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WOMEN MISSIONARIES AND COLONIAL SILENCES IN KENYA’S FEMALE ‘CIRCUMCISION’ CONTROVERSY, 1906-1930

For the people of Kenya, and especially for the Kikuyu-speaking population of the central regions of the country, recent global debates on the emotional and medical harms of female genital mutilation (FGM), allied to arguments about the human rights of the women subjected to such acts, have a strong and profoundly significant historical resonance. In central Kenya, the problems posed by the practice of clitoridectomy first became a matter of intense political, cultural and religious debate from the early decades of the twentieth century. In the 1920s, Christian missionaries in central Kenya mounted a concerted campaign to prohibit ‘female circumcision’ amongst their flourishing African congregations. This provoked a backlash, with thousands of Kikuyu Christians deserting the missions to found their own independent churches and schools in the early 1930s. This event, commonly referred to as the ‘female circumcision controversy’, marks a turning point in Kenya’s colonial history. The circumcision controversy is acknowledged to lie at the centre of any historical explanation of the rise of political nationalism.


2. The term ‘circumcision’ is clinically inaccurate, the practice in central Kenya being more correctly described as ‘excision’. However, throughout this article, in keeping with the language of the existing historical literature, the term ‘clitoridectomy’ will be used to refer to the specific operation conducted upon Kikuyu women, while the term ‘female circumcision’ will only denote historical usage in the Kenyan context.

modern Kenya and the making of Kikuyu political identity, and even in any explanation of the origins of the Mau Mau rebellion. Since the publication, in 1938, of Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya*, which devoted a chapter to the place of clitoridectomy in Kikuyu society, the enduring influence of the female circumcision controversy on Kenyan history, ethnography and sociology has been fully acknowledged.

The place of gender politics at the centre of this controversy has long been recognised. Susan Pedersen, writing with great insight about the involvement of British women activists in the mission campaign against clitoridectomy, has observed that the tendency for men to ultimately dominate the discourse ‘obscured the central role of women whose bodies were, after all, the bone of contention’. Tabitha Kanogo and Wairimu Njambi have both set ‘female circumcision’ in a Kikuyu social and cultural context, recognizing also its importance in fostering female political mobilization, while Lynn Thomas has shown that female initiation was an important realm of women’s authority and vital to the construction of gender and generational relations in central Kenya. Colonial struggles over the practices, especially those

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that involved men and Local Native Council members in the procedures, worked to undercut older women’s authority while contributing to the creation of alternative routes for young women to achieve gendered adulthood.\textsuperscript{10} And both Bodil Frederiksen and Sara Boulanger recognize the significance of female sexuality in the politics of the circumcision controversy.\textsuperscript{11}

Scholars of mission history have found the circumcision controversy to be a more difficult subject. While Jocelyn Murray does emphasise the gender struggles amongst women within the Christian community,\textsuperscript{12} her work deals with the only prominent Protestant church not directly involved in the controversy, the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS). Other histories of the missions principally involved in the campaign against clitoridectomy - the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM), the Gospel Missionary Society (GMS), and the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) – have acknowledged the far-reaching importance of the politics around the clitoridectomy campaign of the 1920s, but all remain silent about key aspects of the controversy.\textsuperscript{13} This essay breaks through that silence by using the archives of the AIM, along

\textsuperscript{9} Kanogo, \textit{African Womanhood}, pp.73-103; Njambi, ‘Iru ria atumia’, 700-705.

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with a fresh reading of other colonial sources, to explore the actions and attitudes of white women missionaries, revealing a more subtle and complex picture of missionary views of African society and the process of Christian conversion than previous studies have allowed. White women emerge as the main protagonists in the controversy, the murder and mutilation of an elderly female American missionary culminating as the critical moment in the political crisis provoked by the campaign against circumcision. The meaning of this murder - ignored, concealed, or misrepresented in other accounts of the circumcision controversy[^14] - will be examined to show that, as the circumcision crisis developed during 1929, white women missionaries stood at the centre of the gathering storm, their experience emblematic of the emotional, cultural and political challenges in the circumcision debate. This account adds an important new dimension to our understanding of gender in Kenya’s circumcision debate, but it also reveals why colonial silence has surrounded the event at the very centre of the crisis: our story must therefore begin with the murder and ‘cutting’[^15] of a white woman missionary.

I

Kakoi Gashingiri arrived at the cottage of his memsahib on the morning of 3 January 1930 at 6.00 a.m., as he had done every morning since taking employment with Hulda Stumpf at Kijabe, the Kenya headquarters of the Africa Inland Mission. Mission stenographer and secretary to the Field Director, Stumpf was an energetic spinster of 63 years who took particular interest in training Kikuyu girls at the Kijabe Mission School. With a reputation for being ‘easily riled’, and having ‘a brusque manner’, Stumpf was not the easiest of companions. Rather than


[^15]: See Joshua, ‘The Church’, 18-19, for reference to ‘the cut’.
share a house at Kijabe, where she had spent her life since coming out to East Africa in 1911, Stumpf lived alone in a small cottage to one side of the main mission buildings. When Kakoi reached the cottage that morning, his friend Mwangi Gachie, like Kakoi a boy of around 14 years, was already in the kitchen, busily lighting the fire to boil water for the morning coffee. The two boys were Stumpf’s only employees. The coffee made, Kakoi knocked on the bedroom door. Getting no answer, he went to collect fruit from the garden for the breakfast, returning to knock at the door again. When no reply came, Mwangi urged him to try the handle: the door was unlocked, and Kakoi entered the room. He was the first person that morning to see the body of Hulda Stumpf, lying partially covered on her blood-soaked bed. Kakoi ran from the cottage to the house of the mission’s Field Director, Lee Downing. While Downing dressed, his wife rushed to Stumpf’s cottage, where other missionaries soon gathered. Within a few minutes the dreadful news was conveyed to everyone at Kijabe: Hulda Stumpf had been murdered.16

Who murdered Stumpf, and why, are questions that have never been conclusively answered. Yet we do not lack for evidence about the case. The murder prompted no fewer than three separate legal proceedings. The first was an inquest, held in January 1930 at Kijabe under the authority of the Kiambu District Commissioner, Sidney Fazan. At this hearing a finding of murder was declared.17 In October, an African man appeared before Fazan - this time in his capacity as Second Class Magistrate - charged with the murder. At this hearing, Fazan found that there was sufficient evidence to merit prosecution, committing the accused for trial in Nairobi.18 The High Court proceedings were conducted in November 1930, before Chief Justice

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Barth, in what proved to be a controversial trial. From these proceedings, the bare facts of the case appeared relatively straightforward. Stumpf’s assailant(s) entered her room as she was preparing for bed, breaking the window with a rock. Stumpf was sitting on the bed to remove her garments: partially deaf, she probably did not hear the approach of her assailant(s) until the window was forcibly broken. She was grabbed by the wrist and thrown back onto the bed, a pillow placed over her head, presumably to stifle her cries. To do this the assailant knelt on her chest: the pressure exerted upon the pillow was very great, breaking Stumpf’s nose and causing her to suffocate. This was the cause of death. The room was undamaged, and nothing was stolen.

The main controversy in the case concerned an aspect other than the cause of death: the victim suffered a serious wound to her vagina, causing extensive bleeding, an injury inflicted just before death. Both government pathologists consulted on the case found that the wound was caused by the cutting action of a blunt instrument. But the fact that the victim died from suffocation, and not from the vaginal wound, conveniently removed the need for the court to reach a firm conclusion as to the cause of this wound. The evidence presented overwhelmingly supported the finding, confirmed at both the inquest and the committal, that Stumpf had been victim of an attempted clitoridectomy, carried out by someone using a Kikuyu circumciser’s knife, but who had no experience in conducting the operation. The implication was that Stumpf’s murder was a consequence of the ‘female circumcision crisis’, then at its height in the Kikuyu lands of central Kenya. Reporting on the inquest, The Times made the critical political connection:

21. Both were conducted by Kiambu’s D[istrict] C[ommission], the redoubtable Sidney Fazan: TNA CO533/394/11, for the inquest, and KNA AG5/2632, for the committal.
The enquiry revealed a story which has caused much disquiet in the country. The medical evidence discounted any theory of attempted rape but inclined to the view that certain unusual wounds were due to deliberate mutilation such as might have been caused by the use of a knife employed by natives in a form of tribal operation.22

On 24 January 1930, three weeks following the crime, the Kenya Police arrested Mtua Nzomo, an adolescent attending the mission school at Kijabe who had previously been employed on the mission as a swine-herd. The police had discovered several sets of fingerprints in Stumpf’s room - on the bedrail, and a clock and a lamp. A huge operation was mounted to fingerprint all persons on the mission, and all Africans living in the vicinity of Kijabe. In this process none of the fingerprints taken in the bedroom could be identified. However, a search through the kipande records - the fingerprint identity cards carried by all Africans who sought employment - revealed that two prints in Stumpf’s room matched those of Nzomo. The prosecution went ahead solely on the basis of this evidence, and despite the fact that the third fingerprint was never identified, and that footprints found on the window ledge and outside Stumpf’s room did not match those of the 16-year-old Nzomo.23

With no other evidence to substantiate Nzomo’s guilt, the prosecution struggled to find a motive for the crime. If Nzomo was guilty, a connection with the circumcision controversy seemed unlikely: he was not Kikuyu, but Kamba, and had no known affiliation with the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) - the political party leading opposition to the missions in central Kenya. These facts affected the presentation of evidence in Nzomo’s High Court trial. The prosecution needed a motive, but no robbery had taken place, and Nzomo’s Kamba background diminished the likelihood of a political connection. The only obvious remaining alternative was sexual assault. The prosecuting counsel, Howell, therefore disputed the pathologists’ view that

23. KNA AG5/2632, Cochrane to Attorney General, 24 Feb. 1930, and subsequent correspondence on collection of evidence; and, ‘Committal’, Kiambu, 9 Sept. 1930, evidence of
the wounds to the vagina had been caused by deliberate cuts, and instead argued that an attempted rape could not be ruled out on the basis of the medical evidence. This line of argument also served the purposes of the colonial government, who for once found the admission of the rape of a white woman preferable to the possible political ramifications of an admission that Stumpf had been the victim of a forced clitoridectomy. In the fraught atmosphere of Kenya's racial politics, ‘black peril scares’ were constantly to the fore in the European imagination, and many of those white settlers learning of the assault at Kijabe were likely to have readily assumed that a sexual attack had taken place.

The missionaries of the AIM were also influenced by such anxieties, and had other reasons besides to wish to put distance between Stumpf's murder and their policy on circumcision. To admit the mutilation would be to concede that the crime against Stumpf was a political reaction to the mission campaign against FGM. Keen to refute any such suggestion, Dr Davis of the AIM steadfastly argued at the trial that no mutilation had taken place. His evidence was central to the prosecution's case. At face value, his testimony carried weight: he had been the first person to examine the body, and had later that day assisted Dr Vint with the post-mortem. But his evidence directly contradicted that of both government doctors. It was also widely reported in the local press, further nurturing the belief among many that a sexual assault, and not a mutilation, had in fact taken place.

Not content to trust to the scales of justice alone, as the trial approached Davis joined


Lee Downing in asking all members of the AIM to pray for Nzomo's conviction. But even prayer proved inadequate: without a clear motive, the prosecution's argument collapsed when doubt was cast upon the fingerprint evidence. Significantly, this only came to light because R.F. Palethorpe, a retired colonial official, informed both defence and prosecution counsel that Lee Downing had privately admitted to him that the clock on which the fingerprints of the accused were found had been in Nzomo's possession several months prior to the murder, being loaned to him by Stumpf 'to enable him to get the pigs to the railway station by 4 a.m'. With the distinct sense that Downing had purposefully chosen not to be entirely honest with the court, Nzomo was acquitted.

II

The events that shaped the crisis culminating in Stumpf's murder had been a long time in the making. Kikuyu of central Kenya conducted clitoridectomy as part of the process of female initiation to adulthood. Clitoridectomy was normally carried out just before puberty, marking the eligibility of a woman for marriage. The ceremonies associated with the operation were a matter of public celebration, forming the basis of the sexual and social education of young women as well as symbolizing an essential element of Kikuyu cultural identity. For many European missionaries, the act of female circumcision was morally repugnant, representing the...
pagan barbarity that Christianity sought to expunge from Africa.\textsuperscript{31} As early as 1906, the Presbyterians of the CSM had instructed converts against the practice.\textsuperscript{32} AIM workers among the Kikuyu first recorded their horror at the practice around the same time, and by 1915 this mission was offering systematic teaching against circumcision to patients attending Kijabe Hospital.\textsuperscript{33} The main advocates of this policy were Dr Elwood Davis, who ran the hospital, and Virginia Blakeslee, then in charge of the girls’ boarding school at Kijabe.\textsuperscript{34}

At the 1918 United Conference of Missionary Societies in British East Africa, ‘female circumcision’ was widely discussed, and two resolutions passed. The first resolution called for direct action by all missions and by government: ‘... the Allied societies should unite in absolutely forbidding the circumcision of girls in their Missions, and that Government should be approached to legislate for its abolition among the heathen.’\textsuperscript{35} The second resolution referred to the medical case against the continuation of the practice:

\begin{quote}
\ldots the native custom of circumcision of girls practices among certain tribes in the Protectorate is, in all instances, purposeless and useless, while in some districts it is highly barbarous and dangerous; and that the custom ought to be abolished.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

According to mission sources, the next stage in the missionary assault on clitoridectomy came when AIM converts at the Githumu church decided to act against the practice. Wary of accusations that the crisis was forced upon unwilling African converts by overly-zealous and moralistic European-led churches, the missions took every opportunity after 1930 to demonstrate the active participation of African church members in any measure against

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{31} Sandgren, \textit{Christianity and the Kikuyu}, pp.72-4.
\bibitem{33} Gration, ‘Relationship of the AIM’, p.135.
\bibitem{34} Church of Scotland, \textit{Memorandum on Female Circumcision}, p.12.
\bibitem{35} Gration, ‘Relationship of the AIM’, p.136.
\end{thebibliography}
clitoridectomy. But despite the claims of African agency, there can be little doubt that developments at the Githumu church were in fact initiated by European missionaries attending an Inter-Mission conference held at Kambui in 1920, following which, in May 1921, the AIM Field Council passed a further resolution:

That the conference of missionaries at Kijabe, 1921, of the Africa Inland Mission, condemn and forbid the circumcision of Christian and all girls under control of Christian adherents, and that all transgressors shall be subject to Church discipline. That any person in class or church membership ridiculing one uncircumcised shall be disciplined also by the church.

From 1921, therefore, each church within the AIM possessed the authority to excommunicate members who allowed the practice of clitoridectomy within their households. The GMS and the CSM had also passed similar resolutions. Mission policy was clear enough, but it was not enforced. During the 1920s, most missionaries accepted that resolutions against clitoridectomy did not reflect the body of African opinion. Urged on by their missionary preachers and teachers, a very few African Christians did declare themselves against clitoridectomy. These individuals were senior church elders of long-standing, or young catechists and teachers whose future was closely bound-up with the missions. With regard to the wider congregations, the attitude of most missionaries remained non-confrontational. Many surely weighed the moral arguments regarding clitoridectomy against the threat of jeopardizing the growth and development of the church. Mission communities throughout central Kenya greatly expanded in the early 1920s, with large numbers of new out-schools and the rapid spread of evangelical work. The problems posed by clitoridectomy were discussed with increasing

36. Ibid.; also Sandgren, Christianity and the Kikuyu, p.73.
37. Church of Scotland, Memorandum on Female Circumcision, p.13.
38. Ibid., pp.12-13, n1.
39. Sandgren, Christianity and the Kikuyu, pp.73-4.
40. For fuller discussion, see Ward, ‘Protestant Christianity’, ch 5; Sandgren, Christianity and the Kikuyu, chs 4 and 5; Strayer, Making of Mission Communities, ch 8 (by Murray).
intensity among the missionaries of the Protestant alliance of missions in Kenya, primarily the Anglican CMS, the Presbyterian CSM, the non-denominational (but predominantly Baptist) AIM and its Methodist off-shoot, the GMS, over the decade. Their energies were directed, through the Kenya Missionary Council, to co-ordinate mission teaching against ‘female circumcision’ and to move towards uniform church discipline.\textsuperscript{41} Resolutions against clitoridectomy were issued periodically by all these bodies, but widespread evasion and deception on the matter among church members was tolerated nonetheless.\textsuperscript{42} During the early 1920s, a handful of girls at the AIM station at Kijabe did remain uncircumcised, but for the most part the mission ban on clitoridectomy was ignored.\textsuperscript{43}

Increased militancy among the missionaries regarding female circumcision, up to 1930, was fuelled by an emerging consensus on its adverse medical effects. Mission doctors had asserted since before 1914 that clitoridectomy was medically harmful, but in the 1920s a concerted campaign took shape headed by Dr John Arthur, of the Church of Scotland. Also a spokesman for African interests as a Nominated Member of the Kenya Legislative Council, Arthur was a man of influence and authority.\textsuperscript{44} His opposition to clitoridectomy derived from experience as a medical practitioner, influenced by his medical-missionary colleague Dr Philp, but also from his moral Christian convictions. Arthur, more than any other individual, gave prominence in Kenya (and then in Britain) to the medical aspects of the operation.\textsuperscript{45} It was he who, in 1929, advocated the adoption of the term ‘sexual mutilation’ in all mission literature on

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 75; Church of Scotland, \textit{Memorandum on Female Circumcision}, pp.16-18.
\textsuperscript{42} Ward, ‘Protestant Christianity’, pp.139-44, for the exceptional example of Nandi, where the AIM successfully banished clitoridectomy in the early 1920s.
\textsuperscript{43} Sandgren, \textit{Christianity and the Kikuyu}, p.74.
\textsuperscript{44} His authoritarian manner was widely acknowledged. Africans at Tumutumu called him ‘Lord Arthur’: Ward, ‘Protestant Christianity’, p.183; Rosberg and Nottingham, \textit{Myth of Mau Mau}, pp.111-12.
\textsuperscript{45} Ward, ‘Protestant Christianity’, pp.162-82; Pedersen, ‘National bodies’, gives an account of the campaign against female circumcision in Britain, led by Lady Athol.
clitoridectomy, to emphasise the physical harm. To corroborate his case, Arthur cited articles published in the *Kenya Medical Journal* during the 1920s, dealing with the effects of clitoridectomy upon women's health, childbirth and psychology.

Evocative though this literature was, it was grounded in relatively little clinical experience. Nonetheless, by the mid-1920s, European opinion had reached agreement over the existence of two types of operation practised in central Kenya, the 'major' and the 'minor'. The 'minor' was defined as 'simple clitoridectomy', and was considered relatively less harmful, although denounced by Arthur as unnecessary and pointless. In a statement signed by four medical missionaries, including Arthur and Davis, this operation was objected to on five specific grounds: it was difficult to perform with precision, and might result in injuries; there was danger of infection; great pain was inflicted; the operation had a 'bad psychological effect', 'drawing attention to sexual organs'; and that, 'although this organ is not, as is erroneously supposed the main seat of sexual gratification, it certainly contributes to this', making its excision 'all the more indefensible'. The missionary definition of the 'major' operation was phrased in more disturbing terms:

... the removal of not only the clitoris, but also the labia minora and half the labia majora, together with the surrounding tissue, resulting in the permanent mutilation affecting the woman's natural functions of micturition, menstruation and parturition, with disastrous results not only to the birth rate, but also to the physique and vitality of the tribe.

46. Church of Scotland, *Memorandum on Female Circumcision*, p.1; Sandgren, *Christianity and the Kikuyu*, p.75.
48. Church of Scotland, *Memorandum on Female Circumcision*, Appendix 1, ii.
These definitions mixed demonstrable facts with less certain assumptions. Up to 1930, the opinion prevailed among Europeans that the severity of the operation varied from place to place, and that the ‘minor’ operation represented a ‘traditional’ form that had given way to the ‘major’ form only comparatively recently. It is not clear, however, how this distinction was first made or where the notion arose that the ‘major’ operation was a modern innovation and that a return to the ‘minor’ operation marked the restoration of ‘ancient custom’. Similar discussions of circumcision practices have been highlighted in studies of Sudan by Janice Boddy, but there is no evidence that Arthur or his colleagues were influenced by knowledge from beyond Kenya.

There can be little doubt that Arthur was aware that an argument for the restoration of ‘custom’ would carry greater sway, however, both with government and with African male elders, than one aimed at prohibition. Certainly, the notion of ‘major’ and ‘minor’ operations was ‘a distinction which had no basis in Kikuyu thinking’ and was ignored by the women operators. Moreover, the medical arguments against clitoridectomy put forward by the missionaries logically implied that the ‘major’ operation had to be a recent innovation, for if it were not then the longer-term medical consequences of the practice would surely have been expected to be more immediately manifest than was apparently the case. It might be reasonably contested, therefore, that the distinction between ‘major’ and ‘minor’ was a myth made to sustain the medical arguments of the missionaries.

Senior Medical Department staff were sceptical of these proposed definitions. ‘No exact

49. Ibid., p.1.
50. TNA CO533/394/11, Moore to Passfield, 6 Nov. 1930.
knowledge is available', wrote the Director of Medical Services in March 1930:

Opinions vary enormously as to the effects upon the population. One medical man employed by a Mission situated not far from Fort Hall has expressed the opinion that 10 percent of the female population are affected in later life in connection with childbirth or otherwise. Another, a private practitioner closely associated with the activities of the Nairobi native maternity hospital, considers that the after-effects of circumcision are negligible.³³

African women tended only to visit the up-country hospitals run by the missions when difficulties in pregnancy arose, it was contended, and thus ‘European experience is no guide to the norm. Accurate knowledge with regard to the facts relating to childbirth among native peoples of Kenya is non-existent.’³⁴

Embarrassed by their ignorance of the most fundamental medical questions about the African population in the wake of the Stumpf murder, the Kenya government set up a sub-committee of the Board of Health in February 1930 to investigate the effects of clitoridectomy. By November, the sub-committee had surveyed all medical practitioners (including missionaries) in the Colony, but had come up with only 374 confirmed cases where practitioners had treated women in whom they had noted clitoridectomy wounds. In clinical terms, the survey offered no conclusive evidence. The smallness of the sample revealed that the experience of even the mission hospitals in matters relating to African obstetrics was extremely limited. However, of these 374 African women, only three were reported as having experienced the so-called ‘minor’ operation, all the others being defined as having suffered the ‘major’ operation. This supported the missionary argument that the physical extent of the operation was severe; but the same evidence also implied that the notion of a ‘minor’ operation for which legislative control could

³³ TNA CO533/394/11, ‘Memorandum on female circumcision’, Director of Medical Services, Nairobi, Mar. 1930.
³⁴ Ibid.
be implemented was largely a figment of the missionary imagination.\textsuperscript{55}

Despite the lack of verifiable evidence, in the 1920s missionary opinion moved steadily towards a consensus on the adverse medical effects of clitoridectomy. In 1927, at the urging of Arthur, the Church of Scotland Mission outlawed the practice amongst all those Africans who worked within the mission. The next year, the mission pressed church members to take an oath against ‘female circumcision’, but this met with African opposition. When the matter was raised at an inter-denominational meeting in Nyeri, a number of prominent Kikuyu Christians, many them from the CSM at Tumutumu and also members of the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), spoke up, forcefully stating that such customs were fundamental to the Kikuyu people.\textsuperscript{56} This marked the beginnings of what was to become a bitter public confrontation between the KCA and the missions.

By the mid-1920s, the KCA was gaining influence as a body representing the political interests of Africans in central Kenya. It had emerged to oppose the African chiefs who dominated the Kikuyu Association, a group formed with the encouragement of the missions to ensure the inter-denominational factionalism in African politics did not undermine the work of the churches. In contrast to the conservatism of the Kikuyu Association, many members of the KCA were younger, second-generation mission converts, who advocated a more radical politics. Many European missionaries, including Arthur, were distrustful of the KCA, fearing it to be an anti-Christian organisation. The KCA in fact campaigned on a wide range of issues, but only when the CSM began to exert increased pressure to prohibit clitoridectomy in 1928, did they present themselves as the guardians and protectors of Kikuyu culture. Elders and chiefs were

\textsuperscript{55} TNA CO533/394/11, Moore to Passfield, 6 Nov. 1930. These figures would later led the Church of Scotland Mission to revise its opinion that two types of operation were commonly practiced: Church of Scotland, \textit{Memorandum on Female Circumcision}, p.2.
\textsuperscript{56} Sandgren, \textit{Christianity and the Kikuyu}, p.75; Rosberg and Nottingham, \textit{Myth of Mau Mau}, pp.114-17.
now accused of bowing to missionary pressure to sacrifice Kikuyu values.\textsuperscript{57} It was easy to portray the missionaries’ attack on clitoridectomy as a European conspiracy to erode the very nature of ‘being Kikuyu’, linked as it was to rites of passage, to marriage and to legitimate childbirth. This conflict reflected generational struggles. The perspective of many second generation converts who supported the KCA was shaped by their desire for greater African involvement in mission policy, and for a greater degree of independence.\textsuperscript{58} Some missions, especially the AIM, were slow to foster African participation in church administration. Arthur, like the majority of his missionary colleagues, dismissed these complaints, and ignored the fact that the KCA had widespread support among mission adherents as well as among non-Christians. This was to prove a grievous miscalculation.

Events moved ahead with great rapidity in 1929. At the annual conference of the Protestant missions, at Tumutumu in March, the CSM recommended that all African Christians ‘submitting to’ the practice of clitoridectomy ‘should be suspended by the churches everywhere’.\textsuperscript{59} This was an attempt to enforce uniform discipline across all the missions. Of the 37 African delegates in attendance, all bar one felt able to agree that clitoridectomy was ‘evil’ in principle, and should be abandoned by Christians; but only 28 delegates took the further step of supporting the proposal to excommunicate those who would not accept church discipline in the matter. The dissenting delegates were from the Anglican CMS, who were unwilling to make so bold an assault upon ‘native custom’: the Anglicans preferred to leave the matter to the conscience of individual missionaries.\textsuperscript{60}

At the same time, the missions tried to press government to act in support of their

\textsuperscript{57} Ward, ‘Protestant Christianity’, pp.146-60 for the KCA role.
\textsuperscript{58} Sandgren, \textit{Christianity and the Kikuyu}, ch 3. See also Church of Scotland, \textit{Memorandum on Female Circumcision}, Section IV.
\textsuperscript{59} Church of Scotland, \textit{Memorandum on Female Circumcision}, pp.34-5.
\textsuperscript{60} Murray, ‘Kikuyu female circumcision controversy’; Strayer, \textit{Making of Mission Communities},
prohibition. They first petitioned the colonial government to legislate against clitoridectomy in 1921, but it was not until 1926 that the East African Governor’s Conference agreed to back measures against clitoridectomy. In that year, a circular was issued on ‘Female Circumcision’, instructing colonial officials to work through the Local Native Councils and Native Tribunals - presided over by African chiefs and elders - to regulate clitoridectomy by outlawing the so-called ‘major’ operation. The circular noted:

The subject is one which requires the utmost tact in discussion. If the impression is given that Government intends to prohibit an ancient custom we should meet with sullen and resentful opposition. It must be made clear that there is no idea of a total prohibition but merely a desire, in the interests of humanity, native eugenics, and increase of population, to revert to the milder form of operation, which is indeed more in keeping with ancient tribal usage.

These were to prove prophetic words. An attempt to enforce gradual change through the self-regulating influence of the Local Native Councils was preferred to any direct prohibition by central government. The Council in Embu District framed legislation, and a copy of these regulations was sent to all other districts as a model to be followed. The impact of this was at first thought to be positive. Other Kikuyu Local Native Council’s adopted regulations, and circumcisers came forward to be licenced (perhaps because it imparted a new form of legitimation). The Embu Council brought a few prosecutions, but elsewhere Chiefs and elders came under heavy criticism from the KCA and the number of cases rapidly dwindled - fewer than 30 were recorded over a four-year period. By October 1929, fearing mounting African

ch 8; Ward, ‘Protestant Christianity’, pp.149-51.
62. KNA PC/RVP.6B/1/5/1, Chief Native Commissioner, Circular No.28, 23 Aug. 1926.
63. Ibid; and TNA CO533/394/10, ‘Note by Secretary, Governor's Conference’.
64. Kiambu, Fort Hall, Meru, Teita, Kitui and South Kavirondo Councils all followed Embu’s example: TNA CO533/394/10, ‘Memo. by Native Affairs Dept., Governor's Conference’.
65. TNA CO533/394/11, ‘Memorandum on female circumcision’, Director of Medical Services, Nairobi, Mar. 1930. Of these prosecutions, 16 were in Embu: TNA CO533/394/11,
opposition to the legislation, officials were now instructed to ‘avoid all appearance of enforcing Christian doctrine by fines and imprisonment’.  

As tensions mounted, from the early months of 1929 a growing number of incidents were reported where, it was claimed, Kikuyu girls were removed from mission premises against their will to be circumcised. Such incidents took place at Kijabe, and even at Arthur’s own Thogoto mission, but it was an incident at the GMS at Kambui that brought matters to a head.

A case was brought before the Magistrate's Court at Kiambu on 17 April 1929, by the Rev. Knapp and his wife Alta, on behalf of one of their mission adherents. It was alleged that the girl, Wanjira wa Kubai, aged 15, had been forcibly circumcised without the consent of her guardians. Wanjira was an orphan who had been placed in the custody of her uncle. In 1926, she had sought refuge at the GMS school at Kambui, where, according to Alta Knapp, she had professed her desire to remain uncircumcised. Seeking refuge at the mission in 1927 and 1928, Wanjira had avoided circumcision over the two years in which she was considered ‘to be of age’. On 31 March 1929, on the same day three of her cousins were circumcised, Wanjira was taken to a river bank by members of her family and operated on by a licenced circumciser named Nyorima wa Longruthi. The next day, Wanjira was brought to Kambui by her elder sister, a Christian convert of the mission. The Knapps, satisfied that she had been circumcised against her will and that the injuries amounted to a serious physical assault, brought the case against the circumciser.

The evidence laid before the magistrate, M.J. Vidal, was confused and contradictory, but the sworn testimony of the victim herself led Vidal to the conclusion that Wanjira had willingly submitted to the operation. Her guardians, recognised in law as responsible for her, had also given consent. Faced with this evidence, Vidal dismissed the charge of ‘grievous hurt’ against

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Moore to Passfield, 6 Nov. 1930.
66. KNA PC/RVP.6B/1/5/1, DC Nyeri to Maxwell, 28 Nov. 1929.
the circumciser and her assistant. However, he found that the operation exceeded the form
detailed in the local ordinances of the Kiambu Local Native Council - the operation was declared
to be ‘major’ - and so fined Nyorima wa Longuthi and her assistant, Gakina wa Kamgorema,
30/- each. The convicted pair apologised to the court, and paid their fines on the spot.  

The court decision horrified the missionaries. The judgement indicated that consent
nullified any prosecution against a circumciser for a ‘grievous hurt’, thereby seriously reducing
the protection that the missions had believed to be afforded by the law. Under pressure from
Arthur, supported by Knapp and by Canon Leakey of the CMS, the Attorney General reluctantly
referred the judgement to the Supreme Court: but Vidal's findings were upheld. Arthur was
incensed, both by the verdict and by what he considered the flippant treatment of the affair by
the Attorney General.  

His reaction precipitated the political climax of the circumcision

A forthright letter from Arthur on the implications of the Kambui case was published in
the East African Standard on 10 August 1929, urging the government to give legal protection to
girls in avoiding circumcision. The Secretary of the KCA, Joseph Kang'ethe, responded one
week later with a circular to all Kikuyu chiefs, asking for their support in defence the right of all
Kikuyu to have their daughter's circumcised. On 29 August, the East African Standard published
Kang'ethe's response to Arthur's letter, accusing the missionaries of seeking to ‘demolish an
ancient custom’, defining a person ‘as a heathen simply because he is a Kikuyu.’

68. TNA CO533/394/10, ‘Criminal Case No.1/1929’, 17 Apr. 1929. Cf. Church of
Scotland, Memorandum on Female Circumcision, pp.34-6. For a similar case in 1926, involving an
AIM adherent, see KNA DC/KBU/7/3, DC Dagoretti to DC Kiambu, 14 Apr. 1926.
69. For the Attorney General's argument: TNA CO533/394/10, Grigg to Passfield, 20 Feb.
1930. Ward, ‘Protestant Christianity’, pp.168-71. The case is briefly mentioned in Rosberg and
Nottingham, Myth of Mau Mau, pp.117-18.
70. EAS, 10 August 1929.
71. For the text, Church of Scotland, Memorandum on Female Circumcision, p.40; EAS, 29 Aug.
1929, for extracts of the KCA letter.
Missionary Council, meeting on 3 September, responded to Kang'ethe's challenge reiterating its call for the legal protection of African women.\(^{72}\)

Over the next few weeks the war of words between the missionaries and the KCA escalated into a physical struggle on the mission stations. Several missionaries now sought to enforce the ban on clitoridectomy by asking for public declarations of loyalty. Trouble was first reported from the Knapp's GMS church at Kihumbuini. Joseph Kange'the had attended the school here, and support for the KCA was strong in the surrounding area. On Sunday 15 September, Knapp took the communion service at Kihumbuini and announced that he would only give the sacraments to those of the congregation who would declare opposition to clitoridectomy. In a congregation of 400, only 30 took the stand. Knapp lost his temper, and the service ended in a chaotic scuffle, as a result of which four prominent members of the KCA appeared before the local magistrate charged with public disorder.\(^{73}\)

One week later, Arthur entered the fray, making a tour of CSM stations in Kikuyuland, asking adherents to take an oath rejecting ‘female circumcision’. At Chogoria only 12 of the congregation took the vow, and wherever he went he met with massive opposition among Kikuyu Christians. At Thogoto, all teachers and other paid agents were given two weeks to sign a vow repudiating clitoridectomy, and the same ultimatum was issued to unpaid officers (elders and deacons) a few days later.\(^{74}\) By the end of the month most of the teachers at Thogoto had been dismissed for their refusal. The AIM applied similar pressures to teachers and mission workers at Kijabe and its main out-stations. The reaction was universally hostile. Many out-schools rebelled against teachers who signed the oath, mission buildings being occupied and


\(^{73}\) Ward, ‘Protestant Christianity’, pp.168-70; E.A.S, 9 Nov. 1929, for the trial.

property seized. Those few who sided with the missions were subjected to considerable pressure. Daudi Mucira, an AIM teacher at Kijabe, initially signed the declaration, but then asked the mission to rescind his action when his neighbours refused to allow him to cultivate his land and threatened his wife and children. Throughout Kikuyuland a massive wave of defections from the missions had begun.

Intimidation and persecution of those Africans who now remained with the AIM, the GMS, and the CSM became increasingly severe throughout October and November. In Kiambu, especially, the situation was extremely tense, and attendance at mission schools and church services dwindled to virtually nothing. The Kijabe and Githumu AIM stations were reduced to two or three families each, and estimates suggest that 95 percent of all the AIM’s 500 adherents left the church. ‘Native dances’, purposely organised at venues close to mission stations, attracted large crowds who sang songs, notably the *Muthirigu*, which ridiculed and abused the missionaries, the government and especially those Kikuyu chiefs who had supported the action against clitoridectomy. Government moves to prevent the dances by declaring them to be illegal unlicensed gatherings and (from January 1930) to ban the songs as seditious tended to be counter-productive, identifying the government more closely with the the missions and thus giving credence to rumours of a generalised European campaign to undermine Kikuyu society. Increasingly embarrassed by Arthur’s role in the crisis and his status as the Nominated Representative for African interests on the Legislative Council, the Governor forced his resignation from government service in November; but not before many Kikuyu had come to

77. Sandgren, *Christianity and the Kikuyu*, ch 5.
78. Ibid., pp.90-3, and Appendix 3., for translations of *Muthirigo*.
79. KNA AG4/1473, ‘Native Authority Ordinance: Prohibition of Dances’; KNA
believe that both the missions and the colonial government wished to abolish female circumcision by legislation.\textsuperscript{80}

These struggles were conducted \textit{within} the missions between those few who were prepared to renounce clitoridectomy - the \textit{Kirore}, as they came to be known - and those who refused to accept the authority of the church - the \textit{Aregi}. The role of the KCA in this was contributory, but not fundamental. As the Christmas season of 1929 approached, having lost their congregations, many missionaries already regretted the stand which Arthur had provoked.\textsuperscript{81} Isolated on their mission stations, they grew increasingly fearful for their safety, and some even went so far as to discuss the possibilities of a 'native rising' before the end of the year.\textsuperscript{82} The climax was to come not in a rising, but with the murder of Hulda Stumpf.

Colonial officials in London had observed these developments in Kenya with growing concern. When news of Stumpf's murder reached London, the introduction of legislation to outlaw female circumcision was considered,\textsuperscript{83} but Drummond Shiels, Under-Secretary of State at the Colonial Office, had other ideas. On 23 January 1930, he held a lengthy meeting with Johnstone Kenyatta, then visiting London on behalf of the KCA to petition the government on Kikuyu grievances. Shiels was impressed with Kenyatta's balanced and sober assessment of the clitoridectomy question, and his summing-up of the situation reflected his visitor's counsel. ‘We must not allow ourselves to be led by the circumstances of this horrible murder into advising the Governor along dangerous lines’, he minuted afterwards:

I have always suspected that if the circumcision question had been handled from the medical side and efficient practical propaganda by the Government medical

\textsuperscript{DC/FH/2/1/1, ‘Unauthorised meetings and songs, 1930-50’.
80. Church of Scotland, \textit{Memorandum on Female Circumcision}, Appendix 7.
82. AIM 81-20-12, Lee Downing to Campbell, 7 Nov. 1929; Sandgren, \textit{Christianity and the Kikuyu}, p.93.
83. TNA CO533/394/10, minute by Bottomley, 23 Jan. 1930, and Grigg to Passfield, telegram, 22 Jan. 1930.
staff had been instituted, we would have been well on the way to solving it. The missionaries have been tactless, and the Government has been content with communications to the Native Councils.\textsuperscript{84}

After the misadventures of its associations with mission policies through their attempts to harness the Local Native Councils as a regulatory body, by mid-1929 the government had already retreated to the position set out in the circular of 1926. Stumpf’s murder in January 1930 merely confirmed the good political sense of that decision. Hulda Stumpf would not have shared Shiels’ confidence in Kenyatta and the KCA to listen to ‘medical propaganda’, but she would have sympathised with the underlying point that a gradualist and educative approach was required. For, as we shall now see, Stumpf was firmly opposed to making female circumcision a matter of either church discipline or legal action.

III

In examining the politics of the circumcision controversy within the missions it is crucial to appreciate the role played by white missionary women, especially within the AIM. Senior AIM posts, like those in other missions, were dominated by men, yet a very significant proportion of the work of the mission was undertaken by women. By the 1920s, women were in the majority among the AIM’s workers in East Africa. Usually working more closely with African women than their male colleagues, women missionaries often had strong opinions on the physical and spiritual evils of the clitoridectomy ceremonies. Stumpf was certainly amongst the most determined of those AIM workers opposed to clitoridectomy. Along with her close friend, Virginia Blakeslee, Stumpf dedicated much of her energies to work with Kikuyu girls at Kijabe, and frequently expressed her disappointment and anger when they left the mission school to be ‘cut’. Despite opposition to the practice, Stumpf and Blakeslee were not
unsympathetic to the dilemmas confronting young Kikuyu girls over the question of clitoridectomy. The struggle between the pressures of ‘traditional’ Kikuyu life and the ‘civilisation’ of mission teaching was presented to young African women as a test of faith, and Stumpf would surely have recognised the expression of that conflict within the Kikuyu girl portrayed in Ngugi wa Thiongo’s *The River Between*, who determines to be circumcised:

I want to be a real girl, a real woman, knowing all the ways of the hills and Ridges .... Father and mother are circumcised .... Circumcision did not prevent them from being Christians. I too have embraced the white man’s faith. However, I know it is beautiful, oh so beautiful to be initiated into womanhood. You learn the ways of the tribe. Yes, the white man’s God does not quite satisfy me. I want, I need something more.

In acting to ban clitoridectomy, the AIM had decreed that learning ‘the ways of the tribe’ stood in contradiction to the ways of Christ. But equally important to Stumpf and Blakeslee was the need to elevate the Kikuyu woman from her oppressed social condition, allowing her to enjoy the status and rights that were the due of every civilised Christian woman.

Stumpf’s letters to mission supporters back in North America, and Blakeslee’s memoirs of her service in Kenya, are dominated by their concerns for the welfare of African women. To other missionary women also, such as the CMS’s Cicely Hooper, whose short novel, *New Patches*, sought to illustrate the dangers of leaving Christian Kikuyu women ‘half-made’, the salvation of African women was as much about a form of liberation as it was about Christian faith. These concerns reflected a social agenda, but it was one in which the creation of a Christian domestic environment was the paramount goal. Good Christian wives were needed for Christian male catechists and teachers, and this required that African women received their

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84. TNA CO533/394/10, minute by Drummond Shiels, 23 Jan. 1930.
85. AIM 81-24-24, Downing to Campbell, 21 Apr. 1930.
Christianity heavily laced with a domestic, home-making ethos. African women were thus not necessarily to be the equal of their menfolk, although their need for a form of liberation was promoted as essential to the wider cause of Christian advancement. However, one might take it further, to suggest that these concerns were inspired to some extent by an emergent feminism. Certainly, the women of the AIM were involved in their own struggle to gain initiatives in mission policy and to establish their role in the mission field independently of male missionaries. If there was an emergent feminist discourse among missionary women at this time, then it must be acknowledged that the liberation of African women was conceived of only within the narrowest and most circumscribed of terms. This female-centred social agenda, however inspired, is not evident in the writings of male missionaries in Kenya from this period, but does seem to have been integral to the religious convictions held by Stumpf, Blakeslee, Hooper and other women missionaries in relation to their dealings with African women.89

Both Stumpf and Blakeslee had long associations with work among women. Hulda Stumpf, born in 1867 into a devoutly Christian family in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, had trained in nearby Harrisburg as a stenographer. After obtaining college qualifications, she moved to Philadelphia, where she gave voluntary help to a hostel in the city for ‘fallen women’, whilst also teaching at a secretarial college. The details of her life at this stage remain obscure, but when she applied for mission service, at the unusually late age of 40, she was still unmarried. In her application to the AIM she gave her experiences in Philadelphia as being crucial in her decision to devote herself to missionary work, but also described a ‘divine calling’ to work in foreign lands, though whether this was to be Latin America or Africa she was uncertain. Ironically, her skills as a stenographer were more sought-after by the AIM than was the extent of her devotions,

89. C. Hooper, ‘Widows indeed’, Church Missionary Review (Mar. 1925), is a remarkable statement of these aims, making a plea for recognition of the individual property rights of...
and it was this that overcame objections to her on grounds of age. She was accepted for mission work, travelling out to East Africa in December 1907.  

Helen Virginia Blakeslee was also from Pennsylvania, her family being Methodist Episcopalians from the town of Blakeslee. She applied to join the AIM in 1908, just before her twenty-fifth birthday. With academic qualifications as a nurse and osteopath, she brought much-needed medical skills. From her earliest days in East Africa, Blakeslee took a strong interest in women's education and worked especially hard to raise money to support Kikuyu girls who sought refuge at Kijabe to avoid circumcision. Amongst the women of the AIM, she became the leading propagandist against clitoridectomy. The close friendship between Stumpf and Blakeslee was cemented when, early in their mission careers, they shared a posting to a Kamba out-station, where for a few months they worked alone. The unusually high proportion of unmarried women among the staff of the AIM, even at this time, led to women being sometimes left alone to manage mission out-stations in remote areas.

Both women became involved in campaigning against clitoridectomy. As early as 1916, Hulda Stumpf had written to a supporter of the mission in North America bemoaning the effect of the ‘season of circumcision’ upon the mission's work:

Nearly all my little village girls were sent off to a district about six miles away to be circumcised. Think of it! and if I could tell you the horribleness of it you would be astonished indeed. The superstition is that a girl will never bear children (a most notorious disgrace) if she is not circumcised.

Stumpf reported in the same letter that the uncle of one girl, being a Christian convert, had urged the missionary to intervene with elders to have the circumcision of his niece stopped.

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91. AIM 81-19-12, ‘Personal file: Helen Virginia Blakeslee’.
92. AIM 81-24-24, Stumpf to Sister Martha, 11 May 1916.
Stumpf was quite prepared to make such a plea herself, and frequently took direct and personal
interest in the cases of particular girl's to prevent their circumcision. That girls faced pressure
from their kin on the one hand and the mission on the other there can be no doubt. In May
1927, on the day following the departure of Downing to visit Nairobi, Stumpf reported that
several of ‘our very best Christian elders’ had taken their daughters from school and ‘had them
circumcised. It seems impossible for some of our native Christians to see harm in allowing this
ceremony to be held.’

That harm, in Stumpf’s eyes, was moral rather than doctrinal: the ‘lewd dances’ that
accompanied circumcision ceremonies, the beer drinking in celebration, and above all the
education in sexual matters given to the young initiates, seemed to Christian missionaries
incompatible with the moral and family values they sought to impart through religion. In sharp
contrast, many Kikuyu associated the lack of circumcision with dangerous immorality. Without
circumcision, girls would not receive education on sexuality, and so their behaviour would be
uncontrolled. Tabitha Wangui, a rare female contributor to the pages of the Kikuyu language
newspaper, Muigwithania, expressed the widely-held view that a lack of circumcision and
prostitution went together. Uncircumcised girls, referred to by the derogatory Kikuyu term
kirigu, could not find husbands and were driven to Nairobi to become prostitutes by the taunts
of their relatives and peers, argued Wangui. This neat inversion of missionary moral arguments
revealed the limitations of the missionary perspective on female circumcision (although it also
revealed the importance of social shunning in the making of prostitutes). But other, more
fundamental misunderstandings also fuelled the fires of doctrinal conflict. The Kikuyu term for
a circumcised woman, muiritu, had been confusingly employed in translating the biblical Virgin
Mary as Muiritu Mariamu. This suggested that the Virgin Mary had been circumcised, whilst also


http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/enghis
implying that, like other muiritu, she would have experienced intimate sexual fondling (known in Kikuyu as Ngwiko) with a variety of male partners. Even without muddying the waters in translation, there was plenty to be found in biblical scripture to defend the practice of circumcision, and Kikuyu Christians were quick to use the Bible in their own defence. Another Kikuyu woman writing to Muigwathania, Wanjiru wa Kinyua, quoted a passage from Galatians, ‘Circumcision is nothing; and uncircumcision is nothing’, to demonstrate the neutrality of Christian teaching on the matter.

Kenya's missionaries tended to suppress these debates over the interpretation of scripture to concentrate on their wider agenda for African social transformation, and this was particularly so for Strumpf and Blakeslee in their commitment to relieving the oppressions of African women. In 1926, the two missionaries took important steps toward further developing their work among Kikuyu women. Both were on furlough in North America in that year, sharing accommodation for a while in Pennsylvania, and then each touring the towns of the mid-West to address groups of mission supporters. Both commonly spoke on the subject of women's training in Africa. Blakeslee was at this time forming a scheme to improve the operation of the Kijabe girls’ school, and expended much effort propagandizing this work among supporters. Her purpose was to raise additional monies to support the school so that she could offer a fuller curriculum, based around domestic science, whilst also expanding the school’s capacity. This matter had to be approached with care. The AIM was a faith-base mission, and there existed considerable opposition to education amongst its members.
Downing, and other AIM leaders, were acutely sensitive to any danger of alienating the support of North American sponsors. In presenting her plans, Blakeslee therefore took pains to stress the ‘appropriateness’ of the curriculum proposed, and to promote the school ‘as a spiritual refuge’.\(^{98}\)

To get a better notion of ‘appropriate’ educational methods, Blakeslee had visited ‘the various Negro schools of America’s Southland’, where she had been impressed by balance of the curriculum offered. Aside from providing a ‘fitting education for an African Christian woman’, she placed emphasis upon the importance of the school as an asylum or refuge. To many AIM supporters, suspicious of those who would educate before evangelising, creation of a ‘spiritual refuge’ was a far more laudable than the advancement of schooling:

Girls were being sheltered who came to escape the sorrows of forced marriages or because they wanted to walk in the path of God, which they would never have been allowed to do in their heathen villages .... Elementary domestic science classes were organised to lay the foundations for training Christian wives and mothers in the development and care of Christian homes. Foundation training for future teachers, nurses, and midwives was given. The girls ... [had] instruction in the three R's .... They all 'majored' in agriculture, being given a teaching in better agricultural methods, which resulted in the harvesting of bumper crops from their school gardens ....\(^{99}\)

In walking ‘the path of God’, the first test for any Kikuyu girl would inevitably be the rejection of clitoridectomy. The reformed girls school was to be an important base from which to protect Kikuyu girls from the practices of their heathen kin, providing a safe environment in which they could reach their own decisions about the operation.

Although there remained opposition to Blakeslee’s scheme within the mission, Downing wrote to the AIM Council in the USA, in February 1927, noting that ‘interest in work among


\(^{99}\) Blakeslee, Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain, pp.165-7.
girls and women of Africa has greatly increased recently among Europeans of Kenya Colony',
and supporting Blakeslee's plans:

The better I understand Miss Blakeslee's scheme for girls' training the more 
pleased I am with it. What would you think of putting her in charge of the 
girls' work of our society and giving her quite a free hand in the use of the 
 funds of that department?^100

Money, indeed, lay at the root of the decision. Blakeslee and Stumpf were surprisingly successful 
in raising funds for the scheme during their tour of the mid-West. The proposals were 
approved, and Blakeslee returned from furlough in 1927 to devote herself to the development of 
the Kijabe Girls' School.

At around the same time that Blakeslee was preparing her scheme for women's education 
at Kijabe, she and Stumpf were instrumental in the formation of a Women's Committee within 
the AIM. Through this group they began to campaign for a more coordinated mission policy on 
all questions relating to women, and especially female circumcision.^101 The mission was 
ostensibly democratic in its constitution, its faith-based orientation leaving plenty of room for 
each missionary to develop their own opinions on policy. The heightened profile of the 
Women's Committee therefore marked a potentially significant development. At Kijabe, the 
Women's Committee began to meet separately, with the blessing of Lee Downing and the Home 
Council (though Stumpf had thought that they would be hindered by the AIM executive).^102 In 
an effort to coordinate women's education at the out-schools with that at Kijabe, as its first task 
the Committee produced (in 1928) two pamphlets on women's issues intended for circulation to 
all AIM stations.^103

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100. AIM 81-19-12, Downing to Campbell, 12 Feb. 1927.
101. AIM 81-24-24, Stumpf to Campbell, 8 Jun. 1927, and reply, 26 July 1927; AIM 81-19-21, 
102. AIM 81-24-24, Campbell to Stumpf, 26 July 1927.
103. I cannot trace copies of these pamphlets.

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The Women's Committee was also intended to work within a broader organisation, linking with other missions. As Stumpf explained:

... the Africa Women's Protective Association is made up of women missionaries from the various missions working in the Colony.... The need for this organization is that the Government can do very little though they do make an effort. In the district of Letein, for instance, women and girls live a wild life and are a detriment to the community, and government is glad to have the cooperation of the missions in trying to create a better atmosphere.  

This evidence of an emerging campaign to give greater prominence to work with African women, linked with contemporary developments in other Kenyan missions and with women's pressure groups in Britain, is difficult to disentangle from religious issues shaping the lives of the missionaries. Within the AIM this is strongly suggestive of gendered disputes among the missionaries, but the elliptical prose style that affects so much mission correspondence, along with the reluctance of field missionaries to reveal internal mission squabbles to supporters, bedevil the task of interpreting the true extent of any factionalism or dispute within a mission.

It is difficult, for example, to assess how the male missionaries reacted to the increased emphasis given to work among women, in which they played a lesser part. We do, however, see an increasing concentration upon the theme of ‘saving’ women in the AIM magazine, *Inland Africa*, during the 1920s as the female circumcision question became more central. This was almost certainly galvanised by Stumpf herself, who, in her capacity as Field Correspondent for the magazine, collated ‘snippets’ from the correspondence of other missionaries for publication, as well as writing short pieces herself. The American-based editor, Horace Campbell, was often

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104. AIM 81-24-24, Stumpf to Campbell, 8 Jun. 1927.
short of good copy and relied upon Stumpf to provide suitable material.\textsuperscript{108} It is also evident that many of the women missionaries of the AIM enthusiastically welcomed the increased prominence given to women's issues within the mission from 1927.\textsuperscript{109}

This is not to say that all the women of the AIM took the same radical posture over clitoridectomy. The possibility of expulsions from the church was a matter upon which opinion was deeply divided. After Stumpf's murder, Downing admitted that 'some missionaries had grave doubts' about the harder line adopted during 1929. Among these were Stumpf and Blakeslee.\textsuperscript{110} In May 1927, Stumpf had written to Horace Campbell to protest at the expulsion of a mission teacher, Joshua Mucai, for having permitted the circumcision of his daughter. Describing the ceremony as 'the bridge over which 'the missionary and the native are not able to cross together', she quoted W.C. Willoughby, from the \textit{International Review of Missions}:

\begin{quote}
To thrust upon African Christians rules of conduct that have not grown out of their own convictions is more likely to breed hypocrites than to unravel perplexities. Each case needs, not the mechanical application of an infallible formula, but the brotherly counsel of some one familiar with local thought and custom and skilled in the cure of souls.\textsuperscript{111}
\end{quote}

Her objection was to the means, not the end, of the emerging policy against clitoridectomy: ‘teaching will have to be done in LOVE and not by legislation’, she told Campbell.

There is a deep irony in Stumpf's opposition to the policy of expulsion. At the trial of Nzomo, the defence counsel, Barret, built his case upon a quite different picture of the elderly missionary's attitude. In contrast to the efforts of the prosecution to keep open questions surrounding the cause of the wounds to Stumpf, Barret constructed Nzomo's defence around the likelihood of the crime having a strong political connection with the female circumcision

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{108} AIM 81-24-23, Stumpf to Campbell, 25 Aug. 1926; AIM 81-24-24, Campbell to Stumpf, 26 July 1927; and for an early earlier example, AIM 81-24-22, Stumpf to Palmer, 21 Apr. 1914.
\item \textsuperscript{109} AIM 81-19-12, Downing to Campbell, 12 Feb. 1927.
\item \textsuperscript{110} AIM 81-24-24, Downing to Campbell, 26 Apr. 1930.
\end{itemize}
crisis. He argued that the crime had probably been committed by more than one assailant, and that those assailants were presumably Kikuyu, having perhaps previously been connected with the mission. He went on to postulate that such persons might have been adversely affected by the AIM's expulsions in the latter months of 1929. A 'native dance' organised by the opponents of the mission had taken place near to Kijabe on 2 January, and there had been conflict with former mission adherents. The turbulence within the mission, and in the region of Kiambu in the days leading up to the murder was stressed. Amid all of this, Barret portrayed Stumpf as a 'lady of determined views', who took a firm stand against clitoridectomy. Extracts from Stumpf's diary were read to the court to give emphasis to these points.

In these extracts, the case of a girl named Elizabeth, in whom Stumpf had taken a special interest, was cited at length. Elizabeth was the baptised name of a Kikuyu girl who had been adopted by a fellow AIM missionary at Kijabe in 1912, on condition that the real father would renounce his claim to the child. Elizabeth was brought up at Kijabe, and had not been circumcised. In 1929, Hulda Stumpf took an active role in arranging a marriage between Elizabeth and her own house servant, Dishon Kimani. It was agreed that Kimani would pay the brideprice to Stumpf,¹¹² and the money would subsequently be used to assist other Kikuyu orphans. Stumpf considered this a fair compromise to Kikuyu custom, but when Elizabeth was told of these arrangements she refused to participate on the grounds that brideprice used in this way would give her no security should Kimani mistreat her. As the female circumcision controversy mounted, Elizabeth's Kikuyu relatives visited her with increasing frequency, much to the annoyance of Stumpf. Under intolerable pressure from both sides, Elizabeth eventually ran away from Kijabe, and in late November it was reported to the missionaries that she had

¹¹¹ AIM 81-24-24, Stumpf to Campbell, 3 May 1927.
been circumcised.\textsuperscript{113}

The details of this case were pursued in court to illustrate the depth of the elderly Stumpf's feelings, the short extracts from her diary revealing her bitterness and anger at how things had turned out. The story revealed a great deal about the convictions of Stumpf and about the political conditions at Kijabe at the time. All of this suggested that Stumpf adopted a hard line on clitoridectomy, the defence counsel implying this was why she had been singled out as the victim of a political crime. The case surely brought Stumpf to notoriety amongst local Kikuyu at a critical time, and her passionate outrage was too often plain for all to see. Whereas Blakeslee came and went from Kijabe, regularly visiting the out-stations in her medical capacity, Stumpf was permanently based at the main AIM Kijabe station throughout the 1920s, and of all the white women missionaries it was she who was most vividly associated in the mind of Kikuyu with the running of the Kijabe Girls' School. Moreover, Stumpf's cottage, situated on the edge of the Kijabe compound and distant from the dwellings of the other women on the station, made her unusually vulnerable to attack. All of these factors made Stumpf a potential target in the political turmoil around the circumcision controversy of the final weeks of 1929. But this was to miss an essential point, and in doing so it lead the prosecuting counsel into grossly misrepresent the views of Stumpf in the courtroom: Hulda was certainly fervently opposed to clitoridectomy, but she was \textit{not} in favour of the expulsion from the church of those African Christians unwilling to take the stand against it.

IV

Let us now turn to the question of silence and concealment. Despite the notoriety and importance of the case, and the abundance of evidence now available, historians either ignored

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\textsuperscript{113} TNA CO533/394/11, evidence of Blakeslee, 20 Jan. 1930.
\end{flushright}
Stumpf’s murder or have presented a confused picture of its relation to the female circumcision controversy. Some have confidently asserted that the victim was raped.\textsuperscript{114} The press coverage of the committal proceedings, and the High Court trial, has been a source of confusion in this regard, especially the reporting of the medical evidence.\textsuperscript{115} Some appear to have confused the Stumpf murder with a case of sexual assault from 1926 that, coincidentally, also occurred in the Kijabe area. That case was of considerable importance in its own right, as it led directly to a change in the law permitting the death sentence to be passed against convicted rapists. Both cases, the 1926 rape and the Stumpf murder, were described in the Kenya press under the headline ‘The Kijabe Outrage’.\textsuperscript{116} The news agencies contributed to this confusion by reports in January 1930 drawing direct parallels between the two cases.\textsuperscript{117} Furthermore, on the basis of comments made by Dr Davis, who observed the postmortem, the AIM cabled the following message to the American head-office on 3 January 1930: ‘Postmortem revealed rape and smothering. Thorough investigation continues. No rising.’ This was circulated to mission supporters throughout North America, and the same information transmitted by circular letter to all AIM missionaries then in the field.\textsuperscript{118}

Some of the mystery surrounding the Stumpf’s fate, and the concealment of the link to the circumcision controversy, was at least partly due to a deliberate attempt by the police to suppress the details of the case. This was directly inspired by Governor Grigg, who had warned London only in October 1929 of his concern that the politics being stirred up by the circumcision controversy might lead to ‘serious disturbances’ among the Kikuyu. The murder was ‘perpetrated with obsceneness and horrible cruelty which indicates aggressive fanaticism’

\textsuperscript{114} Hyam, \textit{Empire and Sexuality}, p.193.
\textsuperscript{115} KNA AG5/2632, Fazan to Attorney General, 11 Oct. 1930, for official complaints.
\textsuperscript{116} Anderson, ‘Sexual threat’, pp.47-74.
wrote Grigg: ‘Police are withholding details from public knowledge’. Fearful of settler reaction to so shocking a case, in January 1930 the police and other government officials resorted to the language customarily employed in cases of sexual assault against European women: initial reports spoke of an ‘outrage’ against a European woman, and a ‘brutal assault’. A similar impression was given in the first reports submitted to London, although two months later Grigg wrote that Stumpf’s murder involved ‘attempted mutilation’ that was ‘a political crime’ arising ‘from the attitude of the mission toward the native custom of female circumcision’. This statement was never publicised in Kenya, where rumours regarding the case ran wild through the settler community.

After Fazan’s committal proceedings, Grigg gave up his attempt to keep the lid on the political aspects of the case. At a meeting with senior missionaries at Government House, Grigg endeavoured to persuade them of the dangers of the situation. This did not prove difficult: the missions remained committed to their stand against clitoridectomy, but they were as keen as was the Governor to bring the discord in central Kenya to an end. Grigg was able to assure them that the revisions to the Penal Code, then being drafted, would make it easier to obtain prosecutions against circumcisers who practiced the ‘major’ rather than the ‘minor’ operation, and that in such cases the consent of the girl would not be a defence. This was, in fact, to prove more difficult to legislate than Grigg then imagined (and was to be quickly abandoned), but the missionaries were happy to seek refuge in compromise and to retreat from confrontation with government. All the missions faced a crisis of conscience over the question of

119. TNA CO533/394/10, Grigg to Passfield, telegram, 22 Jan. 1930.
120. Anderson, ‘Sexual threat’, for the ambiguities of language.
121. TNA CO533/394/10, Grigg to Passfield, 20 Jan. 1930, coded telegram.
122. TNA CO533/394/11, Grigg to Passfield, 15 Mar. 1930.
clitoridectomy, and were glad to back down.

The intensity of the predicament confronting the AIM, however, is difficult to exaggerate. Was it better to present Stumpf as a martyr to a righteous cause, and take the criticism that might follow? Or was it best to present the case as a sexual assault upon a vulnerable European woman, thereby denying any connection with the circumcision crisis? There is no evidence in the surviving papers of the AIM that the matter was discussed in such stark terms. However, the mission maintained a firm public denial that any circumcision had been attempted. As we have seen, in the courtroom this was staunchly upheld in the evidence of the AIM doctor, Elwood Davis, who persistently argued in support of the prosecution's case for an attempted rape. And we know that Lee Downing declined to give evidence that might refute this claim. No discussion of the circumstances of the murder appeared in the AIM magazine, Inland Africa, and even the edition that carried a tribute to Stumpf avoided discussion of the circumcision controversy, describing it as an ‘obnoxious rite’ and ‘pre-marriage custom’. Indeed, the magazine carried no discussion at all over these months of the policy against clitoridectomy, supporters in North America remaining ignorant of the missions’ campaign and the troubles associated with it. Mission correspondence reveals that Downing feared that publicity surrounding Stumpf’s murder might discourage supporters of the mission and reduce funding. In blunt terms, there was good reason for the AIM to hope for a conviction in the Stumpf case that would distance the incident as far as possible from the prohibition of clitoridectomy.

The disaffections of African congregants on 1929 and 1930 dealt the AIM a savage blow.

125. AIM 81-24-24, for his letters to Campbell in the weeks following the crime. Thomas, Politics of the Womb, p.72, also discusses missionaries’ tendency to avoid the topic of ‘female
The autocratic attitude of the mission, their low level of educational facilities - AIM schools were consistently criticised for their poor standards - and a strong emphasis upon evangelism and church discipline, all served to intensify the split brought about by the circumcision controversy. Those who left the mission, the Aregi, soon established their own independent schools and churches. In the area around Githumu, for example, previously the heartland of AIM evangelising, there were 11 flourishing independent schools by 1932. In an effort to win back their supporters after 1930, each of the Protestant missions made compromises on clitoridectomy, concentrating again solely upon the discipline of mission workers rather than seeking to gain obedience from entire congregations. By September 1931, the AIM reversed its policy, deciding to accept clitoridectomy so long as only the minor operation was conducted. But where similar compromise within the CSM did manage to draw back many of their adherents - because of the high regard in which their schools were held - the AIM was never to fully recover. Determinedly interpreting the circumcision crisis as a test of faith for the mission, and viewing the disaffections as a purging of evil, the majority of the AIM’s missionaries appear to have learned few lessons from the experience. Mission policies on education and a conservative approach to the advancement and training of African clergy continued. Throughout the 1930s, and into the 1940s, AIM congregations in Kikuyuland remained small, focusing around the Kirore and a trickle of new converts.

Finally, in the late 1940s, the Kirore too departed from the AIM. Older members and new converts who had joined the mission since 1930 all left together in one, mass exodus. Bitterly frustrated with the lack of progress within the AIM, they nonetheless remained fervently circumcision’ (and abortion) in their fundraising literature.

127. Sandgren, Christianity and the Kikuyu, pp.94-5, citing Davis to Campbell, 4 Sept. 1931.
128. Ward, ‘Protestant Christianity’, ch 6, for the best general account of the aftermath.
129. Blakeslee, Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain, p.8.
opposed to the Aregi, and rather than join the independent churches by then thriving in areas of Kikuyuland that had in the 1920s been AIM strongholds, they established their own society, the African Christian Churches and Schools.¹³⁰ We can gain further insight on the attitude of the AIM to these events by examining the way in which Stumpf’s murder was portrayed in the internal histories of the mission at this second time of crisis. All existing accounts of AIM history stress the importance of the female circumcision question, but only three give any details on the circumstances of Hulda Stumpf’s death. Two of these studies, by John Gratton and David Sandgren, establish that Stumpf was the victim of an attempted clitoridectomy, though neither gives much detail on the political background to the incident.¹³¹ But the only mention of the murder in print offering a first-hand account is that by Blakeslee, and this version has come to be seen as the AIM’s ‘official’ statement. As we have seen, Blakeslee was Stumpf’s closest friend among the community of missionaries and, like Stumpf, took a close interest in girls’ education. In 1956, in the midst of the Mau Mau emergency and only shortly after the mass exodus of Kirore from the mission, Blakeslee published a book entitled Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain.¹³² This collection of missionary memoirs was very much the product of its time, having the wider purpose of publicising the efforts of those very few African Christians who had remained staunch AIM followers through its many troubles and who now joined the mission in opposition to Mau Mau. Blakeslee drew parallels between the 1950s and 1930. Her reconstruction of the struggle against clitoridectomy in 1929-30 (‘the powers of darkness’), was presented as the moment at which a new and stronger church was formed. The same would

¹³⁰ Sandgren, Christianity and the Kikuyu, intro. and ch. 8.
¹³² Blakeslee, Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain, passim.
come from the struggle against Mau Mau, she claimed. In this Blakeslee adopted the orthodox mission line. But, departing from the silence of other AIM sources, Blakeslee provided a detailed passage describing the murder of her friend:

... I mounted my mule and rode over to the little brick cottage where I had taken leave of my friend the night before. Softly I opened the door on a shocking scene. Broken pieces of window glass and several large rocks were scattered about the room .... Hulda Stumpf lay across the bed with a mattress doubled over her face. I was the second person to enter the room after the tragedy, and I made a careful examination of her poor body. She had been brutally treated but was not, as the story was circulated, the victim of a bungling attempt at circumcision. That finally she had been strangled was evident by the large black and blue patches on her throat and neck. She was safe on the other side, but had had a rough passage.  

Here, some 25 years on, was a senior member of the mission giving the first public account of the events surrounding the murder. Such evidence, from a witness, no less, seemingly presents a powerful case. But each of the substantive assertions in Blakeslee’s account can be demonstrated to be incorrect. Blakeslee was not the second person to see the body of Hulda Stumpf, and nor is there any record that she did so at all: all witnesses who saw the body were questioned by the police, and Blakeslee was not among them. Nor did she make any medical examination of the body. She did not therefore see the wounds of the attempted clitoridectomy. Hulda Stumpf suffered only a small bruise to her throat, as well as serious bruising to her chest, and was killed by suffocation with a pillow, not by strangulation.

These matters are of more than pedantic interest. Virginia Blakeslee may be forgiven for wishing to protect the memory of a dear friend, and also for a degree of artistic licence: but the details of the circumcision controversy played too critical a role in the history of the AIM to be meddled with on entirely personal grounds, least of all in the midst of the second great crisis to

confront the mission, the exodus of the *Kirore* and the Mau Mau rebellion of the 1950s. Blakeslee's account was perhaps the sentimental accident of a fading memory, but it was also the view of events which most suited the broader purposes of the Africa Inland Mission by the 1950s.

There can be little doubt that the crises of the 1950s forced the AIM to reassess its past as well as its future. Re-issuing to their mission schools during the Mau Mau period off-prints of a story written by Hulda Stumpf in the 1920s, a story incidentally about the ‘saving’ of a young Kikuyu girl, the only illumination to the author's identity at the foot of the page said all that was needed: ‘Miss Stumpf was martyred in a native uprising in Kenya in January 1930.’ Poor Hulda Stumpf was finally to be presented as a martyr of sorts, then, but faced with the political challenges of the Mau Mau rebellion the mission had even less wish by the 1950s to associate her death with the clitoridectomy question than they had in the 1930s. Other than as a glorious moment of religious revival, the details of the circumcision crisis, and of Stumpf's personal convictions on the means to eradicate the practice of clitoridectomy, were best forgotten.

V

Historians who have written about the female circumcision controversy have no doubt as to its importance in Kenya’s colonial history, but the claims they make have highlighted divergent elements of the story. Claire Robertson has observed that the central place of the controversy in Kenya’s colonial history stems from its intersection with many fundamental social and political aspects of African life, motivating numerous African and European actors in many different ways at the time, and stimulating a wealth of scholarly investigation subsequently. But she also notes that there are significant gaps in our knowledge of the controversy: most

importantly, while the implications were for African women both ‘intimate and profound’, their voices are ‘scarcely represented in the public record. We know very little of women’s thoughts on the subject.’ Though this essay has not been able to find fresh evidence on the agency of African women, it has emphasized the significant role of white women missionaries as campaigners against clitoridectomy and as self-appointed ‘protectors’ of African women. The evidence examined here has also revealed the extent to which key aspects of the crisis were silenced through the actions (and inactions) of missionaries and colonial officials – these silences perhaps explaining why certain parts of the story remain obscured and misunderstood. These concluding comments will briefly elaborate on each of these themes.

We have shown that Hulda Stumpf’s murder and mutilation was the critical event at the climax of the controversy, reaction to her death bringing about a resolution, of a kind, as the missions’ backed down from their initial stance on clitoridectomy. That we have until now known little about Stumpf’s murder and mutilation reflects an act of colonial silencing, orchestrated by missionaries who wished to protect the reputations of their churches against accusations of complicity, and government officials who were concerned to dampen down political reaction in the interests of maintaining order. For both, to let it be thought that Stumpf had been raped was preferable to the knowledge that she had been mutilated: but better still not to speak of her death at all. Deceit, dissembling and outright denial were all part of the colonial silencing that surrounded the culmination of Kenya’s female circumcision controversy.

But Kenya’s historians may also be thought culpable in the silence around Stumpf’s death. John Spencer, whose study of nationalist politics in the years leading up to the outbreak of the Mau Mau rebellion remains a seminal work, views the controversy as having transformed the conduct and character of African politics, fundamentally changing the way in which political

leaders in the KCA related to European settlers, to missionaries, and to the colonial government. But he does not include Stumpf’s murder in his analysis. Rosberg and Nottingham also stress the importance of female circumcision in honing and refining African political action at a critical time, yet, while they acknowledge that Stumpf’s murder brought matters to a head, they do not discuss the circumstances or implications of her death. In short, we know nothing at all about the nationalist reaction to the murder, because no comments of any kind have been recorded. Colonial silencing undoubtedly distorted our understanding of the controversy, but historians of Kenyan nationalism have appeared unwilling to delve into the details of the assault at Kijabe. Was Stumpf murdered because of her actions in ‘saving’ African girls from circumcision? Was the mutilation purposefully planned as a political act? Was someone with KCA connections involved in the crime? These questions are strongly suggested by the evidence from the AIM archives and from the legal hearings arising from Stumpf’s murder, but it is puzzling that they have not been asked before – especially when other papers in the colonial archive make it clear that the Kenya government all along suspected a political motivation for the murder.

Turning to the part played by white women missionaries in the clitoridectomy controversy, historians have examined the divisions among the missions on the question of how to tackle clitoridectomy, focussing on denominational and doctrinal differences. The evidence from the AIM archive shows us that the gendered politics that structured women missionaries’ relations with their male counterparts also defined the response to the controversy amongst a group of female missionaries who worked closely with Kikuyu girls. White women missionaries such as Stumpf, Blakeslee, and Hooper recognized the imperative to educate and transform African male elders as a means to end the harm done to young African women through

138 See the correspondence between Nairobi and London, from January to March 1930, in
elitordectomy. They were not opposed to challenging African elders directly, as Stumpf’s involvement with some of the Kikuyu girls attending the Kijabe School clearly indicates, but these women missionaries objected to the expulsion of mission members as a means to ‘cleanse’ the churches. Their staunch opposition to the confrontational and ultimately coercive approach advocated by Arthur, Knapp, Davis and others is to be seen in their correspondence and in their diaries – a fact that was deliberately misrepresented in the trial of the African accused of Stumpf’s murder in yet another act of colonial concealment.

Women missionaries developed their work with African girls during the 1920s, advocating that greater church resources be directed at women’s education and welfare, and in the process seeking a greater role for themselves in determining mission policies. The gender conflicts this provoked with male missionaries in the AIM worked at two levels, revealing difficulties among the Europeans in the mission but also exposing radically divergent attitudes to the emphasis and style to be adopted in evangelisation. Increased work with African women at a time when the African Christian communities of central Kenya were growing rapidly also changed the gender balance of congregations: more African women came into the churches, which in turn enhanced the cause of female missionaries who argued for greater emphasis upon women’s needs in the work of the missions. All of these developments gave white female missionaries more prominence in the 1920s. With its strong faith-based traditions and its innate suspicions of education, and with a high proportion of women workers, these fissures were particularly deep within the AIM.139

Stumpf’s murder would bring a halt to the development of women’s work of this kind amongst the missions, as the male mission heads of each church retreated from the dangers and

TNA CO533/394/10 and 11.

139 For additional indications of this, see R.D. Waller, ‘They do the dictating and we must submit: the AIM in Maasailand’, in T. Spear and I.N. Kimambo, eds., *East African Expressions of*
threats that the challenge to clitoridectomy had brought. The culmination of the circumcision crisis was not, then, a moment of female empowerment for either African girls or white women missionaries.\textsuperscript{140} Rather, as Kanogo suggested, the clitoridectomy debate ultimately privileged ‘western knowledge and served to legitimate the colonial project.’\textsuperscript{141} Colonial concealment restricted our view of the politics of the clitoridectomy controversy, but it also silenced those white women missionaries who had hoped to challenge the entrenched gender politics of the missions.

\textsuperscript{140} Frederiksen, ‘Jomo Kenyatta’, p.35.
\textsuperscript{141} Kanogo, African Womanhood, p.89.