ABSTRACT

DISSEYATION/THESIS/RESEARCH PAPER/CREATIVE PROJECT: Behind the Curtains of Pola: Creating and Negotiating Local Markets in Sri Lanka

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The pola, a locally built and operated market and social institution in Sri Lanka, has survived over a century. From the 1970s, politicians, planners and policy-makers have attempted to modernize it; the peak is the national government pledging LKR 3,000 millions in 2014. Enormous resources have been wasted due to the gap between the perception among formal actors and the lived pola. This study aimed to understand the pola from the pola-people’s vantage points. I became a member of Kottawa-Pola and the circuit. I learned that the pola is not its physicality or a thing – as the state and planners do— but a journey and has a lived self that needs to be acknowledged. Even when the government restructures, the pola-people use the provisions as raw material to defy and overcome the intervention. The pola is an ingenious institution produced by people to navigate and construct contemporary urban environments.