Children Between Company and Church: Subject-Making in Dutch Colonial Sri Lanka, c. 1650-1790

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The position of children under the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in Sri Lanka has been a hitherto fairly neglected subject in the historiography on the VOC. Recent studies have demonstrated the importance of focusing on children in colonial contexts during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially when analysing political rationalities of colonial power and religion. While the VOC was an early modern mercantilist company, it sought to impose intellectual, moral and bodily discipline on the local population. The Company wanted to create subjects through education and the introduction of Protestant religion, explicitly targeting children. Why did an early modern mercantilist Company-state attempt to create loyal subjects? How was the Dutch Reformed Church involved in this process of subject-making in Sri Lanka, and what was the importance accorded to children? Using ordinances, visitation reports, minutes from church council meetings and school *thombos* (parish registers containing school data), I will show why children in eighteenth century Sri Lanka were targets of Dutch colonial subject-making.

De positie van kinderen onder de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) in Sri Lanka is een tot nog toe weinig verkend perspectief in de historiografie over de VOC. Recente studies over kinderen in de negentiende- en twintigste-eeuwse koloniale context hebben laten zien dat dit een belangrijk uitgangspunt is voor het bestuderen van de politieke visies achter koloniale en religieuze machtsstructuren. Hoewel ze een vroegmoderne, commerciële compagnie was, wilde ook de VOC morele, intellectuele en lichamelijke discipline opleggen aan de lokale bevolking. Door het gebruik van educatie en het invoeren van de protestantse religie wilde de Compagnie hen omvormen tot loyale onderdanen, en zij richtte zich daarbij expliciet op kinderen. Waarom probeerde een vroegmoderne, mercantilistische

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Compagnie-staat haar bevolking door een proces van 'subject-making' aan zich te binden? Hoe was de Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk betrokken in dit proces in Sri Lanka, en welke rol en welk belang werd hierin aan kinderen toebedeeld? Met behulp van visitatierapporten, minuten van de Kerkenraadvergadering en 'school *thombos*' (kerkelijke dorpsregisters die schooldata bevatten) laat ik zien waarom kinderen in het achttiende-eeuwse Sri Lanka het doelwit waren van een Nederlands, koloniaal disciplineringsbeleid.

Introduction[1]

> … see, that all possible attention is paid to the instruction of the school-going youth.[2]

In and around eighteenth-century Colombo (then and now the largest city of Sri Lanka), around 14,000 local children were said to attend Dutch, Protestant, schools[3] – a curious fact, considering the Dutch's initial interest in the region was the trade in cinnamon. Like elsewhere in Asia the aim to control and monopolise the spice trade had resulted in territorialisation of the Dutch East India Company's (VOC) power. The state-like character of the Company's presence in Asia was expressed through continuous acts of warfare, through the diplomatic relations it forged on behalf of the Dutch States General, and, in places such as Sri Lanka, through taxation of land and labour.[4]

1 In this article the term Sri Lanka will be used to describe the island known before 1972 as Lanka and Ceylon, as it contributes to the general historiography on Sri Lanka.
I am grateful to Alicia Schrikker, Geertje Mak, several colleagues and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable and insightful comments on earlier versions of this article. My research project is financed by the Dutch Research Council (NWO), and part of the research for this paper was conducted during an archival trip to Sri Lanka, partly sponsored by the Leiden University Fund/Van Walsem Fonds. Special thanks to the Wolvendaal Church Consistory and the Christian Reformed Church of Sri Lanka for the access to their archives.

2 Reverend Bronsveld in a letter to the Dutch Reformed Church Council of Colombo, Sri Lanka, 29 May 1759. Cited from: 'Extraordinary meeting of 29th May 1759', 4A.2 (1750-1760) section 141, in: Klaus Koschorke (ed.), *Summaries of the Minutes of the Consistory of the Dutch Reformed Church in Colombo held at the Wolvendaal Church, Colombo (1735-1797)* 4A.1-4, translation by Samuel Andrew William Mottau (2008). *Webportal zur Außereuropäischen Christentumsgeschichte*, 16 May 2008, http://www.aecg.evtheol.lmu.de/cms/index.php?id=20, accessed on 31 May 2019.

3 In this article, 'Christianity', '(Dutch) Reformed' and 'Protestantism' as opposed to Roman Catholic Christianity, will be used interchangeably to refer to *Nederduits Gereformeerd*, the specific Dutch, Calvinist denomination analysed here.

4 Piet Emmer and Jos Gommans, *Rijk aan de rand van de wereld: De geschiedenis van Nederland overzee 1600-1800* (Amsterdam 2012).

Nevertheless, many indigenous children in coastal Sri Lanka experienced the colonial power of the VOC in the first place through Christian village schools. To examine what the position of children in the Company's policies and practices was, this article critically questions the role of the Protestant churches and schools as instruments of subject-making in Dutch colonial Sri Lanka.

Children seldom take a central place in the historiography of the VOC. There certainly are studies dedicated to the education, religion and family relations of Europeans and Asians in Company territory that relate to the lives of indigenous children: Gerrit Schutte's overview of the Church in VOC territories, Carla van Wamelen's rich study on colonial family law in Indonesia and Gerrit Knaap's *Kruidnagelen en Christenen* on the early history of the VOC in the Moluccas are all useful to understand the institutional context of interactions between children and the VOC.[5] For the history of Protestant education in Dutch Sri Lanka, Jur van Goor's dissertation from 1978 remains the most thorough study. He demonstrates that the Dutch Church and its educational initiatives became a vehicle for the VOC to control local powerholders, and through them, the population. These studies, however, do not foreground indigenous children as historical actors or political targets.[6] Moreover, historiography of the Dutch colonial context that does deal with children and youth mainly focuses on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Recent research on children's education – for example, by Kirsten Kamphuis and Maaike Derksen – has examined the ideologies and practices of the twentieth-century Dutch colonial government, as well as Protestant and Catholic missions in the Indonesian archipelago.[7] These civilising missions were aimed at educating children to transform them into modern subjects, and through them, the rest of the community. Rooted in late-nineteenth-century 'ethical policies' and 'humanitarian missions', schools and churches were operating fields of the colonial state. The Dutch colonial government used education and religion, as Bloembergen and Raben have shown, as instruments with

5 Gerrit Jan Schutte (ed.), *Het Indisch Sion: De Gereformeerde kerk onder de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Hilversum 2003); Carla van Wamelen, *Family life onder de VOC: Een handelscompagnie in huwelijks- en gezinszaken* (Hilversum 2014); Gerrit Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en christenen: De Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie en de bevolking van Ambon 1656-1696*. Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 212 (Leiden 2004).

6 Jurrien van Goor, *Jan Kompenie as Schoolmaster: Dutch Education in Ceylon 1690-1795* (Groningen 1978).

7 Kirsten Kamphuis, 'Giving for Girls: Reconsidering Colonial Civilizing Missions in the Dutch East Indies through Charitable Girls' Education', *New Global Studies* 12:2 (2018) 217-234. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/ngs-2018-0030; Maaike Derksen, '"On their Javanese sprout we need to graft the European civilisation." Fashioning local intermediaries in the Dutch Catholic mission, 1900-1942', *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 19:1 (2016) 29-55. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5117/TVGN2016.1.DERK.

which to win and keep the loyalty of the archipelago's populations in the late colonial period.[8]

This article examines how the activities of the Dutch Reformed Church in Sri Lanka during the early modern period are related to these nineteenth- and twentieth-century civilising practices in mission schools. Geertje Mak, Marit Monteiro and Elisabeth Wesseling, building on the work of David Scott, Ann-Laura Stoler and others, introduce this special issue with the central observation that targeting the lives of children was a crucial strategy in the subject-making process of modern colonial states.[9] In his work on colonial and post-colonial modernities, Scott observed that the British strategy of colonial rule in Sri Lanka changed in the course of the nineteenth century. He defines such an intricate strategy as a 'colonial political rationality' that characterises the intended outcome of colonial rule and shapes the methods used to achieve this outcome.[10] Colonial power in Sri Lanka had been characterised by mercantilism, enforcing discipline on colonised bodies to attain economic profit. This rationality shifted in the 1830s to what Scott calls 'colonial governmentality': the British wanted the population to internalise the behaviour they imposed, and introduced new intellectual, moral and cultural repertoires to attain that goal. The objective of this particular subject-making was not to extract labour from the colonised, but to transform them. Through reshaping society, the British projected that colonial order would not have to be enforced, but rather be self-regulated by the subjects.[11]

How does early modern Dutch rule in Sri Lanka relate to these concepts of colonial power, governmentality and subject-making, which are designed to explain shifting 'civilising practices' during the late colonial period? To understand the rationality of British colonial power, Scott deconstructs it into an 'object', or objective, that is achieved by aiming 'instruments' at a colonial power's 'target' through 'points of application' or instruments.[12] When applying Scott's analysis to the Company in early modern Asia it is clear that, being a commercial enterprise, the VOC in Sri Lanka had the mercantilist object of gaining revenue from the island, by extracting products through the labour of colonised bodies. Nevertheless, many of the instruments the Company enforced on the local population, such as registration, education and marriage policies, introduced Sri Lankans to Dutch moral values for family life and childhood. Many interactions locals had with colonial power

8 Marieke Bloembergen and Remco Raben (eds.), *Het koloniale beschavingsoffensief: Wegen naar het nieuwe Indië, 1890-1950*. Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 265 (Leiden 2009) 4, 11-12.

9 Geertje Mak, Marit Monteiro and Elisabeth Wesseling, 'Child Separation. (Post)Colonial Policies and Practices in the Netherlands and Belgium', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 135:3/4 (2020) 6-9, 11-15. DOI: https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10871.

10 David Scott, 'Colonial Governmentality', *Social Text* 43 (1995) 191-220, 193. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/466631.

11 Scott, 'Colonial Governmentality', 191, 202-207, 210-214.

12 Scott, 'Colonial Governmentality', 193, 197.

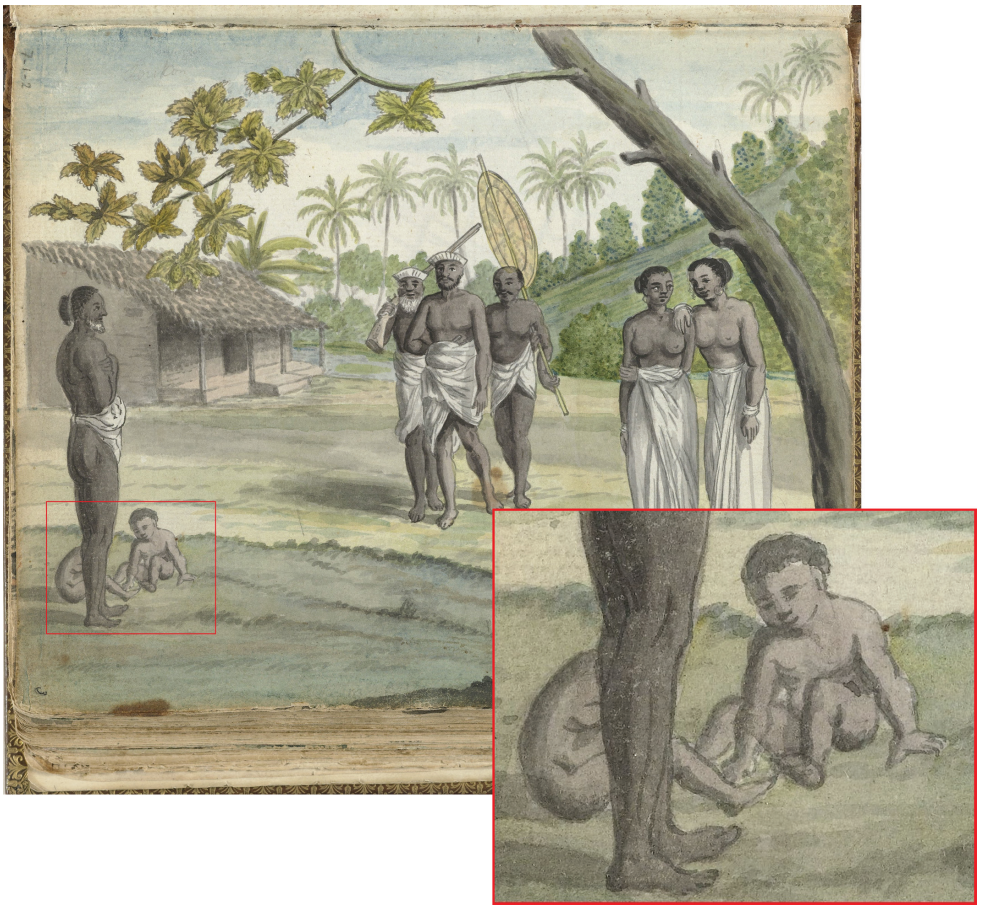

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Figure 1: This aquarelle by Jan Brandes contains a rare contemporary, European depiction of indigenous children in Dutch Sri Lanka (see the detail) amongst a group of Sinhalese women and soldiers. The children appear to be playing or drawing in the grass. On the left, a house with a palm-leave roof is depicted, a type of building that was among others used for schools. This aquarelle appears to be a casual observation, especially with the detail of the children, but the scene could also be a fictional combination of several sketches and moments. Brandes was a Dutch, Lutheran minister who travelled colonial Sri Lanka, Indonesia and South Africa, during which he drew many animals and plants. He also sketched in situ observations of his everyday life, depicting a variety of both European and Sinhalese customs, street scenes and dress styles, offering rather unique eighteenth-century snapshots of Sri Lanka from a European perspective. Similar to historiography, in this aquarelle Sri Lankan children are visible, but only in the periphery. Without omitting the context of the full aquarelle, the cut-out detail invites us to zoom in on these children, much like this article does. Centralising colonised children in colonial histories offers new insights and perspectives on familiar stories and images.[13]

13 Jan Brandes, Lascorijns of Singalese soldaten op Ceylon, 1785-1786 (no title), from the first part of the sketchbook of Jan Brandes (1808) page 3. © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, NG-1985-7-1-2. http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.131429.

took place in the 'operating fields' of the schools and churches of the Dutch Reformed Church. Moreover, local children became 'points of application', and were specifically targeted by the VOC's colonial power. The question then is: how could these instruments and targets support the Company's object of economic revenue?

Education and religion are in the colonial context often associated with 'soft power', as opposed to 'hard power' such as warfare and taxation. However, the work of Tony Ballantyne on the interaction between Māori and British missionaries in nineteenth-century New Zealand[14] demonstrates, among others, that European and local actors in schools and churches could oppose colonial rule but were often also specifically carriers of modern colonial power. Missionary policies relating to the clothing, sexuality and family life of the colonised reached far into the intimate sphere of local households. Late colonial missions could even be labelled as Christian 'colonial' missions[15], symbolising the synthesis of hard and soft colonial power.

As there is no precedent for the study of children in the early modern Dutch colonial context, the approach introduced by Mak, Monteiro and Wesseling, combined with the work of Scott, serves as an inroad into an analysis of the relation between children, Church and the Company-state. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the churches established in the colonies were overseas branches of the Dutch Reformed Church in Europe, placed under the regional board of Amsterdam. Dutch 'missions' as such did not exist under Company rule. Nonetheless, in Asia the early modern Dutch Church and schools enforced Christian, European moral repertoires on Asian children, similar to the instruments of late 'colonial missions' and British colonial governmentality. Was this a 'colonial Church', an agent of colonial power intended to transform indigenous children into colonial subjects? By focusing on the position of children in village schools in Dutch Sri Lanka during the period 1650-1790, I seek to understand why the VOC targeted children, and how the enforcement of Reformed moral repertoires worked in practice. What did the children learn in school? How did schoolmasters get children to attend school, and did they attend? Examining the political rationality of subject-making in the early modern period will answer why the Company involved the Protestant Church in its policies and practices. This analysis of the relations between the Company, the Church and the children during the Dutch period in Sri Lanka subsequently contributes to a wider understanding of subject-making and colonial interaction in practice.[16]

14 Tony Ballantyne, *Entanglements of Empire: Missionaries, Māori, and the Question of the Body* (Durham 2015). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822375883.

15 Mak, Monteiro and Wesseling, 'Child Separation', 2, 5-7, 9.

16 Mak, Monteiro and Wesseling, 'Child Separation', 7.

This article is set out in three parts, in which I analyse educational policies and practices, its disciplining function of children's behaviour and family life, and the relation of the Church's registration to the organisation of labour. In the first part I situate the Protestant schools in their Sri Lankan setting and discuss the Dutch regulations with regard to these schools. The primary sources used are a diverse set of, among others, minutes of church and school council meetings, and ordinances. Normative sources, such as the ordinances, present an idealised image, but they were responsive as well, as they were drafted in direct reaction to local cultural behaviour and moral repertoires the VOC considered problematic. The terms 'children' or 'youth' in this article refer to people up to around twenty-five years old. In Dutch laws and reports by the VOC and the Church these terms refer to this specific age group, regardless of marital or parental status.

The second part analyses the school and the church as institutions and spaces to control and discipline behaviour of colonised subjects. Here, the role of Sri Lankan schoolmasters in Sri Lankan society and the Dutch colonial system is explored, specifically in their function as record keeper in the village. In this section, I particularly pay attention to the instruments the VOC and the Church implemented, such as school attendance, fines, registration and the concept of illegitimacy, and the visitation by the minister which was also an opportunity to use these disciplining instruments. Mechanisms and strategies that children and their parents developed to cope with or counter these instruments, from acceptance to avoidance, will equally be examined.

The third part of this article moves away from the school as a site of education. The relation between schools and the control of labour is analysed, shedding light on why the VOC employed the Church, aside from the need to regulate moral behaviour. For boys, leaving school meant entering the labour force, on which the Company were greatly dependent. Among the sources used here are the school *thombos*, parish records that form a most unique set of sources which historians have thus far neglected.[17] While at first sight these clerical records concern purely the spiritual work of ministers and schoolmasters, deconstructing and contextualising these sources will reveal different functions and new meanings.

The main focus of my research is Colombo and its hinterland, where predominantly Sinhalese Buddhists lived. As of 1658, the VOC, in alliance with the King of Kandy, defeated the Portuguese, who had conquered the western coasts of Sri Lanka. The King of Kandy ruled the kingdom in the centre of

17 Edmund Reimers's 1950 introduction to the school *thombos*, with some transcribed examples, is a useful start for further research: Edmund Reimers, *The Dutch parish registers (school thombos) of Ceylon: Ambalangoda, Patabendimulla, Welitara and Gosgoda* (Colombo 1950). While Schutte (*Het Indisch Sion*) and Van Goor (*Jan Kompenie*) refer to these registers too, there is no detailed or quantitative research of them aside from my current PhD research *Negotiating Conversion and Family Relations in eighteenth century Dutch Colonial Sri Lanka*.

the island and was of great spiritual importance to Sri Lankan Buddhists. In the Dutch period, and today still, worshippers of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Roman Catholicism lived on the island. The dominant group are the Sinhalese Buddhists, who speak Sinhala, followed by the Tamil-speaking minority. The Dutch mainly ruled the coastal areas, which were divided into three Commandments. The Portuguese left an extensive administrative framework that the Dutch maintained, with administrative centres in the cities of Colombo in the west, Galle in the south and Jaffna in the north, and some separate forts on the east coast. The surrounding hinterland consisted of villages with paddy fields, coconut plantations, and forests harbouring cinnamon and elephants. Colombo continued to be the administrative centre, and, of the three cities, currently keeps the most extensive remaining records. Together with its hinterland, it was the key area of Dutch power, registration and education.[18]

Religion and education in practice in Dutch Sri Lanka

When the Dutch took over Portuguese rule, they feared that Catholic converts would remain loyal to the Portuguese, and Sinhalese Buddhists to the King of Kandy. The zealous Dutch Reformed Church was, therefore, made responsible for spreading Protestantism and planting churches, and the VOC prohibited Buddhist and Roman Catholic worship and practices.[19] Throughout the eighteenth century however, Catholic priests from Portuguese-Indian Goa were travelling around the island, converting and serving new and remaining congregations.[20] The west coast of Sri Lanka was a hierarchical, caste-based society. Castes were connected to occupations and mandatory labour, such as serving in the military and peeling cinnamon. Many castes also consisted of sub-castes, each with its own specific task. Caste identities were not directly related to the religious system[21] and could, therefore, intersect with different religious identities. While the Dutch demanded exclusive worship at their

18 Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 135.

19 Lodewijk Hovy, *Ceylonees plakkaatboek: Plakkaten en andere wetten uitgevaardigd door het Nederlandse bestuur op Ceylon, 1638-1796*. Part I and II (Hilversum 1991) 352-353, 355, 369, 402-403.

20 The Sri Lankan National Archives (hereafter SLNA) Lot 1: Archives of the Dutch Central Government of Coastal Ceylon, 1640-1796 (hereafter/1) Declarations of allegiance by Roman Catholic priests (...), inv. 3192; Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 561, 565, 574; Schutte, *Het Indisch Sion*, 182.

21 G.P.V. Somaratna, 'The Superficial Success of the Reformation and the Trials of the Catholic Church (1658-1796) in Sri Lanka', *Journal of the Colombo Theological Seminary* 2 (2003) 92-95; SLNA/1, Documents in Civil Cases, inv. 4779 f. 79-83; The Nationaal Archief, The Hague, (NL-HaNA), Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie 1.04.02 (VOC) Visitation Report Colombo, Galle and Trinconomalee 1758, inv. 2925 f. 964-992.

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Figure 2: Wolvendaal Church in Colombo, Sri Lanka, 17 January 2020. The church was built by the Dutch in 1749 and is currently still in use by the Christian Reformed Church of Sri Lanka, formerly known as the Dutch Reformed Church. While built on a hill just outside The Pettah – the neighbourhoods outside of Colombo Fort – the area around the church has urbanised throughout the centuries.[22]

22 Anonymisation by author. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SL_Colombo_asv2020-01_img01_Wolvendaal_Church.jpg, accessed on 6 August 2020. © Alexander Savin, WikiCommons.

churches, for Sri Lankans different religious repertoires could be combined. Besides, Buddhism and the cultural and political influence of the kingdom of Kandy remained strong as well. Nevertheless, of the estimated 2 million people living on the island in the early modern period, 1 million lived in Dutch territory, and 300,000 of these were registered under the Protestant Church throughout the eighteenth century.[23]

Education in Sri Lanka

Before the European conquests, religion, power and education had already been intertwined in Sri Lanka. Buddhist monks (*Bhikkhus*) and teachers taught young monks and higher-caste lay boys to memorise religious doctrines, read Buddhist texts in several languages and write in the sand and on palm leaves (*olas*). Throughout the island, elementary teaching often took place in Buddhist temples. Around the eleventh century monasteries dedicated to education called *piriven* became more defined, offering several levels of education for monks and political and cultural elites.[24] The Portuguese built Catholic schools specifically for lay people too, often in the same villages or even spaces the *Bhikkhus* had taught. These classes, held separately for boys and girls, taught Roman Catholicism and elementary reading but were attended sparsely. The Dutch transformed these places into schools teaching Dutch Reformed doctrines and texts, continuing the tradition of literacy and religious education. The village inhabitants built and repaired the schools, by order of the VOC.[25] The school building resembled, for villagers, the familiar function of the Buddhist religious space, as Sunday church services were conducted there too. Additionally, the building served as the place where the VOC announced and posted political ordinances.

The schools were managed by the Church and institutions called school councils, one in each Commandment. These councils, established in 1659, consisted of VOC merchants and church elders, and reported to the Company's Commander of the respective district. The church council was dependent on a political commissioner, without whom important decisions

23 Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 117 and 140.

24 Chandra R. De Silva, 'The Education of Buddhist Monks in Sri Lanka: A Historical Review and Some Suggestions for Reform', *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 42:1/2 (2019) 1-28, 5-7. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4038/sljh.v42i1-2.7253; Tilak Kularatne, 'Introduction of Printing to Sri Lanka (Ceylon): The Dutch Press in Ceylon (1736-1796)', *Libri* 45:2 (1995) 65-77, 66. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/libr.1995.45.2.65; Ranavira Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough: Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka* (Tucson 1979) 163-164; Swarna Jayaweera, 'Schooling in Sri Lanka', in: Amita Gupta (ed.), *Going to school in South Asia* (Westport 2007) 167-194, 167-171.

25 Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 115-116 and 142; Jayaweera, 'Schooling in Sri Lanka', 171-172; Somaratne, 'Superficial Success', 112.

regarding church policies could not be made.[26] The first instruction for school councils was published as early as 1663. All children of baptised parents – boys and girls – had to go to school. Younger children could be baptised based on their parents' Confirmation, while older children were baptised only after memorising the Reformed doctrines in school. Children were required to attend school daily except on Sundays, preferably starting around the age of six years, until they were between twelve and fifteen years old. If children had two siblings or more, they were allowed to alternate their attendance. Older pupils, up to twenty years old, were expected to return to school twice a week for Catechism, where their knowledge and Christian lifestyle were tested.[27] The elementary schools were built in the larger central villages and attended by children from the surrounding communities. Importantly, village schools were not envisioned to alienate children from their families, unlike educational policies geared towards child separation in later Dutch colonial history.[28] In Dutch Sri Lanka children were rather seen as potential bearers of Christianity into their communities. The same rationality was part of the ordinances specifically ordering baptised headmen – the village elites – to send their children to school and attend church regularly. This order was not created to exclude lower classes, but to show the villagers the headmen's example of allegiance to the VOC.[29]

In 1704 there were 29 schools in Colombo district, growing to 46 in the course of the eighteenth century. In total there were around 140 Christian schools on the island during the Dutch period, with the number varying through the century.[30] Schools could have up to three schoolmasters, depending on the number of pupils. Some schools were attended by over 250 children, while others saw less than a dozen pupils. It appears that not all schools were continuously in use, but eighteenth-century reports to the Governor-General and the Church in Amsterdam consistently mention a fluctuating number of over 12,000 children who were attending school in the area around Colombo, which corresponds to the approximate amount of children registered in the school *thombos*.[31]

26 In Dutch the *Scholarchale Vergadering*; Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 112-114, 133-137, 153; Kularatne, 'Introduction of Printing', 65-6; Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600-1800: external influences and internal change in early modern Sri Lanka* (Aldershot 1996) 18.

27 Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 112-114, 278-279; NL-HaNA, VOC, Visitation Report Colombo 1738, inv. 2445 f. 1282-1294; NL-HaNA, VOC, Visitation Report Colombo, Jaffna, Galle and Matara 1764, inv. 3201 f. 886-890.

28 Mak, Monteiro and Wesseling, 'Child Separation'.

29 Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 112-114; SLNA/1, Instructions to the native headmen ca. 1790, inv. 2468 f. 9.

30 J.D. Palm, 'The Education Establishments of the Dutch in Ceylon', *The Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 2 (1846) 105-116; Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 125.

31 NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 2925, 964-992; Stadsarchief Amsterdam (SA), Archief van de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk: *Classis Amsterdam (Classis) Letter*

Inside the school building, schoolmasters, often indigenous men, led the church services and school classes. Fully ordained ministers, based in Colombo, Jaffna or Galle, were either European or Sri Lankan men who had mostly received their academic training in the Netherlands. Once a year these ministers travelled through the hinterland district with a member of the school council – a *Scholarch* – on a visitation tour, examining both students and schoolmasters on their knowledge and progress. Required attendance and the visitation system were similar to those in the schools in other VOC territories, the Moluccas in particular, as was the content of the classes.[32] The Dutch Church generally regarded education as the best instrument for teaching and converting local people. Children were taught reading and writing in their own vernacular; in Sri Lanka this was Tamil, Sinhala, Dutch or Portuguese, but the main goal of the schools was to instruct children in the fundamentals of the 'one true faith'.[33] European missionaries and colonial churches often translated European Christian texts to educate local people on their doctrines.[34] Sinhalese schoolmasters also had to focus on spelling and reading of the Sinhala script by using translated Dutch canonical texts, such as the Twelve Articles and the Heidelberg Catechism, but also some instructive texts geared towards Sri Lankan children. They were expected to sing psalms with the children as well. When a printing press was introduced in Sri Lanka in the 1730s, the aforementioned Sinhalese and Tamil translations and parts of the Bible were printed for use in schools and churches, among others in the 'Sinhalese school book' shown below. Little is known about methods of teaching before and besides these printed materials, but often schoolmasters seemed to have continued traditional methods: writing in the sand and memorising doctrines using *olas*.[35]

The widespread approach of the VOC to education shows that Christian schools in Sri Lanka were not only an extension of local practices but also a clear implementation of the Company's objective of creating Christian subjects by enforcing Protestant intellectual repertoires. But how were these educational standards imposed in practice, and were they able to shape village life? Within the schools themselves three instruments that served these

from Colombo to the Classis, 1710, inv. 203 f. 93; SA, Classis, Visitation report Galle 1758, inv. 204 f. 56-83; NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 2445 f. 1282-1294; Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 114.

32 Knaap, *Kruidnagelen*, 107-122.

33 Koschorke, *Minutes*, 'Ordinary meeting of 24th March 1760'; NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 2925 f. 969; SA, *Classis*, 1710, inv. 203 f. 88; Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 565-566; Schutte, *Het Indisch Sion*, 180, 184-185; Somaratna, 'Superficial Success', 112-113.

34 See, for example: Ines Županov, '"I Am a Great Sinner": Jesuit Missionary Dialogues in Southern India (Sixteenth Century)', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55:2/3 (2012) 415-446. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/15685209-12341241.

35 J.D. Palm, 'The Education Establishments', 124-125; Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 464; NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 2445 f. 1282-1294; NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 2925 f. 967; Kularatne, 'Introduction of Printing', 66-67; Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 83-86.

particular purposes stand out: the schoolmaster, visitation and registration, and disciplining methods.

Subject-making in school

The registering schoolmaster

Many studies point to the indigenous schoolmaster as a central figure throughout colonial empires in both the modern and early modern periods. Historians such as Felicity Jensz and Maaike Derksen have conceptualised schoolmasters as cultural intermediaries between local society and colonial state.[36] The schoolmasters in Dutch Sri Lanka seem to have had a similar function. In 1720 there were around 150 local, Reformed schoolmasters in Sri Lanka; this number more than doubled over the next twenty years. These men of Sinhalese, Tamil or mixed background represented a large part of the Church's Asian staff and largely outnumbered the European clerical staff.[37] In Dutch-speaking seminaries established in Jaffna and Colombo, the Church trained Sri Lankan elite boys to become schoolmasters, church functionaries or other VOC employees, such as translators and clerks. For children and their families, seminary education could consolidate their position within the community and the colonial government.[38] The children attending the seminaries were to obtain 'good manners' and assimilate to Dutch culture, as opposed to the vernacular village schools. As Van Goor explains more extensively, the goal was to create a new class of Christianised elites and intermediaries.[39] These seminaries prelude the functions of colonial mission schools: their pupils were not only agents in subject-making but also subjects in the making themselves.

Schoolmasters were considered crucial to the Church, and highly valued if they ran successful schools. Whenever many children could read and recite the scriptures, the ministers credited the schoolmaster in their reports, and vice versa.[40] To the Church and the VOC, Sri Lankan schoolmasters

36 Felicity Jensz, 'Non-European Teachers in Mission Schools: Introduction', *Itinerario* 40:3 (2016) 391. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115316000620; Maaike Derksen, 'Local Intermediaries? The Missionising and Governing of Colonial Subjects in South Dutch New Guinea, 1920-42', *The Journal of Pacific History* 51:2 (2016) 111-142. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2016.1195075; Knaap, *Kruidnagelen*, 116-119; Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*.

37 Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 142-143, appendix C.

38 Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 116-119, appendix C; Dries Lyna, 'Ceylonese Arcadia? Colonial encounters in mid-eighteenth-century Dutch Sri Lanka', in: Paul Puschmann and Tim Riswick (eds.), *Building Bridges: Scholars, History and Historical Demography. A Festschrift in Honor of Professor Theo Engelen* (Nijmegen 2018) 157-163.

39 Koschorke, *Minutes*, 'Ordinary meeting of 24th March 1760'; Koschorke, *Minutes*, 'Extraordinary meeting of 12th December 1760'; Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*.

40 NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 2925, f. 964-992, specifically f. 977; NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 3201 f. 886-890.

represented and facilitated new moral and cultural repertoires in the village, resembling Jensz's and Derksen's analysis of cultural intermediaries. Church personnel, however, permanently complained to the Company about the inadequate budget and subsequent understaffing.[41] This lack of resources and staff resulted in a variety of practices in Dutch Sri Lanka. The majority of schoolmasters were not trained or even a fully-fledged church member, and the Company depended on existing local frameworks.[42] The right to be a schoolmaster could be bought and passed on from father to son, which was established to ensure administratively experienced, loyal schoolmasters.[43] After all, these men were often members of the scribe caste, already familiar with what in practice became the main task of the schoolmaster: record-keeping. Their work was embedded in existing local networks, since they were assisted by informants from the surrounding villages,[44] Compared to the less densely populated Ambon Island in the seventeenth century Moluccas, Dutch Sri Lanka had a much more extensively implemented educational and registration system.[45] The ministers and the VOC relied on the schoolmasters for information on school attendance and family events, such as marriages, births and deaths, and also incidents of unmarried couples and children born out of wedlock. Schoolmasters working in Colombo district travelled to Colombo every few months to report to the *thombo* keeper and at church council meetings.[46]

The schoolmasters could use their position to their own advantage – for example, by reporting negatively or falsely on their local rivals, but it also made their position in the community complicated. A schoolmaster from the Galle Commandment reported to Reverend Bronsveld that he was repeatedly physically threatened by local elite men, while the reverend commented that another Colombo schoolmaster might owe the discipline in his school mainly to the presence of a Protestant local headman living nearby.[47] These types of village dynamics illustrate that Sri Lankans disputed the position of the schoolmaster, and the discipline and administration he represented to them. In this regard, it is better to consider the schoolmaster as an agent of colonial power, rather than an intermediary. Further comparative research on indigenous schoolmasters, comparing them not only in space but also in time, can provide useful insights into the varying practices of this colonial position.

41 Somaratna, 'Superficial Success', 101; SA, *Classis*, inv. 204, f. 20.

42 NL-HaNa, VOC, Decree to Tamil and Sinhalese Schoolmasters 1747, inv. 2693, f. 1433-1434; Reimers, *Parish Registers*, 32-36; Koschorke, *Minutes*, 'Extraordinary meeting of 2nd November 1750'.

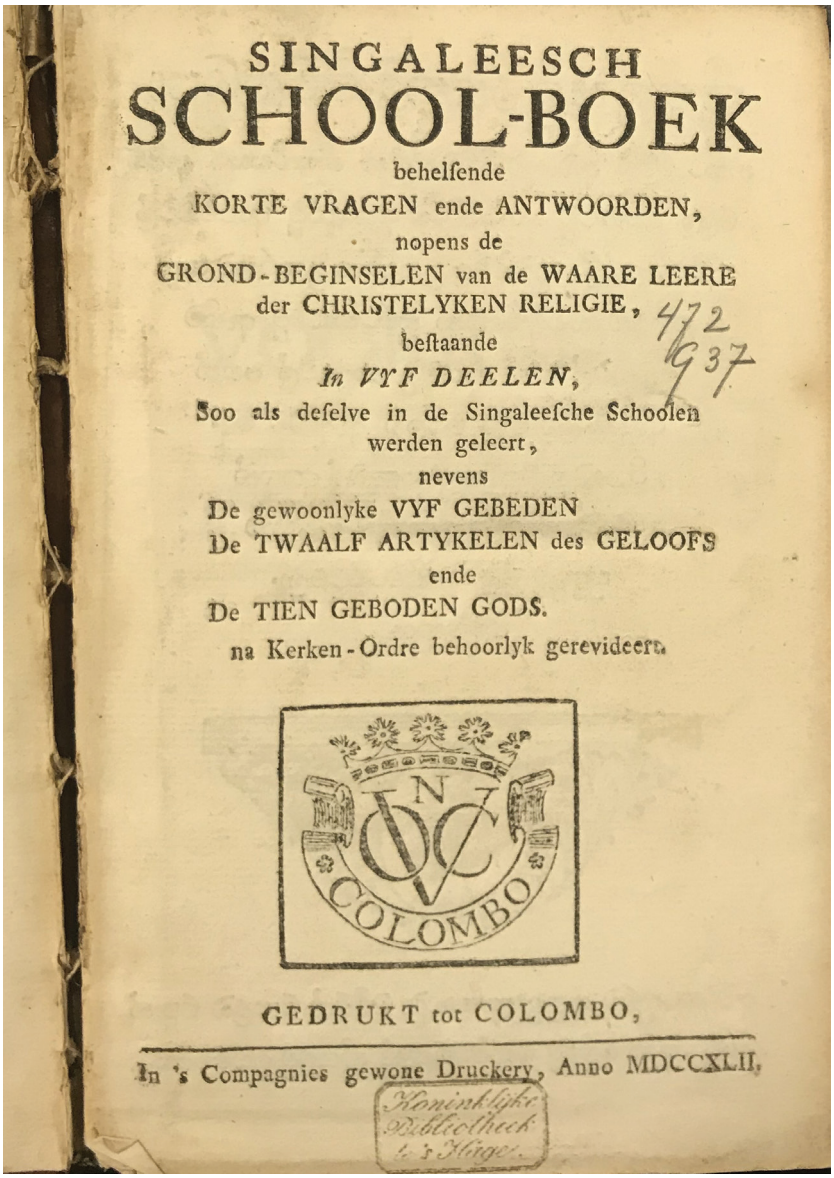
43 Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 117-119, 142; SLNA/1, Protocols of Affidavits of the *Landraad*, inv. 4779 f. 79-83; Koschorke, *Minutes*, 'Extraordinary meeting of 2nd November 1750'; *Wolvendaal Church Archives* (WCA), 2011/35, Minutes of the *Scholarchale Vergadering* (29 June 1779).

44 Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 116-117.

45 Knaap, *Kruidnagelen*, 116-119.

46 Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 117; Koschorke, *Minutes*, 4A-2 (1750-1760).

47 SA, *Classis*, inv. 204 f. 65; NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 2925, f. 975; Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 118-119.



SINGALEESCH
SCHOOL-BOEK
behelsende
KORTE VRAGEN ende ANTWOORDEN,
nopens de
GROND-BEGINSELEN van de WAARE LEERE
der CHRISTELYKEN RELIGIE,
472
G37
beſtaande
In VYF DEELEN,
Soo als deſelve in de Singaleeſche Schoolen
werden geleert,
nevens
De gewoonlyke VYF GEBEDEN
De TWAALF ARTYKELEN des GELOOFS
ende
De TIEN GEBODEN GODS.
na Kerken-Ordre behoorlyk gerevideert.

COLOMBO

GEDRUKT tot COLOMBO,

In 's Compagnies gewone Druckery, Anno MDCCXLII.

▲

Figure 3: Dutch title page of Sinhala School book printed in Colombo in 1742, stating the contents of the book, such as the Ten Commandments and traditional Dutch religious texts. The rest of the book is in Sinhala language and script, including a preface that calls the Sinhalese to devotion towards their salvation, as well as gratefulness towards God and their government. Note the VOC logo in the printer's stamp.[48]

48 *Singaleesch School-Boek behelsende korte vragen ende antwoorden, nopens de grond-beginselen van de waare leere der christelyken religie, bestaande in vyf deelen, soo als deselve in de Singaleesche schoolen werden geleert, nevens de gewoonlyke vyf gebeden, de twaalf artykelen des geloofs ende de tien geboden Gods, na Kerken-Ordre behoorlyk gerevideert* (Colombo 1742) title page. © Koninklijke Bibliotheek, photo by author, KW 1748 B 32, 472 G 37 [OUD SIGNATUUR].

A case in Kalutara, discussed in the Colombo church council, illustrates the significance accorded not only to the schoolmaster but also to schools, as part of colonial discipline in Dutch Sri Lanka. In 1752, due to the absence of a schoolmaster that year, the youth in Kalutara had reportedly 'run wild'.[49] Since these young people were explicitly described as 'wild', or morally undisciplined, in the absence of a schoolmaster, the Church apparently expected schools and masters outside the seminaries to impose disciplined behaviour as well. How did Protestant discipline fit into colonial subject-making? Through the Church, the Dutch imposed new moral and cultural repertoires, such as Christian marriage, baptism and reformed worship. These repertoires represented a Protestant lifestyle, which was regarded as the start, and proof, of spiritual conversion to Protestantism. The VOC valued the enforcement of this lifestyle, expecting that 'native Christians are trained to duly conform in their habits to (...) [the Dutch]',[50] resulting in the production of subjects loyal to the Protestant Company-state, and strengthening the Company's political and economic grip. Reformed education, therefore, combined the targets of the Dutch Reformed Church and the VOC: the production of orderly Protestant subjects, starting in childhood.

In Scott's analysis of modern subject-making, British colonial power used governmentality to ideally replace top-down discipline. While the ideals of the Dutch early modern Church revolved around 'soft power' too, in the form of moral and intellectual discipline through conversion and education, many of the instruments used were based on 'hard power', disciplining the body and imposing protestant customs and rituals. Such instruments as church and school attendance, the levy of fines and the regulation of procreation were all employed to shape Sri Lankans' physical behaviour. To monitor this behaviour the Dutch had introduced structural registration and reporting by schoolmasters and other church employees. The records produced within this administrative framework were based on embodied interactions of Sri Lankans with the Church, particularly during the yearly school visitation of the minister and the *Scholarch*.

Visitation day was an inherent part of the educational and religious system[51] – a ritualised form of control over children and their families. The visitation would have been quite an intimidating spectacle for the children, as it consisted of a large delegation of soldiers and clerical and company agents.[52] In the morning, all children and their families mandatorily

49 Koschorke, *Minutes*, 'Extraordinary meeting of 25th May 1752'.

50 Koschorke, *Minutes*, extract in 'Ordinary meeting of 24th March 1760' (art. 9).

51 Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 278-279.

52 Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 120.

gathered in the school building. After prayer and a sermon, the minister examined the children and registered their results. The youngest were tested on memorisation of the alphabet and prayers; the older children on their understanding of the doctrine, reading and writing.[53] Children of twelve years old and over whose knowledge was considered sufficient were officially discharged from school service by the minister and the *Scholarch*. After this, youth who had been discharged on an earlier visit were examined. The minister resumed conducting official rituals such as baptism and the consecration of marriages, since only ordained ministers could perform them. Finally, the schoolmaster reported on the school and any of his material, financial or spiritual needs, and gave demographic updates, which were reported in the school report and school *thombos*.[54]

The schoolmaster was also obliged to report disobedience and absence at school and in church. A significant part of Protestant physical discipline in the everyday life of Sri Lankans consisted of the imposition of a new weekly rhythm of classes, church services and prayers. These were led by the schoolmaster and enforced by mandatory attendance, on penalty of fines or forced labour, which the *Scholarch* charged on visitation day. The fines were used for the upkeep of school buildings and the salaries of schoolmasters.[55] While the schoolmaster was predominantly held accountable for the success of pupils in their examinations, the school and church penalties directly affected the children. Penalties depended on circumstances, however: 'If anyone is absent, the master should enquire whose fault the absence is. If it is the child's disobedience, [the master] will [physically] punish it fittingly. If it is the parent's fault, they will pay for every child half a *tammekassie* per day',[56] Evidently, the VOC regarded youth as a different legal and social category, capable of making independent decisions to obey and disobey but befitting a different punishment from adults.

The history of church and school fines in Sri Lanka shows increasing tension between the VOC and the Church, with diverging rationalities regarding discipline and faith. The Company abolished the fines in 1745 and paid the schoolmasters' salaries directly instead, wanting to protect its political position from popular hostility. In a request for reinstatement three

53 SA, *Classis*, inv. 203, 85-89.

54 SA, *Classis*, inv. 204 f. 56-83; NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 2925 f. 964-967; NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 3201 f. 886-890; NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 2445 f. 1282-1294.

55 Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 112-114, 278-279.

56 'Imand nu absent zijnde, zal de meester vernemen bij wien de schuld is van het agterblijven is. Zo het des kinds ongehoorsaamheits schuld is, zal hij 't zelve na merite kastijden. Dog soo het der ouders schuld is, zullen zij voor ider kint ider dag een halve tammekassie betalen'. Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 195. A *Tammekassie* was a local coin worth a quarter of a stiver. A day's wage of unskilled labour in Sri Lanka in this period was around six stivers. Pim de Zwart, 'Population, labour and living standards in early modern Ceylon: An empirical contribution to the divergence debate', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 49:3 (2012) 365-398, 368-370. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0019464612455272.

years later, the church council stated that abolishing the fines had caused a decrease in attendance rates and, importantly, its funds, which the Company had failed to compensate. Council members argued that fines did not exist to enforce religion, but rather offered a necessary tool for the 'naturally slow population' to remain committed to the Protestant faith.[57] The Company consequently reinstated the fines to a limited extent in 1751, but the ministers continued to complain about empty schools.[58] While the Dutch explained the lack of school attendance as people's unwillingness or laziness, reasons for absence varied. Many schoolmasters only taught at schools in the few months before the visitation, and parents kept their children at home to work with them or because they considered the two-hour walk to school too dangerous.[59]

Not sending children to school was also a form of resistance against colonial power. Some parents wanted to avoid registration of school dates, or Christian education altogether.[60] Schoolmaster Don David Narklaer of the school in Kohilawatta, around ten kilometres east of Colombo, sued a neighbour at the worldly institute of the land court, arguing that the latter had created a Buddhist ceremonial place, drawing everyone away from his school and church services.[61] The mixed education of boys and girls proved to be problematic as well. In Sinhalese society, girls were traditionally not educated alongside boys in public spaces, especially after their first menstruation, when they were eligible for marriage.[62] In church reports from the early eighteenth century approximately twice as many boys as girls were registered as having attended and graduated from school, while baptisms, for instance, were divided equally.[63] In 1758, the Reverend Bronsveld noted casually that in Bolawalana only boys attended school, as the girls 'had not had the habit' yet.[64] This is an example of how Sri Lankans resisted and ignored imposed cultural repertoires. The VOC had considered this already in 1663, with school regulations promising to protect girls from being 'seduced by the lust of boys and others' in school, simultaneously encouraging girls to start school early, so they could leave school with what the Church considered sufficient Christian education by the age of ten.[65]

57 Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 142; Somaratna, 'Superficial Success', 97-100; NL-HaNA, VOC, *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren*, inv. 2713 f. 1104-1105.

58 Koschorke, *Minutes*, 'Ordinary meeting held on the 24th of June 1771'; NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 3201 f. 886-890; Julius Stein van Gollenesse and Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Memoir of Julius Stein Van Gollenesse, Governor of Ceylon, 1743-1751 for His Successor Gerrit Joan Vreeland, 28th February 1751* (Colombo 1974) 34-36.

59 NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 3201 f. 886-890; Somaratna, 'Superficial Success', 116; Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 132.

60 Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 111, 117.

61 SLNA/1, inv. 4779.

62 NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 2925 f. 977-978; Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 110; Nandasena Ratnapala, *Sinhalese Folklore, Folk Religion, and Folk Life* (Colombo 1980) 142-145; Jayaweera, 'Schooling in Sri Lanka', 170-172.

63 SA, *Classis*, inv. 203, f. 85-89.

64 '...immers de meisjes tot nog toe geene gewoonte gehad hebben...', NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 2925 f. 977-978.

65 '...om niet door de luxurieusheit van de jongens en andren verleyd te werden'. Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 112-114.

The regulation of girls' lives did not end after education, as the Dutch had extensive legislation regarding marriage and procreation. Cohabitation, Catholic and Sinhalese marriages were all criminalised as unregistered unions, like adultery, because they were not registered in the Reformed Church. Children of these unions were considered illegitimate.[66] Similar to the argument that Alicia Schrikker and Kate Ekama make about the European concepts of freedom and slavery in Sri Lanka, Europeans enforced the concept of illegitimacy on a society that had previously not regarded (il)legitimacy or (un)registered marriage dichotomies.[67] The status of illegitimacy was used as a penalty to control marital practice, along with fines, forced labour and corporal punishment. Illegitimate children could not be baptised, nor consequently attend school or be registered in the school *thombos*, preventing them from acquiring agency within the colonial structure. Legitimacy, therefore, was important for families wanting, pretending or forced to be part of the Dutch Church. By legitimising only children of parents who were baptised and married as Protestants, the Church enforced a Protestant lifestyle. Though thousands of Sinhalese registered their marriage and children in the Church, the 'problem' of illegitimacy kept occurring throughout the century: ordinances re-imposing illegitimacy were published repeatedly, responding to resistance and obliviousness to Protestant marital norms. This legislation demonstrates colonial control, but reflects a lack of it even more.[68]

Registration, school fines and the concept of illegitimacy were part of the subject-making process, enforcing behaviour to instil a Dutch, Reformed repertoire, disciplining children's bodies in particular. Embedded as the Church's registration of family life was in the VOC's administration, it served an important function to establish and maintain small-scale control on village communities. Regulations were not always accepted compliantly, or even acknowledged. Nevertheless, educational and religious discipline created an unstable power balance, with the schoolmaster at the centre and disciplining instruments at his and his superior's disposal. It represented a form of colonial coercion that made it impossible for the local population to distinguish the Company's power from that of the Church.[69]

66 Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 12-14, 48-49, 115-116, 263-266, 278-279, 309-310, 574, 585-588, 645-649, 673-674, 769-772.

67 Alicia Schrikker and Kate Ekama, 'Through the lens of slavery: Dutch Sri Lanka in the eighteenth century', in: Zoltán Biedermann and Alan Strathern (eds.), *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History* (London 2017) 178-193, 191-192; Nadeera Rupesinghe, 'Navigating Pluralities Reluctantly: The Marriage Contract in Dutch Galle', *Itinerario* 42:2 (2018) 223. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115318000311; Bulten et al., 'Contested conjugality? Sinhalese marriage practices in eighteenth-century Dutch colonial Sri Lanka', *Annales de démographie historique* 135:1 (2018) 55-56. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3917/adh.135.0051; Ratnapala, *Sinhalese Folklore*, 150-151.

68 Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 12-14, 48-49, 265-266, 309-310, 673-674, 769-772, 785-788; Rupesinghe, *Negotiating Custom*, 171, n. 129.

69 Somaratna, 'Superficial Success', 97-100.

Labour and the Church

The VOC's *Scholarch,* accompanying the minister on his visitations, symbolised the intertwined relation between Church and Company.[70] Why should church registration be overseen by a merchant? While the Church facilitated colonial religion, education, discipline and registration, on visitation day the VOC considered the school 'the responsibility of the State', with the ministers only 'co-supervisors'.[71] How could church registration practices relate to labour extraction when the church records did not directly refer to labour? This final part shows how caste conversion, school discharge and procreation regulations were Christian instruments of political and economic control for the VOC. Why did the Company specifically target children in its policies on labour and caste?

Caste politics in church

The Dutch, like the Portuguese had done before them, tried to undermine the strong position of the higher landowning castes – *Goyigama* in Sinhalese. They appointed middle- or lower-ranking castes, such as cinnamon-peelers (*Salāgama*), in official Company positions. For these groups, converting to Christianity could be a manner of expressing loyalty to the new colonising power. Simultaneously, it enabled their group's social mobility, offering an opportunity to circumvent the *Goyigama*,[72] as in Wattala, for example, around ten kilometres northeast of Colombo. Due to a conflict between the local *Goyigama, Salāgama, Hunu* (lime burners) and the schoolmaster, a whole generation had not attended school or been baptised for twenty years. Eventually, over sixty *Salāgama* and *Hunu* children approached the Reverend Bronsveld during a visitation, and requested him to baptise them. Spiritual reasons aside, they could have been equally motivated by the registration of their baptism and the recognition it provided in the colonial and religious system. They convinced the minister, even though the older children could not recite any scriptures or doctrines. The case was debated by the school and church council and even the Governor-General, but eventually the baptisms were approved, as they won the Church a number of registered congregants. Besides the youth's agency, this case also illustrates how local caste politics could determine who within the community had access to schools, and who was or was not baptised.[73]

70 Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 110.

71 Koschorke, *Minutes*, 'Ordinary Meeting of 24th March 1760' (art. 27).

72 Kitsiri Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900: A Study of Religious Revival and Change* (Berkeley 1976) 46-49, 101-103.

73 NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 2925, f. 980; Koschorke, *Minutes*, 'Extraordinary meeting of 29th May 1759', 'Extraordinary meeting of 2nd July 1759'; SLNA/1, School thombo Pas Betaal (Wattala), inv. 4083, p. 83 ff.

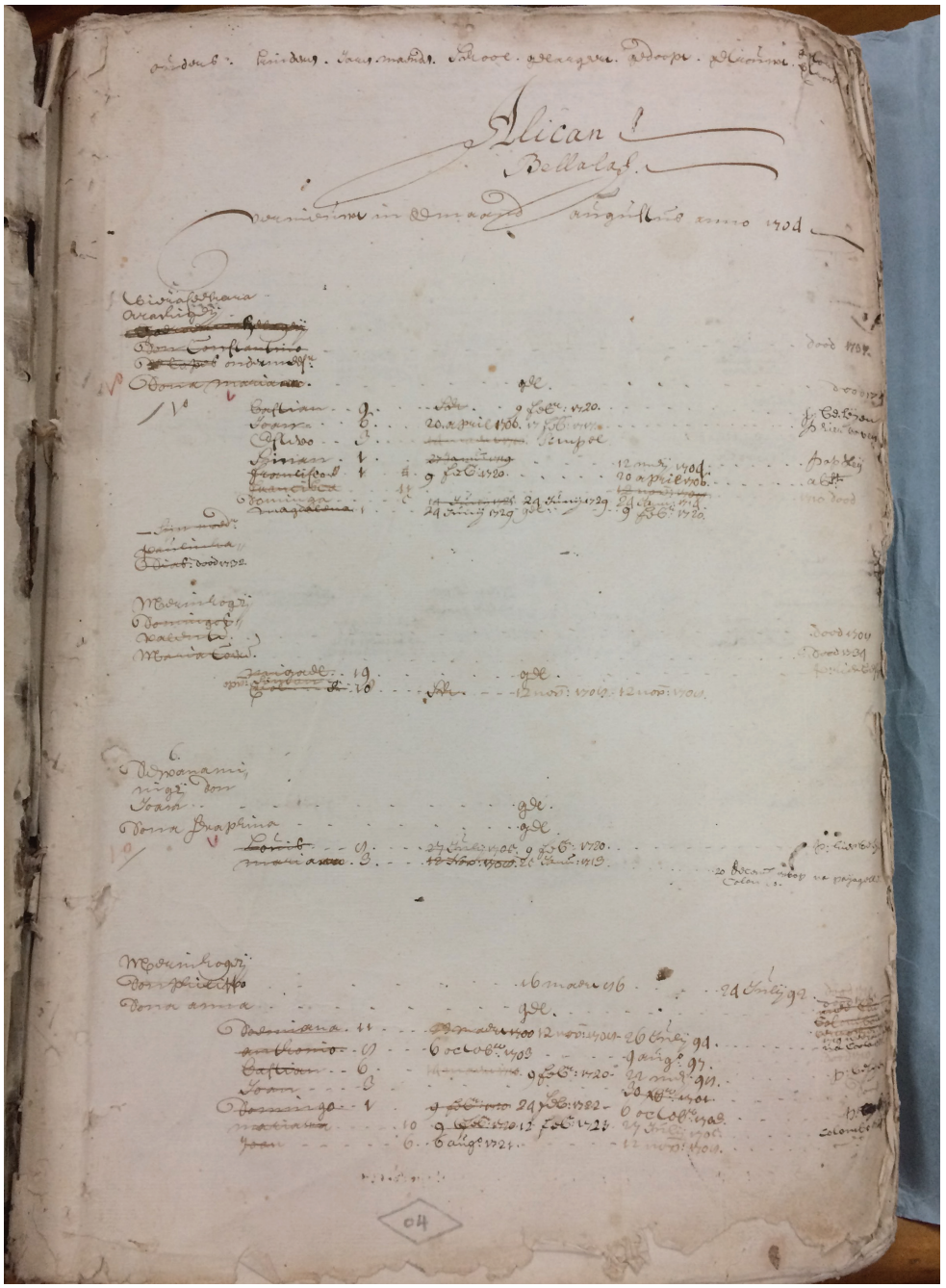


Figure 4: First page of the Alutgama school *thombo*, circa 1704. Many of the geographical descriptions in the school *thombos* can be connected to locations in present-day Sri Lanka.[74]

74 SLNA/1, inv. 4011. Photo by author, July 2018.

The Dutch did not solely focus on castes such as the cinnamon-peelers because of caste politics. Registration was more extensive in the areas where the VOC had a long-established commercial presence, and cinnamon production was a large component of the Company's profits. Kalutara district, an area of cinnamon forests and coconut plantations of great economic importance, had such a tradition of Dutch, caste-based registration. The registers were renewed and updated throughout the eighteenth century, and the *Salāgama* in particular are well represented in the records. In the school *thombo* of Alutgama, one of the seven schools in Kalutara district and about 75 kilometres south of Colombo, 2,000 children were registered as part of the cinnamon-peeler caste. While there are school *thombos* with a similar number of records, the *Salāgama* represented only a third of all children registered in the entire Alutgama school *thombo*.[75] The school *thombos* clearly embodied economic control to the VOC, but why was this specific type of church register so important?

'Largatie': from school duty to caste service

In the school *thombos*, children were always registered in relation to their family and community. The basic categorisation was the nuclear family, imposing Dutch categories of registration, but families were organised into village communities, which overlapped with social positions, occupation and caste. As seen in Figure 4, the registers have one column for parents, one for children, each with an individual name, and columns with the age at the time of registration, baptism date, school start and discharge date, as well as dates for marriage and possible death or migration. The school attendance dates in these school *thombos* are unique, in comparison to other colonial contexts. In the Portuguese empire, royal censuses and parish records either only registered children from their first communion at seven years old or just the numbers of Christians per area.[76] Similarly, the early modern church reports in the Dutch Moluccas gave the number of church members and attendants, but no names or family relations per village. The school *thombos* demonstrate that the Dutch attempted a tighter grip on village populations in Sri Lanka.[77]

75 For example, Bolawalana School *thombo* (2,000 total) and the Tamil School of Colombo (1,700 total); in Hanwella, further east, barely any school registration. SLNA/1, Alutgama school thombo, inv. 4012; Bolawalana, inv. 4028; Tamil School Colombo, inv. 3979; Hanwella 1, inv. 3998.

76 Paulo de Matos. 'Population Censuses in the Portuguese Empire, 1750-1820: Research notes', *Romanian Journal of Population Studies* VII:1 (2013) 4, 11.

77 Knaap, *Kruidnagelen*, 107-125.

While girls did not attend school, or would only do so for a short time, boys were expected at school until they reached the age to start the *rājakāriya* ('services to the king'). This mandatory, caste-related labour was claimed by the VOC in this period and boys ideally started their duties after formal school discharge. The discharge age differed by caste but mostly overlapped with the starting age for the *rājakāriya*: for the cinnamon-peelers this was around eleven years, but children were also registered as leaving school at around twelve, fifteen or even seventeen years old.[78] A student's discharge was marked by a *largatie* ceremony, which the Dutch accredited to 'an old custom'. *Largatie* was an official ritual held during visitation, and involved a certificate called a *largatie ola*. The use of a ceremonial, inscribed *ola* indicates that *largatie* was either a continuation of Portuguese or Sinhalese tradition or a Dutch attempt at claiming ceremonial value to legitimise their education system among the local population. By rewarding children with an *ola*, they might have been more prone to attend and finish school. Children deemed old enough for labour but whose school results were not sufficient would also be discharged from school. In this case, the *largatie ola* was often not granted.[79] Disobedient children or those absent on the day of the visitation could even be discharged without a *largatie* – implying that entering children into the workforce was more important than the actual ritual. Since discharged pupils would return for catechism, there was not a rigid separation between work and education, but the *largatie* changed a child's status, as it was a transition from school service to caste service. That school and church attendance was referred to as 'duty' and as 'service' is not a coincidence; the term *largatie* was otherwise only used in the context of dismissal from a job or forced labour, meaning to 'release' or 'discharge'. I, therefore, argue that, even though in historiography school *thombos* are mainly regarded as parish records, the VOC intended the school *thombos* to be an instrument for monitoring children until they were to become labourers, serving the Company's object on the extraction of caste labour. While school *thombo* registration continued for several decades after the British takeover in 1796, by then school and *largatie* columns had largely disappeared from the registers.[80]

Caste labour and procreation

Ballantyne describes how British missionaries in New Zealand employed labour in their civilisation process. By transforming Māori economic behaviour, the missionaries hoped to instil new moral and spiritual behaviour.[81] The VOC in Sri Lanka emphasised the relevance of labour too,

78 Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 78-90; SLNA/1, Bolawalana, inv. 4028; J.D. Palm, 'Education Establishments', 107.

79 NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 3201 f. 887; NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 2693, f. 1393-1432; NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. 2925, f. 968.

80 SLNA/1, Maditiyawala school thombo, inv. 3996; SLNA/1, Hanwella school thombo 2, inv. 3999.

81 Ballantyne, *Entanglements*, 98.

but to different ends. One instrument the Company used to control the supply of labour was the regulation of procreation within castes.[83] Among others, a 1747 ordinance only allowed *Salāgama* inter-sub-caste marriages when the couple had the marriage registered in the church, and the children only performed the services of, and were registered as, the lowest caste. The same principle applied to enslaved people marrying free people. Children of inter-caste unions could disrupt the supply of mandatory labour by avoiding caste labour of at least one parent, preferably the lower-caste obligation with the lowest social status and the most burdensome duties. The headmen of the cinnamon-peeler communities were, therefore, expected to keep a close eye on every baby born and register them, even before they reached the working age of eleven.[84] The 1747 ordinance was met with resistance and defiance from the *Salāgama*, but to no avail, as the Company prohibited inter-sub-caste marriage altogether in 1753.[85] The *Salāgama* resistance demonstrates the Company's complicated relation to caste, especially when compared to a similar case in the 1770s, when the landowning caste was actually able to temporarily prevent the social downgrading of children in their inter-sub-caste marriages.[86]

The VOC recognised children as a specific legal and social category not only in their family and in school but at work as well. From the age of eleven onwards, the *Salāgama* youth had their own quota of produce to deliver to the Company. It was lower than the quota for adults, as minors were considered 'tender', but it would increase every year.[87] Children's separate status did not mean the Company separated them from its objective of revenue generation. Children under twenty might not have been considered adults, but they were deemed capable enough to join the workforce, with or without education and *largatie*. In a way, the VOC worked in reverse compared to the missionaries in New Zealand. While the Māori were supposed to become good Christians through enforced economic behaviour, the Dutch wanted the Sinhalese to be Christians with a Christian lifestyle, in order to be loyal, productive workers. This is why the political rationality of the VOC, revolving around the object of labour extraction, started with children going to school.

Conclusion

In this article I have analysed the extent to which the Reformed Church was involved in the process of subject-making in Dutch Sri Lanka, and I have looked at the importance accorded to children in this process.

82 Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 118.

83 Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 220, 263-264, 322-328, 570-571, 749; Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie*, 110.

84 Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 570-571.

85 Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 758-759, 778.

86 Hovy, *Ceylonees Plakkaatboek*, 78-90.

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Figure 5: Wolvendaal Church, seen from the front. Note the Sri Lankan man and children in front of the church. Painted in the nineteenth century by John Leonard Kalenberg van Dort, a Sri Lankan man of Dutch descent.[87]

87 John Leonard Kalenberg van Dort, *Dutch Presbyterian Church at Wolvendahl, Colombo: the west front*, 1888. © Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 368150. http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:725319.

The VOC employed the Church as the driving force for subject-making at the village and family level. Personified by the schoolmaster, *Scholarch* and minister, the Church introduced moral repertoires by enforcing Protestant discipline. With instruments such as school fines, *largatie*, and labour and marriage regulations, the Dutch intended to monitor children from an early age into adulthood, using registration as a form of colonial coercion.

The objects of the Church and the Company both collided and cooperated. It remains important to acknowledge the Church's spiritual intentions, as well as the possibility of Sri Lankans' sincere consideration of the Reformed faith as a relevant spiritual repertoire. Additionally, the registration of the Church could provide empowerment, recognition and social mobility. In this article we have seen glimpses of negotiators, people undermining and transforming Dutch policies. Resistance from Sri Lankans regarding their position in the colonial system functioned as a counterweight to subject-making. To find such resistance of girls, schoolmasters and castes, it is necessary to read the colonial, religious archives 'against the grain' at an even deeper level.[88]

In conclusion, modern colonial processes of subject-making, such as humanitarian missions, have deeper roots than often assumed. There is an early modern overlap in Sri Lanka through instruments such as the indigenous schoolmaster, registration and education. Children were a specific target too, recognised by Church and state as a separate, pliable group, potential vehicles of change in their communities. Understanding their position is, therefore, key to understanding subject-making. Yet, while the operating fields of the early modern Church and school resembled those of modern colonialism, using moral repertoires, they should not be understood as a civilising mission. Although masked by the role of a colonial Church, instruments such as fines and school *thombos* reveal the VOC's mercantilist rationality, even towards children. While there are similarities to the far-reaching colonial governmentality Scott conceptualised, the VOC merely aimed at control over behaviour, not mentality. The Company's rationality behind this distinct early modern subject-making was not to transform society, but to have loyal, controllable subjects to increase revenue. It would make for compelling further research to trace and compare different legacies and definitions of (early) modern subject-making throughout the (post-)colonial era.

88 This negotiation by Sri Lankans with colonial power and religion is the focus of my PhD research.

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