagoon. The line of worshippers waiting to gain access to the main shrine room extends outside of the pillars of the inner temple and into the sandy exterior, people mingling amidst the gentle incense smoke. Punnaicholai is unique in that unlike many of the smaller Amman Kovils around Batticaloa, Punnaicholai is host to a hundred and eight different forms of the Amman. Across the walls and arched ceilings one can see Kali Amman, Mari Amman, Kannaki Amman, and a myriad of other goddesses represented under the singular name Amman. While the existence of mother Goddess worship does not signify a subversion of hierarchies by itself, as often times the idealized Goddess is used to enforce gender norms rather than disrupt them, Punnaicholai and numerous other Amman Kovils in the area continue to be sites where women embody the divine. Patricia Lawrence, whose research focused on these specific Kovils, noted the rise of this practice during the height of the conflict. She writes, “temple *pujas* were among the few social spaces in which noncombatant civilians could exchange perspectives about events of the war.”¹²⁰ She describes the temple as one of the only places communities could speak about the violence around them. Because the practice of divine possession makes visible the trauma and violence inflicted by the state, it must take place in a space of safety and sanctuary for community members to vocalize and process their emotions. Due to the staunchly secular stance of the Tigers, the temple was an area they did not dare cross. Similarly, because the Sinhalese state protects religion and religious freedom as a central tenant of the constitution, they would not engage or limit religious space in Batticaloa.

¹²⁰ Patricia Lawrence. "The Watch of Tamil Women: Women's Acts in a Transitional Warscape." In *Women and the Contested State: Religion, Violence, and Agency in South and Southeast Asia*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. 104

PUNNAICHOLAI KALI AMMAN KOVIL

*Map not drawn to scale



Communities and spaces in Batticaloa exist on the margins of multiple systems. The Eastern coast is considered the most diverse region of Sri Lanka, with approximately equal numbers of Sinhalese Buddhists, Tamil Hindus, and Tamil-speaking Muslims. This land was highly contested during the war, and in some places control over the roads would shift from the state to the Tigers as day faded into night.¹²¹ This land lies far from the centrality of the Sinhalese state, but also outside the realm of privileged Tamil groups in Jaffna who had access to Christian missionary education long before those on the Eastern coast. The Batticaloa lagoon encapsulates the fault lines of control and violence, with the Tigers controlling the predominantly Tamil outer areas and the state holding the paddy fields of mainly Sinhalese farmers closer inland. This division fractured local communities, completely disrupting almost all local infrastructures aside from the continued and growing ritual presence at Amman Kovils.

The temple became and continues to be a site where the body can engage in radical and emotional expressions of terror and grief. It is a site where promises are made, where reality is remade, and where ordinary individuals living under conditions of terror can seek a momentary respite from violence. Stories about the sanctity of these temple spaces continue to abound in the wake of the conflict. Worshippers nowadays take note of the intentionality of the temple space, looking to trees that heavily oxygenate the air and create an atmosphere of calm, as well as the inner workings of the shrines that are said to emanate soothing vibrations into the air. These temples are also rumored to have survived destruction against all odds—remaining unmarked by shells, weapons, land mines, and the bloodshed surrounding them on all sides. These spaces as continued emblems of safety and religiosity are sites with incredible potential for the continuance of powerful religious practices.

Despite, or perhaps in spite of the horrific violence marked forever upon the physical land and those inhabiting it, these temples have persisted as physical spaces and sites of emotion, grief, and pain. During the war, the state referred to the Batticaloa area as ‘the Eastern theatre of operations.’ This cold military name for a conflict impacting a region for three decades contrasts the present and continuing performance and theater of

¹²¹ Jennifer Hyndman and Malathi de Alwis. “Bodies, Shrines, and Roads: violence, (im)mobility and displacement in Sri Lanka”. *Gender, Place & Culture* 11, no 4 (2007): 539

sorrow and terror through religious spaces excluded from this military theater. Through exceptional and dynamic religious space, grief is performed, it is written on the body through the powerful and visible act of divine possession, and it engenders community survival and resistance through a marginal space in a violent landscape.

The Munneswaram temple complex on the opposite coast from the Punnaicholai temple also occupies a marginal space, creates an arena for the subversion of hierarchies, lies far from the sacred centers of Tamil Hinduism and Sinhalese Buddhism, and has seen pilgrimage numbers rise both during and in the wake of the war. Like the Kovils in Batticaloa, Munneswaram is a site of divine possession, specifically the possession of women by Kali. While primarily centered on Shiva, the recent rise of Kali worship and divine possession has resulted in greater frequency of visitors at the Kali shrine within the complex. Munneswaram, similar to Kataragama and Amman Kovils in Batticaloa, is also distinctly plural in worship. Priests have unearthed elements of worship stemming from varied traditions in past centuries, and the geopolitical entanglements of the space reflect the current dynamics of pilgrims coming from various religious traditions in Sri Lanka. Munneswaram sits north of Colombo, far from both Jaffna and Kandy. The surrounding town is mostly Tamil and the temple complex is not far from areas such as Mannar, which is also predominantly Tamil. However, the complex lies close to the remnants of the ancient Sinhalese kingdoms of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa. This space truly lies at a moment of interaction between the Sinhalese and Tamil loci of power, creating a space of constant contestation. This dynamic is apparent in the visual representations of space—as Spencer notes when traveling from Polonnaruwa to Batticaloa during the conflict,

“the old capital of Polonnaruwa, with its gleaming stupas, irrigation tanks, sprawling archaeological sites—and huge army bases. Then, after miles of bleak, thinly inhabited landscape, broken up by army posts which drivers had to skirt on badly maintained dirt roads, we would reach a very different kind of settlement, one in which mosques, churches, and *Kovils* replace the Buddhist monuments of Polonnaruwa.”¹²²

¹²² Spencer et al. *Checkpoint, Temple, Church and Mosque*. 21

The interaction of power and space is seen in the presentation and performance of religiosity and power through religious spaces.¹²³ The different architectures of Sinhalese Buddhist and Hindu Tamil temples is the clearest sign of distinctions in communities, but this dynamic is complicated again in places like Munneswaram, which has both a plural base of worship as well as pluralities within its very internal structures.

Much like Kataragama, the stories of deities at Munneswaram bear importance in the present, and mirror shifts in the Sinhalese cosmic hierarchy. Gombrich and Obeyesekere have remarked that Kali was at first too hideous and frightening to be included in the Sinhalese pantheon.¹²⁴ It is certainly true that Kali is quite distinct from other Sinhalese goddesses like the chaste Pattini or the village goddess Kiri Amma,¹²⁵ but it is this distinctness that lends Kali relevance to movements of resistance and to women who engage in divine possession. Munneswaram is said to be the site where Kali first arrived in Sri Lanka, and was subsequently tamed by the goddess Pattini. Bastin remarks, “Kali’s malevolence was curbed and rendered less destructive by the divine power of the Pattini.”¹²⁶ This dynamic is not unheard of, for Pattini is also credited for the inclusion of other deities who disrupt the hierarchy, such as Suniyam or Devol Deviyo. Suniyam, who is the god of sorcery and rituals involving demon possession, was formerly a demon himself. It was not until he interacted with Pattini that his position in the hierarchy shifted and he became a god. Devol Deviyo, another sorcery deity, was also considered far too ferocious for the pantheon until he passed through the seven walls of fire erected by Pattini and arrived on the Southern shore, a deity remade.

Kali especially signifies a disruption of the typical cosmic hierarchy, for she still holds many demonic qualities such as violence, brutality, and a protective ability. Her characteristics not only stray from normative femininity, but stand in direct contrast to the characteristics of other goddesses given space in the Sinhalese and Tamil pantheons.¹²⁷

¹²³ Obeyesekere takes note of this dynamic as well, remarking upon the competition for space between Protestant Monuments and Buddhist ones in cities like Kurunegala (see Obeyesekere, *Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon*)

¹²⁴ Richard F. Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere. *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Pr., 1988.

¹²⁵ Village fertility goddess

¹²⁶ Rohan Bastin. "The Regenerative Power of Kali Worship in Contemporary Sinhala Buddhism." *Social Analysis*, no. 40 (September 1996): 62

¹²⁷ In contrast to Kali, the Goddess Pattini was once reborn as a mango (the purest ritual fruit) because any other birth would sully her deified purity. (See Obeyesekere, *The Goddess Pattini and the Lord Buddha*).

Kali is not associated with pure elements, she is not an image of femininity, but instead frightening to behold, with a terrifying and at times bloodthirsty visage. She exudes raw power, and “she is not simply a demoness, but a demon-conqueror who displays her demonic fury as a necessary condition for her conquest/encompassment.”¹²⁸ She challenges the typical cosmic hierarchy through her demonic power, but through the myths of Munneswaram where she is tamed by Pattini, she is included and grounded in the physical space.

Despite the inclusion of these marginal deities into the Sinhalese pantheon, they are all deeply tied to their demonic roots— remaining marginal, subversive, and powerful. All of these deities also cross the boundaries of practices of worship, themselves representative of plural religious practice in Sri Lanka. Kali, while seen as tamed by Pattini, is still brimming with violent and painful potential. In the previous chapter, the pain on the body as experienced through and because of divine possession was emphasized— and it is difficult to envision deities other than ones who have a connection to a world of violence engaging in a violent ritual, participating in violent landscapes, or providing solace for individuals in times of violence. Worshippers on the Eastern coast have remarked that it is because of the destructive power of Kali that they turn to her in times of distress or violence. While Kali is an Amman goddess, she is also dangerous, destructive, and far more powerful because of these traits. The Munneswaram temple complex is similarly associated with her characteristics, and Bastin states, “Munneswaram’s Bhadrakali temple, as Bhadrakali’s origin site in Sri Lanka has, according to Sinhala Buddhists, all the forms [of Kali] present because it has tremendous original power.”¹²⁹ The mythologized history of this temple complex lends a degree of power to its historical and current positioning, and it is known for being a site of Kali’s chaos, where the world can be transformed.

Munneswaram is a site where hierarchies are subverted, both through the mythologies surrounding the temple complex and the ongoing practice of divine possession. Bastin remarks that Munneswaram is host to oracles who embody the most dangerous form of Kali, Sohokali, the version of the deity who stands over Shiva’s

¹²⁸ Rohan Bastin. “The Regenerative Power of Kali Worship in Contemporary Sinhala Buddhism.” *Social Analysis*, no. 40 (September 1996): 81

¹²⁹ Bastin. “The Regenerative Power of Kali Worship.” 63

corpse sticking her tongue out in a gruesome expression of violence.¹³⁰ Gombrich and Obeyesekere attributed Kali's exclusion from the pantheon to this moment, where she embodies violence and brutality far more than appropriate for a 'pure' deity.¹³¹ At Munneswaram however, the brutality of Kali is not shied away from but instead embodied by women oracles. Bastin describes the *maniyo*, the women who embody the divine at Munneswaram, as individuals who stand outside the norms of Sri Lankan femininity through their social standing as either single, divorced, or widowed, and assertive in a way typically deemed inappropriate for women.¹³² Munneswaram is a site where women can defy social norms by embodying the most violent and demonic form of a deity to express grief and trauma through a powerful and dangerous expression of divinity. This site is marginal, yet linked to divine legitimation through its historical ties to the Kandyan Kingdom and the safety of its kings.¹³³ This subversion of hierarchy embodied in the site itself is replicated again and again in the continued worship of Kali at Munneswaram, and then is engaged with during the ritual of divine possession, where gendered norms are similarly disrupted and the hegemony of nationalism or colonial remains are countered.

The religious sites of Kataragama, Munneswaram, and Batticaloa all rest on spaces of fluctuating control and fluctuating norms. All of them sit atop histories of contestation and threads of power that have existed for centuries and are continued, remade, and reenacted. The specific dynamics of these spaces of plural worship both actively disrupt hierarchies of existence and facilitate that disruption in ritual space. It is no coincidence that divine possession occurs at these sites and not at the sacred centres of Nainativu and Sri Dalada Maligawa—these marginal spaces are conducive to shifts, to attempts to remake the world, and to rituals that carry power outside of the ritual space to challenge or counter hegemonic impositions.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 71

¹³¹ Richard Francis Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere. *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990.

¹³² Bastin. "The Regenerative Power of Kali Worship." 71

¹³³ One instance of this transformative power is the myth of one of the Kandyan Kings, afflicted with a shameful and deadly skin condition, who travels from the sacred center of Kandy to the marginal Munneswaram temple seeking a cure. Kali, through her ability to engage with impure and deadly elements, cures him, bringing the temple and Kali closer to the center and the godly hierarchy.

IV. The Politicization of Space: Kingship and Colonial Control

The temple as a site of exception is formed through centuries of layered power structures that play out upon both religious and external spaces in Sri Lanka. This section will trace out how land and temples were crucial to pre-colonial kingship as well as how religious spaces became sites where colonial power was exerted and enacted. Temples are sites that both reflect the political machinations of the world as well as inform the creation of kingly or colonial power. The rhetoric of statehood holds ubiquitous references to religion and specifically the survival of Sinhalese Buddhism. Through replications of the *Mahāvamsa*, conceptions of space in Sri Lanka are distinctly given a religious relevance.¹³⁴ The resurrection of this mythic past where the Buddha visited Sri Lanka is important to note, for as Alice Greenwald states about the *Mahāvamsa* and *Dipavamsa*, “the intent of historiographical texts under consideration is expressly to locate and affirm an irrefutable interconnection between Buddhism and Ceylon.”¹³⁵ Religious mythologies are inherently tied to land and thus utilized by nation and empire to stake a claim, to mark out territory, to justify the existence or presence of power and rule.

Given this undeniable link between the survival of Buddhism and the land of Sri Lanka, land and its association with rituals of kingship is one facet where dominance is performed through the physical territory of the nation. James Duncan remarked about the Kandyan Kingdom in pre-colonial times that the King was technically the owner of all the land, and further that “land grants were also granted by the king to temples as a display of meritorious behavior and patronage of religion.”¹³⁶ The control of the land is tied distinctly to the King, but the King is also bound to the religion of the land itself, as evidenced by the enormous amounts of land amassed by temples during this time and the yearly kingship rituals in Kandy at the sacred center. Henry Marshall noted in his account

¹³⁴ There is a long history of associating the land of Sri Lanka with religious space. The Buddha is said to have visited Sri Lanka three times, leaving his sacred footprint at Sri Pada, his tooth at Sri Dalada Maligawa, and his hair at a temple in Colombo. Not only is there a deep connection between the Buddha and Sri Lanka, Prince Vijaya in the *Mahāvamsa* was given a warrant by the Buddha to carry forth Buddhism into Sri Lanka. Years later, Anuradhapura also became host to a sapling from the Bodhi tree, Sri Maha Bodhi.

¹³⁵ Alice Greenwald. “Relic on the Spear: Historiography and the Saga of Dutthagamani.” In *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*. New York: Anima Press, 1996.14

¹³⁶ James S. Duncan. *In the Shadows of the Tropics: Climate, Race and Biopower in Nineteenth Century Ceylon*. Ashgate Publishing Group, 2007. 28

of the Kandyan Kingdom, “The King was acknowledged lord of the soil: he taxed the people, and determined the services they were to perform.”¹³⁷ This ownership of land grants the king enormous power over the communities in his domain. The Kandyan Kings exerted their control through the land, and this protection of land as well as enactment of power was simultaneously tied to the need to preserve and carry on Sinhalese Buddhism.

Not only did kings exert dominance over the land itself, they continuously built or protected religious sites to reinforce their hegemony—creating the satellites at the margins in attempts to extend or solidify their control. Brun remarks, “political power and territorial boundaries in the kingdoms were not fixed, but diffused and marked by zones of intermittent influence.”¹³⁸ While the King was owner of all the land, and the land is inherently tied to his divine warrant to carry forth Buddhism, his control is subject to distance, time, and variation. H.L. Seneviratne states about the Nayakkar kingship rituals, “The temples the Nayakkars built or restored were scattered all over the island. Royal visits to these sites, which the inauguration and other festivals of these temples occasioned, had the sociological function of strengthening the king’s hold over the provinces.”¹³⁹ These sites were thus spaces where kingship was enacted and reenacted. The temple itself, a tie to the divine warrant of the land, becomes a source of power and control for the Kandyan Kings. These religious sites performed the dual role of reminding the populace of the reason for their dominion as well as continuously asserting that dominion. Seneviratne goes on to remark about the rituals at such sites, “These ‘festivals’ themselves were smaller scale repetitions of the military displays that were periodically made in Kandy in the guise of religious festivals.”¹⁴⁰ While Seneviratne alludes to a discordance or distinction between what is a military display versus a religious festival, there is a strong alliance between the continuation of the kingdom/king/nation/empire, and the continuation of ‘true’ Buddhism. The interests of power are thus entwined with the interests of religion, and while rituals of Kingship perform the military might of the

¹³⁷ Henry Marshall. *Ceylon: A General Description of the Island and its Inhabitants with An Historical Sketch of the Conquest of the Colony by the English*. London; William H. Allen & Co., 1954. 27

¹³⁸ Brun and Jazeel. *Spatialising Politics*. 6

¹³⁹ H.L. Seneviratne. “Religion and Legitimacy of Power in the Kandyan Kingdom.” In *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*. New York: Anima Press, 1996.178

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 179

kings, this is still central to the ritual itself. The very building of monuments, preservation of territory, and the focus on religious sites reenacts the power of Sinhalese Buddhist Kingship, highlighting the inseparability of rule and religion.

The association of Buddhism to Kingship is not only a sign of such vested interests, but also deeply tied to the cosmic hierarchy. As mentioned previously, the hierarchy of deities is implicated and impacted by socio-political events and tensions, and is both reflective of the world as well as a force of power within that world. Bruce Kapferer writes in his work on Sinhalese nationalisms about Dutugemunu's association with parts of the Kataragama complex and other sites of worship,

“Dutugemunu's building of monuments to Buddhism can be interpreted as action of cosmic stabilization whereby the inherent fragmenting possibility of the world order and of its kingly embodiment—inherent as a function of the logic of hierarchy and incorporating encompassment—is overcome by the affirmation of Buddhist cosmic unifying principles.”¹⁴¹

Much like the Nayakkar Kings, Dutugemunu's association with ritual sites is not solely about governance, it is an exertion of power that interacts with the cosmos of Sinhalese Buddhism. This dominance of power over space solidifies the control of the nation, extends the power from the sacred centers out to the margins, and also prevents the world from devolving into chaos. By stabilizing the hierarchy, these rulers guard against the possibility of disruption or subversion. The need to stabilize marginal religious sites speaks to their disruptive power, for without this stabilization (which is really an imposition of Sinhalese nationalist Buddhism), these spaces have the power to fracture the imaginary through their liminal positioning and the radical practices within their bounds. The ubiquity of temple spaces as sites of control has continued from pre-colonial kingship throughout colonial rule to the present. Bastin remarks, “temples have been critical to the nature and extent of political and economic complexity in the mercantile and agricultural state formation that both preceded and persisted alongside European imperialism.”¹⁴² Even through ages of destruction by colonial powers, the temple has remained a site where power is exerted by the state, as well as a site where the same power of the state can be resisted.

¹⁴¹ Bruce Kapferer. *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia*. Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998. 58

¹⁴² Bastin. “Hindu Temples in the Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict.” 45

Colonial powers such as the Portuguese recognized the power of these sites as locations where kingship was affirmed and invigorated, and during their time in Sri Lanka from 1506 to 1634 they consistently destroyed any religious site they came across.¹⁴³ The extent of this destruction is noted by Robert Percival in 1805, who states,

“Most of these ancient monuments however have suffered severely from the ravages of the Portuguese, whose policy it was to destroy all monuments of art or former splendor among the unhappy natives. But the religious buildings of the Ceylonese were not only defaced and ruined by their barbarous invaders; even the materials which composed them, the hewn stones and massy pillars, were transported to the sea coasts to erect fortifications, and rivet those chains which were imposed on their former worshippers.”¹⁴⁴

The Portuguese did not stop at mere destruction, but attempted to prevent these sites from ever attaining the level of prominence or potential they had in pre-colonial times. Bastin theorizes about this destruction, “their actions served to fracture the important role of temples as political centers and, as such, as sites of potential resistance.”¹⁴⁵ After destroying coastal temples, including Munneswaram, the Portuguese set about remaking these sites to serve as places of power for their own rule and missionary activities. In 1605, the Portuguese Captain General promised Jesuit missionaries all future revenues from Munneswaram, and “perhaps for that reason, the Jesuits applied themselves zealously to the redemption of the site, and in 1606 they completed the destruction of the temple which had begun with Portuguese soldiers six years earlier.”¹⁴⁶ The Portuguese recognized the power of a site like Munneswaram. As Bastin says about this rebuilding, “it indicates how the marginal and disruptive status of Munneswaram was reproduced via the active participation of European missionaries in the 17th century.”¹⁴⁷ These sites did not merely just fall into ruin, but instead were resurrected as positions of power and seen as places with disruptive potential. The Portuguese attempted not only to prevent that potential for Sri Lankan resistance, but also shape that potential to serve their own needs. Nowadays priests at Munneswaram have found remnants of Portuguese worship

¹⁴³ Marshall. *Ceylon: A General Description of the Island*.

¹⁴⁴ Robert Percival. *An Account of the Island of Ceylon*. C&R Baldwin; London, 1805. 221

¹⁴⁵ Bastin. “Hindu Temples in the Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict.” 45

¹⁴⁶ Bastin. *The Domain of Constant Excess*. 1

¹⁴⁷ Rohan Bastin. “Sorcerous Technologies and Religious Innovation in Sri Lanka.” *Social Analysis* 46, no. 3 (2002).171

alongside images or relicts from pre-colonial Sinhalese practices. This is situated amidst the existing imagery and monuments from both the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon and the Tamil Hindu cosmos. Perhaps not in spite of but because of such a history of destruction and attempts at control, Munneswaram is continually a site of chaos, fluctuating order, and potential for resistance against the norm. Because of this, Munneswaram and other religious sites like it are places where hierarchies like the state want to exert their power. However, they are also sites where those hegemonic forces can be disrupted and challenged.

When it came to ritual space, the British used very different tactics than the Portuguese to exert their control and dominion. Reverend Balding remarked that in order to take over the Kandyan Kingdom, the British agreed to respect the rites and rituals of Buddhist practice.¹⁴⁸ Henry Marshall notes from the Proclamation by General Brownrigg in 1815, “Their religion shall be sacred, and their temples respected. The power of His Majesty’s arms will be exerted only against those who, deserting the cause of their country, oppose the progress of His Majesty’s troops, and of their own country men united in arms for their deliverance.”¹⁴⁹ In this proclamation, General Brownrigg acknowledges the potential of the temple as a space of dissent while still according it a degree of protection. In order for the Kandyan to acquiesce to British rule, the British had to agree to this protection, creating a conundrum as the British simultaneously sought to Christianize and ‘civilize’ indigenous Sri Lankans.

However, while the British may have permitted the existence and upkeep of such sites of exception like the temple complexes Munneswaram and Kataragama, they utilized other forms of legislation to weaken the power of such spaces through the control of land and territory. Previously, temples in Sri Lanka had owned large amounts of land and the heads of the temples exacted tithes from those working to maintain the temple and provide food for festivals. However, the Temple Lands Registration Ordinance of 1856 forced temples to cede some of their land to the British.¹⁵⁰ While the British, unlike the Portuguese, preserved the existence of temples, they still attempted to exert their

¹⁴⁸ Balding. *One Hundred Years in Ceylon*. 14

¹⁴⁹ Marshall. *Ceylon: A General Description of the Island*. 209

¹⁵⁰ Jean Grossholtz. *Forging Capitalist Patriarchy*. Durham; Duke University Press, 1984. 60

control over the physical space of the temple by usurping temple lands and weakening the position of the temples as a place of political power over local communities.

The protection of Sri Lankan religious spaces resulted in continued contradictions: the British simultaneously encouraged Christian missionary presence yet could not disavor or forbid indigenous religious practices. Samuel Baker remarks in his accounts of travels in 1869,

“Thus we see the most inconsistent and anomalous conditions imposed in treaties with conquered powers; we see, for instance, in Ceylon, a protection granted to the Buddhist religion, while flocks of missionaries are sent out to convert the heathen. We even stretch the point so far as to place a British sentinel on guard at the Buddhist temple in Kandy, as though in mockery of our Protestant church a hundred paces distance.”¹⁵¹

Even as the British attempted to placate Sri Lankans under their dominion through the protection of these sites, they simultaneously allowed places of resistance and rebellion to form while sowing discord between their supposed civilizing mission and their desire for solid control over the entirety of spaces and bodies in Sri Lanka. In doing so, they upset a central tenant of their own hierarchy: the dominance of British missionary work. Even as these religious sites are being overpowered and granted protection by British rule, they are still acting as a destabilizing factor—forcing the British to reckon with their own internal dynamics between Christianizing missionary work and economic control over Sri Lanka.

While these ritual sites remained places of contestation and liminal power throughout centuries of colonial rule, they also bear the physical and abstract remnants of colonial control. These remnants are a manifestation of colonial debris, both embodied in the physical remains of destruction left by colonial rule as well as trapped in the abstract tensions between the exertion of Christian missionary ideologies onto public space and the positioning of land and temples as sacred Buddhist space. Jayawardena notes, “colonial conquest, however, meant going beyond romanticizing history and enjoying stories of the mythic ‘Other’ in the ‘mysterious Orient.’ It meant an actual physical presence of an imperial power, imposing its control on the land and inhabitants of the

¹⁵¹ Samuel White Baker. *Eight Years' Wanderings in Ceylon*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott &, 1869. 130

colonized territories.”¹⁵² This physical presence is evident in the construction of churches and the destruction of temples. Physical presence, however, is only one facet of the imposition of control onto land and bodies. Controlling space, and the entirety of Sri Lanka, was central to the British imposition of their empire. While the British did not destroy religious spaces, they did shift the role of religious sites, and utilized space extensively to solidify their governance.

The British created and imposed systems of political geography to suite their needs, such as forcing temples to cede their lands, or, as Brun notes, “consolidating and territorializing ethnic difference where there was already established coexistence.”¹⁵³ Colonial powers utilized caste, education level, and ethnic difference to segment space in Sri Lanka, as exemplified by labor practices. Marshall notes that during Dutch rule, they singled out one caste, the Chaliah, to exploit for cinnamon cultivation.¹⁵⁴ He goes on to state, “Like the villeins attached to the soil in feudal times, the Chaliahs were transferred with unmitigated thralldom to every succeeding conqueror.”¹⁵⁵ The Chaliah caste were forcibly moved to wherever cinnamon cultivation was most bountiful and most profitable, creating a migratory system of labor that was based on a specific caste and their segmented role in society. In the wake of Dutch rule, the British went on to channel educated Tamil elites from Jaffna into their administration, increasing social inequities between northern Tamil populations and both Sinhalese and Eastern Tamils.¹⁵⁶ The British also ferried thousands of Indian Tamil workers to staff their coffee and tea plantations, once again segmenting labor and administration based on ethnic difference and nationality.¹⁵⁷ Not only did the British use certain populations to fit their economic or administrative needs, they also implemented a census reporting system that distinguished ethnicity and identity based on Sinhalese, Kandyan, Indian Tamil, and Sri Lankan Tamil, reinforcing ethnic divides through many facets of their rule.¹⁵⁸ Overall,

¹⁵² Kumari Jayawardena. *Erasure of the Euro-Asian: Recovering Early Radicalism and Feminism in South Asia*. Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2007. 187

¹⁵³ Brun and Jazeel. *Spatialising Politics*. 8

¹⁵⁴ Marshall. *Ceylon: A General Description of the Island*. 9

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 9

¹⁵⁶ Bastin. *The Authentic Inner Life*. 404

¹⁵⁷ Granville St. John Orde Brown. *Labour conditions in Ceylon, Mauritius, and Malaya; report*. London: H.M. Stationery Off., 1943. 9

¹⁵⁸ Bastin. *The Authentic Inner Life*. 404

the British utilized their systems of rule and economic exploitation to manipulate identity and space to continue and bolster their control over the entirety of Sri Lanka.

The British enacted control over physical spaces, both on the level of individual sites of worship as well as on a larger scale over the entirety of Sri Lanka. The physicality of British rule, as embodied in the territories communities call home, the temples they frequent, and the physical outposts of colonial or nationalist rule, was built upon the exploitation and reinforcement of ethnic difference. The plural temple complexes referenced in this work counter that history through their marginal location, continued contestation, and disruption of the hegemonic ideas of difference imposed by the state.

V. The Temple as Sanctuary: Religious Space Amidst a Sea of Violence

The conflict between the LTTE and state forces was built upon a landscape bearing the active remnants of colonial rule as well as nationalist conceptions about creating not only a nation, but a motherland. The religiously-inspired rhetoric regarding the Sinhalese motherland imbues the conflict with a mythic character, and even the search for a Tamil homeland reckons with abstract borders of self-determination and sovereignty rather than the actuality of physical space.¹⁵⁹ The tension between these warring ideas of motherland played out on physical territory, impacting the marginal religious locations that were part of this battleground. Hasbullah and Korf note in their work on the Eastern provinces, “the political violence and warfare that ravaged Sri Lanka since 1983 (and even before) has created a warscape, marked by heightened military presence, military checkpoints, guerilla attacks by the Tamil militants, counter-insurgency measures, killings and ‘white van’ hijackings.”¹⁶⁰ While temples themselves are not part of military checkpoints or subject to ‘white van’ disappearances, they are embedded within this landscape and often the places people go to seek solace because of the violence around them.

This section will look at how the terror of the conflict and its manifestation onto physical space aided in the creation of sites of exception. These exceptions are the temple complexes that remain marginal places of power and continued aberrations in the

¹⁵⁹ See Appendix, Figure 3

¹⁶⁰ Hasbullah and Korf. “Muslim Geographies.” 34

hegemonic constructions of motherland, which serves to destabilize state power. Space in Sri Lanka has been inherently changed by a crucible of violence. It has transformed irreparably, even as threads of power and hierarchy remain continuous. The sites of exception that are now sites of divine possession are tied to how the state is embedded in space, how the state attempts to continue exerting power at the margins by the preservation and protection of sites of contestation, and how the idea of the motherland is not only impossible, but also relies upon the creation of discontinuities that stray from the very ideals the nation purportedly upholds.

The state was embedded into space at first in a process that sought to counter the history of colonial rule—the Buddhist and Hindu revivalism that occurred directly after independence. Bastin notes that even though religious freedom was established in Sri Lanka in 1806, it was not until the later revivalism of the nineteenth century, which arose with anti-colonial sentiment, that temples in ruin began to be rebuilt and new religious monuments were constructed.¹⁶¹ In addition to the physical rebuilding of these religious sites, mythologies tying these sites to the existence of the nation or past Buddhist heroes were utilized to reinforce the connection between not only the land and Buddhism, but also the land and the state itself.¹⁶²

Kataragama exemplifies the dynamic of the state attempting to assert power through the propagation of violent mythologies tied to physical space. Despite the South Indian roots of the deity Kataragama, he is inextricably tied to Sri Lanka through the elevation of Valli Amma, his Sri Lankan wife, the imposed connection between Kataragama and the Buddhist hero Dutugemunu in later translations of the *Mahāvamsa*, and President Premadasa's political promotion of Kataragama as a Buddhist pilgrimage

¹⁶¹ Rohan Bastin. "The Authentic Inner Life: Complicity and Resistance in the Tamil Hindu Revival". In *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited*, ed by Michael Roberts. Colombo: Marga Institute, 1997. 390

¹⁶² There is no better place to see the threads of state control and the imaginary of the state than Sinhalese nationalist development schemes aimed to evoke a history of Sinhalese irrigation kingdoms. The state has touted development schemes like Mahaweli Development Project or Gal Oya Development project as evidence for the successes of the state—ignoring how these developments often result in either Sinhalese farmers taking over land previously owned by Tamil communities or the unequal distribution of water to Sinhalese farmers before Tamil ones. Korf calls this 'a Sinhala kind of geography' (see Korf, *Cartographic Violence*) for these political and cartographic projects evoke the image of the famed kingdoms of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, which are both known for their extensive irrigation technologies and agricultural successes. While the evocation of irrigation technologies is not a religious site of analysis, the ubiquity of the water tanks and their tie to irrigation technologies of yore mirrors how religious spaces become not only sites of worship but instead moments where the state and its imaginary disrupts the boundary between mythic histories and the present.

site. Obeyesekere notes about Kataragama, “I see reflected in recent years at this shrine is the making of new myths that seem to redefine the political community and legitimate the Sinhala perception of their rightful hegemony over the nation as a whole.”¹⁶³ The new myths that he refers to includes the story of the Kiri Vehera being built by Dutugemunu’s father and some tales of Dutugemunu’s victory over Elara that claim Dutugemunu sought out a blessing from Kataragama before waging battle. These narratives not only root Kataragama into the formation of the nation, but also serve to continuously exert power over worshippers and those inhabiting the temple complex. Through the production of these myths, spaces like Kataragama are places where the state attempts to further their power and control to solidify their dominion over physical space and the bodies of worshippers by extending power outward and claiming this marginal space as intrinsic to the nation.

The relationship between worship and state power has to be constantly reinforced—and the nation remakes this connection through rebuilding religious sites on the margins and ensuring a physical presence of state power at such sites. The government soldiers protecting Kataragama in the present are not an anomaly, but a norm. During the conflict and continuing into the present, state soldiers were stationed at a Buddhist temple in the heart of Tamil communities in Batticaloa. Currently there are Sinhalese policemen who live there for six months at a time. In response to state control of religious space, the Tigers used to circle the Nagadeepa Buddhist temple, located on an island off the coast of Jaffna, in their war-boats. They never shelled or attacked the island, instead displaying their implicit control over the space. These instances where power is performed and written onto physical space exemplify the state’s projected imaginary, what Kapferer refers to as “the state as a personally and socially constitutive and encompassing organization.”¹⁶⁴

This projection of statehood is explicitly Sinhalese and Buddhist. It is evident in the primacy of Buddhism in the constitution of Sri Lanka, the predominance of Sinhalese Buddhist politicians in positions of immense power, and the weaponization of the state against Tamil communities. The connection between the state and such abstract ideals is

¹⁶³ Obeyesekere. “Myth and Political Legitimization at the Sacred Center.” 219

¹⁶⁴ Bruce Kapferer. “Ethnic Nationalism and the Discourses of Violence in Sri Lanka.” *Communal/Plural: Journal of Transnational & Cross-Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (2001): 43

embodied in the ease at which politicians like President Premadasa, in office from 1989-1993, can uplift the hegemony of the explicitly Sinhalese state. Premadasa stated at one of his ceremonial speeches at a Pinnacle unveiling temple ceremony in 1989, “We should ask ourselves whether we should allow ethnic, racial and parochial conflicts to continue further paving the path for external forces to intervene in the sovereignty of our motherland.”¹⁶⁵ Here, Premadasa takes advantage of the physical and religious space he occupies to make a claim about the assumedly Sinhalese motherland—and he markedly considers both the Tigers and the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) as these external forces that disrupt the control and the bounds of the state. Premadasa reduces the fight for Tamil sovereignty and Tamil rights to a disruption of the nation-state, delegitimizing the marginalization of Tamil communities under the Sinhalese state. Premadasa uses both his platform at a religious space and the association of this homogenized motherland to mark Tamil liberation as an aberration to the state, not something that can coexist with the state. By associating the LTTE with IPKF, Premadasa draws the lines of the nation and the motherland as excluding Tamil sovereignty and even Tamil rights.

The reinforcement of the state as Sinhalese and Buddhist, and the imposition of that narrative onto religious space, comes through in President Rajapaksa’s speeches as well. In his victory speech to parliament upon the defeat of the LTTE in 2009 he states, “This is our country. This is our motherland. We should live in this country as children of one mother.”¹⁶⁶ The one mother and the motherland are once again presumably Sinhalese—folding Tamil communities into the larger discourse around sacred space and marking ALL of Sri Lanka as this sacred space. Bartholomeusz remarks about this rhetoric, “The Sinhala who adhere to the promised-land ideology argue that devolution is the first step toward a separate state for Tamils, a step that can have only perilous results: the desecration of Sri Lanka.”¹⁶⁷ Rajapaksa’s speech embodies this idea that the Sinhala state is essential to the survival of the Buddhist motherland and the very push for Tamil rights or Tamil sovereignty threatens this utopic vision of a Buddhist future. There

¹⁶⁵ President Premadasa. “Speech at the Pinnacle Unveiling Ceremony at the Chittavivekashramaya wickremasinghepura battaramulla.” Speech, June 1st, 1989.

¹⁶⁶ President Rajapaksa. “President Rajapaksa’s Speech to Parliament on the Defeat of the LTTE.” Speech, Parliament, Colombo, May 19, 2009.

¹⁶⁷ Tessa Bartholomeusz. “Women, War, and Peace in Sri Lanka.” In *Women's Buddhism Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal*, edited by Ellison Banks Findly, 283-96. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000.284

is no space for deviance in this paradigm, and thus the framework of the state becomes a sinister discourse, for it relies upon a utilization of abstract and idealized religious space exerted onto temples to create state hegemony and justify state terror.

The mythical ties of statehood to religious sites extend the imaginary of the state onto physical space and physical bodies, even when that imaginary is not replicated or feasible in the physical world. The state is an abstract concept, solidified in its relation to physical sites of analysis and control but extending through time and space without bounds. The state is the shadow of colonial rule; it is white vans picking up Tamil and Sinhalese youth during the conflict who are never seen again. It is Presidents giving speeches aimed at revitalizing religious spaces or protecting the women of the nation and simultaneously soldiers strip-searching sex workers leaving prominent Sinhalese areas of Colombo. It is everywhere, but never truly embodied in one individual or one place. However, the power and control of the state is reenacted at religious sites, and it is a purpose of state power to attempt to control and dominate religious sites with this resistant potential.

Places like Kataragama, Munneswaram, and Batticaloa however, have a less obvious and far more tenuous connection to the control of the state and through their marginality, they resist the hegemonic implications of the nation. These sites are themselves exceptions and enclaves in times of incredible violence. This dynamic of exception is enhanced when they are examined as places interconnected with the world around them—a world with a landscape of brutality, displacement, segmented space, and ideologies of terror for the sake of the motherland. Even as the state attempts to claim them, even as they are, at times, sites of violence, they are also places of sanctuary and exception. Not only do they provide a reprieve from the violence of war, they also generate a space where the hierarchies of power can be disrupted and remade.

Sites like Kataragama, Munneswaram, and temples in Batticaloa don't belong to the state, they don't belong to the Tigers, they don't even belong to the priests. They belong to those in the space, the bodies who turn space into place. The state and the Tigers recognized religious space as powerful, and so these sites became spaces where

the state attempted to exert nationalist control or the Tigers violently assaulted.¹⁶⁸ Even the communities that countered the state, such as displaced families and the physical spaces they still occupy in IDP (internally displaced persons) camps that are continuous reminders of the cost of conflict; their lives are controlled and regulated by state formations. In contrast to this, religious space cannot be regulated the way that other aspects of people's lives are by the state. Not only is Buddhism granted primacy in the constitution itself, but religious freedom has been a central tenant of governance in Sri Lanka since the British empire. The conflict, and the exertion of power over the ambiguous motherland as well as over so many physical spaces in Sri Lanka serves to highlight the exceptional and powerful nature of temple complexes in Sri Lanka. These places hold a power extending from colonial times throughout world-shattering violence to continue resisting hegemonic formations in the present.

VI. Divine Possession and Space: Subversion, Marginality, and Reconfiguration

The sites at which divine possession occurs hold colonial remnants, the residues of conflict, and the continued attempts by the state to impose control. This history of contestation at marginal religious sites does not end with the defeat of the LTTE, but instead has continued into the present as evidenced by government-promoted rebuilding and revitalization of temple spaces.¹⁶⁹ These marginal sites are host to instances of divine possession because of their inherent marginality and positioning at geopolitical fringes where power is constantly shifting. Kataragama, Batticaloa, and Munneswaram all embody this liminality in their physical location, internal geographies, and the marginal religious practices held within their bounds. These places have and continue to be sites where hierarchies, both cosmic and geopolitical, can be subverted, where marginal power can gain strength and exert power toward the sacred centers in Sri Lanka, and where ritual can engage in a rebuilding of a world fractured by violence. I argue that divine possession occurs at these specific spaces because these sites subvert power and hierarchy through their physical geography and existence on the margins.

¹⁶⁸ The LTTE successfully bombed the outer area of Sri Dalada Maligawa and made several other attempts to bomb the temple complex. In addition to their performance of military control at Nagadeepa, the Tigers are rumored to have attempted to attack Kataragama as well (although this claim is less substantiated).

¹⁶⁹ President Premadasa. "Speech at the Pinnacle Unveiling Ceremony at the Chittavivekashramaya wickremasinghepura battaramulla." Speech, June 1st, 1989.

These sites provide power through their marginality—for they are objects of desire for the state and are given a degree of safety even as warring forces fight for control. Lawrence notes this sense of sanctuary when she describes the power of an oracle at the Kallady Kali temple in 1992 during the yearly festival. Thousands were about to watch the annual fire-walking, and while the oracle was preparing for the ritual, army officers walked into the temple. Lawrence writes, “Suddenly, the oracle rushed from the shrine, tore furiously across the space, and, growling angrily at them in the unbearable rage of Kali, chased them out.”¹⁷⁰ The power of the state was subverted in this ritual moment. State forces, soldiers who every day are representations of the terror and brutality of the state, were countered. These soldiers are the same ones who man the checkpoints, they are the same ones who pick up dissenters and innocents in white vans and take them to torture camps. They are the same ones who condone and facilitate enormous violence for the sake of the nation. But in the power of a ritual moment, in the space of a marginal temple complex, their dominance was disrupted. The oracle not only forces the soldiers out, but protects the community within the sanctity of the temple space. It is because of the marginal power of the temple that the oracle, not the state soldiers, hold control over space.

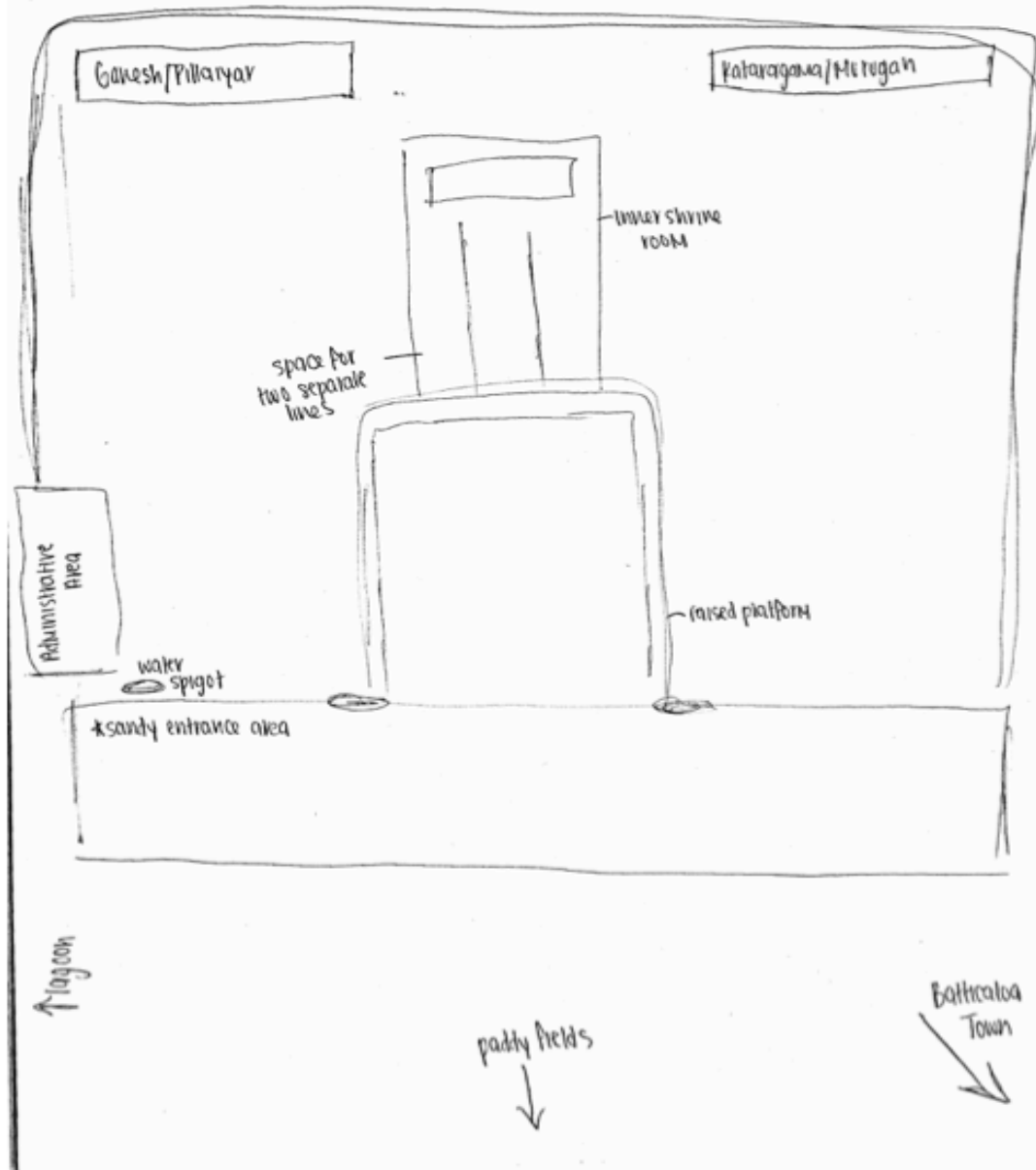
This exertion of power and control over space is made even more powerful when considering the context of the Kallady temple during that time. The entire Eastern coast was and continues to be a fragmented space where the LTTE and the state fought for constantly-shifting control over territories on either side of the lagoon. The violence of the state was especially prevalent in this space where the LTTE posed a constant threat. The brutality of state forces has left irreparable damage to communities in the area. However, the territory of the temple, despite the surrounding landscape under the domain of state forces, was a place where the dominance of the state in the hierarchy was disrupted. Not only were the soldiers not allowed to enter, but they were chased out with the rage of the divine—a force not even they could counter. This claiming of space and assertion of power denies the state its validity, makes visible discontent, and disrupts the hegemony of state power.

¹⁷⁰ Patricia Lawrence. "Grief on the Body." 116

Another instance where the hierarchy of the world is subverted in the space of the temple is a puja ceremony I participated in during December 2015. I was at the Kotthukulathu Mari Amman Kovil on the outskirts of Batticaloa Town, near one edge of the lagoon and surrounded by paddy fields on the other sides. This Amman Kovil was run by an elderly Tamil priest, and as we sat down a few hours before the puja was about to start he began to thread together the numerous flower chains that would later encircle the statue of the goddess. Women began to arrive, followed by fewer numbers of men, and together we began to circle the shrine. As a group we stood first in front of Ganesh, then around to the other deities surrounding the central shrine, and finally into the antechamber of the main shrine. After the puja was performed, the priest brought out a traditional rice-pastry, customarily given to participants after a puja at various temples. However, all of the women were beckoned into the main shrine first for the food, and only after all of the women had their portion and began to eat did the men enter the main shrine room. This inversion of a typical dinner-time scene in Sri Lanka where women often wait until everyone has finished eating before beginning to eat, sometimes only taking the leftovers and never the best portions, is unusual not only in its divergence from normal social conditions but also because it is not the practice at other Amman Kovils. At Punnaicholai Kali Amman Kovil or Kannaki Amman Kovil, there are multiple lines and supplicants of both genders reach the central shrine simultaneously. This Mari Amman Kovil exists at the margins of the margins, in an area still facing the lasting destruction of war and the 2004 tsunami, far from the centers of control and embedded within a population not supported by state powers or even the LTTE. This temple, and the subversive worship that occurs under its roof, extends power outwards into the communities and toward the individuals who worship there.

KOTTHUKULATHU MARIAMMAN KOVIL

*map not drawn to scale



These spaces facilitate disruption during ritual moments as well as embody a subversion of hierarchy in their physical geographies. In Batticaloa, divine possessions occur solely at non-agamic temples, which have risen to prominence during and after the conflict. Agamic temples are the traditional, Brahmin, caste-structure sites of worship for Tamil Hindus. Non-agamic temples, however, are born out of pre-existing goddess worship traditions and often tie in deities like Mari Amma, who some associate with the Christian Mary, or Kali Amma and Pattini Amma, who exist in numerous pantheons. Non-agamic Kovils and the practices located at them were excluded by Hindu revivalism, which privileged the more traditional, agamic temples. The rise of worship at these Kovils thus signifies a shift in the hierarchy, where Kovils considered lower-class or 'impure' are centered within communities over the supposedly 'pure' ritual spaces.

The Kovils in Batticaloa are not singular in their inherent subversion of hierarchy. Munneswaram and Kataragama, due to their centering of marginal deities, also subvert the typical cosmic hierarchy. In doing so, they disrupt norms of gender, purity, and statehood. At Munneswaram, Kali's demonic origins and violent aspects set her at odds with normative femininity. Kali moves between the demonic and the divine, crossing deeply entrenched hierarchies of existence. Divine amidst her demonic fury, she is valorized for the very characteristics that mark her as impure such as violent power and anger. Not only does the mere worship of Kali act to subvert hierarchy, but women oracles at Munneswaram typically embody Kali herself. They hold within their bodies her forceful power and energy, defying the standards of gendered presentation and acceptability while doing so.

At Kataragama, the deity again disrupts the cosmic hierarchy through the deification of previously demonic traits or aspects. Despite his adultery, he is worshipped alongside both his wives in an acknowledgement of impure behavior and exaltation of his godliness. This allows a subversion of norms because non-normative behaviors or characteristics are seen not as demonic, but divine. The deities are simultaneously humanized for their impure behavior and deified amidst those impurities. The physical space of their sites of worship thus becomes a space of destabilization and potential for individuals engaging with marginal practices of disruption like divine possession.

The active and disruptive power of marginal spaces extends outwards to counter the hegemony of the state. This marginality, both in location and in practice of worship, resists state formations. While the state can attempt to imbue such sites with nationalist implications, these places defy the bounds of Sinhalese statehood in their existence as plural sites of worship, instead forcing nationalism to have only a fluctuating control over the space. Not only are there dynamics of ambiguous control, when the state both refuses to protect communities and is an entity inflicting violence these sites also become places of community strength. Lawrence writes, “in the aftermath of occupation by Sri Lankan government security forces and thousands of ‘disappearances’, people could not take their problems to government authorities, so they turned to a different form of agency—to a resource located within Tamil culture.”¹⁷¹ In a place where the delivery of all social services was disrupted, where everyday populations were held suspect for militant connections, and where violence was normalized, Amman Kovils offered a physical space of safety and protection, generating power through their social location.

This marginality comes from being a refuge in a time of violence and because these places are fertile soil for innovative and subversive religious practices. Bastin remarks, “Like the goddess Kali in Sinhala Buddhism and other sorcery deities, the new technologies of sorcery emanate most powerfully from the margins. Thus, their users capture, or strive to capture, the dynamics of Sri Lankan society, particularly its ethnic and gender relations, and in doing so give these relations their shape and reproductive potential.”¹⁷² The marginal practice of divine possession works within the frameworks of society, calling forth the revered power of the divine, even as it transcends other norms. Sorcery thus has this ‘reproductive potential’ because it transacts power from the margins, but engages with the frameworks of societal centers. These innovative ritual practices stem from the margins because of their liminality, because these sites are far from ritual centers that dictate norms of expression or religiosity. These margins are also the sites at which the demonic transcends the boundary of the human world and upsets the hierarchy, creating new hierarchies of worship and new practices to go along with them. Rituals like

¹⁷¹ Lawrence. “The Changing Amman.” 222

¹⁷² Bastin. “Sorcerous Technologies and Religious Innovation.” 171

divine possession can thus exist and grow at places where the disruption of norms of purity can be challenged, such as hosting a pure being in a body thought to be impure.

The expression of sorcery worship at marginal religious sites not only challenges the state's assertion of control over 'pure' religion and 'pure' religious spaces, but also can then be used to challenge the power of the state itself. Kapferer records one such instance at a sorcery shrine outside of Colombo, where he recounts a woman seeking her son who called out "Oh God! King of the Asuras. I have not seen my son for three months. I have no way of reaching him without your divine power. I am helpless."¹⁷³ In this moment, this woman reaches out to a marginalized deity to step in where the state cannot. The state is not merely absent, but actually the force of terror responsible for death and loss. Religious sites that produce marginal expressions of worship disrupt hierarchy and hegemony by calling down deities to enter the human realm and speak truths the state would rather keep hidden. This visibility of truth and acknowledgement of state terror is an assertion of power, and space itself becomes a vehicle where grief is enacted and the violence of the state can be recognized. Space becomes not only the site of resistance, but also an entity of that resistance where power is transmitted outward and the space itself combats the imposition of the state.

The compounded liminality built out of marginal locations, marginal beings, and marginal bodies, results in religious sites where the world can be remade outside of violence. These spaces are all sites where the cosmic world is shifted through the repositioning of marginal deities who disrupt the demon/deity hierarchy. This subversion of cosmic hierarchies creates a similar subversion in the hierarchies of the human realm, for deities disrupt the balance of power and provide communities with the agency to stand against the state. Bastin remarks in his work on newly built and reconstructed temples like Munneswaram that they "provided a focus for new forms of old worship, such as Sinhala Buddhist planetary worship... Thus, it was not a simple matter of old beliefs and practices dying out, but a transmutation of the religious field in which the beliefs and practices occurred."¹⁷⁴ These spaces, and the marginal practices within their borders, do not create or challenge dominance in a vacuum. Instead, the changes in the

¹⁷³ Kapferer. "Ethnic Nationalism and the Discourses of Violence." 33

¹⁷⁴ Bastin. "Sorcerous Technologies and Religious Innovation." 161

world of worship impact the forces that seek to control space. Sorcery worship not only creates new forms of practice such as divine possession, but changes the ritual space and the space outside of ritual through the subversion of both cosmic hierarchies and norms regarding gender and purity.

This resistance is also articulated in the capacity that sites like Munneswaram, Kataragama, and the Kali Kovils in Batticaloa have for plural worship. While Bastin is clear to remark that plural worship is not a simple solution to ethnic conflict and frequenting the same space does not erase the existence of community tension, plural worship does highlight the hypocrisy of the nationhood and motherland dialogues.¹⁷⁵ Bastin remarks about Munneswaram, “The question of the supposed boundedness of ethnic groups, a boundedness condition in the circumstances of hostility and violence, was raised repeatedly by this apparent unity of religious purpose at a single temple complex.”¹⁷⁶ The entities of the empire, the nation, the state, and even the ambiguous Tamil Eelam, all rely upon the dialogue of bounded ethnicity and the need for singular Sinhalese or Tamil space. However, sites at the margins are places that exist under multiple threads of power extended from multiple centers—and these places of plural worship disrupt the framework of nationalist ideologies. Plural worship is not an easy answer to decades of ethnic conflict and centuries of colonial rule, nor is it an instance to casually wave as an example of coexistence during and after a conflict. While plural worship is not a solution, it does defy the hegemonic narrative of the state and creates spaces where community is centered, voice is actualized, and resistance formed.

The disruption of the narrative of the nation is in part formed by the positioning of these spaces as points where the demonic ruptures through the constructions of normality, a destruction that has its own powerful potential. Bastin notes, “Kali, the embodiment of the demonic destruction of the demonic, the destruction of the chaotic and dislocating, is the focus on these fundamentally regenerative actions.”¹⁷⁷ Kali’s divine power holds the chaos of the demonic. She is brutal, terrifying, and people turn to her when they seek protection or knowledge about those taken by a brutal and terrifying state. When women embody Kali, they embody this destructive power, and they are viewed as

¹⁷⁵ Bastin. “The Regenerative Power of Kali Worship.” 11

¹⁷⁶ Bastin. *The Domain of Constant Excess*. 3

¹⁷⁷ Bastin. “The Regenerative Power of Kali Worship.” 70

holding the violent power of Kali herself. In many ways, the state tries to hold a monopoly on violence and chaos. The very order of the state relies upon a certain violent chaos imposed upon the land and upon bodies. These spaces, and the embodiment of Kali, disrupt both order and chaos. This disruption creates a space where the chaotic order of the state is still subverted without contributing to the chaos desired by the state. Women who embody the divine within these spaces are a key facet of this construction, as their body is overcome by an external force, bringing the chaos of the demonic/divine into the world, but containing that force within the physical body and the geographic space of the temple. This deeply contrasts the violent ubiquity of the state, within which violence leaks into state formations, checkpoints, and government regulations. In divine possession this violence is curtailed—it is visible but controlled, even as it represents an embodied and disruptive chaos.

These sites, and the chaos they embody, call forth the expressions of grief and facilitation of safety. The positioning of these religious spaces as sites where grief breaks through the constructed imaginary of state hegemony cannot be understated, nor can the power of that grief substantiated in ritual formations and divine possession. Lawrence writes, “The oracle and the Amman temple bring some sense of safety to an everyday world altered by the state’s configuration of military checkpoints, bunkers, camps, prisons, and other places of detention.”¹⁷⁸ These physical spaces, with their complex geographies and convoluted histories, break the formation of the state by refusing to allow silence in the face of terror. The spaces themselves are conducive to resistance in subtle and powerful ritual forms, as well as continuously enact a resisting power through the reenactment of embodied chaos and hierarchical disruption in the cosmic space.

Since their inception or rebirth, spaces like Kataragama, Munneswaram, and Amman Kovils in Batticaloa have made visible practices of worship that differ from that practiced at the sacred center of the Maligawa or agamic temples on the Eastern coast. These places are the sites of resistance to colonial rule, as seen at Kataragama. They are the places colonial empires saw as so powerful and central to communities that they merited destruction, as seen at Munneswaram. They are also moments where the cosmic

¹⁷⁸ Patricia Lawrence. "Violence, Suffering, Amman: The Work of Oracles in Sri Lanka's Eastern War Zone." In *Violence and Subjectivity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000

hierarchy is disrupted, goddesses are worshipped, demons are remade as divine. In all of these sites, they are also the site where the margins creates a space of plural worship, a sanctuary to violence, an exception to the ethnic and religious differences imposed by the debris of empire and the nationalist state. The physical spaces of these temples is conducive to this project of visibility, carrying with them remnants of moments in time, fragments of colonial destruction, elements of nationalist rebuilding, and the liminality of present forms of worship.

VII. Conclusion: The Body Out of Place/Space

“When the body remembers history it remembers event, speech, location. It is an autobiographical practice remembered, stored away, created and negotiated with. It recalls place... The body acts out of place, the remembered action of a moment that keeps playing again and again in the time of history.”¹⁷⁹

This work is ultimately about possessed bodies, and specifically the bodies of women who embody the divine, with all of its chaos and destruction. While the body itself is a site of analysis and a site of space, that body is both, as Sivamohan writes, ‘out of place’, warped into the chaos of a disrupted hierarchy, but still in physical space, the space of the marginal temple complex. These temples have been sites that reinforce Sinhalese kingship, locations where the Portuguese exerted control through destruction, and continuous places of negotiation during British rule. Stoler’s ‘imperial debris’ remains an active force in the current imaginings of the temples, as they are impacted by the destructive violence of colonial rule as well as the continued positioning as marginal, on the outer spheres from the centers of power. These temples were sites of exception long before the conflict, but continued as exceptions/exceptional in that they were places where the nation was enacted and contested, places where violence is more often protected against than perpetrated, and host to moments of plural worship amidst brutal tension. These temples escape the violence required by the motherland, and whilst embedded in a landscape of horrific terror, they become sites of grief and resistance to hegemonic formations.

¹⁷⁹ Sivamohan. *Thin Veils*. 2

The temple became and continues to be a necessary means of survival. Spencer et al. write, “In the stories we heard of men and women who not merely endured the long years of war, but used whatever means they could find to make those years more endurable for the people around them, we can yet see the glimmer of hope.”¹⁸⁰ The world is not escaped but instead embodied in a parallel manner through the confrontation with terror within a sphere of safety. In the temple, violence can be recalled and reenacted but also remembered, itself turning into a force of chaos that counters the forced order of the state. In this way, these spaces are sites of resistance, places of power, and they embody, both in space and through the physical bodies of women, that continued hope and potential for transformation.

¹⁸⁰ Spencer et. al. *Checkpoint, Temple, Church and Mosque*. 170

CHAPTER THREE

Ritual (as) Power: Theorizing Women's Resistance through Ritual Practice

I. Introduction

“What makes women’s activity so challenging to the idea of the nation is that in its own articulations of gender, the boundaries of the nation are redrawn and threatened”¹⁸¹

The power of divine possession as articulated through the bodies of women and within marginal, contested spaces extends beyond individual bodies and specific spaces. I argue that the strength and visibility of this ritual practice not only acts as a way to reclaim body and space within ritual moments, but also results in shifts in reality itself through the disruption of norms, hierarchies, and mythologized political contexts. Through divine possession, the bodies of women coalesce with liminal space and ritual power to make visible violence, claim space in conflicts over territory, and counter long-standing regulations upon bodies and spaces. Amidst a history of nation and empire consuming bodies and spaces, the ritual practice of divine possession creates resistance through the embodiment of those same consumed bodies and position within contested spaces. This resistance is enacted in the sphere of reality, the space of ritual, and against the cosmic logics of the state. Divine possession challenges the imposition of state violence and terror through a (re)consumption of bodies that are consumed or made invisible by hegemonies, a reterritorialization and creation of sanctuary within contested religious spaces, and a powerful remaking of the world through the exertion of agency by marginalized bodies, spaces, and practice.

This chapter will examine the context around developments in ritual practice and marginal forms of worship. By looking at divine possession as something that enacts power extending outwards from ritual space, it is possible to place it alongside women’s activism in the past, strengthening its potential and viewing the practice as an act of incredible defiance that results in a reimagining of the world. I will first examine how the ritual power of divine possession is created and disseminated outside of ritual space, looking specifically to marginal religious practices and Bruce Kapferer’s work on ritual

¹⁸¹ Sumathy Sivamohan. *Postcolonial Dis/content: South Asian Women and Feminist Theory*. PhD diss., Washington State University, 1999. 51

and reality. Next, I will turn to the historical prominence of religious space and ritual in enactments of resistance within Sri Lanka, as well as the specific ways that women have utilized those forces to dissent against state and empire. Women have employed creative forms of resistance that work outside of the typical political sphere, and divine possession, through the enactment of ritual power outside of ritual space, creates a similar form of resistance.

II. Theorizing Power in/between the Margins

Divine possession inhabits the ambiguous space of ritual, engaging with interconnected realities that cross through social and political formations. This practice mirrors the mythical elements of the state through an engagement with cosmic hierarchies and socio-political ones. The elements of power extending from beyond ritual create space for resistance to be enacted on various planes—divine possession has political ramifications, it involves the religiosity of communities, and also is placed into cosmic battles and a cosmic hierarchy, reflecting the mythical threads contained within religious nationalism and anti-colonial resistance. The power of divine possession stems not only from the marginal power of consumed bodies and contested spaces, but at the interaction of those elements—creating a form of visible resistance that articulates anguish and terror beyond the ritual itself.

Divine possession, like many forms of worship excluded by Sinhalese nationalism (which focuses on purifying Buddhist traditions and excluding impure elements such as demons, sorcery, or the supposed impure bodies of women), is powerful because of its status as a marginal practice. This marginality can be articulated through an analysis of the destructive, chaotic, and mutable power of sorcery worship in Sri Lanka, looking specifically to how practices considered ‘sorcery’ are used to facilitate resistance in varying spheres. Not only does sorcery engender practices of resistance, it inherently defies attempts by entities of power to hold a monopoly over knowledge or ritual practice.

Sorcery worship is a term that delineates between larger, state-sanctioned religious processes embedded within the nation and the ‘folk’ practices of many communities in Sri Lanka. Gombrich and Obeyesekere use the controversial terms ‘Protestant Buddhism’ and ‘Post-Protestant Buddhism’ to describe the shifts in Sri

Lankan Buddhism in the wake of colonial rule.¹⁸² 'Protestant Buddhism' alludes to how Buddhism began to take on many of the characteristics of western missionary practices. In the wake of colonial rule Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism focused on maintaining 'pure' practice and 'pure' elements, which excludes practices considered 'impure.' Bastin writes about this phenomenon, "Throughout the period of Buddhist revitalization purists have denounced the religion of their fellow Sinhalese as being corrupted and in need of major state-sponsored cleansing."¹⁸³ These denounced religious practices are described by Bastin as forms of sorcery worship, for they are practices that stray from the confines of 'pure' Buddhist practice. Sorcery describes ritual processes that deal with demonic elements as well as the divine, and as Bastin notes in his work on Munneswaram, sorcery can also involve enacting revenge.¹⁸⁴ Sorcery is thus less pure, less divine, more dangerous and unpredictable. Religious practices that involve sorcery toy with the cosmic hierarchy by bringing both divine powers and demonic ones into the human realm. Divine possession falls into this category of sorcery because it strays from the norms of 'pure' religious practice. Bastin places divine possession within a context of sorcery worship because his research on Munneswaram is focused on a physical location host to numerous sorcerous practices such as fire-walking. I would argue more firmly that divine possession sits within a sphere of sorcery worship in Sri Lanka, for even whilst interacting with the purity of the divine, this practice involves the supposedly impure bodies of women and marginal religious spaces. This marginality and disruption of ritual norms places divine possession within the sphere of sorcery worship in Sri Lanka.

Sorcery itself is a contentious word, embedded in a history of anthropological 'Othering.' However, as prominent scholars like Bruce Kapferer and Rohan Bastin have shown, the word sorcery is useful in discussing religious practices in Sri Lanka that have been marginalized by colonial hierarchies or nationalist revivalism. British colonizers co-opted prominent religious rituals such as rites of kinship in order to reinforce their own rule as well and simultaneously opened up religious practice through their disruption of the existing social hierarchy and removing elites from ultimate power. Sorcery worship

¹⁸² Richard Francis Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere. *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990.

¹⁸³ Bastin. *The Domain of Constant Excess*. 77

¹⁸⁴ Rohan Bastin. "The Regenerative Power of Kali Worship in Contemporary Sinhala Buddhism." *Social Analysis*, no. 40 (September 1996)

was forbidden in the Kandyan Kingdom, placing the power to hold religious rites solely in the hands of monks associated with the Kings. British rule destabilized this dynamic, allowing marginal forms of worship to flourish within marginal populations. Bastin remarks on this dynamic, “Where sorcery does rupture is in the control over knowledge, particularly the knowledge of social relations.”¹⁸⁵ Religious knowledge was taken out of the control of rulers and placed into communities, even as the British established their economic and political control. The British privileging of religious space also accorded sorcery worship a greater potency, for the religious spaces needed for sorcery practices were protected under law. Even as dominant discourses in post/colonial Sri Lanka seek to marginalize and exclude forms of sorcery worship, subversive religious practices have historically been used to resist colonial rule. In this way, “popular religion can thus assume a position of being a subordinate discourse, a resistant discourse to the formation of new hegemonic orders.”¹⁸⁶ The decentralization and potential for resistance inherent to sorcery worship is crucial to current practices of divine possession, for sorcery generates opposition to imposed hegemonies through its very existence.

Instead of relying upon sacred centers, unique relics, and specific texts or hierarchies of monks, sorcery places agency in the hands of those embedded in communities. Community members become practitioners; practitioners do not enter communities from the outside. Obeyesekere remarks on the deities involved in sorcery worship, “[t]he devas and yakkas are often placated in the precincts of the village; they may even inhabit, or protect the village... Thus the devas and yakkas are directly associated with the material interests of the masses.”¹⁸⁷ While the Buddha is anchored to Kandy through the tooth relic at Sri Dalada Maligawa, deities farther down in the pantheon are movable and accessible to folks who are not in positions of control over the structures of kingship rituals.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Rohan Bastin. "Sorcerous Technologies and Religious Innovation in Sri Lanka." *Social Analysis* 46, no. 3 (2002). 169

¹⁸⁶ Rohan Bastin. *The Domain of Constant Excess: Plural Worship at the Munnesvaram Temples in Sri Lanka*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2002. 82

¹⁸⁷ Gananath Obeyesekere. "Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon." In *The Two Wheels of the Dhamma*, ed. Bardwell Smith. Chambersburg, PA: American Academy of Religion, 1972. 49

¹⁸⁸ This dynamic is exemplified in Obeyesekere's quantitative work on deity popularity at the devales in Kandy, where Kataragama, the most mundane of the warrant gods, is by far the most popular while others like Natha descend towards enlightenment as well as oblivion.

Sorcery worship is radical not only because of its openness and accessibility (at least for male practitioners), but because it focuses on human conditions and matters of the mundane world. Nowadays atop most buses in Sri Lanka, written into the side of buildings and hanging from banners outside homes, is one ubiquitous phrase: “*Buddhu saranayi, dewi pihitayi* (May you take refuge in the Buddha, and may the Gods protect you).” This suggests that while the Buddha may be a refuge, he doesn’t have a physical reach into this world, he cannot offer protection, while the gods can. The more mundane, demonic, or impure these deities are, the more applicable they are to the everyday lives of individuals. This positioning in the hierarchy renders them less divine, as seen with Kali, Kataragama, Devol Deviyo, Gambara Deviyo, and Suniyam. The focus on human plight and struggle reinforces both the accessibility of sorcery practices and the ability of sorcery to remake THIS world, not escape it.

The power of sorcery to reconstitute the world is best seen in the well-told tale of the first exorcism ceremony ever conducted, that of Queen Manikpala and the famed sorcerer Prince Odissa. In this story, Manikpala’s husband, Mahasammata, leaves her side to tend to matters elsewhere in his kingdom. In his absence, she is possessed by a demon, and it takes the ritual power of Prince Odissa to rid her body of the demonic entity.¹⁸⁹ Manikpala is possessed upon the absence of her husband, the leader of the kingdom. It is because of her husband’s absence that she is susceptible to demonic forces, and thus she falls victim not only to demonic forces, but also to neglect by the state in the form of her ruler-husband. When exorcisms are practiced in modern Sri Lanka, they often involve a complex re-enactment of the exorcism of Manikpala. This story is retold through the bodies of possessed in the present, reenacted in order to restore the natural hierarchy of the world and provide protection. Sorcery thus steps in when the state does not to right certain wrongs and re-balance the world.

What is so powerful about these ritual processes is the focus on human potential in the face of terrible danger. It takes a human sorcerer to right the cosmic hierarchy and return the demon to its demonic realm. This action is never limited to the ritual space or simply a metaphor, but generates and provides for a certain community need. The ritual

¹⁸⁹ Bruce Kapferer. "Sorcery, Modernity and the Constitutive Imaginary: Hybridising Continuities." *Social Analysis* 46, no. 3 (2002).

process of the exorcism or other sorcerous practices extends outward, it returns the hierarchy to its previous order within the ritual through the exorcism of the demon and provides protection accorded to community members (even as that protection comes from ritual rather than the state). Kapferer notes, “sorcery fetishizes human agency, often one which it magically enhances, as the key mediating factor affecting the course or direction of human life-chances.”¹⁹⁰ Sorcery centers the power of human beings, and bestows those individuals with a power that transcends the human realm. Within the ritual space of sorcery, humans have the power to confront demons, to embody gods. They have the power to stand in the stead of failed state support. Even as they revert the cosmic hierarchy, they engage in a subversion of the worldly one. Sorcery allows a reconstitution of the world, and as this chapter will go on to articulate, the ritual practice of divine possession holds not only these characteristics of sorcery but also the power to reinvent norms and stand not in the place of the state, but against it.

Bruce Kapferer’s theory on virtuality and ritual practice is immensely helpful in looking to how divine possession extends power outside of certain spaces and individual bodies. Kapferer writes, “The virtual of ritual is a thoroughgoing reality of its own, neither a simulacrum of realities external to ritual nor an alternative reality. It bears a connection to ordinary, lived realities, *as depth to surface*.”¹⁹¹ Virtuality alludes to how ritual practice simultaneously creates a space separate from reality, where the rules of reality are shifted or paused, as well as maintains a connection of power to reality, allowing ritual to enact changes into the reality outside ritual. The virtuality of ritual is connected to reality, but with a different set of rules. Within the virtuality of ritual, gender norms can be crossed, power can be transacted, hegemony can be countered. However, it is not solely a pause in the real of reality or a complete separation, but still deeply tied to reality outside of the sphere of ritual. Kapferer describes these parallel yet interconnected reality/virtualities when he states, “This chaotic dimension (or chaosmos) of ordinary lived processes constitutes the reality of actuality. The virtual reality of ritual, in contrast, is a slowing down of the tempo of everyday life and a holding in abeyance or

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 105

¹⁹¹ Bruce Kapferer. “Beyond Ritual as Performance: Toward Ritual as Dynamics and Virtuality.” *Paragana*, 2, no. 19 (2010): 232

suspension of some of the vital qualities of lived reality.”¹⁹² Ritual thus suspends or lengthens reality itself, opening space for disruption, (re)formation, and contestation. The suspension that Kapferer references is a suspension of terror, of gendered norms regulating women’s access to ritual space, or of looming state control. Ritual allows for these elements to be countered and pushed, and ritual space creates a situation where this slowing down and alleviation can happen.

What is perhaps most important about Kapferer’s work is that the power of virtuality is not limited to the time and space of the ritual itself. Kapferer writes, “The approach to virtuality that I develop accentuates the internal dynamics of rite as the potency of the capacity of ritual to alter, change, or transform the existential circumstances of persons in nonritual realities.”¹⁹³ The power of ritual space to disrupt certain hierarchies extends out of the bounds of ritual space to impact participants and community members in their spheres outside of solely ritual. Ritual can change things within reality, and thus ritual action carries forth power. Kapferer states, “Life crisis rites of birth, initiation, and death in such a situation are not merely representative of changes, they affect them.”¹⁹⁴ The ritual processes surrounding rites of passage aren’t just symbolic, they instead create certain social changes. A pertinent example of this effect is the overtaking of kingship rituals in Kandy by the British empire. This exertion of British power was not only symbolic, but resulted in the decrease in kingly worship, the decline of Natha as a prominent deity, and the opening up of sorcery worship to communities across social strata. This historical moment resulted in the transformation of society, and was both reflected in ritual space and enacted outwards from ritual.

Kapferer’s work focuses on seeing ritual as more than symbolic, looking to process as movement and liminality itself a site of investigation. The points in/between the moments of ritual process are filled with agency and potential. Kapferer references Victor Turner’s focus on ‘betwixt and between,’¹⁹⁵ a phrase that has enormous applicability for looking to ritual practice in Sri Lanka, divine possession especially. The idea of virtuality is built off of this concept of the ‘betwixt and between,’ but it is not

¹⁹² Ibid., 244

¹⁹³ Ibid., 243

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 239

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 234

only the dynamics of ritual itself that are ‘betwixt and between.’ So many aspects of divine possession are liminal formations: the post/colonial state, the physical space of marginal temples, the bodies of those who embody the divine, and the expressions of grief and violence when the state acts to conceal terror. The bodies of those possessed are ‘betwixt and between,’ for they involve bodies from this realm and deities from another world. The spaces where possession occurs are also in this in/between, situated at the margins of varying spheres of political and religious control. This virtuality enables power to extend outwards from the ‘betwixt and between’ of ritual, a projection like ‘depth to surface,’ where the formations of state, nation, and empire can be shifted and disrupted through divine possession.

Divine possession is situated within a deep tradition of resistant sorcery practices and holds power through virtuality, both within and outside of ritual space. Kapferer writes, “In myth and ritual the powerful metaphors and symbolism of the state, a state in mythic time, are engaged to return to a condition of healthy wholeness, the fragmented body attacked by the demons.”¹⁹⁶ As Kapferer notes, the formation of the state does not exist solely within the political sphere, but is formed in part through ritual practices. This formation is seen through kingship rites that assert the dominance of the empire or even the restoration of Manikpala’s being as signifying a restoration of the nation. Historically, formations of nationalism and anti-colonial resistance have also utilized marginal religious space and practice to engender resistance. The existence of the state is deeply tied to cosmic hierarchies and mythologies, and thus the power of the state occurs within the virtuality of ritual as well as the reality of non-ritual space. The state and the ideologies perpetrated by it are carried forth into these varying levels of reality and virtuality, and thus resistance must counter those ideologies upon such levels.

Sorcery usurps power from the state because of its marginal positioning within religious practices. Sorcery is inherently destabilizing, for it involves a disruption of set hierarchies and hegemonies. While anti-colonial resistance utilized this disruption to counter colonial rule, the formation of the nationalist state imposed a continuation of regulation—which is then countered by the destabilizing potential of sorcery worship.

¹⁹⁶ Bruce Kapferer. *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia*. Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998. 100

Within this context of sorcery worship, practices like divine possession can rupture the imaginary of the state in the sphere of politics, reality, virtuality, and cosmic hierarchy.

This capacity for resistance and destabilization of hierarchy on various planes allows divine possession to counter the narratives of state and empire upon multiple battlegrounds. The practice of divine possession implicates the reality of the world in all of its violence, the political intricacies that rely upon dominating bodies and spaces, and the layers of cosmic reality, hierarchy, and mythology. Divine possession resists the regulation of women's bodies, both within the ritual space and outside it. Divine possession also claims space in a context where space is violently fought over, and these spaces hold not only physical political power but also mythic significance. By working within these varying planes and spheres, divine possession disrupts hierarchy and creates space for a reshaping of the world, both in ritual and reality.

III. Colonial Rule and the Resistance of Revivalism

Historically, ritual and religious space in Sri Lanka have been used to engender resistance against colonial rule. As articulated in the *Mahāvamsa*, Sri Lanka is seen as a sacred repository of Buddhism. The arrival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka was born out of Vijaya's rebellion against his family as well as Sinhabahu's resistance to his father's rules. The shift from kingship to sorcery rituals only continued this history of religiously-grounded resistance, and as rites like the Suniyama rose to prominence, ritual maintained a connection with the disruption of hierarchies. Religious revivalism, the most prominent expression of anti-colonial nationalism, is rooted both in resistance to colonial rule and conceptions of a 'pure' Buddhism. This context of religious resistance is important to note, for it provides precedent for forms of resistance like divine possession. This section will trace moments of religious resistance leading up to Sri Lanka's independence from Britain, looking to how religious practice resists the hegemony of colonialism both within ritual moments and extending outside of them.

Moments of resistance, typically male resistance against overly dominating powers, are scattered throughout the *Mahāvamsa* and act to exclude narratives of women's resistance. Sinhabahu is known for disobeying his lion father and taking his mother and sister with him out of the cave, resulting in their speedy marriages while he

goes on to rule a kingdom.¹⁹⁷ Vijaya is initially exiled to Sri Lanka because of his rebellious nature, which results in him being granted a divine warrant to bring Buddhism to Sri Lanka and claiming the land through the body of Kuvanna.¹⁹⁸ These moments of resistance are always articulated, even in their violence, as necessary to the continuance of lineage or the formation of a Sinhalese state. Women are continuously sacrificed in these acts of resistance, yet these masculinized moments of rebellion are the ones immortalized in Rajapaksa's words and the cartographies of the nation. This is not to say that women's resistance did not exist in pre-colonial Sri Lanka or even within the pages of the *Mahāvamsa*, for despite a lack of resources I can engage with from this time period it is without a doubt that women's resistance and challenges to the dominant norms have continued throughout time. However, it is important to note that the moments of resistance elevated by the nation are ones that not only do not see women as actors, but where women are sacrificed.

Built upon this history of (male) resistance, sorcery worship rose to prominence as a response to British colonial rule. As mentioned previously, the opening up of religious space rendered sorcery accessible and powerful in the face of colonial rule. The emphasis on subverting hierarchies through sorcery worship is a key facet of its formations of resistance. The rigid social orders imposed by the British could thus be challenged in ritual space. Kapferer notes that before the British ended kingship, sorcery was punishable by death and prominent rituals like the Suniyama were only accessible to wealthy high-status families in pre-colonial Sri Lanka.¹⁹⁹ Sorcery allowed religious expression free from colonial powers, especially as the British overtook many existing ceremonial processes such as kingship rituals to establish their own dominance. Kapferer writes about the annual rites at Sri Dalada Maligawa, "The festival was continued with the critical difference that it celebrated the British ascendancy over the Sinhalese."²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Mahānāma. *The Mahāvamsa: Or, The Great Chronicle of Ceylon*. Edited by Wilhelm Geiger and Mabel Haynes Bode. London: Luzac &, 1964. 6.20. When Sinhabahu leaves the safety of the cave, taking his mother and sister with him without so much as asking them, the mother is quickly married to her cousin, a neighboring commander, and Sinhabahu marries his sister Sihasivali, carrying on their powerful lineage.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 7.30. When Vijaya is exiled to Lanka, he gains power over the island through the yakkhini Kuvanna.

¹⁹⁹ Kapferer, Bruce. "Sorcery and the Shapes of Globalization, Disjunctions and Continuities: The Case of Sri Lanka." In *Globalization, the State, and Violence*. AltaMira Press, 2004. 20

²⁰⁰ Kapferer. "Beyond Ritual as Performance."

While expressions of religiosity were thus coopted by British hegemony, sorcery worship maintained a resistant quality because of the protections afforded to worship under British law and its dissociation from official practices. The sorcerous elements of worship that steadily grew under colonial rule did not go unnoticed by the British. For instance, Edward Upham remarked about demonic worship, “these demons are invested with the faculty of surpassing the powers of nature, is manifested from the actions ascribed to them; such as looking through the regions of the different elements, using the air as a medium of passing from region to region, and, in fact, exercising the power of the elements.”²⁰¹ Upham saw fit to include the power of demons in his exposition on Buddhism in Sri Lanka, illustrating the prevalence of practices involving demons in ritual. Demonic forces and sorcery worship were recognized (even by the British) as powerful, as something much more difficult for the empire to take control over. This potentiality continues to yield practices of resistance and rebellion through divine possession in the present.

Despite the positioning of marginal practices in resistance to colonial rule, religious revivalism would go on to exclude such practices from the religious spheres of the new nation. As Jayawardena notes, religious revivalism has been a catalyst of nationalist movements that overturn colonial regimes across South Asia.²⁰² In Sri Lanka, the coalescing Sinhalese and Tamil nationalisms at first worked in tandem to resist colonial rule, fighting side-by-side for religious sovereignty, language recognition, and the right to rule.²⁰³ Both Hindu and Buddhist revivalists focused on the right to have Tamil and Sinhala recognized as national languages. Despite the initial confluence of these revivalisms, Solomon Bandaranaike’s Sinhala-Only bill in 1956 and the extreme nationalism of his supporters splintered this anti-colonial coalition. Bandaranaike, backed

²⁰¹ Edward Upham. *The History and Doctrine of Buddhism, Popularly Illustrated: With Notices of the Kappooism, or Demon Worship, and of the Bali, or Planetary Incantations, of Ceylon*. London: R. Ackermann, 1829. 126

²⁰² Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi De. Alwis. *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia*. London: Zed Books, 1996. ix

²⁰³ One example of such a connection between Tamil and Sinhalese revivalism is noted in the connection between the Sinhalese goddess Pattini and the Tamil goddess Kannaki. Both goddesses were married to unfaithful husbands, and both remained faithful to their respective spouses. After their husbands were executed wrongfully, Pattini/Kannaki burned Madurai to the ground in a righteous fury (See McGilvray, “Sex, Repression, and Sanscritization”). There are slight differences in their origin stories, but the undeniable connection between their lives supports Obeyesekere’s claim that Pattini came to Sri Lanka via Kerala Buddhists, hinting to the interconnections in the histories of Hindu and Buddhist Sri Lankans.

by Sinhalese nationalists and Buddhist monks, declared Sinhala the only national language of Sri Lanka, despite the fact that it was the fight for both Sinhala and Tamil to be declared national languages that united these constituencies against colonial rule.

This Sinhala-Only bill and the Sinhalese nationalism around it are not solely within the political sphere, but inscribed into pervasive religious narratives about the survival of Sinhalese Buddhism. Anagarika Dharmapala, the famed nationalist, stated in his call to action,

“We have to ransack the literature of the science of patriotism to learn to act as patriots should for the preservation of our nation, our literature, our land, and our most glorious religion, at whose source our fore-fathers drank deep for nearly seventy generations, which had preserved their vitality to fight against the foes since the time of our heroic and patriotic king, the righteous Dutthagamani... [who] reinvigorated and revitalized the nation.”²⁰⁴

Dharmapala called for everyday individuals to stand up to colonial rule and embody patriotic nationalist ideals through this association with Dutugemunu—a connection that implicates Dutugemunu as this ideal Buddhist hero through his triumph over the Tamil King Elara. Dharmapala’s association between Dutugemunu’s victory and the existence of Buddhism and the Sinhalese nation links these nationalist expressions to religious revivalism. The Sinhalese revivalist movement is so embedded within political discourse that it results in the parallel and interconnected survival of Buddhism and the nation.

This growth of Sinhalese nationalism resulted in the purification of ‘real’ Buddhism, creating social stratification as well as violence. The aspects of worship that were associated with lower strata of society were marked as impure, rendering upper-middle class Buddhism the only ‘true’ Buddhism. Bastin remarks about the socioeconomic stratification of religious practice, “the popular religion of deity and planetary worship, so strongly disparaged as syncretic in Buddhist revitalization, should be the religious practice most popular with the poor and dispossessed.”²⁰⁵ The hegemonic order produced by Buddhist revitalization and imbued within the nation serves to stratify and regulate society. Even though sorcery worship was powerful through its accessibility

²⁰⁴ Anagarika Dharmapala. *Return to Righteousness, a Collection of Speeches, Essays, and Letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala*. Edited by Ananda W. P. Guruge. Colombo: Anagarika Dharmapala Birth Centenary Committee, 1965. 501

²⁰⁵ Bastin. *The Domain of Constant Excess*. 82

and was rendered a force of resistance against colonial rule, it was then demonized by the same Sinhalese nationalism that originally also stood in anti-colonial resistance. This resulted in a purification of Buddhism, with the impetus on Sinhalese nationalism and 'pure' Buddhism allowing violent exceptions such as the brutal repression of the JVP insurrections in the name of the 'pure' Sinhalese nation.

In many ways, this focus on 'pure' religious practice replicated the regulatory ideologies of missionary colonials. While nationalism, state violence, and religiously-motivated violent 'purification' differ from colonial ideologies, they still enact similar systems that result in a further marginalization and stratification of other religious practices outside the bounds of 'pure' practice.²⁰⁶ Gombrich and Obeyesekere were not the only ones to remark upon the 'Protestant' qualities of revivalist Buddhism, and Kapferer writes, "commentators on the Buddhist revitalization refer to the 'protestantism,' 'enthusiastic pietism,' and 'Victorian moralism' of the participants in the Buddhist revival."²⁰⁷ Even as Sinhalese nationalism sought to counter the regulatory ideologies of colonial rule, in many senses religious revivalism and purification resulted in a continuation of similar forms of regulation, even as revivalism spurred anti-colonial resistance.²⁰⁸ These revivalists opposed British hegemony, but were committed to the class formations of post/colonial society and utilized religious 'purification' to concretize class stratifications and render those who practice sorcery once again on the margins of the state.

The very rhetoric of the state is deeply inscribed with the cosmic mythologies of Sinhalese Buddhism and the regulatory ideologies inherent both to religious revivalism and colonial rule. Kapferer writes, "Nationalist political processes brought such cosmic logic into the political arena, giving what is already implicated in postcolonial

²⁰⁶ The purification and religious revivalism resulted in the marginalization of both sorcery worship as well as a closure of the cosmic pantheon and ritual space. Kali was initially seen as too gruesome, and also too female, to occupy a space in the Sinhalese Buddhist practice (see Bastin, "The Regenerative Power of Kali Worship"). This highlights the demarcation between nationalist-sanctioned religious practice and sorcery worship or marginal practices.

²⁰⁷ Bruce Kapferer. *A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983. 22

²⁰⁸ These regulatory ideologies also played out onto ritual space, for not only did the state campaign for Sinhala-Only, the state also elevated Buddhist spaces of worship such as the government developments at Kataragama, the evocation of agricultural and irrigation mastery of the ancient Sinhalese Kingdoms, and the visible lines of protection at Buddhist sites of worship such as the Buddhist temple at Batticaloa.

nationalism—nationalism as a form of national healing and reformation—great direction and poignancy.”²⁰⁹ Nationalism, imbued with threads of the *Mahāvamsa* and positioned as the protector of sacred Buddhism, provides the state with justification for violence and absolute control. This cosmic rhetoric lends a sense of urgency to the success of the state, and bills like Sinhala-Only are portrayed as necessary to the survival of the Sinhalese state.

The cosmic and mythic impetus for the nation propels exclusion and exceptions, condoning enormous violence and suppression in the name of the nation. These political processes are built upon exclusion and rely on marking marginalized groups as ‘invaders’ who destroy the sacred sanctity of the nation. Jayawardena remarks about ethnic minorities in Sri Lanka, “they were accused of destroying ancient traditions and the old idyllic way of life and disrupting the political hegemony of a ‘united’ polity; most of all, they represented the threat of rape and thereby the possible ‘pollution’ of the ‘daughters of the soil’.”²¹⁰ This framework not only allows the nation to exclude, but marks that exclusion as necessary for survival. The nation is thus dependent on limiting access, limiting protection, limiting who is considered within the bounds of nationhood. There is little space for resistance within this paradigm, for anyone who stands against state terror or state exclusion can be marked as against the existence of the nation and its citizens.

While I have focused on the role of Buddhist revivalism and its connections with the state, Hindu revivalism was also a force that marginalized forms of worship outside of pure ritual conceptions. Because of the forceful secularity of the Tigers, this revivalism was not carried out in the rhetoric of the LTTE in the same way that the state transmitted and built up religio-nationalist discourses. However, these parallel revivals, even as they clashed, worked to marginalize resistant practices. Bastin remarks that “Both Buddhists and Hindus elicited a distinction between a revitalized *pure* religion and everyday, or popular religion.”²¹¹ These religious revivalisms did not happen as identical formations in search of a singular pure practice, but they did build off of each other and feed into social stratifications and hierarchies perpetrated by colonial ideologies. These

²⁰⁹ Bruce Kapferer. "Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Culture of the State." *Suomen Antropologi* 27, no. 2 (2002): 7

²¹⁰ Jayawardena and Alwis. *Embodied Violence*. x

²¹¹ Rohan Bastin. "The Authentic Inner Life: Complicity and Resistance in the Tamil Hindu Revival". In *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited*, ed by Michael Roberts. Colombo: Marga Institute, 1997. 396

religious revivalisms, even as they were born out of anti-colonial discontent, limited the capacity of ‘pure’ religious spaces to enact resistance against formations of statehood and empire through the suppression of marginalized sorcery worship practices and liminal deities. Even as these movements sought to counter colonial rule, they engaged in a perpetration of continued threads of regulation. However, by re-marginalizing deities like Kali, worshippers like the women who practice divine possession, and spaces like Kataragama or Batticaloa, this process re-empowered these liminal religious practices by marking them as entities the state could not absorb.

IV. The Gendered Confines of Nationalist Politics

As religious revivalism took hold within the politics of the nation, the gendering of political space began to carry with it the same regulatory ideologies that limited women under colonial rule. The cosmic logic of leadership and its male-centric power in the *Mahāvamsa* ascribed a masculinized Sinhalese identity to political space. Political space holds limited access for women, and then within that space women’s issues have continuously been pushed to the side in the face of an escalating conflict where, despite the gendering of violence, politicians continued to ignore the disparate impacts on women. When women are actually able to enter the nationalist and masculinized sphere of politics, typically as the wives or sisters of politicians, they are then subjected to gendered limitations that prevent them from centering the concerns of women constituents. Because political space excludes women through layered systems of regulation, women’s resistance must take place outside of political formations. Divine possession is not automatically considered political, and the women who embody the divine do not step into spaces of political power as the men of the Mosque Federation in Batticaloa district did during the war.²¹² However, just because this practice does not explicitly involve political space or explicit political motives does not make it apolitical, but instead reveals a powerful articulation of resistance to state power working outside of state-sanctioned systems.

Not only are women excluded from the spaces and spheres of politics and prominent religious practice, but gender is also a hotly contested subject, even in the

²¹² Spencer et. al. *Checkpoint, Temple, Church and Mosque*.

wake of the conflict. In recent years, feminist activists have pushed for an expansion of rights for women. Yet after Sri Lanka signed on to CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1981), no provisions were added in the Sri Lankan legislature regarding violence against women.²¹³ In February 2017, women's activists from all across Sri Lanka filed a statement to the CEDAW committee highlighting various parts of legislation in Sri Lanka that deny women necessary rights or fail to properly address the rights of women, including land ownership laws, marriage-age in Muslim Personal Law and Thesawalamai, lack of labor protections for women, and 'head of household' policies.²¹⁴ When discussing provisions regarding the prevention of violence against women, it is common knowledge that male politicians claim the government is intruding too far into personal matters. Not only is there a lacuna in terms of advocating for gender-related reforms, but due to the exclusionary nature of the rhetoric of the nation, it is difficult to build coalitions between women from various spheres of society. Muttettuwagama states,

“Women from minority communities are often reluctant to join the mainstream women's movement in agitating for changes because they feel that the majority would not understand their fears of being members of a minority. At the same time, women are marginalized within minority rights groups due to these groups' insistence on the adherence to traditional cultural practices regardless of their impact on the women of their community.”²¹⁵

Women are both prevented from entering the sphere of national or large-scale politics and from advocating for women's rights within their own communities. Because of the clear and violent distinctions made by the state between Sinhalese and Tamil women, with Rajapaksa referencing the brave Sinhalese mothers who support the state and the Tamil women victims of separatist violence, it becomes even more difficult to build coalitions between women. The continuous mythic elements of conflict that disregard gender in favor of exploiting ethnic difference and fights for abstract territories make it

²¹³ Radhika Coomaraswamy. "Violence, Armed Conflict and the Community." In *Women in post-independence Sri Lanka*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002.

²¹⁴ "Sri Lanka: Collective Oral Statement to CEDAW Committee." Women & Media Collective. February 21, 2017.

²¹⁵ Ramini Muttettuwagama. "'But I Am Both' Sri Lankan Women under Parallel Legal Systems." *Lines Magazine*, 2001, 187

nearly impossible for women to call attention to the forceful gendering of violence, especially the violence enacted by the state.

The difficulty of coalition building and ensuring women's activism in political spaces becomes even more complicated when looking to the complicity of the law itself. Not only are there barriers to discussing gender-specific legislature such as CEDAW or the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (PDVA), the law itself enables and facilitates state exceptionalism and state terror. Vasuki Nesiah remarks, "Analysis of Lankan legal history suggests that violence and militarism articulate *through* law, rather than *against* law."²¹⁶ Given that the British utilized law to restrict women's bodies and ritual space, and seeing as these threads of regulation continue through religious revivalism embedded in the formation of the state, the law provides little recourse for women. The lack of agency accorded to women in the political or legal sphere speaks to the need for creative forms of resistance. This forces activists, academics, and policy-makers to consider innovative religious practices as a form of resistance and an articulation of dissent against established power and hierarchy.

The small number of women in politics in Sri Lanka speaks to a problem larger than lack of proportional representation, for there are limitations as to the sphere of agency possible in political space. The most prominent woman of the state, Vihara Maha Devi, who has already been established as an emblem of nationhood and good motherhood, is constantly resurrected through the processes of the state.²¹⁷ Following in Devi's footsteps are Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who came to power after her husband, Solomon, and Hema Premadasa. While Bandaranaike was the first woman in the world elected Prime Minister, she also continued fiercely nationalist politics. Hema Premadasa's rise to political authority was viewed differently than Bandaranaike's—for while they both participated in the political sphere and held a great deal of influence, Premadasa was considered low-class and unseemly. During the funeral of Premadasa's husband, who was killed by a suicide bomber, she was seen as violating a gendered code

²¹⁶ Vasuki Nesiah. "Uncomfortable Alliances: Women, Peace, and Security in Sri Lanka." In *South Asian Feminisms*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.146

²¹⁷ Her role as a military advisor is possible because of her fervency as a patriot, ensuring that her femininity is not obscured by militancy. More importantly, Devi disappears from the Mahāvamsa as soon as her role as mother and military advisor comes to a close (See Bartholomeusz, "Women, War and Peace in Sri Lanka"). Devi's power in political space is seen as the result of a certain circumstance, not an overall acceptance of women in military politics.

of conduct for expressing grief and making a speech regarding the continuance of her husband's political priorities. Alwis writes, "Mrs. Premadasa was breaking with 'tradition' in many ways: not only does Buddhist etiquette forbid women to speak at funerals; in addition, she dared to 'talk politics'." ²¹⁸ At the end of the day, it didn't matter how much power Hema had, it didn't matter that she actively bolstered her husband's political work through her mobilization of nationalist women or her political prowess, she was scorned for vocalizing emotion and claiming political agency at her husband's funeral.

Similar to Devi, Premadasa and Bandaranaike are portrayed as continuing certain roles as wife and mother, rather than as woman or person. This is not to say that women cannot gain power or agency in political space, because Bandaranaike and Premadasa mobilized women (albeit for nationalist purposes) and galvanized the nation. However, political space still relies upon the framework of the nation and the suppression of femininity and grief. To reference Sivamohan's quote from the epigraph of this chapter, women's resistance is at odds with the formation of the state, and resistance will have to take forms outside of what is typically considered political space. Divine possession fills this need by standing outside of the bounds of political space yet enacting deeply political resistance.

V. Women's Resistance through Conceptions of Feminine Duty and Religiosity

Despite the limitations posed by political space, I posit that women have engaged with the political through innovative practices of resistance throughout Sri Lanka's history, utilizing both conceptions of femininity and religious space to create this resistance. Even when articulating political motives, women have used ritual chants, the space of prominent religious temples, and proclamations to deities to carry forth their activism. Women's mobilization in Sri Lanka is not always explicitly political, but utilizes the subtle power of ritual space and ritual process. Within this context, divine possession can be seen as a similar form of resistance, one that articulates dissent outside of the boundaries of ritual space and the confines of political channels.

²¹⁸ Malathi de Alwis. "Gender, Politics and the 'Respectable Lady'." In *Unmaking the nation: the politics of identity & history in modern Sri Lanka*. New York: South Focus Press, 2009.137

Throughout anti-colonial resistance, women were key agents articulating dissent against empire. Neloufer de Mel notes that women created forms of resistance to British empire through the Suriya Mal movement, where women mirrored the British campaign to sell flowers raising funds for war efforts by selling flowers and using the money to educate young lower-class women.²¹⁹ These women countered the empire's attempts to utilize their colony to fund other imperial processes and put their profits towards educating women excluded from the colonial system of education so rooted in 'respectability' and class divisions. However, as with many anti-colonial nationalist movements, women's participation and gendered issues were pushed to the side in the wake of independence. The future formation of the nation would go on to continue to exclude the very women Suriya Mal sought to support. Jayawardena notes that socialist groups and anti-colonial organizing in South Asia have continuously failed to support women's movements.²²⁰ This failure prevents anti-colonial movements from truly countering imperium, for without considering the continued gendered regulations of the nation, the newly independent state replicates colonial formations.

After independence from colonial rule, women have continued to resist the violence carried forth by the state through the formation of Mother's Fronts in the South, North, and East. Despite the simultaneous birth of the Mother's movements, these groups failed to build inter-ethnic coalitions and instead reinforced the ethnic divisions exploited for conflict. These movements were also all eventually coopted by the state or the LTTE to suit nationalist or separatist purposes. The Mother's Fronts articulate instances where women utilized norms of motherhood, the visibility of grief, and their supposed duty as mothers to draw attention to violence. Their tactics were so unexpected and forceful that the state was deeply unsettled, and in some instances conceded to these women. These formations of resistance speak to how creative practices can combat state violence through the utilization of marginal bodies and marginal spaces.

The Southern Mother's Front formed in July of 1990 as a response to the state's repression of the JVP uprising. Over 25,000 women joined together to protest outside of

²¹⁹ Neloufer De Mel. *Women & the Nation's Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Sri Lanka*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001. 6

²²⁰ Kumari Jayawardena and Govind Kelkar. "The Left and Feminism." *Economic and Political Weekly* 24, no. 38 (September 1989): 2123

administrative offices and at religious shrines and temples, calling for the state to return their missing sons, husbands, and brothers. These women demanded “a climate where we can raise our sons to manhood, have our husbands with us and lead normal women’s lives.”²²¹ They utilized the very narrative of the nation, claiming that their sacred duty as wives and mothers was being disrupted by the state itself. By utilizing these themes of motherhood, they placed the disappearance of their family members as a threat to the existence of the nation. Their use of tears, curses, and religious space in a very male-dominated political environment mirrors the use of grief, expression of religiosity, and centering of women’s bodies also present in divine possession. While not exactly divine possession, the mobilization of the Mother’s Fronts is an example of resistance to frameworks of statehood using the very elements the state attempts to suppress: the bodies of women and marginal spaces that defy hegemony. This use of such tropes and spaces was a way to ensure legitimacy—these women could not be ignored, nor could they be intimidated or silenced easily. These protest tactics, even as they utilized norms of motherhood and femininity, gave power and agency to women involved. In a time when many activists who spoke visibly about state terror were killed by the military, these women were able to be visible and also unquestionable in their commitment to the family and thus the nation.²²²

Despite these innovative and powerful tactics, the focus on narratives of motherhood created what Alwis called a ‘contingent usefulness.’ The state retaliated by projecting the idea that women were bad mothers, and the state was forced to step in to rehabilitate their sons. These tactics of protest also engage in a projection of Sinhalese nationalism, for these women utilized the rhetoric of the nation by placing their duty as mothers and wives alongside the continuation of the Sinhalese nation. The Mother’s Fronts eventually were coopted by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the main opposition party with almost entirely male leadership. The Southern Mother’s Front, even with its radical tactics and potential, was consumed in a fight to unseat the current political power. In addition to this association with the Sinhalese nation, the nationalist

²²¹ Island, 9 February 1991 in "Motherhood as a Space of Protest: Women's Political Participation in Contemporary Sri Lanka*." *Women in Peace Politics*: 185

²²² Hyndman, Jennifer and Malathi de Alwis. “Bodies, Shrines, and Roads: violence, (im)mobility and displacement in Sri Lanka”. *Gender, Place & Culture* 11, no 4 (2007): 542

undertones to this movement prevented coalition building between this Mother's Front and other Mother's Fronts in other parts of the island. The JVP insurrections occurred throughout the conflict, and while they are borne from different issues and different constituencies, the state still was embarking on a reign of terror against those Othered and placed outside the bounds of the Sinhalese nation as well as those who protested from within the nation.

The Northern Mother's Front, focused in Jaffna, balanced both calling upon maternal obligations as well as maintaining criticality against militant organizations. The Front began in 1984 when young boys started to go missing. One of the founders of the Front, Sarvan Kailasapathy, recounted that the group formed after the army asked mothers to bring their children to check identity cards, grabbed almost 400 boys, and drove them away. Sarvan and a few other women, mostly widows, teachers, or women with progressive husbands, began to take action. She states, "We didn't have a partisan agenda. We were an autonomous group, but we knew that some of the militant women cadres may attempt to join the march. So we took care that no one else hijacked our cause."²²³ These women stormed the government building and demanded that their sons be returned. Two evenings later, all of the boys except a few were brought home.²²⁴ In the wake of their success, Sarvan recounts traveling to villages in the area guiding other women in creating similar acts of resistance to the state. These women were known not only for standing against the state, but for pushing back on militant groups who would encourage women to bear children to carry on the Tamil nation.²²⁵

This radical organizing in all of its visibility was a threat to the formation of the LTTE, and as the Tigers began to massacre other separatist groups in a fight for hegemony over the liberation movement, the Mother's Front was forcibly stopped. Sarvan recounts a meeting that the local LTTE leader demanded of her and her fellow organizers. He said to them "you are mothers, you should be bandaging our injured, you

²²³ Kumudini Samuel, ed. *Women Transforming Peace Activism in a Fierce New World: South and Southeast Asia*. Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), March 2012.101

²²⁴ "Jaffna Missing Person's Parents Protest in Colombo." TamilNet. December 29, 2003.

²²⁵ DAWN publication 108 "There was a notice on the walls of Jaffna at the time depicting a beautiful Tamil woman with all the traditional ethnic markers of pottu, long hair, flowers and saree saying, 'I don't agree with (The President's) sterilization programmes', or something to that effect. (Tamil mothers should have more Tamil babies sort of message)". (108, DAWN Publication). Women activists later found out this mural came from the Tigers.

should be collecting supplies for us, you should be writing about the wonderful sacrifices your children are making to the cause, that's how great mothers should be, not like you people. You are not doing any of this. So we have decided that we are taking over Mother's Front."²²⁶

Despite a successful mobilization of motherhood and a criticism of terror stemming both from the nation and from within Tamil movements, the Mother's Front was effectively quashed by the smothering violence of the Tigers. The LTTE is known for taking over acts of women's resistance, such as Annai Pupathi's hunger strike.²²⁷ The Eastern Mother's Front, formed in 1986, experienced a similar end as the Northern Front. The Eastern Front was known for powerful instances of mobilization—hundreds of mothers took to the streets with rice pounders to stop the LTTE from massacring TELO (Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization). However, Rajani Thiranagama (known for documenting the mother's fronts before her murder by the LTTE) stated, "It became another YMCA."²²⁸ These movements were allowed to continue their charity activities, but were forbidden, under threat of extreme violence, from engaging in any behavior that criticized the Tigers or implied a lack of protection.

The mobilization of motherhood in Sri Lanka did not end with the official closure of the conflict, for the gaping absences left by those disappeared are still ever-present. Tamil Guardian reported a resurgence of the Northern Mother's Front in February of 2015, covering a protest in Kilinochchi where one woman called out "I've waited 6 years, I can't wait any more. Where are our children? Tell us where our children are? Why are you tormenting us?"²²⁹ Later that same year in March, Tamil mothers launched a hunger strike at the Nallur temple in Jaffna, once again calling for their lost sons.²³⁰ In this instance, the temple space is crucial in these women's resistance. The Nallur temple in Jaffna is central to Hindu practice in Sri Lanka, with Nallur occupying a

²²⁶ Samuel. *Women Transforming Peace Activism*. 110

²²⁷ Pupathi was protesting IPKF occupation and violence against women, but died because she was forced by the LTTE to keep her fast.

²²⁸ Malathi De Alwis. "The Changing Role of Women in Sri Lankan Society." *The Status of Women in the Developing World* 69, no. 3 (Fall 2002):

²²⁹ "Tamil Mothers Demand New Sri Lanka Govt Returns Missing Children." Tamil Guardian. February 1, 2015.

²³⁰ "Mothers Launch Hunger Strike by Nallur Temple Demanding Sri Lankan Govt Returns Missing Children." Tamil Guardian. March 5, 2015.

location in the center of the center of Tamil culture. In Jaffna, rigid regulations regarding women's bodies, impurity, and access to temple space are especially pervasive. Women are turning to the religious spaces they are typically excluded from to make visible their continued trauma and the embedded violence of their lives. The positioning of their protest at Nallur temple adds to the forceful and unforgiving visibility of their trauma, for they refuse to cede this powerful ritual space to the nation, instead using it to resist the state's erasure of the missing.

These women stand against the collective consciousness of the nation. They are evidence of terror and proof of the violence the state and the Tigers enacted to maintain their sacred conceptions of territory. Despite the ease at which political forces either forcibly stopped the activities of the Mother's fronts or enveloped them within their own rhetorics, this mobilization of women enacted change, it shook the foundations of the nationalist state, and utilized the very regulations of the state to challenge formations of nation. The Mother's Fronts articulate instances of creative and powerful resistance, and emphasize the need for subversive dissent that counters the state in every aspect of its existence.

In addition to the mobilization of feminine identities such as motherhood, the Women for Peace movement and other moments of feminist political activism in Sri Lanka highlight instances where women stand in opposition to the nation and are silenced within political space. Women for Peace, a coalition of multi-ethnic/lingual/religious women, sought an end to the conflict and actively promoted peace as the only option.²³¹ Not only was Women for Peace regarded as suspect by the state, but "as one Sinhala editorial noted, feminist slogans are not only borrowed from the West; but feminists are also paid by foreign funders to promote sexual licentiousness and thus bring about the cultural decline of the Sinhala nation."²³² Not only were feminist activists viewed as radical, they were also seen as a threat to the very nation itself. The state effectively discredited the policies Women for Peace advocated for by blanketing them underneath this threat to the Buddhist state. As with other threats, the state allowed for violent

²³¹ Alwis. "Interrogating the 'Political.'"

²³² Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis. "The Contingent Politics of the Women's Movement in Sri Lanka after Independence." In *Women in Post-Independence Sri Lanka*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002. 258

exceptions, and Jayawardena recounts about the marches on Women's Day that "in 1984 and 1985 women demonstrating on this day were arrested, tear-gassed and assaulted with batons by the police, and in 1983, Vivienne Goonewardena and other women petitioning for peace were assaulted at the police station."²³³ The very act of calling for peace is thus placed as a radical action in opposition to the very framework of the state. Not only does the state justify singular acts of violence, but also disavows any possibility for peace in order for the nation to continue existing. Feminist political organizing, even with powerful coalition-building, could not stand against the ubiquitous violence of the state.

Feminist organizing and the mobilization of motherhood in Sri Lanka has a long history of brave women standing in the face of enormous violence, not only for themselves but for their families and communities. This organizing is continuous in the wake of the war, not just in the groups of women protesting through a hunger strike at Nallur temple or marches by mothers still seeking information about their sons, but also in protests for women's rights and calls for accountability regarding the military-sanctioned murders of human rights activists in 2011.²³⁴ It is within this context of women's organizing that divine possession has grown, it is within this context that divine possession can be seen as an act of resistance, and it is within this context that the ritual power of divine possession can extend outward into social and political arenas.

VI. The Impact of Women's Divine Possession: Violence, Trauma and Hierarchy

Through the reconsumption of bodies and reterritorialization of space, divine possession becomes an effective form of resistance to the frameworks of nation and empire because it is born out of a landscape of interconnected state violence, women's creative resistance, and a growth in marginal religious practices that make visible violence and disrupt hierarchy. Divine possession fills a need for forms of resistance that can subvert the power of the state and destabilize norms of gender and respectability. The ubiquity of the violent frameworks of the nation, whether through the establishment of bounded territories, refugee camps, the bombing of the Jaffna library, the brutality of

²³³ Kumari Jayawardena. "Feminism in Sri Lanka in the Decade 1975-1985." *Women's Education Centre Series* 15 (September 1986). 23

²³⁴ Sena Vidanagama. "Women Protesting Lack of Movement on Peace Talks in Colombo in 2004." AFP. 2004.

checkpoints through the East, or the subtle ‘disappearances’ of those who dissent, acts to silence society. This violence makes impossible the vocalization of trauma, and thus requires creative action and subversive dissent to articulate resistance as well as simply continue living in a climate of terror. Divine possession not only provides an avenue where violence is made visible on the body and in space, but counters violence itself, expresses trauma, and disrupts set hierarchies that uphold the hegemony of the state.

Violence, the frameworks of state and empire, and the silencing of community voice have all contributed to a destabilization of the norms of society. Neloufer de Mel writes, “After seventeen years of bitter ethnic war there are many Sri Lankan women who are currently redefining their lives not through party affiliation or the compulsions of the women’s movement, but as a result of the exigency born of conflict.”²³⁵ The destruction, both physical and amorphous, that arose from the conflict has irrevocably impacted the lives of all those who have survived. However, this destruction also hinders women’s political mobilization through the hegemonic impositions of patriarchal governance and (state)less powers. The state acts to highlight and reinforce ethnic difference, separating women who could otherwise build coalitions. Violence defines and reinforces hegemony; it erases and silences some while lending power and prestige to the already powerful.

Divine possession, through its embodiment of the disappeared and visibility of violence, does not fall victim to the same problems as explicitly political mobilization because of the inherent plurality of ritual space and the capacity to make evident this interconnected violence. While in many ways violence reinforces gendered codes of conduct, with the LTTE limiting women’s activity in the Northern Mother’s Front to charity work uncritical of militancy and the state marking women activists as threats to the nation with their western-imposed feminist ideologies, violence also acts as a destabilizing factor. The disruption of social services on the Eastern coast, for instance, opened up a power vacuum where women who embody the divine and the men of the Mosque Federation rose to prominence as community leaders.²³⁶ In the wake of the war, I’ve heard numerous Tamil priests remark upon how women’s possession in ritual space is now considered divine possession, where previously women were simply excluded

²³⁵ Mel. *Women and the Nation’s Narrative*. 38

²³⁶ Spencer et al. *Checkpoint, Temple, Church and Mosque*.

from such ritual processes or forced to prove the divine nature of their possession. The protests at the Nallur Kovil in Jaffna in 2015 is again testament to how the violence of war has destabilized norms—for more traditional religious spaces like Nallur continuously restrict women's bodies due to norms of purity/impurity. The rise both in the practice of divine possession in the wake of the war as well as the use of centralized religious space speaks to how the norms of society have been countered through radical ritual practices, yielding a space for subversion.

Divine possession is situated amongst marginal religious practices that have risen to prominence during or in the wake of the conflict, many of which are aimed at making visible community trauma and engendering community healing. Priests and practitioners alike view divine possession as a way to render visible trauma, to see it written on the body, and thus acknowledge its very existence. In a climate of terror and forced silence, this in itself is a radical act. However, while divine possession is not alone in its capacity to generate community healing, it is the only practice that holds growing accessibility for women. Researchers like Lawrence, Obeyesekere, and Spencer et. al. have all recounted the practice of fire-walking to fill a vow to a deity. Fire-walking occurs at Kataragama, Munneswaram, Amman Kovils in Batticaloa, and Kovils in Jaffna. At yearly propitiation festivals, thousands of individuals will line up to walk across the flaming coals. This number has risen significantly during and in the wake of the war, and as Lawrence records, many individuals do so because of their sacred vows.²³⁷ Men held by the state or the Tigers would make a vow, typically to Kali Amma, that if they endured they would honor the goddess for the rest of their years. This vow is either fulfilled through the yearly fire-walking ceremonies or through other rituals, such as *thukkukkaavadi*. While a few women each year will participate in the fire-walking, it is an overwhelmingly male practice with great consideration for pure ritual elements. Each year, there will be a few people who will not make it across the coals safely, and this is typically attributed to their consumption of impure foods or impure practices.

The *thukkukkaavadi* ritual, which involves curved spikes driven into the backs of worshippers from which they are then either suspended from chariot-like mobile

²³⁷ Patricia Lawrence. "The Changing Amman: Notes on the Injury of War in Eastern Sri Lanka." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 20, no. Sup001 (1997): 229

contraptions or attached to another worshipper who is in control of their motions, is only practiced by men. This ritual rose to prominence after the war, and is widely seen as a way for communities to make visible the violence they endured during the war. It is through this expression of pain and self-inflicted violence that the terror of the war is remembered, but positioned as memorials controlled by the community and the embodied individual rather than the state. Derges writes in her work on *thukkukkaavadi* as a healing ritual that “although it arose out of acts of great brutality—many of the devotees had been imprisoned and tortured—it sought to redress the experience of violence by taking control of not only pain but also, more importantly, agency.”²³⁸ Derges’s analysis involves the body itself as a space that offers healing, as well as the assertion of bodily agency into ritual spaces as an act of self-determination. However, the gendered dimensions of this practice cannot be overlooked. While there are ritual practices for men to express the violence they endured in the torture camps of the state, the forced-recruitment of the LTTE, and the everyday brutality of living in a war zone for decades, women also endured this violence yet are given no ritual space to turn to for healing.

While *thukkukkaavadi* is limited to men, divine possession provides a similar site of rupture and reckoning with community trauma for women. By situating women within the prominent ritual spaces of their communities, the trauma revealed on the bodies of oracles like Saktirani becomes something evident for the entire community. It is recognized, it is brought to the forefront, and thus it is held by the community—the violence of terror no longer singular to individuals. In the same way that *thukkukkaavadi* reclaims pain by engaging in a representation and embodiment of violence through agential ritual processes rather than the forced process of terror, divine possession makes visible this violence and offers solace through closure regarding the disappeared. Divine possession is a powerful form of ritual healing that priests consider a process through which sorrow and pain is expressed, and unlike other ritual practices divine possession holds a growing openness and potentiality for women.

Women are survivors of violence carried forth by the state and the LTTE, women fought alongside the Tigers, and women were left behind to carry on as their family members were taken from them. Women who endured the brutality of violence as written

²³⁸ Jane Derges. *Ritual and Recovery in Post-Conflict Sri Lanka*. London: Routledge, 2013. 89

on the body, on the geographies they engaged with, and amidst every aspect of their lives, also deserve the potential for healing through ritual space. However, unlike men, in order to access this form of healing and visibility, women's practices must disrupt the very formation of the state itself through the radical potential of divine possession.

As divine possession grows as a practice and women continuously counter the presumption of demonic possession, the ritual process of divine possession shifts hierarchies through women asserting their experience as divine and not demonic. While demon possession recognizes a temporary aberration in the hierarchy and then reinforces it, divine possession actively creates a disruption and defies the hierarchy. Obeyesekere writes about the power women can gain from divine possession, "[i]n the case of females, becoming a priest is a powerful source of 'liberation'. It gives autonomy and power over others, enhanced social status, and—above all—freedom of movement, which in normal circumstances is severely curtailed for women."²³⁹ To claim, and be viewed as truth, that a body and a being previously excluded from religious space and thought of as impure can host the utmost divinity is a powerful statement, and one that carves out a space for women in ritual reality as well as the world outside of ritual. The power of hosting the divine is reinforced when women oracles become not just legible community leaders but individuals capable of making visible state terror and community trauma. This practice has the power to upset norms regarding women and religious space as well as the frameworks of the state itself.

By centering women and providing women with avenues to social capital through ritual, divine possession results in the continued disruption of set hierarchies. In the past, as Obeyesekere notes, women's ritual practice was considered suspect. Now, priests in Batticaloa consider divine possession to be one of the most common facets of ritual practice at Amman Kovils. One example of this shifting dynamic is the change in how divine possession is validated. Previously, women who embody the divine would have to constantly counter the presumption that their possession was the result of demonic forces, and would have to seek out male ritual specialists for their experience to be adequately validated. From my own fieldwork, I know of one oracle who spent years trying understand and frame her experience before it was considered divine possession.

²³⁹ Obeyesekere. "The Fire-Walkers of Kataragama." 467

However, after she claimed the framework of divine possession and sought out the confirmation from a priest at Kataragama, she rose to prominence within her community. She opens up the shrine next to her house five days a week, her husband supports her ritual practice, and even former President Rajapaksa once visited her for oracular revelation regarding his re-election chances. This contrast between having to fight for recognition and then holding so much social capital the president himself seeks out your work is testament to how divine possession has resulted in shifts in the perception of women's ritual practice and connection with the divine outside of the sphere of ritual. The claiming of divine power within ritual space has resulted in women's increased social capital and social standing outside of ritual—facilitating women's community leadership unhindered by the limitations of the political sphere.

This disruption of norms regarding women's participating in ritual space is a continued theme throughout my own field notes, with many practitioners remarking on how women occupy what is termed a 'secondary space' in society or noting the discrepancy between the worship of goddesses and the hierarchical positioning of women in the mundane world. This delineation of space or societal mobility speaks to how women's access both to ritual space and ritual processes of community healing is severely curtailed. However, the practice of divine possession upsets this hierarchical construction—for women are not only persisting within ritual space but engaging in articulations of power as seen in the accounts of Saktirani or the Kallady temple oracle in the yearly festival of 1992.

This disruption of hierarchies occurs not just in the sphere of ritual reality, for it is placed into movements in the cosmic hierarchy of deities. The movement of Kali into prominent religious practices signifies a shift from Kali's demonic identity to her divine one. However, she maintains demonic power and anger, articulating a disruption in the norms of feminine godliness. Worshippers at Kali Amman Kovils remark that Kali is powerful because she is dangerous and frightening. She has a capacity for protection, and at times revenge, that distinguish her from many Amman goddesses because of her assertion of violence and power without the constraint of chastity or femininity. While many Amma goddesses are known for their acts of destruction (Pattini tearing off her left breast and burning down Madurai after the death of her husband or Draupadi vowing

never to tie her hair up until she had washed it in the blood of her enemies after a rival king attempted to disrobe her,)²⁴⁰ their acts of anger are drawn from their chastity or purity. Kali, on the other hand, is known for murdering her consort in an act of indelible rage. She demands blood, she refutes respectability, and she is worshipped for it.

This movement in the cosmic hierarchy, shifting a deity seen as too demonic for the pantheon into prominence, is again reflected in shifts outside of ritual space. Just as the oracle at the Kallady Kali temple in 1992 was able to chase out the soldiers from the ritual space, divine possession and the cosmic disruption that it creates allows women to disrupt gendered hierarchies by claiming ritual space, engaging in anger and resistance, and enacting this power into the real of reality as well as ritual. The movement of powerful and dangerous Kali into a more prominent location in the pantheons of worship is reflected by the movement of women towards positions where they resist state encroachment on ritual space, bear the scars of violence as well as the experiences of the disappeared, and destabilize both the cosmic hierarchies and the hegemonies of state formation.

The validation of women's divine power within the ritual of divine possession allows a shift in the social strata outside of ritual space—creating resistance to the formation of state hegemony built upon such gendered social inequities. Reiterating Kapferer's concepts of virtuality, "the virtuality of ritual reality is really real, a complete and filled-out existential reality—but in its own terms."²⁴¹ Women who embody the divine are engaging with a reality created by the ritual space, a reality where they can speak openly about violence and terror and make visible those who are lost. This practice then empowers not only those who embody the divine, but the community altogether, to live on and to continue making visible that which is concealed by the state.

VII. Remaking the World: Divine Possession and the Disruption of Hegemony

The power channeled by women through divine possession extends outwards from the depths of ritual space into the projection of reality outside ritual itself. Because the process of ritual involves a slowing down of reality, ritual facilitates shifts and

²⁴⁰ Alleyn Diesel. "Tales of Women's Suffering: Draupadi and other Amman Goddesses as Role Models for Women". *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 17(1), 2002. 9

²⁴¹ Kapferer. "Beyond Ritual as Performance." 244

disruptions in the fabric of normality. Through ritual, the bodies and spaces that the nation attempts to exert control over are centered in expressions of agency and religiosity, allowing every facet of this practice to engage in a disruption of norms, hierarchies, and hegemonies. This disruptive potential results in a rupturing of the hegemonic frameworks of the world and allows ritual practitioners to remake the world itself. This is perhaps the most important facet of the resistant capacity of divine possession—resistance exists within the ritual and it extends outside of it. However, it does more than just exist, for it acts to counter state hegemony and build new formations in its stead, allowing individuals whose lives have been changed irreparably by violence to live on, that itself an act of dissent.

Divine possession disrupts the hierarchies of ritual space and remakes the world not only through the movement of deities within the cosmic hierarchy, but through the rupture of norms of ritual and the visibility of trauma and emotion. Lawrence notes that Saktirani counters gendered norms during ritual possession. She writes, “she blatantly disregarded gendered presentation of her body, and often appeared to have emptied her consciousness of her femaleness.”²⁴² I posit that Saktirani’s disruption of the norms of gender within this ritual moment is powerful not only due to her blurring of gender in that moment, but also because it does not lessen her social positioning or call into question the validity of her oracular revelation. Instead, the shift of her own gender representation allows her to represent the terror suffered by sons or husbands of her community members—for in the ritual possession the possessing deity will make visible through the body of the possessed the fate of the disappeared. The ritual space of divine possession allows the disruption of gendered norms within the ritual itself, and instead of reinforcing state hegemony, this ritual and this disruption counters the imposition of regulations on women’s bodies.

The disruption of social norms through oracular revelation is not uncommon, and one instance of divine possession I witnessed in December 2015 contained the same elements of disrupting gendered norms yet maintaining power. I was visiting the home of an oracle who regularly opens the shrine outside her home to engage in ritual possession. I looked down the row of people, stretching down the dirt road all the way to the main

²⁴² Patricia Lawrence. “Violence, Suffering, Amman.”

street, most of who began their wait barely after the sunrise. The people seeking her oracular revelation were mostly women, some of who traveled to the village specifically to see this oracle. A few minutes after she began her ritual chants, her voice drastically changed in tone and sound—suddenly her chant was deep, sounding far more masculine than before as she embodied the deity. Her movements became fierce and sharp, and as she called people forth individually the power of her vocalizations was evident on the faces of those visiting. The power of her words and ritual actualizations were not lessened by her disruption of norms of the body, but instead strengthened by it. Her ability to cross the bounds of gender, to cross into a sphere of divine authority, and to transcend the boundaries between this world and the realm of the divine are what give her power and agency. The disruption of hierarchy, this subversion of norms, is not merely a result of divine possession, but an inherent facet of the practice itself, and is carried forth into the ritual space and outside of it.

The oracle's individual actions and moments of disruption within the sphere of ritual are impactful in themselves, but are not the only element of power and disruption in the space of oracular revelation. The individuals who come to her are ones seeking solace for pain, seeking healing, closure for the lost, or evidence of the living. The answers they seek become written on her very body—and through this visibility in a space and a time where the state seeks to render invisible not only these hidden traumas but the bodies of women themselves, the ritual of divine possession ruptures the imaginary of the state. Her rituals engage in community healing by lending visibility to violence, trauma, and solace. On the body of the oracle, everyday individuals can find answers in a world of uncertainty. The state and the imposed hegemony of the state rely upon these constructions of violence to persist, but the acts of the oracle in ritual space destroys the frameworks that conceal violence, instead remaking the world of ritual so the terror of the state is revealed in all of its brutality.

This disruption of hierarchies allows a remaking of the world both within ritual space as well as outside of it. At the time of my fieldwork, priests on the Eastern coast not only acknowledged the validity and existence of women's divine embodiment, but also were extremely cognizant of the norms regarding women's bodies and access to ritual space. Not only do priests now acknowledge this gendered imbalance, but some of

them are willing to cede power to women within the spaces of their own temples—and claim that the regulations imposed on women in ritual space stems from religious revivalism and not indigenous traditions within communities. During the time of Lawrence’s research, in the midst of the conflict, this dynamic did not exist. Women had to claim ritual space; it was not allocated to them willingly. This shift in perceptions of women’s involvement in ritual space is testament to how the vocal practice of divine possession has shifted social hierarchies, remaking the world through changing the norms of reality. The resistance, disruption, and reconfiguration within ritual space and society outside of strictly ritual counters state imposition and regulation on both of those levels. However, the power of divine possession does not stop here—for divine possession enacts resistance against the hegemonic imposition of the state in its entirety.

Divine possession engages with and counters the political without residing within the political itself. This ritual practice does so by rejecting the label of political and working outside of the religious frameworks of the state by utilizing marginal religious space and marginal religious practice. This power, coming from the margins of the margins, builds the resistant capacity of divine possession. The way that bodies, spaces, and movements in cosmic hierarchies can work together to enact resistance illuminates the need to expand conceptions of dissent. The possessed body and the complicated nature of agency might not be seen as the most effective way to counter the state, for it resists hegemony through subtle ritual actions rather than overt political ones. However, the ease at which the state and the LTTE were able to coopt the Mother’s Fronts and the continuance of mythic justifications of violence for the nation requires a response that can resist violence in varying spheres. Divine possession carries forth this resistance and reshapes the entirety of the world while doing so. Alwis questions the role of political frameworks of resistance when she states,

“But what are the political consequences of seeking the constitution of political subjectivities through political practices, not social groups? Is not Butler’s call for a constant destabilizing and contesting of the ‘political’... a more radical alternative? Is this not where the emancipatory potential of any society lies?”²⁴³

²⁴³ Alwis. “Interrogating the ‘Political.’” 89

This idea of the ‘political’ is itself steeped within regulatory ideologies—the political formations of the state are built from the frameworks of colonial rule and have been used systematically to exploit difference and engender violence. As Alwis draws out from Judith Butler’s work, in order to effectively disrupt the hegemony of these ‘political’ formations, agency might need to come from outside of typical formations of the ‘political’. As seen with the Mother’s Front, part of their success was the fact that they actively eschewed the label of political activists. They depicted themselves solely as mothers with no political agenda, only seeking to carry forth their families. This radical assertion away from the political was what destabilized the state, if only temporarily. However, in the end the downfall of the Mother’s Front was how easily they were incorporated into either political parties in the South or into charity work as part of the LTTE’s projection of power in the North.

Divine possession enacts resistance because it destabilizes the very frameworks the state uses to enact dominance. It destabilizes ritual itself, it ruptures the control of the state on women’s bodies and spaces, and it engages with the political from outside the sphere of the political itself. Divine possession produces this resistance by working within the ‘betwixt and between’ of ritual, reality, and politics. As Veena Das notes in her work on post-partition India and violence against women, violence does not merely take place on one level or sphere of life, but it is a hegemonic imposition, impacting agency across the bounds of space and time.²⁴⁴ Divine possession in many ways inhabits the space between thresholds, enabling resistance across all of these segmented areas of life. Those who embody the divine bring a being from the metaphysical into the world of reality, crossing the boundary of worlds. In the same way, the divine being who speaks through oracles holds knowledge, truth, and power over the world of reality, exhibiting their power to inhabit these separated spheres and engaging with the in/between. Das remarks that the resistance of women allows communities to begin “building a world that the living can inhabit with their loss and building a world in which the dead can find a home.”²⁴⁵ Divine possession recognizes that rebuilding the world for those still left in it while making visible and remembering those who are no longer in this world of reality

²⁴⁴ Veena Das. “Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain.” *Daedalus*. 125, no. 1 (1996). 68

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 88

requires power from the metaphysical, the real, and the liminal in/between. By inhabiting, embodying, and enacting this powerful expression of marginality and liminality, divine possession remakes and reimagines, opposing the state as it does so.

These acts of resistance through divine possession, in many ways expressed by everyday individuals engaging with their everyday lives in a landscape of terror, become sites of rupture between the real and the not-real, the ritual and the non-ritual. This rupture destroys the collective imaginary of the state, exposing truth in the face of terror, and transcends the boundaries of the nation as well as the metaphysical. A cultural acknowledgement of this dynamic is articulated in the play *The Wicked Witch*, written during the power cuts in 2001 by Sumathy Sivamohan. Sivamohan's Witch is depicted as a hero in a time of enormous violence and uncertainty. The Witch is not explicitly an oracle or engaged in divine possession, but she is tied to marginal practice and worship through her very name. 'Witch' alludes to practices of worship that are persecuted, or dangerous for how they stand against state practices. Her actions engage in a disruption of hierarchy, a visibility of terror, and a connection of women and women's agency to these processes—thus lending her relevance to examining divine possession. The Witch plants a tree, watches it grow, cares for it, and after it bears a bounty of pure golden fruit she plucks it and brings to the city to sell. Upon her arrival, she is called a suicide bomber, and at her sentencing the Judge states, "You are found guilty madam. Of smuggling in essential items. Apparently after your arrival the prices have come down here, and come down there. Do you know what you have done? The people may even begin to eat. Get a real taste for food. You are too dangerous."²⁴⁶ She is so dangerous because she shows people an alternative, and in doing so ruptures the constructed ideologies of the state and the narratives that they put forth. The act of divine possession similarly causes this rupture and disruption of hegemony. The essential things smuggled forth by divine possession are the expression of grief and emotion, the ritual of divine possession is guilty of acknowledging the violence of the state, and the prevalence and existence of this act of resistance creates the power and space to change the very structures of the world.

²⁴⁶ Sumathy Sivamohan. *Thin Veils: In the Shadow of the Gun & the Wicked Witch (performing Act/ivism)*. Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2003. 51

CONCLUSION

Even amidst the constant threat of violence and the constant strain of occupation, the practice of divine possession lends women the agency to remake their worlds. By embodying the divine, women counter norms regarding their bodies that stem from coalescing ideologies of colonial rule and nationalist systems. Conceptions about the inherent impurity of women's bodies are dashed to the side as women become vessels for divine beings. Despite continued attempts by the state to render bodies invisible; whether it is the bodies of survivors of violence, the bodies of those evicted from their homes, or the bodies disappeared by the state; divine possession engages with a forceful and agential visibility of the body. The body thus becomes a site of incredible agency, even as consciousness is overcome and an external force enacts power into the ritual space. The physicality of marginal religious space coalesces with the agency of those embodying the divine to create resistance and disrupt the hegemonic narratives of statehood.

The countless individuals who endured and continue to endure the imposition of the state; whether it is in the formation of political processes, the continued missing and abstract space created by those killed, the ambiguous violence of disappearance, the perpetration of gendered norms of regulation, or the contestation and bloodshed enacted upon physical geographies of communities; they resist as a form of endurance itself. After such violence, living on is itself a form of dissent. Divine possession compounds on that inherent resistance by providing space, validity, and physical expression when speaking out is tantamount to a death sentence. By crossing through and inhabiting the in/between, divine possession facilitates an interaction between the reality of real and the virtuality of ritual. The practice allows acts that disrupt hierarchy to transcend these borders and move outside of solely ritual space, embracing the liminality of practice, position, and body to do so. This inhabiting of the in/between counters the hegemony of the state on many planes. It resists attempts by the state to control physical ritual space, prevents the state from erasing the 'disappeared' from the metaphysical of communities even as they are lost in the physical space of reality, disrupts ideas perpetrated by the nation that justifies conflict for the sake of the women of the nation, and creates a powerful form of protection for those who are protected by no one.

This is not to say that divine possession is some panacea for violence or perfect form of resistance, for the practice is not without danger, requires a degree of male legitimization for women to have their experiences considered divine possession, and risks coopting by the state. However, it builds upon a history of utilizing religious space and ritual tactics to voice dissent, attacks the formation of the political through apolitical tactics and utilizes grief, the expression of trauma, and the scars of violence to create an undeniable rupture in the narratives of the state. Divine possession is powerful, visible, and navigates an ambiguous in/between of the post/colonial nation, the marginal religious space, and the reality of ritual.

This resistance, enacted in ritual space, carries forth outside of the bounds of time to counter a history of colonial and nationalist regulation as well as provide avenues of future resistance. The nation and the state continue to consume bodies in violent ways, consuming through labor or profit or the lasting violence of the disappeared. However, amidst this context of regulation, resistance is enacted within ritual space. It challenges and counters the various ways that the nation and the empire consume bodies and spaces to suit their needs. Sumathy Sivamohan writes, “The local—the acts of marginal women—confront and contest not only moments of decolonization. They also act in response to the recolonization of the transnational space by the nations, both of the west and of the narrowly postcolonial, while they face the political neutralization of the global.”²⁴⁷ The resistance of women whose bodies are marginal and whose spaces are marginalized stand against continued and active formations of colonialism. However, as Sumathy notes, this resistance is deeply tied to the post/colonial, to how colonialism is continued both in the active remains as well as new threads of global transaction and capital. Space and bodies continue to be contested, even if physical violence no longer holds the ubiquity of a conflict zone. Nationalism, colonialism, and post/colonial globalization continue to engage in hegemony, but through its formation of resistance across numerous spheres, divine possession counters these systems by claiming agency and ritual space through the bodies of women.

²⁴⁷ Sumathy Sivamohan. *Postcolonial Dis/content: South Asian Women and Feminist Theory*. PhD diss., Washington State University, 1999. 173

Divine possession provides women with the agency to remake their worlds and reinvent a sphere where trauma is actualized in powerful opposition to state violence. The individuals who practice divine possession are those who have endured unspeakable violence, and in a time where the very act of speaking dissent results in immediate silencing and disappearance, the embodiment of the divine engenders resistance and provides agency within the sanctuary of religious space and using the bodies the nation tries to consume. Those who embody the wrathful power of Kali Amma or other deities gain power outside of ritual as well as within it, themselves transcending the boundaries and inhabiting the liminal space between these constructed realities. Divine possession enacts resistance in a landscape of terror, shifts deeply entrenched social hierarchies, and, perhaps above all, lends agency to the brave women and their communities who seek a way to live on after unspeakable pain.

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APPENDIX

Figure 1: Map of Sri Lanka



Figure 2: Map of Ethnic and Religious Communities in Sri Lanka

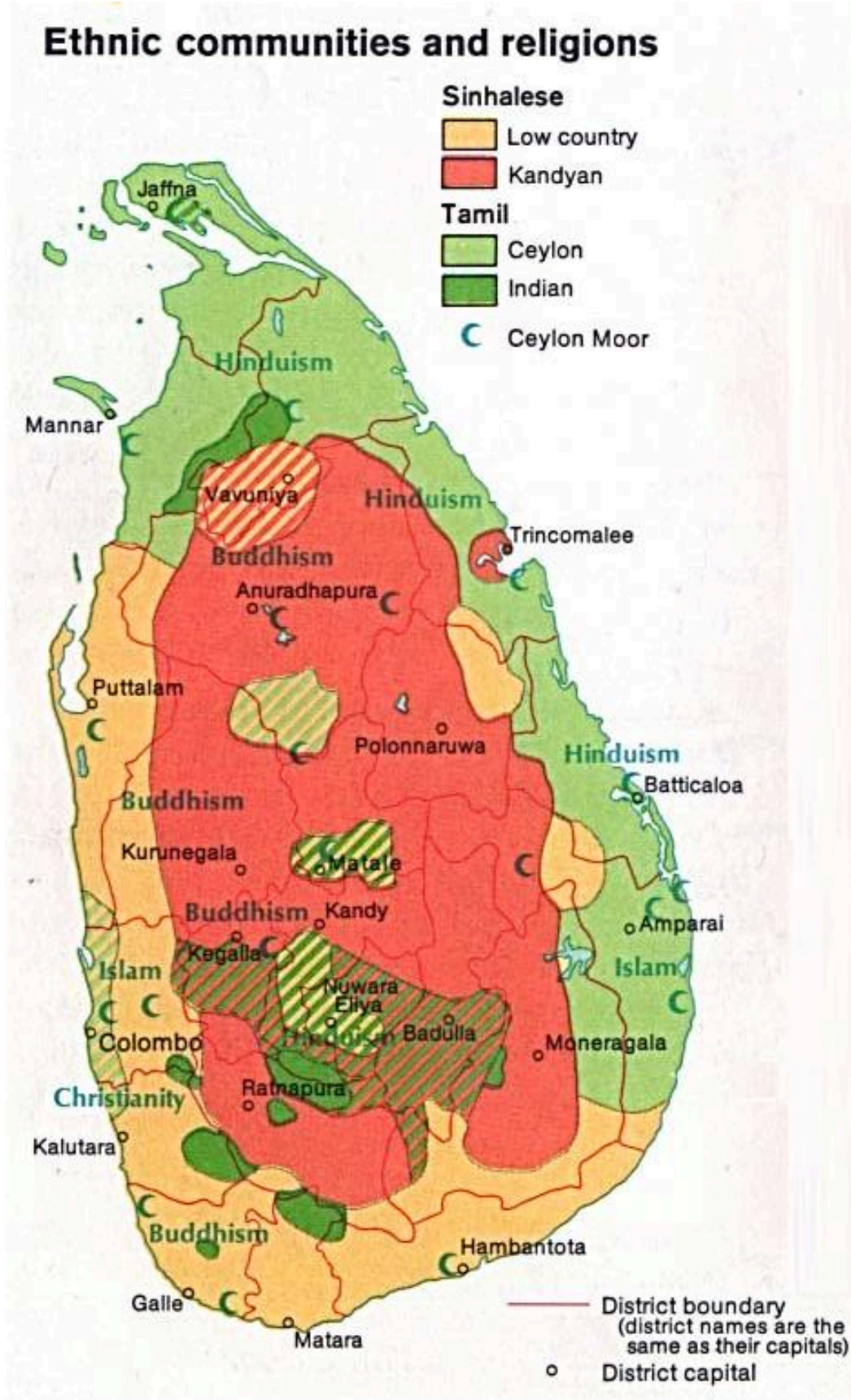


Figure 3: Map of Proposed Tamil Eelam



<http://www.generationaldynamics.com/ww2010/sri2.gif>

Figure 4: Map of Batticaloa



Figure 5: Punnaicholai Kali Amman Kovil during full moon puja



Figure 6: Kataragama Temple Complex between pujas



Figure 7: Central Kataragama Shrine during evening puja



Figure 8: Kotthukulathu Mari Amman Kovil

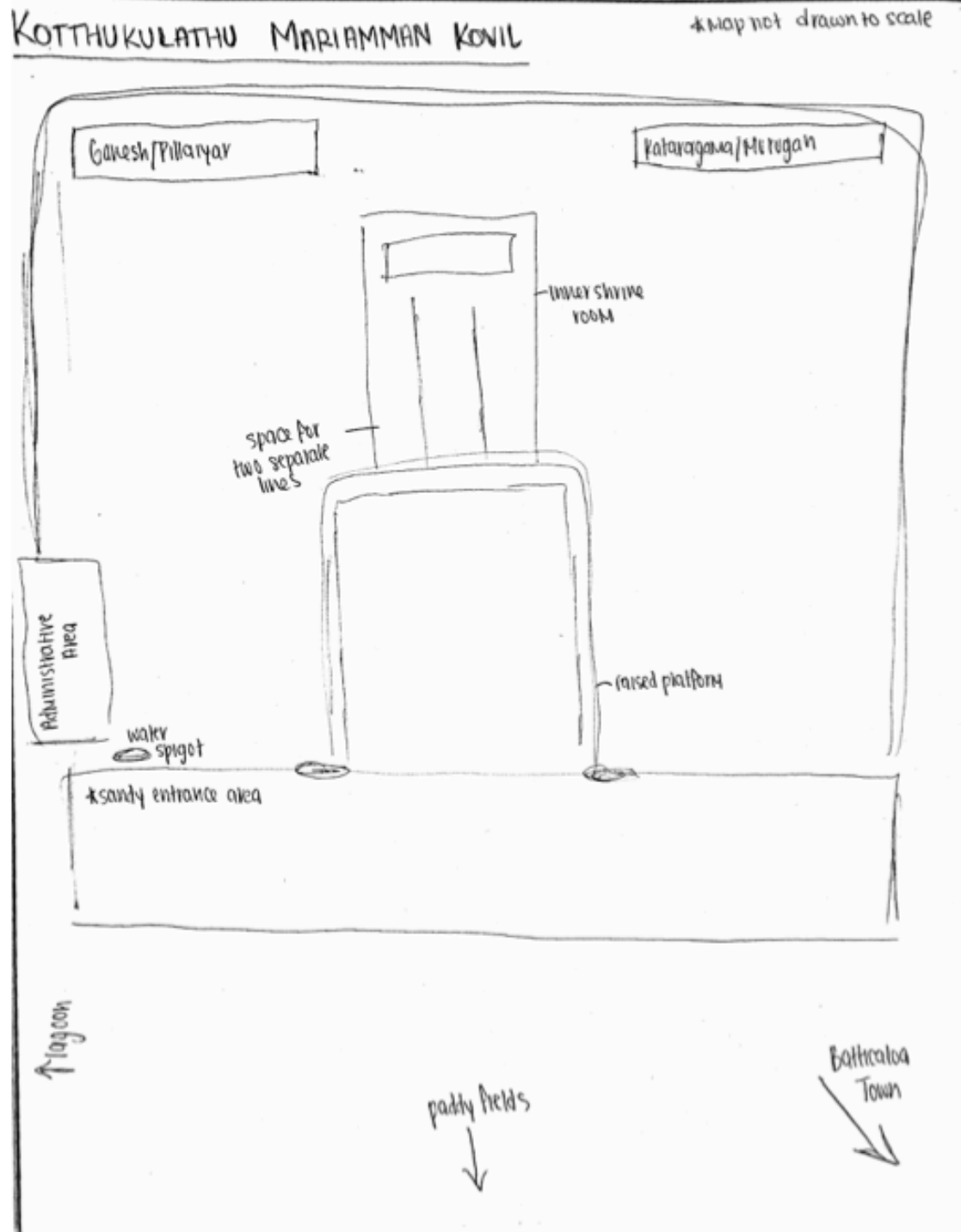


Figure 9: Punnaicholai Kali Amman Kovil

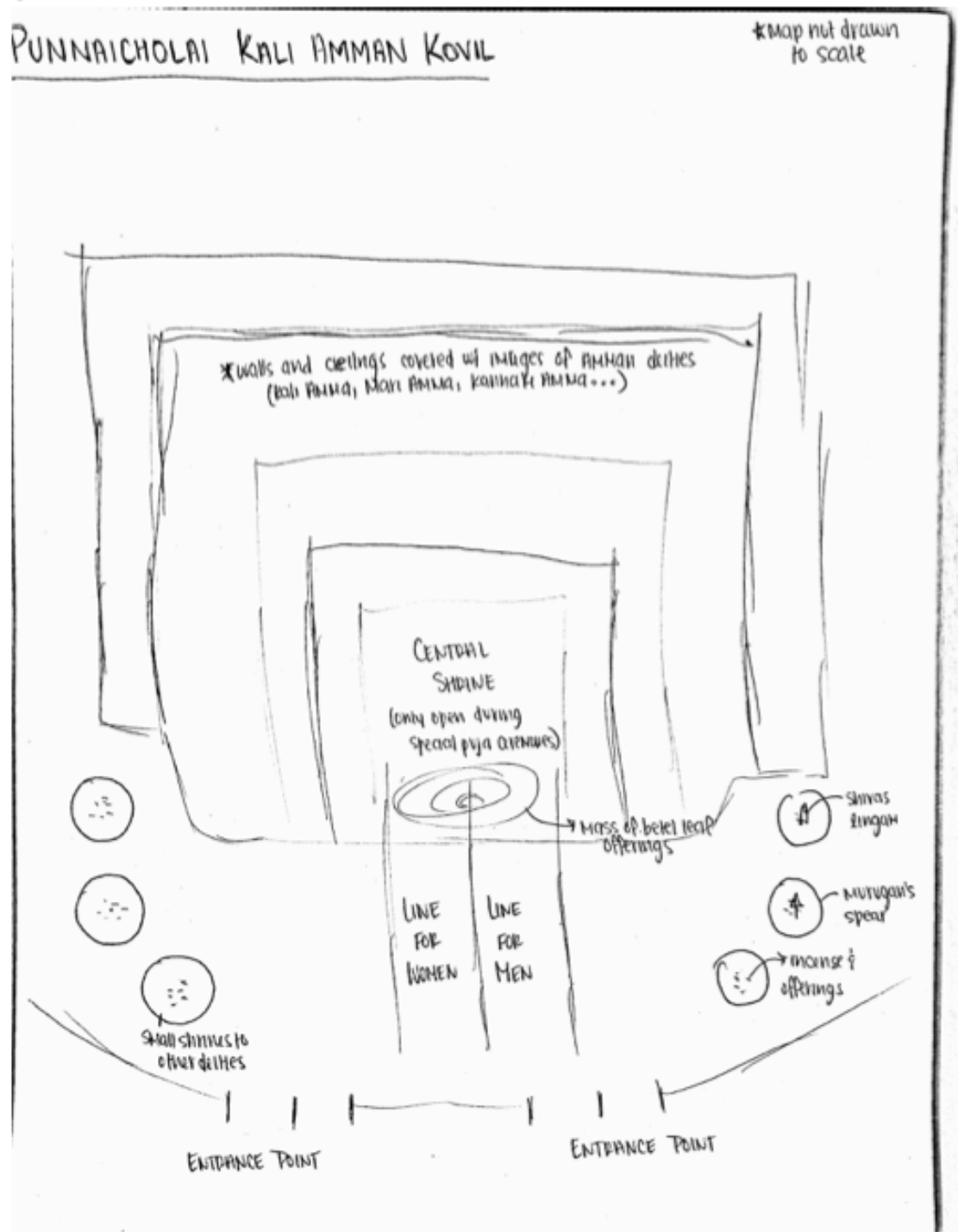


Figure 10: Kataragama Temple Complex

