This publication is made available online by

Swedish Institute of Mission Research at Uppsala University.

Uppsala University Library produces hundreds of publications yearly. They are all published online and many books are also in stock. Please, visit the web site at

www.ub.uu.se/actashop
Gender, Race and Religion:

Nordic Missions
1860–1940

Edited by Inger Marie Okkenhaug

STUDIA MISSIONALIA SVECANA XCI
Gender, Race and Religion:

Nordic Missions
1860–1940

Edited by Inger Marie Okkenhaug
Gender, Race and Religion:
Nordic Missions
1860–1940

Edited by Inger Marie Okkenhaug

STUDIA MISSIONALIA SVECANA xci
Uppsala 2003
# CONTENTS

Acknowledgements 6

**INGER MARIE OKKENHAUG**
Introduction: Gender and Nordic Missions 7

**INGER HAMMAR**
Protestantism and Women’s Liberation in 19th Century Sweden 19

**LISBETH MIKAELSSON**
Gender Politics in Female Autobiography 35

**LINE NYHAGEN PREDELLI**
Contesting the Mission’s Patriarchal Gender Regime: Single Norwegian Missionary Women in 19th Century Madagascar 53

**SEIJA JALAGIN**
“I didn’t come here to play, that’s for sure” Finnish Missionary Women and Authority in Early 20th Century Japan 81

**KARIN SARJA**
The Missionary Career of Baroness Hedvig Posse 1887–1913 103

**HILDA RÖMER CHRISTENSEN**
Building an Empire at Home and Abroad Front Figures of the Danish Missionary Work for Women 1890–1940 137

**HANNA MELLEMSETHER**
African Women in the Norwegian Mission in South Africa 157

**KARINA HESTAD SKEIE**
Building God’s Kingdom The Importance of the House to 19th Century Norwegian Missionaries in Madagascar 175

Studia Missionalia Svecana 204
Acknowledgements

The editor gratefully acknowledges the support given to this project by the Norwegian Research Council, Institusjonen Fritt Ord and Letterstedtska Föreningen. Nordisk Forskerutdanningsakademi (Norfa) and the Centre for Gender Studies, University of Bergen, supported the workshop on Nordic mission and gender issues held in Bergen in the summer of 2000. That innovative and inspiring meeting led to this collection of essays, and in addition to the authors, other participants were Kari Waerness, Gunilla Gunner, Kari Martinsen and Kirsten Alsaker Kjerland. They must be thanked for their knowledgeable comments on our papers. Kirsten Alsaker Kjerland was also central in planning and administering the workshop.

I would also like to thank Deborah Gaitskell for her involvement and support at our second Nordic Gender & Mission meeting in Uppsala, Mai 2002.

Introduction: 
Gender and Nordic Missions

INGER MARIE OKKENHAUG is a Post-doctoral researcher at the Department of History, University of Bergen. Her Ph. D. thesis "The quality of heroic living, of high endeavour and adventure" Anglican Mission, Women and Education in Palestine, 1888–1948 was published by Brill, Leiden in 2002. She has published articles on gender, education and mission in several international journals and is the co-editor of Erobring og overskridelse: De nye kvinnene inntar verden | Conquering and transgressing-The new women conquer the world, Unipub forlag, Oslo 2003.
The Protestant missionary movement of the nineteenth century engaged women on a large scale in North America and in Europe, including the Nordic countries. It enjoyed an unparalleled success among married as well as unmarried women. Women played a central role both at home, as fund-raisers and as active agents in “heathen” countries. An important part of the transformative power of the missionary “project” was its sanctioning of transgressive behaviour as religious exceptions to gender rules. It was the pious woman’s “duty” to overcome her “natural diffidence” in order that she might better serve the mission. It has been claimed that Nordic women missionaries through their work both at home and out in the field were not only liberating themselves from the constraints of the private sphere, but that they also contributed to the liberation of women in general by changing cultural premises. This anthology seeks to explore central aspects of this process based on empirical studies in relation to gender and the Protestant missionary movement in Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway.

From the mid-nineteenth century, the Christian Protestant mission developed considerable momentum. While spreading the Christian gospel was initially the main aim, social work, especially health and education, soon became accepted missionary activities, legitimized as the best way of reaching the local population. In the USA and Great Britain, but also in Germany and in the Nordic countries, women participated in organizational work and in financial as well as practical tasks. The effects of this great movement have to a large extent been the focus of research within Anglo-American history. Lately, however, the issue of gender and Nordic mission work has also become the topic of study.

Part of this article is also presented in the article “Gender and Nordic Missions in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries”, Scandinavian Journal of History (28, 2003): 1–11.

First, let us clarify why this anthology focuses on female missionaries only, and not on their male colleagues, as the main characters in these histories. Fiona Bowie, co-editor of one of the path-breaking anthologies on women and missions, has a good answer: women have been active participators in the modern missionary movement and ... their experience cannot simply be subsumed under that of men. Women and men live in different cultural worlds and this will inevitably manifest itself in missionary life and attitudes. It is also apparent that the voices of women who are recipients of missionary activities need to be heard. Missionaries treated male and female converts differently, according to their own understandings of proper male and female roles. They encountered societies which also distinguished in various ways between the sexes and worked either to reinforce or to undermine these categories. Although broad patterns do emerge, each context is different. It is in detailed examination of particular missionary encounters that the authentic experience of women is revealed and their presence made visible.\(^5\)

The different articles in this collection show clearly that each context is different, thus underlining the need for empirical studies in gaining an understanding of this encounter between the Christian west, including the Lutheran Scandinavian countries, and the non-western world. But there are also common traits. The tension created by the fact that women were “activated” by evangelical mission work and trained, travelled, lived and worked in foreign lands, while at the same time staying within the western sense in a proper, acceptable feminine role, opens up for some general themes regardless of national and geographical context. Key themes here are single women, contested gender hierarchies, missionary or religious feminism and race issues. While British women during the 19\(^{th}\) and part of the 20\(^{th}\) century were part of an imperial power, Scandinavian missionaries had a different political/national framework. Still, they shared the western, Christian culture and sense of superiority in-built in the evangelical, Protestant missionary movement.\(^6\)

In the USA the large number of women active in mission organisations has led historians to characterize Protestant mission as the first and largest feminist movement in the history of North America.\(^7\) A parallel development is found in the Nordic countries. Thus, as Kristin Norseth has pointed out, the massive

---


6. Also the Roman Catholic Church was and still is very active in health and education-based missions. So far, comparatively little research has been done on the various Catholic missions and gender.

participation of women in international mission was typical of deeper social and international developments within Protestant mission-work, which also included Nordic missions. 8

The international aspect of the Nordic mission is seen quite obviously in the fact that they went missionizing in China, South Africa, Madagascar, etc. Women (and men) from Scandinavian countries also went to England and the USA to be trained as missionaries and women from Nordic countries worked for foreign missions. 9 From the 1880s Norwegian women went out as missionaries for German organizations, the China Inland Mission and the British Zenana-mission in India, while Swedish women worked for various Anglo-American missions. 10

The establishment of women’s mission organization was another sign of Nordic missions being influenced by international trends. From the middle of the century mission societies by and for women flourished in North America and Great Britain. In Germany the first women’s mission organisation, “Morgenländische Frauenmission” was established in 1842. 11 These organizations were established partly because women did not gain access to formal influence in the male dominated societies. Women were needed as missionaries in many countries where male missionaries did not gain access to the local women because they lived secluded from the men’s world. In the Nordic countries the development of separate women’s missions did not take place until around 1900. An organization of female Swedish mission workers KMA (Kvinnelige misjonsarbeidere) was organized in 1894, then in Denmark and Finland (1900) and finally in Norway (1902). Even so, women continued to be central in the general mission movement. In Norway which was the leading country in Scandinavia concerning the number of people involved in mission activities, women played a decisive part in the Lutheran Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS), from the time it was established in 1842. 12 NMS, which had close ties to the Lutheran State church, became one of the largest popular movements in the country and women were in a majority both as active members at home and in the field. 13 When NMS in 1904 decided to give women formal rights,

---

12. For many years women contributed most of the financial support for the NMS without having a say in how the money should be spent. L. Nyhagen Predelli 1998. Norway has been called the largest mission country in the world, i. e. Norway has the highest number of missionaries pr. inhabitant.
this happened nine years before Norwegian women in general received the right to vote. In this way the mission could be an explicit model for women’s liberation in society at large.14

In Norway there were direct links between the women’s missionary movement and the feminist movement in the early 20th century.15 Prominent women in the mission movement were inspired by the feminist movement, which became a strong force in Norway in the 1880s. There were forces that urged women’s missionary associations to join the Norwegian National Council of Women (NNCW, Norske Kvinner Nasjonalråd; the umbrella organization of women’s associations in Norway) that finally succeeded in 1910. As Line Nyhagen Predelli has pointed out, this strategy was seen as a way of Christian women to gain influence within the NNCW and to have an impact on the feminist movement.16 She argues that the Norwegian experience of links between Christian mission women and the feminist movement is not an isolated, atypical one, but may be a phenomenon common to the Nordic countries. In Denmark missionary women formed an association which worked actively towards giving women the political right to vote.17 The women’s societies of the Danish Missionary Society tended to focus mainly on mission work. However, the Danish Women’s National Council (the umbrella organization of women’s associations in Denmark) was eager to include the missionary women in their membership.18 In Sweden the pioneers of feminism argued from a Christian understanding for the emancipation of women, as shown by Inger Hammar.19 Also in Finland leading Christian women supported feminist ideas of women’s rights, which they understood as having a solid foundation in the Christian social order. It was argued that Christian women were needed in politics. Thus the Lutheran woman’s calling was redefined as extending into politics.20

While women were often in subordinate positions in terms of the missionary hierarchy, the mission movement contributed significantly to the entrance of women into the public domain. It gave women the opportunity to engage in chari-

16. Ibid.: 42.
17. Ibid.: 49.
table activities outside the confines of the home, the chance to learn organizational and administrative skills, and the opportunity to enter the labour market via mission employment. Thus it is important to pay attention to the ways in which the Lutheran mission movement has acted as a deliberate or unintentional agent of change, particularly in the area of gender arrangements. Most missions have acted deliberately to change gender structures among the local people they encountered in the mission field, but they have also, intentionally and unintentionally, caused changes in such structures both in their own organizations and in their home countries.21

To a great extent, the missionary movement was influenced by developments related to women's entrance into the educational system and the labour market, but the movement itself in fact also contributed towards a greater acceptance of women in the public sphere and left its own mark on the historical move towards equal rights for men and women. This is the first collection of essays in which scholars expressly focus on gender and the missionary movement in a Nordic context.

These essays examine how Christian women have negotiated change within a traditional hierarchy. This “paradoxical emancipation” is characterized by the question: is it possible for women located within a patriarchal structure to transcend traditional boundaries? Is it possible to speak of emancipation and liberation in connection with women who choose to work and act within a traditional hierarchy?22 Thus, a central issue in this anthology is the emancipatory aspect of Protestant Christianity in relation to Nordic women missionaries. The missionary woman's humbleness could be seen as a contradiction to her possibility of exercising power and influence. How have women attempted to challenge the established, male missionary regime? In her contribution on women's agency in relation to the Danish Foreign Mission, Hilda Rømer Christensen is concerned with how Lutheran doctrines have been negotiated and moderated over time. By analysing the ideological and institutional framework in the development of the Danish mission movement, she looks at how the Lutheran concepts and outlook applied to women's missionary work. Rømer Christensen focuses on two different women activists who both exercised power and influence within the missionary movement, but who differed radically in the issue of women's political rights. Thus there was not just one way of interpreting and applying the emancipatory aspect of Christianity to women's lives.


Inger Marie Okkenhaug
However, it is important to remember that the women missionaries who are being found worthy of scholarly attention today are very often the outspoken, exceptional women who left their mark in the form of written sources. But most women missionaries worked quietly within their accepted roles and remained invisible, despite their active lives. Even more invisible than the single women missionaries were the married missionary wives. This is also the case in this anthology. The women who figure here tend to be strong personalities with a will and ability to challenge established practices. One article, however, deals with the domestic side of life at the mission station, based on the correspondence of a missionary wife. In her article Karina Hestad Skeie discusses the importance of the domestic arena in the missionaries' goal to create a Christian African society. Not only was the home an example for African converts of a proper Christian dwelling place, the house also became implicated in the negotiations on and transformation of Norwegian missionary culture and values. Simply converting the "heathen people" to Christianity was not enough; the missionaries' goal was nothing less than restructuring African society. 'Restructuring' suggested physical changes, such as favouring square houses over round huts; these physical changes corresponded to the spiritual changes that took place in the convert. These ideological shifts included creating African women who would preside over homes in which Christianity could flourish.23

It is precisely this process of creating the Christian African woman that Hanna Mellemsether explores in her study of the Norwegian Mission Society's (NMS) attitudes and strategies towards local women in different stages of the organization's work in South Africa. The discourse on women, both African and Norwegian, changed as the mission consolidated their work in KwaZulu/Natal during the 1920's. By that time the role of African women in the congregations had become a point of discussion within the mission organization. Differences in opinion among Norwegian missionaries show how an emancipated, western role for women is contested both with regard to a bourgeois Christian role, and with regard to what the missionaries perceived as the traditional role of women in South Africa.

Evangelical Mission

Missionary work attracted women because it combined a gender-specific, Christian way of life with degrees of freedom denied to the Christian woman in the

West.\textsuperscript{24} It also offered middle class women a wider range of permissible activities than was possible in European and American societies at that time.

Historians have shown that there were two key motifs in European as well as in American Protestant mission work and activity: \textit{an emphasis on direct evangelicalism and an emphasis on the civilizing activities thought necessary for making evangelicalism more effective.}\textsuperscript{25} Both received equal emphasis in late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century mission thinking. Mission theorists felt compelled to share Christianity, and especially their own western version of the Christian culture. In the work of missionaries in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and the Pacific the twin concern for evangelism and social change was reflected both in the number of mission personnel engaged in direct preaching and teaching of the Bible and in the considerable proportion of mission resources committed to institutions dedicated to concrete social change.

In her work on American missions in north India, Leslie Flemming found that most missionaries saw education as the primary avenue for social change among women. Besides teaching local girls and women hygiene and child care, among other things, education also played a central role in the proselytizing process itself.\textsuperscript{26} Susan Hill Lindley argues that evangelism was furthered along with or through education and was the most widespread and effective form of women's missionary activity.\textsuperscript{27} Studies of the Church Mission Society's and London Mission Society's activities in India show that education was seen as a key to conversion; "schools proved to be of invaluable service to all missionary activities."\textsuperscript{28} Also different Nordic missions established schools and many of the women missionaries were trained and worked as teachers in the field. It was here that some of the conflicts between the male missionaries and the women workers were played out. The issue at stake was often the distribution of labour between male and female workers. Professionally trained women did not want to yield to male colleagues, sometimes with less education than themselves. In this anthology Seija Jalagin presents a case where women teachers challenged the patriarchal structures because of a conflict between Finnish women missionaries' sense of professionalism and career, and the existing social framework. A central factor here was local conditions, since male Finnish missionaries' understanding of Japanese gender roles dictated the latitude they assigned to female missionaries.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid: 191
\textsuperscript{26} L Flemming (ed.) Women's Work for Women Missionaries and Social Change in Asia Colorado/London 1989.
In her article on the Swedish missionary Hedvig Passe, Karin Sarja defines three levels in the missionary organization that, to varying degrees, were characterized by patriarchal hierarchy and female subjection. These levels, the central management “back home”, the mission station “out in the field” and the missionary conference, are to be found in most Protestant missions. Sarja argues that precisely because of these several layers, women missionaries had certain opportunities to gain space and influence. The geographical distance between headquarters in Stockholm or Helsinki and the mission fields in Madagascar or the Natal province, with only slow means of communication, also meant that there was a discrepancy between the ideal of gender roles and real life. While work and space in theory were strictly defined according to gender, in practical terms all churches had to be a great deal more flexible in the missionary and frontier situation than they were at home. Here practical needs created pragmatic solutions. Such flexibility could only redound to the advantage of those who at home were deprived of much opportunity to express or assert themselves. Line Nyhagen Predelli discusses how women through their role as missionaries were able to transcend written and unwritten rules for gender-specific behaviour. Her essay discusses the complex and often contested nature of gender relations within the missionary movement. This is illustrated by the mixed success of two women missionaries within the Norwegian Missionary Society who attempted to expand their own opportunities, rights and duties in the mission field. In this case female members of the Norwegian Missionary Society were able to transcend boundaries in the mission field before their headquarters in Norway had officially approved the changes.

Class was another factor that was decisive in women missionaries’ ability to influence their own position. Karin Sarja explores how social class and financial freedom influenced women’s latitude. An aristocratic class background and financial independence allowed the Swedish missionary Hedvig Posse to ignore many of the boundaries that existed for other missionaries in the Swedish Church’s Mission to South Africa. Moreover, for women from the elite, a calling to mission work could be a way out of a restricted existence. Unmarried women from the upper classes had to care for ageing parents and after their death assist their female relatives with housework in their homes. Hedvig Posse’s decision to become a missionary can be regarded as a resourceful choice at a time in her life when she was economically as well as socially independent.

In her analysis of the Christian framework of 19th century Sweden, Inger Hammar focuses on the religious discourse during the period when “the calls to extend

women's sphere of action grew louder. She argues that the Lutheran construction of gender played a decisive role in relation to women's emancipation in Scandinavia. The conviction that Christianity bore within it the source of all emancipation impelled the pioneers of the women's movement to use theological arguments when joining the debate on the liberation of women. Christianity as the guarantee for women's emancipation is also the theme of Lisbeth Mikaelsson's article. She examines religious calling as a strategy for women's emancipation and its practical outcomes. Mikaelsson's thorough research on women's self-representation as religiously subject beings shows that women's experience of having a missionary vocation challenged age-old conceptions of Christian women's primary commitment to the role of wife and mother – according to conservative Lutheranism the only vocation for women. Women's missionary calls revolutionized their own lives and effected changes in women's status.30

Mikaelsson calls this “missionary feminism”, a term not indicating a fixed program. Included in the concept are such elements as the improvement of women's social conditions, extension of women's social and religious roles, and the underscoring of women's value as human beings on a par with men. Women missionaries' texts often express solidarity with local women. However, this is not only a phenomenon characteristic of Nordic mission texts. Images of women's intellectual deprivation, domestic oppression and sexual degradation were used to justify North American as well as European missionary work among local women. Women missionaries wanted to extend what they saw as the superior position women had in Protestant Christianity in relation to non-Christian women.31 It was a moral duty to uplift the position of local women. In her study of missionaries and social and political reformers in South Asia, Kumari Jayawardena shows that female missionaries were very conscious of the status of local women.32 And she,

33. The term "feminism" has various implications, and has a different meaning today from that in the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth century. See eg. Ida Blom’s discussion on relational and individual feminism can be seen as the "two faces" of feminism: I. Blom “Feminism and Nationalism in the Early Twentieth Century: A Cross-Cultural Perspective" in Journal of Women’s History, Vol. 7 No. 4, 1995: 81–94. See also K. Offen “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach” Signs 1988 vol. 14. no. 1: 115–157.
in line with Mikaelsson, argues that the strong, independent, often single women who became important missionaries were feminists in their own way.\textsuperscript{33}

Feminism and mission, or “religious feminism” is also the theme of Gulnar Eleanor Francis-Dehqani, whose research is based on Protestant women missionaries in Iran in the period 1869–1934. Francis-Dehqani argues that these women missionaries can be seen as “feminists”. However, this was not because of their achievements in improving the status of local women. On the contrary, the missionary women improved their own situation at the expense of the local women: her conclusion is that these missionaries undoubtedly forwarded the public position of British women and can, therefore, take their place in the historical feminist movement. However, their success was based upon an undermining of the egalitarianism that is the essence of feminism in its search towards equality for all women. For as they expanded their possibilities for western women, they defined themselves in relation to Persian women whom they considered subordinate and dependent in many respects. Therefore, the evolution of the western feminist movement advanced, whilst at the same time its progress relied upon an unequal relationship between the CMS women and the women of Iran...\textsuperscript{34}

Did Nordic women’s relative success in expanding the scope of gender boundaries build on undisputed notions of racial hierarchies? Focusing on these issues in studies of Nordic missions will show to what extent factors like national background, religious and social conditions ‘in the mission field’ and denominational background influenced the relationship between women missionaries and local women. This encounter is also influenced by the individual woman missionary, her personal religiousness and educational and social background. This collection is an attempt to shed light on one aspect of the many-faceted issue of gender and mission. The women receiving Nordic missions and the implicit Protestant ideal of womanhood have yet to write their history. Even so, Nordic mission was part of an international movement that in practical terms was a feminist project with implications for women’s roles within church and society.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Mikaelsson, L., “Kvinne, ta ansvar og ledelse i dine egne hender.’ Historien om Henny Dons” *Norsk tidsskrift for misjon* 2, 2002


Ever since the Reformation, the Lutheran established church—and this applies to all Nordic countries—played a leading role as the representative of the state’s ideological views. For Luther, femininity was constituted in motherhood; the origins of woman’s God-given calling lay in childbirth. Luther had in fact not ascribed to woman any other calling than the one for which her body was constituted—the bearing of children. However, motherhood was dependent on marriage, and during the nineteenth century this was not an avenue open to all because of the period’s demographic imbalance, with an excess of women and lack of men. Luther’s emphasis on motherhood became a stumbling block for those spokesmen of the religious discourse who, from the middle of the nineteenth century, had to address the delicate issue of how an unmarried woman’s vocation should be defined. When the calls to extend women’s sphere of action grew louder, a conflict arose that ultimately derived from Lutheran teaching’s firm assertion of a complementary view of the sexes.

In examining the gender issues that framed women’s first steps towards integration into society/the public world, it is the religious discourse of the day that informs my analysis. The purpose is to show that our understanding of history can only be broadened if attention is paid to contemporary theological arguments and debates, thus eliminating the risks inherent in ‘religion-blind’ research. Things that are today seen as confusing, obscure, or paradoxical become not only intelligible but also consistent if one interprets them in the light of the world view that influenced and controlled the historical figures in question. Of course, this

1. As a result of the pressure of wider social change, religious legislation entered a phase that would lead ultimately to a secularized state. Gradually the Swedish Lutheran unitary state embodied in the Church Law of 1686 loosened its grip. 1858 saw the revocation of the Conventicle Act that since 1726 had forbidden individual gatherings in the absence of a priest. As a result of the Nonconformist Acts of 1860 and 1873, ‘Swedish’ and ‘Lutheran’ ceased to be synonymous. If they obtained specific permission from the king, Swedish citizens were allowed to form non-Lutheran congregations, and they were also allowed to join other denominations permitted by the state. It was only with the Religious Freedom Act of 1951 that Swedish citizens had the right to abstain from joining a Christian church. In 2000 the Church of Sweden was disestablished.


Inger Hammar
only applies while the period in question is one in which the historical context includes a theological discourse that was a more or less self-evident element in the interpretative horizon of the day. This was still the case in the nineteenth century, when Swedish society was marked by a Lutheran world view, albeit one that had begun to dissolve by the end of the century.

Luther’s construction of society must be seen as an expression of an agrarian world view and naturally enough took its departure point in a static peasant society; in Luther’s conceptualization of the state, the terms *ecclesia* (church), *politia* (politics), and *offentligheten* (public life) were inextricably intertwined. Luther’s portrayal of the state was built on the assumption that the state’s primary function was to ensure the moral and spiritual welfare of the citizenry, and that this was best achieved through a strong, centralized government that was closely aligned with the Church. In this way, Luther’s vision of society was not only shaped by the historical context of the Reformation, but also by the prevailing agricultural and social conditions of the time. The interplay between these elements is evident in Luther’s writings, where he frequently argued that the state had a duty to uphold the moral and spiritual values of the community, and that this could only be achieved through a strong, centralized government that was closely aligned with the Church. This perspective on society remained influential well into the nineteenth century, when Swedish society was marked by a strong Lutheran world view, albeit one that was beginning to dissolve by the end of the century.

--

offentligheten. Kön och religion i emancipationsprocessen”. Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift. 1998:2 b. Eman-
(the state) and oeconomia (the household) were to be the fundamental principles.\(^4\) From cradle to grave, each individual was enfolded in a patriarchal structure, at the heart of which lay the household, the core of the state. The result was that both married and single women lived out their lives within households that, under ideal conditions, provided them with both employment and livelihood. Luther rejected celibacy, and considered marriage the necessary condition for the existence of society. A woman’s calling was to act within the household as spouse, mother, and housewife.

The biblical passages that speak of God’s punishment of mankind at the Fall were to serve as Luther’s guiding principle in interpreting the reciprocal relationship between man and woman. Eve, the matriarch, the mother of all women, had defied God’s commandment by listening to the serpent; the chaos she created in so doing doomed her to subordination ever after.\(^5\) Eve’s lack of understanding was for Luther the reason for her fall: ‘But she did not suspect that the Devil could be there, and therein rested her weakness and short-sightedness. Eve was not wise, like Adam.’\(^6\) Therefore it followed that it was impossible for a woman to lay claim to wisdom: ‘No gown or costume becomes a wife or maiden so ill as the desire to be wise’, stated Luther.\(^7\) Women’s intellectual weakness legitimized the ultimate authority of men, an authority that even extended to the household. Women may speak with authority – ‘as mistresses’ – when they express themselves on household matters, wrote Luther, but it is different when they express themselves on the condition of the state. Admittedly they do not lack the language, but their talk is ‘overwhelmingly childish, muddleheaded, and confused’, he wrote, concluding that ‘woman is created for keeping the household; the man for affairs of state, worldly rule, war, and the courtroom, to uphold and maintain them’.\(^8\)

For Luther, man and woman had been accorded different roles at the Creation, and it was the man, not the women, who should appear in the role of persona publica.\(^9\) Women’s only opportunity to operate openly in a public context was to take

---

\(^5\) Jane Dempsey Douglass, ‘The image of God in women as seen by Luther and Calvin’, in Kari Elisabeth Barresen (ed.), The image of God. Gender models in Judaeo-Christian tradition. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995:236–257). Dempsey Douglass stresses that for Luther, the Fall transformed ‘the whole human situation’. Eve was severely punished, but Adam’s existence was equally changed: ‘He must contend with raging lust. His duty to support and govern his family as well as to rule over the world is a great burden’ (247).
\(^7\) Martin Luther, Dokt. Martin Luthers Bordssamtal eller Colloquia i urval utgifna och översatta of O. A. Stridsberg. (Stockholm: 1877:117).
\(^9\) For the Reformation and gender construction see for example Lyndal Roper, The holy household: women and morals in Reformation Augsburg. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989:2). Roper is one of those to argue that
on the role of mouthpiece, and to appear as the bearer of a holy message. In both the biblical and the Christian traditions, there are examples of women responding to just such a call. It was essential, however, that the woman did not use her role as a mouthpiece to win honour for herself. Her honour was instead indissolubly bound up with her role in the private sphere, while man – through his actions in the public sphere – was expected to win the honour that was enjoined on him by his role as *pater familias*. The role as mouthpiece was reserved for only a few, however, and in the main, woman was expected to exert her influence through her calling as spouse, mother, and housewife. The principle of human equality before God may have been indisputable in Lutheran ideology, but as a result of the belief in the idea of the three estates, each person was allocated a determined position from which to function in society, and which no one could question.

**Women's Roles Altered**

Swedish society underwent a tremendous transformation during the nineteenth century. The structure of the household was shattered, and an increasingly industrial society left individuals to shift for themselves. Seen from a gender perspective, these changes meant that a significant number of women had difficulties supporting themselves, and this in turn gave rise to ideological confusion amongst the leading members of society, perplexed as they were by the new economic circumstances. There was a rush to institute reforms that aimed at broadening the range of employment open to women.

---

the Reformation if anything gave greater legitimacy to the idea of subordination. Compare Lyndal Roper, *The holy household: women and morals in Reformation Augsburg*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). where he suggests that the Reformation's focus on marriage provided the opportunity for women to adopt a strong role, with the intermediate stance taken by Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and gender in early modern Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). In the chapter 'Religion'. See also Merry E. Wiesner, 'Spinning out capital: women's work in the early modern economy', and William Monter, 'Protestant wives, Catholic saints, and the Devil's handmaid: women in the age of Renaissance', both in Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz & Susan Stuard (eds), *Becoming visible: women in European history*, (Boston: Cop., 1987). One scholar to argue that the Protestant tradition was favourable to the liberation process of the nineteenth century is the sociologist Olive Banks. In *Faces of feminism: a study of feminism as a social movement*, (Oxford: M. Robertson, 1981), she identifies the evangelical Christian women's efforts as one of the three elements in the emancipation process; the second element was the set of ideas that emanated from the French Revolution, and the third was rooted in socialist ideology. Even if, in the middle of the nineteenth century, relations between the sexes were still marked by inequality – and the assumptions about what was fitting within the various spheres were still intact – Banks contends that it was at this point that the Protestant women intensified their call for emancipation. 'The doctrine of separate spheres', according to Banks, 'was challenged by feminists who claimed for women the right to break out of both their confinement to domesticity and their legal and political subordination to man.' See also Susan Hill Lindley, 'You have stepped out of your place: a history of women and religion in America*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Knox Press, 1996:366). Like Banks, Hill Lindley only briefly touches on the Lutheran tradition. For an overview of the relationship between emancipation and theology see Susan A. Ross, 'The women's movement and theology in the twentieth century' in Gregory Baum (ed), *The twentieth century: a theological overview*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999).
It was against this background that the early feminists entered into the social debate.\footnote{The pioneering generation of feminists belonged to the cream of Swedish society and were always able to gain a hearing from their liberal friends in the economic, political, cultural, and religious elite. Working-class women, on the other hand, had few opportunities before 1900 to unify or develop emancipatory views on equal terms with upper-class women; they found themselves instead the object of the philanthropic enthusiasms of the leading feminists, intent on raising the proletariat’s moral and social status.}

Fredrika Bremer (1801–1865) was the first woman in Sweden publicly to challenge the religious framework that since the Reformation had determined the extent of women’s calling. Through her political writings Bremer gave women a voice in society, and it was without doubt her commitment that was to carry the emancipation debate to a much wider audience.\footnote{There has been considerable interest in Bremer. For an overview of recent research in English, see for example Brita K. Steindahl, The Education of a Self-Made Woman – Fredrika Bremer 1801–1865, (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1994); Laurel Ann Lofsvold, Fredrika Bremer and the Writing of America, (Lund: Lund University Press, 1999) and Carina Burman, Bremer. En biografi. (Stockholm: Bonniers 2001).} Early in life she distanced herself from the idea that she should take on motherhood. She was certain that this biological vocation was not to be hers.

She made her debut at the age of twenty-seven with an anonymous work about family life in the Swedish upper classes. With books such as Grannarne (The Neighbours), Hemmet (The Home: or Family Cares and Family Joys), and Hemmen i den nya verlden (Homes of the New World: Impressions of America I–II), she became one of the period’s most successful authors. Her work was translated into twelve languages and during her own lifetime reached a wide audience both in Europe and the United States, yet her books are now almost completely forgotten. Instead, successive generations have remembered her as the outstanding figure of Swedish feminism.

The conviction that Christianity bore within it the source of all emancipation impelled Fredrika Bremer to use theological arguments when she joined the debate on the liberation of women. In a secularized understanding of reality, spiritual reality is seen as an abstract construction in the minds of those who hold religious beliefs. A person whose approach to existence is grounded in the absence of a godly dimension is unlikely to see life in terms of living out a calling. Here a human being is understood as a biological being who alone creates the framework that determines the course of his or her life. Bremer’s understanding of the world was of an entirely different nature. For her, Christianity was the guarantee of women’s emancipation: it was the patriarchal interpretation of the biblical account of Creation that had suppressed its liberating message down the ages, denying expression to the freedom that was the cornerstone of Christianity. While remaining loyal to her Lutheran heritage, her Christian world view had a liberal bent. With her
demand for a new view of women’s vocations, she was to find herself in opposition to the Lutheran state’s orthodox gender ideology.

Even during her lifetime, Bremer acquired followers who saw in her ‘the first and noblest spokeswoman and liberator of Swedish women’. Two of them were Rosalie Roos-Olivecrona and Sophie Leijonhufvud. For a period they both had admittance to Bremer’s salon, and in 1859 they together founded Sweden’s first periodical with a distinctively feminist programme. In 1861 Bremer wrote that the periodical, *Tidskrift för hemmet*, was a good portent; in her view, women’s awakening and entrance into public debate were steps on the road towards a truly good society. For twenty-five years *Tidskrift för hemmet* was to serve as a mouthpiece for the still disparate women’s-rights movement in Sweden. Sophie Leijonhufvud (who married Axel Adlersparre in 1868) was responsible for the peri-

odical’s editorial policy throughout its existence. The originality of the authorial voice she developed has been recognized as ‘groundbreaking’ in the history of the Swedish press.15

Even during the early days, the editors stated that it was Christianity that set the conditions for true liberation, and in this respect these pioneers were clearly Bremer’s loyal heirs. For the first generation of Swedish feminists, Christianity was the guarantee of women’s liberation. However, down the ages a patriarchal interpretation of the Bible had obscured its liberating message.16 The conviction that Christianity bore within it the seed of liberation for all women made it impossible for the pioneers to ignore the religious framework of the day; above all, they were intent on razing the theological construction of woman as seductress and temptress. In the first instance, women should not be seen as gendered beings, with sexual yet non-reproductive properties.

An important element in the attack on this unsatisfactory gender role was the struggle to persuade society that women should be understood as intellectual beings on an equal footing with men. This met with great resistance from the leading lights of society who maintained that the biblical passages dealing with female subordination – including in an intellectual sense – must be interpreted literally. Counting in the women’s favour, however, were a number of theologians who during the nineteenth century came to argue that the Bible, in common with all literature, should be studied using historical-critical methods.17 By arguing for an interpretation of the Bible that was less literal, it was possible to circle around those individual passages that gave legitimacy to a misogynist gender ordering.

When the issue of further education for women was taken up in the second half of the century, an intricate problem emerged that did not merely derive from Luther’s mistrust of woman’s intellect, and thus his conviction of her inability to adopt the role of persona publica; a further obstacle existed in the shape of

---


16. For a more detailed analysis of the patriarcha’ tradition’s views on the human condition from Augustine to Luther, see principally Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-talk: towards a feminist theology, (Boston Massachusetts: SCM Press Ltd. 1993:33). For the views of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas in particular, see also Karl Elisabeth Børresen, Subordination and equivalence: the nature and role of women in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald Verl., 1995). Even in the nineteenth century, the interpretation of specific biblical passages and exegeses in general was of interest to the likes of Frances Willard and Elisabeth Cady Stanton; see Carol A. Newsom & Sharon H. Ringe, The Women’s Bible commentary, (London: SPCK, 1992), and in particular ‘Introduction’.

'decency'. For nineteenth-century bourgeois society, 'the public man' appeared as a fully respectable person, the role of persona publica giving him unlimited freedom to move in the public arena. The woman's sphere, on the other hand, was hedged about with restrictions, and for the majority of women it was still the case that they ran the risk of being suspected of sexual impropriety if they were seen out in the streets and squares under any but the most limited of circumstances. Thus 'the public woman' could be interpreted as equating with the prostitute or fallen woman. The fact that the idea of things 'public' was highly gendered in nineteenth-century Sweden was the greatest stumbling block to the further education of women.

The Debate on Women's Education

In line with the Lutheran tradition, the Church of Sweden had for centuries taught the basic elements of knowledge to the whole population without differentiating between the sexes. Its aim was to prepare children for membership in the Church once they reached adulthood. Matters were different when it came to the learning that was disseminated through the universities; as far as the Church of Sweden was concerned, academic study was intended for the state's future civil servants, and was therefore not open to women.

In their struggle for intellectual liberation, women were to be borne along on the liberal currents of the day. The key to liberalism was the idea of personality that lay at its core, and for those who embraced the liberal approach it struck them as contradictory not to recognize women's status as individuals. During Sweden's last Parliament of four Estates in 1865 to 1866, a heated debate raged over the motion that women be allowed entry to further education and new forms of employment. The discussion reveals that there were widely differing views on this point amongst Sweden's leaders. The favourable attitude towards progress that then prevailed found concrete expression in the report that the Statsutskott, or State Committee, put before Parliament in February 1866. The report opened with a declaration that 'the female half of the human race has not been equipped by the Creator with a lesser capacity for spiritual development and moral refinement than

the male.' The Committee proposed amongst other things that women should be
given the right to a university education.19

Ranged against this proposal were the orthodox delegates of all four Estates. One MP, for example, stated that women in general were not ‘equipped by the
Creator with the physical vigour that is necessary to endure prolonged contemplative study, which requires prolonged effort of mind and mental strain’. Every
attempt to set oneself above God’s Creation was doomed to fail.20

Those who defended the proposal were equally convinced. One MP attacked
his opponents’ argument for being based not only on prudery but also on hypocrisy
from the men’s side: ‘since we must surely be agreed on the matter, gentlemen’, he
said, ‘that wherever there is danger to a woman’s honesty, it comes from the man.’21
During the animated debate, a handful of MPs spoke enthusiastically in favour of
the proposals. A fair number of MPs sought the help of the Bible to give weight to
their argument, be it for or against the report.22 For the orthodox, the key question
was whether one should forbid women entry to further education for theological
reasons. Further, they were deeply concerned that women’s appearance in public
life would imperil decency. The pioneers of emancipation in Sweden protested
against such statements; they argued that study would in no way undermine wom­
en’s modesty or demean their value because, when compared with the ballroom,
the lecture hall offered far fewer opportunities for indecent conduct.23 The leaders
of the women’s movement instead proclaimed that education was part of the strug­
gle for greater decency. If a woman was provided with an education and the means
to make a livelihood, she would not be forced into a marriage to find support;
herein they saw the chance of progress towards a better society. Once women had
been given limited access to university education in 1870, the feminists’ leaders
considered it necessary to seek to prove that women’s education stood to serve the
cause of public decency. With their God-given decency, women would exert a good
influence over academic life.

For Tidskrift för hemmet, the importance of the Christian view of life as the
cradle of women’s liberation was not without its limits, however. In particular, they
were not content with the traditional Lutheran interpretation of the liberation that

Andra Häftet:286.
Häftet:154.
Andra Häftet. See for example: 295, 300, 305, 309, 310, and 321.
23. Tfh 1866:35.

Inger Hammar
was embodied in Christianity. At the beginning of the 1870s, Adlersparre and her circle launched an assault on those who held that it was particularly in its spiritual and eschatological aspect that Christianity contained an emancipatory message. Christ had freed the previously so ‘tightly shackled woman’ not only so that her ‘spiritual and heavenly share of inheritance’ would be accorded to her. Since Christianity primarily aimed to change the temperament of its adherents, renewal should stretch right across the social and civil arena. The one was the natural result of the other. In this interpretation, Christianity’s concept of liberation broke the boundaries that had hitherto been staked out between male and female vocations. Nor were Christian views on life the target when the periodical protested against the subordination of women; instead, its attention was focused on the prevailing gender construction, which it argued conflicted with Christianity’s view of humankind.

In the last few decades of the nineteenth century, the early pioneers led a stinging attack on the advocates of an ‘orientalist’ view of women. The legacy of Fredrika Bremer could scarcely be clearer. According to Tidskrift för hemmet, the authors of the Old Testament had been influenced by the Oriental view of women. The Israelites were strongly influenced by an Oriental culture that made women into the medium of man’s passions. Polygamy, at least as it appeared in the Old Testament, was to be understood as a necessary consequence of the view of women that was to be found represented in Oriental society. This, however, was antiquated and was to be completely ignored in the New Testament, argued the periodical. Thus the fact that Israelite society allowed polygamy at the time when the Old Testament was written down was a result of an Oriental gender construction in the periodical’s eyes, and the tendency of the Church tradition to charge woman with being the representative of sin by reason of her sex was found deeply offensive. The latter supposedly derived from an Oriental idea that was unworthy of a culture steeped in the Christian tradition. In a polygamous society it was impossible for an individual woman to realize her influence as wife and mother, said the periodical. It was only when the family through the Reformation was lifted from its earlier despised and dependent position that women were given a chance to influence society. The Reformation had altered the conditions for women's

24. See for example TIF 1875:321 ff. for a thorough review of the English theologian S.A. Brooke’s book Christ in modern life. The passage on p.333, in which he denounced the ‘falska uppfattning af qvinlighet’ (‘false understanding of femininity’) that demanded submission from women at all times, was singled out for special praise. See also TIF 1875. p. 90, where Adlersparre discussed in an extended footnote the value of new scientific fields, and how they problematized the generally accepted interpretation of the Creation myth, noting that the latter ‘icke är att uppfatta efter orden; eller, såsom vi åfven kunde uttrycka oss, att den just är att uppfatta efter orden, men ingalunda såsom verklig’ (‘is not to be understood literally; or, as we would put it, that it can be understood as literal, but by no means as real’).

25. TIF 1873:172.
liberation, but the editor was forced to admit that its emancipatory spirit had been lost somewhere along the way; nevertheless, she still had high hopes that the order of things would be restored. That it had yet to happen could be attributed to what they called ‘the old prejudice’ that women were subordinate to men, a prejudice that ‘the ancient Eastern, Greek and Roman societies passed on to medieval society, and it in its turn to the present’. According to Adlersparre and her circle, the biblical testimony that should be used to define the nature of a true Christian was ‘that which alone is necessary – atonement and salvation in Christ’.

There was an abiding hope that by giving precedence to the New Testament, the early pioneers would finally succeed in razing the patriarchal tradition’s wrongful line on subordination. Yet while it was certainly difficult to find proof that Christ had given support to subordination, Paul certainly had – and at some length, and it was his explicit statements on women’s subordination that the Church of Sweden used as its justification for reviving the idea in the second half of the nineteenth century. To the consternation of the leading feminists, the emancipation project found itself threatened by the established Church’s determination to strengthen a Pauline interpretation of the reciprocal relationship between man and woman.

Adlersparre took up the problem in the periodical by posing the rhetorical question of whether ‘the Pauline message’ placed obstacles in her path as a woman appearing in a public debate. Should not she, like generations before her, heed the message ‘women keep silence in the churches’? She concluded that this was not the case: ‘The woman redeemed and restored by Christ must safeguard if not herself, then the holiness that she bears within herself’, she maintained.

Above all, it was a fact that for several decades the Church of Sweden insisted on the reintroduction and use of the marriage formula ‘Paul the Apostle’s admonition in the fifth chapter verses 22, 23, and 25 of the Letter to the Ephesians’ that drew the greatest protest from feminist leaders.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.

Adlersparre and her circle found it highly questionable to use this passage as the basis for relations between the parties to a marriage. Unfortunately, as they were well aware, as soon as marriage was mentioned their opponents were only too
happy to remind them of ‘Paul, and Peters’ repetition of these humiliating words’. Despite this they were not prepared to acknowledge their primacy: ‘Certainly the explanation for this will be found in the Eastern, ancient low esteem of woman, which, however, should not be transplanted into the Western spirit as recently as in our times’. Instead they held there were good reasons to let themselves be led by Christ himself in this matter. As for the Pauline line on subordination, the leading feminists had little time for it; it posed a threat to the emancipation project.

In the process of the replacement of metaphysical assumptions about reality by an ideological system that centred on the internal life of the individual, a new threat to the early pioneers’ emancipation project emerged – secularization. At Tidskrift för hemmet, they were extremely conscious of the danger of teachings that were sceptical towards metaphysically anchored value and norm systems, or indeed dismissed them entirely. The periodical warned its readers against influences of this kind. Particularly treacherous was positivism, with its misguided ideal of women. Auguste Comte – the zealous denier of the immortal faith – who announced that those who followed his teachings would not have reason to lack ‘Christianity’s dreamt hopes’ was a thorn in the periodical’s flesh. The periodical also issued a warning against ‘the power of pessimism’ that by way of Schopenhauer and von Hartman was continuing to gain a footing in society. Their teachings were dangerous since they were the diametric opposites of Christianity’s fundamental understanding of the meaning of life and the hereafter. It also had negative consequences for society’s morals, because the pessimists’ exhausted world view made them liable to see everything in shades of black. These new beliefs threatened the very heart of the emancipation project.

Conclusion
Since it has long been assumed that the emancipation of women and secularization went hand in hand, research into the history of Swedish women has spent little time in tracing the strongly Christian tone of the feminist movement. Previous accounts of the Swedish emancipation process have primarily focused on the economy as the crucial factor, while at the same time the Swedish clergy have been indiscriminately labelled as negative towards feminism. Christianity, rep-

31. TH 1876:125 ff.
32. TH 1882:65 ff.
resented by its clergy, has in particular in the Swedish research tradition come to be seen as a hand brake, with the consequence that it is principally religion's role as a restraint on the emancipation process that has been emphasized. In doing so, historians have overlooked the contradictions inherent in the fact that from the middle of the nineteenth century, the women who first initiated and then drove forward the emancipation debate were ideologically anchored in a context that has been labelled as hostile to emancipation. The fact that in a Protestant context women were told 'that they could directly speak to God and that God could and would speak to them' was understood as a challenge.34 For women, this and the emphasis on calling, served as arguments when entering the mission arenas far away from home.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Banks, Olive, In Faces of feminism: a study of feminism as a social movement, (Oxford: M. Robertson, 1981)
Borresen, Kari Elisabeth, Subordination and equivalence: the nature and role of women in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald Verl., 1995)
Dagny 1888, 1893
Hammar, Inger, "Några reflexioner kring 'religionsblind' kvinnoforskning", Historisk tidskrift 1998:1 a


Hammar, Inger, “Feminism och teologisk reflexion i emancipationsprocessens initiativskede”, in Rapport från forskarsymposium: Kyrkorna och det moderna samhället. Väckelserörelserna och samhället, Kykrohistorisk årskrift 2000


Hill Lindley, Susan, 'You have stepped out of your place': a history of women and religion in America, [Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Knox Press, 1996]


Kristeva, Julia, Stabat mater och andra texter i urval av Ebba Witt-Brattström, [Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 1990]


Lerner, Gerda, The Creation of Feminist Consciousness, 1994


Luther, Martin, Doctor Martin Luthers Betraktelser över de första Menniskornas Lefnad. (I Mos. 2–10 kap.) Till undersökning och uppfyllande för Evangeliska Christina, utgifven af Carl Georg Hermes, Evangelisk predikant i Kroppendorf wid Magdeburg, [Falun: 1860]

Luther, Martin, Dokt. Martin Luthers Bordssamtal eller Colloquia i urval utgifna och översatta af O. A. Stridsberg, [Stockholm: 1877]


Petzäll, Erik, Straussedebatten i Sverige. En kyrkohistorisk undersökning, [Lund: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrkorelses förlag Stockholm, 1936]

Protokoll hållna hos Högoflige Ridderskapet och Adeln, vid Lagtima Riksdagen i Stockholm år 1865–1866. Andra Häftet

Protokoll hållna hos Välloflige Borgareståndet, vid Lagtima Riksdagen i Stockholm åren 1865 och 1866. Andra Bandet

Protokoll hållna hos Högoflige Ridderskapet och Adeln, vid Lagtima Riksdagen i Stockholm år 1865–1866. Andra Häftet


*Tidskrift för hemmet (TfH)* 1866, 1868, 1869, 1873, 1875, 1876, 1882,


Wiesner, Merry E., ‘Spinning out capital: women’s work in the early modern economy’, and William Monter, ‘Protestant wives, Catholic saints, and the Devil’s handmaid: women in the age of Renaissance’, both in Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz & Susan Stuard [eds], *Becoming visible: women in European history*, (Boston: Cop., 1987 a)


Lisbeth Mikaelssøn

Gender Politics in Female Autobiography

Introduction

Journals, autobiographies, and mission reports constitute a major literary genre in Norwegian mission life, comprising both published and unpublished material. In my investigation of autobiographical texts published by Norwegian missionaries in foreign countries,1 I recorded 228 books and booklets issued in the period between 1843 and 1994. Authors numbered 136 persons, 93 men and 43 women. The figures demonstrate the male dominance of this genre, which becomes even clearer when texts are considered. Male texts amounted to 176 titles, female texts to 52. Although comprehensive, my investigation has not been able to register all the autobiographical writings published in the period. However, even if every single book had been noted, there is little reason to think it would upset the gender balance in favour of women. What the picture would look like if unpublished diaries and autobiographies had been examined, I would not dare to surmise. It would be interesting to know what opinions, values and memories are verbalized in missionary writings never meant for public scrutiny. In some ways such writings can be expected to give a more truthful account of the missionaries’ experiences and opinions. However, published texts have their own merits as written sources, representing literary traditions and value systems in the publicity connected with foreign mission, and sporadically even voicing unorthodox opinions.

Published texts have for the most part been produced within the confines of a Christian literary circuit dominated by the interests of the missionary organizations. Most of the authors belong to organizations connected to the Lutheran state church in Norway, but a considerable minority are Pentecostalists and Nonconformists sent out by their respective societies. In such a context autobiographical accounts have been expected to nourish the mission supporters’ commitment to the missionary cause. Reader expectations and publication politics have not encouraged authors to declare controversial opinions concerning gender. Discussions of woman’s position in the church or Western societies in general have been delicate issues in these quarters. With few exceptions, textual polemics in such matters are lacking. All the same, the genre features gender in several ways.

This article will focus on gender construction in published texts by female authors, concentrating on four main aspects of discourse.

The first deals with the presentation of how women in non-Christian societies are repressed, a repression represented as calling for the assistance and solidarity of Western believers. Misogyny in "heathen" cultures is a constant theme, also dwelled on by male authors. The second aspect is about a universalist theme that is central in the mission movement, i.e. the idea that all men and women share a common humanity, and that christianization entails a restoration of women's humanity, so to speak. The third concerns criticism of misogyny and subordination of women in the missions. Such criticism is not very frequent or strongly accentuated, but there are a few cases I would like to mention. The fourth aspect relates to individual identity construction and women's self-presentation as religious subjects. The marked tendency in this literature for female authors more than men to stress their divine vocation and experience of God's guidance is worthy of special notice. These topics are important aspects of female missionary identity writing, transcending denominational differences.

**Missionary Feminism**

Is solidarity with non-Christian women, universalism, polemics against gender injustice in the missions or church and vocational discourse in any way interrelated? Only in rare cases are all types represented in one and the same text. Still, the topics demonstrate ways of thinking that can be subsumed under the common category "missionary feminism". Such a concept is non-existing in the missions and may sound strange, bearing in mind evangelical conservatism and its hostility to political feminism, which is no uncommon attitude in the missionary movement, either in Norway or elsewhere.

Of course such a use of the term "feminism" can be discussed, and one may well ask if "feminism" and "feminists" should not be restricted to the women's movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the persons active in these movements. Use of the word "feminism" itself dates back to late nineteenth-century political discourse in France, and "féminisme" at that time was synonymous with women's emancipation. Still, it can be argued that scholarship is better served with a broader category, which may encompass emancipatory initiatives and discourse in different kinds of organizations as well as different historical and cultural settings. In her instructive work *European Feminisms 1700–1950*:

---

2. Ibid.:19.
A Political History (2000), historian Karen Offen recommends an inclusive, cross-cultural understanding of feminism and feminists, defining feminism in the following manner: “Feminism is the name given to a comprehensive critical response to the deliberate and systematic subordination of women as a group by men as a group within a given cultural setting.” The concept is said to contain both a system of ideas and a movement for socio-political change, denouncing male privilege and women’s subordination. Her concept of a feminist is likewise inclusive: A feminist is a person (men not excluded) who challenges male domination in culture and society “in whatever geographical location or situation in historical time, or in whatever combination with other issues.”

Such understanding allows for a nuanced analysis of complexities in religious contexts, where gender hierarchies at one and the same time may be challenged by some emancipatory agendas and efforts, but recognized in other respects. Here, religious symbolism and its many functions on personal, ritual and social levels enlarge the horizon. When considering Christianity it should not be forgotten that Jesus himself is an exemplary key symbol uniting (divine) power and submission, and that liberation in a Christian sense has a spiritual and experiential meaning related to the self which is not necessarily incompatible with social or institutional misogyny. In modern Protestantism “the woman question” has many facets. In her work God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission (1997), R. Marie Griffith analyses the paradoxical entanglement of female subordination, solidarity and empowerment among present-day American Aglow participants, demonstrating the intricacies of gender in a conservative organization which is opposed to women’s liberation. Protestant missions have been patriarchal, but not in simple ways, as Line Nyhagen Predelli maintains, and she speaks of “contested patriarchy” and “contested gender regimes” in Norwegian missions.

In my use, missionary feminism is an inclusive, not very precise category, covering ideas and argumentations as well as deliberate work to improve women’s status and influence, at home or abroad. The concept does not refer to a fixed program or a specific agenda exclusively connected with a particular group within the missions. Included in the concept are such elements as express solidarity with

4. Ibid.
foreign “sisters” in their difficult circumstances and “spiritual darkness”. Also included are initiatives towards the improvement of the condition of women’s lives – key words are education and medical care – and the extension of women’s social and religious roles in church and mission life. In foreign missions, the differences between women in many types of cultural and religious settings are brought into focus; ideas and practices which are taken for granted by contemporary Western women may be radically liberating in some foreign or historical contexts.

It can be hard to draw the line between what may be reckoned as feminist and what is just woman-centred in this area. From early on foreign missions became a central object of female activism in which “the woman question” assumed a spiritual as well as global meaning. Christianity was presented as the liberator of women toiling under the cruel rule guaranteed by strange gods. Western women’s responsibility for spreading the gospel and improving their unfortunate sisters’ life conditions has been strongly emphasized, a type of argumentation which is more in line with the moral discourse of Christianity in general than with the discourse of female rights in political feminism. However, female consciousness in the missions has more than one face. Women’s right to vote, to be educated, to work for a living, to be respected as independent and intellectual persons, to have a voice in society – these have been central issues during the modern period, and the missionary movement echoes this fundamental agenda in the aims and argumentations of many of its actors. Without bearing the stamp “feminist”, emancipatory ideas and agendas have fuelled initiatives and modes of understanding in the missions, sometimes in complex combinations with ideas and practices of female subordination. The mobilization of great masses of compliant women for the missionary cause within – as in Norway – an organizational framework dominated by men should not blind us to the fact that many of them have worked for the liberation and independence of women within these frameworks. A historical perspective is absolutely necessary when discussing the radical or feminist character of ideas and initiatives. In Norway, even the cosy women’s missionary societies were considered revolutionary by many people in the nineteenth century, bringing as they did women out of their homes and teaching them to handle religious and organizational affairs without the control of their menfolk. Mission and gender is a complicated matter, affected by colonialism, nationality, class, denomination, and

the times. As Mary Taylor Huber and Nancy Lutkehaus emphasize in their anthology *Gendered Missions*, the fact that the missionary enterprise has been an integral part of colonialism casts its shadows over liberating and enlightening efforts such as giving access to education and other opportunities to subject women. The hierarchical assumptions in Western women's alleged responsibility for their "heathen sisters" are pointed out harshly by Susan Thorne in the same volume, and in her rendering, "missionary feminism" becomes "missionary-imperial feminism." Admitting its ambiguity, the magnitude and variation of activities, conduct and attitudes should nevertheless prevent easy denunciation of missionary feminism.

**Women under "Heathenism"**

Characteristic of a great many texts from the period investigated is a polarized, mythical conception of the world ascribing all kinds of illnesses, including oppression of women, to "heathenism". Stories of the condition of women under heathenism abound in Norwegian missionary writing. Both male and female authors comment on sexual oppression and tell anecdotes that demonstrate the deplorable state of the female sex in non-Western cultures dominated by non-Christian religions. Often the stories are eye-witness accounts, depicting women's poverty, helplessness, and violent treatment by husband and in-laws. In fact, the state of women and girls appears as the embodiment of heathen superstition, immorality,

---

10. In Thorne's own words: "The entire edifice of missionary "feminism" – the employment opportunities, the valorization of (British) women's skills and virtues, the institutional and social space for self-assertion, collective action, and aggressive challenging of male pre-eminences – rested on the existence of a degraded female Other in the colonies and at home. The missionary rationale for women's escape from the separate sphere, in other words, actively depended on the subordination of their heathen sisters" (Thorne, Susan, "Mission-imperial feminism" in Huber og Lutkehaus 1999:60).
cruelty, and lack of civilizing discipline. Women’s distress is a “Macedonia call”, it exemplifies the vision of the Macedonian crying “Come across to Macedonia and help us” to Paul the Apostle (Acts 16,9). It may be cynical to talk of the politics invested in such heart-breaking descriptions, but the texts themselves in many cases explicitly combine female tragedy with the necessity of bringing the gospel message, while presenting missionaries as indispensable agents of change. Women’s distress has been used particularly to enlist female supporters and missionaries. Without disregarding the sincere feelings of missionary authors, it must be stated that women’s distress is a mission-legitimating topic, particularly calling for the solidarity of female mission supporters, the chief money-raising cadres in Norway.11

Different types of missionary work and religious views go together with the topic of women’s distress. The gospel of freedom in Christ is Marie Syltevik’s (1890–1952) prescription against the brutal Chinese oppression of women she depicts in her autobiography I Guds tjeneste (1992). Syltevik does not believe it would be right to tell the women of their oppression and rouse them to protest and revolution. Such efforts would only create dissatisfaction without offering any alternative, and in the end worsen the situation of the women. Her version of missionary feminism is purely spiritual. Other voices express a stronger sense of the necessity of social change. Hanna Holthe (1874–1941) started a school for young girls and female teachers in Yiyang in China, where she was headmistress from 1910 to 1925. Later on she managed the Bible school for women at the same

11. An early example is Sophie Stanley Smith (1860–1891), who was a missionary in China and who challenges her readers to follow her own example of feminine solidarity: Dear sisters, we ask you in the name of the Lord: how can you with a clear conscience stay home, bound by some earthly tie that God can untie, when you know that thousands and thousands of unhappy women live in the deepest darkness of heathenism, without any joys in life and without any hope for eternity? (Smith 1914:127)
station. She has written two autobiographical accounts of her work in China, *Kina på nær hold. Skildringer fra folkelivet og misjonsarbeidet* (1928) and *Blandt Kinas ungdom* (1931). Her school forbade foot binding, and this custom is a recurrent theme in *Kina på nær hold*, where the horrors of the custom and its social motivation are explained. Only slave girls escaped the practice, which made normal feet socially degrading. Holthe views her mission’s resistance to foot binding and its educational offer to women and girls as part of women’s liberation. The girls were taught domesticity, but domesticity is not a primary objective in her texts, as one might expect of a single woman used to supporting herself. A summary of the aims of the school mentions first the hope that the pupils will become disciples of Christ. Secondly, the pupils were to be educated theoretically and practically as teachers and Bible women, and thirdly, they were to be taught housework.\(^{12}\) Holthe describes an examination celebration at the teachers’ training school at which the speeches, including her own, to the young candidates touched on the liberation of Chinese women. Holthe exhorts the candidates to pursue their goals of working for women’s liberation, done by helping women to attain knowledge,

including “knowledge of the path to eternal bliss”.\textsuperscript{13} With her indubitable spiritual commitment, Holthe is a Norwegian example of missionaries with a feminist consciousness who brought education to Chinese women and thereby contributed to the progress of Asian women.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Women’s Humanity}

Missionaries have worked in societies they describe as treating women as subhuman and powerless, sexual objects, and they present the Christian alternative as a kind of “humanization” of the female sex. This way of thinking has a long tradition in Christianity. In spite of ecclesiastical sexism and male dominance in many fields, the Christian religion recognizes the ultimate equality of the sexes in relation to salvation and spirituality. This type of universalism, harbouring the idea of an individual human being who is God’s creature and who is loved and saved by him regardless of social status and gender, has a utopian, even revolutionary potential, which is amply documented by movements and biographies in church history. There are several dimensions to the humanity of the woman theme in these texts. It is repeatedly pointed out, also by male authors, that Christianity gives women a new self-image and status compared with their “heathen” surroundings. Such transformation is related to psychological factors like self-respect and dignity, in contrast to debasement and powerlessness. It is also associated with ethical norms that value women’s lives and health, as opposed to the treatment of women as commodities and objects of indulgence. The humanity theme deals with opinions and values which are not just propaganda, but have been implemented in missionary enterprises like orphanages and schools, i.e. institutions which have been effective in raising women’s status and their abilities to support themselves in local communities. In many reports from such work, the humanity of women is an implicit message, but nevertheless understood easily enough. Women’s equal presence at church rituals likewise expresses the same complex of ideas. One can imagine that in some local settings, the treatment of women in the missions must have been revolutionary and must have been felt like that by the missionaries themselves. The Christian transformation of the status of Santal women is expressed in the following way by Johan Ofstad:

\begin{quote}
Every time a Santal woman puts her sacrifice in the brass bowl on the altar, an incident in all modesty and quietness but of historical importance for the Santal people is taking place. Great things are often hidden in small ones. According to
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. 105.
\textsuperscript{14} Cf. Jayawardena 1995:263.
habitual ways of thinking, a woman has nothing to do with religious matters, but in the Christian congregation she is a human being who is reckoned with. She has a religious task to execute.\textsuperscript{15}

The underscoring of women's value as human beings and spiritual subjects on a par with men is central in missionary feminism, but the political implications of these ideas are various; they go together with patriarchal structures as well as the cult of domesticity. Generally speaking, this way of thinking about gender is not controversial as long as it does not threaten gender hierarchies in the missions. However, the tension between the category of universal human being and the gendered categories man and woman has been released when it comes to the work, role and status of female missionaries. Naturally Protestant mission work has been affected by gender development in Norwegian society in the 150-year period covered by this investigation, and organizational differences should be taken into account. Yet this tension is a general feature, and still exists. Some of the women in this material express themselves in ways that indicate dissatisfaction with their limited roles. There have in all probability been many conflicts in foreign missions occasioned by gender restrictions, and a few glimpses of the struggles of female missionaries surface in their texts.

\textbf{Polemics}

The first woman author in this material who openly criticizes woman's inferior position in church and mission work is Hanna Nygaard (1844–1924), in her autobiography \textit{En missionærhustrus erindringar}, published in 1923. In fact, her statement is the most outspoken one even when compared with later texts. Hanna Nygaard was originally not a missionary in her own right, but the wife of Jørgen Nygaard. The couple was stationed in Madagascar. After her husband's death in 1893 Hanna Nygaard became more independent, and in the period between 1895–98 carried out evangelization work among native people. She performed her work as a Bible woman by gathering small groups of people to whom she read a piece from the Bible, and afterwards there was a discussion with the listeners about what they had heard. Women's right to preach, especially to male listeners, was at that time a controversial issue in the Norwegian Missionary Society (Det Norske Misjonselskap), Hanna Nygaard's organization, and the author knew that her activity was disputed. She comments on her past evangelization work in the following manner:

\footnotesize

\normalsize
At first only women turned up, but the group increased steadily, and in the end I had both male and female listeners. This was controversial, since according to our orthodox principles women were not allowed to speak at public meetings, and even less if men were present. But what should I do? Should I say to the men: “Go away, you must not listen?” If I did, my activity would soon have ended. The men would then have reasoned accordingly: “Why shouldn’t we listen? If she tries to teach our women secrets, we will not let them listen to her.” It was only natural that the men would reason like this, because what did they know of the rule of Paul? They would first have to learn his rules. Fortunately, the Madagascans have never heeded these words of the apostle. They have joyfully accepted God’s glorious gospel, preached by women as well as men. I have rejoiced at the great blessing women’s work in Madagascar has brought. – Even I experienced that the word of God impressed both men and women.¹⁶

Her argument is based on the principle of gender neutrality; women as well as men should be allowed to preach the gospel. In another textual passage she hails the future for the new opportunities it presented for women to bring their own testimonies about the Saviour.¹⁷ Hanna Nygaard’s text testifies how badly the silencing of women has been felt by many Christian women, and how important an issue women’s preaching is for their identity as religious subjects. The author does not say if she applauds the principle of gender neutrality in other matters. It is also worth noting that her comments are not related to opposition she has met with herself, neither does she tell of opposition to other women’s efforts. The question whether the author ever experienced particular instances of oppression in the mission field points to a blank spot in her autobiography, as it does in most other female texts. Still, her statement is a strong one.¹⁸

Paul the Apostle must undoubtedly have been a problematic figure for most female preachers within the missions. On the one hand he is “the apostle of the heathens”, and in that respect a figure of identification. His pronouncement in the Letter to the Galatians, “There is no such thing as [......] male and female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3,28) is interpreted by two of the most prominent female authors in this material, Marie Monsen and Annie Skau Bern-

¹⁷. Ibid. 101.
¹⁸. Hanna Nygaard must have known of the dispute aroused by her female colleague and contemporary in Madagascar, NMS missionary Emmerentze (Emma) Dahl (1855–1932). Emma Dahl came to Madagascar in 1889 and very soon became a controversial figure, partly because of her strong-minded personality, partly because she challenged existing gender structures in the mission community. Dahl openly disagreed with the prohibition against women’s preaching and vented her views in an 1892 mission report, referring to Joel 3.1–2 and its proclamation of a future where women as men will be given the spiritual gift of prophecy. A biblical reference which in all probability is implied in Hanna Nygaard’s optimism about women’s preaching in the future. Emma Dahl’s case and the NMS regulation of Bible women’s activities in this period have been extensively treated by Line Nyhagen Predelli in her dissertation Contested Patriarchy and Missionary Feminism: The Norwegian Missionary Society in Nineteenth Century Norway and Madagascar (1998). See also Seland 2000:96–98.
sen, as an expression of sexual equality legitimating women's service in the missions. On the other hand, pronouncements restricting the position and activity of women within the church go back to the Apostle. Together with other biblical passages, "the rule of Paul", his words in 1 Corinthians that women should be silent in congregational gatherings in order to subordinate themselves (1 Cor. 14, 34–35) has legitimated the silencing and subordination of women. Female missionary authors have known that the "woman question" in its different ramifications and biblical versions is disputed, but generally they do not engage in open polemics in their texts, as Hanna Nygaard did. Their strategy seems instead to be evasion of the theme. Also, one has to bear in mind that publishers and missionary organizations would hardly welcome polemics of this kind, which could easily take attention away from the missionary activities and stir up quarrels among mission supporters. The interests of the missionary organizations may explain why the male authors practically never discuss controversial gender issues.

Defending Women's Missionary Call and Status

Autobiography is a kind of genre worth investigating for knowledge of what sort of motive power the conviction of having a call may have. Generally speaking, the missionary call is unequally emphasized in these texts. Many authors, particularly many male authors, never mention their call. Among those who do describe their calls, various elements are stressed, ranging from supernatural experiences to theological considerations. The subjectivity of the call is a general feature; its variations reflect theological sympathies and the author's location in the denominational landscape. Conservative Evangelicals, Pentecostals and other members of free churches are liable to stress emotional and supernatural aspects. The same holds true for women, who tend to dwell on their vocations more than men, regardless of their denominational belonging. In general, women are also much more intent than men on presenting their call as a vital part of their relationship with the deity.

In earlier times the ideology of the missionary call represented it as a purely idealistic affair, a God-given task devoid of human motivations like ambition, the spirit of adventure, thirst for knowledge; even a sense of Christian duty did not satisfy the standards for what a call should be. Also, the call was thought to be a lifelong obligation. Nowadays expectations are generally less high-flown, and it is usual to think of the call as limited to a period in one's life. There are different rea-

sons for the change, one of the most important being the miserable childhoods of many missionary children. Today there is an open debate about collisions between parental obligation and missionary service which has affected the approach to the missionary call. Echoes of this dilemma are heard in autobiographical writings dating from the last twenty years. However, mysterious vocational experiences are still depicted in missionary texts, not least by women. As earlier, such accounts bear witness to the “purity” of the call, its superhuman character above human wishes and ambitions.

According to these texts, the deity often plays a vital part in the process when the missionary becomes conscious of having a call. This is particularly true of female authors. Some hear God’s own voice speak to them, other women relate how God miraculously reveals their call through other people, and still others use bibliomancy to be assured of their callings.

The missionary vocation appears as a multi-leveled symbol. It signifies divine selection, which makes the protagonist a mythical hero. She becomes an apostle of Christ, a kind of biblical figure embodying the exhortation of Jesus in Matt. 28.19, “Go forth therefore and make all nations my disciples”. At the same time she is a figure of identification for the many mission supporters at home, a person who acts out the ideals and the vocation of the missionary organization that has sent her. Many texts that emphasize the call as a divine event present their protagonists as miraculously guided by God in other matters as well. In such cases, call and guidance structure the life stories and appear as main identity concepts. The predominance of these themes in women’s texts raises the question of whether men and women have different motivations for choosing a missionary career. It also points to the gender politics involved. To what extent does women’s spirituality contest the male clerical authority denied to them? It can be argued that the textual gender politics comprised in the discourse of call and guidance deals with women’s right and duty to choose a missionary career. The deity himself guarantees the chosen women’s status. Naturally the authority of such claims increases the more the call is seen as a divine event. However, these emancipatory aspects of the call are hardly pronounced in the texts. Nevertheless, they may be grasped by many readers.


In a cultural setting where ideas about the complementarity of the sexes are
cherished, one would have expected women authors to point to their feminine
qualities, but the missionaries in this material do not motivate their service in
ideas of femininity. Nor does the need for workers among women and children
appear as a personal motive, although this has been emphasized by the missionary
organizations. The texts certainly demonstrate the existence of domestic ideol-
yogy, particularly when it comes to “civilizing” native women to be homemakers
and proficient mothers. But most of the female authors who explicitly state the
reasons for their missionary service refer to their vocation and relationship with
the godhead. One should not draw far-reaching conclusions about the motivation
and understanding of the women’s missionary roles in the Norwegian context
on the basis of these texts, however. The authors are not necessarily representa-
tive of women missionaries in general. Besides, the texts are selective, they do
not express all their authors’ opinions, and it must be remembered that what
is considered obvious gets no defence. Yet reservations of this kind should not
prevent us from seeing women’s focusing on their relationship with the divine as
a significant feature.

Textual hints suggest that some women have thought a missionary vocation
more important than the role of wife and mother, and that ignoring a missionary
call may disturb a woman’s relationship to God. Annie Skau Berntsen and Laura
Møller both tell stories of the sad fates of women who had relinquished their mis-
sionary vocations for marriage. The women’s choices had displeased the godhead
and made them unhappy.25 The conflict between call and marriage is not presented
as a dilemma for the authors themselves, and the reasons for telling the stories are
not quite clear. They may be intended as messages to readers wrestling with such
a conflict, but the stories can also be seen to emphasize that women’s calls are as
important as men’s calls, i.e. indirectly defending equality between the sexes in
this respect.

A few married women express their difficulties in uniting matrimony with
vocation. Antonie Hagen Torset says that marrying fellow missionary Johan Torset
made her feel that she betrayed her call.26 Methodist Agnes Nilsen Howard, who
had a high position as inspector in her mission organization, mused a long time
over the marriage offer from American missionary Henry George Howard. She did
not accept him until God spoke directly to her and recommended the
marriage.27 Annie Skau Berntsen married factory owner Reidar Berntsen late in life when she

was at the top of her distinguished missionary career. In her second life history she makes it clear that missionary work was her highest priority even after the marriage.28

Norwegian missionary texts support the thesis that an intimate God-relationship can have empowering effects on women. Elaine Lawless has studied female members of Pentecostal congregations in the Southern States of the USA, and she argues that a subjective type of piety stressing a divine call and experience of the godhead is emancipatory for women.29 Elizabeth Petroff maintains a similar view in relation to the visionary women in the Middle Ages. Divine visions in many cases made the woman a powerful, religious figure who was exempted from the usual woman's role. The female visionaries of the Middle Ages built convents and hospitals; they preached and even attacked injustice and greed within the church.30 Another parallel may be seen in nineteenth century spiritualism. Many female mediums became famous and attained great authority from their alleged relationship with the world of spirits. From their public platforms, they even issued messages about contemporary politics, feminism and social relations.31

Conclusion

Autobiographical life stories and mission reports are a major literary genre in Norwegian mission life, and female missionaries have contributed to the genre since the 1880s. It can generally be maintained that both male and female authors display a combination of reticence and eloquence in gender issues, being silent about gender hierarchies and the suppression of women within the missions or Christianity in general, and very communicative about the miserable fates of women belonging to non-Christian religions and cultures.

Foreign mission work in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a popular movement incorporating a version of women's liberation called missionary feminism in this article. Various ideas and agendas are included in the concept; central is the responsibility for non-Christian women that is expressed. Missionary feminism may be combined with a relational perspective focusing on women's contributions and their special characteristics as women, or an individualist argumentation that overlooks sex roles and limitations due to gender. The genre

indicates that women in the missions have wrestled with what it means to be a woman. What appears especially interesting is the way the women's identities as religious subjects have contributed to contesting traditional ideas of the woman's sphere. Women's experience of having a divine call is central in this respect. The deity is represented as the ally of independent women by pointing out missionary careers to them and confirming their responsibility for matters outside the private household, thereby legitimating women's gaining a voice in public space. Also housewives in the mission fields and mission supporters at home share in this idea of social and spiritual responsibility, an idea that can be understood as a liberating and empowering concept for many women in this period.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Mikaelsson, Lisbeth, "Kvinner, kall og skrift - belyst ved livsskildringer av kvinnelige misjonerer." I Kjønnidentitet: Utvikling og konstruksjon av kjønn. Skriftserien 1/92, Senter for kvinneforskning, Universitetet i Trondheim-AVH.


Norseth, Kristin, "at sætte sig imod vilde være som at stoppe Elven". Hovedoppgave i kristendomskunnskap, Det teologiske Menighetsfakultet, våren 1997.


Ofstad, J.J., Dager og netter i India. Santalmissionens forlag, Oslo 1939.


Predelli, Line Nybagen, Contested Patriarchy and Missionary Feminism: The Norwegian Missionary Society in Nineteenth Century Norway and Madagascar Faculty of the Graduate School, University of Southern California, August 1998.

Selands, Bjørg, "Called by the Lord" – Women's place in the Norwegian missionary movement", in Markkola, 2000.


Contesting the Mission’s Patriarchal Gender Regime:

Single Norwegian Missionary Women in 19th Century Madagascar
Women have approached missions with a variety of expectations, and have had ambiguous experiences of liberation and constraint, opportunity and restriction in those organizations. Whatever their openly expressed motivations, women have used missionary work in many ways, not only as an outlet for their religious zeal, energy and creativity, but also as a means to fulfill themselves by putting their own abilities to work.

In the nineteenth century, the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS), a Lutheran mission society founded in Stavanger, Norway, in 1842, sent its missionaries to South Africa and Madagascar. Missionary endeavors and encounters were clearly gendered, and this article focuses on the attempts of two single women to gain positions and opportunities through contesting mission practices and rules concerning the roles women and men could play in the field. Early on, women in the NMS went abroad only to accompany male missionaries, either as their wives or as teachers to their children. From the 1870s, however, women were sent to the mission field as missionaries in their own right. In the period from 1870 to 1910, a total of seventy single women became missionaries for the NMS, employed as teachers, deaconesses and Bible women. Preaching was, at least formally, a male privilege in the mission, and the women's activities that came closest to preaching were conversation, teaching and prayers.

The first Norwegian women missionaries came to Madagascar in 1870. They were Martha Nikoline Hirsch (single; born 1843), Johanne Christiane Wang (fiancée of missionary Christian Borchgrevink; born 1836) and Bertha Dahle (single and sister of missionary Lars Dahle; born 1848). Significant differences in terms of social standing and opportunities in the mission field resulted from women's status as married or single. Single women were employed by the mission, received a salary, and were assigned tasks by the mission conference in Madagascar. Married women, however, were not formally employed by the mission, they were not paid, and their mission work was left to their own initiative.

Protestant missions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were governed by principles of piety and patriarchy, but although leadership and man-
.management positions were occupied by men, as a movement the missions were quickly dominated by women eager to support evangelizing efforts. In addition to providing much needed financial assistance through associations in the missions' home countries, women also came to constitute an important part of the missions' overseas activities. Missions have had to rely on women for fund-raising and support at home, and for mission activities, including schooling, medical work and evangelization, abroad.

Evangelical missions have not been straightforward patriarchal regimes. Instead, they have operated in ways that reveal the often changing, paradoxical, and contested nature of gender relations. The notion of *gender regime*, a concept taken from R. W. Connell,² is useful for describing the changing and paradoxical nature of the positions of women and men in religious missions, as it allows an investigation of both liberating and oppressive forces. Connell employs this term to delineate "a structural inventory of a particular institution."³ The concept rec-

---

³. Ibid., 98–99.
ognizes variations across different institutional contexts, and variations over time in each specific institutional context. What emerged over time in missions were contested gender regimes, or perhaps more realistically in nineteenth century contexts, contested patriarchal gender regimes.

Religious missions, including the NMS, have typically placed constraints on women's activities that have far exceeded those placed on men, and they have confined women's activities to a rather limited sphere. But like women in secular society, women in missions have sought and found strategies for resisting patriarchal gender arrangements. Sometimes the resistance has been demonstrated through women's actual practice crossing the formal rules of the gender regime, while at other times the resistance has been expressed in more vocal terms. At times, women taking active part in the missionary movement have been able to define their own terms of participation, while at other times their needs and wishes have been met with fierce resistance or complete disregard.

In this article we take a closer look at the lives of two single women missionaries, Bertha Dahle and Emma Dahl (born 1855). Through their personal histories and experiences in the mission field in Madagascar, we gain an understanding of the ways in which women tried and sometimes successfully challenged the gendered rules of mission activity. Although the NMS was run by patriarchal principles both in Norway and in Madagascar, the historical record of gender relations within the NMS is marked as much by contest and change as by acceptance and accommodation in terms of women's participation. Bertha Dahle, who joined her missionary brother Lars Dahle in Madagascar with the intent of becoming his housekeeper, fought intensely in order to become a missionary in her own right. As a schoolteacher, Bertha Dahle was moving within an accepted role for women, but had to fight to gain recognition and pay. She eventually succeeded. Twenty years later, Emma Dahl did not have to fight to gain a position, but she actively contested the limits on the kind of work that she could do. Dahl, who at times crossed the prescribed gendered lines of behavior by preaching to Malagasy women and men, sought to gain the formal right to preach, and was in the end forced to leave her post within the NMS. The stories of Bertha Dahle and Emma Dahl are extraordinary examples of how individual missionary women repeatedly contested the patriarchal gender regimes.
chal gender regime of the NMS. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that many missionary women, both married and single, steadfastly carried out their work for the mission in a much less visible manner.\(^5\)

**Bertha Dahle: Seeking to Become a Missionary in her own Right**

Bertha Dahle (1848–1925) became one of the pioneer missionaries for the NMS in Madagascar, where she worked from 1870 until 1896. She had not intended to become a missionary, and departed to Madagascar with the idea of becoming housekeeper to her brother, missionary Lars Dahle. Through her education in “handicrafts, housekeeping, and languages”, Bertha, who was born to a farming family, had the ability to take care of herself.\(^6\) Due to their parents’ early death, however, her brother Lars, who was five years older than Bertha, probably felt responsible for her wellbeing. Their parents' early death must have been part of Lars Dahle's motive for taking his sister along to Madagascar, and part of Bertha Dahle's motive for coming with him.\(^7\) The plan was that Lars would employ Bertha as his housekeeper; an arrangement that would allow Lars to concentrate his efforts in direct mission work.\(^8\) At that time, job opportunities for single women in Norway were limited, and it is likely that Bertha looked upon the post as her brother's housekeeper as a good opportunity. During their trip to Madagascar, however, Lars Dahle surprisingly informed his sister that he was engaged to be married, and she allegedly got furious with him.\(^9\) The foundation on which Bertha's travel to and presence in Madagascar was based, suddenly disappeared, as Lars's fiancee, Gabrielle Svendsen, would soon join her husband to be. As a missionary's wife, Gabrielle Svendsen was expected to take care of all housekeeping duties, and there would thus be little reason and justification for Bertha Dahle's continued stay in the house.

Circumstances would have it that Bertha Dahle got the opportunity to engage in direct mission work. Traveling together with Bertha on the ship to Madagascar in 1870 were, in addition to Lars Dahle, missionary bride Johanne Borchgrevink, and single missionary Martha Nikoline Hirsch. Hirsch, who was the first single

---

7. Their mother passed away in 1856, when Bertha was only eight years old, and their father passed away in 1860, when Bertha was still a child (Reidar Bolling, En stor manns vei. Historien om Lars Dahle. Missions­ selkapets forlag. Stavanger, 1959).
8. For the announcement of their departure to Madagascar, see Norsk Missionstidende, hereinafter MT, No. 3, March 1870: 138.
female missionary to Madagascar for the NMS, was going to establish a school for Malagasy women, and the school gave Bertha Dahle a chance to volunteer her services for the mission. The school became a joint effort by the two women, and when Hirsch got married in 1871, Bertha Dahle took over the position as headmistress of the school.

From the very beginning, the NMS leadership was informed that Bertha Dahle would assist Hirsch at the school. In a letter to the NMS in September, 1870, Lars wrote that

Ms Hirsch and my sister are thinking to start a school for girls as soon as possible (students have already announced their interest). It must, of course, until they have learned some of the language, only be a school in needlework.10

Hirsch did not mention Bertha Dahle's work at the school when she wrote to the NMS leadership, but Lars Dahle repeatedly wrote about the school as a project shared by the two women.11 Before the school started, more than 80 adult women had registered for classes in needlework and writing.12 When it began, a total of one hundred students were enrolled, and the two women were busy teaching and administering the school.13 Towards the end of 1871, Lars Dahle reported to the NMS leadership that

Ms Hirsch and my sister are still working hard with the school. Already some time ago they considerably limited the needlework, and in its place they began teaching writing, reading, and some religion [Bible history and Catechism], and they have a school for small girls [in addition to] the school for the adult [women]. It is with the school in this form that my sister is thinking of continuing, when Ms Hirsch is leaving us.14

Nikoline Hirsch gave up her paid mission career when she, only a year after her arrival in Madagascar, married fellow missionary Martinius Borgen. At that time it was expected of missionary women that they resign from their post upon marriage, as they would take on new responsibilities as wives and mothers. Since Bertha Dahle had been working at the school for women and girls from the time of its establishment, it came as no surprise that she wished to take over the full responsibility in running the school.15 Bertha Dahle was, however, not formally

---

10. Letter from Lars Dahle to the NMS leadership, September 24, 1870. NMS Home Archive, Box 132, folder 3. Unless otherwise noted, all archival material referred to is located at the NMS Home Archive.
11. See Hirsch's letter of October 22, 1870 (MT No. 3, March 1871: 105–107), and Dahle's letter in the same journal issue, p. 101, where he talks of "the ladies' school for girls."
12. MT No. 4, April 1871: 122.
13. MT No. 8, August 1871: 295.
14. MT No. 11, November 1871: 431.
employed by the NMS, and the NMS considered her mission work a voluntary effort. So far only school expenses had been covered by the NMS, while her brother paid for her private upkeep. When Nikoline Hirsch left, and Bertha could no longer be considered only an assistant or helper at the school, a discrepancy appeared between Bertha's efforts and the lack of monetary support for those efforts. Gradually both Lars and Bertha became dissatisfied with their domestic arrangement and the lack of acknowledgment of Bertha's work by the NMS, and they started a campaign to gain official mission employment for Bertha.

Being unsure about her position in relation to the NMS, as she had "not formally applied for her position," Bertha Dahle sought the advice of the NMS bishop in South Africa, Hans Schreuder. Bertha had now come to believe that her efforts within mission- and schoolwork were "the purpose" of her life. In fact, she reckoned herself as "a worker in the mission," and hoped to be acknowledged as such by the mission leadership. Schreuder, who was a fierce supporter of women's work for the mission, wholeheartedly endorsed Bertha's work at the school in Madagascar. Upon the advise of Schreuder, Bertha decided to write to the NMS leadership which, at least formally, was "unaware" of the extent and importance of her work.

In her letter, she explained her job, which consisted of both teaching and administrative duties, in detail. In the spring of 1872, the school had a total of one hundred and fifty students who were taught reading, writing, religion, geography, math and needlework. Lars Dahle took care of Catechism instruction, and two Malagasy assistant teachers were hired to help in the other subjects. Bertha paid the assistant teachers a small monthly sum, while she continued to work without pay. Modesty, perhaps, or the conviction that the NMS leadership knew about the circumstances in which she found herself, prevented Bertha from writing explicitly about her financial situation and from requesting formally to be hired by the NMS. Apparently she hoped that the NMS leadership itself would infer from the description of her work that she in fact needed and requested monetary support. The NMS leadership was at any rate informed that Bertha sought NMS employment, as her brother Lars had been writing privately to the NMS general secretary in Stavanger about the possibility for her to receive a salary. As Bertha's letter to the NMS leadership was published in the main NMS journal in Norway, her efforts at the

---

17. Ibid.
18. Letter from Bertha Dahle to the NMS leadership, April 15, 1873. Box 133, folder 1. See also MT No. 8, August 1873: 299–301.
19. The number was reduced to about ninety when the needlework school for adult women was closed (MT No. 8, 1873: 299).
20. See draft of letter from Roll to Lars Dahle, October 16, 1876. Box 191, folder 4.
school were made public knowledge among mission supporters. By publishing the letter, the NMS leadership indirectly gave legitimacy to her work as a missionary, but it still did not make a connection between its “moral” support and any eventual financial obligations towards her.

In the meantime, bishop Hans Schreuder had suggested that Johanne Vedeler, a woman who originally came to South Africa in 1866 as a private teacher to his children, be paid a yearly sum by the NMS as a compensation for her work as a teacher in direct mission work. For a period of three years, Vedeler had been taking on mission duties outside the Schreuder family, but continued to depend entirely on private support from the Schreuder family. Schreuder thus appealed to the NMS leadership to grant Vedeler a modest yearly stipend of ten British pounds, and his request was approved.21 Soon thereafter, Schreuder sent his proposal for a salary system for missionaries to the NMS headquarters in Stavanger. The system gave married missionaries higher salaries than single, and further distinctions were made between ordained ministers and teachers, and between living in the capital and in the countryside. Gender was also thought a relevant factor, and Schreuder suggested that single male teachers should receive a yearly stipend of eighty pounds, while single female teachers should receive no less than fifty pounds in the capital and forty pounds in the countryside.22

When the NMS leadership in November 1873 decided to grant Bertha Dahle a yearly sum of twenty-five pounds, it was only half of what other single missionary women would receive. Bertha Dahle felt that she had been treated unjustly, and that her work had not received the recognition it deserved.23 The NMS leadership had based its offer on the presumption that Bertha was still supported by her brother, but Bertha Dahle had no intention of being further supported by her brother. Her aim was to achieve full recognition as an official NMS employee. She considered the sum of twenty-five pounds as too small to continue her work, and promptly requested Schreuder to accept her as an employee in the new mission society he had formed in 1873 as a result of organizational and management conflicts with the NMS leadership.24 Such a transfer would mean that Bertha would receive administrative and financial support from the Schreuder mission, and that her work at the school in Antananarivo would continue as before.

As Bertha proceeded to inform the mission community that she had left the NMS and joined Schreuder, a seed of fear that others would join her was planted. In a letter to Schreuder, Johanne Borchgrevink, headmistress of the NMS boarding school for girls in Antananarivo, declared her support of Bertha Dahle. Although Johanne Borchgrevink's work at the boarding school had recently achieved official recognition and support from the NMS leadership, she clearly felt torn between her loyalties to the NMS leadership in Stavanger and to Hans Schreuder in South Africa. Schreuder was an old friend of her family in Norway, and she had received his support in establishing the boarding school. When Johanne Borchgrevink asked Schreuder to support Bertha Dahle, she ended by saying that "then we two women could still reckon ourselves as being under [your] jurisdiction." The mission community in Madagascar was "surprised, dissatisfied and angry" that the NMS leadership decided to offer Bertha the meager sum of twenty-five pounds. Christian Borchgrevink, the missionary inspector, immediately requested the NMS to increase her salary to fifty pounds. Borchgrevink expressed indignation about the NMS leadership's handling of the issue, and interpreted it as a lack of knowledge about conditions in Madagascar in general and about Bertha Dahle's work for the mission in particular. He stated outright that Bertha Dahle "is in reality to be considered as one of the workers in the mission," and that she deserved to be recognized as such. Indeed, he was extremely pleased with Bertha Dahle's efforts at the school, and he estimated that she "is now performing more real mission work than some of the employed missionaries." The proposal to give Bertha Dahle a salary of twenty-five pounds was also heavily criticized by her brother, Lars Dahle, who thought it both a "moral violation" and a lack of recognition. In his letter to the NMS leadership, Borchgrevink imparted the demand from Bertha Dahle that, should she be forced to leave the NMS, the NMS journal was to announce that her departure had been caused by a lack of NMS monetary support. The demand was raised since the missionary movement in Norway was well aware of her efforts in Madagascar.
Madagascar and reckoned her as a worker in NMS service, and such an announce-
ment would surely cause controversy within mission circles.

In an attempt to reduce the risk of an organizational break-up of the mission
in Madagascar, Borchgrevink advised Bertha to wait for the NMS decision before
she sought economic and administrative support from Schreuder, but to no avail.32
Schreuder immediately accepted to take over the responsibility for Bertha Dahle’s
work, and Bertha was therefore on her way out of the NMS.33 In the meantime, the
NMS leadership, on the basis of the information provided by Borchgrevink, decided
to grant Bertha a yearly salary of fifty pounds.34 It was too late to avoid public
scandal, however, as Schreuder wrote to the major daily newspaper Morgenbladet
and informed Norwegian audiences about the NMS leadership’s unwillingness to
give Dahle her due support.35 Schreuder’s public criticism was quite serious, as it
represented a general attack on the NMS and its alleged unwillingness to recognize
the importance of women’s work in the mission. Furthermore, Schreuder made it
appear as if both Bertha Dahle and Johanne Borchgrevink would join him in his
new mission society, and quoted private letters as evidence of the two women’s
willingness to join him.

The publication of Schreuder’s letters in Morgenbladet “arrived as a bomb in
both Stavanger and Antananarivo”.36 The NMS leadership was forced to defend
its record in women’s work and its actions regarding Bertha Dahle’s salary and
recognition as a mission worker.37 The leadership criticized Bertha Dahle’s deci-
sion to join Schreuder’s mission, as she originally had joined the NMS mission as
a private volunteer and had no right to bring NMS schoolwork under Schreuder’s
jurisdiction.38 Before the news arrived in Madagascar, however, Bertha Dahle had
changed her mind, and decided to continue her work for the NMS. The risk that her
actions could cause a deep split within the mission, together with pressure from
NMS missionaries, contributed to Bertha’s change of mind, and made her “prefer
the humiliation” involved in going back to the NMS.39

Christian Borchgrevink and Johanne Borchgrevink, on the other hand, felt pub-
licly humiliated by Schreuder’s newspaper letters.40 They also felt that Schreuder's
use of private correspondence as a means to gain support for his own position had been offensive. Before calling off further contact with Schreuder, Johanne complained that his letters had caused “shame for myself, and for him, whose assistant I am supposed to be,” and that they had made her look disloyal to her husband and to the NMS. Christian Borchgrevink wrote the NMS leadership and explained that he and his wife had been against Bertha Dahle’s original attempt to be transferred to the Schreuder mission, and that their efforts to convince her to remain faithful to the NMS finally had paid off. There had not been any organized “revolt” by women against the NMS leadership.

In sum, Bertha Dahle’s threat to leave the NMS and join the Schreuder mission amounted to one woman’s successful attempt to contest the patriarchal gender regime of the NMS. Confident of her own importance as a worker in the Norwegian mission in Antananarivo, and with the support of well-respected missionaries such as the Borchgrevinks and her own brother, Lars Dahle, Bertha started on the long road to recognition by the NMS. The mission society had been able to take advantage of her voluntary service for several years, and had exploited her brother’s willingness to support her financially. All these years, Lars Dahle tried to run a campaign for his sister’s recognition as a mission worker. It was only when the NMS leadership received a stern reaction from the missionary inspector in Madagascar, Christian Borchgrevink, to its proposal of giving Bertha Dale half the salary of what other single women received, that the NMS leadership changed its position and gave full recognition to Bertha’s work. In this case, it was an alliance between strategically placed individuals that forced a change in NMS policy. Bertha Dahle, Lars Dahle and Christian Borchgrevink could play out their own motives and interests, with the potential threat to make the split between Schreuder and the NMS more dramatic as a supporting mechanism. Bertha Dahle was a pioneer in the NMS, as there were few Norwegian women who worked in the mission field in the 1870s. Twenty years later, controversy had shifted to the content of women’s position in the field.

41. Letter from J. Borchgrevink to Schreuder, undated. NMS Archive. Microfilm No. 5 (Kopibok, 291). C. Borchgrevink ended his friendship with Schreuder in a letter of March 31, 1875 (NMS Archive. Microfilm No. 5).
42. Birkeli 1952: 402. Some of the passages in J. Borchgrevink’s original letter are difficult to read, and I have relied upon Birkeli (1952) for further evidence.
43. Letter from C. Borchgrevink to Dons, March 30, 1875. NMS Archive, Microfilm No. 5.
44. Lars Dahle had a several years long conflict with the NMS leadership about this issue, and he eventually requested that all the regional NMS boards be given the opportunity to review correspondence and decisions concerning Bertha Dahle’s employment and his own involvement in the case (see Box 191, folder 4, for statements from the various regional boards).
Ms Emma Dahl, born March 26, 1855 in Fjellberg parish, Sunnhordland. Died August 26, 1932. As the first of the steadily increasing group of female missionaries, at that time called Biblewomen, Ms Dahl came to Madagascar in 1889. The feverish region around Tsaraindrana, where she worked, broke her down after six years of work. After having improved her health in Norway, she worked for six years for the Norwegian-American church in Madagascar. Here at home she worked many years by traveling around for the heathen- and Israel missions.

The above description of Emma Dahl's life hardly gives justice to the importance of her efforts to expand the role of women in the NMS. Nor does it give any clues as to how controversial a figure she would become in the Norwegian mission in Madagascar.

The daughter of a medical officer, Emma Dahl was among the first girls in Norway to obtain Middle School education. She traveled to Antananarivo, Madagascar, in 1889, where she started working as a teacher at the NMS boarding school for boys. In October 1890, Emma Dahl moved to Fianarantsoa, where she intended...
to work as the "headmistress of a school for girls, to teach fine needlework to a
class of adult women, to visit and look after the female part of the congregation's
sick and poor." It was with regret that she gave up her visiting work in May 1891
because of a conflict with the missionary at the station. Emma Dahl had asked to
"be an intermediary between the missionary and the female [Malagasy] deaconesses
of the congregation, and as such, among other things, have an advisory position
concerning the use of the congregation's money to the best for its sick or poor members." The missionary in charge refused her request, and she was counseled
by the missionary inspector to abstain from her visiting duties in the congregation.
In an 1892 report, Emma Dahl declared her hope that "the time which is being
spoken of in Joel 3, 1–2, is coming soon, so that also we missionizing women can
be permitted to loudly preach peace and salvation to this, in lies and other sins,
deeply sunken people." At the time, Emma Dahl's views on women preachers
were quite radical and controversial. Norwegian women in the religious Haugian
movement of the early nineteenth century had been preaching in public with the
support of their leader, Hans Nielsen Hauge. A conservative reaction in the 1830s
and 1850s, however, had led to the gradual disappearance of women preachers
in Norway. During the rest of the nineteenth century, women preachers were
absent in the Norwegian State Church and also in most other religious awakenings,
organizations and movements.

When a state prohibition against lay preachers was removed in 1841, the
issue of lay sermons in general, and that of women preachers in particular, became
highly contested. In 1888, a State Church diocese meeting in Kristiania (Oslo)
affirmed that the Bible accorded only men the right to *preach in public*. Women,
who were doing work of mercy in the congregation, were only allowed to
speak the word of God in private. Subversive practices by individual women existed at the

---

49. From the available sources it has not been possible to establish who was the missionary in question. Most likely it was Bernt Svendsen, who was head of the mission station in Fianarantsoa from 1885 to 1893.
50. Yearly report from Emma Dahl 1892.
51. Ibid. (yearly report 1892). Joel 3, 1–2 reads: "The Lord says, at that time I will restore the prosperity of Judah and Jerusalem. I will gather all the nations and bring them to the Valley of Judgment. There I will judge them for all they have done to my people. They have scattered the Israelites in foreign countries and divided Israel, my land" (Good News Bible. American Bible Society. New York, 1976).
53. "Konventikkelplakaten," which gave State Church officials the right to control religious gatherings outside the State Church, was established in Norway in 1741 and abolished in 1842 (see Bernt Oftestad et al., Norsk kirkelistorie. Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 1993; Einar Moland, Norges kirkelistorie i det 19. Århundre. Bind 1. Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, Oslo, 1979).
time, however, as women associated with the Salvation Army and the Methodist movement were preaching.⁵⁶ Such practices were illegitimate from the standpoint of the Lutheran State Church, with which the Norwegian Missionary Society was closely associated. Women employed as missionaries by the NMS were in effect working under the conditions laid out by the 1888 diocese meeting.

Both the Norwegian State Church and the NMS pointed to the Bible in order to justify their views on women preachers. A frequently quoted Biblical passage is that of 1 Corinthians 14, 34–35, where the apostle Paul counsels that

As in all the churches of God's people, the women should keep quiet in the meetings. They are not allowed to speak; as the Jewish Law says, they must not be in charge. If they want to find out about something, they should ask their husbands at home. It is a disgraceful thing for a woman to speak in a church meeting.⁵⁷

Another much used Biblical quote is from 1 Timothy 2, 12, where the apostle Paul states that “I do not allow them [women] to teach or to have authority over men; they must keep quiet.”

It was in this situation of hostility and prohibition that Emma Dahl spoke out about her own desire to preach, and her wish that women would be permitted to do so in the NMS. From 1892, her viewpoints on women preachers were common knowledge within the mission community, and the mission had to deal with her views either with ignorance, support or condemnation. The NMS opted to formally disregard Dahl's comments on women preachers, and offered her another position in which congregational work would be her main emphasis.

At the missionary conference in 1892, Emma Dahl's position was the most difficult question on the agenda.⁵⁸ It was noted that she felt dissatisfied by not having the opportunity to work directly towards members of the congregation, and by being limited to perform teaching duties. It was proposed that she move to Fisakana, where she could work as a Bible woman instead of as a teacher.⁵⁹ Dahl had expressed outright her wish to serve as a Bible woman,⁶⁰ and the conference argued that her wishes ought to be heard. There is no doubt that Emma Dahl, being described by fellow missionaries as “eager and zealous”,⁶¹ as “very talkative,”⁶² and as a “warm-hearted mission woman,”⁶³ was a valued member of the mission. That

⁵⁸. Diary of Thorkild Rosaas, No. 6, 1892: 11.
⁶⁰. Ibid.
⁶¹. See Det norske misjonsselskabs 53de aarsberetning. Stavanger, 1895: 106.
⁶³. Missionary conference report, Betafo, Madagascar, 1892.
she was quite a strong-minded person is also clear from comments at missionary conferences. Because of her skills and personality, she was found able to work independently, but her character also made it difficult for others to work with her. It was suggested that missionary Jens Christian Selmer would have to house Emma Dahl at least for a while in Fisakana.64 Selmer replied that, generally, it would be good for a Bible woman to have her own household, and even more so he found it necessary for Emma Dahl to have her own house. Selmer had no desire to have Emma Dahl in his house, and asked the missionary conference not to force him in the matter. The missionary conference agreed that a separate house would have to be built for Emma Dahl in Fisakana.

It is likely that Emma Dahl's independence and strong-minded character contributed to her being moved to Fisakana, where she could work more on her own. It was not only Selmer who had difficulties in dealing with Emma Dahl's personality. Another woman missionary, Amalie Njerve, apparently also experienced conflicts in her relations with Emma Dahl.65 It was thus not only Emma Dahl's contestation

64. Missionary conference report, Betafo, Madagascar, 1892, Box 37, folder 7.
65. Diary of Theodor Olsen 1893: 23. See also letter from Theodor Olsen to Christian Borchgrevink, April 26, 1893, Box 38, folder 2, enclosed as document with conference papers from 1893.
of gendered boundaries that led to conflicts within the mission, but also her strong character. The NMS leadership generally expected such conflicts to be overcome through "brotherly love and mutual understanding."

A house was not built for Emma Dahl in Fisakana, as new circumstances led to changes in the assignments of both Emma Dahl and Amalie Njerve. From the available archival sources, it has not been possible to fully reconstruct the events that led to the changed assignments. It is clear that Emma Dahl had not been satisfied with the decision of the missionary conference to send her to Fisakana, and she was also "unhappy about some of the statements that were made at the conference." Moreover, Jens Christian Selmer was "reluctant to receive her before the NMS leadership had declared its opinion." The NMS leadership pointed to potential conflicts that could develop between missionary women and male missionaries as a result of the mission's limited experience with women missionaries. It saw this lack of experience as contributing to the difficulties concerning Emma Dahl's placement. These factors led to a special meeting being called by Christian Borchgrevink to discuss Dahl's placement. The meeting agreed that Emma Dahl was to move to Soatanana and take up Amalie Njerve's position, while Amalie Njerve would move to Fianarantsoa to take over Emma Dahl's position there. Both women agreed with the decision.

In Soatanana, Emma Dahl worked closely with Theodor Olsen, the missionary in residence. Olsen was very positive towards the work of Bible women, and he and Emma Dahl maintained a good working relationship. Dahl had her own house in the Tsaraindrana district of Soatanana, about three hours away from the main mission station. There she was set to work among the "heathen in their villages, and through conversations encourage these to seek education to be baptized." She also assisted missionary Olsen in teaching catechism students at the mission station and in the outlying areas of the station district. Through her medical knowledge she was able to assist the sick; she taught needlework and established a missionary association among Malagasy women. She was also responsible for supervising the

---

66. Letter from Lars Dahle to Madagascar, October 20, 1892.
67. Diary of Thorkild Rosaas, No. 6, 1892: 12.
68. Diary of Thorkild Rosaas, No. 6, 1892: 12.
69. Letter from Lars Dahle to Madagascar, October 20, 1892, Box 165.
70. Those invited to the meeting were missionaries Engh, Torbjørnsen, Swendsen, Smith, Nygaard, Rustad and Nilsen-Lund. Diary of Thorkild Rosaas, No. 6, 1892: 11.
71. Diary of Thorkild Rosaas, No. 6, 1892: 12. See also letter from Lars Dahle to Madagascar, October 20, 1892, Box 165.
72. The distance is given by Anna Hauge Olsen in her letter to "Louise and Hans" from Soatanana, July 29, 1892 (from disc "Theodor Olsen's letters, part 1, from 1891 to October 12, 1893). Emma Dahl was staying at the station previously occupied by missionary Johan Christian Haslund.
73. Emma Dahl's yearly report, January 21, 1893, Box 38, folder 2.
74. Those seeking baptism received instruction in Christianity before being baptized.
district's schools. At the end of Sunday sermons throughout the mission district, she taught and examined those present: "Through this catechizing, I seek partly to put light on the road to salvation, partly to promote general knowledge in Christianity." She thus taught Christianity to both women and men, and she found this part of her work very rewarding. In practice, the line between teaching and preaching was not absolute. Dahl's congregational activities, which were clearly in the public domain of mission work, were in effect challenging the male claim to hegemony in the area of preaching.

Living alone as a white woman at the station house in Tsaraindrana, Emma Dahl was concerned with her own safety, and missionary Olsen made arrangements to have watchmen sent to her. She did however enjoy the company of the Malagasy evangelist Rajosva, who was her "advisor in everything concerning my work and my house." Twenty-eight year old Rajosva and Emma, who was ten years his senior, developed a personal friendship: "Since he has thought a lot and read a lot, there is great entertainment in him, and I can therefore enjoy myself thoroughly on Sunday afternoons, when at dusk Josva enters my living room to get himself a cozy chat." Emma Dahl's intimacy with a male Malagasy is quite surprising, because male missionaries generally feared the ruining of their moral reputation from precisely this type of close, unsupervised contact with Malagasy women. The NMS did not allow male missionaries to have female servants, and single male and female missionaries were normally not permitted to live in the same house. These rules were enforced both as a result of possible negative reactions among the Malagasy, and of fears of sexual impropriety among the missionaries.

A possible explanation as to why Emma Dahl's regular encounters with a male Malagasy were not remarked upon, is that while the sexual desires of male missionaries, and their potential to cross moral boundaries, frequently were the subject of mission discourse, missionary women's sexual desires were never an issue. At the time, middle class women in general were considered to be devoid of sexual passions. Middle class women's sexuality did not function as a threat to Lutheran
sexual morals, and male sexual desires and fears of rumors of impropriety were the reasons why single women missionaries could not live alone at mission stations. Missionary women were potential victims of uncontrollable white and black male sexuality, and it is surprising that Emma Dahl was allowed to live alone at a mission station, and that she could talk so freely about her encounters with Malagasy males. Not especially good-looking, and perhaps seen as a frigid spinster, it is conceivable that it never occurred to the NMS community that Emma Dahl could be the subject of sexual violation. It is also thinkable that she was regarded as being of such a high moral stature that no one could imagine her being involved in moral wrongdoing. In the context of mission discourse about sexuality and morality, however, it remains puzzling that Emma Dahl was permitted to live and work in a place where she was, to a large extent, outside the boundaries of the intense social control of the mission community. Perhaps the likely explanation of this anomaly can be found in the notion that single women missionaries constituted a special category within the mission community. The women in this category were thought of as asexual, and perhaps as somewhat at the margin of the community of missionary families.

During Emma Dahl's tenure in Tsaraindrana the issue of the rights and duties of Bible women became highly controversial in the NMS. It was Theodor Olsen, Emma Dahl's supervisor, who urged the establishment of instructions for Bible women's work. Olsen's request was not a consequence of any conflict between himself and Ms Dahl, but a result of dissension within the mission community as to what tasks Bible women were to perform. Olsen had a remarkably positive attitude towards women missionaries, and had in fact allowed Emma Dahl to work in ways and in areas that were supposedly reserved for men. She was given a very independent role, and was able to preach not only to children and women, but to men as well. Officially, her examination and teaching of the congregation following Sunday sermons was never called preaching, as a strict line was drawn by reserving the term preaching to men who imparted the word of God in the congregation. In practice, it was difficult to enforce such a strict line between preaching and teaching, as women were imparting the word of God in their daily congregational work. That Dahl's work was controversial is clear, as Olsen, in a letter to missionary inspector Borchgrevink, expressed his hope for a description of Bible women's duties because “an eventual investigation of the way in which I and Miss Dahl are dividing the work would perhaps bring results that would be everything but applauded by our superiors. But what are we to do? Miss Dahl can not just sit with her hands in her lap.”

82. See Theodor Olsen's diary No. 2, 1893: 22.
Can Bible Women Preach?

The 1893 missionary conference gave Theodor Olsen the task to formulate a set of instructions for Bible women. Having heard rumors that he had proposed such instructions because of alleged disagreements with Emma Dahl, Olsen felt obliged to inform the conference that he and Emma Dahl "had been in good relations, were now in good relations, and hoped with the help of God to continue in good relations". Indeed, Olsen "wished to thank the conference, which had given him such a skilled and zealous co-worker." He had only proposed to establish instructions, he said, because he thought it was best for the women workers and for the work itself.

At the 1894 missionary conference, Theodor Olsen presented the following proposal:

Instructions for Bible women
§ 1. The Bible woman's task is to assist the missionary in his work to win and preserve the female part of the population for God's kingdom.
§ 2. For the implementation of this task, she will, as far as skills and circumstances allow, have the following duties:
1. visit the heathens, namely the women, in their homes, to draw them towards Christ, by speaking the word of God to them and in other ways, and to inform those who wish so the preparatory instruction for baptism.
2. Help, as far as she can, with the gathering for services and education, supervise the [Malagasy] teachers, so that they do their work; participate, though not as the leading one, in the preachers' meetings when the Sunday texts are discussed, and generally assist the native workers in their jobs.
3. Be present at the Sunday service, especially where the preacher is worst equipped, and after the service seek to fertilize this through conversation with the audience in relation to today's text and service.
4. To visit the Christian, namely women, in order to meet them as a sister and urge them to lead a clean and decent house life, [and] to diligently use the word and sacraments; gather them for participation in the congregation's charity work, and in general seek to lift and raise the Christian women.
5. Manage the craft schools for women, and establish and lead women's [missionary] associations in those places where the [male] missionary wants it; assist in the practice of caring for the poor and other charity work in the congregation.

To describe the tasks of Bible women was difficult, and a careful line had to be drawn between the male domain of preaching and that of "conversations" about the word of God, which was also permissible for women. The chairman of the conference, Christian Borchgrevink, suggested that "speaking the word of God to them" be changed to "conversation with them." He further suggested that the

85. Ibid. See also Theodor Olsen's diary No. 2: 22.
87. Ibid.
expression “those who wish so [to receive the preparatory instruction for baptism]” be changed to “those women who want [it],” implying that Bible women were to teach only women. Sigvart Wetterstad, however, wanted the expression “namely women” deleted, as Bible women in his opinion also should have the opportunity to visit men. Theodor Olsen replied that “it can not be that dangerous if she [the Bible woman] teaches some boys in the preparatory instruction for baptism,” and he further emphasized that “she can not drive off the men, if accidentally there are men present.” The conference agreed that the instructions were to be considered advisory, and not a strict order. The conference thus indirectly opened for the possibility that women missionaries could teach both women and men in the preparatory instructions for baptism. Whether or not Bible women should supervise education at mission schools was also controversial, but was finally approved.

To many of the conference participants, it was important that women should not take a leading position whenever a man, whether Malagasy or Norwegian, was present. Of particular concern were those occasions when a Bible woman would participate or assist in the services led by Malagasy men who had received instruction to become clergy in NMS congregations. It was suggested that if a Bible woman were to disagree with a Malagasy clergyman, she could insist on the rightfulness of her views, and thus become the dominating part. Theodor Olsen, on the other hand, who could refer to his own experience working closely with a Bible woman, replied:

as to what concerns the dominating, native clergy will always, even if the woman in question is silent, feel personally inferior to the European woman. In my case there has been no damage done to the work, as the native priest has never felt pressured by Ms Dahl; to the contrary, he has been happy to have her.

Olsen, who wanted Bible women to be allowed to give guidance to native clergy, felt the resistance from the missionary conference towards this issue, and decided to ask the missionary inspector for an exception to the rules in the case of Emma Dahl. The final voting result implied that the conference did not explicitly forbid women to supervise Malagasy priests. In practice, it was left to the missionary inspector, the individual missionary in charge, and the woman in question to decide whether or not such work was to be part of a Bible woman’s duties.

The instructions agreed to by the 1894 missionary conference were met with a strong reaction from the NMS leadership. In a letter to Madagascar, the NMS general secretary Lars Dahle emphasized that the regulations concerning Bible wom-

88. Ibid.; my emphasis.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid.
en’s work were not to be considered as instructions, as instructions only were to be used when specific duties that individuals had to perform were given. The NMS leadership declared the conference decisions to constitute no more than a “fumbling attempt” to clarify Bible women's tasks. Concerning preparatory instruction for baptism, the NMS leadership stated that, as a rule, Bible women should only be permitted to teach at the very introductory level. Mission leadership also agreed with the minority of missionaries who had voted against Bible women supervising mission schools, as Bible women had no education that would qualify them for such a position. An even “stronger protest” was raised against the proposed (but not agreed to) regulation that a Bible woman should be an “active participant when the Sunday texts are examined more closely for the native preachers.” The NMS leadership emphasized that Bible women had no “ethical legitimacy” to participate actively in the instruction of how men should read the Bible, as “such a performance can not easily be consistent with the limitation that the word of God has determined for a woman’s activities (1 Cor. 14, 04; 1 Tim. 2, 12). ...” The NMS leadership also expressly forbade any exception to the rules in the case of Emma Dahl. Single women missionaries were thus not granted the opportunity to cross gendered boundaries that were defined as God-given and absolute. Should Emma Dahl be considered an exception to the rule, it would have meant a gradual erosion of the claim that male ordained missionaries had an exclusive right to preach. A clear division existed, then, between the NMS leadership and conservatively oriented missionaries on the one hand, who wanted to keep a tight rein on women’s mission work, and more radically oriented missionaries on the other hand, who looked positively upon giving women more independence and further responsibilities. The conference suggestions concerning women’s work were built on a pragmatism that gradually developed in the field as missionaries adjusted to the local Malagasy environment. The NMS leadership in Norway, however, was concerned that formal rules be enforced, as any lax attitudes in this area could lead to consequences contradicting practice both within the mission itself and within the larger State Church.

The NMS decision to forbid the participation of Bible women in the counseling of Malagasy clergy was not received well by Emma Dahl. According to Theodor Olsen, Emma Dahl was so offended by Lars Dahle’s letter on behalf of the NMS leadership that she

93. Ibid.
94. Ibid. The reference to 1 Cor. 14, 04 is probably wrong. In 1 Chor. 14, 34–35 the apostle Paul forbids women to speak at meetings and to be in leading positions.
95. For this point I am indebted to Karina Hestad Skeie.
was determined to resign from her post. She declares that she can not keep within the frame drawn by the leadership, which I find to be very likely. I cannot agree, however, that ‘its decision is not an expression of God’s, but of Dahle’s will.’ Now, she is at any rate going to travel home this year.. But what will now become of the Bible woman institution and the instructions for it?96

Declaring that she could not abstain from giving instructions to catechumens, the only consolation Ms Dahl got was from Theodor Olsen, who was willing to go to great lengths to accommodate her interests. Olsen interpreted the NMS leadership’s formulation that women “as a rule” should not perform this type of work as actually allowing for an exception in her case.97

In the summer of 1894, Emma Dahl fell ill, and although Dahle’s letter was from October the same year, a connection was made between her illness and the fact that she was explicitly forbidden to perform some of the tasks she had previously enjoyed so much.98 During the summer, Emma Dahl was so gravely ill that the mission community expected her to die.99 At her worst, she had such serious hallucinations that she had to be physically tied to her bed, and the opium she received had no effect.100 Her illness did not progress, however, and she gradually felt better. Christian Borchgrevink and Ove Thesen, both missionaries and medical doctors, agreed that she had had an “attack of ‘acute mania’, an illness which as a rule soon transforms into [better] health.”101 Borchgrevink allegedly believed that Emma Dahl would soon be able to resume her work, but Theodor Olsen, her closest colleague, was unsure about her prospects. Later on, in the fall of 1894, however, after having received the negative news from the NMS leadership, Emma Dahl became more and more disillusioned and bitter, loosing faith in her fellow missionary workers.102 All this led her to draft an application to be discharged from her position in the mission field, “where she, among other things, delivered an exegetic feud with the NMS leadership about women’s right to preach.”103 Due to advice from Theodor Olsen and Christian Borchgrevink, the application was probably never sent.104 Emma Dahl was at any rate expected to travel to Norway on furlough in 1895, and at her request, and with the recommendation of medical doctors, the 1895 missionary conference ordered her to make the journey.105

96. Theodor Olsen’s diary No. 4, 1895: 59.
97. Ibid.: 60.
98. Medical doctor and missionary Bendix Ebbel declared in early 1895 that “the last letter from the NMS leadership has also contributed to her breakdown.” Missionary conference report Madagascar inland, March 25 – April 5, 1895, Box 38, folder 13.
100. Ibid.: 140.
101. Ibid.: 142.
102. Theodor Olsen’s diary No. 4, 1894: 41.
103. Ibid.: 60.
104. Repeated searches for such a letter in the NMS archive have been unsuccessful.

74 Line Nyhagen Predelli
Emma Dahl's career was however far from over. She was ready to depart for the mission field yet again, but laid down specific conditions for her eventual new assignment. At a meeting with Lars Dahle at the NMS headquarters in Norway in 1895, she declared that she could not “leave for the mission field unless the NMS leadership changes its... regulations concerning women’s work out there, as she was of the opinion that in her position as a woman there was nothing that hindered her to teach also in the presence of men.”

Lars Dahle's description of the meeting between himself and Emma Dahl kept to formal facts, but Emma Dahl presented a more elaborated version of the event that took place on September 9, 1895. Describing the content of a letter Emma Dahl wrote to her friends in Madagascar, Theodor Olsen stated that:

Dahle had said that it was impossible for her to come out [to Madagascar] again, as she then would turn crazy. And when she in her stupidity came forward with 'my opinion' [Olsen's opinion] of 1 Cor. 14 about women's right to talk at meetings, in direct conflict with the one expressed earlier by Dahle and the NMS leadership, Dahle became furiously angry, got up from his chair and shouted (!): 'Now, this is going too far!' And Ms Dahl ran out the door with her tears rolling and cried on her way to the mission school, [she cried] at the mission school, [and she cried] at her cousin Mrs. Thorne, the whole day. She must have been somewhat hysterical, when she was in Stavanger.

Emma Dahl knew very well the NMS leadership's position on the issue of women talking at public meetings. Still, she was intent on convincing the leadership that a change in NMS practice concerning women's opportunities in the field was necessary. Emma Dahl is an extraordinary example of how individual missionary women repeatedly contested the patriarchal gender regime of the NMS throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Contesting formal rules, Dahl was able to carve out an independent role for herself in the field; a role in which she, through her practice, transgressed both formal and informal rules of gendered behavior.

In the end, however, the NMS leadership's intent and ability to control women's activities in the mission field put an end to Emma Dahl's career as a missionary for the NMS. In addition to her uncompromising attitude, it was Emma Dahl's openness about her views and activities that ultimately gave the last blow to her career in the NMS. Other missionary women, who were more discrete, were able to preach and talk at large gatherings of people without being reprimanded by the NMS. Simple practical need led missionary wife Hanna Nygaard, in Madagascar.

106. NMS Board protocol (styreprotokoll) No. 13. 1893–1896, meeting on September 9, 1895.
107. Theodor Olsen's diary No. 5. 1896. See also letters from Anna Hauge Olsen to her mother, from Soatanana, January 22. 1896 and February 3. 1896 (from disc “Theodor Olsen’s letters, part 2. From November 10, 1893 to January 1897”).
from 1871 to 1898, to preach for both men and women at a time when such a role was reserved for men in Norway.

In the beginning, only some women came, but the crowd steadily increased, and in the end I had both men and women in my audience. This was somewhat critical, since according to our orthodox notions a woman should not speak in public, and even less when men are present. But what could I do? Should I have said to the men “go away, you can’t listen?” Then my activity here would have ended... But fortunately these Malagasies have never emphasized the words of [the apostle] Paul. They have received God’s glorious gospel with [equal] pleasure if it was presented either by women or by men.108

Hanna Nygaard and Emma Dahl were not alone in taking on a role intended for male missionaries, as women often preached in the schools, hospitals and orphanages where they worked.109 In practice, these women had crossed a crucial barrier well before it was officially acknowledged or approved to do so.

Upon her return to Norway, the NMS offered Emma Dahl a monthly stipend of support during her first year at home. The stipend was also a means of consolation for Emma Dahl, and it constituted a recognition of her zealous efforts as a missionary in Madagascar.110 Emma Dahl continued to work for the NMS until the year 1900, and during those years she traveled around as an emissary on behalf of the NMS.111 In light of her experiences in the mission field, Emma Dahl’s work as an emissary in Norway constitutes a bit of an irony, as she was traveling around and speaking to large gatherings of people. The line between preaching and conversation was, as we have seen, not a clear-cut one, and with Emma Dahl’s past history it is difficult to imagine that she never spoke the word of God on occasions that presented themselves to her. In fact, Emma Dahl continued to cause controversies within the missionary movement, as a vicar in Eastern Norway, who opposed women speaking at public meetings, prevented her from talking at the parish schools.112 Another perspective on Emma Dahl’s work as an emissary has been given by the vicar Chr. Knudsen, who in a letter to Lars Dahle stated that Emma Dahl’s lectures on the mission field were among the “very best” he had ever heard from a missionary. “There was clarity, lucidity, enthusiasm, and an especially pretty form,” Knudsen declared.113 Knudsen could not understand how her lectures

110. NMS Board protocol No. 13, 1893–1896, meetings on August 5 and September 9, 1895.
111. See MT No. 13, 1925: 112. See also letter from Emma Dahl to NMS leadership, January 20, 1898, Box 107, folder 9; “Indtægter ved Emma Dohls sidste Emissærreise 1897” (Box 107, folder 9); and NMS Board protocol no. 13, 1893–1896, meetings on August 10 and August 24, 1896.
112. See letters from H. Landsås to Emma Dahl, September 29 and October 1, 1897 (Box 107, folder 9). See also John Nome, Det norske missionsselskaps historie i norsk kirkeliv. Fra syttiarene til nåtiden. Dreyers Grafiske Anstalt, Stavanger, 1943: 122, and letter from Emma Dahl to NMS leadership, January 20, 1898, Box 107, folder 9.
could cause controversy, if it was not that "one absolutely wants to close woman's mouth in all circumstances."114 Just as the missionary conferences in Madagascar have shown disagreements concerning women's roles in the mission field, these events in Norway show that different opinions existed among the clergy of the Norwegian Lutheran State Church, as well as within the missionary movement. Just the fact that Emma Dahl worked as an emissary indicates that resistance towards women speaking in public can not have been uniformly strong.

Emma Dahl continued to hope that the NMS would post her as a missionary, but she also made plans to come back to Madagascar by other means.115 In 1901 she finally went to Madagascar as a missionary for The United Church and the North American-Lutheran Church, and she stayed there until her final return to Norway in 1906.116 In her new job, she worked as a Bible woman and as headmistress of a boarding school for girls. She also worked temporarily as the missionary in charge at Manantenina station.117 Upon her return to Norway, Emma Dahl continued her work for the missionary movement, traveling around the country and giving lectures about missionary work.

The NMS's further handling of the issue of women preachers is also interesting, as it offers an insight into mission politics. Importantly, it was not only Norwegian women who in practice worked as preachers in Madagascar. Also Christian Malagasy women, with the blessing of NMS missionaries, were used as preachers in NMS congregations. In 1890, a letter from a missionary wife was published in the Norwegian missionary women's journal. The letter described the work of Rasendraosa, who several times has spoken the word of God in the countryside. When we told her that God's word did not allow woman to speak in public, she said: 'But God has through his great mercy opened my eyes, and they [the people] do not know that they are walking towards their own ruin; how can I then be silent. It is burning inside me.' I still think that it would be most correct if she talked with individuals in their

114. Ibid. According to Nome (1943: 122), Emma Dahl also received the "warmest recommendations" from clergyman A. Gundersen in the city of Fredrikstad.
115. Theodor Olsen's diary No. 5, 1896: 20. See also letter from Emma Dahl to Lars Dahle, August 1, 1898, Box 107, folder 9, where she privately inquires about possibilities for NMS employment in Madagascar. The NMS congregation in Tsaraindrana, Madagascar, also requested her re-employment (ibid.).
116. Emma Dahl most likely worked for the American Lutheran Missionary Society, which established itself in Madagascar in 1888 and was headquartered at Fort Dauphin. Another American Society, the Lutheran Board of Missions, came to Madagascar in 1890 and established its headquarters at Manasoa (James Sibree, Fifty Years in Madagascar: Personal Experiences of Mission Life and Work. George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1924: 801). The two missions apparently cooperated, as they published joint conference reports (see "Utdrag av de viktigste konferensforhandlinger av Den Forenede Kirke og Den Norsk-Amerikansk-Lutherske Kirkes Madagaskar-missionærer fra 1888–1921", Imprimerie de la mission Norvégienne, Tananarive, 1921. Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, St. Paul, Minnesota).
homes, but my husband says he does not have the candour to forbid her, when the ignorant people in the countryside beg her to talk to them.\textsuperscript{118}

Furthermore, in 1895, missionary Theodor Olsen wrote in the women's missionary journal about the woman Rasoanjanahary, who allegedly had established several NMS congregations through her preaching in the north-eastern district of Bara.\textsuperscript{119} Both male and female missionaries, and Malagasy converts alike, were thus quietly subverting the NMS rule that forbade women to preach and to speak in public. It is tempting to suggest that the NMS was less diligent in controlling its rules of gendered boundaries when those rules were challenged by indigenous women. It is likely that it was easier to overlook this type of challenging behavior when it was written about in the journal of the women's missionary associations, and not in the main mission journal. In July 1910, missionary Johannes Einrem wrote about similar incidents in the regular NMS journal, and was immediately rebuked by the NMS leadership. Einrem wrote about Rastera, a woman who was in charge at a church; "a woman, a widow, who is both a teacher and a preacher. Her rightful title should be vicar."\textsuperscript{120} Later on, Einrem published a controversial novel about Ravola, a Malagasy woman preacher who had a prominent position in the church and who also performed the baptism ritual.\textsuperscript{121}

Having received complaints from within the missionary movement because of Einrem's letter, the NMS general secretary Lars Dahle published an apology in the very next issue of the mission journal. Interestingly, Dahle did not explicitly forbid women preachers. Instead, he in effect approved of the practice in certain circumstances by stating that

Our [mission] society will not tolerate any preaching by women, unless the situation is such that it is covered by the rule that 'necessity knows no law,' and strict control of this practice will be enforced in our mission fields.\textsuperscript{122}

Women would, in other words, be permitted to preach if there was no suitable man who could perform the task. Dahle emphasized the importance of mission control of who was given permission to preach. In practice it would be difficult for the mission to control who was actually preaching in the field because of the great distance between the various mission stations, and between the mission field and the NMS leadership in Norway. From Hanna Nygaard's experience, we know that women's preaching formally went "unnoticed" by the mission leadership.

\textsuperscript{118} MLK No. 5, May 1890: 38. The letter, which was intended as private correspondence, was published anonymously.

\textsuperscript{119} MLK No. 1, January 1895: 5–7, and MLK No. 2, February 1895: 9–11.

\textsuperscript{120} MT No. 13, July 1910: 313.


\textsuperscript{122} MT No. 16, 1910: 383. my emphasis.
Conclusion

The complex and often contested nature of gender relations within the missionary movement has been illustrated by the mixed successes of two women missionaries within the NMS who attempted to expand their own opportunities, rights and duties in the mission field. That single women were able to successfully challenge the patriarchal gender regime of the mission is well illustrated by the 1870's case of Bertha Dahle. Dahle came into the mission as a volunteer worker, and her efforts at the school for women in Antananarive came to be highly regarded within the mission community. When she dared to seek official employment and recognition through a paid position, she was met with opposition by the NMS leadership. With the support of mission colleagues, and with the threat to join a competing mission society and cause public scandal in Norway, Bertha Dahle was finally able to receive the recognition she deserved as a paid mission worker.

The same juxtaposition of constraint and freedom can be found in the 1890s case of Emma Dahl. This case was not about gaining a position, but about the content of women's work in the field. When women worked in the field without clear instructions from the NMS leadership, they were sometimes able to carve out independent roles that challenged areas of male privilege and control. Emma Dahl was thus able to instruct and examine male Malagasy seminary candidates, and to preach to mixed audiences of Malagasy women and men. When the instructions for Bible women were finally approved, however, Emma Dahl experienced a strict limitation of the tasks she could perform, and the conflict between formal rules and actual behavior in the mission field became acute. The end result was that the mission had no room for a woman like Emma Dahl, who sought formal acceptance of preaching duties for women.

The broader history of Norwegian women's presence and participation as missionaries in Madagascar and elsewhere supports the notion that missionary women were part of a vanguard of women who broke new ground by crossing the established gender boundaries that defined women's rightful place to be in the home. Through their active mission work, both single and married missionary women have held up alternatives and new modes of living to new generations of women.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Seija Jalagin

“I didn’t come here to play, that’s for sure”

Finnish Missionary Women and Authority in Early 20th Century Japan

Finnish missionary women in early 19th century Japan present a case through which one can look into the ways women encountered an alien culture and how they positioned themselves within it in the context of the mission. In this article, the focus is on the development of the position of missionary women in the Japanese mission of the Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland (LEAF). During this process, the identity of women missionaries, as well as their adaptation to Japanese culture and society, came to play a crucial role in their resistance to the gender norms that prevailed inside the mission.

Foreign missions offered women an opportunity to pursue a career, or at least to find work outside the home. They are thus a part of the emancipatory story of a time when women had few career opportunities. This is the study of the case of Finnish missionary women in their struggle to maintain their working status while under pressure from their male colleagues and the leaders of LEAF. The dispute that lasted from 1912 to 1914 troubled the community and the personal relations between the missionaries for several years. The controversy was centred on the question of the division of labour between the male and female members of the mission. It also included the status of the Japanese workers: what kind of power did the Finnish missionary men exercise over their Japanese colleagues and parishioners? One of the defining elements at the focal point of the cultural encounter in this clash was the issue of power. How did the power equation develop at the centre of Japanese culture, despite it or because of it? The question of authority was always crucial in a hierarchically organized religious community. Through this case, we study the influence of a multicultural community on the hierarchy of power and the possibility the people involved had to stretch the hierarchical structures to promote their goals.

1. Jane Haggis has concluded that missionary women's history is "less an emancipatory struggle" than a re-modification of norms. Jane Haggis, "A heart that has felt the love of God and longs for others to know it": conventions of gender, tensions of self and constructions of difference in offering to be a lady missionary, in Women's History Review, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1998: 172. However, the interpretation is dependant on the sources. The material left by missionary societies and missionaries is extremely heterogeneous in nature. The published material, for example missionary magazines and periodicals or memoirs, gives a totally different picture than that found in protocols and other documents of missionary societies. Furthermore, the personal effects left by missionaries, such as letters and diaries, open up a completely different level of narrative of the experiences and feelings in the mission field. The case studied here has left no traces in published material, whereas the protocols and letters of the mission reveal a most complex phenomenon. The missionary archives, as a whole, are of specific interest for historians since they include vast ethno-
Finnish Women in Missions

The missionary movement in Finland began in the early 19th century, influenced by foreign, primarily Swedish and British, contacts. Some members of the Finnish clergy enthusiastically spoke for evangelising work among the heathen. In the first phase Finland itself had been the target of missionary work when a couple of German missionaries tried to come into contact with people in Lapland in the 1730's. Later the missions of the British to more remote parts of the world were described in detail in Finnish newspapers and magazines, and this helped to spread missionary ideas among the clergy and the laymen. The Finnish Bible Society established in 1812 also contributed to the missionary cause. Through the Russian Bible Society, founded the same year, evangelising gained the approval of the Tsar, and the Bible was translated into 14 languages spoken inside Russia. Already in the middle of the 19th century some Finnish women were active in the missionary effort by raising funds that were donated mainly to the Swedish Missionary Society, and to a lesser extent to some other foreign missions. The first missionary sewing group was organised around 1845 in Porvoo, a small city east of Helsinki in southern Finland.

All in all, the mission cause was cherished most by revivalist movements such as the pietists and the evangelicals. These groups were also active in founding the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM) in 1859, which finally institutionalised the early missionary efforts. In 1870 the first seven missionaries arrived in Amboland, southwest Africa. The first women went into the field in early 1871 as missionary brides. The issue of unmarried female missionaries was under discussion for several years and was finally settled when the attitudes in the field developed in their favour. In 1898 the FMS decided to employ Hilja Lindberg as a teacher in the art of weaving. She travelled to Africa together with Anna Rautanen, daughter of one of the first Finnish missionaries to Africa. By 1910 unmarried women missionaries outnumbered men and the trend strengthened

graphic material of different cultures from a time prior to modern cultural anthropology and also provide an opportunity to look into the cultural encounter, though of course from a very biased point of view.


2. In Finnish Suomen Raamattuseura.
over the years. The FELM China mission, established in 1902, received its first missionary women in 1905.

In the late 19th century, evangelicalism challenged traditional Lutheran Christianity, and as a newcomer, Free Church Revivalism also targeted missionary work. Inspired by the British China Inland Mission of Hudson Taylor and the Scandinavian Alliance Mission, the Finnish Free Mission sent its first workers to China in 1891. Over the next decade, four new missionary women reached the field, and two more headed for the Himalayas. Asia was thus gaining a strong foothold among the Finnish missionary associations. This highlighted the role of female missionaries, since Asian gender systems hindered contact between native women and male missionaries.

The decision of the Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland, established in 1873, to begin a mission of its own was the result of a crisis within the evangelical movement. Although the FELM tried to avoid interfering in the crisis within the evangelical movement, the bond between the two organisations in the missionary effort eventually caused them to clash. The leaders of LEAF regarded the members of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission as opponents of the evangelical movement, which was seen as a threat to the missionary enthusiasm amongst the evangelicals. Therefore discussions concerning the establishment of its own foreign mission began in the Evangelical Association in 1896.

The Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland eventually launched its Japan mission in 1900 when it sent two missionaries to Nagasaki in Kyushu. Japan was selected because its climate was considered moderate, its social order stable, and travelling as well as living expenses reasonable. Japan was also regarded as

---

11. This can be said to have been the case in most Asian countries, but especially in India and China, which were the first objects of missionary work. The same goes for Japan. Peter Williams calls China "a notoriously difficult field". Williams 1993: 45.
14. The official name in Finnish is Suomen Luterilainen Evankeliumiyhdistys. SLEY. A detailed study of the organisation of LEAF’s Japan mission in Finland is Koskenniemi 1992.
the leading nation in Asia, and its conversion was expected to promote the Christianisation of all other Asian peoples.\textsuperscript{16} To convert Japan, the leader, would mean to convert the whole of East Asia.\textsuperscript{17}

By early twentieth century Japan had been the target of ardent missionary work for several decades after a lapse of over 200 years. Japan's first encounter with Christianity dates back to 16\textsuperscript{th} century when Portuguese and Spanish Catholics, mostly Jesuits, began active conversions there. On stabilising their power, the Tokugawa Shogunate, rulers of Japan from 1600 to 1867, closed the country in 1639 and prohibited all westerners, with the exception of the Dutch, from entering Japan. A forced reopening in 1859 finally ended the isolation. The practising of Christianity remained banned until 1873, after which Western missionary societies, Catholic, Protestant as well as Greek Orthodox, launched a number of missions in Japan. Even before this, the Protestants had managed to convert some of the local people, although their presence was based on taking care of the spiritual needs of the Westerners in Japan.\textsuperscript{18}

The early Years

In the early years the mission worked under the rather loose guidance of the board. In 1912, when a dispute arose, there were four female and four male missionaries with their wives working in the LEAF mission in Japan.\textsuperscript{19} Originally, the work had started in Nagasaki in Kyushu under the patronage of the British missionaries. The first Finnish missionaries, reverend Rikhard Wellroos (1875–1933) with his family and Ester Kurvinen (1883–1952), present a rather atypical case of LEAF missionaries in Japan. Wellroos was an ordained priest, something that was rarely the case among missionary men. Most of them were laymen who after a short missionary training received the right to preach and distribute the sacraments.\textsuperscript{20} Ester Kurvinen, on the other hand, had no professional training due to her young age. Afterwards it was a strict policy of LEAF to recruit only educated and experienced elementary school teachers as female missionaries. This was the case for the next

\textsuperscript{17} Ilma Ruth Aho, A Record of the Activities of the Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland in Japan, 1900–1946. University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan 1970: 67.
\textsuperscript{18} For a good general analysis of the early phases of Christianity in Japan, see George Sansom, The Western World and Japan. A Study in the Interaction of European and Asiatic Cultures, Charles E. Tuttle, Tokyo 1987.
\textsuperscript{19} In 1907, the overall number of Protestant missionaries in Japan was 672, 48.5% of whom were unmarried women. Statistics based on Otis Cary, A History of Christianity in Japan. Protestant Missions. (Originally published in 1909 by Fleming H. Revell, New York. Charles E. Tuttle, Rutland, Vermont 1987). 359.
\textsuperscript{20} In FELM the hopes for getting ordained clergy to apply for missionary work were frequently turned down. Saarilahti 1989: 82–83. Some missionaries, however, later studied for a degree in pastoral work, usually with the help of their employing organization. See for example Koskenniemi 1992: 307–327.
four missionary women who came to Japan after Kurvinen. Only in 1926 did the first missionary woman come to Japan with a different background from that of an elementary school teacher. Due to the focus on missionary women working among Japanese children and women, LEAF mission had established a kindergarten. Tyyne Niemi, a kindergarten teacher, came to Japan in 1926 to lead this work. She later moved to Sapporo in Hokkaido to establish another missionary kindergarten.21

At any rate, the educational level of the missionary women was as a rule considerably higher than that of the men, something that must be remembered when dealing with the dispute that arose concerning the status of missionary women in the field. Out of the eight male missionaries in Japan in 1900–1920, only two were ordained priests, and five had worked as shop assistants or clerks.22

The beginning of the mission was far from easy. The first missionaries in 1900 were poorly prepared to face Japanese reality: they could not speak Japanese nor had they any kind of training for missionary work in a foreign country. The board had regarded theological education sufficient for missionary work. Contrary to the advice of the British Lutherans, LEAF had decided also to send a female missionary to Japan.23 The Wellroos family and Ester Kurvinen stopped off in London on their way to Japan to learn from the experiences of the British missionaries under whose guidance they were to begin their work in Japan. The example and advice of the members of the Church Missionary Society in England had been crucial for LEAF leaders in their decision to establish a mission in Japan.24

There are several reasons for the poor preparation of the first missionaries. The board had no clear idea of circumstances in Japan, although the mission secretary and member of the board Pietari Kurvinen had formerly been a missionary in Africa for the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission.25 The main focus in selecting candidates for missionary work was on a strong and pure evangelical conviction. The candidates were expected to state this in a short autobiography by explaining how they had come to realise their calling for the missionary cause. The second crucial criterion a candidate had to pass was the medical check-up. There was no point in sending a person who was not strong to the other side of the world. Hence the selection process of the Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland followed the lines of most of the Protestant missionary associations in Europe and North

---

America. On the whole one can conclude that the Protestant missionary culture was rather uniform in nature. The contacts between different denominations were not necessarily intense but broad patterns are undeniably visible. Whenever a new missionary association was to be established or a new mission launched, the leaders would turn to international sister organisations for guidance and forms of action.26

In addition to being inadequately prepared, other deterring factors stood in the way of Wellroos and Kurvinen. Already on the way to Japan, the relationship between Kurvinen and Wellroos became tense, and matters worsened in Japan.27 First of all, Ester Kurvinen was extremely young, and despite the fact that she had a sound background in the evangelical movement and her father, a former missionary in Africa, was one of the leading figures in LEAF, she was a novice at missionary work. Kurvinen's and Wellroos' personal characteristics made them incapable of working together. In the autumn of 1901, Wellroos suddenly resigned and returned home after only a year in Japan. There had been hardships in the family, too. One of their children died in spring 1901, and after giving birth to yet another baby in the summer Mrs. Wellroos was weak and sickly.28 Although Kurvinen had moved to work in the city of Saga with the American Lutherans in September 1901, the relationship between the two missionaries continued to be difficult and was further worsened by their being so far away from the guidance of the board. Struggling to find a way to study Japanese, evangelise and look after his family, Wellroos' emotional balance was shaken, and this accelerated their return home.

After the Wellroos family left Japan, Ester Kurvinen stayed on alone with the American Lutherans in Saga. Two years later she was joined by Siiri Uusitalo (1878–1945), who eventually returned to Finland from her last missionary period in Japan in 1941 after over 30 years of service. At the beginning of the Russo-Japanese war in 1904, Ester Kurvinen and Siiri Uusitalo found their situation completely changed. Their Russian citizenship caused problems for their American hosts.29 In addition to this, they had cherished the idea of opening their own mission for the Finns. The war disrupted the postal services and left the two women without

26. The FELM’s mission in Amboland cooperated with German Lutherans from whom came the models for organizing the missionary work. One of the first seven missionaries of FELM, Martti Rautanen, even married the daughter of a German missionary. Of their eight children, three survived to adulthood, all of whom worked as missionaries in southern Africa, which actually was their home country more than Finland. Kena 2000: 93, 119, 124.
LEAF’s contacts with the British Protestants have already been dealt with. Later the missionaries worked together with the American Lutherans in Japan.
29. Siiri Uusitalo’s diary 18.6., 15.10., 9.11. and 24.11.1904. The original diary is in the possession of Merja Seppälä-Mäkinen, Lahti, Finland.
instructions from the board. They moved to Tokyo, and with the help of some Japanese Christians, ended up in the village of Shimosuwa in the prefecture of Nagano.\(^{30}\) Thus, the pioneers of the Finnish mission in Japan were two young women whose initiative, decision and guidance, against specific instructions from the board, led to the establishment of an independent mission.

In autumn 1905 Taavi Minkkinen\(^{31}\) arrived in Japan and, in a way, completed the mission with his status as a fully empowered male missionary who was entitled to preach at general meetings, distribute the sacraments and administer church discipline. On the other hand, he could not speak Japanese and was thus incapable of carrying out the actual work. This weakened his position in relation to the missionary women.

**From Discontent to Quarrels**

The dispute that came out into the open in 1912 centred on the question of the organization of the work. It revealed that there had been discontent in the way the responsibilities and actions were divided between the men and women. The dispute divided the group into categories by gender, although the wives mostly supported their husbands in this matter. Behind it all was the issue of the status of the missionary women. The Japanese employees of the mission, the Bible women and the preachers, formed the third party through which local culture penetrated into the missionary circle and brought in the challenges of multiculturality. The whole mission, as well as the dispute, was strongly influenced by the fact that the board had not given specific instructions to the mission in Japan. In the contracts between the association and the missionaries, it simply stated that “the board is entitled to give Miss/Mr. (xx) as well as other missionaries a more specific program in the future if necessary.”\(^{32}\) However, no regulations were drawn up before 1912, when the board drafted very detailed orders. Instead, it had always highlighted that the members of the mission had to act in a conciliatory and harmonious way. This loose guidance allowed the missionaries abundant liberty, but also formed the basis for differences of opinion. In addition, the missionaries can be regarded as exceptional persons in more ways than one. They had, first of all, been selected

\(^{30}\) Siiri Uusitalo’s published letters 10.5.1905 and 23.5.1905 in Nuorison Ystävä 1905 (LEAF’s magazine for young people).

\(^{31}\) Taavi Minkkinen (1877–1952) became one of the leading figures of the Japan mission on LEAF. He worked in Japan for five periods between 1905–1945. It is worth noticing that in addition to being incapable of speaking Japanese, Minkkinen was also far less educated than Siiri Uusitalo and later missionary women. Minkkinen had served as a shop assistant before applying for missionary work. He was the first missionary educated by LEAF, although the education remained a vague and unsettled issue for a long time. Koskenniemi 1992: 62, 91-94.

\(^{32}\) The contracts between LEAF and the missionaries. LEAF archives, Helsinki.

88 Seija Jalagiz.
through a strict process. They must have recognised the exceptional character themselves, too, although the public image of at least the female missionaries was characterised by an "I am nothing"-rhetoric and by laying emphasis on humility and self-effacement. Furthermore, the actual work required a lot of persistence.

The board sent the outline of the new regulations to Japan for discussion, which finally triggered off the conflict. The first rule, which defined who was a missionary, caused especially tense reactions. The missionary board, all members of which were men, had concluded that women were not missionaries but assistants in the mission. The missionary women felt that this offended their professional identity and evangelising calling. They sent a comment to the board, which in turn stated that the women "had generally opposed and in different parts misunderstood" the new regulations. Relations between the missionaries were nonetheless getting worse. The missionary board suggested sending an inspector to Japan. For some reason the board did not proceed with this and the missionaries were left alone trying to reconcile their disagreements.

The missionaries finally arranged a general meeting in October 1912 to discuss the issues raised by the new regulations. All the Finnish missionaries, including the wives, took part in the meeting and had the right to speak. In anticipation of difficulties, the chairman of the meeting, reverend Einari Koskenniemi, instructed the participants to state their opinions so as to "mainly bring out positive things". The discussion soon turned to the question of whether a female missionary was entitled to work among Japanese men and a male missionary among Japanese women. The issue was closely linked to the prevailing circumstances in Japan where the life spheres of men and women were separate. The missionary women present at the meeting brought this up several times. The circumstances in Japan were seen as favouring women's work among women, as was the case in other Protestant missions, not just in Japan, but also in China and India.

In this issue the women had also an international example to lean upon. The need to have women in missionary fields was argumentatively supported by all the Protestant and Episcopal missions. As late as 1910, the Finnish Missionary Society

---

33. According to Ulla-Maija Kauppinen-Perttula's research, the "I am nobody" discourse applies to deaconesses and their idealized vocation. Her interpretation emphasizes the discourse as "a reflection of power in weakness." Ulla-Maija Kauppinen-Perttula, Fulfilled by Vocation or Exploited by it "Women’s "Content with Weakness" Discourse under the Pressures of Idealized Deaconess Vocation in Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift 100, 1999: 9.

34. In addition to general meetings, the male missionaries had their own so-called "Finnish conferences". According to the board’s orders, the missionaries started joint meetings on a yearly basis for both the Finns and the Japanese in 1914. Several meetings indicate the hierarchical order of the mission, where the supreme power was in the hands of the Finnish male missionaries.

36. The protocol of the joint meeting of the Finnish missionaries 1.10. and 3.10.1912. LEAF archives, Helsinki.
published Luise Öhler’s writings about women’s foreign missions. Öhler stressed the example of Christian family life led by missionary men and their families, but nevertheless demanded that unmarried women should be recruited in order to have women working full-time for “heathen women”. At the turn of the century, the general opinion was that if Christian work among heathen people was to be successful, it had to be started in homes where women as mothers had an influence on future generations. It was therefore considered crucial to gain the attention of women in this matter, as well as to provide Sunday schools and missionary schools at the elementary and secondary level.

Consequently, at the heart of the rising dispute lay the question of women’s work. The male missionaries had started to exert pressure on the women to work solely among children. Ordinarily the women organized women’s meetings, ran Sunday schools for children, made house calls, distributed leaflets on street corners, and assisted at public meetings by singing and playing. The year 1912 proved to be a watershed in the division of work. Discontent and frustration broke out into the open after the participants had long tried to keep the situation under control in the name of unity.

The previous year had already been full of strains. Three new missionaries had arrived in Japan. Among them was the first Japanese missionary trained in Finland, Tadao, alias Daniel, Watanabe. Watanabe’s arrival marked the beginning of a new phase in the mission. The board had instructed him to work as an equal with the Finnish men which they, however, did not approve. Instead, they excluded Watanabe from their meetings. The board was forced to reprimand the missionaries for such an action before they would consent to work with Watanabe. It is difficult to find a clear reason for the men’s behaviour. Watanabe’s salary was lower than the Finnish men’s, though higher than the women’s, and yet the men complained that it was too high compared to the average wage level in Japan. The most obvious reason for their actions against Watanabe was the missionary men’s inability to accept a Japanese as their equal in missionary work. It was customary to refer to the Japanese parishioners as children as an indication of western paternalism. The young mission and its male leaders did not consider local Christians fit to take responsibility for the work. In the dispute about the division of work strongly defined by gender

37. Öhler’s booklets were originally published in German.
40. Tadao Watanabe (1888–1944) was one of the first converts of the Finnish mission in Shimosuwa. He had studied in Finland for four years and returned to Japan in 1911 with his Finnish wife Siiri (née Pitkanen). Watanabe worked for the mission until 1922.
issues, the interesting feature is that the missionary women took the side of Tadao Watanabe in opposing the conventional authority of the Finnish men.

The prejudice of the Finnish men against Watanabe also reflects their frustration in general. Japan seemed to be hard soil for Christian cultivation. Work was carried out in several small stations by few hands. The frustration of the Finnish men became apparent in 1911, when they started to plan a new mission in Mongolia. However, the board did not allow them to leave Japan. More elements in the unfolding crisis piled up when one of the female missionaries fell ill with acute rheumatism and was unable to carry on her work. Gradually the illness affected her whole being and her nerves broke down. In early 1912, she accused the missionaries' Japanese language teacher of courting her colleagues. A terrible row shook the missionary community and turned the men against women's work. They thought the incident had ruined the reputation of the whole mission. Kaarlo Salonen reported the heated feelings to the board: "I don't think a man is a suitable language teacher for women, and I dare say that a woman is not in her right place as a missionary. This row, in my opinion, proves it!"

By this time the mission had established six stations, all of which were rather small, with only one or two missionaries working in each. In the background lay the fragile image of the mission in the Suwa area. In the early years, the local people had regarded missionary women as concubines of the men, since they all lived in the same big house. The Suwa area was, furthermore, very famous for its hot springs, spas and brothels, which made the missionaries keen on showing proper, Christian morals to the surrounding community.

All these incidents and matters taken together made the men very careful. They received local women only in the presence of their wives, and demanded that the missionary women avoid all contact with Japanese men. It seemed to be safest to restrict the women's field of work to Japanese children, and to reach local women merely through house calls. At women's public meetings, there was always the possibility that men would show up, as had been the case on occasion through the years. In addition to moral issues, the question that defined the boundaries of a missionary's work concerned the right to care for souls.

The discussion at the joint meeting was carefully recorded in the protocol, with some half a dozen remarks, and sent to the board in Helsinki. Based on this, the board put forward a six-point suggestion for the regulations. It said that "only

41. Kaarlo Salonen's letter to the board 6.2.1912. LEAF archives, Helsinki.
42. The Finnish mission stations and their foundation years: Shimosuwa 1905, Okaya, Fukushima and Sendagaya in Tokyo in 1907, and Iida in 1908. The Kamisuwa station was founded in 1912. LEAF archives, Helsinki.
43. Vithori Savolainen to Klas Henrik Ekroos, chairman of the mission board, 13.3.1911. LEAF archives.
missionary men have the post of a missionary, a position that includes the acts of preaching, pastoral counselling, church discipline and the distribution of the sacraments among both women and men, according to their post. Thus women are not missionaries but act as assistants in missionary work, in the areas where it is regarded proper and desirable, as in teaching women and children.44 The LEAF board thus joined the line of cautious Protestant missions, where “the role of women […] was still seen as primarily for women and children and always under ultimate male control”, like in British societies, as Peter Williams has shown.45

The Women Respond: Empowered by God

Siiri Uusitalo, Jenny Nylund and Rosa Hytönen46 wrote a response to the new regulations in March 1913.47 In their letter to the board they repeated most thoroughly the arguments they had already put forward the previous autumn at the joint meeting of the missionaries. The women concentrated on the first point “Who is a missionary?” Uusitalo, Nylund and Hytönen felt there were parts of the regulations that seemed “rude” to them. The women were very careful to stress that they did not regard themselves as missionaries in the same way as men. They did not demand the right to evangelise “freely among all people, we don’t want to act as parish priests.” This, then, was how the women responded to accusations that wanted “to take care of the congregation with two kinds of shepherds and dividing the congregation according to gender.” These accusations were the result of misinterpretation, although they had “unshrinkingly, and from sincere a heart” stated their opinion at the joint meeting and in its protocol. In their response to the board they wished to express a positive point of view of their position and responsibilities.

Without specific instructions, men in the mission could press women to work as they pleased. When the board finally issued regulations governing the missionaries’ work, the women saw it as the final step to being subjected to the authority of men. Being “an assistant” did not give the female missionaries any credit for their years of evangelising efforts, nor did it allow them to carry out the work they felt they were entitled to perform on the basis of their vocation as missionaries.

44. Protocol of the missionary board 3.1.1913. LEAF archives, Helsinki.
47. Siiri Uusitalo’s, Jenny Nylund’s and Rosa Hytönen’s response to the board 18.3.1913. LEAF archives, Helsinki. The following text refers to this document when talking about the response of Uusitalo, Nylund and Hytönen.
According to Uusitalo, Nylund and Hytönen, the terminology in itself was irrelevant, although they did not think “missionary” sounded very beautiful. Rather they regarded themselves as “messengers, God’s messengers”. The women thus pleaded to the highest authority possible and stated that it was for them to follow God’s instructions and not man’s. Hence, they denied the board the right to define gender as a criterion for a missionary. Pleading to God was a step in the direction of interpretation: after all, who could deny women the right to be a missionary, if it was God’s will? At the same time, they continued to weigh the might of the spiritual and secular powers.

According to Bjørg Seland, women in these positions were likely to use theological arguments and, with them, to express “a radical interpretation of the Lutheran ethics of vocation.” The Lutheran idea of a suitable vocation for women was inside the home, the boundaries of which missionary women had explicitly crossed. They were, in my opinion, in a position in which they did not dedicate themselves to the alternative, suitable calling for women outside home either, namely the nurturing calling in which they could function as deaconesses, teachers or nurses did. Missionary work presented a context within which one was bound to overstep the social and at the same time the gender boundaries. Seland interprets this “as a form of feminism” based on religious ideas, rather than a political ideology of emancipation. In the name of a God-given calling, the women felt justified in resisting obstacles, even those posed by their superiors.

The three women in question interpreted God’s will to the effect that He meant them to lead “mostly our sisters at the foot of His cross.” Work among women was not just distributing information or “assisting in teaching”, but caring for souls and providing education. Uusitalo, Nylund and Hytönen determined this as care of souls at all levels: teaching, reprimanding and straightening, i.e. church discipline, just as in Finland.

In their response, the women emphasized the meaning of education. They referred to the educational work of teachers, because “more than just teaching, education and upbringing” is demanded of school teachers. The care of souls was related to education, even the most ideal level of it. The Finnish mission to Japan differed from many other missions because it did not have schools of its own that would have offered the teacher-trained missionary women a working arena that matched their professional identity. In the early days of Shimosuwa, Siiri Uusitalo

Lady missionaries' home in Tokyo in early 1910s. Rosa Hytönen (left) is visiting Siiri Uusitalo and Hide Soejima. Photo courtesy of Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland (LEAF) archives, Helsinki.

and Ester Kurvinen had held English classes for local people, and among these there had been several young men. However, due to limited resources and emphasis on evangelism, the Finnish mission did not establish schools. Besides, in the early 20th century, many of the mission schools that had been exceedingly popular in the 1870’s and 1880’s were facing difficulties because of rather nationalistic educational legislation and the general atmosphere. In emphasizing the role of the teacher as an educator, the Finnish missionary women expressed their firm professional identity that, in their opinion, was put to best possible use in missionary work. Professional identity and a religious calling were by no means in conflict with one another, but instead formed a solid basis for self-reflection among the missionary women.

The women also referred to the religious practices exercised in Finland. According to them, these could also be applied to Japan. Work in a different culture was,
However, more than just planting one’s own set of values straight into new soil. Japanese society placed its own conditions on missionary work, and seemed to demand particularly that female missionaries work among local women. Uusitalo, Nylund and Hytönen stressed that a woman preferred to turn to a woman although a man would like to act as “a real shepherd of souls and lead them conscientiously.” To support their argument, they stated that women were more developed where “a woman works”. The circumstances in Japan were a compelling factor in this because the life spheres of the sexes were so clearly separate. This had to be taken into consideration because it was Christianity that was often accused of causing the social etiquette of a country to crumble.

The surrounding Japanese culture did have an influence on missionary work, as this work could not be carried out in a vacuum. Local custom demanded that men and women to a certain extent remained separated, but what were the limits? According to the missionary women, it was not possible to guide and raise a Japanese woman from an early age, and then on the eve of adulthood delegate the care of her soul to male missionaries. This was contrary to practices in Finland, too. Side by side with pastors, there were many kinds of workers, even societies such as YMCA and YWCA, who also had responsibilities in caring for souls.

Finally, the women reminded the board sharply of the practical objective of missionary work: to educate local Christians and the national church to act independently. Thus, the best caretaker of souls would be other Japanese, “and can be in such a developed country”. Foreigners should not strive for this post for “we, as a matter of fact, are their servants, instead of them being ours”. On this point, Uusitalo, Nylund and Hytönen sided with Tadao Watanabe and the other Japanese employees of the mission against the Finnish men. This also reflects the way women worked at grass-roots level, where personal contacts with local people counted most, whereas the men sought to be effective by converting through preaching to large groups at public meetings. This seems to be one of the broad patterns of the missionary context. According to Frank Salamone, women “tended to work on a day-to-day basis while men tended to reproduce the hierarchical structure with which they felt most comfortable.” Where the men paid attention to the broad picture and institutional side of the mission, the women tended “to think of people in need”.

---

A Struggle for Autonomy, not Equality

It is worth noticing that the female missionaries were in no way attempting to achieve equality with their male counterparts. On the contrary, they accepted the fact that the men had double their salary because of their theological education and because they had families to support. The women did not want positions as clerics to distribute the sacraments, but did consider it insulting that the board had defined “singing, playing, lecturing, and short stories” in public meetings as their main tasks. According to Uusitalo, Nylund and Hytönen, it was narrow-minded to dictate their responsibilities in such a detailed way, because it just could happen that “one is about to talk a little longer, even on the message of the Bible.” The board members, in other words, did not trust that the missionaries they themselves had selected could interpret and teach the word of the Bible. By defending their working practices among Japanese women and children, the women attempted to secure an autonomous position that would guarantee them as broad an arena to work in as possible, with or without regulations. Certainly, tasks strictly separated from those of the male missionaries would provide the women with almost absolute control over their own work, the most important aspect of which, to them, was evangelising, and not just attending to Japanese children. Although it was Rosa Hytönen who established the first kindergarten of the Finnish mission in Iida in 1913, she pointed out sarcastically to Jenny Nylund in a letter dated as late as December 1914 that “I didn’t come here to play, that’s for sure. If I had wanted to play, I’d rather do it in Finland.”

How can it be explained that after many years of vague supervision the regulations came to be so detailed? It is probable that the male missionaries, or at least some of them, felt that over the years, the female missionaries had attained too powerful and independent a position. They had been dominant at the beginning, that is for sure. If this was the case, it was the men’s opinions that found a better response in the minds of the board members. Missionaries on furlough in Finland were entitled to attend the mission board’s meetings, a right many used. The leaders of the association could, in this way, obtain first hand information from the mission in Japan. However, it would seem that it was the male missionaries’ voice that could be heard most distinctly at the heart of the new regulations. After five years of continuously expanding work, the board, in a situation when the missionaries’ relationships with one another were tense, decided to organize the work in a

53. The same conclusion can be found in Sandra C. Taylor’s study of American congregational women missionaries in Japan. Taylor 1979b: 45.
most detailed way. Paradoxically, it was this factor that seemed most threatening to the women, since the male missionaries' tendency to limit the women's line of work could be interpreted as canonised in the new regulations.

However, the guidelines did say that women ought to work among women and children. How, then, is Siiri Uusitalo's, Jenny Nylund's and Rosa Hytönen's persistent response to be interpreted? The women wanted to express how the new regulations gave the men who were in charge in the mission a free hand to interfere with the women's work in a most profound way. They regarded themselves as having been defeated, even left to mercy of their male colleagues, and this was also closely linked to the question of the persons involved. The personal relationships of the missionaries were by no means untroubled. Working periods were long, usually six years. The workload was abundant – never-ending even – and after all the effort and praying, the results seemed meagre and slow. The missionaries lived dependant on one another in isolated areas, and though living under the same roof, they did not necessarily share the same everyday experiences. The routines and mentalities of unmarried female missionaries might be completely different from that of the missionary men and their spouses. According to Frank Salamone, "men and women led different lives" in the mission field. 56

The missionaries who worked in Japan for many years, even decades, reached a deep level of acculturation, and this is especially true of missionary women. Family matters, children's education or illnesses did not redefine their relationship to work and private life. Some of the missionary women might not even have had a home to go back to in Finland. Only ageing parents, siblings with families, and old friends tied them to their home country, whereas professional identity, which was especially strong in missionaries, tied them closely to Japan. It became a new home country where Japanese female colleagues, Bible women, sometimes even foster children, represented the most beloved part of their lives. 57

From this position, it is understandable that Uusitalo, Nylund and Hytönen rose up to defend their autonomy and status as missionaries. One of the aims of the new regulations was to sharpen the organization of the mission. Thus, it was asserted that decisions about who was to be commissioned to which station would be made at the joint meeting of missionaries. Furthermore, Finnish missionary men were to act as foremen at the stations. This meant that a station manned by a married Japanese missionary and Finnish or Japanese women was under the control

57. For example, Siiri Uusitalo's diary reveals this most clearly. Every time she left Japan for Finland, the pain and sorrow grew stronger.
of a Finnish man. In their response to the board, Uusitalo, Nylund and Hytönen also reacted to this directive. The rule, in fact, meant that since the only missionaries in the stations besides the male missionary were Finnish women, it was the women who were placed under control of their male colleagues. In a small mission, like the Finnish one, they simply could not afford to place more missionaries in each station. According to the women, the rule showed distrust in their work. With very strong words they doubted whether the supervisor could carry out his duties: "because not even a man can do everything." As an example they brought up the case of a male missionary who had recently arrived in Japan and had immediately been placed as the supervisor of the Suwa mission station with no knowledge of, among other things, the Japanese language or the women's line of work. Uusitalo, Nylund and Hytönen demanded that the person in charge of a station should also have a superior. The board had not named nor did it afterwards name anyone as the head of the whole Finnish mission in Japan.  

For a long time, missionary women struggled for the right to be posted to a station with a Japanese cleric and his family, something not permitted until the autumn of 1914 after Jenny Nylund had personally attended a meeting of the mission board in Finland to suggest this. However, the joy was premature, as Rosa Hytönen wrote to Jenny Nylund in December 1914: "here [the men] laughed and said that it depends on whether it is accepted here." This fear was not completely unjustified. Although the regulations were very detailed, they did authorise the station head to interfere with the duties of individual missionaries, and through this to affect the significance of their whole being.

The Aftermath

The fierce response of the three women was read aloud at the meeting of the mission board in April 1913, but the board decided not to take it into consideration. Instead it concluded that Uusitalo, Nylund and Hytönen had misunderstood the regulations. No doubt the women had been thorough in their argumentation. They had concentrated on pointing out the threats that faced the status of female missionaries, but the mission board disregarded their criticism. Obviously neither the mission board nor the board of the association understood the situation of the mission in Japan, since their action was based on concerned letters from Japan.

---

58. Later the board ordered the most senior male missionary to act as the foreman of the mission in Japan. In new regulations issued in 1928 the foreman was to be elected among the Finnish male missionaries for a period of two years. Ohjesäännöt työntekijöitä ja seurakuntia varten Japanissa ('Regulations for workers and parishes in Japan'), Suomen Luterilainen Evankeliumiyhdistys, Helsinki 1928.
and occasional visits to the meetings by the missionaries. The board relied on the conventional line of action: it demanded that the missionaries live in harmony and love with one another, indicating implicitly that the women should submit to the men. In practice, this meant that the superior should treat his subordinate with justice, while the subordinate in turn would have to adjust to guidance and supervision. Although the missionary women had pleaded God’s will and authority, the secular power represented by the men of the association, both in Finland and in Japan, overruled them. The yardstick for the correct interpretation of God’s will remained in the hands of the men, the missionaries and the board members.

The board of the association finally confirmed the new regulations in June 1913, and the missionaries in Japan adjusted. Surprisingly enough, all this time accord had been better in the actual work situation, whereas the meetings provided a forum for discussions on fundamental issues. It is probable that taking personal relationships into consideration when posting missionaries to the various stations helped avoid serious clashes.

The aftermath of the controversy occurred at the same time as the beginning of the First World War, and this reduced the activities of the Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland in Japan. Only two new missionaries came to the field between 1914 and 1925, and both were men. After Uusitalo, Nylund and Hytönen, the first unmarried female missionary was not sent to Japan until 1926. Tyyne Niemi was a kindergarten teacher by profession, and this was the position she came to fill in Japan. Possibly the board regarded it safer to appoint women to work among Japanese children. This was exactly what the missionary men had strived to do, and what originally triggered off the controversy. The new mission station in Hokkaido in northern Japan also separated the rather dense group geographically from 1916 onwards. Most likely the intensity of the crisis was further reduced due to the fact that many of the missionaries involved in the dispute returned to Finland for regular furloughs and in this way may have managed to put things into perspective.

The dispute over the role of women as missionaries was the first major crisis in the life of the young Finnish mission in Japan. During the process, the unorganised and vague situation took on firm lines, and open conflict was unavoidable. The fact that missionary women had acquired a way of interpreting spiritual power as contradicting the authority of the men stretched the structures of their hierarchy and created, to some extent at least, space for women’s work. Although the results for the women were quite meagre, the dispute shows that there was room for them to speak out, even when using rather forthright rhetoric. Although their case was eventually turned down, they were entitled to submit their arguments without
restraint. As a consequence no one left the mission, and of the three women at the core of the conflict, Siiri Uusitalo worked in Japan for almost thirty years, Rosa Hytönen returned to Japan as the second wife of Reverend Kaarlo Salonen, and Jenny Nylund worked in Japan in 1917–21 and further continued at her own expense as a pensioner in the 1950s after a successful career as the headmistress of an evangelical institution.

The women’s arguments in the dispute may also be interpreted as an expression of the ideas that were widespread through the mission movement in those days. Although the LEAF missionaries did not cooperate with missionaries of other denominations in Japan and were in fact specifically requested not to do so, they kept in touch informally with Protestant missionaries from other countries, sharing their ideas and experiences.60 In addition, the case shows that the boundaries of ‘white power’ were not tight: the Finnish missionary women crossed the borders of their own cultural background and ethnicity in defending their Japanese co-workers. They had risen to defend their status as missionaries by seeking support in the theological interpretation of their God-given calling, and by joining forces with the other defendants of the mission, the Japanese men and women.

60. Rosa Hytönen wrote to Jenny Nylund that she had been talking to an English missionary woman who had stated that the same kind of disputes the Finns were experiencing had in their denomination led to the establishment of a missionary society consisting solely of women. Hytönen was careful to warn Nylund not to tell anyone she had been talking to an outsider about the discussions in their mission. Rosa Hytönen to Jenny Nylund 19.12.1914. LEAF archives, Helsinki.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Haggis, Jane, “A heart that has felt the love of God and longs for others to know it’s conventions of gender, tensions of self and constructions of difference in offering to be a lady missionary”. Women’s History Review, Volume 7, No. 2, 1998.


Karin Sarja

The Missionary Career of Baroness Hedvig Posse
1887–1913

KARIN SARJA received her doctoral degree in Mission Studies at the Faculty of Theology, Uppsala University in 2002. Her dissertation is published as “Annu en syster till Afrika.” Trettiosex kvinnliga missionärer i Natal och Zululand 1876–1902. (With an English summary: “Yet another Sister for Africa.” Thirty-six Female Missionaries in Natal and Zululand 1876–1902) Studia Missionalia Svecana 88, Svenska Institutet för Missionsforskning, Uppsala 2002. She has taught missiology and mission history with special focus on gender at the Faculty of Theology in Uppsala. Karin Sarja is currently Lecturer at the University of Gävle, Sweden.
The majority of the missionaries in the Protestant missionary period from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century were women. Nowadays, this is a relatively well-established fact if all categories of Western missionaries are included: men (almost all married), unmarried and married women. Also in modern Swedish mission history, the number of women has been very considerable: in most periods of the twentieth century one third of the missionaries were unmarried women, one third married women, and one third (married) men.¹

Among all the Swedish women who devoted their lives to missionary work in “foreign” countries during the previous centuries, there is one in particular who appears as a very remarkable person: the aristocratic, wealthy, and many-talented Hedvig Posse (1861–1927). Even if she is not representative of Swedish female missionaries, she is nevertheless not unique as an unmarried upper-class woman in late nineteenth-century society. In mission history, several upper-class or upper middle-class women worked as missionaries.² Many of them were of independent means, and this offered them opportunities to take initiatives of their own. In this way they could influence missionary organisations that were often characterised by a patriarchal hierarchy and subjection of female missionaries, and in which the formal power was masculine. Women like Hedvig Posse challenged such structures, and the challenges often took the form of independent initiatives, which were not incorporated into the more established modes of work in missionary organisations until at a later stage. In many ways Hedvig Posse appears as a missionary who is indeed worthy of a biographical article dealing with issues emphasizing her missionary work in Natal, South Africa.

Hedvig Posse was a missionary in the Church of Sweden Mission [herinafter referred to as CSM] between 1887 and 1913. During the first ten years, Hedvig Posse worked at the Oscarsberg mission station situated at Rorke’s Drift, northern Natal. In Zulu the area was called eShiyane. Above all, her assignments included

² For examples of this category of women, see for instance Jane Waterson, who was a pioneer physician and missionary in South African history in Lucy Bean and Elizabeth van Heyningen, eds., The Letters of Jane Elizabeth Waterson, Van Riebeeck Society, Second Series, No. 14, Cape Town. 1983, and the British woman Mabel Warburton, active as a missionary in Palestine, whose life is described in Inger Marie Okkenhaug, ”The Quality of Heroic Living, of High Endeavour and Adventure”: Anglican Mission, Women and Education in Palestine 1888–1948, Brill. 2002 and Inger Marie Okkenhaug, ”Warburton, Mabel Clarisse” in New Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.
teaching Zulus in schools and so-called orphanages. In the next stage of her missionary activity, 1898–1901, Hedvig Posse worked in the flourishing town of Dundee, also in northern Natal, where mining required more and more African labour. In Dundee, Hedvig Posse built the Bethany mission hospital, which was to be the first of its kind in CSM history. However, missionary work in Dundee had to be broken off hastily when Hedvig Posse and others were required to leave the town in 1899 because of the South African war that was raging through the area at that time. After a long period in Sweden, primarily because of failing health, Hedvig Posse returned to work at Oscarsberg from 1904 to 1913, after which period she finally left South Africa and her missionary service. The subsequent years up to her death in 1927 she spent in Sweden. During her career as a missionary she was versatile, and in addition to the work already mentioned, she also made translations and produced water-colour paintings; she devoted herself to photography and the documentation of Zulu songs; she built houses, and she paid missionary visits to villages in the area and made a number of journeys throughout the large network she had established.

In this article I will first present Hedvig Posse's background based on earlier research into the Posse family, which was well established in Swedish society and provided a means whereby Hedvig Posse already had a position in her own right.
when she entered into service in CSM. I will then deal chronologically with Hedvig Posse’s missionary work in South Africa, which most importantly will show her relationship with South African society and with the structures of the missionary organisation. There were in fact three levels in the missionary organisation that were all, to varying degrees, characterised by a patriarchal hierarchy and female subjection. However, since there were several levels, there were opportunities for Hedvig Posse and her female fellow-workers to gain space and influence.

CSM was an official, traditional Lutheran mission inside the Swedish State Church, with church mission as the dominating mission theology. The missionary profession was composed of male, ordained missionaries. Missionary work was to preach God’s words, to administer the sacraments and to establish congregations in the so-called Third World. When unmarried women arrived, therefore, they challenged the view both concerning who was to be looked upon as a missionary and also what was to be considered missionary work. The unmarried women were consequently called female missionary workers or women teachers, the latter as the first women worked most frequently as teachers, not as missionaries. It was important to find activities that did not conflict with the words in the Bible about the subjection of women and the words of Paul directed against the women’s public activities, as they were called at the time. Working in orphanages and schools was considered to be a suitable occupation for unmarried women rather than preaching and working to establish congregations.

It was conditions such as these that guided the three levels in CSM within which Hedvig Posse worked. The first level was the central management of CSM in Sweden which had overall responsibility for missionary work and whose board consisted only of men. The second level was the mission station in South Africa where much of the work of the female missionaries was carried out and where everyday life was lived. In CSM it was taken for granted that the position of so-called station manager was held by a male missionary, and female missionaries were consequently subordinated to a male “patriarch”. The third level within CSM was beginning to be formed in South Africa at the end of the 1880s, namely in the so-called missionary conference where only male missionaries were allowed to vote and where a male missionary was elected conference chairman, a position that implied a certain authority over missionary work in Natal and Zululand. Formally, however, this missionary conference was subject to the board in Sweden. In this

---

4. The unmarried female missionaries were allowed one voting representative at the missionary conference of 1921. South Africa, Umpumulo, Umpumulo Lutheran Church Centre Archive, uncatalogued material, §1 at the missionary conference, October 10, 1921. African Christians did not attend the formal meetings of the missionary conference; nor did they vote.
way Hedvig Posse and her women colleagues came to find themselves in a state of tension within three structures governed by men. How did Hedvig Posse arrange her missionary work in relation to the three levels within CSM, and how did she act to gain influence and space in this organisation to implement her visions for church and society in South Africa?

Important issues for consideration are, among others, the impact of the work of the women missionaries on African society and the relationship of the missionaries with both Africans and British colonial authorities. This article will touch on such issues in connection with Hedvig Posse's work, but only to a very limited extent.

In the case of Hedvig Posse, the amount of material available is unusually rich. Above all it consists of a collection of several hundred letters to her sister Anna Posse in Sweden, whose surname when married was Lövgren. Furthermore, there are letters from Hedvig Posse to other contact persons in Sweden and to the central board of CSM. Apart from this extensive number of letters, the picture is further supplemented by CSM minutes and material published in the CSM journal called *Missions-Tidning under inseende af Svenska Kyrkans Missionsstyrelse* [Mission Journal Supervised by the Church of Sweden Mission Board] (henceforth abbreviated CSMJ), in which Hedvig Posse is represented. Moreover, material is drawn from memoirs of the South Africa mission and Hedvig Posse's own memoirs. In addition, Hedvig Posse published a sixty-page text called *A Visit to the Oscarsberg Mission Station* in 1899, the contents of which are used in the present article. Material about and by Hedvig Posse is consequently considerable, and a more extensive biographical work about her would be interesting and something to be wished for.

This article is based largely on Hedvig Posse's own letters supplemented by material already mentioned as well as material from the national archives in Cape Town. Though I am aware of the critical problems raised by sources of this kind, I still think that Hedvig Posse's posthumous collections provide opportunities for scholars to explore how a specific and in many ways extraordinary woman worked, acted, and looked upon the conflicts which arose from her missionary work. Of course the Hedvig Posse material also gives rise to other issues that may be pursued, but in this context delimitation has been important.

Earlier scholarly works have referred to Hedvig Posse within the frame of CSM history, both in relation to South Africa and to women's history. As early as 1962, Tore Furberg called attention to Hedvig Posse in his dissertation about CSM

---

5. Hedvig Posse's letters to Anna Lövgren, née Posse, between the years of 1887 and 1912 are to be found in Uppsala, Sweden, in the Church of Sweden Mission Archives (henceforth CSMA), the Hedvig Posse collection. Anna Posse's (Lövgren's) letters to Hedvig Posse between the years of 1893 and 1920 are kept at Uppsala University Library, Sweden. Uncatalogued material. The Nils Lövgren collection, 473. A. Letters to Hedvig Posse from Anna Lövgren (A. Posse).
between the years 1868 to 1901. Furberg's main interest concerned the formation of CSM as a typical church mission with consequences for mission management and missionary work in both South Africa and India. In Furberg's study, Hedvig Posse is described from the perspective of the extensive issues related to the growth of the church mission, and this perspective does not emphasise important aspects of her missionary activities, and her work after 1901 is not taken into consideration at all. Lars Berge, too, has studied CSM's history in South Africa in a dissertation written in 2000. Here the period is 1902–1910, and the dissertation explores the relations between the Swedish missionaries, British colonial authorities and the rising, independent Zulu church. Berge refers to Hedvig Posse in contexts such as the South African war of 1899–1902, the Bambatha uprising in 1906 and the burgeoning claims for independence from Zulu evangelists such as Daniel Magwaza. However, there is no detailed treatment of Hedvig Posse or the work of other female missionaries in Lars Berge's dissertation.

In this context, three different articles should also be mentioned. The pioneering article by Bengt Sundkler on the history of female missionaries in CSM refers to Hedvig Posse with an interesting emphasis on, above all, her Anglo-Saxon contacts, and I will return to this text later. Hedvig Posse's initiative to document Zulu music during the years 1908–09 has been foregrounded by Lester Wikström in a comprehensive article, the material for which has been gathered from the Hedvig Posse collection of letters. Finally, I would like to mention Siri Dahlquist's portrait of Hedvig Posse for the 75th anniversary of CSM in 1949, because it has contributed useful knowledge on Hedvig Posse's life in Sweden after the end of her missionary service.

Thus previous research has dealt with Hedvig Posse in the context of restricted periods and therefore the material she left behind has not been examined as systematically earlier as in this article. I also think that it is interesting to approach Hedvig Posse for the first time with impulses from scholarly works in women's history about gender, power, the hierarchy in missionary organisations, and an actor perspective as the underlying theoretical prerequisites.

---

10. Siri Dahlquist about Hedvig Posse in ”Pionjärer och ledare i Sydafrika”, in Svenska Kyrkans Mission Sjutiofem år, Svenska Kyrkans Missionsstyrelse, Uppsala, 1949: 130–133. Karin Sarja has dealt with Hedvig Posse and parts of this article in ”Självständighet och underordning. Kvinnoroll och kvinnliga missions-
Hedvig Posse’s Choice of CSM

Hedvig Posse belonged to the aristocratic upper class in Sweden, even though the aristocracy had been deprived of formal power since the beginning of the social reconstruction of the mid-nineteenth century. She came from a family that was well established in church circles. Her mother, Betty Ehrenborg Posse, was a well-known author and as early as the 1830s, she founded a teacher-training institution for women. In one of her many activities, the mother was in contact with Fredrika Bremer, a prominent figure in the woman’s movement in Sweden. Early on, Betty Posse was influenced by Anglo-Saxon revival hymns, and everything indicates that the family had well developed contacts with England. That the mother had much more influence on Hedvig Posse than the father is evident, because the father, Johan August Posse, died when Hedvig was only four years old. After this, the three children – August Mikael Posse, a future clergyman and missionary; Anna Posse, who became a parish deaconess in the 1890s, and Hedvig Posse – lived together with their mother. Betty Posse died when the South African missionary-to-be was 19 years old. The future of the three children was financially secure after the death of their two parents. From 1880 to 1887, when she entered CSM service, Hedvig Posse lived with her brother and sister, but it is difficult to be sure what she actually devoted her time to, as biographical material from this period is scarce.

Both Hedvig Posse and her brother took an active part in the Student Mission Association in Uppsala where H. W. Tottie no doubt influenced Hedvig Posse’s choice of career, since he became mission secretary in CSM as early as in 1883. Rumours of the time even claimed that Miss Posse in Uppsala was engaged to be married to Mr Tottie, a report that was to greet Hedvig Posse when she arrived in South Africa. According to her, this rumour resulted in her future missionary colleagues’ holding her in too high respect.

Thus, in her religious outlook Hedvig Posse belonged partly to the Student Mission Association mentioned above, partly to the Low Church revival movement.
in the Church of Sweden, a movement that would find expression in Evangeliska Fosterlandsstiftelsen [The Swedish Evangelical Mission] with Carl Olof Rosenius as the central figure and with missionary activities of its own. Consequently Hedvig Posse could have applied to enter that mission instead of CSM, but personal contacts doubtlessly decided her in favour of CSM and no other organisation. Furthermore, Hedvig Posse’s family had probably already come under the influence of the Stockholm revival movement around Lord Radstock before they moved to Uppsala.13

Hedvig Posse lacked the formal training and diploma that were to be natural prerequisites for the employment of other women in CSM. However, everything indicates that she had received private tuition while growing up, and that she had a command of English even before her employment as a missionary. In addition, her mother was, as we know, an early promoter of women’s education. Yet Hedvig Posse was in many ways an extraordinary person already when entering into service with CSM, and her shortcomings were in one way or another counterbalanced by the fact that she came from a well-established, aristocratic family with influence on the Swedish State Church, and by the fact that she offered to pay for her own journey to South Africa if she were to be accepted for service. Hedvig Posse’s application did not come as a response to some CSM job advertisement; rather it was an independent initiative connected in turn to personal experiences in the life of the future missionary. Her brother died in 1887, and a future as clergyman and missionary had been planned for him, as already mentioned.14 It was in connection with his death that Hedvig Posse wrote her letter of application to the CSM board, and she was very specific in her choice of the country in which she wanted to be a missionary. She knew she had no training as a teacher or the like, but this shortcoming, she claimed in her application, was outweighed by her experience of God calling her to become a missionary who would lead “heathen children” to the Christian faith.15

15. CSM Archive, A 114, the minutes of the Mission Board 1887–1990. Appendix E to the minutes dated 11.3.1887, Hedvig Posse’s application. Hedvig Posse dated her calling to missionary service to 1884, but she did not enter service until three years later when her brother died. At her first official appearance at the Huguenot Seminary in Wellington, Hedvig Posse recounted the story of her brother’s death in Switzerland and how she then wrote her letter to the Mission detailing her experience of being called to missionary service. South Africa, Cape Town, State Archive, Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk Archive. Huguenote Seminarie (Wellington), V 11, 2/3/1 Bruwe. Sept. 1873–Dec. 1897, A. P. Ferguson to M. Allen 9.8.1887.
Earlier scholarly works on aristocratic Swedish women maintain that their lives were confined to family and relatives. This was even more so for unmarried women within the aristocracy who had to care for ageing parents and, when the parents died, assisted their female relatives with housework in their homes. The number of unmarried noble women rose from the 1850s due to a shortage of men within the group and increasing social levelling. After the death of her parents and her brother and with only one unmarried sister, Hedvig Posse had no close family bonds to take into consideration. She made her own choice at a time in her life when she was economically as well as socially independent. In 1894, in a letter to her sister, who by then had become a deaconess in the Church of Sweden, Hedvig Posse writes: “God is good who rescued us from a passive life in high society ... imagine going to the same meaningless parties year after year”. Thus it was clear that when entering CSM service, Hedvig Posse was an extraordinary future missionary, both because she paid her own fare to South Africa and because she possessed the means to sidestep the formal requirements to training to which other women in CSM’s history were subjected. For CSM, Hedvig Posse was of course a “find” for missionary circles, thanks to her aristocratic origins, her financial position and her important contacts.

Inspiration and Network among Female Missionaries in South Africa

Hedvig Posse’s independence also became obvious when she first arrived in South Africa. On her own initiative and at her own expense, she visited different missionary institutions in order to educate herself further in missionary work. During these visits, she met pioneer women working in South Africa, women who became role models and who inspired her in her future work. Through these visits Hedvig Posse also established a network that was to become quite unique among CSM’s female missionaries. There were two North American mission enterprises that became of vital importance. The first was the Inanda institution of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, commonly known as the American Board, (situated 30 km north west of Durban). The second was the Huguenot Seminary in Wellington in the Cape Region. This institution had close links with Mount Holyoke Seminary in South Hadely, Massachusetts, USA, and this also

17. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse 14–15.5.1894.
18. “Meddelande” i CSMJ 6/1887: 126, and “Svenska Kyrkans Mission” i CSMJ 8/1887: 176. That she travelled at her own expense and on her own initiative can be assumed since no decision about these visits is recorded in the minutes of CSM’s board.
put its stamp on developments at Inanda. Both Inanda and the mission schools, influenced by the Seminary in Wellington and their Mount Holyoke model, argued that one important goal for their work was to raise young African girls to become good Christian mothers and wives.19

In the American Board, the Holyoke seminary was to appear as the decisive inspiration for an extensive group of female missionaries who subsequently would work in wider international contexts. This was one of the leading institutions for the training of female missionaries from the USA in the mid-nineteenth century, and it was often the assignment of these Mount Holyoke-trained women to establish girls' school and orphanage activities on the same model under which they themselves had been trained. The best known seminary influenced by Mount Holyoke ideas was the already mentioned Huguenot seminary in Wellington, and the influence which seminaries such as these had on female missionaries was great, also on those who came from countries other than the North Americas.20 The female teachers in Wellington were eager visitors to seminaries that had activities for African girls, and female missionaries among the Zulu people came regularly to visit the Holyoke schools to discuss their work. Women’s work for women, the main task of the female missionaries, was therefore strongly influenced by Mount Holyoke. The mission which women performed had a common goal: to bring up Christian wives, mothers, female teachers, and female missionaries.

With her international contacts, Hedvig Posse soon became interested in the Huguenot seminary and its contacts with Mount Holyoke, and already on 28 July 1887, she visited the seminary in Wellington. This seminary was sizeable at the time of Hedvig Posse’s visit. About 150 girls and women lived in the home and another 150 participated in the training programmes.21 During a short visit to

---


20. The great importance the Mount Holyoke seminary would have for the education of women in South Africa and for future contributions by female missionaries in the country is closely connected to the South African revivalist Andrew Murray. As a pioneer in the Dutch Reformed Church, Murray searched for resources that would enable him to offer education to Afrikaans-speaking girls. The expectation was that they would be future missionaries. With this goal in mind, he contacted the Mount Holyoke Seminary in the USA and inspired Abbie Ferguson and Anna Bliss to come to Wellington to lay the foundations for the Huguenot Seminary.

Worcester, a similar institution inspired by Mount Holyoke Seminary, Hedvig Posse had the opportunity for the first time of leading the training.22 Hedvig Posse stayed in Wellington for almost three months and apparently made an impression on her female colleagues. Abbie Ferguson, one of the founders of the Huguenot seminary, writes in a letter to her sister Maggie Allen in August 1887: “Miss Posse is to stay two months with us to learn all the ..., thinking that it must be of advantage to her in Natal, so you will hear more of her.” In the same letter “the Baroness” Posse is described as “between twenty and twenty-five, must be nearly six feet tall, has a sweet gentle face, is quite modest almost ... such a dear body”. The estimation also included the fact that Hedvig Posse was an “earnest Christian,” and that her English was good.23

Not only Wellington and Worcester, but also the well-known mission institution of Inanda was a source of inspiration for Hedvig Posse. Here the setting was different. This was a women’s mission in Natal and provided training in the local environment. At Inanda, an important part of the missionary goal was to raise young Zulu girls to become good Christian mothers and wives, similar to the goal of the mission schools influenced by the Wellington seminary and their Mount Holyoke model. For Hedvig Posse, the aim of her visit to Inanda was the same as the aim of her visit to Wellington: to gain experience she could also use in the service she was waiting for at the Oscarsberg mission station.24 The female missionary was influenced by Inanda, and in a letter home to her sister in Sweden she writes about the dream she wanted to realise in her mission work:

You can understand that I would like to have a school with 50 Zulu girls and, like Mrs Edwards, take care of the lessons and, moreover, the supervision of it all. And to have a large garden where they would work with whatever was needed to produce maize, etc, enough for the need of the household. But this is now an outlook for the very distant future, and one needs to learn how to wait.25

---

22. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse, 5.8.1887.
25. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse, 22.10.1887. See also Sundkler 1974: 77.
Oscarsberg from 1887 – Labour and Conflict

After her inspiring introduction to South Africa, Hedvig Posse started working at the Oscarsberg mission in November 1887, in whose service Ida Jonatansson was already participating. The contacts between the Swedish missionaries, particularly Hedvig Posse, and the Huguenot seminary continued for many years, as did contact with Inanda. This networking between female missionaries from different countries was decisive in strengthening the position of women in mission work. Experiences could be exchanged, and college homes were safe havens in times of turmoil or when women felt overworked.

For Hedvig Posse, her contact with Wellington and Inanda was not only comprehensive; it also served as inspiring education for mission work at Oscarsberg, an education which she lacked formally when entering CSM. This training for women at established mission stations was prestigious, and there is every indication that Hedvig Posse, to judge from the quotation above, had a clear vision of how the work was to be organised. Hedvig Posse also maintained contact with the Huguenot Seminary, and Abbie Ferguson visited Oscarsberg in the summer of 1888. Abbie Ferguson wrote to her sister and gave an account of Hedvig Posse’s and Ida Jonatansson’s work. She was impressed with their success and progress in raising the Zulu girls who lived together with the two women missionaries. At this time, eighteen girls lived at the Oscarsberg station and another thirty girls were taught in the day school.

26. The Oscarsberg mission station was situated in the British colony of Natal which bordered on Zululand at Rorke’s Drift by the Thukela river, where the British were guilty of the brutal destruction of the Zulu kingdom, and in 1887 they conquered parts of it as yet another British colony. The British colonial authorities’ demand to impose a hut tax on the Africans, and the ever-increasing labour emigration among African men from the rural areas to mining towns to earn cash money are only two ingredients of the period. Thus Hedvig Posse started her work in a society that was exposed to more and more change. See further in Jeff Guy, The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom: The Civil War in Zululand 1879–1884. University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1994. The female missionaries in CSM, and among them Hedvig Posse, were far from alone in their mission work in schools and so-called orphanages. As a matter of fact, the missionary density in Natal was considerable, and in contemporary scholarly works the history of female missionaries has been interesting from the point of view of what African girls and women were taught during this transitional period in South Africa. See further, for example, Deborah Gaitskell, “Housewives, Maids or Mothers? Some Contradictions of Domesticity for Christian Women in Johannesburg, 1903–1939,” in Journal of African History, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1983: 241–256, and “Devout Domesticity? A Century of African Women’s Christianity in South Africa,” in Cheryl Walker, ed., 1990: 251–272.

27. Ida Jonatansson was a primary school teacher, and she was the first unmarried female missionary in CSM’s history, admitted in 1884. The most common profession for the first generation unmarried CSM female missionaries was that of schoolteacher, and until 1920 almost two-thirds of the women employed in South Africa were teachers. The remainder were nurses or deaconesses. The numerical dominance of women was significant in South Africa. Until 1920, forty women, unmarried as well as married, and twenty-four men had been sent by CSM to South Africa. Biographical notes in Svensko Kyrkons Missionsstyrelse och Missionsorbetore 1874-1925. Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelses Bokforlag. Stockholm, 1926 and in Svenska Kyrkans Mission Sjuttiofem år, Svenska Kyrkans Missionsstyrelse. Uppsala, 1949: 501–517.

28. Hedvig Posse also had regular contact with, among others, the two Lorimer sisters at the Gordon Memorial Scottish Presbyterian mission station. See for example CSM Archives, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse, 15.1.1888.

At Oscarsberg, the mission work of Hedvig Posse and her colleague Ida Jonatansson at the school and in the orphanage would soon be overshadowed by a conflict between the two women on the one hand and their superior Otto Witt, the male mission manager, on the other. This conflict concerned not least questions about women missionaries' right to pursue their professional work. Hedvig Posse's actions in this connection should be seen against the background of her own training at and contact with Wellington and Inanda, both of which reinforced her determination before starting her future missionary tasks. The conflict at the Oscarsberg mission station is also interesting if one considers the actions of the two female missionaries in relation to the two different levels of decision-making processes in the organisation of the mission: the CSM board in Sweden on the one hand and the male director at the mission station on the other. At this time, the mission conference had not yet taken firm shape within CSM in South Africa.

Earlier scholarly works have dealt first and foremost with the controversy around Otto Witt, which is relatively well known in CSM history as a confessional conflict of doctrine, and its principal importance to women's mission work has been suggested. Otto Witt's theological direction had consequences for his views on mission practice, and he questioned the significance of schools, orphanages, and even mission stations in the mission work itself.\textsuperscript{30} My opinion is, however, that in daily life at Oscarsberg for Hedvig Posse and Ida Jonatansson, this conflict also came to include the issue of the unmarried female missionaries' right to carry out the work for which they were employed, that is, school teaching and running the orphanage. Thanks to the material Hedvig Posse left behind and in the light of contributions to scholarly works on women's history, this conflict is an interesting example of female missionaries' actions to defend their right to independent work. Thus the conflict touched on at least three different areas: strategic questions about mission content, confessional questions, and, finally, the subjection of the unmarried female missionaries to the male missionary in the mission practice, that is, the question of power, on which Hedvig Posse's and Ida Jonatansson's posthumous papers shed considerable light.

The conflict between the male and female missionaries also had consequences for the priorities in the mission's work. Hedvig Posse and Ida Jonatansson wanted to work on tasks they thought they had been employed to carry out, whereas the male missionary thought that they should look after his sickly wife, and take care

of his children and household.\textsuperscript{31} During certain periods it was Hedvig Posse’s duty alone to perform the work of both women in the school and orphanage, whereas Ida Jonatansson took care of the Witt family more or less full time.\textsuperscript{32} At this time, about fifteen girls lived with the female missionaries, and in addition thirty girls and boys were taught in the school during the day. This extensive work was thus the sole responsibility of Hedvig Posse.\textsuperscript{33}

The purpose of the school at the mission station was to teach the Christian faith and other subjects and to instruct Africans so that they could read the Bible on their own and become Christians. The teaching of girls and young women at the orphanages was said to bring them up to become good Christian wives and mothers. Through the girls and the young women, their families could also be reached, both the parental families of the girls and their own future families. The education of Zulu girls also included Western “civilized” customs and practices.\textsuperscript{34}

The fact that the place where Zulu girls and young women stayed was called an orphanage in spite of the fact that the majority of the Zulus living there were not orphans illustrates a number of important aspects. For Hedvig Posse and her female colleagues it was important that the girls were taken away from their home settings, since, according to the missionaries, their homes were most often “heathen” and exerted a bad influence on the girls. Furthermore, Hedvig Posse was critical of long school vacations, since the girls ran the risk of forgetting their Western education because of their absences. At Oscarsberg there was established an alternative home which contained everything from new “mummies”, that is, the female missionaries, to new Christmas celebrations. But there were also practical considerations behind Hedvig Posse’s conviction that the orphanages fulfilled an important task for the mission. Here she writes about all the things the girls were to learn, stating that a longer period of time was needed to reach those goals, and she also writes about the intentions behind the establishment of orphanages in the mission:
... that the girls will have the opportunity of learning to read, but they also need to learn to become capable wives for Christian men, and therefore, apart from carrying out common chores such as hoeing, weeding, and harvesting the fields, grinding maize and cooking food, they should also learn to clean, to bake bread, to wash, mend, cut and sew clothes, and for all this, the few years they remain with us will hardly be sufficient.35

In the beginning we hoped, I think, that we would keep the girls for many years in order to educate them to become capable, Christian women. Through the training and the company at the mission we wanted, to some essential degree, to release them from their heathen attitudes and their heathen nature.36

Hedvig Posse’s working day was intense, always surrounded by the girls and young women who lived at the mission. An ordinary day at the Oscarsberg mission might be as follows: an early rise with morning prayer and practical work before breakfast, four hours of teaching before lunch, followed by housework such as washing, sewing, gardening, and agricultural work. Agriculture was essential to the economy of the station. After supper there followed an hour of teaching, and then the day closed with evening prayer. Conditions were rustic and simple, and the girls and young women slept on mats on the floor with grass pillows, and the staple food was maize. On Sundays the pastor held two services: one in Swedish and one in Zulu.37 After worship at the mission station, visits were made to the villages, and during these kraal visits Hedvig Posse together with Zulu girls who lived at the mission station, proclaimed the Gospel to the villagers.38 In this way, they circumvented the guidelines drawn up by the CSM board to the effect that female missionaries should not preach publicly.

According to the missionaries themselves, the Zulu girls and young women came to live together with female missionaries for different reasons. From the letters it is evident, for instance, that some girls wanted to avoid an unwanted marriage, while others wanted to come to the mission to learn to read – the most frequent reason in the letters – and/or they wanted to acquire Western clothes. I find it difficult to have a definite opinion about why girls and women came to Hedvig Posse’s and Ida Jonatansson’s home, because the material from the missionaries may be coloured by a wish to paint life for the Zulus before and after they came into contact with the mission, and particularly after the christening, in contrasting colours.

37 The description of Hedvig Posse’s daily life at Oscarsberg is a compilation of several letters, for example the CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse, 20.11.1887, 19.2.1888.
The CSM board in Sweden had employed Hedvig Posse and Ida Jonatansson for the kind of mission work among girls and young women that I have described here (perhaps with the exception of visiting missions to the villages, since such mission work included women speaking in public). However, the conflict with the male station manager resulted in the female missionaries' work being pushed into the background and replaced by household chores for the male missionary and his family. Differences of opinion in mission strategy, too, made Hedvig Posse and Ida Jonatansson place more emphasis on schools and orphanages in the mission than Otto Witt did.

In this state of conflict Hedvig Posse and Ida Jonatansson acted by writing various letters to the CSM board in Sweden. Those letters forced a statement from the board in which it was emphasised that unmarried female missionaries were only to work on the tasks assigned to them when the board employed them, namely teaching in schools and working in orphanages, and that they could in no way be used to work in the household of male missionaries. Another step taken by the female missionaries was to call the CSM mission board's attention to the need to employ a maid for the Witt family. In this way Hedvig Posse and her colleague protected their independence as missionaries by an exhortation to the board to employ a maid to do the work the unmarried female missionaries were now required to perform for the missionary's family. The ability to take such action was made possible by the contacts that Hedvig Posse and Ida Jonatansson had with central names among CSM's directors, and as a consequence they could play local male superiority off against the male authority of the CSM board in Sweden. The women could also make use of CSM's attitude to mission work, emphasising mission stations and the training of Africans, and set it against Otto Witt's idea of a mission without established institutions. In fact, Otto Witt's line of approach, which among other things excluded orphanages in the mission, was devastating for Hedvig Posse and Ida Jonatansson and their possibilities to continue as missionaries in CSM.

Hedvig Posse's awareness of the fact that she was employed by the Lutheran CSM and that her employment did not include certain tasks was also expressed in the confessional conflict with Otto Witt, and particularly in the question about

41. Hedvig Posse maintained contact with H. W. Tottie, the CSM mission secretary mentioned above. Ida Jonatansson, on her part, was a relative of Hjalmar Danell, who in 1893 succeeded Tottie as mission secretary, but even before that time he was a person not entirely without importance in the circles of the church mission.
women preaching in public. Otto Witt gravitated more and more towards non-conformist revival movements with, among other things, apocalyptic features, and he was of the opinion that missionaries, both male and female, should be itinerant preaching missionaries without a fixed abode. In CSM the prescribed role for women implied that female missionaries had legitimacy "only" through their work in schools and orphanages, and for this and other reasons, therefore, Hedvig Posse pursued a wait-and-see policy in the question of women's preaching. However, she was not completely negative to the basic problems of this issue, as is illustrated by the following:

The pastor asked me yesterday if I wanted to say a few words in the service today, and he would interpret. I said with a laugh: "What good would that do?" Well, he thought my words would be a blessing. Then I gave him a definite No and said that I could not do it. Miss Häggberg talked for a while in church today, which she has done once before. Afterwards I said to the pastor, at his request, that I would talk another time, and that I certainly do not say that women should not talk, but that I cannot abandon the words which say that "woman be quiet in the congregation." ... then I answered a bit upset that even if I should see that it was right and that I should talk, I would not do it before I had left the board's mission service.

It was thus Hedvig Posse's opinion that she could not associate public "speaking" with her employment in CSM, and she also cited the well-known biblical quotation that "woman be quiet in the congregation" as a personal reason for not preaching. A continued discussion about Hedvig Posse and women's preaching would take the scope of this article to far, but I think it is essential to point out that Hedvig Posse obviously saw clearly that in the missionary work in which she was placed, she found herself at the heart of the interaction between the male authority of the mission station and the male authority of the CSM board, and that she could use the latter to confute the former. At the same time, the quotation from Hedvig Posse's letter may illustrate that she saw herself prevented from acting in


43. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse 1–9.11.1889. Miss Häggberg who is mentioned in the letter is Emelie Häggberg, missionary in The Free East African Mission, a small, so called Faith Mission founded in Norway.
the Lutheran CSM whose view on women only allowed unmarried women to work in orphanages and schools, but not to preach in public.

In 1890 the male missionary Otto Witt applied to resign from CSM. This meant that the positions of Hedvig Posse and other female missionaries were reinforced, and that, as an organisation, CSM took a stand where the importance of school and orphanage activities were confirmed in the mission as the arena in which women “should” work. I would argue that Ida Jonatansson’s and Hedvig Posse’s actions in the conflict at the Oscarsberg station, i.e. their opportunities to play the male manager of the mission station off against the men of the Uppsala mission board, contributed to Otto Witt’s resignation from CSM.44

Earlier scholarly works about female missionaries have shown that it was not unusual for female missionaries, when they started their mission work, to find themselves having to act within structure that could raise questions both about themselves and the work they thought they were employed to do. In this way, the conflict in which Hedvig Posse was involved at the end of the 1880s was typical rather than unique in modern mission history.45 For Hedvig Posse, however, her defence of independent work as a missionary would gain new expression when the new station manager, Erik Walberg, arrived at Oscarsberg. This time the end of the conflict meant that Hedvig Posse felt obliged to go back to Sweden for a while, since, as she saw it, the newly arrived male missionary’s ardent yearning for a wife threatened her independent mission work. The repeated attempts by missionary Walberg to discuss marriage quite simply did not interest Hedvig Posse.46

During her stay in Sweden Hedvig Posse planned new initiatives for the South Africa mission, namely the foundation of Bethany Hospital in Dundee.47 As a matter of fact, it was at this time that medical service and health care made their first appearance in CSM’s history. After her introductory missionary years at Oscarsberg, Hedvig Posse probably had time to acquire a clear picture of what was needed as strategic input in a changing South Africa, and as a consequence she turned her attention to the mining town of Dundee. Furthermore, I think that on a personal level, Hedvig Posse, raised in Stockholm, had had enough of rural Oscarsberg this time and its conflicts between missionaries and its relatively one-sided work in schools and orphanages. Nor was the relationship between Ida Jonatansson and

47. CSM Archive, A 1:3, the minutes of the Mission Board 1894–1902, minutes dated 20.12.1897, §5.
Hedvig Posse at its best, and difference in class background, among other things, contributed to this. For Hedvig Posse, an independent position at a hospital, to which she herself had taken the initiative, was probably a more tempting assignment than working as an assistant in an orphanage or school. Apparently submission had its limitations, also in the upper class.

Hedvig Posse at Bethany Hospital

In February 1896 Hedvig Posse quite simply informed the Mission Board in Sweden that she had purchased a piece of land with buildings at Dundee Coalfields, and that her intention was to employ a nurse to work at this place.48 Less than a year later Hedvig Posse sold the property at Dundee Coalfields to acquire land and buildings in Dundee proper instead, a more expansive place surrounded by coal mines.49 Medical mission work was a new field for CSM, which, in accordance with Lutheran tradition, had placed the emphasis on spreading the Gospel.50 But faced with building plans and land already purchased, the CSM board found it difficult to decline Hedvig Posse’s generous proposition, even if they had wanted to. She stipulated that all her possessions in Dundee should be given to CSM after her death. The work at Bethany resulted in nurses being employed by CSM for the first time. Hedvig Posse’s influence was important in the recruitment of members of this occupational group to the missionary profession.51

The Bethany mission hospital was opened in January 1899, and it contained an operating theatre-cum-clinic, two wards, which were “well painted in light, cheerful colours with a small ornamented frieze”, a bathroom with running water, and a large kitchen.52 The first patients were four miners who had suffered burns in an accident at one of the Dundee coal mines.53 The running of the coal mines caused many accidents, and over the years, Bethany Hospital would treat numerous min-
ers for their injuries. Formally, as stated in the minutes of the mission board, Hedvig Posse had responsibility for “the local attention”, whereas a male missionary had authority over “the supervision”.

Apart from the hospital’s activities, there was also a school and an orphanage at the mission station in Dundee, and the entire station was headed by a male station manager, as was the custom in CSM.

Hedvig Posse’s position as the manager of Bethany was restricted since she was organisationally subordinate to male missionaries who did not always share her objectives and wishes for the mission hospital. For Hedvig Posse the aim of Bethany was to receive Africans as patients and at the same time spread the Christian message through devotions, conversations, Bible readings and hymn singing. She also wanted the hospital to be open to CSM missionaries. However, Hedvig Posse experienced that “the gentlemen”, as she called the male missionaries, interfered with the question of who the patients at Bethany were to be. Hedvig Posse's opinion has already been described; the male missionaries, however, and particularly the two Norenius brothers who worked in Dundee, advocated that white patients should also be received at the hospital. Thus Hedvig Posse was again involved in a conflict with male missionaries who were organisationally her superiors. This conflict also involved matters of principle in relation to human attitudes.

At the beginning, it was of particular importance for Hedvig Posse to make clear that Bethany Hospital was for Africans, not for whites. She repeated over and over again that the mission “must say No to the whites!”

For Hedvig Posse the question of white or black patients at Bethany was a question of, among other things, priorities and resources. In her view, white patients who were received for treatment and care required too much work from the nurses at the expense of the time available for black patients.

L. P. Norenius, the male mission station director, appears to have been the one who raised most objections to Hedvig Posse at Bethany, even if J. E. Norenius, the missionary, also expressed opinions about the above problem. In contrast to Hedvig Posse, the male missionaries argued that the rejection of white patients at Bethany would impair the mission. Impairment here referred to the good reputation the Swedish mission had among the whites in power.

---

54. CSM Archive, A I:3, the minutes of the Mission Board 1894–1902, minutes dated 20.12.1899, §5, §6.
56. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse 21.1.1899. See also E I c:3, Mission director’s correspondence, South Africa 1903–1904. H. Posse to G. Hogner 11.2.1903.
57. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse 10.2.1899, 17–18.2.1899. In the view of history provided by CSM, J. E. Norenius, Bland zuluver och karanger. Femtio års missionshistoria på Svenska Kyrkans fält i Sydafrika. Del II, Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelsens bokförlag, Stockholm, 1925: 82, the question of white and/or black patients at Bethany is described as a question on which everybody involved in mission work agreed.
The question about which patients were to be treated at the mission hospital in the first place also had another important aspect. As Hedvig Posse expressed it, the male missionaries wanted to be “sure about their position with regard to Bethany”. Hedvig Posse writes more explicitly in a letter that L.P. Norenius did not want to offer help to Bethany if he could not have any say in the running of the place. This implies that the origin of the conflict at Bethany was Hedvig Posse’s relatively independent position in relation to a male missionary who found it difficult to cope with a hierarchy that was impenetrable to him. Should Hedvig Posse run Bethany in her capacity as financial donor and initiator, or should it rather be run by the male mission station manager who, at least formally, was her superior in CSM?

Unlike at the time of the previous conflict at Oscarsberg, there was now, at the end of the 1890s, a well established missionary conference in the CSM South Africa mission, and this structure, dominated by men, affected Hedvig Posse’s ability to act at Bethany. As a rule, the missionary conference met once a year and was made up of male missionaries. Female missionaries occasionally had the right to be present; they could make submissions in letter-form, and they could in other ways try to exert their influence on the issues discussed. Real influence, however, was almost non-existent, since female missionaries had no right to vote at the missionary conference. Nor could they be present at the more important negotiations held at the conference.

The question about African and/or Western patients at Bethany was not resolved. No decision is documented in the source material of the board in Sweden or the missionary conference. Hedvig Posse stood her ground, and she never surrendered her principles, even if she accepted compromises in specific issues. When she looked back upon her time at Bethany during a visit to Sweden, she stated that one of the reasons for her failing health was the differences of opinion regarding the hospital’s activity and that, during her absence, there was a risk that too many Westerners would receive treatment. In a letter to the mission director, Hedvig Posse writes that “the work is turning onto the wrong track” and continues: “We are sent to the blacks ... our assignment from church and congregation is mission among the blacks.”

Afterwards, Hedvig Posse also expressed her discontent with the CSM board and its director in Sweden. On one occasion she urged the mission director and

58. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse 10.2.1899. About the Norenius brothers, see Berge, 2000: 188 pp. It is evident from this work that L. P. Norenius has a special position in CSM as the only male missionary up to 1900 who was not ordained in the South Africa mission when he took holy orders. After this, CSM had no male missionaries who were not ordained clergymen.
59. CSM Archive, E I c:3, mission director’s correspondence, South Africa 1903–1904, H. Posse to G. Hogner, 11.2.1903.
the board to settle the question about black and/or white patients at Bethany, and her suggestion was that whites should be treated only in an emergency. When no definite decision was taken, conflict and compromise became a recurring theme. Why central CSM did not follow Hedvig Posse's request for a definite decision is a matter of speculation. I think that one way of explaining it is that at this time the missionary conference in South Africa, which was to pass resolutions in all important matters and then to send these resolutions back to Sweden, was so well established that the board in Sweden could not act without its initiative. Hedvig Posse had no formal influence at the missionary conference, and consequently the male missionaries, who represented the opposing view of keeping the hospital open for white patients, were able to dominate.

Hedvig Posse had an eye for the social changes of the time in Natal and for how the mission should respond to them. Her contribution was to open Bethany Hospital to injured African miners and other Africans. Apparently she had no need to express loyalty to the white population and the white government by accepting them as patients at the hospital. Her frustrated feelings when her missionary colleagues wanted to use medical resources for Westerners must have been considerable.

Some time after the establishment of Bethany, Hedvig Posse brought up the question about mission work and a medical mission for Indians in the area. She thought that CSM should widen its mission work to include Indians and that a nurse, in command of two Indian languages, should be employed for that purpose. The fundamental issue was whether CSM should do mission work solely among Africans or whether mission work among Indians could also be included in its responsibilities. Hedvig Posse recommended the latter course. She submitted a letter on this question to the missionary conference; however, the conference turned down her plans of a hospital for Indians. After the missionary conference had rejected her proposal, there is no evidence that Hedvig Posse carried her commitment to mission hospitals for Indians any further. Moreover, the work at Bethany and Dundee was threatened by the outbreak of war in 1899.

The South African war 1899–1902 made a striking impact on Hedvig Posse's work in Dundee. She followed the preliminaries to the outbreak of war closely, and

---

60. CSM Archive, E1 c-3, mission director's correspondence, South Africa 1903–1904, H. Posse to A. Hogner, 11.2.1903. E1 c-5, Mission director's correspondence, South Africa 1907–1908, H. Posse to A. Ihmark, 5–6.12.1907 shows that Hedvig Posse was still concerned that Bethany should give priority to black patients.
63. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse, 24.6.1899, 14.7.1899, 5.8.1899.
she took precautions so as to be able to open Bethany as a war hospital under the Red Cross flag, but external decrees that women and children should leave Dundee thwarted Hedvig Posse's plans to take care of those who had been injured in the war, even if Bethany was used for that purpose. Hedvig Posse and her female colleagues were transported away from the town in an open coal wagon in October 1899, as the troops drew closer.64 Because of her family's earlier connections with England, Hedvig Posse took a decidedly pro-British stand in the war.65 She was of the opinion that the British treated the Africans better than the Boers had done, that the British had the capacity to govern South Africa, and she thought history showed that "God's kingdom had advanced further under British rule".66 The Hedvig Posse letters that have been preserved indicate that she followed the course of the war very closely and that she was relatively well informed about its various developments. Hedvig Posse returned to Bethany in June 1900, when she resumed work for a period. After that she left South Africa at the beginning of 1901 due to failing health.67

Bethany was Hedvig Posse's creation, and as the first mission hospital in the history of CSM, it constituted a pioneering achievement. Within the framework of a Lutheran mission that did not advocate medical mission work, she nevertheless established health and medical care as an important part of this work. However, her position as director of Bethany Hospital led to disagreements with the station manager above her and with the missionary conference where male dominance was solid. With these experiences in mind, when she returned to South Africa in 1904, she therefore cast her eyes once again in the direction of Oscarsberg. Subsequently, she constructed a basis of her own for her work which in several ways was separate from the male structure at the Oscarsberg mission station.

Baroness Hedvig Posse back at Oscarsberg, 1904–1913

After quite a long time in Sweden, Hedvig Posse returned to South Africa at the beginning of 1904. The terms for her return stipulated that for one year she was not to be connected explicitly to any particular mission station nor directly to

65. Tore Furberg. "De svenska missionärerna och hemmaopinionen under Boer-kriget," in Svensk Missionstidsskrift, Vol. L, No. 3, 1962: 157–164. See also Berge, 2000: 209–211. About the South African war, see for example Andrew Duminy and Bill Guest. "The Anglo-Boer War and its economic aftermath, 1899–1910" in Andrew Duminy and Bill Guest, eds., 1989: 345–772; CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse, for example 16.9.1899, 23.9.1899, 2–6.10.1899. There was no total pro-British agreement among the CSM missionaries; a contrary opinion was also represented, see Furberg and Berge, already mentioned above.
66. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse. 22.3.1900.
any particular type of mission work. Quite simply, she was above and beyond all “order”. Hedvig Posse had expressed her wish for such terms in a letter to the CSM board, and they were granted without any discussion, since she once again also offered to pay her own fare to South Africa and all expenses related to her “free” year. Consequently she did not receive any salary from CSM during this period. At that time, it was impossible for any other female missionaries in CSM to have the opportunity, like Hedvig Posse, to stay in South Africa for a whole year without employment or salary. In the material from female CSM missionaries in South Africa, a central and recurring theme is the poor economy of a majority of the unmarried women.

Hedvig Posse's independence and financial resources were also underlined by the project she started at Oscarsberg in 1905: a relatively extensive house designed and built with her own funds and mainly for her private use. The CSM board approved of the building, and they also accepted that Hedvig Posse, to the extent that her strength allowed, should return to service once her initial “free” period came to an end. One of Hedvig Posse's purposes in building this large house was to set up a rest home for missionaries, but she did not realise her project during her stay at Oscarsberg. She did not take this plan up with CSM's board in Sweden, since she believed that working on a rest home would not be approved as relevant for a missionary, and since, as she writes herself, “there are tired people of all nationalities and confessions”. I take this quotation as a sign that Hedvig Posse wanted to approach more missions than just CSM with her rest home, but that she doubted if her colleagues on CSM's board were open to such a broad view. Another reason for Hedvig Posse's building plans was her experience of being a woman and a missionary within an organisational structure dominated by men. Already in 1904 she wrote that since she did not want to live in the mission orphanage or with a missionary's family, she saw no other future way but to acquire an independent home. Furthermore, Hedvig Posse herself described the situation as follows, “a missionary may come here who wants to go away with me”. For Hedvig Posse, a “missionary” in this context implied a man.

---

68. CSM Archive, A I:4, the minutes of the Mission Board 1903–1908; the minutes dated 14.12.1903, §4.
69. CSM Archive, A I:4, the minutes of the Mission Board 1903–1908; the minutes dated 7.11.1904, §3. After an introductory period, devoted primarily to the acquisition of language proficiency, unmarried female missionaries in the CSM mission in South Africa earned about £60 a year at this time. A male missionary who was ordained (and all of them were) had, during his first period, an annual salary of £150, and after language studies were finished, the annual salary was increased to £200. In addition, the male missionary and his wife, who did not draw a salary of her own, could from 1904 on expect an economic contribution of £15 a year for children above the age of 9, a sum which was paid out up to the age of 16 for girls and 18 for boys. CSM Archive, A I:4, the minutes of the Mission Board 1903–1908; the minutes dated 15.12.1905, §26, and 22.1.1906, §11.
70. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse 11, 15.1.1905, 21.9.1905.
71. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse 6, 7.7.1904.
Hedvig Posse's letters to her sister, Anna Posse, make fascinating reading about the hardships of house building: baking brick, transporting timber on ox wagons from Dundee, laying out water pipes, and hiring workers are just some of the aspects to which the detailed letters refer, and when dealing with the confusion of her many tasks and the swarm of workers, Hedvig Posse took upon herself the top managing position.\(^{72}\) This period in Hedvig Posse’s life is dominated by her own projects, and it is interesting to note that she did not devote herself to traditional mission tasks. She returns to the fact that she had limited contact with Africans and with life outside the Swedish mission.\(^{73}\) During the time of the construction work, Hedvig Posse writes more about the difficulty of being dependent on African labour, since, according to her, it is “extremely risky”, and she thinks the Africans do not work enough unless she controls them.\(^{74}\)

After her return to Oscarsberg in 1904, Hedvig Posse continued to cultivate her interest in photography and watercolour painting. She observed and depicted the African surroundings, but she did not take much part in African life. I would argue that in this part of her missionary life, this could again raise questions on the importance of social class structure.\(^{75}\) Social distance is not a remote theme in the letters she left behind. Rather they transmit an awareness of her own origins where Hedvig Posse herself and also the other missionaries were careful about the use of the title “Baroness”.\(^{76}\) Hedvig Posse belonged to a privileged upper class and remained there also in colonial South Africa. On a previous occasion when she had considered leaving the South Africa mission, a male CSM missionary pointed out that it would be a great loss, because, among other things, thanks to her background she had not become “Africanised”.\(^{77}\) In this context, there was a negative connotation to the term “Africanised”. Among other things, it referred to the circumstance that the missionaries lacked the distance to Africans that was deemed appropriate, that they lost the rounded view of society and the world and instead led a life that was too restricted at the mission stations.

72. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B, 28 letters from H. Posse to A. Posse in 1905.
73. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B, H. Posse to A. Posse, 5.5.1905, 18.8.1905.
74. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B, H. Posse to A. Posse, 19.5.1905, 23.6.1905.
75. Letters such as CSM Archive, E 1 c:1, the correspondence of the mission director, South Africa, 1897–1900, H. Posse to G. Hogner, 7.12.1900, and Hogner’s letter preceding the previous one, see B 11:2, correspondence drafts of the mission director, Hogner 1900–1901. Hogner to H. Posse, 7.11.1900. These letters are very interesting examples of Hedvig Posse as an outsider, and therefore the mission directorate in Sweden asks her for advice in several sensitive issues.
76. See for example CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B, H. Posse to A. Posse, 18.12.1887. Hedvig Posse’s arrival as a missionary had even given rise to “fear”; see H. Posse to A. Posse, 22.7.1888. Miss Abbie Ferguson at the Huguenot Seminary in Wellington referred to Hedvig Posse as “my dear Baroness” and “the Baronesse” on a number of occasions. Cape Town, State Archives, Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk Archive, Huguenote Seminarie [Wellington], V 11, 2/3/1, Briewe, Sept. 1873–Dec. 1897, A. P. Ferguson to Maggie Allen.
77. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B, H. Posse to A. Posse, 7.4.1900.
Hedvig Posse contributed financially to the CSM mission in South Africa. Apart from initiatives already mentioned, she also offered money-gifts that facilitated the expansion of the mission to Matabeleland (present-day south Zimbabwe) and Johannesburg – missions that were started after the South African war of 1902 – and through a donation to a rest home for missionaries in Durban called “Svenskbo” [the Swedish nest] which was finalised in 1921. The intentions she had expressed already in relation to her house at Oscarsberg were realised through “Svenskbo”, which, despite its name, became a rest home open also to missionaries outside her own confession and nationality.\footnote{A total of 24 letters from between 1902 and 1914 from Hedvig Posse to a clergyman in Sweden, vicar G. Lundblad have been preserved. This collection of letters treats many aspects of Hedvig Posse’s documentation of Zulu music. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. Letters to vicar G. Lundblad 1902–1914. There is also a great deal about this project in Hedvig Posse’s letters to her sister. See also Wikström, 1974: 214–217.}

“What is most important is collecting Zulu music”


During all her years as a missionary Hedvig Posse had been interested in music; especially worth noting are her initiatives for a Zulu hymn book and her translations of Swedish hymns into Zulu. In her work with Zulu music she upheld continuous contact with a clergyman in Sweden who among other things assisted by making clean copies of the music. A phonograph was also of inestimable help for Hedvig Posse, with the help of which she could make recordings of the Zulu singers, and she then sent the rolls to the Swedish vicar. Now and then missionary Ida Granqvist also took part in this music project, but the most important assistants were the Zulus themselves, among them teacher and evangelist Daniel Magwaza, evangelist Abraham Zulu and teacher Anna Manyoni, who all lived in the vicinity
of the Oscarsberg mission station. Several Africans sang old songs from their heritage that were recorded on Hedvig Posse’s phonograph; on some occasions the Zulus were even “dressed as Zulu warriors to make the songs more real for the vicar”. Daniel Magwaza stands out as a particularly important collaborator in the Zulu music project, and he himself collected war songs that were forwarded to the female missionary. Thus the collection of Zulu music was not just a missionary initiative but a task based on cooperation between Christian Zulus at Oscarsberg and Hedvig Posse.

In the collection of letters between Hedvig Posse and vicar Lundblad in Sweden there is a version of a victory song sung after the battle between the Zulu people and the British colonial power at Isandlwana in 1879 during the Anglo-Zulu war fought at that time and in which the Zulus defeated the British troops. In 1908, in a letter to Sweden, Hedvig Posse writes about her work of collecting Zulu war songs:

82. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to G. Lundblad, 3–9.1909. About the inclusion of war songs, see also H. Posse to G. Lundblad, 15.10.1908.
83. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to G. Lundblad, 23.10.1908. Already at the time Hedvig Posse was building her house at Oscarsberg, Daniel Magwaza helped her with most things, and he was her teacher of the Zulu language. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse, 15.10.1908.
84. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to G. Lundblad, not dated “version of victory song after the battle at Isandlwana, 1879”. For more about the Anglo-Zulu war, see Guy, 1994: 52–64.
What is most important is to collect Zulu music. Now we have 12 noted down through the joint efforts of Daniel and Miss Granqvist. All are war songs. Three (6,7,8) Anna Manyoni sang first for Daniel, and then he helped us; one Israel taught him (11). The others I think he remembers from his childhood. ... The rhythm is very complex. I would like to make Christian words for all these songs in their present form, but it is not easy, because I do not want to use their intricate stress on individual words but find words that fit in with their original stress ... I would like to publish them with Christian words for Zulu use at home and at school.85

Anna Manyoni was here, and she sang a song from the time of the kings.86

I hope that in a few days I will have 8–10 Zulu war songs for two or three voices in clean copies in a book, complete with the meanings of the words and the music.87

Among the Zulu songs there are melodies from the times of the Zulu kings called Mpande, Cetshwayo, and Dinuzulu, among others. Hedvig Posse knew full well that recording music on her phonograph in various parts of Zululand required a lot of work, and for this purpose she had wanted more active collectors.88 During her work with Zulu music she was in contact with a Norwegian pastor and an Anglican missionary for assistance with the collection.89 When Hedvig Posse took part in the third General Missionary Conference of South Africa in Bloemfontein, July 1909, she was elected to a committee for “the writing of good song books” because of her work with Zulu music.90

Hedvig Posse’s intention with the Zulu music was, as was evident from the letter quoted above, to write Christian texts to replace the original texts. She planned to publish the songs in various categories, such as Zulu melodies with Christian texts and the old texts in footnotes, play songs to Zulu melodies, and spiritual songs for children. Tokozani, the collection published in 1914, was a result of this work.91 Material from Hedvig Posse containing 111 Zulu songs with comments is found in the archive of the Umpumulo Lutheran Theological College in South Africa.92

---

85. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to G. Lundblad, 15.10.1908.
86. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse, 5.6.1908.
87. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse, 9.10.1908.
90. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse, 4.7.1909, 29.7.1909.
92. Umpumulo, Umpumulo Lutheran Theological College Library Archives. Uncatalogued CSM material: a black notebook of Hedvig Posse’s.
The recording of Zulu song was the last major project accomplished by Hedvig Posse during her time as a missionary in Natal. Her music work was acknowledged by missionaries from other confessions, and the "Baroness Posse" project was mentioned both at the mission conference in Bloemfontein and in *The Christian Express*, a newspaper published in Lovedale. Her initiative to preserve Zulu music can be seen in relation to her understanding of the increasing changes in South African society at this time. With her resources she wanted to make a contribution to African culture, in this case Zulu music. That the songs should have a Christian text was a point beyond question for Hedvig Posse.

The Last years

Hedvig Posse's last years in South Africa were marked by her deteriorating health, and she left Oscarsberg in 1913. In this connection, she writes to the mission secretary in Sweden: "Next to leaving my home, Africa, the blacks, and my colleagues, it feels sad to have to discontinue my recording of Zulu songs." After her retirement, Hedvig Posse lived in Sweden, mostly in Uppsala. She was active in Svenska Kvinnors Missionsförening, a women's association founded in 1903 as an independent, yet supporting, part of CSM. The original intention of this association for women's mission work was to make the activities known in Sweden and to support mission work among women in India. In a later phase of the history of this association, they decided to support all forms of mission work in CSM. In addition to this commitment, Hedvig Posse also gathered missionaries' children staying in Sweden for evening assemblies in her home in Uppsala. She maintained contact with missionaries in different parts of the world.

One of the last letters from Hedvig Posse found so far is addressed to Archbishop Nathan Söderblom and his wife Anna in 1922. The letter gives evidence of the strong conviction about healing through faith held by Hedvig Posse throughout her life. In the letter she exhorts Mr and Mrs Söderblom to treat the issue of faith-healing with the utmost sincerity and not in the way it was so often discussed in the Church of Sweden. From this letter the reader senses a strong feeling of criticism of

---

93. For a year from 1910 to 1911, Hedvig Posse again stayed in Sweden due to failing health. This time, too, she paid her own travel expenses and went to Sweden by the so-called eastern route, that is, across Zanzibar, Rome, Milan and Switzerland. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse, various letters from 1910–1911.
94. CSM Archive, the H. Posse collection, B. H. Posse to A. Posse, 16.9.1909.
95. CSM Archive, E 1 c:7, the correspondence of the mission director, South Africa, 1911–1913. H. Posse to A. Ihrmark, 16.1.1913.

The missionary career of Hedvig Posse
leading church members in this issue. For the last five years of Hedvig Posse’s life, there is hardly any source material to illustrate what activities if any that occupied her time. Worn out and with joints crippled by rheumatism she died in Uppsala on 22 December 1927 at the age of 66.

Concluding Remarks: sophisticated, dedicated, practical, rich

Hedvig Posse’s work as a missionary in Natal, South Africa, covered a broad field: work in schools and orphanages, photography, pioneering contributions to medical missions, translation work, erecting buildings, documentation of Zulu music, visiting village missions, etc. Her social and political views are evident from her activities, as are her views on the social role of the church and on mission work. Hedvig Posse was able to realise various projects because she was in a financial position that made her independent of CSM. It is furthermore highly probable that her financial assets were of interest to CSM at a time characterised by more and more extensive changes both in Sweden and in South Africa. Hedvig Posse was also richly talented with an eye for strategic ventures; she expressed herself well in speech and writing, and this made it possible for her to influence the direction of the mission.

In spite of all this, Hedvig Posse had to experience that she was a woman with limited formal influence in organisational structures governed by men. However, when she met with opposition in her mission work, she could go on and find new tasks, something that was not possible for most of her female colleagues. Her class, her financial position, and her network of contacts allowed her to ignore many of the boundaries that existed for women and men in CSM. In this article I have paid special attention to the important influences exerted on Hedvig Posse by the North American mission and by the Reformist environment in Wellington. Her establishment of contacts with female missionaries from different denominations was extensive in several ways, and extraordinary in relation to both female and male missionaries in CSM.

Hedvig Posse worked not least by using, in different ways, the three levels of the decision-making process dominated by men – the mission station, the missionary

---

97. Uppsala University Library, the Anna Söderblom collection of letters, Letters from Swedes: H. Posse to A. Söderblom, 18.10.1922.
98. That Hedvig Posse suffered from severe health problems is evident from Lund University Library, the Tegnér collection, E. H. V. 15, H. Posse to E. Tegnér, 27.7.1916. CSM Archive, A I:8, the minutes of the Mission Board 1925–1928, minutes dated 2.2.1928, §3, states that the day of Hedvig Posse’s death was December 22, 1927, and so do other sources. Siri Dahlquist, 1949. 130–133, states that 27.12.1927 was the day of her death.
conference, and the CSM board in Sweden – and by this means she obtained a space for action, particularly in her early years in South Africa. When the missionary conference was formed and grew more and more important for the mission movement in South Africa, it was difficult for her to pursue her own suggestions about the direction of the work. Her last period at Oscarsberg and her building project can be seen against this background. With Oscarsberg as a basis and together with Daniel Magwaza and others, she completed her work of collecting and documenting traditional Zulu music.

Hedvig Posse was not a politically conscious advocate of female emancipation. She did not take a clear stand against the view of the role of women that was dominant in CSM and most other missions in South Africa at that time. She joined the mission organisation under the title of female mission worker, and she did not fight to change her title to missionary. However, what I have outlined in this article shows that through her work and her commitment to new projects, Hedvig Posse endeavoured to accomplish independent work as a missionary. Not least did she look upon her life in South Africa as a cultural achievement.

Hedvig Posse was a Christian woman who, having experienced a calling, took up the work of making Jesus known to other peoples. She wanted and was able to disregard many obstacles placed in her way by others, and instead she saw before her a number of tasks she thought should be accomplished. When she was prevented from performing her missionary work, or when the visions she had for her actions met with strong objections, conflicts arose with, above all, narrow-minded missionaries who happened to be men in superior positions. The overall aim of Hedvig Posse's mission work and financial donations was to perform what she considered the best of deeds, based on her own qualifications and as a person of her own times: to promote universal civilization, in this case Western civilization, in South Africa in the name of Jesus Christ. That this aim in itself could be problematic for various reasons – political, theological, cultural, to mention just some – was not something Hedvig Posse appeared to worry about.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Posse, Hedvig, Ett besök på missionsstationen Oscarsberg, Från Svenska kyrkans missionsfält 17, Uppsala, 1899.


Hilda Römer Christensen

Building an Empire at Home and Abroad

Front Figures of the Danish Missionary Work for Women 1890–1940

HILDA RÖMER CHRISTENSEN, Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen. She is an associate professor and a national research co-ordinator of Gender Studies in Denmark. Hilda Römer Christensen has published extensively in Danish and English on the women’s movements, gender and religion in a comparative perspective and on the making of the welfare state. Publications include Mellem backfishe og pæne piger. Køn og kultur i KFUK 1880–1940 (Among Flappers and Respectable Girls. Gender and Culture in the Danish YWCA 1880–1940) København 1995 and co-editing of Crossing Borders. The remapping of the women’s movements at the turn of the 21st century, University of Southern Denmark Press, 2003.
In recent years the role of religion has come to the forefront in the debate on women's history in the Nordic Countries. This has happened after a long period of neglect and ignorance, where Protestantism has been dealt with as an unproblematic or even outdated framework for current analysis. The role of religion is now being explored and debated in the context of gender and the social and political movements among women and in society at large, not least in connection with women's emancipation and the welfare state.¹

When we talk about religion in a Nordic context we are referring more precisely to the Lutheran protestant trend. Since the Reformation in the 1530s and 1540s, when the churches became an integral part of the government, there have been strong ties between church and state. Furthermore, the state affiliated Lutheran Churches have successfully maintained their dominant position and even today, between 80 and 90% of the population in the Nordic countries are members of the Lutheran Churches.²

Recent studies have raised more far-reaching questions, such as the role of Lutheranism in relation to the advanced level of gender equality and its role in the making of the Nordic welfare states. The Danish historian Uffe Østergaard has made the provocative claim that the social democratic parties in the Nordic countries “are the products of secularized Lutheranism rather than democratized socialism.”³ He is referring to the stronghold of Lutheranism and the making and character of the Nordic welfare states. The scope of this approach has recently been expanded into the field of gender. Does Lutheranism have any share in the advanced level of gender equality in the Nordic countries? Or have Lutheranism and gender equality been mutually exclusive discourses? Already at this stage of research it is obvious there is no single answer to these questions. Rather, they form a kind of new agenda and a starting point for future research. In other words, these questions ought to be contextualized in order to produce new insights and adequate answers.⁴

4. cf Markkola 2001
In the following I will deal with the problem from a slightly different angle and suggest an institutional approach, which includes the significance of revival movements and women's agency.

This approach makes clear how the Lutheran doctrines have been negotiated and moderated over time. How were the concepts and outlook applied in the case of women's missionary work? And how did individual women handle available possibilities and limitations?

I shall document this angle in relation to the Danish case. The focal point will be the establishment of Danish foreign mission work in a gender perspective. From scattered activities in the late 19th century to the formation of lasting organizational structures at the beginning of the 20th century. I will explore the matter in two areas - in institutional contexts as well as in biographical terms. Here I will focus on a couple of front figures in missionary work representing vital trends and diversities in the landscape of missionary activity at home. They originated from and reflected different trends and outlooks in the making of foreign mission work in Denmark. One is Countess Henriette Knuth, who in many respects epitomized the conservative aristocratic spinster generation of the missionary community, and the other is Johanne Vahl Blauenfeldt, who had a background in open-minded parish community and who tried to merge missionary activity with women's rights and suffrage. Both used and broadened the opportunity structures for women in the decades around the turn of the 19th century.

Finally I shall outline a couple of comparative considerations relating to religious culture and gender at European and Nordic Levels.

Institutional Framework of Danish Missionary Work

At first glance there seems to be a specific Nordic profile even in relation to the field of foreign missions. In all Nordic countries except for Iceland, centralized missionary societies were established with foreign interdenominational associations as models. The Danish Missionary Society – DMS – was formed in 1821 and similar organizations followed in Sweden in 1835, in Norway 1842 and in Finland in 1842.

In spite of this similar establishment pattern, the gender profile and women’s issues held different prominence depending on religious and political cultures. In several respects, the women's work in Denmark lagged behind and the activities of women both at home and abroad were accepted later here than for instance in Norway.

The fact that gender equality and women's involvement were accepted only slowly and hesitantly in relation to the missionary field has often been explained...
as surviving and even radicalized traditions of patriarchy and suppression. This
has been seen as characteristic of religious communities in general and of the Inner
Mission community in particular with which the field of foreign mission work
became closely associated in Denmark.

However, this explanation has to be qualified and contextualized in relation
to the specific processes of modernization. First and foremost the establishment
of the field of foreign mission took place in very contested spaces, in which the
ideological, cultural and political power structures of modern society were in the
process of manifesting and consolidating themselves. How was gender fashioned or
built into the new patterns and institutions of modern society?

In Denmark the scattered revival activities of the last half of the 19th century
were split into two movements with the formation of the Home Mission Association in 1861. This left the more liberal branches, the Grundtvigians, in a looser
and delimited network. Both trends fought to influence the formation and deep
structural changes of Danish society during the 19th century, as did other newborn
and significant movements such as the social democratic labour movement
and “cultural radicals”, named after the cultural critic Georg Brandes. Women’s
rights, too, came to the fore with the formation of the Danish Women’s Society as
early as in 1871. The Danish Women’s Society attracted women of Grundtvigian
convictions and was by no means religiously indifferent. But because of its flirta-
tion with cultural radicalism and rational demands for gender equality, it did not
initially offer opportunities for Home Mission-oriented women.

It is interesting to note that, due to the focus on the nation state and ethno-
centric dogma, the Grundtvigians only took a modest interest in foreign mission
work. In the Grundtvigian view, a certain level of civilization was required in
order to become a Christian being, a cultural level that was missing in heathen
countries. This left the field of foreign mission work and also the involvement of
women open to be inhabited and fashioned mainly by the Danish Missionary Society
and its close cooperation partner, the Home Mission movement. Women here
were met with hesitant attitudes that derived partly from conservative translations
of Lutheranism and partly from the hegemonic and middle of the road direction
taken by the Danish Home Mission.

Gradually the Danish Home Mission developed into a strongly centralized and
hegemonic association. The movement succeeded in enclosing the gulf of revival

5. The Grundtvigians, named after the well known poet and clergyman N.F.S. Grundtvig, later mushroomed
or inspired the foundation of a range of well-known institutions, such as the Danish folk-high schools,
dairy and alimentation co-operatives and to a lesser degree the establishment of free-churches.
6. Moral reform and decent sexual behaviour, for instance, were central on the agenda in the so-called
“sædelighedsfejden” in the late 188os.
movements and in the mainstreaming and homogenization of differences on one hand and in the marginalization of dissenters on the other. This left little space both for more radical sects and fractions of any kind as well as for the involvement of women.⁸

During the same period, the Danish Missionary Society established a kind of monopoly in relation to missionary activities both at home and abroad. A monopoly on which also women had to exert their influence and with which they had to negotiate in order to make their way in committees, decision-making processes, and as missionaries. The centralised and strongly Lutheran trend in Danish missionary enterprises did not advance the possibility of changing traditional gender order.⁹

The Danish Missionary society was against women missionaries and by end of the 19th century, only a few women had been allowed to break with the conviction that only men fitted into the vocation or calling as missionaries. “Women were not able to survive the harsh climate and sooner or later they were going to marry.” This was the argument long propounded by the executive of the Danish Missionary Society. A visit of a Christian Indian Brahmin in 1888 who was convinced that women were indispensable in missionary work in India changed the attitude of some of the executives. As a result, the first Danish woman missionary was sent out to India in 1888. Another single woman missionary followed her in 1892.¹⁰ In 1898 the Copenhagen branch of the YWCA took the initiative to send two former members out as missionaries. Financial responsibility was taken over by the Danish YWCA and channelled through the Danish Missionary Society. This arrangement formed the pattern also when the cooperation between the YWCA and the Danish Missionary Society became formalized in 1910.

In principle, the formation of separate women’s committees started with the reorganization of the Danish Missionary Society in 1889. It is interesting to note that the new structure allowed the formation of women’s committees and their representation in line with general gender-mixed committees at a formal level.¹¹ In reality, however, every step taken in relation to women as missionaries and

---

⁸ As has been demonstrated in the canonical work of P.G. Lindhardt: Den danske kirkes historie, Bd VIII, København 1966 (Lindhardt and Niels Knud Andersen (red) and in Olesen: Elith Olesen: De frigjorte og trælefolket. Amerikansk-engelsk indflydelse på dansk kirkeliv omkring år 1900. København 1996.

⁹ The Danish home mission movement thus stayed within the State Church. This implies that free churches or dissenters never played a central role in Danish religious life.


¹¹ The new structure gave women and women’s societies formal rights that were only gradually granted in Norway during the first decades of the 20th century. See: Lisbeth Mikaelson: Kallets økko. Studier i Mission og selvbiografi. Dr. Philos. afhandling i religionshistorie. Det historisk-filosofiske fakultet. Universitetet i Bergen. Juli 2000.: 64
women as activists caused heated debates in the Danish Missionary Society. Most of the members of the all male executive were against these moves, as were male missionaries in the field.12

By 1905 there were only 55 registered Women’s Committees and 12 YWCA groups committed to the Danish Missionary Society in Denmark. In reality more committees existed at an informal level. Perhaps women preferred to work at a less organized level? The stringent requirements of a minimum membership of 25 of the local committees may also account for the low number of formally affiliated women’s committees..

Norway was often referred to as the pioneering country in terms of missionary work and of women’s committee work. Around 1900 it was estimated that in Norway not less than 4000 women’s committees provided two-thirds of the Norwegian Missionary Society’s income.13 The financial element also furthered the cause in Denmark. The budgets of the Danish Missionary Society in 1905, for instance, showed considerable deficits. 14

Foreign Missions as a Source of Women’s Activism

In the scattered field of research into women’s activism in foreign mission, both rural and urban tendencies can be traced.15

A comparative study of a rural and a fishing community in the northern part of Jutland has substantiated interesting differences in relation to the work for foreign missions. While women were hardly visible at the organizational level in the rural community, things were different in a local fishing town. Here women were registered as independent members of the local foreign missions committee and they ran their own single-issue committees and fund-raising activities such as bazaars. However, the greater independence was interpreted in terms of religious activism and Christian charity and apparently not in terms of women’s rights.16

From an urban – Copenhagen – perspective, things worked differently.

One source of dynamics can be traced to the late 19th century Anglo-American Methodist revivalism that spread through Britain and to the Continent. In Copen-

hagen several fashionable religious “salon” circles were formed and women who were later to become prominent in the field of foreign mission work were among the interested public and supporters. They were focused on their own dedication as well as on evangelization and missionary work.17

In 1900 a group of women from this community started Kvindelige Missions Arbejdere, a group inspired by similar KMA branches in Sweden (1894) and England. These women were influenced especially by Anglo-American women ministers and fostered lively communication with similar European and Nordic revival communities, in Keswick in England, Södertälje in Sweden and Wandsbeck in Germany.18 At first, the Danish Home Mission Association was critical towards the international trends that were not considered Lutheran.19

The Danish branch of the KMA took several independent steps and already in 1902 launched a Danish missionary school for women. Surprisingly enough, this happened with the fully acceptance of the Danish Home Mission, which even allowed the KMA women to argue their cause in local missionary houses. In exchange, the women had to comply officially with the doctrines of the Lutheran State Church (Folkekirken) and not challenge the monopoly of the Danish Missionary Society too openly in terms of independent fund-raising and sending out missionaries.20 In quantitative terms the KMA and the related women teachers’ Missionary Society did not become impressive enterprises. But there is no doubt that they played a symbolic role and influenced later developments.21 Not least as a recruitment basis for office holders in the mainstream institutions and for women missionaries.

17. It is interesting to note that the mother of Baroness Henriette Knuth hosted one of the fashionable religious study circles during the 1890s. Here several open-minded supporters of religion and revivalism clustered together. The Bible readings were led by a theological professor Fredrik Nielsen, and in addition to Henriette Knuth and her sister, the circle included notabilities such as C. Bangert, civil servant and head of the Copenhagen branch of the YMCA, professor of economics H. Westergaard – both with spouses, Count Joachim Moltke and Merchant Johan.V. Adolph. All were later to become core personalities in the mission community in Copenhagen.

18. Inspires were the Welshwoman Jessie Pen-Lewis, who was influenced by another well-known woman revivalist, Hanna Whitall-Smith.

19. Elith Olesen 1996. Among the members of the KMA executive were Emsy Collett, (chair), Baroness Olga Scaffalitzky (vice chair) and Sigrid Kurck, Swedish baroness, secretary. KMA secured the support of the Home Mission movement by making the spouse of a minister who belonged to the Home Mission executive a member of the otherwise gentrified executive


21. C.E. Bockelund: Høsten er stor, K.M.A. gennem 50 år. 1950. The women teachers’ missionary society, Lære­rindernes Missionsforbund, was launched in Denmark in 1902, inspired by a similar Swedish association started in Gothenburg in 1899. Olga Paulsen, who also was the chair from 1918 till 1946, became the second woman member of the executive committee of the Danish Missionary Society from 1928–1946. Up to 1935 she sided with the first elected woman of the DMS executive, Baroness Henriette Knuth.
Women’s Missionary Work and The Danish Missionary Society

In spite of the lively activity at the grass-roots level around 1900, it took another 10–15 years to give women formal rights to become missionaries and to establish more organized structures of women’s activities.  

The association journal of the DMS, Dansk Missionsblad focused on the matter in several articles after the turn of the century. In 1903 a country vicar encouraged the formation of women’s committees. “It seems to me that much is lost and that many blessings are laid aside by neglecting this cause”. He also headed off the fear and stereotype expectations, that women’s committee meetings would develop into clubs for gossiping and lead to women neglecting their duties in their homes. He referred to meetings at which women were busy knitting while listening to devotional programme.  

In 1906 Johanne Vahl Blauenfeldt, who was already an experienced activist and organizer in the field, wondered why women were present as observers and not as full representatives at the annual meetings of the Danish Missionary Society. She also pointed to the huge contradiction between women’s work at home and abroad. The influential role that was claimed for women in India and China in the sphere of the home and of religious upbringing contradicted the lack of women missionaries and women in foreign mission work in Denmark. Vahl Blauenfeldt emphasized that “we need many more women’s societies, able to carry forward the work among women in India and China. [...] Let us have women’s societies – even in the smallest places.” Accordingly she strongly encouraged women’s societies to join the Danish Missionary Society and argued for a gender-balanced leadership.

In the following years conscious attempts were made to organize work among women. This happened along two lines: on one hand the YWCA formed its own missionary societies aimed at younger YWCA women. On the other hand, women’s committees aimed at mature women, were established under the auspices of the Danish Missionary Society.

The specific work of the YWCA was launched in 1908. After some discussion and pressure, the leadership of the joint YMCA-YWCA council recognized that

22. This restrictive attitude towards equal opportunities and the independent involvement of women also applied to other main currents of Danish society, e.g. the Social Democratic Party, that very late and very hesitantly accepted women’s branches. Here, too, the preoccupation with centralization and the fear of fractionation was a driving force together with traditional attitudes. See Gruber and Graver (eds.): Women and Socialism, Socialism and Women. An international perspective, especially the section on the Nordic countries.

23. N.B. Hindhede: “Nogle ord om Kvindeforeninger” in Dansk Missionsblad 1903: 83ff. Lisbeth Mikaelson, too, has pointed to the gendered nature of missionary societies in Norway: Women’s societies combined practical and devotional matters, while men’s societies were purely devotional.

24. Johanne Vahl Blauenfeldt:“Flere Kvindeforeninger” In Dansk Missionsblad 1906: 583

25. One incident underlined the democratic deficiencies in relation to women in the Danish Missionary Society. When Countess Henriette Knuth stood as candidate for the missionary executive in 1907, she received only 2 votes, while the elected chairman got 562 votes. Bundgaard 1935: 218.
both young men and women were needed on a larger and more efficient scale in
foreign mission work. The influential Baroness Henriette Knuth became the chair
of the YWCA Missionary Committee.

It took a couple of years, however, before the executive of the Danish Mission­
ary Society accepted women’s work. But finally in 1912 a central Women’s Mis­
sionary Committee for women was launched. By then women’s societies counted
190, with 70 associated children’s societies. The social profile of the all-woman
committee was similar to that of the core home missions societies and consisted
of a mixture of women married to aristocrats, ministers and private businessmen.26
Baroness Henriette Knuth figured as the only unmarried member.

The local women’s committees affiliated to the Danish Missionary Society
spread like wildfire after the formation of the Central Women’s Committee in
1912. In 1918 there were 400 such committees, and in 1934 the number was 507.
In the YWCA, too, most of the numerous local associations [nearly 700 in 1925]
put the issue of foreign missions onto their agenda, some of them forming special
committees.27

Due to efficient fundraising among the rank and file members of the DMS and
the YWCA Committees they were able to contribute impressive sums. For decades,
YWCA women were far ahead of YMCA men when it came to foreign mission fun­
drasing. The annual contribution from women for the Danish Missionary Society,
including the associate children’s work amounted to more than the income of the
gender- mixed societies. Women may also have contributed to other mixed society
incomes and to the considerable legacies left to the society.

The YWCA alone contributed impressive sums. From 1923 to 1934, YWCA fun­
drasing provided an income of nearly 900,000 Danish Crowns, while the amount
brought in by the men’s YMCA committees amounted to less than one third that
sum, 265,000 Danish Crowns.28 The overall goal was to finance the work for and
by women in the Danish Missionary Society. As a result of these joint efforts, the
number of unmarried women missionaries rose from 14 in 1910 over 35 in 1919 to
53 in 1933. Women and women’s missionary work made a vital contribution to re­
vitalising the missionary cause during the first decades of the 20th century, not only
financially but also in an emotional sense. Foreign mission work became one of the
core activities and a main source also of the success of the mission in Denmark.

26. Among the geographically very scattered groups there were two members of the landed aristocracy, a
couple of ministers’ wives and a couple of women married to smaller commercial entrepreneurs. Bund­
gaard 1935: 314
Pioneers at Home

The pioneers I am going to focus on reflect different trends in the huge landscape of mission work.

Baroness Henriette Knuth (1863–1949) belonged to a well-known aristocratic dynasty.\textsuperscript{29} She was the oldest daughter in a family with nine children, and when her father died in 1882, the family moved to Copenhagen. Henriette Knuth did not receive any formal education, but she was encouraged by her mother to engage in public works. After a period as a private teacher, she became involved in work for young female industrial workers in Copenhagen in 1887. Around the turn of the century she became associated with the Copenhagen YWCA.\textsuperscript{30} Soon after Henriette Knuth joined the YWCA, her career curve rose sharply. In 1900 she became chairperson of the Copenhagen association; in 1902 she became head of the Copenhagen county association and a member of the World YWCA Council, and in addition she was appointed president of the national YWCA executive from 1906 till 1929. This YWCA executive formed a joint executive with the YMCA executive and was headed by a male president in the period up to 1940.\textsuperscript{31}

The other person I want to focus on is Johanne Vahl Blauenfeldt (1867–1931), who early on acquired an impressive record for her involvement with children and women’s missionary work. She was, so to speak, born into the mission movement. Her father was a well-known and open-minded rural dean who chaired the Danish Missionary Society in the vital years from 1889 to 1896. Already in 1874 he pointed to the need for women missionaries and he was instrumental in the reorganization and modernization of the Danish Missionary Society in 1889, where the new organizational structure paved the way for women’s societies in line with mixed societies. His intellectual ambitions materialized in the collection of an impressive library on missionary literature, now kept at the University Library in Aarhus.

Apparently Johanne Vahl Blauenfeldt inherited both his literary interests as well as his commitment to foreign mission work and women’s issues.\textsuperscript{32} As a young woman she authored several books aimed at children’s missionary work besides she was active in several causes. Especially after the turn of the century her involvement was openly influenced by the women’s rights movement, an approach she tried to combine with and infuse into the missionary community.

\textsuperscript{29} For bibliographical details see: Henriette Knuth in Dansk Kvindebiografisk Leksikon. Rosinante. København 2000.

\textsuperscript{30} Some “embarrassing incidents” — probably of a sexual character — led to the resignation of the former male chair of the association, and paved the way for Henriette Knuth.


\textsuperscript{32} She was the author of several pamphlets and smaller books, e.g. Hindu Children 1906, Hindu Women 1907, The Christian Women and Suffrage, 1907. Furthermore, she was the editor of Kristeligt Kvindebild 1909–1913 and of a missionary journal for children from 1906–1911. Together with representatives of
The Seductive Leadership of Henriette Knuth

The success of women's foreign mission work during the 1910s and subsequent decades was due not least to the extensive travelling and agitation of Henriette Knuth. She formed the link between the two main columns of foreign mission work among women in Denmark as a member of the central Women's Committee of the Danish Missionary Society and as chairperson of the YWCA Missionary Committee. She became one of the first women to be respected even among the most incarnate misogynists, as a YMCA leader later phrased it. When the Danish Missionary Society finally appointed a woman to the executive committee in 1916, she was an obvious candidate.

Henriette Knuth was a gifted organizer. Even though her organizational style seems rather elusive from a modern perspective, she possessed an excellent faculty for exerting influence on formal organizational structures. She was highly respected and possessed a great ability to bring about consensus among the women and men involved. Through this she was able to further her own priorities – and also at an organizational level to marginalize trends she disliked. This last skill has hardly been mentioned in the generally romanticized memory of her in the home mission community.33 In several of her speeches, she demonstrated that she mastered the rhetorical codes of the mission community. The religious language of the home mission, “the language of Canaan”, has been characterized as a professional language and compared to the language of other professional groups such as doctors and artists. The special vocabulary and expressions served the goal of describing something from another a world. This language was different from everyday language. The religious language can be seen as an identity element in a learning process and a tool by means of which fellowship was created along with distance to the outer world.34

In the 1904 annual report, Knuth encouraged women to work among women, not only in “heathen” countries, but also in Denmark. “As surely as we believe it is a call from God, let us not hold back, but confidently say: Look, Lord, I am Your servant, use me according to Your will and let Your might unfold in my human weaknesses.” It is interesting to note that Henriette Knuth’s statements were flavoured with a tone of sensuality that formed a kind of parallel to a physical and sexual discourse that the home mission movement otherwise tried to silence. Perhaps this hidden mapping of desires formed part of her success?

the women’s rights association Dansk Kvindersamfund, she was a member of a committee that aimed at reforming the church marriage ritual.

33. Henriette Knuth has been extensively dealt with in Rømer Christensen 1995: 66–93
34. Margaretha Balle Petersen: The Holy Danes. In Ethnologia Scandinavica 1981. It is interesting to note that this kind of religious rhetoric developed parallel with political and secular discourses. They also operated with the key concepts of slavery/suppression and liberation.
When Henriette Knuth agreed to head the YWCA's foreign missionary work in 1908, she received her office in the same tone of religiously correct submissiveness: "We were very hesitant, but this is exactly why we did not dare to say no. We prayed so fervently that God would be with us and show us the way, so that the cause might be encouraged faithfully and become a gift from God to us and to the YWCA." 35

During the ensuing years Henriette Knuth demonstrated her ability as an empire builder. Not only was she the architect behind the transformation of the former China Missions Committee of the YWCA into the YWCA Missionary Committee in 1910, of which she also became chair. At the same time Henriette Knuth declared her willingness to arrange meetings for the foreign mission, consequently termed as the Heathen-Mission, all over the country, especially in the smaller associations.

The flourishing period that followed ran parallel to Henriette Knuth's activities. She conducted an impressive travel programme during which she addressed up to

200 meetings a year, a programme that impressed even the male community. Henriette Knuth's rhetorical abilities greatly appealed to the Christian hearts and the purses of women and young girls—"wherever she came, she talked about one single goal: about our Saviour/the Redeemer and his ultimate goal. She always called young women to conversion, faith and duty, at home and abroad in the missionary field," wrote the chair of the YWCA in 1933. 36

It was mainly in a rhetorical and organizational sense that Henriette Knuth furthered the links between mission work at home and abroad. Apart from on a few occasions, she did not participate in big international gatherings. In 1909 she even declined a travel grant that would have enabled her to visit the work being done in India.37 Around that time, she also gave up her seat in the YWCA World Council. But her activity, not least her ability to formulate the views and fire the imaginations of those working toward the primary goal of Christianising the world, strengthened the work both at home and abroad. As such, she became a very important symbol of the links between home and the missionary field.

Henriette Knuth's point of departure was genuinely religious, a fact that together with her personal and organizational abilities opened several doors for her in male dominated organizations. The role she carved out for women and herself in the field of foreign mission work gave her a prominent position in nearly all missionary activities of any significance from around the turn of the century to the mid-1930s.

In a confidential report in 1908, a prominent visitor from the World YWCA pointed to Henriette Knuth as a key figure in this kind of work in Denmark:

"She gives herself most unselfish to the work and seems to have the unbounded respect of all who know her. The only danger is that because of her great strength of character and powers of leadership, her opinions and ideas may dominate the work more than is wise or best. She is the last person in the world who should wish this, but the very nature of things makes it almost inevitable. […] humanly speaking we can only hope to influence Denmark through her." 38

Though the reporter focused on the YWCA, this description also holds true for the role of Henriette Knuth in the field of missionary work as well. All in all, Henriette Knuth developed an impressive influence in the broader field of religious work in the first years of the 20th century, not least in the field of foreign mission work which became a driving force in her activity. In the fight for the enfranchisement of women, however, the limitations of Henriette Knuth's outlook based on

36. Ræder 1933: 169
otherworldly structures became clear. She was not able to transcend the limits of her religious outlook and she was hesitant in the women's suffrage campaign. Along the same lines she was hesitant about the views of the new generation of internationally minded women from the Copenhagen YWCA who wanted to perform missionary work as more professional and modernized YWCA foreign secretaries. 39

Not only the aesthetics of Henriette Knuth, but also her rhetorical and religious outlook epitomized the religious convictions of the YWCA and the mission movement. At one and the same time, she both expanded and created the boundaries of the YWCA and missionary womanhood. In her undertakings she explored the role of a public motherhood, which she moved into the new public or semi-public space of Christian associations. But she always aimed to establish missionary enterprises as a parallel to secular institutions, not to co-operate or disappear in them.

Johanne Vahl Blauenfeldt – Merging Mission and Suffrage Movements

It is noteworthy that the campaign for women's votes took off simultaneously with the intensification of foreign mission work among women. Women and the missionary community may have been influenced more generally by the increasing activities in support of women's rights in Danish society at large. In 1903 women received the vote for the parochial church councils of the State Church, followed in 1908 by the right to vote at municipal elections. During the same years, attention also came to focus on the fight for the vote in parliamentary elections. In general, women of home mission convictions were not prominent in the women's rights associations. Even though several of the religious women's associations were members of the Danish Women's National Council, established in 1899, women of home mission orientation maintained a low profile.

Nevertheless women mainly of home mission orientation launched a Christian suffrage association named Kristelig kvindevalgretsforening in 1908.40 The initiative was inspired by the international mobilization of women during the first decade of the 20th century, and especially by the 1906 International Woman Suffrage Alliance meeting in Copenhagen. Here home mission women were encouraged to join forces in the fight for women's political rights. In 1907 a kick-off meeting was

39. In 1921, Henriette Knuth and the YWCA Missionary Committee declined to authorize a Danish YWCA secretary for China. In 1933 Henriette Knuth and the DMS executive declined to transfer the duties of Danish Benedicte Wilhjelm, a former US sponsored YWCA secretary in Ceylon, to missionary work. Cf. correspondence in the YWCA archives: "KFUKs ydre Mission" in arkiv nr. 10381: KFUM og K i Danmark. Rigsarkivet T 14, T 16.

40. The home mission community monopolised the word Christian as a synonym for home mission convictions.
Johanne Vahl Blauenfeldt. Private photo.

held in the YWCA in Copenhagen followed by the foundation of the association in 1908. Johanne Vahl Blauenfeldt was elected chairperson.

In the association's periodical, *Kristeligt Kvindeblad*, she made visible the suppression of women in the mission community, a quite unusual gesture in the missionary community. The goal of the association was to educate Christian women to take part in public life and to influence these activities through Christian values. She had a splendid fellow worker in her husband who on several occasions gave public speeches in support of the goals of women's public engagements.41

Later on Johanne Vahl Blauenfeldt had to give up her work for the Christian Suffrage Association due to bad health. As a consequence the association was dissolved in 1913. By then Johanne Vahl Blauenfeldt was encouraging members to join the already existing women's rights association, *Dansk Kvindesamfund*.

The differences in the opinions of Henriette Knuth and Johanne Vahl Blauenfeldt were manifested in 1910, when the association's journal, *Kristeligt Kvindeblad*, compelled prominent mission personalities to state their views on suffrage issues. Here Henriette Knuth offered her hesitant attitude:

"I do not regard it as anything desirable but I think that ultimately the right of women to vote is approaching, that is why I cannot work in favour of political

rights for us as women; but I do not dare to work against it, and the absolute waiting standpoint would be short-sighted and wrong. (...) That is why my current stance is that I will seek as much as possible to obtain insight into and knowledge about municipal and political life, while I ask the Lord to make me attentive and dutiful towards His will with me also in this respect.”

The attitude of Henriette Knuth in this matter also influenced and complied with the political and social attitudes of the YWCA and the proclaimed political indifference of the mission communities. This also accounts for the relatively weak profile of the religious women’s associations in the larger landscape of women’s organizations. When the Christian Suffrage Association culminated in 1911, it held around 1200 members, a very modest number both compared to other tone-setting suffrage alliances of the time as well to the thousands of women engaged in foreign mission work by then.43 It is striking that the Danish YWCA did not become a member of the Danish Women’s National Council until 1932, after the retirement of Henriette Knuth.44

In spite of her early and central role in the launching of women’s work, Johanne Vahl Blauenfeldt was not made a member of the central Women’s Committee of the Danish Missionary Society when it was launched in 1912. Instead she was made head of the Children’s Committee established in 1910, and throughout her life she crusaded for work with children and the missionary movement. It seems as if the Danish Missionary Society channelled her energies and the suffrage issue to the less controversial track of children’s issues – though her bad health may also have played a role here. While Johanne Vahl Blauenfeldt chose to campaign for the status of women in an outspoken and conscious way, Henriette Knuth’s attitude was less direct and harder to translate or understand in the framework of a modern secularized outlook. Henriette Knuth no doubt became the most powerful woman of the two and the one whom the missionary establishment accepted first and throughout the period. Even though Johanne Vahl Blauenfeldt held a more marginal position, she nevertheless succeeded in giving voice to a liberal current in the missionary community both in her writings and in her institutional work. That work and those voices have often been overlooked and silenced in historical assessments, not least in those authored by the missionary religious associations themselves.45

42. Kristeligt Kvindeblad 1910: 42.
43. The broader alliance, Landsforbundet for Kvinders Vaiger, founded in 1907, had 10,000 members while the older woman’s rights association founded in 1871, Dansk Kvindesamfund, had 7,000 members.
44. The affiliation finally took place after several invitations and appeals to the YWCA. at that time the largest women’s association in Denmark. Romer Christensen 1995: 102.
45. Suffrage activities, for instance, are not mentioned in missionary literature.
Gendered Educations and Careers

The educational profile of missionaries working for the Danish Missionary Society was highly gendered. In general, male missionaries had formal educations, and from 1917 the society even required an academic degree in theology. For a long time no formal educational requirements existed for women, because they were not wanted as missionaries. After 1900 when woman missionaries were gradually accepted they often had a broader and less prominent educational profile. For many years, teaching and nursing made up the professional background of most women sent out by the Danish Missionary Society. Many of them needed further education and this they received in various ways. From 1912–1923, a special school for women missionaries was established as a joint initiative of the KMA, the Danish YWCA, the Danish Home Mission movement and the Missionary Society. When the school closed down in 1923, it was replaced partly by academic education and partly by extended courses at the YWCA secretarial school, Marthabo.46 However, the Marthabo education was criticized as insufficient, especially in the inter-war period, where a higher degree of professionalism was required.47

Male missionaries with a theological background had job security and after five years as missionaries they acquired the right to apply for a job in the Danish State Church, a fact that caused a kind of crisis in the recruitment of male missionaries. The time as missionary became an adventurous “rites de passage”, after which several male missionaries at a more mature age opted for a parish in the Danish State Church. Furthermore, fewer men applied to become missionaries, particularly in the inter-war period, giving rise to a crisis of recruitment that did not apply to women missionaries.48

The gender specific educational background of men and women missionaries probably paid tribute to the secondary status of many women missionaries; – despite the fact that several of the women succeeded in their undertakings. Here the carrier of Ellen Nielsen makes up an illuminating case. She was among the first Danish women missionaries when she in 1898 was sent to China as a YWCA-sponsored missionary for the DMS. In China she joined an already existing missionary station in Takushan in Manchuria in the northern part of China. Already in 1905 she established an independent missionary station, which over the following years developed into a whole network of institutions, including a boarding school for Chinese women that consisted of a kindergarten, a primary and secondary school and a teacher training college. Besides, she established an industrial school, a kind

47. Bundgaard 1935: 343
48. Bundgaard 1935: 283
of social experiment, which during the 1930s involved 300 persons. Her missionary empire became well known and respected and was even named “the Ellen Nielsen’s village”.49

During the inter-war years, women still showed a remarkable interest in the field of missionary work and women missionaries tended to regard their call as eternal. Many of them remained in the foreign missionary fields, enabling them to unfold abilities they were barred from at home. Without doubt, the less privileged domestic labour market for women played a role in this gender-specific pattern.

A Comparative Outlook

The questions of church structure, political culture and religious mobilization of women is thrilling and interesting. Even though further elaboration is needed, I will outline some similarities and differences in a Nordic and European framework.

In Denmark the organization pattern among home mission women differed from that of other Continental countries. Norway and Germany, for instance, had influential evangelical women’s associations which also influenced the agenda of the women’s rights movement(s). In Denmark the YWCA – or the Young Women’s Christian Association – remained the best known and most influential in this realm, while the women’s societies of the Danish Missionary Society tended to focus more narrowly on the subject of missionary work. It is interesting to note that the umbrella organization of women’s associations in Denmark, the Danish Women’s National Council (Danske Kvinders Nationalraad), was eager to include the missionary and evangelical women in their membership. In Norway and Germany, the political climate seemed less co-operative, and there was a sharper difference between confessional and non-confessional associations. For instance, Line Nyhagen Predelli has demonstrated that in Norway the inclusion of evangelical women caused a heated organizational debate on the principal question of whether religious associations were allowed or not.50 In Germany the inclusion of the evangelical women’s association led to the secession of the radical branch of the German women’s movement around 1907. Both in Norway and in Germany, the evangelical women’s associations had a strong agenda of their own. Their goal was not only to form an alliance of evangelism and feminism, but also to exert their influence on the agenda according to their convictions. In Germany, for instance, the question of family planning and abortion was the subject of heated debate.

around 1908, when evangelical women entered the movement in order to support the conservative wing in the discussion.51

When it comes to the status of missionary work itself, interesting similarities and differences are also evident in a Nordic perspective.

In all four Nordic countries, foreign missionary societies were established with foreign interdenominational associations as models: Denmark 1821, Sweden 1835, Norway 1842 and Finland 1859. In general, the pattern in Denmark is the same as that in Norway and Finland, while a separate development can be traced in the case of Sweden. In the first three countries the pattern seems rather similar, with missionary societies acting as the driving force in co-operation with state churches. In Sweden, foreign missionary work separated from the state church and became much more heterogeneous and similar to the free churches. A further differentiation of the foreign mission work of the Nordic countries points to the following characteristics, which might also account for the differences in women's organizational and specific roles in foreign mission work. Norway has been pointed out as the Nordic missionary country par excellence, mirrored in the popular expression of a “missionary Norway” where three maps are acknowledged: home country – Norway, hero country – Palestine, and heathen country – Madagascar.52 Low church, laymen and pietistic orientation have been pointed to as explanatory factors for the impressive number of missionary committees committed to the Norwegian Missionary Society. (At the beginning of the 1960s they still counted 7700.) The Danish foreign mission community, on the other hand, has been more academic, and there has been a lively theological debate on missionary questions throughout the 20th century, a debate which – given the gender specific distribution of educated theologians – for a long time remained an all-male domain, leaving women to the gendered and secondary field of practical “Martha” tasks. It seems as if the composition of religious cultures play a significant role. And that the combination of lay and low church, and Pietism has given women more influence than the more intellectual and theological structure of the Danish church and missionary field.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bockelund, C.E., *Høsten er stor, K.M.A. genæm 50 år. 1950*


Olesen, Elith, *De frigjorte og trællfolket. Amerikansk-engelsk indflydelse på dansk kirkeliv omkring år 1900.* København 1996.

Petersen, Margaretha Balle, *The Holy Danes in Ethnologia Scandinavica 1981*


Thaning, Georg, *Den grundtvigske tetning og hedningemissionen. Kirkeligt samfund af 1898. 1922*


**JOURNALS**

*Dansk Missionsblad* 1903,1906

*Kristeligt Kvindeblad* 1909–1913 [red: Johanne Vahl Blauenfeldt]

*Kristeligt Dagblad* 15.12. 1943.

*De unges Blad* 1923

**ANNUAL REPORTS ETC:**

*Aarsberetninger fra Det danske Missionsselskab, 1910–1940*

*De kristelige Ynglinge og Pigeforeninger i Danmark: Beretning om Virksomheden fra Indre Missions Udvalg. København 1903.*

**KFUK – D.M.S. 1910–1920.**

**RECORDS**

World's YWCA Archives, Geneva

DMS Arkiv i Rigskivet, København.
Hanna Mellemsether

African Women in the Norwegian Mission in South Africa

The Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) started its work in the African kingdom of Zululand in the 1840s. By 1880 only 300 Zulus had joined the Norwegian mission, but after the British occupation of Zululand in 1879, membership in the congregations grew steadily. By 1920 there were 8,882 and by 1930 14,540 registered members. By then the number of mission stations had reached 12 main stations, most of which were in Zululand although there were a few on the Natal side and one station in Durban, NMS's only urban establishment in South Africa at that time. The mission began the process of building an independent Lutheran Church in KwaZulu/Natal in 1914. A constitution for what was then called “The Norwegian Lutheran Zulu Church” was finalized in 1929, but genuine autonomy for the Church did not become a reality until well after the Second World War.

Women made up the majority of the African members of the congregations established by The Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) in South Africa. Yet they are almost invisible in the historical records of NMS, much in the same way as Norwegian unmarried women missionaries and missionary wives are. Male missionaries wrote most of the NMS archival materials. Looking for the voices of African women in the mission archives is therefore a difficult task. These women were under a double set of silencing structures, as both gender and race were at work.

Nevertheless, because women outnumbered men in most congregations, the missionaries had to take women into consideration both in their work within the congregations and in the strategies they chose for their mission enterprise. The discourse on women, both African and Norwegian, changed as the mission consolidated its work in KwaZulu-Natal in the 1920s. By that time the role of African women in the congregations had become a point of discussion among the missionaries in the field, and new openings and possibilities became available for African women.

In this article I look at the nature of the changes that took place, and analyse arguments used by missionaries in their discussions on the role of African women in the Church. I discuss reasons for the new attitudes towards African women’s

involvement in the missionaries' discourse. It is not difficult to find pragmatic reasons for giving African women new roles in the Church; where male workers were hard to find, women had to be put to work. But I argue here that in addition to the increased demand for "manpower", we find elements of the feminist ideas prevalent at that time also within the discourses of male missionaries. And I show how these thoughts and arguments are very similar to those found in the struggle to claim a space for Norwegian women in active mission work. Differences of opinion among Norwegian missionaries show how a bourgeois Christian role for women is contested both in a western emancipated role, and in what the missionaries perceived as the traditional role of women in KwaZulu/Natal.

**Early Converts in NMS**

When the NMS first started work in Zululand, the organization did not have a strategy specifically aimed at women. Zululand was a hard mission field to plough, work was slow and full of setbacks. Only in the last decades of the 19th century can one see the formation of Lutheran congregations in the area. Very soon it became clear that women were more attentive to the gospel than men.

The early converts to Christianity were labelled "outcasts" from Zulu society. They were young men who had fallen out with local authorities, women who had fled from unwanted marriages, widows and poor people who for different reasons experienced difficulties in "traditional" society. Some of them came to the mission station to work for a warm blanket, for medicines, or simply to get away from hunger in an overcrowded homestead. For some, the mission stations became a place to hide, a safe haven outside the reach of Zulu authorities. Deborah Gaitskell suggests that as a rule those who came to the mission stations to seek improved material conditions were men, while women came because of gender-specific life crises.

However, the motives for seeking baptism would be different from the motives that made people come to the stations, and these motives are more difficult to identify. That the Christian gospel has had a stronger attraction for women than men has been seen as a universal phenomenon. This may among other things be caused by the Christian gospel's expression of universal feminine values at the

---

4. Gaitskell, 1990
5. Etherington, 1978
time: compassion, humbleness, caring etc. The prominent place of women in the New Testament might also be of importance when considering women’s motives for conversion.6

But the high proportion of women that was the rule in missions in South Africa was not always found in other mission fields. To the Norwegian missionaries in South Africa, the large number of women in the congregations represented an exception in the mission’s history and was different from the reality experienced by their colleagues both on Madagascar and in China.7 The missionaries ascribed this to aspects of traditional Zulu society, where men’s power and status were so closely connected to polygamy and the lobola system.

The centrality of polygamy in Zulu society implied that few men were prepared to give up this base for their power, prestige and wealth in order to be baptized. A man who took a second wife was automatically excluded from the congregation and evicted from mission farms. Women, who were often seen as victims with no other option than to accept a polygamous husband, were not treated with the same strictness and could — under certain conditions — still be baptized. In Zululand the traditional authorities made their influence felt on most Zulus, and many of them were staunch opponents to the white missionaries. To go against the will of the “heads” was not an easy decision to take either for men or for women.8

Another aspect of Zulu society that kept men away from the mission stations was the migrant work that pulled men and boys off the homesteads in the countryside and into paid labour in white men’s towns, farms and mines. The migrant workers were increasingly absent from the local community they belonged to, leaving women, children and old men in charge of many homesteads.9

The position of women in the collectivist Zulu society, with polygamous marriages and the tradition of lobola around which so much of their society was structured, was a major theme in mission discourse. As part of the process of “setting women free” from Zulu traditions, the missionaries tried to break the lobola tradi-
tion. The missionaries interpreted lobola as “brideprice”, by which a man bought a woman from her father. But as Jeff Guy has shown, lobola is much more complex and much more central to the accumulation of wealth and power in precapitalist southern African societies.\(^\text{10}\) Marriage in precapitalist southern African societies, Guy claims, set up the productive unit upon which the society was based. Lobola is the social institution of transferring property, usually and ideally in the form of cattle, from the husband's father to the wife's father. With the colonial interpretation of Zulu traditions and Zulu law, “lobola” became a fixed amount in cattle or money, the same for all levels in society, while it earlier had been more flexible and varied according to the bride's family's status and position.

The missionaries tried to prohibit baptized Zulus from taking part in lobola transactions. This led to protests among members of the congregations, and the missionaries had to retreat from their rigid position.\(^\text{11}\) One of the arguments that made the missionaries change their mind was that Christian men and women had difficulties finding marriage partners at all as long as they did not practise lobola. It even happened that missionaries helped Christian men with their lobola payments. The mission saw the collectivist Zulu society with its strong ties to family

---

\(^\text{10}\) Jeff Guy, “Gender oppression in southern Africa’s precapitalist societies” in Walker 1990.
\(^\text{11}\) NMT 18/1922 “Ekombe 1921” by Rev. Stramme.
groups and ancestors, together with polygamy and the national pride of the Zulu people, as the main obstacles to Christianization. As one missionary complained: “this Hydra -worldly love of relatives – where the group is everything, the individual nothing” made it extremely difficult for people to convert.12

This communalism was in direct opposition to the individualism in the mission’s Christian gospel: “One of the best thing about a Christian culture is, as we know, the liberation of the individual – and the development of one's personality to full independence.”13 In the missionaries’ evolutionist thinking, the position of women signalled the degree of civilization a society had reached. To uplift women into a better material and spiritual life, to create Christian homes – as opposed to heathen kraals – in the mission fields was “the essence of work among African women” not only for the NMS but also for larger missions like the Anglican Church Mission in South Africa.14 The improvement in the situation of African women became the most frequently used example of the liberating force of the Christian gospel: “The esteem of women must be established among the native Christians. The conflicting opinions of the position and value of women have created a barrier between heathens and Christians. Everybody knows that among the Christians women have a different status”.15

The image of women in traditional Zulu society that the missionaries evoked in their writings to Norwegian readers was a sinister one. To the missionaries, women as a category were deprived of dignity and power, existing merely as a commodity in a masculine marketplace of “bride trade”. The veteran missionary Ole Stavem sums up the missionary view as follows:

[The girls] cannot run to Natal, at least without assistance. As objects of value – at marriage each girl brought in 10 cows for her father or brothers – girls were being guarded much more carefully than boys were. It’s quite touching to read [in the mission stations diaries] about girls like that, who wanted so much to come to the mission station to learn, but who, by violence, force and abuse were taken back to their homes.16

14. This is the theme in an article by Modupe Labode: “From Heathen Kraal to Christian Home: Anglican Mission Education and African Christian Girls, 1850–1900” in Fiona Bowie et al. (eds.), Women and missions: past and present. Anthropological and Historical Perceptions. Providence, R.I. Berg, 1993. The same importance was given to domesticity also in missions in other parts of the world, e.g. in Kenya, as Tabitha Kanogo shows in her article in the same volume: “Mission Impact on Women in Colonial Kenya”.
The missionaries saw the toil of the women in the homesteads as evidence of the way "heathendom" enslaved women. Women in Zulu society were "beasts of burden" for Zulu men, according to the missionaries. This view was based on the traditional Zulu division of labour where women were responsible for cultivating the land, while men were hunters and soldiers and the ones who took care of the cattle. That this could be a legitimate division of labour did not enter into the discussion. To missionaries, the western, bourgeois division of labour, the female private and male public spheres, was taken for granted and a God-given imperative.

The plight of the African women functioned as a strong legitimization of mission work for the Norwegian public; some of the stories printed in the mission magazines were quite heartbreaking. There is no doubt that these kinds of stories helped to open the purse strings of the mission-interested public in Norway, particularly as Norwegian women were the most important contributors to mission organizations. To a certain extent, the stories were, if not manipulated, then at least edited. It is often a one-sided story of exploited, powerless women, without control of their own lives. The fact that African women could possess substantial power as wives and mothers in a Zulu family, or that women also took part in the "mobs" that fetched girls from the mission stations is rarely mentioned in the missionaries' texts. Instead, the stories told by the missionaries accentuate the picture of the horrible conditions under which these women lived. In this dark image of African heathendom, the mission stations stand out like beacons of light, bringing civilization, respect for women, justice and all that was considered "good" and "right" in the mission discourse.

Even so, one cannot simply dismiss the mission's strong focus on the suffering of women as a tactical move to obtain economic support from the home country. During the first fifty years of NMS activity in Zululand and Natal, most of the missionaries experienced first hand dramatic episodes when angry family members came to fetch a girl who had fled to the mission station. Stories of crying girls who were dragged home by grown men, of missionaries who were pressurized at spear point to hand over a young girl to her family, of furious armed men who besieged the stations, are numerous in mission discourse. These stories are about real experiences, and the prominent place they have in the mission texts is therefore not surprising.17

17. The analysis of the mission image is based on the mission magazines: Norsk Missionstidende, Missionstasning for kvinneforeninger (both NMS) and Missionarren (Den Frie Østafrikkanske Misjon) and biographies and histories written by missionaries for a Norwegian audience. See also Hanna Mellemsether, "Gendered Images of Africa? The Writings of Male and Female Missionaries" in Mai Palmberg, Encounter Images in the Meetings between Africa and Europe. The Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2001.
NMS's Strategy: Making good Christian Housewives

Although the Norwegian missionaries did not have a strategy towards women when they started their work in Zululand, they soon developed a practice similar to that of other missions in the field. Girls who came to the mission station for different reasons were put to work in the missionaries' homes. They took care of the children, they worked the kitchen gardens and did other household chores with no other pay than the opportunity to learn to read the Bible, the one thing that was necessary for any person, as the missionary saw it.

In the missionaries' view, Christianity was the only force that could uplift Zulu women from their poor and oppressed state. Missionaries of all denominations aimed to "raise the heathens" from darkness and suffering, although the means of doing so varied. Many mission organizations experienced that the male population kept their distance from the Christian gospel. They understood that the best way of reaching the Zulu people as a whole was through women. By creating Christian homes, where prayers and reading the Bible were common and a part of everyday life, children would find their natural place within Christianity. The focus on women was therefore part of a mission strategy that aimed at creating Christian homes, with all the virtues of a western bourgeois nuclear family.¹⁸

A telling example of the ideal Christian family as the Norwegian missionaries saw it is Rev. Blessing Dahle's description of Gunhild and Johan Biyela, both members of the Lutheran congregation at Eotimati.¹⁹ Gunhild Biyela is created in the missionary's image in a way easily recognizable to a Norwegian public: she speaks Norwegian, and like many Norwegian housewives, she has a Singer sewing machine. She and her husband Johan, who even looks like a European, have both taken Norwegian names and they have a nice home and two clever children in school. The European ideal of romantic marriage, European fashion and manners are all seen as universal values. This was how the missionaries' vision of the future African was after "Darkness" had been conquered by "Light". In this vision, the place of the women was clearly in the private sphere of a Christian home.

It was an attempt first to "domesticate" the women in the hope that the rest of the family would follow. At the onset of mission work, NMS missionaries gathered Africans on the limited area of the mission stations, and the African women worked in the missionary's home, in the kitchen or with the children in exchange for education, food and lodgings.


While boys were trained in outdoor work on the mission farms or on the missionary's private land, girls were taught household chores like cooking, ironing, sewing, hygiene, childcare, embroidery and gardening in addition to Bible studies in order to become "good housewives". This was seen as necessary and sufficient competence for girls.20

From the beginning of their work in Zululand, NMS strategy had been to "evangelize alone"; that is, they had no education to offer except what was necessary preparation for baptism. Towards the mid-1880s their strategy changed towards a greater involvement also in secular education. This education was not very sophisticated; its aim was to "uplift the native Christians to a higher cultural level and to a daily routine more in conformity with the new sphere they enter through Christianity and Christian upbringing."

Religious teaching, however, was still the most important. The curriculum was still gender-specific, and even now the 'domestication' of women was part of their strategy. Even if subjects like mathematics and English were on the curriculum in girl's schools, it happened that these were left out of the teaching because the Norwegian missionaries found it too difficult to teach these subjects to the African girls.22

From about the same time, the NMS also grew from a station-based organization to a network of outstations and congregations in the areas surrounding the mission stations. By the 20th century, Christians as a rule no longer lived on the station, but often miles away, with little or no regular contact with the white missionary. Africans became evangelists, schoolteachers and a few even became ministers. Towards the 1920s, the evangelists became the main actors in bringing the gospel out to new groups and in keeping up the work of existing congregations.23

Even though the mission station in the 1920s no longer functioned as a safe place for refugees as it had done in the earlier times, the benefits that were offered by the mission were still attractive for people who wanted a better life in the worldly sense. This is reflected in the following observation by the NMS General Secretary in 1929: "The thirst for knowledge seems (...) not to be for knowledge as

---

21. Zuluvennen 1894:178, quoted in Simensen 1986:192. Compared to other mission organizations in South Africa, the NMS were late in starting to offer secular education. One reason for the late start was that the NMS was a poor organization compared to the larger Anglican Church Mission and American Board Mission. They had few resources, both human and financial, to invest in expensive projects, but when the colonial government started to include Zululand schools in the government grant system, it made it easier for NMS to engage in education. Another reason why NMS started late on the "civilization" strategy was a strong puritanical Norwegian tradition where "evangelization alone" was to be the basis for all mission work. The change in strategy therefore came after a tough discussion between the missionaries and the NMS's Home Board in Norway during the 1880s.
22. E. Larsen from Eshowe Industrial School, in NMT 20/1928. Whether this was due to incompetence in the teachers or in the students is not commented upon.
23. NMT 37/1929 Rev. Rødseth: "Vår Zulumisjon i 1928".
such (...) but stems from pride and ambition; they want to be like the Europeans in all possible ways, in particular when it comes to obtaining material goods".24

In the mission schools, Africans received knowledge that was useful in an individualistic "modern" society, where rights and opportunities were achieved by individual merit rather than attributed according to tradition, relations and ancestors. The individualism and promises of equality that were part of the Christian gospel gave hope to people who wanted to participate in a white South African society. Many Africans believed that by becoming Christian and 'civilized' they would also secure their rights as citizens in this modern world. This is also in line with the discourse in the NMS, where Christianity was seen as the only force that could, and inevitably would, change both individuals and societies. It is hard to tell if the modernising motive was as prominent among the women as among the men who sought education at mission schools. An indication of women's attitudes towards schooling is that mothers often sent their sons and daughters to mission schools in order for them to achieve a better life than that offered by the 'old' society.

**New Opportunities for Women**

Towards the end of the 19th century, as mission schools in Zululand started to receive government grants and were met with new demands, African women were promoted from the mission kitchen to the mission school. This kind of employment offered Christian African girls, often from the age of 12, an opportunity to contribute to their family's economy. An adult woman teacher could probably live off her salary, but in addition she often had some chickens or a vegetable garden. Even though a female teacher was paid far less than her male colleagues, this meant that she was more financially independent of a husband chosen by her father or brothers than women in earlier times.25

Teaching was the only kind of paid employment open to African women within the NMS organization at that time. Other kinds of employment, for instance as evangelist or minister, were options for men only, as was the case in Norway. However, there are a few examples of women working as "Bible-women", a function much like that of the male evangelists, but without official recognition or any form of payment. How common this practice was is hard to tell, as these women do not figure in mission statistics of employees or in the payrolls. At least one of these women received some kind of recognition from the mission in that she, on request,

---

25. Often though, this independence was purely hypothetical.
was given a “preaching cloak”, which she proudly wore when she walked around to
the homesteads, preaching the gospel with the Bible in her hand.26

In this way, African women contributed directly to the growth of the congrega-
tions. However, there is no evidence that these Bible-women took part in the
annual evangelist meetings, nor were they elected to the parish councils that
slowly started to develop from the early 20th century.

African Women in the Norwegian Lutheran Zulu Church

The Norwegian Mission Society in South Africa underwent a major change in its
strategies from the second decade of the 20th century. From a classical mission
strategy, with evangelization and gathering believers in small congregations, they
started to work towards establishing a Lutheran Zulu Church in 1914, based on
these congregations. The church-building process made an impact on all levels of
mission work in the 1920s. Africans were expected to participate in all work, from
financial contributions to various levels of the church’s organization. But when it
came to decision-making, the missionaries still maintained their monopoly.

From the beginning, this nascent Lutheran Church was run and controlled by
the missionaries, and the Africans were only given a symbolic function with no
real authority until the 1950s.27 The early organization of the Church functioned
as a training ground for its members with a view to the future when they would
be fully self-governing, self-supporting and self-spreading. From the start of the
process, only men had a place in the formal organization. The place of women in
the new Church soon became a point of discussion.

Women were by and large the ones who carried the financial burdens of the work
of the congregations with the help of their annual dues, offerings, church bazaars
and other activities, often run by the wife of a missionary or later, by the wife of
the African minister.28 While the missionaries found it difficult to extract financial
support from male members of the congregations, they experienced that women
were more punctual in paying their dues.29 “Fit young men who come home from
work in the cities” gave next to nothing from what the missionaries claimed were

27. About the development of the Norwegian Lutheran Church, see Mellemsether 2001.
28. For more about women’s groups and the missionaries’ wives, see Rannveig Naustvoll, “Kvinner i misjonen.
Kvinneliv og hverdagsliv på de norske misjonstasjonene i Natal og Zululand 1900–1925”. Unpublished
women organizations like the manyanos (Xhosa: unions), the women’s prayer groups that in other mis-
sions played such an important role in Christian African society. See Gaitskell, 1990.
29. NMT 15–16/1920. Rev. H. K. Leisegang from Umpumulo observed that while women pay their church
taxes dutifully, men do not. From Eshowe, too, the missionary Rødseth had the same complaints and
stated that the male population even stayed away from church and did not take part in life in the congre-
“big salaries”. But it is obvious that the resources African women had at their disposal were not enough to build a church organization. By teaching women practical skills that enabled them to earn money in a way that was suitable for women, the missionaries hoped to increase the financial foundation of the church. Every penny earned by women in the congregation was potential income for the mission.

But there were also other problems apart from financial ones connected to the female majority: since they were so dominant in numbers, should they not be given a voice in the organization of the Lutheran Zulu Church? This problem was recognized by the missionaries already in 1914, when the first draft of a constitution for the Church was discussed at the missionary conference that year. In this draft, it was suggested that only “men and boys” should have a right to vote for members of parish councils and other offices in the Church organization. Several of the Norwegian male missionaries protested against this proposal, and Rev. Bovim suggested that women should be given the right to vote: “The Zulus should be brought up to give room for women”. Rev. Johan Kjelvei enquired what right men had to “act as women’s consciences”.

Some missionaries pointed to the situation in Norway where women were enfranchised in mission organizations, in local councils and in Parliament, and this was how it should be also in Zululand. Rev. Leisegang claimed that whatever one might feel towards “women’s emancipation” as such, the best thing would be to give Zulu women the right to vote from the start. Unlike some of the missionaries, he saw no purpose in postponing this issue. The majority, with the exception of the superintendent and four other veteran missionaries who voted against the proposal, followed this line, and so women were given the right to vote for representatives in the Church congregations.

The exclusion of women from all positions revealed another problem in the church organization. Many congregations experienced that they could not find a sufficient number of men to form a parish council. The Norwegian missionary, as head of the congregation, was free to choose his own council after consulting with the elders. However, most missionaries let the congregation elect its own representatives. But as it became increasingly difficult to find enough competent men to fill the position, radical measures were suggested.

32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. NMT 4/1911.
Rev. Strømme proposed to the Missionary Conference as early as 1919 that women might become eligible for positions on parish councils and other offices in the Zulu Church. The proposal was brought about by his own experiences in the Esinyamboti district in Natal. In some of the congregations there, the parish councils did not function as most of the male members of the councils were away on migrant work in towns or on farms. "The homesteads were without male heads for most of the year (1919). It is evident that it is of no use to elect substitutes (to the parish councils) in these circumstances. No, women need to come to the rescue, even though it is not quite according to true Zulu tradition".

Strømme argued here against Zulu gender roles; these needed to be transcended in order to do what is best for the congregation and mission work as a whole. From this statement we are given the impression that the main reason for not letting women hold positions in the Zulu Church was Zulu tradition. But did African men object to women being given a role in the Church or did the stronger opposition come from the white male missionaries?

There are few indications in the mission material as to how Africans in the congregations reacted to the change in gender roles that Christianity was supposed to bring about. On rare occasions this is discussed in the Annual Church meeting, usually in connection with discussions initiated by the missionaries on how the Africans should build Christian homes. In the NMS sources from the 1920s, I have found only one incident where gender roles specifically were discussed at a Church meeting. The evangelist Mfundiseni Mswebi pointed out to the other leaders of the church that it was necessary for men to encourage women to learn about hygiene and cooking. According to the missionary who wrote the report from this meeting, many of the African men present spoke in favour of Christian gender roles. They claimed that a lot had already been done to improve the Christian homes, and they were seemingly ready to change their own ways:

We must not blame our women for being unhygienic or for not doing their duty in regard to their work in the house as long as we send them out into the fields to do all the work there, while we men sit at home. It is impossible for them to do all the outdoor work and at the same time take proper care of the home.

Based on this single discussion it is of course impossible to draw any conclusions about African men's attitudes to the position of women in the Church. Nevertheless, it does indicate that African men agreed it was necessary to transform both male and female gender roles in the homes, and they might therefore also

37. CR 1924. "Report from the Annual Church Meeting"
have been willing to give women an opportunity in the Church. But what was said at this meeting, with white missionaries present, might not be in accordance with reality and practice even among Christian men. There are several examples of African men who resisted attending schools together with women and children, and the fact that many teachers were women kept some men away.

What we do know, however, is that Strømme's suggestion about giving women the right to take up positions in the Church was met with resistance from “white male traditions.” During the discussions on the place of women in the Church at the Missionary Conference in 1914, some missionaries drew the line at women’s participation in the right to vote. Rev. L.M. Titlestad expressed fear that if women became eligible, parish council meetings could turn out to “consist only of women.” Whether he by that meant it would be an incompetent council, or if he, like many at the time, believed this was an unsuitable job for women in principle, is not certain. Many of the Norwegian male missionaries were just as negative to giving Norwegian women missionaries new roles, more responsibility or more equal pay as they were to giving African women a place in the Church's organizations.

**Pragmatic Adaptation or Missionary Feminism?**

As we saw above, most of the male missionaries agreed that African women should have the right to vote, to take part “backstage” in the organizations, in the new Zulu Church. These were battles already won by white women in many Christian arenas (but not all by far). Norwegian women missionaries could take part in the discussions and vote at the annual Missionary Conference just like their male colleagues. That black women should have these same rights was in line with the mission notion of “uplifting the heathens”, and as some missionaries pointed out, in line with practise in Norway.

But neither white women nor black were eligible for any positions in the church. To achieve this, another battle had to be fought, and new boundaries moved. This battle would be harder to win than the right to vote.

The one missionary who held the most radical view on the role of women was Rev. P. R. Strømme. At several Missionary Conferences, he argued that Norwegian women missionaries should get better pay, have more independence and be given new responsibilities. In 1925, he claimed that missionaries who maintained that women could not do the same work as men were “at least 40 years behind

---

39. See for example the discussion on new roles for single women at the Missionary Conference in CR 1923.
40. Some of the women were active at these conferences — others were merely onlookers who wished to stay out of “church matters".
the times”. However, the plight of the African women was closest to his heart. Although his proposal from 1919 did not result in a right for African women to hold positions in the Church, he continued his struggle to make space for these women within the nascent Zulu church. In 1922, he wrote in Norsk Missionstidende that the mission had failed to do enough to uplift the Zulu woman “as a human being”. Nor had they done enough to help her “build her home”. Because of this lack of education and training, the mission could not to any extent give her assignments to work for her people and her church: “She does have the faculties” to work for the good of her people, but the mission has failed to use them, Stromme argues. This is a recurrent theme all through Rev. Stromme’s writings.

The arguments used by missionaries for the rights of African women in the Church can be divided into two parts. One is a familiar one from the Norwegian discourse on women in mission work: when there were no men to take on the work, women must be allowed to do it. Lisbeth Mikaelsson use the term “missionary feminism” to describe the process whereby Norwegian women negotiated a new role within the mission movement at home. Missionary feminism can be defined as “the way the women’s identities as religious subjects has contributed to destabilize traditional ideas of what a woman should be allowed to do”. The Victorian/bourgeois ideal of subordination, angels of the homes and keepers of the family were, as we have seen, fundamental to mission work among African women. Both in schools and in practical work on the stations, this was the general idea of the role of women. However, when men could not, or would not, fulfil their duty in the public world of the Church’s organizations, the possibility of women taking on these roles was discussed.

The term mission feminism implies the acceptance of women as useful “tools” in missionary work along with men. Not only do women have a right to work for the spread of the gospel, they also have a duty to do so. With God and the Bible as legitimising factors, women could transcend traditional gender roles and take up work outside the family sphere.

But there is also a different side to the pragmatic view of the term missionary feminism, a side connected to a more ‘modern’ discourse on feminism where

42. Rev. Stromme in NMT 18/1922. When the constitution of the Zulu Church from 1914 was reviewed in 1929, and the Church drew up its first formal organizational rules, women were still not able to hold any offices in the Church, not even at parish level. The rules stated “Parish council members are from 3 to 5 men in every congregation”.
43. See Mikaelsson’s article in this volume. Also Lisbeth Mikaelsson: “Kallets Ekko: Studier i misjon og selvbiografi”, (Dr. Philos thesis), Univ. i Bergen, 2001.
44. See e.g. Mellemsether 1995. During the last decades of the 19th century, after a period of evangelical awakenings all over Scandinavia, several Norwegian women pushed the limits for their accepted sphere of action, helped by the urgency of millenarianism.
claims for women's rights were connected to women's inclusion in the category of humanity. In the missionary discourse, the notion of "full independence" of the subject also included women – both Norwegian and African. The independence of the individual was both a prerequisite for Christianization and a result of it, as we have seen in discussions around the need to "uplift" the heathen women into "civilization" through Christianity. But in addition, a majority of the missionaries argued for what can be labelled a modern role for women, also for the Zulu women who in traditional Zulu culture did not have a formal share in decision-making at any level of society. We can see this in the discussion about the right of African women to vote in Church elections in 1914 and in Strømme's later proposals to give women the right to positions in the Church. It was argued that it was "fair" and "sensible" that women should also have a say in the leadership, since in addition to being in an overwhelming majority, they also contributed the most both in financial and spiritual terms to the life in the congregations.

**Conclusion**

Much research remains to be done before a comprehensive history of African women's participation in the congregations of the Norwegian Zulu church in South Africa can be written. As this article has shown, the NMS was from the start concerned with material and spiritual conditions for African women. The strategies towards African women in the NMS were, as in most other missions, aimed at making good Christian housewives. Following the principle that Christianity in itself was a strong enough force to uplift the people and society, very little effort was put into the education of the women. However, as the lack of men in the congregations became obvious, some male missionaries started to argue for a more including attitude towards African women in the Church. It was a modern role some of these missionaries wanted for African women: a space for women in the public sphere as members of parish councils, the right to vote in Church matters and an education aimed specifically at women.

But in the racially divided setting of South Africa, the discourse on gender is even more fraught with ambivalence and contradictions than in the comparatively homogeneous Norwegian society. In South Africa the foundations of segregationist politics were laid in the 1920s. The assurances of equality and justice for Africans promised by mission education became more and more inaccessible in the real world. The notion of human rights and full participation of African women in segregated South African society never became a topic in mission work, where even African men were set apart from the white minority.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES
NMT. Norsk Misjonstidende [The NMS's mission journal in Norway]
CR. Conference report [Konferansereferat] from the missionary conferences in South Africa. In NMS Archives, Stavanger [NMS SAA].
Home Board Reply. [Svarskriv] to CR.

LITERATURE
Gaitskell, Debbie, "Female Faith and the Politics of the Personal: Five Mission Encounters in Twentieth-Century South Africa" in Feminist Review no. 65 Summer, 2000
Guy, Jeff, "Gender oppression in southern Africa's precapitalist societies" in Walker, Cherryl [ed]: Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945, Claremont/London, 1990
Mellemsether, Hanna, Kvinne i to verdener. En kulturhistorisk analyse av afrikamisinjøreren Martha Sannes liv i perioden 1884–1901, Rapport 1/95 Senter for Kvinneforskning, UNIT Trondheim, 1995
Mellemsether, Hanna, "Gendered Images of Africa. The writings of Male and Female Missionaries", in Mai Palmberg, [ed.], Encounter Images in the Meetings between Africa and Europe, The Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2001
Stavem, O., Et bantufolk og kristendommen. Det norske missionsselskaps syttiaarige zulu-mission, Stavanger, 1915

45. White women gained the right to vote in 1930.
Building God’s Kingdom:
The Importance of the House to 19th Century Norwegian Missionaries in Madagascar
Introduction

In his seminal essay on the Kabyle house, Bourdieu shows the intimate connection that exists between the house, its inhabitants, and the wider society. He argues that in architecture, furnishing, and decoration, as well as through the organization of space, the house objectifies cultural schema and values fundamental to the social context in which the house exists. However, the house is more than a mere material and symbolic expression of these categories and values. According to Bourdieu, it is simultaneously a primary locus for their reproduction. By moving in the house world, and between the worlds inside and outside the house, people internalize these schema as their taken for granted world – as habit, both in a mental and a bodily sense.

Drawing upon Bourdieu’s work on the Kabyle house, this essay examines the importance of the house to nineteenth century Norwegian missionaries to Madagascar. It focuses on Norwegian missionaries in the Vakinankaratra and Betsileo, the two highland regions south of the capital Antananarivo, where the Norwegian mission concentrated its efforts. Examples from their Norwegian contemporaries in other regions of Madagascar will be drawn upon where relevant.

To judge from the archival material, the work of building God’s kingdom in highland Madagascar was to a surprising degree centered around the construction of

1. I would like to thank Brill NV for their kind permission to reprint this article, which first appeared in Karen Middleton (ed.), Ancestors, Power and History in Madagascar. Brill, Leiden 1999, 71–102. I have chosen to reprint the text unchanged, but would like to clarify one point based on the feedback I received presenting the paper at the workshop on ‘Women in Missions’. Bergen June 2000. It could have been made clearer that missionary wives indeed made significant contribution to various work outside the house and thus that the gendered division of space described in the paper was less clear cut in practical life. However, this paper probes into the missionary wives’ domestic role. Even more so, it investigates the ideological importance of her domestic role in the missionary culture and community. An understanding of this is fundamental in recognizing, firstly, how significant the missionary wives were in the missionary enterprise as such. Secondly, it helps explain why missionary wives – perhaps to an even greater extent than single women in the mission, have been so invisible, despite their many roles and active involvement. Other authors in this volume eminently describe how the missionary wife also carried other roles beyond the domestic sphere.

Acknowledgements: This is the first publication from an ongoing Ph.D. project funded by the Norwegian Research Council. My sincere thanks to Karen Middleton for her constructive suggestions. Thanks also to Maurice Bloch for discussions on the house material, to Rita Astuti, Rolf Welde Skeie, professors and fellow Ph.D. students at the Faculty of Arts, University of Oslo, for reading and commenting on earlier drafts. I, however, am responsible for any shortcomings.

4. In this paper I use the term ‘highlands’ interchangeably with ‘Vakinankaratra’ and ‘Betsileo’.

176 Karina Hestad Skeie
buildings, not merely churches, schools, and assembly places but also the houses in which the Norwegian missionaries would live. While the 'mission station' eventually comprised at least a church and a school in addition to the missionary's dwelling, it was often realised in the first instance around a combined school and dwelling, built by the missionary himself. Until a church was built, a room in this building was also used for Sunday services. This building was not only the first physical manifestation of the Norwegian mission's presence in a Malagasy locality to the Norwegian missionaries and their audience in Norway. It was also recognized by the local Malagasy peoples, by the government in Antananarivo, and by mission organizations of other nationalities and denominations, as a sign of their determination to stay. Wherever they settled, the Norwegians created 'Station districts, each with a missionary residing in a mission station at its centre, surrounded by an ever growing number of satellite churches and schools. Constantly travelling out from his station, the missionary would lead the missionary work in the district.

Despite its centrality, the Norwegian missionaries did not define the dwelling as part of the 'real missionary work'. The house belonged to the 'external' or 'indirect' aspects of their task, aspects which were related to but nevertheless distinct from the 'direct' or 'real' work of spreading 'the Word'. This distinction corresponded to a distinction between 'the external' and 'the spiritual', or the 'visible' and the 'invisible', in the missionaries' religion. In Norway, the relationship between what was spiritual and invisible, on the one hand, and what was external and visible, on the other, seems to have been largely taken for granted. In the missionizing context in Madagascar, however, it became somewhat of a theological problem for missionaries. I will show why it was essential for the missionaries to define themselves as preoccupied with 'the spiritual', and how the dwelling played an important part in creating and maintaining this imagery.

While Bourdieu's theory concerns the house in a familiar world, this paper concerns the house in a context of a cultural encounter. Bourdieu's theory is nevertheless relevant in two ways. First, it alerts us to the ways in which the house carried the Norwegian missionaries' culture and values, and structured their lives and work in a very concrete sense. At the same time, the complex dynamic Bourdieu proposes between the house and the world beyond directs our attention to the ways in which the house, on account of being placed in the Malagasy socio-cultural world, became implicated in the negotiation and transformation of Norwegian missionary culture and values.

---

5. I once commented upon the prominence of buildings and their construction in the nineteenth century missionary material to missionary Kjetil Aano, at that time editor of the Norwegian Mission Magazine. He told me that a survey had revealed this theme to be by far the most prominent in the Mission Magazine over the previous decade.
In exploring the role of the house in this cultural encounter, I have drawn on historical sources that tell us about life on the mission station. The classification of the dwelling and everything associated with the dwelling as only indirectly relevant to the missionary task was underlined in a gendered division of labour between the missionary couple: she took care of the world inside the house so that he could spend his time and energy on the 'real' task outside the house. This is one reason why the material from male missionaries, who are most substantially represented in the NMS archives, primarily describes life outside the mission station, where the 'real missionary work' took place. My primary source for the lived world inside the mission station is missionary wife Anna Caroline Amalia Christine (Lina) Haslund's ten year private correspondence to her family in Stavanger. Lina and her husband, Johan Christian Haslund, are central figures in this paper, because the material from them regarding life on the mission station is particularly rich.

Lina Haslund's information can be considered representative in so far as her role as wife and mother corresponded to the situation of most Norwegian missionary wives in Madagascar. The details in her letters also tally with the information given by male missionaries in their personal diaries or in more formal letters to the mission leaders in Stavanger, as well as with photographs of other Norwegian mission station interiors. By the time Lina Haslund arrived in Madagascar, more than 10 years after the Norwegian pioneers, issues regarding housing had probably become part of the largely taken for granted structure of missionary life in the highlands.

I begin with a brief history of the Norwegian mission in Madagascar and an outline of the nineteenth century Norwegian missionaries' home background.

The Norwegian Mission to Madagascar

The substantial missionary effort in Madagascar made by the London Missionary Society (LMS) is well known. Less well studied is the impact of another Protestant mission to Madagascar, that of the Lutheran Norwegian Mission Society

---

6. This chapter is based on 1) NMS archives, Stavanger, Hjemmearkivet (abbreviated NMS/Hjemme), boxes 34–40, Konferansereferater and boxes 131–141 Innkomme brev, and 2) Theodor Olsen’s personal diaries, Bok 1 (1891–1892), Bok 2–3 (1892), Bok 4 (1894, 1896) (abbreviated NMS/Diary/Olsen 1–4). I thank Pier Larson for generous permission to use his 'Catalog of Madagascar holdings contained in the Hjemmearkiv of the NMS' and 'Lists of documents contained in the Larson catalog of the Madagascar holdings of the Hjemme-Arkiv 1866–1899'. I also thank Nils Kristian Høimyr and Randrianirina Philippe for their generous permission to use the printed transcript of Theodor Olsen’s diaries.

7. The letters were donated to the NMS archives in 1971 and 1980. One of the donors had received them from a descendant of Lina Haslund’s brother, Isak Isachsen.

Commencing in 1866, and still active today, Norwegian missionary engagement on the island has been extensive. Indeed, as the French historian Raison-Jourde notes in her exhaustive work *Bible et pouvoir à Madagascar au XIXe siècle*, the Norwegians have left so profound a mark in the Vakinankaratra and Betsileo that any history of Christianity in inland Madagascar not considering their contribution remains incomplete.

The Norwegian mission to Madagascar was inaugurated primarily because the NMS needed a field likely to provide quick positive results. Their first mission field, Zululand-Natal, had proved to be ‘exceptionally hard and unpromising’, and the mission leaders were anxious to retain the growing interest of an increasingly affluent Norwegian population. Their timing proved to be excellent. In 1869, within three years of the first Norwegian missionaries’ arrival, the Merina queen and her Prime Minister were baptized, and ‘the worship’, as Christianity was called, became the state religion for all loyal subjects in the areas under Merina control.

While the Norwegian missionaries were grateful for the large number of Malagasy who filled their churches and were baptized, the fact that ‘the worship’ was ‘the Queen’s religion’ also meant that many aspects of how Christianity came to be practised in the Highlands collided with their own understanding of conversion as something individual and spiritual, a transformation of the inner self. Yet the Norwegian missionaries had to be associated with Merina state Christianity, in order to get pupils in their schools, people in their churches, and permission to preach in the many assembly houses.

The first Norwegian mission stations were founded in Betafo, (Ant)Sirabe, and Masinandraina in the Vakinankaratra. This and Betsileo were to become the primary regions for Norwegian mission effort. From 1874 the NMS began work in Tulear and Morondava on the West Coast, from 1888 on the East Coast (Vangaindrano), in the Bara region (Ihosy), and in the far South (Fort-Dauphin), and from

---

11. Fridtjov Birkeli et al., *Det Norske Misjonsselskaps historie. Madagaskar Inland, Vest-Madagaskar, Øst-Madagaskar*, Det Norske Misjonsselskap, Stavanger, 1949: 19. Madagascar had been known to Norwegians since the 1830s through articles in the Mission Magazine about the work of the LMS. Also, the NMS had started to build a mission ship, and therefore was looking for a field, close to the existing mission in Zululand-Natal, that could be reached by sea.
13. The movement to the West Coast in 1874 had resulted from a disagreement with the LMS. The LMS claimed the capital and ‘a large circle around it’ as their ‘field’. The NMS disputed this claim. (Fridtjov Birkeli, *Politikk og misjon. De politiske og interkonfesjonelle forhold på Madagaskar og deres betydning for den norske misjons grunnlegging 1861–1875*, Egede-Instituttet, Oslo, 1952:141)
14. This field was handed over to a Norwegian-American Mission Society after two years, and the missionaries, first and second generation Norwegian immigrants to the USA, were transferred to the new society.
1892 in Ambohimanga, in the forest region. However, the Norwegian mission in these regions was far less successful than in the highlands.

Before the French occupation in 1895, education was a major part of Norwegian missionary work, especially in the Vakinankaratra and Betsileo, where the Merina government from 1881 tried to enforce compulsory schooling. In addition, there were teachers' colleges in Masinandraina and Fianarantsoa, and a Lutheran Seminary for training Malagasy pastors which was started in Antananarivo but later moved to Fianarantsoa. From the 1880s, Malagasy personnel - teachers, evangelists and pastors - had a major hand in daily missionary work. The first three Malagasy Lutheran pastors were ordained in 1883, and by the 1890s there were more Malagasy pastors than Norwegian missionaries in the Malagasy Lutheran church.

Medical work or 'the work of mercy' became a separate branch of missionary work from 1876. It came to include two hospitals, a medical school run in cooperation with the LMS, work among the leprous, and two institutions for raising Malagasy children in a Christian environment, in which women were to play a major role. Medical assistance also went hand in hand with congregational work for most Norwegian missionaries; some theologians became much sought after lay doctors.

A rapidly growing missionary movement is an important feature of nineteenth century Norwegian society, which was undergoing wide-ranging social change. A period of economic prosperity led to better communications, improved schooling, and greater urbanization. In both urban and rural areas an emerging middle class 'had the necessary surplus of money, time and energy to subscribe to missionary publications, attend meetings, and contribute to a national organization'. Jointly founded by Moravians, Haugians and state church clergy in Stavanger in 1842, the NMS was a private organization fully dependent on financial contributions from its local affiliated societies. By the turn of the century, it had developed into one of the broadest popular movements in Norway, which partly explains Norway's exceptionally large number of active missionaries relative to its population size.

15. Although the Merina government had made school attendance compulsory in 1876, the law of 1881 was more radical (Fuglestad and Simensen (eds.) 1986: 102–103).
16. The Franco-Merina war (1883–85) helped bring about the ordination of Malagasy pastors because it forced the missionaries to abandon their stations for a while (Birkeli et al. 1949: 118, 120).
17. Ibid.: 121.
18. Ibid.: 124.
22. Ibid.: 13. In 1885, the NMS fortnightly journal Norsk Missionstidende had 10,000 subscribers in a
The majority of Norwegian missionaries to Madagascar were recruited from the south-western regions of Norway, where the missionary movement was strongest.23 These were areas where teetotalism and pietistic Christianity had a firm foothold. Arne Bugge Amundsen argues that the pietist awakenings of the nineteenth century can be seen as a movement away from a hereditary collective piety towards an increasingly individual and personally experienced type of religiosity.24 The Haugian movement25 emphasized the Christian ethic and moral responsibility in this world, combining this with the creation of circles of Haugian ‘friends’, which functioned as networks for social and economic improvement. The Moravians’ pietism, which became the stronger influence from the 1840s and 50s, was interconfessional from the outset and had extensive international contacts. Their religion was more emotional and ‘Evangelical’; the subjective experiences of sinfulness and salvation were emphasized.26 From the 1850s clergy in the State church were profoundly influenced by an awakening which moved them closer to the lay movements’ religious outlooks. Thus, the NMS was firmly based within the Norwegian Lutheran state church which also kept the Haugian and Moravian lay influences largely within its membership.

To Bring the Light of Salvation to Those Who Sit in Darkness

The prescript of the NMS states that the purpose of the mission is ‘to take the Gospel of Good Tidings farther and farther beyond the borders of the homeland, to those who still sit in darkness not knowing the Light of Salvation.’27 This highly visual image of the encounter between light and darkness was extremely potent in mission interested religious milieus.28 With strong Biblical roots, it conveys both conviction in the power of the Christian Gospel and the urge to missionize. Many of the Norwegian missionaries were recruited from Evangelical movements

---

25. ‘Haugianism’ named after its founder, Hans Nielsen Hauge, a farmer’s son, was a revivalist lay movement of Norwegian origin, which gained many followers from the 1790s, especially among prominent farming families.
in which salvation followed intense experiences of sinfulness and abandonment by God, often conjoined with very strong fears of death and hell. For those who had experienced how conversion might transform utter despair into peace, a sense of obligation to spread the ‘Good Tiding’ was a powerful motive for becoming a missionary.29

To bring God’s light to those in darkness was a spiritual battle, in which the missionaries saw themselves as engaged in a fight against the King of Darkness’ grip on peoples’ souls.30 This was more serious than a battle between life and death; it was a battle between eternal life and eternal death. Yet this spiritual battle also had clear bodily and material implications. Not only did it lead the Norwegian missionaries to journey to and settle in Madagascar, but once there missionary work had to be carried out on two fronts: the spiritual – through the preaching and teaching of ‘God’s holy word’ – and the bodily and the material – through the creation of an infrastructure of dwellings, schools and churches from which the missionaries could work to create an environment where ‘Christians’ could grow in knowledge and faith. Some missionaries depict themselves as gardeners sowing the word of God in the Malagasy soil.31 It was necessary to prepare the ground beforehand so that the seed would germinate and grow. God’s Kingdom therefore had both internal and external aspects; it was at one and the same time spiritual and corporeal. Yet in another sense the spiritual side of missionary work was God’s realm, as only God could make the seed grow. As mortals, the missionary could only see, describe and work on the external aspects, and conclude from these the work’s internal worth.

**The Mission Station**

The Norwegian missionaries called their dwelling the ‘Mission Station’ (*Missionsstationen*) or simply the ‘Station’, terms which connected the house inextricably to missionary work. Webster’s dictionary defines ‘station’ as:

1. a place or position in which a person or thing is assigned to stand or remain or is standing or remaining. 2. the place at which something stops or is scheduled to stop: a regular stopping place, as on a railroad. 3. the building or buildings at such a stopping place. 4. the district or municipal headquarters of certain public services. [...] 5. a place equipped for some particular kind of work, service, research

---

30. NMS/Hjemme/Box 136/Jacket 14/Minsaas, Fihasinana 5 Aug 1885.
31. NMS/Hjemme/Box 39B/Jacket 1/Einrem, Midongy 12 Jan 1898; Box 134/Jacket 10/Linda, Soatanana 27 Oct 1877; Box 135B/Jacket 8/Minsaas, Fihasinana 23 Feb 1882; Box 136/Jacket 5/Haslund, Tsaraindrana 28 Jan 1884; Box 139/Jacket 8/Thorbjørnsen, Manambondro 16 May 1890.
or the like. 8. Mil. a. a military place of duty. b. a semi-permanent army post. […]
Formerly (in India) the area in which the British officials of a district or the officers of a garrison resided.

In calling their dwellings 'stations' the Norwegian missionaries probably followed an established terminology from other countries and other mission fields, which perhaps in turn had been taken over from a military-colonial context. The connotations of 'station' for the Norwegian missionaries nevertheless fit the definitions in Webster's dictionary. To settle in a location was to 'occupy a place' (besette et Omlandet). The correlation between this and missionizing as spiritual warfare is evident. Since it was the Malagasy who were the 'target', population density was a crucial factor in deciding where to place a station. Places chosen were those where the missionary could most easily reach a sizeable population.

Each missionary was 'placed in' (plassert) or 'appointed to' (bestemt) a particular locality by the mission leaders in Stavanger and/or by decisions taken jointly at the annual meetings of missionaries in Madagascar. From the moment they were selected for the lengthy missionary school education to the time they were
allocated, the missionaries saw the hand of God at work. If their 'vocation' (Kall) was 'from God', He would work through all the decisions to reveal his will. Thus, upon reaching the appointed place in Madagascar, the missionary saw himself as a representative (Udsending, literally, 'outsent') of the NMS and the mission congregation in Norway, but above all of God. The station became his post of duty until he was relieved or given another posting or died. This sense of 'the calling' (Kallet) and of submission to God's will no doubt sustained the missionaries in the face of disappointments and hardships. Some felt that their entire life had been a longing and a preparation for the moment when they could begin 'the holy missionary work' (Den hellige Missionsgjerning).

Both the Norwegian missionaries and local and central Malagasy political powers looked upon the setting up of a dwelling as a declaration of their intent to stay. Competition between the various British, French and Norwegian mission societies also meant that in areas where several organizations had interests, it was considered important to build stations and churches in order to 'secure' and 'occupy' a particular district for the mission society. The Merina government for its part wanted to regulate where foreign missionaries could settle. In Vakinankaratra and Betsileo, no foreigner was allowed to set up a dwelling without permission from the authorities in Antananarivo. In general, however, the Merina government was favourable to and even wanted the missionaries to work in areas under its control. This was not always the case in the other regions of Madagascar where Norwegian missionaries took up missionary work.

Until they could build their own dwelling, Norwegian missionaries in the highlands lived in rented houses. These tended to belong to the most prominent people in the local community, often a Malagasy noble (Andriana), and were usually but not always grander than other houses in the neighbourhood. This association with Andriana at the outset linked the missionaries to the highest strata, and continued, at least indirectly when the missionaries moved into their 'proper dwellings'.

Like other Europeans at the time, the Norwegian missionaries had a strong preference for constructing their dwellings on hilltops. The reason for this preference was generally pragmatic: malaria or 'Malagasy Fever' was perhaps the most serious health problem the missionaries faced, and in areas 'with fever', they, like their European contemporaries, believed hilltops were healthier than places with less change of air. However, the landscape where the Norwegian missionaries placed their station also had a cultural logic of its own. In the highlands, hilltops were associated with holiness and power. Johan Christian Haslund's description of the construction of Ambohimahamasina station in Southern Betsileo illustrates how dramatic the resulting conflict of interests could be:
As a site [for school and dwelling] I had chosen a small hill with evenly falling slopes close to the village. However, the problem with this hill, on which I for several reasons wanted to build, was that it was, or rather had been, a holy site; on its top lay a quite large holy sacrificial stone and beside it was erected a high stake, whose top was decorated with some carved embellishment. Elderly people, whom I have spoken to, said that before the Queen started to pray and commend the people to do the same, this hilltop was a place for public sacrifices, where large numbers of people in the south came together to eat and bring the gods their sacrifices. On such yearly occasions a number of oxen were slaughtered here on the hilltop, and the oxen’s blood was spilled over the sacrificial stone as a kind of propitiatory sacrifice. I had already several times requested the local leader to give me this hilltop to build on. However, I had not succeeded in getting his permission, since he feared that people in the village as well as in the surrounding area would die, either of heat or of cold or of hunger if he were to permit such destructive abomination of the ancestors’ holy place. I did not let him in peace, however; the place’s holiness merely strengthened my desire to erect precisely there a sanctuary for the living God, from which – by God’s grace – a warming beam of light would shine, enlightening the surrounding darkness.32

Through the intervention of ‘an influential Malagasy’ [he gives no details], Haslund eventually obtained permission to destroy the holy site at Ambohimahasina [literally: ‘at the hill which makes holy’], and build his mission station in its place. Closely watched by the Malagasy workmen, the local leader and his household, Haslund himself swung the axe that gave the holy stake its ‘fatal wound’. The sacrificial stone became a cornerstone in Haslund’s house. ‘It was more suitable as cornerstone than as a sanctuary’. ‘Thus it can truly be said that I have founded my school house on a fallen Pagan sanctuary’.

The desacration of a Malagasy holy site in order to replace it with a mission station appears to have been exceptional. Not all hilltops were sacrificial places. Yet the story is highly revealing of how the missionaries thought of their mission as toppling Pagan idols, and replacing them with a more enlightened way of life. No wonder this passage from Haslund’s letter was reprinted in the Mission Magazine.33

In the highlands, the Norwegian missionary houses were built of local material: sun-dried [red] earth bricks, the roof usually covered with grass. The walls inside and out were covered with a mixture of earth, cowdung, water and sand, before they were chalked white. Durability and solidity appear to have been two factors in the choice of building material. In the coastal and forest areas, the missionaries

32. NMS/Hjemme/Box 134/Jacket 4/Haslund, Ambohimahasina 23 Nov 1876.
33. NMT No 4, April 1877:137–138.
rejected the local grass and cane houses in favour of prefabricated wooden houses sent out from Norway on the mission ship.\textsuperscript{34} The Norwegian mission station was more than a dwelling for the missionary and his family; it was the material expression of the mission society's presence in Madagascar. They were large constructions not only because the missionaries liked to keep an open house for missionary colleagues and their families but also to signal power and influence. Coming from a young nation on the periphery of Europe, and working alongside and partly in competition with powerful mission organizations from imperial countries, the Norwegian missionaries and their mission society were concerned about their social status. Judging from the more military aspects of missionizing terminology, size also signified domination, an aspect which was reinforced by the preference for siting mission stations on hilltops.

While there are very few detailed descriptions of Norwegian mission station architecture, the photographs we have of their exteriors suggest that they tended to be highly modern by Norwegian standards, and more in keeping with contemporary architectural trends in Europe than Norwegian style.\textsuperscript{35} They had rooms for different purposes: office, bedrooms, living rooms, storage rooms and a kitchen. In addition, most stations had a separate 'kitchen house', in which the Malagasy servants slept. With time, other buildings were added, not only a school and a church, but also barns and perhaps a small carpentry workshop. Among the Norwegian middle- and upper classes at the time, as in Europe, the internal division of space by function, combined with the gradual differentiation of buildings, reflected the increasing segregation of people by gender, age and social class.\textsuperscript{36} In Madagascar, the category of race was added to the others, for example, the Malagasy servants slept in the kitchen house. In the milieux where the majority of male Norwegian missionaries were recruited, however, this kind of segregation (i.e., of the farmer and his workers and servants) did not take place until the turn of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{37} For most missionary men, the mission station therefore represented a very visible step up the social ladder.

\textsuperscript{34} Asked by the mission leaders about the possibility of building clay houses in the coastal areas, Thorbjørnsen argued that it was not local practice because of the climate, and did not mean that people there were less civilized than in the highlands (NMS/Hjemme/Box 139/Jacket 8/Thorbjørnsen. Manambondro 27 Feb 1890).

\textsuperscript{35} Adjustments were made to local conditions. For instance, the roof had to cover the walls to prevent the sun-dried bricks from dissolving in heavy rain because it was too expensive to build the foundations of stone (NMS/Hjemme/Box 132/Jacket 3/Engh. Betafo 9 Feb 1870). I am indebted to Arne Lie Christensen for his assistance in assessing the architectural style of the Norwegian mission stations. One problem has been that many stations (e.g., Betafo) changed over time as storeys or sections were added, making it difficult to match the original, rather unclear floorplan with the photographs and descriptions.

\textsuperscript{36} Until the nineteenth century, houses in Norway had largely developed through adjustments and addition to existing buildings. The 'Swiss' style, which gained most ground from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, constituted both an aesthetic and a social program (Arne Lie Christensen. Den norske byggeskikken. Hus og bolig på landsbygda fra middelalder til vår egen tid. Pax forlag A/S. Oslo. 1995:282).
Another missionary describes how:

The Station has a large, lovely garden full of [...] the loveliest roses, heliotropes, reseda and some rare red flowers, bibas trees with ripe fruits, peach trees still in flower. In the middle of the garden lies a small pond surrounded by kalas. From the pond, water is led down to the kitchen garden. A low wall with small, white linking posts, almost surrounds the garden. In the middle [...] are three small pavillions which look very pretty indeed.38

Expressing a modern sense of order and beauty,39 in which ‘civilization’ triumphed over nature, the mission station garden also differentiated external and internal space in a new way. It expanded the sphere of the house, creating a distance between it and the world beyond. This was underlined by the wall or fence that bounded the people inside the mission station from the Malagasy outside.

The modern European architecture of the Norwegian mission stations in Madagascar connects them firstly to the LMS missionaries,40 and secondly, to Malagasy people of means. The station which Cameron built for missionary J. Pierce carries the key features of the so-called Swiss architectural style.41 The fact that the Norwegian station houses were built with fireplaces according to English custom supports the theory of British influence.42 According to Sibree, houses of sun-dried bricks were introduced by Cameron,43 and quickly copied by those Malagasy who could afford it for their own dwellings. These were also made bigger, with verandahs, and windows and doors all around. The interior was divided into a living room and two sleeping chambers.44 The houses which Norwegian missionaries describe from Vakinankaratra and Betsileo, however, more resemble Sibree’s description of ‘a Malagasy house of the poorer class’.45 Their simplicity and spatial logic contrasted markedly with the Norwegian mission stations.

37. Ibid.: 284.
38. NMS/Diary/Olsen/Book 1, Friday 28 August 1891.
40. While I have been unable to establish whether the Norwegian missionaries hired LMS trained slaves as builders, they would have found prevailing European architectural styles in Madagascar familiar and suited to their requirements. I am indebted to Arne Lie Christensen for this point.
41. Lina Haslund to her parents and siblings, Ambohimahasina 1 Nov 1876 and 4 July 1880.
45. These houses were rectangular, usually made of a mixture of cowdung and clay, and always oriented from south to north, with a window and a door on the west side. Inside, the house consisted of one room where all the family slept and ate; the domestic animals were kept in the southern end of the room at night. The hard-beaten clay floor was sometimes covered with straw mats, similar to those on the walls. The ceiling was usually black with the smoke from the hearth, slightly north-west of the central pole (Sibree 1870: 203–204; Raison-Jourde 1991: 86–88; Lars Dahlé, Madagaskar og dets beboere, Jac. Dybwads Forlag, Christiania, 1876–1877:165–166; Maurice Bloch, From Blessing to Violence. History and ideology in the circumcision ritual of the Merina of Madagascar, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986:38–39.
The House Interior

Like the majority of her fellow missionary wives, Lina Haslund was one of the 'brides' who came out on the mission ship to marry their fiancés in Madagascar. Students at the missionary school were not allowed to marry and then had to stay two years in the field before they could fetch brides. Mission leaders were able to impose this strict rule because the missionary school financed the students' education and subsistence. The majority of students came from lower class families, and had no other opportunity for higher education. By contrast, missionary candidates with an academic education, i.e. candidates who had financed their own education, were allowed to marry prior to going to Madagascar.

Throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, the Norwegian missionaries married only Norwegian women. Some married single female colleagues, but the majority, like Johan Christian Haslund, got their 'brides' from Norway.

While many of the missionary wives also worked outside the home, teaching Malagasy women handicrafts, hygiene and principles of child care, their primary role was without doubt to run the house and raise the children, and help and encourage the husband in 'his often difficult missionary work'. I interpret the fact that the women who came out as brides were given no formal education in the Malagasy language as a very clear signal from the mission organization that their place was in the house rather than outside.

Like the majority of brides, Lina brought several boxes of dowry. There were duvets, pillows, linen, glasses, vases, lamps, pictures, plates, bowls, meat and coffee grinders, pots and pans, everything required to create a good Norwegian home in Madagascar. She even brought a selection of familiar vegetable and flower seeds for the garden: radish, purslane, parsley, carrots, peas and sweet peas, reseda, snapdragon, sunflowers and dahlias. The majority of seeds germinated and grew well in the Malagasy soil, Lina reported home.

Lina describes the furnishings and decoration of the living room in some detail. Confirming the central place her family in Norway occupied in her thoughts, the 'main wall', facing as one entered, was decorated with 'dear family portraits' and a picture of her 'dear family home'. In the lower corner, a clock stood on a shelf which her husband had worked. The glass had broken in transit, but this 'does not matter

47. As far as I know, before Jan. 1998 three Norwegian missionaries have married Malagasy partners, the first in the 1970s, a second in the 1980s, and the third in 1997. Two of the marriages were between Norwegian women and Malagasy men.
49. Lina Haslund to parents and siblings, Ambohimahamasina, 3 Feb 1877.
much' because the clock still worked. 'It is so nice to listen to its cosy and homely ticking.' Decorating the wall leading to the couple's bedroom, over a buffet, which a Malagasy carpenter made to Christian's specifications, were pictures of their spiritual heritage: one of the Mission school and two of Stavanger cathedral, interior and exterior. Although the buffet 'is a pretty piece of furniture', Lina immediately points out is practicability, with storage space, drawers, and lockable cupboards. On the other side, 'all our prettiest books, shining with their pretty, gilded bindings' stood on 'a pretty bookshelf', which her husband had made and given her for Christmas. A mirror hung in the upper corner of the main wall. The organ was to be placed under the mirror as soon as it arrived. In front of the window, with a chair on each side, stood a sewing table, a birthday present from Christian. In the middle of the room was a new table they had had a Malagasy carpenter make.

The fact that the living room is the only room Lina describes in detail suggests that it was the main room in the house. A room for work and pleasure, the sewing table is a visible reminder that Lina constantly mended and sewed clothes for Christian, the children and herself. It is also clear from her letters that the living room rather than the kitchen was the room for meals, and for receiving and entertaining guests, as was the case among the middle and upper classes of Norwegian
society. Judging from her dowry, Lina appears to have come from a rather wealthy family. Although Christian came from the same social stratum, missionary wives generally came from a higher social background than their husbands. An upwardly mobile group, the missionary school education had made the missionary men appropriate marriage partners for middle and upper class Norwegian women.

Lina repeatedly emphasises how important it was to both of them that everything should be ‘pretty’, ‘cosy’, and in ‘good working order’. The nice but functional furniture are all markers of modern, middle-class tastes. A certain amount of decoration helped to create a sense of well-being and prosperity and ‘elevated the mind’. Too much decoration, however, was inappropriate; it was the useful which embellished a house.

There is nothing in this living room to indicate that it is a room in a house in Madagascar. Norway is present through portraits and pieces of furniture as well as through the basic values and decorative taste. In her first letter to her parents, Lina remarked that they were using a *lamba* (a length of cloth that Malagasy wear) as a temporary table cloth. After the dowry boxes arrived, however, this had been replaced with a Norwegian tablecloth.

‘Norwegianness’ was further underlined in their food. For breakfast and supper the family ate bread, coffee and tea, sometimes with boiled egg and cold meat or home made cheese. For dinner: steak, saddle of pork, turkey, duck, hen, and chicken-, beef-, sago- or rice-soup. The missionary wives exchanged cake recipes, along with advice as to which Malagasy ingredients produce the best results. Thus, Lina described making waffles from manioc flour, egg, sugar and buttermilk. On one occasion she even tried to make *kumle* (potato dumplings), a dish served with variations along most of the Norwegian coast, but because ‘they did not turn out right’, she asks her mother to send out some rye flour next time she sent her a box on the mission ship.

Because meat and vegetables were cheap in the highlands, missionaries could afford a better life style in Madagascar than most people of their class in Norway. Prior to Lina’s departure from Norway, Christian writes to reassure his future parents-in-law:

50. Arne Lie Christensen (personal communication).  
51. The majority of NMS women came from the families of ministers, higher or middle ranking public officials, master craftsmen and builders, ship- and factory owners, and medical doctors (Predelli 1998).  
54. Lina Haslund to her parents, Alakamisy 1 Nov 1876.  
55. Lina Haslund to her parents, Alakamisy 3 Feb 1877.  
56. Lina Haslund to her parents, Alakamisy 17 Feb 1873. Over the years, Christian and Lina had things sent from Norway with the mission ship on a fairly regular basis. In return, they sent Malagasy gifts to family and friends in Norway.
Matters of the house is not something the missionaries speak much about, because there are so many important issues that occupy our interest, and partly because one does not want to aggravate weakly-minded mission friends at home. When the missionaries out here have settled, their situation is at least as comfortable and good as that of the majority of rural pastors at home. As far as food is concerned, one would have to be rich in Norway to be able to live as well as here. For that matter it is not hard to live here, while other things make it hard enough.58

While Lina and Christian's life-style was shared by most of their colleagues in the highlands, it contrasted with how some of the Norwegian missionaries on the East coast lived.59 Standards of living, as well as the degree of ‘Norwegianness’ missionaries were able to recreate on their mission stations, largely depended on their proximity to Antananarivo, where commodities could be bought at the main market or ordered from abroad through the NMS ‘depot’. Since transportation greatly increased their costs and all Norwegian missionaries received the same salary regardless of locality, the differences between them could be substantial. Lina's elaborate meals contrast sharply with those of missionaries on the East coast living largely on the same diet as the Malagasy people around them; rice, coffee and the occasional chicken. While Lina describes how all the good food makes her strong, the East coast missionary complains that the poor nurture is bound to weaken their health.60

Bodies and Boundaries

Cleanliness and order were two fundamental values in Norwegian missionaries' homes. In Lina's letters, this issue is strongly connected with the need to create boundaries between an ordered, clean Norwegian world inside the house and a correspondingly dirty and dangerous Malagasy world outside. The domestic servants appear to have been the only Malagasy people with whom Lina was in daily contact, and her relationship to them was ambiguous. Although she describes them as ‘nice’, ‘kind’ and ‘loyal’, she also complains of difficulty in making them understand what they were required to do. It was not like having servants ‘at home’, i.e. in Norway, where they knew how to wash the floor and make Norwegian food without having to be taught. Although language problems probably played some part in her frustrations, at least in the beginning, Lina also seems to have wanted her Malagasy servants to be and think like Norwegians.

58. Christian Haslund to Mr and Mrs Isachsen, Fihasinana 26 Dec 1875.
59. NMS/Hjemme/Box 140A/Jacket 13/Joh. Smith, Antananarivo 1 April 1893; Box 140A/Jacket 13/Thorbjørnsen, Fianarantsoa 25 May 1893; Box 140A/Jacket 17/Bjertnæs, no place no date; NMS archival photographs of the living rooms at Antananarivo and Sirabe.
60. NMS/Hjemme/Box 140A/Jacket 17/Bjertnæs, no place, no date.
For Lina, the main problem with the domestic servants, 'as with the Malagasy in general', is their 'great degree of uncleanness'. In order to see more clearly when they get dirty, Lina makes them wear white uniforms; besides, 'white suits them best'. Even so, she has to show them over and over again how to 'clean the house properly', constantly checking whether they actually do as they are told. Yet she also describes in detail how the Malagasy women she hired to do her laundry manage to get everything nice and clean, despite washing the laundry in cold water in the river (without putting it to soak) and drying it on the ground. Lina credited the strong 'Malagasy soap'. Drawing on Douglas' argument that 'dirt' is 'matter out of place', I would argue that Lina's concern with Malagasy uncleanness both manifests her sense of moral superiority and differentiates her houseworld from the 'Malagasy' world outside. That it is the domestic servants who constitute a group of great ambiguity is not surprising. As Malagasy they belong to the outside, yet their work brings them inside the mission station. Continually transgressing the boundaries, this marginal group constitutes a visible threat to the structures of the missionary world.

Significantly, there was more to the domestic servants' 'uncleanliness' than what was visible on a white uniform:

We are always exposed to dangers and hardships while being down here [on earth], however, I think this can be said in a more profound sense about life out here where one is surrounded by Paganism and darkness, illness and destitution. Yes, life out here has many seamy sides. One of the worst for me is nevertheless the terrible illness with which the people are so imbued. It gives one constant cause for worry, but even more so when one has small children. Alas! How often do I not worry that our sweet little Agmund will be infected thereof, which could easily happen through the servants in food and drink, clothes and [wash]cloth if God did not protect both him and us.

'The terrible illness', too terrible to be named, is syphilis. According to the missionaries, the Malagasy are 'imbued' with this terrible illness on account of their promiscuity (i.e., immorality). Again and again, they complain that sin against the sixth commandment was the most frequent reason for church discipline; one missionary claimed this was the Malagasy people's 'Sisýfús' stone', which prevented them from developing into mature Christians. In the missionaries' eyes, the prevalence of the disease demonstrated the need for their work in Madagascar, but

---

61. Lina Haslund to her parents and siblings, Ambohimahamasina 3 Feb 1877.
62. Lina Haslund to her mother, Ambohimahamasina 17 Feb 1879.
63. Lina Haslund to her parents and siblings, Tsaraindrana 20 Feb 1881.
65. Lina Haslund to her mother, Ambohimahamasina 8 July 1878.
its sexual overtones also added to the secrecy and fears. While unmarried missionaries' sexuality (i.e., their bodily boundaries) was strongly monitored through rules and prohibitions, married missionaries' sexuality, including related issues like pregnancy, was surrounded by silence. As the Norwegian wife was there to take care of all her husband's needs, the house world was expected to protect against syphilis.

Like AIDS in the twentieth century, syphilis led to a more general fear of bodily contact with Malagasy people. The missionaries' children, characteristically another marginal group, were thought to be especially vulnerable.67 Lina refers to stories circulating among the wives of how Mrs. Egenæs became suspicious of ‘their trusted and much beloved nursemaid’, ‘whom they had thought free of the illness’. Upon demanding to ‘see her underneath from top down’, she had turned out to have ‘the worst sores and abscesses that could be imagined’. It was ‘a miracle’ that the child had not been infected by the nursemaid ‘he had loved so much’. Mrs. Egenæs had stated that, from that day on, no girl would come into their service before she personally had examined them (beset dem) stripped top down.68 Such stories no doubt served to reinforce existing fears and suspicions. Missionary wife Agnethe Lindøe, Lina reports, was convinced that ‘if the Lord had not protected us’, they all would easily have been infected through the water scoop in the kitchen from which ‘so many kinds of people, who [...] come in there, drink’. ‘This is difficult to prevent, since we are not always present ourselves.’ ‘I daily pray the Lord to protect us from all the harm and danger which especially in times like these surround us; and you must do the same for us’, Lina's letter to her mother continues.

The Norwegian missionaries’ discourse on the supposed promiscuity of the Malagasy was partly carried out as a discourse on the Malagasy house; things were bound to go wrong when animals, men, women and children were crowded together in one room for the night.69 At the same time, the Norwegian missionaries felt able to evaluate peoples’ spiritual condition by the cleanliness of their houses, their bodies, and their clothes. Thus, the missionaries thought that their presence had had a good side effect when greater quantities of soap were sold at the markets and

67. Growing up with Malagasy nursemaids and playmates, the missionaries' children quickly learned the language and customs. This made some parents fear that despite their efforts to raise them as "Norwegians", "the Malagasy air" would "permanently damage" the children’s minds, unless they "were torn away in time from the Malagasy soil" (Christian Haslund to his father-in-law, 14 April 1885; and also NMS/Hjemme/Box 137/Jacket 15/Selmer, Soraka 12 Sept 1879). Notions that children were more susceptible to tropical disease, and by extension, to social contamination, seem to have been widespread among European colonialists (Ann Laura Stoler, 'Rethinking Colonial Categories; European Communities and the boundaries of Rule', in Society for Comparative Study of Society and History, 31. 1989:149–150).
68. Lina Haslund to her mother, Ambohimahamasina 8 July 1878.
when Malagasy began to build houses with more than one room. Yet while they wanted the Malagasy to copy the basic structure of the mission station, especially when building substations, it is unclear to what extent they were meant to copy its size and standard. Too big a house with too many commodities was not a good thing, especially not for a Malagasy Christian. The Malagasy are so preoccupied with the material, the missionaries frequently complain, if only they could be as interested in the spiritual.

At the same time, there was always the danger that the Malagasy world might impinge upon the Norwegian missionaries themselves. Upon staying the night in a colleague's home, Olsen remarks that the housekeeping appeared to be 'less soignée', and in another reference to the same couple, that they had become somewhat 'barbarized'. Such developments threatened to reverse the missionaries' imagery of evangelization as a one way process in which they would bring enlightenment to Malagasy people. Thus, Lina's obsession with cleanliness can be seen as a double boundary marker, both marking the moral difference between the mission station and the Malagasy world beyond, and proving that she and her family were able to resist the latter's barbarizing influence.

Yet no matter what the missionaries did to protect their world from its surroundings, the invisible yet omnipresent malaria or 'Malagasy fever' seeped in. The uneasy security of the house set high on the hill became claustrophobic as the fever penetrated its solid walls, infecting the inhabitants, one after the other, with its burning poison. Occasionally the fever held the missionaries hostages in their bedrooms for weeks. It is heartbreaking to read Lina's letter on this subject. Initially, both she and Christian hope that children are less susceptible to the fever than adults, only to recognize the symptoms of malaria in their ailing child. Thinking that fever could be transmitted through breast-feeding, Lina weaned their baby son, only to find him burning with the 'evil' fever the moment he was weaned. On some of the mission stations so many fell seriously ill or died from fever that the station was judged 'unhealthy'. Certain missionaries thought that, once the fever 'got in them', it would return at regular intervals. Others claimed to have developed a resistance after extended exposure, implying that the experienced missionary was less susceptible to the fever than a recently arrived one.

---

70. NMS/Hjemme/Box 134/Jacket 2/Egenæs, Ambohimasina 15 March 1876.
71. NMS/Hjemme/Box 137/Jacket 5/Haslund, Tsaraindrana 16 Feb 1886.
72. NMS/Diary/Olsen/Book 4/Friday 5 Oct 1894.
74. Five Norwegians died on Fianarantsoa mission station within a year, three of them children (NMS/Hjemme/Box 39A/Jacket 4/Johnson, Fianarantsoa 15 Jan 1897). Fever also haunted the new mission station in Morondava (NMS/Hjemme/Box 135B/Jacket 7/Jakobsen, Fianarantsoa 9 Sept 1882).
75. NMS/Hjemme/Box 140B/Jacket 14/Thorbjørnsen, Mananjara 8 June 1897.
Relationships Between Houses

Apart from the domestic servants, the only room in the mission station where Malagasy people were let in on a regular basis was the missionary's office. The office belonged to the 'outside', to the 'real missionary work'. While many Norwegian missionaries learned to cherish and deeply respect many of their Malagasy pastors and teachers, they appear never to have moved freely in and out of each other's homes. On the rare occasions when trusted Malagasy co-workers penetrated further, this is mentioned in the missionaries' letters as if it were the exception rather than the rule. Lina Haslund once tells how one of Christian's trusted co-workers comes into the bedroom to pray for him during a severe fever attack. Another missionary records how he and his wife have made it an annual event to invite the newly examined graduates of the seminary at Ivory, Fianarantsoa, into their house. For this one evening, they remove all chairs and tables, and 'according to the good custom of the countryside', enjoy a typical Malagasy meal of rice and meat, sitting on mats laid upon the floor. Rather than invite the students into their Norwegian world, the missionary couple convert their living room into a 'Malagasy' world, legitimizing this by observing that countryfolk in Norway also sometimes sit on the floor.

Equal to this strong opposition between 'the Norwegians' and 'the Malagasy' is the connection between the worlds of the Norwegian mission stations. Lina's most highly cherished social contact was with fellow missionary wives. Almost unanimously, if in different ways, she and the missionaries underline the close and good relationships between the Norwegians, who go freely in and out of each other's houses, almost as if they belonged to one big family. Missionary wives 'were with each other all without distinction, as if they were home in their own house (...) just like sisters'. The male missionaries consistently used sibling terminology to refer to each other: 'Brother Johnson', 'Brother Valen', etc. Religious differences among the Norwegians must have appeared minor relative to those that came between the Norwegians and the Malagasy or missionaries of other denominations and nationalities. Yet the combination of the sibling terminology with the family name also spells out the createdness of this closeness, and suggests hidden tensions in this egalitarian community based on Christian brotherly love.

76. The bachelore Nilsen-Lund may have been an exception. Nursed by 'the Christians' when ill (NMS/Hjemme/Box 140A/Jacket 19/Nilsen-Lund, Ambatofinandrahana 15 July 1894), he also, apparently as a matter of course, invites a total stranger, a Bara, to stay the night in his house (NMS/Hjemme/Box 140B/Jacket 18).
77. Extracts of Lina Haslund's private letter to her parents reprinted in NMT 18 Sept 1886: 351–360: 352.
78. NMS/Hjemme/Box 39/Jacket 9/Jakobsen, Fianarantsoa 14 March 1895.
79. Lina Haslund to her mother, Alakamisy 1 Nov 1876.
Outside the Mission Station

While the missionary wife ‘held the fort’ in the relatively safe, clean and ordered world of the mission station, the male missionary moved away from the house in order to carry out ‘the real missionary task’ in the Malagasy world ‘outside’. This ‘real missionary work’ is often depicted by the missionaries as a kind of spiritual trial. It is not immediately evident, however, in what sense this was so. Judging from the missionaries’ own descriptions, daily missionary work was highly corporeal and to some extent tediously routinized.

Within a few years of starting up, the typical Norwegian missionary in the highlands ran a large parish from his mission station. He was more or less constantly on the move about the district, teaching and preaching in the villages and negotiating permission from local authorities to create congregations and schools. As these grew in number, he would supervise and lead various kinds of construction work. In addition, houses for Malagasy mission workers had to be built around the station district; assembly houses were erected by the local people as part of their fanompoana, their duty to work without pay for the Merina queen. The missionaries also taught children and adults how to read and write; literacy, together with some knowledge of the Lutheran dogmas, was usually a prerequisite for baptism. As the work expanded, the missionaries would spend several days a week educating their Malagasy teachers, evangelists and pastors, and travelling about the district to supervise their work. Thus, before long most Norwegian missionaries in the highlands were primarily dealing with converts and school children (along with local leaders and state officials), rather than the Malagasy population at large.

At first, however, the missionary had contact with all kinds of people. On long journeys he would spend the night in Malagasy homes, although his hosts would usually sleep elsewhere. In any case he always brought a portable bed and linen, sometimes also food, so that, even as a visitor in Malagasy people’s homes, he tried to be self sufficient and adjusted the surroundings to suit his own requirements.

The missionaries recognised only a small proportion of the work they did as ‘real missionary work’. Construction work and dealing with Malagasy officials, for example, was considered ‘external’ (ydre) or ‘indirect’ work. Although necessary, it was not seen as part of the ‘real task’ (den egentlige Gjerning) of speaking and teaching ‘the Word’. Teaching Malagasy children and baptismal candidates to read and write was part of the ‘real’ task because as Lutherans the Norwegian missionaries believed each individual should have direct access to the word of God. Teaching the Malagasy to sing Christian hymns also counted as ‘real’ missionary work, while seeing the sick and distributing medicines was ‘indirect’ work, unless the missionary had been sent out to work as a doctor. It is clear from their reports that ‘external’
work preoccupied the missionaries as much as 'real' work, and that at least some of them found this frustrating. During the initial phases of starting up missionary work in a place, almost all their time would be spent on 'indirect' tasks.

The manifest corporeality of their work posed theological difficulties for the missionaries. They recognised that investment of resources in the visible organization of God's kingdom in Madagascar was both necessary and worthwhile. Indeed, we could say that they sought to reach the 'invisible', Malagasy people's hearts and minds, by creating a visible infrastructure of dwellings, churches and schools in which they could teach and preach 'the Word'. But in the end what really counted was the individual's inner state. Thus, while the missionaries could not help but constantly look for 'external' signs of spiritual transformation in their Malagasy converts, they always mistrusted what they saw.

This tension can be illustrated through the kinds of complaints missionaries made about Malagasy converts. The missionaries believed that a moral Christian life followed from a true inner conversion. Yet in practice they found that Malagasy converts had to be taught Christian moral behavior, ranging from which 'Pagan' rituals and customs they should not observe, 'how Christian mourn', to codes of dress and cleanliness. Time and again, the missionaries report baptizing candidates who had shown clear signs of having grasped the eternal truths, only to be disappointed to find that these individuals did not grow as Christian moral beings in the ways the missionaries had expected. Missionaries were uncertain whether this meant that the conversion had not been 'of God' in the first place or whether a tender plant had been subsequently corrupted by the unfavourable Malagasy environment.

In this sense, the missionaries' intense efforts in the work of visible construction were constant reminders to them of their own inadequacy. Regardless of the number of churches and schools they built, or the size of the congregations they drew, God's kingdom would be built in Madagascar only to the extent that it was built in Malagasy peoples' souls. The missionaries felt strongly that whatever they did, their efforts were fundamentally inadequate because the 'real' work was done by God'. Only He could make 'the Word' germinate and grow in peoples' souls.

Yet in another sense it was by living their inadequacy to the task that the missionaries' work became 'real missionary work'. Fever and other hardships were systematically interpreted as God's way of testing the sincerity of their 'calling' and of moulding them into vessels of his divine agency. By revealing their inadequacy,

---

80. While protests of inadequacy were 'required' of missionaries as expressions of piety, a reading of their letters suggests that it would be wrong to dismiss these simply as rhetoric.
God demonstrated that human vessels, although important, were not irreplaceable. Thus, in the last instance, the ‘spiritual trial’ that the missionary underwent in the world ‘outside’ the mission station can be read as a constant battle for his own salvation rather than a battle for Malagasy souls.81

Inside and Out

I have indicated how the basic values and cultural schema exposed in the Norwegian mission station corresponded to Norwegian middle class values, but that this was not the home background of the majority of the Norwegian missionaries. For most male missionaries, the lived world of the mission stations scattered in the Malagasy landscape continued a process of social elevation which the missionary school education had begun.

Likewise, the Norwegian culture created on and between these stations was not simply a mirror image of Norwegian culture in Norway. The missionaries always referred to Norway as ‘home’ and to Madagascar as ‘out here’. Yet, after a while they had to create their ‘Norwegianness’ from a collective nostalgia for a beloved and distant homeland. Creating and maintaining a ‘Norwegian’ environment required considerable effort, and this was effort invested in material things (furniture, decoration, dress and food). Moreover, Norwegian culture recreated on the mission stations in Madagascar came to mean something different than it did in Norway,82 because, as with the Kabyle house, the meaning and values of the mission station were created partly through a dynamic interaction between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’. This explains how missionaries might well return to Norway as strangers, despite having lived like ‘Norwegians’ in Madagascar for one or more decades.

The same material symbols that created and sustained their identity both as individuals and as a group also separated the missionaries from the Malagasy. Defining the ‘Malagasy’ as unclean, promiscuous (i.e. immoral), and bearers of contagious illnesses helped to connect the Norwegian missionaries together. Racial differentiation did more than simply ‘fix and naturalize the differences between We and They’; it was also ‘part of how people identify the affinities that they share’.83 That these racial divisions became sharper once the missionary married does not necessarily mean that the Norwegian women were more racist than

---

81. When Maurice Bloch first suggested this idea to me, I dismissed it as unlikely since my understanding was that missionaries worked first and foremost for the salvation of others.
82. Stoler calls colonial cultures ‘unique cultural configurations’ and ‘homespun creations’ (Stoler 1989: 136–137). The manioc waffles brilliantly catch this hybridity. In Madagascar the missionaries would eat manioc waffles and remember the taste of waffles in Norway. Back in Norway, however, at least some would eat waffles and become nostalgic for manioc waffles.
their men. For other colonial contexts it has been argued the presence of European women often 'justified policies already in motion to tighten the European community, and to control those European men who blurred the naturalized categories'. In fact, just after the turn of the century, one Norwegian missionary requested but was refused permission to marry a Malagasy woman. He was not allowed to return to Madagascar until he had married a Norwegian woman.

The main reason missionaries gave for not living in 'Malagasy houses' was that they needed 'proper dwellings' in order to maintain their long term 'health'. Reading the missionary wife's letters, however, it is clear that avoiding sickness meant maintaining boundaries between the Norwegian world inside the mission station and the Malagasy world outside in the broadest sense. In order to fulfil their calling, the missionaries needed to maintain the social person that had left Norway. A 'proper dwelling' provided a prime locus for the reproduction of the values and principles that were fundamental to the missionary and to missionary work. The culture was literally 'in the walls' of the mission stations. Newly arrived missionaries were silently and invisibly enculturated into the axioms of the missionary world in Madagascar as they took over the station from experienced ones.

Maintaining an ever present connection with Norway through their houses became vital to their work of preaching the word of God in Madagascar because it gave the missionaries a measure against which they could guarantee the Gospel as an eternal truth. Thus, the movement outwards, initially from Norway to Madagascar and then from the mission station to missionize in the world beyond, which predominated in the missionaries' imagery of their work, coexisted with an inward movement as missionaries sought protection in the bounded world of the missionary house.

This raises the question of whether and to what extent the missionaries' own religion was changed through its encounter with Malagasy culture, perhaps just as the 'Norwegian' culture they recreated in Madagascar became different from Norwegian culture in Norway. Certainly, the relationship between the internal and the external, largely taken for granted in a Christian country, became more problematic for the missionaries. To what extent these difficulties revealed underlying and unresolved tensions in their own religiosity, and to what extent they were inherent in the process of translating Lutheran precepts and practice into Malagasy

84. Ibid.: 148.
85. Line Nyhagen Predelli, personal communication.
86. NMS/Hjemme/Box 133/Jacket 8/Walen, Tulear 11 June 1875; Box 133/Jacket 8/Jakobsen, Ranompasy 22 Sept 1875; Box 134/Jacket 1/Lindo, Ranompasy 13 Nov 1875; Box 134/Jacket 2/Minsaas, Fihasinana 27 Jan 1876; Box 138/Jacket 13/Gahre, Ihosy 31 Oct 1889.
87. For a telling example of what happened when missionaries failed to establish boundaries, see NMS/Hjemme/Box 140A/Jacket 17/Bjertnes, no place, no date.
socio-cultural contexts is difficult to say. Arguably, the greater importance of ‘doing’ corresponded to ‘Malagasy’ understandings of religiosity.

I have alluded to how attractive the mission station must have been to Malagasy people as the embodiment of rank and material prosperity, not least through its connection with andriana. That most Malagasy people never saw the interior of the mission station probably did not prevent them from imagining the commodities inside; besides, the domestic servants no doubt carried away stories of what was there. In any case, the connection between missionaries and money was both immediate and direct. Raison-Jourde has argued that the LMS missionaries’ extensive building work, and their willingness and ability to pay the rising costs of labour and materials, directly contributed to a massive inflation between 1873 and 1875. In this way, Christianity or ‘the worship’, as embodied by the missionaries, came at least partly to be associated with material property and wealth. No wonder, then, that many Malagasy approached the Norwegian missionaries to ask for monetary and other material contributions, only to be reproached for having failed to grasp the true meaning of the Gospel and for valuing the material over the spiritual.

Despite the striking materiality of life on the mission station, the missionaries did not see themselves as either rich or immersed in material things. The clear primacy given to the spiritual and internal over the material and external in their religion made the lived world of the station ‘invisible’ to them. Although missionary work often turned out to be highly corporeal, these aspects were always subordinated ideologically to the ‘direct’ task of preaching the holy word of God. Indeed, it was precisely because the missionaries needed to create and maintain a picture of themselves as preoccupied with ‘the spiritual’ that the materiality of the lived world of the house had to be made invisible. Yet in another sense, the materiality of the house world played a key role in transforming the missionaries’ daily toil into ‘real mission work’.

This hierarchical logic in turn had gendered implications. So long as the house and the world outside were clearly separated, the missionary could class the highly corporeal and material aspects of the mission station as his wife’s business, thus reinforcing the imagery of himself as preoccupied with ‘the real missionary work’. The more visible the task, the less important it was held to be. Just as the lived world of the station was made invisible to the missionary, so too the key role of his wife in the missionizing enterprise was overlooked.

Yet placing the mission stations in the Malagasy landscape inevitably entangled them and their inhabitants in a web of meaning far beyond what the missionaries had intended, let alone could control. For example, missionary work often involved
breaking sacred taboos stemming from the ancestors and from the past. The house on the hill and the missionary's presence could therefore be harbingers of misfortune and sickness for the Malagasy – as Haslund's first station at Ambomihamasina, built on a desacrated ancestral place, indeed turned out to be. Within three years of his triumphal destruction of the sacrificial stake, the mission station and the Malagasy houses around it lay abandoned. In 1879 the area had been stricken by a fever epidemic, and people died in thousands. Lina and Christian Haslund barely survived, but had to bury their two small children by the station. Many Malagasy people no doubt interpreted this as a manifestation of ancestral wrath.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS
The Norwegian Mission Society's (NMS) Archives, Stavanger, Norway:

HJEMMEARKIVET
Konferansereferater (boxes 34-40)
Innkomne brev (boxes 111-141).
Theodor Olsen's personal diaries: Bok 1 (1891-1892), Bok 2-3 (1892), Bok 4 (1894, 1896)
Collection of Anna Caroline Amalia Christine (Lina) and Johan Christian Haslund's private letters to Lina's parents and siblings in Stavanger, Norway.

WORKS CITED
Dahle, Lars, Madagascar og dets beboere, Jac. Dybwads Forlag, Christiania, 1876-1877.
Heimyr, Nils Kristian, transcript of Theodor Olsen's diaries.


Larson, Pier M.: 'Catalog of Madagascar holdings contained in the Hjemme-arkiv of the NMS'.


Norsk Missionstidende (NMS Mission Magazine) from 1866-1900.


STUDIA MISSIONALIA SVECANA

Formerly Studia Missionalia Uppsaliensia (No. I-LXXX)

Editors: I-XXVII Bengt Sundkler
        XXVIII-LXIX Carl F. Hallencreutz
        LXX- LXXX Alf Tergel
        LXXXI- Alf Tergel and Aasulv Lande

I  Peter Beyerhaus. Die Selbständigkeit der jungen Kirche als missionarisches Problem. 1956
II Bengt Sundkler. The Christian Ministry in Africa. 1960
III Henry Weman. Henry Music and the Church in Africa. 1960
V Eric J. Sharpe. Not to Destroy but to Fulfil: The Contribution of J.N. Farquhar to Protestant Missionary Thought before 1914. 1965
VI Carl-Johan Hellberg. Mission on a Colonial Frontier West of Lake Victoria. 1965
IX Gustav Bernander. Lutheran Wartime Assistance to Tanzanian Churches 1940-1945. 1968
X Sigfrid Estborn. Johannes Sandegren och hans intressen i Indiens kristenhet. 1968
XII Sigvard von Sicard. The Lutheran Church on the Coast of Tanzania 1887-1914 with special reference to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Tanzania Synod of Uzaramo-Uluguru. 1970
XIV Sigbert Axelson. Culture Confrontation in the Lower Congo from the Old Congo Kingdom to the Congo Independent State with special reference to the Swedish Missionaries in 1880's. 1970
XVII Stiv Jakobsson. Am I not a Man and Brother? 1972
XX Carl F. Hallencreutz, Johannes Aagaard and Nils E. Bloch-Hoell (eds.). Missions from the North, Nordic Missionary Council 50 Years. 1974
XXI Josiah Kibita. Church, Clan and the World. 1974
XXII Axel-Ivar Berglund. Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism. 1975

204

Bengt Sundkler. Zulu Zion and som Swazi Zionists. 1976


Gustav Arén. Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia. 1978

Timothy Yates. Venn and Victorian Bishops Abroad. 1978


Emmet E. Eklund. Peter Fjellstedt – missionary mentor of Augustana. 1984

Johan Lundmark. Det splittrade gudsfolket och missionsuppdraget. En studie i relationen mellan kyrkan och judendomen. 1983


Carl F. Hallencreutz et al. (ed.). Daring in order to know. Studies in Bengt Sundkler's Contribution as Africanist and Missionary Scholar. 1984

Hugo Söderström. God Gave Growth. The History of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe. 1985

Pet Erik Gustafsson. Tiden och Tecknen. Israelmission och Palestinabild i det tidiga Missionsförbundet. 1984


Agnes Chepkwony. The Role of Non-Governmental Organisations in Development. 1987

Johnny Bakke. Christian Ministry. Patterns and Functions within the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. 1987

Åsa Dalmalm. L'Eglise à l'épreuve de la tradition. La Communauté Evangélique du Zaïre et le Kindoki. 1986

Aasulv Lande. Meiji Protestantism in History and Historiography. 1988


John S. Phobee. Church and State in Ghana. 1989


Carl F. Hallencreutz (ed.). Pehr Högströms Förättningar och övriga bidrag till samisk kyrkohistoria. 1990


Lissi Rasmussen. Religion and property in Northern Nigeria. 1990


Alf Helgesson. Church, State and People in Moçambique. A Historical Study with special Emphasis on Methodist Developments in the Inhambane Region. 1994

José Marin Gonzales. Peuples indigènes, missions religieuses et colonialisme interne dans l'Amazonie Peruvienne. 1992


Eskil Forslund. The Word of God in Ethiopian Tongues. Rhetorical features in the Preaching of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. 1993


Olaus Brännström. Peter Fjellstedt. Mångsidig men entydig kyrkoman. 1994


205


Göran Gunner. När tiden tar slut. Motivförskjutningar i frikyrklig apokalyptisk tolkning av det judiska folket och staten Israel. 1996


Canaan Sodindo Banana. The Church and the Struggle for Zimbabwe. From the Programme to Combat Racism to Combat Theology. 1996


Arne Tolo. Sidama, and Ethiopian. A study on the Emergence of Mekane Yesus Congregations among the Sidama, South Ethiopia. 1998

Katrin Amell. Contemplation et dialogue. Quelques examples de dialogue entre spiritualités après le concile Vatican II. 1998


Ngwabi Bhebe. ZAPU and ZANU guerrilla Warfare and the Evangelical Lutheran Church. 1998


Bengt Sundklér o Christopher Steed. A History of the Church in Africa. 2000


Staffan Grenstedt. Ambaricho and Shonkolla. From Local Church Independence to the Evangelical Mainstream in Ethiopia. 2000

Jørn Henrik Olsen. Kristus i tropisk Afrika – i spændingsfæltet mellem identitet og relevant. 2001

Maria Lisa Swantz. Beyond the Forest line – The Life and Letters of Bengt Sundklér. 2002

Carl Fredrik Hallencreutz. Yngve Brilioth – svensk medeltidsforskare och internationell kyrkoledare. 2002


Alf Tergel. Tro och religion i historia och samhälle. 2002


Yvonne Maria Werner (red.) Nuns and sisters in the Nordic Countries after the Reformation: A female Counter-Culture in Modern Society. 2003
The Protestant missionary movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth century engaged women on a large scale in North America and in Europe. These eight essays, written by scholars from the Nordic countries, analyze Nordic women missionaries as part of this intentional movement that in practical terms was a feminist project with implications for women’s roles within church and society. The anthology seeks to explore central aspects of this process based on empirical studies in relation to gender and the Lutheran missionary movement in Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway.