POSTCOLONIAL CITIES AS SPACES OF RESISTANCE AND CONTESTATION: THE CASES OF YANGON AND COLOMBO

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ABSTRACT

Many postcolonial cities still possess material remnants of colonial rule. Old colonial buildings and squares serve a variety of functions, ranging from housing government offices and private businesses to open spaces where people gather. I argue that such colonial places are constantly being renegotiated and re-appropriated by postcolonial societies who are not foolish enough to fail to understand that the cities they live in were once bastions of colonial oppression and subjugation. This piece attempts to elucidate these creative processes in Colombo and Yangon. My primary objective is to demonstrate the way locals in Colombo and Yangon construct postcolonial urban geographies through seemingly mundane, daily acts and practices in the context of their interactions within the cities' built, urban environments. I employ two approaches in this work. First, I use a first-person, observational perspective based on my visits to both cities in May 2012 [Yangon] and June 2015 [Colombo]. Second, I utilise the concepts of gazing, place-making, and visibility to enrich my narrative. I conclude that such "weapons of the weak" are powerful in driving resistance against both colonial and neo-colonial contexts.

Keywords: Postcolonial cities, space, place-making, visibility, contestation

OVERVIEW

Under British occupation, Colombo and Yangon [then Rangoon][2] were cities integral to the consolidation and maintenance of the empire in the South and Southeast Asian regions. Colombo emerged as a key trading hub by virtue of its location in the Indian Ocean[3], while Rangoon was shaped into the image and likeness of a quintessential colonial city, as evidenced by its planning and colonial architecture.[4] Their histories, however, are more diverse than a hastily conceived "shared experience" under British imperialism. Their postcolonial experiences are likewise different, not just because of successful past resistance against imperialist powers, but also through the present everyday geographies they actively create.

This piece attempts to elucidate these creative processes in Colombo and Yangon. My primary objective is to demonstrate the way locals in Colombo and Yangon construct postcolonial urban geographies through seemingly mundane, daily acts and practices in the context of their interactions within the cities' built, urban environments. I employ two approaches in this work. First, I use a first-person, observational perspective based on my visits to both cities in May 2012 [Yangon] and June 2015 [Colombo]. Second, I utilise the concepts of contestation and place-making to enrich my narrative.

The first part of the paper provides a historical and socio-political overview of colonial and post-colonial Colombo and Yangon. In the second section, I narrate my first-hand accounts of urban life in the two cities and link notions of resistance, place-making, and visibility to them. I conclude with thoughts on local contestation of colonial architecture and space, which I opine to be a key tie that binds both Yangon and Colombo.

FROM COLONIAL TO POST-COLONIAL: A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Rangoon's origins predate the arrival of the British in 1824. King Alaungpaya, founder of the last dynasty of Burma, turned the small fishing village of Dagon into a bustling port and shipbuilding industry characterised by social stability, an increased population, and the materialisation of suburbs beyond the settlement's walls.[5] The Anglo-Burma War of 1852 left Rangoon in ruins, but gave the victorious British the opportunity to rebuild the city in its colonial image and likeness. Save for the grid system in the southern part of the nascent city – a trademark of British urban colonial planning – Rangoon resembled Calcutta, and was described as classic example of colonial based development.[6] British administrators saw the potential of Rangoon to develop into an even busier port than it had been before they arrived, and resultantly laid out plans that included open spaces, residential areas close to the heavily guarded Shwedagon Pagoda – considered the holiest Buddhist site in Burma – and housing for ethnic Chinese and Indian workers near the river.[7]

By the turn of the century, the colonization of Rangoon was well underway. The British occupants had built spectacular structures such as the Customs House, High Court and Ministers' Buildings, and Strand Hotel, as well as headquarters for firms such as A. Scott & Company, J&F Graham & Company, and Oriental Life Assurance. For scholars like Scott, monumental colonial architecture is deliberately intended for locals to stand in awe of the power wielded by the governing empire.[8] In 1917, a British report proclaimed that the city was "well-designed" and "beautiful," with broad, scenic areas north of the river and proximate to the Shwedagon Pagoda to embody the ruling elite and wealth of the bourgeoisie class.[9] Rangoon maintained its position as a "gateway city" up until Burmese independence from the British. Gateway cities were in a prime position to receive, assemble, and process commodity exports and efficiently distribute a return flow of manufactured goods to other exporting regions.[10]

Post-colonial Rangoon, however, reflected many of the whims and caprice of the ruling military junta, which unseated a civil government in 1962, fourteen years after independence from the British. One of the policies the authoritarian regime, called the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSSP), implemented from the onset was the forcible relocation of residents and the clearance of squatter settlements from the city centre for economic and political reasons.[11] For Philip and Mercer, economically, squatter settlements were seen as an eyesore adversely affecting tourism. Politically, ridding the city centre of huge populations of locals would, in the junta's view, clamp down on the potential for huge gatherings in public spaces.[12]

These two visions were problematic. Burma remained closed to the world well until the 2010s. Tourism numbers paled in comparison to the rest of Southeast Asia, and

obtaining even tourist visas, let alone business or student types, was an arduous task. On the political front, the deliberate elimination of public space use did not prevent locals from assembling and protesting authoritarian rule. The 8888 Uprising, named for peaceful protest action by students, Buddhist monks, and professionals on 8 August 1988 was an attempt at reforming the one-party state.

Many key events took place in cities such as Rangoon and Mandalay. A violent crackdown of the 8888 Uprising led to even harsher laws on public gatherings, limiting these to less than five people at any given time.[13] Free elections took place in 1990 and were captured by pro-democracy icon and daughter of anti-colonial revolutionary Aung San, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. However, the new military leadership voided the results and oversaw Suu Kyi's house arrest, which it imposed a year prior. The epicentre of another peaceful revolt, the monk-led 2007 Saffron Revolution, was in the now-renamed and erstwhile capital city, Yangon. Once again, the military regime clamped down on non-violent resistance with a heavy-handed response.

Both these events arguably helped shaped political developments in Myanmar in the 2010s. Military officials resigned from the *Tatmadaw*, or Myanmar Armed Forces, to take the reins of a "civilian" government. General elections took place in 2010 and 2015, with gradual political and economic liberalisation taking place in between. In the 2015 elections, Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won a supermajority by winning 86 percent of the 664 total combined seats in the House of Representatives and Local Assemblies.[14] The multi-ethnic country, however, remains beset by social unrest, which is most prominently seen in the state's violent treatment of its Rohingya population in Myanmar's western border state.

In contrast to Rangoon's experience with a single occupier, Colombo had already been occupied by the Dutch and the Portuguese before the British gained control of Ceylon's capital, Kandy, and the whole island in 1815. The Dutch linked Colombo to cinnamon and coconut plantation areas in the southwest portion of the country through a preliminary road system[15], while converting it and other coastal cities into fortified areas.[16] Britain made Colombo the new capital of Ceylon after its unification of the island, and the city developed into an international financial centre dotted by government offices, international banks, and hotels.[17] When the British stepped up the cultivation of coffee in the central highlands, they ordered the creation of more paved roads, a railway, and postal system to connect Colombo to the plantations in central Ceylon.[18]

Socially, Ceylonese elites built mansions in the city, which morphed from a cinnamon plantation during the Dutch era into a meeting place of cross-ethnic bourgeoisie who rubbed shoulders with the British, albeit as a second-class group.[19] For scholars like Perera (2002), it was a form of mimicry. Borrowing from Bhabha, Perera invokes the concept of mimicry to describe both the ways of the Ceylonese elite and their grandiose mansions that dominated the cityscape of late 19th century Colombo. Ceylonese bourgeoisie mimicked colonial lifestyles and residential homes, resulting in the production of the "colonial but not quite…(Lankan) aristocratic but not quite".[20] Since the upper-strata of Ceylonese were not allowed to join British clubs, they set up their own in the vicinity of

the Cinnamon Gardens[21], the most exclusive residential area in the city reserved solely for the British. In addition, many of the Ceylonese elites' palatial homes had names very unfamiliar to locals [i.e. Abode of Happiness, Golden Garden], were geographically placed in the "liminal space between the colonial community and the indigenous city".[22] This spatial in-betweenness could also be explained by colonial mimicry, "the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*".[23]

The riots of 1915, formation of the Ceylon National Congress four years later, and the grievances aired at the Donoughmore Commission all contributed to the Ceylonese drive for self-determination.[24] The independence movement was also fuelled by Tamil and Sinhalese nationalism, which was engendered by the increase of Sinhalese urban workers in Colombo's harbour and railway yards.[25] Pressure and agitation from newly formed Ceylonese labour unions, political parties, and intellectuals helped usher in independence from Britain in 1948. Colombo retained its status as the political capital and economic and financial centre of post-colonial Ceylon, then Sri Lanka when the island country was renamed in 1972. Colonial policies that sowed discord between Sinhalese and Tamil populations reared their ugly head in post-colonial Ceylon/Sri Lanka and resulted in a bloody civil war from 1983-2009 between the Sinhala-dominated government and a potent militant group aiming to secede from Sri Lanka to form a separate, independent state: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

URBAN LIFE IN COLOMBO AND YANGON: OBSERVATIONS FROM A TRAVELLER

I have to emphasise three things before I begin my narrative of my experiences in Colombo and Yangon. First, traveling is a personal passion. I carry a small, digital camera and snap up photos of buildings and structures ranging from those with historical and political significance to the everyday, oftentimes "ordinary" cityscape many tourists bypass. Second, I visit as many cities around the world as I can, and explore them by foot mostly on my own. That has its advantages and limitations. On the one hand, I have experienced a diverse array of urban areas, from economic hubs and colonial satellites to capitals of less developed states and Least Developed Countries. On the other hand, my experiences in these cities have been limited to four or five days primarily due to financial constraints. My immersion into these cities is therefore somewhat limited. Partially addressing this is my deliberate intent at observing both locals and the built urban environment they are in, and the subsequent interaction between them. Third, my preference for visiting less developed cities is driven by my identity. I am a Filipino citizen, born and raised in one of the adjacent cities to the capital, Manila. My lineage is Catalan, and many of my forefathers originated from Barcelona. Some of my ancestors were *peninsulares*, a term used to describe people of Spanish descent born in Iberian Spain and engaged in some activities in its colonies, like the Philippines. That said, I do identify myself more with the underdeveloped world and its people than my European roots.

YANGON: MAY 2012

I was among the first batch of tourists that "rushed" to Myanmar after members of the ruling military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), swapped their uniforms from the *Tatmadaw* (army) for the *longyi* to become the civilian leaders of the country in March 2011. I felt I needed to observe the situation for an extended period of time to ascertain when it would be safe to visit. Given Myanmar's history of a ruling military elite that rarely kept its word and resorted to violence to impose its authority on the Burmese population, buying time was beneficial to quell any fears for my personal security.

I obtained a Burmese visa, a requirement that has since been lifted for Association of Southeast Asian Nation citizens like myself, in March 2012 and travelled to Yangon two months later. On the plane and upon arrival, I pondered on the dominant description of Yangon [and Myanmar] in travel guides and forums: "going back in time." This has and continues to have many implications on how Yangon is perceived, many of which I will return to in this piece. Oftentimes, Yangon as "frozen in time" is used as a starting point to either laud the country's moves to open up to the capitalist world-economy or focus on an unjust past that required neo-colonial intervention for any "meaningful" change to take place.

Gazes

On the streets of downtown Yangon, the first noticeable part of my walk was the multitude of curious gazes I received from many locals. The gazes were not suspicious or threatening. They were also accompanied by non-verbal expressions, mostly facial. These small acts surprised me, particularly because the Burmese government enforces harsh punishments on citizens who commit crimes against foreigners. Going by this logic, I expected locals to be, at the very least, aloof towards foreigners. This was far from reality. In one instance, I visited a small shop to buy a can of soda. Seeing I was carrying a small bag and a map, the teenage-looking girl who sold me my drink approached me and gestured to help open the can. By then, I had figured out how to flip the lid while holding onto my possessions, and politely declined her offer. She looked me in the eye, smiled, and giggled with some of her friends.

Exchanging curious yet friendly gazes with foreigners is more than a surprise. It is a manifestation of the locals' resistance towards the former military junta's attempts at quarantining Burmese from the outside world. The harsher penalties carried by crimes against foreigners was as much a sign of the ruling elite's shot at projecting a welcoming environment to outsiders as it was a Panopticon-like control of the population's interaction with the few non-locals in the country. Both of these moves failed. Worldwide attention had been garnered by leaders like Suu Kyi and the events of 1988, 1990, and 2007. At the same time, it would be highly implausible to suggest that the Yangonese learned to look foreigners in the eye only in the two years separating the formation of a civilian regime and my encounters in Myanmar's commercial hub. On the contrary, the locals' actions are learned over time and predate the military junta's change of clothing in 2010.

Verbal communication with locals came mostly in the form of offers for currency exchange. Despite her gradual attempts at reintegration into the global economy, Myanmar's currency, the kyat, had two exchange rates – an official one used in the world market and a *de facto* value – up until April 2012. Since the mid-1970s, the kyat had been pegged to the International Monetary Fund's Special Drawing Right for fiscal accounting in the state sector.[26] The pegged exchange was artificially controlled between six to eight kyats for every U.S. dollar. The *de facto* value, however, was at a staggeringly different range of 1,000 to 1,300 kyats per U.S. dollar. A handful of locals walking around Sule Pagoda Road, the heartbeat of Yangon's business district, approached me, gauging my interest to swap my American currency for the kyat at a rate of one dollar to around 800-900 kyats. I politely declined these offers, which were testimonies to the willingness of savvy Burmese to engage the very foreigners they were deliberately being shielded from in an illegal activity that was once within the sole remit of banks and financial institutions.

All this is indicative of a form of resistance Yangonese and Burmese posed against a neo-colonial ruling power. Despite independence from the British Empire, the Burmese still endured similar practices and policies at the hands of the post-colonial elites. Repression of freedom of speech, the restriction of freedom of association, and regime violence were just some of the practices successive military regimes resorted to that bore a striking resemblance with their British predecessors.[27] And while many of the more prominent protests resulted in outcomes that validated the junta as a neo-colonial force in the Burmese social fabric, agitation against the country's rulers was not limited to large-scale action. Smaller, more intimate and mundane acts like exchanging gazes and smiles with non-locals the junta wanted to cut its population off from, are everyday forms of agitation as well. Equally powerful is some locals' courage to illegally rival state-run financial institutions in currency exchange. Where and how these seemingly innocuous exchanges take – and create – place is equally important.

Gatherings

The many gatherings of people I witnessed along Maha Bandula, Merchant and Sule Pagoda Roads, and Pansodan Street, to name a few, would be aptly framed by a brief discussion on geographical notions of creating place and space. Space, and place, for that matter, is not just about *where* something matters in the way *when* does in explaining *how* and *why* something happens. Rather, space and place are deployed to understand *how* that something matters.[28] The need for space is derived from its relational conceptions, which repudiate claims that space was teleological, given, neutral, and passive geometry.[29] Instead, proponents of relational space argue that space and the spatial relations it engenders are "products of diverse material and discursive practices that in turn actively shape[d] social relations".[30]

Cities, then, are made up of relative spaces, [re]produced by people in "contingent and relational ways," which raises questions on the creation of these spaces, and the management of socio-spatial relations.[31] An engagement in these understandings of space stresses the relational activities that constitute and create space. Instead of viewing space as a static vessel where things occur, space is re[produced] in a ceaseless fashion by

interactive human activity.

One of the more noticeable sights around downtown Yangon was the prevalence of groups of men and women talking, sharing meals, reading newspapers, and selling different kinds of merchandise, which included the hugely popular posters and shirts bearing Suu Kyi's image. Clearly, the sweltering heat and dust storms that infiltrate Yangon did not confine its locals to their homes, even around noontime and mid-afternoon. Perhaps more remarkable is the fact that the new government had yet to formally rescind the ban on gatherings of five or more people dating back to the draconian suppression of the 8888 Uprising. That announcement came sometime between late 2013 and early 2014, a year and a half before my visit. A report claimed that the nominally civilian government led by President Thein Sein had "eased" the public-gatherings ban shortly after taking power in 2011.[32] A perennial problem in post-colonial Burmese state-society dynamics, as evinced by the events described in the earlier parts of this piece, has been distrust. Arguably the most powerful manifestation of the regime's treachery in the post-colonial period was its announcement of free and fair elections in 1990 and subsequent nullification of its results, which heavily favoured Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party.[33] Yangonese and the wider Burmese population were, and are not naïve to the reality that the current ruling elites were still entrenched in the same *Tatmadaw* they had found themselves opposed to and irritating ever since they took power in 1962.

Despite this past and before any formal or legalistic decree, many pockets of Yangonese, mostly garbed in their national dress, the *longyi*, gathered near government offices, parks, pagodas, and shops. There, they communicated with one another, spoke their minds, presumably talked business and even politics. They had stepped out of the "safety of the private domain," taking the "weapons of the weak"[34] to a more unrestricted public platform, regardless of the political leadership's opinion about it.

The Yangonese's face-to-face engagements with each other in more public spaces lead to the creation of place, or place-making. Previously off-limits or highly securitized premises such as streets, parks, and the immediate vicinity of government offices are now subjected to creative and transformational exercises of place-making through conversations and interactions. Such sites now take on a more relational meaning, in line with Kitchin's repudiation of space as a static end-in-itself (2009). These conversations and interactions spark new ideas and insights, and catalyse change.

The transposition of the private onto the public has likewise changed the meaning of perennial places of protest. Shwedagon Pagoda is a case in point. Being the holiest Theravada Buddhist shrine in the country and arguably the world, it has held a dual meaning for locals: a symbol of Burmese religious devotion, on the one hand, and point of assembly for direct protest, on the other.[35] At the same time, it has also been an object of military penetration and custodianship, as demonstrated in years past by media coverage of visits by top *Tatmadaw* and State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) officials.[36]

During my visit to the pagoda, I saw several booth-like sheds scattered around the

premises of the pagoda. While walking barefoot and feeling the sting of the midday, tropical sun, a Buddhist monk and foreign tourist called my attention and invited me to "talk and cool down" for a while. The sheds were small; I was one of four people inside and a fifth person would surely not fit inside. The foreign tourist, an Englishman, introduced me to the two monks inside. Both of them were smiling at me as the Englishman asked where I was from and what brought me to Yangon. It was indeed a pleasant exchange. Despite not being able to verbally communicate with the monks, it was undoubtedly powerful to engage them. They were, in my eyes, some of the most important catalysts of the gradual change and reform Myanmar was experiencing. At the same time, I recognised the importance of those small booths. They offered yet another opportunity for monks, locals, and even foreigners to talk, contemplate, and pray together. Another instance of place-making in a more public yet equally intimate space was being effectuated.

Fig. 1 (above): Open spaces at the base of the Shwedagon Pagoda; Fig. 2: Stalls lined up in front of a colonial building (Source: author)

COLOMBO: JUNE 2015

Bandaranaike International Airport in Colombo was bustling. Not a state-of-the-art facility along the lines of new airports in China, India, and other post-colonial Asian countries, the gateway to Sri Lanka was filled with eager, white backpackers. Long lines in a small and cramped arrival hall make for a frustrating experience. Yet, these whims pale in comparison to the magnitude of the unprecedented civil strife between the island's two main ethnic groups that escalated in this same airport in the latter part of the last century. On August 2, 1984, a suitcase bomb implanted by the LTTE on an Air Lanka flight from Madras to Colombo exploded in the airport, killing 32 people.[37] Two more incidents, in 1986 and 2001, involved LTTE forces striking an Air Lanka aircraft (BBC 1986) and Bandaranaike Airport and an adjacent air base.[38] The latter was orchestrated by the Black Tigers, the LTTE's suicide attack unit, and resulted in almost USD$1 billion worth of damages.[39]

Uneasy peace

The civil war between the Sinhalese-dominated government of Sri Lanka and LTTE fighters ended brutally in 2009 but not without criticism from organizations like the United Nations for a "lack of regard for civilian casualties" and the meting out of "summary justice".[40] An uneasy peace has since reigned in the island-nation. Some scholars posit that colonialism played an integral part in fashioning out tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamils. While the formation and development of identities predated British rule, they were

reconstructed within an "intellectual framework" during British occupancy, leading to stronger ethnonationalism and the Sinhalese-Tamil polarisation.[41] There is also at least an acknowledgment of the link between the British practice of giving better civil service jobs to Tamils rather than to Sinhalese.[42] American missionaries established what were considered as some of the best English schools in Asia in the 19th century in the Jaffna peninsula, an area where Tamils comprised the majority of the population.[43] While there are disagreements about the exact origins of the "Tamil problem," as demonstrated by some of the positions above, it would be foolish to discount the relationship between Sri Lanka's colonial past and the wedge between its two primary ethnic groups.

The heartbeat of Colombo's social life could arguably be found in its largest open space, the Galle Face Green. Originally designed by the Dutch as a first line of defence to fend off possible invasions, the Galle Face Green is now the city's largest urban park, adjacent to a promenade facing the Indian Ocean. A walk along the promenade provided a glimpse of urban life in contemporary Colombo. Lovers occupied the benches parallel to the shoreline while covering themselves with umbrellas. Vendors walked about, selling everything from bottled water to fake football jerseys. Children flew their kites as grown-ups played cricket, the country's most popular sport.

Amidst all this activity, I was left to wonder and ponder about the past's effect on the present and future of Colombo. During the height of the civil war, the country's commercial capital was a warzone. It was the sight of back and forth reprisals, pogroms, raids, suicide bomb attacks, and curfews. Colombo was not a bystander to a war fought in the hills or fields; it was a killing field in and of itself. Bandaranaike International Airport was one such killing field; so were the Colombo Fort Area, Pettah, and Slave Island. An uneasy peace was palpable along Galle Face Green and the Fort Area. The only locals who approached me were men trying to peddle a trip to a temple or shop they seemed to have commissions from. The phrase, "Hello, what country are you from?" was a question posed by about 20 men throughout my visit. The uniqueness of their faces was drowned out by the monotony of their motives. Outside of them, I had very little interaction with the locals. Generally, people I would pass by made little to no eye contact at all, and keep to themselves along the way. On the sidewalks of Church and Main Streets and Beira Lake, the few groups of locals gathered together were made up of men, and they too paid scant attention to passers-by.

This sense of guardedness seemed more like a norm rather than the exception in downtown Colombo. In many ways, this was not surprising. The city that was not so long ago a witness to carnage could not morph into a testimony of calm in less than a decade. However, guardedness is different from fear. The visibility of locals in the streets and parks of Colombo is a nascent form of contestation. Neither Sinhalese nor Tamils were hiding from plain sight. Their visibility and emergence onto public spaces is an active and creative form of protest contra the societal divisions driven all the way back from the colonial era. It is an unsteady peace, but not an invisible one.

Fig. 3 (above): The Galle Face Green and its adjacent promenade; Fig. 4: Fort Area (Source: author)

THE TIE THAT BINDS AND FINAL THOUGHTS

If there is a common thread that ties postcolonial cities like Yangon and Colombo together, it is the built, physical environment in the form of colonial architecture. Colonial buildings, especially in Yangon, have been contested spaces. Burmese government officials took over many of the offices the British had previously occupied in these buildings. For instance, the High Court Building, noted aesthetically for its manor-like design and its clock tower served as the headquarters of the Supreme Court of Myanmar until the ruling junta moved the country's capital to Naypyidaw in 2006. In many ways, the transfer of power from Britain to a sovereign Burma/Myanmar was merely cosmetic as the defense of tyrannical practices was still located in the same place. The same is true for many of the city's colonial era structures. In Colombo, edifices like the Old Parliament and Republic Buildings, and Prime Minister's Office housed various government branches even after the Empire's administration of the island had ended.

It would be tempting to exclude the locals of Yangon and Colombo from the discussion of contesting space as they did not directly wrestle power away from either the colonial ruling elites or post-colonial regimes in a bloody conflict or direct protest. But place-making and visibility are equally potent forms of contestation in a postcolonial context. I would go to the extent of advancing that these "weapons of the weak" are just as powerful against formal, colonial empires as they are towards neocolonial regimes, which both the Burmese junta and successive pro-Sinhalese Sri Lankan governments resembled.

NOTES:

[1] This work is dedicated to my colleagues in De La Salle University namely Dr. Eric Batalla, Dr. Julio Teehankee, Dr. Ador Torneo and Mr. Nong Calanog, as well as Kathleen Bueza, and my former students in Global and Local Peace Issues in Miriam College.

[2] Throughout the text, I alternately use Yangon and Rangoon to describe the city that once served as its country's capital. I switch to Yangon when the city was renamed. This is a conscious decision, respecting not the ruling elites' neocolonial practices as much as deferring to decisions undertaken by a sovereign, independent regime. The same logic applies to my use of Burma and Myanmar, which became the nation's official name in 1988.

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[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Elizabeth Howard Moore and Navanath Osiri, "Urban Forms and Civic Space in Nineteenth- to Early Twentieth-Century Bangkok and Rangoon," *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 40, 2014, pp. 158-77.

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[12] *Ibid.*

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[13] "Burma lifts 25-year old ban on public gatherings," *BBC News*, 29 January 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-21244796>

[14] "The Myanmar Times Election Live," *Myanmar Times*, 1 October 2015, <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/election-2015/live-blog.html>

[15] James Heitzmann, "Middle Towns to Middle Cities in South Asia, 1800-2007," *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 35, 2008, pp. 15-38.

[16] See Endnote 2

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] See Endnote 14

[19] Patrick Peebles, *The History of Sri Lanka*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2006.

[20] Nihal Perera, "Indigenising the Colonial City: Late 19th-century Colombo and its Landscape," *Urban Studies*, Vol. 39, 2002, pp. 1703-721.

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Abingdon: Routledge, 1994.

[24] See Endnote 18

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] Koji Kubo, "A long journey ahead for Myanmar's foreign exchange market reform," *East Asia Forum*, 4 September 2014, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2014/09/04/a-long-journey-ahead-for-myanmars-foreign-exchange-market-reform/>

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[29] Rob Kitchin, "Space II," in Rob Kitchin and Nigel Thrift (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2009, pp. S268-75.

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] See Endnote 12

[33] See Endnote 10

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] See Endnote 26

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] See Endnote 18

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] Niel A. Smith, "Understanding Sri Lanka's Defeat of the Tamil Tigers," *Joint Force Quarterly*, Vol. 59, 2010, pp. 40-44.

[41] John D. Rogers, "Post-Orientalism and the Interpretation of Premodern and Modern Political Identities: The Case of Sri Lanka," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 53, 1994, pp. 10-23.

[42] Marshall R. Singer, "The Tamil-Sinhalese Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: A Case Study in Efforts to Negotiate a Settlement, 1983-1988," Georgetown University School of Foreign Service: Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, 1989.

[43] See Endnote 18.