Gender, Empire and the Church Missionary Society in British Uganda, 1895–1930

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Abstract

The relationship between the British Empire and Christian missions in the colonial context was complex, and the degree to which missions and missionaries might be considered agents of empire contested. Examining Protestant Church Missionary Society (CMS) activity in British Uganda between 1895 and 1930, this article will argue that though missions generally had no official ties to empire, they can still be considered cultural imperialists. Moreover, it will be argued that gender was central to the relationship between missions and the imperial project. Domestic issues, such as marriage, household and personal cleanliness, child rearing and gender roles, were considered essential to the civilising process; the increasingly feminised CMS workforce in Uganda fought to abolish polygamy, physically transform the family home and ‘improve’ the social position of Ugandan women to more closely reflect a British model. Missionaries could not extricate Christianity from British national and imperial culture, and so propagated ideologies, particularly related to gender, that widened and deepened the effect of the British imperial project.

Take up the White Man’s burden –

Send forth the best ye breed –

Go bind your sons to exile

To serve your captives’ need;

To wait in heavy harness,

On fluttered folk and wild –

Your new-caught, sullen peoples,

Half-devil and half-child.

Rudyard Kipling, ‘The White Man’s Burden’.

Introduction

At the end of the nineteenth century India-born Englishman Rudyard Kipling encouraged Americans to, like the English, 'take up the White Man's burden', to colonise the Philippines for the benefit of the 'uncivilised' local population. Kipling's poem is illustrative of the common emphasis on the supposedly humanitarian nature of the imperial project. For Kipling it was the duty of Britain, and America, to bring religion, morality and civilisation to the 'heathen' people of the world.¹ Financial, material and territorial gains were probably greater motivators for empire,² yet it is also important to examine this apparently philanthropic element of the British imperial project, keeping in mind that philanthropy was generally considered synonymous with Christianity and religious missions in this period. While Kipling's philanthropist is gendered male, in 1899 when the poem was published, Christian missions – the most prominent 'philanthropic' organisations in the colonial landscape – were undergoing a feminisation of their workforce. By examining the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in British-controlled Uganda between 1895 and 1930, this study interrogates the complicated relationships between Christian missions, the British Empire and gender, and argues that the goals of missions and missionaries were complimentary to empire.

This article is indebted to a variety of other studies that have explored the gendered nature of missionary work and the relationship between missions and the British imperial project. In *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China*, Jane Hunter explores the role of gendered nature of missionary work in America's informal Chinese empire, and Ulrike Sill's *Encounters in Quest of Christian Womanhood: the Basel Mission in pre- and early Colonial Ghana* interrogates the relationship between empire, mission and gender in nineteenth century Ghana. In the Ugandan context, Holger Bernt Hansen has written extensively on the political relationship between missions and the colonial administration, and Carol Summers looks specifically at the Ugandan colonial administration and missionaries' shared belief that polygamy directly led to syphilis. In *Women Missionaries of the Church Missionary Society in Uganda 1896-1920*, Louise Pirouet argues that female CMS missionaries held imperial beliefs that could influence their behaviour, but does not consider their significance as part of the wider imperial project. This article explores

1 Rudyard Kipling, *The Collected Verse of Rudyard Kipling* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1910) 225.

2 See Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism 1850-2004*, Fourth Edition (Harlow: Pearson, 2004) 8 and B.R. Tomlinson 'Economics and Empire: The Periphery and the Imperial Economy', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire Volume 3: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 53.

both the gendered and imperial nature of the CMS in Uganda, and argues that the performance and promotion of ‘appropriate’ masculinities and femininities extended the effect of the British imperialism.

Three central arguments demonstrate that the CMS in Uganda can be considered an important, if unofficial, part of the wider British imperial project. First, the CMS recognised the need for a closer association with the British colonial administration, in part for its own security, but also because it was believed that a combination of ‘civilisation’, Christianity and economic development were necessary to abolish slavery and create economic and social stability in Africa so that it might continue to be an economically productive colonial site. Second, it was assumed that crucial to the success of this development and civilising process was a focus on ‘improving’ the position of Ugandan women and familial dynamics to better reflect the British model. Third, the attention given to these domestic issues of family and the role of women corresponded to a change in the composition of the CMS itself as women came to play a greater missionary role; though this generally went unacknowledged as the emphasis was placed on male missionaries who could be presented similarly to brave imperial heroes.

In 1895 the first CMS female missionaries arrived in Uganda, at a time when missionaries were at their most influential, holding an almost complete monopoly in education until the mid-1920s. With government intervention in education beginning after World War I, the British-based missionary influence in Uganda began to decline.³ While Catholic missionaries were an important part of the colonial landscape in Uganda, I will focus here – for reasons of the scope of this article and available evidence – on Protestant CMS missionaries and their letters, articles and published books and reminisces. This article reconstructs the British side of this colonial encounter; further research into the reactions and outlooks of colonised Ugandans would be extremely valuable. The bulk of my evidence comes from CMS missionaries who lived and worked in the kingdom of Buganda, the largest kingdom within Uganda, with peoples referred to as the Baganda.

Empire, Christianity and ‘civilisation’

The first Christian Protestant missionaries in Uganda, Lieutenant G. Shergold Smith and Reverend C. T. Wilson of the London-based CMS, arrived in the court of Kubaka Muteesa, King of Buganda, on 2 July 1877. This was eleven years before the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) received its Royal Charter and began to protect British interests in Uganda, and sixteen years

³ Holger Bernt Hansen, *Mission, Church and State in a Colonial Setting: Uganda 1890-1925* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1984) 463.

before the British government officially took direct responsibility for the region, declaring the Uganda Protectorate in 1894. By the early 1880s the CMS was performing baptisms and had established several mission stations in Buganda and other territories.⁴

In July 1891 the chairman of the IBEAC, Sir William Mackinnon, informed the British Foreign Office that the Company would be withdrawing its forces from Uganda, it having become too expensive to continue work in the civil war-ravaged region.⁵ The first Bishop of Uganda, Alfred Tucker, became immediately concerned. Though CMS missionaries had 'entered Uganda, carrying their lives in their hands, never looking for, never expecting, Government protection,'⁶ since IBEAC control Protestants had provided the company with political and military support. Tucker believed that the IBEAC withdrawal would see the region descend into violent chaos and that Protestants, missionaries and native converts alike, having fought under the IBEAC flag in the civil-war, would become immediate targets.⁷ Bishop Tucker spearheaded the campaign to keep the IBEAC in Uganda, appealing to a meeting of the Church Missionary Gleaners' Union for donations to secure the Company's presence at least until the end of 1892. He was successful, and within two weeks the Gleaner's Union had raised £16 000 to donate to the IBEAC.⁸ The IBEAC reversed its decision and stayed until Uganda became a full protectorate of the British Crown in 1894. According to early CMS historian Eugene Stock, 'Bishop Tucker always said that the Gleaners' Union saved Uganda.'⁹ The use of the word 'saved' here is significant. According to Stock, Tucker had not only saved CMS missionaries and other Protestants from violence, but the region as a whole, suggesting British imperialism in combination with CMS presence was beneficial to the native population. The belief that the combination of Christian missionaries and British imperial control was not only complimentary, but often necessary for the good of colonised peoples, was not limited to the Ugandan context.

In 1857 David Livingstone, the immensely popular British missionary-explorer to Africa, made the connection between the missionary movement and the British imperial exercise when he declared that it was his goal in Africa to 'make an open path for commerce and Christianity.'¹⁰ Historian Brian Stanley rightly points out that this association was not purely an unashamed linkage between Christianity and British commercial expansion; rather it was the expression

4 Martin J Hall, *Through my spectacles in Uganda: or, The story of a fruitful field* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1898) 12-13.

5 Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag* (Leicester: APOLLOS, 1990) 128-9.

6 Bishop Alfred Tucker in Roland Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa*, (London: Longmans, 1952) 155.

7 Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 128.

8 Ibid., 129.

9 Eugene Stock, *My Recollections* (London: James Nisbit & Co. Limited, 1909) 166.

10 David Livingstone in Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 70.

of Livingstone's conviction that a partnership between missionary work and 'legitimate' trade would drive out the slave trade, under which many thousands of Africans were suffering.¹¹ Bishop Samuel Wilberforce more explicitly made the connection between Christianity and British commerce:

Was it not meant that God had given us our commerce and our naval supremacy - that industry, that patience which had enabled us to subdue the earth wherever we had settled...our wealth, with our mutual trust in each other, that we might as the crowning work of all these blessings, be the instruments of spreading the truths of the Gospel from one end of the earth to the other?¹²

Wilberforce made it clear that while no suitable local form of economy might replace a system of slavery, British commerce, naval supremacy and industry had the capacity to make for the most effective dissemination of Christianity. The apparently beneficial combination of British economic control and Christianity is reflected in Stock's belief that Tucker 'saved' Uganda by securing the IBEAC presence.

Many, like Livingstone, Wilberforce and Stock believed that the combination of commerce and Christianity could be beneficial to the native populations of Africa. However, this is not to suggest that the imperial project was a benevolent one, or, as Stanley does, that the connection between commerce and Christianity was purely 'anti-slavery ideology.'¹³ The British were not simply interested in the abolition of slavery; the connection between commerce and Christianity also provided moral justification for the British Empire to continue to 'subdue the earth' for its own economic benefit. Moreover, by promoting Christianity and the adoption of other 'civilised' British customs, the imperial project might have benefited through greater cooperation between colonisers and the colonised. Promoting commerce, Christianity and civilisation helped foster economic and social stability and conformity so that Africa might continue to be an economically productive colonial site.

Whether for humanitarian or exploitative purposes, teaching 'civilisation', which included civilised Christian religion, was an important feature of empire. Gender, particularly the role of women, was central to this British notion of civilisation. According to Mary Taylor Huber and Nancy Lutkehaus, Europeans saw the 'proper' division of gender as essential to their civilised imperial and national culture, and colonial Europeans were particularly concerned with

11 Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 70-71.

12 Samuel Wilberforce, in Andrew Porter, "'Commerce and Christianity': The Rise and Fall of a Nineteenth-Century Missionary Slogan.' *The Historical Journal*, 28, No. 3 (1985): 597.

13 Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 71.

‘doing gender right.’¹⁴ Missionaries were dedicated to the civilised division of gender, both in the way they conducted themselves and in the way that they attempted to change the behaviour of colonised people.

Performing and representing gender in the missionary profession

As a part of ‘doing gender right’ the associated public-private division of spheres of action and responsibility were applied to CMS missionaries; male missionaries were considered leaders and preachers, women were delegated more domestic duties. Women were often considered lay missionaries, or missionary’s assistants, rather than missionaries in their own right and were often expected to take orders from male missionaries.¹⁵ Their work was considered supplementary to the central work of male missionaries; missionary wives were considered primarily a ‘helpmeet’ to their husbands.¹⁶ While CMS recruitment advertised the need for ‘men to organise and train and shepherd the flock’, women were only required for ‘women’s work’,¹⁷ which suggests more domestic activities. Certainly women’s missionary work was valued by the CMS; they assumed women were the most appropriate instructors for African women and children, and believed a white female presence would ensure the morality of missionary men who might otherwise be tempted into sin with heathen women.¹⁸ However, the work of men was predominant in the journals, accounts and recollections of CMS missionaries in Uganda.

Travelling through Uganda, John Bremner Purvis described the heroic work of legendary CMS missionary Dr A. R. Cook who ‘worked day and night...to alleviate the terrible sufferings’ of a number of Protestant Baganda involved in a bloody conflict with Muslims in the region. Purvis does mention that Cook was ‘ably assisted by the mission Ladies’;¹⁹ however, these women, who must also have been working night and day, remain nameless. Nameless too is a Protestant Baganda woman, even though Purvis considered her actions one of the most ‘striking instance[s] of self-sacrifice...in the world’s history.’²⁰ The intersection

14 Mary Taylor Huber and Nancy C. Lutkehaus, ‘Introduction: Gendered Missions at Home and Abroad’, in *Gendered missions: women and men in missionary discourse and practice*, eds. Mary Taylor Huber and Nancy C. Lutkehaus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999) 3.

15 Susan F. Baily, *Women and the British Empire: An annotated guide to sources* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1983) 128.

16 Georgina Anne Gollock, *Missionaries at Work* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1898) 133.

17 Dr E. V. Hunter in *The Church Missionary Outlook*, Volume 53, Church Missionary Society (London: Church Missionary Society, 1926) 183.

18 Anna Johnson, *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 49.

19 John Bremner Purvis, *Through Uganda to Mount Elgon* (London: T. Fisher Urwin, 1909) 190.

20 *Ibid.*, 198.

of racial and gender hierarchies meant that such women, no matter how heroic, were even less likely than white female missionaries to be described by name and more likely to be described simply as a 'bible woman' or 'a woman teacher.'²¹ Published CMS literature preferred to marginalise women and emphasise the masculine missionary hero, a figure who was intimately linked with the British national and imperial culture which emphasised masculinity, war, danger, exploration and adventure.

British masculinity in the imperial setting was defined by physical endurance, self-denial and self-sacrifice in dangerous and exotic locations. Missionary men, despite the intended religious focus also got caught up in the excitement and grandeur of heroic imperial adventure. 'Muscular Christianity'²² enabled the imperial ideology of masculinity to comfortably include religion; moreover, the Christianity of physically strong, adventurous imperial men actually functioned as a marker of civilisation. Christianity and morality refined and made gentlemanly the British man, and were used as justification for authority over the 'barbarous' native.²³

Missionary David Livingstone, becoming disenchanted with the stationary life of a missionary in Africa, set out in 1852 on the first of his major exploratory journeys, which he would continue for the next 18 years. As noted above Livingstone was the most influential religious-crusader-cum-imperial-adventurer of the period. British popular culture cast Livingstone as a 'single minded Christian hero', with an 'iron will'²⁴ who navigated the 'hostile and inhospitable country'²⁵ and people of Africa. Like other imperial adventurers he discovered and named many 'unknown lands'²⁶ and environmental features, experiencing close scrapes with aggressive exotic animals, most famously with 'the largest lion [the Bakatta people] had ever seen.'²⁷ Livingstone was the embodiment of the 'muscular Christian', and was propelled to the status of imperial hero. Given the often harsh conditions and exotic locations in which missionary work was carried out, missionary men could comfortably be presented in a similar way to imperial adventurers and explorers. The emphasis on the work and importance of male missionaries, both in the CMS literature and the celebrity surrounding David Livingstone actually masked the reality that by the end of the nineteenth century the missionary profession was becoming increasingly feminised.

The CMS, like other Protestant missionary groups, was male-dominated in terms of administrative hierarchies and organisational control. Additionally, women

21 Ibid., 198.

22 Johnson, *Missionary Writing and Empire*, 40–41.

23 Ibid., 40.

24 C. Silvester Horne, *David Livingstone* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1913) 69–70.

25 Ibid., 218.

26 Robert Smiles, *David Livingstone* (London: Cassel and Company, 1898) 79.

27 Ibid., 62.

were marginalised by the patriarchal administration, male-dominated official literature and mission historiography which tended to emphasise theological and policy issues, from which women were generally excluded. In terms of numbers, however, the missionary enterprise was an increasingly feminised profession; the mid to late nineteenth century saw a world-wide and cross-organisational increase in the number of female missionaries. Accurate numbers of women missionaries are almost impossible to gauge, particularly as missionaries' wives were not counted or recognised in any official capacity by mission organisations, a practice which historian Jeffrey Cox believes has completely distorted the true nature of the missionary enterprise.²⁸ From the mid to end of the nineteenth century the presence of women in some mission societies grew from virtually zero to over fifty per cent, as single female missionaries began to be accepted by mission societies.²⁹

White female missionaries did not arrive in Uganda until quite late in comparison with other areas of the British Empire. The CMS refused to allow female missionaries into Uganda until the 1895 British declaration of the Uganda Protectorate;³⁰ only with official British colonisation was the region deemed safe for CMS women. Regardless of the delayed arrival of female missionaries, the situation of the CMS in Uganda certainly reflects the wider feminisation of the mission enterprise. In 1905, despite men having had an eighteen-year head start, women already made up twenty eight per cent of the official CMS workforce serving in Uganda.³¹ Additionally, of all new missionaries to arrive in Uganda between 1895 and 1905, forty four per cent were women.³² Of course, due to the practice of 'not counting the wives', these statistics do not take into consideration any missionary wives who arrived in Uganda after 1895; in reality the female missionary presence in Uganda would have been much greater.

The preoccupation with the civilised performance of gender, and the opportunity to emphasise heroic images of men in the imperial landscape, meant that the contribution of the increasingly female CMS workforce went largely unacknowledged. Civilised gender relations, however, were not just performed: they were taught. 'Doing gender right' was crucial to fostering a British notion of civilisation in the Ugandan population, and the increasingly feminised CMS workforce focused on Westernising marriage, familial dynamics and the gendered division of labour.

28 Jeffrey Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise since 1700* (New York: Routledge, 2008) 197.

29 Huber and Lutkehaus, 'Introduction: Gendered Missions at Home and Abroad', 9.

30 J. D. Mullins, *The Wonderful Story of Uganda by the Rev. J.D. Mullins; to which is added the story of Ham Mukasa, told by himself* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1904) 91.

31 These figures are derived from lists of all missionaries who served in Uganda in Mullins, *The Wonderful Story of Uganda*, 231-234.

32 Ibid.

Civilised gender and cultural imperialism

Much of the missionary project was concerned with encouraging the adoption of specific forms of marriage, family structure, gendered division of labour and child rearing.³³ CMS missionaries believed these, along with ‘improving’ the position of Ugandan women, were considered essential to the civilising process, which – as has been noted – was believed to bring economic and social benefits for African populations, but probably more importantly to the British imperial project. Much of the work of the increasing number of missionary women was specifically aimed at improving the station of native women and enabling them to assume ‘correct’ gender roles.

According to prolific CMS missionary writer Georgina Anne Gollock, ‘the moral difference between Christian and non-Christian lands is seen more clearly when the position of women is faced.’³⁴ The belief that women in foreign lands, particularly Africa, lived in a state of degradation, overworked and abused by men, was common. The position of women in society was considered a marker of civilisation and the supposed equality of British women was used to argue the advanced stage of British civilisation.³⁵ According to early CMS missionary to Uganda, Ruth Fisher, all Ugandan women were treated abysmally by men, despite distinct regional and tribal differences in the position of women. Fisher describes farming Baganda women as ‘slaves’ who are expected to ‘do the cultivating and cooking of the food.’³⁶ The notion of Baganda women farmers was particularly displeasing to many missionaries who believed this to be evidence of incorrect assignment of gender roles. According to them farming was a job that should have been carried out by men, and work in the fields was contributing to Uganda’s ‘lost womanhood.’³⁷

In the eyes of missionaries, polygamy was the ultimate system of male oppression, and they firmly believed that monogamous, Christian, companionate marriage was the most effective way to improve and make more domestic the position of Ugandan women.³⁸ According to missionaries polygamy promoted gender inequality and was evidence of the immorality of non-Christian Ugandans. Carol Summers explores the way missions and colonial administrators made an association between polygamy, syphilis and supposed immorality in the early

33 Patricia Grimshaw, ‘Faith, Missionary Life, and the Family’, in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 264.

34 Gollock, *Missionaries at Work*, 43.

35 See Claire Midgley, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790-1865*. (Oxon: Routledge, 2007) 14 and Susan Thorne, ‘Missionary-Imperial Feminism’, in *Gendered missions: women and men in missionary discourse and practice*, eds. Mary Taylor Huber and Nancy C. Lutkehaus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999) 45.

36 Ruth B. Fisher, *On the borders of pigmy land* (London: Marshall, 1910) 69.

37 Ibid., 71.

38 Grimshaw, ‘Faith, Missionary Life, and the Family’, 270-1.

twentieth century. Summers argues that from 1907 to 1924 the Ugandan colonial administration grew increasingly concerned about low fertility and high rates of infant mortality attributable to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), which they believed threatened the future of the Ugandan population. Missionary doctor A. R. Cook claimed that the majority of syphilis sufferers in Uganda had 'fallen ill through immorality.'³⁹ To combat the epidemic of STDs the colonial administration, in close association with missionaries, developed a range of institutions and ideologies, essentially designed to 'promote the family as a unit of reproduction and to reform motherhood.'⁴⁰ For the British missionaries and colonial administrators alike, it was the monogamous, nuclear family that would save Uganda, and presumably provide a more efficient, effective and stable male workforce for colonialism.

CMS missionaries promoted European ideas in regard to marriage, family and gender roles; yet they sometimes went much further than this. The CMS brand of Christianity was inextricably linked to British cultural ideas, and this meant that missionaries also endorsed many related, but more tangible, changes. Missionaries made a connection between 'poor' housing and immorality and lack of family life: improved physical dwellings were considered indicators of moral and religious development.⁴¹ For travelling missionary Isobel Barbour the Kraal, a Ugandan settlement made up of huts, was directly associated with 'heathen Africa'; Christian Ugandans no longer resided in these sorts of communities and dwellings.⁴² Katherine Muller also illustrates the way in which the physical space of the Kraal was directly associated with heathenism and immorality; she claimed that the inside of family huts were filled with 'darkness and superstition and ignorance.'⁴³ Missionaries advocated new physical spaces which would better accommodate a nuclear family, for example larger huts would enable children to sleep in the family home, rather than in communal dormitory-like huts for children.⁴⁴ A monogamous, nuclear family, modelled on the British archetype, needed a physical home that went at least some way to resembling the ideal British one. Similarly, Ugandan dress, hygiene and bodies also needed to be altered to reflect a Christian lifestyle.

Christianity and morality were closely linked to appearance, and, as a result, missionaries encouraged particular hygiene and dress habits. Barbour describes

39 Dr A.R. Cook, in Carol Summers 'Intimate Colonialism: The Imperial Production of Reproduction in Uganda, 1907-1925.' *Signs*. 16, No. 4 (1991): 788.

40 Summers, 'Intimate Colonialism', 788.

41 Louise Pirouet, 'Women Missionaries of the Church Missionary Society in Uganda 1896-1920' in *Missionary ideologies in the imperialist era: 1880-1920*, eds. Torben Christensen and William R. Hutchinson (Arthus: Aros, 1982) 236.

42 Isobel E. Barbour, 'Journal letters: Uganda and Kenya' (1927) 32.

43 Katherine Muller, *A Princess of the Cattle Kraal: A Story of Central Africa* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1925) 58.

44 Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa*, 64.

the missionary struggle to ‘get the women into cotton dresses...because they wash and skins do not’, though she was pleased that Ugandans were increasingly interested in using soap.⁴⁵ Barbour also describes cleanliness inspections at a school for girls, where students who were deemed suitably clean were entitled to wear a school frock for the day.⁴⁶ Fisher describes a similar practice, whereby clean schoolgirls were given dolls.⁴⁷ Missionaries encouraged British dress and appearance conventions, and rewarded those who complied with British gifts, and, in these two cases, the gifts further emphasised missionary ideas about appropriate gender roles.

Missionaries also sought to change African bodies, particularly female ones. Most obviously they wanted Ugandan women to be slimmer, and to better reflect British ideals of beauty. Several white judges of a Ugandan beauty contest, including Barbour, projected their own ideas about female beauty on the Ugandan contestants. Barbour believed that in the eyes of the natives the judging panel had made the incorrect choice, having chosen a ‘modest looking girl’ over the ‘bulk and prominence’ of other contestants.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Christianity itself supposedly had the ability to drastically change the female body. Katherine Muller’s short story *A Princess of the Cattle Kraal* follows the young Ugandan princess Muhindi’s conversion to Christianity and time spent in a missionary boarding school. Two female missionaries remove Muhindi from her home, hoping that a new generation of girls will leave behind old traditions. Two years of Christian boarding school ensures that, unlike her older sister, Muhindi is able to grow into a ‘tall, slim, graceful girl.’⁴⁹ Ruth Fisher believed Christianity was able to make some even more revolutionary physical changes, as a Ugandan woman’s ‘scarred face’ becomes ‘quite attractive’ following conversion.⁵⁰

Fisher argued that Christianity:

is raising [Ugandan] women from their depths of degradation and beautifying their lives, cleansing and refining their speech and habits. Clean, tidy homes are now seen, and carefully cultivated land in place of the pestilential filth and gaunt elephant grass. Happy family life is springing up among the people.⁵¹

Fisher made it quite clear that missionaries did not only seek to promote their particular brand of morality, but believed that morality, physical appearance,

45 Barbour, ‘Journal letters: Uganda and Kenya’, 16.

46 Ibid., 13.

47 Fisher, *On the borders of pigmy land*, 82.

48 Barbour, ‘Journal letters: Uganda and Kenya’, 16.

49 Muller, *A Princess of the Cattle Kraal*, 55.

50 Fisher, *On the borders of pigmy land*, 76.

51 Ibid., 73–4.

environment and gender were all intimately related. The Christian restructure of Ugandan society was not only a moral and religious one; it meant the literal restructure of homes and the transformation of physical appearance based on a British model. These restructures and transformations were almost always aimed at women, girls and domestic spaces; to civilise missionaries felt they needed to target, elevate and refine Ugandan womanhood. Thomas Beidelman argues

Christian missions represent the most naïve and ethnocentric, and therefore the most thorough-going, facet of colonial life. Administrators and planters aimed at limited ends such as order, taxation, profits, cheap labour, and advantages against competing Europeans; and in that quest they sometimes attempted psychic domination as well. Missionaries invariably aimed at overall changes in the beliefs and actions of native peoples, at colonisation of heart and mind as well as body. Pursuing this sustained policy of change, missionaries demonstrated a more radical and morally intense commitment to rule than political administrators or businessmen.⁵²

This is probably too harsh a judgement, and an over-simplification of colonial relations; Beidelman, however, convincingly argues that missionaries played an important role in the colonisation process, as colonisers of everyday life and purveyors of British moral beliefs. Though often not linked to the British imperial enterprise in any official capacity, missionaries were, at the very least cultural imperialists, whose actions helped to further the imperial cause.

Conclusion

The relationship between the Ugandan colonial administration and the CMS was by no means always harmonious; missionaries often came into conflict with the administration or objected to certain elements of the colonial enterprise. Missionaries were critical of the Ugandan Railway, believing it to be a source of temptation for local men, and partly responsible for the spread of immorality and venereal disease.⁵³ Bishop Tucker also fought hard against the colonial administration on several occasions, particularly in regard to the administration's introduction of a Marriage Ordinance in 1902-3 and later against the policy of forced labour, called *kasanva*.⁵⁴ On the other hand, as we have seen, Tucker organised for CMS supporters to pay to sustain the IBEAC presence in Uganda.

52 Thomas O. Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) 5-6.

53 Purvis, *Through Uganda to Mount Elgon*, 90 and 200-1.

54 For an analysis of the relationship between the CMS, Tucker and the Marriage Ordinance see Hansen, *Mission, Church and State in a Colonial Setting: Uganda 1890-1925*, 260-69; and for an analysis of the

Though missionaries did not always agree with specific policies or practices of the colonial administration, ultimately they supported the co-existence of empire and the missionary enterprise.

Though popular and CMS literature would have us believe that heroic male missionaries were shouldering 'the white man's burden' in Uganda, in fact an increasingly feminised missionary organisation was undertaking work with a particularly domestic focus. Since gender was central to British ideas about civilisation and national and imperial identity, missionaries made it their duty to elevate the position of Ugandan women, and to spread particular ideas in regards to family, women's work and marriage. Though not official agents of empire in the same way as colonial administrators, missionaries directly associated Christianity with British national and imperial culture, and propagated ideologies, particularly related to gender, that extended and deepened the effect of the British imperial project.

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