

Chatting Sri Lanka: Powerful Communications in Colonial Times



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**Chatting Sri Lanka:
Powerful Communications in Colonial
Times**

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Abstract:

The thesis argues that the telephone had a significant impact upon colonial society in Sri Lanka. In the emergence and expansion of a telephone network two phases can be distinguished: in the first phase (1880-1914), the government began to construct telephone networks in Colombo and other major towns, and built trunk lines between them. Simultaneously, planters began to establish and run local telephone networks in the planting districts. In this initial period, Sri Lanka's emerging telephone network owed its construction, financing and running mostly to the planting community. The telephone was a 'tool of the Empire' only in the sense that the government eventually joined forces with the influential planting and commercial communities, including many members of the indigenous elite, who had demanded telephone services for their own purposes. However, during the second phase (1919-1939), as more and more telephone networks emerged in the planting districts, government became more proactive in the construction of an island-wide telephone network, which then reflected colonial hierarchies and power structures. Finally in 1935, Sri Lanka was connected to the Empire's international telephone network.

One of the core challenges for this pioneer work is of methodological nature: a telephone call leaves no written or oral source behind. Thus the work will have to use a broader body of sources, advertisements and films and 'read between the lines' about the nature and content of telephone conversation. The telephone was more than a crucial part of the island's colonial business structure or a useful tool to call for help in situations of distress, but beyond this primary purpose, it offered the opportunity to communicate and chat with other members of your peer group, which was particularly important for women. The telephone was also an expensive commodity and consumption was the first step for the indigenous elite to challenge the colonial power. The thesis argues that the telephone played a role in the processes of political and identity building during colonial times.

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Glossary:

Ceylon National Congress (CNC)

District Medical Officer (D.M.O.)

Grand Oriental Hotel (GOH)

Karava, Salagama and Durava castes (KDS castes)

National Telephone Company (NTC)

Oriental Telephone Company (OTC)

Post-Master General (PMG)

Planters' Association (PA)

Planters' Association of Ceylon (PAC)

Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)

United National Party (UNP)

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Introduction

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be regarded as an 'Age of Communication': the postal services were operating on a global scale, drastically increasing the delivery speed by using steamship and railways. Telegraph cables around the globe enabled a fast, almost real time communication in the second half of the nineteenth century. The introduction of new forms of written communication, like the postcard, took the popularity of postal services to new heights, but the major game changer was the introduction of new telecommunication media, which brought a significant innovation: the possibility of simultaneous communication. Coinciding with the Age of New Imperialism of the second half of the nineteenth century, these new communication technologies were crucial for the establishment, extension and preservation of colonial rule. But technology is neutral and can serve rulers as much as it can be appropriated by the ruled. Thus, they also played a significant role for the advancement of independence and nationalist movements in the colonies.

The award-winning documentary *The Songs of Ceylon* (1934) nicely depicted that modern telecommunication technologies were very present in Sri Lanka during colonial times.¹ Telephone and radio broadcasting (or 'radio telephony' as it was called earlier) were spreading over the island and were not just a privilege of Western countries. Interestingly, only the radio is shown in pictures, while a telephone call can be heard in the background. In the section entitled 'The Voices of

¹ Basil Wright, *The Songs of Ceylon* (London: Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board, 1934). The island of Sri Lanka is situated east of the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent. In 1518 and 1656 respectively, the Portuguese and the Dutch conquered parts of the island's coastal areas, while the interior of the country, the central or Kandyan highlands remained under the rule of the indigenous kings of Kandy (1590-1815). In 1796, the British annexed the Dutch possessions and subsequently deposed the last king of Kandy. In the course of the nineteenth century, British colonial rule had a deep impact on the island's social and economic structure (as described below), which resulted in Sri Lanka becoming a 'model colony' (see K.M. de Silva, 'The Model Colony': Reflections on the Transfer of Power in Sri Lanka', in *The States of South Asia*, ed. by A. J. Wilson and D. Dalton (London: C. Hurst, 1982), pp. 77-88.) and a 'planter raj' or 'plantocracy' (see e.g. Asoka Bandarage, *Colonialism in Sri Lanka. The Political Economy of the Kandyan Highlands, 1833-1886* (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1983). The political history of Sri Lanka is well covered by the works of *History of Ceylon. From the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century to 1948*, Vol. III., ed. by K.M. de Silva (Peradeniya: University of Ceylon, 1973), K.M. de Silva, e.g. 'Ceylon (Sri Lanka)', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. by Robin W. Winks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 243-252, and K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2005). Also see Patrick Peebles, *The History of Sri Lanka* (Westport: Greenwood, 2006), for a stronger focus on socio-economic developments.

Commerce', the film captures the role of the new media for the island's plantation economy. In 1815, the British succeeded in conquering the Kandyan Highlands, which meant that for the first time, a colonial power controlled the whole island. For the three hundred years until then, only the island's Maritime Provinces had been under colonial rule but in a few decades after 1815, British colonial rule put an end to the mercantile economy of the Dutch era and opened the island for private enterprise and investment. This liberalization of the economy, which came as a result of the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms (1833-34) brought about the probably most crucial development in the colonial history of Sri Lanka: the formation of a large-scale plantation sector, which not only shaped the economic structure of the island but also became a driving force for its social and administrative modernization. The first estates that were established in the Kandyan Highlands were mostly run by European planters, who initially concentrated on the cultivation of coffee, but later experimented with different crops as well: tea, cacao, coconut, rubber, etc.² During the colonial period, the plantation sector was the main source of revenue for the government and it continues to shape the island's economy to the present day. Unsurprisingly, the European planters and traders were the single-most influential community on the island when it came to political or economic decision-making. For them, transport and communication facilities between the port town of Colombo and their remote estates in the Highland were of high importance.³

With regard to its economic and political developments, Sri Lanka occupied a special position in the British Empire that earned her the label 'model colony'.⁴ British rule changed the economic and political framework of the island dramatically. The first step was the introduction of the Colebrook-Cameron Reforms (1833-34) which introduced a radical set of reforms designed to establish the superstructure of the laissez-faire state. Although they had much in common with Bentinck's reforms in British India at the same time, they were more far-reaching in their impact and

² 'Estate', the term used for plantations in Sri Lanka, was defined in the 1901 and 1911 Census as a land 'twenty acres or more in extent, on which there are ten or more resident coolies or labourers'. Edward B. Denham, *Ceylon at the Census 1911* (Colombo: Cottle, 1912), p. 492.

³ See e.g. de Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, p. 360sp.

⁴ The term was coined by the Sri Lankan Historian de Silva, "The Model Colony", pp. 77-88.

more consistent in the application of current liberalism.⁵ On an economical level, the major consequence of the Colebrook-Cameron reforms was to stimulate the establishment of plantations and the ensuing creation of a plantation sector which was enabled by the introduction of Western-style property rights and the sale of Crown Land to private entrepreneurs.⁶ The planting sector was the catalyst for the modernization of the island and one of the most crucial developments during colonial times. The reforms furthermore changed the conditions for private entrepreneurship radically by the liberalizing the export trade in coconuts and plumbago (graphite) and putting an end to the government's monopoly on the cinnamon trade. The Colebrook-Cameron Reforms put an end to the state-centred mercantile economy inherited from the Dutch area and created a colony entirely subjected to economic viability.⁷

At the same time, the Colebrook-Cameron reforms set a political development in motion, beginning with the creation of a Legislative Council, 25 years before India, which was exemplary for a non-white colony.⁸ In 1920, Governor Manning enlarged the Legislative Council: there was a discussion about whether territorial or communal electorates should be established. Finally, the decision was made for territorial

⁵ Lord William Bentinck was sent to India primarily to consolidate the EIC's financial situation. In addition, he introduced several measures to modernise India, which were informed by the idea of utilitarianism and included a reform of the court system, the spread of western education and the abolition of sati. See for example Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁶ Although research by the Royal Botanical Gardens (the first Royal Botanic Garden was established in Peliyagoda (suburb of Colombo) in 1804 and later a second one in Perideniya in 1822) was going on since the beginning of the century, the Kandyan Highlands were at first considered unfit for a plantation industry. The first coffee estates there had been established already in the late 1820s but they remained an exception. This situation and the official policy towards supporting such an endeavour changed in the 1830s due to several reasons. As mentioned, the changing conditions in the West Indies and the Mascarene Island triggered an exodus of planters to other regions, with Ceylon becoming an interesting option. At the same time, the increasing number of land disputes in the Kandyan Highlands caused the government to seize action. The Waste Lands Ordinance declared any unused tract (and in particular forests), for which no title deed could be produced, the property of the British Crown. These Crown Lands were subsequently sold to prospective planters. The economic development of the highlands was underpinned by infrastructural measures such as the Kandy-Colombo road, though not by a proper survey. For further details see James L.A. Webb, jr., *Tropical Pioneers. Human Agency and Ecological Change in the Highlands of Sri Lanka, 1800-1900* (Athens: Ohio State Press, 2002), de Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, Ian J. Burrow, *Surveying and Mapping in Colonial Sri Lanka, 1800-1900* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2008).

⁷ De Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, p. 317, Kumari Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies. The Rise of the Colonial Michael Roberts, Caste Conflict and Elite Formation. The Rise of a Karava Elite in Sri Lanka 1500-1931* (New Delhi: Navrang, 1995), p. 98sp.

⁸ De Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, p. 448.

electorates without any reservation or reserved seats for any group. The introduction of the Donoughmore Constitution in 1931 was a watershed for politics in colonial Sri Lanka. The new constitution made the island the only colony (as opposed to the dominions, which were predominantly inhabited by white settlers) of the British Empire to be granted universal adult suffrage. The constitution was quite an experimental one; it furthermore introduced a State Council which was working as Legislative and Executive power; the constitution was based on the model of the London County Council, instead of the Westminster one.

An important point of the reforms was the abolition of the *rajakariya* system which had a massive influence on the Sinhalese social structure.⁹ Patrick Peebles even argues that command over human labour – the basic form of *rajakariya* – was of even greater importance to Sinhalese society than caste.¹⁰ Furthermore the reforms aimed at the establishment of a Western educational system. The debate about the advantages of having English-medium education in Sri Lanka took place at the same time as in British India, to which Macaulay's *Minute on Education* (1834) was addressed.¹¹

The Colebrook-Cameron Reforms had created several new economic possibilities: one of the most important one was the arrack trade. With the abolition of the *rajakariya* system, Sinhalese not belonging to the *goyigama* elite were able to venture into business; also the cinnamon trade and the ownership of graphite mines were the two other major opportunities. The next step for the

⁹Rajakariya was the traditional system of land tenure, in which land was granted in exchange for services rendered. These services could be rendered in form of public works (roads construction etc.) or special services based on the caste hierarchy; it played a major role for the social organization of the Sinhalese society. The Colebrook-Cameron Commission saw the *rajakariya* system was an obstacle to the free movement of labour and the creation of a land market, which were regarded as vitally important for the establishment of the *laissez-faire* state. Thus *rajakariya* and its use were strongly criticized. De Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, p. 317sq, Patrick Peebles, *Social Change in Nineteenth Century Ceylon* (New Delhi: Navrang, 1995), p. 47.

¹⁰ Peebles, *Social Change*, p. 45sp.

¹¹The colonial state was reluctant with regard the running of schools on its own account. In areas where missionary schools were run, the state would not see a necessity to open a public school. The implementation of the Morgan Committee's Report (1869-70) then introduced secondary English education in the island. For further details see L.A. Wickremarantne, '1865 and the Changes in Educational Policies', *Modern Ceylon Studies*, 1(1970), 84-93, Almut Steinbach, *Sprachpolitik im Britischen Empire. Herrschaftssprache und Integration in Ceylon und den Föderierten Malaiischen Staaten* (München: Oldenburg, 2009)(this book deals with the impact of language policy in the British Empire, with Sri Lanka and the Federated Malay States as case studies).

entrepreneurial families was the investment in estates, mainly coconut in the Low Country. The new opportunities were mainly used by people from the south-western coastal provinces. The majority of entrepreneurial families who used the new economic opportunities were Sinhalese. They made fortunes and become part of the Sinhalese elite during the second half of the nineteenth century: They were former nobodies who become 'new somebodies'.¹² At the turn of the century the new somebodies began to translate their upward mobility into claims for cultural leadership; the Temperance Movement was a first crucial step for them to establish themselves as leaders on a national level.¹³

Ceylon Tamils and Burghers also invested into plantations but for them it was more an economic diversification. The Ceylon Tamils had made use of their Anglican education and had mainly filled the lucrative and prestigious employments in the colonial administration and liberal professions. The Burghers were also mainly engaged in this field. The Moors, who formed another traditional trading community, were less involved in the new businesses, clinging to their established trade relations with India and other countries around the Indian Ocean. Thus in the second half of nineteenth century, a new group began to evolve, comprising employees of the administrative services, the liberal professions, entrepreneurs and indigenous plantation owners, which became part of the colonial elite.

The indigenous elite adopted the habitus and lifestyle of their colonial masters. They began to change their clothing preferences; the first generation wore native dress or a 'fusion style', combining Western and Eastern elements. The next generation gradually began to abandon this style and copied the full Western dress.

¹²In this dissertation, the cipher 'new somebodies' will be used for those (mostly Sinhalese) members of the colonial society who had used the socio-economic opportunities created by the colonial state for their own profit and advance. The term is borrowed from the title of Kumari Jayawardena's book *Nobodies to Somebodies*, in which she analyses the emergence of this new colonial bourgeoisie. In analogy, the cipher 'old somebodies' is used for the already existing members of the indigenous elite, composed of the Ceylon Tamil elite, the Low Country Sinhalese elite and the Kandyan Sinhalese aristocracy (the *radala*), whose wealth and status derived from the vestiges of the former Sinhalese kingdom. Using Jayawardena's terms however does not imply sharing the Marxist perspective of her book. See Kumari Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies. The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka* (London: Zed Books, 2002).

¹³ For more details see: Kumari Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labour Movement in Ceylon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), Tissa Fernando, 'Buddhist Leadership in the National Movement of Ceylon: The Role of the Temperance Campaign', *Social Compass*, XX, 2(1973), 333-336.

They lived in houses which copied the style of the British gentry in design and furnishing; the new homes were located in the prestigious quarters of Colombo and had royalty-inspired names. The indigenous elite also imitated the behavioural patterns of the colonial masters: they bought Western consumption goods and began to join or form clubs and civic organizations. The importance of English education reinforced that development.¹⁴ The change of habitus and lifestyle included also the members who were active in the nationalist movement. The Ceylon National Association (1888), which was the first step towards political initiative and aimed for a constitutional reform, and the Ceylon National Congress (CNC/founded 1919) were founded by members of the indigenous elite who had the same lifestyle as the British elite in Sri Lanka.¹⁵

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the emergent bourgeoisie began to organise itself politically in order to communicate its interests. In this process, indigenous groups followed the examples set by the clubs and organisations of British traders and planters. This was significant for the further development of Sri Lanka in many ways. Accepting the rules of the game set by the British had the result that political demands, including the eventual demand for independence, were always made within the limits defined by colonial constitutions and not against these, quite unlike in India, where the Indian National Congress questioned colonialism and its ideological premises as such.¹⁶ The British appreciated the constitutionalist and loyalist stance of Sri Lanka's political activists and nationalists and eventually rewarded them by granting Sri Lankans the most liberal constitution found anywhere in the Empire. As stated above, the Donoughmore Constitution of 1931 introduced universal adult franchise on the island. This reform fundamentally changed the political structure of the colony, as the nationalists organized in the Ceylon National Congress had to drop their elitist stance for a more populist outlook.

¹⁴ See e.g. Robin D. Jones, *Interiors of Empire. Objects, Spaces and Identity within the Indian Subcontinent, c.1800-1947* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), Michael Roberts and Ismeth Raheem and Percy Colin-Thome, *People in between* (Ratmalana: Sarvodaya Book Publishing, 1989).

¹⁵ De Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, p. 451sp.

¹⁶ The perception of the Ceylon national movement as constitutionalist and moderate runs through all of de Silva's works. See for example De Silva, 'The Model Colony', pp. 77-88.

The political reform came on top of a number of modernization processes, which drastically changed the living conditions of many segments of society, entailing cultural confrontations as well. As in other colonies, this, along with the experience of foreign domination led to a reformulation of identity. But whilst the influence of print media on these processes is quite well researched, the role of other media and notably of telecommunication within the above-mentioned public discourse, on the identity-forming processes and on the daily life of the people living in Sri Lanka during colonial times, has been much neglected. The political development and the question of identity, which determined the public debate during the twentieth century in Sri Lanka, is one of the most crucial developments in the island's modern history, in that it established the foundation of an ethnically and linguistically exclusive nationalism.

The telephone as a research object

The telegraph and the telephone were telecommunication media of the first generation. The telegraph – dubbed the ‘Victorian internet’¹⁷ – enabled swift communication over long distances and had significant impact on many areas, both directly and indirectly. Its direct consequences for the global economy and for imperial politics are obvious, but it also had wider influences, requiring for instance the introduction of a national standard time or the forms of diplomatic intercourse among states. Unsurprisingly, literature dealing with the telegraph has grown significantly during the past two decades.¹⁸

The telephone has been in use now for more than a hundred years, during which period its core function, the transmission of the human voice in real time, has not changed. The massive change in recent decades was the development of the mobile phone and in the decade the number of mobile phones outgrew the telephone with

¹⁷ Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century On-line Pioneers* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998).

¹⁸ See e.g. Robert Boyce, ‘Submarine Cables as a factor in Britain’s Ascendancy as a World Power, 1850-1919’ in *Kommunikationsrevolutionen*, ed. by Michael North (Köln: Böhlau, 1995), pp. 81-99, Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), Iwan Rhys Morus, ‘The Nervous System of Britain’: Space, Time and the Electrical Telegraph in the Victorian Age’, *BJHS*, 33(2000), 455-475, David P. Nickles, *Under the Wire. How the Telegraph changes Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), Roland Wenzlhuemer, ‘Editorial – Telecommunication and Globalization in the Nineteenth Century’, *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 35, 1(2010), 7-18.

landline connection by far. The main focus of scholarly interest regarding the telephone is on the use of mobile phones in Asia and Africa in the post-World War II period, though a handful of studies have researched the use and impact of the telephone in Western and Non-Western countries at the end of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century.¹⁹

Yet despite these works, the history of the telephone in regions outside Europe or the US is still mostly unwritten and Sri Lanka forms a case in point. The only work to contain a few pages on the telephone is the jubilee volume of the national telecom company of Sri Lanka Telecom (SLT).²⁰ Thus, the dissertation is a pioneering study for that area. The aim of the study is to investigate the development, role and effects of the telephone in the colonial period in order to assess the telephone's role for the development and dissemination of national identity. It will also address questions such as the use of the new medium in daily life and how it contributed to the development of separate discourse networks.

History of technology

The literature on the history of technology is vast and the one dealing with the colonial and ex-colonial world has lately grown massively, both in volume and complexity. A history of technology is not in the sense of the word a true history about technology. Rather, technology offers another perspective to look at imperial policies and colonial practices. So far, three major models or approaches in this field have emerged. The first one, which had its heyday in the 1960s, is the 'diffusionist' model. According to that interpretation, modern technologies were invented and elaborated in the West and then transferred to Asia and Africa. From this

¹⁹ For example Claude S. Fischer, *America Calling. A Social History of the Telephone to 1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), Richard R. John, *Network Nation. Inventing American Telecommunications* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010), Frank Thomas, *Telefonieren in Deutschland. Organisatorische, technische und räumliche Entwicklung eines großtechnischen Systems* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 1995)(this book is a sociological analysis of the interplay between technology and society in the case of the German telephone network), Michael Mann, 'The Deep Digital Divide: the Telephone in British India 1883-1933', *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 35, 1(2010), 188-208, Joshua David Baker, 'Telephony at the Limits of State Control: "Discourse Networks" in Indonesia', in *Local Cultures and the "New Asia". The State, Culture and Capitalism in Southeast Asia*, ed. by C.J.W.-L. Wee (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), pp. 158-183.

²⁰ *Making the Connection. SLT and 150 years of Telecommunications in Sri Lanka*, ed. by Michelle Gunawardana and Luxshmanan Nadarajah (Colombo: Sri Lanka Telecom, 2007).

perspective, modern technologies appear as a legacy of colonial intervention, bestowed by the 'advanced' civilization on societies considered 'backward' or even 'primitive'. With growing technological scepticism in the West and rising assertive Third World nationalism, the diffusionist model and its understanding of technology came under scrutiny. A point of departure was the acknowledgement that non-European societies, especially in Asia, had distinct histories of technology of their own. The growing 'indigenous' understanding regarded European colonialism and its technology as characterized by violence – a physical and epistemological one – directly against past practices and outmoded techniques.²¹

The diffusionist model was also challenged by scholars who developed the 'dependency' model. From the perspective of this model, modern technologies played a vital role for the control and expansion of colonial power. The advent of European empires and modern technology are deeply interlinked within that model. Modern technologies were 'tools of the Empire' which enabled the colonial powers not only to strengthen their control over their existing colonies but also to become imperial powers.²² Aside from technology's *long durée*, there appear to have been two crucial moments in modern history of technology in the non-European world according to this approach. The first one is situated in the mid-nineteenth century and is marked by the advent of new technologies such as steamships, railways, telegraph etc., which were significant for the creation of overseas empires and their management. This task was largely completed by the beginning of World War I. The second moment came in the interwar period and brought an interacted flow of technologies from Europe into the colonies. Without underestimating the physical clout and ideological force of these new technologies in the colonial setting, this model celebrates technology's intimate relationship with empire. In the end, this model has the aftertaste of a triumphalist narrative of a victory march of Western civilization.

²¹ The work of Joseph Needham on science and civilization in China is a good example, e.g. Joseph Needham and Ling Wang and Derek J. de Solla Price, *Heavenly Clockwork* (Cambridge: University Press, 1960).

²² E.g. Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress. Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

This deterministic perspective of the 'tools of empire' school is based on three basic assumptions which are all doubtful. First, the belief that the imperialists were free to choose whichever technology suited their book. For the Victorians progress was a religion; the growing mastery over nature was an integral element in their definition of progress and the symbol for that mastery was the steam engine. This belief and the pressure groups within Britain had a significant impact on the techniques which were used in the colonies. In many cases the steam techniques were not effective or hadn't a great impact. This leads to the next assumption, the belief that Western technology increased the power of the colonial regimes over their subjects. The impact of many technologies for conquering and controlling colonies were quite overrated. The introduction of technology often had the opposite effect: it was used by the indigenous people for their own agenda, thus often weakening colonial rule much faster. In many cases the impact of technologies as a symbol of Western superiority had a deeper impact on the British psyche than on 'the natives'.²³ Last but not least, the belief that European technology had devastating effects on indigenous techniques proves in many cases not to be the case. Western technological capacity was often too limited to deal with the whole workload and/or not well adapted to the local circumstances.²⁴

Some fundamental issues with both models remain which also raise general questions. One would be the role of Europe in the whole process; another one the co-existence of 'alternative modernities'.²⁵ However, both models fail to explain the acceptance of technologies in the colony by the indigenous population and the emergence of 'creole technologies'.²⁶ Furthermore, both models consider the exchange of technology and knowledge as a one way street between one metropolis and one colony. But colonies were also laboratories, where

²³ For more details see Michael Adas, *Machines as Measure of Men. Science, Technology and Ideology of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

²⁴ For a critique of the basic assumptions of this approach see Clive Dewey's study, especially chapter 10 and 11. Clive Dewey, *Steamboats on the Indus. The limits of Western technological Superiority in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²⁵ For a general reflection of the problems and core question of the 'history of technology' and colonialism see David Arnold, 'Europe, Technology, and Colonialism in the 20th Century', *History and Technology*, Vol. 21, No.1 March (2005), 85-106, David Arnold, *Science, Technology and Medicine in colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

²⁶ David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old. Technology and Global History since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

technological experimentation and development could take place in ways they were not be possible in Europe.²⁷ The expertise gained in the colonies should not be underestimated for the advancement in the motherland as well as the domestic ambitions and the enhancing of the international reputation of the metropolis. The exchange of knowledge and modifications of technologies was happening through a complex network of interconnections. They involved not only imperial centres but also other colonies, especially in fields where European lacked knowledge, e.g. the British colonial rule in South Asia and the construction of irrigation works.

The third approach is what David Arnold has called a 'postcolonial' approach, because it is moving away from accepted dominant paradigms. Technology is not regarded as an instrument of power but rather as a 'cultural space in various forms of interaction and exchange, of mimesis and reversal become historically possible.' The focus of the history of technology thus shifts from an investigation of the origins and invention towards an enquiry of the uses, meanings and effects.²⁸ The increasing number of studies which are no longer focused on the 'big' technologies, e.g. railways and steamship, but focus on the 'everyday technologies, e.g. sewing machines, have helped to analyse technologies more in their everyday setting and use, focusing more on exploring the role of technologies as agents or instruments of social change.

Technology and society

The 'postcolonial approach' towards the history of technology also has the advantage that it moves away from unsubtle and outmoded approaches like 'technological determinism'.²⁹ Another, more fruitful approach is the 'social constructivist' one. Following this approach, the social environment shapes the technological characteristics of technological artifacts. Technologies are best seen as constructions of individuals or collectives that belong to social groups. Owing

²⁷ Michael Mann, 'Empirische Eilande. Inseln als Laboratorien der europäischen Expansion', *Jahrbuch für Europäische Überseegeschichte*, 5(2005), 27-53 (Mann investigates the role of the colonies as laboratories, where political, social and technological policy making could be tested far easier than in the motherland).

²⁸ Arnold, 'Europe, Technology, and Colonialism', p. 87.

²⁹ For a detailed discussion of the technological determinism and the history of technology see *Does Technology drive History? The Dilemma of technological Determinism*, ed. by Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).

that social groups have different interests and resources, they tend to have different views of the proper structure of the technological artifacts. Thus there is a constant process of negotiation until 'closure' - when the debate and controversy of an artefact is effectively over, is achieved.³⁰

The problem of both approaches is that they privilege one factor, viz. the assumption of the social constructivist approach is that the social always lies behind and directs the stabilization of the artifacts. The 'system-builder' and the 'actor-network' approach argue that those who built technological artifacts are not simply concerned with the artifacts themselves but must also consider how artifacts relate to political, economic, environmental etc. factors. All these heterogeneous factors are interrelated so that success depends on getting them all in line.³¹ The crucial point is that both approaches do not see one of these factors as generally dominant but rather they are all treated with the same analytic vocabulary and ranked equal. Thus both approaches enable us to analyse which factor is the most influential one during a certain phase.

The system-builder approach is product of a particular school of the history of technology linked in particular to Thomas P. Hughes.³² This approach sees technological innovation and stabilization in terms of a system metaphor. Hughes defines technological systems as being 'both socially constructed and society shaping.' A technological system therefore is made up of three components: 'physical artifacts' (e.g. transmission lines, transformers), 'organization' (e.g. manufacturing firms, investment banks) 'legislative artifacts' (e.g. regulatory laws). A technological system runs through several phases, e.g. invention, development,

³⁰ See Wiebe E. Bijker, 'The Social Construction of Bakelite: Towards a Theory of Invention' in *The Social Construction of Technological Systems. New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*, ed. by Wiebe E. Bijker and Thomas P. Hughes and Trevor J. Pinch (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 159-190.

³¹ See e.g. Bruno Latour, *Science in Action* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987).

³² Thomas P. Hughes, *Networks of Power. Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1983), Thomas P. Hughes, 'The Evolution of Large Technological Systems', in *The Social Construction of Technological Systems. New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*, ed. by Wiebe E. Bijker and Thomas P. Hughes and Trevor J. Pinch (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 51-82, Thomas P. Hughes, 'Technological Momentum', in *Does Technology drive History? The Dilemma of technological Determinism*, ed. by Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 101-114, Thomas P. Hughes, *Human-built World. How to think about Technology and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

innovation, transfer, growth which are not simply sequential. Technological systems solve problems or fulfill goals using whatever means are available and appropriated. The system-builder has to balance all heterogeneous factors and bring them in line to make the system fulfill its task whereby deciding if it is successful or not.³³

The actor-network approach draws massively from the works of Michel Callon,³⁴ Bruno Latour,³⁵ and John Law.³⁶ All factors are also treated equally, the stability and form of artifacts should therefore be seen as a function of interaction of heterogeneous elements as these are shaped and assimilated into a network. Of course, several networks can be active at the same time, they can use some of the same elements, and whichever network more successfully cooperates the various elements, is the one who prevails. This approach has the same 'perspective' as the system-builder but it could be argued that it is better for analysing the struggle between various networks. The work will use both approaches for the analyses of the telephone history in colonial times.

'Big' or 'everyday' technology?

There had been a tendency in recent years to shift away from 'big' technologies, e.g. railways, steamships, telegraphs, irrigation schemes etc., which were in most cases capital-intensive and state-managed/-monopolized and quite intensively researched, at least for South Asia. Instead, 'everyday' technologies, such as the sewing machine or bicycle, have moved into the focus of scholarly interest. Simultaneously, the focus has shifted away from the (colonial) state for which 'big' technologies played a role for the ideological aspiration and economic motives. 'Everyday' technologies are not completely free of the influence of state power but allow a research which is more focused on the everyday life in its full variety. Using

³³ Hughes, 'Evolution of Large Technological Systems', p. 51sp.

³⁴ *Mapping the Dynamics of Science and Technology. Sociology of Science in the Real World*, ed. by Michel Callon and John Law and Arie Rip (Houndsmill: Macmillan, 1986), Michel Callon, 'Society in the Making: the Study of Technology as a Tool for Sociological Analysis', in *The Social Construction of Technological Systems. New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*, ed. by Wiebe E. Bijker and Thomas P. Hughes and Trevor J. Pinch (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 83-103.

³⁵ Latour, *Science in Action*, Latour Bruno Latour, *Der Berliner Schlüssel* (Berlin: Akad.-Verlag, 1996).

³⁶ John Law, 'Technology and Heterogenous Engineering: The Case of Portuguese Expansion', in *The Social Construction of Technological Systems. New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*, ed. by Wiebe E. Bijker and Thomas P. Hughes and Trevor J. Pinch (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 111-134.

these 'everyday' technologies as a research object makes it therefore possible to look closer at social life and material culture from the perspective of the history of technology with a more people-oriented and user-based view.³⁷

The telephone does not fully fit into one of these categories. The invention of the telephone was, as Bernard Carlson points out, driven by members of the American middle class who wanted a communication tool that provided an alternative to the telegraph and to the monopoly of Western Union. The telephone thus inherited a 'grass root'-democratic thought: everyone was able to use it, no special training and operator was required.³⁸ On the one hand, telephone networks started out as a tool for local communication and can thus be labeled as 'everyday' technologies. Such local networks would frequently be run without the involvement of the state, something that was impossible for the telegraph. Moreover, the telephone was usually located right inside the home or office and therefore constantly and visibly (and audibly) present in daily life. On the other hand, the telephone also has features of a 'big' technology. Unlike a bicycle or sewing machine, there is no use owning a telephone if nobody else has one. The construction of overland lines and national networks is quite expensive, thus the state or a private company is necessary.

As an object of research, the telephone is situated between a 'big' and an 'everyday' technology. It allows us to investigate daily life during colonial times as well as the agencies of the colonial state and other pressure groups at the same time. The telephone is an arena where interaction and exchange is taking place. What should be kept in mind regarding the history of technology is the critique of David Edgerton, who reminds us that the history of technology is often 'innovation-centric', which can be misleading. Frequently, new technologies are invented and become available while the old or alternative ones remain in use for quite some

³⁷ For more details see David Arnold and Erich DeWald, 'Everyday Technologies in South and Southeast Asia: An Introduction', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 46, 1(2012), 1-17.

³⁸ Bernard W. Carlson, 'The Telephone as Political Instrument: Gardiner Hubbard and the Formation of the Middle Class in America, 1875-1880', in *Technologies of Power. Essays in Honor of Thomas Parke Hughes and Agatha Chipley Hughes*, ed. by Michael Thad Allen and Gabrielle Hecht (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 25-51.

time, while the shock over the passing of the old can be exaggerated.³⁹ Following Edgerton's argument, it is also necessary to check the actual use in relation to other communication media. A history of 'technology-in-use' would therefore paint a different picture. Here, Sri Lanka offers a useful test case, because the telephone as a modern communication technology was used quite early after its invention, while older forms of communication from messenger boys through letters and postcards to the telegraph persisted.

Technology and modernity

Modernity is a term which has been defined in myriad ways and with different intentions, which cannot be all covered at this point. What has to be kept in mind, however, is that technology is usually central to a definition of modernity. In the colonial context, modernity and technology were interwoven and served as perceptible and useable pillars for the legitimacy of colonial rule. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, technology gained massive importance for the 'civilizing mission'. This 'technological modernity' is a specific field of human perception and activity which differs from the Nehruvian belief in the modernity of scientific method and rationality.

Technical artifacts are not a mere expression of a material reality; they do not end there. They are also matters of the mind. Whether a person owns one of these artifacts or has just encountered them in daily life, he knows about them and recognizes them as a part of the modern life. In that light, the question would not be for the role the telephone played in the modernization of the island, but rather whether it did produce an aura of modernity. Bernhard Rieger argues that new technologies were regarded as 'modern wonders'. The awe they created also spread the feeling of being part of modern life in the public, which was increased with each new 'modern wonder' being introduced and becoming available. Thus technologies played a vital role in the self-perception of the public and the creation of modernity, or as Latour puts it: 'modern times have never existed'. This 'technological sublime', which David E. Nye postulated on the basis of Durkheim's

³⁹ Edgerton, *Shock of the Old*.

assumption that for society the idea it has about itself is of a central importance, became an integral part of contemporary consciousness.⁴⁰

Moreover, the use and consumption of technologies echoes the feeling of the consumers' ideas about their lifestyle and the image of the world they wanted to live in. Machines are not just instruments for completing certain everyday tasks, they are a part of the personal and professional life which embodies the person's individuality and pursuit of selfhood. They are a part of the construction of their professional and personal life, thus technology should be more seen from a Foucauldian than mechanical point of view.⁴¹ Technologies create a new world of aspiration and identification; they can create new communities or reinforce existing socio-political hierarchies.⁴²

Sources

The telephone enabled a simultaneous communication with other people, but the major novelty of this new technology was the use of the human voice. Speaking and hearing another person over a distance was a major step forward in telecommunication technology despite all the small problems such as cross-talk, and it offered new opportunities to human communication. But investigating the history of the telephone and telephonic communication brings up a crucial methodical question: what can be used as sources? A telephone call usually leaves no script or recording behind: when the call is over, there is almost no way to find out its contents or subject matter. At best, one of the callers may have written down some of the content in a diary or biography; but this happened only in very, very few cases. Surveillance of the telephone calls would be another possibility, at least in theory. The chances to find direct sources about the content of talks over the telephone are quite low - in that regard the telephone is the historian's worst nightmare.

⁴⁰ Bernhard Rieger, "Modern Wonders': Technological Innovation and Public Ambivalence in Britain and Germany, 1890s to 1933', *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 55(2003), 153-176, David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), Bruno Latour, *Wir sind nie modern gewesen. Versuch einer symmetrischen Anthropologie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2013).

⁴¹ Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of Self', in *Technologies of the Self*, ed. by Luther L. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), pp. 16-49.

⁴² Arnold, 'Everyday Technologies'.

To deal with this type of problem stated, it is necessary to look for other approaches. One way is to approach the problem through official documents, e.g. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, *Ceylon Bluebooks*, etc., which allow us to reconstruct the physical part of telephone networks and their development. When and where did telephones become available? Who were the driving forces behind installations, and did networks develop bottom-up or as the result of central planning? Combined with other information about the daily running of the telephone service, e.g. the prices for a call or a subscription, it is possible to assess a social and economic profile of the subscribers, the purpose of networks and other such basic features of the telephone service.

This first step helps to get an idea of the usage of the telephone, but the major question of the sonic history of the telephone remains: what were the people talking about on the telephone? From the sources available and consulted for this work, there are not many references to the content of talks on the telephone during colonial times. This lack of records can be overcome to some degree with the help of other sources. The study is informed by the work of Rudolf Mrázek who pointed out a new way of keeping track with the impact of technologies such as the telephone, which do not leave behind material evidence. In his book *Engineers of Happy Land*, Mrázek demonstrated that content and nature of conversation were reflected in contemporary documents including literary sources, which can be read between the lines: plays, novels, journals, newspapers etc.⁴³ Taking a look at these remainders the telephone leaves behind in such sources, it will be possible to get an insight of what people were speaking about on the telephone. Naturally, many calls were of trivial nature but it will become possible to trace the influence and role of the telephone as a communication media for the development of the national movement, the emergence of discourse networks and the influence on social development.

Sri Lanka offers a large body of sources regarding the planting sector beside the official documents. The compendium *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, published yearly

⁴³ Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land. Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

from 1863, contains loads of information about everything a planter, merchant or in fact any resident on the island would have been interested in.⁴⁴ Accordingly, the directory contained information about the telephone as a part of the communication infrastructure. For the purpose of this research, the most important information provided by the *Directory* is the list of addresses in the appendix because from around 1900 onward, these lists include telephone numbers. Although separate telephone directories seem to have existed as well during colonial times, no copy appears to have survived.⁴⁵ The lists in *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory* are thus the closest thing to a telephone book.

Diaries and biographies did not yield many results but naturally it was not possible to check the whole range of them. The second major source for the work were newspapers. Printing presses had been introduced quite early in Sri Lanka and in the middle of the century many newspapers began to emerge. The first undertakings already began in the 1830s, and by the second half of the nineteenth century a vivid newspaper scene had emerged. Besides the English newspapers vernacular papers began to be printed, of which the first one in Sinhala was the *Lakmini Pahana* (1862) and first one in Tamil was the *Morning Star Jaffna* (1841). Within the framework of this thesis, only English speaking newspapers have been used for several reasons. First of all, telephone subscribers were almost exclusively members of the colonial elite. They were English-educated, 'most of the educated Sinhalese read the English newspapers...a similar remark applies to the Tamil people and the Tamil press'⁴⁶ and they communicated to each other in English. Besides, the discourse with the colonial power and the European members of the elite had to take place in the imperial language as well. In other words, the discourse taking place within the public sphere was exclusively in English. It is important to keep in mind that not many people were bilingual in the vernaculars (viz. Sinhala and Tamil), making English a kind of natural *lingua franca* during colonial times. A second, more practical reason for looking at the English language papers is that the

⁴⁴ Some issues of the directory bear the title '*Ferguson's Handbook and Directory*', but the content is identical. Thus throughout the thesis the shorter name will be used.

⁴⁵ Again, this is due to the very nature of a directory, as the old copy would be disposed of once the latest update has become available.

⁴⁶ Arnold Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon. Its History, People, Commerce, Industries, and Resources* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1905/reprint 1999), p. 306.

vast majority of them are only available on microfiche, which greatly reduced the time needed to access them, whilst at the same time, timeframe for the thesis was too short for also incorporating Tamil and Sinhala newspapers.

The vernacular languages, Sinhala and Tamil, played still a major role for the patrons when they were addressing their clients for which they used them. It would be interesting if the coverage of the telephone would be different from the English speaking newspapers. The *The Ceylon Daily News* was running two versions, an English one and the *Dinamina*, which contained all the news from *The Ceylon Daily News* translated into Sinhalese. However, the editor's comments on matters of interest for the Sinhala-reading public alone and the comic strips were different: 'One of the most popular innovations is a comic strip where Mudalah – a sort of Mr. Polly – plays a similar role to that enacted by Mr. Jiggs in the famous McManus comic strip "Bringing up Father".'⁴⁷ In the larger picture, it seems not likely that the coverage of the telephone was much different. The English and vernacular newspapers were both run by members of the elite. The English newspaper had different views on some questions, but regarding the topic of the telephone there was no differences in the coverage or editorials. The vernacular newspapers were run by members of the indigenous elite who were interested in the telephone and the extension of the service. Thus it is unlikely that the vernacular newspapers would differ very much in their point of view.⁴⁸

During colonial times, the two principal English newspapers were *The Ceylon Observer* and *The Times of Ceylon*. *The Ceylon Observer* was one of the oldest and most influential newspapers on the island. It was started in 1834 by a handful of Colombo-based British merchants and it gained in importance in 1854 when Alastair Mackenzie Ferguson, who 'may truly be described as the father of Ceylon Journalism', became its the editor and owner. In 1879, A.M. Ferguson handed over the reins to his nephew, who had already been working for the newspaper and he became the driving force not only for the *Observer* but also for the whole publishing house with its broad range of print products: *The Ceylon Handbook and Directory*,

⁴⁷ *The Ceylon Daily News*, 26 January 1929, p. 3, 4.

⁴⁸ See Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, p. 302sp. See also Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation*.

the monthly magazine *Tropical Agriculturist*, pamphlets on agriculture and planting, etc. This selection illustrates that Ferguson and his printing business, including *The Ceylon Observer*, were a mouthpiece of the interests of merchants and planters in Sri Lanka, while claiming to promote 'the martial and moral advancement of the country'.⁴⁹ In 1923, the business was bought by D.R. Wijewardena, who added it to its growing media empire (later known as the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited). Interestingly, the personal and commercial history of John Ferguson has never been researched, even though he held a position comparable to that of Rupert Murdoch or Donald Trump today. His activities were not just limited to Sri Lanka, where he had an influential position within the discourse and was the driving force behind the publishing house. A planter himself, he actively gave talks on the political and economic development in Sri Lanka and was well-connected in both Britain and the USA, always promoting the interest of the Sri Lankan planting industry.⁵⁰

The second major newspaper on the island was the *The Times of Ceylon*, founded in 1846 as *The Ceylon Times*. In 1858, John Capper took over the paper and introduced illustrated journalism. He later left the paper to his two sons. *The Times* had a full staff of Sri Lankan reporters. It was also established to represent the mercantile interest and act as a counterweight to *The Ceylon Observer*.⁵¹

Besides these two newspapers, there were several others, e.g. the *Ceylon Examiner* (founded 1846), which was intended to be a mercantile organ and was discontinued at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the *Ceylon Independent* (founded 1888), the first penny paper on the island with daily publication and the 'pioneer of the cheap newspaper in the East'. With its 'outspokenness' and the 'fearless ventilation of public questions' it addressed a broad urban readership.⁵²

Advertisements are another fruitful source to assess the appreciation and reception of the telephone. The colonial elite in Sri Lanka regarded advertisements as 'crassly American' and, not only by modern standards, advertisements were generally quite

⁴⁹ Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, p. 302sp.

⁵⁰ Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, p. 97sp.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 308sp.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 304sp and 314.

dull. 'In this world of steady consumption, business had little variety to sell and little motivation to advertise.'⁵³ This steady consumption had its impact on advertising which was not only dull but a form of market communication which was more about keeping the already existing consumer habits going and therefore more or less depicting everyday life of the colonial elite. Thus adverts can give us an impression about the way the telephone was perceived during colonial times.

Chapter I

In the first chapter, a spatial and geographical plan of the telephone network will be compiled which is crucial for the further argumentation of the thesis. Before dealing with the development of the telephone as such, it is important to look at the progress of the colonial infrastructure, which was not well developed at the beginning of British colonial rule. During the nineteenth century, the colonial government was mainly concerned to increase the economic value of the colony by stimulating the establishment of a plantation sector in the Kandyan Highland. It began to construct an infrastructure which connected highlands with the port in Colombo, and it offered the land for sale that had become government property in 1833, to promote the establishment of plantations. Throughout the nineteenth century, the infrastructure of the interior of the island was lagging behind the expansion of the planting sector; the major improvement for the transport infrastructure – a substantial railway network linking Colombo with other towns in the highlands – was finished only around 1900. Also around that time, the basic communication infrastructure, postal services and telegraphs, had reached an acceptable level. This paved the way to allocate resources towards more modern technologies such as the telephone. Until then, only a small telephone network in Colombo and a few 'experimental lines' had been constructed. The chapter will further investigate the various issues, which were surfacing, e.g. legal proceedings for private telephone networks and the progress of the network construction during colonial times.

⁵³ Steven Kemper, *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles, Politics, and Culture in Sinhala Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 103sp.

Chapter II

The second chapter will at first examine the people who were working at the telephone exchanges: the telephone operators. It will further look at their working conditions, their daily duties, and especially their recruitment. Did existing colonial hierarchies play a role for the recruitment policy? And did sexual stereotypes and the images of the Victorian era influence the job of telephone operator?

One of the core questions of the work is who were the subscribers? During colonial times the telephone was an expensive communication tool. Thus subscribers in colonial Sri Lanka were mainly members of the elite. But did the subaltern have a voice? Public phones did exist, and so did telephone kiosks where people could make a call for a 'nickel-in-the-slot'. Another way to have access to the telephone network is telephone sharing: one shop or bar in the street or quarter had a telephone subscription and if someone needed to make a call or receive one, he used that telephone and pays a small fee to the owner. This tactic has been used and is still used, around the globe – but it will be hard to prove.

British colonial rule connected Sri Lanka with the world market and unleashed the forces of globalization with all its opportunities on the island.⁵⁴ The flow of new, western commodities, e.g. soap, from Europe and North America to Asia also led to new consumer habits in Asia.⁵⁵ But the localization of the global trends is not quite always exactly the same as in other regions. In contrast to British India where a key element of Mahatma Gandhi's campaigns was a rejection of Western consumption goods, such motives were not present in Sri Lanka. Was the telephone an appreciated consumption good and part of a Western lifestyle?

Chapter III

The chapter will investigate the further impact of the telephone on Sri Lankan society. The telephone offered a fast and convenient way to socialise. Media has a significant influence on the formation of modern societies. Therefore the question

⁵⁴ Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World. A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁵⁵ Douglas E. Haynes and Abigail McGowan, 'Introduction', in *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia*, ed. by Douglas E. Haynes et al (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 1-25.

will be raised if the telephone had a deeper social impact, for instance by transforming social etiquette? This chapter will try to evaluate if the telephone played a role in the political process. For a closer investigation of this question the Sinhala elite will be taken as a case study.

As mentioned, the study will focus on the colonial elite because they were the main telephone users. The emergence of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and its advocates is a well-researched field and thus within the frame of the work the whole development can be considered. It is important to keep in mind that that the Sinhala nationalism was not solely an elite project. As Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah argues in *Leveling Crowds*, it was not just a 'trickle down' but there was a massive surge of 'bottom-up'.⁵⁶ Members of the elite were involved in the identity discourse and were important sponsors, they also used it to gain political support, especially after the introduction of the Donoughmore Constitution (1931). But it was not the national elite which formed up the nationalism, like in India, rather Sinhala nationalism gained a momentum after independence and formed up the national elite.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds. Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1997).

⁵⁷ Jakob Rösel, *Entstehung und Gestalt des Singhalesischen Nationalismus* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1996), p. 318sp (in this book, Rösel analyses the emergence, ideology and manifestations of Sinhalese nationalism).

1. Telephone network

1.1. Phase I (1880-1914)

Although the telephone history of Sri Lanka began in 1880 with the installation of the first telephone line in Colombo and the construction of a small telephone network in the following years, the development of the telephone made considerable progress only around 1905, when a second exchange in Cinnamon Gardens was opened and the urban telephone network in Colombo was no longer limited to the business and administrative areas of the city. Outside Colombo the planters showed a huge interest in the telephone and started to construct their own private telephone systems. The trunk line to link the city with the upcountry was finished in 1911, enabling some of the private telephone system to gain access to the trunk connection. Thus a first step towards an island-wide network was done. Thereafter, the island wide network grew rapidly until the First World War, which ground the whole development to a halt.

The construction of the telephone network is a case of 'Victorian can-do engineering'⁵⁸ on many levels. There was a limited technical knowledge about the construction and handling of telephones, lines and exchanges but that stopped neither the government nor the planters from building telephones. Government policy wasn't far-sighted and especially in the first phase it was more or less a policy patchwork. The pressure from the planters and their initiative forced the government to react and at the same time the government officials tried to incorporate the new technology into the communication structure of the Island which was itself still 'under construction' and underfunded.

1.1.2. The development of the colonial infrastructure

At the beginning of the twentieth century the telephone was a quite young technology even for Western countries. Although the first telephone arrived early in Sri Lanka and the telephone network in Colombo was taken over by the government in 1896, it took until 1905 for the new communication device to attract the

⁵⁸ Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004).

attention of the government. This chapter argues that one major reason to understand the timeframe is the evolution of the island's infrastructure.

Two phases can be distinguished in the build-up of the colonial infrastructure during the twentieth century. The first one (1825-1860) saw the construction of a basic road network with an expansion into the newly conquered Kandy Highlands. In the second phase (1860-1905) the colonial government expanded the road network with a focus on the planting districts. Furthermore, the construction of railway lines which were connecting the major centres was started.⁵⁹ At the end of the nineteenth century telegraphic and postal facilities came into the fore. Thus before 1905, government did not have many financial resources left which could be spent on the telephone.

The first phase

In 1796 the British took control of the coastal areas in Sri Lanka and replaced the Dutch as colonial rulers. The coastal areas had been under foreign rule for almost 300 years but in 1815 the British defeated the Kingdom of Kandy which controlled the Kandy Highlands and thus brought the whole Island under their rule. During the previous centuries the Kandy Highland had been difficult to access from the Low Country due to the natural topography. Accordingly the construction of a road from Colombo to Kandy seemed the best solution for the British to strengthen control over the newly conquered territories. Until then, the upcountry roads had been at best dirt tracks or small jungle paths and the construction of a road network in the Kandyan Provinces was necessary. Initially, military considerations were of course paramount but the opening of coffee estates in the Kandy Highland and the success of commercial coffee culture changed that. The beginning of a plantation economy made economic considerations paramount for the following decades.⁶⁰

During the years until 1860 the colonial government established a rudimentary road network on the island with a focus on the Kandy Highlands. Due to the nature of the

⁵⁹ See Appendix I: Map 1, 2. L.A. Wickremeratne, 'The Development of Transportation in Ceylon, c 1800-1947' in *History of Ceylon. From the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century to 1948*, Vol. III., ed. by K.M. de Silva (Colombo: University of Ceylon, 1973), pp. 303-316, Indrani Munasinghe, *The Colonial Economy on Track. Roads and Railways in Sri Lanka (1800-1905)* (Colombo: The Social Scientists' Association, 2002).

⁶⁰ See Wickremeratne, 'Development of Transportation', p. 303sp.

terrain in the central mountains the construction of roads was difficult and expensive. Thus in the mid century, around 30 percent of the total government expenditure was spent on construction works (see Table 1).⁶¹ Furthermore, the expansion of plantation agriculture in the Kandy Highlands led to a rise in land value and whenever government had to acquire private land for road construction, a compensation had to be paid which made the cost higher.⁶² Recruiting a labour force for the construction of roads was another problem especially in the second half of the nineteenth century due to the fact that workers preferred the more lucrative employment on the estates or in railway construction.⁶³

Table 1: Government Expenditure on Roads and Bridges, and the % contributed by Road Ordinance funds:

year	Total Expenditure (£)	Road Ord. Funds (£)	%
1855	61,06	29,967	48.6%
1856	74,833	30,721	41%
1857	99,771	31,045	31.4%
1858	119,872	33,087	27.6%
1859	132,86	36,641	27.5%
1860	116,542	40,655	34.8%
1861	116,373	38,963	33.4%
1862	112,001	35,347	31.5%
1963	130,883	42,808	32.7%
1864	160,716	43,84	27.2%
1865	171,026	44,366	25.8%
1866	205,976	51,996	25.2%
1867	253,179	51,511	20.3%

Source: Munasinghe, *Colonial Economy on Track*, p. 53.

⁶¹ Accordingly the road revenue became one of the most important sources of income for the colonial government. Munasinghe, *Colonial Economy on Track*, p. 23, 53, 68.

⁶² Ibid, p. 74

⁶³ Ibid, p. 73.

The second phase

Between the 1860s and 1880s the British colonial rule was well established and economic considerations were the main impetus of the road construction policy.⁶⁴ Thus the second phase from 1860 to 1905 was marked by the ongoing emergence of the planting districts (see Appendix I: Map 2). The plantations needed an adequate infrastructure for transportation of the produced goods to the port cities as well as enabling Indian Coolies who were the main working force, to access the plantations. The estates were basically scattered throughout the central highlands and accordingly the cry for more and better roads emanated from the planting community.⁶⁵ Regarding the importance of the infrastructure for their livelihood it was obvious that they were the major pressure group on this matter. The statement of John Ferguson, who was one of the advocates of the planters' community, underlines the demand for the improvement of the infrastructure in the planting districts with the justification of generating revenue:

*The increase in the total value of the island's trade, which now approximates to from 18 to 20 millions sterling per annum, or three times what it was after the coffee failure twenty years ago...roads and bridges are the most potent means of developing the young colony..much was done...nevertheless, to meet the requirements of planting, especially of the new rubber industry, and of native agriculture progress in palms and rice, new roads and bridges are required and should be steadily supplied.*⁶⁶

The planters also objected whenever government funds were allocated to roads in districts without plantations.⁶⁷ During the first and especially the second phase, the

⁶⁴ Nihal Perera, 'Indigenising the Colonial City: Late 19th-century Colombo and its Landscape', *Urban Studies*, Vol.39, 9(2002), p. 1703 sp. 1715sp, Roberts, *People in between*, p. 102sp.

⁶⁵ Munasinghe, *Colonial Economy on Track*, p.90, Wickremeratne, 'Development of Transportation', p. 304sp, Michael Roberts and L.A. Wickremeratne, 'Export Agriculture in the Nineteenth Century', in *History of Ceylon. From the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century to 1948*, Vol. III., ed. by K.M. de Silva (Colombo: University of Ceylon, 1973), pp. 89-118, Frank Heidemann, *Die Hochland-Tamilen in Sri Lanka und ihre Repatriierung nach Indien* (Göttingen: Edition Re, 1989)(Heidemann's work investigates the implementation and enforcement of the repatriation of Indian Tamils from the plantations in the Kandyan highlands to South India after independence).

⁶⁶ John Ferguson, 'Ceylon: Its Industries and Material Progress', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. LVII, 2944(1909), p. 457.

⁶⁷ Munasinghe, *Colonial Economy on Track*, p.90, Wickremeratne, 'Development of Transportation', pp.304-305, Roberts, 'Export Agriculture', pp. 89-118, Heidemann, *Hochland-Tamilen in Sri Lanka*.

government paid close attention to the interests of the planters which determined the government's policy formation in Sri Lanka heavily and therefore the term 'Planter Raj' is quite fitting.⁶⁸ The demands and the influence of the planting community were understandable because they were the backbone of the colonial economy and generated the major part of the colony's revenue. In turn, they demanded that the greater part of revenue be spent on the improvement of the infrastructure.⁶⁹ The planting community of course had the greatest interest in these matters given that their profits depended on it. But the economic activity which was governed by exports to the establishment of a commercial community which was closely linked to the planting industry and which was situated in Colombo.⁷⁰

At the end of the nineteenth century more than 75 percent of the construction of main roads was concentrated in the planting districts.⁷¹ The road network in these areas became adequate while in the more remote districts almost nothing was done.⁷² Despite the fact that there were more roads to build, the roads were also of better quality. A short comparison (see Table 2) regarding the percentage of metalled roads constructed in the Central and the Eastern Province clearly indicates that.⁷³

It should be kept in mind that plantation had also been established in the Low Country, in addition to those in the Kandy Highlands. The part of the planting community operating in these areas also demanded a better infrastructure, first roads and postal facilities and later telephones. Although the colonial government gave priority to the planting districts, the other areas were not forgotten. After all they were part of the planting community and would join the upcountry planters in their pressure. The increase of mileage of roads in the Western Province is a clear indicator.⁷⁴ The improvement efforts in these areas were less demanding and

⁶⁸ Bandarage, *Colonialism in Sri Lanka*, p. 122.

⁶⁹ *ibid*, p. 80.

⁷⁰ Wickremeratne, L.A.: 'Economic Development in the Plantation Sector', p. 429.

⁷¹ Munasinghe, *Colonial Economy on Track*, p. 91.

⁷² A metalled road has a level of surface made of small pieces of stone, *ibid*, p. 91.

⁷³ *ibid*, p. 88.

⁷⁴ *ibid*, p. 64.

cheaper. They also often had a 'favourable' position, for example laying between Colombo and Galle.

Table 2: Metalled roads in the Central and Eastern Province:

	Central Province		Eastern Province	
	Total	Metalled Roads	Total	Metalled Roads
1860	686	75.8%	374	8.2%
1885	761	76.0%	360	16.6%
1890	598	76.7%	344	19.7%
1895	614	81.5%	399	37.3%
1900	667	79.6%	349	46.4%
1905	670	81.4%	356	44.6%

Source: Munasinghe, *Colonial Economy on Track*, p. 89.

Image 1: Bullock carts in the Kandyan Highlands:



Loading of Tea onto Bullock Carts, in 1900, from a Tea Factory in Udapussallawe to the Colombo Harbour for shipment to London.

Source: Munasinghe, *Colonial Economy on Track*, p. 52.

The construction of railways

In the second half of the nineteenth century, demand for tropical products rose in Europe, which made their trade more profitable; the more so since transport costs fell. In the years between 1880 and 1910, the Sri Lankan plantation economy was much more solid.⁷⁵ The number and acreage of plantations steadily grew and the volume of products transported from the plantations to the ports grew accordingly. At the same time a growing population on the plantations, mainly Indian immigrants, required more supplies which had to be transported to the estates in the Highlands. The situation created a severe strain on the existing mode of transportation, which still depended heavily on the bullock cart (see Image 1). This mode of transport was unreliable and a major problem was that during the monsoon season all transport came to a halt. This caused problems for the plantation industry, especially for the tea estates due to the fact that tea was plucked during the whole year.⁷⁶

The construction of railways was a suitable solution. The first piece of track was opened by Governor Ward in 1858 and in 1864 the first train began his journey from Ambepussa (Sabaragamuwa Province) to Colombo. After 1867, railways assumed greater importance both in respect of government investment and in terms of demand for transportation.⁷⁷ The construction of railways went far smoother than that of roads. The initial motive for railway construction was economic, catering for the interest of the planting community. With the network arriving the planting districts widened, road construction during the second phase was conceived with the aim to effect links with the railways.⁷⁸

Limitations of the infrastructure and the speed of travel

By 1905, a sizeable network of roads and railways spread across Sri Lanka. Despite the advances in road and railway building, at the beginning of the twentieth century the main effort for a better infrastructure was clearly focused on the planting district, especially the ones in the Kandy Highlands, which was the economic heart

⁷⁵ De Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, p. 372sp.

⁷⁶ Munasinghe, *Colonial Economy on Track*, p. 99sp and 129.

⁷⁷ *ibid*, p. 62

⁷⁸ *ibid*, p. 118, p. 149sp, Wickremeratne, *'Development of Transportation'*, p. 304sp.

of the island as the map of the infrastructure in 1905 clearly shows (see Appendix I: Map 1). The bulk of the country, especially the Eastern, North-Western and North-Central Provinces and the District of Hambantota were unaffected by the transportation improvements.⁷⁹

Leonard Woolf's description of his travel in 1904 from Colombo to his post in Jaffna gives a good impression of the infrastructure:

In those days the journey was not an easy one. Jaffna..is 149 miles from Colombo. To Anuradhapua...one went by train. From there northwards the line was under construction, the only section so far opened being the few miles from Jaffna to Elephant Pass through the peninsula. The only way to travel the hundred odd miles from Anuradhapura to Elephant Pass was to use what was called the mail coach. The mail coach was the pseudonym of an ordinary large bullock cart in which the mail bags lay on the floor and the passengers lay on the mail bags.⁸⁰

Despite the construction of railways and a road network the main vehicle for the transport of persons and goods until 1905 was the bullock cart. In 1910 23,000 such carts were licensed and the abolition of tolls from 1 January 1911 further increased their number.⁸¹

At the turn of the century, the Kandyian Highlands was mainly jungle area which made the construction of roads and railways, as well the erecting of telegraph and telephone lines, a challenge. One must also realize that most roads were basically no better than dirt tracks suited for the slow moving carts. This impacted on the communication, too, as mail or telegrams were proceeded quickly to the train station or telegraph office but their further conveyance was by way of the bullock cart. Alternatively, telegrams and mail could be delivered from the post office to the estates by foot runners who weren't much quicker. This situation improved slightly with the advent of the bicycle. It was first used by Europeans especially in rural areas as a cheap and effective means for getting around. Leonard Woolf's

⁷⁹ Munasinghe, *Colonial Economy on Track*, p. 256, 271.

⁸⁰ Leonard Woolf, *An Autobiography. Vol.1: 1880-1911* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 142sp.

⁸¹ Denham, *Ceylon at the Census*, p. 5.

description of 'his exploration' through the Mannar District is an interesting example, 'I learnt in my month as A.G.A., I spent most of my time riding about the district, exploring the jungles of the mainland and the small Island of Mannar itself.'⁸² Later on, as bikes were also produced in Sri Lanka en masse, they served as a cheap way of transport to Sri Lankans.⁸³ At the beginning of the twentieth century motor cars made their appearance on the island. The first one was brought to Sri Lanka in February 1902, and between 1905 and 1911, 666 motor cars were licensed. The car was of course expensive but for the planters it was a great opportunity to get relatively fast to the club, the nearby village or to another estate. The car of course remained an expensive mode of transport and thus was limited to a small part of society. It did not come into greater use until after the First World War, when lorries for the transport of passengers and cargo improved the transportation infrastructure and widened options for the users.⁸⁴

The communication infrastructure

It is against this backdrop that the development of the communication infrastructure has to be set. The island's export based economy was closely linked to the world market and depended on market information. Especially for the key products like tea and rubber which could be sold during the whole year, it was imperative to have access to current prices. Local PAs accordingly put from 1896 to 1910, postal and telegraphic facilities as a major topic on their agenda, usually demanding a massive improvement of the service. As mentioned, the delivery speed for telegrams and postal matters was quite low which was further limited by the circumstance that some of the smaller towns and villages didn't have a Post Office at the beginning of the twentieth century. For example in 1909, the Maskeliva PA requested a Post and Telegraph Office at Upcot (Central Province), but their request was denied by government on grounds that they could use the offices at Makeliya (4.4 miles away from Upcot) or Norwood (2.1 miles away from

⁸² Woolf, *An Autobiography*, p. 208sp.

⁸³ Interesting is especially the account of the use of the bicycle as a mean of transport during the riots of 1915. See Nira Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern. Everyday Machines in Colonial Sri Lanka* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014).

⁸⁴ During that time there is also an increase use of cars but due to the price of a car it was only achievable for the upper class. Wickremeratne, 'Development of Transportation', p. 313.

Upcot).⁸⁵ The network of Post Offices and therefore the quality of mail delivery was not changing fast and it remained an issue in the following decades, even though measures such as the Sub-Post Office scheme were introduced. Under this scheme, which aimed to improve postal facilities, ten new offices were introduced in 1921, and their number rose to 172 in 1935.⁸⁶ Also, in a few cases like the Kalutara District, a motorbus was used to speed up delivery. Buses were first introduced in 1921 but still in 1931, the local PA complained that local mail posted in Colombo on Saturday was never delivered until Monday afternoon.⁸⁷

The telegraph offered a faster communication than sending a letter but it also depended on the availability of post offices and that the particular post office was connected to the telegraph network. In the early 1900s even many planting districts had only limited accesses to the telegraph service. Even in the only Hill Station the postal and telegraphic arrangements were insufficient.

*Nuawara Eliya boast so many features and resources, apart from its climatic attraction, which commend it to the colonial, Indian and home visitor as to the residents of every corner of this tropical island...but postal and telegraphic deficiencies have to be experienced to be realized...press telegrams have seldom been more disgracefully delayed than one or two days.*⁸⁸

Also the delivery of telegrams was an issue, 'The prompt delivery of telegrams especially to places outside the free delivery radius of three miles is still a matter of difficulty, especially after dark...The telegram is delivered in the same manner as a letter.'⁸⁹ The Annual Report 1905 of the PA of Ceylon underlines the problem for many of their members which were basically partly negating the advantages of the medium. A typical example is Beddegama which 'is a scattered village' (Galle District). Its nearest Telegraph facility was nine miles away in Dodanduwa, 'You

⁸⁵ *The Times of Ceylon*, 3 May 1910, p. 3.

⁸⁶ Sub-Postmasters are paid monthly allowance based on business of the office ranging from Rs.30 upwards. They also had to provide their own premises and assistance if they required some. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1935, Part II, E5.

⁸⁷ *The Ceylon Observer*, 13 May 1921, p. 3, *The Times of Ceylon*, 7 March 1931, p. 13.

⁸⁸ *The Ceylon Observer*, 23 April 1906, p. 4. There are enough other examples like Badualla or Passara which had neither postal services nor telegraphic extensions. *The Ceylon Observer*, 16 January 1905, p.3, 3 February 1905, p. 5, 15 February 1905, p. 10.

⁸⁹ *The Ceylon Observer*, 17 February 1905, p. 10

should have a cyclist to distribute telegrams. This will...bring in more business. At the present there is a good deal of delay at times in the delivery of telegrams.'⁹⁰ The statement of a planter from Galagedara, which is 12.8 miles away from Kandy, points out the difficulties. The Post Office there had 'no telegraphic office and it usually takes five hours for a telegram to reach me from Kandy'.⁹¹ Consequentially the Department was often criticized, e.g. in 1908, when the planned expenditure for the next year was Rs. 87.000 which was regarded as far too low to improve the matter at hand, 'It is a great reflection on the authorities and perhaps also on the Postmaster-General that a more comprehensive idea of the work to be done by the Post Office and telegraph does not obtain.'⁹²

The ongoing struggle

The crux of the Sri Lankan infrastructure, be it roads, railways or the telephone, was that the growth of the plantation sector continuously outpaced the growth of the infrastructure.⁹³ The main areas where the infrastructure was established were linked to the plantation sector, especially to the planting districts in the Kandy Highlands. The planting sector was the catalyst for the modernization and transformation of the Island in colonial times.⁹⁴ Accordingly the planters and commercial communities, which were mainly situated in Colombo, were spearheading the demands for a better infrastructure. The main issue of the planters was that transport and communication between the interior and the coast were too costly, inadequate and outdated.⁹⁵ The transport infrastructure consisting of roads and railways had received much attention until 1905 but still needed improvement, the same goes for telegraph and postal facilities. That was the time when the telephone began to receive more attention and demands for the build-up of a telephone network were raised, again spearheaded by the planting and commercial community.

⁹⁰ *The Times of Ceylon*, 1 December 1925, p. 2. Instead of going on foot the usage of bicycles for the delivery of telegrams and letters of course led to an increase of delivery.

⁹¹ *The Ceylon Observer*, 18 February 1920, p. 8.

⁹² *The Ceylon Observer*, 3 July 1909, p. 4.

⁹³ De Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, p. 362.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 360.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 362.

The government's infrastructure

Another point worth mentioning is the administrative service and its resources directed towards the improvement of the infrastructure. The lagging behind of the infrastructure compared to the growth of the plantation industry was only a part of the problem. The Sri Lankan administrative system was also lagging behind the economic development of the island. The Survey Department, which was crucial for the emerging plantation economy, is a perfect example. Already when the plantation sector evolved in the nineteenth century, the Survey Department was unable to cope with the fast rising demand. There was a lack of experienced cartographers and other personnel. Until 1866, little topographical surveying had been done and besides almost no accurate maps of the island could be found. The first and more ambitious projects did not start until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But with the demand for land fit for plantations rising fast, areas especially in the remote areas in the Kandy Highland needed to be surveyed. This situation was made more difficult by the lack of trained personnel. Constantly, work was lacking behind and drew the ire of potential investors.⁹⁶ It is quite meaningful that a Department which was so important for the emerging new economic units which received a great share of the government's resources, was barely coping with its tasks.

In general, the staff of the administrative service in Sri Lanka had been relative small especially in relation to the economic growth in the nineteenth century, e.g. during the 'coffee mania'.⁹⁷ At the beginning of the twentieth century the government began to expand the number and size of departments but the main focus was on departments dealing with land and agriculture.⁹⁸ The 'overload' of the administration in other areas wasn't changing much. The Post Department was no exception here, 'The Government, however, does not consider that its staff at present is sufficiently large or well trained to meet demand of this matter, if it

⁹⁶ See Barrow, *Surveying and Mapping*.

⁹⁷ K.M. de Silva, 'The Development of the Administrative System, 1833 to c. 1910', in *History of Ceylon. From the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century to 1948*, Vol. III, ed. by K.M. de Silva (Colombo: University of Ceylon, 1973), pp. 213-248(p. 216).

⁹⁸ W.A. Wisma Warnapala, 'Bureaucratic Transformation c1910-1948', in *History of Ceylon. From the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century to 1948*, Vol. III., ed. by K.M. de Silva (Colombo: University of Ceylon, 1973), pp. 408-427(p. 408).

should arise.⁹⁹ This statement of the Colonial Secretary which was quoted by the Planters Association of Ceylon 1906 highlights that the Government at that point did not have the necessary staff to construct, or at least help to construct ,telephone systems for the planting community. Likewise, in 1925 the Post and Telegraph Association Special General Meeting complained about long working hours which were far worse than the Eastern Telegraph Company. Also, 'Postal Officers had been referred to as the underdogs of the Public Service'.¹⁰⁰

1.1.3. Colombo

Colombo remained faithful in its role as a pace setter by hosting the first telephone network in Sri Lanka. In 1880 Messrs. Alston Scott and Company¹⁰¹ built the first private telephone line, two and a half miles in length, which connected the company's head office in Fort with their coffee store.¹⁰² In 1884, the Oriental Telephone Company (OTC) which built telephone networks all over South and Southeast Asia began to construct a small telephone network in Colombo. The only other line with two telephones so far connected the Customs Department with the Bar in Batticaloa, which were installed by the Post Office in 1884 to experiment with the new technology. The line had a length of 4 km and worked 'satisfactorily'.¹⁰³ On 15 January 1896, the Government took over the network at Colombo and partly overhauled it. The exchange was situated in the General Post Office in the Fort area. Services were available from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. and had with 56 firms and persons connected to it. The eleven Police stations had their own separate exchange but they were connected with the public one as well. The supervision of the network at first fell to the Telegraph department.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Planters' Association of Ceylon, *Yearbook of the Planters Association of Ceylon, 31st December 1906* (Colombo: Times of Ceylon Printing Works, 1907), p. 12.

¹⁰⁰ *The Times of Ceylon*, 3 February 1925, p. 6.

¹⁰¹ Alston Scott and company was one of the major European firms involved in the coffee trade. Roberts, *People in between*, p. 87.

¹⁰² Gunawardana, *Making the Connection*, p. 32

¹⁰³ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, Part VI, 1884, D57.

¹⁰⁴ The same procedure was used for the military telephones. *Government Gazette*, 13th March 1896, p.166, *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1896, Part IV, B5/6, 1905, Part II, B9, 1907, Part II, B17, *The Times of Ceylon*, 1 February 1896, p. 3.

1.1.4. Early Problems

At the early stage, the telephone system in Colombo wasn't working satisfactorily and faced a typical problem of telephone systems in cities around the world at this time; viz. interference with electrical tram wires.¹⁰⁵ The interferences reduced the speaking quality and necessitated the system to undergo improvement work, which was carried out under the supervision of M.G. Mellersh from the Imperial Post Office in 1899. The service was switched to metallic circuits and aerial lead-covered cables.¹⁰⁶ Another issue was that bad weather often reduced the quality of calls and produced interferences; a problem that also occurred with electric power lines. The overhead wires were often torn down by falling branches of Colombo's many trees, especially in the southern part of the city which was a 'garden city'.¹⁰⁷ In consequence the decision was made in 1909 to replace the overhead with underground wires in the Fort District - Cinnamon Gardens followed in 1910 - to reduce the disruption.¹⁰⁸

Working for the Telephone Department in these early days also had its dangers: the conflict between tram and telephone wires resulted in accidents to the telephone workmen who sometime accidentally grabbed the tram trolley wire and were badly burnt.¹⁰⁹ In 1905, the Fort Exchange had to be closed and partly reconstructed because wiring caused imminent danger to human life. A temporary exchange had to be erected which was finished in 1909.¹¹⁰

At that early stage the construction of the network was pretty much 'Victorian can do' engineering. Unlike the OTC the Post Department had no significant experience with telephone constructions in the tropics and they had no opportunity to carry out experiments to gain knowledge about the performance of the materials involved. How lead-covered aerial cables would behave or would the sub-aqueous

¹⁰⁵ Tilman Frasch, 'Tracks in the City. Technology, Mobility and Society in colonial Rangoon and Singapore', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 46, 1(2012), p. 110sp.

¹⁰⁶ *Colonial Reports – Annual, Ceylon*, 1899 p.28, *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1900, Part IV, B4, 1902, Part IV, B15, *The Ceylon Observer*, 16 March 1905 p. 2,3.

¹⁰⁷ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1896, Part VI, B6, 1902, Part IV, B15, *The Ceylon Observer*, 16 March 1905, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ The costs of underground cables were of course much higher than lines which used poles of any sort. *The Ceylon Observer*, 2 July 1909, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1899, Part IV, B5.

¹¹⁰ *The Ceylon Observer*, 2 July 1909, p. 6.

cables in the Beira Lake would still be working in the next few years?¹¹¹ As mentioned above all the department was lacking experienced personal regarding telephones.

1.1.5. Cinnamon Garden Exchange

The development of the harbour which began in the 1880s changed the face of the city in various ways. Colombo North, which is the area north of the railway line and around the Beira Lake, was an elegant residential area until the construction of the breakwater. It was the preferred living area of the colonial elite and much favoured by the British due to the fresh breeze of sea-air which was much welcomed in the tropical climate. The port development scheme which allowed more and bigger ships into the harbor, changed the living conditions, as much soot and coal dust from the steam ships was blown into the air. Thus the residential elite of Colombo, both European and indigenous, moved to the newly inaugurated residential area of Cinnamon Gardens as well as to the seafronts of Kolupitiya and Bambalapitiya. The areas around the port were transformed into docklands, warrens of working-class tenements and shops for small businesses. Pettah turned from a residential area of the Burghers into a hive of slums and shops.¹¹² Accordingly the Fort Exchange was mainly dealing with business and administrative traffic because firms, small businesses and government departments were located in its vicinity.¹¹³ The opening of the Cinnamon Garden Exchange was the first step towards a city-wide telephone network and also changed the character of the Colombo telephone service. Until then, only the business and administration areas had access to the telephone facilities

¹¹¹ *The Ceylon Observer*, 16 March 1905, p. 2.

¹¹² Roberts, *People in between*, p. 100sp, Jones, *Interiors of Empire*, p. 45.

¹¹³ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1896, Part IV, B6. The list includes all the governmental connections to the Fort Exchange in 1905: Flagstaff Street (Harbour Works, Master Attendant, Electrical Adviser), Baillie Street (Public Works Department, Surveyer General, Registrar General, Director of Irrigation); Pettah (Attorney general, Kachcheri, Supreme Court, Police, Court of request, Fiscal, Inspector General of Prisons), General Post Office (Auditor General, treasury, Director of Public Instruction, Government Printer), Colpetty (Veterinary Surgeon). PF 1088, Letter PMG to Colonial Secretary, 27th February 1905.

Until the advent of the automatic running of the service in 1939, terms for subscribers remained the same: telephones had to be rented and rents were adjusted a few times. The basic rent included also a flat rate for local calls and only trunk line calls were paid on the basis of time and distance.

Table 3 shows the problem is that the price of a telephone subscription increase quickly with increasing distance from the exchange. Accordingly, the structural problem of the Colombo telephone system was that many people who could afford a private telephone subscription and would have asked for it, lived in the southern part of the city far away from Fort Exchange. In 1904, the government decided therefore to open a second exchange in Cinnamon Gardens which would give the

Table 3: Rates for Telephone subscribers in 1905:

Service	Tariff (per annum)
For an exchange connected within one mile from the Exchange	125
For every quarter mile beyond a distance of one mile from the exchange	25
For a private line per mile	100
for every additional quarter mile	25
For each telephone supplied with private line	25
For each special switch fixed for extension purpose on the premises of the subscriber	5

Source: PF 1088.

residential areas access to the telephone network. With the exception of the locality north of Kotahena, almost all areas of the city were thereafter able to have access to the network.¹¹⁴ In 1905, ‘Rs 41,000 for the construction of a telephone system which will serve bungalows in Cinnamon Gardens and elsewhere as well as the Government offices and additional mercantile subscribers’ was invested to improve the service.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Later the exchange at Maradana expanded the network further. *Ceylon Administration Reports, 1904 Part II B16/18.*

¹¹⁵ *Ceylon Sessional Papers, 1905, Papers relating to The Rearrangement of Telephone Services, p. 1.*

The southern part of Colombo including Cinnamon Gardens, Havelock Town and Bambalapittiya was a 'garden city', where vast residential compounds were mixed with open space. One of them, a former cricket field, next to St. Clare's opposite Peak View, was chosen for the site of the exchange serving Cinnamon Garden. Despite the joy that telephone facilities were available in that part of the city, the members of the Nondescripton Cricket Club who used the field weren't happy and their Honorary Secretary, F.J. de Saram Espere jr., questioned whether there was 'no other site so suitable...for the proposed new telephone Exchange,' pointing out that the cricket club had been there for 17 years. The Government declined but offered the club assistance to find another site.¹¹⁶

1.1.6. First Trunk Line and Exchanges outside Colombo

The first 'unofficial' telephone trunk line to link Colombo with its hinterland, opened in 1906. 113 miles long it connected railway stations from Kandy via Rambukkana and Colombo to Aluthgama.¹¹⁷ From a technical point of view trunk lines did not pose a particular technical problem at this time. By then, European and American companies had acquired the know-how to build overland lines. Still, overland lines were generally expensive due to the cost of material as wires had to be of superior material.¹¹⁸ The tropical climate on the island and elsewhere in the tropics posed an additional challenge and drove the cost for wiring further up.¹¹⁹ The estimated cost of line construction in Sri Lanka was £ 100 per mile at that time.¹²⁰

However, the overland line did make communication quick and relatively cheap, and in 1907 public trunk lines between Colombo, Kandy and Nuwara Eliya and other districts was pondered by the colonial government as remunerative, as 'they would certainly be of immense benefit both to Colombo subscribers and the planters.'

¹¹⁶ Pending File 1088, Letter Colonial Secretary's office to F.J. de Saram Espere jr. (Honorary Secretary, Nondescripton Cricket Club), 22nd August 1905.

¹¹⁷ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1906, Part II, B15.

¹¹⁸ See Lewis Coe, *The Telephone and its several Inventors* (Jefferson: McFarland&Company, Inc., Publishers, 2005), p. 57sp.

¹¹⁹ See for example Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, 'Beyond the Reach of Monkeys and Men? O'Shaughnessy and the Telegraph in India c.1836-56', *Indian Economic and Social Review*, 37, 3(2000), 331-359.

¹²⁰ *The Ceylon Observer*, 2 April 1908, p. 5.

Given that constructing the trunk lines was expensive, the Telegraph Department was asked to superimpose their messages over the telephone trunk lines. Therefore no new additional telegraph lines would be necessary and cost could be reduced. The superimposing system was already adopted in England and other colonies.¹²¹

The construction of the first trunk line connecting Colombo, Kandy and Nuwara Eliya began in 1909, and the Government also constructed telephone networks in the latter two cities.¹²² The Telephone Department sent Messrs. Leslie Cook, W. Loweth Hilton, De Hoedt, and Hugh Misso together with 19 linemen to Nuwara Eliya and the connecting of local subscribers with the exchange took around three months.¹²³ In 1909 the newly build exchange in Nuwara Eliya had 28 subscribers and the one in Kandy 21.¹²⁴ 'The telephone trunk line from Colombo to Kandy was opened to the public March 10th 1911, and its extension to Nuwara Eliya on April 13, 1911.'¹²⁵ After the successful installation of the first trunk line connection the second major trunk line was build in 1912/13 which connected Colombo with Galle via Kalutara.¹²⁶

1.1.7. Planting districts and private telephones

The first private lines in the Kandy Highlands had already been constructed in 1898 in Dikoya and Nuwara Eliya but these remained exceptions.¹²⁷ Around 1905, the telephone began to appear more frequently on the agendas of local PA meetings, as planters developed a vivid interest in the new technology.¹²⁸ 1906 was a decisive year for the telephone development, as the Planter Association of Ceylon (PAC) resolved a resolution that 'Government be asked to permit private telephonic

¹²¹ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1907, Part II, B19.

¹²² *Colonial Reports – Annual, Ceylon*, 1909, p. 31.

¹²³ *The Ceylon Observer*, 18 January 1909, p. 5.

¹²⁴ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1909, Part II, B11.

¹²⁵ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1911/12, Part II, B5.

¹²⁶ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1912/13, Part II, B6.

¹²⁷ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1898, Part IV, B3.

¹²⁸ Taking a closer look at the minutes of the PA meetings roads, postal service and telegraphic connection were still a major point. Still the infrastructure was far from satisfying for the planting community but the government was investing more money and there was a certain progress. Thus the telephone began to come more into the focus of demands. For example see: Badulla PA (*The Ceylon Observer*, 16 January 1905, p. 3.), Passara PA (*The Ceylon Observer*, 3 February 1905, p. 5), Maskeliya PA (*The Times of Ceylon*, 26 May 1910, p. 6).

systems with the rural Post Offices where practicable for the convenience both of the Public and the Postal Authorities'. In response, the Colonial Secretary stated that 'Government is prepared to consider particular applications for the establishment of private telephone connexions [sic] with the rural Post Offices on terms to be the subject of mutual agreement'. It was obvious that the government did not intend to build telephone systems in planting districts but would tolerate private initiatives. Following this statement the PAC sent copies to the district association for individual actions.¹²⁹ From that point onward the development of the telephone outside the major towns rested on private initiative.

However, planters who wanted to have a line were faced with several problems. Besides practical problems, a major issue for the planters was the great clarity regarding the legal proceeding. The government had allowed the planters to connect their private telephone systems with the local post office. Thus planters were able to call the post office to receive and send telegrams instead of sending a cooly. But it was not clear if the government would keep up their part of the deal or change their mind later which would reduce the efficiency of a local telephone system and it had to be kept in mind that the construction was expensive.

The Galaha telephone system provides a good example for the problems which lay ahead. Galaha and Kalutara¹³⁰ were in proceedings with the government and many local PAs regarded it as a test for the further development of private telephone systems. Accordingly they were awaiting its outcome before making a decision regarding the construction of a private telephone network.¹³¹

Galaha Groups Telephone System

Galaha was one of the first areas in Sri Lanka where tea had been planted and it is situated in the Central Province, eleven miles away from Kandy and on a direct line to Nuwara Eliya. The Galaha telephone system was one of the first private telephone systems build in Sri Lanka and a blueprint for the other private

¹²⁹ PAC, *Yearbook of the Planters Association of Ceylon*, 1906, p. 12.

¹³⁰ The Kalutara District is on the South Western coast of Sri Lanka with mainly rubber and tea cultivation.

¹³¹ *The Ceylon Observer*, 30 June 1909, p. 5. Kalutara and Galaha both received a license for running a private telephone Exchange in 1909. Pending File 2205B, Colonial Secretary's Office to PMG 29th March 1909, No. 123/47777.

exchanges. It also initiated the public debate about handling the issue of private telephones. The system was built and run by L. Carey, a planter living at the Amblamana Estate which belonged to the Ceylon Tea Estates and Agency, Ltd. Carey had the telephone system constructed and was running it on a non-profit making basis for the local planters. In 1910, 27 estates employed the network.¹³²

From the available sources it is not clear when exactly the system had been build but it must have been before a license system for private telephones was introduced in 1909. As the news spread in that year that the government was beginning to construct a trunk line from Colombo to Nuwara Eliya via Kandy including exchanges in these towns, Carey contacted the Governor with the following request, 'Sir, when the trunk line is brought to Kandy and the Kandy Telephone Exchange fitted – will Government see their way to join the Galaha Telephone Exchange with it so that through communication can be established between Galaha and Kandy and the main trunk line.'¹³³

The internal response from the PMG to the Colonial Secretary's Office concerning the question of dealing with Carey's request was: 'The question of a license for Mr. Carey's system does not directly arise here, and I will address you separately on it.'¹³⁴ The PMG's statement indicated that there were three general core issues to be addressed: first, how to deal legally with private telephone systems; second, under which conditions private exchange should be connected with government's trunk service; third, the question if and under which circumstances private systems should be taken over.

The Superintendent of Telegraphs was shortly after sent to Galaha to inspect the situation. The first issue noted in his report was that the telephone system had a switchboard which was only arranged for single wire working and the instruments 'are fairly good but not of the class that would be installed for trunk line working'. Therefore it was not considered suitable enough to be connected to the trunk line

¹³² See Appendix I: Image 1 for a list of the Galaha subscribers. PF 2205B, Letter from L. Carey to Colonial Secretary's Office, 21st February 1910, letter PMG to Colonial Secretary's Office 18th March 1909, attaches report of Superintendent of telegraphs, Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, p. 470.

¹³³ Pending File 2205B, Private letter L. Carey to H.E. The Governor, 15th January 1909.

¹³⁴ Pending File 2205B, letter PMG to Colonial Secretary's Office, 18th March, 1909.

or the Kandy exchange and Carey had to guarantee 'that he will put his system on a metallic circuit basis.' Also 'the exchange is worked by a tamil [sic] boy who does not understand English, it will be necessary before it can be connected for any other Exchange that an English speaking Operator should be trained to work it.'¹³⁵ The conditions stipulated by the Superintendent of Telegraphs were also approved by the PMG and had to be complied with before the Galaha Exchange could be connected with any Government trunk line. Accordingly Carey ordered a new exchange from England and brought double wire to overhaul the system. The exchange finally got connected to the trunk line on 1 April 1910.¹³⁶ In a way, subscribers at Galaha were privileged the trunk line ran close to their village, which made access easy. Other private telephone systems had normally to wait for several years until they were connected with trunk services.

After the connection with the trunk line had been made the subscribers requested that the exchange should be taken over and run by government – ideally at no extra cost, Carey suggested, 'Government to run the exchange & keep up line & repairs at the same rates as is charged in Kandy per subscriber.'¹³⁷ The Department at this point was well aware of the fact that his request would find followers: 'As this application to government to take over a private telephone exchange will in all probability be followed by others and as in my opinion it is inevitable that all the estate telephone lines must sooner or later be absorbed into one system under Government trunk lines.'¹³⁸ Seeing that the system was up to date, the Department decided to take it over on the 1 January 1912 at a cost of Rs. 24,500 for the whole system.¹³⁹

In 1909, the government made the decision about the licenses for private telephone systems and accordingly 'a license [will] be offered...for the Galaha Telephone Exchange on the same terms as those proposed in the case of the

¹³⁵ Pending File 2205B, letter PMG to Colonial Secretary's Office 18th March 1909, attaches report of Superintendent of telegraphs.

¹³⁶ Pending File 2205B, Letter PMG to Colonial Secretary, 21st April 1910, Colonial Secretary's Office to PMG 29 March 1909, No. 123/47777, *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1910/11, Part II, B5.

¹³⁷ Pending File 2205B, Letter from L. Carey to Colonial Secretary's Office, 21st February 1910.

¹³⁸ Pending File 2205B, Letter PMG to Colonial Secretary, 21st April 1910.

¹³⁹ Pending File 2205B, letter PMG to Colonial Secretary's Office, 24th July 1911.

Kalutara District Exchange'.¹⁴⁰ The Galaha subscribers were quite lucky that all three core demands for private telephone systems were solved very fast. The system received a license, got connected with trunk facilities and was taken over by government within a short time. Kalutara was offered a license in the same year as Galaha but the system was taken over in 1927. Most private exchanges had to wait until the 1920s or 30s to be connected with trunk facilities as well as to be taken over by government. The case of Galaha delivered a blueprint for things to come but was also ahead of time.

Private telephone systems

As mentioned, after 1906 several PAs were thinking about getting telephones for their districts but the lack of legal provision was great. The Statement of the Colonial Secretary that 'the Government, however, does not consider that its staff at present is sufficiently large or well trained to meet demand of this matter, if it should arise' underlined that government neither had the manpower and interest at this point to build telephone systems in the planting districts.¹⁴¹ Telephone systems outside towns would thus not only rest on private initiative but the construction - as well as financing the undertaking - and running had also to be organized by the planters. The already mentioned Kalutara District Exchange illustrates the proceedings.

The exchange was run and financed by the local PA, one of the first issues was to raise money for the undertaking and organize its running. The PA formed a separate Sub-Committee, consisting of the Chairman and Secretary as well as Messrs. Galledge, Macadam and Tisdall, which should run the telephone system. The costs were estimated to be around Rs. 1,200 and Rs. 600 should come in the shape of subscriptions (later an additional Rs. 600 were needed and lent by the PA, raising the cost to a total of Rs. 1,800). The PA lent the money on a small interest to the sub-Committee which was a subordinated body using the same structure for financing the undertaking as for running their club. This way of organizing the

¹⁴⁰ Pending File 2205B, Colonial Secretary's Office to PMG 29th March 1909, No. 123/47777.

¹⁴¹ PAC, *Yearbook of the Planters Association of Ceylon*, 1906, p. 12.

running of the system as well as raising the money became the normal way of funding also for the other PAs. The PAs thus used an already existing 'system'.¹⁴²

For the technical site, the Kalutara PA relied on the services of private companies which offered to install telephone networks at the time. The firms were often newly founded or already existing companies which served the needs of plantation industry, e.g. delivering and repairing machines, were extending their services. The Kalutara District Exchange was built by J.S. Collot, 'who may be regarded as the pioneer in the extension of the telephone in the planting district'.¹⁴³ The system started with fifteen subscribers and the switchboard, received from London, had the provisions for 25 in total. The exchange was situated a quarter mile from the Neboda Post Office in a purpose-built house.¹⁴⁴

Organization of a private exchange

A private exchange was normally located in the village, 'central' to the various estates in its vicinity, though some estates would in fact be quite a few miles out.¹⁴⁵ Mary E. Steuart, who visited Sri Lanka around 1904, gives a good description of the remoteness of the place where she stayed: 'Only five miles away is a small town containing a post office, a resthouse, a blacksmith, a doctor, and a hospital, but no beef-shop. Will it be believed, it is the postal depot of a large planting district where the planters absolutely have to send twenty and twenty-five miles to Kandy for their meat?'¹⁴⁶ The exchange was situated in a building which in most cases was erected for that purpose and built as close as possible to a Post Office if one was present.

The connection with the post office was important to the planter because it enabled them to forward telegrams by telephone to the post office and received them

¹⁴² *The Ceylon Observer*, 1 February 1909, p.2, 7 April 1909, p.7. For example the telephone exchange of the Haputale PA. Ibid, 20 March 1909, Supplement, p. 1.

¹⁴³ J.S. Collet was a private contractor living in Colombo (Vauxhall Street) who offered his services as a Telephone Engineer to 'superintend construction of private Telephone Lines in any part of the Island - Special attention given to maintenance and Repairs'. He also specialized in electrical lighting of factories and bungalows – in essence all the services a planter needed. *The Ceylon Observer*, 20 July 1909, p. 6.

¹⁴⁴ *The Ceylon Observer*, 30 June 1909, p. 5, Pending File 2205B, Colonial Secretary's Office to PMG 29th March 1909, No. 123/47777.

¹⁴⁵ See also Figure 1.

¹⁴⁶ She was visiting her son who was working as an estate manager of a cocoa plantation. Mary E. Steuart, *Every Day Life on a Ceylon Cocoa Estate* (London: Henry J. Drane, 1905), p. 56.

without having to send a coolie.¹⁴⁷ The permission to connect the local exchange with the post office was thus crucial for the planter, especially regarding the high costs. This question also gives testament to the lack of legal provision. After it was clear in 1906 that the construction of telephone systems in the planting districts would rest on private initiative, the PAC passed a resolution that 'the Government be asked to permit [connections of] private telephonic systems with the rural Post Offices where practicable for the convenience both of the Public and the Postal Authorities'.¹⁴⁸ In response, the Colonial Secretary stated that 'Government is prepared to consider particular applications for the establishment of private telephone connexions [sic] with the rural Post Offices on terms to be the subject of mutual agreement'. Following this statement the Planters Association of Ceylon sent copies to the district association for individual actions.¹⁴⁹ However two years later the PMG partly abandoned this position, pointing out that 'any Post Offices were only large enough for their present work and that additional accommodation would have to be provided if Telephone Exchange were provided.' Obviously, the 'classic role' initially allocated to the telephone was to be a subsidiary to the telegraph; the latter being used for long distance communication while the telephone bridged the last few mile between the telegraph office and the user.¹⁵⁰ Still, the speed of sending or receiving telegrams was thus much increased.

Up to 1910 the only subscribers to the local networks, who tried to shape the network according to their need, were the planters. Realizing that a direct link to the District Hospital or Police Station would be an asset, they sent another request to government which had 'no objections to the connection proposed, providing the expenditure involved is borne by the owners of the exchange'.¹⁵¹ Especially the

¹⁴⁷ *The Ceylon Observer*, 2 April 1908, p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ PAC, *Yearbook of the Planters Association of Ceylon*, 1906, p. 12.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 12.

¹⁵⁰ Horst A. Wessel, 'Die Rolle des Telefons in der Kommunikationsrevolution des 19. Jahrhunderts', in *Kommunikationsrevolutionen*, ed. by Michael North (Köln: Böhlau, 1995), pp. 101-128 (p. 107, 112)(this article highlights the various impacts and opportunities the invention of the telephone had on communication during the end of the nineteenth century).

¹⁵¹ *The Times of Ceylon*, 13 June 1910, p. 8.

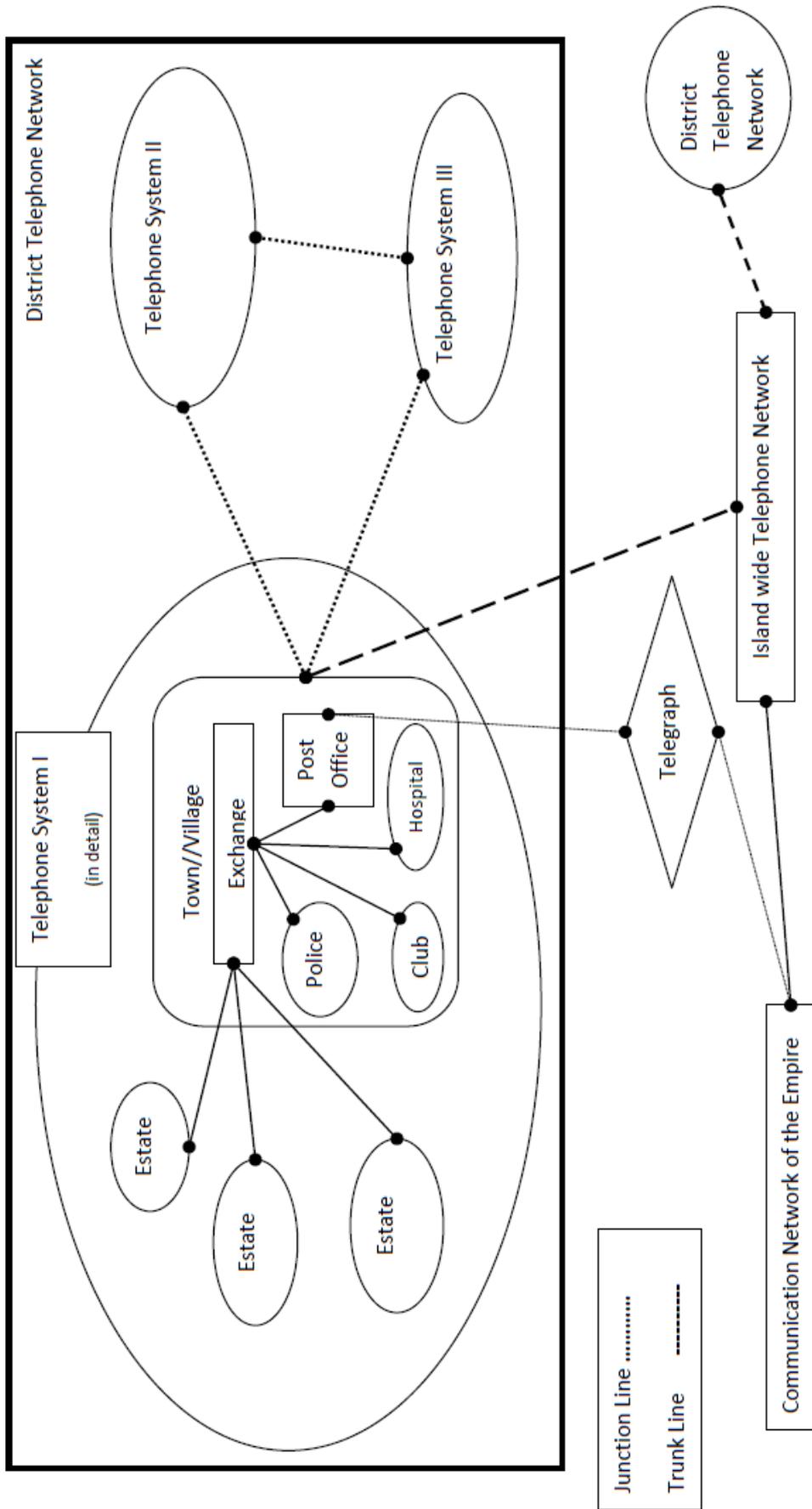


Figure 1: Schematics of a private telephone network (and its integration in the communication infrastructure)

connection to the local medical facility – a hospital, dispensary, the DMO's bungalow or the local doctor - was of great value for the planters.¹⁵²

The box (see Appendix II: Image 2 and 3) shows two examples of private telephone system in 1917, Norwood and Maskeliya, and their subscribers. Besides the estates, it shows the 'usual suspects': post office, police station, hospital and the club. Thus the telephone exchange was connecting the whole life world of the planting community.

A little help

The government decided in the first phase not to get involved in the construction of rural telephones, 'beyond extending a benevolent sympathy towards local extensions'. Government was not supporting these constructions with personal or carrying the extra charges for the connection of government facilities to private exchanges.¹⁵³ But the planting community was too important to be left completely without government support which came by way of subsidies for the estates to acquire instruments and apparatus for telephone purpose at 25 per cent over cost to cover the incidental charges'. In addition, planters were allowed to use trees on Government land as telephone posts.¹⁵⁴

District-wide telephone networks

The Dimbula PA was one of the PAs intending to construct a telephone network on District level. They waited how things were working out at Galaha and Kalutara. In addition they could draw upon the experience of W.L. Strachan, a planter of the Hauteville group of estates in the Agra District and member of the Dimbula PA. Already in 1908, Strachan had installed a line from his estate to Agrapatana Post Office. He then established an exchange at his factory. 'Any planters supplied through the Agrapatana Post Office will be able to join the exchange and when it has grown to fairly large dimensions Mr. Strachan will ask government to take over

¹⁵² See e.g. *The Times of Ceylon*, 8 February 1934, p.13, 2 February 1931, p. 5.

¹⁵³ *The Ceylon Observer*, 2 April 1908, p. 5.

¹⁵⁴ *The Ceylon Observer*, 1 July 1909, p. 7, 24 March 1909, p. 2, *The Times of Ceylon*, 3 May 1910, p. 3, PF 2966B.

the working of it.’¹⁵⁵ Based on the work done by Strachan, in 1909 the Dimbula PA appointed a Telephone Sub-Committee which worked on a proposal for the extension of telephone service in the district. In 1909 the License was granted and it was issued for ‘The Dimbula Valley Tea Company’.¹⁵⁶ In 1910 exchanges were established at the principle centres of the districts Agrapatana, Tillicoultry, Nanuoya and Talawakelle. The four exchanges operated from around 6 a.m. to 9 or 10 p.m. and entertained a network varying from 15 to 30 connections, which included police and railway station, engineering works, hospital and the clubs (for more details see Appendix II: Image 4).¹⁵⁷

To keep cost in check, the Sub-Committee concluded that exchanges with less than ten subscribers were not recommended owing to the cost of the upkeep. With a minimum of ten subscribers the upkeep per annum ‘should be very small’, which meant around Rs. 50 plus Rs. 5 per mile away from the exchange for the repair of

Table 4: The estimated cost for each subscriber in Dimbula to the service would be:

Initial cost	Rs.	C.
Cost of instrument	62	0
Share of switchboard	15	0
Erection, rail frights etc.	13	0
Share of cost of exchange and line connecting with the local Post Office	40	0
total	130	0
additional: for each mile from the exchange, on a tree-borne service - wire, insulators, erection, sundries	30	0

Source: *The Times of Ceylon*, 3 May 1910, p. 3.

¹⁵⁵ *The Ceylon Observer*, 30 June 1908, p. 5.

¹⁵⁶ The estates referred to: Agra, Agrakanda, Albion, Bambarukele, Caledonia, Cenon, Cranley, Cranley Upper, Cymru, Diyunillakelle, Eildon Hall, Elgin, Fairfield (Newton), Fassiferm E.&W., Hunfold&St.Regulus, Holbrook, Koulahena, Lippakela, Macduff, maria, Melton, Mousa Ella, Oddington, Ouva Lelle, Queenwood, Rahanwatta, Talankanda, Tangakelle, Tillicoultry, Vellekelle, Walaha, Waltrim. PF 2205A.

¹⁵⁷ *The Ceylon Observer*, 30 June 1908, p. 5, *The Times of Ceylon*, 3 May 1910, p. 3, *Ferguson’s Ceylon Directory*, 1917, p. 405.

the wires.¹⁵⁸ The estimate for the upkeep included the salary for a telephone operator. The private exchanges had to hire their own personnel and from the 1920s onwards PAs began to recruit female telephone operators (see chapter II) who were trained at the government Telephone School. Of course the PA had to pay for their training.¹⁵⁹

Like many others PAs, the Dimbula PA had several local telephone systems constructed and running within the district.¹⁶⁰ Naturally, they wanted to connect the various local systems with each other to create one district-wide telephone network. The problem was that the license for private telephone systems didn't allow to connect two telephone exchanges with each other which were in different postal districts.¹⁶¹ Accordingly the further connection of the various private telephone exchanges with each other had to be provided by government via junction lines which were then rented to the PA. This service came at a cost: In 1912 the charges were Rs.32 per mile.¹⁶²

As said, the Dimbula PA expected that Government would follow the example of the Galaha Telephone exchange and take over their exchanges as well. However, Government was reluctant: 'The question is complicated by the fact that two classes of construction have to be considered, i.e., a cheap construction suitable for local communication only and a more expensive construction which would be suitable for communication over the trunk lines whenever such are provided.'¹⁶³ Constructing an exchange suitable to be connected to a trunk line meant that building costs would be much higher. In the cases where a cheaper version for bare local communication was built it had to be upgraded later. The Dimbula Telephone Sub-Committee's approach to that question was that Government 'will probably

¹⁵⁸The cost per subscribers could later become more expensive when trees couldn't be used to carry the lines and poles had to be erected. *The Times of Ceylon*, 3 May 1910, p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 21 February 1925, p. 17, e.g. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1932, Part II, C16.

¹⁶⁰ E.g. the Kelani District Exchange in 1928 had eleven exchanges. *The Times of Ceylon*, 23 February 1928, p. 4. Kalutara District Exchange also had several exchanges. *The Times of Ceylon*, 29 August 1929, p. 4.

¹⁶¹ *The Times of Ceylon*, 3 May 1910, p. 3.

¹⁶² *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1912-13, Part II, C6.

¹⁶³ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1908, Part II, B17.

take over all the exchanges at no distant date'. Consequently, all materials and instruments were to be approved by government to be on the safe side.¹⁶⁴

When the distance and accordingly the cost of construction for a separate line would be too high, in some cases the planters used party lines¹⁶⁵ so that far-off estates weren't faced with high costs and were able to get a connection.¹⁶⁶ The plan that 'planters erect and maintain their own lines and Department gave the exchange service' was given up, as the Superintendent of Telegraph strongly opposed it, claiming the service could never be worked efficiently and satisfactorily. This view was adopted by the Department.¹⁶⁷

Constraining topography

The construction of telephone systems and networks in the Kandyan Highland was also difficult due to the topography. For example in the case of the Galaha Exchange 'between 90 and 100 miles of line over rough country' had to be laid by men working their way through the jungle. Additional staff was required as work took up more time.¹⁶⁸ At Matale and elsewhere, PAs decided to wait with building their own systems until equipment and construction work became cheaper.¹⁶⁹ In those years the telephone was not a priority for the government and only a few first steps were made by the government towards overland service. Against that background it is understandable that some PAs were cautious, but this of course doesn't mean that they didn't want a telephone. The number of inquiries made as to the conditions under which Government was prepared to establish and work small local exchanges in the planting district increased steadily after 1906.¹⁷⁰ Responding to these inquiries, the Department announced that a 'pamphlet on the construction of

¹⁶⁴ *The Times of Ceylon*, 3 May 1910, p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ A party line is a local telephone circuit, or loop, shared by several subscribers. The lines were offered by telephone companies in various countries and were cheaper than a private line. It also meant that every subscriber connected to the party line could listen in or participate in the communication. Party lines were quite favoured in rural areas in America and Canada.

¹⁶⁶ *The Ceylon Observer*, 15 March 1909, p. 2.

¹⁶⁷ E.g. Galaha Exchange (Pending File 2205B, Letter PMG to Colonial Secretary, 21st April 1910) or Uva District Telephone Exchange (*The Times of Ceylon*, 26 November 1925, p. 14).

¹⁶⁸ Pending File 2205B, Letter PMG to Colonial Secretary, 21st April 1910, Letter Office of the Superintendent of Telegraphs to PMG 20th December 1910.

¹⁶⁹ *The Ceylon Observer*, 22 March 1909, Supplement, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ *The Ceylon Observer*, 2 July 1909, p. 6.

telephone lines has been prepared and is on sale at 10 cents a copy in Post Offices'.¹⁷¹

1.1.8. Licenses for private telephone systems

The ongoing interest in the construction of private telephones as well as the first few already in operation eventually forced the government to deal with legal matters. Accordingly a license system for private telephones was established. According to Ordinance No.35 of 1909, a license to 'establish, maintain, and work telephone lines, instruments and exchanges, hereinafter called "Telephone System"' was required for telephones 'between two or more buildings within the limits of any property belonging to the same owner'.¹⁷² Thus, a license was also necessary if a planter wanted to connect the bungalow with his factory.¹⁷³

One of the core questions in the internal debate between the PMG, the Superintendent of Telegraphs and the Colonial Secretary Office was which license and therefore the principles laid down within, it should be adopted for the use in Sri Lanka: the one for British India or the one between the U.K. Post Office and the National Telephone Company (NTC).¹⁷⁴ The Indian system embodied the idea of private local telephone system but the right to connect the different networks was reserved for the government. A license based on British system, between the U.K. Post Office and the NTC, would have allowed a company to run a network including various rural areas and towns as well as the construction of trunk lines.¹⁷⁵

In addition to the PAs, requests for erecting private telephone systems were received from various companies, e.g. Messrs. Davis & Co., the Ceylon District Telephone Syndicate or the Electrical Accessories Corp. They also wanted to construct and run telephone networks in the planting districts.¹⁷⁶ This situation

¹⁷¹ *The Ceylon Observer*, 1 July 1909, p. 7.

¹⁷² *The Ceylon Observer*, 15 March 1909 p.3. PF 2966B, attached private license form (see Appendix II: Image 5).

¹⁷³ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1917, Part II, C1. Further see the above mentioned box of the Galahara Telephone Exchange.

¹⁷⁴ PF 2205.

¹⁷⁵ PF 2966B.

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*

raised further questions regarding the scope of the licenses. As the license given to the OTC in 1884 wasn't deemed suitable any more, its stipulations had to be rephrased. The District Telephone Syndicate, a private firm, applied also to provide telephone exchanges to towns, but the Executive Council decided in 1908 that licenses should only be granted for rural telephones.¹⁷⁷ As a result of these applications, telephone systems were prohibited to connect two separate postal districts. Nor were private persons or companies allowed to acquire a monopoly in their area of operation.¹⁷⁸ For Municipalities, towns and 'areas in which the government may be prepared to establish its own telephone system in connection with the post office', no licenses would be issued at all. Connections between different local areas were to be provided by the Government via trunk or junction lines.¹⁷⁹

Ownership and operation

The crucial question was whether the license should be in favour of the PA or the constructing company. Closely linked with that question was if the license should permit the working of an exchange with a profit which then had to be approved by the Government like in the Indian case. PMG Padgen's directive E.457 of 30 November 1908 advocated for leaving estate telephones to private enterprise. He argued that if Government would construct and maintain the telephone system they had to be of high standard which would be too costly for the planting community. If the planters would construct the telephone system themselves, they could adopt a lower standard and thus lower the costs of construction. Also, there would be difficulties for government in finding capital to start the undertaking.¹⁸⁰ This latter evaluation of the situation was seen as decisive and in 1909 it was decided that the licenses should be in favour of the PAs and not any of the companies: '(f)That neither the said Telephone System nor any part of it shall be sold or leased to any person or any Company as a working concern'.¹⁸¹ Private

¹⁷⁷ PF 2966B.

¹⁷⁸ *The Times of Ceylon*, 3 May 1910, p. 3, PF 2966B, attached private license form (Appendix II: Image 5).

¹⁷⁹ PF 2966B.

¹⁸⁰ PF 2205B, Letter PMG to Colonial Secretary, 21 April 1910.

¹⁸¹ PF 2966B.

telephones would therefore being run by planters on a non-profit base which meant that the Department did not have to approve rates. Private companies would only build these systems as private constructors but not own and run them for profit. Accordingly, it was decided that there would be only a 'symbolic' royalty of 1 Rs. per telephone per annum.¹⁸² Finally, 'Government will not grant license to the association it not being a corporate body. It will be necessary for a local resident near the exchange to obtain the license and work the exchange, furnishing copies of the accounts and reporting the Association on the working'.¹⁸³

In 1909 the discussion concerning the establishment of private telephone systems and the design of the license was put to an end. The internal discussion had taken up more than two years. The basic adaption of the Indian system of licensing for Sri Lanka reflects a few important decisions regarding the future development of the telephone. The involvement of the Superintendent of Telegraphs in the whole internal discussion emphasises that the telegraph from the government's point of view was the major communication technology. The telegraph system as well as the whole postal system were not that well developed and still in a state of 'under construction'. That a private telephone system would not be allowed to connect two separate postal districts was mainly a measure to protect the telegraph system.¹⁸⁴ The telephone at this point was regarded as a technology in the second row.

Giving private telephone licenses only to rural areas determined the future development of the emerging telephone network. It was impossible for a company like the OTC, which by then was busily constructing and running telephone networks all over South and Southeast Asia, to operate telephones throughout the island on a profit making basis.¹⁸⁵ Government retained the right to build and control the telephone network. The small private telephone networks were a concession to one of the most important groups in the colony due to the obvious fact that the Government would not be able to construct the networks fast enough

¹⁸² PF 2966B.

¹⁸³ *The Times of Ceylon*, 3 May 1910, p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁵ PF 2966B.

to satisfy the demands of the planters. Above all, 'e) The Government reserves the right to take over the said Telephone System and its connection at any time ... but Government will in no case take over any apparatus or material which is in the opinion of the Government up to a proper standard.'¹⁸⁶

1.1.9 World War I as a watershed

'The telephone service has not been seriously affected by the war.'¹⁸⁷ This rather bold statement made at the beginning of 1915 had to be revised very soon. With the creation of a license system for private telephone systems and a clarification of the circumstances for the running of private telephones, PAs were empowered to build their networks if they could afford it. The planting community had a vivid interest but the outbreak of World War I slowed down the whole telephone development in Sri Lanka dramatically.

A major issue was the supply of telephone equipment which had to be imported from Britain. Even small parts were difficult to get: 'Two or three jacks have been broken during the year. One dozen are on order from England as they could not be produced locally.'¹⁸⁸ As crucial material needed for the construction of telephone systems was unavailable during the war time many PAs which were interested in establishing telephone connections decided to wait until the end of the war. The Kurunegala PA is one example: 'Majority prefers to wait till determination of the war before joining the scheme owing to the inability to get, or high cost, of material.'¹⁸⁹ With conditions prevailing and equipment continuing to be rare or expensive even after the war, the situation began to change only in the 1920s.¹⁹⁰

The shortage not only affected the realization of private telephone networks but also hit the government's efforts: 'The year 1917 was a year of shortage – shortage of supervising staff, shortage of postmasters, and shortage of telephone and other stores, and the record of the year accordingly contains little more than the details

¹⁸⁶ PF 2966B, attached private license form.

¹⁸⁷ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1914, Part II, C9.

¹⁸⁸ *The Times of Ceylon*, 4 March 1930, p. 4.

¹⁸⁹ *The Times of Ceylon*, 5 November 1918, p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ *The Ceylon Observer*, 2 February 1920, p. 2.

of merely “carrying-on”, few extensions or improvement been practicable.’¹⁹¹ Postal services were impeded by the continuing war conditions, while trade restrictions drove up the cost of living increased in general.¹⁹²

The economic situation played an important part. The dependence on a handful of export corps was and remained the dominant economic feature of colonial Sri Lanka. ‘Even the forces that made for change – primarily two world wars and the great depression of 1921-31 – merely served to delineate more clearly existing features without bringing about any notable change in the direction of economic development’.¹⁹³ The First World War and its aftermath until the beginning of the 1920s put considerable pressure especially upon the tea market, which was the main export commodity of Sri Lanka. During the war, the normal market conditions were suspended as the British Government controlled the export of tea from Sri Lanka and India and fixed its selling price. As soon as the war ended, the price of tea fell sharply. The same happened with rubber, which was doing quite well during the war, but prices also took a hit afterwards.¹⁹⁴ Prices of these key products of the Sri Lankan economy only recovered in the middle of the 1920s. Investment into machinery - also suspended during the war – had priority over the telephone, while the unreliability of the market limited planters’ resources.

1.2. Phase II (1920-1939)

The second phase of the telephone history in Sri Lanka witnessed the emergence of an island wide telephone network. The construction of a telephone system was delayed during the First World War due to the shortage of material and equipment. With the economic recovery of the 1920s many PAs began to take to the telephone again, constructing systems in their districts and connecting them to district wide networks. With the extension of the trunk line system and new exchanges in towns

¹⁹¹ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1917, Part II, C1.

¹⁹² *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1918, Part II, C1.

¹⁹³ Wickremeratne, L.A.: *Economic Development in the Plantation Sector, c 1900-1947*. In: de Silva, K.M. (ed.) (1973): *History of Ceylon. From the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century to 1948*, Vol. III. Colombo: University of Ceylon, pp. 428-445, p. 428.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 432sp.

an island wide telephone network was emerging in the 1930s. In 1935, international connections were established first to India and soon after to Britain.

At the beginning of the second phase the government's policy regarding telephones changed for various reasons. Building telephone exchanges in towns and rural areas as well as extending the trunk line system moved up on the agenda and government also paid more attention to the planters' demands by taking over the private exchanges. The telephone was now regarded as a crucial part of the communication infrastructure. The crux in this phase was that government was willing to massively expand the telephone service as well as to modernise, the implementation of that policy was soon delayed by the consequences of the Great Depression. The rapid expansion of the telephone service during the mid-1920s was once again slowed down and did not resume until the second half of the 1930s.

A second major development between the two World Wars was the advent of automatic telephone exchanges which revolutionized the 'telephone culture' in colonial Sri Lanka by allowing a 24/7 telephone service even for small rural exchanges, they also made the female telephone operator redundant. The first automatic system had already been installed in 1923 for interdepartmental use.¹⁹⁵ Sri Lanka's first rural automatic exchange was installed in 1929 in Boragasketiya and that year the town of Kalutara received one. But again, due to the Great Depression the switch to automatized running was delayed until the end of the 1930s.

1.2.1. The changing policy in the 1920s

During the 1920s the government's communication policy changed in favour of the telephone. The extension of the trunk lines, acquisition of private exchanges and the installation of rural exchanges indicate this new approach.¹⁹⁶ There were several reasons for it. As already mentioned, the island's infrastructure was quite

¹⁹⁵In August 1923, an automatic switchboard of the 'Strowger' type connecting the subscribers in the Postal Department was installed. And in August 1924 one of 'Relay' type was brought into use to connect the subscribers of the Public Works and Survey Department. Besides these automatic exchanges and a few semi-automatic ones there were also five private automatic sub-exchanges in Colombo, the first was installed in 1923. *Ceylon Administration Reports, 1929, Part II, C3, 1930, Part II, C7/8.*

¹⁹⁶Rural exchanges will be addressed in the following parts of the chapter.

inadequate to serve the needs of the export-orientated plantation economy. Until 1905, a great deal of financial resources had to be dedicated to road and railway construction and the establishment of postal and telegraphic communication. As a matter of principle, a colony was expected to pay for its own expenditures, which limited the opportunities for a more energetic development. Around 1905 the telephone was quite a new and expensive technology and had not proved its value yet, even though the technology for telephone land line had advanced very much in the beginning of the twentieth century and costs had gone down. But the telegraph was comparatively cheaper and the British knowledge pool regarding that communication tool was rich due to the fact that Britain was one of the most experienced countries in the world at the turn of the century, one could call it a 'telegraph country'.

The discussion in Britain

At the beginning of the twentieth century Britain was in possession of the world's largest telegraph network. The so-called 'all-red' routes connected Britain with all her colonies without touching enemy territory. This network had various economic and political advantages and formed the backbone to Britain's global dominance. New technologies, like telephone or wireless, coming up at the beginning of the twentieth century automatically were regarded as implying risk leading to a neglect of the cable network and therefore to ruin the British supremacy.¹⁹⁷ But the telegraph was more than just a tool to rule the world. For the Victorian Age it was the ultimate symbol of human power over nature. The key for that dominance was discipline which can be regarded as the Victorian value or even fantasy bolstered by intelligence. In the Victorian understanding, as man disciplined nature, so did technology, e.g. the telegraph, disciplined the user in return.¹⁹⁸

The well developed network of telegraphs within Britain which also had synergy effects with the railways made it quite hard for a new communication technology. The dominance of well established technologies made new inventions sometimes

¹⁹⁷ Headrick, *Tentacles of Progress*, p. 97sp and 132sp, Boyce, 'Submarine Cables', p. 84sp.

¹⁹⁸ Morus, 'The nervous system of Britain', p. 474.

appear as toy, and the telephone was a case in point.¹⁹⁹ Its initial use has been confined to intra-domestic communication, as the Chief Engineer of the British Post Office (1879) summarized: ‘The absence of servants has compelled Americans to adopt communication systems for domestic purposes. Few have worked at the telephone much more than I have. I have one in my office, but more for show. If I want to send a message – I use a sounder or employ a boy to take it’.²⁰⁰ Michael Mann argues in his article that a telegram, being much cheaper than a telephone call, remained the major form of long-distance communication. ‘Aristocratic-bourgeois attitudes as well as a desire for political control went hand in hand, meaning that in Great Britain, like in continental Europe, the telephone was an urban means of communication limited to the upper classes of society for a long time.’²⁰¹ Initially, the telephone indeed served mainly local communication, but being mostly run by private companies, which built networks that were detached from the telegraph network, eventually allowed companies to respond to customer demands much quicker and create much more ramified network.²⁰²

Where it appeared, the telephone became an item of discussion, for instance in the papers, which published many articles about its progress. But its public image was not always positive: reports about the telephone constantly contained complains about the time one had to wait for a connection, unfriendly operators, and above all the wires running through the cities. The British Post office had its own concerns, fearing that the telephone threatened the telegraph network. To a degree, these concerns determined the early development of the telephone network which could only occupy the niches in which a telegraph was unprofitable.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Asa Biggs, ‘The Pleasure Telephone: A Chapter in the Prehistory of the Media’, in *The Social Impact of the Telephone*, ed. by Ithiel de Sola Pool (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1977), pp. 40-65 (p. 40sp).

²⁰⁰ Ithiel de Sola Pool et al, ‘Foresight and Hindsight: the Case of the Telephone’, in *The Social Impact of the Telephone*, ed. by Ithiel de Sola Pool (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1977), pp. 127-157 (p. 128).

²⁰¹ Mann, ‘Deep Digital Divide’, p. 197.

²⁰² Wessel, ‘Rolle des Telefons’, p. 107.

²⁰³ Charles R. Perry, ‘The British Experience 1876-1912: the Impact of the Telephone during the Years of Delay’, in *The Social Impact of the Telephone*, ed. by Ithiel de Sola Pool (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1977), pp.69-96(p. 70sp, 79sp.)

The nationalization of the various telephone companies in 1912 marked a shift in the policy towards the telephone in Britain. The advancement of the telephone as a communication tool was led by the business elites from the City of London and the aristocracy.²⁰⁴ The telephone had a massive impact in the business world, and now also entered the private sphere in notable number. The number of calls was going up, too.²⁰⁵ At first, the telephone didn't receive the same enthusiastic treatment as in the USA and there was a 'delay' in the telephone development in Britain. The image of the telephone was changing in the years before the First World War as people realized that the telegraph would not be the communication tool of the future. The British attitude towards the telephone changed alongside that towards other new communication media, such as the wireless or the radio.²⁰⁶ 'Old' technologies of course never disappeared completely but there was space for the use of new ones.²⁰⁷

The sources do not allow us to fully measure the impact of the change in Britain on Sri Lanka. The changing perception of the telephone certainly played a role, as did the fact that it began to be accepted as a part of the imperial communication structure after the First World War. The pressure on the British Government from within Britain itself and several colonies, which demanded that the imperial communication infrastructure should be brought 'up to date', was increasing. The foundation of Imperial and International Communications, Ltd., in 1929 emphasises that changing attitude towards an overhaul and modernization of the network. However, the concern that if the British would focus on these new technologies their neglected cable-based network would fall into foreign hands was still there. Thus the solution was to combine all the competing communication enterprises of the empire and merge them into one unit. After the Imperial Wireless and Cable Conference (1928), the Imperial and International Communications, Ltd. was

²⁰⁴ Perry, 'The British Experience', p. 79, Lyme Hamill, 'The Social Shaping of British Communications Networks prior to the First World War', *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 35, 1(2010), p. 278.

²⁰⁵ In 1913 ten times as many phone calls were made as telegrams sent in Britain: 883 million compared to 88 millions. *ibid*, p. 277.

²⁰⁶ Headrick, *Tentacles of Progress*, p. 130sp.

²⁰⁷ See Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old*.

founded as a semiprivate enterprise and given a near monopoly.²⁰⁸ The company had formed an associated company in Bombay for a wireless telephone service between Bombay and England.²⁰⁹ Consequently it offered in 1932 to float a 'Ceylon registered company' and take over the island's telephone, postal and telegraph service. The offer was, to the disappointment of the planting and commercial communities, rejected by the colonial government.²¹⁰ The changes were happening both on a global and a local level, and it is likely that the policy change in Sri Lanka was influenced to a certain degree by the development in Britain itself.

Step by Step

In Sri Lanka, the new policy towards the telephone was implemented step by step rather than in one single and big move. The first step, taken in the beginning of the 1920s was the decision to construct rural exchanges and take over private ones. The PMG made that clear in 1924 when he stated 'telephone exchange in Planting District matter is receiving the attention of the Government'.²¹¹ In the first phase of network building, such an involvement would have been unthinkable. Combined with the extension of the trunk line system this was a crucial step towards the creation of an island-wide telephone system run by the government.

At the end of the 1920s an additional modernization of the system was inaugurated. Key to that modernization was the change to automatized switchboards but, as we have seen, this change had to be postponed because of the economic crisis. Taking a look at the *Ceylon Administration Reports* from the 1920s, the change of policy appears to be pragmatic. The change towards telephones in Britain and the pressure within the colony itself led to a reconsideration of priorities. But during the last years of the 1920s a change in attitude becomes visible, too, as the statement from the *Ceylon Administration Report* of 1927 indicates:

²⁰⁸ For example, the company was running wireless telephone services between London-America, London-South Africa and London-Australia. See Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress*, p. 132sp, *The Times of Ceylon*, 17 October 1932, p. 5.

²⁰⁹ The capital for this undertaking was largely found by Indians and accordingly, there were Indians on the board of directors. *The Times of Ceylon*, 17 October 1932, p. 5.

²¹⁰ *The Times of Ceylon*, 28 November 1932, p.5, 17 October 1932, p. 5.

²¹¹ *The Times of Ceylon*, 27 September 1924, p. 12.

*Apart from the stimulus offered by the erection of rural exchanges the demand for telephone facilities is daily increasing. The telephone is no longer regarded as a luxury for the wealthy, but as a public utility which should be placed on a level with other modes of communication. The public are beginning to grasp that telephone communication though comparatively expensive checks waste of time and labour, eliminating a good deal of dilatory correspondence and is a great help to social life as well as to the State and commerce. There is no doubt that during the next few years there will be a vast development in telephone system. It is therefore necessary that a comprehensive study should be made of all telephone requirements of the island so that works may not be undertaken haphazard.*²¹²

Thus the government was catching up with the expectations of the planting and commercial communities which already regarded the telephone as a public good.

In the first phase requests from the planting and commercial communities for more telephone connections had more or less been answered in a 'defensive' way. In the 1920s these requests were processed with more eagerness and openness. On his first visit to the Sabaragamuwa Province, Governor Stanley replied to the address of welcome that he hoped to improve telephone facilities before long. He further 'asked the planters to inform him of their wants in a less formal manner. Government, he said, was advised to the fact that the planting industry has been the chief revenue producing agency for some years.'²¹³ In his speech at the Annual Meeting of Planters' Association in 1930, the retiring Chairman E.C. Villiers brought the relationship between state and planting interest to a point: 'I do not think any useful purpose will be served by taking every refusal of our perfectly reasonable demands lying down. After all the agricultural industries pay the piper and it's only fair that proprietors and Companies that we represent should be allowed to call the tune, even if sometimes the piper can't or won't play it.'²¹⁴ The driving force for the telephone development in Sri Lanka were local economic considerations, contrary to British India where the telephone was used to connect all major North Indian

²¹² *Ceylon Administration Reports, 1927, Part II, C10sp.*

²¹³ *The Times of Ceylon, 21 November 1928, p. 12.*

²¹⁴ *The Times of Ceylon, 13 March 1930, p. 4.*

cities and their military cantonment, responding to the threat from the North West, known as the Great Game.²¹⁵

The Great Depression and the delay of the telephone development

The depression in the wake of the Black Friday also hit Sri Lanka.²¹⁶ The island's export-orientated economy depended on the world market. Falling prices affected not only rubber and tea but also the coconuts and other cash crops. The demand for coconut used for soap and margarine, which had risen in the 1920s, dropped considerably and prices fell.²¹⁷

This impact had also direct consequences for the development of the telephone system. Telephone subscriptions were still expensive and accordingly stagnated or even decreased at the beginning of the 1930s.²¹⁸ The most noticeable drop in subscribers was seen at Ambalangoda (Southern Province) 'where during the first half of the year [1931] 75 percent of the subscribers gave up service. No other exchange in the Island was so adversely affected by the prevalent depression. The female telephonist attached to the exchange was consequently withdrawn.'²¹⁹ This was not an exception and due to the drop of subscribers operators were dismissed at several exchanges, even at the biggest exchange in the colony, Colombo, four female and three male night telephonists were made redundant.²²⁰

The consequences of the depression delayed the extension of the telephone system for several years, notably the planned change to automatic switchboards. In addition, many exchanges like Colombo and Kandy were technical outdated and needed upgrading.²²¹

²¹⁵ Mann, 'Deep Digital Divide', p. 201.

²¹⁶ For further reading on the impact of the Great depression on the colonies in South Asia see Dietmar Rothermund, *The Global Impact of the Great Depression, 1929-1939* (London: Routledge, 1996).

²¹⁷ L.A. Wickremeratne, 'Economic Development in the Plantation Sector, c1900-1947', in *History of Ceylon. From the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century to 1948*, Vol. III., ed. by K.M. de Silva (Colombo: University of Ceylon, 1973), pp. 428-445 (p. 436sp).

²¹⁸ In 1930 852 new phones were fitted and 752 were given up making a net increase of 107. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1930, Part II, C7, 1932, Part II, C15.

²¹⁹ Subscribers to the exchange: 1929: 22/1930: 18/1932: 7/ 1933: 2. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1931, Part II, C17.

²²⁰ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1932, Part II, C16.

²²¹ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1930, Part II, C7, 1932, Part II, C3, 1938, Part II, E11.

Popularizing the telephone

A year after the economic decline had hit rock bottom in 1933 the government of the island decided to massively improve the telephone system, 'Authorities consider the present moment a very opportune time for propaganda of this kind since the brightening prospects for the rubber and tea industries are construed as being favourable to an expansion of the department's activities in wireless and telephone development'.²²² To achieve this goal a Five-Year Plan was implemented which allocated Rs. 3,000,000 to improve the telephone system to an up-to-date standard with the aim of making it profitable. The key point of the plan was the switch to automatic exchanges in Colombo and the rest of the island. The Five-Year Plan was flanked by a campaign to popularize both the telephone and the wireless broadcasting.²²³ As a first step of the campaign a special van was sent out to tour the island. The van was equipped with a small wireless set and loudspeakers and a sample of telephone sets.²²⁴ In addition the 'department issued some further leaflets advertising its services. When the new exchanges are installed, an extensive telephone advertising campaign will be conducted.'²²⁵

These government efforts show that the valuation of the telephone had changed since the beginning of the 1920s. During the second half of the 1920s, the telegraph lost its status as the foremost tool of communication, at least as far as its funding was. 'As has been the experience elsewhere, the telephone service competes with the Telegraph Service for short distance traffic where a telephone trunk call is as cheap as and more satisfactory than a telegram. This competition is bound to become keener as the telephone system is developed.'²²⁶

But despite the new valuation for the telephone, the government didn't overdo the construction of telephone exchanges. The policy of providing exchanges only where an adequate return could be foreseen was adhered to as before.²²⁷ Before the start

²²² *The Ceylon Observer*, 5 April 1934, p. 1.

²²³ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1933, Part II, E16, *The Ceylon Observer*, 19 June 1934, weekly edition, p. 23.

²²⁴ *The Ceylon Observer*, 5 April 1934, p.1.

²²⁵ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1936, Part II, E7.

²²⁶ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1935, Part II, E4.

²²⁷ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1937, Part II, E12.

of the Second World War the system was regarded as a very much needed improvement to the communication system of the island. It was now seen both as a useful tool for the economy and security and as a part of everyday social life.²²⁸

1.2.2. Colombo and other towns

In 1908 the Executive Council decided that licenses for private telephones should only be issued for rural telephone systems, while telephones in urban areas should be run by the government. Consequently, the island's major municipalities of Colombo, Kandy, Galle, the Hill Station Nuwara Eliya and a few towns all received telephone systems before the First World War. In the 1920s further towns, even smaller ones, received telephone facilities, even though their number of subscribers was often quite low (see Appendix VI: Table 2). The Colombo Municipality had the largest telephone exchange on the island, with sub-exchanges in the Fort, Havelock Town and Maradana. About half of the subscribers, who had a subscription to a government exchange on the island, were connected to one of the exchanges in Colombo. Because of this size, Colombo illustrates some of the major developments in the telephone history of Sri Lanka.

The number of subscribers to the Colombo Central Exchange was not only determined by the demand of the subscribers but also by the size of the exchange. In 1911 a new switchboard was taken into service, which lasted until 1939, when the new automatic switchboard arrived. Over the years, the 1911 switchboard was several times extended to cope with demand. In 1918, 298 applications for a connection were outstanding, some of which had to wait until 1920 when an extension to the switchboard added 300 lines, bringing the total number of connections to 1000. But even with the new switchboard in place 'very many applicants for telephone have had to be put off till the new switchboard arrived.'²²⁹ This pattern was repeated several times in subsequent years. *Administrative Reports* in 1937 stated that 'at present, the Department is unable to meet the demand for telephones in Colombo as the exchange is full to capacity. Applicants

²²⁸ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1938, Part II, E11.

²²⁹ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1918, Part II, C7, *The Ceylon Observer*, 29 May 1920, p. 9.

for a telephone have to wait until a vacancy occurs. As soon as the new exchange is installed, there is likely to be an immediate increase in the number of subscribers.’²³⁰

Already at the end of the 1920s, the switchboard and all other equipment were outdated and worn out, but due to the lack of finances the old system had to work for another ten years. By then, sections of the main switchboard still had magneto boards which had been twenty years in service. Colombo was not the only city to have a switch board which was technically out of date. The Kandy Telephone Exchange, serving the second largest network in the island, had manual switchboard ‘assembled and fitted up locally using second hand material.’ The report for the year 1939 also noted that it had been in use for over ten years and needed to be replaced with an automatic one as well as a new trunk manual board, as soon as the Colombo Exchange was finished.²³¹

Despite the slightly outdated equipment, the Colombo exchange was quite a busy one, in particular in the 1930s. ‘The busy hour calling rate has recently increased to almost unmanageable proportions. One operator in one hour attended to 400 calls. The “peak” hour calling rate was estimated in the Colombo exchange recently to be 276 per position per telephone. (The normal “peak” load of calls for a position is 160)’.²³² At that rate, Colombo was also one of the busiest exchanges worldwide. The exchange in Jerusalem ‘claimed that there are more calls per day and per hour than any other part of the world. The average number of calls per telephone in Jerusalem is 37.8 per day. In industrial and commercial centres of America the average is 12, and in the United Kingdom 7 per day’ (Electrical Review, 1st June 1934).²³³ The relatively high number of calls also owed to the fact that in Sri Lanka as well as in Jerusalem a flat rate system was in use. A certain number of those calls

²³⁰ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1937, Part II, E6.

²³¹ *The Times of Ceylon*, 20 February 1933, p. 6, *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1933, Part II, E9, 1938, Part II, E11.

²³² *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1936, Part II, E5.

²³³ Quoted by the article from ‘The Miere’ (the Journal of the Post Office Engineering Association of Ceylon) printed in *The Ceylon Observer*, 13 July 1935, p. 6, 8.

were, from the perspective of the post office, 'unnecessary' meaning that subscribers, for example, called to enquire the exact time.²³⁴

Change to automatic running

The change of the Colombo Exchange from manual to automatic operation had already been considered in the mid-1920s in the light that an automatic system would have several advantages over the manual one. First of all the telephone service would be available for 24 hours and second it would be much cheaper because operators could be dispensed with.²³⁵ The third point concerned the telephone rates. Under the existing system a flat rate policy was unprofitable. The report of a special committee stated in 1928 that measured rates should be charged for the telephone and separately for each call. 'This will help the department in saving a good deal of time and work because when charges are made for calls unnecessary calls, as at present, will not be made'. The problem was that the introduction of such a pricing system was only possible once the whole system had been switched to automatic operation.²³⁶

As the conversion of the system was expensive it was postponed again and again, and the Great Depression caused further delay. As the *Administrative Report* of 1930 stated the 'financial situation has again prevented a start being made with the work of converting the Colombo telephone system to automatic working.'²³⁷ It was not until 1934 that the Five Year Plan was put in action to bring the telephone system up-to-date. The central point was to switch the exchanges to automatic running.²³⁸ Once the upgrade was approved, Colombo was to get the most modern type of automatic system called the satellite system. It allowed all subscribers to ring up every other subscriber in the municipal area. However, before the automatic

²³⁴ Ibid, p. 6/8. With the switch to automatic running an electric clock was installed. By dialing 'time' the subscriber was automatically informed of the correct time. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1939, Part II, E11.

²³⁵ Also for the night shift men were used as operators and their service was constantly seen as 'being very unsatisfactory' by the subscribers. Thus the automatic system would provide better service. PF 1822, No 829/91844/93 PMG to Colonial Secretary, 19th December 1911.

²³⁶ The Committee consisted of the Assistant PMG, the Accountant, and the Superintendent of Telegraphs and Telephones. *The Ceylon Observer*, 28 August 1928, p. 6.

²³⁷ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1930, Part II, C7.

²³⁸ *The Ceylon Observer*, 19 June 1934, weekly edition, p. 23.

system was introduced in 1936, the numbers of many subscribers had to be changed.²³⁹

While the extension of the Central Telegraph Office and the construction of two new buildings for the sub-exchanges in Maradana and Havelock Town immediately began in 1936, the installation of the new switchboards was delayed several times because equipment did not arrive until 1939.²⁴⁰ Then, installation of automatic equipment in the Central Telegraph Office, Havelock Town and Maradana is nearing completion ...then new trunk manual board complete with all convenience for quick dealing, recording and line indication has already brought into use. The new board has 13 positions for trunk and overseas telephone calls.²⁴¹ The upgraded exchanges simultaneously opened on 7 April 1939.²⁴²

Simultaneous to the upgrading of the Colombo exchanges, government installed new exchanges in other towns and it also began to take over or construct rural exchanges. In all instances, even for smaller networks, the government used small automatic exchanges. The Five Year Plan of 1934 had (see Table 5) a significant impact on the change to automatic running of the telephone system. Before 1934 automatic exchanges were few and an exceptional.

The switch towards automatic exchanges led to several changes in the operating of the telephone service. But the automation of the telephone service began at the eve of the Second World War.

²³⁹ *The Ceylon Observer*, 28 September 1936, p.1. Besides the central Exchange there were two satellite exchanges: Havelock Town and Maradana. Mount Lavinia also received an automatic exchange. See also *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1936, Part II, E11.

²⁴⁰ For example in 1937 due to the rise of cost of copper wire the estimates needed to be revised again. Thus the delivery was again delayed. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1936, Part II, E11, 1937, Part II, E6, 1938, Part II, E4.

²⁴¹ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1938, Part II, E11.

²⁴² *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1939, Part II, E1.

Table 5: Government Exchanges, 1934-39:

	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
Total Number of Government exchanges	191	204	209	222	236	-
Number of exchanges manually operated	187	197	195	188	119	-
Number of exchanges auto working	4	7	14	34	65	97
Number of subscribers' telephone exchanges manually operated		139	137	128	119	-
Number of working automatic exchanges		7	12	34	65	-
Number of Call Office exchanges		58	58	60	52	-

Source: *Ceylon Administration Reports*, various.

1.2.3. Trunk lines and the emergence of an island-wide network

As the two maps from the 1926 and 38 (see Appendix I: map 3, 4) illustrate, an island-wide trunk line system was slowly built up during the second phase. From a closer look it becomes clear that it was more a 'colonial' type of network than truly islandwide. The whole network is tailored towards Colombo, the administrative and economic centre of the island. 'Communication arteries' connect the city with Kandy and Nuwara Eliya, both in the middle of the planting districts, from there the trunk line network spread out over the planting districts in the Kandyan Highland. To 'provide relief for the Kandy and Colombo trunk lines which were frequently seriously congested' further trunk lines were built during the 1920s, which connected Colombo to Kegalle, Polgahawela and another one connecting Kandy and Nuwara Eliya.²⁴³

The second main artery linked Colombo with the second major port city Galle. This line allowed to connect the planting areas in the Low Country to the system. The trunk line which went from Colombo to Chilaw served the same purpose. The only exceptional trunk line led to the northern city of Jaffna. Though it traversed the northwestern section of the plantation district, it did not seem to serve them nor can a strictly economic reason for Jaffna be identified. Probably the line was meant

²⁴³ *The Ceylon Observer*, 29 May 1920, p. 9.

to serve the many Tamils businessmen and civil servants who were living and working in Colombo. They still had strong ties to the Jaffna peninsula and they played an important role for the running of the colonial administration.

Apart from these major arteries the main reason for building a trunk line or connecting an exchange to the trunk service was to generate revenues. If the line had no prospect of being 'remunerative', it would not be built. In this respect, the answer given by the Colonial Secretary's Office to the Kurunegale PA regarding the connecting of the exchange at Mawatagama with the trunk line is telling: 'Required for a junction line connecting a private telephone exchange with the main trunk line system, is usually for a sum sufficient to give a remunerative return on the capital cost of the junction line and its maintenance, and is calculated at ten per cent of the capital cost.'²⁴⁴ Trunk calls were charged in units of three minutes, until 1938 the price per call was based on distance between the two stations. It was then revised to the basis of radial (or crow fly) distance.²⁴⁵ For these provisions, trunk call charges were often regarded as ridiculously high, the more so when the service and quality of the call were taken into consideration.²⁴⁶ Most annoying for callers was the huge waiting time until the call could be put through. By the time this had been achieved, the repetition of the information had taken up almost three minutes, so basically the full first unit fee.²⁴⁷

The process of connecting exchanges to the trunk line system was going ahead. In the early 1930s the majority of exchanges run by the government were connected with the trunk line system (see Table 6). Due to the fact that the main requirement for construction and running was the profitability of the system or line, it is quite logical that most exchanges were connected with the trunk line system, as otherwise they would not have been built. Private operated exchanges had often to wait longer for a connection to the trunk line network. Table 7 shows the growth of construction of private telephone systems and the access of subscribers to trunk facilities during the second half of the 1920s.

²⁴⁴ *The Ceylon Observer*, 30 June 1920, p. 4, February 1920, Supplement.

²⁴⁵ *The Times of Ceylon*, 22 November 1928, p. 3, *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1938, Part II, E21.

²⁴⁶ *The Ceylon Independent*, 28 February 1928, p. 3.

²⁴⁷ *The Times of Ceylon*, 22 November 1928, p. 3.

Table 6: Telephone plants erected and maintained by the Department:

	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
Exchanges connected with the trunk system	94	102	117	117	121	122	202	209	222	235	277
Exchanges not connected with the trunk system	4	4	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	1
Radio telephones	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	98	106	117	117	121	122	202		222	236	278
Lines equipped for											
Exchange connected with the trunk system	7219	7438	7769	7885	7859	8099	8002	7263	7882	8329	10041
Exchanges not connected with the trunk system	130	150	-	-	-	-	-	25	-	25	25
Radio telephones	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	7349	7588	7769	7885		8099	8002	7288	7882	8417	10066
direct working lines											
Exchanges connected with the trunk system	5490	5452	5168	4812	4736	5049	5099	5171	5383	5608	5956
Exchanges not connected with the trunk system	101	99	s	24	24	34	45	70	54*	84	62
Radio telephones	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	5591	5551	5168	4836	4760	5083	5144	5241	5437	5692	6018
Number of stations											
Exchanges connected with the trunk system	8137	8209	7976	7694	7610	n.a	8249	8481	8882	8963	9749
Exchanges not connected with the trunk system	236	271	126	129	129	n.a.	148	173	150*	186	157
Radio telephones	332	344	352	379	377	n.a.	370	365	366	366	369
Total	8705	8824	8454	8202	8116	n.a.	8812	9019	9398	9515	10275

* Private wire circuits and Post Office lines and instruments outside exchange areas

Source: *Ceylon Administration Reports*, various.

The decision to extend the trunk lines was very much welcomed by the planting community. 'It seems that in the near future we are to have far better telephone communication as Government appears anxious to expand trunk lines to all the more populated districts in the island'.²⁴⁸ The linking with the trunk line was regarded as one of the most pressing issues at the end of the 1920s.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ *The Ceylon Observer*, 24 January 1927, p. 3.

²⁴⁹ *The Times of Ceylon*, 11 February 1930, p. 6.

Table 7: Telephone exchanges connected to the trunk line system:

	Telephone Exchanges and stations not connected with the trunk line	Statistics of private licensed Telephone Exchanges
	Stations (direct working lines)	Subscribers
1924	136(74)	830
1925	176(95)	883
1926	186(62)	776
1927	196(79)	795
1928	213(97)	841
1929	236(-)	864
1930	271(99)	799
1931	126 (-)	725
1932	129(24)	623
1933	129(24)	642
1934	120 (34)	580
1935	148(45)	580
1936	172(70)	578
1937	150(54)	560

Source: *Ceylon Blue Books*, various.

The decision to extend the trunk lines was very much welcomed by the planting community. 'It seems that in the near future we are to have far better telephone communication as Government appears anxious to expand trunk lines to all the more populated districts in the island.'²⁵⁰ The linking with the trunk line was regarded as one of the most pressing issues at the end of the 1920s.²⁵¹

1.2.4. Private Telephones

'[The telephone system] would have existed far earlier, had it not been for the European war.' This statement from a meeting of the Sabaragamuwa PA in 1920 is illustrative.²⁵² With the changing situation and the involvement of the government,

²⁵⁰ *The Ceylon Observer*, 24 January 1927, p. 3.

²⁵¹ *The Times of Ceylon*, 11 February 1930, p. 6.

²⁵² *The Ceylon Observer*, 2 February 1920, p. 2.

many Pas began to resume their attempts to get telephones in their districts at the beginning of the 1920s (see also Appendix VI: Table 3).

Telephone Systems

The way the Galaha and Kalutara PA had chosen to provide telephone connections formed the blueprint for the future installations. Above all, the telephone system had to connect the estates with each other and the facilities in the village like the police station, medical services, the rest house and the club. The already mentioned telephone system in Dickoya is a good example. The exchange had 47 subscribers in 1930: 34 private subscribers, three private paying connections (Maskeliya two, Boga one), three Government paying subscribers (Dickoya and Norwood Police and E.E.), three government non-paying subscribers (the hospital, Norwood and Dickya D.E.), two private non-paying subscribers (the Vicarage and Dickoya Small Bungalow), two Hotton trunk lines (non-paying connections).²⁵³ These private exchanges had to employ their own staff, which in the case of the Dickoya exchange was one mechanic and three linesmen. For an exchange of that size the present staff seemed to be insufficient.²⁵⁴

A real problem for the planters was the connections between different exchanges and networks. In 1925 the Dickoya Exchange expanded its network with a line to Norwood.²⁵⁵ The planters could do this on their own because Norwood was just approximately three miles away from Dickoya. But other connections between the various exchanges within the Nuwara Eliya District had to be done by the government either by connecting the exchanges with the trunk line system or by establishing a junction line. Junction lines were constructed by the government and then rented out to the PA.²⁵⁶ For a junction line connecting a private telephone exchange with the main trunk line system, the provision applied that it had to give a 'remunerative return on the capital cost' as outlined above.²⁵⁷ This would become a major obstacle. The planters were not allowed to connect all the exchanges of one district but were at the mercy of the government. But the government demanded

²⁵³ *The Times of Ceylon*, 4 March 1930, p. 4.

²⁵⁴ *The Times of Ceylon*, 25 February 1931, p. 4.

²⁵⁵ *The Times of Ceylon*, 11 February 1925, p. 7.

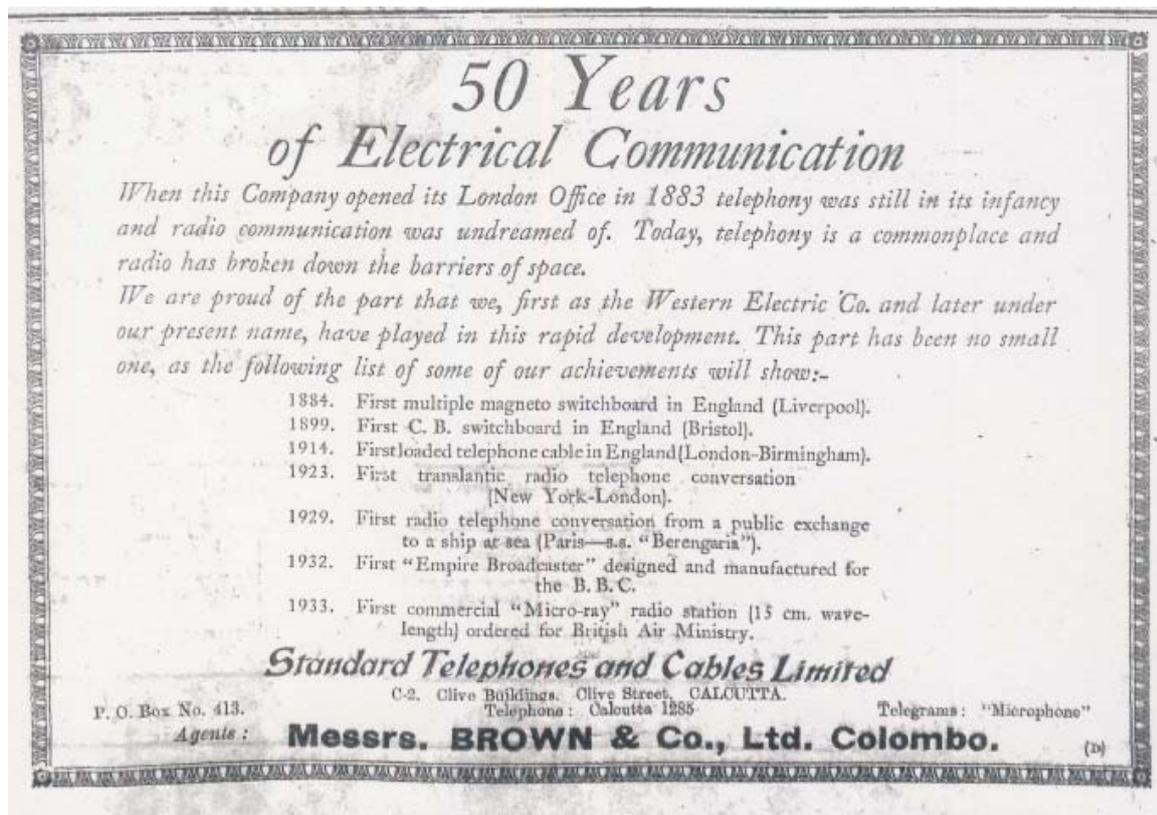
²⁵⁶ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1925, Part II, C6, *The Ceylon Observer*, 11 February 1920, p. 2.

²⁵⁷ *The Ceylon Observer*, 30 June 1920, p. 4.

that the lines would produce a profit or at least cover all expenses. In cases where returns on investment seemed doubtful, the waiting times could be quite long, as a rather frustrated statement from the Kelani Valley PA attests: 'this subject has been discussed for the last eleven years, hither to without any result'.²⁵⁸

When and where they materialized, telephone networks were established by engineering companies such as Boustead Brothers, Brown & Co. or Hutson & Co or private contractors as in the case of J.S. Collet (see Image 2 and 3).²⁵⁹ The planters had to assist the contractors or the members of the Engineering Department with all local un-skilled labour which was required.²⁶⁰

Image 2: Advertisement Messrs. Brown&Co.:



Source: *The Times of Ceylon*, 16 August 1933, p. 13.

²⁵⁸ *The Times of Ceylon*, 12 February 1925, p. 5.

²⁵⁹ *The Ceylon Observer*, 11 February 1920, p. 2.

²⁶⁰ *The Times of Ceylon*, 26 November 1925, p. 14.

Image 3: Telephones on tea estates:



**TELEPHONES ON
TEA ESTATES**

Tea Planters need Automatic Telephones as much as any one out East. By making it possible to establish rapid communication between various points they save the time of both executives and servants. "Standard" Automatic Telephone Systems are without a rival for speed, reliability, economy and appearance. May we send you particulars?

Standard
Telephones and Cables Limited

Clive Buildings, Clive Street (P.O. Box 413), CALCUTTA
Telephone: Calcutta 1785

Agents:
Messrs. BROWN & CO., LTD., COLOMBO. (3)

Source: *The Times of Ceylon*, 30 August 1933, p. 13.

In the 1930s, the telephone became a quite common medium for a planter, as the advert for the 'Dhilimount Estate' in the newspaper column 'House & Property' reveals, '42 acres fully topping rubber, in Kelaniya, 6 miles from Colombo – fully equipped factory, coolie lines, spacious bungalow, telephone, tennis court, motor road to bungalow'. In short, it was an estate with 'all modern conveniences'.²⁶¹

Money matters

Regarding the cost of telephone systems it is important to keep in mind that it was quite an expensive undertaking. The distances between the exchange and estates were far greater than the ones in a town. Subscriptions also had to cover the cost of personal, operators, linesmen, and repairs. For example, in 1924 government was ready to extend a trunk connection via Balangoda as soon as an exchange there was

²⁶¹ *The Times of Ceylon*, 28 January 1931, p. 3.

finished but the planters were not prepared to provide a local exchange 'on account of the large expenditure'.²⁶²

Economic crises had a direct impact upon the efforts to establish or extend private telephones. The depression slowed down the government's plan to extend and modernize the telephone system and it was not able to erect many trunk or junction lines to connect the various private exchanges with each other. The assessment of the situation by the Uva PA (1931) is representative: 'Owing to the general depression of the industries and trade throughout the Island and the consequent necessity of Government curtaining expenditure as much as possible in all departments, ...[extension lines are] unlikely'.²⁶³ But an economic crisis also meant that the planters' own activities regarding telephones would be limited. That was not only the case during the Great Depression. The stricken state of the economy after the First World War also delayed the construction of telephones because the estates could not subscribe due to insufficient funds. Also the rubber slump hit some districts so that planters had to suspend their telephone subscription. For example in 1924, the Government provided telephones at the Ramboda Post Office for the Nuwara Eliya District PA but the estates in that area were unable to take up the opportunity because of the falling prices.²⁶⁴

During the depression there was a huge drop of subscribers on the government exchanges. The situation was unpleasant for the planters because many of them were in long-running contracts and could not quit them. When the government constructed an exchange it demanded a guarantee from each estate that a line would be rented for at least five years.²⁶⁵ In response, the PAs used pooling schemes (see below) to get their private telephone systems running. Such a scheme required an estate to enter contract for several years. On that background the often voiced complains during the great Depression about high rentals for telephones are understandable.

²⁶² *The Ceylon Observer*, 30 April 1924, p. 5.

²⁶³ *The Times of Ceylon*, 27 February 1931, p. 6.

²⁶⁴ *The Ceylon Observer*, 7 July 1924, p. 3.

²⁶⁵ *The Times of Ceylon*, 26 November 1925, p. 14.

Pooling scheme

The 'pooling scheme' was used by planters to get a telephone system running. It meant that all costs were shared equally and every estate paid the same amount for its subscription. In effect, estates closer to the exchange voluntarily paid more to allow estates further away to join the system, as otherwise a telephone would have been unaffordable.²⁶⁶ The contracts of a pooling scheme were limited in time, normally to five years, and by the time the contracts ran out the PA had to decide if the scheme should be extended or not. The pooling scheme was not always used but it gives a good example of the solidarity among the planters and their willingness to get a telephone system running.

The only administrative problem of that system was that not every subscriber joined at the same time and therefore the contracts terminated at different times.²⁶⁷ The Kelani Valley PA's telephone system had 104 subscribers in 1931 and used a pooling scheme to get their district system of eleven exchanges running. By 1931, most of the 104 subscribers had finished the agreed period, but fifteen subscribers had just entered their fifth and final year and five estates were still to be joined up.²⁶⁸

A pooling scheme was also used when the government took over a private telephone network to deal with the often arising extra expenses to bring the system up to date or rather up to the government standard. In that case a pooling scheme could also be used, to spread the expenses out evenly and allow the government to take over the entire network in one go and not bit by bit as in the case of the Kalutara PA. In 1927, the Government decided to take the system over in the coming financial year. The PA decided to run a pooling scheme to cover the additional expenses to bring the system up to government standard, the average annual rental for each subscriber would amount to Rs. 318.74.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ *The Times of Ceylon*, 21 November 1932, p. 8.

²⁶⁷ *The Times of Ceylon*, 13 February 1931, p. 4.

²⁶⁸ *The Times of Ceylon*, 13 February 1931, p. 11, 28 February 1933, p. 2, 23 February 1928, p. 4.

²⁶⁸ *The Times of Ceylon*, 13 February 1931, p. 4.

²⁶⁹ *The Ceylon Observer*, 21 February 1927, p. 4.

Government and rural telephones

A major change at the beginning of the second phase came when government reviewed its policy regarding rural exchanges in 1924. Until then government had only been involved with rural exchanges by connecting them to junction lines or to the trunk line system. Rural exchanges themselves were left to private initiative because they were regarded as unprofitable due to the small number of subscribers in relation to the required high technical standard. 'The situation had changed owing to the reduction of prices of telephone stores and the willingness of planters to pay the rates which Government would find remunerative.'²⁷⁰ One year later the first government-run rural exchange was opened in Ramboda.²⁷¹ The next important step was the installation of rural automatic exchanges instead of manual operated ones. The first of them was built in Boragasketiya, which was connected to the Nuwara Eliya Exchange.²⁷² Government almost exclusively constructed rural exchanges in the planting district.²⁷³

Planters and their problems as subscribers

The planters' most frequent complaint concerned the service and the hours of operation. In rural areas the telephone exchange was often run by the clerk of the Post Office, as a separate (female) telephonist would normally be too expensive for the small number of subscribers. The service provided by the clerks was often regarded as unsatisfactory as they didn't always answer calls immediately.²⁷⁴ But even where a female operator was employed the situation was not always better, 'Put a call through just before the young lady concerned had gone to her tea, it would not be put through to the required number till she returned in half an hour's time.' This 'condition of inefficiency', voiced here by the subscribers of the Kotmale exchange, was a standard complaint. That they therefore decided to discuss this matter with the PMG directly rather than with the local Postmaster, tells a lot about

²⁷⁰ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1924, Part II, C5.

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, C5.

²⁷² *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1929, Part II, C3.

²⁷³ See e.g. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1936, Part II, E12.

²⁷⁴ *The Times of Ceylon*, 27 September 1924, p. 12.

the trust in the system.²⁷⁵ Similar complaints were also voiced by subscribers of private exchanges.²⁷⁶

The opening hours of the exchanges were another point of concern and complaint for the planters. Many calls were made after 4 p.m. but many exchanges were already closed at that time.²⁷⁷ Furthermore, many exchanges were not manned with a night shift. Calling for medical assistance or the police at night was thus impossible. During the 1920s, night shifts were being established in towns but rural exchanges were another story.²⁷⁸ Night calls were also handled by male operators, but their work was in many cases perceived as 'most unsatisfactory' by the subscribers.²⁷⁹

Automatic exchange as the solution

A small automatic exchange was the perfect solution for the rural areas. It allowed a 24 hours telephone service without additional cost. Later they were also installed in the suburban residential areas or semi-rural areas which could therefore be connected with the closeby city or town like in the case of Peradeniya and Mount Lavinia which got connected with the Colombo Exchange. 'The idea behind this scheme is to enable people in outlying residential areas to be afforded all the facilities of communication which are enjoyed by town dwellers. Especially in regard to summoning of medical aid at night, which residents in outlying areas have no ready means.'²⁸⁰ This kind of exchange, however, came at a rather expensive £100 per set and supported 25 lines – a larger number for Sri Lanka in those days, where the average number of lines needed was 10-15. As the government was unwilling to take over exchanges which did not promise an adequate return,²⁸¹ the department was the first to urge the manufactures to build these small ten line automatic switchboards, to solve the problem of providing economically sound telephone

²⁷⁵ *The Times of Ceylon*, 31 October 1928, p. 11,13.

²⁷⁶ For example *The Times of Ceylon*, 1 November 1924, p. 12.

²⁷⁷ *The Times of Ceylon*, 14 February 1925, p. 2.

²⁷⁸ Exchanges in towns with a night operators on duty in 1924: Bandarawela, Galle, Gampola, Kalutara, Kandy, Kegalle, Kurunegala, Matale, Matara, Moratuwa, Nuwalapitiya, Negombo, Nuwara Eliya, Panuduru, Peradeniya, Ratnapura, Talawakelle. *The Times of Ceylon*, 24 November 1924, p. 3.

²⁷⁹ *The Ceylon Observer*, 15 October 1926, p. 9.

²⁸⁰ *The Ceylon Observer*, 17 April 1934, p.1, *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1937, Part II, E11.

²⁸¹ *The Ceylon Observer*, 17 April 1934, p.1, *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1935, Part II, E13.

facilities in rural areas which had only a few subscribers.²⁸² The automatic exchanges were placed near the Post Office in a concrete kiosk which was especially constructed for that matter instead of in the local Post Office as before.²⁸³

But despite the bold statement that 'it is desirable to stress the importance of the automatic system in connection with rural development',²⁸⁴ made in 1930, the installation of automatic exchanges in rural areas did not make much headway. The first rural exchange was installed in 1929 but the subsequent ones in Kahawatta and Nivitigala, both connected to the Ratnapura Exchange, were not built before 1931.²⁸⁵ Due to the consequences of the Great Depression further installations were suspended until 1934. As the economic situation improved, the demand for telephone service in the planting districts increased and so did revenues, allowing the government to come up with the Five Year Plan in 1934. Its core point was the improvement automatic running would make to the telephone service in Sri Lanka. This referred to both cities, such as Colombo, and to the rural areas.²⁸⁶ 'The program of modernization of the telephone system of the Island was actively continued during the year ...and 34 exchanges outside Colombo are now working on the automatic system.'²⁸⁷ By 1938, most of the automatic exchanges thus implemented made their expected returns.²⁸⁸

The taking over of exchanges

Besides the construction of rural telephones the policy change signaled that government would now take a more active part in the extension of the telephone system in rural areas which meant the planting districts in the first instance. Government wasn't much involved in rural telephones until the 1920s apart from constructing a few junction lines. Government had left it to the planting community

²⁸² *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1936, Part II, E12.

²⁸³ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1934, Part II, E10.

²⁸⁴ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1930, Part II, C7/8.

²⁸⁵ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1931, Part II, C11.

²⁸⁶ *The Ceylon Observer*, 19 June 1934, weekly edition, p.23, *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1934, Part II, E10.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 1937, Part II, E11. The main focus of the installation of automatic exchanges in rural areas was in planting districts.

²⁸⁸ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1938, Part II, E12.

to take the initiative and kept the option open to take over local systems. Whoever, apart from Galaha, this option was not made use of.

But the policy change in 1924 made it clear that government was now more willing to take over private telephone exchanges. The planters had always regarded their initiative as a temporary measure and demanded that government should take over and run the exchanges was voiced right from the beginning.²⁸⁹ The Kalutara District (Western Province) telephone scheme had been one of the first ones to be constructed, but their requests that it be taken over by the government had been frustrated on each and every occasion. 'The usual request for Government to take over the entire district telephone system was made to the PMG and received the usual answer'. Similar passages can be found in the minutes of other PAs which were running a telephone system. The Kalutara PA was indeed lucky, as government finally agreed in 1927 to take over the exchange in the following financial year. The main reason for that may have been the town of Kalutara itself, being the biggest town in the Western Province after Colombo and Negombo. Its telephone system had started in with eleven subscribers, and by the time an automatic exchange was installed in 1929 it had 57 subscribers, which was quite a large number. Moreover, Kalutara was already connected to the trunk line between Colombo and Galle (see Appendix I: Map 3).²⁹⁰

A crucial issue for the take-over of the local system by the government was the technical standard of the exchange, as both switchboard and the wires and poles had to meet the government's requirement. For financial reasons, the official standards were sometimes ignored, e.g. by using trees instead of masts or too few masts were set up so that falling branches could tear down wires easily. These issues had to be resolved with the PA paying for the required improvements before a system would be taken over, which was also the case for the Kalutara District

²⁸⁹ 'The proposal of the Government to take over the private telephone systems has met with a ready response from the District Planting community in charge of these telephones'. The statement may be from the end of the 1930ies but it sums up the wish of the PAs to consign their telephone systems to the government. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1936, Part II, E12.

²⁹⁰ *The Ceylon Observer*, 13 May 1921, p. 3, *The Times of Ceylon*, 23 February 1925, p. 8, *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1929, Part II, C3.

Telephone Scheme.²⁹¹ After a period of transition with all repairs having been carried out, the network was finally taken over by government on 1 January 1931.²⁹² Apart from providing a higher technical standard, government-run telephone facilities had several advantages. First of all, these were far cheaper for the subscribers than private ones because a lot of the additional costs such as renting the junction line and hiring telephone operators and linemen were not necessary.²⁹³

In comparison, Kalutara provides a case study of a private network being taken over by government that went very well, not least because it was taken over as a whole and not bit by bit. Moreover, the PA's request was answered relatively swiftly. All other local networks had to wait until after the worst effects of the Great Depression had been mitigated. In 1934, the economic situation was noticeable improving and the demand for telephone service was increasing again. Thus government was preparing for the extension of telephones to various planting districts.²⁹⁴ Accordingly funds were allocated for taking over the remaining 32 private exchanges on the island. These systems would be taken over gradually in the following years. Six private exchanges were taken over until the outbreak of the Second World War. But as in the case of the Colombo Exchange, the scheme was going steadily but not as fast as planned due to the want of material.²⁹⁵ Finally in 1939, the licenses of thirteen private exchanges were terminated and government exchanges installed. The remaining ten would be taken during the year and only four small ones remained in private hand.²⁹⁶

In the debate to formulate a policy for licensing private networks between 1907 and 1909, it seems very obvious that the government officials involved did not want an island-wide system in the hands of a private company.

²⁹¹ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1935, Part II, E13, *The Ceylon Observer*, 21 February 1927, p. 4.

²⁹² *The Times of Ceylon*, 7 March 1931, p. 4.

²⁹³ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1938, Part II, E20, *The Times of Ceylon*, 25 February 1931, p. 4.

²⁹⁴ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1934, Part II, E10.

²⁹⁵ The installations were similar to those proposed to the rural auto scheme and thus the old switchboards of the private exchanges got replaced by new automatic units. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1936, Part II, E12, 1937, Part II, E6 and 1938, Part II, E12.

²⁹⁶ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1935, Part II, E13, 1939, Part II, E6.

Other rural subscribers?

Private telephone networks were run by planters through their local associations. Only a few private exchanges in towns and cities like Colombo were the property of some firms, but these were exceptions. Most of the private exchanges existed in quite remote areas where only planters, and a few government officials or public institutions such as hospitals were interested and could afford a telephone connection. But private networks sometimes also included small towns where the situation was different. 'If those two proposed small exchanges were opened there would be certainly an appreciable increase in the number of subscribers. The mudaliyars and other residents in the neighbourhood of Matugance and Anglawatte would be doubtless anxious to connect to up with the telephone system.'²⁹⁷ From the available sources it is not possible to see whether some mudaliyars²⁹⁸ or other indigenous persons who were not planters did indeed join up. But it is likely that over time the circle of subscribers grew outside the planting community, not least because the town of Kalutara which had a trunk line connection, was close and the whole system also got taken over later by the government. Another example is the Madulkelle District where the local PA separated their telephone system from the association in 1930 for the principle reason 'that with the increasing population of our towns, non-members of the Planters Association might wish to become subscribers and that the management being in the hands of the PA might prevent them from doing so.'²⁹⁹ The planting community thus began to open their telephone networks to other potential subscribers, even though those who could afford a phone were still very small segment of the population.

Environment as a problem

Sri Lanka's climate and environment was quite hostile to the telephone. The construction of telephone lines in jungle areas was tiresome. Trees used as a support for wires tended to break and had to be replaced with wooden masts. Due to the wet and humid climate, these had to be replaced with iron masts which of

²⁹⁷ *The Ceylon Observer*, 13 May 1921, p. 3.

²⁹⁸ Mudaliyars are the members of the Sinhalese nobility who often had taken functions in the village or district administration under the British.

²⁹⁹ *The Times of Ceylon*, 19 February 1930, p. 15.

course drove up the cost again.³⁰⁰ Still, wires continued to get knocked down by falling branches and trees.³⁰¹ Reports like 'Telephone communication to Kandy was disorganized today, between 10.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m., as a result of all three lines being put out of service by an areca nut tree falling on them' can regularly be found in the press.³⁰² The service between Colombo and Galle which was unreliable for a long time due to such interruptions, improved only when the overhead wires were replaced with underground cables in 1929.³⁰³

In addition, the monsoonal rains and thunderstorms took their toll. In 1934 alone, for example, thunderstorms disconnected 161 lines on 9 March, 205 on 18 April, 142 on 7 November and 189 on 8 November. The climate was also different from Europe and required equipment that suited the environment. The two earliest types of automatic exchanges, the 'Strowger' type, brought into use in 1923, and the 'Relay' type, taken into service a year later, experienced difficulties in operation.³⁰⁴

The climate conditions were also wearing down the telephone receivers and switchboards. At the end of the 1920s 'many of the outside Government exchanges have, like the Colombo Central Exchange, reached the end of their useful life and require replacement'.³⁰⁵ The government was well aware of the unsatisfactory state of the hardware but due to the economic situation it would not provide new equipment. From the beginning of the 1930s, the number of complaints raised by the planters regarding that matter increased.³⁰⁶ Another cause for complaint was the quality of repairs when a storm or falling trees and branches had damaged the lines. 'There are yet, however, further general improvements to be carried out both by the Traffic and Engineering Department of this service [Telephone]... Linesmen are still sent out from the head office for the purpose of carrying out repairs after

³⁰⁰ *The Ceylon Observer*, 22 July 1924, p. 3.

³⁰¹ Therefore it was necessary to use more post than normally needed to better protect the wires against falling Branches and trees. *The Times of Ceylon*, 21 February 1925, p. 17.

³⁰² *The Times of Ceylon*, 13 January 1931, p. 5.

³⁰³ It was, however, an expensive installation. *Ibid*, 13 February 1931, p.11, *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1924, Part II, C5, 1929, Part II, C10.

³⁰⁴ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1924, Part II, C11.

³⁰⁵ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1935, Part II, E6.

³⁰⁶ *The Ceylon Independent*, 28 February 1928, p.3, *The Times of Ceylon*, 23 November 1928, p. 4.

storms and are invariably inadequately equipped, resulting in their being unable to do their work properly and expeditiously.³⁰⁷

1.2.5. International calls

From 1935 on, when Sri Lanka was connected to the Empire's international telephone network, it was possible to make calls to Britain and Europe as well as to India and Burma.

The first 'international calls'

The first international 'calls' were made via radio telephony using wireless technology. The case of the wireless conversation between Colombo and Italy from 1932 is a typical example. 'Cavalier Panso, the Royal Italian Consul for Ceylon, was granted permission to the courtesy of the Commanding Naval Officer to speak to his mother, Countess Maria Pansa, in Rome, by using the short wave wireless telephone installed on the Italian Mail Steamer Conte Rosso.'³⁰⁸ For these 'telephone calls,' the wireless sets of ships were used and there was no possibility for the public to use such facilities. Nevertheless, they found great attention in the press like the quoted example which was entitled 'Telephone to Italy'.

Making the connection

The improving economic situation not only enabled the colonial government to implement the Five-Year Plan (with a budget of Rs. 3,000,000) in 1934 to improve the telephone service within the colony but also allowed it to establish an international telephone connection.³⁰⁹ The costs for the cable were Rs. 450,000 and another Rs. 25,000 for the extension to Europe, half of which was paid by the Sri Lankan Government. The costs for the international connection were quite expensive in relation to the extension program within Sri Lanka. Accordingly the plan was criticized by several Members of the Council who voiced that a telephone

³⁰⁷ *The Times of Ceylon*, 25 February 1930, p. 6.

³⁰⁸ *The Times of Ceylon*, 21 December 1932, p. 3.

³⁰⁹ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1933, Part II, E16.

network within the Island was far more important than spending money on the international ones.³¹⁰

In 1935, Sri Lanka was connected with India by a submarine cable between Talaimannar and Dhanushkody. The Anglo-Indian Radiotelephone Service was established in May 1933 and Sri Lanka was connected by landline via Madras with Poona, where the radio terminal of the Anglo Indian Service was located. Operations to India began on 15 March and the link with London opened on 24 October. From then on it was possible to call to the U.K. and to Europe. On 4 April 1937, the Indo-Ceylon Telephone Service was extended to Burma. The calls were transmitted by land line to Madras and thence by radio to Rangoon.³¹¹

The first official call

The first calls to be made between India and Sri Lanka after the line had been opened were between members of the press in both countries, e.g. by A.K. Srinivasam, editor of *The Hindu*, and representatives of the *The Ceylon Daily News*.³¹² The inauguration of the connection to London was marked by a more formal ceremony. The Secretary of State for India was given a briefing for the conversation in advance and told Colombo on 19 October that he 'will probably not desire in the short time available to attempt any serious problems...he should say that this new service will bring the local administration into still closer touch with Downing St.'³¹³ The service was officially opened on 24 October with Malcom McDonald, Secretary of State, talking to Sir Graeme Tyrell, Acting Governor, at Queen's House. 'The Secretary of State inquired about the malaria situation...sent his kindest regards to Sir D.B. Jayatilaka and inquired how Mr. D.S. Senanayake was.' To test the reliability of the service the call was followed by other official calls.³¹⁴ The link to Burma was opened in the form of an exchange of greetings

³¹⁰ *The Ceylon Observer*, 22 May 1934, weekly edition, p. 22.

³¹¹ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1935, Part II, E12, 21, 1937, Part II, E24.

³¹² *The Ceylon Daily News*, 26 February 1935, p. 14.

³¹³ CO 323/1335/6 19.10.35.

³¹⁴ *The Ceylon Observer*, 25 October 1935, p. 6. The greetings sent to Sir D.B. Jayatilaka and D.S. Senanayake are quite interesting. Both were important Sinhalese politicians and involved in the Independent Movement.

between the two Postmasters-General. After that the press of both countries and Reuters were allowed complimentary calls which were much appreciated.³¹⁵

Calls to India and Britain

The telephone service to India was available from Colombo around the clock and for twelve hours (8 a.m. to 8 p.m.) from the rest of the Island. Due to the reduction of charges in 1936 traffic between India and Sri Lanka increased, amounting to 908 calls to India and 899 in the opposite direction.³¹⁶ The telephone link to India was regarded as a 'public necessity' by the planting and commercial communities,³¹⁷ though its main users and beneficiaries apparently were members of the Indian trading community in Sri Lanka.³¹⁸

It is not possible to exactly determine who amongst the Indian community was using the new possibility, but many *Chettiars* operating in Sri Lanka had a telephone connection.³¹⁹ They operated as moneylenders besides owning some estates. The Chettiars operated all over Southeast Asia, e.g. in the Burmese rice market, the Malayan rubber plantations and in Singapore and Indonesia.³²⁰ Thus the telephone connection to South India, Burma and beyond was of interest to them.

Besides the Chettiars a few other Indian merchants, Muslims and Parsis from the West coast of India, operated in Ceylon and used the telephone for their international transactions; to no surprise the 'largest number of paid calls both incoming and outgoing between Ceylon and Bombay; Cochin, Madras, and Trinchinopoly rank next in order of importance.'³²¹ The cities which were called are all in South India with the exception to Bombay which was the economic centre in British India. The Overseas Radio Telephone Service to Britain was not used that

³¹⁵ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1937, Part II, E24.

³¹⁶ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1936, Part II, E22.

³¹⁷ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1936, Part II, E6.

³¹⁸ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1935, Part II, E21.

³¹⁹ See *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 11sp and chapter II.

³²⁰ See David West Rudner, *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India. The Nattukottai Chettiars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 74sp, Michael Adas, *The Burma Delta. Economic Development and social Change on an Asian Rice Frontier; 1852-1941* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), Heiko Schrader, *Changing financial Landscapes in India and Indonesia* (Münster: Lit-Verlag, 1997), K.S. Sandhu, 'Indians in the modern Malayan Economy', *Indian Quarterly*, 23, 2(1967), 106-126.

³²¹ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1935, Part II, E21.

much. In 1936, only 66 calls were made to the U.K of which twelve failed owing to atmospheric disturbances.³²² The major reason for this lack in demand was most probably the costs which amounted to Rs. 64 (Rs.44 on Saturdays) for a three minute call.³²³ It seems that the service was mostly used by tourists passing through Sri Lanka 'and some of them including Sir Harry Lauder expressed their satisfaction with the quality of the transmission.'³²⁴

Table 8: Number of effective international calls, outward (inward):

	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
Calls to India	311(449)	908 (899)	1024 (1286)	994(1521)	1355(1862)
Overseas Radio Telephone	10 in December	44 (23)	51(17)	91(61)	60(30)
Calls to Burma			9 (9)	23(36)	48(36)

Source: *Ceylon Administration Reports*, various.

1.2.6. World War II

In 1939 the implementation of the Five-Year Plan which began in 1934 was coming to an end. Most likely this could have led to a reduction of government’s efforts anyway, e.g. reduction of the engineering staff. But the outbreak of the Second World War left things undone. For Example the conversion of the outdated Kandy Exchange to automatic running was postponed. Also ‘a number of proposals for development and improvement which were under discussion during the year’ needed to be deferred.³²⁵

After the War and independence there was still a steady demand: ‘Telephones were provided to nearly a thousand applicants in Colombo and 600 in the outstations.

³²² *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1936, Part II, E22.
³²³ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1935, Part II, E21.
³²⁴ Sir Harry Lauder (4 August 1870 - 26 February 1950) was a famous Scottish singer and comedian. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1936, Part II, E11.
³²⁵ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1939, Part II, E 1.

Despite the rate of new connections in recent years, there was a persistent demand for telephone service from all parts of the Island'.³²⁶

1.3. Conclusion

The emergence of an elaborated telephone network during colonial times cannot be seen in isolation, as it was a crucial part of the political and economic development of the colony. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, and notably with the introduction of the Colebrook-Cameron Reforms (1833-34), British rule changed the economic and political framework of the island dramatically. The economic transformation favoured the formation of a plantation sector and created a colonial economy, which entirely relied on the export of a few plantation crops. In this system, communication and transport facilities between the planting districts and the port cities became crucial for the island's economy. Yet, the construction of the telephone network was hampered by two major obstacles: Sri Lanka's climate and environment, and economic crises.

The telephone offered an efficient and ultimately 'modern' way to bridge the gap between the estates and the nearest Post Office, and by way of extension even further on to Colombo. In its establishment, two phases can be distinguished. The first phase (1880-1914) began with the installation of the first telephone in 1880, which initiated the construction of the first small telephone network in Colombo four years later. This network was taken over by the state in 1896, but until 1905, no further extensions were realized because most of the financial resources of the state were used to construct roads and railways as well as establish postal services and telegraph facilities. After that, the first telephone networks major towns, Kandy and Nuwara Eliya, together with the first trunk line, connecting Colombo to Kandy and Nuwara Eliya, was constructed. When the island's colonial government virtually ceased to provide telephone facilities to the planting districts between 1905 and 1909, the planters took matters in their own hands and effectively became the driving forces behind expansion. Seen on the whole, a major part of the emerging telephone network in Sri Lanka owed its construction, financing and running to the

³²⁶ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1954, part II, E3.

planting community. The outbreak of the First World War brought the telephone development in Sri Lanka to a halt due to the shortage and expensiveness of material, which had to be imported from Great Britain.

In the second phase (1919-1939), coinciding by and large with the interwar period, rural telephone networks emerged in the planting districts and the major cities and towns received telephone facilities. These various networks were subsequently interconnected with a trunk line system, resulting in the gradual development of an island-wide telephone system. By the late 1930s, the telephone network was relatively well established and its use to convey messages over long distances came almost at the same costs as sending a telegram; with local calls added, the number of telephone calls across the island clearly outnumbered messages sent by telegraph. The ultimate level of expansion was reached in 1935, when Sri Lanka was connected to the Empire's international telephone network, allowing to make calls to Britain and Europe as well as to India and Burma. At the same time, the telephone's technological provisions improved as automatic exchanges were introduced, which made round-the-clock telephone service possible without additional cost.

2. Subscribers and Telephone usage

The colonial telephone network had two hotspots: Colombo and the planting districts. The concentration of subscribers in these two areas produced sufficient sources to allow an analysis of telephone usage and its impact upon society. This chapter will provide a few short general remarks concerning the telephone and its subscribers in colonial Sri Lanka before looking at Colombo in greater detail.

2.1. Some general observations

David Edgerton (2007) has argued that new technologies are often quite ‘overrated’ because old technologies remain in use after the invention of a new one. His main point is that the history of technology is too much focused on the invention and the first use of a new technology while a history of a ‘technology-in-use’ would paint a complete different picture.³²⁷ Edgerton’s criticism of the perspective of many works dealing with new technologies in the last 200 years is certainly valid and leads to the recognition of new technologies – such as the telephone in colonial Sri Lanka - as ‘social’ agents. The telephone is more than just a technology of communication, it is also a commodity associated with modernity and (at least initially), an expensive western lifestyle. Becoming a subscriber thus set a person apart from the large majority of society and enabled him to reevaluate his status. In colonial societies, the ‘consumption’ of new technologies could go even further, not only enabling indigenous elites to claim social parity with the colonizers but also to challenge colonial rule.

Although the telephone network constantly expanded during colonial times,³²⁸ the main form of communication was still the postal service. In 1919, 44 million letters,

³²⁷ A fitting example is steam power in Great Britain: in 1950 there were more steam engines in use than in 1850. Edgerton, *Shock of the Old*, p. XI. The ‘accelerator theory’ claims that the cycles in which these technologies are used are getting shorter, especially since the last decades of the twentieth century (see Hartmut Rosa, *Beschleunigung. Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2005).

³²⁸ The same was the case for the telegraph network. In his article on the limits of telegrams in official correspondence between Sri Lanka and London, Paul Fletcher describes the problem that the telegram was fine for time-sensitive instructions but it was not possible to communicate detailed guidelines and a formal communication was also not possible. Therefore, the letter remained the main form of official communication between London and Colombo. Paul Fletcher, ‘The Use and Limits of Telegrams in Official Correspondence between Ceylon’s Governor General and the Secretary of State for the Colonies, circa 1870-1900’, *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 35, No.1, (2010), 90-107.

postcards and printed matter were passing through the island's postal service,³²⁹ compared to 9,202,459 local and 174,646 trunk line calls in 1919. In 1935, the numbers of calls had risen to 23,497,078 and 1,755,574 respectively, but this was still no match to the postal service, which dealt with 82.203.800 letters within the island.³³⁰ Obviously, communication was still facilitated by way of 'old' media. Moreover, as Table 9 below shows, the telephone service was run at a deficit throughout the colonial period, in contrast to the postal one.³³¹

Despite all obstacles stemming from the First World War, the island's telephone network started to move ahead after the War, with a constant increase in subscribers and calls during that period. In the 1920s the telephone was mainly used for local calls with a steady increase until the beginning 1930s.³³² The trunk and junction line system was still evolving the 1920s and long-distance calls were expensive compared to local services, which offered flat rates. Still, in the 1930s the telephone began to overtake telegrams as a mean of communication (see Appendix III: Image 1, 2).

The number of subscribers to government and private exchanges, which had been quite low before World War I, began to grow during the second phase (see Table 10). But even at the end of this period, subscribers remained a small group, amounting to one percent of the total population (see Table 11). This small number is also reflected in the world telephone statistics of 1926, which has 1.5 telephones per 100 of population in general and 0.17 for Ceylon.³³³ In looking at these figures, one needs to keep in mind that the definition of 'one subscriber' could vary:

³²⁹ These numbers include not only the postal traffic within the island but also the international one. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1919, Part II, C1, C4.

³³⁰ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, Part II, 1935, C20/21, *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1936, p. 453.

³³¹ As an example the financial year of 1938-39 was selected. The telegraphic service was also working at a deficit, which was regarded by the officials as quite 'normal' compared to other countries. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, Part II, 1939, E15.

³³² By the end of the 1920s, the local telephone systems, both private and governmental, were up and running. Further extensions were delayed due to the depression. The next push forward began with the Government's Five-Year Plan in 1934 but the main emphasis was not so much the extension of the Island's telephone network than the modernization of the system. See chapter 'Telephone Network'.

³³³ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1928, Part II, C14.

Table 9: Services in the financial year 1938-39:

Nature of Service	Income (Rs)	Expenditure	Surplus	Deficit
Postal	5,365,668.17	5,519,304.61	206,363.56	-
Telegraph	780,542.27	1,570,112.11	-	789,569.84
Telephone	1,483,692.06	2,570,854.57	-	1,087,162.51

Source: *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1939, part II, E15.

Table 10: Number of subscribers connected to Gov. Exchanges:

year	1911	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926
number of subscribers	579	1977	2042	2134	2319	2658	2911	3158	3486	3787	4150

1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937
4667	5054	5476	5491	5225	4855	4791	4943	5053	5157	5368

Source: *Ceylon Administration Reports*, various.

Table 11: Total population and telephone subscribers:

	Total Population	Subscribers to Government Exchanges	Private Subscribers
1911	4,106,400	579	n.a.
1921	4,498,600	2658	705
1931	5,306,000	5225	725

Source: *Ceylon Blue Books*, various.

he may have been an individual owning several connections (home, business),³³⁴ while at the same time a single connection could serve a family, community or neighbourhood.³³⁵

The major reason for the low number of subscribers was the telephone rates. The minimum length of subscription for mercantile and bungalow lines was twelve months; for private subscribers it was even three years.³³⁶ In addition, costs were considerable as well, as Table 12 shows. This scheme of the Colombo Exchange from 1905 was adapted later for other urban exchanges. In 1921, the rates were increased to Rs. 180 p.a. for business lines and to Rs. 120 p.a. for private connections.³³⁷ These rates remained in force until the introduction of the automatic exchanges and message rate system. At that point, the annual rental for a business line was reduced from Rs. 180 to Rs.140 and for a private connection was reduced from Rs. 120 to Rs.70 per annum, 'in the hope that residential subscribers will take service'. In turn, every call incurred a charge of five cents.³³⁸ These rates compared 'very favourable with those charged by telephone systems in India and other Eastern countries.'³³⁹

The available sources do not allow to give an adequate estimate of the average rate for a subscription to a private telephone system, though it is quite safe to assume that private subscribers had to pay more than the above mentioned rates. The annual fee depended on various factors: equipment in use, cost for the upkeep and personal, distance from the exchange and number of subscribers connected to the

³³⁴ There are also a few cases of one person having several telephone connections. Some managers were in charge of several estates with telephone connection. Their main complaint was that it was impossible to find out how to charge the different amounts to their respective accounts because they receive only one bill. Based on that can be assumed that the department counted several telephone connection for one subscriber in the statistic as 'one subscriber'. These cases seemed to be the exception to the rule. Also there are several cases there wealthy residents in Colombo had a telephone connection in the city and another one in the planting districts or in a smaller town, e.g. the jeweler and gem trader N.D.A. Abdul Gaffor had a telephone connection at his store in the Fort area and to his 'Gaffor' Villa in Trincomalee. *The Times of Ceylon*, 23 November 1928, p. 4, *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, Addresses, p. 13.

³³⁵ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1936, Part II, E5.

³³⁶ *The Ceylon Observer*, 16 March 1905, p. 2sp.

³³⁷ *The Ceylon Independent*, 3 August 1921, p. 1.

³³⁸ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1938, Part II, E11.

³³⁹ *Ibid*, E11.

Table 12: Prices for telephone subscription in 1905:

Type	Connection	Rs.	C.
Business	Mercantile connection with exchange		
	For 2 miles or under	125	0
	Every additional half mile	25	0
Private	Bungalow connection with exchange		
	For 2 miles or under	90	0
	Every additional half mile	10	0

Source: *The Ceylon Observer*, 17 February 1905, p. 3.³⁴⁰

exchange.³⁴¹ The Galaha Exchange (see Table 13)³⁴² and Dimbula District Telephone System, where subscription came at Rs.130 per annum and Rs.30 for each additional mile,³⁴³ can be taken as indications of how much subscription could cost on average. Given that the estates were often a few miles away from the exchange, a subscriber had to pay approximately at least Rs. 170.

It becomes clear that the telephone was a luxury item during colonial times, but it is difficult to assess its actual cost compared to the living cost on the island. Internationally, the price for telephones in Ceylon seemed to be in line with that of other colonial outposts in South and Southeast Asia. In the context of a government employee's average cost of living from 1905³⁴⁴ or the criteria for enfranchisement

³⁴⁰ Both types of connection included one telephone. There was also the possibility to rent a private line with the exchange. The costs were as followed: for 2miles or under Rs. 150 and every additional half mile Rs. 25 as well as two telephones.

³⁴¹The material in use had a clear impact on the cost of the whole system. The switchboard was an expensive part, e.g. the new switchboard for the exchange in Norwood cost RS.2930 in 1934 (*The Times of Ceylon*, 9 October 1924, p. 2). The construction of the lines was another important factor (single wires vs. metallic circuit lines and wooden vs. metallic posts). Also the salaries of the operator(s) and the linesman(men) had to be paid as well as the necessary repairs.

³⁴² As mentioned, the Galaha Exchange was an exceptional case, being run by the government since 1911. Accordingly in 1911 there were no fixed rates for rural telephone exchanges and the Post Office tailor-made them for the Galaha Exchange. PF 2205B, Letter PMG to Colonial Secretary's Office, 24th July 1911.

³⁴³ see Table 4.

³⁴⁴ A telephone connection would cost Rs. 7.50 which would be quite an expensive matter. See Appendix VI: Table 1.

Table 13: Rates for the Galaha Exchange in 1911:

Distance from Exchange	Rs.
For 1 mile or less	90
For 2 mile or less	130
For 3 mile or less	170
For 4 mile or less	210
For 5 mile or less	250
For 6 mile or less	290
For 7 mile or less	330
For 8 mile or less	270
For 9 mile or less	410
For 10 mile or less	450
for each additional Telephone	25

Source: PF 2205B, Letter PMG to Colonial Secretary's Office, 24th July 1911.

for 1921 and 1924,³⁴⁵ it becomes clear that a telephone subscription was an expensive undertaking at that time.

2.2. The telephone in Colombo

Colombo was and still is the Metropolis of Sri Lanka. Its rise began in middle of the nineteenth century due to various processes until then its primacy was contested by Kandy and Galle. At the turn of the century Colombo had become the political, cultural and religious centre of the island with a cosmopolitan touch. In short,

³⁴⁵Among the criteria to qualify for franchise in 1921 and 1924 were 'literacy in English or the vernaculars, and any one of the three economic criteria: a clear annual income of not less than Rs. 600; immovable property (in one's own right or in one's wife name) worth not less than Rs. 1500/-; or occupancy as owner or tenant of houses valued at Rs. 400/- or Rs. 200/- according to their urban or rural situation.' Michael Roberts, 'Elite Formation and Elites, 1832-1931', in *Collective Identities, Nationalism and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka*, ed. by Michael Roberts (Colombo: Marga Institute, 1979), p. 275.

Colombo was setting the pace for the rest of the Island and influenced the major developments in the twentieth century in various ways. It is not surprising that Colombo had by far the largest telephone network of all cities on the Island.

Becoming the Metropolis of the Island

Colombo's role as a political capital during colonial time had begun with the establishment of a Portuguese outpost (1518-1656) because it was a harbour close to Kotte, one of the political centres of the Sinhalese in the 16th century. The city was wrested from the Portuguese by the Dutch in 1656 and became the capital of the newly-created British Crown Colony in 1815. With the defeat of the kingdom of Kandy in the same year, the last Sinhalese kingdom fell, but the island's traditional elites, who were based in the upcountry, preserved the city of Kandy as their power base until the 1880s.³⁴⁶ As Colombo rose as the colonial centre, that traditional 'nationalist' power centre ceased to be a challenge to the colonial authorities, and the indigenous elites also began to move to the new capital. In a sense the city was 'forced upon the Sinhalese in spite of themselves...it was never a city of their own choice or making'.³⁴⁷

To a considerable degree, the rise of Colombo was a result of the dramatic growth of the plantation industry following the Colebrook-Cameron Reforms of 1833. The cash crops from the Kandyan highlands – originally coffee, later tea – required roads and port facilities, for which Colombo offered the best opportunities.³⁴⁸ Moreover, the port of Galle, which had been the island's major port, was gradually becoming too small to deal with large steamships. The construction of a breakwater for Colombo's port, which was completed in 1885, marked a turning point in the development of the city. Thereafter, Colombo became one of the most important ports in the world, the 'Clapham Junction of the East'.³⁴⁹ Alongside export

³⁴⁶ K.M de Silva, 'Resistance Movement in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka', in *Collective Identities Revisited*, ed. by Michael Roberts (Colombo: Marga Institute, 1997), pp. 145-164.

³⁴⁷ Richard L. Brohier, *Changing Face of Colombo (1505-1972): Covering the Portuguese, Dutch and British Periods* (Colombo: Lake House Investments, 1984), p. 2.

³⁴⁸ The other roads to ports in Batticaloa and Hambantota were 'nothing more at present than a very bad trace' and the ports were of no significance. A road down to Galle was not possible due to the topography. Wickremeratne, 'The Development of Transportation', p. 303.

³⁴⁹ Colombo became one of the central ports of call in the Indian Ocean for all major steam ships in the region and therefore the most important port beside Hong Kong in Asia. Location like in the case

businesses, the city also attracted companies importing the island's necessities, which ranged from machinery required in the plantations to textiles and rice. In addition, Colombo also attracted businesses from the other cities, as indigenous entrepreneurs moved e.g. from Galle to Colombo.³⁵⁰

The economic transformation was accompanied by socio-religious change, which came as a revival of Buddhism. This movement of the second half of the nineteenth century, which was also known as 'Protestant Buddhism',³⁵¹ was centred on the coastal strip between Colombo and Galle and was led by members of the newly emerged Sinhalese elite, mainly from *Karava*, *Salagama* and *Durava* castes (KSD castes). They had often benefitted from the economic opportunities provided by the colonial rulers, but found themselves excluded from the Buddhist monkhood (*sangha*), which was controlled by the goyigama caste. To break the dominance of the goyigamas, they created new groups within the sangha and endowed them with temples and monasteries, which emphasized modern education and missionary work. This put Colombo at the centre of a Theravada Buddhist network across the Bay of Bengal and beyond. Likewise, the rivalry between Kandy and Colombo was again tipped in favour of Colombo.³⁵²

The establishment of Colombo Municipal Council in 1865, the demolition of the fortifications in 1869-71 and the layout of Cinnamon Gardens as a new residential area in the 1870s changed both the face and the perception of Colombo. Until the 1860s, Colombo had consisted of three zones: Fort, Pettah and Outer Pettah. The limited possibility of growth gave the city the character of a fortification inhabited by the British colonial masters. But as British rule consolidated and the plantation economy grew, the city had to be adapted. The demolition of the fortifications and

of Singapore was an important factor for the rise of Colombo as a port city. With the 1930ies the importance began to decline for several reasons, e.g. the cost of fresh water. K. Dharmasena, 'Colombo: Gateway and Oceanic Hub of Shipping', in *Brides of the Sea. Port Cities of Asia from 16th-20th Centuries*, ed. by Frank Broeze (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), p. 157sp.

³⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 162sp, Perera, 'Indigenising the Colonial City', p. 1709, Wickremeratne, 'Economic Development in the Plantation Sector', p. 428sp.

³⁵¹ Richard F. Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism transformed. Religious Change in Sri Lanka* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

³⁵² Perera, 'Indigenising the Colonial City', p. 1712sp, see also Mark Frost, "'Wider Opportunities': Religious Revival, Nationalist awakening and the Global Dimension in Colombo, 1870-1920', *Modern Asian Studies*, 36, 4(2002), 937-967.

the disbanding of the Ceylon Rifle Regiment were both major landmarks in the city's history, because they ended its military function. Next came the southward expansion of the urban area, which was followed by considerable population growth: from 28.000 in 1880, Colombo's population grew to about 150.000 in 1900. Of the three cities Kandy, Galle and Colombo, which had all been incorporated in 1866, Colombo advanced most. By 1870, its municipal area held twice as many people as Galle and Kandy and in 1921 it even held six times their numbers.³⁵³

Colombo's massive growth beginning at the turn of the century underlined the changing status of the city. Many Sri Lankans began to move to Colombo and thus the city was slowly 'indigenized'.³⁵⁴ During that time Colombo became a modern city; several new technologies were introduced: electric lightning, tramways, railroads, factories for processing and packing plantation goods. The massive changes in the city's character made it a 'city of work'; offering new employment opportunities on several levels. The city had a huge need for skilled and unskilled workers: the industries ancillary to the plantations, workshops to repair all kinds of machinery or working in the construction and maintenance of the infrastructure for the Public Works Department. After it became the major port of call in Sri Lanka, the harbour needed a large workforce for loading and unloading ships or for the dockyards. The growth of population in the city created many new jobs: domestic servant, rickshaw puller, laundrymen etc. Thus not only the elites moved to Colombo but also many ordinary Sri Lankans who sought work. But the need for an urban labour force was so huge that it also included many unskilled workers from India.³⁵⁵ Besides all these blue collar jobs, the city offered a lot of new white collar ones, too. As the political and administrative centre, the city offered many positions in the lower echelons of the administrative service or in the government departments. Naturally, most of the traders worked and lived in Colombo; the European traders and agencies were situated in the Fort area and Slave Island while

³⁵³ Roberts, *People in between*, p. 102sp, Perera, 'Indigenising the Colonial City', p. 1703 sp, 1715sp.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 1714sp.

³⁵⁵ For more details see Jayawardena, *Rise of the Labour Movement*, pp. 3-32.

the indigenous and Indian ones operated from Pettah.³⁵⁶ The commercial communities created various employment opportunities.

Table 14: Percentage distribution of ethnic groups in Colombo and the total of the population in 1921:

	Colombo	Sri Lanka
Low Country Sinhalese	45.2%	67.5%
Kandy Sinhalese	1.7%	
Ceylon Tamils	6.00%	11.5%
Indian Tamils	16.2%	13.4%
Ceylon Moors	10.4%	5.6%
Indian Moors	5.8%	0.73%
Burghers	6.1%	0.65%
Malays	2.4%	0.3%
Others	6.2%	0.77%

Source: *The Population of Sri Lanka*, ed. by L.N. Perera (Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics, 1974), p. 62.

Colombo was the biggest job market on the island and it is one reason for the different composition of Colombo's population (see Table 14). As a 'city of work', Colombo offered 'traditional' jobs but also several 'modern' one; one of them was employment as telephone operator.

2.2.1. The 'nerve centres': working in the telephone exchanges

Employment at the 'nerve centres' of the telephone network, the exchanges, was one of the few job opportunities in the modern 'white collar' working world for women. Due to the Victorian gender images, women were seen as better suited for operating telephones than men. However, the telephone empowered women to transgress gender boundaries as the job required a certain degree of technical skill, which would have been the prerogative of male workers. Yet seen on the whole,

³⁵⁶ In that regard, it is no surprise that the Central Telegraph Office, which later also hold telephone facilities, was situated right between Pettah and Fort.

the organisation and running of the telephone network and its exchanges mirrored colonial hierarchies and power structure in a microcosm.

Women as telephone operators

The crucial requirement of an operator's job was that he had to perform 'feminine' and 'masculine' tasks. Initially, the tasks an operator had to perform were seen to require technical skills and accordingly, many telephone services in Western countries recruited boys around the age of sixteen or seventeen or men from the telegraph service for the job. The Victorian attitude towards women, in contrast, saw them as being patient, tactful, passive, intelligent, firm, obedient and even submissive. These attributes were perceived as befitting a telephone operator because they were regarded as crucial to keep customers satisfied, who began to complain about the service of male operators.³⁵⁷ Accordingly, telephone companies everywhere replaced them with female operators, and the Sri Lankan Post Office was no exception. In 1896, when the system was taken over from the OTC, six female signallers who had been working in the Telegraph Department were trained as telephone operators.³⁵⁸ The only place where a gender gap remained concerned their working hours. In accordance with practice in Britain, 'calls are attended to during the day by the regular staff of [female] operators...and during the night by men, who are at present taken from the staff of Telegraph and Telephone Inspectors.' In short, nightshifts were regarded as too 'risky' and therefore not suitable for women.³⁵⁹

Not all of the 'feminine' attributes were regarded as conducive to the job. One of the major selling points of the telephone was the privacy of the call. Obviously, an

³⁵⁷ The main complaint regarding male operators in Sri Lanka was always that their service was perceived as 'being very unsatisfactory'. It didn't matter if it was the night operator or the local Post peon. At the beginning of the 1920s, the method of recruitment had been improved and the minimum period of service as operator was reduced from eight to five years but that didn't win the minds and hearts of the subscribers. Michèle Martin, *"Hello, Central?" Gender, Technology and Culture in the Formation of Telephone Systems* (Quebec City: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), p. 41sp, PF 1822, No 829/91844/93 PMG to Colonial Secretary, 19 December 1911, *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1924, Part II, C5.

³⁵⁸ *The Times of Ceylon*, 1 February 1896, p.3.

³⁵⁹ The hours of duty assigned to women operators in 1919 'have been 8 a.m. to 6p.m., 6.p.m. to 8 a.m. being taken by the men.... Calls between 6 and 8 p.m. have risen to such proportions that the hours of the female operators should be extended (as it is done in England)'. PF 1822, No 829/91844/93 PMG to Colonial Secretary, 19 December 1911.

operator was necessary to run the telephone service in these days, but women were notoriously 'curious' which of course would threaten the privacy of the call.³⁶⁰ Complaints about listening-in by the operator were voiced by subscribers to exchanges run by the Government as well as private ones.³⁶¹ In regard to 'listening-in', the Sri Lankan telephone networks were no different from other services around the world, where this fear became a universal motive.³⁶²

Female operators

Female telephone operators were used in the exchanges in Colombo and other major towns right from the beginning of the telephone service which was at first run by the OTC. Outside the towns, their number was much smaller, as local rural telephone systems were normally connected to the local Post Office, where the service was run by the local (Sub-)Post Master and/or male office staff.³⁶³ Female operators, who would have come in as additional staff, would have made the service too expensive to run. Urban areas with their rapidly expanding networks required additional staff and here the hiring of female operators made sense not least because women – once their alleged gender-based limited technical skills could be ignored – received on average much lower salaries than men. The Tables 15 and 16 below show the difference in salary between male and female operators clearly.

While low pay and Victorian gender roles together made it highly unlikely that European women sought to become operators in large numbers, the job appeared to be attractive for local women. Appointing local women to the position of the Lady Supervisor in the 1920s made it finally impossible for white or British women to join the service. The few pictures available (see Image 3 and 4) confirm that female operators were non-Whites. As operators needed to be fluent in English, they were likely to have a middle class background. This points towards Burgher

³⁶⁰ Martin, *Hello, Central?*, p. 143.

³⁶¹ For example: *The Times of Ceylon*, 14 February 1933, p.13.

³⁶² The setting was also used for stories based on an operator who overheard something that she shouldn't have heard. It is doubtful if listening-in was all due to the curiosity of the operators as they also had to clear the lines when calls were finished; measuring the time only necessary for trunk line calls. They could therefore accidentally hear parts of the conversation without any bad intentions, but of course there are always some few bad apples.

³⁶³ *The Times of Ceylon*, 17 February 1925, p.8, *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1935, Part II, E5.

Table 15: New salaries for female telephone operators in 1913:

	Minimum Rs.	Increment Rs.	Maximum Rs.
Old Scale			
Class II	240	40	360
Class II	400	40	600
New Scale			
Operators	300	40	600
Monitors	750	40	900

Source: *Ceylon Administration Reports, 1912-13, Part II, C7.*

Table 16: Recommended salaries for the officers of the Department 1932:

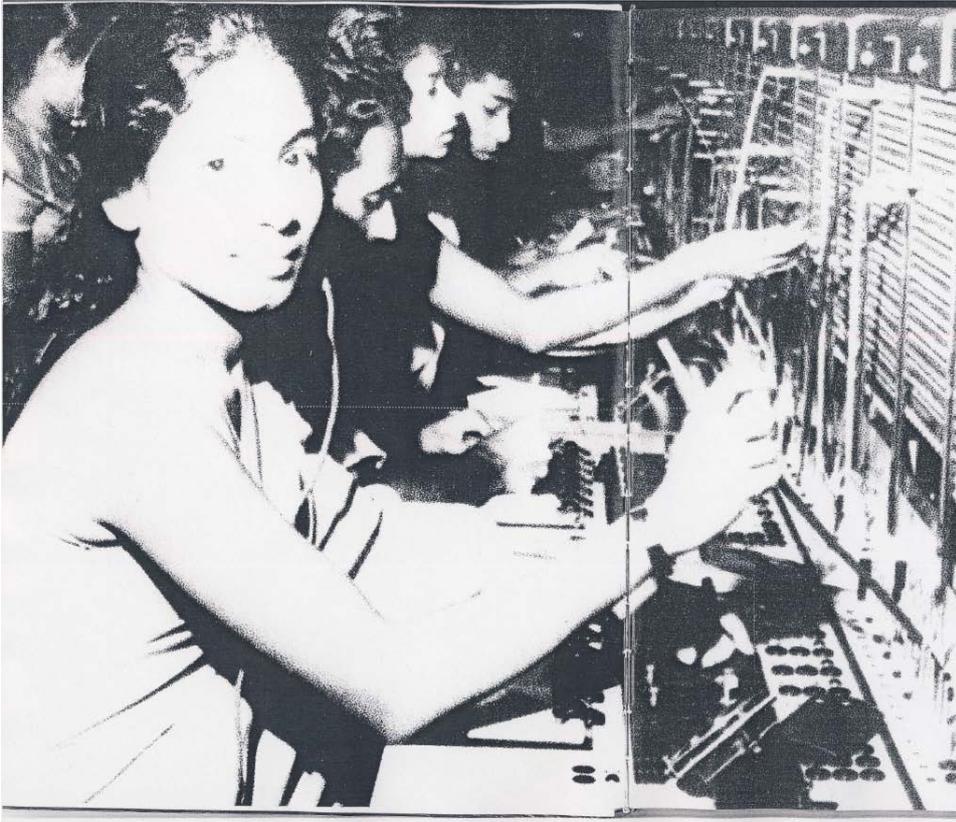
Position	Rs.
Lady Supervisor of Telephones	3,200-4,080
Assistant Lady Supervisor of Telephones	1,680-2,436
Telephone Monitors	900-1,080
Female Telephonist	420-720
Night Telephonist	512-960
Post and Telegraph Peons	270-470
Postal Clerical Service Class II	600-2,436
Local Postmaster	744-1,104

Source: *Sessional Papers, 1932, p. 54-55.*

women who usually received much better education than Sinhalese, Tamil or Muslim women, making them the first women in Sri Lanka to become teachers or take up clerical and secretarial work.³⁶⁴

³⁶⁴ Kumari Jayawardena, *Erasure of the Euro-Asian. Recovering early Radicalism and Feminism in South Asia* (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2007), p. 218sp. Members of the Burgher and

Image 4 and 5: Female telephone operator at the Colombo exchange:



Source: Gunawardana, *Making the Connection*, p. 8 (see also p. 35,52).



Source: *The Ceylon Observer*, 13 July, 1935, p. 6.

Tamil communities were also over-represented in administrative departments if compared to their percentage of the total population. Warnapala, 'Bureaucratic Transformation', p. 418.

Working conditions

The job as telephone operator was stressful and demanding. They had to sit upright in a narrow space and keep concentration for several hours. The high rate of calls at the Colombo exchanges took its toll. 'The busy hour calling rate has recently increased to almost unmanageable proportions. One operator in one hour attended to 400 calls. The "peak" hour calling rate was estimated in the Colombo exchange recently to be 276 per position per telephone (The normal "peak" load of calls for a position is 160)'.³⁶⁵ Part of their duty was to ensure that the lines were cleared at the end of a call. Users of the telephone in those days quite often forgot to turn the handle of his apparatus after replacing the receiver, which made his line appear busy even though the call had ended. Thus the operators had to perform the additional task to check regularly if a line was free or still busy.³⁶⁶

By the mid-1930s, pressure on the female operating staff had grown so much that an investigation by the Medical Officer of Health of the City recommended that their shifts be reduced from 7 1/2 to 6 hours a day. The acceptance of the recommendation is an indication that the Department was well aware of the fact that the job was very demanding and that operators were overworked.³⁶⁷ The tropical climate further added to the distress: 'Subscribers do not appreciate the difficult conditions under which exchanges are worked in a tropical climate. More patience is required.'³⁶⁸ The high number of complaints by the subscribers surely didn't increase morale.

Although the job provided new opportunities, fluctuation among female operators was quite high. This was due to the demanding working conditions but marriage was another major reason (see Table 17). Laws of the day required that a woman quit the civil service as soon as she married. Until 1931, the minimum period of service was three years, but 'resignations on account of marriage on the part of

³⁶⁵ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1936, Part II, E5.

³⁶⁶ 'The Miere' printed in *The Ceylon Observer*, 13 July 1935, p. 6, 8.

³⁶⁷ During the 1930s, female telephone operators were quite regularly seen unfit for duty due to 'ill health':1936:3/1937:1/1938:4. The available sources do not reveal whether this had already been the case in the 1920s because there are no detailed accounts of the personnel in the *Ceylon Administration Reports*. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1936 Part II, E22.

³⁶⁸ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1907, Part II, B18.

female telephonists who had just completed their three years' service was high and this resulted in much inconvenience and expense to Government,' so the minimum period of service required was raised from three to five years.³⁶⁹ The constant drain of experienced operators affected the daily running of the exchange: 'Owing to operating staff being largely new recruits as a result of various resignations of telephonists during the year consequent on marriage principally, the number of subscriber per position at Central Exchange had to be reduced from 95 to 85 to suit the inexperienced operators.'³⁷⁰

Table 17: Telephonists trained and retired 1930-1932:

<i>Telephonists</i>	1930	1931	1932
male/female students	84	52	61
Exchanges			
government	70	45	
non-government	12	1	1
Police	2	6	
Prison Department			1
<i>retired telephonists</i>			
Marriage	10 (and 2 Monitors)	12	15 (and 1 Monitor)
Discontinued	8	6	2
Death	1		
ill-health	1		

Source: *Ceylon Administration Reports*, various.

³⁶⁹ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1931, Part II, C17.

³⁷⁰ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1934, Part II, E19.

Same, same but different

The rural exchanges were rarely run by a female telephone operator because the small number of subscribers would have made it too expensive. Some private exchanges had female telephone operators who were trained at the expense of the PA at the government telephone school. But most rural telephone exchanges were run either by the staff at the Post Office or by a coolie hired by the local PA. The service of male staff was also perceived as 'unsatisfactory' and their working morale was criticized.³⁷¹

Lady Supervisors

The duty of a Lady Supervisor was to oversee the female operators and safeguard the working of the exchange. The position did not exist before 1905 because the exchange at Colombo was rather small. In that year, the opening of the Exchange in Cinnamon Gardens drove the number of subscribers up to 150 and created the need for an 'efficient' Lady Supervisor.³⁷² Further increase of business until 1913 necessitated a second Lady Supervisor for the new Exchange.³⁷³ However, Colombo with its large exchanges formed an exception in that respect, as no Lady Supervisors existed elsewhere on the island.

Selecting the first ladies

The draft advertisement for the position in 1906 reads as follows: 'Wanted a Burgher Lady as Supervisor for the Telephone Exchange. Must be well educated in ordinary School subjects particularly in English and Mathematics. Must write a neat and legible hand; have some knowledge of accounts; and be capable of supervising and dealing with women. She should be between age 25 and 30, of sound health

³⁷¹ The statement of Edward G. Goonewerdene of the Kurunegale PA illustrates this fact. In 1924, the exchange had 62 subscribers and one Lady Operator who was working from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., which included a break of one hour for breakfast. 'When she is at her duty, the public are served without any complaint whatever, the other times the Post Office clerks have to attend to the telephone, when the service is not very satisfactory...the need for another lady-operator is greatly felt, with the increase number of subscribers'. *The Times of Ceylon*, 17 February 1925, p. 8.

³⁷² *Ceylon Sessional Papers*, 1905, Papers relating to The Rearrangement of Telephone Services, p.1.

³⁷³ 'It will be necessary to have a first class supervisor at the Cinnamon Garden Exchange as soon as the number of subscribers exceeds 250.' The position was first filled in 1913 by a Miss Gull. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1907, Part II, B18.

and unmarried.....The officer will be required to resign if she marries.³⁷⁴ That the draft advertisement was explicitly asking for a woman from the Burgher community is not surprising. As mentioned above, women of that community had made big strides in education and were also well trained in English language. In the island's social hierarchy the Burghers as the Euro-Asian community stood somewhere between the British/European and the indigenous communities. Also the Burgher community was one of the major driving factors for a modernization of the Island regarding the way of life and *zeitgeist*.³⁷⁵

There were quite a lot of applications for the position, from which 'Miss Mack of Bambalapitiya (sister of Mr. Proctor P.D. Mack) has been recommended as the most deserving candidate.' However, recruiting the first Lady Supervisor from the ranks of the indigenous colonial elite³⁷⁶ didn't seem to work because in 1907 a new Supervisor had to be recruited, this time coming from England.³⁷⁷ Thereafter, the recruitment policy favoured women from Britain with work experience, preferably with the NTC³⁷⁸ or the British Post Office.³⁷⁹

Working conditions

The contracts for this position were normally two to three years as it was deemed 'undesirable to retain the services of a Lady Supervisor in Ceylon for more than the three years of her agreement. The climate is trying to European women and more

³⁷⁴ PF 1822, PMG to Colonial secretary, 18 April 1906.

³⁷⁵ Jayawardena, *Erasure of the Euro-Asian*, p. 75sp, 282sp.

³⁷⁶ The genealogy of the Mack family, to whom C.L. Mack and her brother P.D. Mack belonged, can be found in the Journal of the Dutch Burgher Union. Burghers were defined as being of Dutch or European descent on the paternal line and the definition was further refined by descriptions of people of 'different shapes and sorts' which were excluded. With that self-ascription, the Burghers distinguished themselves from other Eurasians. The Mack family can therefore be regarded as members of the colonial elite. *The Ceylon Observer*, 6 June 1906, p.6, Journal of the Dutch Burgher Union: Genealogy of the Family of Mack of Ceylon, p. 144.

<http://thedutchburgherunion.org/genealogy/ancestry-m/JDBU%201948%20Vol%2038%20No%204%20p133-152%20-%20Mack%20Ancestry%281%29.pdf> [accessed 1 August 2015], Roberts, *People in between*, p. 244sp.

³⁷⁷ The sources do not reveal what exactly happened. The *Ceylon Administration Reports* for 1907 only says: 'On March 13, 1907, a Supervisor from the NTC's at Westminster came out and took charge of the operating and to train the local operators, and has been able to considerably improve the work.' *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1907, Part II B17.

³⁷⁸ By way of the Telephone Transfer Act (1911), the NTC was taken over by the British Post Office in 1912.

³⁷⁹ The next two Lady Supervisors, Miss Stevens (1909) and Miss McLeod (1912), were both recruited from Britain and for their experience. PF 1822, No 829/91844/93 PMG to Colonial Secretary, 19 December 1911.

especially so when they have to work for their living. Apart from that, they lose touch with modern developments in telephone matters, when they have been away from England for a year or two.’ The conditions of the contract had been agreed upon with the General Manager of the London Telephone Service who approved that ‘the regulations of that Department [British Post Office] require that telephone employees should retire on marriage...if the person should marry in Ceylon...the local Government would be put to liability.’ Their preferred age was between 25 and 30 years and they had to pass a medical examination to demonstrate their suitability for service in the tropics.³⁸⁰ As in the case of the telephone operator, marriage and the tropical climate were central points in the thinking of the British officials.³⁸¹

The financial conditions of the appointment weren’t that good. Miss Gull, the second Lady Supervisor appointed in 1913 for the Cinnamon Garden Exchange, wrote a letter to the PMG immediately following her appointment in which she complained that her present salary was inadequate to live in ordinary comfort. The PMG commented that ‘I do not think (...) [she] has exaggerated her difficulties.’³⁸² Accordingly, a new payment scheme was proposed in 1913, which adjusted the salary of a Lady Supervisor to Rs. 3000 to 4200, while an additional Lady Supervisor was to receive Rs. 3000. This enhanced salary was recommended to secure senior and more elderly ladies, to provide for their comfortable living and avoid discomfort after arrival.³⁸³ But even with the improved salary, Lady Supervisors still ranked low in the hierarchy of the postal or government services.³⁸⁴

³⁸⁰ PF 1822, No 829/91844/93 PMG to Colonial Secretary, 19 December 1911.

³⁸¹ Like in Great Britain itself, it was typical for female members of the Civil Service that they had to be unmarried. ‘in the letter of appointment from the secretary of state she [Assistance Lady Supervisor] was informed that it would be necessary for her to give an undertaking not to marry during the period of her appointment in Ceylon and ...accepting the appointment she duly gave this undertaking’ . PF 1822, Letter PMG to Colonial Secretary, 15 December 1913.

³⁸² PF 1822, Letter PMG 602/4780/12 to Colonial Secretary, 23 September 1913.

³⁸³ PF 1822, Minute Paper, Rgtⁿ No.2/342 from PMG, No.742 20 November 1913.

³⁸⁴ The case of Mrs. Dent, additional Lady Supervisor from December 1917 to September 1920, is quite telling. At the end of her service the question arose who had to pay the return passage. Because she earned under £300 per annum, she was only entitled to a free 2nd class passage to Colombo but no return passage. To reach her he was only entitled to a 3rd class railway fare from the port of disembarkation to her home. PF 1822, PMG Office to Colonial Secretary through the Colonial Treasurer, 10th January 1921, Colonial Treasurer to Colonial Secretary, 3 February 1921. Another

The change of the recruitment policy

The Department's recruitment policy was soon changed again. In 1914, Miss C.R. Pasley and Miss A.M. Dobbs were appointed as Lady Supervisor and Assistant Lady Supervisor respectively in the Telephone Exchange at Colombo on a thirty-month contract.³⁸⁵ Miss Pasley stayed in Sri Lanka for six years as a Lady Supervisor, which obviously contravened the policy formulated in 1907. The length of her service was not due to the war, as her assistant, Miss Dobbs, ended her service in 1917 and was replaced by Miss Dent. Rather, Miss Pasley seemed to have impressed her superiors with such an efficient performance of her duties that she was given a permanent appointment in 1920. Part of the deal was that she had 'to visit telephone exchanges in England during her leave to study improvements in the methods of work.' The Postmaster-General in London had no objections to that arrangement.³⁸⁶

Although the position of Lady Supervisor had been filled with a member of the Burgher community in the first instance, no further woman from the Island was selected in the following years, because they allegedly lacked necessary qualifications: 'At the present there is not a single one, among the locally engaged operators, who shows, so far, any indication of becoming able to discharge Miss McLeod's [current Lady Supervisor] duties in her absence. It will therefore be necessary to recruit the additional supervisor from England.'³⁸⁷ It was only in 1920, when the contract of Assistant Lady Supervisor A.M. Dent expired, that the PMG was in favour of giving a Ceylonese lady the opportunity to prove her suitability for such an appointment.³⁸⁸ On 1 September 1920, L.H. Redlich³⁸⁹ was appointed as Assistant Lady Supervisor. In her sixteen years of service in the Department, she had 'frequently acted as Supervisor and given satisfaction in such temporary

example for free passage on a steamer to Colombo, see PF 1822, Minute Paper from Secretary of State, 3 April 1914.

³⁸⁵ PF 1822, Minute Paper from Secretary of State, 3 April 1914, Report PMG 1916 p.2sp.

³⁸⁶ PF 1822, Report PMG 1916 p.2/3 /PMG Report 15 Dec 1919, General Post Office London, E.C.1, 5 January 1920.

³⁸⁷ PF 1822, No 829/91844/93 PMG to Colonial Secretary, 19 December 1911.

³⁸⁸ PF 1822, Minute Paper No 37495/20 from PMG, 11 October 1920.

³⁸⁹ It is most likely that L.H. Redlich was also a member of the Burgher community. In the *Journal of the Dutch Burgher Union* 'Redlich' is listed as a Burgher family but she is not mentioned in the '*Genealogy of the Family of Redlich of Ceylon*'.

<<http://thedutchburgherunion.org/genealogy/ancestry-r/JDBU%201954%20Vol%2044%20No%201%20p26-29%20-%20Redlich%20Ancestry%281%29.pdf>> [accessed 1 August 2015].

appointments'. Still, the job came with one year of probation and she remained Assistant Lady Supervisor until she retired in 1930 because of the age limit.³⁹⁰

Appointing a 'Ceylonese Lady' of course posed a problem to the hierarchy within the Department. Until then, only a Lady Supervisor and her Assistant (also termed 'Additional Lady Supervisor') had been working at the Colombo Exchanges, whose jobs mainly differed in the salaries they were paid (Rs. 3000 to 4200 and fixed Rs. 3000). The appointment of an indigenous woman necessitated the creation of a new post, 'as none of the Ceylonese staff possesses educationally, or by experience, the qualification for a 'Supervisor''. Accordingly, the salary was also lowered, so that it exceeded that of a Monitor, the next highest grade (who were paid Rs. 750-900), but remained lower than what the European women were paid (Rs. 3000/£200). The salary of the new Ceylonese Supervisor was fixed at Rs.1320-2000.³⁹¹

The role of the Lady Supervisor

Based on common gender stereotypes the Lady Supervisors was attributed with the mother role. 'The Superintendent of Traffic now writes – "Miss Dobbs has by her kindness sympathy endeared herself to the staff under her control whether the trouble be official or domestic Miss Dobbs is their friend in difficulty or distress."³⁹² The European superiors had to take care of the young 'local' girls.

The Lady Supervisors were responsible for the smooth running of the exchange. The term 'efficiency' recurs frequently in both the official documents and in the public appreciations of the service from the Colony.³⁹³ The appointment of a Lady Supervisor is a good example for this. A European lady had 'more authority and better work efficiency' than an indigenous one. 'The appointment of a European Lady Supervisor has had excellent results. The operators here worked better and more quietly than in any other Colonial Exchange which I have visited. It will be

³⁹⁰ PF 1822, 293/33417 Secretary's Office to PMG, 18 November 1921, Minute Paper No 37495/20 from PMG, 11 October 1920, *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1930, Part II, C14.

³⁹¹ The decision to hire a 'Ceylonese Lady' for the position had to be approved by the heads in London. (Downing Street to Governor Brigadier-General Sri W.H. Mannig, 7th February 1921). PF 1822 Minute, Paper No 37495/20 from PMG, 11 October 1920, Ceylon No. 105 Downing Street to Governor Brigadier-General Sir W.H. Mannig, 7 February 1921.

³⁹² PF 1822, 397/65907/14 Postmaster General to the Colonial Secretary, 3 September 1917.

³⁹³ For example see *The Times of Ceylon*, 10 October 1928, p.8, 18 October 1928, p. 15.

necessary to have a first class supervisor at the Cinnamon Garden Exchange...I think that it may be desirable to have another European Lady, unless a local lady can be trained who could exercise the required authority.'³⁹⁴ Efficiency is of course important for the working of an exchange, but the statement reflects the recurring British prejudices towards Orientals. Another theme indicated in this report is that of the self-perception of Colombo as a 'modern city' in the East. The working of the various technologies was crucial for that image because they were hallmarks of modernity.³⁹⁵

The change to automatic running

With the decision to introduce automatic switchboards to the Colombo exchanges in the mid-1930s it became clear that further training of operators would be futile. Moreover, the department changed their policy and began to re-admit married ex-telephonists on temporary contracts. For instance, out of the 23 female operators who were hired in 1936, 15 were married ex-telephonists.³⁹⁶ It is interesting to note here how easily economic considerations superseded ideological principles in certain cases.

A transplanted telephone system?

The organisation of the telephone exchanges as well as the build-up of the whole telephone network, e.g. the license for private telephone systems, relied heavily on expertise obtained from England and from British India. Many of the regulations and organisational features were taken over from the NTC and the British Post Office and for key positions such as Lady Supervisor or Telephone Construction Foreman,³⁹⁷ people were hired who had gathered work experience in Britain. This underlines the problem of technology transfer taking place within a colonial setting. Hughes has defined a technological system as being 'both socially constructed and society shaping.' A technological system is therefore composed of three components: *physical artefacts* (transmission lines, transformers), *organization* (manufacturing firms, investment banks) and *legislative artefacts* (regulatory

³⁹⁴ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1907, Part II, B18.

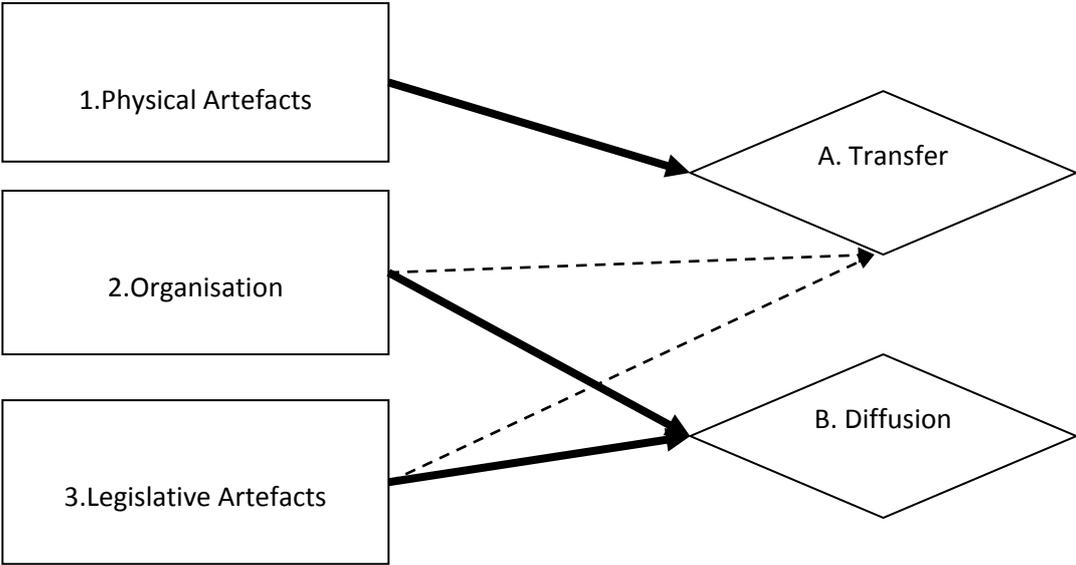
³⁹⁵ See e.g. *The Ceylon Observer*, 9 May 1905, p. 4, *The Times of Ceylon*, 18 October 1928, p. 15.

³⁹⁶ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1936, Part II, E22.

³⁹⁷ See e.g. PF 1711.

laws).³⁹⁸ The transfer of a technology from one country into another has the two components of *transfer* (equipment, methods) and *diffusion* (knowledge, skills etc.). This process is more complicated for modern technology because the required tools and knowledge are far more sophisticated.³⁹⁹ For a successful technology transfer all three components of the technological system have to be included (see Figure 2). An exact replica of the technological system may not be possible due to the fact that the system is also socially shaped and thus differences between the two countries could be reflected in the *organization* and the *legislative artefacts*. Edgerton highlights that the diffusion of a technology across the world does not mean that the technology and its use is everywhere the same.⁴⁰⁰

Figure 2: Technology Transfer (model based on Hughe’s definition of technological systems and Headrick’s definition of technology transfer)



³⁹⁸ Hughes, 'Evolution of Large Technological Systems', p. 51.

³⁹⁹ Headrick, *Tentacles of Progress*, p. 9sp.

⁴⁰⁰ One simple reason can be the lack of money, which can lead to the emergence of 'creole technologies' which are simpler and thus cheaper. Moreover, there can be new technologies unfit for Western countries, e.g. the rickshaw, or new hybrid technologies combining Western and indigenous elements, e.g. river boats in Thailand. Harald Fischer-Tine has called this adjustments and redesigns 'pidgin-knowledge'. Edgerton, *Shock of the Old*, p. 31, 39, 43sp, Harald Fischer-Tine, *Pidgin-Knowledge. Wissen und Kolonialismus* (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2013).

In the case of the telephone the *transfer* was not only transplanted from Great Britain but also from British India; the *transfer* was solemnly not taking place between the imperial Metropolis and the periphery. The different socio-economic environment of a colony, in particular regarding the *legislative artefacts* and the tropical conditions, made a transplantation one on one from Britain to Sri Lanka not quite possible. Accordingly, the Sri Lankan authorities often looked at British India for orientation. The different environment, in particular regarding the *legislative artefacts*, made an exact transplantation almost impossible. Materials or regulations were also taken over from the running of the Indian telephone service because they were tested under the tropical conditions as well as within the legal framework of a colony.⁴⁰¹ When the public demanded an improvement of the telephone services, they often compared it to the system in British India and claimed that the local system should be improved in similar fashion.⁴⁰²

The second point, the *diffusion*, is thus the most interesting. In many cases of big technology, e.g. railways, the transfer was not a complete one: higher positions would only be filled with British and thus excluding the indigenous population from the necessary knowledge. In the case of the telephone in Sri Lanka, the evolution of a telephone network also owed much to private initiative in which members of the indigenous elite were involved. The telephone was not implanted in Sri Lanka by a few white colonial administrators because they thought it would be a useful technology to rule and control the colony.

⁴⁰¹ E.g. the Committee for Public Safety's *Inquiry into the Condition of the Colombo Telephone Service* recommended the materials and methods (Hamilton type, construction of wrought wire and steel etc.) as it 'has been largely introduced into India where its employment for several years has given great satisfaction.' *The Ceylon Observer*, 23 May 1906, p. 5.

⁴⁰² The critic of the Five-Year Plan (1934) for the improvement of the telephone service in Sri Lanka was that without a policy change the whole plan would be without use. India's telephone services would be far more attractive for the subscribers due to the convenient system of hire. The extensions of trunk and local lines would be undertaken by the authorities wherever the financial risk seemed fair. In the latter respect, the *Observer* commented that 'Ceylon may learn some lessons...from India, where the authorities appear to keep objective more clearly in view than they do in Ceylon'. *The Ceylon Observer*, 12 June 1934, weekly edition, p. 31.

2.2.2. Telephones in the public arena

The telephone service was not only available for private subscribers but telephone facilities also marked key locations of the public arena. The telephone was not only a new and practical medium for communication, it was also a commodity. It provided its owner with an opportunity to set himself apart from the great majority of the population of the island, thus sending out a powerful message of being modern and living a Western lifestyle. In this manner, the telephone became a 'social' agent in the public arena.

Telephone and Modernity

At the turn of the century, the residents of Colombo felt they lived in a 'city in transition'. Colombo emerged as the political, economic and social metropolis of the Island, adjusting to the new role while still growing. The colonial government and the municipal board wanted Colombo to become the 'most beautiful tropical city and capital in the world'.⁴⁰³ In 1905, an editorial in *The Observer* dealt with that question under the headline 'Colombo in a State of Transition: How will it appear by 1910?'. It listed infrastructure and technologies as hallmarks of the self-perceived 'modernity' of the city, while telegraph and telephone facilities did not get mentioned at that time.⁴⁰⁴ The city was growing and the change towards a modern city was clearly visible. The port had become a major port of call in the Indian Ocean: many big steamers laid at anchor and passengers were bustling around the port and the Grand Orient Hotel. The streets were no longer filled only by bullock carts and rickshaws but also by bicycles, tramways, motorcars and overhead wiring.⁴⁰⁵ Thus the omission of the editorial piece was made up for one month later in another editorial ('Telephones in the East – The Backwardness of Ceylon'), which highlighted the role the telephone had for the future development of the colony. It stated: 'We do not draw attention thus prominently to the matter merely from the point of view of the convenience of our suburban residents, who should nevertheless have been served long ago in this respect: but as affecting the

⁴⁰³ See e.g. *The Ceylon Observer*, 9 May 1905, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁴ *The Ceylon Observer*, 9 May 1905, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁵ See Denham, *Ceylon at the Census*, Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern*.

reputation of Ceylon in the East for making modern progress and equipping itself adequately with the adjuncts of civilization [original emphasis].'⁴⁰⁶

The city's rivalry with other ports and administrative centres in South and Southeast Asia, especially Singapore, had a major impact on that development. Which city would be the most advanced one was the constant question during these days: The author of the editorial remarked that given the current way things were, other port cities would be ahead of Colombo in the coming years.⁴⁰⁷ 'This result will be owing not so much to a more enlightened recognition by these places of their telephonic needs, as to the business-like method of meeting those needs [original emphasis]'.⁴⁰⁸ The process of modernisation was peripatetic and produced a constant race for the last innovation. Who had the best tramway system or which hotel, the Grand Oriental or the Raffles in Singapore, were more adjusted to the needs and wishes of the modern travellers. The benchmark for modernity in this race was clearly technologies, and the telephone was one of them. But this in turn created constant uncertainties as people had to adapt themselves to 'the new' with all its dangers. Technologies like the telephone were perceived as 'modern wonders', crucial for the advancement of society. New technologies and their advancement were continually heralding a new area of 'modernity', proclaiming that society had made another step into a new modern world. At the same time it was producing a constant 'temporal rupture': the present was a time without historical precedent. Accordingly, to be modern meant to be up to date with the technological progress and the proliferation of technological innovations intensified.⁴⁰⁹

From 1905 onwards, complaints raised against the telephone service and its running regularly addressed the question of 'efficiency'. The *Times of Ceylon's* regular

⁴⁰⁶ *The Ceylon Observer*, 1 June 1905, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁷ 'We hear today from the Straits that the work the Oriental Telephone Company and Electric Company have in hand in India, China and the Straits will occupy at least two years. At the end of that time, we take it, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Singapore and the Federal Malay States will be far in advance of Colombo, rather, of Ceylon generally.' *The Ceylon Observer*, 1 June 1905, p.4.

⁴⁰⁸ *The Ceylon Observer*, 1 June 1905, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁹ Bernhard Rieger explores in his article the ambivalence of public perception of technology during the first decades of the twentieth century. Rieger, 'Modern Wonders', p. 162.

column 'Reflections of an Ordinary Woman' by Mary Elizabeth Writerscramp⁴¹⁰ addressed this issue in 1928, describing how the author and some of her friends were discussing the articles appearing in the papers lately, e.g. the editorial 'so-r-r-r-y you've been t-r-r-r-roubled' published eight days before which was dealing with the 'slackness' of the local telephone service.⁴¹¹ The discussion had taken place on the veranda in the evening, thus in a typical colonial setting.⁴¹² Summarizing the discussions, she concluded,

*I thought Ceylon was easily the most inefficient country, taking it all around...with exception of Ireland in some spots...there is a lack of efficiency everywhere on earth of course...but in Britain there is at least a general intolerance of the inefficient which one can sense all over the country; in Ceylon, slackness is not only tolerated and condoned in many cases but it appears often to be deliberately encouraged.*⁴¹³

On the one side, such complains show the oriental sublime by British members of the elite pointing out the eastern agony and laziness. Seeing themselves as 'torchbearers upon the path of progress',⁴¹⁴ striving to improve the Island, is a motive that often surfaces.⁴¹⁵ Lord Curzon, arguably one of the most notorious imperialists in South Asia, caught that attitude of 'humble strife' in the best way in a speech given to the members of the Byculla Club in Bombay.⁴¹⁶ But such complains

⁴¹⁰ The column 'Reflections of an ordinary woman' by Mary Elizabeth Writerscramp was a regular section during the 1920s and 30s in the Times of Ceylon. It dealt with all kinds of issues and topics concerning the life of upper class women in colonial Sri Lanka.

⁴¹¹ The editorial complains about the current state of the telephone service: 'Throughout the world the vagaries of telephone operators are a source of perpetual irritation from the stage nor from the press has been any more effective than the efforts of the Heads of Department to effect any material improvement. It must be, however, admitted, that in Colombo matters are getting worse instead of better... there is not the slightest doubt that there is something radically wrong with the Colombo Telephone Exchange.' *The Times of Ceylon*, 10 October 1928, p. 8.

⁴¹² The section 'Reflections of an ordinary woman' dealt with all kinds of issues and topics regarding the life of upper class women in colonial Sri Lanka.

⁴¹³ *The Times of Ceylon*, 18 October 1928, p. 15.

⁴¹⁴ George Orwell coined the phrase in his book 'Burmese Days'. The character Veraswami points towards the Eastern agony and superstition. Thus branding the colonial masters as 'torchbearers upon the path of progress'. Michael Mann, 'Torchbearers upon the Path of Progress: Britain's Ideology of a 'Moral and Material Progress' in India. An Introductory Essay', in *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission*, ed. by Harald Fischer-Tiné and Michael Mann (London: Anthem Press, 2004), pp. 1-29 (p. 3).

⁴¹⁵ *The Ceylon Observer*, 2 August 1909, p. 4.

⁴¹⁶ See Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj. The New Cambridge History of India, Volume 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 168.

were voiced from all telephone subscribers, including the indigenous elite. A telephone subscription was expensive and the telephone was seen as a tool to make life more comfortable and as an expression of a modern life style.⁴¹⁷ The press covered not only the development of the island's telephone network and its technical development regularly but also discussed the social use in Western countries; positive and negative sides.⁴¹⁸ But the most telling sources in that regard are advertisements. During the interwar period these often depicted the telephone as a central accessory of a modern Western life-style. (see Image 6, 7).⁴¹⁹ Besides adverts, the telephone was also used in comic strips, e.g. "Bringing up Father". The comic strip was regularly printed in *The Ceylon Daily News* and the main character, Mr. Jiggs, several times uses the telephone (see Image 8, 9).⁴²⁰

The more interesting advertisement of the two is the one for 'Phoenix Hosiery' (see Image 6). The image portrays the archetypical 'modern girl'. The type of a woman emerged as a global phenomenon in the 1920s and 30s. Its key characteristic was the non-compliance with social norms, which required women to behave as a dutiful daughter, wife and mother. Moreover, the image refers to a set of 'transgressive' commodities such as lipstick or nail polish.⁴²¹ The modern girl was a product of the *Roaring Twenties*, an urban-based, consumerist lifestyle which had strong repercussions Sri Lanka as well.⁴²² By the time the advert above was designed the telephone had not yet become a requisite of a modern girl, but (as will be argued later) the link between female lifestyles and the telephone was about to emerge. But that the telephone was an integral part of an urban lifestyle is clearly

⁴¹⁷ Interestingly the telephone often didn't show up on the pictures of the residents and bungalows of the upper class. Jones's *Interiors of the Empire* depicts many photographs of upper class resident but there are no telephone visible on the pictures. The main reason will be that the telephone was in most cases installed in the corridor but the pictures show the living room. See Jones, *Interiors of Empire*.

⁴¹⁸ *The Ceylon Observer*, 2 April 1906, p. 4, 8 April 1909, p. 7, *The Times of Ceylon*, 23 November 1929, p. 10.

⁴¹⁹ Also see Appendix IV: Images 1-5.

⁴²⁰ Also see Appendix IV: Image 6.

⁴²¹ Alys Eve Weibaum et al, 'Modern Girls Heuristic Devise', in *The Modern Girl around the World. Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, ed. by Alys Eve Weibaum et al (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 1-24 (p. 1 and 18).

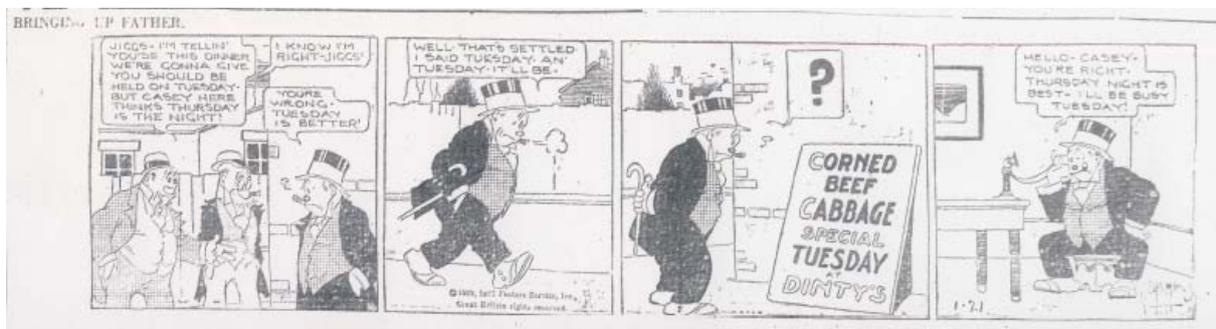
⁴²² In 'Running in the Family', Michael Ondaatje describes the lifestyle his ancestors Burgher in Sri Lanka enjoyed during the 1920s and 1930s. The jazz joint may be missing but the lifestyle was much the same as in European capitals around that time. Michael Ondaatje, *Running in the Family* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

Image 6 and 7: Advertisements:



Source: *The Times of Ceylon*, November 1929, p.3, 26 November 1928, p. 11.

Image 8: Comic 'Bringing up father':



Source: *The Ceylon Daily News*, 20 February 1929, p. 10.

Image 9: Comic:



Source: *The Times of Ceylon*, 1 December 1936, p. 10.

attested by the high (and growing) frequency of calls the Colombo Exchanges had to deal with in the interwar period.⁴²³

Public phones

The expanding network of connections across Colombo increased not only the number of privately owned telephones but also increased pay-phone facilities open to everyone. These public phones known as 'nickel-in-slot' facilities,⁴²⁴ were mainly found in public buildings.⁴²⁵ Telephone kiosks by the roadside, in contrast, were surprisingly few in number; the first one opened in 1924. Instead, call offices were far more common, being built outside Colombo as well.⁴²⁶ In 1938 their number reached 279 (see Appendix VI: Table 4) and it comes as no surprise that the busiest ones were located in Colombo, as shown below. Phone booths were sometimes also provided by association or clubs, e.g. the Automobile Association set up two of them in 1932, which were primarily meant to be used by its members in an

⁴²³ *The Ceylon Observer*, 13 July 1935, p. 6, 8.

⁴²⁴ Several cases were mentioned that coin collecting telephones were manipulated. On one instance 'Metal pieces cut to the size of a ten-cent coin and pressed trouser buttons were systematically used to obtain calls from some street kiosk in Colombo...the culprit on being prosecuted was given ten cuts'; and on another occasion a boy was caught 'collecting the coins from the telephone box at the I.C. Drug store who was pilfered'. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1931, Part II, C17, 1932, Part II, C16.

⁴²⁵ *The Ceylon Daily News*, 20 November 1922, p. 1.

⁴²⁶ 'Call office' is the term used in the *Ceylon Administration Reports* for a number of public phones installed in one place.

emergency or by road scouts to inform the Association's headquarter of floods and the like.⁴²⁷

During the 1920s and '30s, the busiest booths (call offices) were near the I.C. Drug Store (Bambalapitiya), at Maradana Railway Station, Wellawatta Post Office, Havelock Town Post Office, and at the Central Telegraph Office in the Fort district (see Appendix VI: Table 5). Call offices were spread relatively equally across the city except for its northern parts. It is obviously impossible to determine who used these public phones, but the fact that the printed instruction sheet pinned to notice board in all post offices was written in English, Sinhala and Tamil seems to indicate that users came from all major communities living on the island.⁴²⁸ At least, efforts were made not to exclude any potential user.

Hotels

The major hotels in Colombo were subscribers almost from the first moment the telephone had become available on the island, as the telephone was important for them in various ways.⁴²⁹ First of all, the opening of the Suez Canal and the rise of steam shipping expanded tourism to Asia and particularly Ceylon became 'more widely known, year by year, as a winter resort, as a charming island.'⁴³⁰ For most travellers to the East, Colombo was the first real 'oriental' or 'exotic' port of call.⁴³¹ After almost four weeks on board, the Grand Oriental Hotel (GOH), conveniently situated at the harbour, offered proper beds and European meals to the exhausted. Leonard Woolf, an occasional visitor to Colombo, succinctly describes the experience of travellers in these days: 'When we disembarked, Millington and I

⁴²⁷ One was located at the junction of the Avissawella Road with the old Kelani Valley Road, and the other one at the main road junction in Karawanella. Similarly, the United Planters Company of Ceylon Limited was given 'full and free right to erect a Telephone Box at Borella Junction in Colombo' as well as on the company's premises in Pettah. *Ceylon Administration Reports, 1932, Part II, C15, Pending File 580.*

⁴²⁸ *Ceylon Administration Reports, 1931, Part II, C17.*

⁴²⁹ This section will focus on the two prominent hotels, the Grand Oriental (connection since 1905 latest) and Galle Face Hotel (since 1914 latest). Other upper class hotels also had telephone connections, e.g. the Queens Hotel in Kandy, the Charlton Hotel at Union Place in Colombo (since 1912 latest), and the Grand Hotel in Nuwara Eliya (since 1924 latest). *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory, 1905-06, p. IV, 1914, p.XXX, 1912, p.XXXII, 1924, p. 184.*

⁴³⁰ Before reaching Colombo, steamers had to call at the ports of Suez and Aden for coaling. Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, p. 204.

⁴³¹ The description and choice of words in the section 'Information for Tourists' in *Twentieth Century Impression of Ceylon* clearly demonstrates that, e.g. 'bright colours'. *ibid*, p. 204.

went to the G.O.H. (...) which in those days was indeed both grand and oriental, its verandas and great dining-room full of the hum and bustle of passengers perpetually arriving and departing in the ships which you could see in the magnificent harbour only a stone throw from the hotel.⁴³² Both the GOH and the Galle Face Hotel, which was a bit further away from the harbour, were the two upper class hotels where most of the travellers stayed. The most frequented tourist routes went upcountry to Nuwara Eliya via Kandy for a visit to the 'tea country', or along the highway to Anuradhapura and the north of the island. Those who could not stay long made a trip to Mount Lavinia, the beach resort south of Colombo.⁴³³ The hotels of Colombo were the points of departure and arrival of a considerable stream of travellers coming to the island.⁴³⁴ For all of them, the telephone connection was a convenient medium of communication, no matter whether they wanted to notify a friend or relative of their arrival or whether they wanted to contact one of the firms offering car services for a trip across the island, for instance the Apollo Motor Touring company on Slave Island.⁴³⁵

Secondly, hotels increasingly relied on telephones to accelerate internal communication and improve service, in an attempt to afford their guests the latest advances regarding convenience and luxury. By way of the telephone, guests were able to communicate their wishes directly to the staff and thus make the service more efficient. Around 1900, the telephone had become fully established as standard equipment in the grand hotels in Western countries, and hotels in the East vying for the upper-class travellers followed suit.⁴³⁶ Checking in at the Strand, the

⁴³² Woolf, *An Autobiography*, p. 141.

⁴³³ Motor-touring, which 'is very popular and enjoyable in Ceylon', became very popular from the 1900s onward. Still, the railways were recommended for a trip to the Kandyan Provinces. Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, p. 204sp.

⁴³⁴ 'There was a perpetual stream of travellers, 'passengers' as we always called them, to it, staying for anything from a night to a fortnight in the Queens Hotel down by the Lake.' Woolf, *An Autobiography*, p. 218.

⁴³⁵ *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 31.

⁴³⁶ Sidney A. Aronson, 'Bell's Electrical Toy: What's the use? The Sociology of Early Telephone Usage', in *The Social Impact of the Telephone*, ed. by Ithiel de Sola Pool (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1977), pp. 15-39(p. 30).

Raffles or the GOH, they could expect electrical lightning, electric elevators, telephones, and, essential in the tropics, fans for cooling.⁴³⁷

After all, hotels were for tourists far more than places to stay overnight. The hotels had changed their character since they were built during the mid nineteenth century, becoming replicates of the domestic spaces of the bungalow, just on a larger scale. Together with the club and the department store, hotels were public arenas in the colonial setting, where a ‘civilized’, that is Western and modern, lifestyle was performed. Socially and physically open, and usually located at central places of the city, the hotels were much frequented public meeting points.⁴³⁸ That role of the hotels was further underscored by their public telephones, the call boxes, which could be used (and occasionally abused), by any visitor to the hotel at no extra cost. The booths complemented the ballrooms, bars and saloons of the hotels that made them communication hubs of the public sphere. The GOH’s call office was amongst the five busiest on the island during the 1920s and ‘30s (see Appendix VI: Table 5). More generally, the intensive utilization of the telephone booths in hotels indicates that they constituted an important way for those members of the public who could not afford a subscription to satisfy their demand for communication and calling.⁴³⁹

The Club

The garden city in the south of Colombo was the preferred residential area of the city’s upper and middle classes as well as a home to many of their clubs. Clubs in Colombo can be separated in two kinds of institution: the first one is the typical British Club with a sport ground of any sort, library, bar etc. And the second one was more like an association, e.g. Mount Lavinia Life Saving Club, which were dedicated to a certain cause or activity. The club was a significant social space in South Asia, the central location to negotiate and affirm national and cultural identity.⁴⁴⁰ Woolf

⁴³⁷ Tilman Frasch, ‘Tropical Coolness: Culture, comfort and consumption in Britain’s Asian Empire’, in *“Public Sphere in Colonial Southeast Asia”*, Lancaster University, January 2013, *Ferguson’s Ceylon Directory*, 1905-06, p. IV, 1912, p.XXXII, 1914, p.XXX, Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, p. 452, 466.

⁴³⁸ Jones, *Interiors of Empire*, p. 171sp.

⁴³⁹ *The Ceylon Observer*, 13 July 1935, p. 6, 8.

⁴⁴⁰ Jones, *Interiors of Empire*, p. 188.

has comprehensively captured the sentiments of the administrators in the service of the Empire; 'we were, of course, 'displaced persons'. ...we had the psychology of people whose lives had suddenly been torn up by the roots, and in a foreign country, had therefore become unreal, artificial, temporary, and alien. We all pretended to be tougher, more British, more homesick than we really were, yet there was a pinch of truth and reality in all our posturing.'⁴⁴¹ The club gave the British an opportunity to be amongst themselves by excluding unwanted persons through admission and membership rules. The club's interior equipment mixed local with British styles and yet gave the feeling of being at 'home'. The 'club' symbolized the 'centre of British imperialism'.⁴⁴² Those excluded from the top clubs – which usually referred to the indigenous elites without exception – were forced to found their own clubs. Over time, also mixed Club began to exist and thus the South of Colombo became home to many clubs. The other sort of club was more like an association which were dedicated to a certain cause or activity. In the hierarchy of the clubs, a telephone connection became a crucial asset to confirm status, and many upper-class clubs such as the Colombo Club, the Colombo Lawn Tennis Club, the Colombo Golf Club or the Ladies Golf Club, had a connection of their own.⁴⁴³

There was a significant difference between the clubs in Colombo, or other towns, and the planters' clubs in the planting districts. The clubs in the city were meant for everyday usage; it was no problem to drop by and spend a few hours at the club and then go home. The planters' clubs (see for example later mentioned Kelani Valley Club) on the contrary were meeting spots for the weekend. After the work was done on Friday, the planters would go there and stay until Sunday due to the already mentioned distances and travel speed. The planters' clubs were more or less an 'escape' from the estate.

⁴⁴¹ Woolf, *An Autobiography*, p. 158sp.

⁴⁴² *Ibid*, p.219, Jones, *Interiors of Empire*, p. 171sp.

⁴⁴³ *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 79.

Department Store

The department stores were important landmarks in the colonial city: Cargill's was situated right in the Fort, York Street, near the GOH.⁴⁴⁴

Image 10: Othman's Department Store:

LET OTHMAN'S CHRISTMAS

The variety of designs and the tastefulness of colours of OUR fancy Chocolate Caskets will never fail to arise kindly memories of the giver.

AT CHRISTMAS TIME WHEN YOU HAVE SO MANY YOUNG FOLK TO REMEMBER, THE WONDERFUL RANGE OF OUR GIFT BASKETS WILL HELP YOU TO SOLVE YOUR PROBLEM. THERE ARE NEARLY 100 DIFFERENT BASKETS TO CHOOSE FROM—SOME THAT WILL SEND THE WEE TOTS INTO ROSTAGES AND SOME REALLY BEAUTIFUL GEMS, KETS FOR THE OLDER FOLK.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS IN THIS PAGE ARE ONLY A HUNDRETH PART OF OUR STOCK AND IF YOU FAIL TO SEE WHAT YOU REQUIRE PLEASE WRITE AND ASK ABOUT IT. OR VISIT OUR ESTABLISHMENT, AS WE ARE IN A POSITION WITH OUR VAST STOCK OF CHOCOLATE BOXES TO FULFIL ANY REQUIREMENT.

At Prices Ranging from Re. 1.00 to Rs. 17.00 each

Telephone Your Orders—No. 1364.

OTHMAN
The Pettah Leading Grocer.

SOLVE YOUR PROBLEM GIFTS

THERE IS NO TABLE DULLY DECORATED WITHOUT

X'MAS BON-BONS

OUR FINEST ASSORTMENTS OF BON-BONS AND ARTISTIC CRACKERS AT LOWEST PRICES WILL MEET YOUR SATISFACTION.

Fireworks Boxes

A very fine position for Children's Parties and will even keep the grown-ups constantly amused.

A very large selection of series of fascinating and quite luminous fireworks packed in each box.

Its realistic noise will thrill every youngster that sees and hears. Surely it is a source of great amusement for the little tots.

LARGE BOX
Cents 60 each

JUST ARRIVED IN TIME

From The World's Renowned Gardens:

- TURBAN DATES
- TURBAN DESSERT EGGS
- CANTONIA SOFT SHELL ALMONDS
- TURBAN BRAND SELECTED LADY'S BRAZIL NUTS
- TURBAN BRAND CALIFORNIAN WALNUTS
- TURBAN BRAND NEW CROP JORDAN ALMONDS
- TURBAN BRAND NEW CROP VALENCIA ALMONDS
- FRENCH CHOCOLATED & COBBLERS

P. O. Box 298, Colombo.

Source: *The Times of Ceylon*, 21 December 1936, p. 8.

The department stores in colonial Sri Lanka offered a range of Western luxury consumption goods: wines and spirits, perfume, western clothes, soap etc. An important part of the goods was Western food: apples, chocolate or frozen meat. Accordingly the prices for such consumption goods were relatively high and only achievable for the colonial elite. For the British community buying such commodities was a way to fight homesickness but also to distinguish themselves

⁴⁴⁴ The first Cargill's Department store was founded 1844 in Kandy which later also had a telephone connection. When Colombo became the port of call in Sri Lanka the firm opened a store in Colombo. Cargill's was the prominent and most prestigious department store in Colombo but there were also others like Othman (Pettah). For this paragraph Cargill's will be taken as example. Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, p. 457, *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 174.

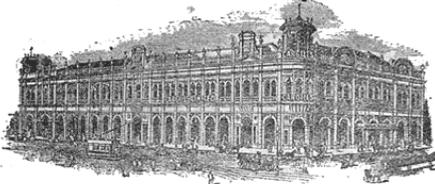
Image 11: Cargills Department Store:

Advertisements.

CARGILLS LTD
(ESTABLISHED 1844.)

—◆—

**THE LONGEST ESTABLISHED AND THE LARGEST
GENERAL STORE IN CEYLON.**



THE SHOPPING CENTRE OF THE ISLAND.

—◆—

OVER THIRTY DEPARTMENTS UNDER ONE ROOF.

You can get **EVERYTHING** you require at **CARGILLS** whether you are a resident or a visitor.

A visit to our spacious Showrooms will show you the extent and variety of our stocks and an examination of our goods will convince you of the quality and the value we offer.

We are here to serve you as we have served the public of Ceylon for 76 years, during which we have earned and maintained an unrivalled reputation for quality, value, service and progress and integrity.

Telephone : No. 800 (four lines), (sub-exchange).
Telegrams : "CARGILLS."

BRANCHES AT: CINNAMON GARDENS,
Kandy & Nuwara Eliya.

Source: *Ferguson' Ceylon Directory*, 1920-21, advertisements.

from the indigenous elites.⁴⁴⁵ For the indigenous elite consumption was, as will be argued in detail in the following paragraph, an important part of the adaption of a Western lifestyle: 'In dealing with the materialistic side of Eastern life, it is at least possible to show how the East has been *outwardly* affected by Western civilization...standard of comfort...has undergone a very great change in recent

⁴⁴⁵ Catherine Hall, 'Ruinous Ghost of Empire Past', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 8 March (1996) <<https://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/the-ruinous-ghost-of-empire-past/92671.article>> [accessed 2 May 2015].

years.⁴⁴⁶ Consumption was furthermore becoming a way of levelling the playing field with the colonial masters and the first step in challenging the colonial rule.⁴⁴⁷ Thus for the colonial society foodstuff was becoming an important element in building prestige and emphasizing difference.⁴⁴⁸

Just like the hotels, the department stores tried to be up-to-date by providing highest Western standards. This included a telephone connection, used mainly to offer their usually well-off customers the opportunity to make enquiries or submit orders for deliveries.⁴⁴⁹ Staff from the department stores would in turn use the phone to stay in contact with importers or the port authorities regarding goods and deliveries. The stores were thus part of a much larger communication system that linked businesses and companies across the city and offered customers an alternative option to use their services (see Image 12, 13). Most companies offering modern Western products or services, e.g. New Colombo Ice Co., Ltd., Apollo Motor Touring, Borella Stores (wine merchants) or Colombo Taxi-Cab Co. (Galle Face garage), could hardly afford (and would not miss) the opportunity to have a telephone installed in their premises.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁶ Denham, *Ceylon at the Census*, p. 157.

⁴⁴⁷ Michael Roberts, 'The two Faces of the Port City: Colombo in modern Times', in *Brides of the Sea. Port cities of Asia from 16th-20th Centuries*, ed. by Frank Broeze (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), pp. 173-187(p. 182sp).

⁴⁴⁸ Jones, *Interiors of Empire*, p. 148, 204, E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies. The Physical Experience of the Raj, c.1800-1947* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), p. 156sp. Due to the steamship and cooling technologies the transport and sale of Western foodstuffs such as apples or chocolate, became possible. Frasch, *Tropical Coolness*. Another important aspect was that wearing Western-style clothes provided access to jobs and social status. Thus the sewing machine is also a technology of great interest. Denham, *Ceylon at the Census*, p. 168sp, Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern*, Jean Gelman Taylor, 'The Sewing-machine in Colonial-Era Photographs: A Record from Dutch Indonesia', *Modern South Asian Studies, Everyday Technologies in South and Southeast Asia*, Vol.46, 1(2012), 71-95.

⁴⁴⁹ Aronson, 'Bell's Electrical Toy', p. 31.

⁴⁵⁰ Also many managers of such firms or companies also had a telephone connection, e.g. John Beattie, assistant Manager New Colombo Ice and H.S. Mackenzie, Manager Ceylon Ice & Cold Storage. *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 264, 31, 53, 50,230, 46.

Image 12: Advertisement for Elephant:

THE WHO MAN FORGOT
to order the Elephant

STRANGE that on the very evening a man runs out of ELEPHANT BRAND, he straightway develops the thirst of ten men. . . . And so to bed, to dream that while he is looking for the elephant on the bottle, that enraged animal comes prancing over the counterpane. . . . Morning at last. Where's that telephone? "Two-four-double-whiskey. NO—two-four-double-six, please. Hello! HELLO! For the love of the thirsty, send out another case of ELEPHANT BRAND!"

ELEPHANT
BRAND
MINERAL WATERS
NEW COLOMBO
Made only by
ICE CO. LTD.
Telephone Nos 2466/2467
Cable Nos THE ELEPHANT
Telegrams Zero Colombo
and THE BOTTLE

Source: *The Times of Ceylon*, 11 April 1928, p. 12.

Image 13: Announcement:

WRITE OR TELEPHONE

TO THE GAS COMPANY
ABOUT COOKING & HOT WATER
APPLIANCES
AND.....

**GET UP TO DATE
WITH
GAS**

GAS is by far the easiest, quickest and most reliable fuel for cooking, hot water, and other processes requiring instant heat at lowest prices....

You do know where you are with Gas; definite rates and hires.

No intricate calculations are required as per electricity such as two-part tariffs, fixed charge rates, watts, kilowatts and "fuel cost clause"...etc.

"GAS—TO BE SURE!"

Monthly Hire Rates :-

Cookers	Rs. 1/-
Geysers	Rs. 1/-
Califons	Rs. 2/-
Low Gas	
Rate	
Rs. 3/- per 1,000 cubic feet	

COLOMBO
GAS & WATER CO., LTD.

Phones:
402
493
4238

Source: *The Times of Ceylon*, 13 November, 1936, p. 15.

Consumption and the telephone

The telephone was used for 'organizing' the consumption, which played an important role in the national awakening but it was also a commodity. The beginning rule of the British colonialism, as we have seen, overturned the economic structure on the island and redefined the rules of the game. The conquest of the Kandyan Highlands brought the whole island under uniform administration, which created new economic opportunities. The Colebrook-Cameron Reforms were accompanied by spatial transformations of the island's physical landscape. In the Highlands, fallow land and jungle tracts were turned into economically viable plantations, while the former separation of the distinction between coast and highlands was overcome by way of new infrastructure such as roads and railways. The Maritime Provinces in turn became connected to the international transport networks.

These colonial transformations and the new opportunities they created led to the emergence of a colonial bourgeoisie. It consisted of members of all indigenous ethnic and religious groups, many of whom had a low-caste background – they were nobodies who became somebodies. The radical changes in the economic structure throughout the nineteenth century brought about social mobility, sometimes in the form of radical changes of the class and caste system.⁴⁵¹ By the middle of the nineteenth century, a colonial elite was emerging consisting of three groups: European planters and traders, the old somebodies of the traditional, often Kandy-based landholding elites⁴⁵² and the new somebodies, the people who profited from

⁴⁵¹ The dominance of the *goyigama* caste was challenged by members of the KSD castes which started as paddy and arrack renters had made small profits which now enabled them to buy land and enter the plantation business. The newly emerged elite of the KSD castes started to challenge the *goyigama* elite and challenged their established position. But also members of the *goyigama* caste who were *nobodies* became *somebodies* and thus challenged the established somebodies of their own caste. For more details see Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation*.

⁴⁵² The old somebodies were composed of two groups: the *mudaliyars* and the *radala*. The *mudaliyars* were the chief headmen and in the beginning of the British colonial rule they were, like for the Portuguese and Dutch before, important for the administrative running of the colony and formed the native department. On the contrary to the Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule which relied heavily on the traditional indigenous machinery of administration the British began to establish the CCS (Ceylon Civil Service). Typically the higher echelons of the bureaucracy were filled with British servants and thus the *mudaliyars* administrative services were taken over by the CCS. Despite losing administrative duties they remained important for the colonial state.

the collaboration with the colonial state. These three groups began to form the indigenous colonial elite, from whose ranks later the political leaders also emerged.⁴⁵³

The telephone as a 'social' agent

The adoption of a western lifestyle was of great importance for the indigenous members of the colonial elite; especially the new somebodies. Making profits and getting rich was all nice and good but in a certain way also meaningless, as it did not necessarily gain them recognition by members of the old elite. If a 'nobody' wanted to become accepted as a 'somebody', he needed to adopt a western lifestyle, acquire their status symbols and interact with the colonial rulers.⁴⁵⁴ As Thorstein Veblen and later Arjun Appadurai have argued, consumption is an important side of individual agency and gives a person the possibility to send a social message.⁴⁵⁵ It was therefore important for the new somebodies to display their newly acquired status and strengthen their position vis-à-vis the 'old somebodies' by way of such symbols. A telling example for this display of symbols by the new somebodies were their clothing habits and housing preferences. The first generation of social climbers wore a 'fusion style' combining Western and Eastern elements: a shirt, starched collar, waistcoat, and a tweed sarong over trousers. The next generation gradually abandoned this mixed style and copied the full Western dress found among Englishmen and Europeans.⁴⁵⁶ Moreover, they began to live in houses which copied the style of the British gentry in design and furnishing and which were located in the

The mudaliyars were recruited from the ranks of the Low Country goyigama caste, the most familiar example is the Bandaranaike family, and often a family member was appointed as successor for an incumbent. Especially the reinforcement of rajakariya and the right to own land gave them a well-established position at the beginning of the nineteenth century and accordingly many mudaliyars were plantation owners. They were the elite of the goyigama caste. The radala, opposed the British until the 1860 by being the leaders of a 'traditional' nationalism which by then lost its force. The new economic possibilities remained unused by the radala and they, like some other Kandyan Singhalese, began to get involved in the twentieth century. Due to the fact that they owned land they were still able to make a good profit with the expanding Plantation District. Peebles, *Social Change*, p. 4sp, 15, 42, 48, 57sp, 69, de Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, p. 327sp, Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation*, p. 102, 153.

⁴⁵³ Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 302sp.

⁴⁵⁴ Peebles, *Social Change*, p.15, Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation*, p. 153.

⁴⁵⁵ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value', in *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 31.

⁴⁵⁶ Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 258sp.

more prestigious quarters of Colombo, e.g. Cinnamon Gardens or Bambalipitiya. Not last, they founded or joined civic societies, notably those in which one could prove oneself in sport, e.g. cricket or racing clubs, the latter also including the ownership of racehorses.⁴⁵⁷

English education was another key to achieve this goal. In the middle of the nineteenth century, many members of the Sinhalese elite began to send their children to boarding schools in England or to the few prestigious schools in Sri Lanka, e.g. the St. Thomas College. English-medium education also opened up new professional opportunities, enabling the educated to join the Ceylon Civil Service or pursue a career in the liberal professions.⁴⁵⁸ Virtually within two generations, the new 'somebodies' in colonial society relinquished their former habitus (to use Bourdieu's term) and internalized an entirely different one.⁴⁵⁹

The change in habitus and lifestyle was important in the second half of the nineteenth century to consolidate the new socio-economic position which became the basis for the strife for political influence in the beginning twentieth century. This habitus was important for the new and old somebodies to gain favours with the colonial power.⁴⁶⁰ The competition for awards and appointments, which was especially by the Sinhalese regarded as the 'official' acknowledgment of status, to no surprise attracted fierce competition.⁴⁶¹ With the beginning of demand for more political participation, consumption began to play a crucial role in challenging the colonial power. At the turn of the century, it was not feasible for the indigenous elite to challenge British rule in political terms without being labelled as 'seditionists'. To avoid political repression, the challenges were concentrated in areas not charged with politics and to less serious activities. They began to own and breed racehorses or played cricket, consumed the same foreign food, had the same

⁴⁵⁷ Likewise, many residents had imposing royalty-inspired names like 'Oliver Castle' (H.J.Peiris), 'Hill Castel' (S.C. Obeyesekere), 'D'yen Court' (Bastian Fernando). Ibid, p. 260sp.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 155

⁴⁵⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Die feinen Unterschiede. Kritik der gesellschaftlichen Urteilskraft* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1982), p. 279, Pierre Bourdieu, *Sozialer Sinn. Kritik der theoretischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1987), p. 162sp, Pierre Bourdieu, *Rede und Antwort* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1992), p. 84.

⁴⁶⁰ The exception was the radala which kept their traditional Sinhalese lifestyle and habitus.

⁴⁶¹ The various positions were not only relevant because of their prestige but also because they offered possibilities of patronage. Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation*, p. 143.

attire and consumerism etc. Matches between all English versus all Sri Lankan cricket teams were common from 1910, with the Sri Lankan teams often winning.⁴⁶² Thus the indigenous colonial elite shored up their self-respect and began to level the playing field.⁴⁶³ And of course religion provided another area where 'native' belief could be combined with modern religiosity to counter Christian missionary activity apparently sponsored (or at least encouraged) by the colonial state.

The introduction of new technologies also enabled new forms of consumption in the colonies. Race horse or sports like cricket and polo were the 'classical' markers for belonging to the upper class. New technologies like the automobile and telephone were luxury goods in colonial times as well as a commodity with the label 'modern Western lifestyle – must have'. George Akerlof and Robert Schiller point out that capitalism not only offers things that a human being needs but that it mostly offers commodities that human beings believe that they need.⁴⁶⁴ The telephone was one of the commodities which played a role in this first step of awakening nationalism and challenging of the colonial power through displaying it in the public arena.

2.2.3. Colombo's subscribers

Unfortunately, it turned out to be almost impossible to find out details of early subscribers to the telephone, as no phone book or similar list seems to have survived. What comes closest to such a manual are the lists of addresses in *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, which gives phone numbers for one of the first times in

⁴⁶² Michael Roberts, 'The Ceylonese Origin of Lankan Cricket', *Himal*, July (2007) <<http://old.himalmag.com/component/content/article/1267-the-ceylonese-origins-of-lankan-cricket.html>> [accessed 12 May 2015].

⁴⁶² Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 155.

⁴⁶³ Consumption also had its impact on the social structure. The emergence of a previously non-existing middle class was also partly due to the colonial transformation processes but also to new consumption patterns. See for example Sanjay Joshi, *Fractured Modernity. Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴⁶⁴ George A. Akerlof and Robert J. Schiller, *Animal Spirits. How Human psychology drives the Economy, and why it matters for Global Capitalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

1924.⁴⁶⁵ Listing 'important people', businesses and institutions of the island, this list can be regarded as a partial telephone book.

The volume of 1924 is in several ways relevant for this work. The Sri Lankan economy, especially the tea and rubber industry, was recovering from the post-war depression. With the improvement of the economic situation and the increasing availability of material kept in short supply during the war, the telephone network could begin to expand again, and the number of subscribers began to rise steadily.

To validate that argument, we need to look first at the political and cultural developments which formed the context in which the telephone was used and could make an impact. As life in the post-war period returned to normal, the war proved to be a catalyst for independence movements in many colonies. These movements were often fuelled by promises for greater political participation, given by the British Government to mobilize support for their war efforts in the colonies. In Ceylon, as in other colonies, various socio-political organizations were founded, initially on the basis of economic interest, to unite the indigenous elites and articulate their political demands and expectations. The CNC was founded in 1919 as an institution to organise the representation of the indigenous elites in the newly created Legislative Council.⁴⁶⁶ The fight for the political representation and particularly the seats in the Legislative Council began to heat up. Also the beginning of the 1920s witnessed the foundation CNC and its failure as an attempt to create a congress party like in India. Also the colonial rule began to be challenged and the first steps towards independence were done. The telephone subscribers were involved in many of these crucial and social processes.

Identifying the subscribers

The first question at hand is if anyone of the groups was using the telephone far more than any other. Based on the data from *Fergusons Ceylon Directory for 1924* it is obvious that the members of all groups had telephone connections: Sinhalese,

⁴⁶⁵The directory for 1922 was the first one to list telephone numbers as an additional information in this section.

⁴⁶⁶ Thomas Prinz, *Die Geschichte der United National Party in Sri Lanka* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1990), p. 24sq (Prinz portrays the formation and ideological foundations of the United National Party and its predecessor, the CNC).

Ceylon Tamils, Moors, Europeans, Burghers and Indian Merchants (Indian Tamils and Muslims). According to the data available, most telephone subscribers were Europeans and Sinhalese. But this has to be taken with a pinch of salt due to the fact that *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory* had a clear cut target group: the planting community and associated businesses. The criteria for the composition of the list could be biased and thus the list cannot be regarded as representative. It is still possible that the list truly reflects the proportion of subscribers from various ethnic/social groups, but more likely the biased view distorts the proportions and gives more space to European and Sinhalese subscribers, who form the overwhelming majority of names.⁴⁶⁷ As a control group the directory of 1936 was used and the above mentioned trends had not changed, only the number of subscriber had gone up.⁴⁶⁸

The data for the European and Sinhalese subscribers available from *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory for 1924* allows us to draw a picture of the telephone users as a group and examine the role the telephone may have played within society. For this examination of the following section will focus on the Sinhalese subscribers because it is of far greater interest in a colonial setting how an indigenous group adapted to and used new technologies, such as the telephone.

Government

The government departments in the Fort area of Colombo were naturally among the first subscribers.⁴⁶⁹ With the evolution of the telephone system, government departments and key officials were connected to the network, e.g. the Governor and the Government Agents in the various provinces.⁴⁷⁰ Along with these, the military garrisons, fire brigades and the police stations were preferentially included

⁴⁶⁷ Population according to ethnic groups (census 1921): Sinhalese 67.5%, Ceylon Tamils 11.5%, Indian Tamils 13.4%, Ceylon Moors 5.6%, Indian Moors 0.73%, Burghers 0.65%, Malays 0.3%, Others 0.77%. Accordingly the European group was quite overrepresented as subscribers.

⁴⁶⁸ See *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1936, Part II, General Directory of Addresses.

⁴⁶⁹ PF 1088, Letter PMG to Colonial Secretary, 27 February 1905. Some Departments, e.g. Postal as well as Public Works and Survey Department were also running small exchanges within the department building. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1929, Part II, C3, 1930, Part II, C7/8.

⁴⁷⁰ Governor Sir Henry Manning (1918-1925) is listed with three telephone connections (Queens House, Colombo; King's Pavillion, Kandy; Queen's Cottage, Nuwara Eliya). The Government Agents were: Central Province (Kandy), North-Western Province (Kurunegala), Southern Province (Galle), Western Province (Colombo). *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 163.

in the emerging network of Colombo and throughout the Island.⁴⁷¹ The departments seemingly used the telephone to quite an extent, not only for local but also for trunk line calls. In 1937-38 the government tried to establish a more 'economical way of using' the telephone, especially for trunk calls, within its departments.⁴⁷²

Moreover, government officers expected to be available at all time, for instance officers in the Revenue, Police, Medical, and Judicial Departments, were given free residential telephones. In 1935, there were 320 such connections; in a further 27 cases half the rental charges were waived.⁴⁷³ The *Ceylon Directory* of 1924 lists officials of various levels and positions, who obviously owned a phone due to their position. These include for instance Sir Anton Bertram, the Chief Justice of Ceylon, and Miss Cathrine E. Anderson, Medical Officer-in-Charge at the Lucky Havelock Hospital for Women and Lady Ridgeway Memorial Hospital). Another very small group, which can be counted in the 'official' network were the foreign consuls.⁴⁷⁴ As the list shows, a few indigenous office holders had also been awarded private connections, such as Durand V. Altendorff, the Superintendent of Police Headquarters at Maradana. Altenhoff's position in civic society – he was Honorary Secretary of the Dutch Burgher Union – indicates the potential of the telephone in organising the public sphere.⁴⁷⁵

Fighting crime

The Police Force was not only connected to the telephone network but it also established their own separate exchange system in 1896,⁴⁷⁶ which enabled the officers at the headquarters to communicate with the police stations throughout Colombo.⁴⁷⁷ Similar to Great Britain, burglaries were drastically increasing in

⁴⁷¹ E.g. the Mahara Jail in Ragama (suburb of Colombo). *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 233.

⁴⁷² *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1938, Part II, E4.

⁴⁷³ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1935, Part II, E7.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 11sp.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 24, 29, 46.

⁴⁷⁶ The Police also hired their own telephone operator for these exchanges, (see Tab X). The Fire Brigade was also connected to the telephone network from early on. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1896, Part IV, B6.

⁴⁷⁷ The telephone very fast became a useful tool for the police to coordinate their action. In 1929, a serious riot broke out in Maradana, which took place right opposite the Police Headquarters. The

Colombo in the mid-1920s. 'Burglary constitutes almost one-fourth of the total serious crime in the Island. The offences are usually committed on dark nights so that eye-witnesses are seldom available.'⁴⁷⁸ Frequent reports in the newspapers and the increase of advertisements for insurance against burglary (see Image 14) indicate both that the number of crimes was increasing and that the public was concerned about it.

Victims would use the telephone to inform the police but despite the quick communication the policemen could not always get to the crime scene in time to catch the burglar, who made his/her escape over a back wall. There are other such stories of the telephone being used to inform the police without contributing to fight crime effectively. One article described the experience of a victim of a burglary who caught a burglar fishing through the window of his bungalow in Slave Island and managed to tie him up. Phoning up the Fort Police Station, he was informed that his residence did not fall into their area of responsibility. A similar incident happened with the Cinnamon Garden Police, and in another case the Slave Island Police did not respond to a call at all. Eventually, the Superintendent of Police ordered one officer at the Headquarters to be on duty from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., while someone reporting an incident would only have to ask the operator for "Police" to get immediately connected to the officer on duty. A commentator in a Colombo newspaper speculated that now "'Police" will have the same magic effect as the words "Fire Brigade" have always had.'⁴⁷⁹

But the telephone was not only used to fight crime but was also used as an instrument of crime. There are several cases where criminals used the anonymity of public phones to make fake calls and scam people, e.g. to have goods delivered without paying for them.⁴⁸⁰ The telephone directory itself was also presented as

officer in charge, Capt. Wright, used the telephone to coordinate with the fire engines and the Magistrate. *The Ceylon Daily News*, 7 February 1929, p. 1.

⁴⁷⁸ Besides Colombo, the Northern provinces were also a hotspot in that regard. *The Ceylon Observer*, 1 August 1928, p. 5.

⁴⁷⁹ The new arrangement also safeguarded that the officer answering the call would speak English. *The Ceylon Observer*, 15 September 1928, p. 6.

⁴⁸⁰ See e.g. *The Ceylon Daily News*, 20 November 1922, p. 1.

evidence in court, e.g. in the cases where medical practitioners called themselves 'Doctor' without actually holding the degree.⁴⁸¹

As the telephone gradually became a tool for the police during the late 1920s, the telephone installations themselves regularly became the target of crime by way of

Image 14: Advertisement of an insurance company 1928:

Burglary

If you cannot prevent it the next best thing is to be protected against the losses arising from it.

There is a certain and definite way of accomplishing this:

INSURE
with
THE LIVERPOOL AND LONDON AND GLOBE INSURANCE CO., LTD.

The { **HOUSEBREAKING**
BURGLARY
THEFT policies issued by this Company include collusion and theft by servants in the employ of the insured, a most desirable and necessary protection.

As Agents for the above Company our expert knowledge and advice is entirely at your service—An enquiry carries with it no obligation on your part and is welcomed by us.

SKRINE & Co.,
Agents

There is one fundamental truth about **GLOBE INSURANCE!**

The premium is so small

You cannot afford to be without it.

Our Burglary Policies can, if desired (at a small additional premium), be extended to include the risks of Loss or Damage occasioned by Fire and Lightning.

CALL, WRITE OR 'PHONE AND WE WILL HOLD YOU COVERED FROM THAT MOMENT IF YOU SO DESIRE.

Source: *The Times of Ceylon*, 17 April 1928, p. 10.

⁴⁸¹ See e.g. *The Ceylon Daily News*, 9 January 1929, p. 1.

theft of wire. The *Administration Report* of 1929 stated that ‘the epidemic of thefts of standing copper wire referred to in last year’s report has unfortunately continued at an increasing rate during the last year.’ 115 cases were reported; and as the thieves seemingly had insiders’ knowledge of the department’s circuit, an organized gang may have been at work, probably operating with the help of information provided by employees or ex-employees of the department.⁴⁸²

Newspapers and schools

Newspapers and schools were leading agents of the public sphere. The indigenous elite send their children either to England or to the few elite schools on the island, mainly situated in Colombo. Here the future participants of the public sphere were educated. The role and importance of newspaper for the public discourse has already been mentioned; the newspapers during colonial times were founded by members of the colonial elite.

As leading promoters of modernity and constituents of the public sphere, schools and colleges as much as the island’s leading papers acquired telephone connections during the early post-war years. The motivation of the publishers and their editors seems obvious: The speed of the information flow mattered to them probably more than to anyone else, and the telephone provided exactly that. Accordingly, all important newspapers on the island (most of them were Colombo-based) had a telephone connection by 1924: *The Ceylon Daily News*, *The Ceylon Examiner*, *The Ceylon Morning Leader*, *The Ceylon Independent*, *The Ceylon Observer*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Times of Ceylon*, *Sinhala Jatiya*. It seems that the majority of the newspapers which had a telephone connection were published in English language.⁴⁸³ The *Ferguson’s Ceylon Directory* regularly holds a list with newspapers

⁴⁸² *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1929, Part II, C10. For other examples, see e.g. *The Times of Ceylon*, 18 January 1932, p. 5 or *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1937, Part II, E16. The following anecdote is not relevant but it shows that the telephone was not always ‘appreciated’ by the police: in 1932 Constable U.A. Weerasinghe took charge of the station in Bandarawela at 10 p.m. After drinking freely he locked up the other peons and tried to communicate by telephone with the Superintendent of Police, Astley Roberts, but he failed. In his rage, he destroyed the telephone by shooting at it. *The Ceylon Observer*, 6 September 1932, p. 2.

⁴⁸³ Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, p. 301sp, see e.g. *Ferguson’s Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 68sp.

and periodicals which includes English and Vernacular newspapers.⁴⁸⁴ But in the List of Addresses in the directory of 1924 Vernacular newspapers are under-represented and only a few are mentioned, e.g. *Sinhala Jatiya* and *Dinamina*. In the later versions, the newspapers are removed from the list of Addresses.

Educational institutions are less well represented in the Directory, but some of the colleges and their teachers had telephone connections, e.g. Rev. Claude Marie, the Director of the St. Benedict's College in Kotahena.⁴⁸⁵ Of course, the most prestigious of them all, St. Thomas College at Mount Lavinia, did have a telephone connection. Since its foundation in 1851, the college had been was the breeding ground for the colonial elite and upper middle-class, both English and indigenous. A degree (and the connections coming along with it) from St. Thomas College was the ticket to enter the upper echelons of the colonial society and accordingly, the members of the new colonial bourgeoisie were eager to send their children there.⁴⁸⁶

Sinhalese subscribers

Taking a look at the Sinhalese subscribers, it is striking that amongst them are not only some of the prominent leaders of the Sinhalese community and influential political figures, like Sir Solomon Dias Bandaranaike and Don Stephen Senanayake,⁴⁸⁷ but also members of all major elite families, e.g. de Mel, Mendis, Pieris, de Soya, etc. The examples listed below not only demonstrate that the island's indigenous elites were keen to add the telephone to their paraphernalia of modernity, but also indicate a potential communication network of the Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalist movement.

- Sir Henry Lawson de Mel.: he was the president of the YMCA and received a CBE for his support of the war efforts. He was a member of the Low-Country Product Association (founded 1908), an organization founded by indigenous planters to represent their economic interests. Members of the association

⁴⁸⁴ See *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, p. 619sp, and 1936, p. 1139sp.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 76.

⁴⁸⁶ Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation*, p. 231.

⁴⁸⁷ Interestingly the telephone connection in Colombo was registered for his wife and the one in Nuwara Eliya was under his own name, *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 41, 334.

were from the karava, goyigama, durava and navandama castes. The Association was one of a few similar ones (e.g. Chilaw Association, Plumbago Merchant's Union), which also served as bases for the fight for political representation and franchise. De Mel was a member of the Legislative Council (in 1921-24 and 1925-30) and sat on the Executive Council of the CNC in 1931.⁴⁸⁸

- A.J.R. de Soya: he owned a Coconut estates and had addresses with telephone connections both in Colombo (Cinnamon Gardens) and Nuwara Eliya. He was elected to the Legislative Council in 1917.⁴⁸⁹
- N. S. Fernando: a Sinhalese merchant in the import-export trade, he had begun with trading curry stuffs on a small scale and was the first 'native to introduce paper on the island'. A staunch supporter of the Sinhala Buddhist movement, he only employed Buddhists in his shop, which was located in the Pettah area. In 1885, he began to publish the journal *Velanda Mithraya* (Merchant's Friend). In his self-description for Wright's portrait of the island's mighty and famous, he claimed that he 'was ... articulating the needs of a section of the rising local merchants and capitalists who felt aggrieved at the decline of their religion and language and tried to assert their identity through religious and cultural revival.' He also participated in the 1915 riots.⁴⁹⁰

Mrs Mallika Hewavitarne: she was the daughter of Andiris Perera Dharmagunawardena, a rich merchant, supporter of the Buddhist revival movement and president of the Buddhist Theosophic Society, the wife of Don Carolis Hewavitarne and the mother of Anagarika Dharmapala (born as Don David Hewavitarne). She was supportive of the activities of her son, making their home in Kollupitiya a hub for his activities in Sri Lanka as well as a meeting point for monks visiting Colombo. The *durava* caste, to which the

⁴⁸⁸ The office of his company in the Fort area also had a telephone connection. *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, Addresses, p.100, Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 318 and 332sp, *Documents of the Ceylon National Congress and Nationalist Politics in Ceylon, 1929-1959, Vol. I, ed. by Michael Roberts* (Colombo: Department of National Archives, 1977), p. 25.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 114, Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 145, 337, see Image 15.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 268, *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1909-10, p. xxxix, Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, p. 474.

Hewavitharnes belonged, generally formed a strong Buddhist lobby with Mallika and her father being among the strongest supporters.⁴⁹¹

Image 15: Advertisement N.S. Fernando:

Advertisements. xxxix

N. S. FERNANDO.

BUSINESS ESTABLISHED 1875.

AGENT IN CEYLON FOR

Messrs. Scott & Browne, Ltd., London; Wm. Duff & Co., London; Wiggins Teape & Co., Ltd., London; Edward Lloyd, Ltd., London; Alex. Pirie & Sons, Ltd., Aberdeenshire; The Rosmarine Manufacturing Co., Ltd., London; Muller Maclean & Co., New York, U.S.A.; F. M. Clements, Sydney; M. Nakai & Co., Kobe, Japan; Reuter Brocklemani & Co., Hongkong, etc., etc., etc.

**Wholesale Stationer, Paper Merchant,
Draper & General Commission Agent.**

SPECIALITIES:

Printing & Writing Papers.	Seth Thomas's Clocks and Time Pieces.	Woolen, Cotton and Silk Goods
Mercantile Stationery.	Soaps and Perfumery.	Millinery.
Binding Materials.	Toilet Requisites.	Fancy Articles.
Account Books.	Patent Medicines.	Umbrellas.
Letter Copying Books.	Spectacles & Sun Glasses.	Haberdashery.
Inks, etc.	etc., etc.	Waterproof Carments
Gold and Silver Watches and Chains.		Bags, Boots & Shoes, etc.

Indian Medical Drugs, Indian Curry Stuffs, Best Portland Cement, &c., &c.

Consignments Undertaken, Realized, and Promptly Remitted.

BANKERS & REFERENCES:

The Mercantile Bank of India, Ltd., London and Colombo.

Telephone No. 18.

Telegraphic Address.—“SUASARIS,”—Colombo.

Codes used :—A. B. C. (Fourth & Fifth Editions.)

All communications to be addressed to

N. S. FERNANDO,
76 & 77, Bankshall Street.

Branches: **The Pettah Cash Drapery Warehouse,**
34, MAIN STREET, COLOMBO.

Source: *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1909-10, p. xxxiv.

- ‘D.D. Pedris & Son’: D.D. Pedris was a Sinhalese merchant who had made his fortune as an owner of graphite mines, besides owning a draper store. His son, D.E. Pedris, who took over the business, was executed in 1915 for his participation in the 1915 anti-Muslim Riots.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹¹ *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p.180, <<http://archives.dailymirror.lk/2007/07/27/feat/01.asp>> [accessed 1 August 2015], Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 269.

⁴⁹² *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1914, p. xxxviii, Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 268.

- Gate Mudaliyar Tudor Rajapakse: he was a prominent landowner, though his fortune was mainly drawn from trade in arrack. Rajapaske was praised as one of the 'liberal subscribers' during the First World War, but he also used his wealth to support Buddhist institutions, gifting three and a half acres at Paranavadiya, so that Ananda College, could move from Pettah to a new site. The institution had originally been founded by Colonel H.S. Olcott in 1886 under the name 'Buddhist English School'. It was one of the four colleges managed by Buddhists.⁴⁹³
- D.C. Senanayake: he was the brother of the CNC leader and first Prime Minister after independence Don Stephan Senanayake. He participated in the temperance movement and was president of the Buddhist Theosophical Society. A political activist like his brothers, he was jailed for participating in the 1915 anti-Muslim riots. Senanayake had several telephone connections to his stores as well as to his residences 'Sirimandura' (Cinnamon Gardens) and 'Sena Nevasa' (Nuwara Eliya). Moreover, he was a major plantation owner, his Sirisena Group being the largest Sri Lankan-owned estate in the Kelani Valley with 600 acres planted in tea, 100 in tea and rubber, and 512 acres in rubber.⁴⁹⁴
- S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike: he was the son of Sir Solomon Dias Bandaranaike, an old somebody and patron of the most influential clans on the island. After his study in Oxford, Bandaranaike entered politics and was elected in the State Council in 1931. He founded the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP/1951) and became Prime Minister in 1956.⁴⁹⁵
- Sir John Lionel Kotalawela: his father, a Police Inspector, married the daughter of Don Charles Gemoris Attygalle who was a new somebody from the goyigama caste and made his fortune as an entrepreneur (Coffee, Graphite mining and arrack trade). John Kotalawela become involved in

⁴⁹³ *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 305, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/060813/funday/OurHeritage.html> [accessed 1 August 2015],

Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 261, 318.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 334, Wickremeratne, 'Economic Development', p. 428sp, Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 147, 193.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1936, Men's Addresses, p. 25, James Manor, *The expedient Utopian: Bandaranaike and Ceylon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

politics in 1915: he was still in school but had to smuggle food into prison for the detained leaders, e.g. Don Stephan Senanayake and his brother F.R. He was elected in the State Council in 1931 and 1936. After his cousin Dudley Senanayake resigned as Prime Minister in 1954, he became the third Prime minister, but lost the election in 1956 versus Bandaranaike.⁴⁹⁶

British (and Europeans)

In comparison to the total population, the British and other Europeans were quite a small group, below one percent. But they were besides the Sinhalese, the largest group of telephone subscriber; this also shows that the number of white subaltern was relatively low.⁴⁹⁷ The British in Sri Lanka went by four 'well-defined classes: civil servants, army officers, planters, and businessmen.' The civil servants were normally regarded as the top dogs, but their overall number in Kandy and the mountains was rather small, planters and civil servants enjoyed almost complete social equality. 'They belonged to the same clubs, played tennis together, and occasionally intermarried.'⁴⁹⁸

The export trade with Europe was in the hands of European trading companies as well as individual merchants, who also supplied the planters with machinery and other equipment. Since the colonial economy of Sri Lanka relied heavily on exports, these merchants were of great importance. Technically, their political and economic interests were closely linked to those of the planters.⁴⁹⁹ Unsurprisingly, this link becomes visible in the form of telephone connections. Both the 1924 Directory and Wright's survey provide ample evidence for this. Besides, there were numerous other European subscribers in Colombo, with government officials, army officers, firms and their managers making up the major part. Amongst the firms with telephone connection were many tea groups, e.g. Lipton's and the Galaha Ceylon

⁴⁹⁶ *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1936, Men's addresses, p. 115. Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 194, <<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~lkawgw/gen3003.htm>> [accessed 1 August 2015].

⁴⁹⁷ The life of the white working class (or subalterns) in the East has hardly been researched, see Harald Fischer-Tine, *Low and licentious Europeans. Race, Class and "White Subalternity" in colonial India* (New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2009).

⁴⁹⁸ Woolf, *An Autobiography*, p. 138.

⁴⁹⁹ In 1854, the PAC was founded as an organization to represent the specific interest of the planters. Until then, planters and traders had cooperated in the Chamber of Commerce (founded in 1837) in their lobbying. Bandarage, *Colonialism in Sri Lanka*, p. 235.

Tea Estates and Agency, Ltd.⁵⁰⁰ Obviously, firms dealing in estate supplies and machinery operated telephones, e.g. Hutson & Co.⁵⁰¹

The Burghers and Eurasians

Although the Burgher community accounted for less than one percent of the island's population, it was an important group for the expression of the lifestyle and the formulation of the ideology of the indigenous elites.⁵⁰² Like other Eurasian groups in Asia, the Burghers were an important transmitter of and collaborator with the colonial powers, being literate in English and of Christian faith. Accordingly, Burghers from early on gained access to the upper ranks in the government service as much as to the jobs in the professions, notably health and law.⁵⁰³ However, their influence in shaping attitudes and living modernity on the island went beyond the male-dominated sphere of the work-place, as Burgher women engaged in numerous charitable and reformist associations.⁵⁰⁴ Amongst the subscriber are many Burghers with either private connection or who were connected to the network as government officials, e.g.:

- G.S. Schneider: he was a lawyer and plantation owner. He was also member of the Legislative Council.⁵⁰⁵
- V. R. Schokman: he was the President of the Burgher Recreation Club in Havelock Town.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁰ See 'Telephones in the planting districts'.

⁵⁰¹ *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 186, Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, p. 450.

⁵⁰² The Burghers were the Eurasian community in Sri Lanka and thus the offspring of marriages between Europeans and Sri Lankans. Their position changed much around the turn of the century, in response to the ongoing identity formation of the various other groups, which basically referred to the concept of purity. The foundation of the Dutch Burgher Union (1908) marked the separation of the Burghers from other Eurasians. Burgher was defined as being of Dutch or European descent on the paternal line and the definition was further linked with a catalogue of 'different shapes and sorts' which were excluded. With that definition the Burgher elite separated itself from the rest of the Eurasians. Roberts, *People in between*, p. 244sp.

⁵⁰³ A few Burghers invested in the plantation sector or other forms of land ownership. Coffee estates and the cultivation of cinnamon were amongst them. *Collective Identities, Nationalism and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka*, ed. by Michael Roberts (Colombo: Marga Institute, 1979), Ch. IV, Table 2, Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 232.

⁵⁰⁴ See Jayawardena, *Erase of the Euro-Asian*.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 331.

⁵⁰⁶ *ibid*, p. 331.

Moors and Indian Muslims

The Sri Lankan Muslims, who called themselves Moors, were traditionally involved in commerce and trading activities.⁵⁰⁷ There were also a smaller number of Indian Moors, or Coast Moors, who had migrated from South India and included several big merchants and retail traders. But Coast Moors were rather a small part within the Muslim community (12.3%) in colonial Sri Lanka.⁵⁰⁸ At the turn of the century, the distinction between these two Muslim groups began to sharpen. The Moors claimed a superior status over the Indian Muslims due to their Arab origins and their longer history on the island. But despite that forged distinction, the socio-economic profile of both Muslim groups was not too different. They often came from humble origins, shared religion, and were mainly active in all forms of commerce: export-import trade, wholesale and retail. A few of them owned estates in the Low Country, but they were exceptions within the community.⁵⁰⁹ Accordingly, the Muslim community perceived itself as a 'trading community', and their political attitude was dominated by a deep loyalty to the British colonial rulers, which put keeping the status quo over demands for reforms, however moderate.⁵¹⁰

The Muslim community in Sri Lanka is not that easy to grasp.⁵¹¹ On the one hand it is a very conservative group and the members of the elite did not adopt a Western,

⁵⁰⁷ Due to religious reason they did not get involved in the most lucrative business, the arrack trade, but they still made profits with the emergence of the plantation sector, especially the trade with peasant coffee, like the Sinne Lebbe brothers, and coconut plantations but they owned quite a low share. The gem trade (middle-men, gem-cutting establishment and retailers) was another important source of capital accumulation especially for Muslims in the South. When Colombo replaced Galle as the main port city, many Muslim gem trades moved their shops from Galle to Colombo. Besides the gem stores near Galle Face and Galle Face Court many Muslim businesses were concentrated in Pettah. Roberts, 'Elite Formation and Elites', p. 167sp, Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 221sp.

⁵⁰⁸ Michael Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation. Sri Lanka: Politic, Culture and History* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publrs, 1994), p. 160.

⁵⁰⁹ Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 221.

⁵¹⁰ In contrast to the Sinhalese and Tamils, English education did not play an important role for the Muslim community because it was not considered important for their trade. Besides English, the *lingua franca* of trade especially in Colombo was Tamil. This attitude changed at the turn of the century due to two external influences: the Aligarh Movement, which promoted English-medium education among the Muslims of India, and the exile of the former Egyptian revolt leader Orabi Pasha in Sri Lanka. Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 225sp, Vijaya Samaraweera, 'The Muslim Revivalist Movement, 1880-1915', in *Collective Identities, Nationalism and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka*, ed. by Michael Roberts (Colombo: Marga Institute, 1979), pp. 243-276(p. 243sp).

⁵¹¹ Margrit Pernau raises some interesting research questions regarding the Muslim community in Delhi during the nineteenth century Margrit Pernau, *Bürger mit Turban. Muslime in Delhi im 19.*

modern lifestyle, e.g. pictures of Muslim Patrons during colonial time show them in traditional clothing and they did not participate in the arrack trade. But they were open to new technologies such as the telephone; for them as merchants it was an important tool, whether for their shops in Fort and Pettah or to coordinate their trade activities. The Moors are Tamil speakers but for their trade activities outside Sri Lanka, Arabic was the *lingua franca* within the trading networks. They also had their own political representation and leading members of the community founded the Ceylon Muslim league in 1924, echoing the development in British India.

Amongst the Moors listed as telephone subscribers are several members of their elite, especially gem merchants, e.g. N.D.H. Abdul Gaffoor, O.L.M. Macan Marikar and Marikar Alim. Many Moor merchants and traders had telephone connections for their shops in Pettah.⁵¹² Interestingly, most of the subscriptions were for their shops which reflected their image as a trading community and only a few homes had telephone connection.

Indian Merchants and traders

Separate from the Moors, numerous Indian merchant groups were operating in Sri Lanka. The most prominent and the majority of merchants were the already mentioned Chettiars from South India. Another, but far smaller group from the Indian West Coast, were Borah and Parsi merchants, or '*Bombay merchants*' as they were called, as well as some Gujarati merchants. The Chettiars, a Hindu caste from South India, were famous (and sometimes notorious) all over the Empire for their expertise in the money lending business. Although they preferred small-scale lending to peasants and businessmen, they also lent money to planters.⁵¹³

Again, the nature of their trade seems to have forced the Bombay merchants and Chettiars to subscribe to the telephone network. In comparison to the size of their group they were quite well represented amongst the subscribers. One of the

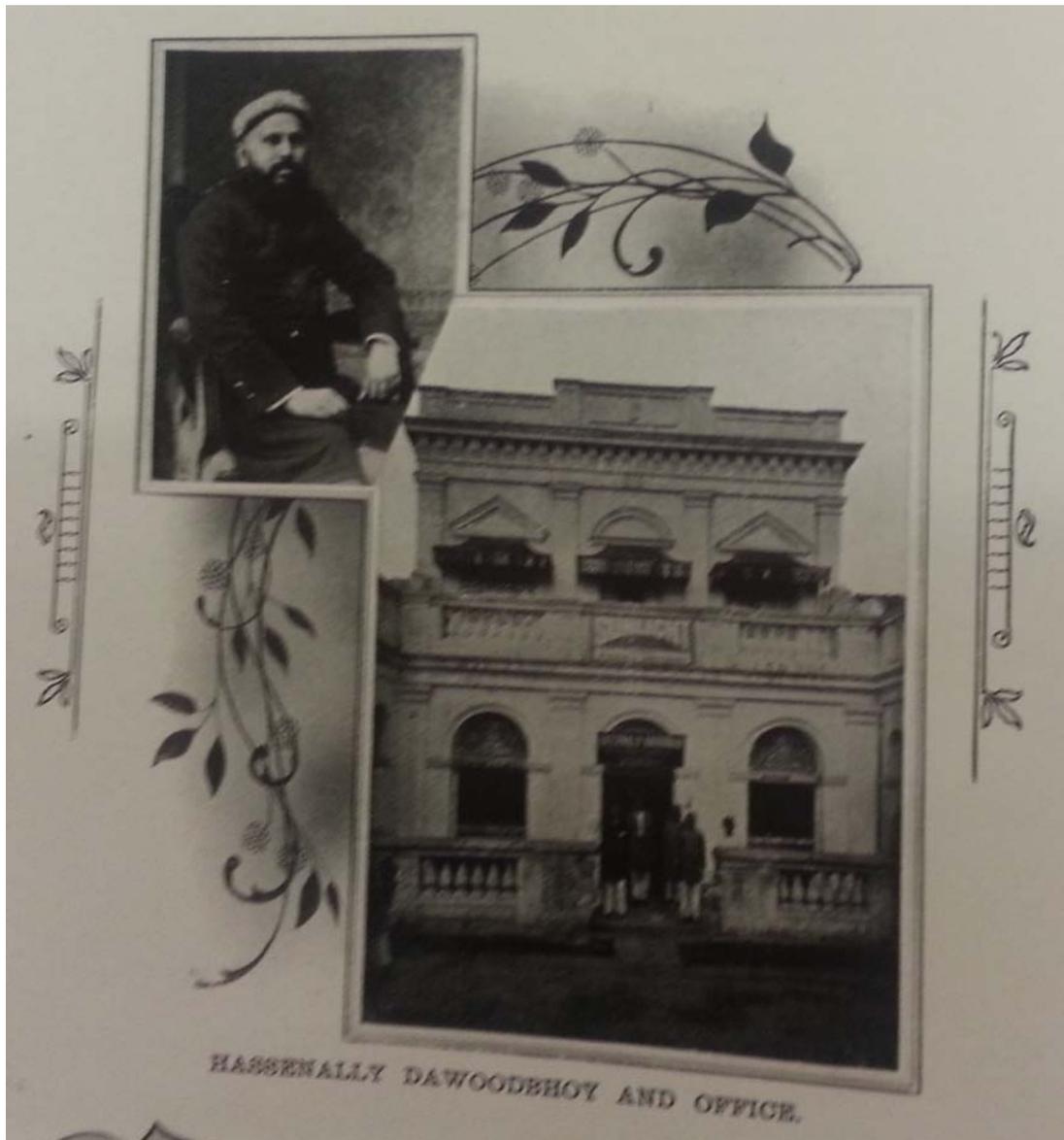
Jahrhundert (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008)(Pernau's study focuses on the social environment of Delhi's Muslims in the nineteenth century with emphasis on their adoption of a bourgeois life-style).

⁵¹² Roberts, 'Elite Formation and Elites', p. 167, *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p.13, 229 *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*,1914, p. xxxviii,

<<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~lkawgw/gen030.html>> [accessed 1 August 2015].

⁵¹³ Roberts, 'Elite Formation and Elites', p. 179, Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 144sp.

Image 16: Hassenallay Davoodbhoy:



Source: Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, p. 502.

prominent examples in the 1924 Directory is Hassenallay Davoodbhoy (see Image 16), the largest of the Borah traders from Kathiwar (India) to operate in Sri Lanka. He was a general and wholesale merchant as well as a commission agent dealing in various English and foreign commodities, though his firm (the shop was located in Pettah) specialised in importing rice to supply the plantations.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹⁴ Ibid, p. 364 sp, *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1925, p. 952, Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, p. 501.

Ceylon Tamils

The number of Ceylon Tamils amongst the subscribers seems to have been rather low compared to their size and role within colonial society. The Tamil bourgeoisie in Colombo was mainly composed of members from the Vellala families with century-old roots in northern Lanka. Ceylon Tamils made up around twelve percent of the population during colonial times, but their concentration in Colombo was relatively high because many of them worked in the administration or legal professions.⁵¹⁵ Given that high socio-economic position, one would expect more Ceylon Tamils among the listed subscribers, but interestingly even their most prominent leaders, e.g. Ponnambalam Ramanathan, seem to have been without a telephone connection.⁵¹⁶ This is hard to explain; financial reasons are unlikely, as this group was economically well established. Nor can 'cultural' reasons have played a role, as the Lanka Tamils were well-educated people with modern jobs, and after all Tamils across the Palk Straits did take to the telephone.⁵¹⁷ This is hard to explain; financial reasons are unlikely, as this group was economically well established. Nor can 'cultural' reasons have played a role, as the Lanka Tamils were well-educated people with modern jobs in the professions, and after all Tamils across the Palk Straits did take to the telephone.⁵¹⁸ Another possible explanation could be the bias of the list of addresses in *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*; accordingly it is possible that the Ceylon Tamils were regarded as not that important from the editorial staff of the directory. On the other hands, the lists hold the 'who is who' of the colony and the leading members of the Ceylon Tamils were also listed, but often without a

⁵¹⁵ After the conquest of Jaffna in 1614 the Portuguese had established a network of missionary schools. The colonial state was reluctant regard the running of schools on its own account. Finally, the American protestant missionaries began to take them over since 1813 and offered an English education. The school system was mainly used by the members of the dominant *Vellala* caste; in the following years they brought the schools under their control to secure their monopoly.

The colonial transformation processes under British rule implemented a modern administration and a new legal framework. Accordingly there were lucrative positions in the administration as well as in the liberal professions opening up. The Jaffna Tamils used the advantages stemming from their Anglicist education and filled the positions in the colonial administration or in other parts of the Empire, for example the Federated Malay States. *Jakob Rösel, Die Gestalt und Entstehung des Tamilischen Nationalismus* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1997), Steinbach, *Sprachpolitik im Britischen Empire*.

⁵¹⁶ See e.g. *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 72, 307.

⁵¹⁷ See e.g. *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 72, 307.

⁵¹⁸ S. Muthiah, 'The Telephone in Madras', *The Hindu*, 8 February (2010)

<<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-metroplus/the-telephone-in-madras/article781411.ece>> [accessed 1 August 2015].

telephone connection. It could thus be the case that the Ceylon Tamils just were not that interested to have a telephone. The reasons for that could be various: many worked in government offices or businesses where they had a telephone at hand and thus may not have regarded one for the home as necessary. In contrast to this, there were many Indian Tamils amongst the subscribers.

2.3. The telephone in the planting districts

During the interwar period, the number of rural exchanges in the planting districts was increasing fast. The telephone networks became an important communication tool on local and district level. With the ongoing extension of the trunk line system, in the 1930s, the telephone was even more used than the telegraph. To sum it up, during that phase the telephone became an important and inherent part of the everyday life on the estates.

2.3.1. Subscribers in the rural areas

With a few exceptions, rural telephone networks were all located in the planting districts and accordingly planters formed the vast majority of subscribers. As a group, these planters were hugely heterogeneous, comprising of Europeans, Burghers, Sinhalese, Ceylon Tamils, and very few Moors.⁵¹⁹ Besides planters, there were usually only a few other subscribers, mainly the government officials, whose number varied from district to district.⁵²⁰ It is impossible to assess from the available sources if any other users had subscribed to the exchange. The already mentioned case of the Kalutara PA and the Madulkelle District Telephone Network suggests that other persons such as mudaliyars or members of the commercial communities, notably Chettiar moneylenders, occasionally became interested in telephone connection. It is not possible to establish their numbers, but given the small number of subscribers to private telephone networks (see Table 7) there cannot have been very many. In terms of the socio-economic or ethno-religious

⁵¹⁹ Many coconut plantation owners were living in Colombo and let a manager run the plantation. Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation*, p. 123.

⁵²⁰ For example see Woolf's description of the life in Jaffna. Woolf, *An Autobiography*, p. 157sp.

profile of the users, there seems to have been no difference between Colombo and the towns and local networks of the planting districts.⁵²¹

2.3.2. The telephone and everyday life on an estate

The statistics of the calls made within the Kalutara District telephone network in 1931 (see Table 18), which had eleven exchanges shows several interesting features. First of all, the telephone was primarily used for inter-district calls.⁵²² The local calls per exchange are not listed in this case but the telephone was becoming part of the daily life on the plantation and was also quite extensively used for local calls. At the beginning of the 1920s, sending a telegram was far more common than the telephone to communicate between Colombo and the planting districts but by the beginning of the 1930s the telephone had caught up.

The remoteness of the estates, especially in the upcountry provinces, was a major factor in the life on an estate and it became a driving force for the introduction of new and modern transport and communication technologies, the motorcar and the telephone. The planting community needed them and had the money to afford them. Especially the telephone quickly became much more than a business tool as it helped the planting community overcome the remoteness of their estates and the social isolation it entailed.

Table 18: Summary of calls (total 102,781), made within the Kalutara PA Telephone Scheme in 1931:

	In	Out	Inter-District	Official
Telegrams	2794	4235		
Trunk calls	8573	3041	76582	1053
Police	4773	989		
Hospital	395	341		

Source: *The Times of Ceylon*, 7 March 1931, p. 4.

⁵²¹ See *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 11sp, *The Times of Ceylon*, 19 February 1930, p. 15.

⁵²² It should be kept in mind that the Kalutara PA telephone network was run by the Government since 1931 (see chapter 'telephone network'). If a private telephone system got taken over by the Government the rented junction lines were converted to free-per-call basis lines. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1938, Part II, E20.

Hot wire

The telephone was a handy business tool for the planting community and offered various opportunities. At the end of the nineteenth century, Sri Lanka's economy had become fully integrated into the world market. The rise of steamships and the opening of the Suez Canal formed the backbone of a global transport infrastructure, which helped to increase trade considerably. This required the planters to stay informed about the prices the cash crops grown on their estates would fetch on the international markets. As the main products from Lanka's plantation sector, tea, rubber and coconut oil, could be harvested and exported during the whole year, information about prices was needed permanently and swiftly. At this point, the economic importance of the telephone became apparent to everyone in the planting community. It first bridged the gap between the local post office and the estate, then between the estate and Colombo, and ultimately between the island and Europe, enabling the planters to adjust the planting and selling of the crop to the conditions of the market swiftly and on short notice.

Besides giving access to the latest market information, the telephone was a handy tool for the management of the estate. The correspondence card from the Hatton Bank to a planter (1892, see Appendix V: Image 1) is a fitting example. It contains the question if the planter would need cash to pay his coolies for the upcoming festival and if the bank should make the necessary arrangement to have the money available for him.⁵²³ Before the branch offices of the Hatton Bank in Maskeliya and Upcot had their telephones installed – which would later make such arrangements much easier – postcards or, in urgent cases, telegrams, provided the only means of communication.⁵²⁴ In the 1920s, it became customary to make business calls after 4 or 5 o'clock.⁵²⁵

⁵²³ Tilman Frasc, (2014), 'Gruß aus der Ferne: Empire, Tourismus und Bildpostkarte, ca. 1890-1930', in *'Fort von hier, nur fort von hier!' Fernweh von 1830 bis zur Gegenwart*, Fernuni Hagen, 23-25 October, 2014.

⁵²⁴ The major banks in Colombo, normally were situated in the Fort area, all had telephone connections. Some of them had also branch offices in other towns. See Appendix II: Image 3, *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 11sp.

⁵²⁵ *The Times of Ceylon*, 1 November 1924, p. 12.

The telephone was similarly advantageous to those estates that were run by managers, who acted on behalf of either absent owners (who often preferred to live in Colombo) or a tea company. The Galaha Ceylon Tea Estates and Agency, Ltd., owned several big estates besides their offices and stores in Colombo (Slave Island, Union Place). Their resident manager on the Amblamana Estate, L. Carey (see Chapter I), had one of the first rural telephone systems built there.⁵²⁶ The company or absentee planter could stay in touch with the affairs on the estate without much cost or delay.

Telephone as a life-saver

The telephone connected the planters closer with many aspects of everyday social life and culture. Being connected to the village or town enabled the planters and their families to ring up the police station or ask for medical aid in case of emergency - provided that such facilities were available. The provision of medical care was not equally good across the planting districts. At the beginning of the twentieth century, residents in remote areas found it common to send a printed form with all particulars to the DMO and then to wait until he arrived.⁵²⁷ This experience prompted a visitor to one of those remote estates to advise any young man coming out to Ceylon as a planter, to learn something of the science of medicine and the treatment of different diseases, as well as to go through an ambulance course.⁵²⁸ Providing medical care to every village was by no means a given thing, and to make matters worse, the estates were usually a few miles away from the village. A speedy communication with whatever medical facility or officer close by could be thus essential. The example of the Kotmalie PA in 1921 is just one among many. In that case, planters complained about the lack of a telephone connection with medical facilities. The members of the PA decided on that meeting to request the PMG to install a telephone connection with the dispensary, which

⁵²⁶ The Galaha Group or Litpton were typical examples for a tea company operating in Sri Lanka. They were involved in the cultivation, preparation and export of tea, besides acting as agents for several smaller tea estates and groups. Both companies had their headquarters in Colombo at Union Place, Slave Island, and had telephone connections, like several other tea groups. *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1924, List of Addresses, p. 152 and 225, Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, p. 440, 450.

⁵²⁷ Stuart, *Every Day Life*, p. 34sp.

⁵²⁸ *ibid*, p. 35.

would have enabled them to call the Medical Officer. The Honorable Secretary pointed out that recently a child's life might have been saved if the Medical Officer at the dispensary could have been called by phone instead of by sending a cooly. The child in question had been bitten by a snake and died before any medical aid had become available.⁵²⁹ The case of the Rottota Dispensary (Matale PA) highlighted this general problem of the rural areas: the PA had repeatedly requested a connection with the dispensary, and even the D.M.O. and the Provincial Surgeon in Kandy, who had been appealed to by the planters, supported the laying of the line. The problem was an 'administrative' one, as the Medical Officer did not occupy Government quarters and thus the request for a telephone connection was denied although the dispensary was just a couple of hundred yards away from the Post Office, which housed the exchange.⁵³⁰ The minutes of the PA meeting in the 1920s are full of similar requests, all of which had been dismissed by the government on various occasions.

To bridge that gap and have a chat

During the 1920s and 30s the telephone consequently became a part of the daily social life on a plantation, connecting the living world of the planter and his family to that of both their neighbours and distant friends. As already mentioned, the estates were often a few miles away from the nearest village or town as well as from the other estates. Distances became relative, as Wright observed in a warning for visitors to an estate: 'long stretches of estate roads and "near-cut" that he [planter] wants you to "walk with him", each mile of which would, for its length, put any mile in Ireland to shame.'⁵³¹ It was not only the spatial remoteness but also a social one. The planter or manager living on the estates was usually the only one of his 'class', the rest of the estate population being coolies. Apart from the social barrier, which could not be broken, language was an issue. Many planters were accompanied by their wives, whilst junior estate managers often had their sisters

⁵²⁹ *The Ceylon Observer*, 25 July 1921, p. 2. For another example see The Uva PA, *The Times of Ceylon*, 8 February 1934, p. 13.

⁵³⁰ *The Times of Ceylon*, 2 February 1931, p. 5.

⁵³¹ Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, p. 204.

with them.⁵³² The situation of these women was especially difficult as work on the estates was predominantly male work. The advertisement for 'Elephant' (see Image 17) provides a good illustration for this. The range of activities for women on an estate was quite limited, consisting of housekeeping and gardening. The next woman with the same social ranking was a few miles out, far from a 'short trip'.⁵³³

The telephone provided a way to bridge that gap and have a chat. That the telephone was keenly used for private conversations can be gleaned from several pieces of evidence. First, there are several complaints that private conversations were interrupted for trunk calls, and on the other hand it was demanded that exchanges should be open longer, up until 8 o'clock, to give the subscribers more time to use the phone. Another insight is provided by the events that followed the Great Depression when planters terminated subscriptions citing the high rentals.⁵³⁴ At that point, the remaining subscribers of the Kelani Valley network complained, in 1932, that the few telephone connections left would 'hardly serve a useful purpose'.⁵³⁵ Such concerns could hardly have been raised had the use of the telephone been restricted to business calls alone. Finally, the price policy is another indicator: private and government subscribers were offered flat rate tariffs for local calls. This development also suggests that the function of the telephone as a social tool to chat and discuss can hardly be underestimated. A similar observation has been made in other plantation areas like Indonesia or Assam in British India.⁵³⁶

⁵³² It is not possible within the scope to evaluate the proportions and there is no work done on that aspect of planting life in colonial Sri Lanka. There were also enough planters and managers who lived alone on their estates and had their wives back in Great Britain or in the city. The list of addresses in *Fergusons Ceylon Directory for 1924* shows that many women were living with their husbands on the estates.

⁵³³ Tea plucking and rubber tapping were female domains; thus the workforce on such estates consisted of many women. But aside from the issue of language, these women had quite different social status; and naturally different living worlds.

⁵³⁴ *The Times of Ceylon*, 11 February 1925, p. 7, 5 February 1930, p. 4.

⁵³⁵ *The Ceylon Observer*, 22 November 1932, weekly edition, p. 2.

⁵³⁶ Barker, 'Telephony at the Limits of State Control', p. 166sp.

Image 17: Advertisement Elephant:

A PLEASING PARADOX
A Cool Greeting Warmly Welcomed
 You too will appreciate a similar Cool Greeting
 if its **ELEPHANT** BRAND.
 Made only by
The NEW COLOMBO ICE Co., LTD.
 PHONE NOS 2466 & 2487 TELEGRAMS ZERO
 BRANCH DEPOT, GALLE

AGENTS:

Nalanda & Dandagama	---	The British Stores	---
Chitra & Perera	---	S. M. Fernando & Co.	---
Aurimacola	---	T. O. Fernando	---
Veyangoda	---	W. H. S. Fernando	---
Negombo	---	O. S. Fernando	---
Daggeda	---	W. J. Gunawardena	---
Jaffna	---	The Jaffna Apothecaries Co.	---
Varanaya	---	S. Mahipala Perera	---
Miracawa	---	T. N. P. Nadas	---
Palacarya	---	D. D. Senarath Appabathy	---
Balangoda, Opanada & Pinnawala	---	K. M. Sivaratna & Co.	---
Kegalle	---	M. A. Fernando & Co.	---

Source: *The Ceylon Observer*, 17 October 1926, p. 16.

The Club and the resthouse

The club was of central importance for the social life in Sri Lanka and elsewhere in the colonies and had been of even greater importance to the planting community.⁵³⁷ The Kelani Valley Club, which was founded in 1884, is one fitting example: Planters and their wives would regularly go there to meet each other, routinely arriving on a Friday afternoon and staying until Saturday. Naturally, club

⁵³⁷ See e.g. Jones, *Interiors of Empire*, p. 188.

life was centred on sport such as rugby, which was played on Fridays and Saturdays. Moreover, the club was famous for its elephant races and clay pigeon shooting. Initially, the club was only open to British planters, but later welcomed indigenous members of the community as well. Right from its foundation, the Kelani Valley Club became a mainstay of the social life in the district.⁵³⁸

Another important meeting place in colonial life was the rest house. The case of the Teldeniya Resthouse (Central Province, thirteen miles away from Kandy) nicely illustrates the importance of the rest house for small towns. The rest house functioned as the 'meeting place of the association [Rangalla PA] and of the lawyers during circuit, besides being frequented by government officials, tourists, and casual visitors'. Providing this centre of social life with a telephone was of course of great importance. This enabled the members of the community, especially the planters, to better coordinate official visits, e.g. by the Medical Officer or the Inspector of Schools who came to the district to visit the estates. Their work frequently required them to change their travel schedules, which was greatly facilitated when they had access to a telephone instead of communicating through official mail or messengers.⁵³⁹ The club and the rest house were centres for the social life in the 'Plantation Raj', allowing people to get together and interact. Accordingly, many were connected with the telephone network where ever possible.

Establishing Law and order

The Government tried to connect the rural police station with the telephone network as soon as possible. In 1926, the Inspector-General of Police regarded the development of the day as a massive leap forward. At that time, there were 123 police stations on the island, of which 107 had access to the telephone network.⁵⁴⁰ A telephone connection with the police created a feeling of security not only for the citizens of Colombo but also for those living in rural small towns and villages. The

⁵³⁸ <<http://kelanivalleyclub.com>> [accessed 1 August 2015].

⁵³⁹ Accordingly the Rangalle PA requested a public phone box for the resthouse because the likelihood to be granted was higher than a direct telephone connection. *The Times of Ceylon*, 5 August 1929, p. 4.

⁵⁴⁰ PF 2583, Office of the Inspector-General of Police to Colonial Secretary, 14 February 1926.

problem in the planting districts was often that the police stations were not able to be rung up at all times by the subscribers due to the fact that many exchanges were only opened during the day.⁵⁴¹

Connecting the various police stations with the telephone network enabled the police force to increase its effectiveness in enforcing the law. The possibility of swift communication was perceived as a great asset to the work of the Police, as 'cases have been recorded every year in which the arrest of the offender or the tracing of the stolen property would not have been possible but for the immediate use of the telephone or telegraph.'⁵⁴² Accordingly, the upper ranks of the Police Force pressed for the extension of the telephone network and particularly for the trunk line system. On several occasions, this also caused frictions between the two departments involved.⁵⁴³

Improving the effectivity of law enforcement was not the only reason why the telephone was regarded as such a useful tool. At the turn of the century, the 'standard' in law enforcement away from the few main centres was pretty low. In most cases, the local headman and constable were more or less bargaining about the punishment of criminals. Leonard Woolf described a case he witnessed in 1905 while serving at Jaffna. A boy from the village of Kangesanturai had been abducted and murdered. The headmen and the child's relatives began to search bullock carts and finally found the boy's jewellery on a young man. They 'beat him with sticks and whips, pushed pins down his nails, and tortured him generally until he confessed...the headmen's and police methods of dealing with accused people horrified me. In those days, as I soon learned, it was a perpetual – and usually losing – struggle to prevent every kind of pressure, including physical violence and torture,

⁵⁴¹ For example, the Panwila Police station (Central Province) was connected by telephone but could only be communicated with 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. (except on Sundays when the Panwila telephone exchange was closed except from 9.30 .am. to 10 a.m.). The Knuckles, Kelebokke and Panwila PA and the District Medical Officer (Madulkelle) pressed for the accessibility of the police station by telephone at all times. They contacted E.F.C. Wright, Deputy Inspector-General of Police (Provinces), who was in favour of their request and the Superintendent of Police (Central Province) had discussed the issue with the District Inspector of Telegraphs and Telephones. The Panwila Police Station thus should be connected with the Wateguma telephone exchange, which would be the most economical solution which would cost about Rs. 300. *The Times of Ceylon*, 25 October 1933, p. 10.

⁵⁴² PF 2583, Office of the Inspector-General of Police to Colonial Secretary, 14 February 1926.

⁵⁴³ E.g. see *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1923, Part II, C8.

being applied to the accused in order to extract a confession.’ He concludes with the observation that ‘it was extremely difficult to prevent effectively the primitive and illegal methods of the police and headmen in dealing with crime.’⁵⁴⁴

The British as a colonial power regarded the establishing and upholding of the rule of law in their colonies as one of their proudest achievements. Based on oriental views the indigenous rulers were regarded as mere ‘oriental despots’ and the rule of law was an important step towards modern, read western, civilization.⁵⁴⁵ Accordingly such conditions were not acceptable from the view point of the colonial power. The possibility of real time communication was regarded as a tool for establishing a western standard of law enforcement on the whole island as the Inspector-General of Police in 1926 put it: ‘The telephone secures further efficiency in, and improved supervision over, outlying Police stations and is of particular help to us in organizing and maintaining a sound Police system in the Provinces in which serious crime is prevalent’.⁵⁴⁶ The telephone, even more than the telegraph, was not only perceived as a tool in the toolbox of the police but also to enable a surveillance of the members of the police force in the more remote areas.

Floods

The usefulness of the telephone became also clear in the context of floods which were quite regular in these times.⁵⁴⁷ The conversation in Michael Ondaatje’s ‘*Running in the Family*’ sums the situation up quite nicely: “So how did your grandmother die?” “Natural causes.” “What?” “Floods.”⁵⁴⁸ There were several incidents where the telephone operators called the subscribers and warned them of the imminent danger: During the incident in 1930 ‘on May 8 at about 8 P.M. the irrigation Engineer in charge of the Flood Scheme telephoned the Night Supervisor stating that Colombo North was in danger of Floods and that the water was rising rapidly. He desired that as many telephone subscribers as could be informed should be warned of the danger. Orders were given that the request should be acted upon,

⁵⁴⁴ Woolf, *An Autobiography*, p. 177sp.

⁵⁴⁵ See Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁵⁴⁶ PF 2583, Office of the Inspector-General of Police to Colonial Secretary, 14 February 1926.

⁵⁴⁷ See e.g. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1931, Part II, C12.

⁵⁴⁸ Ondaatje, *Running in the Family*, p. 23.

and the permanent Superintendent, Gate Mudaliyar A.D. Tillekeratne, personally informed the Superintendent-in-Charge of the Police Headquarters, Captain Wright, at his bungalow. The chairman of the Municipal Council was advised later. As there was no information available at the Exchange as to the subscribers in the Northern area, the street Index Cards of the Engineering Branch were obtained through the Chief Engineer, and subscribers warned of the impending danger...a list of streets which would be affected by floods both in the Northern and Southern areas was later asked and obtained from the Divisional Irrigation Engineer, Flood Scheme, so that it may be requisitioned in the event of a similar catastrophe.⁵⁴⁹ In the 1930s the telephone became more incorporated in the reaction and warning system for floods. Subscribers could now be warned more effectively and the telephone lines were also used for the installation of so-called 'flood alarm apparatus'.⁵⁵⁰

Special occasions

On special occasions, the telephone was also used and displayed as if it were the case for new communication technologies.⁵⁵¹ On the Coconut Exhibition held in Colombo in May 1934, the Post Office set up a temporary call office at the fairground, doing a lot of 'advertising propaganda work to popularize the telephone'.⁵⁵² Another major event was the visit of the Duke of Gloucester to Sri Lanka. During his visit to Nuwara Eliya, 'the trunk line No.3, Kandy-Nawalapitiya and Nawalapitiya-Hatton trunks, and Hatton-Nuwara Eliya trunk line were both reserved for any calls from the Royal special train during the hours the train was passing through the respective areas. On 23 September, the Colombo-Kandy trunk lines Nos. I and IV were also reserved for the Engineering Branch during certain hours for the purpose of broadcasting the proceedings in connection with the Duke's visit to Kandy and the presentation of the Regalia. The full female operating staff was listed

⁵⁴⁹ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1930, Part II, C14. For another example see 1934, Part II, E19.

⁵⁵⁰ In 1931 on the Northern and Talaimannar lines and the lines from Polgahawehla to Murunkan and Madawachchiya to Pallai flood traps had been installed. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1931, Part II, C12, 1934, Part II, E19.

⁵⁵¹ At the 1911 coronation durbar in Delhi a special tent with telegraph connection was established. Tilman Frasch, 'Nocturnal Spaces and Electricity in Asian Colonial Cities, c. 1880-1920s', in *History of Electricity*, Committee for the History of Electricity and Energy, 18-19 December 2014, Paris.

⁵⁵² *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1934, Part II, E18.

for duty on this day (Sunday) at Kandy and extra staff was detailed at Colombo as well.⁵⁵³

2.4. Conclusion

At the turn of the century, Colombo became a 'city of work', offering new employment opportunities in various areas that can be seen as 'modern'; one of them was the telephone operator. According to Victorian gender images, women were seen as better suited for operating telephone switchboards than men. The telephone operator became one of the few job opportunities for women in the modern 'white collar' working world, though racial hierarchies remained intact: indigenous women could become operators, but as their superiors, the Lady Supervisor and Assistant Lady Supervisor, usually British women were recruited. This colonial hierarchy began to crumble in the 1920s, when a Sri Lankan woman was recruited for the position of the Assistant Lady Supervisor. Still, she earned less than her white equivalent.

The two hotspots of the telephone network were Colombo and the planting districts, where the majority of subscribers lived and worked. During colonial times, a telephone subscription was quite expensive and thus subscribers were mainly members of the colonial elite. According to the data available, most of the telephone subscribers were Europeans and upper-caste Sinhalese. A striking feature is that the number of Ceylon Tamil subscribers was fairly low. Moreover, telephone connections were not only owned by private individuals, but also by government departments, companies and leading agents of the colonial public sphere such as newspapers, clubs and educational institutions. Consequentially, the telephone network connected the subscribers with their living world and the telephone became part of their everyday life.

However, it should not be overlooked that the telephone was more than just a practical tool for communication, but also a prestigious commodity. Consumption is an important part of individual agency that empowers a person to determine and

⁵⁵³ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1934, Part II, E18.

express their status. The indigenous elite had adopted the Western lifestyle and habitus of the colonial masters. This had the aim to gain favours from the colonial government and to distinguish themselves from the rest of the indigenous population. Access to the symbols of modernity and consumption were a crucial part of this consolidation of status, and around the beginning of the twentieth century, the indigenous elite increasingly utilized their consumption powers to challenge colonial rule. Breeding racehorses, living in Western style mansions and playing cricket were all parts of this quest, and owning a telephone connection became another symbol of status and therefore a way to even the playing field with the colonial masters.

3. 'The virtual saloon': socialising, discussing and making politics on the phone

As shown in the second chapter, the telephone was used in the rural and urban areas to call for help in situations of distress when speedy communication was essential. Another area for the use of the telephone usage was in commerce: ordering commodities or services over the phone was a part of the colonial world in the interwar period. But most importantly, the telephone became a crucial part of the island's 'colonial business model'. Swift communication between the main port and economic hub Colombo and the planting districts was of crucial importance for the running of the colony and its economic success. This chapter will look beyond the telephone's economic importance and deal with its impact on Sri Lankan society. Above anything else, the telephone was a status symbol and represented the western, modern life-style of the colonial elite. But did the telephone also have a deeper social impact, for instance by transforming social etiquette? Items which change social habits and everyday life have a significant impact on the identity and world view of the people. Accordingly, this chapter will try to evaluate if the telephone had an impact on identity building during the interwar period.

3.1. Socialising on the phone

The case of the correspondence card from the Hatton Bank to a planter (Appendix V: Image 1) is a perfect example to illustrate the advantages of the new telecommunication media. The addressee, a planter, was asked by the bank whether he needed cash to pay his coolies so that the bank would have the money ready in time. Even for such a basic transaction two pieces of writing were necessary - the card with the enquiry and a response. The postal service was increasing in speed and availability during the late nineteenth century, but the correspondence would at least take two days.

The introduction of the new telecommunication media, the telegraph and the telephone, offered a new possibility by allowing communication over distances almost in real time. These communication technologies had a profound impact on the space-time distinction. In the context of telecommunication media, terms like

'distance shrinking' are often used in public, although this kind of thinking better fits for transport than for telecommunication networks. In communication networks, distance plays a role in the construction process, e.g. by determining the cost for cables and the cost of labour required for laying cables, digging trenches etc. But once a telecommunication network is up and running it doesn't 'reduce distance' the way a road would, it rather overcomes distance completely and makes it meaningless. Crucially, time and space outside the network, where human interaction continues to take place, still remains the same as before for human beings; it is only within the network that time and space are newly arranged.⁵⁵⁴

The major difference between the telegraph and telephone was that telegrams were basically 'letters on steroids': they were transmitted much faster than letters but still operated on the same principle. The correspondents had to visit a telegraph office to convey a message, wait for an answer and eventually repeat the procedure. This was revolutionised by the telephone: an immediate conversation without the need to leave the house or office. A telephone call would resolve a financial matter such as the one described above within minutes. But while the telephone provided great advantages for business and in a case of emergency, its advantages were even bigger for private conversation between the users: discussing and chatting, dealing with the great issues of the time from politics to everyday affairs and gossip; almost similar to a face-to-face interaction.

Let's talk

The available sources do not supply much information on the use of the telephone for private conversation, though the minutes of the various PAs indicate that even the planters were quick to acknowledge the social function of a telephone. The driving force for the construction of telephone networks in the planting districts were economic considerations. When planters demanded for a better transport and communication infrastructure, they stressed their importance for economic gain; thereby underlining their own importance for the colony's revenue and pointing out

⁵⁵⁴ Latour, *Science in Action*, p. 228sp, Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, *Telecommunications and the City. Electronic Spaces, Urban Places* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 55sp, John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity. A Social Theory of the Media* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1995), p. 28sp, Wenzhuemer, 'Editorial', p. 7sp.

that such improvements were also in the interest of the government. Making a claim such as 'my wife is bored most time of the day and wants to talk to someone' would hardly have convinced Government.

For the planters, the possibility to communicate with other estates was of great interest. A statement made by a planter during a meeting of the Kelani Valley PA sums this up nicely. When at the height of the economic crisis in 1932, many subscribers were cancelling easing their subscription, this planter stated that 'if they wanted to ring-up an estate they would find that it was off the telephone...and what was the good of the telephone if they could not telephone to the people whom they wanted to telephone to'.⁵⁵⁵ Connecting the plantations was a core point for the planters because they wanted to talk with each other. This is also underlined by the frequent complaints that private conversations were interrupted by the operator to put a trunk call through, and by the demand for extended opening hours of the telephone exchange.⁵⁵⁶

The minutes of various PAs clearly indicate that the telephone was used for private conversations. First of all, local calls were free with a subscription, whereas long distance calls via the trunk line system were charged according to duration (in units of three minutes) and distance and were thus relatively expensive.⁵⁵⁷ Secondly, the quality of trunk calls was often poor and interruptions occurred frequently.⁵⁵⁸ Although the amount of trunk calls grew during the interwar period it still remained far behind the number of local calls, let alone the number of telegrams sent.⁵⁵⁹ Consequently, trunk calls were far from ideal for private conversation because they

⁵⁵⁵ *The Times of Ceylon*, 21 November 1932, p. 8.

⁵⁵⁶ *The Times of Ceylon*, 11 February 1925, p. 7.

⁵⁵⁷ In general, a local call meant that a person was ringing up a subscriber connected to the same exchange. However, when several exchanges were connected to each other calls between these networks were also counted as local, e.g. in the Colombo telephone network. In addition, several PAs had built up networks with several exchanges, which were connected by a junction line. As mentioned in chapter I, the PAs were prohibited to connect telephone systems which were in two different postal districts. Thus the government constructed a junction line which was rented by the PA, but their exchanges were often 6 to 10 miles away from each other. Accordingly, junction calls were covered by the annual subscription.

⁵⁵⁸ *The Ceylon Independent*, 28 February 1928, p. 3, *The Times of Ceylon*, 22 November 1928, p. 3.

⁵⁵⁹ Interestingly, the number of telegraph-telephone messages (the service offered the subscriber the possibility to call the local post office to send/receive a telegram by phone) increased massively during the second half of the 1920s. After the reduction of telegram prices in 1928 and the expansion of the telephone network, there was an increase of 43 percent in telegram-telephone messages on the island. See *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1928, Part II, C13.

were expensive and calls were often interrupted. Trunk lines, and later international connections, were mostly used for business or emergency calls.

Local telephone networks on the other side had a flat rate policy in place. For an annual fee, which depended on several factors, the subscribers could make as many local calls as they wanted. The number of calls or their length didn't matter; the only possible restriction was the working hours of the telephone operator. Flat rates normally led to a more extensive use of the service than an exact billing system did. This was also the case with the colonial telephone service: during the interwar period, the number of local calls continuously increased in urban and rural networks alike. Colombo was one of the busiest telephone exchanges in the world and the case of the Kalutara Exchange (see Table 18) demonstrates that the telephone was massively used for local calls in the planting districts.

These high numbers of calls makes it very plausible that many subscribers used the telephone for private conversations. This line of argumentation is further supported by studies of the use of the telephone in various several Western and non-Western countries during that period. Of great interest in this regard are studies for rural America and the planting areas in Indonesia, where the circumstances were the same as in the planting districts in Sri Lanka. The telephone was an essential tool to deal with the loneliness on the (normally remote) cotton or coffee plantations. People used the telephone for general conversations, thereby satisfying a basic human need: communicating with others.⁵⁶⁰ Finally, one should not forget that telephones were often installed in shops, which functioned as public 'phones boxes'. There, the boundaries between private and business calls became blurred anyway.

⁵⁶⁰ Fischer, *America Calling*, Colin Cherry, 'The telephone System: Creator of Mobility and Social Change', in *The Social Impact of the Telephone*, ed. by Ithiel de Sola Pool (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1977), pp. 112-126, Barker, 'Telephony at the Limits of State Control', Briggs, 'The Pleasure Telephone'.

Women and the telephone

The telephone offered for some women in the colonial society new possibilities. It was one of the few opportunities to get a job in the modern, white collar working world. But as a communication media it made it possible to talk over the phone with other women of your peer group. Given the circumstances this was a unique and amazing opportunity.

Everyday life of elite women

During colonial times, the role of women in society was undergoing a dramatic change, at least the one of upper class women. The indigenous elite was mostly English educated and adopted the lifestyle and habitus of the colonial masters.⁵⁶¹ In that light, the role of women was redefined according to a Victorian image: while the man inhabited the role of the 'pater familias', the wife's proper role was to love, honour and obey the husband and take care of the children; she was the 'angel in the house', as a contemporary poem summed it up. This process was reinforced by legal regulations, e.g. the prohibition of bigamy (1846), which changed the understanding of gender and kinship relations including those of marriage and sex. These changes were welcomed by the emerging elite because the new legal and moral framework enabled them to concentrate economic resources.⁵⁶² The result of that changing image of women was that they were limited to the domestic sphere.

In contrast to men, who could find various venues for associating – the workplace, civic associations such as sport and other clubs, political parties, public functions etc. – women had few occasions to go out and meet other women of the same social standing: social events, clubs and the few women's unions that there were. The public arena was dominated by men. In that regard, the situation was far better in a vibrant city like Colombo than in smaller towns. The short extract from 'When The Ladies Stayed At Home –Thirty-Five Years Ago at Batticaloa' (1937) attests to this, '...he was happy to see many ladies at the party, the Rev. W.M.P. Wilkes, a

⁵⁶¹ Western education was mostly reserved for men, the only group which made dramatic strides forward were Burgher women. Jayawardena, *Erasure of the Euro-Asian*, pp. 212-238.

⁵⁶² Carla Risseuw, 'Gender, Kinship and State Formation. Case of Sri Lanka under Colonial Rule', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 27, No. 43/44, October 24-31 (1992), WS46-ES54. See also Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition*.

former principal of Batticaloa Central College, recalls at the reception given to him and his wife yesterday evening by the school's Old Boys' Association that 35 years ago, not a single lady at Batticaloa attended parties of that nature.⁵⁶³ Satyajit Ray's film 'Charulata', which is based on the novel 'Nastanirh' by Rabindranath Tagore, shows the isolated domestic life of an upper class woman in the second half of the nineteenth century in a painstaking way. On several occasions, the main character, a lonely house-wife, wanders around the house in boredom. She looks through the window on the street and gets excited by the slightest activities outside, happy that there is some distraction. These scenes are quite telling and the movie gives us an idea of how lonely the life of women in the colonial setting must have been at times.⁵⁶⁴ Going out wasn't easy either, as it women required to keep within the dress code of colonial society. Getting dressed took time and wearing European-style clothing in a tropical climate was demanding.

For indigenous and white women living on estates, the situation was in that regard, far worse.⁵⁶⁵ Estates were usually quite remote, miles away from each other and the closest village – estate life was characterized by 'intense loneliness'.⁵⁶⁶ Stories of moral, mental and physical breakdowns were not uncommon. Social events or visits did not happen often because roads were bad and distances were huge. Contemporary observers would speak of the 'very long Ceylon mile' in this regard.⁵⁶⁷ Women living on the plantations therefore found it hard to stay in touch, let alone meet on a more than casual basis.⁵⁶⁸ Women found little else to do than taking care of the household. Not least because of this situation, planters' wives did not always stay on the estate but preferred to live in Britain, especially when they

⁵⁶³ Syntax original. *The Ceylon Observer*, 31 July, 1937, p. 3.

⁵⁶⁴ Satyajit Ray, *Cārutatā* (India: R.D.Bansal & Co., 1962).

⁵⁶⁵ It is not possible to fully evaluate the number of white and indigenous women living on estates during colonial times. The address lists in *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory* indicate that in many cases the wives of planters were also living on the estate. Based on the structure of the plantation sector, the greater part of women living on estates would have been white women. As mentioned, many indigenous members of the elite owned estates in the Low Country, but they lived in Colombo and left the running of the estate to a manager. The estates in the Kandy Highland were mostly run by European companies and planters. Here the planters or managers were living on the plantation.

⁵⁶⁶ It should be mentioned that the account of Mary E. Steuart about estate life was mainly written mainly as a woman to women'. Steuart, *Every Day Life*, p. 11.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 21sp.

⁵⁶⁸ Faster transport by cars was spreading during the world wars but didn't change the situation that much.

had children to look after.⁵⁶⁹ It was different when the estate was owned by a company and run by a young British manager. In that case, he would sometimes be accompanied by his sister. John Ferguson advocated the practice and its advantages, ‘...that where there are daughters in a family, with a son going to the tropics (or even to any colony) a sister should accompany, or be prepared to join each brother. In case of a young men going out to be trained as planters...the presence of a lady would be really an economy.’ The women would have gained a great deal in ‘experience’ of climate and housekeeping, etc.⁵⁷⁰ However, the address lists in *Ferguson’s Ceylon Directory* indicate that in most cases the planters had their wives living on the estates with them and not in Britain, Kandy or Colombo.

Women and telephone conversations

In this setting the telephone offered upper class women a new and amazing possibility: to have a discussion or a chat amongst each other without being present at a designated physical space such as the veranda of the bungalow. The telephone allowed women to ‘visit’ each other without leaving the house and was therefore the first communication media which enabled them break the ‘isolation’ of the domestic sphere. It enabled women to communicate far more frequently with other women of their peer group.

Women were the major group who started to use the telephone as a tool for private conversation all around the world. That created some distress: the telephone was invented with the interests and need of the business community in mind. Thus it was at first often regarded as a business tool, maybe for connecting the home with the office. When mainly women in the early days communicated and socialised over the phone, telephone companies in North America at first regarded it as an ‘abuse of the telephone for domestic purpose’. The telephone should be

⁵⁶⁹ Sir Leybourne Davidson of Huntley Lodge, Aberdeenshire, who was a rubber pioneer in South India and Sri Lanka is a perfect example. He was trained as an engineer and went to Sri Lanka in 1876. Remembering the early days of planting in Sri Lanka, he described the separation from his family as ‘one of the greatest trials of Europeans in the East (...) I could not bear the idea of being parted from my wife and two boys, so we returned home and settled down [in Aberdeen].’ *The Times of Ceylon*, 3 February 1933, p. 8.

⁵⁷⁰ Ferguson, ‘Ceylon’, p. 460.

used in their eyes for short and efficient messaging, like the telegraph; Socialising on the phone was viewed as clogging up the switchboards. But women kept on talking and this also meant profit, accordingly these objections fell silent over time. Women were the first major group who used it as a 'pleasure telephone', to use Asa Briggs's term. Around the 1900, this usage of the telephone became a part of the 'way of living' and women were viewed as an important target group, thus advertisement and policy of the telephone companies changed accordingly.⁵⁷¹ Therefore women had a massive influence on the usage and perception of the telephone.

The desire to use the telephone as a 'pleasure telephone' was surely also given in colonial Sri Lanka, for both Western and indigenous women. The already mentioned column 'reflections of an ordinary woman' as well as the impressions of Mary E. Steuart of plantation life give testament to that. Access to the telephone network was not a problem. In Colombo the telephone network was not only established in the business areas, Fort and Pettah, but also in the residential areas of the city. In the planting areas, the telephone connection was in general with the bungalow, not the factory. Studies for Western and Non-western countries, especially the study of Joshua Barker on colonial Indonesia, have shown that the telephone was used by women in that way. In his article, Barker looks at the telephone in the planting areas of Java, where women faced the same remoteness and as those living in the planting districts in Sri Lanka. The introduction of the telephone extended the sphere of their sociability beyond the spatial confines and gave them new opportunities, or to be more precise, a new channel for communication and exchange. Women in the rural and planting areas used the telephone with similar matter of course as women living in the cities.⁵⁷² The same can be observed in the tea plantations of Assam, where women used the telephone for regular chats with each other; often these conversations were small rituals.⁵⁷³ That this link between female everyday life and the telephone was also seen by contemporaries is well

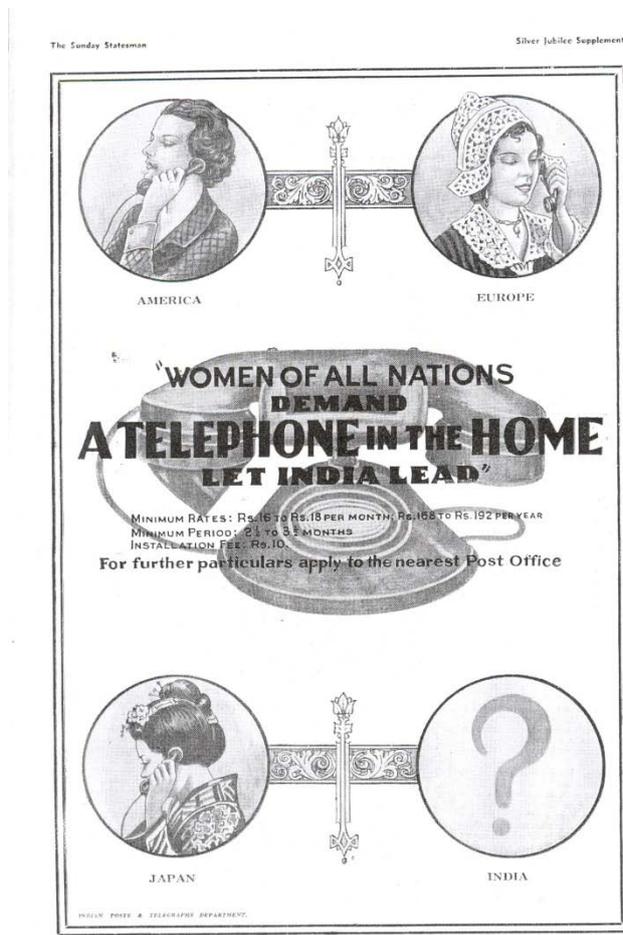
⁵⁷¹ Martin, *Hello, Central?*, p. 5sp, 140sq, Briggs, 'The Pleasure Telephone', p. 55sp, Barker, 'Telephony at the Limits of State Control', p. 165, 179.

⁵⁷² *ibid*, pp. 162-166.

⁵⁷³ Personal conversation with Arora Mandakini, Lancaster, 25.01.2012.

illustrated by an advertisement in an Indian newspaper from the 1930s (see Image 19).

Image 19: advertisement newspaper



Based on these findings as well as the spatial organisation of the network and the price policy, it is very plausible that women were communicating, discussing or/and chatting, over the telephone in colonial Sri Lanka. The telephone enabled women to ‘meet on the line’ and hearing the voice of other women and communicate with them; it should be kept in mind that during that time broadcasting service was still in its infancy and pretty much male dominated.⁵⁷⁴ Women’s sociability was therefore extended beyond the confines of the domestic sphere and physical isolation.⁵⁷⁵ Another important aspect was the intimacy of talking on the telephone.

⁵⁷⁴ See also Barker, ‘Telephony at the Limits of State Control’, p. 166, Martin, *Hello, Central?*, p. 154.

⁵⁷⁵ Michele Martin argues that the telephone therefore had an emancipatory effect and inspired more boldness in women. But the other side of the coin was that it also reinforced sexist attitudes, e.g. gossiping instead taking care of the household. *Hello, Central?*, p. 154, 164.

It was a communication channel for women that enabled them to bypass the mechanism of social control, e.g. proper hours of sociability, proper dress code etc., and was free of a male surveillance.⁵⁷⁶

A point worth mentioning is the changing character of telephone calls. During the first half of the twentieth century letters, postcards and telegrams were the usual way of long-distance communication. A telephone was still quite expensive and most part of society had no access to it. Before the advent of the mobile phone, a telephone call had a far higher cultural significance as nowadays. Private calls were often a small social event: it was customary to make an appointment for a telephone call even for a social call between friends; thus a telephone call can be regarded as a 'social institution'.⁵⁷⁷

Why are private conversations on the phone relevant?

The already mentioned documentary *The Songs of Ceylon* nicely depicts the different faces of the colony in the interwar period, portraying both a traditional society and the impact of modernity and globalization. The modernisation processes were not only transforming the island's economic, political and social structure, but also changed and/or reformulated the belief systems and identities. During this time, everyday lives underwent constant change, especially in a city like Colombo, which witnessed for instance the emergence of modern 'traffic', electric lighting and other such 'modern wonders'.

In this setting, private telephone conversations were more than just fulfilling the basic human need for communication with others. Ranajit Guha argues that the role of 'immediacy', the now and here, plays a major role in bringing together people. 'It is not what people are talking about that is vital to such gossip, but the fact that they are talking to one another in a state of average intelligibility.'⁵⁷⁸ Anindita Ghosh's research on the streets songs sung by the people of Calcutta during the

⁵⁷⁶ Barker, 'Telephony at the Limits of State Control', p. 166.

⁵⁷⁷ Philipp Tingler, 'Zum Tod des Telefongesprächs', *Tagesanzeiger, BlogMag*, 17. Februar (2016) <<http://blog.tagesanzeiger.ch/blogmag/index.php/40360/zum-tod-des-telefongespraechs>> [accessed 18 February 2016].

⁵⁷⁸ Ranajit Guha, 'A Colonial City and its Time(s)', *Indian Economics and Social History*, 4, 3(2008), p. 342.

colonial times is a fitting example for the creation of 'immediacy'. As a major administrative and commercial centre of British India, Calcutta was a melting pot, providing a very different 'urban experience' to various groups of its inhabitants. Calcutta was a vibrant city with various, different layers: nerve-centre of British trade and administration, the 'City of Palaces', the social world of the educated Bengali middle class and the indigenous quarters, known as 'Black Town'. Not just the physical and material, but the social and cultural topography of the city was quickly altering.⁵⁷⁹ The street songs, which dealt with the changing, everyday life in the city, were critical experiential frames through which the city dwellers could capture the ongoing tremendous social and material changes. Singing and listening to the songs shared the experiences of the various groups in the modern colonial city and helped them to manoeuvre in this ever-changing environment. The street songs were 'essential sites for the construction of urban discourses and the shaping of various community, caste and social identities.'⁵⁸⁰ The same mechanism is found in Sinhalese culture, where the *Hatan Kavi* (war poems) of the Kandyan period fulfilled that role. They produced a sense of devotion that was understood by the singers as well as the listeners and made them embrace a sentimental 'we-feeling'. They further emphasized common values which are central to Sinhalese culture, e.g. Buddhism or the deeds of legendary heroes and kings.⁵⁸¹

Telephone conversations are neither street songs nor war poems but they also operate on a similar mechanism, providing an opportunity to exchange thoughts and feelings. Such conversations are a vehicle to deal with the ever-changing social world of the colonial period. In that regard, topics beyond from the great questions of the day, even if they may seem trivial, can also represent deeper cultural concerns which are used by the people to figure out what is going on. In other words, not only 'matters of the head' but also 'matters of the heart' can become important. Jim McGuigan argues that 'the articulation of politics, public and personal, as a contested terrain through affective (aesthetic and emotional) modes

⁵⁷⁹ Anindita Gosh, 'Singing in a New World: Street Songs and Urban Experience in Colonial Calcutta', *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 76(2013), pp. 111-115.

⁵⁸⁰ *ibid*, p. 130.

⁵⁸¹ Michael Roberts, *Sinhalese Consciousness in the Kandyan Period 1590 to 1815* (Colombo: Vijitha Yupa Publications, 2003), p. 115sq.

of communication...provides vehicles for thought and feeling, for imagination and disputatious argument, which are not necessarily of inherent merit but may be of some consequence'.⁵⁸² Telephone conversations therefore also create a mechanism for people to exchange views and create a sense of belonging and social solidarity.

3.2. The Social Network

The telephone became an important tool for people to manage and organise their daily life. Claude S. Fischer has underlined that the telephone can be regarded as a 'social medium': it did not just serve to manage social life, making appointments etc., but it was an important tool to keep in touch with friends and family. This was the case both in rural areas and within cities. With the growth and sprawl of the cities, which saw people move to suburban areas, the telephone was an easy and effective way to stay in touch.⁵⁸³

In colonial Sri Lanka, the telephone was important for organising social life and for arranging meetings with friends and peers. One method was the already mentioned combination of telephone and telegram, called the 'phonogram'. The customer could phone the local post office and the message was then delivered as a telegram to the recipient. Especially in the second half of the 1920 the phonogram became a rather popular type of messaging, but fell behind as the telephone network expanded and the charges for telegrams were reduced.⁵⁸⁴ Apart from business matters, phonograms were also used for making appointments or sending private messages, especially to friends who lived far away. A phonogram was more convenient than sending a telegram, for which you had to go to a post office, while it was cheaper than a trunk line call.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸² Jim McGuigan, 'British Identity and the 'People's Princess'', *The Sociological Review*, 48, 1(2000), p. 4sq, Jim McGuigan, 'The Cultural Public Sphere', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 8(2005), p. 200sp.

⁵⁸³ See Fischer, *America Calling*.

⁵⁸⁴ For example: in 1928, the number of phonograms amounted to 52,624 against 35,256 in the previous year, which is an increase of 43 percent. The telephone book was giving full instructions how to send them. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1928, Part II, C13. *The Times of Ceylon*, 12 November 1929, p. 8.

⁵⁸⁵ *ibid*, p. 8.

The telephone further became an indispensable part of 'ritualized' social interaction and etiquette. One example for its impact was the habit of 'calling', which had several aspects to it. In the most common aspect, 'calling' referred to inviting others to a social visit at one's home, a custom obviously imported from Britain. But calling in the tropics was considered by many as a 'problem of really serious importance'. Going around personally to deliver the cards to persons was 'irksome' and 'laborious'. Ladies often passed several hours with delivering the cards, often by rickshaw, until they had distributed all their cards to people they wanted to meet and returned cards to those who had called them. The season in the British hill station Shimla is a good example: women spend at the beginning of the season two hours per day to get the job done. To reduce this stressful enterprise, in 1904 a 'Postal Calling League' was founded which distributed the calling cards by post.⁵⁸⁶ The telephone was a possibility to further reduce this kind of burdensome tasks required by etiquette. This possibility was more and more used in Britain and it is more than plausible that especially in the Colombo area, the same was the case. A telephone call was a quick and easy solution to the 'irksome' and 'laborious' business.

Any newcomer to the colonies in South Asia was required to introduce himself to the British community residing at his post. 'Calling' was the first and worst duty he had to perform. The newcomer would meet the men at the workplace or in the club but he had to introduce himself to the wives of the officials.⁵⁸⁷ Therefore, the 'chief secretary supplied the recruit with an enormous list of names and addresses of wives to be 'called upon' so that ... [he] could be admitted to 'society (...) there were certain calling hours and if the wife was 'not at home', the newcomer placed his card in a box left on the front veranda (...) if the woman was at home, a servant would accept the card on a tray, carry it in, and the lady would admit the caller to conduct twenty minutes of desultory discussion.'⁵⁸⁸ This duty was quite exhausting due to the heat and the dress code that had to be followed, and had to be repeated when the person called upon was not at home. With the introduction of the

⁵⁸⁶ *The Ceylon Observer*, 28 April 1909, p. 4.

⁵⁸⁷ See e.g. Leonard Woolf's description of his time in Jaffna and Kandy. Woolf, *An Autobiography*.

⁵⁸⁸ Brian Stoddart, *A People's Collector in the British Raj*. Arthur Galletti (New Delhi: Readworthy, 2011), p. 32sp.

telephone, it is plausible that the repetition of calling in person would gradually be replaced with a telephone call.

The telephone and social networks

Most subscribers, and therefore telephone users, were members of the colonial elite. The telephone was therefore not a 'mass medium' during colonial times but rather an arena where a specific social group socialised. But as shown above, this group was not homogenous nor was the importance a phone had for them. In regard of social life, for instance, the telephone was more vital for women than for men. Thus the telephone offered the various social networks a new channel which extended the possibilities, speed and frequency of communication and probably opened up new ones. The increasing usage of the telephone during the interwar period underlines that the telephone became an essential part of the subscribers' social life. Furthermore, social networks incorporated the telephone in their formalized relations and thus made it part of the accepted etiquette. A new member of the white colonial elite could for instance use the telephone to introduce himself to other members of the colonial society and notably to their families.

3.3. Politics on the phone: A Glimpse from Sinhalese Society

The importance of media in the formation of modern societies have been emphasised by various authors. One of the first and most influential one was Karl W. Deutsch who highlighted the importance of social communication for identity building and the construction of nationalism.⁵⁸⁹ Speaking of 'imagined communities', Benedict Anderson focused on the interdependence of 'print capitalism' and nationalism.⁵⁹⁰ However, as social communication is not limited to print products, Anderson's method of analysing print capitalism's role in the

⁵⁸⁹ Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Communication: an Inquiry in the foundation of Nationality* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1953).

⁵⁹⁰ Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1996).

emergency of nationalism can also be applied to other types of communication media and their impact on community making.⁵⁹¹

The link between print products and identity building in colonial Sri Lanka has been fairly well researched.⁵⁹² During the second half of the nineteenth century, Buddhists in the Low Country and Hindu Tamils of Jaffna responded to the aggressive Christian propaganda, which posed a challenge to their faith and identity, through print products. Between 1870 and 1920, there was a huge expansion of the island's communication and information structure: in addition to the many newspapers already in circulation a large number of pamphlets, books and letters were being published.⁵⁹³ Consequently, print products played a major role in the emergence of nationalism and identity in Sri Lanka, providing a crucial arena for political discussion. But while this impact of the print media has been studied quite well, the new communication technologies, telegraph, telephone and to a limited degree radio, have not received the scholarly attention they deserve.⁵⁹⁴

The following section will therefore make a first step towards an investigation if the telephone had an influence on the political development and political discussions during colonial times, especially the emergency of nationalist movements and identity formation. The analysis will focus on the Sinhalese because they were the biggest group of telephone users next to the Europeans and the emergence of a Sinhalese identity and nationalism during colonial times became a driving force for the further development of the island.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹¹ Barker, 'Telephony at the Limits of State Control', p. 159.

⁵⁹² See for example Serena Teenekoon, 'Newspaper Nationalism: Sinhala identity as historical Discourse', in *Sri Lanka. History and the Roots of Conflict*, ed. by Jonathan Spencer (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 205-226.

⁵⁹³ See Frost, 'Wider Opportunities', p. 940, 944, Rösel, *Gestalt und Entstehung des Tamilischen Nationalismus*, p. 222sp.

⁵⁹⁴ In recent years there have been studies on the impact of modern communication media on the contemporary society, e.g. Neluka Silva, 'A Peace of Soap: Representation of Conflict in popular Teledramas in Sri Lanka', in *South Asian Media Cultures. Audiences, Representations, Contexts*, ed. by Shakuntala Banaji (London: Anthem Press, 2010), pp. 163-180.

⁵⁹⁵ The imperial infrastructure and modern technologies were not that crucial for the spread of nationalism as in Sri Lanka as they were in British India, e.g. the working of the Indian Nation Congress would have not been possible without modern technologies such as the railway. The debate about Sinhalese nationalism between K.N.O Dharmadasa, R.A.H.L. Gunawardana and M. Roberts underlines this fact. In that debate about the origins of Sinhalese nationalism, the Sinhala language plays a crucial role. The language had undergone two major changes: the first one in the

Sinhalese, politics and the telephone

The majority of Sinhalese subscribers were members of the elite, old and new somebodies alike. Therefore to measure the impact of the telephone the main focus will be on two intertwined strands. The first one is the quest of the new somebodies for political participation and power, which had to challenge the position of the old somebodies. The main vehicle to achieve this aim was the revival of Buddhism. Until the 1920s, the Sinhalese elite was a heterogeneous group, separated in different groups and each with their own agenda. But during the interwar time the elite began to merge and formed a national elite.

third century and the second one during the 9th and 10th century. Dharmadasa argues that the first major linguistic change, from Prakrit to a proto-form of Sinhala, was closely linked to political events. The constant fights between the South Indian Tamils and the Sinhalese during that time triggered the change. The language became the medium for the Sinhalese to distinguish themselves from the Tamil enemies and to create a common identity. Gunawardana in contrast takes a constructivist perspective which follows the argumentation of Foucault's 'rupture' and the paradigm change in the discourse about nationalism which was initiated by Anderson, Gellner and Hobsbawm. He argues that the Sinhalese identity is an elite construct created during colonial times. Many central terms and concepts were used in pre-colonial times by Sinhala kings to rally support and ensure the loyalty of their subject. But a 'Sinhaleanness' did not exist in that form during that time; it is a construct of modern nationalism. Roberts argues for a socially embedded patriotism: the development of the Sinhalese language enabled the Sinhalese during the Kandyan Period to communicate with each other without great obstacles. Of central importance are songs and poems: they were recited at special occasions, e.g. the Hatan Kavi (war poems) or sung at work, e.g. the shepherds' songs, which were sung at night to not fall asleep. The content of such songs was the deeds of mythical figures or kings. These forms of communication and the sharing of the same knowledge created a form of 'Sinhala consciousness' during the Kandyan period. For more details see Karuna Nayaka Ovitigalage Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion and ethnic Assertiveness. The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, 'The People of the Lion: the Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography', in *Sri Lanka. History and the Roots of the Conflict*, ed. by Jonathan Spencer (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 45-86, Roberts, *Sinhalese Consciousness*.

The development and political impact of Sinhalese nationalism and identity is well researched and need not be repeated here. For further reading see e.g. Michael Roberts, 'For Humanity. For the Sinhalese. Dharmapala Bosat', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 56, No.4 November (1997), 1006-1032, Jakob Rösel, 'Discourse and Practice of Sinhalese Nationalism: Role of Local Knowledge and Decentralisation', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 30, Jul. 27-Aug. 2(2002), 3111-3118, Rösel, *Entstehung und Gestalt des Singhalesischen Nationalismus*, Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Buddhism betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *The Break-up of Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese-Tamil Conflict* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 1988), K.M. de Silva, *Reaping the Whirlwind. Ethnic Conflict, ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1998), Heinz Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Ländern des Theravada Buddhismus*, Volume I (Frankfurt a.M.: Metzner, 1966) (Bechert deals with several aspects of the interaction of Buddhism and political decision-making in Theravada Buddhist countries. In this volume he analyses the rise and impact of the Buddhist revival movement on Sri Lankan politics from colonial times until the election of 1956).

3.3.1. The telephone enters the political stage

Sinhalese elite

Several Sinhalese families and clans, the new somebodies, had made good use of the new economic opportunities to improve their socio-economic status. Making profits was all nice and good but in a certain way socially meaningless unless it found recognition through the state. In olden days, the Sinhalese king was the source for legitimating social status by handing out titles, offices, rewards and other symbols of status. King and state were considered the ultimate instance social status; a perception that did not change during colonial times. In fact, the colonial state employed a similar policy of rewards to secure the loyalty of the indigenous elite.⁵⁹⁶ Accordingly, the aim of the new somebodies was to receive such awards or positions to convert their economic success into social reputation and thus underline their new position within the social order because from the perspective of the old somebodies they were still regarded as 'nobodies'.⁵⁹⁷

The new somebodies began to challenge the privileged position of the old elite not only by copying their lifestyles, but also in competing for honorary awards and positions, e.g. the posts of mudaliyars (headmen or presidents of the village tribunals). The British colonial state had a sophisticated hierarchy of such awards and appointments, which was regarded by the Sinhalese as the 'official' acknowledgment of status. Unsurprisingly, competition for it was fierce.⁵⁹⁸

At the beginning of the British rule, members of the old elite were almost without exception members of the goyigama caste, which was also the largest caste on the island.⁵⁹⁹ Yet this elite was only a small part of the whole caste and was already

⁵⁹⁶ Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation*, p. 141sp.

⁵⁹⁷ Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. XXIII.

⁵⁹⁸ The various positions were not only relevant because of their prestige but also because they offered possibilities of patronage. Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation*, p. 143.

⁵⁹⁹ The Sinhalese caste system is distinct in several ways from the one in India. First of all, there are no Brahmins, who are crucial in the Indian system. The distinction between 'pure/impure', is therefore inapplicable, even though typical rules for caste, like endogamy or caste association based on occupation, do exist. Another major difference is the size and location of the caste: the island's highest-ranking caste, the goyigama, is also the biggest caste, spread out across the whole island uniformly without sub-castes. In the nineteenth century, the goyigama and KSD castes took up 83.1% per cent of the total population and even 93% per cent of the Low Country Sinhalese. Ibid, p. 35sp, Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 164.

under the Dutch entrusted with key positions, e.g. appointments as mudaliyars or headmen; thus giving them a high social status and patronage possibilities. The most important feature was land ownership, which was a source of wealth as much as of prestige. The rajakariya system was founded on the principle of land tenure and the mudaliyars of the goyigama caste were entrusted with the reinforcement of the rajakariya service, therefore they were granted the right of land tenure. The Colebrook-Cameron reforms put an end to this system and removed the traditional caste stratification. In the aftermath of the reforms, the old elite, or 'first class goyigamas', as they were called, gradually lost their importance for the administrative service, but they remained an important pillar for British colonial rule. Accordingly, they wielded significant political influence and held privileged positions in the colonial society until the beginning of the twentieth century.⁶⁰⁰

But most of the 'first class goyigamas' had become Christians, which linked them closely to the colonial power. The Buddhist revival movement was therefore an ideal cause for the new somebodies, who were mainly Buddhists, to find an alternative avenue to power: they could challenge the dominance of the old somebodies by establishing themselves as leaders of the people.

Buddhist revival movement

The focal point for the discussions within the Sinhala community was the revival of Buddhism. Religion played a central role in many of the reform or revivalist movements in South Asia, which formed during the nineteenth century and dealt with the challenges and transformation processes caused by colonial rule. Partha Chatterjee argued that 'the anti-colonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before its political battle with the imperial power' by dividing the world in two domains: the material and the spiritual. Within the material sphere, including economy, statecraft, science and technology, the colonial power has proven its superiority. The construction of a nation here was not truly possible. According to the understanding of the oriental mind, however, the

⁶⁰⁰ Peebles, *Social Change*, p. 115, 140.

West was acknowledging the spiritual sphere as a strong point of the East, which thus became the arena where the sovereign nation could be constructed.⁶⁰¹

In Sri Lanka, resistance against the Christian missionaries began to form during the 1850s and '60s, and it was much more self-confident and vociferous than it had been before. Eventually, Buddhists sought direct encounters with their opponents: Between 1865 and 1873, five public debates between Christian missionaries and Buddhist monks took place, in which each party tried to refute the other party's religious teachings. The Buddhist monks, who faced their opponents with confidence, knowledge and rhetoric skill, won the argument, at least in the eyes of the large crowds attending. On the last and largest of the debates, which took place at Panadura in 1873, Migettuvatte Gunananda proved himself as 'the terror of the missionaries' and deeply affected the next generation of Buddhist activist.⁶⁰² Accordingly, in the 1870s, the Buddhist revival movement began to gain momentum, both organizationally and as a topic in the public discourse. The religious struggle not only engendered new forms of public debate but led to a massive use of print media as well: pamphlets, periodicals and books and though literacy may have been generally low, these treatises found widespread use being read out by monks or pagoda trustees.⁶⁰³

The use of media seemed not only limited to print products: during the 1920s and 1930s, a vivid radio community developed in Sri Lanka with various programs, making a first step towards mass media. 'Radio telephony' began to become quite popular and the 'Sinhalese and Oriental programs' had to be extended several times

⁶⁰¹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* [The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus] (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), see also Adas, *Machines as Measure of Men*.

⁶⁰² Migettuvatte Gunananda was involved in the revivalism of Buddhism for quite some time. He founded the Society for the Propagation of Buddhism in 1862 and was also a prominent book publisher. His activities set also an example for other bhikkhus by adopting a style more like evangelic Christian preachers and forsaking the typical monastic practice of seating themselves and placing a fan before the face in order to de-personalize the message. Another important impact of the his victory was that the news reached the United States where it came to the attention of Colonel H.S. Olcott, a prominent member of the Theosophical Society. This marked a crucial turning point because the involvement of members from the Theosophical Society, especially Olcott, had a major impact for the organization and advancement of the movement. The presence of Westerners who supported Buddhism against Christianity had a far-reaching psychological effect on the Buddhist movement. De Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, p. 429sp, Frost, 'Wider Opportunities', p. 944.

⁶⁰³ Ibid, p. 945, see also Christopher M. Bayly, *Empire and Information. Intelligence gathering and social Communication in India; 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

to meet the popular demand. 'These have been very much appreciated, especially the "Bana" preaching by Buddhists monks. Many cases have been reported of estate superintendents using their receiving sets and loudspeakers for the entertainment of their estates workers.'⁶⁰⁴

Religious revival and caste conflict

The Buddhist revival was basically a Low Country movement supported and organized by certain parts of the Low Country elite. Without the initiative and financial support of their leading members – new somebodies to a man – the movement's activities, for instance by way of print products, would have not been possible.⁶⁰⁵ Whilst their religious beliefs are unquestionably true, their support of the Buddhist revival movement was crucial in challenging the old elite and helped them to legitimate their newly gained social status.⁶⁰⁶ Many members of the old Sinhalese elite in the Low Country had converted to Christianity to improve their social and economic prospects towards the colonial government. While Buddhists were prominent in public life during the nineteenth century, elite status (e.g. as expressed by employment in the Ceylon Civil Service) and Christianity had more or less gone hand in hand.⁶⁰⁷ Buddhism therefore gave the new somebodies much leverage to challenge the old elites' claim for leadership vis-à-vis the masses.

Another important arena of conflict in that context was the clash over control of the sangha. The new elite actively challenged the accepted tradition, not least building on the policy maintained by the kings of Kandy, which restricted admission to the order to members of the goyigama caste. They did so by founding new fraternities

⁶⁰⁴ *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1928, Part II, C11. The newspapers covered the progress of 'radio telephony' as well as radio quite well. They also printed the programs for the various radio services - overseas, Indian, and local ones. It is impossible to assess the impact of the radio in colonial Sri Lanka., but like the telephone this new medium seemed to be relatively popular. If the colonial power tried to use the radio in Sri Lanka as an 'invisible Empire tie'(Chandrika Kaul) or if the policy between India and Sri Lanka like in the case of the telephone was different, has to remain unanswered. For more details see Chandrika Kaul, *Communications, Media and the Imperial Experience. Britain and India in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 123-171.

⁶⁰⁵ De Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, p. 432sp.

⁶⁰⁶ For an interesting discussion of religion in Sri Lankan politics not always being 'baby-kissing' see Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 11-16.

⁶⁰⁷ Jakob Rösel, *Der Bürgerkrieg auf Sri Lanka* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlags Gesellschaft, 1997), p. 25sp (Rösel's work is a detailed analysis of the roots of the civil war).

(*nikayas*) within the sangha through the introduction of higher ordination traditions from Burma on two occasions.⁶⁰⁸ The establishment of the Amarapura and Ramanya nikayas in 1802 and 1851 respectively, effectively removed the goyigamas' monopoly over religious life in Sinhalese society and allowed non-goyigamas to engage in religious activities. This development led to an expansion of the religious sphere, including an increase in the number of fraternities, monks and temples.⁶⁰⁹

Buddhism was an important vehicle for the new elite to express their religious beliefs, but also to display their newly achieved economic and social status. The movement was not a mere site for a conflict between two elite groups. The aim of the new somebodies was not to demolish caste structure and introduce new caste norms or forms of behaviour but to consolidate their newly gained status. Controlling resources, gaining positions of power and receiving legitimation by the state were all essential for fulfilling that plan and above all, it gave the members of the new elite an opportunity to present themselves as leaders of the people.⁶¹⁰ But for being acknowledged by the people as their leaders, they needed to legitimize their claim. In that regard, the temperance movement became a stomping ground for the new somebodies.

Temperance movement

Movements to suppress the consumption of alcoholic drinks were a global phenomenon during the nineteenth century and often had common themes in different countries. Temperance was often promoted by people who possessed a degree of economic and social power but were excluded from politics and it often spread an ideology that had much in common with Protestant middle-class values.⁶¹¹ In Sri Lanka, temperance agitation had already started during the last quarter of the nineteenth century by Christian organizations and missionaries. At

⁶⁰⁸ Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation*, p. 135sp.

⁶⁰⁹ For more details see Gombrich, *Buddhism transformed*, Kitsiri Malagoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900: A Study of religious Revival and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

⁶¹⁰ Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation*, p. 133, 146, 156.

⁶¹¹ John D. Rodgers, 'Cultural Nationalism and Social Reform: The 1904 Temperance Movement in Sir Lanka', *The Indian Economic and Social Review*, 26, 3(1989), p. 319sp.

the beginning of the twentieth century, Buddhists began to develop their own brand of temperance. Their temperance movement went on for two decades and had two significant peaks in activity, in 1904 and 1913.

From April through November 1904, hundreds of temperance societies sprang up all over Sri Lanka. The movement started in the South and made its way across the island. The ideology behind temperance was never clearly defined by its leading protagonists, thus in the first significant peak it wasn't excluding non-Buddhist.⁶¹² 'First, temperance was a vehicle for the propagation of ideas of social order and respectability often historically associated with the modern middle class. Second, temperance served as a means to formulate indirectly a social and cultural identity apart from that provided by the colonial state.' Unlike the temperance movements in the USA or Europe, the movement created a positive cultural image of total abstinence that could be presented as having deep roots in the indigenous culture.⁶¹³ The success of the movement in changing the behaviour of their members represented a triumph for the elites who imposed their values on labourers and peasants; thus closing the gap between the elite and the common Sinhalese.⁶¹⁴

The second peak in agitation, between 1911 and 1914, was primarily a movement of resistance to reforms proposed by the government concerning the arrack business. The agitation was at that time headed by several Buddhist 'nationalist' leaders, e.g. Anagarika Dharmapala, and served mainly to spread the notion of a Sinhala Buddhist nation.⁶¹⁵ The temperance movement, like the cow protection movement in British India, was an important component for the identity building process. It highlighted one attribute of the 'nation', which would be understood and internalized by every member of the community, thereby creating a feeling of solidarity and belonging. The temperance movement was a crucial vehicle to advance the Sinhala cause within the own community and the public arena.

⁶¹² Ibid, p. 332sp.

⁶¹³ Ibid, p. 340.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid, p. 334.

⁶¹⁵ For more details see Jayawardena, *Rise of the Labour Movement*, Fernando, 'Buddhist Leadership', Rösel, *Entstehung und Gestalt des Singhalesischen Nationalismus*.

Emerging elite and leadership

The temperance movement remained a temporary affair and did not convert into an organization or political party to channel religious enthusiasm into the political arena. The inability or unwillingness of the Sinhalese elite to do so tells much about their state of mind and attitude towards the people in general at the beginning of the twentieth century. As mentioned, the Sinhalese elite was not one monolithic group but divided along the lines of kinship, language, economic interests and religion.

The first phase of that movement, peaking in 1904, had been in the hands of the local elites, but when the movement began to spread beyond the districts on the Lankan south and west coasts, the new somebodies of that area (who often lived in Colombo) seized the leadership of the movement.⁶¹⁶ The temperance agitation was used by them to assert their influence and strengthen their patron-client networks, often in areas with pre-existing family ties.⁶¹⁷ These networks would become important in the 1930s as the strife for political power intensified after universal adult suffrage was introduced on the island. The second agitation peak of the temperance movement a decade later helped the self-declared Buddhist leaders to position themselves as national leaders, who now had the stature and credibility to enter the political arena and agitate not only against the British but also challenge the leadership of the old elites.⁶¹⁸

The riots of 1915 and new technologies

The riots were directed against Muslims, especially the Coast Moors, by Sinhala Buddhists. They started at the night of 28 May in Gampola, triggered by a dispute over a Buddhist Perahera procession passing a mosque; the riots then spread from Kandy to Colombo and from there across the whole island. They reached their peak

⁶¹⁶ At the end of the nineteenth century many families which were enriched by the arrack trade diversified in more socially accepted, from a Buddhist point of view, industries. Interestingly, many families still involved in arrack trade supported the Buddhist revival movement as well as the temperance movement without hiding that. They demonstrated that they were 'good' Buddhist and were not thrown out. See Rodgers, 'Cultural Nationalism and social Reform', p. 322, 329sp, 338.

⁶¹⁷ *ibid*, p. 329-331.

⁶¹⁸ Many of the later national leaders emerged through their participation in the temperance movement, e.g. F.R. Senanayake, D.S. Senanayake, W.A. de Silva, D.B. Jayatilaka, George E. de Silva, C.A. Hewavitarana, Athur W. Dias, C. Batuwantudawe. Fernando, 'Buddhist Leadership', p. 336.

between 29 May and 5 June 1915, when they occurred in the Central, North Western, Western, Southern and Sabaragamuwa Provinces.⁶¹⁹

Several new technologies helped to spread these riots: bicycles, motorcars and the telephone. The bicycle was initially a leisure vehicle, at first used by Europeans only, but around the turn of the century it was used by a far larger population. For many working people it became a cheap and reliant means of transport or even a part of work itself, as even the police were equipped with bicycles. From around 1903, local production further enhanced their spread, and around 1911, they were used island-wide.⁶²⁰ In 1915, bicycles made an entry on the stage of communal violence, as both rioters and messengers used them to ride from village to village, spreading fear, attacking Moors and destroying their property or instigating the local population to participate.⁶²¹ By the first decade of the twentieth century, motorcars were still limited to the members of the elite but they had become a permanent and central feature in urban areas. During the riots, motorcars like the bicycles served the Sinhala nationalists to move around, distributing rolls of Lion flags and promoting attacks on Moors. But on the other hand, the motorcar was also used by the authorities in their attempts to, to quell the riots, bringing police to hotspots or carrying off arrested rioters. Occasionally, British volunteers, planters and employees of commercial firms made their private cars available to these efforts.⁶²²

Besides these new transport technologies, the telephone offered both sides a fast medium of communication during the riots. Government used the telephone to share information and coordinate their efforts.⁶²³ This is unsurprising: Colombo's telephone network not only connected the main government departments and police stations, but was also linked to Kandy and Galle via the first trunk lines. Besides, the military had a functioning, separate network.⁶²⁴ The far more

⁶¹⁹ For more details see Tambiah, *Leveling crowds*, p. 36sp.

⁶²⁰ Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern*, p. 116.

⁶²¹ For more details *ibid*, p. 116.

⁶²² *Ibid*, p. 115sp.

⁶²³ P. Ramanathan, *Riots and Martial Law in Ceylon, 1915* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Service, 1916/reprint 2003), p. 31.

⁶²⁴ Government initially treated the riots as communal disturbances but then began to regard them as a conspiracy against the British. Bureaucracy and Police would most likely have been able to deal with the matter but due to that change in perspective, the military was charged with the quelling of the riots. De Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, p. 475.

interesting question is the usage of the telephone by members of the Sinhalese elite during the riots.

Sinhalese Elite and the telephone

The leadership within the Buddhist revival movement and the participation in the temperance movement had given several new somebodies, for instance D.S. Senanayake, George E. de Silva, W.A. de Silva, Arthur V. Dias, the stature and reputation to be Buddhist leaders of national level. They were accepted as such by the Sinhalese population and the British alike. Colombo had become the place where these national leaders and other supporters of their cause, e.g. N.S. Fernando, D.D. Pedris and his son, Don Carolis, had their residence. Only very few of them lived outside Colombo, e.g. Arthur V. Dias whose estate was at Panadure, which is close to Kalutara.⁶²⁵

By the early 1920s, all the above named members of the Sinhalese elite were listed as telephone subscribers, and it is possibly fair to assume that several of them already had subscribed during the 1910s. A case in point is N.S. Fernando, who owned a telephone since 1909.⁶²⁶ In his analysis of the Anti-Muslim Riots of 1915, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan complained about the behaviour of the government-appointed Censors in the aftermath of the riots, stating: 'how many private letters were opened and how many telephone messages were "tapped" by order of the Censors in various post and telephone offices, one cannot tell.'⁶²⁷ This statement indicates that in the 1910s the telephone already was a well-used and established communication channel for the members of the elite. It is therefore quite plausible to believe that the telephone was used during the riots of 1915 as a tool for quick communication and helped spreading and coordinating the riots.

3.3.2. Politics and the telephone during the interwar period

Beginning of the political organization

⁶²⁵ Fernando, 'Buddhist Leadership', p. 336, Rösler, *Entstehung und Gestalt des Singhalesischen Nationalismus*, p. 288sp, Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*, p. 56sp.

⁶²⁶ *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1909-10, p. XXXIV.

⁶²⁷ Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, with the moral authority of the elected representative of the educated Sri Lankans, defended the Sinhalese leaders and condemned the excesses committed by the British forces in several speeches. Together with Sir James Peiris he campaign for a Royal Commission of Inquiry, without success, for two years. Ramanathan, *Riots and Martial Law*, p. 114.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Sinhalese elite began to politically organize themselves. The first organizations were based on economic interests and occupation, e.g. Low-Country Product Association, Chilaw Association, Plumbago Merchant's Union.⁶²⁸ These professional associations and unions formed another starting point in the fight for political representation. Activities often began with (and in some cases remained limited to) drafting petitions to be sent to the government. Politically, the main demand made at this point was that the system of representation for the Executive Council, which was based on ethnicity, should be abolished and that members of the Legislative Council should be chosen from territorial constituencies and by a restricted franchise, which privileged the upper and middle classes.⁶²⁹

The question of representation, especially in the island's highest political institution, the Legislative Council, was a major battleground for political power. While the new somebodies' challenge for social status and religious leadership met with success relatively easily, they were not making much progress in respect of political influence. Representation in the Legislative Council from 1837 to 1911 was reserved for 'first class goyigamas'. Any attempt by the new somebodies to adjust their political influence to their economic power was unsuccessful during that period.⁶³⁰ With the expansion of the franchise in 1911, which made a degree an alternative qualification to gain franchise, and the Manning Reforms in 1923/24, which introduced territorial constituencies, things began to change for the new somebodies and they began to realize their share of political power.⁶³¹

The Ceylon National Congress

⁶²⁸ Jane Russel, *Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution 1931-1947* (Dehiwala: Tisara Prakasakayo, 1982), p. 130sp, Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 318.

⁶²⁹ Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 338sp, Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation*, p. 173.

⁶³⁰ Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 266sq, Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation*, p. 166.

⁶³¹ Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 321sp, Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation*, p. 173.

The foundation and first five years of the CNC opened a new chapter in several ways. The impulse for its foundation came through Edwin Montagu's promise of "responsible government" in recognition of the colonies' contribution to the First World War. The ensuing electoral reforms, known as the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms in India and the Manning Reforms in Sri Lanka, expanded the franchise and introduced a limited degree of responsibilities to indigenous members of the legislative councils. To make the best of the new opportunity, leading members of the elite got together to create a Sri Lankan congress party, a classical catch-all party, which was to include all groups of the island to organise political activities and voting and eventually prepare for the colony's independence. The CNC's founding members came from among Low Country Sinhalese, Ceylon Tamils and the Kandy Sinhalese elite. Sir Ponnabalam Arunchalam, a reputed Tamil gentleman, was elected as its first president.⁶³² However, the hopes of its founding fathers like Arunachalam that the CNC would mark a turning point in Sri Lanka's politics by replacing ethnic and religious identities with a more secular form of nationalism, did not fulfil.⁶³³ Especially the conflict between the Sinhala-speaking majority and the Tamil minority hardened, and by 1924, the Ceylon Tamils had withdrawn from the CNC. As many Kandyan Sinhalese did the same, the CNC became an almost exclusive Low Country Sinhalese organisation.⁶³⁴

The failure of establishing of a congress party copying the successful model of the Indian National Congress, was due to a couple of developments specific to the island, of which only a few are relevant for this thesis. The history of the CNC between 1919 and 1924 marks a turning point for the relationship between the old

⁶³² Prinz, *Geschichte der United National Party*, p. 42.

⁶³³ See K.M. de Silva, 'The Ceylon National Congress in Disarray 1920-1: Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam leaves the Congress', *Ceylon Journal of historical and social Studies*, NS, 2(1) (1972), 97-117.

⁶³⁴ In 1920, the suffrage for the Legislative Council was changed from a communal to a territorial representation, which had given the Low Country Sinhalese a majority. At that point, Ponnambalam Arunachalam, the main figure of the Ceylon Tamil elite, demanded larger representation for the Tamils. Seeing it rejected, he began to retreat from the CNC claiming that it would be representing Sinhalese interest only. The majority of politically active Ceylon Tamils followed his example. The issue that Low Country Sinhalese candidates were –often successfully – competing in constituencies in the Kandy Highland with Kandy Sinhalese candidates was the official reason for the Kandy Sinhalese elite to retreat from the CNC in 1924. Their move was also economically motivated and stimulated by Governor Manning's policy of 'divide and rule'. For more details see K.M. de Silva, 'The Formation and Character of the Ceylon National Congress, 1917-1919', *Ceylon Journal of historical and social Studies*, 10(1967), pp. 70-102, de Silva, 'Ceylon National Congress in Disarray'.

and the new elites. The new and old Low Country Sinhalese elite were now gathered in the CNC. The new somebodies had strengthened their social status and reputation, and the CNC now provided the platform for joint political activities of the indigenous elites, who were seemingly sitting in the same boat. However, the retreat of the Kandy Sinhalese elite from the CNC demonstrated that the old internal order of Sinhalese society had been abandoned and a clear division between elites from the Low Country and from Kandy had emerged.

The most telling example that the new somebodies had succeeded in their struggle for social and political dominance is the model career of Don Stephen Senanayake, who became the first prime minister of independent Sri Lanka. Don Spater Senanayake, the father of Don Stephen, came from a lowly goyigama family in the Negombo District, who remained Buddhist. Don Spater's rising fortune came from graphite mining and he invested the profits in coconut plantations. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, he had become a leading figure in the arrack business and advanced to the rank of a mudaliyar. Don Stephen, the son, was sent to the prestigious St. Thomas College, but later got involved in the second temperance campaign, alongside his two brothers Don Charles and F. R. The trio was also involved in and got jailed for their participation in the anti-Muslim riots in 1915. Nevertheless, Don Stephen was elected to the Legislative Council in 1924 and later to the State Council from 1931 to 1947. He quickly rose through the ranks of the CNC to become one of the island's leading political figures, guiding the CNC and the country to independence. From 1948 to his death in 1952, he served as Sri Lanka's first president.⁶³⁵

The telephone and powerful communications

Like many Sinhalese leaders Don Stephen Senanayake was one of the early telephone subscribers. Aside from the persons already mentioned in the second and third chapters, here are two more examples of politically influential persons who owned a telephone connection at the beginning of the 1920s:

⁶³⁵ Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 192sp.

- Don Richard Wijewardena: He was a press baron, the founder of the *Ceylon Daily News* and later owner of the *Ceylon Independent* and the *Dinamina*. His family had made a fortune in the timber business. He was a supporter of the national movement and was involved in the Anti-Muslim riots and arrested.⁶³⁶
- Sir James Peiris: He came from an entrepreneurial Christian family of Greater Colombo. Peiris was president of both the Ceylon National Organisation (1892) and the CNC (1920), and was elected to the Legislative Council without opposition. He was supported by D.S. and F.R. Senanayake, and his family was also linked by marriage to the de Mels (see Sir Henry Lawson de Mel, p. 141).⁶³⁷

But telephone connections were not only limited to such individuals alone, as other important institutions and organisations campaigning and lobbying within the Buddhist revival movement like the Mahabodhi Society, would also have had telephone connections, even though they were not usually mentioned in the address lists of *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*. For instance, the Buddhist Theosophical Society's Press (see Image 18) had a telephone connection in 1914.⁶³⁸ Moreover, it is very likely that important monasteries and Buddhist schools, notably their principals or abbots, had received a telephone connection, possibly as a donation. This was customary in other Theravada Buddhist countries, e.g. Burma, and with Ceylon's scene of lay supporters being equally vivid it is quite probable that donors provided a landline to Buddhist institutions. Today, laymen often donate mobile phones to bhikkhus.

The telephone network was therefore another communication channel beside print media and face-to-face encounters at social events, in clubs at temples and churches: easy to use, fast and prevalent among the Sinhala elite or other relevant political and social heavyweights. During the 1920s, the elite tried to politically

⁶³⁶ <<http://www.revolv.com/main/index.php?s=D.%20R.%20Wijewardena&uid=1575>> [accessed 1 August 2015], Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 394.

⁶³⁷ Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 332, 367, *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, List of Addresses, p. 278.

⁶³⁸ The Buddhist Theosophical Society Press, as shown in Image 18, had a telephone connection.

Image 18: Advertisement Buddhist Theosophical Society:

Advertisements. XXXV

**THE
BUDDHIST THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY**

Is engaged in Buddhist Educational work, and has established
nearly three hundred Schools and Colleges throughout Ceylon.
HEADQUARTERS—81, MALIBAN STREET, COLOMBO.



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ESTD. 1880.
Twelve Pages twice a Week.

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Job Printing of all kinds executed with neatness and despatch.
Reasonable Prices for Excellent Work.
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Agents and Correspondents in all Principal Cities.
CORRESPONDENCE SOLICITED.

Telegraphic Address: "MOHUSAK," Colombo. *Codes used*—A. B. C. 4th & 5th and Private Codes.

Source: *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1914, p. XXXV.

organise themselves better with the aim to communicate their demands more effectively to the government in their quest for political power. At the same time the strife between the new and old somebodies continued. In this setting, the telephone was potentially more than just a status symbol as it offered a discrete and yet effective way for discussing and making politics. It was another way for members of the elite to communicate their ideas, coordinate their plans, form

alliances, or otherwise show solidarity to each other. In that respect, the telephone can be regarded as a part of ‘discourse networks’ within the colonial society.⁶³⁹

The Donoughmore Constitution and political development in the 1930s

The introduction of the Donoughmore reforms in 1931 was a watershed for politics in colonial Sri Lanka. The new constitution made Ceylon the only colony (as opposed to the dominions, which were predominantly inhabited by white settlers) of the British Empire to be granted universal adult suffrage, turning the Empire’s ‘model colony’ into a constitutional laboratory as well.⁶⁴⁰ As a result, the days when the elites assembled in the CNC could make their political deals in the backroom came to an end, as candidates had to appeal to a much wider electorate in order to win a seat in the Legislative Council.

The political organizations founded until then – the Ceylon Tamils had founded a congress party of their own after the walkout from the CNC – were not political parties but rather representational bodies, bound by economic interest which were identical with ethnic boundaries. This structure tied in with the rising communalism in Sri Lankan politics at the beginning of the 1920s, which reflected the competitions of the various elite groups for political and economic resources. The new electoral regulations changed that situation profoundly. Being Anglicized, Westernized and more often than not Christianized as well, besides holding considerable economic power put these political elites on the back foot when it came to competing for the votes of the ordinary people. Forced to learn how to appeal to the masses more or less overnight, they quickly recognized that using the idioms of the Sinhala Buddhists to address Sinhalese voters was the way to go. It taught them that using communalist language won votes and at the same time provided them with an identifiable “other” who could be blamed for all setbacks

⁶³⁹ The term ‘discourse networks’ is taken from the works of Friedrich Kittler. He argues in his main work ‘Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900’ (Discourse Networks 1800/1900 translated by Michael Meeter and Chris Cullens, Stanford University Press 1990) that technologies are crucial for the processing and formation of culture and memory and therefore it is impossible to separate culture and technology. ‘Discourse networks’ are networks within the society and its discourses that also rely on various technologies, e.g. newspapers, telephone, gramophone etc. Kittler’s work is heavily influenced by the work of contemporary French philosophy, e.g. Michael Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida. See Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

⁶⁴⁰ See de Silva, “The Model Colony”.

and shortcomings. Moreover, it helped them to ally again with the *radala*, which had remained true to their Buddhist faith. Many CNC members dropped the Christian faith in favour of Buddhism, in turn strengthening the influence of Sinhala Buddhism in Sri Lankan politics.⁶⁴¹ These developments in Sri Lankan politics can be illustrated best with the example of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. His father Solomon Dias Bandaranaike was a member of the old Low Country elite, the Bandaranaike-Obeyesekere clan, and held the rank of *Maha Mudaliyar*, a position considered as being the 'first Sinhalese gentleman' and the native right-hand man of the British Governor. After returning from his studies in Oxford, he entered politics and was elected in 1931 to the State Council. In 1934, he openly converted to Buddhism. After independence, Bandaranaike split from the ruling United National Party (UNP) to found the SLFP. In 1956, he was elected Prime Minister on a platform which promoted Buddhism and the Sinhalese language; a success widely regarded as a triumph of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. In office, he began with the 'Sinhalisation' of the island, which included the introduction of Sinhala as the official language and the elevation of Buddhism to the state religion.⁶⁴² Already during colonial times, Bandaranaike's political life was dominated by two schemes of how politics in Sri Lanka should develop. In contrast to many members of the Low Country elite, he was keen to promote reforms for the social and economic development of the island, focusing on the rural population. His other aim was the need for a cultural and religious revival amongst the Sinhalese. He was one of the first politicians to use Sinhala Buddhism as a vehicle for political agitation, regularly employing not only anti-colonial but also anti-Tamil rhetoric, to mobilize political supporters and garner their votes.⁶⁴³

The Kandy and Low Country Sinhalese elite had conflicting views on various subjects during the 1920s and the early 1930s. The Kandyan elite, long hoping to receive autonomy rights for their upcountry homelands, found their hopes squashed with the introduction of the Donoughmore Constitution. In the following elections, several *radala* candidates lost their seats to Low Country ones and their remaining

⁶⁴¹ Rösel, *Bürgerkrieg auf Sri Lanka*, p. 46sp.

⁶⁴² For more details see S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, *Speeches and Writings* (Colombo: Information Division of the Dept. of Broadcasting and Information, 1963), Manor, *The expedient Utopian*.

⁶⁴³ *ibid*, p. 135sp.

representatives lacked the political influence to enforce decisions in favour of the Kandyan interests, e.g. on the question of headmen. Their only option was a political alliance for which they had two possible partners: the Low Country Sinhalese and the Ceylon Tamils, who at that point were trying to form a political block with the Moors and Burghers. The Low Country Sinhalese appeared to be more supportive towards them, while the great legislative majority formed by the two Sinhalese groups would easily safeguard their political interests. This political alliance came alongside further linkages between the two groups, as prominent members of the Low Country Sinhalese elite had begun to marry into elite families from Kandy, e.g. D.S. Senanayake, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, J. Kotewela. This also marked a change in the marriage behaviour of the new somebodies. During the nineteenth century, marriages had been mainly strategic and served to improve the economic position of the two families concerned, especially to produce cartels, but they were now used to acquire the social status by marrying into high-status 'feudal' families. The emerging political alliance in 1936 marked the emergence of one Sinhalese elite.⁶⁴⁴

Until the introduction of universal adult suffrage, no political parties were founded and the political actors organized themselves in interest groups, association or clubs, which were basically melting pots for the elite members with similar interests and occupations. Even the CNC was far from being a modern, political party according to the definition in the Weberian sense.⁶⁴⁵ While introducing the element of mass politics, the Donoughmore Constitution was designed to make the foundation of political parties unnecessary. Accordingly, the members of the elite organized their personal network and followers as they thought best. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, for example, founded the Sinhala Maha Sabha in the 1930s, a staunchly nationalist party, which he used to mobilize his political support.⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴⁴ Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 191, Russel, *Communal Politics*, p. 227sp.

⁶⁴⁵ Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1976).

⁶⁴⁶ There is considerable confusion regarding the date of its foundation. Jane Russell places it in 1934 but K.M. de Silva prefers 1937. Bandaranaike was campaigning on communalist themes as early as 1934 but there is no evidence for the existence of the Sinhala Mahasabha. According to Sir Senarat Gunawardena, its initial meeting was in 1936. See Manor, *The expedient Utopian*, p. 128.

Telephone and discourse networks

Within the scope of this work and based on the sources consulted, it is impossible to assess exactly the impact the telephone had on the emergence of a nationalist movement, the rise of communal politics, the strengthening of Sinhala identity or the formation of a Sinhalese nationalist elite. At the beginning of the 1920s, the telephone was part of the everyday life of the patrons and was clearly used for more than just doing business or expressing status. Like English-language newspapers, it served to disseminate political views and arrive at agreements without face-to-face meetings.

Like print media, the telephone brought politics into the homes (and sometimes offices), but at the same time it offered the unmatched advantage of immediate participation: call to coordinate activities, share an opinion, give a harangue or lend moral support would only take a moment. And all that without having to leave the armchair and go face-to-face. Combining convenience, immediacy and the power of a modern machinery, the telephone possessed essential qualities to make it a part of discourse networks within the Sinhalese community, and by extension of the colonial society as well.

The discourses about ethno-religious identities (mainly Sinhala and Tamil) identities and the future shape of the island were crucial for the political development during and after independence. These discourses including their socio-political consequences were an attempt of the new elite to grapple with the experience of colonial rule, notably the island's exposure to the forces of modernisation and (as it is now called) globalization. The discourse about the impact of Western cultural forces, the discourse about the complex process of evaluating, assimilating or rejecting such forces and the discourse about the Sinhala identity would have not been possible without the media.⁶⁴⁷ Thus this study indicates that the telephone, as a part of the communication infrastructure, enabled far more sustainable discourses on the local and national level.

⁶⁴⁷ See Frost, 'Wider Opportunities'.

Beyond the local

But such discourses were not limited to colonial Sri Lanka and in turn the island's elite was not only involved in the discourses within the island but were also connected to the world outside by using the new possibilities the first phase of globalization offered. Their discourse thus took place on both a micro- and a macro-level.⁶⁴⁸ Besides the imperial connections, the vivid exchange with other Theravada Buddhist countries was an important component of the discourse in Sri Lanka itself.

This kind of exchange, especially with Burma, was nothing new, as networks of exchange had existed for centuries.⁶⁴⁹ However, the level of collective action increased in a tremendous way and included new forms of activities and new organizations, which were not necessarily limited to or dominated by monks anymore.⁶⁵⁰ The new bilingual elite participated in great numbers, exchanging their views by using English as lingua franca as well as the imperial transport and communication infrastructure. The newly emerging networks not only connected South and Southeast Asian countries but also expanded to Europe, Japan and America.⁶⁵¹ The discourse and new activities were now run in great number by laymen using the 'Empire's tool' for their own agenda.

⁶⁴⁸ *ibid*, p. 953, 966.

⁶⁴⁹ For more details see e.g. Tilman Frasch, 'A Buddhist Network in the Bay of Bengal: Relations between Bodhgaya, Burma and Sri Lanka, c.300-1300', in *From the Mediterranean to the China Sea: Miscellaneous Notes*, ed. by Claude Guillot et al (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), pp. 69-92, Tilman Frasch, 'The Buddhist Connection: Sinhalese-Burmese Intercourse in the Middle Ages', in *Explorations in the History of South Asia*, ed. by Georg Berkemer and Tilman Frasch and Hermann Kulke and Jürgen Lütt (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), pp. 85-98, Tilman Frasch, 'The Theravada Buddhist Ecumene in the 15th Century: Intellectual Foundations and Material Representations', in *Buddhism across Asia. Networks of Material, Intellectual and Cultural Exchange*, Vol. 1, ed. by Tansen Sen (Singapore/Delhi: ISEAS/Manohar, 2014), pp. 347-367.

⁶⁵⁰ The most prominent example is the Mahabodhi Society which was founded by Angarika Dharmapala. Recovering Bodh Gaya was one of the major aims; but Dharmapala used the society to connect Buddhist, laymen and monks, all over the globe. For more details see Stephen Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation. Anagarika Dharmapala and the Buddhist World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

⁶⁵¹ The use of the imperial network and believe of the Sri Lankan elite, that this network was crucial to keep the global efforts alive, was also one reason for the loyalty towards the British colonial power found amongst the elites. Frost, 'Wider Opportunities', p. 967, Anne M. Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism. Colonialism and Modernity in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 104sp.

To many Sinhalese a unity Buddhist world was seen to depend on the imperial infrastructure.⁶⁵² Colombo was the hub between the discourse taking place in the national public sphere and the ones on global level. Telephone communication was limited to the local and national level during the interwar period but it would seem natural that especially Colombo's telephone network – the largest local network to be found on the island – played a role.

3.3.3. Telephone as a political issue

The telephone was not only used to discuss and make politics, but it regularly came up as a political issue. The discussion in the political arena was mainly focused on the speed and extent of the development of the telephone service and who should operate the service.

As mentioned in the first chapter, the Imperial and International Communications, Ltd., offered in 1932 to take over the Sri Lankan telephone network. The offer was much appreciated by parts of the planting and commercial communities, who hoped that a liberalization of the service would make it more efficient and improve the service, an often voiced complaint during that time.⁶⁵³ However, the offer was rejected by the Sri Lankan government because they felt that privatization would mean losing of control over a perceived national asset. The arguments made in that discussion reveal that the telephone was much appreciated by the Sri Lankan elites.⁶⁵⁴ In 1934, the question was discussed by the State Council whether a telephone connection with India should be built, costing 25,000Rs. The discussion before the vote, which was passed with '30 voting for and 12 against', brought several important arguments to light:

'Col. T.O. Jayawardene opposed the expenditure of so large a sum to that connection when there were places in the country where a telephone connection was absent. In

⁶⁵² Frost, 'Wider Opportunities', p. 967.

⁶⁵³ *The Ceylon Independent*, 28 February 1928, p. 3, *The Times of Ceylon*, 13 March 1930, p. 4.

⁶⁵⁴ *The Times of Ceylon*, 20 February 1933, p. 6.

his own constituency, Rakwana and Bambarakotuwa⁶⁵⁵ were without telephone and when request was made, the Minister of Communication and Works replied that there was no money. Some explanation, he said, was due.

Mr. G.E. de Silva enquired how it was such a large expenditure was proposed when according to the Minister they were losing millions of rupees every year. The Telephone Department was ever ready to disconnect telephones on the slightest excuse.

The Minister replied that the loss was really on depreciation and interest etc. Until the system of "rate per call" was introduced it would not be possible to reduce expenditure. The telephone service must be kept up to the same standard as in other parts of the world...Five or six years ago Java was connected telephonically with the rest of the world and Ceylon was still behind...from the business point of view such facilities for communication with other parts of the world would be...advantageous.

Mr. D.J. Wimalasurendra said that in view of the present conditions telephone communication between Ceylon and India would not be immediately necessary as the amount of business transacted would be small...the local telephone system required over hauling and he did not think it was right and proper to embark on an expensive scheme before the local system was improved...

The Minister replied that representations were made to the Postmaster-General by the Indian Merchants Chamber, the Chamber of Commerce and several other bodies in that opinion.....

*Sir Henry de Mal...*more important scheme...aerodrome...

*Mr. E.C. Villiers...*the importance of the connection was there...

Mr. S.W. Dassenaik (Colombo South) expressed his astonishment at the Imperialist ground taken by the member from Puttalam in favouring the establishment of an aerodrome. That would enable the rich to fly undoubtedly, but a telephone link would help a poor man to communicate with a son who might be in England and speak to the lad. The member of Puttalam had wide imperial sympathies.

⁶⁵⁵ At this point Sabaragamuwa PA was trying to get telephones for these two valley districts without success. PMG stated that there was a lack of funds and the scheme would be too expensive to be remunerative. *The Times of Ceylon*, 28 April 1934, p. 13.

Mr. G. Robert de Soysa (Balapitiya) supported the vote and said that if they had telephone communication with London, the Minister of Agriculture and Lands might have got his Rubber Restriction Bill passed even earlier.⁶⁵⁶

As mentioned, the cost for connecting Sri Lanka with India and Britain was quite high in comparison to other extension lines within the island. The plan for an external extension was of course supported by the business and planting community, as the above statement by E.C. Villiers shows, who was an influential member in the planter community and ex-chairman of the PAC. But the major argument against that international line was that the telephone system within the colony itself was not as well developed as it should be and therefore be given priority. The telephone was a much appreciated medium and the key policy makers were not only clearly aware of its potential but also used it. The fact that it was mentioned together aerodromes demonstrates that the telephone was closely linked to the modernization of the island; technologies were still perceived as indicators of progress.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the further impact of the telephone on Sri Lanka's colonial society. The telephone offered a possibility to talk, discuss and chat about various topics, ranging from the great questions of the day to trivial matters. Private telephone conversations matter because they were a way to exchange thoughts and feelings, thus helping to deal with the constant changes in life and creating a sense of belonging and social solidarity amongst the various members of the peer groups. In that regard, the telephone was of great interest for upper-class women. They were mostly limited to the domestic sphere and could only on few occasions leave the house to meet other women. For women living on estates, this situation was even worse but the telephone allowed them to socialise with other women of their peer group and intellectually escape their confinement to the domestic sphere without physically leaving the home. Furthermore, the telephone became a formal part of the certain social rituals, notably the tradition of calling. The incorporation

⁶⁵⁶ *The Ceylon Observer*, 22 May 1934, weekly edition, p. 22.

of the telephone in these formalized relations therefore mirrored and to a degree transformed already existing social networks.

Like print media, the telephone brought politics into the homes (and sometimes offices, too), but at the same time it offered the unmatched advantage of immediate participation: just pick up the telephone and make a call to coordinate activities, share an opinion, give a harangue or lend moral support. Using the Sinhalese elite as an example, it has been shown that many of their political actors owned a telephone. As the telephone was an established means of communication during the interwar period, it is obvious that the telephone formed another possibility to interact and exchange views, complementing messages and print products as well as meetings at the usual places. Thus it is plausible that the telephone had a distinct impact on political decision making and identity formation.

Conclusion

The emergence of an elaborated telephone network during colonial times cannot be seen in isolation, as it was a crucial part of the political and economic development of the colony. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, and notably with the introduction of the Colebrook-Cameron Reforms (1833-34), British rule changed the economic and political framework of the island dramatically. The economic transformation favoured the formation of a plantation sector and created a colonial economy which relied heavily on the export of a few cash crops. Communication and transport facilities between the planting districts and the port cities became a crucial part of for the island's economy.

The telephone offered an efficient and ultimately 'modern' way to bridge the gap between the estates and the nearest Post Office, and through the trunk further on to Colombo. The creation of the telephone network can be divided into two phases: The first phase (1880-1914) began with the installation of the first telephone in 1880 which initiated the construction of the first small telephone network in Colombo four years later. Until 1905, no further extensions were realized because most of the financial resources of the state were used to construct roads and railways as well as establish postal services and telegraph facilities. After that, the first telephone networks in rural areas and major towns together with the first trunk line were constructed. The outbreak of the First World War brought the telephone development in Sri Lanka to a halt due to the shortage and expensiveness of material, which had to be imported from Great Britain.

In the second phase (1919-1939), coinciding by and large with the interwar period, rural telephone networks emerged in the planting districts and the major cities and towns received telephone facilities. These various networks were subsequently interconnected with a trunk line system, resulting in the gradual development of an island-wide telephone system. The network's two hotspots, Colombo and the planting districts, reflected the colonial hierarchies and power structure. By the late 1930s, the telephone network was relatively well established and its use to convey messages over long distances came almost at the same costs as sending a telegram; with local calls added, the number of telephone calls across the island clearly

outnumbered messages sent by telegraph. The ultimate level of expansion was reached in 1935, when Sri Lanka was connected to the Empire's international telephone network, allowing to make calls to Britain and Europe as well as to India and Burma. At the same time, the telephone's technological provisions improved as automatic exchanges were introduced, which made round-the-clock telephone service possible without additional cost.

Beginning with the creation of a Legislative Council (established 25 years before the one in India), the Colebrook-Cameron Reforms set a political development in motion, which was exemplary for a non-white colony. The exceptionality of the island's further constitutional development is best illustrated with the introduction of universal adult franchise through the Donoughmore Constitution (1931). With regard to its political and economic developments, Sri Lanka occupied a special position in the British Empire that earned her the label 'model colony'. The struggle for a better infrastructure marked the colonial period throughout: from the planters' view, the communication and transport facilities between the planting districts and the port cities were costly and inadequate. The advanced political representation and the lobby work of the planting and commercial communities, combined with their importance as the main revenue producer of the colony, gave them a significant influence in the public discourse and decision-making. They also used their position to demand an extension of the telephone network. During the decisive years of 1905 and 1909, it was obvious that government would not be able to build telephone networks in the planting districts for lack of funds and personnel. But the planters had already begun to construct telephone networks and wanted more of them. Their initiative raised several issues for the government, e.g. how to deal with the private telephone exchange on legal grounds and if they should be connected with the government's trunk line system. The discussions between government departments and in the legislative from 1907 until 1909 clearly show that no clear policy existed regarding the further development of telephones. The planters not only put pressure on government officials politically, but also pressed ahead with their actions and initiatives to build networks. These networks were no longer theoretical questions, as the exchanges at Galaha and Kalutara were ready and working; and the planters at Galaha were even asking to be connected with the

newly constructed trunk line which was passing by close. Other PAs determined to construct telephone networks were only awaiting the outcome of these two cases. After two years of internal discussion, the government finally formulated its policy in 1909, which determined the future development of the emerging telephone network. Government retained control over the emerging telephone network and tried to secure the dominance of the telegraph system, which from the government's point of view was still the major communication technology. On the other hand, they had to make concessions to the most important group in the colony and introduced a license system, allowing the construction of private telephone networks in rural area. The license system was tailored to the needs of the planters.

In the 1920 the government's policy changed fully in favour of the telephone, when it agreed to expanding the trunk line system as well as installing telephone networks in urban and rural areas. Putting further modernization of the system through automatic switchboards on the agenda for the 1930s was the consequential next step. Basically, this policy change was fulfilling many demands of the planters and commercial communities. The formulation of the government's policy in 1909 and the change in the 1920 reveals that there was no grand strategy or policy in place. The telephone was not an instrument of power, a 'tool of the Empire', as the policy making of the colonial government regarding the telephone was economically driven. If the change of attitude towards the telephone in Great Britain played a role is unclear but the influence of the planters and traders is more than clear. They used their lobbies, the Planters' Association of Ceylon and Chamber of Commerce and their political connection to pressure the government. Many of the pressure groups were formed by members of the indigenous elite, the old and new 'somebodies', who used the telephone for their own aims. Therefore, the presence of Western technologies was not a victory march of western civilization, setting the island on a deterministic path towards western civilization. The Sri Lankan elite was Westernized but at the same time attached to movements promoting traditionalism and religious revival. The main categories for the reformulation of identity during colonial times were indigenous religious ideas and languages.

The license system reveals an interesting point: the flow of knowledge and expertise was not only from imperial metropolis to the periphery but also from other points of the imperial network; in the case of the telephone, the knowledge gained in British India played an important role which also has some wider implications. Sri Lanka's telephone history differs in some central points from that in British India where the telephone at first instance connected the cantonments in the North West with the political centre, Calcutta. The construction of this telephone network followed global strategic and military considerations, emanating from the Great Game.

The two hotspots of the telephone network were Colombo and the planting districts, where the majority of subscribers lived and worked. As a telephone subscription was quite expensive, subscribers were mainly members of the colonial elite: according to the data available, most telephone subscribers were Europeans and upper-caste Sinhalese. Apart from these, telephone connections can be found in government departments, companies and with leading agents of the colonial public sphere, e.g. newspapers and educational institutions. A striking feature is that the number of Ceylon Tamils amongst the telephone subscribers was fairly low. Within the scope of this work, it was not possible to explain the reason(s) for that underrepresentation. This will have to remain a subject for further research.

The telephone's main function, which has not changed for more than a hundred years now, is the transmission of the human voice in real time. From a methodological point of view, the tricky part of researching the content and nature of telephone calls hasn't changed either: they do not leave written or oral evidence behind. When a call is finished, it is not possible for us to know what the conversational partners were talking about. In the case of colonial Sri Lanka, there are basically three sources which will allow us to investigate the usage of the telephone: the first and most obvious one is that some people may have written down the content of their calls or the way they used the telephone in diaries, biographies or similar documents. For the current study, these sources didn't provide much evidence, even though a fairly large body of further such sources which could not be consulted here. A second possibility would be surveillance or

tapping of calls by a state agency (along the lines of the Stasi or NSA), which does not seem to have existed in colonial Sri Lanka. In the aftermath of the 1915 anti-Muslim riots, accusations were made that the colonial government had tapped telephone calls, but no documents to prove this have survived. Finally, there is the method proposed by Rudolf Mrázek, who argues that the content and nature of conversations on the phone can also be reconstructed from contemporary literary and fictional writings – novels, poems, songs and the like – which will have to be taken with a pinch of salt. In addition to such records, Sri Lanka offers a large body of official documents both from the government and from civil associations as well as several major newspapers. Through these sources, it was possible to reconstruct and analyse the various ways in which the telephone was used during colonial times.

A primary reason for using the telephone throughout the period under consideration and regardless of a rural or an urban environment was to call for help, e.g. in cases of snakebites, burglaries or floods. Here a speedy communication was essential. Another reason for using the telephone usage was commercial: swift communication between the port and economic hub Colombo and the planting districts was of crucial importance for the success of the colony, contributing to the profits.

For the subscriber, the telephone was more than a just a practical tool for communication, it was also a prestigious commodity. Consumption is an important side of individual agency and empowers a person to send out a social message. The contemporary image of Sri Lanka during colonial times was that of a 'modern' colony; and modernity was measured in technologies. The telephone was one of several new technologies added to everyday life on the island: electric lighting, tramways, bicycles, sewing machines etc., which all symbolized the modernity and Western lifestyle the indigenous elite sought to adopt. The earlier prestigious catalyst for that development had been an English-medium education and following that, the adoption of a Western lifestyle aligned the elite with the colonial government. At the beginning of the twentieth century, various forms of consuming Western commodities began to play a greater role in the colonial society. For the

British, consumption of western goods was a way to display social distinction and fight homesickness, but for the indigenous elite it served to challenge colonial rule alone. Adopting a Western lifestyle meant to speak English, play cricket or eventually even breed racehorses, but it always included the acquisition and utilisation of Western technology and commodities. Advertisements illustrate nicely that the telephone also belonged to this modern, Western lifestyle in Sri Lanka. Owning a telephone connection was a symbol of status and thus a claim for equality with the colonial masters.

Even though ownership of a telephone did not lend itself for an open display – the apparatus was usually kept within the house – but crucially subscription did, as the phone numbers would be shown in the telephone book, *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory* or in newspaper advertisements. At the same time the telephone network was also a social network. It connected the subscriber and his family with the business world and their social sphere: the peer groups, clubs, temples, churches, rest houses and department stores. The telephone network offered the opportunity of a virtual space for the subscribers to meet, associate and talk. This exchange was limited to two persons at any time but it allowed the subscribers to talk about almost anything. It brought people together, created 'immediacy', and allowed them to deal with the modern world through its own technology. The group that mostly used the telephone consisted of upper class women, who during colonial times were mostly limited to the domestic sphere. The telephone was a vehicle to create a sense of belonging and social solidarity amongst the members of the various social peer groups. The telephone became a formal part of the certain social rituals, notably the tradition of calling. The incorporation of the telephone in these formalized relations therefore mirrored and to a degree transformed already existing social networks.

Like print media, the telephone brought politics into the homes (and sometimes offices, too), but at the same time it offered the unmatched advantage of immediate participation: just pick up the telephone and make a call to coordinate activities, share an opinion, give a harangue or lend moral support. Using the Sinhalese elite as an example, it has been shown that many of their political actors

owned a telephone. As the telephone had become an established means of communication during the interwar period, it is obvious that the telephone widened the possibilities to interact and exchange views, complementing messages and print products as well as face-to-face meetings at the usual places. Thus it is plausible that the telephone had a distinct impact on political decision making and identity formation. The telephone was used for local communication during colonial times and the network in Colombo was the biggest on the island. But so far, it seems that the telephone contributed to the creation of national and macro-national identities and interest groups. This of course is owed to the unique position of the city of Colombo, being the unrivalled metropolis of the island and home to the majority of the colonial elite. A closer investigation in the political and personal networks of the various groups and their utilisation of the telephone, hard as such a study appears to be, would therefore be of great interest. And of course the study of the telephone should also attempt to situate its role vis-à-vis other modern technologies such as the telegraph.

Appendix

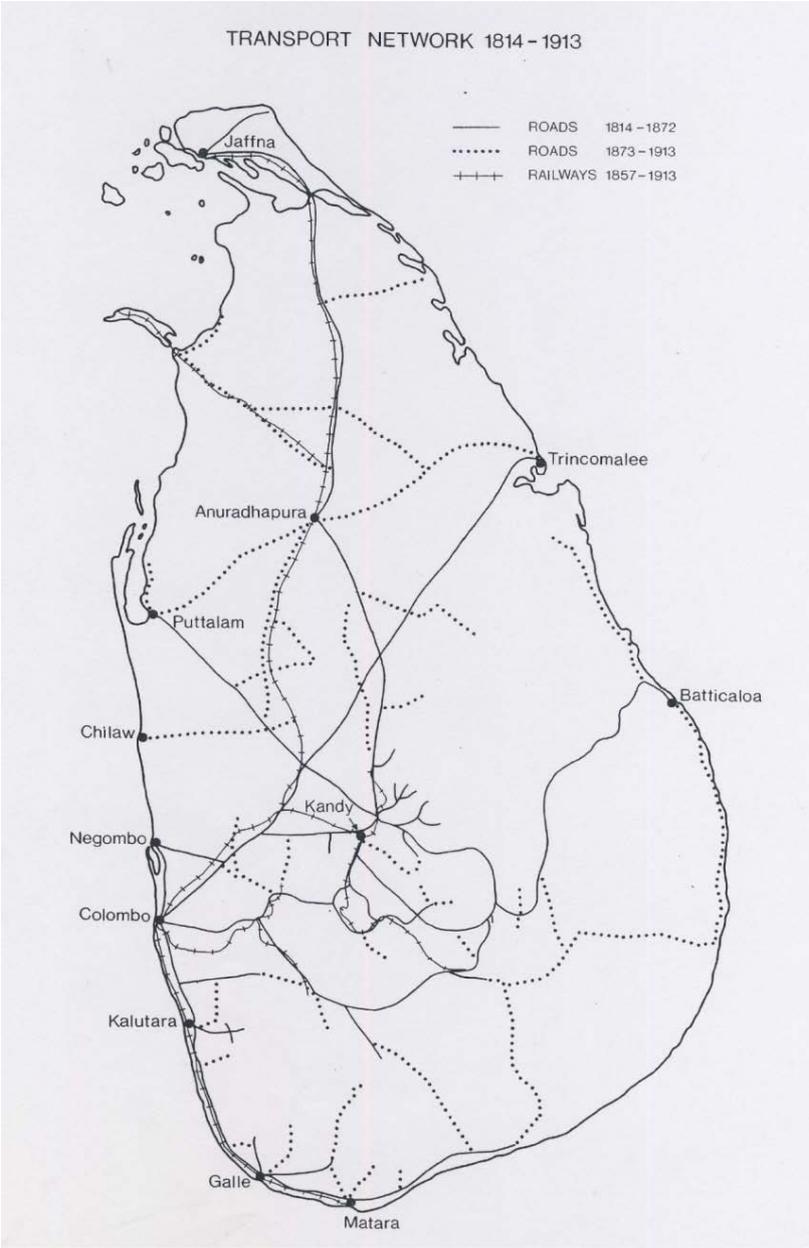
Appendix I: Maps

Map 1: Main roads in 1867:



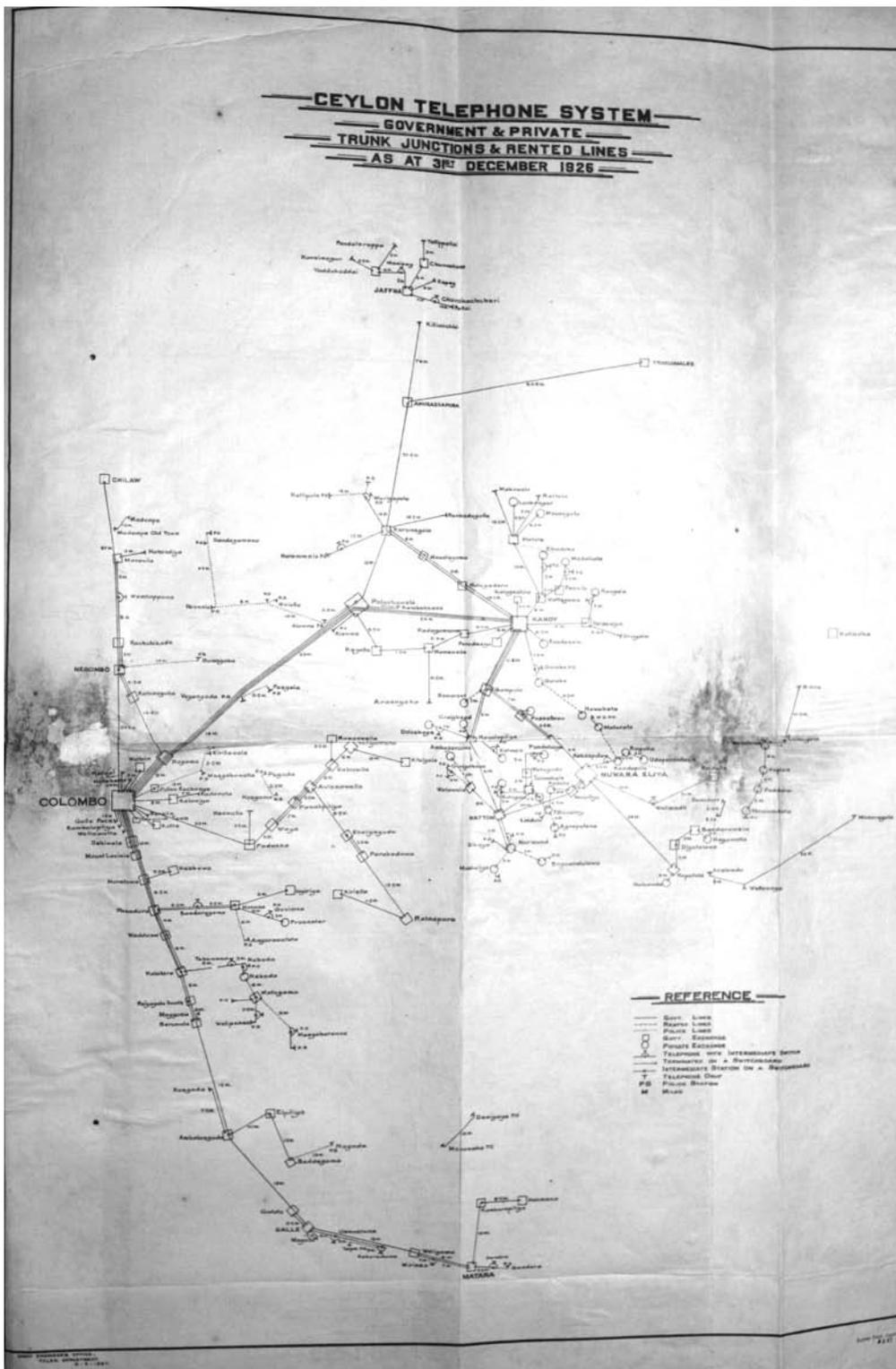
Source: Munasinghe, *Colonial Economy on Track*, p.xi.

Map 2: Transport network in 1905:



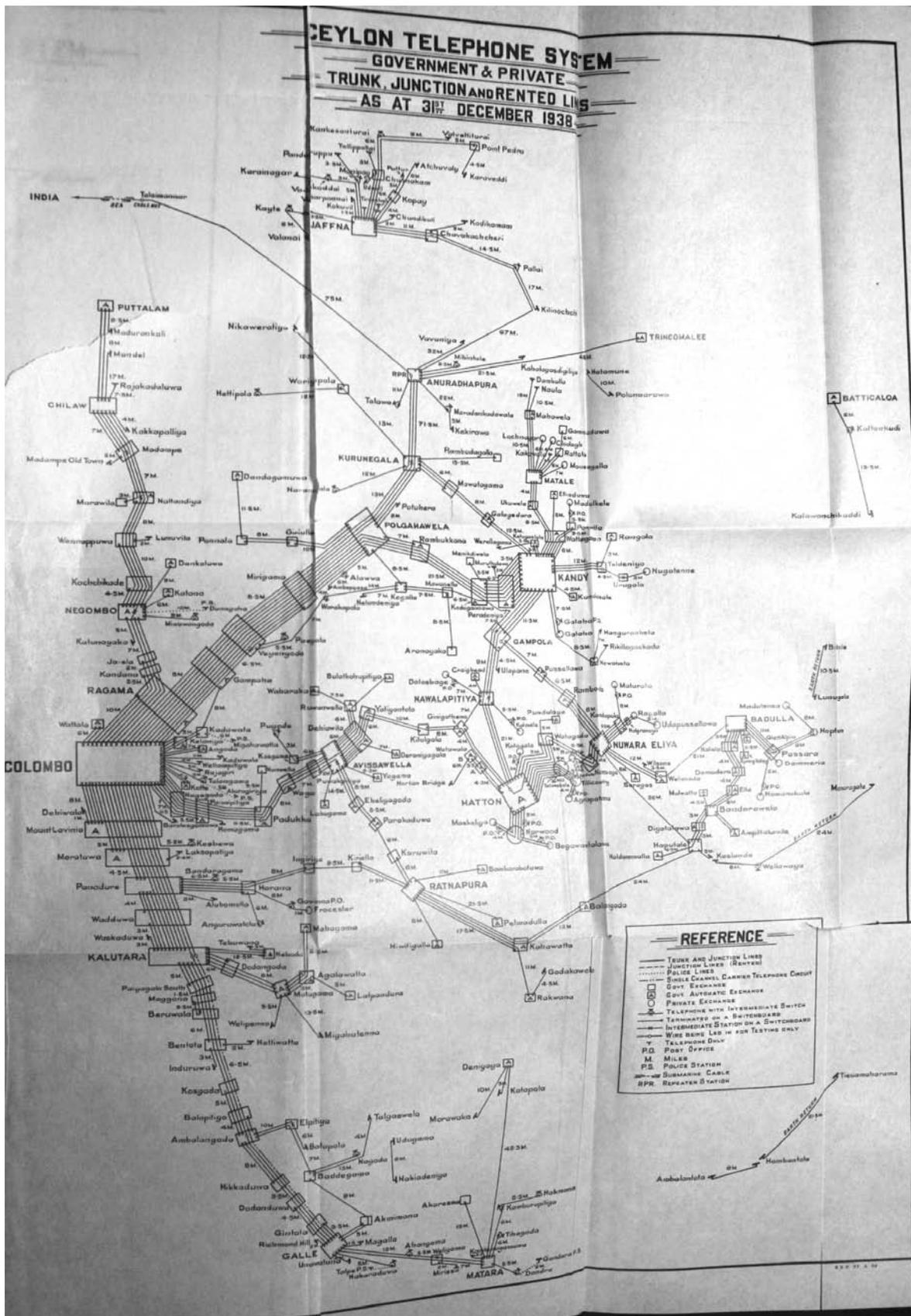
Source: *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1905.

Map 3: Ceylon telephone network in 1926:



Source: *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1926.

Map 4: Ceylon telephone network in 1938:



Source: *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1938.

Appendix II: Images (*Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*)

Image I: Subscribers to the Galaha Exchange in 1920:

GALAHA

HOURS: 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Disturbance Fee, 10 cents per call.

Junction Centre: Kandy Post Office.

Amblamana 1, Amblamana Office 2, Amblamana Small Bungalow 30, Amblamana Upper Bungalow 3, Bellwood 33, Belwood Factory 38, Bopitiya Bungalow 14, Bopitiya Factory 13, Bowlana 23, Bowlana Factory 24, Deltota 36, Deltota Estate Head Kangani's House 53, District Medical Office's Bungalow Deltota, 16, Dunally 8, Erin (Sub-Exchange) 5, Erin Bungalow 6, Erin Factory 7, Frotoft 40, Galaha Estate Conductor 41, Galaha Factory (Sub-Exchange) 18, Galaha Teamaker's Bungalow 20, Galaha Factory Clerk's Bungalow 19, Galaha Factory Bungalow 17, Galaha Manager's Office 21, Galaha Group Chief Clerk's Bungalow 48, Galaha Foreman's Bungalow 61, Galaha Group Dispensary 22, Galaha Post Office 42, Gallantenna 38, Gallantenna Factory 57, Galloway Knowe 45, Godawella Head Kangani's House 29, Genavy 56, Goorookelle Bungalow 26, Goorookelle Group (Sub-Exchange) 25, Great Valley 10, Hermitage 44, Hewaheta Gymkhana Club 4, Hospital (Govt.) 16, Hythe Head Kangani's House 39, Kirimettia 35, Kiriwana Asst. Superintendent's Bungalow 27, Kiriwana 2nd Asst. Superintendent's Bungalow 28, Kitoolamoola 15, Le Vallon Group (Sub-Exchange) 43, Loolecondera Bungalow 52, Loolecondera Factory 53, Maousakelle 9, Naranghena 54, New Forest 34, Old Maddegama 32, Oodoowella Factory (Sub-Exchange) 60, Oodoowella and Ooragalla Estate 60, Pattiyaagama 59, Galaha Police Station 47, Pooprassie Superintendent's Bungalow 46, Pooprassie Upper Division Bungalow 49, Pooprassie Lower Division Bungalow 50, Pooprassie Factory 51, Stellenberg 55, Vedehetta North (Head Kangani's Caddle) 37, Vedehetta (Sub-Exchange) 11, Vedehetta West 12.

Source: *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1920, p. 512.

Image 2: Subscribers to the Norwood Exchange in 1917:

NORWOOD.—Annfield 11, Bathford 23, Battalgalla 20, Blair Athol 2, Bogawantalawa Exchange 27, Castlereagh 18, Darrawella 12, Dikoya S, Dikoya Hospital and Doctor's Bungalow 17, Dikoya and Maskeliya Cricket Club 16, Dikoya Police Station 36, Dikoya Post Office 33, District Engineer's Bungalow 34, Dunkeld 3, Fordyce 'Group 22, Gorthie 7, Halloowella 15, Hatton Exchange 28, Lethenty Group 25, Maskeliya Exchange 30, Mutturaman Chetty, N. R. M. A. 38, Newton 13, New Valley 14, Norwood Club 32, Norwood House 4, Norwood Small Bungalow 24, Osborne 26, Ottery, 21, Norwood Police Station 19, Norwood Post Office 31, Stamford Hill 1, Summerville 5, Telephone Inspector's Bungalow 29, Venture 10, Vicarage 35, Walker & Greig 9, and Wahanarajah 6.

Source: *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1917, p. 511.

Image 3: Subscribers to the Maskeliya Exchange in 1917:

MASKELIYA.

HOURS:—6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Disturbance Fee, 50 cents per call.

Junction Centre: Hatton Post Office.

Alton 15, Annandale 21, Blairavon 16, Brownlow 46, Brunswick 8, Bunyan 26, Cleveland 20, Dalhousie 29, Deeside 18, Dunnottar 17, Ekoisund 37, Emelina 9, Fairlawn 1, Forbes 24, Gangawatte 35, Glentilt 44, Gleungie 7, Gouravilla 13, Hapugastenne 40, Hatton Bank (Upcot 6, Maskeliya 31), Kelaniya 45, Kinora 14, Kintyre 34, Ladbroke 4, Lanka 48, Laxapana 27, Luccombe 39, Mahagalla 11, Mahanilu 12, Maskeliya 41, Maskeliya Hospital 30, Meeria Cotta 2, Mincing Lane 5, Mocha 22, Moray 28, Mourakellie 36, Nathar Saibo & Co., A., 32, Nyanza 38, Ormidale 19, Police Station 42, Post Office 43, Queensland 25, Rickarton 33, Scarborough 47, S. Andrews 28, Stockholm 10, Suriakande 3, Telephone Inspector 60.

33

Source: *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1917, p. 513.

Image 4: Subscribers to the Dimbula District Exchange in 1917:

DIMBULA DISTRICT.

HOURS :—Radella 6-30 a.m. to 9 p.m. ; Tillicoultry (Lindula) and Talawakele 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Agrapatana 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Disturbance Fee, 50 cents per call.

Junction Centre: Talawakele Post Office.

RADELLA EXCHANGE.—Abbotsford 16, Calsay 4, Carlabeck 14, Dessford 6, Easda'e 13, Edinburgh 8, Glassaugh 7, Langdale 3, Maha Eliya 2, Mattakel 11, Radella 9, Radella Exchange 15, S. Coombs 1, Ula Radella 10, Wangis Oya 12.

TILlicouLTRY EXCHANGE.—Agra 13, Agras Exchange 20, Bambrakelle 23, Bearwell 1, Caledonia 10, Cranloy 12, District Hospital 29, Diyanilakele 28, Duke's Bungalow 3, Eildon Hall 25, Fairfield 15, Henfold 8, Helbrook 11, Kowlanena 2, Lippakelle 30, Maria 18, Meltoa 21, Mousa Ella 6, Oavakelle 9, Police Station 17, Post Office 4, Talankande 24, Talawakele Exchange 19, Tangakelle 27, Tillicoultry Bungalow 26, Tillicoultry Factory 5, Walker & Greig, Ltd. 16, Wallaha 14, Waltrim 7.

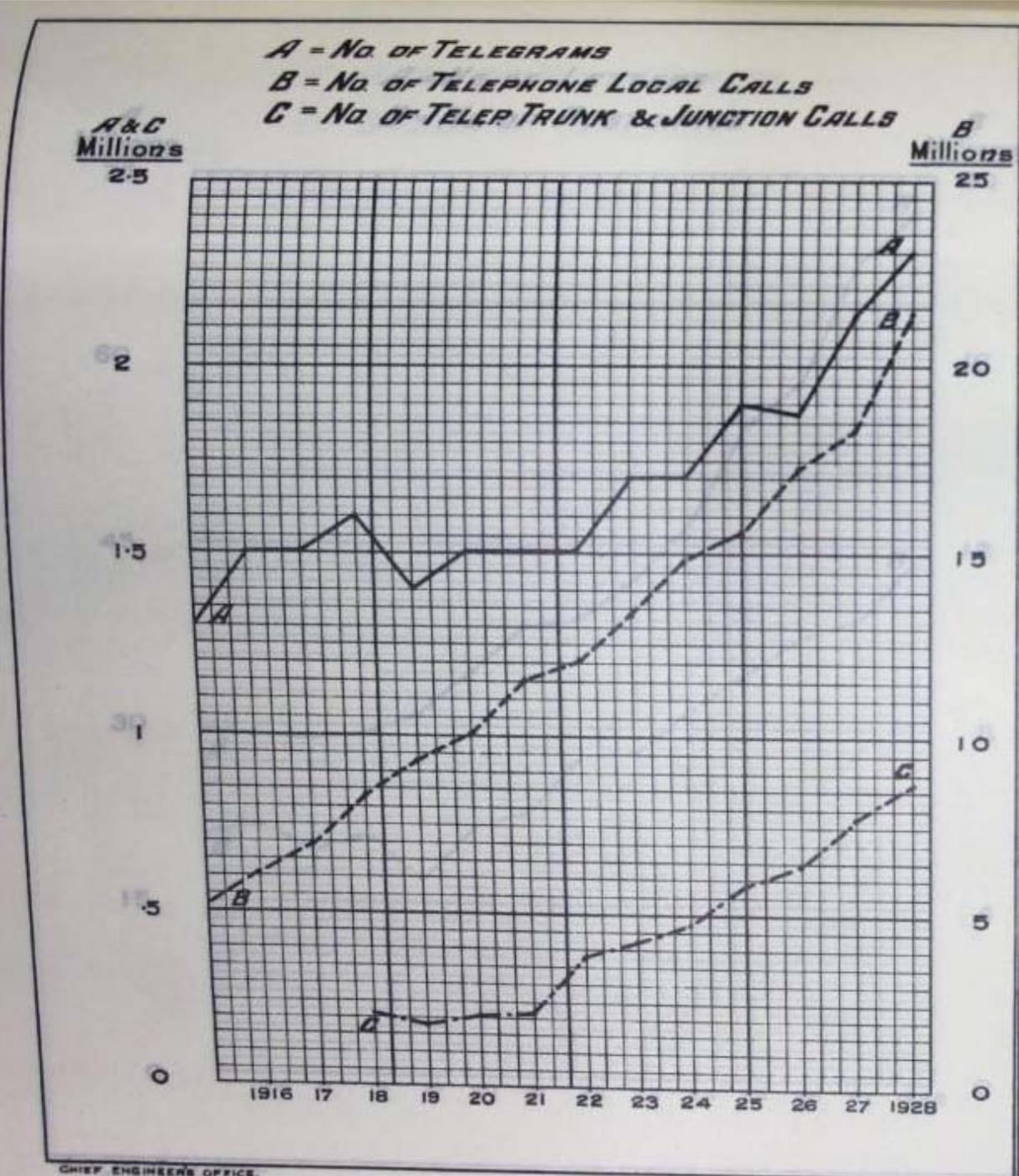
TALAWAKELE EXCHANGE.—East Holyrood 12, Faithlie 23, Ferham 26, Galkandewatte 14, Gienomera 7, Goods Shed, Talawakele 32, Great Western 11, Hemachandra & Co. 15, Jordan & Co. 2, Lamiliere 21, Lindoola 5, Logie 6, Manalingham & Co. 34, Mel-Mendis & Co. 24, Middleton 29, Palmerston 8, Parsonage 33, Police Station 18, Post Office 1, P. W. D., Dimbula, 31, Railway Station 13, Pitnageriya 20, Somerset 16, S. Andrews 4, S. Clair 17, Talawakele Club 27, Talawakele Engineering Works 9, Talawakele Estate 25, Tillicoultry Exchange 10, Wattedgodde 28, West Holyrood 22, Wickremesooriya & Co. 10, Yoxford 3.

AGRAPATANA EXCHANGE.—Agra Elbedde 24, Agra Oovah 14, Agras Sporting and Athletic Club 20, Albion 10, Ardlaw 6, Balmoral 1, Braemore 13, District Medical Officer 5, Diyagama 21, Glasgow 17, Gleneagles 16, Glenlyon 3, Hauteville 19, Holmwood 9, Nutbourne 26, Police Station 11, Portmore 25, Post Office 22, Preston 15, Sandringham 7, Sutton 8, Talawakele Engineering Works, Thornfield 12, Tillicoultry Exchange 2, Torrington 23, Waverley 4.

Source: *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*, 1917, p. 405.

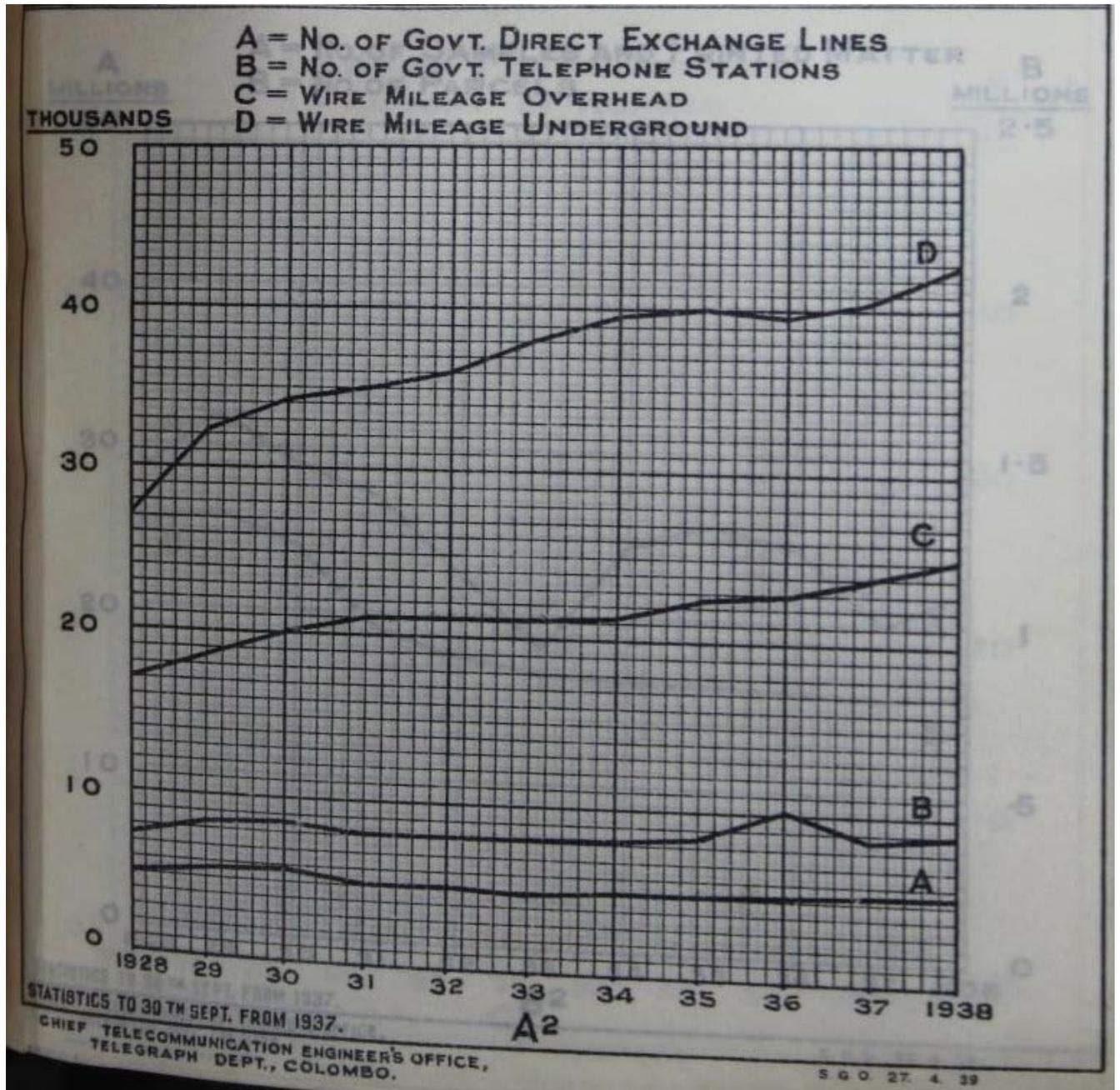
Appendix III: Images (Ceylon Administration Reports)

Image 1: Telephone calls and Telegrams, 1916-1928:



Source: Ceylon Administration Reports, 1928.

Image 2: Telephone calls and Telegrams, 1928-1928:



Source: *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1938.

Appendix IV: Images (newspapers)

Image 1 and 2: Advertisements:



Source: *The Ceylon Observer*, 27 August, 1928, p. 3.

A simple remedy for business worries

HOW easily irritated one can become during a heavy spell of work. Details unattended to; a rush of letters for the Mail; callers taking up valuable time—all these put an edge on one's temper.

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Sold in Liquid or Tablet form by all good Chemists

PRICES: Rs. 1.0, 2.4 and 3.8.

Always carry the tablets when travelling!

Source: *The Times of Ceylon*, 11 November 1929, p.11.

"4711"
is "Santa Claus"
telephone number

To generations of lovely women 4711 Genuine Eau de Cologne has stood for all that is best in Eau de Cologne - has carried on this priceless legacy, the very spirit of freshness and delight. It is an ideal Christmas gift for men too - refreshing, revivifying, invigorating. And there are 4711 Perfumes, Powders and special Presentation Caskets for every taste and every taste.

4711 Genuine Eau de Cologne
Pure & Gold Label

Image 3: Advertisements:

Source: *The Times of Ceylon*, November 1936, p. 6.

Image 4 and 5: Advertisements:

VIGOUR
of mind and
body from
KOLA tonic
THE MOST AMAZING STIMULANT

Your vitality and energy is fully sustained during the greatest efforts in games or office work. Doctors will assure you that it cannot add weight and that it does not affect the liver. Drink it as a liqueur, or diluted with plain or soda water—it has

A 'KICK' WITH NO 'CONSEQUENCES'

SOLE AGENTS FOR INDIA & CEYLON
Cutler Palmer
LONDON-CALCUTTA-BOMBAY-LAHORE-MADRAS-COLOMBO

SOLE AGENTS: BARBARA SMITH & CO. LTD. CALCUTTA. WHOLESALE: J. GUNDEL & CO. LTD. BOMBAY. W. J. MOTILAL & CO. DELHI & MUMBAI. S. S. BHARGAVA & CO. MADRAS. GENERAL MANAGERS: CUTLER PALMER & CO. LTD. LONDON.

Source: *The Ceylon Daily News*, 13 February, 1935, p. 12.

"Life held nothing for me."

Read This Letter.

"I used to have bilious attacks four times a week, and life held out nothing for me. I could not get anything to relieve me until a friend convinced me that Kruschen Salts were what I required. Now I tackle with renewed energy and life when, before taking your famous Salts, I would have left undone through lack of energy. When my friends ask me why I look better and feel like jumping over the obstacles of life, I say, 'Take the daily dose of Kruschen, and you will feel like me, a new man, ready for new tasks.' 'Whenever I used to eat sweets, my boys would say 'Poor Daddy' will pay the penalty to-morrow', but now it is quite different, and they enjoy themselves seeing me eat what I would refuse before. Your Kruschen comes first, then I feel fit for the breakfast table. You are at liberty to make what use you like of this unvoiced testimonial, as I think those who find the right remedy should tell others, and pass good news on.'

12th August, 1927. W. E. Perkins.

Kruschen Salts
Good Health for 6 Cents a Week.

From all Chemists, Stores and Dealers.

Manufactured by H. GRIFFITHS HUGHES, Ltd., Worcester, England (Estab. 1750). (24)

Source: *The Times of Ceylon*, 15 November 1928, p.10.

Image 6: Comic 'Bringing up father':

BRINGING UP FATHER

GAY HELLO TO THE PAL-MR JIGGS? TELL HIM YOUR NAME.

HELLO MR DIGGS-DIGS IS HELEN.

WELL WELL SO YOUR NAME IS HELEN-MY WHAT A PRETTY NAME.

WELL HELEN I'M GOING TO THROW YOU A KISS OVER THE WIRE-BYE-BYE BABY.

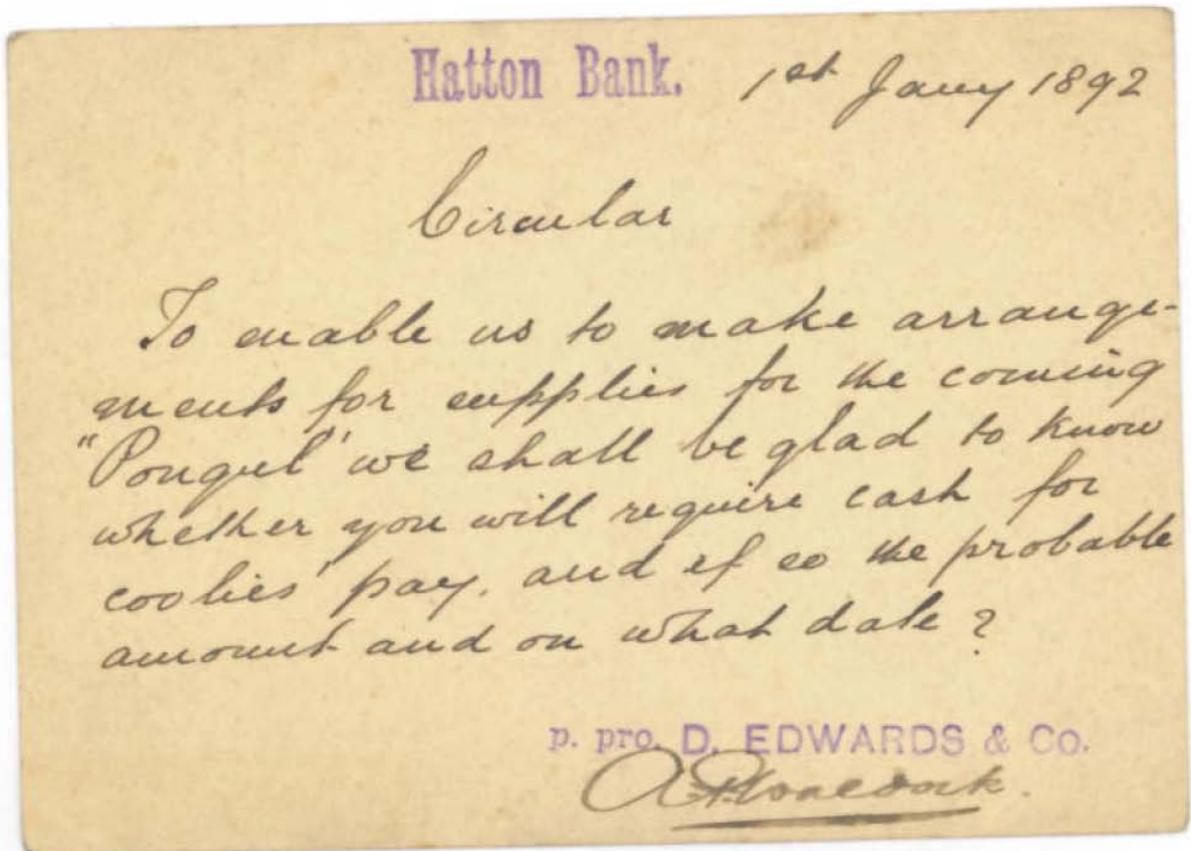
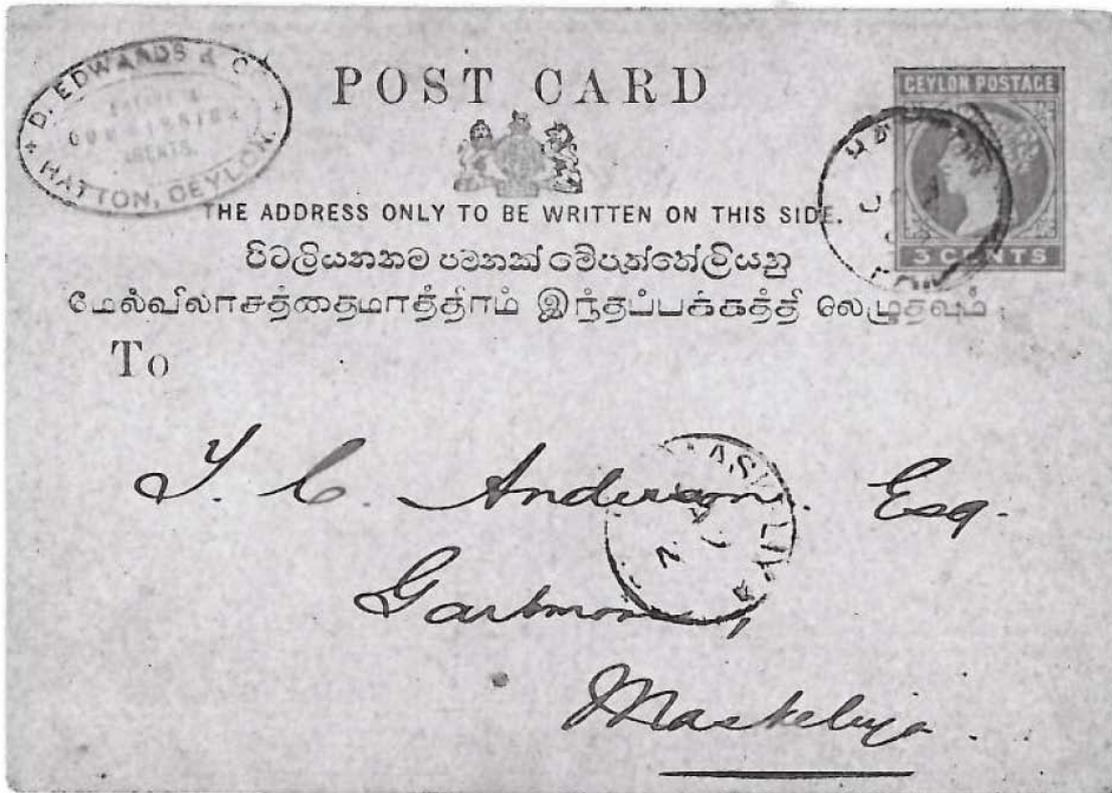
THIS IS A GREAT WORLD.

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Source: *The Ceylon Daily News*, 21 March, 1929, p. 10.

Appendix V: Postcards

Image 1: Correspondence card from the Hatton Bank to a planter, 1892 (front- and backside):



Appendix VI: Tables

Table 1: Cost of living in Colombo compared with Hong Kong and Singapore (1905):

		Colombo		Hong Kong		Singapore	
		Rs.	C.	Rs.	C.	Rs.	C.
A	Servant (average monthly wages)						
	Butler	25	0	25	0	22	0
	Cook	20	0	25	0	20	0
	Cook's assisatant	10	0	unpaid		?	
	Table dressin boy	15	0	16	0	18	0
	Home coolies	13	0	16	0	13	0
	Gardeners	13	0	?		13	0
	Syce or housekeeper or ricksaw coolies	15	0	14	0	16	0
Ayah	10	0	12	0	20	0	
B	Market Prices						
	Beef per lb.	0	20	0	24	0	24
	Motton per lb.	0	40	0	32	0	53
	Fowls each	0	90	0	43	0	6
	Eggs each	0	5	0	3	0	4
	Potato per lb.	0	7	0	7	?	
C	Store Prices						
	Fleur per lb.	0	15	No information		0	15
	Sugar per lb.	0	18	"		0	13
	Jam (British)	0	60	"		0	47
	Buiscuts (lunch)	0	70	"		0	60
	Bacon per lb.	1	60	"		0	14
	Timed milk	0	40	"		0	35
	Sardines	1	0	"		0	78
	Soap	1	10	"		0	60
Whiskey (per bottle)	3	0	"		1	67	
D	House Rent	80 to 250		130 to 260		130 to 260	

Source: *Sessional Papers*, 1905, p. 16 (The table is included in: 'Papers relating to the Revision of Salaries of the Ceylon Government Service&Co.'. (The dollar in Hong Kong and Singapore has been taken as equivalent to Rs. 1 ¹/₃) The table was composed in the context of the discussion if Ceylon officials should receive higher salaries as it was feared that Ceylon would recruit only poorly qualified candidates while the better ones would join the service in Singapore or Hong Kong.

Table 2: Number of subscribers to government exchanges:

Stations	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910/11	1912/13	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
Agalawatta																			
Ahangama																			
Akmimana																			
Alawwa																			
Ambalangoda																	2	2	kn
Angoda																			
Anguruwotota																			
Anuradhapura												14	15	-	-	17x	17x	17x	21x
Aranayaka																			
Atchuvely																			
Avissawella																			
Baddegama																			
Badulla																			
Balangoda																			
Balapitiya																			
Bambarabotuwa																			
Bandaragama																			
Bandarawela																2x	2x	2x	2x
Bentota																			
Beruwala																			
Boragasketiya/Boragas																			
Chavakachcheri																			
Chilaw																			
Chunnakam																			
Colombo	88	86	95	103	129	150	188	267	347	442	516	992	1214	-	1495	1621	1630	1656	1677
Dandagamuwa																			

Stations	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910/11	1912/13	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
Dankptuwa																			
Dehiowita																			
Dehiwala																			
Demodera																			
Daniyaya																			
Deraniyagala																			
Diyatalawa																6x	7x	7x	7x
Dodanduwa																			
Dodangoda																			
Dondra																			
Eheliyagoda																			
Ella																			
Elpitiya																			
Galagedara																			
Galle												27	41	-	46	57	59	66	86
Gammaduwa																			
Gampaha																			
Gampola																9	8	15	21 w
Ginigathena																			
Gintota																			
Giriulla																			
Glen Alpin																			
Govinna																			
Habaraduwa																			
Hakmana																			
Halgranoya																			

Stations	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910/11	1912/13	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
Haliela																			
Hanwella																			
Haputala/e																			
Hatton												9	12			13	14	15	18
Hettipola																			
Hikkaduwa																			
Horana																			3
Ingiriya																			3
Ja-cla																			
Jaffna																		2x	3x
Kadawata																			
Kadugannawa																			
Kahawatta																			
Kalutara												11	16	-	22	31	30	25	30
Kamburupitiya																			
Kandana																			
Kandapola																			
Kandy									s	21	28	43	54	-	73	87	95	111	135
Katana																			
Katugastota																			
Katunayaka																			
Kegalle																			
Kelaniya																4	4	4	7
Kesbewa																			
Kiriella																			
Kitulgala																			

Stations	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910/11	1912/13	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
Kochchikade																			
Kopay																			
Kosgama																			
Kosgoda																			
Koslanda																			
Kotte																2	2	2	2
Kurunegala																ka	13	23	31w
Kuruwita																			
Labugama																			
Latpandura																			
Madampe																			
Magonna																			
Mahagama																			
Mahawela																			
Malwatta																			
Manipay																			
Marawila																			
Matale																ka	15	24	32
Matara												10				13x	13x	13x	14x
Matugama																			
Mawanella																			
Mawatagama																			
Menikdiwela																			
Migahatenna																			
Mihintale																			
Minuwangoda																			
Mirigama																			

Stations	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910/11	1912/13	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
Moratuwa																ka	4	5	15
Mount Lavinia																			
Nagoda																			
Nanu-oya																			
Narammala																			
Nattandiya																			
Nawalapitiya																6	8	8	11
Neboda																			
Negombo															18	19	22	22	36
Niwitigala																			
Nugegoda																			
Nuwara Eliya									s	28	35	54	63	-	72	81	85	103	110
Padukka																			
Paiyagala																			
Pallai																			
Panadure																			23
Pandateruppu																			
Pannala																			
Pannipitiya																			
Panwila																			
Parakaduwa																			
Passara																			
Pasyala																			
Pelmadulla																			
Peradeniya													2			4	4	5	7
Polgahawela																3	3	3	5
Pugoda																			

Stations	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910/11	1912/13	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
Pussellawa																			
Puttalam																			
Puwakpitiya																			
Ragama																2	5	6	7
Rakwana																			
Ramboda																			
Rambodagalla																			
Rambukkana																			
Rangala																			
Ratnapura																			
Rattota																			
Ruwanwella																			
Spring Valley																			
Talangama																			
Tebuwana																			
Teldeniya																			
Tihagoda																			
Trincomalee																			7
Ukuwela																			
Urugala																			
Veyangoda																			
Wadduwa																			
Waga																			
Waharaka																			
Warakapola																			
Wariyapola																			
Watagoda																			3

Stations	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910/11	1912/13	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
Watawala																			
Wattala																			6
Wattegama																			
Weligama																			
Welimada																			
Welipenna																			
Wennappuwa																			
Yitiyantota																			

Stations	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937
Agalawatta												6	6	7	7	7	7
Ahangama													2	2	2	2	3
Akmimana												1	1	1	1	1	2
Alawwa								3	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2
Ambalangoda								kn	22	18	7	2	3	5	7	9	11
Angoda																3	3
Anguruwotota												1	1	t	1	1	2
Anuradhapura	22x	21x	21x	22	26	30	32	33	35	34	34	37	34	34	36	35	35
Aranayaka									3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4
Atchuwely							2	2	2			kn	kn	kn	kn	kn	kn
Awissawella		8	8	8	9	14	27	27	33	29	27	16	13	13	18	19	19
Baddegama									2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2
Badulla							6	44	53	53	53	52	51	54	56	55	55
Balangoda								3	5	9	11	12	13	17	16	15	14
Balapitiya									5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4
Bambarabotuwa																	6
Bandaragama								2	3	5	5	2	2	2	2	2	2
Bandarawela	2	2x	11	11	14	19	22	25	27	27	28	24	23	29	27	25	25
Bentota								5	10	10	5	4	4	5	5	6	7
Beruwala				9	10	7	8	8	9	8	8	6	7	5	5	5	5
Boragasketiya/Boragas									7	7	8	8	7	7	7	7	7
Chavakachcheri									2	2	2	2	2	2	3	4	5
Chilaw				16	21	23	28	30	30	27	24	21	18	20	19	19	18
Chunnakam					3	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Colombo	1930	2125	2303	2460	2625	2836	3037	3117	3348	3352	3164	3012	2948	3115	3182	3244	3313
Dandagamuwa								6	6	6	6	6	6	6	7	6	6

Stations	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937
Haliela							3	14	14	16	17	17	14	17	17	16	15
Hanwella											2	4	4	4	4	4	5
Haputala/e				5	5	8	12	28	29	30	29	28	27	27	28	28	29
Hatton	19	26	31	34	34	44	45	49	46	47	44	39	37	43	42	37	41
Hettipola												1	1	2	2	2	2
Hikkaduwa																2	2
Horana	3	3	3	4	11	12	13	10	10	9	7	5	5	5	5	6	7
Ingiriya	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	5	6	6	6	5	4	4	4	5	5
Ja-cla										6	6	5	4	4	3	3	5
Jaffna	3x	3	3	37	55	64	71	87	93	91	86	79	76	73	72	74	74
Kadawata								3	3	5	4	4	4	5	5	5	4
Kadugannawa						4	9	11	14	12	12	11	11	13	13	14	15
Kahawatta								7	8	12	14	15	12	12	12	12	12
Kalutara	34	35	41	47	48	54	65	62	57	53	46	37	36	36	37	38	43
Kamburupitiya												2	2	2	2	2	2
Kandana												2	2	2	2	4	3
Kandapola																	16
Kandy	142	146	153	169	186	194	205	208	213	205	190	181	176	187	189	184	187
Katana							3	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Katugastota		3	2	2	9	12	15	14	14	14	11	11	9	10	10	9	10
Katunayaka						2	2	2	s	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1
Kegalle				19	20	20	26	31	38	27	21	17	17	20	21	22	22
Kelaniya	10	11	10	12	11	11	13	14	14	10	7	7	6	10	12	12	14
Kesbewa						4	3	3	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2
Kiriella					7	10	11	10	8	9	7	6	6	6	6	6	6
Kitulgala										7	7	6	6	6	5	4	4

Stations	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937
Kochchikade		2	3	3	4	5	5	6	6	5	4	3	3	3	3	3	5
Kopay							2	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Kosgama												1	3	3	2	2	2
Kosgoda									2	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3
Koslanda																	2
Kotte	2	2	3	3	2	4	5	6	7	7	6	5	6	7	6	6	6
Kurunegala	48	55	57	57	59	55	63	69	75	74	71	58	58	57	52	50	53
Kuruwita								2	3	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Labugama																6	6
Latpandura											7	6	6	6	6	6	6
Madampe							6	7	9	7	6	6	6	6	6	6	5
Magonna												2	2	2	3	3	3
Mahagama											11	11	11	11	11	11	11
Mahawela							2	9	9	10	10	9	6	6	5	5	5
Malwatta																8	8
Manipay							4	4	4	4	3	3	2	2	1	1	1
Marawila										4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3
Matale	30	31	31	34	35	38	42	49	49	44	40	35	35	38	40	41	43
Matara	15x	15	34	33	36	36	43	47	53	51	43	41	40	41	42	43	46
Matugama											14	13	13	14	13	15	17
Mawanella							4	8	6	6	5	5	4	4	4	4	4
Mawatagama						4	6	7	5	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	5
Menikdiwela										2	3	2	3	3	3	3	3
Migahatenna															2	2	2
Mihintale																2	2
Minuwangoda															2	2	2
Mirigama															4	5	5

Stations	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937
Moratuwa	16	18	19	19	17	17	23	22	22	25	24	22	18	16	21	22	21
Mount Lavinia				2	11	11	13	16	17	14	14	13	13	14	16	17	23
Nagoda									2	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	2
Nanu-oya							3	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5
Narammala									2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Nattandiya							3	6	7	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	8
Nawalapitiya	14	14	17	18	23	28	31	37	38	39	36	35	35	38	34	34	33
Neboda											11	11	11	11	11	10	10
Negombo	45	51	45	47	46	48	55	54	58	46	39	38	39	36	37	37	40
Niwitigala								17	20	20	17	14	12	12	15	15	16
Nugegoda							6	10	12	11	7	8	6	6	4	4	4
Nuwara Eliya	117	117	122	125	133	142	152	155	157	162	147	135	131	127	125	122	122
Padukka						3	6	9	9	10	10	9	9	9	9	9	9
Paiyagala		2	3	4	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	5	3	3	3	3	3
Pallai																	2
Panadure	35	37	37	44	45	53	68	70	74	72	62	42	40	43	40	40	41
Pandateruppu								1	1			kn	kn	kn	kn	kn	kn
Pannala											2	2	3	3	3	3	3
Pannipitiya														2	3	3	4
Panwila									2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3
Parakaduwa							16	7	7	7	7	3	2	3	8	8	8
Passara								3	7	7	7	6	7	6	6	8	8
Pasyala											2	1	1	2	2	2	2
Pelmadulla								4	4	5	6	6	5	5	7	7	8
Peradeniya	8	10	11	13	15	29	31	33	31	34	33	31	31	31	33	35	39
Polgahawela	6	6	6	7	8	8	9	7	7	9	9	8	7	7	8	7	8
Pugoda															2	2	2

Stations	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937
Pussellawa									2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1
Puttalam								18	20	19	18	17	16	16	17	17	16
Puwakpitiya							11	11	11	12	11	5	2	2	4	4	5
Ragama	7	8	8	9	10	10	11	12	11	11	10	9	8	8	8	7	7
Rakwana																	13
Ramboda				9	12	12	12	12	11	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Rambodagalla									2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3
Rambukkana								7	9	8	8	8	8	8	7	7	9
Rangala											10	10	10	10	10	10	11
Ratnapura	15	20	21	27	33	44	48	53	65	67	66	45	43	47	49	50	53
Rattota										3	6	5	5	3	5	5	5
Ruwanwella							12	16	19	21	24	16	11	13	13	11	12
Spring Valley																9	9
Talangama												1	1	2	2	2	2
Tebuwana											8	9	9	8	8	8	8
Teldeniya				3	3	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4
Tihagoda														2	2	2	2
Trincomalee	12	12	13	17	15	20	25	29	30	27	26	25	24	25	28	27	28
Ukuwela									3	5	6	5	5	6	6	6	6
Urugala							3	6	9	8	6	4	3	2	2	2	2
Veyangoda											2	2	2	2	5	6	8
Wadduwa										5	5	4	2	2	2	2	2
Waga						4	12	15	15	17	17	11	7	7	5	5	5
Waharaka																	5
Warakapola									2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Wariyapola											2	2	2	2	2	2	3
Watagoda	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

Stations	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937
Watawala	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2
Wattala	6	7	7	7	9	11	11	12	15	15	14	13	11	13	15	15	16
Wattegama		3	6	9	10	10	10	14	14	14	15	13	10	10	9	9	8
Weligama								6	6	6	5	5	4	3	3	3	4
Welimada								1	12	14	13	12	12	11	12	13	13
Welipenna												4	4	5	4	4	4
Wennappuwa							2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4
Yitiantota							20	21	22	23	23	15	13	14	16	15	14

Source: *Ceylon Administration Reports*, various.

Table 3: Licenses for construction private telephone circuits: (Source: *Ceylon Administration Reports*, various)

1910/11	8	Neboda, Bandarawela, Maskeliya, Agrapatana, Lindula, Kandapola, Galaha, Rangala
1911/12	15	not specified
1912/13	11	(Total number 42)
1914	7	Rookwood, Hope, Rahatungoda, Mooloya, and Rutland estates, St. Patrick's College and connected buildings, Jaffna, Kitulgala village and estates, Kitulagala, Mudamana, and Ingoya, Morankanda estate to Mansava estates, Ruanwella, Kapuwella, and Moraliyoa estates, Ceylon Motor Transit Co.'s garage and goods shed at railway station, Bandarawela, Monsagalla estate
1915	2	Maturata, Deniyaya
1916	7	not specified
1917-18	none	
1919	5	not specified
1920	1	not specified
1921	2	Udaveriya (Haputale), Lochnagar (North Matale)
1922	2	Pambagama (Eheliyagoda), Sommerset (Gampola)
1923	12	Ury estate (Passara), Craighead (Nawalapitiya), Poramba (Undugoda), St. Michael's College (Batticaloa), Yataderiya (Undugoda), Cocagalla (Madulsima), Beau Sejour (Nakiadeniya), Waharaka (Undugoda), Koslands Group (Koslanda), Ambegamuwa (Watawela), Demodera Group (Demodera), Meenagalla (Nawalapitiya)
1924	9	Oakwell, Ugieside, Pingarawa, Glen Alpin, Craig, Dammeria, including Hopton, Verellapatna, Rangbodde, Frocester estates
1925	2	Elladaluwa, Katugastota
1926	1	Denawaka estate
1927	3	Vincit estate (Ruanwella), Nugatenna (Urugala), We Oya Group (Yatiantota)
1928	3	Clodagh estate (Matale), St. James' estate (Habela), Heatherleigh estate (Rakwana)
1929-30	none	
1931	2	not specified
1932	3	not specified
1933	4	(2 local systems/2 local single lines)
1934	5	Estates: Gonakella, Passara, Hingurugama, Badulla, a licence Private line between two pons at Kitulgala
1935-37	none	
1938	3	for estate systems
1939	7	for estate systems

Table 4: Telephone kiosks during colonial times:

1914		Panadure, Wadduwa
1915		Law Courts (Colombo), Kelaniya, Gampola, Negombo, Polgahawela, Ambalangoda, Mutwal
1916		Horama, Ingiriya, Ragama, Matale, Pussellawa
1915-18	n.a.	n.a.
1919		Dandagamuwa (restricted service), Kotahena, Magalla, Tebuwana
1920	60	Colpetty, Dehiwala, Katukurunda, Teldeniya, Galagedara, Avissawella, Padukka, Watawala, Baddegama, Nanu-oya
1921	n.a.	n.a.
1922	67	not specified
1923	83	(Bambalapitiya) I.C. Drug Store, Post Office at Matwal, Slave Island, Grandpass, Bandarawela, Diyatalawa, Hakmana, Kamburupitiya, Kegalla, Kandapola, Talawakele, Giriulla, Neboda, Kotagala, Haputale, Weligama
1924	98	Borella market, Kanatta road, Deal place, Edinburgh market, Beruwala, Chilaw, Dolosbage, Gintota, Jaffna, Kiriella, Madulkele, Amrawila, Mount Lavinia, Panwila, Ramboda
1925	115	Alawwa, Badulla, Bambalapitiya, Chunnakam, Karainagar, Kayman's Gate (in lieu of Edinburgh Market, Pettah, Colombo), Maggona, Manipay, Mawatagma, Nattandiya, Pandateruppu, Punduloya, Wariyapola, Vaddukoddai, Welimada, Galle Face, Graving Dock, Mount Mary (for the Railway Department)
1926	149	Dondra, Urugala, Katunayake, Rottota, Mahawela, Eheliyagoda, Parakaduwa, Puwakpitiya, Aranayake, Anuradhapura, Trincomalee, Rambukkana, Mawatagama, Rambodagalla, Yatiyantota, Dehiowita, Ginigathena, Unawatuna, Pettah, Hanwella, Narammala, Tellippallai, Dehiwala Bridge, Baseline Road Junction, Railway Stores
1927	176	Ruwanwella, Gammaduwa, Puttalam, Mundel, Pannala, Nugegoda, Madampe, Mandampe Old Town, Nagoda, Kandana, Dematagoda, Katana, Bentota, Niwitigala, Demodera, Haliela, Ella, Anguruwatota, Kahawatta, pelmadulla, Passara, Atchuvally, Armour Street Junction, Maradana Junction (opposite Railway Station), Pamankade Bridge, Kelaniya Vihare Premises, Grandpass Tramway Terminus
1928	191	Grand Oriental Hotel, Yakbedda-Cotta road junction, York street junction, Vine Norton Bridge, Madurankuli, Talgaswela, Angoda, Tihagoda, Warakapola, Kaikawela
1929	209	Balapitiya, Boragsketiya, Boralessomuwa, Chundikuli, Colombo Jetty, Dodanduwa, Galle Bazaar, Hettipola, Hettiwatta, Ja-ela, Mihintale, Pasyala, Rajagiri, Rajakadalawa, Talangama, Ukuwela, Veyangoda
1930	224	Alubomulla, Batapola, Deraniyagala, Dodangoda, Gampaha, Induruwa, Kamburugamuwa, Killinochchi, Kitulgala, Kosgama, Menikdiwela, Naula, Nelundeniya, Puttur, Tirunelveli, Waskaduwa (has been closed since 1.12.30)
1931	227	Agalawatta, Lathpandura, Mahagama, Matugama, Migahatenna, Welipenna - Closed: Nelundeniya, Rajagiri, Madurankiuli
1932	227	Rajagiri, Richmond Hill (Galle), Waskaduwa
1933	227	Nelundeniya (reopened), Unawatuna (closed), Dematagoda Sub-Post Office (closed)
1934	231	Closed: Unawatuna, Wellampitiya, Mihintale, reopened: Pannipitiya, Potuhera, Ulapane

1935	242	Ambepussa, Homagama, Kokuvil, Minuwangoda, Mirigama, Muruthalawa, Pugoda, Wilsons, re-opened: Anguruwatota, Bambalapitiya, Migahatenna, Special Phone Box: Central Telegraph Office: Indo-Ceylon and Overseas Calls
1936	245	Elkaduwa, Namunukula, Hikkaduwa, Kakkapalliya, temporarily closed: Richmond Hill, Dodangoda
1937	272	Godakawela, Morawaka, Koslanda, Deniyaya, Lunuwila, Talawa, Rakwana, Dambulla, Vannarponnai, Halgranoya, Dankotuwa, Waharaka, Werellagama
1937	275	Kaduwela, Hewaheta, Hanguranketa, Madurankuli, Bogawabtalawa, Lindula, , Maskeliya, Laksapathiya, Uduvil, Kodikamam, Kayts, Valanai, Batticaloa, Akuressa, Kattankudi, Nikaweratiya
1938	279	Agrapatana, Akuressa, Batticaloa (for local service only), Bogawantalawa, Bulatkohupitiya, Hanguranketa, Hewaheta, Kaduwela, Kattankudi (for local service only), Kodikamam, Kayts, Laksapathiya, Lindula, Madurankuli, Nikaweratiya, Uduvil, Valanai, re-opend: Dematagoda, Dodangoda, Kamburugamuwa sub-post office, Richmond Hill sub-post office
1939	311	

Source: *Ceylon Administration Reports*, various.

Table 5: The five busiest call offices:

1919	Wellawatta (5002), Maradana Railway Station (3720), Moratuwa (3134), Grand Oriental Hotel (2560), Kalutara (2381)
1920	Maradana Railway Station (4236), Wellawatta (3918), Grand Oriental Hotel (3220), Central Telegraph Office (CTO) (2737), Cinnamon Gardens (2343)
1921	Maradana Railway Station (4078), Wellawatta Post Office (4040), CTO (2922), Colpetty Post Office (4078), Grand Oriental Hotel (2583)
1922	Wellawatta Post Office (4594), Maradana Railway Station (3590), Grand Oriental Hotel (3458), Cinnamon gardens Post Office (2740)
1923	Wellawatta (4926), Maradana Railway Station (4476), Grand Oriental Hotel (3530), CTO (3038), Customs jetty (2305)
1924	Wellawatta (4641), Maradana Railway Station (4192), Grand Oriental Hotel (3515), I. C. Drug Store (2800), CTO (2405)
1925	Wellawatta(5272), Maradan Railway Station (4555), Grand Oriental Hotel (3138), I. C. Drug Store (2910), CTO (2619)
1930	Grand Oriental Hotel(6826), Wellawatta (5423), Mardana Railway Station (3042), Central Telegraph Office (2843), Havelock Town (2642)
1931	Wellawatta Post Office (4541), Colombo Jetty (2671), I. C: Drug Stores (Bambalapitiya)(2502), Havelock Town Post Office (2172), Maradana Railway Station (2160)
1932	Wellawatta Post Office (3906), Havelock Town Post Office (2800), Colombo Jetty (2439), I. C. Drug Stores (Bambalapitiya)(2026), Maradana Railway Station (1979)
1933	Wellawatta Post Office (3455), Havelock Town Post Office (2449), I. C. Drug Stores (Bambalapitiya)(2150), Jetty (2050), Genral Post Office (1659)
1934	C.T.O. (5471), Wellawatta (3734), Havelock Town (2983), Maradana (Colombo)(2523), Call Office at Negombo Post Office (2432)

Source: *Ceylon Administration Reports*, various.

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