

Ethnicity, Indigeneity, and Migration in the Advent of  
British Rule to Sri Lanka

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THE SPATIALLY BOUNDED FORM of the small island or constellation of small islands has often been a convenient receptacle for the idea of the polity, whether precolonial, colonial, or national. At the same time, the island space has generated a rich and contradictory discourse encompassing ideas of utopia, paradise, sexuality, degeneration, and disease. As Greg Denning magisterially writes of the Marquesas, "Crossing beaches is always dramatic. From land to sea and from sea to land is a long journey and either way the voyager is left a foreigner and an outsider."<sup>1</sup> Yet scholars have been taken captive by the structural ease and descriptive density with which islands have been made in history, so that an island or group of islands has seemed a natural unit of analysis. Denning's point that islands are essentially polyglot is critical. In creating island states and peoples, colonists and nationalists buried the creole and hybrid in a turn to the indigenous, endangered, and fragile. In other words, they searched after what was apparently found in the island and nowhere else.

The legacy of island-making has meant that until recently, world historians spent more time with large landmasses than with small and curious places at the edges of the map that are seemingly anomalous.<sup>2</sup> Sri Lanka is such a space, and one that has been marginalized in historical writing. One obvious reason why this island space has received so little attention is the question of where it figures in scholarly geographies: Does it belong in Southeast Asia or South Asia? Yet this unhelpful scholarly quandary is itself a relic of colonial island-making. The narrative of British colonialism from the last decade of the eighteenth century reveals a story of experimentation.

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches: Discourses on a Silent Land—Marquesas, 1774–1880* (Honolulu, 1980), 32. For the history of island-making, see also Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith, eds., *Islands in History and Representation* (London, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> The growth of Atlantic and Pacific oceanic history has, however, started to change this, and the Indian Ocean historiography is also starting to catch up. For critical overviews of these fields, see "AHR Forum: Oceans of History," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (June 2006): 717–780; and also Markus P. M. Vink, "Indian Ocean Studies and the New Thalassology," *Journal of Global History* 2 (2007): 41–62.

The island's coastal regions were first governed as an attachment to the British East India Company's southern territories in the Madras Presidency from 1796. As a result of revolt against this regime of governance, Ceylon, as the British termed the island space, eventually became a separate colony under the Crown in 1802. Ever since the British bounded Sri Lanka in this way, it has not been able to take on a non-islanded political geography.<sup>3</sup>

THE MAKING OF THE ISLAND as a separate unit of governance in turn dictated a colonial policing of the movement of peoples, so that belonging on the island equated with a different identity than did coming from the mainland or elsewhere in Asia. Yet this colonial program took on board some elements of precolonial social structure. The highland Buddhist kingdom of Kandy, the last independent monarchy in Sri Lanka, offers an important example. Even as Kandy went repeatedly into battle and stand-offs with Europeans who had taken the coasts of the island—the Portuguese (r. 1594–1658), the Dutch (r. 1640–1796), and then the British—identities within the kingdom started to contort. The people of Kandy began to differentiate themselves from outsiders.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, foreigners were continuing to arrive within the kingdom as a result of warfare with Europeans. Critically, the last Kandyan kings themselves hailed from South India. The British misunderstood the way in which indigeneity was couched within the idea of the cosmopolitan: the Kandyan kingdom shows the evolution of a Sinhala identity, alongside the continuing adoption of peoples from outside into the core of its structures. After the British took over the kingdom, they sought to repatriate all those who rightly belonged in Company India rather than Crown Ceylon, referring to them as “Malabars,” a term inherited from the Dutch. More broadly, “Malabars” were seen to be foreigners, in contrast to the Sinhala indigenes. In the later nineteenth century, the term was replaced by “Ceylon Tamil,” and so emerged the modern ethnic division on the island. The British definition of indigeneity in the early nineteenth century, and its intervention in changing conceptions of ethnicity, is a critical component in explaining contemporary Sri Lanka, and should have a place in longer histories of ethnicity in the island.

The origin of the ethnic division between the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils has quite naturally, in the context of the recent civil war, served as the dominant question in the historiography on Sri Lanka.<sup>5</sup> Historical answers were first molded by a framework inspired by the work of Edward Said that emphasized the colonial consolidation of ethnic difference in accord with European ideas of race.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For the British advance into Kandy in this early period, see Colvin R. De Silva, *Ceylon under the British Occupation, 1796–1833*, 2 vols. (Colombo, 1953–1962); and U. C. Wickremaratne, *The Conservative Nature of British Rule in Sri Lanka* (New Delhi, 1995). For an attempt to place the British advance in the context of the late Dutch period, see Alicia Schrikker, *Dutch and British Colonial Intervention in Sri Lanka, 1780–1815: Expansion and Reform* (Leiden, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> For senses of Sinhala in this period, see R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, “The People of the Lion: The Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography,” *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 5, no. 1–2 (1979): 1–36; and K. N. O. Dharmadasa, “‘The People of the Lion’: Ethnic Identity, Ideology, and Historical Revisionism in Contemporary Sri Lanka,” *Ethnic Studies Report* 10 (1992): 37–59.

<sup>5</sup> “Ethnicity” and “ethnic difference” are the terms currently used in Sri Lanka to refer to the distinction between the “Sinhalese” and “Tamils.”

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Jonathan Spencer, ed., *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* (London,

Recently the literature has shifted to a post-Saidian position, suggesting that the advent of the British to the island in the early nineteenth century was important, but not all-defining.<sup>7</sup> According to this line of argument, the firming up of ethnicity is usually dated to the period after the 1830s, when a liberal age of reform dispensed with caste differences, leaving ethnicity as the prevalent form of colonial social categorization. In India, by contrast, the use of caste continued.<sup>8</sup> This new direction of argument emphasizes that early colonial categorizations before 1830 were slippery and ill-formed and that their power was restricted; thus they should not be taken as a baseline. One way in which their power was minimized was through existent senses of identity within the island prior to the colonial takeover. Yet factors other than precolonial senses of difference or the later colonial modernist ideology of change must be considered in describing the emergence and consolidation of the Sinhala-Tamil divide.

Crucially, this narrative of the consolidation of ethnicity should not be islanded by a confinement to the processes and structures within the island.<sup>9</sup> Sri Lankan ethnicities emerged in the context of the movement of peoples between India, the island, and the wider region and in the colonial state's attempt to impose new norms and meanings on those movements. As Arjun Appadurai's provocative work shows, the difference between majorities and minorities is crystallized out of the entanglement of state-building with globalization. In the colonial era as well, the friction between the making of the colony and the flow of peoples shifted and created distinctions between those who belonged and those who did not, and this is evident in the period that saw the advent of British rule in Sri Lanka. Thus it is revealing to place the history of ethnicity and colonialism in a transcolonial perspective that shows how the local and the global shape each other.<sup>10</sup>

It is easy to consider island-making and its turn to indigeneity and ethnicity as

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1990); Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail, eds., *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka* (Colombo, 1995); and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978). The seminal article on the formation of identity in the island also emphasizes the advent of colonial categories as definitive. It has been reprinted twice, in 1984 and 1990, since its first appearance as Gunawardana, "The People of the Lion."

<sup>7</sup> Despite the different nuances, the following are relevant here: Michael Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period, 1590s to 1815* (Colombo, 2003); John D. Rogers, "Colonial Perceptions of Ethnicity and Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Sri Lanka," in Peter Robb, ed., *Society and Ideology: Essays in South Asian History* (Delhi, 1993); Rogers, "Early British Rule and Social Classification in Lanka," *Modern Asian Studies* 38 (2004): 625–647. For Sinhala notions of identity, see also K. N. O. Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1992), chap. 1.

<sup>8</sup> See Rogers, "Early British Rule and Social Classification in Lanka"; and also John D. Rogers, "Caste as a Social Category and Identity in Colonial Lanka," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 41, no. 1 (2004): 51–77.

<sup>9</sup> Rogers's careful and important work, cited above, makes the point that Sri Lanka should be contextualized as a region within South Asia. There are at least two other works that attend to the island's connections to the mainland. For caste formation in the island in relation to India in the early modern period, see Michael Roberts, "From Southern India to Lanka: The Traffic in Commodities, Bodies and Myths from the Thirteenth Century Onwards," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 3, no. 1 (1980): 37–47. The relationship between the mainland and the island also features in Sanjay Subrahmanyam's article "Noble Harvest: Managing the Pearl Fishery of Mannar, 1500–1925," in Burton Stein and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *Institutions and Economic Change in South Asia* (Delhi, 1996), 134–172.

<sup>10</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, N.C., 2006), 45.

a matter of discourse alone. Yet structural interventions during this period of British rule are of critical note—not least because the political organization of the island was undergoing dramatic changes in the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth. The separation of islanders and mainlanders came about partly because of the different structures of Crown and Company that governed these territories, and the irritations that were generated in the correspondence between the two. After some decades of attention to questions of discourse, world historians are now turning to the state and governance once more. As Sanjay Subrahmanyam notes, the structure of the state in Asia was in flux at the end of the eighteenth century, and this affected discourses of identity.<sup>11</sup> The entanglement of structural forms with discourse means that the argument here cannot be read as a reductionist one, with the term “island” simply standing for the physical space that it is said to occupy.

The impact of colonialism—in South Asia in particular—has been one of the most debated and contested questions of imperial historiography. Yet there are signs that the days of battle have been superseded by new concerns. The established debate raised questions about continuity and change from the precolonial to the colonial periods, and about the agency of colonized peoples and the power of the colonial state.<sup>12</sup> One of the outcomes of this debate is that a study of precolonial identities is essential for an assessment of the impact of colonial schemes of classification. In a place such as Sri Lanka, immigration and assimilation have a long history. At the same time, however, it is undoubted that the scale of British intervention was unprecedented. In the island, this period saw colonialism unfolding across the whole territory for the first time. In this context, a simple view of the precolonial as indigenous or authentic and as carrying through into an imperial age is difficult to sustain. By moving beyond continuity versus change and placing analyses of patriotism, identity, and indeed the roots of nationalism on a transregional or even transnational canvas, it is possible for new questions to emerge in the study of the impact of colonialism.

THE LAST KING of Kandy, Sri Vickrama Rajasimha, died in captivity on January 30, 1832, in the fort at Vellore in the Madras Presidency. The family of Tipu Sultan, who had ruled Mysore and was vilified as an oriental despot by the British, was also held in this fort. Sri Vickrama Rajasimha was attended by a European surgeon, who found him to be “affected generally with the dropsy,” but the king also asked to be treated by a “native medical practitioner” and in his last hours preferred the latter. He asked his keeper to burn his body on a plot of ground to be set aside for the purpose and sufficient for a “kind of tomb” to be “built over the ashes . . . a small garden being formed and a small Chattray being erected for the accommodation of a superinten-

<sup>11</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions: Making Polities in Early Modern South India* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2001).

<sup>12</sup> For alternative sides of this debate, see C. A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (Delhi, 1998); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, N.J., 1993); Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, N.J., 2001); and Eugene Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795–1895* (Berkeley, Calif., 1994).





*The late King of Kandy, from a drawing by a Native.*

FIGURE 1: "The late King of Kandy, from a drawing by a Native," from John Davy, *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon and Its Inhabitants with Travels in That Island* (London, 1821). Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

dent Bramin [*sic*] and water to travellers."<sup>13</sup> In making this request, the king pointed his keeper to a drawing in his possession of the family tombs at Kandy to show the type of building that he hoped would be raised over his ashes. Yet in asking for a "Chattry," he seems to have had in mind a dome-shaped Hindu funerary monument, typical, for instance, of the Rajputs of India, rather than one consistent with the Buddhist cultural traditions of Kandy.<sup>14</sup> Despite the kingdom of Kandy's heritage, its memory was forged within Hindu norms in this conversation. Understanding why Sri Vickrama Rajasimha was taken from the highlands of Ceylon to South India and why he adopted Hindu symbols can serve as a point of entry into the larger question of how the British intervened in the economy of migration between the mainland and the island.

Sri Vickrama Rajasimha's death marked the end of the Nayakkar royal line, which is said to have commenced with the ascension of Sri Viyaya Rajasimha (r.

<sup>13</sup> Lieut. Col. F. P. Stewart, Paymaster of Stipends at Vellore, to Richard Clive, Acting Secretary of Government, January 20, 1831; and Stewart to Henry Chamier, Chief Secretary of Government, January 9, 1832, File F/4/1461, India Office Records, Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections, British Library, London [hereafter IOR].

<sup>14</sup> See R. L. Mishra, *The Mortuary Monuments in Ancient and Medieval India* (Delhi, 1991), 95.

1739–1747), and which had its origins in South India.<sup>15</sup> The fall of the coastal polities of the island to the Portuguese by the early seventeenth century set the context for a dearth of suitable brides of the superior solar caste for the Kandyan monarchy in the interior of the island. In South India, meanwhile, a class of settlers called the Nayaks, including military adventurers and governors, had broken away from the nominal overlordship of the Vijayanagara Empire. There was thus a congruence of interests between the Kandyans' need to procure brides who could be presented as belonging to the solar caste and the Nayaks' need to stabilize their fortunes in South India. After marrying into the Kandyan royal line, the Nayaks eventually took it over when a Kandyan monarch was unable to sire children with his Nayakkar queens.

The status of the Nayakkar line has served as a point of sustained debate in Sri Lankan history.<sup>16</sup> Were they always perceived as foreigners from South India, or were they internalized? They certainly portrayed themselves as pious Buddhists, in keeping with Kandy's religious ethos, and they were tutored in the Sinhala and Pali languages by Buddhist priests while overseeing a period of cultural renaissance in the interior. Yet a plot in 1760 to depose the Nayakkar monarch, Kirti Sri Rajasimha (r. 1747–1782), may have been prompted by his adherence to the Hindu custom of anointing himself with ash.<sup>17</sup> When the Nayaks multiplied, they were segregated in Kandy and given a separate street for their use, which after the British invasion was called "Malabar Street."<sup>18</sup> It is useful to see the Nayaks as being both excluded from and included in what it meant to be Sinhala and Buddhist, where the sense of these categories is taken to indicate the period's meanings. The traditional idea of bounded or static identity is unhelpful in coming to terms with the shifts in both the self-presentation of these monarchs and how they were viewed by their courts. At the same time, the political import and cultural signification of being Sinhala were not equivalent; it was possible at times to be a Sinhala king even while not being Sinhala in cultural terms.

An important issue that has attracted far less attention from scholars is how the Nayakkar line forged their place in the politics and culture of the wider region. In the centuries prior to Kandy's conquest by the British, the kingdom had linkages with Southeast Asia and South India, involving both the passage of peoples and the formation of a sense of regional community. Kandy might be usefully contextualized

<sup>15</sup> For details of the rise and fall of the Nayakkar line, see Lorna Dewaraja, *A Study of the Political, Administrative, and Social Structure of the Kandyan Kingdom of Ceylon, 1707–1760* (Colombo, 1972); 2nd rev. ed., *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka, 1707–1782* (Colombo, 1988).

<sup>16</sup> For the original debate, see K. N. O. Dharmadasa, "The Sinhala-Buddhist Identity and the Nayakkar Dynasty in the Politics of the Kandyan Kingdom, 1793–1815," *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies* 6, no. 1 (1976): 1–23; and H. L. Seneviratne, "The Alien King," *ibid.*, 55–61. For more recent contributions to this debate, see R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, "Colonialism, Ethnicity and the Construction of the Past: The Changing 'Ethnic Identity' of the Last Four Kings of the Kandyan Kingdom," in Martin van Bakel, Renee Hagesteijn, and Pieter van de Velde, eds., *Pivot Politics: Changing Cultural Identities in Early State Formation Processes* (Amsterdam, 1994), 197–211; Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period*, 46–52; Anne Blackburn, *Buddhist Learning and Textual Practice in Eighteenth-Century Lankan Monastic Culture* (Princeton, N.J., 2001), 32–35; and John Holt, *The Religious World of Kirti Sri: Buddhism, Art, and Politics in Late Medieval Sri Lanka* (New York, 1996). None of these authors follow the story of the repatriation of the last king of Kandy to the Vellore fort.

<sup>17</sup> Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period*, 49. Other historians disagree and point to the economic motivations for this plot; see Dewaraja, *A Study of the Political, Administrative, and Social Structure of the Kandyan Kingdom*, 108.

<sup>18</sup> Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period*, 51.

in relation to the late-eighteenth-century pattern of politics in Southeast Asia, such as Burma and Siam, that underwent a process of centralization, integration, and cultural reconstruction.<sup>19</sup> Just as in the island, the changes involved a new kingly patronage of Theravada Buddhism, the restoration of scholarly monks, and kingly interest in works of scholarship, translation, history, and art.<sup>20</sup>

Various island kings had established connections with Burma and Siam. Particularly noteworthy is the rather exaggerated claim in the twelfth-century section of the Buddhist chronicle the *Culavamsa*. It tells of how the monarch Parakramabahu I, who ascended the throne in 1153 A.D., was victorious in war against the king of Ramanna, and used a navy that “sailed forth in the midst of the ocean . . . like a swimming island.”<sup>21</sup> Ramanna is Ra-manyā, or what later became lower Burma.<sup>22</sup> This episode was exceptional. For the most part, relations with Burma were friendly and beneficial for both sides, and were cemented by the shared bond of Theravada Buddhism and the passage of monks between the two territories. When the need arose for religious revival, Burma looked to the island. Similarly, when Kandy’s rulers needed to reestablish higher ordination for the Buddhist clergy, they looked to Burma. At the tail end of both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, monks had been sent from Arakan to Kandy. Right on time, in 1799, a monk proceeded to Burma with five novices to gain higher ordination there, this time from the British territories on the coast. On returning to Ceylon in 1803, this group set up a new fraternity, the Amarapura Nikaya, which continues to this day.<sup>23</sup> The Amarapura Nikaya provides a successful example of the localization of an imported heritage of Theravada Buddhism, and points to the fragmentation of the Buddhist church that resulted from the division between British-controlled territories and Kandy.<sup>24</sup>

Religious revivalism also underpinned Kandy’s connections with Siam. There were two failed attempts to revive the island’s Buddhist church through contact with Siam during the reign of Sri Vijaya Rajasimha (r. 1739–1747); they were followed by two successful attempts during the reign of his successor, Kirti Sri Rajasimha. Twenty-five monks from Siam arrived in 1753, while a second group arrived in 1756.<sup>25</sup> The strength of this connection is exemplified by the 1760 plot against Kirti Sri: some members of the Buddhist clergy, who had benefited from the king’s religious revival,

<sup>19</sup> Anthony Reid, ed., *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies: Responses to Modernity in the Diverse States of Southeast Asia and Korea, 1750–1900* (Basingstoke, 1997), Introduction and chap. 1; and Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830* (Cambridge, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> For more on this, see Sujit Sivasundaram, “The British Empire and Indigenous Heritages in the South Pacific, South-East Asia and Southern Africa,” in Peter Mandler and Astrid Swenson, eds., *The Heritage of the British Empire* (forthcoming).

<sup>21</sup> *Culavamsa: Being the More Recent Part of the Mahavamsa*, trans. William Geiger, 2 vols. (1829; repr., Delhi, 1998), 2: chap. 86, line 56.

<sup>22</sup> For scrutiny of this claim, see Sirima Wickremasinghe, “Ceylon’s Relations with South-East Asia, with Special Reference to Burma,” *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies* 3 (1960): 38–58.

<sup>23</sup> For the passage of monks back and forth, see Kitsiri Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750–1900* (Berkeley, Calif., 1976), 56–57, 97–98.

<sup>24</sup> For the argument about successful importation, see Anne M. Blackburn, “Localizing Lineage: Importing Higher Education in Theravadin South and Southeast Asia,” in John Clifford Holt, Jacob N. Kinnard, and Jonathan Walters, eds., *Constituting Communities: Theravada Buddhism and the Religious Cultures of South and Southeast Asia* (New York, 2003), 131–149.

<sup>25</sup> Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, 61–67; Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka*, 114–115.

sought to assassinate him and have him replaced with a Siamese prince.<sup>26</sup> The plotters designed an elaborate plan to kill Kirti Sri. They set a pit of sharp spikes under his chair at a religious ceremony. Having learned of the plot, the monarch arrived at the ceremony and exposed the pit, and the event went on as if nothing had happened. The Siamese prince and monks were sent back home.<sup>27</sup>

Kandy's relations with the outside world followed the geographical contours of Dutch colonialism. The Dutch shipped ambassadors and monks on their vessels from Kandy to Southeast Asia. For instance, Kirti Sri's embassy to Siam in 1750 went via Aceh, Sumatra, and Malacca. The vessel flew the Dutch flag throughout the journey; it was lowered and replaced with the "Lion Flag of Lanka" only upon approaching Siam.<sup>28</sup> The Dutch, for their own part, were deeply suspicious of Kandy's external relationships, especially the connections with the wider world that the Nayakkar line brought with them as immigrants from South India. They provided assistance in procuring brides and monks in order to control these relationships to the extent that they could.<sup>29</sup>

The movements of peoples and the sense of community were not directed only toward Southeast Asia, and were not purely religious in this period. A series of intriguing letters between the kingdom of Kandy and a South Indian coastal polity (possibly Arcot) and between Kandy and the French based in Pondicherry suggest the need to place the highland state in the context of the Indian mainland.<sup>30</sup> The Nayakkars did not forget their mainland connections upon coming to power in Kandy; indeed, they spoke to the mainland with a sense of authority and with the hope of respect. In so doing, they did not necessarily bring a new relationship to India. But their correspondence is striking given that Kandy was landlocked by the European colonists who had taken the coasts.

One of the letters, possibly from the Kandyan monarch Rajadhi Rajasinha, was drafted in gold characters, wrapped in two muslin handkerchiefs, and placed into a bag of gold tinsel cloth, which itself was then wrapped in a handkerchief and placed in a white bag and tied up in handkerchiefs. The text included a notice of gifts: "We are in receipt of the set of golden garment [*sic*] which you with your good will sent unto us. In return We are gracefully sending a set of golden garments, a letter bearing our seal and two elephants, one a she-elephant and the other a baby."<sup>31</sup> Accompanying this letter was another of the same date from "Divaka Wickramasinghe, the General of His Most Gracious Majesty (the Beneficent Great Court), the Lord of Sri Lanka." Wickramasinghe heaped praise upon the character of his enlightened monarch, describing him as "resplendent with multitudinous glory as clear and ex-

<sup>26</sup> Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, 66; for a full discussion of this plot, see Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka*, 119–124.

<sup>27</sup> Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka*, 121–124.

<sup>28</sup> P. E. Pieris, trans., "An Account of Kirti Sri's Embassy to Siam in 1672 Saka (1750 A.D.)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch* 18 (1903): 22.

<sup>29</sup> Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka*, 99–103.

<sup>30</sup> C. Rasanayagam, *Tamil Documents in the Government Archives* (Colombo, 1937). This includes a total of five translated letters. I refer to three of them in this paragraph. In addition to this relationship with Arcot, Kandy also had close links with the Tevar of Ramnad, whose territory was separated from the island by the narrowest stretch of sea, being on the opposite coast of the mainland. See Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka*, 97–99.

<sup>31</sup> Draft of the King's Reply to the Nawab of Arcot, dated November 4, 1786, in Rasanayagam, *Tamil Documents in the Government Archives*, 10.



cessively white as snow, *kunda* flowers, sandal paste, autumnal Moon, milk, white lotus, celestial elephant, stars, pearl necklace.” He pointed out that ambassadors from “many countries” had visited Kandy. Having drawn attention to the kingdom’s greatness, he then meted out his criticism of Arcot:

Now the persons who came to represent the honour of Rajamannya Raja Sri the Nawab received presents on their hands, placed them down and departed to their resting place, before the persons who accompanied them could have given them their presents and before they (the envoys) could have been sent away with due respect and honour . . . Some forms of etiquette observed in the island of Lanka may appear disrespectful to you and some of yours may appear disrespectful to us . . . Therefore do not send such Ambassadors. If such are sent we shall not receive them nor talk to them.<sup>32</sup>

These letters between Kandy and India were retrieved from the palace at Kandy after the city’s invasion by the British in 1815. Another letter in that loot was sent by Magdom Lebbe (Magdom Ismail) from Ramnad, on the east coast of South India, and was addressed to the chief minister at Kandy. Written in Arabic-Tamil, it carried news from the mainland. It mentioned a war in Madras and reported that “owing to storms and floods, sloops and boats are in great distress.” Most of the content was devoted to matters of maritime trade. The reason for its Arabic-Tamil script is spelled out: it was necessary in order to prevent information from falling into the hands of the British. The importance of the straits surrounding the island of Mannar, on the northwest coast of Ceylon, was also explained: “there is a house near the Sundresa Aiyer Chattiram (traveller’s bungalow) in the Isthmus of Pamban near Kovilgramamam village at the confluence of the southern and northern seas which is a convenient place for going and coming.” The agent communicated his plan for housing his son at this place. He talked about the possibility of trading in cloths from the mainland: “If after a year or two of business in clothes we find it profitable we can always do that business. If the present samples are approved of, we can send clothes and shell bangles.”<sup>33</sup>

In the decades before the British conquest, the kingdom of Kandy therefore had at least two axes of relations with the outside world: toward Burma and Siam, and also toward South India. These relationships suggest a formation of identity and kingship that drew on regional patterns but was at the same time grasping for independence and respect. The identity of the king and the religion and politics of the kingdom were forged in a larger sphere, and the Nayaks kept up those outside connections. These political, religious, and economic links affected the character of the kingdom and its discourse of Sinhaleanness. An argument can be made that they influenced the composition and sense of placement of Kandy.

<sup>32</sup> Draft of a Letter from the Chief Minister of the King to the Minister of the Nawab, *ibid.*, 10–11.

<sup>33</sup> “An Arabic-Tamil Letter Written by Magdom Lebbe Alias Magdom Ismail, an Envoy from Pondicherry, to the Chief Minister at Kandy from Ramanadapuram on or about 1 October 1799,” *ibid.*, 12–13. For more on the role of Muslim traders within the Kandyan kingdom, see Lorna Dewaraja, *The Muslims of Sri Lanka: One Thousand Years of Ethnic Harmony, 900–1915* (Colombo, 1994).

WAR POEMS SERVE as an intriguing set of sources on the history of the island.<sup>34</sup> One such poem, the *Ingrisi Hatana* (“The English Battle”), survives from the Kandyans’ decisive victory over the British in 1803. The *Ingrisi Hatana* has been preserved in a valuable and essentially unmined collection of palm leaf manuscripts from the island, which date back to the medieval period. These long, thin sheets are beautiful objects of workmanship, with ornate covers and with string binding and lettering.<sup>35</sup> It is likely that war poems were recited to inspire troops or to celebrate victory, and that the preserved copy of the *Ingrisi Hatana* is merely a written transcription of an oral ballad. Such a use is supported by the metric forms of these poems. The *Ingrisi Hatana* shows how warfare with the British, like previous wars, strengthened Kandyan confidence and identity. Its rendition of the English defeat is gory, and the victory is consistently linked to the strength of Sinhalaness:

Behold! how the Sinhala troops showed their might on the battlefield, cutting and slashing the enemy, hurling them to the ground, chasing them down; beating them, tying them up, cursing at them, tauntingly asking “How are you doing?,” stealing what they were wearing and looting, with no hint of compassion.

Some men in the Sinhala army, wielding large and strong cudgels as weapons, pursued the enemy and clubbed them in the head until they were dead. Others wrenched the lances and other weapons from their hands, their umbrellas and flags, while still others seized their elephants, horses, and buffaloes.

Some men in the Sinhala army threw the enemy soldiers to the ground, tearing off the red armor they were wearing; others smashed the pots of rice and hoppers [a kind of pancake] and other things they were cooking on the ground, while others made off with boxes of money, glasses and barrels of arrack, rum, and the like.

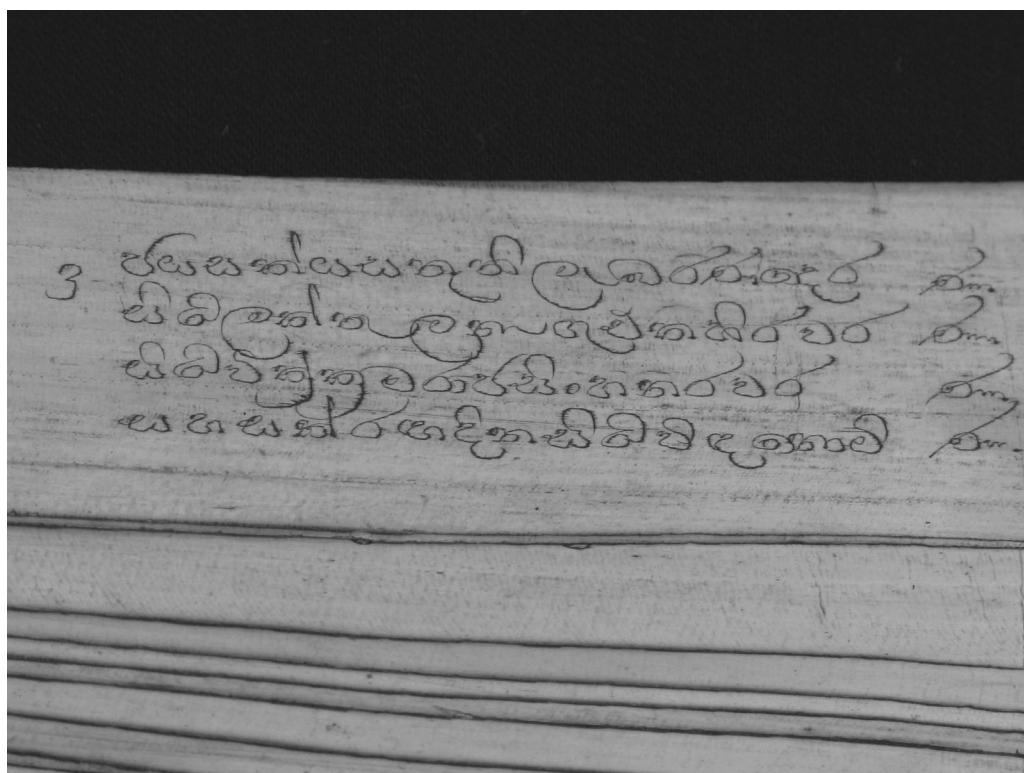
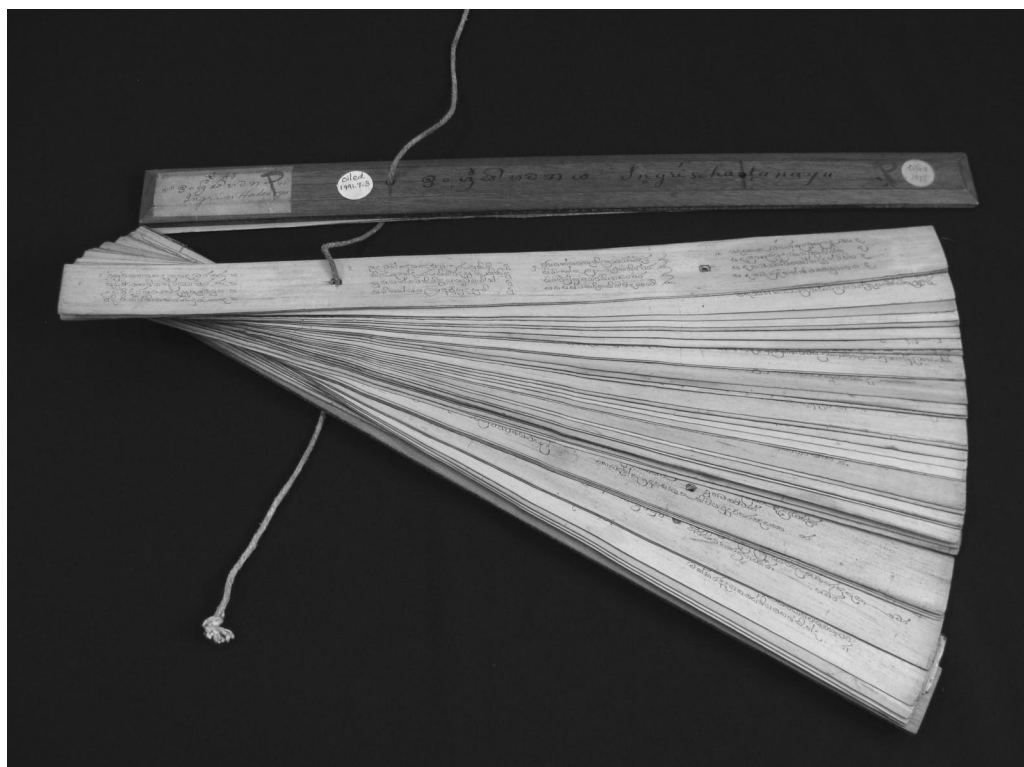
Some clever fighters jumped right into the middle of the fight and beheaded the enemy soldiers; others subdued the enemy, threw them to the ground, and bound their hands from behind. Others taunted them: “If you are so smart, then let’s see you get out of here alive.” Some of the enemy soldiers fled; it was more than they could bear.

Thus the Sinhala army, with no fear of war, showed their might. Then some of the enemy soldiers dropped their weapons. They were taken to be shown to the king. Others in the English army ran away in defeat.

The bulk of the *Ingrisi Hatana* is devoted to the demeanor and status of Sri Vickrama Rajasimha, who was later exiled to South India by the British. The king’s actions are seen in the lineage of Sinhalaness. Repeatedly he is said to have united the three Sinhalas—Ruhunu, Pihiti, and Maya, which were seen as three separate historic kingdoms of the island. “As brave as a lion that rips open the heads of elephant-like enemies, King Sri Vickrama Rajasimha, glorious and majestic, shines like a

<sup>34</sup> The discussion of war poems in this paragraph draws on the analytical claims of Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period*. The following citations from the *Ingrisi Hatana* are from a full translation of this manuscript that I have undertaken from Sinhala to English in collaboration with Professor Udaya Meddegama of the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. Copies of the *Ingrisi Hatana* are available to view in the Museum Library, Colombo; see, for instance, K.11.

<sup>35</sup> For a valuable recent survey of themes covered in palm leaf manuscripts, see Sirancee Gunawardana, *Palm Leaf Manuscripts of Sri Lanka* (Ratmalana, Sri Lanka, 1997).



FIGURES 2 AND 3: A copy of the *Ingridi Hatana* at the Colombo Museum, Sri Lanka, and detail from a leaf of the same copy. Reproduced by permission of the Director of the Colombo Museum.

bright light in the ‘three Sinhala.’ ” At the same time, the poet pointed to the spread of the king’s fame beyond the realms of the island: “Having brought Sri Lanka under one parasol [as a united kingdom], spreading glory in many other countries, His Majesty King Sri Vickrama, may you ever know pleasure, like God-King Sakra!” The “whole of India” was said to be “shining with the splendor” of this king. The victory would be known in “the world” for “five thousand years.” By uniting the land in victory, the king was declared “a lion-king who displays his splendor among elephants.”

This mode of representing kingly triumph was well established in the literature of the island. The “lion king” motif in particular signifies Sinhaleanness, and points to the myth of origin of the Sinhala people, according to which they descended from a lion.<sup>36</sup> The 1803 victory did not bring the entire island under Kandyan rule, as the British continued to hold the coastal regions. Yet the rhetoric of unity and its correspondence to Sinhaleanness and kingship denotes how warfare with Europeans since the time of the Portuguese had served as a context for the evolution of identity, state-making, and associated cultural practices. It also shows the strong hold that the idea of the united island polity had in precolonial Kandy.

THERE IS ANOTHER SIDE to Kandy that needs also to be kept in view. Despite the discourse of Sinhala, it was actually a cosmopolitan kingdom, at least at the elite level; it contained significant elements of diversity. In addition to the monarchs, the Kandyan court and kingdom included a number of important functionaries who had come from or who traced their descent from elsewhere, and who did not lose their identities while being integrated into the structures of the state. In 1810, the British Resident in Kandy, John D’Oyly, who famously depended on spies disguised as monks and traders to discover the workings of the kingdom, noted that the Kandyan king’s paid soldiers included 250 to 300 Malays, 200 “Kaffirs,” or troops from Africa, 20 sepoys from India, 250 Muslims, and 100 “Malabars.”<sup>37</sup> It is likely that a good number of them were deserters from European troops on the island. Throughout their wars with Europeans, the Kandyans also utilized a number of Europeans in their own ranks. In 1803, the British were shocked to learn that one of their artillerymen, a man named Benson, had deserted to the side of the Kandyans. Benson then took charge of the production of gunpowder in Kandy.<sup>38</sup>

Not only was Kandy’s cosmopolitanism reflected in the manner of its defense, but it also carried through to matters of trade. Here the kingdom relied heavily on a number of Moors or Muslims who had been forced into the interior as a result of persecution by the Portuguese. The Moors became the prime advisers to the Kandyan kings on commerce and formed part of the carriage bullock department. They were in charge, for instance, of the royal monopoly over the areca nut trade; they transported the nuts on oxen to the Dutch border, and even hoped to evade Dutch scrutiny and sell them to South Indian merchants. Moors were integrated into

<sup>36</sup> For the origin myth, see Gunawardana, “The People of the Lion.”

<sup>37</sup> Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka*, 201.

<sup>38</sup> Channa Wickremasekera, *Kandy at War: Indigenous Military Resistance to European Expansion in Sri Lanka, 1594–1818* (Colombo, 2004), 60.



the Kandyan kingdom with such facility that they were assigned the task of cleaning the silver and gold vessels used at the sacred Temple of Buddha's tooth relic.<sup>39</sup> Thus, not only did European expansion provide a context for the identity of the Kandyan state to be firmed up as Sinhala, it provided a series of entrants into Kandy, ranging from Europeans to Moors, who made it a cosmopolitan kingdom. The turn to Sinhalaness and this continued cosmopolitanism should not be seen as opposites; for ideas of the cosmopolitan and indigeneity are often engaged in a dialectic encounter in history.

While these changes in composition and placement were taking place in the interior, South Indians continued to arrive along the coastal belt as well, a zone that is not in prime view here, where new castes emerged as the immigrants were absorbed into society.<sup>40</sup> The caste of cinnamon peelers, for instance, emerged among immigrants who had belonged to the weaver caste in South India. In the early British period, connections with the Coromandel coast were particularly strong. Migrants from the coast were said to have come to the island and resided there "for years, carrying on a brisk trade and forming connections with families which are of the same caste as themselves."<sup>41</sup> One historian of immigration has argued that the presence of people of South Indian origin has been a continuous feature of the island's history, and that even the tide of indentured laborers who worked on plantations in the later decades of the nineteenth century should be contextualized in relation to earlier patterns.<sup>42</sup>

Clearly, the relationship between the island's peoples, their identities, and the wider world was complex: arrivals from the outside were assimilated even as they altered existent social distinctions. The structural patterns of Kandy's relations with the outside world and wars with Europeans had an impact on the kingdom's organization and composition, and in turn on its discourse of Sinhalaness.

THE BRITISH DID NOT UNDERSTAND the complexity of these relationships, and their policies eventually swung to a position that viewed the island as distinct from the mainland. For these colonists were in search of the truly indigenous in the island of Ceylon—which would then consolidate their new territory as a cohesive whole. Such an intention was particularly evident in how they sought to repatriate those in Kandy who had recently come from India, and who were related to or associated with the royal family. This was a campaign driven by political necessity. By dispatching Malabars to India from the interior, the British sought to stabilize the security of the island as a colony. This program shows that they saw the Sinhalese as "indigenous" peoples and the Malabars as recent arrivals from South India.

The first few years of British rule on the coastal belt of the island, before the taking of Kandy, shed light on how the placement of islanders in the wider region was recast by Britons. The British first took the Dutch territories of the coast in 1796,

<sup>39</sup> All of this information is from Dewaraja, *The Muslims of Sri Lanka*, chap. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Roberts, "From Southern India to Lanka." For a general analysis of castes in the island in relation to the mainland, see Rogers, "Caste as a Social Category and Identity in Colonial Lanka."

<sup>41</sup> Cited in Roberts, "From Southern India to Lanka," 38.

<sup>42</sup> Patrick Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon* (London, 2001).

in fear that they would fall to the French, and governed them under the East India Company's Madras Presidency. The early British officers in Ceylon thus attempted to make its governance conform to the pattern of the Madras Presidency.<sup>43</sup> Robert Andrews, who was in charge of revenues, grew apprehensive of the powers of the chief headmen through whom Europeans had governed prior to this period. In accordance with a proclamation of 1796, the headmen were stripped of their authority; their duties were then entrusted to officers from South India. In addition to these "Malabar" officials, a range of adventurers from South India arrived on the island and took up tax farming. These changes generated widespread discontent, which was brought to a head by the imposition of a tax on coconut trees and the abolition of service tenures. Open revolt followed, as a result of which the Madras government lost its direct authority over the island's territories.<sup>44</sup> In 1798, Fredrick North became the first governor of Ceylon. He was asked to report not to Madras, but to Calcutta and the East India Company's Court of Directors. During this period of dual control, the Crown had authority over civil and military duties, while the Company had charge of commerce. Given the failures of Madras's rule of Ceylon, North displayed a disdain of the southern presidency.<sup>45</sup> He had initially hoped that the island would be placed directly under Bengal as a separate presidency, but after it became a Crown colony in 1802, he slowly came to realize that this gave him a measure of extra authority.<sup>46</sup>

North's frosty relations with Madras are also apparent in his dealings with Kandy. Throughout his career, most particularly in his disastrous attempt to invade the kingdom in 1803, he was motivated by a belief that the Kandyan court was split by a "Malabar faction": namely that the Sinhala aristocracy resented the king and his relatives because they were foreigners from South India.<sup>47</sup> In this regard, he shared the Dutch perception of the Kandyan court. In the mid-eighteenth century, one Dutchman expressed a wish to see a "Kandyan prince" on the throne so that "the pernicious coast Nayakkars, Malabars and Moorish scum" could be extracted.<sup>48</sup> North attempted at first to forge a subsidiary alliance with Kandy, modeled on those common in India. Accordingly, he hoped to station a British garrison in the kingdom,

<sup>43</sup> The material for this paragraph is drawn primarily from De Silva, *Ceylon under the British Occupation*, 1: chap. 7.

<sup>44</sup> See also Schrikker, *Dutch and British Colonial Intervention in Sri Lanka*, 152–158.

<sup>45</sup> See also U. C. Wickremaratne, "The English East India Company and Society in the Maritime Provinces of Ceylon, 1796–1802," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1971): 139–155; and Schrikker, *Dutch and British Colonial Intervention in Sri Lanka*, 146.

<sup>46</sup> Schrikker, *Dutch and British Colonial Intervention in Sri Lanka*, 155.

<sup>47</sup> U. C. Wickremaratne, in "Lord North and the Kandyan Kingdom, 1798–1805," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 1 (1973): 31–42, goes to the extent of suggesting that the factionalism in the Kandyan court was conceived and exaggerated by the British, while others, such as Jim Duncan, *The City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1990), and Schrikker, *Dutch and British Colonial Intervention in Sri Lanka*, 208, have argued that there was factionalism in the Kandyan court and that it was economic. Regardless of which view we take of the intrigues of the Kandyan court, it is clear from the evidence cited below that North privileged a view of "Malabars" as foreign.

<sup>48</sup> Dewaraja, *The Muslims of Sri Lanka*, 77. For more on Dutch views of the Kandyan court, see K. W. Goonewardene, "The Accession of Sri Vijaya Rajasimha," in G. P. S. H. de Silva and C. G. Uragoda, eds., *Sesquicentennial Commemorative Volume of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka, 1845–1995* (Colombo, 1995), 441–467.

and in return to appropriate a part of its revenue to the British government.<sup>49</sup> He negotiated in secret with the chief minister, Pilima Talauve, whom he perceived to be the foremost Sinhala aristocrat, and sought to place him on the throne instead of the king. But North was unable to find an “ethnic” division between Pilima Talauve and his king. When negotiations broke down in 1803, war ensued, resulting in disaster, as retold by the *Ingrisi Hatana*. The Nayakkar king was restored.

Yet British ideas about the need to rid Kandy of “Malabar” influence began to have a slow effect. In 1812, Pilima Talauve was executed by the king for treason; Ahalepola was then appointed as chief minister. Ahalepola in turn cooperated with the British, eventually fleeing to the maritime provinces, under British control. From there he commissioned texts that provided an ethnicized critique of the Nayakkar line and played up the monarchs’ Indian ancestry and Hindu leanings.<sup>50</sup> British ideologies of difference may well have provided a context for Ahalepola’s invective. With his help, the British conquered Kandy in 1815, and their desire to separate the Nayakkar line from their subjects came to full fruition. Governor Robert Brownrigg noted the predicament of the “Malabars adhering to the King”: they were caught between their loyalty to the monarch and their hope of returning to India.<sup>51</sup> British benevolence dictated that they should all be repatriated:

The Malabars from the Coast of Coromandel, as well as the Moors from the same quarter, are by their birth and parentage the natural subjects of His Britannick Majesty, and of the Hon. The East India Company. They are exhorted to keep in mind this bond of Allegiance—and to hold in view the hope of being able (as loyal subjects of the British Empire) to return with safety and protection to their families, relations, friends and cast, in their native countries, under the Hon. Company’s Government . . . Such safety and protection, with a passport to their country, and every reasonable assistance and support, is hereby offered to them—thus timely before they become involved in the guilt of actual hostility and armed opposition . . . neglecting which warning, they will incur the danger of being treated not only as enemies but as traitors.<sup>52</sup>

There was therefore a concerted attempt to separate the so-called “Malabars” from the true inhabitants of the island. While the term “Malabar” was used for many people on the coast as well, this program was restricted to those in Kandy who were linked to the Nayakkar line. However, in the fort and pettah of Colombo, on the coast, the British did not allow Malabars and Moors to own houses or land, following a Dutch regulation.<sup>53</sup> The program of repatriation included the king, and this was why Sri Vickrama Rajasimha was sent to South India. Brownrigg wrote that Sri Vickrama Rajasimha should be kept “amongst those of his own cast and consequently in or near that part of the country from whence his family originates.” The Company, however, worried that his presence in South India would “disturb the tranquillity of

<sup>49</sup> For North’s attempt at forging a subsidiary alliance, see Wickremaratne, “Lord North and the Kandyan Kingdom.”

<sup>50</sup> Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period*, 51.

<sup>51</sup> Dispatch from Robert Brownrigg in Kandy reporting the capture of the king, February 25, 1815, CO/54/55, the National Archives, Kew [hereafter TNA].

<sup>52</sup> Proclamation of His Excellency, Governor Robert Brownrigg, February 11, 1815, *ibid*.

<sup>53</sup> Dispatch from Governor Horton to London, July 7, 1832, CO/54/117, TNA, repealing the acts that were put in place banning “Moors and Malabars” from owning land and houses in the Colombo fort and pettah.

our Districts.” As a compromise, it was agreed that he would be housed in the Vellore fort.<sup>54</sup> The Crown government of the island then carefully categorized the king and his retinue before their departure to India. When the brig *Eliza Tutocoveen* took Nayakkar prisoners of war across the sea in May 1815, their details were verified in tabular form: the Company was told which “cast” each individual belonged to, “what country” each belonged to, and also how long each had been resident in Kandy.<sup>55</sup> Eighty-one people were imprisoned in the fort with the king, while many others were dispersed in South India.<sup>56</sup>

The entire contingent of repatriates was divided into several categories. The first class comprised the group that had been confined to the fort, which included the king and his relatives. The second category was made up of those who had resided in Kandy for a long period and were “in some degree aliens in their native country.” The members of this class did not have to be treated as prisoners, and the Ceylon government was unwilling to pay for their upkeep, except for a short period before they returned to their ordinary occupations. The third class of repatriates were those whom the Ceylon government viewed as “merely sojourners on this side of the Gulph.” In addition to these three classes, Ceylon also sent to India a small number of “Malays, Caffres and a few natives of Bengal.”<sup>57</sup> While the Dutch had complained about the influence of people they deemed to be foreigners in Kandy, they had never had the authority to orchestrate this kind of eviction. This narrative displays the power of British interventions.

Yet such an interpretation must be guarded, for the British quickly found that their program of repatriation was difficult to carry out. The exiles did not see themselves as residents of South India. In numerous petitions addressed to the British, they complained of being stranded in a foreign country.<sup>58</sup> In a striking instance of resistance, seven prisoners disembarked at Cuddalore, and two of them insisted that “they [were] natives of Kandy and not of Malabar.”<sup>59</sup> In another case, ten Kandyan families arrived in Tanjore alleging that “their destination to Chalempalegam in Tondiman’s country must have been founded on some mistake . . . that they know no such place in Tondiman’s country [and] that they are with the exception of one of their number utter strangers to Tondiman’s country.”<sup>60</sup> The prisoners were surprised in part because they did not see a difference between Crown and Company. One petitioner wrote to the Crown governor of Ceylon: “I humbly beg leave to state that after the Honourable Company became masters of Candy, it has pleased the Honorable Company to send my late father and other families to these parts of

<sup>54</sup> Robert Brownrigg to Hugh Elliot, Governor in Council, April 8, 1815, File F/4/515, IOR. See also secret letter from Fort St. George, October 7, 1815; and Hugh Elliot to Robert Brownrigg, April 26, 1815, *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Among the “countries” listed were “Tanjore, Ramnad, Negapatam, Bendigalle, Puducotte, Madura, Trenevelly, Seveganta, Velantchery, Colleloor.”

<sup>56</sup> This figure comes from Charles Marriott to the Chief Secretary of Government at Fort St. George, April 1, 1816, F/4/515, IOR.

<sup>57</sup> The different categories are laid out in Robert Brownrigg to Hugh Elliott, Governor in Council, Fort St. George, April 8, 1815, *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> See, for instance, F/4/880, IOR, for a batch of such petitions.

<sup>59</sup> J. Macdonald to the Chief Secretary of Government, Fort St. George, March 21, 1816, F/4/515, IOR.

<sup>60</sup> The Resident of Tanjore to the Chief Secretary of Government, Fort St. George, October 1, 1816, F/4/527, IOR.



country.”<sup>61</sup> By 1816, the Crown government had to admit that some of the prisoners of war had returned to the island. In attempting to force its policy through, the government declared it illegal for anyone who had been a “Malabar” resident in Kandy one year prior to the kingdom’s takeover to remain in the island without “written permission” from a representative of the governor.<sup>62</sup>

As might be expected, Sri Vickrama Rajasimha himself did not adjust to his new situation. Charles Marriott, who was in charge of the king, wrote:

To eradicate the kingly notions of a person (and that person by no means a wise one) who has by his account been seated on a throne about nineteen years, must be the work of time and infinite patience, and till these notions are eradicated it is useless to expect that ideas of private comfort will be planted or grown up.<sup>63</sup>

Sri Vickrama Rajasimha attempted to assemble his court while in exile, calling his ministers at specified hours. He asked for a crown to be made out of some beaten gold that he had in his possession.<sup>64</sup> For his daughter’s earring feast, he asked for 800 seers of raw rice, 2,500 young coconuts, 3,000 plantains, 200 candles, 1,500 limes, 30 jackfruits, 10 sheep, 200 eggs, 50 fowls, and 30 large fish. His request that the fish be caught in inland water tanks, like those that were part of the Kandyan kingdom, provides an important clue.<sup>65</sup> He expected similar extravagance for the marriage of his daughter. In response it was noted: “Independently of the objections on the score of expence it would obviously be very ill judged to indulge on his part or that of his family a taste for the splendours of royalty.”<sup>66</sup> The captive king was never resettled away from the Vellore fort. His attempt to merge Kandyan traditions with Hindu funerary rites is therefore fitting. It shows that the British idea that a “Malabar” could separate his identity from a “Sinhala” had failed to materialize. By 1834, the Ceylon government had to shift its policy and allow all the “Malabar” exiles, except the close relatives of the family of the king, the possibility of returning to the island.<sup>67</sup>

The program of repatriation, and the partitioning of the mainland from the island, meant that the colonial state was particularly suspicious of the movement of people from India to Ceylon, and within Ceylon from the Kandyan territories to the lowlands, in the years after Kandy’s fall. In 1816, for instance, a sitting magistrate suggested that if “Malabars” wished to move in either direction between Kandy and Colombo, they should have to obtain a pass, which would be granted only after a personal interview. Sitting magistrates and police officers were instructed to watch carefully for Malabars who moved between territories.<sup>68</sup> One class of people who came under colonial scrutiny as a result of this directive were the mendicants who

<sup>61</sup> Petition to His Excellency the Governor in Council at Ceylon, the humble representation of Dince Swamy, the son of late Condeswamy Naicker, head brother in law of Istree Rajady Rajah Singa Maha Rajah, the king of Candy, F/4/1461, IOR.

<sup>62</sup> Order of Council of Government of Ceylon, signed James Gay, Secretary of Council, June 24, 1816, F/4/527, IOR.

<sup>63</sup> Charles Marriott to Chief Secretary of Government, Fort. St. George, October 11, 1816, *ibid*.

<sup>64</sup> See the correspondence in F/4/527, IOR.

<sup>65</sup> Petition transmitted to Ceylon, June 18, 1821, F/4/880, IOR.

<sup>66</sup> Chief Secretary Hill to the Officiating Paymaster of Stipends, Vellore, September 23, 1825, F/4/1013, IOR.

<sup>67</sup> Extract from Political Letter from Fort St. George, July 11, 1834, F/4/1461, IOR.

<sup>68</sup> Sitting Magistrates Office to J. Sutherland, Secretary of the Kandyan Provinces, July 31, 1816, Lot 10/130, Sri Lanka National Archives.

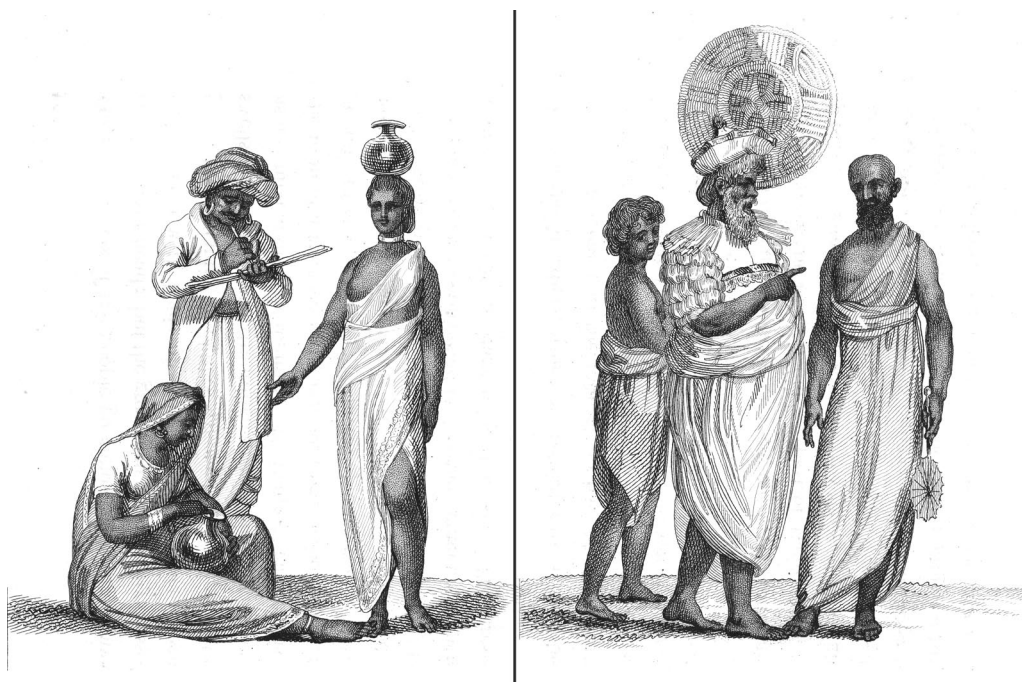


FIGURE 4: “Malabar dresses and Candian dresses.” From James Cordiner, *A Description of Ceylon* (London, 1807). Reproduced by Permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

lived an itinerant life across South Asia. Eleven mendicants were detained upon arriving on the northwest coast of Mannar from India in September 1816, and were said from their “appearance and manners” to be “exactly the sort of men whom it is the desire of the Government to prevent penetrating into the interior.”<sup>69</sup> A magistrate also reported that in 1816 he had apprehended a “Malabar man who calls himself Cahilasan Poille and pretends to be a native of Colombo and is going in search of medicinal herbs.”<sup>70</sup> The sitting magistrate of Colombo documented the case of a man named Ramparasad and sent on the transcript of an interview with him:

Q. What is your Native Place?

A. Benares.

Q. What is your usual occupation?

A. I am Brahmin Beggar by profession.

Q. When were you last at Benares?

A. Four years ago, since that I was at Poonah and Kokam and Cochin and then I took a circuit on the Coast of Coromandel.

Q. What is your object in coming to Ceylon?

A. I came to perform a religious promise at Cataragam and to go to Adam’s Peak.

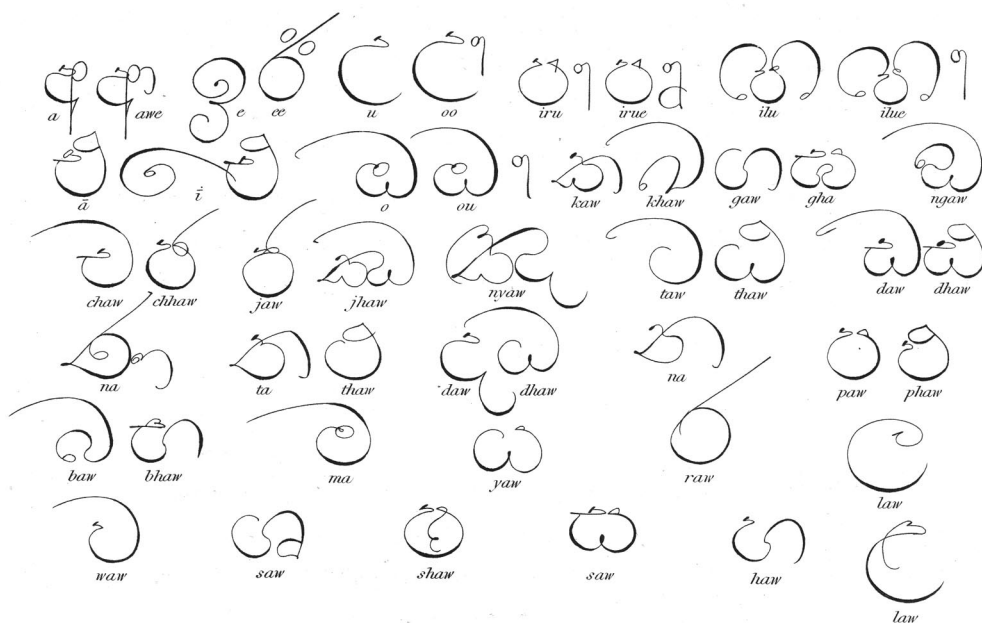
Q. Why did you proceed without a passport?

A. I was not aware it was necessary—I landed at Mannar in company with three others vizt. Goolapadoo and Iwat Ghirey, who are both are gone away—the third is now with me, who is called Bederadesus . . .

<sup>69</sup> Correspondence from Cutcherry, Mannar, September 4, 1816, *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Sitting Magistrates Court to Secretary to the Kandyan Department, Colombo, August 5, 1816, *ibid.*

### CINGALESE ALPHABET.



### MALABAR ALPHABET.

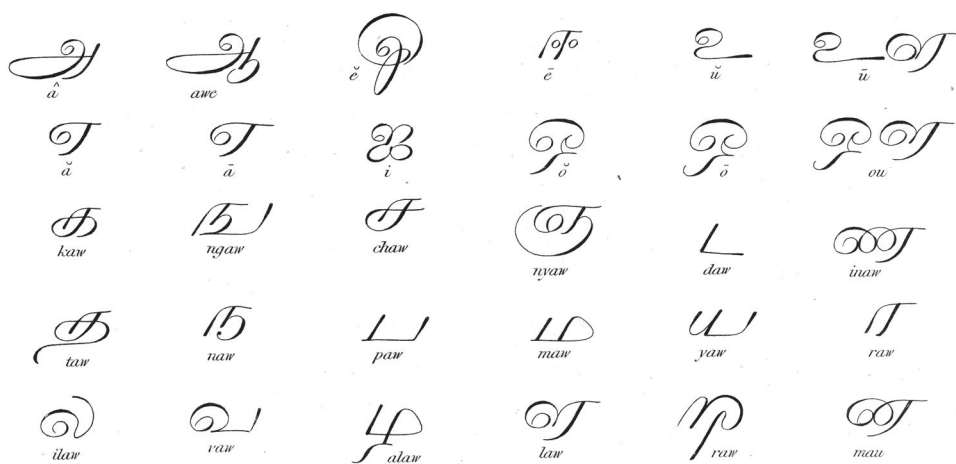


FIGURE 5: "Cingalese Alphabet and Malabar Alphabet." From James Cordiner, *A Description of Ceylon* (London, 1807). Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

Q. Did you converse with many Kandyan Malabars in the Kandyan Country?

A. I conversed at Cateragam with none. I can't speak Tamul or Cingalese. I understood from the Hindostanee Priest at Cateragam that many of the persons I saw were Kandyans, but they were not dressed like coast Malabars.<sup>71</sup>

The man's route of travel was deciphered by the questioner: it encompassed North India and South India. After landing in Mannar, he had spent six weeks in Jaffna

<sup>71</sup> Extract from interview, September 13, 1816, Colombo Sitting Magistrates Office, *ibid*.

in northern Ceylon; from there he proceeded to Trincomalee on the east coast of Ceylon for a month, then south to Kataragama, which is sacred to both Hindus and Buddhists, then on to Badulla before climbing the mountain of Adam's Peak, a site of religious pilgrimage.

There is some evidence that the extent to which the British policed the movement of Malabars in the years after the fall of Kandy led to new tensions between communities. This is apparent in two petitions that were presented to Governor Brownrigg from "Weeraragoe of Candy, now at Colombo." The petitioner, who identified himself as a man from Tanjore in South India, had arrived in Kandy forty-five years prior to the petitions and had made his living as a merchant with no connection to the royal family of Kandy. After the royal family and its relatives were detained, the petitioner claimed that his house was attacked "in the night time" by a man named "Muddor, inhabitant of Candy in the accompany of some Cingalese men." In fear, the petitioner fled Kandy after obtaining a passport from D'Oyly. After being detained on the coast in Colombo, he was asked to make a weekly appearance before a magistrate and was treated as a prisoner. His family was, in the petitioner's words, "reduced to insufferable indigence and starvations without having any assistance nor means of support whatever in this strange place." In a further petition, the man complained that he had received no response from Brownrigg; he said that he been reduced to utter poverty, forced even to sell his clothes, and that members of his family had fallen ill.<sup>72</sup>

THE LEGACY OF THE PARTITIONING of India and Ceylon is also evident in the regulation of travel in the opposite direction, by soldiers and plantation workers going to the island from the mainland. Britain initially articulated its taking of Ceylon's coasts as a way of defending India. The politician George Pitt, for instance, wrote that the island was "the most valuable colonial possession in the globe as giving to our Indian empire a security which it had not enjoyed from its first establishment."<sup>73</sup> Given Ceylon's military significance, its early governors believed that India owed the island the favor of supplying troops when they were needed. Men from the mainland were used in the Kandyan wars of 1803 and 1815, and to quell the wide-scale rebellion that engulfed the interior in 1817–1818. Yet the governors of Ceylon had cause to complain about the delay and bureaucracy that the island experienced in the Company's handling of their requests for reinforcement. For instance, Brownrigg noted his "heavy disappointment" when one of his requests for a supporting force for the 1815 war, which eventually saw Kandy's fall, was denied because the Company's army was fully occupied on the mainland.<sup>74</sup> During the rebellion in 1817–1818, he wrote again of the "anxiety and distress" he had labored under because the Madras Presidency did not dispatch the native troops he had expected from them. He noted that these additional troops would have enabled him to "occupy those parts of the Country, which being abandoned by [him] for want of troops, afforded secure retreats to

<sup>72</sup> Petitions to Sir Robert Brownrigg from Weeraragoe of Candy, now at Colombo, *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Cited in De Silva, *Ceylon under the British Occupation*, 20.

<sup>74</sup> Dispatch from Robert Brownrigg, January 16, 1815, CO/54/55, TNA.



the rebel chiefs, as well as resources to feed the flame of rebellion, which was expiring.”<sup>75</sup>

The troops that did come were also a point of discord. From the start, Governor Brownrigg complained about the “expensive Staff Establishments” sent with every regiment of troops arriving from India.<sup>76</sup> He expressed concern that the Indian government’s desire to organize a separate commissariat for their troops would result in the “greatest confusion.”<sup>77</sup> He was anxious that the Indian troops be placed securely under his command and that no intermediate officer should do injustice to Brownrigg’s “Rank in His Majesty’s Service.”<sup>78</sup> The different structures under which the men from the mainland were organized eventually led to open discontent. In July 1818, Colonel Arthur Molesworth wrote to Brownrigg to report the great dissatisfaction prevailing among the troops from India at the rate of exchange that determined their pay:

They embarked on this Service under the full conviction from former usage that they were to receive their Rations gratis and that they should be paid in Gold Pagodas or in Arcot Rupees exactly in the same manner as on the Coast, consequently they were inclined to leave on an average two thirds of their Pay with their families.<sup>79</sup>

Instead, these “coast sepoys” had been paid in Ceylon fanams at a depreciated rate of exchange, which meant that even common articles that they had been able to buy while on service on the continent were now beyond their reach. The sepoys, Molesworth added, “really cannot exist on the present rate of exchange.” Brownrigg was alarmed at the prospect of mutiny and intervened, declaring that the rate of exchange at Fort St. George should apply as well to the payment of these troops.<sup>80</sup> However, he pressed India on a question of principle. The confusion about terms had arisen from a distinction between “field service” and “foreign service”: Indian troops were paid and rationed as if they were on field service, when they had expected to be treated as if they were on foreign service when they embarked from India.<sup>81</sup> In effect he asked the Company whether it viewed Ceylon as “foreign.” Having obtained a complete description of the “resources of the Country, the extent of Supplies available for various Troops, and the rates at which those Supplies, including various petty articles in common use with the natives are procurable,” the Company decided that it was unwilling to class service on Ceylon as home service; instead, the precedent set by the Indian troops who had served in 1795 in the Molucca Islands would apply to Ceylon.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Robert Brownrigg to Hugh Elliott, Governor in Council, Fort St. George, August 18, 1818, CO/54/71, TNA.

<sup>76</sup> Dispatch from Robert Brownrigg, August 17, 1818, *ibid*.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Brownrigg to Vice President in Council, Fort William, August 3, 1818, *ibid*.

<sup>78</sup> Secret and Political Letter from Robert Brownrigg to Hugh Elliott, Governor in Council, Fort St. George, August 18, 1818, *ibid*.

<sup>79</sup> Arthur Molesworth, Commander of the Madras Troops Serving in Ceylon, to Hugh Elliot, Governor in Council, Fort William, July 16, 1818, CO 54/73, TNA.

<sup>80</sup> J. B. Gascoigne, Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, General Order, July 19, 1818, *ibid*.

<sup>81</sup> J. J. Wood, Military Secretary, to Edward Wood, Secretary of Government, Fort St. George, July 10, 1818, *ibid*.

<sup>82</sup> Edward Wood, Secretary of Government, Fort St. George, to the Commissary General, July 28, 1818, *ibid*. The Molucca Islands are now known as the Maluku Islands and are part of the Malay Archipelago.

Given this exchange, it is not surprising that the body of an Indian was cast as distinct from that of an islander. The Company's officers noted the Indian troops' peculiar propensity to be "affected by ulcers in the lower extremities," and how this resulted from the climate of the interior.<sup>83</sup> All that one of the leading medical men of the island could say in reply was that "the persuasion which appears to prevail at Fort St. George of the general unhealthiness of the Interior of this Island . . . is by far too unqualified, and is taken up on loose and vague grounds."<sup>84</sup> By the end of the 1817–1818 rebellion, Brownrigg, like North before him, had learned his lesson. He announced that he would embark on an extensive program of recruitment among men on the island, thereby ensuring that his dependency on the mainland would be reined in:

His Excellency the Governor and Commander of the Forces, considering it advisable to raise a Corps for the defence of the British Dominions in the Island of Ceylon to consist of His Majesty's Native Cingalese Subjects, invites such Persons of the Class of Lascareens of the Vellale, Fisher and Chando Casts, as are willing to serve the Crown as Soldiers in any part of Ceylon, and are able bodied, to offer themselves for enlistment for a term of Three Years.<sup>85</sup>

Later, however, once Ceylon had been consolidated as a colony, troops were moved between the two territories again.<sup>86</sup> In 1825, European troops from the island were somewhat begrudgingly sent to Burma, which was termed "the state adjacent," at the request of the Governor General in Council in India, Edward Paget; in 1837, Ceylon governor Robert Horton sought to firm up the procedure whereby Ceylon could supply troops to the Madras Presidency in times of emergency.<sup>87</sup>

The use of Indians on the island was evident in other contexts as well: mainlanders were used to provide labor on roads, to transport supplies during war, to repair irrigation tanks, and, in what has been the most studied instance of their use, as plantation workers.<sup>88</sup> Yet the correspondence on the use of Indian troops is important because it provides a snapshot of one of the earliest uses of Indian labor on the island, and so reveals the mechanisms that came to dictate later uses of Indians.

From the 1830s, for instance, the British saw plantation laborers arriving from the mainland as distinctly Indian and so of a separate lot—this despite the evidence that Indian plantation workers were sometimes recruited on the island rather than through agents sent to South India.<sup>89</sup> In the early years, some traveled by sea to

<sup>83</sup> Alex Watson MD, President, Medical Board, to Hugh Elliott, Governor in Council, June 18, 1818, *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Deputy Inspector of Hospitals to Secretary for the Kandyan Provinces, October 23, 1818, *ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> General Order, January 27, 1819, *ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> For the use of Indian troops overseas in the later period, see Thomas Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860–1920* (Berkeley, Calif., 2007), chap. 3.

<sup>87</sup> Governor Edward Barnes to London, January 17, 1825, and attached letters, CO 54/88, TNA; Governor Horton to London, September 2, 1837, CO/54/155, *ibid.*; Governor Mackenzie to London, June 30, 1838, CO/54/163, *ibid.*; Governor General Auckland, in India, to Mackenzie, July 30, 1838, CO/54/164, *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> For the construction of roads, see Sujit Sivasundaram, "Tales of the Land: British Geography and Kandyan Resistance in Sri Lanka, c. 1803–1850," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 5 (2005): 925–965. For other uses of Indian labor, see Roland Wenzlhuemer, "Indian Labour Immigration and British Labour Policy in Nineteenth-Century Ceylon," *Modern Asian Studies* 41 (2007): 575–602; and Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon*, chap. 1. See also Ian H. vanden Driesen, *The Long Walk: Indian Plantation Labour in Sri Lanka in the Nineteenth Century* (New Delhi, 1997), 18–20.

<sup>89</sup> Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon*, 26.

Colombo and then marched inland, while others crossed over by boat from Ramnad to Mannar, then made their way to the interior on foot. By both routes the walk was about 150 miles. At the start these workers were part of a floating community, traveling back and forth between the mainland and the island, though this changed over time as they became heavily indebted and effectively indentured. Official figures indicate that in 1839, for example, there were 2,719 arrivals and 2,202 departures, and in 1845 there were 73,401 arrivals and 24,804 departures.<sup>90</sup> Some allowance must be made here for the fact that departures were less easy to account for than arrivals, but even when this difference is taken into consideration, it is clear that many workers met their deaths in Ceylon, and that for whatever reason a sizable number never returned. While on the island, the workers very quickly became a separate community: they worked in districts with plantations and lived in poor accommodations “behind the line.” By the middle of the nineteenth century, their plight served as an effective reminder of the distinction between the “Malabars” and the other inhabitants of the island: the British treated them as domiciled foreigners. Curiously, the British utilized the term “Malabar coolies” to refer to the plantation workers for most of the nineteenth century, even when they did not come from the Malabar coast.

Discussing the status of plantation workers takes us beyond the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Yet it makes the point that by this time a partitioning of islanders and mainlanders had occurred, and a partitioning of those on the island into distinct groups. These partitions arose out of the structural interventions of British colonization. However, the term “partition” should not lead to the assumption that these colonial interventions were final or fully successful. The case of plantation workers is a good one to support such a qualification. The plantation workers were later termed “Indian Tamils,” in contrast to “Ceylon Tamils,” who lived on the coast, and in line with the slow replacement of “Malabar” with “Tamil.” In 1964 and 1974, some were given Indian citizenship, while others were given Sri Lankan citizenship; a remnant, however, remained stateless on the island until they received Sri Lankan citizenship in 1988 and 2003.<sup>91</sup> Thus the distinction between mainlanders and islanders continued to be a potent one in the politics of post-independence Sri Lanka. In effect, this partitioning left a lot of unfinished business.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THINKING beyond natural spatial units is becoming a more established concern in historical writing. For instance, the way in which India was peninsularized as a bodily unit in history has recently been very convincingly unraveled.<sup>92</sup> Sri Lanka’s territorial shape also has its history; today it is popularly called “the pearl of the Indian Ocean,” or alternatively, “the teardrop of the Indian Ocean.” Yet more than these discourses, which have their own histories, the making of the island of Sri Lanka involved a decisive attempt on the part of the British to intervene in the movements of people across the seas that divided what became separate territories, and this process carried through in the style of British governance through

<sup>90</sup> Driesen, *The Long Walk*, 20.

<sup>91</sup> Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon*, 226.

<sup>92</sup> Sumathi Ramaswamy, “Visualizing India’s Geo-Body: Globes, Maps, Bodyscapes,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 36, nos. 1 and 2 (2002): 157–195.

the late nineteenth century. Popular discursive imaginings of territory need to be tied in securely to structural interventions. More broadly, given the power with which islands have been separated off from continents, scholars need to reconsider marginal spaces. In the British Indian Ocean world, these include territories that are now beginning to attract some historical work: Sri Lanka, the Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar, the Maldives, Diego Garcia, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.<sup>93</sup>

In one area, at least, the British were successful in their project of separating the island from the mainland. Outside the region, the largest repositories of documents that are relevant to the island's history for this period are in London. Yet the papers related to the Sri Lankan side of the story are in the National Archives at Kew, while those for India are in the India Office Records in the British Library in central London. The tiresome journey between the two collections means that Indian historians rarely look at the Sri Lankan files and vice versa. Indeed, these differences have shaped the contours of South Asian historiography: Indian historians do not for the most part consider Sri Lanka. But since the island's peoples were shaped so profoundly by migration from the mainland and then by colonial control over such migration, it is vital that scholars put these territories together and frame their accounts in a way that challenges national boundaries.

The point of the argument is not that hybrid identities gave way to harder classifications with the arrival of the British. Such a statement is too simple: British categories were themselves changeable. Such a statement also essentializes the character of the pre-British identities of the island. The term "cosmopolitan" is applied here to Kandy to indicate a cosmopolitanism bounded by a sense of universal kingship and Sinhaleanness. Theorists have shown that the desire for cosmopolitanism undoubtedly comes from wanting to engage with otherness, but it also begins from a position of rootedness and self. The cosmopolitan is inevitably tied in with the idea of indigeneity.<sup>94</sup> Rather than radically redrafting identities, the impact of British ideologies emerged as a consequence of the power of British colonialism to change the political organization of the island and its society. Crown rule intervened more powerfully than any external power had done in the evolving pattern of ethnicity within the island. In particular, it was concerned to track indigeneity and to exalt it as a determinant of difference while isolating the foreign. This was partly a result of the need to stabilize the colony in political terms and to order it as a unit. The points of friction between different arms of British governance meant that the Malabars, who later became Tamils, were said to belong not in a Crown territory, but rather in mainland India. This was a misunderstanding of the dialectic between the indigenous and the cosmopolitan.

<sup>93</sup> For some recent works that deal with these islands and the Indian Ocean world more broadly, see Richard Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen and Indentured Laborers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge, 1999); Clare Anderson, *Convicts in the Indian Ocean: Transportation from South Asia to Mauritius, 1815–53* (Basingstoke, 2000); Piers Larson, *Ocean of Letters: Language and Creolization in the Indian Ocean Diaspora* (Cambridge, 2009); Solofo Randrianja and Stephen Ellis, *Madagascar: A Short History* (Chicago, 2009); S. Sen, *Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands* (Oxford, 2000); Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius* (Durham, N.C., 2005).

<sup>94</sup> See, for instance, Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, eds., *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice* (Oxford, 2002); and for a long perspective, Sheldon Pollock, "Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History," *Public Culture* 12 (2000): 591–625.



The impact of colonialism in shifting transnational connections is not peculiar to Sri Lanka. In other colonial territories as well, such an impact may be linked to changing ideas of ethnicity. According to John Comaroff, who writes primarily of Africa, ethnicities are best understood not as things but as relations, and their content is wrought in the particularities of the ongoing historical construction of such connections.<sup>95</sup> From this it follows that ethnicities, like other identities, are about the placement of the self in relation to other peoples, in everyday life and in political and social processes; studying shifts in relations leads to an understanding of changing conceptions of ethnicity. It is important to add that such relations between peoples should not be localized too quickly, for it is not only our own age that has witnessed globalization or migration. Thinking of ethnicity as relational across distance sidelines a debate about when ethnicity arose, and in particular the question of whether it was precolonial or colonial. Instead, what comes into view is the transnational context of the local and how the shifting sense of the transnational molds the local.

<sup>95</sup> John L. Comaroff, "Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Difference in an Age of Revolution," in Edwin N. Wilmsen and Patrick McAllister, eds., *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power* (Chicago, 1996), 162–183.

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