

„If She no Learn, She no Get Husband“: Christianity, Domesticity and Education at the Church Missionary Society’s Female Institution in Freetown, 1849 – 1880

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RESÜMEE

Silke Strickrodt: „If She no Learn, She no Get husband.“ Christentum, Häuslichkeit und Erziehung an der Female Institution der Church Missionary Society in Freetown, 1849 – 1880

Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts erkannten die in Sierra Leone tätigen Missionsgesellschaften die Notwendigkeit von Sekundärerziehung für Mädchen. Trotz des Konsenses darüber gab es sowohl unter den neuen Lehrerinnen als auch unter den Eltern der Mädchen große Meinungsunterschiede. Diese bezogen sich zum Teil auf räumliche Aspekte – Standort der Schule, Organisation von Mahlzeiten –, aber auch auf die „vollständige moralische Transformation“, die man durch Sekundärerziehung erreichen wollte. Der Aufsatz befasst sich auch mit dem neuen sozialen Raum, der die Missionierung für europäische sowie afrikanische Frauen schuf.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the Protestant overseas missions that had been spawned by the Evangelical Revival in the English-speaking world were essentially male enterprises.¹ The leadership of the mission societies, the missionaries sent out to the various mission fields and the people who were the focus of their activities were all male. Women played only subordinate and supporting roles, as wives, daughters, widows or other dependents of the missionaries and the converts. From the 1830s and 1840s, however, there was an increasing awareness of the importance of women for the success of the missionary project. According to evangelical thinking, women were morally superior beings who played a crucial role for the spiritual welfare of the family and society in

1 I wish to thank the participants in the workshop and Christiane Reichart-Burikukiye for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

general. Due to this, missionary societies became increasingly interested in the conversion and education of women. This new focus on female education created a new space for women in the religious sphere. For European women, the increasing need for female teachers meant that there were now opportunities to work as missionaries in their own right;² for indigenous women in Africa and elsewhere, the encounter with missionaries endowed religious experience with a new significance.

Conversion to Christianity was inextricably linked with a redefinition of gender roles. Like most of their contemporaries, the Evangelicals considered men and women fundamentally different and emphasised their complementary social roles: men dominated the public sphere of work and political life, while the private sphere of the home became identified as the appropriate place for women. A Christian woman was defined by her role as housewife, wife and mother as much as by her religious faith. This ideology of domesticity had become firmly established within the British middle classes by the 1840s and was then spread by the missions to the working classes and across the British Empire.³

There is a substantial body of literature about the “African encounter with domesticity”.⁴ However, it relates mainly to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when most of Africa had become subject to European colonial rule and European attitudes to Africans were marked by racism. In these works, missions are often portrayed as being complicit in the colonial endeavour to subjugate Africans and turn them into colonial servants. An exception that deals with the earlier period is John and Jean Comaroff’s analysis of the encounter between the Tswana and the missionaries of the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) in the mid-nineteenth century.⁵ They show that conversion to the Christian faith and the ideology of domesticity were inseparably linked, entailing a reordering of social and physical space. They note the importance of outward signs of Christianity, such as dress

2 The first missionary society to recruit women as independent agents was the Society for the Propagation of Female Education in the East, founded in 1834 with the object of furthering female education in India and elsewhere (J. Haggis, *White Women and Colonialism: towards a non-recuperative history*, in: C. Midgley (ed.), *Gender and Imperialism*, Manchester 1998, p. 45-75). However, not until the 1870s did the large British missionary societies begin to employ female missionaries officially (P. Williams, ‘The Missing Link’: The Recruitment of Women Missionaries in some English Evangelical Societies in the Nineteenth Century, in: F. Bowie, D. Kirkwood and S. Ardener, *Women and Missions: Past and Present, Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, Oxford 1993, pp. 43-69).

3 For the debate about the public and private spheres, see A. Vickery, *Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History*, in: *The Historical Journal* 36, 2 (1993), pp. 383-414 and L. Davidoff’s and C. Hall’s Introduction in the revised edition of their *Family Fortunes*, New York 2002), pp. xiii-xlix.

4 D. Gaitskell, *Housewives, Maids or Mothers: Some Contradictions of Domesticity for Christian Women in Johannesburg, 1903-39*, in: *Journal of African History* 24 (1983), pp. 241-56; K. Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos*, Cambridge 1985; E. Schmidt, *Peasants, Traders, and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939*, Portsmouth, NH/ Harare/ London 1992, pp. 122-54; K. Tranberg Hansen (ed.), *African Encounters with Domesticity*, New Brunswick, New Jersey 1992).

5 John and Jean Comaroff, *Homemade Hegemony*, in: id., *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, Boulder 1992, pp. 265-95. A slightly shorter version of this essay appeared in Tranberg Hansen, *African Encounters* (note 3), pp. 37-74.

and architecture. Domesticity was the creation of a new space, ‘home’, which for the missionaries signified a (square) house inhabited by a nuclear family with clearly defined gender roles, the husband as the breadwinner and the wife as homemaker. Importantly, the Comaroffs do not regard ‘domesticity’ as one static social institution but emphasise the existence of various models of domesticity that evolved over time and were contested: “Precisely *which* Western models of domesticity, for instance, were exported to the colonies? How stable and consensual were they in their own societies?”⁶

In this article I examine missionary attempts to introduce domesticity to Sierra Leone in the mid-nineteenth century, particularly their efforts to educate young African women to become “good Christian wives and mothers”. My focus is on the Church Missionary Society’s Female Institution in Freetown, founded in 1849 as the first secondary school for females in West Africa and probably the whole of Africa. It was re-named Annie Walsh Memorial School in 1877 and still exists, its buildings having miraculously survived the recent war in Sierra Leone. From the beginning, the school was staffed exclusively by women, including European single women sent out for the purpose. This is remarkable because the Church Missionary Society (CMS) employed female agents officially only from 1887.⁷ In my discussion, space is important on several levels. First, as already indicated, I am concerned with the emergence of a space for female agency in foreign Christian missions and with the use that women, both African and European, made of it. Then I look at the Female Institution as a social space that was shaped by the transcultural encounter between missionaries and Africans. In this space, the various actors, such as teachers, students, parents and members of the advisory committee, competed for control and tried to impose their respective ideas of the purpose the school was to serve. Finally, I discuss the physical space of the school building, seeking to show how the reordering of this space towards the end of the period examined here reflects a change in European ideas about the roles that educated Africans were to play in colonial society.

The Sources

The CMS Female Institution is very well documented for the period between 1849 and 1880. The documentation consists mainly of the correspondence of teachers who worked at the school, comprising letters and reports. The letters were written to the clerical secretary at the CMS headquarters in London. The superintendents of the Female Institution were expected to correspond with him regularly and report not only on their work but also on their experiences more generally, their personal views, preoccupations and any occurrences that they thought important. Junior teachers were not obliged to

6 Ibid., p. 266.

7 Williams, ‘The Missing Link’ (note 1), p. 54; J. Murray, ‘The Role of Women in the Church Missionary Society, 1799–1917’, in: K. Ward/ B. Stanley (eds.), *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799–1999*, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK 2000, pp. 66–90.

write but were encouraged to do so. Most made ample use of this offer, writing in order to explain their problems, tell their side of the story in cases of conflict and complain about their colleagues. These letters contain much that is personal, offering an intimate – and very subjective – view of the teachers’ world in mid-nineteenth-century Freetown. Unfortunately letters from the secretary to the teachers were not preserved.

The superintendents of the Female Institution also wrote half-yearly reports to the Ladies’ Visiting Committee in Freetown, which served as a local control organ. These reports are more factual accounts of the development of the school, giving the number, names and progress of students and noting any special occurrences. Copies were sent to the CMS secretary in London, and extracts were published in CMS publications, mainly the *Church Missionary Record*, in order to encourage support for the mission. The letters and reports end in 1880, later material having been destroyed when the CMS buildings were damaged in the Second World War.

Apart from the teachers’ correspondence, there is also miscellaneous material generated by the CMS which gives information about female education in Sierra Leone and the Female Institution in particular. This includes the minutes of the meetings of the Ladies’ Visiting Committee, which provide much detail concerning individual students at the Female Institution, the curriculum and the committee’s discussions and decisions. The Candidate Papers contain some of the application letters by teachers for work in the mission field, giving information about their family background. Finally, the correspondence of CMS missionaries in Sierra Leone who did not work at the Female Institution also gives some relevant information.

These sources have a number of limitations. The teachers’ correspondence is highly subjective and sometimes manipulative, as they try to present themselves and their work in the best possible light. The committee’s minutes are intermittent, only a few having survived. The greatest drawback, however, is that these documents are exclusively of European provenance. There were African teachers at the school, but their perspective is not recorded, as they did not write to CMS headquarters.⁸ Nor did the students or their parents establish an archival existence. Information about them comes exclusively from the writings of the missionaries. Nevertheless, the material available can occasionally be supplemented by sources which reflect African views. A. B. C. Sibthorpe, the Krio historian, mentions the school.⁹

8 An exception is the memoir by Adelaide Smith Casely Hayford, who briefly worked at the Female Institution and refers to her experiences there. However, this was only after the period discussed here, in the early 1890s. See A. M. Cromwell, *An African Victorian Feminist: The Life and Times of Adelaide Smith Casely Hayford 1868–1960*, London 1986, p. 50.

9 A. B. C. Sibthorpe, *The History of Sierra Leone (1868/1906)*, new ed.: London 1979. Three editions of the book appeared during Sibthorpe’s lifetime, each being a revised and enlarged version of the former. As I have not seen the first or second editions (which appeared in 1868 and 1881 respectively), I do not know whether the reference to the school already appeared in them or whether it was added only in the 1906 edition. However, it seems unlikely that it was made in the first edition, which was brief and had form of a catechism. For a discussion of Sibthorpe’s life and work, see C. Fyfe, A. B. C. Sibthorpe: A Tribute, in: *History in Africa* 19 (1992), pp. 327–52. Another possible source for African perspectives, which I have yet to consult, are Sierra Leone’s newspapers.

Sierra Leone in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

Sierra Leone in the mid-nineteenth century was not identical with the country bearing this name today.¹⁰ It was much smaller, comprising only the peninsula on which Freetown was situated. It was an unusual mission field for several reasons. First, it was already a British colony, a settlement having been founded in 1787 by British philanthropists and taken over by the crown in 1808. Second, it was the Church Missionary Society's first mission field; hence the CMS had few models to draw on in its work there. Solutions had to be worked out on the ground, and many of its activities there can properly be described as experiments. Third, CMS activities focused upon an unusual kind of person. The colony was settled by various groups of immigrants, the largest being the liberated Africans or 'recaptives' – former slaves who had been captured by the British anti-slave trade squadron in its effort to suppress the slave trade on the West African coast. Between 1808 and 1864 about 68,000 persons were brought to Sierra Leone and liberated there. It was these people and their families who became the focus of the CMS activities. Cut off from their homelands, many of the recaptives (to whom I will refer as 'Sierra Leoneans') embraced the Christian faith. They highly esteemed European education, seeing it as an avenue to success. Hard-working and ambitious, many turned to trade and were successful, trading along the West African coast or indeed with Europe. Due to their success, the colony experienced a period of prosperity in the 1840s and 1850s. Freetown became an urban centre with a recaptive elite that was mission-educated, self-confident and cosmopolitan in outlook. A school inspector who visited Sierra Leone in 1868 noted 'the peculiar determination with which the people style themselves "English."¹¹

The historian Leo Spitzer called the mid-nineteenth century in Sierra Leone the 'era of good feelings', by which he meant the belief among Europeans, and particularly missionaries, that, if properly educated and 'civilized', Africans could attain the same standards as Europeans. This is not to say that Europeans had no feeling of cultural superiority, but they did not believe that race determined cultural attainment or that there was something inherent in Africans that prevented their 'civilization'. Not until the 1870s did racist ideas begin to affect European thinking about the African inhabitants of Sierra Leone.¹²

The CMS clerical secretary in London for the whole period from 1841 to 1872, the Reverend Henry Venn, was one of the foremost exponents of the belief that Africans and other indigenous people were capable of governing themselves if properly educated. His great project, conceived and pursued in his office in London, was to educate a Sierra

10 The following paragraph is based on C. Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*, London 1962; id., *Freed Slave Colonies in West Africa*, in: J. E. Flint (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 5: From c. 1790 to c. 1870, Cambridge 1976, pp. 170-99; J. Peterson, *Province of Freedom: A History of Sierra Leone, 1787-1870*, London 1969; L. Spitzer, *The Creoles of Sierra Leone: Responses to Colonialism, 1870-1945*, Madison, Wisc. 1974.

11 TNA: CO 267/297, J. Stuart Laurie, Report on the Elementary Schools of Sierra Leone, Inner Temple, 6 June 1868.

12 Spitzer, *The Creoles* (note 9), 45.

Leonean elite that would be able to take over the mission in Sierra Leone and turn it into an African church.¹³ For this purpose he developed secondary education in the colony, founding the Grammar School for boys in 1845 and, in 1848, re-founding the Fourah Bay Institution for the training of recaptive boys as missionaries and teachers.¹⁴ The development of female education in the colony in the 1840s needs to be seen in the context of this general advancement of secondary education in Sierra Leone in the period.

The Beginning of Missionary Education for Girls

Concern about female education in Sierra Leone was first voiced in the 1840s, when missionaries began to note that African women were lagging behind the men in education. Recaptive children, girls as well as boys, received elementary education in the CMS day schools in the villages. However, according to a CMS missionary writing in 1848, the girls' education suffered from several disadvantages compared to the boys'. Firstly, while boys were taught subjects such as "Writing, Arithmetic, Geography and Grammar" between 12 a.m. and 2 p.m., girls spent this time sewing. Secondly, while boys were educated by qualified schoolmasters who had often been trained at the Fourah Bay Institution, the instruction of girls was left to the schoolmasters' untrained wives. Thirdly, there was no higher education for girls. Talented boys could continue their education at the Fourah Bay Institution, but no such provision was made for girls.¹⁵

The local CMS committee took two measures to remedy this situation. First, from 1842 married missionaries and catechists were encouraged to take into their family up to three promising African girls. The object of this informal measure of education was threefold: under the wing of the missionary wife, the girls were to receive moral instruction, to be taught household duties and trained as schoolmistresses.¹⁶ Second, in 1845 the CMS decided to try a formal model of education, the foundation of a girls' school that would provide "a higher degree of education to those promising Native Girls from the Village-Schools who may be employed as Teachers and Schoolmistresses."¹⁷ The school, called the CMS Female Institution, was located at Regent. It was given into the charge of Anna Christiana Morris, a European woman sent out by the CMS in 1843 in order to help "raising the character of the Female of Africa." The local missionary, the Rev. Nathaniel

13 Fyfe, *A History* (note 9), pp. 300-1; E. Stock, *The History of the CMS*, 4 vols, London 1899, vol. II, p. 101; P. Williams, 'Not Transplanting: Henry Venn's Strategic Vision, in: Ward/Stanley (eds.), *The Church Missionary Society* (note 6), pp. 147-72. Venn's vision of an African church was partially achieved by 1860, when the first nine parishes were handed over to the Native Church. In 1864, Samuel Crowther (d. 1891), a Yoruba recaptive who had been educated in CMS schools in Sierra Leone and London, became the first African bishop (CMS Register, pp. 298-9: List III, no. 7).

14 Fyfe, *A History* (note 9), pp. 236-7.

15 CMS Archive Birmingham [hereafter: CMS]: CA 1/0 11/15, Rev. N. Denton, Minute on Female Education (n.d., received by the Committee in London on 24 April 1848).

16 CMS: CA 1/0 5/6: N. Denton, Summary of the Principals which Regulate the West Africa Mission (1846).

17 Church Missionary Record 16, 9 (Sept. 1845), pp. 195.

Denton, had the “general superintendence” of the school. The number of students was limited to twelve, some of whom were to be taught at the expense of the CMS while others were charged fifteen shillings per month for board and tuition. Among those funded by the Society were the children of Sierra Leonean CMS agents, including a daughter of the future bishop, the Revd Samuel Ajayi Crowther.¹⁸

Anna Morris did not remain in her position for long; in September 1845 she left the school on her marriage to a missionary colleague.¹⁹ The school was then run by the Revd Denton, his wife and an African assistant until the CMS sent out another teacher in November 1846. This was Sophia Hehlen, a German. She moved the school to the village of Kissy, where she worked on her own responsibility, being subject only to the control of the local committee and the CMS headquarters. In November 1848, another single woman, Julia Emily Sass, was sent to Sierra Leone in order to found a second girls’ school. This was the Female Institution at Freetown, which opened in January 1849. The two schools then became distinguished in purpose. Julia Sass’ school became ‘a female Educational Establishment of a superior kind’ that provided higher education for the daughters of wealthy Freetown elite, who in the period were often sent to London for education.²⁰ Sophia Hehlen’s school turned into an infant school and a sewing school. In the latter, the children were to be ‘carefully instructed in the Holy Scriptures and trained to industrial habits.’²¹ This school closed in April 1851 when Sophia Hehlen returned to Europe. However, meanwhile another girls’ school had been established and thirty children from Hehlen’s school were transferred there.²² This was the Liberated Girls’ School at Charlotte, established in October 1850 by Sabina Peter Clemens, following the death of her missionary husband. The main purpose of the Liberated Girls’ School was the accommodation and education of girls rescued by the British Navy from slave ships off the West African coast. The school also served as a day school for girls from neighbouring recaptive villages. It provided ‘elementary’ and industrial education and grew rapidly: in September 1851 there were 72 schoolgirls, by September 1857 129 and by August 1860 150.²³

Another secondary school for girls existed on the outskirts of Freetown between 1856 and 1866. It was run by Mary Beale, another CMS missionary widow who had decided to remain in the colony after the death of her husband. By December 1858 her school had twelve boarders and thirteen day scholars; by 1865 there were 25 boarders.²⁴ The school was self-supporting, the parents paying a fee of £1 per quarter for tuition and

18 CMS: CA 1/0 6/28: J. Warburton to A. C. Morris, Gloucester, 25 Jan. 1845; CA 1/0 6/29: J. Warburton to A. C. Morris, Gloucester, 27 Jan. 1845.

19 CMS Register, p. 263: List II, no. 29.

20 Church Missionary Record 21, 1 (Jan. 1850), p. 4.

21 Church Missionary Record 22, 4 (April 1851), p. 78.

22 CMS: CA 1/0 72/11: S. P. Clemens, Report of the Liberated Girls’ School, Charlotte, Sept. 1851 (who mistakenly refers to Miss Hehlen’s school at “Wellington”); Church Missionary Record 23, 4 (April 1852), p. 78.

23 CMS: CA 1/0 72/11, 15, 18: S. P. Clemens, Report of the Liberated Girls’ School, Charlotte, Sept. 1851, Sept. 1857, Aug. 1860.

24 CMS: CA 1/0 38/3, 15: M. Beale to H. Venn, Sierra Leone, Lily Cottage, 18 Feb. 1858, 20 Nov. 1865.

board. This enabled Mary Beale to employ a Sierra Leonean assistant, Miss Lemon.²⁵ Although she hoped that eventually she would be able ‘to hand the School over to the native young ladies to conduct it themselves’, the school closed soon after her death in December 1866.²⁶ However, Miss Lemon then appears to have opened her own school. This is implied by the school inspector’s report of 1868, which lists three private ‘adventure’ schools in Freetown, among them the “Charity School” run by an unidentified African woman who had been trained by Mary Beale. Another of these schools was run by Priscilla Paris, a former student of the Female Institution in Freetown.²⁷ Two more girls’ schools were started in the 1870s by Sierra Leoneans, Mrs Rose Hughes and Mrs Rosa Farmer.²⁸

From the 1860s other missionary societies founded secondary schools for girls that rivalled the CMS schools. A Roman Catholic priest arrived in Freetown in 1864. In 1866 he was joined by three nuns, one of French, two of Irish origin, of the Order of St Joseph of Cluny, and these established a boarding school for girls.²⁹ From 1880 there also existed a Female Educational Institution, sponsored by a private company that had been formed in 1879 under the management of James Taylor, a Sierra Leonean and devout Wesleyan. Although most of the company’s members were Wesleyans, the school was not run by the Wesleyan mission. Its curriculum included ‘domestic as well as academic studies.’³⁰

The CMS Female Institution

The Female Institution started out on the model of boarding schools for middle- and upper-class girls as they existed in England. These were small, private schools run by a lady proprietress who was untrained but genteel. They were usually accommodated in the proprietress’s residential household, which provided a family-like atmosphere.³¹ The Female Institution’s founder, Julia Sass, was a deeply religious middle-class lady from London who was in her mid-twenties when she arrived in 1848. She was not a trained teacher: all the education she had received was “the education of Ladies in England.”³²

25 CMS: CA 1/0 38/3: M. Beale to H. Venn, Sierra Leone, Freetown, 18 Feb. 1858.

26 Ibid.; Sibthorpe, *The History* (note 8), p. 188.

27 TNA: CO 267/297, J. Stuart Laurie, Report on the Elementary Schools of Sierra Leone, Inner Temple, 6 June 1868.

28 Fyfe, *A History* (note 9), p. 425. Cf. Cromwell, *An African Victorian Feminist* (note 7), 22.

29 TNA: CO 267/297, J. Stuart Laurie, Report on the Elementary Schools of Sierra Leone, Inner Temple, 6 June 1868. Fyfe, *A History* (note 9), p. 326.

30 CMS: CA 1/0 61/13, D. W. Burton to H. Wright, Sierra Leone, 9 June 1880; CA 1/0 197/5, M. Shoard to H. Wright, The Annie Memorial School [sic], Sierra Leone, 29 Nov. 1879; Fyfe, *A History* (note 9), p. 424.

31 C. Dyhouse, *Miss Buss and Miss Beale: Gender and Authority in the History of Education*, in: F. Hunt (ed.), *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women, 1850–1950*, Oxford 1987, pp. 22–38, p. 27; M. Vicinius, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850–1920*, London 1985, pp. 165–6.

32 TNA: CO 267/297, J. Stuart Laurie, Report on the Elementary Schools of Sierra Leone, Inner Temple, 6 June 1868; CMS Register, p. 264: List II, no. 37. The CMS archives contain little biographical detail concerning Julia Sass. There is no application from her in the Candidate Papers, indicating that she may have joined the CMS not via a formal application but through informal networks. However, some of her family background can be reconstructed

She worked as the school's superintendent until 1869, interrupted by two extended furlough visits to recover her health (from February 1853 to October 1855 and from February 1860 to January 1864). For Sass, the Female Institution was *her* school – and indeed, during the first three decades of its existence she very much determined the school's organisation, as the CMS gave her much freedom to do so. Her influence outlived her sojourn in Sierra Leone, partly because her successors were colleagues and friends of hers who continued her system. Furthermore, after her retirement she continued to influence the CMS's decisions concerning the school by giving advice to the CMS secretary in London and assisting in choosing staff for the school.³³

The school was accommodated in the Society's mission house in Freetown. This was a family house and normally occupied by a missionary couple, rather than being a proper school building, and thus would have provided the family atmosphere that characterised secondary schools for girls in England.³⁴ Initially, the school was quite small, starting with only six students whose parents paid for tuition and board. The school admitted boarders and day-scholars. The former fell into two categories – ordinary or “second-rate” boarders and parlour boarders, who had their dinner with the superintendent at the latter's table, for which privilege they paid an extra fee. The ordinary boarders ate separately, their dinner consisting of African dishes (“rice and sauce” is mentioned in the sources).³⁵

The school quickly grew in numbers and importance. By September 1852 there were 25 students, including 15 boarders.³⁶ By March 1865, the number had risen to 47 students, and in December 1879 to 68 students, 39 of whom were boarders.³⁷ The school's growth in importance is also indicated by the fact that while initially its students came from the prosperous Freetown elite and local African CMS staff, very soon it attracted students from all over West Africa, including Yorubaland, Fernando Po, the Cameroons and the Gold Coast. One of its most prominent students was Sarah Forbes Bonetta, who studied there between 1851 and 1855 and subsequently worked there briefly as a teacher. She was an Egbado girl who had become a ward of Queen Victoria after being “rescued” by a British naval officer who stated that she would otherwise have become a victim to human sacrifice in Dahomey. Her enrolment is testimony not only to Queen Victoria's belief that Africans should best be educated in Africa, but also to the school's prestige.³⁸

from information given in the decennial censuses. According to this, she was the second of seven children. Her father had died by the time she was twenty, possibly several years earlier, which may have left the family in a financially precarious situation and herself unprovided for. However, her brothers, all younger than her, were well-educated, one becoming an architect, another a dentist and the third a general practitioner and Member of the Royal College of Surgeons (TNA: HO 107/672/3, fo. 6, p. 7 [1841]; HO 107/1507, fo. 29-30, p. 51-2 [1851]; RG 9/76, fo. 53, p. 41 [1861]).

33 CMS: C/ AC 2/2: H. Wright to J. E. Sass, 10 April 1874; H. Wright to Miss Shoard, 20 April 1874.

34 Fyfe, *A History* (note 9), p. 253, citing Court of Recorder 27.3.45.

35 CMS: CA 1/0 187/61, J. E. Sass to Henry Venn, Female Institution, Freetown, 16 March 1868.

36 CMS: CA 1/0 187/82, J. E. Sass, Report of the Female Institution, 30 Sept. 1852.

37 CMS: CA 1/0 187/88, J. E. Sass, Report of the CMS Female Institution, Kissy Road, March 1865; CA 1/0 61/11, M. Burton to C. Fenn, A. W. M. School, Sierra Leone, 6 Dec. 1879.

38 Walter Dean Myers, *At Her Majesty's Request: An African Princess in Victorian England*, New York 1999.

This growth in size and importance necessitated various changes and a professionalisation of the school. An advisory committee, the Ladies' Visiting Committee, was constituted in November 1850. This followed the system at the CMS grammar school for boys. The committee consisted of several missionary wives and widows in Freetown under the leadership of a male secretary and was to serve as a local control organ. The Female Institution's superintendent was obliged to write half-yearly reports, which were then discussed by the committee at its half-yearly meetings. The committee authorised decisions concerning the school or referred them to CMS headquarters in London. In practice, however, it had limited influence on the development of the school in this period due to its weak position vis-à-vis the superintendents, who strongly identified with the school and were unwilling to accept outsiders' interference. This is illustrated by a query sent by the committee's secretary to the CMS headquarters in 1875:

*[W]hat are the relations of the Visiting Committee to the [Female] Institution, have they any right to make suggestions, or must they be guided entirely by those who are in charge of the Institution[?]*³⁹

The school's rapid growth also led twice to its removal to a larger building: first, in 1851, to Kissy Road, on the outskirts of town, and then, in 1865, to a new, purpose-built house on an adjacent plot of land. The school's location outside the town had been the subject of heated debate between Julia Sass and the members of the Ladies' Visiting Committee. While some of the former favoured a location in the town, Sass (who as usual prevailed) was adamant that the school should remain outside, arguing that Freetown was 'neither an agreeable nor a suitable place for a girls' Boarding School.'⁴⁰

The growth in student numbers necessitated an increase in the school's staff. From 1849 there was always an African teacher employed at the school. Some of these young women were praised in their European colleagues' letters to the CMS. Among them was Sarah Anne Jones, daughter of the principal of the CMS Fourah Bay Institution, the Rev. Edward Jones. She worked in the school from 1857 until her premature death in 1859.⁴¹ Rose Philips was at the school for fifteen years, first as a student and then, from 1868 to 1873, as a 'general Assistant'. When she left the school on her marriage to an African merchant, she was presented with a gold watch 'in acknowledgement of her long and

39 CMS: CA 1/0 10c/23, Minutes of a Meeting of the Visiting Committee of the Female Institution, 4 Oct. 1875. Julia Sass and her successors at the Female Institution were not exceptional with regard to the degree of autonomy which they enjoyed in their work. Rather, this seems to have been the rule at CMS schools in Sierra Leone. This is indicated by the following description of Sabina Clemens' and Mary Beale's schools: "Mrs Clemens' school prospers. She will not allow even the Com[mittee] to interfere nor any individual but she has right judgment & her school is blessed. Mrs Beale's is the same way no one interferes" (CA 1/0 95/7, A. Freymuth, Sierra Leone, 7 Feb. 1861). Similarly, Jane Caspari, who directed the Female Institution in the 1870s, was reported to have "a great dislike to being questioned or interfered with in any way & does not see the use of a Ladies Committee" (CA 1/0 63/1, C. Caiger to Mr Wright, C.M. Institution, Freetown, 25 Oct. 18[75]).

40 CMS: CA 1/0 187/27, J. E. Sass to H. Venn, Kissy Road, Freetown, 1 Dec. 1858.

41 CMS: CA 1/0 187/21, J. E. Sass to H. Venn, Kissy Road, Freetown, 19 Oct. 1857; CA 1/0 187/29, J. E. Sass to H.s Venn, Kissy Road, Freetown, 21 July 1859. For the Revd E. Jones, see Fyfe, A History (note 9), pp. 199, 237; CMS Register, 298: List III, no. 6.

faithful services'.⁴² Miss Quaker, perhaps the daughter of the Rev. James Quaker, principal of the CMS Grammar School between 1863 and 1882, worked at the Female Institution from 1878 until her marriage in June 1880. She had previously been educated for "eight years in a very good school in England."⁴³ She taught French and Music and was valued as 'a most efficient teacher.'⁴⁴ Furthermore, throughout the period Julia Sass experimented with various methods using additional African assistance, such as employing her most advanced students as monitors, training pupil teachers, or (albeit without success) employing a matron to supervise the boarders out of class. Nevertheless, by the late 1850s Sass had become convinced of the necessity of the employing more than one European teacher: "I do entreat you, dear Mr Venn, leave no one Lady here alone again!"⁴⁵ From then on, the CMS tried to staff the school with two Europeans, a superintendent and a teacher. From the mid-1860s the number was sometimes increased to three. Between 1848 and 1880, sixteen European women were sent out to staff the school. Almost all were single, with two exceptions: Catherine Caiger (*née* Godwin), a missionary's widow, and Martha Burton (*née* Bywater), a missionary's wife. The relatively high turnover of the staff was due mainly to illness or inability to cope with the work and/or the colleagues. This is not surprising, given that these women usually had not been trained as teachers (although some had teaching experience) and, unlike their male colleagues, had not been prepared by the CMS for their work in Sierra Leone.⁴⁶ Many European teachers stayed for only one four-year spell of service, or less.

However, there were some who worked there for many years, carving out a career for themselves. Besides Sass, these included Catherine Caiger, Jane Caspari and Maria Roberts Bywater. Caiger had first gone to Sierra Leone in 1857 as a missionary's wife. Being based in Freetown, she served on the Ladies' Visiting Committee and for two years as the Institution's superintendent during Sass' absences. After her husband's death in 1870, she returned to England, but in 1872 returned to take charge of the Female Institution. She finally returned to Europe in 1876, after 19 years of CMS service.⁴⁷ Caspari, originally from Poland, joined the staff of the Female Institution in 1865 and worked there until 1878, interrupted only by furlough visits. Following her retirement from the Female Institution, she went to Japan as a governess in the family of a CMS missionary. Three years later, in 1883, she accepted employment by the CMS at its mission in Osaka,

42 CMS: CA 1/0 63/14, C. Caiger: Report of Female Institution, April 1873.

43 CMS: CA 1/0 67/3, J. Caspari to C. Fenn, The Annie Walsh Memorial School, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 14 March [1878]. For the Revd J. Quaker, see Fyfe, A History (note 9), pp., 327, 436. He is documented to have visited England in 1871, and it seems likely that this was when he took his daughter there for schooling (CMS Register, p. 304; List III, no. 36).

44 CMS: CA 1/0 61/17, M. Burton: Report of the A. W. M. School to the Committee of the CMS, July 1st 1879.

45 CMS: CA 1/0 187/20, J. E. Sass to H. Venn, Kissy Road, Sierra Leone, 19 June 1857 and 17 July 1857.

46 From the 1860s, the CMS increasingly recommended to its female candidates that they take a training course at the 'Home and Colonial School' or at one of the Mildmay Institutions. However, these were informal arrangements; it was only in 1891 that a CMS Training Home for women was opened.

47 CMS: CA 1/0 63; CMS Register, p. 106; List I, no. 531.

where she died in 1888.⁴⁸ Bywater worked at the Female Institution as a teacher for four years before marrying a missionary colleague in 1863. She then succeeded Sabina Clemens as superintendent of the Liberated Girls' School at Charlotte. Her husband died in August 1870, but she remained in her post until at least 1876. Then she worked for the American Episcopal Church's mission to Liberia. By 1880 she was in the United States and eager to rejoin the CMS in Sierra Leone, but the CMS was not interested.⁴⁹ Two of her sisters also married CMS missionaries and worked in Sierra Leone, one of them, Martha, taking charge of the Female Institution in 1879.⁵⁰

All the European teachers were from a middle-class background, but as the century progressed teaching experience became increasingly important. Some of the school's staff had gained this experience by teaching in Sunday schools or secondary schools or by working as governesses in England. Two individuals, however, Annie Freymuth (who worked at the Female Institution in 1860-61 and again in 1864-65) and L. A. M. Williams (1875), had previously worked in schools in India. Three teachers had received at least some professional training: Elizabeth Adcock (1864-66) had been trained at the Ladies' College at Cheltenham, L. A. M. Williams at the Home & Colonial Training Institution, and Mary Shoard (1874-77) for some months at the Deaconesses' House at Mildmay, "where ladies are trained for the Lord's work at home and abroad."⁵¹ Thus the CMS profited from the development of the secondary teaching profession in Britain in the period. Nevertheless, the superintendent of the school was always a 'lady', who by definition had not been trained as a teacher.

The Curriculum

In 1865, Julia Sass described the object of the school as "to make our girls quiet sensible housewives."⁵² The girls were to be trained for domesticity – but what did this mean? Or, in the Comaroffs' words: Precisely what kind of domesticity? To find this out, it is necessary to look at the curriculum.

The school aimed at a complete moral transformation of the girls. They were therefore given a fourfold education: firstly, religious and moral, secondly, academic, thirdly, domestic and industrial, fourthly, "accomplishments". These aspects are often difficult to separate, because the religious and moral education suffused everything, the ultimate aim of the academic education as well as of the industrial and domestic training being

48 CMS: CA 1/0 67; CMS Register, p. 268; List II, no. 61.

49 CMS: CA 1/0 62; CA 1/0 61/7, M. Burton to H. Wright, Annie Walsh Memorial School, Sierra Leone, 14 July 1879; CMS Register, p. 267; List II, no. 52.

50 CMS: CA 1/0 61; CMS Register: List I, no. 885.

51 CMS Register, pp. 268, 271; List II, nos. 59, 77, 78. For the Ladies' College at Cheltenham, see Dyhouse, 'Miss Buss and Miss Beale' (note 30); L. Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work: Middle-Class Women in England and Wales 1850-1914*, Newton Abbot 1973, p. 29; Vicinius, *Independent Women* (note 30), pp. 163-210. For the Mildmay Institute, see *ibid.*, 46-84.

52 CMS: CA 1/0 187/44, J. E. Sass to Mr Venn, Kissy Road, Freetown, 19 Dec. 1865.

to give girls a Christian world view and instil virtues such as diligence, honesty, industry, obedience and thoughtfulness.

Religious education comprised both formal and informal instruction. This started with the daily rhythm of life at the school, which was structured in accordance with Christian time. The day was framed by prayers, family prayers being held at 8 a.m. and evening prayers at 8 p.m. The Sabbath was of course observed and Christian holidays, particularly Christmas, were celebrated. Formal religious education comprised daily scripture classes, which were prescribed by the rules laid down by the Ladies' Visiting Committee in November 1850.⁵³ True to the Evangelical devotion to the Bible, Julia Sass noted in her report of 1858 that "[t]he acquaintance with the Word of God is put before all."⁵⁴ Another rule stipulated that one evening per week was to be set aside for the attempt to instil a "missionary spirit".⁵⁵ How exactly these evenings were filled was left to the individual teachers. Some used them to read missionary information from the CMS' publications, while others practised needlework in support of the Sierra Leone Mission. Thus, in the late 1870s Jane Caspari reported that her students produced clothes for African children in the interior:

*We have thus been enabled to send several parcels of made up garments to the various outgoing Mission Stations. These clothes act as an inducement of heathen children to go to school.*⁵⁶

Besides the scripture classes, the curriculum of the school (as laid down by the rules) comprised "Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Geography, Outlines of History, General Information by means of Object Lessons &c. Needle work, Grammar, [vocal] Music, [and] Drawing and French as an extra."⁵⁷ Apart from needlework, this was regular secondary school fare in England, comprising a mixture of academic subjects and accomplishments. The major difference was probably the academic standard, which was probably much higher than at many secondary girls' schools in Britain. Not only were teachers at the Female Institution better qualified than most secondary school teachers in Britain, but there was assistance from missionary colleagues in Freetown in cases of illness or if a teacher was unable to teach a particular subject. For example, in 1851 the Revd G. Nicol relieved Julia Sass from "the trouble" of instructing the students in "singing by notes", which she was unable to do.⁵⁸ In 1853, after Sass had returned to England on her first furlough visit, the Revd E Dicker and his wife took over the classes until a new teacher arrived from England.⁵⁹ Moreover, unlike secondary schools for girls in Britain before

53 CMS: CA 1/0 10c/1, Regulations of the Female Institution, Freetown [21 Nov. 1850].

54 CMS: CA 1/0 10c/86, J. E. Sass, Report of the Church Missionary Female Institution, Sept. 1858.

55 CMS: CA 1/0 10c/1, Regulations of the Female Institution, Freetown [21 Nov. 1850].

56 CMS: CA 1/0 67/3, J. Caspari to C. Fenn, The Annie Walsh Memorial School, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 14 March [1878].

57 CMS: CA 1/0 10c/1, Regulations of the Female Institution, Freetown [21 Nov. 1850].

58 CMS: CA 1/0 10c/1, Regulations of the Female Institution, Freetown [21 Nov. 1850]; CA 1/0 187/79, J. E. Sass, Report of the Female Institution, Freetown, April 1851.

59 Church Missionary Record 26, 3 (March 1855), p. 52.

1865, academic standards at the school were subject to external control in the form of an annual public examination of the girls. In England, examinations of female boarding schools were rare before 1865, being regarded as unsuitable as they encouraged “un-feminine” traits, such as competitiveness, which partly accounted for the low standard of most of these schools.⁶⁰ In Sierra Leone, however, the CMS imposed the same system of control on the Female Institution as it did on its Grammar School for boys. These examinations were great events for the school and for the CMS community in Freetown and put pressure on teachers and students to do well.

During the 1854 examination, students were given oral and written tests by three CMS missionaries and there was an audience comprising the mission’s staff in Freetown: “Revd. N. Denton, Revd. J. N. & Mrs Graf, Mr & Mrs Frey, Mr & Mrs Schlenker, Mr & Mrs Beale, Mr & Mrs Maxwell, &c.”⁶¹ In 1856, 24 students were examined in the presence of the Bishop, his wife, three missionary couples and the two teachers, Julia Sass and Mary Wilkinson:

*... the Revd Maxwell proceeded with the Examination of the 1st and 2nd Classes in geography, with the maps of Europe, Africa & Asia, and he afterwards examined some Classes in Arithmetic. The Revd Jones took the Pupils in Grammar and some in Geography, and the Bishop & Mr Pocock examined alternately in Scripture. The Pupils showed their Cipheryng, Exercise, and Copy Books, also their Needle-work [...] All our Friends expressed themselves pleased & satisfied with the progress of the Pupils, the Bishop said it was much more than he had expected.*⁶²

Students who did well were given prizes as incentives, such as ‘workboxes furnished with cotton etc, books and writing materials.’⁶³ These examinations made possible a direct comparison with the achievements of the boys at the Grammar School and thus provided a stimulus to academic and religious teaching (to the detriment of industrial and domestic training). In 1859, however, Sass wanted to abolish them, citing as one reason her doubts about “the expediency of such public affairs in a girls’ school in this country.”⁶⁴ It is not clear whether the CMS agreed with her, since another examination is documented in the following year but then the documentation ends.⁶⁵

As regards industrial training, the only craft taught at the Female Institution in the period was needlework. The regulations laid down that “plain [needle] work be considered of the first importance and that all be taught to cut out, make, and mend their own clothes, and Fancy work be regarded only as Recreation.”⁶⁶ According to the curriculum of late 1850 or early 1851, one and a half hours daily were to be spent doing plain work,

60 Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies* (note 50), pp. 24-6.

61 CMS: CA 1/0 224/4, M. E. Wilkinson, Report of the Female Institution for the half-year ending March 31 1855.

62 CMS: CA 1/0 10c/10, The Examination of the Pupils of the CMS Female Institution, Freetown, 26 Sept. 1856.

63 CMS: CA 1/0 136/10, H. E. König, Report of the Female Institution, Freetown, 5 Oct. 1861.

64 CMS: CA 1/0 10c/13, J. E. Sass, Report of the CMS Female Institution, Oct. 1859.

65 CMS: CA 1/0 136/10, H. E. König, Report of the Female Institution, Freetown, 5 October 1861.

66 CMS: CA 1/0 10c/1, Regulations of the Female Institution, Freetown [21 Nov. 1850].

darning, mending and marking.⁶⁷ The inclusion of needlework in the curriculum is not easy to interpret. Plain needlework was not an occupation for ladies and was not taught to middle- and upper-class girls in England. Indeed, Sabina Clemens, who managed the Liberated Girls' School at Charlotte, regarded it as a "very improper" occupation for a young lady.⁶⁸ Not until the 1870s did it become acceptable if done for charity, and thereafter many secondary schools in England allowed "practice in sewing while making garments for the poor."⁶⁹

However, it was this craft that missionaries regularly taught.⁷⁰ Part of its attraction was the importance of European-style dress as an outward sign of Christianity and European values. Moreover, it was an occupation that tarried well with the domestic ideal, as women could practise it while staying inside the home, rather than having to leave the domestic sphere. This was particularly important in Sierra Leone, where women were used to earning their own money rather than being financially dependent on their husbands. Many did so by trading and street-selling, which the missionaries found shocking. In Britain, the street-sellers or costermongers belonged the lowest of all classes. Furthermore, trading brought women to all kinds of sinful places – including the market place – which the Evangelicals abhorred for fear of contamination by association.⁷¹ Nevertheless, given that girls at the Female Institution were to become the West African elite, the importance accorded to plain needlework stands out from its otherwise middle-class educational programme.

At any rate, rules and reality were two different things. This seems to have been true particularly in the case of needlework under Julia Sass' regime, where it was accorded only minor importance as compared to religious and academic instruction. In fact, Julia Sass introduced it as a subject only because it gave her "time to rest from talking & explaining."⁷² In the 1860s, when there was a greater number of staff at the school, she left it to be taught by junior teachers or monitors. Moreover, needlework presented a problem because some of the teachers, being middle class ladies, had never learnt it themselves. For example, when Jane Caspari arrived at the school in 1865, she was praised by Julia Sass for her general qualifications ("a person of sound sense and education, as well as piety") but was said to be "even more deficient" in needlework than the other junior teacher at the school.⁷³

67 CMS: CA 1/0 11/21, Report No 3: List of classes and time employed in the same.

68 CMS: CA 1/0 72/5, S. P. Clemens to H. Venn, Charlotte, 16 Oct. 1858.

69 Hunt, *Divided Aims: the Educational Implications of Opposing Ideologies in Girls' Secondary Schooling, 1850–1940*, in: Hunt (ed.), *Lessons for Life* (note 30), pp. 3-21, p. 7.

70 Comaroff/ Comaroff, *Homemade Hegemony* (note 4), p. 281; L. Denzer, *Domestic Science Training in Colonial Yorubaland, Nigeria*, in: Tranberg Hansen (ed.), *African Encounters* (note 3), pp. 117-39, pp. 118-20; Gaitskell, *Housewives* (note 3), 245.

71 D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: a History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, London/ New York 1993, pp. 129-35.

72 CMS: CA 1/0 187/1, J. E. Sass to H. Venn, Mission House, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 21 Feb. 1849.

73 CMS: CA 1/0 10c/44, J. E. Sass to H. Venn, Kissy Road, Freetown, 19 Dec. 1865.

Domestic training was minimal and was of low priority to Sass and most of her colleagues. According to the school rules, students were required “to keep their clothes and other things in perfect order and each take her turn in household work such as sweeping and cleaning the Sitting rooms, School and Sleeping rooms &c.”⁷⁴ In the 1870s, newly arrived teachers sometimes criticised the lack of domestic education. Thus, in 1872 Helen Thomas complained that few students “could perform the *least* household matters properly, I acknowledge how difficult it is to combine Industrial employments with lessons, without entirely destroying every incentive to study.”⁷⁵ Similarly, L. A. M. Williams, who briefly joined the staff in 1875, argued: “The elder girls also require to be instructed in housekeeping, by assisting in the house, for a week each, they should also be taught to lay the dinner table properly, and to learn the higher branches of cookery. Not in the cook room, but of us, and with us.” However, her proposals for a greater emphasis on household matters were disregarded by her colleagues and, she complained, often met with “only a rude answer.”⁷⁶

These complaints may have been a normal part of mission life, where individuals have different ideas about how things should be done and what the priorities should be. But they can also be interpreted a sign of a more general shift in attitudes and ideas concerning the education of African girls and their future roles. In April 1875 the Ladies’ Visiting Committee decided to put more emphasis on industrial and domestic training, expressing the hope that henceforward “the Rules referring to the Girls being employed in Industrial Work might be more fully carried out.” One of the teachers was to be appointed to the post of “house mother”, whose duty it was “to train the girls in all matters relating to domestic work, and also to overlook their general conduct out of School hours.”⁷⁷

For Julia Sass and her like-minded colleagues, domesticity was not primarily about domestic chores and industrial skills. Rather, a Christian housewife was first of all defined by a moral and spiritual superiority that qualified her for her role as a partner and support of her husband and an instructress of children. In order to achieve this, Sass’ students were given religious instruction and what she regarded as a minimum of academic education that would enable them ‘to read & write with comfort & pleasure to themselves & others, by this I mean of course not the mere act of reading & writing but understanding themselves & making others understand, & to this end they must of course have knowledge of other things Geography, History &c.’⁷⁸ There was an implicit understanding that those who had attended the Female Institution would supervise households rather than doing domestic work themselves; the availability of servants was taken for granted.

74 CMS: CA 1/0 10c/1, Regulations of the Female Institution, Freetown [21 Nov. 1850].

75 CMS: CA 1/0 210/3, H. E. Thomas to Mr Hutchinson, Female Institution, Freetown, 14 May 1872.

76 CMS: CA 1/0 23/72 L. A. M. Williams to the Secretaries of the CMS, C.M.S. Institution, Sierra Leone, 10 June 1875.

77 CMS: CA 1/0 10c/20: Minutes of a Meeting of the Visiting Committee of the Female Institution held at the Institution Monday April 5th 1875.

78 CA 1/0 187/44, J. E. Sass to H. Venn, Kissy Road, Freetown, 19 Dec. 1865.

Parents' Expectations and Influence

The Female Institution was in great demand in the Sierra Leone colony and elsewhere in West Africa, as is indicated by its rapid growth. What did the parents whose children attended the school expect from it, and what influence did these expectations have on the school's development?

The 1840s were a period of social transformation in Sierra Leone with the rise of a prosperous and mission-educated elite, comprising mainly recaptives. The Female Institution filled a need created by these changing circumstances by offering the kind of education that would make possible a good marriage match. This was indicated by Sass shortly after the opening of the school in early 1849:

*The people are every anxious for Instruction of a superior kind for their Girls; those who do not value it for higher reasons, desire it, because they say that without it their daughters must remain unmarried. This was told me by the Mother of one of my Girls, she added, that things are not how they used to be, the young Men here are well instructed themselves and will not take ignorant Girls for their wives, therefore, she said, it had become absolutely necessary for girls to read, write, cast up accounts, work and "know well to mind the house." At the same time she gave me no very encouraging idea of her daughter's abilities for she said "She no can learn, head too hard. If she no learn she no get husband."*⁷⁹

However, even if the members of the Freetown elite defined themselves as 'English', they were not completely cut off from their African cultures. The memory of their home societies was still alive and they lived in an African environment and mixed with neighbouring groups. In 1876, the superintendent reported a conversation with a mother who delivered her child to the school:

*You would sometimes be amused to hear what requests the parents make when they bring their children; only last night a mother after having settled all the arrangements concerning her daughter said "and now, Missis, I beg you to squash her for me, I give you full liberty, the girl is very saucy at home, so squash her well," in good English, be very strict with her.*⁸⁰

This mother expected the school to act as a transforming influence. The teachers were permitted to turn her into an obedient daughter and responsible member of society. The same transformation might be performed by secret societies such as Poro for boys and Sande/Bundu for girls among the neighbouring Mende people. In their initiation schools, adolescents were taken into the bush, sometimes for two or three years, to be given the education (practical, religious, historical, sexual) that would enable them to hold a position in society. Only those who passed this training achieved the status of full,

79 CA 1/0 187/1, J. E. Sass to H. Venn, Mission House, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 21 Feb. 1849.

80 CA 1/0 67/5, J. Caspari to Mr Wright, C. M. Institution, Freetown, 30 Dec. 1876.

respected members of society.⁸¹ It is possible to see parallels between such societies and the role played by the Female Institution for the recaptive girls, as was explicitly acknowledged by A. B. C. Sibthorpe in his *The History of Sierra Leone*:

But I say unto Sierra Leone youths, any elementary scholar whose parents can afford it, who does not pass through the Grammar School before active service, will all life be a “blunt axe.” With natural ability or without, Grammar School is a new world of wisdom inside Freetown; the atmosphere of common-sense pervades the premises; even a dunce, when he enters here, if he cannot learn by books, he will by looks and hearings. Let no Sierra Leone youth enter into active life without being baptized into the Grammar School education. It is Sierra Leone boys’ Porroh Bush! [...] Should I repeat the same admonition to every Sierra Leone maiden whose parents who can afford to pass through [the Female] Institution, “Sierra Leone Girls’ Bonda Bush,” before launching into the wide world as I have done to every Sierra Leone youth concerning the Grammar School, I will be thought too superfluous...⁸²

The records indicate that the parents had clear ideas about what they wanted and could put considerable pressure on the Female Institution, as they paid school fees and the school was supposed to be self-supporting. Furthermore, from the late 1860s the Institution had to compete with rival schools, particularly that of the Roman Catholics, which further increased the parents’ power vis-à-vis the superintendents. Therefore, rather than being predetermined by the CMS, the school’s development was the outcome of struggles between the superintendents and the African parents, particularly in the early stages of its existence. The parents too wanted their daughters to be trained for domesticity, but their ideas of domesticity sometimes differed from that of the CMS teachers.

An example where this becomes apparent is the refusal of the parents to let their daughters be used as teaching assistants. Julia Sass soon disabused the CMS of this notion:

Perhaps the Parent Committee imagine that the Children now in the School will supply the deficiency [in teaching assistants], but this can never be thought of. Those I have are, as you know, the daughters of Native Merchants, Clerks &c, who intend them to be taught here while quite young and will afterwards send them to England for a year or so. They can well afford it, and are far too proud & independent to allow them to teach even in my Sunday-School, much less would they permit the Mission to benefit by the education given them. I assure you, dear Sir, they think the mere fact of their paying for the Children’s schooling is quite sufficient.⁸³

It was this refusal that forced the CMS to develop an alternative strategy for procuring teaching assistants. It introduced a foundation scheme, which sponsored the teacher

81 C. Bledsoe, *The Political Use of Sande Ideology and Symbolism*, in: *American Ethnology* 11 (1984), pp. 455-72; T. O. Höllmann, *Porro und Sande: Geheimgesellschaften im westlichen Afrika*, in: *Münchener Beiträge zur Völkerkunde* 1 (1988), pp. 115-30; J. V. O. Richards, *The Sande and Some of the Forces that Inspired its Creation or Adoption with References to the Porro*, in: *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 8, 1-2 (1973), pp. 69-77.

82 Sibthorpe, *The History* (note 8), pp. 174, 178 (author’s emphasis).

83 CMS: CA 1/0 187/3, J. E. Sass to H. Venn, Female Institution, Freetown, 22 May 1850.

training of gifted girls from less affluent backgrounds. The first ten foundation scholars were admitted in November 1850, and from then on there were always a number of foundation scholars.⁸⁴

By making it clear that teaching was beneath their daughters, the parents put themselves above the missionary teachers, which must have rankled. However, this attitude complied with one ideology of domesticity, according to which respectable women did not work – a lifestyle which the missionary teachers themselves were unable to afford. Furthermore, as Sass noted, parents who could afford it used the school as a preparation for sending their daughters to England in order to turn them into ‘ladies’.⁸⁵ This, too, the teachers resented but could not alter:

*[The parents] seem to think that if they send [their daughters], when sixteen years old, to England that even if they know nothing before, they will in a year or so learn all necessary to make them Ladies.*⁸⁶

These Africans looked to England for the standard and not to the Female Institution. Their domestic ideal was that of the lady of leisure and accomplishments, rather than that of the missionaries with their Evangelical emphasis on usefulness, hard work and self-improvement. This is also implied by particular subjects which in 1857 the parents requested to be taught at the Female Institution: music, drawing and French.⁸⁷ They were all ‘accomplishments’ and an integral part of secondary school curricula for girls in Britain. They were re-introduced, subject to an extra charge.

The Roman Catholic mission’s boarding school, which rivalled the Female Institution after 1866, offered a wide curriculum with a strong emphasis on academic subjects and ‘accomplishments’: “English language, Grammar, Engl[ish] Composition, Ancient and modern history, Scripture lesson, lesson on Christian politeness, reading, writing, sewing, knitting, artificial flowers, Arithmetic, geography, drawing including maps, landscapes, linear and aquarel [sic] or painting in water colours, Music, French language.”⁸⁸ These subjects could be taken (and paid for) as single subjects, something which until then the Female Institution had refused to offer. African parents used the competition between the schools to their advantage and shopped around for the best offer. This pragmatic attitude was noted by the Female Institution’s teachers, who observed that “one or another [of the students] will be absent from School & go ‘to try the Romans’ as

84 CMS: CA 1/0 10c/1, Minutes of a Visiting Committee held for the first time at the Female Institution, Freetown, 21 Nov. 1850. In 1873, the number of students on the CMS foundation was reduced, but by then there was another scholarship for gifted girls, the Anna Braithwaite scholarship (CA 1/0 63/14, C. Caiger, Report of the Female Institution, Freetown, April 1873).

85 For an example, see CMS: CA 1/0 224/4, M. E. Wilkinson, Report of the Female Institution for the half-year ending March 31 1855: “Eleanor Johnson of Freetown who was formerly in the Institution as day-scholar re-entered as Parlour boarder for 3 months only preparatory to her going to England.”

86 CMS: CA 1/0 187/7, J. E. Sass to H. Venn, Kissy Road, Freetown, 7 June 1852.

87 CMS: CA 1/0 187/15, J. E. Sass to Rev. Venn, Female Institution, Kissy Road, Freetown, 19 Jan. 1857.

88 TNA: CO 267/297, J. Stuart Laurie, Report on the Elementary Schools of Sierra Leone, Inner Temple, 6 June 1868.

their phrase is.”⁸⁹ In 1870 the Ladies’ Visiting Committee’s bowed to this pressure and decided to offer single subjects.⁹⁰

The Female Institution in 1879 / 80: The Dawn of a New Era?

In early 1879, the Female Institution was given into the charge of a missionary couple, David W. and Martha Burton. Martha became the superintendent, while David worked for the CMS as their industrial agent in West Africa. This meant assessing the state of the society’s buildings and other properties in Sierra Leone and Yorubaland, repairing or rebuilding them or advising on their sale. He was an American who had formerly worked with the American Mission in Sherbro. She was the sister of one of the Female Institution’s former teachers, Maria Roberts Brierley (*née* Bywater).⁹¹

Within a few months of their arrival at the school, the Burtons proposed major reconstruction works in the school. While this may not be so surprising given David Burton’s profession, it is remarkable as the school building was still quite new, having been finished in 1865 after five years of construction work. Julia Sass had helped to design the building.⁹² The Burtons explained the need for renewed construction work with partly low-quality craftsmanship and wear and tear suffered by the building in the fourteen years of its existence. However, the main reason was that they found the school building impractical for the purpose of giving girls “that moral – social – & domestic culture which is so necessary to fit them to become good wives and mothers.”⁹³ The proposed alterations show that the Burtons’ notion of what being “good wives and mothers” meant for their African students differed significantly from those held by Sass and her colleagues. It was a domesticity of a different kind.

The first alteration made by the Burtons concerned the dining hall and the kitchen. Formerly, “second-rate” boarders had taken their meals in the downstairs dining hall, while the teachers and parlour boarders had eaten upstairs. According to David Burton, the girls in the dining hall had been “left to themselves and we found great irregularities.”⁹⁴ He enlarged this hall by removing the wall to the adjacent “Breakfast Room and Infirmary”, creating one large space where from then on all students took their meals jointly with the superintendents. According to the Burtons, this led to “a marked improvement in the girls’ appearance at table.” Furthermore, in one corner of the new dining hall they enclosed a space and fitted it out as a kitchen, including a “good cooking stove”. Under Sass’ management, the kitchen where the boarders’ food was prepared had been located

89 CA 1/0 187/65, J. E. Sass to H. Venn, Female Institution, Freetown, 12 June 1868.

90 C A 1/0 10c/15, Minutes of Committee held at the CMS Female Institution, Freetown, 9 April 1870.

91 CMS Register, p. 267: List II, no. 52.

92 CMS: CA 1/0 187/47, J. E. Sass to Mr Venn, Freetown, 18 March 1866.

93 CMS: CA 1/0 61/5, D. W. Burton, A. W. M. School, Sierra Leone, 25 June 1879.

94 CMS: CA 1/0 61/5, D. W. Burton, A. W. M. School, Sierra Leone, 25 June 1879. All quotes in this paragraph come from this letter, unless otherwise marked.

in a separate building in the backyard and staffed by one or two male African cooks. The Burtons sharply criticised this arrangement, describing this kitchen as “entirely unfit for any European lady to enter to give directions in the cooking.” Under the new arrangement, the older girls were to be brought into the kitchen and taught “in that most necessary part of domestic economy”, that is “cooking and other household arrangements.”⁹⁵ These changes had several implications. By eating in the dining hall with all students, the Burtons abolished the distinction between boarders and parlour-boarders. The joint meals and the abolition of the African cooks also meant that the boarders did not have “rice and sauce” for dinner any more but would now eat European dishes. Finally, cooking became a part of the girls’ training.

The second change which the Burtons proposed concerned the students’ dormitory, dressing room and lavatory. The dormitory was situated in the main building and consisted of one large room, measuring 18 x 65 feet, where all the boarders slept. The lavatory was in a separate building at the far end of the backyard. It was equipped with “a table or frame work with 32 wash basins.”⁹⁶ In this building there also was a room which the students used as their dressing room and to store their trunks and boxes. David Burton counted 42 trunks, “which fill the room with only paths to pass comfortably between them.” Thus it was “not possible with these arrangements to give the girls such training as they require to fit them to take charge of Christian homes.” He proposed the construction of an additional dormitory in a new building. Moreover, rather than having all the girls sleep together in one or two large rooms, he wanted to create small bedrooms by partitioning the dormitories into small sections, each for two girls. The Burtons saw two advantages in such an arrangement: the girls’ clothes could be stored in their bedrooms, which would make it easier “to teach them neatness in their bed room.”⁹⁷ Furthermore, the privacy and quietness of small rooms would offer better opportunities for prayer.⁹⁸ Another suggestion by the Burtons concerned the construction of a laundry on the school’s premises. Under Julia Sass, the school did not have its own laundry: the linen had been sent out to different houses to be washed. The Burtons justified the need for a school laundry, writing that it would rid the school of the bedbugs which were thought to be brought in from the houses where the linen was washed. Also, a laundry would save the school the cost of the washing, estimated at fifty pounds annually, and might even be a source of revenue. Most importantly, it would afford the opportunity to “give the girls instruction in a most necessary branch of household economy.”⁹⁹ This implies that the Burtons not only intended to teach the washing of clothes, but also that the girls were to do it commercially. This would have been unthinkable for Julia Sass, who had regarded

95 Ibid.; CMS: CA 1/0 61/11, M. Burton to C. Fenn, A. W. M. School, Sierra Leone, 6 Dec. 1879.

96 CMS: CA 1/0 61/5, D. W. Burton, A. W. M. School, Sierra Leone, 25 June 1879. All quotes in this paragraph come from this letter, unless otherwise marked.

97 CMS: CA 1/0 61/6, M. Burton, A. W. M. School, Sierra Leone, 5 July 1879.

98 CMS: CA 1/0 61/13, D. W. Burton to H. Wright, Sierra Leone, 9 June 1880; CA 1/0 61/6, M. Burton, A. W. M. School, Sierra Leone, 5 July 1879.

99 CMS: CA 1/0 61/13, D. W. Burton to H. Wright, Sierra Leone, 9 June 1880.

her school as “a select establishment”, and even more so for the parents who in 1850 had thought it beneath their daughters’ dignity to be used as teaching assistants.

It is not clear whether the proposal was ever realized. Nevertheless, the differences between the Burtons’ ideas and those of their predecessors are illuminating. Personal priorities may of course have played a role: the changes to the dining hall and the abolition of the distinction between parlour boarders and ‘second-rate’ boarders indicate a democratisation, which may in part be ascribed to David Burton’s American background. But the shift of emphasis towards domestic and industrial work can also be regarded as a reflection of contemporary developments in female education in Britain, where laundry and cooking acquired a new importance and became integral parts of the curricula in the new industrial schools for girls. These schools provided elementary education for working class girls who were expected to enter domestic service.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, due to its symbolism as a cleansing ritual, laundry work had come to be seen as a suitable occupation for socially displaced or ‘fallen’ women in late nineteenth-century Britain.¹⁰¹ Thus the Burtons’ attempt to introduce cooking and laundry can also be interpreted as a reflection of changing ideas about the roles that Africans were to play in the colony. Rather than educating “a middle-class to stand beside, not below, their European contemporaries”,¹⁰² as the CMS had aspired to do in the earlier period, missionaries in the late nineteenth century were beginning to envisage a more servile role for their female African students.

100 The Education Act of 1890 made a special provision for the introduction of laundry work in girls’ elementary education (F. L. Calder/ E. E. Mann, *A Teachers’ Manual of Elementary Laundry Work*, London 1891, p. vii).

101 L. Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Class and Gender*, Cambridge 1995, pp. 25-6; A. J. S. Maddison, the Secretary of the Female Aid Society recommended laundry work as the occupation “best fitted to meet the needs of a physical and industrial training” for the inmates of Homes for Fallen Women (*Hints on Rescue Work: A Handbook for Missionaries, Superintendents of Homes, Committees, Clergy, and Others*, London 1898, p. 119).

102 Fyfe, *A History* (note 9), 252.