

ABSTRACT

RICHARDS, JONATHAN BLAKE. "The Dawn of a New Day." Southern Methodist Missionaries, "Christian Womanhood," and Cultural Transformation in the Heart of Africa. (Under the direction of Dr. Kalinga).

This thesis chronicles and analyzes the lives of two Southern missionaries named, Lorena Kelly and Cathrine Parham. Both of these women served as Methodist missionaries in the Belgian Congo from the 1930s till the Congo's independence in 1960. Their experience mainly included work amongst the Tetela women at the Wemba Nyama station in the center of the Belgian Congo. The thesis argues these two missionaries believed in an ideology that they termed "Christian Womanhood." This ideology infused modern notions of domesticity, femininity, and progressivism with Southern Methodism. Through classes on sewing, childcare, housekeeping, and healthcare, these missionaries sought to teach their female students the essence of "Christian Womanhood." I argue that this ideology, though contradictory in its very nature, enabled these women missionaries to operate and function in the public sphere of society. Lastly, this thesis examines how this ideology of "Christian Womanhood" formulated new identities and modes of power for the Tetela women. I argue that female graduates of the mission schools essentially formulated new identities as Christian Women who also found new forms of power in society.

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“The Dawn of a New Day:” Southern Methodist Missionaries, “Christian Womanhood,” and
Cultural Transformation in the Heart of Africa.

by
Jonathan Blake Richards

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Owen Kalinga
Chair of Advisory Committee

Dr. Katherine Charron

Dr. Kenneth Vickery

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my advisor, Dr. Kalinga. Thank you for being a mentor and friend.

BIOGRAPHY

Jonathan “Blake” Richards was born and raised in Fayetteville, North Carolina. He graduated from East Carolina University in 2015 with Bachelor of Arts in History and enrolled at North Carolina State University’s in the fall of 2015.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: The Missionary Lives of Lorena Kelly and Catherine	
Parham.....	20
Chapter Two: “Christian Womanhood,” “Woman’s Work for Woman,” and	
Progressivism.....	47
Chapter Three: Cultural Transformation, Identity, and Legacy.....	
Conclusion.....	108
Bibliography.....	114
Appendix A.....	121

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Wedding Ceremony.....	121
Figure 2. Shaunika and Lelese, 1940.....	121
Figure 3. Teacher and Wife, 1940.....	122
Figure 4. Learning to Sew.....	122
Figure 5. Girls Home Textbook.....	123
Figure 6. Main Church at the Wemba Nyama Station.....	123
Figure 7. Present Day Main Church at Wemba Nyama.....	124

Introduction

On January 31 1936, a young Southern Methodist missionary from Iredell County, North Carolina, was a few miles away from the Central African coastline. On board the *Lanstephan Castle* passenger ship, this missionary awoke to an early sunrise. Appearing on the horizon was her first glimpse of her destination, the Belgian Congo. As she witnessed her first glimpse of this foreign land, in her common Biblical undertone, she wrote:

As I have had the privilege of standing at the dawn of a new day and watching the sun rise from behind the continent of Africa and melt away the shades of night; so I felt that I am having the privilege of entering the life of the natives of Africa at the dawn of a new day with them, and that I shall have a part in helping to drive out from their hearts and lives the darkness of superstition, fear, and evil, and to fill them with the faith of God, assurance of life, and with love.¹

Lorena Kelly wrote this to her mother right before she set foot on African soil for the first time. At that time, she did not know that she would be a missionary in the Belgian Congo for more than thirty years. Kelly and her later friend and fellow Methodist missionary, Catherine Parham, entered into the Belgian Congo in the early 1930s. These two particular Southern Methodist missionaries offer a unique historical insight into the world of the Southern Methodist Missionary enterprise. Their stories give voices to many historical understandings concerning gender, the American South, and African colonial history. This thesis seeks to track and understand these ideas and their implications, placing them within the larger paradigms of U.S. women's history and African colonial history.

¹ Kelly to Mother, 9 February 1936, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

The ideas carried by these two Methodist missionaries must be separately examined from two historical lenses. The first point of view is that of the scholarship of American women's mission work and U.S. women's history. Within the past few decades, scholars of American women's mission history have increasingly examined the cultural transfer of American ideas of gender across national boundaries. In the early 1980s, American imperialism scholarship began to flourish and questions concerning women's involvement in the modern missionary movement began. The first major work in examining this was Jane Hunter's, *Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China*. Hunter examined the relationship between Chinese women and American missionaries, arguing that American women occupied positions not available to them at home. In response, Chinese women viewed these women as powerful individuals, despite their limited role at home.² After Hunter's work, that of Patricia Hill and Dana Robert became founding works for examining American women missionaries.³ These scholars began asking questions and probing concepts concerning gender, society, and imperialism.

This research project will add to this scholarship by examining how the particular women under study, Lorena Kelly and Catherine Parham, operated as missionaries in the early twentieth century in spite of their restricted gender roles as women born and raised within the paternalistic traditional confines of the American South. This thesis argues that

² Jane Hunter, *Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984).

³ Patricia Hill, *The world their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission movement and cultural transformation, 1870-1920* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan press, 1985); Dana Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997).

Kelly and Parham's ideas of gender and society were firmly based in the beliefs of what they termed, "Christian womanhood," an ideology that infused modern notions of domesticity, femininity, and progressivism with Southern Methodism. It will also argue that by transferring notions of "Christian womanhood" across the Atlantic and implementing them amongst the Congolese, these women created a space to operate as influential, Southern Christian women despite their restrained socially constructed gender role. This particular argument is not a radical departure from the other scholarship on American women's mission history. American women taught mainly ideals of domesticity and religious practices to native women. In response, this enabled them to secure influential roles as Christian women by working specifically with women. Scholars have commonly observed this pattern as being part of the "Woman's Work for Woman" movement, which was a nineteenth century Protestant female based missionary movement and ideology that focused on work with specifically foreign women.⁴ However, scholars haven't paid considerable attention to the work of Southern missionaries, particularly in the twentieth century. Despite a reasonable amount of scholarship that argues that the movement ended by the early twentieth century, I argue that the notion and ideology of the "Woman's Work for Women" movement was still relevant for these Southern Methodist missionaries.

Lorena Kelly and Catherine Parham's attention to working with foreign women and their focus on a particular ideology, known as "Christian womanhood," speaks to the larger picture of U.S. women's history. Although female gender roles were relatively limited in the

⁴ Dana Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997); Dana Robert, *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers: Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

South, there were tremendous efforts to reconfigure gender roles during the progressive movements in the early twentieth century. I argue that that the missionaries, within this case study, were influenced by and a part of the Progressive Era social movements of the early twentieth century. During the Progressive Era, Southern women pushed the boundaries of their gender role by becoming engaged and organized in order to promote social reform in the South. The experiences and ideologies of Kelly and Parham are related to these humanitarian and social reform based movements of the Progressive Era, in which women played an active and local role in implementing. In addition, these Southern Methodist missionaries took these progressive beliefs and combined them with traditional and modern notions of Christian womanhood that revolved around domestic practices of the home. Ultimately, this combination influenced these missionaries to focus on working with foreign women and thus expand the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement into the twentieth century.

Race has to be a factor when discussing these missionaries because they were from a region in the world that was defined by race. Furthermore, a Southern woman’s understanding of womanhood was also defined by race. As historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall has argued, “white womanhood” was predicated on establishing racial distinctions between black and white men and women. Dowd Hall has argued that in the early twentieth century, “white womanhood” was based on the racial stereotype that black men longed for white women as the “forbidden fruit” of their sexual needs.⁵ In this stereotype, black men were

⁵ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Mind That Burns in Each Body: Women, Rape, and Racial Violence,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*. ed. Ann Snitow (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 334.

believed to be the beasts who raped white women, and crucial to this ideology of “white womanhood,” was the ideals of chivalry: the white man rescuing the Southern “lady” from the black rapist who preyed on the sexual purity of white women. In this example, we can clearly see that a Southern woman’s understanding of “womanhood” was essentially predicted on certain racial beliefs.⁶

In this light, gender and race cannot be separated and though this is not about these issues per se, the fact that race was a factor means that we have to bear it in mind in the discussion of these women missionaries. Indeed, there is in fact a need to research into the manner in which these two missionaries understood Africa as the “dark” continent, and therefore, the way that they associated Africa and its people with “darkness” and how it shaped their comprehension of “Christian Womanhood,” which represented the “light” that erases the darkness. Was their understanding of “white womanhood” essentially based on spreading their message to black people? These are questions which are connected to Kelly and Parham’s understanding of “Christian Womanhood;” and further research on other Southern missionaries would potentially answer some of these questions.

The second historical lens used for this research project is to understand the work of these missionaries in the larger African mission and colonial narrative. In 1952, Roland Oliver published the influential *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* which was the first academic book to argue that missionaries played a pivotal role in the expansion of the various colonial empires in Africa. Oliver asserted that by creating settlements deep in Africa’s interior, missionaries were major agents of colonial growth. Oliver represents the

⁶ Ibid., 328-349.

birth of Africa mission history in the sense that he is the first to argue that missionaries' possessed historical agency.⁷

Since Oliver's book, historians have continued to observe the part that missionaries have played in the colonial world. In particular, attention towards mission history increased in the aftermath of the colonial independence movements. During this period, historians of Africa have turned to the endeavors of the early missionaries in order to explain the breakdown of the colonial regimes. Historians have argued that missionaries were widely responsible for creating an educated elite group of Africans who nationalized and challenged the colonial order. A notable example is J.F. Ade Ajayi's book, titled, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891, the Making of the New Elite*.⁸ While he was one of the earliest African academic historians, Ajayi was also one of the first historians to argue that mission education was directly related to the rise of an African elite class, stating, "But in their linguistic and educational work, in their economic policies, and above all, in the class of Western-educated elite they were seeking to create, their influence covered the whole country."⁹ Other notable works include Emmanuel Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914: a political and social analysis*, and Robert Rothberg's work, *Christian Missionaries and the creation of Northern Rhodesia, 1880-1924*.¹⁰ Overall, this trend in Christian missions'

⁷ Roland Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* (London, UK: Longmans, Green and Company, 1952).

⁸ See also: Emmanuel Ayandele, *The missionary impact on modern Nigeria, 1842-1914: a political and social analysis* (1966); Robert Rothberg, *Christian missionaries and the creation of Northern Rhodesia, 1880-1924* (1965).

⁹ Ade Ajayi, *Christian missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891; the making of a new élite*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969), xv.

¹⁰ Relating to the Belgian Congo: Marvin Markowitz, *Cross and Sword; the political role of Christian missions in the Belgian Congo. 1908-1960*, (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 1973); René Lemarchand, *Political Awakening in the Belgian Congo*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1964).

history merely places the missionaries in relation to the colonial rule and explored their connections with African political resistance movement.

Until the 1990s, historians of African missions largely viewed the historical impact of the missionaries as agents of colonial conquest, administration, and influencers of African political resistance movements. However, in the early 1990s, Jean and John Comaroff completely altered the field of both colonial and African mission history. In their most influential two-volume book, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, the Comaroffs examined how Anglican Nonconformist Christians interacted and altered the lives of the Tswana people of South Africa. Most notably, the Comaroffs popularized a prevailing argument that is termed, “cultural imperialism.” This argument largely states that “colonial encounters” between Europeans and Africans resulted in a cultural transformation of many African societies. Shifting ideologies within a colonized society enabled these cultural transformations. Specifically, the missionaries transformed and changed culture by teaching and implementing their Western ideologies onto African subjects, which in turn led to cultural change.¹¹

This thesis seeks to place the work of Lorena Kelly and Catherine Parham into the larger scholarship of “cultural imperialism.” This particular section of the thesis essentially asks the same question that scholars since the Comaroffs have continued to pose: “what impacts did the work of missionaries have on their host cultures, and how can historians

¹¹ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Vol. 1: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Vol. 2: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 28.

measure and understand these changes in the present?” I argue that the ideologies and cultural practices central to the missionary’s idea of “Christian womanhood” dramatically shaped and changed the culture and everyday lives of the Tetela women who attended and graduated from the mission schools. Cultural change also meant that the Tetela women embraced a new identity, founded on the ideologies and cultural practices of being a Western Christian woman. In the end, the Christian Tetela female identity enabled the Tetela women to find new sources of power and authority within the colonial society. By focusing on the cultural changes that the Southern Methodist missionaries initiated, we can uncover the legacy of these missionaries by examining the present day cultural practices and tensions that currently exist amongst the Tetela.

Chapter one will describe and observe the experiences of the two missionaries in the Belgian Congo from the early 1930s till their forced removal during the 1960 Congo independence movement. The narration will include the pre-missionary life of Kelly and Parham, the path each took to becoming a missionary, descriptions of daily missionary work, mission schools, the Southern Methodist’s relations to the colonial government, and the Southern Methodists forced removal.

The second chapter will be an analysis of these women within the context of American mission and U.S. women’s history. I argue that Lorena Kelly and Catherine Parham embraced a certain ideology that they referenced as “Christian Womanhood,” which embodied certain ideals of traditional and modern understandings womanhood, femininity, and religion. By embracing this ideology, these women enabled themselves to defy their

gender role and spread the word of God in a foreign area. The second part of this chapter will attempt to place the early twentieth century missionary movement within the broader spectrum of women's progressive movements in the South by examining how these Southern Methodist missionaries incorporated progressive beliefs into their version of "Christian womanhood."

The third and last chapter of the thesis will examine the work of Kelly and Parham within the larger argument over "cultural imperialism." Following the words of Jean and John Comaroff, I argue that the ideology of "Christian Womanhood" led to cultural change and identity formation amongst the Tetela women. By embracing a new identity, Tetela women found new, though not necessarily greater, forms of power within society. This last chapter also serves to understand the legacy of the two missionaries and the Tetela women. These legacies embody themselves in the current cultural practices of the Tetela people.

The Missionary Enterprise

Before beginning this study, a brief introduction to the modern missionary movement and the background to the Southern Methodist missionary history is essential for contextualization purposes. This thesis specifically studies the work of the Southern Methodist missionaries who were stationed in the central part of the Belgian Congo from 1900 to 1960. Although missionaries have existed in Sub-Saharan Africa since the first Portuguese explorers in the sixteenth century, what is known as the "modern missionary movement" initially began in the eighteenth century Enlightenment Era. Peter Gray has

noted, “In the century of the Enlightenment, educated Europeans awoke to a new sense of life. They experienced an expansive sense of power over nature and themselves.”¹² This “new sense of life” challenged the established, traditional religious doctrine. In response, a revival amongst Protestant American Churches spurred the evangelical fervor of the First and Second Great Awakening. By the late-nineteenth century, evangelical revival coincided with the emergence of industrialized colonial imperialism. Spreading the Kingdom of God became realistic as steamboats made it possible to transport these missionaries. In addition, newly established colonial governments and economies supported missionary work within the colonial territories.¹³

In terms of the American missionary work, although though American missionaries increasingly ventured overseas, the Western Frontier remained an important area for American missionaries in the nineteenth century; spreading the Gospel to Native Americans was at the forefront of the American missionary movement, as America continued to expand westward. Despite this domestic trend in American missionary circles, American missionaries increasingly traveled abroad in the period 1880-1920, the heyday of the modern missionary movement.¹⁴

¹² Peter Gray, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, vol. 2, *The Science of Freedom* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 3. see also: Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996); & Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1640-1950* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹³ Wilbert Shenk, “General Introduction,” in Dana Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997) ix-ix. Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 242-306 & 397-405.

¹⁴ Daniel Bays, *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home: Explorations in North American Cultural History* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2010) 60-75, 91-190.

This thesis focuses on the missionary work in the twentieth century; long after the modern missionary movement had begun. Lorena Kelly and Catherine Parham both began their evangelizing careers in the Belgian colony in the early 1930s. They stayed in the Congo until they left at the time of the Congo's independence from Belgium. As we shall see, the Southern Methodists began their operations in the early twentieth century. They mostly expanded during the 1920s and 1930s which is slightly later in terms of the timeline of the colonial missionary enterprise.¹⁵

Southern Methodist Missionary History

This section will briefly describe the history of the Southern Methodist missionary movement in order to provide a context for the work of Lorena Kelly and Catherine Parham. Methodism began as a Protestant revival movement, led by the teachings of John Wesley, in eighteenth century England. By the mid-eighteenth century, Methodism had spread to the United States. Historian, Wade Barclay, noted that the revival-based teachings of John Wesley uniquely intertwined with the “spirit of the new American nation.”¹⁶ Eventually, Methodism found its converts and eventual congregations across colonial America.¹⁷

There is distinction to the label, “Southern Methodism.” Specifically, “Southern Methodism” relatively refers to Methodism that has and continues to exist within the South. This distinction is due to the fact that the Methodist Church was largely separated between

¹⁵ Ibid., 487-492.

¹⁶ Wade Barclay, *History of Methodist Missions Part One: Early American Methodism 1769-1844* (New York: The Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church, 1950), vi.

¹⁷ Ibid., v-vi.

the North and the South for much of its American existence. By the early 1840s, the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) was deeply divided between the North and South regions of the nation. America's religious institutions, similar to the rest of the country, were also deeply divided over the issue of slavery. The divide was spurred by a growing emergence in Northern abolitionists who questioned the South's claim that slavery was a "positive good."¹⁸ These opposing ideologies eventually came to a climax during the MEC's 1844 General Conference. The issue centered on the resignation of Bishop James O. Andrew. A Georgian slave owner, Andrew, was the "general superintendent" of the Methodist church who was scheduled to be the next chair over the Methodist annual conferences. Northern Methodist refused to be guided by a slave owning Southerner who did not accurately represent the North's religious stance towards slavery. After a week of debate, the Northern and Southern representatives and ministers decided to divide between the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS).¹⁹

In the discussions during the 1844 General Conference, the missionary enterprise was barely mentioned. This was due to the fact that it barely existed in 1844, while the missions program also lacked central control by the MEC, as many local churches and regions orchestrated mission programs. Since the late eighteenth century, American Methodist groups have engaged in both domestic and foreign mission work. Most notably, Thomas Coke, the original Bishop of the Methodist Church in America, mission work in Asia in the late eighteenth century gave him the name of "Foreign Minister of Methodist" in English

¹⁸ Robert Sledge, *Five Dollars and Myself: the history of mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1845-1939* (New York, NY: United Methodist Church History of Mission Series. 2005), 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31-35.

Methodist circles.²⁰ By 1818, John Stewart, an African-American preacher, began spreading the Methodist message to the Wyandots Native Americans in Ohio, which was the first major American domestic Methodist missionary effort. Due to the promotion of mission work by Stewart, the Methodist Missionary Society formed in 1845. However, at the moment of the MEC separation, the Missionary Society was still in its early stages of development. In addition, this Missionary Society would later be replaced with organized and regulated Mission Boards.²¹

The split in the Methodist Church meant that the MECS's Missionary Society would operate separately from the MEC. Before the separation, the Missionary Society's headquarters was located in New York. However, the new headquarters of the MECS's Missionary Society was now placed in Louisville, but later moved to Nashville in 1854. From 1844 to 1861, the MECS's domestic and foreign mission enterprise increased rapidly. The main cause of this growth was the success in fundraising and the centralization of the MECS's Missionary Society. Churches from all over the South channeled funding to the Louisville and the later Nashville headquarters. In 1846, the MECS raised about 73,000 dollars for the mission enterprise, and by 1854, funding had risen to around 168,000.²² During this period, the majority of mission work mostly involved established small churches, providing limited aid for certain groups, and converting individuals. It wasn't until the post-Civil War era that Methodist missionary work would witness the growth of organized schools, churches, and hospitals across the nation and globe.

²⁰ James Cannon, *History of Southern Methodist Missions* (Nashville, TN: Cokesbury Press, 1926), 21-23.

²¹ Sledge, 13-30, 34-35.

²² *Ibid.*, 47-50.

During this period after the Methodists separation and before the American Civil War, programs were divided between domestic and foreign missions. Domestic missionary programs or “home missions” were any missionary efforts that resided within the geographical boundaries of the United States. Typically, these programs targeted minority groups who were often poor and not affiliated with Methodism. Before the American Civil War, the Southern Methodist domestic missionary efforts concentration on converting and aiding minority groups. Specifically, the Methodists focused heavily on reaching American slaves. By 1860, while whites consisted of 454,203 of the MECS’s membership, “colored” individuals numbered a substantial 171,857 membership.²³ In addition, the MECS missionaries were also involved in many Native American groups within the South.²⁴

The other field in the Methodist missionary enterprise before the Civil War was the foreign missions.²⁵ During this period, the foreign missionary department focused the majority of its efforts in unsettled territories of the American West. Although California became U.S. territory in 1848, this part of the country was still largely considered “foreign” to the missionaries who, like many other individuals, trekked to the area during the height of the gold rush. By 1860, there were over 3,000 Methodist members in the California region. In 1854, the MECS’s General Conference established the Kansas Mission Conference, which devoted its efforts on the newly acquired U.S. territory in the West. Similarly, Northern

²³ Ibid., 55.

²⁴ Ibid., 47-60, 185-217.

²⁵ For historians, the phrase, “foreign missions,” often means missionary work outside the national borders of the establishment church. For this particular study and this specific period (1841-1860), “foreign missions” will be used as representing anything that resided outside the Southern region of the United States. Therefore, newly acquired U.S. lands in the West would be considered “foreign.” After the Civil War, and after statehood was granted to these regions, they would be considered “domestic mission” work.

Methodists missionaries also settled in Kansas. This Northern presence created conflict between the two Methodists groups, ultimately limiting the influence of the MECS missionaries. Lastly, in 1847, the MECS General Conference decided to send a few willing members to Shanghai, China, for mission work. Although the missionary effort continued to grow after the American Civil War in this region, the majority of these few individuals suffered health problems that hindered any progress.²⁶

By 1870, the MECS had only begun mission work in China, as its missions enterprise growth was stunted by the American Civil War and the early Reconstruction years of the South. However, the period between 1870-1910 saw tremendous growth in its missionary enterprise. Largely, this increase in missions was spurred by continued growth of the MECS; between 1870 and 1910, its membership increased from 586,418 to 1,870,582.²⁷ By 1910, it had over 3,000 missionaries in China and it expanded its activities to other parts of East Asia. By 1920, its missionaries numbered around 2,000 in Japan and 6,000 in Korea. At the same time, the MECS also reached various parts of Latin America. In 1870, only a few mission stations were located in South Texas where missionaries attempted to spread Christianity to Mexicans. By 1910, it had advanced across Mexico, numbering around 7,000 missionaries. Elsewhere in Latin America, missionaries in Cuba rose to 3,000 and to 6,700 in Brazil. The last program to materialize was the African Mission, which wasn't initiated until the 1910 General Conference. The main centers were in the Belgian Congo, but the American Methodists were also present in Liberia, which was claimed mainly for the MEC not the

²⁶ Ibid., 61-83.

²⁷ Ibid., 161.

MECS missionaries. The MECS African mission settlements were perhaps its weakness, as missionary membership was relatively low. By 1930, the highest missionary membership in the Belgian Congo has risen to roughly one thousand. This limited presence in Africa could be due mostly to the fact that much of Africa was already dominated by various European missionary societies.²⁸

Women in Southern Methodist Missionary Enterprise

From the beginning of the modern missionary movement, women have been active participants in it, even if this meant only accompanying their husbands. This trend is similar to the experiences of Southern Methodist women. One of the first records of a Southern Methodist woman missionary comes from Mrs. M. L. Kelly. By the 1850s, Kelly, who was a pastor's wife, actively sought to set up a missionary society for women in Bethlehem, Tennessee, focusing most of her efforts on finding missionary work in Shanghai, China. Mrs. Kelly's endeavor was the first attempt to create a female oriented Southern Methodist mission organization. The American Civil War stunted her plans, but in the 1870s, she again attempted to form a mission society for women based in McKendree Church, Nashville, Tennessee. After organizing with local churches, she founded the Woman's Bible Mission of Nashville, which was a women based home mission program that provided aid to the poor

²⁸ Ibid., 182-183, 357-363.

and the sick. By the 1870s, other women-based mission programs, similar to Mrs. Kelly's, had emerged across the South.²⁹

An increase in female participation eventually led to the General Conference of the MECS to create a separate Woman's Board of Missions in 1878. This Board recruited for and regulated various missionary expeditions, but it seemingly still cooperated with the male dominated General Mission Board. The Woman Mission Board mostly sent females for two main vocations. Firstly, women went to mission hospitals to work mainly as nurses. Secondly, women established schools that were designed specifically for native women. Many such schools were located in mission stations already serving and educating the native male population. American women largely ran these female oriented schools with a certain level of autonomy; however, the highest authority over these schools was given to the male missionaries, who oversaw education, both male and female. In essence, many of the various mission stations were run by both men and women missionaries, who may have been recruited and trained by different mission boards, but occupations within these mission stations differed by gender as the American women typically educated native women. Of course, as supplies and missionary participation fluctuated, women may have worked in both male and female schools.³⁰

Similar to the other MECS missions, participation and finance increased exponentially after the Reconstruction era. For instance, in 1880-1881, during the beginning years of the Woman's Board, the yearly contribution to the MECS woman's group was less

²⁹ John McDowell, *The Social Gospel: The Woman's Home Mission Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South 1886-1939* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 6-9.

³⁰ These assumptions are largely based on the sources of Methodist missionary work in the Belgian Congo.

than \$20,000. However, during the 1887-1888 fiscal year, financial contributions numbered about \$70,000 and, by 1908, the average yearly donation was around \$200,000. From the 1880s till the 1920s, the Foreign Department of the Woman's Mission Board stressed missionary activity in China. The majority of women missionaries deployed to China specifically concentrated on nursing or educational work in and around Shanghai. Other areas of the globe where these women missionaries established stations included Brazil, Mexico, Cuba, Japan, Korea, and the Congo. For the Domestic Department of the Woman's Mission Board, women missionaries provided schools and aid to various parts of the South.³¹

In 1906, the male-dominated General Conference of the MECS proposed to merge the women's home and foreign missionary societies. Despite resistance by the Methodist women, the women's foreign and home missions were forced to merge to form a single Woman's Missionary Council. The merging was also meant to create cooperation between men and women missionaries and between the General Council and the newly created Woman's Missionary Council. The merger illustrates the authority of men in the MECS at the height of the missionary movement as the male dominated General Council attempted to closely regulate the activities of the Woman's Board. In the end, women missionaries had little voice in the matter and were forced to combine their foreign and home mission boards.

In addition, although the purpose was to regulate woman's mission closely, there were still clear divisions between male and female missionary activities. In the correspondence between the missionaries consulted for this research project, the files were

³¹ Sledge, 261-291.

still headed, “Foreign Department Woman’s Work.”³² In addition, at least until the late 1930s, women mainly attended separate missionary training schools in the South; one of which was Scarritt College located in Nashville, Tennessee. Upon graduation from these training programs, women seemingly were recruited by the woman’s division of Mission Board, and served in the same capacity as previous female missionaries, that is, as educators for native women.³³

The Southern Methodist missionary enterprise was an enormous endeavor that reached its height just before the First World War. However, similar to other missionary societies, the Southern Methodist eventually declined in the post-WWI era. Although short lived, missionary societies were powerful instruments of colonial change amongst their host cultures. In particular, women played an incredibly important role in spreading Christianity to all corners of the colonial globe, especially to “native” women.

The experiences of two particular Southern Methodists, Lorena Kelly and Catherine Parham, belong to this history of the international and American missionary movement. These Southern missionaries are part of the broader narrative of women missionaries who belonged to Southern church denominations and organizations. The following chapter will explore the lives and experiences of these two Southern Methodist missionaries in more detail.

³² Esther Case to Catherine Parham, 8 June 1931, Box 1, Folder A, Catherine Parham Papers.

³³ McDowell, 6-12, 126-129; & Sledge 299-302.

CHAPTER 1: The Missionary Lives of Lorena Kelly and Catherine Parham

Lorena Kelly was born in 1903 at Mt. Mourne in Iredell County, North Carolina. Although very little was documented about her early life, it can be concluded that the future missionary was raised in a middle-class Methodist family. Census material suggests that her family held land and were farmers, making her a white and Southern middle class family at the turn of the century. Kelly was born into a family that emphasized a Methodist upbringing, and would later write in very romantic, overtly Christian tones to her mother's enjoyment.³⁴

Catherine Parham was born two years earlier than Kelly and was raised in Stinson, Georgia. This rural area is currently known as Durand, Georgia, located in Meriwether County, seventy miles southwest of Atlanta.³⁵ Parham, similar to Kelly, was raised in a Southern middle-class Methodist family. Her father, James Parham, was a farmer who owned land, and could read and write. Catherine Parham also had five siblings, one of whom was an adopted son, named, Valley Joil.³⁶

Records of Kelly's high school information cannot be found but she most likely graduated by 1920. By 1922 she was attending the North Carolina College for Women (NCCW), which was located in Greensboro, North Carolina. It is not entirely clear what Kelly was specifically interested in studying at NCCW. However, for her, perusing a missionary career was always a lifelong dream, as she stated to her mother in 1922, "I have

³⁴ Year: 1900; Census Place: *Ransom, Columbus, North Carolina*; Roll: 1190; Page: 11A; Enumeration District: 0035; FHL microfilm: 1241190.

³⁵ Catherine Parham's description of her missionary work, Box 1, Folder A, Catherine Parham Papers.

³⁶ Year: 1910; Census Place: White Sulphur Springs, Meriwether, Georgia; Roll: T624_203; Page: 7A; Enumeration District: 0084; FHL microfilm: 1374216.

thought I wanted to be one ever since I can remember.”³⁷ At NCCW, she admitted that this dream had materialized: “but since I have grown older I have thought of it quite differently and more seriously.”³⁸ Shortly after graduating in about 1926, she signed up for missionary work and was sent to Scarritt College for missionary training.

Similarly, after graduating from Durand High School in 1917, Parham began pursuing formal higher education in 1918. At Creighton-Shumaker Business College, she studied bookkeeping and secretarial work, and after graduating, she taught courses at College Park Methodist Sunday school and was the superintendent of the Junior Department from 1919-1923. Also during this period, she worked for the Epworth League, which was a youth based humanitarian Methodist program that existed from 1890 until the late 1920s.³⁹ While involved with the Epworth League, Parham also attended the Business College.⁴⁰ In 1923, after years of higher education and church organizational work, she “volunteered for life service as a missionary under the Methodist Board of Missions.”⁴¹

Scarritt College

Before leaving the United States for mission work, both missionaries, Kelly in 1926 and Parham in 1923, were excepted to Scarritt Bible and Training School, an establishment designed to train missionaries and other Christian workers. Crucial to the growth of the

³⁷ ³⁷ Lorena Kelly letter to Mother, 6 March 1922, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Epworth League Historical Note*, Bridwell Library Collection on the North Texas Conference (Dallas, TX: Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University).

⁴⁰ Catherine Parham’s description of her missionary work, Box 1, Folder A, Catherine Parham Papers.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Southern Methodist women's missions was the building of the Scarritt Bible and Training School. The formation of this college for Methodist missionary women was largely attributed to the workings of Belle Bennett, an activist for women's participation in the missionary fields. Absent in the Southern Methodist women's missions was an institution that could train Southern Methodist women for missionary work. By 1889, Bennett began promoting and fundraising for the creation of Scarritt College. In 1892, the school was first constructed in Kansas City, Missouri. In 1923, it moved to Nashville, Tennessee.⁴²

The college's main goal was to nurture future female missionaries. Material is limited on the exact curriculum and plan of study for these women, but a few sources do offer a general overview. A student at Scarritt College spent roughly two years completing the training program (bachelors and graduate degrees were not offered until the late 1930s).⁴³ It seems that the school was divided into three departments: the Bible, Home, and Foreign Department. In reference to the Bible department, this section of the school consisted of religious classes taught by male professors; at least two courses were divided into Old and New Testament studies. Taking courses in the Bible department were a prerequisite before continuing in the program. After these women completed these, they chose between pursuing a missionary career in the Foreign or Home Department. In the foreign department, women most likely trained for work overseas in the various Methodist missionary centers.

⁴² Sledge, 292-294.

⁴³ Carroll Van West, "Scarritt College for Christian Workers," *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*.

These classes most likely taught the essence of creating Christian Homes, which was based on lessons of domesticity and proper family roles.⁴⁴

In the Home Department, missionaries were trained for deaconess or Home missions work. The MECS “Deaconess Program” was created in 1902 by Belle Bennett, the same woman who founded Scarritt College. The historian Robert Sledge has described the activities of these deaconesses as:

Their tasks were many and varied. They labored as nurses and teachers and social workers. They served as dormitory matrons and administrators and community organizers. They worked in cities and towns and rural areas in the South and West, but also in Mexico and Brazil and China, among other places. Wherever they went, they were lay evangelists, proclaiming the gospel with their words as well as with their deeds.⁴⁵

To put this program into perspective, women were often denied clerical positions in the MECS. The deaconess program offered an alternative to priesthood that women could obtain. Although Bennett denied that the purpose of the deaconess program was to replace clerical men, the program did act as a clerical substitute for Christian women.⁴⁶

The highest participation in the deaconess program lasted from 1922 to 1940. The program’s popularity contributed largely to the output of trained missionaries by Scarritt College, although the exact number of deaconesses recruited and employed is unknown. However, the historian Lois Myers estimates that over forty-eight trained deaconess were hired for specifically rural areas of the South. Catherine Parham is an example of this Home

⁴⁴ A complete curriculum of this department is missing from this research project. However, it can be inferred some of the lessons taught within this institution by examining the practices of these Methodist missionaries in the field.

⁴⁵ Sledge. 292.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 291-292.

mission movement. After graduating from Scarritt College, she was hired by the Epworth League, a Methodist organization for young adults, and worked as a deaconess of the MECS. Her “Deaconess Certificate” read, “This is to certify that *Catherin Parham* is a duly accepted and consecrated Deaconess of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and is appointed to work in the Home Field under the Board of Missions Department of Woman’s Work, March 22, 1925.”⁴⁷ Serving as “deaconess” involved Parham participating in home missions in the coalfields of Hemphill, W.V. for several years before she left for the Congo in 1931.⁴⁸ The other missionary in this story, Lorena Kelly, was not a deaconess. Instead, after graduating from Scarritt, she taught courses at the training institute from 1929 to 1935.⁴⁹

In the 1920s, besides teaching, nursing, and other occupations, one of the only vocations for women which provided them the opportunity to leave the home and contribute to society, was a career in mission work. Scarritt College provided missionaries, such as Kelly and Parham, with the tools that enabled women to surpass the paternalistic constraints of the South; the college gave these missionaries a vocation that pushed them into the public sphere. For example, in comparing the different motivations between missionaries in the present to the past, Thelma Stevens noted, “I would think that those same women, ones that I know-and I knew an awful lot of them- today would have gone as a missionary with quite a different motive. I mean by that that the paternalism would no longer be in their minds. . . . I don’t know, I suspect a lot of missionaries went out because that was the best they. . . .that

⁴⁷ Catherine Parham, “Deaconess Certificate,” Box 1 Folder A.

⁴⁸ Catherine Parham’s description of her missionary work, Box 1, Folder A.

⁴⁹ Lorena Kelly letter to Mother and Family, Sunday 1929, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers; Lorena Kelly letter to Mother and Family, Box 1, Folder A; & Lorena Kelly letter to Mother, August 11, 1935, Box 1, Folder A.

was the most challenging vocation they could come up with.”⁵⁰ Essentially, Stevens is hinting that these women were conscious of the limited opportunities available to women contribute to society. In response, missionary work was an available vocation that gave women the tools to contribute to a society within the public sphere.⁵¹ In addition, Parham’s involvement with the Epworth League and Kelly’s calling to the mission field represents the larger Southern progressive movements which were occurring during this period, such as the Women’s division of the YMCA and the Saloon Leagues.

Recruitment

In 1931, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South recruited Parham to be a foreign missionary. Her recruiter, Esther Case, wrote to Parham that the Congo station was in need of “three new women missionaries.” Although Case noted the Church was under serious “financial depression,” the Board of Missions could only afford these three missionaries. For the Congo, the Woman’s Department specifically wanted to see a Girls’ Home built and maintained by the new women missionaries. As Esther Case noted, “But I am convinced that there is plenty of work to be done in the Congo in connection with the Girls’ Home, by assisting those who are taking care of the orphan babies and in doing evangelistic work as opportunity may present on the station and in outstations.”⁵² Four years later, in 1935, Lorena

⁵⁰Thelma Stevens, Interview with Thelma Stevens 13 February 1972, *Southern Oral History Program Collection*.

⁵¹ It is important to keep in mind that the motivation behind these Scarritt College graduates was strongly rooted in the wanting to spread Christianity. However, a training institution which taught missionaries not only the spreading of the Gospel but various humanitarian lessons, such as nursing, suggests that these women wanted to have some form of public contribution to society, which wasn’t solely religiously based.

⁵² Esther Case to Catherine Parham, 8 June 1931, Box 1, Folder A, Catherine Parham Papers.

Kelly received her missionary appointment; although documentation is absent, the Woman's Department most likely selected Kelly.

Parham sailed to the Belgian Congo in 1931, beginning her foreign mission career. She, being a few years older than Lorena Kelly, left for the Belgian colony four years earlier than Kelly.⁵³ In 1935, a group of Southern Methodist Missionaries boarded the *S. S. Westernland*, and among them, a Miss Foreman, Mrs. Perry, and the “new missionary just going out.”⁵⁴ The “new missionary” was Lorena Kelly, who, at age thirty-two, began her foreign missionary career by embarking a passenger ship in New York City destined for Brussels, Belgium. As Kelly left the New York port, she stated, “The lady on the statue of Liberty in her kindness held in her hand a torch to light up our path of departure, as she bid us Bon Voyage.”⁵⁵ Unlike Parham, Kelly had to spend a few months in Brussels to learn French, the colonial language of the Belgian Congo. Whether Parham was already fluent in French is not recorded, as she was not required to learn the language. However, she would later communicate fluently and directly with the Belgian-French speaking colonial administrators.⁵⁶

While in Brussels, Kelly attended French classes, which were seemingly provided by the Methodists Church in that city. She also went to French-speaking church services designed to help her with the language. As she noted, “I attended last Sunday a servbe (sic) conducted in French entirely, and was able to understand a few of the words which were said,

⁵³ Catherine Parham's description of her missionary work, Box 1, Folder A.

⁵⁴ Kelly to Family, 28 September 1935, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Kelly to Family, 28 September 1935, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

and was able to sing in French with the congregation easily. . . .I expect to follow this plan so that I can become accustomed to the French and so that I can also have an opportunity to participate in a service of worship that I can really understand.”⁵⁷ She continued this process for the next several months until she could speak and write French fluently.

To the Congo

By late January 1936, Kelly began her journey to the Belgian Congo after first stopping in London. One early February morning during the trip to the Belgian Congo, Kelly awoke to see her first glimpse of Africa across the horizon. She, in her common Biblical language, wrote, “As the sun came slowly up from behind the land those words, ‘From Afric’s (sic) sunny fountains, From India’s Coral strand’ was brought to my mind.”⁵⁸ The “words” Kelly was referring to was a common motto amongst missionaries, which held that they would spread the Gospel from “Africa’s sunny fountains” to “India’s Coral strand.”⁵⁹ That same morning, she was asked to sing a solo for the morning service. Kelly was “delighted to have this opportunity” and decided to sing “My Task” and another song.⁶⁰ “My Task” was a fitting song for the occasion. The last verse goes:

And then my Savior by and by to meet,
When faith hath made her task on earth complete,
And lay my homage at the Master’s feet,
 Within the Jasper walls,
 Within the Jasper Walls:

⁵⁷ Kelly to Mother and Family, 17 October 1935, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

⁵⁸ Kelly to Mother, 9 February 1936, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

⁵⁹ Cronk, “The Sixth Sense in Missionary Training,” *The Missionary Review of the World* 41, (1918): 373-374.

⁶⁰ Kelly to Mother, 9 February 1936, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

This crowns my task.⁶¹

“Within the jasper walls” refers to the jasper-stoned walls surrounding the “city of gold” in heaven as referenced in Revelations 21:18. For Kelly, it was her evangelical “task” to spread “faith” across the earth the completely. Music was incredibly important for her, as she would later play the organ and lead much of the worship music at the mission stations. In the same breath, She wrote:

. . . so I felt that I am having the privilege of entering the life of the natives of Africa at the dawn of a new day with them, and that I shall have a part in helping to drive out from their hearts and lives the darkness of superstition, fear, and evil, and to fill them with the faith of God, assurance of life, and with love.⁶²

Missionaries such as Kelly and Parham were extremely guided by their “task” to spread the word of God to all kingdoms of the world. However, this evangelical “task” also included the desire to dramatically alter the traditional beliefs of the Africans, which Kelly described as the “darkness of superstition, fear, and evil.”⁶³ Parham sometimes ended her letters with the short verse: “A land of happy African homes, Fears banished, Faith Confirmed (sic), Rich in schools and teachers, I’ll (sic) of body and mind cared for and healed, Christ all and in all Africa!”⁶⁴ These romantic attitudes towards missionary work are prevalent throughout Kelly and Parham’s writings. From the moment they saw Africa, these women were guided by their devotion and understanding of Christianity. For Kelly, seeing Africa for the first time

⁶¹ Maude Louise Ray, “My task,” *Hymnary.org*.

⁶² Kelly to Mother, 9 February 1936, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers. Such attitudes were common among many missionaries, see also: H. Alan C. Cairns, *Prelude to Imperialism: British Reactions to Central African Society 1840-1890* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965); & Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁶³ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁴ Parham to Friends, 29 January 1935, Box 1, Folder A, Catherine Parham Papers.

actually represented a “dawn of a new day” in which she could spread her Christian message and bring light to the “darkness” that was Africa.

During the colonial era, the only area the Southern Methodists developed in Africa was in the Belgian Congo. In 1910, just after Leopold’s reign, a group of missionaries, led by Bishop Walter Lambuth and Dr. John Gilbert, surveyed the Belgian Congo as a potential Southern Methodist mission site in Africa. Similar to Lorena Kelly’s religious language, Bishop Lambuth described his first sighting of Africa, noting, “Glibert and I retired to our room and prayed that God would accept a rededication of our lives upon this the threshold of the great African continent and our new life work.”⁶⁵ Although Bishop Lambuth and Lorena Kelly arrived in the Congo twenty years apart, they were already suggesting that Belgian colony was a ripe place for missionary work with their first site of the African continent.⁶⁶ Why did the two Methodist missionaries perceive the Congo as the “threshold of the great African continent” and the region where missionary work was so needed? Perhaps, for these American missionaries, the Congo’s recent violent and publicized history had created humanitarian awareness of this colonial territory. In Joseph Conrad’s 1899 novel, *Heart of Darkness*, he states:

The word ‘ivory’ rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse. . . And outside, the silent wilderness surrounding this clear speck on the earth struck me as something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Alexander Reid, *Congo Drumbeat: History of the First Half Century in the Establishment of the Methodist Church among the Ateila of Central Congo* (World Outlook Press, 1964), 14-15.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 11-15.

⁶⁷ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1990), 15.

Conrad is describing the Belgium “invasion” of the Congo and the greed surrounding the land’s valuable resources. At the Berlin Conference in 1884, the European leaders divided the African continent between themselves. For King Leopold II of Belgium, his prized territory was the central part of Africa, where the mighty Congo River flowed two thousand miles of land. The Belgium King called this vast territory, “The Congo Free State.”⁶⁸

King Leopold II plundered the Congo’s natural and human resources and the territory’s most prized and plentiful possessions, ivory and rubber. For Leopold, this included forced labor camps, which the Congolese served as the source of labor. The king created a special military police, the “Force Publique,” in order to implement his demands. The atrocities that followed Leopold’s ruthless reign were something of a nightmare. For instance, according to an African woman’s account, her village was forcibly removed and enslaved for labor. During the march towards a labor camp, her husband became weak and refused to walk further, the soldiers then stabbed him to death. Infants were thought to be unnecessary and soldiers ordered women to drop their newborns, and continue walking. The most documented and photographed punishment for Africans was the severing of limbs by the Force Publique. These events continued until the atrocities were discovered, mainly by missionaries, who publicized them to the world. By 1908, the Belgian government had seized control of the Leopold’s Congo, and vowed to end the atrocities by establishing the new colonial state, the Belgian Congo. By 1910, the year the Methodist missionaries arrived in the Congo, the world knew about the atrocities of the Belgium King. Perhaps, these two

⁶⁸ Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998) 84-87.

missionaries were not only answering a spiritual call, but maybe a humanitarian one as well.⁶⁹

Before Bishop Lambuth and Dr. Gilbert ventured into the Congo, Catholic and Protestant missionaries had already established themselves. Although the former had accompanied Portuguese explorers and merchants since the late 15th century, the first organized mission group to reach the Congo was the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) in 1878. The famous adventurous stories of Henry Morton Stanley and David Livingstone attracted particular attention to Central Africa and this British based mission society was the first to establish a mission station at the opening of the Congo River.⁷⁰ In response to the Protestant presence, the French Catholic missionary society, called the French Congregation of the Holy Ghost, established a mission station in 1880. Eventually, as King Leopold claimed the central Congo for himself, Belgium Catholic missionaries began pouring into the colony in the late 19th century. Although the Belgian Catholic missionaries represented the majority of missionaries in the Congo until 1960, other European and American Protestant missionary societies emerged in the colony, and they included British, Belgian, and American Presbyterians and Methodists (MECS). It should be noted that these Protestant groups were a minority compared to the Catholics.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Ibid., 122-133, 257-259.

⁷⁰ It is important to note that the famous British missionary, Dr. Livingstone, was widely popular in Britain, especially at the time of his death in 1873.

⁷¹ Marvin Markowitz, *Cross and Sword; the political role of Christian missions in the Belgian Congo. 1908-1960*, (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 1973), 1-10.

On February 1, 1912, after a lengthy and treacherous journey, Bishop Lambuth and Dr. John Gilbert arrived at their destination, Wembo-Nyama, which is one of many villages home to the Tetela:

On our entire journey we crossed many rivers and streams =, waded through swamps, met fifty chiefs, visited two hundred villages, treated four hundred patients, camped in a number of cannibal villages, were exposed to African fever, bitten a number of times by the tsetse fly while on the river; but by the goodness and mercy of God, we escaped all these dangers and, penetrating to the heart of Batetela country, arrived at the village of the great chief Wembo Nyama on Thursday, February 1, 1912.⁷²

According to Bishop Lambuth, the Wembo-Nyama chief was thrilled to see an “evangelist” and within the same year, the two missionaries convinced the chief to allow a mission station to be built in close proximity to the village.⁷³

The Tetela were the sole ethnic group that the Southern Methodists interacted with in the Belgian Congo. The Tetela are a Bantu-speaking group that currently live in the area between Lusambo and the upper Congo River near the Maniema Provinces, which is situated in South Central Congo. The Tetela and their neighbors, the Kusu, are assumed to be subgroups of the larger Mongo family.⁷⁴ The earliest known record of the Tetela comes from an account of an Afro-Arab trader, Tippu Tip, who was the self-proclaimed ruler over the people who he called the “Watetera,” which ethnographers suggests was transformed into the colonial ethnic name “Tetela.”⁷⁵ Source material on the history of the Tetela is quite limited, although the few sources available present several trends. First, the Tetela arrived in the

⁷² Reid, 17.

⁷³ Reid, 18; & Richey Hogg, “The Missions of American Methodism,” chapter in *The History of American Methodism* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1964), 108-109.

⁷⁴ F. Scott Bobb, *History Dictionary of the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 457.

⁷⁵ Thomas Turner, “Batetela, Baluba, Basonge: Ethnogenesis in Zaire,” *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 33, no. 132 (1993): 598-608.

southern part of the Congo during the Bantu migration over the last several thousand years. Second, from at least the middle of the nineteenth century, the Tetela were either victims of the Arab-slave trade or they interacted with these merchants. Missionary accounts depict the Arabs as those who forcefully raided villages for slaves.⁷⁶ Early anthropologists, such as E. Torday, note that the Tetela traded slaves to the Arabs.⁷⁷ Third, there are references that suggest that some of the Tetela people came into contact with the Belgians before 1920. Specifically, during Leopold's reign, a Tetela based rebellion against the state occurred.⁷⁸

Mission Work

At the Wembo-Nyama station, six missionaries comprised three married couples, along with Bishop Lambuth and Dr. John Gilbert, established the first church by 1914. As news of Bishop Lambuth's successful journey reached America, Southern Methodists began recruiting and sending missionaries to the Wembo-Nyama station. By 1917, the missionaries founded another station called Minga. In 1922, the first Annual Conference was held which brought together the forty-one Southern Methodist missionaries in the Congo. Within that same year, the missionaries expanded, creating another station at Tunda and eventually the last mission station, Lodja, was established the following years.⁷⁹ Throughout its time, Wembo-Nyama remained the missionaries' main station, and the other surrounding stations acted as satellite ones. The central station often had the highest church, school, and medical

⁷⁶ Lorena Kelly to Friends, July 1938, Box 1, Folder B, Lorena Kelly Papers.

⁷⁷ E. Torday, "Cultural and Environment: Cultural Differences Among the Various Branches of the Batetela." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 51, (1921): 370-382.

⁷⁸ Turner, 587-590; & Torday, 370-382.

⁷⁹ Reid, 21-39; & Hogg, 108-109.

participation, while both primary and higher level schools were located at Wembo-Nyama. According to Lorena Kelly, by 1938, each station averaged over twenty missionaries who managed the church, school, and the medical facility.⁸⁰ According to the Southern Methodists' "Annual Conferences of the Central Congo-Africa," between 1936 and 1938, the total missionary force, excluding the Lodja station, was one-hundred and one, although this does not include the Tetela converted teachers and medical assistants who served the missionaries. This number of missionaries had increased by a few dozen only.⁸¹

When Catherine Parham arrived at the Tunda station in 1931, the residing missionaries welcomed her with a letter that read, "For you've come to this land to seek and save Many souls for the Master's use. So Catherine dear, we're glad you're here."⁸² Five years later, specifically, March 1936, Lorena Kelly arrived at the Wembo-Nyama Station. Kelly portrayed her first African morning by describing the singing of the Tetela, stating "They sang with such volume that it seemed that they almost filled the earth with their music. My, it sounded fine to me!"⁸³ In describing the new environment, Kelly mentioned that the majority of buildings were made of brick, while the residential ones were made of mud, which she described as a "mud house."⁸⁴ Initially, she stayed with a fellow missionary named Myrtle. Kelly mentioned that her residential "mud house" was a four room building, which was well equipped with cooking, bathing, and living furniture and utilities. Although the "mud house" did not have running water, she noted that "one of the boys brings it in for

⁸⁰ Lorena Kelly to Friends, 25 December 1938, Box 1, Folder B, Lorena Kelly Papers.

⁸¹ Reid, 158.

⁸² Wembo Nyama Station Welcome Letter. October 9, 1931. Box 1, Folder A, Catherine Parham Papers.

⁸³ Lorena Kelly to Home Folk, 3 March 1936, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

us.”⁸⁵ The missionaries at Wembo-Nyama welcomed her, noting that they were “very cordial indeed,” inviting her to evening meals in their respective houses.⁸⁶ On that same morning which she heard the Tetela singing, Kelly was introduced to the Tetela students at the station. She spoke in English, while another missionary interpreted her words into the local language.

Before being assigned a job at the mission station, Kelly was required to master the Tetela language. For over a year, her main task was taking Tetela classes, given by Mrs. Stilz; she also studied advanced French. Although it is not documented, Parham supposedly went through the same process of learning the Tetela language. Typically, language was the key to bringing salvation to natives, as this bridged the communication gap existing between the two. For instance, biblical translations into the native tongue were important for these missionaries, and Kelly was thrilled when the New Testament translations arrived at the station in August of 1938. She even describes her excitement over a mission boy who brought “two chickens” in exchange for a bible.⁸⁷ In less than a year, Mrs. Stilz had taught Kelly the Tetela language.⁸⁸

Initially, much of the Tetela culture was surprising to these missionaries. For instance, within a few days of arriving in the Congo, Kelly witnessed a six-month ceremonial ritual due to the death of a chief’s son. The Tetela would beat the drums everyday in order to fend off their ancestral spirits from inflicting harm on the living. She translated this ceremony in her usual Christian mindset: “This superstition is no longer something about

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Lorena Kelly to Mother, 7 August 1938, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

⁸⁸ Lorena Kelly to Papa, Mama, and Family, 16 March 1936, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

which I have to read, but something which I see with my own eyes. But one can see the fruits of the labors of the missionaries.”⁸⁹ However, correcting cultural “superstitions” would ultimately not be the goal of these two missionaries. Instead, building “Christian Homes” and imposing their conception of womanhood on Congolese women would be their objective.

After completing their Tetela language sessions, Kelly and Parham would eventually both become teachers at several of the mission stations. Specifically, the two missionaries carried out the majority of their work at the girls’ schools. For contextual purposes, before covering Kelly and Parham’s teaching experience and interactions with Tetela women, an overview of everyday missionary life is necessary. At that time, a normal mission station consisted of a church, school, and a medical facility. These buildings can be broken down into a place to worship, a center of learning and Westernization, and a place to maintain the health of the community. Each of the Methodists’ mission stations in the Congo, Wembo-Nyama, Lodja, Tunda and Minga, had all three of these.⁹⁰ A normal day at a mission station usually consisted of a list of activities at the school and the church throughout the day. In 1938, Kelly wrote that a typical day began with an early morning prayer and breakfast. Following this prayer, school was held from 6:30 am to 11:30 am, after which, extracurricular activities and mission station upkeep lasted until dinner was served in the late afternoon. Post-class activities consisted of agricultural work, “dramatization,” choir

⁸⁹ Lorena Kelly to Papa, Mama, Family, 5 April 1936. Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

⁹⁰ The amount and variation of these buildings differed from station to station. For instance, the Wembo-Nyama station had both primary and advance schools, while the satellite stations had only primary schools for boys and girls.

rehearsal, bible meetings, and others. After dinner, the majority of evenings consisted of a church service.⁹¹

If a missionary worked as a teacher, she or he most likely led worship during the church services by singing, playing an instrument, or organizing the music. In particular, Kelly played the organ and was the choir director for the church services. The choir, composed of Congolese men, practiced after school for Sunday morning choir specials, Holiday performances, and choir shows at the Methodists annual conference. During the 1938 Diamond Jubilee Conference, the entire Congo Southern Methodist missionary organization gathered in Elizabethtown. For the past year, Lorena Kelly had organized a choir routine to be performed at the conference. The choirs, consisting of the Tetela men, were dressed in all-white suits specifically for the occasion. Kelly wrote the choir's main performance, a song about the history of the Methodist missionary work in the Belgian Congo. The song was mixed with several students acting out specific moments in history, such as the portrayal of Henry Morton Stanley exploring the Congo and the first Methodist missionaries arriving. The choir performance included, according to Kelly, "a good old-fashioned Negro Spiritual," and an act showing a "witch doctor" being banished by missionaries.⁹² Kelly noted, "Everyone was profoundly impressed with great and beautiful hymns, and with the historic tableaux. People from all walks of life were there, from the

⁹¹ Lorena Kelly to Mother and Family, 7 November 1937, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers; & Lorena Kelly to Mother and Family, 30 January 1938, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

⁹² Lorena Kelly to Friends, July 1938, Box 1, Folder B, Lorena Kelly Papers.

Governor –General to the day-laborer.”⁹³ Parham’s letters rarely mention her involvement with leading worship.

Besides daily church and school routines, Parham and Kelly left the mission station for errands, local village meetings, and missionary expeditions. For instance, in 1935, Parham and a fellow missionary, Myrtle, biked over one hundred and sixty-five miles across the Congo, visiting over twenty villages. This expedition was evidently conducted to scout potential missionary stations. Parham described that in every village, the “Natives” were extremely happy to see the missionaries, noting:

If noise and dancing can make people happy, I saw very few unhappy people that day. When we entered a village the drumming and dancing ceased long enough to find out all about us as the Natives feel free to ask questions about where we are going, what we are going to do when we get there, and etc.⁹⁴

Kelly also ventured outside the mission station usually to interact with the local villages. These usually consisted of joining the Tetela during ritual occasions. For example, on April 5, 1936, Kelly wrote that a “tremendous crowd of people” gathered at the Wembo Nyama chief’s home. The beating of drums accompanied the people as Kelly was describing a funeral for the chief’s son, who had died six months prior. For the Tetela, the funeral of this importance lasted for six-months with drum beatings everyday. Kelly stated that the drums were “keep the spirit of this person from coming back and harming them and to establish

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Parham to Friends, 23 January 1935, Box 1, Catherine Parham Papers.

their innocence in the eyes of their fellowmen.”⁹⁵ However, Kelly saw this ritual through the eyes of a missionary as she referenced that this was simply “All superstition, you see.”⁹⁶

Both Kelly and Parham served as teachers throughout their career in the Congo, and at first, they taught boys and girls in programs designed for the general education of the youth. Eventually, the two missionaries helped create educational programs designed specifically for Congolese women, and this became their pre-occupation until they were forced to leave the Congo in 1960. These classrooms created a space for them to express their beliefs and operate as Southern Christian women.

Throughout most of the twentieth century, Presbyterians and Methodists worked together in the Congo, managing six main stations altogether: Westcott Brothers, Southern Presbyterian, Northern Methodist, Four Square Gospel, Garanganze Evangelical Mission, and London Missionary Society. The missionaries under study were part of the Southern Methodist, whose main station, as stated previously, was Wembo-Nyama along with the surrounding satellites, Tunda, Lodja, and others. In the early 1930s, the Southern Methodist’s educational system was concentrated at the main station, while the satellite stations possessed their own schools. To explain, the bigger and advanced schools (Normal and Bible School) were located at the Wembo-Nyama station, while the satellite stations such as Tunda, only had basic primary schools; these primary schools (usually referred to as the Central School) were designed for Congolese children. This early education was offered to both boys and girls; however, sources suggest that girls specifically had their own lessons in the girls’

⁹⁵ Lorena Kelly to Papa, Mama, and Family, 5 April 1936, Lorena Kelly Papers, Folder A Box 1.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

schools, known as the “Girl’s Home”.⁹⁷ These primary school students learned the Methodists three R’s: reading, writing, and music. Students were not taught the colonial language; instead, they learned how to read and write in their native language.⁹⁸ Disregarding Belgian colonial policies, the missionaries taught in the native language in an effort to easily spread the Kingdom of God. Typically, the students lived in boarding houses at the mission stations. After boys graduated from the primary schools, usually by the age of fifteen, they chose to either attend the Normal or Bible School; the former was designed to produce teachers for the mission schools, while the Bible school created Congolese pastors.⁹⁹ Lorena Kelly’s first appointment was the “Directress of Central School at Tunda.” She supervised eleven teachers, who were graduates of the Normal School, while she also managed the sixty-two students who lived in the dormitories.¹⁰⁰

Although Kelly worked in the Central, Normal, and Bible schools throughout her career, attention to the development of the Congolese women schools is directly related to this particular study. Even though the Girls Home is referred to as “girls,” this was really designed for adolescent girls. By at least 1931, one of the Girls Home was built at the Tunda station, where Parham taught in 1931, and by March 27th, 1934, another Girls Home was built at the Tunda station as requested by Parham.¹⁰¹ They referred to the Girls school as a “Home” because they taught the Congolese girls basic domestic lessons:

⁹⁷ Parham to Friends, 20 October 1933, Box 1, Catherine Parham Papers.

⁹⁸ Lorena Kelly to Mother and Family, 4 July 1937, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

⁹⁹ Lorena Kelly to Friends, 25 December 1938, Box 1, Folder B, Lorena Kelly Papers.

¹⁰⁰ Lorena Kelly to Friends, 7 November 1936, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

¹⁰¹ Parham to Ina Davis Fulton, 27 March 1934, Box 1, Catherine Parham Papers.

It may be of interest to you to know the nature of the Home and why it is called a home instead of a school. The girls who come to us are trained for Christian leaders among their people. They are to be the wives of the teachers and evangelists and some day we hope that they will be our Bible Women. Their grade school work is done at the regular station day school, but they live at the Home until they are married. This gives them the influence and training of a Christian home, which they would not have anywhere else, as we have no second generation Christians as yet.¹⁰²

Attendance at these Girls Homes was at eleven students at the time of Parham first arrival in 1931, growing to 48 girls by October, 1938.¹⁰³ At the Wembo-Nyama station, Kelly stated that by 1938 a Girls Home had been built and that she taught at this position along with her teaching duties at the Normal and Bible school.

These Girls Homes seemed to have been created, initially, in order to ensure that the male Congolese had a wife after their graduation. Typically, missionaries believed that men would indulge in “heathen” practices if they did not have a Christian educated wife by the time they graduated. For example, Kelly mentions a specific male student, Shungu, who was a graduate of the mission schools. She recorded Shungu’s testimony concerning marriage:

Those days I wanted to marry a wife, but I wanted to marry only a wife from my home village. Miss White did not want me to. She begged me to marry a wife from the fence (Girls’ Home). I really did not want to, but because of her patience my thoughts were changed. I selected one of the girls from the fence and married her. She is truly a Christian. I thank God because He put the desire in the heart of Miss White to help me in my marriage. We were married on the 7th of June 1935.¹⁰⁴

The main goal of mostly all female mission schools was to ensure that male graduates were paired with a Christian wife.

¹⁰² Parham to Friends, 20 October 1933, Box 1, Catherine Parham Papers.

¹⁰³ Parham to Friends, 23 October 1938, Box 1, Catherine Parham Papers.

¹⁰⁴ Lorena Kelly to Friend, July 27, 1939. Lorena Kelly Papers. See also: Sean Morrow, “No Girl Leaves the School Unmarried: Mabel Shaw and the Education of Girls at Mbereshi, Northern Rhodesia, 1915-1940. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 14, no. 4 (1986). 601-635.

Broadly speaking, this anti-heathen ideology was a common characteristic amongst all European and American missionaries. This ideology was predicated on the larger attempt to characterize Africans as “inferior,” “tribal,” and “backward.” This inferiority also associated the black skin color as being inferior to whites. Historian Patrick Brantlinger has written extensively on this topic. In particular, it is fitting that he begins his article, titled, “Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent,” with Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, citing:

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow says that Africa is no longer the "blank space" on the map that he had once daydreamed over. "It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names.... It had become a place of darkness." Marlow is right: Africa grew "dark" as Victorian explorers, missionaries, and scientists flooded it with light, because the light was refracted through an imperialist ideology that urged the abolition of "savage customs" in the name of civilization

Brantlinger argues that this “imperialist ideology” manifested itself into imperial policy and attitudes towards Africans through the colonial era. For Kelly and Parham, they also fall within this argument as they too mixed Africans, skin color, and inferiority into an ideology that separated the world between the civilized and the uncivilized or segregating the light from the dark.¹⁰⁵

At these early versions of the Girls Home, the main lessons taught were basic domestic practices. Girls didn’t graduate from the school, rather they stayed until they were ready for a Christian husband. An important goal of these schools was to foster “Christian” wives for the graduates of the Normal and Bible School, as Parham stated:

¹⁰⁵ Patrick Brantlinger, “Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent,” *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1, (1985). 166-203.

To see our trained evangelists and teachers marrying heathen girls, as they all do when there are no trained girls for them to marry, is heart breaking. An evangelist with a wife is a most ineffective worker, and we long for the day when the number of girls being trained in the Home will equal the number of boys being trained for evangelist and teachers.¹⁰⁶

The curriculum included lessons of infant care, housekeeping, and cooking. In the 1930s, these schools were small and run only by a few women missionaries, including Parham and Kelly.¹⁰⁷

By the 1950s, full-scale Home Economic schools were thriving at these mission stations. In 1954, Parham commented that the school at the Lodja station had over 60 women in 1957.¹⁰⁸ Upon graduating from the Home Economic School, women could potentially attend and graduate the Normal School and become a teacher for the Home Economics School.¹⁰⁹ The Home Economic Schools developed in the 1950s, similar to the Girls Home of the 1930s, focused mainly on housekeeping and cooking. In about 1961, Kelly wrote a textbook for the Home Economics School, titled, “Lama Nama Luudu Pudipudi uma le Mama Tola.” Although the book is in Tetela language, the images clearly depict the core objective of the book, which is to teach basic housekeeping, infant caring, and cooking techniques. For example, there is a lesson that shows an African woman dusting the corners of a house. The cover of the book even shows an African woman cleaning a window inside of her house. In essence, the home economics school focused mainly on domestic practices for women. In addition, although this seemed rare, women could attend the Bible School,

¹⁰⁶ Parham to MacKinnon, 11 September 1933, Box 1 Folder A, Catherine Parham Papers.

¹⁰⁷ Lorena Kelly to Mother and Family, 13 March 1938, Box 1, Folder B, Lorena Kelly Papers.

¹⁰⁸ Parham to Friends, 3 April 1954, Box 2, Catherine Parham Papers; & Kelly to Friends, 17 January 1957, Box 1 Folder D, Lorena Kelly Papers.

¹⁰⁹ Parham to Friends, 15 August 1955, Box 2, Catherine Parham Papers.

along with the boys, suggesting that this school was co-educational. Of course, African women attended the Bible School once they graduated from the Girls Home, and upon completing the Bible School, they became schoolteachers at the Girls Homes.¹¹⁰

The End

Throughout the 1950s, Parham made several trips back to America in order to help her mother. By 1958, her sister, who had done this previously, died, forcing her to leave the Congo and her missionary career, permanently. When she returned to America, Parham continued to take care of her mother, while she also taught sixth grade at her hometown in Georgia. In 1976, Catherine passed away in Asheville, North Carolina. Sources are limited on Catherine Parham's post-missionary activities.¹¹¹

Lorena Kelly stayed in the Congo until she was removed in 1960 because of the post-independence upheaval. Generally speaking, there was a tremendous amount of backlash towards the missionaries, as they were seen as an extension of the colonial government.¹¹² For instance, in December 1960, Kelly and several missionaries returned to the Congo after the conflicts declined. Once she arrived at the Lodja station, she was greeted by a Congolese led police force, which proceeded to round the missionaries together, inspect their baggage, and question them. As they were being questioned, the head police officer noticed Kelly. She noted, "When this head man came to look at mine, he smiled and told one of his helpers that

¹¹⁰ Home Economics Textbook, Lama Nama Luudu Pudipudi uma le Mama Tola, 1961, Lorena Kelly Papers; & Parham to Friends, 27 December 1937, Box 1, Catherine Parham Papers.

¹¹¹ *NC Department of Health*. North Carolina Deaths, 1976-77.

¹¹² Marvin Markowitz, "The Missions and Political Development in the Congo," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 40, no. 3 (1970): 239-247.

I was one of his former teachers.”¹¹³ This interaction between Kelly and a former student is interesting and perfectly represents another result of education, which many scholars have already explored. Missionaries like her educated Africans became part of the African elite. This particular African became a head police officer, carrying out the orders of the Congolese government.

Eventually the police force released the missionaries, and let them return to work at the mission stations. However, less than a month later, Kelly was forced to evacuate the Congo a second time. Of this, she wrote:

Though our hearts are torn with grief that circumstances arose which necessitated a second evacuation of all the missionaries from the Central Congo conference, we take comfort in the realization that we have left there a strong well organized church which we believe will continue to function¹¹⁴

Kelly worked in Zambia for a few years after leaving the Congo, mostly writing textbooks for mission schools. In 1965, she was able to return to the Wembo-Nyama station. She worked at the Woman’s School, which had now become a junior high school for women. When the missionaries left in 1960, African missionaries were placed in charge of the mission stations and ran the operations as normal. In 1969, Lorena Kelly finally retired as a missionary, and returned to North Carolina. After the missionaries left, power was transferred to the African teachers that graduated from the mission schools.¹¹⁵ Lorena Kelly passed away in 1995. Similar to Parham, Kelly died in Asheville, North Carolina. Both of

¹¹³ Lorena Kelly to Folks, 26 December 1960, Box 1, Folder E, Lorena Kelly Papers.

¹¹⁴ Lorena Kelly to Bishop Newell S. Booth, 26 January 1961, Box 1, Folder E, Lorena Kelly Papers.

¹¹⁵ Lorena Kelly, Interview with Lorena Kelly 18 August 1972. Lorena Kelly Collection.

these missionaries devoted the majority of their lives to spreading the Kingdom of God to another continent.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ *NC Department of Health*. North Carolina Deaths, 1993-96.

CHAPTER 2: “Christian Womanhood,” “Woman’s Work for Woman,” and Progressivism

In describing the Annual Woman’s Conference in 1955, which was a gathering for Southern Methodists women in the Congo, Kelly made a note of this concept of “Christian womanhood,” stating, “It was a great success and we feel that it was a real historic event in the development of the Christian womanhood of the tribe.” In the same letter she also observes that, “Some of our Christian women are showing great courage in their experiences these days.”¹¹⁷ Parham also emphasized this concept of womanhood when she held a lesson that taught about the many influential women of the world, “to tell them about other women of the world.”¹¹⁸ In all of Kelly and Parham’s typed and handwritten documents, the notion of “Christian womanhood” cannot be ignored. From teaching African women the basic concept of sewing or arguing that African women should be influential leaders within their communities, the concept is with these missionaries in every step of their journey.

This chapter examines what this concept of “Christian womanhood” meant, how the notion shaped the lives of these Southern women, and how the experiences of Kelly and Parham relate to the broader scholarship of women’s mission history. First, the chapter begins with a short summary of Kelly and Parham’s work with Tetela women. The important aspect in this section is their emphasis on aiding mainly the Tetela women and their attempt to change the culture of these women. Second, the chapter explores what scholars have

¹¹⁷ Kelly to Friends, 7 January 1956, Box 1 Folder D, Lorena Kelly Papers.

¹¹⁸ Parham to Mammy, 2 October 1949. Catherine Parham Papers.

termed the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement, which was a nineteenth century American Protestant, and female missionary movement and ideology that focused on work with foreign women. The third part of the chapter argues that the experiences of Kelly and Parham suggest that the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement influenced the mindsets of Kelly and Parham, despite its apparent decline after the 1910s. This section argues that these Southern Methodist missionaries extended the lifespan of the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement well into the mid-twentieth century. Kelly and Parham accomplished this by focusing their efforts on working with African women, and clinging to the ideals of the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement. The last part examines how these Southern Methodist missionaries attempted to formulate a new version of “Christian womanhood” that was based in the Progressive era social reforms movement of the early twentieth century. In other words, these two missionaries advanced the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement by essentially combining traditional and modern ideas and practices.

“Woman’s Work for Woman”

By focusing specifically on teaching native women the concept “Christian womanhood,” Kelly and Parham seemingly created a “space” to operate in the public sphere within their society. Historically, women have never truly been “stuck” within the private sphere of societies. Instead, they have always found spaces within society to operate as influential individuals. Similarly, during the early twentieth century, given that vocational opportunities to women were limited, women still found roles within the society. The two

Methodists missionaries under consideration were raised in a patriarchal Southern society where there were limits placed on the rights and opportunities for women. Kelly and Parham, similar to female nurses, teachers, and domestic church related occupations, used their calling to be a missionary as a way to enter directly into the public sphere. As shall discuss in the later stages of this chapter, these two missionaries were part of larger progressive reform movement that challenged the patriarchal confines of the American South and created more professional opportunities for women. The historian Lois Myers has examined the rural deaconess program of the Southern Methodists during the early twentieth century. Briefly, this was a domestic female-based mission program. Myers has noted that domestic and foreign missionary work gave Southern Christian women access to the religious public sphere despite the restrictions placed on them, such limitations included female priesthood and other positions of authority in the church. Myers adds, “Denied access to careers in the clergy, Southern Methodist women found outlets for ministry through mission institutions, established, funded, and operated by women.”¹¹⁹

Kelly and Parham’s focus on spreading the Gospel to the Tetela women is not unique to the broader women’s mission historical narrative. Since the mid-nineteenth century, American women missionaries began to find a space within the religious public sphere by devoting their evangelizing efforts on foreign women. Historians commonly refer to this focus on “Christian womanhood” as part of the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, the “Woman’s Work for Woman” was an

¹¹⁹ Lois Myers, “You Got Us All a-Pullin’ Together: Southern Methodist Deaconess in the Rural South, 1922-1940,” chapter in *Work, Family and Faith: Rural Southern Women in the Twentieth Century*, (Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 172.

American Protestant female-based missionary movement that focused on American women spreading the gospel to foreign women. The actual phrase, “Woman’s Work for Woman,” was used as a “universal motto” for American Protestant women. As Myers has noted, “Mission-minded women gave the motto a positive spin, believing ‘it took women to reach other women and children with the gospel.’ Staying within their sphere, they worked out their callings as teachers, nurses, and social workers.”¹²⁰ Dana Robert, the foremost authority and historian on this subject, has observed that:

‘. . . woman’s work for woman’ emphasized that it took women to reach other women and their children with the gospel. Notions of gender separatism had originally created a small space for women’s ministry—a space that missionary women enlarged by founding missionary schools, hospitals, orphanages, and ultimately evangelistic ministries. ‘Woman’s work for woman’ was the first significant gender linked mission theory.”¹²¹

These historians have also argued that the “Woman’s Work for Women” movement created a space for women to operate despite the patriarchal restrictions existing within American society.¹²²

Since the beginning of the modern missionary movement, American women were often relegated to the private sphere of American life and religion. Historian John McDowell has noted that Southern Methodist women were often restricted in their roles within the Southern society. The church essentially allowed, although restricting in its own ways, women to explore new roles and positions within society. These women carried and wielded

¹²⁰ Myers, 172.

¹²¹ Dana Robert, *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers: Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 7.

¹²² Connie Shemo, “Directions in Scholarship on American Women and Protestant Foreign Mission: Debates Over,” *History Compass*, 10: 270–283; & Robert, 2002, 5-13.

the idea that they had a divine right and duty to spread the Kingdom of God across the world. In order to spread this Kingdom, these women used the practices of the private sphere such as domesticity, that is, wifhood, and motherhood, in order to create a space for them to operate as influential missionaries and members of the church. As Robert wrote:

Missions occupied the central spot in women's hearts because they provided opportunities for leadership in the church. With their focus on reaching women and children, women's missionary societies had carved out a vital niche and power base from which women could participate in lay ministries.¹²³

Similar to Robert's argument, Kelly and Parham focused specifically on working with women that allowed them to create a space to operate or to use as a "power base." By teaching foreign women the essence of "Christian womanhood," these Americans became influential agents of social and cultural change.¹²⁴

The "Woman's Work for Woman" was designed to bring the Gospel and civilization to the "heathens" of the world. Firstly, the "Gospel" meant bringing teachings of Christianity and western civilization, such as the establishment of educational and medical institutions in order to "uplift" African women from their pagan and male-dominated society. Robert has noted that the "Woman's Work for Woman" movement was based on the "belief that non-Christian religions trapped and degraded women, yet all women in the world were sisters and should support each other."¹²⁵ Through the "Gospel," American women could essentially rescue fellow women subjected to paganism. Secondly, the "Woman's Work for Woman" movement was based in the "domestic agenda of Victorian America," which emphasized that

¹²³ Robert, (2002), 5.

¹²⁴ John McDowell, *The Social Gospel* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1982), 116-120.

¹²⁵ Dana Robert, *American women in mission : a social history of their thought and practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 133.

the role of women was to create and maintain “Christian Homes.” These “Christian Homes” stressed the woman’s domestic and private role within society, which was mainly to carry out the domestic responsibilities of childcare and housekeeping. Thirdly, the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement was designed to create a “sisterhood” amongst all Christian women. If every Christian women knew the “Gospel” and maintained their Christian Homes, then the world could be united through this common “sisterhood” of Christian women. I label the values of the mid-nineteenth century “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement as being traditional.¹²⁶

Scholars have argued that the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement began to decline in America by 1910; that is, decades before Kelly and Parham embarked on their missionary careers. One of the reasons scholars for this decline in the movement is the immediate effect of the First World War and the Great Depression that followed it. By the end of the First World War, the world that Europe and America had created was changing and evolving. American women missionaries also felt these changes, and they eventually led to a drop in missionary participation. Even though colonialism continued after the First World War, this period represents the decline of the “heyday” of modern American missionary movement.¹²⁷ In addition, the Great Depression financially crippled American churches and their missionary agendas. This led to a decrease, although not a complete drop, in female missionary participation. The great “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement, which was led by women missionaries at the height of the missionary movement, weakened.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 135.

¹²⁷ Hastings, 398-405.

Lack of female missionary participation contributed to the decline in the popularity of the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement; however, another reason for this drop is that it was the result of the ideological changes amongst American women. The decline of Women Mission Boards and the notion of “Woman’s Work for Women” was a consequence of the immediate impact of the worldwide progressive movements of the early twentieth century. The introduction of progressivism urged women who at the time were gaining the right to vote and participating in the public sphere, to resist past notions of separate gender spheres and roles in society. In other words, the polarized gender roles of the nineteenth century were weakened under the wave of the new women progressive movements, causing the focus on women-based missionary work to become outdated. The result of this wave of progressivism was the transformation of the slogan, “Woman’s Work for Women,” into a concept known as the spreading of “World Friendship,” which concentrated on evangelizing both male and female and creating a common friendship in Christ.¹²⁸

The impact of progressivism has been debated amongst scholars of American women mission history. Historians have suggested that these worldwide and American progressive movements convinced women that “Woman’s Work for Woman” was an outdated and archaic concept that couldn’t function with the development of gender equality. Patricia Hill, an American women mission historian, has argued that the early twentieth progressive movements urged female missionaries to “professionalize” the occupation of the missionary. In this new “profession,” women could work in society and encourage social reform that could reach both female and males. Hill adds that, “Women’s clubs embarked upon a

¹²⁸ Shemo, 270-283. Robert (1996), xviii.

program of municipal and civic reform that appealed to the New Woman of the Progressive era.”¹²⁹ She argues further that the need to “professionalize” the missionary occupation was the result of the increasing of educational opportunities for women at this time.

Consequently, schools designed for missionary work were built during the early twentieth century. As chapter one of this thesis explored, the two missionaries of this case study attended Scarritt College, which attempted to create professional and skilled female missionary workers.¹³⁰

Robert has also noted that the ideologies originating from the Progressive era were not logically aligned with the concept of “Woman’s Work for Woman.” In her sub-chapter titled, “World Friendship and the Logic of Decline,” Robert has suggested that the liberating notions of gender equality of the Progressive era found the old notion of separate missionary spheres for women obsolete. She comments:

The very things that had made the woman’s missionary movement attractive to mothers and grandmothers—the separate women’s societies, the narrow focus on woman’s special obligation to work for other women, “Woman’s Work for Woman”—began to seem old-fashioned.¹³¹

Similar to Patricia Hill, Robert asserts that the professionalization of the women’s missionary field also focused efforts away from “Woman’s Work for Woman” and more towards a system focused on the all-encompassing “World Friendship” concept. She adds that “The logic of World Friendship worked together with the changing role of women in American

¹²⁹ Patricia Hill, *The world their Household: The American Woman’s Foreign Mission movement and cultural transformation, 1870-1920* (Ann Arbo, MI: University of Michigan press, 1985), 142.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 138-149.

¹³¹ Robert (1996), 313.

society . . .”¹³² The “changing role” was of course the arrival of new educational and occupational opportunities for women during the early twentieth century.¹³³

These explanations for the decline of the “Woman’s Work for Woman” concept have largely been accepted by scholars. However, this narrative is not completely black and white. Although Dana Robert suggests that this decline was mostly due to the changing ideology amongst women, he has also noted that the decline was due to the decision orchestrated by the male missionaries to merge the female mission boards with the general boards. As stated in the introduction of this thesis, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, merged its mission boards in 1906 against the will of women. As Robert notes:

The dismantling of the woman’s missionary movement makes for depressing reading. In each case, women fought and resisted the mergers, but they were either powerless to defend themselves because they had no laity rights in the church, or else they were to accept compromises that slowed but could not stop the ultimate dissolution of their organization.¹³⁴

The fight against the merging of the mission boards presents a paradox in the history of the fall of the “Woman’s Work for Women” movement.¹³⁵ Despite the evolving progressive ideologies concerning gender equality, women still resisted the merging of mission boards. It can be concluded that the decline of “Woman’s Work for Woman” was a combination of the changing progressive ideology amongst women, the professionalization of women, and the male initiated takeover of the women’s separate sphere. The latter reason suggests that the

¹³² Ibid., 313.

¹³³ Ibid., 313-316.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 304.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 302-316.

progressive ideologies of women were not completely attempting to erase the separate sphere of female missionary work.

Expanding “Woman’s Work for Woman” into the Twentieth Century

Although scholars have argued that the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement ended prior to the 1920s, Kelly and Parham’s experience and understanding of “Christian womanhood” suggest that the concept continued to guide them in their work in the Congo. Twenty years after the decline of the movement, the two missionaries were still deeply attached to teaching Congolese women along the notion of “Christian womanhood,” specifically stressing the religious, domestic, and social responsibilities and duties for women within society. Specifically, they implemented “Christian womanhood” in the “Girls Home” and in the home economics schools.¹³⁶

This suggests that the “Woman’s Work for Woman” notion never left the minds of the Southern Methodist women missionaries. In addition, the emphasis on “Christian womanhood” still suggests a traditional perspective in regards to gender roles in society. This section will examine both the material and ideological connections between the Southern Methodist missionaries and the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement. As noted previously, Dana Robert has written extensively on the merging of the Mission Boards as a major reason for the decline in the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement. This occurred in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, merging the Women’s Division of the Mission

¹³⁶ Esther Case to Catherine Parham, 8 June 1931, Box 1, Folder A, Catherine Parham Papers.

Board with its male counterpart in 1906.¹³⁷ Although the merger occurred, it did not stop Southern Methodist women from continuing their work amongst foreign women. Kelly and Parham may have never mentioned the banter “Woman’s Work for Woman” openly, but their religious calling was exclusively centered on helping African women. It can also be argued that that the merger of the mission boards was not exactly a real merger. It seems that the Southern Methodists Women’s Division of the Mission Board still functioned to recruit Southern women. As noted in the introduction of this thesis, the letters between Parham, Kelly, and their recruiters were addressed, “Foreign Department Woman’s Work.”¹³⁸ The female missionaries also annually celebrated a “district woman’s meeting,” between Methodist women “delegates,” fellow female missionaries, and female students. These were large scale meetings that were organized by the Southern Methodist church in order to emphasize their work amongst the foreign women. In addition, Scarritt College was strictly a Southern Methodist school for training potential women missionaries. For the Southern Methodists, this was one of greatest institutions that supported women missionaries for, as Myers has commented: “In an era when women rarely found welcome in theological seminaries, Scarritt prepared women for missionary service by providing a curriculum, covering the potential tasks women might face on the mission field, from bookkeeping to performing sacred music.” Myers argues that the southern rural deaconess program depended upon Scarritt College female graduates such as Catherine Parham, who was a deaconess

¹³⁷ McDowell, 126.

¹³⁸ Esther Case to Catherine Parham, 8 June 1931, Box 1, Folder A, Catherine Parham Papers.

before leaving for the Congo.¹³⁹ At least until the late 1920s, the Women's Division of the Methodist Mission Boards funded the school for producing these future female deaconesses and missionaries.¹⁴⁰

In terms of the actual ideas of the "Woman's Work for Woman," Kelly and Parham's work aligns with some of the original ideas of the movement. Firstly, these Southern Methodist missionaries believed that it was their divine duty to uplift these Tetela women from their heathen, pagan, and patriarchal societies. To Kelly and Parham, women occupied a limited role within traditional African family structures: "You see, their parents know nothing about helping adolenent (sic) girls through these trying years. Always they've married them off and let their husbands tame them with fist and stick."¹⁴¹ Mrs. O'Toole, a missionary at the Wembo-Nyama station, described the Tetela women as, "Having been taught that women have no intelligence and there was no need of their trying to learn, the girls have an inferiority complex."¹⁴² Parham also observed this "inferiority complex" amongst the Congolese women, noting in 1946, that "The most distressing thing is the backwardness of the women. The old tribal laws ruled out any initiative or individual thought, everyone just conformed to a pattern without giving the matter any consideration whatsoever."¹⁴³ Later in 1955, she also commented that "In the place where they have not yet gone there are very few girls in school, due to the fact that in this part of the world women

¹³⁹ Catherine Parham, "Deaconess Certificate," Box 1 Folder A.

¹⁴⁰ Thelma Stevens, Interview with Thelma Stevens 13 February 1972, *Southern Oral History Program Collection*.

¹⁴¹ Parham to Friends, 14 March 1954, Box 2, Catherine Parham Papers.

¹⁴² O'Toole to unknown, 1933, Zicafoose-O'Toole Papers.

¹⁴³ Parham to Good Friends from Around the World, 16 March 1946, Catherine Parham Papers.

and girls have always had to take the left-overs, even at meal times.”¹⁴⁴ The basis of their belief in African women’s inferiority was in their perception of polygamy, which was founded upon a patriarchal system that treated women like an object of monetary value. The missionaries perceived polygamy as an incredible threat to a “Christian Home.”

By introducing practices of domesticity and the building of a “Christian Home,” these missionaries were promoting certain “liberating” notions that were incredibly different than the largely patriarchal Tetela society. While describing one of her students, Kelly noted, “She is proving to be one of our finest girls, exercises much initiative and leadership.” For these Methodists missionaries, the term “leadership” held several meanings. Firstly, “leadership” implied that a women be a leader within the home by ensuring the security and health of the family. This aspect of leadership was carried out through domestic responsibilities of the household, as taught in the Girls Home.

Secondly, “leadership” exerted a certain religious component that incorporated notions of equality; although it was limited in its application. Similar to men, women had a responsibility to spread the Kingdom of God throughout Tetela society. Within this religious component, male and female African students were at times equal. Certain bible lessons were often co-educational, and Parham bragged about the success of girls, “In different standard achievement tests a few of the girls have scored higher than their boy class mates.”¹⁴⁵ In addition, after women graduated from the Girls Home, they had the opportunity to attend a co-educational Bible School, and after completing the Bible School successfully, women

¹⁴⁴ Parham to Friends, 15 August 1955, Catherine Parham Papers.

¹⁴⁵ Parham to unknown, 1933, Box 1, Folder A, Catherine Parham Papers.

would become teachers of religion at the Girls Homes. While describing how women were allowed to obtain a mission education, Parham stated, “To really appreciate this record one must remember that the Bible School is co-educational and that African women have always been considered decidedly inferior to men by their own people.”¹⁴⁶ By showing disgust towards this perceived position of gender inferiority, these missionaries suggest that they saw women as equals to men at least in some aspects of life. However, although these women missionaries’ established co-educational schools, a clear gender hierarchy existed within the mission stations. This can be argued because the sole reason behind establishing schools for the Tetela women was to provide a spouse for men who had graduated. The prioritization of male students is clearly a sign of a mission education that had a gender hierarchy but there did exist a small space for African women to occupy position of authority.

Lastly, Kelly and Parham’s understanding of “Christian womanhood” and “leadership” also consisted of completely abandoning one’s family. In the words of Kelly, “Some of our Christian women are showing great courage in their experiences these days. . . . These women had learned to love God and walk in the Light and they just could not bear to live in a polygamous marriage, even if they had to pay the price of breaking up their homes and losing all their children.” She and Parham believed that these teachings enabled women to exert individual thought and “leadership,” even to the extent of leaving a family in rejection of the practice of polygamy.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Parham to Friends, 27 December 1937, Box 1, Catherine Parham Papers.

¹⁴⁷ The influence of these missionaries and “empowering” of African women could be inaccurately portrayed by the missionary sources; despite Kelly’s claim that they were forming Congolese women “leaders,” who embodied “courage,” this could have easily been an exaggeration; missionaries could be embellishing their

The second idea that Kelly and Parham expanded from the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement was the traditional domestic role of women. Similar to the Victorian missionaries of the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement, these two missionaries believed in the domestic role of woman in society.¹⁴⁸ The original intent of founding the Girls Home was to mold suitable wives for the Christian educated Congolese males. Parham was being literal when she said that “girls being trained in the Home,” meaning that Congolese women have to be trained to take care of the home. Even in the early years, she stated with self-reflection that, “We shall soon be able to take better advantage of the opportunity we have in training them [Congolese women] to make real Christian homes.”¹⁴⁹ By teaching African women home economics, Kelly and Parham believed that they were creating “Christian Homes” that was founded upon the Christian mother and wife.

“Christian Homes” essentially embodied both notions of religion and traditional gender roles. For these missionaries, women should both base their homes on Christian morals and maintain the home through domestic practices. In reference to the moral tenants of Christianity, Kelly and Parham were mainly concerned with establishing a loving relationship with one husband and one wife, which was the opposite of the Tetela generally accepted polygamist practice. For instance, as Kelly once wrote of one of her students, “He married one of the lovely girls from the girls’ home at Minga. . . .He loves his wife. To one

achievements to show progress to the donors at home. However, the belief in their influence over African women is valuable because it demonstrates the progressive and individualistic mindset of these missionaries, which is to empower women through domestic behaviors.

¹⁴⁸ I cannot classify Kelly and Parham’s ideologies as being “Victorian” because their understanding of Christian womanhood was both traditional and modern.

¹⁴⁹ Parham to Ina Fulton, 27 March 1934, Box 1 Folder A, Catherin Parham Papers.

in a Christian land that statement would sound absoluteky (sic) unnecessary (sic), but in a land where women are bought and sold like goats and cows these few words carry with them the demonstration of the transforming power of the love of God.”¹⁵⁰ In other words, love between man and female was the core Christian component in a “Christian Home,” it also shows a sense of satisfaction and success on their part as missionaries. The second aspect of a “Christian Home” that these missionaries stressed was the domestic responsibilities of the women in maintaining the home. Home economics classes centered on teaching domestic responsibilities of women within the household. As Kelly put it, “In their little mud and thatched house, the girls are learning fundamental principles of sanitary cooking and housekeeping and Christian home making.”¹⁵¹ These missionaries firmly believed that a Christian education which was based on teaching housekeeping and cooking would create a “strengthened” Christian woman who could form a Christian-based home. To reiterate, although Christianity is not directly related to practices of domesticity, these missionaries believed that the woman’s actual role within society was the foundation of a “Christian Home.”

The making of a “Christian Home” seems to correlate directly with the Victorian inspired missionaries that Dana Robert was referring too. However, Southern women, at this time, were actually modern individuals who abandoned many Victorian practices and ideals. For instance, Glenda Gilmore has explored that the modern racial ideologies and practices of white supremacy actually made Southern women “modern” rather than “Victorian” because

¹⁵⁰ Lorena Kelly to Friends, 7 November 1936, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

¹⁵¹ Kelly to Friends, 5 December 1954, Box 1 Folder D, Lorena Kelly Papers.

racism adapted modernity, such as the creation of segregated modern institutions.¹⁵² As will be discussed later in this chapter, Kelly and Parham's understanding of a "Christian Home" also resemble a "modern" and progressive ideology of the South at the time. In this sense, these two missionaries cannot be truly connected to the Victorian inspired women missionaries of the past. Although similar, we witness an adaptation of traditional and modern values and practices, such as the need to keep women within the private sphere but that women should be at the forefront of social reform by bringing these "Christian Homes" to the world. In other words, these missionaries kept the Victorian practices concerning domesticity, but their intent and ideology is connected to the Progressive Era.

Lastly, Robert has noted that the "Woman's Work for Woman" movement served to create a sisterhood amongst Christian women. Similarly, this idea of a common sisterhood was exemplified when Parham showed the girls the "other women of the world." In the same breath, "Woman's Work for Woman" emphasized the domestic responsibilities of women which would help to liberate them from the oppressive non-Christian worlds. Of course, creating a "sisterhood" that liberates women by emphasizing Christianity and the domestic role of women is contradictory. However, this contradiction was ignored. As Parham noted:

This coming week-end we are to have a district woman's meeting and all the visiting delegates will stay in the model house of the Home Ec. Building. Our Home Ec. classes this week have concentrated on getting things ready. We cleaned the house from top to bottom and polished it until it shines. The girls always enjoy such work. But then they seem to enjoy all their school work, and we are still very proud oof [sic] them. At the district meeting I have two sessions tell them about other women of the world.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), xv-xxii, 31-60.

¹⁵³ Catherine Parham to Mammy (Mother), 2 October 1949. Box 1 Folder B, Catherine Parham Papers.

In this quotation, Parham is emphasizing that the Home Economics class must clean and polish the house, while she later notes that the lessons will examine “other women of the world.” Who these “other women of the world” were is not clear, but they could have easily been other influential Christian women throughout history. What is important is that Kelly and Parham were trying to forge a common gender identity or a “sisterhood” of women.¹⁵⁴

In terms of the wider scholarship on this particular subject, many historians have illustrated that other missionaries attempted to both liberate African women and also mold them into being Christian wives, who were inferior to their husbands. Staying in the realm of Congo history, Nancy Hunt has argued that the Belgian government, along with the help of Belgian Catholic missionaries, built educational institutions that taught Congolese women lessons, similar to Kelly and Parham’s work, in domestic and medical work. For Hunt, “liberation” for the Belgian government meant that Africans would be freed from the effects of urban life such as alcoholism, crime, and prostitution. In addition, these educational institutions attempted to shape these African women into the common “Western family,” which relegated women to the home. The difference in Hunt’s investigation is that there was no real and deliberate attempt to “liberate” African women from their present cultures; the Belgian government designed and funded these Congolese schools in order to remedy the effects of urbanization.

Research conducted by Fiona Leach has suggested that West African Anglican missionaries set up schools for African women in order to create monogamous relationships

¹⁵⁴ Robert (1996), 130-137.

and families with Christian African men. In order to do so, missionaries had to liberate African women from their “pagan” practices. Similar to the Southern Methodists, once this liberation was completed, inferiority to the husband was the next step.¹⁵⁵ The words of Sean Morrow, Musisi Nakanyike, and Madupe Labode explores the transformation from heathen to Christian homes.¹⁵⁶ My study differs slightly from the other works because it argues that these missionaries actually believed that they were “liberating” African women. The majority of these other studies do note that their missionaries also attempted “liberate” their subjects, but this liberation was only in the sense of being set free from pagan and heathen practices. Kelly and Parham, as I have pointed out, believed that women actually possessed a powerful ability to become leaders within the community and be influential agents of social change and progression. Historian Samuel Thomas also asserts that the female missionaries who taught Luhya girls in Kenya also believed in these same themes of liberation and leadership. Thomas contends that Luhya girls actually aspired to become leaders within the church, as this was similar to the lives of their mission teachers.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Fiona Leach, “African Girls, nineteenth-century mission education and the patriarchal imperative,” *Gender & Education* 20, no. 4, (2008), 335-347.

¹⁵⁶ Sean Morrow, “No Girl Leaves School Unmarried: Mabel Shaw and the Education of Girls at Mbereshi, Northern Rhodesia, 1915-1941,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 19, no. 4, (1986); & Musisi, “Colonial and missionary education: women and domesticity in Uganda, 1900-1945.” Ed. K.T. Hansen. *African Encounters with Domesticity* (1992). Modupe Labode, “From heathen kraal to Christian home: Anglican Mission education and African Christian girls, 1850-1900,” Ed. Deborah Kirkwood, *Women and Missions, Past and Present: Anthropological and History Perceptions*, (1993).

¹⁵⁷ Samuel Thomas, “Transforming the Gospel of Domesticity: Luhya Girls and the Friends Africa Mission, 1917-1926,” *African Studies Review* 43, no. 2 (2000): 1-25.

Progressive Shape of “Christian Womanhood”

In her article, “Stepmother America: The Woman’s Board of Missions in the Philippines, 1902-1930,” Lauren Prieto has argued that the post 1920s conception of “Christian Womanhood” that embodied certain modern and progressive themes, noting:

Efforts to improve women’s lives through clubs, medical care, and formal instruction culminated in the Woman’s Bible Training School at Cagayan. The status to which American women hoped to elevate Filipinas incorporated a decidedly modern type of womanhood, including professionalized obstetrics and infant care, advanced education and professionalization, and athletics, all alongside Christianity.¹⁵⁸

Prieto called this “modern type of womanhood” a “modern extension of woman’s work for woman.”¹⁵⁹ This “modern extension” was the lingering influence of the Progressive era’s notions of “womanhood,” which emphasized the woman’s role within public social reform. Her conclusions seem to confirm Kelly and Parham’s ideas that the world needed social reform, and this reform began with associating “womanhood” with moral, religious, and humanitarian reform. This “modern type of womanhood” was coupled with traditional understandings of gender roles, such as the woman’s job to be the nurturer of the family; the woman was supposed to morally and spiritually take care of the family, while the wife and mother was suppose to clean and feed the family. In this section, I argue that these Southern Methodist missionaries’ concept of “Christian Womanhood” was influenced and shaped by the progressive movements of the early twentieth century.

¹⁵⁸ Laura Prieto, “Stepmother America: The Woman’s Board of Missions in the Philippines, 1902-1930,” chapter in *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960*, edited by Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Sklar, and Connie Shemo, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 344.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

With regards to the South, the Progressive era shaped and influenced women in the emerging American New South. As in Patricia Hill's, *The World Their Household*, women expanded their role in their societies by bringing their "homes" to the world. Instead of simply being cosigned to the domestic sphere, women were at the forefront of the advances in social reform. These women reconfigured their gender role by becoming increasingly involved within the public sphere by confronting the preexisting patriarchal power structure. It should be noted that American women have never truly been restricted to the domestic sphere. Women have occupied many roles within the public sphere before the Progressive Era. For instance, the nineteenth century was filled with women who were influential missionaries in various parts the world. However, as historian Mary Evins has noted, "Yet at the turn into the twentieth century, women more forthrightly challenged patriarchy, power, and prejudice, both quietly through the daily processes of their lives and overtly through public actions."¹⁶⁰

From the late 1890s to the 1930s, women were powerful agents of Progressive social, moral, economic, and medical reform within the South. Their goal, similar to the "Woman's Work for Woman" movement, was to provide aid to those who needed them the most: the poor and their unsaved brothers and sisters. According to the historian Elisabeth Perry, the Tennessee Centennial Exposition also consisted of a "Woman's Department." The exposition was a celebration of the Tennessee's state history, while the Woman's Department was created in order to celebrate the female side of this history. The president of the Woman's

¹⁶⁰ Mary Evins, forward to *Tennessee Women in the Progressive Era: Toward the Public Sphere in the New South*, ed. Mary Evins, (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2013), xii.

Department, Kate Kirkman, read in her celebratory speech in 1897 that “Woman’s Work” which she defined as, “Whatever may be necessary to preserve the sanctity of the home and ensure the freedom of the state.”¹⁶¹ For Perry, these words simply mean that women must bring the moral, religious, hygienic, and economic infrastructure of the home to the world or the state as this will ensure human progress. During the Progressive Era, the “New Woman” of South was being associated with public social reform that would bring the “homes” of women to the world. These Southern “New Women” organized themselves through local communities and brought social change to their worlds. Specifically, women congregated and formed themselves in all-female church groups that relied upon nurturing and developing their communities.

An example of these all-female church organization is discussed in Jean Hamm’s, “To Teach, to Preach, and to Heal: The Women’s Missionary Society at Konnarock.” Hamm argued that, beginning in 1923, the Women’s Missionary Society of the United Lutheran Church established schools, churches, and hospitals for mountain families “at the intersection of the Appalachians of Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Tennessee.”¹⁶² This particular missionary society was part of the progressive reform movements that emphasized the moral, spiritual, and material improvement of its subjects.

He adds:

¹⁶¹ Elisabeth Perry, introduction to *Women in the Progressive Era: Toward the Public Sphere in the New South*, ed. Mary Evins, (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 2.

¹⁶² Jean Hamm, “To Teach, to Preach, and to Heal: The Women’s Missionary Society at Konnarock,” chapter in *Tennessee Women in the Progressive Era: Toward the Public Sphere in the New South* ed. Mary Evins, (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 46.

. . . in the twentieth-century Progressive spirit of the reform work of mountain settlement schools, the goals of the Women's Missionary Society were to help toward the social, moral, and economic rehabilitation of the southern mountain poor, among other mission projects. Acting on the Social Gospel tenets of social Christianity, Lutheran women determined to invest in the material elevation of the southern Appalachians, to represent the Lutheran faith in the mountain South, and to elevate the overall quality of life of the highland people within the communities surrounding the school.¹⁶³

Hamm's examination of the Women's Missionary Society at Konnarock is a case study that falls among the many other all-female Southern organizations who were part of a Progressive movement.

What is also important about this particular case study is that the Women's Missionary Society at Konnarock lasted years after the Progressive period had ended, for as Hamm notes, "Although the Progressive Era classically dates from the end of the nineteenth century in to the first two decades of the twentieth century, the influences of the period began much earlier and the work, particularly in the South, continued long after."¹⁶⁴ The foreign missionary efforts of the Southern Methodist, their spreading of the Social Gospel, along with its material and moral attachments, lasted for decades after the 1920s. It is worth remembering that Parham and Kelly were educated in the 1920s, and that it was also the period that they realized their calling to be missionaries. I believe that these local and regional Progressive Era movements influenced Kelly and Parham, in the same manner as other Southern women during this period. Christian schools such as Scarritt College were most likely embedded with these progressive notions of the Social Gospel.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 52.

It should be noted that this particular case study of the Women's Missionary Society at Konnarock is one of many religious and non-religious female organizations that sought to bring social reform during the Progressive Era. Another is John Egerton's, *Speak Now Against the Day*, in which he specifically refers to the humanitarian work of the women's division (YWCA) of the YMCA across the South.¹⁶⁵ In addition, Lynne Rieff and Lois Myers have both written extensively on progressive Southern women who worked for social reform.¹⁶⁶ Of course, these are a few of many case studies completed that explore the work of female organized groups who were influenced by progressivism and social reform.

Kelly and Parham embodied these notions of social reform and moral, spiritual, hygienic, and material salvation. For these Southern Methodist missionaries, "salvation" was achieved by embracing their progressive and modern version of "Christian womanhood." According to Parham and Kelly, African girls were part of a morally corrupted society that held women in a low position.¹⁶⁷ By embracing the teachings of Christianity, women could become morally and spiritually competent within their new Christian community, which would ultimately give them spiritual power. In addition, a "Christian woman" meant that women were responsible for the hygienic and material well-being of the family and community. The Home Economics class stressed the hygienic practices of raising children, and this included cooking and bathing. In addition, the "Christian woman" was also

¹⁶⁵ John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in South* (New York: NY: Alfred Knopf Press, 1994), 77, 122-3, 165, 237, 377, 426-7.

¹⁶⁶ Lynne Rieff, "Go Ahead and Do All You Can: Southern Progressives and Alabama Home Demonstration Clubs, 1914-1940," in *Hidden Histories of Women in the New South*, (Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press, 1994).

¹⁶⁷ As cited previously, Parham noted, "In the place where they have not yet gone there are very few girls in school, due to the fact that in this part of the world women and girls have always had to take the left-overs, even at meal times." Parham to Friends, 15 August 1955, Catherine Parham Papers.

responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of a family's material objects such as cleaning, sewing, and other activities.

These habits are similar and attached to the Southern Progressive Era social reform movements that lasted until the 1930s. Most importantly, although the teachings of "Christian Womanhood" seemed to confine women to the private sphere, these missionaries actually believed that Christian women belonged in the core of every community, as they were responsible for the ultimate well-being of society.¹⁶⁸ In the end, these progressive tendencies ultimately represent a developed understanding of "Christian Womanhood" and the "Woman's Work for Woman" concept. I also argue that these Southern Methodist women extended the "Woman's Work for Woman" movement by adapting the concept of "Christian Womanhood" to these Progressive Era social movements.

Paradoxes and Conclusions

A common theme throughout this chapter is the paradoxical nature of these Southern Methodist women. While clinging to their progressive concept of "Christian Womanhood," these missionaries surged into the public sphere and demanded that women have a central location within the communities. In the same breadth, this concept of "Christian Womanhood" was embedded with the traditional belief that women must stay within the private sphere, as this is where her influence should be felt. If we examine the lives of Kelly and Parham, we witness female missionaries believing that women belonged in the home, where their responsibilities were to take care of their Christian family. Despite teaching this

¹⁶⁸ This is similar to the previous section that noted the leadership characteristic of "Christian Womanhood."

belief to African girls, Kelly and Parham lived their lives outside the home, and were valuable agents of change in the world. In other words, they essentially used what they knew despite its contradictions in order to operate within the public sphere.

This is how these female missionaries survived and operated despite the limitations that society confronted them with solely because of their gender. They crossed the Atlantic Ocean, taking with them their traditional sense of “Christian Womanhood” and argued that it encouraged social reform and change amongst their African subjects. Kelly and Parham believed in all the notions of “Christian Womanhood,” yet they lived a life that seemed to contradict its core principles. In a similar vein, as Lynne Rieff’s says in her examination of the Alabama Southern progressive women:

Despite their optimistic outlook and plans for the regions development, Progressives allowed certain ‘paradoxical combinations’ as part of their agenda. Because these reformers were unwilling to abandon certain beliefs and institutions that retarded the South’s progress, they were ambiguous in their rhetoric and actions, simultaneously advocating tradition and modernity.¹⁶⁹

I argued that Kelly and Parham “allowed” these “paradoxical combinations” in order to push towards the public sphere because this was the only path to do so. Although their version of “Christian Womanhood” was limited by its very nature, it still allowed them to operate as forceful agents of society and history.

Although popular scholarship often argues a clear separation between the “Woman’s Work for Woman” and the “World Friendship” movements, the case of Kelly and Parham proposes that this separation, at least for Southern missionaries, was not so clear. These two

¹⁶⁹ Lynne Rieff, “Go Ahead and Do All You Can: Southern Progressives and Alabama Home Demonstration Clubs, 1914-1940,” in *Hidden Histories of Women in the New South*, (Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 135.

missionaries both retained their traditional Southern ideologies concerning gender and embraced new progressive ideologies that “ended” the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement. The main reason why historians assume the “Woman’s Work for Woman” died in the 1920s is also due to inadequate research on American women missionaries. However, a developing trend in female mission history is beginning to shed more light on the post 1920s situation. As Connie Shemo has commented, “In a related trend, scholars of women missionaries are beginning to study the time period past the 1920s, when institutions for women began to merge with those for men and there was less clear cut space work for women.”¹⁷⁰ My research suggests that the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement, at least for Kelly and Parham, did not completely end in the 1920s. Instead, the two formulated “Christian womanhood” in associated with the social reform practices and liberating ideologies of the Progressive era. At the same time, this modern type of “Christian womanhood” was coupled with traditional gender roles which for Kelly and Parham were linked. In the end, their work points to an expansion and a reformulation of the “Woman’s Work for Woman” that lasted until Lorena Kelly was removed from the Congo. Lastly, Kelly and Parham’s understanding of “Christian womanhood” and their emphasis on spreading this ideology to other women, similar to women missionaries of the past, essentially enabled them to become influential missionaries.

¹⁷⁰ Connie Shemo, “Directions in Scholarship on American Women and Protestant Foreign Mission: Debates Over,” *History Compass* 10, no. 3 (2012).

CHAPTER 3: Cultural Transformation, Identity, and Legacy

In 1991 and 1997, anthropologists John and Jean Comaroff published volume one and two of their famous work, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*. The book examined the work of Nonconformist missionaries amongst the Tswana in southern Africa. In this book, the Comaroffs argued that colonialism cannot be understood through the lenses of a “simple exercise in domination and resistance,” meaning that historians in the past have merely examined colonialism by examining the manner in which the colonial empire governed and the resistance towards colonial rule ¹⁷¹ Specifically, African Christian missionary historiography before the 1990s mostly, from two angles, examined missionaries as part of the colonial ruling apparatus; it also observed the missionaries’ later influence on political resistance movements. Instead, the Comaroffs contended that colonialism, and the efforts of missionaries, has to be understood within the context of the “colonial encounter” between the colonizers and colonized.¹⁷² Missionaries were essentially at the core of this “colonial encounter.” The various European empires used missionaries in order to assimilate, in the case of the French, or alter the culture of their African subjects. This interaction between the colonized and colonizers illustrates the various changes that these encounters incurred, especially in regards to cultural change:

Colonial encounters everywhere consisted in a complex dialectic: a dialectic, mediated by social differences and cultural distinctions, that transformed everyone

¹⁷¹ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Vol. 2: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 28.

¹⁷² The Comaroffs have coined the term, “colonial encounter,” which is used to understand African cultural change by examining the interactions between the colonial and the colonized.

and everything caught up in it, if not in the same way; a dialectic that yielded new identities, new frontiers, new signs and styles-and reproduced some older ones as well; a dialectic animated less often by coercive acts of conquest, even if violence was always immanent in it, than by attempts to alter existing modes of production and reproduction, to recast the taken-for-granted surfaces of everyday life, to re-make consciousness; a dialectic, therefore, founded on an intricate mix of visible and invisible agency, of word and gesture, of subtle persuasion and brute force on the part of all concerned. This, again, is why colonialism escapes easy definition.¹⁷³

The argument presented in the above excerpt was the start of a new scholarly conversation concerning what historians refer to as “cultural imperialism.” This term essentially means that European manipulated and changed the cultures of their colonial subjects, replacing it with aspects of European based culture. The Comaroffs assert two main arguments. Firstly, “cultural imperialism” occurred during the “colonial encounters” between the colonized and the colonizers. They add that cultural change was essentially guided by certain colonial ideologies that perpetuated colonial societies. Historians and anthropologists can measure the perpetuation of this colonial ideology by observing the changes in “everyday life” of the colonial subjects. Specifically, the Comaroffs argue that cultural practices, beliefs, and norms represent the “everyday life” of human beings. Secondly, they proposed that indoctrinating Africans with a colonial ideology and changing their everyday habits developed a new self-awareness or “consciousness” amongst certain Africans who were exposed to this. In addition, this new “consciousness” gave rise to new identities amongst certain Africans. This chapter seeks to add to the ongoing debate concerning missions and cultural transformation or “cultural imperialism,” which the Comaroffs began in the early 1990s. Specifically, the chapter discusses the “colonial encounter” in the context of African women

¹⁷³ Ibid., 28.

and the Methodist missionaries in the Belgian Congo. I argue that the missionary work of Southern Methodist women challenged and changed the culture and lives of everyday Tetela women who were educated by these missionaries. As discussed in the second chapter, these Southern Methodist women taught African women the essentials to a certain ideology, “Christian Womanhood.” This ideology was based in teachings of domesticity, female Christian leadership, and domestic roles caused these African women to become self-aware of their new roles as African Christian women. Being conscious of their new domestic role, this cultural transformation also enabled the Tetela women who had graduated from the Methodist mission schools to find new forms of power and roles in their societies.

Firstly, the study evaluates the manner in which Tetela women became culturally aware of their new identity as Christian females. Secondly, the study will observe how these new identities and self-awareness as Christians essentially led to new forms of power for these the Tetela women. Thirdly, for over a decade, historians have contested the Comaroff’s “colonial encounter” of which the missionaries were major actors. This section of the chapter will consider the arguments against the Comaroff thesis, and in the process will attempt to place my missionaries into this broader debate on “cultural imperialism.” I argue that cultural negotiation, although limited at times, occurred during the colonial period between the Tetela and the Southern Methodists; however, cultural negotiation and mixing accelerated after the missionaries, along with their Christian villages, left. Lastly, I will examine this post-colonial period by observing recent family cultural practices and structures. In this section, I argue that the ideologies which the missionaries brought influenced the culture of their African

subjects. After the missionaries left, the ghost of missionaries and their ideologies continue to hang over the Tetela.

Ideologies and Identities

As discussed in the second chapter, the Tetela women who attended the Methodist mission schools encountered a particular type of ideology that was introduced by female missionaries. This ideology was referred to as, “Christian womanhood,” which was a combination of Victorian gender roles, domesticity, Southern Methodism, and progressivism. Firstly, Kelly and Parham firmly believed that “Christian womanhood” began with abstaining from “heathen” practices or anti-Christian traditions, such as polygamous relationships. Kelly once noted that “Truly the black darkness is slowly, but surely, fading into the pale dawn of a new day for Africa.” The “darkness” Kelly was replacing was first and foremost the gospel of Jesus Christ which had to replace of certain “pagan” religious beliefs.¹⁷⁴

For these two missionaries, “Christian womanhood” also consisted of following traditional gender roles that were associated with Western societies. In particular, Kelly and Parham’s concept the woman’s role within society was rooted in the gender roles established in the American South. The role I am referring to was generally centered on the domestic responsibilities of the Southern middle class woman. For Kelly and Parham, “Christian womanhood” was centered on the woman’s duty to create and maintain a “Christian Home.” Parham once stated, “We shall soon be able to take better advantage of the opportunity we

¹⁷⁴ Kelly to Mother, 9 February 1936, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

have in training them [Congolese women] to make real Christian homes.”¹⁷⁵ Simply, a “Christian Home” was one built around the domestic responsibilities of the mother. These responsibilities consisted of maintaining the home by cooking, cleaning, following the teachings of Christ, and by abstaining from heathen practices or traditional African cultural practices such as polygamy. In other words, it was the woman’s responsibility in ensuring that the home exemplified Western culture. For instance, maintaining a Christian home meant that women needed to make Western clothes for their husbands and children, so the missionaries imported sewing machines, and taught the Tetela women how to sew (see figure 4). The textbook written by Lorena Kelly (figure 5) also clearly illustrates the domestic responsibilities associated with a “Christian Home.”

This first section of the chapter argues that this ideology of “Christian womanhood” manifested itself in a new identity amongst the Tetela women who became culturally aware of their new status as Christian women. Before this chapter reaches that conclusion, we must understand how certain ideologies can change societies and how we can measure these changes. The Comaroffs asserted that societies base their culture and institutions around the most powerful ideologies existing within a society. They have argued that we can measure how powerful these ideologies are by examining the culture of the “everyday;” society’s fashion habits, reading material, cooking habits, household relationships, and worship rituals, all of which resemble certain powerful fundamentals in a society. The Comaroffs have also argued that power is the ability to shape and change ideologies in a society, and thus change the everyday habits as power “presents, or rather hides, itself in the forms of everyday life.

¹⁷⁵ Parham to Ina Fulton, 27 March 1934, Box 1 Folder A, Catherin Parham Papers.

Sometimes ascribed to transcendental, suprahistorical forces . . . these forms are not easily questioned.”¹⁷⁶ According to the historian Paul Landau the Comaroffs’s focus on power is based on the “hegemony” of certain ideologies, which manifest itself in the cultural of the “everyday.” In many African communities, much of their everyday habits were manipulated and changed by various missionary groups. To a significant extent, the everyday life of these communities began to resemble Western and Christian practices and ideologies, such as the simple act of sending one’s child to a school everyday or reading a Bible every morning. In the Congo case, the “identity” I am referring to is directed at those Tetela women who graduated from the mission schools, most likely married Christian husbands and continued working at the mission stations. I am not including Tetela women who lived outside the mission stations. ¹⁷⁷

The Southern Methodists who penetrated the Belgian Congo indoctrinated the Tetela women with a certain colonial ideology by teaching them the essence of “Christian womanhood” in the girls’ schools, and later, the home economic schools that were developed in the 1950s. This indoctrination of this ideology can be seen in the changing daily habits of the Tetela women in the home. With regards to cultural changes in households, the Comaroffs have observed that, “Given that the seeds of cultural imperialism were most effectively sown along the contours of everyday life, it is no surprise that the process

¹⁷⁶ John and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Vol. 1: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 22.

¹⁷⁷ Paul Landau, “Hegemony and History in Jean and John L. Comaroffs’s ‘Of Revelation and Revolution,’” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 70, no. 3 (2000): 503.

emphasized the physical and social architecture of the household.”¹⁷⁸ The maintaining of a home was taught extensively in the Girls Home and later the Home Economic schools of the 1950s. Specifically, this included basic everyday cleaning routines, including washing, cooking, dusting, and other activities, in order to ensure the woman created a “Christian Home.”

The creation and maintenance of a “Christian Home” also meant that women had to establish a relationship with only one husband. After graduating from the Girls Home or the Woman’s School, these Tetela women would marry one male who worked at the mission station. After marriage, these Tetela women would begin creating and maintaining a “Christian Home” by performing domestic duties in the home. The act of marrying only one husband, committing to this husband within a “Christian Home,” and performing domestic duties clearly represents a shift in the everyday norms of the Tetela women. All of these activities also represented a commitment to abstain from traditional Tetela cultural practices. In addition, using Western materials and tools in order to act out this ideology of “Christian womanhood” clearly represents a shift the Tetela women’s mindset.

The Comaroffs have also argued that the Nonconformist missionaries also helped create a specific Tswana identity. This Tswana identity was based upon the cultural distinctions and categorization that the missionaries implemented as the Tswana began to understand themselves as Africans who were the uncivilized, savages, and heathens. The formation in the later years of the Tswana self-identity was largely created in resistance to

¹⁷⁸ John and Jean Comaroff, “Home-made Hegemony: Modernity, Domesticity, and Colonialism in South Africa,” in *African Encounters with Domesticity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 67.

the beliefs of the missionaries, as the Tswana understood their identity to be in conflict with the missionaries. This uniquely Tswana identity influenced resistance movements against the missionaries and colonial domination. Landau has commented on this notion of “colonizing the consciousness,” asserting that, “Through being alienated from themselves they saw themselves as having lifeways opposed to that of Europeans and drew together into a self-conscious identity.”¹⁷⁹ In their *Of Revelations and Revolutions*, the Comaroffs note:

The Tswana may have learned the political language of colonialism. And they may have conducted themselves according to [colonialism’s] practical terms. But the more they were forced to comply with European forms of discourse, the more they came to rely upon, and invoke, the distinction between *sekgoa*, the ways of the whites, and *Setswana*, Tswana ways.¹⁸⁰

Similarly, for these Southern Methodist missionaries, the identity of the Tetela Christian women was also generated by the cultural distinctions enforced by the missionaries. However, instead of resisting the missionaries, the result was the Tetela women understanding their new identity as Christian women who were distinct from the “heathens” living in the non-Christian villages. The missionaries enforced these cultural distinctions by alienating the Tetela women from their villages by allowing board at the station, indoctrinating them with a new identity based in “Christian womanhood,” and by repeating the ideology by teaching and practicing domestic habits, such as sewing and cleaning.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Landau, 506.

¹⁸⁰ Comaroffs, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Vol. 1*, 308.

¹⁸¹ It should be noted that the Comaroffs asserted that Tswana embraced the ideologies of the missionaries, which can be seen by examining the habits of the everyday. However, repeated exposure to Christianity, along with colonial state pressures, the Tswana also developed their own identity in conflict with the missionaries.

In his, “Transforming the Gospel of Domesticity: Luhya Girls and the Friends Africa Mission, 1917-1926,” Samuel Thomas speaks directly about cultural awareness amongst African women who were influenced by missionaries. Thomas argued that missionaries helped to shape a new identity in some of the Luhya women who went to the mission schools that were based in notions of Christianity and womanhood. Thomas also points out that this new self-awareness in this group of Luhya women influenced them to believe that they were culturally and spiritually superior to the traditional Luhya women. This “elitist” belief eventually morphed into a social and economic elitist status amongst these women within society. Instead of forming an identity in conflict with the missionaries, these Luhya women became culturally aware by seeing themselves in conflict with their own culture. Similarly, Lorena Kelly and Catherine Parham taught African women that the traditional customs, which supposedly limited the influence of women in African societies, were for “heathens.”¹⁸² Instead, Kelly and Parham preached that Christianity could free oneself from these heathen practices. As Lorena Kelly said:

Two [women] recently left their husbands because they married the second wife. These women had learned to love God and walk in the Light, and they just could not bear to live in a polygamous marriage, even if they had to pay the price of breaking up their homes and losing all their children. With such stamina if Strengthened and developed, God can build his kingdom.¹⁸³

This anti-heathen message was directly in conflict with Tetela beliefs. The anti-heathen and anti-traditional African culture message was essentially the bedrock of becoming an African Christian woman. Graduated Tetela women had to embrace the understanding that their

¹⁸² Parham to Friends, 16 March 1946, Box 1, Folder B, Catherine Parham Papers.

¹⁸³ Kelly to Friends, 7 January 1956, Box 1 Folder -, Lorena Kelly Papers.

traditional culture, especially the practice of polygamy, was sinful. Therefore, by embracing “Christian womanhood,” Tetela women formed a social identity that was in conflict with their culture.¹⁸⁴

The pictures of Tetela women which the missionaries took, in addition to stories describing newly created “Christian Homes,” expressed a new identity amongst the converts and it resembled the ideology of “Christian womanhood.” As pointed out earlier, the entire reason behind the creation of a Girls’ Home was to ensure the husband would have a Christian wife. As Parham commented, “To see our trained evangelists and teachers marrying heathen girls, as they all do when there are no trained girls for them to marry, is heart breaking.”¹⁸⁵ (see figures 1, 2, & 3). The act of marrying a Christian spouse illustrates that the teachings of the missionaries succeeded. Kelly and Parham’s letters also seem to suggest that these “Christian Homes” were in close proximity to the mission stations and separate from the rural villages as the majority of the male graduates continued working at the mission stations. For instance, a male graduate from the Normal school (teachers school) named Lukika married a graduate from the Girls Home, produced a baby boy, and was the principal at a boy’s school at the Tunda station. In addition, some of the male graduates would establish a single church in a village, and be the residing pastor, and a male

¹⁸⁴ Samuel Thomas, “Transforming the Gospel of Domesticity: Luhya Girls and the Friends Africa Mission, 1917-1926,” *African Studies Review* 43, no. 2 (2000): 1-25.

¹⁸⁵ Parham to Miss Mackinnon, 1933, Box 1, Folder A, Catherine Parham Papers.

student would take his Christian wife with him to live in the village. However, this does not seem to be a popular situation, as sources rarely described this arrangement.¹⁸⁶

If the Tetela female graduates hadn't developed a new identity, they would probably have not continued with their education, and most likely have not ever married a Christian husband who was determined to have a Christian wife. In addition, Kelly and Parham also show that many graduates of the Girls' Home taught at the female schools at the main and satellite stations. It can be assumed that these Tetela women recruited and taught other women about their notions of Christian womanhood, which is a further indication that the ideology of "Christian womanhood" changed the identities of these women.¹⁸⁷ It should be noted that this "identity" mostly refers to those women who completed the curriculums and married a mission man.

This analysis speaks to how identities were constructed during the colonial period. Most importantly, it can be argued that Kelly and Parham essentially created the conversation concerning conflict between Christian Tetela women and their traditional cultures. This identity of being an African Christian woman was predicated on an ideology that the world was divided between uncivilized and civilized humans. When Kelly first caught a glimpse of Africa for the very first time, she was on board of a ship as she saw the African continent on the horizon. In this moment, she noted:

As I have had the privilege of standing at the dawn of the day and watching the sun rise from behind the continent of Africa and melt away the shades of night; so I felt

¹⁸⁶ Lorena Kelly to Friends, 7 November 1936, Box 1, Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers. See also: Sean Morrow, "No Girl Leaves the School Unmarried: Mabel Shaw and the Education of Girls at Mbereshi, Northern Rhodesia, 1915-1940." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 14, no. 4 (1986). 601-635.

¹⁸⁷ Parham to Friends, 15 August 1955, Catherine Parham Papers.

that I am having the privilege of entering the life of the natives of Africa at the dawn of a new day with them, and that I shall have a part in helping to drive out from their hearts and lives the darkness of superstition, fear, and evil, and to fill them with the faith of God, assurance of life, and with love.¹⁸⁸

On that morning, the Atlantic Ocean was between her and Africa. For Kelly, it wasn't merely the ocean that separated her from Africa. The African continent represented the evils and the heathens of the world. What separated Kelly and Africa that morning was the godless and the saints of the world, the darkness versus the light, and rationality versus superstition. Frantz Fanon stated that the colonial understood the world through a Manichean worldview: "The "native" is declared impervious to ethics representing not only the absence of values but also the negation of values. He is, dare we say, the enemy of values. In other words, absolute evil."¹⁸⁹ Joan Scott has furthered this argument by proposing that the French's "civilizing mission" survived (and continues to survive) because it rested on distinguishing the civilized from the uncivilized:

On the one hand, the promise of inclusion is held out to those who choose to become French; on the other hand, the very characteristics that mark these people as in need of "civilizing" prevent their ever realizing the promise. For what sustains the superiority of the French, what makes them civilizers (instead of oppressors) is the inferiority of those they seek to uplift.¹⁹⁰

In other words, the identity of being a Christian woman was predicated on dividing the world into a Manichean worldview between the good and the bad. This worldview was the bedrock of "Christian womanhood" and this is how identity was formed amongst the Tetela by seeing themselves in conflict with their host culture.

¹⁸⁸ Kelly to Mother, 9 February 1936.

¹⁸⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2004 original published in 1963), 6.

¹⁹⁰ Joan Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 89.

Power and Authority

This identity of being a “Christian woman” enabled the Tetela women to find new forms of authority and power. In recent years, historians have begun examining the missionary impact on African female empowerment in several ways. Specifically, scholars have attempted to measure the nature of female power in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial settings. Comparing the responsibilities and authority of African women before and after the exposure to Christianity and colonialism completes this method. For example, in an article on African girls and Christian education, titled, “African girls, nineteenth-century mission education and the patriarchal imperative,” Fiona Leach has argued that that the Anglican Victorian missionaries of the nineteenth century actually lessened the responsibilities of women by ignoring previous traditional female responsibilities, such as agricultural work, and instead focused on domestic duties, She notes that:

The Victorian feminine ideal promoted women as the weaker sex, as confined largely to the home and as dependent on men for their economic means, whereas African women had traditionally played a significant role in agriculture and other forms of economic activity. This restructuring of African women’s lives to conform with Anglo-Christian lifestyles implicated the missionaries in curtailing women’s traditional economic and social freedoms, marginalizing-and in some cases impoverishing-them.¹⁹¹

In traditional Tetela society, women most likely were responsible for the maternal and domestic responsibilities of the home, including agricultural work. This can be assumed, as

¹⁹¹ Fiona Leach, “African girls, nineteenth-century mission education and the patriarchal imperative,” *Gender and Education* 20, no. 4 (2008): 344.

Djundu-Lunge has noted, that the men were mostly responsible for hunting.¹⁹² However, my research does not attempt to specifically create a balance sheet that calculates which setting (pre-colonial or colonial) allowed African women to exercise the most power. I want to examine how the Tetela women abandoned their traditional culture and embraced the “world” that was brought by the missionaries. This new world brought new (though not necessarily greater) forms of power to Tetela women.

The encounter between the colonial and colonized introduced Africans to a new world. This modern “world” insisted that male and females possessed certain distinct roles in modern societies. For Lorena Kelly and Catherine Parham, the female role consisted of the beliefs and responsibilities concerning “Christian womanhood.” The Comaroffs have contended that the colonial encounter enabled colonial subjects to become conscious of their self in new ways and their role in the colonial society. In this thesis, the Methodist missionaries shaped the Tetela women who became self-aware of their position in colonial society as that of being a Christian woman who was distinct from the Christian man. What is important here is that the missionary essentially created the awareness in Africans that European gender roles were superior to that of traditional gender roles. By accepting this concept of “Christian womanhood,” the Tetela women openly explored new forms of power and authority in the new “world” that the missionaries introduced. The embrace of these new sources of power essentially represents change over time. This is not to say that the Tetela women did not already possess certain influential roles within their traditional societies, but

¹⁹² Paul-Amy Djundu-Lunge, “Analyse socio-culturelle et spirituelle de l'oeuvre missionnaire de l'eglise methodiste unie parmi les tetela du zaire central: La contextualisation de l'evangile pour une inculturation de la foi chretienn.” diss. (Québec, Canada: Universite Laval, 1991).

they did explore new forms of power because of the new modern “world” introduced to them by the missionaries.

To understand this transformation better, an examination of the pre-colonial female roles of Tetela society is needed. In pre-colonial traditional Tetela culture, males typically held the majority of power. Sociologist Djundu-Lunge has noted that the Tetela were a warrior based ethnic group. Bravery and heroic acts in battle often decided who should be the influential community leaders. Furthermore, accession to political authority was often decided through an ancestral male line. In addition, like many African societies, polygamy was fundamental to the Tetela, as marriage was first and foremost about survival, and procreation was the essence of survival. Having a polygamous lifestyle was a sign of prestige and security, as the more wives one had, the more likely the male’s ancestral line would continue to survive. Pre-colonial families were most likely a result of arranged marriages. The two families involved would often arrange these marriages during a child’s early life. Like many other African societies, the husband gave the wife’s family the payment of the bridewealth. Of course, the latter, which was usually in the form of currency and/or livestock, was crucial in Tetela culture, as according to Lunge, this ensured “stabilité du foyer,” or the “stability of the home.”¹⁹³ Although I cannot be as certain what the full role of women was in Tetela culture at that time, they were most likely responsible for the agricultural and maternal work within and outside the household. However, as Lunge observes, and according to the writings of the missionaries, it can be concluded that society was largely a patriarchal one.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Lunge (1991), 44.

¹⁹⁴ Lunge (1991), 42-47.

The missionaries encouraged an entirely different aspect of marriage which was foreign to Tetela society. For the missionaries, marriage should not entirely be based on survival and the continuation of the male ancestral line. Instead, marriage should be a choice by both partners to increase their commitment towards God by not engaging in heathen practices. For instance, as cited in the first chapter of the thesis, one of Kelly's male students, Shungu, noted that he was persuaded by the missionaries to choose a true Christian wife:

Those days I wanted to marry a wife, but I wanted to marry only a wife from my home village. Miss White did not want me to. She begged me to marry a wife from the fence [Girl's Home]. I really did not want to, but because of her patience my thoughts were changed. I selected one of the girls from the fence and married her. She is truly a Christian. I thank God because He put the desire in the heart of Miss White to help me in my marriage. We were married on the 7th of June 1935.¹⁹⁵

Parham also ended many of her letters with a note stating, "A land of happy African homes, Fears banished, Faith Confirmod (sic), Rich in schools and teachers, I'lls (sic) of body and mind cared for and healed, Christ all and in all Africa!"¹⁹⁶ The "happy African homes," for these missionaries, were built upon a loving relationship between husband, wife, and God.

Instead of having their spouses chosen for them, sometimes at the time of birth, Tetela Christian women were now able to choose their spouses. This act of choosing a partner, which was not entirely based on the means to survive, gave women a certain level of power nonexistent in traditional Tetela society. In his study of Luhya girls, Thomas has said that girls potentially flocked to the mission stations in order to avoid an arranged marriage and to postpone matrimony for years, as such was allowed only after completion of mission

¹⁹⁵ Lorena Kelly to Friend, 27 July 1939, Box 1, Folder B, Lorena Kelly Papers.

¹⁹⁶ Parham to Friends, 29 January 1935, Box 1, Folder A, Catherine Parham Papers.

education. In addition, several Luhya women may have used the missions to avoid marriage completely. Although mission education taught domesticity, these Luhya women were not forced to marry, contrary to their traditional culture, and thus could avoid marriage entirely by working at the mission station.¹⁹⁷

Kelly and Parham noted that the primary purpose of women's education was to ensure a Christian wife for the Tetela male graduates. In order to ensure that these men had a Christian wife, the missionaries had to train potential wives to be equal to the Christian males attending the mission schools. Of course, "equal" in the sense that women and men had the same obligation to spread the Kingdom of God; education was essentially part of this obligation. Parham once noted, "In the places where they have not yet gone [the missionaries] there are very few girls in school, due to the fact that in this part of the world women and girls have always had to take the left-overs, even at meal times."¹⁹⁸ Parham's words suggest that Christian teachings could ultimately create equality amongst male and female. In addition, the Bible School, at the higher levels, was co-educational. As stated in chapter two, women were allowed to attend the Bible School in order to teach in the Girls Home after graduation. On this subject, Parham stated, "Four of our Tunda girls have finished Bible School. . . To really appreciate this record one must remember that the Bible School is co-educational and that African women have always been considered decidedly inferior to men, by their own people."¹⁹⁹ Although the ideal Christian wife had limited rights

¹⁹⁷ Thomas, 3-26.

¹⁹⁸ Parham to Friends, 15 August 1955, Box 1, Folder B, Catherine Parham Papers.

¹⁹⁹ Parham to Friends in America, 27 December 1937, Box 1, Folder A, Catherine Parham Papers.

and privileges by virtue of being relegated to the home, Parham and Kelly attempted to empower these women by giving them knowledge concerning domestic practices.

According to Nancy Hunt, Catholic schools taught that the purpose of female education in the Congo was aimed to parallel the men's progress. By indoctrinating women with Western domestic ideology, Congolese women were seen as equal to the educated men or the "évolués." Hunt states that, "The church [Catholic Church] generally advised évolués to look for wives of an equal level of "evolution" and the program for women was intended to reduce existing incongruities between elite men's level of "evolution and that of their wives."²⁰⁰ To a certain extent, female education was designed, in a technical sense, to infuse a certain level of equality amongst Congolese husbands and wives. Although this colonial policy aimed at promoting equality amongst both genders, Western family ideology typically gave a tremendous amount of authority to husbands as it restricted wives to the home. However, in the same breath, Congolese Christian wives were different than the non-Christian wives that Congolese Christian husbands often married. These women were seen as equal in terms of the levels education. The same could be said about the Tetela women who were educated by these Methodist missionaries. Of course, a certain gender hierarchy still existed within these "Christian Homes," as men were thought to be the head of the household.²⁰¹

Knowledge of western domesticity also gave Tetela women direct authority over the household. For Kelly and Parham, women were responsible for creating a "Christian Home."

²⁰⁰ Nancy Hunt, "Domesticity and Colonialism in Belgian Africa: Usumbura's Foyer Social, 1946-1960," *Signs* 15, no. 3 (1990): 445.

²⁰¹ Hunt, 1990, 447-472.

This home was an area where the husband could comfortably live; as Parham noted, a woman must, “provide a home into which a man can bring his colleagues and friends with joy and the assurance that they will be welcomed.”²⁰² Although teaching domestic practices limited the Tetela strictly to the home, it provided an area for which women could express their authority and opinion. Although men ruled over the home, the “Christian Home” was regulated and maintained by Christian Tetela women. The women could essentially dictate and control the family’s hygiene, diet, and childhood spiritual upbringing, while the man was supposed to work at the mission stations.

Giving authority of the home to the woman and instilling notions of domesticity in order for women to “equal” men promoted a sense of individuality, independence, and equality concerning these Christian Tetela women. Each woman was now responsible for the upkeep of her specific home, promoting a sense of individuality. In addition, each Tetela woman was able to choose her spouse based on her own spiritual calling and love interest, which also promotes a sense of individuality. If a Tetela woman had a dispute with her husband, they most likely settled this between each other. In traditional African culture, the community would have settled these disputes, or specifically, the males of the wife’s family would confront the husband. -This open dialogue between husband and wife promotes a sense of equality existing within the home. All of these practices suggest that the Christian Tetela women explored new powers and responsibilities. As stated previously, dialogue may have existed between partners but men were still the head of the households and were most likely the main decision makers.

²⁰² Catherine Parham to Friends, 25 November 1969, Catherine Parham Papers, Box 3, Folder 3.

Samuel Thomas supports the point that I am articulating in this section. Thomas has argued that Luhya women became empowered because they chose their husbands independently instead of having them chosen through arranged marriages. As mentioned earlier, Thomas also notes that Luhya girls used the missions “to both delay marriage and to exercise control over the choice of a spouse.”²⁰³ Similarly, Tetela women were allowed to choose their husbands, and only a husband that was a culturally equal or was a Christian. As in Thomas’s study, the “Christian womanhood” also contained a liberal strand that promoted individuality and independency. Parham once commented that, “The most distressing thing is the backwardness of the women. The old tribal laws ruled out any initiative or individual thought, everyone just conformed to a pattern without giving the matter any consideration whatsoever.” Similarly, Thomas cited a missionary who said that, “some Christian boys. . . prefer to take heathen wives . . . because they are not quite so independent.”²⁰⁴ In other words, by embracing Christianity, Christian Tetela women, although not directly noted by the missionaries, promoted a sense of individuality.

Some historians have examined African female empowerment by observing how missionaries helped (and the extent of this help) to assimilate African women into the colonial and post-colonial economies. For instance, in his “Missionaries and Female Empowerment in Colonial Uganda: New Evidence from Protestant Marriage Registers, 1880-1945,” Felix Meier zu Selhausen has argued that Protestant missionaries in Uganda were responsible for providing an avenue for African women to become part of the colonial

²⁰³ Thomas (2000), 20.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 10.

economy. However, although literacy increased amongst these African women, Selhausen noted that, “. . . they were largely excluded from participating in the colonial wage labor market.”²⁰⁵ Instead, these African women only found work at the mission stations. Other scholars, including Nancy Hunt and Kathleen Sheldon, have also said that missionaries were largely responsible for enabling African women to enter the workforce. However, both of them have noted the limitations that have plagued African women in achieving equal pay and opportunity as their male counterparts.²⁰⁶ For this thesis, the Tetela women did work within the mission stations, but a change in their socio-economic status as a result of the mission education cannot be observed because of the lack of data.

Cultural Negotiation

The preceding sections of this chapter have seemingly argued that these Southern Methodist missionaries engaged in a complete one-dimensional cultural transition of those Tetela women who graduated from the mission schools. This argument aligns with the “cultural imperialism” and “colonial encounter” argument articulated by the Comaroffs. Of course, this particular methodology is part of a larger debate among scholars. In particular, Andrew Porter disagreed with the notion of “cultural imperialism.” For Porter, the Comaroffs’s argument depicts agents of colonial expansion, that is, missionaries, as one-dimensional cultural imperialist, who whole-heartily altered African societies. Instead, he

²⁰⁵ Felix Meier zu Selhausen, “Missionaries and Female Empowerment in Colonial Uganda: New Evidence from Protestant Marriage Registers, 1880-1945,” *Economic History of Developing Regions* 29, no. 1 (2014). 74.

²⁰⁶ Kathleen Sheldon, “I Studied with the Nuns, Learning to Make Blouses,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 31, 3 (1998); & Nancy Hunt, “Domesticity and Colonialism in Belgian Africa: Usumbura’s Foyer Social, 1946-1960,” *Signs* 15, 3 (1990).

argues that cultural imperialism has to be understood as a negotiation between these two societies. This contrasts sharply with the Comaroff's depiction of a complete cultural domination of a host culture. In many cases, Africans chose certain aspects of the Western culture and rejected others. Porter has stated that "This portrayal of the missions' activity is nevertheless problematical. Cultural imperialism in the form of establishing European norms was only effective, as Said has rightly recognized, when 'premised on the silence of the native.'"²⁰⁷ The "silence of the native" simply means that the accounts of the colonized are absent from these arguments. By only focusing on the missionaries, historians neglect the various modes of resistance by the colonized. This "resistance" also caused cultural negotiation to occur between the colonized and colonizer.

Porter's criticism is incredibly important as attempts to actually understand how cultural transformation occurs, which is through the process of negotiation and resistance. Missionary historian, Connie Shemo, notes that since the late 1990s, mission scholarship has attempted to understand missionaries beyond the "colonial paradigm" as simply cultural imperialists. Instead, comparable to Porter, the "colonial encounter" was the negotiation of ideologies and culture between the missionary and the colonized, As Shemo noted:

Instead a picture emerges of shifting relations of power and constant negotiations over the shape and direction of projects such as schools for girls and hospitals for women and children. This fits in with a broader critique that the framework of "cultural imperialism" does allow sufficient room for agency of people in host cultures.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷Porter, 386

²⁰⁸ Shemo (2012).

For the Southern Methodist missionaries in the Congo, cultural negotiation and resistance occurred, but it was accelerated during the postcolonial period. This section of the chapter will present moments of negotiation and how the missionaries simultaneously attempted to limit forms of negotiation and resistance.

As stated previously in this chapter, Kelly often remarked on how Tetela women were dedicated Christians, as she noted:

Two [women] recently left their husbands because they married the second wife. These women had learned to love God and walk in the Light, and they just could not bear to live in a polygamous marriage, even if they had to pay the price of breaking up their homes and losing all their children. With such stamina if Strengthened and developed, God can build his kingdom.²⁰⁹

In this excerpt, cultural negotiation is evident. The quotation implies that both husband and wives were attending the mission stations and most likely graduated from its institutions. This is because the two husbands who were most likely graduates of the mission schools married another wife, which forced these two women to leave the relationship. The quotation could be interpreted that the women were married to a non-Christian husband before enrolling at the mission station. However, the majority of these women had enrolled in the schools when they were young and did not have a husband until they met one in the mission station. This excerpt illustrates resistance, and thus “negotiation,” because the Christian men essentially disobeyed the missionaries and destroyed their “Christian Homes.”

Another example of cultural negotiation occurred when the missionaries officiated marriages of their female and male students. During such ceremonies, Kelly noted that the

²⁰⁹ Kelly to Friends, 7 January 1956, Box 1 Folder -, Lorena Kelly Papers.

missionaries, in order to please the parents, allowed the males to give a dowry to the female's parents. As she said:

Six of the girls from the Girls' Home were married to students here in the Bible School and the Normal School. Yesterday morning the interested people of those involved came and transacted their business matters concerning the marriages. That is the grooms paid the father or the guardians of the girls the money and things they demanded in exchange for the girls. Those things included money, cloth, a goat, copper crosses, and bracelets.²¹⁰

Although Kelly stated that these exchanges were “the extent of the heathen wedding,” this particular action represents a crucial moment of cultural negotiation. This example implies that when parents enrolled their daughters into the schools, they knew that their family would eventually receive a form of payment from the eventual Christian groom's family. This is clearly a sign that negotiation occurred between the parents of the students and the missionaries. As discussed previously in this chapter, the practice of “bridewealth” amongst the Tetela and other African ethnic groups is a key component of society and families. These exchanges ensure stability within the home, between families, and the community as a whole. If the missionaries decided not to involve this part of the “heathen wedding,” then Christian marriages and the act of sending one's daughter to the mission schools may have been impossible. In this perspective, the entire goal of creating “Christian Homes” was based on this cultural negotiation.

These examples illustrate that cultural negotiation occurred throughout the colonial period between missionaries and Africans. However, these missionaries also attempted to limit this by creating a controlled and monitored area where their students and graduates

²¹⁰ Lorena Kelly to Mother, 27 August 1939, Box 1 Folder A, Lorena Kelly Papers.

lived. The missionaries operated mainly within their stations. Once students were enrolled in the schools, they spent most of their adolescent life in missionary compounds. This tendency is due to the fact that the missionaries had autonomy and influence over their students for extended periods of time during which the majority of students were boarded. Keep in mind that these mission schools were a school of choice for Africans, as their fathers had to sign a contract allowing their daughters to attend the schools:

I _____ father of _____ promise the Mission that I will leave my child _____ in the Girls' Home at Wembo Nyama until the Mission wishes to let her go.

I promise also that I will not marry my child to a person who is not a Christian.²¹¹

Of course, if the father later permitted his daughter to marry a non-Christian man, the sources suggest that the girl would simply stop attending the mission schools because the graduates of the schools only married Christian spouses. In addition, if the father had already arranged their daughter's groom before entering into the school, then the mission would either ask the father to "redeem her or we must pay it [dowry]."²¹²

Students who stayed the entire length of their adolescent years and graduated from the schools were deeply involved in the process of cultural transformation. The end "product" of this transformation was a Christian African woman who married a Christian man, after which they lived under the authority of the missionaries in the "Christian village." Ruth O'Toole, the missionary mentioned in the second chapter, noted that these Christian

²¹¹ O'Toole to unknown, March 1934, Zicafoose-O'Toole Papers

²¹² Ibid.

villages consisted of a “Christian atmosphere.”²¹³ This “atmosphere” was essentially the residing authority of the missionaries over their Christian African graduates. In addition, logically speaking, African parents of the graduates could have potentially supported their child’s educational accomplishment and cultural transformation. The reason is that such parents would have benefitted socially and economically from this process in the sense that wages from employment of their offspring would have helped the family. In this perspective, this was the African attempt to adjust and negotiate the new Western money economy which the Congo just became part of.

To summarize, these Tetela Christians stayed within realm of authority of the missionaries. Serving their area, the missionaries created established boundaries between the heathen and the Christian Tetela. Although cultural negotiation occurred, these boundaries illustrate that the missionaries attempted to limit resistance and negotiation. During the post-colonial period, the realm of the missionaries’ authority in the mission stations was not present and boundaries between the villages and the schools collapsed. This post-colonial period is the moment that the cultural spheres (Christian and non-Christians) accelerated at a rapid pace. This will be furthered explored in section three of this chapter.

Post-Colonial Cultural Negotiation, Conflict, & Legacies

As pointed out earlier, in 1960, the Southern Methodist missionaries were forced to leave the Congo because of the violence following the country's attainment of independence

²¹³ Ibid.

from Belgium.²¹⁴ Decades after their departure, the legacies of these missionaries continue to exist in Tetela society. This legacy manifests itself in Tetela who have blended the indigenous culture with the ideas and culture which Christian missionaries introduced. This particular section emphasizes that cultural “negotiation” was accelerated during the post-colonial period between the Tetela. The only available work that examines the impact of these changes is Paul-Amy Djundu-Lunge's 1996 PhD dissertation. Lunge conducted field research on Tetela family units located in Wembo-Nyama and the surrounding areas. From his observations, he argued that social change occurred in the Tetela families because of the missionaries. His study was based on the individual Tetela family members testimony and on his own observations. The specific region of the study was in the “semi-urban” areas located in Wembo-Nyama. This locale is important because, as he notes, these changes in families occurred more significantly in areas that experienced colonialism the most, such as Wembo-Nyama and its surrounding neighbors.

Lunge has argued that gender roles changed significantly within the family unit after the arrival of the Southern Methodists. He contends that before the colonial era, traditional Tetela society was patriarchal and household authority was dominated by males. Modernity and the influence of the missionaries strove for the “Émancipation des femmes et dialogue dans le couple” (Emancipation of the women and dialogue between the couple).²¹⁵ In response, current Christian households have, as he also states, “Le dialogue s’installe dans les loyers chrétiens” (The dialogue settles in the Christian homes). Although this dialogue

²¹⁴ Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila* (London: Zed Books, 2002).

²¹⁵ Lunge (1996), 199.

occurs between these Christian couples, Lunge also states that the men still have significant authority in the family noting, “*Toutefois, les homes cede il difficilement leur place*” (However, men hardly give their place up).²¹⁶

In terms of wider authority, Lunge points out that the community has less authority over individual Christian families. Instead, individuals within the marriage, both husband and wife, have authority over their own lives and household. As he puts it, “*La communauté famillale ou clanique garde toujours sa valeur mais la tendance est de permettre à chaque member de sauvegarder d’abord ses interest, et en second lieu ceux des autres*” (The family or clan retains its value but the tendency is to allow each member to protect their interests first, and secondly, those of others).²¹⁷ Important to Lunge’s argument is the fact that the community still has value over the family. Although dialogue and household authority exist within families, the community can still be used to influence specific families, such as settling disputes between husband and wives. What exists in modern Tetela culture is the presence of two different social forces: the Western and the traditional civilizations. Lunge notes that:

Again, we have seen the consequences of the westernization of society and the tetela family. Our analysis leads us to consider the cohabitation of tradition and modernity as an unavoidable social fact. This statement can be applied to any social system or subsystem that has been exposed simultaneously to these two influences.²¹⁸ (translated from French)

During the colonial peroid, the missionaries had compelete control over their students who had graduated from the mission schools and lived in their “Christian Homes” in the Christian

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 211.

village of the mission station. In the post colonial period, the Tetela community has integrated these Christian families and still has power over these family units. This is a clear sign that negotiation, between cultures, has occurred during the post-colonial period.

With regards to marriage, as a result of the Christian missions, Lunge concludes that certain families no longer practice polygamy. However, parents can remain invested in deciding who their child will marry, suggesting that arranged marriages still occur. In addition, the practice of “bridewealth” is still practiced amongst the Tetela. During the colonial period, the missionaries or the graduated African student would choose their spouse. Although it is not entirely clear what the role of the parent was in this decision, it does seem that the missionaries or the graduated students played an important role in choosing spouses. As noted previously in this chapter, the missionaries attempted to avoid the influence of the parents by purchasing or negotiating the “bridewealth” of their students with the parents. However, since arranged marriage occurs between Christian and non-Christian families, this is the result of a post-colonial cultural negotiation. ²¹⁹

The existence of two different cultures, Western and traditional, within Tetela society speaks to the larger legacy of the Methodist missionaries who sought to change the role of family members, especially women. Lunge noted that certain Tetela families believe that a return to the traditional model of family is essentially for their survival, As Lunge notes:

Thus, to speak of the future of the tetela family is to evoke the problem of its survival. Thus, in the opinion of the majority of respondents, it is absolutely necessary to protect this traditional institution considered as the very foundation of tetela society. The concern is great, according to participants in our survey, there are several areas [of society] that are seriously affected [in a negative sense]: structure, role of parent,

²¹⁹ Ibid., 198-213.

morality, management of family patrimony, behavior of young people and emancipation of women, and others. [translation from French]²²⁰

Lunge's observations represent conflict that is the result of mixing cultures, as these people struggle to determine which culture is best for their survival. In particular, "l'emancipation des femmes" is the legacy of Kelly and Parham's teachings on "Christian womanhood." In this particular case, we witness the effects of the Tetela finding new forms of power by embracing the ideology of "Christian womanhood." For traditional minded Tetela individuals, this was perceived as a problem as this "femmes" had become "emancipated."

The legacies of these missionaries are directly rooted in the current cultural conflict in Tetela society. As discussed previously, the Methodist missionary "civilizing mission" was predicated on establishing categories of good and bad, such as the "heathen" versus the "saint." This Manichean worldview was introduced to Africans, teaching them that their only way to salvation was to rid oneself of heathen practices. If conflict between the more Christian Tetela and the traditional people still exists today, as Lunge notes, then it is rooted in the legacy of a Manichean worldview introduced by the missionaries as Christian Tetela may continue to perceive indigenous culture as morally and spiritually incorrect or inferior.

Although the missionaries left in 1960, many of the Tetela still practiced Christianity. In regards to the graduates of the mission schools, these Tetela Christians still operated the stations until the early 1960s. However, with the exception of the church buildings, most of the mission stations were eventually abandoned as foreign mission funding stopped. For instance, the hospital at the Minga station is now abandoned, but despite this, Tetela

²²⁰ Ibid., 210-211.

Christians have not stopped from continuing their religious practice. For instance, Congolese African Methodist churches still hold conferences in and around the Wembo-Nyama area in the Central Congo.²²¹ In addition, Southern Methodists are still in contact with many preachers and funding churches within the Wembo-Nyama region.²²² For example, the Methodist missionary organization, “Congo Partnership through Christ,” stays connected to over nine different Methodist churches located in Wembo-Nyama.²²³ Although American churches stay in contact with some of their former colonial mission stations, the funding is clearly absent or limited as the conditions are poor. According to Lunge, the churches still play a powerful role within Tetela society. For example, he noted that the church is the main proponent of encouraging non-polygamous relationships. He says that, “les Eglises encouragent les union pour la vie, le modele traditionnel n'etant plus efficace” (The churches encourage union for life, the traditional model no longer being effective).²²⁴

The largest piece of infrastructure built by the Southern Methodists was the main church located in Wembo-Nyama. This church was the heart and soul of the Southern Methodists missionaries. With its boarded windows and deterioration showing, the church is still a symbol of the missionaries who raised it from the ground. The Tetela marching out of the church are most likely the grandchildren or great grandchildren of those same Tetela pupils who learned about Christianity and Western civilization from the Methodists. (see figures 6 & 7) Although Lorena Kelly and Catherine Parham are not physically there singing

²²¹ “Bishop Nkulu Ntanda Ntambo,” *UMC.ORG Official Online Ministry of the United Methodist Church*.

²²² Gabriel Yemba Unda, “The United Methodist Mission In Eastern Congo,” *UMCMISSION.ORG* & Christie House, “House Notes: Caring for Mothers, Minga Hospital,” *MINISTRYWITH.ORG*

²²³ “Wembo Nyama Children’s Ministry Specialists,” *CONGO-MISSION.ORG*.

²²⁴ Lunge (1996), 200.

the Christian hymns alongside their Tetela friends, their legacy and ghosts still walk among the Tetela. In this respect, their “legacy” follows that they introduced a different world and culture to the Tetela. However, cultural negotiation occurred during the post-colonial period, which is when the missionary boundaries were lowered between Christian and non-Christian Tetela.

Conclusion

Southern Methodist missionaries changed Tetela society by introducing them to new Western and Christian ideologies. Specifically, work amongst the Tetela women created an identity around the ideology of “Christian womanhood” as taught by Lorena Kelly and Catherine Parham. We can evaluate these new identities and cultural changes by examining the changing everyday life for these Christian Tetela women. For the Christian Tetela women, “Christian womanhood” meant exploring new forms of power and authority within Tetela society. Lunge’s recent study demonstrates clearly that these Christian and Western influences still impact Tetela culture. Specifically, participants of Lunge’s study refer to the indoctrination of “Christian womanhood” as the “emancipation of women.” The research also shows that the existence of Christian and Western culture in Tetela society remains a problem for more traditional Tetela individuals.

This chapter has attempted to apply the Comaroffs’s “colonial encounter” historical method to the specific are of the Congo in which the Southern Methodists worked. Briefly, this school of thought holds that the encounters between the colonialized and the colonials

initiated ideological changes in the former. These changes shaped the cultures to resemble mostly Western practices. The “colonial encounter,” as the Comaroffs termed it, also asserts that people of European origin such as missionaries were one-dimensional cultural imperialists who sought to alter every aspect of African life. However, the “colonial encounter” method and understanding missionaries as simply cultural imperialists have caused a fierce debate amongst historians since the 1990s. As stated previously, these criticisms of the “colonial encounter” historical argument disregards cultural negotiation between the colonized and colonizers. The single most important theme existing in these criticisms is that historians give too much agency to missionaries and disregard the actual negotiation of culture and ideology that existed prior to and during the “colonial encounter.” I have illustrated that missionaries such as Kelly and Parham were completely consumed with changing the culture of the colonized. They did change the culture of those who graduated from the mission schools and eventually established “Christian Homes.” However, cultural transformation was not a one-dimensional and non-negotiable transaction. Instead, cultural negotiation, although limited by the missionaries, occurred between the Tetela and missionaries. Once the colonial era ended, cultural negotiations accelerated between missionary educated Tetela and non-missionary influenced Tetela. According to Lunge, we witness the combination of traditional African and Christian cultures within the Tetela family during this period.

Observing the roots of cultural tensions between current traditional and Christian Tetela individuals can help to pinpoint the “legacies” of Southern Methodists. I have argued

in the third section of this chapter that missionaries created the conversation concerning the nature of ideology that Tetela culture should be based upon. Most important, Kelly and Parham's own "civilizing mission" was predicated on a Manichean worldview that separated the uncivilized and the civilized Africans. This is an incredibly important legacy of the Southern Methodist missionaries as they introduced a specific type of world to the Tetela, which was built upon establishing the good from the bad (heathen from the Christian). By the post-colonial period, missionaries had set the table for the Tetela to discuss and negotiate culture further. In addition, I believe social strife, in regards to the their culture, is largely the result of the Manichean world introduced by the missionaries which makes negotiation and compromise between traditional and Christian Tetela, difficult.

Conclusion

During her last trip to Africa, Kelly stayed in Southern Rhodesia trying to return to the Congo in 1961. Of course, this was made impossible as conditions in the former Belgian colony were turbulent at that time. On March 7, 1961, she wrote her last letter home to America. The letter described her unsuccessful attempt to reenter the Congo. She noted, “Let us pray more earnestly that His power will reveal itself and save those wonderful people for His Kingdom. . . We are grateful for your continued love, interest, and prayers. Let us be diligent in our united effort to take Congo for Christ!”²²⁵ Kelly’s words seem optimistic, but it was clear that she would never return to the country, ending her missionary career in one single letter. Similarly, this thesis has to end these stories and the arguments in them.

The second chapter argued that these Southern Methodist missionaries were consumed by an ideology known as “Christian Womanhood.” This part of the thesis has advanced the point that “Christian Womanhood” consisted of notions revolving around femininity, domesticity, and religion. For these missionaries, their divine duty was to spread this ideology to women across the world, teaching or “civilizing” them according to the Victorian-era belief in keeping women within the home. Of course, this notion of “Christian Womanhood” did not simply consist of these restrictive themes. Instead, this ideology contained an independent or leadership component that emphasized being a “woman,” whose role within society and the community was crucial for its survival. Although they belonged within the home, women had to show “leadership” by regulating and maintaining the

²²⁵ Lorena Kelly to Friends. 7 March 1961. Box 3, Folder D, Lorena Kelly Papers.

hygienic, nurturing, and religious aspects of the home. This version of domesticity gave women a certain divine duty and role within society. Even for Kelly and Parham, their belief in “Christian Womanhood” essentially enabled them to expand beyond the home by being missionaries, who needed to spread this ideology to other women.

Of course, “Christian Womanhood” as a mission ideology is not new. Scholars such as Dana Robert have published many works on the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement. As stated in the second chapter, this movement was the nineteenth century American and European protestant belief that Western women must spread these notions of “Christian Womanhood” to other women across the world. Scholars have mainly argued that this movement, in regards to American missions, had declined and eventually ended by the 1930s. However, this particular research project has argued that the movement was still alive for these Southern Methodist missionaries. In fact, Kelly and Parham were completely motivated and captivated by this ideology of “Christian Womanhood” until Kelly’s removal from the Congo in 1960. At this point, I asked why this was so? My answer was that Kelly and Parham were deeply influenced by the Southern progressive movement, which occurred during the early twentieth century. The Progressive Era inspired many local women organizations to lead social reform programs across the South. These programs emphasized, similar to Kelly and Parham, that women should be at the heart of communities. Most importantly, women must be at the forefront of moral, economic, and medical social reform. I argued in the second chapter that Kelly and Parham’s connection to these Progressive Era

southern women essentially shaped a new version of “Christian Womanhood” that pushed the “Woman’s Work for Woman” into the mid-twentieth century.

There are several key areas of this chapter that still need to be pursued. Besides Kelly and Parham’s connection to Progressive Era social reform movements, what else influenced them to stress “Christian Womanhood” amongst the Tetela? I would argue that the influence of their immediate pre-missionary environment shaped their understanding of the world and of how women should operate within it. Specifically, the patriarchal nature of the South may have influenced these missionaries to believe in this notion of “Christian Womanhood.” In addition, this environment may have led to the contradictory nature to the ideology, as it attempted to restrict and liberate women. The majority of scholars have noted that the “Woman’s Work for Woman” movement ended in the early twentieth century. However, how much research has been conducted that examines missionary groups of the South? This analysis would require historians to investigate the ideological and habitual differences between the role of women in Northern and Southern churches of the United States. When were women allowed to be ordained pastors in the North as opposed to the South? Unlike the Southern Methodist mission boards, were the male and female missions boards completely combined in the North? All are questions that need to be investigated and discussed.

The third and final chapter of the thesis attempts to examine the experiences of these missionaries through an African historical perspective. I have attempted to place these missionaries in the wider debate over cultural imperialism. The chapter uses the Comaroffs’s methodology for understanding the way in which cultural transformation operated. In

particular, I examine how the daily habitual changes illustrate cultural change. In addition, these changes in behavior also demonstrate a new “identity” amongst the Tetela women. This “identity” was bound to the ideology of “Christian Womanhood,” as discussed in the second chapter. I further this argument by noting that this new identity enabled Tetela women to seek new forms of power in societies. Although “Christian Womanhood” attempted to relegate women to the home, this ideology, as discussed in chapter two and three, exhibited liberating notions of womanhood that empowered female missionaries and their Tetela students.

An important distinction expressed in the chapter is that the Tetela women I was referencing were those who most likely graduated from mission schools and lived in “Christian Homes.” These women, along with their husbands, stayed in close proximity to the influential missionaries. Although cultural negotiation did occur, this was the missionaries’ attempt to limit negotiation between the two parties. Once these missionaries left, cultural negotiation accelerated between Christian and traditional African families. A common criticism of the Comaroffs, as Porter has expressed, is that cultural imperialism denies any negotiation between cultures. I have argued that cultural negotiation occurred during the colonial period; however, negotiation accelerated during the post-colonial period when the boundaries created by the missionaries were gone. Historians have often noted that the topic of “cultural imperialism” is an outdated argument. Many scholars have taken Porter’s criticisms and, instead, have examined the inner dynamics of cultural negotiation

between missionaries and the colonized.²²⁶ This study suggests that cultural negotiation has experienced different paces throughout the colonial and post-colonial period, depending upon how groups of societies were kept in contact with one another.

In order to prove this argument further, I would need to conduct anthropological fieldwork amongst the Tetela. Through personal interviews, demographic and archival research, amongst others, I could delve into this argument further. An aspect missing from the third chapter is an investigation of what the post-colonial cultural negotiation actually looked like. How did Christianity spread to other members of the Tetela? How did these Tetela then negotiate between traditional and Christian cultures in order to produce the present mixture? In addition, future fieldwork could help examine how power and conflict operates among the Tetela. Do Christian Tetela have authority over traditional Tetela? This study has proven that tensions exist between these two groups of the Tetela. However, what are the characteristics of this tension in more detail? Is the conflict openly discussed or hidden within society? Lastly, an anthropological study could also inquire about the current trends amongst the Tetela. Are the younger generations embracing Christianity, traditional, or a mixture of cultures without being aware of its roots?

While reflecting on this research project, I have often wondered what Catherine Parham and Lorena Kelly thought about their experiences? Were they ever conscious of the

²²⁶ See: Noriko Ishii, *American Women Missionaries at Kobe College 1873-1909* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Rui Kohiyama, "No Nation Can Rise Higher Than its Women:" The Women's Ecumenical Movement and Tokyo Woman's Christian College," in Barbara Reeves-Ellington (eds.), *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1860* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). 269-92; & Barbara Reeves-Ellington, "Transferring American Domesticity: Women, Mission, and Nation-Building in Ottoman Europe, 1864-1874," in Barbara Reeves-Ellington (eds.), *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1860* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). 269-92.

impact that they had on Africans? I am sure that they believed they were part of something “bigger” than themselves, especially in regards to worldwide religious change. But did they ever think about their role in fostering colonial ideals amongst Africans?²²⁷ For researchers who read this manuscript, myself included, they exist as names within this thesis. Their letters, photographs, and diaries are held at East Carolina University’s (ECU) Joyner Library in collection boxes and tucked away behind the doors of the Special Collections Department. Before this time, these primary sources belonged to separate families, who were most likely related to Kelly Parham in some manner. It wasn’t until a librarian at ECU began searching and gathering local missionary records that these sources came into the possession of the university. I have worked with these sources for the past two years, thumbing through the many letters that these missionaries sent back home to be read by their loved ones. I have come to know these missionaries through these letters and photographs that documented their unique experiences. Throughout this research process, the their faces and their sweet letters to “mama” have manifested themselves into historical actors who been woven into my historical arguments and theories. Although they died almost half a century ago, their stories and lives continue to exist within these pages.

²²⁷ This is especially a curious question as they lived during the post-colonial period, as the world was rethinking and critiquing the actions of Western missionaries, governments, and militaries during the colonial period

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Figure 1: Wedding Ceremony



Box 5, Lorena Kelly Papers, ECU Joyner Library

Figure 2: Shaunika and Lelese, 1940



Box 5, Lorena Kelly Papers, ECU Joyner Library

Figure 3: Teacher and Wife, 1940



Box 5, Lorena Kelly Papers, ECU Joyner Library

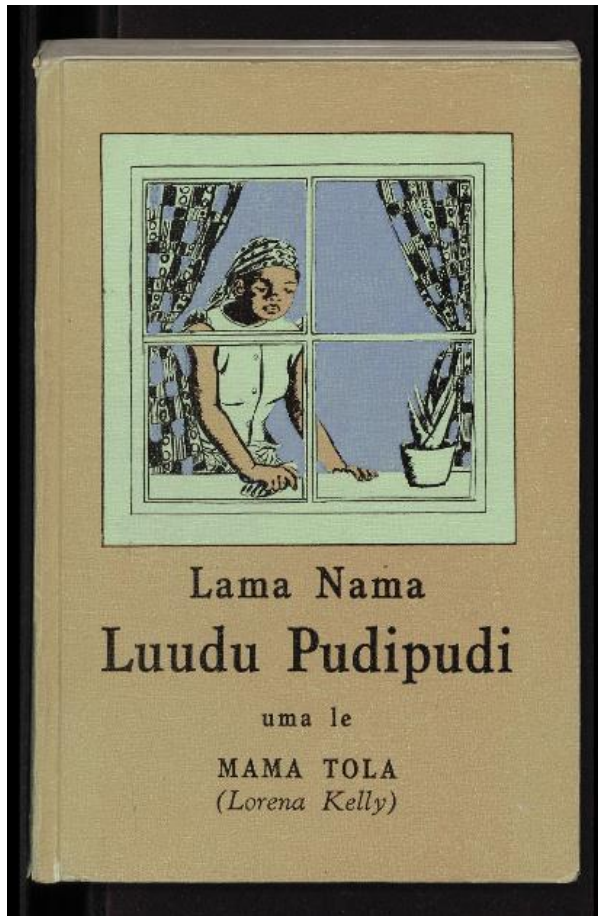
Figure 4: Learning to Sew



Box 5, Lorena Kelly Papers, ECU Joyner Library

Figure 5: Girls Home Textbook

123



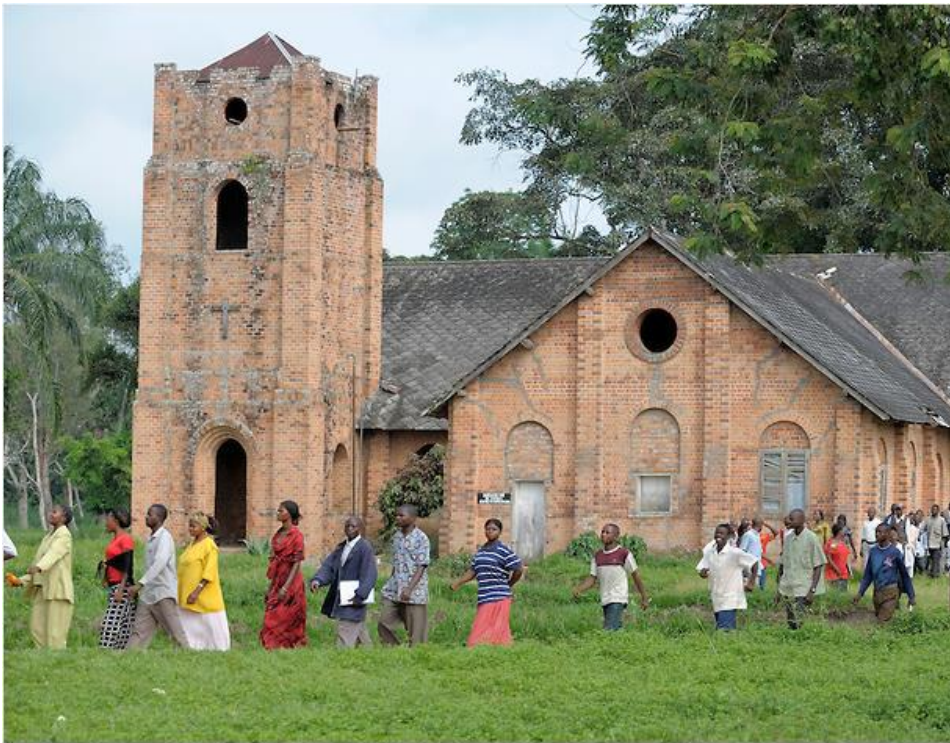
Box 5, Lorena Kelly Papers, ECU Joyner Library

Figure 6: Main Church at the Wemba Nyama Station



Box 3, Catherine Parham Papers, ECU Joyner Library

Figure 7: Present Day Main Church at Wemba Nyama



Images by Paul Jeffery

<http://kairosphotos.photoshelter.com/image/I0000a9PznL.enrU>