

**Telling her story:
Constructing a historiography of
Mrs Alice Brink –
Afrikaner Woman in Mission**

by
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Declaration

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Abstract

This study is an exploration of the life and history of Alice Mabel Brink, a woman who dedicated her life to the Dutch Reformed Church's missionary endeavours in Nigeria in the early twentieth century, but who has been overlooked in the authoritative histories of Dutch Reformed mission in the past. In accordance with a new approach to history and church history, that focuses on uncovering untold stories and unknown dimensions of the past, this study seeks to tell the untold story of Alice Brink. It is an attempt to give a new perspective on a history that has previously only been viewed from the dominant, white, male perspective. This is done by reading and analysing four diaries (from 1913-1939) and one unpublished manuscript written by Alice Brink, and telling her story according to those writings. This historiography is constructed through the lens of feminist theory and therefore is concerned with analysing and exposing instances of oppression in Alice Brink's story, as well as celebrating her flourishing and acts of resistance to the dominant order. Telling and listening to this story, however, also requires a general understanding of the contexts in which it takes place. Chapter 2 of this study, therefore, explores the context of early twentieth century mission, while chapter 3 discusses the context of gender and being a woman in early twentieth century South Africa. Chapter 4 contains the story of Alice Brink, constructed from my reading of her diaries. In chapter 5 a few themes are discussed, which emerged from my reading and telling of Alice Brink's story. Chapter 6 presents a general conclusion regarding Alice Brink's story and the themes discussed.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie ondersoek die lewe en geskiedenis van Alice Mabel Brink, 'n vrou wat haar lewe gewy het aan die NG Kerk se sending na Nigerië in die vroeë twintigste eeu, maar wat in die verlede oor die hoof gesien is in die geskiedskrywing van NG sending. In ooreenstemming met 'n nuwe benadering tot geskiedenis en kerkgeskiedenis, wat fokus op die ontdekking van ongekende stories en onbekende dimensies van die verlede, wil hierdie studie die onbekende verhaal van Alice Brink vertel. Dit is 'n poging om 'n nuwe perspektief te bied op 'n geskiedenis wat voorheen hoofsaaklik vanuit die dominante, wit, manlike perspektief vertel is. Hierdie perspektief word daar gestel deur vier dagboeke (1913-1939) en een ongepubliseerde manuskrip wat geskryf deur Alice Brink, te lees en te analiseer ten einde haar storie daarvolgens te vertel. Hierdie geskiedskrywing word gedoen deur die lens van feministiese teorie en fokus dus op die ontleding en blootstelling van elemente van onderdrukking in Alice Brink se storie, sowel as die viering van haar suksesse en dade van verzet teen die dominante orde. Om hierdie storie te vertel en daarna te luister, vereis 'n algemene begrip van die konteks waarin dit plaasvind. Hoofstuk 2 van hierdie studie ondersoek dus die konteks van sending in die vroeë twintigste eeu, terwyl hoofstuk 3 die konteks van gender en vrou-wees in die vroeë twintigste eeu Suid-Afrika bespreek. Hoofstuk 4 bevat die verhaal van Alice Brink, wat saamgestel is vanuit my eie lees van haar dagboeke. In Hoofstuk 5 word enkele temas bespreek wat na vore gekom het in die verhaal. Hoofstuk 6 bied 'n algemene gevolgtrekking aangaande die verhaal van Alice Brink se en die temas wat bespreek is.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background and rationale

In his inaugural lecture (focusing on the importance of memory) Robert Vosloo (2015: 13) stated that the past is not yet the past but plays – in all its complexity and ambivalence – in on the present in a powerful way. “Not only do we have a grip on the past,” he argues, “but the past also has a grip on us” (Vosloo,2015: 3). Therefore, we should continue to struggle with the question of whose truth has to be told, by whom, and to what purposes (Vosloo,2015: 10). We can, after all, always pose other questions to the past which bring new insights, and the information from the past can always find new narrative configurations (Vosloo,2015: 10). In this sense, yesterday can always be better... or worse (Vosloo,2015: 10).

Over the last few decades, a new approach to history and church history has emerged, which focuses on uncovering an unknown dimension of the past, and serves in some sense as an instrument for righting injustice (Janz,2007: xi). According to Janz (2007: xi), this approach was, in fact, already developed about a century ago, in conscious opposition to the elitism of conventional historical investigation that was fixated on the “great” deeds of “great” men and little else. Sadly, the vast majority of human beings – almost all women, the socially inferior, economically distressed, politically marginalised, educationally deprived, or culturally unrefined – had mostly been left out of the story (i.e. history) (Janz,2007: xi). This is no less true with regards to the story of mission, and specifically mission in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), since the story that has been told thus far has been very male dominated. Plaatjies (2005: 6) argues that women have carried the DRC for ages, and yet there are only a few women who have played a historiographical role in its church history. For instance, one of the most concise books about the women who played a role in DRC mission – *Vroue met nardusparfuum* (Women with nard perfume) by J.M Cronje – was written *by a man* (albeit a well meaning man). Landman (2013: 202) argues that this book sings women’s praises mainly in terms of their functionality, yet their own voices remain silent.

It is with these types of historiographic works in mind that, during the second wave of the women’s movement in the late 1960’s, feminists began to explore the lives of women who

had been ‘hidden from history’ (Weiler,1999: 43). This approach was further explored by Howard Zinn’s magisterial essay on American history – *A People’s history of the United States* – which was published in 1980. Zinn wove a history of social activism by telling American history from the perspective of women, outsiders, and the marginalised (Bass,2009: 14). Such histories are naturally “subversive,” as they open space for little heard voices to speak (Bednarowski,2008: 15). The focus of this new approach is therefore on presenting stories that have traditionally been silenced and/or disregarded (Middleton,1999: 4). Bass (2009: 4) refers to this as a new interest in old stories: “Discovering the other side of the story.” Therefore, by exploring the past in new and different ways we understand our actions anew and discover unexpected spiritual possibilities for our lives (Bass,2009: 3). In South African historiography, there has also been a new cognisance of the gendered nature of historical agents in recent years (Swart,2007: 48). This new approach and cognisance thus give us new perspectives on histories that have previously been seen only from the side of the dominant/male/white/oppressor’s perspectives, by uncovering lost and untold stories.

Feminist theology is concerned with addressing the same problem. Since its earliest days, feminist scholarship has been concerned with recovering what has been lost; with telling stories (Middleton,1999: 4). Thus, feminism and feminist theology have a commitment to listening (Jones,2000: 14). It is interested in women’s diverse circumstances and works toward reconstructing women’s histories (Ackermann,2006: 226). In *Cartographies of Grace*, Jones (2000: 5) argues that women’s lives have long been ignored as a subject of critical reflection. According to her, the future imagined by feminist theorists is one that has already left its mark, often as a barely discernible imprint, upon the face of history (Jones,2000: 6). She refers to the complex dimensions of lives that have survived and flourished throughout the centuries and emphasises that these lives need to be studied and celebrated (Jones,2000: 6).

The flourishing of women is the subject of constructive feminist analysis, and the source of some of its most creative insights (Jones,2000: 6). Feminist theology, on the one hand, takes a special interest in the lives of women, their stories, their hopes, their flourishing. On the other hand, it is also concerned with their failures and multilayered experiences of oppression (Jones,2000: 14). Jones (2000: 6) regards it as imperative to keep exploring and telling

women's lives¹ since anyone who reflects on women's lives knows that the fate and future of women can never be separated from the fate and future of all persons and the planet as a whole. Feminism is rooted in the conviction of the full humanity of women and is engaged in reconstructing human society, including religious institutions (and their histories), to reflect women's equality with men (Rakoczy,2004: 11).

In contemporary feminist theory, the term used to summarise the problems, harms, or injustices that women face, is *women's oppression* – broadly defined as the dynamic forces, both personal and social, that diminish or deny the flourishing of women (Jones,2000: 71). Theorists argue that women's differing experiences of oppression provide a knowledge that reveals more of power relationships than does the hegemonic knowledge of those who control and exploit them (Weiler,1999: 45). Telling women's stories can therefore either shed light on the oppressions of patriarchy² or celebrate their resistance to the dominant order (Weiler,1999: 45).

Feminist theology emerged as a grassroots challenge to traditional views of women's role in religion and society (Jones,2000: 13). Therefore, it has to start from the ground up – from experience (Ackermann,2006: 226) – otherwise it is not feminist theology. In correlation with this, the previously mentioned historiographical approach is often referred to as “history from below,” or “grassroots history” (Janz,2007: xi). I believe this makes feminist theology and the proposed historiographical approach very compatible. Both are concerned with telling lost, neglected, untold stories; both are committed to listening to the voices of the marginalised; both intend to explore the experiences of those who have been silent/silenced.

Ultimately, feminist theory is less concerned with reconstructing the terrain and rather aimed at providing markers for travelling through the terrain in new ways, i.e. new routes through old landscapes (Jones,2000: 19). Jones (2000:19) argues that feminist theory's principal contribution lies in analysing and reorientating. Considering the way history – especially the history of mission in the Dutch Reformed Church – has been portrayed, I ask the question: Is

¹ See Middleton, S, Weiler, K. 1999. *Telling Women's Lives: Narrative Inquiries in the History of Women's Education*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

² Patriarch is the archè (rule) of the pateres (fathers). It is a type of “power-over.” It is a term used in descriptions of the multiple structures, beliefs and practices which ensure that men exercise power over women. (Thatcher,2011: 26)

there an alternative story or another side to the story; a new route through this old landscape of DRC mission?

1.2 Problem statement

This study³ will, therefore, seek to recover a lost history within the DRC missionary enterprise – the narrative of a woman in mission whose life has been ignored and overlooked in the authoritative histories that have dominated missional studies in the past (Middleton, 1999: 4). It will tell the story of Alice Brink – generally referred to as ‘Mrs Attie Brink’ (i.e. according to her husband’s name) in the little that has been written about her.

1.3 Methodology

This thesis consists first and foremost of a historiographical study. For the purposes of this study, I will utilise primary sources in the form of four ego-texts⁴ (diaries from 1913 – 1957) and one unpublished manuscript. These sources were made available by the Dutch Reformed Church archives in Stellenbosch. Since this study will entail an in depth study of the aforementioned sources, it will be qualitative⁵ (i.e. exploratory) research.

As was shown in the background and rationale of this study, I will follow a feminist theological approach. Thus, I will view the story of Alice Brink through a feminist theoretical lens. In *Cartographies of Grace*, Jones (2000: 3) suggests that feminist theorising is not limited to a specific discipline, but should take place in every department – therefore also in the department of history. As stated earlier, what makes the new historiographical approach (discussed above) and feminist theory so compatible is the fact that they share a common goal: liberation. Feminist theory is concerned with the liberation of women (and *all* who

³ Much like Middleton and Weiler in *Telling Women’s Lives: Narrative Inquiries in the History of Women’s Education* (see Bibliography)

⁴ Diaries, letters and other personal documents written by the person involved.

⁵ Quantitative and qualitative research are two different approaches to research that have developed from two very different paradigms of research. Quantitative research is the “close examination of people’s words, actions, and documents in order to discern patterns of meaning which come out of this data” (Maykut, 1994: 16). “The goal of qualitative research is to discover patterns which emerge after close observation, careful documentation, and thoughtful analysis of the research topic” (Maykut, 1994: 21). It involves an in depth analysis of people, groups or processes. “Qualitative research places emphasis on understanding through looking closely at people’s words, actions and records. The traditional or quantitative approach to research looks past these words, actions and records to their mathematical significance” (Maykut, 1994: 27).

experiences oppression), while the indicated historical approach is aimed at uncovering and telling histories that have been silenced in the past – which can also be regarded as a liberating act. This turn to telling women’s stories expands the scope of feminist theory as a whole. In telling and listening to women’s stories, “we discover new rules, assumptions, and categories of thought that provide new material for feminists both to analyse and critique and explore constructively and use” (Jones,2000: 6).

On the other hand, Jones (2000: 6) rightfully states that respecting differences in the lives of women requires that feminist theorists listen carefully to the varied experiences of all women and avoid too quickly imposing upon them theoretical categories that do not fit. This means attending to women’s accounts of their lives in their own words, according to their own narratives and is what I aim to do in telling the story of Alice Brink. The research will therefore be inductive – “bottom up” – which means that I will be doing exploratory work. Instead of going to these texts (diaries) with a specific hypothesis, I will begin with general observations in order to develop some general conclusions. Using feminist theory as a lens means that one has to explore the basic assumptions, orders and rules that contribute to both the oppression *and* flourishing of women (Jones,2000: 4). Doing feminist theory within in the field of theology (i.e. feminist theology) means to be critical of male dominance, the absence of women’s voices, practices and structures that exclude women, doctrines and structures that uphold patriarchy etc, and to analyse and expose these occurrences (Ackermann,2003: 33).

Traditionally feminist theorists have focused on the oppressions of patriarchy (Weiler,1999: 44). However, over the last few decades the focus has shifted to include studies of women’s resistance to the dominant order (Weiler,1999: 44). Writing the history of women confronts one with the central theoretical problem in understanding the past: how to unearth the oppressive structures that maintained a patriarchal order while simultaneously affirming that women were not the passive victims of oppression (Middleton,1999: 2). Feminist theory tries to hold its analysis of women’s *oppression* in tension with the appreciation for both the *flourishing* of women and the *complex “givenness” of their multiple circumstances* (Jones,2000: 6). In doing so, feminist theory views women not only as history’s victims but as its active agents and ever-engaged protagonists as well (Jones,2000: 6). These two approaches of either documenting patriarchal oppression or celebrating women’s resistance continue to shape feminist history (Weiler,1999: 44). In this study, I will seek not to do one

or the other, but to pay special attention to *both* Alice's experiences of oppression *and* her resistance to the dominant order.

When it comes to analysing women's oppression, feminist theorists have found that oppression is not always easy to name (Jones, 2000: 3). In *Justice and the politics of difference* Iris Young (1990: 70-91) describes *five faces of oppression*⁶ viz.: Oppression as marginalization which refers to being excluded from useful participation in social life; Oppression as powerlessness which refers to the inhibition in the development of capacities and a lack of decision-making power; Oppression as exploitation which refers to the transfer of one group/person's energies to another, to produce unequal distributions; Oppression as cultural imperialism which refers to the dominant meanings of society rendering a group's perspective invisible; and Oppression as violence (in any form). Although these are certainly not the only forms of oppression one can identify, I believe these *five faces* will be helpful in exposing and discussing the oppressions that Alice possibly had to face and will be discussed in more detail later in this study.

As I have stated earlier, I will not only be focussing on Alice's possible experiences of oppression but on her possible flourishing and successes as well. As Jones (2000: 6) argues, there is much more to women's lives and to feminist theory than accounts of oppression and we have to shed also on those experiences as well.

Although it is my intention to approach this study as objectively as possible and to explore Alice's story by doing "bottom-up" research, I cannot deny my own position, perspectives and experiences. As is true for many historians and feminists – or feminist historians – this study is written from my own situated and limited perspective. My choice to write and explore this particular history has emerged from my own history and desires (Weiler, 1999: 43). As a white, cisgender, woman, born into the Afrikaner culture and working within the sphere of religion and specifically the Dutch Reformed Church, Alice's story is also a part of my history on various levels. In a sense, by researching and exploring the story of Alice Brink, I will also be exploring my own past and I cannot be completely objective. It is, therefore, unavoidable that the comments and conclusions made in this study will be based on my own reading and will present what I read as important and true. I therefore regard it as a

⁶ See Young, IM. 1990. *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

responsibility, not only to tell this story but to be cautious of my own prejudices regarding this particular history as well. Bass (2009: 4) states in *A People's History of Christianity*, that this type of study is suggestive rather than comprehensive, and serves as a 'scrapbook' rather than a 'textbook.' It is important to keep this in mind, especially in light of my own situatedness. One also has to respect the complexity of the life of the one whose story is being told, knowing that what is revealed in their recollections and reflections is but a fragment of a life (Ackermann, 2006: 231). This study will, therefore, be presented more as inquiry and exploration than as a final truth (Middleton, 1999: 6).

Weiler (1999: 47) emphasises that historians not only have to be conscious of their own assumptions by recognising the situated quality of narratives but also have to consider the context in which such evidence is produced. The feminist approach is not only aimed at addressing the contradictions of competing discourses but also the context in which narratives are produced and the relationships of power through which various accounts are given (Weiler, 1999: 47). Weiler (1999: 56) argues that "accounts of women's lives, the ways they frame the choices they made, the way they are viewed, all need to be examined as constructs produced at specific historical moments, under particular circumstances." For this reason, the different, intersectional contexts within which Alice Brink's story took place will be discussed. These contexts play an important role in Alice's experiences of oppression and flourishing as well.

1.4 Introductory remarks

It is important when telling the lives of women to keep in mind the contexts in which they function. Post-colonial theorists point out that the all-encompassing identity 'woman' often overshadows the meaning of race in a racist society, class, power or oppression, age or other kinds of differences that can influence that identity (Weiler, 1999: 46). There is no one person (or woman) moving through history with a single identity, since there are constant creations and negotiations of the self, emerging from competing and contradictory discourses (Weiler, 1999: 46). A feminist approach addresses not only the contradictions of competing discourses but also the context in which narratives are produced and the relationships of power through which various accounts are given (Weiler, 1999: 47). Therefore it is important to explore, not only Alice's story, but the various contexts within which it plays out as well.

1.4.1 Mission in the early twentieth century

Mission in itself is a very contested and complex topic, encompassing themes such as colonialism, imperialism, paternalism, patriarchy etc. The very use of the term “mission,” reminds one of the colonisation of territories and the oppressive practices that came along with it. (Bosch,2008: 303).

For much of South African history, white settlers sought to confine the egalitarian implications of evangelical missions to the spiritual realm (Elphick,2012: 39). In the 19th century, the DRC pioneered the practice of segregated churches and, in the twentieth century, decisively shaped apartheid theory (Elphick,2012: 39). Yet, paradoxically, by the time it reached its greatest power, the DRC had become one of the most evangelical, mission-minded churches in the country (Elphick,2012: 39). A severe tension existed between two of its most fervently held commitments – to evangelise people of colour and to preserve white supremacy (Elphick,2012: 39).

During the past few centuries, Christians generally did not have any doubt concerning the superiority of their own faith over all others (Bosch,2008: 291). It was, therefore, perhaps to be expected that their feelings of religious superiority would spawn beliefs about cultural superiority (Bosch,2008: 291). The *volkskerk* (national church) that emerged in 1900 was a markedly evangelical church deeply committed, at least at the level of its leadership, to Christian missions (Elphick,2012: 50). The DRC developed into a powerful missionary church – a success partly due to the emotional energy of revivalism, but also to its racially separate churches, which ensured that black converts would not disturb the comfort that the Dutch settlers had come to expect from their church (Elphick,2012: 50). As the twentieth century began, it was still too early to speak of an Afrikaner⁷ nation with a mission – even a bit too early to speak of an Afrikaner nation at all, though nationalist sentiment was stirring during the carnage of the Anglo-Boer War (Elphick,2012: 51). Yet the church that embraced almost all Afrikaners was dedicated to a mission directed at black and brown peoples (Elphick,2012: 51). To the Afrikaners, it seemed that God had placed them in Africa for a reason (Elphick,2012: 51). This combination of missionary zeal and segregationist

⁷ The term “Afrikaner” refers to the Dutch-Afrikaans society in South Africa

ecclesiology – both articulated and implemented by a powerful, centralised, and synodical church structure – were to shape the DRC powerfully in the new century, and, along with it, Afrikaner politics (Elphick, 2012: 51). Missionaries were seen as government allies in executing the policy of “separate development” (Bosch, 2008: 304). Segregated churches allowed the DRC to fulfil its evangelical duty in the unique conditions of South Africa. Segregation was also, they believed, suitable for the Rhodesias and Nigeria, where the DRC conducted “foreign” missions (Elphick, 2012: 50).

It is important to note that Alice, as part of the missionary enterprise in the Sudan region of Nigeria was also part of the religion, culture and *volkskerk* that regarded themselves as superior. Understanding the context of mission and its ties to colonialism is important if one wants to gain a better understanding of Alice’s story. It gives some insight into the fact that Alice could simultaneously be the oppressor (as part of an imperial and paternalistic enterprise) and the oppressed (as a woman in a patriarchal society).

1.4.2 Gender roles and Afrikaner women in early twentieth century South Africa

In the same way that understanding the missionary context is important in telling and understanding Alice’s story, one also has to keep in mind the cultural context of being a woman in twentieth century South Africa. The Anglo Boer War (1899-1902) was without a doubt the most influential event in the lives of Afrikaner women of the early twentieth century and an important moment in the history of women in South Africa (Buchner, 2007: 238). A few decades after the war, the Afrikaner woman became known as the “*volksmoeder*” (mother of the nation). The term depicts the Afrikaner woman as “the gentle, caring one who is the cornerstone of the household and simultaneously also the central and inherent strength of the Afrikaner people” (Buchner, 2008: 238). In a 1918 publication by Willem Postma, *Die boervrou, moeder van haar volk* (The farmer’s wife, mother of her people), women were encouraged to acquire characteristics such as faith, courage, a spirit of sacrifice, homeliness and being a good example (Buchner, 2008: 239). The piety of Afrikaner women was similar to that of Europe before the Enlightenment, which relied on the believer’s ability to distinguish between right and wrong, as well as a subordinate relationship to God (Landman, 1994: 57). With the establishment of the Women’s Monument in 1913 African Women also reminds that their national identity priority precedence over any other identity

(Landman,1994: 66) Landman (1994: 66) states that Afrikaner women were victims of a female sub-culture in a male dominated society. She described the women's understanding of God, themselves and the male sex as follows (Landman, 1994: 59):

“First, they all began with the dominant Calvinist and masculine understanding of the sovereign God as all powerful, before whom they were expected to recognise their submissiveness and their guilt. Their lot was a poor self-image and a willingness to maintain their situation subservient not only to God but to the male-dominated culture.”

Afrikaner women, like Mrs Brink, were rooted within a very patriarchal society. The discourse of domesticity was prevalent in early twentieth century South Africa. Could the mission field serve as a space where these women would have a chance to break free from the constraints of their patriarchal society? Or was the role women played in mission merely an extension of this concept of the *volksmoeder*?

1.4.3 Women and mission in early twentieth century South Africa

In 1874 the doors of the Huguenote Seminary in Wellington (South Africa) were opened. Dr Andrew Murray was involved in the process of establishing the seminary and it was with his help that teachers from the United States of America were imported to educate and ‘form’ young girls (Van Wijk,1964: 14). Since these teachers were very interested in mission and regarded themselves as missionaries, they did much to instil their passion for mission in the girls they taught. Some of the teachers were part of the *Women's Board of Missions* in America and inspired the girls to establish a similar league in South Africa. In other circles, the idea was not always met with the same enthusiasm as some women remarked: “American women can do such things, but we shouldn't; it's not appropriate work for women” (Van Wijk,1964: 14). Despite remarks such as these, the Hugenoten Sending Vereeniging was brought to life and started sending as well as supporting missionaries in various countries and other parts of South(ern) Africa (Van Wijk,1964: 14). In 1890 the *Vroue Sending Bond* (VSB – Women's Board of Mission) officially came into being, and not too long after that, *Fredenheim College* – where women could study missionary- or social work (Van Wijk,1964: 15). It was these organisations and institutions that gave women the opportunity to contribute

in various ways to the missionary cause, either by becoming missionaries themselves or supporting and enabling others to do missionary work. One of those women was Alice Mabel Matthewson (later Brink).

1.4.4 The Story of Alice Mabel Brink

Alice Mabel Brink (née Matthewson) was the wife of Rev. Attie Brink, who, together with her husband, did missionary work in the Sudan region of Nigeria. Okkenhaug (2003: 13) argues that the women missionaries who are found worthy of scholarly attention today are mostly the outspoken, exceptional women, but that most female missionaries worked quietly within their accepted roles and remained invisible, despite their active lives. Even more invisible (therefore disregarded and silenced) in historiographical works than the single women, are the married missionary wives. It is particularly these stories that have been left untold, and therefore it is one of these that I wish to tell: The story of Alice Brink. This study will seek to uncover her story by reflecting on her personal diaries, dated 1913-1939.

1.5 The value and structure of this study

This study is of great value, especially at this moment in history. Despite the great advances that have been made in the name of feminism over the past few decades, the future that feminists imagine and seek to create – one without oppression – is not yet in our grasp. To this day, women's achievements are measured and discussed in terms of their relationships to the men in their lives and their role as mothers. An example of this was when news reporters referred to Olympic medalist Corey Cogdell as “wife of Bears lineman Mitch Unrein” during the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio (Bannon, 2016). It is incidents such as these that make it essential to keep telling the stories of women's lives; women like Alice Brink, whose successes and flourishing are sidelined by the stories of men. Hopefully telling her story will inspire others to uncover or tell new stories of other women's lives too (Middleton, 1999: 6).

Successfully telling and/or understanding any story (or history) requires a clear sense of the context in which it takes place. I will, therefore, start telling Alice's story by painting (in words) the backdrop against which it took place. Chapter's 2 and 3 will deal with *Mission in the early twentieth century* and *Gender roles and Afrikaner women in early twentieth century South Africa* respectively. In Chapter 4 I will attempt to give a short overview of Alice's life

story, based on her own recollections in her ego-texts. Chapter 5 will contain a few general themes, observations and analysis as identified in Chapter 4. The study will close with a short conclusion in Chapter 6.

Chapter 2

Mission in the early twentieth century

In order to form a better understanding of any one story, it always helps to have some idea of the landscape against which that particular narrative takes place. Keep in mind that the purpose of this study is to find a new route through the old landscape of mission history – specifically in the Dutch Reformed Church. To navigate these new routes, however, one needs to have some understanding of the “old landscape.” In this chapter, I will therefore briefly describe one of the many layers of this landscape within which a significant part of Alice Brink’s life story takes place, i.e. mission in the early twentieth century.

As has been stated in Chapter 1, mission in itself is a very contested and complex topic, encompassing themes such as colonialism, imperialism, paternalism, patriarchy etc. My objective is not, however, to provide a comprehensive account of mission during this time period or an all-inclusive study of these themes. The aim of this chapter is simply to offer glimpses into a few different missionary contexts, which – woven together – form the backdrop of Alice Brink’s story. These contexts include: mission in the early twentieth century; mission in South Africa during that time; the Dutch Reformed missionary enterprise; mission to the Tiv people of Nigeria and finally, to what extent women were involved in mission at that time.

2.1 Introduction to mission in the early 20th century

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a time of immense European territorial expansion, especially in Africa (Porter, 2003: 1). Subsequently, the dominant understanding of mission during this period followed the same pattern (Yates, 1994: 7). Using the term “mission” already implies that there is a sender; someone who is being sent; those to whom one is sent; and an assignment one is sent to complete (Bosch, 2008: 1). The very use of the term calls upon images of the West’s colonisation of territories and its subjugation of their inhabitants, suggesting that the one who sends has the authority to do so (Bosch, 2008: 303). It can therefore be no surprise that, since the sixteenth century onwards, if one said “mission,” one in a sense also said “colonialism” (Bosch, 2008: 303).

According to Bosch (2008: 262), twentieth century missional thought – and the colonial mindset behind it – was, to a great extent, the aftermath of the Enlightenment. In reaction to the Church’s authoritative stronghold over society, people were prompted – by movements such as the Renaissance, the Reformation and several revolutions – to question the church’s dominant position (Lewis,2003: 102). The eventual demise of its quiet self-evidence during the Enlightenment caused the Christian faith to become strained and overemphasised by those who continued the practice. The latter responded to the former’s challenge with new forms of piety and several evangelical awakenings (Lewis,2003: 102). This overemphasis, combined with the new expansionist worldview, based on the Enlightenment’s profound belief in progress, paved the way for a world-wide Christian missionary movement (Bosch,2008: 274).

The discovery and development of new countries and territories were a result of the Enlightenment’s strong focus on progress (Lewis,2003: 102). In the wake of the colonisation of the so-called “backward civilisations,” missionaries attempted to bring the Christian gospel to non-Christian nations (Lewis,2003: 102). The intimate relationship between church and state, and the hegemony of Christianity that was evident ever since the time of Constantine, made it difficult to differentiate between political, cultural, and religious elements and activities, since they all merged into one (Bosch,2008: 275). For European colonising powers, it was completely natural to assume that they, as Christian monarchs, had the divine right to subdue “heathen” peoples. Colonisation and Christianization therefore not only went hand in hand but were – in terms of ideology – two sides of the same coin (Bosch,2008: 275).

The partitioning of Africa by aggressively competitive European powers held immeasurable consequences for the future of the continent (Hanciles,2004: 162).⁸ Technological developments brought unprecedented levels of interaction between African societies and the Christian world and in Africa there was a widespread readiness to embrace the new religion, which came in “beautifully wrapped European cultural packaging” (Isichei,1995: 4). The nature of these encounters, and the promise of social upheaval that came along with it, swung the odds in favour of Christian conversion (Hanciles,2004: 163).

⁸ I acknowledge the fact that, with regards to missionary endeavours in Africa, not all situations and contexts were the same. Although I want to remain mindful of the fact that one cannot generalize colonial/missionary encounters for all of Africa, the aim of this chapter and section is indeed to paint – with “broad brush strokes” a very *general* idea of the context of missions in the early twentieth century.

Njoku (2007: 1) argues that “although few will debate the historical role of missionaries in extending the frontiers of the empire and their contribution to the remaking of African societies,” the collaborations between missions and imperial authorities have not been emphasised enough. It is during the Victorian era that colonial officials became increasingly aware of the value and significance that mission work had for the empire. Settlers who arrived at the Cape of Good Hope, for instance, were sent not only to subdue the indigenous population but also to evangelise them (Bosch,2008: 303). As representatives of the motherland, missionaries often became the pioneers of Western imperialistic expansion (Bosch,2008: 304). Missionaries played a critical role in the consolidation of colonial control in Africa (Njoku,2007: 2). Both missionaries and colonial rulers imposed processes and practices of collaborative hegemony on African societies – albeit not always successfully.

Missionaries often “appealed to home governments for protection and assistance in opening the frontier for the gospel” (Aguwa,2007: 132). In some cases, they would petition the imperial government to extend its protectorate to areas where they were working, by arguing that unless this happened, a rival colonial power might claim that territory (Bosch,2008: 305). In many areas of Africa, volatile conditions were thought to threaten European ambitions and consequently the missionary enterprise as well (Porter,2004: 280). There was a widespread conviction amongst missionaries that formal intervention by European/Western powers was necessary and would be beneficial for the majority of those concerned (Porter,2004: 281). According to Bosch (2008: 305):

In virtually all instances where missionaries became advocates of colonial expansion, they genuinely believed that their own country’s rule would be more beneficent than the alternative – either the maintenance of the status quo or some other form of European power. By and large, then, missionaries tended to welcome the advent of colonial rule since it would be to the advantage of the “natives.”

Ultimately, it becomes clear that “mission” served the colonial cause a lot more than the colonial powers served mission. Christianity became an agent of colonialism and was crucial in establishing and maintaining political, cultural and economic domination (Njoku,2007: 5). While most missionaries’ primary focus was the interests of the native people, they often remained silent about the horrors committed by colonial authorities, not realising that simply

by accepting the presence of colonial lords, they were in fact rather serving the interests of the colonisers (Bosch,2008: 306). Although they sometimes criticised imperial policies, they also advocated for colonial expansion for a variety of reasons (Korieh,2007: 147). This is not to deny the good intentions that many missionaries fostered, but those intentions were very obviously tainted by the colonial pursuit. Despite the fact that many missionaries saw themselves as ‘anti-imperialist’ and their relationship with empire was often very ambiguous, it was near impossible to escape all involvement with empire and the expansion of territories (Porter,2004: 13). Aguwa (2007: 131) lists the following three reasons for the collaboration between missionaries and colonialists:

First, their respective goals sometimes traversed each other. Second, they shared a common religious and cultural background. Third, they shared the same ideologies about racial differences, as well as stereotyping.

The colonial expansion of the Western Protestant nations might have been thoroughly secular originally, but in the nineteenth century, colonial expansion once again took on religious overtones and become intimately linked with mission (Bosch,2008: 303).⁹ Bosch (2008: 303) writes:

There came a time when the authorities enthusiastically welcomed missionaries into their territories. From the point of view of the colonial government the missionaries were indeed allies. They lived among the local people, knew their languages, and understood their customs. Who was better equipped than these missionaries to persuade unwilling “natives” to submit to the *pax Britannica* or the *pax Teutonica*? ...What better agents of its cultural, political, and economic influence could a Western government hope to have than missionaries?

With the dawn of the high imperial era (1860-1910) the complicity of mission agencies in the colonial venture became undeniable.¹⁰ The same time period also marked a phenomenal

⁹ Although the link between Mission and empire is not the only narrative and the relationship between mission and empire is a very complex one, I have found it to be the dominant one in twentieth century missional thought. For a more in depth discussion see: Porter, A. 2004. *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant missionaries and overseas expansion, 1700-1914*.

¹⁰ Some missionaries who took the colonial agenda seriously, were, in fact, also critical of it – as could be seen from submissions to the Edinburgh Conference in 1910 (De Gruchy,2003: 216).

increase in missionary recruitment, which cannot solely be attributed to the colonial enterprise, but was certainly pursuant to the idea of being sent to remake the world in Britain's image (Bosch,2008: 307).¹¹ Consequently, missionary activity had a very strong national character (Hastings:2003: 20).

By the twentieth century, colonial governments were reluctant to rule Africans without the help of missionary manpower, expertise, and financial support (Elphick,2012: 115). It was in this time that white dominance emerged undisputed (Hodgson,1997:78). There were more traces of racism in the high imperial era than ever before (Bosch,2008: 308). This development went hand in hand with an increased disregard of "native" talents and capabilities than it seemed in the mid-nineteenth century and earlier (Bosch,2008: 308). The paternalistic ideologies of colonial officials and missionaries alike meant that they gladly but consciously took it upon themselves to be the guardians of the "less-developed" races (Bosch,2008: 308). Missionaries and colonialists shared a common conviction about their divine mandate to evangelise and civilise (Aguwa,2007: 127). Even though interest groups sometimes followed different strategies in their dealings with Africans, all European actors pursued the same civilising agenda – at least on an ideological level (Njoku,2007: 3). Cultural assimilation was a crucial part of this "civilising" mission, which was firmly based on the notion that Europeans were racially superior to non-Europeans/Africans (Beck,2007: 11). This mindset regarded the peoples of Africa as dependent upon the wise guidance of their white patrons who would "gradually educate them to maturity" (Bosch,2008: 308).

One can, however, not deny that the indigenous peoples of Africa played a major role in mission and the spread of Christianity on the continent. Africans were actively involved in the Christian missionary enterprise from the beginning (Aguwa,2007: 136). This is especially clear in Alice Brink's diaries¹² and other histories of the DRC's missionary endeavours in Nigeria¹³. Too often, histories of missions and the growth of Christianity slides into a form of triumphalism, where local cultures are seen as passive and static (Isichei,1995: 6). It is not my intent to suggest that mission was a purely Western, imperial, expansionist venture, but rather to create a sense of the background and context from which Alice Brink originally

¹¹ Although the intertwinement between mission and colonialism evolved differently in Germany and other colonizing countries, I refer specifically to Britain, as it was the main colonial power in South Africa.

¹² See Chapter 4.

¹³ See 2.2.5

came. This context – within which she lived and worked for most her life – was not only that of mission but specifically mission within the Dutch Reformed Church.

2.2 South African and Dutch Reformed Church mission in the early 20th century

As seen above, the close link between the colonisation of South Africa and the missionary enterprise cannot be ignored. According to Cronjé (1982: 11), upon their arrival in the Cape colony, Jan Van Riebeeck and the UEIC (United East Indian Company) already considered it as their duty to bring the Christian faith to the indigenous peoples of Africa. As in pre-Enlightenment Europe, the relationship between church and state was a very closely connected one in South Africa. It was seen as the duty of the State to propagate the true Reformed faith among the inhabitants of the country (Cronjé, 1982: 12).¹⁴ The prescribed prayer with which Van Riebeeck (a Reformed Dutchman) started the colony specifically mentioned the task of bringing the gospel to “the naked heathen” as one of their responsibilities (Kritzinger, 1988: 14). Missionaries offered little challenge to white domination in both church and state. Although they often sought to defend the indigenous people from the injustices of colonial rule, they did not question colonial rule itself (Elphick, 2012: 64).

The first official missionary, who came to South Africa with the specific purpose of evangelising the indigenous inhabitants, was the Moravian, Georg Schmidt, who arrived in 1737 (Kritzinger, 1988: 14). The following two centuries was marked by many missionary endeavours from various missionary societies, including but not limited to: The London Missionary Society (LMS); The Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society; The Scottish Missionary Society; The Paris Evangelical Mission Society; The Rhenish Missionary Society; The Berlin Missionary Society; The Church Missionary Society (CMS); Swedish Missionary Society; The Swiss Missionary Society; the Church of the Province of South Africa (CPSA) etc. (Kritzinger, 1988: 17). The South African network of missionary institutions was, by global standards, enormous in relationship to the size of the population it served (Elphick, 2012: 110).

2.2.1 Mission in the Dutch Reformed Church

¹⁴ In reality and practice, however, this idea was not acted upon until almost a century later. Initially the DRC and Dutch settlers were very averse to the idea of mission. See discussion below.

In South Africa, The Dutch Reformed Church was the original church of state (Kritzinger,1988: 17). For most of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, it was the only church that had the right to hold public worship (Elphick,2012: 39). It is historically also regarded as a church that has been profoundly committed to missions (Elphick,2003: 56). This is evident in the fact that the decision to appoint missionaries for work among the indigenous inhabitants of Southern Africa, was already made during its first synod in 1824, and at the 1857 synod, it was decided that the DRC would start “foreign”¹⁵ missions (Kritzinger,1988: 17).

Inspired by news of revivals in the United States and Northern Ireland, DRC ministers convened a conference in 1860, for clergy from all denominations. The local revival started in a Methodist church and spread swiftly through Dutch Reformed churches of the Western Cape.¹⁶ It put a strong emphasis on the Bible, the conversion experience, and evangelism (Korieh,2007: 153). The central message of the revivalist movement was a call on Christians to proselytise and spread the Christian message to all parts of the world (Korieh,2007: 153). In the wake of these revivals, the DRC adopted innovations that would distinguish it from other Reformed churches – a church thoroughly Reformed in ecclesiology and theology, overwhelmingly Dutch linguistically and culturally, but with a spiritual emphasis more typical of Anglo-Saxon evangelical churches of the Victorian era (Elphick,2012: 41). This general spirit of revival contributed to the establishment of foreign DRC missions in a major way (Saayman,2007: 47).

2.2.2 Gelykstelling (Equalisation of the races)

Early Dutch settlers had a conviction that they (and their decedents) were in a special covenantal relationship with God. Johannes Du Plessis, who is still regarded by some as “the founder of South African missiology”, was convinced that God had called the DRC primarily

¹⁵ “Foreign” referred to work outside the Cape Colony.

¹⁶ The revival was a direct consequence of revivals in Scotland, Ireland, America, the Netherlands etc. These revivals inspired DRC ministers to convene a conference for all ministers of all denominations in Worcester. The conference inaugurated seven weeks of intensive prayer for “an out pouring of the Holy Spirit” and consequent revival. Andrew Murray Jnr was a minister in Worcester at that stage, and played a leading role in the conference. Shortly after the conference the “revival” – characterised by prayer, confessions and an array of emotional responses – started and swept across towns and churches all over South Africa.

See: Crafford, D. 2002. 1860. ‘n Golf van Herlewing in Hofmeyr, G. *NGK 350*. Wellington: Lux Verbi. p.120-121

to evangelise Africa and only secondarily to bring about social change (Elphick,2003: 63). Another key figure in DRC mission, J.G. Strydom¹⁷ – who had been a missionary among the Tiv in Nigeria from 1912-1919 – declared that there rested a sacred responsibility with the DRC as a “Christian civilized people... to raise the native out of the poverty and misery of barbarism” (Elphick,2003: 65). The DRC sacraments of communion and baptism also provided a social boundary that reinforced the emerging identity of white settlers as “Christians,” and excluded most “heathen” slaves from society (Elphick,2012: 39). It should, therefore, come as no surprise that the two dominant understandings of mission in the DRC were: (i) mission is essentially evangelistic, concentrating on the conversion of Gentiles and the planting of churches; and (ii) mission is done “by white people to black people.” (Saayman,2007: 7)

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the DRC not only got involved in foreign missions, but also started focusing more seriously on missionary work among the local Coloured people (De Gruchy,2005: 5). Its commitment to mission, however, often conflicted with its role as the spiritual home for most (white) settlers, who were terribly uncomfortable with the egalitarian implications of evangelical missions (Elphick,2012: 39). Many Dutch-speaking white settlers feared that missions would lead to *gelykstelling*, i.e. equalisation among the races. As an increasing amount of “heathens” – often slaves and servants – converted to Christianity, questions arose regarding their incorporation into the established churches of the DRC. Settlers were very uncomfortable with the idea of “being put on equal footing with their servants or slaves” (Giliomee,2003: 216). Some of the white settlers, who regarded the DRC as the epitome of their cultural and racial identity, were unhappy when black converts began to appear in congregations that were formerly all-white and requested access to the sacraments etc (Elphick,2003: 56). Any action that violated social conventions that supported the class hierarchy, was met with great opposition (Giliomee,2003: 216)

Although the 1857 synod declared racial segregation to be neither “desirable” nor “scriptural,” and that members from the heathen population should be absorbed into existing congregations (Giliomee,2003: 219). However, as a middle ground option, they agreed that those who were not prepared to do so were allowed to establish separate gatherings and congregations (Giliomee,2003: 219). These segregated churches and gatherings were

¹⁷ Not to be confused with J.G. Strijdom – a later prime minister of South Africa

attributed it to “the weakness of some” (white settlers) (Elphick,2012: 44). Although this “middle way” decision was initially proposed as a means of overcoming the barriers to missionary work and the fear of *gelykstelling*, the resolution was poorly formulated. Giliomee (2003: 220) describes the inclusion of the phrase “the weakness of some” as a fatal mistake that was soon used to sanction racist practices. When the DRC eventually pioneered the official practice of segregated churches in the late nineteenth century it helped neutralise the white settlers’ suspicion and wariness of missions (Elphick,2012: 39). Segregated churches made it possible for the DRC to continue with their missions within the unique conditions in South Africa. This practice was also implemented in Nigeria¹⁸ and other countries where they conducted “foreign” missions (Elphick,2012: 51). Although this resolution – to allow congregations to have separate gatherings – was only intended as a temporary measure to overcome the settlers’ resistance to mission, it inevitably lead to the rapid formation of separate black congregations (Elphick,2003: 56). In 1881 these congregations were grouped into the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa (Giliomee,2003: 221). The DRCM was a separate body with its own synod but remained subordinate to the DRC synod, on which it depended for clergy and financial support (Elphick,2003: 57).

Regardless of the settlers’ fear of *gelykstelling*, by the twentieth century the DRC had become one of the most evangelical, mission-minded churches in the country (Elphick,2012: 39). The segregation of the churches and the establishment of the DRCM made possible a more concerted missionary effort within the DRC since it mitigated much of the anti-missionary sentiment among the Afrikaners (Giliomee,2003: 212).

The “volkskerk” that emerged in 1900 was a markedly evangelical church deeply committed – at least at the level of its leadership – to Christian missions. Nonetheless, evangelical impulse remained a threat to the white people, who cherished their churches for the psychological refuge and cultural affirmation it provided and were reluctant to share them with others (Elphick,2012: 50). Most of the European immigrants – and almost all white children born into the settler society – were absorbed into the local Dutch culture and the Dutch church (Elphick,2012: 39). This slowly started changing as immigration from the

¹⁸ There is clear evidence of this in Alice Brink’s diaries. The segregation in the DRCM churches in Nigeria, however, was not only carried out across racial lines, but according to gender-lines as well (i.e. separate services for men and women). See also Chapter 4.

Netherlands declined and settlers from Britain, Germany etc. formed their own churches, but the Dutch and their Afrikaans descendants remained the majority among the white people in South Africa (Elphick, 2012: 39). Their missionary spirit and the Dutch settler's understanding of the nature of the church, however, remained in deep tension (Elphick, 2012: 50).

During a (Free State) mission conference in 1929, J.G Strydom¹⁹ – then mission secretary of the Free State DRC – argued that it was in the interest of “the white man in Africa” to “evangelize the heathen” and that it was time to clearly express the church's standpoint “in regard to relations with the native” (Elphick, 2012: 227). Strydom, and other colleagues on the General Synod Missions Commission, drafted a mission policy that denounced *gelykstelling* and stated the following (Elphick, 2012: 228):

“History has clearly and repeatedly taught that social *gelykstelling* is the downfall of both [whites and blacks], because it is psychologically unsound for persons of different races to have intimate association with one another on the same terrain and footing, because this causes bastardization and has a denationalizing influence that every right-minded white and native abominates, because it has the consequence of erasing the particular lines of the separate personality of each race.”

On a Theological level, the policy stated that “the Native” is a “human being” with a soul that is equal to that of any other human being, “in the eyes of God” (Elphick, 2012: 228). To reconcile their theology with their aversion to *gelykstelling*, the commission advocated for separate development (Elphick, 2012: 228). The fact that the DRC had developed into a powerful missionary church, was rooted in the racial separation of the churches, which ensured that black converts would not disturb the comfort the Dutch settlers had come to expect from their church (Elphick, 2012: 50). The segregation of churches laid the foundation for apartheid theory and provided the basis of the Afrikaner nationalists' twentieth century “civil religion” (Giliomee, 2003: 212).

By the twentieth century, the DRC was dedicated to a mission that was directed specifically at black and brown peoples, slaves and servants (Elphick, 2012: 51). The combination of

¹⁹ Also a missionary among the Tiv people from 1912-1919

missionary zeal and segregationist ecclesiology would shape the DRC immensely in the new century. As the “imperial factor” waned in South Africa, the missionaries increasingly turned for support to white paternalists in the government of the newly formed Union of South Africa (Elphick,2012: 116).

2.2.3 The Native Question

After the four British-ruled colonies of South Africa united to form the Union of South Africa in 1910, many white Afrikaners became convinced that the “native question” required urgent thought and action (Elphick,2003: 57). The DRC came under scrutiny from black leaders as being an “anti-Native” church. In response, ten DRC mission leaders, led by Johannes du Plessis, produced a document titled: *The Dutch Reformed Church and the Native Problem* (1921) (Elphick,2003: 59). Although the document noted that the church’s efforts were in some ways inadequate, it was mostly used to justify their position and supply evidence of how much the DRC was already “doing for the Natives” (Elphick,2003: 59). The writers, however, made serious demands on behalf of “the Natives” – higher wages, better housing and education, more land etc – but simultaneously stressed the fact that the “white race is and must remain the ruling race,” and that “coloured and black sections of the population occupy a strictly subordinate position” (Du Plessis,1921: 11). It furthermore states that the “demand of the natives for equal rights is foolish and futile” but that offering equal opportunities is plausible (Du Plessis,1921: 13).

DRC mission leaders, such as Strydom, were among the first people to rework segregation theory into what would later become the framework of Apartheid. By the mid-1930’s DRC leaders were propagating, far and wide, the church’s mission policy and its apartheid ideals (Elphick,2003: 77).

2.2.4 The Social Gospel²⁰

Early twentieth century missionaries in South Africa produced little independent theological reflection and relied mostly on imported concepts, primarily from the global network of

²⁰ According to my research the use of the Social Gospel in the South African and DRC contexts has not received much scholarly attention in the past. I therefore lean heavily on Elphick’s discussions of the matter in this section. It is definitely a subject that deserves a more in depth study, but as my aim is merely to provide a brief and general history of missions in South Africa, I did not do that here.

English-speaking Protestants (Elphick,2012: 132). In Britain and North America, Protestant churches started using the “Social Gospel” to combat the evils of industrial society. In the wake of social transitions to industrialisation and rapid urbanisation, poverty and squalour were on the rise (Jacobs,2015: 2). Traditional Protestantism seemed unable to address the crisis of industrialisation and the intellectual doubts of many congregants, that arose in the last decades of the nineteenth century (Elphick,2012: 132). The “Social Gospel,” however was based on the idea that industrialisation could be utilised in a positive way, by positive social programs in an effort to help society (Jacobs,2015: 3). Jacobs (2015:2) describes it as “the attempt of conscientious Christians to respond to the social inequity of (the) time.”

In early twentieth century South Africa, many missionaries started advocating for social change (Elphick,2012: 132). They began to stress the immanence, rather than the transcendence, of God. They proclaimed a God who could not only save individuals from sin but could also save society from injustice (Elphick,2012: 133). Although numerous South African missionaries were attracted to the Social Gospel, they were only occasionally inspired by the loosely socialist language. Few of them publicly questioned traditional evangelical doctrines or the focus on evangelism in missions (Elphick,2012: 134). They found the American tradition of post-Civil War “home missions,” that focused on educating and Christianising people from the defeated Southern states, much more appealing (Elphick,2012: 134). This approach represented a more accommodating and moderate version of the Social Gospel – encompassing themes of hard work, self-help, and Christian moral formation – that appealed to missionaries, paternalist white settlers, and many cautious black people (Elphick,2012: 134). Still, both strands of the Social Gospel that reached South Africa, stressed Christian charity and reconciliation between different social groups. Both proposed to empower the oppressed through education and moral formation (Elphick,2012: 134).

Twentieth century South African missionaries addressed social or political issues more comprehensively than their predecessors by identifying the whole of society as their target (Elphick,2012: 135). Most policies of the Social Gospel missionaries were not radical but derived from earlier assumptions that missionaries should guide, or even coerce, individuals and societies into moral improvement (Elphick,2012: 148). Many missionaries and missionary-minded Christians were convinced that authentic Christian mission required a

broad, assertive campaign against social ills and unjust social institutions and laws. They believed that social salvation depended on healthy Christian families and churches (Elphick,2012: 148). Missionaries thus responded warmly to the imperialists' call for social reform, moral betterment, and an end to class divisions (Elphick,2012: 62).

2.2.5 Tiv-mission

The Dutch Reformed Church's mission to the Tiv people of Central Nigeria began in 1908 with the arrival of Rev. George Botha (Cronjé,1982: 166). A few years prior, Dr Karl Kumm – originally a member of the North African Mission (NAM) – felt called to evangelise the people of the so called *Sudan*²¹. His plan was to build mission stations right through that area, in order to “prevent the tidal wave of Islam” (which was prevalent in North Africa) “from reaching further south” (Casaleggio,1965: 17). When existing missionary societies were not prepared to take on the responsibility, a new society, the *Sudan United Mission* (SUM), was formed in Edinburgh, Scotland. In July 1904, Dr Kumm and three representatives of the SUM left for northern Nigeria, but soon realised in order to reach their goal of establishing a chain of mission stations right through Africa, they would need assistance. Over the next few years, Dr Kumm visited numerous countries – including South Africa in 1907 – with the purpose of forming subsidiaries of the SUM (Cronjé,1982: 164). His visit to South Africa, not only resulted in the birth of a subsidiary branch, but also lead to the recruitment of George Botha, who was a theological student at the time.

After his ordination, Rev Botha left for England, where he received training and met up with VH Hosking from the Methodist church – also a South African. Upon their arrival in England, Botha and Hosking learned that the American branch of the SUM was already working in the area originally allocated to them. In October 1908 they made their way to Nigeria as the first two missionaries of the South African SUM branch, and a year later they were joined by Mr C.F. Zimmerman and two single women, Ms. C.M. Cilliers and E. Milne²² (Cronjé,1982: 166). The “search” for a suitable place to establish the South African branch's mission station ensued and eventually, they settled at the foot of Dilikop, among the Mbula tribe (De Vos,1987: 9). Two years later, it was decided to move the mission station from

²¹ The Sudan is a region in Northern Nigeria – not to be confused with The Republic of the Sudan.

²² Smith (1972: 29) states that “this was a brave new venture for these women in so primitive a land...” but fails to name them, only referring to them as “single women.”

Dilikop to Salatu, due to the inappreciable size of the Mbula population (Casaleggio,1965: 26).

In 1913 the South African branch of the SUM held their first field conference in Salatu. The first item on the agenda was the division of “Tiv land” (Nigeria) between the English and Afrikaans sections of the branch – which was interdenominational and therefore employed both English- and Afrikaans-speaking personnel. They decided that “the time was not yet ripe” for such a step (Casaleggio,1965: 45). During the conference, it was also decided to start a second mission station called Zaki Biam, which was made possible by the arrival of more mission staff members earlier that year – including J.G. Strydom and A.J Brink (Cronjé,1982: 164). In November 1913 Alice Matthews arrived in Salatu and after another field conference in April 1914, she married Attie Brink. They left for Zaki Biam on the same day (Casaleggio,1965: 47).

By 1915 there were four “couples of the DRC” serving the South African branch of the SUM. “They were Rev. and Mrs. J.G. Botha, Rev. and Mrs A.J. Brink, Rev. and Mrs W. Malherbe, and Rev. and Mrs J. Strydom” (Smith,1972: 31).²³ It was during this time that the DRC requested permission to leave the SUM and work independently in the region. On the first of July 1916, the DRC officially took full responsibility for the work among the Tiv people with the agreement that the English-speaking missionaries would find work elsewhere (Smith,1972: 31). Mission in Tiv land henceforth became the responsibility of the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM). Rubingh (1969:96) argues that this shift brought with it, a complex heritage of missionary attitudes and relationships with indigenous African peoples. It also meant that for forty years the Tiv would not be introduced tribally, linguistically or ecclesiastically to other churches or tribes within the SUM (Smith,1972: 31).

The first twenty years following the DRC’s secession from the SUM, are generally regarded as trying times for the missionaries in Tiv land, as the local population were little interested in the missionaries’ attempts at evangelisation (Rubingh,1969: 92). Rubingh (1969: 92) states that it was equally difficult to find people to “serve as servants.”²⁴ It was the son of Saai, the

²³ Note that the women in these “couples” are referred to only by their husband’s names, as in most of the earlier works on mission history.

²⁴ See 4.2

headman of Salatu – a child named Akiga – who was the first among the Tiv people to “publically confess the Lord as his personal Saviour” (Casaleggio,1965: 72). Akiga was the servant (“personal boy”)²⁵ of Alice Brink. He was amongst the first four converts of the Tiv people to be baptised in December 1917. Evidently, not long after the baptism, the missionaries discovered that all four of these “first converts from paganism” were “living in sin,” and they were placed under censure (Casaleggio,1965: 52). Casaleggio (1965: 53) writes:

The years that followed, were characterised by the severe struggle to establish the gospel in this heathen country. At virtually every subsequent council meeting the censure of one of the Christians was handled. For many years it was as if the gospel made no impression on these heathens. As Rev. Botha stated: “Darkness descended and it was like we were chipping at a boulder.” [my translation]

By 1930 the number of baptised adults still stood at six and the DRC regarded the work amongst the people of Tiv land to be extremely difficult and unfruitful (Rubingh,1969: 93). Regardless, a number of mission stations were opened between 1916 and 1935. This included Mkar, which was established by Alice and Attie Brink, and eventually became the headquarters of the DRCM in Tiv land (Cronjé,1982: 168). When they initially arrived at Mkar in 1923, the Brink’s were given a small hut which had previously been used as a pigsty – a structure known to the Tiv as an “ate,” which was basically a roof on poles (Smith,1972: 163). Their beginning in Mkar was modest and challenging, but they found the people there to be much friendlier, more approachable and helpful compared to their experiences at the other mission stations (Casaleggio,1965: 57). Some of the local men were eager to learn. Although there were no classrooms, within two months Alice Brink was teaching forty men and two women under the trees at Mkar. One year after their arrival, they opened a boarding school. They also provided basic medical care and were surprised by the number of people who were blind and came to them, looking for help (Casaleggio,1965: 59). It was a characteristic of evangelical missions to use the provision of western-style education and health services as an extra-doctrinal technique for “winning souls” in the mission field (Njoku,2007: 6). Eventually, in 1925, Dr. Paul Labuschagne and Ms. Vosloo arrived at Mkar

²⁵ See 4.2

and could formally start treating people. Years later, a school was established for those who were blind, thanks to the work of Alice Brink.

Despite the many disappointments the DRC missionaries experienced during their first twenty-five years in Nigeria, there was an unexpected and surprising breakthrough/“awakening” in the second half of the 1930’s. Ironically, this “revival” amongst the Tiv people was not brought about primarily or directly by missionary endeavours, but by the Tiv people themselves. In the villages – far from the mission stations – local leaders started inviting people to gatherings where they would pray and read the Bible together (Cronjé,1982: 170). As a result, Bible Schools emerged all over Tiv land and other parts of Nigeria (Cronjé,1982: 171). Tiv people spontaneously and actively started sharing the Gospel with their own communities (Rubingh,1969: 126).²⁶ This indigenous movement, lead to the rise of as many as eighty-nine “bush Bible Schools,” by 1944. These Bible Schools – led by local leaders who somewhere, somehow came into contact with the Christian faith and received some form of education – became a most valuable asset in the establishment of the Church in Tiv land and the larger Nigeria (Cronjé,1982: 171). Over the next quarter century the efforts and intensity of missionary work, by and among the Tiv, would only increase. By 1952 the mission station at Mkar had become the centre of a wide evangelistic ministry (Smith,1972: 164). It was the home of an organised congregation, with a proper church building; a hospital with a maternity section; a primary school (with seven grades) and the beginnings of a college for teachers (Smith,1972: 164).

Despite the eventual success of the DRCM’s work in the eyes of the missionaries – when the Tiv “at last began to respond to the Gospel in great numbers” – there was a growing discomfort amongst DRC members about supporting a mission field so far removed from South Africa. According to Cronjé (1982: 177), growing demands of other missionary outreaches closer to home – such as Malawi, Zimbabwe and the Eastern Cape – and the financial depression of the 1930’s, made it increasingly difficult for the DRC to continue supporting the DRCM in Nigeria. It was therefore decided to transfer the work in Tiv land to another Reformed Church or missionary society. From 1956 to November 1961 the DRCM’s work was gradually transferred to the CRC (Christian Reformed Church of America). After

²⁶ This serves as a great example of the fact that Africans played a significant role in spreading Christianity in Africa, and that they were not always the object of mission, but often times also the subject (Isichei,1995: 6).

fifty years in Nigeria, the DRCM handed over the baton and ceased to operate in Nigeria (Rubingh,1969: 128).

2.3 Women in mission in the early 20th century

In the same way the term “missionary” immediately recalls images of colonial expansion, it has historically naturally referred to the work of men. It should come as no surprise that the first Protestant missionaries were all male, and their wives were only grudgingly allowed to partake in missionary activity (Isichei,1995: 79). In South Africa, the transformation from this traditional mission pattern, where the missionary force was dominated by male pastors, was even slower than most other missionary agents (Elphick,2012: 109). By 1911, forty-one percent of all Protestant missionaries in South Africa were women. Three in four of these were wives of missionaries (Elphick,2012: 109). These women typically devoted themselves to their own home and children, and to teaching African women and children to read the Bible, sew and perform other domestic tasks (Elphick,2012: 109). Male missionaries usually regarded themselves as being those God had called and sent, and their wives often shared this vision (De Gruchy,2003: 217). Until about 1938 – when the emphasis on social ministries led to more single women being recruited as missionaries – the majority of women in mission were missionary wives (Elphick,2012: 109).

Before 1925 few single women were recruited to South African missions, and the arrival of Cilliers and Milne at Salatu in 1913 was most certainly the exception rather than the rule. However, in the late nineteenth century, there was a noticeable increase in female recruitment and South Africa specifically had a growing share of female volunteers (Porter,2003: 9). When the single, women missionaries were finally welcomed they were soon in a majority (Isichei,1995: 79). Their predominance, however, was partly masked by the fact that wives of missionaries were not listed separately – as can be seen in Smith’s (1972: 31) history of Tiv mission. In several mission society lists, men were categorised according to whether or not they were ordained, while women were classified by their marital status (Gaitskell,2003: 134).

The earlier nineteenth century prominence given to missionary wives became increasingly overshadowed as more and more single women were recruited. To a certain extent, the

dominant sphere for women's work was no longer only at home (Porter,2003: 10). Regardless, the traditional emphasis on domesticity and its significance in the lives of converts remained important to many (Porter,2003: 10)

In the mission field, women were still operating largely in a man's world (Porter,2003: 10). Ecclesiastical norms reinforced gender stereotypes and women missionaries' role remained theologically and institutionally less influential than their numbers would suggest (Porter,2003: 10). Often women were unrepresented on the local decision making bodies or would have to meet in a separate conference, of which the recommendations were often disregarded (Isichei,1995: 80). Women's new roles in the mission field also didn't seem to shift the male clerical dominance in their home countries (Gaitskell,2003: 132). Nonetheless, the missionary enterprise presented women with the opportunity to enter the public domain and participate in ways that were not permitted otherwise.

2.4 Concluding remarks

Throughout this chapter, it becomes clear that the context of mission in the early twentieth century was in more ways than one very hegemonic in its nature. From the very beginning, the missionary enterprise was intrinsically linked with colonial expansion, crossing new frontiers and the consequent subordination and domination of those who were marked as "the other." Within the South African context, the missionary endeavour quickly became very racialised and eventually – although not intentionally – contributed to the segregation of churches according to cultural and colour lines. In the last section, it also becomes clear that the missionary context was not only marked by white (as well as Western and European) dominance but by male dominance and hegemony as well. Despite the clear cultural, racial and gender hegemony present in missionary endeavours, a balanced perspective on the activities of Christian missionaries also has to acknowledge their good intentions and multiple roles as agents of modernization (Njoku,2007: 6). It is within this complex and somewhat ambiguous context that Alice Mabel Matthewson entered the "missionary life." The colonialist, male dominated, missionary enterprise, however, is not the only backdrop against which Alice's story took place. In the next chapter, I will discuss the context of gender in South Africa in the early twentieth century and explore in more depth the role of

women in mission in the early twentieth century. This will assist us in unveiling yet another layer of the backdrop against which Alice's story takes place.

Chapter 3

Gender roles²⁷ and Afrikaner women in early 20th century South Africa

As indicated in the second chapter of this study, the landscape against which Alice Brink's story takes place, is a multi-faceted one. Since it is the goal of feminist theory to evoke and explore the structures, ideologies, cultural practices and institutions that perpetuate the oppression of women, it is not only the landscape of mission in the twentieth century, but also the socio-political situation in South Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century that has to be taken into account. Feminist theory focuses on women's experiences and has to be aware of the fact that those experiences are the product of those women's heritages (Jones, 2000: 7). Therefore, in applying a feminist theological lens, one has to begin with "the critical analysis of given contexts" and "focus on how gender roles are understood and lived out" (Ackermann, 2006: 227). According to Ackermann (2006: 232), telling and listening to the stories of women requires discernment that is sensitive to the context, place and plight of the narrator. Therefore, in this chapter, I will sketch a broad picture of what being an Afrikaner²⁸ woman in early twentieth century South Africa – as Alice Brink (née Matthewson) was – entailed. I will discuss Afrikaner women and the *Volksmoeder* ideology, the pietism of Afrikaner women, and their role within the DRC.

3.1 Introductory remarks

In early twentieth century, South Africa the general attitude towards women reflected the sentiments and practices of a patriarchal society (Cloete, 1992: 45). As Landman (1994: 4) puts it: "Afrikaner women were the victims of a female subculture in a male dominated society. Gender roles, and the position of women, were largely based upon a White, Western, Christian paradigm (Walker, 1990: 25). Afrikaner nationalism was on the rise and the role of women as *volksmoeders* (mothers of the nation) was widely advocated, not only in the

²⁷ The standard, culturally excepted view of there being two sexes and the assumption that those two opposite (binary) sexes need to act in specific ways that are regarded as the norm (Thatcher, 2011: 7). Gender can be understood as a social structure that conditions practice (Connell, 2002: 55).

²⁸ In this chapter I will use the terms "Afrikaner" and "Boer" alternately to refer to the Dutch-Afrikaans settler society. The term "Afrikaner" refers to the whole Dutch-Afrikaans society in South Africa (including the so called Cape Dutch population), while "Boer" refers to those Afrikaners who trekked from the Cape inland during the Great Trek, as well as those who were participants in the South African wars.

See: Giliomee, H. 2009. *The Afrikaners: biography of a people*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

general society but also within religious circles and the specifically the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). Since Alice Brink (née Matthewson) was a member of the DRC and sent to the mission field in the Sudan region (Nigeria) as a representative of the DRC, I will also address the church's perception of women; the role of women in the DRC; and the religiosity of twentieth century Afrikaner women.

3.2 Afrikaner Women and the Volksmoeder (Mother of the nation) ideal

During the last few decades of the nineteenth century, and the dawn of the twentieth century, South Africa was a country ravaged by war. Indigenous Africans, Dutch settlers, and the British Empire came head to head in a series of wars, known as the South African wars (1879-1915). The Second Boer war (i.e. The South African war) was especially hard on the Boer women and children. British forces held thousands of women and children captive in concentration camps – usually after torching their homes and the lands they lived on – in an effort to break the Boer resistance (McClintock, 1995: 109).²⁹ These women were, however, not regarded and/or remembered solely as victims, but as loyal martyrs and bitter-enders. Those who managed to evade the concentration camps supported the Boer troops by distributing provisions and tending to the farms (Swart, 2007: 46). It is said that it is their tenacity during the war that inspired and motivated the men during the war (Swart, 2007: 46). McClintock (1995: 109) points out that:

Late nineteenth century narratives are scattered with references to the burly, whip-wielding Boer women, who dragged waggons over mountains and knew more about inspanning oxen and breeding horses than embroidery anglaise.

The aftermath of the war, and the suffering; heroism; patriotism; and defiance attested to Afrikaner women during the war, was an idealised image of women – particularly Afrikaner/Boer women (van der Merwe, 2011: 77).³⁰ This ideal image of Afrikaner

²⁹ I refer to the suffering of Boer women and children for the purpose of this study and with no intent to disregard the suffering that others endured during the war. Boer women and children were not the only ones held captive by British forces. Although the South African war was primarily between the British Empire and the Boer Republics (Republic of Transvaal and the Orange Free State), it was not an exclusively “white” war, and men, women and children from other groups and races also suffered during this war. See: Giliomee, H. 2009. *The Afrikaners: biography of a people*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

³⁰ Of course – as argued by Brink (1986) and Vincent (1999) – not all Afrikaner women, and especially working class women, automatically accepted this idealised role.

womanhood – known as the *volksmoeder* – was further promulgated by the erection of the *Nasionale Vrouemonument* (National Women’s Monument) in Bloemfontein in 1913 (Swart,2007: 48). The unveiling was attended by nearly 20 000 people from all over South Africa and publicly invoked the suffering of women and children during the war (Vincent,1999: 11). “The iconography drew heavily on themes of martyrdom, stoicism and loyalty” (Swart,2007: 48). With the erection of the monument, the role of women as fierce fighters and farmers during the war, was replaced by the figure of a mournful and lamenting mother with a baby in her arms (Van der Merwe,2011: 83) The image of Afrikaner women as militant and political was buried for good, and the perception of Afrikaner womanhood as suffering, stoical and self-sacrificing was ratified (Van der Merwe,2011: 83). The ideal Afrikaner woman was depicted as a mother who made the ultimate sacrifice in service of her nation (Chetty,2015: 43). With this one icon, women all over South Africa were reminded that their national identity should take priority over any other identity (Landman,1994: 66). Christina Landman (1994: 4) points to the fact that Afrikaans women played no part in the planning, erection or inauguration of ‘their’ monument. These women were therefore not the creators of the label they were now forced to wear and adhere to; it was simply ascribed to them by Afrikaner men who were aiming to achieve their nationalist ideals (Landman,1994: 4). Landman (1994: 4) explains that it was not the martyrdom of Afrikaner women that caused the submissive state they took on, but the *national honouring of martyrdom* that allowed suffering to become such an inseparable part of their nature (Landman,1994: 4).

The works of historiographers, Erick Stockenström³¹ and Willem Postma (alias Dr Okulis)³² – who were both closely connected with Afrikaner nationalist organizations such as the Broederbond, the Smuts and Hertzog governments and the Dutch Reformed Church – also played a significant role in establishing the *volksmoeder* ideology (Van der Merwe,2011: 87). Both men used the historical figure of the “Voortrekker Mother,”³³ in their depiction of Afrikaner women and the construction of the *volksmoeder* image. The “Voortrekker Mother” was the predecessor of the *volksmoeder*, and was able “to do it all.”

³¹ Stockenström. E. 1921. *Die Vrou in die Geskiedenis van die Hollands-Afrikaanse Volk: n Beknopte Oorsig van die Rol wat die Vrou in die Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika gespeel het in die 350 Jaar tussen 1568 en 1916*. Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia

³² Okulis. 1918. *Die Boervrou, Moeder van Haar Volk*. Bloemfontein: Die Nasionale Pers.

³³ The Boer women on the Great Trek

(She) was teacher, doctor, and nurse; and if there was fighting to be done, she cast the bullets and stood faithfully at her husband's side. (Vincent,1999: 11).

Postma declared that it was the Great Trek – far from civilisation, in the face of various dangers and difficulties, without proper protection and amidst prosecution – that prepared Afrikaner women for “the greatest task,” viz. “to be mother of a nation” (Okulis,1918: 56). Stockenström insisted that, already during the Great Trek, Voortrekker women were very aware of their calling as the mothers of the future Afrikaner *volk* (people) (Brink,2008: 8). He described Voortrekker women as: useful (in preparing food and ammunition); patriotic; illiterate (therefore natural and simple); very moral; willing to sacrifice everything for their freedom; and fearless – mainly because of their faith in God (Landman,1994: 61).

In *Boervrouw, moeder van haar volk*, Postma devoted a whole chapter to describing the character of the Boer woman (*karakter van die Boervrou*) (Brink,2008: 8). He identified four significant characteristics of the *volksmoeder*, viz.: active and uncompromising patriotism; a deep sense of religion, the acceptance of martyrdom; and submissiveness (Landman,1994: 5).

The “*volksmoeder*” was generally understood as a blueprint of women’s societal roles, constructed for women, by men like Postma and Stockenström (Vincent,2000: 61). This “blueprint” soon spread throughout South Africa, as the *volksmoeder* became the logo of the first successful, widely read women’s magazine, *Die Boerevrou* (The Boer woman) (Brink,2008: 7). Who and what exactly a true Boer woman (or *volksmoeder*) was, was a subject of great deliberation in *Die Boerevrou* and the list of qualities that readers came up with was infinite (Kruger,2008: 119). The Boer woman was described as: “queen, mother, bride, sister, pure, natural, humble, friendly, loving, funny, shy, teacher, homemaker, soap maker, coffee brewer, rusk baker, sock mender, porridge maker, seamstress, kisser, butcher and chicken feeder” (Kruger,2008: 119).

The formalised and coherent *volksmoeder* ideology resulted mostly from Afrikaner (Dutch-South African) historical writings of the nineteenth century (Swart,2007: 47), but Ria van der Merwe (2011: 84) points to the fact that the concept of women as “mothers of the nation” was already prevalent in 1803, when the Governor of the Batavian Republic of the Cape advocated for the education of girls, on the basis that they were the “*toekomstige moeders van*

die volk” (future mothers of the nation). According to Governor De Mist, women not only needed to be excellent mothers, but “had to be educated to be the centre of the family’s happiness” (Van der Merwe,2011: 85). Education was thus used to introduce children from a very young age to a “carefully constructed image of the Afrikaner” as “a chosen people with a strong sense of identity, tradition and unique culture” (Van der Merwe,2011: 85). Girls were raised to become mothers who upheld that culture and the moral standards it prescribed. Becoming a mother was not only their civic responsibility, but a defining feature of their identity (Chetty,2015: 39).

Being a *volksmoeder* revolved around homeliness, motherhood, educating children and subservience to men (Botha,2013: 2). For many women – especially those with volatile social stature – this image was a very attractive one (Vincent,2000: 67). The South African War left in its wake: social, political and economic structures that were in a state of flux (Van der Merwe,2011: 98). In a time of immense turmoil the *volksmoeder* image gave Afrikaner women a “sense of stability and purpose in a rapidly changing world” and served as a stabilising force (Brink,1990: 291). It was a prototype for ordinary women to follow (Van der Merwe,2011: 99). As “*volksmoeders*,” they became central figures in the “most significant historical memories” of the Afrikaner people (Vincent,2000: 68). It provided a sense of purpose and agency. Anthias (1989: 7) discusses five major ways in which women generally tended to be involved in national processes during the early twentieth century. These are all evident in the role(s) ascribed to Afrikaner women. They were expected to act as: biological reproducers (i.e. “mothers of the nation”); reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups; as patrons of ideological reproduction (transmitting ‘culture’); as signifiers of ethnic/national differences (symbols in ideological discourse) and lastly, as participants in national struggles (Anthias,1989: 7).

On the other hand, Afrikaner women often immersed themselves in these roles, with great pride and vigour. During the 1914 Afrikaner rebellion – against the government’s decision to send troops to invade German South West Africa on behalf of the British during the First World War – women chastised Afrikaner men who were not willing to rebel and/or volunteer for active service (Swart,2007: 46). After the rebellion, two Afrikaner women wrote an open letter addressed to “daughters of South Africa” in various newspapers, describing the *volksmoeder* as: being “the first Afrikaner blood to flow on the breast of South Africa.”

According to the letter, a volksmoeder was someone who “knew the land when you could not leave your waggon without a gun;” maintained “Boer ways;” helped to “prepare the way for civilisation;” and who “saw the 1881 war through from beginning to end.” (Swart,2007: 51). In the letter, they called upon Boer women to take part in The Mass Women’s Demonstration on 4 August 1915, during which approximately 4000 women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to deliver petitions for the release of General De Wet and 118 detainees (Brink,2008: 10). The underlying idea in the letter was that women should “stand by their fatherland, just as they would by their father or husband” (Swart,2007: 53).

Their use of the term was ambivalent. On the one hand, women were coming together to “free the men,” by translating their domestic role into the political sphere. On the other hand, women’s demands were formulated in terms of their position to men – as wives, mothers and daughters (Swart,2007: 55). This ambivalence is seen clearly in the ego texts of Petronella van Heerden – one of the few female doctors of the twentieth century – whose writings was studied and translated by Van Niekerk (1998: 369):

In my young days, the woman's place was in the house, but I had not been really too concerned about it until, in Philippolis, Emily Hobhouse lent me John Stuart Mills's book, *The Subjection of Women*. My first response was: he does not know Boer women! I was thinking of the women who had sjambokked their husbands who had deserted during the Boer War and refused them entry into their homes. This did not look very much like subjection. But then I started investigating and found out to my utter indignation that the woman's legal position was atrocious. She was classified under children and idiots, when she married she became a minor, she had no control over her possessions or her children and she could do nothing without the permission of her husband.

The *volksmoeder* ideology was equivocal, with both progressive and conservative tendencies (Swart,2007: 45). Vincent (1999: 1) argues that Afrikaner women broadened the term “*volksmoeder*” by using the language of domesticity and motherhood to include themselves in the social and political realm. The *volksmoeder* image, which depicted Afrikaner women as noble, honourable, courageous and hard-working, offered them a medium through which they could fight back against their marginalisation and claim their identity as strong, dynamic women, but unfortunately it could also be used to inhibit and control them (Vincent,1999:

14). The term was often used to reiterate the notion that men and women were naturally predisposed to inhabit certain roles in society (Vincent,1999: 15). Women were portrayed as the servants of the nation – nurturers, keepers of moral standards, teachers and the promoters of the Afrikaans language (Cloete,1992: 51). The *volksmoeder* was a “deliberately constructed image,” based on fragmented historical facts, “which did not bear in mind the realities that the majority of Afrikaner women” had to face on a daily basis (Van der Merwe,2011: 98). Rather than being agents of their own lives and stories, women were seen as participants in the lives of their children and husbands (Brink,1990: 291). In a poem about the original Women’s Demonstration in 1915, Afrikaner Nationalist poet Jan F Celliers writes:

“I see her wait, patient, without word.
I see her win, for husband and son and brother,
Because her name is Wife and Mother” (Swart,2007: 54)

Women – specifically white women who belonged to the middle- or upper class – were not supposed to work outside of the home. The South African judicial system supported this notion by placing various restrictions on women, and especially married women who, for instance, had the status of a minor/child (Botha,2013: 2). There was also a different set of societal rules and norms that applied to women (and *volksmoeders*). In her study on female students at the University of Pretoria, for instance, Ria van der Merwe (2011: 93) writes:

...the policies in place on the general behaviour and dress code of female students differed from those applicable to male students, in that women were far more restricted. Whereas male students were allowed to wear short trousers (with long socks and closed shoes, however) in the warm summer months women were initially not allowed to wear trousers at all and their dresses had to cover their knees. When trousers were finally allowed, they could only be worn with a jacket that covered the buttocks. Unlike their male counterparts, women students were not permitted to smoke on campus or in a public place when wearing the university blazer, because smoking was considered “unfeminine” and “unbecoming” for a woman.

3.2.1 The position of women in early twentieth century South Africa

The political culture of early twentieth century South Africa was thoroughly masculine. In *Die Boervrouw, Moeder van haar volk* (The Boer woman, mother of her nation), Willem Postma emphasised that the party political arena was no place for a woman/*volksmoeder* (Vincent,1999: 5).

Nevertheless, while European women were fighting for their right to have a say during the suffrage movement, Afrikaans/Boer women had an unprecedented amount of influence, earned by their involvement during the South African wars (Swart,2007: 49). Although they had no formal rights, their role was not a passive one (Swart,2007: 47). Men generally saw no place for women in politics or the labour force but believed it was their role to be carriers of civilisation and culture (Van der Merwe,2011: 84). As *volksmoeders*, Afrikaner women's role as mothers did not only apply to the private-, but also to the public sphere (Vincent,1999: 10). The dualistic use of the term meant that, even though it could constrain women in many ways, it also awarded them many liberties within the public sphere. Since political issues were regarded as family issues, it made sense for women to be involved with politics (Vincent,1999: 10). Being a mother to the nation naturally meant merging the domestic sphere with public responsibility. Women were thus called upon to be mothers of their own families, but also of their "super-family," i.e. the Afrikaner nation (van der Merwe,2011: 77). Postma explained that the *volksmoeder* is aware that she carries the future of her nation and her church in her lap³⁴ (Okulis,1918: 157). The establishment of the *Nasionale Vroue Party* (NVP – National Women's Party) in 1914 was largely a result of The Mass Women's Demonstration in support of their men, husbands, *volk* and church (Brink,2008: 10).

Afrikaner women were expected to help establish and uphold Afrikaner nationalist ideals, and the NVP certainly gave them the opportunity to do so (Cloete,1992: 45). The family unit was seen as "the last bastion beyond British control," and the "cultural power" of the *volksmoeder* was used "in service of white (read: Afrikaner) nation building" (McClintock,1995: 110). McClintock (1995: 110) asserts that white (Afrikaans) women were "both colonised and colonisers." They often embraced the racial prejudices that were prevalent at the time (Vincent,1999: 5). They were not only the consumers of Afrikaner culture but also active participants in the invention of Afrikaner identity in service of white nation building (Du Toit,2003: 156). Du Toit (2003: 175) asserts that Dutch-Afrikaans

³⁴ "sij weet dat sij in haar skoot dra die toekoms van haar volk en haar kerk"

women were not always “passive recipients of a male-constructed discourse,” but played a key role in the construction and articulation of a gendered Afrikaner nationalism. “The power of motherhood” was sufficiently utilised to establish white domination (McClintock, 1995: 110). Afrikaner women played a significant role in building the political movement that entrenched white (and Afrikaans) power and privilege (Du Toit, 2003: 176). From the start, women’s suffrage in South Africa was connected to the battle to uphold white power (Walker, 1990: 24). It is often argued that women were granted the right to vote in the nineteen thirties, not necessarily because gender roles were regarded as such a pressing issue, but to secure the white, Afrikaner vote (Botha, 2013: 2). Soon after the fact, the *National Party* (NP) approached the women of the NVP and requested that they – in the spirit of sacrifice – amalgamate to serve the greater *volksideaal* (national ideal) (Brink, 2008: 11). They conceded and sent *volksmoeders* back home to focus their domestic responsibilities and saving the nation one household at a time (Brink, 2008: 11).

Middle-class women were thus in a very ambiguous position – allowed to engage in the socio-political realm, yet confined to the household as mothers and representatives of the virtues of morality (Chetty, 2015: 2). Organisations such as the *South African Women’s Federation* (SAWF)³⁵; the *Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging* (ACVV – Afrikaans Christian Women’s Society);³⁶ and the *Vroue Sending Bond* (VSB – Women’s Missionary Society) gave women “the opportunity to move outside the confines of the household” into the public/social arena. Involvement in organisations such as these provided women with a sense of independence and greater purpose (Van der Merwe, 2011: 87). “White Afrikaner women, in particular, were involved in the area of social work,” since their “perceived moral characteristics” made them the ideal candidates to work in that field (Chetty, 2015: 48). This type of work caused little disruption to conventional gender roles, since it aligned with the idea of women as mothers of the “extended family” (i.e. the nation or *volk*) and would not require “a change in women’s virtuous qualities, but merely that they introduce their morality there (Chetty, 2015: 48). “To limit the social upheaval of changing women’s roles, their activities were couched in the language of domesticity” (Chetty, 2015: 48). Du Toit (2003: 175) explains that:

³⁵ See Van der Merwe, R. 2011. Moulding volksmoeders or volks enemies? Female students at the University of Pretoria, 1920-1970. *Historia* 56, 77-100

³⁶ See Du Toit, Marijke. 2003. The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism: Volksmoeders and the ACVV, 1904-1929. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 29: 1, 155-176

...this ‘language of social housekeeping’ claimed responsibility for non-familial social spaces, extending women’s mothering role beyond the home to forge ‘a new, more inclusive definition of the political’ and claiming some direct power for women in a redefined public arena... Afrikaner women participated in a distinct female political culture that ‘extolled the virtues of domesticity while simultaneously legitimating women’s public relationships to politics and the state, to community, workplace and marketplace.

Working class women “adopted and adapted the *volksmoeder* ideal to claim their own legitimacy, as valid members of society” (Van der Merwe, 2011: 82). The rapid industrialisation after the South African war led to a slow but steady increase in the representation of women in the labour market (Vincent, 2000: 62). Despite the Great Depression, the percentage of women who were part of the industrial labour force rose from fourteen percent in 1924 to twenty five percent in 1938 (Vincent, 2000: 62). McClintock (1995: 109) points out that – as in Victorian Britain – in reaction to women joining the labour market, “a revamped ideology of motherhood was invoked to usher women back into the home and the domestic life.” As with the enfranchisement, the education of women was not generally regarded as a way to empower them, but to prepare her for her role as wife and mother. Women were urged to educate themselves so that they could “judge well and sensibly and really serve (their) people, as female citizens as well as (in the first place!) Mothers,” (Du Toit, 2003: 174)³⁷. Van der Merwe (2011: 85) points to the editorial *Die Boervrou* of August 1920, in which young girls were encouraged to study as much as they could, so they – as homemakers – would be educated enough to challenge their husbands intellectually.

Despite great changes within the social structures during the twentieth century, the subservience of women prevailed, which proves how deep these perceptions of gender roles were rooted (Botha, 2013: 2). There were outliers, of course, but generally speaking, most Boer women were very conservative and opposed to change in terms of their position (Botha, 2013: 2). The *volksmoeder* image remained a very influential archetype in the lives of Afrikaner women – especially those in the middle class – up until the last decade of the

³⁷ Quoted from an article in *Die Burger*, 29 December 1925 and translated by Du Toit (2003: 175).

twentieth century (Klein,2004: 48). By that time, women were no longer specifically referred to as *volksmoeders*, but the legacy of the discourse lived on – not only in society but in the Dutch Reformed Church as well (Büchner,2008: 246).

3.3 Afrikaner women, pietism and the DRC

Historical information regarding women is notably absent from the records of the first two centuries of the DRC's existence (Plaatjies,2003: 92). For a very long time within the reformed tradition, the Bible was used to justify and propagate the exclusion of women, not only from church office, but also from the socio-political arena (Botha,2013: 3). Influential theologians such as Abraham Kuyper and Karl Barth proclaimed an entirely dualistic and binary understanding of gender roles (Botha,2013: 8). Barth claimed that, although men and women are equal before God, they are not equal in the duties/functions that God has assigned to them (Botha,2013: 8). According to Barth, it is the woman's duty to be subordinate and obedient to her husband and follow his initiative, while it is the husband's duty to be the leader and initiator (Botha,2013: 8). Kuyper – who believed that men and women were created unequally – was, without a doubt, one of the most influential theologians with regards to the gender roles DRC members adhered to. His theological ideas had a profound impact on the Reformed church fathers and specifically on the Afrikaans men who completed their studies in the Netherlands (Plaatjies,2003: 97). Ultimately, it was his theology that framed the theological discourse regarding women – and the role of women – in the DRC (Plaatjies,2003: 97). Kuyper – who published *De eerepositie der vrouw* (The honoured position of a woman) in 1914 – distinguished between the subordinate position of women in the public sphere and their honourable position in the private sphere (Botha,2013: 8). According to Kuyper, it is unnatural for a woman to give her opinion since it is the head of the family's responsibility to speak on behalf of the whole household (Plaatjies,2003: 97). He also argued that women's participation in the public and political sphere is against God's will and goes against their nature (Plaatjies,2003: 99).

Decades later this patriarchal, dualistic and hierarchical theological framework was still prevalent within the ranks of the DRC. This is seen clearly in the work of Johan Heyns,³⁸ who regarded the subordinate position of women as the God given order of creation

³⁸ An Afrikaans theologian, from the late twentieth century, whose work was widely read in Reformed circles. See Plaatjies (2013: 121-126)

(Plaatjies,2005: 8). In his works, he often used the binary oppositions that were already established in the early twentieth century by theologians such as Kuyper. These included: man/woman, head/help, strong/weak, father/mother, labour field/domestic field etc (Plaatjies,2003: 126). The DRC was distinctly dualistic in its views regarding men and women; black and white; soul and body etc (Plaatjies,2003: 130). There was a direct correlation between the anthropology of the Reformed tradition and the theological presuppositions of the DRC regarding women (Plaatjies,2003: 130).

As the central social institution for Boer/Afrikaner communities, the DRC, by and large, shaped the gender discourse of the time (Du Toit,2003: 163). Both Willem Postma and Eric Stockenström – who are often regarded as the architects of the *volksmoeder* discourse – were well known within Reformed circles and had strong connections to the DRC (Landman,1994: 5). However, even before Postma, Stockenström and various other male writers developed the *volksmoeder* discourse, women were immersed in an older, gendered, religious discourse, which was woven together with the new nationalist ideology (Du Toit,2003: 175). Rather than *volksmoeder* ideology influencing religion, it was religion that shaped this ideology (Landman,1994: 15). As early as the late 1880's, the DRC's *Vrouwen Zending Bond* (Women's Mission League) argued that, barring their domestic obligations, women also had a duty towards church and state (Brink,2008: 10). Their loyalty to the nation and to God was later regarded and described – by men like Postma and Stockenström – as a characteristic which Afrikaner women inherited from their Dutch foremothers (Landman,1994: 5). In reality, however, it was not the Dutch women/feminists who had the greatest influence on them, but the thoughts of Dutch men (such as Abraham Kuyper), passed on by the Afrikaans men who studied theology in the Netherlands (Landman,1994: 9). Since history alone could not uphold this ideology, they developed a patriarchal, nationalist theology (Landman,1994: 15).

The dominant discourse within DRC tradition thus maintained that the role and function of women in the church was biologically determined and divinely ordained (Plaatjies,2005: 13). Early twentieth century Afrikaner women were severely influenced by the patriarchal ideologies within the DRC and adopted a dependent, obedient, voiceless role in the church. Although it is true that women asserted themselves in various ways and often used the *volksmoeder* image to their advantage, they refrained from questioning male hegemony,

which was prevalent in the church (Walker, 1990: 318). In her study on *volksmoeders* and the ACVV, Marijke du Toit (2003: 165) refers to an evening of lectures on “the role of women,” to which members of the DRC synod and their wives were invited:

De Zuid-Afrikaan reported approvingly that female members did not speak in public - instead, church ministers spoke on their behalf. From the beginning, male speakers routinely reminded women of their duties '*als vrouw, als moeder, als Christin*' (as woman, as mother, as Christian). At times, speeches included muted warnings against women moving beyond their allotted sphere. The times necessitated female action, but women's '*roeping als huismoeder*' (calling as house-mother) must not be abandoned.

The religious discourse of the time and the rising nationalist ideology shared one central trait: the propagation of an idealised notion of motherhood which prioritised the household above all else (Du Toit, 2003: 164). This ideal was comprehensively discussed in Dutch Reformed Church magazines, which often combined religious and nationalist identities (Du Toit, 2003: 155). Afrikaner women were regarded as the keepers of the Boer *volk*. Their far-reaching moral influence was deemed to be the reason why the Boer population remained a white race; why the Boer folk remained “true to the church and religion of their fathers;” and why the Dutch population never became one with the English and therefore remained a unique, pure nation (Landman, 1994: 8).

When the suffrage movement gained momentum in South Africa, there was strong resistance from the side of the church. In one instance it was said that “the fearful prospect of equality for men and women would lead to social chaos,” while in another, an essay by the Worcester (Western Cape) *Christelike Jongelings Vereniging* (Christian Young Men’s Society) asked whether women should be allowed to speak publically and reiterated: “*met nadruk neen en nogmaals neen*” (emphatically no and, once again, no) (Du Toit, 2003: 166). Some church leaders discussed “*vaderlijke heerschappij*” (fatherly dominion), linking men with the divine, whilst others reiterated the notion that, for women, worshipping God entailed obedience to men and silence in public (Du Toit, 2003: 166).

Initially, Afrikaans, Christian women also tended to oppose the suffrage movement and other efforts to establish equality between men and women. During a 1907 ACVV congress, for

instance, Elizabeth Roos (first president of the ACVV) dismissed the suffrage movement stating: “we as Afrikaans women have never yet felt that we are restricted, and have never yearned for more freedom and power”³⁹ (Du Toit,2003: 166). Although later on, female members of the DRC started to take more public action (usually by means of philanthropic efforts) and support the suffrage movement, it was usually in keeping with the *volksmoeder* theme (Du Toit,2003: 166).

3.3.1 The role of Afrikaner women in DRC mission

The *volksmoeder* image and the idealised notions of motherhood were used by the DRC to support missionary and philanthropic efforts (Van der Merwe,2011: 78). The arrival of Rev Andrew Murray in the Cape, and the revival that followed, brought about a “new orthodoxy in the church.” This led to new patterns and practices within the DRC, which provided women with new opportunities regarding church- and particularly mission-related activities (Du Toit,2003: 163). Initially, the involvement of women in the DRC was very haphazard and had no formal structure (Plaatjies,2003: 95).

An apparently spontaneous religious revival that swept the Cape countryside was given official sanction by the church. *Predikantsvrouwen* [sic] established a network of prayer groups for female parishioners and, by the late 1880s, the *Vrouwen Zending Bond* (Women's Missionary Association)... Numbers of young Dutch-Afrikaans women graduated from the new seminaries, versed in the teachings of evangelical piety. From the 1880s, letters, poems, sermons and stories in DRC missionary publications (mostly written by male church ministers) also specifically and extensively celebrated a maternal piety that glorified women's domestic duties, emphasised mothers' responsibility for their children's souls and praised quiet and modest worship. (Du Toit,2003: 163).

The first South African seminary was Stellenbosch Gymnasium. Unsurprisingly, it was an exclusively white, male seminary, aimed at training white men to become ministers and missionaries (Plaatjies,2003: 138). In 1874 a mission college for women, the *Huguenote-Siminarie* (Huguenot Seminary), was founded in Wellington, with the aim of training women who dreamed of working in the mission field – not necessarily as missionaries, but as

³⁹ As translated by Marijke Du Toit (2003: 166).

teachers (Plaatjies,2003: 137). Women and men were now both being trained for the mission field, parallel in terms of focus but apart in terms of vocation and location (Plaatjies,2003: 138). The institution had close links with Mount Holyoke Seminary in Massachusetts, USA (Sarja,2003: 112). Both institutions regarded raising “young African girls to become good Christian wives and mothers” as the most important goal for their work (Sarja,2003: 112).

Four years later the *Huguenote Zending Vereeniging* (Huguenot Mission Society) was born, with the purpose of sending missionary teachers from their own Seminary to the mission field (Plaatjies,2003: 138). The DRC encouraged the establishment of assisting mission societies (*hulpsendingvereenigings*), since it furthered their cause, while still excluding women from official church structures (Plaatjies,2003: 138). This was also in keeping with the DRC’s ideologies regarding women, who were often praised for the supporting role they played as wives, mothers, nurturers etc (Plaatjies,2003: 139). Even after serving as leaders and missionaries for years at mission stations, women were seen as “primarily playing a supporting role during the male missionary’s ministry” (Plaatjies,2003: 140). DRC leadership regarded the involvement of women in philanthropic and missional activities in terms of functionality (Plaatjies,2003: 176). Since evangelicalism involved the utilisation of qualities usually associated with women, it correlated with the traditional view of women. They welcomed their assistance – and presumably needed it – but would not allow them to become members of the DRC’s own Missionary Committee. Despite the DRC’s reluctance to allow women in leadership, nearly fifty percent of the funds they spent on missionary work came from the VSB (Plaatjies,2003: 139).

Out of the *Huguenote Zending Vereeniging* (which was a smaller, local society) the *Vrouesendingbond* (VSB) was born in the hope of establishing a unified women’s league for Christian women throughout the whole of South Africa (Oberholster,1940: 108). It was founded by Mss. Ferguson, Murray (Emma – referred to in historical writings as “Mrs. Andrew Murray” or “Mrs. dr. A. Murray”)⁴⁰ and Spijker (Plaatjies,2005: 8). It soon became known as one of the “recognised assisting services” (*hulpsendingdienste*) of the DRC (Van Wijk,1964: 27). Although it was established outside of official church structures, the VSB

⁴⁰ The achievements of Emma Murray and her contributions to an array of missionary societies, are often discussed, by theologians and historians alike, in relation to her husband, Andrew Murray. This is a trend in most historical writings on mission in the DRC, and also where Alice Brink is involved.

had no intention of being disconnected from the DRC (Plaatjies,2003: 143). Their aim was to get female DRC members involved in missionary projects and to cultivate a good relationship with the Missions Committee of the DRC – which was essential to them (Van Wijk,1964: 27). Although the VSB gave women an avenue through which they could participate in ecclesiastical activities, the culture regarding women in the church did not change much (Plaatjies,2005: 9). Women were still being arranged into their own separate organisations, whilst remaining under patriarchal control and left out of the governing- and decision making structures (Plaatjies,2005: 9). These separate structures socially- and spiritually isolated them from ordinary church members, who were not involved in the organisation(s) (Plaatjies,2005: 13).

In 1904 the first seminary for female missionaries, *Fredenheim*, was founded by Ms. A.P Fergusson – who funded the entire project (Cronje,1984: 29). According to Van Wijk (1964: 3) sending women to the mission field was a priority for the VSB from the very beginning. She explains that the VSB was compelled to provide training for the young women who so readily and frequently gave themselves up for the missionary cause (Van Wijk,1964: 31).⁴¹ In the “Golden Jubilee Report” of nineteen forty, *Fredenheim* is described as:

“the little place where she [the daughter of South Africa] can go to equip herself for service to the Master.” (Vrouesendingbond Goue Jubileum-kongres,1940: 84).

Fredenheim was recognised by the DRC, as a training centre for female missionaries and social workers. This made it possible for the VSB to send female missionaries to the mission field (Plaatjies,2003: 140). They were, of course, not given the same status as men were and although they were primarily trained as missionaries, they also received instruction in “practical subjects, such as nursing, maternal science, the art of cookery, home science etc.” [my translation] (Van Wijk,1964: 32). In some ways, the missionary movement was influenced by women’s entrance into the educational system and labour market, but the movement itself also contributed to greater acceptance of women in the public sphere (Okkenhaug,2003: 12).

⁴¹ “Waar jong dogters hulleself gedurig vir die sending aangebied het, is dit vanselfsprekend dat die VSB voorsiening moes maak vir hul verstandelike en geestelike ontwikkeling. So het dit gekom dat Fredenheim in die lewe geroep is.” (Van Wijk,1964: 27).

The tendency of Dutch-Afrikaans women to get involved in – and organise – philanthropic projects (particularly within the DRC), is often regarded as an effort to close the gap between the active political role they played during the war and the new domestic role assigned to them (Du Toit, 2003: 164). It gave them new opportunities to participate in charitable activities outside the confines of the home (Okkenhaug, 2003: 12). Their efforts and projects were, however, often extremely racialised. According to Stockenström (1921: 246), it was the deep religiosity of Afrikaans women that “kept the nation white.”⁴² This was a consequence of the strong nationalist culture that was not only emphasised within the political realm, but within the DRC as well.

3.3.2 The pietism of early twentieth century Afrikaner women

After closely studying the diaries of seven Afrikaner women, Landman (1994: 3) came to the conclusion that Afrikaans women “believed in a demanding male God who wished to be pleased and empowered those who succeeded in doing so.” Their piety resembled that of pre-Enlightenment Europe, which relied heavily on a submissive relationship towards God and the believers’ ability to distinguish between right and wrong (Landman, 1994: 57). The characteristics of a good Christian woman were: obedience to the authority of husband and father; piety; good manners; frugality and service to others.

Although Stockenström ascribed Afrikaans women’s religiosity to Calvinism and the Bible, Landman (1994: 7) argues that the books and teachings of Dutch pietists had a much greater influence. Pietist theology supported the idea that everything (including all forms of misfortune) should be blamed on personal sins (Landman, 1994: 118). Afrikaans female piety was characterised by excessive feelings of personal guilt directed towards a domineering and demanding male God, a simple view of Christ as a martyr suffering with them, and an extremely negative view of the self as well as the rest of humanity (Landman, 1994: 12). Under the strong influence of Andrew Murray, women also tended to see and describe God as a personal God – “the God who provided comfort amidst their personal sufferings” (Landman, 1994: 2-7). The loss of so many of their children and loved ones due to their circumstances in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, caused a preoccupation with the “fate of the souls of their deceased beloveds” (Landman, 1994: 117). The image of God as a very

⁴² As translated by Landman (1994: 8)

powerful, masculine, male God, provided them with a figure in whom they could find refuge in times of death and danger (Landman,1994: 118). The perceived demanding nature of their God led to their own self-hate and self-humiliation (Landman,1994: 118). The piety of these Afrikaner women, which was marked by self-hate and submissiveness, was used by men to keep them out of the public sphere and still engage them in the male nationalist struggles (Landman,1994: 3).

Although it was partly male-formulated piety, it was attractive to these women because, on the one hand, it allowed them a personal relationship with God, which they were often denied with their husbands; on the other hand, because they were naturally proactive people, it afforded them the attraction of a life of individual holiness, self-sacrifice and service to God. (Landman,1994: 2)

The piety of these Afrikaner women had a great influence on their perspectives and behaviour and it fuelled their submissiveness.

3.4 Concluding remarks

Throughout this chapter, it becomes clear that the context within which Alice's story takes place was one marked by the submissiveness and martyrdom of women. The ideologies, cultural practices and Church structures that were dominant at the time, were all used to perpetuate the oppression of women and confine them to the domestic sphere. Women were expected to be wives, mothers and the bastions of Afrikaner culture – which was deeply rooted in the Dutch Reformed Church. It is clear that motherhood was an especially important theme, not only in Alice's culture, but also according to the institution where she received her education. In early twentieth century South Africa, both the gender context and the context of mission were marked by white, male, dominance and hegemony. These contexts perpetuated the oppression of women, as well as other marginalised groups. On the other hand, it is clear that there were also those who broke out of the constraints placed upon them in these contexts.

In the following chapter, it will become clearer to what extent these ideologies and gender roles – as well as the context of mission – impacted Alice's life. Chapter 4 will comprise the story of Alice Mabel Brink, according to my reading of her ego-texts.

Chapter 4

The story of Alice Mabel Brink (née Matthewson)

4.1 The Early Years

In 1851, nineteen settlers claimed farms on the edge of the Great Karoo, just south of the Orange River – which was declared as the northern border of the Cape Colony the year before (Boshoff, 2010: 40). Initially, these settlers were members of the DRC in Colesburg, but in 1854 they founded their own church and with it, a town was born. It is in this church – DRC Hopetown – that Alice Mabel Matthewson was baptised at age two.⁴³ Alice was born in Hopetown on the twentieth of October 1877⁴⁴ to parents, Alexander Matthewson and Louisa Cornelia Jacoba Matthewson (née Janse van Rensburg).⁴⁵ She grew up on the farm, Lilydale⁴⁶ as the eleventh child out of fifteen – two of which died shortly after birth – with her ten sisters and four brothers (Geni, 2015). Her diaries do not reveal much about the first twenty years of Alice's life but she did at one stage, looking back, divide her life into periods of ten years each, referring to the first ten years only as her “birth and childhood” and to the second as her rebirth (“second birth” i.e. being born again) (Brink, 1919: 20 Oct '19).

4.2 Settling down in Zaki Biam

During the third decade of her life, Alice concluded her studies (presumably a course in missionary work) at *Fredenheim College*⁴⁷ in Wellington. After she completed her studies she worked in Potchefstroom for four years before finally moving to the Sudan region in Nigeria. On the twenty second day of June 1913, at age thirty five, Alice bid her whole family farewell and left their farm, Lilydale, for Cape Town. In Cape Town, she boarded a ship – *Her Majesty's Hospital Ship Gloucester Castle* – to the Sudan region⁴⁸. However,

⁴³ Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk Hopetown. 1870. *NG Kerk Hopetown Doopregister 1870-1892*. [baptismal registry] G 35 4/5. Stellenbosch: NG Kerk in SA Argief (ABID).

⁴⁴ There is a discrepancy regarding Alice's birth year. Archive records show that she was born in 1877, but Alice herself declared her birthday in 1919 as her fortieth birthday (Brink, 1919: 20 Oct '19).

⁴⁵ Birthday calendar book. 1913. *Gedenkbladen*. K-DIV 392. Stellenbosch: NG Kerk in SA Argief (ABID).

⁴⁶ Die farm Lilydale lies in the corner where the Orange River and the railway to Kimberley intersect. During the South African War the British forces established a camp on the farm aimed at protecting the railway bridge.

⁴⁷ See 3.3.1

⁴⁸ The Sudan is a region in Northern Nigeria – not to be confused with The Republic of the Sudan.

since there was no direct route to that region at the time, she first travelled to Britain, where she met up with Johannes du Plessis.⁴⁹ Her journey was not without discomfort. On her third last day aboard – nineteen days since their departure – she wrote that she felt her “powerlessness deeply” [my translation], as she had contracted the flu and was, on top of that, feeling terribly seasick (Brink,1913: 23 Aug ’13). In the face of this, she asserts that “The Lord knows... why He allowed this illness” to take hold of her and that she is “sure about her calling,” regardless (Brink,1913: 23 Aug ’13).

Alice arrived in Southampton, England, on the twenty-sixth of August and spent just over a month in London, meeting with other missionaries⁵⁰ from the *Sudan United Mission* (SUM); finding “suitable clothes” for the “mission field;” sightseeing etc. She also attended a gathering for all the “Afrikanders [sic] in London,” along with twenty nine “Afrikaners,” including Dr. WH Murray of the *Nyasaland Mission*. (Brink,1913: 5 Sept ’13)

In a meeting held in September during a conference in Swanwich (also known as Swanage) for those interested in mission work in Sudan, Alice was asked to stay in England until January of the next year, in order to travel with a larger group. Alice, however, asserted herself by expressing the “wishes and commands” [my translation] of the South African branch of the SUM, and “*they decided*” that, in that case, she should go on her own (Brink,1913: 21 Sept ’13).

On the first day of October 1913, Alice boarded the Falaba passenger ship in Liverpool, with nine other missionaries from different mission societies. She spent her thirty sixth birthday aboard the ship and wrote that although she “was far from friends and loved ones, (she was) alone with God” [my translation] (Brink,1913: 20 Oct ’13).

After travelling for nearly a month – first on the passenger ship and then on a riverboat – Alice arrived at Tbi on the twenty ninth of October 1913. Her travels continued the following

⁴⁹ See 2.2.2 and 2.2.5

⁵⁰ Although Alice trained for missionary work at Fredenheim, there was a definite disparity between male and female missionaries. In Afrikaans female missionaries were referred to as “*sending werksters*” – the female form of “missionary workers.” I will, however, refer to Alice as a missionary (or one of the missionaries) throughout this chapter, as it eases readability and technically was her vocation.

day by “bushcar,”⁵¹ with two men – Messrs Dawson and Maxwell – by her side. The men travelled respectively by foot and push-bike. She described her experience on the “bushcar” as follows:

It has one wheel in the middle and four shafts. One man pushes from behind and one pulls from the front. It is actually enjoyable when the road is good and the two carthorses [sic] understand each other... It was a strange feeling to ride through the bush in a strange country, with two strange young men whose language you do not know. (Brink,1913: 29 Oct '13) [my translation]

On her way to Salatu,⁵² she was held back a few days by a stomach bug but finally met up with Attie Brink, who travelled with her for the remainder of her journey. They arrived at Salatu on the eighth of November 1913 and Alice – in her own words – “finally felt as if (she) had reached her destination” [my translation] (Brink,1913: 8 Nov '13). The following day Alice attended her first church service(s) in Salatu – one for the local Munchi people and a separate one for the “white” people. In her diary entry on that day, she emphasised how glad she was to be able to do something “even if it was only to play the organ (reduced to the diminutive form, “*orreltjie*” in the original text)” (Brink,1913: 9 Nov '13).

Alice soon came in contact with J.G. Strydom⁵³ and his family, when both his child and Mrs Strydom got sick and had to be tended to. She also immediately started classes with one of the other missionaries to learn the Munchi language. At the time, Alice was living and working in Salatu, while Attie – whom she would later marry – was in Zaki Biam. On Christmas day 1913, she writes that “(their) two brothers George Botha and Attie Brink came over from Zaki Biam” [my translation] (Brink,1913). When Attie returned to Zaki Biam, Alice and one of her colleagues, Lulu de Villiers, went with him for a two week vacation. During this time, the two women sometimes held services in the village of Zaki Biam. Alice once again reiterates that she could “but merely play the organ (*orreltjie*)” and sing along (Brink,1913: 10 Jan '14).

⁵¹ See Appendix, fig.1

⁵² The primary mission station of the South African Branch of the SUM.

⁵³ See 2.2.2 and 2.2.5

When she led her first reading class in February 1914, she described her experience, stating that she had “never felt (her) incompetence and powerlessness more.” She described her daily routine as follows:

Every morning there is a service, and then I go to the medical hut to tend to the sick. I like the work, and the little knowledge I gained in Woodstock Hospital helped a lot. Afterwards an hour language study. Sometimes I spend the whole hour on one thing and still don't know, or haven't discovered, anything more. The best of us still only know a little. In the afternoon: school. The remainder of the time we spend on language study and other work. With personal boys,⁵⁴ one sometimes has much trouble (girls⁵⁵ are not available at all). One cannot always depend on them. I have a good boy now, Akiga⁵⁶. Hope he will stay long. (Brink, 1913: 1 Feb '14) [my translation]

In March of 1914, Johannes du Plessis⁵⁷ was on a tour of the DRC's mission stations in Africa and visited Salatu. Alice described his stay as a “great blessing and encouragement.” They held a field conference during which he addressed the missionaries and gave counsel. “During his stay,” Alice wrote, “it was decided that we would get married.” Subsequently, Alice, Attie and Lulu de Villiers travelled to Wukari where “it was decided” the ceremony would take place on the eighth of April 1914 (Brink, 1913: 6 Apr '14). It was the first wedding ceremony held by missionaries in that region (Brink, 1935: 16 June '36).⁵⁸ Alice recounted the day as follows:

Rev. Botha brought in the bride and Miss. De Villiers was bridesmaid. Everything was very simple, yet stately. A happy day for the couple; one they looked forward

⁵⁴ *Jongens* – Although Akiga was a young man at the time, the term “boy” was used in a derogatory manner to refer to native/black men who were naturally regarded as servants. It was often used by white colonizers to refer to those they regarded as subordinate. The same principal counts for the term “meidjes” used for women and girls.

⁵⁵ *Meidjes*

⁵⁶ Akiga was the first among the Tiv people to publically confess his faith and later became one of the “native missionaries.” Later, he was also responsible for the establishment of some of the Bible Schools and mission stations in the region. See 2.2.5

⁵⁷ Often referred to as the founder of South African missiology. See 2.2.2

⁵⁸ Twenty two years later Alice wrote about another wedding in her diary, stating: “It is the fifteenth (wedding) that takes place in Tiv land. The first was that of Rev. and Mrs. Brink in Wukari. In those days it was still sports to get married here, now with cars etc. it has become very monotonous.” (Brink, 1935: 16 June '36) [my translation]

to for a long time. For those the Lord had brought together, there could not be a happier day. (Brink,1913: 4 May '14) [my translation]

That same day Alice and Attie⁵⁹ travelled to Zaki Biam⁶⁰ – Alice in a hammock⁶¹ and Attie by foot – where they henceforth lived and worked together. Their home was not yet finished and they had to stay in a small hut while Attie built it (Brink,1913: 8 Apr '14). With limited supplies, Alice almost immediately started teaching the younger Munchi speaking children by using, for instance, the lid of a travelling bath as a blackboard. She declared in her diary that it brought her great joy to do so (Brink,1913: 4 May '14). She also established classes for women a few months later (Brink,1913: 15 Aug '14). During her first months in Zaki Biam, she again spent some time with the Strydom family, who came to visit during their holiday (Brink,1913: 26 June '14).

Soon, “the terrible news” reached Zaki Biam that a war had broken out in Europe. On the fifteenth of August 1914, Alice wrote:⁶²

Fire burns! In Togo land, they are already fighting. The future is dark and unknown. God teaches us to entrust everything to Him. (Brink,1913) [my translation]

In September of that year, she noted that the Strydom family was ordered to leave Salatu for Wukari. The forces in charge foresaw a battle in Tokum and feared that the troops would target Tbi next. Two days later, Alice and Attie received news that a battle had indeed broken out in Tokum and they were called to attend a meeting in Salatu before the Strydoms left for Wakuri. They made their way to Salatu, but the meeting never took place, since the Strydoms were again ordered to leave Salatu in haste. Thus, the Brinks returned to Zaki Biam and continued with their work there. It was a troublesome time for Alice and the people of the Sudan region.

In her birthday entry of 1914, she declared:

⁵⁹ See Appendix fig. 2

⁶⁰ Cronjé (1984: 131) describes Zaki Biam as: “their (Alice and Attie) mission station”

⁶¹ See Appendix fig. 3

⁶² Interestingly, in the same entry/inscription she writes: “The Munchi’s are becoming more and more willing to work in our houses.” [my translation]

It was a year full of new experience(s). Much that was lovely and pleasant. A lot, indeed, a whole lot of love the Lord has shown me through His children. And through revealing Himself to me. My husband's love and sacrifice in everything for my sake is tremendous and I thank the Lord. (I) think of the thousands who are unhappy in their marital lives. How shall I thank the Lord for His love towards me in the past year! How can I walk in a way, so that I can glorify His name and be worthy of my calling? God help me... But there was also many difficulties in this past year and many silent tears are shed. In this life there is much pain, effort, misunderstanding and uncertainty etc etc. Satan often hits with fists. He leaves nothing untouched in order to pull us away from the Lord. How often did the prayers of loved ones and the congregations that support me, not comfort and encourage me? What is more, how often did I not in Spirit see Jesus praying on the right hand side of the Father and hear Him say by means of his Word: 'I prayed for you that your faith will not falter.' What then, of the future? That is in God's hand. It is war. We walk as if in a very dark night... We must walk by faith. (Brink,1913: 20 Oct '14)

[my translation]

In January 1915, Alice and Attie went on their first holiday since Alice arrived in the Sudan. For nearly a month they travelled through Tiv land, in order to "get further away from the war" and to "get to know the ways of the (local) people better" (Brink,1913: 29 Dec '14). Their last stop was in Wukari, where they visited the newly established School for Evangelists. The school opened just prior to their visit, with thirteen students (twelve men and one woman) of which Akiga – who was once Alice's "personal boy" – was one. After their holiday, their school in Zaki Biam was re-opened and soon grew from twenty one to fifty learners (Brink,1913: 1 Feb '15).

4.3 The double loss

1915 was a difficult year for Alice. After attending a field conference in Tbi in March; celebrating their first wedding anniversary April; and living through drought and famine in "Munchi land;" Alice got terribly sick at the end of May. Although never formally divulged in her diaries, it can be deduced that she was pregnant at the time. She wrote:

I was not completely healthy, but there was a hope in something that provided a lot of courage and that made the discomfort and the illness lighter. (Brink,1913: 9 Sept '15) [my translation]

At the end of July Alice and Attie left Zaki Biam for Tbi, where they were urged by their doctor (Dr. Davies) to get to Dr. Grey in Lagos as soon as possible. It took them nine days per ship, train and ferry to finally get to Lagos. Once they saw Dr. Grey he advised that Alice should undergo an operation as soon as possible. Reflecting on this, Alice explained:

This was a critical moment for us. We had to decide right away. We immediately took refuge in the Lord. He was very near to us and led us clearly, although we could not comprehend the consequences of the operation at the time. (Brink,1913: 22 Aug '15) [my translation]

Although Alice never clearly stated the nature of the operation, one can derive from what she had written, that she not only lost her child, but also the ability to ever have children. Although she initially only confirmed that the operation went well, she stated in later reflections:

It all seems like a dream and yet it was a serious reality... The consequences and character of the operation were very painful for us, but the Dear Lord knows what is best for us. That which was very precious to us has been taken away from us. Dr. Grey told us that very few doctors in the world had the opportunity to witness or perform such an operation. It is the first he had seen or done... (Brink,1913: 10 Sept '15) ... We have suffered a double loss. The sweet hope for the future is dashed. My heart was broken when I learned the meaning of the operation. I mourned and wept more than a mother over her baby⁶³. Today my heart aches anew and the tears flow freely. The Lord, however, allowed everything and I earnestly pray for comfort and victory. I want to forget myself and just focus on the needs of others... (Brink,1913: 24 Sept '15) [my translation]

She referred to the time after the operation as a “trying time” (*tyd van beproewing*) and in her birthday entry of that year she wrote:

⁶³ “*lieveling*”

I have no words to describe my experience. My desire is that everything my husband and I had to go through will be of help and blessing to others and that this costly ordeal will bring us closer to God. (Brink, 1913: 20 Oct '15) [my translation]

4.4 On holiday in South Africa

In November of 1915, three months after leaving Zaki Biam, Alice and Attie arrived in Cape Town on holiday. They spent their time back in South Africa, not only by visiting family and friends in Wellington and Lilydale, but also addressing many congregations, groups and societies all over the country to promote; ask for support; and give witness to the work they were doing in Zaki Biam and the Sudan region. Alice also specifically mentioned in her diary that they attended a National Party (*Nasionale Party*) function in Hopetown (Brink, 1913: Feb '16). Other towns/congregations they visited and addressed included: Potchefstroom (where Alice worked for four years before leaving for Sudan); Fordsburg; Braamfontein; Frankfort; Betlehem; Durban; Pietermaritzburg (specifically to visit the Voortrekker Museum); Bloemfontein; Bredasdorp; Genadendal; Caledon; Franschhoek; Stellenbosch; Gordon's Bay; Cape Town etc.

During their time in South Africa, they also had contact with Prof. J du Plessis and Dr. Andrew Murray on several occasions (Brink, 1913: 3 May, 17-19 Jul '16). They attended multiple meetings regarding mission work. Alice specifically mentioned addressing branches of the VSB in Hopetown and Franschhoek. In late July of 1916 her husband, Attie Brink, got ordained and the following month they boarded a ship back to Nigeria. While the Brink's were in South Africa, the decision was made by the DRC to secede from the SUM and take independent responsibility for mission work in Tiv land (Smith, 1972: 31). Alice and Attie thus returned a mission field that was now the full responsibility of the DRCM and its missionaries.

4.5 Renewed fervour in Zaki Biam

After being away for more than a year, Alice and Attie Brink finally arrived in Zaki Biam. They travelled for more than a month and made a few stops along the way. Both contracted fever during their journey back to Tiv land. Alice resumed teaching at the school they started

when she first arrived in Zaki Biam. She showed a renewed fervour for working amongst the women of that area (Brink,1913: 22 Oct '16). Once back, they were again visited by the Strydom family. For the first time, Alice mentioned that *she* was in charge of the Sunday service for women (Brink,1913: 12 Nov '16).⁶⁴ On Christmas day 1916, Alice and Attie collectively led the Christmas service. This time she did not “merely play the organ,” but gave part of the sermon to the crowd of one hundred and fifty people (Brink,1913: 25 Dec '16). During this time in her life, Alice's diary entries also depict her as becoming more self assured and independent. She started hunting, biking and travelling on her own (Brink,1913: 9 Jan '17). She attended council meetings and took part in “preaching the Gospel” (Brink,1913: 3-10 May '17). She took full responsibility for leading church services and tending to school matters, in the absence of the men (Brink,1913: 18 Aug '18). She also became involved in matters regarding the Tiv-language and translation – translating songs etc (Brink,1913: 8 Jan '18).

On the other hand, it was also a difficult time for Alice. In her diary entries from this time she mentioned Satan much more frequently (Brink,1913: 17 March '17), and she often wrote about struggling with the aftermath of her operation. On her wedding anniversary she noted:

We have received much love from the Lord and from each other. How much love have we given to others? Satan is busy tempting us because we do not have children to bring joy to our hearts and home. Jesus is everything to us... (Brink,1913: 8 Apr '17). [my translation]

And again later:

If the Lord had done to me what I have deserved, where would I be today? How much effort and struggle hasn't the Lord helped me through recently? Instead of punishing me, He told me in love: Search for what is in the heavens, and not that which is on earth. The world and her desires (children also) are passing, but those who act according to God's stays in eternity (Brink,1913: 12 Jul '17)... The temptation to have an own child resurfaces anew (Brink,1913: 16 Jul '17). [my translation]

⁶⁴ “I had fifteen women in the service today. Last Sunday there were twelve.” [my translation] (Brink,1913: 12 Nov '16)

Many people in Alice's life (including herself), got very ill in this time. In South Africa, her sister, Hester, passed away at a "young age" after suffering from tuberculosis and various other illnesses (Brink,1913: 12 March '17). George Botha – a close friend and colleague of the Brinks – was sick with yellow fever and two other colleagues – Mss. Hosking and Steward – died of the same disease. Others – such as Attie and "everyone in Salatu" – suffered from malaria, while Alice herself contracted pertussis (whooping cough) from the local children. She declared late 1917 as a "time of sickness and hardship" (Brink,1913: 18 Oct '17). She later refers to 1917 as "a disappointment and a failure," stating: "God alone knows how I weep and feel about it" (Brink,1913: 1 Jan '18).

In May of 1918 Alice, Attie and George Botha departed on a trip through the region, with eight servants to carry their luggage; four servants "for the hammocks;" and a velocipede and a "personal boy" for each of them (Brink,1913: 25 May '18). Their goal was to find a suitable area to establish a third mission station. They travelled through more than twenty villages and returned a month later, but made no decision regarding the new station at the time. When, at a later stage, a decision had to be made, the three men – Attie, George Botha and J.G. Strydom held a meeting. Alice was not included (Brink,1913: 17 Aug '18). Back in Zaki Biam, Alice continued with classes for women, teaching them songs, "Old Testament history," and how to read (Brink,1913: 25 July '18). Together with Attie, she also started a Boarding School for future teachers and evangelists (Brink,1913: 18 July '18).

In May of 1919, Alice and Attie left Zaki Biam on another tour of the villages in the Sudan region, this time to "preach the Gospel" (Brink,1913: 14 May '19). During the trip, they often split up and on many occasions Alice held services of her own (Brink,1913: 16 May '19). Later that year they also started focussing on the translation of the "Old Testament history" into the Tiv-language (Brink,1919: 29 Sept '19). Both Alice and Akiga worked on the project. Alice also translated some Bible texts and songs with the help of Akiga.

In the 1920's Alice truly started taking own initiative. She often travelled on her own – with servants of course – to some of the villages in order to preach and hold services there. She held a weekly Sunday service in a village called Gondo and established a "Sunday school" in two of the nearby villages, which one of the local men, Asom, would lead (Brink,1919: 8 Feb

'20). She also continued work on the translation of Old Testament history with Akiga and the DRCM missionaries. By mid-November 1920, they had translated the histories from Genesis to Judges (Brink, 1919: 15 Nov '20).

Regardless of all these endeavours, it was another trying year for Alice. In her birthday entry of 1920, she wrote:

What a year of struggle has passed. Never before have I gone through such a time.
A dark year... God alone knows what went on in my heart: How often I was on the edge of despair... And now Lord teach me something more about the way of sacrifice this year... (Brink, 1919: 20 Oct '20).

At the end of 1921, Alice and Attie again travelled to South Africa, via England, for a holiday. On their way, they spent some time in London and according to Alice the “greatest and most significant/noteworthy event” during their stay was the *Dingaan's Day*⁶⁵ celebrations. Her reflection on the event revealed the following:

About fifty Nationalists were together and after a good meal, we listened to warm speeches and good music. We enjoyed it very much and will remember it for a long time. Only one thing bothered me very much and that was the smoking and drinking of ladies [underlined] as well as gentlemen. What will become of our Afrikaner [sic] nation?!! [sic]. (Brink, 1919: 12 Dec '21). [my translation]

She also mentions travelling with some “Afrikaners” and that most of them were “*Nattes*”⁶⁶ (Brink, 1919: 23 Dec '21). They entered the New Year aboard a ship from Southampton to South Africa, but when it was decided that there will be a dance to celebrate, Alice responded:

What will become of this Godless planet of ours (Brink, 1919: 31 Dec '21). [my translation]

⁶⁵ *Dingaans Day* was a religious celebration on December 16 – also known as “Day of the Covenant/Vow” during which Afrikaners commemorated the *Voortrekkers*’ victory over the Zulu people at the Battle of Bloodriver in 1838.

⁶⁶ In South Africa at the time there were two main Afrikaner political parties: The National Party (NP) and the South African Party (SAP). Their supporters were referred to as the *Natte* and the *Sappe* respectively.

4.6 The Roman (Catholic) Threat and other challenges

Alice's next (available) diary was written fourteen years later and starts in July 1935. During that time Alice and Attie moved to Mkar where they established a new mission station in 1923 (Cronjé, 1982: 246). According to Cassaleggio (1964: 57), the couple had a very challenging and unassuming – yet gratifying – start in Mkar. They opened another boarding school there and provided medical care where needed. They found that a lot of people in that area suffered from blindness and were eventually joined by Dr. Paul Labuschagne and Ms. Vosloo⁶⁷ who took over the medical work (Casaleggio, 1965: 59).

From her diaries, it seems that by 1935 Alice had become very comfortable and confident in holding church services and giving sermons by herself (Brink, 1935: 26 July '35). Yet, we find Alice dealing with a whole new challenge; one that had not been present in the first decade of her stay in the Sudan region, i.e. The Roman (Catholic) Threat. The frequency of her diary entries on the matter suggests that it was a very serious and frustrating issue in her life at the time. In her own words she explained:

It is becoming a tremendous battle in Tiv land. The Romans⁶⁸ leave no stone untouched. Wherever we start, there they are too and (because) they do not only use our boys but get Tbo teachers from the South they can open more schools. (Brink, 1935: 26 July '35). [my translation]

At the time of these entries, Alice and Attie (whom she referred to in previous diaries as Attie, but in this diary often calls “Mr. Brink”) were once again touring through the region, visiting different villages and mission stations, and preaching the Gospel at every turn. In villages where they were met with disinterest or hostility, either Satan or the Roman Catholics were to blame according to Alice. About one village, for instance, she wrote:

The darkness is still very dense here. The people hear (the message) but Satan immediately takes the seeds away again. Kuhe is also still here with his three

⁶⁷ No first name given.

⁶⁸ “Romans” is a direct translation of the Afrikaans term “*Roomse*” which was often used by Afrikaners to refer to Roman Catholics. Not to be confused with the Roman Empire or citizens of Rome.

wives... He is trapped in the snares of Satan. (Brink,1935: 27 July '35). [my translation]

When the missionaries took it upon themselves to discipline some of the local people who converted to Christianity and did not act in a way that was expected of converted Christians, Alice declared:

All these things prove how strong evil, and how weak the Tiv Christian, is (Brink,1935: 20-22 Nov '35). [my translation]

In other instances she reported on fights between the “Romans” and the local DRC missionaries (Brink,1935: 13 Oct '35); and also wrote about the children who joined the Roman Catholic church and “lured away” the others with “many things” (Brink,1935: 31 Oct '35). According to Alice, it was a “stressful time for Tiv land” since it had become “flooded” with “the Romans.” In her diary entries between 1935 and 1938, she often wrote about the destruction of the DRCM’s work by the Roman Catholic missionaries, for example:

The Romans are also working hard to lie and deceive here and destroying our schools in this manner. (Brink,1935: 24 Oct '37).

When it was not Satan or the “Romans,” who caused trouble, she blamed the women for the behaviour of the men:

Had seventy women in the prayer meeting tonight and spoke very direct with them about the immoral life that the women lead... instead of helping up the deep sunken man, they pull the man further down (Brink,1935: 29 Oct '35). [my translation]

4.7 Bible Schools, Conferences and the Indigenous Movement

Amidst all these “challenges,” Alice and the other missionaries continued their work teaching and preaching to the local people. In November of 1935, they started a new venture called the “Refreshers Class,” which was focused on teaching local converts “the Bible, singing, how to teach songs, writing and reading.” They were also educated on “how to teach children to read and write” (Brink,1935: 25 Nov '35). After completing the “course” these students were sent

in different directions to other parts of the region to work (as missionaries) and teach others (Brink,1935: 1-7 Dec '35). This was the beginnings of the indigenous movement that would later spread across the Sudan region.⁶⁹

Despite all this, Alice at times seemed to feel as if they were not making progress in their work. As 1935 drew to a close, she wrote:

It is sad to think that the years go by and there are so few conversions. One feels anxious when you think about everything. (Brink,1935: 29 Dec '35) [my translation]

At the beginning of February 1936, they held their first “Native Conference”⁷⁰ during which a number of daily meetings were held with local converts; those who were interested but had not yet converted; and even a few who were regarded as “heathens.” There were separate gatherings for men and women, as well as those who had already converted, and those who had not (Brink,1935: 1 Feb '36). During the conference, they specifically addressed the issue of “dancing,” which was a significant part of Tiv culture. Alice wrote extensively about the discussion in her diary, which mostly comprised of reasons why natives should not attend Tiv dances after converting to Christianity. In a later diary entry Alice’s disapproval of dancing once again came to the fore, when she stated:

The Ishen dances⁷¹ and gambling are tremendous forces of destruction to the Lords work and also to the Bible Schools. (Brink,1935: 24 Oct '37). [my translation]

During the conference, natives from the Sudan region gave testimonies regarding their own conversion to Christianity. Alice emphasised in her diary that there were a hundred and fourteen people who “stood up for the first time to confess (their faith in) the Lord” (Brink,1935: 2 Feb '36). This was the beginnings of what would later be referred to as the “awakening” or “revival” in Tiv land.⁷² Native Conferences were used as an opportunity for the DRCM missionaries to teach the Tiv people their ways and what the implications were –

⁶⁹ See 2.2.5

⁷⁰ Inboorling Konferensie

⁷¹ ADEJUMO EMMANUEL. 29 July 2015. *Ishen dance by Africa Heritage Theatre Troupe*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5JYS1cUvjE> (Accessed: 1 August 2016)

⁷² See 2.2.5

according to them – of becoming a Christian. During the next Native Conference in 1937 – which was attended by 500 people – they discussed, amongst other things: “marrying the wife of your father;” “what a man should do, who converts but already has more than one wife;” “Tiv clothing;” etc. (Brink,1935: 9-12 Jan ’37).

By 1936 a number of (bush) Bible Schools had been established throughout the region, mostly at the hand of Tiv converts. These schools were being managed by the local people – many of whom attended the conference. After the 1936 Native Conference ended, Alice and Attie paid visits to (i.e. went to inspect) a number of them. In her diary entries, she again noted the presence and influence of the Roman Catholic missionaries in many of the villages and Bible Schools they visited (Brink,1935: 16 Feb ’36).

From the thirtieth of April 1936 until the second of May all the female “missionary workers” came together for a “Female Workers” (*Werksters*) Conference. The theme and topic under discussion was: “Carry the Burden of the Tiv Woman”⁷³ “as wife; as mother; and as educator.”⁷⁴ Also under discussion was: “the burden of the Tiv daughter,” “in her town and environment;” “her problems and temptations;” and “as future wife.” Lastly, they discussed how they could draw/attract the Tiv women and daughters to their classes and the Christian religion.

In October of that year, Alice attended a conference at one of the Bible Schools, which was organised by Aka Korinya – a “native missionary.” The conference was mostly for – and by – the local (native) Bible School leaders. On the last day of the conference, Alice (1935: 9 Oct ’36) recalled, twenty six people confessed their faith in the Lord in public for the first time. She was so taken with it that she wrote down a few of their conversion stories (Brink,1935: 9 Oct ’36).

Not long after the conference, the DRCM workers held a separate “White Conference”⁷⁵ which included: a “Spiritual Conference,” a “special extensive Council Committee meeting” and a “School Conference” (Brink,1935: 9 Nov ’36).

⁷³ “*Dra die Las van die Tiv Vrou*”

⁷⁴ Note that these characteristics are also those ascribed to *volksmoeders* – See 3.2.

⁷⁵ “*Blanke Konferensie*”

Most of Alice's diary entries from the late 1930's are about these conferences and the different Bible Schools. She also often referred to camps for people suffering from leprosy, which it seems they established (Brink,1935: 6 Sept '37). In June of 1937 they (Alice et al) also formally started an "Evangelist Class" (Brink,1935: 22 June '37). Alice was very aware of the changes she had experienced during her time in the "mission field" and the advances the DRCM had made in their work, but often stated that it had not been enough or that she had not done enough (Brink,1935: 21 Mar '37). On her birthday in 1937, she wrote:

My birthday! Hours, days, months, years fly by like a shadow. The goodness of the Lord is great towards me. I thank Him for health and so many other blessings that I enjoy. I am ashamed of all my sins and great idleness to learn. I should have been ripe in faith by this time and sometimes I am still like a child. (Brink,1935: 20 Oct '37).

Similarly, on her wedding anniversary the following year, she wrote:

Today we've been married for twenty four years. How aware we are of our incompetence for the work of the Lord. There is coldness and idleness in more ways than one. May the little time that still lies ahead be more blessed and more fruitful. (Brink,1935: 8 Apr '38). [my translation]

Regardless, one cannot ignore the enormous changes in the way Alice eventually came to see her own abilities – especially compared to her earliest writings. She gained a great amount of confidence during her time in the Sudan region. In October of 1937, she wrote:

There were fifty four in the service. Everyone listened attentively and there was a feeling of freedom to talking. (Brink,1935: 25 Oct '37) [my translation]

In her 1935 diary, Alice often referred to the work of translating the Bible into the Tiv language. Although in this regard Alice never stated that *she* did the translations, it can be deduced that she took part in the project and was involved throughout (Brink,1935: 5 Oct '36).

Alice had come a long way since she first arrived in the Sudan region. Yet, it seems as if she was never satisfied with what they (and she, personally) had achieved. One of their efforts to increase the number of conversions was a “week of Evangelization.” Alice explained it as follows:

This matter was brought before the *Kristene*⁷⁶ and they found it appealing. It was then decided to hold such a crusade across the whole of Tiv land from six to thirteen February (Brink, 1935: 16 Jan '38). [my translation]

The DRCM missionaries and workers tasked the native converts (referred to by Alice as “*Kristene*”) with this undertaking. Although Alice herself did not partake in the “Evangelization week,” she wrote reports on it in her diary, focussing primarily on the number of villages that asked for schools to be established there. She also reported on a fight that broke out between the Roman Catholic and DRC converts in one of the villages (Brink, 1935: 24 Mar '38). Summing up the result of their “crusade,” Alice wrote:

In nineteen places the people asked for schools. There are many more places where the people want schools. The *Kristene* only covered a small part of the large region... How great would it be if our mission could immediately establish schools in all the places? (Brink, 1935: 24 Mar '38).

While the “Evangelization week” took place in areas and villages in the region where they had not done much work before, Alice continued with her usual work in the more known areas: visiting Bible Schools, preaching at services, giving classes to the women etc. In early February of 1938 she wrote:

To visit and help at a school every day, and then to stand and talk for an hour and a half every evening makes one very tired (Brink, 1935: 2 Feb '38).

From May to December of 1938 Alice and Attie once again travelled to South Africa on holiday. When they returned they held and attended a number of conferences and meetings i.a. the yearly Native Conference and the “Female Workers”⁷⁷ Conference.

⁷⁶ This is the term used for native people who had already converted to Christianity.

⁷⁷ “*Werksters*”

To celebrate the New Year (1939), Alice and a few guests⁷⁸ who were in Mkar for the conferences held a picnic on the banks of the Katsina-Ala River. Alice recounted it as follows:

...Some [of the people] were in *Voortrekker*⁷⁹ clothing. The ladies (*werksters*) together with the chairperson of the VSB chose representatives for the Council Meeting. The young people played and enjoyed it. (Brink, 1935: 3 Jan '39).

Alice's last available diary entry is about a Council Meeting in April of 1939. It drew a dismal picture of what was expected for the future their work in the Sudan region:

As per usual, the Council again had a lot to do and there were things that were difficult to decide about. Before the Council (meeting) began there were rumours that the *Tivbode* would cease to exist. The Readers club would die, the Boarding School was already condemned to death... The Leprosy Camp was ready to be thrown overboard. Humans plan but God prevails! Everything is still alive and continues and we hope (it) will flourish. (Brink, 1935: 10-15 Apr '39) [my translation]

Alice and Attie continued their work in the Sudan region for another fifteen years. As seen in Chapter 2, it was a very fruitful time for the DRCM in Tiv land and the Sudan region. By 1952 Mkar, the mission station established and managed by Alice and Attie had become the main mission station of the DRCM in Nigeria. It was the centre for education; medical work; and theological training; with a school for the blind and a treatment centre for people suffering from leprosy (Cronjé, 1982: 246).

4.8 Alice's Book for Mothers

In later years Alice also wrote a book titled: “*n Boek vir Moeders*” (“A Book for Mothers”). Although the book was never published, it gives some insight into Alice's psyche and her

⁷⁸ Reverends Coetzee, Gerrits, Botes, presumably their families and some of the female missionary workers (*werksters*) in the area.

⁷⁹ The *Voortrekkers* were a deligation of Cape Dutch citizens who wanted to escape the British rule in the Cape. Under different leaders, various groups started what is known as “The Great Trek” to the inland of South Africa. The history of the *Voortrekkers* and their stories were widely celebrated and regarded as the cornerstone of Afrikaner culture. It was also used to fuel nationalist sentiments. Dressing like Voortrekkers and celebrating Dingaans Day proves the nationalist mindset and attitudes of Alice and her colleagues. See also 3.2

perspective on the role of women. The book was mostly directed at local (Tiv or Vakaranga) women. In the book, she emphasised that a mother's most important job is to educate her children – both scholastically and religiously – and turn them into “good, sincere” people (Brink,n.d.: 1). She also pleaded for mothers to work together with the missionaries, so they could help each other to raise the children to become “suitable dwellings for the Spirit of God” [my translation] (Brink,n.d.: 3). The book is filled with guidelines on how to teach children to believe in God; to pray; to be obedient; to only speak the truth; and how to discipline children etc.

Alice clearly regarded it as the mother's responsibility to raise and educate the children (Brink,n.d.: 59). Her descriptions of what it means to be a mother and the roles she ascribed to women with children aligned well with the *volksmoeder* ideology. She also stressed the piety of women, stating that mothers need to serve the Lord and pray for their children (Brink,n.d.: 59). In the closing chapters of her book, she reiterated that women were “created to be of help to the man” (Brink,n.d.: 62). Women, according to Alice (n.d.: 62), should help the men (and their children) in their work, in serving the Lord, and by assuring that their clothes are clean and in good condition. She further stated that women should make the men happy by cooking and cleaning the house and yard. As in her diaries Alice, in her book, blames the women for the behaviour of the men and describes it as the women's task to assure that the men are behaving “correctly.” In her own words:

Truly, many women let their husbands stumble. Sometimes you let them stumble by (brewing) beer for them... or by chasing after other Satanic things, and by complaining about everything all day. The Lord says: Help your husband. The devil says: Let your husband stumble. Who are you going to obey? (Brink,n.d.: 64)
[my translation]

Lastly, Alice also describes it as women's responsibility to “lift up” their *volk* (people). This prescribed role is very much in line with “volksmoeder” ideology and the nationalist ideals it encouraged.

4.9 Concluding remarks

Although it is clear from her ego texts that Alice was fully embedded in the patriarchal culture and the *volksmoeder* ideology of the time, she was in many ways a pioneer. The missionary enterprise gave her an opportunity to fulfil what she described as her “calling.” It granted her the freedom to do work which women of her time were simply not allowed to do or that were traditionally ascribed to men – such as preaching. When comparing her diaries to other sources, it becomes clear that Alice Mabel Brink (née Matthewson) was a key player in the eventual success of the DRCM in Nigeria. Together with her husband, Attie, she established the main DRCM mission station in Nigeria, as well as many schools, medical centres etc. Alice worked in the Sudan region for forty two years before retiring in January of 1954 and moving back to South Africa with her husband, Attie, by her side. She died in 1956 at age seventy nine (Heringa, 1913: 20 October).

Throughout this narrative, there are many themes that naturally emerges from Alice’s ego-texts; some themes that expose the oppressive forces in her life and others that shed light on her flourishing and successes. The influence of early twentieth century missional thought and the colonial mindset behind it is clear throughout Alice’s diaries. The same counts for *volksmoeder* ideology and the piety ascribed to Afrikaner women. Although there is an array of subjects that can be discussed in this regard, for the purposes of this study I have identified only a few. As stated in the first chapter of this study, the choices made will reflect my own reading of Alice’s writings and will present what I have regarded as important and true. In the following chapter, I will discuss Alice’s role as a “female missionary in a male dominated world;” the influence of *volksmoeder* ideology; her pietism and feelings of guilt; health and wellbeing; and the dualistic way of thinking that was clearly present in her reflections. Keep in mind that this telling of Alice’s story is but a fragment of her life and that the themes I have identified are not in any way exhaustive or final.

Chapter 5

The multi-faceted nature of Alice Brink's life story

5.1 Introductory remarks

From this study, it is clear that Alice Mabel Brink (née Matthewson), made a significant contribution to the DRC's mission in the Sudan region (better known as the Tiv-mission). Yet, she is rarely mentioned in books and studies on the matter, often being referred to only as the wife of her husband Attie. In a time when women were primarily expected to become wives and mothers – “*volksmoeders*” if you will – Alice went far beyond the borders that had been set and exceeded society's expectations. In her early thirties, she felt called “to go work for the Lord,” and decided to go study at *Fredenheim* college to equip herself for missionary life (Brink, 1919: 20 Oct '19). Although Alice eventually became the wife of a missionary, she was not merely “tagging along” to the mission field with a man who would later become her husband. She was a missionary worker in her own right and was educated accordingly.

In many ways, Alice was a pioneer and a trailblazer. She quite effortlessly settled into a role that was not often ascribed to women of the early twentieth century. Yet, it is also clear from her ego texts that she was a woman of her time, who succumbed to many of the prescribed gender roles discussed in Chapter 3. The complexity of being a woman in the early twentieth century – and the intersections of gender, race, culture etc. – cannot be ignored. Her story is an ambiguous one. As a woman, she was oppressed by the patriarchal, male dominant culture of the time – infamous for its racism, sexism and authoritarianism (Landman, 1994: 75). As a white, Afrikaner, Christian woman, she assumed the role of “coloniser” and “oppressor.” She was both a “victim” of the *volksmoeder* ideology; and a trailblazer for women who felt called to work within the church and religious arena. Like countless middle class women of the time, Alice was in a very ambiguous position for most of her life – allowed to partake in spheres that were normally reserved for men, yet strongly influenced by the dominant (white, male, Christian) culture and its ideologies.⁸⁰

It is, in other words, not only the *landscape* of Alice's narrative that is multi-layered. Her persona and story is multi-faceted as well. In this chapter I will therefore briefly discuss the

⁸⁰ See Chapter 3

various intersections within Alice's story that shaped and influenced the role she played as a female mission worker in the Sudan region of Nigeria viz.: being a female missionary in a male dominated world; the influence of *volkmoe*der ideology; her pietism and guilt; health and wellbeing; as well as her participation in colonization and perspectives regarding Satan and the Roman Catholic tradition.

5.2 Female missionary in a male dominated world

5.2.1 Agency

In a world dominated by men, women like Alice were marginalised in church and society. They were certainly not granted equal access to participation (Isherwood,1993: 17). In such a world, women who did not conform to a formula; who were “independent, articulate, wilful;” who dared to step outside the stereotype, were scattered thin (Isherwood,1993: 20). This ability of some women to overcome barriers, have influence and be heard – especially in hegemonic contexts – is often invoked by what feminist theorists refer to as “agency” (Hanmer,2016: 237). Agency is generally viewed as someone having – and exercising – reason, rights and responsibility (McHugh,2007: 4). It has also been defined as “what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of the goals or values they regard as important” (Hanmer,2016: 237). As previously discussed, Alice enrolled at *Fredenheim* college in her early thirties after she “felt called” to go “work for the Lord.” Although her ego texts do not reveal the circumstances or events surrounding her calling, it is important to note that it was her own convictions that fuelled her interest and eventual involvement in mission work.

Alice used the resources at her disposal – as a woman in the early twentieth century – to ensure that she could participate in the church's missionary endeavour. As seen in Chapter 3, receiving a tertiary education was not common amongst women of her time, but *Fredenheim* provided Alice with the opportunity to do so. Although mission work was not the only field where young, pious, evangelical, women could “serve the Lord” and find “usefulness,” it was an important one at the time and the path Alice chose for herself (Robert,1997: 34). Agency operationalizes the concept of choice and refers to the capacity to define one's goals and act on them (Hanmer,2016: 237).

Throughout Alice's diaries, it is clear that she felt personally called to the mission field. She travelled to Nigeria on her own volition, not as a missionary wife, but as a female missionary who would later marry a male counterpart. During her initial journey to the mission field in Nigeria, she spoke at a number of meetings and conferences. From the very beginning, Alice acted with a sense of agency that was not common amongst women in the early twentieth century.

Robert (1997: 14) rightfully points out that for many women "the opportunity to marry a missionary represented a step beyond the limitations society imposed on them." There are exceptions, of course, but according to Robert (1998: 21) evidence from biographies of missionary wives, suggest that the commitment to mission preceded their commitment to their husbands.⁸¹ Although we know very little about the four years Alice spent working in Potchefstroom, her history fits the pattern pointed out by Robert (1997: 11) in her study on "missionary wives" in America, viz. that among female missionaries (missionary wives) there was a tendency to get involved in social service before they made the decision to marry/become foreign missionaries. For women like Alice, the decision to marry a missionary was often a vocational one – at least in part. Although it remains unclear what the history of Alice and Attie's relationship was – or what the motivations behind their nuptials were – it is certainly true that their relationship opened doors for Alice. Not only was she able to work as a missionary, and act with a form of independence that was not often granted to women of her era, but she had the opportunity to preach; to attend meetings and conferences; to establish schools and mission stations etc. Alice's story is an example of how a women's own sense of agency can increase through acquiring more knowledge and experience (Hanmer,2016: 238).

When acting with agency leads to the questioning, challenging and changing of norms and institutions that perpetuate the subordination of women, a woman's agency leads to empowerment (Hanmer,2016: 237). We see fragments of in Alice's life story. In the time she felt called to become a missionary worker, the matter of women speaking in public was a contested one. Women were not allowed to partake in official church structures. However,

⁸¹ Although Robert studied the biographies of *American* women in mission, I believe many of the patterns drawn from his studies apply to the world wide mission field and missionary wives in general. The fact that Ms. Ferguson, who founded *Fredenheim*, was from America also meant that there was a strong American influence.

the religious revival that took place after the arrival of Rev Andrew Murray in the Cape colony brought about new opportunities for women to participate in church- and mission activities (Du Toit,2003: 163). Even though they were still regarded as subordinate in terms of the missionary hierarchy, the mission movement opened an entrance of women into the public domain (Okkenhaug,2003: 11). Examples of Alice's own agency and participation include i.a.: preaching, the establishment of schools and clinics, translating works into the Tiv-language,⁸² attending meetings and conferences etc. The fact that someone like Alice took part in these activities, and took advantage of a rare opportunity, challenged the norms and practices of her day. Her resistance was covert and maybe even unintentional, but meaningful none the less (Thapan,2003: 77).

Alice is a complex character in this regard – breaking barriers and stepping outside the stereotype, but never overtly. I have already pointed to the many ambiguities in her story. This, however, is not an uncommon phenomenon. Agency can be exercised in many spheres of life. The ability to act with agency in one sphere does not necessarily spill over into having agency in others (Hanmer,2016: 239). Women's agency sometimes facilitates change which challenges male power, but they can also at other times choose to promulgate and embody ways that reinforce traditional power relations. Thapan (2003: 82) emphasises that whatever form agency takes, resistance by individual women in their everyday lives are critical in giving them a feeling of self-worth. This is affirmed through Alice's ego-texts, as we see her gaining more and more confidence and self-worth as time goes by. In her earliest diary entries she often questioned her own worth and contributions, but through exercising her agency and taking on more and more responsibility we saw her grow into an assured and assertive missionary.

5.2.2 Oppression

Despite the fact that Alice was acting with an agency that was not expected of women in the early twentieth century, she remained in many ways a victim of patriarchy and the hegemonic culture. The fact that women were receiving instruction in missionary work did not mean that the church and the religious sphere was becoming any less patriarchal. Protestant missions of

⁸² For more on the impact of missionary linguistic work, see Gilmour, R. 2007. Missionaries, Colonialism and Language in Nineteenth-Century South Africa. *History Compass*, 5:6, 1761- 1777

the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were governed by principles of piety and patriarchy (Predelli,2003: 54).

In feminist theory the term that is used to refer to the struggles, harms, injustices or problems women face within a patriarchal, male dominated society is *oppression*. In circumstances of domination, where women occupy the subordinate place in the power dynamic – regardless of their own agency – they experience diminished control over their lives (Jones,2000: 72). Iris Young (1990: 39) identifies “five faces of oppression” to assist in reflecting on different experiences of oppression. These are quite easily identifiable throughout Alice’s story.

The first identifiable “face of oppression” is “oppression as cultural imperialism” (Young,1990: 58). According to Young (1990: 59), cultural imperialism is the act of universalizing a dominant group’s experience and culture and establishing it as the norm. Although being a missionary wife meant that Alice could act with a form of independence that many women of her time did not have, the mission field was still a world where men (i.e. the dominant culture) had the final say. It was men who set the rules and standards regarding appropriate gender roles and behaviours (Jones,2000: 88). These roles and the men who set them were thoroughly discussed in Chapter 3. Cultural imperialism is thus the process of defining a set of rules for behaviour that is appropriate for a certain group (e.g. Afrikaner women, *volksmoeders* etc.), according to the standards of the hegemonic culture. We see this when certain roles – such as nurse, nurturer, teacher etc. – are automatically ascribed to Alice due to her being a woman. Oppression as culture imperialism therefore also leads to *gender socialisation* – i.e. learning to act according to the social expectations and attitudes associated with one’s gender (Maluleke,2002: 14). It also becomes clear throughout her diaries, that she was so strongly influenced by these rules and standards, that she herself promulgated them.

Although Alice clearly exercised her agency in “choosing” her vocation, being a woman meant that Alice was not *only* educated in missionary work, but also in the more practical and nurturing subjects such as nursing, cooking, maternal science, home sciences etc. Female missionaries were specifically trained to play a supporting role for the male missionaries (Plaatjies,2003: 140). Regardless of how strong their own call to mission work was, wives of early missionaries were highly committed to their role as “helpmate” (Robert,1997: 32). This occurrence is referred to by Young (1990: 53) as “oppression as exploitation.” We see proof

of this throughout Alice's story, for instance when she is asked to help one of the male missionaries, George Botha, with his household tasks:

“George Botha asked me to take responsibility for the household as long as I am here (in Salatu)” (Brink, 1919: 22 Nov '19)

Robert (1997: 31) describes the use of women by men in the mission field as follows:

For missionary men, a wife seemed desirable to ward off loneliness, as well as to take over household tasks so that they would not be distracted from their “true” mission work of preaching the gospel. For the missionary woman, however, having a husband was necessary to enable her to engage in the work at all. Thus, no matter how strong her individual call, a central motivation for mission was that of assisting her husband in the “true” mission work and being loyal to him at any cost.

Furthermore, in the mission field, it was often regarded as the duty of the women— especially missionary wives – to teach, help and tend specifically to women and children.⁸³ This is what Young (1990: 50) refers to when explaining that oppression as exploitation involves setting social rules about what work is and who does what for whom. Being a woman was understood as having a predisposition for working with women and children. The missionary enterprise relied on women for fund-raising and support in their home countries, and for education, nursing, medical work and evangelization abroad. Women were also utilised to do the work where male missionaries could not gain access to local women, but were still not granted the status men had and compensation they received, for the work they did (Okkenhaug, 2003: 10). This was true for Alice as well. After arriving in Zaki Biam she almost immediately started teaching the Munchi children and not long after began with classes for women. Whenever she gained renewed focus, it was primarily directed at women and children in the area. She often stated that she regarded working amongst the native women as a priority (Brink, 1916: 24 Oct '16) and when she led a Sunday service for the first time, it was the women's service. Women, such as Alice, were expected to fulfil certain roles and do the tasks allocated to them without any compensation, just for being women.

⁸³ Compare Robert (1997: 36).

Even though a woman like Alice was able to defy the stereotype, women were still being arranged into their own separate spheres of influence, whilst remaining under patriarchal control and left out of the governing- and decision making structures (Plaatjies, 2005: 9). This is referred to by Young (1990: 56) as “oppression as powerlessness.” She asserts that to a certain extent many people have some power in relation to others, even though they lack the power to decide policies or results. Most people, however, do not regularly participate in making decisions that affect the conditions of their lives and actions (Young, 1990: 56). Although there were instances where Alice was allowed input and agency, there are a number of examples in Alice’s diaries where she was left out of decision making. Her wedding day serves as one of these examples. From her diary entry, it seems that the decisions regarding when, where and how Alice got married was made by the men in her life – particularly Prof J du Plessis.⁸⁴ Another example is the decision regarding where a third mission station in the Sudan region would be established. Although Alice went along with the men (Attie Brink and George Botha) to scout the region and find the suitable place for the new station, when a decision had to be made it was during a meeting held between Attie, George and J.G Strydom. Alice was left out.

Although Alice herself never directly referred to experiencing powerlessness, exploitation or carrying the burden of cultural imperialism, I believe that these three “faces of oppression” are present throughout her story and the experiences she reflected upon. These are certainly not exhaustive, but shed some light on the challenges Alice had to deal with as a female missionary in a male dominated world.

5.2.3 Two sides of one story

We have learned throughout this study that women’s experiences and stories often contain examples of both their flourishing and/or their oppression (Jones, 2000: 6). It is the challenge of feminist theory to hold the analysis of their oppression in tension with an appreciation for their flourishing. The discussion of both Alice’s agency and oppression seeks to honour this tension – a tension present throughout Alice’s story. We see something of this tension in Alice’s participation in the missionary endeavour. Even though it had become socially acceptable for women to participate in religious servitude and organisations within the

⁸⁴ See 4.2

Church, they were not in the least encouraged to take part in independent ministries such as preaching (Robert, 1997: 10). This was especially true within the DRC. The mission field, however, was a vehicle through which Alice was granted the opportunity to do so – initially with reluctance and little self-assurance, but later quite effortlessly and with great confidence. On one hand mission field was a very patriarchal and male dominated arena and one certainly cannot ignore the colonial mindset behind it. On the other, it was also a sphere which allowed women, like Alice, agency to participate in ways that were uncommon – especially in South Africa – at that point in history. She is one of many women who “broke new ground by crossing the established gender boundaries that defined women’s rightful place to be in the home” and who presented alternatives and “new modes of living” to the generations of women that would follow (Predelli, 2003: 79). Although Alice never fully escaped the gender roles that society had placed upon her, her participation in the missionary endeavour broke through many of the boundaries and restrictions that were set for women of her time.

5.3 The *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation)

One specific role that Alice – as an Afrikaner woman – could not escape was the role of *volksmoeder*. Although Alice never explicitly used the term in her writings, there is no doubt that she was deeply influenced by *Volksmoeder* ideology.⁸⁵ Despite the fact that she surpassed many of the barriers set by the gender norms of her day, the role of *volksmoeder* seemed to follow her all the way to the mission field in Nigeria. Like many South African and Afrikaner women of her era, Alice was so strongly influenced by this ideology⁸⁶ that she herself advocated for and adopted the role of *volksmoeder*. This is a great example of the consequences of cultural imperialism as discussed above.

From Alice’s ego texts it is evident that she regarded being a mother as a woman’s most important task and responsibility. For this reason her – speculated but unconfirmed – failed pregnancy and consequent inability to have children, was a very traumatic experience. Time and again Alice wrote in her diaries about the severe loss she felt and the heartbreak it caused both her and her husband, e.g.:

⁸⁵ See 3.2

⁸⁶ See Oppression as Imperialism above.

Satan is busy tempting us because we do not have kids to bring joy to our hearts and home. (Brink,1916: 8 Apr '17) [my translation]

I want to glorify the Lord and not constantly mourn for what I cannot have. (Brink,1916: 12 Apr '17) [my translation]

Despite the fact that Alice never had children of her own, she maintained that motherhood was a women's most important role. The great value attached to motherhood was not only intrinsic to *volksmoeder* ideology, but also a very strong focus of the Huguenot seminary - out of which *Fredenheim College* was born. According to the Mount Holyoke model – which the Huguenot Seminary followed – the main task of female missionaries was to produce Christian wives, mothers, female teachers and female missionaries (Sarja,2003: 112). While she remained childless, Alice channelled her commitment to motherhood and her desire to be a mother in another direction. By educating other women (especially native Tiv-women) on the subject, she could utilise her knowledge of motherhood and still find “usefulness”⁸⁷ in that field. As was often the practice in the missionary enterprise, Alice treated female converts according to her own understanding of proper female roles (Bowie,1993: 18). In an attempt to cultivate the same understanding of motherhood that she fostered amongst the Tiv-women, she later wrote a book called: *Book for Mothers (Boek vir Moeders)*. The book focused on three main aspects that she proclaimed as the responsibility of all mothers viz.: educating and raising children; supporting men and nation building (i.e. “to lift up (the) *volk*”). Coincidentally, all three of these characteristics lie at the heart of *volksmoeder* ideology.

Through Alice's writings – as in Chapter 3 – it becomes clear that *volksmoeder* ideology was ambivalent at best. On the one hand, it translated the domestic role of women well into the socio-political and even the religious (mission) sphere. On the other, it confined women to a serving and supporting role. Even after Alice took on more “missionary” (traditionally male) responsibilities, such as preaching and holding church services, she was still expected to fulfil the role of mother, nurturer and caregiver.

⁸⁷ See Robert, 1997 p.34

The perception of womanhood as suffering, stoical and self-sacrificing lies at the core of *volksmoeder* ideology. This is a strong theme throughout Alice's diaries. She often referred to her own suffering and sacrifices, describing it as if it were her duty – not only as a woman and wife but also as a missionary. For instance, after her operation she wrote the following:

I just read the life history of Townsend... One doesn't feel like you can talk about sacrifice when you see what the people had to go through. (Brink,1913: 5 Oct '15).
[my translation]

My desire is that everything my husband and I have gone through will be of help and blessing to others... (Brink,1913: 20 Oct '15). [my translation]

On her wedding anniversary the following year, she wrote:

Lord, teach me more of the road of sacrifice this year... (Brink,1913: 8 April '16).
[my translation]

In these and numerous other examples it becomes clear that Alice regarded sacrifice as essential and her suffering as a means to be of service to others. Landman (1994: 4) argues that it is *volksmoeder* ideology's honouring of martyrdom, suffering, and sacrifice that led to the extreme piety of women like Alice – which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Another very important characteristic of the archetypal *volksmoeder* that is present in Alice's ego texts, is the importance given to National and cultural identity. Maluleke and Nadar (2002: 14) refer to the amalgamation of religion, culture and gender socialisation as the "unholy trinity." This fusion manifests in *volksmoeder* ideology's expectation of women to uphold and transfer the "National" Afrikaner culture. As is often the case, Alice's own culture not only justified but perpetuated the oppression of women (Maluleke,2002: 14). *Volksmoeder* ideology also promoted the idea that Afrikaner cultural norms were absolute. Alice's commitment to her national and cultural identity was illustrated by the fact that she

celebrated Dingaan's Day⁸⁸ – even in Nigeria – and aligned herself with the National Party (*Nasionale Party*). Besides various other happenings, the fact that she wrote “A Book for Mothers” shows that she regarded it as her duty to transmit her culture (regarding e.g. motherhood, religion, customs and practices etc). It was also revealed that she thought it a “privilege” to support her compatriots during wartime.

We had the privilege of sending a lot of things (supplies) to the prisoners of war
(on St. Helena), i.a. a pair of knitted socks to Gen. Cronje. (Brink, 1913: 9 Aug '13)
[my translation]

It is evident that the *volksmoeder* ideal – although never explicitly mentioned in her writings – was very influential in Alice's life. Despite the many ways in which she surpassed the cultural norms of the day, she remained a “victim” of an ideology that was constructed for (Afrikaner) women by men. This shows how deep *volksmoeder* ideology was rooted in the sub-culture of Afrikaner women (and Alice specifically). As seen in Chapter 3, this ideology went hand in hand with the pietism of Afrikaner women.

5.4 Pietism and guilt

Afrikaner women from the early twentieth century were very much under the influence of books and teachings by Dutch pietists and theologians such as Reverend Andrew Murray. Afrikaans women believed in – and served – a very personal and demanding God. Alice was no exception in this regard. Her pietism is clearly noticeable throughout her ego texts and resembles the exact description Landman (1994: 12) gave in “The piety of Afrikaans women.” Alice's diaries are filled with excessive feelings of guilt; images of a God that are very personal, but also quite demanding; a negative self image; and firm opinions concerning what is right and what is wrong.

For most of her adult life, Alice was surrounded by men whose religious views that can be described as very conservative, pious and paternalistic. Seeing as she studied in Wellington, where Andrew Murray Jr. – described by Elphick (2012: 41) as the most influential DRC

⁸⁸ *Dingaan's Day* was a religious celebration on December 16 – also known as “Day of the Covenant/Vow” during which Afrikaners commemorated the *Voortrekkers'* victory over the Zulu people at the Battle of Bloodriver in 1838.

minister in nineteenth-century South Africa – served as a DRC minister and established the Huguenot Seminary, Alice most certainly would have been in contact with his teachings. Murray specifically set out to install evangelical piety and support for missions among the women in the DRC (Saayman, 2007: 49). His theology and pietism would've had a formative impact on Alice's religious views. Her contact with W.H Murray and A.C Murray – relatives of Andrew Murray Jr. who were also involved in the DRC's mission⁸⁹ – probably reinforced this form of piety. Furthermore, she had regular contact with two other prominent figures in early twentieth century mission viz.: J. Du Plessis and J.G. Strydom.⁹⁰ According to Elphick (2012: 151) Du Plessis' writings – which include a sympathetic biography of Andrew Murray that was published in 1919 – reflect a traditional and sentimental piety. Before he became the Mission Secretary of the Freestate Synod, Strydom – whose theology was generally more conservative than Du Plessis'⁹¹ – was a colleague of Alice in the Sudan region. It would be safe to assume that he too would have had a great impact on her piety and theological thinking. Considering these influences, it is no surprise that Alice was enthralled by the same form of (male-formulated) piety that the majority of Afrikaans women exhibited during the nineteenth- and twentieth century.

Throughout Alice's diaries, it is clear that she had very strong views on sin. Subsequently, she often experienced and wrote about feelings of guilt. She frequently wrote about the punishment she thought she deserved and how merciful the Lord was for not punishing her in the ways she believed she deserved. E.g.:

If the Lord had done to me what I have deserved, where would I be today?"
(Brink, 1913: 12 Jul '17)

In all the years God was very good to me, even though I was unfaithful and sinned
a thousand times over. (Brink, 1919: 20 Oct '19) [my translation]

I am ashamed of all my sin and great idleness to learn (Brink, 1935: 20 Oct '37)

⁸⁹ See Saayman, W. 2007. *Being Missionary Being Human: an overview of Dutch Reformed Mission*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster publications p.65-66

⁹⁰ See Chapter 2

⁹¹ See Elphick, R. 2012. *Equality of believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa*. South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press p.228

In March of 1921 W.H. Murray (from Nyassa) came to visit in Zaki Biam. During one of his sermons, he told a story that Alice found so meaningful that she recounted the tale in its entirety in her diary afterwards. It was the story of a local man in Nyasaland who had a dream about being lost in the wild when lions started chasing him. The man asked Dr. Murray to interpret the dream and Alice recalled the interpretation as follows:

Ds Murray then said, he is lost in his own sins and he will perish. The lion is the devil that wants to doom him... (Brink,1919: 13 March '21).

There are many other examples in her ego-texts where Alice refers to the work/influence of Satan/the devil – sometimes on the work they were attempting to do and other times on a more personal level, which would usually lead to feelings of guilt.

With regards to my own soul, it sometimes seems to me as if I am like a football that is being kicked around. The players are a lot of Devils. (Brink,1919: 26 Dec '19) [my translation]

In “The Piety of Afrikaans women” Landman (1994: 2) posits that women were attracted to this type of piety because on one hand it allowed them a personal relationship with God and on the other it allowed them – as naturally proactive people – a life of individual holiness, self-sacrifice and service to God. Both the image of God as a personal God and a God that demands to be served, are present in Alice’s ego-texts. We see her experience of the personal God in the use of phrases such as “How shall I thank the Lord for His love towards me” or “We immediately took refuge in the Lord. He was very near to us...”⁹² In many instances and especially after her operation, she experienced God as a God who provided comfort amidst her personal sufferings (Landman,1994: 7).

Her image of God as a demanding God is evident in the following examples:

“I have been ill for 5 days now. (I’m) feeling better again today. (I) also have glorious victory in my soul. The Lord was once again busy teaching me the lesson of total submissiveness. Yesterday evening I read something about ‘Victory’ and

⁹² See 4.3

had to shed bitter tears because I was not able to fully say it and often failed. I thank God for peace and joy in my soul. May the Lord protect me going forward and help me to take the lowest place. (Brink, 10 Feb '14) [my translation]

...but those who act according to God's (desires) stays in eternity. (Brink, 1913: 12 Jul '17) [my translation]

The image of a male God who demanded to be served was oftentimes the cause of Alice's negative self-image. In her opinion, she, time and again, failed to live up to God's standards and often perceived herself as unworthy.

How shall I live in a way (*wandel*) so that His Name will be glorified and I will be worthy of my calling? (Brink, 1913: 20 Oct '14) [my translation]

More than ever, I feel unqualified for the work of the Lord (Brink, 1913-1919: 5 Oct '15) [my translation]

In her diaries she often belittled herself and her contributions, using diminutive language and phrases. As she built more confidence in her ministry and work, she seemed to do this less, but never felt as if she *was* or had done enough (Brink, 1935: 21 Mar '37).

Alice did not only view herself in this way, but the rest of humanity as well – often pointing out the “sins” of others. As mentioned earlier, she had very firm ideas regarding what was right and wrong, and a strong sense of morality. Allow me a few examples:

“When will (humanity) stop testing God and desecrate his day (i.e. Sunday).” (Brink, 1913: 4 Aug '18) [my translation]

We enjoyed (the Dingaan's Day celebrations) very much and will remember it for a long time. Only one thing bothered me very much and that was the smoking and drinking of ladies [underlined] as well as gentlemen. What will become of our Afrikander [sic] nation?!! [sic]. (Brink, 1919: 12 Dec '21). [my translation]

We were shocked by the report that King Edward abandoned the throne and wants to marry a widow that has now divorced from her husband for the second [underlined] time (Brink,1935: 17 Dec '36). [my translation]

In reference to the dancing at a New Year's celebration:

What will become of this Godless planet of ours (Brink,1919: 31 Dec '21). [my translation]

Alice was not only concerned for the “the fate of the souls” of her loved ones, but of her compatriots and the people of the Sudan region as well. She severely judged the Tiv-people and their outlandish cultural practices, such as the Ishen dances,⁹³ and other rituals, their gambling, drinking etc. She repeatedly blamed the “immoral life the women (led)” for the behaviour of the “deep sunken” men (Brink,1935: 29 Oct '35).

Similar to other feminists' use of the term “oppression,” Landman (1994: vii) describes the piety of Afrikaner women as “enslavement.” It is this type of piety, according to Landman (1994: vii), that caused women like Alice to become enslaved/oppressed by *volksmoeder* ideology and the sacrifices it called for. Of course, there were some positive aspects to this tradition. It was within this tradition that Alice could live out her calling and find self-empowerment and –fulfilment (Van Schalkwyk,2006: 12).⁹⁴

5.5 Health and Wellbeing

Although very often women were attracted to mission work because it provided a feeling of usefulness, the conditions of missionary life often turned the motivation of being useful into a reality of self-sacrifice (Robert,1997: 35). The idea of self-sacrifice is, of course, a prominent theme within *volksmoeder* ideology and the piety found amongst nineteen- and twentieth century Afrikaner women. These two worlds, therefore, complemented each other perfectly – the one honoured and promoted self-sacrifice, while the other demanded it. Robert (1997: 35) points out that poor living conditions, difficult childbirth/pregnancies, unremitting hard work and even loneliness led to the early deterioration of health among missionary wives. In her

⁹³ See Chapter 4.

⁹⁴ For more on the creative tension between the disempowering/repressive and the life-giving/liberating aspects of Afrikaans women's spiritualities, see Van Schalkwyk (2006: 12).

diaries, Alice constantly discussed themes and situations regarding her own and others' health and wellbeing. Not long after she arrived in Nigeria, she declared:

“Health is indispensable in this country” (Brink,1913: 20 Feb '14)

During her time as a missionary in the Sudan region, Alice had numerous life threatening and miserable experiences with regards to her health. She was struck down by fever on more than one occasion and often suffered from stomach diseases. She lived through outbreaks of malaria as well as the Spanish flu pandemic. As a women – and missionary wife – it was expected of her to play a nurturing role and nurse those who became ill – whether it was missionaries, their wives or children – back to health. Having received some training in nursing and other more “practical” subjects – as was custom for women of her time⁹⁵ – she often worked in the clinic and tended to the ailments of the local people. Alice also played an active part in the establishment of a clinic and school for the blind, and camps for people suffering from leprosy. Without a doubt, Alice's worst health-related experience (according to her ego-texts) was the loss of both her unborn child and her ability to have children.

Phiri and Nadar (2006: 9) argue that women draw from their religious heritage and spirituality to become health providers to themselves and others. Throughout her diaries, it is apparent that Alice regarded health and wellbeing (or a lack thereof) as a direct result of God's involvement in the world and her life. In one of her earliest available diary entries, she wrote:

The Lord knows everything. He knows why He allowed this illness may I see His hand in everything. (Brink,1913: 23 Aug '13) [my translation]

After her very traumatic operation in 1915 she explained it as follows:

The consequences and character of the operation were very painful for us, but the Dear Lord knows what is best for us. (Brink,1913: 10 Sept '15)... The Lord, however, allowed everything and I earnestly pray for comfort and victory. (Brink,1913: 24 Sept '15) [my translation]

⁹⁵ See 4.7

The idea that God gives and takes away health, or that God is directly involved in these matters, is in line with Alice's pietism. Her perception of God as a personal God who comforts her in the face of health issues also attests to this. Besides understanding health as a gift from God over which God had all power, she also saw the loss thereof or threats upon it, as part of the sacrifices one had to make for the sake of "the Lord's work." As in many other areas of her life, Alice's perspective on health shows that she was a woman of her time, severely influenced by a culture that regarded women as stoic martyrs who would sacrifice their lives for their husbands, children and nation. One could argue that Alice's worldview was a consequence of her own oppression by the male dominant culture and the rules of patriarchy.

5.6 The coloniser

The fact that Alice herself was oppressed by the cultural norms of her time, however, did not mean that she could not – or did not – also adopt the role of oppressor. Like many Afrikaner women of her time, Alice became complicit in the racism that went hand in hand with Afrikaner nationalism; the imperialism that went hand in hand with the missionary endeavour; and the paternalism that went hand in hand with evangelization. The strong alliance between colonialism and mission has already been discussed in Chapter 2. Mission and colonisation were inseparable enterprises. As Fernandez states: To colonise was to missionize and to missionize was to colonise (Fernandez, 2010: 39). Although Nigeria was not a colony of South Africa, the colonial mindset behind Alice's actions and behaviour is undeniable. McClintock (1995: 110) bluntly states that white women were both colonised – by patriarchy, *volksmoeder* ideology, and binary thinking – and colonisers, ambiguously complicit in the history of African dispossession (McClintock, 1995: 110). Afrikaner women (*volksmoeders*) were seen as patrons of culture and therefore like many women in the South African context, Alice was an active participant in the forceful transmission of Afrikaner culture in the Nigeria and the paternalistic, colonial mindset behind it.

In evaluating her relationship and interactions with the native people of Tiv-land and the Sudan Region – and especially her reflections surrounding those interactions – Iris Young's (1990: 39) "Five Faces of Oppression" again comes to mind. Oppression is traditionally linked with conquest and colonial domination. In Alice's writings, the most evident form of

oppression towards the native people is “oppression as cultural imperialism.” Although the extent, manifestation and experience of this form of oppression in Alice’s life and the lives of the Tiv people cannot be compared, these faces of oppression apply to both. They were, of course, not oppressed to the same extent or in the same ways. It is also important to keep in mind that Young’s categories of oppression are not meant to be exhaustive, and therefore doesn’t cover the entire scope of people’s experiences of oppression. It is merely one theory that aims to illuminate experiences of oppression (Jones,2000: 79) and that can assist in shedding light on certain aspects of the oppression of the people of the Sudan region – in which Alice was an active participant.⁹⁶ One can deduce that Alice’s participation in the oppression – through acts of evangelization and colonisation – was a result of her own oppression by the cultural imperialism of a patriarchal, male dominated, hegemonic society.

As argued throughout this chapter, Alice has been conditioned to regard Afrikaner culture and the Christian religion (as taught by the DRC) as the norm and everything else as unusual – and in Alice’s view: damned. attempts to impose upon When the dominant group views their own cultural expressions and identity as the norm, they usually regard differences exhibited as *lack* and *negation* by those who they have marked as “the other” (Young,1990: 59). The missionaries – and Alice specifically – had no respect for the local people’s way of life. This, however, should come as no surprise when taking into account statements from people like J.G Strydom⁹⁷ – who worked with Alice in the Sudan region – which declared that there rested a sacred responsibility with the DRC as a “Christian civilized people... to raise the native out of the... misery of barbarism” (Elphick,2003: 65). According to Njoku (2007: 5) such attempts – i.e. to impose particular ways of seeing and being or values and attitudes – exposes their self-righteousness and limited understanding of African societies. This type of hegemonic project and universalization of one group’s experience and culture as the norm is exactly what “oppression as cultural imperialism” refers to (Young,1990: 59). One example of this is when Alice proudly wrote/reflected:

⁹⁶ Hinga (1996: 38) writes: “...part of African women’s struggle is against the imperialism implicit in the efforts of others, particularly Westerners, to represent them... their critique of Western paternalism includes the critique of Western women insofar as they, too, may presume to speak on their behalf...” I want to be mindful of this and therefore emphasize that I only speak from Alice’s perspectives – as written in her diaries – and the assumptions that can be made from that information.

⁹⁷ See 2.2.2 and 2.2.5

When we visited here (Miango) for the first time there were only a few unclothed people in the service in a round hut. Then, none of the (Irigwe) people wore clothes. The men only (wore) a little fleece and the women, leaves. Today there are sitting almost two hundred men and women in a spacious church building. The women are clothed in a pretty headscarf and short Riga and loin cloth. The men (in) a Riga, short or long pants... It is a tremendous change. There was also a lot more silence during the service than before... (Brink,1935-1938: 21 March '37).

Their domination, however, was not only exercised by means of cultural imperialism. From Alice's accounts, it is clear that the native people were automatically expected to work for the missionaries. They were used as modes of transportation and often took Alice and the other missionaries (or their luggage) wherever they wanted/needed to go by carrying them in hammocks, on their backs or shoulders, or by bushcar. At times Alice referred to them as "carthorses" and once, when they had to cross a very deep river, Alice recollected the experience as follows:

Where the tree trunk ended, we climbed onto the shoulders of our two tallest carriers, while a third held our feet. It is an art to sit on the shoulders of two men in this way, without falling off. The best way is to hold on to the frizzy hair⁹⁸ (Brink,1913: 25 May '18). [my translation]

When the local people were not willing to work for them, it seemed to be a cause of frustration and even somewhat incomprehensible. They would not give up the search, though. Alice wrote about this in her diaries more than once. Allow me a few examples:

It is very hard to find Tiv children who want to work. Anenge is the first Tiv girl (*meidje*) who came to school, and she is now the only Tiv girl who has started reading. She is also the first girl who works for white people. (Brink,1913: 30 Nov '14). [my translation]

"The Munchi's are becoming more and more willing to work in our houses." (Brink,1913: 15 Aug '13) [my translation]

⁹⁸ "*kroesjes*"

The domination is overt in these examples. According to Young (1990: 48), in a slave society, where people claim the right to appropriate the labour of others, this phenomenon is often legitimated by ideologies of natural superiority and inferiority. Where people – in this instance the local people from the Sudan region – exercise their capacities under the control, according to the purposes, and for the benefit of others, it can be described as “oppression as exploitation” (Young, 1990: 49). Young argues that wherever there is racism, there is the assumption, more or less enforced, that members of the oppressed racial groups ought to be servants of those in the privileged group (Young, 1990: 52). This type of oppression, specifically in this situation, also led to oppression as powerlessness. Young (1990: 56) describes the powerless as those who lack authority or power and over whom power is exercised. Powerlessness is further characterised by the exposure to disrespectful treatment based on the status you occupy according to those who exercise power (Young: 1990). This led to the fact that the missionaries sometimes took it upon themselves to physically or by way of chastening, discipline the local people, who did not act according to their laws and standards (Brink, 1935: 20-22 Nov ’35). At one stage a chief laid a complaint against them with the Government for disciplining the children (Brink, 1919-1921: 4 May ’20). Young (1990: 61) refers to this face of oppression as “oppression as violence.”

When telling and reflecting on Alice’s story, one cannot ignore these darker, less romantic aspects of her story. The fact that she is both the oppressed and the oppressor, once again highlights the fact that she is not a one-dimensional character and that her story is multi-faceted one. Alice was also greatly influenced by her own male dominated culture and men such as J.G. Strydom, who for instance denounced the idea of *gelykstelling* and wrote a book called “*Die Roomse gevaar en hoe om dit te bestry*” (The Roman [Catholic] Threat and how to fight against it).

5.7 Dualistic thinking and The Roman (Catholic) Threat (“Die Roomse Gevaar”)

A theme that becomes very prominent in Alice’s diaries later in her life (1935 and onwards), is the “threat” Roman Catholics was – according to Alice – to their mission work and the message they were proclaiming. Alice regarded their two most threatening enemies as 1) The Roman Catholic Church and 2) Satan. She experienced and described both these “enemies” as destructive forces of their work in the Sudan region.

Although her true disdain for the Roman Catholic missionaries only came to the fore in her later diaries, there were already signs of this in her earlier entries e.g.:

It is Reformation Day. Today we think back to how Luther broke the Roman (sic) yoke and yet their work continues with leaps and bounds. (Brink,1913: 31 Oct '15)

Alice's preoccupation with the Roman Catholic missionaries' presence and influence in Nigeria and her views regarding Satan's actions in their lives, unmasks the dualistic way of thinking that was characteristic of her Afrikaner, male dominated, patriarchal culture and present throughout her ego texts. Dualistic thinking – or dualism – is a thought pattern that divides everything into two categories as opposites, which in turn creates a curious set of binary⁹⁹ oppositions (Cranny-Francis,2003: 2). It operates according to a set of hierarchically arranged roles in society which makes one half of the equation positive and the other negative (Cranny-Francis,2003: 2). E.g.: good vs. evil; men vs. women; white vs. black; God vs. Satan; Reformed vs. Roman Catholic etc. These dualisms are seen in many other aspects of Alice's story, such as the separate services and conferences held for men and women. Dualisms are used to make two seemingly opposite elements enemies of each other and place them in camps over against each other, creating categories of "us-them," "either-or" (Nelson,1992: 15).

The Roman Catholic Church was viewed as a "foreign institution" and therefore a threat. Higgs (2008: 501). The term "*Roomse gevaar*" was later used in South African politics (by the National Party) – along with "*Swart Gevaar*" ("Black threat") and "*Rooi gevaar*" ("Red threat" i.e. the Communist threat) – to stir up emotions against the Roman Catholic Church as a spiritual threat to the Christian faith. On the eve of World War II, *Die Kerkbode* (The Church Messenger), the official newspaper of the DRC, asserted that the major threats to world peace were Communism and Catholicism, not Nazism (Higgs,2008: 501).

J.G. Strydom, who worked alongside Alice and Attie in the Sudan region – and therefore most probably had a strong influence on her thinking – wrote a book in 1937 called: "*Die Roomse gevaar en hoe om dit te bestry*" (The Roman threat and how to fight it). The fear of a

⁹⁹ The (twofold) division of humanity into opposites (Thatcher,2011: 3)

loss of power and identity is apparent. Strydom, who later became the Secretary of Mission in the Free State synod, was also strongly opposed to *gelykstelling*¹⁰⁰ and eventually became a very important contributor to the DRC mission policies that led to Apartheid ideology. This all attests to dualistic thinking, a thought pattern that creates the idea that there is “us” and then there are “others,” both in the form of people and of ideas and customs (Kinghorn, 1999: 37). In this particular case, the “others” were the Roman Catholics, whose aims were thought to be, to manipulate the world into uniformity (Kinghorn, 1999: 38). Although Alice herself didn’t use the term “*Roomse gevaar*,” in her ego-texts, her reflections were evidently in line with the mindset and dualistic worldview behind it.

5.8 Concluding remarks

In reading Alice’s ego-texts one can immediately sense that she is a complex character and that she – like her story – has many sides. She was a woman of her time, influenced and formed by the ideologies, thought patterns and the dominant culture that she was embedded in. She was susceptible to the influences of the men who she was surrounded with. But she was also more than that. She was a woman who had agency; who crossed the boundaries of her prescribed role, stepped outside the stereotype and defied the gender norms of her day.

Jones (2000: 6) warns against imposing theoretical categories that do not fit upon the experiences of the women whose stories we are telling. Keeping this in mind, the comments and discussions above; the identified themes; and theoretical applications are by no means meant to be exhaustive or determinative. They are merely a few general observations and analyses, made in order to develop a few general conclusions – a ‘scrapbook’ if you will (Bass, 2009: 4). In the final Chapter of this study, I will, therefore, draw some general conclusions surrounding Alice’s story.

¹⁰⁰ See Chapter 2.2.2

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Introductory remarks

Telling the story of Alice Mabel Brink (née Matthewson) uncovered an unknown dimension of the past; a story that was waiting to be told (Janz,2007: xi). It is an exploration of the life of a woman who had previously been “hidden from history” – behind her husband’s title, name and vocation (Weiler,1999: 43). Telling and listening to this story – a story that might have been overlooked otherwise – is an act of liberation; of giving a voice to the voiceless. Before exploring and uncovering the story of Alice Brink, the only thing we knew about her was that she was the wife of Rev. Attie Brink – even referred to as Mrs Attie Brink – who did mission work with her husband in the Sudan region of Nigeria (also referred to as Tiv land). After listening to her story, told through her diaries, we now know that she was a missionary in her own right; an educated woman who did not only fulfil the role of teacher – as was expected – but of preacher as well.

Alice’s story sheds light on a part of history that has, in the past, largely been a male story; a “great” story about the “great” deeds of “great” men (Janz,2007: xi) – i.e. DRC mission in Tiv land, Nigeria. In telling this old story of DRC mission from a new, female perspective, we discover that there are other sides to that story – a new route through an old landscape (Jones,2000: 19). It gives us a glimpse into the history of DRC mission from the perspective of those who have been marginalised and pushed to the sidelines, but who often did a lot or even most of the work.

6.2 The ambiguous story of Alice Mabel Brink

Alice Mabel Matthewson (later Brink) was born into a world where women were not expected to become anything more than *volksmoeders* (mothers of the nation i.e. wives, mothers and nationalists); a world where women were honoured for their piety, self-sacrifice and submissiveness. In early twentieth century South Africa, gender roles confined women to the domestic sphere, while men were regarded as the breadwinners, decision makers and natural leaders. *Volksmoeder* ideology was said to honour Afrikaner women, but in reality, it

restricted them to being participants in the lives of their children and husbands rather than agents of their own lives. Reclaiming the histories of women enables us to explore and to expose these patriarchal myths about women's place and capabilities (Isherwood, 1993: 21). It is by telling the stories of women like Alice – who broke the stereotype and crossed boundaries set by the dominant culture – that we not only expose these myths, but bring about change in our perceptions of women's participation, both in the past and the present.

In her expansive work on “gender, race and religion in Nordic missions,” Okkenhaug (2003: 12) poses the question: “Is it possible for women located within patriarchal structures to transcend traditional boundaries?” Alice's story is one of many examples that prove that it is. Throughout this study, it becomes clear that Alice played a much larger role in the eventual success of the DRC mission in Nigeria than she had previously been credited with. Despite the fact that she was deeply rooted within the male dominant culture and the consequent self-sacrificing, submissive female subculture, we learn that she often acted on her own volition and with an agency not common for women of her time. Alice studied to become a missionary worker and travelled to Nigeria, not at the side and as the wife of a missionary, but as an answer to her own calling. She boarded a ship to Nigeria (via London) as an unmarried woman, all on her own. Despite the colonial – and therefore in many ways oppressive and subjugating – nature of mission in the early twentieth century, the DRC's missionary enterprise presented Alice with an opportunity to break free from the gender norms and societal constraints of her day. It was a space within which she could grow and flourish; where she could do what she felt called to do. As a missionary worker in Nigeria, she preached; attended meetings and conferences; participated in the establishment of schools, mission stations and clinics; and helped to translate the Bible in Tiv. These were things that women were traditionally not expected or even allowed to do, but the rules in the mission field were different.¹⁰¹ For the most part, she did the same work that her husband Attie and her male counterparts were tasked with – with added responsibilities such as teaching, nursing and maintaining the “household.” Even though she was doing this in oppressive social and cultural circumstances, she lived her life sure of her own spirituality and cultural identity (Van Schalkwyk, 2006: 5). She would, however, not have been referred

¹⁰¹ For an interesting and extensive discussion on how missionary work provided an environment where Afrikaans women could find healing from the consequences of patriarchal and racist culture, see: Van Schalkwyk (2006: 4-19).

to as a missionary, but rather as a missionary worker,¹⁰² and therefore would not be awarded the same title as her male counterparts but in reality and practice Alice was and acted as a missionary. As a woman working within the religious sphere, and specifically the DRC, I celebrate these successes and the flourishing of Alice Brink, for it is women like her who exposed the patriarchal myth that women were not predisposed or capable of doing such work. It is the work and flourishing of women like Alice Brink that pushed the boundaries of patriarchy and made it possible for women like me to be able to work within this field.

The fact that Alice in many ways flourished within the context of mission in Nigeria, however, does not mean that she did not also experience oppression in other ways. Alice's ego-texts exposed the oppressive structures and practices present in early twentieth century Afrikaner culture, as well as in the missionary endeavours of the DRC in Nigeria. Feminist theory is concerned both with the failures and successes, the flourishing and oppressions that women experience, and in Alice's narrative, we are confronted with both. Alice lived in a juxtaposition of constraint and freedom – acting with agency in some spheres of life and experiencing oppression (consciously or subconsciously) in others.

While Alice moved beyond the boundaries of the gender norms of the day, one cannot ignore the fact that she was also a woman of her time. This becomes clear throughout her diaries as well as in her "Book for Mothers." Alice's ego-texts show that she was strongly influenced by *volksmoeder* ideology; dualistic thinking; pietism; and the colonial mindset that fuelled the missionary endeavour.¹⁰³ In line with *volksmoeder* ideology, Alice regarded motherhood as a women's most important task/role. Despite the fact that she could not have children of her own, she made it her mission to teach the Tiv women how to be mothers to their children and wives to their husbands. She was a supporter of the NP and their nationalist ideals, and although Nigeria was never a colony of South Africa, she was an active participant in the forceful transmission of Afrikaner culture and the colonial mindset behind it. Alice's pietism¹⁰⁴ and dualistic thinking¹⁰⁵ are also apparent in her ego-texts; which are filled with feelings of guilt; images of a very personal and demanding God; and strong ideas about what is right and wrong; good and evil; normal and abnormal.

¹⁰² *werkster*

¹⁰³ See Chapter 5

¹⁰⁴ For a more detailed discussion of Alice's pietism see 5.4

¹⁰⁵ For examples of Alice's dualistic thinking see 5.7

Being a woman of her time and therefore strongly influenced by the dominant male culture and ideologies of the day, meant that Alice was not only oppressed¹⁰⁶ by that culture, but also a participant in it. As many women of her time, she was ascribed the role of nurturer, nurse and keeper of the household and expected to fulfil these roles¹⁰⁷ – even on the mission field in Nigeria. She was often kept out of the decision making structures¹⁰⁸ and expected to act according to societal rules set by men.¹⁰⁹ This means that, as a woman in a male dominated, patriarchal culture, she was the *oppressed*, but as a white, missionary woman tasked with the transference of that culture to the Tiv people, she also became the *oppressor*. She was “colonised” – by patriarchy, *volksmoeder* ideology, and binary/dualistic thinking – but she was also a “coloniser” due to her participation in the missionary endeavour and African dispossession. She had and acted with agency in some areas of her life, but in others areas, she remained a victim of the patriarchy. It is exactly this tension between the awareness/analysis of Alice’s oppression and the appreciation for her flourishing, that feminist theory encourages us to celebrate and keep.

The more we familiarise ourselves with Alice’s story, the clearer it becomes that her narrative is an ambiguous one, painting her as both the oppressed and the oppressor; the colonised and the coloniser. Further ambiguity lays in the fact that throughout Alice’s story we witness both her oppression and her flourishing; her submissiveness and her agency. Throughout her story Alice moves back and forth on the scale between oppression and flourishing; between being the oppressed and the oppressor. In this manner, her story reflects something of the ambiguities and intersectionality that we are all faced with on a daily basis. This ambiguity struck me on a personal level, as it is the same ambiguity that I embody within my own life story – i.e. being grouped with the oppressed in some instances and the oppressors in others. As a woman, I often experience the oppressions of male hegemony. However, as white, cisgender woman, and a minister within the DRC I am a product of white privilege¹¹⁰ and work for an institution that is historically regarded as the gathering place for the architects of

¹⁰⁶ Alice’s experiences of oppression is discussed in 5.2.2

¹⁰⁷ Young (1990: 50) explains the setting of social rules about what work is and who does it for whom as oppression as exploitation. See 5.2.2

¹⁰⁸ Young (1990: 56) describes incidences such as these as oppression as powerlessness. See 5.2.2

¹⁰⁹ This can be defined as oppression as cultural imperialism (Young, 1990: 59). See 5.2.2

¹¹⁰

Apartheid. I am very aware of the fact that in many stories and instances, I am often grouped with the oppressors, and sometimes even unintentionally act as such.

In the face of these ambiguities, however, this study shows how one woman negotiated change, whilst firmly rooted within a patriarchal and paternalistic society. Alice's story sensitised me to the fact that our own narratives are filled with failures and flourishing; with acts of liberation and oppression; with situations in which we have the necessary agency and other where we do not. It points us to the ambiguities within our own stories and shows us that we can bring about change despite the cultures that we are embedded in. It is just as important to remain aware of these ambiguities within our own lives as it is to identify it within Alice's narrative. Understanding these ambiguities gives us a more rounded picture, not only of Alice's own story, but the contexts and histories that she was a part of as well. Telling this ambiguous story adds more colour to the picture of DRC mission that has been painted thus far. It sheds a – ever so slightly – brighter light on the participation of women, not only within the religious sphere, but also outside the boundaries and stereotypes of early twentieth century gender roles in South Africa. However, we have to keep in mind that there are always more sides to these stories – both Alice's story and the story of early twentieth century DRC mission – to explore. As stated in Chapter one, this study was never meant to present or evoke a final truth, but to add a new voice to the conversation and inspire further discussions of these topics. This telling of Alice's story is therefore not comprehensive but suggestive.

6.3 Why telling women's stories is important

Alice's story, however, is not the only ambiguous story that is waiting to be told. We need to keep telling women's lives and their stories, as often and in as much detail as possible. All we have to do is examine the world around us at this moment in time, to realise that a future without oppression – the future that feminist theorists imagine – is not yet in our grasp. The dominant story that is being told is still that of (seemingly) “great” men and those who do not fit into that story are still being marginalised. The male hegemonic culture is very much alive and keeps perpetuating the oppression of women and other marginalised groups.

We need to keep telling these stories, “in order to trigger a process of investigation, rethinking, change and ultimate transformation within patriarchal society and religious institutions” (Isherwood, 1993: 16). Shüssler Fiorenza (2014: 251) argues that over the last six hundred years or so, feminist thought has emerged again and again and then has been submerged and forgotten so that every third generation has to start over again. Sociologists tell us that it is the function of the third generation to dig up what the second generation tried hard to forget about the first generation (Isherwood, 1993: 14). Isherwood (1993: 14) identifies the third generation, in this context, as present-day Christian feminists and it is our responsibility to assure that the feminist ideal will not be submerged and forgotten again.

We need to keep telling these stories so that there can be a stronger awareness regarding situations of oppression and a stronger desire for change. According to Ackermann (1993: 23), “the process of conscientization¹¹¹ starts with the awareness of ourselves in relation to the historical contexts in which we live. In this process of self-knowledge and social knowledge inform one another. As knowledge of the social world becomes personal, connections are made with the experiences of other women and also with all situations of oppression.” Telling stories helps the process of conscientization, and therefore is crucial not only in exposing oppression but in creating a desire for change as well.

Hopefully the telling of this story – the ambiguous story of Alice Mabel Brink – will inspire others to uncover and tell other untold stories of women’s lives too.

¹¹¹ The discovery of self as oppressed, which leads to the desire for change (Ackermann, 1993: 22).

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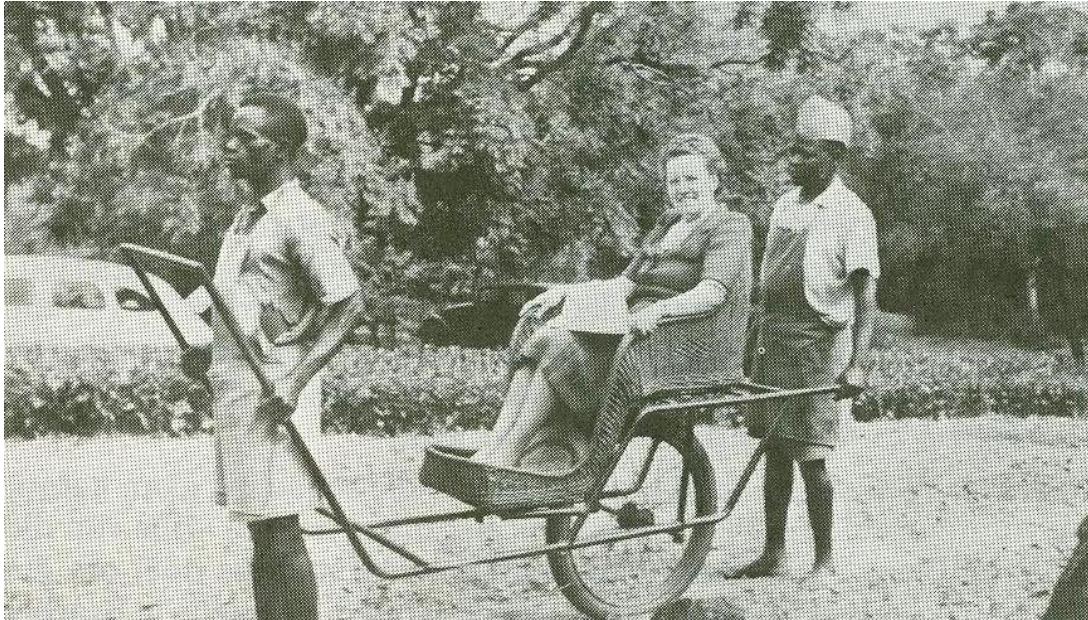
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Appendix

Fig. 1



Example of a Bushcar – Passenger and carriers unknown

Cronjé, JM. 1984. *Vroue met Nardusparfuum*. Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel. p.135

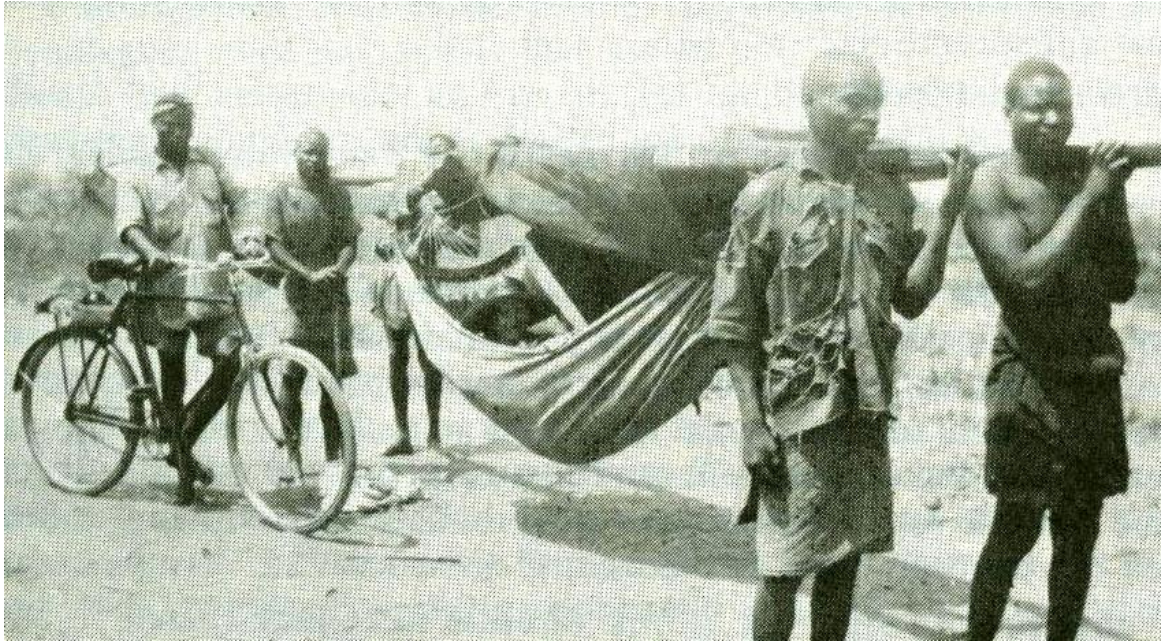
Fig. 2



Alice Mabel Brink and her husband Attie Brink

K-DIV 829. Stellenbosch: NG Kerk in SA Argief

Fig. 3



Example of a hammock – Passenger and carriers unknown

Cronjé, JM. 1984. *Vroue met Nardusparfuum*. Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel. p.135