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Citation

Infrastructure's (Supra)Sacralizing Effects: Contesting Littoral Spaces of Fishing, Faith, and Futurity along Sri Lanka's Western Coastline

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This article explores the ways in which infrastructural development can cause the sacred to become a source of political legitimacy and sacred authority to become a politically charged construct. For resource-dependent communities, the ecological damage caused by infrastructural development can cause ostensibly profane issues to be imbued with sacred meaning and value. With sacralization comes the expectation that figures of sacred authority will campaign for justice on behalf of the communities that they represent. When the authority evoked comes from outside the boundaries of institutionalized religion, however, processes of suprasacralization come into play. By exploring infrastructure's (supra)sacralizing effects, I demonstrate how environmental ontologies can provide a competing basis for transcendence. In turn, this can reveal the politically progressive role of the sacred in eroding the legitimacy of institutionalized religion. I illustrate these ideas through an empirical analysis of the effects of the China-backed Port City Colombo project on Catholic fishing communities located along Sri Lanka's western coastline. Drawing on ethnographic data, I explore how littoral spaces of fishing, faith, and futurity have become contested through the claiming of (supra)sacred places of power and justice. *Key Words: BRI, environmental ontologies, infrastructure, Sri Lanka, (supra)sacralization.*

This article explores how small-scale fishermen located along Sri Lanka's western coastline grapple with the loss of livelihood incurred by the China-backed Port City Colombo project. Since the end of its civil war in 2009, Sri Lanka has experienced an "infrastructure boom" (Ruwanpura, Brown, and Chan 2020, 165) that is mostly financed by Chinese corporations as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Port City project entails extensive land reclamation off the coast of Colombo, which has accelerated the destruction of aquatic ecosystems and galvanized the neoliberalization of Sri Lanka's littoral spaces. These spaces are defined by fishing and Catholicism, which, over several hundred years, have become entwined. They are now "coproduced" to the extent that the terrestrial Church and aquatic resource base have become a conceptual whole that is "narrated, negotiated, and experienced on its [littoral] edges" (Grydehøj 2015, 98; see also Stirrat 1992; Jazeel 2013; Woods 2018b). Although the Catholic Church occupies a respected position in the religio-political hierarchies of Sri Lanka, the lives and futures of fisher communities have become more precarious constructs,

especially in the postwar years. In response, the Catholic Church has become an increasingly divisive religious institution. A coterie of Catholic priests plays a prominent role in the People's Movement Against Port City (PMAPC), but some of the most senior figures in the Catholic hierarchy have been accused of accepting Chinese bribes in exchange for their nonopposition to the Port City project, thus becoming ideologically alienated from the fisher communities from which they have traditionally drawn strength. In response, civic and environmental activist organizations have filled the void created by the acquiescence of the Catholic hierarchy by using spaces of Catholicism to organize and politicize fisher communities outside the public authority afforded by the Church. They blend traditional and alternative forms of sacred authority to fight against both the Port City and Catholic Church, in turn exposing infrastructure's (supra)sacralizing effects.

I interpret *sacralization* as a process of imbuing ostensibly secular or profane issues with sacred meaning and the evocation of sacred forms of authority to campaign for sociospatial justice. *Suprasacralization* is when the authority evoked comes from outside the

boundaries of institutionalized religion. As the sacred becomes a source of political legitimacy, sacred authority thus becomes a more politically charged construct. Exploring infrastructure's (supra)sacralizing effects therefore involves considering how the power of the sacred is reified and the role of the sacred is splintered among those affected by large-scale infrastructure projects. For many whose livelihoods depend on natural resources, the ecological degradation wrought by infrastructure-led development can pose "existential threats to personal and community well-being" and might even "cause individuals to seek security in the supra-empirical realm of religion" (Wilford 2010, 339). Beyond security, religion can also shape the formation and expression of environmental consciousness as "many religions have a strong link between the biophysical world and human imagination and understanding of the cosmic world," which can "provide a spiritual basis for social activism" (Kong 2010, 767). Where this activism occurs through the framework of institutionalized religion—through formal religious hierarchies and the political influence they exert in the public domain—infrastructure's sacralizing effects can be observed. Where it occurs outside of these frameworks, suprasacralization comes into play. Importantly, alignment between religious leaders and the communities they serve can shape, legitimize, and enforce ideas and communal narratives concerning the environment, leading to their sacralization. Contrariwise, misalignment, or even nonalignment, can bring about the suprasacralization of issues. The cleavage that emerges at the nexus of (supra)sacralization provides an entrée into theoretical debates concerning the role and place of the sacred in a secular(izing) world. In particular, the *suprasacred* responds to Della Dora's (2018) lament that

> we need new vocabularies to narrate [sacred] spaces; we need a lexicon that captures simultaneity and fluidity, while retaining focus on material specificities. Sacred space needs to be approached not as a static thing, nor as a disembodied set of practices and discourses, but as an assemblage, always made and remade. (65)

The suprasacred evolves the sacred in new directions that go beyond the institutionalization of sacredness by religion, and its manifestations through religious infrastructure. In doing so, it reveals the slippages that emerge when both secular and religious infrastructures are recognized as being uneven in their coverage and effects. Far from there being a "general teleological and progressive human and societal development from the primitive 'sacred' to the modern 'secular'" (Casanova 2011, 54; after Asad 2003; C. Taylor 2007; Cannell 2010), the Sri Lanka case reveals the enduring tension between the progressive and the primitive and how sociospatially contingent these categories are. Indeed, in Sri Lanka it is the institutionalized form of the Catholic Church that bears traces of the "modern 'secular,'" which in turn creates a void that is filled by more primordial ontologies of what sacredness is and where it exists. Abstracting these ideas, we can begin to see how an empirical focus on littoral space reveals the disjunctive interplay between terrestrial and aquatic environments, where the former is colonized by man and the latter is defined by the immanence of the ocean. Accordingly, the former is constantly subjected to secularizing impulses, whereas the latter is a source of sacredness that is primordial, resistant, yet also vulnerable to terrestrial processes (B. Taylor 2010). In this vein, the suprasacred is distinct from informal or lived religion. The expansion of terrestrial infrastructures into the ocean brings these constructs into productive tension with one another. It can reveal the extent to which terrestrialized religious formations have come to manifest as the "superstructural and superfluous additive[s]" (Casanova 2011, 55) that theories of the secular have long assumed, simultaneously creating space for other, more primordial, or suprasacred, formations to come to the fore.

I use infrastructure as an interpretive perspective through which sociospatial influences can be identified and understood. By interrogating distinct, yet overlapping, infrastructural formations, and the theoretical potential that exists at their nexus, I respond to Cowen's (2020) questioning of "what can be gleaned—conceptually and empirically—about urban life and its imperial afterlives when we take infrastructure as both an *object* and *method* of inquiry" (471, italics added). Further, just as infrastructure is "necessary for any form of sociality to extend itself" (Berlant 2016, 394), its overlaps can reveal other forms of extension, which offer pathways through which its potential as a "living, breathing, leaking assemblage of *more-than-human* relations" (Anand 2017, 6, italics added; see also Hetherington 2019) becomes apparent. For the purposes of this article, these overlapping infrastructural formations are the

Port City Colombo project and the Catholic Church. The more-than-human relations that these overlapping formations give rise to foreground new articulations of the sacred that are rooted in, manifest through, and call into question preexisting categorizations of place (Wilford 2012). By interpreting the sacred as a primordial ontology of being that is rooted in nature and that is used to subvert "sacred" places of institutionalized religion, I embrace the "analytical value of sacred, sentient, and spiritual categories in understanding political action and knowledge" (Gergan 2015, 263; see also Wilkins 2020b). Although this value has been recognized for some years now (after B. Taylor 2004), I contend that the role of nature in providing the basis for transcendence often echoes the discursive framing of secularization theorists, who associate transcendence with primitive life. Foregrounding nature as integral to present-day civic consciousness, I argue that the nexus of infrastructural overlap can reveal how politically progressive the sacred can be.

Infrastructure's (Supra)Sacralizing Effects

Over the past decade or so, the effects of infrastructure-led development—ranging from one-off projects, to transport and communications networks, to more wide-ranging region-building initiatives—have provided a point of focus for geographical scholarship. No longer is infrastructure viewed as "stabilized and 'black boxed' with little interaction from users" (Furlong 2011, 460). Rather, the ways in which it is "implicated in networks of environmental, political, and social relations that always exceed their geographies" (Anand 2011, 544) have been identified and explored. Notwithstanding these developments—which are considered later—the ways in which infrastructure intersects with religion are underexplored. This oversight is problematic for two reasons. First, an underarticulated assumption is that infrastructure projects are materializations of the secular—variously defined in terms of modernity, rationality, progress, capital, and more—within a landscape. Infrastructure can therefore be understood to be a conduit for secularizing forces to permeate public life, the relative success of which reveals the extent to which "modernity is not only a question of mud and concrete, but of aesthetics and ideology" (Davies 2021, 746). Second, as counterpoint, it must be recognized that religious groups work to establish

and maintain their own infrastructures—places of worship, shrines, symbolic presence, and sometimes schools and other community services—as well (Wilkins 2020b). To understand the effects of infrastructure-led development on society is to therefore understand how people, groups, and organizations respond to being situated at the nexus of two seemingly distinct infrastructural logics. Although these infrastructural logics intersect in various ways, the focus of this article is the role of the environment (the "commons") in connecting them.

Infrastructure as Conduit and Connector

The development of infrastructure often foregrounds a (sometimes radical) transformation of sociocultural, political, economic, and environmental landscapes. These transformations reflect the extent to which infrastructure provides a material conduit through which the ideals of capital, progress, and futurity and more are transferred to, and become rooted in, place. Infrastructural conduits can, as a result, cause new ontological, perspectival, and behavioral logics to manifest. Many transport and communications infrastructures, for example, work to rationalize space, thus imposing an economic logic on its use and utility, which, in turn, can be to the detriment of hitherto passive environmental actors (Gandy 1999). In these cases, infrastructure becomes "integral to the making of capitalism, space, and ecological risk" (Ranganathan 2015, 1301), with Anand (2017) demonstrating how in Mumbai, India, "the city and its citizens are made and unmade by the everyday practices around water provisioning" (vii). This observation finds broad-based resonance in cities of the Global South, where infrastructure-led development can be seen to symbolically trigger the "denial, disavowal, or downplaying of the ecological ruptures and social inequities frequently induced" (Ruwanpura, Brown, and Chan 2020, 168) by them. To this point, in exposing the gendered reproduction of infrastructure, Siemiatycki, Enright, and Valverde (2020; after Anand 2011) recognized that the masculinist gaze from which infrastructure projects are envisioned can explain why the felt effects of these projects are often pronounced among women, the poor, racial minorities, and other groups that could be deemed marginal. That said, as these examples attest, as much as infrastructure can be a conduit through which the normative logics of

neoliberalism and masculinism (and secularism as well) become transferred to, and dispersed throughout, place, so too do they connect and fuse with other, preexisting materializations of modernity.

Discourse has become increasingly attuned to the fact that, as points of connection, infrastructures are entangled within broader webs of relations that moderate, and can disrupt, their function as a conduit. For example, in a study of storm drains in Bangalore, India, Ranganathan (2015) demonstrated how the infrastructural assemblage works to open up a "more distributed notion of agency and a more relational urban political ecology" (1300). As a connector that brings various (and often hitherto disparate) actors—human and nonhuman, material and transcendent—into intimate conversation with one other, infrastructure can therefore cause power to be redistributed in disruptive, yet also potentially emancipatory, ways. As Ranganathan (2015; after Gidwani 2008) recognized, the distributed agencies of infrastructure give rise to "para-sites" of capitalism; or those places in which "non-human elements interact in surprising ways to both fuel and destabilize capitalist processes" (1302). In this sense, the "non-human" relates primarily to the environment, which can be exploited in the service of capitalism but can also provide a rallying point for resistance by those whose livelihoods depend on natural resources. Writing of settler colonialism in Canada, Cowen (2020) demonstrated how the spatiotemporal connectivity of infrastructure can "open space for the distinct subjects and spaces of refusal and survivance and for the possibility of infrastructure *otherwise*" (480). The idea of "infrastructure otherwise" can help disrupt the rationalizing logics on which most infrastructures are based, thus revealing the *alternative* connections to which they might give rise. Accordingly, infrastructure otherwise can be seen to "disrupt the smooth flow of capitalism into seemingly "empty" frontier spaces" (Gergan 2015, 267), in turn establishing a vantage point from which the *coloniality* of infrastructure can be revealed, challenged, and (better) understood.

What we can begin to see here is the development of an alternative, yet in many respects also complementary, theoretical position to Curley's (2021; see also Davies 2021) recent articulation of infrastructure as a "colonial beachhead" that "establish[es] the conditions for future dispossession, displacement and marginalization" (388). Infrastructures can be seen to accumulate and expand over space and time; they form colonial beachheads that offer an increasingly rigid and restrictive vision of the present and future, but in the same breath they can also be imagined otherwise. Value can therefore be created by bringing these two positions into productive tension with one another. For those implicated within infrastructurally defined, sometimes competing, webs of power and influence, the idea of infrastructural overlap provides a theoretical entrée through which infrastructure's effects can become more nuanced but also more integral to the (re)definition of what futurity can, or might, look like. Specifically, as the point at which different infrastructural regimes intersect, the commons provides theoretical insight into the ways in which human action has long been shaped by the ideological overflows that seep out from infrastructural overlap, (mis)match, or both. It can be understood as the "infrastructure of infrastructure" (Hetherington 2019, 6) and can focus scholarly attention on the conceptual territory that infrastructures cocreate through their intersectionality. This involves interpreting infrastructure as both conduit and connector, which can, for example, cause the secularizing ideals of the built environment to be moderated by the sacralizing claims of institutionalized religion. Accordingly, as much as the sacred can be understood as "situational … tied up with, and [drawing] meaning from, social and political relationships" while maintaining a "substantial" quality that is "poetic" (Kong 2001, 212–13), so too can its contingencies be understood as derivatives of infrastructural (mis)match.

Sacralizing Infrastructures and the Contestation of the Commons

Infrastructures can be seen to impose new layers of meaning on the landscapes on which they are built. In some cases, infrastructures might be harbingers of secular modernity; in others, they might provide places through which religious beliefs are reified and the sacred can be accessed in material form. Either way, infrastructures are never agnostic and often bring about the confusion, complexity, and hybridity of meaning, rather than a sense of linear progression (Cannell 2010). From this perspective, infrastructure can provide an analytical vantage point through which the sacred–secular interplay might be probed and understood anew. Although

normative understandings of the secular posit that it "has come to be increasingly perceived as a natural reality devoid of religion, as the natural social and anthropological substratum that remains when the religious is lifted or disappears" (Casanova 2011, 55; after C. Taylor 2007), geographers have contributed an important sense of spatial contingency to the debate. Notable is Wilford's (2012) articulation of the "sacred subdivisions" of U.S. suburban spaces, wherein the place-based infrastructures of evangelical churches are shown to coopt the secular into "webs of sacred significance that [their] pastors and members co-create" (405). Going further, Wilford (2012) explained how the evangelical megachurch Saddleback

> becomes but one religious island in a sea of religious potentiality. This is in sharp contrast to "traditional" religious performances that rely on strictly making and separating secular and sacred place. … These new evangelical performances blend the sacred and secular so that the secular becomes only the *potential* for the sacred, not its opposite. (405)

Important is Wilford's emphasis on the potential of the sacred and the idea that place-based performance of religion can complicate any preexisting sense of categorical distinction between the sacred and the secular. Since then, geographers have embraced this sense of sacred potential by developing theoretical counterpoints to the long-standing emphasis on the secularization of society. Notable is Della Dora's (2018) notion of "infrasecular geographies," which advances a spatial paradigm "characterized by the contemporaneous cohabitation and competition between multiple forms of belief and non-belief, as well as by hidden layers of a collective 'religious subconscious'" (45). The idea of cohabitation evokes the layering effects of infrastructure and how one form of meaning might supplant another through infrastructural development but can never eradicate it entirely. Instead, both society and place are imprinted with memories of what came before, thus opening up the potential for old forms of meaning-making to emerge as a counterpoint to the new. In turn, the sacred is imbued with the constant potential to emerge as a sociopolitical force in the world. Splicing together these layers of meaning is embedded within the *infra-* prefix, which, tellingly, speaks to both the sacralizing potential of infrastructure and the contemporaneous complexities of infrasecularity. As Della Dora (2018; after Asad 2003) went on to elaborate, the infrasecular

highlights the interstitiality of religion's "invisible visibilities," that is, aspects of historically dominating religions that are so deeply embedded in a society's collective memory, culture, values, institutions, everyday speech, and in the landscape that they become unseen. In its first "vertical" connotation (*infra-*), "infrasecular" thus neatly encapsulates the layer of religious subconsciousness hidden underneath secularism. (48)

Implied here is a degree of mapping of the sacred onto the religious and the primacy of religious infrastructures in reproducing the sacred. My notion of the suprasacred extends these ideas by decoupling the sacred from the religious infrastructures to which it is often attributed and realizing instead the potential of the sacred to manifest as a primordial counterpart to religion or otherwise outside of religion's institutional parameters. The primordial character of the suprasacred and its potential to complement, compete with, or contest the religious foregrounds its subversive political power. Informing this position is Howe's (2017) work on landscapes as seemingly passive backdrops against which the vicissitudes of the religious and the secular play out. A key contribution is his critical interrogation of the assumption that place is inherently linked to religious identity and experience and that "religion always involves making places" (Howe 2017, 161). This, he argued, is inherently exclusionary, because it leads to the imposition of one (dominant) religious vision on place, which in turn closes down the potential for primordial alternatives to flourish. As an alternative vision, the secular, and the institutions through which it works, is always already in competition with the religious for the primacy of meaning. To secularize a landscape—or to bury religious (sub)consciousness under a new layer of secular meaning—is, then, to insist on the "sacramental power of place" (Howe 2017, 19). This power is enshrined in the notion of *geopiety*, or the affective ties that cause landscapes and the natural world thereof, to become meaning-*full* to people. Through these geopious ties, the natural world—the commons—becomes a construct that is inherently contested by the religious and secular infrastructures that claim to imbue it with alternative meanings and values.

The suprasacred exists outside the empirical realm of religious infrastructure and meaning; instead, it is rooted in the natural world. It is primordial and reflects a form of geopiety that transcends institutionalization. In many respects, the suprasacred is a

theoretical refresh of what B. Taylor (2004) described as instances in which "people feel awe and reverence toward … the earth's living systems and even feel themselves as connected and belonging to those systems" (1002). Importantly, Taylor recognized the linguistic difficulty in capturing what exactly this means, also highlighting how the numinousness of nature can help to realize the full *value* of the sacred. This is a value that transcends the formalization of religion in its institutionalized—or *infrastructuralized*—form and can be understood as the sacred bedrock of an infrasecular world. The suprasacred is, in this vein, a sociopolitical force that is rooted in the environmental commons and is therefore under the constant threat of desecration from both the secularizing infrastructures of the built environment and the sacralizing infrastructures of institutionalized religion. It is at this point that my notion of infrastructural overlap becomes salient, with the commons being constantly implicated in the everyday actions, beliefs, and livelihoods of disenfranchised communities to resist efforts to "transform commons into state property or capitalist commodity" (Gidwani and Baviskar 2011, 42). These efforts are pronounced in Sri Lanka, where the country's postwar development has brought into sharp relief infrastructure's (supra)sacralizing effects.

The Port City and Its Various (Dis)Placements

Since the culmination of the civil war in May 2009, Colombo—Sri Lanka's capital city—has been transformed. Relative political stability has attracted waves of private investment, causing the Colombo skyline to extend upward and outward. Indeed, these outward extensions are a result of the flagship Port City development, which involves, among other things, reclaiming more than 600 acres of land from the Indian Ocean (Fuglerud 2017; Radicati 2020; Ruwanpura, Brown, and Chan 2020; Woods 2022). Inaugurated in September 2014 by incumbent President Mahinda Rajapaksa and Chinese President Xi Jinping, the estimated US$1.4 billion cost of the project—the largest ever foreign investment in Sri Lanka—is borne by the Chinese, with its construction being undertaken by the China Harbour Engineering Company. Despite the name, and despite being located adjacent to it, the project has little to do with Colombo's preexisting industrial

port. Rather, the reclaimed island, which faces the mainland's central business district, will house luxury office and apartment buildings, designer shopping malls, hotels, a golf course, and a marina, among other exclusive amenities. It is a project rooted in the reclamation of land to meet the needs of new users, activities, and politico-economic agendas, leaving little room for their forebears. It is also a project that has ushered in change on many levels, from the more tangible terrestrialization of the ocean and the alteration of shorelines and aquatic ecosystems that comes with it to the more intangible effects on society, livelihood, and political favor. As Grydehøj (2015) explained:

> Terrestrialisation projects … are far from the straightforward triumphs of material fixity that they first appear or that the "reclamation" discourse suggests. Flux always begets flux, and the human impetus to construct fixed histories and solid spaces can mask the true consequences of transformative processes. (99)

These consequences began to reveal themselves in January 2015, just a few months after the project was officially launched. Rajapaksa was democratically removed from power and succeeded by a coalition government, which, "promising greater levels of transparency and accountability" (Radicati 2020, 546), immediately put a stop to the Port City project. Later that year, however, the project was resumed under new terms (including, among other things, stricter environmental controls and a rebranding as the Colombo International Financial City). In response to the acquiescent effects of China's "debt-trap diplomacy" (Carrai 2019; Gao, Tse, and Woods 2021), the project has since received multiparty political backing. Despite political support, the Port City project has already proven to negatively affect the livelihoods of many (Gidwani and Baviskar 2011; Anand 2017). Among the most affected are the fishing communities located along Sri Lanka's western coastline, particularly those based along the stretch of coastline that runs from Colombo to Negombo—a historic, and majority Catholic, fishing town located approximately thirty-five kilometers north of the capital. These communities face multiple forms of displacement as a result of the Port City development. Drawing on ethnographic work with these communities, Radicati (2020) highlighted these displacements through her explanation of how large-scale, and ongoing

dredging of sand [to reclaim land for the Port City] would add to already high levels of coastal erosion, literally making the land on which their houses were built disappear over time. Combined with the anticipated decline in fish populations who would have a harder time laying eggs and reproducing in increasingly murky and trafficked waters, many fishermen were convinced that even without formal orders [from the government] to relocate, the very act of constructing the Port City would make fishing impossible. (547–48)

The impact of these displacements is significant and has been estimated to affect 30,000 fishermen in Negombo alone (Chan, Ruwanpura, and Brown 2019). Although the challenges facing these communities are relatively unique within Sri Lanka, they share many commonalities with similarly marginal communities throughout the Global South, which occupy a "space largely overlooked, or even actively avoided, by Sri Lankan state agencies and the Colombo middle class" (Radicati 2019, 332). In response, environmentalists, religious leaders, and fishing unions have come together to voice their opposition to the Port City project and to draw attention to the increasingly precarious futures that they face. Precarity can, in this sense, reveal the slippages that emerge from the overlapping of seemingly distinct infrastructural regimes and the injustices that each reproduces.

These injustices are acutely felt along Sri Lanka's western coastline, where the public authority of the Catholic Church is simultaneously asserted and undermined through its engagements with the Port City project. This has created a cleavage through which alternative expressions of authority have emerged. Of these, notable is the PMAPC, which was formalized in 2015 and has since "engaged in street protests, litigation, and hunger strikes to express the strength of their opposition … [and] draw attention to the prospect of irreversible loss to ecosystems, harm to livelihoods, and ecological ruination" (Ruwanpura, Brown, and Chan 2020, 172). Central to both the organization of the PMAPC, and, as I came to learn, its increasingly expansive oppositional stance is the role of Catholicism and its pervasive socioreligious infrastructure that spreads along the western coastline. This role has, over time, become bifurcated along more moderate (representing the formal Church) and radical (informal, church) lines. Whereas the former camp acted initially as political mediator and subsequently as

passive acceptor of the Port City, the latter camp has offered more radical resistance, initially in opposition to the Port City but subsequently expanding to include opposition to the first camp (the Church) as well. Whereas the interests of the Church reflect its embeddedness within Sri Lanka's political networks, those of the church reflect its ideological alignment with the concerns of activist groups concerned with environmental degradation, and loss of livelihood. In this sense, "religion's effects on environmental injustice are far broader than just inspiring, organizing, and legitimating resistance" because they can "influence the siting of environmental injustices, potentially as an underlying vector of oppression" (Wilkins 2020b, 281; see also Wilkins 2020a). These oppressions emerge at the nexus of infrastructural overlap, in turn triggering the (supra)-sacralization of the commons.

Contesting Littoral Spaces of Fishing, Faith, and Futurity along Sri Lanka's Western Coastline

The subsections that follow draw on qualitative data derived from ethnographic research conducted in late 2019 and early to mid-2020. The research is part of a broader, regionally oriented project that explores the effects of Chinese infrastructure investments on religious communities in various countries along the BRI. As part of the project team, I am responsible for developing the Sri Lanka case study. I have been conducting research in, and visiting, Sri Lanka for nearly two decades now and since my first trip in 2003 have observed many of the country's recent transitions firsthand. Important for the purposes of this project is my PhD research, the fieldwork for which was conducted in Sri Lanka in the immediate postwar years, from 2010 and 2011, and involved extensive ethnographic research among Sri Lanka's mainline Christian, Catholic, and evangelical communities (see Woods 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2018a). Although the current project has so far elicited seventy-one interviews with various stakeholders located primarily in Colombo and environs and Hambantota (another key site of infrastructure investment), this article reflects a subset of the sample; that is, those stakeholders directly affected by the Port City project. Specifically, it draws on twenty-eight interviews conducted with fishermen,

and in some instances their wives as well, living in Negombo and the Colombo ward of Modara (thirteen interviews); Catholic priests and nuns involved in the PMAPC (four interviews); Negombo-based reporters and filmmakers (seven interviews); and other social and environmental activists[1] (including a Buddhist monk; four interviews). The subset was mostly located in either Colombo or Negombo and was embroiled in the littoral politics of infrastructural overlap triggered by the Port City. To be clear, the subset excludes Colombo-based interviewees who were not affected by the Port City and interviewees located in Hambantota or other sampling locations. These interviewees make up the remainder of the total sample of seventy-one.

All interviews were conducted by the author in English, the exception being the interviews with the fishermen and local activists, which were conducted in Sinhalese and translated into English with the help of a local research assistant. Besides the interviews, I spent significant periods of time with some of my participants. These informal engagements involved sharing meals and photographs with each other, sitting in on community meetings, and even watching a public screening of a locally made documentary film that explores how fishermen in a village south of Colombo struggle to cope with the loss of livelihood brought about by environmental change and Sri Lanka's sociotechnical transition. Taken together, these everyday stakeholders provide a counterpoint to the elite voices of policy experts and government officials, which can "obscure how … the uncertainties around critical resources provision are already an ongoing, almost mundane feature of everyday life" (Anand 2017, viii). An interpretive framework was used for data collection and analysis, meaning that interviews were open-ended and loosely structured along the lines of key topics. These included identifying the effects of the Port City project on everyday life and understanding how different sociopolitical actors responded to these effects and how these responses were rationalized in accordance with various, sometimes competing, other times complementary, cultural logics. All interviews were audio recorded, fully transcribed, and analyzed using an open coding approach. Given the latent political sensitivities surrounding the Port City project, and Chinese investment in Sri Lanka more generally, data are presented here in a way that obfuscates their origins. This refers to the changing of

names, and the obscuring of places and organizations to ensure anonymity for all voices presented.

The Evolving Alliance of Sri Lanka's Littoral Spaces

Sri Lanka's western coastline is defined by two things: its fishing communities and the Catholic Church. Over time these littoral spaces of fishing, faith, and futurity have evolved in response to Sri Lankan modernity, which, in turn, has destabilized the once interdependent relationship between them. With this in mind, the purpose of this subsection is to highlight how these spaces have emerged and how they are being challenged and reshaped in response to the catalytic effects of the Port City. In many respects, it is the ocean that first established, and continues to reinforce, the connection between fishing and faith. As Father Rajitha, a Catholic priest and leader of the PMAPC, explained: "That [the ocean] is their main source of income for hundreds of years, they have been living on the sea, so for them it's the mother." The metaphor that Father Rajitha evoked—that the ocean is the "mother" that nourishes the community—speaks of the ontological connection that entwines the two. Dinesh, a Negombo-based journalist and son of a fisherman, explained in more detail how, when he was growing up, "we had the belief that the ocean *belongs* to the fishermen." A fisherman who operates out of Modara validated this sentiment, explaining how his relationship with the ocean is "a bond it cannot be broken unless all the water is gone" and that "God created us, so God will provide a way for me to survive." Here the fisherman evokes another role of the ocean as "mother"—that of giver and protector—and in doing so reveals the numerous ways in which fishermen continue to imbue the ocean with both meaning and value.

Along Sri Lanka's western coastline, however, this environmental axiology has, over centuries, been colonized by the Catholic Church. The ocean provides both a material and a spiritual channel through which Catholicism reaches out and embeds itself within the sociocultural lives of fishermen (Woods and Kong 2022). As material channel, it provided the means by which Catholicism was first introduced to Sri Lanka by the Portuguese, with the coastal areas proving to be relatively easier to colonize than areas further inland (Stirrat 1992). As spiritual channel, the elevated sense of risk and

uncertainty associated with fishing causes these communities to seek protection and security through the transcendent, because "the life of a fisherman is really uncertain … you don't know what will happen tomorrow" (Dinesh). Catholicism readily fills the role of protector, which in turn has strengthened the attachment of the fishermen to the Church. Father Rajitha explained how this protective role harks back to "the time of the Europeans, [when] church was on the side of the powerful, so people naturally like to be with powerful people, so church was one means of seeking security." Father Xavier, a retired Catholic priest and son of a fisherman, explained how, as a result, "they are very devotional people, the Catholic fishermen, so their faith and fishing has been very strong, they are the backbone of the Catholic Church," to the extent that "once they receive communion, after that they stopped going to school and go out to sea." Receiving communion—the formalization of an individual's acceptance into the Church—marks the point at which they entrust themselves into the Church's protection and thus begin their lives as fishermen. This sentiment was pervasive; for example, Dinesh explained how "even if you take a new boat or something, the first thing is that they go to the priest and ask for blessings." In this mindset, as much as the ocean sacralizes the church, so too does the church resacralize the ocean.

Through these spiritual connections and dependencies, Catholicism has also come to dominate the sociopolitical lives of fishermen. Throughout the world, the Catholic Church is a "deeply hierarchical institution with almost all formal authority vested in its clerical leaders" (Wilkins 2020a, 149), which, as I demonstrate later, makes the splintering of the Church and subversion of place-based authority an important harbinger for the crisis of institutional religion in general, and for figures of sacred authority more specifically, in contemporary Sri Lanka. Whereas Father Xavier and Father Rajitha, respectively, observed how "the Catholic church has built unity amongst these people, loyalty amongst these people" and that "they are dependent on the church leadership," Dinesh offered a more critical perspective. He described the relationship as one of "control over the lives of people," before citing the examples of education (Catholic schools), marriage (by a Catholic priest), and death (last rites and burial in a Catholic plot) to highlight the pervasive role of the

Church in the social lives of the people. In turn, this foregrounds an assumption of loyalty. Although loyalty was, in the past, depicted as an unproblematic outcome of the sociospiritual protection that the Church provided the people, in recent decades it has been called into question. This questioning reveals a deeper rift in the Church, which has contributed to the bifurcation outlined earlier. Father Rajitha explained how this bifurcation stems from the fact that

> we have some of the huge churches, massive churches on the coast, mostly built by the income brought by the fishermen. Not only the churches, also some of the schools in coastal areas, which are now closed to fishermen but open to the elite, but built by fishermen, fishermen's money. … But now, the children of the fisher community can't enter those schools because they can't pay. … The whole country, due to free economic policy, or market policy, education is becoming a commodity.

The problem that Father Rajitha identified here is that the church is increasingly seen to service the needs of the market, rather than the needs of the people who originally contributed to the construction and expansion of its material infrastructures. It is at this point that the overlapping role of the Port City project comes into play, although it is important to note that land reclamation did not necessarily cause the problems of coastal erosion, water pollution, depleted fish stocks, overfishing, and so on. Rather, it has sped up these preexisting processes and has also magnified their effects. These effects have caused the ocean, fishing, and the lives of fishermen more generally to be coopted into the neoliberal logics and ethics of the market (after Harvey 2005; Gidwani and Baviskar 2011; Grydehøj 2015; Woods forthcoming). This is proving to be a difficult transition for many; an assumption of abundance has since given way to the ocean becoming a more competitive place in which to earn a living. Fishermen now have to go further out to sea, and for longer periods of time, in the search for fish, leading to an overall (and sometimes significant) loss of income. Through these processes, we can begin to see how neoliberalization works as a variegated process of sociospatial transformation that intersects with both the land and sea, the material and the environmental, the human and transcendent. It not only foregrounds the rationalities of the market in practices that were once taken for granted but it also reveals a

"range of marketization *processes* at play across a range of geographies" (Birch and Siemiatycki 2016, 177).

Although these processes of marketization might be rooted in the transformation of the ocean, their effects extend to the realm of the terrestrial as well. As spiritual protector of the endangered and sociopolitical voice of the unheard, the Catholic Church is deeply implicated in these effects (Radicati 2020). Yet, in being implicated, it also becomes inflected with the logics of the market. Father Xavier recalled a time when "there were bishops, cardinals, who belong to our congregation, our church, who spoke on behalf of the fishermen. But today, we don't hear it. That is wrong. … We have a commitment to the fishing community." His lament reveals the sacred authority of the Church and its increasing unwillingness to leverage such authority in support of the community it serves. The sense of abandonment that such a stance evokes is not necessarily new but is symptomatic of a longer legacy of dispossession from Sri Lanka's littoral spaces. As Radicati (2020) explained in her ethnography of fishing communities during and immediately after the civil war, "Dispossession often came about in highly impersonal and top-down ways. Instead of negotiating with more powerful actors and institutions, fishers … can only *navigate* circumstances beyond their control" (544). The unwillingness of the Catholic Church to support their communities merely adds to the accretion of previous waves of neglect that originate with the state but find more personal meaning in and through the institutions of everyday life. It is in this vein that the alliance of fishing, faith, and futurity can be interpreted as an evolving construct that has become increasingly contested through the pervasive sacralization, and the more recent suprasacralization, of the commons.

(Supra)Sacralizing the Commons

As we can begin to see, the issues facing Sri Lanka's fishing communities have a sense of spatiotemporal continuity to them. Spatially, they emerge from the ocean but increasingly affect the terrestrial lives of these people. Temporally, they started many years ago and will become only more pronounced with time. Father Dilshan, a Catholic priest who was born into a Negombo-based fishing family, evoked this sense of continuity when he claimed that "our

people have fear of the future, because although we say this is *our* port, the Port City, once they develop it fully, then they will extend certain areas for their business purpose … they may widen their horizons." Although the commons—articulated here in terms of "our" port, and by extension, "our" ocean as well—is seen to be a more pervasive construct that goes beyond environmental resources, so too does it cause the inflections of a neoliberal ethic to affect ever more walks of life, reflecting the "coloniz[ation] and eras[ure of] public space" (Kaika and Swyngedouw 2000, 132) wrought by infrastructure. Yet, these inflections are rarely met with passivity; instead, they can galvanize collective action and politicization. As much as the commons are pregiven and based on the rights of access, so too are they "made," and indeed remade, as a "dynamic and collective resource—a variegated form of social wealth—governed by emergent custom and constantly negotiating, rebuffing, and evading the fixity of law" (Gidwani and Baviskar 2011, 42). Through these processes of making and remaking, they become "saturated with diverse social and political claims" (Anand 2011, 545), which creates openings through which opportunities for the abuse of authority can manifest.

Percy, the representative of a nongovernmental organization that works closely with fishing communities, shared how the Catholic Church had originally worked against the project. In this capacity, it claimed some notable successes in lobbying the government to limit the effects of the Port City construction, such as extending the boundary of sand dredging to 10 km offshore and adding institutional heft to the protest movements that brought about a halt to the project in 2015. Later that year, however, these measures were seen to be temporary when the project resumed, and dredging began to creep back to the shore. As Percy explained, "Church said that we had done our best so we cannot do anything more. Later stage, we realized that Chinese company had tried to bribe the Catholic Church, to repair the Basilica here in Colombo." The bribes of which Percy spoke are an alleged donation[2] of 37 billion rupees to the Catholic Church from Chinese actors in return for its nonobjection to—and thus tacit support of—the Port City project. In itself, these allegations are symptomatic of more global trends in which "personal and systemic barriers hamper Catholic clerical efforts to … green their churches"

(Wilkins 2020a, 146), but the Sri Lanka case is unique for the neoliberal ethic that underpins the Church's nonintervention. The acceptance of the bribe sparked outrage among the protest movement, which, as Dinesh put it, reflected the Church's "lust for money." The sacred authority of the Church thus shifted from being used to protect its community to being "sold" in exchange for noninterference, meaning that as the commons becomes implicated in processes of neoliberalization, so too does the Church's sacred authority. Dinesh went on to explain how

> the hierarchy of the Catholic Church very systematically sabotage all these protestors, protests at the ground. It was so sad. … This hierarchical order of the Catholic Church is very dangerous, because if bishops say something, it will come from above, down to the people and that will be preached to the Church. So, it is a one-way communication, there is no feedback. So, if the priest says, "Don't go for any protest," people will say, "If I go for protests, next time I will lose my privileges in the Church." … Those days, there was so many big [protest] groups in this Negombo area, and priests purposely sabotage those things.

The language of "sabotage" goes beyond passive non-intervention and speaks to the actively interventionist work of priests and the "hierarchical order" to work against those they are meant to protect. Capital provided the stimulus and mechanism through which such a reversal was believed to be enacted, but it reveals a more fundamental erosion of the sacred values of the Church. Coincidentally, 2015—the year that the Sri Lankan Church's shift was observed—was the same year that Pope Francis published *Laudato Si'* ("Praise Be to You"), an encyclical on human–environment relations, designed to spur the Catholic hierarchy to become more environmentally attuned. After its publication, Father Xavier spent a number of years translating it into Sinhalese and publishing it locally in an attempt to reinvigorate the Church to more actively oppose the Port City project on environmental grounds. As he explained, the encyclico asserts that "creation has become a new neighbor for us … now we feel the call to love nature, infrahuman nature … it is very important, whatever the Pope is telling, even the sea resources must be protected." In evoking the encyclico, Father Xavier contextualized the abuses of the sacred authority of Sri Lanka's Church within a global schema, bringing the local appropriation of the commons for political leverage into stark contrast with the Vatican's directive. Through this reasoning, the encyclico can be seen to resacralize the commons, thus highlighting the injustices within which the Sri Lankan Church has become embroiled (Djupe and Hunt 2009; Wilkins 2020a, 2020b). Through resacralization, the role of the ocean as mother is reasserted and brought into contrast with the inaction of the Catholic hierarchy in what Father Xavier described as "making the seabed a cemetery."

Although these contrasts both reflect and undermine the sacred authority of the Church, they also create openings for suprasacred forces to fill the void through the pursuit of sacred reconciliation and ecological justice. In doing so, the commons shift from being a "passive substrate on which politics acts" (Anand 2011, 545) to a political force in and of itself. This force is one that is rooted in its primordial power as sacred resource. Indeed, it is the very rupturing of the sacred landscape into Church and non-Church actors that the notion of (supra)sacralization encapsulates that "allow[s] multiple actors to engage with the … promise of democracy and justice *despite* its indefinite deferral" (Gergan 2020, 9, italics added). This has caused Sri Lanka's fishing communities to become decoupled from the Church, simultaneously working through its physical infrastructure to make democratic claims to their futures.

Reclaiming (Supra)Sacred Places of Power and Justice

The responses of the Catholic Church to the Port City project reflect both an assertion of sacred authority and also a hollowing out of its power over people. Divergent understandings of, dependence on, and (in)action in support of the commons have led to this hollowing out, creating a sacred void that has since been filled by alternative expressions of suprasacred authority. These are expressions that are rooted in the materio-symbolic infrastructure of Catholicism but that emanate from outside its formal institutional boundaries. In itself, this reveals a ground-up reversal of the idea that "pressure emanates from the Vatican concerning the importance of Catholic environmental teaching, it largely dissipates before reaching the parochial clergy" (Wilkins 2020a, 159). With this, we can observe a shift from sacred authority being located in politically involved, and thus corruptible, religious institutions

to it providing the motivation for individuals to engage with the political on terms that are different from those dictated by the Church. This shift is significant. As Father Rajitha put it, fishermen "need the Catholic Church, because they all believe in, they have been taught that salvation outside the Church is not possible. … Anything that is outside the Church is sinful, those sorts of beliefs still work." As a result, the sacred authority of the Church remains rooted in the place of Catholicism—the church building itself—but becomes increasingly disassociated with the people—the priests—attached to those places. In doing so, the sacred authority of place is reified and the authority of its human interface is undermined (after Wilford 2012). Environmental activist groups recognized this dynamic, using the infrastructure of the Church to inspire political action. As Sanjay, the leader of an activist environmental organization, explained:

> We went church by church, because even the priest doesn't take the leadership [on environmental issues], some people are taking the leadership, that way we use the church as a point to get together. … We use the church to organize people, but without priest. Without priest, because priest was always on the side of the Port City.

Privileging the place over the person enables people like Sanjay a new type of suprasacred authority, one that is rooted in ecological justice and taps into the ontological power of resource-dependent livelihoods. Fishermen like Dinesh, who are dependent on the ocean and yet disenfranchised by the inaction of the Church, were particularly attuned to this dynamic, going so far as to claim that "we have Church [as an institution], but no Jesus. … Jesus not make one Church in the world; Jesus not say make the Church, because he know that if we make Church, we have a problem." What Dinesh evoked here is the idea of the corruptibility of man and the idea that churches—as man-made institutions—and the buildings they occupy are materializations of such corruption and therefore separate from the sacred authority of Jesus. Dilip, another environmental activist, interpreted this sentiment and reconciled it with the success of Sanjay's strategy by explaining how "they don't feel like they have parted from the Church, because the church [as place] is theirs." Sacredness manifests in places—whether it is the ocean or the church building—and the fact that these places are so intimately intertwined with the

lives of fishermen means they claim them as their own (Woods and Kong 2022). Priests have a presence, but they do not have the same sorts of sacred rights as the people, especially when they do not align with the people (Djupe and Hunt 2009). Sanjay went on to explain this dynamic:

> Even they [priests] tell us not to do things in the church, they can't tell to the people. They need the people. … Even priest is there because of the people, so they can't tell to the people [not to come to the church]. They can tell to us, because we're like a group not from the community, they can tell us don't come, but when the people ask us to come, then priest has to be silent. … People, they respect the priest, but when they [priests] do something wrong, they do not tell anything, but they continue their work. Those fishermen are like that.

Sanjay raised two interesting points here. He highlighted the compromised role of the parish priest in controlling the people and how the power of his work stems from his spiritual alignment with the needs and problems of the people. He also highlighted how people respond to the corruption of the priests, by "not tell[ing] anything" but by quietly tolerating, while subverting, their authority. There is a strong performative element to Sanjay's actions, which leverage the centripetal pull of the Church's infrastructure to galvanize social solidarity, suprasacred authority, and political action. This reveals how "effective cultural action 'fuses' the elements of performance: actor, background culture, audience, setting, and structures of power are all seamlessly woven together in successful cultural acts, while they are 'de-fused' or disconnected in unsuccessful ones" (Wilford 2012, 4). Place foregrounds the success of the performance, but place also undermines the structures of sacred power that give the performance meaning in the first place. This sense of performative and resolutely place-based paradox is rooted in the sacred, but opens up possibilities for the suprasacred to seep through as well. To the extent, then, that the "very categorization of religion remains in place, conceived as external and universal force/object to-be-deconstructed" (Jazeel 2013, 13), so too does such categorization become liable to be appropriated and redefined by people according to the sacred terms that are defined by them. It reveals the general "defusing" of the Catholic Church from place, which, in a bigger schema, reveals the secularization of the Church's terrestrial infrastructure and

the vulnerability of this infrastructure to suprasacred appropriation. These forms of (supra)sacred alignment translate into spiritual power for Sanjay, who does not identify as Catholic but is nonetheless able to leverage the deep-rooted sense of

> spirituality, and the power of the [spiritual] things. Because sometimes, the real awareness, the real political awareness does not work. Because if you say, OK, this is happening, they don't care because it's something political and they know there's a real money power [behind it]. They think they cannot fight with them. But when it comes to inside their heart, and through the spiritual, they don't care about that [money power], they come for the fight.

Sanjay's comments provide insight into the evolving interplay between sacralizing and secularizing forces in Sri Lanka and the role of environmental ontologies in bringing about their reconciliation. Fundamentally, the diminished authority of the Church reflects the "move from existing under a sacred canopy (i.e. from having broad religious authority) to working under countless sacred umbrellas in countless sacred archipelagos" (Wilford 2010, 339; after Berger 1967). Although this sentiment reflects the fracturing of sacred authority that suprasacralization encapsulates, it does not necessarily explain the enduring power of sacred places—churches—in mobilizing new forms of spiritual power. These churches come to represent "performative acts of place-making [that are] informed by understandings of the transcendent" (Tse 2014, 202) but that, importantly, substitute the transcendence of religion with that of the sacred power of the commons. Indeed, whereas Tse sought a productive sense of contingency that recognizes the interoperability of the sacred and the secular, the suprasacred drills down more specifically into the politicization and thus splintering of the sacred into different realms of (in)authority (Woods 2021). The commons are at the heart of this splintering, providing a point of dependence, legitimacy, and futurity that can be used to render the sacred a resolutely accountable construct. In itself, this provides a more realistic view of the interplay between religion and the environment that goes beyond how "people feel awe and reverence toward … the earth's living systems and even feel themselves as connected and belonging to these systems" (B. Taylor 2004, 1002) and focuses instead on the lived realities of ecological degradation and the (in)efficacy of institutionalized religion in providing sociopolitical support and reconciliation. Ultimately,

then, this reveals that although the sacred might be believed to be an a priori construct for many, its manifestations are resolutely contingent and can provide broader insight into the role of environmental ontologies in redefining the extent of, and limits to, religious authority.

Among Sri Lanka's fishing communities, this typically involved a shift in the locus of power from institutionalized forms of sacred authority to more independent, and often individualized, forms of self-prescribed collective authority. Father Xavier reasoned that parish priests "give the word of God, they give the sacraments, that is their primary [role]. … But today, worship must be related to life." The fact that it has become increasingly decoupled from "life" reflects Father Xavier's subsequent admission that "the priests, as a body, individuals are there." By calling priests "individuals," he referred to the idea that they are increasingly putting their own interests before those of the Church and those of the communities they are expected to serve. Their authority becomes a point of leverage that can be used for personal gain. In itself, this point builds on the fundamental fact that many priests were actually born into fishing families and thus pursue ordination as a pathway to upward mobility. Again, Father Xavier recognized this pattern, explaining how "the mentality, even among priests, they are ignorant people. I am coming from a fishing community, but given the opportunity and the facilities, they will come out. Slowly, it is the fishing children to be our priests, our bishop." Through these opportunity-driven career pathways, the power of the institution is gradually supplanted by the opportunity for individual gain. The Port City did not create this dynamic, but it catalyzed its effects. It sacralized the commons and, in doing so, reified the "spreading of market principles through particular imaginaries of citizenship" (Birch and Siemiatycki 2016, 183). Through this spreading, sacred authority is imbued with a more primordial sense of environmentally rooted meaning and dependence instead. The (supra)sacralization wrought by the Port City expands beyond its putative infrastructural boundaries, fueling the ongoing negotiation of sociospatial futures.

Conclusions

The effects of the Port City project on Sri Lanka's fishing communities are pervasive but also sometimes difficult to separate from the preexisting

threats to livelihood that these communities face. As Ruwanpura, Rowe, and Chan (2020) astutely observed, research into the BRI "has no neat beginnings nor endings" (340), with the case of the Port City project lending credence to this assertion. In many respects, however, it is the Catholic Church, and the sacred authority that it (once) carried, that brings these effects to life. Its (in)actions reveal some of the ways in which infrastructural development projects intersect with, and affect, the social and cultural lives of people. It is true that "religious organizations and religiously motivated actors are affiliated with a wide range of social movements around the globe engaged with the same injustice, poverty, and development crises as political ecologists" (Wilkins 2020b, 277), but the Sri Lankan case reveals how sacred authority can be leveraged in ways that perpetuate ecological injustices. In doing so, however, it also reveals the place-based nature of this authority and how place can, in turn, be used for new types of suprasacred authority to be exercised. These practices are a method through which popular opposition to the Port City can be galvanized, but they also reveal the hollowing out of the Church and its increasingly recognizable misalignment with those it is meant to represent. Alternative worldviews are being galvanized in response to ecological degradation, worldviews that call into question the relative ability of Sri Lanka's more traditionally oriented religious structures to effectively and realistically respond to the effects of modernization. As Wilkins (2020a) asserted, the Catholic Church's ability to "bind communities across time and space directly limits their capacity to transform *despite* clear reasons to do so" (160, italics added).

The "binds" of which Wilkins (2020a) spoke provide a compelling analytical perspective from which the religion–environment nexus can be further explored and understood. Binds speak of togetherness, of attachment. They unite people to people, people to place, and place to power. In their unification, though, they also have the tendency to be inward-looking in their prioritizations. It is this orientation that offers a profound barrier to the reconciliation of religious and environmental ontologies. Amidst the forces of secular modernity, religious leaders are becoming increasingly embroiled in matters of the mundane, the everyday, and the here-and-now, rather than the transcendent, the worldly,

and the greater good. It is this dynamic that is so clearly evinced in the Sri Lanka case and one that has been catalyzed by infrastructural development and has resulted in the suprasacralization of the Church. Of course, any religion is embroiled in the complexity that stems from the interrelationships between humanity, God, and nature. The point is to identify where different infrastructural regimes overlap and what these overlaps mean for the contestation of the commons. By identifying and explicating these intersections, sociopolitical injustices can be reproduced and suprasacred sources of authority can emerge. Thus, as Wilkins (2020a; see also B. Taylor 2004, 2010; Gao, Woods, and Kong 2021) put it, "The central question facing social scientists interested in the greening of Catholicism is thus not whether Catholicism *could* be green—the answer is clearly yes—but *whether* and *where* such greening is occurring" (148, italics added). Building on Wilkins' sentiment, I add that we also need to ask how greening has become a point of connection that provides an alternative ontological standpoint from which both the sacred and secular can be interrogated and integrated through the lenses of environmental (in)justice and socioreligious futurity. Infrastructural geographies are centrally implicated in these debates and can provide avenues through which the political role and placing of the sacred in and to everyday life can be identified and interrogated anew.

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Notes

1. These individuals self-identified as "environmental" activists.
2. Although a public record of this donation does not exist, it was an allegation shared by all environmental activists interviewed.

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