THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SPACES OF SPAS AND THE IDENTITY OF THE MASSEUSE IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

The central focus of this thesis, the organisational entity termed the spa, signifies a local place that stamps its prominent presence in the (semi)urban geographies of Sri Lanka. Spas appear with a remarkable multiplicity within the role they play in the local specificity; as legally endorsed wellness service providers and as places of commercial sex work. In this context, spa work has become socially taboo, and being a masseuse at a spa is socially stigmatised. Informed by this social phenomenon, this thesis explores the intersection of the social construction of the organisational space of spas and the identity of the masseuse who works within it, in the wider society of Sri Lanka. Espousing the socially produced notion of space introduced by Henri Lefebvre and the relational view of space advocated by Doreen Massey as its theoretical lenses, the thesis examines the influence of local socio-cultural values on the relational constitution of spas and the identity of the masseuse, and delves into how masseuses negotiate their work identity in and through the multiple realms of their everyday life.

Embedded in the constructivist paradigm, the study employed a qualitative approach with data generated through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with masseuses and several other social actors who are associated with spas. Narratives produced by the masseuses reveal that the frontal representations of spas act as a veneer that obscures the power relations within them. In such a power-geometry, class and gender relations, which are shaped by the particular locality, act as forces that place rural young women and socially-alienated single mothers as the (sexual) labour force and affluent, heterosexual men as the client base of spas. In the power negotiations which produce this spatiality, masseuses are exposed to (sexual) labour exploitation inside

these spas and social exclusion and oppression outside them, because they are identified as the morally perverted Other of the 'respectable woman.' In the various spheres of everyday life, masseuses negotiate their work identity by deploying the body as a place and portraying and performing a 'seductive femininity' inside the spas and multiple other femininity constructs such as 'rural femininity' or 'respectable femininity' as they cross the boundaries of spas. The thesis contributes to feminist geographic research scholarship and organisational studies scholarship by deciphering the social construction of the place called the spa in the local specificity of Sri Lanka, and foregrounding a certain category of women's lived and embodied experiences of being masseuses in the locale.

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List of Abbreviations

AL	Advanced Level
DROCS	The Department of the Registrar of Companies Sri Lanka
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
GCE	General Certificate of Education
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OL	Ordinary Level
RA	Research Assistant
SLDA	Sri Lanka Department of Ayurveda
SLTDA	Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority
STD	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
TCM	Traditional Chinese Medicine
USA	United States of America

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1   A PRELUDE TO THE STUDY

The year was 2018, and I was living in a suburb of Colombo, the most urbanised and populated city in Sri Lanka. Early one morning, I was travelling to my workplace while listening to a radio programme called Balumgala, broadcast on Neth FM, a popular radio channel in Sri Lanka. This programme is dedicated to reporting illegal and socially unacceptable activities that take place within the country. On that day, the programme was reporting a police raid of a spa, which was accused of using women in 'prostitution'. The commentator was criticising the women who were arrested in the raid—alleging that they were engaged in sex work—and holding forth on the deleterious effects of such spas on communities. This type of reporting is quite common in the mass media of Sri Lanka. While listening to the programme, I recalled a similar incident reported earlier as a news item by a television channel. I remembered the women arrested at the raid making a futile attempt to cover their faces with their hands or a small handkerchief as they climbed into the police jeep. As I continued to drive, I gazed at the name boards visible through the shutters of roadside shops, noticing for the first time the spas which had not captured my attention before. I counted about ten spas within the eight kilometres I travelled.

This experience—in particular, the way the women working at spas were portrayed in the media—inspired my academic interest in the booming Sri Lankan spa industry and prompted many questions. What does the place called the spa represent to the minds of the people in Sri Lanka? How are these organisational spaces lived through their inhabitants and users? How is the social space of the spa constituted through the relational practices of multiple social actors within the wider

Sri Lankan socio-cultural environment? How does the social production of the spas influence the construction of the identities of the women who work in spas? How do the historical and cultural conditions in Sri Lankan society influence women to place themselves as masseuses[1] in these social spaces? How do masseuses deal with their work identity in the multiple realms of everyday life?

Ultimately, this thesis seeks to address the question: *How does the social construction of the spaces of spas intersect with the construction of the identity of the masseuse in Sri Lanka?* It does so by delving into the ongoing stories, trajectories, and narratives of the place called the spa within the cultural geography of Sri Lanka. It critically examines the lived experiences of masseuses—the primary inhabitants of these places, as they are the labour constituents of spas—within the multiple power-geometries of Sri Lankan society.

1.2   CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Massage therapy has long been closely identified with sex work[2]. There is a significant corpus of literature that critically observes the influence of such connotations on the professionality of massage therapists and the practice of massage, which is regarded as an ancient form of health treatment (Bryant & Palmer, 1975; Frembgen, 2008; Kahambing, 2021; Monk-Turner & Turner, 2017; Nicholls & Cheek, 2006; Rasmussen & Kuhn, 1976; Sullivan, 2012; Thornton & Timmons, 2013; Wiryawan & Bunga, 2018). These studies, which have been carried out in both

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[1] I use the signifier masseuse, which is a gendered term, to refer to women who work in spas instead of massage therapists or spa workers.

[2] I use the term sex work over the term prostitution to reflect my position in understanding their labour as a form of employment in the commercial sex industry (Bindman et al., 1997). Yet, I do not ignore the exploitative conditions that are ongoing in relation to sex work, especially in the context of this research, where sex work is criminalised and culturally prohibited. I seldom use the term prostitution and only in reference to other parties' often pejorative utterances of the term.

the Global South and North, explicitly discuss the stigma associated with the massage profession due to its conflation with sex work, and the related necessity to regulate the massage profession by means such as licencing and certification, and claim a distinctive professional identity for massage workers (Shroff & Sahota, 2012; Sullivan, 2012; Thornton & Timmons, 2013). Irrespective of such scholarly claims, the close association between massage work and sex work remains an observable phenomenon.

In the recent past, spas have also been identified as a novel space in which to engage in sex work. The wellness economy has recorded a significant growth since the early 2000s and, as a central part of the wellness economy, the spa sector has similarly grown remarkably in terms of the number of venues and revenue generated as well as the employment provided (Global Wellness Institute, 2017). In parallel, in many countries spas have become an integral part of the sex industry, hidden under the guise of a key component of the wellness economy (Monk-Turner & Turner, 2017; Suttikun et al., 2017; Wiryawan & Bunga, 2018). This is particularly evident in the Global South, where the largest number of spas are concentrated compared to other parts of the world (Global Wellness Institute, 2017). Studies conducted by Suttikun et al. (2017) and Wiryawan and Bunga (2018) suggest that in the Global South's social milieu, spas most often have negative connotations as venues where commercial sex work takes place.

As my experience and mass media reportage attest, the above phenomenon is quite evident in Sri Lanka. Visibly, within the second decade of the twenty-first century, with the influence of multiple global forces and local conditions, which I will elaborate in the latter part of this chapter, many establishments have been emerging under the name tag *spa* in the urban/suburban parts of Sri Lanka.

Concurrently, numerous news items report police raids of places accused of engaging in 'prostitution' under the guise of wellness spas (Chaturanga, 2017; Daily News, 2018; Newsfirst, 2014; Warnasuriya, 2018). Examination of newspaper advertisements for spas (e.g., The Sunday Times newspaper Hit-Ad page) suggest these promotional texts symbolically and strategically signify spas as places where sex work could occur and most probably would occur. Most often, the explicitly stated novel, enthusiastic, and attractive feminine presence and the hidden service offerings, as well as the subtle, seductive use of women's bodies in these advertisements, obliquely suggest sex just as they are designed to evoke erotic feelings. Therefore, as evident in the locality of Sri Lanka, the term *spa* signifies a place providing sexual services as opposed to its original meaning as a place that deals in wellness. In the meantime, spas have been recognised as a place of (sex) work which attracts poor, young females, especially those who migrate to the city from the rural geographies of the country (Live at 8, 2022).

In this context, explicitly associating with these organisations (spas) as either a client or an employee has become a social taboo (Economynext, 2018) in the wider Sri Lankan society. Sri Lanka is a country where socio-culturally and religiously intelligible gender norms (Kiribamune & Samarasinghe, 1990), informed mainly by Sinhalese Buddhist ideologies (Lynch, 1999, 2004), are prevalent. Such ideologies give supreme value to the moral purity of women. In particular, the sexual morality of women is highly valued in the Sinhalese Buddhist society, which considers "virginity at marriage as a symbol of the national tradition" (Lynch, 2004, p. 69). Furthermore, Sri Lankan society expects women's behaviour to be characterised by

lajja-baya[3]—fear of and shame in engaging in socially disapproved or ridiculed behaviours—and if women lose their *lajja-baya*, they become disreputable characters in society (Hewamanne, 2008b; Jayawardena, 2015; Lynch, 2004). In these socio-cultural conditions, work in spas is stigmatised, and the women who provide their labour as masseuses become 'societal misfits.' Such social exclusions happen not only because of the conflation of spa work with sex work but also because of the bodily engagement that occurs in providing massage therapy, which may affect the purity of women conceptualised through these traditional socio-cultural values. It is problematic for women working in spas to situate themselves in society in terms of their occupation (Kahambing, 2021; Trice, 1993) or even to identify with their occupational identity outside the organisational spaces in which they work.

Against this sociocultural backdrop, in this thesis I focus on the spas in Sri Lanka, which are emerging as a unique form of social space in the local context, attracting young females as labour constituents. The proliferation of spas and the increasing trend of women choosing spas as a place of employment, irrespective of spas' identification in society as a place of sex work, has become a social discourse in Sri Lankan society. Those women are being stigmatised heavily in society for 'selling their bodies' and acting without commitment to protect their *lajja-baya* as prescribed by society. Though the conditions in relation to spas unfold in this manner, the prominent presence of this organisational entity in the urban geographies of the country, and young females' engagement with these organisations, have not received significant feminist or broader scholarly attention. The lived and embodied

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[3] Gananath Obeysekera, in the book, *The cult of the goddess Pattini* (1984)*,* defines *lajja* as shame and *baya* as "fear of ridicule or social disapproval" (p. 504).

experiences of women who work in the place called the *spa* within the hereto-explained socio-cultural conditions in the specific locality of Sri Lanka yet remain absent from scholarly enquiry.

1.3   RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

In the above context that I critically explore the social constitution of the spas and the identity formation of women who work as masseuses in the wider Sri Lankan society. This thesis answers the research question:

How does the social construction of the spaces of spas intersect with the construction of the identity of the masseuse in Sri Lanka?

This overarching research question is answered through three sub-questions:

1. How do the spatial practices of spas inform/shape the construction of the identity of the masseuse?

2. How is the construction of the place called the spa and the identity of the masseuse influenced by the socio-cultural values of the wider Sri Lankan society?

3. How do masseuses negotiate their work identity in and through the multiple social spaces of everyday life?

Deriving from the research questions stated above, the prime objective of this thesis was to explore the ongoing association between the social construction of the spa and the construction of the identity of masseuses—the females who are involved in socially stigmatised work—within the wider socio-cultural environment of Sri Lanka. The conceptualisation of the thesis is established on the ontological view that space, place, and the identities of people are social constructions. Grounded on such an ontological tenet, I draw from two socio-spatial perspectives—Lefebvre (1991)'s

understanding of *space as a social product* and Massey (2005)'s understanding of *space as relationally produced*. Drawing from these theoretical perspectives, I critically delve into the spatial relations of the multiple social actors—the inhabitants and users of spas, and the other social actors who intermingle with spas in their day-to-day interactions—within and beyond the spaces of spas, and explore how such spatial relations articulate the identity of these social spaces and the identities of its inhabitants, in particular the masseuses.

Applying Lefebvre's understanding of space provides deep insights into the social relationships such as class and gender relations concealed in Sri Lankan society's space, which can be distinguished by its own character (Lefebvre, 1991; Merrifield, 1993). Acknowledging that neither the locale nor the spa exists independent of and beyond the influence of global capitalism, Lefebvre's "conceptual triad" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33) adopted in this thesis allows uncovering the local character of space—which entails Sri Lankan forms of production and unique social interactions—within the neo-liberal economic context. In particular, it explores the economic, social, and cultural formations in the urban and rural geographies of Sri Lanka, which influence the production of the spas and the formation of the identity of the masseuse.

Massey's relational view of space provides a strong theoretical foundation to understand the relational practices that occur in and beyond the spas, which produce social space of spa in the locale. Massey also gives prominence to the social character of space and puts forward the necessity to delve into the unique and individual trajectories and stories (Massey, 2005) of the place called the spa and the masseuses within the social, cultural, political, and economic conditions of Sri Lanka, a Global South country. Massey (2005) conceptualises "places […] as

integrations of space and time; as *spatio-temporal events*" (p. 130, emphasis in original) and as "woven together out of ongoing stories [or] as a moment within power-geometries" (p. 131). Correspondingly, in this thesis I delve into how the place called the spa within the Sri Lankan society's space is woven together in an ongoing manner by the social actors who intermingle and entwine in and beyond the organisational settings of spas, through their collective spatial practices. I also utilise the work of feminist geographer Linda McDowell (1999), in the development of arguments regarding the ways in which spatial practices continuously produce and reproduce the identities of the organisational spaces of spas, and the women who work as masseuses, as individual and collective subjects in society.

This theoretical underpinning ultimately foregrounds the hitherto-untold narrative of the social space of the spas and the hereto unheeded lives of masseuses in the Global South socio-cultural milieu. Being a feminist researcher born and grown up in the specific locality chosen to conduct this research, I am influenced by an ethico-political responsibility to acquire more profound insights into the everyday experiences of women in the locality, especially women who are faced with discrimination and oppression mainly due to their gender intersected with poverty, educational background, location, and social class. As my experience suggests, 'being a woman in the locale' is shaped and reshaped by gender relations, class relations, and multiple other factors unique to the specific socio-cultural geography. In this thesis I attempt not to merely explain how such relations produce the reality of the masseuses' lives within and beyond the spas, but to advance the understanding of the everyday life of women in Southern geographies who locate themselves in sex/body work-related industries. Thereby, I make a political claim to advocate for

social change and emancipation for this category of women who are marginalised and subjugated within the power-geometries of the specific locality.

1.4   BACKGROUND TO THE SPATIAL SETTING OF THE STUDY

As there are many places which are closely associated with the meaning-making of spas, such as massage centres/parlours, salons, and ayurvedic treatment centres, the focus of "analysis and overall theoretical explication" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 31) is the places that are explicitly recognised under the signifier *spa*[4]. In the local context, it is also observed that although the terms spa and massage centre are often used interchangeably, this research is confined to entities recognised as spas and to masseuses working in spas. Given this understanding, it is vital to now provide an overview of the spa industry in the Sri Lankan social setting[5].

There has been a substantial growth of the spa industry in Sri Lanka since the beginning of the twenty-first century. This growth reflects both a global phenomenon as well as a local phenomenon. It has been acknowledged in the literature that the spa industry has started growing rapidly all around the world during the last decade of the twentieth century (Tabacchi, 2010). In particular, this growth is related to the wellness economy. 'Wellness' became a global buzzword in the early 2000s; at the same time wellness began to be recognised as a new mode of tourism (Koncul, 2012). As reported by the Global Wellness Institute, the worldwide wellness economy grew by 10.6% between the years 2013-2015 and accounted for an estimated global value of 3.7 trillion U.S. dollars in 2015 (Global Wellness Institute,

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[4] The term originated from the Latin phrase "*Salus Per Aquam* or *Sanitas Per Aquam (health through the water)*" (Langviniene & Sekliuckiene, 2008, p. 2, emphasis in original).

[5] Based on the gathered data, Chapter 5 of the thesis provides an in-depth explication of the historical conditions of emerging spas in the local specificity, adopting the theoretical framework of the study.

2017, p. iii). As a central part of this economy, in 2015 the spa industry has contributed a value of $99 billion U.S. globally (Global Wellness Institute, 2017). Globally, spas have grown in number and revenue generated as well as employment provided, with the largest number of spas concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region (Global Wellness Institute, 2017). The growth of the spa industry as part of the wellness economy continued[6] until the COVID-19 outbreak, which negatively impacted all facets of the tourism industry, including the wellness tourism sector (Global Wellness Institute, 2021).

The Sri Lankan spa industry reflects this global growth pattern. In addition to the global trend, the growth in the spa industry in Sri Lanka has been triggered by local conditions, such as the widened economic liberalisation of the country and the development of the tourism sector in the post-war era (Fernando, 2016). Observing the pre-COVID global trends, Sri Lankan policy-making institutes identified the spa industry as an emerging sector in the tourism industry, one that had a significant capacity to contribute to the growth of the economy (see Fig 1.1). The spa industry has been recognised as a vital part of the wellness tourism strategy, which was integrated into Sri Lanka's national export strategy for the period 2018-2022 (Ministry of Development Strategies and International Trade, 2018). This proliferation of spas in Sri Lanka also occurred against the backdrop of the political stabilisation of the country following the cessation of the separatist civil war in 2009, which had continued for 26 years. This new political stability led to a secure

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[6] The contribution of the spa sector to the wellness economy in 2017 was $93.6 billion U.S., and $110.7 billion U.S. in 2019. This figure recorded a sudden drop to $68 billion U.S. in 2020 due to the COVID-19 outbreak (Global Wellness Institute, 2021).

atmosphere for business operations such that 2009 could be marked as a momentous year for the spa industry in Sri Lanka, and spas' growth occurred from this time.

Figure 1.1. Tourism Sector Statistics of Sri Lanka (2002-2016)
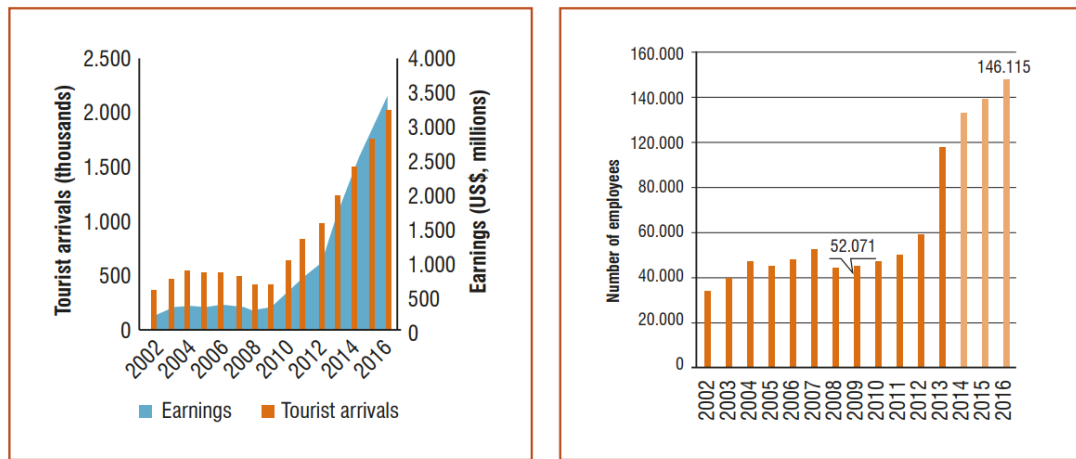
Source: Ministry of Development Strategies and International Trade (2018, p. 13)

Spas were first established in Sri Lanka as a means of attracting tourists before and around the year 2000. Sri Lanka's attractive geographical location and the recognition it enjoys among tourists for the effectiveness of traditional wellness methods, such as ayurvedic[7] medicine, boosted the growth of tourist-focused spa establishments (Ministry of Development Strategies and International Trade, 2018). Such establishments were most often attached to tourist hotels and were named *spa* and *ayurvedic treatment centre.* These entities were promoted as places which provide standard services offered by wellness spas globally such as foot massages, water baths, ayurvedic massages, and similar experiences for the tourist clients of the respective hotels. Tourist-focused spas proliferated mainly in the coastal areas until

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[7] The term Ayurveda combines the words *ayuh* (life) with *veda* (science). It is an ancient and holistic wellness treatment system, popular in Asian countries like India and Sri Lanka, which helps to balance the mind, body and spirit (Mowery, L., n.d.)

the tourism sector in Sri Lanka collapsed due to the Easter Sunday attack[8] in 2019, the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, and the political turmoil in 2022.

The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) defines a spa as "an entity devoted to enhancing and relaxing overall wellbeing, through a variety of professional services and treatments that encourage the renewal of mind, body and spirit" (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, n.d., p. 1). Among the variety of spa types recognised by the International Spa Association (2010), four types are available in Sri Lanka: destination spas, resort/hotel spas, medical spas, and day spas. Among these, the most widespread are hotel spas, medical spas (ayurvedic spas), and day spas. Hotel spas target the international tourist population and highly affluent local clientele. The primary focus of this thesis, however, is those spas which are objectively recognised as 'day spas', and which record their presence in the urban locations of the country and primarily target the local population. Relative to tourist-oriented hotel spas, local customer-oriented day spas emerged only in the recent past. It is quite challenging to grasp what conditions exactly precipitated such growth, but the number of such local spas significantly exceeds those of tourist-oriented spas, and are geographically concentrated in highly urban locations (Live at 8, 2022).

It is difficult to find an official record of the exact number of spa establishments in Sri Lanka due to the paucity of research and public information available regarding this industry. In 2021 the *Sri Lanka Spa and Massage Centres*[9] blog reported that around 263 spas operated in Colombo, Sri Lanka's most populous

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[8] A series of terrorist bombings happened on Easter Sunday, 2019, targeting churches and luxury hotels in Colombo.

[9] The publicly available *Sri Lanka Spa and Massage Centres* blog provides information on Sri Lankan spas and massage centres. This may not be the exact number of spas in Colombo and its suburbs, and the real figure could exceed this amount. Due to the unavailability of proper records and the blurry nature of the industry, a reliable number could not be captured.

city, and its adjacent suburbs (Sri Lanka Spa & Massage Centre, 2021). This number increased to 320 in 2022 (Sri Lanka Spa & Massage Centre, 2022). Though it is difficult to trace whether all of these are registered spas[10], this number accounts for nearly half the spas registered as business organisations under *The Department of the Registrar of Companies, Sri Lanka* (DROCS). DROCS records revealed, in 2021, there were nearly 560 registered entities (across Sri Lanka) that included the term 'spa' in their business name, and this number reached 660 in 2022. It is assumed that these numbers do not include tourist-hotel-affiliated spas, as these typically operate under the registered name of the hotel. Other than these officially traceable records of spas, the media has reported that prior to the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 there were around 40,000 spas/massage centres in Sri Lanka with around 200,000 employees (Hari TV, 2020). Although I am unable to discern an accurate figure of the number of spas operating in the country, I firmly believe that the above official records are only a shallow representation of it.

Alongside the growth of spas, a widespread discourse in Sri Lankan society is visible through social texts such as television, newspapers and social media (Economynext, 2018; Newsfirst Sri Lanka, 2021; Pradeep, 2017; Warnasuriya, 2018) which emphasises spas' association with commercial sex work. The conflated nature of the places of sex work and places of massage treatment, particularly women's affiliation with those places, appear to disturb the ideological regimes in the cultural setting of Sri Lanka. News reportage often alleges that spas are being used as legal

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[10] There are three institutions involved in registering spas in Sri Lanka. Those are the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), Sri Lanka Department of Ayurveda (SLDA) and Department of the Registrar of Companies, Sri Lanka (DROCS). SLTDA is explicitly engaged in registering tourist-oriented spas, and SLDA for Ayurvedic medical treatment centres. Including those two types of spas, all kinds of spas should register as business organisations in the DROCS. Therefore, *registered spas* in this thesis mean entities registered as a spa with DROCS.

fronts for sex work (Live at 8, 2022). There is evidence that these associations may have merit as, while spa establishments appear to be places which offer professional massages and ayurvedic therapy, their promotional texts implicitly evoke more erotic suggestions (See Fig 1.2).

Figure 1.2. Spa Advertisements

Source: https://www.google.com, accessed on 17 Feb 2020

Under the continuous influence of colonial rules (authority) and "related respectability politics that are continuing from the 1800s" (Perera, 2022, p. 64), sex work is legally prohibited in Sri Lanka under the Vagrants Ordinance of 1841, which was first introduced in the British colonial era. Under the Vagrants Ordinance of 1841, power is vested with the police to arrest women (or any person, for that matter) without a warrant if they are suspected to be "behaving in a riotous or disorderly manner in any public street or highway" (Sri Lanka, 1841, p. 150). This law is highly ambiguous, and United Nations human rights interventions in the country point out the possibility that the police will "arbitrarily arrest women in prostitution, using their possession of condoms as evidence of engaging in prostitution, and subject these women to harassment, sexual bribery and extortion" (UN. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2017, p. 9). Deeply rooted cultural values and ideological assumptions implicitly and explicitly operate to prevent sex work from being decriminalised in Sri Lanka. In this legal context, the women who

work in spas are frequently arrested and remanded. Later, they are brought to court, granted bail, and fined 100 rupees—an exceedingly small amount of money in the local context. However, such police raids are given considerable publicity by reporting them as news in printed and electronic media (Daily News, 2018; MENAFN-Colombo Gazette, 2020; Newsfirst, 2014). Primarily this reporting focuses on the women arrested at raids rather than any other actors involved in the day-to-day activities of the spa establishments, including the clients (see for example; Prime Vision, 2020).

The government authorities involved in tourism development initiatives explicitly claim that the hotel and spa industries have a bad reputation as places of employment (presumably due to such places affiliation with commercial sex work) among the public (Ministry of Development Strategies and International Trade, 2018). Moreover, it has been officially voiced that the cultural values of the country make any sort of involvement in such industries "shameful for women" (Ministry of Development Strategies and International Trade, 2018, p. 20). These claims represent the gender-based anxiety related to the industry. In response, Sri Lankan government authorities have undertaken many initiatives to regulate the spa industry. For example, the above-stated definition of spas was provided by the SLTDA to emphasise the authentic services that should be carried out by spas and to improve such places' social recognition. Although it was possible until the recent past to establish a spa simply via a company registration, with the latest trends of such places affiliating with commercial sex, the regulations have been tightened to prevent illegal practices which are said to take place under the guise of genuine wellness therapy (Ministry of Development Strategies and International Trade, 2018). Thus, as stipulated by the Tourism Act No. 38 of 2005, a spa or wellness centre must obtain a

licence from the SLTDA and follow the guidelines stipulated by that authority. However, such measures are still very much confined to tourist-focused spas, and do not restrict the establishment of spas with a local-customer orientation. As a result, the proliferation of spas in urban locations, rural, young women's attraction to such workplaces, the non-availability of legal measures to avoid exploitative and oppressive social conditions within such places, and social exclusion/marginalisation of women who work in spas remain as ongoing phenomena in the locale.

1.5   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In this thesis, I explore a social phenomenon ongoing in the geographic context of Sri Lanka, a country which belongs to the Southern part of the world (over time called the third world, developing world, postcolonial world, and, at present, the Global South). The roots of colonisation are still visible in the Sri Lankan socio-cultural milieu (Jayawardena, 2000), and as a country exposed to capitalist developing agendas it is continuously under the influence of the developed capitalist economies of the North. As discussed earlier, my inquisitiveness to explore the research phenomenon emerges with the observation of the distinctive presence of an organisational entity called spas in the urban geographies of the specific locale and understanding the necessity to inquire into the lived experiences of women who are placed as labour constituents of such places with a stigmatised identity. In this thesis I investigate the spa as a social space constructed out of the distinctive relational practices in the locality of Sri Lanka and the complex trajectories and stories (Massey, 2005) of the localities of the Global South. Expounding the relational perspective of space, Massey (2005, p. 9) "understand[s] space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality" and asserts that each locality has "their own trajectories and own stories to tell" (p.

11). This thesis is an attempt to represent the distinctiveness of the relational production of a particular organisational space of a Global South country.

Many scholars have asserted the necessity of overcoming the colonisation of knowledge ongoing in the Global South arena by adopting a postcolonial perspective to studies in such localities (Connell, 2007, 2013). The importance of adopting "strategies that are geographically, historically, and culturally grounded" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 17) to inquire into the women's experience in non-Western social milieus has also been recognised. Appreciating such claims to explore phenomena that occur in the Southern milieu, this thesis adopts a socio-spatial perspective to explore the ongoing existence of the place called spa. In this endeavour, I build on the theoretical claims of Global North scholars (Henry Lefebvre and Doreen Massey), as their spatial theories primarily conceive space as constituted out of social relations and concede the local character of space - the heterogeneity of space. I firmly believe that adopting a socio-spatial theory itself allowed me to explore the historically and culturally established power relations in the specific locality and the influence of the global processes on the locale and its culture, in contemporary global society. By way of such socio-spatial orientation, the thesis critically examines the intersection between the social construction of the organisational entity termed spa and the construction of the masseuse identity in Sri Lanka. The knowledge produced concurrently contributes to the organisational studies literature, gender and identity literature, and to the area of feminist geographic research both within the Global South and more generally.

Space has become an important consideration in organisational studies over the last two decades, perhaps due to the influence of time-space compression on organisations in the globalised world. With the growing focus on relating space with

organisational dynamics, many scholars claim that a 'spatial turn' has evolved (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012, p. 4; Taylor & Spicer, 2007, p. 338; Weinfurtner & Seidl, 2019, p. 1) in organisational studies. Indeed, with that spatial turn, studies have focused on examining the relationships between spatial-material arrangements of organisations, and the identity formation of these organisations and organisational participants (Våland & Georg, 2018). In addition, there are also studies on how work identity matters for the spatial performance of identity (Grey, 1994). However, notwithstanding the significance claimed for spatiality in the formation of identities (Massey, 2004, 2005), the literature remains largely silent on the seemingly dialectical relationship between the social production of organisational spaces and the identity formation of workers, especially in relation to gendered and socially stigmatised work categories. In such a context, this study theorises the intersection between the social construction of the organisational spaces of spas and the identity formation of the masseuses, and advances knowledge on the relational construction of organisational space and identity.

There is a long history of scholarly attention to sex work and a large component of which that also focuses on the identity formation of commercial sex workers and other phenomena related to sex workers (Agustín, 2007; Armstrong, 2018; McCarthy et al., 2014; McKeganey & Barnard, 1996; Murray et al., 2010; Sanders, 2004, 2005; Stewart, 2021). The incidence of commercial sex work in Global South countries has also received scholarly attention, especially in the geographical contexts of Thailand (Hubbard & Sanders, 2003; Spanger, 2013), Ethiopia (van Blerk, 2011a), Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2006; Sultana, 2021) and Sri Lanka (Hewamanne, 2020; Karunanayake et al., 2020; Miller, 2002; Ratnapāla, 1999; Vithanage, 2015). In addition, a smaller body of work (Oerton & Phoenix,

2001; Suttikun et al., 2017) devotes attention to spa workers specifically. However, there is a dearth of empirical studies examining the work-identity formation of masseuses in relation to the organisational geographies of spas in the Global South's socio-cultural milieu, especially in the specific locality of Sri Lanka. Their lived and embodied experiences in multiple power geometries of the locality and the historical conditions, especially the post-colonial dynamics which produce them as masseuses at the unique place called spa, has not been deeply examined. Researching these phenomena is significant due to the noteworthy presence of these organisational spaces in the specific geographic context, and the tendency of socio-economically vulnerable young females, hailing mostly from rural geographies in the locale (Hari TV, 2020), locating themselves as masseuses at spas. Women's tendency to choose work in spas happens irrespective of such places' connotation with sex work, the stigma associated with such work, and the legal and cultural restrictions that are prevailing in the specific locality. In particular, this thesis contributes to feminist geographic research by advancing knowledge of everyday experiences of a particular category of the female labour force who are socially oppressed and marginalised.

In addition, via reproducing the narratives of masseuses who work in legally registered organisational entities called spas, this thesis foregrounds the oppressive social conditions borne by those women in the multiple realms of their everyday life, as a category of women despised by broader society as belonging to a reputedly socially and morally deviant group. In giving prominence to the oral narratives of the masseuses, this thesis reflects the multiple political voices (explicitly told or implied) of these women, such as their claims for social justice, fair and humanitarian treatment, and labour rights. It is expected that findings from this thesis will be relevant to regulatory bodies and policy-making institutes that will then (hopefully)

address the conflicted nature of multiple employment sectors such as sex work, tourism, spas, massage therapy, and ayurvedic treatment, all of which exist in the local context. Thereby, the findings of this thesis will emphasise to these regulatory bodies the necessity to update and introduce legislation which aligns with the social dynamics prevalent in contemporary neoliberal society.

1.6 THESIS OUTLINE

This introductory chapter has discussed the background of the study, its significance, and its contributions. It also provided a synopsis of the spa industry in Sri Lanka. The second chapter provides a critical review of the literature relevant to the socio-organisational phenomena explored in the study, and discusses the appropriateness of a spatial perspective to explore such phenomena. Subsequently, in Chapter 3, I discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the study and elaborate on the relevance of the specific theoretical points of view to the thesis research questions and analysis. In Chapter 4, I present the methodology of the thesis, which includes an explication of the philosophical position of the thesis, methods employed to gather and generate data, the practical process of conducting the study, the rationale for choosing narrative analysis, and finally a reflection on my embodied positionality in relation to the research subjects.

The fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters, taken as a whole, present the ongoing production of the place called the spa in the Sri Lankan power-geometry, and the lived and embodied experiences of masseuses in a spatial context which assigns them a stigmatised work identity. The fifth chapter weaves a textual web via the stories, trajectories, and narratives shared by multiple social actors who relationally produce the place called the spa. It also discusses the formation of the spatial identity of the spa and the work identity of the masseuse birthed by the historical and cultural

conditions prevalent in the social space of Sri Lanka. In the sixth chapter, via the life stories of masseuses, I highlight the historical and cultural conditions whereby these women become masseuses— 'assuming' an identity which is stigmatised, and which continuously exposes them to social oppression and degradation. Those stories explicate their negotiations within multiple extant power geometries in the country, which are part of the economic, social and cultural formations within the space of Sri Lankan society. The seventh chapter explores the masseuses' lived experiences in and out of the boundaries of spas, and how they mask and unmask themselves as masseuses when they interact with other social actors in work, private, and public realms of life. Finally, in Chapter 8, I present my conclusions stemming from the findings of the study and suggest avenues for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins by exploring studies which address the interplay between masseuses and sex workers, and how such a relationship has been represented in the literature. It demonstrates how such interplay was initially recognised in the literature from the Global North and later started appearing in the Global South literature. The chapter then moves to limited studies that examine the construction of identity and identity management of the masseuses who perform a labour role in the places called spas. Next, the chapter reviews the positionality claims of the researchers regarding sex work and commercial sex workers. This is followed by a discussion of the literature that focuses on the identity aspects of sex workers who perform sex labour roles in multiple venues related to the sex industry. Finally, the chapter concludes with an analysis of existing literature on the sex industry in the geographic context of Sri Lanka, and draws out how academics have overlooked the development of the place called the spa in association with the sex industry.

2.2 MASSEUSES WITHIN THE CONNOTATION OF 'SEX WORKER'

In this section, I critically review the literature which focuses on the association between massage and sex work, as the relationality between identity formation of sex workers and masseuses directly links with the socio-organisational phenomena observed in the spas of Sri Lanka. It is generally accepted that sex/gender ideologies in a particular society affect how men and women are positioned in such a society and inform their everyday interactions in various ways. One aspect of such an influence is that certain occupations are gendered and

understood as male or female jobs (Lorber & Farrell, 1991). A number of occupations in contemporary society are highly gendered, such as beauty therapists, massage therapists, and sex workers (Chan, 2011). Discourses about these occupations primarily indicate these as feminised jobs, and such jobs are also widely understood as profoundly disturbing moral and ethical tenets that are deeply rooted in the cultural settings in which they are carried out (Chan, 2011). Most contentions on those occupations lie within the frame of disciplining the female body and performances, informed by socially ascribed meanings of femininity in different cultural geographies. In light of this, I discuss how masseuses' engagement in multiple spaces, such as massage parlours, spas, and health treatment centres, have been represented, problematised, and critiqued in studies conducted in diverse spatio-temporal settings.

The practice of massage has long been closely associated with sex work, and the majority of studies critically observe the influence of such connotations on the professionality of massage therapists and the practice of massage, which is regarded as an ancient form of health treatment (Bryant & Palmer, 1975; Frembgen, 2008; Kahambing, 2021; Nicholls & Cheek, 2006; Sullivan, 2012; Thornton & Timmons, 2013; Wiryawan & Bunga, 2018). As early scholars in the field, Bryant and Palmer (1975) consider the emergence of massage parlours as a "deviant service system" (p. 227) in the United States of America (USA) in the early 1970s. This contention is induced by the observation that those places provide sexual pleasure or erotic fantasy, and a range of pleasurable sexual experiences such as manual masturbation, in addition to massage services. Bryant and Palmer (1975), while highlighting the sexualised nature of the work of being a masseuse, also emphasise that "*young women who work as masseuses*" (p. 227; emphasis added) assume jobs in massage

parlours because of the financially rewarding nature of the job. This one-dimensional view ignores the underlying causes behind the occupation choice made by those young women. Based on the findings derived from the interviews with masseuses in Mountain City of USA, Bryant and Palmer (1975) conclude that the masseuses in their study attempt to avoid being labelled 'prostitutes' even though they do provide sex-related services to their customers and decry these women's reluctance to identify themselves as 'prostitutes' by claiming that they willing accept "the responsibility and self-image of "hand whores"" (p. 227).

The above study, as well as Rasmussen and Kuhn (1976) attention to the association of massage therapy with sex work, highlight that as early as the 1970s, the link between massage and sex work had been a significant concern of scholars in the Global North, especially in the USA, perhaps due to the prominent presence of it in those geographies. There is little evidence that these connections existed in Sri Lanka prior to the last two decades, and there has been limited scholarly attention on the existence of such phenomena in the Global South until the recent past. Explicitly, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, academic debates have turned their attention to the emergence of the phenomenon in the Global South arena, especially in countries in the Asia-Pacific like China, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Thailand (Chan, 2011; Kahambing, 2021).

Consistent with this earlier work from the Global North context, Kahambing (2021) recent research conducted in the geographic setting of the Philippines found that massage therapists (predominantly women) in the local setting do not identify themselves as sex workers, even though their work involves providing sexual services within the occupation of the massage therapist. Further, Kahambing (2021) points out that, in the Philippines, which is primarily governed by Catholic ideology,

the massage profession is associated with stigma, and massage therapists migrate from rural to urban cities as a means of avoiding stigma and the risk of becoming known to their relatives in their hometowns. Comparing the claims brought by the studies of Bryant and Palmer (1975) and Kahambing (2021) on masseuses/massage therapists, the former study brings a harsh and moralising critique of women's engagement in sexual services within massage parlours, while the more recent study brings a more empathetic view on the involvement of women in such work. Bryant and Palmer (1975) use pejorative terms such as 'whore', 'hand whore' and 'prostitute' to describe these workers, while Kahambing (2021) designates them more neutrally as sex workers or massage therapists. This difference may reflect the opinions of the authors but is also likely to be a strong reflection of the historical transition of scholarly perspectives towards sex work and sex workers and the more recent liberating movement of sex work (Smith & Mac, 2018). Although these two studies were carried out in two distinctive spatial and temporal settings, they underline the ongoing conflation of massage work with sex work from past to present, and from North to South.

Similar to Bryant and Palmer (1975), most studies that have paid attention to the conflation of sex work and massage work advance positions about the necessity of regulating the massage therapy profession through licencing and certification. Thornton and Timmons (2013) have strongly advocated the importance of such intervention, affirming the link between massage and 'prostitution' from ancient times. According to them, in many countries, 'prostitution' happens covertly through the appearance of massage services. They further assert that the association between the two causes an "image problem" for the massage therapist profession (Thornton & Timmons, 2013, p. 373). By observing the effects of regulating the massage therapy

profession in the USA, they claim the importance of licencing the occupation of a massage therapist in order to bring professionalism to the occupation. However, their study also signals the possibility of such licencing intervention to create a well-established illegal market for massage work due to the high entry cost of the licenced massage therapist profession.

Shroff and Sahota (2012) also discuss the need to increase the professional recognition of massage therapists in Canada by registering them as professionals and introducing higher-status education programmes for massage therapists. However, in their study, their focus is primarily on providing a recognised educational status for massage therapists in Canada to address the issue of "cultural misunderstanding of massage and confusion with bodyworkers" (Shroff & Sahota, 2012, p. 191). As such, although their emphasis may differ, both Thornton and Timmons (2013) and Shroff and Sahota (2012) limit their attention to the necessity of ascribing a 'professional identity' to massage work through the licencing and education of massage therapists.

Perceptions of the massage profession as sexual, and the marginalisation of such labour from more accepted professional labour, have long been concerns of massage therapists (Sullivan, 2012). Massage therapists who seek a legitimate professional identity for their work that is marginalised in society, attempt to manage their identities by desexualising the multiple roles they play in the massage profession. According to Sullivan (2012) ethnographic study done in the USA with practising massage therapists and massage instructors, female and male therapists deploy distinctive means of desexualisation to develop a professional identity around their occupation. Female massage therapists and instructors adopt a more defensive orientation; concerned about their interactions with the client, their appearance is maintained through dress and the parameters of the body to establish a professional

identity. In contrast, male massage therapists and instructors are claimed to have a more proactive approach to desexualising their clinical identity by associating with the medical profession. As Sullivan (2012) suggests through his study, attempts to gain a professional identity influence the way in which an individual makes meaning of their "place in the profession, the bodies performing the work and the work they ultimately perform" (p. 273). He concludes that in attempts to construct a legitimate professional identity, "practitioner's bodies and labour practices become a site of struggle for professionalization" (p. 273). While important in terms of recognising the gendered nature of massage work, his study fails to meaningfully engage with the deeply established sexualised nature of massage work and massage professionals' extent of involvement in sexualised work in their daily work routines. Further, the study limits its attention to professional identity management within the site of massage therapy through bodily engagement and labour practices, and does not consider how massage therapists are involved in identity management beyond the site of work, in their everyday lives.

A study conducted in Canada by Oerton and Phoenix (2001) with female therapeutic massage practitioners and home-based sex workers found that both professions are associated with a tainted identity. Massage practitioners claim the challenging nature of their job due to broader society's assumption that massage work is assumed to be sex work (Oerton & Phoenix, 2001). They claim that massage work is distinct from sex work, yet they acknowledge some similarities claimed by the two categories of workers. Those commonalities are that "both groups of women work on men's bodies and their clientele is typically heterosexual. And, significantly, both sex work and bodywork also involve forms of touch primarily engaged in for monetary gain" (Oerton & Phoenix, 2001, p. 389). It is noteworthy that both

professions overwhelmingly work on men's bodies, indicating a normativity concerning sex and bodywork. The findings of Oerton and Phoenix (2001) imply that both massage and sex services in the geographic context of Canada have been designated as being 'appropriate' or 'essential' for heterosexual men, agreeing with the Australian-context findings of Pini et al. (2013).

According to Oerton and Phoenix (2001), sex has always been problematic for women. "Embodied, potentially erotic, intimate, physical encounters are perilous because if women are seen to be doing them outside a narrowly circumscribed set of contexts [...] then they risk imputations of disreputability and immorality" (Oerton & Phoenix, 2001, p. 387). Different societies have different understandings and orientations towards public sexual encounters. The authors explain how such contextual meanings associated with sex influence women in the massage profession as follows:

> Instrumental, contractual touch is intensely problematic for women because public heterosex is a symbolic oxymoron; typically, heterosex is constituted as private and intimate, rather than as payment for services rendered. For women, publicly advertising and providing a personal service (as in 'relaxing massages' or the like) is therefore fraught with risk. More importantly, the conjunction of these powerful discourses – of private, intimate touch and public, instrumental touch between women and men – creates a vacuum or empty centre into which different and paradoxical meanings can be sucked. (Oerton & Phoenix, 2001, p. 389)

Therapeutic massage practitioners and sex workers, through their narrations regarding different bodily engagements with the client, attempt to point out the sex and non-sex aspects of the two different professions. However, commonalities are

present in their work, and Oerton and Phoenix (2001) claim that these two categories of women commonly attempt to overcome the accused despicability by deploying unique discursive devices in their narrations. For instance, therapeutic massage practitioners distinguish what is sex and not-sex by describing the level of bodily interactions that they have with their clients.

2.3   IDENTITY FORMATION OF MASSEUSES AT SPAS

Since the start of the twenty-first century, the spa industry has experienced rapid growth globally. As a result of the intense competition in the market, it is observed that there has been a progressive commodification of spa services (Tabacchi, 2010). In this context, there is a tendency for spas to become places of providing sexual services beyond the typical massage therapy that is expected to occur under the signification of a spa. This tendency has been observed in a few recent studies conducted in the Global South (Chan, 2011; Wiryawan & Bunga, 2018). Wiryawan and Bunga (2018), based on the findings of their study done in Indonesia, identify spas as a novel place where sex massage therapy occurs. Based on moral grounds, the authors emphasise that tendency of the spas to become places of engaging in 'prostitution' is a threat to the security and order of society. According to Wiryawan and Bunga (2018), using spas as a space for engaging in sex massage therapy, and providing such sexual services at spas under the façade of massage therapy indicate that spas have now become part and parcel of sex tourism in the globalised world. Like many scholars brought into discussion above, Wiryawan and Bunga (2018) also pay considerable attention to law enforcement. However, it is essential to note that they disregard the relational practices in society that exacerbate the emergence of such phenomena in the Indonesian context, and narrowly view legal intervention as the only means to address the emergence of spas

as a site of sex work. Further, the authors pay little attention to the social conditions of workers who provide their labour within spas.

Concerning the identity dynamics of masseuses in spas, Chan (2011) found that "Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) masseuses" (p. 519) working in a mass-scale spa complex in a Chinese urban city, attempt to distinguish themselves from young masseuses who provide services with a high sex content, in the same work site. In their work at spas, TCM masseuses attempt to demonstrate that they are associated with the medical profession and come from urban locations. In light of this, Chan (2011) claims that TCM masseuses are engaged in constructing "expert" and "urbanite" (pp. 519-533) identities in relation to their work. Spas appear to be a well-established mass-scale business in the study setting; however, these spas earn more profits from 'beautiful young-aged masseuses' by positioning them as sex objects and distinguishing them from TCM masseuses by rendering the latter a more professional identity. The spa management does this differentiated identity construction by deploying different signs and symbols within the spa complex. To provide a few examples, TCM masseuses are marked with a high price compared to the other young masseuses to denote the high quality and professionality of their service.

Moreover, in the "masseuse selection stations" (Chan, 2011, p. 523), TCM masseuses' photos are displayed, highlighting the information (age, hometown, type and strength of the massage) that distinguish them from other young masseuses hailing from remote locations. At the same time, young masseuses who offer more sex-oriented services are promoted with "bright coloured… clothing, …playful and alluring poses and smiles" (p. 524). In addition, a service beyond a massage is suggested by associating the photos of young masseuses with "[c]uteness,

personality, youthfulness and sexiness" (p. 524). These aspects are remarkably similar to my observations of the connotations evoked by the promotional texts of the spas in Sri Lanka presented in Chapter 1.

Through the findings of his ethnographic study, Chan (2011) asserts that compared to young masseuses who fulfil the sexual desires of clients, TCM masseuses identify themselves as a higher-status category of women who possess a positive social identity. His study also indicates that spa businesses serve two purposes in the Chinese urban geographies: to provide professional massage treatments, and/or to provide sexual massage. However, Chan (2011) focuses only on the identity performances of TCM masseuses within the spas, and does not offer thoughts on the young masseuses positioned with a sex-connoted identity and their sense of being in the spa. Instead, they are positioned as the deviant Other in comparison to the TCM masseuses. Chan (2011) also does not explore the influence of the social space of China on the identity formation and performance of masseuses inside the workplace and outside in society.

In Thailand, a geographical context where commercial sex work is a highly established lucrative business, the venues for massage work also associates with sex work (Monk-Turner & Turner, 2017; Taylor, 2005). In this context, Monk-Turner and Turner (2017) identify that massage work is linked with sex work, and that massage therapists are faced with an identity dilemma due to such associations in the Thai context. However, Monk-Turner and Turner (2017) conclude that in Thailand, spas operate as a highly professional space for massage service, which is functionally and practically discrete from street-front massage establishments that offer sexual services. This suggests that, quite contrary to China and Indonesia, in the context of Thailand, the original understanding of spa that exists, though the association

between massage therapy and sex work has become a matter which received scholarly attention.

2.4   DEALING WITH SEX WORKER IDENTITY

In a neo-liberalised global economic context where sex has become a commodity, places of selling sex have expanded from traditional brothels to massage parlours and then to spas, as it explicitly appears in the geographic context in which I locate this study. Much of the literature discussed above differentiates masseuses from sex workers and massage therapy from sex work, regardless of the fact that since ancient times the parallel but sometimes intersecting existence of both has been acknowledged (Nicholls & Cheek, 2006). Indeed, it is observed that some scholars put massage work under the umbrella term sex work, considering sexual services as a broader spectrum of activities (Stewart, 2021; Weitzer, 2009), while others attempt to discern a clear separation between sex work and massage work. A critical reflection of the studies discussed above shows that a lack of attention has been received on the lived and embodied experiences of masseuses who have to manage overlapping identities as massage therapists and sex workers.

2.4.1 Sex Worker and Social Stigma

Notwithstanding the ubiquitous censures, the transactional sex industry has persisted in diverse forms from ancient times until today. Those people engaged in selling sex, which I term sex workers, are typically referred to as prostitutes in many societies, a term which carries with it deeply negative connotations. These workers are considered "as a social category, as [men or] women who do not adhere to sexual and other behavioural norms" (Bindman et al., 1997, p. 3). Sex workers are considered to be harmful to society and lowly, and in many countries their labour is criminalised. They are marginalised or rejected from ordinary society as their work

engagement is not accepted by society, and they are typically associated with social stigma (Chowdhury, 2006; McKeganey & Barnard, 1996; Murray et al., 2010; Weitzer, 2018). Viewed through the three taints specified by Goffman (1963)—physical, social and moral—which have long been utilised by scholars to frame stigmatised occupations, sex work primarily comes under the label of "moral taint" (Kreiner et al., 2006, p. 620). The stigmatisation of sex work is a near-universal phenomenon, which is understood as an occupational hazard (Abel & Fitzgerald, 2010; Weitzer, 2018). Moral and ethical concerns deeply rooted in the cultures of society act as powerful forces which reinforce the stigmatisation and marginalisation of sex workers. The severity of sex work stigma is dependent on the venue of sex work, the nature of the sex work performed, and the clientele served. For instance, street sex workers are much more stigmatised compared to other sites of sex work like escort clubs (Weitzer, 2018).

Careful observation of the sex work literature shows that the sex worker identity is integrated with stigmatised identity, minoritized identity, and criminalised identity (Stewart, 2021). As a result of social exclusion and social stigma, those who engage in sex work are vulnerable to oppression and violence in many societies (Armstrong, 2018; Miller, 2002). Such oppressive conditions often get worsened when they intersect with the gender, class, and economic background of the worker concerned (Romero, 2018). The sex industry is a highly gendered industry where the majority are women who sell sex and men who buy sex (Smith & Mac, 2018). Usually, any society more fiercely condemns and stigmatises women's engagement than men's engagement in sex work. This condition is termed the "sexual double standard" by Sallmann (2010, p. 148). Further, sex workers who hail from

marginalised socio-economic backgrounds are intensely exposed to stigma-led social exclusion and oppression (van Blerk, 2011a).

Until the emergence of the "sex as a labour" debate, sex workers were mostly vulnerable to exploitation at work due to not being safeguarded from any "international, national or customary protection from abuse [which are] available to others as citizens, women, or workers" (Bindman et al., 1997, p. 3). The sex as labour debate began forty years ago, when workers in the commercial sex industry demanded that they should be identified as sex workers instead of calling them the derogatory term prostitute. Around the 1980s, sex worker activists started promoting the empowering frame of sex work and raised their voices to identify the work they perform as a form of employment (Bindman et al., 1997; Ditmore, 2006). For example, Smith and Mac (2018) claim the importance of recognising the work rights of sex workers while being critical of the arguments brought by society which attempts to position sex work within the dichotomy of good or bad. They strongly assert that sex workers' rights should be protected, as they are a part of the labour force that provides productive labour.

There are ongoing debates concerning the usage of terminology to identify people engaged in selling sex. Suprihmbé (2019a), who is an erotic labour theorist, condemns using the term sex worker as a replacement for the term prostitute, arguing that the term itself reflects the agenda of outsiders to derogate their service from other forms of employment. Suprihmbé (2019a) suggests this terminology is the preference of White cis women who experience sexual commerce as a lucrative business which empowers women. According to Suprihmbé, Black or brown women in the sex industry may not always be empowered, and may have more complicated experiences that need to be recognised when deciding on the terminology that should

be used to identify individuals in the commercial sex industry. Acknowledging the need for sensible terminology, she politically calls herself a *proheaux[11] womanist*. Suprihmbé's view indicates the necessity to acknowledge that Black, brown, and non-Western, third-world, or Global South women's experiences of sex work may differ from the experience of White or Western women.

2.4.2 Paradigmatic Controversies in Relation to Sex Work

There are two main paradigms reflected in the research on sex work. One of those, the *oppressive paradigm* (see for example, Farley, 2004), argues that sex work is essentially oppressive and is an archetypal manifestation of male domination in patriarchal societies (Weitzer, 2009). This perspective manifests the adverse life circumstances from childhood, like poverty, various forms of abuse, use of drugs, homelessness, and relating with pimps[12] (McCarthy et al., 2014). Furthermore, the oppressive paradigm generally views sex workers as a victim of society, while ignoring the fact that they are also products of society (Agustín, 2007).

Opposing the oppression-oriented view, scholars in the *empowerment paradigm* argue that sex work is not necessarily exploitative, and that human agency may be involved in such work. The scholars who hold this perspective associate sex work with other service provisions like massage therapy and psychotherapy (Weitzer, 2009). They argue for the potential of sex work to be "edifying, lucrative, or esteem-enhancing" (Weitzer, 2009, p. 215). Both these paradigms have been

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[11] This term is derived from the word proheauxism which is coined by Suprihmbé. Proheaux womanist is defined as "a sex worker womanist, feminist, or hustler-heaux committed to collective and personal justice, not just sexually, but through recognition of labor and physical security" (Suprihmbé, 2019b).

[12] A person, normally a man, who solicits customers for sex workers in return for a share of the earnings. Pimps often exert control over sex workers through intimidation, fear, physical and sexual abuse, and other abusive methods.

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criticised for holding extreme positions. This criticism asserts that the oppressive paradigm overemphasises the adverse conditions associated with sex work, while the empowerment paradigm solely emphasises the positive stories, ignoring the highly negative experiences of sex work (Weitzer, 2009). Weitzer (2009) asserts that both exploitation and empowerment are inherent elements of sex work which may vary according to the place, time and sector in which it occurs.

Denying these extremist views, Weitzer (2009, p. 215) proposes a "*polymorphous paradigm*" to research and understand sexual commerce. Scholars adhering to this paradigm (Stewart, 2021; Weitzer, 2009, 2022) hold the view that there is an integration among the working conditions, power relations, and experiences of sex workers. So, all such aspects should be taken into consideration when attempting to define or understand sex work. Distinct from the other two paradigms, the polymorphous paradigm takes into consideration the following:

> […] complexities and to the structural conditions shaping the uneven distribution of worker's agency, subordination and job satisfaction. Victimization, exploitation, choice, job satisfaction, self-esteem, and other factors differ between types of sex work, geographical locations and other structural conditions. Commercial sexual exchange and erotic entertainment are not homogeneous phenomena. (Weitzer, 2011, p. 1338)

The inclusivity of multiple factors that make it possible to understand sex work from a broader perspective could be considered a significant contribution made by the polymorphous paradigm. This paradigm broadly guides the understanding of sex work in this thesis, as it signals the importance of considering the heterogeneity associated with the phenomena, as the sex workers' experience may differ according to multiple contextual circumstances.

2.4.3 Identity Politics, Identity Performances and Negotiations of Sex Workers

Researchers have examined how sex workers deal with their identity and engage in identity politics, performances, and negotiations in order to challenge or cope with unfair and often sordid experiences they encounter in different social contexts due to stigma. Chowdhury (2006), espousing a social constructionist standpoint, highlights how a female sex workers' movement in Bangladesh struggled to deconstruct their stigmatised social identity and to reconstruct their identity as sex workers more positively by claiming their "rights as human beings, citizens, women and workers" (p. 335). In Bangladesh, sex workers are often called by the denounced term *potita,* which means fallen woman. This socially-imposed identity, and the hegemonic cultural order of Bangladeshi society, were challenged by sex workers who were marginalised due to such conditions. Extending Snow and Anderson (1987)'s theorisation of personal identity, Chowdhury (2006) asserts that Bangladeshi sex workers struggled to construct a new identity by rebuilding themselves as new individuals by defining their "self-designations and self-attributions with new terms, appearances, and realizations" (p. 342). As explored through sex workers' identity talk, the identity construction struggle of them appears mainly in four patterns which the author terms associational dialecticism, oppression consciousness, resistance narratives, and essentialist contention (Chowdhury, 2006, p. 346). Associational dialecticism is asserted as sex workers' attempt to parallelly associate and disassociate with two distinct types of identities. That is to associate with identities which are safeguarded with rights, such as a labourer, civilian, human being, or woman, and disassociate themselves from the identities such as thieves and captors. Secondly, sex workers are found to be conscious regarding the oppression that they encounter in society. They have expressed stories demonstrating their

attempts to safeguard sex workers' rights while fighting against such oppressive conditions. Thirdly, sex workers have shared narratives with the researcher to emphasise the resistance that they showcased to the actors such as police officers who try to harass them due to being sex workers. Finally, Chowdhury (2006) argues that sex workers make an essentialist contention by claiming that they are providing an essential service by fulfilling men's essential carnal desires, which leads to discipline in society.

Recognising the spatial element of identity performances, van Blerk (2011a) explores how young sex workers who work in bars in Ethiopia construct multiple identities performatively, and negotiate their multiple identities to fit into the different environments in which they live, such as their work environment, family environment, and community environment. Drawing from Judith Butler's (1993) theorisation of performativity, van Blerk's study demonstrates how sex workers perform gendered identities in multiple spatial scales, in particular, bars, bodies, and the community. The identity performances of the sex workers were found to be mainly influenced by normative views of femininity and power relations in Ethiopian society. In the bar space, young sex workers who are identified as 'bar girls' perform a feminine identity which is acceptable to the desires of the clients and the bar owners. Beyond the bar spaces, in the community, their performance adapts the socially regulated feminine behaviours and appearance.

Further, they are concerned about the exclusionary process that may result from divulging their identity to the family at home, and living far from the village is used to avoid such risk of being excluded. Based on these findings, van Blerk (2011a) concludes that in the Ethiopian geographic context, young female sex workers' "performance of femininity is inherently encased within wider structures of

rural poverty, inhibiting their ability to transcend the relatively powerless position of women inherent in traditional gender dynamics" (p. 229). One of the noteworthy contributions of van Blerk (2011a) is understanding the body as a spatial scale, and revealing how the females in her study construct bodily boundaries in their identity performances.

In a study done of sex workers in Britain, Sanders (2005) explores how sex workers capitalise on sexuality by constructing a "manufactured identity" (p. 328) in the spaces of work. Moreover, Sanders found that even in the Global North, due to the stigma associated with such work, sex workers tend to conceal the work they perform from their families and other social actors, using pseudonyms at work to hide their identity and performing what could be characterised as double lives. Similarly, McKeganey and Barnard (1996) found that sex workers typically maintain a clear division between their work and private lives to manage their stigmatised identity.

From the point of view of Sallmann (2010), the techniques used by sex workers to conceal their identity can be understood as implicit attempts to resist the stigma associated with their work. Based on a study in the Midwestern United States of 14 sex workers' lived experiences of stigma, Sallmann (2010) found that sex workers are extensively exposed to social labelling, violence at work, and discrimination in society. Many stories in his study depict the resistance of sex workers to "social double standards against which they were judged" (Sallmann, 2010, p. 155) and to the discriminatory practices exercised by society. From a social justice perspective, holding the view that every individual has a right to be treated with dignity and respect, Sallmann suggests that a systematic approach is required to examine the stigma associated with sex workers. Such focused attention to sex worker stigma is

presumed to bring social justice to sex workers by reducing or eliminating the unfair treatment and oppression that they encounter (Sallmann, 2010). Based on this argument, Sallmann (2010) underscores the necessity to explore the historical conditions which lead women to engage in sex work, and to examine the appropriateness and utility of laws that criminalise sex work.

Weitzer (2018) argues that stigma-coping techniques used by sex workers could only manage the impacts of stigma, and such strategies do not help to reduce or eliminate stigma. Therefore, he suggests it is essential to normalise sex work in an effort to erode the stigma associated with it. Weitzer (2018) suggests that one way this could be achieved is by shifting the language used to identify sex workers. He argues that sex-neutral language should be used instead of derogatory terms, including by sex workers themselves, in order to change social attitudes. Other preconditions for attitudinal change suggested by Weitzer (2018) include the unbiased portrayal of sex workers in the media, the decriminalisation of sex work, and lobbying for sex workers' rights by business owners and managers in the commercial sex industry. Lastly, but emphatically, Weitzer (2018) shows the importance of sex worker activism through sex workers' collectives and organisations to combat the stigmatisation of sex work. However, despite Weitzer's exhortations, his research does not bring any empirical evidence to show the practical possibility of implementing the above strategies to combat socially constructed stigma, which is deeply rooted in cultural settings. Further, in suggesting the involvement of commercial sex business owners and managers in promoting sex worker rights, Weitzer does not pay attention to the potential contribution of such profit-motivated actors to the exploitation and subjugation of sex workers in many instances.

The corpus of studies above shows that sex worker stigma has been extensively studied from multiple perspectives. Broadly, these studies depict how sex workers deal with the stigma attached to their work and how they resist or engage in identity politics to manage their tainted identities. However, sex work literature has barely examined the intersectional association between the political process of identity construction and the social construction of the sites of sex work. Specifically, the literature remains silent on how sex workers politically produce and reproduce social spaces in their everyday interactions in an attempt to negotiate their socially problematised identities. It is worth breaking this silence and adopting a more socio-spatial perspective to explore these phenomena, based on the premise that both space and identities are relationally produced (Massey, 2004). Such exploration will produce knowledge on whether sex workers challenge the 'disreputable image' constructed around them, and/or challenge the social relations which are responsible for deeply establishing such identity.

2.5   RESEARCHING MASSEUSES AND SPAS IN SRI LANKA

Though spas seem to have a wide presence in Sri Lanka compared to the past, as a legally-endorsed organisational entity, the social dynamics within these organisational spaces have not received the attention of the scholarly world. The emerging spa industry and disreputability associated with spas in the wider society of Sri Lanka as a place of sex work necessitates looking into how such organisational space is constructed within the socio-cultural specificity of Sri Lanka. The women who constitute the labour force of these spas have also been largely neglected in the academic arena. The literature review above clearly shows that masseuses are broadly (mis)labelled as 'prostitutes' in many countries, irrespective of whether they engage in sex work. Under such conditions, it is evident that women who work as

masseuses are exposed to many types of social oppression within the organisational spaces of spas and in society at large. However, as far as I know, no studies have investigated the embodied experiences of masseuses with a stigmatised work identity in and out of the organisational spaces of spas in the context of Sri Lanka. This study will address this empirical lacuna.

Although sex work is an under-researched area in Sri Lanka, some studies have explored the societal existence of sex workers. The study by Ratnapāla (1999) of sex workers in Sri Lanka reported that 1,770 masseuses were working in massage clinics at that time. The study further reveals that these masseuses were under the age of 30 and belonged to middle-class families in rural areas. Ratnapāla (1999) emphasises that these masseuses were sex workers who performed sexual functions under the guise of massage. Spas have not been identified as related to sex work, yet this should not be surprising as such places did not prominently exist in the geographic context of Sri Lanka at the time of Ratnapāla's (1999) study. A later study by Karunanayake et al. (2020) considered female sex workers in Sri Lanka and their psychological well-being, concluding that sex work creates adverse effects on the mental well-being of female sex workers. Surprisingly, Karunanayake et al. (2020) also did not explicitly identify spas' relationality with sex work, though both studies pay attention to sex workers in different places such as streets, massage centres, lodges, and hotels.

The social conditions of the development of sex work and sex trafficking in the Sri Lankan context have received the attention of Vithanage (2015). In her Master's thesis, she emphasises that despite the presence of sex work in Sri Lanka from ancient times, sex trafficking is novel to the everyday discourse in the Sri Lankan context, and has received less scholarly attention. Vithanage (2015) also asserts that

the spatiality of engaging in sex work, which was previously concentrated in the sites such as brothels, lodges, and hotels, is radically shifting in the country, with sex work shifting to massage parlours and clubs as key sites. She asserts that such a spatial shift has enhanced the vulnerability of sex workers and their likelihood of being exploited due to these recently appearing spaces being much more unobtrusive as sites of sex work. In the view that it is essential to avoid the tendency of women being trafficked for sex work in the locale, Vithanage (2015) emphasises the necessity to recognise sex work as work in Sri Lanka. Such recognition presumably could create a space for women to explicitly reach for help when they are exposed to sex trafficking. Further, she notes that there is a responsibility for scholars and educators in Sri Lanka to make aware the general public regarding the necessity to protect the rights of sex workers as individuals in society rather than "stigmatising sex work as immoral and illicit" (Vithanage, 2015, p. 48).

The absence of spas in the above studies also shows the importance of foregrounding the intersection between the social construction of the place called the spa in the social, cultural, economic, and political environment of Sri Lanka, and the formation of the identity of the masseuses who work in spas.

2.6 SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the literature relevant to the research problem of the thesis. In this endeavour, I focussed on presenting the gaps in the studies that addressed the association between masseuses and sex workers. As indicated in the chapter, such association has been a concern of the scholarly world from the very early period. The wellness-related spa concept also has a long history in the Global North, seemingly only reaching the Global South recently, although the latter localities have an ancient history of their own wellness concepts, such as ayurvedic

medicine treatments. The literature review clearly indicates that spas' association with the sex industry is hardly being captured or addressed in the academic literature. Although, in the urban cities of Sri Lanka, the establishments represented as spas show a remarkable presence, there is an empirical vacuum in exploring how such social space is produced in the broader society through the interactions of multiple social actors. Also, the specific female labour category of masseuses—who are connoted with a sex worker identity and thereby stigmatised—in the Sri Lankan social milieu has not received the attention of the scholars who focused on the social dynamics of sex workers in the locale. With this understanding of the literature relevant to the research phenomena, I now move to present and discuss how looking into these phenomena through a socio-spatial perspective contributes to advancing knowledge of the lived experiences of women in the sites of spas that are located in the socio-cultural geography of Sri Lanka.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

3.1   INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2, I critically reviewed the literature relevant to the socio-organisational phenomena explored in the study and discussed the appropriateness of a spatial perspective to explore such phenomena. In this chapter, I review the theoretical underpinnings of this study and elaborate on the relevance of the specific theoretical points of view to the arguments developed in the thesis. The aim of the chapter is achieved by organising it into two main sections. In the first section, I elaborate on the two socio-spatial perspectives which informed the process of understanding how the place called the spa is produced through the social relations existing in the space that is Sri Lankan society. In the second section, I discuss how the notion of identity is situated in my thesis and elaborate on the theories of identity that contribute to the process of gaining knowledge on the identity formation of women who perform the role of 'the masseuse' in the social space spa. Finally, I establish the integrated nature of the concepts of space, place, gender, and identity, and the influence of such integration on the premises drawn from the theoretical claims in the thesis.

3.2   THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF SPACE AND PLACE

In recent decades, space and place have received the attention of management and organisational studies scholars. With this "spatial turn" (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012; Sergot & Saives, 2016, p. 337; Taylor & Spicer, 2007, p. 341), many scholarly engagements with space and place have marked these two concepts as fundamentally influential factors in conceptualising the work behaviour and interactions of individuals in organisations (e.g. Best & Hindmarsh, 2019; Clegg & Kornberger,

2013; Dale & Burrell, 2007; Dale et al., 2018; Hernes et al., 2006; Watkins, 2005). The conventional understanding of space as a physical container, which is the solid geometrical meaning attached to the term 'space' (Lefebvre, 1991), has been challenged in many of the studies done in relation to organisational space (Chan et al., 2019; Taylor & Spicer, 2007). Instead of representing space as "a neutral container designed simply to receive whatever is poured into it" (Kornberger & Clegg, 2003, p. 79), space is now conceptualised as dynamic and lively (Ropo & Höykinpuro, 2017). Thus, movement and the becoming nature of space have been emphasised in many contemporary studies (Chan et al., 2019; Hernes et al., 2006; Kornberger & Clegg, 2003; Weinfurtner & Seidl, 2019). In this conception, the everyday practices of human and non-human occupants constitute space (Kornberger & Clegg, 2003), which leads to an understanding of space as a continuous production that occurs as an outcome of the ongoing interactive activities of individuals, collective subjects and material objects.

This understanding of space informs my overarching understanding of the place called the spa in Sri Lankan society's space. In the following section, I discuss the contribution of two theoretical perspectives brought by Lefebvre (1991) and Massey (2005) toward establishing knowledge in this thesis.

3.2.1 Space as Socially Produced

Many of the theorisations of space in the fields of management and organisational studies are informed by the socially produced view of space introduced by Henry Lefebvre in his book *The Production of Space,* published in France in 1974 (translated into English in 1991). In this book, Lefebvre explicitly proposes space as a (social) product and points out that every society produces its own, unique space. Hence, "each mode of production, along with its specific

relations of production" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 31) produces a distinctive space. This distinctiveness makes it challenging to analyse space as an 'object' which offers a universal theoretical explanation. Therefore, he suggests that instead of analysing the objects in space by considering space as a submissive receptacle, it is necessary to consider "space as space in itself" and reveal "the social relationships embedded in it" (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 89-90). Based on this argument, it can be considered essential to pay attention to the social relationships concealed in space (Lefebvre, 1991; Merrifield, 1993), such as class relations and gender relations. As I argue in this thesis, space in Sri Lankan society needs to be distinguished by its own character, and it entails Sri Lankan forms of production and unique social interactions (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 31) innate to that cultural specificity. Those are worthy of inquiry through a spatial perspective which allows for uncovering the local character of space. However, neither the locale nor the spa exists independent of and beyond the influence of global capitalism.

The conceptualisation of space by Lefebvre predominantly distinguishes society's space as perceived, conceived, and lived. These three spaces are linked to three aspects of producing space, which Lefebvre terms the "conceptual triad" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33). Thus, society's space is produced through the continuous interaction of these three aspects, which form the spatial triad, and those necessarily become the basis of the day-to-day living of human beings in the world. *Spatial practice* (perceived space), *Representations of space* (conceived space), and *Representational space* (lived space) are the interrelated aspects which form this spatial triad.

Spatial practice "embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation" (Lefebvre, 1991, p.

33). A society's space is continuously produced through spatial practice. This refers primarily to the material performances of the members of society, for example, where people and other material things are located and how those are used (Taylor & Spicer, 2007). Perceived space constitutes not only the daily routines but also the history of a society which has and is developed progressively (Dale & Burrell, 2007, p. 8). How people perceive space influences their everyday usage of space; hence, "spatial practices structure daily life and a broader urban reality" (Merrifield, 1993, p. 524).

Representations of space are understood to be the dominant space of society, conceived by designers, engineers, planners, and other sorts of technocrats (Lefebvre, 1991). They denote the interactions within a society that lead to the production of space and the "order" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33) enacted by such interactions. The order imposed by such interactions becomes our knowledge of space, denoted through objectified expressions such as verbal indications, spatial codes, jargon, and symbols (Merrifield, 1993).

Representational space is "directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39, emphasis in original). It is the space which is lived by its 'inhabitants' and 'users' as well as those such as artists, writers, and philosophers who wish to describe space. This aspect of space "overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects" (p. 39). Representational space connects with the covert side of the life of people in a society. This aspect of space "forms, informs and facilitates the deviations, diversity, and individuality that are fundamental aspects of any social encounter" (Watkins, 2005, p. 213). Any spatial event in the social world emerges from the continuous and mutual interaction of these three vital constituents of the spatial triad (Lefebvre, 1991).

Lefebvre's understanding of space goes beyond the abstract understanding of space which emerged from Cartesian logic (Merrifield, 1993; Watkins, 2005), and which has simultaneously dominated and constrained research on space to analysing only the things which are contained within a space. Furthermore, Lefebvre's theory problematises the acceptance of space as a mental construction which dominates most contemporary inquiries on space. He argues that considering space merely as a mental construction leads to ignoring the social realities of everyday life, and understanding space only as a physical container for everyday activities. However, space is not simply a physical container for our lived experiences; instead, the process of producing space is fundamental to our everyday performances in the world (Lefebvre, 1991).

Lefebvre's spatial triad has been utilised by organisational studies scholars as an analytical tool to explore the different spatial events taking place in the social world. Watkins (2005) asserts that the spatial triad is a powerful resource for analysing the processes of organisations. Thus, it offers a radical methodology through which to analyse organisations by integrating three diverse views of space—social, physical, and mental—together. As such, the spatial triad helps to identify critical problems in the social world and aids in addressing such problems (Watkins, 2005). So, the spatial triad informs the current study to understand human interactions within spas, the physical constitution of spas, and inhabitants' sense of lived experiences in spas.

Weinfurtner and Seidl (2019) also emphasise the significance of Lefebvre's spatial triad in providing a comprehensive understanding of society and the ways and means by which a society is constructed. Thus, the spatial triad is claimed to be an unbiased, integrative framework (Gottdiener, 1993) which sheds light on the

interactions existing among the different constituents that form a space, such as the "discursive formations, structural conditions and economic and various other social characteristics" (Weinfurtner & Seidl, 2019, p. 3) of space, as well as the influence of such interactions on day-to-day life routines.

The work of Dale et al. (2018) and Dale and Burrell (2007) have used Lefebvre's theorisation to gain a comprehensive spatial understanding of organisations. Dale et al. (2018) state that Lefebvre's spatial theorisation helps to develop knowledge and explanations "for the social construction of organisations and for the controversies over the products, services and (unintended) consequences these organisations contribute to the wider society" (p. 14). As they further assert, it contributes to understanding the diverse and complex nature of capitalist work organisations.

Drawing insights from the aspect of spatial practice in producing social space, Dale and Burrell (2007) claim that human experiences within an organisation are not solely constructed based on the routine interactions with the materiality of the organisation or the intuitive understanding of the spatial interactions that occur in a specific place. It is also crucial to understand the way in which space is represented historically and how such meaning is produced through social and cultural constructions. Therefore, the social space of a 'spa', which is the focus of this study, should not only be understood through the habitual interactions of the occupants of such spaces using the materiality of the organisation, but also must be viewed through the way in which a 'spa' has developed throughout the history of that particular society. The element of 'representations of space' denotes the deliberately-designed spatial configuration of the organisation (Dale & Burrell, 2007, p. 9). As such, any organisation is spatially configured consciously to signify the values and

goals of that organisation, which are intended to be communicated to the specific customer(s). Hence, an organisation uses spatial politics to construct its unique culture and employee identity (Dale & Burrell, 2007). Finally, representational space denotes the imaginary spaces that exist beyond the dominant spaces of the organisation. In a workplace, this is how physicality is veiled through symbolic meanings or how informal spaces are constructed as resistance to dominant spaces (Dale & Burrell, 2007). As Dale and Burrell further state, the socially-produced understanding of the space provides a device "for a subtle understanding of the social and material interplay in an active, social production of space" (p. 7). So, I firmly believe deploying the three aspects introduced through the spatial triad by Lefebvre would provide a comprehensive theoretical base for studying ongoing social and material interactions that constitute spas in Sri Lanka.

Extending this, Taylor and Spicer (2007) propose a definition of organisational space that integrates the different approaches organisational scholars use to consider space in their studies with the theoretical framework proposed by Lefebvre. The narrative review on space literature presented by Taylor and Spicer points out that scholars use three approaches to consider space in management and organisational studies. The most popular approach is drawn from Euclidian geometry and considers "space as distance" (Taylor & Spicer, 2007, p. 327). These studies emphasise physically built spaces; for example, those considered in studies on workplace layout. The second dominant approach to studying organisational space conceptualises "space as materializations of power relations" (Taylor & Spicer, 2007, p. 330). This approach, informed by Marxist ideology, considers how space is mobilised in organisations to exercise power and control employees. The third approach concentrates on the experiences of people who inhabit spaces. This

approach, which enlightens my study of spas in Sri Lanka, assumes that the lived experiences of the inhabitants of space and their perceptions of that space matter more than the physical manifestation of space. Taylor and Spicer (2007) relate these three approaches to the conceived, perceived, and lived spaces suggested by Lefebvre in the spatial triad, and present their own definition of organisational space "as practices of distance and proximity which are ordered through planning and interpreted through the ongoing experience of actors" (Taylor & Spicer, 2007, p. 335). This definition untangles the complexity of understanding space and offers a means to explore organisational spaces empirically.

3.2.2 Space as Relationally Constructed

Corresponding to Lefebvre's understanding of space as socially produced, this thesis is underpinned by Doreen Massey's theorisation of space as relationally constructed (Massey, 2004, 2005). This theorisation has been marked as an influential theoretical perspective in relation to space which has the capacity to make a noteworthy contribution to the field of organisational studies (Sergot & Saives, 2016). Massey views space as a construction of interactions rather than as a physical setting in which interactions occur. As interactions constitute space from the broadest to the tiniest scale, space is thus constantly produced and reproduced through "relations", which are meant to be "embedded material practices" (Massey, 2005, pp. 9-10). The production and reproduction of space through relational practices resonates with the idea that space is processual in nature or in a continuous state of flow. As Massey (2005) puts it, "[Space] is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (p. 9). Therefore, to understand the social space of spa in the current

temporality of Sri Lanka, it is necessary to inquire into the past and present stories of the human actors who have continuously produced this social space so-far.

Massey's theorisation of space connects with processual thinking, which recognises continuous change in any phenomena under consideration (Bakken & Hernes, 2006). The processual understanding of space revises the ontological stance of considering entities/organisations "from an ontology of *being* to an ontology of *becoming*" (Chia, 1995, p. 594, emphasis in original). This understanding is critical for organisational studies scholars to view organisations as evolving entities rather than fixed and stable ones. The processual view of space demands the integration of spatiality with time, and compels scholars to take into account the movement of things.

According to Beyes and Steyaert (2012), replacing the noun 'space' with the verb 'spacing' is an important conceptual move vital to theorising and researching the everyday encounters of organisational space. This theorisation "entails a move from representational strategies of extracting representations of the world from the world to embodied apprehensions of the everyday performing of space, to different enactments of organizational geographies" (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012, p. 47). Hernes et al. (2006) propose the recursive view of space which encompasses both the relational and processual views of space. In the recursive view, space is understood to be produced and reproduced through actions and interactions. This happens in an ongoing manner and constitutes that space. In this manner, space allows actions and interactions to happen within it, and also becomes continuously shaped and reshaped by such interactions. Thus, that the recursive understanding of space accepts stability as well as renewal (Hernes et al., 2006, p. 44). Informed by the processual view, this thesis pays attention to the everyday encounters of spacing spas via the narrations of

masseuses and seeks to apprehend the everyday performance of spas in the cultural specificity of Sri Lanka.

When space is continuously constructed through relations, multiplicity and heterogeneity become its essential characteristics. Due to heterogeneity, there is a possibility for the simultaneous existence of different trajectories and stories in space (Massey, 2005). Here, the term *trajectory* denotes the changing nature of any phenomenon, for example, a "living thing, a scientific attitude, a collectivity, a social convention, [or] a geological formation" (Massey, 2005, p. 12). Baldwin (2012) interprets these trajectories as the "ideas, practices, and material processes that can affect people in the conduct of their daily lives, in their quest to live well; they are relationships and processes that affect others and may be authored by individuals, groups, and by non-humans" (p. 208).

Stories are the narrations that interpret the history, the changes, and the movement of things. Massey insists on the diversity encountered in the world by highlighting the impossibility of the story of one part of the world, like 'the West', necessarily becoming the story of other parts of the world. Thus, through a recognition of the spatiality of the world, it becomes possible to acknowledge that each locality has its unique and individual trajectories and stories to voice (Massey, 2005). As such, most of the research studies done in relation to the organisational spaces of the Global North do not necessarily represent the unique nature of the organisational spaces of the Global South, which are inherently a construction of the distinctive trajectories and stories of the localities of the Global South. However, Massey's theorisation does not overlook the fact that local processes intersect with global processes in producing localities. In light of this, instigated by the relational sense of space, this study concentrated on an organisational space of the Global

South in the belief that it will foreground the trajectories and stories that are shaped and reshaped by the social, cultural, political and economic conditions within the spatial boundaries of the Global South, as well as by the conditions beyond it.

3.2.3 Place in Relation to Space and the Woven Togetherness of Place

Academic commentary articulating the notion of space often discusses the association between the concepts of space and place. Tuan (1977), for example, asserts the necessary interconnection between the two concepts, a link that is inherent in all attempts to define the two concepts. His theorisation, however, relates space with movement and place with pause. As Baldwin (2012) elaborates, space is "the realm of action, [and] place is where one stops, reflects and becomes" (pp. 207-208). This view acknowledges place as a concrete concept and space as an abstract concept (Cresswell, 2004).

In contrast to the above, Massey (2005) argues that place is an assimilation of space and time rather than a specific point or a location that could be marked on a map. When space is understood as relationally constructed or as a construct of diverse stories and trajectories occurring concurrently, places could be understood as the assemblage of such stories (Massey, 2005). Articulating a specific place is inherently a political process performed by human and non-human actors through their negotiations of space and time. Therefore, a place is "a moment within power-geometries of space" (Massey, 2005, p. 131), and it is entwined by an accumulation of ongoing stories. This woven togetherness, according to Massey, which happens through the interactions of humans and nonhumans, is a salient characteristic of place. Considering such woven togetherness as a basic premise and adopting Massey's notion of place, this thesis explores the political processes of producing the place called the spa in wider Sri Lankan society through negotiations of space and

time by masseuses and other social actors who work in spas, within and outside of spas.

According to this view, to understand the spatiality of a spa, it is necessary to 'stretch out' the social relations which constitute such places in Sri Lankan society. Two aspects of such relations are thought to be class relations and gender relations (Massey, 1994a). While focusing on both these aspects of social relations, I give prominence to understanding the influence of gender and gender relations in the production of the place called the spa and the identity of the masseuse. In particular, I inquire into the lived experiences of women who enact the role of masseuses as gendered beings in the socio-cultural milieu of Sri Lanka. As Massey (1994a) puts it, "geography matters to the construction of gender" (p. 2), and, conversely, when determining the nature of gender interactions in a society, such relations become an influential factor in the production and reproduction of geographies. She emphasises that the perceptions of space and place by people in a particular society are interconnected with the "particular social constructions of gender relations" (Massey, 1994a, p. 2). What it means to be a woman, and the experiences and positions of women in society, differ across time and space (McDowell, 1999). Therefore, to inquire into the lives of women, it is essential to understand how femininity and masculinity are interpreted through space and time. In McDowell (1999)'s view, place and gender are interrelated and are formed reciprocally via social practices and interactions in different places, such as at work, and in the home, city, or village.

3.3   IDENTITY AND IDENTITY FORMATION

This section explicates the theoretical notions of identity that inform the development of knowledge on the identity construction of women who enact the role of masseuses/massage therapists in the places called spas, within the socio-cultural

specificity of Sri Lanka. The French term *masseuse* is the 'work/occupational identity' ascribed to female workers in massage centres or spas. While the word masseuse is recognised as a gendered term, the more gender-neutral term of *massage therapists* is also used to commonly identify male and female workers who work in these places. Beyond this gendered aspect, the two terms are differentiated based on a concern towards attributing professionality to massage work. The term masseuse signifies an association with 'prostitution', which is stigmatised in society (Kahambing, 2021). In the view of Richards, the term masseuse gives the idea of "happy endings", which is defined as "ending the massage with a sexual release" (2017, para 6). Hence, the term massage therapist is related to licensed health massage treatment providers, not sex workers. This thesis focuses primarily on the construction of the masseuse identity, which Richards (2017) claims is related to sex work, where I explore the lived and embodied experiences of masseuses—women who hail mainly from economically-deprived social positions within the power-geometry of Sri Lanka. As per my observations in the locale, women workers in spas are seldom identified with the professionality-associated term massage therapist. Such identification is evidenced in official texts such as job vacancy/promotional advertisements and policy documents issued by the government intuitions of Sri Lanka, such as the Tourism Development Authority, but in the everyday discourse of society, many demeaning and derogatory terms are used to identify women who work in spas. Sex work-related terms or place-bound terms such as 'spa girls' are used to label these women. Therefore, as this thesis revolves around identity-related matters derived from the social constitution of spas, it becomes necessary to elaborate on how theories of identity influence the issues discussed in this thesis.

Despite, or perhaps because of the complexity and multiplicity of understandings of the notion of identity, it has become a popular concept in the field of organisational studies. This is due, primarily, to the increasing claim of organisational studies scholars that identity matters a great deal to individuals who are a part of different socio-organisational settings (Alvesson et al., 2008, pp. 5-6). Indeed, individuals in any socio-organisational setting seek to have a clear sense of 'self' and how their self/identity fits into the environment they live in (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016).

The identity literature places the understanding of identity between two extremes. At the one end, identity is understood as a fixed construct with essential qualities that an individual possesses. This tradition views identity as relatively fixed and much more straightforward (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). At the other extreme, more critical perspectives argue that identity is necessarily fluid and fragmented in nature (Alvesson et al., 2008; Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Cresswell, 2004; Massey, 2005; Sundberg, 2004; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; van Blerk, 2011a). According to the latter view, identities are continuously changing, making identity formation an ongoing process. In light of this, "every identity is reconceived as un-centered, as in process and transition, as having no essence to which it will tend or revert" (Gibson-Graham, 1996, pp. 28, 63). My understanding of identity in this thesis aligns with this processual view. Hence, I acknowledge identities as fundamentally formed through daily social interactions, engagements, and practices (Massey, 2004).

3.3.1 Place-bound Identity Formation and Negotiation

Identity construction can best be understood as a continuous negotiation that occurs between individuals and the social relationships they maintain (Dale &

Burrell, 2007). In contemporary societies, the work that people engage in determines, in part, their meaning, status, and identity (Smith & Mac, 2018, p. 49; Trice, 1993). By way of example, in the initial stages of forming a social relationship, it is not uncommon for the employment of a person to form the basis of discussion with new acquaintances. Thus, work has become a central force in the formation of "self-definition and intersubjective relations" (Dale & Burrell, 2007, p. 106). Furthermore, the prestige associated with one's work or occupation, as well as the prestige associated with the place of work within the broader social context, influence the ability or willingness of an individual to identify themselves with that work (Van Maanen, 2010). Thus, social context plays a central role in determining the status hierarchy of occupations. Conversely, when a person is occupied in an employment which is socially conceptualised as 'dirty work', the ability of such individuals to negotiate their identity in society is severely restricted (Van Maanen, 2010).

Scholars argue that there is an apparent relationship between identity, work (occupation), and space. Such arguments are informed by the understanding that identity is spatially performed (Dale & Burrell, 2007, p. 105). However, this association is diverse and continuously changing in nature. It is empirically evidenced that the work that a person performs and the spatial organisation they work for become powerful identifications of these individuals (Grey, 1994). Thus, the identification of employees with their work organisation matters for their individual identity and the identity they carry beyond the organisation's physical boundaries (Dale & Burrell, 2007, p. 101). For example, Grey (1994) shows how accountants carry their work identity to public spaces outside the organisation. However, Grey also reveals that their willingness to carry their identification with the organisation as their individual identity is dependent on their occupational status

within the organisation. Therefore, it seems that the status associated with a person's work does matter for the spatial performance of identity.

Salvi (2013, p. 22) asserts that identity is a cognitive phenomenon that essentially influences the behaviour of individuals in a specific spatial and temporal context. Identity helps sense the places individuals belong to in relation to other social actors and "helps people to 'locate' themselves in their social worlds" (Bondi, 2013, p. 11). A very sensible view of identity is that identities are constructed in an ongoing manner relative to the "social and discursive contexts" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165) in which people are situated.

Massey (2005) claims there is no essentiality that is given to an individual, but rather that an individual's identity is continuously formed or constructed in and through social interactions. Acknowledging an anti-essentialist understanding of identity, she argues that spatial identities are constructed relationally in the same way as space is constructed relationally (Massey, 2004, 2005). Considering the global scale to the local scale, spatial identities of "places, regions, nations and the local and the global" (Massey, 2004, p. 5) are constructed through relational practices. Spatiality plays a vital role in the formation of identities, and all three aspects, viz. identities and interactions among them, as well as spatiality itself, are concurrently constructed (Massey, 2005). As such, the identities of organisational spaces and the individuals occupying such spaces are constructed through the collective relational practices of human and non-human actors. Such identities are not only a product of relational practices within a specific organisational space but also "a product of relations which spread out way beyond" (Massey, 2004, p. 6), such as national and global spaces.

The concept of social identity is also essential to understand in this thesis. Social identity has been understood in diverse manners. Snow and Anderson (1987) refer to it as:

> identities attributed or imputed to others in an attempt to place or situate them as social objects. They are not self-designations or avowals, but imputations based primarily on information gleaned on the basis of appearance, behaviour, and the location and time of action.
>
> (p. 1347)

In this definition, the behaviour of people, their appearance, as well as the time and space of action, are influential in imputing identities. Social identities alleged by the other to an individual may contradict the personal identities are attributed by the individual to themselves. Snow and Anderson (1987) also explain how people engage in *identity work* in that they perform multiple activities to construct, represent and maintain their personal identities when those are challenged by socially imputed identities. Snow and Anderson suggest four ways of doing identity work: "(a) procurement or arrangement of physical settings and props; (b) cosmetic face work or the arrangement of personal appearance; (c) selective association with other individuals and groups; and (d) verbal construction and assertion of personal identities" (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1348). In examining how masseuses deal with their stigmatised identities in multiple spheres of their daily lives, Snow and Anderson's theorisation of doing identity work has profoundly influenced this thesis.

Some scholars also argue that individuals' social identities are formed and constructed continuously based on the occupation or organisations they are attached to, and based on the different social categories to which they belong, such as gender, ethnicity, race, and age (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). A similar view is expounded by

Romero (2018), who insists that gender, class, race, sexuality and abilities are the bases that determine individuals' identities in society. The everyday lived experiences of an individual in a specific spatial and temporal context are defined by the interactions between these bases of social inequalities and differences. In any society, an individual's opportunity to access social privileges and the extent of oppression they encounter are affected by such social identities (Romero, 2018). Especially when it comes to employment, these bases become influential in determining accessible employment opportunities. A woman's experience in a particular society is, therefore, determined not only by her gender but also by her position in class and other social identity hierarchies. A woman of low economic and social status who has not been privileged enough to access superior educational opportunities becomes relegated to the level of a persona non grata in society. Although such women are compelled to enter the labour force to provide economic necessities to their families, they are less likely to have access to jobs which are socially honoured and recognised (Romero, 2018).

3.4 TAKING BODIES AS A PLACE AND PERFORMING IDENTITIES

Thinking of the "body as a place" (McDowell, 1999, p. 34) influences the production of knowledge on how masseuses negotiate their work identity in and out of the boundaries of spas. McDowell (1999) posits an understanding of the body as a place, location, or site which could be distinguished from one person to another as we distinguish one place from another. Bodies occupy space and hold obvious material qualities such as shape or size, while the spaces and places these bodies occupy matter to the manner in which they are presented to others and how others perceive and respond to them. There is a tendency in contemporary feminist research to consider the body as a fluid entity, as the malleable nature of the body gives it the

ability to hold different forms and shapes through time and space (McDowell, 1999). This concept opens up a theoretical approach to understanding the interconnection between an individual's body and his/her social identity. This conception of the body has influenced the current study in its explanation of how masseuses negotiate their identities through bodily inscriptions and bodily performances in the multiple realms of their everyday lives.

The manner in which bodies are understood varies, corresponding to the spatial scale in which they are located (McDowell, 1999). This could be understood as the influence of hegemonic cultural inscriptions on the presentation of bodies in society. Smith (2012) points out that the body distinguishes one person from another, both in a physical sense and a social sense. The body is also constructed out of social relations, which influence the process of forming the personal identity of individuals. Conversely, gender, as well as other forms of social distinctions, are constructed based on corporeal identities. Butler (1993) is a proponent of such understanding, and she contends that the cultural meanings of gender are constructed by taking the body as a focal place for assigning such meanings.

McDowell (1999) proposes that "bodies [are] surfaces that may be differentially affected by social practices and that they may be transformed and differentially presented to particular audiences" (p. 47). Such a theoretical position is informed by the Foucauldian theorising of the "body as a surface to be inscribed by social practices" (McDowell, 1999, p. 50). This helps to conceive that "bodies are acted upon in discursively constructed institutional settings" (McDowell, 1999, p. 50). Under these conditions, bodies are disciplined in multiple social settings, such as the home, the workplace, and the street, necessarily through social practices. Furthermore, according to Foucault's theorisation of power as relational, something

which is exercised rather than possessed (Foucault, 1995), in different spatial and temporal settings, the dominant party exercises power over the submissive body. In a society dominated by patriarchal ideology, disciplinary surveillance severely affects many women's (as well as certain men's) bodily inscriptions. Grosz (1994) discusses the historical and cultural influence on objectifying bodies by extending the Foucauldian understanding of the body as a socially inscribed surface. As she puts it, "the body or rather bodies…are not only inscribed, marked, engraved, by social pressures external to them but are the products, the direct effects, of the very social constitution of nature itself" (Grosz, 1994, p. x). Patriarchal ideologies could intensify the disciplinary control over women's bodies and behaviour. Hence, women are compelled to inscribe their bodies to adhere to the local ideological restrictions and avoid being 'out of place' in a particular social setting.

Female existence is significantly influenced by the cultural concerns of a particular society. Because women are directly exposed to the gaze of others, they are compelled to manage their 'visible self' in accordance with the social setting they represent. As Tseelon (1995) discusses, clothing is used to convey different messages congruent to the expectations of the social audience. Therefore, women tend to put a varying level of effort, care, or consciousness into clothing due to the influence of the social gaze. Tseelon (1995) interprets effort as the time spent on dressing and decorating the body, care as the level of concern for planning the body representation, and consciousness as the "awareness… of being an object of the gaze of the Other" (p. 55). These theoretical perspectives, which explain the performance of bodily femininity, support conceptualising how masseuses negotiate their work identity inside the spas and multiple social settings outside those organisational boundaries.

3.5   SUMMARY

This chapter elaborated on the central theoretical notions which will inform the analysis and discussion of the findings of the study. Two salient socio-spatial perspectives will be used in the study to explain how the place called the spa is socially constructed in Sri Lanka, and how such social construction informs and is informed by the construction of the identity of the masseuse within that specific social and cultural milieu. Contributing to the understanding of space as socially produced, I presented different theoretical views which describe the interactive and integrated nature of the concepts of space and place, identity, and gender, all of which play a crucial role in explicating the findings of this study.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present the methodological choices made when conducting the study underpinned by the previously discussed philosophical position. The chapter aims are achieved by organising it into seven sections. The chapter begins by presenting the ontological and epistemological stances that informed the research approach and the methods employed to gather and analyse data. Next, I explain why a qualitative approach was adopted to explore the research phenomena. This is followed by the method employed to generate and gather data, which includes elaborating on the rationale behind choosing the data sources, how the process was pragmatically carried out, and the challenges encountered. Subsequently, I explain the ethical conduct of the research, followed by the concern towards ensuring trustworthiness. After that, I explain the analytical process, which explains the rationale behind choosing narrative analysis. Finally, I reflect on my embodied positionality when dealing with the research subjects.

4.2 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In this section, I present the philosophical stance that informed methodological choices of this inquiry and the specific methods employed to gather and analyse data.

4.2.1 Ontological and Epistemological Stances of the Research

The practical conduct of a research inquiry is influenced profoundly by the inquirer's philosophical assumptions, which address the fundamental questions of ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Since I hold an ontological position of *relativism* and a *subjectivist* epistemological

position, I situate this thesis in the constructivist research paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln et al., 2018). The ontological position or perspective of the researcher refers to what that researcher believes to be the "very nature, character and essence of things in the social world" (Mason, 2018, p. 4). In view of the above, I assume that "realties are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature and dependent for their form and content on the individual person or groups holding the constructions" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Because I subscribe to social constructivism, I believe that reality is constructed by social actors through their perceptions and behaviours and that these constructions are complex in nature and subject to change. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how reality is socially constructed (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018).

The conceptualisation of this thesis is established on the ontological view that the organisational space and the identity of people are social constructions. Lefebvre (1991) claims space to be a social product constituted through the everyday practices of human and non-human occupants (Kornberger & Clegg, 2003). Massey (2005) also understands space as continuously produced through the ongoing interactions of the social actors who inhabit and create that space. Such an ontology resonates with relativism, which assumes that social actors continuously accomplish social phenomena and their associated meanings through their interactions (Bryman, 2012). Throughout the analysis of the research findings, I establish the processual nature of the phenomena informed by a processual understanding of space (Bakken & Hernes, 2006; Hernes et al., 2006). So, the ontological stance of viewing organisations as evolving entities rather than as fixed or stable institutions (Sergot & Saives, 2016) informed the knowledge-creation process of the thesis. Integrating spatiality with

time and considering the movement of things in relation to the organisational entities of spas in the local context, the thesis aims to develop deep insights into the relevant organisational phenomena. The findings elaborate the ongoing trajectories and stories of the emplaced social actors (Baldwin, 2012; Massey, 2005), in particular the masseuses who produce the social space known as the spa.

The research study explores how the place called the spa is produced in an ongoing manner via the network of interactions among different social actors in the social, cultural, economic and political context of Sri Lanka, and how the ongoing production of the place called the spa informs and shapes the construction of the identity of the masseuse. Furthermore, the study explores how the masseuses negotiated economic, social, and cultural formations in the Sri Lankan society's space in their past, and how such moments produce the place of spa in the present temporality. It uncovers the historical process of becoming a masseuse— 'assuming' an identity which is stigmatised and continuously exposes them to social oppression and degradation. Finally, the thesis creates knowledge on the ongoing experience of being a masseuse—how masseuses negotiate their multiple identities as they relate with others, in and out of spas, and how they behave in their occupational, private, and public realms.

Based on tenets of constructivism, the generation of knowledge on reality—the social construction of the place called the spa and the identity of the masseuse—is achieved through adopting a *subjectivist* epistemological position (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln et al., 2018). By going through the narrative accounts produced by individuals, I strived to analyse and interpret the subjective meanings assigned by them to the social realities related to the construction of the place called the spa and the identities of the labour constituents of such spaces. This entailed a subjectivist

approach to understanding and reconstructing these social realities (Lincoln et al., 2018). I assumed that the knowledge or experience of these social realities could be brought about through a dialectical interaction with the social actors that relationally produce the place called the spa. In doing so, I paid particular attention to the subjective meanings and interpretations, which are "multiple [and] incommensurable" (Hammersley, 2012, p. 35), generated by the women who work in Sri Lankan spas and the multiple actors who intermingle with them in the process of producing this social reality.

Given this social constructivist understanding of the world, I believe that the subjective meanings of the world are "negotiated socially and historically [and] are formed through interactions with others […] and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 8). In this knowledge creation process, I focused primarily on the women who work in spas, as they are the main constituents who enact these places relationally with clients, managers, and others. The subjective interpretations of the masseuses in relation to their spatial experiences, and the stories of the everyday realities of their lives in the social and cultural context of the local specificity of Sri Lanka, were acquired through an interactive dialect between the research subjects and me.

I consider gender to be a variable that influences the everyday experiences of masseuses inside and outside of spas and in the construction of their identity as masseuses. As a feminist researcher, I firmly believe in the essentiality of acquiring more profound insights into women's conditions and experiences in society. Therefore, the intended phenomena are explored from a feminist point of view (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). This research is conducted with an agenda that goes beyond merely explaining the reality of spas, and is oriented more towards

advocating social change and emancipation for a specific category of women who are marginalised and subjugated within the social and political context of Sri Lanka. These women are also exposed to (sexual) labour exploitation, oppression and social marginalisation, and are excluded from the labour rights debates in the local context. As argued by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018), in research informed by a feminist viewpoint, it is crucial to inquire into women's experiences in order to describe and interpret social realities, and to empower women by giving them a voice through the study. Since masseuses are the subjects studied in the thesis, I bring their unheard voices to the readers' attention, and wherever possible, do so verbatim to preserve their unique voice (Lincoln et al., 2018). Thereby, I provide an opportunity for these women to speak for themselves against the exploitative and oppressive socio-organisational conditions that overshadow them in the local context. Thereafter, I explicate the social change that they themselves believe will bring emancipation to their lives, which are now pressurised by social stigma and many vulnerabilities.

4.2.2 Research Approach

The overarching objective of this research study was to critically examine the intersection between the social construction of the spaces of spas and the identity of the masseuse in the wider socio-cultural environment of Sri Lanka. The research was susceptible to contextual knowledge and required an exploration of how social actors produce, interpret, assign meanings to, and understand the spatiality of spas. Based on the nature of the research problem and my ontological and epistemological stance explained earlier, I adopted a qualitative research approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018, p. 10), qualitative research "is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world." The qualitative approach

encompasses an interpretive and naturalistic approach to understanding a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), where a researcher can sense "how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted" (Mason, 2002, p. 3) by social actors. The phenomena considered in the thesis required a more naturalistic and interpretive approach, as those social realities are constructed in an ongoing manner by people or social actors in the specific local context (Hammersley, 2012). The nature of the social phenomena needed an inquiry into the way in which individuals, specifically the masseuses, interpret the social reality they experience. They are the main social actors involved in producing the social space of the spa relationally, and have endorsed the meaning given to the organisational environment that they occupy with other social actors such as clients and managers. How these spaces are constructed affects their social identity of "masseuse". Consequently, their perceptions and interpretations of their everyday lives within and outside of the spaces of spas was interrogated and privileged.

4.3   METHODS OF GENERATING AND GATHERING

This section elaborates on the research setting of the thesis and the data sources and methods adopted to explore the phenomena.

4.3.1 Research Setting, Data Sources and Methods

The field of study investigated in this thesis is the spa industry of Sri Lanka, as the phenomena observed were an ongoing reality concerning the organisational entities under the signification of spas and the masseuses who constitute the labour force of such places. Therefore, I gathered data from the social actors who work in and interact with the regulated spas, the business organisations registered under the business registration laws of Sri Lanka, and other social texts related to the spa industry, and generated meanings through them.

As the place called the spa is constructed through the interactions of multiple social actors who inhabit and use those places, those individuals' knowledge (Mason, 2018) was necessary to explore their lived experiences in spas to gain a deep insight into the phenomena. Masseuses are the principal inhabitants who relationally produce the spa space, and their identities are constructed in and through their engagement with spas (Massey, 2004). Furthermore, the study explored their experience of being identified as a masseuse, an identity connoted with sex work, and how they deal with such identity in multiple realms of life. The primary data source of this thesis was the masseuses who work at legally-registered spas in and near Colombo, Sri Lanka. I believe that their views, understandings, interpretations, stories, narratives, and interactions (Mason, 2018) in everyday living are meaningful properties that will provide knowledge on the construction of the spaces of spas and their identity in the local specificity, and provide the reader with an understanding on how these masseuses negotiate their work identity in multiple realms of their lives.

Moreover, other social actors who interact with masseuses and the spa organisations, such as officials attached to the Sri Lanka Department of Ayurveda (SLDA), Non-Government Organisational (NGO) actors, and spa owners/managers, were also considered important repositories of knowledge and experiences (Mason, 2018) on the spa industry, and specifically on the multiple social actor performances within the spa industry. Their perspectives were essential in gaining contextual knowledge of the spa industry in the locale in order to deepen the understanding of the relational practices that produce spas (Massey, 2005) and the identities of masseuses in the local context. However, I have decided not to solicit the views of clients even though they are one of the important social actors who produce this space. A few reasons for the exclusion of their perspective are the transient nature of

interactions that they have with spas, and the difficulty of reaching them due to the tabooed nature of spas in Sri Lanka. Further, my main focus is inquiring about the lived experiences of females in spas, not the males who become their clients. Yet, the role played by the (male) clients as the users of spas in relationally producing spas has not been ignored in the thesis.

I employed semi-structured interviews as the primary data generation method, based on the research-informed belief that semi-structured interviews would allow a flexible dialogic interaction between the researcher and interview participants, and construct and reconstruct knowledge in relation to the phenomena under study (Mason, 2018). I expected that the interactions with masseuses would produce contextual knowledge of the everyday spatial practices of spas in Sri Lanka and produce rich insights into the "trajectories and stories" (Massey, 2005) of such spaces in Sri Lanka.

It was necessary to carry out the data generation and gathering process under the COVID-19 'new normal' situation, and, as a result, the initial methods chosen for data gathering and generation underwent drastic changes. Under COVID-19 conditions, research data gathering relied primarily on technology-enabled modes. Although I planned to physically visit the field and conduct face-to-face interviews with masseuses, due to travel restrictions I could not physically visit the location to conduct fieldwork. Instead, I had to consider internet-based interviewing methods such as Zoom or Skype, or telephone interviewing, which are techniques used when the research subject is spatially distant (Cachia & Millward, 2011; Jenner & Myers, 2019; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Sipes et al., 2022; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004; Weller, 2017). So, as the most viable and feasible option given the temporal circumstances, I chose to conduct telephone interviews with the masseuses. Internet-

based interviewing methods were not workable as the masseuses were unfamiliar with such modes of communication. Video call methods such as Viber or WhatsApp were also not pragmatic due to costliness of telecommunication services in Sri Lanka. Telephone interviewing was also conducted with the other social actors, as telephone interviews were indicated to be more convenient for them as well.

This thesis also utilised non-intrusive web-based research methods (Warrell & Jacobsen, 2014) to access secondary data to gain background knowledge on the research setting and to enrich the insights generated from primary data. I accessed sources such as e-newspapers and websites which publish news relevant to spas in Sri Lanka. Those were identified by searching the keywords: Sri Lankan spa, Sri Lankan spa news. I gathered news stories, promotional advertisements, job vacancy advertisements, and YouTube videos from those sources. In addition, I accessed websites which publish information on Sri Lankan spas such as Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, Department of Registrar of Companies, and Department of Ayurveda. These data provided information on regulatory measures in relation to the spa industry and other contextual data. Furthermore, I collected comments posted on the social media platform Facebook by the general public in Sri Lanka on spas and on women who work as masseuses in spas. These comments reflected how the wider society is engaged in co-constructing the identities of spas and the masseuses who work in them. Finally, for further enrichment of primary data, I gathered printed newspaper texts about spas, mostly spa promotional advertisements and job vacancies, in Sri Lankan printed news sources which could not be found via internet searches.

4.3.2 Accessing Data Sources and Conducting the Process

In the first phase of the study, from September 2020 to January 2021, I conducted 25 semi-structured in-depth interviews with masseuses over the phone. During this phase, I also gathered secondary data that were accessed and collected via online modes as described in Section 4.3.1.

To recruit the participants, I planned to adopt a snowball sampling strategy, as it is recognised as a successful strategy through which to access "hidden and hard-to-reach populations" such as the "deprived, the socially stigmatised and elites", and as an effective way of reaching "the vulnerable and more impenetrable social groupings" (Miller & Brewer, 2003, pp. 274-275) of socially excluded and marginalised groups. Masseuses are a hard-to-reach cohort since the stigmatised social identity forced on them by society compels them to lead hidden lives. Approaching masseuses was a challenging task at the initial stage of data gathering, as I had to reach Sri Lanka while being physically located in Australia.

I used several methods to approach as an initial point of contact to gain access to the spa industry. I depended on my relatives and friends in Sri Lanka and posted messages through Facebook and WhatsApp asking for support to develop a contact. The response rate for such requests was minimal, which I perceived resulted from cultural antagonism towards spas due to such places being perceived as places of prostitution. The responses of my relatives reflected their displeasure towards my engagement with exploring phenomena related to the spa industry. Such discontent was well reflected in my sibling's reaction when I contacted him to ask whether he had contacts with any party affiliated with spas. He suddenly responded, "*Have you*

gone out of your mind? Do you think I am a person who visits such joints[13]? Don't talk nonsense." Though I did not mean to insult him, and I apologised for asking such a question, his response confirmed the taboo nature of spas in Sri Lankan society. He also reprimanded me for choosing to research spa workers and asked me whether I could not find some other research field to work in. His criticism implied that researching spas was dishonourable for me as a 'respectable woman' and an insult to our family. This particular incident convinced me quite firmly of the stigma associated with the spas in Sri Lankan society and strengthened my determination to conduct this research.

For several weeks, I felt lost as far as data generation was concerned, as I could not find any masseuses, or even an individual having contact with a masseuse. Facing such difficulty, I had to rely on my husband to ask whether any of his friends had interactions with masseuses and spa owners. The first contact I managed to develop through a friend of my husband was Sameera, who had owned a few spas in Sri Lanka before COVID-19. He confirmed his interactions with spas and agreed to help me contact masseuses. The first contact he provided was Devini, who became my first research participant. Devini was very open in expressing her views, attitudes and stories of lived experiences within spas. However, she did not show any interest in introducing any other masseuses who worked with her. This encounter made me suspect Sameera's involvement in the matter. He had requested to be a kind of 'gatekeeper,' a middleman through whom I could approach masseuses, and conversations with him conveyed an attempt to provide contacts in exchange for financial compensation. I realised that such an individual could seriously jeopardize

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[13] A term used in the colloquial language to identify places where people can meet sex workers.

my research since he could have an undue influence on the women, he summoned to the interviews based on his power relations with the masseuses (Okumus et al., 2007). Therefore, on ethical grounds, I rejected his request and sacrificed the opportunity to obtain access to more masseuses via Sameera.

Later, another friend of my husband provided me with the contact of Shashi, a woman who had personal interactions with him. He offered me her number with Shashi's prior knowledge of my study and her consent. Shashi was a twenty-five-year-old unmarried woman with one and a half years of work experience in spas. After describing the purpose of my research, she conveyed her willingness to provide me her fullest support. I recognise Shashi as the 'rescuer' of my research, as my intention to adopt a snowball sampling strategy worked well with her. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19-related regulations, spas were not operating as usual. Shashi was also facing difficulties in contacting her co-workers, as most of them had returned home due to the closure of the spas and the risk of police raids due to COVID-19. As Shashi said, the women were reluctant to be contacted at home, as none of their family members were aware of their job affiliations with spas. Despite such challenges, Shashi provided another two contacts with their prior consent. The thread that started with Shashi worked to reach about twelve research participants.

As these interviews were going on, one of my school friends contacted me with a reference to Viranga, a research officer at *Managing Families,* a non-government organisation (NGO) (see Table 4.2 for details). Through Viranga I was introduced to Shaman, an official of another NGO: *Empower Community*. This NGO's role in society was the prevention of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)/Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) and empowering marginalised women in Sri Lanka (see Table 4.2 for details). *Empower Community* identifies spas as places where

commercial sex work occurs, and interacts closely with masseuses who work in spas. After going through a formal process, I requested them to facilitate my approach to masseuses. The members of the organisation were very cooperative and introduced me to a female field officer (Nadee) of their organisation who provided me with contacts of masseuses. Nadee was a friendly young woman who acted as a responsible 'gatekeeper' and facilitated access to masseuses. During the informal conversations that occurred spontaneously between us, she shared many stories about the operations of spas in the local context, and shed light on the lives of masseuses. Those stories enriched my understanding of the research setting from which I was spatially distant, and reduced my pragmatic interactional gap with the social actors and spaces of spas. Through her support, I reached twelve more masseuses working in registered spas in Colombo and its nearby suburbs.

When I reached around twenty participants, I found that certain common themes were emerging from the narrations of the participants, especially in relation to spatial practices of spas and their identity performances. However, in each new interview, the narrations of their lived experiences created new insights on the women's plight in the socio-cultural geography of Sri Lanka. Considering the richness of data generated from the interviews that mostly exceeded one hour, and the difficulty of reaching participants, I decided to cease interviewing masseuses after I reach twenty-five interviews altogether.

While interviews were being carried out in the first phase of the research, I also gathered secondary data on the internet related to spas. First, I accessed spa promotion advertisements available on different websites. I also collected newspaper reportage on spas, especially about spa raids, and watched spa-related news reporting videos posted on Sri Lankan online news channels. Meanwhile, I also gathered data

on spas from the *Sri Lanka Spa and Massage Centres* blog and websites of *The Department of the Registrar of Companies, Sri Lanka; Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority;* and *Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau*. Since I am a Facebook user, I was attentive to public comments on spa-related news and posts from the beginning of the study. During data generation phase, I collected comments posted by viewers of such posts. I also collected comments posted by the general public on the Sri Lankan spa-related videos posted on YouTube. Here, I focused mainly on public opinion and judgement on spas and spa workers reflected in those texts, and colloquial terms used to identify masseuses.

In the second phase, from February 2021 to April 2021, I conducted semi-structured telephone interviews with other social actors who interact with spas. First, I conducted interviews with officials of *Empower Community* and *Managing Families,* with whom I already had communication. Those actors were Shaman, Viranga, and Nadee. Next, I reached out to the Sri Lanka Department of Ayurveda (SLDA), through one of my friends, and conducted an interview with Rohan who had long-term experience with the activities of the SLDA. I also conducted an interview with Gaya who had owned a 'ladies-only spa' eight years ago. These interviews provided me with additional background information on the spa industry of Sri Lanka, such as historical conditions that influenced the proliferation of spas, how the establishment, operational activities, and management of local spas materialised, and the rules and regulations in place to regulate the spa industry. Moreover, as social actors who interact directly with the organisations and labour constituents associated with spas, they offered in-depth insights into the lives of masseuses and the nature of spas in the local context.

During the second phase of the study, I recruited a Research Assistant (RA) from Sri Lanka as I could not collect any printed texts relevant to spas while I was in Australia. The RA was a graduate of a Sri Lankan State University and had experience in the capacity of an RA. I instructed him to visit the National Archives and the National Library of Sri Lanka and collect data such as spa promotional and job recruitment advertisements published in newspapers, news reporting/articles on spas in Sri Lanka, and promotional brochures of spas. Although he was physically located in Sri Lanka, this process too was heavily affected and disturbed by travel restrictions and lockdown conditions that continued at the peak of a COVID-19 wave in Sri Lanka. Even under such adverse conditions, the RA provided some of the data I requested from him. He also sent me a count of job vacancies and promotional advertisements published by spas in newspapers for a period of ten years. This quantitative data provided insights into the general tendencies related to spa operations' annual trends since 2009.

Performing Telephone Interviews; Gains and Challenges
Interviewing Masseuses

I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with twenty-five masseuses in the first phase of data generation. All the interviews were guided by an interview guide (see Appendix A) and were conducted via telephone. The duration of interviews varied based on the participant's willingness to share her experiences, understanding, and perspectives, and ranged from forty minutes to one and a half hours. All the interviews were conducted in the main local language—Sinhalese. The use of the local language facilitated the development of an excellent rapport with the participants and was perceived as generating more genuine and open responses. Also, using Sinhalese, my native language, allowed me to inquire deeply into the lived and

embodied experiences of the masseuses. In addition, it facilitated an accurate analytical process that led to the development of insightful theoretical arguments based on the data generated. All interview conversations were recorded with the prior consent of the interview participants using the recording facility of the phone utilised for the interviews.

The first few minutes of the interviews were devoted to building rapport and gaining background knowledge about the respondents. This background data presented in Table 4.1 supported the establishment of knowledge regarding their experiences based on their age, marital status, previous work experience, educational background and hometown. However, the nature of their work engagement within the spa, described in Table 4.1 became clear primarily in the middle stage of the interview, when I managed to establish a good understanding of the study and developed trust with the participants. The masseuses' work roles ranged from providing clients with a sensual massage—which culminated with manual masturbation provided by the masseuse—to sexual intercourse. As indicated in Table 4.1, thirteen participants explained their work role as providing sensual massages combined with manual masturbation, while the other twelve participants identified themselves as sex workers based in registered spas having a local clientele.

After acquiring some background knowledge on the masseuses, I focused on allowing these women to talk about embodied and lived experiences of being a masseuse when performing their work roles within the organisational boundaries of spas, and when performing the multiple roles of everyday life beyond spas. As argued by Bryman (2012), the process followed in semi-structured interviews is *flexible*. The researcher has to focus on "what the interviewee views as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns, and forms of behaviour" (Bryman,

2012, p. 468). Therefore, I had to alter the questions situationally based on the matters that emerged during the interviews. From the first interview, I found that research participants were eager to share narratives regarding experiences of their simultaneous roles as woman, masseuse/sex worker, mother, sister, wife, and/or daughter, inside spas and in broader society. Moreover, they wanted me to provide space for them to express their perspectives and interpretations concerning the meanings that are socially attached to local spas as well as to their work identity. Many interviews elicited narratives of masseuses' life experiences or their fellow workers' life experiences, which pointed me towards an approach comprising a narrative analysis (Mishler, 1991; Riessman, 1993, 2008) in the interpretation of data.

Table 4.1

Background details of the participant category Masseuses

Pseudonym	Age	Hometown	Experience in Spas	Education Level[14]	Previous Experience	Marital Status	Work Engagement
Achini	25	Homagama	3 years	AL (pass)	Preschool teaching, Bank Assistant	Married and separated	Sensual Massage
Aliya	18	Galle	1 year	OL (fail)	Fashion outlet	Unmarried	Sensual Massage
Anoja	37	Anuradhapura	1 year	OL	Garment for 12 years	Married	Sensual Massage
Chamani	27	Polgahawela	4.5 years	OL (fail)	Strait to spa job at 23	Lived together and separated	Sex Worker
Chanchala	22	Embilipitiya	5 years	Year 11	Garment	Unmarried	Sex Worker
Chandhi	42	Weligama	5 years	Year 8	Garment, Grocery shop	Married and separated	Sex Worker
Devini	42	Nuwara Eliya	3 years	Year 5	Garment	Divorced	Sensual Massage
Dilukshi	34	Galle	8 years	AL (pass)	Cashier	Married and separated	Sex Worker
Hirushi	42	Moratuwa	7 years	AL	Montessori teacher	Divorced	Sex Worker
Mandari	30	Kurunegala	2 years	AL	Garment in between a break from the spa	Unmarried	Sensual Massage

[14] General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinal Level (OL) is an examination conducted by the Department of Education in Sri Lanka for Year 11 students in island-wide schools. To sit for GCE Advanced Level (AL), school students should successfully complete this examination. GCE AL examination marks the completion of secondary education. This is recognised as a highly competitive examination, and a student who passes the examination qualifies to enter the state universities in Sri Lanka. Out of the 350,000 students who sit for this examination, approximately 30,000 students are admitted to universities due to the limited capacity of the state universities.

Pseudonym	Age	Hometown	Experience in Spas	Education Level[14]	Previous Experience	Marital Status	Work Engagement
Manisha	24	Rathnapura	2 years	OL	Strait to spa job at 22	Married and divorced	Sex Worker
Mila	45	Moratuwa	5 years	Year 8	Garment	Married	Sex Worker
Nethra	45	Matara	5 years	Year 11	Salon	Married and separated	Sex Worker
Nimeshi	31	Galle	6 years	OL	Strait to spa job at 25	Married and separated	Spa Owner
Nishadi	24	Rathnapura	2.5 years	OL (fail)	Garment	Married	Sensual Massage
Nishini	26	Bandarawela	1.5 years	OL (pass)	Supermarkets as a data entry operator	Married and separated	Sensual Massage
Priyani	50	Payagala	8 years	Year 4	Foreign domestic work, Karaoke club	Married and separated	Sensual Massage
Rushi	22	Awissawella	1.5 years	OL	At a shop	Lived together and separated	Sex Worker
Sanuli	22	Anuradhapura	3 years	OL (pass)	Straight to spa job at 19	Unmarried	Sensual Massage
Sashi	25	Rathnapura	1.5 years	OL	Grocery shop	Unmarried	Sensual Massage
Shami	38	Moratuwa	1 year	OL	Salon	Unmarried	Sensual Massage
Shenuki	22	Embilipitiya	1 year	OL (pass)	Garment	Married	Sensual Massage
Surani	27	Galle	7 years	OL	Garment for three years	Divorced	Sex Worker
Tisha	29	Matara	3.5 years	OL	Printing shop	Married	Sensual Massage
Vinu	25	Matara	1.5 years	OL	Garment	Unmarried	Sex worker

Source: Data generated by the researcher, September to January 2021

Like Holt (2010) and Stephens (2007) I was initially hesitant about using telephone interviews to elicit in-depth/narrative responses from the participants, as I feared they would be an ineffective mode of generating data as they did not facilitate face-to-face interactions with the research subjects. However, Holt (2010), through his experience, found telephone interviewing a productive tool when interviewing participants hailing from underprivileged socio-economic conditions because they are not being exposed to surveillance by the researcher. Similarly, in my study, a few participants explicitly claimed they were willing to provide me with interviews as their identities were not exposed to me directly.

This is clear in my interaction with Nishini. When I was explaining the ethical conduct of the research to Nishini, she confirmed that she had no issues regarding confidentiality, stating that "*If you came and met us and talked to us, if you saw and talked to us, if you took our names, and all other details and talked to us, we would have been afraid. Since you are not doing that and only talking to us on the phone, I am not afraid. You have an advantage because you are talking on the phone*." This proved the telephone to be an effective mode to reach subjects leading a covert life in society due to their stigmatised identity. Bryman (2012) has also claimed that participants tend to be less anxious about responding when the researcher is not physically interacting with the interviewees. The spatial distance among us facilitated masseuses' sharing knowledge about social exclusion, marginalisation, oppression, and mental and sexual harassment experienced in their everyday life, in and out of spas.

Fear of divulging data and recordings to social media was a concern for some participants, and they inquired about this eventuality from me directly. Taking video/audio recordings of spa workers and publishing those on YouTube is a current

but unethical practice that goes on in the country. This concern was first raised by Nishadi, who was the sixth masseuse I interviewed. After her interview, I specifically addressed this concern when obtaining consent for the interview. One reason for this concern may have been that during the period of data gathering, an incident occurred in the country where a Parliamentary Minister released a few telephone conversations with celebrities including models, actresses, female parliamentarians, and judges, to the social media (Gunasekara, 2020). Some of these conversations were salacious and revealed sensitive information of prominent characters like parliamentarians. The incident created an atmosphere of fear among people with regard to telephone conversations. Therefore, I had to verbally assure the masseuses of the ethical conduct of the research. Though I successfully built trust among the majority of participants, some masseuses avoided talking to me even after explaining my ethical safeguards in response to these concerns. Sometimes, even after providing their consent, they did not answer the phone when I rang them to conduct the interview. Under such circumstances, I had to give up my intention of obtaining these interviews. Even some participants who participated in the interview with prior consent, such as Surani, demonstrated reluctance to answer me in detail and provided short, terse answers to my questions. Therefore, Surani's interview went for only forty minutes. That was the shortest interview, while the longest interview went for around one and half hours.

Interviewing Other Social Actors

An interview protocol also guided interviews with the other social actors (see Appendix B). However, questions were altered based on the nature of the interaction of those participants with masseuses/spas and their organisation's affiliation with the spa industry (see Table 4.2). Most often, these interview participants responded to

questions in a lengthy manner. Except for the interview with a former female spa owner (Gaya), all other interviews went on for close to one and a half hours. Three male participants, Viranga, Shaman, and Rohan, shared their knowledge of ongoing practices in the spa industry, and their experiences within the industry, quite freely. They expressed their perspectives and views regarding masseuses' lives according to their observations, employment conditions, regulatory aspects, and operational activities of spas in the local context. These conversations supported me to confirm or rebut my former knowledge and perceptions of the spa industry in Sri Lanka. The other social actors' views helped me to ascertain background knowledge of the historical development of the spa industry in the locale. In addition, Nadee had very close interactions with masseuses and shared many stories regarding the lives of women working as masseuses in local spas. It should be noted, however, that these stories have not been used in the thesis, as my main intention in the study is to produce knowledge on the lived and embodied experiences of women who perform the role of masseuse in spas based on their direct testimony; not that provided, and interpreted, by a third party.

When interpreting data, I used these alternative social actors' views to understand external spectators' views on masseuses' lives in spas, and to broadly understand the discourse on spas and masseuses prevalent in wider society. To the best of my ability, I tried not to let these views be authoritative claims which overwrote masseuses' experience and knowledge.

Table 4.2

Background details of the participant category Other Social Actors

Pseudonym	Age	Pseudonym of the Organisation Attached/ Occupation	Experience with Sex Workers/Masseuses	Role of the Participant in the Organisation Attached
Shaman	51	Senior Director of the NGO *Empower Community*	28 years	The NGO Shaman is attached was established in 2002 and around 18 people are working in it. The main focus of the NGO is marginalised women, including sex workers, in Sri Lanka. They are one of the main bodies working on HIV/STD prevention in Colombo and its close suburbs. They conduct awareness programmes and take necessary measures for this purpose. This NGO recognises spas as a place of sex work and closely associates with spas and masseuses in the awareness programmes and numerous projects.
Viranga	38	Research Officer of the NGO *Managing Families*	12 years	The NGO Viranga is attached to is a long-established organisation which focuses on family planning and sexual and reproductive health in Sri Lanka. Viranga has worked as a research officer for ten years and has extensive experience and knowledge about the operational activities of spas and experience of women
Gaya	40	Former spa owner	2 years as an employer	In 2014, eight years before the interview date, Gaya owned and managed a spa which was restricted to females.
Nadee	37	Field officer at *Empower Community*	8 years	Nadee is a female field officer who works in *Empower Community*. As a field officer, she closely associates with spa workers and makes them aware of the protective measures to avoid STDs and HIV.
Rohan	N/A	Former Consultant to SLDA and an Ayurvedic doctor	20 years	Rohan is an ayurvedic doctor who served as a consultant involved in legal reforms and preparing guidelines for the establishments operating under the SLDA.

Source: Data generated by the researcher, February to April 2021

The Social Construction of Spaces of Spas and the Identity of the Masseuse in Sri Lanka

4.4 ETHICAL CONDUCT

Since this study's primary data generation strategy was semi-structured interviews conducted with female workers in the spa industry, the study belonged to the Human Research category. Therefore, I obtained ethical approval (2000000658) from the QUT University Human Research Ethics Committee. Due to COVID-19-related challenges of accessing the primary research participant group, an ethics variation was obtained to interview the other social actors specified earlier. Approval was also obtained to use a local Research Assistant in Colombo to gather published data on spas in printed form.

During data generation and analysis, I was genuinely concerned about the privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of the masseuses as stipulated in the ethics application. Therefore, at the beginning of the interviews, I asked participants to choose a name they would like to be identified by and emphasised that they were not required to disclose their real names or any other personally identifying information. The name mentioned in the interview was also later replaced with a pseudonym in thesis writing, as, in certain instances the name provided was the participant's real name.

I could not share the printed participant information sheet with the masseuses, as sharing technologies (for example, emails) were unfamiliar/inconvenient to them. Therefore, I verbally explained all the ethical concerns and safeguards via telephone before requesting their consent for the interviews. I also verified that they had been working in the capacity of a masseuse for more than one year at a legally registered business organisation called a spa. Then, I obtained their verbal consent for providing information and agreed on a convenient time to conduct the interview. Before the interview, I confirmed that the participants were located in a safe place,

ensuring confidentiality. Given my strict compliance with conducting the research ethically, I should acknowledge here that the explanation of ethical concerns to the participants produced a certain 'fear' in some participants regarding the interview. A few interviewees I reached changed their minds after listening to the ethical concerns. I believe that their educational background and unfamiliarity with ethical procedures made some of these respondents afraid, and although I sought to allay these fears by recounting the measures put in place to protect their confidentiality, I respected their decision to choose not to participate in the research.

Interviews with the other social actors were also conducted in compliance with ethical approval. However, the approach adopted to obtain ethical approval in conducting the research was decided based on the level of access and familiarity of the participants with the technology of sharing documents. As the other social actors had greater familiarity with and access to technology, I emailed the consent forms to them and received their signed consent via email. Although the participants from NGOs had no issue with disclosing their organisation's name, complying with ethical approval obtained, I replaced the names of the organisations and the participants with pseudonyms. Rohan, who was a former consultant to the Sri Lanka Department of Ayurveda (SLDA) is not an official member of SLDA. As I have observed, SLDA has had many confrontations with the spa industry which are noteworthy to this research. Therefore, I refer to SLDA with its actual name, as replacing it with a pseudonym would distort the intention that led to the inclusion of that organisation in this thesis, which was to emphasise the significant role played by this organisation in relation to the spa industry in Sri Lanka.

4.5   ENSURING TRUSTWORTHINESS

Positivist assumptions of validity have often challenged the value and standing of research findings generated through a qualitative research approach. It is, however, questionable whether a qualitative research study based on the ontological and epistemological stance of social constructivism needs to ensure its validity per se, since the researcher does not here seek to access an objective social reality through her/his research findings. However, this challenge has not been shirked by qualitative researchers and they have developed alternatives to claim the value and rigour of the knowledge constructed through qualitative research, which lies in the social constructivism paradigm (Bryman, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As an alternative, Lincoln and Guba (1985) have presented trustworthiness as a means of ensuring that the findings of a qualitative research study are worthy of consideration by its audience (Nowell et al., 2017; Schwandt, 2014). I think it is also important to acknowledge here that some scholars even question the attempt to evaluate the acceptability of research findings by setting a judgment criterion within binary oppositions such as valid/invalid and trustworthy/untrustworthy (Scheurich, 1996).

Assuring the value and rigour of the knowledge produced in this thesis, I followed the trustworthiness criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985)—credibility, accuracy, and dependability, which are aligned with the epistemological assumptions of social constructivism. In order to enhance the *credibility* of the research findings, data were generated from several sources and multiple methods, such as interviews with masseuses in spas, interviews with other social actors who interact closely with spas and masseuses, and documentary analysis of secondary sources obtained via the web, social media, and other institutions. This facilitated the enhancement of fit between my representation of the research participants and their

own views, interpretations and experiences of their world. Audio recording of interview conversations ensured data *accuracy*, and I maintained a notebook/field journal to document any noteworthy points that came up during the dialogic interaction between me and the research subjects. In addition, using the local language during conversations enhanced the richness of data, as it facilitated free-flowing communication between the two parties. Further, transcriptions in the local language, later used for data analysis, prevented/minimised the distortion of ideas that could happen through early translation (van Nes et al., 2010). Finally, continuous reporting of the research procedure to the supervisory team enhanced the *dependability* of the findings.

4.6   DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND THEORISING

4.6.1 Heading Towards Analysis and Interpretation

It took around eight months to complete the data generation and gathering activities of this research. Due to the difficulty experienced in reaching the research subjects, there were times where no noteworthy activity occurred. For example, after conducting the first interview with Devini, it took almost two months to find the second interview participant, Sashi. During this period, apart from gathering data from the web and other documentary sources, I transcribed Devini's interview. By considering transcribing interviews as the first step of data analysis (Mason, 2018), data generation and analysis occurred as parallel processes. Initially, I adopted Google voice typing for the transcriptions. This enabled the conversion of speech into text. However, as the application did not recognise the audio file voice or any other method of uploading the file, I had to repeat the interview to enable the tool to convert my speech into text. This was an arduous and time-consuming process, and I had to re-repeat some words as the typing tool did not recognise my pronunciation.

However, this experience helped me to understand the nature of masseuses' responses to my questions, and the areas in which I needed to be more specific and less complex during the conduct of the interviews. Most importantly, by repeatedly engaging with the voice recording, I understood that I should focus more on stimulating the participants to provide details of their spatial experiences within and outside of spas.

With this understanding, I continued the interview thread that started with Sashi and the contacts found via Nadee. During breaks from interviews, I engaged continuously in the transcription process. I switched from Google voice typing to the Unicode typing online application. This allowed me to type Sinhala words in English, enabling a real-time conversion in the Sinhala font. I found this method more convenient than Google voice typing, and completed all my transcriptions by applying this method. While transcribing, I assigned pseudonyms to all the research participants to protect confidentiality. Transcribing myself helped me familiarise myself with the research participants' responses and sense how data related to theory at the surface level. The transcriptions were kept in Sinhalese language for the purpose of analysis without translating to English. According to van Nes et al. (2010) keeping interview transcripts in the original language to the maximum possible extent helps to overcome the possibility of distorting meaning of the data during the analysis. Similarly, my intention was that keeping the transcripts in the original language would prevent/minimise any negative effect that could come about by errors, omissions or oversimplifications in translation, leading to the loss of richness in the analysis and interpretation. I expected to translate only the key quotes useful for building arguments in the process of theorisation.

After transcribing all thirty interviews, I was left with a large amount of data in the form of interview transcripts and other forms of textual/visual data. My experience with these data was similar to many other qualitative researchers' experiences. It was not a straightforward task to find and access a logical path to make sense of a large amount of inherently-rich data (Bryman, 2012).

4.6.2 Why Narrative Analysis?

To begin the analysis, I went through the interview transcriptions (in the local language) of masseuses several times and uploaded those into the NVivo software. Then, as my first attempt towards making meaning of participants' interview conversations, I went through a coding process through NVivo. I developed around eighty codes and fifteen categories by going through about ten interview transcripts. When coding by focusing on the theoretical underpinning of the study I paid attention to certain important aspects, such as what a specific data item represents, what the data item is all about, what the item implies, what is happening as indicated by the data item, what people are doing, and so on (Bryman, 2012; Lofland & Lofland, 2006). However, in the middle of the process, I recognised that it had led me to the common pitfall of most coding processes; that is, it had resulted "in fragmentation of data" (Bryman, 2012, p. 583) and erased the narrative flow of the views shared by the masseuses (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). As Riessman (1993) experienced in her study on divorce and gender, the lengthy accounts of masseuses' experiences in different spatial settings, and their dealing with and negotiating their multiple identities were not accurately represented in the thematic categories. I was experiencing something similar to Riessman (1993), as she explains: "I found myself not wanting to fragment the long accounts into distinct thematic categories. There seemed to be a common structure beneath talk about a variety of topics" (p. vi). This

was exactly how I felt about my first attempt to develop an analytic path via a rigid coding process.

Recognising the importance of focusing on elicited narratives, I applied narrative analysis to make sense of the everyday spatial experiences of masseuses in and out of spas shared during the interviews, and thereby establish knowledge of the social construction of the place called the spa and the identity of the masseuse. Mishler (1991) concedes that qualitative interviews are a form of discourse which generates valuable resources for narrative analysis. Riessman (1993) also admits the potentiality of applying narrative analysis to interview transcript materials gathered in a traditional manner. So, I began to uncover the stories that masseuses had employed to describe past and present events in their everyday lives as they relationally produce the place called the spa, past events in their life that led them to locate themselves as masseuses in Sri Lankan spas, and ongoing experiences of being with the identity of the masseuses in the spas and the broader socio-cultural setting of Sri Lanka.

The narrative analysis adopted in the thesis is influenced by the followers of Labov and Waletzky (1997 [1967]) work on personal-experience narratives, such as Johnstone (2016), Mishler (1991), Riessman (1993), and Riessman (2008). Johnstone (2016, p. 543) states, "Labov's work on narrative offered legitimacy and methodological rigour to scholars interested in the qualitative analysis of human identities and experiences." According to Labov and Waletzky (1997 [1967]), narrative clauses serve two essential functions. First, the referential function of the narrative clauses is how the stories relate to the real world, the experiences, characters, and locations indicated in the clause. Then the evaluative function deals with the narrator's purpose in recounting the story or why the researcher should listen

(Johnstone, 2016; Mishler, 1991). These two were considered in analysing and interpreting masseuses' narrative accounts. Also, those were related to the "social characteristics" (Johnstone, 2016, p. 543) of the narrator, such as the social and economic class, educational background, nurtured geographic location, ethnic and religious relations and any other it was sensed. Interviews with other social actors and secondary sources supported me in this regard, especially to relate masseuses' stories with the ideological context of the local geography in which the masseuses are located. The transcripts in vernacular language (Mishler, 1991), that is in Sinhalese, represented the narrative accounts that were produced during the interview without any distortion of meaning. This helped me to relate the ideas and experiences shared by the masseuses to the ongoing social, cultural, economic, and political processes in the local context. The narrative quotes selected for interpretation were translated by me and accuracy of those were confirmed by sending those to a professional English translator in Sri Lanka.

The selection of narrative analysis also aligns with Massey's (2005) project of space and spatiality. Based on de Certeau's position on space and representation, Massey claims that the dynamism of the 'real life' is erased in the scientific attempts of writing. As she explains de Certeau's view:

> Narratives, stories, trajectories are all suppressed in the emergence of science as the writing of the world. And that process of writing, more generally of making a mark upon the blank space of a page, is what removes the dynamism of 'real life'. Thus, in his attempt, which is really the whole burden of his book, to invent ways of recapturing those narratives and stories (precisely to bring them back into some form of produced 'knowledge') …
>
> (Massey, 2005, p. 25)

Therefore, by adopting a narrative analysis approach I believe I was able to establish a more complete picture of the 'reality' of masseuses' life in the social context of Sri Lanka.

Finally, through adopting narrative analysis approach, I developed three analysis chapters informed by the overarching objective of the thesis. However, I was not rigidly fixed to the pre-determined set of research questions in this endeavour. Instead, I followed an analytic induction approach, as certain narrative accounts demanded to make changes to some research questions (Riessman, 1993). I altered the research questions in that manner, and in arranging the chapters, I gave prominence to my understanding and interpretation of why the masseuses provided lengthy accounts of the specific experiences, incidents, and events that occurred in different spatio-temporal settings. Based on such understanding, broader themes were developed to present the stories and trajectories of the place called the spa in Sri Lanka and the stories of the women who perform the role of the masseuse in the spas.

4.6.3 Interpreting and Theorising

According to Barbre and Personal Narratives Group (1989, p. 261), "[w]e come to understand [narratives] only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the context that shapes their creation and to the world views that inform them." Narratives are explanatory but do not "speak for themselves" (Barbre & Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 264), and therefore require the researcher's involvement for critical interpretation (Riessman, 1993).

The interpretation of the research subject's narrative accounts was mainly underpinned by the relational understanding of space, developed by Massey (2005) and Lefebvre's (1991) theorisation of space as socially produced. In Chapter 5, I

stretch out ongoing social relations which produce the place called the spa and describe how the perceived, conceived, and lived spaces of the spa are produced through the interactions of inhabitants and users of such spaces, and the other social actors who interact with spas. It reveals that the social space of the spa is "woven together" (Massey, 2005, p. 131) by the emplaced actors—masseuses, spa clients, owners/managers, police, and other regulating institutes, and NGOs—as they negotiate the socio-cultural, economic, and political processes in the locale.

Chapter 6 gives prominence to the narrative accounts of the masseuses on their becoming a masseuse at the local spas. There, I pull together different narratives of masseuses which indicate similar storylines, or which uncover the historical conditions (economic, political, or cultural formations) which induce or compel young and/or rural women and single mothers in Sri Lanka to assume the masseuse role in the places of spas. It uncovers the power relations underlying in the locale, which extensively produce places called spas and which bring women to choose a stigmatised profession which continuously exposes them to social oppression and degradation. Specifically, drawing from the work of selected feminist scholars, in Chapter 6 I undertake a gender and class-oriented analysis to understand the process of becoming a masseuse in the local specificity.

In Chapter 7, I present how the spatial identity of the spa and the social identity of the masseuse, which are co-constitutive (Massey, 2005), matter in the everyday lives of masseuses in the occupational, private, and public realms. I then discuss how the masseuses engage in different identity performances in and out of the spas by deploying different bodily inscriptions and bodily performances. The theoretical base of Chapter 7 is constituted by feminist geographer Linda McDowell's (1999)

understanding of bodies as a place, and Goffman (1990) and other scholars' work on identities associated with stigma and concerning sex work identity.

4.7 METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

4.7.1 Situating 'Myself' in the Research Process

In this section, I seek to reflect critically on my role as the researcher involved in the study, and the influence of my positionalities in terms of class and status, gender and sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, and religion. Within these aspects, I situate myself as a cis-gendered heterosexual Sri Lankan woman who belongs to an educated, Sinhalese-Buddhist, middle-class family background. I was born and nurtured in a Colombo suburb, which could be discerned as an urban location of the country. From childhood, my life has been influenced by Sinhalese-Buddhist ethnic-religious values and the patriarchal ideology-driven cultural values which govern women's behaviour in Sri Lankan socio-cultural space. Therefore, in writing this section, I acknowledge the impact of my subjectivity on different parts of the research process, such as my enthusiasm for exploring this particular research phenomenon, on the generation of data and the analysis and interpretation of data (Ashcraft & Ashcraft, 2014).

My curiosity to explore the phenomena studied in this thesis, that is, how the place called the spa is socially constructed and how such a phenomenon intersects with the formation of the identity of the masseuse in society, is derived from my academic interest in critical organisational research. From the time I was reading for my undergraduate degree, I was interested in inquiring into human experiences in the organisational spaces in the locality of Sri Lanka. As presented in Chapter 1, my everyday observations of organisations under the sign of spas, the way in which spas were represented in mass media, as well as the views and perceptions of the society

that I interacted with, regarding spas and women who work in spas, urged me to investigate such phenomena further. Furthermore, as a woman subject to the control of the above-mentioned ideological regimes, I felt a deep ethical and political responsibility to explore this micro-narrative of a part of the female labour force in Sri Lanka. I acknowledge that my own identity as a woman in the locality influenced me throughout this research process. In addition, I wondered about the spatial experiences of women within and beyond spas, as they are subjected to culturally intelligible gender norms prevalent in countries of the Global South. Hence, I was bewildered by the way in which these women were and are criticised, stigmatised, and marginalised due to their association with spas, while the same society that condemns them both overtly and covertly, accepts the existence of spas.

4.7.2 Politics of Accessing the Research Participants

Wolf (2018) argues that women face specific difficulties and challenges when accessing research settings because of their gender. Apart from gender, my attempt to access the research setting was shaped by some rare circumstances. According to Bryman and Bell (2003), different strategies can be used to access the intended research setting, such as via friends, colleagues, academics, or reaching out to a sponsor, gatekeeper, and so on. At the design stage of fieldwork, I intended to reach out to interview participants by employing such tactics. However, this was not as easy as I thought due to certain unexpected circumstances unfolding during my pragmatic entry into the data gathering and generation phase. As discussed earlier, conducting the research under COVID-19 'new normal' conditions, and the inability to access the research setting in a physical manner, produced non-compensatory damage to the effectiveness of this research.

Consequently, I had to reach out to masseuses while being spatially distant from the research setting. Their covert life when moving about in society made my task even more arduous. Seeking help from friends, colleagues or relatives via Facebook and WhatsApp posts did not work smoothly at the beginning of the process. As most of these messages reached my female friends and colleagues, they were reluctant to comment on them, presumably because of the taboo nature of spas due to such organisations' association with sex work. Under such conditions, I was compelled to rely on patriarchal relations such as my brother and husband to gain access to the research participants. My brother's response to my request was highly antagonistic, as explained earlier, both due to the taboo aspect of spas and because he was uncomfortable with me engaging in a research study that was closely related to the sex industry. With his refusal, my last resort became my husband, and initial access to the masseuses succeeded via his network of social relations. Wolf (2018) argues that some feminist researchers in male-dominated societies can only gain access to the field through 'male privilege'. Berik (2018) and Abulughod (1990), in their studies, used their husband's and father's help to access the field. Sri Lankan feminist researcher, Seneviratne (2010), discusses specific circumstances that made her draw upon male privilege to access the ethnographic field in her thesis. As she wondered in her thesis, I also questioned whether I, as a feminist researcher, was 'opportunistic' when attempting to gain initial access to the masseuses. However, during this process, I was very careful not to let these male intermediaries have undue influence on the participants, and such concerns led me to drop the first contact developed with the spa industry, Sameera. Moreover, I ensured that even my husband could not reach my recordings, transcripts, or any other data that could identify the research participants.

The second thread I found via a female friend of mine made me much more comfortable as far as the 'male privilege' dilemma was concerned. Though this referral again connected me to a few male intermediaries, with their involvement, I was introduced to the field officer of *Empower Community*, Nadee, and she gave me the contacts of several masseuses, with their prior consent. Still, I wonder whether Nadee's power as a field officer, or her close interactions with the masseuses, privileged me to access the participants. This was reflected in some participants' comments like, "*how can we reject your request when Nadee miss requests us to do [the interview]?*", "*Nadee miss helps us a lot, and I can trust you because of Nadee miss.*", "*I should tell you the truth, miss, because Nadee miss knows us well*", etc. Compared to the first thread I went through, the masseuses contacted through Nadee shared their knowledge and experiences of spatial practices which produce spas in the local setting much more freely. Thus, I may have been privileged by the "goodwill of [the] gatekeeper" (Okumus et al., 2007, p. 10) and by the existing power relations between Nadee and the masseuses.

4.7.3 Understanding and Acquiring Knowledge of the Subject; the Masseuse

It is believed that as researchers, women can make a greater epistemological impact by engaging in research that studies the lives of other women (Wolf, 2018). As Wolf argues, to gain deep insights into a phenomenon involving women, a vital role is played by the woman researcher's knowledge and experiences in relation to the context in which that phenomenon is situated. This "embodied subjectivity" (Wolf, 2018, para. 50) played a crucial role in my encounter with the participants. My familiarity with the socio-cultural values in the local context and the experience of being a woman facilitated me in building rapport with the masseuses during interviews. For example, Hirushi, during her interview, said, "*You can ask me*

anything, miss; as you are a woman, I can say anything to you." Such statements convinced me that my femaleness supported the development of a trustworthy relationship among us. Furthermore, a shared understanding of disciplinary regimes which govern female behaviour, and my life experiences as a female, served me well in the process of sharing experiences with these female masseuses.

To address the problem of *power* in the relationship (Lincoln, 2009) between the participants and myself, I attempted to empower the participant as much as was possible during the interview. While obtaining guidance from the interview protocol and asking questions, I encouraged and facilitated the respondents to narrate their spatial experiences in and out of spas without interruption. I further ensured that I listened well to their stories, which resulted in producing benefits such as building a good rapport, authenticity, trust, and self-disclosure (Lavee & Itzchakov, 2021). Empowerment of the participants and being a good listener have also elicited valuable micro-narratives of masseuses' everyday experiences, producing valuable, in-depth, and insightful data that enriched the knowledge generated in this thesis. Participants also found me to be someone who has given value and significance to the stories of their lived experiences in the socio-cultural milieu of Sri Lanka, stories that are generally unheard by others due to the stigma associated with their work identity. This was reflected in Shenuki's words: "*I feel so relieved after talking to you. Usually, no one talks to us. We keep everything inside ourselves. I feel relaxed after I spoke to you openly. Thank you for talking*." This statement made me sense the pervasiveness and ruthlessness of the social marginalisation experienced by these women due to their stigmatised identity, and it energised me with a renewed and perceived sense of worth in carrying out the study.

Nevertheless, I believe there was a psychological distance between myself and the research participants due to my positionality as a middle-class female academic and their reading of me as an 'outsider' (Ashcraft & Ashcraft, 2014) who could not readily empathise with their life circumstances and experiences. It is true that I had no prior experience of the spatial practices that produce the spa's social space, and remained a 'strange outsider' when sharing their experiences. To 'equalise' the relationship and create a friendship (Wolf, 2018) among us, I called them by their (chosen) given names and encouraged them to call me by my name. However, they always called me *miss* during the interviews, and this signified the 'distant position' they assigned to me within the social hierarchy that both they and I, willingly or unwillingly, were a part of. Wolf (2018) points out that redressing the effect of the class difference between the researcher and the subjects is challenging, although there are many similarities between the two parties, such as gender, language, nationality, culture, and race, especially when the researcher's subject represents the rural poor and the urban working-class.

In my study, I also sensed that the research subjects worried about whether I would position them at the 'wrong' end within the hegemonically ascribed right/wrong dichotomy. Such fear was reflected in some of the participants' statements, such as Hirushi's; "*Please don't get me wrong, miss. Since I cannot do any other job, miss, I am doing this job.*" Such worry must have influenced most women to narrate their stories of becoming masseuses/sex workers. Understanding that most of such underlying factors lie within those women's position in gender/class hierarchies and the structural conditions of poverty, I decided to provide them with a space for their stories in this thesis (Chapter 6). Here, I emphasise that my intention was not to make an authoritative/judgmental claim about the women

who work in Sri Lankan spas. However, as a feminist geographic researcher reinforced by the social constructionist perspective, my attempt here has, perhaps, been political and rather performative (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Hence, I may have represented the particular way I desire others to see the masseuses' reality, ignoring many other equally legitimate ways of seeing the world.

As the researcher, I was productively involved in knowledge production, so my interpretations could have discursively created the reality when I represented it (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Subjectivity is an inherent characteristic of qualitative research, but qualitative researchers celebrate the worth of the researcher's subjectivity in researching the social world (Hammersley, 2012). Accepting the impossibility of eliminating the effect of subjectivity, I consider it crucial to acknowledge the influence of my subjectivities in the knowledge production process at work in this thesis, especially in the stages of data analysis, interpretation and deriving conclusions. In the attempt to interpret participants' claims, stories, and trajectories in the patriarchy-driven social and ideological context, of which I am also a part, my gendered experiences in such an ethical-political milieu have profoundly influenced my representation of reality. I incorporated my understanding of the historical and social conditions that constitute the phenomena in the locality in this thesis; for example, the interpretation of the spatial practices that produce spas, how gender relations affect women's roles as masseuses, and so on.

However, I was concerned about the possibility that my subjectivities—especially my class assumptions and urban life experience that I assumed and believed as the reality of the world—could distort the representation of the reality of the research subjects' lives. I frequently conducted briefing sessions with my academic mentors and their consolidated scrutinization of the interpretive and critical

claims I made during the analytical process helped me avoid many such instances, and supported my attempts to represent masseuses' spatial experiences without significant distortions. With my academic mentors' guidance, I also took steps to avoid language that infantilised the research subjects (Huot, 2013), who were mature women of 18 years or more.

Moreover, as I revealed earlier, most participants shared narratives of their experiences as women, in and out of spas. Those stories were about physical/mental/sexual harassment that they have experienced in their domestic life, work life in spas, and social life. In some instances, listening to their stories was mentally exhausting and emotionally breaking, as such experiences were beyond my realisation due to the socio-cultural background that I belonged in. Realising this after conducting the first few interviews, I restricted myself to having only one interview per day, and allowed myself to relax the day following to maintain my own wellbeing. When interpreting data, the involvement of my academic mentors was crucial to avoid the possibility that my emotionality would govern the knowledge creation process.

I explore masseuses' narratives and experiences from a feminist perspective, and strongly believe in the necessity to bring female participants' voices into the research study to allow the reader to absorb them and make her/his own interpretations. Therefore, rather than vehemently re-narrating their experiences myself in the thesis, I use lengthy quotations to enable the reader to gain knowledge of masseuses' first-hand experiences of the spatial practices that produce spas. It was a challenging task to present these data in a thematically driven mode, as the interpretations of the participants of their experiences in and out of spas were multiple, incommensurable, and distinctive to each individual. If I had attempted to

put together or combine each subject's understandings, it could have distorted the interpretations and meanings they have given to the social reality surrounding them. Therefore, including more extended quotes of narratives produced by the masseuses in the analysis chapter allowed me to accurately represent 'reality' as understood by the research subjects.

4.8   SUMMARY

In this chapter I provided the methodological foundation of the thesis and the rationale for choosing the methods employed to gather and generate data and to produce knowledge of the research phenomena investigated in the thesis. The three following chapters present the stories and trajectories of producing the place called the spa and forming the identities of masseuses in the broader social milieu of Sri Lanka.

Chapter 5: Producing the Place Called the Spa: Social Actors' Performances and the Spatial Practices of Spas

This chapter analyses the 'place called the spa' in the geographic context of Sri Lanka, by understanding space as socially produced. Simultaneously drawing upon the conceptual triad developed by French philosopher Henry Lefebvre and the theoretical position—space is produced through the interrelations of human and non-human actors (Massey, 2005); the chapter weaves a textual web of how the place called spa is socially constructed. In adopting the spatial triad, I give prominence to the spatial practice of spas—the way in which the actors in the environment perceive space— and to the representational space—lived social relations of inhabitants and users of space—while deciphering how these two aspects of space constitute the place called spa simultaneously with the representations of spas in the local and global context. The chapter also extends its textual web to present the relational process of forming the work identity of the masseuse, in parallel to their bodily interactions with other bodies in the spatiality of spas.

The chapter aims are achieved by carrying out an in-depth analysis of the narratives produced by the masseuses—the inhabitants of spas— and the trajectories and stories of the spas shared by the other social actors who interact with spas in their daily routines, such as Non-Government Organisation (NGO) actors, actors involved in regulating spas, and spa owners. By presenting the stories of multiple social actors, the chapter (re)narrates how the place called the spa is "woven

together" (Massey, 2005, p. 131) by the emplaced actors—masseuses, spa clients, owners/managers, police and other regulating institutes, and NGOs—as they negotiate the socio-cultural, economic and political processes in the locale. By this means, this chapter provides the empirical foundation for the research questions: *How do the spatial practices of spas inform and shape the construction of the identity of the masseuse in the social milieu of Sri Lanka?* and *How is the construction of the spaces of spas and the identity of the masseuse influenced by the socio-cultural values of the wider Sri Lankan society?*

5.1 GEOGRAPHIC POSITIONING AND ONGOING CONSTRUCTION OF THE PLACE CALLED THE SPA

This section presents the way in which the spas began their positioning in the urban geographies of the country and the mindset of people in society. Here I primarily reveal the visible roots of its emergence and the multiplicities associated with its representation in urban geographies. In addition, this section presents the multiple discourses related to the identity formation of the organisational entity, spa, in Sri Lankan society.

5.1.1 Ongoing Emergence of Spas

Spas have been stamping their presence on the geographical context of Sri Lanka since the year 2000, and the influential role played by these organisational entities in the social, economic, and political spheres of the locale is understood to remain strong even in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak. As presented earlier, the growth of spas in Sri Lanka has been triggered by the global growth in the spa industry recorded since the early 2000s, caused by the increased health priorities of people worldwide. Developments in global tourism and the attraction of Sri Lanka as a tourist destination have had a crucial impact on the spa industry. Simultaneous to

such global influences, certain location-specific factors and forces have also influenced the boom in the industry. The development of the tourism sector after the end of the separatist war in 2009, a war that prevailed for 30 years, and tourist-focused government policies, as well as widespread neoliberal economic conditions, created a breeding ground for the establishment of the organisational entities called spas. Beyond such perceptible conditions, the growth of spas seems to be also influenced by many other social and cultural conditions ongoing in the locale.

The rapid growth of spas is characterised by significant spatial concentration in the highly urban locations of the country, which was not the condition that prevailed in the period before the 2000s. Based on his nearly thirty years of experience with female sex workers[15] Shaman from NGO-*Empower Community* insists the proliferation of spas in Sri Lanka occurred within the decade leading to 2021. He explained his understanding of the way that spas have unfolded in the locale in this way:

> Spas were not much popular in the years like 2002 and 2003. It was only about ten years ago; it began to grow. In terms of numbers, now it has reached its peak. In small towns such as Borella or Narahenpita, on averagely, there are around 08-10 spas. That means it started to grow about ten years ago anyway. A specific setback could be seen for one year due to COVID [19]. Otherwise, we noticed that it reached its peak around 2019 and developed to its maximum level before [COVID-19].

The growth of spas is significantly evident in the Colombo district—a highly urbanised and industrialised location with the highest population and population density. This shows the prominence of spas within and around the metropolis of Sri

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[15] As mentioned in Chapter 4, Shaman closely associates with female sex workers in Sri Lanka in the initiatives taken by the NGO to provide awareness of and protection from sexually transmitted deceases. Their NGO recognises spas as a place where commercial sex workers work.

Lanka. Most of these entities focus on local customers rather tourists. Some research participants also highlighted the geographical concentration of spas in Colombo in particular. Research participant Sanuli (with three years of experience as a masseuse) commented, for example:

> Anyway, Colombo itself means spas. There are spas at every step. If you look here and you find a spa, you'll see another spa when you look the other way. The places called spas will never be closed. I don't think such attempts will be successful. If these are closed for some reason, the management contacts customers by phone and brings them back, even when the curfew[16] is imposed. These things happen. This cannot be stopped and will not stop because there are many people who have such needs.

Sanuli made this statement with a confident tone, marking the significant social positioning of spas in the local context and the powerful forces behind the establishment and ongoing management of spas. Sanuli reminds me of my own experiences and observations 'there' and 'then' (Massey, 2005, p. 41) when I was in Sri Lanka two years before, residing in a suburb close to Colombo. The remarkable presence of spas that I experienced 'there' and 'then' inspired me to explore this social phenomenon seems valid, even in the temporality that Sanuli expounds on in the above comment. Sanuli's use of hyperbole reflects this omnipresence of spas and the forces behind the ongoing social production of those entities. She asserts that construction of the place called spa happens in an ongoing manner (Massey, 2005) within the urban geographies of the country, such as Colombo, and that these organisational spaces have become rooted in this urban milieu. The same trajectory of the spas was expressed by many other masseuses while claiming such ongoing emergence is driven by the immense demand for the services offered by spas.

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[16] During the COVID-19 outbreak curfew was imposed by Police to manage the spread of the virus and police arrested people who breached the laws imposed in relation to COVID-19.

As the data generated in this study shows, spa establishments can be distinguished from each other based on customer orientation and service offerings. When considering the customer orientation, two distinctive types of spas are evident, viz. local-customer-oriented spas and tourist-oriented spas. Tourist-oriented spas are mainly affiliated with hotels, especially in areas of the country like the southern province where tourism flourishes. Participants who had interacted with the spa and ayurvedic medicine sector for a long time claim that the places called spas emerged during the 1990s and early 2000s as places affiliated with tourist hotels. With the development of global tourism and Sri Lanka being recognised as a tourist destination, the tourist hotel-affiliated spas grew noticeably. Past studies show that spas affiliated with the tourism sector have become a part of the global sex tourism market (Maginn & Steinmetz, 2015).

This thesis does not include consideration of the spas affiliated with the tourism industry, as the snowballing strategy adopted in sample selection could not reach masseuses who work in tourist-oriented spas, and several attempts to interview officials from the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) proved futile. Initial interactions with them have shown that they were reluctant to provide me with a detailed description of the tourism-oriented spa sector in Sri Lanka. I sensed their reluctance as an avoidance strategy deployed to avoid the responsibility of commenting on the very complex and opaque spa sector in the country.

The tourism-oriented spa sector collapsed with the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020. In 2019 there were approximately 350 entities registered as spas and wellness centres under the Authority, and in 2021 this number decreased to 108 (Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau, 2021). According to the SLTDA, most of the labour force in tourist-oriented spas consists of foreign migrant women from countries such

as Thailand, and this fact was confirmed by Viranga during his interview. It is evidenced that controversies are associated with spas affiliated with tourist hotels. Figure 5.1 shows newspaper reportage as an example of such.

Figure 5.1. Newspaper article – 5-start hotel raid
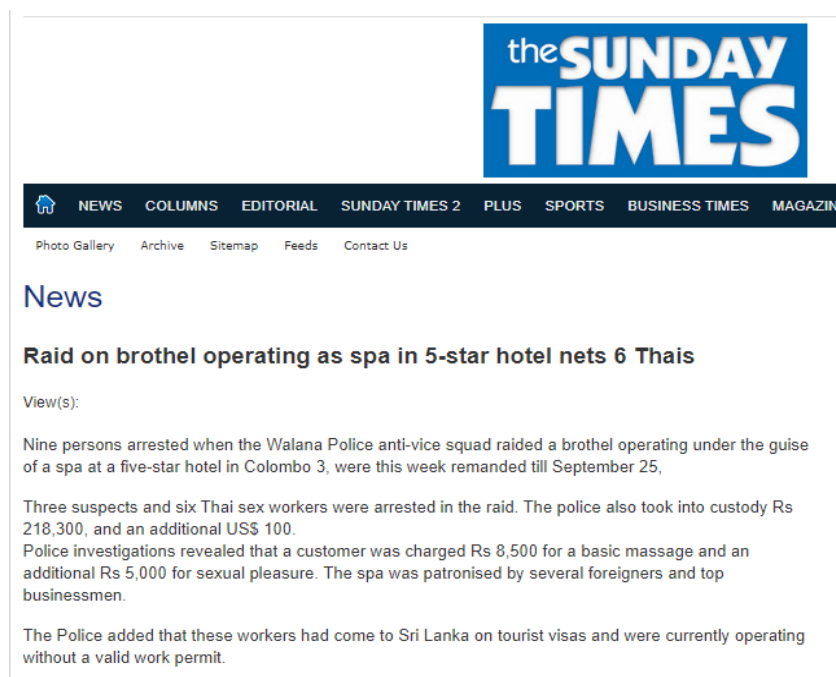
The local-customer-oriented spas, my prime attention in this thesis, are the most widely present organisational entity in the urban locale. There are two subtypes of these organisations, distinguished by the social class that the customers represent. Viranga classifies these two types as ordinary and professional spas. He says lower/upper-middle-class customers visit 'ordinary' spas, while high-class people visit professional spas. Viranga explained what is meant by professional spas based on his long experience in the industry:

> From the [service] fee itself, they have segmented their customers. Their target group is different. I mean, the customers of professional ones come in vehicles, and usually, they are high-class customers. Sometimes even [parliamentary] ministers. It's even difficult for us to approach those girls for an interview.

The term professional was used by Viranga merely to emphasise the affluent class focus and high cost of services offered by these spas. The term does not necessarily imply that sex work does not occur in such places, as the views of the interview participants depicted.

The ordinary spas are the organisational entities that Sanuli spoke about, which she claims are ongoing even during COVID-19 times, predominantly having a lower/upper middle-class customer base. Despite these claims to difference, however, masseuses' responses revealed that the ordinary spas are also keen to attract high-class customers willing to pay well for their services, and that such customers often visit ordinary spas. The twenty-five masseuses who participated in this research were working or have worked for at least one year in these ordinary spas, which were operating as legally registered business entities. In my discussion, which follows, on the spatial practices of these spas, I will refer to such spas as *local spas*.

5.1.2 Continued Presence in Touch-barred Spatio-temporality

In a context where the operational activities of most organisational entities were, and are, affected by the multiple waves of COVID-19, the presence of the local spas did not dwindle, even under 'COVID-19 new normal' conditions where human interactions and touch were often prohibited. During the critical period of the outbreak, these entities had to operate amidst many obstacles. The media often reported incidents where police raided such establishments for not adhering to COVID-19-related health rules and regulations (MENAFN-Colombo Gazette, 2020). As the data gathering process of the research took place during the peak times of COVID-19, a temporality which altered all facets of human life in the country,

participants' conversations indicated that spas were operating irrespective of the human touch and human interaction-related barriers that prevailed.

In July 2021, a decision was made by the State Government of Sri Lanka to grant permission to open spas 'without any restriction' soon after a slight reduction in the number of COVID-19 patients was reported during the third wave of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka (Director General of Health Services, 2021). While relaxing travel restrictions in the country to some extent, the Director General of Health Services issued orders under the *Program to Manage Individual, Community, and Social Activities* to close down places of worship such as (Buddhist) temples, (Cristian/Catholic) churches, and (Hindu) kovils[17], and to prohibit domestic ceremonies such as religious events and weddings. In the temporality of making such decisions, schools and universities in the country had been closed for more than a year, ever since the first wave of COVID-19, while many other business organisations were subject to restricted operations. The decision led to a rise in dissent among the general public, especially among Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists, which was much visible on social media platforms. These groups questioned why spas had been opened when many other social, religious, and economic activities had been subject to COVID-19 restrictions.

An online news channel highlighted the perceived inappropriateness of these decisions under the heading "Provincial travel restrictions extended; temples closed, spas open" (Lanka Hot News, 2021). This title draws attention to two of the most

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[17] Kovils are religious places of Hindu people. In the Tamil language, this literally means the "residence of god". The second largest population of Sri Lanka are Tamils, and they mostly follow the religion Hinduism.

sensitive spaces in the minds of the people in Sri Lankan society, *viz*, the high regard for religion and national culture. The government decision reveals a glimpse of the regulatory and political endorsement of the existence of spas, which may have been influenced by the significant employment opportunities secured by businesses. As the YouTube channel, Hari TV reported in July 2020, around two hundred thousand individuals working in forty-thousand spas all over the country have become jobless and financially vulnerable due to COVID-19. An anonymous author in the LankaEnews (2021) who writes under the pseudonym 'scholar in the field of Sociology' explicitly criticises the above government decision, claiming that it proves that Sri Lanka has become a politically endorsed "[i]nternationally renowned women's sex labour market." This is a kind of reflection of the public perception of spas in the country. Although there are no visible signs of the legitimate and legally sanctioned existence of such a sex labour market, the article claims that such a market exists with the implicit endorsement of the powerful social authorities.

5.1.3 Identifying Spas as *Reputable Sex Factories*

While the proliferation of spas was placed as an important topic of discussion in the everyday discourse in the locale, it has also appeared as a topic of discussion in the public speeches of politicians. Not long before the above incidents, a Parliamentary Minister of the prevailing government in the year 2021 made a contentious claim about spas and their expanding geographical presence in the country. During an address to a public gathering in his remote and quite rural village, he drew the attention of certain 'responsible parties' to the places called spas.

> Thousands of innocent girls in these villages have been trapped inside these
> reputable sex factories [*nambukara lingika karmanthashala*] called spas. Is

there anyone who can speak a word against it? Now it has come to Mahiyangana [his village]. It may move to Panampattu[18] too. Educated, intelligent people and those who talk of building the country do not speak about the fate of those innocent girls. We say that Sri Lanka is the greatest country in the world and that we are Sinhala Buddhists. If anyone thinks that you can become a Buddhist by painting a *dagoba[19]*, building a staircase [in a temple], placing a Buddhist flag, offering some flowers [to the Buddha], and lighting a few [oil] lamps, they can think they are Buddhists. That is being a Buddhist for the sake of being a Buddhist. But are there any real Buddhists who can stand up for those innocent girls? There is no one. Because they [girls] are destitute... (the continuation of the speech could not be found).

(Newsfirst Sri Lanka, 2021)

The politician in his polemic gives a noteworthy identification of spas as *reputable sex factories* constituted by thousands of innocent girls in villages as (sexual) labourers. By identifying spas as reputable sex factories, he signifies the local particularity of spas and the social identity of spas in the locale. He directly affiliates spas with the commercial sex industry, which does not have legal authorisation. The term 'factories' relates these organisational entities to capitalist industrial production, and claims spas as places that utilise female sexual labour (in place of machines in factories) to produce sex on a 'mass scale'. Simultaneously, the ironic usage of the term 'reputable' signifies unorthodox social acceptance associated with the places called spas against the places notorious for selling sex, such as brothels. The politician seemed disturbed by the "geographical stretching-out" (Massey, 1994b, p. 147) of spas, and the influence of such tendency in putting 'innocent' girls of rural locations of the country, such as his village, into menace.

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[18] Panampattu is an extremely rural area in the country. This village name is used in everyday discourse to emphasise the rurality of a village.

[19] A dome-shaped memorial in temples, worshipped by Buddhists in the belief that Buddha's relics are inside.

The polemic seeks to draw the attention of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists, academic scholars and other educated people to the spatial practices of local spas. He indicates the existence of some invisible force that silences such parties. He also criticises the dominant ethnic-religious groups for their superficial religious behaviour while demanding attention to the societal influence caused by the abundance of spas.

Rural women's migration into urban locations of the country since the liberalisation of the economy and the resultant women's increased participation in economic activities (Miller & Carbone-Lopez, 2013) has been having an uneasy relationship with Sinhala-Buddhist ideologies, which have historically influenced the setting of some "prescribed standards of conduct for [Sinhala] women" (Silva, 2004, p. 100). Such predominant discourse considers women as the central determinant of the country's moral identity (Lynch, 2007). In particular, Sri Lankan society broadly recognises that women in rural geographies are innocent and naïve (Hewamanne, 2008a; Lynch, 1999, 2004). As they move to Colombo and its close suburbs, they are believed to lose their moral purity. According to Hewamanne (2008a), 'village women' are recognised as the "unadulterated bearers of Sinhala Buddhist culture" (p. 38). As Lynch (2004) elaborates, the term 'innocent' is often used with 'village girls' and denotes the purity of those women, precisely their sexual purity. They are believed to be untouched by modern or corrupted influences generally perceived as prevailing in the urban spaces (Attanapola, 2006; Lynch, 1999).

Therefore, it seems that the politician identifies this proliferation of spas as a threat to 'young and innocent females' who migrate from rural to urban geographies. He also warns about the possibility of the geographical stretching of spas to encroach on rural areas, which he claims poses a threat to the 'rural purity' and the lives of

females in villages. Therefore, with such moral panic, he calls out the attention of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists and educated people on the spatial practices of spas.

5.2   THE LOCAL PARTICULARITY OF SPAS

Spas, as organisational entities, have a rather multiple existence in the geographical context of Sri Lanka. On the one hand, spas exist as organisational entities which enjoy legal recognition. In fact, these are conceived as legally registered business organisations which have procured licenses to engage in spa-related services. The "objective expression" (Merrifield, 1993, p. 523) of spa is recognised by the state government, and their distinctive presence is endorsed by including them as a separate entity in the list of organisations controlled by COVID-19 restrictions. On the other hand, these entities are perceived as places of sex work and have been subject to ongoing societal criticism conditioned by such social perception. This criticism is particularly directed at women who perform the role of masseuses rather than the men who are the consumers of (sexual) services offered in such organisational spaces, as suggested in the politician's comment above.

The roots of the conceptual model, which direct the practice (Gottdiener, 1993; Lefebvre, 1991) of spas in the local context, is an integration of the Western model of a health spa and the Eastern model of ayurvedic treatment. However, the material practices of spas serving local clients in the locale seem to have unique characteristics extending beyond such understandings of spas. The literal meaning of a spa has changed over time, and varies in different geographical locations. The emergence of the space called the spa dates back to A.D. 100 and was identified by the Romans as a place where therapies with natural water treatment were available (Varney, 1983). This understanding of the spa is characterised by the treatment it

offers and its geographical location. Varney (1983) highlights that the term 'spa' signifies different meanings in different countries and regions.

As an example of such a distinction, the European spa concept closely relates to health and wellness, while the American spa links to fitness. People in America expect "rejuvenation" from a spa, while Europeans expect to get "re-educated" (Varney, 1983, p. 21). Geographically-varied multiple meanings do not prevent the recognition of the spa as a global concept, nor does it hinder the making of its meaning as a global phenomenon. The International Spa Association (2019) defines a spa as a "place… devoted to overall well-being through a variety of professional services that encourage the renewal of mind, body, and spirit." This definition opens up a much broader space for the service offerings of spas. As this study's main focus was not on analysing what spas mean in Sri Lanka, it is not possible to use these understandings beyond the boundaries in which they were made to arrive at an understanding of spas in the local geography. However, it is also difficult to claim that spas in Sri Lanka operate quite free from such global influences. Notwithstanding such influences, spas in the local context have their 'own characteristics' beyond the many understandings of spas in different geographies (Massey, 2005).

Placing the above in Lefebvre's schematic view of space, "each society offers up its own peculiar space, as it were, as an 'object' for analysis and overall theoretical explication" (1991, p. 31). The spatial practices, representational space and representations of space produce any society's space. The space of a society can be deciphered by evaluating the everyday life of the occupants of space. Understanding how the place called the spa is produced in the social space of Sri Lanka necessitates exploring the three aspects of space of the organisational entities

"coded" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33) as spas. The spatial practices of spas and representational space could be best decoded by examining the everyday life of the masseuses, who are the labour constituents of spas. The following section interprets spas' spatial practices and representational space to decipher the spa's peculiarity in the specific spatial context of Sri Lanka. In this effort, I bring forward the narrations of the main occupants of spas—the masseuses—and the supporting voices of other social actors such as a former consultant of the SLDA, officials of NGOs, and spa owners who interact with the spas and the masseuses.

5.2.1 Frontal Representations and Clandestine Aspects of Spas

During the interviews, masseuses confirmed that they work in spas registered legally as business organisations and serve a local clientele primarily. The frontal representations (Lefebvre, 1991) of local spas are conceived to make certain actors perceive those as legitimate places that provide massage therapy, while some spas are schematically represented as places that offer Ayurvedic massage therapy. Achini explained how the place where she worked changed over time with different identifications:

> Firstly, the place was named ayurvedic [spa], and the steam bath was done.
> But exact *Panchakarma*[20] Ayurvedic treatments were not done. As having it
> under the pretext of Ayurveda may cause problems, Ayurvedic [name board]
> was later removed, and the name spa was used on the [name] board.

The term 'spa' seems to be the safer representation of this particular place, as Ayurvedic identification requires fulfilling regulations imposed by SLDA[21].

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[20] The term originates from Sanskrit. Panchakarma treatment primarily works on purifying and healing the body and mind as a whole.

[21] This was stated by Rohan, who is an Ayurvedic Doctor and who has been involved in regulating the ayurvedic medicine sector in Sri Lanka. According to him, if a spa is using the name Ayurvedic, it is required to adhere to the regulations imposed by the Department.

However, irrespective of such regulatory forces in effect to prevent ordinary spas from using the term Ayurveda, the representation is a continuing practice of spas. Figures 5.2 and 5.3 further confirm masseuses' assertions about the frontal representation of spas.

Figure 5.2 Frontal representation without Ayurvedic term

Source: https://www.google.com, accessed on 18 July 2022

The frontal coding of the spa in Figure 5.2 does not use the specific manoeuvring term 'ayurvedic'. Nevertheless, it emphasises its legitimate presence by indicating *Pvt. Ltd*, which indicates it is a registered, "official" business.

Figure 5.3 Frontal Representation with Ayurvedic term
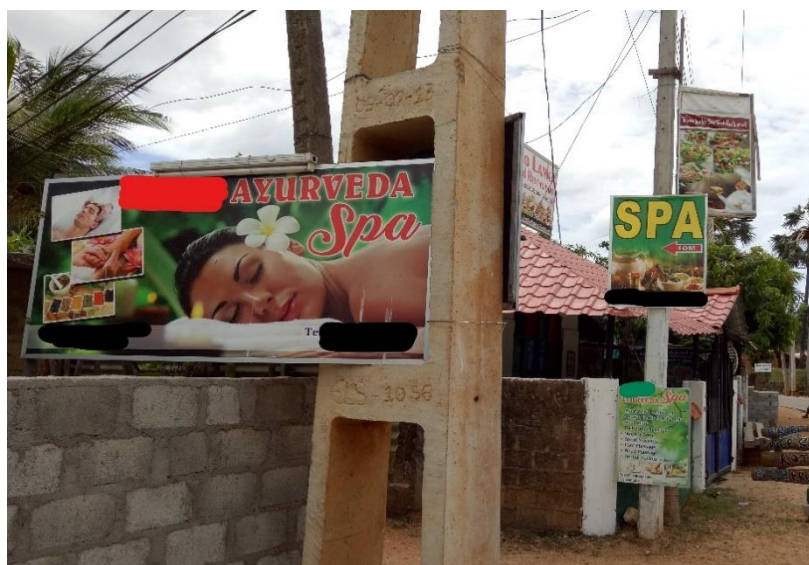
Source: https://www.google.com, accessed on 18 July 2022

Even though Figure 5.3 above does not indicate its authorisation by the SLDA, its frontal coding implies it is an Ayurvedic spa. The frontal coding of spas, or the way in which owners/managers conceive spas by utilising symbols and signs, was elaborated by masseuses in many instances. Below is how Sanuli explained this practice.

> The people who do spas have an idea to do it in this particular way. As there will be problems if the police come, in some places [spas], they keep two or three Ayurvedic oil bottles to show that it is an Ayurvedic spa.

Sanuli clearly states that Ayurvedic connection is a maneuverer used to emphasise compliance with the law. The above representations of spas have influenced the perception of young women who have migrated from rural geographies and their initial decision to choose a spa as a workplace. These women seem to enter spas without being able to discern the complexity behind the sign "Ayurvedic spa", and without being aware of spas' clandestine side. Nishadi elaborated on this experience:

> I saw an advertisement in the newspaper when I was with two of my friends. I didn't really know what an Ayurvedic spa was then. There were lots of advertisements for vacancies in Ayurvedic spas.

Continuing the narration of her lived experiences in spas, Nishadi stated that she understood what Ayurvedic spas mean 'in reality' – or the underground meaning of spas – within a few days of working in the spa. Similarly, Nishini provided a lengthy explication of her experience in spas, which reflects how spas are "directly lived through" by the "inhabitants and users" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39).

> At our place, there was no manager. I even worked as the cashier. I take care
> of the customer and handle all issues from the moment I open the door to a
> customer. And then, afterwards, the *lamai*[22] [masseuses] are put on *selection*.

Masseuses working as a cashier is a daily reality in spas. According to a few masseuses' narrations, a loyal and well-experienced woman is put on to the cashier position as their regular work role. In certain circumstances women have to perform in both roles as a masseuse and a cashier. They perceive it as a status given as an honour to their dedicated service within the spa. However, during her interview, Nadee[23] , from a spectator's view, interpreted this practice differently. Such practice puts the masseuse at additional risk when a police raid happens, as the person in the cashier position is responsible for the operations of the spa at the time of the arrest. This fact was not emphasised by Nishini or any other woman who performed cashier cum masseuse roles. However, it was revealed that a masseuse is charged only a fine of Rs.100, the cashier is charged Rs. 50,000 at the court when they are charged for engaging in 'prostitution'. Masseuses may not have emphasised this during interviews due to the reason that such charges are usually borne by the ownership. Further, the cashier is responsible for developing the customer base of the spa, so only masseuses who are good at relational politics can assume such a position.

Nishini continued explaining her lived experiences of enacting the role of the masseuses in the spatiality of spa:

> Let's say the customer took me. All I do is take the man in and ask him to
> change in the washroom when he arrives. Some people like to have oil
> treatment. Some people like to be treated with lotion. Some do not want to

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[22] *Lamai* is a typical term used to signify factory floor workers in Sri Lanka, which literally means children.

[23] As explained in chapter 4, Nadee is a female field officer who works in *Empower Community*. As a field officer, she very closely associates with spa workers and makes them aware of the protective measures to avoid sexually transmitted diseases.

use either [oil or lotion]. We must first ask them what treatment they like. Then the massage should be given from the legs to the head. A good massage should be given to the back and front of the body. It takes half an hour to finish the massage anyway. So, it's good for us to go for a half-hour massage. Otherwise, if completed in one or two minutes, each person will have about forty minutes left for the *feeling*[24]. That is disadvantageous to us. After the massage, it is easy for us to handle the man. This is because a massage facilitates good blood circulation. It relaxes his body. Then it is easy for us to feel him as he is mentally very settled then. So, it is easy for us. While giving the massage and speaking a few words of love, we ask him if he wants a feeling or not. If he says yes, we provide the feeling…[we] never give *lip kisses* or *sucks*. I tell [the client] directly how I provide the treatment. When told directly, there are no complaints. After doing the feeling, we do a *handshake*[25], send him to the washroom, clean the room and come out.

Nishini's narration above brings together the representations of space and the representational aspect of space (Lefebvre, 1991), which illustrates how spas are produced through social interactions. Initially, she connects the bodily interactions that occur in spas with the conceptual model of spas that guides the everyday direct practice of those places. In the latter part, she puts forth the embodying complexity of the bodily interactions among the masseuses and clients—the inhabitants and users of spas (Lefebvre, 1991; Merrifield, 1993). Wiryawan and Bunga (2018)'s definition of massage therapy helps to illuminate the abstract archetypal of a spa, as it identifies massage as a health treatment carried out to cure different ailments "such as headaches, back pain, …stress, osteoarthritis, mental disorders, (anomalies in) infant growth, digestive disorders, muscle and joint pains" (p. 54). However, when it comes to the spas in the locale, while those places are symbolised as places which

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[24] Sensual massage.

[25] A specific common term used by the masseuses to signify manual masturbation.

provide massage therapy, the narrations of the masseuses reveal their service provisions extend beyond the symbolic meaning (Lefebvre, 1991) of massage. Their work typically involves sex-related services ranging from providing the clients with a sensual massage—which culminates with manual masturbation provided by the masseuse—to sexual intercourse.

The "directly lived" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33) space of spas narrated by Nishini above was endorsed by an additional twelve of the twenty-five masseuses I conversed with. These participants provide sensual massages and sex-related services to their clientele. In their interactions with the clients, they enforce their own rules to set boundaries for their services. They believe it is crucial to explicitly state their service provision rules to avoid undue influences made by clients.

Another twelve of the twenty-five research participants claimed they were sex workers and engaged in transactional sex in or outside spas. While some spas provide space for the provision of all sorts of services within the service continuum stated earlier, some spas restrict direct sexual interactions inside spas. Therefore, women tend to develop contacts within the spas and later meet up them outside the spas to provide transactional sex services, which brings them an extra income.

In this manner, masseuses' claims about lived space of spas or how their bodies interact with the clients' bodies (Gottdiener, 1993; Lefebvre, 1991) within spas show that representational spaces of spas differ from how those places are represented to the outer world. Lefebvre (1991) states that different representations of buildings contain the power relations that occur in space. The "frontal expressions" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33) of buildings do not depict the nature of these power relations or the underground operations of the power relations. The power relations within the organisations called spas are challenging to understand through the frontal code, spa,

which is only plausible compliance with the law. The performances of multiple social actors—masseuses, clients, and spa owners—are influenced by power relations, and in such relations, clients and owners hold more power. Masseuses' performance within the spa depends on the nature of demanded conditions derived from the client, and the spatial acts demanded by the owners who own the physical space masseuses occupy.

Chamani, who works as a sex worker in a spa, elaborates in detail on her performances within spas, revealing the multiplicity of the spatial practices within spas. Furthermore, her narrative depicts how the lived reality of spas contrasts with the frontal representations, as the spa space is produced through its inhabitants' interactions.

> After working in this field, I get to associate with other people in the field. So, as far as I know, though spas are promoted as ayurvedic places, there are hardly any spas that provide such authentic massages. Even though ours is called an Ayurvedic spa, [after a few seconds of silence] I hope you understand what I mean, *miss*. The people who come to us do not expect the same thing [not the authentic massage]. We have to give what they expect. In the place where I worked before, though it was called an Ayurvedic spa, it was not ayurvedic treatment using [ayurvedic] medicines that were provided. The payment is made at the entrance [by the customer], and the treatment is provided as packages. There are packages called the *full body*, then the *suck*. So, the service is dependent on the package… To be honest, a man does not come to a spa just to get a massage. They come to get something done that the wife does not provide at home. The man will never return if only touch and a massage are done. Obviously, they come for sex treatment.

The above suggests that local clients who visit spas in Sri Lanka mostly perceive spas as a place of fulfilling sexual needs and visit spas to fulfil such needs. While the frontal codes like spa and Ayurvedic ensure conformity with the 'typical identity' of a spa, multiple cultural subtexts (see Figure 5.4: private and hidden

parking, feminine presence with skimpy dress, 24-hour service) provides users of this place some sense what is going on inside the building. Therefore, clients expect service beyond an authentic massage or Ayurvedic treatment. In this way, when spas are lived through by its inhabitants and users, it "overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). This reality is well depicted in Sanuli's comment, *keep two or three Ayurvedic oil bottles to show that it is an Ayurvedic spa*. For another instance, Tisha noted that though her spa has a steam bath facility, only two or three out of fifty customers ask for a steam bath service. Based on these narratives, spas could also be understood as a place where intense commodification is going on in relation to sex.

Hirushi, Chandhi, Dilukshi, and Nethra shared similar experiences to Chamani of the lived reality of spas claiming their engagement in sex work. They repeatedly uttered that spas could not survive in the current market without providing sex-related services. As Hirushi explains:

> In fact, many spas do that, and without doing that *subject* [sex] spas cannot survive. We can't build up the customer base without that. Nowadays, it happens in many places [of spas].

Hirushi engages in sexual intercourse-level bodily interactions with her clients and views sex services as the leading *subject* in spas.

In the previously stated sexual service continuum, Shashi represents the lowest end as she only involves in the basic level of sexual services such as *feeling massage* and *handshake*. However, she understands her level of involvement in sex services as the widely popular client demand within the spatiality of a spa. She explains how their service is closely associated with sex:

> Some people say that they don't even want the massage. That means they take a feeling massage, then a handshake and go. Many people come to get a

feeling massage. To a greater extent, about 75 percent to 80 percent come to have a feeling massage.

According to masseuses' claims, the *feeling massage* stated above is the sensual massage that leads to providing the client sexual pleasure. As none of the participants claimed to be a massage practitioner who provides authentic massage services without sex content, it can be concluded that sexual (massage) services are the prominent spatial practice in the local spas in the locale.

5.2.2 Class and Gender Based Acceptance and Refusal of Relations

Within the "power-geometry" (Massey, 1994b, p. 25) of spas, some individuals or social classes seem more likely to be accepted, while others are being refused from access to spas. The narratives of masseuses on their lived experiences within spas reflect the distinct relationships different social classes have in the production of spas.

Chamani and Shenuki segment their customers as 'ordinary customers' and 'VIP customers.' They identify ordinary customers as men who work in companies/offices and belong to the educated middle-class. On the other hand, the VIP customers are wealthy men such as politicians, businesspeople, actors, and professionals who belong to the high socioeconomic class. While ordinary customers mainly pay a fixed price for the service received, VIP customers are willing to pay a high price. Chamani explained the difference between the two customer segments:

> At most, the ordinary customers give us two thousand or two thousand five hundred rupees. But the customers we have categorised as *VIP*s pay us a large amount personally, in addition to the amount given to the cashier. They sometimes pay more than five thousand [rupees]. If an ordinary working man comes, he cannot spend much on us. So, we try to attract more *VIP*s.

While the most embraced customer segment is the men who can pay 'extraordinary' amounts beyond the standard, ordinary customers are also welcomed

to local spas. The masseuses perceive these customer segments as 'decent' and 'manageable'. While accepting upper-middle-class or high-class men, they condemn the visits of three-wheel drivers (taxi drivers), bike riders, or bus conductors to spas. This shows that people who belong to the lower classes in the social hierarchy are actively excluded from this "power-geometry" (Massey, 2009, p. 21). When Hirushi spoke about a 'genuine customer', I asked her what she meant by the term. Her response to my inquiry reveals the significance of class relations in producing the place called the spa.

> You know that there are *rasthiyadukarayo*[26] who go by bikes and three-wheelers. When we walk on the street, they joke about us and make various comments. They call us *baduwak*[27]. We have heard such things an infinite number of times. But there is that *genuine* group. They don't talk to us like that. They know we're not doing anything wrong. They tell us that we provide an excellent service. They tell us, "Don't think you are doing anything wrong; you are doing us a great service." That's why we prefer *genuine* people. They come and go in vehicles. They don't talk to us even when they see us on the street. They mind their own business. We can walk on the roads without problems. We will not be able to walk freely on the streets if we serve all types of customers. They will point us out to everyone. When they are in the midst of friends, they will say, "she is that kind and this kind." In fact, this is one of the main reasons we choose genuine customers. They are not going to spread gossip about us. Actually, they are also visiting these places secretly.

Hirushi identifies people who ride bikes and three-wheelers collectively as *rasthiyadukarayo*, which means riffraff. She expresses her strong disdain towards such a category in society who insult masseuses by calling out to them, outside the

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[26] Riffraff

[27] This term literally means commodity. However, in everyday discourse in the local context, this term is used to signify a woman who sells her body to earn money.

spas, as commodities. By excluding 'riffraff' from these spaces, masseuses show their resistance to being treated with humiliation beyond the boundaries of spas. Her narration provides a deep sense of the class-based discursive formation of identities in multiple spaces of Sri Lankan society. It is challenging to interpret what the term 'genuine' signifies in Hirushi's comment. The people in the 'genuine' category admire masseuses for providing a service they could not receive via other forms of social spaces produced in society, such as family (Lefebvre, 1991). The genuine category admires masseuses' services within spas and lets them be imputed with a worthy sense of work identity. The interactions within the spas with them do not influence masseuses' spatial experience outside the spas. As the genuine customer's association with spas is covert, the secrecy of masseuses' involvement is also protected beyond the spas. Also, customers who belong to the genuine notion are not the people that masseuses like Hirushi meet in everyday life at public places, as there is a social distance between the class represented by Hirushi and the 'genuine' client. On the contrary, in many ways the 'riffraff' and Hirushi (and other masseuses) belong to the same social class and commonly occupy public spaces accessible to their social class. In light of the understanding reflected through the notion of 'genuineness' which Hirushi emphasised, I put forth that masseuses' spatial experiences in and out of spas influence class-based acceptance and prohibition, which actively produce the social space of the spa.

Hisrushi's concern for social class in the selection of customers is reminiscent of the identity given by the politician to these places as *reputable sex factories*. Fulfilling the sexual needs of the affluent class has brought with it a particular reputation for spas, and the need for such places is extensively, though tacitly, recognised by the state and society. Apparently, the network of social relations

(Massey, 1994b; Truong, 1990) under the signification of spas facilitates serving the sexual interests of males of the urban high class and the upper/lower-middle classes.

Viranga, during his explanation of different types of spas in society, emphasised how the place called a spa is produced by accepting and refusing clients based on the socio-economic class that they represent.

> Many high-class people come to professional-level spas. Maybe people like [parliamentary] ministers. Such places are very difficult to reach. Usually, the clients who go to street sex workers for around five hundred rupees never visit such places. Usually, middle-class people go to ordinary spas. Again, it's like the upper-middle class. Even such places are not visited by inferiors. People like *nattamila*, I mean the people who lift goods in *Pettah* [market][28]. People who belong to that social class often go to street sex workers. So, spas are mainly visited by upper-middle-class people who do jobs.

The above comment further indicates spas as a power-geometry where social inequalities are prevalent based on the class affiliation of clients, and perhaps social class act as a crucial factor which influences the production of the place called a spa. The spas in the locale widely facilitate the affluent men in society to fulfil their carnal desires covertly and without impairing their reputable social identity. Aliya explains their clients' covert spatial behaviour when visiting the spas:

> They are coming like hiding. They don't even park their vehicle in our park. They seem very scared when coming. Because they worry whether the people at their home will get to know, or it [their visit] will affect their status. Sometimes, they talk with us and tell us that their wife will kill them if they are found out. Even if they get a call while in the spa, they say they are elsewhere.

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[28] *Pettah* market is a very busy open market in Colombo city. The labourers who lift goods in this market for day pay are called *nattamila*.

Due to spas being a tabooed organisation in Sri Lankan society's space, spa visits of the affluent social class are invisible in the public sphere. According to Hirushi, their clients *enter the spa slowly, but they struggle to go out faster than they came*. Within the mutually beneficial interactions between masseuses and the affluent men, masseuses also ensure the protection of customers' privacy and facilitate hidden spa visits as it affects the ongoing existence of the spa. An example of such practice is the provision of a safer path for the clients to exit from the spa.

Disparaged spatial identity associated with spas and the need of clients to have covert spa visits act as deciding factors in the planning and physical designing of spas, and in the use of verbal signs of expressing spas to the outer world. Sanuli explained how such happens in spas' positioning in the (sub)urban locations.

> Many people see whether these are located on inner streets. Because [they] cannot go to spas near [their] houses. Then problems will be created in the homes. If anyone is coming, it looks straight ahead on the main road. Almost everyone is coming [visiting] like doctors, engineers, police people. They check whether there is parking in inner streets which nobody can see, and whether the neighbourhood will make issues. Also, whether it is safe from police [raids], we can retain the customers if [we] can locate a spa in such a place.

As Sanuli points out here, spas are visited by many professionals, and their safety from police raids and societal affronts influences the physical making of spas. Even the spa advertisements published in newspapers explicitly promote the hidden parking facilities and facilitate the secret social life of the affluent and middle-class male customer base of spas (See Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4. Spa Advertisement - Neeroga
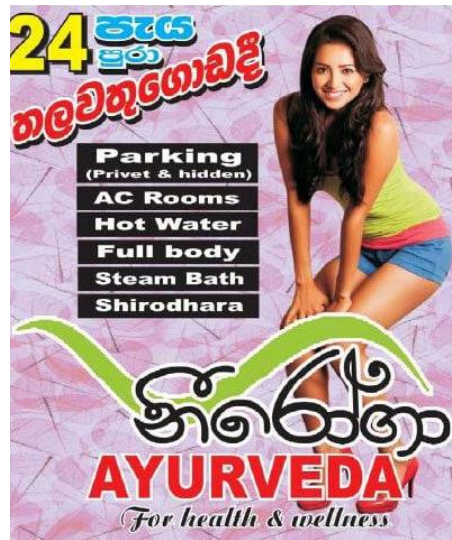
eSource: https://srilanka-massage.blogspot.com/, accessed on 07 November 2021

The spas are also produced as a prohibited social space for women as consumers. Out of the twenty-five masseuses, only Nishini said that she had provided service to a woman in her one and half years of career in spas. Unlike in western countries, it is rare to see a woman visit a spa in Sri Lankan society to get an authentic spa treatment. Rohan, during his interview, remarked on gender-based social prohibition, which means excluding women, particularly middle-class women, from this place.

> Rather than when a man says he is getting a massage when a woman says she is getting a massage can perhaps create a big issue. In general, in Colombo, it is quite a normal thing. And also, in high-class society. But the social perception relatively changes when it comes to the middle class, whether it is a man or a woman. It is perceived as going for a bad thing. This problem is faced by people who do massage as well as the people who get a massage.

A few dichotomous relations that affect the social space of spa, are explicitly and implicitly indicated in the above comment. As perceptible to me, those are

men/women, urban/rural and high-class/middle class. When men and women are comparatively considered, consumption of the massage service is considered deplorable for a woman. This reflects the social control of women's spa experience in Sri Lankan society, and the *big issue* that Rohan points out here comes from the gender norms, religious constraints, and marital obligations, as my feminine experience in the locale would confirm. This condition is also prevalent in Israeli society, as found by Poria (2008). In her view, consuming massage services is socially controlled in patriarchal societies, and women are reluctant to receive massages due to obligations to social norms. Accordingly, Poria (2008) concludes that massage is a cultural experience that denotes power asymmetries among females and males in a particular society.

Yet, as Rohan suggests, the interactions with this social space are somewhat acceptable to the high-class society and urban geography, but considered unacceptable for the middle-class (men and women). As it appears, class and gender-based prohibitions are active in the spatiality of spas and hence let us recognise it as a power-geometry where class, affluence, geographic location, and gender act (Massey, 2009) as significant determinants which restrict access to spas.

When it comes to spa establishments available in the locale, a few could be found strictly limited for women, which are promoted as nail spas and foot spas. It is noticeable that such spas are confined to affluent-class women. Gaya is a woman who had such a spa combined with a salon a few years before our conversation occurred. 'High-class' women have mainly visited her spa, and she explained why she restricted her spa only to women.

> I had a *ladies only spa*. One of the main reasons for making it *ladies only*
> was the recognition of spas in Sri Lanka. If gents came there, it's not good

for me. If I let them in, a situation could have been there where even I can't even go down the roads [*pare bahala yanna bari thathwayak athi wenawa*]. So, even though a couple came, I did not allow the boy to enter the spa and keep him outside. Everything that happened inside was visible out over the glasses.

As dominant ideologies which define women's behaviour in society refuse 'decent' women's involvement with spas, Gaya believes that she would not even be able to face society if she had allowed male clients. Due to such social disgrace heavily influencing society's interpretation of 'women's character,' she has even designed her spa as a place visible to outsiders by using glass walls. She believes that prohibiting the place for men and having an open spatial design helped her represent her spa's non-sexual authenticity. As Gaya's narration expounds, on the side of consumption, the local spas that mark a significant presence nowadays are being produced as a gendered social space in general that excludes women's occupancy as consumers, yet not as labour constituents.

As evidenced above, class and gender act as the main social relations that influence the construction of the place called the spa. The interactions between space, class, and gender have been affected by the culturally specific ideas that define gender and class in the local context (Massey, 1994a).

5.2.3 Spas as Viewed Through the Other Social Actors' Eye

While the masseuses explicate the daily reality of spas, and how gender and class-based power relations constitute this social space, I observe that such spatial construction is perceived by the other social actors as threatening to the authentic meaning of spas, or the so-called professionality of spas. Further, I observed that this social space is interpreted relative to the societies beyond the locale. Viranga, with his research experience in the places of commercial sex work, brought a contention

regarding the professional identity of spas, and explained how the market conditions are operating in the production of the social space of spas.

> The industry has lost its professionalism and is not in a position to maintain professionality. That is because sex work is illegal in Sri Lanka. Illegal means criminalised. If a person wants to obtain such a service, they cannot find a sex worker anywhere in Sri Lanka. On the other hand, if we run a spa as an ayurvedic treatment place, if we take such in Bangkok, they operate it as a highly professional ayurvedic treatment centre. There [in Bangkok], a place of sex work and professional spa could be distinguished by drawing a clear line. In Sri Lanka, the two are messed up.

He believes that the spa sector in Sri Lanka is 'in a lost place' as there is a 'bewildered market condition' in terms of demand and supply. According to him, many detrimental effects derive from the spa industry's bewildering nature. Such a condition makes it difficult for spa management or spa workers to precisely identify the customer's actual demand, whether a massage, ayurvedic treatment, or a sex-related service.

While the masseuses claim that there is an ongoing tendency for sex to be the most-demanded commodity (Brents & Hausbeck, 2007) in the spatiality of spas, the other social actors who interact with the occupants of spas were much more straightforward in claiming the spas' close association with sex work. According to Shaman, spas have replaced many other sex-trading linked establishments such as brothels, lodges, street-based sex, and massage parlours. He traced this tendency as an ongoing increase in spas since the year 2009. Rohan interprets this trajectory in the spa industry as something 'harmful' to society.

Irrespective of many moral and ethical anxieties set along with the commercial sex industry, specific advocacies towards considering prostitution as (sex) work emerged in the early 2000s (Smith & Mac, 2018). With such momentum, many

countries enacted sex work decriminalisation policies. Today, some Global North countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, France and Denmark have given legal status to sex work, and some Global South countries such as Indonesia and Bangladesh have decriminalised individuals' engagement in sex work. As already explained in Chapter 1, selling sex is legally prohibited in Sri Lanka. Also, such work is extremely stigmatised due to the effect of the deeply rooted cultural values mainly instigated by the Sinhalese-Buddhist ideologies (Lynch, 2004). Viranga stated that it is even impossible to create a space to discuss sex work decriminalisation in Sri Lanka. Even though politicians have expressed concern about the many complexities which put women at risk, there is strong opposition from the general public and religious leaders towards such a regulatory measure.

> Decriminalising sex work is not even coming to the level of social discussion at least like abortion. So, we can't even grab a complete sense how the society will respond to this matter. Parliamentarians sometimes tell us that they personally like to do that. But they ask how could they contest for the next election after they raise hand for that [in the parliament to enact a law] or after proposing that [an act for decriminalising sex work]. So, nobody takes the risk, not even a government. We can't even sense the nature of resistance towards that, as it still has not even reached such level of discussion.

Viranga's comment above indicates the strong level of opposition towards attempts to decriminalise sex work in the local context, and he emphasised that even there is no slight room for discussion on such matter. I recall in the recent past, two female parliamentarians raised their voice on the need for sex work decriminalisation as a means of protecting sex workers from sexual trafficking, social oppression, and harassment. Such attempts created unrest among the general public and those parliamentarians were insulted in the social media platforms by labelling them as brothel owners.

In fact, places called spas are extensively tabooed in the social setting of Sri Lanka. Viranga explicated that the extreme social stigma associated with spas impedes people from openly discussing spa visits in the public sphere.

> Our people visit spas in an unobtrusive manner. Even if they visit, never tell that they have been to such a place. It looks like a stigma. If not, they could have said. We've never heard in a society that someone has visited a spa. Have we ever heard someone say he visited a spa in a public speech? But we don't hide it when visiting a spa on a Bangkok tour. That is all because of social stigma. Isn't it?

The term 'our people' indicates the local particularity of spas. A similar social phenomenon could be differently viewed in different geographies based on cultural specificities that influence the construction of place (Massey, 1994a). In Viranga's responses, he always compared Sri Lankan spas with the Bangkok spas and emphasised that the socio-cultural context of Sri Lanka has produced the social space of spa as a 'unique' space in society. As he highlights, affiliation with the place called the spa is heavily stigmatised, and disclosing such affiliation never happens in public discourse.

Surpassing the above stated ideological restrictions, societal refusal, and legal prohibitions, commercial sex work has a long history in Sri Lanka, as in the other parts of the globe. One of the major studies done on the sex workers of Sri Lanka by Ratnapāla in the 1990s claims that the illegal commercial sex industry in Sri Lanka prevailed in the places such as streets, brothels, and massage parlours. Spas were not indicated as a place of sex work in this study, although the survey explicates masseuses as a type of sex worker who works in massage parlours (Ratnapāla, 1999). As per my observations, the global spa concept had not widely reached the Global South localities such as Sri Lanka during Ratnapāla's study. The spa concept

transcended the local geographies as an effect of globalisation with the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Shaman, an actor who interacts with spas in his work routine, claims that spas have opened an 'elite space' for sex work in the locale, involving less stigma than in other places. This ongoing tendency of producing spas as an elite social space for sex work was emphasised by him as follows:

> Some value has been created in connection with the spas. Greater value is being created there [in spa] than ever before. The value is that now there is a space for them to engage in the profession without standing in the streets or elsewhere. Doing the profession in a spa has a little more self-respect or else a little more self-esteem than in other places.

Within the hierarchy of places of sex work, Shaman locates spas as having a high status compared to the other establishments notorious for sex work. According to him, women who work in spas have a better social position than sex workers in other places. Perhaps due to such 'spatial value', spas seem to proliferate in the (semi)urban geographies in the locale, and women are attracted to constitute the labour force in those places. Though the masseuses did not endorse such a kind of better social position, the visible proliferation of spas and abundant labour supply to such places indicates some kind of distinctiveness of spas compared to massage centres or even brothels.

Despite this distinctiveness, Rohan identifies spas as a threat to the authentic ayurvedic treatment sector. The ongoing identity formation of the place called the spa in present temporality, as he presumes, is as follows:

> The identity of the spa now has much of a low quality. That means now, I mean the current situation. It means that in many places, spas are being conducted as an institution that is harmful to society or as an institution that is not approved by society. Because now, there is a large number of such

places where women are employed as prostitutes or otherwise employed in wrongful work. Due to this, it [spas] started abundantly. Actually, it was not the condition at the beginning.

Rohan denotes an antithetical association between society and the place called the spa, though it is a reality that exists in society. He indicates a social resistance to the signifier spa. He further explained this by relating spas' perplexing association with other signifiers, 'prostitution' and 'massage centre'.

Spas are disparaged in society due to the bad image that it is associated with. Spas are sensed as massage centres; massage centres are meant brothels maintained under a different name. That is how society identifies those. So, it is broadly viewed as conducting an anti-social act under the guise of Ayurveda.

He also described how this 'place identity' influences the construction of the identity of the women (Massey, 2004) who work in all sorts of spa and massage-related places. In his perspective, the place identity of spas directly influences the women's being in society and exposes them to social marginalisation and exclusion.

That's why if a woman works in a place of massaging nowadays, she will never be accepted by society. If she is like an unmarried woman, when she is going to marry, she will not be able to tell that, "This is my job."

While Rohan reflects on the culturally-inscribed societal resistance towards the spas and women who work in spas, he clearly states that due to the place-bound identity of spas, all women who engage in massage work become 'societal misfits.' The stigma that Rohan implies here is particularly vested in women, and how these women are disparaged in society is well evidenced in multiple social texts. The statement below was posted by an individual in the comment section of a YouTube video on spas in Sri Lanka.

Whores [*vesiyo*], There seems to be no other job in this country. Not because of economic problems, but because of these bitches' strong urge [*balliyanta*

thiyena asahane], they do these. Those bitches are well suited for women like men [intersex men].

The above comment, as well as the majority of other posts, indicate these actors position the heterosexual male in a 'superior place' and disparage the women and men who inhabit spas by claiming they engage in morally and socially deviant behaviours. In addition to using abusive terms like *vesiyo* [whores] and *bitches* [bitches], many other pejorative signifiers have been used to identify women who work in spas and in parallel to that people who visit spas are identified with non-normative sexualities such as *ponnayo* (gay/intersex men). This shows that men who visit spas and women who perform as masseuses are repudiated in the public discourse as "scary hetrosexualities" or "non-normative sexualities" (Pini et al., 2013, p. 168).

5.3 PRODUCING SPAS AND WOMEN PERFORMING AS 'MASSEUSES'

In this section, I bring forth my readings in between the lines of masseuses' narrative accounts, as an attempt to manifest the everyday lives of masseuses as they are lived through the spaces of spas. It brings how the masseuses are placed within the power-geometries of spas in relation to the network of social relations that produce a spa.

5.3.1 Objectification and Commodification of Women

In a capitalist society, the survival of the working class is determined by its ability to sell its labour power as a commodity (Marx, 1847). In the emerging reality of the production of the social space of spa, women's bodies have become a commodity marked by a price. The price of this commodity is not determined by the human who is subject to such a commodification process, but by the capitalist agent. The spa owners decide the price of each woman in the spa. The *selection*, an

embedded material practice of spas, reveals that women are showcased as objects in spas in a similar manner to that of products or commodities sold in shops. The customers of the spas can decide which object they will consume to fulfil their desires or needs. Nishadi explained how the women enact themselves as attractive commodities and produce the space of *selection*.

> Now, if there are five of us, the customer can select one from the five to give him the treatment. We have uniforms, and we wear a red dress on Mondays. So, we looked similar as all of us were beautiful girls. All the girls are very young and look alike. A red light comes on at the place of *selection*. Under that, the girls look lovely. Then we wear a blue dress on Tuesdays. All of us look the same. Then we have to wear a skirt and blouse on other days. We need to wear a short skirt and a blouse. We also need to tie our hair or keep it short. Also, we need to put on makeup.

Although the COVID-19 outbreak constrained me from experiencing and observing these organisational spaces, Nishadi's explanation was powerful enough for me to capture 'spacing' (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012) of spas by the main inhabitants—masseuses and clients. As Nishadi's statement clarifies, beauty is a critical factor which marks girls' presence at the spatial practice—*selection*. Spatial elements like the red lighting and bodily inscriptions such as makeup, hairstyle, and dress code become the factors that materialise women's attractiveness. The similitude of the young women, highlighted by Nishadi, shows the tendency of this space to make them similar but beautiful commodities ready for consumption. These embodied spatial performances are further discussed in Chapter 7.

Most newspaper advertisements for spas highlight the feminine presence—the attractiveness of the masseuses—rather than the type(s) of service provided. *Beautiful, cute, young female therapists* is a well-known line used in spa promotional advertisements in newspapers. In this context, women have become the 'icons' representing the excellence of service quality reflected in their beauty, desirability and youthful freshness. See Figures 5.3 and 5.4 for exemplar newspaper advertisements on spas.

Figure 5.5. Spa Advertisement – Red Apple Ayurvedic Spa

Source: https://www.google.com, accessed on 17 Feb 2020

Figure 5.6. Spa Advertisement – Samanmal Ayurvedic Spa

Source: The Sunday Times Hit Ad, 2018 June 10, p. 123

Images, colours (red), and verbal symbols used in these advertising materials emphasise sexuality, femininity, and novelty to symbolise the services provided inside the respective spas. The Sinhalese wordings in the second advertisement, which exemplifies the ongoing objectification of women, can be translated as *look for the beautiful [women] butterflies spreading a jasmine-scented breeze by the fluttering of their wings and be drawn to the smell of flowers*. Here the poetic imagery depicting the appealing feminine presence is strategically linked through the sexy picture of the young woman to the erotic experience that could be obtained inside. As these texts indicate, sex and sexuality are used as marketing tools (Brents & Hausbeck, 2007), and women have been explicitly reproduced as commodities readily available for sexual consumption. Hence, in this specific locale, the spa has become an "institutional site of sexual consumption" (Brents & Hausbeck, 2007, p. 436). Apart from sex being articulated as a commodity, women are being defined, marketed, and consumed as commodities in such a context.

5.3.2 Exploitative Spatial Practices and Masseuses as 'Passive Subjects'

While such objectification of women is ongoing in the spaces of spas, the ownership of these organisations has suppressed the right of their female workers to demand a salary commensurate with the job they perform. Many are not entitled to a wage for utilising their labour-power as masseuses or sex workers. Hence, unlike other capital-labour relations, the 'price of labour' (Marx, 1847) is not received by these women, and that price is replaced by the physical space and amenities provided to perform the labour role.

The primary strategy used to attract women to the spas is emphasising the earning capacity of the masseuse job. This evidences that the spa owners primarily play on women's economic vulnerability. Hence these intermediaries strategically

act to exploit the weakest point in the lives of rural, poorly-educated or single-parent women, who are struggling to locate themselves in a reasonable livelihood. The job vacancy column of the *Lankadeepa* newspaper, published on 26 November 2017, has 95 advertisements for masseuses. Of those 95, around 60 advertisements state that the masseuses are entitled to a monthly salary and a commission that ranges between Rs. 60000 – 200,000. Below are three examples of job advertisements.

Figure 5.7. Masseuse/therapist job vacancy advertisements

	Translations
	Advertisement 1: An **Ayurvedic** spa needs trained / untrained [female] therapists. Salary + commission between 60,000 - 80,000. Food and accommodation are free.
	Advertisement 2: Government registered **Ayurvedic** spa needs untrained [female] receptionists/ [female] therapists. (Full time/part-time) Monthly income of more than 150,000.
	Advertisement 3: An **Ayurvedic** spa needs trained/untrained [female] therapists below 35 years.

Source: Lankadeepa Lahipita, 2017 Nov 26, p. 21-23

The use of the feminine version in the local language for the term therapists indicates that these organisations intend only to attract females as therapists, reflecting the gendered nature of this organisational space. The income explicitly stated here is the monthly salary that could be earned by an educated/experienced

middle management level employee in the Sri Lankan corporate sector. In reality, the masseuses are not paid a salary per se but receive a considerable remuneration as tips (gratuities) from satisfied customers.

> Risini: How are you paid in the spa?
>
> Achini: We are not paid a salary. Our income is the tip received from the customer. The place I worked in is a place that attracts a lot of customers. That means there are places where there is sex in spas in Sri Lanka. Also, there are places without *sex*. The place where I worked was a place where there was no sexual intercourse. In the places that have sex work, the *lamai* [masseuses] earn around four to five lakhs [Rs. 400,000-500000] per month. However, the treatment was not the only thing available in the place where I worked. When we do the *handshake*, we receive a *tip* that amounts to Rs. 1500, 2000 or even 2500 from each customer. There are days when we have around 7, 8 or 10 customers to work with.

While three masseuses claimed they obtained a commission from the owners for the service they provided in the spas, other participants asserted that they only received a tip. Their services are offered as packages, and a price is charged to the customer at the entrance at the reception. As most of these women are not entitled to a salary, the ability to generate value for their labour (Marx, 1847) is dependent on their embodied spatial performances (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012) within the spa.

In spacing the spa, masseuses capitalise their body in the first thirty minutes to compensate the price charged from the customer (profit earned by the physical space provider—owner) at the reception. Then their "embodied practices of spacing" (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012, p. 47) are targeted on earning (tip) for their own living. Masseuses have a 'constrained choice' in the spatiality of spas, and as such, engagement in sex-related services, instead of being an individual choice, is a compelled choice instigated by their socio-economic vulnerability.

It is also evident that masseuses passively accept the ongoing practices of labour exploitation in the spas. None of the women had resentment towards the money earned by the owners of spas by utilising their bodies as a 'commodity'. In Aliya's view, it is not fair to ask for a salary since the owner provides all the facilities to perform their job role. According to Nethra (a sex worker), in addition to providing the physical space to perform the job, some spas provide lodging facilities for the workers.

> We are not paid a salary. They take 1500 [rupees] from the customer. As we get a tip from the customer, we are not paid. But they don't charge us for providing lodging. If we are in a boarding [place], we will have to pay the boarding fee. Maybe, 10000 or 15000 [rupees]. They don't charge us for light [electricity] and water bills.

Masseuses who are provided with lodging work for nearly 18 hours per day in the spa. That means they do two shifts per day. So, providing lodging can be understood to facilitating easy access to masseuses during peak demand hours by the spa owners. Most of the masseuses expressed gratitude to the owners of spas for providing the physical space and other facilities to engage in their work in a comparatively comfortable manner. As an outsider, Shaman interpreted this as, "*Doing the profession in a spa has a little more self-respect or else a little more self-esteem than in other places*." Shaman's use of the term 'profession' directly relates to sex work. Truong (1990) suggests that the site (place) of involvement in sex work influences the extent to which such work is considered morally deviant and criminal. Extensive social control is exerted over street sex workers as they are not connected with an employer (Truong, 1990). As Truong elaborates:

> …women who work in institutions providing sex-related entertainment such as massage parlours, night clubs and escort agencies have a sexual identity

which is defined not as sexually deviant but as personal service. The nature

of this identity is related to the social construct of the institution that they

work for.

<div align="right">(1990, p. 89)</div>

This view cannot directly be applied to the operations of spas in the locale as spas are also widely recognised as a place of sex work irrespective of the multiplicity of embodied spatial practices of masseuses. Though none of the masseuses reveals their work identity outside of spas, it is evident that they have a kind of inner sense of respectability of being a sexual service provider in a spa. Also, the participants were very much pleased with the safety assured by the owners within the spas. Their protection from the unpleasant spatial experiences as they interact with police (in raids), clients (sexual harassment), and outsiders (undue influences/acts of humiliation) are said to be assured by the spa owners/managers. Sanuli, Nishadi, and Tisha all had stories where their owners/managers were involved in assuring their safety.

A police raid is a prevalent practice that happens at spas. According to all the participants, irrespective of the extent of the bodily interaction with the customer, the police arrest women who occupy the spa at the time of the raid. Even massage which leads to masturbation provided in spas is considered sex work by the police, though the masseuses claim that it is only a hand-touch-based interaction. Therefore, many had experiences in police custody. In such incidents, masseuses are confident that they are protected and facilitated by the owners to obtain bail from the courts. As the masseuses narrate, owners seek to minimise raids by the police by providing them with bribes. Therefore, they believe that a raid by the police only happens if the police want to create a 'drama' to convince the general public that they take action to

reduce the proliferation of spas or when the owner has not paid sufficient bribes. I revisit Sanuli's comment regarding the omnipresence of spas in Colombo, here again:

> Nobody wants to eliminate these [spas]. But they want to show that they are trying to eliminate this. The police inform us in advance that a raid would happen. They tell us, "We will raid, so vacate the place early." Maybe that [raid] is because of a command of the President or a politician, if not to show to the narrow-minded outsiders, they do this [raid] to show them that they are doing [raids]. Closing a spa means just a performance to them [interested parties].

When a raid happens, a few women are provided to the police and easily obtain bail in court. Even the legal fees and the negligible fine, i.e., 100 rupees, are borne by the owners of the spa.

The above acts of the spa owners have influenced masseuses to recognise spas as a 'safe place' of work which helps them to earn well, compared to many other employment opportunities accessible for their social, economic, and educational background. Yet, Viranga terms the labour practices carried out in many spas as "*complete slavery*." Masseuses seem to be unaware of and unconcerned regarding such exploitative practices that are ongoing in these places. For instance, although spas are registered business organisations, masseuses are not provided with an appointment letter; they have no work rights, and are not protected by any safety protocols which protect labourers in other organisations. They are also given a fake identity for use within the spa by assigning a pseudonym, and their presence in the spa is not marked as employment. This reinforces their labour's fungibility, as economically vulnerable young women could be easily found to replace vacancies.

According to Viranga, masseuses' passive response towards the exploitative practices at spas is instigated mainly by the stigma associated with their work.

> They never complain about malpractices in spas because of the stigma. Never tell that they were not paid due to fear of shame. They can't complain to the police at all. So, they accept the way they are treated. So, they have no place to go and talk or complain. I think that even these women are not covered by the *Shop and Floor Act*[29]. I never believe that the spa industry could be regulated when it's dependent on the tip paid by the client without having an [legal] Act or establishing a minimum wage rate.

From an outsider's perspective, Viranga understands that spas are (re)produced as an absolutely insecure place of work for young females, especially those who migrate from the country's rural areas in search of a decent way of living. Viranga indicates that stigma exposes these women to exploitative practices within the spatiality of the spa. Yet, there is an utter silence among the masseuses regarding the spatial practices of exploiting their labour. This silence is derived from the innate gratitude for the provision of a physical space to capitalise on their bodies to earn their livelihood. The spa has become a place which is mutually beneficial to both parties—spa owners and masseuses. Among my participants, the only masseuse who expressed her voice to reveal the underground spatial practices of spas was Devini. To conclude this chapter, I bring her argument about the role of management/ownership of spas, which indicates a voice of resistance to exploitative practices that are ongoing in the place called the spa.

> Devini: The owners of spas are responsible for changing the social recognition of this job.
> Risini: Why do you say that?

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[29] Refers to the Shop and Office Employees Act which stipulate the regulations of employment, hours of work, and remuneration of employees in shops and offices.

Devini: Because everything happens at their discretion. If they ask from *lamai*, "do you like to do this job?" They agree. Because they want drugs. You must have heard *miss*? I have never seen heroin. But I have seen *lamai* using ice. They need around four thousand to four thousand five hundred rupees for drugs. Those *lamai* cannot sleep and stay awake for 24 hours. If we stay awake for 24 hours, then they can do their business. Do you think anyone is coming to have a massage at midnight 12? Nobody comes like that. Not anywhere in the world. You must know *miss*? These are going towards the sex side. Management should take the responsibility for not to motivate *lamai* into doing such things. *Lamai* are even given a bonus for doing such things. Then the *lamai* are motivated to do such things. Such things influence societal perception…

5.4   SUMMARY

In this chapter, I revealed how the place called the spa is produced through the interactions of multiple social actors such as masseuses, spa clients, spa owners, NGO actors, police, and the general public. The beginning of the chapter explored the prominent presence of organisational entities called spas in the geography of Colombo and its close suburbs. Then the chapter explicated the aspects of spatial practice, representations of spas, and representational space to produce knowledge on the social production of the space. It analyses how the frontal aspect acts as a veneer which conceals many power relations within spas. Though spas are represented as ayurvedic health treatment providers, placemaking of spas typically involves providing a range of sexual services.

The labour force in these places comprises rural young women and single mothers from impoverished socioeconomic backgrounds. Within the power-geometry of the spa, masseuses are placed in submissive status, and their performances within spas depend on the desires of clients and owners. As masseuses' economic survival is vested in the hands of the clients who provide a tip, which is the only economic return that they receive for their service, and the owners who provide

the physical space, which is comparatively safe and secure, those parties subsume power over the masseuses' bodies, which leads to intense commodification of masseuses in the place making of spas.

The existence of spas in Sri Lankan society's space is exposed to heavy social criticism due to the close association of its spatial practices with sex-related services. This criticism is mainly oriented towards the females who play the role of masseuses in these places. They are being stigmatised as women who transgress the ideologically-driven socio-cultural values that govern womanly behaviour in Sri Lankan society's space. However, the existence of the place called spa seems to be having a regulatory and political endorsement simultaneously with an unorthodox social acceptance for fulfilling an 'essential need' of affluent/middle-class men. Social class acts as a crucial determinant of relations that spas accept and prohibit. Hence, high and middle-class men are much embraced in these places while the lowest working-class men are refused. The endorsement of the affluent class in this power-geometry does not only happen because of the economic gain to masseuses but also because they tend to help masseuses to conceal their work identity outside the boundaries of spas. Moreover, as part of their role in the spa, masseuses protect the confidentiality of the affluent clients, making this power relation a mutually beneficial one. In the planning and designing of spas and geographically locating covert spa visits of the affluent class, men are accommodated.

Irrespective of the spatial practices of spas which exploit women's (sexual) labour and the stigma associated with the masseuse identity in society, spas have become an alluring workplace for rural young women compared to other 'feminised work roles' accessible to their social, economic, and educational backgrounds. Against this backdrop, in the next chapter, I bring the life stories of masseuses to

uncover the underlying structural conditions vested in the social, cultural, political, and economic milieu of the country, that influences the process of women becoming a masseuse at the place called the spa.

Chapter 6: Narrative(s) of Becoming a Masseuse at the Place Called the Spa

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 5, I delved into the manner in which the unique place called the spa in the specific geographic context of Sri Lanka is produced and reproduced by ongoing global and local social interactions, and, in relation to that, how the work identity of the masseuse is formed and constructed with the relational practices within spas. With the premise that space is continuously produced through relational practices as a never-ending process, by imagining "space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (Massey, 2005, p. 32) in this chapter, I bring in the stories of 'women's lives'—women who perform the role of the masseuse in places called spas, located, generally, in the highly urban milieus of Sri Lanka. As Soja (2010) argues, "life-stories have a geography too; they have milieu, immediate locales, provocative emplacements that affect thought and action" (p. 16). The life stories of masseuses are understood in this thesis to have their own characteristics shaped and reshaped by the "articulated moments in the networks of social relations" (Massey, 1994b) within and beyond the places called spas.

The stories narrated by the masseuses produced in this chapter explicate their historical negotiations with economic, social, and cultural formations in the Sri Lankan society's space, and how such moments produce the place of spa in the present temporality. Before moving on to the identity negotiations that are ongoing in their present being of a masseuse in the spa (the analytical focus of Chapter 7), it necessitates uncovering the historical process of becoming a masseuse— 'assuming'

an identity which is stigmatised and continuously exposes them to social oppression and degradation.

6.2   CROSSING THE BOUNDARIES: RURAL TO URBAN, ASSEMBLY LINES TO SPAS

There is a tendency for rural women who migrate to Colombo in search of jobs in the apparel industry to move into spas. Nine participants out of the twenty-five women I interviewed had migrated from remote rural areas, originally searching for employment as shopfloor workers at apparel manufacturing factories. This observation was also confirmed by Viranga. As part of his role in the Non-Government Organisation (NGO), he had interviewed about five hundred spa workers and identified that many women had migrated from rural areas and moved from apparel manufacturing spaces to spas. Therefore, I first bring the stories of two selected participants, Nishadi and Anoja, who crossed rural-urban geographical boundaries to assume jobs in "global assembly lines" (Federici, 2002, p. 62) before moving into spas due to the taxing and often frustrating work-life conditions associated with the occupation of a shopfloor worker.

6.2.1 Nishadi and Anoja; In Search of a Fruitful Economic Geography

Twenty-four-year-old Nishadi was at her husband's parent's house when I called her. She was not actively engaged in spa work because of the COVID-19 lockdown that prevailed during that time. She resides at a boarding house in Colombo when she works in the spa. Nishadi was one of five women I conversed with working at spas while having an active married life. Her hometown is Rathnapura,[30] and she migrated to Colombo in search of employment soon after

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[30] Approximately 100kms from Colombo and a three- and half-hour journey on public transport.

sitting the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level (OL) examination[31]. Born to a low-income family which faced many hardships due to poverty, Nishadi was forced to assume the economic burden of her family, as she explains below:

> After I stopped going to school, I thought I should get a job because of the many financial hardships that I faced at that time. So, I started working in a garment factory. I did not get a large salary. I remember the salary was 18500[32] [rupees/month]. I was working and working for about two years. I could barely live on that salary since it all went on fulfilling my food needs. Meanwhile, I saw an advertisement in the newspaper when I was with two of my friends. I didn't really know what an Ayurvedic spa was then. There were lots of ads for vacancies in Ayurvedic spas.

Nishadi was seventeen when she migrated to the city to work in a garment factory. Nishadi is just one of the thousands of young women who migrate from rural villages to the city in search of wage-labour roles in global assembly lines at a very young age (Hewamanne, 2008b; Jayawardena, 2020; Lynch, 2007). Crossing rural-urban spatial boundaries has been a continuous phenomenon since ancient times in Sri Lanka. Yet, this traversing became prominent during the British Colonial period—1815 to 1948. Designated by the British as the capital city of the country, many commercial activities have become concentrated in Colombo and its adjacent suburbs. Though it lost its status as the national capital in the post-colonial era, the industrialisation of the city and its suburbs has occurred without ceasing, such that Colombo is designated as the commercial capital of the county. Colombo became the metropolitan location where economic and social power was concentrated compared

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[31] GCE Ordinal Level is an examination conducted in Sri Lanka for Year 11 students in island-wide schools.

[32] A single person's monthly cost of living in Colombo is approximately 100,000 rupees (Numbeo.com, 2022)

to peripheral, rural areas. This geographically uneven development led to significant economic and social differences among the country's different provinces.

The burgeoning of capitalist relations of production, and the adoption of open economic policies, have changed traditional gender relations, where men were expected to be breadwinners while women were supposed to be 'homemakers' (Kiribamune & Samarasinghe, 1990). With the transformation of socio-economic conditions, it became unimaginable for women not to engage in jobs in many countries (McDowell & Massey, 1994), including Sri Lanka. Emplacement of the Export Processing Zones (EPZs), locally termed *kalapa,* has accelerated rural-urban migration, especially of young women. The new employment opportunities that emerged in global assembly lines enticed rural women away from their families to cross village boundaries in search of better living conditions for themselves and their families. Nevertheless, these wage-labour roles assumed on global factory floors by (rural) women did not bring promising consequences for these women who were on a quest for a better life. In lieu of providing economic independence or empowering women, a corpus of literature in the area of gender studies (see for example; De Alwis, 2002; Hewamanne, 2008b; Jayawardena, 2015, 2020; Samarasinghe, 1998) shows that those wage-labour roles have brought many undesirable consequences to women's lives within the socio-cultural milieu of Sri Lanka. Research in the area of gender studies with Sri Lanka as the spatial scale calls attention to such detrimental effects on women's lives (e.g. Hewamanne, 2008b; Jayawardena, 2018, 2020; Samarasinghe, 1998; Seneviratne, 2018; Seneviratne, 2019). These studies make plain how women in these apparel factory spaces, for example, are exposed to labour exploitation and sexual harassment.

As the political regimes at that time promised, apparel and textile manufacturing factories in the EPZs were expected to bring emancipation to the lives of young, rural women who lacked opportunities to continue their education because of their class, gender, and geographical locations at birth. Nishadi's story reveals that these capitalist organisations have been unable to fulfil these women's essential needs. Disappointed by the inability of the 'sewing girl' job in the global assembly line to allow her to escape from poverty, she felt compelled to choose a job as a masseuse, which is socially categorised as 'dirty' and 'immoral' (Baskwill, 2019; Frembgen, 2008). The reiteration of the word *working* signifies the exhaustion associated with the life she led in the factory floor and the manner in which she felt her labour was being exploited.

Seneviratne (2019), using her ethnographic fieldwork experience in the EPZ in Katunayake, explains the ongoing process of female labour exploitation that happens in such spaces. As she claims, the female workers labouring in assembly lines are continuously exposed to exploitation by managers' pushing them to work to the point of exhaustion for a meagre salary to achieve tough production targets. As a garment worker, Nishadi's salary was just sufficient for her to secure a part of the essentials required for living. Her decision to choose employment in an organisation that she was totally ignorant about in terms of its spatial practices, and the role she needed to perform, is profoundly influenced by her poverty and lack of education and resulting lack of choice.

In the previous narration, Nishadi unveils another trajectory typical to young women born in rural spatial scales in Global South countries (see for example; van Blerk, 2011a). Secondary school dropout is a common social phenomenon in the rural areas of Sri Lanka. Although Sri Lanka has an adult literacy rate of 91.7% (UIS

Data Centre, 2018), there are many disparities between the quality of rural and urban education produced by geographically uneven development. Further, educational opportunities are much more open to the rich rather than to the poor, especially those hailing from the rural areas of the country (Baker, 1988). Unless a poor and rural student crosses the main hurdles of the free education system and enters a state university, it is most often difficult to find a professional job that eventually leads to gain an acceptable standard of living. Moreover, the historically-developed patriarchal system, which has strong roots in remote rural areas, prevents women from seizing the available opportunities to continue their education. Like Nishadi, many of my research participants had not crossed the senior secondary education hurdle. Only four participants claimed that they had sat for the GCE Advanced Level (AL) examination[33].

Constrained by such factors, Nishadi became a masseuse at the age of twenty-one. She continues her story related to becoming a masseuse as follows:

> Then [after seeing the advertisement], we gave a call. They just asked for general details and asked us to come. So, we went. A lot of the girls out there were wearing *shorts* and *skinnies*[34]. It was scary to see. I told my friend, "This is not going to work; let's go back; I am afraid to stay here." A person there explained to us what we should do. I was terrified. After that, I came to my boarding [house]. Then I went back to the job that I had before. Worked there again for another year. But two of my friends had gone to do spa work. They both earned good money. And then I thought it was okay to make up my mind. Then I went too. So, in the early days, I was scared. A salary was

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[33] GCE AL Examination marks the completion of secondary school education in Sri Lanka. This is recognised as a highly competitive examination, and a student who passes the examination qualifies to enter state universities in Sri Lanka. Out of the 350,000 students who annually sit for this examination, approximately 30,000 students are admitted to universities due to the limited capacity of the state universities.

[34] Camisole; A women's clothing for the top part of the body with thin straps over the shoulders.

not paid as such; only a tip is received. I got used to it within a week or two. After getting used to it, I worked there for around two years.

As her narrative suggests, boundary-crossing—becoming a masseuse in a spa—was not a straightforward decision for her initially. She was constrained by the cultural expectations (of society) related to her role as a woman, assumed to be "at the core of Sri Lanka's moral identity" (Lynch, 2007, p. 9). Initially, being hesitant and scared to assume a job in which she was required to wear *shorts* and *skinny tops,* which are culturally delineated in the local village context as obscene and inappropriate for a 'well-behaved girl,' she emphasises how her poverty compelled her to become a masseuse. Everything at the beginning frightened her—the fear Nishadi expressed reflects her inner conflict aroused by the 'superior moral' behaviour expected from (village) women by Sinhala-Buddhist cultural hegemony (Hewamanne, 2008a). For Nishadi, the spa became the 'last resort' that she believed will bring her emancipation from the daily struggle to make ends meet caused by her disadvantaged social, economic, and geographical position. After becoming used to the spa conditions, she continued working in spas for two and half years, until spa operations were disturbed by continuous police raids that went on due to COVID-19. She claims that she was engaged in the threshold services offered by a spa— oil/lotion massage, *feeling massage,* and *handshake*. Her husband is not aware that she is involved in the two latter services, though he is aware that she is working in a spa.

> Risini: Do you like the job that you perform at the spa?
> Nishadi: I don't like it at all. I do it because I want money. Otherwise [I am] truly sickened. Sometimes troublesome customers come, drunken men, come; when such things happen, I feel disgusted. I question myself, "what is this life?" So, I don't do the job with enthusiasm. But I enjoy eating,

drinking, and laughing with my friends [co-workers]. Honestly, I don't like the time spent with customers.

As Nishadi explicates here, she is engaged with the core of her job— maintaining the bodily interactions with the clients— with a strong disinclination and distaste. The women who are involved in sex/bodywork are subjected to commodification within the places called spas, and such processes lead to sexual violence and exploitation of these women by the dominant men. Engaging in the jobs is not an informed choice which has been taken by considering the many available alternatives, but is a constrained choice influenced by these women's vulnerability to many socially disadvantaged circumstances (Samarasinghe, 2008).

Anoja is another young woman who migrated from Anuradhapura[35] to Colombo at the age of twenty-two to find a solution for many of the financial hardships in her family. Until she turned thirty-five, she worked continuously for thirteen years in apparel manufacturing factories as a shopfloor worker. Being a shopfloor worker for a long period did not uplift her life as she expected. After becoming frustrated with the job in the apparel industry, she entered into a marriage that could be considered a 'late marriage' in the Sri Lankan context (Malhotra & Tsui, 1996). After getting married, her life became even more complex, and she even considered the next viable labour role available for a poor, rural woman—domestic work in Middle Eastern countries (Samarasinghe, 1998). Somehow, she could not go abroad, and entered the spa industry to make the dream come true that she had when migrating to the city at the age of twenty-two.

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[35] A district 200 km distant from Colombo, which takes 4-5 hours to travel to by public transport. The people in the district depend on farming and various other types of cultivation as their livelihood.

After I resigned from the garment factory, I tried to go abroad. But it was disturbed […]. Then I saw the newspaper; the spa advertisements are there in *Lankadeepa* [newspaper]. I came [to the spa] after seeing it. We don't have a place [a house] to stay. We wanted to buy land and build a house. That's the main problem which caused me to choose this job. If I had gone abroad, my salary could have been 40000 [rupees]. I won't be able to save at least five cents in hand by going abroad [*rata giyath athe satha pahak wath ithuru kara ganna beri wei*]. I chose this because I thought I would be able to get over the difficulties [*goda enna*[36]].

Anoja's narration evidences that spas are becoming the third approachable organisational space for women hampered by poverty and many other socially disadvantaged conditions. Though she stated that she could not really get over her difficulties as she anticipated, she managed to fulfil her family's basic needs. Her husband works as a *three-wheel*[37] driver, which is a popular masculine livelihood in Sri Lanka. There is a high tendency of unemployed young boys and men with financial difficulties who are secondary school dropouts to enter into three-wheel driving (Kumarage et al., 2010). Anoja's unemployed husband entered the three-wheeler driving profession after she sent him money to buy a vehicle. Since Anoja is the member of her family who earned well, she bears the cost of the lease payment for the three-wheeler.

Anoja's story is an explication of how the socio-economic space called spas appears to be more alluring than work in apparel and textile manufacturing factories, and probably more than foreign domestic work. Anoja compared her current job life with life in the garment factory as follows:

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[36] Literal meaning is coming out of water when it is drawn. In colloquial language this term is heavily used to signify get over the financial difficulties.

[37] This is a vehicle with three wheels. A popular taxi type available in countries like India and Sri Lanka.

Risini: Do you feel comfortable working in the spa?

Anoja: Garment life is extremely miserable [*Garment jeewithe harima dukbarai*]. We are not paid a decent salary at the factory. In fact, that life is full of sorrow. In this life [in the spa], the only problem is keeping awake at night. These days we don't earn much because of the *corona* [COVID-19]. Otherwise, this is good. I am not sure about the others, but the *spas* I found were good. Not bad at all.

Anoja identifies the spa as a comfortable workplace for her, compared to the agonies she endured at the garment factory. Anoja's sense of 'comfort' associated with the job and the place of work not only derives from her ability to earn a substantial income compared to the income earned from garments but also derives from her past experience of poor working conditions, unattainable targets, excessive work shifts, verbal abuse, and sexual harassment on factory floors and surrounding vicinities of factories, aside from the meagre lodging and sanitary facilities available for workers in EPZs of Sri Lanka (Jayawardena, 2015). Later in the conversation, Anoja talks about the real sense of comfort she feels in her work life at the spa.

Anoja: We have facilities in the spa. Since I am there for 24 hours, working days and nights, I sleep [there]. They don't tell me to do any work.

Risini: Do you work all 24 hours?

Anoja: 24 hours is like this. This [spa] opens at 10 or 11 in the morning; I start work at that time and work until 4 [pm], then go to sleep for one or two hours. Then get ready for the night. That [shift] ends at 4 in the early morning. After that, I go to sleep again. Again, wake up in the morning around 9 or 10 and start working once again. […]. It's terribly busy at night. So, the night is very tiring. [We] are not allowed to sleep at night. […] Drunken men come at night. Sometimes they are troublesome.

Here, she first suggests her work at the spa as a positive experience concerning the flexibility of work, facilities (lodging and working conditions) and relationship with the managers at the spa. Later, she lets slip the underlying reality behind the 'comfort' she contends that she has in relation to the places called spas. Largely,

masseuses revealed that they must work the night shifts to earn a better income, and sometimes both the day and night shifts. Also, as many of the narrations revealed, these women are exposed to numerous types of harassment by clients; they have to fulfil strange sexual urges of clients, and sometimes violent or antisocial behaviours of both drunken and non-drunken men. Here I bring a few other masseuses experiences within spas shared in much detail with me. Mandari explained that:

> Very strange types of men come to this kind of spa. Sometimes it is extremely hard to control them. There are many problems like that. We sometimes fight with them and chase them away [from the spa].

Tisha talked about diverse types of customers that they have to deal within spas as follows:

> There are some customers who are really good. But some people are there who try to harass that *lamaya* [masseuse], touch, squeeze and hurt them. But some customers are very calm. They get the massage and give a tip to the *lamaya* when it is over. Some people also hurt the *lamaya*, abuse her and treat her just like the way they treat a *ganikawa* [prostitute].

Tisha who involves only in providing sensual massage and manual masturbation at spas, explains how they are being sexually harassed by certain clients in their everyday interactions as they lived through those spaces (Lefebvre, 1991). Furthermore, some masseuses have explained that they have to engage in providing kind of strange type of treatments called *punishment treatment,* as such men's sexual feelings arouse when they are beaten by a cane. These are a few out of many challenging experiences faced by masseuses when they are working inside spas.

Moving back to Anoja's narration above, all the challenging experiences brought by the masseuses like Tisha and Mandari may not be exactly similar to Anoja's experiences. The experience of women in sex work or sex-involved work could be considered homogeneous, and their positive or negative experiences depend

on the circumstances they face at work (Weitzer, 2013). Yet, Anoja's experience is not entirely positive, as she also indicates that there are troublesome customers. Given this, her positive perception regarding the work at spas reveals the kind of psychological comfort she gains from the ability of her job to fulfil the needs of her family and make her [financial] dreams come true. In fact, such capacity surpasses the discomfort and fatigue associated with the two shifts, the lost sleep for seven days, the harassment meted out by drunken men, and the suppression of painful emotions. She clearly communicated the pain she undergoes and the strategies she employs when controlling her emotions at work, to provide a satisfying service to a client who has the supreme authority to determine her income (tip).

> When I get a customer, I remember my husband. Even though we give massages, we touch these men. That is sorrowful too. [...] on the one hand, I am happy about this job, and on the other hand, I feel sad. I am married, [I] have my husband, we don't even have babies. So, I am stuck with this job because I do not have money. So, I am sad.

Anoja narrates how her life at spas creates positive emotions and negative emotions both. According to her, she is engaged in regular services at spas, body massages, *feeling massages*, and *handshakes*, and does not engage in other sexual acts. These bodily interactions with the clients matter to her. Anoja's husband is aware that she works in a spa, but she has told him that she is only engaged in Ayurvedic massage services. Her husband has warned her not to engage in sex work and *not to get caught to him by doing such things*. The control of female sexuality by males in both the spaces of the home and the spa is reflected in the above narration, and she is struggling to balance the demands of her husband and her clients. In a patriarchal cultural setting where protecting chastity and respectability are considered

a noble duty of a woman (Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011), the predicament she is faced with is evident through her narrations.

The stories of Nishadi and Anoja show the tendency of women to transition into the spa industry, since they perceive it as an economically rewarding employment option compared to the feminised labour roles that emerged in the Global South with neo-liberalisation. While Devini, Shenuki, Surani, Chandi, Mandari, and Chanchala, whom I interviewed, had their own stories of becoming a masseuse, commonly, all of those tales reflected that they had migrated from patriarchal family institutions in remote rural locations to EPZs in the metropolis, and then to certain 'spa zones' at different stages of their lives in search of fruitful economic geography to fulfil financial dreams related to themself and their families.

A study by van Blerk (2011a) with Nazareth-Ethiopian young women working in bars reveals that at a very young age rural women migrate to the city in search of employment opportunities, and are eventually placed in the bars as 'bar girls'. Van Blerk's study shows the inability of those women to negotiate their relationships within the spaces of bars due to their lower hierarchical position in society, and the tendency of them to engage in providing sexual services to clients to secure their earnings. As van Blerk (2011a) argues, these young women's lives are hampered as a result of "structural conditions of poverty" (p. 222). The stories of the women in this thesis shows that the positive effects promised by neo-liberal globalisation could not keep its promises in the Global South countries like Sri Lanka. The feminised job opportunities created by neoliberal globalisation in the metropolis have put rural young women into a further untenable social position and led them to assume relatively lucrative job opportunities emerging in relation to the sex industry.

6.3 A WOMAN'S PLACE IN RURAL GEOGRAPHIES AND BECOMING A MASSEUSE

This part of the chapter presents the stories of Rushi and Nishini, who exemplify another facet of rural young women's experience in Sri Lanka; they both were expelled from their families when they were teenagers. At a very early stage of life, Rushi had become a sex worker and a drug user. Nishini, on the other hand, demonstrated hostility toward all men caused by many oppressive conditions she experienced at a very young age in her life. Their stories reflect how historically-embedded conventional social beliefs, that are a part of patriarchal society, drive young women to accept the option of being sexual objects for men's consumption.

6.3.1 Rushi and Nishini; A Blemish on 'Feminine Family Respectability'?

Rushi is a twenty-two-year-old woman who started working in a spa at the age of seventeen. She left her parents and 'ran away' with her boyfriend at the age of sixteen, even before sitting for the GCE Ordinary Level examination. Teenage dating and love affairs are not accepted in Sri Lankan society, and parents tend to oppose such relationships strongly when they hear of them. Sometimes, parents punish and force teenagers to end such relationships, at least until they have completed their education. However, there are many instances when girls and boys run away from their homes to make their relationships a success. Rushi faced the same situation when she eloped with her boyfriend with the expectation to get married. For some reason, maybe because they were not allowed to marry at that age, as the legal age for marriage is eighteen, they did not enter a legally binding marriage and lived together for nearly one year. She later learned that her partner was having many other affairs with other women, so she decided to leave him. After this 'turn around' in her life, she was refused by her family and relations. She was not welcomed by her

family any longer, and they deemed her a girl who had committed a shameful act which humiliated the whole family. The circumstances consequent to her action compelled her to migrate to Colombo to seek a way of living. The inability to remain 'dutifully' at home as a girl who had committed a 'culturally delineated sinful act' pushed Rushi to choose employment as a masseuse in a spa, rather than economic difficulties alone.

> Rather because of financial difficulties, as I left home with him [boyfriend] during my school-going years. So, I faced many problems after I returned home. They [my family members] said that it would create issues related to my younger sister's reputation. It became difficult to stay at home. So, I went to Colombo without staying at home anymore.

In the local context, pre-marital sex or living together with a partner without legally marrying is considered highly disgraceful and shameful behaviour, and cultural incriminations are heaped on such a girl's head if she commits such an act. Therefore, if the male partner refuses to marry her legally, or if he abandons the relationship, society believes that the girl should be shamed and humiliated and ought not to 'face society' with dignity and respect. It is generally thought that she will not be able to make a successful marriage after such an incident and that it will also prevent any other female youngsters in the same family from entering suitable marriages in the future. Such value is mainly dictated by the cultural norms and expectations which emphasise respectability and honour in a woman's behaviour (Lynch, 1999). As per certain cultural beliefs, women's respectability is ultimately centred on female chastity and virginity (Lynch, 1999; Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011). Behaving with *lajja-baya*, translated by Obeyesekere as "shame-fear" (1984, p. 504), is a significant criterion used to judge the respectability of a girl's character (Hewamanne, 2008b; Jayawardena, 2015; Lynch, 1999, 2004).

For a girl to enter a 'respectable' marriage and live with dignity, she must have her virginity intact. Female sexual purity is considered a critical signifier of Sinhala national tradition, and is given a prominent place when performing traditional wedding customs (Lynch, 1999). A bride is welcomed with respect into her groom's family only after proving her virginity; otherwise, she will be humiliated and blamed for engaging in the 'sinful and shameful act' of pre-marital sex. This custom is, of course, fading with the advent of widespread modern norms trending toward liberating women from patriarchal controls (Malhotra & Tsui, 1996), and with the widespread influence of western cultural values produced by globalisation. Nevertheless, such modern trends have rarely reached rural geographies or the mindsets of ultra-conservative people who value historically established 'customs and traditions' (*charithra waarithra*). Moreover, there is a historical belief that if the bride faints when performing the wedding rituals on the *poruwa*[38] then she is not a virgin. These customs act as reinforcing mechanisms of objectifying women as readily available for society's gaze (de Beauvoir & Parshley, 1993).

Therefore, a girl in a similar predicament to Rushi is often rejected by her family and friends. Such stories are very prevalent, especially in the rural geographies of the country. Yet, male chastity is not judged in a similarly controversial matter. The male party is rarely blamed in relation to such an incident, nor do they face recrimination or public shaming. Hence, it is generally believed that men's socially constructed 'maleness' is facilitated by the patriarchal ideology that acquits and releases them from guilt (Eisenstein, 1999; Truong, 1990). This social control exercised over female sexuality and the power associated with males were

[38] A plank with an arch built temporarily to perform marriage rituals in a wedding.

well illustrated by Nishini during her conversation. I reflect on her views here, though I will present her story subsequent to Rushi's story. In Nishini's words:

> A woman is more likely to be pointed at than a man. As we say, *pirimi mona waradda kalath hawasata nawala geta ganna puluwan* [no matter how many mistakes men make, they can be given a shower and taken home in the evening]. The girl does not have such rights. *Kellek hari, kanthawak hari, gahaniyak hari* [A girl or a lady or a woman] does not have that status in society.

Nishini here makes a statement regarding gender relations in the locale, and how such relations influence on the entirety of women in the locale. *Pirimi mona waradda kalath hawasata nawala geta ganna puluwan* is a famous saying in Sri Lankan society. It is used by parents or adults to advise young girls in families regarding the importance of chastity and purity of character. This phrase captures the deeply-rooted patriarchal values of the Sri Lankan society, and signifies the discriminated social status of men and women within the patriarchal heterosexual matrix. The socially-constructed sexual hierarchy places maleness on a pedestal (Eisenstein, 1999), where men are privileged in society's disciplining and controlling agenda. Females have been assigned an inferior and weaker social position, and become desperate after committing the alleged wrongdoing. This is because alleged misconduct gives rise to negative word of mouth, commonly termed 'defamation of character'. Such power relations inscribed by patriarchal ideology subjugate women in an ongoing manner and reinforce the subordinated social position of women (Bareket, 2018).

These beliefs are not only limited to the locality of Sri Lanka but also could be found in other Southeast Asian countries such as Cambodia. According to Samarasinghe (2008), *Men are gold: women are cloth* is a popular saying in Cambodian society. She explains the terms underlying meaning as follows:

> [A] white cloth, once it is flung into the mud, can never be cleaned to regain its pristine purity and whiteness. Comparing the white cloth to female sexual purity, the conventional social belief in Cambodia is that a woman's reputation becomes irretrievably blemished if she loses her virginity before marriage. She becomes a 'damaged good' in the eyes of Cambodian society. Alternatively, man can have multiple sexual experiences and his value remains untarnished. Men are like nuggets of gold that fall or are thrown into the mud. Once you pick it up and wash off the mud, it will regain its original shine.
>
> (Samarasinghe, 2008, p. 89)

Rushi's story reflects the propensity of such cultural values to put women's lives at risk. It can even be said that the emotional vulnerability caused by gender-biased social values and norms have made women sex workers. After some moments of conversation, Rushi became more open and revealed that in addition to working in the spa, she works as a commercial sex worker. Workers in spas are subject to surveillance by spas owners to monitor whether they have sexual relationships with clients inside the spas. In some spas, owners have imposed specific rules and regulations related to the extent of sexual expression that the employee could have with their clients. Though handshakes/feeling massages are considered an essential part of a masseuse's work, some spas restrict their workers from providing sexual services beyond that. Therefore, Rushi uses the contacts that she develops inside the spas to find clients and engage in sex work at places outside the spa. The spa that she works in is a place where she develops contacts with clients. Rushi is also a user of the drug called *ice* (medical term *crystal methamphetamine*). She admitted that she started engaging in sex work as she needed money to fulfil her drug needs. Rushi

explained why she decided to situate herself as a sex worker in the following manner:

> Rushi: In many spas, customers expect to have sex. But it's not possible to do such things everywhere, even in spas. So, we develop contact and go to an outside place. Many [clients] expect such things rather than a massage in my workplace.
>
> Risini: Why did you decide to have such relationships with the customers of spas?
>
> Rushi: Because I can earn a lot of money. I also use a little bit of drugs. So, I need a little bit of money.
>
> Risini: Do you use drugs?
>
> Rushi: Yes, ahh. [I] need a lot of money for those things. It's difficult to earn that much by doing an ordinary job.

Nishini brought another story that demonstrated how culturally inscribed patriarchal values and norms have almost compelled women to select spas as their last resort. Nishini was twenty-five years old at the time of the interview. She was compelled to marry at the age of eighteen due to social pressures, without a genuine desire to do so. She told me that her marriage resulted from an incredible co-incidence in her life and asked me whether I was ready to listen to her 'long' story. Since I expressed interest in her narrative, she unfolded the turning point in her life.

A few months before the GCE AL examination, Nishini accompanied her grandfather to see a doctor. As the hospital was quite far away from their home and buses were not available frequently, they could not reach home before nightfall. Then, when they boarded a crowded bus[39], her grandfather left her and got off the bus because of an argument that had taken place between them. After that, Nishini

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[39] Buses are the main public transport means available for the general public in Sri Lanka wo could not afford a private vehicle. Mostly buses get overloaded with passengers in peak traveling time where people have to travel even on the platform.

got off the bus (this took a lot of time as the bus was overcrowded) to find him but could not find him. She became quite frantic as there were no more buses to her village at that time of the night. After calling and informing her parents, she contacted her fiancé, who lived close to the area in which she was stranded. According to her, her parents were aware of her love affair. He took her to the home of one of his aunts and allowed her to spend the night there. She could not contact her parents during the night as her phone was dead. When she called them back in the morning, they accused her of spending a night with a boy. Although she tried to convince them that she had stayed at her fiancé's aunt's house, her parents were unwilling to believe her. Nishini told me how her mother responded, "If you have spent a night with a boy, then marry him *ape muune dali ganne nathuwa* [without daubing soot on our faces]."

Ape muune dali ganne nathuwa is another culturally loaded, common saying in Sinhala society, especially in rural locations, which means that the parents will become humiliated if a girl commits a shameful act such as spending a night with a boy before marriage or engaging in some form of pre-marital sex. Daubing *dali,* soot, on the face symbolises 'painting the face in a black colour'. In Sinhala culture, while white is recognised as an auspicious colour (*suba*) symbolising luck and purity, black most often symbolises inauspicious or (*asuba*) unfortunate events, disgrace, or insults (Disanayaka, 1980). The comment made by Nishini's parents reflects the dominant societal view, which indicates that if a girl's character is tainted, her family members become unable to face society due to embarrassment. As a member of a family comprising two female siblings, I had heard this aphorism several times before in my teenage years as part of some 'golden advice' given by my mother. I cannot recall my brother being advised in the same way. In fact, parents' anxiety

about girls is widespread, irrespective of the rurality/urbanity, socio-economic class of the family, or educational level. Raising a daughter and protecting her character until she enters into an honourable marriage is considered a noble duty vested on all Sinhalese mothers. As Marecek and Appuhamilage (2011) state, safeguarding family respectability and reputation is the social duty of women in Sri Lankan society. Having daughters in a family enhances the importance of the 'family honour' since it is believed that daughters would not be able to secure a decent marriage proposal if any incident occurs, which smears *a blot on the escutcheon*. These kinds of practices are not only specific to South Asian countries like Sri Lanka (Bareket et al., 2018).

Nishini mentioned that her parents' reactions had made her desperate as she could not return to her village without salvaging her honour. Consequently, she decided to marry her boyfriend in despair, relinquishing her ambition to be a lawyer someday.

> […] I had no intention of getting married so soon. I was a person who learned with great interest. I was also called at school *ganankaari* [a female who excels in mathematics]. So, it [marriage] is not something that happened according to my own will. I had big dreams on my mind. I wanted to become a lawyer after taking the law entrance exam. That's what I worked for. But this is what happened.

Therefore, placing herself as a masseuse at a spa did not happen merely because of her desire to be empowered (Weitzer, 2009, 2018). Based on her statement *this is what happened* which she connects her life circumstances to the present temporality, it can be argued that, Nishini was compelled ultimately to become a masseuse by the deeply rooted cultural values in the locale. After this turning point in her life, Nishini had to deal with many issues. Her story indicates that women's suffering is very often caused by oppressive conditions stemming from the patriarchal institution called the family, which facilitates the process of male

domination over female sexuality and body (Truong, 1990). In the meanwhile, while facing struggles in her domestic life, she gave birth to a child. She continues to narrate her story thus:

> Since then, when I went to my husband's house after marriage, I fed [earned and looked after the basic food needs of] my husband and my mother-in-law. I took care of them. [I] did it alone. My husband did not even do a job then. The job that I did was not a big one. [I] worked at a *coolspot* [café] for a while. First, I went to work in a shop selling Sinhala medicines [Indigenous medicines]. From morning till night. I take the bus at 7 in the morning, and then I take the bus back at 7.30 at night. That means I leave home at half-past six in the morning and go back late at eight. From that time in the morning, I cut *katuwelbatu*[40] with a pair of scissors until late at night. That's what I did [I heard her giggling through the phone, which made me feel the sarcasm with which she regards her own past life]. I go home at night and foment my hands with hot water. My fingers are bruised with the scissors, and also because of the thorns, they hurt. There were sores on my fingers. So, I go to sleep after fomenting my fingers with hot water. After that [job], I went to work in the *coolspot*.

Her utterances reflect the multi-faceted sufferings in women's life in South Asian countries. She had to work every day, including weekends, in the coolspot, which made her neglect her 'stereotypically female domestic chores'. If she did not work, there was no one to earn for her family, including her mother-in-law and an aunt of her husband. As the capitalist relations of production spread their tentacles into the rural geographies of the country, and with the widespread influence of the feminist liberation movement, the tendency of women to engage in economic activities has also increased. However, it is doubtful whether the shared economic role in the family unit has liberated women from the burden of the domestic labour

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[40] Medical term of *katuwelbatu* is *solanum virginianum*. It is a shrub with small thorns which is used as a drug substance in making indigenous/ayurvedic medicine.

role (McDowell & Massey, 1994) that they had played previously within the family. Marecek and Appuhamilage (2011) state that in Sri Lankan society, irrespective of women's involvement in a wage-labour role, and irrespective of whether the husband is employed or not, the division of labour within a family unit assigns household chores and child and elder care as primary responsibilities of women. In Nishini's case, while she was assuming the role of the breadwinner in the family, she was blamed by her husband's relations for neglecting domestic chores and for not bringing a dowry[41] when she was married.

> Once, she [husband's aunt] mentioned to my mother that I am not doing any household work, not sweeping, not cleaning, I do not cook, I do not work in the garden[42] [in the rural areas still there is a large ground area adjoining a house]. I actually go to work three hundred and sixty-five days. If I do not go to work, there is nothing to eat or drink at home. Not even rice […]. At a nearby grocery shop, she has also said that their son has brought home a woman who is virtually a beggar [*hinganniyak*]. When I heard this, I felt really disappointed about all of them.

While all these torments were going on, Nishini's husband became addicted to the drug *heroin*. While her labour was being economically exploited at the workplace, her earnings were looted by force to fulfil his desire for drugs. She also had to succumb to the physical violence of her husband. Such substance abuse among unemployed youth is most often the result of economic liberalisation and globalisation, which exacerbated the miserable social conditions of women in patriarchal societies. It has led women to take over the role of breadwinners within the family, not for economic empowerment but for the family's very survival. Yet,

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[41] The custom of bringing a dowry in terms of money or property by the bride is still prevalent in Sri Lankan society. Especially in arranged marriages, the dowry is taken into consideration when confirming the marriage.

[42] In the remote areas of the country, there is still a considerable ground area adjoining a house.

the power of control over women, which is still vested in the male counterpart in the relationship, seems to be exacerbating the subjugation of women.

As Nishini narrates, she leaves her family and her two-year-old child when she is pushed beyond endurance. She was continuously experiencing difficulties in her life because of her marriage to her drug-addicted husband. As she narrates, the miseries related to her 'femaleness' continue to happen. Her husband would not grant her a divorce, and she still sends money to her mother-in-law to look after her child.

> Afterwards, I did a lot of jobs. In the *Arpico* [supermarket] as a cashier, in *Food City* [supermarket] as a data entry operator and an accounting job in a wheel alignment [service place]. My husband did not allow me to work in any of these places. He even came to those places where I worked and tortured me. I worked in garments [apparel manufacturing factories] too. [He] did not allow me to work freely in those places as well.

Afterwards, she could not continue working in her husband's village area and migrated to Colombo in search of a job. She tells one of her friends that she is looking for a job, and her friend proposes that she joins a spa. Nishini explains her entry into the social space of the spa as follows,

> I told her [friend], "I don't even have a job. I have no money. I have no way to get anywhere. I have nothing to eat or drink." She said, "Right, I'll help you. I will look for a job. But even I don't have enough money to give. But there is a job like this. You can make money. I'll make it for you if you like." I then asked, "what kind of job is it?" She said there was just a massage to be done. I asked, "what is going on there? People tell *me wage dewal* [things like this]. Is that so?" She said to me, "no, you don't have to do *e wage dewal*[43] [things like that] only if you like. If not [if you don't like it], it is not required." Then I said, "so then, why [should I] not [do]?" Because I was

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[43] Things like that, and this could be assumed as sex work. In the conversation with Nishini, she used many references similar to this. This shows her reluctance or shyness to explicitly express words related to sex which are assumed to be inappropriate for 'good girls'.

also very helpless. I had no money. I had no money even to eat or drink. That girl gave me five hundred rupees even for the bus. And then, I went to work in the spa. [They] taught me how to massage. I had no idea what to do beyond that.

As Nishini narrates, actors in the spa have represented the spa as a place of doing regular massage, in their first demonstration of work. She was ignorant about what she has to do beyond that as her body interacts with client's bodies inside the spas (Lefebvre, 1991). The *thing* Nishini is hesitant to state in the dialogue explicitly could be assumed to be sex. As discussed in the previous chapter, the organisation called the spa in the Sri Lankan social context exists within a double bind. Under the legal structure, these organisations are established as places of spa-related services. However, in the broader societal discourses, they are identified as places of 'prostitution'. Such a spatial identity troubles Nishini and presents her with a psychological dilemma. However, extreme economic vulnerability counteracts her internal misgivings related to the immorality of her work and the traditional cultural norms institutionalised by hegemonic ideologies.

She is vehement about the nature of the oppression and harassment going on in a male-dominated society, as follows:

> Nishini: Mostly, a woman is forced into that place because of a man. Though men always blame women by calling her that name[44], they never think that it's because of them that [a woman] has fallen into that situation in the first place[45]. It's because of a man that it happens to a woman. Definitely, a man is behind the reason for such a thing. Somewhere, a man is the reason why a woman falls by the wayside [or] is forced into that job.

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[44] Based on my knowledge of the language and the context, she hesitates to express the word *vesi* [whore], which is considered an obscene word in the local context. However, this term is used heavily, most often by men, but sometimes even by women, to accuse another woman based on her (assumed) character.

[45] Choosing a job at a spa or maybe becoming a sexual object of men.

> Risini: Do you mean to say that men's behaviour has caused women to enter into spas rather than economic difficulties?
>
> Nishini: Mostly, nearly a hundred percent, it is like that. I assure you, rather than economic hardships, hundred percent, it's because of a man. Somewhere, a man is involved. Everyone [all women in spas] I met was like that. [They are] fallen into that situation because of a man. Though a man calls a woman by that name[46], they do not know that they are the reason for it. There are some men who go to a woman and get those things done and then blame the same woman.

As I felt, compared to her tone during the conversation as a whole, specifically when she was making this statement it was utterly aggressive. She repeatedly uses the word man/men and her repetition and aggression show her anger towards male-dominated society, which blames only women for sexual infringements.

6.4 THE PLIGHT OF WOMEN FACED WITHIN THE PATRIARCHAL FAMILY INSTITUTION

This part of the chapter narrates the lives of two women, Achini and Hirushi, who were born to lower-middle-class families in urban locations of the country and chose to become masseuses when pushed beyond endurance. Their stories challenge my argument developed above, identifying the lack of education as a propelling factor that causes women to choose employment options closely related to the commercial sex industry. Their stories reflect how the socially disadvantaged and inferior position of women within the patriarchal institution of the family drives women to 'choose' socially stigmatised work.

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[46] Same as footnote 44 above

6.4.1 Achini and Hirushi: If We Really Had a 'Perfect Husband'.

Achini was born in a suburb close to Colombo, and amongst her co-workers, she is the only one who hails from such an urban location in the country. She is 25 years old, and Achini's entry into the spas happened concurrently with her marriage.

> In fact, one of the reasons I entered this job is [my] husband's drug addiction. There is a saying that a person who is addicted to that [drugs] can do anything. He was not at all worried about me going to this job. He just wanted money. I didn't spend the money I earned from this [spa] on him. But he is free from his responsibilities. That's why. In fact, no one would fall into place like this if the person called the *husband* were *perfect*. No husband would like his wife going into that type of work [I assume she means sex-related services]. There is no problem if he fulfils all the responsibilities at home by doing a job. We won't seek it [a spa job] if he looks after us. [We] fell into this situation due to desperation.

Achini was disappointed that her husband did not, at least, play the role that was expected that a man to perform in the family institution in a patriarchal society. While avoiding the socially-defined responsibilities of a husband, he inadvertently causes her sexuality to be exploited by commercial institutions. Achini has a two-year-old child (son), and she separated from her husband due to his drug addiction. She was concerned about her son's future and wanted to get rid of a husband who could turn out to be a flawed role model for her son. Achini was the most educated among the masseuses in the participant group. She had passed her AL examination with considerably good grades (A, B and C grades for the three subjects she sat for), though those were not sufficient to be selected for a state university. One of the major drawbacks of the education system in Sri Lanka is its inability facilitate high school and university dropouts to find decent employment (Alawattegama, 2020). Therefore, she followed various certificate courses in preschool teaching, spoken English, and IT. She has also taught pre-school in an international school before

marriage. At the time of the interview, due to COVID-19, she was not actively operating as a spa worker, and was concerned about the risk and uncertainty of her job. She mentioned that she wanted to do a degree and was looking for a government job. She reflects here on the underlying causes behind her job selection, which is socially stigmatised.

> As I think, many [women] do enter this job; I am not sure whether it is something wrong with the country's education system. A person needs to take care of a family while fulfilling all individual needs. [You] think now that buying clothing for the children and us will cost my entire salary. Nothing will be left to spend on other stuff. Maybe, the inability to manage is a weakness of mine. There are loans to repay. That's why. No one goes willingly to do this job. I don't want to show my body to anyone. So, it involves a great effort to keep mentally tough. I don't think so much about what I am doing. If we overthink, it will make us mentally insane…I still can't find a suitable job. I have already forwarded about 1000 [job] applications. I don't have any personal connections. Even when we apply for a job, we never get it. If [I] go to a shop, boutique, or garment factory, I can earn something. But it's better doing this job without putting a tremendous effort [*nahila nahila*] in such places.

Though Achini has a good education, she is worried about her inability to find a decent job to fulfil her necessities. Achini did not have the locational disadvantage of rurality, as she was born, schooled, and living in a semi-urban area. As indicated through her story, she can be assumed to belong to a lower-middle-class family. However, it seems she is in a socially disadvantaged position as a woman who belongs to a social class which does not have affiliations with the people who have the power to introduce her to a decent job. So, her choice is constrained to some sex-stereotyped employment opportunities available for women in the wage-labour market (Truong, 1990) of Global South countries, created by the neo-liberal economic globalisation. Though she is located in a city where power is concentrated

comparative to other local areas in the country, she is alienated in such power-geometry as she does not possess the characteristics required to thrive in the specific place (Massey, 1994b; Massey, 2009).

Achini relates her narrative to the wider social criticism towards the job of the masseuses, in parallel to her experience of bodily interactions within the spa: *No one goes willingly to do this job. I don't want to show my body to anyone. So, it involves a great effort to keep mentally tough.* This statement connects me with different comments made by people on the social media platform *Facebook*, on women's work performances within spas. Following are two of those, which reflects the public resentment and condemnation towards the job of the masseuses, which is deemed as morally and socially deplorable.

> Person A: Do you really have to sell your body to earn money? Better begging on the streets than [doing] that. The *vesiyo* [whores] who work in those spas just want to make money easily. When they become greedier, they start on their own, and some girls out there get caught.

> Person B: What the devil! Isn't there any other job to earn money? At least, you could have gone to a *garment*. What do you call *nathi bari kama* [poverty][47]? *Jathake waradda thama ithin* [It's just a matter of parentage]. It doesn't matter, though we have spas like that. As those are available today, a girl can walk down the street without fear.

People in the above comments suggest that the best employment option available for women with poverty is working in a garment factory, if not begging on the streets, instead of 'selling their body' in spas. However, Achini, in her comment, implies her resistance towards this widely-entrenched societal criticism, and explains the comparative spatial experiences in multiple places of work—at the spa, at the

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[47] A slang term used to refer to poverty. Literally, it means having nothing and cannot do anything.

garment factory, at the boutique or shop, and justifies why she prefers 'selling her body' by being a masseuse at a spa.

However, she also narrates the mental effort it takes for her to separate her mind from her body to engage, as she is 'spacing' the spa, which more or less requires her to be an object readily available for the consumption of men. According to Achini, she tries to keep her *mind tough* and believes that overthinking could make her *mentally insane*. She is forced to choose economic survival over nobility. Though I am not homogenising women's experience in a particular spatiality, generally in the specific locality of Sri Lanka, women's minds are moulded by religio-politically inscribed cultural norms which consider that women's bodies should not be exposed to the collective gaze of men; that is, of men who are not their husbands. Such norms, in fact, reinforce women's subjugated position, for example, by constraining their freedom to wear a type of dress they prefer. These are potent means of exercising social control over women (Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011). As de Beauvoir and Parshley (1993) argue, women tend to perceive their body as per the meaning assigned by patriarchal society. Young girls, as they mature, tend to feel that "on the street, men follow her with their eyes and comment on her anatomy. She would like to be invisible; it frightens her to become flesh and to show flesh" (de Beauvoir & Parshley, 1993, p. 333).

So, is it because of greediness for money that women enter spas, expose their bodies to clients, and let them and spa owners exploit their sexuality? Or are the places called spas capitalising on Sri Lankan women's economic and emotional vulnerability to create a space that unleashes systematic sexual violence against women? According to Truong (1990), patriarchal ideology facilitates male domination of female sexuality and transforms women into sexual objects. Males are

considered a privileged social group who have access to female bodies as a source of pleasure. As such, apparently, in the geographical context of Sri Lanka, a network of social relations (Massey, 2004) in the form of spas is emerging, which make use of female bodies and femaleness as a pleasure-generating and profit-amassing venture. This observation connects me with the argument of Simone de Beauvoir that the man has constructed the concept called woman as the 'other' of male. Thus, she is made the object while he is the subject all the time (de Beauvoir & Parshley, 1993).

In the above public comments on the social media platform, the very same men who ask whether women (masseuses) really need to sell their bodies to earn money simultaneously claim that spas should exist to protect girls (chaste women) in society. Such public views on social media platforms create a demarcation between pure, chaste women and immoral masseuses in spas. This connects me with the Madonna-whore dichotomy—"Polarized representations of women in general as either good (chaste and pure) Madonnas or bad (promiscuous and seductive) whores" (Bareket et al., 2018, p. 519)—that is claimed to exist in societies from ancient times, as a means of reinforcing patriarchal ideology (Bareket et al., 2018; Tanzer, 1985).

As the above public views denote, safety of 'chaste women' is expected to be protected by 'immoral women' at spas. It suggests that the public endorse the existence of spas while disapproving women's enactment of such places. Literature claims that commercial sex work is institutionalised as 'sine qua non' of society in order to meet the carnal desires of men in a patriarchal society (Pini et al., 2013; Truong, 1990). As Truong further elaborates:

> The family accommodates female chastity, while prostitution accommodates
>
> male lust. With chastity, female sexuality is being denied and yet glorified.
>
> With prostitution, female sexual desirability (instead of female sexuality) is

being promoted, and yet stigmatised as sexual deviance. This dichotomy
serves to divide women by concealing their consciousness of their common
position as sexual objects serving male interests, and therefore contributes to
the perpetuation of male domination.

(1990, p. 45)

The data in this thesis indicate the proliferation of spas in Sri Lanka is invisibly facilitated in constructing a legitimate space for men to fulfil their carnal desires covertly. However, the women who provide the sex-labour roles in such spaces are socially stigmatised and legally oppressed.

The trajectories in research participant Hirushi's life also explicate the above-discussed facet of women's lives in a male-dominated society. Hirushi is a forty-two-year-old woman who has four children. She is based in a highly urban city which is adjacent to Colombo. Like Achini, Hirushi attended a popular girls' school[48] in Colombo, and has passed her GCE Advanced Level examination well. She had also worked as a kindergarten teacher before entering the spa sector. As Hirushi narrated, her entry into the spa sector happened with her separation from her husband after giving birth to four children. She shouldered the burden of looking after her children as well as her parents. She was one of the very courageous women in my participant group who had to bear the responsibility of supporting a large family of seven on her own. In the pre-COVID 19 era, she earned around one hundred and fifty thousand rupees (considerably a reasonable income to manage cost of living in the country) by working in the spa. She has seven years of experience as a spa worker and had

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[48] Her school is recognised as a reputed Christian girls' school in Sri Lanka, and during the conversation, she shared that she is really sad about the place that she is fallen into now, though she has attended a *good* school in the country.

worked in more than four organisations during her spa career. She narrated the story of her entry into the spa scenario:

> When I first entered, I did not know what it was really. I had the belief that it's a salon. When I went inside, I saw a big difference. It was called a Salon and Spa. [But] the *lamai* [workers] were of various kinds. I was used to wearing dresses that covered my body. At first, after [I] saw those women, [I] left and came home. But in a couple of days, I thought I should go back and talk to them [the spa owners] because I had many problems at home.

Neither Hirushi, Achini, Rushi, Anoja, Nishadi, nor Nishini had 'gut feelings' to overcome their moral values or the culturally inscribed norms that governed womanly behaviour at first. However, they were compelled to choose that path due to specific economic and emotional vulnerability caused by many other underlying social forces. As Hirushi claims, she is occupied as a sex worker to retain her customer base in order to secure more earnings in a spa that accommodates men who demand sex.

> I should tell you, *miss*, [I] cannot survive without doing such things [sex]. Though we are reluctant to do so, we are compelled. Sometimes, we really feel angry. Because when we think about what our husbands have done to us, it's unfortunate that they have left us with four children.

Hirushi seems to be speaking about a collective of women rather than her own life. As a girl grows up with the consciousness of being the Other of men, she starts believing that finding a husband is mostly like finding a 'protector'. While she sees man as the indispensable Other, she tends to perceive herself comparative to him as the inessential (de Beauvoir & Parshley, 1993) However, as many women realise after entering marriage, Hirushi understands that men are not potent enough to be her 'protector'.

Hirushi's husband has divorced her and is not even paying her children's legally stipulated maintenance cost. As far as divorce and separation are concerned, women are very weakly protected by the law pertaining to divorce in Sri Lanka. The male party often evades paying spousal and child maintenance, and is sometimes not even present in court to carry out the legal proceedings related to divorce, and this is a quite widespread practise in the country. Due to many kinds of legal and social obstacles, the legal divorce rate is exceptionally low (Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011). Divorce often leaves a woman facing social barriers to remarriage, and there is a considerable social stigma attached to being a divorced woman. As Marecek and Appuhamilage (2011) put it, divorce makes women unable to live safely in society, and they become the targets of numerous forms of gossip and social condemnation. Hirushi narrates her own experience of being a divorced woman as follows:

> No matter what job we do, just imagine a single woman with children at home, *e padhe hadena eka hadhenawama thama* [she will definitely be a target of gossip]. Even if [we] stay home without a husband, the same thing will happen. So, it's better to work at this [do the job at a spa, or, maybe, engage in sex work] and be called as such.

Hirushi's narration echoes the oppressive social conditions faced by a divorced woman. She attempts to make her inner self strong rather than becoming perturbed by societal criticisms. She explained how opportunistic men tried to exploit her sexually under the guise of helping. All sort of oppression she experienced in patriarchal society, she tends to perceive sex work as a secured way of living. Here I connect to a comment made by Devini on her experience as a divorced woman, which is similar to Hirushi when dealing with men in the society.

> I faced a lot of problems when I was doing a normal job. Wherever we are, we have no freedom in this society with men. When we say that we don't have a husband or are divorced, people try to take advantage of us. By doing

a little help, they expect such kind of thing [sexual advantage]. That's how it happens. I am extremely worried about being born a woman.

This shows the insecurity of spouseless women and their propensity to be sexually exploited by men in a male-dominated society. So, their choice seems dichotomous. On one end, they have the option to let men use them sexually without having a secure means of income to fulfil their hunger. On the other end, choose a masseuse job that assures a sufficient income to look after their family while being sexual objects for men's consumption. Irrespective of their choice, they are exposed to social stigmatisation as having a bad character. Stranded amongst the material and immaterial life conditions of hunger and social stigma, she chooses to appease her hunger as her most immediate concern. Hirushi continues her narration to justify her choice to become a sex worker.

> We cannot stop the way society looks at us. I don't know how many people will strangely look at me even though I am suffering with my children today. But, if we are right, that's all. Because no one comes to see our stomach [hunger], there are people who ask whether [I] ate, but there is no one to ask if [they] should bring something for us to eat. That's why I say, no matter whatever job we do, it's none of others' business. We do it of our own free will. I have no choice because of my children. I am doing this job as a last resort. If I had a job somewhere that would get me around a lakh [rupees per month], I would stop this job right there. I am that eager to quit this job.

Hirushi's narration demonstrates her resistance towards the way that society perceives them. Though it is totally a voluntary choice of Hirushi, becoming a masseuse/sex worker, the condition of being lack of choice, brought her to present life condition. Multiple factors like economic vulnerability, gender, social class, cultural formation in the locale, have positioned her as a sex worker at a spa, in an intersectional manner (Romero, 2018). Having four teenage children and being a sex worker is not an easy task for Hirushi. She is apprehensive about her sixteen-year-old

son. She is afraid that someday he will visit the same spa where she works. Hirushi shared with me an experience of one of her co-workers who had faced such an incident. As she narrated, that woman's son has visited the spa, and after seeing his mother working in the spa, he forces her to serve him. Later, this woman's son compels her to fulfil his sexual desires at home.

Hirushi further explains the unpleasantness of her embodied experiences within the spaces of spas and the difficulty of balancing her work-life due to the aversive nature of social interactions that she encounters within the spas.

> I do not feel like eating when I go home tired. When I go home, chores are piled up. So, I don't feel like eating. When thinking about the job that we do today, I should talk to you openly, miss. We have to touch and do a handshake; I don't feel like eating at least a little amount of food[49]. Sometimes, I request my mother or daughter to feed me. I know what I am doing. I can't feed even my own child. Those [experiences inside spas] are always remembered. Sometimes, I tell my mother to mix the food plate and feed them [kids] with a spoon.

If I put here the experience of all the participants, all of those will reflect the way in which they are experiencing a self-conscious feeling of guilt as well as a disgust, more or less the same as Hirushi outside the spas, in particular at their home. It is discernible that becoming a part of the sex industry completely/partially by being a masseuse is an informed, free choice for these women. Yet, structural causes put them into such vulnerable socio-economic conditions (Smith & Mac, 2018). The place of these women in the power-geometries of spas and out in the wider society is influenced by social, economic, and political relations that constitute those power-geometries (Massey, 1999; Tomassini & Cavagnaro, 2020).

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[49] Sri Lankans eat food after mixing rice and curry with their right hand. The use of utensils is not a common tradition.

6.5   SUMMARY

The gendered positioning of women is influenced by historical conditions, along with the socio-economic and political conditions apparently acting as deeply-rooted bases of positioning women in the space of spas as masseuses. This chapter was an attempt to foreground such conditions prevailing in the local context of Sri Lanka via the voice of a few women who were eagerly looking forward to narrating the stories of their 'place' within such locality. Their stories were most often unheard by academics and feminist activists, and reflect a need for a space of respect and care in a social context in which they are highly stigmatised and alienated.

The stories of Nishadi and Anoja represented a significant observation of the study. A lucrative economic space called spas is emerging for rural-young women who could not find their aspired economic prosperity via feminised wage-labour roles created in the Global South countries by the neo-liberal economic globalisation. Stories of Rushi and Nishini elaborated on the invisible power of patriarchal values and norms to bring women into the desperate choice of assuming sex-labour roles that emerge in the spa industry. The final part of the chapter revealed the lives of Achini and Hirushi, which exemplify how the socially-disadvantaged and inferior position of women within the patriarchal institution of the family drive women to 'choose' socially stigmatised jobs.

Through the narratives of women brought in this chapter of their lived experiences in and out of spas, I argue that their gendered being in the power-geometries of the locale is intersected with multiple other factors, and have placed them as masseuses/sex workers at the emerging place called the spa. Now I move to examine closely how the spatial identity of the spa and the social identity of the

masseuse are co-constituted within the social space of Sri Lanka, and how the masseuses negotiate multiple identities inside and outside the places called spas.

Chapter 7: Being a Masseuse in and out of Spas: Ephemeral Identities

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The place (space) called the spa in Sri Lankan society is produced and reproduced through the relational practices of multiple social actors, both in and out of spas. In deciphering lived, perceived, and conceived spaces of spas, in Chapter 5, I presented how the place called the spa is relationally produced as a (sub)urban sexscape where young, rural, socio-economically impoverished women are being placed as (sexual) labourers in mass scale. Irrespective of the multiplicity of the masseuses' actual engagement with a wide range of (sexual) services offered in spas, society collectively identifies them as 'prostitutes'. Being subject to culturally-instigated social condemnation as morally deviant characters with a stigmatised identity, women often tend to choose employment at spas that are burgeoning into prominence in the (sub)urban areas of the country. Against this background, Chapter 6 of this thesis brought the narrations of masseuses to illuminate the power negotiations that go on in the multiple power-geometries of social, cultural, political, and economic formations that have influenced predominantly-rural young women and socially-alienated mothers to become masseuses in the place called the spa.

In this chapter, I revisit the narrations of the masseuses to examine how the spatial identity of the spa and the collective work identity of the masseuse, which are co-constitutive (Massey, 2005), matter in the everyday lives of these women in the occupational, private, and public realms. Firstly, I bring some different claims of masseuses who narrate their embodied experiences of work, and their acceptance and

rejection of the collective identity assigned to them by society as morally deviant characters. Later, the chapter explains how these young women negotiate their multiple identities in and out of the spaces of spas, as they cannot carry their occupational identity into their everyday lives, lived out in private and public realms. In this endeavour, I dissect the body inscriptions and bodily performances deployed by masseuses in constructing the masseuse identity in the spatiality of the spa, and undoing the masseuse identity outside the spatiality of the spa. Finally, I narrate their stories in order to demonstrate their innately perceived sense of worth in being a masseuse, although their occupation as masseuses and their spatial affiliation with spas are disavowed and stigmatised in Sri Lankan society.

7.2   WHO ARE WE 'IN' HERE, AND WHO ARE WE 'OUT' THERE?

I begin this chapter with Tisha, who vehemently claims that she should not be identified as a sex worker just because she works in a place called a spa. Tisha's voice reflects many masseuses' resentment of society for assigning them a *collective identity* as 'prostitutes'.

> When we say a prostitute, we mean that a person directly has sex [with clients]. [But], within a spa, though a massage is done, it's something that we do with our hands. There is no bodily interaction between the two parties. If a hundred [clients] come within a month, if I do that [sexual intercourse] with a hundred [clients], I will fall into the prostitute's level.

Tisha presents a 'criterion' she suggests that should be used to differentiate sex workers' spatial performances from her own spatial performances. She refuses the tendency of society to collectively call them sex workers. She asserts that the touch-based bodywork performed by the workers like Tisha at spas does not belong to the category of sex work. By "marking out the boundaries between what is sex and 'not-sex'" (Oerton & Phoenix, 2001, p. 406), she claims that their work should not be

considered morally deviant, as such workers do not actually fall into the category of prostitute. According to Tisha's assertion, though their work has sexual content, they seek an identity differentiated from the prostitutes. Yet, in the societal context, women's engagement with men's bodies, outside the socially prescribed spaces like family institution, is disavowed. Therefore, society broadly imputes disrespectability to masseuses' work in spas.

As asserted by Oerton and Phoenix (2001), "[i]nstrumental, contractual touch is intensely problematic for women because public heterosex is a symbolic oxymoron; typically, heterosex is constituted as private and intimate, rather than as payment for services rendered" (p. 389). The women in the participant group who claimed they were not sex workers had a very similar sense of their occupational identity, which is co-constituted with the spatial identity of the spa. Most of their talk reflected an ardent desire to distance their touch-based bodywork from public disrespect associated with sex work. However, they are conscious of the socially constructed collective identity around their work which involves socially disavowed bodily touch. So, they claim that irrespective of the extent of the disconnection from men's body, and the lack of intimate sexual content involved in the work role that they perform within spas, they are recognised as morally ambiguous characters and have been denigrated and pushed into a marginalised social position.

Denigration of people engaged in the massage profession is not merely a gendered phenomenon. Even professional masseurs are stigmatised and marginalised in society due to a context-specific inclination toward a massage leading to the end of corporeal sexual pleasure (Frembgen, 2008). In the context studied in this thesis, gendering is an active construct in spas, which are promoted as places that house providers of massage services in general. Work in these spas has attracted women—

especially women in socio-economically weak positions—on a mass scale due to the reputation of this work as an economically promising occupation. Their 'inferior place' in the gender and class hierarchies (Cresswell, 1996), together with their stigmatised work identity, has intensified the denigration of these women in society.

As Tisha continues her lived experiences of being a masseuse, both in and out of spas, she explains the numerous forms of harassment that she has to face in her everyday life:

> Yet, people do not accept it. They have put both into one [category]. People never say, "that a certain spa is a good spa." Those who work in spas and brothels are measured using the same measure [*degolloma ekama mimmen thamayi maninne*]. Some people say, "that [she] is a commodity [*baduwak*]." It has happened to me, if I go to the grocery store to buy some food in the morning, they say to other people around that I am a prostitute.

Society discursively constructs a common spatial identity for both brothels and spas, and a common occupational identity for sex workers and masseuses. Observation of social media posts and public discourses on spas evidence that women who work in spas are rarely called 'masseuses' or 'massage therapists' in society's everyday utterances. In such utterances, degrading and objectified signifiers such as *spa kella* (spa girl), *baduwak* (commodity), *spa kaalla* (spa piece), *ganikawa* (prostitute), and *vesi* (whore) are used to identify these women. This shows that in the discursive formation of the identities of spa workers, they are heavily objectified and relegated into nothingness. While published texts such as spa promotional advertisements, job vacancy advertisements, and the web pages of spas use signifiers associated with professionalism such as 'massage therapist' to identify these women, this tendency towards objectification could also be observed in such texts as discussed in Chapter 5.

The elided nature of sex work and massage work that occur in spas is the underlying cause behind this stigmatised identification. Although the term spa signifies a place where sex services are provided for citizens living in the wider society, the research participants claim that these sexual services range from the provision of a sensual massage that ends with onanism to actual sexual intercourse. Women like Tisha, who position themselves at the less corporeal end of this sexual service continuum, believe it is unfair to identify them as prostitutes. They argue that they only have a hand touch-based interaction with clients.

In the co-constitution of the organisational identity of the spa and the occupational identity of the masseuse, masseuses are labelled, denigrated, and stigmatised for deviating from society's moral expectations (Goffman, 1990). Due to such a stigma, women who work as masseuses are susceptible to numerous forms of subjugation and harassment in the multiple "realms of being" (Burns, 1991, p. 239). Such a social stigma affects them when attempting to fulfil their basic needs, such as food and lodging, and also influences social interactions inside spas. Tisha continues her story:

> Then that customer comes and selects me and says, "They [men who said that she is a prostitute] told me about you, that's why I came and selected you", like that. Sometimes, the man who said that was someone who had taken me before. Since that man did lie, telling me I did numerous things, the man who came later also expected the same. Because of this, we sometimes say, "He lied; we didn't do such."

The spatiality of the spa, which is produced via the interactions of masseuses and clients, is inescapably entangled with the production of social spaces outside the boundaries of spas. The interactions that take place within organisational work boundaries (the spas) transcend beyond those boundaries and affect every interaction of these masseuses in society. This also happens contrariwise, where social

interactions discursively form masseuses' identities as readily available objects for the sexual consumption of men. As a consequence of such a tainted reputation and identification, masseuses need to have a covert life in all the spaces that they occupy. Their actual selves become concealed, and they mask themselves at spas and, through habit, even in the private and public spaces outside the spa boundaries. All the women in the participant group except Nimeshika[50] (including the twelve women who have claimed to engage in commercial sex work) have concealed their work identity and spatial affiliation with spas in their interactions outside spas. They also conceal their personal identity in their interactions with spa clients and managers who work in spas.

Devini, who has also claimed that she should not be identified as a sex worker, explained how the perception of society toward a masseuse influences human interactions inside spas.

> They [clients] tell us many things. They ask us, "Let's go out. Cannot make it inside. I'll pay you this much." No one will accept that I'm not doing [sex work] because such things happen inside spas. No matter how good we are inside, we can't face society when we go outside. That's the fundamental problem that we are faced with.

The inside-outside comparison here reflects the multiplicities associated with the social production of the place called a spa. These contemporaneous diversities (Massey, 1994a, 2005) are produced by the ongoing relations between clients and masseuses. As Devini highlights, due to such multiplicities, masseuses are exposed to undue influences and harassment by their male clients. They are also exposed to

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[50] Nimeshika had several years of work experience as a spa worker and has now moved to the business administration end of spas. She identifies herself as a businesswoman who manages workers in a spa.

brutal social exclusion and marginalisation outside the spas. Devini explains her lived experiences of the ongoing exclusionary social processes due to her embodiment as a morally deviant character in society. She sets down her thoughts of living with stigma as follows:

> Society looks at us with extreme disgust. Usually, when we say we work in such a place, people look at us with aversion. Even the people in our boarding place don't like us. We live with fear. When they ask where I work, I tell them that I am working in a restaurant, cooking in the kitchen. Even they don't like to have close relationships with a person who works in this field [spas]. People don't like it because weird things happen inside these places. They don't even want to hear a name or at least to meet someone who works here [at a spa].

Apart from the inability to obtain lodging or housing, these women are also isolated in society if their 'tainted' occupational identity or spatial affiliation with 'ill-famed' spas are exposed. As Devini explains, their lived experiences in society are always associated with the fear of social isolation and disparagement. The reluctance to be intimate with, hear the name of, or even meet a masseuse demonstrates quite clearly how these women are being condemned by many people and marginalised in all sorts of social interactions. Due to this stigma, masseuses represent themselves, albeit deceptively, as being employed in garment factories, restaurants, salons, or grocery shops, all of which are widely available and popular occupations among women who belong to similar disadvantaged social, economic, and educational backgrounds.

The stigma associated with spas and spa work affects their everyday life in the public realm. It also affects relationships with their families—parents, husbands and children— and compels them to live with false identities in the private spheres of life. The experience of being labelled with derogatory terms and discrimination in

society is a quite common experience of sex workers, who are very often associated with stigma in many societies. According to Sallmann (2010) living with stigma is an integral part of sex worker's everyday lives, and affects their self-perception as subjects in society. The stories of the masseuses who claim themselves as non-sex workers, which constituted half of my participant group, have similar self-perception as the sex workers.

Participants' experience of social exclusionary practices was very pervasive, and many of their stories reflected that spatial identity of the place called the spa makes them feel 'out of place' (Cresswell, 1996) in public and private realms outside of spas. Shenuki utters her experience as follows:

> Nobody knows that I work in a spa other than my husband. They (other people) think we engage in 'prostitution' when we say that we are working in a spa. That is the view prevailing all over Sri Lanka. Once [we] mention the name *spa*, it is thought of as a place of prostitution. We cannot reveal to anybody that we are working here [spa]. We don't tell anyone unless we talk to a highly trustworthy person. We lie to everyone. Otherwise, if we speak the truth, we are despised and denigrated. Only we know our problems. Nobody will come to provide solutions to our problems or to help us.

Shenuki's tone in making this comment reflected extreme anxiety regarding the 'Othering' process, which marginalises spa workers. Shenuki comes from a highly rural location of the country called Embilipitiya in the Rathnapura district. She has a two-and-a-half-year-old child and a husband who does not have a decent income, so Shenuki bears the economic burden of her family. She says her husband is desperate to let her do this job, and though spa work is considered a shameful profession, they had to choose this occupation as a means of survival. Shenuki's story also reflects the constitution of spas as an economic space which facilitates poor families to earn their livelihood.

Young and unmarried masseuses emphasised that their parents, who lack interactions with the urban city, are unaware of what a spa means in the metropolitan city and the spatial practices ongoing in spas. Surani talked about village people's lack of knowledge about the spatial practices of spas:

> Only my mother knows that I am working in a spa. But she is not aware of precisely what happens inside. If something goes wrong, there should be someone who knows where I work. She doesn't know what a spa really means. It's the village, you know.

Even Surani was unaware of what she had to do as work when she joined a spa after working three years in a garment factory. She is confident that her mother is far from actually sensing the meaning associated with spas in urban geographies.

Aliya, who accepted a masseuse job at seventeen years of age, believes that if her parents were to discover that she is working in a spa, they would expel her from the house.

> If a client recognises us at the spa, he will tell that to [people at] home. If they find out that [I am working in a spa], they will not accept me in our house again. Though they know that it is a spa, they are unaware that I am doing a handshake. If they get to know, they won't like it. Nobody has recognised me at the spa so far. But we always live in fear.

Aliya's hometown is a remote village in the Galle district. According to her, her family members are also unaware of the opaque spatial practices that produce places called spas in urban geographies. She is afraid of becoming exposed and identified by a known person. Though she is not engaged in sex work per se, her bodily interaction with a man in the provision of corporeal sexual pleasure through a handshake given to the client is something that is imbued with shame and degradation in the minds of villagers. As I argued in Chapter 6, since many women are characterised by *lajja-baya*—fear of engaging in socially disapproved or

ridiculed behaviours—bodily engagement with male clientele to bring to fruition an erotic fantasy is considered an act of losing *lajja-baya*. Such engagement with men makes these women lose their sense of respectability in society (Hewamanne, 2008b; Jayawardena, 2015; Lynch, 2004). Revealing such interactions, which are accepted as being morally deviant, could have devastating consequences for the interactions of these women in private realms.

Aliya's fear of disclosure due to her fear of the reactions (Quinn & Earnshaw, 2013) of her family towards her work identity connects me with a story narrated by Achini, who lives in a Colombo suburb. This related to an incident that happened to one of her co-workers, a woman she had brought into our interview, to signify the seriousness of the identity disclosure reaction of 'village people' in rural areas of the country. I set down her narration below, as it was told to me:

> […] when such a piece of news [the fact that a girl in a village is working in an urban spa] reaches a village, it works to the point of someone being strangled to death. There were incidents when girls who got into trouble took such news to their living areas. A father of a friend of mine drank poison and died. This girl worked with me. Her boyfriend knew that she worked there. They started their relationship by getting to know each other there [spa]. They were planning to marry after getting their parents' permission. However, later the relationship broke up. Somehow, that boy got angry and went to her home. She was from a distant village, Thanamalvila[51]. Somehow, he went there and told her father that "she works in a place like this. Do you know what she is doing in Colombo?" It is hard for people in a village to bear it when something like that is told to them. At that time, my friend had built a house for herself in preparation for marriage, had even made gold jewellery for herself, and was in an [economically] stable

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[51] Thanamalvila is a rural village, 243 km geographically distant from Colombo, having very poor socio-economic conditions compared to urbanised locations in the country.

position. Her father also knew that she earned well. Her father could not bear the news and committed suicide. All of us went to the funeral.

This narration reveals many facets of the lives of economically impoverished young women in rural/remote localities of the country. Thanamalvila is an impoverished remote area that lies on the worst end of uneven economic development. The main livelihood of the inhabitants of this area is farming and other forms of cultivation, and their lives are associated with many socio-economic hardships. The protagonist in Achini's story must have migrated to the city with the expectation of leading her family to a financially stable position and making a decent marriage after achieving such stability. These were the aspirations of many young women whom I interviewed. However, her dreams were shattered by this unexpected incident when her job was divulged to her parents by her ex-boyfriend. This story exemplifies the tolerance rate of people in rural areas to their daughters' (or family members') spatial affiliation with spas, and the disastrous consequences of disclosing the work identity of a masseuse. Compared to highly urban locations such as Colombo, villages like Thanamalvila are considered the loci of national culture and tradition. People in villages are hypersensitive to women's moral (that is, sexual) degradation and view women's (sexual) purity as the prime locus of family respectability (Attanapola, 2006; Lynch, 2004). As Achini states above, if people in the village hear a narrative of a woman belonging to their family losing her virginity (indulging in sex outside of marriage), there is a fair possibility that such an incident will have devastating outcomes.

7.3 BOUNDARY SETTING AND PERFORMING IDENTITIES

Against this background, concealing the work identity of masseuses is a critical concern in the lives of most masseuses. In an attempt to set boundaries between

multiple realms—occupational, private, and public—masseuses are compelled to perform multiple identities and produce a social space which gives them a 'sense of belonging' or a 'sense of being in place'. Nishini indicated this as performing dual characters:

> I never give my [private] number to customers. I bought a Rs. 2000 worth small phone and provide that number to anybody who asks. If I mix up my personal life and my job, my whole life will become a pickle [*accharuwak*][52]. I don't want to do that. Otherwise, we will not be able to do both. In my job and my personal life, I have two characters.

The dual characters played by Nishini are the role of masseuse performed within the spa, and outside of the spa in social interactions, Nishini performs multiple roles like that of mother, wife, daughter and a community member. According to Hernes et al. (2006), people's social behaviour in a particular society is bounded by the norms of conduct which define social relations. Whether we carry such behaviour outside the boundaries of that space depends on our willingness to identify with one or another social group. Within the spatiality of spas, while masseuses are bound to perform an identity desirable to clients as it necessitates ensuring their economic survival, outside the boundaries of spas, they are not in a position to assume their work identities. Undoing the masseuse identity, which conflates with the sex worker identity and (re)doing the socially recognised, ideologically driven role of the 'decent woman', is a pivotal part of the everyday life of masseuses. In the following section, I discuss the different ways and means of doing and undoing the masseuse identity to ensure the best fit/belongingness to the relational group in the multiple social spaces that these women occupy.

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[52] A food that is prepared by mixing diced vegetables or fruits. This term is heavily used to signify a situation where people mix up a few things and face a messy condition.

7.3.1 Being 'In Place' at a Spa; Performing the Occupational Identity

Pseudonyms as a Masque

Masseuses in spas use a pseudonym provided by the spa owners/managers or set by themselves. Participants highlighted several reasons for using pseudonyms to identify themselves within the space known as the spa. Sanuli describes below the spatial practice of naming that goes on in spas as follows:

> We don't use our real names when we go to a spa. As I told you once, some people do this [the business of spas] on a mass scale. They have thirty or twenty-five spas. Some do it exactly in the right way. They decide on a name and tell us. If so, we use that name. If not, we name ourselves. We create a short name for ourselves and use that name when dealing with our customers. We use small, small [short] names like Sandu, Nathu, Rithu, and Sithu.

From the masseuses' point of view, fictitious names help them conceal their identity from their clients. As many respondents stated, if someone from their village visits the spa, they will be unable to face the village folks when they return to the village. So, they believe that this false persona helps them unmark their actual presence as masseuses within spas.

> Then, I think the customers can't gauge our age or maybe even of an older woman. [Age can sometimes be] determined from the name. Also, they can recognise us and remember us easily through a nickname. Let's say that the name is Siriyalatha in the village. However, after coming here [to a spa], a different name, a *posh* name like Sandu or Nethu, is used. That's why such a name is given.

Beyond concealing their personal identities, masseuses use *posh* names which are short in length, to hide their naivety and rurality and to present a veneer of sophistication. Thus, it helps them camouflage their rural identity and replace it with

an urban identity. Siriyalatha[53] was a well-known female name in the locale in the pre-modern era. Nowadays, Siriyalatha has old-fashioned/rural connotations and does not reflect the modernity and urbanity that these women want to, indeed have to, project within the spaces of spas. So, the use of the name Siriyalatha suggests to me that Sanuli has used it to emphasise the rural identity denoted through it. Consequently, these women believe that using a 'posh' and 'short' name will erase the rural identity created by the name given by their parents in the villages. On the other hand, such name changes also help these women to hide their age and look younger, which increases their 'demand' in spas.

This name-based identity management practice in spas facilitates spa owners to establish their businesses on a mass scale (in the 'right way' as Sanuli believes) while, at the same time, allowing them to easily control and swap women who are used as (sexual) labourers in their organisations. As I argued earlier, this spatial practice reflects the fungibility of masseuses' labour in the spa business, which has an excessive supply of labourers.

Body Surface Adornment and Space Making

According to Lefebvre, "the relationship to space of a 'subject' who is a member of a group or society implies his relationship to his own body and vice versa" (1991, p. 40). Therefore, social practice determines how the body should be used in a particular relational setting. Foucauldian theorisation denotes the 'body as a surface' that could be inscribed on to make it fit with the social setting that it occupies (Foucault, 1995). Extending this idea, McDowell argues that bodies are "surfaces that may be differentially affected by social practices and …that they may

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[53] A novel called Siriyalatha was written by W.A. Silva in 1907, and based on the book, a Sinhala movie was also produced in 1957.

be transformed and differentially presented to particular audiences" (McDowell, 1999, p. 47). Inscribing the body surface with elements which symbolise female sexuality is apparently the prime desire of masseuses, as such representations will ensure the gaze of the heterosexual male client. Twenty-six-year-old Nishini wanted to make me understand how the 'femininity inscribed' body matters to their 'place' within the spa.

> We can only continue this job if we continue to have this [bodily] appearance. Just think, generally, if there is no flour in a place where cakes are made, the cakes cannot be made. Just like that, if we lose our beauty, it is impossible to survive in this job [in this place].

Nishini compares her body with the ingredients used to produce a cake and thereby relates her work within a spa to a production process in a manufactory. Spas are reproduced as a space for commodifying the female body, and masseuses are conscious that their "body is integral to the product on offer" (Sanders, 2005, p. 320) at the spa. Nishini's comment reiterates the fact that being subject to this ongoing objectification process in the production of spas is very often passively accepted by the masseuses.

Nishadi, who is very young, aged twenty-four, expressed her pleasure in possessing the appropriate age, body shape and feminine beauty, which allows her to attract male clients.

> Beauty is a must in order to work in this field. [Customers] like slim, little girls. They do not like fat, older women.

Assuming the heterosexual male spectator's position (Tseelon, 1995), where the male spectators are clients who hold the power of determining masseuses' survival in the spa space, Nishadi explains the value given to the culturally inscribed body surface, which symbolises the 'standards of beauty'. A desirable body shape

and a desirable age (McDowell, 1999) are emphasised as determining factors of success in the spatiality of spas.

> A lot of *lamai* [girls] I work with are beautiful. Almost everyone. Only beautiful [women] are put there, not older [women] or fat [women]. Only slim little girls are put on. Then a lot of work, flows [into the spa]. About sixty or seventy customers visit [the spa] in a day anyway. Our boss has about twenty spas. All of the beautiful girls are there [in those spas]. If a fat [woman] is put on, it will break all work [customers], and because of that, fat women are not put up [for selection].

This highlights how masseuses enact the embodied spatial practice called 'selection' in spas. Thus, feminine beauty materialises through body shape, size, and colour, allowing the masseuses to position themselves in a 'place' within the spa. Their ability to position themselves in this space persists until they possess the "idealized female body (…young, slim and white)" (McDowell, 1999, p. 48). The endowment of such body attributes bestows young women with power over aged women or women with undesirable body attributes. Dark, aged women face difficulties in competing with fair, young women in the selection process. Priyani was fifty years old and expressed her fears about losing her 'desirable body attributes' and the mental stress she underwent as follows:

> I really try to keep my body beautiful. I am always trying to be attractive for at least another day. Only then I can do this job. There are different types of medicines that we take. There are tablets that keep us young. One of such pack costs around five thousand rupees. While I am working, I have to take those tablets. Also, we apply a quality [fairness] cream.

Priyani's view reflects her competition with time, which will eventually make her seem 'out of place' in the spa. So far, she was quite contented in that so far, she looks young to the Other's gaze, although she is fifty years old. However, she has to spend a considerable amount of her income on beauty care products in order to

maintain her youthful appearance and beauty. Her tone during the interviews also reflected her innate concerns regarding her uncertain future, which depends heavily on her possessing the type of feminine beauty that is most desired by her male clientele.

These narrations indicate that the body that reflects "feminine beauty and desirability" (Young, 2011, p. 123) is at the centre stage of the masseuses' service exchange process within the cultural space of the spa. In this process, the masseuses simultaneously understand the body as "a tool, agent and object" (Csordas, 1994, p. 5), which ensures their emplacement within the spa. The spatial practices within the spa presuppose a desirable body shape, age and beauty; in other words, women are "commodified" within spas. As McDowell (1999) argues, the diversities in shape, size, and other factors of the body act as the bases or criteria whereby one is socially discriminated against and disadvantaged. Such bodily differences can create two groups in a particular social setting. These two groups are the dominant group and the inferior group. In the social setting of the spa, bodily distinctions create a power asymmetry which grants more power to women who possess natural beauty or are successful in inscribing beauty on their bodily surfaces. These desirable physical attributes empower beautiful women, and give them an edge over women (who become the 'Other') with undesirable bodies Thus, a power gap or a power divide is created in spas, between women with bodies that are desirable to men and other women who do not possess such attributes. van Blerk (2011a) has also found that young women working in bars which provide sexual entertainment services ultimately become objects of bar clients' desires. In such places, women become objects of their male clients' desires, and these clients exercise power over women coming from impoverished socio-economic backgrounds.

The spatial designs of spas, which are instituted and enabled through design decisions, are also influenced by spa owners' intention to highlight the 'femininity inscribed body'. The designs of spas are conceived and executed to represent the masseuses' bodies as desired by their clients. Sanuli explained how the design and arrangement of the spa, especially the place in which the selection happens, deceptively transforms female bodies that are undesirable into those desirable to the eyes of the clients.

> Now, when we are put into the selection [floor], the lights are dimmed at the place of selection. Some lights make us look white. Then [we] look beautiful. There are some black [dark], fat, ugly women. But they look gorgeous too [with the lights on].

Such spatial design helps women represent themselves as 'desirable objects' and reduce the marginalisation of women who are 'dark-skinned, fat and ugly', as Sanuli believes. In the meantime, promotional advertisements of spas emphasise the presence of "cute, young, female therapists/girls" in spas when compared to advertising other services provided in these places.

The spatial designing aspect highlighted by Sanuli also facilitates equalising the power asymmetries among workers. Beyond that, it seems that women bestowed with feminine beauty who possess the power to seduce clients, treat their co-workers with empathy. In some instances, since they possess such seductive power, young masseuses tend to compete with fellow workers and create conflicts. However, most masseuses claim that they help each other earn a reasonable income for everyone. These women are compassionate and empathetic to one another because they understand that they all come from similar socio-economic backgrounds and have to struggle against similar life circumstances. When some women are not demanded on the *selection floor*, other women who are much in demand tend to be away from the

selection process until others obtain an opportunity to capture a client. As Hirushi once told me, popular masseuses in high demand sometimes request clients to select other women who had not been selected by the clients for the whole day.

Masseuses had various interpretations regarding how their bodies should be represented inside the spa. Those interpretations seem to be interconnected with the multiple identities that they wish to perform within the spa. In the identity management process within the spa, most women believed that presenting their bodies to reflect a 'sex worker identity' (van Blerk, 2011a) is crucial to attracting their male clients. In this instance, these women's body adornment via clothing and make-up helps to position themselves as 'desirable objects' in the eyes of their clients. Aliya explained the standard practices/rules of presenting their bodies to clients, facilitating the desirability of their bodies' spatial presence within spas.

> Risini: How do you present yourself to attract customers?
> Aliya: [I] wear short [outfits]. Most of the time, I wear *skinnies* and shorts.
> [When I wear a dress, I] usually, wear short dresses. Make-up is a must. That
> is our rule.
> Risini: Are there any such rules?
> Aliya: Yes. *Miss*[54] has told us to apply make-up and present ourselves in a
> way that can attract customers. If we do not present ourselves as beautiful,
> we will not be able to get work.

The female body is used here as a surface for decoration (McDowell, 1999) and there are explicitly defined rules on the presentation of the body within the spa. Applying make-up and wearing short or skimpy dresses operate as verbally enacted policies in the production of the place. Performing a 'sex work identity' (van Blerk, 2011a) via these means helps to sustain the client base of a particular spa. Tisha has

[54] The spa in which Aliya works is managed by a woman, and usually, the terms *miss* or *madam* is used to identify female managers in the local context.

also admitted that short/open and bright coloured attire, high heels, relaxed, loose hair, and heavy makeup act as the implicit but enforced rules related to decorating body surfaces. This shows that intermediaries who engage in spa business capitalise on women's sexualised bodies to grab better earnings and attempt to reproduce these women's bodies as 'desirable objects' that attract male clientele. Some spas even prescribe uniforms designed especially for these women to wear.

According to Devini, the skimpy dress is the common practice of representing a sexualised body, which the management of spas also demands. However, it could be observed that there are identity performances that go beyond a heavy orientation towards a sex worker identity. Devini explains how she resists the dominant practice in spas and attempts to maintain her rural identity, something which 'decent/respectable clients demand'.

> The way I stay there is how I usually stayed in the village. I wear denims or tights. There are instances where customers do not take us because we are dressed, in clothing that covers the body. Then the managers tell us, "You don't get customers when you dress like that. You must wear shorts and show your body to attract customers." Sometimes *godak wadagath* [highly decent] people come there. Such people take us. Some people are not heavily oriented to that [sexual] side. Those people also take us. Various types of people come to the spa, and there are multiple types of women. Even the way we dress is unique in this field. Most of the time, [women] wear short dresses. But this is how I dress. I don't know whether you will believe me or not. But that's how I dress.

Devini has described herself as a masseuse who does not engage in sex work at a spa. She relates covered dress and skimpy dresses with decent clients and sexual pleasure-seeking clients, respectively. Also, she demonstrates that the closed dress symbolises the 'village identity', and rather than considering it as a marginalised identity, as suggested in the study of (van Blerk, 2011a), Devini posits it as an

identity admired by the 'decent' clients. In the socio-cultural context of Sri Lanka, behaving with *lajja-baya* is a significant criterion used to judge the respectability of a girl's character (Hewamanne, 2008b; Jayawardena, 2015; Lynch, 2004). Such cultural norms in a society driven by patriarchal ideology indicate influential views in the lived social relations within the place of spa, although such spatiality is widely recognised as culturally and morally ambiguous.

This idea is next connected to the representations of the spa by Hirushi:

> Hirushi: Our spa is designed in a *genuine* manner. Anyone will feel like visiting us when they see [the spa]. When they see the situation of the *lamai* [girls], the way they are dressed, the way they talk, they never return. Even when a newcomer arrives, we talk in a friendly manner with them. We speak to them in a way that attracts a newcomer. We never encourage them to return.
>
> Risini: What do you mean by the situation of girls?
>
> Hirushi: That means they are dressed decently. They wear pants, long denims, they wear shoes and white coloured shirts. Like that, we wear nicely. We open [our spa dresses] when it's needed. When we come out [of the room] again, we dress nicely like before. When the customer arrives, they get bored and try to leave if we stay all open. When it's closed well, it can only be seen when they come inside.

So, not only Devini above, but Hirushi, being a sex service provider within a spa, explains how respectable dress matters in capturing the gaze of the 'respectable customers' or the 'genuine customers,' as she identifies them. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the genuine customer is the main target of the spa that she is working in. The spatial performances of masseuses and the designing of the spa are both done to attract this customer base. Hirushi also demarcates the place she works in as a genuine place which attracts genuine customers, who belong to affluent social classes. As explained in Chapter 5, these are the clients who treat masseuses with dignity and respect, compared to others who belong to lower socio-economic classes.

Chandi, a sex worker in a spa, revealed that there is a high demand for women dressed in long dresses, who have a "respectable look," since there are diverse customer preferences. This shows that women in spas are also influenced by the disciplinary acts and laws instilled in them and instituted by society, as these women believe that the men who seek corporeal and sexual pleasure from them also prefer 'decent women,' a notion constructed entirely by patriarchal ideology. Culture in the locale intervenes (Lefebvre, 1991) in the very production of the socially disreputable space called the spa and influences the constitution of the body of the inhabitants of that space.

7.3.2 Fear of Being 'Out of Place'; Undoing the Masseuse Identity
Performing in the Public/Private Sphere

Respondent masseuses were keen to describe how they produce social spaces relationally by strategically using appearance, dress, and bodily adornment. Thereby, they engage in constructing multiple identities in different social settings, even beyond the boundaries of spas. In this section, I go back to the dual character Nishini referred to in her narration. This dual behaviour, I would even call it performing multiple characters, is reflected in many of the masseuses' narrations of their lived experiences outside of spas. Nishini explains the importance of demarcating the boundaries between work and life:

> Even though I do this job, nobody can say that I am doing this job when I go out. It's not good to confuse [*patalawagannawa*] my job with my personal life.

Nishini believes that masseuses are being stigmatised in society due to their inability to distinguish between life inside spas and life outside of spas. The following has been expressed, in Nishini's own words:

Some girls go out in the same way that they dress for this job. Some girls wear short gowns, skinnies and shorts. They are not bothered because they are used to it. All the wrong things happen when we confuse [*patalawagannawa*] our life and our job. People look in the wrong way. I wear *gowns* most of the time at work; if not, a t-shirt with shorts. Yet, I don't wear those gowns or t-shirts outside the spa. A person can't say that I work there when I go out like that [dressed decently]. We should be respectable [*wadhagathakama*] when we dress. Usually, when people see a girl, they say she's working in a place like this. So, we need to understand that. Because of stupidity, some [girls] think that they look beautiful when they wear things like that [skimpy dresses]. Inside, certain feelings are aroused; men look at these girls with lust, in the wrong way, with strange and uncontrollable feelings; though we wear clothes like that inside the spa, we are not required to step out and show everything to everybody. If we do this, that is our fault. If we confuse [*patalawagannawa*] our job and our [private] life by showing off our bodies to all and sundry, then we will be excluded from society, and that will be our fault. It is not a problem with the society we live in.

This reconfirms the significance of dress in distinguishing the inside/outside boundaries in the everyday lives of women who perform as masseuses. Spa clients take advantage of sexuality as a mere act performed (Sanders, 2005) within the spas by masseuses, perhaps to keep clients attracted in order to revisit or to mark their significance within the spa. Nevertheless, Nishini's comment suggests that masseuses' lives outside spas are also a performance that capitalises on their sexuality defined by the cultural precepts of society.

Tseelon (1995) argues that being a display for the Other's eye is a climacteric factor influencing women's body representation via clothing. The clothing of the category of masseuses represented by Nishini's claim is constrained by the "fear of display" (Tseelon, 1995, p. 29) outside the spas—in public spaces. Aliya mentioned in her interview that though she has a "desire to display" (Tseelon, 1995, p. 29), she is reluctant to do so because of society's surveillance.

Inside we wear very short dresses which reveal our bodies. But when we go out, we continue to cover our bodies and dress in the normal way. In fact, at first, I did not like to dress like that soon after I came from the village. However, I got a lot of work [at the spa]. Maybe it is because I look younger. Then, *Miss* there [in the spa] told me, "If you wear short dresses, you will be able to earn more." That *Miss* is the one who bought me such clothes. And then I dressed like that. After a few days, I thought I looked pretty when I wore clothes like that. I like to wear short dresses, even outdoors. But I'm scared. I am afraid that when I am outside [they] will get to know I am working here [at the spa]. Therefore, I do not wear short dresses outside as I am scared [they] will say wrong things about me, will talk about me.

Displaying themselves and defying social rules can identify masseuses as being the deviant Other of the 'ideal woman' constructed through hegemonic practices. Masseuses as 'women' in this specific cultural setting are conscious of the cultural boundaries and hegemonic social rules operating within their society. Imbued with such consciousness, these masseuses identify dress and appearance as the prime means of concealing their work identity—an identity which is heavily disparaged in society. The term *wadhagathkama,* which means respectability/decency, was uttered by many of the research participants and runs like a bright thread through the social texts of this thesis. The masseuses used this term constantly in their utterances with respect to their dress and appearance. Chandi explained her concern regarding 'respectability' reflected through dress.

Whatever dress I wear inside, I never go out in the same dress. We go out in a respectable manner [*wadhagath widiyata*]. Inside the spa, it's normal to be seen by customers. But many people look at us strangely [*amuthu widyata*] when we've dressed like that on the street. We don't like to be seen as odd. Usually, society measures [people] by their dress. So, we don't walk on the streets that way [with the dress inside]. Usually, we wear a dress in a respectable manner, in such a way that people cannot say a word [against us].

All of these women assert that the sex-work identity—reflected in the skimpy dress and heavy makeup—is performed as a strategy to attract the male client. Here, femininity, signified by clothing and makeup, has been used as an economic tool to help these women earn money. That is the standard representation of the body accepted in the spa. However, female sexuality is a double-edged sword: what is only natural inside the spa has become an abnormality, indeed, a monstrosity, outside the spa. Therefore, most masseuses do not carry the identity represented in the spa when they cross the borders of spas. Moreover, these masseuses believe that most of the time, clients assure them of confidentiality, as these clients' spa visits are also a covert practice. If such visits are revealed, it can spoil the client's representation of himself as a respectable individual, especially if the client is very affluent and influential.

As Chandi and Nishini explain above, masseuses' desired representation of the body outside the spas is influenced by the dominant cultural ideology which governs female sexuality. Therefore, the representation of masseuses' bodies is focused on distinguishing themselves from the identity of the 'prostitute'. As Tseelon (1995) claims, female modesty is primarily linked to dress and body. The masseuses' knowledge of being subjected to such disciplinary controls (Foucault, 1995) is reflected through Chandi's statement, "*society measures* [judges people] *by their dress*." Any attempt at women's non-conformity with female modesty puts these females at the risk of being identified as 'prostitutes' and deemed impertinent (Tseelon, 1995). Masseuses widely believe that their spatial affiliation has designated them with a 'prostitute identity' in society; via clothing, then, they make all efforts to erase such an identity and perform the role of the modest woman. As Stone (1990) argued, appearance denoted through clothing matters to people's identification in

society. Masseuses engage in identity work by way of deploying appearance—the appearance of a respectable woman—created through clothing and accessories. Most of these masseuses believe that such an appearance would help convince people that they conform to culturally-defined normative female behaviour.

Masseuses have also pointed out geographical variations in the cultural definitions of women. Chamani comes from a village in the Anuradhapura district[55] and explains how she modifies her appearance based on the cultural precepts of her village.

> Chamani: If we go to a village, with makeup and all, it will create problems. People in the villages are strange [*amuthui*]. They will wonder what this woman is doing in Colombo. That's why I don't wear make-up in the village; I change my look completely when I go home. We wear *shorts* when we go out here [in Colombo]. In villages, it is not possible to do so.
> Risini: What do you mean by people in the villages are strange?
> Chamani: People in the villages think strangely [*amuthu widiyata*]. It's weird for those people to see us wearing short dresses. People insinuate different things if we go there wearing short skirts and make-up. The people in our areas think very traditionally.

Chamani has claimed that she works as a sex service provider in a spa. She is also conscious of the disciplinary control exercised through surveillance (Foucault, 1995). She believes that it is essential to comply with such "disciplinary power and regimes of corporeal production" (McDowell, 1999, p. 51). Reflecting the diversity associated with relationally constructed space (Massey, 2005), Chamani cautiously demarcates the cultural boundaries of the two geographical locations that she occupies. Representing female respectability through body surfaces is understood as

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[55] The central town of Anuradhapura is 200 km distant from Colombo and is nearly a 7-hour journey by public transport.

critical in village localities rather than in the urban city. In both settings, her desire to or fear of displaying her body is managed by the Other's gaze This Other's gaze determines her relational existence as it commonly pertains to all women in society. The above argument demonstrates how a society's culture and moral concerns intrude on the bodily lived experience (Lefebvre, 1991) of masseuses.

Safeguarding Intimate Relations

Masseuses' behaviour in the public realm is primarily influenced by the fear of divulging their work identity to their families, relations, or village folks. While their need to choose an occupation is instigated by the desire to obtain decent living conditions for their own families, they believe that revealing the means of doing such could bring their intimate relations to an end, as I have presented earlier in the chapter.

Unmarried young women like Shashi, Aliya, or Sanuli have never told their parents and relations in the village about their work affiliations with spas. Primarily, they represent themselves to other villagers as workers in salons and garment factories. Knowing that they might be expelled from their families for transgressing the cultural expectations of the village, they are willing to take such risks to gain financial stability and a prosperous and respectable married life. Married young women like Shenuki, Tisha, and Nishadi have assumed the role of the bearer of their family's economic burdens, concealing their touch-based bodily interactions with other males from their husbands. Their stories reveal that divulging such interactions could put their family lives at risk. Single mothers like Devini, Hirushi, and Dilrukshi are looking after their children, and live in fear of being exposed if their work affiliation with spas is revealed to their family members. Hirushi, a mother of

three teenage children, explained how careful she is when developing social interactions outside spas:

> I am cautious because of my children, my mother, and father. It's almost seven years, and nobody at home knows that I am doing this job. I have never been exposed because I do not even associate with my neighbours. I have been on rent for four years in this area, and I have never interacted with anyone. As I know the job I am engaged in, I can't keep interactions with them because they will ask where I work and so on and so forth. I don't allow myself to face that situation. I don't even attend funerals or weddings or anything. I have told my family, "Don't go out for anything. If something is needed, I will bring it, and no one should go out."

The freedom to associate with society is not only constrained for masseuses but for their family members as well. By avoiding even necessary interactions with social actors, they live a surreptitious life in their villages and neighbourhoods. As Hirushi's comments reflect, they voluntarily alienate themselves from other human beings to avoid brutal experiences of social exclusion and marginalisation.

Masseuses face internal struggles as they sense their work involvement conflict with the internalised cultural expectations that are put on women in a patriarchal society. This was reflected in Aliya's comment:

> I don't think what I am doing is wrong. Maybe, as a woman, it is wrong. Of course, it is wrong. But I have no alternative other than doing this to make my living. I do this job because I need money. My family was in a lot of financial difficulties. That is why I had to apply for this job when I was 18 years old.

Aliya is attempting to position herself within the dichotomy of right and wrong as those views have been defined in a Sri Lankan social setting. First, she claims that the work she performs is "not wrong", which suggests that she desires to emphasise her non-involvement in sexual interactions with her clients. Here again, it is quite evident that she believes that 'being a woman' and 'being a masseuse' are conflicting

existences in society. The statement "*As a woman, it is wrong*" reflects her 'sense of guilt' for not adhering to the deeply-rooted normative cultural behaviour expected from women in Sri Lankan society.

The words of married women like Hirushi during the interviews always reflected a sense of low self-esteem and guilt, of being a socially deviant character (since they perceive me to be part of that wider society) and therefore, she requested me not to misunderstand their choice of occupation made purely for economic/life survival, and primarily enforced by their socio-economic vulnerability. The comment made by Hirushi (and set down below) is regarding her future aspirations about herself and her family. This epitomises the struggle of masseuses with their inner selves and the social world.

> After saving some money, I wish to open my own salon. Then I can erase the traces of my previous life. If I can build a shelter and leave a place to live for my kids when I die, that's all I expect. I want to do this without being exposed to others' words [insult from others].

7.4 MASSEUSES' VOICE TOWARD IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION

To conclude my analysis, I bring the political claims made by masseuses regarding their occupation. These claims indicate a strong desire and an eagerness to positively reconstruct their spoiled identity in society (Chowdhury, 2006; Goffman, 1990). I raised the question as to how they think their work within the organisational space called a spa, should be recognised in the Sri Lankan society's space. As I reflected on their responses, I realised that most of these masseuses have internalised the stigmatised social identity constructed by multiple social actors. Though they challenge and resist the social identity cast upon them as 'bad women/girls' such

voice is not manifested in the public sphere. However, as they express themselves to me, they resist such identification.

Achini emphasised how their jobs as masseuses help women overcome economic hardships and play a significant economic role in improving the standard of living of their families.

> How many families are living on this job? When we inquire about the problems these girls have to face, those problems are very much similar to ours. Some girls are homeless, and don't have any relatives, some have a lot of issues with their parents and in their houses.

Achini then moved on to challenging the deeply rooted cultural commandments which consider their job as a deplorable one.

> These girls, somehow, it's their own bodies. So, they can do whatever they want with their bodies. But people never think like that. They are unable to go to other jobs. Maybe they don't have [the necessary] educational qualifications. Even if they did have, they believe that the earnings made using their qualifications are not sufficient to solve their problems. A girl who earns thirty thousand rupees by going to a garment [factory] earns two to three lakhs from this job [at a spa]. In fact, they don't have any problems. They don't need to show their palms[56] to anybody [*katawath atha nopa innawa*]. What they do is done at their discretion.

Achini argues that women (in impoverished socio-economic conditions) should have a right to capitalise on their bodies in order to earn their living. This reminds me the slogan "We eat by giving our labour; we demand our rights as labourers" (Chowdhury, 2006, p. 337) used by Bangladeshi sex workers to circumvent stigma associated with sex work. Viewed through Chowdhury (2006) study, Achini is also

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[56] The slang *atha nopa innawa* is used to mean, not seeking handouts from anybody or begging. That means not depending on anybody financially.

making a "disassociational claim" (p. 350) by stating that masseuses need to avoid being dependent on society or becoming a burden to society. Her accusation goes to the heart of the structural conditions that exist in the country that I discussed in Chapter 6. And these historically developed conditions have pushed these poor, mostly rural women to choose a job that is socially unacceptable to many.

Shashi asserted that spa workers are being criticised by society because of society's lack of knowledge of the spatial practices of spas.

> I just think that the way society thinks about *spas* is just plain stupidity on the part of the people. They have no idea what is really going on. Anyone who knows is exactly aware that it is not something wrong. I don't see anything wrong with a spa. Maybe I think like that because I work there.

Shashi condemns society's rejection of spas and masseuses' work in spas. She identifies the outsiders who interpret the place called a spa without knowing the spatial practices that go on inside the spa, as being absurd. Like Shashi did, almost all of the participants who positioned themselves as masseuses, who performed at the minor end of the sexual service continuum, defied and disavowed the pejorative label attached to their occupation, arguing that the touch-based interaction that they have with clients should not push them into the category of 'bad girls'. They demarcated their 'touch-based' spatial practices as being separate from the 'real' sex workers' work practices, and claimed a sort of superiority or social recognition over 'real' sex workers.

Shenuki believes that their profession, and with it, their social status, should be elevated, and brought to a position where it ceases to be an offence to society.

> I think it is good to bring this [occupation] to a point by some means such as legalising, where the workers involved in sex work are not condemned by society. There are a lot of men and women who have developed themselves and become upwardly mobile by doing this job. They have earned enough

for themselves and have made their personal lives happy. Otherwise, we always have to live with fear or suspicion.

Presumably Shenuki seeks legal status for the sex-related services that occur in spas as these organisational entities already have a legal existence in the locale. She claims legal recognition for the task of providing bodily sexual pleasure inside spas, a recognition that could bring cultural acceptance to masseuses and their families. Living with fear means not only having to fear public humiliation, but also to face brutal treatment by the police. Masseuses' claims about interactions with police demonstrated this "oppression consciousness" (Chowdhury, 2006, p. 350). They assign a dualistic role to the police as an 'enemy' as well as a 'facilitator'. The amount and frequency of switching between these two roles by the police (enemy and facilitator) depends on the cultural and state pressure that comes into force at a specific temporality. As the masseuses express, police repression most often happens so that police can escape the clutches of social criticism, rather than as a genuine attempt to eradicate the social space called the spa. Shenuki continues her narration of resistance towards societal perceptions:

> We are not doing something wrong. The workers inside know that we are not doing anything wrong. But [people] who view us from outside do not think in that way. I think they should visit this place and society should change the way they think. We are not doing a bad thing. It is not like we are having fun by doing this. Those who are engaged in this work have a lot of problems. There are children, Leaving the little ones and coming to work is an awfully hard thing. If we suddenly get caught in a raid, the little ones are at home alone. [We are] working with a lot of such issues. People should consider our situation and should think of us in a better way, [We] need relief.

In a similar manner to Shashi, Shenuki also relates to society's interpretation of spas and the space of the spa, which is lived through its inhabitants and users.

Although it appears that they passively accept the way they are treated, their imaginations of the space of spa seek to change (Lefebvre, 1991) how spas are positioned in the mindset of society. The mere interpretations of social space by those who view it from the outside cannot easily capture or decipher the clandestine side of such spaces (Lefebvre, 1991). As the masseuses' life stories reflected, lived experiences of being a masseuse are associated with many negative social confrontations. Shenuki appeals for relief from the wider society, and she urges others carefully consider the appalling life circumstances of most masseuses in Sri Lanka.

Nishini perceives spas as institutional spaces that ensure the safety of the 'ordinary woman' in society. She believes that it is 'quite essential' to have a place in which the carnal desires of men are fulfilled, and that such a service ensures the wellbeing of the wider society.

> Nishini: As these [organisations] exist, the number of women raped in Sri Lanka is less. As they [men] have these [spas], they [men] can get rid of their stress. If there are no such places, a lot of problems will arise. When viewed in that way, there is nothing wrong [with spas]. If it's done in the wrong way, then it is wrong. If done right, it is not bad.
> Risini: What do you mean by doing a spa in the wrong way?
> Nishini: That is, usually a spa is done by massaging, giving a feeling and doing the handshake. However, under the tag of spa, there are places that sell sex. That is the wrong way.
> Risini: So, do you think societal views should change?
> Nishini: Yes, of course. The spas have been banned and closed for the past few days[57]. During that time there were lots of rapes and juvenile crimes[58].

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[57] During the initial period of the COVID-19 outbreak, the operations of spas were banned. Nishini is referring to that period.

[58] This is just a statement made by Nishini. I have no evidence to validate/invalidate an association between the availability of spas and rape and juvenile crimes.

Risini: Does that mean you think spas have an impact on rape and juvenile delinquency in Sri Lanka?

Nishini: Yes. Definitely, I think. Actually, there are people [men] who have such needs. That man would definitely like to do it without harming anyone…So the man is satisfied when he comes to a place like this, and he spends money and fulfils [his] need. Nobody wants to do such things by force [*balahathkaarayen*], and later, just go to jail and get a bad name [*naraka namayak gaganna*]. In that sense, the spa is a great strength to society as a vehicle that prevents such things. If there is really a situation where a girl can go down the street after nine at night in the Colombo area, that is the biggest reason [availability of spas]. If you put a girl on the street just after 11pm, no matter how she covers [her body] with a *saree*[59], people [men] will take her, they [men] have such mean thinking. Even to get it done by force. People [men] could fall into such levels. If people are relieved from the mental stress that is a result of frustrated sexuality, then they will not fall into that level. …In that sense, it [having spas] is a great strength [*loku haiyak*].

The confident tone in Nishini's voice when expressing these views still echoes in my mind and even appears in research notes. As I recall, she was the first respondent who presented this argument during the interviews. Later on, this was also introduced into the discussion by Sanuli, Aliya, Nishadi, and Priyani, with similar sorts of views as Nishini's above. It indicates they suggest that the sexual content of their work role as a service that benefits society, in the view that frustrated sexuality of heterosexual men could lead to violent behaviours which harm women and children. The spas fulfil an 'essential need' of men and thereby ensure social wellbeing, which could be disturbed by non-contentment of sexual urges of men. These findings are supported by other studies which have focused on sex work and

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[59] *Saree* is a garment of six meters in length, cotton or silk, draped around the body. This is a traditional dress worn by women in South Asian countries. In the cultural specificity of Sri Lanka, this is accepted as the most respectable and disciplined dress a woman can wear as it covers all over the body.

sex related work (e.g., Chowdhury, 2006; Mayes et al., 2015; Pini et al., 2013). According to Chowdhury (2006), sex workers in Bangladesh argue that the biological makeup of men incorporates some strong sexual desires, and sex work can be viewed positively as a social service which serves as a means of fulfilling such desires thus helping to keep Other women in society safe. This perspective of sex workers is termed as "essentialist contention" (Chowdhury, 2006, p. 352). Pini et al. (2013) explicate that residents in the Australian rural township of Kalgoorlie view brothels and 'skimpies' (barmaids who work topless) as a necessity to keep their town (and the women in it) safe from mining men. As they interpret residents' view, "men have an uncontrollable heterosexuality which needs to be given release otherwise sexual and other violence will ensue" (Pini et al., 2013). Similarly, spas are claimed to be protecting women in urban locations of the country from men's violent behaviours that may urge from non-fulfilment of strong sexual desires.

I assert that Chowdhury (2006)'s argument that the identity reconstruction claim made by masseuses assuming heterosexual men has essential sexual needs, allows society to continue "class-based oppression" (Jana, 2003 as cited by Chowdhury, 2006, p. 352). This exposes the socio-economically vulnerable women, who provide their (sexual) labour at spas, and are mired in further subjugation and oppression in society for the sake of Other women's respectability.

7.5   SUMMARY

Being a masseuse in the social milieu of Sri Lanka is heavily stigmatised, as her interactions inside the spas are conflated with sex work. This chapter reveals that, irrespective of the extent of masseuses' engagement in sexual service, in wider society they are collectively identified as sex workers. This chapter brought the narratives of the masseuses who deny identifying them by society collectively as sex

workers, simultaneously with the narrations of the women who assert themselves as sex workers in spas, regarding their lived experiences of shouldering an identity related to sex work, in and out of spas.

Performing the sex worker identity empowers women as successful masseuses in the spaces of spas. Yet, beyond the boundaries of spas, stigmatised sex worker identity, collectively formed around their occupation, influences masseuses' interactions in multiple realms of being and exposes them to humiliation, harassment, social exclusions, sexual exploitation, and many other devastating social conditions. Therefore, different strategies of pretence, deception, and fabrication have been used by these masseuses simultaneously to enact the work identity within spas and to conceal their work identity outside the spas. Masseuses' stories reveal that conscious bodily inscriptions and bodily performances are deployed by them to mark the boundaries between multiple realms of their lives. In such efforts, it is observable that the masseuses capitalise on the socially constructed meanings of femininity, and portray desirable feminine body surfaces and perform desirably feminine behaviours to fit in with the expectations of audiences in the multiple social spaces they occupy.

The social practices within a spa require masseuses to deploy their bodies simultaneously as a tool, agent, and object to make their 'place' within the spa; which, in turn, secures their earnings. They firmly believe that being a masseuse inside the spa requires them to perform a sex worker identity. The portrayal of feminine body inscriptions and performing sexuality desirable to the male gaze assures both their economic survival and that of their families. Some exceptional practices, such as portraying a 'respectable woman' and a 'village woman' identity, which inherently conflicts with a sexualised identity portrayal, could also be found in the spatiality of spas when delving into masseuses' responses. The findings reveal

that such representations of 'disciplined femininity' are preferred by the 'genuine/respectable' client who, it is claimed, belongs to the affluent class. Such findings, I must admit, have perplexed me and made me doubt whether these women are subject to disciplinary control exercised over women, even inside places that are run and manned by individuals who deviate from society's normal and normative moral precepts.

Masseuses are hyperconscious of the social gaze and disciplinary controls (Foucault, 1995) enforced on women's bodies in their everyday life, as they perform in the public sphere. Deviating behaviours could expose them to brutal social rejections and exclusionary processes. Therefore, they intentionally and deliberately present their bodies in a way that signifies 'respectable femininity', a concept prescribed for the 'ideal woman' by dominant cultural regimes. Perfect compliance helps them safeguard their innately valued intimate interactions in the private realm. On a final note, their voice reflects a claim for a 'place' in society, beyond being recognised merely as socially deviant and morally ambiguous characters. These masseuses claim quite firmly that they are performing a labour role in a capitalist society, and that they are ensuring society's well-being, albeit to a limited extent, by fulfilling the carnal desires of men.

Using the findings discussed throughout the previous three chapters, in the next and concluding chapter, I proceed to synthesise and conclude the journey of exploring the social production of the place called the spa, and the construction of the identity of the masseuse in the social, cultural, and economic milieu of Sri Lanka.

Chapter 8: Synthesis and Conclusion

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter, I gather together the stories and trajectories of the place called the spa, and the narratives of the lived and embodied experiences of masseuses within the economic, political, and socio-cultural specificity of Sri Lanka, and then discuss the overall conclusions from the research findings. I also review in this chapter the theoretical and empirical contributions of this thesis and elucidate in what ways the findings of the thesis enhance existing academic knowledge. Finally, I point out avenues for further research that will enhance the knowledge produced in this thesis.

This thesis is based on understanding space as a social product which is produced and reproduced through ongoing human and non-human interactions. This continuous social and material interplay involved in producing the spa was explicated throughout the thesis, focusing on how embedded material practices of producing spas interact with the broader economic, social, cultural, and political formations of the geographical context of Sri Lanka. In the concluding story that I weave textually into this chapter, I remark on how the spatial practices of spas inform the identity formation of spas and masseuses in the local geography. The conclusion explains that the process involved in producing the place called the spa, and the identity of the masseuse, is a co-constitutive process informed by class and gender relations which define the hegemonic social and cultural values in the specific geographical formation of Sri Lanka.

8.2   CONCLUDING THE STORY OF SPAS AND MASSEUSES

Producing spas and forming the identity of the masseuse as an ongoing co-constitutive process in the socio-cultural specificity of Sri Lanka

As explicated in the previous three chapters, delving into narratives of masseuses revealed how spas are produced and reproduced with distinctive local characteristics (Massey, 2005) as a peculiar form of space (Lefebvre, 1991) in the specificity of Sri Lanka. Though spas are often represented as legally-endorsed entities for providing spa-related services, such places' formation is most often linked to a wide range of sex-related services in the local geography. Oral and written social texts exhibit numerous locally-formed pejorative identities of spas, such as *reputable sex factories*, *joints* (places where one can meet prostitutes), and *badu pots* (whore houses). Such social discourse reflects a severe criticism of spas in the urban milieu since these spatial constructions appear to disturb specific Sri Lankan ideological regimes that value national culture, feminine respectability, Sinhala-Buddhist tradition, and rural purity.

As specified by the spatial narratives of masseuses, the place called the spa is produced and reproduced through the ongoing interactions between affluent, middle-class men (client base) and socio-economically deprived women hailing largely from remote-rural locations of the country (labour constituents). However, the making of the spa is not beyond the influence of multiple other social actors, such as owners/managers of spas, the police, regulatory authorities, NGOs, media, and the general public. Irrespective of the multiple interactions which constitute spas, women who perform the role of the masseuse are incessantly blamed for their engagement with the spatiality of the spa. Rather than identifying them as masseuses, wider society imputes them with disreputability and often associates them with numerous derogatory identities such as *badu* (commodities), *vesiyo* (whores), *ganikawo*

(prostitutes), and *keli* (pieces), denoting the commodification and objectified positioning of masseuses in the locale. These women's stories reveal that they are exposed to social marginalisation/exclusion due to being labelled as morally deviant subjects in society.

In a context where sex work is illegal and culturally taboo, the frontal aspects of spas usually depict Ayurvedic or wellness centre characteristics. Such representations are evident in the name boards of spas, their promotional advertisements, and (massage therapist) job vacancy advertisements. In fact, when the spatial practices of spas are expounded, there is a paradoxical association between these representations of spas and what masseuses experience as their daily reality within the spas (Lefebvre, 1991). As the masseuses live through the spaces of spas, they materially engage in a wide range of sex-related services, as such services are in high demand among local male clientele who seek the services of spas. Largely the male clientele of spas expects services beyond an authentic massage or Ayurvedic treatment, and this has caused the typical positioning of spas in the mindset of the 'local' client. Thus, when the spa is lived through by its inhabitants and users, it "overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). In a society where sex is becoming a commodity that is in very high demand, spas are relationally produced as places where intense commodification goes on in relation to sex (Brents & Hausbeck, 2007). In this context, the very survival of masseuses as the labour constituents of the spas is obviously reliant on the provision of sex-related services, and their bodies are placed within spas as commodities marked by a price. The material practice called *selection*, which showcases women and allows the client to choose based on their desired body features of women (body shape, skin complexion, and age), denotes the extent of

objectification ongoing in spas. The power relations among the social actors that produce this place together put masseuses in the weakest position, in relation to the capitalist ownership that supplies the physical space and the male clients who provide money in exchange for sexual services.

The trajectories and stories of spas in Sri Lankan society reveal them as a power-geometry shaped by unique cultural, economic and political formations (Massey, 2009). For instance, as the findings suggest, class and gender-based prohibitions and acceptances are active in determining access to spas in the locale. Evidently, men belonging to the upper and upper-middle classes, professionals, and politicians are welcomed in spas more than labouring class men. Acceptance or refusal of sexual relations is triggered by the wealth possessed by these men belonging to the affluent classes. The reliance of masseuses on the tip, which is a gratuity exchanged for the fulfilment of men's carnal desires, could be discerned as a significant factor which causes these power relations to interact dynamically in producing the place called the spa. Beyond that, the taboo nature of spas in society and their stigmatisation due to cultural influences actively contribute to such class-based access to spas. Hence, elite men who are recognised by masseuses as 'genuine or VIP clients' seek a place where they can fulfil their carnal desires while protecting their social reputation. Such conditions create a mutually beneficial relationality among masseuses and elite clients, as masseuses are always concerned about concealing their socially-disavowed spatial affiliation with spas.

As far as men of the labouring class are concerned, maintaining a reputation is of less concern, as was indicated through the oral narratives of masseuses. From the masseuses' standpoint, interacting with the labouring class men—who also belong to the same class as masseuses—at spas affects their relations beyond the boundaries of

spas, as they have to interact with them in their everyday life beyond such boundaries. Moreover, class-based identity construction is a minor concern of labouring class men like three-wheel drivers and men who use modest vehicles like bikes, as the masseuses' views indicate. So, they are less attentive to hiding their association with spas. The interactions with labouring class men cause them to experience stigmatisation and brutal exclusionary practices of society outside the spas, as such men readily humiliate masseuses by exposing their affiliation with spas and the performances within the spa.

Another aspect of multiplicity in the production of this social space is the manner in which gender is formed in the specific cultural context (Massey, 1994a) and how "geographical variation in gender relations" (p. 2) matters in such a process. The labour force of spas is constituted of young, rural women and single mothers, who are socially vulnerable and economically destitute. Nevertheless, contrary to this lived reality of the workers, visiting a spa for beauty therapy or massage treatment by a local woman is socially disavowed in the sense that spas are supposed to be 'scary places' for 'respectable women' who are bounded by the disciplinary notion of *lajja-baya* (shame-fear). Such ideology-driven restrictions influence 'middle-class women' more than women who belong to the elite social classes. Obviously then, spas are culturally prohibited places for middle-class women. Though a few spas are visible in urban locations that are represented as luxurious places that provide beauty therapy, foot massages, pedicures, and manicures, those places are confined to elite and urban women. This gendered and class-based spacing of spas highlights the local particularity of the place, and the influence of the cultural formation of society on producing those spaces.

The multiple social actors beyond the boundaries of spas are engaged in discursively constructing the place called spa in their everyday social interactions. Their talk suggests spas as places which replace other sites notoriously recognised for sex work. They argue that it has created an 'elite space' for sex work which is ascribed with a particular 'value'. In this discursive formation of the space (Edelman, 2011), they suggest that the conflation of the signifiers, 'spa' and 'prostitution', has created confusion among the two distinctive customers who seek either authentic spa treatment or sex treatment. This ambiguous nature of the two occupations put the lives of both categories of women—the masseuses and sex workers—at risk in numerous ways. As the findings reveal, within the spatiality of the spa, women are vulnerable to sexual abuse by clients and intermediaries, short-term detentions, coerced sexual bribes by the police, sex-labour exploitation by spa owners, and so forth. The most salient spatial practice of exploitation is the non-payment of any remuneration to the masseuses by the management for the labour role they perform within a spa, though they are employed (although not officially) by a legally endorsed organisational entity. This characteristic of spas demarcates this place from all other sorts of sex work-related entities such as brothels, as such entities have obviously an illegitimate existence. Though I do not endorse female labour exploitation in illegitimate entities, the particular practice in spas is peculiar as the ownership earn by utilising women's labour with legitimate authority. In the production of the spa, the masseuses' being suggests an "absent-presence" (Maddrell, 2013, p. 505), where their actual bodily presence in the place is contradictorily associated with their absence as individual subjects. Irrespective of their physical bodily performance in enacting the role of a masseuse, these women are not marked or recognised in any legitimate text. The use of pseudonyms at work

indicates that their presence could never be traced except in the records of the police and the courts. Such an 'absent-presence' intensifies the risk and burden of their parallel beings as masseuses and women in the specific cultural setting.

Regardless of the societal criticisms vested on the masseuses collectively as a socially and morally disparaged category of workers, the thesis suggests spas are an alluring workplace for young rural women and socially-alienated single mothers. The life stories of masseuses heard in this thesis emphasise the effect of class and gender relations in Sri Lankan society on the production of the spa as an attractive place of work for young, rural women and single mothers. First, as women's narratives suggest, spas are increasingly recognised as safe and rewarding places of work compared to many other 'feminised labour roles' available in the local context with the advent of economic neo-liberalisation. Particularly relative to the popular, low-paid 'sewing girl' (Seneviratne, 2018, 2019) job in global assembly lines—designated as the most 'socially recognised' job for young, rural women who are burdened by poverty—women tend to recognise 'the masseuse job at the spa' as a more economically rewarding, flexible, and relatively less physically demanding job. The thesis findings show a broadening effect of the mentally and physically exploitative and exhaustive labour roles which were restricted to poor, rural, young women in the global apparel manufacturing firms, a fact which has seldom been noticed by past studies (Hewamanne, 2008a, 2008b). Irrespective of the fact that women's (sexual) labour exploitation is an ongoing spatial practice in spas, women who experience appalling, low-paid shift work in assembly lines are relatively unconcerned about such practices in spas, and often seek jobs in spas as the work is economically rewarding and flexible. Women, who are disadvantaged since they occupy vulnerable socio-economic positions, have a tendency to make the radical

transition from assembly lines to spas, although it requires them to negotiate many patriarchal ideological notions which govern their gendered being in Sri Lankan society (Massey, 1994a). The economic power that the spas permit the masseuses to assume allows them to escape from the disadvantaged life predetermined by their socio-economic class. Assuming the 'tainted work identity' of the masseuse in the taboo space of the spa grants these workers' economic empowerment and helps them to fulfil the essential needs of their families.

In a context where spas are produced as another form of capitalist relation which causes the objectification and commodification of women on a mass scale, the findings of the study show that such a process is influenced by the historically-established class and gender relations within the Sri Lankan cultural specificity. Massey (1994a) argues that geography influences the formation of class and gender relations and that such relations become influential in the production and reproduction of geographies. Moreover, what it means to be a woman varies across different spatial-temporalities. The life narratives produced by masseuses reveal how their 'being' as women influenced the process through which they had become masseuses. As the findings conclude, 'feminine family respectability', a deeply rooted patriarchal ideological conception vested in women, especially in young rural women, often pushes them into destined trajectories. The trajectories of life that make them unable to position themselves as 'respectable women' in rural geographies force them into circumstances where they choose to place themselves as masseuses in the places called spas in urban geographies. Therefore, spas are not only produced through the everyday interactions of the constituents of those places; the 'spa' is a result of the masseuses' negotiations as gendered beings with multiple power-geometries in the locale (Massey, 2009).

Being a masseuse and negotiating work identity: Deploying the body as a place

The stories of masseuses' lived experiences within spas confirm that being a masseuse is not a consistent and homogeneous performance, and that there is a multiplicity in what masseuses 'do and act out' (Gregson & Rose, 2000) within spas. These women distinguish themselves based on the extent of bodily interactions with clients, and some masseuses make the spas a place of sex work in and through their relational practices of spacing (Best & Hindmarsh, 2019; Beyes & Steyaert, 2012). Meanwhile, another set of masseuses disavows their collective identification as sex workers by claiming that they only engage in hand touch-based interactions with the clients. Yet, they acknowledge the sexual content of their job, as massages lead towards corporeal sexual pleasure (Frembgen, 2008; Monk-Turner & Turner, 2017; Oerton & Phoenix, 2001; Wiryawan & Bunga, 2018). This category of masseuses strongly resist identification as 'prostitutes' and show resentment towards the use of objectified signifiers such as *spa kella* (spa girl), *baduwak* (commodity), *spa kaalla* (spa piece), *ganikawa* (prostitute), *vesi* (whore) and many more condemnatory and pejorative terms commonly used to identify them.

Irrespective of the diverse form of (sexual) interactions among masseuses and clients in spacing spas, masseuses have internalised the ongoing stigmatisation (Goffman, 1990; Quinn & Earnshaw, 2013) of their work identity in the cultural geography of Sri Lanka. The narratives of the masseuses demonstrate that the stigma associated with their work intersects with their 'inferior place' in gender and class hierarchies (Cresswell, 1996), producing their everyday life in society. As they anticipate discriminatory outcomes like social isolation, expulsion, and disparagement resulting from exposing their work identity outside the boundaries of spas, they tend to conceal their masseuse identity (Gregson & Rose, 2000) and

spatial affiliation with the spa when they move beyond its boundaries. Yet, inside the spas, these women are bound to perform an identity desired by the client, as such performance is the essential means of their economic survival. So, the daily routine of masseuses consists of doing and undoing the masseuse identity to ensure the best fit/belongingness to the relational group (Cresswell, 1996) in the multiple social spaces these women relate with.

The doing and undoing of the masseuse identity in multiple realms of life—occupational, private, and public—reinforces the understanding of the "body as a place" (McDowell, 1999, p. 34). To distinguish themselves from the other masseuses working in spas, as well as to be like other women outside the spa boundaries, masseuses deploy idiosyncratic body inscriptions and bodily performances (McDowell, 1999). Within the boundaries of the spa, they firmly believe that their "body is integral to the product on offer" (Sanders, 2005, p. 320). Interactions with clients inside spas require portraying the body with 'feminine inscriptions' and performing a 'seductive femininity' to keep their clientele captivated. The client enticement that masseuses perform and the economic rewards they receive are mutually reinforcing aspects of spas. Endowment with seductive feminine qualities, especially those admired in the local cultural specificity like a fair complexion, slim body, and a 'cute' and young look, allow some masseuses to be more successful compared to others and place them at the higher end of the power hierarchy among masseuses. This also suggests that these masseuses understand the body as "a tool, agent and object" (Csordas, 1994, p. 5), which ensures their emplacement within the spa. The body endowed with "feminine beauty and desirability" (Young, 2011, p. 123) and the body displaying seductive femininity are the central aspects which ensure masseuses are 'in place' within the cultural space of the spa.

Masseuses' performances in the public/private sphere are instigated primarily by the fear of being 'out of place' in relation to others. The fear of brutal disclosure reactions of the social actors with respect to their work identity makes boundary setting between work and the non-work related public/private spheres the utmost import in their life. This boundary setting is again enacted through appearance, dress, and bodily adornment, with masseuses being hyperconscious of the social gaze (surveillance). As the narratives of these women suggest, their social behaviour in the public realm is oriented towards performing a 'respectable femininity' prescribed by the ideological values which govern and discipline female behaviour in the locale. They always compare/contrast themselves with an imagined 'ideal woman' articulated by disciplinary social regimes, and attempt valiantly to portray and act out such women during public interactions. Furthermore, illustrating the influence of geographically varied cultural formation of gender, respectable femininity is articulated and practiced through the 'rural innocent' woman's identity. The effect of respectable femininity in certain circumstances transcends the boundaries of the public realm and regulates the masseuses' portrayal of the body even on the *selection floor* of the spa. Men's desire for women with 'respectable or rural' appearance within spas shows the embeddedness of hegemonic rules which govern female behaviour in the locale. Performing respectable femininity in the public sphere allows masseuses to safeguard their innately valued intimate interactions in the private realm. They tend to conceal their masseuse identity and portray themselves as engaged in 'respectable feminine jobs' accessible to their class and educational background.

Finally, I conclude that masseuses look forward to positively constructing their spoiled identity in society. Though they have internalised the stigmatised social

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identity and exhibit a 'sense of guilt' in engaging in a morally denigrated occupation in the cultural specificity of Sri Lanka, their voices also reflect a perceived sense of worth in being a masseuse, albeit admitting the sexual content of their work role. They believe that better social recognition and legal status should be given to the work they perform inside the spas as they are engaged in a 'worthy social service'. As they argue and suggest the service that they provide to men ensures the safety of other women in society. This essentialist claim reinforces the ideology that men have uncontrollable sexuality (Pini et al., 2013) which can threaten society, and exonerates the exploitation of masseuses' labour that places them as sexual objects in the places called the spas.

8.3   CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

This thesis enriches the understanding of space, gendered labour, and sex work by emphasising the multiplicity, heterogeneity, and uniqueness of constitution of such phenomena in different geographies. Thereby, it contributes significantly to the feminist geographic research and to the gender and identity studies and organisational studies literatures.

This thesis focussed on an organisational space that marks a remarkable presence in the urban geographies of Sri Lanka, which has attracted rural young women and socio-economically deprived single mothers as labour constituents, despite the severe stigma in Sri Lankan society attached with such spatiality and work role within such space. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study which addresses the social dynamics of the organisational space of the spa and produces knowledge on the ongoing spatial practices of spas. This thesis contributes to understanding of spas as dynamic places of work in which identities of its inhabitants are created and contested.

Further, this thesis responds to the lack of academic attention on studying the sex-labour role performed by women in the spas of Sri Lanka, and elucidates the complex socio-political dimensions of masseuses' work within spas. Here, I have foregrounded the subtleties of the lived experiences of masseuses who have opted to perform an economically-promising, highly-demanded but socially denigrated sex labour role as a masseuse at these organisational spaces. The thesis demonstrates that not only poverty of women brings them to choose sex-labour roles at spas, but there are multiple other factors historically and culturally constructed, which are unique to the specific locale, which place women in this stigmatised labour role. It highlights that experience of women in sex work or sex-related work is contingent on the socio-cultural conditions of specific geographical locations. In this sense, the study contributes to feminist geographic research by theorising the place of a particular category of female labour—masseuses in a country of the Global South.

Further, the masseuses' narrations, brought into discussion, represent their voice which has usually been understudied or overlooked due to the imputed disreputability of their job. Their experiences as labour constituents of spas, which have a legitimate existence as business organisations in the locale, direct attention to the necessity of fair treatment of them as labourers. I had no political interest in making a judgmental claim about their work or to position them and their work within the problematic dichotomy of right and wrong. Yet, I acknowledge the existence of masseuses in the socio-political environment of Sri Lanka, who play a sex-labour role within spas. Persecution, stigmatisation, or social exclusion of these women have not addressed the problematic existence of these organisational spaces. Such conditions have just led to further subjugation of these women. This thesis has significant policy implications in the locale and suggests the necessity to examine the

prevailing yet outdated laws which put masseuses at risk while reinforcing the patriarchal control. Further, the thesis directs attention towards the necessity to address the historically-established structural conditions under which women position themselves as masseuses in these peculiar social spaces.

In addition, this study empirically strengthens the understanding of the (female) body as a place, and explains how masseuses deploy the fluidity and flexibility of the body in doing and undoing their masseuse identity in multiple spheres of their everyday life. It has been observed that masseuses produce space relationally by performing multiple femininity notions which are socially constructed, such as seductive femininity, respectable femininity, and rural femininity. The findings explicate how power relations, as well as understanding and attitude towards the body in different societies, influence in the relational production of space.

The thesis contributes to the organisational studies literature by adopting two socio-spatial perspectives to understand how the organisational place called a spa is produced and reproduced within the socio-cultural specificity of a Global South country, Sri Lanka. To the best of my knowledge, this study is the first to decipher the place called the spa by adopting Lefebvre's spatial triad and Massey's relational sense of place. Expounding this social space by using these specific theoretical notions as an analytical framework allowed me to foreground gender and class-based power relations in the political geography of Sri Lanka, which positions women as 'sexual objects' in capitalist organisations. Further, it demonstrated the co-constitutive process of the construction of the identity of a local place called spa, and the identity of its labour constituents in the geographic setting of Sri Lanka. The

findings of this thesis advance the understanding of the gendered and sexual labour in the organisational spaces of a specific Global South country.

8.4   SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

[Space]…is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far."

(Massey, 2005, p. 9)

This thesis does not mark the end of the construction of the place called the spa in Sri Lankan society's space. It is a process which is always under construction. Accordingly, this thesis provides insights into the part of the stories and trajectories hitherto in a one locale and in a specific point in time. Possibly there could be many more stories and trajectories to hear, which will (re)produce this social space, as it is a never-ending process. Further, as I argue in this thesis, the (re)production of such space is a political process rather than a neutral process. Observations in this thesis opens up the possibility of societal and attitudinal change in favour of masseuses who are oppressed and marginalised due to their spatial engagement with spas.

In this study, Massey's relational sense of place and Lefebvre's socially produced view of space are used as analytical frameworks to explicate how the place called the spa is socially produced with its own unique characteristics in the social milieu of Sri Lanka. However, due to COVID-19 related social distancing and travel restrictions, I could not make direct observations of the organisational spaces of spas. The material environment of spas thus remains an important area of future research of value just as an ethnographic approach to this study will further enrich the knowledge produced on this reality.

This research has focused on local client-oriented spas which are widely present in Sri Lanka. The spatial elements and lived experiences of workers in

tourist-oriented spas—a burgeoning dimension of the Sri Lankan spa industry—remains as a significant opportunity for further research in order to develop comparative/contested geographies in a given locale. These include studying what role racial, ethnic, and religious elements play in the spatial formation of local and tourist spas, and the way in which such elements influence the bodily interactions of the occupants of those spas. A further critical area for inquiry exists in relation to how tourist spas differ from (and create relationalities with) local spas due to the expectations of international visitors and the potential exoticisation of local masseuses.

The findings of this thesis indicate that policy-level interventions are required to address the complex interactions between different work contexts, such as spas, places of sex work, massage parlours, and wellness and tourism sectors. The findings point to a need for further policy focussed research in order to determine policy interventions and enactments necessary to establish women's empowerment within the spas, and to create a safe workplace for female labourers who are exposed to vulnerabilities due to their unawareness of certain concealed spatial practices of these places. Such research interventions will enable these women to collectively represent themselves as a part of the female labour force in Sri Lanka, thereby empowering them to raise their voice against the exploitation of their (sexual) labour.

This study confirms that there is a remarkable presence of spas in the specific geographic context and that these exist as legally (and politically) endorsed entities. Notwithstanding this fact, the female workforce, which constitutes the labour force of these places, has not been considered by feminist academic voices that stand for women's (labour) rights. Feminist research attention in the locale is observed to be strictly constrained to a few 'feminised workspaces' such as apparel manufacturing,

the plantations sector, and foreign domestic work (Attanapola, 2006; Hewamanne, 2008b; Jayawardena, 2018; Lynch, 2007; Samarasinghe, 1998; Seneviratne, 2010, 2018, 2019). Female labour at spas has not been explicitly addressed, even by recent studies which focus on the social dimensions of sex work in the locale (Karunanayake et al., 2020; Vithanage, 2015). Therefore, this organisational space remains under-researched and needs further to be examined from a feminist standpoint in order to draw attention to women's presence in spas under oppressive and exploitative work conditions. This thesis marks an initial step in addressing this lacuna by highlighting class and gender-based oppression in the power-geometries of the Sri Lankan society's space. The knowledge of the power-geometries in the specific locale brought in this thesis, points out the need to have a geographical sense in understanding class and gender-based exploitation in the broader Global South context.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide – Participant Group Masseuses

Introductory Explanation	Explain the purpose of the study in brief and ethical considerations.
Background Information about the interviewee	What is your hometown/ from which district of the country do you come from? What is the highest educational level that you achieved?
Research Questions	**Interview Questions**
Q1: How do the spatial practices of spas inform/shape the construction of the identity of the masseuse?	1.1 How long have you been in this job?
	1.2 In how many spas did you perform this job?
	1.3 What are the main activities that you perform in your job?
	1.4 What kind of an environment do you have in your organisation? (Does attractiveness of the space matter?)
	1.5 How is the workspace designed in your organisations?
	1.6 Does the management of the organisation involve in designing or changing the nature of your workspace? If so, how do they involve?
	1.7 What are the main objects in your environment which support you to perform your job?
	1.8 Does the way in which the space is arranged matter to perform your job role?
	1.9 Do you have flexibility in arranging the spaces of the organisation in a manner convenient for you to perform your job? If so, how?
	1.10 What are the places within your organisation, that you really like spending time during your work hours? Why do you like those places?
	1.11 How do you spend time inside the organisation during nonworking hours /leisure times?
	1.12 What are the places of your organisation that you like most to spend your leisure time? Why do you like those places?
	1.13 Do you change the way you perform the job based on the requirements/type of the client/customer?
	1.14 Do you or your co-workers use any symbols, signs, codes to identify different places of your organisation? If so, why do you use such?
	1.15 How do you think as a work organisation, a spa is perceived by the Sri Lankan society? Do you think that this perception should be changed? How do you think that perception should be changed?
	1.16 How do you think the way in which you are identified in the society influence for your performance in the spa?

	1.17 Can you share your experience on the way in which the social recognition of your job influenced for your interactions with the clients?
	1.18 Can you share your experience on the way in which the social recognition of your job influenced for your interactions with the management?
Q2: How is the construction of the place called the spa and the identity of the masseuse influenced by the socio-cultural values of the wider Sri Lankan society?	2.1 How do you think the society recognises the job of a masseuse/ your job?
	2.2 Are you comfortable with the way in which the society recognises the job of a masseuses?
	2.3 Do you think that the way in which the society recognise your job should be changed? If yes, how should it happen?
	2.4 Can you provide me some experiences on how your job role impacts to you in the places out of work?
	2.5 How do you think being a woman benefit your job?
	2.6 How do you think being a woman matter for your job?
	2.7 What are the main factors that keep you attracted to this job?
Q3: How do masseuses negotiate their work identity in and through the multiple social spaces of everyday life?	3.1 Are you married? Do you have children?
	3.2 What does your husband/children/family think/talk about your job?
	3.3 What were your main reasons for selecting this job?
	3.4 How do you introduce yourself, in relation to your job, to outsiders? (e.g., to relations/friends)
	3.5 Do you use a pseudonym within the spa or in any other place? If so, why do you do this?
Ending	Do you have anything to share with me, that you think I should know but that I didn't ask, or you did not get an opportunity to share?

Appendix B: Interview Guide – Participant Group Other Social Actors

Introductory Explanation	Explain the purpose of the study in brief and ethical considerations.
Interview Questions	Explain your relationship with the spa industry in Sri Lanka?
	How long do you have experience with the spas industry and spa workers in Sri Lanka?
	What is the nature of the spa industry in Sri Lanka as you perceive?
	Do you think that there are different segments in the spa industry of Sri Lanka? If so, what are those? What kind of different customer bases do these different segments cater to?
	Do you think that a spa in Sri Lanka and in a Western country signify the same meaning?
	What kind of idea do you have regarding the social recognition associated with the spa industry of Sri Lanka?
	How do you think such recognition is influencing the women who work as masseuses in Sri Lanka?
	Why do you think that a spa is associated with such a recognition?
	What kind of social and cultural factors has influenced in construction of the identity of masseuses in Sri Lanka?
	Do you think that certain measures should be taken to enhance the recognition of the spa industry and recognition of the spa workers? If so, who is responsible to take such measures? What are the measures that you recommend in your viewpoint?
Ending	Do you have anything to share with me, that you think I should know but that I didn't ask, or you did not get an opportunity to share?

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