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ENTREMONS. UPF JOURNAL OF WORLD HISTORY

Universitat Pompeu Fabra | Barcelona

Número 13 (Octubre 2022)

www.entremons.org

The coloniality of girls' education in Sri Lanka. Agency, transformation and adaptation

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Rebut: 4 de gener de 2022 **Acceptat:** 2 de setembre de 2022

Abstract:

This article looks at the global, entangled history of girls' education in late colonial Sri Lanka. This article looks at two European women educators, Lilian Nixon and Florence Farr, who came to the island to become principals of girl's schools at the beginning of the twentieth century. Both had been educated at the Cheltenham Ladies College, England, whose impact on the education of girls, in England and the Empire, is crucial. By looking at the

discussions on girls's education at CLC, Ladies' College (Nixon), Colombo, and Ramanathan College (Farr), Jaffna, Sri Lanka, this article proposes a new, global historical, approach to the history of girls' education and female empowerment, colonial power structures and postcolonial transformations. I will argue that the answer to the question whether colonial girls' education and its successors is seen as empowering, depends on the conceptualisation of empowerment and agency in their relation to religion. The case study of Sri Lanka can, thereby, serve as an

¹ DOI : 10.31009/entremons.2022.i13.01

example to instigate new discussions within postcolonial and feminist approaches in history.

Keywords:

Colonial education, gendered education, agency, coloniality of gender, Sri Lanka, religion

Introduction

The 'careless' and 'restless' bodies, and 'inattentive' and 'obstinate' minds of native girls were disciplined and moulded in missionary schools via a 'gospel of gentility' that sought to produce 'respectable' ladies who were both pious and industrious, restrained and gentle. The education of their minds was thus also synonymous with the education of their hands and bodies (...) as a form of inculcating the additional Christian virtues of civility, devorum and cleanliness, and signalling (...) the transformation of 'heathen' bodies into 'respectable' ones.²

This argument laid out by Malathi de Alwis reflects one possible side scholarship has taken in the last decades in regard to the history of girls education in Sri Lanka since late colonial times.³ According to her and others, such as Swarna Jayaweera, Nira Wickramasinghe and Janaki Jayawardena, contemporary (middle-class) girls' education in Sri Lanka is the heiress to a colonial education system based on Christian missionary efforts to 'civilise' and convert.⁴ Other voices, mainly that of Kumari Jayawardena, highlight the empowering aspects that have come out of the educational efforts of white women who came to Sri Lanka to educate Ceylonese girls, may it be a direct personal influence or opening up the possibilities of feminist and socialist discussions.⁵ As she has argued, those women were and still are either remembered as 'devils' or 'goddesses', depending on the political, religious, and gendered views of those remembering them: 'there was no agreement on who were goddesses and who

² Alwis, "Respectability", "Modernity" and the Policing of "Culture" in Colonial Ceylon', 179.

³ This article would not be possible without the valuable help and encouragement by Tirthankar Chakraborty and Judith Bachmann.

⁴ Alwis, "Respectability", "Modernity" and the Policing of "Culture" in Colonial Ceylon'; Jayaweera, 'European Women Educators Under the British Colonial Administration in Sri Lanka'; Jayawardena, 'Cultural Construction of the 'Sinhala Woman' and Women's Lives in Post-Independence Sri Lanka'; Wickramasinghe, *Dressing the Colonised Body*.

⁵ Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*; Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*; Jayawardena, 'Sinhala Buddhism and the "Daughters of the Soil"'; Jayawardena, 'White Women, Arrack Fortunes and Buddhist Girl's Education'.

were devils, and those who were goddesses to some were devils to others.'⁶ Two of the white women examined by Jayawardena are Florence Farr (1860–1917) and Lilian Nixon (1873–1945) who were either judged as goddesses or devils, depending on those judging them.

Sri Lanka had been colonised in parts since the sixteenth century, first by the Portuguese, then by the Dutch. Since 1815, it was fully controlled by the British Empire. All educators, but mostly the British, influenced the educational system in Sri Lanka. This educational system was deeply linked to the Christian missionary endeavours who were the sole managers of schools until the emergence of government, Buddhist and Tamil schools at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Even though there were Christian missionary schools for girls since the 1820s, it took until the end of the nineteenth century to establish comprehensive English and vernacular girls' schools in the country.⁷ Sri Lankan scholarship concerned with the question of gender and colonialism as well as many other non-academic voices agree that what we know about gender (in Sri Lanka) and how we know about it is shaped and mediated by colonial history and the history of education. This stands in contrast to those who maintain that prevalent gender roles, and therefore the subordinate status of women and often restriction to the home, being a wife and mother first, are embedded in a Sinhala (Buddhist) or respectively Tamil or Muslim identity. As Malathi de Alwis argues, 'Ceylonese women were placed within 'culture' and 'tradition' in the 'challenge and reponse' between colonialism and nationalism in the nineteenth century'.⁸ According to her, Ceylonese women needed to conform to 'respectability', a frame created through the exchange between 'Evangelists' and Sinhala and Tamil locals. While I agree with the severity of the coloniality of gender as it is portrayed here, acknowledging the influence of education on establishing a new form of girl- and womanhood, following de Alwis' argument might lead to viewing this new conception as a stable and fixed idea which was put onto Ceylonese women (and white women educators alike) by the colonisers and the male local elite. However, as I will argue, what is usually referred to as 'Victorian womanhood' or 'Victorian virtues' has to be looked at from a different angle. Respectability, motherliness, emotionality, being a home-maker and the perfect companion to one's husband, are attributes which were only established through the exchange between white

⁶ Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, 18.

⁷ Jayaweera, 'European Women Educators Under the British Colonial Administration in Sri Lanka'; Albrecht, 'Motherhood, Religion, and Feminism. Colonial Encounters, Intersectional Identities'.

⁸ Alwis, "'Respectability', 'Modernity' and the Policing of 'Culture' in Colonial Ceylon", 178.

women educators and the local women and men in Ceylon and they became British values as much as Ceylonese ones.

In this article I propose the perspective that the difference in the evaluation of white women educators in late colonial Sri Lanka is bound to differing (feminist) notions on “empowerment” and its relation to religion. Present day education of middle-class girls in Sri Lanka is still bound to the parameters set by the colonial educational system: it is class based, gendered and mostly separated on the basis of religion. There are either Buddhist, Hindu or Christian schools⁹, whereby the latter are the only “mixed” schools in terms of religion, only having a slight majority of Christian students. In contrast, Buddhist, this includes all state schools, and Hindu schools only have to have about three percent of students of other religions. Consequently, religion and gender are inextricably linked within the Sri Lankan educational system. Until today, discussions are held which are concerned with the empowering and disempowering aspects of girls-only schools.¹⁰ This discussion can be traced back to the beginnings of universal girls' education, globally: the middle and late nineteenth century.

In order to contextualise this discussion in the history of girls' education in Sri Lanka, I will first give a short insight into the theoretical premises of writing postcolonial histories of girls' education in Sri Lanka. Then, this article will look at two European women educators who came to the island to become principals of girl's schools at the beginning of the twentieth century: Nixon and Farr. Both had been educated at the Cheltenham Ladies College (CLC), England, whose impact on the education of girls, in England and the Empire, is crucial. By looking at the discussions on girls's education at CLC, Ladies' College (founded by Nixon), Colombo, and Ramanathan College (led by Farr), Jaffna, Sri Lanka, this article proposes a new, global historical, approach to the history of girls' education and female empowerment, colonial power structures and postcolonial transformations. The examples of the two schools in Sri Lanka will also illustrate the differing memory practices in regards to the first Principals, Nixon and Farr. Whereas Nixon is remembered highly within the school today, the role of Farr is driven into the background of the schools founder and national hero, the Tamil Ponnambalam Ramanathan (1851–1930). I will argue that the answer to the question whether colonial girls' education and its successors is seen as empowering, depends on the conceptualisation of

⁹ There also is a handful of Muslim and International, private, schools. However, examining those would exceed the scope of this study.

¹⁰ Interviews with former and current students and teachers, September 2021.

empowerment and agency in their relation to religion. The case study of Sri Lanka can, thereby, serve as an example to instigate new discussions within postcolonial and feminist approaches in history.

Global discourses, colonial agencies

The history of colonialism is bound to the question of agency. Whether it concerns the hierarchical structures of gender, race, class or religion, the constrictions, boundaries and possibilities of agency are the core interest of postcolonial and global historical research. Especially when it comes to the voices we can 'hear' in the sources available to us, scholarship is still bound to the restrictions and (pre)selections of/in the archive, the researcher's positionality and contemporary discourses and power structures.¹¹ This becomes even more important when looking at gender within (post)colonial power structures. In these cases, the conceptualisation of agency as the power to act (freely) become more problematic.¹² Similar arguments are drawn in the case of gender, religion and agency.¹³

Especially in postcolonial countries such as Sri Lanka, present day politics and struggles continue to influence the historical narrations in relation to the colonial past. In the case of women's role in it, the history of feminism and gender struggles, this narration is either challenged from feminist historians¹⁴ or women's histories are incorporated or swallowed up into the national, and religious, narratives.¹⁵ This is also the case for the history of (gendered) education in the country. When looking at the histories told about the most prominent schools in the country, which are middle-class, gendered and often separated along the lines of religion, they are always put in relation to the national history. This is the case for Buddhist, Hindu and Christian schools alike. However, when it comes to the remembrance of the founders and

¹¹ Burton, *Dwelling the Archive*; Mel, *Women & the Nation's Narrative*; Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.

¹² Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with Patriarchy'; Thomas, 'Historicising Agency'.

¹³ Bracke, 'Author(iz)ing Agency. Feminist Scholars Making Sense of Women's Involvement in Religious 'Fundamentalist' Movements'; Burke, 'Women's Agency in Gender-Traditional Religions. A Review of Four Approaches'; Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*; Scott, *Sex and Secularism*; Singh, 'Religious Agency and the Limits of Intersectionality'.

¹⁴ Alwis, 'Maternalist Politics in Sri Lanka'; Jayawardena, 'Cultural Construction of the 'Sinhala Woman' and Women's Lives in Post-Independence Sri Lanka'; Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*; Mel, *Women & the Nation's Narrative*.

¹⁵ Gombrich and Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*; Holt, *The Sri Lanka Reader. History, Culture, Politics*; Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka. Histories and Stories*; Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*; Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*.

early principals of those schools, which have been white Europeans, North Americans or Australians until the second half of the twentieth century, this narration differs. Within the schools, they celebrate founder's days and it seems as if the role of the early principals and founders is much the same.¹⁶ However, it is mostly the founders of the Buddhist schools, respectively the Hindu schools in the north, which are celebrated in local and national newspapers. This is even more so the case when it comes to girls' schools. In those instances, the founders and principals are celebrated for bringing girls' education to Sri Lanka.¹⁷ Even though this leaves the colonial power relations uncriticised, it is a practice often used by supporters of girls' and women's rights as well as a narrative which is commonly used in the schools' memorial lectures as means of empowerment.

Remembering the actions by the founders and early principals in this way does not mean, that colonial power structures are passively incorporated and accepted. Rather, it needs to be viewed as a sign of colonial agency in its own right. Using the theories by Judith Butler, Michael Bergunder has argued for the case of postcolonial history of religion, that there can never be a passive re-iteration of a narration, discourse or action, which leaves the meaning of it unchanged. Instead, every articulation is a re-articulation within a new context inherently transformative as such. This way, it opens up to see possibilities of colonial agencies which have not been seen before.¹⁸

The same goes for the history of gendered education in Sri Lanka. This is as much the case for the present-day narration of schools' histories¹⁹ as it is for the gendered educational practices themselves. To illustrate this, I will use the example of Ladies' College, Colombo, and Ramanathan College, Jaffna, and their early histories. This will show the ways in which, on the one hand, colonial power structures were undoubtedly present, but could nevertheless be used and transformed by local actors.

¹⁶ This is the case in boys' and girls' schools alike, across the country, and can also be judged by the presence of the founders and early principals on their websites. Fieldwork and interviews conducted in September 2021.

¹⁷ See for instance in the case of Marie Musaeus Higgins: , 'Musaeus, Mother and Mentor from America'.

¹⁸ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*; Bergunder, 'What Is Religion? The Unexplained Subject Matter of Religious Studies'; Bergunder, 'Comparison in the Maelstrom of Historicity'.

¹⁹ Albrecht, 'Motherhood, Religion, and Feminism. Colonial Encounters, Intersectional Identities'; Albrecht, 'The Politics Within the Histories We Write. Race and Religion, Gender and Education in Colonial Sri-Lanka'.

Colonial ladies- Cheltenham Ladies' college

Not only in the debate about British feminism around 1900, but also in the question of colonial power structures and anti-colonial aspirations, the relevance of education is evident. Education fulfilled two roles in the British Empire: First, the education of the masses was seen as a means to create and strengthen a national, British identity, through which a so-called “Britishness” was created in Britain itself, as well as in the colonised territories, as a (male) identity.²⁰ Through this identity, social control over the lower classes, as well as over colonized subjects, was to be created.²¹ On the other hand, however, education had the task of enabling individual improvement and further education, which was, however, strongly limited to the (male) middle class. Within both spheres, the emphasis was placed on defining moral forms of behavior and social affiliations.²² In addition to these class-specific — as well as implicitly and explicitly race-specific — differences, research has elaborated that an equally weighty picture of gender differences underlay the Victorian notion of education. Here, too, in the case of the middle classes, as historian Joan Burstyn argues, the primary function of education was to instill and impose the so-called ‘ideal of womanhood,’ through which “woman” and “womanhood” were constructed as entities.²³

Burstyn traces the different schooling of girls and boys back to the different gender-specific roles in the family of the new middle class. In this family, a woman's position was always defined by her husband, first by her father and then by her husband. The husband's position was measured by his profession and his income. A higher income enabled the family to hire domestic servants, which meant that the wife and children now had “free time”. Boys were already being educated in day schools or boarding schools in the early nineteenth century, but girls were taught at home by private tutors or — in keeping with the upper classes — by governesses because of the desired separation of private household and public life. Since this proved too costly, however, girls were also increasingly taught in schools from the mid-nineteenth century onward. Here, too, however, the curriculum was divided along gender lines. Since, according to Burstyn, a woman could not achieve status through her own aspirations,

²⁰ Casinader, *Transnationalism, Education and Empowerment*, 25; Aldrich, *School and Society in Victorian Britain*, xx.

²¹ Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*, 11.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

but only through her husband, girls were trained toward that goal.²⁴ '[Education should] equip women primarily to fulfill their womanly duties.'²⁵ However, if women wanted to attain higher education because of a desire for a profession, this too had to remain within the bounds of 'appropriate' occupations. Thus, female teachers, nurses, or doctors agreed with the image of women as mothers with a caring nature. This 'social motherhood' strengthened and secured above all the social status of unmarried middle-class women.²⁶

According to Burstyn, this division of the sexes into a public work life and a private home life, which was already evident in schooling, formed the idea of separate spheres in which woman and respectively man would each have their own position of power. These were coupled and filled with notions of male superiority in reason (and profession), and female superiority in morality. As a result, it was attributed to women to spread and teach their virtues. This became her specific task in national and colonial endeavors.²⁷ Interacting with religious, especially Anglican and Unitarian, discourses, woman became the moral protector of society.²⁸

Because of its hegemonic discursive position, the assumption of gender differences in intellectual and moral terms could be exploited by both feminist and anti-feminist sides.²⁹ Thus, there is agreement that progress regarding higher education for women was only possible because 'the Victorian domestic ideal' was reinforced by both feminist and anti-feminist sides.³⁰ Both positions argued the need for women's education to fulfill their role in the British nation and empire.³¹ Not surprisingly, the new colleges and high schools for girls and women that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century were perceived as 'conservative' institutions that upheld 'conventional' values and ideals of femininity.³²

The Higher Education Movement drew on, grappled with, and reappropriated the domestic ideological tradition that assigned to women responsibility for the maintenance and superintendence of the home, the family, and the private virtues of religion and morality.³³

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12–18.

²⁵ Bush, "Special Strenghts for Their Own Special Duties", 387.

²⁶ Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*, 21; Martin, 'Gender, the City and the Politics of Schooling', 144–48, 160.

²⁷ Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*, 31.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

²⁹ Bush, "Special Strenghts for Their Own Special Duties"; Heilmann and Sanders, 'The Rebel, the Lady and the "Anti"'; Schwartz, 'Feminist Thinking on Education in Victorian England'.

³⁰ Bush, "Special Strenghts for Their Own Special Duties", 391.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 387; Schwartz, 'Feminist Thinking on Education in Victorian England', 672.

³² Bush, "Special Strenghts for Their Own Special Duties", 391.

³³ Green, *Educating Women*, 3.

'The Victorian ideal of womanhood,' as well as 'the Victorian domestic ideology,' were thus formative in the emergence of Victorian feminism, which fought largely for education and suffrage in addition to the reform of norms of sexuality.³⁴ Under the guise of imperialist and evolutionist discourse, feminists and anti-feminists could fight for the education of girls and women. As so-called imperial feminists, women in colonial territories such as Ceylon also adopted these ideas and advocated for women's education with the goal 'to be gracious hostesses presiding over simple, neat homes in which children and husbands would find their moral center'.³⁵

It was not only Victorian feminists and anti-feminists in England who were concerned with girls' education, but also the (female) missionary enterprise. Similarly, there the view was held that the education of the (two) sexes should differ — women's education should enable them to 'fulfil their womanly duties'.³⁶ Women's commitment to home and family was seen as vital to the nation and the empire which is why this came to be the centre of female education.³⁷ Education should prepare women to become what was deemed to be the perfect wife and mother. Therefore, most emerging secondary educational institutions and emerging colleges for women in the nineteenth century fostered 'conventional values and ideals about femininity'.³⁸ Still, education was central to the globally emerging feminist politics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because of its focus on developing 'women's personal, intellectual, emotional and spiritual emancipation'.³⁹

In the course of the nineteenth century, more and more single female missionaries were sent out to the colonies after being educated in newly established schools and colleges for women. Even though the female missionaries themselves were trained to become wives and mothers at home, becoming a missionary then enabled them to pursue another path and emancipate themselves from the restrictions at home.⁴⁰ One such was Cheltenham Ladies' College (CLC). Founded in 1853 for the girls of Cheltenham, CLC was soon opened for boarders by the famous Principal Dorothea Beale. By the end of the nineteenth century, the school had over nine

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁵ Ramusack, 'Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies', 311.

³⁶ Bush, "Special Strengths for Their Own Special Duties", 387; Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*, 13, 31.

³⁷ Bush, "Special Strengths for Their Own Special Duties", 387; Green, *Educating Women*, 3.

³⁸ Bush, "Special Strengths for Their Own Special Duties", 391.

³⁹ Schwartz, 'Feminist Thinking on Education in Victorian England', 679.

⁴⁰ Pui-Lan, 'The Image of the 'White Lady''.

hundred students, about half of them boarders.⁴¹ Cheltenham as a town was a place for families active in the British colonial apparatus. Families, who had spent time overseas came there to spend their furlough or to retire; women whose husbands were still working in the colonies lived there with their children to give them an English education.⁴² Therefore, CLC soon became known throughout the empire as the best possible education for girls of empire families or those who wanted to work in the empire later on.⁴³ For Principal Beale, a Christian identity and Christian education was central to the school.⁴⁴ In 1884, St. Hilda's College was opened as a Resident Training College for women resembling the Oxford and Cambridge women's colleges; however, students should continue to stay for a year longer than their studies and gain practical experience from teachers at CLC. In that final year, 'religiouis knowledge, and the theory and practice of education' were to be taught.⁴⁵ Beale often recommended trainees from St. Hilda's to become teachers and principals throughout the British Empire and beyond.⁴⁶

So far, the sources from CLC and the scholarship on the history of education in the British Empire suggests that Victorian ideals of womanhood have been exported into the world and passively adapted by local actors. This view, however, will be challenged when looking at the adaptations of girls' education and images of womanhood in Sri Lanka.

Lilian Nixon and Ladies' college, Colombo

Many women who were educated at CLC and joined St. Hilda's went on to become missionaries with the Church Missionary Society (CMS). One of them was Lilian Nixon. She had joined CLC in 1888, aged 14 and stayed for a year. After that, she went to Germany to study Philology and stayed for a short while in France to learn the language. She then went to a college in Belfast, where she was from, for four years to take B.A. Honours degree in Modern Literature and Philology.⁴⁷ Already planning to become a teacher in the Empire, she went to a Training College in London.⁴⁸ She was taught by the Home and Colonial School Society and

⁴¹ Clarke, *A History of the Cheltenham Ladies' College 1853-1953*, 5.

⁴² Buettner, *Empire Families*, 2-18.

⁴³ Clarke, *A History of the Cheltenham Ladies' College 1853-1953*, 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴⁶ Most schools were established in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and India.

⁴⁷ Anon, 'Extracts from a Letter from Lilian Nixon to Miss Constance Andrews', 142.

⁴⁸ There, she was taught by Dr Mary Wood and Frances Mary Buss, two 'pioneers of girls' education' to prepare for her work in the colonies until she was sent out to Ceylon. Hitchcock, *A History of c.m.s. Ladies' College. 1900-1955*, 14

used what she had learnt when training teachers herself. After she had been to Ceylon for some years, she wrote 'I cannot be too thankful for my 'Home and Colonial' training without which this particular part of my work would be impossible'.⁴⁹ After her time in London, she went to a Missionary Training Home in 1898, 'reading Theology and doing parish work'.⁵⁰ After almost a year, in June 1899, she was accepted as a missionary and set out for Ceylon.

CLC was often called 'mother College' to her 'daughter Colleges' worldwide. Ladies' College Colombo was one of them. It was founded by the CMS in 1899 and opened in February 1900.⁵¹ Since then, it stands under the Bishop of Colombo.⁵² Even though Nixon had only been at CLC for a year, it stayed close to her heart and educational practices. In the history of Ladies' College, Colombo, CLC is remembered as the foundation of Nixon's character and intellect. As Mabel Simon (Principal 1946–1963) pointed out in 1957, 'Lilian Nixon was a pupil of one of the greatest English schools founded in the middle of a century of outstanding educational enterprise, Ladies' College, Cheltenham'. Referring to the 'famous Principal, Dorothea Beale', Simons continues praising CLC as a crucial part in enhancing women's education.⁵³ Apparently, even in the middle of the twentieth century, Ladies' College felt connected to its roots in England and celebrated their relation to Cheltenham. The 55 years memorial booklet praises the 'great academic tradition' Nixon entered at CLC, which enabled her to join doctors, social workers and missionaries all over the world.⁵⁴ Even now, Ladies' College celebrates the education Nixon received at Cheltenham. Being enabled by Beale, Nixon was set out to become a 'missionary to further women's education'.⁵⁵ Throughout her years in Ceylon, Nixon personally stayed in close contact with Cheltenham. As Simon maintained, 'her school life at Cheltenham was certainly a happy one, leaving her with a life-long respect for education'.⁵⁶ Via the CLC magazine, many former students stayed in touch and reported on their work overseas. In 1901, a letter by Nixon was published in which she wrote that

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁰ Anon, 'Extracts from a Letter from Lilian Nixon to Miss Constance Andrews', 142.

⁵¹ Hitchcock, *A History of c.m.s. Ladies' College. 1900-1955*, 1.

⁵² *Ladies' College. 90th Anniversary Commemorative Volume 1990*, 1.

⁵³ Simons also links Beale's efforts to the women's emancipation movement of the nineteenth century by helping to 'overcome the weakness of girls' education'. Hitchcock, *A History of c.m.s. Ladies' College. 1900-1955*, 12

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁵ 'Lilian Nixon BA Cert. Ed Principal'.

⁵⁶ Hitchcock, *A History of c.m.s. Ladies' College. 1900-1955*, 13.

it was such a pleasure to hear about everything at College. I always feel how very, very much I owe to my two years there, and in my work out here it is always my aim as nearly as possible to follow out, although in a very small way, the ideals Miss Beale put before us.⁵⁷

Even though Ladies' College, Colombo, initially started out in a rented bungalow with just two children, Nixon insisted on calling it the 'Ladies' College' rather than the usual title of 'Girls' High School', a name that has been used ever since. Most likely, Nixon wanted to highlight the link to her own education at CLC and had a specific 'ladylike' girlhood in mind for her students and picked the name accordingly. The vision of womanhood which was promoted at CLC was centred on the idea of two complementary sexes, both equally important for society but different in character, a view which reciprocally structured the gendered order of the empire.⁵⁸ This becomes apparent in the CLC magazine:

The life, character, and capacity of woman, must, when adequately handled, be at all times a most interesting, if not the most interesting study for women. Woman, her history, her writings, and her genius, seem to me to have at the present time a special interest, not for women only, but for general humanity. Man and woman are, if I may so speak, the opposite poles of the great electric chain of human existence, and it is only by connecting the mind of the two that it is possible to produce that perfect circle, that conscious thrill of life as a whole, which is essential to the right conception of the proportionate value of its parts.⁵⁹

Ladies' College takes pride in not solely focussing on academic excellence, but also on the development of skills such as music, sports, drama, poetry and creative writing. This is attributed to Nixon who founded a college 'on the highest ideals of the liberal tradition that she herself had inherited from her years at Cheltenham'.⁶⁰ Nixon established a curriculum similar to 'home'. She also opened a Kindergarten and conducted training classes for teachers to work in English and vernacular schools.⁶¹ Apart from the academic subjects, special attention was paid to needlework, which was taught by Miss Whitney for the first years. Whitney had come to Ceylon with Nixon and became the manager of the school. When Whitney left for furlough in 1906, the class for embroidery and needlework lapsed, but as soon as she came back and

⁵⁷ Anon, 'Extracts from a Letter from Lilian Nixon to Miss Constance Andrews', 142.

⁵⁸ Hall, 'Of Gender and Empire. Reflections on the Nineteenth Century'.

⁵⁹ Davies, 'Madame de Stael. A Character-Sketch', 1.

⁶⁰ Obeyesekere, *Ladies' College a Centennial Narrative 1900-2000*, 17.

⁶¹ Anon, 'Extracts from a Letter from Lilian Nixon to Miss Constance Andrews', 143; Nixon, 'The Ladies' College, Colombo', 24.

brought new materials, needlework became a 'special feature of the College'.⁶² It were not only these 'womanly subjects' which should make a Ladies' College girl a 'lady', but also her behaviour, attitude and attire. Feminist anthropologist Malathi de Alwis was once asked about the quote from Uduvil College mentioned before, *how can someone run 'orderly and submissive'*? She then reminisced on her own school years at Ladies' College, Colombo:

As a student in a private girls' school founded by the Church Missionary Society, I was once thirty minutes late for Sinhala choir practice. Running the entire breadth of our school, I burst into the auditorium, breathless, sweating, my hair dishevelled and uniform askew. The rather aged teacher-in-charge was our chaperone since the choirmaster was a handsome and nationally-acclaimed singer, who was also the reason for my urgency. She had watched my arrival with great distaste and made me sit beside her as the choir was in mid-song. (...) She ended with a final warning: 'If you keep running around in such an ungraceful fashion, you will never find a husband. Don't you know that our Sinhala men only like women who are civilized, 'respectable' and submissive?'.⁶³

De Alwis's story narrates the picture of a version of femininity taught at school which focusses on respectability and submissiveness. This, however is not the only version which can be told. Several other accounts focus on the empowering aspects of female education at that time. Following from this, how we judge female education must take into account the limitations in place to see the possibilities they opened up. May it be the 55th anniversary or the 120th, Ladies' College is proud to stand in the line of what its leaders today attribute to the vision of its founder Nixon. On the one hand, this vision entailed to train the girls to become 'centres of light in their future homes', but, on the other hand, to be 'independent, upright without being pretentious'.⁶⁴ This illustrates the importance Ladies' College, still today, places on the image and memory of its founder as a role model for its students. Nixon is not remembered as a European woman who placed European values onto the children, but rather, those values are seen as Sri Lankan and empowering at the same time. A similar example of this is the Ramanathan College, Jaffna.

⁶² Hitchcock, *A History of c.m.s. Ladies' College. 1900-1955*, 32.

⁶³ Alwis, "'Respectability', 'Modernity' and the Policing of 'Culture' in Colonial Ceylon", 186.

⁶⁴ Hitchcock, *A History of c.m.s. Ladies' College. 1900-1955*, 50; Speldewinde, 'Principal's Report 2019', 6.

Florence Farr and Ramanathan college

Because of the influence of Christian missionary schools and the — legitimate — fear of conversion, the Buddhist and Hindu revival movements which started in the late nineteenth century in Ceylon instantly focussed on education.⁶⁵ Strikingly, these educational endeavours, both Buddhist as well as Tamil, by men and women, felt the need to also place a white woman as the Principal of their most prominent schools. This was mainly for two reasons. Firstly, a European woman would have been educated in the highest possible (colonial) standard of those times (see Lilian Nixon); and secondly, only a white woman at the top would enable them to gain a competitive edge over the missionary girls' high schools led by Christian women.

The most important English-language girls' school for the Tamil Hindus was founded by Ponnambalam Ramanathan in 1913 and directed by the English theosophist Florence Farr, whom Ramanathan had met in London in 1902.⁶⁶ The Theosophical Society (TS) was founded in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott and others in New York with the aim to create a society for the so-called occult sciences and the search for true religion. The society rapidly gained a broad following in North American and Europe. However, Olcott and Blavatsky were mostly interested in studying the religion of the 'East', mainly Hinduism and Buddhism, so they established their Headquarters in Madras, South India, in 1882. The Theosophical Society subsequently gained many followers in South Asia, East Asia, Australia and South Africa. Their biggest impact, however, was in collaborating with religious reform movements in these regions — as they did in Sri Lanka. Olcott and Blavatsky first came to Sri Lanka in 1880. Their interest in the island and its religion had been sparked by the English translated transcripts of an 1873 debate in Panadura, a village south of the capital, Colombo. Some Christian missionaries had challenged the Buddhist High Priests Sumangala and Gunananda to a debating duel, to establish what was the better religion. The Christian missionaries thought this debate would consolidate the superiority of Christianity once and for all. But the Buddhist High Priests Sumangala and Gunananda won the debate and it became the founding moment of the Buddhist revival movement. The Theosophical Society worldwide and local networks ensured the rapid expansion of Ceylon's Buddhist movement throughout

⁶⁵ For the history of the Buddhist revival movement and Buddhist girls' education, especially the parallels of the argument made here, see: Jayawardena, 'White Women, Arrack Fortunes and Buddhist Girl's Education'; Albrecht, 'Motherhood, Religion, and Feminism. Colonial Encounters, Intersectional Identities'.

⁶⁶ Kraft, 'The Sex Problem', 271–72; Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, 135–46.

the 1880s and 1890s. Many of its adherents later became part of the anti-colonial and national movement which would lead to Ceylon's independence in 1948. However, there were not only Buddhist members, but various people joined or supported the society because they saw the possibility of working against the financial and intellectual networks of the Christian missionary societies. One of them was Ponnambalam Ramanathan. Though being a Hindu himself, Ramanathan had also been an early supporter of the Women's Educational Society, founded by middle-class Buddhist women and funded by the Buddhist Theosophical Society in 1889 to establish schools for Buddhist girls.

According to his writings, the idea of founding a college specifically for girls 'in which both temporal and spiritual knowledge could be given to Hindu children' had been in his mind for about ten years prior to its establishment.⁶⁷ That was when he visited London. He had been invited by Allan Bennett, a former Theosophist and member of the Order of the Golden Dawn (OGD) who was the tutor of Ramanathan's younger son of his first wife. Ramanathan had been in contact with the Theosophical Society since the 1890s when he met Olcott and went to conferences with him. Though Ramanathan never became a formal member, he came into contact with many people around the world via the society's networks and used them to travel and speak worldwide. It was only two weeks after Florence Farr joined the TS in 1902 when she wrote in her journal that she had met Ramanathan who was 'speaking to spiritual seekers'.⁶⁸ Allan Bennet had been Farr's co-magician in the OGD, which she had left before joining the TS. At that meeting, Ramanathan and Farr had a conversation on girls' education and she told him that once he would put his plans into action, she would join him in Ceylon. Soon after that, Ramanathan, then widower, met his future wife, Theosophist R. L. Harrison, in Australia. She, too, was invested in the education of girls, and later became the manager of the school and worked closely with Farr until the latter died in 1917.

With Ramanathan College, the Hindu reformer, politician and educationalist wanted to review a specific version of Hindu womanhood. This version, however much it was legitimised by 'ancient Hindu tradition' by Ramanathan himself and others, was as much a product of colonial exchange and conversation with 'Western education' and conceptions of femininity. Even though Ramanathan's biographer argues that he envisaged this school 'to be a shrine of Hindu

⁶⁷ Vythilingam, *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan*, 545.

⁶⁸ Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 271.

culture' and 'to recapture the true spirit of the ancient and traditional culture of the Hindus which he feared was fast disintegrating under the impact of Western influences'.⁶⁹ Ramanathan himself stated the need to combine the best of East and West:

To give the girls seeking admission to the residential Hindu School, such a training as would make them not only thoroughly efficient at home and in society without being denationalized, but also devoted to God, loyal to the King and desirous of the welfare of the people; and to embody in practical form the ancient Indian system known as *Guru Kula Vasam* (...) A similar system in the case of boys has been in vogue in the West for several centuries, but it was only about fifty years ago that it was extended for the benefit of girls with most satisfactory results in England and other Western countries. The time has come for giving our girls of the present day the advantages of the *Guru Kula Vasam* system so as to make them thoroughly efficient and useful both at home and in society.⁷⁰

To do so, he wanted to incorporate the newly established Kindergarten system as well as the Montessori system for primary education.⁷¹ Only then, 'little children will be trained in mind and body'.⁷² Most likely, it was Farr who suggested to apply the Montessori system. The training of this had just been started at Cheltenham Ladies College, so before she left for Ceylon, she went there to make herself extra familiar with the principles of Montessori education in advance.

On first sight, this stands in stark contrast with Ramanathan's other remarks on (Hindu) womanhood and the (bad) influence of western culture. Hindu girls who were 'the proud heirs and inheritors of so great and glorious a culture and tradition' had started to 'embrace an alien culture whose influence upon them was, he believed, extremely unwholesome, even positively pernicious'.⁷³ It was the declared goal of the training at Ramanathan College to form the graduates into 'good Hindu wives and mothers'.⁷⁴ For Ramanathan, there was apparently never any question that the woman must devote herself to the home according to 'the divine plan'.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Vythilingam, *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan*, 543.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 550.

⁷¹ At that time and around the middle of the twentieth century, the Montessori education system was quite prominent in India as well. Maria Montessori, also a Theosophist at some point in her life, had travelled to India and started to establish schools with the writer and political figure Rabindranath Tagore. Bandyopadhyay, 'Educational Ideas and Practices of Rabindranath Tagore and Maria Montessori. A Comparative Analysis'.

⁷² Vythilingam, *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan*, 551.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 543.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 555.

⁷⁵ Alwis and Jayawardena, *Casting Pearls*, 7.

That is why, after some back and forth, he spoke out against universal female suffrage in 1928 because it would destroy 'domestic peace and domestic purity and harmony'.⁷⁶ As his biographer maintains:

He wanted Hindu girls to grow up in a predominantly Hindu environment, breathe a Hindu atmosphere, imbibe Hindu ideals and exemplify in their day-to-day lives the ancient and traditional virtues that have for centuries untold been the proud hall-marks of Hindu womanhood. He was convinced that the position of women in any society is a true index of its cultural and spiritual level.⁷⁷

This cultural and spiritual level of womanhood, Ramanathan argues, was apparent in the 'ancient' Hindu scriptures. However, womanhood had been neglected throughout the centuries.⁷⁸ Notably, this argument was one previously put forward by female theosophists like H. P. Blavatsky, Annie Besant and even Florence Farr. All of them argued that the Asian woman was once freer than the Western and it was only because of colonialism and the influence of colonial Christianity⁷⁹ that the Asian woman was now in the 'degraded' status she must be lifted up from.⁸⁰ His educational efforts and, in particular, the establishment of Ramanathan College are often viewed as an attempt to revive a version of Hindu womanhood which is seen as 'traditional' — on contrast to modern femininity. The most prominent account of this comes from his biographer who argues that founding the college aimed 'at building a home for the spirit of Hindu womanhood, torn and distracted as it was by the savage hand of time and the impact of alien influences'.⁸¹ Supposedly, he was 'out of sympathy with the modern concept of woman's place in society' and 'clung tenaciously to the view that the legitimate sphere of a woman's activity is the home'.⁸² Strikingly, as I have shown before, this is not in fact a 'traditional' version of femininity, but rather aligns with the contemporary notions developed in the colonial exchange between missionaries, religious reformers and educationalists. This becomes clear when we look at the following passages:

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 487.

⁷⁷ Vythilingam, *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan*, 543.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 544.

⁷⁹ They maintain that there is a difference between the patriarchal, contemporary form of Christianity and that of the early Christians, such as the Gnostics.

⁸⁰ (HPB), 'Women of Ceylon as Compared with Christian Women'; Besant, *Essentials of an Indian Education*; Farr, *Modern Woman. Her Intentions*; Paxton, 'Feminism Under the Raj'; Nancy, 'Bridging Cross-Cultural Feminisms'.

⁸¹ Vythilingam, *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan*, 554.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 556.

In the home, woman is the mistress and with every faculty trained and developed by a correct scheme of education, she exerts an influence for the good of the race, comparable to, and often in excess of what her male counterpart achieves outside.⁸³ (...) Women are the true nation-builders, for their proper function is not merely to bring into the world a brood of children, but more, to impart to them in their early formative years the sort of training that befits them for leadership in later life. The woman is the true conservator, the guardian-angel of a nation's culture, the torch-bearers of a people's civilization. The intellectual moral and spiritual discipline she imparts to her children in their imrepsionable years is of more enduring value than all their subsequent training. National regeneration, Ramanathan maintained, can be achieved mainly through the agency of the mother. An illiterate, degraded and superstitious mother can hardly cultivate the graces of life, or have a true sense of what is becoming or rise to her heights of duty or responsibility.⁸⁴

The frame of Ramanathan's vision of womanhood is clearly constituted by the contemporary notions of nationhood, racial regeneration and the complementarity of the two (!) sexes. The emerging idea of a Ceylonese nation was directly related to the concept of racial hierarchies and the possible degeneration of a race by too much consume of alcohol, the increase of venereal diseases and declining morals. These problems resulted in specific demands for conduct of the sexes and influenced the roles of men and women in society. Debates on these topics were global in their scope. They were especially prominent within the Theosophical Society but also within local religious reform movements in South Asia.⁸⁵ Even though Ramanathan clearly positioned himself against the impact of Christian missionary schools⁸⁶, he adapted their curriculum and daily practices. Instead of prayers and chapel time, he sent his students to the temple and personally directed them in worship. Further, he supervised the serving of meals in the dining hall, was 'keen about their personal cleanliness' as well as their

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 544.

⁸⁵ Alwis, "'Respectability', 'Modernity' and the Policing of 'Culture' in Colonial Ceylon"; Albrecht, 'Motherhood, Religion, and Feminism. Colonial Encounters, Intersectional Identities'; Albrecht, 'The Politics Within the Histories We Write. Race and Religion, Gender and Education in Colonial Sri-Lanka'; Ramusack, 'Embattled Advocates'.

⁸⁶ At one instance he recalls that 'I found the parents wailing their lot and complaining bitterly of the poison instilled into the minds of such of their boys and girls as had to go to Christian schools for their education'. (Vythilingam, *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan*, 545–46) Jayawardena also argues that it was solely her reaction against Christianity which made Ramanathan choose Florence Farr as Principal, since her opinions on womanhood were not aligning with his own. Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, 144. It must be noted, however, that this opposition (of Farr and many other theosophists) against Christianity was not regarding Christian teachings, but the institutionalisation of Christianity in its current state.

dress and manner.⁸⁷ Still, he encountered opposition from the missionaries. In particular it was feared that his new school, being in close proximity, would draw students away from Uduvil College — which in fact it did not or at least not considerably.⁸⁸

Coming back to Florence Farr, she had left London in 1912 and travelled to Colombo, where she stayed for a few months. In 1913, Ramanathan College was formally opened in Jaffna. In her letters to her friends W. B. Yeats and Bernard Shaw, Farr described her experiences in Ceylon. At various instances, Farr notes that the girls saw her as a mother. However, even Farr's example illustrates the privileged position she was in. Once, she wrote that

here I govern a little kingdom at present. (...) The children that have fever — the children who steal — the children who are so naughty no one else can manage them are brought to me I hear evidence and give decision. It is exactly like being Queen Elisabeth.⁸⁹

Strikingly, what was most reported on Farr around that time and in later histories of the school was that she was an old girl of Cheltenham Ladies College. However, she had only been there for a year, often opposing the refinements of femininity at that school.⁹⁰ She only came back to Cheltenham in order to prepare for her time in Ceylon and to learn the Montessori methods. Still, Ramanathan's biographer Vythilingam argues that Farr was a

graduate of the famous Cheltenham Ladies' College, and an English woman of singular culture and refinement, whose was a name to conjure with in the literary and philosophical world of her time, was appointed Principal. Nothing short of the lure of his great name could draw her to this distant land.⁹¹

It is apparent that Vythilingam aims at highlighting the role of Ramanathan and pushing Farr in the background of this story. Other scholars have, rightly, argued that it was not, in fact, Ramanathan who 'lured' her to Ceylon, but the prospect of a new phase and chapter in her life, already knowing that it would end soon.⁹² In the remembrance of the history of the school, Farr

⁸⁷ Vythilingam, *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan*, 555.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 547.

⁸⁹ Letter Farr 1913, in Johnson, 'Florence Farr'.

⁹⁰ In particular, Farr opposed the idea of marriage in its current form and the need for women to engage in biological reproduction. Albrecht, 'Isis as Superwoman. Reproduction and Racial Superiority in Theosophical Feminist Writings'.

⁹¹ Vythilingam, *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan*, 549.

⁹² In this respect, it does not surprise that all of Farr's later work focusses on becoming a 'social mother' by becoming a teacher and enhancing the status of the human race. Farr, *Modern Woman. Her Intentions*; Farr, *The Solemnization of Jacklin. Some Adventures on the Search for Reality*; Johnson, *Florence Farr. Bernard Shaw's "New Woman"*, 181-182; Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, 143

only plays a small role is only mentioned briefly in one of the school's celebratory magazines. The focus of the history are Ramanathan and his wife, the theosophist Leelawathy Ramanathan who was a devotee follower of her husband and took over the management of the school after Farr's death. Still, the remark regarding Cheltenham needs to be stressed. Apparently, CLC was not only prominent and seen as a leading school, but also an accepted one for teaching women — also in Ceylon. Ramanathan and his supporters must have known that many Christian missionary women being teachers and principals in Ceylon and India came from CLC. So their work was not seen as teaching a 'corrupted' version of western femininity, as it is often argued, but it was solely the Christian framing of the teaching, including the wish to convert the students and influence the native religion, which was seen as problematic.

Conclusion: agency within colonial boundaries

Lilian Nixon and Florence Farr might have come to Ceylon with a different vision and opinion on the persons they would encounter; but they came for similar reasons. The schools they founded clearly shared the common goal of educating Ceylonese girls in becoming an asset to society, mainly by becoming mothers and educating the future generations. For this, the girls in their schools had to conform to a specific version of femininity: being adequately dressed, following the rules of the daily routines and learning 'womanly subjects' in addition to those of the boys' schools' curricula. Because of the influence of missionary education throughout the nineteenth century, religious reformers and male and female educationalists alike set out to establish girls' education which was in line with the conceptions of womanhood that had previously been taught. The role of women, becoming a mother and a wife and as such being necessary for society and the nation, was viewed the same; even the role that religion played in the schools was quite alike. It did not matter whether it was a Christian, Buddhist or Hindu girls' school, the female student was to learn about religion as much as about anything else.⁹³ She was to become a religious, female subject. This means that the discussion around the empowering or disempowering aspects of girls' education based on the notion of the female student and its need to be educated differently, needs to be expanded by the importance of

⁹³ Similar arguments can be made for boys' schools, but further study would be required to make substantial claim and see differences.

religion in conceptualising the female subject — especially when it comes to a global history of girls' education.

The two examples of Ladies' College, Colombo, and Ramanathan College, Jaffna, and their relation to the Cheltenham Ladies College have shown the global and colonial entanglement of girl's education at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century in Sri Lanka. It also became clear that the influence of CLC reached further than their direct imperial connections, since the Ramanathan College was decidedly non-Christian, against the religious ideal of CLC. Ramanathan College also shows that CLC's girls' education programme was adapted and utilised by local actors to increase the success of their own educational endeavours. Even though Ramanathan had a very different idea of the ideal womanhood that was to be educated in his school than Florence Farr, he used her education and status to gain prominence for his school.

Coming back to Jayawardena's take on the remembrance of the 'devils' and 'goddesses', the examples of Nixon and Farr are quite intriguing in that regard.⁹⁴ As Jayawardena makes out in her book, if it comes to the moral character of those two actors, they have been judged very differently by Sri Lankan locals during their time there, Nixon portraying pious womanhood and Farr that of the so-called 'New Woman'. This, however, changes when the voices judging are concerned with the influence of colonial agents, such as Christian missionaries, and nationalist reformers, such as Ramanathan supported by theosophists such as Farr. Notably and as shown, this is in no way related to their specific educational endeavours and teachings of girl- and womanhood, as what was, and in some ways still is, taught at the two schools concerning respectability, conduct, and obedience is quite the same. Specifically, at the time of Nixon and Farr, girls' education was based on the effort to make them suitable wives and mothers. Rather, it is religion in its relation to national and ethnic identities on which grounds the differentiation between Nixon and Farr is made: in Nixon's case, Christianity as foreign entity to Sri Lankan national identity and in Farr's case, Hindu as part of Sri Lankan Tamil identity.

Jayawardena adds on the part cited before, that 'there was much sexism in both these categories'.⁹⁵ Without judging whether the ideals of womanhood taught in the schools was

⁹⁴ Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, passim.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

empowering or disempowering, the underlying thought by Jayawardena is crucial for understanding the complexities of the history of girls' education in Sri Lanka. Judging Nixon or Farr as 'devils' or 'goddesses' reduces their actions to specific evaluations based on contemporary and present-day notions of femininity — a femininity grounded in colonial power structures and those of religion. Whereas female missionaries such as Nixon have just been able to secure more rights and powers than those before them, Farr was not in a position to challenge the religious and political authority of the much-celebrated Ramanathan — or even if she was, the subsequent scholarship and remembrance of Ramanathan pushed her into the background of the story.

The role of Cheltenham Ladies College for the global efforts towards female education must not be underestimated. However, the empowered, educated, skilled and competent woman graduate always had to be religious, too. Colonial girls' education, therefore, cannot be examined without looking at religion. As a result, it has to be seen as a global identity which was adapted and transformed by various religious educational efforts. CLC was only able to achieve the position it held because it symbolised the epitome of this religious, educated, competent womanhood. This notion of religion was precisely what was adapted by local educationalist: By applying and transforming the approaches to educate girls brought to the island by white women educators such as Nixon and Farr, it was possible to educate girls in the means of a devotee, religious subject without the need to conform to Christian ideals. On the contrary, on the one hand, the attempts to convert the students at Ladies' mostly failed and, on the other hand, the example of Ramanathan College illustrates that it was as easily applicable to Hindu girls. The transformations taking place at the times of Nixon and Farr and, even more so, the present-day remembrance of the founders of the schools and the positive evaluation of the educational practices and images of womanhood taught at the schools nowadays which are attributed to the founders, leaving out educational changes in the second half of the twentieth century, those transformations of *whose* images of womanhood those are and *whose* educational practices are applied illustrates the colonial agency mentioned by Bergunder in relation to Butler: Re-iterations of images of womanhood and the education of girls within colonial boundaries are still re-iterations opening up transformations, which, as we can see today, are interpreted as *Sri Lankan*.

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