Navigating Empire: Migration and Social Mobility of Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia, 1800-1948

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About the cover

The cover of this thesis was taken from a collection of postcards representing early twentieth century Penang. This postcard- the Government Post Office of Penang (1910)- represents a point of contact between Jaffna and Malaysia as so many Jaffna Tamils worked at the Post Office during the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries. The Post Office in Penang was also significant since the city was usually the first point of arrival from colonial Sri Lanka to Malaysia.

Source: Khoo Salma Nasution and Malcolm Wade. *Penang Postcard Collection 1899-1930s.* (Penang, Malaysia: Janus Print and Resources): 47

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For my grandparents who dared me to dream.

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Prologue

Jaffna Tamil-Malaysians in the 21st century

The British colony of Malaya became independent Malaya on 31 August 1957.[1] During the years leading up to independence, different diaspora groups went on to stake their claim in the newly formed nation, but as Malaysian citizens rather than British subjects. One of these groups was formed by the Jaffna Tamils, who had left northern Sri Lanka in the previous century to work as civil servants in British Malaysia. After WWII some of them had left and returned to Sri Lanka after the visit of Government Representative Velupillai Coomaraswamy, who had secured ship passage for retirees of the civil service and their families. Other Jaffna Tamils stayed in Malaysia. For them, the coming decade would pose new challenges: becoming Malaysian citizens and taking part in the emerging independence movement.[2]

For Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia, one particular street, Jalan Vivekananda[3], shows the historical emergence and remaking of a diasporic identity throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1958, a year after independence, Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman supported the opening of the Vivekananda secondary school. The school joined the primary school and ashram (started as a reading room in 1904). Both served the collective group of Jaffna Tamils for their religious, educational, and social needs for decades from 1911 onwards.[4]

In a 2014 report from the Malaysian newspaper *The Star*, emphasis is placed on the heritage of the Jaffna Tamil community in post-independent Malaysia. The street, along with the ashram and two schools, reveals the colonial remembrance of a subset of Tamils, often forgotten in the current socio-political tripartite framework of contemporary Malaysian society (Malay, Chinese, and Indian Tamil). The surrounding neighborhood of Brickfields has been a mainstay of the South Asian,

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[1] Two dates are associated with Malaysia's independence. The first is 31 August 1957. This is the date of the *Federation of Malaya Independence Act of 1957,* when the British granted independence to Malaya. Independent Malaya consisted of the Protected States of Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Selangor, Terengganu, Perlis, Perak, Penang, and Malacca. The second date, 31 August 1963, is the date of the official establishment of Malaysia, including the above mentioned states, as well as, North Borneo, Sarawak, and Singapore. Singapore separated on 9 August 1965.

[2] The Sri Lankan National Archives (hereafter SLNA): *Ceylon Sessional Paper IX, 1946*. "Report on the General and Economic Conditions, and etc., of the Ceylonese in Malaya. June 1946."

[3] Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was an Indian Hindu monk and disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. He is most famous for preaching on interfaith connections at the first Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago in 1893. In that year he began his journey from India to Chicago on the ship S.S. Peninsular. He made his first and second stops in Colombo and Malaya. See: M.R. Paranjape (ed.), *Swami Vivekananda: A Contemporary Reader* (London: Routledge, 2015).

[4] See newspaper article: Yip Yoke Teng, "The Heart of Jaffna Tamil Community," *The Star*, December 12, 2014 (Accessed August 19, 2020). *https://www.thestar.com.my/news/community/2014/12/12/the-heart-of-jaffna-tamil-community-street-named-after-philosopher-swami-vivekananda-boasts-establis* Note: Teng states, "Its Mughal-styled grand structure was built after a round of fundraising in 1911 while the adjacent Tamil school opened its doors in 1914 with 14 students."

particularly Tamil, diaspora over the twentieth to twenty-first centuries. The area is lined with Tamil eateries, serving delicious banana leaf lunches, clothing stores with a colorful selection of sarees and salwar kameez (or Punjabi suits as they are called locally), jewelry stores, sweet shops with a vibrant array of *halvas, jelebi, rasmalai, gulab jamun* and *payasam*, and not to mention all the DVD stores with the latest Tamil film releases. Outsiders to the area most associate the streets of Brickfields with the variety of Indian Tamils settled in Kuala Lumpur, as the official categorization of South Asians living throughout Malaysia falls under the designation 'Indian'. However, Jalan Vivekananda serves as a reminder of the heterogeneity of *Tamilness* in the country, as the street showcases Jaffna Tamil-Malaysian roots within the larger Indian Tamil-Malaysian context.

In her 2014 work concerning cooliehood, Tao Leigh Goffe opens with these words, "Occupations- the jobs we perform- intimately shape our daily lives."[5] A migrant's work shaped their own and others' perspectives of life in colonial society, for better or worse. In the early decades of the twentieth century, civil service work, government housing, a school and an ashram on Jalan Vivekananda shaped the daily lives, outward public life and the intimate realm of domestic space for the Jaffna Tamils and showcased their networks of influence in colonial Malaysia.

Lined with government funded residences for civil servants, in Jalan Vivekananda, former occupation in the civil service was tied to a privileged community identity for the Jaffna Tamils - a colonial model minority or the brown middlemen. It shaped how British colonial officials and other locals interacted with the group. It also influenced the group's view of themselves and interaction with both the British and others around them.

Jalan Vivekananda and the surrounding neighborhood embodied the transference and transformation of colonial relationships across the Indian Ocean.[6] Thiranagama notes the longer history of middle-class migration out of Jaffna during the British period. Working and living abroad as an educated middle class created a reputation

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[5] Tao Leigh Goffe, "Intimate Occupations: The Afterlife of the 'Coolie,'" *Transforming Anthropology* 22, no.1 (2014): 53-61.

[6] During the early to mid-twentieth century Jalan Vivekananda, Scott Road and the surrounding area of government houses became known as Little Jaffna or Sinna Yalpanam. See the following newspaper article: Preveena Balakrishnan, "Malaya's Ceylonese Connection," Penang Monthly, July 2019, Penang Institute. (Accessed February 23, 2021) *https://penangmonthly.com/article.aspx?pageid=15682&name=malayas_ceylonese_connection* Also see the website of the Sri Kandaswamy Kovil (Temple). The temple is located on Scott Road in Brickfields. (Accessed: February 23, 2021). *https://srikandaswamykovil.org*

of success both in northern Sri Lanka and their new homes across the ocean. These migrants were the ones who "made it" and represented the region whether it be in Malaysia or even further away in destinations such as South Africa. Ties to northern Sri Lanka were still strong throughout the early twentieth century and started to wane only after the second World War. A sense of self as a Jaffna representative remained, despite living far away from the peninsula.[7]

This thesis unravels migrant navigation of empire through the position of a middling group- the Jaffna Tamils- and their notions of belonging across locales under colonial rule. Personal and collective narratives of navigation speak to the making of minorities within independent nation-states still grappling with the categories and frameworks of ethnicity and class created in the far and recent past. Legacies of position, prestige, and access to goods and services are often framed through the lens of majority versus minority ethnic socio-economic relations. Within majoritarian-minoritarian politics, the story of the exceptional minority group surfaces as an example. How does religion and educational access influence class privilege and position in the homeland and inform migration abroad and the experiences of the diaspora in the country of settlement? As migrants continue to move for educational and employment opportunities or are pushed abroad due to war and climate change, their drive for belonging allows us to question how a diaspora becomes accepted and gains privilege or faces alienation in the new locale.

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[7] Sharika Thiraganama, "Making Tigers from Tamils: Long Distance Nationalism and Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto," *American Anthropologist* 116, no. 2 (2014): 269-270. On page 269, Thiraganama mentions the emergence of a Little Jaffna in Kuala Lumpur in 1920s. Later on page 270 she goes on to note how Jaffna Tamils living in Malaysia were not judged by those back home as a diaspora losing part of themselves, but rather as representatives of Jaffna Tamil culture wherever they went.; For references on the South Asian migrant population in South Africa see: Sunil Amrith, "Tamil Diasporas Across the Bay of Bengal," *The American Historical Review* 114, no.3 (June, 2009): 562. Note: Amrith cites newspaper references from the *Tamil Nesan* concerning the conditions of Tamil migrants in 1930s in South Africa. See Footnote 58: "Tennappirikka Intiyar," Tamil Nesan (August 13, 1932).; "Tennappirikka Intiyarkal," Tamil Nesan, (October 15, 1932).; "Tennappirikka Intiyarkalin Kavalaikkitamana Nilaimai," *Tamil Nesan*, (November 23, 1932).

Introduction

Jaffna Tamils and the historical roots of Indian Ocean migration

Introduction

How did colonial subjects navigate the challenges of empire? The changes brought about through interaction with colonial rulers propelled people to seek out opportunity wherever it happened to be. Migratory patterns throughout the different oceanic worlds help us explore the many ways subjects navigated empire. Movement between South and Southeast Asia provides the focal point here. Migration out of the region into other parts of the world span centuries. Migrants from the area have traveled seasonally to trade, proselytize, and settle. Evidence of such movement is seen throughout Southeast Asia from its temples at Angkor Wat in modern day Cambodia to Besakih in Bali. Yet during the British colonial period South Asian migrants such as laborers destined for the plantations of the Caribbean and South America, as well as, civil servants meant for the government offices of East and South Africa traveled even further across continents, making it one of the largest migrations of the colonial period. It was a chain reaction, as the freedom of enslaved Africans in the Caribbean directly influenced the recruitment of laborers from South Asia to work the plantations. This continued to provide goods further across the Atlantic. While, civil servants and merchants from South Asia maintained order and fueled the economies from East to South Africa.[8]

Though movement from South Asia to the Atlantic Ocean World and Western side of the Indian Ocean with destinations from Trinidad to Kenya are more well known, the region known as the Bay of Bengal[9] influenced development around the globe during the British period. Historian Sunil Amrith estimates about 28 million people crossed the area between South and Southeast Asia from the mid-nineteenth century up until WWII.[10]

In this time period, Jaffna Tamils would join this large and accelerated movement. Just as Sujit Sivasundaram points out, migration between Sri Lanka and Malaysia has been understudied in the wider literature as India is usually the point of reference for discussing South Asian movement abroad during the nineteenth and twentieth

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[8] Crispin Bates. (ed.), *Community, Empire, and Migration: South Asians in Diaspora* (Hyderabad, India: Orient Blackswan, 2003).; Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).; Crispin Bates and Marina Carter, "Sirdars as Intermediaries in Nineteenth-century Indian Ocean Indentured Labour Migration," *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 2 (2017): 462-484.

[9] The Bay of Bengal has connected modern-day India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore for centuries from seasonal to more permanent migration.

[10] Sunil Amrith, *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2011).; S. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015): 2.

centuries. However, Sri Lankan migration is significant for exploring notions of religious, economic, and cultural recycling and movement, subjecthood and identity formation in Southeast Asia.[11]

The first generation of migrants leaving Jaffna for colonial Malaysia[12] in the mid-nineteenth century initially sought to sojourn in the not-so-distant colony to gain from better economic circumstances. Ramasamy surveys Jaffna Tamils' desire to temporarily travel to the colony to build capital as colonial civil servants and then return home. Furthermore he shows that by the early twentieth century, more and more Jaffna Tamils were born in the colony and permanent settlement based on further educational and employment opportunities became a reality. As members of the civil service, Jaffna Tamils dominated the clerical, medical, technical, administrative, and supervisory departments, basically holding a monopoly on government employment from 1885 to 1930.[13]

The result of such movement for civil service employment resulted in a significant number of Sri Lankan migrants in the colony with Jaffna Tamil ancestry. By 1931, the census of Malaysia recorded 18,407 Sri Lankan migrants. A decade later, after the second World War, these numbers had reached to about 25,000 inhabitants of Sri Lankan descendant, of which 22,000 were Tamils.[14] Recruitment in the colonial civil service, as well as, their educational background from English-medium missionary schools, contributed to the Jaffna Tamils forming the majority of migrants from Sri Lanka to colonial Malaysia. Their ties to the government allowed for knowledge exchange and interaction between British colonial officials, other Jaffna Tamils, and the diverse sets of people living throughout the colony.

[11] Sujit Sivasundaram, Islanded: *Britain, Sri Lanka, and the Bounds of an Indian Ocean Colony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013): 11.; Susan Bayly discusses the notion of a "Greater India" to explain connections between India and the rest of the region. See: Susan Bayly, "Imagining 'Greater India': French and Indian Versions of Colonialism in the Indic mode," *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no.3 (2014): 703-744.

[12] The author will utilize colonial Sri Lanka and colonial Malaysia instead of their colonial names of Ceylon and Malaya. This follows recent trends put forward by scholars like Nira Wickramasinghe and Alicia Schrikker. By utilizing colonial Sri Lanka and Malaysia, these scholars feel we can move away from telling the story of former colonized nations from the perspective of the colonial power and rather showcase the perspective of the local communities.

[13] Rajakrishnan Ramasamy, *Sojourners to Citizens: Sri Lankan Tamils in Malaysia, 1885-1965* (Kuala Lumpur: Sri Veera Trading, 1988): 84.

[14] The remaining migrants were Sinhalese and Burghers. *Ceylon Sessional Paper IX, 1946*: 3.; *Census of British Malaya, 1931*. (Kuala Lumpur, Government Press, 1932).

A grievance sent from a Jaffna Tamil migrant to British colonial officials exposes such an interaction between the colonial power and those under its rule. In 1940, a 39-year old man named C.S. Sinnadurai sent a petition to British officials in colonial Malaysia, seeking pension money for a return back to Jaffna with his family. As a former civil servant, he sought compensation for wrongful treatment and dismissal from his post as daily-paid time-keeper for the Federated Malay States (F.M.S.) Railways.[15] The petition was addressed to no one less than the British Prime Minister. In 1920 Sinnadurai had started his employment in the Railways and became time keeper after having passed the Government seventh standard exam at age 19.[16] After failing a first exam in 1924 to enter into a position in the General Clerical Service, three years later Sinnadurai was successful. However, when it was discovered that he was above the age limit to be placed in a position, Sinnadurai was not granted an appointment. This is why Sinnadurai directly addressed the Prime Minister a first time with a complaint.[17]

Once the government learned of the issue, they commanded the civil service office to "abide by the consequences and admit him to the services. Orders were given to the High Commissioner accordingly."[18] The civil service offered Sinnadurai a position with a salary of 40 dollars a month. However, he was told that he had to start from scratch, in terms of benefits, with this new employment. Unsatisfied with the news, Sinnadurai asked for a salary of 50 dollars a month and his previous service to count towards seniority and pension benefits. This also was not granted and Sinnadurai remained a daily-paid employee until he resigned in 1929.[19]

Shortly before his resignation, he sent a set of letters protesting his treatment. To help his appeal, Sinnadurai started his petition emphasizing his heritage and religious status, and that he was "the son of a British subject- a loyal tiller whose residence is situate in the extreme north of Ceylon, one of the potential Islands in the far East under Your Majesty's yoke."[20] With this one sentence, Sinnadurai accentuated his

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[15] National Archives of the UK (hereafter NAUK): CO273/556/14- *Petition of C.S. Sinnadurai*. Telegram sent April 18, 1930. London, UK: NAUK.
[16] NAUK: CO273/577/17- *Mr. C.S. Sinnadurai, Retired from the Railway Clerical Service 1932*. Telegram sent to Private Secretary's office at Buckingham Palace March 21, 1932. London, UK: NAUK.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

British subjecthood and his lineage from Jaffna, noting that his father was a tiller or agriculturalist from the Vellalar caste.[21]

After mentioning this, he continued that "he has exceeded his father in loyalty to the British Government is beyond doubt and that the healthiness of his constitution, he feels sure, has coped him with an immaculate determination that he is unquestionably capable to discharge any kind of duties."[22] Further into the letter he makes note of his shared Christianity with British officials, hoping officials will remember their Christian values in showing mercy to his situation.

Sinnadurai's story provides insight into the experiences of a particular set of Jaffna Tamils, Christian Vellalars, and their relationship with colonial officials throughout empire during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries serving as a middling group between the British and other local communities. Their historical residence in Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka, high caste roots as Vellalar, generational interaction with colonial powers, and desire to gain employment in the civil service all played a role in the advancement of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar influence across British colonies.

However, Sinnadurai's letter leaves room for larger questions concerning the role of identity and representation as colonial subjects navigated the bureaucracy of empire. This thesis considers the significance of interaction between British officials and a Tamil community from the perspective of Jaffna Tamil migrants living in Malaysia during the nineteenth to twentieth centuries. Through this investigation we can come to understand *why* middling groups in colonial society fashioned and performed Britishness and the ways indoctrination of colonial rule via missionary education influenced employment opportunities and hierarchization of cosmopolitan colonial societies through the making of model minorities.

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[21] In the hierarchy of the Sri Lankan Hindu caste system, the Vellalars are just below the Brahmins and the largest caste community on the island. The interesting fact to note is that within the Hindu caste system, there are four main varnas of classifications within caste hierarchy. These include: the Brahmins or priestly caste, Kshatriyas or warrior and royal elite, Vaishyas or agriculturalists and merchants and finally the Shudras or laborers and service providers. The fifth non-caste or outsiders are the untouchables. Within the varna system, there are many sub-groups or jatis. The Vellalar jati actually falls within the shudra varna, however, their position in colonial Sri Lanka developed to become a powerful and high agricultural land-owning elite. Thus, in the hierarchy of Ceylon/Sri Lanka's Hindu caste system, they fall right below the Brahmins. During the nineteenth century, missionaries from India, the USA, UK, and Canada opened missionary schools and proselytized to all castes in the Jaffna community. Many Vellalars attended missionary schools during this time and some converted to Christianity. See: Sinnappah Arasaratnam, "Social History of a Dominant Caste Society: The Vellalar of North Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in the 18th Century," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 18, no. 3-4 (1981): 377-391.

[22] NAUK: CO273/577/17.

This thesis examines the larger story of colonial subjects and the ways they maneuvered the constraints of colonialism. Here colonialism refers to the domination of a bounded space by a foreign power.[23] In the categorization of people living throughout the British empire, British officials were at the top of the hierarchy while local communities experienced varying positions along the colonial social ladder. These positions could change depending on the circumstances of the time. Local communities, consciously and subconsciously, used different mechanisms in their dealings with those in power to influence their place in society through public and private performance with others around them since the goal of middling groups was to maintain an elite position vis-à-vis other groups. In the next section, I place this work on Jaffna Tamils within the historiography of Indian Ocean World migrations and explain the conceptual context used throughout this thesis to explore Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar navigation of empire vis-à-vis British officials, while vying for privileged positions in cosmopolitan Malaysia with other migrant middling groups such as prominent Eurasians, South Indian Chettiars and Chinese.

Historiography

Sri Lankan Tamils and the Indian Ocean World

There have been few studies on Jaffna Tamil migrants in Malaysia. The 1930s saw an anthology by Ponniah and Kulasingham while Selvaratnam and Apputhurai produced a similar work in 2006.[24] Both works showcase the legacies of prominent Jaffna Tamil migrants in British Malaysia. Though the books provide background information regarding the migration of Jaffna Tamils, they serve more as guides for the *who is who* of Jaffna Tamil-Malaysian society. Throughout the works, the reader learns about Jaffna Tamil-Malaysian elites such as leaders, educators, lawyers, doctors, and business owners. These anthologies note how elite Jaffna Tamils have shaped colonial and post-colonial Malaysian society. The works are written to showcase the contributions of the community to the emerging independent nation-state, but do not address the underlying analytical questions of migration and social mobility in the British empire.

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[23] Engseng Ho, "Empire through Diasporic Eyes: A view from the Other Boat," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 2 (2004): 211.

[24] E.I. Ponniah and A.T. Kulasingham, *Spotlights on the Jaffna in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Publisher not identified, 1935). The British Library notes the publisher as the Commercial Press, while Yale University identifies the Jaffnese Co-Operative Society and the National University of Singapore states the publisher is not identified.; Thilliaiampalam Selvaratnam & Sinnapoo Apputhurai, *Legacy of the Pioneers: 125 years of Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Percetakan Printpack SDN. Bhd., 2006).

Two other works, Ramasamy's 1988 publication and Sathiaseelan's work from 2006, on the other hand, are more of historical surveys of the mechanisms behind movement between the two locales. These mechanisms included a high caste status and access to missionary educational institutions. This served as a pipeline to civil service employment in colonial Sri Lanka and later Malaysia. Ramasamy and Sathiaseelan provide detailed statistics for the number of migrants, the places they settled, the departments they worked in, and their contributions to a cosmopolitan Malaysian society.[25]

Despite the details of these four works, there lacks a structural analysis on the Jaffna Tamil movement between colonial Sri Lanka and Malaysia, certainly against as part of a larger framework in which colonial subjects maneuvered the rule of empire in the Indian Ocean World during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since the formation of Area Studies after the second World War, particular regions of the world have been studied separately as South Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, East Africa, Southeast Asia, etc. This has left much unsaid about the longer connections between them. In the past two decades the emergence of Indian Ocean World studies or the "new thalassology" bridges several world regions and brings together the fluid exchanges between them.[26]

Placing the story of Jaffna Tamils within the larger thalassology of the Indian Ocean World provides a frame for the convoluted religious and educational layers of navigation during the colonial to post-colonial era. Studying the Indian Ocean realm reveals the significance of analyzing the intricacies of Indian Ocean World studies to showcase the process of globalization and integration from pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras.[27] As Clare Anderson notes, by studying within the domain of the new thalassology we can focus on the individuals and communities which shaped and changed local cultural and religious practices.[28] Thus scholars of the Indian Ocean World can historicize local communities during the colonial era, and directly speak to the legacy of these histories in the post-colonial period.

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[25] Ramasamy, *Sojourners to citizens*.; Samathilingam Sathiaseelan, *Malayak Kudipeyarvum Yalpanach Samugamum*, Translated from the Tamil version to English, *Malayan Migration and Jaffna Society* by P. Balanathan (London: UK-Ceylon Malaysian Forum, 2007).

[26] Marcus P.M. Vink, "Indian Ocean Studies and the 'new thalassology,'" *Journal of Global History* 2, no 1. (Mar 2007): 41-62. **Note:** The Indian Ocean World had always been a fluid region of economic trade (think spices and textiles even before European intervention) and cultural trade (religious ideas as seen with Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic religious spaces throughout the region).

[27] Vink, "Indian Ocean Studies and the 'new thalassology'."

[28] Clare Anderson, *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 8-9.

Sujit Sivasundaram emphasizes the localization of the Indian Ocean World in his prominent analysis of the ways Sri Lanka became "islanded" or separated from other parts of South Asia over the course the island's three major colonial eras: the Portuguese period (1505-1658), Dutch period (1658-1796), and British period (1796-1948). In his introduction he casts South Asia, and Sri Lanka in particular, as a region "where multiple layers of Europeans had traveled and settled, and their descendants mattered for the nature of British rule."[29] British colonial officers, in a similar vein as the Portuguese and Dutch before them, relied on knowledge acquisition and exchange with those they encountered. Through his study of migration out of India to different locales along the Bay of Bengal, Sunil Amrith also posits this notion emphasizing how "precolonial history shaped its colonial history in many ways, and many forms of connection across the sea outlasted and outlived empires."[30]

Another leading scholar of Sri Lanka, Nira Wickramasinghe, focuses on the way colonial encounters recycled local information for the purpose of rule. The consequence of this recycling can be seen in the formation of local modernities. Local modernities were shaped by the educational and religious changes brought to the island creating new categorizations of local communities and strengthening already existing hierarchies.[31] In regards to these encounters, Wickramasinghe asks an inquisitive question pondering the various ways colonial rule affected people beyond violence, conversion, and forced labor. She goes on to ask how locals related themselves to colonial rulers. What were the imaginations attached to Europe?[32]

All three authors, Sivasundaram, Amrith, and Wickramasinghe discern British rule relied on such imagination of the self vis-à-vis colonial rule to make colonial subjects. Building on the work of these influential historians, I propose us to go a step further and consider how this imagination of Britishness affected locales publicly and privately leading to migration out of Sri Lanka. For local communities, especially elites, adjacency to British culture in public correspondence or imagined privately in intimate settings influenced navigation of European domination. Power dynamics were at play prior to European rule. To maintain elite position under different colonial systems, local communities came to imitate as a form of self-preservation.

For the Southeast Asian context, scholars such as Andrew C. Willford and again Sunil Amrith discuss this navigation through the analysis of Tamil migration

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[29] Sivasundaram, *Islanded,* 10.
[30] Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, 4.
[31] Nira Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006): 7.
[32] Ibid.

throughout the region.[33] Both scholars analyze the various aspects of the migratory experience focusing on the push and pull factors which led to South Asian migration and consequential development in the new country. Some examples include Tamil identity formation and/or the interplay between the migrant group's place within the nation-state and the nostalgia for the old country. For instance, Amrith points out how migration was not a singular process. Migrants could be tied both to their everyday experiences in their new place of settlement yet still hold onto their varying nodes of imagination for the old country, not to forget their connection to the old country through news from relatives, friends, letters and newspapers.[34]

Willford alludes to this nostalgia by examining contemporary diaspora formation. He does this by reviewing colonialism's influence on post-colonial Hindu revivalism and Islamic nationalism between Malaysia's Tamil and Malay communities.[35] Lynn Hollen Lees also provides commentary on the transformative years of colonialism in British Malaysia and its effects on migrant identity formation. She does this by describing the roles of various ethnic groups in the colony. For instance, she notes that the island of Penang was already a hub for trade, commerce, religious and cultural exchange long before Francis Light's arrival in 1786.[36] The area we now know as Malaysia was a center of interaction between South, East, and Southeast Asia for centuries.

Drawing from the formation of diaspora in colonial Malaysia, Willford, Amrith, and Lees examine colonial and contemporary social, political, cultural, and economic effects of categorization on groups living in Malaysia. Building on the work of these prominent scholars, I also illustrate the significance of colonial categorization on groups once settled in a colony abroad. However, by combining an emphasis on public and private conceptions of Britishness, this work also highlights how diverse ethnic groups become homogenized under British rule eventually leading to the tripartite system of Malaysian society we know today. This duality of heterogeneity-homogeneity can tell us about conceptions of the self and the effects of adjacency to colonial rulers on opportunity and social interactions across colonies.

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[33] Andrew C. Willford, *Cage of Freedom: Tamil Identity and the Ethnic Fetish in Malaysia* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006).; Amrith, *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia*.; Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*.

[34] Amrith, *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia*, 2.; Amrith, "Tamil Diasporas across the Bay of Bengal," 561.

[35] Willford, *Cage of Freedom.;* A. C. Willford, "The 'Already Surmounted' yet 'Secretly Familiar': Malaysian Identity as Symptom," *Cultural Anthropology* 21, no.1 (2006): 31-59.

[36] Lynn Hollen Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects: British Malaya, 1786-1941* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017): 1.

Speaking more broadly, authors such as Celine Arokiaswamy and Susan Bayly have analyzed migratory movements in the Indian Ocean World.[37] Over the centuries, South Asia's religious and cultural influence and diverse identities have been created and imagined across the oceanic realm. Taking from these past imaginations, when the British arrived in Malaysia, they sought to forge relationships with those already living in the area in a similar fashion to South Asia. As their strength in the region grew, they facilitated and encouraged newfound migratory patterns in the region to Malaysia and elsewhere.

While Sri Lankanists focus on the significance of positioning Sri Lanka as a localized hub for identity construction and colonial subject making, Southeast Asianists and Indian Ocean scholars take a broader approach to show the circulation of ideas from the pre-colonial to colonial periods. Answering Biedermann's and Strathern's recent call to study Sri Lanka as part of that larger geographical framework[38], this work historicizes the continuities out of Sri Lanka and into Malaysia emphasizing the connections between regions in the opposite direction of past surveys like Ronit Ricci's most recent book on Malay royalty and convict migrants banished to the island.[39] Focusing on movement out of Sri Lanka into Malaysia during the colonial period attempts to close the gap concerning the continuities between the past and present in the region.

South Asian sub-elites and subordinates in British Malaysia

During the late 1960s into 1990s, a variety of scholars have studied South Asian migration and consequential diaspora formation in Southeast Asia during the centuries of industrial expansion. Kernial Singh Sandhu's 1969 work and Sinnappah Arasaratnam's work from 1970 document Indian migration to the region from socio-economic and socio-cultural perspectives.[40] Much of their work and the work of others like Jain, Ramasamy and Ramachandran focus on subaltern perspectives of

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[37] Celine W.M. Arokiaswamy, *Tamil Influences in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines* (Manila: S.N., 2000).; Bayly. "Imagining 'Greater India.'

[38] Zoltan Biedermann and Alan Strathern (eds.), *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History* (London: UCL Press, 2017).

[39] Ronit Ricci, *Banishment and belonging: Exile and Diaspora in Sarandib, Lanka, and Ceylon* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[40] Kernial Singh Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of Their Immigration and Settlement 1786-1957* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969).; Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970).

plantation labor during the advent of British rule into early independence.[41] A more recent work by John Solomon documents and examines the legacies of untouchable identity erasure among Tamil-Singaporeans over the colonial to post-colonial era.[42] These scholars focus on the different ways empire made Indian migrants subordinate in colonial South Asia and Southeast Asia.

The visibility of Indian Tamil migrants takes precedent in the contemporary Malaysian ethnic relation make-up. However, the story of the Jaffna Tamils fits within the experiences of sub-elite formation throughout empire and can provide context for the heterogeneity of South Asian diasporic experiences in Malaysia today. The commonalities of subordination and sub-elitism show that the economic and socio-cultural positions of various ethnic groups in Malaysia are tied to the needs and biases of the colonial system, a legacy of knowledge recycling between colonies uncovering how our past speaks to our present.

How do the Jaffna Tamils differ in their everyday experiences from other migrants to colonial Malaysia? Two ways are through their identity as well-positioned white-collar workers and community formation as an advantaged diaspora. *Identity* is who a person is internally and externally. It is the qualities they display making them different or similar to others. Identity corresponds to the notion of *community* defined as a unit of people sharing interests, religion, background, language, etc. For the Jaffna Tamil high-caste Vellalars, their identities formed different modes of community based on religion and class.[43] Throughout this work, I will show how a particular facet of the Vellalars, those who converted to Christianity and subsequently migrated across empire, formed into a specific community based on their experience within the host society. Identity and community are placed at the intersections of the formation of Jaffna Tamils as familiar to the British, hence becoming sub-elites while also remaining as strangers vis-a-vis colonial rulers. This made them simultaneously subordinate while benefiting from a sub-elite position.

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[41] Ravindra K. Jain, *South Indians on the Plantation Frontier in Malaya* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).; Rajakrishnan Ramasamy, *Indians in Peninsular Malaysia: A Study and Bibliography* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Library, 1984).; Selvakumaran Ramachandran, *Indian Plantation Labour in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: S. Abdul Majeed and Co, 1994).

[42] John Solomon, *A Subaltern History of the Indian Diaspora in Singapore: The Gradual Disappearance of Untouchability, 1872-1965* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[43] Benedict Anderson profoundly analyzes the many ways a group can come together to form a community. This community is imagined through shared language as seen through print and other forms of material culture creating the idea of one people. See: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

By departing from other scholarly takes such as Ramasamy's perspective of the Jaffna Tamils as successful agents of the British, this work acknowledges the privilege of the community as a sub-elite while also including commentary on the different ways of being as a sub-elite in colonial society. The community changed along with British rule based on the way they were perceived and the ways they perceived of themselves as presented by their position in society. Jaffna Tamil migrants could not necessarily control the colonial institutions dictating their lives, yet they still had the capacity to shape the outcome of the oppressive colonial system to ultimately gain from it. They were able to do this through their adjacency to colonial rulers.

Scholarship on South Asian communities in Malaysia has focused on representational politics and elite Indian organizations like the Malaysian Indian Congress.[44] There is a lack of information regarding how elite communities fashioned and performed these identities in their public and private correspondences. Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars teach us about formulations of race and categorization for the purpose of self-preservation and position within a world dominated by Western powers. While scholars have analyzed both elite and non-elite experiences across the Indian Ocean World, this work converges these institutional and cultural systems showing that colonial subjects could experience empire from a position of privilege and also subordination.

The next point of analysis ponders how this colonial interaction in Sri Lanka led to their migration to colonial Malaysia.[45] For Amrith, the Indian Ocean World frames the significance of chain migration's "layered pasts" for the Tamil communities of Malaysia. Through chain migration, migrants fuel and develop the foundations of a given society which affects the culture and politics of a community and nation. In chain migration, one settled group pulls their relatives and acquaintances to join them in the new country of settlement leaving lasting imprints on a society. Amrith points this out by stating, "A new consciousness of the Tamil diaspora, with sharper internal and external boundaries, emerged from the pages of the Tamil newspapers of the 1930s, but a strong sense of ambiguity prevailed, as diasporic consciousness

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[44] Charles Hirschman, "The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya Political Economy and Racial Ideology," *Sociological Forum* 1, no. 2 (1986): 330-361.; Yee Fong Leong, *Labour and Trade Unionism in Colonial Malaya: A Study of the Socio-economic and Political Bases of the Malayan Labour Movement 1930-1957* (Penang, Malaysia: Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1999).; Timothy Norman Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).; Shanthiah Rajagopal and Joseph Milton Fernando, "The Malayan Indian Congress and Early Political Rivalry Among Indian Organisations in Malaya, 1946-1950," *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2018): 25-42.

[45] Amrith, "Tamil Diasporas Across the Bay of Bengal."; Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*.

appeared to be torn between the many worlds of its imagination."[46] Tamil diasporic evolution parallels the agency and ownership individuals had over their life paths which was influenced by the rules and surveillance of colonial rulers. The legacy of Sri Lankan Tamils in colonial Malaysia was and is active and shows the group as direct participants in the organization of empire. Just as the Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars would go on pull their relatives to colonial Malaysia, they first encouraged them to join missionary schools, back in colonial Sri Lanka, which would play a significant role in educational and religious acquisition needed for civil servant jobs leading to the quest for employment.

These actions encouraged the view of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars as a sub-elite since they served as intermediaries for the British during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This gave them the capacity or merit to bargain for higher status within colonial power structures. This placed them just below colonial officials in the scheme of empire, yet they were still not entirely equal to them. In this sense, they were subordinate, the second layer of analysis. Subordination is defined by the connotations that the more powerful group cultivate regarding an empire's various subjects. Subordination defines the otherness and double consciousness of these subjects as below those in power, sometimes in terms of wealth, access to goods and services, and on various level of rank. Subordinates also enabled the colonial administration to maintain order, characterize colonial presence in the periphery and categorize each group according to their own definitions.[47]

Jaffna Tamils were not the only group to serve as both sub-elite and subordinates throughout European empire in South and Southeast Asia. Nalini Ranjan Chakravarti for example wrote about the recruitment and migration of civil servants from India to Burma during the late nineteenth into twentieth centuries.[48] Local circumstances led the British to recruit neighboring Indian communities to fill the ranks of the civil service in the urbanized areas of Burma, such as Rangoon.[49] Just as Indian sub-elites

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[46] Amrith, "Tamil Diasporas Across the Bay of Bengal," 561. Note: Amrith includes a footnote here. He utilizes Benedict Anderson's analysis of the press and its influence on the development of national-consciousness/the imagined community. Amrith goes on to state in his footnote, "Yet in the mobile waters of Southeast Asia, Anderson's assumption that the only (or even the most important) 'imagined community' was the national one seems misplaced: the Tamil press in urban Southeast Asia in the 1930s spoke of and spoke to- many 'imagined communities'-at once." Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

[47] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Routledge, Original 1903, Reprint 2004).

[48] Nalini Ranjan Chakravarti, *The Indian Minority in Burma: The Rise and Decline of an Immigrant Community* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

[49] Ibid, p. 31.

were recruited to aid colonial interests in neighboring Burma, Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars would go on to be at the forefront of a similar establishment in Malaysia. The perception of the community as perfect interlocutors by the British, as well as, the networks established by South Asian sub-elites enabled migration and sustained it in new locations.

Bringing together European conceptions of locals and communal networking skills is significant for regarding daily life within empire as a dynamic process, full of complexities. To maintain and adapt in another outpost of British rule, sub-elites code-switched among themselves and with officials. Code-switching consisted of changing language, dress, and manners depending on the social setting. Evidence of code-switching speaks to the public and private forms of fashioning identity in proximity to British colonial rulers.[50] Performing otherness, whether in relation to colonial power or as the subordinate, speaks to how local communities navigated the portrayal of their image during the colonial era. It affords reading colonial history from the perspective of duality.

By studying underexplored experiences of Jaffna Tamils living in British Malaysia, we can analyze sub-elites in colonial society and question common narratives of colonizer and colonized. As Lees notes, "Colonial rule had boundaries that were not only flexible, but also permeable in many settings, although inequalities of power twisted interactions in fundamental ways."[51] As a sub-elite under the British, the Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars provide an example of how local communities sought to circumvent victimhood through navigation of empire. On one end they were loyal to the British but also to their community. This loyalty translated into the balance and maintenance of a high position in colonial society. This enables us to rethink the role of local communities throughout empire moving away from the classical view of dominators and dominated. The story of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars muddies the waters showing us the capacity for power exchange but also suppression that occurred between officials and their subordinate sub-elites in

[50] I compare this view of code-switching to Homi Bhabha's discussion of Frantz Fanon. Bhabha reviews Fanon's analysis of how local populations are identified by the colonial machine, Homi Bhabha, "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition.", 117 in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds)., *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 112-123.

[51] Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects:* 6-7. **Note**: Lees refers T.N. Harper's take on polyglot and cosmopolitan societies. These multi-ethnic and multi-cultural spaces served as a field for code-switching between different communities. Cultural mixing aided adaptation and change throughout hierarchical societies of empire. See: Lees's footnote number 11 on page 6.- T.N. Harper, "Empire, Diaspora and the Languages of Globalism, 1850-1914," in A.G. Hopkins. (ed)., *Globalization in World History* (London: Pimlico, 2002).

public correspondence and intimate settings leaving lasting imprints between the past and present.

Chapter Outlines and Sources

Notions concerning how migrant communities find their way in host societies, how they change their identities, and how they are adopted by and adapt themselves to their new homeland are at the forefront of assimilation, acculturation and contemporary political decisions throughout the world. Through my analysis of the Jaffna Tamils, I pursue to uncover the connection between past and contemporary issues concerning migration in colonial Malaysia. This will be done by divulging the intricate relationships between missionaries, colonized subjects, and colonial officials during the empire making process. By bringing together historiographical debates concerning colonial subjects and the modernist view of community development, as well as, the production of agents of empire, this work explores how the migration of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars were an essential part of the cosmopolitan evolution in colonial Malaysia over the nineteenth to twentieth centuries. What does this say about the experiences of settled communities of contemporary independent Malaysia?

These relationships and experiences are explored throughout the introduction, five core chapters, and a conclusion. Each chapter focuses on a different theme, following a chronological order. While the first two chapters examine the colonial Sri Lankan side of the story during the nineteenth century, the third one examines the migratory transition between the two colonial locales. The last two go on to examine identity formation and representation in cosmopolitan colonial Malaysian society.

Starting in 1800, Chapter One serves as the starting point for understanding knowledge exchange and transformation between the Jaffna Tamil Vellalars and missionaries. This chapter introduces the intersections of education and religion as sources of navigating empire in colonial Sri Lanka up to 1875, serving as a catalyst for migration to colonial Malaysia. How did education and religion serve as tools to create colonial subjects both familiar and stranger to colonial rulers? How did this familiarization and stranger-making contribute to the push and pull factors leading some Jaffna Tamil Vellalars to convert to Christianity and essentially migrate from Jaffna to colonial Malaysia at the end of the nineteenth century? To explore these questions, this chapter relies on historical readings of missionary documents and Tamil correspondence.

Missionary documents from the American Board of Commissioners from the Harvard Houghton Library provides context for caste and conversion during the early to mid-nineteenth century. Official documentation regarding census and legislative papers from the Sri Lanka National Archives historicizes missionary, local, and official correspondence between colonized and colonizer allowing for the examination of experiences on the bureaucratic level but also the personal private level. Besides colonial sources, Tamil sources are used to read against official narratives converging aspects of caste, mission, and the double consciousness that emerged from the public and private fashioning of both. Tamil customs and law found in the Thesavalamai, as well as a work by Mudaliar Rasanayagam called *Ancient Jaffna* place nineteenth-century events in the context of Jaffna prior to- and during- British involvement in the region.[52]

Chapter Two brings us to later part of the nineteenth century in 1875 and introduces us to the beginning of the twentieth century up to 1913. This chapter explores how the synergies between missionaries, Jaffna Vellalars and British colonial officials formed the catalyst for this community to seek out and obtain civil service positions in colonial Malaysia. What was the initial push towards colonial Malaysia? Despite movement, were Jaffna Tamils still tied to colonial Sri Lanka through education, employment and kin networks during the turn of the century?

To analyze such questions some missionary documents are reviewed. However, this chapter relies more on historical readings of census material, official colonial correspondence, and memoirs to understand how mission schools served as an arena of bounded agency, that is alternative modes of expression based on the restrictive modes of colonial rule, for Jaffna Tamil Vellalars. By reviewing letters of encouragement from the Malaysian colonial administration, we see the outcome of this bounded agency. Sent in both 1867 and 1875, these letters sent to the colonial Sri Lankan government from Malaysia, specifically requested Jaffna Tamils to work in the civil service. Recruitment practices are analyzed here since it is these methods of gaining employment which showcase the drive of the community to navigate colonial rule. Advertisements in gazettes and memoirs of migrant families like the Rogers and MacIntyres allow us to uncover the public and private performance of Jaffna Tamil identity formation in the colonial environment. Larger imaginaries of what it means to be Jaffna Tamil in Malaysia are informed by proximity to British officials and heterogenous groups in the colony.[53]

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[52] Mudaliyar C. Rasanayagam, *Ancient Jaffna: Being a Research into the History of Jaffna from Very Early Times to the Portuguese Period* (New Delhi and Chennai, India: Laurier Books Ltd, 1993).

[53] William Arasaratnam Rogers, Jr., *Fifty Years in Malaya* (Colombo: Ceylon Observer Press, 1940); S.C. MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane* (Singapore: University Education Press, 1973).

Chapter Three focuses on the aftermath of WWI up to 1933 showcasing how identity was solidified in colonial Malaysia. The chapter discusses the consequence of Tamil bounded agency through the migration of converted Jaffna Tamils of Vellalar origin. What were the practices uprooted from colonial Sri Lanka to Malaysia? How did their conversion affect their socioeconomic and sociocultural status in the frontier colony? I introduce both historical and anthropological readings of official colonial correspondence, memoirs, petitions from Jaffna Tamils, and cartoon illustrations to answer these questions. Jaffna Tamil ties to the British are at the core of understanding how their identities changed and adapted to the Malaysian colonial environment. Yet, the community's ties to the old country were still strong affecting their loyalty between their place of origin and their new place of settlement. How did this speak to the notion of loyalty? To whom were they loyal? The answers inform the group's place within empire. This chapter focuses on the years between WWI and WWII as migration continued to peak and then abruptly stop.

Chapter Four discusses the changing dynamics of high position and status in the colony from the 1930s up to the start of WWII. What effects did the war have on the Jaffna Tamil-Malaysian community? Primary sources such as correspondence showcase the memories of change in society leading up to WWII for the community. It is during the war that the elite status of the community within colonial society becomes complicated since the Japanese also target them as a community to serve as agents of their empire across Asia, while also stripping the community of their comfortable position in the daily life of Malaysia. How would the Jaffnese-Malaysian community go on to navigate this challenge to their identity?

In the last chapter, Chapter Five, I analyze the peak and decline of Jaffna Tamil migration between the two colonial outposts of the British empire through an analysis of colonial records concerning the war and citizenship policies procured after the war. The second World War has a profound effect on how the Jaffna Tamils felt about their place in Malaysian society. Colonial Malaysia resembled the United States, in that, migrants thought of the country as the land of opportunity, with streets *paved with gold*. During the interwar years, many of the Jaffna Tamils reaped the benefits of the opportunities present in colonial Malaysia. Yet, WWII stripped much of their profit away. After the war, the pro-British Jaffna Tamils were happy to see the British return. However, with new talk of independence and their elite status under threat, how would the Tamils continue to showcase their loyalty? Would their ties to colonial Sri Lanka remain? By utilizing the memoirs of prominent Tamil-Malaysians of Sri Lankan descent such as the MacIntyre family and the Rogers family, Chapter Five demonstrates that the transition from colonial rule to an emerging independence movement was shrouded in nostalgias and

competing loyalties through the declaration of naturalization as British citizens in Malaysia.

This thesis displays the settlement of the community in colonial Malaysia by framing the continuities and differences of the community's navigation over the nineteenth to twentieth centuries within the British Empire of South and Southeast Asia. As Sivasundaram notes in *Islanded,* colonial synergies were based on "constant movement and recycling that characterized colonial takeover."[54] To illustrate the importance of Indian Ocean World interactions and the migratory influence on identity formation, a variety of Vellalar narratives are weaved throughout each chapter.

The story of the Jaffna Tamils is an essential case study for comprehending Indian Ocean World interactions over the colonial to post-colonial era. As the least studied group of Tamils in Malaysia, the Jaffnese represent a minority within a minority. Their migratory experience from a rural to urban perspective speaks much about subjecthood and citizenship during moments of change between empire and independence. The story of the Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar showcases how local communities maneuvered the objectifying system of colonization through performance and imitation- ultimately using colonial rules against the system.

Memories of education, religion, and agency tell us about the adaptations of various communities throughout South and Southeast Asia. As a region with many different ethnic groups, Malaysia serves as prime illustration of how communities in Southeast Asia influenced, challenged, and developed vis-à-vis each other within first the context of Britishness and then within independence. No wonder, the slogan of Malaysia's contemporary tourism campaign, is "Malaysia, truly Asia." Hence, the lines between what is means to be a contemporary Malaysian in the post-colonial realm directly stem from the contested categories created during the colonial era through migratory patterns and integration in the new locale.

Contested categories experienced within multi-ethnic societies are at the forefront of larger questions surrounding globalization and decolonization of former colonial societies. Studying the Tamil diaspora, one can come to understand how colonial pre-migration patterns and historical trajectories impact how a community views itself, maintains and changes their cultural frameworks, and develops educationally, socially, and economically. In comparison to Ian Hacking's debate concerning dynamic nominalism, the Tamils represent the "historicized form of nominalism

[54] Sivasundaram, Islanded, 17.

that traces the mutual interactions over time between phenomena (colonial migratory patterns to post-colonial nation and state building) and the human world (Sri Lankan Tamil experiences in Malaysia) and our conceptions and classifications of them."[55] A group's imagined community stems directly from history informing our past and present.

[55] Ian Hacking, "Making up People," *The London Review of Books* 28, no. 16 (2006).

CHAPTER 1

Migration Catalyst: Vellalar agency, missionaries, and education, 1800-1875

1.1 | Introduction

For centuries, the Jaffna Peninsula was a hub for cultural, religious, and economic exchange. Influencers further north from Tamil Nadu and Kerala, East from Indonesia and Malaysia and West from Arabia left their mark on the region. Different names for the island such as Sarandib, Lanka, and Ceylon attest to the various imaginations attached to interactions between locals and visitors to the island.[56]

These names often emphasize the histories of the central and southern domains of the island.[57] A volume from 1926 provides an early account on the kingdoms of northern region. In this year, Mudaliyar C. Rasanayagam, a prominent member of the Ceylon Civil Service, complied an early history of Jaffna. Regarding its pre-colonial history, he writes, "The Phoenicians, the Arabs, the Ethiopians, the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans from the West, the Chinese, the Javanese and the Burmese from the East, not to speak of the nations of India, vied with each other at various times to monopolise the trade of North Ceylon."[58] Jaffna served as a point of contact between visitors, settlers, and conquerors of the island from the earliest years of the common era into various European conquests from the Portuguese, Dutch, and British.

By the time of Rasanayagam's writing in 1923, Sri Lanka had seen 117 years of British rule. His title as a Mudaliar or headman along with his employment in the service spoke to his adjacency to British rulers and his representative position in colonial society. The subsequent work by the civil servant provides a neglected narrative of the northern region of the island from the perspective of a Sri Lankan Tamil. His role as a local colonial subject writing about Jaffna speaks to the longer history of socio-

[56]Ronit Ricci describes the nomenclature of the island in the first few pages of *Banishment and Belonging*. "Sarandib, the old name employed by the Arabs for the island, was the spot where according to Muslim tradition Adam, the first man and first prophet, fell to earth upon his banishment from Paradise...Lanka, the fabulous demon Kingdom in the Ramayana, was also a site of banishment, where Sita was forcibly taken by Ravana, far from her husband Rama, his kingdom and his subjects...Ceylon, the name employed by successive European rulers of the island, was closely associated with exile in the colonial period." From Ricci, *Banishment and Belonging*, 2.

[57]Sri Lankanists focus mainly on the historical trajectories of the central region and Kingdom of Kandy, as well as the southern areas along the coast. The north is often neglected in discussions on Sri Lankan history and features heavily in anthropological and historical works about the war. A recent prominent work by scholars focuses on Sri Lanka's place within larger narratives of Indian Ocean World circulations, however, Jaffna is heavily neglected in the discourse. See: Biedermann and Strathern, *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History.*

[58]Rasanayagam, Ancient Jaffna, 118. Rasanayagam (1870-1940) attended the missionary St. Thomas College in Colombo and became Interpreter of the Law Courts for the Clerical Service in 1889. In 1920, he received the title Mudaliar, which was a colonial title for headmen of a caste community. From 1923-1929 he served in the Ceylon Civil Service at the Jaffna Kachcheri (Revenue Collector's Office).; Sanmugam Arumugam, *Dictionary of Biography of the Tamils of Ceylon*. (London, S. Arumugam,1997): 14.

religious communication between the inhabitants of Jaffna, missionaries, and colonial rulers. His role also hints at the position of Jaffna high-caste Tamils in colonial society.

Prior to Rasanayagam's work, Europeans relied on descriptions of the island from missionaries and colonial officials. The books of these writers were often the result of a nineteenth century Orientalist take on the culture, religion, and flora and fauna of the island. They exotified yet also familiarized the region to their own homelands. Their narratives provide not only descriptions of the island for those back at the metropole, they also serve as tools for partitioning the island and its people in order to make the island legible to colonial rulers.

One way missionaries attempted to familiarize the island was through the description of its size. An example from 1807 by Anglican missionary John Cordiner described the island we now call Sri Lanka as a similar size to Britain. He went on to characterize the flora, fauna, and people of the island for British readers back home.[59] Chronicles from Cordiner and others inspired another missionary fifty-seven years later. In 1864, Wesleyan missionary R. Spence Hardy also composed a description of the island for European readers. According to him, the island was a little smaller than Ireland and served as the watch-tower for the sub-continent. Hardy noted that the island was to Asia, as Britain to Europe and Madagascar to Africa.[60]

Missionaries also described the island's topography and cultural customs for readers back in Europe. Hardy painted a contradictory picture of the landscape, weather, and behavior of local communities. For one outsider, colonial Sri Lanka was described as an unbearably hot and humid country, with only two months of sun. The cuisine solely consisted of rice and curry day in and day out. There was an abundance of riches like pearls and jewels but also of hardships such as disease and dangerous wild animals. Local communities' worshipped foreign deities. An emphasis was also made towards the cheating nature of locals.[61]

Yet other travelogues proclaimed opposing opinions in their description of the island. According to Hardy, some saw the island as a paradise full of lush and hilly scenery with exotic animals sprawling the land in the South and dry plains teeming with elephants in the North, as well as, a production of abundant amounts of

[59] James Cordiner, *A Description of Ceylon* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, Paternoster Row, 1807).
[60] R. Spence Hardy, *Wesleyan Mission: South Ceylon, 1814-1864* (Colombo: Printed at the Wesleyan Mission Press, 1864).
[61] Ibid.

precious stones. The climate was enjoyable and the local people were described as gentle and kind. Hardy goes on to mention that both accounts were accurate in the extreme, however, to comprehend the true experience of living in colonial Sri Lanka, a middle ground was closer to reality.[62]

This was the mindset of many missionaries and Orientalists coming to colonial Sri Lanka over the nineteenth century. Whether it was praise or complaints, an important take-away from foreign accounts of the island exposed the motive to both familiarize and make strange the region from the homelands of colonial rulers. Defining and categorizing the local environment and people served as a mode of knowledge production for officials. On the other hand, Rasanayagam's account a century later provided the voice of a colonial subject writing on the history and heritage of northern Sri Lanka from the view of a local contrasting and conforming to definitions of otherness. He also provided a particular viewpoint of the region- that of the high-caste Vellalar.

In the year 1800, a Tamil missionary from Tamil Nadu would become the bridge for exchange between local Jaffna Tamils, missionaries, and colonial officials. His place in Jaffna society served as the starting point for making the outer and inner lives of local inhabitants understandable to British rulers. This could be used to inform the socio-cultural, socio-religious and socio-economic dynamics of the island and later outside the island to other destinations for both colonial ruler and colonial subject. This chapter introduces modes of exchange between the two groups from intersections of education, religion, and empire. Exchange adds sources for navigating empire in colonial Sri Lanka up to 1875 and provides a catalyst for migration to colonial Malaysia. How did education and religion serve as tools to create colonial subjects both familiar and stranger to colonial rulers? How did this familiarization and stranger-making contribute to the push and pull factors leading some Jaffna Tamil Vellalars to convert to Christianity and essentially migrate from Jaffna to colonial Malaysia at the end of the nineteenth century?

Narratives from Christian missionaries[63] provide insight into the ways religious and non-religious colonial officials sought to understand yet also misinterpret the

[62] Ibid., 2-3.

[63] For accounts from Christian missionaries see: Cordiner, A Description of Ceylon.; Sir James Emerson Tennent, Christianity in Ceylon: Its Introduction and Progress under the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, and American Missions (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1850).; Hardy, Wesleyan Mission.; William Howland, Historical Sketch of the Ceylon Mission (Ceylon: The American Board, 1865). Christian missionaries were not separate from empire-making. Though missionaries sought to convert local communities to Christianity, their educational institutions also served to indoctrinate these people into the colonial apparatus, making them into colonial subjects.

landscape and culture of the local communities they encountered. By influencing local societies through religion, Christian missionaries and colonial officials were both trying to understand the people by familiarizing them to European and Anglo-American cultures. By making local communities and their ways of life understandable to them, the colonial state could more easily control the people under their purview. For missionaries and officials, caste was part of the colonial Sri Lankan society they tried to comprehend. There were also sources of local information that colonial rulers chose to ignore since they could not discern its meaning. By ignoring these sources, such as local ways of consolidating power within the misunderstanding of caste, high caste Vellalars had the capacity to navigate the challenges of colonial society.[64]

The Jaffna peninsula, located in the extreme north of the island, had at times been a scene of great commerce while at other times it was a barren landscape in decline. Its locale has made it, historically and physically, a place looking out towards the sea. At the same time, it received colorful newcomers and adventurers in the appearance of merchants, religious figures, fishermen, colonial rulers and subordinates.[65] To understand socio-cultural and socio-economic dynamics within the region one needs to turn to caste. The ways British and American missionaries interpreted caste, as based on their own view and the view of elites within Jaffna

[64] To understand the ways the colonial state tried to understand the societies they encountered- see: James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). On pages 2 to 3, Scott writes: "How did the state gradually get a handle on its subjects and their environment? Suddenly processes as disparate as the creation of permanent last names, the standardization of weights and measures, the establishment of cadastral surveys and population registers, the invention of freehold tenure, the standardization of language and legal discourse, the design of cities, and transportation seemed comprehensible as attempts at legibility and simplification. In each case, officials took exceptionally complex, illegible, and local social practices, such as land tenure customs or naming customs, and created a standard grid whereby it could be centrally recorded and monitored…These state simplifications, the basic givers of modern statecraft, were, I began to realize, rather like abridged maps. They did not successfully represent the actual activity of the society they depicted, nor were they intended to; they represented only that slice of it that interested the official observer."; The recent work of Maaike Derksen also provides an account of missionaries making colonial subjects in Dutch New Guinea. She shows missionaries worked in tandem with the colonial government to understand, convert, and familiarize locals into Dutch colonial subjects. See: Maaike Derksen, "Local Intermediaries? The Missionizing and Governing of Colonial Subjects in South Dutch New Guinea, 1920-42," *The Journal of Pacific History* 51, no. 2 (2016): 111-142.; Kirsten Kamphuis, "An Alternative Family: An Elite Christian Girls' School on Java in a Context of Social Change, c. 1907-1939," *BMGN- Low Countries Historical Review* 35, no. 3-4 (2020): 133-157.

[65] Nira Wickramasinghe and Alicia Schrikker, "The Ambivalence of Freedom: Slaves in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 78, no. 3 (2019): 501. By focusing on the experiences of slaves in Jaffna during the eighteenth to nineteenth century, Wickramasinghe and Schrikker provide great detail on caste consolidation and power dynamics of different castes in the region such as the Vellalars, Madapallis, Nalavars, Pallars.

society, can paint a picture for the later trajectory of educational and employment dominance of Vellalars during the British period. This is the first point of reference for understanding religious interaction between missionaries and Jaffna Tamil Vellalars. The missionary account is significant for comprehending how the intersection of religion and education, during the early British period in colonial Sri Lanka, led to conversion and the strengthening status of a sub-group of Vellalars, Christian Vellalars, in the territory.[66]

One missionary in particular, Reverend Christian David, aided the strengthening of Vellalar dominance concerning the acquisition of missionary education. As argued by Mark Balmforth in his work on Jaffna missionaries, David served as an intermediary and source of local knowledge making well into the nineteenth century. Originally from Tranquebar in Tamil Nadu, David's family also experienced conversion and interaction with missionaries. In 1800, David went to Jaffna to reconvert old churches from the Dutch era into first Anglican and later Wesleyan and Methodist houses of worship during the British period.[67] Once these churches were up and running, caste observance became an issue for British and American missionaries. Tensions arose through seating practices. Lower castes often sat in the back of churches and higher castes not only sat in the front but also received eucharist before lower castes.[68]

Despite both high and low castes being present at service, higher castes became the target for missionary interest in Jaffna. It was thought by accessing higher castes, all facets of society would eventually convert. This helped colonial officials to create a set of men similar to them yet also allowed these higher castes to access positions of influence in colonial society. Tamil Reverend Christian David is an example of this. As the first missionary responsible for the revival of Christian mission efforts in Jaffna, he shows the convergence of colonial subject-making from a religious standpoint and provides insight into how local communities sought opportunity through a colonial system.

The following sections rely on missionary sources from the Harvard University Houghton Library Archive (HUHL), official colonial correspondence through

[66] Ibid.

[67] Balmforth provides a much-needed analysis of the arrival and influence of Christian David in the Jaffna region. David served as an intermediary and source of local knowledge making well into the nineteenth century. See: Mark E. Balmforth, "A Tamil Pietist in Ceylon: The Educational Experiments of Christian David," *International Journal of Asian Christianity* 3 (2020): 44-68.

[68] G.P.V. Somaratna and Napoleon Pathmanathan, *The Life and Times of Christian David* (Kohuwela, Sri Lanka: Colombo Theological Seminary, 2013): 136.

legislative and census documents from the Sri Lanka National Archives (SLNA) and local narratives on caste from Tamil elites like Rasanayagam. Simply relying on one type of source leads to interpreting interaction between ruler and ruled from the perspective of those in power. Combining all three forms of source material allows the historian to show the influence elite local communities had over some segments of colonial society.

Following the historiography section, 1.3 uses secondary literature from Rasanayagam to explain caste hierarchies in the region during the different European periods. This lays the groundwork for section 1.4. This section uses missionary documents to read beyond the grain providing insight into the place of Vellalars in colonial society and their interaction with missionaries like Christian David in schools. It also provides clues to how colonial officials responded to proselytization efforts.[69] Section 1.5 uses documents from the SLNA such as census, legislative papers, and Rasanayagam's work to examine caste politics in the region showing us local, missionary, and the official opinion concerning subject-making and the state of affairs in the colony. The final section, 1.6., continues analysis of these sources to show the ways local Vellalars navigated as both familiars and strangers among colonial interventions occurring around them. The next section places this narrative within the broader historiography of caste, mission studies, and double consciousness of Jaffna Tamil Vellalars.

1.2 | Hierarchization and caste

During the nineteenth century, the caste question featured prominently in the conversion efforts of missionaries to the island. Both missionaries and colonial officials used the knowledge they attempted to understand about colonial subjects to govern the regions under their rule. The customs, religion, and social dynamics they did not understand also played a role in how they interacted with local communities. Scholars of Sri Lanka discuss this desire to make the colony legible through forms of hierarchization and partitioning.

In his 2008 work, Sri Lankan Historian Nirmal Dewasiri shows that communities are formed before hierarchies. These separate communities, sharing a spatial locale, may have independent evolutions. However, hierarchization occurs as outside entities

[69] Remco Raben, "Ethnic Disorder in VOC Asia. A Plea for Eccentric Reading," *BMGN- Low Countries Historical Review* 134, no.2 (2019): 115-128.

seek to place these varying communities in a fixed order.[70] Colonial rulers coming into South Asia encountered a system of classification among local communities and though they did not necessarily create caste in the region, Europeans aided in its transformation. John Rogers pushes forward the dynamics surrounding caste in the region with classification systems of European powers. For Rogers, colonial officials did not solely dominate local communities rather colonial rulers inserted notions of European modernity into already existing local hierarchies. This combination enabled Europeans to assert power while it also provided local communities different ways to navigate this same power.[71]

During the nineteenth century, British colonialism moved away from old conceptions of empire-making to new modes of control. The British Empire developed in two-parts from an Old Empire to a New Empire over the course of the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries.[72] For instance, on one level, the Old British Empire was characterized by conquest and dominance over sole control of overseas possessions and the physical control over local populations. The New British Empire was characterized by a psychological dominance over the people or as David Scott states "it was concerned rather to develop techniques of subjectification, surveillance, and discipline; and the colonial missions are the emblems of this civilizing project."[73]

Historians of South Asia and Sri Lanka, in particular, studying the colonial period, colonial forms of hierarchization and partitioning of the island, inform the historical trajectories of ethnic relations, economic development, and socio-cultural and socio-religious dynamics found throughout the region. In *Islanded*, Sivadundaram shows the colonial endeavor to produce knowledge needed to maintain order among a diverse society. During the early decades of the British period, colonial officials, as well as, European and American missionaries relied on local communities for information on local forms of knowledge. However, following the decades of British liberal reforms, Sivadundaram notes by the 1830s, British officials turned to other sources, namely Europeans and Americans, to aid the expansion of colonial rule. A hierarchy of different ethnic groups assisted the daily and bureaucratic functioning

[70] Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri, *The Adaptable Peasant: Agrarian Society in Western Sri Lanka under Dutch Rule, 1740-1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2008): 186.
[71] John Rogers, "Caste as a social category and identity in colonial Sri Lanka," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 41, no.1 (2004): 51-77.
[72] David Scott, "Conversion and Demonism: Colonial Discourse and Religion in Sri Lanka," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no.2 (1992): 334-335.
[73] Ibid, 335. Scott also refers here: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979).; Ashis Nandy, "The Psychology of Colonialism: Sex, Age and Ideology in British India," *Psychiatry 45, no.3* (1982): 197-219.

of colonial Sri Lanka. Categorization and the consolidation of hierarchies in colonial society directly stem from the making of imperial structures and the colonial gaze of subjectification and indigenous conceptions of hierarchy within society.[74]

Colonial officials based their governance on knowledge of cultural forms from South Asia. John Marriot shows the colonial government was produced and transformed as a result of the very processes it sought to understand. A relationship of reciprocity ruled colonial societies.[75] In *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects*, Lees follows this line of analysis in her discussion of colonial subject making in British Malaysia. She notes that empire needs to be understood from the mindset of colonized people and their experiences. By focusing on their experiences, scholars come to learn how local communities were controlled and also how they responded to British dominance.[76]

Though the significant take-away from Sivasundaram, Lees, and others shows the need to emphasize the experiences of colonial subjects under European rule, there is still a layer of analysis missing, the experience of local communities from their perspective. Another Southeast Asianist, Remco Raben, goes a step further. Raben shows how colonial societies were indeed complex with many different local communities aligning or rebelling against European rulers. He emphasizes the fact that "race, occupation, religion, class, and legal status constantly interplayed and directed the definition of social boundaries." Instead of contributing to segregating society as analyzed in colonial documents, colonial subjects navigated colonial rule through moral communities going against the classical view of strict boundaries and hierarchies in colonial society.[77]

This chapter brings together Raben with Sivasundaram and Lees by acknowledging the importance of relating the colonial gaze to the development of hierarchies in colonial society while also exposing the way proximity to colonial rulers enabled certain people, i.e. elites, in society to strengthen their access to an intermediary position in the colony. Though boundaries and hierarchies could be changed depending on circumstance, this chapter shows how reliance on categorizing locals fed into the way these communities saw colonial rule. Their gaze, rather than the British one, is the focus here. Proximity and adjacency to European rule informed such a gaze allowing for elites to more easily navigate the constraints of empire.

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[74] Sivasundaram, *Islanded*, 10.
[75] John Marriot, *The Other Empire. Metropolis, India and Progress in the Colonial Imagination* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003): 2.
[76] Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subject*, 8.
[77] Remco Raben, "Colonial Standard and Historical Knowledge: Segregation and Localization in a Dutch Colonial Society," *Journal of Modern European History* 18:2 (2020): 177-193.

The starting point of interaction between local Jaffna Tamils and British officials is at the mission school, a practice similar to the Dutch period. For scholars of missionary studies, the separation or intertwinement of mission and empire is the core of the colonialization narrative.[78] Investigations surrounding the separation of mission and empire focus on independent trajectories between missionary interaction with colonized subjects and colonial officials interacting with colonialized subjects. Though missionaries and colonial officials were separate institutions in colonial Sri Lanka, scholarly criticisms of the missionary enterprise argue that at the "micro-level" missionaries "often appear to enact or mimic the operations of political and economic imperialism at the macro level."[79] Missionaries were both actors imparting colonial rule by strengthening pre-existing hierarchies yet through religion, they also promoted ideas of Eurocentric modernity among local communities. In turn, locals appropriated such categorizations.[80]

In their discussion on slave communities in Jaffna, Nira Wickramasinghe and Alicia Schrikker note the role of missionaries in Jaffna society. Missionaries are often regarded as the cultivators of equality for the lower- and outcaste groups of South Asian society. This is certainly the case for India.[81] However, starting in the

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[78] Jeffrey Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise since 1700* (New York: Routledge, 2008).; Norman Etherington (ed.), *Missions and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[79] Etherington, *Missions and Empire*, 4.

[80] Though it is often assumed the British focused on making locals into colonial subjects, previous colonial rulers followed a similar strategy to gain control of local resources and the minds of people. A recent article by Bente de Leede shows the religious and educational indoctrination of Sri Lankan children in the schools and churches of the Dutch Reformed Church during the Dutch colonial era. She notes, "...civilizing missions were aimed at educating children to transform them into modern subjects, and through them the rest of the community...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 took place in the 'operating fields' of the schools and churches of the Dutch Reformed Church." See: Bente de Leede, "Children Between Company and Church: Subject-making in Dutch Colonial Sri Lanka, c. 1650-1750," *BMGN- Low Countries Historical Review* 135, no. 3-4 (2020): 109-111.; Another recent work by Mak, Monteiro and Wesseling also focuses on the separation of children from local communities for education and religious purposes during the Dutch colonial era. They write, "Child separation was never about education only, but always imposed specific morals and life styles on its subjects as well. It caused profound fault lines in colonized families and communities. For colonial politics, it was key to controlling, influencing and discipling the colonized population." See- Geertje Mak, Marit Monterio and Elisabeth Wesseling, "Child Separation: (Post) Colonial Policies and Practices in the Netherlands and Belgium," *BMGN- Low Countries Historical Review* 135, no. 3-4 (2020): 4.

[81] Chandra Mallampalli, *Christians and Public Life in Colonial South India, 1863-1937* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004).; Robert Eric Frykenberg. (ed.), *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003).; Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1858* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).; S. Neill, *The Story of the Christian Church in India and Pakistan* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).; John William Kays, *Christianity in India: An Historical Narrative* (London: Smith, 1859).

Dutch period, the colonial Church was complicit in the power acquisition of high-caste Vellalars in Jaffna. For instance, Dutch ministers allowed for the registration of slaves as property by the Vellalars. Wickramasinghe and Schrikker conclude the role of missionaries introducing equality among all castes in Jaffna as minor compared to other parts of South Asia.[82]

Tools of education, colonial language acquisition, and Christianity could be disbursed to operate within colonial society. Balmforth shows this in his article on Reverend Christian David's life as a missionary during the British period. As a Tamil, David was a colonized subject yet as a missionary he also served as a complementary intermediary of Anglo and American missionaries and colonial officials. David served as the catalyst for the strong Vellalar relationship to Anglo and American missions.[83]

The mission was described as a transmitter of the colonial mindset by communicating the various levels of colonial rule and capitalist frameworks.[84] Jeffrey Cox debates that "the precise relationship between missionaries and non-Western Christians varied enormously over the globe, but wherever Christianity grew, missionaries were important figures in one way or another in non-Western Christian communities."[85] The above mentioned authors emphasize the synergy between missionaries and local communities showing the ways oppressed lower castes coped with the dominance of high-caste Vellalars and missionary complacency in their relationships with members of the caste. This chapter furthers the discussion on the role missionaries played in complying with tensions between groups within the empire through hierarchization. It also accentuates the way elites refashioned and navigated the definitions of otherness placed on them. Missionary complacency strengthened caste dominance in mission schools influencing the socio-economic, religious, and cultural dynamics for Vellalar familiarization and stranger-making in colonial society. Through these relationships elite subjects were maintained and remade to become fully engaged participants in the colonial networks around them.

For this chapter, official colonial narratives through missionary documents and official correspondence, as well as, information from Rasanayagam are read from the theoretical perspective regarding merit. Jaffna Tamil Vellalars had a head-start

[82] Wickramasinghe and Schrikker, "The Ambivalence of Freedom," 18.
[83] Balmforth, "A Tamil pietist,", 63.; Mark E Balmforth, "In Naki's Wake: Slavery and Caste Supremacy in the American Ceylon Mission," *J-Caste* 1, no. 1 (2020): 155-174.
[84] Clifton C. Crais, *White Supremacy and Black Resistance in Pre-Industrial South Africa: The Making of the Colonial Order in the Eastern Cape, 1770-1865* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 104.
[85] Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise since 1700,* 21.

in their interaction with British missionaries from the merit assigned to them by themselves and colonial rulers. Suraj Yengde introduces the intricacies of merit in his profound work concerning the experiences of outcastes, formerly known as untouchables vis-a-vis the privileges of high caste communities in India. These privileges are results of their dominant role in South Asian society from a caste perspective. Though his work is more contemporary, Yengde's narrative can also apply to historical surveys of caste. The successes or failures of a particular group are based on their perceived hard work and merit. Yengde makes the argument that these merits are based on years of dominance by higher castes. Hence, these notions of merit negatively impact the experiences of low caste and outcaste people in India. In turn higher castes continue to control access to education and employment.[86]

The cultivation of privilege or merit speaks to the historical development of Vellalars prior to- and during British rule. This merit links the perpetuation of their high caste status to the merits or privileges granted to them in a colonial system. This is reproduced in official correspondence. Though not the intention of many scholars, reading colonial documents often recreates the language of such sources throughout our writing. Raben draws attention to this stating "...whether done by reading along or even against the archival grain, [colonial documents] tend to confirm the colonial discourses, perspectives and categorisations as these studies remain within the discoursive fold offered by the colonial authors."[87] Raben does not dispute the importance of colonial documents, however, he does provide reflection on how we rely on such officialized citations at face value.

Colonial documents show that these factors were not introduced by European officials but rather changed to fit the needs of colonial rulers. Thus, colonial documents represent local communities from a bureaucratic perspective. This bureaucratization often characterized local communities into set social identities. Official categories were not necessarily the same experienced on the ground. By including the notion of merit alongside such narratives, I follow Raben in reading beyond the archive. Recounting historical life will never reveal the exact experiences of the groups and individuals under a historian's review. However, reading beyond the archive uncovers some aspect of the ambivalent space of colonial rule and colonized experience to discover the truth of bureaucratic representations from local communities themselves.[88]

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[86] Suraj Yendge, *Caste Matters* (Ebook version- Kobo) (India: Penguin Random House, 2019): 23-25.
[87] Raben, "Ethnic disorder in VOC Asia."
[88] Ibid.; Craig Lockard, "'The Sea Common to All': Maritime Frontiers, Port Cities, and Chinese Traders in the Southeast Asian Age of Commerce, ca. 1400-1750," *Journal of World History* 21, no. 2 (2010): 241.

Engagement with caste politics and missions is unique as compared to colonial India since it is often thought that caste was not as strong in influencing local communities.[89] However, it is Vellalar high caste status and dominance over Jaffna society that provide the merit or clout needed to engage with colonial officials while also serving as a barrier to equality with the British. This made the experiences of conversion a process of familiarization to British ways of being while high caste status made the community strangers from fully accessing the colonial regime. Yet their caste status also allowed for initial communication with the British and the later maintenance of socio-cultural and socio-economic networks creating a double consciousness among Jaffna Vellalars. Subordination under the British allowed justification for official control over locales of empire. From the local perspective, high caste and conversion enabled dominance over education influencing later economic migration as civil servants maintaining authority in Jaffna and abroad. The following sections review caste, conversion, and schooling to uncover the making of colonial subjects among Jaffna's elite.

1.3 | Background to caste in Jaffna

To first understand colonial conceptions of caste in the region, let us turn to the rise of the Vellalar caste in Sri Lanka. Scholars such as Bryan Pfaffenberger describe the beginning of Vellalar caste dominance in north Sri Lanka as early as the thirteenth century into seventeenth century, the period known as the Jaffna kingdom. Pfaffenberger proposed Vellalars dominated government politics since the Jaffna kingdom. He provides evidence citing Pieris (1914) and Hutton (1961). Hutton writes that the kings of Jaffna brought 18 Vellalars over from Southern India to aid in governmental consultation.[90] R. Visvanathan contradicts this information, however. He writes that this information is cited from the *Kailai Malai*, an unreliable source with details later proven to be mythical. Rather, Vellalar migrants and established fisher communities combined through intermarriage creating the Vellalar community encountered by the Portuguese during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[91] In pre-colonial Tamil Nadu, as the highest caste, Brahmins dominated

[89] Rogers, "Caste as a social category."
[90] Bryan Pfaffenberger, *Caste in Tamil Culture: The Religious Foundations of Sudra Domination in Tamil Sri Lanka* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1982): 35. Pfaffenberger cites J.H. Hutton, *Caste in India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961): 67.; Paul Edward Pieris, *Ceylon: The Portuguese Era, Being a History of the Island for the Period 1505-1658. Vol. 1 & 2* (Colombo: Colombo Apothecaries, 1914).
[91] R. Visvanathan, (2013). *The Tamils in India, Ceylon, and Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: R. Visvanathan, 2013): 143.

political and economic functions. As sudras, Vellalars were barred from attaining higher positions despite their land-owning status.[92]

However, Pfaffenberger goes on that in Jaffna, kings needed the support of prominent Vellalars. Without their support, a king's rule was unstable and difficult to maintain. This was the Jaffna experienced by the Portuguese of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[93] At this time hierarchization of caste society was as follows: Brahmins, dominant agricultural castes such as the Vellalars and Madapallis, a small group of artisans and the untouchable laborers.[94] Similar to caste categorization of Tamil Nadu, castes in Jaffna were divided into *kudimai a*nd *adimai*.[95]

Continuing from the Portuguese, interactions with Dutch colonial rulers over the course of the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries further consolidated high caste influence over Jaffna society. Wickramasinghe and Schrikker discuss the experiences of adimai castes such as the Nalavars and Pallars in relation to caste dominance by kudimai castes like the Vellalars and Madapallis. Citing Arasaratnam, Wickramasinghe and Schrikker note that the Vellalars were able to consolidate power in Jaffna under Dutch rule by acquiring appointments as officials and *mudaliyars* under the colonial regime. Despite the challenge from another high caste, the Madapallis, the Vellalars were eventually able to secure their elevated position in colonial society. They did this through various means such as stamping out caste rivals through economic agreements with colonial powers concerning tobacco

[92] Ibid, 144. On page 144, Visvanathan writes, "Under the Palayam system, Telugu Totians and other Tamils except the Vellalars were appointed as Nayaks. The Vellalars were kept out because the founder of the system, Visvanatha Mudaliar believed that a Vellalar can never be King. The position of Vellalars in South India was difficult at that time and was not changed until the Imperial Chola Period."; From this quote we can see the correlation between the connotations of their sudra varna status as an obstacle to their socio-economic climb over the centuries. This would continue but also change over the course of pre-colonial and colonial eras as different actors navigated the changing systems.; Frykenberg, *Christians and missionaries in India.* See: Chapter 4- Heike Liebau. "Country priests, catechists and schoolmasters as cultural, religious, and social middlemen in the context of the Tranquebar mission," 70-92, 82 Footnote 51- "What constituted or defined 'low' could be problematic. Brahmins defined Vellalars, the former elite rulers and upholders of the proud culture of Tamils, as sudras, even though they were anything but not, and they certainly cannot be confused with paraiyar...It took early Europeans some time to sort such things out."

[93] Pfaffenberger, *Caste in Tamil culture,* 35. Pfaffenberger cites Pieris, Ceylon.

[94] Ibid, 38.

[95] Ibid.; The kudimai were the higher caste communities such as goldsmiths, blacksmiths, carpenters, temple carvers and coppersmiths. These castes were obligated to work for the Vellalars since it was believed that their artisan skills were in their prime due to generations of caste intermarriage. Because of this, the Jaffnese believe that "the son of the blacksmith will excel even his father." It was believed that generations of caste intermarriage led to skills of a caste group becoming better and stronger over time. The opposite of the kudimai is adimai or the slave castes. These castes were untouchables who lived outside the home of the high caste but were utilized as laborers on the estates of Vellalars.

growth, as well as, absorbing the other communities into their caste structure during the Dutch period.[96]

Often proclaimed as one of the oldest castes in Jaffna, scholars can trace challenges to Vellalar dominance starting in the Portuguese and Dutch (seventeenth to eighteenth) periods of colonial rule. During the Portuguese era, one particular caste, the Karaiyar, or the fishing caste[97] challenged the Vellalars through their allegiance to the Portuguese. These challenges had a legacy. According to Visvanathan, during the Anuradhapura and Jaffna kingdoms, Karaiyars served as soldiers for royalty. They occupied a similar status to other higher castes associated with royalty such as the Madapallis and Vellalars.[98] By converting to Catholicism during the Portuguese era, the Karaiyar gained tax-cut privileges. Yet, the privilege of this community began to diminish during the Dutch period since their loyalty was with the Portuguese and Catholic faith.[99]

Besides the Vellalars, the Shanar, later known as the Navalar, claimed status as one of the oldest communities of Jaffna. During the Portuguese era, the Shanar provided service to the royalty of the region. Their specialization developed over time to be associated with toddy tapping thus during the Dutch period, their position eventually evolved to become bondsmen for the Vellalar.[100] This occurred for a multitude of reasons. One reason stemmed from the legacy of the tobacco trade in southern India and northern Sri Lanka. During the Dutch period, colonial officials sought to gain from the tobacco trade controlled by the Raja of Tanjavur in Tamil Nadu. To gain from this trading system, the Dutch provided privileges to the Vellalar for growing the crop crucial to trade and expansion for the Dutch colonial power.[101] The Dutch then allowed the Vellalars to dominate lower castes as slave labor, such as the Shanar/Navalar.[102]

By allowing the Vellalar to slowly dominate the Shanar as slave labor combined with Vellalar dominance as tax-accessors, the colonial power helped the caste become more powerful in the region. This was the period defining hierarchization

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[96] Wickramasinghe and Schrikker, "The Ambivalence of Freedom." Wickramasinghe and Schrikker cite Arasaratnam, "Social history of a dominant caste society."; Rasanayagam, *Ancient Jaffna*, 387-388, 389-390.

[97] The Sinhalese people have a corresponding caste called Karava.

[98] Visvanathan , *The Tamils in India, Ceylon, and Malaya*, 145.

[99] Arasaratnam, "Social history of a dominant caste society," 377-392, 379-380.

[100] Ibid, 381.

[101] Wickramasinghe and Schrikker. "The Ambivalence of Freedom,", 6.

[102] R.F. Young and S. Jebanesan, *The Bible Trembled: The Hindu-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth-Century Ceylon* (Vienna: The De Nobili Research Library, 1995).

in the region, whereas, communities climbed or downgraded on the scale of caste categorization. Not only were powerful Vellalar families able to maintain slave labor, but also more ordinary Vellalar families gained power through colonial rule. Colonial powers understood that their economic control in the region relied on their communications with and access to the Vellalar community.[103]

Though the Karaiyar and Shanar/Navalar were significant challengers to Vellalar status in the region, as Rasanayagam has shown, the experience of another group, the Madapalli, is even more telling concerning the battle for dominance in Jaffna. The origins of the Madapallis are quite mysterious. They are said to come from the historical Kalinga country of eastern India (i.e., Orissa and northern Andra Pradesh). Rasanaygam points out that the community were royalty back in this region with married names ending in "palli" showcasing their royal status. As they migrated south to Jaffna, they intermarried with Vellalar families while keeping their distinguished royal caste title Madapalli. Visvanathan claims that royal Madapallis were related to the kings. They served as religious advisors and he makes the claim that they were actually Brahmins.[104]

During Portuguese rule many of these royal Madapalli families converted to Catholicism and were removed to Goa to aid the Portuguese in their rule there. The Madapallis who stayed were given administrative appointments. Besides these royal (Raja) Madapallis, there was a lay set of Madapallis in Jaffna, as well. Their strength in numbers created a bitter rivalry for administrative positions with the Vellalars.[105]

In September 1658, at the start of the Dutch period, the Madapallis and Karaiyar's combined forces in a rebellion against the new colonial power. This combined effort against the Dutch led to execution of the rebellion's leaders, as well as, the suppression of both communities. Vellalar elites took advantage of the situation aligning themselves with Dutch officials. Those Vellalars who had converted to Catholicism under the Portuguese, re-converted to Protestantism during the Dutch period and maintained their status as administrative servants. This explains their dominance over Madapallis.[106]

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[103] Wickramasinghe and Schrikker, "The Ambivalence of Freedom."; Dewasiri, *The Adapatable Peasant.;* While Dewasiri focuses on the caste hierarchies of the Sinhala, his review of caste hierarchization among the ethnic group during the Dutch period can be compared to the same occurrences in northern Sri Lanka.

[104] Rasanayagam, *Ancient Jaffna*, 387-388.; Visvanathan, *The Tamils in India, Ceylon and Malaya*, 146.

[105] Rasanayagam, *Ancient Jaffna,* 387-388.

[106] Arasaratnam, "Social History," 381-383.

Vellalar dominance continued to grow during the British period. At the tail end of the eighteenth century into the nineteenth, there is evidence that the Madapalli helped increase Vellalar numbers in north Sri Lanka. It seems that during the Dutch period, though the Vellalar were able to dominate the Karaiyar and Shanar/Navalar castes, as noted above, the Madapalli remained rivalries vying for power. As the Portuguese and then Dutch took over the region, both groups, left royal duties and dispersed throughout the villages as land-owners. However, as the Vellalars strategically climbed the colonial ranks, rather than challenge the higher caste, some Madapallis decided to join them. This could be influenced in part by the intermarriage between the two groups.

A popular Jaffna Tamil proverb states, "Kallar, Maravar, Kanathaakampadiyar. Mella mella vandu Vellalar avar," meaning that all the castes mentioned, Kallas, Maravas, and Akampadiyas over time become Vellalars.[107] With the suppression of the community after the rebellion and since the Madapallis were so close in rank to the Vellalar, many from the group blended into the hierarchy of the Vellalar caste to maintain their status in the region. This not only explains the increasing dominance of the group in Jaffna, but also explains the overwhelming percentage of the caste in the area (see Tables 1.1 and 1.2 on page 53 and 54). This was the state of affairs in Jaffna at the advent of missionary efforts in the early British period. The following section takes us to the beginnings of the missionary movement in the region starting with Tamil Reverend Christian David.[108]

[107] Arasaratnam, "Social History of a Dominant Caste Society."; S. Ratnajeevan Hoole, *The Exile Returned: A Self-portrait of the Tamil Vellalahs of Jaffna, Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Aruvi Publishers, 1997).
[108] Wickramasinghe and Schrikker, "The Ambivalence of Freedom," 6. On page 6 the authors state, "In 1760, out of a total of 516 mudaliyars in the four provinces of Jaffna, 317 were Vellalars and 127 Madapalli. Gradually the Vellalar caste was able to absorb in its fold a host of other castes, including the Madapallis." The authors cite Arasaratnam, 378-86 for this information.

TABLE 1.1 | Description of Caste in the Population of the Jaffna District, 1827[109]

Caste Name	Number of people
Vellalar	45,651
Madapally	12,995
Caria	7,562
Nallua	7,559
Covias	6,401
Pallas	6,313
Chetty	4,807
Moquah	2,532
Chandas	2,173
Moors	2,166
Washerman	2,152
Brahmin	1,935
Tannecaras	1,892
Paredesy	1,830
Pareas	1,621
Chevia	1,593
Mallagam	1,501
Carpenters	1,371
Tunilah	1,291
Caycolas	1,043
Barbers	1,024
Cadia	970
Blacksmith	904
Silversmith	899
Company Nallua	739

Caste Name	Number of people
Burgher	477
Tawesy	437
Choyaroot digger	408
Pallewelly	376
Parember	362
Free Slaves	348
Potters	329
Dyers	302
Weavers	272
Mallialam	210
Torambas	197
Brassfounder	105
Turners	76
Marawa	54
Weleper	50
Masons	47
Pandaram	41
Simipadawer	40
Parawa	35
Ship Carpenters	33
Nattowen	22
Caware Chetty	18
Slaves of Burghers	18
Oilmonger	4
Total	**123,188**

[109] SLNA: *Census of 1827*. "Description of Caste and Religion of the Population of the Jaffna District," 137.; The most complete information of the census is from 1827 and then repeated again in 1874. A.G. Ranasinha reports: "Prior to 1871, in the British period, estimates of population had been made from time to time on the basis of returns made by Headen. On the 27th January 1874, shortly after he assumed the Governorship of the Island, Sir Edward Barnes signed an order for a census to be taken, but the results of the census were published as in 1827." See- A.G. Ranasinha. *Census of Ceylon 1946. Vol 1. Part I- General Report.* (Department of Census and Statistics: Colombo, 1950). In a 2012 article by Pim de Zwart, he estimates almost the entire population of Jaffna as Christians in Jaffna in 1789 during the Dutch period yet the Census of 1827 shows only about 8% of the entire population were Christians in the British period. According to de Zwart figures for religious observance among the population were submitted each year by ministers to the Directors of the VOC and Synods of the Republic. This could influence such high numbers during the Dutch period. See: Pim de Zwart, "Population, Labour and Living Standards in Early Modern Ceylon: An Empirical Contribution to the Divergence Debate," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49:3 (2012): 376-378.

TABLE 1.2 | Religion of the Population of the Jaffna District, 1827[110]

Religion among various castes	Number of followers
Protestant	839
Roman Catholic	9,201
Mohametan	2,166
Hindu	110,982
Total	**123,188**

1.4 | Christian David and background of mission schools

On March 22nd in the year 1800, the Anglican preacher Christian David reached Jaffna from the Indian port of Nagapattinam. The distance between the two towns, separated by the Palk Strait between India and Sri Lanka, made for a short trip of two days. Upon arrival to the peninsula, David would have been confronted with similar sounds and visuals from his hometown of Tranquebar[111] in Tamil Nadu, as the people of Jaffna spoke a very similar language as his own. The British administration ruling over Tranquebar allowed the Danish missionaries of the *Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge*[112] to sponsor David as a Tamil preacher to their British territory, colonial Sri Lanka.[113] This position was formalized in 1801 under the first civilian governor, Frederick North in 1801.[114]

Through this position, he sought to convert the people of Jaffna to Christianity and provide Christian education. As a Tamil with ancestral roots from a Vellan Chettiar

[110] Ibid.
[111] The Tamil name for Tranquebar is Tharangambadi.
[112] Somaratna and Pathmanathan, *The Life and Times of Christian David.;* On page 131 it states, "The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), which helped Christian David to come to Sri Lanka, was founded in 1698, and is the oldest Anglican mission organization. By 1709 SPCK was spreading further afield: a printing press and trained printer were sent out to Tranquebar to assist in the production of the first translation of the Bible into Tamil done by the German Lutheran missionaries Bartholomaeus Ziegenbealg and Heinrich Pluetshau from the Danish-Halle Mission. SPCK has continued to work closely with churches of many different denominations, whist retaining a special relationship with churches within the Anglican Communion."
[113] Ibid.
[114] Balmforth, "A Tamil Pietist in Ceylon," 53.

family (Vellalar),[115] he was able to connect with the people of Jaffna through language and previous caste background, a trait essential to the conversion process of this particular region. Like the Jaffna Tamil Vellalars, the legacy of elevated caste status was attached to Christian David. The privileges of high caste communities stem from their proximity to colonial rulers. This status influenced officials to interact with them. It also opened doors for educational and economic advantages under colonial rule.

N.C. Sargant shows the connection between Christian David and Jaffna Tamils. He writes,

> *The name Christian David often passes before us in the narratives of the first missionaries to Ceylon. Here he was the link between the Tranquebar missionaries, their converts and the first missionaries to come from England and America to work in India and Ceylon during the nineteenth century. He was also the first Tamil man, indeed the first Indian, to be ordained by an Anglican Bishop.*[116]

Rev. Christian David is significant for understanding the trajectory of potential conversion to Christianity for the Jaffna Tamil Vellalar, as well as, the collaboration between this Tamil community, the British colonial government of Sri Lanka, and the migratory journey between the old colony and the frontier colony of British Malaysia. As Dirks notes in his foreword for Cohn's 1996 work, "Colonialism was made possible, and then sustained and strengthened, as much by cultural technologies of rule as it was by the more obvious and brutal modes of conquest that first established power on foreign shores."[117] This can be seen within the colonial regime prior to British take-over, the Dutch period.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Dutch colonial system of education revolved around teaching Calvinist doctrine to Tamil and Sinhalese communities through an elementary memorization of the catechism. An in-depth approach to teaching the catechism was avoided by the Dutch at the time. Evidence of this can be seen from the work of Dutch minister of religion and historian Philippus Baldaeus. He served as a minister in Jaffna in the seventeenth century with his work being translated a year after his death in 1672. From his volumes on interaction

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[115] Balmforth notes Vellan Chettiars refer to a merchant community of Vellalars living in proximity to Tanjavur. See: Balmforth, "A Tamil pietist in Ceylon," 47.
[116] N.C. Sargant, *The Dispersion of the Tamil Church* (Delhi: I.S.P.C.K., 1962): 57.
[117] Nicholas B. Dirks in his foreword to Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996).

between Dutch colonial officials and the Tamil people of Jaffna, he advised the Dutch governors to promote Dutch Reformism among local communities with "oral instruction…in as few points as possible."[118]

This advice proved to greatly influence the conversion of the local Sri Lankans. Many locals, especially those connected to elite families, converted to Dutch Protestantism to maintain positions in the Revenue department and other occupations associated with the civil service. In order to acquire these positions, one had to follow Calvinist doctrine.[119] However, after the handover of colonial Sri Lanka from the Dutch to the British in 1796, many British colonial officials recall the reestablishment of temples upon the departure of the Dutch.[120] In Jaffna alone, three hundred temples were constructed during 1796, and many Tamils went on to openly practice Hinduism.[121] Upon his arrival, Rev. David alludes to this in his autobiography. He finds the old Dutch churches in a state of decay. Upon opening the door to one decrepit church, he found sheep had made it their home.[122]

From his autobiography, we learn that David was the sole missionary in Jaffna at the start of the British period and because of this he was largely responsible for the reemergence of colonial conversion efforts in the region. He was also utilized by British officials to help instruct British missionaries in Tamil language, culture, and caste distinctions. Directly writing to Rev. Mr. J. Twisleton, the Chaplain to Government of Principal Schools on the Island of Ceylon,[123] Rev. David writes,

[118] Philippus Baldaeus, *Description of the Great and Most Famous Isle of Ceylon.* Translated from the High-Dutch, Printed in Amsterdam, 1672. (New Delhi and Madras, India: Asian Educational Services, 1998): 811.
[119] Young and Jebanesan, *The Bible Trembled.*
[120] Bente de Leede is currently working on a PhD at Leiden University investigating the everyday practices between mainly Sinhalese converts to Dutch Reformism to review how conversion and belief functioned among local Sri Lankan communities during the Dutch colonial era.
[121] Sargant, The dispersion of the Tamil church, 58.; Young and Jebanesan, The Bible Trembled.; W.T. Keable, A History of St. Thomas' College, Colombo. (Colombo: The Colombo Apothecaies Co., Ltd., 1937).
[122] Sargant, *The dispersion of the Tamil church,* 58.
[123] Reverend Thomas James Twisleton (1770-1824) was Secretary and Chaplain to the Colonial Government of Ceylon as well as the Principal of Schools in Jaffna in the early years of the nineteenth century. As Principal of Schools he served as a head of administration of education in the region. By 1815 he was promoted to Archdeacon of Colombo. He served in this role until his death in 1824. See: Joseph Forster (ed.), *Alumni Oxonienses: The Members of the University of Oxford, 1715-1886; Their Parentage, Birthplace and Year of Birth, with a Record of their Degrees, Being the Matriculation Register of the University, 4 vols* (London: Parker and Company, 1887).

> *It is with the sincere satisfaction I have to inform you that the Rev. Mr. Palm with his family arrived on the 24th Instant at Jaffna, who informed me he had the permission of his Excellency the Hon'able Governor to reside and to do his missionary work at this place, supporting him to be the missionary you were pleased to say in your letter of the 18th Instant that you would send to Jaffnapatnam, I have to return you my most humble thanks for this new remarkable instance of your goodness, by help of God, hoping I may be ever worthy of your kindness and favour.*[124]

Rev. David played a pivotal role in his correspondence with British colonial officials. Through his appreciation of Rev. Palm's arrival, we can not only infer that Rev. David was asked to help Palm in his missionary work but also that David requested missionary assistance in the region, showcasing that he played a direct role in missionary involvement in Jaffna. The letter goes on to continue, "Bounties and Protections bestowed upon the congregation and on me, particularly for an additional blessing of sending a missionary to the many and many which His Excellency already conferred on us..."[125] Churches would no longer be allocated as sheep dens.

Another instance points to Christian David's influence among colonial officials during the early nineteenth century. A note from the Jaffna Kachcheri, the district secretariat for the Jaffna region,[126] dated 7 October 1809 requests funds of 482 Rix Dollars to be sent to Christian David for the completion of St. John's Church at Chundicully. The Jaffna Kachcheri requests a printed authorization for receiving this amount on behalf of David.[127] Thus, David was not only influential in drawing Western missionaries to the region but he was also important for reestablishing churches in the region through endowments from official colonial channels.

However, there was a barrier to such missionary efforts. The early nineteenth century saw British colonial officials wrestle between practicing non-intervention or

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[124] SLNA: *Letters from various departments and individuals to the Chief Secretary Inward and Outward 6/A237-Schools.* Rev. Christian David. July 20th, 1805. Letter: To the Honorable Reverend Mr. J. Twisleton-Chaplain to Government of Principal of Schools on the Island of Ceylon.
[125] Ibid.
[126] The district secretariat for the Jaffna region. This is where official correspondence between colonial officers and the Jaffna Tamil representative would go through.
[127] SLNA: *Letter from Jaffna Chutchery to Chief Secretary of the Government.* Dated 7 October 1809. Jaffna Kachcheri 6/A130.

intervening in the religious and cultural affairs of local communities in South Asia.[128] As a religious man, Sir Robert Brownrigg, Governor since 1813 and best known for bringing the whole island under British rule by acquiring Kandy, leaned towards the latter.[129] He opened colonial Sri Lanka to missionaries from Britain, the United States and Canada. Bureaucratically, Governor Brownrigg signed the documents allowing missionaries of the Wesleyan Mission (1814) and American Board of Commissioners (1816) to proselytize in Jaffna. However, it was Christian David's requests and influence encouraging missionary migration to the region.[130]

The exchange between Rev. David, the colonial government, and the initial missionaries to Sri Lanka during the early nineteenth century parallel the relationship between the local Jaffna Tamil Vellalars and the colonial environment. Knowledge exchange was at the heart of colonial operations. Forms of knowledge between colonial officials and local communities transformed between both actors. This created new modes of thinking, hierarchization, categorization, compliance and resistance.[131] Rev. David's story is vital for explaining the advancement of the Jaffna Vellalar community, at home and abroad, through conceptions of the familiar and strange. By analyzing David's autobiography, we read the narrative of missionary and educational work from the perspective of a Tamil himself, even though he himself was an outsider to Jaffna. Reading his story, from his perspective, speaks to the complexities of Indian Ocean migrations at the time of European empires yet it also speaks volumes to the connections in the region over pre-colonial to colonial periods.

In many ways, David was both familiar to Jaffna Tamils through his identity as a Tamil, language, and high caste status. He was also a stranger through his birthplace of Tamil Nadu, occupation as a Christian missionary and proselytizing endeavors. The same can be said for his placement among American and British missionaries

[128] See: Jana Tschurenev, "Between Non-interference in Matters of Religion and the Civilizing Mission: The Prohibition of Suttee in 1829," In H. Fischer-Tine and M. Mann (eds.), *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India* (London: Anthem Press, 2004). In this work, Tschurenev reviews the contradictory stance of non-intervention yet also interference by the British in the local religious affairs of South Asian communities. On one hand the British had a policy of non-intervention in the affairs of local communities. This was to maintain stability and order within the empire. However, on the other hand, the civilizing mission of the time called for interference in local communities' religious and social life.

[129] Tennakoon Vimalananda, *Sri Wickrema, Brownrigg and Ehelepola: Being Letters Addressed to the Home Govt. from 1811-1815 by Major General Wilson and Lieut.-General Robert Brownrigg, Governor of Ceylon*. (Colombo: Gunasena, 1984).

[130] Balmforth, "A Tamil pietist."

[131] Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*.

and colonial officials. He was familiar through his religion, multi-lingual language skills and mission efforts. Yet, his placement within the colonial hierarchy as an identifiable local and his familial legacy within Hinduism made him distant from colonial rulers.

Movement and influence between Tamil Nadu and Jaffna is centuries old. Other sources mentioning David tell his story from their perspective, often found in missionary documents and official colonial correspondence during the early nineteenth century.[132] His autobiography provides his own voice and gives us insight into his interactions with local Jaffna Vellalars.[133] David's influence making colonial subjects has been narrated mainly through British and American missionary accounts. Reading accounts of David through his own words and those of missionaries shows the need to place more emphasis on local voices in colonial history. Empire functioned beside and through the people.

Empire had direct influence on some functions of daily life while at the same time barely integrating within certain aspects of a local communities' culture. Official sources tend to gloss over the importance of David; however, his voice parallels how local communities could grasp their own agency within the machine of empire.[134] David's skill navigating between British and American missionaries, British officials, and Vellalars coincides with the future experiences of the high-caste community.

The influence of the church in colonial Sri Lanka served as the contact zone for both colonial officials and colonial subjects since it was through their interaction that the two had to negotiate power dynamics between each other.[135] This is not to say that local communities had an equal footing when it came to these points of contact, since local communities were forced to be subjugated to the dominating colonial government at hand. However, these zones rather served as a field for two previously separated communities to mediate various networks of influence. For the British, their colonial rule served as a sovereign institution, which ruled over local Sri Lankan communities through official correspondence and regulation. Yet, on the everyday level, some local communities had the capacity to negotiate their daily lives within the system. Thus, for missionaries, they played the part of communicating

[132] Tennent, *Christianity in Ceylon.;* Sargant, *The dispersion of the Tamil Church.;* Young and Jebanesan, *The Bible Trembled.;* Charles R.A. Hoole, *Modern Sannyasins: Protestant Missionary Contribution to Ceylon Tamil Culture* (Berlin: Peter Lang Publishing, 1995).; SLNA: 6/A237-Schools.
[133] For more detailed accounts of David, see Balmforth, "A Tamil Pietist in Ceylon."
[134] Ibid.
[135] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992): 6-7.

the "essential ingredients of British rule"[136] to local communities creating them in the image of the sovereign institutions around them. While for the Jaffna Tamil Vellalars, they were able to negotiate certain sections of colonial rule to gain from the dominating order, placing them at the junction of empire. This served as the gateway for dominance in mission schools. The next section explores Vellalar dominance in educational institutions.[137]

1.5 | Caste politics, missionary accommodation and education in mission schools

Upon their arrival in 1814 and 1816 respectively, the Wesleyan and American missionaries, found a north Sri Lankan society dominated by the Vellalar caste. Scholars have shown that these religious groups sought to access high caste elites for missionary efforts in South Asia since they had positive opinions regarding their connections and control over larger society from a long legacy of caste relations on the peninsula.[138]

Elites in South Asia served not only as go-betweens for local communities and colonial subjects but they also used their agency within colonial society to benefit generation after generation. From the colonial point of view, South Asian elites were being formed in the likeness of colonial rulers. After 1817, American and British (Wesleyan Methodists, American Board, and Anglican) missionaries combined forces to form "missionary unions" in the Tamil speaking areas of Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Jaffna to access the Jaffna Tamil community. American and British

[136] Etherington, *Missions and Empire,* 4.

[137] Kristina Hodelin-ter Wal, " 'The Worldly Advantage It Gives…': Missionary Education, Migration and Intergenerational Mobility in the Long Nineteenth Century, Ceylon and Malaya 1816-1916," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics* 31, no. 1 (2019): 5-23.

[138] Heike Liebau, "Country priests, catechists and schoolmasters as cultural, religious, and social middlemen in the context of the Tranquebar mission," 70-92.; E.M. Jackson, "Glimpses of a prominent Indian Christian family in Tirunelveli and Madras, 1863-1906: Perspectives on caste, culture, and conversion,", 35-335. Both in Frykenberg, *Christians and Missionaries in India.;* Also see: R.E. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From beginning to present* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008).; In this work, Frykenberg analyses what it means to be an Indian Christian. He notes that being an Indian Christian means one has a dual identity. This dual identity is connected to both indigenous kin- and caste-groups, as well as, the Christian faith and its larger networks. Also see: Geoffrey A. Oddie, *Hindu and Christian in South-east India* (London: Curzon Press, 1991).

missionaries felt "education was seen as a means of preparation for the gospel."[139] Through education missionaries and British officials associated the Jaffna Vellalars with another highly educated British community, the Scottish. If the community could become more like the British (like the Scottish), they could be helpful allies in the function of empire.[140] Both Catherine Hall and Malathi de Alwis review this process as the civilizing of subjects.[141]

Caste politics and mission efforts went hand in hand. Part of the reason missionaries were successful accessing the Jaffna Vellalars was through, to a certain extent, the allowance of caste distinctions within the conversion process. As an Anglican missionary, Rev. Christian David, was confronted with backlash concerning the caste issue in Jaffna for his allowance of caste distinctions during church services. His own familial association with- and understanding of- the Vellan Chetty Vellalar community allowed for the maintenance of access to the Vellalars of Jaffna. During communion, David was reported to provide the eucharist to those of the higher caste before the lower castes. This is something he learned to do from the missionaries back in his hometown, Tranquebar. Though Anglican preachers were against the recognition of caste in the church, one bishop, Heber, sought David's advice on how to deal with the practice of caste in the Anglican church among South Asian

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[139] Hoole, *Modern Sannayasins.;* According to Hoole, the American and British missionaries (American Board, Wesleyan Methodist and Anglican) eventually became seen as "almost one and the same" to the Tamils of North Ceylon (252). This points to Catherine Hall's emphasis on a particular type of colonizer and colonized dynamic showcasing that interactions between missionaries and Jaffna Tamils were focused on negotiations between proselytization and education. Found in: Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Oxford: Polity Press, Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

[140] See: Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Minutes of Indian Education by the Honourable T.B. Macaulay, dated the 2nd February 1835," in Gaurav Gajanan Desai and Supriya Nair (eds). *Postcolonialism: An Anthology on Cultural Theory and Criticism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005): 121-131.; Missionary Minnie Harrison stated, "The Jaffna Tamils are... 'the Scotsmen of the East,' industrious, thrifty, intelligent,- a race among whom farming is the most honourable profession, a people dark-skinned, straight-haired, healthy, with no signs of extreme poverty." See: Minnie Hastings Harrison, *Uduvil, 1824-1924: Being the History of One of the Oldest Girls' Schools in Asia.* (Tellippalai, Sri Lanka: Printed at the American Ceylon Mission Press, 1925).; The comparison of Jaffna Vellalars to the Scottish trickles into the twentieth century as seen from a statement found in the Royal Stationary Office. In referring to the educational and employment advancement of the Jaffna Tamils it states, "In this connection, we cannot help recalling a period in our own history when, as the result of the superior educational facilities and better teaching prevalent in Scotland, a minority was enabled to secure a larger share of administrative and executive posts in the UK than could have been justified on any proportional allocation." SLNA: *Colonial Office: Ceylon Report of the Commission on Constitutional Reform presented by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Parliament by Command of His Majesty.* September 1945, 176. London: His Majesty's Stationary Office.

[141] Hall, *Civilising Subjects.;* Malathi Nalika de Alwis, *Maternalist Politics in Sri Lanka: A Historical Anthropology of Its Conditions of Possibility. Vol. 1 & 2.* Ph.D Dissertation (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998).; De Alwis, specifically offers insight into the experiences of Jaffna Christian women."

communities. David, as well as, high-caste Anglican church members felt caste should be allowed to remain in the church, since for them, caste was a social issue rather than a religious problem. David was quoted as saying, "no matter how far a Paraiyan might improve in education and financial standing, he would never be acceptable to those of Sudra origin, to the point at which they would be willing to eat with him."[142] The issue went on to be a debate within the Anglican churches found in South Asia since caste continued to remain a topic of discussion.

A set of letters between Reverend Thomas James Twisleton, Principal of the Schools to John Rodney, Chief Secretary to Governor[143] dating December 1806 showcase both a complaint regarding the topic of caste while also exposing government compliance concerning the caste issue. The first letter from Rev. Twisleton to Rodney discusses an incident at a Christian seminary where a group of Vellalar boys leave the school in protest of a small number of Chalia boys[144] sharing the classroom with them. At first, these boys received their lessons in separate rooms, however, to combat the practice of caste the teachers at the seminary had allowed these Chalia boys to receive their daily lessons in the same room as the Vellalars.

Caste rules dictated that higher and lower castes had to occupy separate spaces in all aspects of daily life. It was believed if a higher and lower caste person shared a particular space, the higher caste could be polluted, leading to a loss of their high-caste status. Vellalar boys, who made up the majority of students at the seminary, protested this mutual learning environment and sent a petition to the leaders of the seminary requesting the placement of Chalia boys in a separate room, as before.[145] Twisleton promptly protested. By giving into Vellalar demands, the church would essentially allow caste to continue among the community, something which from

[142] Somaratna and Pathmanathan, *The Life and Times of Christian David,* 136. **Note:** Paraiyan is one of the fifth-castes, or untouchable castes (adi dravida). The common English term, Pariah stems from the treatment of this caste. Sudra origin refers to the placement of the Vellalars in the varna system of Hindusim. The four categories of the varna system as: Brahmins (priestly caste), Kshatriyas (warrior and royal caste), Vaishyas (merchant caste), Sudras (worker caste).

[143] John Rodney for Chief Secretary appointed by the second governor of Ceylon, Thomas Maitland (Governor from 1805-1811). As Chief Secretary of Ceylon, Rodney chaired an office of the Board of Ministers of the State Council of Ceylon. See: Arnold Wright. (ed.), *Twentieth century impressions of Ceylon: It's history, people, commerce, industries, and resources* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, Original 1907, Reprint 1999).

[144] Chalia or Saliyar is a caste of weavers. In the hierarchy of the Jaffna caste system, this group is considered a low-caste. According to the Census of 1827, the Chalia caste consisted of 272 people or only <1% of the Jaffna population.

[145] SLNA: *6/A237* Letter to the Honorable John Rodney- Chief Secretary to Governor. From Thomas James Twisleton. Date- December 16th, 1806.

the missionary perspective was degrading and anti-Christian. However, not soon after, Chalia boys were returned to a separate room for instruction.[146]

Though the answer from Rodney to Twisleton is unknown, one can speculate that the amount of 56 Vellalar boys as compared to 6 Chalias at the seminary combined with the prominence of Vellalars in the Jaffna region influenced the outcome of the petition from the Vellalars.[147] These letters and the petition from three different agents of empire, showcases the junction between missionaries and colonial officials attempting to control a local community, while a local community adjacent to colonial rulers, affects the outcome of an aspect of colonization.[148] Occurrences like these would go on to color colonial communications between Vellalars and the British in different locales of empire. Though the British held the seat of control, they also had to contend with the preeminence of the Vellalar community, their familiars, enabling the community to maintain their identity within the Jaffna region, as well as, benefit from the foreign system of authority.

Missionary groups, particularly the Americans were quite efficient in their accommodation of caste distinctions in the church. For instance, a passage from 1843 in the diary of Messrs. Whittlesey, discusses the attraction of the church for the lower castes and higher castes of Jaffna. In this entry he mentions the loyalty of the lower castes to the Hindu faith as particularly strong and notes how the higher castes are more open to the conversion process. One can see this when he states, "It was said that almost none, if any of the low outcaste men come to church…Low castes seldom converted…e.g. gardeners, masons, coolies, house-keepers, carpenters, barbers, blacksmiths, etc."[149] The excerpt continues by stating the importance of focusing on attracting the higher castes due to their cooperation with the missionaries.

Whittlesey never emphasizes a challenge to the conversation of caste in interactions with missionaries. The attitude continues into the next decade when it is noted how the American missionary Benjamin Meigs affirms the rapport between the Vellalars and the missionaries when he states, "The Vellalars are emphatically our people… they are thriving, intelligent, and the best behaved of the Tamil people."[150] During the

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[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid.

[148] See: Prashanth Kuganathan, "Social Stratification in Jaffna: A survey of recent research on caste," *Sociology Compass* 8, no. 1 (2014): 78-88.

[149] Harvard University, Houghton Library (hereafter HUHL): American Board of Commissioners (hereafter ABC), ABCFM Messrs. S.G. Whittlesey. Commonplace Book, October 6, 1842-1847. On Reading Tamil Language, Mission Meetings, Committees, School in Oodooville, 38.

[150] Young and Jebanesan, *The Bible Trembled.;* HUHL: ABC, ABCFM, 5/60, Jaffna, 6/08/1852.

course of missionary involvement in the Jaffna region, the Vellalars and other higher castes were targeted by these outside Christian groups enabling the community to climb the colonial social ladder. And though the Vellalars are able to navigate their identities vis-à-vis colonial officials and missionaries, they are still subjected to the authorities' connotations of inferiority and superiority regarding local communities. The fact that the outside powers see the Vellalars as "our people" and the "best behaved" of the Tamil people sheds light on one of the way Vellalars were able to sustain their hold on the benefits of empire since they are familiarized to British and American categorization. Yet they are also seen as the stranger as they experience distance between the cultural example of western religion, mannerisms and local ways of being.

In the end, colonial officials had a less negative view of the community as compared to others in the colony. I say *less negative* here rather than *more positive* since connotations of inferiority and superiority are still associated with local communities. After all they were still regarded as lesser than British and American Christians. One does not have to analyze official colonial correspondence for too long, before the attitudes and bias of the British towards Tamils are revealed. From the perspective of the missionaries and officials, the attitude of uplifting the Vellalars while still respecting the community vis-à-vis other castes groups played a role in interactions. British Wesleyan and American Board missionaries were not separate in their colonial opinions concerning the perception of the Vellalars. It also influenced Vellalar dominance in the region.

On the other side of the coin, the Vellalars were aware of heightened missionary labors in Jaffna. During the early years of missionary efforts, a British Wesleyan Methodist refers to interaction between missionaries and the elderly men of Jaffnese villages. The reference claims, "It is no uncommon remark of the old men, in reply to the exhortation of the missionaries, 'Do not urge me to change. I am now too old, and must follow in the religion of my fathers; but here are my children. Christianity will prevail in their day, and if they will, let them become Christians now."[151] This account displays the Tamil realization concerning the certainties of colonization (the influence of Christianity), as well as, the future benefits of Christianity for their children in terms of education and socio-economic attainment. Through these transactions Jaffna Tamil migration to British Malaya takes place and the mobility of the community in the frontier colony can be directly traced.

[151] Account of the American Mission in Jaffna, a Wesleyan Methodist Mission. This is quoted in Tennent, *Christianity In Ceylon.*

Two schools run by the American Board manifest colonial transactions between colonial entities and native populations. The first school, Batticotta Seminary, was established in 1823 in Jaffna. Batticotta Seminary was set up to train young men for the ministry. The second school, Oodooville (Uduvil) also established in Jaffna a year later in 1824, trained young girls to become "good wives" for these young men. Similar schools with comparable goals opened throughout Jaffna during the early to mid- nineteenth century. It is during this time, that we can see the increase of Vellalar influence vis-à-vis other castes, missionaries, and colonial officials from a religious and educational perspective.

For instance, the census of 1827 shows that out of 49 caste categories and a total population of 123,188 in Jaffna, the Vellalars made up 37% of the population, while the Madapallis made up 10%. The two groups have the largest numbers compared to the rest of the categories. Brahmins only made up 1.5%, while Chetties are at 4%.[152] Though the Brahmins and Chetties were/are still respected in Sri Lankan caste society, their small numbers and internal shield from missionaries[153] was one piece of the puzzle regarding Vellalar and missionary correspondence in schools like Batticotta and Oodooville.

The fact that during the 1820s, the Vellalars made up about 37% of the population, serves as testimony for missionaries targeting the community and the community targeting missionaries for educational access. In later censuses of 1871, 1881, 1891, and 1901, the number of Madapallis diminished to the level of becoming nearly extinct, while the Vellalar percentage increased to eventually become 50% of the population of Jaffna. As Arasaratnam notes, in modern Jaffna, the group has almost become obsolete since over the nineteenth and twentieth century they merged with the Vellalar community.[154] Their strength in numbers, as well as, their status fostered an environment of mutual religious and economical negotiation between Vellalars and missionaries. The final section reviews Vellalar adjacency to colonial rulers forming into intermediary colonial subjects.

[152] SLNA: *Census of 1827.*

[153] There are Chetties who also interacted with missionaries and converted but these are in smaller numbers compared Vellalars. Concerning Brahmins, they shied away from intercourse with missionaries, though there are a few sources of evidence in the archives which discuss a brahmin boy going to a missionary school during the nineteenth century.

[154] Arasaratnam, "Social History of a Dominant Caste Society," 381.

1.6 | The making of Christian Vellalars

Caste relations, education and conversion cultivated a space of exchange in Jaffna. Vellalars and missionaries negotiated religion and economic structures with each other. One-way Tamils had to negotiate their interactions with missionaries was through the showcase of leaving Hinduism behind and embracing Christianity by removing the daily appliance of the *pottu*, or mark on the forehead. The pottu is the mark placed on the forehead of Hindus. This mark is evidence that they have prayed in the morning. On women and men, it is commonly seen as a round dot and/or ash on their forehead. In order to enter the school and obtain lessons, missionaries required children to remove this sign of Hinduism[155] Another way Tamils had to compromise was through their eating habits. Once at the mission schools, Vellalars often intermingled with those of lower castes and had to share kitchen and cleaning facilities. According to Hinduism, once this intermingling occurred, these Vellalars lost caste. This played a role in conversion.[156]

Though the British and Americans saw the Vellalars as the 'Scotsmen of the East' who lack poverty, this was not entirely accurate. During the 1820s, the Jaffna region faced a drought crisis leading to a lack of crop cultivation with increasing threats to the function of their farms.[157] Despite their place as high-caste and image of prestige, the risk of poverty was always around the corner. These hardships played a factor in some Vellalars seeking employment and education through missionaries. One family, the MacIntyres, provide an example of intermediaries as both colonized and representing colonial officials to local communities across colonies. In the memoir written by a descendent of the MacIntyre family, S.C. MacIntyre discusses how the family went from being Vellalar Hindus to Wesleyan Methodist Christians. The process starts in the 1820s with the great-grandfather of S.C. MacIntyre. He notes,

> *Great-grandfather had to struggle hard to bring up his growing family. The compulsion of circumstances drove to him to seek employment under an American missionary attached to the Vaddukodai [or Batticota] Seminary. In doing so he appears to have outraged the sentiments of his relatives, to whom the rules of the Vellala caste were more sacrosanct than even religion itself. However, great grandfather had the strength of character to face the realities of life. He went to work for a salary in order to supplement the meagre earnings of his farm.*[158]

[155] Young and Jebanesan, *The Bible Trembled.;* De Alwis, *Maternalist politics in Sri Lanka.*
[156] Howland, *Historical Sketch of the Ceylon Mission.*
[157] Young and Jebanesan, *The Bible Trembled.*
[158] MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane, 7.*

Vellalars experienced push-back from some in their community regarding interaction with missionaries yet many also understood the immediate and future gains of corresponding with them. Besides education and employment, many missionaries had a direct line of communication with colonial officials leading to the civil service opportunities the Vellalars would go on to profit from.

Another gain at the center of initial conversion to Christianity among the Tamils during the 1820s was access to medicine. Other scholars of colonial missionary studies discuss the allure of Christianity for native populations due to Western medical access.[159] Many villagers died with the outbreak of cholera in the mid -1820s.[160] A decade later in the 1830s and continuing into the 1840s, one particular missionary of the Batticotta Seminary helped increase Tamil attendance at missionary schools through his medical skills. At first Tamils were reluctant to interact with American missionary Samuel Fisk Green but with acknowledgment of his medical skills, as well as, the memory of cholera, Tamils started to increase their interaction with him.[161] The legacy of his skills are still seen in Jaffna at Manipay with the Green Memorial Hospital, first opened in 1848.

The influence of medicine on mission school attendance seeps into further decades. An example is from the cholera outbreak of the 1860s. The Principal Chief Medical Officer of 1867, W.P. Charsley, writes about the outbreak in 1866. He proclaims, "In my report for 1866 I stated that cholera had broken out with violence in the Northern Province at the close of that year in a true epidemic form. The whole of that Province was affected more or less, but the Peninsula of Jaffna was the most severely visited, and the epidemic continued in a most virulent form through the early part of 1867."[162] During 1867, out of 10,064 cases of the disease in the whole northern province[163], 6,862 people died.[164] Prior to 1866 and 1867, medical missionaries and colonial doctors provided vaccines to the local communities, however, many were reluctant to acquire these vaccinations. With the outbreak of cholera, many individuals sought after these vaccinations through the efforts of medical missionaries like Samuel

[159] Hall, *Civilising Subjects*..
[160] Helen I. Root, *A Century in Ceylon: A Brief History of the Work of the American Board in Ceylon, 1816-1916* (Chennai: Asian Educational Service, 2004): 15.
[161] Thiru Arumugam, *Nineteenth Century American Medical Missionaries in Jaffna, Ceylon with Special Reference to Samuel Fisk Green* (Sydney: South Asian Studies Centre, 2009).
[162] SLNA: *Administration Report 1867*. Report by W.P. Charsley, M.D.- Principal Chief Medical Officer and Inspector-General of Hospitals, 266-267.
[163] The northern province of Sri Lanka includes the regions of Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya.
[164] SLNA: Administration Report 1867, 266-267.

Fisk Green. There is an account from the American Board of one convert named Onesimus. Ravaged with the disease, he sought medicine from the missionaries. He made a remarkable recovery which many attributed to his access to medicine, as well as, his prayer efforts.[165]

The compromise went both ways. Missionaries also had to navigate the educational and economic reasons for Jaffna Tamils to engage with them. An example can be seen from an American missionary to Ceylon, William Howland, who was stationed in Ceylon from 1845 to 1892. In 1865 he writes:

> *The increased desire for education, especially for female education, is also a result of missionary labor. Whereas, at first, females could hardly be persuaded to attend school, and none came but the children of poor parents, there is now no difficulty in obtaining any desirable number of candidates for admission to the Uduvil school, and they often come from the higher classes...The great eagerness for an English education for boys, indicates a surprising change in the state of the community. This desire for English, on account of the worldly advantage it gives, is undoubtedly excessive; and it seems to be a hindrance to other forms of missionary labor. It can now be controlled, but must in time, like other evils, work its own cure.*[166]

Missionaries were well aware of the reasons why many Jaffna Tamil Vellalars were so willing to collaborate with them. The main reasons being their willingness to gain a missionary education since they saw the advantages in obtaining the language acquisition needed for government employability. They took the 'worldly advantages' which a missionary education could give them, exposing the fact that Jaffna Tamils were not solely engaging with Americans and British in the traditional colonizer versus colonized framework but were direct agents in obtaining advantages from the dominating system to climb the colonial social ladder. Hence the agency of Jaffna Tamils is at the forefront of colonial cooperation. Though the goal of missionaries was to proselytize and 'save souls', Jaffna Tamil Vellalars navigated these systems by utilizing missionary schools for English language attainment and higher education. On the surface, it appears Jaffna Tamil Vellalars solely sought the benefits of missionary education and once obtained, most likely reverted back to Hinduism. Though some Tamils followed this example, there were many who converted and remained Christians.

[165] Root, *A Century in Ceylon*, 15.
[166] Howland, *Historical Sketch of the Ceylon Mission.*

Christianity and education in colonial Sri Lanka and the UK intertwined to create colonial subjects. Not only did colonial subjects learn under a similar curriculum as officials, they also followed similar career trajectories. In many instances, Jaffna Tamils had acquired certificates through the Cambridge University exam system in much the same way as their British counterparts. Education in mission schools mirrored elite schools back in the metropole. Balmforth narrates the historical trajectory of Tamil and European curriculum among locals and missionaries in both India and Jaffna to mirror modes of recitation and subject-matter.[167] One source dated from the 1890s from the curriculum of St. Thomas' in Colombo provides a common college curriculum[168] found in missionary schools across colonial Sri Lanka over the nineteenth century.

TABLE 1.3 | Course of study at St. Thomas College for 3 years[169]

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
- Algebra, to the end of quadratics - Ancient History to the Christian Era - Catechetical Religious Instruction - English composition - Euclid, Books I to IV - Geography, Physical - Greek, New Testament - Latin, Caesar, Virgil - Natural Geography, Philosophy, and Mechanics	- Algebra (concluded) - Cicero, Horace - Elements of Astronomy - English composition - Euclid (concluded) - Homer - Mathematical Geography - Modern History to the 16th century - Sacred History - Xenophon	- Butlers' Analogy of Religion - Ecclesiastical History - English composition - Herodotus, Attic Poets - Livy, Terence - Logic - Modern History from the 16th Century - Plane Trigonometry - University of Logarithms and Mensuration

Through this type of curriculum, missionaries and officials hoped to create a set of local men fit to assimilate to British culture.[170] As the colonial departments used English as their medium of daily work, the young men trained and educated in missionary schools were deemed similar to colonial officials and sought after to fill the ranks of the colonial apparatus.[171]

[167] Balmforth, "A Tamil pietist in Ceylon," 51-52.

[168] College stands for the high school level of education under the British system. Not to be confused with the college/university system in the USA.

[169] Keable, *A history of St. Thomas College, Colombo,* 14-15. Separate chapters in the work include: "Mr. C.H. Christian David's history of St. Thomas-1894."; "Mr. L.J. Gratiaen's book-English schools in Ceylon 1870-1900."

[170] Ibid, 7.

[171] Ibid, 175 states, "There were other incentives to English education. Although much of the ancient Ceylon system of local government was retained, the legal, medical, educational and other government departments were English in character, and gave openings to English speaking Ceylonese, of which those who could afford the new education, were quick to take advantage."

Colonial Sri Lanka would be part of a larger system of educational indoctrination of local societies across the British empire. The movement of English language education and the making of elite colonial locals spread to colonial India, Malaysia, China and Korea.[172] Like other locals through South and Southeast Asia, Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars became a complementary group to British officials. Their education and employment status assimilated them to the influence of European modernism, making them ideal intermediaries.

Mission schools like Batticotta Seminary and Oodooville School represent a specific kind of relationship in the everyday field of colonial life yet two questions remain. Just what did conversion give to some Vellalar Tamils? How did these gains follow or lead them to British Malaya and influence their intergenerational mobility? A letter sent from the colonial government of Malaysia to Sri Lanka provides clues. Sent in 1867, this letter requested educated men to staff civil service departments in the new colony. In this year the Straits Settlements were officially part of the government of colonial India. However, on 1st April, the territory ceased to be part of India, becoming its own separate colony.[173]

There is no mistake that there is a direct correlation between colonial Malaysia becoming a separate colony, and the request for educated staff for the civil services. An official correspondence from colonial Malaysia states,

> *When the British Government accepted, in the nineteenth century, the invitation to grant protection to the Malay States, the premier Crown Colony of Ceylon was appealed to by the Malayan authorities to assist the new Protected States towards their organization and development by encouraging the migration to Malaya of educated men to man the various branches of the Government service and of skilled workmen to serve as artisans in the construction of Government buildings, offices, hospitals, rest houses, public roads, bridges, railway lines, etc.*[174]

The same colonial office record quoted above goes on to mention how British colonial officials were needed to staff the high positions of the new colony's civil

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[172] Ibid, 175-76.

[173] In relation to the separation between India and the Straits Settlements, the document states, "It is Hereby Ordered by Her Majesty, by and with the Advice of Her Privy Council, that on the First day of April, 1867, the said Act to Provide for the Government of the Straits Settlements shall Come into Operation.- Signed Edmund Harrison.";
NAUK: CO 273/10: Despatches and Original Correspondence for Malaya (formerly Straits Settlements) Feb. to June 1867.

[174] NAUK: CO 273/660/7: Colonial Office Records: Petition Ceylonese Community in Malaya, 1940.

services. Another appeal was made in 1875 by the Colonial Secretary of the Straits Settlements requesting for overseas staff to aid in economic development. Colonial officials sought the assistance of the Jaffnese to fill positions for the junior civil and technical services, particularly for the Public Works, Railways, Medical, Posts and Telegraphs, Clerical, and Surveys divisions. Empire did not solely function through the work of the Europeans, rather it was a project brought together through the efforts of the various communities found throughout the region.[175]

1.7 | Conclusion

Some readers may attribute the introduction of Christian David in 1800 and Western missionaries like Wesleyan Methodists and the American Board in 1814 and 1816 respectively, as solely a colonial phenomenon- a story of the dominators (i.e., Western forces) oppressing the local community (Jaffna Tamils). Reading beyond British and American missionary sources reveals the assortment of factors contributing to the making of colonial subjects in mission schools and the influence this had on the migration of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars.

The beginning of this chapter considered the influence of Christian David and the colonial government. It is the relationship between the Tamil Reverend and the colonial government which spark a new-found interest in resurfacing missionary efforts in the region, as well as, the emphasis on westernized education. Christian David's coupling as an agent of empire as well as a colonized local, parallels the same navigation processes employed by Jaffna Tamils within colonial rule. His duality as familiar and as a stranger to missionaries and Jaffna Tamils speaks to the experiences of the local community vis-à-vis missionaries and colonial officials revealing their gaze of empire. The events set in motion from David's religious work in the region served as an example of Jaffna Tamils participation as double-conscious intermediaries.

Tracing the caste politics and dominance of the community from the Portuguese and Dutch periods helps explain the hold they had on Jaffna society during the British colonial era. The junction of religious conversion and maintenance of authority in larger Jaffna Tamil society alludes to the processes of negotiation for both Vellalars, missionaries and colonial officials. It is the challenge to maintain the prominent position among castes in Jaffna through increasing their numbers with the Madapallis and strategically converting to Catholicism and Calvinism during the

[175] NAUK: CO 273/660/7.; Sathiaseelan, Malayan Migration and Jaffna Society, 5.

Portuguese and Dutch periods, which shows the community's will to maneuver the outside forces they came into contact with. Even through conversion, their story is one of caste influence. How will caste, religion and employment continue to color colonial interactions across borders?

As fifty percent of the population and with the view of prestige attached to the community, the Vellalars were the first pick for missionaries and colonial officials to become more like the colonial rulers. Missionaries acquired converts and left their Protestant legacy in far regions of the world and shaped and changed the colonial experience. Local populations like the Jaffna Tamil Vellalars gained educational benefits through mission schools leading to government employability and intergenerational mobility throughout the colonial Indian Ocean World.

While never wanting to downplay the power that colonial rulers employed over local communities, this chapter framed the significance of how local communities were able to still make use of their capability to progress within the British order. Through education and religion, Jaffna Tamil Vellalars navigated colonial society. Some examples include acquiring access to medicine and undermining creeping poverty from drought and famine during the 1820s and then again in the 1860s. As mentioned, better health through vaccinations and seeking employment and education among the missionaries helped aid in the preservation of the community. The connection between Vellalars, missionaries, and colonial officials culminated in the 1867 letter of encouragement between the colonial Sri Lankan government and the colonial Malaysian government. The Jaffna region became the focal point of recruiting a well-educated local elite for use throughout the empire. This letter would not be the only one sent seeking the expertise of the Jaffna Tamil community. Another letter of 1875 would go on to plant the seeds for larger scale migration in the following decades, blooming into flowers of mobility, prestige, and elitism for the community in British Malaysia. How would ties between the two colonies remain at the height of migration? The next chapter focuses on these tied connections and the identity formation of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars as settlers in a new colony abroad at the turn of the century.

CHAPTER 2

The Jaffna Tamils begin to sojourn in Malaysia, 1875-1913

2.1 | Introduction

The turn of the century is a phrase often connotating vast change and movement throughout the world.[176] Thinking of this time period provokes images of industrialization, development, and migration particularly throughout Western empires. Some may think of the Irish who left their island to find opportunity in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. While others think of Italians, Russians, and Jews who migrated further west from their homelands across the Atlantic starting new lives. They navigated from one empire to another. Some found great opportunity and others immense challenges.[177]

During this same time period, migration between South and Southeast Asia drove industrialization and change in Asia and the Western world. Rubber plantations and trade from Malaysia left its mark on the development of the United States and Western Europe. Besides extracting material for industry, colonial powers also tested bureaucracy and policy in their colonies before implementing such reforms at home. Seeds of expansion bloomed not only in the West but also throughout the colonized world. The story of migrants in Malaysia goes beyond such grand narratives of expansion and instead provides commentary on personal and local experiences within empire.[178]

For South and Southeast Asia, the colonial subjects presented with economic and social opportunity utilized their knowledge, skills, and networks to gain employment in a variety of emerging sectors from the Railway, Postal, Medical, and Public Works departments. Others took the opportunity to open businesses, trade, or oversee plantation work. Malaysia has always been a site for a diverse population. Trade between the larger region with Malacca and Penang show a longer history of interaction between Chinese, Malay, Arab, Indian, Sri Lankan, and European actors

[176] The turn of the century often refers to the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth.
[177] Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction.* (London: UCL Press, 1997).; Nancy L. Green, "History at Large: A French Ellis Island? Museums, Memory and History in France and the United States," *History Workshop Journal* 63 (2007): 239-253.; Kathrin Pieren, "Negotiating Jewish Identity through the Display of Art," *Jewish Culture and History* 12, no.1-1 (2010): 281-296.
[178] Amrith, *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia.;* Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal.;* Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects.;* Natasha Pairaudeau, *Mobile Citizens: French Indians in Indochina, 1858-1954* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2016).

for centuries. The Peranakan and Nyonya communities attest to this history.[179] However, during the British era, this diversification increased further due to industry and also population increase. Malaysia became a cosmopolitan society under colonial rule.[180]

Labor migration from all levels of society drove empire across British colonies. Laborers were recruited from the populations of India, Java, and China for plantation work. Civil service labor was recruited from Eurasian populations in the region, elite Malay communities, as well as those from Sri Lanka, India, and China. Elite communities, like the Eurasians show the complex position as colonial subjects both familiarized to- and distanced as strangers from- colonial authorities.[181]

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many Eurasian families had an access to privilege and favor within and among European groups in the colony. According to Kirsty Walker this would change at the turn of the century, particularly in 1904 with the establishment of a color policy.[182] The policy dictated the placement of communities, formally and informally, based on skin color and ethnic features.[183]

Policy was influenced by the separation of Europeans and locals in the colony based on racist eugenics theories of the time. As Eurasians were too close to Europeans in

[179] Peranakan is the name given to the variety of communities of mixed heritage in Malaysia. The largest group mixed with Malay and Chinese descent are known as the Baba Nyonyas. Eurasians, particularly those mixed with Asian and Portuguese descent are known as Cristang. Some Peranakans are mixed with local Malay and Indonesian descent known as Peranakan Jawi. Another group are mixed with South Asian heritage and local heritage. They are known as Peranakan Hindu Meleka or Malaccan Chetties. These communities can be found throughout the port cities of Malacca, Singapore, and Penang. They have a long history of interaction of locals and trading and colonial interlocutors in the region. See: Chee Beng Tan, *The Baba of Melaka: Culture and Identity of a Chinese Peranakan Community in Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya: Penlanduk Publications, 1988).; C. B. Tan, *Chinese Peranakan Heritage in Malaysia and Singapore* (Petaling Jaya: Penlanduk Publications, 1993).; Chien Ying and Shahrim Ab. Karim, "Historical and Contemporary Perspectives of Nyonya Food Culture in Malaysia," *Journal of Ethnic Foods* 3, no.2 (2016): 93-106.

[180] Lees, Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects.

[181] Harper, The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya.

[182] Kirsty Walker, "Intimate Interactions: Eurasian Family Histories in Colonial Penang," Modern Asian Studies 46, no.2 (2012): 311-12.

[183] Charles Hirschman examines categories of race in colonial Malaya in his 1986 article. On page 354 he uses Wertheim to explain the color line in colonial Malaysia. He cites the following: "Wertheim's characterization of Southeast Asia as a whole aptly fits the Malayan case: 'Nineteenth century colonial society was molded on racial principles: belonging to the dominant white upper caste provided one with prestige and power largely independent of one's personal capabilities. A strict ritual was introduced and maintained, by force when necessary, to preserve the white caste from contacts with Asiatics on the basis of equality and to maintain the former's prestige as the dominant group.'" Hirschman, "The making of race in colonial Malaysia," 330-360. The quote is cited from: W.F. Wertheim, "Southeast Asia," 423-434 in David L. Sills. (ed.). *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, vol. 1.* (New York: Macmillan and the Free Press, 1968).

blood, British officials sought other groups in the region to aid in the maintenance of empire while still having stronger ethnic differentiation from those in power. [184] This distancing and familiarization of colonial subjects reinforced hierarchies and categorizations of people throughout empires, a practice similar in other parts of Southeast Asia with the recruitment of civil servants from India to Burma and Indochina.[185] The movement of English language education and the making of sub-elite colonial locals spread to India, Malaysia, China and Korea. Colonial Sri Lanka was part of a larger system of educational indoctrination of local societies across the British empire.[186]

Jaffna Tamils were differentiated from both local populations and other migrants in Malaysia at the turn of the century as they were religiously and linguistically tied to the British yet still seen as strangers through skin color and mother tongue.[187] By 1875, the Colonial Secretary of the Straits Settlements[188] sent a second letter to the colonial government of Sri Lanka, requesting overseas staff, particularly from Jaffna. By the late nineteenth century the Jaffna peninsula had garnered a reputation as a headquarters for civil service recruitment. The legacy of missionary schools and English language acquisition had familiarized Jaffna Tamils as colonial subjects. Education and employment in the civil service of colonial Sri Lanka motivated British colonial officials to bring their Jaffna Tamil staff along with them on secondment to Malaysia. By 1909, Jaffna Tamils made 50 percent of the Federated Malay State Railways (FMSR). They would go on to saturate other departments of the colonial Malaysian civil service.[189]

Initially, migration was a male endeavor. However, as salary and housing opportunities were favorable, soon wives and children followed. For Jaffna Tamils, migration occurred first as sojournment and developed later into permanent settlement. In order to comprehend the significance of this process, this chapter asks the following questions: Despite the influence of movement, how would Jaffna Tamils remain tied to colonial Sri Lanka through education, employment and kin networks during the turn of the century? What exactly was initial movement like

[184] J. de Vere Allen, "Malayan Civil Service, 1874-1941: Colonial Bureaucracy/Malayan Elite," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 12, no. 2 (1970): 149-178.; Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine (eds.) T*he Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).; Walker. "Intimate interactions."

[185] Chakravarti, *The Indian Minority in Burma.;* Pairaudeau, *Mobile Citizen*.

[186] Keable, *A history of St. Thomas College, Colombo*. Colombo: 14-15.

[187] Walker, "Intimate Interactions," 311-312.

[188] The Straits Settlements consisted of Singapore, Penang, and Malacca. The territories came under direct British rule during the establishment of the region as a Crown Colony on 1st April 1867.

[189] Selvaratnam & Apputhurai, *Legacy of the Pioneers,* 53.

from 1875 to just before the start of WWI? Through movement were Jaffna Tamils able to obtain social power in the colony vis-à-vis other groups?

Often, colonial bureaucracy is studied through the lens of British colonial officials. However, it must be noted that colonial society functioned not only through the rule of British officials but through the many ways colonial elites appropriated the systems in place, showcasing their agency to navigate the challenges presented by colonial rulers. English language ability and education acquired through mission schools made the Jaffna Tamils essential candidates to work the civil service of Malaysia. Their skills were so much sought after that colonial officials from colonial Sri Lanka taking up the call for the administrative services in Malaysia sent out announcements for the Jaffna Tamils to follow their supervisors abroad.

Administrative exchange between the two colonies was integral to the opportunities presented to colonial subjects like the Jaffna Tamils. In *Malayan Migration and Jaffna Society,* scholar Sathiaseelan mentions the influence of Governors Sir Henry McCallum[190] and Sir Andrew Caldecott[191] on this movement. Both governors had formerly served in colonial Malaysia before taking up duties in Sri Lanka. Another official, James W.W. Birch,[192] had moved in the opposite direction, serving first in colonial Sri Lanka and then Malaysia. The transfer of these officials parallels the movement of civil servants on the plantations and offices of the two colonies

[190] During the 1870s-80s, Sir Henry McCallum served in the civil service of colonial Malaysia (Singapore). His most important role in the region was as Deputy Colonial Engineer at Penang during the 1880s. His career continued onto colonial Nigeria during the 1890s and then to Natal at the turn of the century. His final career tour was as governor of colonial Sri Lanka from 1907-1913. Throughout his career, the rubber crop played a major role. The lives of both colonial officials and subjects were intertwined through economic and social means. See: E. O Egboh, "British Colonial Administration and the Legal Control of the Forests of Lagos Colony and Protectorate 1897-1902: An Example of Economic Control Under Colonial Regime," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 9, no.3 (1978): 70-90.; Victor R. Savage and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Toponymics- A Study of Singapore Street Names*. (Pennsylvania: Eastern University Press, 2004).; https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/politics/colonial-henry-mccallum.php

[191] Sir Andrew Caldecott was colonial administrator in colonial Malaysia from 1907-1922, during the height of railway development in the colony. He served as cadet of the Federated Malayan States (F.M.S.) in Negeri Sembilan in 1907, Federal Secretariat in Kuala Lumpur and Deputy Controller of Labour in 1913. From 1916 to 1920 he served as Assistant Secretary and Chief Secretary. Then from 1920 to 1922 he was Assistant Secretary to the Colonial Government. See: *The Colonial Office List, London* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1923).; *Association of British Malaya, British Malaya* (London: Newton and Company, 1936).; Sir Andrew Caldecott, *Who's Who*. (London: A&C Black and Oxford University Press, 1996).; *Fifty Years of Railways in Malaya, 1885-1935* (F.M.S.: Kyle, Palmer and Co, Ltd., 1935).

[192] James W.W. Birch was a colonial administrator in Perak from 1874 to 1875. In 1875 he was assassinated in the state. This led to the outbreak of a war in Perak. These events ultimately led to the expansion of British power throughout colonial Malaysia. See: Cheah Boon Kheng, "The Malay Politics and the Murder of J.W.W. Birch, British Resident of Perak in 1875: The Humiliation and Revenge of the Maharaja Lela." *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 71, no.1 (1998): 74-105.

throughout the 1870s and 1880s.[193] The years 1881-1883 show the first significant movement from Sri Lanka to Perak, Malaysia. During this time, 200 Sri Lankan clerks, overseers, dressers, surveyors, artisans, and Indian laborers of the Ceylon Pioneer Corps were sent to Perak.[194]

Like other elite locals in South and Southeast Asia, Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars became complementary to British officials. However, their status as local Asians bound their capacity to function in colonial society as equals to those in power, despite the democratic notions put forth by British society. Their education and employment status assimilated them to the influence of European modernism, making them ideal intermediaries below British rulers. The following sections use an eclectic variety of source material to explore how the synergies between missionaries, Jaffna Vellalars, and British colonial officials formed the catalyst for this community to seek out and obtain civil service positions in colonial Malaysia.

After the historiography section, section 2.3 uses records from the 1887 Royal Jubilee, the memoir of the Rogers family, printing press records and letters by Tamil bible women to explore the way Jaffna Tamils adapted to colonial rule through the performance of Britishness. This lays the groundwork for the study of migration between the colonies in section 2.4. This section relies on census information, gazettes and advertisements to understand the push towards British Malaysia. The last section, 2.5 uses memoir recollections from elite colonial migrants like the Rogers family and MacIntyre family, as well as, railway records. Their stories juxtaposed with railway staff information help explain the motivations for initial migration and the effect this had on the making of a Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar identity in colonial Malaysia.

As the first migrants to Malaysia were men, the stories of women are often forgotten. As many official correspondence records, as well as, memoirs focus

[193] Sathiaseelan, *Malayan Migration and Jaffna Society,* 4.

[194] Selvaratnam & Apputhurai, *Legacy of the Pioneers,* 39. Footnote 178 cites: S. Durai Raja Singham, *A Hundred Years of Ceylonese in Malaya and Singapore, 1867-1967* (Kuala Lumpur: Raja Singham, 1968): 38.; Also see: Ramasamy, *Sojourners to citizens,* 85. Ramasamy also provides evidence of this movement. He states, "The Ceylon Pioneers Corps which was seconded for service in Perak in 1883, besides constructing the first railways in the state, also surveyed virgin jungles and laid long stretches of new roads. Selangor, too, employed this Corps in the construction of roads and railways. Although the labourers comprised men from South India, the clerks, engineers, surveyors and overseers who formed part of the Corps, were of Ceylonese origin. The other Malay states employed many Ceylonese technical staff when land development and public works were thought expedient for progress."; F.A. Swettenham, *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1906): 239.

on the perspective of men, there is little record of migration to Malaysia of Jaffna Tamil women. However, this chapter seeks to fill this void by exploring the female perspective in Jaffna. By using letters from bible women this chapter shows the way women in one point of empire encouraged male migration to another locale. Memoirs are also an important source for telling the story of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar migration since these accounts shed light on the way colonial subjects could influence the outcomes of colonial rule, despite both families representing a very small and specific kind of sub-elite and privileged experience in the colonial environment.

The different ways these families told their stories open the door for questions regarding community building abroad and how sub-elite colonial subjects seek to be remembered in later generations, walking in step with reading beyond the archive. This chapter provides the basis for larger imaginaries of the group as both familiar to- and distanced as strangers from- colonial officials during the formation of a heterogenous and categorized Malaysian society. The next section places this narrative within the broader historiography concerning agency and double consciousness of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars as performative colonial subjects.

2.2 | **Ambiguity and Performance**

This chapter explores the initial phase of sojournment for economic purposes. There were three significant phases of Jaffna Tamil movement to colonial Malaysia. The first phase of moderate movement occurred between 1870 to 1900, with the initial arrival of civil servants of the Postal, Railway, Public Works and Medical offices. The second phase peaked during the early 1900s to 1930, as the frontier colony developed further and the established Jaffna Tamils were able to secure jobs for their family and friends. This enabled chain migration patterns. Migration slowed down during the 1930s and almost stopped entirely with the advent of WWII. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the second and third phases.[195]

Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar movement follows other sub-elite sojournment throughout South and Southeast Asia during the late nineteenth century. For instance, South Asians had ventured to various parts of Southeast Asia as colonial subjects of various empires. One example, South Indian Tamils, left Pondicherry for colonial Indochina. They were sent to work in the French colonial administrative offices. Scholar Natasha Pairaudeau examines this lesser known movement

[195] Sathiaseelan, *Malayan Migration and Jaffna Society.*

noting the trajectory of education in schools like Pondicherry's French lycee, the acquisition of employment as interpreters and intermediaries for the French, and the recruitment of these local elites to serve in the administrative offices of French Indochina.[196]

For Sri Lankans, movement between colonial Sri Lanka and Malaysia is more common than scholarly analysis suggests. Other ethnic groups from Sri Lanka have migrated to create new lives in the frontier colony. S.N. Arseculeratne describes Sinhalese migration to the colony. Though their numbers are a lot smaller than Jaffna Tamil movement between the two colonies, Sinhalese took advantage of the civil service and business opportunities available to them in Malaysia. Young Sinhalese bachelors followed family members to trade in jewelry.[197] Their English language education via Colombo, Galle, and Matara also afforded them positions as technicians and clerical hands in the railways and postal service.[198] An even smaller community, the Ceylon Burgher Eurasians, worked in colonial Malaysia as medical doctors, surveyors and government officials.[199] Similar to colonial Indian elites serving as agents in other locales of European empire, colonial Sri Lanka served as a factory for the recruitment of its locals. This facilitated their function as representatives of British officiality across the region.[200]

Scholars of migration to the peninsula, like Lynn Hollen Lees, regard the relationship of local communities and British officials in relation to a local proximity to Anglophone culture. Often in rivalry with each other, sub-elite communities would perform Britishness for educational, economic, and societal benefits.[201] This

[196] Pairaudeau, *Mobile citizens*, 2.

[197] For one of the only studies of Sinhalese migration to colonial Malaysia see: S.N. Arseculeratne, *Sinhalese Immigrants in Malaysia and Singapore, 1860-1990:* History through Recollections. (Colombo: K.V.G. de Silva and Sons, 1991). Winstedt refers to the expertise of Sinhalese jewelers living in Malaysia. Their knowledge identifies gold ornaments found in Singapore. See: R.O. Winstedt, "Gold Ornaments Dug Up At Fort Canning, Singapore," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 42, no.1 (1969): 49-52.

[198] Arseculeratne, *Sinhalese Immigrants in Malaysia and Singapore*, 19.

[199] E. Allard, "Social organization of Eurasians in the Malaya Federation." *Current Anthropology* 5 (1964): 422.

[200] For examples of elite Indian recruitment for the civil service of Burma see: Chakravarti, *The Indian Minority in Burma.* For examples of French Indians being recruited for the civil service of French Indo China see: Pairaudeau, *Mobile citizens.*

[201] For different examples of sub-elite interaction with British officials and its influence on identity formation among multi-ethnic Malaysia see: Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects.;* Walker, "Intimate Interactions,"; Lian Kwen Fee, "The Construction of Malay Identity Across Nations: Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 4 (2001): 861-879.; Hirschman, "The making of race of colonial Malaya."; Philip Loh Fook Seng, *Seeds of Separatism: Educational Policy in Malaya, 1874-1940* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975).

performative Britishness presented itself within the ideals of colonial subjecthood. Being seen as cooperative subjects enabled locals like Jaffna Tamils to combine their familiarity to British ways of being with global networks to other locales of employment.

Lees writes, "Colonial rule accustomed growing numbers to a kind of performative Britishness and contextual allegiance to the British Empire that temporarily overcame ethnic and religious divisions."[202] Lees continues that this performance, steeped in collaboration with colonial officials, granted sub-elites a specific self-confidence and it equated to social power within the colonial system. She notes, "By-products of colonial rule, these multilingual men both helped to build plantation colonialism and later, also helped to undermine it. They mediated the daily operations of the Empire and the rigid hierarchies established by the British, which proved impossible to maintain in practice."[203]

Whether Tamil, Sinhalese, or Burgher, colonial Sri Lankans shared similarities in this performance of Britishness. However, the larger number of Jaffna Tamils in colonial Malaysia point to colonial subject-making across empire. Sinhalese and Burghers also migrated as civil servants yet Jaffna Tamils dominated colonial offices in Malaysia due to their language abilities in English and Tamil. Both languages aided colonial control over Indian Tamil plantation workers, something the Sinhalese and Burghers did not have access to. Another feature for the dominance of Jaffna Tamils as compared to Burghers between the two colonies stems from the ethnic distance between colonial subjects and officials.

While Lees, Pairaudeau, and Walker have shown the dynamics of sub-elites performing in the likeness of colonial rulers, this study moves further by emphasizing the experiences of Jaffna Tamil sub-elites through their own agency to navigate colonial systems. It also shows the ambiguities of performing Britishness, the formation of a double-consciousness identity. What were the mechanisms used to navigate empire and complement performance? The second half of this section dives deeper into such methods.

Three mechanisms in particular drive this chapter- social, educational, and employment networks. These provide the ways the group navigated colonial society between locales. The Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars are similar to earlier examples of sub-elite navigation within colonial spaces. In his 2016 work, Sood frames the

[202] Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects*, 16.
[203] Ibid, 39-40.

familial and economic ties of merchants and artisans from Safavid Iran and Mughal India to broader associations across European East India empires and Indian Ocean migratory patterns. These associations, usually through "residence, birth, religious affiliation, livelihood, or education,"[204] served as the glue enabling sub-elites to maintain a stable arena of economic advancement in the region. Associations could be described as households, the extended family network and villages. On the larger scale they were described as diasporas. The ties between those associated with one another, whether they were near each other in the same country or far from each other across different areas of the India Ocean World, speak volumes to the strategies employed to survive and flourish within empire.[205]

Similar to Sood, a volume edited by Lucassen, Lucassen, and Manning also comes to mind when discussing the particularities of migration. To illustrate this, even though the British aided in Jaffna Tamil migration, it was also these particular Jaffna Tamils who had the space to promote their language skills and connections in their motivation to move abroad.[206]

The emphasis on indentured labor throughout the Indian Ocean world leaves a gap in the exploration of a minority group within a minority, the Jaffna Tamils and their adjacency to British officials.[207] This is not to say that the study of indentureship is not important, on the contrary it is vital for the analysis of migratory patterns in the region and its influence on the modern nation-state, however when we think of Jaffna Tamils in comparison to Indian Tamils of Malaysia, one must note the differences between the two migrations in terms of caste, class, and occupation. These factors led to vastly different statuses and legacies over the colonial to post-colonial period.

As compared to other migrant groups in Malaysia, familial ties are the core structural element for describing Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar movement between colonial Sri Lanka and colonial Malaysia. As Kok states in the Lucassen, Lucassen, and Manning volume, "The intensity and composition of migration flows is affected by inheritance customs, household structures, marriage patterns, family strategies

[204] Gagan Sood, India and the Islamic Heartlands: An Eighteenth-Century World of Circulation and Exchange (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 248-249.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Jan Lucassen, Leo Lucassen and Patrick Manning (eds.), Migration History in World History: Multidisciplinary Approaches (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2010): 9.
[207] Ibid.

and ties between kin."[208] All of these structures or associations aided in Jaffna Tamil migration in a multitude of ways. [209]

Their initial sojournment was possible through a variety of associations which would go on to color their linkages with their community and the other ethnic communities around them, both British and Malaysian. As former Vellalars, the Jaffna Tamil migrants to colonial Malaysia were bound to a historical esteemed status as landowners and leaders of the north Sri Lankan region. This status provided the initial entry for European interlopers to seek and interact with the group upon arrival to Jaffna.

As Christians, particularly Protestants, the Jaffna Tamil migrant held on to even stronger bonds with Europeans since they were seen as similar to British rulers. It was thought that as Protestants, Jaffna Vellalars would serve as better fathers, husbands, and subjects.[210] This would enable them to serve as intermediaries throughout their empire. As Sood notes, it was these partnerships between households, extended families, and ultimately diasporas, which enabled a community to stabilize their position via the maintenance of interrelations between the group's individual and communal status and their place in the larger arena of empire.[211]

A transfer of knowledge through educational institutions, religious instruction, and caste migration allowed for such navigation. This knowledge sharing directly correlated to modernization efforts in the region. For the Jaffna Tamil, modernity connected the opposing effects of globalization on identity formation, as well as, the personal aspirations of Vellalars. Quoting Giddens, "The self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences; in forging their self-identities, no matter how

[208] Jan Kok. "The Family Factor in Migration Decisions," in Lucassen, Lucassen, and Manning, *Migration History in World History,* 215.

[209] Other migrants used kinship networks to migrate as well. For instance, indentured laborers were often recruited by fellow villagemen and family members. However, Jaffna Tamil family networks were different since they provided not only knowledge from previous migrants, but also inheritance and employment connections. For an explanation of inheritance customs see: Henry Wijayakone Tambiah, *The Laws and Customs of the Tamils of Jaffna* (Colombo: Women's Education and Research Centre, 2001): 14.

[210] British Library (hereafter BL): Morning Star (Utayatharikai). Vol. XV, A Protestant's Implement (1845): 29. It states, "His Christian principles, regulated by Christian truth, and accompanied by a Christian influence, will produce a moral change in his character. Which, on account of its completion is figuratively called in the Scriptures 'a new birth'...By becoming a Christian, he will become a better father, a better husband, a better friend, a better subject, and will uniformly endeavor, as the fruit of his religion, to discharge, as in the fear of God, all the duties of public, social, and domestic life.".-Rev. G. Mundy.

[211] Sood, *India and the Islamic Heartlands.*

local their specific contexts of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications."[212]

The Vellalar of Jaffna experienced a changing of the self, based on the modernization of their region from the perspective of the colonial power. As Giddens notes, this changing of the self is characterized by the reorganization of time, space, and the expansion of mechanisms across various locales. These mechanisms of modernization are not tied to one specific place. They can be transferred across space transforming everyday social relations between agents.[213] Hence, though colonial officials dictated change on the institutional level, i.e.-postal, railways, infrastructure and education- Vellalars recognized the changing times and navigated these educational and economic institutions. They adapted and profited from such change.

In this way, migration encompassed not only the hopes and dreams of the individual migrant, but also that of the migrant's larger affiliations. Circulation and transfer of experiences between migrants and families left behind influenced initial migration between Jaffna and colonial Malaysia. Migrants were pushed by their own particular desire for betterment, but also motivated by the maintenance of their kin networks. This showcased the intertwinement between individual and communal motivations for success leading to their self-preservation and climb to elitism in the region.[214]

Leaving one colony for another brought with it similar but also new sets of challenges. Jaffna Tamils were favored by British officials for the skills they brought to the civil service as familiars but they also did not have full access to higher positions and equal treatment vis-à-vis the British and later other local communities like elite Malays. This reinforced their status as strangers, both to the British and the colonial Malaysian state. In this way as sub-elites Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars utilized their networks to maintain agency over their movement but as subordinates their aspirations were constrained or bound.

By placing the Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar experience at the intersections of social influence and subordination, this chapter contributes insight to the many ways sub-elites navigated colonialism. On one hand, though Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar migration between two colonies encompasses the clout of the community

[212] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991): 2.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Sood, *India and the Islamic Heartlands*, 50-53.

among British officials, studies on sub-elites have overlooked the continued barriers to equality put in place by the dominating system. These barriers motivated the group to form loyalties to the British and themselves. This made them seem as collaborators.

However, these loyalties were not one-dimensional and the Jaffna Tamils did not simply want to become more like British rulers. Performative Britishness could be seen as a tactic to obtain upward social mobility for their collective. For the British, maintaining order over society meant hierarchization of multi-ethnic people to keep control. This give and take from colonial officials created power dynamics among the various ethnic groups. At times certain people were favored and at others they experienced disadvantages.

This chapter contributes to literature on sub-elites in Southeast Asia by showing the experiences of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar migrants through the juxtaposition of their sub-elite and subordinate position as double consciousness colonial subjects. The following sections explore the ways the group communicated bounded agency and memory between Sri Lanka and Malaysia, informing initial migration and community formation.

2.3 | Performative Britishness in Jaffna

What ties between Jaffna and Malaysia existed influencing movement? There are a variety of reasons the group left one peninsula for another. Challenges to Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar prestige like colonial regulation, droughts, famine, and lack of opportunity in colonial Jaffna guided the socio-economic aspirations of the group from the late nineteenth century onwards. The performance of British ways of being served as the mechanism for their access to British spaces.

Performing British language and culture allowed Jaffna Tamil agency when navigating the constraints of the colonial system. A significant illustration of this process can be seen from records found in the Jaffna Kachcheri from 1887. The year marked the Jubilee celebration of Queen Victoria's empire across the globe. Jaffna Tamils played a large role in the celebrations for colonial Sri Lanka. The Jubilee Pamphlet holds a plethora of information concerning the event. It lays out the festivities of the celebration, the songs and play to be performed, and provides a history of Queen Victoria's reign over the British empire from her coronation in 1838 up to the jubilee in 1887. The writer of the song portion of the pamphlet, a Jaffna Tamil signed as S.S.J. opens the document by stating,

> *"The following songs were composed with a view of adding interest to the celebration of the Jubilee of Her Gracious Majesty, in a manner pleasing to the people and worthy of the great event. The fact, that the author has been repeatedly asked by friends in different parts of the Island for Tamil songs to form a part of their festive programmes, shows that they will meet a demand. They give expression to the feelings of high esteem and loyalty which the Tamil speaking inhabitants of Ceylon and India are so well known to cherish towards their Illustrious Sovereign."*[215]

We have a clue that some of the Jaffna Tamils involved in this exchange were Christians since the table of contents shows us that songs are to be performed by girls of the Wesleyan Mission Church. On the surface, the opening of the pamphlet shows Jaffna Tamils were asked by the British to take part in these celebrations. On a deeper level we can infer they are not only enthusiastic and willing to participate in such an event but they are also fostering this opportunity to showcase the prominence of their community. They perform their loyalty to colonial rulers.

Loyalty is demonstrated through the historical narration of the Queen's rule. The Tamil writers focus on the Queen's accomplishment in the various colonies. When they get to the narration of colonial Sri Lanka, they emphasize everything the Queen brought to the colony including the first Railway construction in 1857, the union of the Electric Telegraph system with India in 1858, the general scheme of Public Education taken on by the Legislature in 1868, the extension of Village Councils in 1870, and the census from 1837 to 1871 to name just a few.[216] Jaffna Tamils equated British rule with modern advances into the colony, performing their patriotism towards colonial rulers.

On the other hand, Jaffna Tamils also fit themselves within the structure of British officiality through their songs. This shows their rooted familiarity with the British. Jaffna Tamils demonstrate their culture within the context of colonialism in a song titled "Taru." The lyrics are as follows:

[215] SLNA: Jubilee 1887. "Preface of Queen Victoria's Jubilee signed by S.S.J." Jaffna Kachcheri.
[216] Ibid.

"Pomp and festival in the Colonies,
Powerful, glorious, wise England-
Paint in vivid colors honorable-
Faithful,-ever loyal feelings of all,
Fostered and nurtured in
Favor of Empress of India.

Think of a sovereign of principle,
Throned in the hearts of the subjects, and
Sceptred with authority and justice;-
Trace the salutary laws and rule,
Thanks and praise, sung in joy,
England Queen ever deserves.

Prudence, in sound ministration under
Policy, sounding the mental depths of
People,-very well makes a Queen;-
Faithful to whom we shall prove.
Festival, test of this,
Justly engages the Jubilee.-[217]

While songs in celebration of the sovereign tie Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars to colonial officials. They are both familiarized and made stranger to British rulers through continued religious negotiations in Jaffna.

One distinct faction of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar society strategically negotiated within colonial society. They aided in the socio-economic development of their community. This group was known as Tamil bible women. Tamil bible women were local Jaffna Tamil women who previously converted to Christianity and were utilized as door to door proselytizers. They taught other local women the bible, English, how to read and write in Tamil, and also sought to convert Hindus to Christianity. Tamil bible women were agents of empire since they aided in conversion efforts during the 1880s and 1890s. This brought Jaffna Vellalars into closer adjacency with the British.

Though Jaffna Tamil migration started in the 1860s and 1870s with the letters of encouragement from 1867 and 1875, the pinnacle of migration would be some decades later during the 1890s into 1910s. With the encouragement of conversion during the 1880s and 1890s, Tamil bible women served as a catalyst for forming

[217] Ibid. The third saranam has been italicized by the author of this dissertation.

Christian Vellalar homes. They also contributed to the educational prospects of their sons and economic opportunities for their husbands. This was essential for the civil service jobs acquired by male Jaffna Tamils in both colonial locales. They were not only agents of empire for the British but agents for the advancement of the Jaffna Christian community.

Over the course of the late nineteenth century Tamil bible women wrote letters to American missionaries. These letters display the interrelationships between Tamil women and missionaries in Jaffna. How did this interconnection play a role in Tamil influence over migratory patterns between Jaffna and Malaysia? A number of letters from the 1880s provide clues. This will help to fill in the blanks regarding Jaffna agency surrounding conversion. Letters written to female missionaries by converted Tamil bible women describe their work. These letters were originally written in Tamil while missionaries translated some of the letters into English. In exchange for their service preaching the word, these women made requests asking for assistance securing a place at missionary boarding schools for their children and the children of family members.[218]

For instance, a Tamil bible woman by the name of Medith David, located at Uduvil, Jaffna in 1887 wrote, "My dear friend one of my sons wishes to learn English in the school which is at Batticotta. But I have no money to send him to that school and I hope you and Miss Capron will help me to send him to that school. Wait for a reply."[219] As a bible woman, Medith tapped into a crucial resource: seeking the assistance of missionaries for the admittance of her son into Batticotta Seminary.

Other letters written by Tamil bible women illuminate these types of exchanges. Bible women always started their letters by addressing the number of meetings held throughout the week, the number of villages they visited, and the scriptures they taught to their pupils. For instance, a letter dated 1888 described the work of Tamil bible woman, Anna Laksmy. The description started, "Anna Laksmy who works at Nunaville [a village in Jaffna] is very regular in her work. She reads the Bible to 48 women and 5 women are being taught by her. She visits not less than 40 houses monthly and converses with 48 women and 44 children."[220] After this detailed

[218] HUHL: Report of Mrs. Emily Umyer, Bible reader in Punnalaikadduvam and Kurumpychuddi, Ceylon for 1894. *American Board of Commissioners,* 9.5.1. Box 2.
[219] HUHL: Letter- Oodooville Jaffna 28 April 1887. *American Board of Commissioners,* 9.5.1. Box 6. Mission Field Papers: Correspondence with Missionaries and Correspondence with Nationals and Others, 1872-1926.
[220] HUHL: Report- Anna Laksmy, Jaffna, November 1888 from Mrs. Howland. *American Board of Commissioners*, 9.5.1. Box 2. Mission Field Papers: Correspondence with Missionaries and Correspondence with Nationals and Others, 1872-1926.

narrative, Anna continued the letter by informing the American missionaries about how she was persuading one of her pupils to send her daughter to the mission school for further education despite the resistance she got from the mother.

The authenticity of such exchanges can be questioned for these types of reports since on some level bible women could have been appeasing western missionaries as they were employed by them. It must be inferred that bible women made private and public negotiations in their interactions with colonial missionaries. Through a careful reading of these exchanges, many of these women had the capacity to realize the benefits associated with their work, i.e. access to schooling and jobs.

Another letter from 1888 by bible woman Emily Ponnarchy hints at the community push for involvement with mission schools. In her recollection she mentioned how one of her pupils sought to attend church services from the influence of her brother and sister who converted and were trained at the Kopay Training School.[221] Despite push-back from her elders, the pupil wanted to attend church for the broader benefits she could acquire through association with Christianity. Hence, the encouragement among other women and family members in their villages to send their daughters to missionary schools and enter Christian establishments, served as the catalyst for the growing Christian population.

Letters written by American Board of Commissioner (A.B.C.) missionaries reporting back to their headquarters in New Haven also provide clues concerning Tamil influence in acquiring benefits through interaction with missionaries. In 1897, writing from Batticotta back to New Haven, Mrs. Hattie Houston Hitchcock describes the work of a Tamil bible women named Mrs. Mary Gananamutthu. She began the letter by discussing how she accompanies Mrs. Gananamutthu in her bible work on one of the islands which are connected to Jaffna by a one-hour drive via a causeway. She noted the enthusiasm and energy of Mrs. Gananamutthu stating how she always drew a crowd to hear her preaching.[222] She continued the letter with a report on another bible women named Julia. Hitchcock wrote,

[221] HUHL: Report- Emily Ponnarchy, Jaffna, November 1888 from Mrs. Howland. *American Board of Commissioners*, 9.5.1. Box 2.

[222] HUHL: Letter by Mrs. Hattie Houston Hitchcock, Batticotta, Jaffna, Ceylon, August 27, 1897 to Miss Fay, New Haven, Connecticut, USA. *American Board of Commissioners*, 9.5.1. Box 3. Mission Field Papers: Correspondence with Missionaries and Correspondence with Nationals and Others, 1872-1926.

> *"Julia lives in Punnaly, one of the most uncivilized little villages, three miles from here. She is doing good work there and in another village a mile from there, I went to a meeting at her house a few days ago, and nearly everybody in the village had just been joining in their heathen festival and were all smeared with ashes but a number of them came to the meeting and listened attentively."*[223]

This letter written by Hitchcock to the head mission station was meant to provide details concerning the alliance between Tamil bible women and A.B.C. missionaries in conversion efforts. From the missionary perspective, these reports serve as an indicator for the religious goals of the mission. However, Hitchcock's report also affords us the Tamil voice within these exchanges. The crowd Mrs. Gananamutthu and Julia drew shows the impact of Tamil missionaries on the local community.

Previous letters from Tamil bible women showed the request for their sons to attend mission schools. The archival documents written by A.B.C. missionaries also flaunt Tamil agency in regards to taking advantage of the opportunities presented under the colonial system. From a letter written on February 4th, 1897 by Mary Joseph to the mission in New Haven, she noted how the father of a Tamil child named Emma Carruth was anxious to have his daughter educated by the missionaries. In order to secure her entry into the mission school, he walked to and from Mrs. Joseph's home at all times of the day. Mrs. Joseph went on to ask the head missionary in New Haven if she would talk with Mrs. Hastings about arranging entry into the mission school in the next term for young Emma. Joseph felt it was vital to get her into the school soon since she had other relatives interested in conversion. Emma's influence over her family became stronger upon seeing her enter the school and acquire education. This aided in conversion.[224]

Joseph's letter goes on with the description of another young girl named Abbie, her draw to Christianity and the influence this had over her family. Joseph noted, "Abbie's child's father who was long disappointing me has finally repented and now is a candidate to the church. And besides Abbie's mother's two sisters who are widows are also candidates and have most firmly promised me to attend the church from next Sunday."[225]

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[223] Ibid.
[224] HUHL: Letter from Mary Joseph, February 4th, 1897 to New Haven, Connecticut, USA. *American Board of Commissioners,* 9.5.1. Box 3. Mission Field Papers: Correspondence with Missionaries and Correspondence with Nationals and Others, 1872-1926.
[225] Ibid.

The significance of these set of letters is two-fold. One, the letters show the willingness of A.B.C. missionaries in their assistance to get bursaries for the family members of Tamil bible women to attend mission schools. Second, it also shows us the clout Tamil bible women fostered among missionaries. Their positive standing amidst western female missionaries provide the building blocks for obtaining places in schools for their children, influencing their families to interact with missionaries, and ultimately serving as the bridge between colonial officials and their community.

Bible woman Mrs. Caroline Chester Valliammai Sangarapillai serves an early example of a Tamil missionary influencing migration between colonial Sri Lanka and Malaysia. She is the first recorded Jaffna Tamil migrant between the two colonies during the nineteenth century. As a catechist for the Christian Catechists missionaries, she accompanied her husband, Gloucester, to Penang, Malaysia in 1837.[226]

Both were educated through missionary schools. She was educated at the Uduvil school while her husband was educated at the Nallur Boys Seminary. After their marriage, they both migrated to Penang as missionaries and returned to Jaffna due to health reasons after two years of service in 1839. She would go on to start a girls' school in Jaffna with the help of American Board missionaries and teach there until her death in 1842.[227] Caroline's story showcases the give and take relationship between the high caste local community[228] and colonial entities. On the one hand, Caroline and her husband serve as the example of Jaffna Tamils taking advantage of the opportunity to migrate within empire for employment while from the missionary perspective, their goal of maintaining Tamil Christian homes was achieved through the influence of Tamil Christian women over their husbands.

While bible women encouraged conversion and education, the advent of the printing press in Jaffna also provided as an important way Vellalars showed their own capacities for movement. The printing press was introduced by the American Board in the 1820s. Though started by the American Board, local Jaffna Vellalar converts to Christianity went on to run the *Morning Star* attached to the press. Through the newspaper they promote migration between colonial Sri Lanka and Malaysia, next to personal and official announcements concerning the Christian

[226] Selvaratnam and Apputhurai, *Legacy of the Pioneers*, 40.
[227] Harrison, *Uduvil*, 1824-1924, 25.
[228] Caroline Chester's high caste status is interesting since her last names Valliammai Sangarapillai denote her status as a Vellalar. In the Tamil language the suffix 'pillai' is used for those of the Vellalar caste.

community. Announcements also foretold the importance of education needed to acquire employment within the colonial environment.

Starting in 1820, the American Board printing press spread Christian-themed news via two printing press machines which increased to three presses by 1836 and four by 1838. It employed up to seventy people by 1850 with a significant portion being Christian converts from the Batticotta Seminary.[229] Two such employees, Samuel Dana[230] and Lincoln Ripley[231] in 1856 provided written consent of their devotion to Christianity. The declaration served as a contract for their employment and benefits.

However, Samuel and Lincoln were not just in a position of subjugation to the missionaries. Similar to bible women a few decades later, they requested benefits for members of their family such as their wives. They both requested to have specific rooms in the printing press offices which could accommodate their wives. This showcased their bargaining power to obtain more benefits for their loyalty as Christians.[232] Missionaries gained converts and more leverage among the local community through husbands influencing their wives and the people around them, while Jaffna Tamils sought and obtained not only education opportunities but employment and profits, as well.

Samuel and Lincoln show the community's use of religious relationships for educational and employment benefits at various stages of their life course. Some years later the American Board printing press was acquired by two Jaffna Tamils of Christian faith, originally from the Vellalar caste. Their names were Messrs. Ripley and Strong and they bought the press for four hundred British pounds. When Ripley passed away in 1866, his wife sold his share to their son-in-law, Mr. Asbury. The press would then go on to be called *The Strong and Asbury Press*.[233]

These Jaffna Tamil Christians, Ripley, Strong, Asbury, Samuel and Lincoln would go on to influence not only the religious news found in the *Morning Star*[234] but also the secular news, as well. Much of this secular news would go on to be announcements

[229] "The company of them that publish": a brief history of the American Ceylon Mission Press. (Manipay: The American Board Press, 1956).
[230] He is also referred to throughout the document by his Tamil name Mylvaganum Sevasampoo.
[231] He is also referred to throughout the document by his Tamil name Viravanarther Valvopilly.
[232] HUHL: ABC8.2.16 Accounts and Miscellaneous papers, 1821-1869. Folder 1- American Mission printing and binding establishment in Ceylon 2/2/1856.
[233] "The company of them that publish," 6-9.
[234] The Morning Star was a newspaper started in 1841 by the Christian missionaries of the American Board. It is said to be the second oldest newspaper in Sri Lanka. Source: "The company of them that publish."

and advertisements concerning employment opportunities in both colonial Sri Lanka and colonial Malaysia, particularly about the civil service and plantation overseer opportunities. A passage from February 1845 proclaimed the Governor was authorised to endorse any native person who was qualified for various ranks in the Sri Lankan civil service as long as they proved their credentials through examination.[235]

Similar results culminated from cooperation between British Wesleyan missionaries and Jaffna Tamils as seen from Christian Vellalars who went on to get advanced certificates and degrees at universities in the UK. These certificates and degrees enabled students to sit for civil service examinations in colonial Sri Lanka. Continued interaction between locals, missionaries and officials intertwined religion, schooling, and employment, influencing the recruitment and subsequent migration of Jaffna Tamil civil servants.[236]

2.4 | Push towards British Malaysia

The strategies of bible women networks tied into male and family migration patterns to Malaysia. Continued ties remained during the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. From the Censuses of 1881 to 1891 there is evidence that conditions in Jaffna became disadvantageous during this time. In this ten-year period, there was approximately a 4.7 per cent increase in the population escalating from 265,583 people to 279,045. A decade later in 1911, there was an increase of about 14.5 per cent with the population rising to 326,518.[237] This influenced migration to British Malaysia increasing the South Asian population in the territory. The census of 1901 for British Malaysia shows us an increase in the number of various ethnic groups in the colony over the last 10 years. The South Asian population of the colony, including Tamils and other groups, saw the largest increase out of any the inhabitants of colonial Malaysia increasing from 20,154 persons to 58,211 or a 189.5 per cent increase.[238]

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[235] BL: The Morning Star- published semi-monthly. Devoted to education, literature and religion. (1845-1855). New Regulation for the Civil Service of Ceylon (14/02/1845).

[236] Keable, *A History of St. Thomas' College, Colombo.;* On page 182-183, Keable writes, "At their first coming the Cambridge exams were a great stimulus. For the clever boys there were the English University scholarships to prepare for; to parents and employers they gave a certain standard of education guaranteed by the name of a great university; to school masters they gave something definite to work for, which parents approved of, and which gave a clear and tangible result for their boys to aim at. The Calcutta examinations and the early days of the Cambridge examinations produced many of the best scholars, novelists, Ceylon historians, essay writers, antiquarians, translators and writers on Ceylon, that this Island has seen amongst her English education sons: and they produced also a distinguished company of doctors, lawyers, churchmen, schoolmasters, politicians, and civil servants."

[237] Ramasamy, *Sojourners to Citizens,* 46.

[238] British Museum (hereafter BM): *Census of 1901.* Census of the Federated Malay States 1901.

TABLE 2.1 | Total Population and Increase in Ethnic Groups in British Malaya, 1891-1901[239]

Ethnic Group	1891	1901	Total increase 1901	Increase per cent
Tamils and other Natives of India	20,154	58,211	38,057	189.5
Eurasians	564	1,522	958	169.8
Other ethnicities	1,073	2,582	1,509	140.6
Europeans and Americans	717	1,422	705	98.3
Chinese	163,429	299,739	136,310	83.4
Malays and other Natives of the Archipelago	231,551	312,486	80,935	34.5
Total	**417,488**	**675,962**	**258,474**	**161.5**

Recruitment and movement between the colonies was a result of the community *performing Britishness.*[240] In the African context, local civil servants were often described as "white-blacks" for their status as representatives of the colonial social order.[241] For the Jaffna Tamils, first in colonial Jaffna and then colonial Malaysia, maneuvering the colonial system meant becoming malleable to the ideas of belonging across empire. This flexibility meant Jaffna Tamils would maintain ties to both British officials, as well as, their interregional and local networks. This created the duality of their everyday experience between colonial locations.

Leaving their familiar environment and going to a foreign land was no easy feat for the Jaffna Tamils. Though colonial Malaysia was often described as an Eldorado, it was also noted as a mysterious region with lurking dangers. The western peninsula was said to be filled with uncultivated jungle, dangerous wild tigers, poisonous snakes, and malaria. Travel to and from the two locales was determined by the monsoon with wet and dry seasons. From May the southwest monsoon was the dry season with high temperatures, while October commenced the northeast monsoon and served as the wet season. The months between October and January saw the

[239] Ibid.
[240] Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects,* 16.
[241] Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, Richard L. Roberts (eds.) *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006): 4.

most humidity and rain. With this knowledge in hand, Jaffna Tamils were still determined to sojourn in what was called the frontier.[242]

As Lucassen and Lucassen note there was a significant increase in migration during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries due to urbanization, the development of transportation and the emergence of global economic systems.[243] The influx of South Asians in the colony fits this larger migratory movement and included a variety of different people such as Tamil indentured laborers from India and Punjabi police and military personnel, for example. However, very significant for this story was the arrival of Jaffnese civil servants during this 10-year period. How did Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars learn about these civil service positions, leading to their contribution as migrants to Malaysia?

This inflow of migrants was encouraged by Governor Sir Frank Swettenham during his term from 1901-1904. In his account of his time in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, Swettenham noted that as the states of British Malaysia grew and became more successful, the administration needed more civil servants to staff the governmental departments and plantations. He shares that higher post recruits were of mainly British descent, however, for middle and lower clerical posts, recruits were mainly "Eurasians from the Straits or Ceylon, the rank and file of the police from India and Malay countries, and the railways, post, and telegraph offices from India and Ceylon."[244] Focusing on the recruits from colonial Sri Lanka, there were two ways that Jaffnese would learn about such positions in British Malaysia. One way was through word-of-mouth from relatives and friends who had already migrated.

The migration of Caroline Chester in 1837 to Penang and then the movement of another migrant Murugasu Vaithilingam to Singapore in 1875, served as the starting point for the oral communications of opportunity in the frontier colony.[245] S.C. MacIntyre illustrates this with the recollection of his father's journey to Kuala Lumpur in 1896. With the death of his father in 1891, it fell on E.T. MacIntyre to take care of his sickly mother, three younger sisters and brother still living in Jaffna,

[242] Thomas John Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements of the Straits of Malacca, viz. Pinang, Malacca, and Singapore, with a History of the Malayan States on the Peninsula of Malacca* (London, UK: Murray Publishers, 1839).
[243] Lucassen and Lucassen, "Chapter X," in Lucassen, Lucassen and Manning, *Migration History in World History,* 414.
[244] Swettenham, *British Malaya.*
[245] Selvaratnam and Apputhurai, *Legacy of the Pioneers,* 40.

leaving a heavy burden on the twenty-two year old.[246] The opportunity came about for E.T. MacIntyre to migrate in late 1895. Some years prior, his sister, Rose Sellamah and his brother, Edwin Ponniah, had moved to the region often described as having streets paved with gold or as an Eldorado. It was their enthusiastic promotion of the region, as well as, the newfound openings in the civil service which promoted E.T. MacIntyre to take a leap of faith and apply for a position in the new colony's civil service.[247]

On 9th March, 1896, Dr. E.T. MacIntyre made the journey to Penang. The journey took about five days between Jaffna, Nagapattinam, with Penang as the final destination. First sailing from Jaffna to Nagapattinam, migrants like MacIntyre would stay one night with distant relatives or at a guest house specifically designed for the journey between Jaffna and Penang. After staying overnight for two days in Nagapattinam, migrants would continue on to Penang which was a journey of another three days.[248] Since February 1845, the colonial Sri Lankan government was open to any qualified local person for the civil service. This not only enabled local Sri Lankans to apply for the civil service in their home country but also paved the way for these same people to apply for the civil service in other parts of the empire since those already living in colonial Malaysia were providing attestations of their settlement and success in the colony.

Jaffna Christian and Hindu Vellalars were recruited in large numbers along with the higher-ranking British officers of the colonial Sri Lankan Civil Service (C.C.S.). Once colonial Malaysia became its own separate colony in 1867, officials sought to fill civil service positions in the region. There was one problem however, the lack of eagerness to join the frontier's civil service from the UK as well as officers from other Eastern colonies. Heussler notes that the first-choice recruits from the Indian Civil Service were not interested in joining the civil service in the Straits Settlements prior to and after 1867. A recruitment campaign started back home in the UK through cadet examinations. However, this also proved to be unsatisfactory since many in the UK knew very little about the colonial outpost of Malaysia and what they did know was not positive. Stories of malaria, wild tigers and poor living conditions were abundant back home at the metropole.[249]

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[246] MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane,* 12.
[247] Ibid, 14.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid.; Robert Heussler, *British Rule in Malaya: The Malayan Civil Service and Its Predecessors, 1867-1942* (Oxford, England: Clio Express, 1981).; Ramasamy, Sojourners to Citizens.

The next choice became colonial Sri Lanka. For instance, while the colony was still part of colonial India, Sri Lanka was described as the "mother hen" of the British colonies in the East. For this, in 1847, colonial Sri Lanka supplied the first lieutenant general to the Straits, specifically Malacca.[250] The colony was targeted for the recruitment of officers for Malaysia's colonial offices. Below the highest officials were the next level of British officers such as junior magistrates, interpreters, and assistant auditors.[251]

As per the letters of encouragement from 1867 and 1875, we can see that British officials in colonial Sri Lanka were invited to take part in the civil services of colonial Malaysia through attractive increases in salary. As the already established group of local civil servants, many Jaffna Tamils were able to follow their bosses to the new colony while in other cases they were directly recruited through word-of-mouth from relatives and friends already abroad, as well as, through advertisements in Christian and Hindu newspapers, magazines, and government gazettes.

This leads us to the second way the Jaffna Tamils discovered these new opportunities abroad, advertisements. Announcements for positions were often released in the government gazettes of colonial Sri Lanka while those wishing to apply would also send a reply which would be published in the gazettes. Attentive candidates would provide written evidence for their interest in applying for said positions. These applications were often found in Christian newspapers like the *Morning Star.*

In 1866, one such notice was sent by Ramalingam Wythianather. He states, "I, Ramalingam Wythianather of Kythady do hereby give notice that it is my intention six weeks hence to apply to His Excellency the Governor to be appointed and enrolled as a Notary Public of Navetculy and throughout the district of Jaffna, [signed] May 15th, 1866."[252] A few months later another such announcement by Nicholas Saverimuttoo proclaims the same interest for a civil service position in Jaffna. He writes, "I, Nicholas Saverimuttoo of Katcovalam in the Parish of Point Pedro, now residing in Jaffna, do hereby give notice of my intention six weeks hence to apply to His Excellency the Governor to be admitted and enrolled as Notary Public to practice in the Parish of Point Pedro and throughout the District of Jaffna, [signed] 1st August 1866."[253] These are not the only two examples of such proclamations

[250] Heussler, *British Rule in Malaya*, 25.
[251] Ibid, 32.
[252] SLNA: R. Wythianather (15th May, 1866, Jaffna). Notice for employment found in 1866 issue of *Morning Star*.
[253] SLNA: J.N. Saverimuttoo (1st August, 1866, Jaffna). Notice for employment found in 1866 issue of *Morning Star*.

found throughout the 1866 issue of the Christian newspaper. In total there are six or seven of these types of announcements over the course of the whole year. These types of advertisements did two things. One- it showed the means of entry into the civil service as partly a public process. As a group with adjacency to British officials, Jaffna Tamils had the opportunity to sit for civil service exams and accompany their bosses in junior positions in the new colony. Two- it also encouraged other Jaffna Tamils interested in the civil service to showcase their interest in the widely read newspaper.

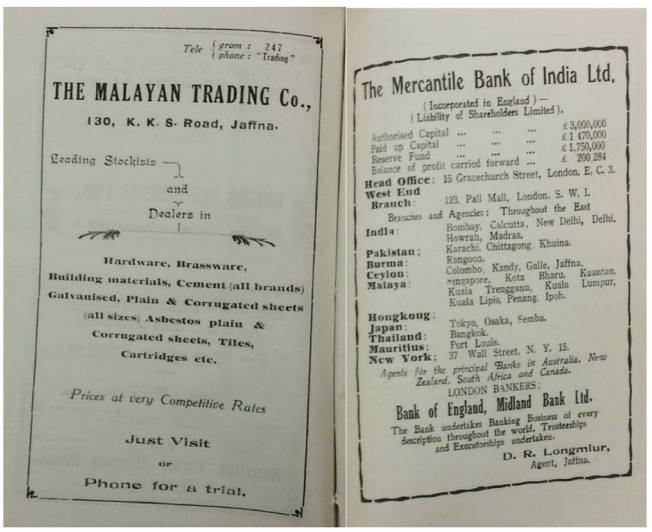
Government Gazettes would also release information concerning vacant positions in the civil service. For instance, in the decade following the initial influx of migrants, the Gazette of 1917 released a significant number of vacancies for positions in various departments. For example, one such vacancy states, "Appointment vacated. The appointment of Dresser, Grade II, Medical Department, held by Mr. P. Kathiravelu, has been rendered vacant from the 4th July, 1917, by his absence without leave or reasonable cause."[254] While on the next page it announces the position of an auctioneer. As per the Auction Sales Enactment of 1905, it states, "Mr. M.D. Nayagam, of Kuala Lumpur, has been granted a license as an auctioneer for the State of Selangor, for one year, from the 1st December, 1917."[255] The Tamil names found in both the vacancy and auctioneer announcements throughout the Gazette demonstrated the monopoly Jaffna Tamils had over civil service positions.

These types of advertisements showcased available vacancies sparking interest in the next generation of Jaffna Tamil applicants. It also displayed economic advancement in the colony through gaining licenses for jobs in the private sector such as auctions and later with plantation ownership. Along these lines, Jaffna Tamils and British officials alike had access to this source of news, embodying colonial interactions as mutual between colonial subjects and officials. It was a combination of the British attitude towards the group, as well as, the advertisements found in Christian newspapers and government gazettes which partly drove the community to migrate to the new colony. The other side of the coin speaks to Jaffna agency to make a richer life for themselves.

The continued display of relations between Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars aspiring for positions in Jaffna and those who had already left for the new colony can be seen in more advertisements found in the *Morning Star* during the early 1900s. For instance, one such advertisement placed by the agent of Jaffna, D.R. Longmuir, is

[254] NAUK: CO574- "No. 2266- Appointment Vacated. F.M.S. Gazette, 1917."
[255] Ibid., "No. 3548- The Auction Sales Enactment, 1905. F.M.S. Gazette, 1917."

a one-page advertisement for the Mercantile Bank. The bank shows branches for colonial Sri Lanka and Malaysia with other branches across South, Southeast, and East Asia. Another advert is for the Malayan Trading Company located in Jaffna. The company states that it provides supplies for building materials, brasswares, hardware, cements, etc.[256]



Tele { gram : 247 / phone : "Trading"

THE MALAYAN TRADING Co.,

130, K. K. S. Road, Jaffna.

Leading Stockists and Dealers in

Hardware, Brassware, Building materials, Cement (all brands) Galvanised, Plain & Corrugated sheets (all sizes) Asbestos plain & Corrugated sheets, Tiles, Cartridges etc.

Prices at very Competitive Rates

Just Visit or Phone for a trial.

The Mercantile Bank of India Ltd.

(Incorporated in England) — (Liability of Shareholders Limited).

Authorised Capital	£3,000,000
Paid up Capital	£1,470,000
Reserve Fund	£1,750,000
Balance of profit carried forward ...	£ 200,284

Head Office: 15 Gracechurch Street, London, E, C. 3.
West End Branch: 123, Pall Mall, London, S. W. 1.
Branches and Agencies: Throughout the East
India: Bombay, Calcutta, New Delhi, Delhi, Howrah, Madras.
Pakistan; Karachi, Chittagong, Khuina.
Burma: Rangoon.
Ceylon: Colombo, Kandy, Galle, Jaffna.
Malaya: Singapore, Kota Bharu, Kuantan, Kuala Trengganu, Kuala Lumpur, Kuala Lipis, Penang, Ipoh.
Hongkong: Tokyo, Osaka, Semba.
Japan: Bangkok.
Thailand: Port Louis.
Mauritius: 37 Wall Street, N. Y. 15.
New York: Agents for the principal Banks in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada.

LONDON BANKERS:

Bank of England, Midland Bank Ltd.

The Bank undertakes Banking Business of every description throughout the world. Trusteeships and Executorships undertaken.

D. R. Longmiur, Agent, Jaffna.

FIGURE 2.1 | Mercantile Bank and Malayan Trading Company

Though not a call for employment positions, these advertisements show the continued link between the two colonial locales through the need for hardware and building materials for personal use, as well as, for banking services between the colonies. A large enough establishment of Jaffna Tamils were traveling between colonial Sri Lanka and Malaysia.

The early 1900s continued to see the influx of Jaffna Tamils to colonial Malaysia through civil service positions. In the call for civil service cadetships for 1909, it was mentioned that candidates could be "natural-born British subjects of European or Asiatic descent."[257] This was for cadetships in colonial Sri Lanka, while the call allowed only Europeans to sit for examination for the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States and Hong Kong. The notice proceeded,

[256] BL: Advertisements for Mercantile Bank and Malayan Trading Company. *Morning Star* (1900).
[257] NAUK: *Civil Service Commission (CSC) 1909.*

> *"The examinations for these appointments will, as a rule, be held in the month of August of those years in which vacancies have occurred in the Civil Service of Ceylon, or in that of Hong Kong, the Straits Settlements, and the Federated Malay States, and the successful candidates will be allotted, as and when opportunity offers, to the various Colonies or States in which vacancies may exist upon a consideration of all the circumstances, including their own wishes, but the requirement of the Public Service will rank before every other consideration and the Secretary of State receives full discretion to allot as he thinks fit."*[258]

This call for cadetships across the eastern portion of the British empire pointed to the continued advertisement for civil service positions in the various colonies. The fact that examinations were open to both Europeans and Asians for colonial Sri Lanka hints at the openness towards those of Asiatic descent being part of the civil service in that colony. While the restriction of those of European descent for colonial Malaysia indicates the lack of interest of the group to work there. This lower number of British officials in the colony can partly be attributed to the need for those who were "physically qualified for service in tropical climates"[259], a stereotype often attributed to locals such as the Jaffna Tamils. The increase of Jaffna Tamil civil servants during the 1890s into early 1900s tells us that the group was continuously accompanying their British counterparts to the colony in junior levels, as well as, being transferred between the two colonial locales. They were not necessarily sitting for examinations in the civil service in colonial Malaysia but were still getting to the colony via Jaffna.

The combination of word-of-mouth recollections, advertisements in magazines, newspapers, and official announcements through the Civil Service Commission all contributed to the exodus of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars and Hindus to colonial Malaysia. Jaffna Tamils sought better opportunities to continue the prestige of their community in Jaffna and even elevate their status in a different colony. Initially as sojourners, how would migration change their position as colonial subjects? The last section reviews the intertwinement between adjacency to rulers, social status, and continued migration.

2.5 | Performative Britishness in Malaysia: Prominent family connections

Jaffna Tamil adjacency to colonial rulers played a role in their migration networks and social status in Malaysia. Though memoirs do not represent the group as a collective, they do provide some insight into how the most privileged Jaffna Tamils

[258] Ibid.
[259] Ibid.

benefitted from adjacency to colonial rulers. From the highest levels of middle ranking positions in the civil service to the lowest, Jaffna Tamil migrants embraced colonial rule, gained white collar employment, and became complementary to British dominance in the region.

William Arasaratnam Rogers, Jr. is one example of a higher positioned migrant. In his 1940 work, he narrated his own migratory journey between colonial Sri Lanka and colonial Malaysia during the late nineteenth century. He began his tale writing: "I came to Malaya in 1890, and was placed immediately in Medical Charge of the Hospital at Kuala Kangsar, in Perak, F.M.S., and of the District in General, including the household of His Highness the Sultan of Perak."[260] From its opening lines, the memoir established essential clues for the status the Rogers family would go on to acquire in the frontier colony.

For one, as a civil servant in the medical service, the fact that he was directly placed in charge of a hospital speaks volumes to his position among British officials back in colonial Sri Lanka, as well as, Malaysia. His familiarity with the Sultan of Perak also tie him to the local elites of the colony, as not only a Jaffna Tamil migrant, but also as an agent of empire taking note of his gained closeness to Malay royalty through his British civil servant appointment.

The memoir continued with descriptions of life in colonial Malaysia from the 1890s into the 1930s showcasing Rogers experiences as a civil servant and plantation owner. In between his rise of economic challenges and prosperity, the account also provided details surrounding the families' connections to high British officials and other European interlocutors in the territory.
Rogers migration in the 1890s is an example of how well-connected Jaffna Tamils navigated British rule between colonies.

During the 1890s into 1910s, many of these migrants performed well in the service yet they were also limited in how far they could rise in the civil service. Selvaratnam and Apputhurai chart the positions of 209 Jaffna Tamil civil servants of the FMSR between the years 1901 and 1909 (See Table 2.2, Chart 2.1 and 2.2 on page 105 and 106). Of these 209 employees, only 19 men were dismissed, resigned, or absconded. Another 43 died

[260] Rogers, Jr., *Fifty Years in Malaya,* 2.; Rogers refers to colonial Malaysia with the more classical term Malaya. Another detail to note- F.M.S. stands for Federated Malay States. Colonial Malaysia would be made of the Federated Malay States consisting of Selangor, Perak, Negeri Sembilan, and Pahang; The Unfederated Malay States consisting of Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Terengganu; and the Straits Settlements consisting of Singapore, Penang, and Malacca.

in service, retired on abolition of office or medical board recommendation. Despite positive reviews for the majority of Jaffna Tamil civil servants, they also were barred from obtaining higher positions. According to personal memoirs and anthologies, maintenance of European power dictated such constraints.

Selvaratnam and Apputhurai note, "The government has a duty to ensure that as far as possible a European would never have a non-European as his superior...Europeans believed that they should, and indeed must, live at a certain standard which was higher than that of the Asian communities...their power was based on prestige rather than military might."[261] The majority of Jaffna Tamils of the FMSR reached the position of Clerk, Class 1. The most senior placement for local Asian colonial subjects was Office Assistant. Only 3 Jaffna Tamils reached this level by 1909.

TABLE 2.2 | Jaffna Tamil civil servants of FMSR- Positions and Performance, 1901-1909[262]

Position	Number
Office workers	
Senior (European position)	5
Office Assistants (most senior Asian position)	3
Chief Clerk	17
Clerk, Class 1	68
Clerk, Class 2	46
Clerk, Class 3 (lowest level)	12
Railway Workers	
Permanent Way Overseers	12
Permanent Way Inspectors	5
Inspectors (Bridge, Engineer, Telegraph)	11
Train Guards	8
Guard Grade 1/Head Guard	8
Yard Master	4
Signalman	2
Technical Assistant Special (senior positions)	2
Clerk of Works/Tech. Subordinates	3
Tracer	1
Linesman	1
Miscellaneous	
Miscellaneous	1
Total	**209**

[261] Selvaratnam and Apputhurai, *Legacy of the Pioneers*, 54-55.
[262] Ibid, 55.

CHART 2.1 | Negative Record of Performance, 1901-1909[263]

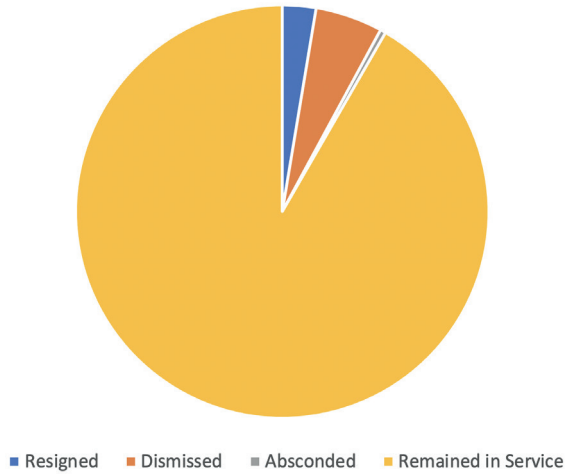
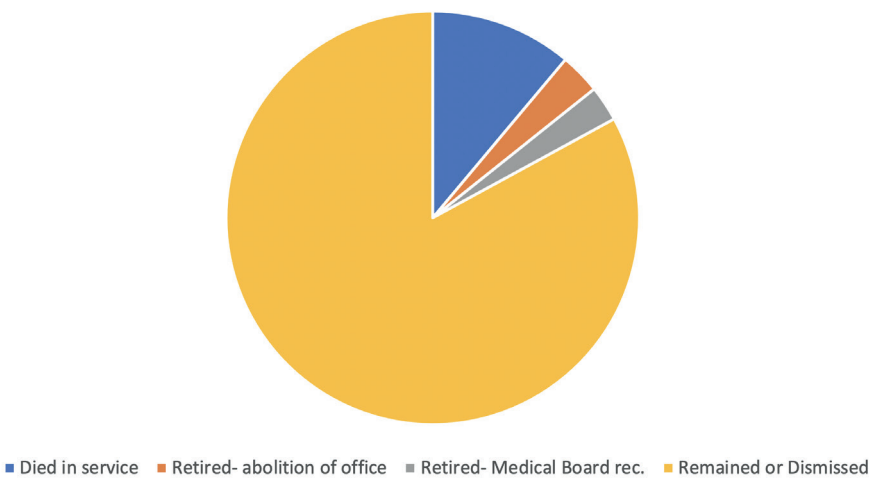


CHART 2.1 | Retirees of service, 1901-1909[264]



[263] Selvaratnam and Apputhurai, *Legacy of the Pioneers,* 55. Out of 209 men, 6 resigned, 12 were dismissed, and 1 absconded.
[264] Ibid., Out of 209 men, 28 died in service, 8 retired upon abolition of office, and 7 retired on medical board recommendations.

While adjacency to colonial rulers provided entrance into the civil service of Malaysia, most Jaffna Tamils did not reach beyond Clerk or Office Assistant. Migrants turned to communal networks for alternative possibilities. The lives of the MacIntyres provide generational insight into the migrant experience in colonial Malaysia for Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars.

After working in the Medical Department for over 10 years, Dr. E.T. MacIntyre had developed a name for himself in the Jaffna Christian community as a lay leader within the Methodist congregation in Kuala Lumpur and as a civil servant.[265] As his reputation grew, so too did his economic situation. S.C. MacIntyre writes, "The great rubber boom of 1910 was at its height, and financially it had been a good year for father, who had put through some estate deals."[266] One estate was located in Jaffna at Kangasanthurai.

In his childhood, S.C. MacIntyre recalls trips between Kuala Lumpur and Jaffna to visit with family, bring goods and money to relatives, and check on the plantation. Following his civil service career abroad seemed like a prosperous choice, not that the endeavor did not also have its challenges. The reliance on Dr. E.T. MacIntyre for financial aid from his extended family back in Jaffna was very similar to other past and contemporary stories of the model minority myth. That is to say, the illusion of socio-economic perfection in a new locale, often paints the relocator as the bearer of financial stability for relatives back home. Thus, it is often these members of the family who feel it is there duty to provide monetary help upon visiting their homeland. The socioeconomic ties between colonial Sri Lanka and Malaysia continued to color the communal networks of Jaffna Tamils in British Malaysia over the early nineteenth century.

While Dr. E.T. MacIntyre was part of the first large arrivals from Jaffna to Malaysia, his son, S.C. MacIntyre, born in 1903, represents the second generation who saw the Malaysian peninsula as their home despite having childhood memories of Jaffna from visits back and forth to their ancestral homeland. He was educated at the

[265] Though there are no exact numbers for how many Christians migrated between Jaffna and Malaysia. Documents provide clues concerning the role of Christian Vellalars in the civil service. We can infer that the majority of migrants were Hindu Vellalars, however. As part of the large Methodist community and as one of the forerunners of the Methodist Boy's School, MacIntyre served as a representative for the community. As Visvanathan states, "For the Tamil Christian community, the church played an important part in satisfying their religious needs. The Tamil Methodist church in Kuala Lumpur was founded through the efforts of Ceylonese Methodists. Generally, all Methodists prayed in the same church." This shows just how central the Methodist church was to Jaffnese Christian activities. See: Visvanathan, *The Tamils in India, Ceylon and Malaya,* 205.

[266] MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane,* 37.

Kuala Lumpur Methodist Boy's school, first opened by Dr. W.T. Kensett in 1897 and where his uncle Samuel Abraham was headmaster, as well as, missionary schools in Jaffna.[267] This continued the trajectory of education needed to acquire a white-collar position in colonial Malaysia. In his earliest recollections of his childhood, MacIntyre paints a picture of affluence in colonial Malaysia. At a young age, MacIntyre recalls his father being a man of influence in the hospital at Serendah.

Around 1908, at the age of 5, MacIntyre remembered his father being transferred as a doctor in the government hospital in Serendah to one in Kuala Lumpur. Transport between the two locations was by train and from his memory, MacIntyre stated how many of the station-masters and railway guards were Jaffna Tamils.[268] Upon moving to Kuala Lumpur, the family lived in a house on Tanglin Road across the street from the General Hospital. As this was a promotional post, the family was provided with private transport "in the form of a 'Victoria' drawn by an Australian bred ex-race horse for the family use, and a trap and pony for father's professional visits."[269] These early memories illustrate the wealth and privilege generated through white-collar positions in the frontier colony.

Like other Asian civil servants, MacIntyre also experienced pressures, as well. In his diary, Dr. E.T. MacIntyre writes about the hardships of maintaining a plantation in Jaffna, sending money back to his extended family, as well as, securing a well-founded future for his immediate family placing his children in the leading educational institutions in colonial Malaysia.[270]

Next to monetary growth and challenges, there was also socio-cultural prosperity for the Jaffna Tamil Christian community in Malaysia. The MacIntyre family in particular was at the forefront. During the early 1900s into 1910s, the activities of the Jaffna Tamil Christian community gathered around the Methodist Tamil Church run by family member and missionary Samuel Abraham, while the community as a whole, Christian and Hindu, congregated at the Selangor Ceylon Tamil Association.[271] Synergy between the Jaffnese and British continued in these spaces. MacIntyre mentions that the Association received the President and High Commissioner of the Malay States, Sir Arthur Young and his wife who was presented with flowers by MacIntyre's sister, Evelyn.[272]

[267] MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane.;* Sargant, *The dispersion of the Tamil church,* 89.
[268] MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane,* 36.
[269] Ibid.
[270] Ibid.
[271] Ibid, 39.
[272] Ibid.

The maintenance of relations with the British provided conveniences for the children of new migrants to the colony, and it also enabled the Jaffnese to monopolize on civil service positions for family members. However, was this hold on the colonial social power truly strong for the Jaffna Tamil migrants?

Into the 1910s, Dr. E.T. MacIntyre was seen as a leader for the Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar community. For instance, upon his return from a training trip in England in 1913, "he was garlanded with flowers, given a procession from the railway station to the Town Hall and honored with an address of welcome."[273] His community placed him as the pillar of success and respect, the example of someone *who made it*. However, from the view of the British he was still a subordinate despite his sub-elite status. His training in England was supposed to provide him with a promotion in the civil service. Yet like other Asian civil servants, upon this request, he was denied and forced to remain in his previous appointment and go without a salary increase.[274]

Despite the parade of welcome from Jaffna Tamils, he still was seen as a subordinate in the eyes of the British. Though he was a familiar through education and employment, his ethnicity kept him at arms' length like a stranger. Many Jaffna Tamils would go on to have such experiences during the early twentieth century, always reminded of their double consciousness identity within empire. This glass ceiling, never being able to fully acquire equality with the British despite their loyalties and adjacency, led to frustrations. In the case of MacIntyre, he retired some years later and opened his own dispensary and private practice.[275] These examples would go on to direct the second generation's drive for achievement and climb for social recognition as an elite community in Malaysia through not only associations with colonial officials but also by their own socio-economic networks.[276]

Jaffna Tamils were able to utilize the advantages gained in colonial Malaysia by opening their own businesses and practices adding another element to the colonial subject and colonial official dynamic. Through their capacity for change, the Jaffnese were able to amplify the work offered to them under the colonial enterprise

[273] Ibid, 41.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Ibid, 43.
[276] Selvaratnam and Apputhurai note a passage from John G. Butcher stating, "if anything rarer in the FMS, Dr. E.T. MacIntyre, a Jaffna Tamil who received his initial medical training in Ceylon, was unable to rise above the most junior position as a doctor could hold even after he went to England to obtain qualifications which were higher than those held by many of his superiors." See: Selvaratnam and Apputhurai, *Legacy of the Pioneers,* 54.; John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya, 1880-1941* (Kuala Lumpur: OUP, 1979).

to maintain an agency (though bounded) and independence for their community. Thus, even with the reality of British constraints under the colonial system, the community now had the resources to once again change and control the outcome of their socioeconomic experience. So, if the British did not want to promote a Jaffna Tamil, after some years working and with enough savings, they could take their employment into their own hands, opening their own businesses and acquiring plantations. The background of this led to the upward mobility of this group during the twentieth century.

2.6 | Conclusion

At the turn of the previous century, the Indian Ocean World was a region of mixed origins, with a variety of experiences under British colonialism.[277] Colonial Malaysia was made up of a variety of peoples who shared a long history of interaction in the region. There were Chinese laborers and merchants, South Asian laborers and merchants, local Malay communities, Eurasians, and Europeans. As noted by Amrith, "European authorities tended to treat old and new migrants collectively, on the basis of race- as 'Chinese,' 'Indian,' or 'Arab'- however different the nature of their overseas connections."[278]

This formed British opinions concerning the various groups and though they placed a collective higher in their colonial hierarchy, colonial communities were still only subjects in the eyes of the government. Yet, from the local perspective, this colonial multi-cultural environment still fostered divisions and differences between the various peoples. Competition in regards to who belonged and cultivated power vis-a-vis each other and with the colonizer was at the forefront of identity development in the region.[279] This would drive the next generations of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars to work on establishing their own separate identity as prominent members in the colony, particularly in contrast to Indian Tamils and even Jaffna Tamil Hindus in the region.

It was challenges to Christian Vellalar status that pushed them to seek better opportunities first in colonial Sri Lanka and then in a colony abroad. These challenges included natural threats to crop cultivation such as drought, impending poverty, and competition for civil service positions from Sinhalese and Burghers.

[277] Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects*, 1.
[278] Amrith, *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia*, 58.
[279] Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects*, 219.

The establishment of colonial Malaysia as a separate colony in 1867 would drive the British to find staff for the governmental offices in the region. As British men back in England, as well as, in the colony of India were reluctant to join the civil service in the frontier colony, the next group to target were the civil service officers already in colonial Sri Lanka. From the British perspective, the Christian Vellalars were essential candidates to follow their British superiors to colonial Malaysia since they were seen as closer to the British in religion and culture. Already saturating the colonial Sri Lanka civil service and with mounting responsibilities back in Jaffna, the opportunity to sojourn in colonial Malaysia presented itself as a great convenience.

The driving force for upward social mobility can be circled back to developments in Jaffna such as the promotion of conversion and education by Tamil bible women which aided in the bounded agency of the Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars. This bounded agency presented itself as the circulation of ideas to climb the colonial social ladder through education and then employment. These circulations transferred between families and friends throughout the local community, adding to the prestigious status of the Vellalars in Jaffna and influencing migration to colonial Malaysia.

The performance of British language and culture among Jaffna Tamils created the double conscious identity as a colonial subject within empire. They were both familiars and strangers from British colonial officials as informed by their sub-elite and subordinate statuses. Their networks with each other and the British were seen through direct correspondence via jubilee celebration songs, word of mouth information concerning opportunities abroad and advertisements between the colonies. These circulations between colonies tied Jaffna Tamils to the old country and the new place of settlement making them targets to serve as 'modern' agents of empire.

As more Jaffna Tamils moved to the colony over the 1890s into the early 1900s, the projection of good fortune followed and the image of prosperity was pictured in the minds of family and friends back in Jaffna. The challenges faced by this first sojourner generation lead to the changing dynamics between the first and second generation's experiences in the colony. As the colonial state in Malaysia changed, so too did the opportunities for the Jaffna Tamils.[280]

[280] In comparison to the African colonial context Lawrance, Osborn, and Roberts mention how opportunities for acquiring wealth and status changed over time for African civil servants during the colonial era. See: Lawrance, Osborn, and Roberts, *Intermediaries, interpreters, and clerks,* 5

The next chapter explores these changing dynamics in the colony vis-à-vis the colony's diverse population. Would prosperity within the colonial structure remain? Or would new challenges arise? By asking ourselves how and when the community went from being a group of sojourners to a group of migrants, we can come to understand the solidification of the group's identity as Jaffnese-Malaysians. It is the intersection of loyalties to the colonizer and the desire to become a minority elite among other minority sub-elites that form the backdrop of Jaffna Tamil participation in Malaysian state building. Hence, how would their father's and mother's experiences shape the identities of second generation Jaffnese in colonial Malaysia during the 1920s, as well as, the third generation in the 1930s? What were the steps involved in the establishment of the group as a settled migrant community? The next chapter explores the socioeconomic and sociocultural experiences of the second generation as connections to the homeland begin to dwindle and Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars start to move from sojourners to permanent settlers.

CHAPTER 3

Jaffnese-Malaysians?: Becoming a solidified migrant group, 1914-1932

3.1 | Introduction

Recent works by scholars of South and Southeast Asia have turned to personal narratives of those on the margins of colonial society such as convict and plantation laborers.[281] Their stories expose the invisibility of inter- and intra- relationships forming social networks in the colonies.[282] On a bureaucratic level, the British controlled the lives of local communities with the stroke of a pen. Yet for some individuals on the ground, they may have never met a colonial official face to face. For others, they inhabited spaces alongside colonial officials in the departments of the civil service or in privileged spaces as wealthy merchants and plantation owners. These visible subjects aided the rules, regulations, and daily function of the colony. One's social, cultural, and economic position informed their class in the colonial setting. Their status was influenced by their adjacency to those in power.[283]

These tied connections speak to larger perceptions of identity development within the context of familiarity and alienation for different groups living across empire. To explore this process, this chapter asks the following questions: What are the types of narratives surrounding Jaffna Tamil migrant visibility in colonial Malaysia? What role did they play in these perceptions and how did others perceive such visibility? How did the group monopolize jobs in the civil service into the 1920s and 30s and did this process play a role in the group becoming both subordinate and sub-elite Jaffna Tamil-Malaysians vis-à-vis other ethnic groups in the colony?

Contrary to those on the margins, Jaffna Tamil migrants were visible subjects. A select number of memoirs, historical narratives and anthologies have provided some detail about their lives working in the colonial Malaysian civil service.[284] Yet personal accounts remain limited and there is a lack of description regarding life and position between the colonies. The works available are official colonial correspondence. While memoirs written by elite members of the group, provide a selective narrative

[281] Anderson, *Subaltern Lives*.; Bahadur, *Coolie Woman*.; Goffe, "Intimate occupations."
[282] Goffe, "Intimate occupations."; Goffe uses coolie narratives to expose the inner lived experiences of those deemed invisible in colony society. Also see: Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2015).
[283] Nurfadzilah Yahaya analyzes the intersections of Arab migrants in Southeast Asia and colonial law during the Dutch period. See: Nurfadzilah Yahaya, *Fluid Jurisdictions: Colonial Law and Arabs in Southeast* Asia (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2020).
[284] Anthologies: Ponniah and Kulasingham, *Spotlights on the Jaffna in Malaya*.; Singam, *A hundred years of Ceylonese in Malaya and Singapore, 1867-1967.;* Selvaratnam & Apputhurai, *Legacy of the Pioneers*.; Historical publications: Ramasamy, *Sojourners to citizens*.; Sathiaseelan, *Malayan Migration and Jaffna Society*.; Memoirs: Rogers, Jr., *Fifty years in Malaya.;* MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane*.

on family lineage and socio-cultural place in society. Both types of sources provide clues on the visibility of the community. How did this exposure influence memory and contemporary national narratives?

Though they tell fictional stories, novels from the past 20 years have drawn from the historical circumstances between colonial Sri Lanka and Malaysia during the economic boom of the 1920s and depression of the 30s. These stories give an example of classification of Jaffna Tamils, as well as, their identity formation as influenced by relationships between officials, missionaries, and upper- and middle-class families.

One literary example is Shyam Selvadurai's 1998 novel, *Cinnamon Gardens*. The story paints a nuanced picture of competing loyalties between Jaffna, Colombo, and colonial Malaysia through the family history of the Kandiah family. In the early 1900s, Murugasu Kandiah shocked his village in Jaffna when he beheaded the gods in his familial shrine and converted to Christianity. He married Louisa Barnett, who hailed from a long-established Christian Tamil family.

The Barnetts did not approve of this union, as Murugasu was too new a convert to be considered a true Christian for the family. Despite this, the young couple ran off to Malaysia to make their fortune by purchasing a rubber estate. Though the characters are fictional, the novel depicts in an imaginative sense, the ways migration, religion, and socioeconomic status not only influence but also affect the lives of South Asian families living under the British colonial system.[285]

Like the fictional Kandiahs, the experiences of Jaffna Tamils throughout the British empire speak to the connections across its various locales. For Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars like Murugasu, knowledge making during the early to mid-nineteenth century directly tied into the socioeconomic and sociocultural factors occurring back home in Jaffna, down into Colombo, and further abroad to colonial Malaysia. These connections influenced the lives of Sri Lankan Tamil families across generations. Their lived experiences were also influenced by interaction with both British colonial officials and other local communities across colonies such as other Tamils, Sinhalese, Malays, Chinese, and Eurasians.[286]

[285] Shyam Selvadurai, *Cinnamon Gardens* (New Delhi, India: Penguin Books, 1998).
[286] For additional fictional examples see: Rani Manicka, *The Rice Mother* (London: Penguin Books, 2002).; R. Manicka, *The Japanese Lover* (London: Hachette UK, 2010).; For academic and non-fictional accounts see.; Ponniah and Kulasingham, *Spotlights on the Jaffna in Malaya*.; Ramasamy, *Sojourners to citizens*.; Sathiaseelan., *Malayan Migration and Jaffna Society*.; Selvaratnam & Apputhurai, *Legacy of the Pioneers*.

These various interlocutors held a variety of jobs and social statuses in colonial society. Fictional family history narratives found in novels expose the making of bourgeois colonial subjects. Differences in religion and socioeconomic status played out within the small number of Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia and despite their limited numbers, loyalties and adjacency to those in power came to inform ties to other groups, as well as, colonial officials.

As a collective, the experiences of the Kandiahs' illustrate the religious efforts of missionaries and the colonial socioeconomic development between different locales of the British empire as seen through Chapters One and Two. Their story speaks to the enlistment of sub-elite colonial subjects as white-collar migrants navigating the politics of European influence in the region by serving as intermediaries through civil service work and community associations among higher positioned- and middle- to lower- positioned groups in the colony.

This chapter adds to the fictional narratives of the past 20 to 30 years with the historical context of two specific cartoons, family history memoirs, census records, civil service documentation and anthology description. These sources display the performance of *being seen* as respectable colonial subjects, as well as, power relations in cosmopolitan colonial societies. Memoirs, anthologies, and cartoons juxtaposed with civil service documents contribute to understanding the evolution of diasporic identities of Jaffna Tamils living across the British empire and their place in colonial Malaysian society next to other colonial subjects. Diasporic identities refer to the markers of internal cohesion and external display of culture (language use, food, music, dress, etc.) among a diaspora. It encompasses the imagined or real links to the original homeland and the changes to these connections in the country of settlement.

The early to mid-twentieth century shapes the identities of Jaffna Tamils living in colonial Malaysia turning them from sojourner, migrant, and finally to diaspora. Bounded agency is one way the group navigates competition from other groups in the colony and the rule of British officials. This influences the transition from sojourner to permanent migrant. Their agency is directly affected by the transition of eliteness (landed wealth, education and opportunity) back in Jaffna to competing loyalties in a cosmopolitan ethnically diverse colonial Malaysian society.

Practices uprooted from one colony to another such as educational, religious, and economic networks aided in the creation of a Jaffna Tamil identity in colonial Malaysia. The visibility associated with the group would connect Jaffna Tamil Christians with their Jaffna Tamil Hindu counterparts, as well as, Chinese, Indian,

Malay and British associates. Interactions with other local subjects influenced not only their image in the colony but also the formation of new identities in response to perceptions and classifications of adjacency to British officials. The status and image of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars next to other ethnic groups over the period spanning WWI to the 1930s provides context for the identity formation of colonial migrants in the grips of British cultural domination around the globe.

This is highlighted through examples of census records, civil service documents, cartoon portrayals, and memoir recollections, including a song, throughout the following sections of this chapter. Section 3.2 provides a historical framework to the evolution of diasporic identities among Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia. Following this section, section 3.3 uses census records and memoirs to show colonial favoritism as a result of adjacency as familiars and strangers to British officials. This favoritism leads to further economic and social opportunity. Section 3.4 continues this analysis using memoirs and civil service documents to explore life as a civil servant in the colony from the Jaffna Tamil perspective. The next section, 3.5 adds another layer of analysis through cartoons produced by other groups in the colony such as Indian Tamils and Eurasians. Finally, section 3.6 brings these competing narratives full-circle with the socio-economic, and socio-cultural circumstances during the Depression years of the 1930s. The next section explores the historical context for colonial subject making and the ways this status affected the lives of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars.

3.2 | Being seen: Visibility of sub-elites

During the colonial period, political, social, cultural, and religious categorizations of local communities were repurposed and specified by European colonial officials. However, in her most recent work, Nurfadzilah Yahaya provides a different perspective on the making of colonial categorizations by turning to the gaze of Arabs living throughout the Indian Ocean region. Arab merchant communities, particularly living in the Dutch East Indies, influenced colonial jurisdiction for their benefit at a time of fluid and contested law-making in the colonies. For Yahaya pluralism in law and local communities created an environment for multiple possibilities in legal regimes. She notes, "British and Dutch jurisdictions expressed very specific relationships between territory, authority, and forms of law, and it simultaneously puts into stark relief the preponderance of diasporic Arab merchants generating their own jurisdictions across the Indian Ocean in tandem with those of the European colonists."[287]

[287] Yahaya, *Fluid Jurisdictions*, p. 5-6 of Kobo E-book version.

As sub-elite agents in colonial society, Arab communities in Southeast Asia used the ambivalence of colonial law-making to benefit their own socio-economic, -religious, and -cultural networks. Adjacency to colonial jurisdiction, strengthened their own position and influenced the development of European sovereignty in the region.

Similar to Yahaya, the work of Lees also adds a window into the mechanisms employed by sub-elites to maintain a high position in colonial society.[288] These two mechanisms, loyalty and performative Britishness, were by-products of familiarization and stranger-making vis-à-vis colonial officials. Sub-elites were driven to maintain positive relations or loyalty with rulers as defined by their allegiance to the colonial system. Thus, loyalty is at the center of colonial rule. For this chapter, loyalty is reviewed from the translation of legislative language. This gives context to the visibility of Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia.

The British empire is not the only center of power providing us with complex ways colonial interlocutors upheld and accepted the status quo of the time through loyalty. David A. Sartorius emphasizes the relationship between the loyalty of colonial subjects and Spanish rulers in Cuba a century earlier.[289] While the previous century saw the fight for independence in different locations of the Caribbean and Latin America, many Cuban residents remained steadfast in their loyalty to colonial rulers even in the face of rebellions and an impending independence movement.

For Sartorius, colonial subjects were loyal for different reasons. Many Cubans recognized there were many possibilities available to them through their allegiance.[290] These possibilities could be land ownership for the creoles[291] of the island to freedom and closer proximity to rulers for Africans. Everyone in the colonial hierarchy expressed their adherence or rebellion with the Spanish partly in response to the status quo of colonial society. In this way, Sartorius accentuates these contradictory dynamics as a means for rulers to maintain empire and a way colonial subjects navigated the constraints placed on them and the opportunities available under such leadership.[292]

[288] Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects*.
[289] David A. Sartorius, *Ever Faithful: Race, Loyalty, and the Ends of Empire in Spanish Cuba* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2013).
[290] Ibid., p. 4. Sartorius writes, "Rather than identifying the generation of wealth for planters and the Spanish state as the sole end, or goal, of the imperial project, this book emphasizes the multiple reasons that empire lasted so long in Cuba, namely because so many individuals looked to colonial rule to attain a wide variety of ends."
[291] In the Cuban context, creole refers to people of Spanish-descendant born on the island rather than Spain. Culturally they became Cuban rather than Spanish, having never lived in Europe.
[292] Ibid. Sartorius mentions that Cubans tested the limits of empire to acquire the best lives possible under colonial rule.

Other authors of the colonial period emphasize the place of loyalty in the greater functioning of an empire. Whether Spanish, British, French, or Portuguese, empires historically have relied on the making of loyal subjects to aid in the maintenance of their power. This has taken the form of loyal soldiers, missionaries and civil servants.[293] These different functions were intertwined in the hierarchization of subjects throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For instance, the British empire in eastern Africa saw the intertwinement of specific ethnic groups with soldier work. M. Osborne describes the recruitment of the Kamba to serve as military personnel and soldiers in colonial Kenya. They were sought after for their loyalty in a similar vein as other groups like the Sikhs of the Punjab region of colonial India and Gurkhas from colonial Nepal. The Kamba themselves were quite proud of their reputation since it provided them with status above other groups in the colony. [294]

Besides soldiers, previous chapters have shown missionaries and civil servants as agents of empire. For colonial Malaysia, missionary schools and the English-language courses they provided were in high-demand. Lees notes that English language defined status and access for the communities studying under such schools. This performance of Britishness or acquisition of language was the gateway to higher status for such communities. Schooling and language were forms of learning to be British. For colonial multi-ethnic Malaysia, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries influenced "the forms and rhetoric of British colonial subjecthood, which spread well beyond the small British-born population."[295]

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[293] For works on elite solider formation throughout the British empire see the following works. For Gurkhas or soldiers originally from Nepal and Sikhs, originally from the Punjab region see: Mary Katherine Des Chene, *Relics of Empire: A Cultural History of the Gurkhas, 1815-1987.* PhD Dissertation, Anthropology (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1992).; Darshan Singh Tatla. "Sikh Free and Military Migration during the Colonial Period," *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration* (1995): 69-75.; Gavind Rand, " 'Martial Races' and 'Imperial Races': Violence and Governance in Colonial India, 1857-1914," *European Review of History: Revue Europeenne d'historie* 13, no.1 (2011): 1-20.; Anjali Gera Roy, "Soldiers, Artisans, Cultivators and Revolutionaries: The Movement of Sikhs in the Indian Ocean," *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 9, no.1 (2012): 1-19.; M. Osbourne, *Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya: Loyalty and Martial Racer Among the Kamba, c. 1800 to the present*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).; For works on elite local missionary formation across empire see: Oddie, *Hindu and Christian in South-east India*.; Neill, *A History of Christianity in India*.; Frykenberg, *Christians and Missionaries in India*.; Chima J. Korieh and Raphael Chijioke Njoku (eds.), *Missions, States and European Expansion in Africa*. (New York: Routledge, 2007).; For works on the making of a colonial civil servant elite see: Lawrance, Osborn, and Roberts, *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks*.; Pairaudeau, Mobile Citizens.

[294] Osbourne, *Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya*, 3.; Cynthia H. Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided Societies* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1980).

[295] Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects,* 146-47; 155.

In turn, all three- soldiers, missionaries and civil servants, are examples of how those under colonial rule were both subordinate to European officials but also structured their interactions to obtain a comfortable position in society, showing their agency. Tamil civil servants in French Indochina demonstrate the way local communities show loyalty to colonial rule yet their ambitions also disclose loyalty to the collective. These different lines of loyalty played out over the colonial period. It was their loyalty that enabled them to become French citizens in the colony. This gave them access to positions needed to maintain their comfort between French India and Indochina. They were both loyal as French citizens and as South Asians.[296]

Competing loyalty is a theme also seen in the works of Yahaya and Lees. While Yahaya emphasizes Arab influence on colonial law-making and jurisdiction in the Indian Ocean World, Lees shows the differences in everyday life for various colonial subjects under the hand of colonial bureaucracy. This chapter deviates from the two by turning to the ways Jaffna Tamils navigate being seen in colonial society. Visibility added to opportunity in employment and movement between colonies through the gaze of Jaffna Tamils. Being seen tells us about the intersections of compliance, non-compliance and authenticity for subject-making during the British colonial period.

Cultural authenticity during post-independence is a direct legacy of colonial legislation.[297] Focusing on Indian Tamils, anthropologists Richard Baxstrom and Andrew C. Willford take a historical view of the (de)humanization and subject-making of Tamil plantation workers in colonial Malaysia and its influence on the contemporary experiences of the group.[298] For instance, Willford examines the tie between historical notions of ethnicity and religion to their contemporary conflations. Baxstrom frames colonial and post-colonial experiences through Foucault's analysis of systems of thought and governmentality.[299]

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[296] Pairaudeau, *Mobile citizens*.

[297] Willford, *Cage of freedom*, 1-2.

[298] Richard Baxstrom, "Governmentality, Bio-power and the Emergence of the Malayan-Tamil Subject on the Plantations of Colonial Malaya," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 14, no.2 (2000): 49-78.; Willford, *Cage of freedom*.; A. C. Willford, *Tamils and the Haunting of Justice: History and Recognition in Malaysia's Plantations* (Singapore: NUS Press and University of Hawaii Press, 2014).

[299] Baxstrom, "Governmentality, Bio-power and the Emergence of the Malayan-Tamil Subject on the Plantations of Colonial Malaya."; Baxstrom cites Foucault's concept of systems of thought in his Footnote 4, p.50: Michel Foucault, "Candidacy presentation: College de France, 1969," in Paul Rainbow (ed.). Robert Hurley. (trans.) *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth-The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 1.* (New York: The New Press, 1997).; For Foucault's discussion on governmentality, see Baxstrom's Footnote 6, p. 51: Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (eds.) T*he Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991): 102-103.

Though these Foucauldian concepts originally describe the socio-economic and political development of Europe, Baxstrom juxtaposes these concepts onto the colonial and post-colonial domain of Southeast Asia. The hierarchization of colonial society fits the evolution of bureaucratic classifications of subjects in a given area to the official governing apparatus of the colonial regime and finally to notional classifications that apply to different ethnic groups occupying the colonial space. These classifications influence all levels of society from the social to the cultural and economic and even personal, down to the individual level.[300]

This affected the inner and outer experiences of colonial subjects through the jobs they acquired, the clothes they wore, the community organizations they developed and attended, magazines and newspapers they read, and the schools they sent their children.[301] In the last years of the twentieth century into the early years of the twenty-first century, scholars such as Wickramasinghe and DeAlwis focused on the way colonial rule became represented on the body. In some instances, the non-elite were called by local leaders to disregard western dress for local fashions. Some colonial subjects used clothing as one avenue to resist the entrenchment of colonial rule.[302] However, scholars like Wickramasinghe also show that elites used clothing to signify their status in society. For instance, urbanized, educated and English-speaking elites wore western clothing to showcase their proximity to Western rulers.[303]

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[300] Baxstrom, "Governmentality, Bio-power and the Emergence of the Malayan-Tamil Subject on the Plantations of Colonial Malaya," 51.

[301] For colonial examples see: Yen Ching-Hwang, "Class Structure and Social Mobility in the Chinese Community in Singapore and Malaya, 1800-1911," *Modern Asian Studies* 21, no.3 (1987): 417-445.; Dalia Chakrabarti, "The Cartoon of a Bengali Lady Clerk: A Repertoire of Sociological Data," *Sociological Bulletin* 53, no.2 (2004): 251-262.; Walker, "Intimate interactions."; Kaamya Sharma, "The Orientalism of the Sari-Sartorial Praxis and Womanhood in Colonial and Post-colonial India," *South India: Journal of South Asian Studies* 42, no.2 (2019): 219-236.; For an anti-colonial take see: Marc Rerceretnam, "Anti-colonialism in Christian Churches: A Study of Political Discourse in the South Indian Methodist Church in Colonial Malaya, 1890s-1930s," *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 25, no.2 (2010): 234-61.; For post-colonial examples see: Ranggasamy Karthigesu, "The Role of Tamil Newspapers in Ethnic Cultural Continuity in Contemporary Malaysia," *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 4, no.2 (1989): 190-204.; James Gomez, "Consolidating Indian Identities in Post-independence Singapore: A Case Study of the Malayalee community," *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 25, no. 2 (1997): 39-58.

[302] Malathi de Alwis, "The Production and Embodiment of Respectability: Gendered Demeanours in Colonial Ceylon," In Michael Roberts. (ed.). *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited, Vol 1.* (Colombo: Marga Institute, 1997): 105-144.; De Alwis, "Maternalist politics in Sri Lanka."; Nira Wickramasinghe, *Dressing the Colonized Body: Politics, Clothing, and Identity in Sri Lanka* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2003), 60-61. Wickramasinghe writes about the preacher Anagarika Dharmapala's call for Sinhalese men and women to disregard western dress and emphasize local fashions during the early twentieth century.

[303] Wickramasinghe, *Dressing the colonized body,* 60.

Another scholar, Chris Wilson provides an example of elites and western dress from the South Asian diaspora of East Africa. For the scholar, both elite and non-elite diasporas utilized outer appearance as a strategy to showcase their status and climb the colonial ladder. While previous works have analyzed the portrayal of dress as a weapon of subalterns, Wilson includes those from elite circles. The act of being seen included the everyday experiences of colonial subjects, regardless of their place in the hierarchy of colonial societies like Malaysia.[304]

The behaviors of colonial subjects, whether school attendance or clothing, were consequences of the way colonial rulers governed a region. Rather than strictly ruling over subjects with an iron fist, colonial authorities governed by pervading the psyche of colonial subjects at the macro-level, i.e.- economic and political practices in place, to the micro-level, i.e.- family and the individual, in turn influencing all the ways of being seen.[305]

Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler demonstrate the ways European culture and political spaces were influenced by its colonies but also became remade by colonial encounters, something Homi Bhabha refers to as a form of mimicry.[306] He states, "... mimicry emerges as one of power and knowledge."[307] Taking from Edward Said and Samuel Weber, Bhabha shows that by mimicking colonial rulers, colonial subjects garner a power to navigate the challenges of colonial rule since they are reformed as a recognizable Other that is "a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite."[308] European rule became the cultural standard while the difference between colonial subjects and rulers was on full display.[309]

Colonial Malaysia was an arena of the same othering and familiarization seen in many other European colonies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The daily

[304] Chris Wilson, "Dressing the Diaspora: Dress Practices Among East African Indians, circa 1895-1939," *Modern Asian Studies* 53, no.2 (2019): 660, 662.; Wilson takes from Terence Turner's 1980 work "The Social Skin," which details the universality of dress across societies. See: Terence Turner, "The Social Skin," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2, no.2 (2012): 486-504.

[305] Baxstrom, "Governmentality, Bio-power and the Emergence of the Malayan-Tamil Subject on the Plantations of Colonial Malaya."; Baxstrom mentions the tie between Foucault's thoughts on governmentality and systems of thought with Machiavelli's The Prince. Machiavelli conceives of governing over others through influencing their ways of being, changing their systems of thought to fit within the purview of those holding power.

[306] Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1.

[307] Ibid, 153.

[308] Ibid., Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978): 240.

[309] Cooper and Stoler, *Tensions of Empire*, 346.

procedures of the colony meshed with the recruitment efforts of civil servant staff and shipping operations aimed at pulling immigrants to the colony.[310]

No matter whether reviewing colonial Africa, South Asia or Southeast Asia, one thing remains similar. Scholars are seeking to iron out the ambivalent space found in colonial rule-that of domination from officials, participation by officials and subjects, yet also navigation and resistance from subjects.

Diaspora formation during the colonial period is usually described from modes of hierarchization found in the archive. However, like previous chapters, by including sources beyond the colonial archive, the story of the Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars provides a unique perspective on loyal colonial subject making in Malaysia. As Lees states, "Willingness to be called a British subject meant far more than expression of loyalty to the British crown."[311] It was used as a means of maneuvering the constraints of a colonial environment.

Despite being such as small ethnic group in Malaysia, there are varied experiences within the Jaffna Tamil diaspora based on religious background and linguistic level. However, from official colonial correspondence, it seems Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars came to represent all facets of the community. How was this so? By examining the notion of loyalty from the elite to middle echelons of the group, this chapter shows the multiple loyalties within the Jaffna Tamil diaspora through the challenges experienced within British authority and the monopolization of jobs next to other groups in colonial society. Taking WWI as the starting point, the following sections give voice to the intersections of loyalty, performing otherness, and subject-making for the minority within the minority.

3.3 | Migration increase, colonial favoritism, and Jaffna Tamils

Between the first World War and the 1930s, the Jaffna Tamils experienced both an increase and decrease on the acquisition of civil service jobs. During the years just prior to the first World War to the early 1920s, the Jaffna Tamil population in colonial

[310] Kernial Singh Sandhu and A. Mani (eds.), *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: ISEAS Publishing, 2006).
[311] Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects*, 160.

Malaysia increased by about 77 percent.[312] As seen from Chapter Two, population increase in Jaffna influenced migration movement outside the region to the south of Sri Lanka and further abroad to British Malaysia.

The good fortune acquired abroad encouraged more students to attend missionary schools. Once they were of the appropriate age, they would desire for candidacy in the civil service. Competition for jobs in the first decade of the twentieth century combined with recruitment practices pushed migration. Thus, from the census of 1901, Malaysia saw the most substantial migrant increases from the region between 1891 and 1901 (see Table 2.1, Ch. 2). This expansion would continue into the 1910s and early 1920s. Table 3.1 shows the population increase of Jaffna Tamils into the urban areas of the Federated Malay States by 1911.

TABLE 3.1 | Sri Lankan Tamils in the Federated Malay States, 1911[313]

States	Numbers
Selangor	2,824
Perak	1,692
Negri Sembilan	861
Pahang	626
Total	6,003

Urbanized population increase correlated with Jaffna Tamils working the civil service of the colony. The increase among Jaffna Tamil migrants who could read and write overall streamlined the group to serve in such positions abroad. Table 3.2 shows this increase among male and female Jaffna Tamils from 1901 to 1921.

TABLE 3.2 | Literacy rate increases of Jaffna Tamils of colonial Sri Lanka[314]

Year	Male		Female	
1901	1,655	-	577	-
1911	1,962	+ *19%*	850	+ *47%*
1921	9,531	+ *386%*	2,423	+ *185%*

[312] Sathiaseelan, *Malayan Migration and Jaffna Society,* 41.; BL: *Census of Ceylon* 1921.
[313] Ibid.
[314] BL: Census of Ceylon 1911, 100-101. These pages show the increases between 1901 and 1911.; Census of Ceylon 1921, 196.; Sathiaseelan, Malayan Migration and Jaffna Society, 11.; Sathiaseelan uses the Census of Ceylon 1946, 106 and Census of Ceylon 1921, 110.

As Table 3.2 shows an increase in the amount of Jaffna Tamils who could read and write, particularly of those educated in missionary schools, over the first twenty years of the twentieth century. By 1921, literacy among men had increased by about 386 per cent while woman had an increase of 185 per cent.[315] According to Sathiaseelan, "Census statistics for Jaffna District from 1871 to 1931 show a very mild growth when compared to other districts and migration was a deciding factor in it. The least growth of 1.2 percent in 1921 is attributed to plague and migration."[316] Over the course of 1911 to 1921, the Jaffna Tamil population in colonial Malaysia increased to 7,000 families making the link between population increase in Jaffna and the migration out of the region to Malaysia directly tied together.[317] By 1921, Jaffna Tamil migrants lived across the western Malaysian peninsula in the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States, and Unfederated States due to the focus on infrastructural and economic development. See Table 3.3 below.

TABLE 3.3 | Colonial Sri Lankans in British Malaya, 1921[318]

Location	Straits Settlements	Federated Malay States	Unfederated Malay States
Indians*			
Males	1,055	6,591	791
Females	259	908	214
Total	1,314	7,499	1,055

*Sathiaseelan notes that Indian stands for both Indian Tamils and Jaffna Tamils in the colonial Sri Lankan census. However, the majority of these people were Jaffna Tamils.

During the 1910s, literacy and educational background are some factors of structural agency contributing to the monopolization of civil service jobs for Jaffna Tamil migrants to Malaysia. The experiences of World War I (WWI) served as a catalyst to solidify Jaffna Tamil relations with British officials. This helped the community navigate the challenges presented to them throughout the 1920s and 30s such as competition from other ethnic groups in the colony. How would WWI influence relations between colonial subjects and officials? Let's turn to the start of the war.

The year 1914 saw the beginning of WWI throughout Europe. Southeast Asia was relatively spared of the war minus the German and Austrian possessions such as

[315] Census of Ceylon 1921, https://archive.org, 196.
[316] Sathiaseelan, *Malayan Migration and Jaffna Society*, 11.
[317] Ibid.
[318] Ibid, 44.

Tsingtao in China. Thus, for most inhabitants of the region, WWI or as it was known then, the Great War, was a distant thought. The only exception was independent Thailand whose king, Vajiravudh, declared war on Germany and Austria in 1917 and sent troops to France to aid the Allies in the war effort.[319] For the colonial Southeast Asian territories, though the war was not felt through invasion, it was rather experienced as opportunity. The war placed European authority in the region in an awkward position. It was at war, that Britain's jurisdiction over colonial Malaysia could be weakened since resources and attention were given to the success of the Allied war front.

This directly influenced how colonial subjects saw their colonial officials. Specific to Malaysia, the Jaffna Tamils aided the British during this uncertain time. For instance, in 1915, there were riots in Singapore. On 15 February 1915, Urdu speaking sepoy soldiers of the 5th Light Infantry took part in a mutiny of the British army on the island. They released German prisoners of war at the camp there and proceeded to kill 30 British and Indian soldiers and civilians. The memoir of the MacIntyre family noted that Dr. E.T. MacIntyre was placed in charge of the Special Constabulary or special police force to aid in the round-up and conviction of the rebel soldiers. In total 202 sepoys would be found guilty of rebellion.[320] A member of the Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar community was at the forefront of helping the British restore order after this uprising.

MacIntyre is an example of individual loyalty and alignment with colonial officials during the 1910s. However, the Jaffna Tamil community as a whole would also go on to display one of the largest testaments of their loyalty towards the British by gathering a total of 2,250 Pounds to purchase a plane for British efforts during World War I. This acquisition occurred in 1915, after which the Jaffna Tamil community named the plane Jaffna (See Figure 3.1 below). Dr. E.T. MacIntrye presented the plane to the British.[321] Through displays of patriotism, Jaffna Tamils continued their aim of remaining in the favor of the colonial rulers vis-à-vis the other various Asian communities populating the colony. How would Malaysian born Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars navigate the ebbs and flows of colonial authority and favoritism throughout the decades? How would this go on to influence their visibility as both subordinate and sub-elite colonial subjects? The next section examines these questions through colonial correspondence and memoir recollections.

[319] Thep Boontanondha, "King Vajiravudh and Making His Military Image," Paper presented at the 8th Singapore Graduate Forum on Southeast Asian Studies (2013).
[320] Heather Streets-Salter, "The Local was Global: The Singapore Mutiny of 1915," *Journal of World History* 24, no.3 (2013): 539-540.; MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane,* 67.
[321] MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane,* 43.

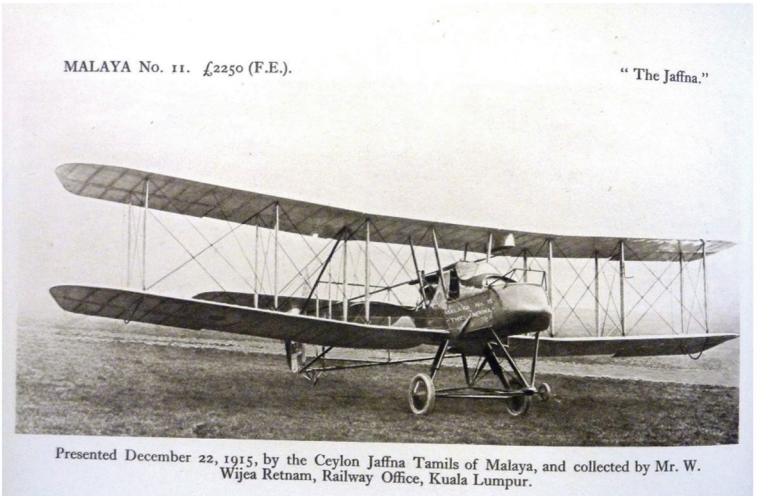

FIGURE 3.1 | The Jaffna[322]

3.4 | Jaffna Tamils as civil servants

In his memoir S.C. MacIntyre paints a picture of not only successes for his father upon retirement from the civil service, but also failures, as well. During 1918, the MacIntyres were enjoying the fruits of their labor with the purchase of a model T-ford car, the acquisition of more properties on Parry Road, Princess Road, and Circular Road in Kuala Lumpur, as well as, jungle land in Sungei Besi for the purposes of building a rubber plantation there. It was in this year that the Spanish flu wreaked havoc on the inhabitants of peninsular Malaysia so to combat the disease, through his connections with the Empire Dispensary, Dr. E.T. MacIntyre was able to open his own dispensary. The following year he was appointed as a life governor of the Chinese Maternity Hospital, made member of the Sanitary Board, selected to serve as a Justice of the Peace and continued his religious leadership by being recognized by the Y.M.C.A. for his involvement in Christian events and affairs.[323]

[322] The Jaffna. Presented 22 December 1915 by the Ceylon Jaffna Tamils of Malaya and collected by Mr. W. Wijea Retnam, Railway Office, Kuala Lumpur. Note: According to Capt. Elmo Jayawardena, a replica of the plane resides in Melbourne at the Point Cook Air Force Museum. See article in Daily Mirror Sri Lanka-Jayawardena, Elmo, "An Aeroplane named 'The Jaffna,'" *Daily Mirror* (March 13, 2018). www.dailymirror.lk/article/An-Aeroplane-named-The-Jaffna--147175.html

[323] MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane,* 44.

Two years later, in 1921, S.C. MacIntyre completed his Junior and Senior Cambridge examinations and studied for further qualification so he could gain admission to law school in London. He goes on to note that during that year, the family's model-T ford car was replaced with a seven-seater Chandler. From the outside the family seemed to be the example of the perfect migration story, the migrants who made it. However, behind this frontal image of success, was also an inner financial crisis for the family. S.C. MacIntyre states, "Father was in the midst of developing the jungle land in Sungei Besi into a rubber estate at the wrong time with borrowed capital, and his investment soon turned into a white elephant. All his properties had been charged to raise the money for development and the continuance of the slump ruined him financially."[324]

MacIntyre goes on to note how his father expressed his worries and grieves in his diary, noting on the 13th May 1921, "Times are hard. Managing to get through. It is a question of five loaves among five thousand people."[325] Thus, despite the fortunes afforded the MacIntyres, as well as, other Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars, many from the group still endured struggles as a sub-elite. This goes back to their subordinate status regardless of having proximity to colonial institutions.

MacIntyre comments that during this time his father's salary was not small, however, the responsibilities back home in Jaffna such as economic aid for parents and relatives back home added to his financial obligations. According to the Thesavalamai, it is parents' duty to support their children in youth. In turn, as children grow and become adults, it is their obligation to financially support their parents in their elderly age. If children failed in their duties to their elderly parents, then parents could revoke property rights from said children, disinheriting them.[326]

Besides, these socioeconomic bonds back in Jaffna, Dr. MacIntyre also had to rise to the responsibilities of his own nuclear family. Not only was tuition money needed for his son S.C. MacIntyre's education in England, it was also required for his daughter Glady's education at medical school, daughter Evelyn's education at C.M.S. Ladies College and Ceylon University College back in Colombo, and his youngest son's education, as well.[327] Combine all of this with the debt of his failing plantation and one can see that the climb for elite status in the British empire was a path full of personal difficulties and outside challenges. The narrative of the Jaffna Tamil

[324] Ibid.
[325] Ibid, p. 45.
[326] Ramasamy, *Sojourners to Citizens*, 19.
[327] MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane,* 44.

Christian Vellalars both served as the example of success but also provided evidence for the strains of becoming a colonial elite. These were two sides of the same coin. How did the Jaffna Tamil monopoly over civil service positions during the 1920s play a role in this combined subordinate and sub-elite status?

By the early 1920s, the Jaffna Tamils formed the backbone of the colonial Malaysian civil service. This was possible with the steady move between Jaffna and peninsular Malaysia of qualified Jaffna Tamil Christian and Hindu Vellalars to fill in middle ranks of the colonial civil service. These civil servants monopolized on positions mainly in the states of Perak, Selangor, and Pahang. See Table 3.4 below.

TABLE 3.4 | Jaffna Tamils in colonial Malaysia (by State)- 1911- 1921[328]

State	Year 1911			Year 1921		
	Total	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**
Penang	**-----**	-----	-----	**326**	263	63
Malacca	**-----**	-----	-----	**255**	190	65
Perak	**1,692**	1,382	288	**2,208**	1,634	574
Selangor	**2,824**	2,399	425	**4,110**	3,302	808
Negri Sembilan	**861**	715	46	**1,327**	1,024	303
Pahang	**626**	578	48	**750**	631	119
Johore	**-----**	-----	-----	**452**	356	96
Kedah	**-----**	-----	-----	**377**	285	92
Perlis	**-----**	-----	-----	**18**	11	7
Kelantan	**-----**	-----	-----	**149**	130	19
Trengganu	**-----**	-----	-----	**9**	9	------
Total	**6,003**	5,074	807	**9,981**	7,835	2146

By 1911 there were 1,692 Jaffna Tamils living in Perak, 2,824 living in Selangor and 626 living in Pahang. A total of 6,003 Jaffnese Tamils were living in peninsular Malaysia by the time. Of this number there were 907 women who had joined their husbands to the colony.[329] Johor would eventually become another state with a significant population of Tamil civil servants of Jaffna origin.[330]

[328] Sathiaseelan, *Malayan Migration and Jaffna Society*,46.
[329] Ibid, 41.
[330] MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane*.

These numbers increased between 1901 to 1911. Sathiaseelan provided evidence of this from both colonial Sri Lanka censuses. He noted that the census of 1901 alluded to the fact that the Jaffna Tamils were "a singularly industrious and economical race."[331] Similarly, the 1911 census mentioned that "one of the most remarkable features of the past ten years has been the steady flow of Jaffnese to the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States."[332] Similar to other groups throughout empire like the French Indians of Indochina and Kamba soldiers of Kenya, references like these of the Jaffnese Tamils in official colonial censuses show us that the British view of the group was more favorable as compared to other groups.[333] It is not overly ambitious to connect this view with the British targeting the Jaffna Tamils to work in the civil service. It also shows us that there indeed was a significant enough movement between the two colonial locales for the census in colonial Sri Lanka to mention this as a statement in its appendix section.

By 1921, the report of the colonial Sri Lanka census also particularly made note of the heavy migration of Jaffna Tamils between Jaffna and peninsular Malaysia, specifically for civil service clerical employment.[334] While looking ahead to the 1930s, the colonial Malaysia census of 1931 provided numbers for the total amount of Jaffna Tamils in the colony as 14,500.[335] Following this analysis of the numerical breakdown of the group, we ask ourselves just what was the social narratives of Jaffna Tamil visibility as civil servants in the colony? In the next section we will review this visibility through the act of performing as British colonial subjects.

3.5 | Civil servants performing Britishness

The correlation between the rise in Jaffna Tamils living in colonial Malaysia and those working for the colonial Malaysian civil service is more than evident. From Chapter Two we reviewed the cadet examinations from 1909 calling for natural-born subjects of British or Asiatic descent to apply for candidacy for the civil service in colonial Sri Lanka. However, when it came to the call for this same candidacy in colonial Malaysia, there was only a call for those of European descent. During the late nineteenth into early twentieth century, Jaffna Tamils were not necessarily taking examinations to acquire positions in colonial Malaysia. Rather, as the letters of

[331] Sathiaseelan, *Malayan Migration and Jaffna Society*, 43.
[332] Ibid, 44., Make note of the official use of the term 'Jaffnese' to describe members of the group in colonial correspondence.
[333] Osbourne, *Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya*.; Pairaudeau, *Mobile citizens*.
[334] Sathiaseelan, *Malayan Migration and Jaffna Society,* 43.
[335] Ibid.

encouragement for 1867 and 1875 tell, they were following their British counterparts to the frontier colony to serve under their bosses in the civil service on the peninsula. A similar narrative follows into the decade following the 1910s.

Into the 1920s, the British government sought to increase British civil servants working in the colony. We can see this from a set of documents concerning the recruitment of candidates to serve in the colonial Malaysian civil service.[336] These documents are important for finding a middle ground between the perspectives of colonial officials and Jaffna Tamils living in Malaysia. It is through this analysis we can come to understand the experiences of colonial subjects.

Colonial policy changes from 1926 to 1927 are important for reviewing civil service recruitment during the late 1920s. During these years, British officials[337] back at the metropole's Home Office analyze the state of the civil service by changing the age of recruitment and introducing a different examination system. A conference was specifically called to create additional propaganda efforts to recruit subjects of British descent for the Malaysian civil service, as there was a lack of interest during this time similar to what we see in 1909. There were two reasons for the lack of interest among British descent candidates. The first reason: many candidates applied for the Indian civil service as it had fostered a reputation as the most prestigious colonial civil service. The second: there was an idea that India was better for one's health as there was a cold season unlike Malaya. This was said to make India a more desirable location from a medical standpoint.[338] Because of this, during the 1926-1927 recruitment year, there were more unfilled vacancies than expected for the Home Office in regards to the colonial Malaysian civil service.[339]

Besides figuring out ways how to attract British descent subjects to the colonial Malaysian civil service, the conference also pondered ways to discourage those of Asian descent from applying. One particular point of conversation describes the difficulties native-born candidates posed to the colonial Sri Lankan civil service. The

[336] In this section, the author utilizes colonial Malaysian civil service records from the National Archives at Kew Gardens in London. They are found in the CO273 series for Colonial Malaysia and make up the years 1926-1932 and includes information on the recruitment process, testing process, and petitions from individual civil servants concerning their pensions and salaries.

[337] These British officials include: Mr. Ellis, Mr. Ormsby Gore, Mr. Windstedt, Mr. Marriott, Mr. Alexander, Mr. McElderry, Mr. Gordon Guggisberg, Sir Gilbert Grindle, Mr. Rankine, Mr. Samuel Wilson, and even a reply from King George V.

[338] NAUK: CO 273/539/3- *Recruitment policy for the Malayan Civil Service.* Letter signed from Walter D. Ellis, 5 May, 1927. London: National Archives, Kew Gardens, London.

[339] NAUK: CO 273/539/3. In 1927 there were only 9 out of 19 vacancies filled for the Civil Service in colonial Malaysia.

Under Secretary of State, Walter Ellis stated, "In view of the complications arising out of the appointment of Ceylonese to the Ceylon Service, I presume we must take it that the 3 Ceylon vacancies for Europeans will be filled in any case."[340]

The saturation of Sri Lankans including Jaffna Tamils in the colonial Sri Lanka civil service had been an advantage but also inconvenience from the view of officials. Ambitions to not only work the middle echelons of the civil service but climb into higher positions tied to notions of equality and status as elite colonial subjects, as well as, civil servants. Yet under colonial rule, these ambitions went against the British hierarchical system of the time. Just as this was true for colonial Sri Lanka, it became valid for colonial Malaysia, as the Jaffna Tamils were permeating the colonial Malaysian civil service, as well.

Colonial officials wanted to curb the influence of Asian civil servants through the implementation of a new testing system which would hold higher standards for admission to higher positions in the civil service. During the conference, President of Raffles College in Singapore, Richard Olaf Winstedt proclaimed, "As regards Malaya, what we say is that we cannot get our recruits and that the present form of examination is not bringing out candidates."[341] Colonial Secretary Hayes Marriot responded with,

> *"I do not think we are wedded in the Straits to a competitive examination. As long as we can get suitable candidates of the right caliber, we really do not mind...We do look at the educational standard as being a very serious one. We are constantly being attacked from the native point of view. They say, 'Why cannot we come into the administrative billets?' We have always had the answer, 'Because you are not fitted for it; the standard of the Civil Service is such that you would not get into it even if you went in for the examination.' We have to be careful that we have still got that argument up our sleeves..."* [342]

This exchange shows the reader two displays. The first: the civil servant point of view. In the case of the colonial civil services though some local communities, in this case

[340] Ibid, 7.; Mr. Walter D. Ellis served as the Under-Secretary of state during this time. You can find more information on Walter D. Ellis, the Under Secretary of State of Colonial Office London in Colin Mackie, *A Directory of British Diplomats* (London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Historians, 2014).
[341] Ibid, 18.; Richard Olaf Winstedt was member of the Legislative Council in the Straits Settlements from 1924-1931. He held other prominent positions in the colony such as the first President of Raffles College Singapore. He was member of other colonial educational boards in the colony. See: Richard O. Winstedt, *Malaya and Its History* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951).
[342] Ibid.; Hayes Marriott was Colonial Secretary until retiring from 32 years of service in 1928. Upon his retirement, the Straits Times proclaimed him "a servant of the empire." See: "Retirement of Sir Hayes Marriott," (26 Dec. 1928). *The Straits Times*, 11.

the Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars, were able to remain in the favor of the British for lower positions, they still experienced and endured discriminatory practices when their numbers were too high or they wanted to reach for more elevated positions. The second: the official speculation of local communities gaining too much clout or power in the civil services leading to a call to curb their entry into official offices through stratification of recruitment. Marriot continued his suggestion by noting that the Malaysian civil service cannot accept anyone with lower than a First- or Second-class honors from Cambridge or Oxford.[343] These strict requirements could disqualify many candidates of Asian descent since according to Winstedt, they pose a threat to the position of British officers.[344]

Winstedt took such discouragement a step further with the suggestion of a competitive exam. He noted, "The main reason we want a competitive examination today is to keep out Asiatics. I am speaking for Malaya."[345] Parliamentary Under-Secretary William Orsmby-Gore then retorted mentioning that an examination still was not necessary since many locals will not meet the requirements of First- or Second-class honors at British universities.[346] The exchange continued with a debate concerning whether to implement testing or not. The ensuing debate and conference ultimately argue about the weakening of colonial hierarchy and Asian civil servants becoming too comfortable in British spaces of authority.[347]

Becoming too much like the British became taboo and colonial subjects balanced their double consciousness as both loyal subjects and strangers.[348] For officials there was agreement concerning a need to curb the amount of positions available for Asian applicants and an increase to those available for British candidates since they did not want British candidates to fear having to work under Asian leaders in the civil service.[349] The anxiety of British candidates were not the only ones on display from these arguments. Rather, we can take away the fact that British officials at the

[343] Ibid.; William George Arthur Orsmby-Gore, 4th Baron Harlech was a British conservative politician and banker. He was Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the colonies in the late 1920s. He served as Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1936 to 1938. He had a long career as politician after serving in World War I See: W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore, "Report by the Right Honourable W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore, M.P. (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies) On His Visit to Malaya, Ceylon, and Java during the year 1928," (London: Colonial Office, 1928).
[344] Ibid, 20
[345] Ibid, 19.
[346] Ibid, 20.
[347] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*; Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects*.
[348] Ibid.
[349] NAUK: CO 273/539/3, 21.

metropole were continuously developing policies within empire to balance power dynamics between officials and subjects.

This was the attitude at the metropole. What about the British view in the colony? The conference conveners complained about the chances of applying this in the colony. Towards the conclusion of the conference, Ellis alludes to this obstacle. He regarded the following: "Under the present system of examination they are really not in the hands of the Secretary of State, except in name; the Civil Service Commissioners nominate the people, and we have to take them, and so it is not so easy to get up propaganda as if the posts were really ours to give."[350] There is a disconnect to the ways of rule at the metropole and in the colony. Though the Home Office could dictate the initial standards for candidacy to the civil service, it was ultimately within the authority of the Civil Service Commissioners who could nominate and subsequently choose a candidate for the colonial civil service. This is how, despite, the discriminatory policies put in place, the preference for Jaffna Tamils to serve in colonial Sri Lanka and colonial Malaysia civil services outweighed such potential obstructions.

If we take a step back, we can see why this concern for the saturation of the colonial Malaysian civil service infiltrated the minds of British officials. As the numbers of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars show, there was a steady flow of civil servant workers to the frontier colony from the late 1890s to 1910s, and then further into the 1920s. This significant arrival of colonial subjects within the offices of the empire, were on one hand a much-needed asset for the British, as Jaffna Christian Vellalars served as middle men. Their visibility also worked against them, so much so that a conference was called to restrict the amount of access colonial subjects could have in such an authoritative space.

The resulting visibility of the group influenced not only colonial officials but also other local communities living throughout the colony. These perspectives were displayed publicly through cartoons. Cartoons are important documents to read beyond the archive since they provide us clues for understanding the representation of a community. As Stuart Hall proclaimed- meaning is produced and exchanged between a society's member through representation. This representation takes the form of not only language but also images.[351]

[350] Ibid, 22.
[351] Stuart Hall. (ed.), *Representations: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 1997): 1-11.

In the case of colonial Malaysia, language is represented through official colonial documents and memoir narratives concerning Jaffna Tamils and other groups. Images are represented through cartoons. Dali Chakrabarti suggests the importance of using imagery in conjunction with written word as a way to make meaning of ideas surrounding the subject. She states, "Any cartoon has 2 elements: a drawing and an idea. It is a complete construction. A good cartoon does not need a caption. In a single frame, using only black and white, the whole argument is expressed. The cartoon is predominately critical in nature, though funny in form, and despite its narrow range, it records significant changes in society."[352]

During the 1930s, these cartoons offered readers commentary on socio-cultural and socio-economic developments in colonial society. They speak volumes on how a particular community is seen by others and comes to represent themselves through their reaction to such images.[353] Two cartoons of Jaffna Tamil migrants serve as examples for the relationship between Jaffna Tamils, British officials and other ethnic groups in the colony resulting from diasporic experiences (See Figure 3.2).

FIGURE 3.2 | Jaffna Tamil in Malaya- Indian Cartoonist[354]

[352] Chakrabarti, "The cartoon of a Bengali Lady Clerk," 252.; Also see: J. Berger, *Ways of being* (London: BBC, and Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972).; Roland Barthes, *Image-music-text.* (Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath) (London: Fontana Press, 1977).; Elizabeth Chaplin, *Sociology and Visual Representation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

[353] Ibid.

[354] Ponniah and Kulasingham, *Spotlights on the Jaffna Tamils in Malaya*.

Figure 3.2 shows a newspaper cartoon of a Jaffna Tamil man living in Malaysia. This depiction is from the viewpoint of an Indian cartoonist. A few details stand out when we glace at this image. For one is the style of dress of the Jaffna man. The man's dress imitates the western style through his top hat, umbrella, two newspapers, loafer shoes, and long overcoat. The clothing and stance of the two men standing in the background also serve the colonial gaze through their western suits and cane, as well as, their proximity to a western style fenced home which appears to be on an upper middle-class street. The man's appearance still has elements of upper-class Tamil features, as well. This can be seen through his neatly trimmed mustache.

In her 2003 work on *Dressing the Colonised Body*, Wickramasinghe states, "Authenticity can be likened to a collective dream which calls for material proof."[355] This cartoon represents the convergence of western clothing, a Tamil mustache and proximity to an upper middle-class neighborhood. It speaks to this notion of authenticity since it is through their dress, physical appearance with emphasize on a mustache, and housing that we see the inner workings of showcasing a westernized Jaffna Tamil authenticity. Western clothes contradicted the weather of the region. However, more local styles of clothing were associated with localized communities. Western styles of clothing, on the other hand, fit within the image of being closer to British rulers.

Nonetheless, two specific features still reveal the attachment to Tamilness in this cartoon: the mustache and the man's brown skin. Over the centuries the mustache in Tamil societies was/still is correlated to masculinity and wisdom. It was also associated with higher castes and higher social status in society. It is often depicted in classical Tamil art, poems and literature with descriptions and images of high caste men with long hair including long beards and big curled mustaches.[356] The Indian cartoonist illustrates the Jaffna man with a more westernized version of the Tamil mustache which is shorter and trimmed, as this was the way to adjust local customs to the fashion and rule of the British colonizers. In a way it was the acceptance of changing times, or the acceptance of a British version of modernity. The symbol of Tamil wisdom and masculinity is was detailed but from a westernized point of view. [357]

The man's posture and appearance are very much British with the significant differentiation between him and the British rulers being his brown skin. Hence, turning back to Wickramasinghe, this image provides not only context for how the

[355] Wickramasinghe, *Dressing the Colonised Body*, 70.
[356] V. Ayothi, "Extract from Tamil oral literature Mukkoodal Pallu," *Indian Literature* 51, no 6 (2007): 142-144.
[357] E. Annamalai, "Changing Society and Modern Tamil Literature," *Mahfil* 4, no.3/4 (2003): 21-36.

Indian community in Malaysia viewed the Jaffna Tamils but it also shows us that the Jaffna man was seen as absorbing the dress and practices of British rulers to fit more easily into the framework of the oppressive system around them, essentially transforming to gain from- and remain seen in- the colonial structure.[358]

The Indian cartoonist depicted the Jaffna Tamil as an upper middle-class figure and though westernized in his image, he still seems to hold on to an air of independence and sophistication. In Figure 3.3, the Eurasian cartoonist had a different take on the image of the Jaffna Tamil in the frontier colony. The first aspect of the image that jumps out to the viewer is the fact that the Jaffna man is walking behind the British man with an umbrella. The umbrella seems to be for the British man's use, as if at any moment the Jaffna man will open the umbrella and hold it up for the British man if it begins to rain. While, in the first picture, the umbrella could have either been just for the Jaffna man, or maybe the Indian cartoonist was also making a connotation to this servitude of the Jaffna man for their British superior. Another feature of the cartoon shows us that the Jaffna man is much shorter and slighter in figure compared to the tall and broad British man connoting that the British man holds power over the Jaffna man. The British man also seems to be giving orders.

Despite this, both men are dressed the same and at first glance, the viewer may think both men are placed on more equal terms. Taking a step back, however, we can infer that though the equal dress showcases the Jaffna man's adjacency to British officials, it also shows us the negative overtone of the Jaffna man being in the shadow of the British man. He is the subservient follower of the British and looks up to the ruler in an almost childlike manner with a big teeth-exposed smile.

The difference of the Eurasian cartoonist's depiction of the Jaffna Tamil is not only satirical, it also uncovers rivalries between the Jaffna Christian Vellalar community and the mostly Christian and English educated Eurasian community in Malaya during this time. Both cartoonists confirm that the Jaffna Tamil had a specific place in Malaysian society and their image was ingrained among various communities. One thing is clear, the Jaffna Christian Vellalar was associated with the middle class and the civil service. On the one hand their style of dress and emulation of British habits and customs was seen as a determined attempt to reach an equality with the colonial rulers since they placed their loyalties with them, just like the Eurasians.

[358] Wickramasinghe, Dressing the Colonised Body, 70.; In speaking about the colonial period of colonial Sri Lanka Wickramasinghe states, "...customs, practices, food and dress habits of visitors and conquerors were absorbed and transformed with little reflective feelings of guilt."

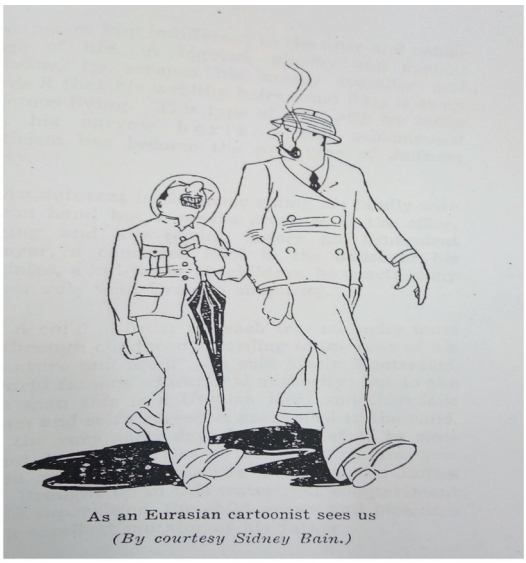

FIGURE 3.3 | Jaffna Tamil in Malaya- Eurasian[359]

To some this was either admired while to others it was ridiculed. Through their illustrations, cartoonists relied on caricature of Jaffna Tamils to showcase the place of this particular community in colonial society.[360]

Interesting enough these two cartoons were found in an anthology written by Jaffna Tamils in the 1930s.[361] The anthology included not only the cartoons but served as a who is who of Jaffna Tamil society in the colony. As the start of the 1930s saw a decline in civil service recruitment from Sri Lanka for locally-born recruits, as well as, a threatened global economy during the depression years, Jaffna Tamils sought to permanently settle in the colony and showcase their contributions to the colony through such a work.[362]

[359] Ponniah and Kulasingham, Spotlights on the Jaffna Tamils in Malaya.
[360] Christopher P. Lehman, The Colored Cartoon: Black Representation in American Animated Short Films, 1907-1954 (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007): 3.
[361] Ponniah and Kulasingham, Spotlights on the Jaffna Tamils in Malaya.
[362] Ramasamy, *Sojourners to citizens*, 96.; Ramasamy cites the following: Hindu Organ, 4 April 1925, 3. He writes, "Before the 1920s the idea of settling down in Malaya was never given any serious thought by the Jaffnese. Almost all of them returned with their families to Ceylon on retirement. Then, as a result of a change in official policy to recruit local-born candidates for government service, the idea of settling down in Malaya was first discussed in 1925 in a series of letters to the editor of a local newspaper in Jaffna. It expressed views that the Jaffnese who had contributed immensely to the early development of Malaya, should settle in Malaya and partake in its further development. It was argued that conditions in Jaffna were not sufficiently favorable to accommodate the increasing population should employment opportunities in Malaya be closed for them."

They displayed these cartoons with pride showing that identity is not permanent and changed depending on who was speaking and showcasing it. Quoting Stuart Hall, "Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation."[363] It is this juxtaposition of their identity in relation to British ways of being that positioned Jaffna Christian Vellalars as a privileged community while still experiencing constraints within the colonial system. Their identities were not solely based on outward familiarization with the British but also the inward realization of the pressures of colonial categorizations.

Jaffna Tamils used their adjacency to British officials to remain visible subjects showing their agency to navigate the colonial apparatus. This agency allowed them to evolve and change in a cosmopolitan society where fluidity and limitations guided position in society. Depending on the favor of colonial officials, one's climb on the colonial social ladder was seen as threat or asset. Therefore, though these images paint a perceived picture of the Jaffna Tamil in the favor of the British, it also alludes to the difficulties this community had when maneuvering colonial networks, showcasing their contested categorization among British and other communities in the colony. As an agent of empire, the group had to tread a fine line of ambition by remaining in what the British deemed *staying in their place.*

3.6 | Conclusion

This chapter has added a new understanding on the making of visible colonial subjects. Loyalty and adjacency were mechanisms used by Jaffna Tamils to assert their dominance or remain seen in the colonial civil services and respond to the challenges and constraints presented by colonial officials. Loyalty, in particular, served as the emotion and action needed to manage many different colonial domains. As emotion, loyalty was portrayed through the imagined and real benefits of alignment with-, beside-, or outside- the common rule of the land. As action, loyalty among colonial subjects took the form of employment, educational indoctrination, and cultural practices aligning Jaffna Tamils and others with colonial rulers.

English language skills became the bargaining position for these middling and elite local groups for the education and cultural aspirations available to them. This double

[363] Stuart Hall. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 392.

consciousness formed middling groups into loyal subjects of colonial rule yet it also gave access to spaces usually closed to other communities in the colony, especially during the first World War and subsequent socio-economic development after the war into the 1930s.[364]

The legacy of interaction with colonial missionaries and British officials from the early nineteenth century back in Jaffna to the initial migration process in the late nineteenth century into early twentieth century influenced the more favorable view of the group by British officials. In turn, the Jaffna Christian Vellalars saw their educational background as a gateway to civil service positions and access to British spaces and consequentially monopolized on such employment during the early twentieth century.

As we saw from the two cartoons, Jaffna Christian Vellalars sought to access such spaces through their day-to-day dress, behavior such as speaking English, and through their grooming habits. The body became a representation of navigating colonial rule since it showcases their image in the likeness of those in power. Some of the more successful sojourners like the MacIntyres, portrayed this navigation by owning plantations. Family lineages and networks were used by the Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars to promote their ties and loyalty to the British. However, their *Tamilness* as seen through their skin and mother tongue, did not provide full access to these British spaces.

At the advent of the migratory process, these sojourners faced a new world ahead. Despite the various castes in Jaffna society, they were leaving a relatively homogenous locale for a heterogenous cosmopolitan peninsula. It was here that their climb on the colonial social ladder would be rift with competition from a variety of ethnic groups, all with their own idiosyncrasies and reasons for gaining or rebelling against the favor of the British. This would lead to two sides of the same coin- garnering the respectability of colonial officials while not crossing the line into the realm of British power.

[364] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.; Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects*, 148.; For constructions of identity and place in society for South Asians living in colonial Malaysia and Singapore see: Rajesh Rai, "'Race' and the Construction of the North-South Divide Amongst Indians in Colonial Malaya and Singapore," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 27, no.2 (2004): 245-264.; R. Rai, *Indians in Singapore, 1819-1945: Diaspora in the Colonial Port City* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).; A. Mani, Pravin Prakash, and Shantini Selvarajan., "Tamil Community and Culture in Singapore," in Mathew Mathews (ed.), *The Ethnic Mosaic: Many Cultures, One People* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2017).

Because of this, the categories defining Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars were contested. They were on the one hand, highly represented in positions just below the British, a sub-elite. While on the other hand, their clout was often disenfranchised when they demanded the continued favor of their group. Then during the late 1920s into early 1930s, the group, along with others was seen as having too much influence in the colonial civil service. The British began giving preferential treatment to Malays who were campaigning themselves as the sons of the soil or *bumiputera*. To appease the Malays and keep their hold on Malaya, the British turned to limiting the number of spots available for non-Malays in the civil service through official recruitment policy while increasing those available for Malays and those British subjects of *pure* European descent on both sides of their families. This made the place of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars in the cosmopolitan society coded.

Besides, the 1930s saw the curbing of migration of Tamils in general from both India and Ceylon. In the case of India, the colonial Indian government complained about the treatment of indentured laborers from Tamil Nadu and thus banned the continue migration of the group to the colony.[365] In the case of Ceylon, migration slowed down due to the lessened recruitment of Jaffna Tamils for the civil service, as well as, the independence movement happening there. The Jaffna Christian Vellalars felt that their influence was waning. However, if the security of their influence was so vulnerable, did they ever have real authority in the first place? What does this say about the navigation of colonial entities from the perspective of those under its rule?

Competition in colonial society influenced local communities to advocate their accomplishments and note their legal status as British subjects. They advertised how they were a benefit to the larger society. They worked to consolidate the portrayal of their community into one distinctive narrative about the meaning of being a Jaffna Tamil living in Malaysia solidifying their place as a permanently established diaspora. The Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars were one part of the Jaffnese migrant community. There were also Jaffna Tamil Hindus, as well as, other South Asian communities.

The South Asian communities face the problem of others, both British and Malay and non-Malays alike regarding them as a monolith. Through preconceived notions, they were placed under one umbrella concerning what it means to be a South Asian in the colony. As Malaysia becomes more polarized during the 1930s, some South Asians like the Jaffna Tamils narrated *Jaffnese-Malayasianess* from their perspective.

[365] BL: IOR- *Report on the Conditions of Indian Labour in Malaya by the Right Honorable V.S. Srinivasa Sastri,* 1937.

Yet, through their interactions with British officials, they were ultimately still subordinates hoping to enter elite spaces. However, a group is never a monolith. There are many opinions vying to be heard, making the process of solidification dynamic and full of convulsions. In the process of navigating empire, the Jaffna Tamils became identified as a particular group. They became a sub-elite within the British colonial system teaching us about formulations of race and categorization leading to new social groups within a world dominated by Western powers. How do Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars tackle these challenges to their position from the British changing their favor to Malays and even Malayalees from South India? How does the community navigate these obstacles in the wake of WWII? Will they remain loyal to the British once the Japanese are in power and Malay nationalism becomes ever more apparent during the war years? Chapter Four will explore these questions at a time of impending war and ideas of nationalism are in competition with colonial rule.

CHAPTER 4

A colonial model minority?: Jaffna Tamils as a complementary community on the eve of WWII, 1933-1942

4.1 | Introduction

For much of the first half of the 1930s, the world was steeped in extreme poverty and hardship. Trade came to a halt. Food was scarce. And the luxuries experienced by the middle classes became a distant dream of the roaring 20s.[366] Like much of the rest of the world, colonial Malaysia experienced the economic downfall of the early 1930s. And while the previous decades had solidified the dominance of Britain in India, Burma, Hong Kong, and Malaysia, by the depression years, anti-colonial sentiment had taken root among the elites and working classes of South and Southeast Asia.[367]

As global trade significantly dwindled at the metropole, colonial rulers living throughout the colonies sought to maintain the function of empire.[368] However, the economic insecurities brought about by the Great Depression fostered an environment for political and social change. Leaders in the European colonies such as Mahatma Gandhi, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and Subhas Chandra Bose in British India, Sukarno in the Dutch East Indies, and Ho Chi Minh in French Indochina strengthened independence sentiment among the masses while also influencing conversations on who belonged as the indigenous inhabitants of the nation.[369]

Independence sentiments combined with extreme economic decrease. By the early 1930s, prices of goods throughout the colonies increased the pangs of poverty for vulnerable groups while motivating resistance to colonial rule.[370] Though the Southeast Asian British colony was not sparred of the economic effects of the depression, interestingly, Malaysia deviated socio-economically from its South and Southeast Asian neighbors during this time. Similar to India and Indonesia, Malaysia had a multi-ethnic society with competing narratives of inclusion and exclusion and while India sought to gather these different groups under one unified collective of resistance, calls for reform from locals in Malaysia were often compatible with continued British rule.[371]

[366] Dieter Rothermund, *The Global Depression of the 1930s, 1929-1939* (London: Routledge, 1996).; Nicholas Crafts and Peter Fearon (eds.), *The Great Depression of the 1930s: Lessons for Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).; Marc Matera and Susan Kingsley Kent, *The Global 1930s: The International Decade* (London: Routledge, 2017).

[367] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (London: Zed Books, 1986).; Nicholas Tarling, *The Fall of Imperial Britain in South-east Asia* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[368] Tarling, *The Fall of Imperial Britain in South-east Asia*.

[369] Ibid, 16-17. Tarling explores the decline of British empire in Southeast Asia as a result of the depression. British officials gained support of indigenous elites to maintain order throughout their empire.; Angus Mcintyre, "The 'Greater Indonesia' Idea of Nationalism in Malaya and Indonesia," *Modern Asian Studies* 7, no.1 (1973): 75-83.; Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World.*; Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years, 1919-1941* (Berkeley, CA: University of Berkeley Press, 2002).

[370] Dietmar Rothermund, *India in the Great Depression, 1929-1939* (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1992).

[371] Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects*, 233.

A unified anti-colonial struggle did not yet exist in cosmopolitan Malaysia from the early 1930s to the Japanese invasion. Previous decades of colonial acquisition and rule in Malaysia led to the formation of colonial subjects from various communities seeking and acquiring economic opportunity. By the 1920s, Malaysia served as Southeast Asia's powerhouse, influencing trade from India to China. The colony also supplied tin and rubber throughout much of the globe.[372] With the economic downfall, the prosperity of the colony became constrained as a result of a weakened British center. To maintain the function of the colony, the reordering and categorization of local communities fell in line with the economic changes of the time, shaping diaspora formation and the imagined communities of Malaysia's ethnic landscape defining what it meant to be Malaysian whether Malay, Tamil, Chinese, Eurasian, or Arab.[373]

Reordering appeared through official and unofficial recruitment of educated and skilled groups like Eurasians and Tamil civil servants, Punjabi and Nepali police officers, and South Indian Malayalee civil servants and plantation overseers. Migrating as skilled workers influenced their experienced and assumed place in 1930s colonial Malaysia.[374] As privileged subjects, government employees had access to the jobs and income needed to benefit further generations during the economic downturn for two reasons. The first: officials categorized local communities

[372] Ibid, 11.

[373] Crispin Bates' edited volume discusses South Asian elites and their proximity to British rulers during the colonial period, specifically the 19th century and early 20th century. Subho Basu provides a similar account of the Bengali elite, their proximity to British colonial education and the effect this had on elite formation at the local and national level. See: Crispin Bates (ed.), *Beyond Representation: Colonial and Postcolonial Constructions of Identity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).; Subho Basu, "The Dialectics of Resistance: Colonial Geography, Bengali Literati and the Racial Mapping of Indian identity," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no.1 (2010): 53-79.; On page 60, Basu writes, "I argue that to colonized Bengali elites the ideology of race was filtered through concerns about self-identity and thus generated their desire to claim genealogical proximity to ruling European imperial elites." Also see Suraj Yendge's idea of merit in Yendge, *Caste Matters*.

[374] Both Jaffna Tamils and British officials often mentioned the image of the Jaffna Tamil as a civil servant throughout official, anthologies and interviews with Jaffna Tamils. For instance, Jaffna Tamils are noted as the majority of local civil service in the following missionary documentary: Keable, *A History of St. Thomas' College, Colombo.*, Keable mentions on page 182-183 the tie between the St. Thomas school and the recruitment of civil servants.; Official colonial correspondence mentions recruitment of Jaffna Tamils seen in the administration of C.E. Spooner of the Ceylon Public Works Department. Many of the office workers, overseers, clerks and engineers were of Sri Lankan Tamil origin. The railway traffic manager, T.A. Cook, in 1917 directly made a deal for students from St. John's College in Jaffna. These students were recruited as civil servants. From: Thiraganama, "Making Tigers from Tamils,", 270. Thiranagama cites: Singam, *A Hundred Years of Ceylonese in Malaysia and Singapore.;* For colonial reference see: *Ceylonese in Ceylon Sessional Paper IX, 1946.*

according to cultural, linguistic, and religious commonalities.[375] The second: there was conscious and unconscious complacency of such a categorization on behalf of the local community.[376]

From this categorization, it is not surprising that the education and employment experienced in one colony transferred to colonial Malaysia. As we have seen in previous chapters, education and employment translated to jobs in the civil service, access to education and community organizations, such as church societies and state councils, in the new country of settlement, and economic growth needed to open businesses upon retirement. For Jaffna Tamils, this adjacency did not provide total protection, however. Other groups would challenge the position of the sub-elite throughout the 1930s, specifically Malayalees from Kerala and other higher-positioned South Indians.[377] The depression fueled competition from others and barriers to equal opportunity such as more advanced positions in the civil service, served as a glass ceiling. It exposed the commonalities of colonial subjects serving empire to benefit the crown and halted true equality between local communities and rulers.

Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars utilized three forms of communication to navigate these glass ceilings: their word through petitions, their imagined representation through community organizations (church societies' and state councils) and their access to shared knowledge through magazines. These three forms of communication were used as the instruments providing identity markers and socio-cultural and socio-economic spaces for members of the group. The solidification of competing Tamil identities occurred over the course of the interwar years. To explore these three forms of communication, this chapter asks the following questions: How did petitions, community organizations and magazines speak to the consolidation of a Jaffna Tamil diasporic identity in Malaysia needed to circumvent the colonial glass ceiling? How did these forms of communication enable the group to maintain beneficial adjacency to these same regimes on the eve of WWII? What was the extent of Jaffna Tamil influence as a middle group in 1930s Malaysia?

[375] Hirschmann, "The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya."; C. Hirschmann, "The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity in Malaysia: An Analysis of Census Classifications," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no.3 (1987): 555-582.; Frederick Holst, *Ethnicization and Identity Construction in Malaysia*, Vol. 12 (London: Routledge, 2012).; Sin Yee Koh, *Race, Education and Citizenship: Mobile Malaysians, British Colonial Legacies, and a Culture of Migration* (New York: Palgrave EBook version, 2017).
[376] Michael Stenson, *Class, Race, and Colonialism in West Malaysia: The Indian Case* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980): 26.
[377] Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*.

In this chapter I argue that the identity of Jaffna Tamils continued to be a contradictory space since their status as familiar sub-elites to the British, as well as, stranger-subordinates meant migration was a form of class mobility against the backdrop of impediments to equality under British rule during a time of economic constraint and hardship.

Sinnadurai's story, from the introduction chapter, provides just one account of the intersection between the privileged position of Jaffna Tamils, the access they had to colonial officials, and the glass ceiling toward advancement.[378] It is the contradictory experiences of Jaffna Tamils, specifically, Christian Vellalars, that expose the paradox of both subordinate and sub-elite positions as a complementary local community or colonial model minority. [379]

Similar to the model minority myth applied to twentieth century North America, the educational and employment opportunities available to Jaffna Tamils enabled access to socio-economic resources and privileged position in Malaysia garnering them the nickname *Brown Britishmen* or *Black Europeans*. The moniker was expressed by other communities living and working in colonial Malaysia. This nickname, used sarcastically by some and appropriated by others, signified Jaffna Tamils' perceived and real adjacency to British colonial rulers. Their style of dress, speech, housing,

[378] See Chapter 1.

[379] Freida Wong and Richard Halgin discuss the formation of Asian-Americans as a model minority throughout the mid-twentieth century in the USA. This mythization praised the accomplishments of Japanese Americans and other Americans of East Asian descent. This was used against the stagnation of other minority groups in the USA like African-Americans. If one particular group could assimilate into dominant Anglo-American culture, then other communities had no excuse to complain. These tropes were put forth during the 1960s. See: W. Peterson, "Success Story: Japanese-American Style," *New York Times Magazine* (1966): 11.; Frieda Wong and Richard Halgin, "The 'Model Minority': Bane or Blessing for Asian Americans," *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* 34, no.1 (2006): 38-40.; Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).; Sonja Thomas also discusses dominant minority culture of the Malayali Christians of the St. Thomas Church. Despite being such a small minority, they garner privileges similar to high-caste communities while still facing subordination under contemporary governmental policies. See- Sonja Thomas, *Privileged Minorities: Syrian Christianity, Gender, and Minority Rights in Postcolonial India* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2018).

education, jobs, and patronization of social clubs expressed the performance of British colonial culture.[380]

Migration equated to class mobility leading to the formation of the group as a model minority. Resources provided economic wealth for both the Jaffna region and Malaysia during the colonial era.[381] Jaffna Tamil return-migrants remember economic growth as a result of repatriations from migrants living in Malaysia. These fortunes influenced the dowries of Jaffna women engaged to male migrants residing in Malaysia, infrastructural development, and housing acquisition.[382]

Elderly Jaffna Tamils note the monetary assets and subsequent advancement of upper-caste streets in Jaffna as a direct result of resources from migrants in Malaysia and Singapore. Thiranagama notes particular newspapers such as the *Hindu Organ, Morning Star,* and *Jaffna Catholic Guardian* dedicating a separate section to offer news from the relatives and friends in the colony. The relative abroad in Malaysia shaped the image of the prosperous migrant who made it, a complementary local community to British officials.[383]

[380] Many South Asian scholars such as anthropologist Sharika Thiranagama, economic historian Marc Rerceretnam, and others remark on the adjacency to Britishness on the part of some Tamils throughout the colonial world. Thiranagama provides commentary on the establishment of Jaffna Tamils as the 'pen-pushers' of colonial Malaysia. British colonial officials specifically sought out the community from missionary schools in Sri Lanka and placed them in administrative positions. Rerceretnam emphasizes the nickname given to Christian Tamil-Malaysians during the late colonial period: Black Europeans, for this same familiarity to British language and customs. See: Marc Rerceretnam, "Black Europeans, the Indian Coolies and Empire: Colonialisation and Christianized Indians in Colonial Malaya and Singapore, c. 1870s-c. 1950s," Ph.D Dissertation, Economic History, University of Sydney (2002).; Thiraganama, "Making Tigers from Tamils," 269-70 for details on the positions of Jaffna Tamil diaspora in colonial Malaysia.; Sinnappah Arasaratnam, "Historical Foundation of the Economy of the Tamils of North Sri Lanka," in Chelbamayagam Memorial Lectures, Fr. X. Thaninayagam, (ed.) (Jaffna: Saiva, 1986).; As we saw with the cartoons in chapter 3, the relationship between British rulers and Jaffna Tamils was illustrated from the perspective of other communities like Indians and Eurasians. It was also positively used by some Jaffna Tamils to describe their position in colonial Malaysian society.

[381] A variety of sources such as the memoirs of MacIntyre and Rogers mention the connections between Jaffna and Malaysia such as sending children back to colonial Sri Lanka for education, the purchase and maintenance of plantations in both colonies, and visits to family. See: Rogers, Jr., *Fifty Years in Malaya*.; MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane.*; Scholarly interviews with descendants of Jaffna Tamil return-migrants also emphasize the economic ties between the two colonies. See: Thiraganama, "Making Tigers from Tamils," 270.

[382] Ibid., Also see anthologies: Ponniah and Kulasingham, *Spotlights on the Jaffna in Malaya.*; Singam, *A Hundred Years of Ceylonese in Malaya and Singapore.*; Selvaratnam & Apputhurai, *Legacy of the Pioneers*.; Historical publications: Ramasamy, *Sojourners to citizens*.; Sathiaseelan, *Malayan Migration and Jaffna Society*.; Memoirs: Rogers, Jr., *Fifty Years in Malaya*.; MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane*.

[383] Ibid.; *The Morning Star* provided news concerning the Protestant religious groups in Jaffna, while the *Jaffna Catholic Guardian* did the same for the Catholic community. The *Hindu Organ*, an important newspaper for Jaffna Hindus, spoke to the Hindu community. See: S. Katiresu, *A Handbook to the Jaffna Peninsula and a Souvenir of the Opening of the Railway to the North* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2004).

Their status was similar to the more modern notion of the model minority. The model minority idea is steeped in tropes regarding the success of Asian-Americans as seen through their educational and socio-economic adjacency to mainstream American culture. The myth serves to compare and contrast the variety of communities in the United States. In the contemporary era, this categorization associated with the level of success obtained by successful versus unsuccessful migrants is ingrained in the socio-economic framework of American society. The categorizations of minority groups are not an invention of recent years and though the experience of Jaffna Tamils is situated in early years of the twentieth century and in a different location, the mythization around their position influences their communal and individual experiences in a hierarchized society vis-à-vis other groups living in colonial Malaysia, something strengthened over the 1920s and 1930s.[384]

During the colonial era this categorization proved advantageous but also limiting for the Jaffna Tamils. I have covered the advantages in previous chapters. Here I turn to the ways such a status did not fully protect the group against competition from other complementary local communities like the Malayalees. From the 1920s to the 1930s, the Malays and Malayalees began to gain the attention of colonial officials and they became the two groups also sought after for civil service work as a result of the move to maintain good relations with Malay groups and to offset the expenses of Jaffna Tamil civil servants. Malayalee recruits worked for lesser salaries, a much needed relief to colonial officials during the depression years.[385]

In less than a generation, the Malayalee group would double their numbers compared to the Jaffna Tamils. As the Malayalee population increased over these years, the Jaffna Tamil community remained a small part of the larger Tamil community at about 13,648 by 1935.[386] Competition with other groups become apparent from changing attitudes throughout the 1920s and 30s. Complaints as seen through petitions allude

[384] For works including important information regarding the legacy of hierarchization in colonial Sri Lanka see: Alicia Schrikker, *Dutch and British Colonial Intervention in Sri Lanka, 1780-1815* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).; James S. Duncan, *In the Shadows of the Tropics: Climate, Race, and Biopower in Nineteenth Century Ceylon* (London: Routledge, 2007).; Sivasundaram, *Islanded*.

[385] Ramasamy, *Sojourners to citizens*, 98 states, "In the plantation sector the Ceylon Tamils faced stiff competition from the Malayalis from Kerala in South India who offered themselves to work for much lower salaries."

[386] NAUK: CO882/17- *Eastern No. 170 Malay States:'Policy of Decentralization and Constitutional Reorganization*.' "Letter from S.W. Jones, F.M.S. High Commissioner to Secretary of State concerning Ceylon community in Malaya representation on councils and other public bodies."(1940).; Clarence E. Glick, "The Changing Positions of Two Tamil groups in Malaysia 'Indian' Tamils and 'Ceylon' Tamils," Paper presented at Second International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies. (Chennai, Tamil Nadu, 1968). http://tamilnation.co/diaspora/malaysia/glick.htm

to this development, while local community organization documents provides a narrative on how the Jaffna Tamils networked among themselves to offset rivalries in an evolving cosmopolitan colonial society.

By analyzing petitions, community organizations and, to a lesser extent, magazines, this chapter examines just how influential middling groups were in colonial society. This influence is explored through the following sections: Section 4.2 serves as the historiographical section of the chapter. Next, Section 4.3 uses official colonial correspondence to explore the changing categorizations of colonial subjects in cosmopolitan Malaysia. Using petitions, section 4.4 shows the response from Jaffna Tamils to such change. Through petitions, individuals in the group navigate the hardships of the depression and seek to maintain their position in the colony. Section 4.5 analyzes Jaffna Tamil identity formation through official correspondence while 4.6 uses correspondence from community organizations, and magazines to explore consolidation of communicating the place of Jaffna Tamil-Malaysians in colonial society. The following section places petitions, community organizations, and magazines in historical context, allowing for the exploration of Jaffna Tamils' influential position, social mobility and drive for equality against the backdrop of competition and the emergence of nationalism in the colony.

4.2 | Cosmopolitan hierarchies and the colonial model minority

Cosmopolitanism and British notions of culture and modernity motivated the types of migrants moving between regions of South and Southeast Asia. As diasporas formed, indoctrination into British modernity influenced identity development among the different local communities found throughout the Indian Ocean World. Scholars such as Lynn Hollen Lees, Sunil Amrith, Susan Bayly, and Frederick Cooper among others have written immensely on the topic.[387] In her 2002 work, Susan Bayly analyzes how racial readings of empire communicated notions of modernity to European and non-European locals alike. This shaped colonial society in a categorical and hierarchical order influencing colonial identities and later national ones.

[387] Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society, and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1999).; Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).; Amrith, *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia*.; Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*.; Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects*.

Colonial officials from Western Europe were shaped by ethnological views of the nineteenth century. Ethnology was a research field focused on the study of race. It pushed stereotypes of various ethnic groups living under colonial domains. It influenced notions of inferiority and superiority among different communities. Bayly writes that this "science" emphasized that in order for a group to be considered superior they possessed two significant qualities such as believing in a monotheistic faith and obtaining nationhood.[388]

Following this line of thought European colonial powers placed themselves at the top of such an evolutionary hierarchy yet across their empire they sought out other communities, not directly at the top of this classification system but close enough to aid in the everyday functions of empire. As an example, the French in Algeria and Indochina utilized those ethnic groups which would serve as "suitable clients and military recruits" while remaining in an inferior position vis-à-vis the European ruler.[389] The Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars fit within this framework through their Christian religion and consolidation as a separate community from other groups like Indian Tamils. This was seen through their saturation of the civil services and the definitive ways they are described by British officials showing their assistance to empire as government employees.

The legacy of hierarchization bounds the agency of colonial subjects as they seek to maintain or climb in status in society. The Jaffna Tamils used their agency and maintained their elevated status through petitions, community organizations, and magazines. Their status as a complementary local community or colonial model minority provided access to communicating with the British, a legacy of their agency as seen through familial ties, education, and religious background. However, this status did not protect them from the bureaucratic obstacles in place regarding higher positions in the civil service, pension benefits, and sick leave, as well as, representation in official colonial correspondence regarding identification in colonial documents.

While the duality of privilege and stagnation emphasizes the colonial gaze of creating model minorities, petitions, community organizations and state councils, as well as, magazines allow for the exploration of the Jaffna Tamil gaze. Through their responses to British categorizations, we see how middling groups can be depicted by

[388] Susan Bayly, "Racial Readings of Empire: Britain, France, and Colonial Modernity in the Mediterranean and Asia," in Leila Tarazi Fawaz and C.A. Bayly (eds.) *Modernity and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002): 292.
[389] Ibid, 295.

others and how they see themselves. Friction, competition, and position expose the paradoxes of living as a model minority -a colonial sub-elite, favored yet also limited as subordinates.

Though many in the community showcased the fruits of their labor through their position in society and their socio-economic status, as well as, communal development during mid-twentieth century Malaysia, they still answered to British rule of law and custom. Scholars of the British empire have argued that British officials legitimized their rule by "modernizing" local communities and influencing them to become more like the British.[390] Depending on your place in the hierarchy, you had more or less proximity to British ways of being such as English schooling and employment, Western dress, Western food and drink, and sociability. Initial proximity was accessed by the categories put in place by the British. British officials categorized local South Asians and separated locals from Europeans and also from each other. Continued proximity was gained through communication with officials.

In the post-Rebellion era, British officials utilized imperial multiculturalism. This policy distinguished local South Asians by race, class, and ethnicity. Though these various communities were also placed in a hierarchy of closeness to British rulers, these same officials had no intention of "turning them white."[391] For elites in this hierarchy, from the British standpoint, they were not fully equal to them. This played out in colonial record documentation as well as cultural practices.

Culturally speaking, local Christians were seen as assimilated into western culture. Their habits of daily life, from dress, to the food they ate, and the people they associated with, became scrutinized during legal trials. How anglicized did local Christians become? This was the question on the minds of colonial officials throughout the British empire. From the local perspective, rather than becoming anglicized, they navigated these British social spaces by invoking a different way of being South Asian. These different ways of being incorporated colonial elements forming a new identity. Colonial discourse provided opportunities to circulate within a variety of networks. This identity allowed for room towards equality with rulers. This is why a

[390] Cooper and Stoler, *Tensions of Empire*.; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects*.

[391] Mallampalli, *Christians and Public Life in Colonial South India:* 5.; Mallampalli cites various works regarding indirect rule in different parts of the British empire. For further discussion on the topic he suggests- Sir Frederick Lugard's views on Nigeria in *The Dual Mandate* in British tropical Africa from 1922; Rupert Emerson's *Malaysia: A study of direct and indirect rule* from 1964 and more contemporary works from Mahmud Mamdani (1996); J.C. Meyers (2008); P.J. Marshall (1996); and Nicholas Dirks (2001). See full footnote in Mallampalli (2011).

focus on Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars is significant for understanding who came to represent the Jaffna Tamil community in correspondence with British officials.[392]

Despite their will to be equal to colonial rulers, in Malaysia the British made it known that the Jaffna Tamils were still in a position of subjecthood to the crown. This can be seen with formal interaction between the British and Jaffna Tamils particularly in civil service complaints like that of Sinnadurai and informal interactions through community organizations and magazine columns.[393]

All three types of communication represent forms of agency but also perform the maintenance of the status quos found in colonial society. Writing about petitions, historically, the very act of petitioning has appealed to both ruler and ruled. In the colonial context, petitions served as the official space the ruled could expose their grievances, both collectively and individually. Bhavani Raman examines the use of documentation throughout colonial South India, focusing on the Madras Presidency. She argues that written proof in all its forms such as law, codification, and letters between the metropole and periphery informed the public administration of the Empire.[394] The micro-practices of writing was the key to power relations and influence in a colony. The meticulous practice of maintaining records for every instance of interaction allowed local communities, particularly sub-elite scribes and clerks, to manipulate the details of such documents for their benefit and ease of life under colonial rule.[395]

Raman goes on to cite Veena Das claim that documentation notes the rules of governance but also allows possibility for the performance of mimicry or the performance of such rules to navigate subordination.[396] Raman and others show South Indians using the written word to imitate the rules of those in power through

[392] Ibid, 21.; Hephzibah Israel, "Cutcherry Tamil vs. Pure Tamil: Contesting Language Use in the Translated Bible in Early Nineteenth-century Protestant Tamil Community," In R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.). *The Postcolonial Bible Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).; H. Israel, "'Words…Borrow'd From Our Books': Translating Scripture, Language Use, and Protestant Tamil Identity in Post/colonial South India," *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 15, no.1 (2008): 31-32.
[393] NAUK: CO273/577/17.; See Chapter Three.
[394] Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012): 2.
[395] Ibid.
[396] Ibid, 3.; Raman cites: Veena Das and Deborah Poole (eds.), *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* (Sante Fe: School of American Research Press, 2004).

writing petitions.[397] The Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars are included here. However, petitions and letter writing were not the only form of performance needed to navigate the contradictions of colonial society. I add two other forms to this argument. Colonial sub-elites also come together through community organizations, like church societies and state councils, as well as, magazine subscriptions. This formed a unified identity needed to maintain higher status in a hierarchized society.

Community organizations, whether through the church or secular, combined with magazine readership[398] fostered the notion of an imagined community within the diaspora. The 1930s furthered the reach of print culture across colonies.[399] A Jaffna Tamil civil servant living in colonial Sri Lanka had access to the socio-economic and socio-cultural musings of a fellow civil servant in Malaysia and vice versa. The collective imagination determined what it meant to be Jaffna Tamil living in Malaysia. This definition-making played out in the community organizations of the 1920s and 1930s influencing formal and informal perception of the group vis-à-vis others. Image linked to the maintenance of privileged status. Any limitations presented from colonial rulers could be resisted through representation from community organizations. The next sections examine changes to recruitment of government employees and employs Jaffna Tamil responses to their changing adjacency to British rule.

4.3 | The Great Depression's effect on Jaffna Tamil civil servants

Elite families like the MacIntyres and Rogers (Chapters Two and Three) provide fine-tuned accounts of their rise to success in the colony and also give us glimpses into failures. But the most important takeaway is the fact that their writings display the elite's goal to place themselves in a high position within colonial society. The Jaffna Christian Vellalars were able to draw on their image and connections to appease British rulers when they experienced roadblocks in their climb up the colonial social ladder. Changes in colonial policy during the 1920s towards civil service

[397] See Footnote 66 in Raman citing C. Ramakrishna Sastri, *The Gentlemen's Letter Writer: Containing Useful Letters and Petitions* (Madras: Vepery Missions Press, 1844).; Francis Cody, "Inscribing Subjects to Citizenship: Petitions, Literacy Activism, and the Performativity of Signature in Rural Tamil India," *Cultural Anthropology* 24, no.3 (2009): 347-80.
[398] Rogers, Jr., *Fifty years in Malaya*.; MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane.*
[399] Anderson, *Imagined communities*.; Amrith, "Tamil Diasporas across the Bay of Bengal."; Amrith notes that print culture spoke to many imagined communities of a diaspora not just the national one.

employment waned the favor of Jaffna Tamils as recruits. This had an effect on access to petitions, promotions and retirement. The early 1930s saw the continued policy implementation of preferential treatment for Malay employees in the civil service, as well as, retrenchment and salary decreases for current employees.

In 1933, one particular debate concerning preferential treatment of local Malay communities ensues. Sir Samuel Wilson in 1933 sends a report to the colonial office concerning this discussion by noting, "It is the policy of Government to give qualified Malays preference over other applicants for employment."[400] He noted how this can cause great controversy and jealousy among the different non-Malay communities in Malaya since many offices such as the Railways and Public Works were dominated by Chinese, Indians, and Eurasians. Chinese and South Indian and Jaffna Tamils have already sent in their grievances concerning the topic. As this was the time of depression around the world, Southeast Asia was hit hard by the financial crisis with limited trade of rubber in particular, a staple of the Malayan economy.[401]

This caused the Chinese and South Asian communities to send in questions concerning newer policy favoring Malay employment. Three questions in particular were sent in by non-Malay communities with the most significant being, "Is H.M. Government aware that considerable apprehension exists among the locally domiciled non-Malay population of the F.M.S. that the principle of 'other things being equal' has not been rigidly observed in retrenchment and may not be rigidly observed in future recruitment?"[402] From this question Wilson analyzed that it is evident that the Chinese, South Indian and Jaffna Tamils realized the importance of their contributions to building and maintaining the colony. They felt their place in Malayan society is just as important as the Malays, specifically at a time when ethnic politics in the country promoted "Malaya for the Malays."[403]

Besides the Malay elites, there was competition for government positions from another group during the depression, the Malayalees. Accepting lower salaries, the South Indian group became more attractive recruits during the economic downturn of the 1930s. As evident from the censuses between 1921 and 1937, there was an increase in Malayalee population in the colony. Similar to Jaffna Tamils, Malaylees had the education and English language skills to work civil servant positions yet

[400] NAUK: CO273/591/8- Malayan Civil Service: Admission of Asiatics
[401] Ibid.
[402] Ibid.
[403] Ibid.

as a different linguistic group, they did not have the same investment in Tamil community formation (see Table 4.1 below).

TABLE 4.1 | South Asian communities in West Malaysia from 1921-1947[404]

Community	1921	1931	1947
Tamils (Indian and Sri Lankan)	387,509	514,778	460,985
Jaffna Tamils	10,614	14,500	*15,968
Malayalee	17,190	34,898	44,339
Telugu	39,986	32,536	24,093
Total- South Asians	**444,685**	**582,212**	**545,385**

* The number of 1947 Jaffna Tamils also includes other and indeterminate South Indians.

The exchange led into a discussion on the differences between the various ethnic groups by mentioning stereotypes such as the industriousness of Chinese and South Asians in the civil service and the lack of drive among Malay civil servants. This was used to showcase why civil service departments in the past had preferred non-Malays to Malays. However, this was juxtaposed against the need for maintaining peaceful relations with elite Malays for political and cultural reasons. During the 1930s, many British servants saw the Malays as essential for promoting their interests of rural populations. At the same time, conflicts between various ethnic groups needed to be avoided resulting in recommending and considering the questions sent by the non-Malays to Parliament.[405]

This account shows us on the one hand the racialized attitudes towards the cosmopolitan society of British Malaya and it also shows us how local communities played on these British attitudes of categorization to negotiate benefits in the colonial environment. By promoting their education and status in Jaffna and abroad, Jaffna Tamils defended their desire to maintain positions in the civil service for the

[404] BM: Moruboe Vincenzo Del Tufo, *Census 1947 -Malaya, Comprising the Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore: A Report on the 1947 Census of Population* (1947): 78.; Indians refers to those with ancestry from colonial India and colonial Ceylon.; Numbers for Jaffna Tamil population at 1921 were taken from Sathiaseelan, *Malayan Migration and Jaffna Society.* Footnote 41- Table 3 which comes from *Report of the Census of Ceylon 1921*, Vol. I. Part II, 45-46.; Numbers for Jaffna Tamil population in 1931 were taken Ibid., Footnote 40, Sathiaseelan cites the *Report of the Census of Ceylon 1921*, Vol. I. Part I. Section 15, 110-111.; The Telugu group migrated as workers on plantations. I have not found much more information on this group. It is assumed that they migrated temporarily for work and returned to their villages in south India.

[405] Ibid.

generations coming after them. We can see this in a song by the Jaffna Tamils (see Figure 4.1). It states,

"Sons of Jaffna! We are proud of you.
Dressed in tu-tup, verti or baju.
Clerks and teachers, doctors, dressers too.
Toiling as they never toiled before.
We will make the people understand-
That we can as a community, stand-
Serving well our king and motherland.
Britain is a wide-world friend."[406]

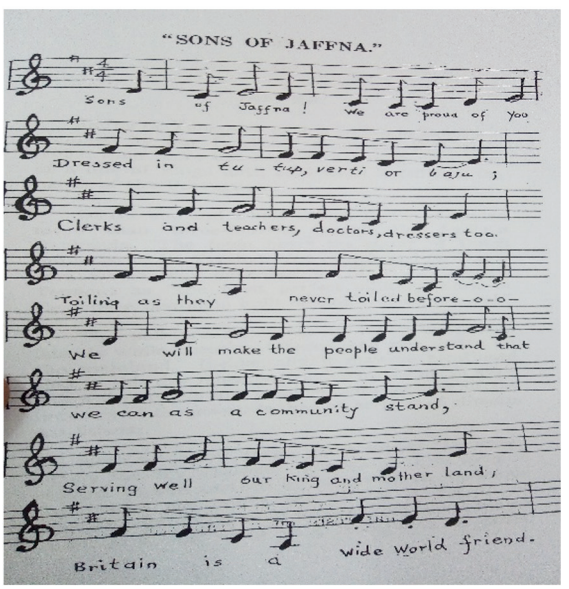

FIGURE 4.1 | Sons of Jaffna Song[407]

[406] Ponniah and Kulasingham, *Spotlights on the Jaffna Tamils in Malaya,* 90.; There is not much information regarding the composition of the song, for instance, there is no information on why the song was written, the exact year it was written and the occasion for its composition. We can infer it was composed between the years 1901-1935 since it mentions the king (either King Edward VII who ruled 1901-1910 or King George who ruled 1910-1936) and the anthology was published in 1935. In the year 1922, Dr. E.T. MacIntyre was presented to the Prince of Wales on his visit to Kuala Lumpur. The song could have also been written for this occasion but there is no information confirming this. See also: MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane,* 46., In a diary entry from 29 March 1922, MacIntyre writes, "Prince arrives. It was a gala day. Thousands upon thousands have congregated at Kuala Lumpur to see him. I was presented to His Royal Highness- a rare privilege. Evening went to the ball where I was again presented."
[407] Ibid.

In this song we see the beginnings of the formation of a Jaffnese-Malaysian identity based on occupation and clothing. This identity served as a way of navigating the challenges posed by the colonial environment. The emphasis on the Jaffna Tamils as clerks, teachers, doctors, and dressers displayed their socio-economic contributions to the colony, while their attire of either the Malay tu-tup, South Asian verti or Chinese influenced baju referenced their status as proud assimilated migrants of colonial Malaya.

Through their clothing they saw their immediate home as Malaysia while they recalled a pride in being from Jaffna. Britain was their friend and this is why they served the king. To the Jaffna Tamils, their loyalty and closeness to the British warranted their continued monopoly on such positions since they sacrificed and contributed to the betterment of the colony or as the song mentioned, they have never toiled so much as of now. Their appeasement to the British in official questions and letters shows us that the cosmopolitan society of British Malaya was a breeding ground for rivalries and judgements from the British to local communities and even local communities towards each other. By showcasing the best qualities of their communities, these groups were boosting the reputation to always keep a high placement in British categorization of various colonial subjects. The next section shows Jaffna Tamil responses to socio-economic depictions of the group in official and informal capacities and examines different forms of communication regarding Jaffna Tamil adjacency to officials and their push-back against rules limiting their influence.

4.4 | Seeking their rightful due as colonial subjects: Jaffna Tamils writing petitions

Petitions are the first form of communication informing Jaffna Tamil identity in cosmopolitan Malaysia. How did petitions expose the glass ceiling within the colony? Firstly, petitions were an important form of communication used by colonial subjects to defend their position, rights, and identity in colonial society. Secondly, taking from Bernard Cohn's writing on colonial forms of knowledge, petitions represented official procedures and correspondence between British officials and subordinates. The questions asked by local communities and the responses received tell a lot about categorization and the formalities of correspondence based on one's subjecthood.[408]

[408] Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*.; David Dery, "'Papereality' and Learning in Bureaucratic Organizations," *Administration and Society* 29, no.6 (1998): 677-89.

C.S. Sinnadurai's 1940 petition displays the mechanisms the ruled used to appeal to authorities. By petitioning on his own behalf, he reveals his objection, essentially protesting his treatment upon his retirement, while still conforming to the language and official processes available for correspondence with colonial officials. Petitioning enabled the ruled to advocate for themselves using the language of rulers. This conformity allowed rulers to maintain and regulate control over subordinates. Sinnadurai is not the only example of an individual from the local Jaffna Tamil-Malaysian community seeking retribution. Other local Jaffna Tamils and other communities would use petitions to navigate and negotiate the privileges of middling and high positions in colonial society. This chapter takes one other example to show the representative role of petitioning on one's behalf. [409]

Just three years prior to Sinnadurai's letter, another Jaffna Tamil migrant made his grievances known to the colonial government. The year 1937 marked eight years since A. Nallathamby retired from the Public Works Department of Perak. In his petition to the Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, W. Ormsby-Gore and the High Commissioner for the Malay States in Singapore, Sir Shenton Thomas,[410] we learn that Nallathamby was seeking his pension for his years of service to the colony. He opens his letter stating, "The petitioner is aggrieved at the treatment meted out to him by the Government of the Federated Malay States after his long and faithful services of 20 years in the Public Works Department, Perak."[411]

Nallathamby opens his letter by mentioning his loyalty to the British as seen by many years of service, a tool used by Sinnadurai three years later in 1940. Petitions are not the only sources emphasizing the loyalty of Jaffna Tamils. Colonial correspondence, memoirs, and secondary literature discuss and analyze Jaffna Tamil loyalty to colonial rule.[412] Loyalty becomes another form of performing Britishness providing

[409] NAUK: CO273/556/14.; NAUK: CO273/577/17.; NAUK: CO850/157/21- Retrenched Officers: Seniority on Re-employment, including Petition by Clerks in General Clerical Service, Malaya 1939.
[410] A Cambridge graduate, Sir Thomas Shenton Whitelegge Thomas served as the last High Commissioner of the Straits Settlements from 1934 to 1942 before being captured as a prisoner of war during the Japanese occupation. After the reestablishment of British rule after the war, he continued his post until the Malayan Union of 1 April 1946. Prior to his years in the British Colonial Service in Malaysia, he served as governor in Nyasaland (today's Malawi). Vernon Cornelius-Takahama, "Past and Present Leaders of Singapore," *National Library Board of Singapore*, March 20, 2012).
[411] NAUK: CO273/623/14- "To: Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, W. Ormsby-Gore and High Commissioner for the Malay States, Singapore- Sir Shenton Thomas. From: The Most Humble Petition of A. Nallathamby, ex-overseer Public Works Department, Krian, Parit Buntar, in the State of Perak, Federated Malay States. Dated 18 August 1937." *Mr. A. Nallathamby, formerly overseer, Public Works Department 1937-1938*.
[412] NAUK: CO273/591/8.

proximity to colonial rulers.[413] It is this performative allegiance that ties Nallathamby to British officials and drives him to seek their help in obtaining benefits that have been denied to him at earlier stages of his career. Nallathamby continues his letter emphasizing his continuous faithfulness and thoughtfulness as an employee of the department for over twenty years in the administration. He evokes the same learned forms of letter writing used for correspondence with high officials.[414]

He goes on to mention his only indiscretion during an illness. This prevented him from working at his full capacity. Despite his illness, the Head Overseer displayed no sympathy. This resulted in negative exchange concerning his work ethic. He was then dismissed in 1929 from his post. In order to appeal to the Principal Secretary of States for the Colonies located at the Colonial Office on Downing Street in London, Nallathamby pleads, "The petitioner spent all his youth and energy in the service of Government and at a time when he expected to reap any little reward or benefit he was summarily dismissed not taking his long service into consideration or sympathy. The result of his summary dismissal has thrown the petitioner into dire misery with a wife and children to care for."[415] Despite his grief, Nallathamby's narration falls on deaf ears as he comments later that his appeals to local authorities and the High Commissioner for the Malay States continuously go unanswered.

Nallathamby's petition must be placed within the bureaucratic legacy of British colonial society. The paper trail dictated official correspondence between officials and colonial subjects. The value of an argument between the two rested on the reliability of official written documentation. For the petition writer, initiating correspondence was their form of agency in preserving their right to voice their grievance. Officials either acknowledged such proclamation with a positive answer or reminded the petition writer their true status vis-à-vis others through a negative response.[416]

Nallathamby follows in the conventions of petition writing of the time by addressing British officials as "Your Honour" throughout his letters. The importance of the address is not the most significant function here, rather it is the maintenance of official language learned from previous networks of knowledge in mission schools

[413] Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects.*
[414] Raman, *Document Raj.*
[415] Ibid.
[416] Dery, "'Papereality' and learning in bureaucratic organizations."

and civil service work.[417] Conventions of address are a strategy used to remain in the favor of colonial officials. What does this address display about bounded agency? While addressing the receiver of the letter as 'Your Honour,' he stated that his last resource was to send a letter to the Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies in London. He wished that the Principal Secretary honored his request for not only his service to the crown but also for the sake of justice as he felt his pension or gratuity, as well as, the grant of passage for him and his family were the benefits rightfully due to him. He continued, "The petitioner has a large family dependent on him and at his declining age finds that he has nowhere to cling to for his future sustenance and rests with the fervent hope that Your Honour will descend on him as his Saviour and mete out justice tempered with mercy in his appeal for assistance."[418] He signed the letter off stating that he prays that the Principal Secretary hears his call and through sympathy and magnanimity provides due justice.

From Nallathamby's point of view, we can gain insight into the tools Jaffna Tamil civil servants and ex-civil servants utilized to maneuver rigid colonial structures. For one, when confronted with an injustice, particularly concerning due salary, pension benefits or other forms of payment, Jaffnese Tamils utilized the perceived modernity brought to local communities by Western powers such as justice. By accentuating his loyalty and faithfulness, Nallathamby like Sinnadurai, hopes the British will take sympathy for his situation providing the justice they purport to bring to local communities throughout their empire. In this way, Nallathamby is continuing to show his adherence to colonial officials while also seeking equality parallel to them. By reaching out to the Colonial Office in London, Jaffna Tamils show that they will not be silenced when local authorities avoid their grievances. Rather they bring their protests to the highest colonial office in London, explaining their cases and seeking retribution such as benefits and passage back to Jaffna, continuing the importance of colonial linkages for civil servants between the two colonial locales.

Another interesting point to review: Nallathamby's address to the Principal Secretary as his potential Saviour. Previous chapters have shown how Christian conversion deemed Asian communities, especially middling groups, as closer to

[417] Raman, *Document Raj*.; Raman notes how the book by Sastri titled *The Gentlemen's letter writer* provided a manual for Indian civil servants to learn the conventions and style of writing official letters, something they would not necessarily learn in school. The two Tamil teachers responsible for the manual wanted to provide a guide for the many aspiring clerks. In this way they would have a head-start in articulating their concerns if such an opportunity presented itself.
[418] NAUK: CO273/623/14.

colonial officials.[419] By promoting his Christian terminology and emphasizing his own religious background Nallathamby makes himself similar to the reader of his letter. On the other end, if we read between the lines, we can infer that the civil servant was using a commonly used British trope against them. Often the colonial trope of saving local communities was exploited by Western colonial powers to maintain order throughout empire.[420]

This is apparent through the strategic targeting of first the education and religious conversion of Tamil Vellalars back in Jaffna and then the recruitment of the same community to serve as civil servants in colonial Malaysia. Further evidence to this comes from the strategic recruitment of non-caste *adi-dravidas* to labor on the rubber plantations and the favoring of the Malay communities to appease Malay Sultans, allowing for the British to dominate the colony under the guise of protecting the local inhabitants, and so on. Thus, as seen through letters written to colonial officials from Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars like Nallathamby and Sinnadurai, we come to regard this inversion of British values appropriated by local colonial subjects.

From the British perspective, it is revealed that they did not show sympathy for Nallathamby's situation. In a response letter from W. Ormsby-Gore, he notes that during Nallathamby's last ten years of service he took sick leave 34 times, making him absent on average three days a year. By mentioning this in his response, Ormsby-Gore suggested that Nallathamby was not as ill as he had previously advised. He continued his letter writing,

> *"The petitioner is about 46 years of age and is now living in Singapore with a man who is employed in the Municipality, and works in a shop near the Royal Air Force Base. He has six children who are in the care of his relatives in Ceylon. He owns some landed property in Ceylon which is said not to be of much value. The Police report that 'his reputation is not bad except that he was dismissed for drunkenness.' Drunkenness is mentioned in a letter to him from the Executive Engineer, Public Works Department, in 1925 but it does not appear to have been the immediate cause of his dismissal."* [421]

[419] See Chapter 1 for discussion on conversion.

[420] See: The 1899 poem by Rudyard Kipling- "The White Man's Burden."; R.A. Huttenback, "The British Empire as a 'White Man's Country'- Racial Attitude and Immigration Legislation in the Colonies of White Settlement," *Journal of British Studies* 13, no.1 (1973): 108-137.; A.J. Stockwell, "The White Man's Burden and Brown Humanity: Colonialism and Ethnicity in British Malaya," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 10, no.1 (1982): 44-68.; Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia during British Rule* (London: Routledge, 2014).

[421] NAUK: CO273/623/14- "Response from the Right Honorable W. Orsmby-Gore, Colonial Office. Dated 14 February 1938."

There are two main functions of this response. The first offers us insight into the perspective of the British. For British colonial officials, such pleas from former Jaffna Tamil civil servants seem to be scrutinized for any discrepancies in the petitioner's narrative, in order to justify the rejection of the grievance. The second function of this response provides clues to the connections between British officials and Jaffna Tamils, as well as, Jaffna Tamils with kinfolk in both colonial Malaysia and colonial Jaffna. Orsmby-Gore mentions that Nallathamby is currently living with a fellow member of his community alluding that his current situation is not as dire as he recommends.[422]

By living with a fellow Tamil, we can see the connections among the community in colonial Malaysia. Furthermore, Ormsby-Gore mentions that the petitioner's children live in Sri Lanka with family, showcasing the continued links to the homeland colony. Children were often sent back to Sri Lanka for educational and socio-cultural reasons as seen by not only the petition of Nallathamby but also from the memoirs of the MacIntyre and Rogers families. In many cases, children would return to Malaysia to rejoin their families and obtain employment in the colony. Other times they would remain in Sri Lanka, splitting families into two different branches across colonial locales.[423]

Another significant feature of connections between Jaffna Tamils living across locales was landed property maintained in Jaffna. Even though this land was of meager value, the fact that Nallathamby owns this property suggests his Vellalar status. Just as the acquisition of businesses enabled an alternative avenue to the maintenance of privilege in colonial society, socio-economic privilege back in Jaffna provided a means to accommodate rejection. As Christian Vellalars were up against the colonial glass ceiling, they sought out these communal connections enabling them to navigate colonial society for their own, as well as, families' comfort.

For the Jaffna Christian Vellalars, their prestigious reputation attached to their former caste would follow them across colonies serving as a benefit at some moments and a source of judgment during others. By owning land, the British see the former civil servants as embellishing their need for benefits. Yet, as even mentioned by the colonial officials, the land is often of little value during the mid-twentieth century. This is the case for a variety of reasons mentioned in earlier chapters such the lack of maintenance of properties by the generation coming up during the late nineteenth to early twentieth century.[424] It was this generation who sought out civil service

[422] Thiraganama, "Making Tigers from Tamils."
[423] See S.C. MacIntyre and Rogers memoirs.
[424] See Chapter 1 and 2.

positions. Other reasons included an increase in population, droughts and overall poverty. In order to maintain or even gain the benefits of this reputation, the Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars sought a better life abroad in another colony of the British empire. It was the imaginative notions of British sympathy and the value of justice driving Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar loyalty towards colonial officials. Loyalty was not necessarily literal. It was also performative and through a performative loyalty they saw a way to climb the colonial social ladder towards equality.

As a colonial model minority, British responses reminded Jaffna Tamils that they were not on equal footing with rulers. They were complementary to British officials in the civil service while they remained subordinate. This led to frustrations within the group and it drove competition within colonial society. Linkages between Jaffna Tamils become essential for navigating competition. The biggest lesson of this exchange and its aftermath, showcases the vulnerability of Jaffnese agency. On one hand, their agency pushed them forward by acquiring employment and a sub-elite status in colonial Malaysia, while on the other hand, it could only bring them so far in their ambition for equality with the British. The British had the final decision regarding the outcome of a petition, yet how would the Jaffnese organize themselves to circumvent challenges from colonial officials and other colonial subjects? Let's take a look at the idea of bounded agency and the formation of community organizations and magazines as tools to strengthen Jaffna Tamil social mobility.

4.5 | Bounded agency and defining the identity of Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia

Jaffna Tamil identity in colonial Malaysia is not only tested, negotiated and revealed through petition writing. Community organizations such as church societies' and state councils also provided a space for Jaffna Tamil community representation separate from other colonial subjects, particularly other Tamil groups. These community organizations defined the characteristics of representation at least on paper. How did forms of community building such as organizations and magazines maintain Jaffna Tamil adjacency vis-a-vis officials? What was the extent of their influence? A report from a state council meeting provides an example. The 1935 *Report on the development of the Selangor State Council*[425] *noted,*

[425] The administrative capital of the colony, Kuala Lumpur, is located in the State of Selangor.

> *An amendment to the definition of paragraph one of the Constitution of State Council was effected, whereby 'Indian' was to be held to include Ceylonese whose fathers or more remote ancestors were natives to India. This was to provide representation for Tamils including Jaffna Tamils of whom there are a large number in the country, many of them better educated than the Indian Tamils of whom most are engaged in labour on estates.*[426]

The attitudes of British government officials spoke volumes to official colonial discourse regarding the Jaffnese community. The High Commissioner of 1940 also noted that the Jaffnese were more cultured and had a higher standard of living compared to the Indian Tamils, illuminating the prejudices held by the British concerning both communities.[427]

Beginning during the earlier British colonial phase, these attitudes would continue to color the interactions between colonial subjects and officials while also providing certain advantages for the more favored community. Opportunities presented to Jaffna Tamils over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provided an awareness of how colonial officials saw them vis-à-vis other groups, particularly in colonial Sri Lanka and Malaysia. This awareness paralleled Jaffna Tamils rise as a colonial model minority.

In many examples from official colonial records (India Office Records and Colonial Office records) the Jaffnese had a direct line of communication to colonial officials, especially at high levels such as with High Commissioners and Secretaries of State. A letter concerning the Sri Lankan Tamil community was addressed to the Right Honorable Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, M.P., His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies and signed by the representatives of the Conference of Ceylon Associations of Malaya- M. Saravanamuthu of Penang (President) and R.V. Karlakandan of Kuala Lumpur (General Secretary). The 1940 exchange points to the racialization of Jaffna Tamils vis-à-vis others and their proximity to British officials. It also details the desire to form a more unified communal identity through the Ceylon Associations of Malaya.

A less unfavorable view of the Jaffnese Tamils takes precedent in British definitions of the group. To clarify, I use the phrase 'less unfavorable' to show the British take on the Jaffnese was not necessarily more positive in comparison to their outlook of the Indian Tamils, rather their image of the community aided in the strategic target of the group to assist in the function of British Malaya. Though described with better

[426] NAUK: CO882/17.
[427] NAUK: CO 273/660/7. Enclosure in No.

terminology, a model minority or colonial complementary community is never the same as the ruling power.

For the Jaffna Tamils this served two purposes. For one, the lumping together of both Jaffna Tamils and Indian Tamils easily could lead to resentments between the two similar yet separate communities influencing the solidified identity formation of the group. Secondly, the Jaffna Tamils could utilize this definition to their advantage enabling them to obtain and maintain representative positions on councils appointed by British officials concerning South Asian communities living in Malaysia. How would the Jaffna Tamils utilize their agency to navigate the contradiction between basking in the advantage of being defined as 'Indian' yet also yearning to separate themselves from the negative connotations associated with being seen as 'Indian Tamil?' Bounded agency contextualizes this contradiction.

The key operating their position in colonial Malaysia was the Jaffnese implementation of their bounded agency. According to Evans, the actions of an agent are a direct result of that agent's belief in their future possibilities. This is based on the personal boundaries developed within the cultural structure of their society. This determines the agent's behavior and their choices.[428] Hence, bounded agency concerns the processing of past habits, routines, and experiences leading itself to future opportunities considered in the exigencies of the current moment.[429] We can see parallels to young Jaffna Tamils entering the labor market in Southeast Asia during the beginning of the twentieth century. This is seen from the previous habit or routine of educational attainment that serve as the first step in Jaffna Tamil bounded agency across locales. Next, is the conversion of some people in this community and finally, it is the realization of employment in the civil service. This drives the socio-economic climb of the group through civil service employment, plantation ownership, relationships with British officials, and networks within the community.

Evans notes that bounded agency has four transition behaviors. These are as follows: strategic behavior, step-by-step behavior, taking chances behavior and wait and see behavior.[430] Strategic behavior can be described as pre-planned actions taken by the agent to acquire upward social mobility or financial stability, among other goals. While, step-by-step behavior relies on an agent experiencing one positive outcome and hoping the next outcome will be the same. Taking chances behavior is similar to

[428] Karen Evans. (2007). "Concepts of bounded agency in education, work, and the personal lives of young adults." *International Journal of Psychology* 42:2, pp.85-93., p. 85.
[429] Ibid.
[430] Ibid., p. 86.

the active strategic behavior in that the agent bases his actions on the preconceived positive outcomes of future possibilities. Finally, wait and see behavior is similar to step-by-step behavior in that the agent takes a more passive approach in realizing the opportunities available to them.[431]

It is plausible to say that the Jaffnese Tamils applied the use of strategic behavior and taking chances behavior to benefit from their bounded agency. Over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was apparent that educational, religious, and socio-economic strategies directly linked to the acquisition of colonial employment and as a consequence, the British left the door open for this group to experience social mobility. Jaffna Tamils take chances to migrate abroad since they strongly feel they will change their position for the better within their community. To maintain their hold on these opportunities, the community would go on to form community organizations for the continued betterment of the group. The next section analyzes two specific kinds of community organizations: church societies and state councils along with magazines.

4.6 | Community organizations and magazines: Consolidating a Jaffna Tamil diaspora

Church societies played a major role bringing together Jaffna Tamil migrants. The MacIntyre family were supporters of this type of organization. For instance, during the 1920s, S.C. MacIntyre sought to start an Epworth League under the Methodist Tamil Church. Though he initially faced some opposition from the Union Epworth League, with the support of church friends, his petition to start the church club was approved. By garnering connections within the Jaffna Tamil network, support of such organizations was possible. The founding of the League was not the only aspect of bringing together the Jaffnese in colonial Malaya. These church organizations often pulled resources together to also provide a weekly or monthly source of communal news. S.C. MacIntyre followed this trajectory by attaching a publication to the Epworth League to circulate the social and literary news of the community. He became founder, editor and publisher of *METELASSON* (Methodist Episcopal Tamil Epworth League and Sunday School Official News). During his departure to study abroad in England during the mid-1920s, this publication came to a standstill.[432]

[431] Ibid., p.86-87.
[432] MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane*, 52.

Though *METELASSON* fizzled out with the editor's departure, it provides an example of how church societies were informally and formally linked to Jaffna Tamil identity in colonial Malaysia. A longer established example of a publication attached to a religious organization was the *Malaya Tamil Church Magazine.* Beginning in the 1920s and continuing into the 1930s, the magazine was published monthly and served as a space for Jaffna Tamil communal imagination from news on religious and social activities, as well as, announcements.

Educational information is also tied into these religious spaces of community development. In the 1919 issue, the writer opened the foreword by mentioning how this magazine was a great establishment for the Christian Tamils who have migrated to British Malaya. The writer went on to say how the magazine should be a source of news to and from the many Tamil Christian congregations in British Malaya from Singapore to Kedah. News should also be included from the homeland, colonial India and Ceylon. The success of the magazine he/she mentioned lied in the "support from all well-wishers [through] articles and notes written by many people so that the interest may continue. Secondly, it will need a large number of subscribers."[433] With a significant number of supporters, the magazine continued to provide essential content to the community.[434]

The *Malaya Tamil Church Magazine* ran from 1919 to 1921 laying the groundwork for other church magazines into the 1920s and 1930s. It is just another example for comprehending Jaffna Tamil migrant networks between the mother country and the frontier.[435] Since the late nineteenth century, church publications fostered community within a congregation. An imagined community developed from the shared sense of readership.[436] Religious magazines such as the *Jaffna Catholic Guardian, Morning Star,* and *Hindu Organ* connected readers in both colonial Sri

[433] BL: *Malaya Tamil Church Magazine*. Foreword. (Singapore: Rev. R.K. Abraham, 1919).; I could only access the magazine for the years 1919-1921. Not much information is available concerning the number of subscribers and the reach of this particular magazine. However, secondary literature discusses the importance of magazines for particular congregations. See: Earnest Lau, *From Mission to Church: The Evolution of the Methodist Church in Singapore and Malaysia, 1885-1976* (Singapore: Genesis Books, 2008).; K.D.M. Snell, "Parish Pond to Lake Nyasa: Parish Magazines and Sense of Community," *Family and Community History* 13, no.1 (2013): 45-69.; Jane Platt, *Subscribing to Faith? The Anglican Parish Magazine 1859-1929* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

[434] Ibid.

[435] Thiranagama notes that Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia represented the culture of Jaffna Tamils in Sri Lanka in a different colonial setting. The diaspora is often alienated from the homeland but the Jaffna Tamils living in Malaysia were rather representatives of Jaffna characters abroad. See: Thiraganama, "Making Tigers from Tamils," 270.

[436] Anderson, *Imagined communities*.; Amrith, "Tamil Diasporas across the Bay of Bengal."

Lanka and Malaysia. Publishing and distribution of other church publications such as *The Guardian* from 1918-1920 and *The Malaya Christian Friend* from 1928 onwards went hand in hand with magazine distribution over the early to mid-twentieth century. The languages of magazines were in both English and Tamil showing British colonial influence on community building among colonial subjects.[437]

During the 1920s these church societies and subsequently attached publications fostered an environment for news from Jaffna and India but soon enough during the 1930s it would provide the groundwork for a Jaffnese-Malaysian identity by transplanting the nostalgia of the homeland into their daily experiences in the settlement country.[438]

During the years of the Great Depression, the press circulated many imagined communities. Readers could respond to political, economic, and cultural challenges within their own community and from others. Magazines and social clubs served as a way for Jaffna Tamils to self-organize in the wake of a highly urbanized cosmopolitan society. It enabled them to garner the kind of group image as sub-elites and standout in a hierarchized environment.[439]

Besides, church societies and magazines, the Jaffna Christian Vellalars also sought out representative positions on local councils. Through this representation, leaders of a specific group guided the narrative concerning their particular community. In turn they had the power to proclaim the set image of their group in colonial society, among themselves, the British and others. The Jaffna Tamils were not the only South Asian community to foster an image of collectiveness to grasp benefits within a stratified population. Riho Isaka notes that Gujarati elites also employed this strategy during the British period in colonial India. The author writes about how the Gujarati elites conceived a definite notion of Gujarat and the Gujaratis during the late nineteenth century. She continues noting that "in their interaction with the British, Indian elites in general began to adopt the rhetoric of representing communities,

[437] *The Guardian* circulated around the same time as the *Malaya Tamil Church Magazine*, from 1918-20. It was a bi-weekly Anglo-Tamil publication based in Penang. *The Malaya Christian Friend* started in 1928 and ran on a monthly basis in Tamil. For more information see: L.D. Barnett, *A Catalogue of the Tamil Books in the Library of the British Museum, Vol. I-II* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1995).

[438] See: Amrith, "Tamil Diasporas across the Bay of Bengal."

[439] Mark Emmanuel discusses the readership of Malay newspapers in 1930s Malaysia. Through newspapers Malays of different socio-economic backgrounds could access the political debates of late colonial society. Rather than reading the news, newspapers provided an arena of political and cultural commentary on the current state of affairs in the colony from letters between readers and editors. See: Mark Emmanuel, "Viewpapers: The Malay Press of the 1930s," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 41, no.1 (2010): 1-20.

which encouraged them to reformulate caste and religious identities and develop the notion of the nation...in relation to Gujarat, they also began to emphasize and articulate regional identity."[440] As Isaka suggests, it was during this period when the colonial elites were adopting and pushing forward particular representations of themselves.

Prior to the nineteenth century, these elite communities developed reputations and identities associated with their groups, yet as Isaka goes on to note, it is the intersections of colonial interactions which encourage local elites to appropriate the imagination of regional identities to lay claim to representing the whole group regardless of religious status, caste background, or socio-economic status. One particular sub-group, serving as the voice of the community. Jaffna Tamil migrants, especially Christian Vellalars, invoked such stories of past interaction between their ancestors and colonial officials, advertised their work ethic and educational skills and their prestigious status as land owners. By linking their regional identity with these positive attributes, they were able to justify their demands to maintain their status, advocating for their position to remain sub-elites under the British. This is essentially the core behind sub-elite displays of loyalty and continued intertwinement with colonial rulers.[441]

While church magazines served as a religious tool for communication and representation, regional councils served as the secular form of communication. We have already seen how the British defined an Indian person in their exchanges regarding regional councils. Jaffna Tamils are included in such a definition enabling a leadership role among all 'Indians' in the colony. However, during 1940, the original definition becomes a source of concern for all parties involved: British and Tamil alike. In that year, on behalf of the Ceylonese or colonial Sri Lankan community, the High Commissioner of the Federated Malay States (F.M.S.) wrote to the Secretary of State concerning the groups representation on councils and public bodies. To open his letter, he cited a message from Sir Hugh Clifford from 1928 during the appointment of the first Indian community representative, Mr. Veerasamy. In this letter, Clifford mentioned the diversity of the 'Indians' noting that among them are Muslims, Christians, with the majority being Hindus. Overall, Ceylonese, the majority of which are from Jaffna, reached 12,300 during 1928. He went on,

[440] Riho Isaka. (2006). "Gujarati Elites and the Construction of a Regional Identity in the Late Nineteenth Century," in Crispin Bates, *Beyond Representation*, 51.
[441] Ibid.

> *The Government reserves to itself the right, at any time when a vacancy occurs... to select any member of the Hindu community, whether born in the Federated Malay States or not, or Indian or Ceylonese, to represent the community the majority of whom subscribe to the Hindu religion; though the community which is represented now by Mr. Veerasamy on this Council is called the Indian community, we regard it as including the Ceylonese...*[442]

From this proclamation, the British take on who is an 'Indian' was clear. However, with the increase in Indian nationalistic ideals, Jones believed Clifford's definition would become a source of conflict. He mentions how during the 11th of June 1935, the Indians in Selangor protested such a definition at a public meeting in Kuala Lumpur. They demanded the definition be changed since it was this definition allowing the appointment of Mr. Vethavanam, a Jaffnese Tamil, to succeed Mr. Veerasamy. To calm the situation, the British appointed a neutral candidate, Mr. Benjamin, an Indian Christian Tamil.[443] It was thought that as an Indian, Benjamin could speak to the majority Indian community and as a Christian, he was outside the realm of Hindu politics between Indian and Jaffna Tamils. He also could relate to the Jaffna Christian Tamils.

Jones went on to state how there was a Jaffna Tamil on the Perak State Council. There were Jaffna Tamil representatives still on other public body councils such as Sanitary Boards, as well. Once again according to the British, the Jaffnese presented "much higher standards of living and culture than the Indians."[444] However, with a significantly lower population than the Indian Tamils, the Indians numbered 379,996 and the Jaffna Tamils at 13,648 in the F.M.S. by 1935, the British felt that the support of Jaffna Tamils in representative councils was no longer justifiable. Clifford suggested heeding to Indian requests while at the same time also limiting Indian representation in general for the appeasement of Malay Sultans.[445]

Besides the Malays, another community from South Asia would challenge the position of the Jaffnese Tamils as intermediaries: the Malayalees, originally from Kerala in Southwestern India. According to Sandhu, the Malaylees began migrating in larger numbers during the 1920s as Jaffnese Tamil migration was decreasing.

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[442] NAUK: CO882/17- "Letter from S.W. Jones, F.M.S. High Commissioner to Secretary of State concerning Ceylon community in Malaya Representation on Councils and Other Public Bodies," (1940).; Glick, "The changing positions of two Tamil groups in Malaysia."

[443] Ibid.

[444] Ibid.

[445] Ibid.; The 1930s saw the rise of Malay nationalism. See: William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967).

The Census of 1947 provides numerical evidence for the migration of Malayalees migration to the colony (See Table 4.2).

TABLE 4.2 | Indians per State in colonial Malaysia[446]

Ethnicity	Johore	Kedah	Negeri Sembilan	Penang	Perak	Selangor	Singapore
Tamil-1931	38,534	43,007	41,431	48,202	129,261	140,008	37,231
Tamil-1947	38,022	39,995	29,481	49,360	107,626	123,099	42,240
Telugu-1931	2,936	4,733	2,385	914	14,824	4,411	122
Telugu-1947	2,512	4,390	1,273	671	10,913	2,824	346
Malayali-1931	7,197	1,639	4,087	1,653	7,675	4,401	4,378
Malayali-1947	9,048	2,226	3,418	1,406	7,154	6,349	9,712
Other South Indians-1947	1,578	1,675	849	2,413	1,819	1,985	4,150
Total South Indians-1931	**48,667**	**49,379**	**47,903**	**50,769**	**151,760**	**148,820**	**41,731**
Total South Indians-1947	**51,160**	**48,286**	**35,021**	**53,850**	**127,512**	**134,257**	**56,448**

Interestingly, Table 4.2 shows Malayalee population increase between 1931 and 1947 in the urbanized states of Selangor, Johore, Kedah and Singapore. The increase of Malayalee migrants combined with the stalling of Jaffnese during the 1920s lent itself to competition between the two groups. From Sandhu we know that Malayalees initially came to Malaysia as laborers working the factories, construction industry and waterways. However, their position soon increased to civil servants in the clerical and junior offices, as well as, serving as intermediaries on plantations. Once in colonial Malaysia, they proved to be fit for the same types of positions dominated by Jaffnese since like the former group, the Malayalees could not only speak for others in their community in Malayalam but they also could communicate with Tamils in Tamil and they had English language skills. They succeeded Jaffna Tamils as "conductors, clerks and assistants on the European-owned rubber, oil and other plantations."[447]

Like the Jaffnese Tamils, the British also reserved affirmative attributes to the Malayalees. Prejudices concerning South Asian communities was presented in the

[446] Del Tufo, *Census 1947*, 79.
[447] Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 123.

official report by Tufo. He noted the time between the 1931 and 1947 census showed an increase in Malayalee numbers, despite the lack of female migrants, since their "superior physique and the fact that appreciable numbers of them have always lived in towns where they are much engaged in stevedoring and the building trades."[448] Thus it is the 1930s, where we see shifts in positionality in the colony.

Jaffna Tamils would counter these newfound restrictions and challenges to their position, however. They would go on to continue fighting for the right to speak for their community on larger regional councils, as well as, local councils. Though their support was waning regarding regional or state councils, they navigated local boards to maintain some influence among South Asian communities in the colony by distancing themselves from Indian Tamils. This distancing seen through official colonial correspondence, emphasis on identifying as Jaffna Tamil and frequenting Jaffna Tamil run organizations- framed Jaffna Tamil separation as a method to ensure their high place in a colonial environment.

Colonial society was an arena of contestation for everyday local communities who had to answer to a rigid colonial system. Those communities who functioned as a sub-elite under the colonial power like the Jaffna Tamils, Malayalees, Eurasians, Malays and even a small portion of Indians and Chinese, were in continuous struggle to cultivate the benefits associated with close ties with the British. Thus, resentments developed between these communities in their drive to gain and maintain the positive opinion of those at the top.[449]

The discouragement of others joining councils stems from the fact that the Jaffnese defined their community based on specific characteristics, such as religion or caste background, education and socio-economic status. It was mentioned from the Census of 1947 that Malayalee men did not have many women joining them in colonial Malaysia, thus they were not likely to form families with fellow Malayalee women, though they could have formed familial ties with other women in the colony. That is beyond the scope of my analysis, however. By the early 1900s and expanding throughout the 1910s and 1920s, the proportion of Jaffna Tamil women joining their husbands in the colony increased (see Table 4.3).

[448] Del Tufo, *Census 1947*, 79.
[449] Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects*, 218-219.

TABLE 4.3 | Females per thousand males for 1947[450]

Ethnicity	Federation of Malaya	Colony of Singapore	Malaya (Unfederated)
All Ceylonese	785	657	767
Arab	813	981	885
Ceylon Tamil	786	663	776
Siamese	1,062	1,306	1,065

The formation of families enabled the community to development into a diaspora throughout the major towns by the 1930s.[451] This made their sway over the British stronger. According to the 1947 census, most Jaffna Tamils lived primarily in the four States of the F.M.S, as well as, Singapore. This can serve as a clue for why members in the group wished to take part in the councils of these states. We have seen how leaders in the community established themselves vis-à-vis other communities in the colony. The next question we ask should be why they this did? What drove the Jaffnese Tamils to set themselves apart as a single community in a cosmopolitan colonial society? We should explore self-enhancing and self-improving mechanisms utilized by the group.

In an edited volume on cross-cultural perceptions of the self, Heine, analyzes the way collectives use positive and negative associations of the self as a way to gain advantages in daily life. There are two forms of self-evaluation aiding a group's image: self-enhancement and self-improvement. In the first, Heine proclaims that an individual embellishes their positive attributes in relation to their negative ones. In this way an individual maintains a positive image so they can benefit from said image. In the latter, Heine states that an individual exaggerates a negative self-image relative to their positive attributes. They do this to improve upon their weaknesses.[452] In the self-enhancing method, an individual aligns themselves with those they perceive to be winners, those who have access to the necessary benefits for their upward social mobility. In the self-improving method, an individual seeks the

[450] Ibid, 82.

[451] Ibid, 81.; On page 81 Tufo writes, "The Ceylonese live chiefly in the four States of the former Federated Malay States and Singapore, where the Jaffna Tamils are extensively employed in the Government Service, including that of the Malayan Railway, and the Sinhalese mainly engrossed in trade. Indeed, only one out of eight lives outside those five territories."; Clarence E. Glick notes how the Jaffnese Tamils lived mainly in urban environments since this is where government administrative offices were located. See: Glick, "The Changing Positions of Two Tamil Groups in Malaysia."

[452] Steven J. Heine, "An Exploration of Cultural Variation in Self-enhancing and Self-improving Motivations," in Virginia Murphy-Berman and John J. Berman (eds.), *Cross-cultural Differences in Perspectives on the Self* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2003): 101.

approval of others in their group, aligning themselves with the wider community's behavior and opinions.[453]

The Jaffnese utilize both methods in their climb up the colonial social ladder. As individuals, self-enhancement goes hand in hand with the Jaffnese Tamil desire to become equal to officials. Leadership roles and organizations were the gateway to creating an environment of winners. Yet as a collective community,[454] self-improvement fits into the community's desire to push forward a communal image for the betterment of the group by controlling the image of the Jaffnese Tamil. By improving upon weaknesses, such as the waning access to civil service positions, they seek to navigate an undermined position vis-à-vis the group in power.

Recent scholarly debates regard these mechanisms utilized by local sub-elites in colonial society as a form of collaboration between Europeans in power and specific communities in the colony.[455] I think it is important to see the mechanisms employed by local elites from a different perspective. Instead of a collaboration, sub-elites were seeking the same rights and opportunities showcased by those in power. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a time of change throughout the metropole and periphery. Industrialization and technological changes were advancing communication and connections around the world. Europeans proclaimed to modernize their colonies and along with this came the European concept of the nation-state, freedom, and equality. By seeking equality with the officials, local sub-elites were appropriating the dues promised to them during this time of change. Collective consolidation, that is forming into a diasporic community who had power to control their image, guided the desire for social mobility.

Grasping leadership roles in community organizations and establishing themselves as the voice of the community through magazines were the core of their self-enhancing and self-improving process. How would this struggle for equality effect the community once power shifts hands during WWII? How would the Japanese view the sub-elite and would they target the community to aid in the function of a new empire in the region? Would they seek favor with this group or would they finally see themselves as equals within the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere? How would this affect their image? Chapter Five explores these questions.

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[453] Ibid, 103.

[454] I use the anthropological definition of collective community here to refer to communities that see the group as the core unit of their society, as opposed to individualistic communities that see the individual as the core unit of a given society.

[455] Walker, "Intimate Interactions."; Pairaudeau, *Mobile citizens*.; Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects*.

4.7 | Conclusion

This chapter examined Jaffna Tamil identity formation as a colonial model minority during the 1930s. Petitions, community organizations, and magazines were the three forces transforming the Jaffnese from a group of migrant families associated with each other to a consolidated community. The daily lives of current and former civil servants showed us how Jaffna Tamils tapped into their connections, both British and fellow Tamils, to petition for themselves in times of obstruction. Nallathamby showcased this through his appeal to British officials for his pension. By using their words in the language of petition writing, the Jaffa Tamils appealed to colonial rulers. Their networks and connections were directly tied to their bounded agency. The everyday daily functions as a civil servant spoke to this bounded agency since Jaffna Tamils strategically navigated the challenges of a cosmopolitan colonial society based on the spaces they were able to not only access but also carve out for themselves. This bounded agency enabled them to access the educational and socio-economic spaces needed for upward social mobility and the consolidation of a community ideal despite the challenges and frustrations involved.

Community organizations provided social networks while magazines distributed the shared knowledge needed to consolidate Jaffna Tamil diasporic identity. By acquiring leadership roles, the Jaffnese were forming their identities against other groups like Indian Tamils. Though this separated the two groups in colonial society, it was an outcome of Jaffna Tamil self-improvement and self-enhancement strategies. Magazine circulation influenced what it meant to be Jaffna Tamil in a competitive colonial society. In a stratified colonial environment with many ethnic groups, survival depended on remaining in the favor of the rulers. In representing the community on local boards, councils, and in church societies, the Jaffna Tamils were maintaining the mobility of their community between colonies.

The interwar years saw a shifting of British interests in the region. To maintain order, the British shifted their favor to the Malay communities and another South Asian community, the Malayalees. As the British promised to protect the Malays, this group wondered why they did not receive preferential treatment in the civil service. As Malay communities acquired English language skills during the 1920s and 1930s, the British noted that a balance in the civil service needed to take place in the colony to quell resentment. Thus, spots for other communities were lessened over time. The Malayalees were another South Asian community targeted by the British to work in colonial Malaysia. The migrants of this group were both English-speaking and though their native tongue was Malayalam, they spoke Tamil, as well. They could work on the plantations as overseers, serving as intermediaries who had lessened

ties to the Tamil laborers. They also started to work in the civil service, as well. This threatened the position of the Jaffna Tamils who felt they had been loyal servants to the British from the late nineteenth century into the mid-twentieth century. Thus, representation in community organizations was the way Jaffna Tamil leaders sought to maintain their community's sub-elite status at the forefront of colonial relations.

So, how did these experiences lend themselves to the development of a Jaffna Tamil diaspora identity? For the Jaffnese, social mobility was at the heart of maintaining sub-elite status as subordinates under officials. However, the colonial glass ceiling did not disappear despite this positionality. The experiences of higher positioned groups were both privileged and limited. They were adjacent to colonial officials yet never the same. Power dynamics among colonial subjects would transform further during the start of the second World War. Would the status of the group work in their favor at this time? Would their adjacency to the British make them targets of the Japanese? What would loyalty look like? Would they return to Sri Lanka? The final chapter explores the question of belonging for the Jaffna Tamils during a time of crisis and increasing nationalism in colonial society.

CHAPTER 5

Leaving subjecthood, becoming citizen: WWII's influence on a Jaffnese-Malaysian identity, 1942-1948

5.1 | Introduction

World War II served as the crossroads towards change. The war rearranged power dynamics between the global north and south. After the war, European powers attempted to reestablish colonial administration across their colonies. Local elites responded in different ways to the return of colonial rulers. While some welcomed a return of the British, French, and Dutch, others looked towards self-rule and moved away from European control. In response to the separate citizenship laws of Canada, the independence of India in 1947 and then Sri Lanka a year later in 1948, British officials introduced the 1948 British Nationality Act in order to account for the status of subjects throughout the colonies and commonwealth.[456] As a consequence of emerging decolonization and naturalization, different formulations of citizenship and identity reverberated further east across South and Southeast Asia shaping the politics of the late colonial period. The period after the war shifted conceptions of majority/minority populations and influenced the emergence of independent nation-states.[457]

Much had changed in the world over the course of the depression years to mid-1940s. The Germans, Italians, and Japanese combined forces and painted the world black with fascism from Western Europe to the Pacific. From the orders of Hitler, bombs leveled London, a puppet Vichy regime ruled France, and officials performed acts of genocide in death camps throughout central and eastern Europe. The news broadcasted across the continents confined the war to Europe and Asia, until the attack on the Hawaiian base at Pearl Harbor, on 7 December 1941, thrust the United

[456] Randall Hansen, "The Politics of Citizenship in 1940s Britain: The British Nationality Act," *Twentieth Century British History* 10, no.1 (1999): 67-95.; James Hampshire, *Citizenship and Belonging: Immigration and the Politics of Demographic in Post Britain* (London, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).; Hampshire writes, "The 1948 British Nationality Act (BNA) created the expansive citizenship category of citizen of the United Kingdom and the Colonies…The Act was in fact prompted by the discussion of the Canadian government to introduce their own citizenship, as a result of which Canadians would possess British subjecthood in consequence of their being Canadian citizens. This hardly seems the stuff of constitutional revolution, but it was viewed by the British government as a breach of indivisibility of subjecthood throughout the Empire and Commonwealth. BNA 1948 rectified the situation by creating an imperial citizenship for the UK and colonies that conferred British subject status through legislation at Westminster.", 19.

[457] Ibid., Albert Lau, "Malayan Union Citizenship: Constitutional Change and Controversy in Malaya, 1942-48," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 20, no.2 (1989): 216-243.; A. Lau, *The Malayan Union Controversy*, 1942-48 (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1991).; Sarah Ansari, "Subjects or Citizens? India, Pakistan and the 1948 British Nationality Act," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no.2 (2013): 285.

States into the war. The American image of Rosie the Riveter came to represent the Allied Forces fight for freedom against the darkness of the Axis powers.[458]

Just a day after bombs dropped on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese arrived on the shores of peninsular Malaysia at Kota Bharu in Kelantan. From the early to mid-40s just before the victories of the Allied forces, the lives of people throughout South and Southeast Asia were strife with the authoritarianism of Japanese occupation. Like the depression years a decade before, food shortages, unemployment and price increase dictated the lives of everyday Malaysians with the added turmoil of violence.[459] Chinese guerillas fighting against the occupation, enlistment for independence movements in South Asia, forceful recruitment for the Burmese railway, and the attempt to win the hearts and minds of Malay communities influenced the darkened atmosphere of the colony.[460]

Since the 1970s onwards, Western academics have focused on the leaders, generals, soldiers, and role of Western nations in the battles fought against the Axis powers and ultimately the victory of the Allied Forces. These perspectives are given precedent for the remembered experiences of the Second World War, from the concentration camps to the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They speak to the nostalgic tales of wartime heroism in the contemporary era.[461] However, recent scholarship has shed light on Japan's imperial aspirations of war in the Pacific.[462] In the former

[458] Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decisions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962).; Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter: Women, the War, and Social Change* (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1987).; David Kahn, "The Intelligence Failure of Pearl Harbor," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no.5 (1991): 138-152.; Gordan Martel (ed.), *The World War Two Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004).; Gregg Huff and Shinobu Majima (eds.), *World War II Singapore:* The Chosabu Reports on Syonan (Singapore: NUS Press, 2018).

[459] Memoirs written by Malaysians recollect the Japanese occupation. See: Rogers, Jr., *Fifty years in Malaya*.; MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane*.; Sybil Kathigasu, *No Dram of Mercy* (London: Neville Spearman, 1954).

[460] Cheah Boon Kheng, "The Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941-45: Ibrahim Yacob and the Struggle for Indonesia Raya," *Indonesia* 28 (1979): 84-120.; C. B. Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict during and after the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941-46* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012).; Akashi Yoji and Yoshimura Mako (eds.), *New Perspectives on the Japanese Occupation in Malaya and Singapore, 1941-1945* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008).

[461] Edmund David Cronon and Theodore Rosenof, *The Second World War and the Atomic Age, 1940-1973* (Northbrook, Illinois: AHM Pub. Corp, 1975).; Robert Alexander Clarke, *The Second World War: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).; A.W. Purdue, *The Second World War* (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1999).; Philp D. Grove, Mark J. Grove, and Alastair Finlan, *The Second World War, vol. 3: The War at Sea (*Chicago: Taylor and Francis, 2004).; Chris Bambery, *The Second World War: A Marxist History* (London: Pluto Press, 2014).

[462] Li Narangoa and Robert Cribb (eds.), *Imperial Japan and National Identities in Asia, 1895-1945* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003).; Sandra Wilson, Robert Cribb, Beatrice Trefalt, and Dean Aszkiclowicz, *Japanese War Criminals: The Politics of Justice After the Second World War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

colonies of South and Southeast Asia, memoirs and oral histories have served the colonial recollections and post-colonial heritage narratives of contemporary nation-states in the region focusing on the everyday experiences of colonial subjects in the Asian theater of war.[463]

Subjects living throughout colonial Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Burma experienced the uncertainties of capture, food and fuel shortage, and violence at the hands of the Japanese. A short recovery from the hardships of the 1930s translated into further adversity with the occupation. At the same time, Japanese officials capitalized on the independence movements taking place throughout the Indian Ocean. They encouraged South Asians throughout the diaspora to join the Indian independence struggle.[464] Civil servants like the Jaffna Tamils were caught in an awkward position. As colonial subjects working the British government, they served as the backbone of colonial administration. Yet, as South Asian migrants, they were also reminded of emerging independence back home. While surviving the horrors of war, colonial subjects were faced with questions regarding continued subjecthood upon a British return or citizenship in a potential independent nation.[465]

Through an intersection of Jaffna Tamil endurance of war and the longing for a British return, this chapter reviews four particular questions: (1) What does it mean to be a Jaffna Tamil Malaysian and what are the negotiations made between the two countries concerning the well-being of Jaffna Tamils living in post-war Malaysia? (2) How do Jaffnese define themselves during the post-WWII years? (3) Would their loyalties to the British remain or would it shift to the emerging independence movement on the peninsula and back in Sri Lanka? (4) How do these stakes speak to citizenship, further movement abroad, and social mobility of non-Malays in the colony?

[463] Paul H. Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya: A Social and Economic History* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).; Kenichi Goto and Paul H. Kratoska, *Tensions of Empire: Japan and Southeast Asia in the Colonial and Postcolonial World* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003).; Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain's Asian Empire and the War with Japan* (London: Penguin, UK, 2005).; Also see: Lees, *Planting empire, Cultivating Subjects.*

[464] In Malaysia, South Asians were recruited to fight for India's independence through the military branch of the Indian National Army and the administrative branch of the Indian Independence League. South and North Indians, as well as, Jaffna Tamils, Sinhalese and Eurasians from colonial Sri Lanka were deemed by the Japanese as a collective South Asian community to promote anti-colonial sentiments in both India and Sri Lanka. See: Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten armies.*; A. Mani and P. Ramasamy, "Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army: A Southeast Asian Perspective," Paper presented at the seminar on 'The Forgotten Army in a World War: Subhas Chandra Bose's INA and Asia's independence' organized by the ISEAS and the India Club (2006).; Peter Duus, "Imperialism Without Colonies: The Vision of a Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 7, no.1 (2007): 54-72.

[465] Various scholars of war-time history for Southeast Asia make note of this. See the following: Kratoska, *The Japanese occupation of Malaya.*; Goto and Kratoska, *Tensions of Empire.*; Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten armies.*; Also see: Lees, *Planting empire, Cultivating Subjects.*

Upon the 1945 summer victory of the Allied Forces in Malaysia, the British returned to a devastated colony. The majority of locals were happy to see a British return, while elites sought an independent nation. The ambiguity of the transition period fostered questions of continued colonial rule or independence for displaced local communities. As a migratory colonial region, various communities grappled with this socio-economic recovery. Recovery efforts inside and between the country of settlement and the homeland played out next to strengthening nationalism. A report written by a government official from colonial Sri Lanka explores this transitory period for the Jaffna Tamils living in Malaysia.[466]

In November of 1945, the British colonial government sent Velupillai Coomaraswamy as a representative of colonial Sri Lanka to investigate the effects of war on Sri Lankans living in colonial Malaysia.[467] His task was to write a report on the welfare of all Sri Lankans living in the colony (Tamil, Sinhalese, Burgher). However, much of the report focuses on the largest group living in the colony, Jaffna Tamils. The report provides an overview of the history of the group's migration starting in the late nineteenth century up to their position in the colony after WWII. Coomaraswamy lays out the effects of war on the Jaffnese and details the plight of the community. On page 4, paragraph 8 of the report, it states,

> *When the Japanese invaded Malaya, practically the entire Ceylonese community was trapped. A few foresighted people were fortunate to send their families to Ceylon earlier and a few others, who had no particular reason for being in Malaya, were able to get away to Ceylon and safety. But the great majority of them were compelled to remain with their families in Malaya. With the Japanese came restrictions, inhibitions, fear and suffering and the community was left to fend for itself as best as possible in the circumstances.*[468]

[466] Ibid.

[467] According to the *Dictionary of Biography of the Tamils of Ceylon*, Sir Velupillai Coomaraswamy was born in colonial Sri Lanka on 1892 and died in the 1960s. After joining the Ceylon Civil Service, he held many positions in the service such as Police Magistrate and District Judge of such locations as Puttalam, Negombo, and Kegalle. He later held senior positions in Colombo such as Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs. Upon independence in 1948, he was appointed Deputy High Commissioner for Ceylon in the UK and later Canada. See: Arumugam, *Dictionary of Biography of the Tamils of Ceylon,* 44.; Sandhu and Mani note that, "V. Coomaraswamy was the representative of the government of Sri Lanka sent to recommend ways and means of rehabilitating the Sri Lankan community in Malaya after World War II."; In the anthology of Sinhalese migrants to colonial Malaysia, Arseculeratne mentions V. Coomaraswamy as arriving November 1945 as a Representative of the Government of Ceylon. See: Sandhu and Mani. (eds.), *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, 345.; Arseculeratne, *Sinhalese Immigrants in Malaysia and Singapore*, 338.

[468] SLNA: *Ceylon Sessional Paper IX, 1946*, 4.

Coomaraswamy's report speaks to the continued relations between colonial Sri Lanka and Malaysia over the nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Writing from the viewpoint of a diplomat, the representative's words showcase the linkages between colonies on the eve of independence with colonial rulers attempting to reestablish their power. Coomaraswamy's diplomacy represents the concern shared between the governments of colonial Sri Lanka and Malaysia for the welfare of migrants from one colony to another. Questions of a return or permanent settlement as citizens of the adoptive country come to the forefront here. The experiences of WWII inform and force the compromises eventually taken.

The position of Jaffna Tamils in colonial society informed their treatment by Japanese officials. Before the war, legacies of categorization and Jaffna Tamil employment and social networks garnered the community a middle-class position in colonial Malaysian society. This middling status afforded and encouraged Jaffna Tamils to stay in the colony. Over the course of the 1930s, individual Jaffna Tamils differentiated themselves from others in the group, as well as, other migrants through community organizations and magazines essentially creating different imaginations of diaspora. With more permanent settlement, Jaffna Tamils like their Chinese and South Indian counterparts were faced with a question of staying or returning right before, during and after the war years. These formative years influenced ideals surrounding a break from colonial rule, shaping nation and state building across Southeast Asia.

Thinking about these opportunities for remigration, as well as, citizenship, this chapter analyzes WWII's effect on the social mobility of Jaffna Tamils during and after the war. Competing notions of freedom, independence, and loyalty are in the hearts and minds of colonial Malaysians during the Japanese occupation. By focusing on these moments of diaspora formation in Southeast Asia, Chapter Five emphasizes the significance of inter-imperial change from subjecthood to citizenship at the end of the war as the movement towards independence took greater shape in the region. For local communities, an important decision to stay in the country of settlement, return to the homeland or migrate to another locale was tied to their public and private identities vis-à-vis other local subjects in colonial society. Competing narratives of belonging informed choices to stay or return revealing their position in an emerging post-colonial society.

By analyzing memoir accounts this chapter examines how colonial subjects expressed familiarization to- and also became strangers- to new forms of power in the region, both through the occupation of the Japanese, as well as, a return of British rule. Other sources such as official war and civilian correspondence, explore the transition from subjecthood to citizenship next to emerging nationalism in colonial

Malaysia. While the core of the chapter reviews how World War II and the post-war era bounded Jaffna Tamil agency in a colonial society moving towards independence and Malaysian citizenship, later parts analyze the stakes of potential citizenship in the colony and the ways this would impact the social mobility of Jaffna Tamils. The next section emphasizes the historical significance of the formation of a permanent diaspora during the war.

5.2 | Cosmopolitan modernity and nostalgia

Scholars such as Bayly and Harper, Kratoska, and Narangoa and Cribb have recounted the historical implications of WWII in Southeast Asia.[469] They show how the events of WWII rearranged political power between European officials and their colonial subjects. Not only did the war change notions of citizenship, belonging, and sovereignty but it also influenced definitions of identity throughout multi-ethnic colonial Southeast Asia.[470] In the first two years after the war, India and Sri Lanka gained independence from the British. The events of the two colonies affected not only the position of Britain in the region but also the lives of locals from South Asia living in colonial Southeast Asia. With an eye on independent South Asia, both colonial officials and colonial subjects contemplated new meanings of sovereignty and citizenship and their place within the post-war order.[471]

Prior to WWII, migration and settlement had formed Southeast Asia into a multi-ethnic cosmopolitan region. Though migration throughout the region did not start with European rule, it did encourage accelerated settlement of local communities throughout different locales to trade, proselytize and work for colonial governments. Previous chapters have discussed the scholarly analysis of the increased movement of different people throughout the Indian Ocean region. Tamils, Punjabis and Bengalis from South Asia, Southern Chinese from the Canton, Fujian, Hainan, Jiangxi and Guangdong regions, Malays from Sumatra, Eurasians, and others traversed between South and Southeast Asia. As these groups mingled, they learned each other's' languages, wore each other's' attire and patronized each other's businesses and restaurants. Many imaginations came together forming a cosmopolitan culture at the new locale.[472]

[471] Stockwell, "The White Man's Burden and Brown Humanity."; Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*.; Nira Wickramasinghe, *Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka, 1927-1947* (New Delhi, India: Vikas Publishing House, 1995).

[472] Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarin: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006): 190.

Cosmopolitanism drove the public life of colonial society. However, in what ways did these groups diversify? Was it a diversity of thought, everyday living, or the formation of multi-cultural ethnic backgrounds? Between the World Wars, the streets of colonial Malaysia had transformed into a heterogenous multi-ethnic society where the collective associated with each other by code-switching between cultural groups and adapting to each other.[473] For instance, a Chinese local born in Malaysia might have conversed in Hokkien at home with their parents, Cantonese with a local shop owner, and Malay with their neighbor. In a similar vein, the public life of other groups like Tamils, Eurasians, and Malays functioned in this way, altering their behavior and language depending on who they interacted with.[474] This is something Van der Veer noted as the colonial approach to universalize the local or familiarize various ethnic groups in multi-cultural destinations. This stance regarded all individuals as part of the same worldwide community. For officials, all people living in a multi-ethnic locale could develop side-by-side as part of the same colonial society through public displays of ritualized assimilation into British spheres of influence. Belonging within this cosmopolitan universalization pushed for the homogenization of heterogenous groups.[475]

After the war, British officials and elites sought to consolidate the various ethnic groups in the colony, creating the classical ethnic frame of Malaysian society: Malay, Chinese, Indian. Yet groups like the Jaffna Tamils sought to maintain their separate identity vis-à-vis other South Asians. However, though interaction in this cosmopolitan society allowed for the translation and conversion of localities into a universal or uniform British empire, through official policy and unofficial social norms, officials and elites homogenized groups into larger collectives for political and economic purposes.[476]

Middling groups particularly benefited from an engagement with others throughout empire since it was seen as modern and equal from the official perspective- such theoretical equality would culminate with the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights.[477]

[473] Code-switching is defined as an individual changing their language, dress, and demeanor when encountering someone else of a different culture in order to be understood by person of said culture.
[474] Ho, *The Graves of Tarin*.; Willford, *Cage of Freedom*.; Willford, "The 'Already Surmounted' yet 'Secretly Familiar.', Amrith, *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia*.; Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*.; Lees, *Planting empire, Cultivating Subjects*.
[475] Peter van der Veer, "Colonial Cosmopolitanism," in Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (eds.), *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 165.
[476] Ibid., p. 166.; Stockwell, "The White Man's Burden and Brown Humanity."; Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*.
[477] Declaration of Human Rights. 1948. The UN. https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/ (Accessed January 20, 2021).

Lees emphasizes this official view of modernity noting, "The longer the Empire lasted, the larger and more powerful the middle ground of modernity into which upwardly mobile and literate people were drawn. A liberal message of political equality among British subjects and cosmopolitan prosperity for all resonated among the educated, even if it was denied in practice."[478] Being a cosmopolitan British subject went hand in hand with those of middling status. Cosmopolitan modernity promised equality for British subjects in theory but in practice hierarchization remained. Depending on your position in colonial society, being a cosmopolitan colonial subject meant something different. The elite benefitted through employment and privileged status. The lower classes faced subordination and lessened opportunity. So, while different communities mingled on the streets and interacted in the public sphere, in a more private setting like their home or club organization, groups formed cohesive private and public images for those deemed part of their smaller community.[479]

During the colonial era, the identities of colonial Malaysian communities were officially defined through census records (Chapter Two and Three), and unofficially through communal organizations (see Chapter Four). In this chapter, identity refers to the feeling of sameness and comradery among a group. Through official colonial discourse and recollections from Jaffna Tamils there is an attempt to form a public persona based on perceived collective characteristics such as education, socio-economic status, and dual Anglophile and Tamil attitudes and behaviors which were deeply rooted in European notions of progress, modernity, and later citizenship.

Hollen Lees notes this in her narration of South Asian-Malaysians of middling status in the colony. South Asian-Malaysians defined modernity through their writing, careers, and by securing their children's place in the Anglophone colonial world through education. The identity of sub-elite South Asians in British Malaysia went hand in hand with "a growing Anglophone public sphere." During the transition period between the return of colonial rule and increasing nationalist sentiment, these characteristics would be challenged resulting in the choice to remain or move on.[480]

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[478] Lees, *Planting empire, Cultivating Subjects*, 311.

[479] See the following: Hirschman, "The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya Political Economy and Racial Ideology."; Leong, *Labour and Trade Unionism in Colonial Malaya*.; Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*.; Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects*.; Rajagopal and Fernando, "The Malayan Indian Congress and Early Political Rivalry Among Indian Organisations in Malaya."; Also see: In a response to Benedict Anderson's classic *Imagined Communities*, Partha Chatterjee asks us to move away from the European conception of the nation-state by asking, "Whose imagined community?" Who is represented through official and unofficial correspondence, public and private spaces? From Partha Chatterjee, "Whose Imagined Community?" *Millennium* 20, no.3 (1991): 521-525.

[480] Lees, *Planting empire, Cultivating Subjects*, 236.

By the end of the second World War, notions of modernity changed for locals living in cosmopolitan colonial Malaysia. Influenced by Anglophone law and Malay customs, colonial officials and Malaysian elites would define who was a Malaysian subject and later citizen between the mid-1940s and independence. T.N. Harper addresses the aftermath of the war as a period of reckoning for the colony. He states, "The troubled years between the British reoccupation in September 1945 and the declaration of the Emergency in July 1948 set in motion politics that would dominate the transition to independence."[481]

During these years, the British military administration attempted to realign the colony back to British rule and British officials sought to legislate citizenship for all subjects living in colonial Malaysia through the Malayan Union. Malay elites unsatisfied with the forthcoming legislation strengthened nationalistic sentiment. This growing Westernized Anglophone public sphere of citizenship alongside heightening nationalism was strategically imagined through the autobiographical memoirs of prominent members of colonial society. And in an attempt to memorialize the lives of individuals, a particular version of Jaffna Tamil heritage narratives between the colonial and post-colonial periods emerged.

Recent work from Ashma Sharma shows the importance of autobiographical memoirs for the recollection of migration and the development of communal identity abroad for South Asians living in diaspora on the islands of Fiji, in the UK, and Africa. Sharma uses memoir accounts from the nineteenth century onwards to demonstrate the formation of a specific narrative of South Asian identity abroad. Family and religious ties and shared cultural histories are mediums emphasized in memoirs to create a specific diasporic identity. These descriptions parallel the myth-making of identity formation since they attempt to consolidate a singular aesthetic as presented through conventional truths found in the memories of the writer.[482]

A select number of Jaffna Tamils also employ this medium to promote their individual life histories in Malaysia. Rather than focus solely on the perceptions of returning officials through colonial correspondence, memory and memoirs provide the perspective of Jaffna Tamils during the transition period of colonial rule to

[481] Harper, The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya, 55.
[482] Ashma Sharma, "Transnational Lives, Relational Selves: South Asian Diasporic Memoirs," PhD Thesis. Australian National University (2018).; Ashma Sharma, "Tracing the Relational Ethic in the Postcolonial Life Writing in the Indo-Fijian diaspora," Life Writing 15, no.2 (2018): 273-283.

emerging nationalism.[483] Memory is used during and after the war for nostalgia of a previous time of opportunity and class mobility between colonies. It also serves as a means of remembering the past but also maintaining collective identity in contemporary cosmopolitan Malaysian society.[484]

Exploring Jaffna Tamil memory through memoirs and literature such as a biography are the bridge between official documents and everyday experiences during the years between WWII and independence. The memoirs of the MacIntyre and Rogers family, as well as, a biography about E.C.C. Thuraisingham provide insight into the changing position of the community during the war exposing how they identify themselves after the war. Though from a Eurasian perspective, another memoir from war-time hero Sybil Kathigasu, details the experience of middle-class elites during the war. Her narrative provides insight into the war's effects on colonial attitudes during the 1940s leaving clues for the development of a new Malaysia. The following sections bring together these remembered autobiographical narratives alongside official correspondence to showcase the moment of change for the Jaffna Tamils, a moment that will either establish the Jaffna Tamils as a strong homogeneous community or a fragmented minority within a minority in a cosmopolitan multi-cultural society. The stakes of coming together as a unified Jaffna Tamil community form the backdrop maintaining their status as government servants and subjects to Malaysian citizens as anti-colonial feelings grow stronger after the war.

5.3 | Identity and position during WWII

How does the war and its aftermath influence Jaffna Tamil identity in post-war Malaysia? Understanding the formation of a middling group in colonial society helps us to define their collective public and private personas in post-war Malaysia. By the mid-twentieth century, the Jaffna Tamils had become an established middle-class in colonial Malaysia. The formation of middling status in South and Southeast Asia was a collective process. Unlike individualistic societies of the West, Jaffna Tamils thought of representation and community from a collective perspective

[483] Lees, *Planting empire, Cultivating Subjects,* 322.; Memoirs include: Rogers, Jr., *Fifty years in Malaya*.; MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane*.; Arseculeratne, *Sinhalese Immigrants in Malaysia and Singapore,* 272.; Joseph M. Fernando, Zulkanain Abdul Rahman, Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali, *E.E.C. Thuraisingham: A Malaysian Patriot* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 2013- Ebook Kobo).
[484] Lees, *Planting empire, Cultivating Subjects*, 322.

despite influence from colonial society.[485] Becoming middle-class was not only accomplished by the individual but also by those around an individual validating their status. As the scholar Misra writes, "...while the element of social mobility was conducive to progress, the factor of socially accepted consciousness involved fulfilment of conditions precedent to that progress."[486]

Though Hindu Jaffna Tamils were the majority of the small Jaffnese community, it was the Christian Jaffna Tamils who took the reins serving as representatives of the community. SelvaRaj analyzes community building in his 2016 work concerning the identity formation of Jaffna Tamils in Singapore in the post-colonial period. During the colonial era Jaffna Tamils became absorbed into the ethnic framework of Singapore. This was a result of their small numbers compared to the large population of Indian Tamils. The author opens his article stating, "Postcolonial multiculturalism in Singapore revolved around the hegemonic premise that all members of the population belong to ethnoracial communities."[487]

Jaffna Tamils distinguished themselves internally (Hindu and Christian) and externally to other groups in the colony. Quoting an interviewee, SelvaRaj notes the public and private differences between Christian Jaffna Tamils as compared to Hindu Jaffna Tamils. The interviewee recollects that the Christian Tamils cultivated the image of a distinguished upper-middle-class through their senior positions in the civil service and comfortable living standards. They used these positive associations of middle-class status to represent Jaffna Tamils.[488] By coming together and forming a homogenous community it strengthened the image of the community as a whole. This image equating to middle-class, educated, civil servant. For the Jaffna Tamils, this was a way to use their agency to garner advantage with British officials in times of prosperity but also stagnation.

[485] The basic anthropological definition of individual cultures/societies regards the individual as the most significant decision maker for their lives, while collective cultures/societies regards the individual as a larger representation of the whole community. Whereas the actions of an individual in an individualistic society reflect on that said individual, the opposite is true in collectivistic societies. Here, the actions of the individual reflect upon whoever is part of that group.

[486] B.B. Misra, "The Middle class of colonial India," in Sanjay Joshi (ed.), *The Middle Class in Colonial India* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2010): 35.; Also see: Vijay Prasad discusses the collective identity of South Asian-Americans as a middle-class model minority. He argues that the celebration of prominent South Asian-Americans in media, literature, and entertainment allows for the formation of an imagined successful community of model minority American citizens. Vijay Prasad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

[487] Christopher N. SelvaRaj, "The postcolonial predicament of Ceylon-Tamils", p. 55-79, in Kwen Fee Lian (ed.), *Multiculturalism, Migration, and the Politics of Identity in Singapore* (Singapore: Springer, 2016): 55; Also see: Holst, *Ethnicization and Identity Construction in Malaysia*.

[488] SelvaRaj, "The postcolonial predicament of Ceylon-Tamils," 63.

The concept of bounded agency has been discussed in detail in early chapters, so I will not go into too much detail here. Rather, I would like to compare the experience of bounded agency to another group. The experience of transition for the Jaffna Tamils living in colonial Malaysia is quite similar to the French Indian Tamil sub-elite of colonial Indochina. As Pairaudeau examines in her work on French Indian Tamil colonial citizens from Pondicherry and Karikal living in Saigon, it was during the period between the second World War and independence movements in Southeast Asia that saw Western and Asian attitudes change towards colonialism, migrants, and diaspora. Colonial sub-elite South Asians had to grapple with questions surrounding their legal status, colonial allegiances, attitudes towards nationalism and belonging across the region.[489]

Like the French Indians of Indochina, Jaffna Tamils became sub-elite in colonial Malaysia. As sub-elites, they were still subordinate in their status as compared to British officials. In a colonial setting, subordination can often lead to resistance and rebellion.[490] However, becoming a model minority meant assimilation into Anglophone culture. The most prominent members of Jaffna Tamil society externalized British standards of living through their dress, language skills, and aspects of daily living (see cartoons in Chapter Three). Some South Asian newspapers portrayed British Royal birthdays and jubilees as celebratory events rather than colonial forms of burden.[491] What do the Jaffna Tamils seek in accepting ideals of the British? Maintenance of this familiar image provided a high social status in colonial society and separated them from negative stereotypes associated with other communities like the Indian Tamils. However, unfair treatment in employment opportunities and policies diminished their social capital leading to resistance as seen through petitions (Nallathamby and Sinnadurai), early retirement and the opening of businesses in urban centers like Kuala Lumpur. These forms of defiance spoke to the many ways Jaffna Tamils navigated the glass-ceilings presented by colonialism despite their contradictory subordinate status.

[489] Pairaudeau, *Mobile citizens*, 294. Pairaudeau writes, "On the wider global stage, Western attitudes towards colonization had shifted, just as Vietnamese attitudes towards other Asians, and Indian's attitude towards its countrymen overseas, were reshaped. A tangled mass of questions hung over the overseas Indians of Indochina, Indian French citizens included, concerning their legal status, their national and imperial allegiances, and their sense of belonging."

[490] Rerceretnam, "Anti-colonial sentiment in Christian churches."

[491] Lees, *Planting empire, Cultivating Subjects,* 237.; Hollen Lees describes the Indian Tamil middle-class in British Malaysia. During the 1930s a newspaper, *The Indian*, served as a platform to celebrate Royal events, promote the image of the Tamil sub-elite as loyal imperialists, and provide the framework for modernity and progress in cosmopolitan Malaysia, 236-237.

After the war, Jaffna Tamils had to engage new strategies to maintain their position in a changing colonial society. One way was through the older generation's retirement and the encouragement of the younger generation to take the place of their older relatives. In the conclusion of his memoir, William Arasaratnam Rogers reminisces about his retirement and the future prospects for the next generation. By 1940, he had been retired from the Medical field for 34 years. For Rogers, he suggests retirement to those Jaffna Tamils of proper age living in colonial Malaysia and working in the civil service. On page 90, he pens, "One should honourably retire and make room for the younger generation. That is the rule in Government service that at the age of 55 one must retire...It is the same the world over especially after the last great war [WWI], and the young people who helped to win the war do not want to be kept on the waiting list for very long."[492] His opinion shows one way the Jaffna Tamils sought to maintain their monopoly over civil service positions. Through retirement, the older generation could open places for the younger generations.

The prosperity experienced among the older generations continued to push the younger towards the civil service despite added pressures from the British government. Over the course of the 1920s into 1930s, the British restricted the monopoly of the Jaffna Tamils by introducing policies calling for only local-born Malaysians and Malays to apply for the civil service.[493] Prior to the 1930s, many Jaffna Tamils had been born in colonial Sri Lanka, restricting their applications. Next to this, a set of letters written to local Jaffna newspapers noted conditions in Jaffna were not conducive for return migration. Rather, those already in Malaysia should settle there and continue to contribute to the development of the frontier. To combat these changes, the community steadily became local-born permanent residents over the course of the 1930s and 1940s (see Table 5.1).

[492] Rogers, Jr., *Fifty Years in Malaya*, 90.

[493] A *Retrenchment Commission* called for reduced recruitment of civil servants from abroad. Instead the colonial government of Malaysia should focus on local-born recruitment among colonial Malaysians, particularly Malays. With this policy, the British placed Malays into the same positions of the Railways, Postal and Telegraphs departments usually dominated by Jaffna Tamils. See: Ramasamy, *Sojourners to Citizens*, 95-96.; Concerning the pro-Malay policies Ramasamy cites the following: *Retrenchment Commission 1922*, Interim Report, No. 41 (Kuala Lumpur, Government Printers, 1922).; *Proceedings of the Conference of Rulers*, 50th Conference, January 1924, Item 1.; Concerning letters between Jaffna newspapers, Ramasamy cites: *Hindu Organ*, 4 April 1925, 3.; Concerning table numbers, Ramasamy cites: *Census of Malaya, 1931* (Kuala Lumpur, Government Printers, 1932).

TABLE 5.1 | Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia: Sri Lanka-born vs. Malaysia-born, 1931 and 1947[494]

Origin	1931		1947	
Sri Lanka-born	15,113	90%	10,222	52%
Malaysia-born	1,667	10%	9,580	48%
Born elsewhere or unknown	6	0%	0	0%
Total	**16,786**	**100%**	**19,802**	**100%**

Rogers' words also offered a glimpse into the changing colonial society of the 1930s on the eve of Japanese occupation. Rogers continued,

> *Look at the Japanese...while they yet hold to the old tradition of respect to the Mikado (their Emperor) as God's own vice-regent, and would not touch his person which they consider most sacred, yet the young blood asserted its power and rose in rebellion against the old Prime Minister, and the other old Cabinet Ministers and wanted to shoot them down, and actually fired on them. That is the modern spirit among the nations all over.*[495]

Rogers memoir exposed the change in attitude within Japanese society towards tradition. This feeling in Japan would parallel the growth in nationalist sentiment across South and Southeast Asia regarding progress and opportunity. With nationalist movements taking shape in colonial Indochina and strengthening in India, Sri Lanka, and Burma, people across the region desired freedom from colonial rule. Ideas about who belonged to a nation were also in the minds of majority populations. Hence, majoritarian politics of the 1920s and 30s in combination with the Japanese occupation of the 1940s changed the daily lives of colonial Malaysians. Who had access to employment opportunities? Why were certain communities benefiting and others were not? These were the questions on the minds of all inhabitants of the peninsula during and after the war. As this was the political and socio-cultural landscape of the time, the Jaffna Tamils would employ similar strategies of socio-economic position as a response to such changes. However, like all local communities throughout Southeast Asia, their response would be bound by the policies of the decade.

At the end of 1940, the Japanese celebrated the 2,600th anniversary of their empire. Japanese and other ethnic groups living in Japan and abroad celebrated the event

494 *Census of Malaya*, 1931.
495 Rogers, Jr., *Fifty Years in Malaya*, 90-1.

with festivities and feasts. Bayly and Harper examine the Japanese occupation and its aftermath in their 2005 work *Forgotten Armies*. Bayly and Harper write, "Many Vietnamese, Burmese and Indians resident in Tokyo eagerly participated. Indian organizations, founded to press for India's immediate freedom from British rule, congratulated the emperor."[496] Whether willingly or reluctantly, Southeast and South Asians alike celebrated in Japan to not only maintain their positions there but also for shared ideals of an independent Asia. Japan played a role in aiding and supporting the Indian independence movement as well as Subhas Chandra Bose's army, something that flowed into the efforts of occupation in Malaysia. The Jaffna Tamils would be propositioned to show their loyalty to the Japanese by serving independence efforts.

The MacIntyres were recruited to take part. For instance, S.C. MacIntyre aided in receiving Subhas Chandra Bose on a visit to Malaysia during 1943. MacIntyre writes that despite Jaffnese reluctance towards the Indian Independence movement, participating in the movement would ensure their survival while at the same time, their hearts hoped for the victory of the Allies. On page 120 of his memoir he discusses his time as Chairman of the Johore State Branch of the Indian Independence League. He states,

> *A majority of the Ceylonese felt that the question of Indian independence was not their business and, therefore, they should not be taxed for contributions. Then, there were those among the Indian community who were not reconciled to the idea of a Ceylonese being the Chairman of the League. And lastly, there were those who, for obvious reasons, openly professed loyalty to the cause but, in private, did their best to obstruct and delay the implementation of the League's programme of work.*[497]

Though we can never be certain who was loyal or not to the League, participation went hand in hand with maneuvering the threats imposed by an unstable environment during WWII.

Jaffna Tamils also found themselves navigating the same challenges between themselves and Indian Tamils experienced during the British period. During the occupation, the Japanese mobilized the South Asian diaspora to collaborate with their imperialist project across Asia. South Asians worked as a collective in the Indian Independence League (IIL) and Indian National Army (INA) at this time. For South Asians the Indian nationalist movement conferred a variety of tests in

[496] Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten armies*, 37-39.
[497] MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane*., p. 120.

allegiance. Allegiance to the colonial establishment, the Japanese occupation, and/or the movement to independent states across Asia. Allegiance offered protection for some and for others it meant internment.[498]

The MacIntyre memoir provides details concerning S.C. MacIntyre's interaction with the Japanese and the protections granted or denied individuals during the war. In his initial dealings with the Japanese, MacIntyre attacked a Japanese official in defense. In any other case, this would have led to an instant death. MacIntyre was taken in and questioned and he proclaimed that he was only defending wartime duties for the IIL[499] when the Japanese official threatened his life. He told the Japanese official that if any punishment came to him, the IIL would address the matter with the Government of Japan, since he was not a Japanese subject. Surprisingly MacIntyre was spared by the Japanese since they deemed his defense appropriate and as MacIntyre claimed, they wanted no trouble with their allies, the INA and IIL. Through his tale of confrontation and luck, MacIntyre narrated a picture of bravery and triumph and garnered the highest advantage in dealing with the Japanese, a spared life during the war. Stories like this one carve a place in nation and state building post-independence.[500]

In contrast to MacIntyre, the experiences of another Jaffna Tamil, E.C.C. Thuraisingham, narrate the harsher realities of wartime interaction. In his biography, we learn many Sri Lankans, both Jaffna Tamil and Sinhalese, were recruited to serve in the Ceylon Department and Lanka Unit.[501] Supposedly, Thurasingham did not get involved with these units leading the Japanese to be suspicious of him. The Japanese found out through an informant that Thuraisginham had studied in England in his youth. Upon a visit to his home, the Japanese questioned him and executed some of the Chinese laborers on his estate. These experiences hardened anti-colonial feelings. For Thuraisingham, the occupation of Malaysia exposed the weakness of British rule. Biographers Fernando, Rahman, and Ghazali write, "The war indicated that the British colonial regime was not invincible and could be defeated by an Asian power and that Asians could govern their own countries."[502]

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[498] Pairaudeau, *Mobile citizens*, 275.

[499] The IIL and the INA were part of the Government of Azad Hind. This was the Provisional Government of Free India. It was set up in occupied Singapore during 1943 and supported by the Axis powers. MacIntyre refers to the IIL as the Government of Azad Hind in his memoir.

[500] MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane*, 124-125.

[501] Fernando, Rahman, Ghazali, *E.E.C. Thuraisingham*, 50.; Arseculeratne, *Sinhalese Immigrants in Malaysia and Singapore*, 290-291.

[502] Fernando, Rahman, Ghazali, *E.E.C. Thuraisingham*, 46.

Lees, Bayly and Harper, and anthologies on the Sinhalese and Jaffna Tamil communities in Malaysia make note of this realization among local communities. The mythization surrounding the strength of British rule was shattered during WWII. Many like Thuraisingham, MacIntyre, Rogers, and others saw the quick abandonment of British colonial officers and military as proof of weakness and betrayal to protect colonial subjects. The reality of British colonies ruling themselves strengthened as a result of such sentiment.[503]

Memoirs reveal some willingness among Jaffna Tamils to participate in the IIL and INA, as well as, the Ceylon Department and the Lanka Unit for similar reasons of survival, fear, and independence. However, from the biography of Thuraisingham, it is noted that MacIntyre was convinced that participation in the Japanese funded IIL and INA could help lead to independence in Sri Lanka. This directly contradicts MacIntyre's own narrative. As a leading representative of the Sri Lankan Tamils in Malaysia, his experiences show the continued ties between Sri Lanka and Malaysia for Jaffna Tamils and other Sri Lankans, as well as, the ways allegiances were changed by- and shifted due- to circumstance. Colonial subjects adapted to the mode of leadership based on similar modes of security in colonial society- class and position.

Ceylon Burghers or Sri Lankan Eurasians were also recruited by the Japanese regime to participate in the Ceylon Department and Lanka Unit. A letter from Subhas Chandra Bose to Gladwin Kotalawela,[504] the prominent Sinhalese businessman and Parliamentarian, discuss the prospect of Ceylon Burghers for the Lanka Unit. Bose writes, "Regarding the Ceylon Burghers, the main point is as whether they regard themselves as children of the soil and whether they are trustworthy. If they are then there is no objection to their joining the IIL. You have only to be careful that they do not come in with an ulterior motive- viz. come in to pump out information regarding our organization."[505] Such an exchange hints that despite the occupation appropriating the positions of local communities for the benefit of their rule, they still questioned their loyalty based on their ties to the British.

[503] Rogers, Jr., *Fifty years in Malaya*.; MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane*.; Arseculeratne, *Sinhalese Immigrants in Malaysia and Singapore*.; Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten armies*.; Fernando, Rahman, Ghazali, *E.E.C. Thuraisingham*..; Lees, *Planting empire, Cultivating Subjects*, 308.

[504] Gladwin Kotalawela (1914-present) is the son of Sir Henry Kotalawela. During his youth, he lived in Malaysia as a businessman. During WWII he took part in the IIL as a price control inspector in Malacca. He formed the Ceylon Department of the IIL. See: Arseculeratne, *Sinhalese Immigrants in Malaysia and Singapore*.

[505] Arseculeratne, *Sinhalese Immigrants in Malaysia and Singapore*, 205.

The story of Malaysian war-time hero Sybil Kathigasu serves as an example of how allegiance could have a negative outcome for local communities during the Second World War. As a Eurasian with both South Asian and Irish heritage, Kathigasu was loyal to the British colonial regime throughout the Second World War. She also had ties to the Jaffna Tamil community through her marriage to Dr. Kathigasu, a Jaffna Tamil-Malaysian. As physicians she and her husband came to the aid of Chinese rebel fighters and others in their local community throughout the early war years. Their operations had to be done in secret. If the Japanese found out this would mean internment, torture and possible death. For the Japanese, the Kathigasu family was suspicious for a variety of reasons such as their Eurasian and Jaffna Tamil heritage, their loyalty to the British and their sympathy for the Chinese resistance army.

In 1943 Sybil and her husband were caught by the Japanese and interned. Sybil was questioned, beaten and tortured and remarkably through it all she maintained her loyalty to the British. Writing the foreword to her memoir eleven years later, the colonial administrator to the colony, Sir Richard Winstedt wrote,

> *"Mrs. Kathigasu had the blood of Asia as well as Ireland in her veins and was born at Penang...The white cliffs of Dover and the Sussex downs were alien to her. Yet when the Japanese were yelling poeans on their Emperor's birthday, she from the dust of her verminous cell sang 'God save the King.' Passionately loyal to the British flag, she loved it partly, I think, because it sheltered her religion."*[506]

Ties to colonial officials for both Eurasians and Jaffna Tamils were exposed throughout official correspondence and memoirs. By mentioning her Christian faith, European heritage, and loyalty to the British flag, Windstedt showed the familiarity between colonial officials and Eurasian local communities. In earlier chapters, I have shown how notions of the familiar and strange were also employed in descriptions of Jaffna Tamils. Shared heritage, religion and customs were the basis of sub-elite loyalty to the British in colonial Malaysia. These commonalities were also the stakes for forming into homogenous categorized communities in the colony during the mid-twentieth century.

Sybil Kathigasu's story shows that there were two pathways to maintaining loyalty during the war years for sub-elites like the Eurasians and Jaffna Tamils. While Kathigasu was vocally steadfast in her allegiance to the British, the Jaffna Tamils were private in their dedication. Outwardly many cooperated with Japanese

[506] Kathigasu, *No Dram of Mercy*, 9-10.

occupiers in the administration and Indian Independence movement. Secretly some would warn colonial Sri Lanka of Japanese movements while others felt involvement in the IIL and INA aided in the independence of Sri Lanka. The different narratives show the adaptable loyalties and definitions of communities and the ways their agency was bound yet adjustable by the restraints of another outside regime. What were the repercussions of constraints placed on Jaffna Tamils and how did it affect the developing homogeneity of the group? Keeping these questions in mind, the next section will analyze the negotiations and move from subjecthood to potential citizenship made between colonial locales concerning the well-being of the Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia.

5.4 | War is over: Negotiating subjecthood and citizenship in post-war Malaysia

The Japanese Lieutenant -General Baba surrendered to Major-General Wootten at Labuan, Borneo on 10 September 1945. The fighting would continue until the final surrender by detachment soldiers two months later on 8 November.[507] The British had returned to Singapore by August of that year, and once victory was attained, they were able to establish themselves throughout the rest of the colony. However, they returned to colonial subjects who were greatly changed by the war. Would they be able to return to the everyday functions of the colony that had been routine before war?

To aid in the transition, the British Military Administration (BMA) was put in place as the ruling government from August 1945 to the end of the war and then on to a new government establishment with the Malayan Union of early 1946.[508] How would the Jaffnese Tamils appeal to the BMA for aid recovery from the war? How would their connections lend to rehabilitation of their jobs, financial stability, and social status? What would the British think of some Jaffnese serving the Japanese during the war? The memoir of S.C. MacIntyre provides some detail of the restoration of a British colonial Malaysia.

According to the memoir, the BMA called upon those who served the INA and the Japanese for questioning. On 31 December 1946, British security officers arrived on

[507] P. Lim Pui Huen and Diana Wong (eds.), *War and Memory in Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000): 129.
[508] Ibid.

the doorstep of the MacIntyre home. They requested the identities of administrators from local INA branches during the Japanese occupation. S.C. MacIntyre refused to provide their whereabouts so to protect their identities. He thought of himself as responsible for the participation of his fellow Jaffnese in the INA offices during wartime. Upon this admission, the British officer, Capitan Reed accused MacIntyre of participating in war against the United Kingdom. MacIntyre explained that "if raising money and recruits for the INA on the *orders* of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind was a crime, then he was guilty."[509] By mentioning the fact that he was following orders he hoped to calm the British officer's anger and have him realize the realities of the situation at the time. This seemed to work, as the officer went on to provide the reason for his visit. MacIntyre was requested to serve as a defense witness in an INA trial in New Delhi.

He agreed and found himself on a journey to New Delhi from his home in peninsular Malaysia. Something was strange along the journey, however. While in route to New Delhi, MacIntyre and others were accompanied by armed British soldiers. Upon his arrival, he expected to meet with those who requested him to serve as a witness to the trial. However, he soon found out he had been sent to a prisoner of war camp under the surveillance of the British.[510] He was left confused and wondering who to turn to for release from such a fate? This would be the consequence faced by some leaders of the Jaffnese Tamils, initially during the return of the British. Through his memoir, MacIntyre defends his role in the war. Through his writing, he also self-fashioned a heroic image. And while the beginning of his memoir recollects the MacIntyres as the *who is who* of colonial society, the later parts set up- his family as the new *who is who* in post-independent Malaysia.

The identity or position of the Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia tested their allegiance from colonial rule to the occupation. Those who worked for the British administration continued to work in the same positions during the chaos of the war. With the loss of property and rationing of food, working for the regime meant survival. To refuse would mean death. Many Jaffna Tamils were able to survive the war through employment as compared to their Chinese counterparts. However, this would cause an immediate stigma particularly for those deemed leaders in the community.

This stigma derived from the orders of the BMA at the end of the war. The Civil Affairs Directive from 1945 stated, "Upon the liberation of Malaya or within such

[509] MacIntyre, Through Memory Lane., 130. The word 'orders,' has been italicized for emphasis.
[510] Ibid, 130-137.

territories thereof or adjacent thereto as are under the control of your forces you will proclaim martial law and set up a military administration for the government of the civil population of the territory."[511] The goal of the BMA was to restore law and order, reestablish control over the territory and prepare for the reentry of the colonial government into Malaysia.

One way the military did this was by maintaining good relations with the representatives of the various ethnic communities in the region. The BMA Civil Affairs plan of 1945 directed the military to "maintain constant and friendly contacts with the loyal leaders of all communities and to enlist their influence and services."[512] To test their loyalty, colonial subjects, particularly the leaders of specific communities, were surveilled by the BMA. With martial law came questioning and suspicion towards the fluid identities of local communities exhibited during the war. During the war, allegiances were tested and Jaffna Tamils became fluid in their identities towards the Japanese by taking part in the Indian Independence movement while still feeling loyal to the British cause.[513] It would take the report of Coomaraswamy and the questioning of Jaffna Tamil representatives like S.C. MacIntyre to curb the suspicion of the BMA and reestablish the colonial regime. These were the repercussions of constraints placed on Jaffna Tamils during and after the war.

What was the fate of the families and the other former civil servants turned business owners who survived the war? In March 1946, Velupillai Coomaraswamy, recounted the experiences of the Jaffna Tamils prior to- and during the war. Prior to the war, the Jaffna Tamil community was considered a middle-class community. Through their migration and employment mostly in the civil service, they enjoyed a comfortable standard of living as compared to colonial Sri Lanka. Coomaraswamy wrote,

[511] NAUK: CO273/674/8- *Civil Affairs Directive During Military Occupation, 1945*. "Directive on Civil Affairs for Malaya to the Supreme Allied Commander, Southeast Asia Command," Paragraph 1.
[512] NAUK: WO203/4002- *Malaya: British Military Administration, Civil Affairs Plan, 1945 March-September*. "Part VI- Departmental Organization etc. in Malay Peninsula and Singapore Divisions," Paragraph 34, Section D.
[513] Pairaudeau, *Mobile citizens*, 304.; In relation to the Indian French citizens of Indochina, Pairaudeau writes, "Indian French citizens' firm belief in themselves as devoted citizens of France extended into wider allegiances with other overseas Indians during the tense years of the Depression. Their political allegiances were tested during the Second World War, but fluid 'Indian' identities were also put to good use." In comparison to the Jaffna Tamils, their fluid identities were an asset during the war in the sense that their position kept them relatively safe, placed them in similar positions they had before the occupation, allowing them to warn their networks of Japanese activities. These fluid identities however were also questioned by the BMA upon the return of the British.

> *They have all the characteristics of the middle-class: conservatism, pride and social consciousness. The majority have no vested interests in Malaya and depend entirely on their salaries and pensions for their livelihood...Before the war they had rarely been in want and the high standard of living which they consistently maintained and which was common to the country generally, left them hardly with any savings except their personal belongings.*[514]

The comfortable lifestyle of the Jaffnese, as described by Coomaraswamy, was destroyed during the war. The Japanese looted Jaffnese homes, taking with them Jaffnese financial security. Coomaraswamy noted that as the Japanese set up government, to gain some normalcy, many Jaffnese were recruited to continue work in their previous positions as long as they helped in the war effort through taking part in Japanese empire building.[515] He went on to mention the Japanese categorized the Jaffna Tamils with the Indian Tamils and expected them to take part in the INA and IIL. By partaking in the wishes of the Japanese, the Tamils protected themselves and were able to communicate warnings to colonial Sri Lanka during the war. As for Indian independence efforts, Coomaraswamy mentioned that the interest of the Jaffnese were "lukewarm and a general estimate could safely say that they derived more good in the way of personal protection and did little or no harm to the British cause to which they were consistently loyal."[516]

The report was a defense of Jaffnese experiences during the war and it showcased the plight of Jaffnese as victims of the war. Though within this victimhood, the Jaffnese felt they had avoided disloyalty to the British as employees of the Japanese. They did this by sending warnings to colonial Sri Lanka about attacks. By emphasizing the lack of interest in the INA and IIL, Coomaraswamy was assuring the British of the community's continued loyalty to British rule. Placing this report next to memoir and biographical accounts, however, we learn that loyalty and allegiance were fluid for local communities. Anti-colonial feeling could go hand in hand with a longing for a return to British rule.

The letter continued with suggestions on how to aid in the financial improvement of the Jaffnese. He mentioned how the BMA initially provided relief to local inhabitants at a monthly rate of $5 a man, $4 a woman, and $3 a child, with a rate of $20 a family. Inhabitants were also supplemented food. A ration of three katis or four pounds of rice for a male, two and half katis for a woman and two katis for a child was provided

[514] SLNA: *Ceylon Sessional Paper IX*, 1946, 4.
[515] Ibid.
[516] Ibid, 5.

among other goods such as salt and sugar as the increase in price between 1941 and 1945 contributed to Jaffnese being unable to pay current prices for such goods (see Table 5.2 below).

TABLE 5.2 | Food prices between 1941 and 1945[517]

Food Item	1941 Pre-War		1945 During War, Black Market	
Rice	5 to 8 *cts*	p. kati	90 to 120 *cts*	p. kati
Sugar	8 *cts*	p. kati	350 *cts*	p. kati
Salt	3 *cts*	p. kati	80 *cts*	p. kati
Firewood	25 *cts*	p. pikul	300 *cts*	p. pikul
Cloth	30 to 100 *cts*	p. yard	600 to 1500 *cts*	p. yard
Cigarettes	10 *cts*	p. ten	200 *cts*	p. ten
Vegetables	3 to 12 *cts*	p. kati	40 to 400 *cts*	p. kati
Soap	5 *cts*	p. cake	150 *cts*	p. cake
Beef	48 *cts*	p. kati	180 *cts*	p. kati
Mutton	60 *cts*	p. kati	350 *cts*	p. kati
Eggs	3 *cts*	p. each	35 *cts*	p. each
Kerosene Oil	10 *cts*	p. bottle	150 *cts*	p. bottle
Shoes	500 *cts*	p. pair	30 *cts*	p. pair

However, many families still faced destitution, having lost their wealth and homes, thus further funds needed to be administered. Advances of financial aid were sent to committees to distribute among the Sri Lankan community living in Malaysia. Commaraswamy wrote,

> *The general principle followed was that committees were empowered to grant relief to the extent of $50 in individual cases and any recommendation for the payment of more than this amount had to be approved by me before payment was made. In all, cases, however, it was impressed on the committees that relief was to be granted for the most needy and urgent cases only where the necessity for such relief had arisen as a result of situation created by the Japanese occupation. (For numbers of relief see Table 5.3 below).*[518]

[517] Ibid, 6.; The prices prior to the war is seen from the year 1941 while the 1945 prices represent wartime Black Market prices.; A kati is the measurement of the ration. For measurement reference, three katis equals 4 pounds.; A pikul is another form of measurement. 100 pikuls equal 1 kati.; Cts. Stands for cents. And P. stands for per.

[518] Ibid, 8.

TABLE 5.3 | Relief Loans for Sri Lankans per location[519]

Location	Number of people granted relief	Total amount of relief granted in $
Singapore	101	2,935
Malacca	15	635
Penang and Province Welesley	13	750
Perak North	45	1,803
Perak South	71	2,857
Selangor	340	9,140
Negri Sembilan	115	3,360
Pahang	12	700
Johore	18	1,140
Kedah	23	1,870
Kelantan	100	190
Total	**754**	**25,200**

The fact that Coomaraswamy held such a representative position between the two governments to provide aid to the Sri Lankan migrants living in colonial Malaysia meant that connections between the two were still vital to diasporic networks and imaginations. For some a return to colonial Sri Lanka was the last step in rehabilitation after the war. However, as the imagery of prosperity would follow Jaffnese upon their return to their homeland, they needed funds to reestablish themselves back home, as well as, passage back. The BMA formulated a policy so that government servants and their dependents who had reached retirement age during the Japanese occupation or who were about to retire, as well as, all other Sri Lankans in colonial Malaysia who were non-Governmental servants, could return to colonial Sri Lanka with funded passage from the BMA.[520]

For those who could not return or wanted to stay in colonial Malaysia, Coomaraswamy suggested a loan scheme to assist in restoring financial stability for the group. These loans would help families rent or purchase homes, rebuild a business or simply fund family celebrations such as a marriage. Once the loan scheme was put in place, it soon became apparent just how many families were in need of rehabilitation funds. He noted that with 700 Sri Lankan families living in the state of Negri Sembilan, applications for loans reached $200,000. For the total of colonial Malaysia, the loan application amount had reached $2,000,000. He sought the help of the Sri Lankan government. But such a loan scheme between the two governments could cause

[519] Ibid.
[520] Ibid, 9.

controversy as this type of aid might have encouraged resentment among other groups like Indian Tamils, Chinese, Malays and others in the colony who were in equally destitute situations and were not being afforded the same assistance. A solution was formulated to avoid clashes between Sri Lankans and others in the region. Approved loans would be sent to relatives in colonial Sri Lanka, who in turn could send the money to their relatives in colonial Malaysia. Loans would not exceed $1,500 with the exception of $2,000 in special cases.[521]

Jaffna Tamils navigated socio-economic challenges after the war through their networks between colonial Sri Lanka and Malaysia. Networks remained important for the community's socio-economic and cultural position in the colony at a time of emerging nationalism. A nationalism that interrogated their sense of diasporic imagery and place in Malaysian society. The war created a dilemma for migrant diasporas across South and Southeast Asia. The migrant verses the Indigenous, questions of national belonging, and a loyalty to the independent nation-state were at the forefront of post-war recovery.[522]

Coomaraswamy's appointment exhibits that the social connections of the Jaffna Tamils played a major role in their resistance of ever-manifesting obstacles to their social mobility in colonial society. Networks enabled the community to carve out a variety of strategies to benefit during moments of stability but also during moments of hardship from one colony to another. As we see from a potential return to the homeland, return migration could also be a method of endurance. Survival within the colonial environment required flexibility which the Jaffnese portrayed through the migratory process. This flexibility would be a skill employed in the continued identity formation of the community on the eve of colonial India and Sri Lanka's independence. Negotiations between both colonial Sri Lanka and Malaysia show the continued concern of colonial subjects across different locales, as seen through diplomatic visits concerning the welfare of Jaffna Tamils abroad. Colonial society was changed after the war. The question of citizenship rather than subjecthood came to the forefront in 1946. With continued ties to Sri Lanka, Jaffna Tamils were presented with returning or staying in Malaysia. The final section discusses the stakes of potential citizenship in the colony and the ways this would impact the social mobility of Jaffna Tamils.

[521] Ibid.
[522] Pairaudeau, Mobile citizens, 274-275.

5.5 | Stakes of citizenship and social mobility of Jaffna Tamils after WWII

In March 1946, Jawaharlal Nehru arrived on the shores of colonial Malaysia. A significant figure of Indian Independence, Nehru promoted "Asian Unity" to South Asians during speeches abroad. As independence of the colony deemed- the Jewel in the Crown- inched closer and closer, colonial rulers worried about the travels of Indian leaders to other colonies. While in peninsular Malaysia, Nehru urged those in the diaspora to take part in public and world affairs in their countries of settlement. This visit and rhetoric, along with meetings between the British and Malay sultans, prompted the British to contemplate the future of British Malaysia.[523]

What would be the colony's future? Would Malaysia remain under the cloak of British rule or become independent? Alongside the BMA, British administrators consolidated their rule in Malaysia by uniting the three administrative regions through the Malayan Union (MU). The concept of the MU came about as a result of fear concerning the impending loss of important colonies like India in 1947 and later Sri Lanka in 1948. For other colonies like Malaysia, the British hoped to return to colonial rule (with concessions) through imperial influence to avoid the loss of control over territories.[524]

The MU of 1946 was a direct result of the end of World War II. The successor to British Malaysia, the MU, set to unify the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States, and the Unfederated Malay States under a centralized government. The MU was considered controversial due to the short time the British government went about obtaining approval from Malay sultans. Within the span of a month, approval from all nine sultans was gathered.[525] British officials threatened to blame the sultans for collaborating with the Japanese during the Occupation. This accusation would enable the British to dethrone said sultans. Following the threat, Malay royalty

[523] BL: IOR/L/PJ/8/636. "Visit of Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru to Malaya, 13 to 26 March 1946.", 4.; Jawaharlal Nehru would become the first Prime Minister of independent India.

[524] During the 1940s, the official narrative out of the UK was contradictory concerning decolonization throughout Asia and Africa. While policy encouraged independent rule of colonies, consolidation under a commonwealth of nations sought to maintain British imperialism abroad. See: M.R. Stenson, "The Malayan Union and the Historians," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 10, no.2(1969): 345.; Mohamed Noordin Sopiee, *From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation: Political Unification in the Malaysia Region 1945-65* (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya, 1974): 18.; Cheah Boon Kheng, "Malayan Chinese and the Citizenship Issue, 1945-48," *Review of Indonesian and Malaysia Affairs* 12, no.2 (1978): 95-122.

[525] Nine states have sultans: the former Federated and Unfederated States- Kedah, Kelantan, Johor, Negri Sembilan, Pahang, Perlis, Perak, Selangor, and Terengannu.

reluctantly approved of the MU which still stripped them considerably of their power. This would go on to influence the politics of the 1950s.[526]

Questions about citizenship and categorizations of particular communities arose during conversations concerning the MU. Would migrant communities like South Asians and Chinese become citizens of the colony or would they return back to their homelands? As seen through Coomaraswamy's report, some Jaffna Tamils were contemplating whether to return back to colonial Sri Lanka or stay abroad. In regards to a citizenship policy, the MU stated:

> *The policy of His Majesty's Government is to promote a broad based citizenship which will include, without discrimination of race or creed, all who can establish a claim, by reason of birth or a suitable period of residence, to belong to the country. It is proposed, therefore, to create by Order in Council a Malayan Union Citizenship. The following persons will acquire Malayan Union Citizenship: (a) persons born in the territory of the Union or of the Colony of Singapore; (b) persons who at the date on which the Order in Council becomes operative have been ordinarily resident in those territories for ten years out of the preceding fifteen. (In calculating the fifteen years' period, the period of Japanese occupation will be disregarded.)...Those acquiring Malayan Union citizenship otherwise than by birth will be required to affirm allegiance to the Malayan Union.*[527]

Citizenship would be granted to all ethnic groups in British Malaysia. Malays, Chinese, South Asians, Indigenous groups, Eurasians, and Europeans all had equal footing in regards to citizenship policies under the plan.

The MU would establish citizenship for non-Malay groups making them a permanent and official part of the socio-cultural fabric of Malaysian society. Declaring themselves the *bumiputera* or sons of the soil, the Malay elite worried that these citizenship rights could weaken their political power in society- as South Asian and Chinese communities now would be considered in larger questions encompassing economic, educational, and political aspects of identity formation and nation-state building.[528]

[526] Goto, *Tensions of Empire*.; Goto cites: Omar Affrin, *Bangsa Melayu: Malay Concepts of Democracy and Communities, 1945-1950* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993).
[527] BL: MSS.Eur.D. 1946, File 545: Document 41. *Malayan Union and Singapore: State*.
[528] Part of this section is taken from my 2015 MA/MSc thesis in International and World History from Columbia University and the London School of Economics., Kristina Hodelin, (2015). "Satu Malaysia: Missionary Schools and the Root of Tamil Marginalization in the Malaysia Education System, 1951-1957," MA Dissertation, Columbia University and the London School of Economics: 1-58.

On 1 April 1946, the MU was formed setting in motion more changes to come during the remainder of the decade and into the next. A month prior, S.C. MacIntyre found out he would be released from the New Delhi prisoner of war camp and sent back home. After continued attempts to British officials pleading to be removed from wrongful detection, his letters were answered in March 1946. On 31 March he began his journey back home to peninsular Malaysia. Eventually, he would make it back home on 29 April, a month after his initial departure from New Delhi and almost a month since the declaration of the MU. He ends Part II of his memoir stating how it seems fate and the BMA planned to keep him out of Malaysia till about the last days of the military rule, since just that month the MU was implemented in the region.[529] This went hand in hand with the shedding of memories of the war and thinking towards Jaffnese placement in Malaysia. MacIntyre writes, "Presently, my time was absorbed by the exigencies of my profession and the adventures and excitement of the past 'began to fade into the twilight of memory.'"[530]

The memoirs of elite families like the MacIntyres and Rogers promoted a nostalgia of position and privilege for middling groups before the war. Through nostalgia middling groups in society promoted their contributions to colonial society after the war during conversations surrounding citizenship.[531] SelvaRaj shows the nostalgia some retired Singaporeans of Jaffna Tamil descent displayed in their memories of the British colonial period. One man, a retired surveyor, Nathan noted that early Jaffna Tamil migrants in colonial Malaysia came together as a community in order to survive. The most important thing for them was the ability to help each other. He stated, "...nobody else would help you. Why should they? *Only your own people will look out for you.* Your own community was the most important source of support."[532] In their transformation from migrant community to diaspora, the Jaffna Tamils of the colony came together through shared commonalities of education, socio-economic status and cultural values (Tamil and Anglophone). Networking was a strategy employed by migrant communities between locales in order to prosper in a new setting.

Despite their initial heterogeneous character, religious differences and varying village associations back in Jaffna, the Jaffnese cultivated a comfortable socio-

[529] MacIntyre, *Through Memory Lane*, 137-140.
[530] Ibid, 140.
[531] Lees, *Planting empire, Cultivating Subjects*, 322. Lees writes, "Colonial nostalgia comes in multiple forms and flourishes in many ethnic groups in the form of romanticized depictions of simpler times, when community and family offered protection."
[532] SelvaRaj, "The Postcolonial Predicament of Ceylon-Tamils,", 62.; SelvaRaj cites an interview with Nathan, early 50s, former SCTA [Singapore Ceylon Tamil Association] executive committee member, retired surveyor. Emphasis of italic sentence is from SelvaRaj.

economic status within a cosmopolitan society with competing interests. By developing into a what appeared to be a homogenous united front, the community gathered their socio-economic resources and socio-cultural clout with the British to maintain and support their sub-elite position in colonial society. However, with the emergence of majoritarian nationalism, Jaffna Tamils would choose between returning to their homeland or they would adapt loyalties towards the making of an independent Malaysia.[533]

By 1 February 1948, the move towards independence was underway with the Federation of Malaya.[534] Citizenship rights for colonial subjects corresponded with the 1948 British Nationality Act. By naturalizing as both a British subject and Sri Lankan (Ceylon) or Malaysian (Malayan) citizen, Jaffna Tamils along with other local groups declared their position as both local citizens and also members of the British empire abroad. Naturalizing meant local communities in the colonies had access to enter the UK as migrants. It also meant they aligned themselves as citizens of British protected states. This position also gave them an option to stay or to leave.[535] The visit of Coomaraswamy enabled many Jaffnese to return back to Sri Lanka and build life anew with their families there. Others were comfortable with their lives in Malaysia and after building community and wealth, felt the colony was now their home.[536]

During the late 1940s and 1950s, Malaysian elites along with British officials began to discuss potential independence for the colony.[537] Who would belong as Malaysian during rising nationalism in the colony? From the 1930s onwards, a tri-ethnic framework of Malay, Chinese, and Indian dominated the politics of Malaysian society, yet the Jaffnese felt they should have separate representation for their interests in government and employment. The conference calling for the Federation of Malaya included representatives of not only the Malay communities, but also the Chinese, Indian, and Sri Lankan ethnic groups.[538]

The Sri Lankan representative was E.C.C. Thuraisingham. He played a prominent role in negotiations between the Malaysian elites and British administrators concerning

[533] SLNA: Ceylon Sessional Paper IX, 1946.; Fernando, Rahman, Ghazali, E.E.C. *Thuraisingham*.
[534] Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, 258.
[535] NAUK: HO 334 series includes naturalization documents of subjects of varying ethnic groups living in Malaysia. Certificates of Jaffna or Ceylon Tamils show place of birth as Sri Lanka or Malaysia and place of residence as Malaysia. Their citizenship is declared as Sri Lankan during the late 1940s and early 1950s. For those who stayed, their citizenship would be declared Malaysian after independence. For example see: NAUK- HO 334/784/2631. *Certificate of Naturalization No. R6/2631- Arumugam Parasothy*.
[536] Hansen, "The Politics of Citizenship in 1940s Britain."
[537] Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, 258-259.; Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects*.
[538] Ibid.; Fernando, Rahman, Ghazali, *E.E.C. Thuraisingham,* 58-63 (Ebook version).

the place of non-Malay communities in the framework of an independent Malaysia by heading the Ceylon Federation of Malaya and representing the groups interests in political negotiations. By 1948, he was nominated as one of the 75 members of the Federal Legislative Council by the High Commissioner. With this role he advocated for Sri Lankan interests for citizenship rights and representation in the federation alongside other representatives such as Chinese, Malay, Eurasian, and British.[539]

By serving along with Malay, Chinese, and Indian representatives, he showed the public and private persona of separate representation for the small group of Jaffna Tamils, something continued into the later decades with the creation of the Malayan Ceylonese Congress. His legacy and the portrayal of the legacies of prominent families like the MacIntyres, Rogers, and Kathigasus influenced the continued position of the Jaffna Tamils as a model minority during the emerging independence movement of 1948 up to independence a decade later. Citizenship, loyalty, and position would shift from that of a British subject to a Malaysian citizen.

5.6 | Conclusion

This chapter brought the themes of the familiar and strange to the forefront of the years during and just after WWII. Though they were familiarized to British culture, colonial rulers continued to see the Jaffnese community as the other. Prior to the war, the British showcased this by ignoring Jaffnese calls for a separate identity from Indian Tamils in official colonial policy. This would continue after the war with discussion of a Malaysian citizenship. As a colonized sub-elite in a cosmopolitan society, the Jaffna Tamils navigated homogenization through a set of negotiations such as leadership roles. They were both subordinate and resistant to the colonial regime. The daily lives of the colonial subjects entailed a set of contradictions in their climb on the colonial social ladder.

In some way the Jaffna Tamils were subordinate to the British regime because of the social capital it provided them individually and as a collective across empire vis-à-vis others like Indian Tamils. Jaffnese bounded agency through education, family networks, and migration strategies enabled the group to be seen and treated as sub-elites, while it also made them subordinate to the British. Resources and networks were exchanged between colonial locales as seen through associations in the urban centers of colonial Malaysia and Malaysian-Sri Lankan funds back in Jaffna.

[539] Fernando, Rahman, Ghazali, E.E.C. Thuraisingham, 63-64 (Ebook version).

This exhibited the continued agency utilized by the group over changing political dynamics in both countries. The Jaffnese responded to these changes by making choices on their allegiance to the British and to the homogeneity of their community.

This chapter defined the community identity of the Jaffnese as developing into a homogenous one internally while wanting to remain distinct from other South Asian groups as an answer to the changing political situation of post-war Malaysia. With the rise of majoritarian nationalism, negotiations of citizenship for all communities in the region, and questions of a return to Sri Lanka or permanent settlement in Malaysia looming in the minds of Jaffna Tamils, loyalty to the colonial regime or alignment with the emerging politics of the nation influenced collective interests.

The sub-elites in colonial society experienced complacency, subordination and the privileges of a high status in colonial society. Subordination could be a form of agency since it facilitated the pieces of the puzzle needed to become a sub-elite in the colonial system. It aided in the separation between cosmopolitan urban cities in Malaysia. In turn, the status experienced during the early to mid-twentieth century changed with nationalist sentiment during the 1930s-1940s. The community adapted to new-found patriotism for an independent Malaysia rather than a British-ruled colony under representation from elite families like the MacIntyres, Rogers, and Thuraisingham.

The post-colonial narrative focuses on the larger homogenization of South Asians in colonial Malaysia. The story of the small minority within a minority, the Jaffna Tamils, reminds us of the diversification found in cosmopolitan societies. Current communal relations in the post-colonial era provide answers by pointing to the legacy of the end of empire in the colony and its effect on sub-elite loyalties and identity formation and the diversity in the different ways of being Malaysian.

*Conclusion | **New identities and diasporic connections***

What does it mean to be a Jaffna Tamil-Malaysian during post-independence?

In the post-colonial era, to be a Jaffna Tamil-Malaysian means to be tied to a legacy of white-collar migration, proximity to colonial rulers, and a moderate to high socio-economic status. Since the colonial era, the Jaffna Tamil community has been a tiny fraction of diverse South Asians living throughout Malaysia. Together with Sinhalese and Burghers, the Jaffna Tamils continue to comprise a small number at about 250,000 people today.[540] Within the larger tripartite framework of contemporary Malaysian society the Jaffna Tamils are deemed part of the larger minority of South Asians designated as 'Indian,' making them a smaller minority within a minority. As became apparent throughout this thesis, this contemporary categorization has a long history in the colonial census of Malaysia from the early to mid-twentieth century. After independence, the consolidation of different ethnic groups under umbrella terms continued with categorizations such as 'Chinese,' 'Indian,' 'Malay,' and 'Others.'

While language used in colonial censuses concentrates different people in more solidified categories, contemporary correspondence and media coverage of the Jaffna Tamils from personal memoirs and portrayals of the community by other ethnic groups showcase attempts to distance from the stereotypes associated with impervious categories. For instance, colonial censuses began to categorize local people living throughout Malaysia according to ethnic group and religion. Occupation and place of origin became associated with the category assigned to the individual. The maintenance of empire relied on consolidating different colonial subjects into broader categories in census documents while correspondence also contained passages on the social, religious, and economic differentiations between Indian Tamils, Jaffna Tamils, Malayalees, Chinese, Malays, Eurasians, and many others. It set the tone for the opportunities available to individuals under a colonial framework.

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[540] See newspaper article: Malay Mail "Sri Lankans Commemorate 151 Years in Malaysia," *Malay Mail*, March 28, 2018. (Accessed January 10, 2021). http://epaper.mmail.com.my/2018/03/28/sri-lankans-commemorate-151-years-in-malaysia/ Note: In the article, it states, "The once tiny Ceylonese community, which includes Tamils, Sinhalese and Burghers now, makes up almost 250,000 of Malaysia's richly diverse population of more than 32 million people."

The movement of these groups throughout South and Southeast Asia has not been new. Trade, religious beliefs, language, political and economic visions have circulated throughout the region for centuries. Borders were permeable. However, the regimented order of colonial rule came into contrast with the centuries' old free movements and identities of people living in the region. With colonial rule in the nineteenth century came a 'border-fication' of different places- India, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia were British, Indonesia was Dutch, and Indochina was French. As migration continued, borders narrowed between the many people living under each colonial power and new imaginations and ties to the homeland and place of settlement emerged. Differences between local people based on religion, occupation, language and class also became borders connected to status and place in society depending on proximity to those in power. This laid the groundwork for consolidating these groups further as part of post-independent nationalism.

For the first generations of Jaffna Tamils who migrated to Malaysia these borders determined interaction with other Jaffna Tamils, colonial rulers, and other people living in their new country. While today older members of the small minority continue to refer to themselves as 'Ceylonese,' 'Ceylon Tamils,' or 'Jaffna Tamils', the younger generations have started to identify simply as Tamil since familial connections to Jaffna and Sri Lanka have dwindled since the 1940s onwards.[541]

Colonial remembrance can serve as a bridge of acceptance for minority groups in multi-cultural societies, yet it also contributes to border-making between people and nations throughout the Indian Ocean world. Bringing attention to a group's contributions to a society speaks directly to the nation and state making processes of former colonized countries.[542] For instance, in recent years, there has been a

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[541] Glick, "The Changing Positions of Two Tamil Groups in Malaysia.", SelvaRaj. "The postcolonial predicament of Ceylon-Tamils," 55-79.

[542] On multiculturalism and pluralism in former colonies, Daniel P.S. Goh states, "[In former dominions of Britain] the universal application of liberal multiculturalism [equality] breaks down in former colonial societies, where the legacies of colonial racialization continue to structure contemporary politics of identity and claims to national citizenship and ownership of modernity…The state in postcolonial societies is born of the colonial imposition of absolute power and built on colonial racializations as opposed to being merely inflected by it as in postimperial societies. As an instrument of absolute rule, sometimes intentionally operating with a divide-and-rule strategy but mostly operating on the premise of ethnic pluralism along the lines prescribed by colonial racialization, the colonial states intervened in local society and organized the social economy according to its pluralist model. Consequently, the nationalist elites who inherited the legacies of colonialism also inherited a racial state and its pluralist worldview." Daniel P.S. Goh, "From Colonial Pluralism to Postcolonial Multiculturalism: Race, State Formation and the Question of Cultural Diversity in Malaysia and Singapore," *Sociology Compass* 2, no.1 (2007): 233-234. Also see the following articles: Robert W. Hefner (ed.) *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia* (Honolulu, Hawa'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001).; C. Giordono. "Governing Ethnic Diversity in Rainbow Nations: The Politics of Citizenship and Multi-culturalism in Peninsular Malaya- the Case of Penang," Focaal: *European Journal of Anthropology* 44 (2004): 89-102.

renewed attention to the Jaffna Tamils in media and diplomatic circles in Malaysia. Newspapers like *The Star* and *Malay Mail* drew attention to the more than 150-year presence of Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia, among others with a story I wrote about in the introduction.

The newspaper article from *The Star* focused on the story of Jalan Vivekananda and the desire to save two schools and an ashram from potential construction damage of a perspective skyscraper. In 2016, these buildings became a national heritage site.[543] The ashram, schools and center tie education and religion to Jaffna Tamils navigating colonial rule and contemporary national stories of belonging in the nation-state.[544]

Religion, education, occupation and place thus continue to identify different ethnic groups living in Malaysia today. As shown throughout this study, education and religion positioned the group for jobs in the colonial civil service both in Sri Lanka and in other colonies of the British empire. For those in the diaspora, the imagined community post-independence is traced from the migration networks, occupation and place of the group in colonial society. During the colonial era, being a Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar migrant to Malaysia was defined by historical ties to religious educational institutions in Jaffna. These institutions opened doors for low- and mid-level positions in the civil services. Connections to each other through these networks- led to pulling more migrants to the colony through the circulation of ideas in written and oral correspondence.[545]

By the 1930s, media by way of newspapers, magazines, and spaces for social interaction like the church and religious clubs encouraged the formation of a particular Jaffna Tamil identity in colonial Malaysia- the middle-class civil servant. Jaffna Tamil identity like that of other groups in post-colonial Malaysia is a result of migration patterns and interaction with colonial officials based on circumstances in the local environment. As result of this positioning a person of Jaffna Tamil descent had a different life trajectory and still associates themselves as a Jaffna Tamil differently from their peer living in Sri Lanka who experienced the war or a 2nd generation Jaffna Tamil living in Toronto, Ontario or Staten Island, New York.

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[543] See newspaper article: Bavani M, (2016, June 20). "112-year old Vivekananda Ashram is now a Heritage Site," The Star, June 20, 2016. (Accessed January 8, 2021). *www.thestar.com.my/metro/community/2016/06/20/112yearold-vivekananda-ashram-is-now-a-heritage-site/*

[544] Ibid.

[545] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

In Malaysia, an emphasis on a lineage from Jaffna during the colonial era allowed space to carve out a comfortable middle-class life in colonial society while encountering the limitations of power under British rule. Post-independence this emphasis on differentiation as seen through spotlight on Jalan Vivekanada and celebration of 151 years of presence in Malaysia, also works towards maintaining a separate status vis-à-vis Indian Tamils as part of the model minority framework.[546]

Jaffna Tamils as a colonial and post-colonial model minority

Civil Servants revisited: Sinnadurai and Nallathamby

This thesis has been about the many ways Jaffna Tamils navigated empire. Public persona and lived private experiences were bound to the opportunities available to the group and the capital gained from favorable circumstances encompassed not only material wealth but also elite reputation. This is a common narrative for many middling groups of colonial society like the French Indians of Indochina, Chettiars living throughout Southeast Asia, and Eurasian communities of South and Southeast Asia. The Jaffna Tamils are both unique and similar as compared to others since religion, education, and language acquisition in English allowed a privileged space within the British colonial system. Their uniqueness however lies in how the Jaffna Tamils adapted with the changes to British rule through performance. Opportunities gained during the colonial period shifted and changed during the post-colonial era with the attempted amalgamation of heterogenous groups into homogeneous ones.[547]

This homogenization occurred on a larger scale with the Indian Tamil community and on a smaller scale between the more numerous Hindu Jaffna Tamils and the smaller group of Christian Jaffna Tamils. While British officials sought to combine both Indian and Jaffna Tamils into one group concerning political representation

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[546] Though Willford examines Indian Tamils, his argument can be applied to Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia, as well. In his 2006 study of Tamil identity in Malaysia, he mentions, "Elite Indians…were ambivalent about being labeled 'Indian,' given the common indexes of Indianness within the national media… Elite Hindus, we saw, countered the stereotypes through a diasporic imaginary that reconnected with transnational Hindu reform movements and posited a greater India premised on neo-Hindu ideas of religious ecumenism." See: Willford, *Cage of Freedom*, 284.

[547] Ramasamy, *Sojourners to Citizens*.; Kahn (ed.), *Southeast Asian identities*.; Van der Veer, "Colonial cosmopolitanism," in Vertovec and Cohen. (eds.), *Conceiving cosmopolitanism*.; Stenson, *Class, Race, and Colonialism in West Malaysia*.; SelvaRaj, "The Postcolonial Predicament of Ceylon-Tamils."; Pairaudeau, *Mobile Citizens*.

on councils from the 1940s onwards, the Jaffna Tamils sought to gain recognition as a group separate from the larger one. This would go on to continue during the post-independence era with conflicts over representation of Tamils in government leading to debates on whether Jaffna Tamils should join the Malaysian Indian Congress despite the creation of a separate political representative party, the Malaysian Ceylonese Congress.[548]

Homogenization contradicted the special position of the Jaffna Tamils, in particular a facet of the sub-group who arguably had the most recognizable voice among the community, the Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar civil servants. In this thesis two civil servants presented this recognizable voice when exposing grievances for unfair treatment concerning pension benefits in petitions to British authorities during the 1930s and early 1940s: Sinnadurai and Nallathamby. Both of them were able to access elite spaces for correspondence with high colonial officials because of two significant features: their religious background along with education and language acquisition. The conversion of some Jaffna Tamil Vellalars to various sections of Christianity (Methodism, American Congregationalism, and Anglicanism), as well as their attendance at missionary schools during the nineteenth century correlated to the language used in the petitions from both civil servants around 1940.

Sinnadurai and Nallathamby are just two examples for presenting diasporic identity construction and colonial subject-making along with the circulation of ideas regarding hierarchization across locales.[549] Throughout their petitions, the word loyalty was often affirmed, as in loyalty to the British order or status quo of the time. Another feature of these letters was the connection with British officials based on their common Christian faith and subjecthood to the crown, as ways to bridge the gap between themselves and British officials. The style of letter writing was directly tied to a legacy of interaction between colonial subjects and officials through education and conversion in colonial missionary schools.

Mimicry or the performance of Britishness was used to appeal to- and challenge the social constraints of colonial hierarchies. The fact that both Sinnadurai and Nallathamby addressed the highest officials such as the Prime Minister, Secretary of State, High Commissioner and even attempted to correspond with Buckingham Palace, shows the level of space garnered by the group as familiar to the British. Both officials and the Jaffna Tamils familiarize the latter with being associates

[548] NAUK: CO882/17- *Eastern No. 170 Malay States*.; Glick, "The Changing Positions of Two Tamil groups in Malaysia."; SelvaRaj. "The Postcolonial Predicament of Ceylon-Tamils."
[549] Ho, "Empire through diasporic eyes."

of the British in terms of social position. Yet, the ultimate rejection of their pleas also regarded colonial subjects as strangers to colonial rulers, as not equal to those in power.[550] The position of Jaffna Tamils in the civil service gave them economic privilege but the position also served as a buffer to be used against subaltern groups in the colony, essentially labeling as a mechanism of order and control.[551]

Sri Lankan Tamils and the Indian Ocean World

This thesis has shown that space and access are part of the ways Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars navigated the constraints of empire. It seems that Christian David's arrival in Jaffna in the early nineteenth century and the subsequent missionary settlements from the Methodists and American Congregationalists, amongst others, created the space for Jaffna Tamil Vellalar ascendancy as the pen-pushers of the British empire. This built on a long history of social and religious interaction between the Vellalars with colonial powers, dating back to the Portuguese and strengthened during the Dutch period of Sri Lanka.

In the early nineteenth century Jaffna Tamil Vellalars cooperated with missionary groups. Through these missions, Jaffna Tamil children attended school and acquired the education and language skills needed to later work as civil servants for the various colonial regimes. While attending such schools, Jaffna Tamil Vellalar parents and children made concessions among themselves and others. This may have looked like taking on the last names of scholarship sponsors, while still retaining their Tamil name in accordance with their caste and social network.

Caste dominance by the Jaffna Tamil Vellalars during the Dutch and early British period set up the making of a colonial model minority across the British Empire. During the early nineteenth century, Jaffna was a caste conscience society with a larger proportion of the higher castes being Vellalar along with lower castes communities in subordination to the higher castes. Though missionary schools targeted all caste groups in northern Sri Lanka, the dominance of Vellalars gave them the resources, both economic and social, to attend missionary schools in larger numbers. From the onset of renewed missionary interest in the region, Jaffna Tamil Vellalars understood the dynamics of the changing times, as an old villager

[550] Raman, *Document Raj*.

[551] Vijay Prasad discusses the model minority concept used for South Asians living in the U.S. He notes that the model minority status directly works to pacify African-American sentiments about discrimination by the mainstream society. See: Prasad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*.

around 1850 already noted this when he told missionaries to focus on the children of Jaffna since education will provide them with the skills to function in colonial society.[552]

Attendance at such institutions enhanced the dominance of the caste group in the region and later abroad. It did this in two significant ways. Firstly, Jaffna Tamils changed with conversion by becoming familiar to British rulers through Anglophone cultural traits in the form of language, dress, and religious practices. And secondly, these traits continued across the Bay of Bengal providing networks for migration and socio-economic power in British Malaysia.

Traditionally, the narrative of colonizer/colonized focuses on the ways colonial officials ruled or dominated over others without taking into account the leverage sub-elites had living comfortable lives as compared to other groups. Through religious practices, Jaffna Tamils assimilated to some Anglophone cultural traits while maintaining a separation as a distinctly local community, something we saw from the early twentieth century cartoons. The western dress of the Jaffna Tamil as portrayed through the Indian and Eurasian lens, as well as proximity to British rulers shows us the way other local communities saw the collective. The fact that the cartoons were included in an anthology written by Jaffna Tamils during the 1930s also provides another lens for understanding double consciousness and performance of Britishness on the part of the group, something described as the tension between public adjacency to Anglophone culture and private navigation of British domination.[553]

South Asian sub-elites and subordinates in British Malaya

Privately Jaffna Tamils maintained inner beliefs and local ways of being prior to colonial influence, while publicly the fervency of religious practices through the church and ways of living deemed "modern" by British standards, such as use of English language, sending children to English-medium schools, and forming social clubs and organizations showcased local modernity within the hierarchization of colonial society. Attachment to British educational values, similar to schooling back at the metropole where school lineage was important for social status, was aspired under colonial rule. Continued identification with former Vellalar status through marriage practices and remembered and contemporary reminiscence as Christian

[552] Tennent, *Christianity In Ceylon.*
[553] Ponniah and Kulasingham, *Spotlights on the Jaffna Tamils in Malaya.*; Hoole. (1997). *The Exile Returned.*

Vellalar families shows the way public performance and private cultural and local forms intersected with colonial rule and interaction with officials.[554]

The tensity between balancing the outward and inward show of adjacency to British officials made Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars as both sub-elite but also a subordinate group setting them up to serve as intermediaries across colonies. Though not officially written into any law, they unofficially were a complementary local community or colonial model minority for the British since they could be used to maintain the daily functions of the colony. We saw this in official colonial correspondence between British officers in their discussions of different groups in Malaysia. Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars also utilized this complementary position to their advantage to maintain a sub-elite prominence across empire. Through this status they were able to acquire the monetary funds and rank to send remittances to Jaffna and build a life in Malaysia.

Religion, education, language and Anglophone cultural traits worked side by side with Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar networks for movement. Caste lineage as Vellalar and Christian religious background along with the school one attended set up the Jaffna Tamils to serve in lower and middle positions in the colonial Sri Lankan civil service. Conditions in Jaffna during the late nineteenth century, as well as, the changing attitudes among the younger generation towards more sedentary occupations like the maintenance of farmland tied local Jaffna village networks to kin and colonial employment under British civil servants, first in Colombo and then in Malaysia.

Local announcements and advertisements by British officials, as well as, word of mouth from kin fostered an environment for generational migration between the two colonies showing the many layers of migration networks. This chain migration formed a triangular system of movement between Sri Lanka, to the port of Nagapattinam, onwards to Penang and Kuala Lumpur. The educational and socio-religious background of the Jaffna Tamils, as well as, the timing of conditions in Jaffna and opening of Malaysia as a separate colony deeply influenced Jaffna Tamil movement abroad. For any migrant group, it is both the circumstances of their place and time, as well as, capacity to utilize networks that promote movement from one place to another.

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[554] S. Arasaratnam, "Dravidian culture in Malaysia," in A. Amerasinghe and S. Panda (eds.), *Festschrift 1985: James Thevathsan Rutnam.* (Colombo: Sri Lanka UNESCO National Commission, 1985). Note: Arasaratnam discusses the continued endogamy among caste groups in Malaysia despite caste overall being a weaker indicator of a person's social status.

The first generation of Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars followed their British employers and planned to build enough capital to gain higher positions, live comfortably in the colony and send money back to Jaffna. Life in the colony was not as easy as advertised, despite higher wages. Jaffna Tamils, like many other migrants, were met with an under-developed landscape with natural dangers such as untamed wildlife and inconveniences of underdeveloped roads. However, over the early twentieth century the colony would develop rapidly because of the variety of migrants and local communities taking part in development of the railway and postal systems.

As the physical landscape changed in the colony, so did the socio-economic and socio-religious networks of Jaffna Tamils. The first generation of migrants, like E.T. MacIntyre and William Arasaratnam Rogers Jr., took part in the establishment of the first church and social organizations for the Christian community in Kuala Lumpur. The small group of Jaffna Tamil Christians stood out from the larger Jaffna Tamil Hindu group by coming together week after week at the Methodist Church in Kuala Lumpur and continuing to send their children to English-medium Christian schools whether in Kuala Lumpur or back home in Jaffna.

Education and religion continued to be the gateway for social advancement and maintenance of sub-elite status for the Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars. However, as Jaffna Tamil civil servants sought higher positions in the various departments of government, they were quickly denied or told they needed Cambridge certificates to apply for such jobs. One civil servant, E.T. MacIntyre, produced such a certificate but was still denied a higher position. Familiarity to the British did not protect the sub-elite from experiencing discrimination in employment among the higher echelons of the civil service since the colonial order functioned on a hierarchy of British colonial officials on top with sub-elites never being true equals to them despite the idea of colonial subjects living and working together as a unit for the functioning of the empire.

Some Jaffna Tamils, particularly Christians, circumvented such constraints on their agency by opening businesses and using their acquired capital to purchase plantations in the colony. Through local councils and church organizations and magazines, the Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars garnered the reputation of prosperous white-collar workers. The clout associated with their proximity to the British spoke to community development in later decades. Even Jaffna Tamil Hindus living and working in the colony remembered the Christians as speaking for the community in interactions with the British. It was usually a Christian member of

the group who served as a representative during festivals, stately visits, and on local boards, obtaining attention for the community concerning social events such as donations for temple construction for the Hindu group and the political position of the Jaffna Tamils vis-à-vis other groups like Indian Tamils.

Jaffna Tamils were not homogeneous for sure, however, their strategic placement based on historical colonial interaction over centuries created the conditions for a particular 'middle class elite' voice to represent the group. This is evident during significant events of colonial history. The first World War brought the group together to purchase and dedicate a plane named Jaffna to the British war efforts. After the second World War, Jaffna Tamils proclaimed their loyalty to British war efforts by sending messages back to Sri Lanka. After the war, political changes and the discussion of independent rule fostered questions of subjecthood, citizenship, and loyalty of non-Malay communities to the nation.

Memoirs from families like the MacIntyres and Rogers allowed room for elite members within the group to fashion an image of prominence in the colony as subjects and then citizens. This could be juxtaposed with official colonial correspondence regarding the group, as well as, imagery portrayed about the group by other communities. And while memoirs allowed elite Jaffna Tamils to tell their stories from their perspective, it also left room for one representation of the group narrating their stories in such a way as to maintain a privileged standing as political sentiment changed. Everyday stories of the Jaffna Tamils were just as varied as other groups in the colony based on monetary access, employment, education, and place of origin. Colonial documents and memoirs emphasizing the elite gave space for the fashioning of the group as a model minority.

This image and the ways Jaffna Tamils navigated the challenges of British rule across empire began to change during the 1940s to 1950s. As Malay elites and the British began to negotiate the idea of an independent Malaysia, other local groups faced the reality of leaving behind the life they made in a colony abroad or returning to the land from whence they came. Where was home? Was it Sri Lanka, China or India? Was it Malaysia?

With the visit of V. Coomaraswamy, some Jaffna Tamils decided to reunite with their families bringing along memories of their golden years in Malaysia. The homes of some streets in Jaffna were built from the remittances of families who had lived and worked in the frontier colony. Locals fondly remember the time of Jaffna Tamil migration to Malaysia to make fortunes. Cafes, homes, and stores in Jaffna point to

this remembered local history. These recollections along with the physical evidence of homes, eateries and retail establishments point to the forgotten significance of such a migration across colonies.[555]

For those who stayed, a choice was made to become permanent settlers in Malaysia. They had to acquire citizenship and pledge loyalty to the colony separate from their homeland. Before and during independence, the Jaffna Tamils would shift from a complementary local community to a tiny minority among a larger minority. What would be their place now in an independent nation? How would they make their voice heard at a moment of emerging nationalism amalgamating various local communities into larger groups? On the political level one example is the creation and maintenance of the Malaysian Ceylonese Congress while on the socio-cultural scale remembered ties to the homeland are displayed through a community center, white-collar jobs and positions in government, media attention and local eateries in Brickfields serving the recipes of Jaffna.

Further research: Diasporas in the Indian Ocean World

Looking at scholarship beyond independence gives insight into the silences surrounding smaller local histories in Malaysia. Silences in the archive usually surround the 'impossible subject' such as plantation laborers, while the Jaffna Tamils are the opposite.[556] Middling groups were 'possible subjects' who were well-connected and well-positioned in the colonial and contemporary eras in terms of economic funds, employment and education. They were the mythicized model minority through their connections with British colonial officials. Studying the group also lends itself to criticism because of this status. However, by avoiding the circumstances of Jaffna Tamil diasporic development across empire, we miss the significant context for nuanced experiences as both sub-elite and subordinate in colonial society speaking to the maintenance of the contemporary political and economic order in the nation-state.

Hierarchization enabled the short-term and long-term function of British rule while it also spoke to the historical diaspora formation of local communities. Being familiar or stranger to British modes of being spoke to the ways local communities

[555] For recollections from returnees and for more discussion on the memory of migration back and forth between Jaffna and Malaysia see: Thiraganama, "Making Tigers from Tamils," 269-270.
[556] M.R. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).; Goffe, "Intimate Occupations," 53.

were granted or denied access to the British and others. Diaspora encompasses many different backgrounds with contemporary categorization tying the original circumstances for their migratory movement. The stories of Jaffna Tamils give an alternative voice to the many stories within the South Asian communities of Southeast Asia.

As a diaspora, Jaffna Tamils had a dual position as middling subjects, privately and publicly. Other groups viewed them publicly as conforming to Britishness. The group performed Britishness, professionally and socially. The song "Sons of Jaffna" attests to the legacy of Jaffna Tamil position in colonial society as the lyrics note historical roots as tillers loyal to the British crown, working day in and day out for the success of Jaffna and Malaysia. The lives of the group allow scholars to explore the way colonial systems tie to the legacy of class maintenance and the changing shape of such preservation at the end of the British period.

With independence, the community sought to create space for themselves in the national movement with the Malaysian Ceylonese Congress countering the homogenization of group identity in Malaysia while also providing avenues to maintain a comfortable life for themselves and generations after them. Access to British officials during the colonial period and access to post-independent government officials and local media speak to religion, class, and diasporic imaginations of position and success. The story of Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia ultimately provides context for how privileged diasporas fashion themselves for personal and group success abroad as informed by and changed from memory.

The Indian Ocean has always been a space of change and absorption from religious influences to political and economic development. The history of the region, like the identities of people are also part of these ebbs and flows tying contemporary circumstance to the past. The dynamics of previous movement between South and Southeast Asia has informed the culture, social dynamics, environmental change and identities of the people in the region from the colonial period to now. The past informs our present. The two cannot be fully be separated.

In a compilation on food and identity in the Caribbean, Anthropologist Hanna Garth writes, "Identity is always a relationship, not a property."[557] It is a relationship that connected the historical interconnections between Jaffna Tamil Vellalars and missionaries in nineteenth century Jaffna through conversion and education. In

[557] Hanna Garth (ed.). *Food and Identity in the Caribbean* (London: Bloomsbury- A&C Black, 2013): 20.

turn, it influenced initial migration during the late nineteenth century and created chain networks between Jaffna and Malaysia. These same networks allowed the group to navigate constraints within the colonial system from denial of higher positions to pension benefits. These relationships or imaginative scenarios informed the complementary or model minority label garnered by the group over the nineteenth to twentieth centuries. They were imagined by both Jaffna Tamils and other communities at the time and even to this day. These relationships are remembered as part of legacy and heritage embodied through just one example of the Jalan Vivekananda Ashram, primary, and secondary schools.[558]

Media and official documentation played a role in the circulation of a particular image of the group. As recently as 2018, the Malaysian government provided 2.5 million Malaysian ringgits toward the construction of the Malaysian Ceylonese National Community Center. Men of the Jaffna Tamil community were presented with the donation by the then Prime Minister (PM) Najib Razak. An article on the news website Citizens Journal states, "The Prime Minister made it plain that he has very high regard for the Ceylonese community, he said that his personal physician is a Ceylonese Tamil. He spoke of great individuals of our community and particularly named Ananda Krishnan as an example for all Malaysians to follow."[559]

The donation and accompanying statement direct attention back to the model minority label. The Prime Minister emphasizing the fact that his personal physician is a 'Ceylonese Tamil' echoes the colonial association of the group with white-collar work. It also alludes to the continued image of the community as medical staff and other white-collar professionals. As a response to the PM's praise, the article mentions the early days of the Malaysian Ceylonese Congress and the appointments of its members as permanent representatives to the United Nations, ambassadors, high commissioners, legal advisors, personal physicians to PMs and Malay royalty, financial advisers, admirals, and one person as a member of Senate. The men present also asked for a grant of aid for Tamils in Sri Lanka.[560]

Like memoirs, public media prioritizes the accomplishments of- and favor given- to the group. Such inter-relationships between those in power and the elites continue

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[558] Ibid. Garth cites Richard Wilk's 1999 work noting that "individuals are able to construct 'imaginative scenarios' of the kinds of people they wish to be as they consume and identify with a range of new commodities and media images.", See: Richard Wilk, "Real Belizean Food: Building Local Identity in the Transnational Caribbean," *American Anthropologist* 101, no.2 (1999): 244-255.

[559] See article on Citizens Journal (Accessed January 20, 2021): cj.my/64204/Ceylonese-community-receives-rm2-5million-aid/

[560] Ibid.

to promote the model minority myth about the Jaffna Tamils living in Malaysia. However, it is also important to note the year of the donation- 2018. This was the year PM Razak's party faced heavy competition from the opposition party during reelection. The donation came at a time when the ruling government needed support to defeat their opponents. Those labeled as the 'Ceylonese Tamils' historically were tied to the ruling party since 1957.[561]

The accompanying picture and statement in the article spotlights the governmental gaze and male voice concerning the community today. The colonial documents used throughout this study also mostly give voice to male migration between the two locales of the Indian Ocean World- the exception of the narratives from missionaries and Tamil Bible women. Moving forward, I call upon scholars to study the Jaffna Tamil-Malaysian experience from the female perspective.

While there is rich work being done concerning the narratives of women migrants between India and Malaysia during the colonial era and the effect of lived experiences on their descendants in diaspora, this is lacking for their Jaffna Tamil counterparts. How have Jaffna Tamil-Malaysian women played a role in the formation of diasporic imaginations in Malaysia? There also needs to be more engagement with women's perspectives across both Indian and Jaffna Tamil comparisons of the indentured and civil servant migrant experiences. Though there is a lack of first-hand accounts of Jaffna Tamil migrant women, through interviews and ethnography scholars can grasp the remembered narratives of such movement through descendants.[562]

Next to a focus on different gendered narratives under colonial rule, a study on different occupations among Jaffna Tamil migrants is also important for understanding the colonial and contemporary comparison between Indian and Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia. Some Jaffna Tamils also migrated to the colony as plantation overseers rather than office civil servants. How did this dynamic between the two influence portrayals of one as a model minority and the other as the subaltern? How does this tie to the legacy of privilege in Jaffna among high-caste Vellalars and the enslavement of low-caste and untouchables back home and the subsequent recruitment of those with a high-caste background for civil servant positions and

[561] Ramasamy, *Sojourners to citizens*, 189-190.

[562] For analysis of women's agency under indentureship in Malaysia see: Arunima Datta." 'Immorality,' Nationalism and the Colonial State in British Malaya: Indian 'Coolie' Women's Intimate Lives as Ideological Background," *Women's History Review* 25, no.4 (2016): 584-601.; A. Datta. *Fleeting Agencies: A Social History of Indian Coolie Women in British Malaya* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

those with a lower-background for indenture? How do these economic and social frameworks play into access, status, and categorizations post-independence? It is important to further study caste and power dynamics between the two colonial locales. This can help us better understand contemporary migration policy favoring the educated elite (brain drain) between nation-states in the Indian Ocean and the effects of this on those migrating as a result of climate disaster or poverty who may not necessarily have the same socio-economic and education background as those migrants favored by current policies.

The Jaffna Tamils were not the only model minority of the colonial era. During the 1920s to 1930s, the British also sought to recruit other complementary groups like the Malayalees as overseers. Sinhalese migrated to the colony as jewelers and some also worked as civil servants. How do the experiences of these communities speak to the contemporary framework of 'Malay,' 'Chinese,' 'Indian,' and 'Others' in Malaysia today? This work has also mainly focused on Christian migrants. However, among the Jaffna Tamils, many are Hindu. For them there is a remembered history of the Hindu Revival in Jaffna during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Do generational memories of the movement inform solidarity with Indian Hindus in Malaysia over a shared 'Greater India' heritage? There is something to say about minorities within minorities and the ways they navigated empire as a result of being labeled the 'model.'

Malaysia serves as a case study for such categorization informing the dynamics of movement between the Indian Ocean. To move across the Indian Ocean World was the norm throughout the centuries. People navigated the ocean for trade and to start new lives. In the process they were changed by encounters with different religious, linguistic and political cultures. Empire facilitated South and Southeast Asian networks of movement and intimacies between people during the time influencing personal perception of the self and the group as well as the other. These intimacies were shaped by waves of power changes over the centuries from open space between territories to more fixed boundaries over the colonial period.

As nationalism and climate change rise in the region, how does the mythization of the model minority contribute to contemporary migration policy? As Lowe shows the intimacies of former colonial subjects are shared across the locations of former empires.[563] Indentured laborers and white-collar workers were recruited and formed lives in the new place of settlement. It is their origin of economic status that continues to inform contemporary racialization of former colonial subjects

[563] Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents.*

today. Ancestrally, a Fijian, Trinbagonian, or Kenyan of South Asian descent may be intimately tied by ethnic group yet they have also been changed linguistically and culturally as a result of the circumstances surrounding migration and occupation. Moving forward, opportunity is available for future research connecting the Indian Ocean with other oceans such as the Atlantic and Pacific to uncover commonalities and differences of South Asian diasporic spheres.

Another significant point of analysis to consider are Jaffna Tamil-Malaysian ties to the homeland. How do these diasporas remember Sri Lanka? The post-colonial period in Jaffna has been a tumultuous one. Exclusion and discrimination in official language and representative policy, as well as, violence and warfare have characterized news headlines from Sri Lanka to Malaysia. What were the effects of such news on diasporic Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia? After the war, some Jaffna Tamils gained refugee status in Malaysia. The grant of aid requested in 2018 for Sri Lankan refugees was an example of continued concern for the homeland. Despite the distance formed between the two nations over the 1940s onwards, the Jaffna Tamils living in Malaysia continued to remember their ancestral ties to the region.[564]

Further research by way of interviews is needed to show contemporary imaginations of Sri Lanka among Tamil-Malaysians today, as well as, continued adaptation to the country they have known for a century. How does attachment to this country affect public place and private space? What does this mean for a second migration to Western commonwealth nations such as Australia, Canada, and the UK? The diversity found in all three regions contribute to understanding the varying levels of imperial and colonial rule during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, contemporary migration policy and racialization of former colonial subjects. Diasporas found within all three regions present new ways for connecting to new waters of change in the contemporary socio-political, socio-economic, and socio-cultural frameworks of ethnic categorizations and migration between former colonial locales and metropoles during the twenty-first century.

[564] Thiraganama, "Making Tigers from Tamils," 269-70.

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Appendix

Summary

This thesis examines a case study of a diasporic sub-elite community in colonial Malaysia, the Jaffna Tamils from northern Sri Lanka and those specifically converted to Christianity during the early nineteenth century and originally of Vellalar caste. How does religion and educational access influence class privilege and position in the homeland? How does it inform migration abroad and the experiences of the diaspora in the country of settlement? By answering these questions, this thesis unravels migrant navigation of empire through the position of the Jaffna Tamils as a middling group and their notions of belonging across locales under colonial rule from 1800 to 1948. Their success in colonial Sri Lanka and abroad was a result of education offered by Christian Anglo- and Anglo-American missionaries, socio-economic and employment networks among Christian Vellalars and the performance of British conceptions of modernity. These performances enhanced the options and opportunities of Christian Vellalars within the British empire. Through this investigation we come to understand *why* middling groups in colonial society fashioned and performed Britishness and the ways indoctrination of colonial rule via missionary education influenced employment opportunities and hierarchization of cosmopolitan colonial societies through the making of model minorities.

There have been few studies specifically on Jaffna Tamil migrants in Malaysia. Works from the 1930s and early 2000s showcase the legacies of prominent Jaffna Tamil migrants in British Malaysia. Though the books provide background information regarding the migration of Jaffna Tamils, they serve more as guides for the *who is who* of Jaffna Tamil-Malaysian society. Throughout the works, the reader learns about Jaffna Tamil-Malaysian elites such as leaders, educators, lawyers, doctors, and business owners. These anthologies note how elite Jaffna Tamils have shaped colonial and post-colonial Malaysian society. The works are written to showcase the contributions of the community to the emerging independent nation-state, but do not address the underlying analytical questions of migration and social mobility in the British empire. Two other previous studies from 1988 and 2006 provide a more historical survey of the mechanisms behind movement between the two locales. These mechanisms included a high caste status and access to missionary educational institutions.

Despite the details of these more descriptive works, there lacks a structural analysis on the Jaffna Tamil movement between colonial Sri Lanka and Malaysia, certainly against as part of a larger framework in which colonial subjects maneuvered the rule of empire in the Indian Ocean World during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since the formation of Area Studies after the second World War, particular regions

of the world have been studied separately as South Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, East Africa, Southeast Asia, etc. This has left much unsaid about the longer connections between them. In the past two decades the emergence of Indian Ocean World studies or the "new thalassology" bridges several world regions and brings together the fluid exchanges between them. Placing the story of Jaffna Tamils within the larger thalassology of the Indian Ocean World provides a frame for the convoluted religious and educational layers of navigation during the colonial to post-colonial era.

Each chapter explores different aspects of Jaffna Tamil movement. Starting with the narrative of Tamil missionary Christian David, Chapter One introduces the intersections of education and religion as sources of navigating empire in colonial Sri Lanka up to 1875. His efforts and influence over Anglo- and Anglo-American missionaries served as the catalyst for migration to colonial Malaysia. During this time, Jaffna Tamils were familiarized to Anglo- and Anglo-American notions of modernity in mission schools but still remained strangers as subjects. Chapter Two analyzes Jaffna Tamils sojourning in Malaysia. It shows how the synergies between missionaries, Jaffna Vellalars and British colonial officials influenced recruitment and ultimately employment in the civil service between the two colonies. Chapter Three goes on to examine the consequences of such movement. Though strong ties to Jaffna remained during the early 1900s to 1920s, by the 1930s more and more Jaffna Tamils were locally born affecting loyalty between place and space. Next, Chapter Four discusses the changing dynamics of privileged status in the colony from the 1930s up to the start of WWII. It is during the war that the elite status of the community within colonial society becomes complicated since the Japanese target Jaffna Tamils to serve as agents of their empire in much the same way as the British, while also stripping the community of their comfortable position in the daily life of Malaysia.

Chapter Five explores the peak and decline of Jaffna Tamil migration between the two colonial outposts of the British empire through an analysis of colonial records concerning the war and citizenship policies procured after the war. The second World War has a profound effect on how the Jaffna Tamils felt about their place in Malaysian society. Colonial Malaysia resembled the United States, in that, migrants thought of the country as the land of opportunity, with streets *paved with gold*. During the interwar years, many of the Jaffna Tamils reaped the benefits of the opportunities present in colonial Malaysia. Yet, WWII stripped much of their profit away. After the war, the pro-British Jaffna Tamils were happy to see the British return. However, with new talk of independence and their elite status under threat, how would the Tamils continue to showcase their loyalty? Would their ties to colonial Sri Lanka remain? By

utilizing the memoirs of prominent Tamil-Malaysians of Sri Lankan descent such as the MacIntyre family and the Rogers family, Chapter Five demonstrates that the transition from colonial rule to an emerging independence movement was shrouded in nostalgias and competing loyalties through the declaration of naturalization as British citizens in Malaysia. In summary, each chapter displays the settlement of the community in colonial Malaysia by framing the continuities and differences of the community's navigation over the nineteenth to twentieth centuries within the British Empire of South and Southeast Asia.

For Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalars public persona and lived private experiences were bound to the opportunities available to the group, since the capital gained from favorable circumstances encompassed not only material wealth but also elite reputation. This is a common narrative for many middling groups of colonial society like the French Indians of Indochina, Chettiars living throughout Southeast Asia, and Eurasian communities of South and Southeast Asia. The Jaffna Tamils are both unique and similar as compared to others since religion, education, and language acquisition in English allowed a privileged space within the British colonial system. Their uniqueness however lies in how the Jaffna Tamils adapted with the changes to British rule through performance. Opportunities gained during the colonial period shifted and changed during the post-colonial era with the attempted amalgamation of heterogenous groups into homogeneous ones.

This homogenization occurred on a larger scale with the Indian Tamil community and on a smaller scale between the more numerous Hindu Jaffna Tamils and the smaller group of Christian Jaffna Tamils. While British officials sought to combine both Indian and Jaffna Tamils into one group concerning political representation on councils from the 1940s onwards, the Jaffna Tamils sought to gain recognition as a group separate from the larger one. This would go on to continue during the post-independence era with conflicts over representation of Tamils in government leading to debates on whether Jaffna Tamils should join the Malaysian Indian Congress despite the creation of a separate political representative party, the Malaysian Ceylonese Congress.

Homogenization contradicted the special position of the Jaffna Tamils, in particular a facet of the sub-group who arguably had the most recognizable voice among the community, the Jaffna Tamil Christian Vellalar civil servants. In this thesis two civil servants presented this recognizable voice when exposing grievances for unfair treatment concerning pension benefits in petitions to British authorities during the 1930s and early 1940s: Sinnadurai and Nallathamby. Both of them were able to access elite spaces for correspondence with high colonial officials because of two

significant features: their religious background along with education and language acquisition. The conversion of some Jaffna Tamil Vellalars to various sections of Christianity (Methodism, American Congregationalism, and Anglicanism), as well as their attendance at missionary schools during the nineteenth century correlated to the language used in the petitions from both civil servants around 1940.

Sinnadurai and Nallathamby are just two examples for presenting diasporic identity construction and colonial subject-making along with the circulation of ideas regarding hierarchization across locales. Throughout their petitions, the word loyalty was often affirmed, as in loyalty to the British order or status quo of the time. Another feature of these letters was the connection with British officials based on their common Christian faith and subjecthood to the crown, as ways to bridge the gap between themselves and British officials. The style of letter writing was directly tied to a legacy of interaction between colonial subjects and officials through education and conversion in colonial missionary schools.

Mimicry or the performance of Britishness was used to appeal to- and challenge the social constraints of colonial hierarchies. The fact that both Sinnadurai and Nallathamby addressed the highest officials such as the Prime Minister, Secretary of State, High Commissioner and even attempted to correspond with Buckingham Palace, shows the level of space garnered by the group as familiar to the British. Both officials and the Jaffna Tamils familiarize the latter with being associates of the British in terms of social position. Yet, the ultimate rejection of their pleas also regarded colonial subjects as strangers to colonial rulers, as not equal to those in power. The position of Jaffna Tamils in the civil service gave them economic privilege but the position also served as a buffer to be used against subaltern groups in the colony, essentially labeling as a mechanism of order and control.

Being familiar or stranger to colonial officials spoke to the ways local communities were granted or denied access to the British and others. Diaspora encompasses many different backgrounds with contemporary categorization tying the original circumstances for migratory movement. The stories of Jaffna Tamils give an alternative voice to the many stories within the South Asian communities of Southeast Asia.

As a diaspora, Jaffna Tamils had a dual position as middling subjects, privately and publicly. Other groups viewed them publicly as conforming to Britishness. The group performed Britishness, professionally and socially. The song “Sons of Jaffna” attests to the legacy of Jaffna Tamil position in colonial society as the lyrics note historical roots as tillers loyal to the British crown, working day in and day out for the

success of Jaffna and Malaysia. The lives of the group allow scholars to explore the way colonial systems tie to the legacy of class maintenance and the changing shape of such preservation at the end of the British period.

With independence, the community sought to create space for themselves in the national movement with the Malaysian Ceylonese Congress countering the homogenization of group identity in Malaysia while also providing avenues to maintain a comfortable life for themselves and generations after them. Access to British officials during the colonial period and access to post-independent government officials and local media speak to religion, class, and diasporic imaginations of position and success. The story of Jaffna Tamils in Malaysia ultimately provides context for how privileged diasporas fashion themselves for personal and group success abroad as informed by and changed from memory.

The Indian Ocean has always been a space of change and absorption from religious influences to political and economic development. The history of the region, like the identities of people are also part of these ebbs and flows tying contemporary circumstance to the past. The dynamics of previous movement between South and Southeast Asia has informed the culture, social dynamics, environmental change and identities of the people in the region from the colonial period to now.

Acknowledgements

As I sit down to write this acknowledgement section, it is late spring 2021. I originally envisioned writing this last year but the planet had other plans for all of us. As I embarked on the editing process, I experienced isolation, fear, and darkness along with the rest of the world. But I also had much support from friends inside and outside of academia. As Zoom conversations became the normal source for keeping in touch- shared cries, laughter, and reminiscences of fond memories in the archives, conferences, and our favorite social spots allowed light to shine through such a fearful time.

During this journey, a few memories stay etched in my mind. In the summer of 2018 I found myself on a small and cramped boat leaving Jaffna port, heading to one of the small islands just off the coast. The trip was no more than 20 or 25 minutes. As I peeked out at the water, I smiled to myself remembering the many 25 minute journeys I took between islands back home on the Staten Island Ferry. Looking out at the water reminded me about my childhood growing up between the islands of New York. Islands have always been central to my life starting with the lived experiences of my grandparents. Though far away from their homelands- the Pearls of the Antilles- their home was always brimming with family and friends speaking in Kreyol and Spanish with the flavors of the islands wafting throughout the halls and the music of Celia Cruz playing in the background. Within my home and immediate surroundings (I grew up in Little Sri Lanka), there was a vast amount of diversity. There was diversity in thought, language, and culture.

My grandfather in particular encouraged a love of all things culture. My grandparents lived in a small apartment in downtown Staten Island near the ferry terminal. From their window you could see the cargo ships traveling along the Kill van Kull strait. Watching them go, we wondered about where they would end up. He would make up stories about their destinations. Sometimes the stories were short and other times elaborate and sometimes the stories would lead to tales about ports around the world from his place of origin- the Caribbean- to China, India, Africa or Europe. These stories stayed with me throughout my childhood and teen years. Years later in my late 20s/early 30s, I once again found myself looking out towards the water on a ferry boat leaving one island for another. I was reminded of these stories and the diversity of experiences and influences found between bodies of water.

The privilege of conducting research has brought me across many islands/many continents over the past 5 years from the US, UK, Netherlands, and Sri Lanka. I would first like to thank my Radboud family- professors, colleagues, and friends

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Propositions

1 Personal and collective narratives of migration speak to the making of minorities within independent nation-states still grappling with the categories and frameworks of ethnicity and class created in the far and recent past (this thesis).

2 Legacies of position, prestige, and access to good and services, and education directly influence the social mobility of a migrant group abroad (this thesis).

3. For any migrant group, it is both the circumstances of their place and time, as well as, capacity to utilize networks that promote movement from one place to another (this thesis).

4 Historically voluntary migrants have moved to gain education, employment, religious freedom, and to flee conflict. In the past few decades climate change is also one of the main reasons for movement. Depending on the circumstances of migration, a group is more easily accepted in the new society and acquires privileges or they face more visible alienation in the new locale. This influences contemporary migration policy in much the same way it did during the colonial era.

5 Haitian Anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot said, "History is the fruit of power, but power is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous. The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots." Under empire power dynamics created new categorizations of people and weakened and strengthened old ones. While colonial powers promoted the idea of equality, they were also at the top of the colonial social order. Local communities experienced varying positions in colonial society. These positions could change depending on the circumstances (invisible forces of power) of the time.

6 The experiences of those under colonial rule expose the roots of power dynamics of yesterday and today. Our past speaks to our present.

7 American Anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston said, "There are years that ask questions and years that answer." These words guide my academic work and my personal life.

About the author

Kristina Hodelin (1989, New York) received her Bachelor's in Anthropology and Sociology from Pace University in New York in 2011. The following year, she was fortunate to be awarded a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship to Malaysia. Her time living and teaching in the Southeast Asian nation exposed her to the interconnections of current ethnic relations and the legacy of empire in the country. This has inspired her academic work ever since. From 2013 to 2015, she completed a dual Master degree from Columbia University and the London School of Economics' joint program in International and World History. During her time in the program, she continued to study the legacy of empire through interactions between British missionaries and Indian Tamil plantation laborers in 1950s pre-independence Malaysia. In September 2016, she joined Radboud University as a PhD staff member funded by the Radboud Institute for Culture and History (formerly Historical, Literary, and Cultural Studies). Kristina's main research interests includes migration, identity formation, and the making of minorities under colonial rule in the Indian Ocean world and examines how our past and present inform each other. Building on her previous work, Kristina further analyzes the intersections of religion, socio-economic privilege, and language acquisition to inform migration between colonial Sri Lanka and Malaysia. In between her academic studies- she worked in the museum and international education sector in New York. Her personal and professional experiences living in her hometown and abroad has informed her interests in movement and connections between oceans. She has published in the international peer-reviewed *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics*. Forthcoming work will appear in an edited volume on Jaffna and in a special issue with the *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*. Outside of her academic endeavors, she loves to cook and talk all things food and music.