

CONTESTING COLONIAL MASCULINITY/ CONSTITUTING IMPERIAL AUTHORITY: CEYLON IN MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH PUBLIC DEBATE

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This essay is about many things. First, it is about the period between 1845 and 1860 in the lives of two British ‘public men’², James Emerson Tennent and Samuel White Baker. During this time, both men lived in, worked in, and wrote about Ceylon. They were central figures in both the colony itself and in shaping British understandings of Ceylon’s history and culture. Second, it is about the role of these men in debates regarding the temper of authority, conflicts that emerged from cleavages in ‘public life’ when colonial revolutions in the mid-nineteenth century, including the revolt in Ceylon in 1848, shook the certainty of Britain’s global colonialism. It is thus about the ‘fatal impact’ of colonies — particularly Ceylon — on the constitution of a truly ‘imperial’ politics and public sphere in the mid-nineteenth century. Third, this essay provides a genealogy of the gendered performances of authority, of the ‘competing masculinities’ that were articulated by Tennent and Baker in their publications about Ceylon. In particular, it identifies nature as one key cultural site of this competition and empire as the theatre housing the performance.³

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² I use the term ‘public men’ to refer to men who pursued public objectives — politics and writing in particular — and who rooted their authority in particular forms of masculinity. The terms ‘public life’ and ‘public debate’ are employed to blur the distinction between two Habermasian realms: the ‘sphere of public authority’ and the ‘public sphere’.

³ Judith Butler discusses identities and gender in terms of performativity: ‘acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs or other discursive means.’ See Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 134-41. Catherine Hall has articulated

As the sum of its parts, this essay is an effort to take seriously the challenge issued by Gyan Prakash to look to the ‘spaces’, ‘interstices’, and ‘in-between’ strategies present in the field of history and to understand that ‘criticism means identifying new arrangements out of ... complicities and interpenetrations.’⁴ The historiography of Sri Lanka’s British colonial past would do well to heed this challenge. Until very recently, this literature has rarely engaged in broader debates about empire, colonialism, Orientalism, or gender. As such, Sri Lanka is notably absent from the rethinking of approaches to colonialism that have developed in South Asian historiography over the last three decades. Moreover, Ceylon has been neglected as a site of inquiry for the ‘new imperial’ history, overshadowed — as is much of the history of imperial Britain — by the impact of India on metropolitan culture.⁵ Given the limited nature of recent work on British colonialism in Sri Lanka, this essay offers a crucial intervention, identifying a set of important interconnections between Sri Lankan and British imperial histories.

Two Public Men

James Emerson Tennent and Samuel White Baker are less studied — and certainly less celebrated — than such contemporaries as Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, Benjamin Disraeli, and Thomas Macaulay. Yet there is analytic value in attending to the lives of these other public men and situating them within the broader matrix of the public life of the Victorian empire. First, this approach provides a sense of the precariousness of ‘authority’ and the need

the notion of ‘competing masculinities’ in her analysis of how Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill framed an agenda for debate in mid-Victorian London. See Hall, ‘Competing Masculinities: Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill and the case of Governor Eyre’, in Catherine Hall, *White, Male, and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 255-95.

⁴ Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 237.

⁵ Only a handful of scholars have critically engaged the field in the manner of subaltern studies, the new imperial history, or postcolonial studies, despite the stake of these approaches in Indian historiography. Important works in this vein include Patrick Peebles, *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon* (London: Leicester University Press, 2002); Neloufer de Mel, *Women and the Nation’s Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: Kali for Women in association with the Book Review Literary Trust, 2001); David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Eric Meyer, ‘Forests, Chena Cultivation, Plantations and the Colonial State in Ceylon 1840-1940’ in Richard H. Grove, Vinita Damodara, and Satpal Sangwan, eds., *Nature & the Orient* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 793-827; Ananda Wickremeratne, *The Roots of Nationalism: Sri Lanka* (Colombo, 1996); Patrick Peebles, *Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Ceylon* (New Delhi: Navrang, 1995); John D. Rogers, ‘Post-Orientalism and the interpretation of Premodern and Modern Political Identities: The Case of Sri Lanka’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53:1 (1994), 10-23; T.J. Barron, ‘Science and the Nineteenth-Century Ceylon Coffee Planters’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 16:1 (1987), 5-21.

for public men to continually shore-up the bases of their own authority. Second, it gives depth to the idea of ‘public men’, demonstrating that the competitions — political, literary, intellectual — in which public men engaged were not the sole domain of celebrity but were a rather quotidian affair of public life. Third, it illustrates the extent to which public men contributed to public life via print culture, a vigorous and mobile cultural formation that mitigated the effects of distance and brought the metropole and its colonies into close contact. And finally, it furnishes weight to the claim that public men staked their reputations on colonial matters, and that there is thus an immediate imperial context to nineteenth-century public life.

James Emerson was born in Belfast in 1804, the third son of merchant William Emerson. His education at Trinity College, Dublin — where he showed particular interests in politics and natural history — prepared him, like other members of the Protestant Anglo-Irish elite, for imperial service. In 1832 he married the wealthy banker heiress Letitia Tennent and eventually succeeded to her family’s large properties and took her name, becoming James Emerson Tennent. Politically Tennent was middle-of-the-road. In 1832 he was elected Whig MP for Belfast as part of the Earl Grey government that introduced the Great Reform Bill of 1832, though in 1834 he followed Lord Derby out of Parliament, toppling the Grey administration. Later Tennent sat with Peel’s liberal-conservatives, an administration which he served as secretary for the Board of Control for India from 1841 to 1843. In 1845, he accepted the position as Colonial Secretary of Ceylon, a position he held until 1850. Tennent was a metropolitan-*cum*-colonial man: an intellectual man, a political man, a man of Trinity College Dublin and of Westminster, a man of metropolitan training and colonial aspiration, whose political authority was increasingly dependent on his knowledge of Ceylon.

Samuel White Baker was not of the same mould as Tennent. He was descended from a line of colonial adventurers, naval officers, writers, and plantation owners. Born in 1821, he was from an upper middle class, if not aristocratic, background and his family’s history was firmly entangled with empire. His grandfather, Valentine, a Royal Navy Officer during the American Revolutionary and Continental wars, invested wartime profits in lucrative estates in Jamaica and Mauritius and exercised considerable influence as an absentee plantation owner and a respectable merchant in Bristol. Samuel’s father, also named Samuel, was sent to Jamaica in 1815 to learn the family business, but unlike his future son, he did not appreciate the ‘wilds’ of the colonies and returned to London to manage his business. The younger Samuel Baker stood to inherit the affluent lifestyle provided for by two generations of well-handled plantations and investments. In his youth, Baker spent his time reading travel literature and participating in athletics—boxing, fencing and shooting especially. He found his nimble mind and adventurous fancies restricted while working for his father in London and in 1844 left to manage the family plantations in Mauritius. But soon Baker was bored of even this task and seeking greater adventure arrived in Ceylon, like Tennent, in 1845, lured by the promise of elephant hunting.

Tennent's four years in Ceylon were marked by tension: within the administration itself; between the administration and planter society; and between the administration and the indigenous peoples of Ceylon. Tennent's appointment to Ceylon had been an attempt to infuse new blood into a colony where the civil service was dominated by the 'family compact', a group more invested in the price of coffee than in governing. The 'family compact' resented Tennent's appointment; one of their own, senior civil servant P.E. Wodehouse, had been passed over for Tennent's job. The appointment of Lord Torrington — the young cousin of new Whig Prime Minister Lord John Russell — as governor in 1847 was also an attempt to infuse new blood into the colony. This decision was a slap in the face to Tennent as well as the 'family compact.' Tennent was passed over for the position as both a Tory and a friend of Derby, who was replaced as the head of the Colonial Office by Earl Grey.⁶ Tennent, who felt he had already acquired considerable knowledge about Ceylon through study and experience, was forced to work under a man with no colonial experience. Considerable animosity developed among Tennent, Torrington, and Wodehouse.

Baker disdained both the plantocracy and the colonial administration in Ceylon and quit both circles for the mountain retreat of Newera Eliya.⁷ Initially this was not by design, however; soon after arriving Baker contracted what he called "jungle fever" — probably malaria. Doctors prescribed fresh air and altitude and Baker retired to the government rest house at Newera Eliya to recover. There, Baker was captivated by the landscape and perplexed as to why the apparently fertile land remained uncultivated. Convinced of the land's capacity to yield crops, Baker bought 1000 acres at the bargain rate of £1 per acre — a rate set precisely to entice settlers to Ceylon — and planned his new settlement. Baker and his brother John purchased all the tools, seeds, farm animals, furnishings, building materials, and farm equipment, hired several overseers and servants, and shipped everything — including settlers — from England to Ceylon. His account of the development of the settlement included commentary on the high cost of improving the land, digging wells, the construction of residential and farm buildings, 'recalcitrant natives', disease, and crop failure. Despite their trials, Samuel and John were soon turning a profit.⁸ The settlement also provided Baker with a base from which to conduct hunting expeditions, inextricably linking the identity of settler-colonist to that of the colonial sportsman; he and his brother even had special guns and knives made for themselves in London.

In 1848, various long-standing grievances of both Europeans and indigenous inhabitants of Ceylon with the colonial state came to a critical

⁶ The 3rd Earl Grey, Henry, (1802-1894) was the son of early-1830s Whig Prime Minister, the 2nd Earl Grey, Charles (1764-1845).

⁷ For an overview of these criticisms see Brian Thompson, *Imperial Vanities: The Adventures of the Baker Brothers and Gordon of Khartoum* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 10-24.

⁸ For an account of this endeavour, see Baker, *Eight Years' Wanderings in Ceylon*, 14-33. Also see Thompson, *Imperial Vanities*, 17-25.

convergence, resulting in the 1848 revolt in Ceylon and a parliamentary inquiry in London.⁹ Torrington responded to the revolt by declaring martial law, executing eighteen insurgents — including a Buddhist priest — and imprisoning or transporting others.¹⁰ The severity of the repression split public opinion in Ceylon and in Britain. In London, radical MP Joseph Hume was alerted to the situation by a faction of Europeans in Ceylon and the revolt became a focal point for Parliamentary opposition to Earl Grey's colonial policy. Wodehouse and Tennent both gave evidence before a Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry, whose members included Hume, Benjamin Disraeli, Sir Robert Peel, and W.E. Gladstone.¹¹ The extent of the tension among Ceylon's administrators was revealed during the inquiry when correspondence in which Tennent and Wodehouse viciously slandered one another was introduced. Grey, who had defended the administration throughout, was embarrassed by their behaviour and dismissed all three officials.¹² Despite this setback, Tennent held strong to his colonial aspirations and was encouraged to do so by Grey, whom he was told, 'does not take so unfavourable a view of your conduct as to regard it as disqualifying you from being employed again in some other colony; he will accordingly take an early opportunity of offering you employment.' Grey kept his word and Tennent was soon appointed

⁹ The growth of the plantation economy, facilitated by favourable government policies, negatively affected peasant cultivators: peasant *chena* (slash and burn) agriculture was on the decline; new roads cut across and silt from the plantations flooded peasants' land; and wandering cattle were impounded or shot. See Eric Meyer, 'Forests, Chena Cultivation, Plantations and the Colonial State in Ceylon 1840-1940,' 793-827. Other economic grievances common to both indigenous peasants and Europeans fuelled disaffection. After the collapse of the coffee industry in the late 1840s, the government was operating on a heavy deficit budget, and so Grey ordered the imposition of additional taxes. A gun tax, a dog tax, a tax on verandas, the Road Ordinance — which required each inhabitant of Ceylon to either pay a road tax or work six days annually on the repair and construction of roads — and rumours about the imminence of thirty new taxes further aggravated the situation. The revolt of 1848 was peasant-led, and did find sympathizers in the European community, most notably newspaperman Dr. Christopher Elliot, who brought the revolt and its suppression to the attention of MPs in London.

¹⁰ In a special session of the Supreme Court at Kandy on August 28, convened to try prisoners captured before the proclamation of martial law, seventeen were acquitted, two hundred and forty were released without trial, and seventeen were convicted of high treason and condemned to death — though Torrington later reluctantly commuted the sentences to imprisonment or transportation. Of those captured during the period of martial law, eighteen were executed, sixty-six were imprisoned, and twenty-eight were transported. For narratives of the revolt see: Lennox A. Mills, *Ceylon Under British Rule, 1795-1932* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933); K.M deSilva, 'The "Rebellion" of 1848 in Ceylon', *The Ceylon Journal of Historical Social Studies* 7:2 (1964), 144-70.

¹¹ The Parliamentary Committee Inquiry's reports were published by Parliament in 1851. PP 1851 XXII, 1-238. Also see K.M. de Silva, 'The 1848 "Rebellion" in Ceylon: the British Parliamentary Post-Mortem; Part I', *Modern Ceylon Studies* 5:1 (January, 1974), 40-76.

¹² Tennent was told that 'such dissensions between two officers of high rank cannot fail to have a most injurious effect on the whole body of civil servants in Ceylon.' Quoted in de Silva, 'Sir James Emerson Tennent: Colonial Administrator and Historian', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka* 41 (1996), 21.

governor of St. Helena, though he never assumed office.¹³ This was to be Tennent's last chance. Disraeli, who had ruthlessly cross-examined Tennent during the inquiry into Ceylon, and who enjoyed increasing power in the Tory governments throughout the 1850s and 1860s, used his influence to thwart later attempts to appoint Tennent to the Board of Control for India. Tennent lived out his days as Permanent Secretary to the Board of Trade. Unable to procure the colonial posting he desired, his career was viewed as a failure. In 1866 Disraeli wrote that Tennent 'has turned out to be the most inefficient & useless of our public servants: no business in him: no sound information: his de[partmen]t in a disgraceful state & himself a mere club gossip & office lounge.'¹⁴

Tennent's time in Ceylon cost him his career; Baker's cost him family and nearly his life. Baker returned to England in 1854, extremely ill and having already lost two sons and a daughter abroad. Though Baker's health improved, his wife Henrietta died of typhus shortly thereafter. Desperate to fill the void created by the loss of his wife, Baker ventured to join his brothers in the Crimea, but the war ended before he reached them. Seeking more colonial adventures, he then tried to attach himself to David Livingstone's expedition to Africa, but was firmly refused by both the Royal Geographic Society and Livingstone himself. Finally, he found adventure with Maharaja Duleep Singh, a keen sportsman himself, on a hunting excursion to Hungary. Their journey was cut short, though; while in Turkey, Baker outbid the local Pasha for the woman who would become his second wife, Florence Von Sass. Baker, Von Sass and Singh were forced to flee from the Pasha on horseback to Bucharest. Baker and Von Sass went on to explore the Nile, not returning to England until 1865. It was these later adventures, and his publications relating them, that entrenched Baker as the stereotypical, if not prototypical, Victorian explorer.¹⁵ But his adventures in Ceylon, and his essential defeat there, left his reputation far from secure. His authority as a successful settler and sportsman was tenuous at best.

Authority, masculinity, revolution

Frequently the domains of empire — the 'imperial' and the 'colonial' (and their respective 'isms') — are understood via a relationship in which the latter proceeds from the former. Things 'imperial' are the result of national processes aimed outward and things 'colonial' are the local effects of the 'imperial.' In this essay, however, 'colonial' is used to refer to local fields of experience and meaning produced in the uneven polylogic relations between extant, though certainly not static, populations and aggressive foreign populations with social, political, or economic designs on that people or the

¹³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 21.

¹⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 23.

¹⁵ Michael Brander, *The Perfect Victorian Hero: Samuel White Baker*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1982).

territory they inhabit. 'Imperial' here refers to a transnational realm of experience and meaning constituted by the totality of colonial domains within a system ambitious of foreign domination. The character of the 'imperial' is the effect of the 'colonial', and the nation is the centripetal effect of these realms rather than the centrifugal origin.

Revolutions throughout the British Empire in the mid-nineteenth century undermined the surety of colonial power, producing an anxiety about the stability of all forms of authority — personal, political, social, and cultural. Colonial authority was repeatedly and violently challenged in Jamaica (1831, 1865), Canada (1837-38, 1849), Afghanistan (1839-42), China (1839-42, 1856-60), the Punjab (1845-49), Ireland (1848, 1865), Ceylon (1848), Burma (1824-26, 1852), India (1857-58), and New Zealand (1845-72). Public men attempted to reconstitute authority, both in colonial settings and in the metropole, through competing formulations and performances of masculinity; masculinity was the key conceptual guarantor of authority. Knowledge about being 'a man' was constituted through a matrix of racial, ethnic, religious, and class identities; being white, Anglo-Saxon, Christian, and bourgeois was crucial to the construction of an authoritative masculinity. Archetypal figures such as the rugged sportsman, the muscular Evangelical, the colonial man of action, and the intellectual man demonstrate the salience of masculinity in determining authority over nature, the labouring class, the 'heathen', the colonized, and 'woman.'

Historians have noted that the mid-nineteenth century was precarious, both in terms of Victorian masculinity and British colonial authority. Exploring these vacillations as inextricably linked suggests that moments of colonial 'distress' are not indicative of empire's operation as a safety-valve for national tensions, but rather gesture to the profound impact that such events had on imperial Britain's political and cultural formations.¹⁶ Each revolt, as a tangible threat to colonial power, contributed to a prolonged anxiety about authority in general. Revolutionary eruptions and authorial interruptions created spaces from which public men articulated new relationships between masculinity and authority. Recent studies by Catherine Hall have elaborated the impact of the imperial domain on national formations in Britain in the period between the first two Reform Bills, especially at their inceptions.¹⁷ Her

¹⁶ John Tosh and Michael Roper have argued that understanding masculinity as a volatile and unstable dynamic of history is particularly important in the mid-Victorian context, when masculinity was in a transitory phase, 'from one dominant masculinity to another ... One of the most precarious moments in the reproduction of masculinity is the transfer of power to the succeeding generation.' Roper and Tosh, 'Introduction', in Roper and Tosh, eds., *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 17. Miles Taylor argues that 'distress' throughout the British empire in 1848 resulted from an export of national tensions. He thus maintains empire's status as a receptacle filled only from the metropole and negates its impact upon metropolitan culture and politics. Taylor, 'The 1848 Revolutions and the British Empire', *Past and Present* 166 (2000), 146-180.

¹⁷ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002). Hall, 'The Nation Within and Without', in Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall, eds., *Defining the Victorian*

discussions of the political fallout of the Morant Bay rebellion in 1865 in relation to the Second Reform Bill are particularly rich, for they establish masculinity as the basis for debating authority, and periods of colonial revolution as discrete moments at which debate was galvanized.¹⁸ These debates operated broadly within the imperial realm via ‘webs of empire’ that connected Britain and colonial sites such as Jamaica and Ceylon in an integrated ‘system of circulation ... of ideas, ideologies, and identities across space and time.’ The links between authority and masculinity in this period were configured and contested through an empire that was ‘both fragile, prone to crises where important threads [were] broken or structural nodes destroyed, yet also dynamic, being constantly remade and reconfigured through concerted thought and effort.’¹⁹

By mid-century, the work of these webs had ensured that Ceylon had become increasingly present in the metropolitan imagination. Several book length studies had appeared since 1800 and Victorian periodicals constantly featured articles on religious, political, economic, and sporting aspects of the island.²⁰ The consumption of these texts is difficult to measure, but the profusion of material does suggest that Ceylon was on the minds of educated and politically-minded readers, especially the public men who were engaged in shaping the agenda for public and political debate. The 1848 Ceylon revolt, the Parliamentary Inquiry into its causes and repression, and the *Times*’ coverage of the debates in parliament made this interest acutely momentous.

Nation: Race, Class, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 179-233.

¹⁸ Hall, ‘Competing Masculinities.’

¹⁹ Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Macmillan, 2001) 14-15; 15.

²⁰ Early British accounts of the island include: Robert Knox, *An Historical Relation of Ceylon: together with somewhat concerning Severall Remarkable passages of my life that hath happened since my Deliverance out of my Captivity* (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1911) [First published in 1681 and reprinted in 1817.]; Robert Percival, *An Account of the Island of Ceylon: containing its history, geography, natural history, with the manners and customs of its various inhabitants* (London: C. and R. Baldwin, 1803); Reverend Robert Fellowes, *The history of Ceylon from the earliest period to the year MDCCCXV; with characteristic details of the religion, laws, & manners of the people and a collection of their moral maxims & ancient proverbs* (London: J. Mawman, 1817). Accounts of Ceylon published in the 1840s include Major Jonathan Forbes, *Eleven Years in Ceylon* 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1840); J.W. Bennett, *Ceylon and Its Capabilities* (London: Allen, 1843); W. Knighton, *The History of Ceylon from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (London, 1845); Knighton, *Forest Life in Ceylon*. 2 vols. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1854); James Willyams Grylls, *The Outstation; or, Jaunts in the Jungle* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1848); and Charles Pridham, *An Historical Political, and Statistical Account of Ceylon and its Dependencies* (London: T. and W. Boone, 1849). These volumes were commonly reviewed in such publications as *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* and *The Dublin Review*. Moreover, the *London Quarterly Review*, *The United Service Journal and Naval Military Magazine*, *Bentley’s Miscellany*, *Blackwood’s-Edinburgh Magazine*, *Colburn’s New Monthly Magazine*, and *The Dublin Review* featured articles on Ceylon in the 1840s and 1850s.

This was not lost on one contemporary commentator, who wrote with regard to one 1849 book,

As far as the political world is concerned, this may be regarded as a most timely publication, affording statesmen a full and accurate account of the past condition and the present situation of a colony, which, within the last twelve months, has seen an insurrection of its natives suppressed in the blood of the leaders of revolt. In our estimation, no such sad event was required to confer an additional interest upon the island of Ceylon — the land of romance to every geographer, ... the country of huge elephants, ... the land of strange traditions, and, if possible, of still more strange realities; for even to this day its woods are filled with wild men.²¹

In 1843 Thomas De Quincey had captured for the readers of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* some of this romance, the great potential of Ceylon as a colony, and also hinted that the hard work of colonization remained:

Ceylon is in fact already, Ceylon is at this moment, a gorgeous jewel in the imperial crown.... Great are the promises of Ceylon; great already her performances. Great are the possessions of Ceylon; far greater her reversions. Rich she is by her developments, richer by her endowments. She combines the luxury of the tropics with the sterner gifts of our own climate. She is hot; she is cold. She is civilized; she is barbarous. She has the resources of the rich; and she has the energies of the poor.²²

For De Quincey, the space of the colony was a feminine one — as notable for her endowments and her resources as for the challenges posed by her energies. Ceylon's one disadvantage, or 'calamity' as he called it, was to be found 'in the laziness of her population' and their want of the 'motives to exertion.' De Quincey located the 'motives to exertion' requisite to filling nature full of promise in the authority of a vigorous Anglo masculinity. He argued that Britain's rise to imperial dominance *vis à vis* other European nations and its own colonies was the end result of a competition in which, 'the power constitutes the title; the man that has the ability to go a-head, is the man entitled to go a-head; and the nation that *can* win the place of leader, is the nation that ought to do so.' He argued that the dominance of 'one race of men' was explained by 'British energy' and 'our aptitudes of colonization.'²³ Colonization was a masculine endeavor defined by 'man's ability.'

²¹ W.B. McCabe, 'Ceylon — Its Ancient Traditions and Modern Missionaries', *Dublin Review* 26:52 (June 1849), 273.

²² Thomas De Quincey, 'Ceylon', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 54 (November, 1843), 623.

²³ *Ibid.*, 636; 623; 622-23.

There is an echo of De Quincey in Thomas Carlyle's 1849 essay, 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question', in which he argued that Britain's imperial dominance was the result of a 'manfullness' characterized by strength and natural worth. He wrote,

Up to this time it is the Saxon British mainly; they hitherto have cultivated with some manfullness: and when a manfuller class of cultivators, stronger, worthier to have such land, abler to bring fruit from it, shall make their appearance, — they, doubt it not, by fortune of war and other confused negotiation and vicissitude, will be declared by Nature and Fact to *be* the worthier, and will become proprietors, — perhaps also only for a time.²⁴

Public men and imperial commentators such as De Quincey and Carlyle offered to readers in the 1840s a theory of imperial authority dependant on masculinity that was *sui generis*. Masculinity was defined as a timeless, natural, uncontested, and necessary quality of authority. If empires — those grand edifices of authority, deference, and resistance — rose and fell, they did so on the measure of a masculinity generalized to a whole race or class of persons. Imperial authority, perhaps, was not a natural occurrence, the argument went, but the *dependence* of authority on masculinity was. This was a dependence to which public men in the mid-nineteenth century clung — in fact, to which they clung ever more tightly — as their authority — and thus their masculinity — was repeatedly and violently challenged first in colonial domains and then imperial ones.

Carlyle's masculinity was not *sui generis*, however. It existed, as Catherine Hall has argued, in tension — in competition — with that articulated by John Stuart Mill. The political debates and legal proceedings that occurred in Britain following the violent and unequivocal displays of colonial authority staged by Governor Edward John Eyre's suppression of the 1865 Jamaican rebellion were staged according to competing 'conceptions of authority and power associated with masculinity.'²⁵ John Stuart Mill led the prosecution of Eyre. He and his allies — including Thomas Huxley, Herbert Spencer, and Charles Darwin — focused their critique of Eyre's authority through the lens of legality, maintaining that a proper authority resides in the performance of an equitable rule of law. This rule of law, he believed, operated to raze the dependence of individuals on society and provide them with the potential to realize a type of individualism that was at the heart of a masculinity he associated with mid-nineteenth-century bourgeois men. Thomas Carlyle led the defence of Eyre, appealing to iconic figures of action, men of passion who provided the order and stability necessary to manage a world racked with savagery and anarchy. In Eyre, Carlyle recognized those masculine qualities of authority. The genesis of the public debate between Carlyle and Mill,

²⁴ Thomas Carlyle, 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question', *Fraser's Magazine* (December 1849), 670.

²⁵ Hall, 'Competing Masculinities', 256, 288.

however, was nearly twenty years earlier, in 1849 — against a broad imperial backdrop of colonial unrest in Ceylon and Ireland, debates about free-trade with regard to the corn laws and the Irish famine, as well as the dramatic decline in price of coffee in the absence of protective tariffs and the impact of this decline on plantation economies in Ceylon and Jamaica.

Mill and Carlyle were not the only public men to debate conceptions of authority associated with masculinity in this context. The next section of this paper will explore some of the performative aspects of the masculine claims to authority made in the mid-century press by James Emerson Tennent and Samuel White Baker. The debate between Carlyle and Mill appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* one year after the rebellion in Ceylon, precisely as the Parliamentary Committee inquired into it, one year prior to Tennent's dismissal from his colonial post and the publication of his first study of Ceylon, and three years prior to the appearance of the first of Baker's books about hunting and settler colonialism in Ceylon. In Baker's books, *The Rifle and the Hound in Ceylon* (1854) and *Eight Years Wanderings in Ceylon* (1855), the Victorian reader encountered much of the same rhetoric and racial imagery that Carlyle had used in 1849, but in the performance of a different masculinity: the colonial sportsman. Tennent's two studies of the island, *Christianity in Ceylon* (1850) and *Ceylon: An Account of the Island, Physical, Historical and Topographical* (1859), bear many of the characteristics of John Stuart Mill: the liberal, metropolitan, man of reason. In debating race and empire, Mill, Carlyle, Tennent, and Baker all had personal and political authority at stake. Their professional lives depended on their reputations as political, cultural, and social authorities; thus their articulations of masculine authority must also be read personally. Together, they gesture toward the important historical relationship between masculinity and imperial authority, even as they demonstrate its non-fixity. In their masculine performances and their representations of Ceylon, Tennent and Baker each had something different at stake in the domestic socio-political climate. Tennent staked his political career, his authority as a colonial administrator, on his intellectual claims to colonial knowledge. Baker, temporarily defeated by Ceylon, staked his reputation and authority as a settler-colonist and colonial sportsman on his publications and intended them to authenticate that reputation.

Masculinity, Elephants, and the Natural World of the Colony

David Scott argues that the history of the British in Ceylon since 1832 is a history of governmentality, of colonial authority 'directed at the destruction of and reconstitution of colonial space' and 'the systematic redefinition and transformation of the terrain on which the life of the colonized was lived.'²⁶

²⁶ David Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, 40; 41. Foucault defined governmentality as 'economy at the level of the entire state, which means exercising towards its inhabitants and their wealth and behavior a form of surveillance and control.' Michel Foucault

This terrain was a vast social world that included people, animals, and resources. It was a colonial version of Foucault's 'complex composed of men and things ... men in their relations, their links, their imbrications with these other things which are wealth, resources, means of subsistence.'²⁷ Arguably this political rationality was not the sole domain of the state; co-extant was a broader cultural imperative to 'classify, categorize and bound [a] vast social world ... so that it could be controlled.'²⁸ Certainly governmentality as a cultural imperative informed De Quincey's understanding of colonialism as a process aimed at the transformation of nature. 'As Colonization advances', De Quincey wrote, 'that ground becomes eligible for culture — that nature becomes full of promise ... because the dreadful solitude becomes continually narrower under the accelerated diffusion of men ... and under the eternal discoveries of civilization, which combat with elementary nature.'²⁹

With this rationality's broader cultural proclivity to reconstitute space in mind (a project Kavita Philip terms 'Civilizing Natures'), John Mackenzie's concept of an 'Empire of Nature' assumes a new and more compelling significance.³⁰ What he describes as a 'vast natural world that lay in some respects beyond the full grasp of British power', in which 'only the hunter and the forest officer ... maintained a tenuous grip', was a far more complex epistemological space. Hunting *did*, as Mackenzie suggests, take the British to the frontiers of empire where they were able to gather intelligence and offer a display of power, but so too did plantations, missions, and administrative tours. The 'Empire of Nature' was not solely the physical domain of the hunter and sport was not placed simply above administration in an implicit acknowledgment that 'rule was maintained more successfully by the power of the gun, even in symbolic action in the natural world, than by bureaucracy alone.'³¹ The 'Empire of Nature' was a vast natural and *social* world graspable through the operation of a multiplicity of narratives about nature produced from a multiplicity of perspectives about how to rule by 'defining and classifying space.'³² On one level these narratives operated as part of the broader cultural imperative of governmentality, or what Nicholas Dirks refers

'Governmentality', in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 92.

²⁷ Foucault, 'Governmentality', 93.

²⁸ Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 5.

²⁹ De Quincey, 'Ceylon', 622.

³⁰ Kavita Philip, *Civilizing Natures: race, resources, and modernity in colonial South India* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004). Philip, 'English Mud: Towards a Critical Cultural Studies of Colonial Science', *Cultural Studies* 12:13 (1998), 300-331. Philip plays with the dual meaning of 'civilizing' in much the same way Catherine Hall does in *Civilising Subjects*, to refer to both the character of colonial men and their intentions — men of civilizing natures aimed at civilizing nature.

³¹ John MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 192; 195.

³² Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, 3.

to as cultural technologies of rule.³³ On another level, these narratives were most often written for consumption in the metropole, and in the ‘definition of a body of information that is needed, the procedures by which appropriate knowledge is gathered, its ordering and classification, and then how it is transformed into useable forms such as published reports, statistical returns, histories, gazetteers, legal codes and encyclopedias’, these narratives situated nature as a key site for the articulation of competing forms of masculine authority.³⁴

In the decade after his dismissal from his post in Ceylon, Tennent defended what he believed to be the masculine basis of authority in his histories of Ceylon published in 1850 and 1859. These texts set out an intellectual approach to the state-management of natural resources through, on one hand, classification, enumeration and the application of this knowledge and, on the other, the cultivation of a civilized ‘savage’ through education. Conversely, the settler-colonist and popular sportsman Baker, in his two books on Ceylon published in 1854 and 1855, posited an authority of which the masculine basis resided not in intellectualism or state-management of resources but in the individual man’s ability to improve and conquer the ‘wild spaces’ of empire through hunting and settling. When read against one another their narratives manifest ‘competing masculinities’ at several points: the utility of the government’s botanical garden; the role of missionaries in ‘civilizing natures;’ the role of English education; and the ‘civilizing’ effects of coffee versus rice. Perhaps the starkest assessment of how each man performed a certain imperial authority was in their discussions of elephants — their nature, their uses, and man’s relationship to them — in Ceylon. In the space remaining, this essay will focus on how both Tennent and Baker, via the reconstruction of particular forms of colonial masculinity *vis à vis* elephants, made their texts perform certain claims to authority within the broader imperial realm of public debate. In Baker’s texts, elephants appear as part of a dangerous natural landscape, which only the colonial sportsman could conquer and make safe for civilization. Conversely, Tennent frames the elephant as a curiosity of the natural world, one that needs to be studied and known before it can be tamed and civilized.

In imperial print culture, the elephant in Ceylon was an ambiguous figure, at once savage and sagacious. It was a beast of great fury, most certainly to be feared, but it was also intelligent. In other words, this ‘leviathan of creation’ was a trainable animal capable of providing valuable labour for the project of colonial modernity. Historically, the elephants of Ceylon were valued for their labour. The people of Ceylon had long captured, tamed, and traded elephants and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Dutch exported elephants to both the east and west coasts of India, primarily for labour or ceremonial functions.³⁵ During the period of British rule, elephants

³³ Nicholas Dirks discusses ‘cultural technologies of rule’ in the foreword to Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, ix.

³⁴ Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, 5.

³⁵ According to Tennent, ‘from time immemorial the natives have been taught to capture and tame them, and the export of elephants from Ceylon to India had been going on without

were employed on government works such as road and bridge building, and in the clearing of the jungle in order to keep up with demand for timber for boats, bridges, furniture, and house production.³⁶ As coffee cultivation flourished in Ceylon in the mid-1840s, the elephant's value as source of labour was tempered by its potential threat to the crop and the planter. Indeed, the government sought to protect human life and coffee so much that in the 1840s and 1850s it offered rewards for slain elephants.³⁷ Typically, Ceylonese elephants did not have tusks, and thus were rarely hunted for ivory as were their Indian and African counterparts. On those rare occasions when ivory was to be had, most of it was exported to China or used domestically for ritual purposes.³⁸ Elephant hunting in Ceylon was thus for bounty or prestige. Regardless, in narratives about Ceylon, the elephant held a special place. It was almost always discussed and then always separately from other animals, the subject of its own chapter, in which the character of the elephant was explored as well as methods of hunting and capturing. This literary capture marked the elephant's peculiar place in the imperial imagination: for the hunter it was the greatest of opponents, for planters the greatest threat, for historians and other intellectuals the greatest natural curiosity, and for government both the greatest nuisance and the greatest asset.

Tennent described elephants as 'harmless and peaceful', animals not 'instinctively vicious or even highly irritable in their temperament.'³⁹ Furthermore, he claimed that they were neither bold nor courageous and that 'the incessant slaughter of elephants by sportsmen in Ceylon, appears to be merely in subordination to the influence of the organ of destructiveness, since the carcass is never applied to any useful purpose, but left to decompose and to defile the air of the forest.'⁴⁰ Baker, on the other hand, described elephants as 'naturally savage, wary, and revengeful'.⁴¹ He was, however, clearly

interruption from the period of the first Punic War.' James Emerson Tennent, *Ceylon: An Account of the Island, Physical, Historical, and Topographical*. 2 Vols. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1859), II: 272. On the Dutch trade see II: 52.

³⁶ Meyer, 'Forests, Chena Cultivation, Plantations and the Colonial State in Ceylon 1840-1940', 798.

³⁷ Samuel Baker wrote, 'The government reward for the destruction of elephants in Ceylon was formerly ten shillings per tail; it is now reduced to seven shillings in some districts, and is altogether abolished in others, as the number killed was so great that the government imagined they could not afford the annual outlay.' Samuel White Baker, *Eight Years' Wanderings in Ceylon*, 127. It is difficult to ascertain the number of elephants slaughtered during this program, but Tennent reported that 3500 rewards were claimed in the northern provinces between 1845 and 1848 and 2000 in the southern provinces between 1851 and 1856. Tennent, *Ceylon*, II: 324-4. Placing a bounty on an animal was not an unheard of colonial policy; in Australia the Clyde Company issued a bounty on Thylacine because of the danger they posed to sheep herds. Robert Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger: The History and Extinction of the Thylacine*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 131.

³⁸ Tennent, *Ceylon*, II: 273.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II: 277.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, II: 332.

⁴¹ Baker, *The Rifle and the Hound in Ceylon* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854), 9.

impressed with their combination of might and perceptiveness and he found them especially useful in establishing his settlement at Newera Eliya. ‘This elephant was particularly sagacious’, he wrote, ‘she was employed in making, a dam across a stream. She was a very large animal, and it was beautiful to witness her wonderful sagacity in carrying and arranging the heavy timber required.... These she herself arranged, under the direction of her driver, with the reason apparently of a human being.’⁴² Nonetheless, this characteristic, he argued, only served to make the elephant more dangerous.

In part, the differences in Baker’s and Tennent’s descriptions of elephants can be ascribed to their colonial geographies. Baker understood the elephant as a settler-colonist and a sportsman from his position in the central jungles of Ceylon: a ‘wild country’ filled with ‘savage beasts.’ But it was a country that was gazed upon and ruled over by the colonial sportsman. It was the very designation of the country as wild that constituted the colonial sportsman as the civilizer; Baker explained, ‘a sportsman naturally directs his path to some land where civilization has not yet banished the wild beast from the soil.’⁴³

Moreover, Baker’s subjectivity was neither wholly British nor wholly Ceylonese: it was colonial. The colonial sportsman was not simply an English export as J. A. Mangan argues, nor was big game hunting simply a ‘cultural characteristic’ of imperialism as John Mackenzie suggests.⁴⁴ The imperial hunt was an invented tradition and, according to William Storey, it, ‘as described in the memoirs and stories of hunters, embodied special cultural values. No similar hunting traditions existed. This is not to say that the British had no indigenous hunting traditions: obviously they did. It is to say that British expatriates hunted different kinds of animals, in different ways, for emphatically different reasons.’⁴⁵ The colonial sportsman, as practitioner of the colonial hunt, was a culturally invented identity that emerged from and existed in the hybrid space between the Englishman and the ‘native’. A distinct feature of the colonial sportsman, much like the settler-colonist — an identity which Baker also claimed⁴⁶ — was the ‘sustained and direct character

⁴² Baker, *Eight Years’ Wanderings in Ceylon*, 27.

⁴³ Baker, *The Rifle and the Hound in Ceylon*, vii.

⁴⁴ J.A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal* (London: Frank Cass, 1998); Mackenzie, *The Empire of Nature*, 7. Mangan identifies sport as existing at the heart of British imperialism, residing there as the ‘chief spiritual export’, as the ‘diffusion of an ideal.’ Mackenzie argues that hunting was a ‘cultural characteristic’ of British imperialism, one that emerged out of the ‘hunting cult’ that evolved in England and was exported around the empire.

⁴⁵ William Storey, ‘Big Cats and Imperialism: Lion and Tiger Hunting in Kenya and Northern India, 1898-1930’, *Journal of World History* 2:2 (1991), 136-7.

⁴⁶ Baker also identified the elephant as a danger from the perspective of a settler-colonist. He wrote, ‘Few people understand the difficulties with which a small village has to contend in the cultivation of rice. The continual repairs of temporary dams, which are nightly trodden down and destroyed by elephants; the filling up of the water-courses from the same cause; [and] the nocturnal attacks upon the crops by elephants.’ Baker, *Eight Years’ Wanderings in Ceylon*, 88.

of the engagement between indigenous and European cultures.⁴⁷ The colonial sportsman, as a mobile and predominantly white, upper-middle class masculine figure, defined himself in opposition to both the indigenous and the English hunter.

Baker conceded that '[t]he character of the [English] nation is beautifully displayed in all our rules for hunting, shooting, fishing, [and] fighting', but clearly delineated the colonial hunt — and by extension the colonial sportsman — as remarkably different from the English variety.⁴⁸ In colonial spaces sport possessed an intensity that sport at 'home' could not rival:

The acknowledged sports of England will appear child's play; the exciting thrill will be wanting, when a sudden rush in the jungle brings the rifle on full cock; and the heavy guns will become useless mementoes of past days, like the dusty helmets of yore, hanging up in an old hall ... All these souvenirs of wild sports, contrasted with the puny implements of the English chase, will awaken once more the longing desire, for the 'Rifle and Hound in Ceylon'.⁴⁹

Baker was hardly the first colonial sportsman to express such a sentiment. James Grylls described the hunt as something more than 'the mere ordinary pleasure that one experiences in sport generally, such as running into a fox after forty minutes chase.' He continued, 'it must be the consciousness of the power of man over every beast of the field, and the pride of wielding it, that causes one to feel such intense gratification when an elephant is brought down in the midst of its own native wilds!'⁵⁰

The defining characteristic of the colonial sportsman in these configurations is an especially virile masculinity made possible only through the imposition, indeed the penetration, of that identity into narratives about the natural world. By implication, this framed the masculinity of the colonial sportsman as something wild and instinctual. European hunters reduced the skill of the indigenous trackers they employed to a particular instinct, the 'jungle eye.'⁵¹ Baker described one tracker named Banda as 'a man of good birth in his nation. Strikingly handsome and beautifully proportioned, with the

⁴⁷ Nicholas Thomas, *Possessions: Indigenous Art/Colonial Culture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 9. Also, see Homi Bhabha's various works on the ways meanings are reconstituted by those inhabiting the liminal spaces of interacting colonial cultures collected in *The Location of Culture* (New York, London: Routledge, 1994). For how this gets worked out by colonial sportsmen see Elizabeth Vibert, 'Real men hunt buffalo: masculinity, race and class in British fur traders' narratives', in Catherine Hall, ed., *Cultures of Empire: Colonisers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 282 and 289; also suggestive is Scott Bennett, 'Shikar and the Raj', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 7:2 (1984), 73.

⁴⁸ Baker, *The Rifle and the Hound in Ceylon*, v.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 409.

⁵⁰ Grylls, *The Outstation*, 56.

⁵¹ MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature*, 192.

agility of a deer, he is in all respects the beau ideal of a native hunter. His skill in tracking is superb, and his thorough knowledge of the habits of all Ceylon animals, especially of elephants, renders him a valuable ally to a sportsman.⁵² The colonial sportsman, according to Baker possessed a similar combination of instinct and knowledge of habit that he described as the 'game eye.'

Unless the traveler is well accustomed to wild sports, he has not his 'game eye' open in fact; he either passes animals without observing them, or they see him and retreat from view before he remarks them ... Quickness of eye is an indispensable quality in sportsmen, the possession of which constitutes one of their little vanities. Nothing is so conducive to the perfection of all the senses as the constant practice in wild and dangerous sports. The eye and the ear become habituated to watchfulness, and their powers are increased in the same proportion as the muscles of the body are by exercise.⁵³

The possession of this instinct, however, did not cast the colonial sportsman in the same wild role as the 'native' because he also possessed an understanding, a reason, which set hunting apart from killing. Baker clearly delineated the 'great difference between elephant-killing and elephant-hunting; the latter is sport, the former is slaughter.'⁵⁴

Baker defined 'sport' by three attributes. First, knowledge of the terrain and the species was required. The colonial sportsman, wrote Baker, 'should thoroughly understand the nature and habits of every beast or bird that he looks upon as game. This last attribute is indispensable; without it he may kill, but he is not a sportsman.' Second, the pleasure of the colonial sportsman 'consists in the chance of the animal escaping.' Baker likened the technique of the native 'killer' to that of an relentless leopard, 'noiselessly stalking till within ten paces of their game, they let the broad arrow fly. At this distance who could miss? Should the game be simply wounded, it is quite enough; they never lose him, but hunt him up, like hounds upon a blood track.'⁵⁵ Baker claimed that killing in this manner was a terrible system. He could not consider it sport when there was 'no rest for the animals; in the day-time they are tracked up, and on moonlight nights the drinking-places are watched, and an unremitting warfare is carried on.' Baker and others attributed the increase in this method of killing to the government system of rewards. The problem, as Baker saw it, was that a 'native' could 'obtain a gun for thirty shillings; and with two shillings' worth of ammunition, he starts on a hunting trip. Five elephants, at a reward of seven shillings per tail, more than pay the prime cost of his gun.'⁵⁶

⁵² Baker, *The Rifle and the Hound in Ceylon*, 248.

⁵³ Baker, *Eight Years' Wanderings in Ceylon*, 124-5.

⁵⁴ Baker, *The Rifle and the Hound in Ceylon*, 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 4; vi; 126.

⁵⁶ Baker, *Eight Years' Wanderings in Ceylon*, 129; 128-9.

The third defining attribute of the colonial sportsman was his ability to kill in a creditable manner, which meant a display of masculinity that placed the animal and the sportsman in an arena of combat in which both faced a certain amount of danger. As a sportsman Baker saw elephants as a natural adversary and elephants' natural intelligence, argued Baker, rendered 'them the more dangerous as foes. Even when tamed, there are many that are not safe for a stranger to approach.'⁵⁷ Baker's conception of the elephant as both savage and sagacious made it the worthiest adversary within the 'wild' interior:

Men who have not seen, cannot understand the grandeur of wild sports in a wild country. There is an indescribable feeling of supremacy in a man who understands his game thoroughly, when he stands upon some elevated point and gazes over the wild territory of savage beasts. He feels himself an invader upon the solitudes of nature ... And he is shortly upon the track of the king of beasts.⁵⁸

Native hunters were often characterized as shooting down from the trees or other secure positions that removed them from potential danger. One anonymous hunter, upon the termination of the bounty on the elephants, commented that he was

delighted to think that the government has not granted further sums for the destruction of this noble animal in any district, so there is every probability of their meeting death with the gun in a creditable manner, instead of finding destruction or a wretched wound at every pool or stream where exhausted nature compels them to drink at, every moonlight night, and where as surely the crafty nigger sits safely ensconced behind some unassailable rock, or perched on some equally safe overhanging tree.⁵⁹

Thus, in performing the colonial sportsman, Baker positioned himself against the English hunter, as the dangers the colonial hunter faced were far more impressive for the game was truly 'wild', as well as against the 'native' hunter, who lacked any notion of 'sport' and killed game in a cruel and uncivilized manner. 'To quiet, steady-going people in England,' Baker wrote,

there is an idea of cruelty inseparable from the pursuit of large game; people talk of 'unoffending elephants', 'poor buffaloes', 'pretty deer', and a variety of nonsense about things which they cannot possibly understand ... There is no doubt whatever that a

⁵⁷ Baker, *The Rifle and the Hound in Ceylon*, 9.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁹ Anon, 'Journey of a Week's Shooting in the Eastern Province of Ceylon', *Bentley's Miscellany*, 44 (1858), 553, 561.

certain amount of cruelty pervades all sports. But in ‘wild sports’ the animals are for the most part large, dangerous and mischievous, and they are pursued and killed in the most speedy, and therefore in the most merciful, manner.⁶⁰

In delineating the position of the colonial sportsman between the metropolitan man and the ‘native’, Baker constituted both instinct and reason as formative of that identity, though he emphasized the latter.

In contrast, Tennent’s discussion of an unnamed, though ‘distinguished’, sporting gentleman in Ceylon emphasized instinct:

One gentleman in Ceylon ... came to the conclusion that the passion thus excited within him was a remnant of the hunter’s instinct, with which man was originally endowed to enable him, by the chase, to support existence in a state of nature, and which, though rendered dormant by civilization, had not been utterly eradicated. This theory is at least more consistent and intelligible than the ‘love of nature and scenery’, sentimentality propounded by the author quoted above.⁶¹

The ‘author quoted above’ was, of course, Baker, whose ‘motiveless massacres’, Tennent argued ‘would admit of no manly justification.’⁶² Rhetorically, this association of the sportsman with instinct and subsistence linked the identity of the colonial sportsman to that of the ‘native’ in a primitive state of nature unaffected by civilization, and therefore to an identity unable to produce the civilizing effects of colonial rule.

Tennent’s characterization of elephants was based on different sources than Baker’s. Baker constructed his characterizations from his experience and performance of the colonial sportsman — a man of action who constituted his narrative of nature through direct observation and interaction with the colonial ‘complex of men and things’ that he was describing. Tennent’s narrative was removed and detached. He valued science, art, and knowledge gained through books. His narrative was constituted through the performance of the metropolitan-*cum*-colonial man, a colonial man still ostensibly removed from that domain. Tennent’s geography, like Baker’s, was crucial to his representation of Ceylon and to his masculine claims to authority. Of the almost 150 pages of Tennent’s two-volume *Ceylon* dedicated to elephants, about one-third focuses on the derivation of the word elephant, their physiology and anatomy (replete with diagrams mapping the body), and their habits — all garnered from books. More than half of his account of elephants was concerned with the method of their capture and their behaviour in captivity.

⁶⁰ Baker, *Eight Years’ Wanderings in Ceylon*, 126-7.

⁶¹ Tennent, *Ceylon*, II: 324.

⁶² *Ibid.*

During my residence at Kandy, I had twice the opportunity of witnessing the operation of a grand scale of capturing wild elephants... [in my journeys] I succeeded in collecting so many particulars relative to the habits of these interesting animals in a state of nature, as have enabled me not only to add to the information previously possessed, but to correct many fallacies popularly received regarding their instincts and disposition.⁶³

Despite his claims to collecting ‘new’ information about elephants on his journey, we can be fairly certain, based on the extensive footnoting and the great attention to the conduct of elephants while in captivity, that his knowledge about elephants was still primarily restricted to more domestic environs: books and captivity. The capture of elephants was indeed an extra-metropolitan activity, in that it obviously required space enough to capture or ‘kraal’ these large animals, but it also required the assistance of thousands of people — a population only available in the vicinity of colonial cities.⁶⁴ The precise movements of Tennent cannot be determined for the duration of his tenure in Ceylon, but it seems as though his movement outside of Colombo, the seat of the colonial state, was rare. When he did make an official tour of the Central Province (essentially the old kingdom of Kandy) in 1848 Tennent went armed — not with a gun, but rather with Andrew Nicholl, an Irish landscape artist educated in mapping and drawing, as his draftsmen.

Tennent’s two-volume *Ceylon* contains about eighty illustrations by Nicholl, and his influence also bore upon other illustrations in the work. Tennent wrote to Nicholl in 1859 to ask him to assist the scientific draftsman employed to make three drawings of,

the attitudes of the elephants during their struggles in the kraal. The animals, he will do well, as he makes studies from the living elephants in the Zoological gardens, but he is at a loss for foliage. He has no sketches of Ceylon trees, and especially of creepers and climbing plants, and straggling roots above ground. Now it occurs to me that you may have some rough sketches of these that would enable [him] to make the foregrounds in character with Ceylon vegetation.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid., II: 271. In 1867 Tennent repackaged his writings on Elephants in Ceylon into a single and separate volume, *The Wild Elephant and the method of capturing and taming it in Ceylon* (London: Longmans and Green, 1867).

⁶⁴ A ‘kraal’ refers to both a particular method of capturing elephants and the large wooden enclosures in which they were captured. The capture required thousands of people to herd the wild elephants, usually driving them by noise alone, through a great wooden ‘funnel’ into an enclosure. R.K. de Silva and W.G.M. Beumer, eds., *Illustrations and Views of Dutch Ceylon 1602-1796* (London: Serendib Publications, 1988) has good illustrations and Dutch descriptions of the kraal from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

⁶⁵ Letter from Tennent to Nicholl dated March 17th 1859. Quoted in Martyn Anglesea, ‘Andrew Nicholl and His Patrons in Ireland and Ceylon’ *Studies [Ireland]* 71 (Summer, 1982), 147.

Nicholl must have agreed to this request because his work appears in the 'Noosing Wild Elephants' frontispiece to volume one. The figure of the colonial sportsman grasping the 'wilds' with the gun in Baker's texts is thus replaced by the metropolitan Victorian man grasping the colony through a medium unavoidably implicated in the culture of colonialism; landscape paintings and other artistic representations of a colony, argues Nicholas Thomas, permitted 'the affirmation of profound attachment to the land on the part of the artist as an individual, and more significantly, on the part of the settler nation, for whom the artist may presume to speak.'⁶⁶

Through artistic representation of the land and its inhabitants, Tennent exerted a cultural technology of rule. These artistic renderings were processes by which he performed a colonial masculinity that was detached and more metropolitan in character. It was an intellectual masculinity opposed to Baker's colonial sportsman. Tennent's account of elephants included only ten pages on elephant hunting, in which he directly refuted Baker's 'manly justification' for the 'motiveless massacres' of elephants, arguing that to those 'who are not addicted to what is called 'sport', the statement of these wholesale slaughters is calculated to excite surprise and curiosity as to the nature of a passion that impels men to self-exposure and privation, in a pursuit which presents nothing but the monotonous recurrence of scenes of blood and suffering.'⁶⁷

There is a certain performativity to the texts of both Baker and Tennent. Authority in the colonial realm was produced through quotidian bodily acts — hunting, administering, policing, and so forth. In the imperial realm of public debate, however, authority was predicated on word games, discursive performances of unseen colonial masculinities. In a realm where news circulated as commodity,⁶⁸ the performances of masculinity and authority were primarily discursive. Baker's texts are ones more traditionally recognized as primary sources by historians; they are first-person accounts of his experiences as a colonial sportsman and settler-colonist. But the texts do not only report, they enact. Baker's 'usable forms' about hunting and the trials of a settler-colonist, through the deliberate pacing and a personal writing style, invited the reader to race through the natural world of Ceylon, just as Baker did on his hunting expeditions. They encouraged the reader to embody the rugged masculinity that Baker advocated as the basis of authority. The exhilaration that Baker felt and skill that he developed as a colonial sportsman were echoed in his approach to writing. While Baker's writing style undoubtedly made his accounts more engaging, one reviewer faulted him for the hurried style of his narrative. Laurence Oliphant found Baker's account of the island simultaneously intriguing and unsatisfying:

⁶⁶ Thomas, *Possessions*, 24.

⁶⁷ Tennent, *Ceylon*, II: 323.

⁶⁸ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 15.

He gives us glimpses of much that is interesting in his search for game; but, because it is unconnected with the matter in hand, he hurries us away upon the track of a rogue elephant ... We should have liked to have heard more of the Veddahs, for instance; but the district they inhabit is the finest part of Ceylon for sport, so of course we must not expect to be told about wild men when there are wild beasts in the case.⁶⁹

Tennent's texts perform also. They perform a metropolitan perspective, detachment, objectivity, third-person rhetorical authority, and a scholarly apparatus — footnotes, appendices, and index. These are the texts' — and therefore Tennent's — claims to authority: they produce the protractive effects of history and colonialism, by which the two projects become identical and the very act of writing history is forgotten as a significant cultural technology of colonial power. To remember this is to recognize colonial history itself as a latent archive and to see the performativity of that History as a meaningful process. Baker's claims to authority are rooted in experience and action; Tennent's, in his footnotes. His knowledge of elephants is not derived from his own observations but from those of Pliny, Aristotle, contemporary medical doctors, and coroners' reports, and especially *Menageries*, published by that great Victorian society concerned with the improvement of individual character and dedicated to 'the imparting of useful information to all classes of the community:' The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.⁷⁰ This volume, Tennent writes, 'is the most compendious and careful compilation with which I am acquainted of the information previously existing regarding the elephant. The author incorporates no speculations of his own, but has most diligently and agreeably arranged all the facts collected by his predecessors.'⁷¹ The title of the book indicates the nature of the information that Tennent relied upon. It was necessarily metropolitan, a menagerie being where a collection of 'wild' and foreign animals is kept, usually for exhibition.

Baker discredited this type of source as the basis of authority, arguing that menageries removed the elephant from its 'wild' location—which of course upset the geographic nature of Baker's own claims to authority. He wrote: 'A person who has never seen a wild elephant can form no idea of his real character, either mentally or physically. The unwieldy and sleepy-looking beast, who, penned up in his cage at a menagerie, receives a sixpence in his trunk, and turns round with difficulty to deposit it in a box; whose mental powers seem to be concentrated in the idea of receiving buns tossed into a

⁶⁹ Laurence Oliphant, 'A Sporting Settler in Ceylon', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 75:460 (1854), 233.

⁷⁰ Quoted in John Clive, *Macaulay: The Shaping of the Historian* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 112. Tennent frequently cited Pliny's *Natural History*; Aristotle's *De Animal*; Dr. John Hill's *Natural History of Animals*; Ceylon coroners' reports; and The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge's *Menageries*.

⁷¹ Tennent, *Ceylon*, II: 275 n. 1.

gaping mouth by children's hands.'⁷² Tennent rebuffed this assertion, claiming that with 'tiresome iteration', men like Baker, 'having had no further opportunity of observation than is derived from a casual encounter with the outraged animal' continue in 'misrepresenting the ordinary character of the elephant.'⁷³ Each man was equally convinced that the performative vagaries of their texts would ensure their authority on colonial matters. At the time anyway, it seems that Baker had captured the imagination of at least one reviewer, who wrote that,

The interest of Baker's book ... [is] in the perfectly new character in which he represents the island where he has now permanently established himself ... for he is no coffee-planter ... or Ceylon civil servant ... Nor is he stationed out here with his regiment ... shooting elephants. He is no mere dilettante sportsman, endeavouring to recover the effects, and dissipate the recollections, of half-a-dozen London seasons. He is a *settler* — positively a settler in Ceylon ... He is a solitary specimen in Ceylon of that race so highly respected in our own country, which combines at once the sportsman, the farmer, and the gentleman. It has ever been a matter of astonishment to us that no sportsman of the Cinnamon Isle has before been inspired by his romantic and adventurous life to depict those scenes in which he has himself revelled, so as to allow the public the gratification of participating, although only in imagination, in wild sports of a nature as exciting and hazardous as the manner in which they are prosecuted is novel and enjoyable.⁷⁴

Conclusion

In reading Baker and Tennent in terms of masculinity and authority, and Ceylon and Britain in terms of nature and public debate, this essay has sought to reply to Gyan Prakash via a sympathetic mode of analysis. In other words, this essay has adopted a mode of analysis that examines the components of and relations between texts simultaneously through models and theories that operate through affinity, interdependence, and mutual association. Subjectivities do not exist in isolation and it is impossible to comprehend Baker's colonial sportsman as a unique subject position without an appreciation for the range of positions against which he was ranged, such as Tennent's metropolitan-*cum*-colonial man, or Carlyle's 'man of passion' and Mill's 'man of reason', for that matter. Likewise, pasts were not forged in isolation; nor should historiographies be. The story of Tennent and Baker forces us to re-think the reading of debates between Mill and Carlyle and to return them to their time of writing in the late 1840s, a time of great political

⁷² Baker, *The Rifle and the Hound in Ceylon*, 8.

⁷³ Tennent, *Ceylon*, II: 327.

⁷⁴ Oliphant, 'A Sporting Settler in Ceylon', 227-8.

and economic turmoil in the imperial domain. In a complimentary fashion, histories of imperial Britain as an effect of its colonial parts must continue to test their theories with relation to sites other than India, Jamaica, and Ireland. Ceylon offers a unique case, for though it was a small colony often — then and now — eclipsed by India, its looming presence in the mid-nineteenth-century print culture suggests that it played its part in constituting the grounds for public debate in London, especially in the aftermath of the 1848 revolt.

Analysis of these sorts of historical interpenetrations is crucial to gainsaying the mutual lacunae in the historiographies of both Sri Lanka and imperial Britain. For Sri Lankan historiography this point is especially urgent when one considers the obscuring effect of K.M. de Silva's historiographical contribution to the *Oxford History of the British Empire*. Consistent with the theoretical and methodological conservatism of the *OHBE*, de Silva preferred to ignore both the importance of then-recent critical studies and the potential directions to which they gestured for Sri Lankan history. Rather, the essay was a vehicle for de Silva to reify the position of his own histories, one of which he argued was the 'first comprehensive history of the island by a single author ... since the days of,' eerily enough 'Sir James Emerson Tennant.'⁷⁵ Perhaps, especially given this disclosure, it is time for a reassessment of Sri Lanka's transnational location within both past histories and present debates.

⁷⁵ K.M. de Silva, 'Ceylon (Sri Lanka),' in Robin Winks, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume V: Historiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 248. This claim is made with regard to his *A History of Sri Lanka* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981). Moreover, de Silva implies that the only significant study of British rule produced between 1960 and 1995 was his *Social Policy and Missionary Organizations in Ceylon, 1840-1855* (London: Published for the Royal Commonwealth Society by Longmans, 1965).