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# Missionary wives, women and education: the development of literacy among the Batswana 1840-1937

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## Introduction

Western education was introduced to the African continent by missionaries most of whom hailed from Europe. These European missionaries left their places of abode for religious reasons, believing that it was God's will that the "heathens" had to be converted to the Christian religion. Elsewhere, and in Africa specifically, the missionaries were usually in the forefront of other parties interested in the continent, traders, adventurers, and concession seekers.<sup>1</sup>

The missionaries soon realised, however that conversion to the Christian religion faced many hurdles. There were language barriers, different cultural beliefs<sup>2</sup> and the sheer stark reality that the intended converts were illiterate and therefore could not read and interpret the Bible. For the missionaries to achieve their goal of Christianising their hosts, they had first to teach them rudiments of literacy, reading and writing. These skills were meant, hopefully, to enhance the reading and understanding the message of the Bible. Western education in most areas in which missionaries operated was introduced in this manner. A manner that was rightly, intended to facilitate conversion to the Christian religion than the "rounded" type of education as we know it today. The education offered by the missionaries tended to be scriptural in nature because the intended converts were supposed to read and understand the great book of God—the Bible. It is no surprise therefore, that the introduction of western education was, at the initial stages, rudimentary stressing religious studies more than anything else. The three R's, reading writing and 'rithmetic though still rudimentarily taught were an addendum to the main target, scripture. Once the potential converts could read and understand the Bible, then half the battle was won as the converted would facilitate the conversion of others.

The missionaries realised that for conversion and education to take place, they had to do so within the rubric of potentially moderate societies—ones that were not likely to be confrontational towards their endeavour. They therefore targeted the leaders of the various African groups, and in the case of Botswana, the leaders of the various *merafe*. Once the leaders of the African groups were convinced and converted to the new teaching, then it was hoped that their influence would help disseminate the new faith to their folk.<sup>3</sup> Western education was introduced in the manner such as described above among the Batswana.

The missionaries who came to introduce education and indeed Christianity, were members of the London Missionary Society (LMS), a protestant society formed in 1795.<sup>4</sup> Its mission, was, among other things, and as Goodall says, "to carry the glorious Gospel of the blessed God to the heathen."<sup>5</sup> Coming to Southern Africa in 1817, and represented by the famous missionary Dr Robert Moffat, the LMS established a base at Kuruman (Kudumane) in South Africa. It was from this base that the rudiments of western education and Christian beliefs were sown among the Batswana. The Bible was translated into Setswana and several newsletters *Mokaedi wa Becwana*, *Mahoko a*

*Becwana* were printed by the Moffat Press at this base.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Livingstone, the famous Southern and Central African missionary and explorer, made visitations into the interior of the sub-region from the base at Kuruman. When Livingstone met and befriended the Bakwena King Sechele, and introduced scripture and rudimentary education he was coming from the LMS base at Kuruman, a base which later became an important LMS anchor for its penetration into the interior for evangelical purposes.

The success of the missionary venture in Africa and other activities associated with it has always been accredited to men. Men then, as is the case now, albeit gradually changing, dominated the various functional positions of the society. Women efforts were hardly noticed and were hardly taken seriously by societies that were predominantly chauvinistic. It is the aim of this paper to articulate and assess the contributions of women in the development of education among the Batswana from the time of missionary arrivals to the first quarter or so of the twentieth century. The adage "behind a successful man is a woman" could not have been more apt for these women educationists. This paper examines a selected number of women (some of whom were wives of the early missionaries) involved one way or the other, in the furtherance of education among the Batswana and their impact on the educational development in the country.

It should also be mentioned from the onset that at the time of writing this paper, information relating to the various educational backgrounds of women discussed herein was not available. Such information pertains to say, their educational qualifications, the levels of their schooling, the subjects they specialised in, whether they were qualified teachers, the types of schools they went to, the environment in which they grew up and so on. This would have enhanced our understanding of their successes and failures in their educational endeavours. Perhaps future researchers pursuing this topic would like to highlight some of these in order to bring out a more holistic picture of the efforts of these women. It should also be mentioned that while the focus of this paper is on the educational efforts of women it does not preclude their conversion efforts in the true sense of the male missionaries. In their every day dealings with people around them, they inadvertently converted some, whether through religious education or other means, after all they would have wanted to enhance the "noble" cause pursued by the men and in cases by their husbands.

### **Mary Livingstone<sup>7</sup>**

Mary Livingstone came with her husband from Kuruman during their visitations to the interior. When in 1847, Dr. Livingstone was busy converting the King Sechele to the Christian religion and teaching him to read the Bible, Mary Livingstone together with some assistant teachers that had been trained in Kuruman helped set up a Christian school at Kolobeng.<sup>8</sup> The curriculum of the school necessarily pointed to the scriptural studies especially the New Testament, which had already been translated into Setswana. As an addendum to the Christian school was the infant school run by Mary Livingstone, where she introduced the basic rudiments of Western education, teaching children how to read and write. For hours on end Mary patiently taught the Bakwena children not only reading and understanding the Bible, but also how to write their own names, how to count and some bit of 'rithmetic. It is said that by 1848, Mary Livingstone's infant school had an enrolment of sixty eight students.<sup>9</sup> Despite the set backs of initiatives to start schools at the time—drought, herding at the cattle posts, various chores at home and at *masimo* (Lands) to which often and without notice, the pupils seemingly "abandoned" the school, Mary Livingstone seems to have laid a foundation for future development of education.

Because Mary's husband was intent on contacting and evangelising as many groups as possible, the Livingstones left the Bakwena mission and its school superintended by a

Motswana evangelist, Paul Mebalwe<sup>10</sup> in 1851 to move further north to spread the gospel among the northern groups. In the subsequent year the mission station was destroyed by the Transvaal Boers who were poised to procure cheap labour, take fertile lands from the Bakwena, as well as nipping in the bud the chances of the "kaffirs" being influenced and possibly armed by the "beastly" English missionaries.<sup>11</sup> Although the mission station was destroyed, the modest efforts of Mary Livingstone of instilling rudiments of education were not destroyed and in the subsequent years the German based Hermannsburg Missionary Society and later the LMS, revived the mission and its school and therein lay the introduction of western education and its future development. The unsung hero of this noble development had been Mary Livingstone. Although her efforts in this venture were eclipsed—nay—have not been publicised, we now know that she was instrumental in introducing literacy among the Bakwena, and that from then on literacy spread, and indeed was well sought after throughout the Batswana country, a development that continues to date.

### **Elizabeth Lees Price**

Elizabeth Lees Price was, like Mary Livingstone, the daughter of the famous LMS missionary Dr. Robert Moffat. She got married to the Reverend Roger Price, another of the batch of LMS missionaries which came after Dr. Livingstone. Roger and Elizabeth Price were first stationed among the Bangwato (1862) where, like her sister Mary, she was instrumental in fostering literacy. In fact even before she got married, and as part of growing up in a missionary environment, her parents expected her to do something along missionary lines of uplifting the welfare of the "natives". She was therefore expected to teach (in Kuruman) African girls of all ages to sew, and help them with Bible classes. Later she started her own school for children<sup>12</sup> Arriving among the Bangwato in 1862, "Lees" played an important role in introducing literacy. Her husband, Roger, was later, in a letter to the Directors of the LMS in England, to acknowledge the role played by his wife in consolidating the spread of literacy among the Bangwato.

The congregations on Sabbath days generally are pretty good, but there are not converts and I am persevering from morning to evening with my hands full, and I am assisted by my wife at the school.<sup>13</sup>

Mrs. Price specifically played a leading role in educating the Bangwato royals, with the hope that they would then influence their kind to want to achieve the same. Khama (later Khama III) and his younger brother Khamane, were Mrs Price's pupils and had the privilege of being taught within the missionary house. Elizabeth Price wrote extensively on the two Bangwato heirs.

Khamane... his perseverance is wonderful and to see him copy exercises or sums repeating them aloud with renewed emphasis, and with all kinds of gestures what he cannot understand... He is surpassed by two other scholars, but he is decidedly talented and shrewd, curious and quick in observing and knowing different characters... Khame is again very different. He lacks application by both being quick and relating to others in school... but has a good deal of decision of character combined with an easy gentle disposition which causes him to be universally loved.<sup>14</sup>

Elizabeth Price, unlike other women restricted to teaching women only according to the attitudes of the time, was "fortunate" to have had an opportunity to teach mixed classes. So popular were her classes that she was to write in her memoirs in 1863 that her classes were always full to the extent that "some students write on broken boxes and planks and others generally sit on the floor. Khama always does."<sup>15</sup> As could be expected

the curriculum was *ipso facto* biblical with rudiments of writing and arithmetic. But perhaps in order to attract more women to attend school, Mrs Price introduced sewing classes and homiletics where women learnt baking.<sup>16</sup> Deficiency of the curriculum aside, Mrs Price played an important role in introducing literacy to the extent that by 1865, the Prices and another missionary Mackenzie, were conducting three schools, for 30,000 people who lived in Shoshong, with eight Africans as assistants, six of whom were Segkoma's sons.<sup>17</sup>

Mrs Price left Shoshong in 1866, to continue the struggle of educational work among the Bakwena. The Seminary Institution started in Shoshong and indeed the Moffat Institution in Kuruman were the result one way or the other of the educational ground work of Mrs Price's efforts which later culminated in the building of Tiger Kloof Institution at which most leaders of Botswana were educated.

Even in Molepolole, Mrs Price continued with the efforts she had started in Shoshong reviving the school that had been started by her sister Mary, fifteen years earlier. She was to be helped by a Miss Christian Wallace, another woman missionary sent by the LMS to help "Mma" Price in fostering educational advancement among the Bakwena. By 1867 Price and his wife were teaching 150 scholars at Molepolole<sup>18</sup> "They are so anxious to learn, "Mma" Price wrote in her journal. "Mma Price" and Miss Wallace could not handle large classes and were somewhat relieved during rainy seasons "as pupils were at the gardens during the rainy seasons and at the cattle posts."<sup>19</sup> For nearly twenty years among the Bakwena, "Mma" Price helped her husband with the popularisation of education. Besides conversion which was done mostly by her husband, she taught arithmetic and a little bit of English in addition to sewing and baking classes. By the time she left Molepolole for Kudumane she had many graduates who could read and write, some could add very well and others could speak English very well as well as being able to sew their own apparels. Mrs Price's contribution to education cannot be underestimated. Both among the Bangwato and the Bakwena she helped lay a foundation upon which others would continue to improve—an exercise that continues to this day.

### **Alice Young**

The Bangwato had moved from Shoshong to what is now old Phalatswe by 1890 and they were beginning to exert some pressures on the missionaries to teach their children something beyond religious education. The Bangwato hoped that formal education would better prepare their children for the ever changing world around them. In response to this plea, the LMS for the first time pledged its commitment to formal schools with qualified teachers. It was under these circumstances that the LMS sent, among others that would come after her, Miss Alice Young, a qualified teacher to teach among the Bangwato. Kgosi Khama himself had written to the Directors in London on the issue of qualified teachers:

We write to our fathers, we are your children.... we ask for two teachers so that one can be the teacher of the school, and the other the teacher of the church for this is a very large town.<sup>20</sup>

Alice Young and another teacher, Ellen Hargreaves, finally arrived in 1894. Young found that the Bangwato parents were so keen on having their children taught and specifically expressed a concern that they be taught the English Language. Probably this desire stemmed from the popular belief that the acquisition of the English language would not only facilitate easy communication but would also go a long way in helping attain the skills and "superior" knowledge of the Europeans.

By the end of 1894 a formal primary school had been built with Alice Young as its Principal. For the first time the Bangwato parents were expected to pay school fees—five shillings a year—and those who wished to learn English paid two pounds sterling a

year.<sup>21</sup> Contrary to expectations that the school would suffer from inadequate enrolment because most parents were not gainfully employed, Miss Young reported an enrolment of 150 with 38 of them paying school fees of two pounds sterling per year.<sup>22</sup> Young's school had five large rooms consisting of a central hall and four classrooms designed to accommodate up to three hundred children.<sup>23</sup>

The subjects taught included reading, writing, arithmetic, needle work (now fashion and design), geography, drawing (now technical drawing), domestic economy (now home economics), kindergarten, singing and musical drill. Young found that her students were adept, quick to learn although they tended to have problems with arithmetic. It is not clear why this was so and it may be mentioned here that students in Botswana today tend not to find Mathematics particularly an easy subject, which explains why there are few mathematics teachers in our secondary schools. Perhaps research ought to be conducted to ascertain why this is or not so. Young was particularly pleased with her sewing class, and she gleefully reported that "they have made many dresses and fifty girls have learnt to knit and have made good baby shoes"<sup>24</sup>

By 1897, the Phalatswe school functioned full swing with a normal school rota, all under the able guidance of Young. She was to report to her superiors in England that:

My work in school is all done in English so that my time with Setswana is very limited. I have 320 children and of these eighty older scholars take their lessons in English. They have previously been taught by a native [sic] teacher from Lovedale and they are very anxious to go on with it. These children can manage well with the Setswana class... But I must take the English class as I have no one capable of teaching it.<sup>25</sup>

English appears to have been a very important subject, after all the saying was—as it is now—though not necessarily valid—"you are not educated until you can speak the Queen's language". Young's commitment and dedication to teaching continued uninterrupted until 1898. In that year she married a trader, resident in Palapye. Her teaching duties thus became somewhat lessened but her efforts had been phenomenal in introducing formal education among the Bangwato. Like "Mma" Livingstone and "Mma" Price she had laid a solid foundation upon which the future development of education could be built. Subsequent teachers and policy makers found the ground levelled and used her base for further educational improvements.

### **Ellen Hargreaves.**

Ellen Hargreaves arrived at the same time and the same work place as "Mma" Young in 1894. Presumably she was meant to be the teacher of the church while Young would be the teacher of the school as Khama had earlier requested. However because the enrolment was high, Hargreaves had to help Young with some of the teaching. Hargreaves efforts in this endeavour appeared to have been less fruitful than those of her counterpart because she complained that the daily life of the Bangwato rotated between work at home and at the lands, thus making it hard to start regular classes.<sup>26</sup>

Hargreaves frustrations were revealed through her frequent absence from duty. She became somewhat bored in Phalatswe and sought a more rewarding life in the urban vortex areas, especially Bulawayo. The resident missionary, W.C. Willoughby had at times to step in for Hargreaves classes during one of her frequent absences. "Today I am confronted for the first time with the necessity of starting an English class for women. Miss Hargreaves could help me if she were here."<sup>27</sup>

Hargreaves herself indicated that classes for women were occasionally interrupted when women left for the fields during ploughing and harvest time prompting her to write that: "I started an English school class for women two months ago and until they went away to the gardens a few came regularly..."<sup>28</sup>

In her defence Hargreaves noted three impeding reasons which hindered her progress. First came "the unsettled condition of the tribe during the last two years". This presumably refers to the virulent political struggle between Khama and the British South Africa Company. The latter was intent on annexing Khama's country and indeed the rest of the Batswana lands to the then Southern Rhodesia, a move that prompted the three kings of Botswana to visit England in protest against the BSA Co's nefarious intentions. Second in 1896 the Bangwato country and indeed the northern region of the Batswana country, was plagued by rinderpest. The people were not at the gardens, cattle posts nor schools because they were preoccupied with seeking alternative ways of survival. Thirdly, Hargreaves found no "prospect of work opening amongst the married women of the tribe to any extent for some time"<sup>29</sup> Women educational careers were virtually non-existent, so that skills acquired which did not relate to women's immediate needs and expectations were not altogether fruitful.

In venting out her frustrations, Hargreaves concluded:

I have found them [Bangwato women] in consequence of the hard conditions of their lives and as a result of their exceedingly low intellectual level utterly without regard to any department of work new to them. I tried to encourage them to have their dresses made for them, but they don't care how to make them. The same applies to learning how to read. I am going to resign.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the negative and sometimes arrogant and insulting attitude, Hargreaves did not disregard the value of women's education. Indeed she mentioned a few promising women.

In one village a woman is teaching a few other women and I am very much hoping that this form of work will be eschewed. Three days a week I go to the various parts of town and try to help the women to act out and knit their own dresses. This helps me become better acquainted with women.<sup>31</sup>

Hargreaves' endeavours were significant, albeit short lived. In 1898 she resigned and went to live in Bulawayo. She had extended literacy among the Bangwato women. However, her efforts in this venture were stifled by the nature of the society which did not give immediate credence to the education of women, an attitude that tended to play a negative psychological effect on the women themselves for at the time they tended not to be overly enthusiastic about advancement of their education.

### **Ella Sharp**

Another woman sent by the LMS, Ella Sharp arrived in Phalatswe in 1899. Mrs Johnson, née Young, had been married, Hargreaves had resigned and Sharp had been sent to replace them. One of the things that impressed Sharp was the in service teacher training scheme started by Young. Young had particularly noticed two female teachers whose skills in her eyes deserved mention. These were Koolebale and Semane. Reporting on her first impressions to her supervisors in London she was to note that:

I have one teacher by Mrs Johnson and she is really good, she has all the elements which go to make a good teacher. Many of the teachers trained by Mrs Johnson went out with Sekgoma [during internal disputes]. Another girl, Semane who was good was married to the chief.<sup>32</sup>

Sharp strove to follow "Mma" Johnson's footsteps, and, besides the normal teaching, she also had a class of training teachers. By 1900 thirty nine students had registered to be trained as teachers while a hundred and twenty were ready for normal teaching.<sup>33</sup>

Another feature of educational development which struck Sharp could be seen in the manner in which Batswana responded to learning. A number of spelling books were sold and the aura in Phalatswe showed, in the words of Ella Sharp "an intensive desire to know how to read." The books were purchased by the elderly and the boys because their duties called for absence from school. Most boys spent time herding cattle, and the elderly busied themselves with normal village duties rather than attend school. Girls attending Phalatswe Central School usually surpassed the boys in their number though they themselves continued to be disturbed by other homely chores. Of the one hundred and thirty five that were on register, eighty were girls.<sup>34</sup>

Despite Sharps endeavour to train teachers at the Phalatswe Central School, wealthy Bangwato citizens continued to send some of their children to South Africa for further education. Sharp consistently ran short of assistant teachers because the able students left to be trained elsewhere. "Mma" Sharp was to write to her superiors in London lamenting the fact that she did not have assistant teachers because the best usually went to Lovedale, South Africa, for further training<sup>35</sup>

In 1902 the Bangwato moved from Phalatswe to Serowe because of shortage of water in the area. "Mma" Sharp moved with the Bangwato to the new place and the Central School was built adjacent to the hill near *Kgosing* (chief's place). Although another school, the *Kgotla* School, and later Khama Memorial, was to be built through local effort the Central School headed by "Mma" Sharp continued to function and many Bangwato were educated in that school. To date the school still stands, and its name is synonymous with that of "Mma" Sharp. "*Batsadi ba rona ba tsene ko sekolong sa ga Mma Shapa*", Bangwato interviewed about this school proudly asserted.<sup>36</sup> (Our parents attended Miss Sharp's school.) It was a school remembered for offering academic and the much vaunted "industrial education" for such subjects as lace making and crocheting for girls and wood working or carpentry for boys. "*Mma Shapa*" had done a phenomenal job and had gone along way in enhancing educational development among the Bangwato and among women in particular. The training of teachers and the introduction of "practical" education were no small feat for a woman among men who harboured essentially negative attitudes towards female capabilities.

### Christian Wallace

Miss Wallace came to work among the Bakwena in the late 1870s with Mma Price. Information regarding Miss Wallace's educational endeavour in Molepolole is scanty although we know for certain that she was sent to help Mma Price in fostering literacy among the Bakwena. She had joined the Price family while they were on furlough in England as "governess" and returned with them to Molepolole and becoming an indispensable part of the mission.<sup>37</sup> Una Long, the author of *Journal of Elizabeth Lee Price* had this to say about Ms Wallace:

She helped Price with his school and also held classes for servants in the house. Unfortunately we know little of Miss Wallace—hardly more than that she suffered from a rheumatic heart but that when she was well she was tireless and she dearly loved Mrs Price's children. Mrs Price had the greatest admiration for her capable and energetic nature, and her companionship made a vast difference to Mrs Price's life at Molepolole.<sup>38</sup>

Be that as it may, the little information available shows that by the 1880s Miss Wallace was in the thick of educational development in Molepolole. In 1887 she reported that her school had an enrolment of eighty seven students of whom fifty eight were women.<sup>39</sup> Miss Wallace also enjoyed the services of local graduates trained at the Moffat Institution, Moshoboro, and Mosiemang. Besides the ordinary work of evangelism, they assisted in teaching beginners reading and writing. Miss Wallace observed that "there are



several students desirous to learn the English language especially since Sechele's youngest son Motsatsi has returned from Basutoland and speaks English well".<sup>40</sup>

Miss Wallace filled the gap, albeit briefly, when the Prices left Molepolole in 1885. She took charge of the school in Molepolole assisted by local trained pastors. She was to hold the fort until the 1890s when a more qualified woman missionary, Miss Mary Partridge was sent to take over educational development in Molepolole. Miss Wallace's efforts however had been far from fruitless as she kept "the light burning" by keeping education attendance live in Molepolole until more other qualified teachers arrived.

### **Mary Partridge**

Mary Partridge arrived at almost the same time as Alice Young and Ellen Hargreaves. She was stationed at Molepolole and also destined to advance Batswana education. Her impressions concerning education among the Bakwena did not deviate from the general trend that occurred throughout the Protectorate. Bakwena were anxious that their children should be taught. Much as that was the case, Partridge faced the same problems experienced by her colleagues in Gammangwato. At certain times of the year, especially during harvest and ploughing time, the enrolment of the students somewhat dwindled.<sup>41</sup> In her educational endeavour Partridge was assisted by deacons, particularly Kgabo, who had been trained at the Moffat Institution<sup>42</sup>, no doubt a trend that had been started by Mrs Price and Miss Wallace. Partridge taught both women and men, and had special classes for women where sewing and home economics were taught.

Partridge became a very strong proponent of rights and education for women. By 1910 Partridge had been established enough to have assessed the state of educational development in Molepolole especially in relation to women advancement. Partridge complained to the Directors in England that her appointment was not specifically devoted to womenfolk, because when she did devote herself to the womenfolk of the Bakwena the Directors in England did not seem to appreciate her efforts. "I fully understood when in England that I was to take charge of a mixed school and so also did Mr Williams".<sup>43</sup> The implication was that her efforts concerning the teaching of women *vis-a-vis* men were less important than those of her male counterparts leading her to wonder why the Directors singled her out among the missionaries.

Partridge articulated her views quite clearly following the Bechuanaland District Committee (BDC) meeting held in Serowe in 1904. The BDC was composed of the various LMS missionaries in the various districts of Bechuanaland. Members of the BDC had endorsed that Batswana in general had a low opinion about women. Therefore, this attitude made women missionaries unable, if not unfit for their labours among the Batswana. This statement was vehemently refuted by Partridge who asserted that such a view implicitly suggested that there was no place for women missionaries. Writing to the Foreign Secretary she stated that:

First they [BDC] point out that the low opinion of womanhood held by Bechuana men is a difficulty peculiar to work among these tribes [sic], but seeing that this low opinion of womanhood is held also by the people of India and China, I fail to see this difficulty "peculiar" to Africa nor why it cannot work here as well as in those countries.<sup>44</sup>

Partridge argued that not all Batswana looked down upon women. She cited two examples of women who held positions of authority among the Batswana and had been awarded the highest accolades by the Africans. The exaggerated view of women by her BDC brethren aimed at discouraging full participation of women missionaries and perpetuated the belief that all Batswana did not think highly of women. "The names of our women workers," continued Miss Partridge, "Miss Wallace and Miss Young are

honoured as much if not more than those male missionaries who worked amongst the Bangwato and the Bakwena."<sup>45</sup>

Some BDC members were of the opinion that women were only fit to teach girls. Partridge contended that by her teaching both girls and boys, the latter would grow to understand that women were not inferior.

As to the statement that "there is no scope for lady missionaries in this mission for the teaching of boys" I myself consider that by teaching the boys with the girls in one school we benefit the tribe, by helping to break down this degrading notion of the inferiority of women, by expecting the boys to carry all the heavy school materials used in the general work of the school, by insisting on their share of the work of cleaning the school premises... not allowing the girls to enter and leave school first.<sup>46</sup>

Missionaries, Partridge went on "should put the women of their churches more to the front in their prayer meetings and classes". In this way, she argued, "much more good would be done and we should hear less even than we do today of the superiority of a lot of lazy men over their patient hard working wives, sisters and mothers"<sup>47</sup> To sum up the view on the position of women, Partridge suggested that male missionaries held the same viewpoint as some of the Batswana men. To that end she cited a male missionary who once articulated—regarding the appointment of women to positions of authority—"If I could have my way," remarked the anonymous missionary, "all the lady teachers should be under the superintendence of a male missionary"<sup>48</sup> Such a remark according to Partridge, was unworthy of a Christian gentleman of this century!

Partridge first ran a mixed school and later a separate girls' school. The idea of two separate schools came from the Directors in England and Partridge was not enthusiastic about the issue, preferring a mixed school instead, but the Directors word naturally prevailed. With the help of local teachers, Hayden Lewis took charge of the boys leaving Partridge to see to girls' education. Partridge's school boasted of two hundred and forty girls, Lewis's school had one hundred boys.<sup>49</sup> The high enrolment was because the school was free, it was not ploughing time, and also education was becoming an increasingly well sought after commodity. The pupils in both schools were taught the same old academic ritual: the three Rs, scripture and home economics. Older women learned how to read, especially the Bible:

I started a reading class for those women who are unable to read belonging to the church enquirers last Wednesday as one way of getting at them and it promised to be very successful. I have told the people that married people can also come whether they belong to the Church or not.<sup>50</sup>

The LMS women missionaries tried to teach the Batswana women and include them in both school and church activities. They also served as examples of educated women successfully holding positions of authority. Batswana women especially Semane and Koolebale had proved able assistant teachers in Phalatswe Central School. After they were married their duties in educational endeavours somewhat diminished. This only served to exarcebate the attitude held by both male missionaries and Batswana men towards women.

Not all male missionaries had a negative attitude towards their female counterparts. Some of them continually stressed the need to have serious efforts made in order to buoy the spirit of women's education. "We need", wrote missionary Hayden Lewis:

or rather the work needs a woman who will devote her life to the salvation of her sex...The lady who is my colleague had her time fully occupied with educational work, and we need another lady missionary to take up and thoroughly organize work among women.<sup>51</sup>

### **Koolebale and Semane**

Koolebale and Semane were Batswana women who were to a large extent products of missionary—specifically women missionary educational endeavour. Unfortunately there is not much information about them, except for bits and pieces one gets here and there from missionary correspondences.

Koolebale—and it is difficult to say whether this was her first or last name—because she appears in records as just "Koolebale" helped Young in teaching, reading and writing Setswana. Sharp reported in 1900 that "I have one teacher, Koolebale trained by Mrs Johnson (Young) and she is really good she has all the elements of a good teacher."<sup>52</sup> She also played an important role in other rudimentary schools in the Phalatswe area. She helped in teaching others how to read and write, especially Setswana and reading the Bible. When the Secretary of the LMS visited the society's members among the Batswana in 1892 and inspected schools, Koolebale played a leading role in helping explain the state of education and the problems they were facing. She was a good interpreter, active in physical education and helped in "drills" and was instrumental in organising one that was performed before the important visitor from England.<sup>53</sup>

Unfortunately there is little information in missionary records that could tell us more about Koolebale and how she continued to help advance Batswana education. Be that as it may, what she did by the standards of the time was quite significant, for, the educational development to take root, the missionaries benefitted from her assistance since she was skilled, willing, trainable and helped in spreading and convincing many about the value of education. Future researchers should look more closely on the role played by Koolebale and Semane in educational advancement.

### **Semane**

Like her colleague Koolebale, Semane Setlhoko has just a little more information on her probably on account of, among other of her good qualities, marriage to Kgosi Khama III of the Bangwato. She was a commoner, born around 1879 and married Khama in 1900<sup>54</sup> She was twenty one years then, a school teacher, intelligent, pretty and a committed Christian. Her marriage to Kgosi Khama was not readily approved on account of her inferior origins, but Khama saw in her a woman who could lead the Bangwato women into the modern world.<sup>55</sup> She later became the mother of the modernist, nationalist and sometimes controversial Tshekedi Khama. She was later to teach Seretse Khama, first president of Botswana and other royal boys hymns and scripture and encouraged Sunday Schools and church services.<sup>56</sup> She died in 1937.

Semane was a product of missionary teachings, particularly that of Alice Young. Immediately upon her arrival, the latter singled out a young lady, sixteen years old, as being responsible and Christian. She helped Young in teaching needle work, music and drill.<sup>57</sup> Ella Sharp who succeeded Young also singled out Semane whose skills deserved mention. Sharp continued where Young had left off, especially with the teacher training programme. With "hands on training" from both Young and Sharp, Semane turned out to be a rounded teacher, teaching most subjects offered at primary school level.

In 1900 Semane got married to Khama and although her services in teaching were somewhat reduced by virtue of her new position, she continued being instrumental in furthering education among the Bangwato by offering them teaching services both at "Mma" Shapa's school at Serowe and at the *Kgotla* School. Seretse Khama, among other Bangwato, is one of those who benefitted from her tutelage. She probably was one of the first educated Batswana who made a significant contribution in the educational

development of Botswana only to be rivalled by Dr. Gaositwe Chiepe, present Minister of education who played a leading role in the educational and political development of this country. Dr Chiepe was the first woman ever science graduate, director of education, ambassador and foreign minister, cabinet, and education minister. Her contribution to educational development has been phenomenal. She appropriately filled the gap that had been left by Semane.

## Conclusion

The efforts, contributions, of women discussed in this paper were far from fruitless. Although the male dominated world often highlighted male achievements and or failures—as if women did not exist, this paper has—in a small way—attempted to bring the women efforts of the time into focus.

Unnoticed by the world, and the chauvinistic attitudes of the LMS itself, women missionaries played a significant role in the educational development of the Batswana. As if not to be eclipsed by their male counterparts, they did not limit their contributions to the furtherance of education only, but also played a role in the scriptural education as well as conversion.

It was women missionaries who popularised education among the Batswana: be it academic, religious, or practical, they were always involved. While the male missionaries busied themselves with conversion and therefore had little time with education *per se*, the women filled this gap. Indeed the efforts of Mary Livingstone, Elizabeth Price, Christian Wallace, Mary Partridge, Ella Sharp, and Semane were significant in the educational development of Batswana. Teaching in very difficult conditions, sometimes with language and cultural barriers, a lack of classrooms, books, and assistant teacher personnel shortages these women persevered to lay a solid foundation and somewhat of an inheritance (*boswa*) on which the Batswana could build and improve their educational system for the future of their children. In the words of Una Long, "the success of the mission work [and education] rested as much on the missionary's wife as did the missionary himself—a fact not always sufficiently appreciated outside [and inside] missionary circles."<sup>58</sup>

## Notes and References

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- 3 P.T. Mgadla, "Missionary and Colonial Education Among the Bangwato 1862-1948" (PhD Thesis, Boston University, 1986), pp. 85 -86.
- 4 See N. Goodall, *A History of the London Missionary Society 1795-1945*. ( London: Oxford University Press, 1954) Ch.1, also see R. Lovett, *History of the London Missionary Society*. ( London: n.p., 1899) chs. 1 -3.
- 5 Goodall, *A History of the London Missionary Society*, p.3.
- 6 See N. Parsons, " Hegemony and Experimentation in the Pre-colonial and Colonial Education of Botswana" Paper presented in Tlokweg Conference on Education for the 21st Century in Southern Africa, 26 -27 October, 1994, p.26.
- 7 Mary Livingstone was the daughter of "the father of the LMS in Southern Africa", Dr. Robert Moffat, who came to Southern Africa in 1817. Mary married the famous missionary and explorer Dr. Livingstone who had been sent by the LMS to help Moffat in Southern Africa.
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