**“THE DEMANDS OF DUTIFUL SUBJECTS”: COLONIAL EDUCATION AND GOVERNMENTALITY IN CEYLON AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY**

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# INTRODUCTION

A strong desire for more educated politicians has recently been expressed in Sri Lanka. For example, the editorial of a popular English broadsheet drew attention to the fact that 94 MPs did not have an O/L qualification and that 25 of the 225 MPs had undergraduate degrees. It then opined that “this situation is absolutely shocking in a country that has maintained high literacy levels and an impressively high level of postgraduate qualification holders when compared to the size of its population in South Asia”.1 In the run up to the 2020 General Elections many candidates have sought to emphasize their educational background as a suitable qualification for holding public office. Yet, it is often forgotten that education, more specifically, a particular form of education, was central to Sri Lanka’s earliest democratic experience in 1912. This paper explores the ways in which colonial education was foregrounded as a necessary precondition for democratic governance at the turn of the 20th Century in Ceylon.

It has long been recognized that colonial education was an important ideological foundation for the establishment and perpetuation of colonial rule (Whitehead, 2003, 2005; Viswanathan, 1989; Holmes, 1976; Mangan, 1993). More recent work has attempted to approach the relationship between colonial education and governance in more complex ways; drawing attention to resistance (Seth, 2007), exchange (Allender, 2009), even the appropriation of colonial education in independence struggles (Segalla, 2007). While this work speaks to the ideological function of colonial education for colonial rule, a more material link between colonial education and colonial governance has proved to be far more difficult to establish. This paper attempts to make a tentative step in this direction by exploring a specific moment in which colonial education was made a mandatory criterion for participation in colonial governance in Ceylon at the turn of the 20th Century. It argues that colonial education was foregrounded as a means of challenging a fundamentally racial constellation of colonial governmentality and attempts to track how these demands from Ceylonese elite emerged, they were received by colonial authorities, and draws attention to the negotiations and contestations around its implementation as colonial policy.

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK/ METHODOLOGY

This paper draws from Michel Foucault’s attempts to develop a method for studying governmental rationality and its relationship to the genealogy of the modern state. Foucault focuses attention on understanding how the problem of the population came to be the major concern, target, field, and basis of analysis for governmental rationality and practice (Foucault, 1991). Approaching education in this way requires sensitivity to the claims about governmental rationality that were foregrounded by Ceylon’s local elite in their demands at the time. How did they deploy education as a strategy and technique to challenge the mode of governmental rationality that existed at the time? What effect did this have on colonial governmental practice and how did colonial authorities seek to negotiate this challenge to existing modes of rationality? And, what were the difficulties in translating this challenge into a political technology that would reinforce their rule in the Island? In exploring these questions, this paper seeks to understand how colonial education was utilized and contested as a terrain for counter-conduct in Ceylon at the turn of the 20th Century. To answer

1 <http://www.ft.lk/article/603681/Educated-MPs>

these questions, this paper draws from memoranda, commission reports and proceedings, newspaper coverage as well as correspondence between the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Crewe and the Sir Henry McCallum, the Governor of Ceylon.

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The most significant Constitutional change in Ceylon prior to the Crewe-McCallum Reforms of 1912 was the establishment of the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms of 1833. The Colebrooke- Cameron Reforms were significant in that they established the principle of race as being germane to the task of representation and governance. Under these reforms, which, as David Scott argues brought Ceylon firmly under the aegis of a form of colonial governmentality (1995), communal representation was hardwired into seats on the Legislative Council with the six unofficial members of the Council being nominated by the Governor to represent the Europeans, Sinhalese and Tamils. A minor adjustment to this scheme was introduced in 1889 when provisions were made to nominate a Kandyan Sinhalese and Muslim representative as well. In other words, the existing constellation of colonial governmental practice was fundamentally premised on the function of race.

The Crewe-McCallum reforms of 1912 was the first major attempt to reformulate the Colebrooke- Cameron scheme of governance. These reforms are often dismissed as a mere prelude to the changes that took shape in 1931 with the granting of universal franchise (Russell, 1982; Scott, 1999, Wickramasinghe, 1995, 2015). A.J. Wilson, one of the few scholars to have closely examined these reforms, opines however that these reforms were “the first stage in the regeneration of modern Ceylon”, and led to a fundamental shift “f]rom an era of a Government of well- discussed laws” to a “period of Government by co-operation” (Wilson, 1959, 114). Thus, the reforms require far closer attention.

The Crewe-McCallum reforms arguably emerged out of demands by Ceylonese elite for more inclusion in colonial governance. Colonial education was a significant argument advanced in their demands for this change in colonial governance. The memorial by James Peiris that initiates the conversation about reform of the Legislative Council begins by establishing the inadequacies in the representation of each community in the Island pointing out the lack of correlation between representation and communal population. Having established this, Peiris then highlights the spread of colonial education as firstly an indication of the progress of the colony since 1833. More importantly, colonial education is also averred as a suitable qualification for introducing a right to vote that is limited by educational qualification. Underscoring the popularity of this position, Peiris’ views are echoed by subsequent memorials sent by the Jaffna Association as well. Thus, colonial education is foregrounded in the demands for change of the existing system of colonial governance (‘Despatches Relating to the Constitution of the Ceylon Legislative Council', 1910).

For colonial authorities, most notably Governor McCallum and the Earl of Crewe, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, these demands raise significant concerns. For Governor McCallum, the colonial education of the memorialists is a symbol of their alienation from their roots in Ceylon, arguing that they are separated by “a wide gulf from the majority of the native inhabitants of the colony”. However, this position is a problematic one for McCallum since it appears to contradict the assumption that a colonial education is the best preparation for participation in a democracy.

Recognizing this difficulty, McCallum grudgingly suggests to Crewe that provision be made to nominate (rather than elect) an additional member to represent the educated Ceylonese.

McCallum’s argument in other words recognizes the memorialists as a separate community but does not believe their claims require treatment outside the existing mode of governmentality. It falls to the Earl of Crewe, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, to formulate a new system of governance in a way that addresses the demands of the memorialists as well as the concerns of McCallum. Crewe’s dilemma is that the problem of recognition, particularly for a group of people

who possess European tastes and education, cannot be easily dismissed. Crewe’s solution to the conflicting views of the memorialists and McCallum is to propose the special representation for educated Ceylonese that would be elected rather than nominated (*Further Correspondence relating to the Constitution of Ceylon Legislative Council*,1910).

Crewe’s decision led to much debate over how education was to be defined and a local commission was appointed to come up with a suitable definition. While all those who came before the Commission agreed that education was a suitable criterion for democratic participation, there was significant debate as to the minimum threshold that would be acceptable. However, two of the most pressing concerns were the extent of an individual’s education in English as well as the supplementing of an educational qualification with a property qualification. However, both of these concerns are expressed in classist terms making clear that if education was to be a qualification for involvement in governance, it should be limited to only a few men who speak English and are wealthy ('The Legislative Council Constitution Commission 1910', 1910).

Therefore, though education was foregrounded as a means of challenging colonial governmentality, this challenge was framed in such a way as to exclude significant segments of the Ceylonese population. Furthermore, the foregrounding of education as an additional terrain for colonial governmentality did not mean that the valence of race-based mode of governmentality was diminished. Communal representation was retained, and the Governor continued to nominate unofficial members to the Legislative Council to represent particular communities. In addition, the representations before the Commission are beset with concerns about demarcating boundaries between representatives of communities and the new class of elected unofficial members.

# CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I have attempted to excavate the centrality of education along European lines to the practice of democracy in Ceylon/ Sri Lanka. I have argued that European education could be appropriated by both colonizers and the local elite to argue for and against the need for reform of colonial structure of governance. These debates and negotiations suggest that the memorialists sought to advance a claim for recognition as a population that was constituted and demarcated by the colonial education that they had obtained. What strikes me as most poignant about the exchanges between these local elites and Ceylon’s colonial authorities is the way in which they sought to challenge the seemingly biopolitical framing of a form of governance based on race by foregrounding a disciplinary form of power that was ineluctably advanced within and through colonial education. While race still played a significant role in colonial governance in Ceylon, education had opened the possibility of imagining and operationalizing a different mode of constituting relationships between populations in the colony. Thus, this paper has sought to map the possibilities of utilizing one form of colonial conduct to demand reform of another.

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