

BACK IN THE MAIN TEXT

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Erasure of the Euro-Asian: Recovering Early Radicalism and Feminism in South Asia, Kumari Jayawardena, Social Scientists' Association, Colombo, 2007

In a recent letter to a Sunday newspaper, A. M. Williams lamented the absence of a formal Burgher presence in all matters pertaining to the governance of Sri Lanka today and went on to say:

One need not speak of the many achievements or contributions that the Burghers have made throughout history in Ceylon and Sri Lanka and still continue to do. One must also not forget that these contributions were not made by the Burghers for the Burghers but for the entire country and all ethnicities that live here (*Sunday Leader*, 12/08/2007, p.34).

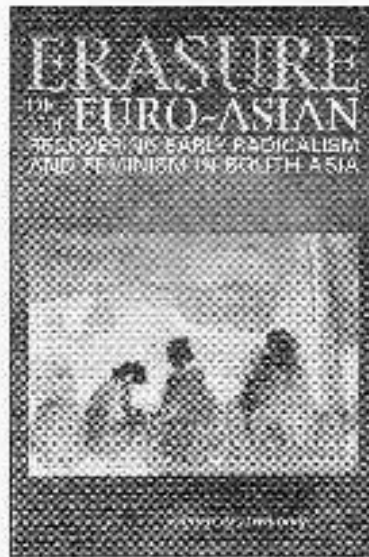
The assertion that we 'need not speak' about what the Burghers achieved, seems to assume not only that everyone knows that Burghers contributed to the modern history of Sri Lanka but also how important those interventions were. This is far from being the case.

Burgher contributions to the modern history of Sri Lanka are largely ignored or not given any prominence in the history books. Kumari Jayawardena claims in the very title of her new book that they have been 'erased' - erasure being a deliberate act. When the Burghers are mentioned, one-liners and short paragraphs about them are the most common. Sometimes there is a whole chapter dedicated to them (e.g. Fernando 1972, McGilvray 1982, Brohier 2002). Jayawardena herself has a chapter about them in her book *Nobodies to Somebodies* (2000). Whole books with the Burghers as their subject are rare (e.g. Brohier 1994, Muller 2006). The most common works are those which have the Burgher community as the cultural and social backdrop to works of fiction, biographies and auto-biographies by Burgher writers like Carl Muller, Michael Ondaatje, and Jean Arasanayagam (née Solomon). Scholarly academic works devoted *entirely* to the socio-political history of the Sri Lankan Burghers are the rarest. The authors of the most

significant recent book - *People Inbetween* (Roberts et al. 1989) - categorically state that theirs is 'not a definitive history of the Burghers but ... a contribution towards such histories' (ibid, p.24). It was however, the only scholarly work which had the Sri Lankan Burghers at the very centre of its focus, until now.

In her new book, *Erasure of the Euro-Asian*: Kumari Jayawardena brings her own ethnic identity into the spotlight in a work which seeks to restore the central role played by South Asian men and women of mixed European and Asian ancestry, mainly in Sri Lanka, in the mid-19th to mid-20th century period of transition from colonial rule to

independence. This is a work which is in keeping with the trajectory of her socio-historical scholarship over the decades. Much of her major works are seen as pioneering research and some of them are now the standard text on the subject. She began with *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*, followed by *Ethnic and Class Conflicts in Sri Lanka*, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women in South Asia during Colonial Rule* and *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka*. From the clues scattered in these works, it was to be expected that she would one day pay attention to her racially mixed Euro-Asian community, not simply in a bland stone-age



to space-age narrative, but in a critical examination of its role in the modern history of South Asia, particularly in Sri Lanka. For instance as far back as 1972, she laid out the groundwork for her later excavations when she analyzed the rise of the 'multi-racial Ceylonese Middle Class' (emphasis added) and its role in relation to British colonial rule. She identifies the radical section of this class - mainly 'professional men who had come into contact with foreign political and social movements and were active in fostering various campaigns in Ceylon, including the Buddhist revival, the temperance and political reform movement, and working class agitation' (Jayawardena 1972, p74). Except in the case of A.E. Bultjens and his role in

Buddhist revivalism and trade unionism, she does not focus in detail on the Burgher/Eurasian component of these radicals in this instance. She rectifies this gradually in her later work and completes the task in this new book.

Erasure of the Euro-Asian has been written against the background of Jayawardena's long experience of being a leading socialist and feminist scholar, educationist and activist who has often been at the receiving end of bitter criticism from some quarters of the so-called 'nativist' indigenous intellectuals of Sri Lanka, some of them her own socialist fellow travelers. Whether or not this has anything to do with her being of mixed Sinhala – English origin is the million dollar question. Her parents were the Dr. A. P de Zoysa from Sri Lanka and Eleanor Hutton from England. The more generous explanation could be that it is because in her early work she specialized in exploring how issues of ethnicity overshadowed class struggles and gave birth to Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. Perhaps it is an analysis like the following which irked her critics:

In this situation, where a Sri Lankan consciousness could not arise, the need of the new class for an identity that it could espouse vis-à-vis the foreign rulers and foreign economic interests, was met by a revival of older identities based on the familiar traditional categories of religion, caste and ethnicity. Rather than being swept away by the winds of nationalism and national unity, the older forms of identity were given a new lease of life, resulting in communalism, casteism, a distortion of history, a revival of myths of origin, and hero-myths along with the creation of visions of a past 'golden age'. (Jayawardena, 1985/2, pp. 141)

As she shows in *Erasure*, her experience of being at the receiving end of criticism is nothing new. Her claim is that the radical and pioneering work of nation building by some leading 19th century South Asian Euro-Asians was erased from the history books due to their mixed-race origins. But she makes the important point that this was not only a matter of prejudice on the part of the British and the local colonized Asians. Jayawardena shows how 'it was not their *marginality* – namely the pursuit only of Euro-Asian sectarian issues – but their *centrality*, emphasizing questions concerning the *whole of society*, that characterized their utopian vision of a better world' (*Erasure*, p 282.) The Euro-Asians were 'subversive hybrids' who were seen as a serious threat to the political stability of the colony on the one hand, and the aspirations of the indigenous population to sole post-colonial political and economic power on the other. This was mainly because of the crucial coupling of their mixed identity with

their westernized / European manners and customs, their intellectual prowess, and their knowledge about, and adoption of, the rhetoric and practices of the class struggles and revolutionary movements against imperialism and colonialism which swept through Europe and the colonies in the 19th century. They were:

[...] radical, with a Utopian-like vision of a democratic plural society of the future. They emerged as catalysts for modernization and social change, and were, on occasion, proto-nationalist and feminist, participating in the vanguard of the early anti-colonial challenge. (Jayawardene 2007, p2)

Kumari Jayawardena is very much a modern Sri Lankan Euro-Asian cast in this mould. 'Euro-Asian' is a term coined by her to include those of mixed European and Asian origin in South Asia, in both the paternal and maternal line of descent, to get round the confusing array of terms used to signify such people – e.g. Eurasian, East Indian, Anglo-Indian, Anglo-Ceylonese, Euro-Ceylonese, Burgher, Dutch Burgher, Portuguese Burgher, and so on. It also circumvents other names for these people which were considered derogatory - mulatto, half-blood, half-caste, mechanics, micks, railway stock, planter stock, Tommy stock etc. Also it saves her from the wrath of those families and communities who, for instance, might accuse her of calling them 'Eurasians' when they claim to be 'Burghers' and vice-versa. Within each group there are hierarchies and caste-like divisions of people who are sensitive about what they are called. She therefore avoids all the fuss with her neologism. Part 1 with its first three chapters, nearly a third of the book, is a detailed piece of scholarship and writing which describes this naming and the emergence of the Euro-Asian communities with their uneasy attempts at assimilation into mainstream South Asian society from Portuguese times onwards. Here she covers Euro-Asian communities in Singapore and Indonesia as well. It is however Part Two (Euro-Asian Radicalism and Modernism) and Part Three (Gender, Patriarchy and Nation) which are her main concerns and comprise the heart of the book.

Modernist Radicals

Kumari Jayawardena begins her work of recovery by tracing and assessing the impact of world events, from the late 18th and the 19th centuries, on South Asian colonies. The American Revolution of 1776, the French Revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848, Latin American independence movements, revolts in the West Indies, resistance to colonization in parts of India like the Punjab, unrest in Ireland,

struggles for reform in Britain (Chartism, franchise rights, struggles for a free press, free trade and laissez-faire policies), the counter movements from Utopian Socialists and Marxists against capitalist society, the labour agitation and trade unionism struggles in Europe, challenges to Christian orthodoxy from Baptists, secularists, Darwinists, theosophists, free thinkers, – all of these ‘shook the ideological foundations of traditional society’ and were ‘considered subversive by the ever-vigilant colonial rulers who monitored the influence of such movements on colonial society’ (ibid, p86).

Jayawardena traces the Euro-Asian radical lineage in South Asia from Henry Derozio and the *Young Bengal* movement in India in the first half of the 19th century to Charles Lorenz and the *Young Ceylon* group in Sri Lanka in the later part of the century. Through their newspapers, periodicals, societies and associations, they kept abreast of the revolutionary world events. In India, the ‘Derozians’ challenged traditional Hindu society and the colonial political system from their bases in Kolkata and wider Bengal. They took up various issues for social and political reform and campaigned against patriarchy, polygamy, caste injustices, forced labour, female subordination, banning of widow remarriage, political conservatism, idolatory, ‘tyrants and priests’, and the denial of access to the civil service to Indians. ‘They started the process which inspired and heralded other Indian nationalist and reform movements of the late 19th century’ (ibid, p110). However Jayawardena points out that these later Hindu and Muslim nationalists were ‘politically militant but socially reactionary’. They ‘spoke out for political change and Home Rule, but hesitated to espouse secularism or to critique local social practice Only a small minority of ideologues were able to combine secularism, nationalism and social change – among the pioneers being the Derozians’ (ibid, p125). Jayawardena shows how it was this crucial combination of Derozio’s radicalism in both the political and social spheres which led to his being denied his true place, if not being completely ignored, by the history of this era in India. It was a similar case in Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka, it was the Irish medical doctor, Christopher Elliot whom Jayawardena credits with being one of those who initiated the agitation for radical reform in the colony in the 1840’s. Influenced by the political revolutions in Europe, the British Chartist movement and the revolt in Ireland, Elliot was the proprietor and editor of the *Colombo Observer* newspaper, through which he challenged the colonial government and its British lackeys. He called for constitutional reform with representative government and

political rights for *all* the people. He accused the government of Ceylon as being ‘as much despotic as that of Russia’. The newspaper also became the main source of news and information for local dissidents about the revolutionary movements in Europe and in the colonies. This news reached Kandy where the armed revolt of Puran Appu took place in 1848. Governor Torrington made specific reference to the role of Elliot (that he was ‘getting up agitation all over the country’) and the Colombo radicals, who via the *Observer* conveyed the news from France to the Kandyan areas.

These Colombo radicals included Euro-Asian proctors and advocates - one of the few professional groups who were not government servants. They were free citizens who were able to express independent opinions. Their practice in provincial towns put them in touch with the mass of the people. They challenged government policies, denounced the racism of resident Europeans, took up political causes and became part of the struggle for citizens’ rights. Among them was the Euro-Asian lawyer Richard Morgan. Considered a friend of the poor and the oppressed, he was actively involved in the reform movement. He critiqued the caste system and its influence in judicial affairs, and in 1843 he led the formation of the ‘Friends of Ceylon’, a society open to ‘Native or European-born’, which agitated for more representative legislature and the achievement of self-government. They were joined in their struggles, petitions and appeals to the House of Commons in Britain by the merchant capitalists calling for ‘no taxation without representation’, and in condemning the financial policies and lack of expenditure on public works of the colonial government. Morgan went on to take the Burgher seat, one of the six ‘Unofficial’ seats in the Legislative Council, and in later life accepted high judicial positions which compromised his earlier radical positions. But the dissident traditions he advocated in his youth along with Elliot and others, inspired Euro-Asians like Charles Lorenz and the *Young Ceylon* group.

Lorenz was a product of the Colombo Academy (today’s Royal College) begun by the colonial government in 1835. Quoting from *People Inbetween*, Jayawardena describes how the Academy was responsible for forming the minds of the brightest local students. Dominated in its early years by nearly 60 percent of Euro-Asian students, the academy schooled its students in the Classics, British history, the works of the Enlightenment, and in the pantheon of English literature. While creating ‘the ideal of the Cultured Gentleman’, the ‘well-read Man’, the ‘Moral Man’, and the man of ‘Rounded Respectability’ (descriptions borrowed from *People Inbetween*), the Academy more importantly created men who

could stand up for themselves and ‘express opinions on political matters’. The school produced:

students with the ability to question orthodoxy, to disagree with their peers, and to have the courage to express their views even under conditions of colonial rule. Among such students [...] were James de Alwis, Muttu Coomaraswamy, Richard Morgan and Charles Lorenz – all of whom were to make their mark in the Legislative Council. (Jayawardena 2007, p 146)

Lorenz was a protégé of Christopher Elliot. He “eagerly imbibed” Elliot’s progressive liberal ideas and joined him in protests against government policies—starting in 1848 when Lorenz appeared at a public meeting against oppressive taxes. Lorenz learnt his radical journalism from Elliot’s *Ceylon Observer*, and in 1850, along with Frederick Nell, Louis Nell and Charles Ferdinands, started the literary journal *Young Ceylon*. Jayawardene considers the journal’s appearance as ‘a watershed in the island’s political history’. It discussed literary subjects, advocated social and political reform and the modernization of society. More importantly (as she quotes from *People Inbetween*) ‘it was saturated with and permeated by a Ceylonese patriotism’. Euro-Asians began to consider themselves as ‘Ceylonese’ by the late 19th century and some of them argued for a ‘cross-ethnic Ceylonese identity’ which would ‘subsume and dissolve the particularistic identities held by Burghers, Sinhalese, Colombo Chetties, Moors, Tamils, Malays and others’ (Roberts et. al., 1989, p178). This Ceylonese identity was pushed in the *Examiner* which was bought in the 1860’s by a group of Euro-Asians – the first newspaper in the colony to come under Ceylonese management. Frederick Nell and Charles Lorenz were among its first editors and it soon became a serious critical publication with distinct political and social messages.

Lorenz followed Morgan to occupy the Burgher seat in the Legislative Council - one of the six ‘Unofficials’ – the others being a Sinhalese, a Tamil and three Europeans. Established in 1833, the Legislative Council, by the 1860’s had become ‘outmoded and out-of-step’ with the colony’s rapid economic progress and was considered ‘unrepresentative of the emerging bourgeoisie which included many highly qualified professionals’. The Unofficials called for an increase in their numbers and argued for political reform and representative government. When a vote of censure on the government was passed opposing military expenditure being borne by the local government and not the imperial government as in other colonies, the Unofficials walked out when the vote was overturned later.

Lorenz resigned from the Council after this and focused his efforts on leading the movement for political emancipation by forming the Ceylon League in 1865. Jayawardena argues that it was ‘the first such organization to criticize the authorities’ (p161). It accused the colonial government of encroaching on the constitutional privileges of British subjects and asked people not to trust in its sense of justice. It called for agitation to defend ‘our rights’, arguing that the time ‘has arrived’ for a ‘constitutional resistance’. Jayawardena quotes from Blazé (1948), that the Ceylon League ‘won the support of all classes, and succeeded in creating a general appreciation of the need for constitutional reform’, and that Lorenz, ‘more than any other man... began the movement for the political emancipation of the Ceylonese’ (Jayawardena 2007, p 162).

The Erasure

Citing examples from contemporary Indian historical works Jayawardena, devotes a short but tightly packed section to show how the role of Derozio and the Young Bengal movement was under-played and even erased from Indian history. But strangely she does not undertake such an exercise to illustrate her point about erasure when it comes to her analysis of the late 19th and early 20th century radical contributions of Sri Lankan Euro-Asians. Perhaps she feels it is more important to attend to her work of recovery rather than waste pages pointing out the lacunae and the downplaying by mainstream Sri Lankan history. For instance, taking just two examples, it is interesting to analyze the place given to the people and organizations mainstreamed by Jayawardena – such as Elliot, Lorenz, *Young Ceylon*, the *Ceylon Observer*, the *Examiner*, the Friends of Ceylon, and the Ceylon League, in two major works of Sri Lankan history – *The History of Ceylon*, Vol. III, (eds. K.M de Silva et al, 1973) and *A History of Sri Lanka* (K. M. de Silva, 1981/2003). Reading Jayawardena, it is clear from their writings, their actions, their newspapers and their organizations, that these Sri Lankan Euro-Asians were radical and utopian for their time. Using strong, positive words and phrases like, ‘bold in their challenges’, ‘part of the struggle for citizens rights’, ‘in the forefront of agitation’, ‘most influential radical leader’, ‘a watershed in the island’s political history’ etc., Jayawardena leaves no doubt in the reader’s mind about their ‘centrality’ to the agitations for social and political change and the vibrancy of the times. Hence it is interesting that K. M. de Silva sets out to analyse the ‘causes of (the) tepidity’ (emphasis added) of the politics of the period after concluding that:

In striking contrast to the vigorous resistance offered by the Buddhist movement to the encroachment of Christianity in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the island's formal politics lacked any sense of purpose and animation (de Silva, 1981/2003, p 356).

He goes on to say that 'There was no demand from Sri Lankans themselves for representative government, and the colonial government of the day made the most of this'. (ibid. p359).

It is clear that de Silva does not consider the Euro-Asians as being Sri Lankan. de Silva does commend Dr Christopher Elliot for his 'remarkably outspoken journalism' and credits him with leading the agitation for reform of the Legislative Council in the 1840's, 'to make it genuinely representative of the people at large.....but the radicalism of his demands ensured their speedy rejection by the colonial authorities' (ibid, p357). de Silva concedes that the revival of the 'pressure for reform' in the 1850's came from 'European merchants and plantersand from the Burghers' but goes on to stress that the colonial government rejected their attempts to increase the Unofficial representation in the Legislative Council on the grounds that they were only expressing the 'narrow views of class interests' and not that of the 'great body of the people'. Colonial Governors 'made much of the fact that there was no agitation from the people at large for an elective system of representation' (ibid, p358). de Silva concurs that their radicalism was in pursuit of self-interest, while for Jayawardena, it was a genuine radicalism, pursued in the interests of a wider 'Ceylonese' identity.

In this context, de Silva argues strongly that the British journalist William Digby's two pamphlets of 1876 and 1877 'were enormously influential' in making the case for constitutional reform. But Jayawardena does not mention Digby in this vein – as being so influential. She makes no reference to these two pamphlets. And from his point-of-view, de Silva makes no mention of Richard Morgan, *The Colombo Observer*, Lorenz and Young Ceylon in this political context of the mid to late 19th century. The term 'Burgher' appears so rarely in his book that de Silva does not even include it in his index. In the early part of 1991, K. M. de Silva and Michael Roberts had a heated exchange in the newspapers over de Silva's scathing review of *People Inbetween* (op.cit.1989). de Silva considered Lorenz as 'very much the odd man out in the Burgher elite' and went on to say "I believe the rest of the (Young Ceylon) group were peripheral figures and the group itself was not of any great significance in the wider perspective of the island's history' (*Ceylon Daily News*, March/April 1991)

In the larger *History of Ceylon*, Vol III (op.cit. 1973) with chapters contributed by different authors, the Burghers are discussed in a little detail but it is made clear from the outset that they were not 'conventional Ceylonese' but 'descendants of Europeans of unmixed blood or the descendants of Europeans who had had connections with native women' (L. A. Wickremeratne, ibid, p 167). Elliot, the Friends of Ceylon, *The Colombo Observer*, Lorenz, and the Ceylon League are mentioned in connection with the developments in the Legislative Council in the 19th century in a chapter written by K. M. de Silva, but the tone in which they are referred to is a mixture of condescension and reluctance to accept that these individuals and institutions were central to the campaigns for political and social change, while sometimes conceding grudging praise for their tenacity and intelligence (pages 233, 238-39).

The most striking 'erasure' made by de Silva is that of the role of A. E. Buultjens in the trade union movement. In *The Rise of the Labor Movement*, Jayawardena considered Alfred Ernst Buultjens (1865 – 1916) as 'the first person to introduce ideas of trade unionism into Ceylon' (1972, p.80). In a detailed and extensive analysis, she argued that 'the earliest labour dispute which had the elements of a modern industrial dispute was the strike of printers that took place in 1893' and that 'it was the outcome of the propaganda in favour of trade unions that had been carried on by A. E. Buultjens and Dr. Lisboa Pinto (ibid, pp 93 - 94). Jayawardena's claim about Buultjens' importance in the birth of trade unionism has been consistent. She repeats it in *Feminism and Nationalism* (1986, p127); again in *Nobodies to Somebodies* (2000, pp 242 - 243); and now in *Erasure of the Euro-Asian* (2007, pp 169 – 177). de Silva mentions Buultjens once in his *A History of Sri Lanka* (1981 & 2003, p 347) but only as one amongst a few names mentioned in a sentence regarding the development of Buddhist schools and not in relation to trade unionism.

In the *History of Ceylon* Vol III, Buultjens is similarly mentioned in an almost identical sentence but is also afforded a footnote stating 'Buultjens, a Burgher, was Principal of Ananda College from 1890 to 1899, in succession to C. W. Leadbeater' (op.cit.,1973, p 203). In neither instance is it even hinted at that Buultjens 'renounced Christianity as a student in Cambridge in 1887, and converted to Buddhism' (Jayawardena,1986, p 127), and 'was active in Buddhist education, which he regarded as a national cause, and clashed with the colonial government and missionaries on this issue' (ibid, p174). Jayawardena's *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon* can be found as a footnote reference about four times in this *HOC* Volume III, twice in connection with the

temperance movement and twice in connection with trade unionism. Therefore her opinion about Bultjens could not have been missed. Indeed one footnote urges the reader to look up the book, citing the page numbers, 'for a comprehensive study of Goonesinha's impact on the politics of the nineteen twenties' (de Silva et.al., 1973, p 404). The Sinhalese A. E. Goonesinha, founded the Young Lanka League in 1915, the Ceylon Labour Union in 1922 and led the island's first general strike in 1923. There is no such urging to read the earlier sections where Jayawardena provides a comprehensive study of Bultjens' impact in the same context. It is also significant that the Young Lanka League is described by K. M. de Silva thus:

The Young Lanka League might be described as the first 'radical' and 'nationalist' political association to be formed in Ceylon with a political programme which was overtly and defiantly opposed to the continuation of British rule in the island. (ibid, p 390)

Change the name of the League to 'The Friends of Ceylon' or 'The Ceylon League' and we get the other perspective provided by Jayawardena in *Erasure of the Euro-Asians*.

The Euro-Asian 'New Woman'

It is also interesting to note the differences between *Erasure of the Euro-Asian* and other significant works of history about the role played by the Euro-Asian woman Agnes de Silva, the wife of George E. de Silva, in the women's franchise movement of the 1920's. In the 1981 publication to celebrate 50 years of universal suffrage in Sri Lanka (ed. K.M. de Silva, 1981), Tilaka Metthananda makes the observation that at the general sessions of the Ceylon National Congress held in Kandy in 1925, 'a resolution on votes for women, submitted by the Mallika Kulanga Samitiya, was proposed by a Mrs Asline Thomas and seconded by Mrs. George E. de Silva (née Agnes de Silva) who was later to play a crucial role in lobbying for female suffrage when the Donoughmore Commission visited the island in 1928' (ed. K.M.de Silva, 1981, p67-68). Later, Agnes de Silva is again mentioned as one of the members of the Women's Franchise Union, formed in 1927, 'on the initiative of a group of affluent and influential Colombo-based women ...almost all of (whom) were wives of Congress politicians' (ibid, p. 68). Metthananda underplays their agency by stressing that the WFU had to be 'persuaded' to set aside their initial reluctance and send a deputation to give evidence before the Donoughmore Commission.

Going on to say that 'the reform programme they drafted was a modest and extremely cautious one' (ibid. p67), Metthananda asserts that 'the women of Sri Lanka were generally a lethargic group when it came to the assertion of political rights. This was well demonstrated during the visit of the Donoughmore Commission in 1927' (ibid, p70).

In contrast, in *Erasure of the Euro-Asian*, Jayawardena gives us a different slant on Agnes de Silva née Nell. Jayawardena is more forthright about her placing her at the forefront of the franchise movement stating, 'Agnes was a leader of the ...movement...and among the boldest of the middle-class women making claims to political equality' (Jayawardena 2007, p 230-231). Unlike Metthananda who does not expand on her assessment of Agnes de Silva playing a 'crucial role', Jayawardena sets out Agnes's radical Lorenz-Nell Euro-Asian pedigree and quotes her (citing Jane Russell 1981) as saying:

Lord Donoughmore asked if we wanted Indian Tamil women labourers on the estates to have the vote, I replied: 'Certainly, they are women too. We want all women to have the vote'. (Jayawardena 2007, p232)

Further, when Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan made his notorious statement that giving women the vote would be like 'casting pearls before swine', Agnes de Silva hit back that it was prejudiced men who were the swine. Hers was in a hard-hitting provocative speech which was given full coverage in the press at the time (see ibid, p232). Metthananda refers to Ramanathan's remark and his anxiety to 'protect the sacredness of the home' (ed. K.M.de Silva, 1981, p 69). She makes no reference to Agnes de Silva's reply. In her 1990 article mentioned above, Metthananda makes no reference to Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan's cutting remark (nor to Agnes de Silva reply), but chooses to foreground his patriarchal concerns, stating that 'The most vehement opponent of women's franchise was Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, the Tamil leader, who argued that it would lead to the destruction of domestic peace, purity and harmony that prevailed in the household' (eds. Kiribamune and Samarasinghe, 1990, p67)

Kumari Jayawardena co-authored (with Malathi de Alwis) the most comprehensive study to date of the women's franchise movement in Sri Lanka, appropriately titled 'Casting Pearls' (de Alwis/Jayawardena, 2000). Going back to the original sources, and analyzing every aspect of the movement in great detail, they give rightful prominence to Agnes de Silva and others, and show the passion and

dedication with which the women of the movement engaged with the issues – an engagement which was far from one which was ‘lethargic’, ‘lacking in enthusiasm’ and not showing ‘any interest in political participation’.

Agnes de Silva is one of the many Euro-Asian women that Jayawardena recovers from the shadows of history. She sees all of them as belonging to the phenomenon of the ‘New Woman’, the emergence of who in both the West and the East (including the colonial world) was:

one of the startling challenges to patriarchy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In Asia, she was the educated, bourgeois woman who was in the process of liberating herself from patriarchal domination, not only by joining women’s associations, publishing feminist journals and demanding gender equality in terms of social and political rights, but also by asserting her personal independence and sexuality. (Jayawardena 2007, p 252)

Jayawardena describes how the pioneering spirit of Agnes de Silva continued in her daughters Anil de Silva and Minnette de Silva, the former “an early woman journalist, art critic and political activist” (ibid, p 234), and Minnette, Sri Lanka’s first woman architect. Jayawardena quotes Neloufer de Mel (2001) that through the choices she made in her life, Anil de Silva defied the boundaries of “the prevailing Puritanism and nationalist rhetoric” which were the “important rubrics of respectability” of the times (ibid, p 234). Choices like becoming a journalist in London in the 1930’s and writing critical articles about the culture and social practices of Sri Lanka, living abroad and marrying a foreigner (for which she was bitterly attacked in the nationalist Sri Lankan press), becoming secretary of the Indian People’s Theatre Association – ‘a vibrant leftist theater group’ (ibid, p 235) and being actively involved with Indian and French communists at different periods of her life. Minnette was also an ‘adventurous and creative pioneer’ who ‘went against the grain’ (ibid pp 236 & 237). She studied architecture in India (at that time a strongly male world) and became ‘not only the first local (and possibly Asian) woman architect, but also the first in Sri Lanka (in the 1950’s) to pioneer a synthesis of modernism and tradition in architecture’(ibid, p237).

Jayawardena’s recovery of the Euro-Asian ‘New Woman’ of the late 19th and early 20th centuries takes place against an extensive and detailed background chapter (ibid, Chapter 9, pp185-211) where she explores the making of myths about the ‘oriental’ and Euro-Asian woman – myths constructed

around fantasies of the ‘Orient’ in Western culture during the colonial era, myths about the ‘exotic’, desirable and subservient oriental woman, myths expounding the beauty and sexuality of ‘half-caste’ women, and from the indigenous Asian side, myths about her immorality and impurity. Citing examples, Jayawardena argues that these stereotypes continue to be in vogue today - for example in the perception predominant in cultural practices like the Sinhala cinema, of the bad, immoral urban Burgher girl played against the good, chaste Sinhalese village girl.

The 19th century saw the spread of liberalism and movements for democratic rights, and with that ‘the demands of western women for education, employment, franchise rights, and birth control increased’ (ibid, p 213). These movements for women’s rights, begun in the earlier century by women like Mary Wollstonecraft and her *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) in Britain, and Olympe de Gouge’s *Declaration of the Rights of Women* (1791) in France, spread across the colonial world. Jayawardena argues that Euro-Asian women in South Asia, overcoming their negative stereotypes, led these movements, being ‘among the first women to make a historic breakthrough, confronting traditional attitudes and patriarchal practices’ (ibid, p 214). Their first advances were made in education and going to work outside the home. In India and Sri Lanka, pioneer Euro-Asian women teachers, nurses and doctors paved the way for women of other communities to excel in education and obtain employment. They were helped by the liberal attitudes to women expounded by radical Euro-Asian men, their journals and organisations, like for example Frederick Nell, Charles Lorenz, the *Young Ceylon* group, and Alfred Driberg whom Jayawardena describes as ‘a remarkable example’ of ‘early feminist consciousness among Euro-Asian men’ (ibid, p 215). Driberg wrote to his father from school in Britain, ‘eagerly supporting that idea’ that his sisters might also be sent to school there, referring to ‘the good which would result from the foreign education they would get there’ and continuing – ‘I don’t think it right that boys alone should be sent here from Ceylon – Why not girls?’ (ibid, p 215, quoting from Roberts et.al., 1989, p62). When the Cambridge Junior and Senior examinations were introduced in 1880, they attracted young Euro-Asian women who were the first to go in for higher education. Among the earliest was Hetty Driberg who obtained second-class honours at the Cambridge Junior examination in 1881. The census data for the thirty year period 1881 to 1911 revealed the huge advances made by Euro-Asian women in literacy. While being significantly higher than that of Sinhala, Tamil and

Muslim women, they were even higher than that of the men of these communities.

These advances in literacy and secondary and higher education enabled Euro-Asian women to make inroads into the professions open to women at that time. They became school teachers, and also taught other women nursing, dressmaking, art, typing, secretarial and clerical work. Some of them became writers, poets and artists while others became successful business entrepreneurs. Others pioneered modernism in education by setting up schools for girls. Jayawardena sees the entry of Euro-Asian women into the Medical College 'as their most spectacular success'. It was opened to women in 1892 and Euro-Asian women like Alice de Boer, Winifred Nell, Claribel van Dort, Rachel Christoffelsz, Helen Kiddle, Ursula van Rooyen and Sylvia Ebert were among the first to qualify as doctors in the 1890's and early 20th centuries.

Jayawardena had already identified this 'New Woman' in Asia in her pioneering work *Feminism and Nationalism* (1986), but in her chapter on Sri Lanka in that book, she does not dwell on the ethnicity of the women she writes about. The nexus of her analysis is purely around gender and class. The term 'Burgher' appears just twice and only two Euro-Asian Sri Lankan women are mentioned – Winifred Nell in connection with women in higher education and entering the medical profession (p121), and Agnes de Silva (Nell) in connection with the women's franchise movement (p124). Similarly in *Nobodies to Somebodies*, in the chapter entitled 'The Debut of The Bourgeois Woman' (Jayawardena 2000, pp 277-297) her analysis focuses on class, caste and gender and not on ethnicity per se, even though she refers to Sinhala and Tamil bourgeois woman, and again mentions Winifred Nell and her niece Agnes (Nell) de Silva and cites Deloraine Brohier on the pioneer Burgher women doctors being the 'new women' of Sri Lanka. In contrast, the chapter in *Nobodies to Somebodies* entitled 'Burghers and Eurasians as Modernizers' (Jayawardena 2000), except for one sentence again about the pioneering Burgher women doctors, is entirely about class and the ethnic Euro-Asian males.

Jayawardena, amongst others, has been questioned for 'a non-articulation of a feminist analysis in [their] writings on ethnicity', despite being 'actively involved in several feminist organizations in the country' (de Alwis, 2003, p 19). This was when, in the 1970's and 1980's, Jayawardena engaged with 'class and communalism/ethnicity but not gender' (ibid.) in her writings, while being a founding member of such multi-ethnic feminist organizations like the Voice of Women and

the Women's Education and the Research Centre (WERC). de Alwis asked 'why Sri Lankan feminism has taken so long to theorize the conjuncture between ethnicity and gender' (ibid, p16). Jayawardena, however, did tackle the question of gender and ethnicity in her later work (see Jayawardena 1992 a/b/c) and now again in Chapter 11 – of *Erasure of the Euro-Asian* entitled 'Racism, Revivalism and Gender' where she re-visits the familiar ground of the role of race, class and religion in the articulation of national identity that she had covered elsewhere. Here she shows again how the Buddhist revival of the 19th century, begun as a response against Christianity, later evolved into a campaign against everything western and European /Euro-Asian, resulting in the rise of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism which has come to dominate the socio-politics of the country ever since.

The Sinhala-Buddhist revival sought to exclude certain 'alien' practices and customs, and to reactivate what was believed to be tradition, and in doing so, promote Sinhala patriotism. [...these] included preserving the 'purity' of the 'Aryan Sinhala' nation, combating Christianity and missionary education, and discouraging 'hybridization' and mixed marriages of Sinhala Buddhists to Christians, Euro-Asians and foreigners. (Jayawardena 2007, pp 252-53)

In this wake, questions of gender and nation became central issues. The responsibility of the 'respectable' Sinhala-Buddhist woman towards the nation was laid out and Euro-Asian women became particular targets of criticism:

In contrast, however, to many nationalists of neighbouring countries, who projected ideas of the 'New Woman' and spoke of women's emancipation, the conservative Buddhists argued that what was needed was a return to tradition and old values, imposing a restraint on unacceptable types of 'modernity'. This was to counteract the 'corrupting' influences on local women of Christianity, missionary education and western values.....This involved two strategies: preservation of the 'purity' of local women and glorifying their beauty, while insisting on the immorality and unattractiveness of European and Euro-Asian women, whose looks and clothes became the target of vituperative comment. (ibid, pp 253-54)

Jayawardena explores the most personal aspect of her identity in the penultimate chapter of *Erasure* which deals with the issue of marriages of Sinhala-Buddhists to Europeans and Euro-Asians, of which she is a product. By the late 19th century, marriages and alliances across race and class barriers – European men with local women and local men to European women - 'were socially and even officially deplored' (ibid,

p258) even though theoretically ‘there was freedom of choice in marriage’ given that ‘under colonial laws, one could (within stipulated age and consanguinity) marry a person of any class, caste, ethnicity or religion’ (ibid, p 260). Jayawardena explicates in detail how, since Portuguese times, despite the strict caste stipulation in traditional Sri Lankan society, ‘marriages... took place of local men of wealth and high social status and women of British, Dutch and Portuguese origin’(ibid, p 261). She goes on to identify ‘the good and the great’, mainly Sinhala families, in the socio-politics of modern Sri Lanka, whose ancestry can be traced to mixed marriages, with either Europeans or Euro-Asians. Her list is long and detailed, and includes, for example, the Bandaranaike, de Soysa, de Abrew, Don Carolis, Bawa, Coomaraswamy, Macan Markar, Ramanathan, and Saravanamuttu families.

Jayawardena goes into the detail of the vociferous criticism of these marriages in the Sinhala-Buddhist press and in public campaigns, from the late 19th century onwards in journals such as *The Buddhist*, newspapers such as ‘*Sinhala Jathiya*’, and the writings of Piyadasa Sirisena and Anagarika Dharmapala. Jayawardena also quotes from the records of a meeting held in 1927 at the Colombo Tower Hall to denounce mixed marriages:

The speeches referred to the harmful consequences of mixed marriages, such as the ‘weakening’ of the race, as the children of such marriages “always thought and acted according to western ideas as a result of the influence of the mother.” Moreover such children “did no good to the Sinhalese nation.” Another problem discussed at the meeting was that, if educated Sinhalese men married Europeans, “Sinhalese women of the educated classes would find no husbands.” (ibid, p 271)

Jayawardena argues that ‘unrecorded East-West partnerships occurred among all classes’ in South Asia, and that ‘the reality was different in that a “laissez-faire” attitude in choice of marriage partner became increasingly prevalent over the decades’, so much so that over the centuries since Portuguese colonialism, ‘racial mixing has continued with each generation, making South Asia an example of hybridization, which is a continuing process today’ (p278).

Erasure of the Euro-Asian is a rare book and an important addition to the sparse bibliography on the Sri Lankan Burghers or Euro-Asians. Like Roberts et. al. in *People Inbetween*, Jayawardena does not claim this to be a definitive history of the Sri Lankan Euro-Asians. As the book’s subtitle

suggests, her intention is more precise and more focused. It can be argued that the mainstream history of Sri Lanka has characterized the social and political changes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries as ‘tepid’, ‘melodramatic’, ‘lacking in purpose and animation’ etc., and in the process downplayed and even erased the pioneering, radical and utopian nature of the central role played during that period by Sri Lankan Euro-Asians: Kumari Jayawardena has shown how the historical waters of that era were certainly hotter—if not exactly at boiling point –when it came to agitations for constitutional and political reform, social changes, and the celebration of a common Ceylonese identity. She certainly seems to have the more accurate reading of the temperature of those times and this book has achieved what she set out to do – to recover the Euro-Asian ‘public intellectual’ from the ‘footnotes in small-print’ and give him and her ‘a new and acceptable face in the main text’ (Jayawardena 2007, p288).

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International McCarthyism: The Case of Rhoda Miller de Silva by Judy Waters Pasqualge

The American mind has been seduced by a confused mythology that has rationalised and justified violence in their country. On the one hand, they are taught to be proud that their country was born in violent revolution – but that revolution is supposed to have decided the basic lines of their society for all time. Any idea of revolution to change the structure of society is subversive and impermissible.

On the other hand, there is the myth of the frontier peopled by rugged, lonely heroes fighting and killing everything and everybody that stood in the way of what was Right and Just. That is the myth of violence that is refreshed, renewed, resuscitated for every generation, presumably to explain the violent trends in their society.

Rhoda Miller de Silva, "That Man in the White House," *Ceylon Daily News*, 11 June 1968

The [Ceylon] government and the opposition have never been able to find common ground on questions that deeply affect the entire nation's future such as the campaign to grow more food and save foreign exchange; the forging of a lucid and progressive education system so that the young will not be made to pay too dearly for the personal ambitions and political perversities of their elders.

It is only on the matter of increasing allowances for themselves that all parties could come together. This in itself, it seems to me, is a mockery of the poor whose heads must ring with preachments on austerity and morality.

Rhoda Miller de Silva, "No Shortage of Skilled Members," *Ceylon Daily News*, 16 August 1968

[excerpts from articles in the book]

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