# BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS

## MISSIONARIES, EMPIRE, AND AFRICAN STUDIES

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**Kristin Fjelde Tjelle.** ***Missionary Masculinity, 1870–1930: The Norwegian Missionaries in South-East Africa.*** New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. xii + 325 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $95.00. Cloth.

**John Stuart.** ***British Missionaries and the End of Empire: East, Central, and Southern Africa, 1939–64.*** Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2011. xv + 237 pp. Acknowledgments. Abbreviations. Bibliography. Index. $40.00. Paper.

**Patrick Harries and David Maxwell, eds.** ***The Spiritual in the Secular: Missionaries and Knowledge about Africa.*** Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2012. xvi + 341 pp. Contributors. Acknowledgments. Abbreviations. Index. $45.00. Paper.

Scholarship about Christian missions working in Africa has played an important role in pushing the boundaries of historical studies of Africa since the publication of Roland Oliver's pioneering work, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* (1952). Three recent titles about missions and missionaries in Africa are attempting to continue this tradition by prodding African studies to engage in conversations with three emerging interdisciplinary subfields: gender studies, the history of science, and decolonization studies. All three successfully demonstrate how engaging with broader academic discourses facilitates a deeper comprehension of the complexities of the internal and international forces affecting missions in Africa. They also highlight how a fuller understanding of missionaries' encounters with Africans enables greater insight into a number of important transnational phenomena that occurred during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Kristin Fjelde Tjelle's *Missionary Masculinity, 1870–1930* is probably the most theoretically rich of the three studies. Tjelle's main objective is to

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examine the ways in which constructions of "missionary masculinities" had social, psychological, and practical consequences for the male missionaries of the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) who worked among the Zulu people from the mid-1800s through the mid-1900s. Her study successfully helps to fill in a number of important gaps in the scholarly literature. For instance, although there is no shortage of gender studies that focus on African women or female missionaries, works on men are markedly absent, and Tjelle rightly points out that men are gendered too! Similarly, few historical studies have explored the relationship between Christianity and masculinity, specifically in the African context. Tjelle's work is premised on the idea that masculine identities are constructed and reconstructed out of clusters of cultural ideas and social practices that can change over time and space. Moreover, she emphasizes the relational nature of a plurality of masculinities, noting that some masculinities are constructed in relation (and in opposition) to others and that in certain contexts hierarchies of masculinities, largely based on power, are sometimes in competition with one another. In this context Tjelle argues that the specific missionary masculinity of many of the NMS men was created in contradistinction to African, settler, and imperial masculinities that the Norwegians encountered. Even within the NMS's missionary masculinity there were a number of tensions: between modern ideals of self-making and Christian ideals of self-denial, between being professional breadwinners and housefathers, and between power and powerlessness, the latter often relating to conceptions of "unmanliness." Missionary men had to be both strong and warm, show "hardness" in human matters and "softness" in spiritual matters.

Tjelle is keen to demonstrate that when certain NMS men displayed signs of unmanliness, or a masculinity that deviated from views of what it meant to be a missionary man by the NMS men in power, such behavior often led to their being sacked from the organization. In doing so she offers an innovative lens for reinterpreting a number of key events in the mission's history. The first case was the resignation of missionary Bishop Hans Schreuder in 1873. Whereas previous historians have suggested that he resigned because of ideological differences and disagreements over authority—he had an episcopal church view that invested power in the executive, whereas his detractors had a more democratic view of mission polity—Tjelle interprets Schreuder's demise as due to the ascendency of a certain missionary masculinity that prioritized the concept of self-making over older ideas that valued advanced education and social stature. Tjelle next tells the story of the dismissal of Christian Ofteboro in 1888 for being a worldly man who was perceived to be lacking a strong inner spiritual life because he suggested that the NMS should devout as much time to the plough as it did to the Bible. He also was involved in money-making activities that made him resemble worldly white settlers, thus embodying a countertype to the image of missionary manliness. Finally, Tjelle relates the story of the suspension in 1903 of Simon Ndlela, the first Zulu evangelist put in charge of a NMS station. Tjelle describes how Ndlela was accused of not combatting features of Zulu masculinity that were perceived by the NMS as valorizing idleness and immature behavior. In none of these cases, however, was it clear to what degree being accused of possessing a countertype masculinity served as the causal factor in the exclusion of these three men. Terms such as *masculinity* and *unmanliness* were not used by the historical actors themselves and these are largely categories projected backwards onto these situations. In most cases it appears as if the previous interpretations focusing on theological differences, racial views, accusations of insubordination, desires for power, and personal differences were the most salient explanations. It does not seem, however, that Tjelle is trying to sweep away these explanations, but rather is offering a new analytic tool for interpreting them.

John Stuart's *British Missionaries and the End of Empire* is similarly interested in analyzing the interplay between local and international forces, in this case how these dynamics shaped Anglo-Protestant missions in southern and eastern Africa between the outbreak of the Second World War and the conclusion of the colonial period. He argues that the two most important factors for understanding British missionaries during the period of decolonization were their responses to African nationalism and the growing secessionism in African Christianity, but he also effectively shows how other international factors such as the ecumenical movement, emerging discourses on human rights, and concerns over communism and nuclear war also helped to shape missionary experiences during this period.

The international scope of missionaries in Africa is also seen in *The Spiritual in the Secular*, edited by Patrick Harries and David Maxwell, which argues that a number of missionaries to Africa made significant contributions to European knowledge in both the social and physical sciences and served as pioneers in a number of fields, including entomology, botany, zoology, medicine, linguistics, and social anthropology. In a time before the professionalization of the academy, these amateur intellectuals, or "missionary foot soldiers of science" (52), helped to drive a vast global network of ideas connecting them to dozens of the most prominent universities, museums, and royal societies throughout Europe and beyond. A number of leading scientists drew on missionary writings and were dependent on them for information, while scientific giants such as Charles Darwin and William Harvey even encouraged missionaries to gather evidence and to send samples back to Europe. Harries's valuable overview in chapter 1 lists some of the notable achievements of these missionaries while pointing out that as early as the 1600s, both Protestant and Catholic missionaries were responsible for much of the knowledge produced about Africa, until they were sidelined in the 1930s by university-based scholars. Missionaries wrote the first scientific works on Africa, including the first extensive botanical survey of the continent, and collected and identified thousands of species of plants and insects. The first detailed descriptions of gorillas as well as other pioneering studies on chimpanzees and driver ants were published in the leading scientific journals in the U.S. and Britain by missionaries, while other missionaries (as described in chapters by Patrick Harries and John Manton) drew on indigenous African forms of knowledge to make contributions toward medical advancements in treating glaucoma, heart murmurs, poor circulation, and leprosy. Some missionary "discoveries" were financially profitable, such as the identification and introduction of the Robusta variety of coffee by the Spiritan father Alexander Le Roy of Gabon, although here Harries rightfully points out that missionary forays into the growing of new cash crops had both positive and negative social effects for different groups of Africans. Finally, a number of chapters (including those by Erika Eichholzer, John Cinnamon, Dmitri van den Bersselaar, and Honoré Vinck) demonstrate how, somewhat paradoxically, missionaries laid the foundations for studying and preserving African languages and material culture and also introduced influential anthropological concepts. The collection does an admirable job of untangling the multiple layers of missionary motivations for taking part in the production of Western scientific knowledge about Africa, and it also opens up a new line of inquiry about the nature of the global networks that these actors helped to create and sustain.

One of the most significant contributions that these three works make as a group is the way in which they complicate and give nuance to our understanding of missionaries' relationships to the colonial and imperial states in which they worked. All of the contributors join a growing number of scholars who have questioned the oft-repeated trope that missionaries were the handmaidens of empire by highlighting the varied nature of these relationships. There are certainly a number of case studies here that detail missionaries' partnerships with colonial states on various projects, including Manton's examination in *The Spiritual in the Secular* of leprosy eradication in Nigeria and Stuart's chapter in *British Missionaries and the End of Empire* of the rehabilitation of Mau Mau detainees in Kenya (chapter 5). But an overwhelming number of cases in these three volumes point toward contentious relationships between various missionaries and colonial states, with the former, especially in the latter decades of empire, often highly critical of their colonial administrations and viewed in return as agitators and "troublemakers" (Stuart, 152). Tjelle recounts how Norwegian missionaries saw themselves as "neutral men-in-between" the white settlers and the Zulus (209) and that during the Bambatha rebellion of 1906 they criticized the brutality of the pacification campaign and were later often critical of what they saw as the unjust treatment and oppression of black Africans. In *The Spiritual in the Secular* van den Bersselaar's chapter describes how the writings of the Anglican missionary George Basden served as an important critique of the policy of Indirect Rule in Nigeria, while Vicnk's chapter explores the writings of two Flemish priests in the Belgian Congo who developed the idea of *indigénisme*, which came to embody strong anticolonial sentiments. Partly inspired by Flemish nationalism, one of these priests wrote in 1939 that he believed "colonialism to be the greatest horror of history," while a few years later he published an article branding colonialism in Africa as the "white plague" (231–32).

*British Missionaries and the End of Empire* gives the most sustained attention to this issue, and Stuart, too, documents missionary voices that were critical of colonial regimes. These included a number of Presbyterian missionaries in Nyasaland who campaigned against the treatment of Africans during the state of emergency there in the 1950s, while the Church of Scotland gave its unequivocal support for African self-determination and stood against colonial rule in Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia. But Stuart also echoes Harries and Maxwell in pointing out that there was no single missionary response to colonial rule and that the Christian missionary enterprise was incredibly heterogeneous when it came to imperial politics. A case in point is the reactions of the Church Missionary Society to the Mau Mau emergency in Kenya; while the organization's home body openly decried police brutality and implicitly called for the replacement of the governor, the Bishop of Mombasa was more eager to build a partnership with the colonial authorities and wanted Anglicans to withhold their criticism of the government during the crisis. Even within these two general camps, opinions changed as particular events unfolded between 1952 and 1955. Thus Stuart concludes that "diversity" and "ambiguity" were the key factors in missionaries' relationships with empire during the Second World War and after as they ran the gambit from racism and imperialism to fervent antiracism and anti-imperialism, with some in between demonstrating paternalism and/or ambivalence. All three of these works encourage scholars to avoid overgeneralized assumptions and to investigate every situation and locale carefully, as there was no such thing as a unified response to empire among the many different Christian missions and their members.

The major complaint that can be leveled against these three titles is a criticism that is familiar in Africanist circles and has long been applied to historical studies of Christian missions working in Africa: the lack of African voices in these accounts and an apparent lack of research conducted in the African continent itself. A number of recent historians of Africa and of empire in Africa have made excellent use of local sources in their narratives about Christian missions in the continent, and they have effectively shown how the "African factor" was not only crucial to a fuller understanding of the period but also shaped the missionaries' thinking and decisions.[1] However, neither Stuart nor Tjelle conducted research in Africa, while fewer than half of the contributors in *The Spiritual in the Secular* volume cite material from the countries where their case studies took place. Stuart at least acknowledges in the introduction that this is a limitation of his own work, and there are scattered sounds of African voices throughout these volumes. But there seems little sustained discussion of these views and little serious thought about the roles played by African actors in the local dynamics of these case studies. Exceptions include brief references to African points of view in the contributions by Eichholzer and Vinck in *The Spiritual in the Secular* and one comment by an African that was recorded in a missionary source and is quoted by Tjelle in chapter 5 of *Missionary Masculinity*.

*The Spiritual in the Secular* declares clearly that its focus is missionary knowledge *about* Africa and not explicitly the African contribution to knowledge production. But even in this case one wonders if African voices and research done in African territories could turn up rich sources about the transmission of local knowledge to missionaries or how specific insights of local agents altered a missionary's thinking on a given subject. It may be that the sources are lacking in local African institutions and that some of these scholars should receive a pass for not including sources that may not exist. However, at the very least, it seems that this avenue of research for scholars of Christian missions in Africa may prove valuable and be worthy of further exploration. Maybe then we can get a more comprehensive sense of the ways in which local African actors and the intimate surroundings of the missionaries affected their own views of gender, their own understandings of scientific endeavor, and their own desires to take part in voicing support either for or against colonial regimes in the twilight of the colonial period.

## Note

1. See, e.g., Derek R. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c.1935–1972* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and Elizabeth A. Foster, *Faith in Empire: Religion, Politics, and Colonial Rule in French Senegal, 1880–1940* (Stanford University Press, 2013).

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## NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF SLAVERY AND SLAVE TRADING

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**Sandra E. Greene. *West African Narratives of Slavery: Texts from Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Ghana*.** Bloomington: Indiana University Press. xiv + 280 pp. Acknowledgments. Note on the Translations. Note on Ewe Orthography. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $28.00. Paper.

**Robin Law, ed. *Dahomey and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: The Journals and Correspondence of Vice-Consul Louis Fraser, 1851–1852*.** London: British Academy. vi + 287 pp. List of Maps. Appendixes. Endnotes. Sources and Bibliography. Index. £55.00. Cloth.

**Randy J. Sparks. *Where the Negroes Are Masters: An African Port in the Era of the Slave Trade*.** Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 328 pp. Important Terms, Names, and Places. Notes. Acknowledgments. Index. $29.95. Cloth.