

Ceylonese arcadia?

Colonial encounters in mid-eighteenth-century Dutch Sri Lanka¹

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(...) a malicious Step-mother, who together with her own children sits on the eggs of the inheritance of this first-marriage daughter' (Johan van Heemskerk, *Batavische Arcadia*, 1637)

With a remarkable reference to seventeenth-century Dutch prose, two Sinhalese brothers eloquently accused their stepmother of thievery in July 1755. Convinced that she had held back part of their inheritance, Anthony and Philip Gomes had brought her before the Dutch colonial court in Colombo, Sri Lanka.² In an attempt to persuade the council members of her wrongdoing, they wove in the timeless *topos* of the wicked stepmother in their plea, referring to the above-mentioned seventeenth-century prose work of the *Batavische Arcadia*. Although it was not uncommon for litigants in Dutch Sri Lanka (1640-1796) to quote influential European jurists from earlier centuries such as Hugo Grotius, the noteworthy use of a non-legal excerpt makes this petition stand out. These Sinhalese brothers consciously chose to position themselves on the colonial intersection of the Dutch Republic and Sri Lanka. But why did an anecdote from a seventeenth-century Dutch novel become part of an eighteenth-century Sinhalese family feud in the first place? What does this court case reveal about the encroachment of Dutch institutions in coastal Sri Lanka? And what can this example tell us about the cross-cultural colonial encounters of Sinhalese and Dutch socio-legal practices?

In the seventeenth century the Dutch East India Company (voc) had replaced the Portuguese as the European presence in Sri Lanka. The Dutch assumed power in a vast coastal region populated by several hundred thousand indigenous inhabitants, with different religious and cultural backgrounds (Van Goor, 1996). Although their main interest was to secure

a profitable trade in cinnamon and elephants, the Dutch also installed religious and legal institutions (Schrikker, 2015). These churches, schools and courts of law not only governed the social worlds of the VOC employees and their next of kin, but also intervened in the everyday lives of Sinhalese, Tamil and other families in Sri Lanka (Schrikker & Lyna, 2019). This contribution will use the small window provided by the Gomes brothers and their stepmother as a means of looking at the much broader encroachment of Dutch institutions upon local families in eighteenth-century Sri Lanka. Starting from the legal documents of the Council of Justice in Colombo, and then incorporating archives from the Dutch Reformed Church, this research will thus explore the choices and constraints offered by these Dutch institutions to individual local inhabitants of eighteenth-century Sri Lanka.

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A SINHALESE FAMILY FEUD

The protagonists of this story are Anthony and Philip Gomes, and their stepmother Bastiana Fernando, Christian Sinhalese inhabitants of the coastal city of Kalpitiya (Colpetty), about 150 kilometers north of Colombo.³ Anthony and Philip were the oldest sons in a family of five, with two younger brothers and a sister.⁴ Anthony was a little under 25 years old and unmarried when he began the suit; his brother was somewhat younger, but already married.⁵ They came from a relatively well-to-do family, with several plots of land and a decent patrimony.⁶ Their father Frans Gomes was an indigenous chief of the mid-ranking washer caste.⁷ After Frans' death Philip had succeeded him as chief, and a couple of years earlier Anthony had taken up a position in the Dutch Reformed Church.⁸ Their mother had died back in 1745 when they were only young adolescents, and soon after Frans had taken Bastiana as his second wife. The new couple had a fruitful marriage, and within eight years Bastiana gave birth to another two boys and two girls.⁹

The relationship between the children of the first marriage and their stepmother Bastiana deteriorated shortly after Frans Gomes died in September 1753.¹⁰ Bastiana had accepted Frans' debt-ridden inheritance, but had immediately begged the Dutch governor of the island to sell off two gardens, which were legally not entirely hers. She was granted this exception, and when the properties were sold, Bastiana had called her stepchildren together in the paternal home in Kalpitiya. Much to the surprise

of Anthony and his siblings, Bastiana had made up her own allocation clause to divide the inheritance of her late husband. She felt entitled to half of the profit of the sold gardens, and wanted to divide the remaining half among her children and stepchildren.¹¹

158 Anthony claimed that the children of the first marriage first had to be given their maternal half of the sold gardens, and that only the remaining half was to be divided by his stepmother. When Bastiana refused to reconsider her initial proposal, Anthony and his full siblings took the matter to the Dutch colonial court. Anthony and his siblings claimed that the two pieces of land had been handed down by their great-grandfather to Frans, one of them in full property and the other to share with his two brothers. However, Bastiana argued that these properties had been valued after Frans' first wife had died, and that a sum of money equaling their value had already been taken out of Frans' estate before he remarried Bastiana. That money was handed over by Frans to the *boedelmeesters*, a group of indigenous VOC officials managing the assets of (half-)orphaned minors. Therefore, according to Bastiana, the two gardens were fully part of her conjugal property, and thus her allocation clause was legally just.

In the end the last will of Frans Gomes tilted the suit towards the first-marriage children. Frans signed this document shortly before his death, when he was already sick and bedridden. In it, he conferred the two gardens to his first-marriage sons. In a final petition Bastiana tried to get this will annulled, as she felt that Frans had done wrong by her, leaving her with huge debts and little gains. Nevertheless – and not surprisingly, given the solid evidence – the court ruled in favor of the first-marriage children, but did not seem to follow up on their verdict, as three years later Bastiana had still not paid the first-marriage children.¹²

THE WICKED STEPMOTHER

Although the last will of Frans Gomes provided conclusive evidence, it was Anthony's and Philip's statement from a week later that delivered the symbolic blow to Bastiana's defense.¹³ Eloquently phrased and carefully thought through, they urged the court to keep their stepmother tied to the Roman Dutch family law. Armed with specific references to Hugo Grotius' renowned Dutch law book, they proved that their father's will stood above intestate inheriting and was thus legally binding.¹⁴ In addition, they refuted Bastiana's claim that the two gardens could have been

taxed and subsequently bought out of the conjugal property of Frans and Bastiana, as their father was bequeathed the gardens under the *fidei commissum*, and not in full property. This arrangement implied that the inherited gardens were not to be pawned, sold or divided, in order to keep them in the family (Roes, 2006). To support this argument on *fidei commissum*, Anthony and his brother Philip referred to a specific ruling described in a law book from a sixteenth-century lawyer, again displaying their firm knowledge of Roman-Dutch law.¹⁵

It is worthwhile to note that, despite their Sinhalese background, the Gomes brothers explicitly depended on the Roman-Dutch law of inheritance. Sinhalese rules of intestate succession could, however, have equally strengthened their case, as these stated that family property should always revert to the source (Rupesinghe, 2016). But throughout the entire case proceedings, not a single mention is made of Sinhalese customs, either by the Gomes Brothers or the defendant Bastiana. In lower colonial courts of eighteenth-century Sri Lanka, aspects of Sinhalese law were still honored, despite a growing dominance of company rules in family law. But before the highest court of their jurisdiction, the Gomes brothers relied on Dutch law books to strengthen their arguments. In itself this is not surprising, as the majority of litigators before the high colonial court in Colombo and lower courts in other jurisdictions did so, and mentions of jurists Hugo Grotius or Joos de Damhouder were omnipresent (Rupesinghe, 2016). What set the Gomes brothers apart from other litigators was their more literary approach to the plea, with a rich vocabulary, numerous metaphors and, above all, their references to non-legal publications. They started their statement as follows:

“The lovely saying of lord Van Heemskerk in the *Batavische Arcadia* folio 175 goes that it is always the foul desire of an evil stepmother to keep on sitting with her own children on the eggs of the inheritance of first-marriage children, and the prosecutors [the two brothers, Ed.] unfortunately had to experience that for themselves.”¹⁶

This passage comes from an erudite Dutch novel, first published in 1637, with at least ten reprints between that time and the mid-eighteenth century (Grijzenhout, 2004). The *Batavische Arcadia* introduced the new literary genre of the pastoral novel to the Dutch Republic. The book recounts the elegant story of a group of young men and women daytripping to the beach north of The Hague, indulging themselves in polite discourse on Dutch

history, law and customs. As they also brought up anecdotes about Batavia, the capital city of the Dutch East Indies, Van Heemskerck's book – together with its contemporary *Journaal van Bontekoe* (1646) – is considered as the archetypical colonial novel. It was a clear attempt to educate younger readers on national history, and a key narrative in the construction and self-image of the young Dutch nation and its colonial territories (Salverda, 2007). Although it is strange at first sight to find the novel filled with legal information and scholarly notations, it is no surprise, since Van Heemskerck himself was a lawyer, and even a relative of Hugo Grotius. He briefly worked as a legal representative for the VOC in London, and would eventually become a member of the Dutch Supreme Court (Salverda, 2007).

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One of the stories told by a protagonist in the *Batavische Arcadia* features a wicked stepmother and the daughter of a rich nobleman, the most beautiful girl in The Hague. When the daughter fell in love, her stepmother became worried that a possible marriage would diminish both her share of the inheritance and that of her second-marriage children. She manipulated her husband into condemning his daughter's budding relationship and even locking her up in her room. But the young couple still found a way to secretly communicate and plot their escape. They managed to flee the house and leave the city, but after a dramatic carriage crash the young couple drowned in the river. Filled with regret, the father buried them together.

Starting off their plea with this brief reference to the *Batavische Arcadia*, the Gomes brothers immediately conjured up the powerful mental image of a wicked stepmother, who ruthlessly controlled her blended household, manipulating her husband like a puppet on a string and denying the first-marriage children their rights. But they did not leave it there, and throughout their statement Anthony and Philip Gomes wove in further images of wicked stepmothers taken from classical literature.

“It should not surprise the Honorable Lords that one seldom hears that a stepmother treats the first-marriage children of her husband honestly and well, because ‘noverca’ in fact is the name of a stepmother, of which the learned Tacitus says that ‘Novercale odium’ is a bitter hate, to such an extent that in Latin the words ‘bitter’ and ‘stepmother’ are hardly distinguishable.”¹⁷

The Gomes brothers tapped into a long history of negative stereotyping of stepmothers; in classical literature they were already hated figures, with

Tacitus' famous depiction of Livia as a scheming and ruthless manipulator. Stepmothers were portrayed as poisoning, murdering and greedy women, out for money (Barrett, 2001; Noy, 1991; Watson, 1995). Later on in their plea, Anthony and Philip even brought in a renowned Greek depiction of a wicked stepmother, when they referred to Bastiana as a "Xanthippe with her evil-talking tongue". Xanthippe probably was the second wife of the philosopher Socrates, depicted by the likes of Diogenes Laertius and Xenophon as a moody woman, always publicly complaining about how terrible her husband was.

One week after they offered the court Frans' will as definitive proof of Bastiana's offense, Anthony and Philip Gomes presented the court with this carefully crafted plea in which Bastiana's behavior was explained in a much larger objectified context of wicked stepmothers. Armed with specific references to Dutch, Latin and Greek literary representations of stepmothers, the brothers wanted to convince the court that stepmothers throughout history had always been embittered, dishonest and vengeful women, compelled by nature to mistreat children of previous marriages. Together with the undeniable proof of Frans' will, this eloquent plea further ensured that the court ruled in favor of the first-marriage children, granting Anthony and Philip the upper hand in the family feud with their stepmother Bastiana.

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THE SEMINARY IN COLOMBO

The question remains how these two young Sinhalese men had acquired knowledge of these European literary sources in the first place, in such a thorough manner that they could make precise allusions to them in their own narrative. The answer probably lies hidden in the court files, with a small reference to Anthony Gomes as a 'leermeester'. An ordinance published by the Dutch government in Sri Lanka on 15 September 1758 tells us that a 'leermeester' was the name given to a specific Sinhalese native catechist of the Dutch Reformed Church, belonging to the *radā* or washer caste, just like the Gomes brothers (Hovy, 1991). This piece of information led us to explore the archived meetings of the Dutch Reformed Church in Colombo (Mottau & Koschorke, 2008b). It turns out that in 1751 – four years before the court case – young Anthony Gomes was the record keeper or writer (*kanakapulle*) of Reverend Mathias Wermelskircher, a professor at the Dutch Seminary of Colombo.¹⁸

This Seminary was founded in Colombo in 1696, six years after the first one was established in the northern city of Jaffna (Van Goor, 1978). In the 1750s, the Colombo Seminary offered both primary and secondary education to 24 indigenous students, half of them Sinhalese and half of them Tamil. They were recruited from good families, often from the circles of indigenous chiefs and interpreters. On average, students enrolled at the age of 14, and were offered a 6-year intensive training, in which they were only granted 10 days off per year (Van Goor, 1978). After a reform in 1740, the program had been centered around the study of classical languages, and the students also had classes on theology, Church history and even Dutch history.¹⁹ They were trained to become schoolmasters, catechism teachers, comforters of the sick, proponents or even reverends, all local intermediaries who lived in the countryside and attempted to convert natives.²⁰ However, in everyday life the schoolmasters mainly functioned as Dutch civil servants who recorded births, deaths and marriages, rather than religious teachers (Schrikker, 2007; Van Goor, 1978). The Colombo Seminary was run by seven preceptors, or teachers: a Rector and Co-Rector, and five schoolmasters teaching Latin, Dutch, Sinhalese, Tamil and Hebrew.²¹ Reverend Wermelskircher was one of these, and in December 1752 he would even become the Rector of the Seminary, and thus one of the highest ranking officials in the Dutch Reformed Church of Sri Lanka.

It is difficult to assess how Anthony had ended up on the radar of Reverend Wermelskircher, but perhaps information on Anthony's hometown of Kalpitiya can enlighten us: this was a strategically important trading settlement for the Dutch, up north along the coastline. This outpost was protected by a fortress, and was home to several Dutch institutions. Meeting reports from the Dutch Reformed Church in Colombo show that staff members of the Seminary were sent to Kalpitiya to visit the Church and school at least every other year. There they held services, appointed new deacons, admitted new members to the Church and baptized the children (Mottau & Koschorke, 2008a; 2008b). Visitations such as these were also crucial for seeking out indigenous students to recruit for the Seminary (Van Goor, 1978). Reverend Wermelskircher only went to Kalpitiya once, in December 1743, when he administered Holy Communion there and baptized children. Could it be that this was the moment when the Reverend met the 13- to 14-year old Anthony Gomes, and recruited him as a student?²²

Enrollments lists of the Seminary have not been kept, but given Anthony's self-reference as a native catechist in the court files, he most likely

received training there in the late 1740s.²³ Both the Reverend and the other board members of the Dutch Reformed Church clearly held Anthony in high esteem, as in June 1751 they allowed him to take over some of the duties of a sick teacher.²⁴ For six months Anthony attended to the formalities of baptism and marriage in the midday services of the Wolvendaal Church in Colombo, in Sinhalese, Tamil and Portuguese, doing so without any form of payment.²⁵ It is highly unlikely that the Dutch Reformed Church would have admitted a young Sinhalese man to replace a Seminary teacher if he had no knowledge of classical languages or theology, further underpinning the hypothesis that Anthony must have been a student there previously. In December 1751, the board members would even recommend the Dutch Government of Sri Lanka to officially appoint Anthony and pay him for his services, but it remains unclear whether or not this actually happened.

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As the students of the Seminary were taught in classical languages, it is plausible to infer that Anthony gained his knowledge of the classical writings of Tacitus and Plato as a student at the Seminary in Colombo.²⁶ Whether or not he became acquainted with the *Batavische Arcadia* via the same route is hard to tell, as it is still the case that little is known about book collections in the Dutch colonial territories.²⁷ But given its huge popularity in the Dutch Republic at that time, and its explicit references to 'national' history, the book most likely circulated among the Seminary staff and students, either as mandatory reading for a course on Dutch history, or as an interesting read in-between classes.

In the end Anthony's seemingly gratuitous references to *Batavische Arcadia*, the writings of Tacitus and the mentioning of Xanthippe could perhaps have been more than mere rhetorical instruments to blacken the reputation of his stepmother Bastiana. By mentioning these literary works, Anthony Gomes built on the education he had likely received at the Seminary in Colombo. Although the Seminary's main goal was to produce local-born religious and civil servants who could convert and control the indigenous population, this education had thus provided Anthony – and by extension his siblings – with the necessary cultural capital to engage in a multifaceted colonial setting. Whether consciously or not, this Sinhalese man wanted to appeal to the learned world of the council members of the colonial court. He hoped to be recognized as one of them, hinting at a shared cultural frame of reference. Moreover, by referring as two young Sinhalese men to a highly popular Dutch novel such as the *Batavische Arcadia* in an effort to win a case before the Dutch colonial court, Anthony

and his brother firmly placed themselves on the crossroads of the Dutch Republic and its overseas territories, just as the novel itself had done.

164 But perhaps Anthony was counting on more than a mere cultural connection with the council members. On closer inspection, three of the eight judges who presided over his lawsuit in the Council of Justice turned out to be officials in the Dutch Reformed Church of Colombo as well. As Elder and Deacons respectively, the judges Franchimont, Visser and Schokman had also been participating in the closed-door Church meetings, beginning two years before the Gomes-Fernando court case.²⁸ As such, both Anthony and these judges were members of the inner circle of Reverend Wermelskircher. By referring to his cultural capital built up as a student and / or staff member of the Seminary – headed by Rector Wermelskircher at that time – in front of three judges with close personal ties to that same religious official, Anthony was perhaps not only counting on his conclusive evidence to win the suit against his stepmother, but on his personal network of Dutch officials as well.

A CEYLONese ARCADIA?

The rhetorical strategy of Anthony and Philip Gomes – relying on the former's training at the Dutch Seminary – strengthened their case, as they won their lawsuit against their apparently malicious stepmother Bastiana. However, a closer investigation of the legal position of widows and stepmothers in the eighteenth-century colonial context nuances this topos. Bastiana had tried to get the will of her late husband annulled, as she felt that he had done her wrong. But was this the case? If we look at the Dutch Republic, widows were relatively well-off compared to their counterparts elsewhere in Europe, as spouses – via their wills or in prenuptial contracts – often bequeathed to them more than the customary half, naming their wife principal heir or granting them usufruct (Schmidt, 2010; Schmidt & Van Der Heijden, 2016). Bastiana Fernando, however, was worse off than her counterparts in the Republic. Her late husband had only offered her usufruct of the house and the gardens, and distributed his most valuable property – namely the gardens – among his first-marriage sons. In addition, it becomes clear from the same will that Bastiana had little means of her own, as she could only give away negligible sums of money to her mother and mother-in-law.²⁹ When it turned out that she had received a debt-ridden inheritance from her husband, and that he had already se-

cured 1800 guilders for his first-marriage children, Bastiana therefore had little option but to ask the governor for a favor. Rather than a selfish choice to sit on the eggs of the inheritance, Bastiana's efforts to retain the profit of the sold gardens were more likely the survival strategy of a widow with little means, looking for a solution in a web of constraints.³⁰

Her weaker position is further underpinned by the fact that three years later she was still involved in lawsuits to safeguard her inheritance. In 1758 Bastiana was sued by her brother-in-law Louis Gomes, who in 1755 had stood accused next to her by his nephews Anthony and Philip, and even testified on her behalf. Three years later Bastiana and her sister Gimara (who was the widow of the third Gomes brother, an uncle of Anthony and Philip) were apparently having usufruct of land belonging to the Gomes family.³¹ Louis and his two sisters-in-law Bastiana and Gimara passed on the usufruct between each other, but now that it was his turn to receive the earnings from the land, Bastiana wanted to sell the property. She somehow made both Gimara and Louis sign a document by which they agreed that these properties were put up for public sale. During these proceedings Louis urged the court to force Bastiana to finally give his brother's children (i.e. Anthony, Philip and their siblings) their rightful part of the profits, referring back to the 1755 case.

But the image of the malicious stepmother Bastiana is not the only one deserving of some nuance, since it turns out that Anthony Gomes' persona was not as innocent as the court documents seem to indicate. The Consistory Minutes of the Dutch Reformed Church mention that in September 1754 – just before the court case against Bastiana began – he reportedly abducted a niece of his stepmother.³² How this was related to the family feud over the inheritance remains unclear, but it indicates that the family ties were severely damaged before the suit. Both Anthony and Bastiana were excommunicated by the Dutch Reformed Church, pending further enquiry. Shortly after the verdict, Anthony asked a high official of the Dutch government in Colombo to be relieved of his duties as *leermeester* or native catechist. Could this excommunication have been the reason? In May 1756 the *Political Commissaris*³³ painted a rather startling image of Anthony during the Consistory meeting, accusing him of being “lazy, insubordinate and unworthy” and that “instead of catechizing in the homes of members and the poor, Anthony has spent all his time in his ar-rack, brandy and other material interests, and has not shown much interest in furthering the spiritual life of the congregation, to which he had pledged himself, as it has clearly occurred to me [*Political Commisaris* Ed.] from

his request last year to be relieved of his office” (Mottau & Koschorke, 2008b). Therefore, given the fact that he still referred to himself as *leermeester* in the court case against his stepmother, for some reason Anthony Gomes had asked to be released of his duties soon after the verdict. The Dutch Reformed Church seems to have followed Anthony’s request and the recommendation of the *Political Commisaris*, and removed him from his office, never again to mention him in a meeting.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

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The case study of Anthony Gomes is a remarkable example of the colonial cross-fertilization between Dutch and Sinhalese socio-legal practices. As the son of a mid-rank indigenous VOC official, his confession of faith to the Dutch Reformed Church had allowed the adolescent Anthony to appear on the radar of Reverend Wermelskircher. This connection ensured that Anthony was admitted to the elite Colombo Seminary, where he became the personal clerk of the Reverend and received training to become a native catechist. There he was introduced to both classical literature and Dutch history, and was able to build up considerable cultural capital. When Anthony and his siblings were caught up in a family feud with their stepmother Bastiana, he brought her before the Dutch colonial court to seek justice. In an effort to win the suit, Anthony strategically employed his cultural capital: he wove in references to the shared European literary heritage such as the *Batavische Arcadia* to appeal to the judges of the Council of Justice. In addition, at least three council members were part of the same social network around Reverend Wermelskircher, by now Rector of the Colombo Seminary and one of the highest officials of the Dutch Reformed Church in Sri Lanka.

In the end the story of Anthony Gomes can be read as that of a clever youngster, who consciously used the opportunities offered by Dutch institutions to further his own interest and that of his family. On the other hand there is also something tragic to this tale, as we are offered a glimpse of a talented and gifted young man who was trusted by the highest Dutch religious officials on the island, and granted education and job opportunities. But after a weird abduction story, his consequent excommunication and his resignation from the position of catechist, he seemingly fell out of favor with both the Political Council of Ceylon and the Dutch Reformed Church.

On a more general level this case study testifies to the all-pervading interaction between Dutch institutions and the everyday lives of local inhabitants in the eighteenth-century colonial context. The colonial apparatus imposed constraints on their social worlds and was occasionally even the vehicle of symbolic violence. But a more traditional top-down analysis of this encroachment of colonial power does not do justice to the opportunities these institutions offered to Sinhalese or Tamil people under Dutch rule, allowing them to negotiate and shape their own lives and those of their families, on the colonial crossroads of indigenous and European socio-legal worlds.

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2. Sri Lanka National Archives (SLNA), Dutch Records, Lot 1 (hereinafter SLNA 1), Vol. 4290: *Anthony Gomes and others contra Bastiana Fernando, Louis Gomes and Domingo Fernando, 1755-1756*.
3. Their Portuguese-sounding last names probably refer to an ancestor who was baptized a Christian and adopted a European name, rather than an actual Portuguese lineage.
4. After Anthony and Philip came Nathalia, Michiel and Frans Gomes. Frans and his first wife Maria Philipsz had a second daughter Saplina, but she passed away before the lawsuit began. SLNA 1/4290: *Dictum of the defendants Louis Gomes and Domingo Fernando, 10 July 1755*.
5. The defendants Louis Gomes and Domingo Fernando were the legal guardians of all the children of the first-marriage, except for Philip Gomes, who was already married. They used an extract of the so-called *schoolthombo* (sort of parish registers) to prove this to the court. SLNA 1/4290: *Dictum of the defendants Louis Gomes and Domingo Fernando, 10 July 1755*.
6. When their father Frans died, he left his children two plots of land and about 2000 rixdaalders. Their stepmother left her mother and stepmother a grand total of 30 rixdaalders. SLNA 1/4291: *Last will drawn up between Frans Gomes and Bastiana Fernando, 16 February 1753*. Anthony and his siblings came from a relatively well-off family, as their great-grandfather Louis Fernando de Fonceka had left his family no less than five gardens and nine slaves. SLNA 1/4314: *Transcript of the last will of Louis Fernando de Fonceka, January 25 1725*.

7. Frans Gomes is referred to in the court documents as ‘Rajepakse Mohandiram van de wassers lascorijns’ and ‘reviseur of singaleese tale’. In Dutch Sri Lanka *mohandirams* were the assistants of the heads of the provinces (*modliaars* or *koraals*), and thus the second in rank of the indigenous chiefs. All of these chiefs were local elite as members of the highest caste of *goyigama* (Hovy, 1991). The *lascorijns* were indigenous soldiers, and a *wasser* the Dutch name for the *radā* caste (Rupesinghe, 2016). The term Rajepakse can be translated as ‘loyal to the king’ (Reimers, 1950). As the Portuguese and Dutch replaced the local king with a feudal system, this probably implied ‘loyal to the Dutch’. Thanks to Luc Bulten for pointing this out.
8. SLNA 1/4290: *Anthony Gomes and others contra Bastiana Fernando, Louis Gomes and Domingo Fernando, 1755-1756*. The positions of Anthony Gomes in the Dutch Reformed Church are discussed later in this contribution.
9. These second-marriage children are called Louis, Augustinus, Saphina and Anna Maria and are mentioned as such in the last will of Frans Gomes. SLNA 1/4291: *Last will drawn up between Frans Gomes and Bastiana Fernando*, 16 February 1753.
10. The Censura Morem-meeting of the Consistory of the Dutch Reformed Church in Colombo dated 28 September 1753 states that they received news of the local schoolmaster that *mohandiram* Frans Gomes of Colpetty had died (Mottau & Koschorke, 2008b). There are no explicit mentions in the court documents of inter-familial difficulties before Frans’ death, although the strong language used by the Gomes brothers in their pleas could refer to a longer troublesome relationship with their stepmother.
11. To be precise, Bastiana divided the other half into four equal parts: she kept another half of that, handed out a quarter to her four own children and offered the remaining quarter to her five stepchildren.
12. This 1758 case will be discussed later on in this contribution. SLNA 1/4314: *Louis Gomes contra Bastiana Fernando, widow of Frans Gomes and Gimara Fernando, widow of Michiel Gomes. 1758*.
13. There is no indication that Anthony was represented by a lawyer when he presented them with his *dictum* in the court’s session of 18 July 1755. There is always a chance that the statement was written by a third party, but there are no indications to support that this was the case. The statement was preceded by the message “De twee eerste [referring to Anthony and his brother Philip Gomes] voor sig als de andere eyss(chers), dienen van den dictum, luidende aldus”, and concluded with “was getekent Anthonij Gomes & Philip Gomes”. SLNA 1/4290: *Dictum of Anthony Gomes and Philip Gomes*, 18 July 1755.
14. This concerned the *Hollandsche consultatien en advijzen* of Hugo Grotius. More precisely: “vide het 3. Deel van de hollandse consultatien en advijzen pag 175 n 4 cons 59”; “zie het voormelde derde deel pag 89 n 2 cons 26” and “sie het vierde deel van de holl. consultatien pag 729 cons 396”. SLNA 1/4290: *Dictum of Anthony Gomes and Philip Gomes*, 18 July 1755.
15. This concerned a book of Cornelis van Nieuwstad (1549-1606), namely *Utriusque, Hollandiæ, Zelandiæ, Frisiaeque, curiæ decisiones*, first published in 1602. In the court files the following reference is found: ‘8. Vonnis des leenhof van holland, zeeland en west vriesland, beschreven door cornelis van nieuwestad pag 226’. SLNA 1/4290: *Dictum of Anthony Gomes and Philip Gomes*, 18 July 1755.
16. “Het heerlijk zeggen van den heer van heemskerk in de batavische arkadie fo 175, namentlijk dat de vuijle begeerte van een quadaardige stiefmoeder altoos is, om met haar eijge kinderen op de eijeren den erfenisse van de voorkinderen te blijven zitten, hebben de eyss tot hun leetwezen thans seer waaragtig bevonden”. SLNA 1/4290: *Dictum of Anthony Gomes and Philip Gomes*, 18 July 1755.
17. ‘Geen wonder E.agtb. heeren een zelden hoord men, dat een stiefmoeder met haar mans voorkinderen eerlijk en welgehandelt heeft, want noverca is eigentlijk de naam van een stiefmoeder en daar en tegen zegt den geleerden Tacitus dat Novercale odium een bitter

- haad is, sulx dat men in de latijnsche woorden bitter en stiefmoeder weinig verschil vinden kan.' SLNA1/4290: *Dictum of Anthony Gomes and Philip Gomes*, 18 July 1755.
18. The term *kanakapulle* comes from the Tamil word *Kanakkapillai*, and the Dutch made it into *kannecappel*. It referred to an official, writer or clerck (Hovy, 1991).
 19. In 1740 governor van Imhoff made several amendments to earlier resolutions regarding the Seminary in Colombo, including the division of the 24 students into three and not two batches (mixed-raced children as a new category), and two of the best students were sent out to the Dutch Republic for two additional years of study (Hovy, 1991).
 20. The extraordinary Consistory meeting of February 5 1761 discussed a resolution from the Political Council of Ceylon, stating: "In the said Seminary, such subjects as children of Sinhalese and Tamil parents, but no mixties, casties, or such others of this kind, shall be trained from their very early youth, so that they may, after the necessary instruction, be in a position to be employed as efficient native schoolmasters, 'Krankbezoekers', Catechism teachers, and according to the degree of their capabilities also as native Proponents, and even in exceptional cases as native Predikants, for the extension (i.e. spread) of the true Reformed religion among the native inhabitants everywhere in the country, or, if they are not inclined to serve in the schools or the churches, then at least for employment as native chiefs." (Mottau & Koschorke, 2008b).
 21. In an Extraordinary meeting of the Consistory of 5 November 1759 it is stated that from now on there will be six preceptors instead of seven: "one Rector, one Co-Rector, one Latin Preceptor, one Dutch schoolmaster, one Sinhalese and one Tamil schoolmaster", with the Hebrew schoolmaster left out (Mottau & Koschorke, 2008b).
 22. An extraordinary meeting of 12th December 1743 mentions: "The Rev. Mr. Wermelskircher reports that he administered Holy Communion at Tutucorin and Calpetty, and furnished a list of the children whom he had baptized at these places for record by the Scriba." (Mottau & Koschorke, 2008a)
 23. However, as Anthony's name does not feature on the examination lists of the Colombo Seminary, he probably never completed the entire program (van Goor, 1978).
 24. This was decided in a Censura Morem-meeting of June 25th, 1751 (Mottau & Koschorke, 2008b).
 25. The minutes of the meeting do not mention precisely in which church Gomes attained to these services, but it was probably the main Wolvendaal Church in Colombo (Mottau & Koschorke, 2008b).
 26. The list of study material does not feature Tacitus or Plato explicitly, but the Seminary's library more than likely held these works (Van Goor, 1978).
 27. Joan Gideon Loten, who was Governor of the island at the time of the Gomes-Fernando lawsuit (1752-1757), had a copy of Van Heemskerck's novel in his possession when he was in office in the East Indies. In 1737 Loten had received a copy of Van Heemskerck's novel as part of a box with eleven other books when he was stationed in Semarang, Indonesia. It is most likely that he still had this copy with him when he travelled to Sri Lanka, and was governor there between 1752 and 1757 (Raaijmakers, 2010).
 28. Arend Jansz. Schokman was elected Elder in November 1755, and held that position until his death in February 1757. Volkert Franchimont was elected Elder in November 1753, and kept that position all throughout the 1750s. Willem Visser became Deacon in November 1753, and Elder in November 1755, just when Schokman took up the same position. Visser was relieved of his office in 1758 (Mottau & Koschorke, 2008b).
 29. SLNA 1/4291: *Last will drawn up between Frans Gomes and Bastiana Fernando*, 16 February 1753.
 30. The current state of research does not allow us to determine whether or not Bastiana was an exception to the rule. However, some explorations in other court cases seem to indicate that other stepmothers faced similar challenges to Bastiana, where they were left hardly anything by their husband, who gave nearly everything to his first-marriage

children. The precise reasons for this apparent disadvantage or discrimination of colonial second wives will be the topic of a forthcoming publication within the abovementioned NWO funded project.

31. SLNA 1/4314: *Louis Gomes contra Bastiana Fernando, widow of Frans Gomes and Gimara Fernando, widow of Michiel Gomes*. 1758.
32. This was probably a daughter of Gimara Fernando, the sister of Bastiana. Further information is unfortunately lacking from the meeting reports.
33. The *Political Commissaris* was a representative of the highest colonial authority (*Political Council of Ceylon*), and present at each meeting of the Consistory. The *Political Council* had the final word in appointing officials in the Dutch Reformed Church (Mottau & Koschorke, 2008a).