

A Space Too Vast and Silent? German Deaconesses and the Patriarchy of the Berlin Mission in Apartheid Transvaal

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RESÜMEE

Lize Kriel: Ein Raum zu riesig und still? Deutsche Diakonissinnen und das Patriarchat der Berliner Mission im Transvaal unter Apartheid¹

Unverheiratete deutsche Missionarinnen, die während der ersten Jahrzehnte der Apartheid nach Südafrika kamen, fanden eine Missionsleitung vor Ort, die von älteren Männern autoritär dominiert wurde und sich weigerte, die Apartheidpolitik der im Jahre 1948 gewählten Regierung zu kritisieren. Am Beispiel einer einzelnen Missionarin aus Ostdeutschland versucht der Aufsatz, die vorhandenen Quellen zu hinterfragen und festzustellen, welche Möglichkeiten einer Frau offen standen, die in manchen Fragen die Annahmen der Missionsleitung nicht teilte.

Still considered a recently-identified scholarly pursuit, the study of women missionaries in the twentieth century has nevertheless already resulted in several thorough research outputs on Western women working in various continents.² In South Africa the work of Joan Millard and Deborah Gaitskell³ sheds light on the careers of a number of women

1 Many thanks to Nora Thoma for her assistance with translating many of the quotations from German into English. I myself, however, remain responsible for the final version of all translations in this article.

2 See D.L. Robert (ed.), *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers. Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century*, Maryknoll 2002; R.C. Brouwer, *Modern Women, Modernising Men. The Changing Missions of Three Professional Women in Asia and Africa, 1902–69*, Vancouver 2002; D. Gaitskell (Guest ed.), *Women and Missions Issue*, *Le Fait Missionnaire* 16 (July 2005). The Summer 2000 number of the journal *Feminist Review* was a special issue which also contained contributions on the twentieth century – see next footnote.

3 J. Millard, *Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Missionary Wives in South Africa: Equal Partners or Historical Non-entities?*, in: *Missionalia* 31 (April 2003), No. 1, pp. 59-71; D. Gaitskell, *Female Faith and the Politics of the Personal: Five Mission Encounters in Twentieth-Century South Africa*, in: *Feminist Review* 65 (Summer 2000), pp. 68-91. Also see G. Cuthbertson/L. Kretchmar, *Gender and Mission Christianity: Recent Trends in South African Historiography and Theology*, in: *Missionalia* 24 (November 1996), No. 3, pp. 277-301.

in English-speaking church denominations. Single women missionaries in the Berlin Mission Society (hereafter BM), while having been under some scrutiny in East Africa⁴ and extensive investigation in China,⁵ are still largely invisible in South African mission historiography.

In the existing scholarship, particularly on the side of the still very useful, but aging works by South African scholars, the role of German women in missions in South Africa is often ignored, mostly perceived in the form of a supporting wife alongside a white male missionary, and thus entrapped within the ideology of the male-dominated South African leadership.⁶ Few studies (all by German authors) recognise the possibility of more diverse gendered undercurrents within the BM.⁷ This comes as no surprise considering the strong authoritarian and paternalist approach of the BM, particularly as its development in South Africa has been scrutinized in several studies.⁸ In an article on this issue, Gunther Pakendorf linked these missionaries' "growing alienation from the needs and aspirations of the indigenous converts" to their "increasing acceptance of and co-operation with Boer authorities":

*... when in the apartheid era human rights violations, mass removals and political repression were affecting not only the general population but the very adherents of the mission churches themselves and protest against these policies came from various quarters, the German missions were to a very large extent silent. It was a silence resulting as much from the absence of an interventionist tradition in Lutheran theology as from the elected affinities, developed over several generations, between German missionaries and their children and the white rulers of the land.*⁹

A 'large extent' of silence was, however, not total silence. There were South African German missionaries, like Pakendorf's own father, Paul-Gerhard Pakendorf, who played a crucial facilitating role between the African congregations, the South African admin-

4 I. Fiedler, *Wandel der Mädchenerziehung in Tansania: Der Einfluss von Mission, kolonialer Schulpolitik und nationalem Sozialismus*, Saarbrücken 1983.

5 V. Boetzinger, „Den Chinesen Chinese werden.“ *Die deutsche protestantische Frauenmission in China, 1842–1952*, Stuttgart 2004.

6 D.W. van der Merwe, *Die Berlynse Sendinggenootskap en Kerkstigting in Transvaal, 1904–1962*, Argiefjaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis 50, II, Pretoria 1987; G.J. Jooste, *Ras, Volk en Politiek in die Berlynse Sendinggenootskap. Die Berlynse Sendinggenootskap en die Rassevraagstuk in die Unie van Suid-Afrika*, D.D. Thesis, University of Pretoria 1996; L. Zöllner/J.A. Heese, *Die Berlynse Sendelinge in Suid-Afrika en hul Nageslag*, Pretoria 1984.

7 K. Roller, „Statt dessen schwang sie eine andere Waffe“. *Gewalt und Geschlecht in Texten der Berliner Mission über Südafrika aus dem Zeit um 1900*, in: H. Stoecker (ed.), *Mission und Gewalt. Der Umgang christlicher Missionen mit Gewalt und die Ausbreitung des Christentums in Afrika und Asien in der Zeit von 1792 bis 1918–19*, Stuttgart 2000; K. Rüter, *The Power Beyond. Mission Strategies, African Conversions and the Development of a Christian Culture in the Transvaal*, Münster 2001; A. Schultze, „In Gottes Namen Hütten bauen“ *Kirchlicher Landesbesitz in Südafrika: die Berliner Mission und die Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche Südafrikas zwischen 1834 und 2005*, Stuttgart 2005.

8 Van der Merwe, *Die Berlynse Sendinggenootskap* (footnote 6); Jooste, *Ras, Volk en Politiek* (footnote 6).

9 G. Pakendorf, "For there is no Power but of God." *The Berlin Mission and the Challenges of Colonial South Africa*, in: *Missionalia* 25 (1997), No. 3, pp. 255–273.

istration and the German head office of the BM.¹⁰ The growing distance between the South African BM community and their African congregations, and the resultant silence about the way they were treated by the apartheid government, were generally also more acutely observed by those BM workers who came to South Africa from Germany after the Second World War.¹¹ They were part of a new generation of mission workers, many of whom were willing, in the words of Deborah Gaitskell, to “facilitate their own redundancy”¹² and transfer the church established by white missionaries to the hands of black Christians.¹³ Three of these new missionaries were too outspoken in the eyes of the apartheid government and promptly sent back to Europe.¹⁴ Those who wanted to cross the space between white patriarchy and black alienation in this political climate would have had to display more patience with local inequalities – even to a degree act partial complicity in white privilege, in order to be allowed to stay. They would have had to work more unobtrusively against the existing structures, in order to be permitted to work at all. Such collaborations, however, required a foundation of trust between privileged and oppressed, and those missionaries who decided to adopt this approach had to realize that they were still followed by the shadows of their predecessors.

In a patriarchal world there are certain sectors where women, because it would be so unexpected of them, can act more unobtrusively than men. Sometimes, simply out of previous experience of not having been taken seriously, they can afford to be more outspoken, or more daring in their actions, often with the frustration of someone who has nothing to lose. The correspondence of Deaconess Anneliese Dörfer, who arrived in the Transvaal from East Berlin in November 1952, portrays a dissident approach of this kind. This has prompted me to consider the possibilities for this category of single white female to have intervened in the vast and silent space (in the making of which gendered domesticity was an “active ingredient”) between white BM missionaries and their black congregations. Could it be that the current silence on resistance against apartheid in BM historiography merely reflects a silence in a particular kind or reportage – where dissidence would not have been tolerated and for that very reason not have been reported on?

Yet, even in Dörfer’s case, it would be overstretching the interpretative possibilities of the archival material to brand her a political activist – she too came from the Lutheran theology with its “absence of an interventionist tradition.”¹⁵ The fact, however, that she

10 H. Lehmann, *Zur Zeit und zur Unzeit. Geschichte der Berliner Mission 1918–1972 III*, Berlin 1989, p. 840, Zöllner/Heese, *Die Berlynye Sendlinge in Suid-Afrika* (footnote 6), pp. 327-328.

11 Lehmann, *Zur Zeit und zur Unzeit III* (footnote 10), pp. 789, 822; Schultze, „In Gottes Namen Hütten bauen“ (footnote 7), pp. 166-167.

12 A phrase used by Deborah Gaitskell with reference to Anglican missionary Hannah Stanton in: *Female Faith and the Politics of the Personal* (footnote 3), pp. 68-91.

13 Lehmann, *Zur Zeit und zur Unzeit III* (footnote 10), pp. 826 & 830: „Wer in diesen Jahren noch ausgesandt wurde, musste damit rechnen, dass er nur einen zeitlich begrenzten Auftrag empfing. Sein Dienst musste zu einem großen Teil darauf gerichtet sein Mitarbeiter aus der afrikanischen Kirche dafür zuzurüsten eines Tages an seine Stelle zu treten. Das galt für die Schwestern wie für die Missionare.“

14 Lehmann, *Zur Zeit und zur Unzeit III* (footnote 10), pp. 380-1.

15 Pakendorf, “For there is no Power ...” (footnote 9), pp. 255-273.

was checked up by the police on at least two occasions, and that in 1956 a South African “Native” Commissioner refused to renew her permit to stay on at the Blaumberg mission station in the Hananwa’s “reserve” in the Northern Transvaal – and that the senior missionaries of this synod did not respond in a very sympathetic way towards the sister – does indeed indicate that Dörfer’s approach to South African trans-racial interaction was uncomfortably different from those of the majority of ‘settled in’ whites, including several missionaries. Whereas the community of Berlin missionaries in South Africa to a large extent carried over the nineteenth-century mentality of the mission society (maintaining friendly relations with the white authorities and earning respectability in their view), Anneliese Dörfer marched onto the Transvaal scene with her post-Second World War European views.

Dörfer, who had spent the War working as a nurse in East Prussia, left the GDR right at the time when missionary culture in Berlin was, for the second time in less than two decades, assuming a dissident position towards the state (although many would argue, not dissident enough).¹⁶ Encountering African dissatisfaction with apartheid from this vantage point made Dörfer more sensitive to black people’s frustrations than many a white missionary who had maintained amicable relations with South Africa’s white communities for generations. As a single woman, a deaconess who in the pietist tradition of her Mother House (Salem-Lichtenrade) has dedicated herself to a lifetime of service,¹⁷ her focus on African hardship was also undivided. She did not have the same concerns as the South African women married to BM missionaries. Most of them had little prospect of returning to Germany and had to envision a future for themselves and their children in an environment where Afrikaner nationalism was promising a secure future in which Christianity *and* ‘separate development’ were held in equal measure as respectable ideals.

Dörfer soon became the ‘unofficial’ spokesperson – both in the Transvaal and in Berlin – of a handful of ‘sisters’, as the deaconesses were locally called.¹⁸ What they all had in common was that they did not depart in their engagement with indigenous people from the same point of “growing alienation” which Pakendorf associates with the more established South African missionary families. Avid and confiding correspondent as she was, Sister Anneliese Dörfer’s letters to the BM Committee and her Deaconesses’ Mother House in Germany comment as much on South African Berlin missionaries’ marginalization of ‘the sisters’ as on these missionaries’ (in Dörfer’s words) ‘soft’¹⁹ attitude to social injustice against Africans. In this way Dörfer’s voice forms a striking commentary on the fact that the BM was slow to outgrow its patriarchal philosophy in South Africa. Furthermore, it becomes clear that, at least in the parts of the Transvaal that Dörfer was com-

16 Lehmann, *Zur Zeit und zur Unzeit III* (footnote 10), pp. 704-722, 793.

17 A. Pfötenhauer/G. Freytag (eds.), *Zeit aus Gottes Hand. 100 Jahre Schwesternschaft des Diakonissenmutterhaus Salem-Lichtenrade*, Bad Gandersheim 2006, pp. 9-33.

18 The concept “Deaconess” hardly ever features in the South African Correspondence of the BM.

19 Kirchliches Archivzentrum Berlin (hereafter KAB): BMW 3030, 1954 – 1968: A. Dörfer – J. Zimmermann, (Ost-?)Berlin, Ostern, 10 April 1966.

menting on, this tenacious patriarchal world view discouraged both Africans and white women from appropriating responsible, self-determining roles. Of course, the reason why the white “sisters” were so acutely aware of the restrictions imposed by patriarchy was that they were on the receiving end of this discriminating practice themselves – far more so than missionaries’ wives and daughters.

Dörfer’s correspondence in the archives of the BM in Berlin indeed provides a privileged view of tensions between ‘missionaries’ and ‘sisters’, but also between ‘Berlin’ and ‘Transvaal’ – and her participation in it. However, juxtaposing Dörfer’s letters with the correspondence between various male missionaries of the Northern Transvaal Synod restrains one from viewing these white men as one-dimensional enemies of Africans and women in general. On the contrary, their ambivalences and inclination towards change also became clear as the BM slowly proceeded to recognise the independence of an Evangelical Lutheran Church for black people in South Africa in 1963.²⁰ Through her letters Dörfer did indeed contribute to the pressure the Mission Committee in Berlin applied to the South African missionaries to accommodate new approaches that were changing the image of mission work worldwide, and to assist the local African Lutherans to take over the management of their church.

Dörfer’s protest against the policies of the National Party and her superintendents’ patriarchy was in the first place a ‘paper indignation’ expressed in personal letters to fellow sisters and men she trusted in Berlin. She directed letter after letter to the mission headquarters, situated ironically beleaguered in GDR-controlled East Berlin, but then also to the Matron of her Deaconess House, which had in the mean time relocated to Bad Gandersheim near Hannover in West Germany.²¹ Because Dörfer had a joint contract with both these employers, the Mission inspectors and the Matron tried, as far as possible, to exchange the information in the letters they received.²²

While quite aware of undercurrents in black politics in the Transvaal – first from reading and then from what she observed in African households – Dörfer’s (and her fellow deaconesses’) impact is not to be sought in the politicising of Africans or a contribution to the international Anti-Apartheid movement. Through the years Dörfer’s correspondence rather represents the self-recording of the limitations to white female agency within her institutional parameters. One has to ask, in the face of an intrusive over-regulatory state, a South African BM community at pains to attenuate that state, and the resultant high levels of alienation on the side of black BM Christians, if even the best efforts by sisters like Anneliese Dörfer would not just have evaporated in the vast and silent space between the BM and their African converts. Or did the deaconesses’ efforts matter then and there?

20 Van der Merwe, *Die Berlyne Sendinggenootskap* (footnote 6), p. 121; H. Lehmann, *Zur Zeit und zur Unzeit. Geschichte der Berliner Mission 1918-1972 II*, Berlin 1989, p. 597.

21 1959–1960. See Pfotenhauer/ Freytag (eds.), *Zeit aus Gottes Hand* (footnote 17), pp. 75-76.

22 KAB: BMW 3028: VERTRAG Zwischen der Berliner Missionsgesellschaft, Berlin NO 18, Georgenkirchstr. 70, einerseits und dem Vorstand des Diakonissenmutterhauses Salem, Berlin-Lichtenrade, Hohenzollernstr 15, andererseits, 1. Januar 1947.

One also has to keep in mind what Tripp in her study of trans-racial Christian collaboration in Uganda has called the “dual and contradictory identities of colonial women”.²³ Dörfer’s writings are a manifestation of struggle both within and against a double network of mission- and government-institutionalized patriarchy. I also say ‘within’, because Dörfer was indeed also facing the classical white women’s temptation to negotiate a matriarchal position for herself amongst the patriarchs, from where she could join in the process of perpetuating the infantilising of her converts. And paternalism is of course not a “whites only” prerogative. Although the post-Second World War missionary enterprise in many respects gives the impression of a great effort to “undo” previous generations of white missionaries’ exercises of control, African evangelists and pastors had to respond to the long paternalist tradition in their church. This could either be embraced or resisted – more probably embraced in some respects and rejected in others – in establishing their new management culture.

While amongst English-speaking denominations the idea had already gone out of fashion well before the Second World War,²⁴ the sisters who came to South Africa in the service of the BM in the 1950s still endorsed a form of “women’s work for women”.²⁵ In a wryly ironic way, this approach could somehow still make sense in some South African spaces as late as the 1960s.²⁶ Because industrialization and urbanization were driven and later characterized by racialised migrant labour, a significant proportion of black women were left behind in the rural Transvaal as functional single parents. The German deaconesses were single women too, and childcare was part of their vocation. They were professional women, trained in nursing or education.²⁷ Moreover, through their double connection with the BM’s Women’s Mission Bureau in Berlin and their Mother Houses in various parts of Germany, they plugged into a network of German Christian women willing to make donations and to talk about the effects of apartheid in Europe. When Anneliese Dörfer could no longer rely on material assistance from East Germany, her Mother House in its new location in West Germany generously continued to contribute to the material needs of people left destitute after forced removals in South Africa.²⁸ That it is undesirable continually to represent African woman as if in constant need of European charity is obvious, but the counter-question is what alternatives there were in apartheid South Africa. The white community was increasingly insulating itself in its

23 A.M. Tripp, *Women’s Mobilization in Uganda: Nonracial Ideologies in European-African-Asian Encounters, 1945–1962*, in: *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 34 (2001), Vol. 3, p. 543.

24 It “was the first significant gender-linked mission theory. Behind it lay middle-class western assumptions that western women needed to help liberate their sisters around the world by reaching them in their homes, teaching them to read, and providing medical care for their bodies.” Robert (ed.), *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers* (footnote 2), p. 7.

25 Lehmann, *Zur Zeit und zur Unzeit III* (footnote 10), p. 823.

26 „Was nun eher doch anders ist als in Ostafrika, sind die vielen Frauen, denn wenn man sie nach ihren Männern fragt, fast immer die Antwort bekommt: Er ist zu den Weißen gegangen.“ BMW 3028: A. Dörfer – Missionshaus, Berlin, 19 April 1953.

27 Lehmann, *Zur Zeit und zur Unzeit III* (footnote 10), pp. 829–830.

28 Archiv, Diakonissenmutterhaus Salem-Lichtenrade, Bad Gandersheim (hereafter ASL): Rundbrief, Anneliese Dörfer, 23 Juni 1967:

own separate familial interests. Education was taken out of the hands of the missionaries, and opportunities for medical mission work was restricted.²⁹ In the 1960s, opposed to the officials and the soldiers of the apartheid government who supervised forced removals, a white deaconess' handing out of blankets, buying vegetables and medicine, or offering a ride in her Kombi, was a meaningful counterpoint. In the lives of women pushed into the margins of history, quotidian gestures mattered. Bible schools, prayer groups and singing hymns together mattered.³⁰ One could argue that black women could have organized these activities themselves, but against the historical background of a paternalist supervision of such activities, the deaconesses' approach was a significantly different gesture of solidarity. Besides, as Gaitskell has pointed out, religion remained one of the very few social outlets where people who were categorized into different races could still find common ground.³¹

That the deaconesses' role at this quotidian level does not loom large in the social memory of the African communities which Anneliese Dörfer or any of the other sisters had worked in, is to be expected. As Andreas Heuser illustrates in this volume, the removal of female power from church memory is by no means restricted to Lutheran churches in South Africa, but rather characteristic of a much broader tendency towards male domination, also in African Independent Churches. Besides, the form of service deaconesses were committed to is not of the kind that claims public recognition. Furthermore, while the older, patriarchal "chiefly tradition" of story-telling in African communities was thrown into rather creative disarray by the processes that drove men to the cities and left women in the countryside,³² Lutheran Christians were not at the centre of the making of a new trans-ethnic Marxist-inspired historical rhetoric of protest and resistance. Like the missionaries and the deaconesses, as "good Lutherans" an "interventionist tradition" was not strong in their adopted theology either.

By living so closely with the indigenous converts of the BM, deaconesses became acutely aware of their needs and aspirations, thus countering the "growing alienation" which, according to Pakendorf, characterizes the twentieth century history of missionary-convert relations. Of course the deaconesses were not all equally successful. While Anna von Waldow with her meekness and innovation was loved and respected by most and dismissed or passed over in silence by some,³³ Anneliese Dörfer with her forceful conviction was a little too terrible always to be taken seriously, but then again too headstrong completely to ignore.³⁴ But they were both appreciated in the communities where they

29 Lehmann, *Zur Zeit und zur Unzeit III* (footnote 10), p. 829.

30 KAB: BMW 3030: Abschrift aus dem Brief von Anneliese Dörfer vom 5.6.63; Auszug aus einem Brief von Schwester Anneliese Dörfer vom 17.11.64; ASL: Rundbrief, Anneliese Dörfer, 23 Juni 1967.

31 Gaitskell, *Female Faith* (footnote 3), pp. 88.

32 I. Hofmeyr, *We Spend our Years as a Tale that is Told. Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom*, Johannesburg 1995.

33 KAB: BMW 3030: R. Hagens, *Duivelskloof – Oelke*, (Ost-?)Berlin, 10 Oktober 1956.

34 KAB: BMW 3028: P. Begrich, *Missionshaus Berlin – A. Dörfer*, 17 Dezember 1953.

had worked, and maintained contact with their congregations and with each other after retiring back to Germany.

In the subsequent section of the paper examples are offered of the factors that restricted Anneliese Dörfer's agency, particularly during the first four years of her stay in South Africa: the patriarchy of the BM in the Transvaal as well as the institutions of the apartheid government whom the BM preferred to appease rather than confront; and then also the scepticism with which their previous experience with the BM and other white agencies had left African communities on BM mission stations in the twentieth century.

In the last section I consider the more "established" second part of Dörfer's stay in South Africa – after her removal from Blaumberg in 1956. It will be noticed how Dörfer's interaction with fellow white male missionaries gradually became less confrontational – to a large extent through the willingness of white missionary wives to create a working space for her, as well as through the commitment of a younger generation of missionaries to transfer the mission church to African hands. From 1963 onwards, the employees of the BM in South Africa were actually in the service of the newly established African churches. Bishop Paul-Gerhard Pakendorf, under whom Dörfer then worked in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Transvaal, had been elected to this post by the African pastors.³⁵ However, perhaps because Dörfer had to fight so hard for recognition during her first years in South Africa, she remained fairly uncomplimentary with reference to fellow white missionaries and their wives and sometimes underappreciated the extent to which they supported her, if only by providing an infrastructure through which and beneath which she could proceed with her "women's work".

The BM in South Africa and their Resistance to Single Female Workers

The operational procedure of the BM in the Transvaal was firmly established in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when men who came to South Africa to found new stations were expected to marry. The labour on the mission station was to a large extent perceived as a team effort between husband and wife, each with their gender-specific roles. In this tradition several missionary wives made formidable contributions to the education and medical welfare of African communities.³⁶

When the BM Director and the Chair of the Women's Mission Bureau visited South

35 Lehmann, *Zur Zeit und zur Unzeit II* (footnote 20), pp. 596-600.

36 K. Roller, „Statt dessen schwang sie eine andere Waffe“ (footnote 7) highlights two such careers. Another example is Helene Franz (née Schultz), the wife of Missionary Robert Franz, who worked amongst the Hananwa of the Blouberg/Bochum area from 1897 until 1914. A hospital established (not on the mission station, however) through the Franz couple's private initiative, became well-known throughout the greater Soutpansberg region, particularly for the treatment of leprosy (/syphilis?) and later tuberculosis. See Zöllner/ Heese, *Die Berlynse Sendelinge in Suid-Afrika* (footnote 6), pp. 84-86; Van der Merwe, *Die Berlynse Sendinggenootskap* (footnote 6), p. 156; T.J. Makhura, *The Role of Women in the Boer-Bagananwa War, 1894–1895*. Paper presented at the South African Historical Society Biennial Conference, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 2-6 July 1995.

Africa in 1939, an appeal was made by Missionary L. Gieseke and his wife for single German women's assistance as nurses in Venda territory. The BM had indeed, for a long time already made use of the service of deaconesses in East Africa and in China. The Giesekes' argument was that the missionary's wife already had enough other responsibilities.³⁷ During the German visitors' subsequent tour through Vendaland, an African pastor had a different story to tell Alice Bühring of the Women's Bureau. He argued that the Venda women could only be converted by fellow-women, and that the missionaries' wives, with their household responsibilities, simply did not have the time to provide the undivided dedication this would require. Was this the only reason, or was there also something about missionary wives' direct connection to the missionary's paternalist authority that did not appeal to Venda communities?

The Deaconess Movement in Germany, rooted in the pietism of the nineteenth century, had by the outbreak of the Second World War become a well-established aspect of German religious culture – in fact, the War already marked the beginning of its decline in popularity. How did it work? Deaconess Mother Houses offered formerly unmarried women and young widows the opportunity of a professional training (mostly as medical nurse) and a career of Christian service to the community. It was also possible for a deaconess to be “seconded” to Missionary Societies, with whom a contract would normally be raised which entitled the deaconess to return to her Mother House when she retired.³⁸ When after the Second World War the BM assigned several deaconesses to South Africa, it was not right away clear to the South African missionaries what these women were supposed to do. Some, like Anna von Waldow, wanted to continue the “women's work for women” for which von Waldow had been rather famous in Tanganyika before the War, because of the innovative way in which she “Christianised” indigenous initiation customs.³⁹ Former medical workers, like Anneliese Dörfer, would follow von Waldow into an evangelizing assignment, considering the fact that South Africa was not willing to recognize foreign medical qualifications obtained elsewhere than in Britain. Gieseke's wife, recognizing in such “sisters' work” much of what she was under the impression she had been doing anyway, wrote to Berlin, suggesting a rethinking of the missionary wife's status as a thus far unpaid co-worker of the BM.⁴⁰ The “sisters”, as we have seen, were convinced that their approach was different and supplementary to missionaries' wives' efforts.

In 1949 a gathering of BM missionaries in the Transvaal compiled a number of resolutions. That a statement attempting to demarcate deaconesses' work was grouped together with an announcement failing to reject apartheid reconfirms the BM's patriarchal position:

37 BMW 1/9350, 1937-9: L. Gieseke, Vorträge gehalten auf der Freizeit im März 1939 in Pietersburg, Südafrika.

38 There were several variations to the model. My description here applies specifically to Anneliese Dörfer. See Pfötenhauer/ Freytag (eds.), *Zeit aus Gottes Hand* (footnote 17), pp. 9-33.

39 See K. Fiedler, *Christianity and African Culture. Conservative German Protestant Missionaries in Tanzania, 1900-1940*, Leiden, 1996 and I. Fiedler, *Wandel der Mädchenerziehung in Tansania* (footnote 4).

40 KAB: BMW 4343: 20 Mai 1950.

Apartheid: The convention passed the following resolution: Our church does not pursue earthly goals and does not permit that political teachings penetrate the church. We emphasise emphatically that our synod and church will not get involved in the politics of the government provided that nothing in the Bible obliges us to do so. [...]

From the convention comes the request to clarify the principles of Communism. [...] The participants at the convention realize the dangerous consequences of this idea for the natives. On the part of the pastors the thought was pronounced that we do not want anything to do with such a spirit but on the other hand we should not fail to notice that the church has responsibilities towards the poor. [...]

The question of the Superintendent, how the members of the convention perceived the dispatching of female missionaries in our synod, was spontaneously answered by the assembly: we do not reject female helpers but we wish that they should stay within the framework of female activities.⁴¹

In a statement compiled by Northern Transvaal BM Superintendent Martin Jäckel as late as 1955, the question whether a missionary should be sent to the mission field married or unmarried was addressed. Apparently Jäckel had compiled the statement in consultation with his fellow male missionaries. The report is significant for an understanding of the mentality at the time and is thus summarised here in some detail. Missionaries, it was said, are male and should marry – whether before or at the soonest appropriate time after arrival in South Africa. Single missionaries in remote areas, so the statement continued, face the temptation of starting relationships with black women; in urban areas, of idly spending time and money with other young men. While it was contemplated for a moment that a wife takes up a lot of time which a bachelor would otherwise have had for himself, the author reminded himself that a bachelor has to trouble himself with every ‘triviality of the household’. The implication is clear: either women or servants are supposed to do that – and wives are the more economical option. Missionaries’ daughters were considered the most appropriate kind of brides, because they could probably speak an indigenous language, and would most likely have a qualification either to nurse or to teach or they would have some experience in office work. The additional advantage was that they were already in the country and thus saved the BM the cost of relocation to South Africa.⁴²

The paper’s theorizing was indeed matched by the actual tendency of young missionaries to opt quite often for missionaries’ daughters as prospective wives – another explanation why the missionary fraternity had remained so close-knit and family-oriented: missionary daughters seemed a good choice from an affective, economic and career perspective. This was then the hegemonic order which Anneliese Dörfer entered in 1952, one in which an unmarried, aspirant missionary was deemed problematic, so much the more

41 KAB: BMW 10904 – Jäckel, 1949-1956: Niederschrift des Konvents zu Botschabelo am 17.-18. Oktober 1949.

42 KAB: BMW 8568, Jäckel, 1955: Soll der Missionar verheiratet oder unverheiratet auf das Missionsfeld gesandt werden?

if she were female. In 1953, together with two other deaconesses, Dörfer compiled a collective letter about their grievances:

*... in the report on this year's Brandenburg-Missionskonferenz in Berlin it was explicitly stated that great importance must be placed on the work of women in the mission. This women's work is foreign to many of our missionaries and is rejected by most, since the direct service of proclaiming the Gospel is the privilege of men. They have nothing against it if female missionaries are posted as nurses, or similarly, as teachers or hostel matrons. Therefore [female] teachers are welcomed at the moment because they do not strain the coffers of the Berliner Mission, but rather contribute to fill it up.*⁴³

Female assertiveness of this kind resulted in references such as the following in the correspondence of male missionaries of the BM in the Transvaal: "Yes, our 'dear' sisters! They want to have everything according to their own wishes."⁴⁴ ... and: "... the sisters create more trouble than all of the missionaries together."⁴⁵

The Deaconesses' ideal of being recognized as woman missionaries was far from being accepted in the Transvaal by the early 1950s. Willy Leue, who for years had been the missionary in charge of the station Edendale near Pretoria, as well as supervisor of the Mission's printing works and also treasurer of the Northern Transvaal Synod, had a particularly hard time understanding the principle of deaconesses' work:

*Have you already heard that Miss Lore Fricke got engaged and now wants to get married? I find that good. If only all sisters would do that, then that would be a good solution to the ever-increasing problem of the sister question.*⁴⁶

Already two years previously, Leue confided to Superintendent Martin Jäckel: "Long live the new era. It is hilarious; but we two just do not quite fit in any more".⁴⁷

It is significant to note that the "sister question" and the "new era" related to a different perception of racial hierarchies in the Transvaal. In the letter by Dörfer and her colleagues quoted above, the issue of reaching African women through women's mission work is mentioned. From the following letter, in which Leue discusses another female co-worker of the BM, one can see that the changing roles of women and black people in society were not to be debated separately. Leue held the assumption (and he felt confident that he shared it with Jäckel) that the ideals of women like Dörfer and the attainment of racial equality went hand in hand and augured problems for the established ways of the BM in South Africa:

43 KAB: BMW 3028, 1936-1981: Anneliese Dörfer, Madgalene Johst, Elisabeth Mertens – Dr. Grünwald, ca. September 1953.

44 KAB: BMW 10904: 1949-1956: W. Leue – M. Jäckel, 6 September 1954. „Ja, unsere "lieben" Schwestern! die möchten alles nach ihren eigenen Wünschen haben.“

45 KAB: BMW 10904: Jäckel – Leue, 21 Oktober 1954: „... die Schwestern machen mehr Mühe als alle Missionare zusammen.“

46 KAB: BMW 10904: W. Leue – M. Jäckel: 30 Oktober 1955.

47 KAB: BMW 10904: W. Leue – M. Jäckel, 24 Juni 1953: „Es lebe die neue Zeit, sie ist köstlich, nur wir beide passen nicht mehr so recht darin.“

*I have to say that if all sisters could be like her [Dr Lehmann] then I would also be reconciled with the sisterhood. This obsession with racial equality she will soon get rid of here, but otherwise she is game for anything.*⁴⁸

Much can be read into Leue's choice of metaphors, much that might not be substantiated. What I deduce is that a woman who was willing to act as 'one of the guys' would be one that could be absorbed into existing power structures, in which male whiteness dominated. From several of the above quotations from Leue's correspondence it becomes clear that it would be wrong to assume a unified vision among all the professional German women who came out to South Africa since the 1950s. What is significant is the way Leue marked "this obsession with racial inequality" as the one thing they had in common – and *that* was the problem. Anneliese Dörfer, for one, did not lose her obsession.

Dörfer and the Authorities

That Dörfer was one of the very few BM workers to have had a close shave with the apartheid authorities (this was, in fact, the only reason why she was written into Werner van der Merwe's history of the BM in the Transvaal⁴⁹) sets her into a category of her own. She cannot be upheld as representative of the deaconesses in general in her confrontations with the South African authorities. Nevertheless, her interaction and collaboration with other deaconesses and missionaries, as presented in the next section, sheds more light not only on her but also on her fellow BM workers' attitudes towards the South African state.

Shortly after her arrival in South Africa, Dörfer wrote to Gerhard Brennecke, Director of the BM in Berlin. From Anna von Waldow's mission station in Vendaleland, where Dörfer was supposed to gain insight into the more experienced deaconess's approach to "women's work", she reported how she and her fellow-sister had had "exciting conversations about policies towards the natives". Dörfer also reported on her observation of African resistance against the apartheid government penetrating into the deeply rural Vendaleland:

*I also found the greeting with the clenched fist and the upright thumb impressive: Kehre wieder, Afrika!*⁵⁰

48 KAB: BMW 10904, 1949-1956: W. Leue – M. Jäckel, 11 November 1953.

49 W. van der Merwe, Die Berlynse Sendinggenootskap (footnote 6), p. 151.

50 BMW 3028: A. Dörfer, Beuster – G. Brennecke, Berlin, 26 Dezember 1952. Dörfer uses the German translation of the popular African National Congress slogan „Mayibuye iAfrika“ – May Africa return / return to us our country. Dörfer already knew the slogan from Ludwig Weichert's popular book *Mayibuye i Afrika. Kehre wieder, Afrika!* It was first published in the late 1920s and Dörfer had it listed as one of the books she had lost during her repatriation from British East Africa in 1940. See KAB: BMW 3028: Liste über das im feindlichen Lande verbliebene Eigentum der Diakonisse Anneliese Dörfer, ca. April 1940.

This was underlined in red by Brennecke (or one of the other readers of the letter in the Mission House in Berlin?). An observation like this supported Brennecke's conviction that the BM in South Africa should break away from its cosy relations with the South African State.⁵¹

It was at Blaumberg, where she was sent in 1955 to stand in for another missionary on home leave, that Dörfer for the first time assumed full responsibility for a mission station and learnt to know the intrusive ways of the representatives of the apartheid state. The fact that she was a single woman living alone in a "native reserve" bothered the police. It is interesting that she did not communicate this issue to the BM in Berlin, and that the missionary society only learnt about it via her Mother House:

*We learnt from your Mother House that the police had visited you several times to impress upon you the fact that you were staying at Blaumberg at your own risk. This was all new for us to hear ... We would nevertheless have been most grateful if you had also informed us about it.*⁵²

But Dörfer had a further problem. Being of East German origin, she did not need to do much to attract the attention of the South African police in their feverish search for communists:

*They are anxious about people from communist areas around here. Fourteen days ago the police looked me up again; they have heard that I came from East Germany. They have to check such people. I tried to explain to the policemen what nonsense this was, but the one read out a document with the whole list of communist countries and amongst them was East-Germany too. I asked him if he had not heard anything about 17 June and the stream of refugees.*⁵³

The Blaumberg experience shaped Dörfer's approach to her work in South Africa in an important respect: it left her with a deep impression of just how reluctant the male leadership of the BM in the Transvaal was to confront the government. In April 1956 she was informed that the "Native Commissioner" of the region was not willing to extend her work permit in the Blaumberg "reserve" of the Hananwa community and that she had to leave the mission station by the end of May 1956. Her superintendent, Martin Jäckel, did not act to defend Dörfer's position,⁵⁴ and Treasurer Willy Leue took the opportunity to remind the BM management in Berlin that he had been opposed to the idea of female missionaries from the start, and that with Dörfer's expulsion he had been vindicated in his apprehension.:

What I wrote to you in my last letter about the placement of female missionaries in the native reserves was unexpectedly and quickly verified in that Sister A. Dörfer has to leave

51 Lehmann, *Zur Zeit und zur Unzeit III* (footnote 10), pp. 822-823.

52 KAB: BMW 3030: A. Oelke, Südafrika-Dezernat, (Ost-?)Berlin – A. Dörfer, 17 Oktober 1955.

53 KAB: BMW 3030: Aus einem Brief von Schw. Anneliese Dörfer an FrI. Taap, Januar 1956.

54 KAB: BMW 3030: A. Dörfer – Missionsinspektor, (Ost-?)Berlin, 28 April 1956; A. Dörfer, Blaumberg – A. Bühring, (Ost-?)Berlin, 3 Mai 1956, Komiteesitzung vom 7 Mai 1956.

*Blauberg in the next month by government order. As Mr Brother Jäckel wrote today, her resident permit for the Blauberg reserve will not be extended. In the coming years this will most probably also occur in other places, and we must adjust to the changed situation.*⁵⁵

He also used his letter to outline his segregationist vision of the future of South African mission work to the Committee in Berlin. He saw the path South African politics were taking as inevitable and suggested an approach that befitted the apartheid state: “missionary work for blacks by blacks under supervision and guidance of white missionaries.”⁵⁶ Opposed to Leue’s supervision model stood the deaconesses’ credo of service and the BM Committee in Berlin’s ideal of an independent African Church on equal footing with other Lutheran Churches in the world.

Faced with abandoning Blauberg, Dörfer found consolation in a letter from the Women’s Mission Bureau in Berlin. They placed hope in Dörfer’s report that the woman regent of the Hananwa in the Blauberg reserve wanted to ask the government to reconsider its decision to expel Dörfer.⁵⁷ One can imagine the Women’s Bureau’s indignation upon learning that the BM in South Africa did not support this sentiment. Rather, in anticipation of the government’s unease concerning Dörfer’s presence in the reserve, Jäckel had months before already started working on plans for her transfer. That the Women’s Mission Bureau in Berlin and the male leadership of the BM in the Northern Transvaal stood literally worlds apart as far as their views were concerned is clear from the sarcastic correspondence that followed between Leue and Jäckel.⁵⁸ The Committee in Berlin had to resolve the tiff by approving Dörfer’s transfer to Medingen,⁵⁹ the model mission station built up in the previous century by the legendary Missionary Fritz Reuter. There Dörfer would be able to serve the large and well-established African BM congregation.

This expulsion incident explains why one should not expect to find evidence of Dörfer’s awareness and understanding of (not to mention sympathy for) African political talk in her official reports to her local supervisors.⁶⁰ One learns about this from her letters to her Mother House, the Women’s Mission Bureau and men in Berlin she had known well and trusted.

African Apprehension

In July 1955 Dörfer wrote to the Mission Inspector in Berlin (she was justifying the need for the BM to approve her application for a car):

55 KAB: BMW 3029, 1934-1953: Aus einem Brief von Supt. W. Leue, Pretoria vom 21 April 56 an Supt. Oelke.

56 KAB: BMW 3029, 1934-1953: Aus einem Brief von Supt. W. Leue, Pretoria vom 21 April 56 an Supt. Oelke.

57 KAB: BMW 3029, 1934-1953: A. Bühring – A. Dörfer, 17 Mai 1956.

58 KAB: BMW 10904, 1949-1956: M. Jäckel – W. Leue, 8 Juni 1956; KAB: BMW 10904, 1949-1956: W. Leue – M. Jäckel, 11. Juni 1956.

59 KAB: BMW 3030, 1954– 1968: Komiteesitzung, 3 Juli 1956.

60 I am therefore reluctant to take such reports as representative of Dörfer’s view on the forced removal by the government of the BM congregation at Kreuzburg a few years later (1963). See Schultze, „In Gottes Namen Hütten bauen“ (footnote 7), p. 475.

We are living in serious times, and from our most recent past we know exactly what propaganda means, we also know how fast a regime which is so similar to our Hitler era will and must come to an end. I am really convinced that the time for a white person still to be heard will soon be over. Even here in remote Blaumberg one finds in the huts the inflammatory pamphlets they receive from their folks in the city. I therefore consider every day not spent in the service of our Lord Jesus as a loss.⁶¹

To Dörfer it was clear that the window for her to spread the gospel in Africa was closing. Her capacity for agency was connected to the African communities' general frustration with South African racial politics, as well as the African congregations' history of previous experience with the BM. Dörfer wished to venture away from the more familiar feminine roles; she wanted also to appropriate formerly masculine-designated responsibilities such as preaching and managing a mission station. She could therefore expect not only African gestures of respect, but also feelings of resentment and disappointment previously directed at white male missionaries, to come her way.

In March 1956 she still reported with pride that the Hananwa of Blaumberg addressed her respectfully as an old man from their own community. In the same letter she reflected with amusement on the fact the Hananwa outside the Church expected her to have a husband (perhaps even more amusing from the Africans' perspective was that they had to 'earn' their medical treatment (and good treatment it would be – Dörfer was an excellent nurse) by figuring out what was going on in the pictures of Dörfer's "flanellograph".

In the first place I work with the sick; it is difficult because acquiring medication is almost impossible due to enormous transport difficulties. Prior to the treatment I hold a sermon. I seat myself amongst them, hang up a huge biblical picture in front of us and tell them about Jesus. In the beginning I got foolish replies, because I asked questions in a foolish way. For example: "Do you know Jesus?" "No, how should we know him? Is he your husband?" When I tried to explain with the picture who Jesus is, they said, because he has so many long cloths wrapped around him: "Oh, it is a woman?" until they smilingly ascertain: "Aha, he has a beard."⁶²

However, in April 1856 Dörfer had to witness African resentment towards the BM from within its own ranks:

The teacher-in-charge Rapholo stirs up the people: "The Mission is to blame: if they had given us additional buildings, your children would still have been able to go to school here."⁶³

The mission was blamed for allowing the government to determine that the mission school on the Blaumberg station could no longer teach the final year of primary education

61 KAB: BMW 3030: A. Dörfer, Blaumberg – Missionsinspektor, (Ost-?)Berlin, 18 Juli 1955.

62 KAB: BMW 3029, 1934-1953: A. Dörfer – Berlin, 29 März 1956 (Nur für die Hand des geschlossenen Mitarbeiterkreises und zur Vorlesung in kirchlichen Veranstaltungen, nicht zum Vertrieb in den Gemeinden!).

63 KAB: BMW 3030: A. Dörfer – Missionsinspektor, (Ost-?)Berlin, 9 April 1956.

– due to alleged lack of space in the existing facilities. In the way Dörfer reported this to the Inspector in Berlin, she seems to have shared the resentment, but she also had to admit her own inability to change the situation or the local community's attitude. The Inspector in Berlin was a bit astounded, but grateful, when Dörfer also bluntly sketched the situation on this mission station after almost a century's work by the BM. It would have been somewhat harder for a missionary who had spent several years with his family on such a mission station to admit defeat so openly:

When I take a look at our work of almost ninety years I ask myself what we have accomplished. Excellent Missionaries have worked here, but now we are being ridiculed that our work is going backwards instead of forwards, and that is true. No one worries about the Evangelists, they do whatever they want – in other words, they do nothing. [...] The Evangelist Moremi goes to his station very seldom, and if I ask him to explain it, he tells me that there is a very good prayer woman who leads the services, because after all no men ever came! I have already been here for one year and in this year the church council only met once. We go into raptures about preaching to the heathen while we do not have anyone who can take care of them.⁶⁴

Of the many things that can be read into this quotation, three have immediate relevance: Blaumberg in the mid-1950s was a fine example of the alienation between the BM and their congregations to which Pakendorf alludes in his article; gender relations within the African congregation itself seemed close to a breakdown; and the women who still wished to continue with their worship in the Lutheran way were getting on with it without the need of help from a white missionary – male or female. What Dörfer was useful for on Blaumberg mission station (until the government removed her) was to provide for the medical needs of the Hananwa – clandestinely, because the South African government did not recognise medical qualifications obtained in Germany, and with medicine donated from West Germany.⁶⁵ When she eventually did return to Blaumberg for evangelising among the Hananwa women, it would be as a visitor in the company of Carolina Mofya, the leading local Christian woman.⁶⁶

White Wives Making Space for a New Kind of Agent

Dörfer's transfer to Medingen in July 1956, at the time when relations between the Women's Bureau and the South African BM leadership were at such a low point, was successful, to a large extent because it could be facilitated by a missionary wife, who

64 KAB: BMW 3030, A. Dörfer, Blaumberg – Missionsinspektor, (Ost-?) Berlin, 9 April 1956.

65 KAB: BMW 3030: Anruf von Frau Oberin Elizabeth Kette, Mutterhaus Salem, 5.10.55: Salem möchte Schw. Annelise gern mit Medikamenten helfen – durch das Krankenhaus in Holzminden – und möchte dazu auch die zollfreie Einfuhrgenehmigung in Anspruch nehmen.

66 KAB: BMW 3029: Aus der Juni-Nummer der "Glaubensgrüße" aus dem Diakonissenmutterhaus Salem, Berlin-Lichtenrade: Ein Brief aus Afrika von Schwester Anneliese Dörfer: (als sie die Nachricht von Heimgang der Oberin ihres Mutterhauses erhalten hatte).

had also been a missionary daughter. In 1905 Wilhelm Krause had arrived on the mission station as Reuter's assistant, in 1906 he had married Reuter's daughter, Maria, and together the two of them ran the mission station until Krause's death in 1966.⁶⁷ Sister Krause accommodated not only Anneliese Dörfer, but also Anna von Waldow, who had in the meantime been retired rather gracelessly from 'her' station in Vendaland.

The way of women turned out to be the way of compromise, of innovating from within the stereotypical mould. In this, they seem to have had the support of Medingen's white men, Missionaries Wilhelm Krause and Renning Hagens.⁶⁸ However, in this instance the initiative was taken in the domestic domain, and Hagens' actions were actually restricted to grateful observation and reportage to Berlin. Mrs Krause was using her position as the 'typical' missionary wife to create a space for the 'new' missionary women. Note how, regardless of the fact that the construction work had in all probability been physically performed by male African labourers, Hagens ascribes the actions to Mrs Krause itself, because they were her initiative, in her sphere of responsibility:

Last Sunday (7.10.) I was in Medingen and saw that Mrs Krause had already erected a kitchen for the sisters. [...] She divided the building with a partition so that the sisters can use the second room as a bathroom. Mrs Krause also erected a veranda in front of the 'Rondavel', which the sisters can also use. Everything is well thought through and made with love.⁶⁹

And Anneliese Dörfer was grateful too:

30.11.56

Since Wednesday I am in Medingen and am surrounded with so much love that I can scarcely handle it. At other times it was so different. You would not believe the beautiful way in which the Krauses have prepared my home. They thought of everything, it became a piece of heaven just like Medingen is anyway, but what they did for me is so much and so nice that I would have liked you to be able to see it too. Is there any other person on earth that has things as good as me?

The blacks, the way I got to know them, are also different from those in the other areas. Only the language will give me problems: it is Kilobedu and often very different from Sesotho. That means lots of hard work, but Mrs Krause and her sisters are helping so caringly...⁷⁰

At last Dörfer was provided a space within which she could pursue the "women's work" she was so eager to do. But as we have seen at Blauberg, her agency only had effect where

67 Zöllner/ Heese, Die Berlyne Sendelinge in Suid-Afrika (footnote 6), pp. 216-217.

68 Missionary Hagens only arrived in South Africa in the 1930s. After the Second World War he worked in Germany for some time before returning to South Africa with his wife and family. See Zöllner/Heese, Die Berlyne Sendelinge in Suid-Afrika (footnote 6), pp. 145-146.

69 KAB: BMW 3029, 1934-1953: Aus einem Privatbrief von Missionar R. Hagens, Duivelskloof, vom 10. Oktober 1956 an Supt. Oelke.

70 KAB: BMW 3030, 1954-1968: Aus einem Brief von Schw. Anneliese Dörfer aus Medingen, 30. November 1956.

indigenous communities had been receptive to it. And that was mostly where African men did not feel threatened by her presence and African women identified with her in an environment where African men were largely absent. This disrupted state of affairs could not all be blamed on the BM; but sending more agents resembling the image of former patriarchy into a situation that had been “allowed” to develop by previous patriarchs was not likely to improve relations. The question now arose: given the limitations in which Dörfer’s work in the Transvaal was initiated, to what extent could she or the other deaconesses help redress the damage done to relations within the BM and its congregations brought about by a paternalist tradition?

What a Woman Like Dörfer Could Do

There were indeed things Dörfer could do that missionaries’ wives were less likely to do. Especially if they were South African, their inclination for taking risks would have been smaller. Unlike the German deaconesses, such women had no safety net in the possibility of repatriation to Germany, should they be caught frequenting and staying over in “black areas”, as Anneliese Dörfer often did.⁷¹ Furthermore, specifically while occupied with raising their children, missionary wives would have had to brave social pariah status if they were to venture too far away from the accepted white South African assumptions about ‘dealing’ with blacks as inferiors who belonged in their own place. Had the white South African BM community felt differently, it might have been easier, but there were many influential missionaries who prided themselves upon the fact that significant aspects of BM thinking about educating Africans were adopted by the apartheid government.⁷²

Although in the last decade of her work in South Africa Dörfer no longer worked under old-school missionaries like Jäckel and Leue, she never became quite comfortable with the male leadership of the BM in South Africa.⁷³ The forced removal of two successive congregations amongst whom she had worked was a bitter pill for her to swallow, and could not be explained away easily. In the face of her own inability to turn the tide – of history, and the BM’s own history of ‘elected affinities’ – she continued to hold the white male missionaries of the BM in South Africa responsible:

The grief of my Kreuzburg people really struck me. Brother Johannsmeier wrote that he had visited them, that they are collected and calm. So they’ve always been. What does a

71 KAB: BMW 3029: Aus der Juni-Nummer der “Glaubensgrüße” aus dem Diakonissenmutterhaus Salem, Berlin-Lichtenrade: Ein Brief aus Afrika von Schwester Anneliese Dörfer: (als sie die Nachricht von Heimgang der Oberin ihres Mutterhauses erhalten hatte). Also see: KAB: BMW 3030: A. Dörfer – J. Zimmermann, Ost-Berlin, 4. Oktober 1966 & Komiteesitzung vom 8. März 1960: Komitee stimmt den von der Auto-Kommission beschlossenen Erhöhungen der Meilzahl für die Dienstfahrten folgender Mitarbeiter zu: Schwester Anneliese Dörfer auf 6.000 Meilen. In the 1960s Dörfer used her mission station as ‘base’, from where she toured for weeks to visit the various small congregations in “black” areas.

72 Van der Merwe, Die Berlyne Sendinggenootskap (footnote 6), p. 114.

73 KAB: BMW 3030: A. Dörfer, Kreuzburg – J. Zimmermann, Ost-Berlin, 6 Mai 1965.

*man who is overworked and proud of his diary full of appointments know about the suffering of disease, hunger and homelessness?*⁷⁴

She felt that the Mission could have acted more forcefully and stood up more strongly against the government. Just before the date scheduled for the Kreuzburg resettlement she already wrote:

What they have planned for our people of the mission is far worse than what awaits Botschabelo. They do not get houses but miserable corrugated iron huts. The land on which they are placed is so poor and small that they cannot plant the smallest thing; at the same time Africa is so, so big and has many huge pieces of land that one could not even imagine in Germany, on which people could settle; they are punished by not getting any land they could cultivate, because they live at the mission station and pay the mission for this. There is also no work, which means they are at the mercy of starvation. "Is that not very Christian!!!!!!?" [...]

Well, we have drawn up a petition and I will take two men to Pretoria, where Missionary Schultz will then go with them to the government; but our Missionaries are so soft!!⁷⁵

At this stage Dörfer was reaching retirement age. Her health was also deteriorating. She started making preparations to return to her Mother House in Germany. The decision was concluded when she was severely injured in a car accident in 1967.⁷⁶ If not embittered, she was extremely frustrated by this time: frustrated that more forceful action could not have been taken, perturbed by the limitations to her own agency: her age, her gender and her whiteness. She was also not comfortable with many of the directions taken by the new African leadership of the church – perhaps a sign that Dörfer, at that irritable point, was disgruntled with everything. Almost comical is the way her scepticism with new ways of doing things echoes the way her own arrival on the scene a decade and a half previously had unsettled the “old guard” white missionaries. Her comments nevertheless give us a glimpse of the ways the new church hovered towards, and then again shied away from the paternalist practices of their German founding fathers:

When we compiled the new rules, the wish was loudly expressed by the Africans that they no longer wanted to be ruled by the pastors' wives and that the leadership could just as well befall any other woman. They have also properly brought this to the vote, but in my opinion this is no happy solution, because through the position of her husband the pastor's wife is involved with the members of the congregation in a completely different way than some young woman teacher who can perhaps write a report – even on a typewriter – but has absolutely no spiritual foundation. The suggestions are coming in from all sides now,

74 KAB: BMW 3030, A. Dörfer, Krankenhaus Holzminden – J. Zimmermann, Missionshaus, Ost-Berlin, 18. Juli 1967. When considering that Johannsmeier on several occasions went out of his way to defend the importance of Deaconesses' work, he of all people was perhaps the most undeserving of Dörfer's frustrated naming and blaming.

75 KAB: BMW 3030, 1954 – 1968: A. Dörfer – J. Zimmermann, Ost-Berlin, Ostern, 10 April 1966.

76 KAB: BMW 3030: Komiteesitzung vom 18. April 1867.

*and we should get together and examine them all again. This is how it goes with rules, which the Africans love so much and which I detest.*⁷⁷

It was perhaps time for Anneliese Dörfer to retire. After she witnessed the forced removal of a second congregation she had worked in, there was not much endurance left in her. Whereas back in 1957 Alice Bühring of the Women's Mission Bureau could still console her with the following words:

*Can you still win the trust of the women even under so much tension? I think that especially in such heated political times it is a gift that a woman can find her way to other women despite all. And there a lot of good can be done if the heart is allowed to talk*⁷⁸

... in 1966 Dörfer wrote to Jutta Zimmermann, chair of the Women's Mission Bureau in East Berlin:

*Maybe you will now reply to that [the forced removal of the Kreuzburg congregation] in a different way and talk about suffering, enduring, etc. etc. Please do not do that, dear Sister Zimmermann, you would not get anywhere.*⁷⁹

Who knows what Anneliese Dörfer felt like in the newly-built retirement facility of her Mother House in Bad Gandersheim in West Germany? Did the letters she received from her African co-workers, whom the fellow-inhabitants of the Mother House also knew from Anneliese's reportage about them over the years, cheer her up, or would it just remind her of work incomplete?

The biggest irony of the BM's work in South African in the 1950s and 1960s is that its missionaries had to salvage the "growing alienation" between their society and its Christian converts in order to grant these Christians their independence. Trans-racial relationships had to be re-built in order to facilitate white withdrawal, so that the BM's church in South Africa could become black. On the one hand the deaconesses' work within the BM represented a moment of trans-racial solidarity in defiance of the apartheid state's attempt to categorise people as races and to separate all their activities accordingly. On the other hand, the movement of the time was towards African independence, and in order to challenge the apartheid state in its refusal to grant that to black South Africans in the greater political arena, the BM at least had to grant it to the church they had founded in South Africa. Dörfer could not help commenting on this with some nostalgia:

*I think the mission era has already long passed. Director Brennecke has steered towards its end; of course he too still knew the old times.*⁸⁰

But there is something contradictory about white missionaries getting more involved

77 KAB: BMW 3030: A. Dörfer – J. Zimmermann, Ost-Berlin, 4 Oktober 1966.

78 KAB: BMW 3029, 1934–1953: Frauenmission, Berlin – A. Dörfer, 6 November 1957.

79 KAB: BMW 3030, 1954–1968: A. Dörfer –J. Zimmermann, Ost-Berlin, Ostern, 10 April 1966.

80 KAB: BMW 3030: A. Dörfer, Bad Gandersheim – J. Zimmermann, Ost-Berlin, 23 Juni 1968.

in African people's lives – their hardship and their joy – in order to enable their own organization to withdraw “gracefully”. It did not go undetected by the African women in their farewells to Anna von Waldow a few years earlier. Dörfer herself had these farewell messages translated into German. What follows is my English translation:

Judith Masekela (*pastor's wife*): ... *This is the matter. Today we woman cry the way widows used to cry. Because our Mother leaves us ...*

Emely (*teacher's wife*): ... *God has seen the poverty of our station; therefore he gave us the sister. That was joy. But today he takes her away again. When she goes, she should not forget: I have left people who are very, very sad. May she pray for us, for our hearts are very sore ...*

An elderly woman: ... *Now she goes. May she go in peace. See, however, that we stay without consolation ...*⁸¹

Now Dörfer had to face similar emotions in the letters former members of her congregation sent her in Bad Gandersheim:

*Hearty greetings to you, our sister. We are alive with the help of the Lord. When I came home, to Kreuzburg, I found that you, our sister, have already left us. It killed my heart that I couldn't find you any more. My other grief was that my house had already been demolished. Truly, Sister, this was a great grief for me.*⁸²

81 KAB: BMW 4342: Tsililo tshihulu (das große Weinen). Wörter schwarzer Christen zum Abschied von Schwester Anna von Waldow. Übersetzt von Schwester Eva-Marie Strümpfel.

82 BMW 3030: C. Makwela – A. Dörfer, Bad Gandersheim, 14 August 1967. Andrea Schultze quoted extracts from this letter as she found it translated in the Station file for the Kreuzburg Mission Station (1939-1967) in the BMW archives. To her the document was of exceptional value as the only contemporaneous evidence she could find on how this congregation experienced their forced removal. Regrettably, the original Sotho letter seems to have been lost. Schultze, „In Gottes Namen Hütten bauen“ (footnote 7), p. 475.