

## 1 Introduction

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Beginning in the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth, the Dutch United East India Company (VOC) used the island of Ceylon as a site of banishment for those considered rebels in the regions under Company control in the Indonesian Archipelago, many of whom were members of royal lineages. Convicts and slaves from these territories were also sent to Ceylon, as were native troops who served in the Company's army. After their takeover of the island in 1796, the British, too, brought to Ceylon colonial subjects from the archipelago and the Malay Peninsula, primarily to serve in their military. It is from these early political exiles and the accompanying retinues, soldiers, servants, convicts and slaves that the community of the Sri Lankan Malays developed, with its cohesiveness based, above all, on an ongoing adherence to the Muslim faith and the Malay language.

The previous paragraph has briefly introduced a group now referred to as the "Sri Lankan Malays." And yet the history of this designation is neither simple nor straightforward, regarding both place ("Sri Lanka") and people ("Malay"), and as a result nomenclature has emerged as a methodological and theoretical theme in this book, its exploration bringing to the fore a set of questions about understandings of space, temporality, stories and belonging. I raise it here, at the very start, because it is impossible to refrain from naming the place, people and culture I write about, yet also untenable to qualify what is written at every turn. In considering exile, diaspora and the literary culture they fostered, place is clearly a central theme. But what constitutes "a place"?

The island to which Javanese princes, and many other members of royal families from across the Indonesian Archipelago, were sent by the VOC in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries possessed several names: Sarandib, Lanka, Ceylon. How, I ask in this book, do the different – perhaps distinct, overlapping or competing – names of a place shape the ways in which that place is imagined, and the way its histories are told and retold across space, time and literary cultures? Furthermore, I consider how these different imaginings in turn come to shape

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experiences and affiliations. The island's names, I propose, were not mere interchangeable designations. Rather, they represented different traditions, histories and attachments that fostered understandings of, and approaches to, exile and diaspora in lived experience. I will suggest that nomenclature determines place and its imaginings no less than do its physical and spatial dimensions.

Different religious and literary traditions attached different names to the Indian Ocean island off India's southeastern coast. What exile-related echoes did these names – Sarandib, Lanka and Ceylon – carry, especially for a diasporic community? Sarandib, the old name employed by the Arabs for the island, was the spot where according to Muslim tradition Adam, the first man and first prophet, fell to earth upon his banishment from Paradise, a tradition that was known and retold across South and Southeast Asia. Exiles and their descendants engaged with this exilic geography, one that implied that they were not only banished individuals but also returnees to a primordial sacred site. Lanka, the fabulous demon kingdom in the Ramayana, was also a site of banishment, where Sita was forcibly taken by Ravana, far from her husband Rama, his kingdom and his subjects. The Ramayana was widely known in the archipelago, where its story was recast in stone, expressed through dance and theater, and written down in a range of genres, and it would have been intimately familiar to Javanese exiles. Ceylon, the name employed by successive European rulers of the island, was closely associated with exile in the colonial period. To consider if and how these nomenclatures were linked is to ask whether these were parallel, synonymous or perhaps competing nomenclatures for a single place or, possibly, names that were employed for what their users believed to be distinct sites rather than a shared location. Far from constituting a technicality or a marginal scholarly quibble, this is a query that can help assess whether the different exile narratives of Adam, Sita and the eighteenth-century banished were, or could have been, linked in people's imagination and lives.

The question of nomenclature extends beyond place also to the people whose history and writing traditions are at the heart of this study. The ancestors of today's Sri Lankan community came from diverse backgrounds with many being of Javanese or east Indonesian ancestry. A portion of the political exiles in the late seventeenth century, and especially throughout the eighteenth, were members of ruling families in their homelands. For example, the Javanese king Amangkurat III of Mataram was exiled along with his retinue in 1708 after a bitter struggle over the throne with his uncle, the future Pakubuwana I; the twenty-sixth king of Gowa in south Sulawesi, Sultan Fakhruddin, was exiled in



Figure 1.1 Detail showing Sarandib from al-Idrīsī’s 1154 world map, as reconstructed by Konrad Miller in 1927.

1767 on charges of conspiring with the British to oppose the VOC trading monopoly in eastern Indonesia.<sup>1</sup> Also exiled during the eighteenth century were, among others, the prince of Bantam, the crown prince of Tidore and the king of Kupang. Another important figure exiled by the Dutch even earlier (1684) was Sheikh Yusuf of Makassar, a leader, religious scholar and “saint” from Sulawesi. Such prominent figures had followers who joined them in exile and often also established a local following in Ceylon. Some of the banished eventually returned to

<sup>1</sup> Mataram was the central Javanese dynasty that rose to power in the sixteenth century. It reached its heyday under Sultan Agung (r. 1613–1646), who established hegemony over central and east Java. Although in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Mataram kingdom increasingly lost power and territory to the Dutch East India Company and split gradually into several smaller courts, their rulers were all descended from a single family. On the sultan of Gowa and his family’s life in Ceylon, see Suryadi, “Sepucuk Surat dari Seorang Bangsawan Gowa di Tanah Pembuangan (Ceylon),” *Wacana: Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya*, 10.2 (2008): 214–245.

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their places of origin. Thus, for example, after the aforementioned King Amangkurat III's death in Ceylon, following almost thirty years of exile, his descendants and servants were repatriated in 1734 to Java, where the king's body was reinterred in the royal cemetery at Imogiri. Many others, however, stayed and lived out their lives in Ceylon, either by choice or deprived of any alternative.

Not only did early arrivals from the archipelago to Ceylon come from different islands and regions and, as a consequence, speak multiple tongues: Their religious affiliation was also not monolithic, as can be glimpsed occasionally in archival records. A Dutch document from 1691, for example, noted that "widows of Amboin soldiers would be provided with small pensions provided they are Christians."<sup>2</sup> There is evidence that certain exiles, convicts or soldiers, accepted Christianity and that some later reverted to Islam.<sup>3</sup> The references to Balinese and Ambonese soldiers in Dutch service, although not explicitly discussing religion, suggest that there were Hindus and Christians among the larger group.

How did a group possessing such diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious pasts come to be masked by the unifying terms "Malay" and (in Sinhala and Tamil) "Ja," the two most common appellations used today? Both "Malay" and "Javanese" are, to a certain degree, misnomers for a group with such varying ancestry. Using "Indonesian," a more accurate term in today's context in terms of describing their country of origin, would be anachronistic, and it is, consequently, a designation that carries little attachment. My point, however, is not to assess the "correctness" of a particular name but to raise questions about this shifting nomenclature, its imposition from without and adoption from within during different periods, and its relationship to a sense of belonging and place.

The appellations used to identify the Sri Lankan community have changed over time. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Dutch referred to the group as the "Easterners" (*D. Oosterlingen*), another blanket term, like "Malay," that did not hint at the diversity of their home regions.<sup>4</sup> This tendency may have reflected the fact that many of the "Easterners" had lived in Batavia (to the east of Ceylon) before coming to Ceylon and so may have developed a sense of community and

<sup>2</sup> SLNA 1/23, Political Council Minutes, July 18, 1691.

<sup>3</sup> *Jubilee Book of the Malay Cricket Club* (Colombo: Ceylon Malay Cricket Club, 1924), 158–159.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, SLNA 1/73, Political Council Minutes, August 30, 1736.

shared identity that reflected that experience rather than their individual, geographically diverse backgrounds. However, the designation “Javanese” (D. *Javaans*) was also used in some Dutch sources and could suggest that Javanese people formed a majority within the community in its formative stages or again that, with many coming from Batavia (situated on Java), it indicated their site of departure to Ceylon.<sup>5</sup> Yet many sources contained a broader range of appellations for people originating in the Indonesian Archipelago, including “Balinese,” “Makassarese,” “Madurese,” “Javanese,” “Ambonese,” “Buginese” and others. In his 1672 account of life in Ceylon, the Dutch reverend Philippus Baldaeus depicted in great detail many of the battles between the Portuguese and the Dutch, and repeatedly mentioned various categories of soldiers fighting on both sides, among them the Javanese and Bandanese.<sup>6</sup> In the customary document that Librecht Hooreman, outgoing commander of Jaffna, wrote in 1748 for his successor Jacob de Jong, outlining developments during his tenure and challenges for the future, he mentioned two particular individuals: “Lastly, I mention here that two persons are confined to this Castle as Prisoners of State viz. Bantams Pangerang [Prince] Diepa Coesoema and the Madura Prince Radin Tomogon Rana Diningrat. The followers of the former consist of three men and three women and that of the latter two men and two women.”<sup>7</sup> Specific sites were indicated in this passage: Bantam (Banten) in west Java and the island of Madura.

Such depictions raise questions about the almost complete disappearance of languages of the Indonesian Archipelago other than Malay from the extant written records. It is true that Malay was a lingua franca of trade and Islamic culture, widely known in Southeast Asia for several centuries, certainly along the coasts. Yet the islands known as Indonesia today were, and still are, among the world’s most linguistically diverse

<sup>5</sup> B. A. Hussainmiya, *Lost Cousins: The Malays of Sri Lanka* (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1987), 55–57.

<sup>6</sup> Phillipus [sic] Baldaeus (originally published 1672), translated from Dutch by Pieter Brohier, “Phillipus Baldaeus: A True and Exact Description of the Great Island of Ceylon,” *Ceylon Historical Journal* 8.1–4 (1958–1959): 1–403. For mention of Javanese soldiers see, for example, 147, 225, 226, 279; for soldiers from Banda see 147, 162, 225.

<sup>7</sup> For the Dutch original and an English translation, see *Memoir of Librecht Hooreman commander of Jaffna 1748 for his successor Jacob de Jong*, translated and edited by K. D. Paranavitana (Colombo: Department of National Archives, Sri Lanka, 2009), 74. The information contained in such passages has historical significance that goes beyond the nomenclature question. Ranadiningrat, the Madurese prince mentioned by Hooreman, was the son of Cakradiningrat IV, the king of Madura who was exiled to the Cape, while his sons Ranadiningrat and Sasradiningrat were exiled to Ceylon; see Zainalfattah, *Sedjarah Tjaranja Pemerintahan di Daerah-daerah di Kepulauan Madura dengan Hubungannya* (Pamekasan: Paragon, 1951), 154.

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regions and the early arrivals to Ceylon must have spoken a wide range of tongues. As will be shown, some traces of the earlier diversity do remain, with the links to Java, although not immediately apparent, closer to the surface of Malay texts than those to other parts of the archipelago, perhaps because of the high percentage of Javanese among the early exiles, their elevated status and a long-standing written Javanese literary tradition whose products could be transmitted to new surroundings. The very term used for writing Malay in Sri Lanka, employing a modified form of the Arabic script that is known across Southeast Asia as *jawi*, is a Javanese one: *gundul*.<sup>8</sup> However, mention in Malay manuscripts of Makassar, Sumenep, Aceh and additional places shows clearly that sites beyond Java were significant as well.

Other sources, especially letters and petitions written in exile, point to additional, far-flung places across the Indonesian–Malay world to which those classified as Malays felt a connection and allegiance, and to which they often wished to return. For example, a letter written in 1792 by two brothers, descendants of Sultan Bacan Muhammad Sah al-Din from the island of Bacan in eastern Indonesia, beseeched the Dutch governor and Council in Batavia to allow them to leave Ceylon after having lived there for twelve years.<sup>9</sup>

Based on evidence found in Malay writings and colonial documents preserved in Sri Lanka, it is therefore not obvious that the community would develop an exclusively Malay affiliation. Along with its varied roots and adding to its internal diversity were the Malays' close contacts and frequent intermarriages with the Tamil-Muslim community, the Moors, traces of which are found in many manuscripts.<sup>10</sup> It seems,

<sup>8</sup> The term *gundul* (“bald”) is used in Java to refer to the Javanese language written in an unvocalized form of the Arabic script (whereas the more common, and vocalized, Arabic script used to write Javanese is known as *pégon*). For an excellent survey of *jawi* across the Malay world, see Annabel Teh Gallop et al., “A *Jawi* Sourcebook for the Study of Malay Palaeography and Orthography,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 43.125 (2015): 13–171. An example from Ceylon is on 116–117.

<sup>9</sup> Letter, Ceylon to Batavia, 1792, Leiden University Library, MS Cod. Or. 2241-Ia (11).

<sup>10</sup> In this context it is of note that, to the best of my knowledge, no term corresponding to *peranakan* is used at present in Sri Lanka to describe the children born of such marriages. The term, however, was used occasionally in the past to refer to individuals from the archipelago who were of Chinese descent, as evident from Dutch records. See, for example, the request made by Pernakan Sinees Jan Lochsien to the court in Galle, to return to Batavia (SLNA 1/173, Political Council Minutes, December 5, 1776). For an example from a Malay text, see Chapter 8. The Moors, like the Malays, have traditionally written their language in the Arabic script (known as Arabu-Tamil or *arwi*). I consider the Arabic script, in some ways, as another standardizing cloak, like Malay, that has acted as a unifier that obscures a diversity of languages and backgrounds. On the Moors, see Asiff Hussein, *Sarandib: An Ethnological Study of the Muslims of Sri Lanka* (Dehiwala: Asiff Hussein, 2007), 1–400.

however, that with time a gradual process of moving toward a unifying appellation (as well as an almost complete dominance of the Malay language and a more religiously homogeneous group) took place. If during Dutch times the categories of Easterners and Javanese were dominant (with occasional references to additional subgroups, including Bandanese, Malays and Balinese, among others), under the British the term “Malay” gained prominence, certainly in colonial records. The British categorized the group based first and foremost on their collective language, Malay, but also on the physical similarities they identified between them and the local inhabitants in the newly founded British settlements in Malaya (Penang, 1786) and, later, Singapore (1819). Malays were perceived as possessing features unique unto themselves, as Robert Percival concluded in 1803: “The religion, law, manners and customs of the Malays, as well as their dress, colour and persons, differ very much from those of *all the other inhabitants of Asia*. The Malays of the various islands and settlements also differ among themselves, according to the habits and appearance of the nations among whom they are dispersed. Yet still they are all easily distinguished to be of the Malay race.”<sup>11</sup>

The use of “Malay” certainly became more entrenched with the founding by Governor Frederick North of the Ceylon Rifle Regiment, also known as the Malay Regiment in the early nineteenth century, in which many Malays served and which provided not only employment but also a shared sense of commitment and community.<sup>12</sup> A significant relationship existed between life in the Regiment and Malay literary culture: Members of the Regiment copied classical Malay works and also wrote their own stories and poems, especially in the form of *pantuns* and *syairs*;<sup>13</sup> the literature’s principal promoters and audiences were

<sup>11</sup> Robert Percival, *An Account of the Island of Ceylon: containing its history, geography, natural history, with the manner and customs of its various inhabitants: to which is added, the journal of an embassy to the court of Kandy* (London: C. and R. Baldwin, 1803), 147 (my emphasis).

<sup>12</sup> On the history of the Regiment, see B. A. Hussainmiya, *Orang Rejimen: The Malays of the Ceylon Rifle Regiment* (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> The relationship between the Regiment and Malay literary culture was first pointed out by Hussainmiya, *Lost Cousins*, 92–94. Pantuns were popular throughout the archipelago, in Malay, Minangkabau, Achenese, Batak, Sunda and Javanese (in which they were known as *parikan* or *wangsalan*). The Malay pantun is a quatrain, with a rhyme scheme of ABAB, and meant to be sung. The genre has been oft-studied, including inquiries about whether there was a semantic connection between the first and second couplets; see Liaw Yock Fang, *A History of Classical Malay Literature*, trans. Razif Bahari and Harry Aveling (Singapore: ISEAS, 2013), 442–445. The *syair*, among the most popular of genres across Muslim Southeast Asia, is a form of traditional Malay verse, consisting of four-line verses with each line containing four words, i.e. eight to twelve syllables. Its rhyme scheme is AAAA and internal rhyme is common. Heated debates raged among

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related, in one way or another, to the Regiment; members of the Regiment conducted lessons for Malay children, ensuring they were literate in Malay written in the jawi script; soldiers who traveled to Malaya and Singapore on assignment served as a bridge between the community in Ceylon and the large Malay centers to the east by guaranteeing a circulation of ideas, texts and people among them.<sup>14</sup> In addition to these significant dimensions of the community's life that came to bear also on language dominance and nomenclature, especially pertinent to further understanding of the adoption of the designation "Malay" is the question of how interactions among colonial administrators and scholars categorizing the peoples of Ceylon and those peoples', in this case the Malays', self-definitions shaped the nomenclature over time. In other words, how did "insider" and "outsider" perceptions interact and impact shifting naming practices and, with them, shifting identities and understandings of the past and the present?<sup>15</sup>

Throughout this book, I have tried to consistently use the "appropriate" place and group names in context so as to convey the force and different memories they carried. For example, Chapter 6 is an investigation of the island and its exilic histories through the prism of "Saran-dib." Because "Sri Lanka" (replacing Ceylon) was adopted as the name of the nation state only in 1972, it is used for the most part when recent references are made, yet the designation "Lanka" is ancient and resonates deeply, as elaborated in Chapter 7 with its focus on the Ramayana. The terminologies used for the wider region can often be anachronistic when considering earlier centuries, or otherwise vague or constructed, and I employ them – the Indian Ocean world, Indonesian Archipelago,

scholars in the twentieth century over the dating of the *syair's* early appearance as a poetic form in Malay literature with claims ranging from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century; see *ibid.*, 447–449. The most famous *syairs* are likely those composed by Hamzah Fansuri (c. sixteenth century) on mystical themes, but as the genre gained ever wider popularity in the Malay-speaking world it was employed also for writing about nonreligious subjects, including romance and history; see Ismail Hamid, *The Malay Islamic Hikayat* (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1983), 39. *Syairs* were recited and performed on various occasions and served didactic, religious and political purposes. They became, like the more story-like Malay *hikayats*, almost all-encompassing in the breadth of their themes and perspectives.

<sup>14</sup> See Hussainmiya, *Lost Cousins*, 93–94.

<sup>15</sup> The question of Malay identity has been the topic of heated debates and important scholarship in recent years, although the Sri Lankan Malays often remain unmentioned or are mentioned only briefly in these writings. For critical scholarship on Malayness, see, for example, the contributions in Maznah Mohamad and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied (eds.), *Melayu: The Politics, Poetics and Paradoxes of Malayness* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011); also Timothy P. Barnard (ed.), *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity across Boundaries* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014); Joel Kahn, *Other Malays: Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in the Modern Malay World* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2006).



Indonesian–Malay world, South Asia and Southeast Asia – at different points where fitting for the sake of clarity and approximation. Ultimately, my underlying assumption, following Doreen Massey’s seminal work, is that space (however it is divided and marked) is the product of interrelations, constituted through interaction, a sphere of “coexisting heterogeneity” that is always in the process of being made and remade.<sup>16</sup> Exploring names – their histories and imaginings – provides one key to understanding this phenomenon.

As the book considers space or place in their varied meanings, so it considers time. Stories can operate in a range of ways, and their alternative forms of temporality have in part guided this endeavor, for which linear chronology seldom provided the model. What this means in practice is that the book’s chapters explore texts from different periods and places to show how a particular exile- or place-related story or trope was imbued with different temporal dimensions, from the cosmic to the contemporary, collapsing time to allow multiple temporalities to coexist, making the story, or its germ, relevant across eras. Integrating sources from different periods in Malay, Arabic and Javanese from Ceylon, Java and elsewhere in single chapters not only challenges the linearity of time and literary transmission but also provides a further example of multiplicity, of open-endedness and continuity, across what are usually seen as distinct spatial categories, opening up “time-spaces” for exploration.<sup>17</sup>

There are several continuums that weave their way through the book which I wish to highlight. One is the continuum between exile and return. If, as I suggest, Adam’s exile from heaven to earth foreshadowed the Malays’ arrival in Sarandib, which constituted for them a form of return to the original site of human banishment, Adam’s plight can offer a paradigm to think about both exiles and returns and how they connect and are intertwined in much of what follows. Sita’s case is relevant, too, as her return from banishment in Lanka turned out ultimately to offer her another form, perhaps more agonizing, of exile. Several prominent eighteenth-century exiles to Ceylon also experienced returns, whether in life or in death. The latter, posthumous homecomings suggest another continuum, that of mobility, which took various forms – some literal, some more imaginative – within diasporic life, including the movement of exiles, soldiers, texts, sacred objects and familiar food. In some cases, not even death, burial and the construction of tombs, often considered places of “final rest,” were indeed conclusive, precluding mobility. Finally, and further in the background, is the broader continuum of exile

<sup>16</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 9.      <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 177–195.

and forced migration as it took shape in colonial Dutch Asia, for which we must consider a vast domain and the movements within it, a domain that now traverses nation-states and continents but was contained within a single imperial realm: exile from one's home region to a city such as Batavia on Java, to Indonesian islands such as Sulawesi or Ternate, across the Indian Ocean to Ceylon, or half a world away to South Africa.<sup>18</sup>

Following stories and imaginings produced in relation to place, time and movement through the prisms of Sarandib, Lanka and Ceylon guides this book. For this purpose I employ a comparative approach which seeks to explore the Sri Lankan Malays' history, literature and perspectives on exile through multiple lenses and from different shores, integrating sources in Malay, Javanese, Arabic, Dutch and English to present the views of colonized and colonizer in the Dutch and British periods, poetic and prose depictions of exile, single texts that move between and across languages, religious traditions relating to Ceylon and documents ranging from letters to family diaries to theological manuals and charms. In this endeavor I build on, and extend, earlier scholarship in which the nomenclatures of the island and the particular textual and imaginative worlds they evoked did not play a major role.

To date, the Sri Lankan Malays have been studied first and foremost by linguists who have found the local variety of Malay to constitute a highly interesting contact language that combines Austronesian, Dravidian and Indo-European elements, due to long-standing ties among speakers of Malay, Tamil and Sinhala.<sup>19</sup> In several other academic fields the Sri Lankan Malays have remained on the margins of scholarship, including in area studies, focusing on both South Asia and Southeast Asia. Sri Lankan Malay writing was produced in a region now referred to as "South Asia." The carriers of Malay to this region converted it, by way of their linguistic, religious and literary practices, into a frontier of Southeast Asian, or Malay-world, Islam. Across the Indian Ocean from the Indonesian Archipelago and on the path to Mecca, Ceylon was not an entirely unknown site, yet still distant and foreign and certainly not part of a (however loosely connected or imagined) shared world of Malay writing practices and literary production. To this day, this physical distance and frontier-like quality are reflected in the

<sup>18</sup> For an introduction to the topic, see Ronit Ricci, "Introduction," in Ronit Ricci (ed.), *Exile in Colonial Asia: Kings, Convicts, Commemoration* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 1–19.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, the contributions in Sebastian Nordhoff (ed.), *The Genesis of Sri Lanka Malay: A Case of Extreme Language Contact* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).