

Drawing on Elements from the Past for Nationalist Superiority: Deconstructing the Political Subtext of YMBA Building In Colombo Fort, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Architecture has frequently served political purposes throughout history. The YMBA building in Colombo Fort, Sri Lanka, was constructed by the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA); once a leading organization in the Buddhist revival movement. The building effort that aligned with the decolonization movement led by the indigenous Sinhalese-Buddhist community, incorporated numerous traditional elements from Kandyan architecture. This repertoire included the Paththirippuwa (octagonal pavilion) from the Temple of the Tooth Relic, as a strategy to regionalize architecture within the Ceylonese context, while simultaneously incorporating modernist architectural elements, materiality, and construction methods of Western origin.

The YMBA building was designed to contrast Colombo Fort's cityscape, particularly the nearby Gafoor Building; a quintessential manifestation of British colonial architecture. This contrast generated a rift between two opposing political ideologies of the time, visibly reflected through two disparate architectural approaches. In this context, it is hypothesized that the YMBA building was an intentional attempt to assert indigenous ideological dominance over colonialism, visually. This research ascertains if this is the case. This study employs a qualitative research method and uses case studies as its strategy. While using tabulation for analysis, as the interpretation strategy, it employs Derridean deconstruction to investigate the political subtext of the YMBA building. The research was carried out in January 2022. By deconstructing the building, the intent of the nationalistic political movements of the day to become the most hierarchically powerful ideology of the nation will be tackled, relying on extant secondary data. The study leads the discourse to question the term 'pseudo' to describe the nationalistic architectural tradition in which, buildings are decorated with traditional motifs and elements.

The research identifies that the YMBA building, with its exaggerated Kandyan-inspired elements, symbolically asserts nationalist identity by visually overpowering colonial architecture. This reflects the nationalist appropriation of logocentric hierarchies to counter colonial dominance, thereby validating the research hypothesis. The study also exposes contradictions extant in the architectural discourse such as privileging decorative symbolism over functionalism.

Keywords: Architecture, Colonialism, Deconstruction, Derrida, Nationalism,

Introduction

Architecture, like many cultural practices, reflects the truths and realities of its time. Often, dominant ideologies influence its approach, purpose, function and aesthetics. However, unlike other cultural forms such as art, the substantial capital investment in architecture typically

restricts its ability to challenge the status quo. Consequently, buildings hold clues to the ideological currents of their time, often serving as tools for political manifestation and exploitation, making architecture inherently political and politicized (Tafuri, 1969).

Colombo Fort and its peripheral areas conceal layers of colonial and postcolonial history beneath their surfaces, reflecting complex narratives of authority, gentrification and masculinity (Perera, 2002b; Perera, 2002a; Perera, 1998). Amidst the many historically iconic British and Dutch buildings, as well as post-independence modern low-rises that are perched within Colombo Fort, as illustrated by Wijetunge (2012), the YMBA building stands out as a conspicuous symbol of Buddhist presence and agency. The building was constructed during Ceylon's mid-20th century decolonization effort, by an organization founded specifically to support this project. During that period, architecture about the aforesaid effort drew upon traditional architectural styles of the past to reinforce a sense of indigenous identity. Many institutional and public buildings adopted this traditionalist approach, although it was later criticized as 'pseudo', according to Dissanayake (in Pieris, 2013), or 'crude' as Jazeel (2007) tells us; for its perceived inauthenticity.

Derrida (2004) is a pioneer in questioning the binaries and hierarchies in socio-cultural phenomena through his idea of deconstruction. He problematizes the logocentric approach of the Western philosophical tradition of creating meaning. This logocentric approach always involves understanding phenomena in binary opposition, and generates a power relation where one is given power over another, in a hierarchical structure – a 'violent hierarchy'. Such can exist also in architecture.

The indigenizing efforts of the early-20th century Ceylon gave birth too many architectural styles, which later acted as agents of nationalism. These styles often remain national or class identities, and are reproduced in various architectural forms (Perera, 1994; Pieris, 2013; Wijetunge, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c; Wijetunge et al., 2024). However, in a multi-ethnic environment where multiple architectural styles and languages represent different ethnic, religious and class backgrounds, a particular architectural language's domination can misrepresent reality, in turn leading to violence.

This article aims to explore the incorporation of deconstructive reading in architecture as a means of revealing the inherent violence embedded within architectural forms. The first objective here is to determine whether traditional architectural elements used in the YMBA building created a historically-privileged image, symbolizing an ideologically powerful Sinhala-Buddhist institution in Sri Lanka. The second is to identify the aspects through which, the building's architectural elements exhibit violence, as outlined in Derridean deconstruction.

Theoretical Background

Architectural Interpretations via Deconstruction

The discourse of the relationship that exists between architecture and deconstruction is developed mainly because of the architectural style known as 'deconstructivism'. Given this, Wigley (1993) argues that buildings, like language, carry hidden meanings, and are haunted by the 'traces' of what they could have been; embodying both presence and absence. Through Derrida's (1985) lens, architecture becomes an open-ended philosophical space rather than a fixed structure, inviting architects to question and reveal the cultural and historical forces embedded in their designs. This perspective redefines architecture as an evolving mutable discourse, rather than a static, purely functional practice (Wigley, 1993). Derrida (in Leach, 1997: 303) explains that the only way of deconstructing architectural thinking is "*[through] an attempt to visualize that which establishes the authority of the architectural concatenation in philosophy*". From this point onwards, architecture can be linked to writing for "*[its] spatiality, thinking in terms of a path, of the opening up of a way which – without knowing where it will lead to – inscribes its traces*". The popular misconception about the deconstructive architectural style (and

deconstruction in general) is that it does not carry meaning, or demolish meaning. Derrida (1985) made it clear (when he was invited to design *Parc de la Villette* by Bernard Tschumi) that architecture without meaning is meaningless, and architecture is simply chaos. Architecture is a carefully woven text that exists by using elements that are unique to itself, and is a complex of texts that is part of an endless system of texts. Derrida says that architecture is a way of living, as he sees architecture as a form of writing (Leach, 1997). It is, therefore, responsible for the series of texts, that it is a part of. It could be a social text, political text, contextual text, or something else, and importantly, architecture produces meaning compared to those.

One of Derrida's (1985) key attempts is to question the logocentric tradition of Western Philosophy. The word 'logocentrism' derives from the Greek word 'logos', which generally implies "[to] an existence of an external center that gives credibility to thoughts, expressions and patterns" (Hoteit, 2015, p. 118). In logocentric tradition, there is a belief in an 'internally coherent and consistent' idea of a center, such as 'truth', 'good' or 'nature'. The opposite side of it is 'falsehood', 'evil' and 'culture' respectively, which "[are] always presented as in some way harmful, deficient, deformed or secondary, in short as a falling away from the fullness and self-sufficiency of the primary term" (Brunette and Wills, 1989: 6-7). According to Derrida (in Campbell, 2012: 109-111), Logocentrism "[operates] in images by appealing to sources of transcendence outside of the image, and we assume them to be natural, a priori or fundamental. The logocentric vision is comforting and when looking at an image often with a logocentric vision, it ultimately draws us into, a coherent, non-contradictory, and singularly authoritative meaning. The visual deconstructionist identifies and highlights the 'dominant visual regimes' and locates alternatives". For example, in the 'Universal Corrective Map of the World' as illustrated by McArthur (1979) can be pointed out. In his view, the traditional map as we know it, is upside down. According to his corrective map, when the traditional South is located in the traditional North, China and the Pacific islands seem to be in the middle of the map. Europe on the other hand, is found in the right-bottom corner (Campbell, 2012, p. 110). In the logocentric way of generating meaning, the meaning always depends on the opposite of the concept. According to Brunette and Wills (1989), 'Day' cannot exist without a 'night'. As they put it, "[if] there were only day (without night to differ from it), we would not be able to conceptualize such a thing as 'day'" (Brunette, P. and Wills, D., 1989, p. 7).

Derrida believes that meaning is generated by 'difference'. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is both different and deferred. Therefore, the meaning of a word in a text (present) is created by deferring the words that are not there (absent). They are tied with a linkage between the 'absent' and 'present' (Harland, 1987, p. 138). Therefore, the meaning contains the identity (what is), and the difference (what it isn't), and it is continuously being 'deferred' (Appignanesi et al., 2004). Derrida (in Sarup, 1988) further describes that the idea of a sign is determined by what he calls 'trace'. A sign therefore contains 'traces' or 'imprints' of all the other signs, and the meaning is created by this relationship.

Understanding the violence in logocentric vision and the lack of stable meaning leads to an unclear idea of the political ground where a deconstructionist, especially regarding architectural thinking, can ground his/her feet. Deconstruction dwells on problematizing rather than solutionizing. In other words, it does not give a final analytical judgment of the image, and does not seek to answer an image, but rather to set alive the complexity that is always already within the image (Campbell, 2012).

Although the idea of deconstruction is commonly used to break down or dismantle concepts or in architectural terms, breaking down traditional or well-established architectural systems, deconstruction is a critical way of looking at the texts that are already constructed. Miller (1978: 341) clarifies "[deconstruction] as a mode of interpretation [that] works by a careful and circumspect entering of each textual labyrinth [...]. Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself". Miller (2009) also states that the task of deconstruction is not bringing the oppressed to the position of the

privileged. Architects might develop ideas of deconstruction of a contextual text, in a particular socio-political text. However, since deconstruction is not a way of construction, it is a method of 'demonstrating a text that is already dismantled'. Thus, it can be used to understand the political hierarchies in architecture.

Methodology

The research follows a qualitative approach and its strategy is case studies. It focuses on the YMBA building as a unique representation of the intersection between architectural form, political ideologies, and colonial/postcolonial dynamics. The case study method allows for an in-depth analysis of the building's structural and aesthetic features, and its role within the broader socio-political landscape of Sri Lanka during the decolonization movement.

Data for this study were primarily drawn from secondary sources, including historical records detailing the construction, purpose and design principles of the YMBA building, along with writings by key figures involved in the Buddhist revival movement and decolonization. Architectural analyses were also examined, focusing on the building's incorporation of Kandyan elements, alongside modernist Western influences. Additionally, political and cultural writings from the period of the building's completion provided insight into the broader nationalist discourse and the ideological role of architecture in asserting indigenous dominance over colonial powers. Extant literature on the YMBA building, Sri Lanka's decolonization movement, and architectural studies addressing the intersection of colonial and indigenous styles in postcolonial contexts further informed the study. The core of the analysis will be framed by Derridean deconstruction, which seeks to uncover hidden meanings and contradictions within the text of the building itself. Deconstruction is employed to interrogate the apparent dichotomy between the indigenous and colonial elements pertaining to building design, revealing how these elements interact to challenge the power structures of the time. The building's architectural elements – such as the Kandyan motifs and modernist materials – will be deconstructed to explore how they may reflect an ideological subtext of resistance to colonialism. This approach will seek to expose the power relations embedded within the architectural form, considering how the building articulates nationalistic ideologies, both in its symbolic and physical presence in the cityscape.

Additionally, the study will engage with the concept of the 'pseudo' tradition as it pertains to nationalistic architecture, critiquing the idea that incorporating traditional motifs within a modern context constitutes a superficial or inauthentic expression of Indigenous culture. By examining how the YMBA building negotiates tension between tradition and modernity, this study challenges the use of the term 'pseudo' in discussions of postcolonial architecture. Tabulation is used for this analysis. The study adheres to ethical guidelines, refraining from gathering primary data. The fieldwork was carried out on 22 January 2022.

Case Study

Understanding Colombo Fort

Before tackling the YMBA building, it is pertinent to study Colombo Fort as its context. Colombo Fort has a rich, yet violent history of ethnic, cultural and financial exchange. The indigenous and Arab traders first used Colombo's port as a center for trade. Subsequently, the Portuguese took over it. They gradually developed it as an extended fortification, including the area called Pettah today, for the residential purposes of the married Portuguese men. However, in the 17th century, the Dutch reduced the Fort in size, excluding Pettah. The male dominance in the heart of Fort remained until the demolition of its protective rampart by the British in 1869 (Perera, 1994). In fact, the area from the Fort's north wall (of the extended wall) up to Kelani River

was called the 'Black City'. However, until the British facilitated education for upper-class women in post-colonial Ceylon to empower them in the late 19th century, it was the women from the Black City – a historically women-friendly space – who actively contributed to the feminization of its urban landscape. What must be understood here is that the interior core of the Fort was an enclave for white males and elite social circles, while its outer spaces or peripheries were significantly feminized and ethnically diverse. Ultimately, societies from the aforesaid two contrasting physical spaces (i.e. core and periphery) defined themselves in relation to one another; not only through social hierarchies, but also through gender dynamics. Thus, it can be argued that the city has long-inherited a history of self-definition through its ethnicity-based binaries. The interior socio-political space deliberately reinforced a hierarchical power structure that privileged white males. This was facilitated by systematically excluding all non-white males from within the city. This dominance was sustained by the white male's ability to assert superiority over the 'other', as whiteness was positioned as an inherently greater status than that of other races, ethnicities, and genders (Perera, 2002a). This notion of 'otherness' subsequently found extension during the nationalist effort.

Nationalistic Movement and Otherness

The ethno-nationalist identities create artifacts and activities. However, in this case, architecture, beyond its relation to sovereign power and political systems is conspicuous (Pullan, 2015). The nationalistic movement created an antithesis to the colonial values that the Ceylonese had appropriated and maintained at that time (Perera, 1994). The YMBA was an outcome of this opposition, aroused by the nationalistic movement prompted by the 'Buddhist Revival' under the decolonizing project (Wijetunge, 2003). A majority of the leaders of this movement were Westerners who had converted to Buddhism, predominantly prompted by polemic debates such as *Panaduravadaya*, or the natives hailing from colonial elite backgrounds who had grown up and educated in Western Christian environments. According to Obeyesekere (1992), the form of Buddhism that Henry Steel Olcott initiated was similar to Protestant Christianity, which followed rationalistic principles delving on modern science. Given this, Obeyesekere (in Pieris, 2013: 97) asserts that "*Buddha's own enlightenment was Westernized*", by the aforesaid movement. Therefore, arguably, the actions of the nationalistic movement were hardly indigenous. Such actions were rather the Sinhala-Buddhist interpretation of Western values, showcasing the attempt to define itself through the 'other'. For example, a Buddhist school system was established in Colombo, modeled closely after Christian missionary schools in both structure and function. These schools were sponsored by the Buddhist Theosophical Society and *Mahabodhi* Society (Wijetunge, 2003). As Perera (2002b) explains, institutions such as the YMBA and Ananda College in Colombo were proposed by Olcott as a direct challenge to the monopoly of Christian missionary education (Pieris, 2013). In this backdrop, it could be argued that the YMBA building is conceived within this notion of the 'other'.

Architecture of the YMBA Building

'Sir Baron Jayatilake Street', previously known as 'Prince Street' is one of the landside entryways to Colombo Fort. It connects the Fort with Pettah, and runs parallel to the Colombo harbor (Figure 1). These two geographical and socio-cultural regions are physically divided by a canal, which was previously the moat that protected Colombo Fort's eastern wall. Although the British subsequently removed this moat, the physical boundary it once marked is still notable. After all, it still separates the two regions of Fort and Pettah to date (Perera, 1994).

N. D. H. Abdul Gafoor was one of the premier jewelry exporters in Ceylon, and had an international reputation in jewelry business. The 'Gafoor Building' was completed in 1915, next to the Colombo harbor, housing the aforesaid business. Subsequently, it gained the reputation for being one of the finest commercial structures in Colombo (McMillan, 2005). As Pieris (2013) tells us, the renowned British architectural firm Edwards Reid and Booth designed this building

that contains a prominent arcade and dome, introducing an alternative model for architectural indigenization (Figure 4). The case study taken up here is the YMBA building, located within Colombo Fort, which cannot be conceived without the aforesaid structure (Figure 2). Even in the contemporary times, the YMBA building is one of the most recognizable structures in the vicinity, contrasting with the surrounding colonial as well as modern international-style counterparts. It follows the modernist structural principles, while adding Sinhala-Buddhist signifiers. Its corner is 'decorated' with a prominent shaft, which reaches a contrasting height – well above the building's height of eight floors (Figure 5). The prominent borrowed element of *Paththirippuwa* from the Temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy decorates the top of the aforementioned shaft. Two smaller shafts that flank it are also topped with smaller versions of the *Paththirippuwa*. Also, the building manifests traditional motifs from historic Kandyan and *Gampola* period wood carvings, used for its window as well as the roof detailing. In contrast, the building also suggests influences of architectural modernism, and especially, Art Deco – an industrialization-related art and architectural style. Such influences manifest the building's cosmopolitan cultural relationships (Perera, 1994) (Figure 3). The need for a Fort branch of the YMBA came into discussion as early as 1934. However, disagreements with the British government, uncertainties about the land plot and financial issues, prevented the actualization of the project until 1956. Architects Oliver Wijesinghe, T. N. Wynne-Jones, and H. F. Billimoria were involved in the early stages of the project. It was later carried forward by Justin Samarasekara and Neville Gunaratne. Although a competition had been launched originally for its design, many submissions were rejected as they did not follow the specifications (colomboymba.org, 2024).

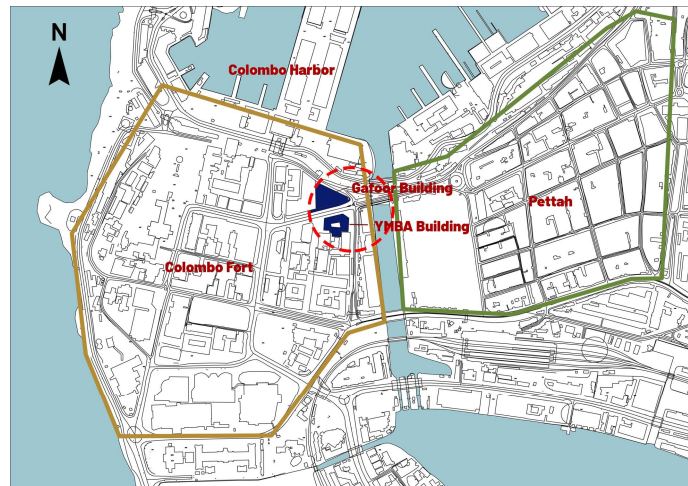


Fig.1- Geographical location of YMBA and Gafoor building in Colombo Fort and Pettah context
Source: Author (2024)



Fig. 2-YMBA standing next to the Gafoor building.
Source: <https://www.skyscrapercity.com/threads/fort-colombo-1.1557410/>



Fig. 3- Art Deco staircase of the YMBA.
Source: Author (2024)

Although the ideological backgrounds of the two buildings are seemingly contradictory, they respond to each other creating a cohesive architectural image (Figure 2). It seems that the two corners of these buildings are competing with each other. However, these buildings together create a gateway from Pettah to the Fort, framing another iconic British colonial period building, the 'Cargills Building' in the background. Contextually, the two buildings do not receive much prominence from the western direction (from within the Fort). From a phenomenological point of view, one starts to feel their presence, when approaching them from the Pettah side.

In the logocentric vision, by its nature, hierarchy is divided between the two poles of power spectrum. It applies to architecture too, considering architecture as a text. It is not a mistake that the institutes of power often used historically, bigger objects (*i.e.* buildings, monuments, obelisks) in a politicized manner. It is argued that bigger objects have psycho-sexual meaning that is ideologically exploited (Rupasinghe and Botejue, 2023). In other words, bigger objects have inherent logocentric power than smaller counterparts. In this sense, the higher tower – that of the YMBA building in this case – is privileged over the 'other' – that is the Gafoor building – in the hierarchical order. The bigger one is privileged over the smaller one in the logocentric project. Bigger buildings have an abstract sexual meaning. According to Lefebvre (1991), they become phallic because they are arrogant and reflect bureaucratic and political authoritarianism. In the deconstructive reading, this sexual power of being big or possessing a big object is logocentric. Masculinity is often depicted in bigger things, and bigger things are presented as masculine symbols. A bigger penis, chest or arm is culturally considered more masculine than smaller ones. Bigger objects too such as buildings are inherently given a logocentric power through this sexuality-based power distribution. The notion of power is embedded in the sexual nature of bigger objects, suggesting the male dominance of Sinhala-Buddhist politics through site-specific visual dominance. The purpose of these 'phallic' elements is to impress every spectator and convey an impression of authoritarian power (Lefebvre, 1991). The masculinity in these phallic or phallogocentric structures is privileged over the less-masculine objects. This Lefebvrian metaphor gives the YMBA a 'phallogocentric logocentrism'.



Fig. 4- Gafoor building before the YMBA was built.

Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/410812797239482507/>



Fig. 5- YMBA corner

Source: Author (2024).

The Buddhism-centric logocentrism during the latter part of the British colonial powers gave architecture the power to act upon it. The nationalistic movement powered by the 'Protestant Buddhist' societies was a characteristic of 'oppositional politics' (Perera, 2002b). The series of debates that peaked with the famous one that took place in the city of *Panadura* between *Migettuwatte Gunananda Thero* and Father David de Silva also attracted Western enthusiasts towards the Buddhist revival. This helped the Buddhist cause to reach a privileged position, and Buddhist institutions were able to pedagogically strengthen it in order to extend the ideology generationally. Bhabha (1994: 35) argues that the use of symbols and icons from the past that signify the past "*[is] not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic*". In the context of indigenization, Ceylonese Christian authorities too realized the ideological importance of grounding the religion

in the region. The emergence of Church buildings built in the so-called 'pseudo' style is indicative of the power relations between the already-privileged and powerful Christianity, and the emerging Buddhist counterpart. Pieris (2013) argues that colonial period architecture that borrowed from traditional decorations has wrapped Buddhist architectural motifs around European classical forms. Campbell (in Pieris, 2013) points out to the Trinity Chapel in Kandy, and posits that religion attempted to address natives by reinterpreting itself. This was achieved by building in vernacular and culture, which could not be done only by translating worships and scripture to the native tongue. Although it was the claim, this suggests that at the time of the building and designing (in the early 1930s), Christian authorities that were in a privileged position, had to considered winning the hearts of the indigenous by submitting to indigenous traditions. That is an indicator of the revival of Buddhist power. Moreover, many other churches such as the Cathedral of Christ the Living Savior in Colombo 07 have referred to traditional precedence. However, the Independence Hall in Colombo could be the highlight of this architectural tradition, which drew national attention to this architectural style.



Fig.6



Fig.7



Fig.8

Fig.7 - Cathedral of Crist King, Kurunegala.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cathedral_of_Christ_the_King,_Kurunegala

Fig. 7 - Cathedral of Crist the Living Savior, Colombo.

Source: M.N.R. Wijetunge collection (2024)

Fig. 8 - Independence Monument, Colombo.

Source: M.N.R. Wijetunge collection (2024)

The attempt to reach an extreme height by placing a *Paththirippura*-like element on the most visible façade of the YMBA building was not required by the function of the building by any means. It is arguably a forceful attempt to elevate the building to a privileged position. *Paththirippuwa* is an octagonal architectural element, historically found in buildings, related to the Kandyan period. It has a cosmological meaning, which is a reference to logos as well. Obeyesekere (2015) describes that the eight sides of *Paththirippuwa* represent the eight directions of the universe, and the king sits in the middle symbolizing himself as *bhūpati*. The octagonal plan and the double-pitched cone-shaped roof give the YMBA building significant visual dominance as a focal point. Particularly in the Temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy, the visual prominence lies in the *Paththirippuwa*, where the king traditionally addressed his people, although the religious and cultural importance lies really, in the shrine room of the interior where the tooth relic is placed. The politically stubborn act of late President Ranasinghe Premadasa to propose a golden canopy over the shrine room in 1987, costing a whopping Rs. 20 million, was criticized for the risk it paused to the historic building, and especially owing to the damage to its 'antiquity' (Wickramasinghe, 2013). Yet, this act could be cosmologically and semantically justified, considering the need of visually highlighting the religious importance of the building. The cosmological meaning, historical practice and visual prominence assign *Paththirippuwa* a logocentric prominence; an idea of a universal center. But in modernist terms, *Paththirippuwa* in Kandy served a functional purpose, providing a high platform for the king to speak to the public, other than the cosmologically-applied meaning and visual dominance. However, the *Paththirippuwa* in the YMBA is there merely as a reference to prove the 'Buddhistness' of the building. Based on their observation in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA, Venturi, Izenour and Brown (1977) introduced the concept of the 'decorated shed' as a building typology that separates

structure from symbolism. They argue that in a decorated shed, the form itself is straightforward and functional, while meaning is conveyed through applied decoration, such as signs or ornamental details. This approach contrasts with buildings designed to communicate through their shape alone, such as that of ducks. Venturi and Scott-Brown advocate for the decorated shed as a practical and honest approach to architecture that aligns with realities of commercial and public buildings, where function and clear communication take priority over formal expression. Venturi's theorization of a duck and a decorated shed is based on the context of American consumer culture. From a practical viewpoint, in a context where Buddhist ideology was actively marketed or made a commodity, the *Paththirippuwa* serves the purpose of a large American billboard fronting a functional shed.

However, the implication of traditional Kandyan architectural elements in churches resulted in an interpretational crisis. That is, the traditional elements resorted to by the designers reflect the 'identity crisis' of Christianity under the nationalistic revival, and on the other hand, the legitimacy of traditionalistic motifs to anchor the meaning of Buddhist-ness. Therefore, although *Paththirippuwa* signifies the Temple of the Tooth Relic in common sense, in the perspective of the Christian church, it symbolizes Buddhist authority it also attempts to assume. Hence the ultimate signified meaning of the element known as *Paththirippuwa* is lost in an aporia. Besides, the aforesaid identity was challenged by the so-called Buddhist leaders themselves. As a result of Premadasa's *Gam Udawa* (village reawakening) project, replicas of the Temple of the Tooth Relic were constructed in many locations around the country. It, not only caused the authenticity of the original work to degrade. This degradation can be argued as a declining of its 'aura', as Benjamin (2008) refers to it.



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

Fig. 9-Paththirippuwa of the Temple of Tooth Relic.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paththirippuwa#/media/File:Sri_Dalada_Maligawa_\(Patthirippua\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paththirippuwa#/media/File:Sri_Dalada_Maligawa_(Patthirippua).jpg)

Fig. 10-A replica of the Temple of the Tooth Relic, built-in Anamaduwa.

Source: <https://www.newscutter.lk/sri-lanka-news/top-stories/fake-dalada-maligawa-08012023-55826/>

Results and Discussion

Key Theoretical /Deconstructive Concepts	Deconstruction of the case study: YMBA building in Colombo Fort
1. Logocentrism & Hierarchical Privileging	- Bigger objects (<i>i.e.</i> buildings, monuments, towers) are logocentrically privileged over smaller ones. This ties to Derrida's critique of logocentrism, where one term in a binary is always given dominance (in this case, large buildings = power, masculinity, nationalism). - The YMBA building's height and <i>Paththirippuwa</i> are privileged over colonial structures, reinforcing a nationalist ideology.
2. Binary Opposition & Hierarchical Structures	- Bigger vs. smaller, colonial vs. nationalist, Buddhist vs. Christian, functional vs. decorative. The nationalist project reverses, but also sustains colonial logocentrism. - The YMBA's power relies on the presence of the 'other' (<i>i.e.</i> Gafoor building, a colonial structures), meaning its identity is relational rather than absolute.

3. Différance: Meaning is Never Fixed	- Originally signified royal authority (<i>i.e</i> Kandy, King's throne) - Then Buddhist sanctity (<i>i.e</i> Temple of the Tooth Relic) - In YMBA, it becomes a nationalist marker and paradoxically echoes Christian churches that borrowed Kandyan motifs. - This shifting of meaning is a classic example of Derrida's <i>différance</i>, where signs are never stable and always defer meaning to other contexts.
4. Aporia & The Self-Destruction of Meaning	- The Paththirippuwa's meaning collapses into aporia (it both signifies Buddhist nationalism and recalls Christian architecture, creating a contradiction). - Replica structures (<i>i.e</i> Premadasa's <i>Gam Udawa</i>) undermine the aura of authenticity, linking with Benjamin's (2008) critique. - The YMBA's architecture attempts to assert a Buddhist identity, but in doing so, it paradoxically loses its exclusivity (as Christian churches also used Kandyan motifs). - The bigger-vs-smaller power structure exists only because of the smaller object – the nationalist project depends on its colonial 'other' for self-definition, which undermines its claim to pure authenticity.

Conclusion

This article reveals the politics of referring to the Kandyan traditional architectural motifs in the YMBA building in Colombo Fort, using the strategy of Derridean deconstruction. By deconstructing the YMBA building constructed by nationalists, it becomes evident that the logocentric violence initiated by the colonial masters was perpetuated by their successors.

The indigenizing efforts in the architectural sphere commenced at the latter part of colonial times, with the intellectual contribution coming from many British and local architects. The nationalist revival shook colonial ideological authority, and architecture was a critical part of the decolonizing project. Such nationalistic architecture significantly influenced public buildings; predominantly institutional buildings. The nationalist approach was manifested in institutional buildings, since the nationalists initiated an aggressive pedagogical and institutional decolonizing campaign.

The nationalism at the time referred to architectural elements and motifs of Kandy – the last indigenous kingdom of Sri Lanka – as the ultimate signifier of national identity. Yet, with Christian churches absorbing Kandyan elements, they lost their value as the ultimate signifier of Buddhist-ness.

Although the Kandyan *Paththirippuwa* served a practical purpose, its depiction in the YMBA was purely decorative. It was made unnecessarily tall, and the only conclusion that can be arrived from this observation is that it was owing to the symbolic purpose of visually overpowering colonial ideology. The Nationalists utilized the logocentrically privileged nature of bigger objects for their ideological mission.

Just as day cannot exist without night, a larger object lacks individual presence without a smaller counterpart – whether in buildings or architectural elements. Due to this binary opposition, the smaller is inherently present within the larger, as its very definition relies on comparison. The YMBA building is naturally juxtaposed with the Gafoor building, where, in Derridean terms, the 'other' defines self-identity. The larger structure derives and amplifies its masculine power through the presence of the smaller, in this case, the corners. The rise of nationalism, the rejection of Western colonial values, or their adaptation into Sinhala-Buddhist ideology made such architectural expressions both ideologically and sentimentally potent. By constructing this architectural metaphor of a dominant phallic form, the YMBA building generates an illusion of power – instilling nationalist fervor by metaphorically diminishing the masculinity of colonial authority. In this light, it could be said that the study fulfils its intended objectives and aim.

This study carries limitations. First, it relies heavily on secondary sources, meaning that it is subject to the biases and limitations inherent in historical documentation and existing architectural critiques. Second, the study focuses solely on the architectural analysis of the YMBA building, and does not incorporate interviews or direct primary sources from individuals involved in the building's design or construction, which may limit insight into the intent behind specific architectural choices.

Moreover, several areas remain vacant for further exploration. While decorative elements may not serve a functional or pragmatic purpose, they carry ideological and political significance. This

challenges the hierarchical privileging of pragmatism and functionalism over ornamentation in architectural discourse, as well as the problematic and oppressive use of the term 'pseudo'.

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