

Conversion and Curriculum: nonconformist missionaries and the British Foreign School  
Society in the British West Indies, Africa and India, 1800-1850\*

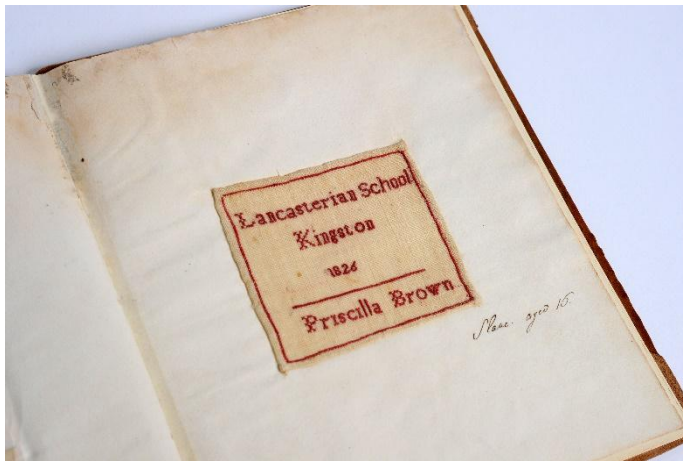
Inge Dornan

In 1826, Baptist missionary William Knibb sent the British and Foreign School Society (BFSS) samples of his pupils' handwriting and embroidery signed with their name, age and status (slave and free) from the colony of Jamaica. The 'Slave Book'<sup>1</sup> (so named in the Society's archives) is an extraordinary artefact, for slaves in the British West Indies were customarily prohibited from learning to write, a fact that is poignantly illustrated by the dearth of written records by slaves in the colonial archives. The 'Slave Book' bears witness to the goals of nonconformist missionaries like Knibb who before the Abolition Act (1833) challenged such long-standing planter prejudice by making religious instruction of the enslaved, based upon teaching slaves to read and in some cases also to write, a *sine qua non* of Christian conversion. It furthermore testifies to the role of pedagogy in nonconformist missionary education and, in particular, to nonconformist missionaries' adoption of the Lancasterian method, also known as the British System, championed by the BFSS.

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<sup>1</sup> Uxbridge, Brunel University London Archives, British and Foreign School Society Papers, BFSS/1/5/1/8/4/3, Slave Book, unpaginated. On William Knibb and the role of the missionaries in the British West Indies see Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Cambridge, 2002).



This study draws on the largely untapped and newly catalogued collection of foreign correspondence in the BFSS archive to establish how the BFSS operated hand in hand with nonconformist missionaries to export the British System to Africa, India and the British West Indies in the first half of the nineteenth century, and to scrutinise how the British System functioned in each of these regions prior to 1850. Underlying both approaches is a concern to address two recognisable themes of missionary historiography, each related to the nature of missionary sources: first, the relatively limited engagement by scholars with archival records on missionary pedagogy;<sup>2</sup> and second, the dominance of the white male missionary voice in

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<sup>2</sup> See Patricia T. Rooke, 'Missionaries as Pedagogies: a Reconsideration of the Significance of Education for Slaves and Apprentices in the British West Indies, 1800-1838', *History of Education* 9 (1980), 75; eadem, 'The pedagogy of conversion: missionary education to slaves in the British West Indies, 1800-33', *Paedagogica Historica* 18 (1978), 356-374; Felicity Jensz, 'Missionaries and Indigenous Education in the 19th-Century British Empire. Part II: Race, Class, and Gender', *History Compass* 10 (2012), 306-317, at 310..

mission archives.<sup>3</sup> Nonconformist missionary correspondence to the BFSS provides a unique window into how nonconformist missionaries sought to implement the British System in their schools, while the Society's liberal and progressive education reform agenda, which saw it open its teacher training college to women teachers and missionaries<sup>4</sup> as well as Indian, African and West Indian 'native assistants', gives a measure of visibility and voice to a cast of persons typically marginalised in early nonconformist missionary archives. Finally, while this article offers a case study of nonconformist missionaries' use and application of the British System, it also speaks to a wider scholarship on the relationship between missionaries, education and imperialism. Jean and John Comaroff's seminal two-volume study, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (a third volume on pedagogy is forthcoming) underlines the dual significance of literacy as a mutually constitutive instrument of Nonconformist evangelism and the European 'civilising mission', which together, they argue, played an essential role in the 'colonization of consciousness' that underpinned European 'hegemony' in South Africa in the nineteenth-century.<sup>5</sup> The BFSS archive of foreign correspondence underscores the Comaroffs' emphasis on the importance of pedagogy as a tool of European hegemony, in so far as it documents why and how nonconformist missionaries eagerly reached out to the BFSS to help establish nonconformist mission schools in each of these three regions.<sup>6</sup> At the

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<sup>3</sup> On the dominance of the white male missionary voice and the marginal role of native voices in missionary archives and narratives see, Felicity Jensz, 'Non-European Teachers in Mission Schools: Introduction' *Itinerario*, 40 (2016), 389-403. On recapturing the voices and influence of native missionaries see, Richard Hölzl, 'Educating Missions. Teachers and Catechists in Southern Tanganyika, 1890s and 1940s', *Itinerario* 40 (2016), 405-428; Hugh Morrison, 'Negotiated and Mediated Lives: Bolivian teachers, New Zealand missionaries and the Bolivian Indian Mission, 1908-1932', *Itinerario* 40 (2016), 429-449.

<sup>4</sup> The lines between 'missionary' and 'teacher' were frequently blurred. However, there were men and women who studied at the BFSS's teacher training college who taught in mission schools but were not evangelists, such as the prominent West Indian educational reformer and former BFSS pupil, John McSwiney.

<sup>5</sup> Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1: *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago and London, 1991); eidem, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 2: *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Chicago and London, 1997). For a critique of missionaries, cultural imperialism and the 'colonization of consciousness' see Ryan Dunch, 'Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Missions, and Global Modernity', *History and Theory* 41 (2002), 301-325.

<sup>6</sup> For broad overviews on the operation of the BFSS in these regions see, George Bartle, 'The Role of the British and Foreign School Society in the Education of the Emancipated Negro, 1814-75', *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 15 (1983), 1-9; idem, 'The Role of the British and Foreign School Society in Elementary Education in India and the East Indies 1813-75', *History of Education* 23 (1994), 17-33.

same time, however, this archive adds an important qualifier to the role of pedagogy as part of the apparatus of European hegemony and cultural imperialism by providing evidence of how pedagogy was actually implemented by nonconformist missionaries before 1850. As this study argues, prior to 1850 the British System, where it was adopted, was far from consistently and rigorously applied in nonconformist mission schools in the three regions studied here. Pedagogy was certainly conceived of as a crucial component of nonconformist evangelism and the European ‘civilising mission’ in this period, but its effectiveness as a tool of European hegemony must be weighed against the very real and concrete obstacles that challenged its implementation in the British West Indies, Africa and India in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The BFSS owes its origins to Joseph Lancaster, a Quaker and educational pioneer, who in 1798 established the first Lancasterian school for the poor in Borough Road, Southwark, London, and in 1804, opened Britain’s first teacher training institution, also in Southwark, known as Borough Road College (BRC).<sup>7</sup> Lancaster aimed to deliver a cost effective system of elementary instruction that could be rolled out to the mass of Britain’s poor and working classes, to which end he developed the Lancasterian monitorial method, whereby a master or mistress trained up a handful of talented older children to become monitors, who in turn instructed younger and less able pupils. In a context of increasing industrialisation, Britain’s political and social reformers cast a critical spotlight on the manners and morals of poor and working-class children; as Michel Foucault argues in *Discipline and Punish*, they turned to elementary education, and to the Lancasterian system in particular, as a tool of social control and discipline.<sup>8</sup> Central to this was the inculcation of a moral code founded on Christian knowledge and instruction. In 1808, the *Society for Promoting the Royal British or Lancasterian System for the Education of the Poor* was

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<sup>7</sup> George Bartle, *A History of Borough Road College* (Kettering, 1976).

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London, 1977), 165-167.

formed and in 1814, signalling its transformation into an educational society with a global as well as a national agenda, it changed its name to the *British and Foreign School Society*.

The British System's strong Christian ethos was woven into the fabric of the BFSS and underlined its commitment to widespread social reform through moral and mental 'improvement' based on Christian education. Its Committee comprised prominent evangelicals, both Anglicans and nonconformists, including renowned abolitionists, the MPs William Wilberforce and Henry Brougham, and the Society's founders Samuel Whitbread and Treasurer, William Allen. After 1814, further leading lights of British abolitionism, Thomas Fowell Buxton and Zachary Macaulay, subscribed and donated to the Society. Thomas Clarkson also gave his support to the BFSS and urged his contacts in Jamaica to adopt the British System.<sup>9</sup> It should come as no surprise that in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, evangelicalism conspired with the goals of abolitionism and social reform to direct the BFSS's overseas operations toward the slave societies of the British West Indies and Africa. It was a conviction of the essential importance of Christian conversion and instruction to the 'improvement' and 'elevation' of West Indian and African slaves, largely born of the British antislavery campaign, which paired the BFSS with the nonconformist missionary societies in a mutual vision of a European Christian 'civilising mission'.

The British System's unsectarian pedagogy also further aligned nonconformist missionaries to the BFSS. As the BFSS manual stated: the British System 'excludes the creed or catechism of any particular sect' so that 'all sects and parties' are encouraged to send their children to British Schools.<sup>10</sup> For this reason, the Bible was the only religious text on its curriculum. This corresponded with the goals of nonconformist missionary evangelism that identified the Word of God as the primary route to conversion and salvation, and helps to

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Taylor to James Millar, 18 August 1817, Brunel University London Archives, British and Foreign School Society Papers, BFSS/FC/Jamaica/123.

<sup>10</sup> Introduction by Joseph Stern, *Manual of the System of Teaching: Joseph Lancaster and the British and Foreign School Society* (Chippenham and Bristol: 1994), vi.

explain why nonconformist missionaries were intent on teaching pupils to read: and why they looked to pedagogy to underpin their overseas' mission in the first place: their pupils were to be enabled to access the Word of God first hand, though reading the Bible.. Indeed the desire for printed texts, translations and teaching materials that accompanied the nonconformists' expansion overseas is evidence of the centrality of pedagogy to nonconformist evangelism.

It was through the Society's teacher training college, BRC, and its manual, distributed to all four corners of the globe over the course of the nineteenth century, that nonconformist missionaries sought to acquire knowledge of the British System. From 1810 onwards, the nonconformist missionary societies, namely the London Missionary Society (LMS), the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) sent a steady stream of missionaries to BRC, including, in 1824, William Knibb, who would later send the Society 'The Slave Book'.<sup>11</sup> Via the Society's Ladies' Department, BRC also welcomed missionary wives as well as widows and single women keen to instruct in overseas mission schools. When nonconformist missionary societies approached the BFSS to recommend trained male teachers for their mission stations, they frequently expressed a preference for married men, often on the grounds that their wives might be profitably employed in delivering instruction, particularly to girls. The Ladies Department's annual reports went so far as to single out missionary wives as commendable conduits of the British System overseas.<sup>12</sup> Gendered European notions of female education accorded women a distinct role in delivering missionary pedagogy where parts of the curriculum were segregated by sex: in the British System, needlework was taught exclusively to girls by female teachers (recall Priscilla Brown's beautifully embroidered insignia of the Lancasterian school in Kingston, Jamaica, in the second image of 'The Slave Book' above). This was even

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<sup>11</sup> Brunel University London Archives, British and Foreign School Society Papers, Borough Road Training College Male Students, 1810-1877, 1-26, BFSS/2/6/3/1.

<sup>12</sup> Brunel University London Archives, *Seventh Report of the Ladies Committee of the British and Foreign School Society* (1821), 26.

more the case in India, where female teachers were exclusively employed in the all-female zenanas.<sup>13</sup> The BFSS collection of foreign correspondence testifies to the visible, valuable and frequently indispensable role of women in the field of nonconformist missionary pedagogy and instruction, most especially in the delivery and promotion of overseas female education prior to 1850.<sup>14</sup> Employing men and women trained in the British System was a clear sign of the nonconformist missionary societies' aspirations to situate Christian pedagogy at the heart of overseas evangelism. It was also a sign that when it came to education, nonconformist missionaries were in broad alignment with the BFSS and current educational reforms in Britain in pursuing a commitment to expand education to girls as well as boys, and, in so doing, to open up the field of missionary instruction to women as well as men.

The BFSS's goal to effect the material and moral reform of Britain's poor and working-classes through elementary education readily transformed into support for nonconformist missionary efforts to expand pedagogic instruction to 'native teachers'. Over the course of the nineteenth century, nonconformist missionaries from each of the regions under study dispatched a small handful of their most talented students to Britain to study at the BRC. Joseph May, a former slave from Sierra Leone, trained at BRC in 1840 and became a missionary, first, in Freetown, Sierra Leone, then later in Gambia. May studied alongside Charles Knight, also from Sierra Leone. Three years later, another Sierra Leonean, William Allen, trained at BRC.<sup>15</sup> In a letter to the BFSS, Reverend Badger wrote positively of the

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<sup>13</sup> A zenana was a distinct and separate area of a Muslim household reserved solely for women, more commonly known as harems

<sup>14</sup> See Regina Ganter & Patricia Grimshaw, 'Introduction: reading the lives of white mission women,' *Journal of Australian Studies* 39 (2015), 1-6; Patricia Grimshaw, 'Rethinking Approaches to Women in Missions: The Case of Colonial Australia', *History Australia* 8 (2016), 7-24; Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, Connie A. Shemo (eds), *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960* (North Carolina, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Borough Road Training College Male Students, 1810-1877, 1-26, BFSS/2/6/3/1.

training these men received at the college and their role in introducing the British System to Sierra Leone:

Your Society has done essential service to our schools here, in having taken Charles Knight, Joseph May, and William Allen into your Institution in the Borough-Road. They have acquired a great amount of information, and a good method of communicating it to the children of their own country. They have introduced the system with great success, and have been very diligent in its application. I know of nothing that has done more to raise the character of our schools.<sup>16</sup>

In a letter to the BFSS the following year, Badger lavished praise on the three BRC trained Sierra Leonean missionaries, describing them as ‘among the best teachers in the colony.’<sup>17</sup> The instruction these men had received at the college prepared them for a leading role in the implementation of the British System in nonconformist mission schools in different areas of Africa and contributed to securing a positive reputation among their European counterparts. In this respect they, as well as others who went before and after them at BRC, represent a notable counterpoint to studies that emphasise how ‘native assistants’ were commonly subordinated to and typically derided by European missionaries.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, nonconformist missionaries emphasised to the BFSS that creating a pool of ‘native assistants’ was essential to the survival of their mission stations, if for no other reason than to alleviate the financial pressure of employing costly European missionaries and teachers. To this end, nonconformist missionaries exhibited an eagerness to establish

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<sup>16</sup> Brunel University Archives, British and Foreign School Society Papers, Annual Report 1845, 27-28.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, Annual Report 1846, 29.

<sup>18</sup> On the tensions and ambivalent relations between ‘native assistants’ and European missionaries, see Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* 2: 78-88; in contrast, for the close bonds that formed between European and non-European missionaries, see David Maxwell, ‘The missionary home as a site for mission: perspectives from Belgian Congo’, *Studies in Church History* 50, 428-455.



overseas training schools. In the British West Indies, for example, four Normal Schools (teacher training schools) were built in the immediate aftermath of the 1833 Abolition Act: all four adopted the British System and were overseen by the BFSS's former pupil, John McSwiney. Concerted efforts to increase the number of native teachers came to nothing, however, when in 1845 the British government terminated the Negro Education Grant, which had been introduced to help fund the creation of an elementary system in the aftermath of slavery, and two of the schools were forced to close. Thereafter, missionaries and education reformers consistently complained to the BFSS about the severe lack of well-trained local teachers in the former slave colonies. In Africa and India, 'native assistants' were even more instrumental in the running of mission schools in this period, for interpreters and translators were often essential to the delivery of instruction in the vernacular. In 1840, the LMS sent the BFSS a breakdown of its worldwide operations: it included '151 missionaries, 39 European and 382 native assistants' covering 554 stations and out-stations.<sup>19</sup> The high proportion of native agency represented in these figures is striking, especially as it is unclear whether the figure of 151 missionaries also comprised non-Europeans. Such data provides quantitative support to recent studies in missionary historiography, by Esther Ruth Liu, Joan-Pau Rubiés and David M. Thompson among others, which highlight the essential role played by 'native assistants' in nonconformist evangelism.<sup>20</sup> It is, moreover, in the context of such data and studies that the role and impact of African missionaries such as May, Knight and Allen ought to be read. For the very term 'native *assistant*' belies the leading role that they and other

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<sup>19</sup> Brunel University London Archives, British and Foreign School Society Papers, Annual Report 1840, 118.

<sup>20</sup> Esther Ruth-Liu, 'The Nineteenth Century Missionary-Translator: Reflecting on Translation Theory through the Work of François Coillard (1834-1904)', *Studies in Church History* 53 (2017), 376-388; Joan-Pau Rubiés, 'Ethnography and Cultural Translation in the Early Modern Missionaries', *Studies in Church History* 53 (2017), 272-310; David M. Thompson, 'A Triangular Conflict: The Nyasaland Protectorate and Two Missions, 1915-33', *Studies in Church History* 54 (2018), 393-406; Bronwen Everill, 'Bridgeheads of Empire? Liberated African Missionaries in West Africa', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40 (2012), 789-805; Jan Hüsken, 'The Recruitment, Training and Conflicts surrounding "Native teachers" in the Moravian Mission in the Danish West Indies in the Nineteenth Century', *Itinerario* 40 (2016), 451-465.

native missionaries played in the delivery of pedagogic and evangelistic instruction in mission communities.

The practice of nonconformist missionaries of sending talented pupils to BRC and missionaries subsequent positive reports on the accomplishments of these former pupils, illustrates the way in which the likes of May, Knight and Allen represented proof both that ‘elevation’ and ‘improvement’ of Africans and emancipated West Indians was possible (and it was generally believed by both religious and secular reformers that such proof was needed), and that the synthesis between Protestant evangelism and education yielded favourable results. For the same reason, nonconformist missionaries reported confidently on their pupils’ capacity for progress and harnessed an array of empirical and material evidence to signal the strides taken toward their reformation. ‘The Slave Book’ that Knibb dispatched to the Society is an example of this process. The exquisite handwriting and embroidery produced by slave and free children was consciously curated by Knibb so that the BFSS could witness with its own eyes the fruits of Christian instruction, quite literally, through the hands of the enslaved. As a further example, the Jamaica Education Society, which had adopted the British System in all of its twenty-nine schools in the colony, sent the BFSS copies of its annual reports, documenting the numbers of pupils in reading, spelling and arithmetic classes as well as the numbers of pupils who were able to write on paper and who were studying English grammar, geography and needlework.<sup>21</sup> Missionaries also illustrated their pupils’ abilities by drawing attention to the subjects and texts they studied. From Neyoor, India, Reverend Baylis wrote in 1855 that pupils in his boys boarding schools were ‘taught in English as well as in their own language’, studying “‘Scripture Selections,” the whole of Allen and Cornwell’s “Grammar for Beginners,” a part of the historical lessons in “Daily Lesson Book No 4,” and the whole of a first geography, containing chiefly, the

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<sup>21</sup> Brunel University London Archives, British and Foreign School Society Papers (BULA BFSS Papers), *Statistical Report of the Jamaica Education Society*, BFSS/FC/Jamaica/44.

geography of India.’<sup>22</sup> In the girls’ school, he observed, pupils had ‘made considerable progress’ in ‘scriptural knowledge, geography, grammar, in their own language’, which he judged to have a positive effect, adding the ‘education thus given ... will do much towards civilizing the Shanar people – once altogether sunk in the abominations of devil-worship, and in the grossest ignorance.’<sup>23</sup> Unmistakeable here is the framing of missionary education as a ‘civilising’ mission. It was by transforming their pupils’ progress into tangible evidence of missionary evangelism – samples of handwriting and embroidery, lists of books copied and memorised, performance data and tables of attendance – that nonconformist missionaries hoped to secure the moral and material support of their home societies and education and philanthropic institutions such as the BFSS in delivering the overlapping goals of Christian conversion and ‘civilising’ mission.

Indeed, the BFSS could be in no doubt that its moral and material support was desperately needed in the early decades of overseas evangelism. For although nonconformist missionaries displayed considerable optimism toward their pupils’ aptitude for ‘improvement’, they also expressed considerable anxiety regarding the difficulties they faced in implementing the British System in their schools. For a start, trained missionary teachers from BRC were never sufficient in number to make up for the shortfall overseas of those suitably trained in the British System. Writing to the BFSS from South Africa, in 1835, one missionary observed that pupils were ‘instructed by means of lesson boards on the Lancasterian plan, in so far as I am acquainted with it.’ He added, ‘I have only to regret that I have not a more thorough knowledge of that system.’<sup>24</sup> At the same time, this missionary praised the abilities of the native teachers working at the mission and the overall value of native agency in the colony. From Jamaica, Reverend Jabez Tunley reported to the BFSS: ‘those schools which are in operation [*sic*], are not conducted so fully on the British System

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<sup>22</sup> BULA BFSS Papers, Annual Report 1855, 83-84.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 84-85.

<sup>24</sup> BULA BFSS Papers, Annual Report 1835, 96.

as one could wish the Masters of which schools, never having been in the “Normal Institution” except on a visit or so.’<sup>25</sup> Tunley’s comments were not exceptional and support William Green’s principal criticism of the monitorial system in the British West Indies that it was conducted by poorly trained monitors and teachers whose grasp of monitorial pedagogy was ‘woefully deficient in understanding.’<sup>26</sup> From the Cape of Good Hope, Reverend Atkinson wrote: ‘Of *system* I cannot say much. The entire want of monitors has occasioned much difficulty ... I have often been obliged to act as monitor myself to the classes in succession.’<sup>27</sup> Similarly, LMS missionary Reverend Addis, who studied at BRC in 1827, wrote to the BFSS of his difficulties in securing suitable teachers in South India and confided that his mission schools were conducted on a ‘modification’ of the British System, which he justified by stating ‘anything complicated will not answer at present in our vernacular schools, for even our more simple method, based upon your system, takes a new schoolmaster some considerable time to learn – so utterly deficient in anything like order or regularity is the teaching of the schoolmasters of this country.’<sup>28</sup> Thomas Sturgeon, from the Baptist mission in Fernando Po in the Gulf of Guinea, admitted: ‘We carry out the British system in this, and all our schools, as far as possible.’<sup>29</sup> From South Africa, Reverend Taylor likewise acknowledged that he tried to ‘follow the British system as much as possible.’<sup>30</sup> Where training in the British System was limited, among teachers as well as monitors, ‘modification’ and ‘adaptation’ of the British System was bound to occur, though what this looked like in practice missionaries were rarely inclined to disclose in their correspondence with the BFSS.

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<sup>25</sup> Jabez Tunley to the BFSS, 13 March 1847, BULA BFSS Papers, BFSS/FC/Jamaica/54.

<sup>26</sup> William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment, 1830-1865* (Oxford, 1976), 334-5.

<sup>27</sup> BULA BFSS Papers, Annual Report 1841, 114.

<sup>28</sup> BULA BFSS Papers, Annual Report 1850, 86.

<sup>29</sup> BULA BFSS Papers, Annual Report 1845, 28.

<sup>30</sup> BULA BFSS Papers, Annual Report 1851, 100.

A severe shortage of teaching materials and sufficient funds further ensured that ‘modification’ and ‘adaption’ of the British System was common. Pleas for teaching materials and complaints of missionary poverty pervade missionary correspondence to the BFSS. Missionaries at the LMS stations in Griqua Town, South Africa, wrote of their mixed fortunes in operating the British System in their schools. The day school at the head station was ‘conducted according to the [British] system’ and the new school room built in 1831 was ‘completed, fitted up, and organized according to the Model School, Borough-road.’ Notwithstanding, financial constraints prevented the LMS missionaries from introducing the ‘excellent [British] system’ into twelve new day schools.<sup>31</sup> In 1840, from the Cape of Good Hope, Reverend Dr Philip begged the BFSS to send him whatever teaching resources it could spare: schools are ‘generally destitute of lessons,’ he declared, ‘*you can be at no loss in sending us any quantity, for the whole colony is a state of destitution .... We have at this moment perhaps thirty stations all crying out for lessons.*’<sup>32</sup> In the British West Indies, nonconformist missionaries routinely despaired at the scarcity of teaching resources. In 1844, the Baptist missionary Reverend James Phillippo pleaded with the BFSS to send him school materials, explaining: ‘some of the schools under my charge have been so destitute of every thing of the kind as to render them any thing but lancasterian [sic] schools’ and in some ‘scarcely a lesson of the british & foreign school society has been seen to adorn the walls, as I had not a spare sheet of them in possession.’<sup>33</sup> Rarely did nonconformist missionaries in the British West Indies feel adequately provisioned in delivering elementary instruction in the colonies, and their letters to the BFSS ensured that the Society was well aware of the considerable material difficulties under which they laboured.

Similarly, in Africa and India, where nonconformist missionaries typically taught in the vernacular, the BFSS was informed of their struggles to source translations, particularly

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<sup>31</sup> BULA BFSS Papers, Annual Report 1838, 122.

<sup>32</sup> BULA BFSS Papers, Annual Report 1840, 49.

<sup>33</sup> James Phillippo to the BFSS, 11 February 1840, BULA BFSS Papers BFSS/FC/Jamaica/14.

in the early days of mission work in these fields. Indeed, even as late as 1862, a report from the Christian Vernacular Society for India to the BFSS concluded: ‘there is a lamentable deficiency of good Christian school books in many of the languages.’<sup>34</sup> In Bangalore, both Wesleyan and LMS missionaries were reported to be ‘exceedingly anxious to see good school books translated into Canarese.’<sup>35</sup> At the LMS mission station in Kuruman, South Africa, missionaries printed their own translations via the local presses, in addition to applying to the British and Foreign Bible Society to send translated books, paper and ink.<sup>36</sup> In 1834, the BFSS was informed that Reverend Robert Moffat was in the process of printing a translation of the reading book used at Borough Road into Tswana.<sup>37</sup> Missionary complaints to the BFSS about the limited number of translated texts and references to the painstaking efforts of missionaries (and, we are typically left to presume, ‘native assistants’) to produce spelling books and texts in local languages – for example Moffat’s Tswana translations, or, as another missionary reported, a translation into ‘Tesuto dialect’ (presumably Sesotho)<sup>38</sup> – simultaneously reflect the importance placed on vernacular instruction as a means to support conversion and the considerable lengths to which missionaries went, as well as demonstrating the difficulties they faced, in delivering vernacular instruction. Widespread evidence of lack of pedagogical training, combined with limited teaching resources and the difficulties of creating and obtaining translated texts point to the challenges faced by nonconformist missionaries in operating the British System in their mission schools. Moreover, the correspondence of nonconformist missionaries with the BFSS documents their struggles to deliver the British System in mission schools and thus cautions against over-emphasising the widespread effectiveness of pedagogy as a tool of European ‘civilising’ mission before 1850.

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<sup>34</sup> BULA BFSS Papers, Annual Report, 1862, 88.

<sup>35</sup> BULA BFSS Papers, Annual Report 1843, 32.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen Volz, ‘Written On Our Hearts: Tsana Christians and the “Word of God” in the Mid-Nineteenth Century’, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 38 (2008), 115-116.

<sup>37</sup> BULA BFSS Papers, Annual Report 1835, 114.

<sup>38</sup> BULA BFSS Papers, Annual Report 1857, 18.

While material difficulties challenged the full and proper implementation of the British System, the response of local populations also mitigated against its effectiveness as a tool of nonconformist evangelism and ‘improvement’. From the British West Indies, the BFSS learned of extremely poor levels of pupil attendance in nonconformist mission schools, which missionaries typically blamed on the combined effects of poverty, child labour, and the failure of (formerly enslaved) parents to apprehend the value of education. From India, the Society learned of the particular difficulties attending female instruction and the constraints imposed on the curriculum as a result of a clash over competing British/missionary and Indian views on education, gender and religion. From Bombay, Miss Richmond wrote of the ‘insurmountable difficulties’ that attended teaching girls, which included ‘religious differences, early marriages, and intense dislike to the native women learning English .... We are not allowed to teach English, or give any kind of religious instruction.’<sup>39</sup> Laurence Kitzan argues that missionaries in India faced far more opposition than their counterparts in Africa, and directors of the LMS on more than one occasion issued warnings to missionaries not to interfere in India’s political affairs and to steer clear of condemning Hindu social customs, such as suttee, for fear of stoking up religious conflict.<sup>40</sup> From South Africa, the BFSS learned how the spread of English language instruction also provoked opposition. Reverend Rolland, writing to the Society in 1851, from Beersheba, explained: at one of the national assemblies it was ‘gravely proposed “to destroy all the missionaries”, they having, it was alleged, shown the way for the other Europeans who are now taking possession of their country.’ Highlighting local animosity toward the missionaries, he reported that a young man ‘brought up in our schools proposed to destroy all the books and houses of the missionaries’ and to ‘kill all the whites’; however, later he ‘abandoned’ his plan.<sup>41</sup> In their correspondence

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<sup>39</sup> BULA BFSS Papers, Annual Report 1869, 32.

<sup>40</sup> Laurence Kitzan, ‘The London Missionary Society and the Problem of Authority in India, 1798-1833’, *Church History*, 40 (1971), 468.

<sup>41</sup> BULA BFSS Papers, Annual Report 1851, 99.

with the BFSS, nonconformist missionaries both wittingly and unwittingly revealed how local people were neither fully passive nor fully persuaded recipients of Christian instruction and pedagogy.<sup>42</sup> Hayden Bellenoit argues for the limitations of pedagogy in the case of India, concluding that ‘rather than serving as a hegemonic colonial undertaking, mission schools were subject to Indian agency and contestation.’<sup>43</sup> Indeed, in all the three regions considered here, even those parents who sent their children to mission schools did not shrink from pressuring missionaries to adapt their pedagogy in ways that aligned with the parents’ interests, in some cases to such an extent that it undermined the ultimate goals of nonconformist evangelism by insisting upon the omission of Christian instruction altogether. As this study has argued, nonconformist missionaries considered Christian pedagogy an essential instrument of evangelism in all three regions under study before 1850, and approached the BFSS to provide teacher training in the British System, via BRC and the BFSS manual, along with much needed moral and material support. The BFSS’s liberal and progressive education reform agenda resulted in an inclusive approach to teacher training that embraced the instruction of women as well men, and of non-European as well as European students and future teachers. Nonetheless, nonconformist missionary correspondence with the BFSS suggests that adequately trained teachers were never sufficiently numerous in the missionary field. Lack of training, funds and teaching resources contrived to hinder the proper operation of the British System, so that in all three regions ‘modification’ and ‘adaptation’ were common, particularly in the early decades of evangelism. If we add to this picture the varying degrees of local resistance to missionary instruction, as in the case of the disappointing pupil attendance in the British West Indies, widespread resistance to Christian

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<sup>42</sup> For further examples of local resistance to evangelism and pedagogy see, Volz, ‘Written On Our Hearts’, 120; on the refusal of local peoples to passively accept the pedagogy practised by missionaries from the Church Missionary Society in Kenya see, Robert W. Strayer, ‘The Making of Mission Schools in Kenya: A Microcosmic Perspective’ *Comparative Education Review*, 17 (1973), 321.

<sup>43</sup> Hayden J. A. Bellenoit, ‘Missionary Education, Religion and Knowledge in India, c. 1880-1915’ *Modern Asian Studies*, 41 (2007), 393.



instruction among communities in India, and opposition to English language instruction in parts of Africa, we are left with the question of just how effective missionary pedagogy was as a tool of nonconformist evangelism (or indeed of European hegemony) in the first half of the nineteenth century. To answer this satisfactorily, extensive research is now needed into how alternative pedagogies were practised by missionaries, how effectively they were implemented in mission schools, and how they were adopted, adapted or opposed by local communities. It remains to be seen whether, in terms of the considerable range of challenges they faced in situating pedagogy at the heart of overseas evangelism and the sometimes insurmountable obstacles they experienced bringing about conversion through the curriculum, nonconformist missionaries' use and application of the British System represents the rule or the exception in the British West Indies, Africa and India in first half of the nineteenth century. Overall, the BFSS archive provides a unique perspective from which to examine the relationship between education and evangelism in these three regions and sheds light on what was actually taught and delivered in nonconformist mission schools. This makes it possible better to comprehend the role and impact of pedagogy in overseas evangelism. Indeed, evidence from the Society's interaction with nonconformist missionaries suggests that the widespread difficulties that nonconformist missionaries experienced in operating the British System in their schools mitigated against over-emphasising the potency of British Protestant pedagogy to meet the goals of European evangelism and a 'civilising mission' in Africa, India, and the British West Indies in the first half of the nineteenth century.