

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: COLONIAL CHOREOGRAPHY: STAGING SRI LANKAN DANCERS UNDER BRITISH COLONIAL RULE FROM THE 1870s – 1930s

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Arachchilage, Doctor of Philosophy, 2018.

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and Performance Studies.

In textbooks the terms “Kandyan dance” and its equivalent in the Sinhala language “*udarata nātuma*” are used to describe the dance tradition that was predominantly practiced in the Kandyan region of Sri Lanka. Nationalist histories portray Kandyan dance as a continuation of a pristine tradition that was passed down from ancient Sinhala kingdoms. As the Sinhala nationalist discourse glorified Kandyan dance vis à vis its Tamil counterpart, it obscured the British colonial encounter with Kandyan dancers by leaving out a part of the rich history of dance. As I demonstrate in this dissertation, colonialism transformed to a significant extent the Kandyan dancescape of the British colonial period, particularly between the 1870s and 1930s. Therefore, this dissertation re-examines the history of the so-called tradition of Kandyan dance with the focus on the British colonial encounter with performers of the Kandyan region. As a Sri Lankan dancer, I try to trace and interpret the histories of dancers that were ignored or shrouded in silence in colonial and

Sinhala national histories. As a historian, I interpret archival materials through textual and visual analysis while as a dancer, I interpret archival materials through my embodied knowledge of Kandyan dance. I examine: How did the Sinhalese devil dance become a showpiece during the British colonial period, setting the ground for it to be elevated with the new name of “Kandyan dance”? Who defined its aesthetic parameters and repertoire? How did the performers respond to their colonial experience?

I argue that, with the help of the native elites, the colonizers displaced, mobilized, manipulated, staged, and displayed performers of the Kandyan region for the benefit of colonial audiences through processions organized for British royal dignitaries, colonial exhibitions, photographs, and travel films. I call this process “colonial choreography”, which defined the aesthetic parameters and repertoire of Kandyan dance. However, the dancers were not just the victims of colonial choreography but also contributors to colonial choreography through their creativity and resistance. Therefore, I also argue that while collaborating with the colonizers, the dancers responded creatively to their experience and covertly resisted the colonial masters.

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BRITISH COLONIAL RULE FROM THE 1870s – 1930s

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2018

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Susan A. Reed, my great mentor who was there throughout my PhD studies.

Acknowledgements

During my first year at the University of Maryland, I took a graduate seminar titled “Historical Methods and Historiography in Theatre” taught by Dr. Esther Kim Lee. That’s when the seed for this dissertation was planted. I am indebted to Esther, who is also my advisor, for inspiring me and guiding me in my exams and in writing papers and this dissertation. Together with Dr. Franklin Hildy, she also secured for me graduate and travel funding, so I could focus on my dissertation.

My gratitude is extended also to my dissertation committee members for giving me strength and confidence to complete this project. Dr. Hildy taught me to use the archival method to interpret performance history. Dr. Maura Keefe was my dance self in the committee. She encouraged me to bridge the textual materials with my embodied knowledge of Kandyan dance. Sri Lankan dance cannot be separated from its musical practices. Therefore, Dr. Lawrence Witzleben’s feedback helped me to contextualize Sri Lankan dance in the broader spectrum of performance. Since I was not a historian, going through historical materials on Sri Lanka was new to me. Without the guidance and feedback of Dr. Nira Wickramasinghe, I would not have been able to base my research on Sri Lankan and South Asian history.

During my studies I learned a lot from past and current faculty members of UMD Theatre and Performance Studies. I am grateful to Dr. Laurie Frederik, Dr. James Harding, Dr. Faedra Carpenter, Dr. Caitlin Marshall, and Dr. James Reed Ball.

I am deeply indebted to all my dance and performance teachers from my primary school till now for trusting me and sharing their embodied knowledge with me: Peter Surasena, Manthosa Bandara Tennakoon, Dulawansa Gunawardhana,

Susanatha Gunawardhana, Irangani Rajapaksha, Waidyawathie Rajapaksha, Rekha Padmakumari, Vipula Janasantha, Mudiyanse Dissanayake, Moksha Samarasuriya, Leslie Felbain, Karen Bradley, Miriam Phillips, Patrik Widrig and Sara Pearson.

This dissertation could not have been completed without the group of mentors who believed in me and always supported my academic career. I cannot adequately express my gratitude to Susan Reed, Ranjini Obeyesekere, Gananath Obeyesekere, Michael Fernando, Sunil Goonasekere, Ratna Handurukanda, Sinha Raja Tammita-Delgoda, and H.L. Seneviratne.

The scholarly inputs and feedback I received for my research helped me enormously to enrich this dissertation. I am grateful to John Rogers, Anne Blackburn, Sujit Sivasundaram, Jeanne Marecek, Sharika Thiranagama, Daniel Bass, Mythri Jegathesan, Jonathan Spencer, Neloufer de Mel, Janaki Jayawardena, Tina Ramnarine, Antti-Ville Kärjä, Avanthi Meduri and Sitara Thobani.

I could not have completed this dissertation without the intellectual and emotional support of the friends I made at Maryland. I would like to thank David Chavannes, Christina Banalopoulou, Maryam Houshyar, Daniel Dilliplane, Brittany Marie Ginder, Meghan Bowden and Patrick Crowley. Christina read two of my chapters and gave invaluable feedback while she had her own deadlines to meet.

My friends and colleagues at Peradeniya helped in several ways. They ranged from emotional support and intellectual inputs to signing surety bonds by risking their provident fund for which I am indebted to Rohana Seneviratne, Sumudu Walakuluge, Chaminda Halvitigala, Athula Samrakoon, Manoj Alawathukotuwa, Leena Seneheweera, Vinusha Wijewickrama, Liyanage Amarakeerthi, Sumathy Sivamohan,

Gamini Keerawella, Prasad Sethunga, Maduranga Kalugampitiya, Shavendra Dias, Sumudu Seneviratne, Arjuna Parakrama, Kalinga Tudor Silva and Buddhika Konara.

I also wish to express my gratitude to all my friends who contributed to this dissertation in various ways. For rich discussions and emotional support, Janaka Bandara, Lohan Gunaweera, Harindra Dassanayake, Krishantha Fedricks, Priyantha Fonseka, Ellen Fisher, Bruce Gundersen; for hosting me during my archival research in London, Sunethra Kanumale and Jagath Weerasinghe; and for reading every page of this dissertation and copyediting it, Carlton Samarajiwa.

I was lucky to have a group of academic colleagues who gave me invaluable inputs for my research. I want to thank Pradeep Dissanayake, Andi Schubert, Samal Hemachandra, Uditha Gunasekara, Eva Ambos, Ramla Wahab-Salman, Harshana Rambukwella, Vagisha Gunasekara, Nadeera Rupesinghe and Eshantha Peiris. Eshantha was so generous as to read two of my chapters and give me valuable feedback amidst his busy schedule.

Finding materials would not have been easy without the enormous support of the library and archive staff. I would like to thank the staff members of the following institutions who supported me: Michelle Smith, Performing Arts Library, McKeldin Library, University of Peradeniya Library, the National Archives Kandy Branch and Colombo Branch, the Royal Asiatic Society Library – Colombo, The American Institute for Lankan Studies Library – Colombo, The British Library, The British Film Institute, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and The Library of Congress – Washington DC.

The priceless support of my extended family can never be forgotten: B.M. Walisundara (Amma), Gunatillake Banda (Appachchi), Keerthiratne Aluthge, Mercy Gangegedara, Sudeshika Mantillake, Sudarshini Mantillake, Athula Rathnayake, Prasad Anuruddha, Janaka Aluthge, Dinesh Aluthge, Nayan Rathnayake, Chandrika Karunarathna, and Sanuli Rathnayake. Last but not least, I would like to express my everlasting and special gratitude to my wife Vajira Mantillake and son Vimarsha Mantillake for their patience and sacrifice in foregoing their time with me, so I could complete this dissertation.

Without fellowships and grants from several institutions I would not have been able to produce a dissertation like this. I would like to thank the individuals and committees that provided me the following grants: Fulbright travel grant, UMD Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies (TDPS) fellowships, University of Maryland travel grant, TDPS travel grants, Intercollegiate Sri Lanka Education (ISLE) and National Center of Advanced Studies (NCAS) – Sri Lanka.

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Introduction

In the Sri Lankan public school system of the 1980s, all students were required to study one aesthetic subject from a set of three options: painting, music, and Kandyan dance. I decided on Kandyan dance although I am still not quite sure what influenced me. Perhaps, it was the popularity that Kandyan dance had achieved as a showpiece of Sinhala culture. My dance teachers taught me what we called Kandyan dance that had emerged from *Kohomba kankariya*, a ritual originally performed two thousand years ago to heal a Sinhala King and is part of the proud Kandyan heritage.

Although as a child I did not question why Kandyan dance was one of the three options in the public-school curriculum, I have since learned that it was mainly through public education that Sinhala nationalists elevated Kandyan dance to the level of the national dance. As students, we also never questioned the history of the term “Kandyan dance.” We never asked who defined its aesthetic parameters and repertoire or what this dance looked like during the British colonial period. These questions were obscured in the Sinhala nationalist discourse of Kandyan dance, which did not disclose the British colonial encounter with Kandyan dancers. This is what I intend to examine in this dissertation. Therefore, I ask: How did the Sinhalese devil dance become a showpiece during the British colonial period, setting the ground for it to be elevated with the new name of “Kandyan dance”? Who defined its aesthetic parameters and repertoire? How did the performers respond to their colonial experience?

I argue that, with the help of the native elites, the colonizers displaced, mobilized, manipulated, staged, and displayed performers of the Kandyan region for the benefit of colonial audiences through processions organized for British royal dignitaries, colonial exhibitions, photographs, and travel films. I call this process “colonial choreography”, which defined the aesthetic parameters and repertoire of Kandyan dance. However, the dancers were not just the victims of colonial choreography but also contributors to colonial choreography through their creativity and resistance. Thus, I also argue that while collaborating with the colonizers, the dancers responded creatively to their experience and covertly resisted the colonial masters. Although I contextualize the colonial encounter with performance practices in the Kandyan region within a broader colonial gaze, my main focus is on British colonialism. As I describe later in the introduction, I define colonialism as a psychological condition. Therefore, even a native Sri Lankan would perceive dance through a colonial gaze.

Apart from textual and visual analyses, I follow scholars who proposed using the researcher’s embodied knowledge to interpret dance histories. As I explain in the methodology section, I use my twenty-eight years of embodied knowledge of Kandyan dance that I define as the “postcolonial bodily archive.” As a Sri Lankan dancer who grew up in Kandy in the company of dancers, I try to recreate the sense of presence of the dancers who performed during the British colonial period.

Historicizing Kandyan Dance

The term “Kandyan dance” and its equivalent in Sinhala language *udarata nātuma* had begun to appear in twentieth century descriptions of Sri Lankan dance.¹ Before it was called “Kandyan dance,” nineteenth century historical evidence suggests that the British called it “Singhalese devil dance.”² In pre-colonial Sri Lanka, lower caste villagers, upper caste landowners, the King’s court performers and entertainers performed in very different ritual, religious, and social contexts. They did not perceive most of those performances as “dance.” Some of them performed *Kohomba kankariya* as a prosperity ritual. While lower caste dancers performed in public in religious processions such as the *Daladā perahera*³ as their duty to the King (*rājakāriya*), upper caste Kandyans privately performed *udekki*. While some females performed *digge nātuma* as a duty to the King, females in the village performed *kalagedi sellama* (water pot play) as a folk game. However, the British saw all such performances as “dance.” Furthermore, the British also called these performers “devil dancers,” unilaterally imposing Christian notions of the devil on Sri Lankan dancers, although some of them represented sacred indigenous deities.

The British colonial encounter with the dance of the Kandyan region between the 1870s and 1930s forms the scope of this research project. Before the British invasion, the coastal areas of Sri Lanka were colonized by the Portuguese (1505-1658) and the Dutch (1658-1796). In the face of these foreign invasions and internal

¹ However, the German term “Kandyan Tänzer” was used to describe Udekki dancers from Kandy in Carl Hagenbeck’s *Indien Exhibition* in 1898.

² In different records “Singhalese devil dance” appears inconsistently as “Singhalese devil dance,” “Cingalese devil dance”

³ The procession that honors the Tooth Relic of the Buddha. I discuss this in detail in Chapter 2.

conflicts the Sinhala Kingdom moved to the central highland, which is the Kandyan region. Although part of Sri Lanka became a British crown colony in 1802, after battles and negotiations in 1815 the British conquered the Kandyan Kingdom, giving them control over the whole island under the British Flag until 1948. However, in this study, I only focus on the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. This is the period that scholars consider as “New Imperialism” or “High Imperialism” (Maxwell 2000; Hoffenberg 2001) accompanied by the mass-production of “images of non-westerners” through colonial exhibitions and photographs (Maxwell 2000, ix). In Sri Lanka too, 1870 “marked the introduction of major changes” (Bastiampillai 1968, 131). Social changes followed the introduction of English education throughout the country (131-32). Government instructions and information systems were centralized (*ibid*). Thus, archival evidence of dance started to appear after the 1870s. My study does not go beyond the 1930s because it also marked another change – socio-cultural and political – in Sri Lanka. According to Michael Roberts, Sri Lankan history in the 1930s and 40s is marked by an “unusual degree of inspirational influence from India” (quoted in Reed 2010, 111). Therefore, this study covers the period from the 1870s to the 1930s. Indian cultural and national forces inspired Sinhala cultural nationalism.

Because the Sinhala Kingdom of Kandy was the last territory to be captured by the British, the dance of the Kandyan region had symbolic value as a representation of the pre-colonial past. Sinhala nationalists used this symbolic value to elevate Kandyan dance to a national dance in the twentieth century (Reed 2010). Histories of Kandyan dance started to appear after the mid-twentieth century, which

later became the official history of Kandyan dance disseminated through public education. This official history links Kandyan dance to an untouched, uncontaminated, pure dance of the pre-colonial Kandyan Kingdom. Thus, in Sinhala writings, it is almost impossible to trace the history of Kandyan dance during the British colonial period.

The historicization of Kandyan dance matters because the current writings do not adequately acknowledge its colonial past that led to nationalist discourse on dance. Negligence of the colonial past of Kandyan dance continued to trigger tensions that can even instigate ethnic violence in Sri Lanka. The people of Sri Lanka were the victims of thirty years of civil war between the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan government forces. The Tigers, who claimed to represent the Tamil people of Sri Lanka, fought for a separate state combining the Northern and Eastern provinces of the island. The Sinhala majoritarian government militarily defeated the Tamil Tigers in 2009. But the tensions that gave rise to the civil war persisted.

On July 16, 2016, a clash between Sinhala and Tamil students at a welcome ceremony in the Faculty of Science at the University of Jaffna⁴ resulted in several students being injured. The performance of the *ves* dance – the most popular Kandyan dance – in the ceremony was the *casus belli*. In a grand welcome to the new students, the Sinhala students wanted to use *ves* dancers, a tradition that had originated during the British colonial period, which was later conceived as a Sinhala tradition. While the Sinhala students wished to mark their Sinhalaness through *ves* dances, the Tamil student resisted. Seeing this fight over a dance as a clash of nationalist factions,

⁴ This is equivalent to “school of science” in the US education system.

however, obscures the underlying colonial roots of the issue, a point made clear by President Maithripala Sirisena in a comment a few weeks later. When a Sinhala extremist group accused the President of allowing Tamil leaders to govern the Tamil majoritarian Northern Province, President Sirisena replied that he was not the one who divided Sri Lanka into nine provinces and that he could not accept responsibility for something that the British colonizers had done. Whether Sinhala and Tamil people fight over provinces or *ves* dancers are used to welcome important people, both are colonial inventions that are generally overlooked by all parties involved. Both Sinhala and Tamil nationalists and students who were manipulated by them were unable to see the histories of Kandyan dance stemming from the British colonial period.

Overlooking Sri Lankan colonial history would lead to superficial conclusions. For example, anthropologist Bob Simpson, analyzing the “devil dance”⁵ of Sri Lanka, concludes that “artistic forms associated with rituals of healing and exorcism are transformed into commodities appropriate for consumption by tourists” (1993, 165). Because he does not historicize the transformation of “devil dance” into a commodity in the colonial period, he portrays a partial picture of the relationship between “devil dance” and tourism. Based on her research on the Argentinean tango and its colonial encounter, dance scholar Marta Savigliano observes exotic passion imposed on the colonized in auto-exoticized conditions (1995, 2). Therefore, although Sri Lankan dancers of the twentieth century and twenty-first century exoticize

⁵ Although Simpson mainly discuss about so-called devil dance in the low country regions, my observation applies to all forms of “devil dance” in Sri Lanka.

themselves to cater to the tourists, the roots of the exoticization go back to the British colonial period, particularly the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

I agree with anthropologists Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer when they claim in their edited volume *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (1993) that “the time has come to spell out some of the links between the poetics and politics of colonial discourse and the practical project of colonial rule. This would allow us to see postcolonial cultural practices as products not just of Orientalist theory but of colonial practice” (1993, 6). Breckenridge and Veer further assert that internal Orientalism or internal colonialism is “by far the most problematic feature of the postcolonial predicament” (1993, 11) because the habits and categories of the colonized have been shaped by Orientalists and colonial roots (*ibid*). Therefore, to grasp the postcolonial manifestation of Kandyan dance through Sinhala nationalism and tourism, I contend that it is necessary to examine the roots of the aesthetics of Kandyan dance stemming from the British colonial period.

Literature Review and Rationale

In this dissertation, I focus on three bodies of literature: histories of dancing bodies, colonialism and postcolonial critique that applies to South Asia, and Sri Lankan dance history. First, I consider scholars who have written about approaches to examining and writing histories of dancing bodies. Then, I discuss the work on colonialism and colonial histories of South Asia to help contextualize British colonialism in Sri Lanka. Finally, I consider the literature on Sri Lankan dance with a

view to discussing the methods used and scope covered. Since my dissertation only focuses on Kandyan dance in Sri Lanka, I only review the literature on Kandyan dance through which I position this research and my contribution to the literature.

Writing Histories of Dancing Bodies

Scholars of theatre and performance studies and dance studies have grappled with writing histories of dancing bodies. In her book *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003) theatre and performance studies scholar Diana Taylor provides new ways of looking at dancing bodies in colonial history. She problematizes the polarization of archives that include textual materials from repertoires which enact “embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing” (2003, 19–20). She claims that both archive and repertoire have a dynamic relationship that informs each other, and proposes studying cultural phenomena as “scenarios” that include both archival evidence such as narratives and texts and repertoires such as gestures and attitudes (28). Rather than studying texts (archive) and dance (repertoire) separately, I follow Taylor’s approach that allows me to study dancing bodies in colonial history as scenarios where texts and dance inform each other.

While Taylor suggests working with both archive and repertoire, dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster proposes a way to rewrite the archive as a bodily text. In her chapter “Manifesto for Dead and Moving Bodies” in *Choreographing History* (1995), Foster claims that writing histories of dancing bodies must become a “process of interpretation, translation, and rewriting of bodily texts” (9). To rewrite a bodily text, Foster states that historians should first “grant that history is made by bodies”

(10). As the historian's body moves through the textual archives about the bodies of the past, both past and present bodies redefine their identities. According to Foster, the writer's body should allow those dead bodies to lend a hand to find out where they stand, how they came to stand there, and what their options for dancing might be

(6). As Foster suggests, I will allow dead Sri Lankan dancers to lead me through the textual archive to write their histories.

Like Taylor and Foster, dance and performance studies scholar André Lepecki emphasizes the relationship between dancing bodies and writings especially in Western dance history. To Lepecki, the Western dance discourse cannot be imagined without "writing." Lepecki elaborates on how perceiving dance as writing and dance through writing was continued by Western scholars such as Jean-Georges Noverre and Jean-Noel Laurent (2004, 125–27), who wanted to preserve dance through writing. In Western dance history, notation played a unique role. Lepecki argues that because dance was inscribed into notations the process of choreography manipulates and controls the dancing body (2004, 2007). Therefore, choreography has power to manipulate dancing bodies. As I discuss later in detail, I borrow Lepecki's notion of choreography. However, in the Sri Lankan context, choreographies were not inscribed into documents as notations but were solidified as dance repertoires which are practiced even today. I agree with Taylor because Sri Lankan dance during the colonial period had been preserved not as notations but as repertoires. For example, as I discuss in Chapter 2, the use of *ves* dancers to welcome or to escort royal dignitaries has become a common repertoire used to welcome any important person in Sri Lanka today.

Colonialism and South Asia

Colonialism can be discussed *inter alia* through the lens of economic exploitation and cultural manipulation. Postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963; 2004), sternly criticizes Western colonial exploitation. To describe the colonizer's mind, he puts the following words into his mouth: "Work yourself to death, but let me get rich!" (Fanon, 2004, 135). However, literary critic Edward Said discusses the colonial project differently. As he states in his *Orientalism* (1978;1979), colonial masters politically and economically controlled natives through knowledge and power (Said 1979, 32). In order for colonizers to control the colonized through representation and mis-representation, Europeans invented "the Orient" (Said 1995, 24), the site created by Westerners mostly in their imagination. Colonial literature, museums, and exhibitions mainly disseminated the image of the Orient. Both Fanon and Said were instrumental in developing the postcolonial theory that critiques colonialism primarily in territories that were colonized by the Europeans.

Theorists and historians have extensively discussed the characteristics of colonialism in South Asia. Some scholars consider the knowledge and the cultural productions created during British colonialism as colonial constructs. Historian and anthropologist Nicholas B. Dirks argues that British colonizers invented the modern Indian caste system giving it an important identity for Indians (Dirks 2001). He shows how anthropologists like Louis Dumont constructed knowledge about Indian caste based on western notions of individualism (Dirks 2001, 4–42). In his book

Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India (1996), scholar of colonialism Bernard Cohn argues that British definitions of Indian art and culture created a colonial cultural hegemony. I agree with Dirks and Cohn when I discuss how the Europeans interpreted pre-colonial performance practices as “dance” that makes sense to European audiences. However, in Kandyan dance history, I also see instances where colonizers and colonizer elites collaboratively choreograph dances.

Contemporary postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994; 2004) contends that colonial knowledge and constructs emerge from interdependent relationships between the colonizer and the colonized, which he defines as hybridity. According to Bhabha, “it is the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the ‘people’. And exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves” (2004, 56). Therefore, to Bhabha, South Asian cultural expressions such as dance, music, and theatre that emerged under colonialism should be analyzed through hybridity. Bhabha’s notion of hybridity helps me to analyze the choreographic process of Kandyan dance during the colonial period where both British government officers and Kandyan aristocrats contributed to the choreography.

Although the choreographic process involved hybridity between European colonizers and natives, the choreography was created to satisfy audiences. How can we understand this complex process where not only the colonizer but the colonized also contributes to the choreography? In *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of*

Self under Colonialism, Indian historian Ashis Nandy interprets the hybridity between the East and the West in psychological terms (1983). According to Nandy, after British colonialism South Asian culture cannot be imagined without colonial meanings. He interprets British colonialism as a psychological condition deposited in the minds of the colonized people caging them in the structures of the modern world (1983). Although there were some differences between British colonialism in India and Sri Lanka, Nandy's interpretation of colonialism helps one to grasp colonialism as "a state of mind" (1) that was manifested through dance in processions, colonial exhibitions, photographs or films. Thus, based on Nandi, I use colonialism as a psychological condition to demonstrate how it influenced the development of choreographies to satisfy the European desire for Oriental and exotic bodies.

Scholars of subaltern studies have provocatively claimed that South Asian History is an elitist history. In his classical work *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983), historian Ranajit Guha claims that both native and foreign elites have silenced rural peasants in the history of India. Subaltern studies scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her key essay "Can the subaltern speak?" (1988), claims that subaltern groups such as women and lower caste Indians cannot speak as they are not being heard by the elites. Writing history from an elitist point of view applies to colonial Sri Lanka as well. This is evident in a few studies on Kandyan dance (Bandar 1908; De Zoete 1957)⁶ done during the British colonial period. These writings composed in or on the British colonial period interpret

⁶ Although De Zoete published her work in 1957, part of her research on Kandyan dancers is done in the 1930s.

Kandyan dance events from an elitist point of view. Therefore, like subaltern studies scholars, I try to write on the experience of Kandyan dancers who were a subaltern group during the British colonial period.

Colonized people are not just victims of colonization but they creatively responded to their experience. Nandy rejects identifying the colonized as “the gullible, hopeless victim of colonialism caught in the hinges of history” and characterizes the colonized as someone who fights “his own battle for survival in his own way, sometimes consciously, sometimes by default” (1983, xv). Nandy’s view is echoed by Sri Lankan historian Nira Wickramasinghe when she claims “peoples were not prisoners in the cage of the colonial state or of empire but were a diverse and differentiated population who received and processed multiple messages in their everyday existence” (2014a, 2). In her book *Metallic Modern: Everyday Machines in Colonial Sri Lanka* (2014a), Wickramasinghe argues that nonelite groups in Sri Lanka experienced modernity directly through their encounter with machines such as Singer sewing machines, gramophones, trams, bicycles, and industrial equipment (2). In this dissertation, I follow the train of thought of Nandy and Wickramasinghe to some extent when I discuss the experience of Kandyan dancers. Instead of seeing them as victims, I elaborate on how dancers faced their circumstances creatively.

Sri Lankan Dance History

Romantic and nationalistic narratives about Kandyan dance occlude dancers’ complex encounters with European colonialism. Native scholars who wrote about Kandyan dance as a heritage tend to overlook its colonial past. Mahawalatenne

Bandar is the first native scholar to write an essay on Kandyan dance under the title of “Kandyan Music” (1908). He wrote it for a competition organized to encourage Kandyan scholars to write about their own art and culture (*JRASCB 1906 1907*, XIX:20). This competition was fueled by the Orientalist movement prevalent at the time. Therefore, although Bandar’s essay contains important information about pre-colonial dance in the Kandyan region, it does not focus on the colonial period.⁷ Other writers such as Arthur Molamure (1956, 1958), George Keyt (1953) and Anuradha Seneviratna (1984) also presented Kandyan dance as part of the Kandyan heritage.

Most Sinhala scholars who wrote about Kandyan dance perpetuated methodological biases that they had internalized from colonial anthropological, folkloric, and musicological studies. As a result of the legacy of colonial education, even the most important native Sinhala writings on Kandyan dance had been written from the anthropological and folkloric point of view, ignoring its colonial history. European scholars such as John Callaway (1829) and Paul Wirz (1954) perceived and interpreted dance as a ritual practice ignoring its politico-economic and aesthetic aspects. Internalizing the European colonial methodological biases, Sinhala scholars such as Ediriweera Sarachchandra (1966), Tissa Kariyawasam (1986), and Mudiyanse Dissanayake (1988, 1993, 2012) who wrote about Kandyan dance also emphasized its ritual origins and features. They used various approaches adapted from colonial anthropology and colonial folklore studies but did not focus on Kandyan dance under colonialism. Dissanayake, for example, had contributed

⁷ However, Bandar provides some anecdotes about how the descendants of the performers of Kandyan royal court had to work in the plantations during the British colonial period (1908).

enormously to the literature on Kandyan dance but, since he used anthropological and ethnographical methodologies, most of his research was historically framed after the 1980s when he started his field work. Although C. de S. Kulatillake has provided some historical descriptions of Kandyan dance during the Kandyan Kingdom (1974, 1982a, 1982b, 1984), because of his musicological approach he too did not focus on the British colonial period.

Scholars and practitioners such as J.E. Sedaraman (1979) and Waidyawathie Rajapakse (2002, 2004) who were born into ritual dance families provide very important accounts of Kandyan dance. However, since they focused on their rich ritual traditions they have not written about dance under colonialism. Although he is not from a ritual dance family, dance scholar and practitioner Piyasara Shilpadhipathi wrote an essay on the first Sri Lankan dance troupe that was taken to Carl Hagenbeck's (1844–1913) colonial exhibition (2003). However, he refers to the tour of this dance group as an isolated event without contextualizing it against Orientalism, imperialism, or colonialism, which I take into account in this dissertation.

Research methodological constraints prevented non-Sri Lankan scholars from studying the colonial history of Kandyan dance. Non-native scholars such as Beryl De Zoete, M.D. Raghavan, Marianne Nürnberger, Susan Reed and Eva Ambos who made the most significant contribution to the literature of Kandyan dance are ethnologists or anthropologists who were informed by their ethnographic methodologies and mainly wrote about their contemporary experience. Of these scholars, only De Zoete researched the late colonial period. All the others did their

field work in post-independent Sri Lanka. Due to their methodological limitations they paid little attention to the British colonial encounter with Kandyan dancers.

British dance ethnologist and historian Beryl De Zoete's (1879-1962) writings about South Asian dance was driven by her fascination for the "Orient" (1953, 1957). Her adventure in South Asia was influenced by colonial exhibitions. She thought there was an "urgent" need to go to the East, after she saw *The Exposition Coloniale* in the Parc de Vincennes brought to Europe by Carl Hagenbeck. The "mysterious" art (1953, 11) she saw at the exhibition inspired her to search for Kandyan dancers and write about them. Introducing her book *The Other Mind* (1953), De Zoete described the purpose of her trip to Asia as "my treasure hunt was for something immaterial – a dance-tradition of amazing refinement and beauty which these tributary peoples had inherited from their long cultural association with the great continent of India" (1953, 11). This statement shows her Orientalist treasure hunting approach to South Asian theatre and performance. While De Zoete praised Kandyan dancers highly (1951, 80), she ignored the low country dancers of Sri Lanka. Her writings about Kandyan dance have been shaped by her selective biases. Because she had already decided on what she was going to look for, it seems like De Zoete had composed her narrative in her mind even before going to the field. Although her understanding and interpretations reveal historiographical problems, she uncovered some important historical facts about Sri Lankan dancers' experience in colonial exhibitions. Therefore, I rely on De Zoete for historical accounts of Kandyan dancers' experience in colonial exhibitions.

Indian anthropologist Raghavan's research on Kandyan dance (1955, 1956, 1967) consisted of field work, most of which he did during the 1950s. Thus, he did

not study the encounter between Kandyan dancers and colonialism. As an Indian scholar, Raghavan tries to draw parallels between Kandyan dance and South Indian dance in terms of dance movements, costumes, and musical instruments (1967, 61-76). Thus, Raghavan's research agenda did not include the colonial history of Kandyan dance.

Austrian anthropologist Marianne Nürnberger conducted her field work in the second half of the twentieth century. Her main contribution to Kandyan dance is her book *Dance is the Language of the Gods: The Chitrasena School and the Traditional Roots of Sri Lankan Stage-Dance* (1998). Although she discusses tradition and ritual, Nürnberger mainly focuses on Kandyan dance's shift from ritual to stage in the second half of the twentieth century, focusing on one of the main dance schools in the country – Chitrasena Dance. Therefore, she did not have to study Kandyan dance during colonialism.

German anthropologist Eva Ambos (2011) studied the ritual dances of the Kandyan region and southern coastal regions of Sri Lanka. She claims that transculturality changed the image of Kandyan dance and “devil dance.” Drawing from the British colonial archives, Ambos has shown how colonizers had used the term “devil dance” inconsistently. Expanding on the British encounter with “devil dance,” I demonstrate that sometimes this inconsistency occurs because Europeans imposed a different value to “devil dance” in the Kandyan region than the “devil dance” in the Maritime Provinces (low country). Ambos also claims that colonial gaze “discover[ed]” devil dance to bring out the difference between colonizer and colonized, and that devil dance legitimized the colonial project (2011, 258). While I

agree with Ambos that devil dance legitimized the colonial project, I argue that the British colonizers choreographed the “devil dance” for colonial audiences.

American cultural anthropologist Susan Reed (2002, 2009, 2010) did extensive fieldwork in the Kandyan region and worked closely with ritual dancers. Her book *Dance and the Nation: Performance, Ritual, and Politics in Sri Lanka* (2010) is the most comprehensive anthropological work on Kandyan dance. Although Reed mentions some major historical events before the twentieth century, given the fact that her book is an anthropological work, only one chapter discusses the history of Kandyan dance. Based on her fieldwork in the 1980s, Susan Reed argues that in the post-independent period, Sinhala nationalists transformed the dance of the Kandyan region into the national dance of the Sinhala majority state (2010). However, Reed herself observes that although Kandyan dance assumed the role of national culture after 1956, the quest to find a national dance goes back to the 1930s (2010, 111–12). In the 1930s, especially in the light of Rabindranath Tagore’s visit to Sri Lanka, the native elitists wanted to find ways to express the national emotion through their own literature and art (*ibid*). Therefore, the historical period of Reed's main research which is about dance and the nation begins in the 1930s.

Taking as my point of departure the historical period covered in Reed's research, I go back to the colonial past in my dissertation. Thus, the historical period of my research begins in the 1870s and ends in the 1930s. In the history chapter, Reed lays out very important events of the British colonial period such as the Prince of Wales’ visit, Hagenbeck’s exhibitions, and the visit of the American modern dance pioneer Ted Shawn. It is with these events that I begin my journey to the past as a

native, postcolonial dancing body to study the history of Kandyan dance during the British colonial period. I consider this a very important period in Kandyan dance history because I contend that the parameters, aesthetics and choreographies used by Sinhala nationalists were developed during the British colonial period.

Methodologies

Throughout this dissertation, as a native Sri Lankan dancer, I try to interpret the colonized dancing bodies of Sri Lanka that had been suppressed and silenced in colonial and Sinhala national histories. Like Foster, as a dance historian, my attempt is to recreate “the sense of presence conveyed by a body in motion, the idiosyncrasies of a given physique, the smallest inclination all form part of a corporeal discourse whose power and intelligibility elude translation into words” (S. L. Foster 1995, 9). As a Sri Lankan dancer who grew up around dancers, I want to recreate the sense of presence of the Kandyan dancers who danced during the British colonial period. To do that, I want to utilize methodologies that allow me to interpret microhistories that “narrate specific historical actions or events” and macro histories that “describe the conditions that frame and explain the events” (Postlewait 2009, 9). I think it is important to be able to zoom into microhistories and zoom out of them to see macrohistories to gain a comprehensive picture of the history.

According to theatre historian Thomas Postlewait, “historical inquiry is the pursuit of truths about the past within the conditions and constraints of possible knowledge” (2009, 23). As Wickramasinghe states, “to write history is for me, among many other things, to recreate in a certain way, selectively and intuitively, a particular

period and how it felt to live during this period (2003, 4) Although it is challenging to trace the history of an ephemeral cultural practice such as dance, I use my embodied knowledge to interpret the archival evidence.

I am a Kandyan dancer and a historian interested in the history of Kandyan dance. Therefore, I approach my research materials in both roles -dancer and historian. Since my research is largely based on archival materials, as a historian I interpret materials through textual and visual analysis, and as a dancer I interpret archival materials through my embodied knowledge.

I conducted my research at three locations: Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom (London), and the United States (Maryland). In Sri Lanka, I conducted archival research in the National Archives in Colombo and Kandy, the University of Peradeniya library, the Royal Asiatic Society Library, Colombo. In Colombo, I also examined colonial photo collections at the Plate Studio gallery. In London, I studied the materials in the Asian and African Studies collection in the British Library, and rare films in the British Film Institute's archive. In Maryland, I used the University of Maryland library system and particularly accessed nineteenth century newspapers and rare books, photographs, and videos through the library's online databases.

As a historian, I use the textual and visual analysis methodologies to examine Sinhala literary works, early colonial accounts, and wall paintings and wood carvings to understand the pre-colonial dance scene in the Kandyan region. I follow the role of the dance historian as Foster describes it: "a historian's body wants to inhabit these vanished bodies for specific reasons. It wants to know where it stands, how it came to stand there, what its options for moving might be. It wants those dead bodies to lend a

hand in deciphering its own present predicaments and in staging some future possibilities” (1995, 6). As a native Sinhala speaker, I have the advantage of reading Sinhala literary works. Therefore, I analyze Sinhala poetry and other literary works written between the eighteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. I also study early colonial accounts and reports on pre-colonial Sri Lankan culture and folklore to understand the performance practices in pre-colonial Kandy. I also study wall paintings and wood carvings in Kandyan temples for evidence of the nature of dance and performances in pre-colonial Kandy.

I analyze the British colonial government servants’ reports and their interactions with Kandyan aristocrats regarding the organization of performances and processions. I study the accounts of the British royal visits to Kandy published in both London – *Illustrated London News*, *The Graphic*, *The Times* – and Sri Lanka – *The Ceylon Times*. To know how dancers were used in royal welcomes and processions, I also analyze Sinhala newspapers such as *Kavata Kathikaya*, *Lakrivikirana*, *Satyalanarayana*, *Gnanartha Pradeepaya* and *Sarasavi Sandarasa*.

As a dancer, I use embodied methodologies to interpret archival materials. Cultural anthropologist Jane Desmond emphasizes the need for methodologies that bridge materials with bodily knowledge when she writes the following words: “to keep our broader levels of analysis anchored in the materiality and kinesthesia of the dancing body, we need to generate more tools for close readings, and more sophisticated methodologies” (1993, 59). If we consider the texts and bodies as “materials,” to bridge that materiality with bodily knowledge, we need to develop and use embodied methodologies. To develop embodied methodologies, we must first

acknowledge that the researcher's body carries knowledge. Using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of bodily "habitus," sociologist and dance scholar Helen Thomas claims that individuals embody histories, social forces, and identities as bodily knowledge (2000, 127–28). However, the researcher's bodily knowledge needs to be able to interpret archival materials.

In this research, I follow the dance scholars who argue that it is possible to interpret archival materials through embodied knowledge. Dance scholar Deidre Sklar proposes a methodology that relies on the researcher's own body and bodily intelligence as a point of access for the study of cultural practice as corporeal knowledge (1994, 9). She calls this methodology "kinesthetic empathy," in other words, "feeling with" the dancers as well as visually observing their movements (1991, 8). Although Sklar's works mostly involve dance ethnography, her proposal to use the "researcher's own body and bodily intelligence" can also be used to interpret archival materials. Foster considers archival materials as texts that "document a certain kind of kinesthetic awareness cultivated in dancing bodies" (2005, 81). Therefore, she analyzes eighteenth century dance notations and claims that it is possible to gain epistemological ground for bodily experience, a kinesthetic empathy.

Based on Sklar, Foster, and Taylor, dance scholar Priya Srinivasan proposes "bodily archive," to use the body as an archive. According to her, bodily archive "leaves its traces in live bodily interactions, whose history remains captured in muscle memory and through bodily labor and kinesthetic contact" (2012, 17). She uses bodily archive as a researcher who both engages with ethnographic and archival methodologies. Even though I do not use ethnography for this research, I still can use

my “bodily archive” to interpret archival materials because I study both archival materials and embodied practices as “scenarios.” As mentioned earlier, for research in performance, Taylor suggests approaching research as “scenarios” where embodied memories (the repertoire) are inscribed as textual memories (the archive) (2003, 28). Therefore, in this research to interpret “scenarios” – interconnected textual materials and performances – I use my “bodily archive” that I acquired as a Kandyan dancer.

However, as some of my influential dance teachers are descendants of Kandyan dancers who were brought to colonial exhibitions, my “bodily archive” not only carries the traces of dance labor but also carries the bodily experience and muscle memory of Kandyan dancers’ colonial bodily experiences. Furthermore, since I learned Kandyan dance in postcolonial conditions, my “bodily archive” carries traces of postcolonial experiences too. Therefore, I interpret my “bodily archive” as “postcolonial bodily archive,” which carries both colonial and postcolonial traces of Kandyan dance. I use my “postcolonial bodily archive” acquired during my twenty-eight-year Kandyan dance career to access and interpret dance and movements inscribed in documents, photographs, and films.

As a Kandyan dancer who grew up in Kandy, I had the privilege of dancing in rituals such as *Kohomba kankariya* as well as in processions, on stage, and in tourist shows. This allows me to interpret the transformation of movement sequences, movement quality, sense of directions, and sense of audience that are inscribed in archival materials and repertoires. Although I cannot go back to the nineteenth century, through embodied methodologies, I can bodily experience to some extent the differences in dancing in rituals, in processions, on stage, and in colonial exhibitions.

This helps me to explore how the parameters and the aesthetics of Kandyan dance changed when colonizers dislocated the ritual performers and displayed them in colonial entertainments. Therefore, the use of my “postcolonial bodily archive” to interpret the colonial archive is for me a decolonization process.

In January 2016, I wrote the following part of a monologue for my contemporary dance piece *My Devil Dance*, in which I embodied a Kandyan “devil dancer” who was brought to a European zoological garden.

“1815, Sri Lanka, was colonized, by the British. Ever since then,
I, we, I, we, I, we
became dependent on
rich white nations, rich nations, rich white nations, rich nations,
Corporations, IMF, World Bank,
rich white nations, rich nations”

After reading a historical note which described the suffering that “Sinhalese devil dancers” went through in the cold European winter when they were transported to “zoological gardens,” I was walking from the library to my student house in College Park, USA, in the winter of 2013. Although I was wearing all the proper winter clothes, still it was freezing. That is when I got the inspiration for *My Devil Dance*. My body was shivering. I could not but re-live in those dancers’ bodies through my feelings pins and needles in my body. My memories of European winters⁸ intensified my experience. I could have been among those dancers who suffered in

⁸I was able to visit the United Kingdom, Germany, and France during my two-year Masters Degree studies in Switzerland. These are three countries where “Sinhalese devil dancers” were exhibited in zoological gardens and in colonial exhibitions.

the cold a hundred-and-forty years ago.⁹ In this dissertation, I want to write an alternative history of Kandyan dancers by bringing the body of the dancer to center stage.

In *My Devil Dance*, using my “postcolonial bodily archive” I interpreted and choreographed the dead dancing bodies I encountered in archival materials. As I was choreographing the Sinhalese devil dancer’s experience in the colonial exhibition in my piece, I was able to interrogate the choreographic patterns of the colonial exhibitions and choreographic directions of European colonizers. This academic and artistic exercise led me to articulate the colonial staging of Sinhalese devil dance, the process I call “colonial choreography” in this dissertation.

Key Terms

Colonial Gaze

I contend that it is important to understand the colonial gaze as manifested in Sri Lankan dancers, particularly how they were perceived and displayed during the colonial period. Even though they defined it slightly differently, both Fanon and Said emphasized the importance of grasping the “colonial gaze” to critique European colonialism. Colonial gaze can be defined as looking through the white man’s eyes. Said asserts that the European colonial eye generalized the Orient by dividing, deploying, schematizing, tabulating, indexing and recording “everything in sight (and

⁹ Although I do not come from a dance family, from my fathers’ side I am a relative of the famous *Udekki* dance family of Kandy.

out of sight)” (1978, 86). In his *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986), Fanon states “the image of the biological-sexual-sensual-genital-nigger has imposed itself on you and you do not know how to get free of it” (202). He further asserts that the white man’s eye “is not merely a mirror, but a correcting mirror” (*ibid*). Therefore, colonial gaze is not an innocent passive look at non-white bodies but, in fact, calls for action to “correct” colonized bodies. Like Said, I will use the concept of the colonial gaze to show how the European colonizers schematized pre-colonial performance practices as “devil dance.” At the same time, I agree with Fanon, as colonial missionaries demonized the dancers of the Kandyan region. However, as I demonstrate in Chapter 1, the colonial representation of Sri Lankan dance goes beyond demonization as it becomes an exhibit for colonial audiences.

The colonial gaze influenced both the colonizer and the colonized in their imagination of the colonized body. “Gaze” is not an innocent look; it has power not only to identify and objectify but also to impose on the subject the role given by the gaze (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2007, 207). Thus, colonial gaze identifies, objectifies and forces the colonized other to be obedient to the colonizer. As Bhabha asserts, “an important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness” (2004, 66). As discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, Sri Lankan dancers were imagined as “other” dancers and fixated as devil dancers and performers who had an intimate relationship with animals. This ideological construction of the Sri Lankan dancer still shadows current Sri Lankan dance.

The European colonial gaze divided people and objectified colonized bodies as inferior to the Europeans. Fanon provides a psychological analysis of racism in which he discusses the European colonial objectifying of the black body. He claims that the white man made the black man an object “for not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man” (Fanon 1986, 110). Accordingly, the European colonial gaze objectified and imprisoned the colonized body in the cage of the “other” created by the Europeans. Like Fanon, Said too in his *Orientalism* contextualizes the European invention of the “other” mainly as a product of later European colonialism. However, in their provocative book *Barbaric Others: A Manifesto on Western Racism* (1993), Merryl Wyn Davies, Ashis Nandy and Ziauddin Sardar historicize the European colonial gaze as a product of continuous European historical discourse (Davies, Nandy, and Sardar, 1993). Fanon provocatively expresses the power of colonial gaze when he states “for the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white” (1986, 12). While the colonial gaze created a discursive duality between the “Europeans” and the colonized “other,” colonized people were positioned as inferior to the Europeans.

Since I define colonialism as a psychological condition, in this dissertation the term “colonial gaze”¹⁰ means a gaze conditioned by psychological colonialism. Therefore, one does not need to be European to perceive things through a colonial gaze. As I demonstrate in the following chapters, Americans, native aristocrats and dancers could also be equally influenced by the colonial gaze as the British, Germans,

¹⁰ The Sinhala people use the term *sudda* to characterize white people. In a future work, I will refine and expand the colonial gaze as the “*sudda* gaze.”

or French. When I use the term “colonial audience” it means the spectators who perceive dance through the colonial gaze.

Colonial Choreography

Although “choreography” is often considered an aesthetic practice, its political power and implications cannot be ignored. Dance scholars Mark Franko and André Lepecki emphasize the western dance’s dependency on written texts. In his *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body*, Franko claims that the notion of “choreography” emerged during the baroque period and formulated ‘body as text’ in the Western dance (Franko 1993). Both Franko and Lepecki show that the Western dance discourse depends on writing. In this light, Lepecki re-frames our current understanding of “choreography” with a new interpretation of “choreography” charged with strong political undertones (2007). Lepecki proposes “choreography” as a theoretical model for analyzing how the body is inscribed, manipulated, and controlled in Western history. Using Lepecki’s notion of “choreography,” I examine how the European colonizers inscribed, manipulated and controlled Sri Lankan dancing bodies. In this dissertation, I use the term “choreography” in both aesthetic and political senses.

Borrowing Lepecki’s political notion of choreography and applying it to the colonial context, I develop the concept “colonial choreography”¹¹ to discuss the choreographic process of colonized bodies. Colonial choreography is the process in

¹¹ In the context of the Philippines, dance scholar Lorenzo Perillo has used the term “colonial choreography” once in his article “If I was not in prison, I would not be famous”: Discipline, Choreography, and Mimicry in the Philippines (Perillo 2011). However, he has not theoretically defined “colonial choreography.”

which colonized bodies were dislocated, mobilized, manipulated, staged, and displayed for colonial audiences. The European colonial gaze set the parameters for colonial choreography. As theatre scholar Erika Fishcher-Lichte argues, “organizers of the colonial exhibition exposed the non-Western performers to the gaze of the Western spectator. Whatever stance the spectators took in such a situation, their gaze always objectified the performers (1997, 230). Colonial choreography has two dimensions: one, choreographies that were made during the colonial period; two, choreographies that were made for colonial audiences, particularly Euro-American audiences, to satisfy their aesthetic taste of the colonized body. Although there is an element of resistance within colonial choreography as I discuss later, its parameters were set to entertain the curious colonial audience. Rather than what the natives wanted to show, choreography was defined on the basis of what the curious audiences wanted to see. For example, when the Prince of Wales visited Kandy, the performances that the Prince looked at “with curious eyes” (Ceylon Times, December 4th 1875) were reproduced in Europe as an event in a colonial exhibition called *Ceylon Exhibition*.

The manipulative power of choreography combined with colonial power created a powerful tool for choreographing colonized bodies. Based on his research in India, Dirks observes, “cultural forms in newly classified ‘traditional’ societies were reconstructed and transformed by and through colonial technologies of conquest and rule, which created new categories and oppositions between colonizers and colonized, European and Asian, modern and traditional, West and East, even male and female” (1992, 3). We can consider dance as a cultural form, and ask: What were the colonial

technologies used to reconstruct and transform Sri Lankan dance? In the same way that Lepecki shows how, in the western world, choreography was used as a technology to inscribe, manipulate, and control people, I consider choreography a colonial technology. Therefore, choreography as a technology combined with colonial power creates a powerful mechanism which I call colonial choreography that manipulated, controlled, and displayed Sri Lankan dancing bodies in processions, exhibitions, photographs, and films in a hierarchically lower position than the Europeans and Americans.

Colonial choreography does not only consider the British colonizer as its choreographer. It can also include Germans, French, Americans, Kandyan aristocrats, and native dancers. I agree with Nandy when he articulates colonialism as a state of mind (Nandy 1983). Colonialism manifests in the minds of both colonizers and the colonized. It is this colonial mentality that facilitated colonial choreography. Thus, I argue that no matter whether the choreographer is the British Governor, government officer, Kandyan aristocrat, German animal trainer, British photographer, American filmmaker, or native dancer, they choreographed for colonial audiences which makes their choreography colonial. Some choreographers had power to mobilize and manipulate dancers on a large scale such as in processions. Subaltern dancers choreographed their own bodies in certain performances. Regardless of the origin of the choreographer, I contend that they create colonial choreographies because they choreograph to satisfy certain parameters of the colonial expectation of the colonized.

Although the Europeans tried to fixate colonized dancing bodies in a way that makes sense to the colonial sensibility, Sri Lankan dancers also contributed to

colonial choreography through their bodily expressions, and bodily resistance (intentional or unintentional). As Nandy asserts, colonized people fought their own battle for survival “sometimes consciously, sometimes by default” (1983, xv). While dancers were collaborating with the colonizers, they created new bodily expressions, and sometimes secretly resisted authority. Therefore, while colonial choreography includes manipulation and control of Sri Lankan dancing bodies by colonizers, it also includes experiments with bodily limitations, resistance, and innovation by dancers.

I contend that there are at least two levels of colonial choreography: macro choreography and micro choreography. Colonial choreography at the macro level includes mobilization of bodies on a large scale such as for processions, colonial exhibitions, dislocating ritual dance labor and relocating them in entertainments. Colonial choreography at the micro level includes, for example, *ves* dancers’ movement innovations when they were mobilized in strange spaces such as colonial exhibitions and streets. Micro level choreography also includes the dancers’ deliberate or spontaneous bodily responses to their experiences as recorded in colonial photographs and films.

European Colonialism and Imperialism

European colonialism cannot be grasped without understanding the European imperialist attitude. Although colonialism and imperialism carry overlapping cultural implications, they are not quite the same. While scholars define imperialism as an attitude (Said 1993), colonialism is defined as a practice (Loomba 2015). According to Said, imperialism means “thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do

not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others” (Said 1993, 7). Imperialism is the mindset of the empire that justifies the occupying and ruling of another territory. Elaborating on Said’s interpretation, literary scholar Ania Loomba explains the difference between imperialism and colonialism more eloquently. According to her, “the imperial country is the ‘metropole’ from which power flows, and the colony...is the place which it penetrates and controls” (2015, 28). Imperial power flows from a place such as Britain, France, Spain, or Germany, and controls the colonies through the process of colonization. That process is colonialism. Therefore, “imperialism can function without formal colonies (as in the United States imperialism today) but colonialism cannot” (Loomba, 2015, 28). Loomba’s definition of imperialism is helpful to understand how Sri Lankan dancers were choreographed to celebrate and enforce European imperialism especially through royal visits and colonial exhibitions. Although she sees colonialism more as the physical control of land and people, Nandy sees it as psychological control.

As discussed earlier, Nandy defines colonialism as a state of mind. Therefore, for him, colonialism is operated through the discourses created by the colonial mentality. Thus, Nandy reminds us of the difficulty of defining colonialism within its own discourse when he states “the West has not merely produced modern colonialism, it informs most interpretations of colonialism” (1983, xii). Colonialism is also a mechanism that controls the mind. Black nationalist Marcus Garvey also held a similar view about colonialism and psychology. According to him, colonized people are enslaved in mental slavery (Azikiwe 2013). While I clearly see the physical control aspect of colonialism, when I discuss dance and choreography,

borrowing from both Garvey and Nandy I use colonialism as a psychological condition.

Resistance and Double-edged Choreography

Kandyan dancers sometimes resisted colonial authority. According to Nandy, the colonized do not remain simple-hearted victims of colonialism but instead make choices (1983, xiv). However, colonized dancers' resistance cannot always be comprehended as visible public resistance because it was a kind of hidden resistance. In contrast to publicly visible resistance, political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott introduces a new way of understanding the resistance of subordinate groups, which he defines as "hidden transcripts" (J. C. Scott 1990). He describes the hidden forms of resistance of oppressed people in his books *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985) and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990). According to Scott, every "subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a 'hidden transcript' that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant" (1990, xii). The hidden transcript is executed as "rumors, gossip, folktales, songs, gestures, jokes, and theater" (xiii).

Validating Scott's approach, performance studies scholar Dwight Conquergood asserts that "no scholar can make any claims about the consciousness, false or otherwise, of oppressed people without access to their hidden transcripts" (1992, 91). He develops Scotts' notion of hidden transcript into a performance theory that he characterizes as "counterperformances of the hidden transcript" (*ibid*). Conquergood claims that,

Under the nose of their oppressors, they create subtle, complex, and amazingly nuanced metaperformances that subversively key the event and critique the hierarchy of power. Through performance they sabotage the dominance displays of their superiors. Even as their bodies are inscribed and scripted to conform to the choreography of power, they simultaneously deploy bodily symbolism to signal defiant release (90–91).

Although the authorities choreographed the subordinates the way they wanted, the bodies of the subordinates carry a symbolic resistance. In the Sri Lankan context, the performance of the subordinates becomes even more complex.

Sri Lankan dancers, especially in rituals, use a performance technique called *depita kapena* (double-edged). For example, dancers use double-edged verbal expressions that produce two different meanings. Based on their knowledge and language ability, different audiences understand the expression differently. Therefore, although I borrow the notion of hidden resistance from Scott and Conquergood, I define the Sri Lankan dancer's resistance through performance as "double-edged choreography." Dancers' actions were visible and audible to European audiences, but their meanings were ambiguous so that the natives received meanings different from those received by the Europeans. This double-edged choreography can include wit, satirical elements, awkwardness, mockery, and laughter. Intentionally and sometimes unintentionally, dancers perform these elements as a form of resistance. These kinds of resistance can also be found elsewhere. For example, when the United States of America colonized Hawaii by dethroning Queen Lili'uokalani and the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1893, a female poet Ellen Kekoahawaiikalani Wright Prendergast wrote a patriotic protest song named *Kaulana Nā Pua* in Hawaiian for the Royal Hawaiian Band to play (Nordyke and Noyes 1993). Since it was sung in Hawaiian, the

colonizers did not understand what they were singing about. Through that song, the Band praised the sovereignty of the Hawaiian Kingdom and expressed their love for the land while they portrayed the colonizers as “the evil-hearted messenger[s]” (Nordyke and Noyes 1993, 28–30). I demonstrate that Kandyan dancers resisted the colonial authority through double-edged choreography in a similar way as the Royal Hawaiian Band resisted authority.

Dancer vs. Dancing Body

In this dissertation, I do not study the “dancer” in colonial history only as someone conveying aesthetic expressions. I also examine the biopolitical implications for colonized dancers, which I define as colonial corporeality in chapter 3. Dance scholars have extensively discussed the difference between analyzing the dancer objectively and studying the dancer body’s lived experiences subjectively (Thomas 2003, 93–95). According to cultural anthropologist Sally Ann Ness, to know how dancers felt certain experiences in their bodies, “we might do best to look at the mark they leave not upon the space surrounding their actions or the eyes watching them but *upon the bodies that are their medium*”¹² (2008, 6).

While objectively studying the dancer in history, I also study the colonized dancer’s everyday reality as he/she encounters it through his/her corporeal materiality or as the tool of the dancer. For Ness, the “dancer’s body can be seen to form the “host material,” a living tissue, for dance’s gestural inscriptions” (*ibid*). Studying the dancer’s body as material, I try to understand how Sri Lankan dancers felt

¹² Original emphasis.

colonialism in their bodies, for example, how they experienced the European winter weather and how they had to stretch their muscles and tissues to display the gestures of animals.

The Kandyan Region

There were two types of administrative divisions in the Kandyan Kingdom – *ratas*, and *disavas*. *Ratas* were smaller areas surrounding the city of Kandy and *disavas* were larger areas beyond *ratas* which were distant from the city. There were nine *ratas* which were administered by *ratemahatvaru* (*ratemahatmaya* in the singular), who were Kandyan aristocrats. The nine *ratas* were: Udunuvara, Yatinuvara, Tumpane, Harispattuva, Dumbara, Hevaheta, Kotmale, Udabulatgama, and Patabulatgama. It is these nine *ratas* that I mainly consider as the “Kandyan region” in this dissertation. In two instances I discuss dancers from Anuradhapura and Aluth Nuwara which were outside the borders of *ratas*, and belonged to Nuwarakalaviya *disava* and Sabaragamuwa *disava*. I discuss them here because those areas were also under the Kandyan Kingdom and had the same dance practices.

Sri Lanka vs. Ceylon

During the British colonial period, the country was called Ceylon. However, because it is now called Sri Lanka, in this dissertation I use the terms “Sri Lanka” and “Sri Lankan” to refer to the country and people respectively even during the colonial period.

Chapter Outline

Chapter one, “Pre-colonial Performance Scene and Colonial Dancescape,” provides a historical, social, and politico-economic context to the other three chapters of this dissertation. I first discuss how dance functioned as a form of labor in the pre-colonial Kandyan region. I also demonstrate how performers used various terms for performance practices as they served different purposes than what the Europeans identified as “dance.” Then, I discuss how colonial economic reforms and cultural conditions influenced dance in the Kandyan region and the ways the British redefined the notion of dance, female and male dance, and dance labor. Finally, I discuss how the female dancers were relegated to the background in the colonial period. I examine the case of *kalagedi nātuma* (water pot dance or *kalagedi* dance), the ubiquitous female dance that was promoted in colonial exhibitions and postcards in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. I contend that the British heterosexual men, missionaries, and Protestant Buddhists imposed Victorian Protestant morals and work ethics on the female body and redefined pre-colonial female dance labor as domestic labor as aptly demonstrated in the *kalagedi* dance.

In the second chapter, “Choreographing Special *Peraheras* and *Ves* Dancers for Royal Dignitaries,” I examine how the *ves* dancers were mobilized in the Kandy *perahera* (the procession of the Temple of the Tooth) in the backdrop of the colonial gaze and exoticization between the 1870s and 1880s. I particularly demonstrate the choreographic process of the special *perahera* organized for the Prince of Wales’s visit in Kandy in 1875. I analyze the *ves* dancers in *peraheras* organized for royal dignitaries against its historical context. I argue that amidst a competition among

native elites prevalent at the time, British officers and Kandyan aristocrats choreographed a special *perahera* to entertain the Prince of Wales by transposing *ves* dancers from their confined ritual space on to the streets where they had to develop a new movement sequence needed to dance and walk at the same time. I also argue that through their dance, the dancers sometimes secretly resisted the colonial authority and mocked the royal princes.

The *perahera* exhibited for the Prince of Wales in Kandy inspired German animal trainer Carl Hagenbeck and his two brothers to transport Sri Lankan dancers to European colonial exhibitions. Therefore, in chapter three, titled “Performing with Animals and Embodying Animal Movements,” I examine how the Hagenbecks displayed Sri Lankan animals and people before colonial audiences during their exhibitions of Ceylon. I contend that colonial choreographers defined and manipulated the bodies of Sri Lankan performers in order to entertain curious colonial audiences by displaying dancers alongside wild animals in colonial exhibitions. I also argue that colonial exhibits that staged the intimacy between wild animals and people inspired Sri Lankan *ves* dancers to choreograph the dance repertoire called *vannamas* that embody the characteristics of certain animals.

In chapter four, “Colonial Choreography for the Camera: Encounter between the Kandyan Dancer and the White Man Behind the Camera,” I examine the encounters between the colonizers behind the camera and Sri Lankan dancers facing the camera by analyzing the British commercial photographer Joseph Lawton’s photograph of “religious dancers at the Bo tree ceremonies” (1870/71) and American filmmaker James A. Fitzpatrick’s “devil dancers of Kandy” scene in his travel film

Charming Ceylon (1930). I study how the dancer's body, his dance movements and dance costumes were manipulated and captured in colonial photographs and films. I contend that the awkward movements of dancers in the photo of "religious dancers at the Bo tree ceremonies" and the film *Charming Ceylon* express traces of the choreographic instructions of Lawton and FitzPatrick. I also argue that through these contradictory and awkward moments, the Kandyan dancers mocked the white man behind the camera when they returned the gaze to the colonizer and to their audience to reclaim the accurate depiction of the dancers.

Finally, the conclusion provides a coda for this dissertation by showing the implications and legacy left by the British colonialism on Sri Lankan dance. I claim that one needs to examine the colonial past in order to understand the aesthetic parameters that continue to define the postcolonial dance scene in Sri Lanka. Therefore, in the conclusion, I reiterate the importance of historicizing Sri Lankan dance against the backdrop of the British colonialism.

Chapter 1: Pre-colonial Performance Scene and Colonial Dancescape



Fig. 1.1: Sri Lankan performers in *John Hagenbecks' Singhalesen-Dorf* in Germany in 1926 (Radauer 2017).

John Hagenbeck (1866-1940), the half-brother of famous animal trainer Carl Hagenbeck, was a planter and exported Ceylon Tea. Along with tea he also transported animals and dancers from Sri Lanka for colonial exhibitions. In 1926, one such group was performing in Germany at *Singhalesen-Dorf* (Sinhalese Village) and was set up for a photograph (Fig. 1.1). This photograph depicts what I call “colonial dancescape,” which I explain below. Hagenbeck lumped together performances that would never happen in pre-colonial Sri Lanka in his exhibition, a practice his brother Carl Hagenbeck started in the 1880s. Kandyan lower caste (*beravā*) ritual priests appear in the photo in their sacred *ves* costumes with mask dancers from Southern

(low country) Sri Lanka posing next to them. In the middle of the photo is an elephant choreographed in a so-called saluting posture. In front of the elephant's body is seated a person in the costume of a Kandyan aristocrat. Female dancers in the image with their bodies fully covered are carrying *kalagedi* (water pots) that suggest they are performers of the *kalagedi nätum* (water pot dance). This combination of performers reveals a uniquely characteristic dance under British colonialism which was not seen in pre-colonial times. What brought these performers together to make it a unique combination? What did they look like in the pre-colonial Kandyan region? What choreographic decisions did the colonial choreographers make? These are the questions I intend to address in this chapter.

1.1 Introduction

One purpose of this chapter is to provide a historical, social and politico-economic context for the other three chapters of this dissertation. I first discuss how dance functioned as a form of labor and the fact that performers used various terms for performances in the pre-colonial Kandyan region. Then, I demonstrate how the British, influenced by colonial economic and cultural conditions, redefined the notion of dance, female and male dance, and dance labor. Finally, I examine the case of *kalagedi* dance (water pot dance), the ubiquitous female dance, which was featured in colonial exhibitions and postcards in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. I argue that by imposing Victorian Protestant morals and work ethics, the British heterosexual men, Christian missionaries, and Protestant Buddhists redefined

pre-colonial female dance labor as domestic labor that is aptly demonstrated in the *kalagedi* dance.

Various forms of performances practiced in the pre-colonial Kandyan region could be characterized as a repertoire of performances since the term “dance” does not encompass all the embodied cultural practices in the region. According to Taylor, “repertoire” can include gesture, orality, movement, dance, singing, sports, and rituals (2003, 19–20).¹³ Although various natives performed in different contexts, most of them were not considered “dancers” or “artistes” under the pre-colonial economic system in Kandy. During the colonial period, Europeans, especially the British, interpreted certain Kandyan embodied performance practices as “dance” by imposing European parameters of dance. Therefore, using the term “dance” to describe pre-colonial performance practices is questionable. When I discuss pre-colonial performance practices, I try to incorporate pre-colonial meanings as much as possible. However, unfortunately, I too will have to use the term “dance” in this dissertation at least for two reasons. Since my overall argument is that Sri Lankan performers were choreographed as “dancers” for colonial audiences, it makes more sense to use the very terms that the colonizers used. Also, because the colonial discourse of Kandyan dance predates my dissertation, I am stifled by the vocabulary developed during the colonial period. As postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha convincingly asserts, the colonized are “imprisoned in the circle of interpretation” (2004, 119). The postcolonial discourse of Sri Lankan dance within which I am writing this dissertation

¹³ However, in Sri Lankan context, we also need to include drumming, and craftsmanship to the definition of embodied practices.

is also mainly based on the colonial notion of dance. Therefore, although I question it, I too am imprisoned in the term “dance” in my discussion.

1.1.1 Pre-colonial Performance Scene

The pre-colonial performance scene is the social, cultural, political and geographical space of various performances staged in the pre-colonial Kandyan region. Its major characteristic is the lack of mobility for the performers between social, cultural, political, and geographical spaces. Understanding the Kandyan socio-economic system is vital for understanding its pre-colonial performance scene. Therefore, in this section, I discuss how different groups of people performed diverse performances in various contexts in the Kandyan region. Kandyan performers were governed by socio-economic structures such as caste, *rājakāriya* (duty to the king), *nilapangu* (service tenure land), and dance families or *paramparāvas* (family lineage). The pre-colonial performance scene in the Kandyan region was highly diverse in terms of the social hierarchy of the performers and the functions they served. They perceived their performances from the perspective of many different concepts and terms. “Dance” or “*nātuma*” in Sinhala is only one of the many terms that Kandyans used in pre-colonial times.

1.1.1.1 Caste, *Rājakāriya*, *Nilapangu* and *Paramparāva*

It is important to understand the caste system in the Kandyan Kingdom (1592¹⁴-1815) to understand the socio-economic and political status of its performers. According to scholars, the Sinhala caste system originated in India and developed its own peculiar character in Sri Lanka (Ryan 1953; K. M. De Silva 1981). Unlike the Indian caste system, it is not directly related to religion (Peebles 1995; Gunasinghe 2007, 33). Although the low country, Southern and Western parts of the island were under Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial rule, the Kandyan Kingdom was not conquered by European colonizers until 1815. Until then Kandyan society preserved its royal and feudal bureaucracy and ancient conventions (Ryan 1953, 197), of which caste is one. Social, political, economic, and religious relations in Kandyan society was regulated by the caste system (Seneviratne 1978, 9; Meyer 2014), which divided society into two broad groups, *goyigama*, the ritually high group of cultivators, and service castes, the ritually inferior groups (Gunasinghe 2007, 33). The *Radala* people, the Kandyan aristocrats, occupied the top layer of the *goyimaga* caste group (Gunasinghe 2007, 33), and therefore occupied the highest rung of the Kandyan caste system. Performers in the Kandyan region mainly belonged to the *beravā* (drummer) caste, which is the lower position in the caste hierarchy and is the largest of the low service castes (Reed 2002, 246, 2010, 12). The *beravā* caste was obliged to provide “drummers, pipers and dancers at festivals” (Malalgoda 1976, 90) under the *rājakāriya* system.

¹⁴ As historian Lorna Dewaraja argues “it is from 1592 that the real saga of the Kandyan kingdom begins” (Dewaraja 1988, 5).

Dancers who belonged to the *beravā* caste used their dance labor as rent for occupying the land they lived in. In the Kandyan kingdom ritual duties such as dancing and drumming were part of the land tenure system known as *rājakāriya* (Reed 2010, 85). *Rājakāriya* literally means “duty to the king.” Since it involved payment of taxes and duties to the state, Gunasinghe characterizes it as “labour rent” (2007, 30). It is “a form of ground rent, which occurs in a land controlled by an overlord, where the fields are divided into demesne and plots of tenants” (Gunasinghe 2007, 30). The tenants pay their rent through their labor. Although the word *rājakāriya* means “duty to the king” the labor or the service did not always directly go to the king. It went to the landlords (Gunasinghe 2007, 30) such as temple priests and aristocrats. Anthropologist H.L. Seneviratne also defines *rājakāriya* as work or labor and observes that temple services that tenants perform under *rājakāriya* were not religious acts and should be understood as “work” (*vaeda*) or “the king’s duty” (*rājakāriya*) (1978, 134). In line with both Gunasinghe and Seneviratne, I contend that dancing and drumming under the *rājakāriya* system should be characterized as dance work or dance labor.

It was precisely the *nilapangu* system that enabled Kandyan aristocrats to mobilize dancers and drummers. Kandyan aristocrats had served as patrons of Kandyan dance and drumming for centuries (Reed 2010, 76). In the Kandyan economic system *nilapangu* referred to plots of land “held by inferior tenants generally of service duties [who] obtained the total product of *nilapangu* for themselves” (Gunasinghe 2007, 25). In return, they had to perform duties through their labor to their landlords, who were Kandyan aristocrats or temple priests. For

example, at the *Embekke dēvālaya*¹⁵ near Kandy *nilapangu* termed “*nätum panguwa*” (dance service land) was assigned to perform *Valiyak mangallaya* (“Service Tenure Register 1: Kandy” 1870, 473; Lawrie 1896, 1:223). Under the Kandyan politico-economic system there were certain *nilapangu* given only to female performers. “*Natana panguwa*” (dance service land) also known as “*geekiyana panguwa*” was given to female *digge* dancers (Perera, 1917, Appendix xv). According to sociologist and historian Ralph Pieris, “certain lands could only be held by women, e.g., for the service of dancing at a *devale*,¹⁶ or for *alatti*¹⁷ service” (R. Pieris 1956, 96). In these *nilapangu* there were dancers and drummers who were obliged to perform for the Kandyan aristocrats. This is how Kandyan aristocrats were able to mobilize dance labor in processions to entertain British royal dignitaries, as I discuss in Chapter 2.

Although the caste system is useful for understanding the political economy of performers, over-emphasis on caste sometimes could lead to oversimplification. I agree with the historians (Dirks 2001; Rogers 2004) who argue that the caste system should be understood as a historical phenomenon rather than as a structural feature of South Asian societies. Characterizing Kandyan dancers and drummers only by caste categorization is problematic as it undermines the role played by the dance families of dance lineages (*paramparāvas*). For example, when *nilapangu* was assigned to performers, caste was not mentioned in the *nilapangu vistaraya* (Service Tenure Register). A particular land was given to a performer and his or her family (“Service Tenure Register 1: Kandy” 1870). Therefore, that performer and his family were

¹⁵ *dēvālaya* is the shrine-house dedicated for local deities.

¹⁶ *dēvālaya*

¹⁷ *Alatti* service is a ritual service in *dēvālayas* such as Vishnu rendered only by females. For example, *alatti* service is done during the *Valiyak Mangallaya*.

obliged to perform their duties by their landlords. While some *beravā* caste families or *paramparāvas* performed in *Valiyak mangallaya* in the *Visnu dēvālaya* “Service Tenure Register 1: Kandy” 1870, 181), other *beravā* families performed for the entertainment of the Kandyan aristocrats. Robert Knox (1641–1720), English sailor, who was captured in 1660 during the Kandyan king Rajasingha II, was allowed to travel in the Kandyan region. Knox observes that Kandyan aristocrats were the patrons of dancers and people who performed tricks in their houses (1681, 254). Therefore, although these performers belonged to the *beravā* caste, very rarely did they perform in the same spaces until the British colonial period. However, they occasionally performed in spaces other than what they were assigned in their *nilapangu*, based on their various skill levels. As dance scholar Mudiyanse Dissanayake observes, even important ritual services such as *mul yakdessas*¹⁸ in *Valiyak mangallaya* were assigned to a different *beravā* family just because the one who inherited them through *nilapangu* from his family was incapable of performing it well (Dissanayake, 2000, 256–57). Therefore, the way dancers performed their ritual duties under caste, *rājakāriya*, and *nilapangu* should be understood in their particular context. Although they were from the *beravā* caste, they had changed their ritual duties. Thus, occasionally the Kandyan politico-economic system made exceptions based on its needs. Mobilizing *Valiyak mangallaya* dancers in the procession exhibited for the Prince of Wales in 1875 is one such exception discussed in Chapter 2. I am not arguing that studying the caste of the performers is not important, but I contend that understanding the dance families and *paramparāvas* would provide

¹⁸ Chief ritual priest (dancer).

another layer of understanding of the relationship between performers, kings, temple priests and aristocrats in the pre-colonial Kandyan region.

1.1.1.2. Diversity of Performance Contexts and Concepts

The pre-colonial performance scene in the Kandyan region was highly diverse in keeping with the social hierarchy of the performers and their functions. While Kandyan upper-caste men performed *udekki*¹⁹ dances (Bandara 2009, 92; Reed 2010, 238) privately, lower caste performers danced in *Valiyak mangallaya* rituals in public. While some females performed *kalagedi sellama* (water pot play/game) in the villages, females from certain families performed *digge nātuma*²⁰ in some *dēvālayas*. The Kandyan kings had formed different guilds of performers such as singers, dancers, drummers and acrobats for court performances.

During the Kandyan kingdom, different kinds of performance were staged in different settings based on their purpose. They were part of their belief system, part of their lifestyle and leisure, entertainment, and work. Although we cannot divide them without some overlap, for analytical purposes it is possible to categorize them according to their purposes. There were performers who took part in rituals such as *Kohomba kankariya*, *Valiyak mangallaya*, *digge nātuma*, *Kadawara kankariya*, *gammaduwa* and *bali*. *Kalagedi sellama*, *an-keliya*, *li-keliya* and *sokari* could be considered leisure-oriented performances while *panteru* and *vannamas* were entertainment-oriented. *Udekki* was performed both for rituals and for entertainment.

¹⁹ Hourglass-shaped small drum that is held in the palm.

²⁰ *Digge* dance or *diggei* dance is a female dance practice that took place in certain *dēvālayas* such as Sabaragamu Saman *dēvālaya*, in pre-colonial times.

Before the arrival of the British in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, people in the Kandyan region engaged in various performances, such as movements, singing, drumming, and recitation that cannot be subsumed under “dance” or “*nätuma*” in Sinhala. The Kandyan people did not perceive their movement practices through European notions such as dance, music or theatre. As ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl observes, most languages of the world do not have a specific term that encompasses music as a total phenomenon, and instead “they often have words for individual musical activities or artifacts such as singing, playing, song, religious song, secular song, dance, and many more obscure categories” (Nettl 2005, 21). This applies to dance as well. Nettl further talks about the terms used in Native American societies and observes that the Blackfoot people use the word *paskan* “that can roughly be translated as “dance,” which includes music and ceremony and is used to refer to religious and semi-religious events that comprise music, dance, and other activities” (2005, 21-22). Nettl’s example shows the complexities of articulating various performances in different cultures. In the case of the pre-colonial Kandyan region, the opposite of the Blackfoot conceptualization can be observed. Rather than using one word that encapsulates music and dance, the Kandyans used many different terms and concepts to describe various performances. *Nätuma* is the nearest term for dance. For example, *nayyadi nätuma* is an example of dance. *Keliya* and *sellama* refer to certain enjoyable plays/games such as *li-keliya* (stick play), *an-keliya* (horn play), *pol-keliya* (coconut play) and *kalagedi sellama* (water pot play/game). *Kankariya* can mean a ritual consisting of dance, drumming, and recitation of which *Kohomba kankariya* and *Kadawara kankariya* are examples.

mangallaya is a ritualistic celebration as used in *Valiyak mangallaya* and *Heta Pas mangallaya*. After British colonialism these various terms and concepts were subsumed under “dance” or “folk play.”

1.1.2 Transition to the Colonial Dancescape

According to dance scholar Tamara M. Johnson, dancescape is “an amalgamation of dance scenes that are often interlinked either through geographic proximity, membership networks, or influence” (2011, 2). “Dance scene” signifies a more isolated dance space while “dancescape” denotes the connectedness of different dance scenes that go beyond their geographical, social spaces. Johnson observes that dancescape “incorporated ritual and embodied memory, while simultaneously recognizing the ever evolving patterns of dance movements and shifting social contexts” (3). I use the concept of dancescape as it helps to conceptualize the amalgamation of dance scenes when the social context is transformed from pre-colonial to colonial. For the purpose of this dissertation, I articulate it as “colonial dancescape” as this transformation happened during British colonialism. As I discuss in this section, the transition from pre-colonial performance scenes to colonial dancescape was facilitated by the following factors: abstracting and appropriating pre-colonial performances as “dance” that makes sense to European audiences, revolutionizing the pre-colonial political economy of the Kandyan region with new colonial reforms, Orientalism and the curiosity for exotic exhibitions that governors like William Gregory invested in.

1.1.2.1. *The Colonial Articulation of “Dance”*

I contend that the British ignored the nuances of pre-colonial performances when they abstracted certain performances and appropriated them as “dance” so as to make sense to European audiences. Discussing material cultural objects such as artifacts and crafts in India, Cohn in his book *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (1996) claims that based on European standards, the British defined Indian art and craft in a way that made sense to the Europeans (1996, 76–77). In the same way, the Europeans articulated, abstracted and appropriated the “dance” of Sri Lanka based on the European perception of dance. Euro-centric approaches led to categories such as dance, music, theatre, folk dance, and oriental theatre, which is sometimes not only problematic but also prevents understanding the nuances in the performance practices of a country like Sri Lanka. However, to know the history of performances during the colonial period, we need to study how the colonizers conceptualized them. As dance historian Davesh Soneji argues, it is impossible to historicize the contemporary use of the term *devadasi* in Indian dance without reference to knowledge systems that developed during colonialism (2012, 6). Therefore, it is vital to examine the ways British conceptualized Sri Lankan dance.

Scholars of ethnomusicology, dance studies, and performance studies problematize the use of terminology from European music and dance to describe non-European performance practices. As ethnomusicologist Alan P. Merriam observes, ethnomusicologists such as Willard Rhodes have identified this issue of essentializing the Western notion of dance and music (Merriam 1964, 5) by 1950s. As Nettl states,

In Western society we recognize language, literary art, music, dance, and drama as more or less separable domains for which we have developed

independent scholarly disciplines: linguistics, literary scholarship, musicology, art history, choreology. If there are societies that draw the lines at different points or not at all, they have or will have developed other intellectual ways of viewing their culture, ways that correspond to their conceptual classifications, and, like ethnomusicologists in the West, they see the rest of the world through their own eyes, hoping that some insights will come to them from what is also inevitably an essentially ethnocentric approach (Nettl 2005, 26).

When the Europeans encountered pre-colonial Sri Lankan performances, they interpreted them based on European standards of music, dance, and theatre. The Europeans called *yakdessas*, the ritual priests who performed in *Valiyak mangallaya* (see Chapter 2) “devil dancers.” Dance scholar Adrienne Kaeppler also makes a similar observation to Nettl. She elaborates on how the concept of “aesthetics” and “beauty” is related to “evaluation” (2003). Therefore, when people encounter dance practices of other cultures, they evaluate them based on the observer’s own values. Kaeppler claims that aesthetic principles are cultural values (2003, 161). Based on the art historian E.H. Gombrich’s term, she proposes the concept of “the beholder’s share,” to understand how people interpret the dance and music of other cultures (Kaeppler 2010). What does the beholder bring to the site? How does the competence of the observer affect the interpretation? (2010, 186). This explains why Europeans called ritual priests sacred to the natives “devil dancers.” European missionaries (Gogerly, 1908), British government servants (Tennent, 1850), British news reporters (*The Ceylon Times* 1875d) and British illustrators (*Illustrated London News* 1876a), who called *yakdessas* “devil dancers” were ignorant about the nuances of the performances and too arrogant to hear how natives perceived those performers.

1.1.2.2. *The Colonial Political Economy*

The British revolutionized the political economy of the Kandyan region with new reforms. Describing his experience in the early twentieth century, novelist Leonard Woolf,²¹ who worked as a government servant in Jaffna, Kandy and Hambantota districts in Sri Lanka, states that laws and ordinances of the British administration regulated “the everyday lives of the inhabitants not only in matters of public order, but also of the ownership of land, agriculture, trade, industry, labour, religion, and education,” and therefore, “the whole life in this area has been completely revolutionized in the space of a hundred years” (Woolf 1928, 42). As Woolf correctly identified, colonial laws and ordinances revolutionized the island’s political and economic structures. The Colebrooke-Cameron constitutional reforms of the early 1830s marked Sri Lanka’s transition to modernity (N. Wickramasinghe 2014a, 7). These reforms completely transformed the structures of the country (Peebles 1973, 306). One reform was the abolition of *rājakāriya* in 1831 (Sivasundaram 2007, 952) whereby the Kandyan natives had to give up their traditional work and were compelled to participate in the export plantation economy.

The appropriation of labor in the Kandyan region was of great concern to the colonial government. From the 1840s onwards, the colonial government invested in export crops such as coffee, tea and coconut. The plantation economy required hundreds of laborers “regularly employed in the systematic cultivation of a single cash crop for sale in the market” (Bandarage, 1983, 66). As historian and sociologist Asoka Bandarage states, coffee plantations “in particular require a large, regular, and

²¹ Leonard Woolf was the husband of the English writer Virginia Woolf.

well-disciplined labor force,” and during the coffee harvest, “labor requirements increase tenfold” (1983, 174). The plantation economy needed a strong and large labor force. The colonial government’s attempts to mobilize Kandyan peasants for the plantations failed, according to Bandarage, for two reasons: most of the Kandyan peasants were primarily wet-rice cultivators and it was difficult to introduce them to plantation labor and since the Kandyan labor system was caste-based, the peasants were reluctant to become a wage laborers (Bandarage 1983, 174–75). To prove her point, Bandarage quotes an English writer who in the nineteenth century wrote, “in England the study of statesmen is to find employment for the poor; while in Ceylon the difficulty is to find poor to employ” (quoted in Bandarage 1983, 175). Given this condition, it is fair to assume that the government needed every possible laborer, including ritual dancers, for the new plantation economy to succeed. When it failed to mobilize the natives, the colonial government characterized them as lazy, particularly the Kandyan people (Bandarage 1983, 175). Governor Hercules Robinson addressing the Legislative Council in 1866 stated that,

The wants of the native population of the Island are few and easily supplied by an occasional day’s work in their own gardens or paddy fields. Their philosophy, their love of ease and indolence or their limited ideas, whichever may be the real cause, render them perfectly content with what they already possess (quoted in Bandarage 1983, 175).²²

By 1908, Kandyan performers had to work in tea plantations. Mahawalatenne Bandar met a young performer, a great-great-grand son of Malawara Muhandiram, once a

²² However, fulfilling the need of the plantation economy, Indian immigrant laborers were brought to the island since the mid-nineteenth century.

famous performer in the Kandyan kings' court (*Kavikara Maduwa*), and a grandson of another famous performer Saibo Malawaraya of Alutnuwara *Devale*, "returning home after a day's cooly²³ work on a tea estate" (1908, 131). While Bandar's testimony shows how dance labor was transformed into plantation labor, what is more intriguing is how the colonial government exported both tea and dancers since the late nineteenth century. John Hagenbeck, the half-brother of famous animal trainer Carl Hagenbeck, was a planter, and he exported Ceylon tea (Rothfels 2008, 222) and dancers in the same ship to Europe for the colonial exhibitions.

More intriguingly, tea was exported to European kitchens and restaurants and dancers to European exhibitions and circuses to cater to exotic European tastes. According to religious studies scholar Elizabeth Harris, driven by the feeling of superiority and romantic fascination, colonizers imagined Sri Lanka as their "exotic Other" (Harris 1994, 6). She elaborates on the *perahera* as an example of exotic attraction to the West (7). When the Hagenbecks transported dancers, they also transported elephants. As Wickramasinghe observes, the Zoo was a "product of nineteenth-century colonial presentation of the Orient and the interest of European people in strange species" (Wickramasinghe, 2003, 34). This became obvious when Hagenbeck exhibited Sri Lankan dancers with elephants, monkeys, snakes, and bulls for his exhibitions that some scholars called "human zoos" (Blanchard et al. 2011). These exhibitions targeted specific markets. According to dance scholar Marta Savigliano, exotic representation "commoditized the colonials in order to suit imperial consumption" (Savigliano 1995, 2). Therefore, Sri Lankan dance, exoticism,

²³ Cooly is a derogatory term used for laborer.

and imperial consumption cannot be separated. Dancers who performed in rituals became exotic exhibits as a result of the new colonial economic scene.

1.1.2.3. Orientalism, Exhibition, and Governor Sir William Henry Gregory

I consider Governor William Gregory to be a master colonial choreographer who manipulated dancers at a macro level.²⁴ He may not have literally choreographed the movements of the dancers but during his governorship through his priorities, interests and decisions he facilitated the redefinition of Kandyan dancers as Orientalist and exhibition objects especially for colonial audiences. Therefore, he became a colonial choreographer at a macro level.

Anglo-Irishman William Henry Gregory was a politician, art administrator, and a Governor of Sri Lanka. In 1857 he was elected to the British parliament as the member of Galway, which he represented until 1871 (Bastiampillai 1968, iv). Gregory chaired the parliamentary committee on the British Museum in 1860 and was elected a Trustee of the National Gallery in 1867 (Blackburn 2010a, 192). He was active in London museums and galleries when the age of exhibitions started. Historically contextualizing the International Exhibition at South Kensington in 1861, *The London Illustrated News* in its inaugural issue announced that “this is the age of exhibitions” (quoted in Hoffenberg 2001, xiii). He assumed duties as Governor of Sri Lanka (Ceylon) on March 4, 1872 and served until he resigned on May 8, 1877 (Bastiampillai 1968, v). The “mysterious charm” of the South Asian region was one reason that Gregory was attracted to Sri Lanka (Jenkins, 1986, 219). Compared to the

²⁴ I describe the macro and micro level of colonial choreography in the introduction.

other Governors, Gregory was considered one who attempted to improve the social conditions of the colony (Bastiampillai, 1968, 105). He was knighted as Sir William Henry Gregory by the Prince of Wales when he visited Kandy in 1875. Gregory came to Sri Lanka when the Orientalists' interest in Sri Lanka was emerging.

Orientalist curiosity about the Island's art, culture, and people started from the 1870s onwards. This Orientalist trend parallels similar conditions in the South Asian region. According to literary theorist Edward Said, "without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said, 1979, 3). Cohn echoes this political ramification of Orientalism when he argues that "colonial rule is based on forms of knowledge as much as it is based on institutions of direct control" (1983, 182). Royal Asiatic Societies established in the colonies contributed enormously to Oriental studies. The Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society was founded in 1845 (Aldrich 2014, 4). However, the formative period for Orientalist activities in Sri Lanka is considered to be the 1870s (Blackburn 2010a, 189). As historian Anne Blackburn notes, the interest in "Oriental literature" that started to develop during Governor Robinson's tenure reached "fever pitch during the era of Governor Gregory" (Blackburn 2010b, 46). Governor Gregory built the Colombo Museum in Sri Lanka in 1875, and it was opened in 1877 (Aldrich 2014, 4). In 1882, the Kandyan Art Association was established to revitalize the "dying" traditional art and to support traditional craftsmen "by providing them a sales outlet" (Reed 2010, 106).

The council meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society Ceylon Branch held on February 5, 1906 reports that they were going to hold a competition with the help of their committee on Oriental Studies, which was formed in 1902 (*JRASCB 1906 1907*). The objective of the competition was to “get Kandyans to describe Kandyan customs that are going out of use and memory” (*JRASCB 1906 1907*, XIX:20). At the council meeting held on August 29, 1906, in accordance with the opinion of renowned Indologist and Orientalist Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), the first prize was awarded to S.D. Mahawalatenna for his essay on “Kandyan Music” (*JRASCB 1906 1907*, XIX:97). This essay becomes the first ever essay written on Kandyan dance by a native; it was published under the name Mahawalatenne Bandar in *the Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* in 1908 (Bandar, 1908).

Governor Gregory had a great sense of and skill in museums and exhibitions. He considered a museum as an indispensable institution for Oriental studies (Bastiampillai 1968, 148–49). He had a two-fold purpose when he built the Colombo museum: “amusement at the sight of objects of wonderment, and education” (quoted in N. Wickramasinghe, 2003, 35). Gregory’s writings suggest that he had a knowledge of ethnographical museum collections and skills in “scientific” display (Gregory 1894). Explaining his experience and aspiration in the mid-nineteenth century, in his autobiography he states, “I had a great idea of turning the present British Museum into what would have been the finest and most scientifically arranged museum in the world” (Gregory 1894, 208). Although he could not have fulfilled what he envisioned for the British museum, he had a great sense of exhibition of art,

culture, and history. Describing the manner in which he would have arranged the “Central Hall of Antiquities” in the British museum, he states that,

The visitor would enter at the earliest period, the Egyptian, and then proceed through Assyria and Greece to Rome. In this great hall the largest sculptures would be arranged, and running out of it at right angles would have been rooms for smaller objects. The large hall would have been the vertebrae of the building, the smaller rooms the bones connected with the vertebrae (Gregory 1894, 208–9).

This statement shows the refined aesthetic taste that Gregory had acquired when he arrived in Sri Lanka. As I argue in Chapter 2, Gregory’s aesthetic taste was used when the special *perahera*, the procession, was choreographed for the Prince of Wales when he visited Kandy in 1875. Therefore, Gregory’s aesthetic sense contributed to colonial choreography at a macro level. Gregory’s attempts to preserve and exhibit ancient Kandyan heritage were not always welcomed by the evangelical Christians in the country. For example, a leading evangelical, A. M. Ferguson, who was the editor of the *Ceylon Observer*, condemned Gregory’s effort when he ordered repairing the walls of the Temple of the Tooth because he (Ferguson) thought it was supporting “idolatry” (Rogers 1987, 354). Justifying his efforts in Kandy in a personal letter Gregory wrote to a concerned Christian lady that “I do care for the old remains of ancient Kandyan glory and I have worked hard to restore them” (Blackburn 2011, 77).

When it comes to Buddhism and cultural practices, Gregory consulted Kandyan aristocrats. He had kept accounts of the meetings he had with Kandyan aristocrats regarding refashioning Kandy city (Blackburn 2011, 77). Gregory was also involved with negotiations between the British officers and Kandyan aristocrats about changes to sacred cultural artifacts, and in some instances, aristocrats were flexible to

changes proposed by the government officers (79). This shows that based on the need, Kandyan aristocrats changed their cultural traditions. As I demonstrate in chapter two, Kandyan aristocrats were flexible to mobilize ritual dancers (*ves dancers*) from their ritual space to colonial entertainments.

1.2 Colonial Dancescape

Under the colonial dancescape, I examine two aspects. First, focusing on the Kandyan region, I discuss how the idea of dance and dance labor was redefined in the colonial dancescape in Sri Lanka. The introduction of capitalist labor relations which stemmed from colonialism changed the notion of dance labor. Europeans did not consider pre-colonial ritual dance productive labor for development. Not only was it perceived as unproductive, but it was considered a threat to colonial power. Therefore, the colonial government redefined ritual dance labor as exhibition dance labor turning it into an export commodity for colonial exhibitions. Although the dancers faced some difficult experiences in Europe, colonial exhibitions provided them physical and a certain social mobility.

In the second section, I discuss how the female dancers were relegated to the background in the colonial dancescape. While the British heterosexual men and missionaries redefined pre-colonial female dance labor, they imposed Victorian Protestant morals and work ethics on female dancers. The Protestant Buddhist movement, which was inspired by Protestant Christianity, also contributed to disciplining the female dancing body. Next, I present a case study of *kalagedi nātuma* (water pot dance) where the ideal disciplined and domestic Sinhala woman was

choreographed. I contend that relegating females to the background, disciplining and controlling them as domestic workers, and choreographing the *kalagedi* dance are all choreographic actions that contributed to colonial choreography.

1.2.1 Transforming Unproductive Ritual Dance Labor into Exhibition Dance

Labor

The notion of labor changed with the introduction of capitalist labor relations. Historian David Ludden characterized the idea of “development” emerging from colonialism as the “development regime” which was linked to the growth of the modern state and of economic progress (Ludden 1992). Ludden further argues that the colonial development regime is “a child of capitalist empire” (Ludden 1992, 252). Although his conclusion was based on his studies in India, the notion of the development regime is relevant to Sri Lanka. According to Gunasinghe, “exploitation of the surplus from the producers is intensified and continues under capitalism” and “the worker is alienated from all the means of production and has nothing to sell except his labour-power” (2007, 7). However, based on cultural critic Raymond Williams, dance scholar Priya Srinivasan argues that “the labor of dancing cannot be separated from its means of production, the dancing body” (2012, 11). Therefore, in the case of Sri Lankan dancers, rather than alienating them from their means of production, they were alienated from their ritual and social context under the capitalistic economic system. For example, ritual dancers such as *yakdessas* were moved out of rituals like *Kohomba kankariya* and *Valiyak mangallaya* and used in entertainments in the colonial dancescape. As I discuss in the final section, female

dancers of *kalagedi sellama* (water pot play) were dislocated and used in domestic labor.

In India, the “development regime” “evolved on coherent, consistent lines after 1870” (Ludden 1992, 264). It is around the same decade that Governor William Gregory contributed to several development projects in Sri Lanka. Reflecting back on the decade 1870 to 1880, Honorary Corresponding Secretary of the Royal Colonial Institute John Ferguson remarked that the “next decade [1870-1880] in the history of Ceylon has its interest in the very prosperous, busy, and successful government of Sir William Gregory” (1887, 35). As I show later, it was after the 1870s that dance laborers (termed “devil dancers”) were officially identified as “professionals,” who became exhibits especially for colonial audiences. However, before it was re-defined for exhibitions, Europeans considered ritual dance labor as unproductive, demonic labor that posed a threat to their colonial order.

1.2.1.1. Unproductive Dance Labor

Europeans did not consider pre-colonial ritual dance to be productive labor. Raymond Williams defines “productive labour” as “a specialized sense of primary work on materials in a form which produced commodities” (1980, 35). Accordingly, pre-colonial performance, especially ritual dances in the Kandyan region, cannot be considered productive labor because they did not produce commodities. For example, the ritual dance in *Valiyak mangallaya* was considered a “service,” a “duty to the king” or a “labor rent.” Therefore, colonial capitalists did not see ritual dance labor as productive labor. The British were not the only European colonizers in Sri Lanka to

label dance as unproductive labor. Even in the seventeenth century, the Dutch officially labeled dance as useless labor in a resolution of the Council. According to Denham, on December 20, 1659 “the Dutch Government decided to expel all dancing women and other useless people by which the Company suffered a loss from the sixty villages they inhabited” in Southern Sri Lanka (1912, 487). Including the preparations, a ritual like *Kohomba kankariya* requires at least two full days of labor (Dissanayake 1988, 124–46) of several people. *Valiyak mangallaya* is performed continuously for seven nights (Dissanayake 2000, 14). Condemning *Valiyak mangallaya*, Knox states “they have a superstition, which lasteth six or seven days, too foolish to write; it consists in dancing, singing, and juggling”²⁵ (Knox 1681, 80). Therefore, a considerable native labor force was needed to maintain these ritual traditions which the British perceived as superstition. Since the British wanted to make a success of the plantation economy in Sri Lanka and did not have enough laborers, we can assume that they did not perceive ritual dance labor as productive labor.

Under the British laws and ordinances introduced in the early nineteenth century, ritual dancers became an unproductive labor force. With the abolition of *rājakāriya*, ritual dance labor became superfluous; the “labor rent” that ritual dancers paid through dance labor became no longer compulsory. They were not required to perform their “duty to the king” anymore.²⁶ When the British abolished the *rājakāriya* system, they abolished the political economic system governed by the

²⁵ Original spellings.

²⁶ However, *nilapangu* system continued to operate.

Kandyan court. Therefore, new laws and ordinances made many of the caste rules and functions meaningless (Ryan 1953, 198). Ritual dance labor lost its meaning because under *rājakāriya* it was a form of “work” rather than a religious act (Seneviratne 1978, 134)²⁷ or an artistic endeavor. While new reforms dislocated dancers from rituals, they also stigmatized them as devil dancers.

1.2.1.2. Dance Labor as a Threat

To Europeans, ritual dance labor was demonic dance labor, as the dancers were communicating and embodying the devil. As cultural anthropologist Susan Reed observes, the terms “devil dancer” and “devil dance” are ubiquitous in nineteenth-and early-twentieth-century British descriptions of Sri Lankan dance (2010, 100).²⁸ Based on the Christian worldview, Europeans schematized devil dance as an immoral practice. In his research in the Pacific, anthropologist Richard Eves claims that Christian missionaries considered visible bodily behavior such as excessive bodily movement in dance as immoral (1996, 92–93). Analyzing Frantz Fanon’s use of dance in his writings, philosophy scholar Joshua M. Hall argues that when the “dance” of the colonized is described by the colonizers, it signifies an “obscene” practice (2012, 276). In Sri Lanka too, it was the Christian missionaries who labeled and condemned Sri Lankan ritual dance as devil dance (Sherman 1979, 139).

²⁷ I am not denying the fact that the performers had religiosity or sacred feeling about their work. However, I agree with H.L. Seneviratne that *rājakāriya* should be considered as work rather than a religious act.

²⁸ Anthropologist David Scott also demonstrates how colonizers miss-interpret native notion of “yak” as “devil” while it also means deity for Sri Lankans (D. Scott 1994).

British missionaries were discontented with the financial support of the colonial government for “devil dance” rituals like *Valiyak mangallaya*, a ritual conducted after the annual Kandy *perahera*, which the colonial government continued for various reasons.²⁹ Wesleyan missionary R. Spence Hardy in his book *The British Government and the Idolatry of Ceylon* describes the payment voucher that the British government used to pay the “devil dancers” who performed in *Valiyak mangallaya* in 1839 (1841). This voucher records an ironic moment where the payment was given for “devil dancing” “For Her Majesty’s Service.” Hardy criticizes this voucher and the government act of paying for “devil dancing”(1841, 32). Hardy provides the specific amount that the government paid as “For the Devil Dancing called Walliyakoon, £3 13s. 21/2d”³⁰ and criticized it saying, “the British Government pays the expenses of a ceremony which consists of invocation by a demon priest” (1841, 30). This shows that Kandyan ritual dance labor was considered demonic dance labor.

The colonial government perceived ritual dance and drumming as labor that disrupts the smooth functioning of government. As I described in the introduction, performers in pre-colonial times, especially ritual performers, did not differentiate dancing from drumming. Although drumming can exist without dancing, Kandyan dancing cannot. Historian Michael Roberts, based on the police ordinances, argues that the noise of native drumming was a threat to the British government (1990, 1994). Based on Roberts, ethnomusicologist James Sykes observes that the colonial

²⁹ I discuss *perahera* and *Valiyak Mangallaya* in detail in Chapter 2.

³⁰ Original spellings, capitalization, and italicization.

government suppressed ritual drumming because it disturbed the modern form of labor (2011, 83–84). Since ritual dancing and drumming mostly take place in the night, as Sykes shows, “the ability of drumming to ruin one’s sleep before the workday threatened to ruin any peaceful night” (2011, 84). Therefore, to the colonial government, dance was not only unproductive labor but also a threat to productive labor as the ritual dance disrupted the sleep of the “actual” laborers.

1.2.1.3. From Ritual Dance Labor to Exhibition Dance Labor

During the British colonial period, ritual dance labor was redefined as exhibition dance labor. According to Nandy, while the colonizers perceived themselves as adults, they saw the colonized as children and “as adults take the responsibility to write moral codes for children, Westerners took the same role for the colonized (1983, 15).” Governor Gregory exemplifies the colonial adult who tried to help the colonized Sri Lankans to develop. One of his attempts was to reconstruct the village community by developing agriculture in the North Central province. Describing the Governor’s work, the Government Officer Dickson reported that Gregory transformed the “wilderness into a garden” (quoted in Brow 2012, 131). Dickson’s phrase “wilderness into a garden” explains how colonizers perceived native culture vs. colonial modernity. This binary between undeveloped-developed, unproductive-productive, child-adult, wild-garden, native-modern, can apply to dance as well. While ritual dance is unproductive, dance for entertainment is productive. Therefore, as I described in Chapter 2, it is not a coincidence that colonial officers and Kandyan aristocrats dislocated the ritual priests (called *ves* dancers) from their

ritual space and mobilized them to entertain the Prince of Wales during Governor Gregory's time. As Gregory transformed the wilderness into a garden, during the 1870s the labor of so-called devil dancers was transformed into exhibition dance labor.

Analyzing Gregory's efforts to reconstruct village communities, anthropologist James Brown argues that "it also supplied an ideological justification for the exercise of state power in pursuit of a progressive policy of improvement while simultaneously cloaking that policy in the mentality of respect for ancient customs" (2012, 132). Therefore, although a phrase like "wilderness into a garden" was used to describe work as benevolent, it was also state power geared to the colonial development regime. To make unproductive labor productive, labor has to produce commodities (Williams 1980, 35). It is in this context that ritual dance labor became dance labor for exhibition. Dance scholar Ethel Lucy Urlin, writing in the early twentieth century, categorizes Sri Lankan devil-dance as "primitive dance" (1912, 4). However, in the colonial government census of 1871, under occupations, like other artists such as musicians, tom-tom beaters, dancers, singers, comedians, nautch girls, so called devil dancers were classified as "professionals" (Census of the Island of Ceylon 1871 General Report, 1873, 90). Why were the Sri Lankan devil dancers considered primitive if they were professional? They were professional dancers, but what they professionally performed was the primitiveness of the colonized. That is why Sri Lankan "devil dancers" were very successful in Hagenbeck's Ceylon Exhibition when they were transported to Europe as part of colonial exhibitions.

Colonial exhibitions provided Sri Lankan performers who lacked mobility in pre-colonial times physical mobility and a certain social mobility. When we compare the other service castes (lower castes) in Kandyan society in the late nineteenth century, performers were the first lower caste group who had the opportunity to travel abroad, especially to Europe. It is true that while in Europe, these dancers sometimes “suffered dreadfully from the cold” (De Zoete 1957, 152), sold postcards (Aldrich 2014, 98), were paid poorly, and also collected cigarette butts they found on the exhibition ground, re-rolled them, and sold them (De Zoete 1957, 65). De Zoete met some of the dancers who went to colonial exhibitions and observed that, regardless of the difficulties they faced, no dancer “regretted the adventure,” and that they remained “proud of their experiences and anxious to show off the few words of French, Spanish or German ... together with the names of European and American cities” (1963, 130–31). Some of the performers stayed in Europe, performed in circuses, had children, grandchildren and never returned home. Reflecting on her grandfather Epi Vidane’s³¹ experience in the Hagenbecks’ colonial exhibition in the 1920s, Ganesha Vidane states that his “life improved in comparison to what he left behind in Sri Lanka. He was taken care of when sick and even the hospital bills were paid” (Soysa 2017).

³¹ His name was also written as A.P Vidane.

1.2.2 Relegating Female Dancers to the Background and Choreographing Domesticity

In the pre-colonial Kandyan region, female dancers were ubiquitous. The British re-defined the Sri Lankan female dancing body differently from the pre-colonial perception. Although the female dancing body was dominant in the pre-colonial performance scene in Sri Lanka, the British re-defined the male dancing body by relegating female dancers to the background. After demonstrating the female presence in the pre-colonial Kandyan region, I trace the trajectory of female dance practices in the British colonial period, particularly during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. I also show how the British controlled and disciplined the Sri Lanka female body as a domestic body. Finally, I demonstrate how Victorian morals and Protestant Buddhism, inspired by Protestant Christianity, ideologically contributed to colonial choreography by portraying female domesticity in the *kalagedi* dance (water pot dance).

Unlike in India, during British colonial rule male dancers dominated the Sri Lankan dancescape. As Ashis Nandy states, European colonialism comes with masculinity's dominance over women and femininity (Nandy 1983, 4). During British colonial rule in India, the colonizers were hostile to female dancers. As dance historian Davesh Soneji observes, "beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, vociferous social reform movements in South India aimed to dislodge communities of professional dancing women from their hereditary performance practices" (Soneji 2012, 3). However, during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Indian female dancers were exoticized as Indian "nautch girls" for Euro-American

audiences (Srinivasan 2012). Around the same time under the same colonizer, the dancescape in Sri Lanka, however, took a different shape. Although like in India the British disrupted female dance practices in Sri Lanka, later they did not exoticize female dancers. Instead, they exoticized the Sri Lankan male dancers as Sinhalese “devil dancers.” Describing Indian female dancers, dance historian Priya Srinivasan argues that “women were effectively in the same category as ‘primitives’ and ‘Orientals,’ read paradoxically as backward and naive, but also highly spiritual” (Srinivasan, 12). In Sri Lanka, rather than female dancers, it was the male dancers who fit into those categories Srinivasan describes. Sinhalese “devil dancers” were considered spiritual, primitive, and Oriental. While the British dislocated female dancers in Sri Lanka, they highlighted male dancers.³² Not only were they categorized as devil dancers but also the male dancing body became the dominant dancing body in the colonial dancescape. Female dancers who in the pre-colonial period performed to welcome and entertain Kandyan kings and royal dignitaries (Davy 1821, 156,167) were replaced by male dancers. When the Prince of Wales visited Kandy in 1875, only male dancers were employed to entertain the royal party.³³ The displacement of female dance practices makes it hard to find evidence of Sri Lankan female dancers in the Kandyan region during British colonial rule.³⁴ This is one reason why this dissertation focuses more on male than on female dancers.

³² After the 1930s homoerotic gaze of certain photographers like Lionel Wendt elevated the status of Kandyan male dancers (Aldrich 2014).

³³ I discuss the Prince of Wales’ visit and dancers in Chapter 2.

³⁴ However, there is little evidence on *diggei* dancers especially in Sabaragamuwa areas. Also, around the twentieth century colonial exhibitions started to feature the *kalagedi* dance by females.

1.2.2.1 Female Presence in the Pre-colonial Dancescape

Although the male dancers started to dominate the colonial and post-colonial dancescape, female dancers were prominent before British colonial rule. Most of the male dancers in pre-colonial Sri Lanka performed in ritual contexts. Therefore, while most of the female performers were considered “dancers” in pre-colonial times, most of the male performers were not even considered “dancers.” As stated earlier, they were considered *yakdessas*, ritual priests. On the other hand, there is ample evidence to suggest that females performed as dancers (*nalangana*)³⁵ in the Kandyan court, in *dēvālayas* and their rituals, and in public festivals.

Historical sources suggest that it was the female dancers who entertained kings and royal dignitaries. It is important to know the significance given to the female dancing body in the Kandyan royal court. As M.B. Ariyapala in his *Society in Medieval Sri Lanka* (1956) claims, Kandyan women served and entertained the nobility with song, dance and acrobatics (quoted in de Mel 2004, 124). English captive Robert Knox’s descriptions of the Kandyan king’s entertainers also suggest that the king used females for his and his visitors’ entertainment (Knox 1681, 71). Early English writer John Davy in his *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon, and of its Inhabitants* (1821) claims that the Kandyan king had a special guild called “*natum ilamgama*” (dance guild) and in the Malabar fashion Kandyan court dancers were females (Davy 1821, 156).³⁶ It is true that Kandyan kings had enlisted male performers such as acrobats and martial artists. However, whenever the literature

³⁵ Female dancer.

³⁶ Description of judicial sentences under Kandyan kings, suggests that Malabar female dancers performed at the palace gate (P. E. Pieris 1950, 633)

refers to kings, royal dignitaries and “*nätum*” (dances), it is the female dancer that is described. The Sinhala literary work *Vayanti Malaya*, written in pre-colonial times, also describes female performances of erotic dances (*kāma nätum*) for kings and ministers (M. Wickramasinghe, 2010, 27). The description of female dancing (*nalangana nätum*) in *Vayanti Malaya* was similar to that of female dancing in messenger poetry (*sandesa kavya*) (Sannasgala 1964, 331), which I describe next. This evidence suggests that Sri Lanka had a tradition of featuring female erotic dances when kings and royal dignitaries were entertained through dance (*nätum*) in the pre-colonial era.

Female dancers played an essential role in *dēvālayas* and their rituals. Sinhala literature provides ample amount of evidence of female dancers performing in *dēvālayas* and Buddhist and *dēvālaya* processions. The authors of Sinhala messenger poetry (*sandesa kavya*) written between the Kotte and Kandy periods (1412-1815) highly praised the female dances performed in the *dēvālayas*. *Paravi Sandesha*, *Selalihini Sandesha* and *Sevul Sandesha* provide vivid descriptions (Dissanayake 1993, 318–21) of female dance practices in pre-colonial Sri Lanka. Female dancers performed in the *daladā perahera* (the procession that honors the sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha), one of the most sacred processions in Kandy today. According to the chronicle *Mahāvamsa*, females danced in a procession honoring the sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha during the Anuradhapura period (377 BC–1017). Mahanama, the author of the *Mahāvamsa*, describes the dancing women who performed in the Buddhist procession (W. Geiger 1912, 217). There is no mention of male dancers in this description of the *daladā perahera*, which suggests female dancers’ engagement

with *dēvālayas* and Buddhist temple processions. Although they began to disappear from *dēvālaya* rituals and processions during British rule, they played a major role in pre-colonial times.

Females performed in public festivals. Although public dancing by women was discouraged under British colonialism, it was celebrated in the pre-colonial Kandyan region. During the reign of King Rajasinha II (1635-1687), women played a prominent role in the *Esala perahera*,³⁷ which was a public festival and procession in Kandy. According to Robert Knox, females belonging to various guilds lined up in threes in a row, holding hands, and walked between the dancing and drumming groups in the *Esala perahera* in the seventeenth century (Knox 1681, 79). Knox describes how enthusiastically women danced in public festivals in Sri Lanka during the pre-British colonial period (79). One could argue that the Buddhist revival movement in the eighteenth century, led by Velivita Saranamkara, relegated female dancers to the background. However, we have evidence that females performed in *peraheras* even in the nineteenth century. John Davy, describing the *perahera* in the nineteenth century, states that “women of the temple...ladies of the court...dressed in royal apparel” took part in the *perahera* in Kandy enthusiastically (1821, 173). Therefore, it is fair to claim that females appeared in public festivals freely in the pre-British colonial period although the scene started to change after the British arrived.

³⁷ I discuss the *Esala perahera* in chapter 2.

1.2.2.2 *Where Have All the Female Dancers Gone?*

Although female dancers did not totally disappear from the scene during British rule, they certainly lost their prominence. The British pushed them off of center stage because they perceived the Sri Lankan female body as ugly, making it unattractive to the white heterosexual men. Missionaries also contributed to the marginalization of female dancers as they controlled and disciplined the Sri Lankan female body as a domestic woman by imposing Victorian morals on it.

Unlike the Kandyan kings, the British colonial gaze perceived Sri Lankan females as ugly and did not patronize female dances. As Nira Wickramasinghe observes, the British associated Sinhalese women with masculine features (2003, 90). The British colonel in *La Feerie Cinghalaise* provides the general view of Sri Lankan women when he says “strange country...everything is nice, except the women. At twenty, they are finished” (quoted in N. Wickramasinghe 2014, 72). Although the Kandyan kings were amused by South Asian female dancers, the British were not. Most of them saw Sri Lankan females as ugly. When the colonel says, “everything is nice, except the women,” it shows the European white man’s disenchantment with the Sri Lankan female.

The Sri Lankan female dancing body failed to satisfy the white male heterosexual expectations of the Oriental dancing girl.³⁸ In her discussion of the “Oriental Dancing Girl,” dance scholar Priya Srinivasan observes that white men did not like the Indian female dancing bodies (labeled as nautch dancers) when they

³⁸ Oriental dancing girl is metaphor created through white male sexual fantasy about the imagined places of Egypt (Karayanni 2004), Arab, Persia, or Mughal empire (Bald 2013, 44). Therefore, the term Oriental dancing girl has been used to a range of female dancers including Middle Eastern belly dancers to Indian temple dancers.

performed in New York in 1881 (2012, 56–57). As Srinivasan shows, early nineteenth century ballets that featured “Oriental dancing girls” (sometimes performed by Russian ballerinas) confirmed the physical image of “Oriental dancing girls” as slender, fantastic and exotic dancing girls (Srinivasan 2012, 52–53). Therefore, when Indian female dancers visited New York, they did not please the American white male imagination of the oriental dancing girl. I contend that a similar disruption happened when the British heterosexual male encountered the female Sri Lankan dancer. As Wickramasinghe states Sinhalese women created an uneasy feeling because they fell short of the traditional expectation of Oriental women (2003, 91). Although female dancers were praised and promoted in pre-colonial Sri Lanka, they did not impress the British. Elizabeth Harris in her book *The Gaze of the Colonizer* claims that Sri Lankan women were not idealized or romanticized by British men (Harris 1994).³⁹ Although some British writers have praised the Sinhala female figure, the female face disappointed them. As the military officer Lieutenant De Butts states, “the Cingalese women have generally good figures, but the same degree of praise can scarcely be extended to their faces, which are seldom handsome, or even pretty” (De Butts 1841, 135). Since the British did not perceive Sri Lankan females as pretty, it is fair to assume that they did not extol or appreciate Sri Lankan female dancers. South Indian female dancers likewise did not fulfill the white man’s expectation of the Oriental dancing girl in the late nineteenth century. Sri Lankan female dancers nullified the white heterosexual male expectation of the Oriental

³⁹ However, occasionally, British have praised bare-breasted *Rodiya* women over Sinhalese women as “truly feminine” (De Butts 1841, 144).

dancing girl. There are further disappointments that both Indian and Sri Lankan female dancers encountered during British times.

The British might have seen female dancers who performed for the Kandyan kings as a threat to their colonial authority. As Soneji argues, in South India, the Tanjore court *devadasi* dance - temple dance by females – was an emblem of cultural capital against colonial modernity as it displayed the superiority of native kings (Soneji 2012, 29). Therefore, the British colonial authority in Sri Lanka might have adopted a similar attitude to female court dancers in the Kandyan court. Since female court dancers were associated with the male dominance of Kandyan kings, the British might have seen it as a threat. As I argued in Chapter 2, to praise British Governors the British appropriated poetic genres such as *astaka* and *prasasti* that were originally sung in praise of Kandyan kings. However, the British could not use the female dancers associated with Kandyan kings because it ran counter to Victorian morals.

The perception of the female dancing body in Sri Lanka was transformed by missionaries with their introduction of Victorian values. The missionaries saw Sri Lankan women through the prism of Victorian womanhood (De Alwis 2002, 22). Therefore, part of the mission of the missionaries was to discipline the Sri Lankan female body. It is more likely that the prejudice against female performers in London was channeled through the female dancers in Sri Lanka. Throughout the nineteenth century, Victorians in England stigmatized female performers. They recognized “that acting and whoring were the occupations of self-sufficient women who plied their trade in public places” (Davis 1988). As in London, in Sri Lanka too “female chastity was mapped on the body” (De Alwis 1996, 104). However, as Rana Kabbani argues,

“women were a sub-group in patriarchal Victorian society just as other races were sub-groups within the colonial enterprise. Oriental women were thus doubly demeaned (as women and as 'Orientals') ” (1986, 7). Although Victorian morals subjugated British women to some extent, colonized women were oppressed even more. Britain’s Victorian prejudices against female performers were extended to Sri Lankan female dancers. As a result, by the early twentieth century the Sri Lankan female was generally considered suitable for prostitution (Reed 2010, 114). During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, missionaries imposed Victorian morals on Sri Lankan females, including dancers.

Through the work of missionaries, Victorian morals passed down to the perception of the Sri Lankan woman as a domestic woman. Describing the refashioning of the body in the Pacific during the British colonial period, anthropologist Richard Eves claims that females were encouraged to work inside, and that this attitude parallels with female domesticity prevalent in Victorian England at the time (Eves 1996, 117). In Sri Lanka the missionaries introduced Victorian forms of social disciplining to Sri Lankan women under the title of “Domestic Science” through formal and informal education (De Alwis 2002, 25). In both British colonies, in the Pacific and in Sri Lanka, Christian missionaries disciplined women through Victorian morals. In both cases, the role of the female was imagined to be that of a domestic woman. In both locations females were trained for domestic work: mat making in the Pacific (Eves 1996, 110) and needlework in Sri Lanka (De Alwis 2002, 23). In his review of the results of the census of 1911, the British colonial civil servant and superintendent of census operations in Ceylon E.B. Denham states, "the

occupations most numerous followed by women were the manufacture of coir, lace making, mat weaving, domestic service as ayahs, and the management of their own landed property, none of which requires great physical exertion" (1912, 310).

Denham's report reveals at least two major facts regarding Sri Lankan females and labor. First, it shows the disciplining of female bodies through domestic work by the early twentieth century. Second, when he says, "none of which requires great physical exertion," it reveals that less physical labor was required by women. On the contrary, dance labor requires "great physical exertion." Therefore, it is clear that less physical labor such as for needlework was encouraged for women and great physical labor such as dance was discouraged during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Denham later in his report gives another clue to the question I raised at the beginning: where have all the female dancers gone? When he reports about domestic servants, Denham states that Indians⁴⁰ come first and "the Kandyan come second in the number of female domestic servants" (1912, 489). This reveals that more than low country women or any other women (except Indian), Kandyan women were working as domestic servants by 1911. Therefore, it is fair to speculate that Victorian morals and Christian missionaries dislocated female dancers of the Kandyan region appropriating them for domestic service among other work. Christian morals about womanhood penetrated Sinhala society through the Buddhist revival movement of the early twentieth century.

⁴⁰ These are women with Indian origin who were brought to Sri Lanka as workers.

1.2.2.3 Choreographing Female Domesticity: *Kalagedi* Dance (water pot dance)



Fig. 1.2: *Kalagedi* dancers with *ves* dancers titled as “devil dancers” in a picture postcard produced by Skene company, Sri Lanka between 1880s-1920s

Although the British pushed female dancers to the background, colonial choreography promoted a dance named *kalagedi* as it satisfied the colonial gaze and natives trapped in the colonial mindset. Although *kalagedi sellama* (water pot play) (Raghavan 1967, 87–88) was a folk play in pre-colonial times, during the British colonial period, it became a theatricalized dance. During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, *kalagedi* dance became an inevitable dance staged by Sri Lankan females⁴¹ in and outside the country. While *kalagedi* dancers were featured in postcards in Sri Lanka (Fig. 1.2), they were also included in colonial exhibitions (Fig. 1.1). The emergence of *kalagedi* dance should be analyzed in the backdrop of

⁴¹ Colonial choreography also featured so called “nautch girls of Ceylon” and “Tamil dancing girls” which I don’t discuss in this dissertation as it is beyond my focus.

Victorian morals, Protestant ethics and their Sri Lankan appropriation, Protestant Buddhism.⁴²

Protestant ethical views of the female had been transmitted to Sinhala society through Protestant Buddhism by the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Natives had been internalizing Christian and European values and mannerisms during this period. In his census report of 1911, Denham contends that "the 'habits and wants of the natives' have changed so considerably in the last hundred years" towards Europeanization (1912, 4). Around the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, protestant Christianity was also able to inspire a modern Buddhist revival movement which was, ironically, against Europeanization and Christianity. From the 1880s members of the Theosophical Society led by Henry Olcott, Helena Blavatsky, Annie Besant, and prominent scholarly Buddhist monks influenced Anagarika Dharmapala to pioneer Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. Inspired by Protestant Christianity, Dharmapala started the modern Buddhist revival movement that anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere aptly characterizes as Protestant Buddhism (1970). As historian Janaki Jayawardena states, Dharmapala introduced "along with monogamous marriage the European ideas of civilized life combined with Christian values and virtues such as chastity, fidelity and family honour" to Sinhala culture (2002, 177). Anthropologist Malithi De Alwis shows that through his "extremely influential pamphlet" *Gihī Vinaya*, the Daily Code for the Laity, published in 1898, Dharmapala "clearly spells out how women's sexuality and

⁴² It is possible that folk dance revival movement emerged in Britain in the early twentieth century (Brocken 2013) influenced the emergence of female village performance such as a theatrical dance *kalagedi*. However, as I demonstrate in this section, it is also convincing to believe that Victorian morals and Protestant Buddhism ideologically contributed to *kalagedi* dance.

their everyday lives should be constructively regulated through the practice of sanitation and religiosity, so that they could be suitable role models for their children" (De Alwis 2002, 29). Therefore, Dharmapala's ideal Sinhala woman could not perform certain kinds of dance in public. Dharmapala and his Protestant Buddhist movement indirectly contributed to colonial choreography by re-defining and manipulating the Sri Lankan female dancing body.

Protestant Buddhism de-eroticized the female dancing body. Although erotic female dancing was encouraged in the Kandyan court, the natives who embraced Victorian Protestant morals silenced the narrative of female erotic dance practices. Based on the examples of the Pacific, Eves argues that prohibition of certain dances made it clear that "control of sexual activity was of central importance in achieving the objectives of the missionaries" (Eves 1996, 95). In Sri Lanka, Protestant Buddhists imposed Protestant morals about the female body and sexuality on Sri Lankan females. De Alwis contends that scholars influenced by Victorian Protestantism silenced the possible narrative of erotic festivals when they de-eroticized the bare-breasted female bodies depicted in the Sigiri frescoes (De Alwis 1996, 107). She shows how nationalist scholars, inspired by Victorian Protestantism, tried to "discursively clothe and domesticate" the images of bare-breasted female bodies (*ibid*). Although she makes the claim about female bodies in frescoes, the same applies to female bodies in the colonial dancescape. In her PhD dissertation, Janaki Jayawardena quotes a translated passage from an article written by a Buddhism monk for the newspaper named Vajirabuddi in 1923.

There were no vulgar dances [Ballroom dance, Baila dance (A Portuguese dance)]⁴³ among Aryan Sinhalese and such dances are spread among respectable families today. Because of these dances women's chastity and shame/fear disappears completely and if a woman loose [*sic*] her shame and fear, there is no point of talking about other things (that she loses [*sic*] everything a good woman suppose [*sic*] to have). Especially women should be obedient to men and should have quiet and sweet habits and behave well (Vajirabuddhi, 1923. Translated) (Quoted in Jayawardena 2002, 187–88).

This shows how Buddhist monks inspired by Dharmapala and his Protestant Buddhist movement raised their voices against possible female erotic dance. In this article, while condemning dances that can create an erotic effect, the monk tries to de-eroticize Sinhala female dancing. One way to do so is to publicly condemn it, as shown in the case of the Buddhist monk's article to the Sinhala newspaper. Another way is to facilitate and promote dances that feature de-eroticized domesticity.

Instead of the erotic female dance, colonial choreography, ideologically supported by Victorian domesticity and Protestant Buddhism, promoted the *kalagedi* dance that essentialized the water pot, an ideal symbol of the Sri Lankan domestic worker. In the picture postcard produced by Skene company between 1880s-1920s female dancers carry a *kalagediya* (water pot) suggesting that they were *kalagedi* dancers⁴⁴ (Fig. 1.2). The water pot was ideal to portray the Protestant Buddhists' as well as Christian missionaries' imagination of the Sri Lankan female as a domestic woman. Based on her analysis on ballet dancing, in her edited volume *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power*, Susan Foster claims that dancing bodies are

⁴³ Original parentheses.

⁴⁴ In the photograph, the female who are carrying drum, *horane* (a horn) could be identified as musicians. However, there is a woman who is carrying and a kind of fan, most probably a savaram. There are other photographs where Sri Lankan females performed savaram. Although I am not elaborating in this chapter, I consider female savaram is a colonial choreography. Since savaram signifies comforting the man (historically Kings), it also attracted the Victorian British.

gendered and are reflected in the paraphernalia that dancers use (1996, 1–2). Since pre-colonial Sri Lanka was an agrarian society, the water pot symbolized the ideal role of the domestic woman. In pre-colonial villages females did not practice *kalagedi sellama* as a staged dance but as a play or game (activity for enjoyment) during Sinhala cultural festivals such as the New Year celebrations (Raghavan 1967, 87–88). However, during the British colonial period, *kalagedi sellama* (water pot play) became a staged dance⁴⁵ featuring females carrying water pots as shown in postcards and colonial exhibitions.

The dress of the *kalagedi* dancers fulfills both Victorian and Protestant Buddhist standards of women's dress. Although women in the village were casual about covering their upper bodies in the pre-colonial period, the layered dress worn by *kalagedi* dancers suggests the influence of Victorian and Protestant morals during the time. Wickramasinghe shows that the practice of covering the upper body was fluid among women in pre-colonial Sri Lanka. Even in the fifteenth century women covered their upper body only when going out (2003, 15). After the colonial presence in the coastal areas, women in the Kandyan region did not face religious pressure to cover their upper body. In the rural villages, the situation was even more casual. It cannot also be overlooked that there was a caste factor that forbade certain women to cover their upper body in the pre-colonial period. Since *kalagedi* play was mainly practiced by village women, it is fair to assume that these female dancers were casual

⁴⁵ There is evidence to suggest that Malabar dancers (most probably females) performed with a prop similar to *kalagediya*, at the Kandyan king's palace gate during the King Sri Vikrama Rajasinha (1780-1832) (Pieris, 1950, 633). However, this dance could not be the *kalagedi sellama* as it was performed by Malabar dancers. And, it cannot be comparable to the staged *kalagedi* dance became ubiquitous during the colonial period.

about covering their upper body when they danced. The following verse taken from *kalagedi māle*⁴⁶ sung during *kalagedi* play suggests the casual nature of their dress: “*kekulu detana osariyen vasagene, rukulu valalu gena dete la gena,*” (Silva and Malalasekera 1935, 116), which translates as “cover their flower buds of breasts with *osariya*,⁴⁷ bangles in both hands,”⁴⁸ and “*osaripatin tana ran teti vahagena*” (Silva and Malalasekera 1935, 113), which translates as “covering golden-plates like breasts with the *osariya*.⁴⁹” These verses suggest that females who practiced *kalagedi* play covered their bare breasts just with an *osariya*. However, as evident in colonial photographs of the time, *kalagedi* dancers were dressed in layered costumes (Fig. 1.2). More than the pre-colonial dress, the new *kalagedi* dance dress resembles Victorian dresses and the female dress suggested by Protestant Buddhists. Victorian women generally wore many layers of clothing (Macdonald 2012). Therefore, as depicted in the photo, *kalagedi* dance women’s dress resembles the Victorian dress more than the pre-colonial village dress. As Wickramasinghe observes, Dharmapala’s movement had a definite puritan streak in returning to Victorian codes of conduct (2003, 17), even though its outlook was against Christianity and some Victorian attire such as hats. Dharmapala in his influential articles, *Dharmapala Lipi*, proposed a dress for women that covers her “black legs, navel and midriff” (quoted in De Alwis 2002, 27). Particularly, about covering the upper body, Dharmapala claims that “a proper blouse should cover the breast, stomach and back completely”

⁴⁶ *Kalagedi māle* is a written text that describes a game played by women (Sannasgala, 1964, 682). The game Sannasgala refers to here is *Kalagedi sellama* (water pot play).

⁴⁷ A style of wearing the saree.

⁴⁸ My translation.

⁴⁹ My translation.

(Wickramasinghe 2003, 17). The dress of the *kalagedi* dancers in the photo fulfills Dharmapala's dress code for the ideal Sinhala woman. Therefore, it is fair to suggest that the dress of the *kalagedi* dancers was influenced by both Victorian and Protestant Buddhist standards of female dress.

While the British heterosexual men and missionaries re-defined pre-colonial female dance labor, they imposed Victorian Protestant morals and work ethics on female dancers. The Protestant Buddhist movement also contributed to disciplining the female dancing body. The ideal disciplined and domestic Sinhala woman was depicted in the *kalagedi* dance. Sending females to the background, disciplining and controlling them as domestic workers, and choreographing the *kalagedi* dance are all choreographic actions that contributed to colonial choreography.

1.3 Conclusion

Pre-colonial Kandyan performers were governed by socio-economic structures such as caste, *rājakāriya* (duty to the king), *nilapangu* (service tenure land), and dance families or *paramparāvas* (family lineage). Dancers who belonged to the *beravā* caste used their dance labor as rent for consuming the land they lived in. Systems such as *rājakāriya* and *nilapangu* gave Kandyan aristocrats the power to mobilize dancers and drummers outside the ritual context. However, it is also important to consider dance families and *paramparāvas*, since they reveal another layer of information on the relationship between performers, kings, temple priests and aristocrats in the pre-colonial Kandyan region, which cannot be accessed only by studying the performers' castes.

The performance scene in the Kandyan region was highly diverse in terms of the social hierarchy of the performers and the functions they served. During the Kandyan kingdom, different kinds of performance took place in different settings according to their purpose. Before British colonization, natives in the Kandyan region practiced various performances such as gestures, movements, singing, drumming and recitations that cannot be encapsulated in the term “dance” or “*nätuma*” in Sinhala. However, ignoring the nuances of pre-colonial performance practices, the Europeans abstracted certain performances and appropriated them as “dance,” a category that made sense to colonial audiences.

With the new colonial reforms, the British revolutionized the pre-colonial political-economy of the Kandyan region. Since the plantation economy required a strong labor force, the colonial government tried to mobilize every possible native laborer. Performers who were dislocated from their traditional economic settings were transported to Europe as exhibits in colonial exhibitions. Entrepreneurs like John Hagenbeck, who exported Ceylon Tea, also transported Sri Lankan dancers to satisfy the colonial taste for the exotic.

The notion of labor changed with the introduction of capitalist relations of labor. While people like Governor William Gregory contributed to colonial choreography through government policies and priorities, Orientalist curiosity which developed in the 1870s ideologically backed the exoticization of dancers. Europeans did not consider pre-colonial ritual dance as productive labor. Under the British laws and ordinances introduced in the early nineteenth century, ritual dancers became an unproductive labor force. British missionaries perceived ritual dance labor as

demonic dance labor and condemned it. The colonial government also perceived ritual dance and drumming as labor that disrupted the smooth functioning of the government as it disturbed the workers' night sleep. Transforming the disruption into a commodity, the British redefined ritual dance labor as exhibition dance labor, and transported dancers to colonial exhibitions. Exhibition dance labor also opened up possibilities for the exploitation of dance labor. However, colonial exhibitions provided Sri Lankan performers who were deprived of mobility in pre-colonial times, physical mobility and a certain social mobility.

Female dancing in Sri Lanka was redefined in the colonial dancescape. Although female dancers were omnipresent in the pre-colonial Kandyan region, the British heterosexual men, missionaries and Protestant Buddhists relegated female dancers to the background in the colonial dancescape. While the British heterosexual men and missionaries redefined pre-colonial female dance labor, they imposed Victorian Protestant morals and work ethics on them. The Protestant Buddhist movement, which was inspired by Protestant Christianity, also contributed to disciplining the female dancing body. *Kalagedi* dance (water pot dance) became ubiquitous in the colonial dancescape as it depicted the ideal disciplined and domestic woman. In the twentieth century, *Kalagedi* dance became part of the repertoire of almost every dance show that featured Sri Lankan dance.

Chapter 2: Choreographing Special *Peraheras* and *Ves* Dancers for Royal Dignitaries

In 1995, one of our dance teachers took me and my friends to perform *ves* dances in the Kandy *perahera*, the annual *Esala* procession conducted to honor the sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha.⁵⁰ During the month of *Esala* (July), the *perahera* is conducted over ten consecutive nights. In my experience as a performer in the *perahera*, I realized that on some days the *perahera* moved faster when it got to the end.⁵¹ When the performers or elephants before us moved faster, we too had to move faster to fill the empty space between them and us. Sometimes we were almost running while pretending to dance. After a very tiring performance, waiting to go home, we couldn't resist walking fast or running at the end of the *perahera*. In fact, as young dancers, we loved those moments when we didn't have to dance seriously but could improvise our own Kandyan dance movements and expressions on the run. This happened on one of the days in the *perahera* in 1995. Pretending to dance, we were almost running. This is when a father who was watching the *perahera* with his kids shouted at us. I looked at him, and he said angrily, "*Ei! Duwanna epa, natapiyau*"⁵² (Hey! Dance, don't run [you idiots!]).⁵³ We did not dance for him or his family. Even if we wanted we could not because the *perahera* kept moving. Although

⁵⁰ The terms *Esala perahera* or *dalada perahera* are also used for this procession which I describe in the introduction.

⁵¹ Especially this happens when only few people are watching the *perahera* towards the end.

⁵² Spectator's calling of "*natapiyau*," can also be analyzed as a derogatory expression that shows caste discrimination towards *ves* dancers who traditional belonged to a lower caste – *berava*. Reed discusses instances when dancers were addressed with verbs and slang terms that asserts the superiority of the speaker (Reed 2010, 166).

⁵³ My translation.

I had to run from him at that moment, his voice keeps reverberating in my mind. I was wearing the *ves* costume, the sacred costume of the ritual priest who blessed his people and families through dance. Those ritual dancers who had worn this costume before me a hundred and twenty years ago only performed in rituals in this sacred costume. They only danced; they didn't have to run or walk without blessing the people. But, in the *perahera*, why did I have to dance and walk at the same time or run sometimes? My research shows that *ves* dancers had to adjust or modify their movements to suit a *perahera* as they were taken out of their ritual context and sent to the streets to perform in processions for the British royal dignitaries. This chapter discusses the British colonial encounter with Kandyan *ves* dancers in special *peraheras* choreographed for royal princes during the 1870s and 1880s.

In 1883, Kudamudiyanse Giragama Diyawadana Nilame,⁵⁴ the Kandyan aristocrat in charge of the Temple of the Tooth and its rituals including the annual procession, submitted a handwritten proposal in English to the British Colonial Government Agent (GA) of the Central Province. It proposed how the *perahera* should be conducted to welcome Sir Arthur Gordon, the newly appointed Governor of Sri Lanka on his first visit to Kandy as Governor in 1884. Giragama proposed who should bring the elephants and who should bring the dancers, and how many dancers there should be. Based on Giragama Diyawadana Nilame's proposal, the GA issued a

⁵⁴ Diyawadana Nilame is the official rank who is in charge of the ceremonies of the Temple of the Tooth including the *perahera*. During the British rule this was also called Diwa Nilame, Diwa nilame or Dewa nilame.

Government order (“SLNA – Kandy. Royal Visits” 1883) to the Kandyan aristocrats (*radala*)⁵⁵ detailing their responsibilities in organizing the event for the Governor.

2.1 Introduction

Interaction between Giragama Diyawadana Nilame and the colonial government officer reveals an example of the process that I call colonial choreography, mobilizing colonized dancers to entertain colonial audiences. Although colonial choreography is meant for colonial audiences, it is a collaborative undertaking between the colonizer and the colonized in which the native elites played a major role. The colonial government would not be able to choreograph such captivating processions with dancers and elephants without the help of natives, especially Kandyan aristocrats. The interaction between Giragama Diyawadana Nilame and the Central Province GA to welcome Governor Gordon provides an example of how processions were choreographed for colonial and royal dignitaries during the British colonial period. There is not much documentary evidence available on the interactions between colonial officers and Kandyan aristocrats in regard to the *peraheras* organized for the Duke of Edinburgh in 1870, the Prince of Wales in 1875, or for the Duke of Clarence and Prince George in 1882. However, there is a detailed account of the *perahera* organized for Governor Arthur Gordon in 1884 (“SLNA – Kandy. Royal Visits” 1883). Because of its ritual tradition that depended on the

⁵⁵ In this dissertation I use the term Kandyan aristocrat to characterize *radala* people, the highest privileged and powerful group in Kandyan Kingdom. *Radala* is the highest sub-caste of *goyigama* caste (Roberts 1982, xx). I discuss about caste differences and tensions later in this chapter.

Kandyan caste and *nilapangu*⁵⁶ system, I speculate that the organizing procedures for all the above-mentioned processions were similar.⁵⁷ The archival materials on the *perahera* of 1884 provide the earliest and most detailed account of the interaction between colonial officers and Kandyan aristocrats in respect of the *peraheras*. I examine in this chapter, the choreographic process of the *peraheras* displayed for royal dignitaries. To do that, I depend on the interaction between Giragama and the GA on the procession of 1884 and scattered archival materials about early *peraheras* for royal dignitaries in 1870, 1875, and 1882. In those special processions presented for royal dignitaries, I particularly look at the organization process, the exoticization of natives for British audiences, who the performers were, how these processions changed the dance repertoire and movements, and how dancers responded to the colonial authorities. I have performed not only in the Kandy *perahera* but also in many other *peraheras* in and around Kandy. Therefore, apart from archival materials, my methodology is also informed by the embodied knowledge transmitted and maintained through my own body—what, in the introduction, I define as “postcolonial bodily archive.”

In this chapter, I do not discuss the origin of the *ves* dance or the history of dancers in the Kandy *perahera*. Instead, I examine how the *ves* dancers were mobilized in special *peraheras* in Kandy in the backdrop of the colonial gaze and exoticization between the 1870s and 1880s. My assumption here is that the *ves*

⁵⁶ *Nilapangu* is a type of service land and a system of labor in Kandyan Kingdom. I discuss about *nilapangu* in detail in chapter 1.

⁵⁷ I am aware that different colonial Governors had different approaches to deal with native elites. However, given the Kandyan ritual tradition and its politico-economic system, I contend that internal organization process of *peraheras* did not change much between 1870s and 1880s.

dancers of the Kandyan dance were mobilized for the first time from their confined ritual space on to the street for entertainment during the British colonial period. As I discussed in chapter one, it was the European colonizers who interpreted Kandyan ritual and religious performances as “dance” that could be appropriated for entertainments for colonial audiences.

Therefore, examining how the *perahera* was choreographed for the Prince of Wales is important for understanding the trajectory of Sri Lankan dance in general and Kandyan dance in particular. Not only did the special *perahera* popularize *ves* dancers by exhibiting them for the Prince of Wales in Kandy, it, in turn, inspired German animal trainer Carl Hagenbeck to transport Sri Lankan dancers and elephants for European colonial exhibitions. Scholars have mentioned the Prince of Wales’ visit as an instance where the *ves* dancers were taken out of the ritual context (Dissanayake and Kaluarachchi 2000; Donaldson 2001a; Reed 2010). However, only Susan Reed has spent at least three pages in her book on the Prince of Wales’ visit and Kandyan dancers. Scholars have not analyzed the *ves* dancers in *peraheras* organized for royal dignitaries against its historical context; I intend to do that in this chapter.

I argue that amidst competition among native elites, colonial officers and Kandyan aristocrats choreographed a special *perahera* to entertain the Prince of Wales by mobilizing *ves* dancers from their confined ritual spaces onto the streets where the dancers developed a new movement sequence to dance and walk at the same time. The Kandyan aristocrats used their cultural hegemony – knowledge of Kandyan dance, traditions, rituals, and their caste superiority in *nilapangu* – to exhibit their legitimacy, not only to the British but also to their rival low country elites when

the Prince of Wales visited Kandy. I also argue that in special *peraheras* the dancers expressed their resistance to British royal princes by reciting Sinhala language *prasasti* and *hatan kavi* that praised the Kandyan Kings' victories over European invaders.

2.1.1 The Kandy *Perahera*

The Sinhala term “*perahera*” means “procession”; the *perahera* in Kandy was called the *Esala perahera*⁵⁸ since it was held in the month of named *Esala* (July). It was a very important religious and political event in the pre-colonial Kandyan Kingdom. As cultural anthropologist H. L. Seneviratne observes, in the Sinhala Kingdom of Kandy c.1500-1815, the ancient notion of union between religion and polity was well expressed in the state-sponsored *Esala perahera*⁵⁹ held in honor of the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha and the four major gods of the kingdom (Seneviratne 1977, 65). *Daladāwa*, the sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha, was not only a religious object but it also had strong political significance. For any ruler to exercise sovereignty over the island legitimately, he or she had to possess the Tooth Relic (K. M. De Silva 1981, 92). Therefore, the *perahera*, the procession that honors the Tooth Relic, symbolized the legitimacy and the power of the King. It was a

⁵⁸ *Esala perahera* was also called *Esala keliya*. Moreover, it is also called *dalada perahera* as it honors the Tooth Relic of the Buddha.

⁵⁹ Earlier the *perahera* in Kandy was called *Esala perahera*. The latter part of the eighteenth century, King Kirti Sri Rajasingha connected the *Esala perahera*, which was a ceremonial worship of Hindu gods, to the Temple of the Tooth, while also including the worship of the *dalada* in the *Esala perahera* (K. M. De Silva 1981, 202).

symbolic way for the monarchy to display its power and legitimacy among the people of the country.

Through the Kandy *perahera*, Kandyan kings and Kandyan aristocrats (*radala*), or as the British called them Kandyan Chiefs, spectacularly displayed their hierarchical order, power, and legitimacy. Robert Knox provides a vivid description about the hierarchical order of Kandy *perahera*. Based on his experience of how the king presented himself in the *perahera*, Knox states: the king “gets up upon an Elephant all covered with white Cloth, upon which he rides with all the Triumph that King and Kingdom can afford, through all the streets of the city” (1681, 79). This shows the importance of the *perahera* that allowed the kings to show their triumph in spectacular style. According to historian Michael Roberts, the Kandy *perahera* was a microcosmic representation of Kandyan society, as “it was 'a preeminent representation of the caste system' and 'a validation of the existing hierarchical order’” (Roberts 1982, 7). It was not only the kings who presented their symbolic power through *perahera*; Kandyan aristocrats also displayed their power. As Seneviratne claims, participating in the *perahera* was considered a prestige and a royal favor for Kandyan aristocrats as it reflected the politico-administrative system of the Kandyan Kingdom (1978, 137). Therefore, the Kandy *perahera* was a spectacular representation of the legitimacy and hierarchical order of Kandyan society.

After the British conquered the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815, the British government acted as the guardian of the Tooth Relic. As historian Sujit Sivasundaram observes, unlike other European powers who occupied parts of Sri Lanka, the British could be seen to stand in the lineage of Sri Lankan kings for two reasons. The British

captured the last king of Kandy and also possessed the Tooth Relic of the Buddha, the sacred signifier of their right to rule (Sivasundaram, 2013, 6–7). As I demonstrate later in the chapter, this narrative that the British monarch is a continuation of the Kandyan kings convinced the native elites to honor the British royal family members when they visited Sri Lanka. The colonial government and the Kandyan aristocrats used the Kandy *perahera* to honor royal dignitaries as it symbolized the power, legitimacy, and hierarchical order of the Kandyan Kingdom, the last kingdom of Sri Lanka.

2.1.2 Ves Dancers in Rituals

Today, *ves* dancers are the most popular dancers among Kandyan dancers. Although *ves* dancers became omnipresent since the mid-twentieth century, appearing on stage, welcome ceremonies, processions, tourist brochures, postcards, currency notes, stamps, and lottery bills, they originally performed only in rituals as ritual priests. *Ves* dancers mainly performed in two types of rituals – *Kohomba kankariya* and *Valiyak mangallaya*. *Kohomba kankariya* was the most important ritual in Kandyan villages and it was performed “as a thanksgiving, a forgiving, and a postharvest celebration”(Reed 2010, 24). *Valiyak mangallaya* is a ritual only performed after a *perahera*. It is performed to drive away “*vas dos*,” evil eyes/influences from the people and elephants performed in Kandy *perahera* (Dissanayake 2000, 14). The name *ves* refers to the dancers because of their costume. *Ves* in Sinhala means impersonation or disguise, and the “term is derived from the silver color glittering headdress of the dancer known *Vestattuva*” (Seneviratne 1977,

69). Ritual practitioners believed that the *ves* costume represents the sacred costume of the king Malaya (Reed 2010, 40), who, according to the legends, performed the first *Kohomba kankariya*. Although the natives of Kandy considered these dancers as sacred dancers, the European colonizers called them “devil dancers,” imposing Christian religious notions onto native ritual dances.⁶⁰ Therefore, during the British colonial period not only were rituals like *Kohomba kankariya* and *Valiyak mangallaya* discouraged, but also dancers who performed in those rituals were displaced from their ritual spaces onto entertainment spaces. Before the British colonial encounter *ves* dancers had not performed for entertainment purposes.

There is no evidence to suggest that *ves* dancers performed for entertainment on the streets before the British colonial rule, particularly before the Prince of Wales’s visit to Kandy in 1875. The only evidence that suggest *ves* dancers performed outside *Kohomba kankariya* or *Valiyak mangallaya* ritual is the British commercial photographer Joseph Lawton’s photograph of two “religious dancers at the Bo tree ceremonies” (1870/71).⁶¹ Lawton’s photograph’s setting and its title (Fig. 2.1) suggest that these two dancers are Buddhist religious dancers who performed in temples such as Sri Maha Bodhi, the Buddhist sacred Bo tree in the ancient city Anuradhapura. Although the headdress and almost all the ornaments are similar, these two dancers’ costume is different from the costume of *ves* dancers (Fig. 2.2) who performed in the *perahera* for the Prince of Wales in 1875.

⁶⁰ I discuss the discourse of devil dance in detail in chapter 1.

⁶¹ I discuss about how dancers’ bodies were manipulated in Lawton’s photo in chapter 4.



Fig. 2.1: "Religious dancers at the Bo tree ceremonies," The British Library, Photographer Joseph Lawton, 1870/71 (Lawton 1870).



Fig. 2.2: Four *ves* dancers, two other dancers, and two drummers (described as devil dancers) who performed in the special procession for the Prince of the Wales in Kandy. Archived as the Royal Archives, Windsor (Bourne 1875).

It is possible that the dancers in Lawton's photo are a different kind of *ves* dancers.⁶² Their costume suggests that they do not perform in rituals like *Kohomba kankariya* or *Valiyak mangallaya*. Ritual *ves* dancers wear a dress called *hangala* (the frilled dress they wear on the waist) which has a ritual significance to the dancer (Dissanayake, 1988, 136). It is worshiped in *Kohomba kankariya*. Therefore, *hangala* is an intrinsic component for *ves* dancers who perform in rituals. However, the dancers in Lawton's photo do not have a *hangala*. It is hard to believe that a *ves* dancer could perform in a ritual like *Kohomba kankariya* or *Valiyak mangallaya* without a *hangala*. This suggests that the dancers in Lawton's photo are not ritual priests (*yakdessas*). It is possible that these two sets of costumes had the same origin.⁶³ Even if these two sets of costumes might have had the same origin, by the 1870s they took different shapes and had different purposes – for Buddhist religious events, and for rituals like *Kohomba kankariya*. It is hard to believe that the *ves* dance costume changed within five years, since the photos of these two sets of dancers – performed in Bo tree ceremony and performed in the *perahera* for the Prince – were taken between 1870/71 and 1875.⁶⁴ Even if one considers the two dancers in Lawton's photo as *ves*

⁶² Are these the dancers called “*malal ves* dancers”? Writing to a newspaper, a gentleman named Abayarathna expresses an opinion which suggests that a different form of *ves* dance called “*malal ves*” was performed in *Esala perahera* in 1828 (Abayarathna 2009). However, I did not find evidence to prove this opinion true. Even if that is true, they are different kind of *ves* dancers than what one finds in rituals such as *Kohomba kankariya* and *Valiyak Mangallaya*. Without evidence it is difficult to say that dancers appear in Lawton's photo are *malal ves* dancers. What is revealing is that they are a different kind of *ves* dancers.

⁶³ According to the legend of the *Kohomba kankariya* ritual, first *kankariya* was held in the city Anuradhapuraya. Therefore, dancers in Lawton's photo might open up new assumptions in the history of Kandyan dance. However, this will be a research for the future.

⁶⁴ It is possible that they evolved in different locations – Anuradhapura and Kandy – over time. Again, this should be set aside for future research.

dancers, they also had performed for a religious event, and not for entertainment. Therefore, there is no evidence that suggests *ves* dancers performed for entertainment outside their rituals.

2.1.3 The British Royal Princes' Visits to Sri Lanka in the Nineteenth Century

The first three British royal visits to Sri Lanka took place in the late nineteenth century in 1870, 1875, and 1882. Queen Victoria's second son Prince Alfred Ernest Albert, the Duke of Edinburgh, in 1870 marks the first royal visit to Sri Lanka by a British royal family member with royal blood. Victoria's first son Prince Albert Edward, the Prince of Wales, visited Sri Lanka in 1875. The tone of the local newspaper *The Ceylon Times* suggests that the Prince's visit was more important to Sri Lankans than the Duke's visit, as Prince Edward was "the future King" of Britain (*The Ceylon Times* 1875b). The two royal brothers, Prince Albert Edward's two sons, Prince Albert Victor, the Duke of Clarence, and Prince George Frederick Ernest Albert, Prince George of Wales visited Sri Lanka in 1882. The accounts on these first three royal visits were published newspapers, books, and manuscripts.⁶⁵ To entertain these royal princes, various exhibitions were organized.

⁶⁵ These accounts include, local newspapers, both English (*The Ceylon Times*) and Sinhala (*Lakrivikirana, Satyalankaraya, Gnanartha Pradeepaya, Sarasavi Sandarasa*), and in London newspapers and magazines (*The Times, Illustrated London News, The Graphic*). Moreover, accounts of these visits can be found in books and manuscripts such as *The Duke of Edinburgh in Ceylon: A Book of Elephant and Elk Sport* (Capper 1871), *India 1875-1876, Volume Two: Ceylon to Pondicherry: Nineteenth-Century Photographs from the Royal Archives, Windsor* (Bourne 1875), *India in 1875-76: The Visit of the Prince of Wales: A Chronicle of His Royal Highness's Journeyings in India, Ceylon, Spain, and Portugal* (Wheeler 1876), *The Prince of Wales in India* (Gay 1877), *The Prince of Wales' Tour: A Diary in India* (Russell 1877), *Notes of the Visits to India of their Royal Highnesses the Prince of Wales and Duke of Edinburgh, 1870-1875/6* (Fayrer 1879), *A Pleasure Trip to India, during the Visit of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales: Afterwards to Ceylon* (Corbet 1880), *Ceylon in the Jubilee Year* (Ferguson 1887).

Choreographing *perahera* and *ves* dancers for royal dignitaries should be analyzed in the backdrop of colonial curiosity. After Sri Lanka became independent from Britain in 1948, Queen Elizabeth II visited Sri Lanka in 1954. The Sri Lanka government arranged various exhibits to entertain the Queen. Analyzing those exhibits, theatre and film historian Jeffrey Richards observes that “the Empire is largely constructed as exotic,” featuring elephants, tea plantations, Royal Botanical Garden,⁶⁶ and “in almost every place they visit, the royal couple are entertained by native dancers” (Richards 2007, 271). Even though these exotic exhibits were continued through postcolonial Sri Lanka, the model for displaying natives for curious Europeans was created in the 1870s during the first two British royal visits to Sri Lanka by the Duke of Edinburgh and the Prince of Wales.

Various British accounts presented the Duke of Edinburgh’s visit to Sri Lanka in 1870 as an exotic expedition for curious colonial audiences. The presentation of the Prince’s adventure as exotic expedition is captured in the title of the book *The Duke of Edinburgh in Ceylon: A Book of Elephant and Elk Sport* (1871), written by a British government servant John Capper. John Capper’s career responsibility for the colonial government shows his ability to present Sri Lankan culture to curious European audiences. Capper was the acting Commissioner of Ceylon to the Great Exhibition (Crystal Palace Exhibition, London) of 1851. Historian of visual culture Peter Hoffenberg, in his book *An Empire on Display* (2001) argues that the Great Exhibition ignited an “exhibition mania” throughout Europe, North America, and the

⁶⁶ Richards mistakenly stated that the Royal Botanical Garden is in Colombo while it is actually in Peradeniya near Kandy.

British Empire, and created a permanent effect on our understanding of exhibitions (Hoffenberg 2001). Therefore, as the Acting Commissioner of Ceylon at the Great Exhibition, Capper's official responsibility was to exhibit Sri Lanka for curious colonial audiences. One should also take into consideration that Capper was also Secretary of the Asiatic Society, Colombo (Hobhouse 2002, 44), which was established to pioneer "oriental" research in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, for some time, he was also the editor of *The Ceylon Times* newspaper (Wright 1907, 304–5). With all his track records, in his book John Capper portrayed⁶⁷ the Duke's visit to Sri Lanka as a royal adventure in a distant land with strange cultural practices.

During the Easter holidays of 1872, the Duke of Edinburgh exhibited his collection of water-color sketches, drawings, and more than seven hundred objects that he had collected during his Royal visits during 1867-1871 at the South Kensington Museum (*Illustrated London News* 1872), London. As *Illustrated London News* (ILN) reports the objects he exhibited came from his visits to "Australian colonies, Tasmania, Japan, China, Malacca, Singapore, India, Ceylon, Cape of Good Hope, New Zealand, Mauritius, Sandwich Islands, Tahiti, and Manilla" (*Illustrated London News* 1872). Therefore, exhibiting the materials from Sri Lanka should be understood in the larger context of European curiosity to watch non-European cultures. However, the Duke's visits to places other than British colonies such as Japan and China were also seen as exotic encounters. It is also important to mention

⁶⁷ However, it is worth mentioning that Capper's book provides a great deal of information about Duke's visit and Capper was also aware of his difficulty to grasp "Eastern" culture. At the Great Exhibition committee, Capper had mentioned that collecting information from Eastern countries is a uncertain and tedious process (Hobhouse 2002, 44).

the connection between the royal exhibition and the South Kensington Museum, now called the Victoria and Albert Museum. The South Kensington Museum was founded in parallel with the Great Exhibition of 1851. This shows the connection between the nineteenth century royal visits and the display of colonized cultures as exhibits for the curious British, which later expanded to other colonial audiences in various forms of colonial exhibitions. While the Duke's visit to Sri Lanka helps to see the larger picture of royal visits and exoticization of colonized cultures, I particularly use the case of Prince of Wales to discuss Kandyan dancers and *peraheras*.

People of the Kandyan region were choreographed to give an exotic experience to the Prince of Wales. When the Prince of Wales visited in 1875, two major London-based illustrated journals, *The Graphic* and *ILN* sent their illustrators to report the event. Describing the media presence at the event, special correspondent of *The Ceylon Times* reports that "Kandy will afford them a fruitful supply of picturesque objects with which to gratify the curiosity of readers of the illustrated journals" (*The Ceylon Times* 1875c). This statement clearly shows that one of the main audiences of these London based journals are curious British readers, and that their curiosity is going to be satisfied because the British illustrators are going to supply images that are exotic to their audiences. The statement of *The Ceylon Times'* correspondent became true when both *The Graphic* and *ILN* published images of the Kandy *perahera* that featured elephants and "devil dancers" (*ves* dancers). For the entertainment of the Princes, the British colonial government and the Kandyan

aristocrats displayed their own costumes, Veddas,⁶⁸ elephant kraals,⁶⁹ gardens, fireworks, *perahera* and “devil dancers.”

Choreographing natives for the Princes produced bizarre spectacles in Kandy. For example, when the Prince of Wales reached Kandy by train on 2nd December 1875, the 57th regiment under Captain Collins conducted a guard of honor for the Prince and played “God Save the Queen”⁷⁰ while aboriginal Veddas were displayed next to a railway wagon (*The Ceylon Times* 1875c). *The Ceylon Times* described Veddas as those “who occupy so low a scale in the place of civilization” (*The Ceylon Times* 1875c). *The Ceylon Times* special correspondent further mentions that the Prince turned towards the Veddas, and “looked with a curious eye for a few seconds,” and that while he got into the carriage and started to leave, the band played “God Bless the Prince of Wales” (*The Ceylon Times* 1875c). The Sinhala newspaper *Lakrivikirana* of December 4, 1875 reports that the Christian pastor who brought those Veddas to Kandy, later made them dance from door-to-door and parade the streets of Kandy (quoted in Matharage, 2006, 149–50). By displaying the Veddas, the British entertained the “curious eyes” of the Prince. However, consciously or unconsciously juxtaposing the Veddas, who were considered to be at a lower scale in civilization, alongside a military band playing “God Save the Queen” and “God Bless the Prince of Wales” created a specific choreography. This choreography places native Sri Lankans at a low position in a hierarchy where God, Queen, and Prince (and therefore, the British) occupied the highest position. The ideology of this

⁶⁸ Veddas are considered so-called aboriginal people of Sri Lanka

⁶⁹ Elephant kraal is a structure that uses to entrap wild elephants. Elephant kraal and hunting elephant was a favorite sport of the male members of the British royal family.

⁷⁰ “God Save the Queen” is the national/royal anthem of the British Crown.

choreography becomes clearer when the Christian pastor made the Veddas dance and paraded them on the streets. Making the Veddas dance, rather than sing or speak, places them in a “primitive” category. Christian missionaries associated the dance of the colonized with primitiveness (Eves 1996). Through this bizarre spectacle the British positioned Sri Lankan natives at a lower place in their own hierarchy, which is a characteristic of colonial choreography.

Without the help of the native elites, the British colonial government alone could not have organized the exhibitions and spectacles that celebrated the royal visits. As historians Ismeth Raheem and Percy Colin-Thomé observe, colonial events such as royal visits provided the native elites with an opportunity to display their status; in the Ceylonese social order, status was a form of power (Raheem and Colin-Thomé, 2000, 54). However, according to feminist scholar and social scientist Kumari Jayawardena, the British government consciously engaged in getting the support of the native elites for royal entertainment. As she claims, “the British effectively used royal visits and skillfully manipulated the native bourgeoisie of the colonies” (K. Jayawardena 2000, 311). She suggests that royal visits were skillfully manipulated events rather than naturally emerging “opportunities.” Through various rewards, the colonial government incentivized native contributions to royal visits. Particularly, the colonial government sought resources from native elites to entertain the royal dignitaries. This shows how the British appropriated native resources to organize exhibits and spectacles for royal dignitaries. While they appropriated

financial resources from low country elites,⁷¹ they appropriated traditions and rituals from Kandyan aristocrats.

The colonial government mainly sought financial contributions from low country elites to entertain the Princes. When the royal dignitaries visited Sri Lanka, most often they visited India as well. For the colonial government in Sri Lanka it was difficult to compete with the stunning effects that great and wealthy Indian cities produced (Capper 1871, 2). Therefore, it sought financial contributions from low country elites to entertain royal dignitaries. Since the low country were financially prosperous merchants, colonial government appropriated their financial contributions by giving responsibilities to selected low country elites and groups to entertain the royal dignitaries. As Jayawardena observes, while the low country elites used their donations to establish their economic and social position, the colonial government rewarded them with honors of various types and with royal handshakes (K. Jayawardena 2000, 311). Donating for royal visits was presented as a patriotic act. The London newspaper *The Times* in December 1882 made a statement about hosting the young princes' proposed visit to Sri Lanka in January 1882. Since no Sri Lankan had stepped out to take financial responsibility for the entertainment even by December (one month prior to the visit), *The Times* reminded its readers about how the low country elite Charles de Soysa entertained the Duke of Edinburgh in 1870, and stated that "there is plenty of time still for some patriotic native to show what Ceylon can do for those whom she delighted to honor" (*The Times*, 1882, 8). This

⁷¹ I consider elites emerged with trade from Southern and Western Sri Lanka as low country elites. I define this in detail in the next section when I talk about the competition between different elite groups.

shows how the British articulated the financing of the royal entertainment as a gesture of patriotism to Sri Lanka – the very territory that they had colonized.

The colonial government made Kandyan aristocrats contribute to royal entertainment by appropriating their traditions and rituals. Sivasundaram notes that poetic genres such as *astaka* and *prasasti* recited in praise of Sri Lankan kings were used to praise the British monarch and officers after their occupation of the country (2013, 6–7). There is evidence to show how Kandyans entertain this narrative even in 1835, just twenty years after the British occupation of the island in 1815. A reporter, using the pseudonym “Senex” in an article about the Kandy *perahera*⁷² to the London newspaper *The Times*, stated that “*mangala astaka*” that was recited to bless the Kandyan King was repeated at the *Nata dēwāle*⁷³ for the British Governor, as representative of the “King of Great Britain and Kandy” (Senex, 1835). This shows how the Kandyan traditions were appropriated under British rule. As Wickramasinghe observes, appropriating certain traditional features, the British refashioned costumes to represent various native groups including Kandyans (2003, 78–80). This is the context in which Kandyan aristocrats appropriated their traditions and rituals for royal ceremonies and entertainment by exhibiting the Tooth Relic of the Buddha, organizing elephant kraals and hunting expeditions, exhibiting themselves in Kandyan costumes in British official ceremonies, and choreographing *perahera* and *ves* dancers.

⁷² He named it *Esala Keliya*, which was another name used for *Esala perahera*

⁷³ *Dewale*, *devale*, or *dēvālaya* is the shrine-house dedicated for local deities such as *Natha*, *Vishnu*, *Pattini*, *Kataragama*, *Dedimunda*.

2.2 Ornamental Mode of Rule and Spectacles for the Princes

Spectacles organized for the British royal dignitaries should be seen as a complex political activity, where the British mobilized colonized bodies to entertain members of the royal family, yet positioned them in a hierarchically lower place to the British. The British displayed their empire as a spectacle both in the metropolis and in colonies. A scholar of literature, Marty Gould claims that “if it was to survive and grow, the British Empire could not remain ‘out there’ as some vague, unarticulated abstraction” (2011, 1). Therefore, during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century the British Empire and its victories were enacted in theatres in Britain (Gould 2011). For Gould it was more important for the British to enact their empire in the metropolis.

However, unlike Gould, historian David Cannadine argues that it was more important for the British to display their empire in the colonies. In his book *Ornamentalism* (2002), Cannadine argues that through spectacles, ceremonies, royal expeditions, exhibitions, and distribution of honors, the British created an ornamental mode of rule in their colonies (Cannadine, 2002). Bernard Cohn claims that in the nineteenth century the British struggled to construct ritual and cultural expressions “through and by which British authority was to be represented to Indians” (Cohn 1983, 176). Cohn’s observation about the Indians is applicable to Sri Lanka as well. The British use of the *perahera* for royal visits is a good example.⁷⁴ For Cannadine,

⁷⁴ According to The Times of Ceylon, performing private *perahera* for European dignitaries had occurred even before 1875. The reporter states “The *perahera* was of a purely private character, confined as on the occasion of the visit of the German Princes a few years ago” (The Ceylon Times, 3rd December 1875)(*The Ceylon Times* 1875b). However, for the British the *perahera* had ornamental value. However, it is fair to assume that for obvious reasons, the entertainments arranged for the

the ornamental mode of rule was through the spectacular display of hierarchy (2002, 85). For example, when a procession is organized, everyone who engages with it has a role. These roles are hierarchical. Therefore, when someone attends this procession, s/he is inevitably placed within the hierarchy, the British monarch being at the top.

Since the Kandyan aristocrats had blood relations to the Kandyan kings and legitimacy in the Kandyan Kingdom, the British articulated the British monarch as a continuation of the Kandyan Kingdom, and thus rationalized the Kandyan aristocrats' service to the British monarch. As Jayawardena observes, the British built up the cult of royalty, and "the 'natives' were told that they were ruled by the British monarch, who was theoretically the successor to the local kings" (2000, 311). However, this does not mean that all the Kandyans accepted the British monarch as their King; they demonstrated their disappointment through rebellions in 1818 and 1848. After the British brutally crushed the Kandyan rebellions,⁷⁵ Kandyan aristocrats lost hope of reclaiming the Kandyan monarchy. Their realization might also have been informed by events in the neighboring country India, where the British crushed the Indian Mutiny in 1857. As Nandy observes, in colonial cultures, identification with the invader bound the rulers and the ruled in an unbreakable binary relationship (Nandy 1983, 7). Therefore, Kandyan aristocrats had no option but to collaborate with the British.

British prince such as Prince of Wales should have been superior than the one organized for the German Princes.

⁷⁵ The breach of the Kandyan Convention signed between the British and the Kandyan aristocrats triggered the 1818 rebellion. In 1848, the stress created by British expropriation of traditional lands is one of the reasons for the outbreak of the rebellion. In both rebellions, natives were massacred, and leaders executed by the British government.

By the 1870s, the British comfortably disconnected the Kandyans from their native kings. This is shown in *The Ceylon Times* report on the arrival of the Prince of Wales. Editor Alexander Allardyce, who succeeded John Capper, stated that “the people of this country have knowledge of their kings only by tradition, just as they hear of Buddha....It is only now they are brought face to face with a Prince destined, we trust for many years to come, to be their Ruler, the embodiment of a power far greater than the mightiest of their Sovereigns” (*The Ceylon Times* 1875a). It is important to remember that, compared to the low country, the British considered “Kandyanness” as the authentic culture of the land (N. Wickramasinghe 2014b, 48);⁷⁶ this helped them to make the connection between the Kandyan and British monarchies. However, Allardyce portrayed the British monarch not only as the continuation of the Kandyan kings but also as far greater than the Kandyan kings who had become characters belonging to history.

When it comes to the question of where the British Empire is displayed, both Gould and Cannadine are correct, because obviously the British displayed their empire both in the metropolis and in colonies. Both Gould and Cannadine discuss the display of the British Empire from the British point of view. In his book *Ideologies of the Raj*, historian Thomas R. Metcalf demonstrates how the British distributed “Indian titles, such as those of Raja, Nawab, and Rai Bahadur, as well as lands and money” in ceremonial assemblies called durbars to princes, notables, and officials who are loyal to the monarch (1995, 51). Jayawardena shows how both the British

⁷⁶ Governor Gordon treated “the high-born members of the island’s *Goyigama* caste as ‘traditional’ aristocracy, whom he vested with power as paramount chiefs” (Cannadine 2002, 59).

and the local elites in Sri Lanka used royal handshakes and gifts to achieve their political and commercial aspirations (2000). However, I contend that it is also important to understand how the British ornamental mode of rule affected the native dancers and how they responded to the British royal spectacles and ceremonies.

The way bodies were choreographed in ceremonies and spectacles during the British colonial period exemplifies what I articulate as colonial choreography. As I demonstrate in the next few pages, the British ornamental mode of rule defined the aesthetics colonial choreography. As Cannadine observes, the British invented honorific ceremonies and spectacles in an unprecedented scale during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (2002, 85). I contend that these honorific ceremonies, spectacles, in other words, ornamental mode of rule were carefully choreographed. It is possible to deconstruct the technique of this colonial choreography. From the choreographic technique perspective, it is a technique that manipulates – moves, positions, dislocates, and relocates – colonized bodies in a space to create an expression that entertains Europeans (and Americans). This choreography incorporated native ceremonial practices. Therefore, it creates a hybrid choreography. Moreover, this choreography positioned colonized bodies hierarchically at a lower place to the British (European and American). These are the same choreographic techniques one finds in the *perahera*, the procession performed before the Prince of Wales.

The British appropriated Kandyan rituals and spaces into their ornamental mode of rule. Gould argues that although “the East” was portrayed as a site of “spectacle and mysticism,” in practice, “the Occidental mind was just as susceptible

to the influence of spectacle as its Oriental counterpart” (2011, 14–15). Cannadine is also in agreement with Gould, when he observed that to maintain the British empire outside Britain, the British created and performed public ceremonies (Cannadine 2002). For example, when Governor William Henry Gregory was knighted by the Prince of Wales in Kandy, they used the *mangul maduwa*, the main gathering hall of the ancient Kandyan Kings.

It is clear that through this act Governor Gregory impressed his monarch. During the Prince’s visit to Kandy, Governor Gregory was knighted which is one of the most prestigious honors for an imperial soldier (Cannadine 2002, 95) at the ancient Audience Hall of the Kandyan Kings (*The Ceylon Times* 1875d). After presenting the Knighthood to Gregory the Prince expressed his contentment with Gregory’s service and particularly stated that “he felt an additional satisfaction in doing so in the presence of the Kandyan Chiefs and in the Audience Hall of the old Capital of Ceylon” (*The Ceylon Times* 1875d). According to the *Satyalankaraya* newspaper, this was the first time a Knighthood was offered in Sri Lanka (quoted in Matharage 2006, 153).

Given Gregory’s affection for Kandyan art, architecture, and culture it is more likely that he himself decided that his Knighthood should take place in the ancient Audience Hall of the Kandyan Kings in front of Kandyan aristocrats. The end of the hall, where Kandyan kings had reclined on a throne was covered by a platform covered with crimson cloth and placed two chairs, one for the His Royal Highness and another for the Governor (*The Ceylon Times* 1875d). This is a carefully thought-out choreography. Through appropriating the space, it incorporated the symbolic

value of ancient Kandyan Kings practice of rewarding his servants. The Prince was positioned where the Kandyan King would sit. There is another reason that one could think that the Governor was part of this choreography. As recorded in the colonial archival documents, government officers had decided how the Audience Hall should be used and where different people should be positioned when the levees happened in Kandy. For example, when the Governor Arthur Gordon visited Kandy in 1884, colonial government officers mapped where the participants should be placed in the Audience Hall (Fig. 2.3). This choreography shows how the British also wanted to claim their empire and legitimacy through local spaces and rituals. There is a similar case in India as British wanted to replicate Mughal cultural practices and symbols such as court dress, ornaments when they organize various durbars.⁷⁷ The reason for both the Prince of Wales and the Governor Gregory to select the ancient Audience Hall of Kandyan Kings shows that the British Monarch wanted to claim the symbolic power of the space and the ritual of the Kandyan Kingdom.

The British colonial government and Kandyan aristocrats created hybrid ceremonies as part of ornamental mode of rule. On December 3rd 1875, the day the Governor Gregory was knighted, the Prince also presented a medal to Kandyan aristocrat Kuda Banda Dunuvila, the Diyawadana Nilame in charge of the ceremonies of the Temple of the Tooth including the *perahera*. On that day the Prince arrived at the ancient Audience Hall through the steps of the *Māligawa*,⁷⁸ Central province GA and Kandyan aristocrats escorted him while the Western Band of the 57th regiment

⁷⁷ See *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Cohn 1996), *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Dirks 1987).

⁷⁸ The sacred Temple of the Tooth

played “God Save the Queen” (*The Ceylon Times* 1875d). This shows the hybrid nature of the ceremony. Kandyan aristocrats’ in their traditional dress and colonial officers in European dress, a military Western band playing “God Save the Queen” in the *Māligawa*, the Temple of the Tooth of the Buddha, provide perfect examples of hybridity. Describing the knighting of Governor Gregory, *The Ceylon Times* special correspondent explains the hybrid nature of the event: “it was a scene that will not soon pass away from the memory of those who were privileged to witness it. It was a picture in heraldic form in an Asiatic setting, in which the East and West were brought together in one great festive grouping” (*The Ceylon Times* 1875d). Therefore, the British colonial officers and Kandyan aristocrats created a hybrid ceremony by bringing in native elements such as art, architecture, dress, and bodies into it.

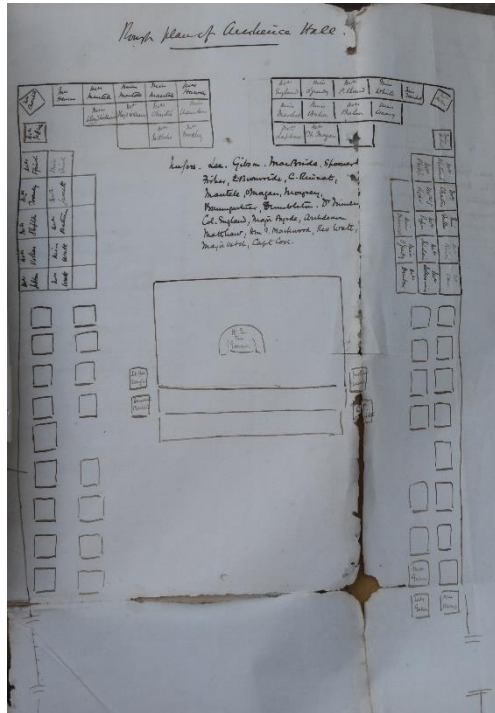


Fig. 2.3: Map of the seating arrangement of the ancient Audience Hall in Kandy. Plan for the visit of the Governor Arthur Gordon in 1884 (“SLNA – Kandy. Royal Visits” 1883).

In ceremonies and spectacles, the British positioned Kandyan aristocrats in a hierarchically inferior position. Although the British incorporated native practices, spaces and bodies into their spectacles and celebrations, they modified them in a way that positioned natives in a hierarchically lower position. On the knighting of Governor Gregory, a celebration of British military power, *The Ceylon Times* went on to say, “it was well that such a ceremony took place at such a time and in that place, in the presence of assembled Kandyan Chiefs, who would appreciate the honor whilst they looked on and admired the ceremonial and its surroundings not the less that they partook so largely of an oriental element” (*The Ceylon Times* 1875d). Kandyan aristocrats who symbolically represented the Kandyan court were placed in a hierarchically lower position whereby the British made them witness the supremacy of the British military and monarchy. This becomes clearer in the condescending comment made by *The Ceylon Times* correspondent regarding presenting a medal to the Diyawadana Nilame. The newspaper reports that the Prince shook hands with the Chief and “he next presented the Dewa Nilema⁷⁹ with a medal, and himself pinned it on the Chief’s breast, which the face of the old man met a picture of pride and gratification” (*The Ceylon Times* 1875d). Whether the correspondent’s facial reading of the Diyawadana Nilame was accurate or not, it is obvious that Kandyan aristocrats were choreographed in an inferior position in this ceremony. While the British choreographed the bodies of Kandyan aristocrats to demonstrate British superiority, aristocrats refashioned their tradition to impress the Prince.

⁷⁹ Diyawadana Nilame.

When they choreographed the *ves* dancers and *perahera* for the Prince of Wales, Kandyan aristocrats used their cultural hegemony to demonstrate their legitimacy on the one hand to the British monarch including colonial officers and on the other hand to the low country elites. To grasp the political functions of cultural symbols, political theorist Antonio Gramsci has provided a theoretical framework commonly known as “cultural hegemony.” Although Gramsci himself did not use the term, he describes its basic tenets when he states "the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production" (Gramsci 1971, 12). Gramsci’s observation about “dominant fundamental group” can be applied to both the British and the Kandyan aristocrats. Nicholas B. Dirks uses the notion of cultural hegemony to discuss the construction of caste in colonial India (2001). To compete with the financial power of low country elites, Kandyan aristocrats used their cultural hegemony to choreograph *perahera* with elephants and *ves* dancers in which they demonstrated their legitimacy that was linked to the pre-colonial Kandyan Kingdom.

2.3 The British, and the Competition between Native Elites

When the British royal dignitaries visited Sri Lanka in the nineteenth century, the colonial government seemed to take advantage of the competition and tension between the Kandyan aristocrats and low country elites prevalent at the time. According to historian Patrick Peebles status discrepancy in the country caused the

tension between elite groups (Peebles 1973, 307). As Wickramasinghe observes, caste tensions erupted among the elites of the *karāva*, *durāva*, *navandanna* and *vahumpura* castes against the *goyigama* caste in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (2014, 146–47). Although the tensions between so-called lower caste low country elites and *goyigama* aristocracy originated in the Maritime Provinces, they soon spread to the Kandyan region (Roberts 1982, 149–50), and Kandyan aristocrats who belonged to the *goyigama radala* caste also entered the competition. In this dissertation, I consider only non-*goyigama* elites of the Maritime Provinces as low country elites. Therefore, the term “low country elites” only includes *karāva*, *durāva*, *navandanna* and *vahumpura* caste elites.

Since the British occupation of Sri Lanka in 1815, tensions between Kandyan aristocrats and low country elites prevailed over the caste hierarchy, legitimacy, land ownership, administrative positions, and status (Peebles 1973; Roberts 1982; Bandarage 1983; K. Jayawardena 2000; Peebles 2006). Therefore, I contend that these tensions between Kandyan aristocrats and low country elites had an effect on how both of these native elite groups participated in the British royal visits. Their eagerness to impress the royal dignitaries resulted in a competition of spectacles.

When the first two royal visits took place in Sri Lanka in 1870s, there was a particular caste rivalry between the two native elite groups – the *goyigama* aristocracy (*radala*, the Kandyan aristocrats) and the *karāva* bourgeoisie (low country elites). Merchants belonging to the *karāva* caste purchased the traditional lands that belonged to Kandyan aristocrats (Bandarage 1983) and became highly successful businessmen in the nineteenth century. By the end of the century, people of the *karāva* caste were

confident enough to challenge the majority *goyigama* supremacy (Peebles 2006, 9). Jayawardena, in her *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka* (2000), provides strong evidence of the emergence of the *karāva* bourgeoisie such as the de Soysa family (2000).⁸⁰ According to her, the richest merchant capitalist of the nineteenth century Sri Lanka was Charles de Soysa (56). He belonged to the *karāva* caste, which was the fisher caste and lower than the *goyigama* (farmer) caste in the traditional caste hierarchy (Rogers 2004, 53–54). Lower caste Soysa becoming the richest merchant in the country using their traditional lands could have been a difficult experience for Kandyan aristocrats to come to terms with.

Both caste and class conflicts resulted in tensions between Kandyan aristocrats and low country elites. Roberts interprets this tension as a caste conflict in his book *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation: The Rise of a Karava Elite in Sri Lanka 1500-1931* (1982). However, according to Jayawardena, conflicts between elites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries should be analyzed as tension between social classes (Jayawardena, 2000). However, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the Kandyan aristocrats' legitimacy to power played a role in these tensions. Although low country elites became financially successful and powerful, traditionally, Kandyan aristocrats had the legitimacy to become the rulers in the Kandyan Kingdom (K. M. De Silva 1981, 148). As Jayawardena herself observes, low country elites were “not ‘feudal’ in the traditional sense of being a privileged class linked to the institution of royalty” (K. Jayawardena 2000, 311). Therefore, the

⁸⁰ Kumari Jayawardena's thesis of becoming “somebodies” from “nobodies” mainly relates to elite class formation. She does not link it with caste. However, her book provides a great detail about caste background of the new rich class.

tension between Kandyan aristocrats and low country elites should be understood as a conflict both between castes and classes that was partially created by the British to their advantage. I am particularly interested in this tension because I contend that it had an effect on how native elites organized spectacles for British royal dignitaries. Therefore, whether they were more concerned about their caste or class or not, both Kandyan aristocrats and low country elites struggled to figure out the best way to impress the royal dignitaries.

2.3.1 Competition of Spectacles during Royal Visits in 1870 and 1875

Tension and competition between these two elite groups resulted in competitive spectacles that they choreographed for the British royal visits in 1870 and 1875. Because there was tension between low country elites and Kandyan aristocrats about status, power, and legitimacy in dealing with the British, they also invested in exhibitions and ceremonial events to impress the royal dignitaries. To that end, while the low country elites used their financial power to create a hybrid spectacle where they even hired European performers, Kandyan aristocrats broke the Kandyan ritual tradition by mobilizing ritual dancers to choreograph a spectacular procession for royal dignitaries.

When the Duke of Edinburgh arrived in 1870, British officers in the Central Province and Kandyan aristocrats put together an exhibition. They exhibited the *daladā*, the Tooth Relic, organized a *perahera*, played drums, displayed the Veddas, and Jack, a ceremony by the British man-of-war (Capper 1871, 54–66). As *The Ceylon Times* April 19, 1870 reports, Kandyan aristocrats recited a paean in praise of

Prince Alfred written in the Pali language⁸¹ on golden leaves with a richly ornamented cover (*The Ceylon Times* 1870a). The Prince's reply to this gesture of Kandyan aristocrats was also recorded in the newspaper. It was addressed to "the Ratemahatmayas,⁸² Chiefs, and other Headmen of the Central Province." The Prince's address goes as follows:

Gentlemen, I thank you sincerely for the address you have presented to me, and for the share you have taken in welcoming me so warmly to this city. I am gratified to know that you appreciate the advantages you enjoy under the gentle rule of the Queen. I gratefully acknowledge the expressions of your loyalty and devotion to Her Majesty, and of your good wishes on my behalf.
ALFRED (*The Ceylon Times* 1870a).

Although Kandyan aristocrats tried to impress the Prince, it does not mean that all the Kandyan aristocrats were united. In fact, they competed among themselves to impress the Royal dignitaries. As *The Ceylon Times* reported, at a reception while all other Kandyan aristocrats were wearing more or less a dress similar color palette, only "Cambawattie Ratemayatmaya"⁸³ was wearing a dress with a variety of colors to impress the Prince and the crowd (*The Ceylon Times* 1870b). Describing the reception held for Kandyan aristocratic ladies, *The Ceylon Times* reported that the event happened "in precisely the same manner as obtains at a reception of European ladies" (*The Ceylon Times* 1870b). Although there were some unique events that took place in Kandy, altogether the events organized in Kandy by the aristocrats were not spectacular enough to compete with the spectacle organized in Colombo by low

⁸¹ Pali is the language that major Buddhist texts were written in. Theravada Buddhist traditions which Sri Lankans practice.

⁸² Ratemahatmaya is the chief headman in the Kandyan Kingdom and the Kandyan provinces of British time (Roberts 1982, xxi).

⁸³ Original spelling.

country elites. Based on the reports the exhibits at Kandy could not exceed the spectacular performance that happened in Alfred House, Colombo.

Outperforming the exhibits in Kandy by using their financial power, low country elites Susaw and Charles de Soysa (uncle and nephew) organized a unique spectacle hybridizing various Eastern and Western dance and theatrical events at their house named after the Prince, Alfred House. When Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, visited Sri Lanka, the Soysas were the only natives that were able to host a reception for the Prince (Roberts 1982, 154). Apart from the pearl and gem embedded golden plate and cutlery for the Prince (quoted in Matharage, 2006, 102), Capper describes the spectacle at Alfred House as “unique in itself – the first of the kind given by any native of Ceylon” (1871, 97). While the Prince danced in the ballroom, the band of the 73rd regiment played in the upper veranda (Capper 1871, 103). Just outside the house, many theatrical events took place. Separate buildings were used for different performances.

According to Capper, “blending European and Oriental music,” Alfred House performances included “Hindoo nautch girls,” a band of boy dancers in “red dresses of grotesque fashion” (Fig. 2.4), puppet theatre, a band of jugglers, performers on the slack rope and trapeze (1871, 103–4). As Jayawardena states the “Western entertainment included Dave Carson’s minstrel troupe, Professor Ruchwaldy ‘the Hungarian wizard’ and Signor Donatto ‘the wonderful one-legged dancer’” (2000, 319). According to the Sinhala newspaper *Lakrivikirana* of April 30, 1870, the performances included *Ehelepola*, a native drama performed on a rotating stage and in either Sinhala or English languages depending on the audience (quoted in

Matharage, 2006, 101). *Lakrivikirana* also reported that there were stick dances, *raban* dancers, and *udekki* dancers⁸⁴ (quoted in Matharage 2006, 101). These descriptions show the grandiosity and the hybrid nature of the spectacle that the de Soysas organized at Alfred House. De Soysas, through attractive hybrid spectacles surpass the exhibitions and ceremonies organized by the Kandyan aristocrats.



Fig. 2.4: A group of low country dancers performed for the Prince Alfred in 1870.⁸⁵

The spectacle at Alfred House in 1870 did not just exhibit hybrid theatrical performances; it also exhibited the wealth of low country elites which Kandyan aristocrats did not have. There were no Kandyan aristocrats who could have spent such an amount of money for royal entertainment. Therefore, to compete with the low

⁸⁴ *Raban* and *udekki* are drums that dancers in Kandyan region used to play while they are dancing.

⁸⁵ Illustrated London News (*ILN*) published this image on June 11th 1870. *ILN* titled this dance as “native performance called “Hobson Jobson” in Colombo” (*Illustrated London News* 1870a). This is probably the dance what Capper described as “red dresses of grotesque fashion.”

country elites, Kandyan aristocrats had to come up with a different strategy to impress the royal dignitaries which they tested five years later in 1875 when the Prince of Wales visited Sri Lanka.

When the Prince of Wales arrived in Sri Lanka, three parties – Kandyan aristocrats, Central Province Government Officer (GA), and the Governor William Gregory – joined to create a fascinating experience in Kandy. All three of these wanted to conduct an impressive exhibition in Kandy. On the one hand, the Kandyan aristocrats wanted to impress Prince Albert Edward more than the low country elites impressed Prince Alfred. Since Kandyan aristocrats did not have the financial resources to overpower the low country elites, they used the symbolic capital they had – which were knowledge and the power to mobilize ritual dancers and elephants which drew high interest among the British in the context of Orientalist curiosity and exoticism in the 1870s.

On the other hand, the colonial government wanted to provide the Prince of Wales a better experience in Kandy than what the Duke had. As the newspapers report, the Duke of Edinburgh's visit to Kandy had some bumps. For example, the officers did not carefully think about how the people were going to see the Duke while his carriage passed through the Kandy town. According to a special correspondent of *The Ceylon Times*, when the Duke came to Kandy the organizers made a mistake because the carriage “drove through the town at a hard gallop” which prevented the people from seeing the Prince (*The Ceylon Times* 1875c). To see the Duke, people from faraway places came to Kandy and stayed in uncomfortable conditions (Capper 1871). Therefore, this mistake seemed to disrupt the whole purpose of the royal visit.

The Central Province GA and the Governor wanted to create a better experience in Kandy. William Gregory was a man with a fine aesthetic taste and had been appointed a trustee of the National Gallery in England in 1867 (Bastiampillai, 1968, iv). As historian Anne Blackburn observes, Governor Gregory was greatly drawn to art, architecture, and the visual surroundings of the Central Province in general and Kandy in particular (Blackburn, 2010, 200–201). Gregory was appointed to Sri Lanka in 1872 as Governor, two years after the Duke visited the island. Therefore, when the Prince of Wales arrived in Sri Lanka, the country had the perfect Governor to appropriate Kandyan aristocrats' knowledge and expertise in Kandyan art, architecture, and rituals.

Spectacular events in Kandy staged by the Kandyan aristocrats outdid the Colombo events organized by low country elites. Describing the Kandy events, both Sinhala and English local newspapers literally reported that Kandy defeated Colombo. The Sinhala newspaper *Satyalankaraya* of December 10, 1875 reported that in welcoming the Prince Kandyan people defeated Colombo (quoted in Matharage 2006, 148). *The Ceylon Times* also made the same judgment in their paper on December 4. According to their special correspondent, “the decorations of the town testified well to the royal feelings of the Kandyan population, throwing, we are sorry to say, in their taste, their richness, and variety, the preparations in Colombo far into the shade” (*The Ceylon Times* 1875c).

This does not mean that low country elites were silent when the Prince of Wales arrived.⁸⁶ However, the events in Colombo were not as spectacular as the events in Kandy. With the help of the colonial government Kandyan aristocrats put together an exhibition that the low country elites could not organize. Kandyan aristocrats mobilized dancers and elephants using their power and knowledge of Kandyan art and culture which could not be achieved with the financial power of the low country elites. This is clearly evident when we compare the images published in London illustrated journals such as *ILN* and *The Graphic*. When the Duke visited, these magazines published the Colombo spectacle but not the Kandy *perahera*. However, when the Prince of Wales visited, although the events organized by low country elites did not get good publicity, both magazines were filled with pictures of elephants, dancers and the Kandy *perahera* organized by Kandyan aristocrats.

To some extent, Michael Roberts (1982) and Kumari Jayawardena (2000) discuss the British royal visits and receptions and events organized to impress the Princes particularly by low country elites. However, what I focus on is how Kandyan aristocrats responded to royal visits, how their actions affected *ves* dancers and their movements, and how the dancers responded to the circumstances that arose at the processions. Their tension and competition with low country elites pushed them to refashion the Kandyan traditions and rituals to impress the Prince of Wales. While Governor Gregory was in favor of Kandyan art, architecture, and tradition, Kandyan aristocrats took advantage of their knowledge of art, and their power over dancers and

⁸⁶ Charles de Soysa financially contributed to many events around Colombo, including founding two schools in Moratuwa city to be named Prince of Wales and Princess of Wales College in honor of the visit (Jayawardena 2000, 313).

elephants to choreograph a *perahera* to impress the Prince, the prospective King of England. While the elites competed with each other, what happened to the *ves* dancers? How did they appropriate their movements? And how did they resist?

2.4 Choreographing the Special *Perahera* for the Prince of Wales

Kandyan aristocrats used the *perahera* to display the persistence of feudal ties between them and the lower caste people who were obliged to work for the aristocrats under the *nilapangu* and caste systems. As I discuss in Chapter 1, Kandyan politico-economic structures such as *nilapangu* and caste system required service-caste people to work for aristocrats. The *perahera* was not only an exotic spectacle to be displayed for the Prince but it was also the best spectacle to display the superiority of Kandyan aristocrats over service-caste people. As I mentioned in the introduction, the Diyawadana Nilame and Kandyan aristocrats are in charge of conducting the annual *perahera* at the sacred Temple of the Tooth. However, when the royal dignitaries visited Sri Lanka, they used the *perahera* for secular purposes to impress the royal visitors. Kandyan aristocrats used their cultural hegemony to choreograph the special *perahera* and *ves* dancers to exhibit for the Prince of Wales.

By 1875, through the emergence of Orientalism and Governor Gregory's interest in Kandyan art and culture, Kandyan aristocrats understood the aesthetic taste of the colonizer. They knew what the Prince of Wales would enjoy. They knew that their costumes, elephants, temple rituals, and dance would cater to the European taste for the exotic. Although aristocrats had organized a *perahera* for the Duke in 1870 before, the *perahera* they choreographed for the Prince of Wales in 1875 was

different. First, one day before the actual *perahera*, aristocrats arranged a special “rehearsal” of the *perahera* for the Prince to watch privately at the Governor’s House (Fayrer 1879, 53). Second, unlike the earlier *perahera* for the Duke, they incorporated two major choreographies – bringing in four *ves* dancers from the ritual space to the entertainment space (Fig. 2.5) and making an elephant “salute” to the Prince and receive sugar-cane from him. Wanting to impress the future King of the country, combined with their competition with low country elites, Kandyan aristocrats did not hesitate to dislocate the *ves* dancers from their ritual space to the entertainment space. Although there were other performers such as whip-bearers, fan bearers and drummers, the highlight of the procession was the *ves* dancers and the elephant choreography. The space given to elephants and the *ves* dancers by London Illustrated magazines when they reported the *perahera* in 1875 suggests that those two choreographies attracted the British eye.

2.4.1 Elephant Choreography

Kandyan aristocrats made the elephants salute the Prince. A captivating moment for the Prince and the Royal audiences was the giant elephant kneeling at the feet of the Prince and receiving sugarcane from him. As *ILN* reports, “upon arriving opposite the Prince the great beasts wheeled slowly round in line, and knelt down in salutation before the Prince. Upon their rising he went forward, patted them, and gave them pieces of sugarcane” (*Illustrated London News* 1876b, 34). This is choreography. Elephants would not do such a performance unless they were choreographed and directed to do so. Not only were they directed to kneel down but

some of the elephants were ordered to trumpet to the Prince (*The Ceylon Times* 1875d). Elephants obeying the orders to trumpet and to kneel down to the Prince symbolically reinforced the colonial order and obedience. Probably this is why, as *The Ceylon Times* reports, the Prince took a great interest in the elephants of the *perahera*, especially the obedient one who saluted him (*The Ceylon Times* 1875d). The Sinhala newspaper *Satyalankaraya* of December 10, 1875 reports that Kandyan aristocrats brought these elephants to the procession and the Prince expressed his happiness to take the most obedient elephant to England (quoted in Matharage, 2006, 150). The communication between the colonial officers and Kandyan aristocrats regarding displaying elephants in *peraheras* provides more details about the choreographing process.

Elephant choreography was a matter of interest for the British officers. For the British domesticated elephants were alien (Roberts 1994, 152). Although the newspapers only reported the spectacular event of elephants, the behaviors of the elephants that were brought in front of the Prince should have been of great concern for the Central Province GA. According to archival records, in August, 1875, just a few months before the Prince arrived, an elephant belonging to Kiribath Kumbure Basnayaka Nilame, a Kandyan aristocrat, had killed a man on the last day of the annual Kandy *perahera* (“SLNA – Kandy. General Festivals” 1876). Because of this incident, before the annual Kandy *perahera*, Kandyan aristocrats such as Dunuwila Diyawadana Nilame and Madugalle Basnayaka Nilame, who were responsible for bringing the elephants, had to assure the GA in writing that the elephant they brought had never killed a human (“SLNA – Kandy. General Festivals” 1876). Although

documents about bringing elephants to the special *perahera* for the Prince do not exist, we can infer that it would have been a great concern for the Central Province GA. Choreographing an elephant to come to the feet of the Prince seemed dangerous. However, both the British officials and Kandyan aristocrats didn't want to miss the opportunity to impress the Prince through attractive elephant choreography.

2.4.2 *Ves* Dancers from Ritual to Entertainment

British Orientalist and exotic aesthetic parameters materialized through the introduction of *ves* dancers in the special *perahera* choreographed for the Prince. As Cohn argues, it was the British patrons who created the parameters for the classification of art, which determined what was valuable, what would be preserved as monuments of the past, and what should be placed in museums (Cohn 1996, 77). Since the patrons of art and crafts in colonial India, particularly in the nineteenth century, were the British, they defined the parameters of art. Although Cohn discusses material culture, his argument can be applied to the appropriation of Sri Lankan dance from ritual to entertainment during the British colonial period.⁸⁷ However, the British alone could not have materialized their aesthetic without the support of the natives. As ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl observes, colonialism forced Western aesthetic values on the elites of the colonized societies (Nettl 2005, 432). Therefore, although it was the aesthetic parameters of the British, the native elites put that aesthetic into practice, adding their own knowledge and skills.

⁸⁷ What I describe as art and aesthetic here, in the context of Sri Lankan dance during the British colonial period, does not share the same art and aesthetic parameters of the contemporary European art such as ballet or opera. What I consider here is European art and aesthetic parameters of Orientalist and exotic art.

Therefore, when the *ves* dancers were dislocated from ritual and brought to entertainment, it fulfilled the British parameters of Orientalist and exotic art. However, it was the Kandyan aristocrats who put those colonial parameters in to the practice.

Introducing *ves* dancers from ritual to *perahera* was a novelty. Entertainment was not the purpose of the *ves* dancers in rituals (Reed 2010, 40–54). Therefore, introducing *ves* dancers in the special *perahera* for colonial audiences was a novel attempt that formed a turning point in the history of *ves* dance. According to eyewitnesses, the *perahera* was exceedingly grotesque but novel, and interesting (Russell 1877, 235). As reported in the Sinhala newspaper *Gnanartha Pradeepaya* of December 3, 1875 the components of the *perahera* were especially assembled for the Prince’s view (quoted in Matharage 2006, 150). Therefore, it is fair to assume that *ves* dancers were introduced in this *perahera* for the first time⁸⁸ out of their ritual or religious context. Probably this is why, according to *The Ceylon Times*, *ves* dance (described as devil-dancing) “went rather poorly off” (*The Ceylon Times* 1875d). However, this *perahera* has been described as “one of the finest that he [the Prince] is likely to see in the East” (*The Ceylon Times* 1875d). Therefore, overall, the *perahera* was a success as a spectacle which was ultimately the purpose of the organizers.

The special *perahera* for the Prince of Wales was choreographed for entertainment purposes. In 1875, the *perahera* was shown to the Prince on two days. On the December 2, a private *perahera* was performed for the Prince in the garden of

⁸⁸ As I mentioned earlier, there is no evidence to prove that *ves* dancers danced in *perahera* s for entertainment purposes before 1875.

Governor's House as a rehearsal for the December 3 *perahera* which was performed on the street in front of the Temple of the Tooth. *Ves* dancers performed in both of these *peraheras*. Describing the *perahera* at the Governor's House, *The Ceylon Times* clearly states that this was performed "for the Prince's entertainment after dinner" (*The Ceylon Times* 1875c). It was a spectacle that the Prince watched with great interest (*The Ceylon Times* 1875b). *Ves* dancers who performed for the Prince were ritual priests and this was clearly identified by *ILN* (*Illustrated London News* 1876b, 34). *ILN* further states that although *ves* dancers are ritual priests they performed for the special *perahera* to amuse the "very extra-ordinary visitor" (*Illustrated London News* 1876b, 34). This statement clearly suggests that the *ves* dancers were dislocated from ritual space into entertainment space. Because *ves* dancers became entertainers, they had to go through new processes such as rehearsals like professional entertainers.

Unlike in the rituals they performed, *ves* dancers had their first dance rehearsal during the Prince of Wales' visit. Like professional entertainers, *ves* dancers had to go through a rehearsal process, although they had never rehearsed their dance before the Prince's visit. Joseph Fayrer, the royal physician who witnessed the *perahera*, writes "we had a dinner party at Government House, and after it, a private rehearsal of the *perahera*,⁸⁹ a procession of elephants by torchlight, and grotesque figures of devil dancers, making hideous contortions as they passed." (Fayrer 1879, 53). *ILN* also reported that this *perahera* was a private rehearsal. According to *ILN*, "in order that his Royal Highness might view at his leisure the details of the

⁸⁹ "Perihara" is the term used by Fayrer.

procession, it was arranged that a private rehearsal should take place” (*Illustrated London News* 1876, 34). This also shows that not only was the special *perahera* a rehearsal, but a performance that was choreographed for the Prince to watch leisurely as entertainment.



Fig. 2.5: An image published in *The Graphic* shows how a Kandyan aristocrat explains to the Prince while the *ves* dancers⁹⁰ perform in front of him (*The Graphic* 1876).

Because they were dislocated from ritual space and relocated in entertainment space, the *ves* dancers' performance did not please some of the British observers. The four *ves* dancers (Fig. 2.2) that were brought to the *perahera* in 1875 were not entertainers. As I discussed in Chapter 1, they were not even called dancers in pre-colonial times. *Ves* dancers who perform in rituals are called *yakdessas*, ritual dance-priests (Reed 2010, 25). Therefore, it is no surprise that *ves* dancers disappointed some British observers. Although the *ILN*'s reporter described the manner the *ves* dancers were dressed as “four priests fantastically dressed in garments glittering with

⁹⁰ Although *The Graphic*'s illustration shows six *ves* dancers, only four *ves* dancers performed (Fig. 2.2). However, altogether there were six dancers including two non-*Ves* dancers (Fig. 2.2).

gold, silver, and gems,” he describes the performance as “posture in strange, wild figures” (*Illustrated London News* 1876b, 34). The dancers’ music was also not pleasing to some British ears. Reflecting on the same *perahera*, the correspondent of *The Graphic* reported that “pipe-players, and tom-tom men kept up a most deafening clamour during the whole time” (quoted in Reed 2010, 100–101). One could argue that even in the ritual context, the British observer might – because of the colonial gaze – perceive *ves* dancers as posturing “strange, wild figures.” However, in a ritual context, *yakdessas* knew what they were doing. They had agency. However, when they were dislocated into the entertainment space, they did not have the same agency they had in the ritual context. As I discuss later, it is possible that the *yakdessas* were confused. Therefore, I speculate that the dancers’ confusion of the space was seen as “posture in strange, wild figures” by the British observer. However, this does not negate the Euro-centric perspective of non-European performance practices that were prevalent in the nineteenth century. Europeans’ inability to comprehend the dance and music of the other part of the world was not unique to nineteenth century Sri Lanka. Europeans incapability to grasp the music of non-European cultures has been recorded in other parts of the world as well. By analyzing one of the founders of the so-called Berlin school of comparative musicology, E.M. von Hornbostel’s writings on “African music,” ethnomusicologist Stephen Blum claims that Westerners who listened to non-Western music in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century had issues in appreciating them (Blum 1991, 3–36). Because of the Euro-centric perspective, some of the Europeans were not able to appreciate dance and music in their own context. Moreover, since some British observers did not consider

the space boundedness of *yakdessas*, they could not comprehend the dance.

Therefore, it is important to know who the *ves* dancers were who performed for the Prince of Wales and where they came from.

Although it is a very difficult task to find information about individual *ves* dancers, I contend that these were dancers who performed the *Valiyak mangallaya* ritual. Some descriptions of the nature of the dance performed for the Prince suggest that those *ves* dancers performed part of *Valiyak mangallaya* ritual. Special correspondent of *The Ceylon Times* stated that “after the *perahera* there was some devil-dancing which went rather poorly off” (*The Ceylon Times* 1875f). As I described earlier, *Valiyak mangallaya* is only performed after a *perahera*. Therefore, “some devil-dancing” that dancers performed “after the *perahera*” should be part of *Valiyak mangallaya*. Describing the dancing, *ILN* also reported that “the priests went through what to them was a religious ceremony” (*Illustrated London News* 1876b, 34). As I explained earlier, *ves* dancers who performed for the Prince were not entertainers. They were ritual priests. Although they were dragged into an entertainment space, what they knew was the ritual dance. Since what they performed at the *perahera* for the Prince seems like *Valiyak mangallaya*, it is possible that the dancers who performed *Valiyak mangallaya* were brought to the special *perahera*. *Valiyak mangallaya* is performed only by certain families of dancers who had inherited it as *nilapangu*.⁹¹ Therefore, Kandyan aristocrats had the power to mobilize

⁹¹ *Nilapangu* system requires tenants who occupy certain land to perform certain duties to noblemen (Kandyan *radala*/aristocrats), *dēvālayas* or *vihara* (temples). For example, ritual performance was tied to *nilapangu* service system (Seneviratne 1977, 74).

dancers under the *nilapangu* system. Since the British also considered “devil dance” as unproductive, demonic labor, they appropriated it into entertainment.

Kandyan aristocrats had the power to mobilize *Valiyak mangallaya* dancers. Under the Kandyan *nilapangu* system, Kandyan aristocrats were able to mobilize natives to do certain duties for them. When royal dignitaries visited Kandy, Kandyan aristocrats used the *nilapangu* system to mobilize native labor to impress the royal dignitaries. As Capper observed, when the royal dignitaries visited Sri Lanka, the colonial government needed “a willing army of workers” from “the children of the soil” to entertain them (1871, 2). Describing the preparation in Kandy, Capper notes that “Kandy was thronged to overflowing with toiling volunteers” (1871, 3). I contend that these “volunteers” mentioned by Capper should be the natives who had to work for their *nilapangu* under the supervision of the Kandyan aristocrats.⁹² Communications between Giragama Diyawadana Nilame and the Central Province GA provide perfect proof of this. In a hand-written document submitted for the GA’s approval, Giragama proposed “each chief to bring two sets of dancers...the *perahera* to take place in the usual order” (“SLNA – Kandy. Royal Visits” 1883). Based on this communication that took place in 1883 for the *perahera* for Governor Arthur Gordon, it is fair to assume that a similar process happened when the Prince of Wales visited 1875 eight years before. Basnayaka Nilames, a group of Kandyan aristocrats, were in charge of the *dēvālaya*⁹³ where *Valiyak mangallaya* was performed (Dissanayake 2000). Therefore, when Kandyan aristocrats were asked to bring dancers, the place

⁹² This doesn’t mean that all the volunteers who worked in Kandy worked because of the *nilapangu* system. However, given the nature of *nilapangu* system, it was the best way for Kandyan aristocrats to mobilize “volunteer” labor.

⁹³ As I mentioned earlier, *dēvālaya* is the shrine-house dedicated for local deities,

where they could easily mobilize *ves* dancers was the *Valiyak mangallaya* ritual conducted in *dēvālayas* such as the Vishnu *Dēvālaya* in Kandy.⁹⁴ Duties of ritual performance were tied to the *nilapangu* system (Seneviratne 1977, 74). *Nilapangu* was properly documented as “Service Tenure Registers” under the British and according to the register *Valiyak mangallaya* is a ritual duty for the dancers who occupy certain lands of some *dēvālayas* (“Service Tenure Register 1: Kandy” 1870, 473). Therefore, the easiest way for Kandyan aristocrats who were in charge of *dēvālayas* to bring *ves* dancers to the *perahera* was to mobilize them from the *Valiyak mangallaya* ritual.⁹⁵ When *ves* dancers who performed in confined ritual space were brought on to gardens and streets they had to re-adjust their movements. They had to do their own colonial choreography at a micro level.

2.5 Dancers’ Response to Colonial Encounter

Although *ves* dancers were choreographed into the ornamental mode of rule, dancers developed their own movement vocabulary to adapt to new spaces such as streets and expressed their hidden resistance to the colonizers. According to Nandy, colonized people are not just gullible, hopeless victims of colonialism; instead, they fought their own battle for survival in their own way, sometimes consciously and sometimes by default (Nandy 1983, xv). I also agree with Nandy as *ves* dancers fought their own battle when they were brought on to the streets for royal

⁹⁴ In the past, *Valiyak mangallaya* was also held in *dēvālayas* other than *Vishnu* (Dissanayake, 2000).

⁹⁵ It is hard to believe that Kandyan aristocrats mobilized dancers who only performed *Kohomba kankariya* ritual while mobilizing *Valiyak mangallaya* dancers was much easier.

processions. I discuss how *ves* dancers responded to the macro⁹⁶ choreography that colonial officers and Kandyan aristocrats created to entertain royal dignitaries, and how *ves* dancers created their own micro choreographies to adapt to new spaces such as streets.

2.5.1 Walking and Dancing: Developing a Walking Sequence (*Gaman Mātraya*)

The patterns of *ves* dancers' walking sequences were defined by their confined ritual spaces. Since *ves* dancers only performed in ritual spaces before the British colonization, their walking patterns were shaped by the limitations of the spaces in the rituals they performed such as *Kohomba kankariya* and *Valiyak mangallaya* (Mantillake 2010, 96). Both *Kohomba kankariya* and *Valiyak mangallaya* are rituals that are bound to their ritual spaces. While *Kohomba kankariya* is performed in a rectangular space of 60 X 30 *riyanas*⁹⁷ (Dissanayake 1988, 124) which is about 96 X 45 feet, *Valiyak mangallaya* in the Kandy *Vishnu Devayala* is performed in almost a square space (Holt 2004, 164) in an area smaller than that of the *Kohomba kankariya*. The *ves* dancers' movements were confined to these spaces. In Kandyan rituals, they perform two major types of *mātrayas* (movement sequences) – *natana/pagana mātrayas* (dancing sequences) and *gaman mātrayas* (walking sequences) a “stylized animated walking” (Reed 2010, 51). In rituals, *ves* dancers perform walking sequences in three main patterns: walking back and forth, walking along the line of a figure 8 (Fig. 2.6), and walking in a circle. I

⁹⁶ A detail description of what I called macro and micro choreography can be found in the introduction.

⁹⁷ A native measurement unit.

contend that these three patterns of walking were shaped by their confined ritual space. In rituals, *ves* dancers do not perform walking sequences outside ritual spaces. When they were brought to the *perahera*, *ves* dancers had to face new challenges.

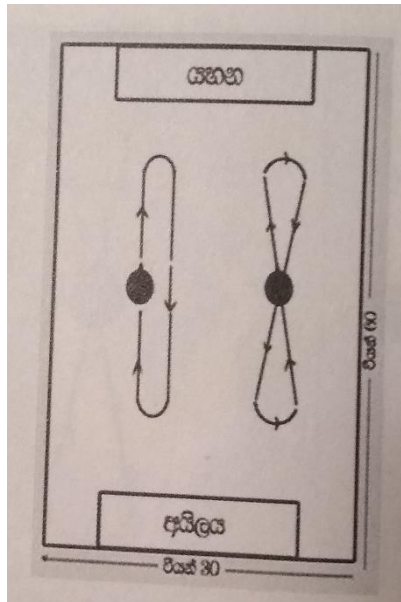


Fig. 2.6: Walking back and forth, walking along the line of a figure 8, of *ves* dancers' walking sequences in *Kohomba kankariya* (Mantillake 2010, 118).

When they were sent to the street, *ves* dancers were confronted with new challenges in performing *gaman mātraya* (walking sequence). One major challenge was that, unlike in the ritual space, they had to constantly move along the streets. In the *perahera*, *ves* dancers use the three main patterns of walking that they used in rituals - walking back and forth, walking along the line of a figure 8, and walking in a circle. Since these walking sequences kept them within the same space on the street, it did not help them in moving along the street, which is the general feature of a procession. Therefore, they had to find a new walking sequence to move along the streets. The second challenge was to figure out the direction they should face while

walking. In the *perahera*, the *ves* dancers were positioned before the Relics of the Temple of the Tooth or *dēvālayas*, or before Kandyan aristocrats who walk in the *perahera*. This positioning before the Relics or aristocrats presented a new spatial challenge of direction to face when walking. They could not turn their back to the sacred Relics or the Kandyan aristocrats as it would have been offensive. Dancers could not fully turn towards the Relic or aristocrats and walk backwards as it would have been dangerous especially in the night. Confronted with these two challenges, *ves* dancers needed to find a new *gaman mātraya* (walking sequence) that enabled them to move along the streets, without offending the Relics or aristocrats, and without hurting themselves.

Dancers have appropriated one of the basic movement sequences from rituals to effectively walk sideways on the street. In both *Kohomba kankariya* and *Valiyak mangallaya*, there are various performance sequences that involve dance, singing, and dramatic elements (Dissanayake 1990, 9). The dancers appropriated a basic step from the *yak anuma* (invitation to the deities) in their ritual. In *yak anuma*, *ves* dancers perform a repetitive movement sequence to the beat of the *geta beraya*:⁹⁸ *takundat jin jin, taku taka jin jin*. It is a four-step movement that they perform placing their right leg, left leg, right leg, and left leg. This is very similar to what Kandyan dancers now consider the first *goda sarambaya*, hand and leg exercise. This was a brilliant appropriation as it solved all the challenges they confronted on the streets in a *perahera*. When the dancers make two lines along the street, this four-step movement sequence allows them to move sideways. Their first two steps allow them to look at

⁹⁸ *Geta beraya* is the predominant drum in Kandyan dance.

the Relic/the aristocrats and their third and fourth steps allow them to move down the streets while glancing at the street ahead. Moreover, through this movement sequence *ves* dancers are also able to look at the dancers from the other line to make sure that they are following the same phase. They perform this *gaman mātraya*, walking sequence, until they decide to perform *natana mātraya*, dance sequence. After a short movement-ending-sequence (*kastirama*), they perform the dancing sequence (*natana mātraya*). When they end that dance sequence, again they start the walking sequence (*gaman mātraya*) sideways. It is also a perfect choice from the dancers' point of view because it does not require a lot of physical energy to perform that walking sequence. Therefore, after a dancing sequence which requires more energy, the dancers can relax a bit during the walking sequence.

Ves dancers might not have found this perfect solution in the first instance they were brought on to the street. When they were brought to perform for the Prince of Wales, it created awkwardness regarding the phase of the *perahera*. *ILN*, describing the *perahera* as a procession, remarks: “the procession – although from the long pauses and breaks it could scarcely be called a procession” (*Illustrated London News* 1876b, 34). For other performers except *ves* dancers the Kandy *perahera* was not new. Therefore, it is fair to assume that other performers knew how to keep the pace of the *perahera*. It is probably the *ves* dancers who couldn't keep the pace as they had to dance and walk at the same time. However, with time, *ves* dancers mastered this. They have become experts in escorting very important people from royal dignitaries to new university entrants, as we witnessed at the Jaffna University in 2016 where groups of students clashed over the *ves* dancers without knowing the

colonial history of the *ves* dance. Developing new walking sequence (*gaman mātraya*) is not the only way *ves* dancers responded to their encounter with the colonizers.

2.5.2 Resistance through Double-edged Choreography

One should not assume that the interactions between royal dignitaries and natives went smoothly. Although on the surface it seems like a perfectly organized exhibit for royal dignitaries, one should assume that there was resistance and tension in these *peraheras*. Colonial resistance cannot always capture the western notion of “resistance.” According to Nandy, colonized natives’ attempts to create alternative expressions to the main stream should be identified as their anti-colonialism, “it is possible to make it ours, too” (1983, xvii). Native Sri Lankans expressed their resistance through double-edged choreography⁹⁹ before the royal dignitaries. For example, according to a Sinhala newspaper, at the elephant kraal in 1870, mocking Prince Alfred Ernest Albert’s royal title, natives called an untamed elephant “Duke,” and native onlookers laughed and shouted with thrill (Matharage 2006, 83–84). The sound of the word “duke” resembles some of the terms that Sri Lankan used to call/shout at elephants. Therefore, even if the authorities heard the natives produce the sound of “duke” in the context of an elephant kraal, they could not reprimand them. In a way, what the natives did was to take the term “duke” and make it their own to mock at the colonizers. The dancers also expressed their resistance against royal dignitaries during the *perahera*.

⁹⁹ I introduce resistance and double-edged choreography in the introduction.

By reciting Sinhala *prasasti* and *hatan kavi* that praise the victories of Kandyan kings over Europeans, dancers in the *perahera* mocked the British royal princes and resisted the British ornamental mode of rule. *Prasasti* were praise-songs performed for Sinhala kings at court (Donaldson 2001b, 38). *Hatan kavi* (battle poems or war ballads) such as *Ingrisi Hatana* (the battle against the English) (Obeyesekere 2009, 21) provide vivid descriptions of the defeat of the British forces (Donaldson 2001, 78). *Parangi Hatana* (Portuguese battle) also describes the glorious battle against the Portuguese fought by the Kandyan king Rajasinha II (Donaldson 2001, 70). Dancers in Kandy later adopted these *prasasti* and *hatan kavi* in their dance repertoires.

When the two royal brothers, the Prince Albert Edward's two sons, Prince Albert Victor, the Duke of Clarence, and Prince George Frederick Ernest Albert, the Prince George of Wales, visited Kandy in 1882, British officers and Kandyan aristocrats arranged a *perahera* to welcome the young Princes. The Sinhala newspaper *Sarasavi Sandarasa* of February 3, 1882 published an intriguing report. According to the reporter, "we heard songs that were composed to praise King Narendrasingha and songs that describe the atrocities of the British and the Portuguese during the Sinhala Kingdom. Even if the Princes and the British agents heard these, they would not understand them as they don't know Sinhala"¹⁰⁰ (Matharage, 2006, 215–16). This is strong evidence of double-edged choreography that dancers performed in the *perahera* in the face of the royal dignitaries. The dancers found moments when they could play with the authorities. I also witnessed

¹⁰⁰ My translation.

this playfulness when I danced in the Kandy *perahera* in 1995. As young dancers, we were ready to ignore accepted norms by being playful in our recitations and dance movements, as long as we didn't get into trouble.

Although the *Sarasavi Sandarasa* report of the 1882 *perahera* doesn't exactly reveal the sources of those songs, it suggests that dancers sang *prasasti* and *hatan kavi*.¹⁰¹ While the dancers covertly resisted the colonial authority when they sang *prasasti* and *hatan kavi*, ironically, they symbolically subordinated themselves to the Kandyan kings by reinforcing the Kandyan feudal hierarchical structure. However, the dancers' subordination to aristocrats did not undermine their resistance to the British. While the Princes celebrated the superiority of the British monarch through the ornamental mode of rule by positioning the native in a hierarchically inferior place, the dancers resisted the colonial authority by celebrating their kings who defeated the British, and therefore mocked Prince George Frederick Ernest Albert, who later became King of the United Kingdom as George V.

2.6 Conclusion

Spectacles organized for the British royal dignitaries should be seen as a complex political activity where the British mobilized colonized bodies to entertain the royal family members. Therefore, it was an ornamental mode of rule which depended on ceremonies and spectacles. However, to ensure the legitimacy of those ceremonies and spectacles, the British needed to seek the support of the native elites

¹⁰¹ The newspaper does not mention whether they were *ves* dancers or some other dancers such as *udekki*, *panteru*, or *nayyadi dancers*. It is possible that they are *udekki*, *pantheru* dancers who sing *prasasti* as part of their repertoire.

and make use of their financial and cultural resources. When the British royal dignitaries visited Sri Lanka in the nineteenth century, the colonial government seemed to take advantage of the competition and tension between the Kandyan aristocrats and low country elites prevalent at the time, which resulted in the competitive spectacles that they choreographed for the British royal visits in 1870 and 1875. The colonial government mainly sought financial contributions from low country elites to entertain the Prince. Both Kandyan aristocrats and low country elites struggled to figure out the best way to impress the royal dignitaries. The spectacle at Alfred House in 1870 did not just exhibit hybrid theatrical performances, but also exhibited the wealth of low country elites which Kandyan aristocrats did not have. The colonial government made Kandyan aristocrats contribute to royal entertainments by appropriating their traditions and rituals.

In 1875, when the Prince of Wales arrived in Sri Lanka, three main sections – Kandyan aristocrats, Central Province Government Officer (GA), and Governor William Gregory – were amalgamated to create a fascinating experience in Kandy. The British consciously choreographed the ornamental mode of rule. In ceremonies and spectacles, the British positioned Kandyan aristocrats in a hierarchically inferior place. In the context of the competition with low country elites and wanting to reclaim their legitimacy symbolically, Kandyan aristocrats used their cultural hegemony – their knowledge and expertise of Kandyan art, architecture, dance, and ritual, hierarchical power – to choreograph an impressive *perahera* for the Prince of Wales. They added two new performances to the *perahera*. They choreographed an elephant to “salute” the Prince and to receive sugar cane from him, and they

mobilized *ves* dancers – who traditionally performed only in a confined ritual space – in the gardens and streets making them entertainers. Unlike in rituals, when they were mobilized in the *perahera* for the Prince of Wales, *ves* dancers became exotic entertainers and had to go through a rehearsal like professional theatrical dancers. According to the description of the dancers, it is possible that these dancers were mobilized from the *Valiyak mangallaya* ritual, where Kandyan aristocrats had control over *ves* dancers.

Although *ves* dancers were choreographed into the ornamental mode of rule, they were not passive victims of the British ornamental mode of rule. When they were sent to the street, the *ves* dancers confronted new challenges to perform walking sequences (*gaman mātraya*). The dancers had appropriated one of the basic movement sequences from ritual to effectively walk sideways on the street. Moreover, by reciting Sinhala *prasasti* and *hatan kavi* that praise the victories of Kandyan kings over Europeans, the dancers in the *perahera* mocked the British royal princes and resisted the colonial authority and the British ornamental mode of rule.

Exhibiting the *perahera* and *ves* dancers became a token of welcome not only for Royal dignitaries but also for British Governors, and other VIPs. Special *peraheras* were organized as an exotic spectacle in which elephants and dancers performed together. In 1907, the Colonial Secretary and the acting Governor at the time, Sir Hugh Clifford, asked Leonard Woolf, Assistant Government Agent (AGA) Central Province, to organize a first-class exhibition of Kandyan dancing for a Governor's visitor, which Woolf did with Nugawela Diyawadana Nilame. Mobilizing *ves* dancers for royal dignitaries continued through postcolonial Sri Lanka. In 2013,

the current Prince of Wales, Charles Philip Arthur George, visited the Sri Lanka for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). After 138 years, again a group of *ves* dancers were choreographed to welcome the Prince of Wales at the Katunayake airport, Colombo.

The *perahera* choreographed for the Prince of Wales marks a major milestone in the history of Kandyan dance. It was a most influential moment, where *ves* dancers of Kandy were mobilized as performers which took them to Europe for the first time as part of colonial exhibitions, and later made them the national dancers of Sri Lanka. Eleven years after the Prince's visit to Kandy, in 1886, a German animal trainer took his famous *Ceylon Exhibition* to London which included both elephants and *ves* dancers. In his poster, in big capital letters, he emphasized that there would be "at the close of each entertainment the great Perra-harra¹⁰² procession, the same as shown before His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales in Kandy" (see the poster in chapter 3). Therefore, examining the choreographic process of the Kandy *perahera* and *ves* dancers for royal dignitaries in its historical context is crucial for grasping the trajectory of Kandyan dance.

¹⁰² Original spellings

Chapter 3: Performing with Animals and Embodying Animal Movements

In 1926, Epi Vidane's (Epi hereafter) head was inside an elephant's mouth. Neither was the elephant attempting to crush Epi's head nor was Epi trying to examine the elephant's mouth. Brought on a boat from Sri Lanka, both Epi and the elephant were performing a trick that held the curious European audiences captive in John Hagenbeck's *Indienschau* in Germany (Fig. 3.1). Epi's intimate relationship with his elephant determined the rest of his life in Europe and the US. He became a professional elephant trainer, started a family, raised kids, performed in various colonial exhibitions, world fairs and circuses, and never came back to Sri Lanka.

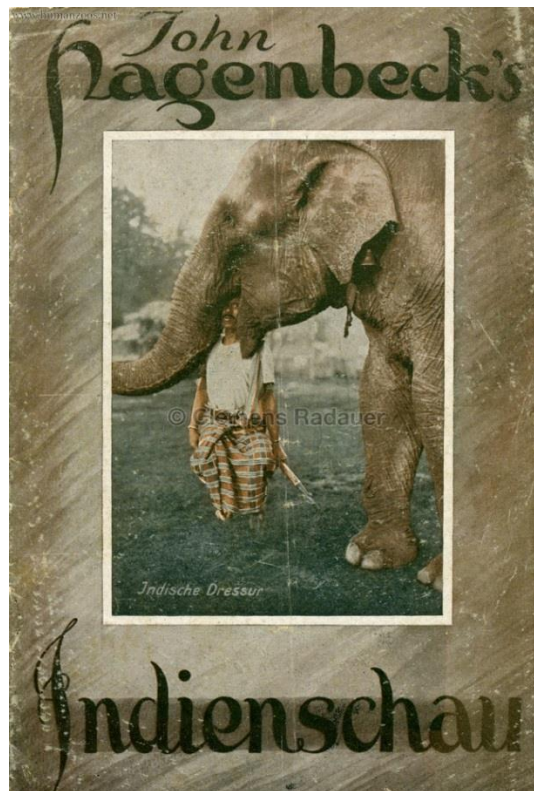


Fig. 3.1: Epi Vidane performing his trick with his elephant at *John Hagenbeck's Indienschau* in Germany, in 1926 (Radauer 2017).

In 1999, when I was studying Kandyan dance, one of my dance teachers choreographed a few dance pieces for a tourist show in Sri Lanka. One of the pieces he choreographed was *Gajaga vannama*, the recital of the elephant. He had two choreographic choices: he could choreograph the piece using pure Kandyan dance movements or he could choreograph the dance in which we had to embody the characteristics of an elephant. He chose the latter and said that “*api aliya wage natanakota, suddo kaemati*” (white people like to watch when we dance like elephants). He also instructed us “*aliya wage adambaren natanna*” (dance with pride, as if you are an elephant).

3.1 Introduction

When I examine how Sri Lankan performers were displayed in European colonial exhibitions and how the dancers responded creatively, I see a connection between the two incidents mentioned above. Both Epi’s elephant trick and *Gajaga vannama* that embodies elephant characteristics are colonial choreographies that satisfy the exotic taste of colonial audiences. To convey the superiority of Europeans and the inferiority of the colonized, the Europeans choreographed the colonized performers associating them with animals. In her book *Displaying Death and Animating Life: Human-Animal Relations in Art, Science, and Everyday Life*, Jane Desmond, a scholar of embodiment and performance, argues that colonizers placed colonized people alongside animals under the same category of exhibits (Desmond 2016, 256). Therefore, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century,

European show business entrepreneurs exhibited Sri Lankan performers alongside the wild animals in European zoological gardens.

Focusing on the colonial exhibitions where the Hagenbecks, three show businessmen, featured Ceylon, I examine how the organizers displayed Sri Lankan animals and people before colonial audiences during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this chapter, I contend that colonial choreographers defined and manipulated the bodies of Sri Lankan performers in order to entertain curious colonial audiences by displaying performers together with animals in colonial exhibitions. However, I also argue that colonial exhibits that staged the intimacy between animal and people inspired Sri Lankan *ves* dancers to choreograph the dance repertoire called *vannamas* that embody the characteristics of certain animals.

3.1.1 Colonized Bodies in Exhibitions and Displaying them with Animals

To understand the Sri Lankan dancer's experience in colonial exhibitions, it is important to grasp how Europeans displayed colonized bodies in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. One of the terms used to describe the bodily experience of the colonized is "colonial corporeality." In their edited volume *Discipline and the Other Body: Correction, Corporeality, Colonialism* (2006), historians Anupama Rao and Steven Pierce define colonial corporality as "visceral, embodied experiences of domination and control" and also argue that it was "an integral part of governmental practices of codifying, categorizing, and racializing differences" (2006, 5). According to them, corporeal violence marks and constitutes the boundaries of alterity between the colonized and the colonizer (2006, 5). As Dirks claims, "brute torture on the body

of the colonized was not the same as the public exhibition of a colonized body, but these two moments of colonial power shared in more than they differed” (1992, 5). The exhibition of Sri Lankan dancers in colonial exhibitions shares the aspects of visceral, embodied experiences of domination and control that Rao and Pierce define as “colonial corporeality.” However, in the case of Sri Lankan dancers, colonial corporeality cannot be framed only through corporeal violence.

As I define it, the term “colonial corporeality” includes not only the European domination of colonized bodies but also the creative responses of the colonized dancers expressed through their bodies. According to Susan Foster, corporeality is bodily reality as manifested in a cultural experience (S. Foster 1996). If we expand the notion of “cultural experience,” it can include the colonial encounter as it can also be defined as a cultural experience. Therefore, colonial corporeality can be defined as bodily reality as manifested through the colonial encounter. As I define it, colonial corporeality is the bodily reality that both the colonizer and the colonized came to terms with. While the Europeans re-defined, manipulated, domesticated, and displayed the colonized bodies for colonial audiences, the colonized performers pushed their bodily reality by creating new bodily expressions through dance which gave them a certain agency. Therefore, it is helpful to see colonial corporeality as what I call colonial choreography, a mechanism of manipulation and presentation of colonized bodies to colonial audiences.

Europeans re-defined and displayed the superiority of the Europeans juxtaposing it with the inferiority of the non-European colonized bodies through popular entertainments. According to Frantz Fanon, the body of the colonized has

been defined by “thousand details, anecdotes, stories” written by white men (Fanon 1967, 111). The authors of *Barbaric Others* contend that the Greek, Roman, medieval classical traditions, and Judeo-Christian religious thought that provided the foundation for the European myth that perceived life beyond Europe, the New World, is uncivilized, savage, and barbaric (Davies, Nandy, and Sardar 1993, 33). Like botanical and zoological specimens, Victorian scientists re-defined colonized people into hierarchical systems of classification (Maxwell 2000, 2). Since non-Europeans were considered savage and wild, they were placed in an inferior position in the hierarchy while the Europeans occupied the highest position. Europeans juxtaposed themselves with the so-called wildness of the colonized people through public exhibits such as Colonial Exhibitions, World Fairs, Zoological Gardens, and Human Zoos. In these spaces, colonized people were exhibited along with wild animals. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that the inventor of the modern animal zoo Carl Hagenbeck is also an organizer of human zoos.

Europeans displayed the colonized body imagining it to be the missing link between animals and civilized Europeans. Exhibits of colonized bodies were ill-informed by European mythical narratives such as the Hottentots that relate colonized bodies to animals. According to the myth, the creatures called Hottentots were neither animals nor humans, and therefore were categorized as the intermediate race between animals and humans (Boetsch and Blanchard, 2008). A twenty-year-old South African slave girl baptized as Saartjie Baartman was brought to London in 1810 and was derogatively called “Hottentot Venus.” She became a curious object because her body structure was strange to Europeans – hersteatopygia (an accumulation of fat

around the hips and buttocks) and her macronymphia (usually large labia) (Boetsch and Blanchard 2008), and exhibited as a live object in several European museums including the Natural History Museum in Paris. Many European scientists measured and “studied” her body parts and compared them with different kinds of apes. After studying the body of Baartman, scientists billed her body as the “missing link” (Boetsch and Blanchard 2008, 62) between apes and Europeans. Hence, Europeans imagined Baartman’s body to be the missing link between apes and contemporary Europeans. As art historian and anthropologist Christopher B. Steiner observes, when Europeans encountered non-westerns, they “reduced them to a metaphor of otherness that served only to confirm European expectations of the exotic rather than to challenge those assumptions” (1995, 203). Therefore, Europeans dehumanized the colonized people by displaying them as another kind of animal. Through this process, European exhibition organizers reduced Sri Lankans to wild creatures that associated with wild animals.

3.1.2 Animals and *Ves* Dancers in Pre-colonial Rituals

Although *ves* dancers occasionally enact animals in rituals like *Kohomba kankariya* and *Valiyak mangallaya*, they had not performed with real animals before British colonialism. As I discussed in Chapter 2, when the Prince of Wales visited Kandy in 1875, the British and the Kandyan aristocrats choreographed special *perahera* where they made both *ves* dancers and elephants perform for the Prince. In the Kandyan region there were performers other than *ves* dancers like *nayyadi* dancers who performed in *peraheras* alongside elephants and performers who were

disguised and performed as dogs in *Sokari* folk drama (Sarachchandra 1966).

Performers used masks to disguise themselves as dogs.

Ves dancers performed dramatic enactments in rituals. In rituals, *ves* dancers, ritual priests (*yakdessas*), occasionally performed dramatic acts representing various characters. However, *ves* dancers do not use costumes or make-up. They only use dialogues and bodily expressions (*vacika* and *angika abhinaya*)¹⁰³ (Dissanayake 1990, 10) to express their character and move the narrative forward. The principal dramatic element in Kandyan rituals is imitation (Dissanayake 1990, 46) of characters through the dancer's body. As Mudiyanse Dissanayake observes, in Kandyan rituals there are two types of imitation, one is just imitations that are meant to entertain the audience and the other is ritualistic imitation used to bless the people. (1990, 48).

Ves dancers enacted animals that were part of the narrative of the ritual. During the ritual act called *ura yakkama* (ritual of the boar), the leading *ves* dancers (*mul yakdessas*) embody gestures that resemble a wild boar. There is another dance named *avenduma*, which is performed as an offering dance to local deities (Sedaraman 1979, 178), consisting of four segments called *vattamas*. During the fourth *vattama*,¹⁰⁴ the *ves* dancer enacts a boar using hand gestures (Dissanayake 1988, 141). On both these occasions, the enactment of the boar is related to the main narrative of the ritual and both of them should be considered ritualistic imitations. Therefore, until the colonial exhibitions, *ves* dancers did not embody or enact animals for entertainment purposes.

¹⁰³ Dissanayake uses the term *abhinaya*.

¹⁰⁴ This *vattama* is called *donga ronjin gajin gajigata vattama*.

3.1.3 *Vannamas*

Vannamas are a set of oral singing repertoire believed to have been composed in the eighteenth century in the Kandyan Kingdom. The lyrics were written for each meter and specific musical tune. In the pre-colonial period the purpose of the *vannama* was to praise the kings and royal dignitaries (Sannasgala 1964, 295). In 1908, in his essay titled “Kandyan Music” in *the Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* (Bandar 1908), Mahawalatenne Bandar, a descendent of Kandyan aristocrats, published the lyrics of the *vannamas* used in the Kandyan region. This was the first instance that the lyrics of *vannamas* were published. The lyrics and the description that Bandar provides suggest that even in 1908 the *vannamas* were about Kandyan kings, their victories over Europeans including the British, and the love relationships between Kings and Queens. However, the emphasis of the content of the *vannamas* changed during the British colonial period.

During the early twentieth century, the *vannamas* that praised the Kandyan kings were streamlined, and the *vannamas* that describe animals came to the lime light.¹⁰⁵ Although the number of *vannamas* was eighteen in theory, Bandar shows that there were at least thirty *vannamas* in practice (1908). However, since the early twentieth century the repertoire became fixed with eighteen *vannamas*. Unlike in Kandyan times, these eighteen *vannamas* were inspired by animals, myths, religion

¹⁰⁵ This change of the emphasis of content of *vannamas*, reflects the change of Sinhala consciousness during the British colonial period. This is a topic for a future research.

and folklore. The lyrics provided by native scholar S.L.B. Kapukotuwa (1934) reveal that, at least by 1934, thirteen out of eighteen *vannamas* describe a particular animal or the character of an animal. For example, the lyrics of the *Hanuma vannama* that praised the Kandyan kings' victorious war over Europeans¹⁰⁶(Bandar 1908, 137) have been replaced by a description of a monkey (Kapukotuwa 1934, 16). Not only the content but also the delivery of the *vannamas* was changed during the British era.

Although the *vannama* repertoire was originally written for singing, later dancers began to use the songs of *vannamas* as accompaniments for their dance. *Vannamas* were originally sung for entertainment (Donaldson 2001b) in the music-dance hall (*Kavikara Maduwa*) attached to the Kandyan Court (Sannasgala 1964). The repertoire was composed only for singing (Kulatillake 1982a). However, *vannamas* began to develop as a dance after the British intervention (Donaldson 2001b, 324) in the Kandyan dance. Even if the dancers performed to the recitation of *vannamas* before the British, they should have been *naiyadi*, *udekki* or *panteru* dancers who performed for entertainment. *Ves* dancers (*yakdessas*), ritual priests, who only performed in rituals, began to perform *vannamas* during the British period. Based on his field research between 1968-70, H.L. Seneviratne states that in *Valiyak mangallaya*, *ves* dancers recited *naiyadi vannama* (1978, 103) (recitation of cobra). Based on his field work in the 1980s, Mudiyanse Dissanayake claims that there is no recitation of cobra in *Valiyak mangallaya* and Seneviratne misinterpreted ritual of cobra (*naya yakkama*) as recitation of cobra (*naiyadi vannama*) (2000, 19). It is possible that *ves* dancers performed recitation of cobra in *Valiyak mangallaya* in the

¹⁰⁶ Portuguese

1960s and dropped it by 1980s. However, I contend that even if *ves* dancers performed recitation of cobra (*naiyadi vannama*) in the 1960s, they added it to *Valiyak mangallaya* after the British colonization. During the colonial time, *ves* dancers not only began to dance to *vannama* recitations, but also literally embodied and enacted some of the animals that were being described.

3.2 The Novelty of the Hagenbecks' Exhibitions of Ceylon

Carl Hagenbeck was a German animal trader, trainer and showman (Poignant 2004, 115). He was primarily a successful entrepreneur of colonial exhibitions who have transported and displayed various exotic animals and people in Europe and the US. Scholars who studied colonial exhibition and human zoos have written about Carl Hagenbeck's exhibitions extensively (Fischer-Lichte 1997; Ames 2008; Blanchard 2008; Blanchard et al. 2011). However, when we examine Sri Lankan performers' experience in colonial exhibitions, we need to consider the involvement of all three Hagenbeck brothers – Carl Hagenbeck, John Hagenbeck, and Gustav Hagenbeck (1869-1947) (the Hagenbecks hereafter). Although, they portrayed Sri Lankans under various labels,¹⁰⁷ the most popular title was *Ceylon Exhibition*. To include all the exhibitions which featured Sri Lankans, I use the term Exhibitions of Ceylon, in this chapter. In this section, I discuss the novelty of the Hagenbecks Exhibitions of Ceylon, and how they displayed humans and animals together.

¹⁰⁷ *Cingalese Exhibition, Ceylon Exhibition, Sinhalese Caravan, Ceylon Caravan, Ceylon Expedition, Carl Hagenbeck's Indien, Malabaren-Truppe, Les Cynghalaise de l'Exposition, Ceylon-Dorf, Ceylon Village and Indian Arena, VölkerschauIndien, Singhalesen, Indienschau, Village da Ceylan, Village Hindou, Singhalesen-Dorf, "Süd-Indien"-Schau, IndischeVölkerschau.*

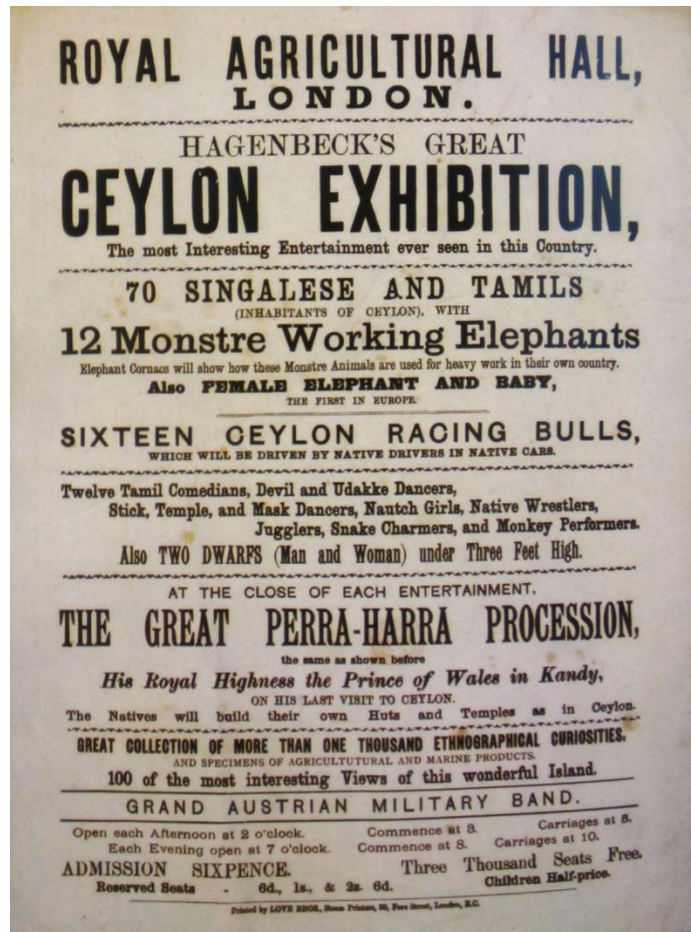


Fig. 3.2: A poster of *Hagenbeck's Great Ceylon Exhibition* in London in 1886 (Saparamadu 2011, 6).

According to Erika Fishcher-Lichte, “Ceylon-Caravan” was the most spectacular event ever shown in a European colonial exhibition (1997, 76). In 1883, the first Ceylon exhibition was premiered in Paris and then exhibited in the Zoological Garden in Berlin, “where it drew more than 90,000 visitors in a single day” (Ames 2008, 84). Between 1884 and 1886 the Hagenbecks produced “at least four more exhibitions” on Ceylon (*ibid*). To meet the demand, John Hagenbeck, who lived in Sri Lanka as a planter and trader, assembled a group of performers in 1885. As he himself states, “aside from dancers I also engaged for our European tour a large number of elephant drivers, magicians, contortionists, snake-charmers, and other

characteristic figures of Indian folk life, as well as women with their children” (quoted in Ames, 2008, 43). In 1886, the Hagenbecks proceeded to London with the *Ceylon Exhibition*.

In 1886, lower caste *ves* dancers, upper class *udekki* dancers,¹⁰⁸ low country mask dancers along with elephants, snakes, bulls, and monkeys reached London. The exhibition was given wide publicity in Britain. One poster announced that the British were about to see, “the most interesting entertainment ever seen” in the country through the Hagenbecks’ *Ceylon Exhibition*. According to the poster, Hagenbeck presented “70 Sinhalese and Tamils (inhabitants of Ceylon), with 12 Monstre [*sic*] working elephants...also [a] female elephant and baby, the first in Europe, sixteen Ceylon racing bulls” (Fig. 3.2). The poster further describes the performers as “Tamil comedians, devil and *Udakke*¹⁰⁹ dancers, stick, temple, and mask dancers, Nautch girls, native wrestlers, jugglers, snake charmers, and monkey performers. Also, two dwarfs (man and woman) under three feet high” (Fig. 3.2). One of the main catch phrases in the London poster was the Great Perahera Procession, “the same as shown before His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales in Kandy, on his last visit to Ceylon” (Fig. 3.2). There is no doubt that the attractive captions captured the attention of British audiences. Hagenbeck strategically marketed his *Ceylon Exhibition* to a

¹⁰⁸ One could argue that although *udekki* dancers are originally from upper castes, dancers who performed in Hagenbecks are lower caste dancers. However, *udekki* playing techniques, dance techniques, and tricks (*ath maru*, *geta*) are still only performed by performers from certain upper caste Kandyan families. Images of the Hagenbecks’ exhibitions suggest that *udekki* dancers were brought to exhibition were skillful performers. Therefore, I contend that Hagenbecks transported upper class *udekki* dancers to their colonial exhibitions.

¹⁰⁹ Original spellings.

London audience that had already been fascinated by the images and descriptions in *ILN* and *The Graphic* of the Prince's encounter with *ves* dancers, and elephants.

The Hagenbecks added novelty to the exhibition of the colonized. According to Nigel Rothfels, a historian of animals and culture, Hagenbeck introduced novelty to the way animals and people were displayed in exhibitions (2008, 86). Although colonial exhibitions were presented as scientific when they were billed as ethnographic displays, as historian of German culture Eric Ames argues, Carl Hagenbeck “turn[ed] to fiction” and “over time, a dramatic shift in emphasis took place in the practice of ethnographic exhibitions: from a seemingly positivistic mode of representation to a blatantly performative one, in which participants enact fictional roles that are literally assigned to them” (Ames 2008, 15). Ganesha Vidane, the granddaughter of Epi who was brought to Europe by the Hagenbecks, witnessed the fictional performances that Sri Lankans were assigned not only by Carl, but also by the other Hagenbeck brothers. In an interview, Vidane states that the Hagenbecks had pre-scripted roles and categories for Sri Lankans to perform, and whoever goes to perform with the Hagenbecks had to fit into those roles and categories (Soysa, 2017). The Hagenbecks knew what animals and what kinds of performances they wanted to display through their exhibitions of Ceylon to entertain European audiences.



Fig. 3.3: Tamil female dancer featured in the Hagenbecks' Ceylon tea poster in *Indien Exhibition*, Berlin in 1898 (Saparamadu 2011).

The Hagenbecks displayed a fictitious Sri Lankan village life. Although the performers had their own performance skills, they were specially trained to entertain white audiences. Vidane, in her interview, talks about how Sri Lankans had to act to satisfy the colonial gaze. She claims that “people had to act normal, as if they were at home just living in this village. The surroundings were always fake and the things they were doing had nothing to do with their real lives” (Soysa 2017). Vidane firmly asserts that the exhibition of Ceylon basically “was a show to fool the white men into believing that wild tribes lived a certain way” (Soysa, 2017). The Hagenbecks trained Sri Lankan performers to fool white people. Vidane’s testimony clearly suggests that

the exhibition of Ceylon was just a performance far from the real life of the performers and presented a fictitious Ceylon.

As entrepreneurs, the Hagenbecks used the Ceylon Exhibition for various trades. Apart from exhibition tickets, they profited from other types of commercial activities around the exhibitions. They sold their own brand of tea named Hagenbeck's Ceylon Tea¹¹⁰ (Ciarlo, 2011, 88). Since John Hagenbeck owned tea plantations in Sri Lanka, the Hagenbecks exported and promoted their tea at the exhibitions. They used the image of Sri Lankan Tamil female dancers (Fig. 3.3) to advertise their tea. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Tamil people were brought from India to Sri Lanka as laborers for the tea plantations. Therefore, I contend that the Hagenbecks used the image of the Tamil female dancer to represent the plantation workers and also to exoticize their tea for the European market. Apart from tea, the Hagenbecks also sold animals, especially elephants, to other show businessmen such as P.T. Barnum. They also produced picture postcards featuring Sri Lankan performers and animals and sold them at the exhibitions.

To entertain his audiences, the Hagenbecks used comic acts at their exhibitions as if they were clown shows. As one who interviewed Sri Lankan dancers who performed in the Hagenbecks' exhibitions, De Zoete states that while Kandyan dancers were rehearsing in Hamburg for the Hagenbecks, "one of them lost his cloth for a moment, [and] it produced such a prodigious applause that the losing had to become a regular part of the programme" (1957, 65). This shows how the

¹¹⁰ Their exact brand name was Hagenbeck's Ceylon Tee.

Hagenbecks used Sri Lankan dancers to make the European audience laugh as at theatrical clowns.

They included freakish entertainments in the exhibitions of Ceylon.

Nineteenth century and early twentieth century European audiences were attracted to freak shows. As sociologist Robert Bogdan observes, freak shows were carefully studied, choreographed stage productions which sometimes were fictions (2011, 57). Therefore, the freak show was a site where many curiosities can be incorporated and staged. In Hagenbecks' *Ceylon Exhibition* held at the Royal Agricultural Hall in London in 1886, the poster mentioned of "two dwarfs under three feet high" (Fig. 3.2). Exhibiting these kinds of so-called abnormal figures was an essential part of freak shows. In the Franco-British Exhibition in 1908 the Hagenbecks exhibited two dwarfs (Fig. 3.4) as part of the "Ceylon Village and Indian Arena."



Fig. 3.4: Hagenbecks' Sri Lankans at *Franco-British Exhibition* in 1908 (Radauer 2017).

The Hagenbecks displayed humans and animals in a novel way in their exhibitions. How did the Hagenbecks display colonized people with wild animals? Surprised by the Hagenbecks' display of Sri Lankan dancers alongside the animals, De Zoete describes Kandyan dancers in colonial exhibitions as "one of the strangest episodes in the history of dance" (1963, 130). It is not surprising that a British dance critic who was attracted to Kandyan dance with an Orientalist desire for treasure hunting couldn't comprehend animal-people displays in colonial exhibitions, which according to Adorno, were "products of nineteenth-century colonial imperialism" (2005, 116). The entanglement of animals and humans was not an accident, but linked to the race theory (Sivasundaram, 2015, 159) What De Zoete did not realize was that, regardless of the aesthetic qualities of Kandyan dancers, the Europeans schematized them as another kind of wild animal inferior to the Europeans, which the Hagenbecks displayed in their exhibitions.

They staged humans and animals in a novel way. As performance studies scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett asserts, there were two options for exhibiting live ethnographic specimens – the zoological and the theatrical (1998, 42). However, Carl Hagenbeck merged these two approaches when he staged the wildness (*ibid*) of non-Europeans. Therefore, the Hagenbecks created a new space in their exhibitions, in which the distance between the live specimens and spectators was blurry. Analyzing the Hagenbecks' use of space, Ames observes that the boundaries between the physical performance spaces and spectators became blurry in the Sinhalese village (2008, 86). For example, Sri Lankan people and animals were exhibited in constructed "habitats" such as the Sinhalese Village (*Singhalesen-Dorf*). People and

animals were not caged. They were allowed to move freely within the space. However, according to sociologist and critical theorist Theodor Adorno, in terms of the freedom of the live specimens, the new spatial arrangements of the Hagenbecks' zoological displays still deny freedom and only keep the boundaries invisible by introducing "trenches instead of cages" (Adorno 2005, 115). Even though there were no cages, both Sri Lankan animals and performers were controlled and manipulated in a novel way.

Both Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) and Ames (2008) extensively discuss the Hagenbecks' use of space in colonial exhibitions. However, it is also important to understand how the Hagenbecks choreographed colonized bodies in their exhibitions for the entertainment of colonial audiences. Choreographing animal-human performances marks one of the important aspects of the Hagenbecks' exhibition of Ceylon. In the next section, I examine how they choreographed Sri Lankan people and animals in their exhibitions. I focus on the positioning and manipulating of colonized bodies – colonial choreography – in the Hagenbecks' exhibitions of Ceylon.

3.3 Choreographing Intimacy between Sri Lankan Animals and People

The Hagenbecks choreographed Sri Lankan people alongside animals emphasizing the intimate behavior between animals and people. Influenced by myths, the Europeans schematized the life beyond Europe as uncivilized and savage (Davies, Nandy and Sardar 1993, 33). Therefore, before the European colonial gaze, both Sri

Lankan wild animals and human dancers belonged to one category –that of wild creatures. This is why the Hagenbecks billed Kandyan dancers as “Wild Men of Ceylon” (De Zoete 1957, 65) and choreographed them as specimens that are uncivilized and close to animals. However, the way the Europeans portrayed Baartman as Hottentot Venus to show the so-called missing link is different from the way the Hagenbecks choreographed Sri Lankans. When Baartman was exhibited, her body was the curious object but when Sri Lankans were exhibited, I contend that it was not primarily the body but the intimate behavior between animal and people that was objectified.

The British narratives of Sri Lankans highlighted the close relationship between animals and natives. British stories about the South Asian animal-human relationship are common. Sujit Sivasundaram observes that British writers, sometimes based on Christian missionaries’ diaries, created wolf-child stories, tales of boys that were raised by wolves (Sivasundaram 2015, 164–65). Sivasundaram further asserts that wolf-child stories influenced writer Rudyard Kipling to create the character Mowgli in his collection of short stories *The Jungle Book* (1894) (*ibid*). In his book, Nobel literature prize winning writer Kipling used the anthropomorphism of wild animals and blurred the corporeal differences between the colonized people and wild animals in South Asia. The Europeans and Americans considered Kipling a certain authority on the experience of the colony, as he was born and lived in India in the late nineteenth century. Later, stories from *The Jungle Book* were made into popular cinema. Although Kipling tries to narrate moral stories, the anthropomorphic

qualities he imposed on wild animals such as wolves and elephants established a narrative of intimacy between wild animals and South Asians.



Fig. 3.5: “Companions” a monkey and a man, in *Picturesque Ceylon*, plate 36 (Cave 1893, 1:68).

Sri Lanka was also portrayed as a site where animals and humans were companions. The relationship between animals and Sri Lankans was disseminated through photographs as early as 1893. Henry W. Cave, a member of the Royal Asiatic Society, published an image of a Sri Lankan holding a monkey (Fig. 3.5) in his book *Picturesque Ceylon* (1893). The title he gave to the image was “Companions” (Cave 1893, 1:68). However, not only the British narratives but also the native ones might also have convinced the Europeans to associate Sri Lankans with wild animals. For example, the original myth that the Sinhala people were descendants of a lion might

have supported the British narratives about the animal-people relationship. While Kipling and Cave portrayed the animal-human relationship in words and pictures, the Hagenbecks did it with bodies through choreography.

The Hagenbecks choreographed Sri Lankan performers as behaving wild. As in a theatrical performance, they choreographed Sri Lankans to portray a certain narrative, idea, a feeling about the wildness of Ceylon. As someone who grew up in European circuses, Vidane reminds us that in the Hagenbecks' exhibitions when Sri Lankans "were not performing, they could wear 'normal' clothes, but during the performances they had to behave 'wild.' That's what they got paid for, after all. Even my granddad had to act like [a] Veddah¹¹¹ for certain shows even though he was not one" (quoted in Soysa 2017). As discussed in Chapter 2, the British portrayed Veddas as a tribe "who occupy so low a scale in the place of civilization" (*The Ceylon Times*, 1875), and were displayed to please the Prince of Wales's curious eye. As the Hagenbecks used the Prince's connection with exotic Sri Lanka in his publicity for the Ceylon Exhibition, they choreographed Vedda performances to show the wild men of Ceylon. For that choreography, it did not matter that Vidane's grandfather Epi was an elephant keeper and not a real Vedda. Out of non-Veddas, the Hagenbecks choreographed Veddas that embody the "Veddaness," which represents wildness.

The Hagenbecks choreographed Sri Lankans as another kind of animal. As Nandy claims, "the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal" (1983, 29–30). De

¹¹¹ Same as Vedda, so-called aboriginals of Sri Lanka.

Zoete asserts that, according to one of her native informants, Hagenbeck transported Kandyan dancers “as another kind of wild animal” for his zoo along with other animals such as elephants (1957, 89). Sometimes, Sri Lankan performers’ condition at the exhibitions was not very different from those of the animals they performed with. Sri Lankan dancers were left to suffer in the cold European winter weather (De Zoete ,1963, 130). Some performers died because the poor conditions in the circus made them fall ill¹¹² (Soysa, 2017).

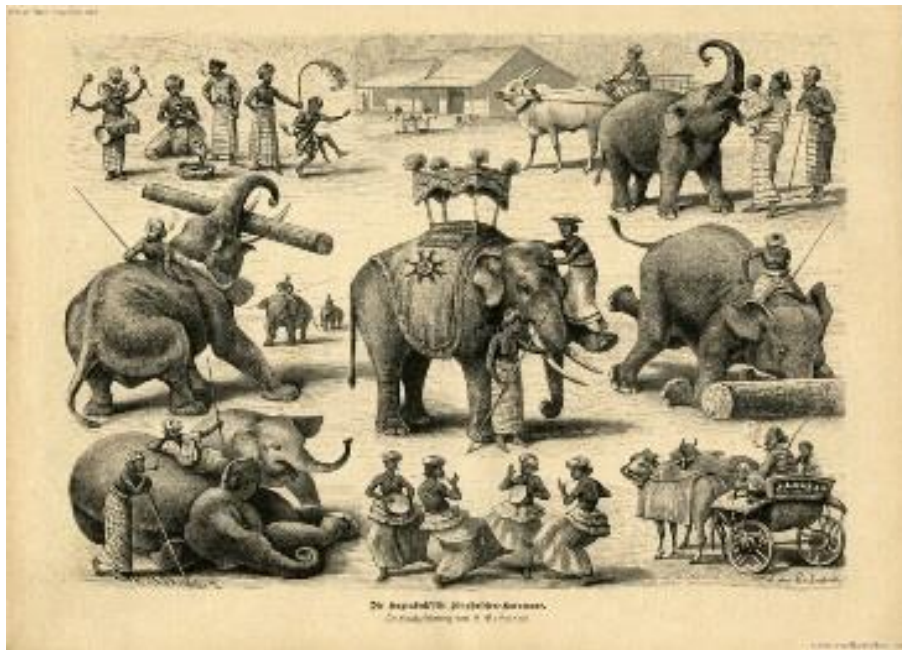


Fig. 3.6: Intimacy between animals and Sri Lankans. An illustration from *Hagenbeck's Sinhalese Caravan*, Germany in 1885 (Radauer 2017).

Exhibitions of Ceylon were choreographed to create a sensation about animal and humans. As mentioned earlier, the Hagenbecks theatricalized what Kipling did with literature (Fig. 3.6). Reflecting on the great Cingalese exhibition of 1884, one of

¹¹² However, as Vidane witnessed, performers like Epi who were very important to the exhibitions were taken care of when they were sick (Soysa 2017).

his largest exhibitions, Carl Hagenbeck himself asserts that “sixty-seven person[s] with twenty-five elephants and a multitude of cattle of various breeds caused a great sensation in Europe. I travelled about with this show all over Germany and Austria, and made a very good thing out of it” (Hagenbeck, Elliot, and Thacker 1911, 29–30). As his poster of the London exhibition in 1886 shows, Hagenbeck displayed “working elephants, also [a] female elephant and baby” (Fig. 3.2). He imposed anthropomorphism on elephants to create a sensational narrative for European audiences. I contend that the description of elephants symbolically communicates that, like people, the male elephant works while the mother elephant takes care of the baby.

Although they were billed as wild animals and wild men, both Sri Lankan animals and dancers were choreographed as domesticated specimens. As discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, the British saw so-called devil dancers and elephants as a threat to Christianity and to the symbolic power of their authority. However, in exhibitions of Ceylon, elephants were no longer a threat to European authority. They had already been domesticated by elephant keepers like Epi, which gives a certain symbolic power to Sri Lankan elephant keepers. However, manipulating and exhibiting Sri Lankans with elephants as companions in colonial exhibitions provided greater symbolic superiority to the European colonizers. As theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte observes, colonial exhibitions established an “irreversible relationship between superior spectator (observer) and inferior, objectified performer (the objects of observation)” (Fischer-Lichte 1997, 230). Therefore, encountering domesticated elephants and domesticated “wild men” in the same exhibition space was a unique

symbolic triumph for European colonial audiences. However, not all the Sri Lankan dancers silently accepted the colonial corporeality that they were given as wild men. J.E. Sedaraman, a Kandyan dancer who was brought to the Hagenbecks' exhibition, filed a lawsuit against Hagenbeck because he had billed Sinhalese as "wild men" (De Zoete 1957, 152).

3.4 Animal Choreography

As noted in Chapter 2, the Kandyan aristocrats choreographed elephants to salute the Prince of Wales. Although it was animal choreography, it was not until the Hagenbecks' exhibition of Ceylon that Sri Lankan animal performances became widely popular among colonial audiences. There is also another major difference between Kandyan aristocrats' animal choreography and Hagenbecks' animal choreography. The latter not only choreographed real animals but also people as animals for colonial audiences. Therefore, the term "animal choreography" to describe Hagenbecks' exhibitions includes both real animals that were choreographed and Sri Lankans who were choreographed as animals.

3.4.1 Monkey Choreography

In the Hagenbecks' exhibition poster of "monkey performers" (Fig. 3.2) that portrayed performances of real monkeys (Fig. 3.7), it is more likely that "monkey performers" meant people performing as monkeys. An illustration of the Hagenbecks' Sinhalese Caravan performed in Germany in 1884 shows that there was a person who danced next to a real snake (Fig. 3.8). Is this Hagenbeck' monkey performer? Behind

the performer, there is a person carrying what looks like the branch of a tree. If this is the monkey performer, it is probable that the branch was used to remind the audience of the relationship between monkeys and trees. However, the costume of the dancer is a reminder of snakes.



Fig. 3.7: “Monkey performer,” a detailed view of an illustration from *Hagenbeck’s Sinhalese Caravan*, Germany, 1885 (Radauer 2017).



Fig. 3.8: “Monkey performer,” a detailed view (Fig. 3.6) of the illustration in *Hagenbeck’s Sinhalese Caravan*, Germany in 1884 (Radauer 2017).

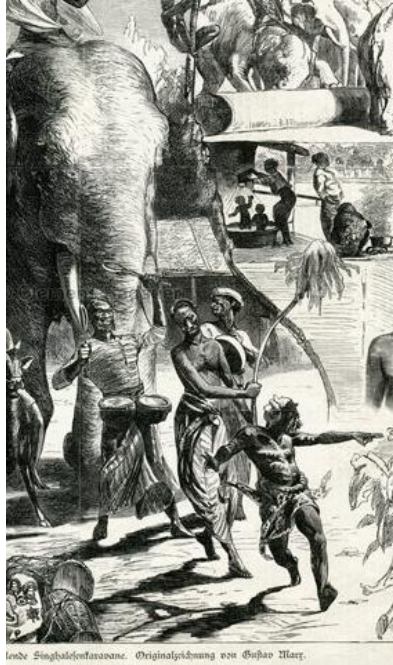


Fig. 3.9: “Monkey performer,” a detailed view of an illustration from *Hagenbeck’s Sinhalese Caravan*, Germany in 1884 (Radauer 2017).

A similar kind of animal choreography can be seen in another poster of the same exhibition, the Sinhalese Caravan in 1884 (Fig. 3.9). Here instead of a snake, the performer is depicted in front of an elephant. As in the earlier image, there is a person carrying what looks like the branch of a tree. The costume of the dancer resembles snakes. However, the dancer’s body is painted, and he is wearing a headdress with horns. These bizarre images of dancers raise the question: what did the Hagenbecks try to display through this choreography?

I contend that through monkey choreography, the Hagenbecks depicted the wildness and the “devilness” of the colonized. Art historian Hope B. Werness, in his *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in World Art* (2006), asserts that

in “the early Christian Physiologus,¹¹³ the monkey represents the ‘very person of the devil’” (Werness 2006, 282). Christian imagery of the devil also consist of horns (Werness 2006, 197). Furthermore, in the Old Testament the snake symbolized negativity (Werness 2006, 381). Therefore, all the features that the Hagenbecks choreographed in monkey performers represent the Christian notion of the devil. The monkey represented not only wildness as a wild animal but also “devilness.”

3.4.2 Elephant-Human Choreography

The European attitudes towards elephants impacted on how they choreographed elephants and Sri Lankans in colonial exhibitions. It seems that the British had an ambiguous relationship with elephants. On the one hand, they were fascinated by the physically strongest animal on earth. On the other hand, the British saw the elephant as a threat to their symbolic colonial power (Roberts 1994, 152). In Mughal paintings elephants appeared to celebrate the power of the emperors of India (Sivasundaram 2005, 30). Thus, the elephant’s power also symbolizes the power of South Asians and elephants in warfare. The potential military power of the elephants troubled the Europeans, especially because South Asians successfully used elephants in warfare. Therefore, torturing and hunting elephants became an adventurous sport for the British colonizers throughout South Asia. They suppressed the power of elephants by killing or domesticating them.

Killing elephants was considered a token of pride by the British royal family. In Sri Lanka elephant hunting expeditions and elephant kraals were organized as an

¹¹³ A didactic Christian text.

event of honor for distinguished royal and other colonial guests (Raheem and Colin-Thomé 2000, 54–55). After killing the elephant, the royal princes took the tail of the elephant to England as a token (quoted in Matharage 2006, 164). In 1875, when the Prince of Wales was returning after an elephant hunt with the elephant tail, his horse cart fell over a bridge. According to a Sinhala newspaper *Lakrivikirana*, after the prince got up the question he asked was “*charli mage valgaya ko?*” (Charlie, where is my tail?¹¹⁴) (quoted in Matharage 2006, 165–66). This shows that the elephant’s body has a certain agency of exhibition of power. The prince was worried about the elephant tail because by exhibiting it, he also exhibits his power.

The other way the British suppressed the power of elephants is by domesticating them. For the purpose of war and processions pre-colonial Sri Lankans tamed wild elephants by trapping them, a system known today as “elephant kraal.” The British used the pre-colonial elephant capturing technique (Raheem and Colin-Thomé 2000, 57) and used it as a sport. By domesticating elephants, the British symbolically suppressed the military power of the elephants. In Sri Lanka, the male elephants separated from their herd pose a threat to villages and crops. As Sivasundaram states, the British domesticated wild elephants and “by taking ferocious elephants into captivity, Britons presented themselves as protectors of crops and local settlements” (2005, 40). Domestication of elephants had reached a high point by the 1930s. Quoting a visitor, the Colonial Report on Ceylon in 1937 reports “the most domesticated animal to be the elephant” in Sri Lanka¹¹⁵ (Colonial Reports -

¹¹⁴ My translation.

¹¹⁵ The report does not provide factual evidence. It was rather presented from a point of view of a visitor.

Annual (Year 1937): Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of Ceylon, 1939, 3).

Whether the elephant was killed or domesticated, both marked a symbolic triumph for the colonizers. Thus, when the domesticated elephants were displayed for European audiences, the elephant also became an exhibit of imperial power. When the Europeans exhibited domesticated elephants and colonized people's bodies together, it placed the Europeans in a hierarchically upper position.

Queen Elizabeth's father, Prince Albert Frederick Arthur George, visited Sri Lanka in 1925. To entertain the royal visitor elephant keeper Epi Vidane performed a spectacular trick: the elephant "lifted and carried Epi around while his head was in the elephant's mouth" (Anver 2015). The Hagenbecks did not miss Epi's extraordinary talent and his intimate relationship with his elephant (Fig. 3.1). As the Hagenbecks appropriated the *perahera* performed for the Prince of Wales that also included elephants, they used Epi and his elephant who performed for Prince George in their exhibitions. The Hagenbecks shipped Epi and his elephant to their Zoological Garden in Germany in a boat (Anver 2015). Although the Hagenbecks were not the first choreographers, they popularized the elephant-human choreography of Epi through various circuses in Europe and the US.

Between 1928-1930, Epi was in the US performing for the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus (Anver 2015). However, his granddaughter noticed that Epi did not like the US experience. As Vidane states, "that was a time of racial segregation in America. He felt very uncomfortable there. In Europe he was a star, the exotic elephant man, and was treated with respect. In America, he was just a non-

white-male worker” (quoted in Anver 2015). Therefore, he decided to return to Germany. To pay his way out of the contract, Epi had to sell his elephant that travelled with him from Sri Lanka to Europe, and finally to the US (Anver 2015). As journalist Gazala Anver states, “unfortunately, his elephant did not perform the head trick with the new owner. The result was that the new owner’s head was crushed and the elephant was shot” (Anver 2015).

3.5 Embodying Animal Characteristics in *Vannamas*

Sri Lankan dancers responded to their colonial corporeality creatively. The genre that scholars have conceptualized as “human zoo” is not enough to understand the Sri Lankan dancers’ experience in the Hagenbecks’ exhibitions of Ceylon. “Human zoo” is one of the lenses through which one can study human-animal exhibits in colonial exhibitions. Scholars justify their use of the term “human zoo” as it captures the West’s arrogant abuse and animalization of colonized people (Blanchard et al. 2011). It is true that Sri Lankan performers were abused and animalized in Hagenbecks’ exhibitions. However, I contend that understanding the colonized performers’ experience through the lens of the “human zoo” victimizes the colonized and silences the creative ways in which they engaged with their experience.

By the early twentieth century the embodiment of animal characteristics in *vannamas* became popular among *ves* dancers, who were originally ritual priests. According to Reed, it is “clear that by the mid-1930s dancers had already begun to incorporate some innovations into the *vannamas*” (2010, 114). De Zoete in the mid-1930s witnessed that *ves* dancers embodied animals such as elephants, snakes and

monkeys in *vannamas* (1957). De Zoete mentions a paper advertisement in Sri Lanka that promised the appearance of a real cobra “on the stage during the cobra *wannama*”¹¹⁶ (1957, 30), which is the *Naiyadi vannama*. Although De Zoete says that performance never happened and it “may only have been a newspaper man’s foolish joke” (*ibid*), it shows the early twentieth century discourse about novelty in *vannamas*. According to anthropologist Marianne Nürnberger arm-movements that indicate the elephant were introduced by the Chitrasena School of Dance (1998, 81–82) which was established in the 1940s. However, De Zoete observed that *ves* dancers used arm-movements to depict elephant even in the 1930s. According to De Zoete, *ves* dancers performed “certain snake-like movements...with the hands; also an elephant-step, with trunk movements” (1957, 26) in *vannamas*. This shows how *ves* dancers embodied animal characteristics and movements in *vannamas* such as *Gajaga* (recital of the elephant), *Naiyadi* (recital of the snake), and *Hanuma* (recital of the monkey). By the twentieth century, *Gajaga* had become the most popular *vannama* (Reed 2010, 87) that embodied elephant characteristics. What inspired the *ves* dancers to choreograph *vannamas* that embody characteristics of animals?

Following De Zoete's train of thought, one can conclude that dancers who performed *vannamas* inspired the colonial exhibition organizers to display Sri Lankans alongside the animals. Based on her experience in the mid-1930s, De Zoete speculates that some of the names of *vannamas* that describe animals may have inspired the Hagenbecks to exhibit them in circuses and exploit their “supposed ‘wildness’ ” (1963, 130). However, the European colonizers’ characterization of

¹¹⁶ De Zoete spells *vannama* as *wannama*.

colonized people's "wildness" is not unique to Sri Lankan dancers. Terms such as "wildness" and "wild men" were freely used to describe colonized Asians, Africans, and Australians in colonial exhibitions (Maxwell 2000; Blanchard 2008; Blanchard et al. 2011). Thus, it is unlikely that the names of the *vannamas* inspired the Hagenbecks to display *ves* dancers in circuses alongside animals because European exhibitions organizers had already perceived colonized people as wild men and their so-called wildness. As I argue, it is not the Sri Lankan dancers who inspired the exhibition organizers but the dancers' experience in colonial exhibitions that inspired them to create new choreographies. Therefore, I contend that dancers' intimate experience with animals inspired *ves* dancers to choreograph *vannamas* that embodied animal characteristics.

There is a parallel between the animals that were featured in Sri Lanka in colonial exhibitions and the animals that were embodied in the *vannamas*. As discussed above, the Hagenbecks tapped into the European fascination for experiencing exotic animals and colonized people through spectacles. This explains why the Hagenbecks transported, among other animals, elephants, snakes and monkeys and displayed them alongside Sri Lankan performers. Europeans were fascinated with those animals and also amused by how Sri Lankan associated with those animals (Hagenbeck, Elliot, and Thacker 1911). Intriguingly, the dancers embodied the characters of the same animals that were brought to the colonial exhibitions. For example it can be inferred from De Zoete's descriptions that by the early twentieth century the most popular *vannamas* included the *Gajaga vannama* (recital of the elephant), *Naiyadi vannama* (recital of the snake), and the *Hanuma*

vannama (recital of the monkey) (De Zoete 1957). These are the same *vannamas* that *ves* dancers embodied. However, this does not mean that the dancers only embodied elephants, snakes, and monkeys in their dance. *Ves* dancers also embodied animals such as the horse and hare (De Zoete 1957, 26). However, there is a strong parallel between the popularity of elephants, snakes and monkeys in Hagenbecks' exhibitions and the popularity of *panamas* that embodied the characteristics of the same animals, especially in the early twentieth century. As I argue, this parallel is not a coincidence. What can one learn from this parallel? How does this parallel happen?

Sri Lankan dancers who were brought to the Hagenbecks' colonial exhibitions experimented with their dance movement vocabulary. In his review of the Ceylon Census of 1911, E. B. Denham observes that "the numerous exhibitions at which Ceylon has been represented, Ceylon tea shops and travelling troupes of Ceylon dancers and jugglers in Europe have given many Sinhalese an opportunity of seeing the world" (1912, 277). By attending colonial exhibitions, the *ves* dancers were exposed to the performances of many different cultures and theatrical expressions. Particularly, as De Zoete speculates, *ves* dancers learned "what Europeans expect of a wild Sinhalese" when they traveled to Europe (1957, 102). The dancers understood the colonial taste for the "wildness," wild animals, and the intimacy between wild animals and people. Based on that knowledge, *ves* dancers choreographed animal characteristics into the *vannamas*. It is possible that *ves* dancers also used hand gestures from ritual dance acts like in *avenduma* in their new choreographies.

The same dancers who were brought to the Hagenbecks' exhibitions of Ceylon began to embody animal characteristics in the *vannamas*. When it comes to

the embodiment of animal characteristics in *vannamas*, the first set of *ves* dancers appearing in the records are Nittawela Gunaya, Ukkuwa, Lapaya, and Heenbaba (De Zoete 1957). All these four dancers have been regular participants of the Hagenbecks' exhibition of Ceylon (*ibid*). Therefore, it is safe to assume that these are the first set of *ves* dancers who embodied and popularized animal characteristics in the *vannamas* they performed. Colonial displays of Sri Lankans along with wild animals inspired *ves* dancers to embody animals in their *vannama* dances. While negotiating with colonial corporeality that the colonial exhibition organizers wanted to impose on them, Sri Lankan *ves* dancers created new corporeal expressions through the *vannamas*.

Some of the *vannamas* like *Gajaga*, the recital of the elephant, were well suited for *ves* dancers whose dance is grounded and steady. The groundedness which is a quality of the dance of rituals like *kankariya* gave *ves* dancers a unique character when they performed *vannamas* such as *Gajaga*. The dance of the *yakdessas* (*ves* dancers) was grounded and they had a strong connection with the ground.¹¹⁷ Their training emphasizes holding their weight on their legs for a long time. Therefore, when *ves* dancers perform the *Gajaga vannama*, their groundedness perfectly embodies the characteristics of the sacred giant elephant described in the *vannama*. The slow and steady rhythm of movement that *ves* dancers bring to the *Gajaga vannama* depicts sacredness, groundedness, and pride.

¹¹⁷ Perhaps, as these dancers were originally rice farmers, their groundedness might have been influenced by their rice farming practices. This requires more research.

Where does the *ves* dancer get the embodiment of pride in the *Gajaga vannama*? In the post-colonial dance scene, when *ves* dancers perform the *Gajaga vannama* they embody pride. This is an extension of the pride embodied in the *Gajaga vannama* since the early twentieth century. According to De Zoete's observations, *ves* dancers embodied "proud trunk movements" (1957, 100) in the early twentieth century. In the present day, some audiences go on to describe this proudness as arrogance.¹¹⁸ As mentioned at the beginning, it is this proudness that our dance teacher instructed us to embody as if we were elephants. However, during colonial times, what caused the *ves* dancers to embody pride? Did it come through the embodiment of the strength and power of the elephant? Or did it come from the masculinity of the movements¹¹⁹ and ritual authority that the *yakdessas* had in the *Kohomba kankariya* and *Valiyak mangallaya*? If so, when *ves* dancers performed the *Gajaga vannama* in front of colonial audiences, did it provide a symbolic authority to the colonized?¹²⁰ These are questions for a future study.

Although the colonizers tried to confine Sri Lankan dancers into a certain corporeal framework, the *ves* dancers pushed those boundaries of colonial corporeality through their dance expressions in the *Gajaga vannama*. It is difficult to decide whether the *ves* dancers claimed a symbolic authority. However, even if they couldn't claim an authority by embodying the elephant, I argue that they challenged

¹¹⁸ I have heard this several times, and I was also told that I look arrogant when I perform the *Gajaga vannama*.

¹¹⁹ Reed observes the masculinity and pride in the movements of *yakdessas* in *Kohomba kankariya* (Reed 2010, 35)

¹²⁰ Even if it gives an agency, one could argue that the dancer still embodies the elephant for the colonial consumption. One could also argue that embodying the elephant is a way of self-exoticizing.

their given colonial corporeality as “wild men” and demonstrated that they were creative choreographers and dancers who gave themselves a certain agency.

3.6 Conclusion

Europeans re-defined and displayed the superiority of the Europeans by juxtaposing them with the inferiority of the non-European colonized bodies through popular entertainments. Thus, the Europeans displayed the colonized body imagining it to be the missing link between animals and civilized Europeans. The Hagenbeck brothers exploited the European fascination for exotic animals and people. They introduced a novelty to the exhibition of the colonized. They displayed fictitious Sri Lankan village life in their exhibitions of Ceylon portraying Sri Lanka as a wild, exotic place; and performers had to dress “wild” and act “wild.”

One of the main highlights of the Hagenbecks’ exhibitions of Ceylon was the intimacy between animals, particularly elephants, and people. This is supported by the British narratives about Sri Lankans that highlighted the close relationship between animals and natives. Exhibitions of Ceylon were choreographed to create a sensation about animals and humans. The way the Hagenbecks’ exploited the intimacy between animals and humans inspired *ves* dancers to choreograph *vannamas* that embodied animal characteristics.

While negotiating with colonial corporeality that the colonizer wanted to impose, through the *vannamas*, *ves* dancers choreographed new corporeal expressions. Therefore, in a way *ves* dancers pushed the boundaries of their given corporeality and asserted a certain agency as artistes, especially in Sri Lanka.

However, even though they pushed their colonial corporeality as dancers, their *vannama* choreographies did not challenge the colonial audience. In fact, *ves* dancers choreographed *vannamas* that satisfied the exotic taste of colonial audiences which made their effort a colonial choreography.

Even in the postcolonial era Sri Lankan dancers continued to perform *vannamas* that embodied animals for colonial audiences. In the postcolonial dance scene, the intimacy between animals and dancers emerges as self-exotic choreographies by native artistes, which were promoted by tourism. In the postcolonial era, there is no obvious colonizer who controls the Sri Lankan dancer's corporeality. However, the dance repertoires that are being performed for tourists still contain dances that embody animals. Since most of the twentieth and twenty first century Sri Lankan tourist dance performances target mainly Euro-American tourists, it appears that Sri Lankan dancers perform *vannamas* for Euro-Americans who are fascinated by exotic dancers that embody animals. The colonial fascination for Sri Lanka as a wild, exotic site is depicted in Hollywood movies like *Elephant Walk* (1954) set in Sri Lanka featuring both *ves* dancers and wild elephants.

Chapter 4: Colonial Choreography for the Camera: Encounter between the Kandyan Dancer and the White Man Behind the Camera

In 2001, while I was following a dancing class in Colombo, our dance teacher asked me and two of my friends¹²¹ whether we would like to be photographed in dance costumes and have our photographs printed in a calendar for the year 2002. Growing up as young dancers in Sri Lanka, we loved the big wall calendars with dancers. Our dancing teachers filled the walls of our dancing classes with old calendars with pictures of dancers. They were role models for us. I had personally collected two such calendars of dance Guru Wilabadage and Channa Wijewardena. Recalling the popularity of the dancers who had appeared in previous calendars, as a young dancer I felt it was an honor to appear in a calendar. Therefore, even without knowing who was going to produce the calendar, I agreed. Moreover, the remuneration promised was attractive.

The photo shooting day arrived. Three dancers including me gathered at the outdoor stage which was an elevated cement platform under a big banyan tree at Sudarshi Cultural Institute in Colombo. The photographer, a Sri Lankan, and his assistant arrived with a set of camera equipment. We did not know him. The photographer selected that location because he didn't have to pay for the location as it was considered a site for cultural activities.¹²² He also said that we should not

¹²¹ I don't mention their names to protect their privacy.

¹²² Sudarshi rents studios and space for private classes and events. Our dance class was also held in Sudarshi; therefore, the Sudarshi authority knew us. They might have thought that the photographer was taking pictures for a class event, and not for a commercial event.

mention the real purpose of the photo shoot to the Sudarshi authorities.¹²³ The photographer wanted us to be dressed in three costumes. I wore the Kandyan *ves* dance costume, one of my friends a drummer's costume, and the other a low country "devil dance" costume with the mask of *gara raksha* (*gara* daemon). After assembling his camera equipment, the photographer instructed us "*dance poses tikak denna balanna*" (adopt some dance poses). I thought that he was going to photograph the Kandyan dancers and the low country dancer separately. I was wearing the *ves* costume, which belongs to the Kandyan dance tradition of the central hills of Sri Lanka. The drummer's costume and drum also belong to the Kandyan tradition. However, the costume and the mask of the "devil dancer" belong to the low country dance tradition. Therefore, the proper way to present the dancers was to photograph the *ves* dancer and the drummer with the Kandyan drum and the low country mask dancer separately. However, the photographer flocked all three of us together to photograph us. At the time, I thought he just wanted to show Sri Lankan dancers in his calendar but later I realized that he choreographed us to compose a particular image that he had in his mind. For that image an accurate depiction of the tradition did not matter. Although he was a Sri Lankan, he was also influenced by the colonial photographers and film makers who did not differentiate between Kandyan dancers and low country dancers, and therefore portrayed both dancers as "devil dancers."

As the photographer asked us to give some dance poses, I held the pose I like best: I bent my right knee pointing to the right while balancing my whole body on my

¹²³ I later realized that, if Sudarshi authority had known that he photographed us for a calendar, they would have charged him.

half-bent left leg. My left hand was half-bent and directed towards left, and my right hand was curved right in front of my chest. I turned my face towards my left as I was looking over my left hand. The dancer with the low country mask and dance costume posed to my left. The drummer was next to him on the far left pretending to play the *geta beraya*, the drum predominantly played in Kandyan dances. This pose completely distorted the accurate depiction of dancers and instead gave the impression that *geta beraya* is played for low country mask dancers. The photographer went to his camera, looked through it and said, “We have to change the *ves* dancer’s pose.” He came to us and asked me whether I could stand straight and pose. I adopted a blessing pose keeping both hands together right in front of my chest. The photographer went back to his camera and said that I was covering my costume. Therefore, he advised me to pose in a way that I did not cover the *ves tattuwā* (the headdress), *avulharaya* (chest piece), and *bubulu patiya* and *ina hedaya* (the decorated waist ornaments). I opened my chest wide and raised my right hand above my head so as to display my whole costume. The photographer also asked the devil dancer whether he could kneel so as not to cover my costume. My friend tried out a few poses while he was kneeling. The photographer didn’t like them. My friend tried another pose. Still the photographer didn’t like it. By the time my friend found a pose that pleased the photographer, my right hand, the one I had raised, was aching. I didn’t feel quite right about my dance pose; I felt my body was in a stiff military pose; I felt awkward. Although I wanted to be photographed, I did not like my encounter with the photographer. Later, I realized that what he wanted was not a dance movement, but a still body in a dance costume. Although the costumes were

designed for dancing, the photographer wanted to just display costumes using dancing bodies as vehicles. However, at last, the photographer was satisfied and took several pictures. He promised to come to our class on Saturday the following week and meet our teacher, show our photos, and pay for our labor.

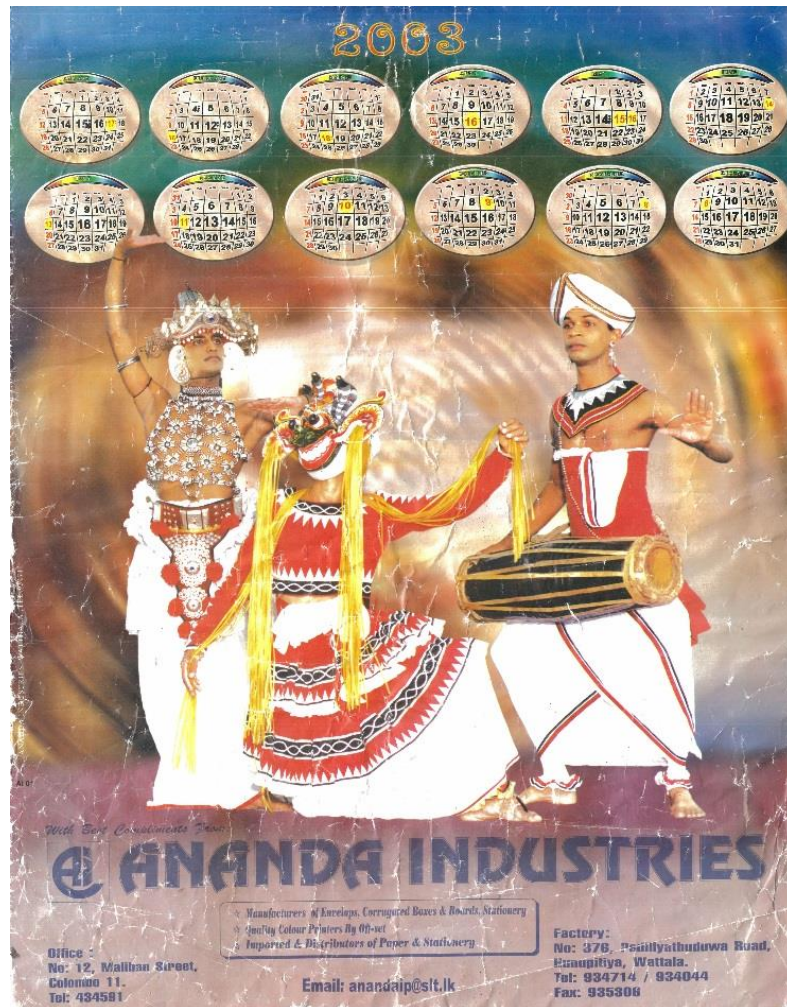


Fig. 4.1: The author in a ves dancer's costume in a calendar 2003, Sri Lanka

On Saturday, we waited for the photographer in the class. He did not come. Our dancing teacher tried to call the number on his business card. The call did not go through as the phone had been switched off. After that, we were never able to contact him, see him or see our photos. We were all upset. Our teacher tried to give us some

money from his own pocket. But we declined his kind offer. We didn't think it was his fault. After all, it was not mostly about money. Two years later, I received a call from my friend who told me that he found a calendar (Fig. 4.1) with two dancers and a drummer, and the Kandyan dancer was me.

4.1 Introduction

Now, when I see the calendar with my photograph and think about my experience, I gain some insight into the relationship between the person behind the camera and the dancers who were being choreographed, exploited, and objectified. I project that insight into the past to examine the encounters between the colonizers behind the camera and Sri Lankan dancers during the British colonial period, which I discuss in this chapter. In my experience, how photographers take advantage of dancers by paying little or nothing seems a common occurrence. Although compensation is important, I am not going to talk about dancers' fees here. Rather than focusing on the financial value of the dancer's labor, in this chapter, I study how the dancer's body, his dance movements, and dance costumes were manipulated and captured on colonial photographs and films –the photographs and films that were produced during the British colonial period for colonial audiences.

Using Andre Lepecki's notion of choreography where he articulates it as a mechanism that disciplines, captures, and archives bodies¹²⁴ (Lepecki 2007), I argue that colonial photographers and filmmakers executed choreographic instructions to manipulate the dancer's body in their camera frames. However, the dancers' bodies

¹²⁴ I discuss this in detail in the introduction and later in this chapter.

archived in photos and films also carry traces of resistance. Contrary to the view that colonized people were silent subjects in their encounters with the colonial masters, I see Sri Lankan dancers assert their agency through their movements and expressions, although they were unnoticed or ignored by the white person behind the camera. Communications scholar Anne Maxwell claims that colonial images capture the tensions of the colonized bodies and their frozen responses for the colonizers who put them in front of the camera (2000, 47). A similar observation was made by Raheem and Colin-Thomé in their book *Images of British Ceylon: Nineteenth Century Photography of Sri Lanka*, which claims that when the colonizers captured the colonized bodies “one must assume that there were awkward moments and tensions generated on some occasions” (2000, 49). Therefore, looking for these tensions and awkward moments is my point of departure in this chapter, and I do so by particularly examining the British commercial photographer Joseph Lawton’s photograph of “religious dancers at the Bo tree ceremonies” (1870/71) and “devil dancers of Kandy” section of *Charming Ceylon* (1930),¹²⁵ a travel film produced by white American filmmaker James A. FitzPatrick. I contend that the awkward movements of dancers in the photo of “religious dancers at the Bo tree ceremonies” and the film *Charming Ceylon* express traces of the choreographic instructions of their authors Lawton and FitzPatrick. Through these contradictory and awkward moments, the dancers mocked the person behind the camera where they return the gaze to the colonizer and to their audience to reclaim the accurate depiction of the dancers.

¹²⁵ Although YouTube links and some online sources mentioned that it was produced in 1931, it was released in the United States in November 1930 (Bradley 2009, 457).

4.1.1 Joseph Lawton and James A. FitzPatrick

The British photographer Joseph Lawton was active in Sri Lanka between 1866 and 1872. He set up a studio at Castel Hill Street, Kandy, in 1866. Lawton is most regarded for taking photographs of ruins commissioned by the Committee on Ancient Architecture in Ceylon in 1870-71 (R. K. De Silva 1998, 20). According to the Victoria and Albert Museum description, Lawton composed “a unique series of aesthetically powerful images” of Anuradhapura, Mihintale, Polonnaruwa and Sigiriya (“Victoria and Albert Museum Photograph Summary” 2017). While his photographs of ruins facilitated “antiquarian scholarship,” he was a commercial success as a seller of photographs of "picturesque views of ancient ruins overgrown with creepers and gnarled trees" that appealed to tourists and overseas buyers (“Victoria and Albert Museum Photograph Summary” 2017). This shows that Lawton was catering to the market for exotic visuals, and as a commercial photographer he knew what could be sold to buyers overseas. Writing about colonial photography in India, historian David Prochaska characterizes the notion of “picturesque” as an eighteenth-century aesthetic concept that originated in England and transplanted in India (Prochaska 2008, 249). Not only in India, but also in Sri Lanka, photography aroused public curiosity and photographers were ever ready to exploit its financial rewards (Raheem and Colin-Thomé 2000, 48). Lawton’s success in exoticizing the natives of Sri Lanka is recognized in *ILN*’s decision to publish his work in 1870. During Prince Alfred’s (Duke of Edinburgh) visit to Sri Lanka, Lawton took photographs and two of them were engraved in *ILN*. The two images titled “High-

caste ladies of Kandy” and “Kandyan chiefs”¹²⁶ were published in *ILN* on July 9, 1870 under the title of “The Natives of Ceylon” (*Illustrated London News* 1870b).

According to *ILN*, these photographs were taken at the Kandy levee of the Duke on April 30. He also captured two dancers at “Bo tree ceremonies” in the ancient city of Anuradhapura.

American film producer, writer and narrator James A. FitzPatrick was trained in dramatic art, worked as a journalist, (“James A. FitzPatrick” n.d.) and became well-known as a travel film producer. His travel films were distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) and screened at thousands of theatres across the US (J. Geiger 2011, 62). During the 1930s and 40s FitzPatrick’s films were widely distributed as filler material to be shown in theatres (O’Brien 2002, 62). Therefore, through his travel films, FitzPatrick made a tremendous impact on American and British audiences at a time that lacked travelogues about “distant” places. An award-winning Broadway musical writer Thomas Meehan claims that by the 1970s there was “an entire generation of Americans around the age of 40 whose ideas about travel and the look of foreign countries were unconsciously formed by watching FitzPatrick’s travelogues” (Meehan 1971). These films were made for international audiences (Aitken and Ingham 2014, 21). As film scholar Harvey O’Brien observes, in the case of Ireland, FitzPatrick’s travel films made a tremendous impact on Irish tourism and also on how the Irish people themselves promoted their country among outsiders (2002, 73). FitzPatrick’s films presented a stereotypical image about distant places. A romantic portrayal of the place was more important to FitzPatrick than

¹²⁶ Kandyan aristocrats were called Kandyan chiefs during the British colonial time.

accuracy. He has essentialized certain iconic images and clichés of happiness in rural places to deliver emotional comfort to American audiences (O'Brien 2002, 66). These included places untouched by industrialization, the simple and happy life of peasants, agriculture without machinery, and pre-modern forms of labor. These interpretations of distant places came with an authoritative voice.

FitzPatrick's travel films exoticized "distant" places through an imperialist arrogant tone that depicted a one-sided image. As a filmmaker, FitzPatrick looked at other places and cultures from his American perspective. Therefore, he interpreted other places by imposing American impressions of them (J. Geiger 2011, 62). The voice of the natives was totally suppressed in these travel films. This suppression accompanied the British colonial and/or US imperial power to capture and interpret colonized people. As film scholar Jeffrey Geiger observes, FitzPatrick's films on the Pacific islands, *Fiji and Samoa* (1933) "served as an advertisement for joint British and US imperial control in the Pacific (2011, 62). FitzPatrick's film naturalized the superiority of English-speaking civilizations and therefore their ownership of the territories. Although he did not claim territory, in his film *Charming Ceylon* he literally demonized Sri Lankan dancers in order to exoticize them.

Although there were many differences between Lawton and FitzPatrick, their portrayal of Sri Lankan dancers follows the method of exoticizing natives. A collection of Lawton's photographs of ancient ruins of Sri Lanka is stored in the British Library. When I was carefully turning the fragile pages with photos of ancient ruins, I found a photo of two dancers captured in 1870/71 (Fig. 4.4). Why did Lawton capture dancers among the ruins? At first, this could be seen as something out of

place. However, two dancers among the ruins of ancient cities is not an accident. I contend that the effect of capturing ancient ruins and capturing native dancers in photographs both come under one colonial project of recording and reconstructing the ancient wisdom of the Orient that started in the mid nineteenth century. Sixty years after Lawton captured his photo, FitzPatrick featured “devil dancers of Kandy” in his travel documentary *Charming Ceylon* in 1930. Although he does not pronounce it as oriental, he too framed the dancers within the colonial parameters of the primitive and exotic. Capturing and manipulating dancers became possible for both Lawton and FitzPatrick due to a combination of technologies that should be understood within the context of colonialism.

4.1.2 Technologies of Capture

Sri Lankan dancers were captured through both camera and choreography. Manipulating and capturing bodies in photographs and films was possible due to the apparatus called “camera.” The term “apparatus,” as articulated in critical theory, is the mechanism that an authority uses to organize something the way it wants in order to control it. For example, the police department is an apparatus of the government. In his lectures at the Collège de France (1978-1979), published as *The Birth of Biopolitics* (Foucault 2008), French philosopher Michel Foucault observes a particular style of government that he identifies as panopticism (Foucault 2008, 67). According to Foucault, panopticism is a type of government that regulates populations through the application of political power on all aspects human life by allowing them to be supervised (67). Panopticism is an apparatus that allows

supervising the behavior of individuals. Institutions like schools, prisons, and factories use this apparatus to manipulate people's bodies to fulfill the objectives of the institution concerned.

Based on the Foucauldian idea of "apparatus of government," Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben argues that the apparatus "must always imply a process of subjectification, that is to say, they must produce their subject" (Agamben 2009, 11). Taking Agamben as the point of departure, art critic and scholar Kate Steinmann considers the camera as an apparatus that subjectifies the body it captures (Steinmann 2011). The camera produces its subject by capturing it. Therefore, when a dancer is being captured through a camera, he becomes the subject. This line of thought is followed in the works of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

Deleuze and Guattari also discuss the power of the apparatus in their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987). They demonstrate how authorities subjectify laboring bodies through the "apparatus of capture" such as "war machines" (437). Thus, for Deleuze and Guattari, "apparatus" is not necessarily a physical tool like the camera. It can also be a conceptual tool such as a "war machine" that has the capacity to capture people to fulfill the course of the war. "War machine" is a mechanism used by the authority to capture and manipulate people.

Based on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of apparatus of capture, Lepecki articulates "choreography as apparatus of capture," where he considers manipulation and capturing bodies as choreography (Lepecki 2007). For Lepecki, choreography is an apparatus that subjectifies dancers. Drawing on Steinmann's and Lepecki's ideas, I

consider both the colonizer's camera and colonial choreography apparatuses of capture. Sri Lankan dancers were captured at two levels. On one level, dancers' bodies were captured through the colonizer's camera. On the other level, within those photos and films, dancers were captured in the choreography directed by colonial photographers and filmmakers. For example, when FitzPatrick captured the "devil dancers of Kandy," he not only captured them through his video camera but also through the technology that Lepecki defines as "choreography." They are biopolitical mechanisms that manipulated and captured the colonized Sri Lankan dancers. The dancers' bodies were captured in complex ways especially when the person behind the camera operated in an unequal colonial power structure.

Camera technology made it easy for colonizers to capture and represent the images of the colonized. Between the 1870s and 1920s photography achieved major technical advances and spread rapidly around the world (Webb 1995, 177). This created a belief in the European visual representation of the non-Europeans as an accurate depiction of the truth (177). This technical illusion of image making applied to the images of Sri Lankans during the British colonial period. In their book *Images of British Ceylon: Nineteenth Century Photography of Sri Lanka*, Raheem and Colin-Thomé observe that outsiders started to accept photography as an ideal medium for accurate documentation of Sri Lanka mainly because of its apparent reality and precision (2000, 48). Colonial photographers and film makers exploited the technical ability of the camera to the fullest and distributed their work among curious audiences worldwide. It was not only the technology that supported the photographer's and film

maker's adventures in Sri Lanka. They were also backed by the ideologies that essentialized Sri Lankan dancers vis à vis their colonial counterpart.

4.1.3 Representation of Colonized Bodies through Camera

It is my contention that the visual representation of colonized bodies of Sri Lankans should be understood against the backdrop of Orientalism that alienated the colonized. A critique of Orientalist representation of images will contextualize how and why photographers and filmmakers choreographically directed the Sri Lankan dancer to appear certain ways in their photos and films. In his edited volume titled *Colonialism and Culture*, Dirks observes that colonial technologies created new categories and oppositions between colonizer and colonized, European and Asian, modern and traditional (Dirks 1992, 3). Although he does not use the word camera technology, the colonial technology in his description is very much in line with colonial photography and films. The visual representation of the Orient was conceived as an outside distant place in need of being saved from colonialism. In his influential essay "Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order," political theorist and historian Timothy Mitchell claims that the Orient "appears as an essentialized realm originally outside and untouched by the West, lacking the meaning and order that only colonialism can bring" (Mitchell 1992, 313). Although Sri Lanka too was presented as "untouched by the West" (*ibid*), the reactions and bodily expressions of the dancers recorded in photographs and films disrupt that Orientalist narrative as I argue later in this chapter.

The visual representation of the Orient was not necessarily an accurate depiction of those cultures considered Oriental. Algerian literary critic Malek Alloula articulates the colonial representation of the Orient through aesthetic terms when he states that colonial images are “at once their [colonizers] poetry and their glory captured for the ages; it is also their pseudo knowledge of the colony” (Alloula 1986, 4). Therefore, for Alloula, meanings about the Orient are an aesthetic endeavor which is not necessarily based on the real lives of the colonized people. This explains why photographers and film makers become choreographers manipulating the dancers in their works. However, the abstract Oriental imagination alone could not convince image makers (photographers and filmmakers) to choreograph their dancers. I contend that it was more the financial gains behind the exotic images that made them active in the field than just capturing images for aesthetic reasons.

In order to make profit, colonial commercial photographers and filmmakers turned their cameras towards bodies that colonial audiences conceived as exotic. Sri Lanka was imagined as a strange exotic Island. As Wickramasinghe observes, in Sri Lanka “natives were photographed as exotic subjects and their images adorned books which described the strange lands outside Europe” (2003, 98). Nineteenth century colonial ethnographic curiosity created the market for image makers who exoticized colonial subjects. According to Raheem and Colin-Thomé, ethnographic curiosity for the material culture of remote and exotic people provided photographers a lucrative global market that they exploited to the fullest (2000, 46). Photographers such as J. Lawton, W.H. Skeen, Charles T. Scowen, A.W.A. Platé established photographic companies in Sri Lanka in late nineteenth century and captured and printed a wide

variety of exotic images for postcards, book covers, newspapers and magazines. As they established their business identity through Sri Lankan images, they had to produce unique exotic features of the natives of Sri Lanka.

4.2 Capturing Costumed Ornamented Sri Lankan Male Bodies

One of the unique features of colonial representation of Sri Lankan natives is its emphasis on costumed and ornamented male bodies. It is important to grasp the image value of costumed and ornamented male bodies as exotic bodies to understand why image makers delivered choreographic directions to dancers by positioning their bodies, costuming, and make-up. However, the colonial camera not only captured costumed bodies. We also find subjects without costumes or ornaments among the late nineteenth and early twentieth century photographs of Sri Lanka. As historian Robert Aldrich noted, the extraordinary and seductive in life overseas was portrayed through half-naked “photographs of ‘primitive’ people, such as the Veddahs of Ceylon and of seductive women, particularly bare-breasted women of the Rodiya caste” (2014, 99). However, naked bodies of the colonized were ubiquitous in colonial films and photographs. Malek Alloula provides a good example of this in his book *The Colonial Harem* (1986). Therefore, it was not unique to Sri Lanka. What is unique about the portrayal of Sri Lankans, particularly men, is the emphasis on their costumes and ornaments. As Raheem and Colin-Thome observe, colonial photographers were attracted by Sri Lanka’s fascinating costumes and “weird rituals” (2000, 46). The images of dancers fit in perfectly with this attraction. The photographs portray people performing “weird rituals” in fascinating costumes. This

explains why Lawton captured “religious dancers at the Bo tree ceremonies” among his photos of the ruins of ancient cities. However, one question is still open: why didn’t the colonizers capture female bodies in costumes?

As I discussed in chapter one, female public appearance in performances and spectacles was ubiquitous in the pre-colonial Kandyan region. Therefore, it is hard to assume that Sinhala culture prevented females being photographed. Victorian morals redefined and marginalized the Sri Lankan female dancing body (see chapter 1). It is possible that it is this Victorian marginalization of female dancers that resulted in the paucity of female dancing bodies in photographs.

Sri Lankan female dancing bodies in costumes did not attract colonial heterosexual male audiences and white male photographers. This does not mean that Sri Lankan females were not subjects of colonial photography. However, rather than costumed bodies, female bodies without costumes attracted the white male gaze. All the early commercial photographers of Sri Lanka were males who supplied materials for colonial audiences that were dominated by the heterosexual male gaze. Therefore, it was mainly the bare-breasted Rodiya women who attracted photographers.

However, it seems like the British men in general didn’t think that Sri Lankan women were attractive. Except for the Rodiya women, Sri Lankan female bodies in the late nineteenth century not only did not win the attraction of the European male, but also disappointed heterosexual white male expectations. The British colonel in *La Feerie Cinghalaise* provides a general view of how the British male saw Sri Lankan women when he states “strange country...everything is nice, except the women. At twenty, they are finished” (quoted in Wickramasinghe 2014, 72). This statement

shows how the British heterosexual male gaze objectified the Sri Lankan woman's body and perceived it as unattractive after age twenty. Priya Srinivasan observed a similar male response to Indian female dancers when they performed in New York in 1881 (2012). As I describe in chapter one, according to Srinivasan, Indian female dancers did not fulfill the imaginary oriental female dancer that white men had in their minds (2012, 55–57). Using Srinivasan's example, we can assume that Sri Lankan female dancers also did not attract colonial male audiences which included white cameramen.¹²⁷ Therefore, costumed female dancing bodies were not archived as photographs. In contrast, male costumed bodies attracted the white photographer.

Among the colonial photos, the costumed and ornamented male bodies of Kandyan aristocrats who inherited pre-colonial fashions received the attention of colonial audiences. According to pre-colonial Kandyan customs, lower caste people were not allowed to wear ornaments and were only allowed to wear dresses to cover the bottom part of the body. Therefore, only the aristocrats' costumes and ornaments attracted the colonial photographers. The images and descriptions of Kandyan aristocrats' dress and ornaments (Fig. 4.2) published in *ILN* on July 9, 1870 show the exoticization of Sri Lankan costumed bodies (*Illustrated London News* 1870b). In its report, *ILN* describes the costumes of Kandyan chiefs as "remarkably ungraceful" and particularly states that "these Kandy people adhere to their ancient fashions, unlike the inhabitants of Colombo and other seacoast places" (*Illustrated London News*, 1870). Since Lawton took this photo, it is highly possible that *ILN* used Lawton's

¹²⁷ However, there are other reasons why female dancers were not prevalent in Sri Lanka around the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century which I discuss in chapter 1.

description with his photographs, particularly about Kandyan people's adherence to their ancient costumes and ornaments. Even if they are not Lawton's words, we can assume that he knew the costumes of Kandyan chiefs' would have a great market in Britain because Sri Lankan commercial photographers benefited from the ethnographic curiosity of the Europe of the 1860s and 1870s (Raheem and Colin-Thomé 2000, 46-48). Therefore, it is not a coincidence that Lawton who captured costumed Kandyan chiefs is the same photographer who captured two costumed dancers at "Bo tree ceremonies" in the ancient city of Anuradhapura.



Fig. 4.2: Kandyan chiefs, ILN July 9th, 1870. An engraving based on Joseph Lawton's photograph.

It was not only colonial photographers who were attracted to costumed and ornamented male bodies. Costumed male dancing bodies particularly received the attention of colonial filmmakers. For example, in the early twentieth century film *The Song of Ceylon* (1934), the British director Basil Wright allocates significant screen time to show Kandyan dancers and particularly the *ves* dance costume. The film has

four sections and ends with a climatic rhythm given to the fourth section. The fourth section is titled “The Apparel of a God” and this is where he elaborates on the Kandyan dancer’s costume. He captured moments when the dancers wear their ornaments and used them to support his narrative of the film. Wright describes the characteristics of the Buddha by using the Kandyan *ves* dancer’s costumes and his ornaments. However, Wright is not the first colonial film maker who portrayed Kandyan dancers’ costumes. Before Wright, FitzPatrick engaged with costumed dancers more as a choreographer. Rather than just capturing the dancers FitzPatrick manipulated them.

4.3 Manipulation of Dancers: “Religious Dancers at the Bo Tree Ceremonies”

While producing images of male dancing bodies for their market, European commercial photographers maintained colonial power in their interactions with dancers. Raheem and Colin-Thomé claim that capturing cultural differences was capital (2000, 48). One could say that photographers just captured the cultural differences when they were in the field. However, Anne Maxwell in her book *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions: Representations of the “Native” and the Making of European Identities* claims that colonial photographs produced for the mass tourist market were wedded even more firmly to the stereotype (2000, 10). Therefore, what image makers did was not just capturing cultural differences but actually contributing to the stereotypes of the exotic people using their power as the colonizer. Sometimes colonial image makers choreographed stereotypical exotic

people. This is clearly articulated by Raheem and Colin-Thomé when they state that the encounter between the camera and the subject reproduces and enhances “the relationship between the ruler and the ruled” (2000, 48). Therefore, when the Sri Lankan dancer confronted a white man behind a camera, it created a specific relationship that gave him the upper hand to manipulate dancers in their camera frames. Image makers did not just record exotic bodies but sometimes created exotic bodies in their photographs and films using their power inherited from colonialism.

Since the colonial photographers and filmmakers had a specific colonial audience in mind, they manipulated the dancers to get their desired image. In other words, to capture an image that is appealing to colonial audiences, image makers choreographed dancers. In his book *Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology In Architecture, Film, And Literature*, French literature and film scholar Panivong Norindr claims that colonizers painted a specific picture of the colony by consciously manipulating native signs (Norindr 1996, 26). Costumes and ornaments had a symbolic value particularly in pre-colonial Kandyan culture. For example, the Kandyan hat with a *mal gaha*, a tree ornament, symbolized royalty and this hat was later adopted by other Kandyan chiefs (aristocrats) (Coomaraswamy 1908, 33). While dress and ornaments were a symbol of power for Kandyan aristocrats, the dancer’s costume signified their ritual affiliations and/or their social position. As Wickramasinghe observed, “clothes are never innocent or simply functional; they ‘signify’”(2003, 2). When they captured the dancers, both Lawton and FitzPatrick manipulated them to portray an exotic costumed body to their colonial audiences. According to Mitchell, colonial visual representation of reality was “always an

exhibit set up for an observer in its midst, an observing European gaze surrounded by and yet excluded from the exhibition's careful order" (1992, 297). Mitchell articulates this exhibition's careful order as a colonial exhibitionary order. By analyzing Lawton's "religious dancers at the Bo tree ceremonies" and FitzPatrick's *Charming Ceylon*, I demonstrate that the dancers' awkward moments, tensions, and mockery disrupt the colonial exhibitionary order.

During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, when they captured Sri Lankan dancers in images, the colonial photographers arranged performers' bodies and their hands. As Robert Aldrich observes, photographers not only took natural shots but also "posed pictures, and on occasion manipulated models and accoutrements" (Aldrich 2014, 98–99). Basel Mission Archive owned a photograph of four Kandyan *ves* dancers and a drummer (Fig. 4.3). The image was produced in the 1880s by Colombo Apothecaries Company, established by W. M. Smith and James Smith in 1883 but taken over by a British photographer, Charles T. Scowen. It is possible that Scowen took this photo. Although the photographer's exact name is not available, given the history of colonial photography in Sri Lanka and the ownership of the Colombo Apothecaries Company, we can safely assume that it was taken by a white man.



Fig. 4.3: “Singhalese devil dancers,” Basel Mission Archive, produced by Colombo Apothecaries Company in 1880s. Photographer Charles T. Scowen¹²⁸

There are two awkward poses in this photo which suggest that the dancers were choreographed by the photographer. Four dancers are holding a hand gesture which is not practiced in Kandyan dance. While their left hand is straightened toward their down left, the index finger and thumb of their right hand are connected. This hand gesture resembles the gestures of low country dancers more than any of the Kandyan dance forms. These Kandyan *ves* dancers are also ritual priests and did not perform hand gestures that were strange to them. As ritual priests, *ves* dancers’ hand gestures had a ritual purpose. For example, they used hand gestures to invite sacred beings. And they also used different hand gestures to bless others. Therefore, these dancers would not pose this strange gesture unless they were instructed to do so. This

¹²⁸ It is also important to mention that because Colombo Apothecaries Company was established in 1883 and pre-owned by W. M. Smith and James Smith, there is a little doubt about the author of this photograph.

awkwardness impels me to believe that these dancers were choreographed in order to make them more appealing to colonial audiences. It is also possible that the photographer wanted the dancers not to cover the costumes which carried exotic features. Also, the photographer might have thought that these dancers should portray a gesture that suited the caption of “Singhalese devil dancers.” Moreover, the way the drummer is set up in the photo also suggests that it was choreographed by the photographer. The Kandyan drummer who plays the *geta beraya* for *ves* dancers would never sit as in the photo. In order to use the physical energy required to play this drum, the drummer needs to stand and slightly bend his knees. Therefore, the awkward sitting posture of the drummer also suggests that he was choreographed by the photographer to suit the image that he wanted. However, these four dancers and the drummer are not the first set of dancers to be choreographed awkwardly by a European photographer.

Between 1870-71, two *ves* dancers were photographed by Lawton in the ancient city of Anuradhapura and were titled “religious dancers at the Bo tree ceremonies” (Fig. 4.4). When I studied the existing photographs of Kandyan dancers, I realized that Lawton’s “religious dancers at the Bo tree ceremonies” is the first photographic evidence of Kandyan dance history. Therefore, Lawton and the two dancers appearing in the photo constitute the first encounter between colonial photographer and Kandyan dancer.

The two dancers who stood still before Lawton’s camera in 1870/71 predate all the Kandyan dancers who were made to stand still in postcards, tea promotion posters, tourist brochures, postal stamps, money notes and calendars. This image is

the earliest photographic evidence we find on Kandyan dancers. Therefore, as far as we know, these two dancers were the first two Kandyan dancers to be objectified for British colonial presentation by a (white) person behind the camera. There are two dancers standing against the ruins of the sacred Bo tree in Anuradhapura. The dancers' ornaments are very similar to the present day *ves* dance costume.¹²⁹ Since Lawton took this photograph in 1870/71 in the early stage of photography in Sri Lanka, it provides the earliest evidence of the Kandyan dancer and his costumes. However, when we study 'religious dancers at the Bo tree ceremonies' some questions arise regarding the way these dancers were photographed by Lawton. In the photo why did the dancers stand against the ruins? Why did they stand? Why did both of them keep their arms on the ruins in same manner?



Fig. 4.4: "Religious dancers at the Bo tree ceremonies," The British Library, Photographer Joseph Lawton, 1870/71 (Lawton 1870).

¹²⁹ I discuss the difference between this costume and present day *ves* costume in chapter 2.

4.3.1 Choreographing the Exotic

Lawton choreographed the dancers in a way that presents an exotic character to his audience. He had not taken a random photo to show two dancers but a choreographed image. Describing how photographers in Sri Lanka “staged” gestures and attitudes in the early twentieth century, Wickramasinghe claims that they became “masters of the pose” (2003, 99). Lawton’s images of religious dancers depict the early stage of the photographer’s mastery of poses. Here dancers were captured against a backdrop of ancient ruins to give an exotic flavor to colonial audiences. Therefore, Lawton had carefully manipulated the dancers within the setting. One also wonders since these are religious dancers whether they would voluntarily want to turn their back to the sacred Bo tree unless they were instructed to do so. The Bo tree in Anuradhapura is deeply significant and sacred for Buddhists as it is believed to be the southern branch of the historic Bo tree in India under which Prince Siddhartha attained Buddhahood. Especially *ves* dancers are associated with sacredness within the space they perform. Let’s assume that dancers wouldn’t mind turning their back to the Bo tree. Even then, there is no doubt that this visual composition came from the photographer who asked the dancers to stand against the Bo tree, so he could capture both the dancers and the ruins which have exotic value.

As Lawton wanted to show the costumes of the dancers, he made them stand in his photo. Like the photographer who mainly wanted to capture my *ves* costume, Lawton wanted to capture the *ves* costume of the two dancers. Therefore, Lawton instructed them to be still in a position that he could capture the costumes. This

stillness is a choreographed stillness. In the same way, a choreographer keeps a dancer still in a ballet pose to exhibit a certain expression, Lawton choreographed the two dancers in a still pose until he captured the image. Thus, I contend that what we see in Lawton's photo is a choreographed stillness. As Mitchell observed, colonial photographers organized and grasped the world as though it were an exhibition (1992, 296). Therefore, what we see in a colonial photograph is an organized image composed for display such as newspaper illustrations, travel postcards and posters for colonial exhibitions. The *ves* dancer has to stand in order to see some of his delicate ornaments such as *ina patiya* and *bubulu patiya*, which are waist ornaments containing silver buttons. If the dancer is seated, it wouldn't show those ornaments and detailed carvings. The *ves* costume's decorations attracted the colonial audiences who were fascinated by oriental carvings and engravings.

Lawton positioned the dancers' arms in a way that he could capture both the ornaments and engravings on the ruins. Analyzing the European photographs of Pacific people, art historian Virginia-Lee Webb argues that "some startling and obvious information often reveals that a given event was staged entirely at the suggestion of the photographer" (1995, 177). In the photo, both dancers keep their hands on the wall that shows synchronism. While the dancer on the left puts his left hand on the wall, the dancer on the right places his right hand (Fig. 4.5). This choreography does two things. On the one hand, it shows the engravings carved on the ruined stone. That carving of a human figure carrying a *pun kalasa* (the water pot of prosperity) is an important symbol in Sinhala architecture. If the dancers had their hands naturally by their sides, they would cover the *pun kalasa*. On the other hand,

when they kept their arms on the ruins, it was ideal for showing the specificity of the ornaments they wore on their hands. This pose particularly shows the *hasthakada*, the ornament that dancers wear on the back of the palm. By manipulating the dancers' arms Lawton was able to capture both the carvings on the ruins and the details of the dancers' ornaments. Therefore, this is colonial choreography for the *mise-en-scène* (arrangement of scenery) of the colonial photographer.



Fig. 4.5: Detailed view of Fig. 4: dancers' arms were positioned to capture the engravings of ruins and their ornaments.

While displaying the ornaments and their costumes and exposing the engraving on the ruins, the dancers had to be still in front of the camera because in the nineteenth century the image capturing time was slower in cameras. Therefore, until the photographer was satisfied that the *ves* dancers in Lawton's photograph kept their bodies still for longer than I did my body in front of the camera in 2001. African

American theatre historian Harvey Young writes similarly about the history of the display of black bodies in the US. Although it was in a different context, the photographer's interaction with his subject has certain similarities with the interaction between colonial photographers and Sri Lankan dancers. According to Young, since the subjects were being arrested they had to perform stillness in photographs (2010, 27). In the same way, the two men in Lawton's photograph had to perform stillness as costumed brown-bodied dancers of Sri Lanka. By keeping the dancers still, Lawton was also able to capture perfectly the ornaments *ves tattuwā* (the headdress), *avulharaya* (chest piece), and *bubulu patiya* and *ina hedaya* (the decorated ornaments of the waist) and also capture the ruins. *Silambu*, the ornament that dancers wear on their bare feet might also attracted the colonial exotic taste. Although *silambu* do not cover the feet, the way dancers wear *silambu* is similar to the way one wears shoes. Therefore, it is possible that colonial audience perceived the dancers' wearing *silambu* as an act of mimicry and enjoyed it as they wore them on bare feet. As my photographer at Sudarshi exploited my labor while I was in pain, Lawton exploited the labor of the two dancers in his photo. However, Lawton's photo not only captured the ornaments of the dancers and ruins but also captured the awkwardness through which dancers seemingly mocked the colonizer.

4.3.2 Awkward Resistance

I define "awkward resistance" as the resistance that comes out of awkwardness and as awkwardness. As described in the introduction chapter, it is the hidden resistance I focus on in this dissertation. Awkward resistance is a form of

hidden resistance. As Lawton manipulated the dancers' arms, he captured the awkwardness of their bodies in his photo. This awkwardness is a trace of choreographic direction given by the photographer. Through this awkwardness the dancers return their gaze towards the colonizer. Both dancers stand on ruined stones. The dancer on the right side of the photo is shorter than the other. And the taller dancer is standing on a stone slightly higher than the other one's stone. Therefore, when they place their arms on the wall behind them the taller dancer has the advantage of his own height and that of the stone he is standing on. While the taller dancer seems comfortable with where he placed his hand, the shorter dancer seems uncomfortable, which expresses an awkwardness in his body and face (Fig. 4.5). As Wickramasinghe claims, "if people cannot or do not speak, their bodies always do" (2003, 5). At the same time, Wickramasinghe warned that bodies also can lie (5). However, from my experience I know when a dancer was asked to pose an awkward pose, it can be expressed through the body. Therefore, I claim that, in Lawton's photo, the shorter dancer's body and face express the inconvenience of positioning his hand on the stone wall.

The contradictory facial expressions of the dancers in the photo disrupt the colonial exhibitionary order and mock the photographer and the colonial audience. The shorter dancer in Lawton's photo has to keep his right arm awkwardly, perhaps painfully, until the photographer captures his desired image. Because the shorter dancer is in an awkward, uncomfortable position, his facial expression carries pain and unpleasantness. Trying to look at the camera painfully his head bends a little to a side, eyes half-closed. In stark contrast, the taller dancer keeps his head erect, face

wide open, looks and smiles right at the camera.¹³⁰ Although Lawton's photograph and its caption pretend to suggest that this image is a representation of reality, it was actually a choreographed image. To use Timothy Mitchell's articulation, Lawton's photograph was created through a colonial exhibitionary order. Lawton placed two dancers as exhibits for the European gaze by carefully ordering the exhibitions. However, awkwardness and contradictory facial expressions of the two dancers disrupt the colonizer's exhibition's careful order.

Through that disruption of the exhibition's careful order Sri Lankan dancers mock the photographer and the audience. I speculate that intentionally or unintentionally dancers mock the colonizers in the photograph. One could argue that the dancers' exhaustion, confusion, or annoyance caused the awkwardness. However, this awkwardness reveals and exposes the wrong notions about the authenticity of exotic images. Therefore, it is a mockery directed at the audience who believe that this was how dancers posed before the camera representing their real lives. At the same time, it is a mockery of the photographer who ignores the dancer's bodily and facial expressions. If we analyze the act of wearing *silambu* and shoes through Bhabha's notion of mimicry and mockery (2004), dancers mock the colonizers who perceived wearing *silambu* as a mimicry of donning shoes.

¹³⁰ Here, I am not trying to read the minds of the dancers. However, I am reading the dancers' bodily and facial expressions.

4.4 Choreographing the “Devil Dancers of Kandy” in *Charming Ceylon*

During the 1920s and 30s, James FitzPatrick produced a series of travel documentaries titled *Travel Talks: The Voice of the Globe*. American media company Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) distributed them locally and internationally. As mentioned earlier, they were widely distributed as filler material to be shown in theatres. FitzPatrick’s audiences were mainly American. In 1930, he produced a seven-minute and forty-three-second long documentary film on Sri Lanka titled *Charming Ceylon*. As the title suggests, the producers wanted to show the charm of Sri Lanka particularly to curious colonial audiences. It seems FitzPatrick valued the appropriation of images more than he valued the accuracy of the depiction. Analyzing the travel documentary *Glimpses of Erin* (1934), O’Brien observes that Fitz Patrick omits three centuries of progress in Ireland and portrays a rural country (O’Brien 2002, 66). Such inaccuracy of information is also visible in *Charming Ceylon*. When FitzPatrick describes the European invasions of Sri Lanka, he totally omits the Portuguese invasion and only mentions the Dutch and English. This narration at the very beginning of the film gives us a clue to FitzPatrick’s authoritative yet inaccurate depiction of Sri Lanka that the audience was about to see. As I demonstrate in this section, FitzPatrick’s authoritative but insensitive directorship has created problematic and contradictory moments in the film. In *Charming Ceylon*, among other exotic themes such as “picturesque primitiveness,” “primitive methods of labor,” “elephants stop their work in the field and go down to the river to bath,” “chewing betel nuts...a common practice among the poor classes in most countries of

the Orient,” FitzPatrick allocates considerable screen time to “devil dancers of Kandy.”

In a scene in the film, where the filmmaker presents “devil dancers of Kandy” there is a drummer, four *nayyadi* dancers dressed in *nayyadi* costume,¹³¹ and two dancers with black painted bodies. FitzPatrick presents these seven performers as “devil dancers of Kandy.” His narration about the dancers goes as follows: “This dance usually starts very slowly. The rhythmic beat of the drum gradually works itself into a mad frenzy. We are told the chief inspiration of the devil dancers is [unclear] they are driving away evil spirits” (FitzPatrick 1930). The scene about “devil dancers of Kandy” starts as a long shot. The drummer is playing a *geta beraya*, which is the main drum accompanying *nayyadi* and *ves* dances. Four *nayyadi* dancers seem to be skilled *nayyadi* dancers. The other two dancers are wearing a costume that is strange to the dance forms of the Kandyan dance. Their upper body is bare. Their faces and bodies are painted in black with a few random white spots on the face and torso. They are wearing dark colored short pants. On top of the pants, they are wearing dark color string-like frills. They are carrying a bunch of leaves in their hands.

The dancers start walking and then dancing in a circle around the drummer. Two body-painted dancers start hopping and running around the drummer in a circular pattern. *Nayyadi* dancers follow their leader¹³² one after the other in a circle. Two body-painted dancers do not follow the *nayyadi* dancers but perform their own

¹³¹ *Nayyadi* dance is one of the main dance forms of Kandyan dance. These dancers wear a unique dress called *nayyadi* dress. It is very similar to the dress worn by *udekki* dancers, which is another main dance form of Kandy.

¹³² Traditionally, dancers lined up in hierarchical order based on their seniority in their dance families. Therefore, most senior dancer leads the dance sequence.

movements. At first, all six dancers move in a circle clockwise and later, one body-painted dancer starts to move anti-clockwise. Then the film edits into a medium close shot where two body-painted dancers move as if being possessed by spirits. The “devil dancers of Kandy” section of the film ends when the two body-painted dancers stop their movements. FitzPatrick’s “devil dancers of Kandy” section contains costumes and movements that are very unusual to the Kandyan dance repertoire. Who are these unusual dancers? What are these unusual costumes?

By the time FitzPatrick was producing *Charming Ceylon*, the so-called devil dancers of Kandy had become popular particularly among colonial audiences. By 1929-30, when FitzPatrick came to Sri Lanka, Kandyan dancers had gained wide recognition by performing in a variety of colonial exhibitions, circuses, and carnivals such as *Carl Hagenbeck’s Ceylon-Expedition* (1884), *International Exhibition Liverpool* (1886), *Singhalesen Kassel* (1887), *The Barnum & Bailey Greatest show on Earth* in the US (1896), *Carl Hagenbeck’s Indien* (1898), *Louisiana Purchase Exposition* in the US (1904), *Exposition Coloniale de Paris* (1906), *Hagenbeck Greater Shows* in the US (1906), *Chef Mykalowa* (1910), *Carl Hagenbecks Tierparkin Stellingen* (1911 or 1908), *VölkerschauIndien* (1911), *Carl Hagenbeck’s Ceylondorf* (1908), *München Oktoberfest – Hagenbeck’s Indien* (1911), *John Hagenbeck’s Singhalesen* (1923 or 1930), *John Hagenbeck’s “Ceylon”* (1924), *John Hagenbeck’s “Süd-Indien” -Schau* (1925?), *John Hagenbeck’s Indienschau* (1926), *John Hagenbeck – Village da Ceylan* (1926), *Village Hindou – Jardin d’Acclimatation* (1926), *Singhalesen Dorf* (1926?), *Barcelona International Exposition* (1929), and *Circus Sarrasani* (1920s). However, the dancers were billed

as “devil dancers” in most of these expositions. As discussed in chapter one, during the nineteenth and early twentieth century the colonial writers called Sri Lankan dancers Sinhalese “devil dancers”¹³³ (Davy 1821, 229; Tennent 1850, 49; Urrin 1912, 4). They used the term “devil dancers,” unilaterally imposing Christian notions of the devil on Sri Lankan dancers, although some of these dancers represented sacred indigenous deities. The name “devil dancers” continued and gained wide publicity through the colonial exhibitions and circuses. However, it seems the “devil dancer of Kandy” that FitzPatrick encountered in Sri Lanka did not meet his expectation of the “devil dancer.”

Because FitzPatrick didn’t find the “devil dancers” that satisfied his and his audience’s imagination, he had to create a scene using fictional dancers. As Maxwell observes, the colonial depiction of the Orient through visual media employed reductive tropes to impart a vivid sense of Oriental and exotic cultures trapped in distant times (2000, 10). FitzPatrick’s strategy in *Charming Ceylon* was to create a scene with fictional dancers. For a filmmaker, it would have been visually easier to portray the so-called “devil dancers” of low country as they wear masks that symbolize various malevolent spirits. However, the so-called devil dancers of Kandy did not wear masks or perform chaotic movements to convince FitzPatrick’s American audience that this dance was happening in a distant exotic place. Four *nayyadi* dancers and a drummer would not convince Fitzpatrick’s audience that they were the “devil dancers of Kandy.” Therefore, he needed something visually and theatrically convincing to match his voice over about the devil dancers which went as

¹³³ This also appears as “Sinhalese devil dancers” or “Cingalese devil dancers” in different records.

“devil dancers... are driving away evil spirits.” Since the four *nayyadi* dancers we see in *Charming Ceylon* were not devil enough to colonial audiences, FitzPatrick created two other fictional dancers using his imagination and choreographed a scene that matched his expectation which is explained through his narration. These are the two dancers we come across in *Charming Ceylon* with strange costuming and black painted bodies.



Fig. 4.6: *Nayyadi* dancers

4.4.1 Choreographing Fictional Devil Dancers

In order to portray the devil dancers of Kandy, FitzPatrick created two fictional devil dancers with costumes that placed them in the distant past. Analyzing the film *Fiji and Samoa*, film scholar Jeffrey Geiger observes that although FitzPatrick’s voice over describes the Fijian people as “threats of savagery” in the film, the images of native people seem hardly dangerous or disturbing (2011, 63). This shows that regardless of how the colonized people existed, FitzPatrick portrayed

them as savages. However, in *Charming Ceylon*, he took a conscious decision to create two fictional devil dancers to match his voice over. Kandyan dancers by the 1920s and 30s wore two sets of costumes – *Ves* (Fig. 4.3) and *Nayyadi* (Fig. 4.6). The costumes worn by two fictional dancers are not Kandyan dance costumes. Kandyan dancers also do not do paint their bodies black. Therefore, fictional dancers’ costumes and body painting were specifically created for the film scene. As gender studies scholar Esha Niyogi De observes, colonizers imposed the imperial principle of binarism such as civilized and savage through new technologies of sight (2016, 442). In the film, through two fictional devil dancers, FitzPatrick portrayed the Kandyan dancers of Sri Lanka as savages. They are either wearing hair wigs or their hair is styled in a way that shows unruly and uncombed hair (Fig. 4.7) This gives the impression that the devil dance of Kandy is practiced by an uncivilized group of people. According to postcolonial literary critic Edward Said, nineteenth century academic and imaginative demonology exaggerated “the mysterious Orient”(1978, 26). This was true of colonial Sri Lanka too. Colonial writings conveyed a stereotypical image of uncivilized Sri Lankans through devil dancers (Tennent 1850, 233). Therefore, the fictional dancers in the film fulfill the colonial stereotype about uncivilized dancers in Sri Lanka. In the film scene, the dancers’ upper bodies were left bare. One could argue that the upper bodies and the branches of trees that they carried were reminiscent of the stereotypical Veddas, who are considered the aboriginal people of Sri Lanka. However, the Veddas do not wear face or body paint as do the two dancers in the film. Also, the Vedda dance is not considered Kandyan dance and they do not perform with *nayyadi* dancers as the two characters do in the

film. As in the case of the photographer who captured me in Colombo, for FitzPatrick the accurate depiction of the dancers did not matter. What mattered was to produce a convincing image of “devil dancer.” To convince his audience that devil dances of Kandy are performed by a primitive group of people in a distant place, FitzPatrick created two “devil dancers” and choreographed them among Kandyan *nayyadi* dancers.



Fig. 4.7: Two fictional devil dancers with Kandyan *nayyadi* dancers who appeared in James FitzPatrick’s *Charming Ceylon* (1930).

Using two fictional devil dancers, FitzPatrick choreographed a chaotic dance scene and called it “devil dancers of Kandy.” According to Mitchell, the colonial interpretation of the non-Western world is marked by chaos rather than order (1992, 289). In *Charming Ceylon* FitzPatrick choreographed the dance scene as a chaotic event to go with his voice over “the rhythmic beat of drum gradually works itself into a mad frenzy. We are told the chief inspiration of the devil dancers is [unclear] they

are driving away evil spirits.” As the *nayyadi* dancers perform, the film director leads the two fictional devil dancers to hop and run among the *nayyadi* dancers to the same drum beat but in a disruptive way. The director manipulates the two fictional devil dancers to occupy the space of the *nayyadi* dancers by disrupting them. This happens when the voice over goes, “the rhythmic beat of the drum gradually works itself into a mad frenzy.” Therefore, this scene might look like a chaotic dance to colonial audiences whereas actually it is a choreographed scene.

FitzPatrick painted the faces and bodies of his two fictional devil dancers in black to make their appearance “devil” to his colonial audiences. Colonial representation depended on deliberate difference in time and displacement in space (Mitchell 1992, 297). Therefore, the filmmaker had to find a way to displace his native characters from their real time and space. FitzPatrick used black face and body painting to displace the Kandyan dancers from their current time which was the 1930s and placed them in an ancient time and a distant place. Although we don’t find any evidence of face or body painting in the dancers of the Kandyan region,¹³⁴ the faces and bodies of the two fictional dancers in *Charming Ceylon* were painted black. According to anthropologist Richard Eves, in the colonial context of the Pacific, visible aspects of the body such as face painting were seen to indicate immorality (1996, 96). Therefore, by painting faces and bodies FitzPatrick depicted Kandyan dances as an immoral practice connoted by the term “devil dancers.”

¹³⁴ Some colonial writers mention about body painting in *Valiyak mangallaya* ritual (Senex 1835; Souter 1901). First of all, since we don’t have evidence to support it is hard to believe that those claims were accurate. Even if they are accurate, the dancers they mentioned had performed in ritual and sacred spaces where *nayyadi* dancers do not perform. Therefore, there is no evidence to suggest that *nayyadi* dancers performed with body painted dancers.

FitzPatrick used the knowledge he brought from America to create “devil dancers of Kandy” through black face and body paint. It is possible that, as a white man growing up in America in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, FitzPatrick was inspired by black face painting. According to American musicologist Charles Hamm, blackface minstrelsy was the most distinctive and widely disseminated popular American cultural product in most of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century (Hamm 2000, 165). Therefore, the popular culture that FitzPatrick grew up in was full of black face painting. As he was a world traveler, his knowledge of performance practices of different cultures might also have helped him.

FitzPatrick derived inspiration on “devil dance” and black body painting not far from the United States. In Trinidad in the *canboulay* festival black laboring class people performed “devil” masquerades by painting their naked bodies in black paint (Stewart 1986, 302). According to British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, one of the characteristics of “tribal rituals” is body painting (1986, 42). As a travel documentary maker who encountered many cultures, he might have seen black face and body painting dancers in other places. Under the title of *Travel Talks*, FitzPatrick had produced nearly 222 travel documentaries by travelling in virtually every country in the world (Meehan, 1971). His travel experience is also shown in his nickname “The Voice of the Globe” (“James A. FitzPatrick” n.d.). Through black face and body painting FitzPatrick gave Sri Lankan dancers an appearance of tribal ritual dancers to his colonial audience. Since FitzPatrick had dramatic art training at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts (Meehan, 1971) at a time when the blackface minstrelsy

was popular, it is very likely that he had a knowledge of blackface make-up and body painting. It seems, therefore, FitzPatrick made a conscious decision to paint the half-naked bodies of Sri Lankan dancers to create a scene of “the devil dancers of Kandy.”

4.4.2 Choreographing Awkwardness and Mockery

Creating awkward and contradictory moments in documentaries is very likely when the director is ignorant of the culture and insensitive to the dancers’ reactions. In 1940s FitzPatrick gave an interview that shows his arrogance when dealing with the natives of other countries. He stated:

I would like to debunk the idea that a world traveler must know several languages to get along—I speak just pidgin stuff in foreign countries... It's surprising what you can do with pantomime. In Canton, I get in a rickshaw and push the man in the back with my feet twice to go ahead... Don't forget the old smile. It's the old smile that counts whether you're in Siberia or on the lower East Side of New York City (Meehan, 1971).

This shows his lack of interest in learning about a foreign culture which can make him ignorant of cultural expressions. This arrogant attitude of manipulating other people’s bodies to get what he wants to achieve also shows his insensitivity to the people of different cultures. FitzPatrick’s comment about the smile shows his insensitivity to details such as other people’s actual reactions to what he was doing. In fact, while he was probably using his “old smile” to manipulate Sri Lankan dancers, FitzPatrick did not realize that the dancers were laughing and mocking him.

Through the dancers’ confusions in *Charming Ceylon*, we can find moments of colonial choreography of awkwardness. As discussed earlier, awkward moments and tensions are recorded in the colonial photos and films. When “devil dancers of Kandy” dance in a circle, the leader of the *nayyadi* dancer starts dancing after a little

bit of confusion. The main reason for this confusion is that for the film they had to dance with two other totally different dancing bodies they are not familiar with. Their movement patterns do not match well. In the circle, when one fictional devil dancer changes direction, he bumps into the leader of the *nayyadi* dance (Fig. 4.8). The leader looks at his arm to make sure it is ok. This is a moment of tension. It seems as if the reason why the leader of the *nayyadi* dance looked at his arm was to make sure that he did not mess his arm with black paint. It is very unlikely that two fictional devil dancers had professional face or body paint on them. From the appearance of their costumes and paint, it seems that FitzPatrick found a temporary solution by costuming and painting them onsite. When he bumps into the black painted dancers, the *nayyadi* dancer wanted to make sure that the temporary black paint did not ruin his body and white costume. This reaction of the *nayyadi* dancer shows the awkwardness and the tension among the dancers suggesting that “devil dancers of Kandy” is a piece of colonial choreography.

Awkward moments and dancers’ mockery captured in the film disrupt the colonial exhibitionary order and return the gaze to the colonizer. In the middle of the scene FitzPatrick sends *nayyadi* dancers into the background bringing the two fictional devil dancers into the foreground of the camera frame. The two fictional devil dancers’ performance reminds the dancers that they were possessed by spirits. These two dancers’ extended and energetic movements are accompanied well by FitzPatrick’s voice over “they are driving away evil spirits.”



Fig. 4.8: A fictional devil dancer bumps into the leader of *nayyadi* dancers, *Charming Ceylon*



Fig. 4.9: While fictional devil dancers perform, *nayyadi* dancers are laughing in the background, *Charming Ceylon*

Laughter or mockery is not part of the *nayyadi* dance. However, the facial expressions and reactions of performers show that when the two fictional devil

dancers are “driving away evil spirits” the *nayyadi* dancers and drummer are laughing (Fig. 4.9). According to religious studies scholar Jacqueline A. Bussie, the laughter of the oppressed can work as a form of resistance (Bussie 2007). But, it was a hidden resistance because the *nayyadi* dancers were sent to the background, and instead of dancing, they just stood beside the drummer. The drummer and the four *nayyadi* dancers curiously look at the fictional devil dancers and laugh at them. James C. Scott, in *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, observes that it is on the “backstage” where the mockery happens, the place where elites do not have the control over (1985, 27) peasants. As anthropologist Kithsiri Malalgoda observes, the European missionaries’ lack of knowledge about the people created laughter among the Sinhala people. Malalgoda asserts that because of the “limited knowledge of the language and customs” the Sinhala people mocked the missionaries (1976, 201). As the Baptist missionary Ebenezer Daniel himself reported “we often meet with little but...laughter” (*ibid*). Therefore, the laughter of the *nayyadi* dancers in the background is not just a laugh; I contend that it is a form of resistance expressed through mockery. The dancers knew that they were performing a choreography that the foreign filmmaker wanted. Seeing two fictional devil dancers performing among them particularly to the beat of their drum *geta beraya* was awkward for the *nayyadi* dancers. Although FitzPatrick was believed to be a careful filmmaker who avoided ugliness and controversies (Meehan, 1971), I speculate that through the awkward moments in *Charming Ceylon*, the *nayyadi* dancers and drummer mock the colonial filmmaker. The dancers also mock the audience of the film whenever the audience believes that “devil dancers of Kandy” is a true depiction of Sri Lankan dance. Since

the colonized dancers mock the white filmmaker and the colonial audience, through this mockery the dancers also return the gaze to the colonizers.

4.5 Conclusion

The colonial visual representation of Sri Lankan dancers through photography and travel films should be studied against the backdrop of Orientalism and exoticism. While the Orientalist discourse since the 1870s started to articulate Sri Lankan ancient culture, colonial exoticization of it continued until the mid-twentieth century. The exotic Sri Lankan natives were portrayed through their costumes and ornaments. Therefore, costumed and ornamented male bodies such as Kandyan aristocrats and Kandyan dancers received the attention of colonial photographers and filmmakers. In this context, to make a profit colonial commercial photographer Joseph Lawton and filmmaker James A. FitzPatrick turned their camera towards Kandyan dancers' bodies that were conceived by the colonial audiences as exotic. However, the Oriental and exotic Kandyan dancing bodies that satisfy the colonial audience were not easy to capture.

To satisfy their audiences Lawton and FitzPatrick had to choreograph dancers' bodies by manipulating them in their *mise-en-scenes*. While Lawton positioned "religious dancers at the Bo tree ceremonies" against the selected settings, FitzPatrick created fictional devil dancers to choreograph the "devil dancers of Kandy" scene for his film. Presenting Sri Lankan dancers to colonial audiences was possible by capturing technology. Sri Lankan dancers were captured both through white men's camera and through their choreography. Therefore, the Kandyan dancers' bodies were

captured and became subjects of both camera and choreography. However, these technologies also captured the awkward moments, tensions, and mockery of Kandyan dancers.

Although Kandyan dancers have been presented as an exhibit by manipulating them, awkward moments, contradictory facial expressions, and laughter captured in Lawton's photo "religious dancer sat the Bo tree ceremonies" and FitzPatrick's "devil dancers of Kandy" scene in his film *Charming Ceylon* disrupt the colonial exhibitionary order. In awkward moments which are traces of colonial choreography, through bodily expressions, facial expressions, and laughter Kandyan dancers return the gaze to the colonizers. Therefore, I speculate that through their bodily expressions and laughter Kandyan dancers mock the colonial photographer, filmmaker, and the audience who are the consumers of those photos and films. It is a mockery directed at the photographer and the filmmaker who ignored the dancers' bodily and facial expressions. It is also a mockery directed at the consumers who believe these capture a true depiction of the real encounter between the cameramen and the dancers.

Conclusion

As the Sinhala nationalist discourse glorified Kandyan dance vis à vis its Tamil counterpart, it obscured the British colonial encounter with Kandyan dancers by leaving out a part of the rich history of dance. As I demonstrated in this dissertation, colonialism transformed to a significant extent the Kandyan dancescape of the British colonial period, particularly between the 1870s and 1930s. With the help of native elites, the colonizers displaced, mobilized, manipulated, staged, and displayed performers of the Kandyan region for colonial audiences through processions organized for British royal dignitaries, colonial exhibitions, photographs, and travel films, a process I introduce in this dissertation as “colonial choreography” that defined the aesthetic parameters and repertoire of Kandyan dance. However, the dancers were not just the victims of colonial choreography but also contributors to colonial choreography through creativity and resistance. While collaborating with the colonizers, the dancers responded creatively to their experience, and covertly resisted the colonial masters.

The performance scene in the Kandyan region was highly diverse in terms of the social hierarchy of the performers and the functions they served. Pre-colonial Kandyan performers were governed by socio-economic structures such as caste, *rājakāriya* (duty to the king), *nilapangu* (service tenure land), and dance families or *paramparāvas* (family lineage). During the Kandyan kingdom, natives in the Kandyan region practiced various performances such as gestures, movements, singing, drumming and recitations that cannot be encapsulated in the term “dance” or “*nātuma*” in Sinhala. However, ignoring the nuances of pre-colonial performance

practices, the Europeans abstracted certain performances and appropriated them as “dance,” a category that made sense to colonial audiences. While people like Governor William Gregory contributed to colonial choreography through government policies and priorities, Orientalist curiosity which developed in the 1870s ideologically backed the exoticization of dancers.

With the new colonial reforms, the British revolutionized the pre-colonial political-economy of the Kandyan region gearing it towards plantation economy. The notion of labor changed with the introduction of capitalist relations of labor. To fulfill the strong labor force required by the plantation economy, the colonial government mobilized every possible native laborer, including performers. Europeans did not consider pre-colonial ritual dance as productive labor. Under the British laws and ordinances introduced in the early nineteenth century, ritual dancers became an unproductive labor force. British missionaries perceived ritual dance labor as demonic dance labor and condemned it. The colonial government also perceived ritual dance and drumming as labor that disrupted the smooth functioning of the government as it disturbed the workers’ night sleep. Transforming the disruption into a commodity, the British redefined ritual dance labor as exhibition dance labor, and transported dancers to colonial exhibitions. Entrepreneurs like the Hagenbecks, who exported Ceylon Tea, also transported Sri Lankan dancers to satisfy the colonial taste for the exotic. Exhibition dance labor also opened up possibilities for the exploitation of dance labor. However, colonial exhibitions provided Sri Lankan performers who were deprived of mobility in pre-colonial times, physical mobility and a certain social mobility.

Female dancing in Sri Lanka was redefined in the colonial dancescape. Although female dancers were omnipresent in the pre-colonial Kandyan region, the British heterosexual men, missionaries and Protestant Buddhists imposed Victorian Protestant morals and work ethics on women and relegated female dancers to the background in the colonial dancescape. Pre-colonial female dance labor was redefined into domestic labor. *Kalagedi* dance (water pot dance) became ubiquitous in the colonial dancescape as it depicted the ideal disciplined and domestic woman. In the twentieth century, *Kalagedi* dance became part of the repertoire of almost every dance show that featured Sri Lankan dance.

Spectacles organized for the British royal dignitaries should be seen as a complex political activity where the British mobilized colonized bodies to entertain the royal family members. Therefore, it was an ornamental mode of rule which depended on ceremonies and spectacles. However, to ensure the legitimacy of those ceremonies and spectacles, the British needed to seek the support of the native elites and make use of their financial and cultural resources. When the British royal dignitaries visited Sri Lanka in the nineteenth century, the colonial government seemed to take advantage of the competition and tension between the Kandyan aristocrats and low country elites prevalent at the time, which resulted in the competitive spectacles that they choreographed for the British royal visits in 1870 and 1875. The colonial government mainly sought financial contributions from low country elites to entertain the Prince. The government made Kandyan aristocrats contribute to royal entertainments by appropriating their traditions and rituals.

In 1875, when the Prince of Wales arrived in Sri Lanka, three main sections – Kandyan aristocrats, Central Province Government Officer (GA), and Governor William Gregory – were amalgamated to create a fascinating experience in Kandy. The British consciously choreographed the ornamental mode of rule. In ceremonies and spectacles, the British positioned Kandyan aristocrats in a hierarchically inferior place. In the context of the competition with low country elites and wanting to reclaim their legitimacy symbolically, Kandyan aristocrats used their cultural hegemony – their knowledge and expertise of Kandyan art, architecture, dance, and ritual, hierarchical power – to choreograph an impressive *perahera* for the Prince of Wales. They choreographed an elephant to “salute” the Prince and to receive sugar cane from him, and they mobilized *ves* dancers – who, only performed in a confined ritual space – in the gardens and streets making them entertainers. According to the description of the dancers, it is possible that these dancers were mobilized from the *Valiyak mangallaya* ritual, where Kandyan aristocrats had control over *ves* dancers.

Although *ves* dancers were choreographed into the ornamental mode of rule, they were not passive victims of the British ornamental mode of rule. When they were sent to the street, the *ves* dancers confronted new challenges to perform walking sequences (*gaman mātraya*). The dancers had appropriated one of the basic movement sequences from ritual to effectively walk sideways on the street. Moreover, by reciting Sinhala *prasasti* and *hatan kavi* that praise the victories of Kandyan kings over Europeans, the dancers in the *perahera* mocked the British royal princes and resisted both the colonial authority and its ornamental mode of rule.

The *perahera* choreographed for the Prince of Wales in 1875 marks a major milestone in the history of Kandyan dance. In 2013, the current Prince of Wales, Charles Philip Arthur George, visited the Sri Lanka for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). After 138 years, again a group of *ves* dancers were choreographed to welcome the Prince of Wales at the Katunayake airport, Colombo. Choreographing dancers for the Prince in 1875 was a most influential moment, where *ves* dancers of Kandy were mobilized as performers which took them to Europe for the first time as part of colonial exhibitions. Exhibiting the *perahera* and *ves* dancers became a token of welcome not only for Royal dignitaries but also for British Governors, and other VIPs. Special *peraheras* were organized as an exotic spectacle in which elephants and dancers performed together. Eleven years after the Prince's visit to Kandy, in 1886 German brothers, the Hagenbecks took their famous *Ceylon Exhibition* to London which included both elephants and *ves* dancers.

One of the main highlights of the Hagenbecks' exhibitions of Ceylon was the intimacy between animals, particularly elephants, and people. This is supported by the British narratives about Sri Lankans that highlighted the close relationship between animals and natives. Exhibitions of Ceylon were choreographed to create a sensation about animals and humans. The way the Hagenbecks' exploited the intimacy between animals and humans inspired *ves* dancers to choreograph *vannamas* that embodied animal characteristics.

While negotiating with colonial corporeality that the colonizer wanted to impose, through the *vannamas*, *ves* dancers choreographed new corporeal expressions. Therefore, in a way *ves* dancers pushed the boundaries of their given

corporeality and asserted a certain agency as artistes, especially in Sri Lanka. However, even though they pushed their colonial corporeality as dancers, their *vannama* choreographies did not challenge the colonial audience. In fact, *ves* dancers choreographed *vannamas* that satisfied the exotic taste of colonial audiences which made their effort a colonial choreography. Even in the postcolonial era Sri Lankan dancers continued to perform *vannamas* that embodied animals for colonial audiences. In the postcolonial dancescape, the intimacy between animals and dancers emerges as self-exotic choreographies by native artistes, which were promoted by tourism. The colonial fascination for Sri Lanka as a wild, exotic site is depicted in Hollywood movies like *Elephant Walk* (1954) set in Sri Lanka featuring both *ves* dancers and wild elephants.

The colonial visual representation of Sri Lankan dancers through photography and travel films should be studied against the backdrop of Orientalism and exoticism. The exotic Sri Lankan natives were portrayed through their costumes and ornaments. Therefore, costumed and ornamented male bodies such as Kandyan aristocrats and Kandyan dancers received the attention of colonial photographers and filmmakers. In this context, to make a profit colonial commercial photographer Joseph Lawton and filmmaker James A. FitzPatrick turned their camera towards Kandyan dancers' bodies that were conceived by the colonial audiences as exotic.

To satisfy their audiences Lawton and FitzPatrick had to choreograph dancers' bodies by manipulating them in their *mise-en-scenes*. While Lawton positioned "religious dancers at the Bo tree ceremonies" against the selected settings, FitzPatrick created fictional devil dancers to choreograph the "devil dancers of Kandy" scene for

his film, *Charming Ceylon*. Presenting Sri Lankan dancers to colonial audiences was possible by capturing technology. Sri Lankan dancers were captured both through white men's cameras and through their choreographies. Therefore, the Kandyan dancers' bodies were captured and became subjects of both camera and choreography. However, these technologies also captured the awkward moments, tensions, and mockery of Kandyan dancers.

Although Kandyan dancers have been presented as an exhibit by manipulating them, awkward moments, contradictory facial expressions, and laughter captured in Lawton's photo and FitzPatrick's film scene disrupt the colonial exhibitionary order. In awkward moments which are traces of colonial choreography, through bodily expressions, facial expressions, and laughter Kandyan dancers return the gaze to the colonizers. Therefore, I speculate that through their bodily expressions and laughter Kandyan dancers mock the colonial photographer, filmmaker, and the audience who are the consumers of those photos and films. It is a mockery directed at the photographer and the filmmaker who ignored the dancers' bodily and facial expressions. It is also a mockery directed at the consumers who believe these capture a true depiction of the real encounter between the cameramen and the dancers.

As I demonstrated in this dissertation, performers of the Kandyan region went through major transformations during the British colonial period. On the one hand, Kandyan dancers were choreographed for exhibition with wild animals to please colonial audiences. On the other hand, the new exhibition economy opened up possibilities for dancers to market their dance labor which gave them a certain amount of social and physical mobility. In the history of Sri Lanka's performing arts,

dancers were the first and most influential group of “artists” to travel and market their labor abroad. Although they were not provided with proper clothes to suit the European winter, they still seized the opportunity to go to Europe and to America in search of new possibilities. While Sinhala dancers were separated from their families during their long stay in Europe, they found new Tamil companions at the colonial exhibitions. Although Sinhala and Tamil students in the Jaffna campus clashed over the *ves* dance in 2016, during colonial exhibitions, Sinhala *ves* dancers and Tamil comedians shared the same ship, food, performance space, and sometimes harsh conditions such as the European winter.

Kandyan dancers’ experiences during the British colonial period has predominantly archived as texts and visual. Therefore, the ability to use embodied knowledge – the postcolonial bodily archive – to interpret the colonized dancers’ experience was a decolonizing process for me. Because, through this research I was able to recreate how colonized dancers creatively responded to their experience and resisted the colonial authority. Methodologies used in this research can also be used to study the postcolonial history of Sri Lankan dance – postcolonial choreography.

Colonial choreography and neo-liberal policy initiatives have provided inspirations for postcolonial choreography in Sri Lanka. February 4th is Sri Lanka’s Independence Day. To celebrate the 70th Independence Day, ironically the Sri Lanka government invited Queen Elizabeth II for the ceremony held a few days ago on February 4, 2018. Her third son Prince Edward Antony Richard Louis, the Earl of Wessex, represented her. The dances choreographed for this latest royal visit to Sri Lanka exemplify the postcolonial choreography of Sri Lanka. On February 1, the

Prince was entertained by a group of *ves* dancers at Trinity College, Kandy. This shows that Kandyan *ves* dancers are still being choreographed to entertain British royal dignitaries, following the aesthetic parameters of colonial choreography. However, what is different about postcolonial choreography is that it depends very much on young dancers such as school children.¹³⁵

For the main Independence Day celebration in Colombo, a group of young female dancers rehearsed (but did not perform) a “laptop *nätuma*” (laptop dance), with props that looked exactly like laptop computers. This was a dance that the Ministry of Education choreographed to show off the Government’s initiatives to enhance information and computer technology in schools. However, the people mocked the laptop dance through various media which also involved a satirical laptop dance that went viral on the social media. This prompted the government to drop the dance from the ceremony.¹³⁶ I see a connection between the *kalagedi nätuma* (water pot dance) that was staged during the British colonial period and the laptop *nätuma* (laptop dance) that was choreographed for the 70th Independence Day.

Historicizing Sri Lankan dance during the colonial period and post-independence period reveals the capitalist manipulation of female labor wrapped with the country’s ethnic conflict. The water-pot dance marked the beginnings of a new choreographic tradition that tried to stage ideal female work through so-called folk

¹³⁵Through state dance education and dance contests organized by the Ministry of Education, a competition has been created among young dancers. This competition has also been heightened by television reality programs.

¹³⁶ Critics pointed out that it was ridiculous to perform a laptop dance to celebrate information technology while children in poor schools don’t even have basic sanitary facilities.

dances.¹³⁷ Sinhala females were choreographed as domestic workers who fulfilled the needs of the male Sinhala workers. The Sri Lankan “folk dance” tradition that started with the water-pot dance in the colonial period where females were depicted as domestic workers continued through the post-independence period. Using the same logic of the water-pot dance, during the 1950s a veteran choreographer Panibharata choreographed *goyam nātuma* (rice harvest dance) and *kulu nātuma* (winnowing-fan dance) that depicted females as farmer women that helped in the production of rice as the image of the ideal working woman created by the governments of the time.

As Ceylon tea became the main capitalist product of Sri Lanka, the female body became the subject of the so-called folk dance. Following the same logic of the water-pot dance, Sinhala choreographers started to choreograph Sinhala dancers representing Tamil female tea plantation workers. Female tea pluckers (as they were called) and their sexually abusive foreman (*kangāni*) were imagined and choreographed in the “*te dalu nātuma*” (tea-leaves dance or tea dance) as a fast beat romantic dance. On one occasion I was choreographed as the *kangāni* in a *te dalu nātuma* presented by one of my teachers; I thought it was a fun dance not knowing its political implications. The act of choreographing *te dalu nātuma* by Sinhala choreographers using Sinhala dancers runs parallel with the act of the Sinhala extremists’ denial of Tamil self-determination in the north of Sri Lanka. Both acts deny the Tamils their right to self-determination. Although they are ethnically Tamil, tea plantation workers are culturally different from the Tamils in the Northern

¹³⁷Choreographing “folk dance” in Sri Lanka parallels the British and other European choreographies of the “folk dance” tradition of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by which the everyday life of the villagers was romanticized and choreographed for the stage.

Province. However, I would argue that in the Sinhala choreographic consciousness, they are the same –Tamils. It was this imagination that led Sinhala people to choreograph the *te dalu nātuma* to include Tamil culture in their dance shows. When Sinhala people choreograph the so-called Tamil folk dance on behalf of the Tamil people, it denies the Tamil people their right to express the image they want to portray about themselves through dance. Moreover, the Sinhala choreographer becomes the voice of the Tamil people.

When we trace the aesthetic parameters of these so-called folk dances, the laptop dance can also be considered a “folk dance” that portrays the capitalist production of female labor in twenty-first century Sri Lanka. I contend that through the laptop dance the Ministry of Education wanted to show British royalty, the former metropole and the world that Sri Lanka was transforming its female laboring bodies into information technology workers. Although the government wanted to depict an image of a globalized Sri Lanka through the laptop dance, what it also portrayed is the country’s neo-colonial dependency on the world’s economic power centers, and the imposition of neoliberal economic policies on female workers. However, as under colonial rule, Sri Lankans in the postcolonial era too resisted the authority’s decisions through double-edged choreographies that are also part of postcolonial choreography.

Glossary

<i>beravā</i>	caste of drummers and dancers.
<i>daladā</i>	the Tooth Relic of the Buddha.
<i>dēvālaya, dēvāle, dēwāle</i>	shrine-house dedicated for local deities.
<i>digge</i> or <i>diggei nātuma</i>	female dance practice performed in certain <i>dēvālayas</i> .
Diyawadana Nilame, Diva, Diwa, or Dewa Nileme	official in charge of the ceremonies of the Temple of the Tooth including the <i>perahera</i> .
<i>Esala perahera</i>	procession held in the month of <i>Esala</i> (July), also called <i>Esala keliya</i> ; later also called <i>dalada perahera</i> as it honors the Tooth Relic of the Buddha.
<i>gaman mātraya</i>	movement sequence dancers use to walk while dancing.
<i>geta beraya</i>	the main drum used in Kandyan dance.
<i>goyigama</i>	farmers, the highest caste in the traditional caste hierarchy.
<i>hangala</i>	the frilled dress that <i>ves</i> dancers wear on the waist
<i>hatan kavi</i>	battle poems or war ballads.
<i>kalagedi nātuma</i>	water pot dance.
<i>kalagedi sellama</i>	water pot play.
<i>kalagediya</i>	water pot.
<i>kāma nātum</i>	erotic dances.

<i>karāva</i>	fisher caste lower than the <i>goyigama</i> caste in the traditional caste hierarchy.
<i>Kohomba kankariya</i>	a dance ritual performed in the Kandyan region, usually in villages, for prosperity.
<i>Māligawa</i>	the sacred Temple of the Tooth of the Buddha.
<i>nätum panguwa</i> or <i>natana panguwa</i>	service tenure land for dancers.
<i>nätuma, nätum</i> (plural)	dance.
<i>nilapangu</i>	type of service land (service tenure land) and a system of labor in the Kandyan Kingdom.
<i>paramparāva</i>	lineage. family lineage (<i>paul parampara</i>) or teacher-student lineage (<i>guru-shisya parampara</i>).
<i>perahera</i>	procession. See <i>Esala perahera</i> .
<i>prasasti</i>	songs of praise performed for Sinhala kings in court.
<i>radala</i>	the highest sub-caste of <i>goyigama</i> caste; Kandyan aristocrats.
<i>rājakāriya</i>	duty to the king; payment of taxes and duties to the state.
Ratemahatmaya	chief headmen in the Kandyan Kingdom, and the chief headmen in the Central Province during the British colonial period. These positions were held by Kandyan aristocrats.
<i>udekki</i>	hourglass-shaped small Kandyan drum that the dancer holds in his palm while dancing.
<i>Valiyak mangallaya</i>	a dance ritual performed in Kandyan <i>dēvālayas</i> after a <i>perahera</i> .

- vannama* a set of oral singing repertoire believed to have been composed in the eighteenth century in the Kandyan Kingdom.
- ves dancer* Kandyan ritual dancer dressed in sacred headdress, *ves tattuwā*; also called *yakdessa* (devil dancer).
- yakdessa* So-called “devil dancer,” ritual priest who performed in rituals such as *Kohomba kankariya* and *Valiyak mangallaya*.

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