CHAPTER TWO

From Slaves to Christian Mothers

Developing a Doctrine of Female Evangelism, 1863–1877

When the HMS Wasp docked in the late Seychellois spring of 1865, the young Kate Kadamweli was among the nine girls who disembarked into the waiting arms of the UMCA’s new British lady missionaries. Kate’s disembarkation from the Wasp was the start of fifty-three years as a congregant with the UMCA, during which time she worked as an assistant teacher, trained as a nurse and tended to patients in the mission’s hospital at Mkunazini, married, bore children, and mentored countless inquirers. Over her long career with the mission, Kate turned to the church to weather abandonment by her husband (also one of the mission’s first African adherents) and the death of a daughter. Her faithfulness through trial inspired the authors of mission sources, who counted her as one of the mission’s stalwarts and featured her time and again in UMCA publications and propaganda. Missionaries celebrated her “nice, modest, staid behavior,” and congregants remembered her as “the dearest woman that ever was.”

When Kate arrived at the Seychelles, however, the achievements by which she would be remembered were still years in the future; in June of 1865 missionaries simply saw her as one among a group of “tiny young things” lined up on the deck of Her Majesty’s Ship, awaiting redemption from a host of social, spiritual, and physical ills. Steeped in the rhetoric of nineteenth-century abolitionism, the missionaries
who met Kate and her eight female companions at the HMS Wasp identified that day in June 1865 as their “liberation” from slavery. Not only were the girls being physically and legally emancipated, the missionaries exulted, but they would also now be free to escape the more esoteric cruelties and degradations that slavery entailed. Chief among these was the spiritual ignorance in which slaves lived. Free from the grips of heathenism—or worse, Islam—Kate and her companions could serve God according to their own judgment and win souls for Christ.²
Whether she had been enslaved for one month or several years, the moment of Kate’s “liberation” probably passed her and her fellow refugees unnoticed. As a young girl from the mainland, Kate would have been wholly unfamiliar with the rhetoric of abolitionism, redemption, and liberation with which the missionaries approached their work, and could not have imagined such lofty implications in her physical transfer from an Arab dhow to a British ship that June day. The concept of an autonomous individual, free to choose in such black and white terms between salvation and damnation, was not something that Kate would have had the cultural vocabulary to understand. Rather, the East African system of patronage and dependency—the lens through which Kate would have seen her situation—is usefully imagined in terms of relative degrees, rather than in the stark terms of black and white so often associated with the plantation economy of the American South.³ It is not likely that slaves whom missionaries “redeemed” in mid-nineteenth-century East Africa understood themselves as having secured any sort of “freedom.” Instead, Kate would have seen her arrival at the Seychelles in a much more practical and mundane manner—as a transfer from one master to another.

The circumstances unique to East African women in the mid- to late-nineteenth century shaped how Kate engaged with her new masters. In much of precolonial Africa, women were in legal terms perpetual dependents. A woman’s relationship to male kin, such as a husband, uncle, brother, or father, secured her status within a community. Without such rights, women lacked access to, and representation in, judicial processes and were highly susceptible to transfer, forced marriage, pawnship, enslavement, or other forms of exchange.⁴ Women were also relatively easy to assimilate into domestic society through these same processes. The instability of the late nineteenth century left women even more vulnerable to transfer and enslavement than normal, and women quickly outnumbered men in the slave trade. When met with such extreme vulnerability, women did what their social standing demanded they do, which was to construe relationships as familial, to impute kinship, or to forge relationships that drew them into closer personal relationships with known protectors. And by 1865, missionaries were well known as powerful patrons and protectors in whom Africans imagined pathways toward alternative networks of support and valuable opportunities to create a range of new kinship ties—both real and imagined. Kate, then, would have seen these new masters as potential avenues to form a range of familial and kinship relationships, perhaps with the missionaries themselves or with other congregants of the mission.
The predisposition of East African women to forge familial relationships and to impute kinship ties dovetailed in many ways with the expectations of British missionaries. The mission's Tractarian ideology and related desire to hire only single British ladies with no children of their own led to a tendency among the UMCA's female workers to also approach their work through the idiom of kinship and family. These familial relationships and the (real and fictive) kinship ties that bound missionaries to adherents, and adherents to each other, came to constitute the heart of the UMCA's affective spiritual community. Yet, the missionaries did not fully understand the extent to which their new adherents’ vulnerability shaped their relationships and the particular ways they invested in the UMCA community. The lack of overt conflict between the missionaries’ assumptions and the refugees’ expectations masked the subtle yet significant difference between them—a difference that would shape in unforeseeable ways the nature of the mission and its work, wresting control away from the missionaries in ways they could not have envisaged.

We Must “Decline Any More Single Women”

Although there were only nine girls in Kate’s cohort from the HMS Wasp, their numbers grew quickly over the UMCA's first decade. By 1873, ten years after Kate and her shipmates were incorporated into the mission, the UMCA stations at Zanzibar boasted thirty-two women on the rolls. By 1875 the population of female scholars alone had more than doubled to fifty-nine, not including women too young or old to attend school. The girls’ school, the bishop noted, was increasing “in even a larger proportion than that for boys.” The numbers overwhelmed the new Bishop Steere to such an extent that he knew “not how to turn.”

The influx of arrivals to the mission in the early 1870s—what missionaries would soon characterize as a crisis—can be explained in several ways. Perhaps the most immediate reason was an 1871 agreement between the mission and British consul Dr. John Kirk. Administrators had long harbored hope that Kirk’s relationship with UMCA founders and workers, as well as his Anglican faith, would help grease the bureaucratic wheels in their search for adherents. Late in 1871, Kirk flexed his diplomatic muscles and secured a series of informal agreements that granted the UMCA first right of selection on all the children freed at Zanzibar, the Seychelles, and Aden. While exclusive access to the orphans and other children liberated under
Kirk's domain virtually guaranteed the mission a steady stream of recruits, Kirk's offer came with a problematic caveat. Struggling to find homes for adult *mateka* (“captives” or “booty,” i.e., slaves), Kirk granted the mission exclusive access to orphans and other freed children *only if* the mission would also accept adults. In a letter to the bishop of Winchester, Kirk revealed the political calculations behind this offer. He suspected Tozer would feel that while adults were not the mission's intended audience, they would nonetheless be an advantage because they could provide labor on the mission's estates. The prospect of a permanent work force might be enough to convince Tozer to “accept a few of an older clap than he has hitherto admitted.” Were this true, it would only reinforce the similarities between slave owners and missionaries in the minds of redeemed Africans.

The second factor that caused an uptick in arrivals to the mission was an 1873 anti-slave-trading agreement. Britain finally succeeded in pressuring the sultan of Zanzibar to legally abolish all slave shipments by sea that year. While the seagoing trade in slaves may have been illegal, it was not illegal to hold or employ slaves. In 1873, the British consul general John Kirk tried to persuade the sultan's governors (sing. *liwali*, pl. *maliwali*) in the slaveholding areas of the mainland of the benefits of enforcing the sultan's 1873 treaty. Kirk argued that trading entrepreneurs on the mainland might benefit from putting slaves to work performing “continuous labor” on their own estates. And put them to work they did; Arab settlers, Swahili-speaking townsmen, and their non-Muslim neighbors employed slaves to cultivate local plantations in record numbers. This was the local impact of the broader economic and abolitionist processes described in the previous chapter, which had the ironic result of naturalizing slavery in East Africa. Further, authorities implemented the 1873 decree slowly and incrementally; both smuggling and overland trade to coastal ports continued to flourish for many years. This process of the legal but not practical abolition of slavery exacerbated tensions within the coastal slave system that had grown up over the nineteenth century, resulting in the intensification of political and military conflict on the coast. Slaves rebelled, such as in July 1873 when slaves on the Pangani River took up arms and left their masters en masse. Others escaped, rates of which rose with the intensity of disputes. Other *watoro* (“people who run away”) sought succor with patrons deemed (for whatever reason) to be preferable, or shifted locations in search of different masters. Increasingly after the 1860s, the range of new patrons available to *watoro* or other unattached slaves included missionaries.

The UMCA was not the only organization to benefit from the treaties; diplomatic machinations surrounding the 1873 decree allowed other evangelical organizations...
along the coast to collect enough followers to launch viable missions in the region. For the Church Missionary Society mission in Kenya, the 1873 diplomatic mission of Sir Bartle Frere altered the course of what had been an unsuccessful campaign up to that point. In relative terms the UMCA incorporated far fewer *watoro* than their CMS counterparts in Mombasa, who frequently found themselves at odds with local *waliwali* over the fate of *watoro* and other maroons who made their way to the Rabai and Freretown settlements.

When presented with Kirk’s proposal, the missionaries were ambivalent. Gone would be the days when missionaries could make their way slowly among periodic gifts from the sultan, masters, and other residents, as well as individual *watoro* (runaways), *mateka* (captive slaves), and local slaves. They would be forced to accommodate adults, whose very presence at the mission would introduce what the missionaries considered to be serious theological and practical issues. Would the distractions that attended adult Africans outweigh the advantages of a virtual corner on the market of refugee children? they wondered. Adults were challenging cases, raised without Christ and influenced for too many years by the heathen customs of the interior. Adults also had “indefinite powers of addition,” which caused practical theological problems. Space was limited, and the adult adherents were as yet imperfect Christian parents. Despite their discomfort with admitting adults, first right of selection of liberated children proved too enticing for the missionaries to pass up. The mission accepted Kirk’s proposal and begrudgingly welcomed all *mateka*, both young and old, into the mission. This would prove to be a much larger concession than they had imagined at the time, however, for although missionaries predicted in 1878 that the slave trade was “practically at an end,” *mateka* and *watoro* would continue to arrive at the mission for more than thirty years to come.

The third factor that accounts for the influx of refugees to the mission in the early 1870s—and accounts in particular for the disproportionate number of women on the mission’s rolls—was the gendered dynamics of slaving. In general terms, single female refugees like Kate and her eight female companions on the *Wasp* constituted a majority of the Indian Ocean slave traffic. This was true for two reasons. First, in most African societies, single, widowed, or otherwise dependent women were most vulnerable to enslavement because they lacked a husband, brother, uncle, or father to represent them in any number of local judicial processes. Second, in the profit-driven wars and raids that were increasingly common in the late nineteenth century, women and children were generally captured and men
were killed, fates that reflected the ease with which women and children could be absorbed into a lineage or community. Female slaves from local plantations also sought patronage with the UMCA in relatively large numbers, increasing even further the number of women and girls for whom the mission was responsible. All of this suggests that the gender balance of the day of Kate’s adoption—nine girls and five boys—and of the overcrowded situation at the mission’s Zanzibar stations of Shangani and Mkunazini, was less a reflection of mission policy or priorities than of broader trends in nineteenth-century Indian Ocean slaving. In fact, so entrenched were these trends that the gender disparity would continue to shape the mission for years to come. In 1877, for example, one mission worker reported that he was in charge of “fifty more women than men” at Mbweni and that, therefore, he must “decline [to accept] any more single women” from the consulate.

Kate and Fayida

While Kate Kadamweli eventually came to symbolize for the missionaries and the UMCA propaganda machine the archetypal adherent, the story of her arrival at and incorporation into the mission is far more mundane. In fact, Kate’s story and that of a young woman named Fayida mirror the arrival and incorporation stories of countless other female refugees and personify the broader trends that led to a gender imbalance at the mission. Told here, their stories offer two important insights pertinent to the development of the UMCA’s affective spiritual community. First, their stories illustrate the process by which women in the first cohorts of UMCA adherents arrived at the mission. Kate and Fayida’s journeys to Zanzibar illustrate how many others like them ended up at the mission’s doors seeking succor, and the social structures and realities governing their lives, their understanding of the world around them, and their perceptions of the choices and decisions in front of them. Second, the context of the social systems and realities that governed the lives of Kate, Fayida, and others among the first cohorts of female adherents of the UMCA sheds light on the interior lives and expectations of the UMCA’s female adherents. We see that the UMCA’s British lady missionaries did not understand, and the mission sources misrepresented, much about their charges and the ways in which they approached their incorporation into, and lives within, the mission—these misunderstandings would fundamentally alter the nature of the mission’s work with women.
Kate arrived at the Seychelles a young girl about whom we know very little. Kate's given name and her date of birth, for example, are lost to history. While we may never know what she was called by family and friends, it is not likely that Kate was actually the “tiny baby thing” Ms. Tozer and Ms. Jones recalled selecting from the group of children who disembarked from the Arab slave ship. Infants and toddlers were sometimes carried to the mission by their mothers, but Kate’s mother seems not to have been with her at the Seychelles. It is far more likely that Kate made the journey from the interior to the coast by foot, walking under her own power. To do so, she would have been older than a “baby” and closer to the age of a young girl—perhaps seven or eight, or even an early adolescent. Malnourishment, tattered clothing, fear, and the painful subjugation of the previous months or years, however, may have made Kate appear younger than she actually was. Further, the paternalism inherent in the British “civilizing” mission presumed a childlike status of all East Africans. Ms. Tozer and Ms. Jones were likely falling back on an old trope, rather than reporting reality, when describing their newest charges.

Kate probably shared with her thirteen redeemed shipmates and congregants on the island several other characteristics, most notably their likely mainland birth. In the 1860s Zanzibar received large numbers of slaves from throughout eastern and central Africa, some of whom remained on the mainland to work for masters there, or became slaves on plantations on Zanzibar, Pemba, or other plantation islands in the Indian Ocean. An increasingly large percentage of the luxury trade into and out of Zanzibar during the nineteenth century consisted of slaves like Kate and the others rescued by sailors on the Wasp. Slaves were so valuable as status markers, historian Jeremy Prestholdt has argued, that “as much as Zanzibaris valued imported manufactures, they wanted imported people more.” Thus by the height of East Africa’s nineteenth-century economic boom, human beings had become Zanzibaris’ most highly valued and sought-after commodity. In the 1850s—fourteen years before the arrival of the UMCA—between ten and fifteen thousand slaves passed through Zanzibari ports every year.

It is impossible to say for sure whence on the mainland Kate came to Zanzibar, but the history of the slave frontier can offer a hint. By the 1850s the coastal Muslims who sourced many of the slaves that came through Zanzibar had established a permanent trade center at Tabora, and Unyamwezi became the traders’ inland base. Caravan routes stemmed north into the interlacustrine kingdoms and west into the Zaire basin. By this time, the ivory frontier had receded, drawing traders further into the interior. These central routes brought ivory and slaves from places
such as Kigoma, along the lake border with what is today Democratic Republic of the Congo, or even from the DRC itself, as well as from Rwanda or Burundi, or near Mwanza, Musoma, or into Uganda. Given the demographics of the trade at the time Kate arrived at the mission, it is likely she made her way from one of these areas to the coast as a member of a slave caravan.24

Kate did not record a “redemption” story, but many other young women did. To be sure, even if a personalized account of Kate’s journey did exist, gathering any “truth” from that record would have been a fraught endeavor. Recorded, translated, and published by missionaries, “receptive” stories present particular challenges to the scholar looking for “accurate” or “factual” accounts of the lives of refugees. Certain narrative conventions operate in accounts of slaves’ lives as told by missionaries. Given that such accounts often served as fund-raising propaganda, and that missionary amanuenses heavily edited them, myriad alternative narrative outcomes are contained within and behind the stories that were eventually recorded. Indeed, the very act of seeking to “contain the ‘native voice’” had the paradoxical effect of inscribing “a record of its presence and even its actual operation in the voices and narrative strategies of the texts themselves.”25 Although it is possible to argue that the voices of African congregants have been lost entirely in these “ventriloquized texts,” when read against the grain these narratives can and do reveal some of the only traces of the otherwise-silenced voices of mission adherents. Other scholars working with recaptive life stories come to similar conclusions.26

The story of one Fayida (meaning “profit” in Kiswahili) sheds light on what Kate, and many of their fellow congregants, were likely to have experienced. Fayida related her own “redemption” story to mission workers in 1897, decades after both she and Kate arrived at the mission. When Fayida was young, perhaps an age similar to Kate, she lived in what was likely southeast Tanzania. The persistent insecurity from escalating slaving wars had already disrupted her family; her mother was missing—either dead or captured—and her father worked some distance from home. Fayida lived in the village with her sister and two remaining brothers. One day the small family heard rumors that a group of ethnic Magwangwara was headed toward the village, gathering captives to sell into slavery. The siblings spread scattershot through the open country surrounding their home, Fayida and her brother doing their best to hide. Unsuccessful, the pair was captured and joined a number of other men, women, and children in the caravan. Fayida, her brother, and their fellow captives walked for many days. Exhausted, she attempted to hide in a thick forest and escape, but caravan leaders spotted her and recaptured her. At the
coast, the captors locked Fayida and the other children in a big stone prison house, where they bunked down in a shed on the roof. Here Fayida was separated from her brother—he was sold and never seen again. Fayida apparently remained behind, watching the comings and goings of other captives around her. Her captors were “horribly wicked,” she recalled years later, and the remaining slaves “lived in misery and deadly fear.”

One night, under cover of darkness, their abductors ushered Fayida and her fellow captive Panya—also soon to be a UMCA adherent—onto a waiting dhow. There they spent several miserable days at sea—wet, sick, and hungry. Spotted by a British Navy cruiser, the dhow was stopped and its crew apprehended. With promises of food from the soldiers, the children bedded down along the water’s edge and boarded the British ships in the light of day. Once on Zanzibar, the remaining slaves were held at the consulate until missionaries adopted them. Kate’s experience was likely very similar.

It is unlikely that Fayida and Kate understood their reception by the UMCA missionaries in the same way that the missionaries did, as the moment they gained their “freedom” or “liberation.” Kate likely approached her “saviors” with, at best, the casual indifference of someone already familiar with the experience of being traded from one master to another several times in her short life. More likely, Kate and her shipmates responded to this move with fear and trepidation. The missionaries themselves even noted their new charges’ sense of foreboding. They crouched on the deck “with no clothing save the narrowest possible strip of calico round their middles,” recalled one onlooker in the sensational manner typical of mission sources, “with their hands clasped round their necks, looking up into your face with an expression of utter apprehension that something much more dreadful than even they had experienced, would surely come upon them, now that they had fallen into the hands of the dreaded white man.”

Further, Kate’s existence among the British missionaries after her “liberation” would have offered few hints that her life had changed in any substantive way. Unable to communicate in either English, Kiswahili, or Kate’s mother tongue, the missionaries would have packed Kate into the new ship bound from the Seychelles for Zanzibar without her consent. Soon after landing in Zanzibar, Kate would have been stripped of her old clothes and of her old name, signaling the birth of a new identity. Her new patrons would also require that she join the other African adherents in performing agricultural, manual, and domestic labor. Between these duties and the toll of the church bell for five-times-daily prayer, her days would have been highly regulated—just like those of coastal slaves. Marooned in this
new environment, Kate and her fellow adherents would have done what any slave would do: rely entirely on the missionaries for shelter, protection, clothing, and sustenance. It is easy to imagine how in this context, the refugees’ expectations of the UMCA missionaries would have been little different from their expectations of their previous masters. The term *watumwa wa balozi* (“slaves of the [British] consul”) or *watumwa wa wangereza* (“slaves of the British”) were colloquialisms that local Zanzibaris used to refer to *mateka* (captives) who lived on Zanzibar’s mission stations, and their use in the late nineteenth century suggests that slave masters and missionaries were less distinguishable in the minds of Africans than either masters or missionaries would have liked to imagine.31

On that June day in 1865, however, Kate would have known nothing about the life that awaited her at Shangani. She would only have known what was immediately true, which was that she had recently been wrenched from her natal home, forced to walk great distances with little food, perhaps sharing in the burden of an ivory tusk, with people she did not know and who did not treat her especially well. She was now, apparently, under the guardianship of a new master, one with whom she did not share a language or the cultural repertoire to understand her new situation. Kate might have considered herself relatively lucky to have fallen at the doorstep of the Anglican mission, for the missionaries’ offers of food, clean clothes, and other forms of protection suggested they were powerful patrons, and Kate may have heard rumors that missionaries were actively recruiting low-status clients. Some captives might have also understood that the missionaries represented new status hierarchies and avenues to access new forms of power emerging throughout East Africa in the latter half of the nineteenth century.32 After all of this, she was very likely hungry, tired, and afraid.

Kate’s uprooting, a tumultuous and lonely journey to the coast, and her likely confusion about the missionaries’ intentions are important not only for understanding how East Africans came to be members of the UMCA mission community, but also for understanding the particular gendered experiences of female refugees incorporated into the mission in its first few decades. Kate, as we have seen, likely did not understand her arrival as a moment of “liberation.” Rather, the ideology of paternalism that circulated in nineteenth-century coastal society—and which was similar to that of governing communities further to the interior—was in fact much more ambiguous. People called *mtumwa* or “slave” were in actuality one of several categories of subordinated client. The line between slave and free was really only distinct in the minds of society’s most dominant members—slave masters and
missionaries. And wherever that line lay in actuality, it was the result of struggle and remained in flux. Indeed, a slave “rarely rejected the language of clientele altogether but continued to search for a preferred patron-master.” Coastal dependents did not imagine their lives in terms of “freedom” or “unfreedom,” but they sought instead to negotiate the best relationship of dependency possible.

For single women and girls, negotiating the best relationship of dependency possible often meant construing relationships as familial or imputing kinship. Again, despite localized variations in social practice, women in precolonial African societies were generally considered perpetual dependents. Without a husband, uncle, brother, or father accompanying her, a female refugee such as Kate or Fayida or countless other women whom the UMCA intercepted lacked access to the judicial process and to the legal and physical protections that relationships with a male kin would have provided her. When met with such vulnerability, women tended to construe relationships as familial, or to forge new relationships through the exchange of bridewealth, pawnship, or other forms of rights in person. Vulnerable women sought protectors, offered them merciful expressions of gratitude, and felt a strong pressure to conform by forging, asserting, or claiming various kinship ties. Crafting an alternative network of support was a strategy of survival that allowed a female refugee a way to reduce her isolation and vulnerability. Female refugees sought familial and kinship ties not just with members of new African communities in which they found themselves on the mainland, but wherever they were isolated from their kin group—including when they arrived in the care of the UMCA.

Perhaps already calculating the ways in which she could reduce her vulnerability and intrude more forcibly into her new community, Kate traveled with the UMCA staff from the Seychelles to Zanzibar. If she was not suffering from the seasickness that routinely plagues voyagers who brave the choppy waters of the strait between Zanzibar and the Tanzanian mainland, Kate might have dared to look over the bow of the boat toward her new home. With every list of the ship, she would have caught a glimpse of a skyline nearly identical to the one that greets business travelers and tourists coming by dhow or ferry from the mainland today. Stone Town, built where the land juts out into a point on the island’s long western side, would have offered Kate a breathtaking welcome. The shoreline is, as one contemporary observer described, “a fringe of large, and for the most part very stately, flat-roofed houses, looking as eastern-like as possible.” In Kate’s time the buildings were new and crisply whitewashed, built to house some of the island’s most important individuals, businesses, and foreign consulates. The massive yet simple homes of the
island’s wealthiest landowners, with skillfully carved wooden doors that exhibited “modest riches and subdued elegance,” stood next to the Old Fort, what is today one of the oldest standing buildings in town. The most imposing of the street’s structures, the Beit al-Ajaib and the Old Dispensary, were not yet constructed, but the multistoried buildings with clock towers and opulent wood-carved balconies popular at the time would have been quite a sight for Kate to behold.

Depending on the route they took from the port to Shangani, the group may have entered the maze of houses and little shops that branched out behind the Old Fort. They would have walked past the pop-up stalls of lower-class merchants who sold fish and other species of seafood, freshly baked loaves of bread, the putrid-smelling durian fruit, and branches laden with the bright red, hairy fruit known locally as shoki shoki on the three-foot-high curbs of the white buildings, raised to allow pedestrians escape from the donkey-led carts and the floods of the monsoon rains. The travelers might have stolen glimpses through open wooden doors into the ground-level courtyards of the patrician homes, whose several stories spiraled up to rooms lavishly furnished with Persian rugs, Chinese pillows, ornately carved imported tables and chairs set with Asian or European porcelain, and walls hung with French mirrors and American clocks. These were homes Kate might have entered as a slave, but her new life as a Christian would generally preclude mixing with town Muslims.

Once at the mission house in Shangani, with its wooden doors shut tightly against the heathenism and “Mohammedanism” of the outside world, Kate would have begun her slow transformation into a Christian. Before anything, Kate would have been bathed. In washing away any lice and fleas acquired on the long voyage from her home, the missionaries were also washing away remnants of Kate’s past. Kate would have stepped out of the bath and into a pink dress and matching half-handkerchief, both physically and symbolically cleansed. Kate’s redressing was part of the symbolic rebirth that slaves up and down the Swahili Coast endured each time they were sold, freed, or otherwise transferred. Had Kate or her companions been shifted to new patrons before, this would have been a familiar ritual. While perhaps not as extreme as the “horrible masquerade” that took place during slave markets, in which newly arrived slaves “were forced to wear a profusion of gold, beads, expensive cloths, sometimes even flowers in their hair” designed to make them look healthy and desirable on the auction block, new clothes were fundamental to this social remaking. This was true from the wealthiest Zanzibaris’ clothing of their wapembe (decorated or adorned slaves), to the poorest Zanzibaris—some
of whom were themselves slaves—who clothed their new acquisitions in lengths of *merikani* cloth, to the missionaries, who offered their new adherents *merikani*, *leso*, and cotton frocks in various patterns stitched by church supporters at home. Redressing by an owner was a “graphic scene of domination” and a way to remove traces of their former lives and to mark them as members of the community.⁴⁰

Part of a slave’s symbolic rebirth was a new name. Slaves of all ages had received Swahili names that reflected the respective owner’s hope for their collective future. Common among the UMCA’s girls were Bahati, Faida, Mabruki, Baraka, and Heri (“fortune,” “profit,” “blessed,” “blessing,” and “happiness”).⁴¹ The ritual renaming after baptism was little different. In another step toward redemption, the little girl from HMS *Wasp* became Kathleen.

This symbolic rebirth was, of course, merely the first step in what the UMCA understood was a long journey into Christendom. The rest was a largely internal transformation that would unfold as the result of daily attention and learning by example. The ancient notion of “reserve” or “economy” that underwrote the
Tractarians’ approach to evangelism meant that children and inquiring adults should learn about Christianity through slow revelations of the Gospel in ritual and practice. As we have seen, the missionaries were less concerned with the number of “heathen” they converted than with the quality of the religious instruction those adherents received. The girls would “catch the rising spirit” only by living the faith, and would come to embody a distinctly African Anglican moral character over time. One day, missionaries hoped, they would have the wisdom to appropriately interweave Anglican principles with longer-standing African institutions and practices. Over time, the missionaries would develop into a coherent ideology that privileged the Christian mother as the most perfect evangelist of this new way of Christian living.

And who better to teach these skills than the women whom social theorists imagined to stand at the top of the civilizational peak? Missionaries postulated that “English ladies” were “absolutely essential for the making [of] much real progress amongst the women of Africa.” The mission’s belief that English ladies were crucial to success among heathen women was a product of mid-nineteenth-century British secular humanitarian thought and of the particularities of Tractarianism. Popular discourse held that British women had a duty and a unique ability to share their advantages and model their lives to their heathen sisters. Through service abroad, European women could introduce a Western feminine ideal and a domestic agenda of Western modernity to indigenous peoples, embodying the new knowledge, technologies, and practices that were revolutionizing their own home societies. Further, their shared womanhood meant that European women alone were capable of transforming heathen women; they alone, contemporaries thought, held the key to “opening heathen hearts to the civilizing influence of Christian love.”

British “Lady” Workers

In its approach to the evangelization of African women, the UMCA broke from the example of earlier overseas missions. Before the mid-nineteenth century, women were generally only permitted to serve in Protestant missions as wives of clerics and male staff. In addition to the manifold domestic duties required to maintain a mission station, mission wives carried the extra burden of the expectations of childbirth and child-rearing. Further, they were expected to help promote the evangelical work for which their husbands were responsible, and to assume the
additional tasks of teaching schoolchildren and the local women the “skills of European domesticity.” In some mission societies, a missionary wife was so essential to overseas work that recruiters insisted on providing bachelor conscripts with a “suitable companion” from among a pool of aspiring single female missionaries just prior to departure. Otherwise reluctant to send single women to the overseas field alone, home staff acquiesced only in the hope that the women would soon marry either widowers or bachelors already living in the mission field, relieving them from the labor and expense of returning home to acquire a wife, or saving them the disappointment of abandoning their work altogether.48

The paucity of women in the mission field changed mid-century. After the 1850s, Western women began pursuing professional careers to an unprecedented degree, which increased the number of women available for, and interested in, overseas mission work. Educated nineteenth-century women found foreign mission work to be very alluring. Between 1865 and 1910, the number of women in the mission field grew exponentially, and female lay workers soon outnumbered ordained clerics.49 Particularly for single women, field service offered opportunities unavailable at home. Missionary work was a viable and socially acceptable alternative to marriage, and it allowed single women the opportunity to pursue careers that were less accessible in England, such as physician and teacher. Yet, while the movement of women to the mission field gave them an “independent outlet for salaried, professional work,” it simultaneously “cast their mission field as a domestic sphere, exported patriarchal church institutions which marginalized women’s formal religious authority, and projected a middle-class ideal of marriage and family life.”50 While the implications of this irony are explored in later chapters, it is sufficient for now to say that “women’s work for women” became the catch phrase for British missionary activities from the mid-nineteenth century to the second decade of the twentieth century, when it functioned as both a justification for and a description of their work in the field.51

As a Tractarian mission, the UMCA from its inception offered devout, single Anglican women the opportunity to pursue a religious calling overseas. Indeed, although a recent historiographical survey of women in missions identifies the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 as the moment that Protestant women “develop[ed] an established professional identity which expanded beyond the private sphere,” the UMCA seems to have considered its women missionaries to be professional members of the staff in the 1860s, well before its contemporaries.52 As we have seen, Tractarians valued the ancient inheritances of asceticism and
the monastic ideal of retirement from the world. Spinsters were idealized both as ascetics and as willing to retire and devote their lives to service. The UMCA’s commitment to hiring only single women missionaries, rather than wives (or potential wives) for their male missionaries and clerics, meant that administrators could be selective about how a recruit’s qualifications fit into the broader wants and needs of the mission. Perhaps more important for how the mission functioned in practice, a woman without any immediate kinship ties of her own—no husband, no children—was poised to invest fully in the Tractarians’ emotional and embodied approach to evangelism. A confirmed spinster did not have a husband or biological children vying for her attention, and was therefore free to devote her time, emotional energy, and—significantly—mothering instincts to her African charges. The emotional availability of British lady workers for intimate affective relationships was central to the Tractarian evangelical strategy and to the filial nature of their relationships with their female charges.

Considering its female employees to be qualified professionals rather than simply “wives of” or temporary volunteers, the UMCA established and publicized minimum qualifications for employment. These minimum qualifications reveal much about the values of the mission and its expectations for the relationships of the British lady workers with their African charges. A woman’s professional training, the strength of her religious devotion, and her personal character all constituted the evangelical repertoire from which Tractarian workers would draw while in the field, and mission recruiters carefully scrutinized each woman’s credentials prior to conscription. Recruiters first urged aspiring female missionaries to consider carefully whether they had the religious devotion to see them through the challenges of the mission field. Overseas work was physically and personally demanding: death and chronic ill health from malaria or other diseases was common, return trips home for health care or to visit family were expensive and infrequent, and since the UMCA required their British employees to remain unmarried while serving, the female recruit faced the very real possibility of being the lone European woman at a remote mission station. Recruitment pleas thus specified among their qualifications “a real Missionary vocation, and a determination to give oneself up entirely to a life of religion and work.” UMCA recruiters and former missionaries alike were clear that all the work of the mission—the teaching, nursing, domestic, and industrial work—“need[s] to be done as a religious act, as an offering to God, as a way of helping on the whole work of the Mission: the spreading of the kingdom of Christ.”
Women secure in their religious commitment were reminded, however, that a “mere wish to be generally useful is not sufficient qualification.” Rather, “ladies willing to offer their services should have had the training necessary to qualify them for the work they wish to undertake.” Nurses wishing to take up the mantle of Tractarian-inspired service, for example, needed “three years’ hospital training” and “trained knowledge of midwifery” as well as dispensing. Recruiters urged prospective teachers to have classroom experience, plus time spent working with pupil-teachers, infants, or teaching Sunday school. Further, recruiters stipulated that all women—especially those seeking only general domestic employment—should have “training in the womanly duties”; thus candidates were required to be competent in “cooking, bread-making, house-keeping, laundry work, needlework, [and] book-keeping.” Proficiency in “all that appertains to keeping a house nice” was important for two reasons. First, workers believed that “the health” and “nerves” of a mission station largely depended on well-cooked food and on the “order, punctuality, and peacefulness” with which European women could run field stations. Second, staffers argued that even if the new recruits “may not have to do the actual work . . . they are almost certain to have to train others to do it.”

The career headmistress of the Mbweni Girls’ School, Caroline Thackeray, epitomized the mission’s ideal of a professional staff member, and she surely underwent intense scrutiny to this end before being hired in 1876. A cousin of the English novelist William Makepeace Thackeray, Caroline Thackeray was born to an upper-class British family. At the time, personal wealth was a necessary requirement for mission work: upon announcing the small stipend given to clergy and lay members—£20 annually—Bishop Steere explained that “they who come to the work should either support themselves, or else that, having food and raiment, they should therewith be content.” And wealth was something Thackeray had. She paid for the construction of many buildings on the Mbweni campus herself, and funded her entire career at the mission, which stretched until her death, with personal funds. Wealth and class notwithstanding, Thackeray was a trained teacher. Charged with the task of running the girls’ school, Thackeray arrived at Zanzibar via the boat carrying the mail from the Yemeni port of Aden on November 11, 1877.

UMCA recruiters judged the suitability of would-be workers not only on their professional qualifications, Tractarian-style religious devotion, and affinity for communal life, but also on a host of personal characteristics. A female missionary, for example, needed “a constant endeavour to bear and forbear; a determination to bear willingly, not grudgingly, the petty annoyances and discomforts and worries
which are sure to be felt.” She needed patience, a sense of humor, and a sacrificing spirit. Thackeray, it seems, had all of these. She was reportedly “extremely cultured,” but was also a “force to be reckoned with.”

Above all, mission sources detailed, the work “absolutely requires a person with something of the motherly instinct in her”; an interest “in teaching will not do alone.” Intimate, affective relationships that imputed kinship were absolutely fundamental to motivating missionaries’ work in East Africa and in creating a sense of fellow feeling among members of the congregation. Cultivating a love for Christ was paramount to the mission’s project, but the day-to-day efforts to that end were also emotionally charged. Beginning in the earliest days of the mission, the emotive component of female missionaries’ work was essential to creating ties that bound young freed slaves to the mission. The UMCA’s single lady workers and their parentless charges, many of whom they raised from infancy, formed intimate, lifelong bonds within the boundaries of the schoolhouse and orphanage, and many considered their young charges to be their very own daughters and sons. The UMCA’s female workers often brought the youngest of the orphans into their homes and raised them as their own. This was particularly true in the years before the establishment of the refuge for adult former slaves at Mbweni, when parentless youths were placed with established Christian couples or families, and before the first cohorts of Africans were old enough to raise orphans on their own. Like most of her fellow women workers, for example, Miss Pakeman considered the girls with whom she lived to be her own daughters. Writing about the marriages of Kate Kadamweli and Mary Aliangu, who had arrived with Kate, Pakeman wrote, “I am quite proud of my married daughters who are winning golden opinions by their nice, modest, staid behavior since they attained to the dignity of married life.” As an unmarried, childless woman, it is likely that Pakeman did indeed consider Kate and Mary to be family.

The missionaries’ own “mothering” of the freed slave girls and their descendants was also a model for the budding female evangelists. Writing about her own days in the classroom, Caroline Thackeray recalled how intimately teaching and mothering were tied: “I cannot imagine a more happy life than that of being ‘housemother’ and head-teacher in one, in such a school, if only the whole heart is in it.” Although the mission’s preoccupation with cultivating female evangelists had underwritten mission practice long before, Caroline Thackeray made an explicit statement of this philosophy in 1898. Regarding the UMCA’s approach to their female congregants, she wrote:
It is not only as teachers, but as wives and mothers of the next generation of African Christians, that we have to look to them. As a rule every native clergyman and teacher is married, and what these wives of the native clergy and teachers are will affect the next generation of African women far more than anything else that is done in the Mission... because I am persuaded that as the mothers are so will the children be, and if we can train well these girls, it may make centuries of difference to progress in Africa.65

The African mother had “a natural and God-given capacity,” Thackeray added. “Africa’s future depends much in an earthly sense on her women,” she wrote, “nay, in more than an earthly sense, for is it not the law of God’s providence that the mothers of the next generation will have the greatest share in the moulding of it?”66 If planting an expansive and unified church was the missionaries’ goal, an investment in the mission’s female adherents was the means through which they hoped to achieve it. They focused their efforts first on raising wives for the African clergy and on cultivating female teachers for marriage to other Christian-educated evangelists, convinced that a strong cohort of African female evangelists who approached outreach through an embodied affective spirituality was the key to extending the mission’s influence throughout East Africa and to cultivating communities of followers.

As single women, the UMCA’s British lady workers were well poised to turn their “motherly instincts” and emotional attentions to their new charges. Women who may have wanted families of their own but who never had the opportunity, and women who desired children but not a marriage, could find in the UMCA ready daughters. Single ladies could invest wholeheartedly in raising orphans, boarders, and adult inquirers alike from a state of spiritual and civilizational infancy to fully formed Christians. Without their own kin, the mission’s lady workers devoted their lives to mothering good Christian citizens; especially in the first decades of the mission’s work, British mission workers acted as both “mother and father” for hundreds of orphaned slaves the mission raised. Caroline Thackeray also considered graduates of the Mbweni School to constitute her “large family.”67 The numerous obituaries that Caroline Thackeray wrote about former pupil-teachers during her tenure attest to what the missionaries considered to be the strong and enduring bonds between pupil and teacher, mother and daughter. She lamented in an obituary for Blandina Limo, a former pupil-teacher, that “to me she was as a daughter, and her affection, and thoughtfulness, and interest in all that concerned
me, made her few visits to the little guest-cottage on my *shamba* always a delight. Many of the UMCA’s female missionaries wrote home proudly that their young charges seemed to return the sentiment. One missionary described feeling “real sympathy with the young lady of 18 who, on being invited to superannuate herself [from school], remarked, ‘far indeed be such a thought from me and what should I do with all my days? And are you not my mother? Why then should I wish to leave you?’” On her deathbed, Sister Agnes’s “daughters” are said to have implored their “more than mother’ not to die, but to come back to them again.” The complex social structures and realities that shaped the nature of refugees’ incorporation into the mission made the expressions of filial love flow both ways.

The lady missionaries’ willingness to act in loco parentis did not overtly conflict with the refugees’ need for guardians, but it was also not precisely the same sentiment. Indeed, the missionaries themselves might not have understood the difference between a “liberated” refugee who was presumed free to make her own decisions, and a girl driven to forge familial ties and to impute kinship as the only means at her disposal to secure access to resources and protection. The distinction was slight but meaningful, and obscured differences that would provoke conflict not long down the road.

An Asylum for Freed Slaves

The broader historical trends and political agreements that presented the mission with adherents also quickly led to its overcrowding. Rather than drift from their theological moorings, the administrators redoubled their efforts to ensure that their youngest adherents were receiving the attention and guidance they needed to develop into civilized Christians. This was particularly true for the younger female adherents, a group about which the mission worried endlessly given the role they would have in shaping the next generation of Christians. Regarding the daily work that was supposed to instill Christian values in their young charges, one mission worker mused that if the UMCA’s girls are “to prosper, they must have constant supervision. If you want a thing done you must insist upon it . . . after a struggle they accept a thing as inevitable and so do it.” According to officials, mission girls were blessed with little in the way of role models from older refugees who are “fed, clothed, and supplied with rice . . . of course they are as lazy as they can stand, and why not? Why should they work? They have got all they want.” Thus to insulate
their impressionable young adherents from the influences of adult *mateka*, the administration separated the congregation and employed fallow farm land for the purpose of “disposing of liberated slaves.” Administrators designated the land the “Mbweni *shamba*,” and in so doing ascribed a name to the eventual home to generations of female evangelists.

In theory, such an “asylum” would provide respite opportunities for adult refugees, many of whom were generally “quite unfit for work” upon their arrival. The proposed scheme for the *shamba* indicated that “all persons received on the estate will be required to work under the direction of the manager and will be fed, clothed, and lodged by the mission.” Until they formed “regular” (by which Steere would have meant “Christian”) marriages, “men and women will be lodged apart, each sex having its own house and separate meals.” Once married, couples would take up residence on a “model farm,” which was to be “planted out in a kind of village . . . each couple in a cottage with small garden.” Each couple would “have a house built for them with a plot of land attached, and will be allowed one day a week to work it for their own profit.” In lieu of food and clothing, a couple could choose payments, which would increase with length of time and aptitude for work. All persons living on this “model farm” were required to “conduct themselves according to the general rules laid down by the Mission.” These rules aimed to instill a “general orderliness of life,” which required “no theft, drunkenness, fighting, immorality, or bad language.” Of course, they must also observe “Sunday, the chief Christian Holy days, and such attendance at Church and School as may seem desirable.” Failure to maintain this “general discipline” would be met with “stoppage of payments and privileges, and in gross cases by the authority of the Consul General.” Missionaries intended that *shamba* residents, not just the farm itself, would serve as a model to the rest of the congregation and to local observers.

The adult refugees were not the only ones on the receiving end of the missionaries’ matchmaking attempts. The true work of the mission, administrators believed, was “to train missionaries and only indirectly for the benefit of released slaves.” This was best done by creating Christian families from two individuals raised as Christians since childhood. By 1874 this had already begun to happen. Steere reported that the year opened auspiciously with the New Year’s Day wedding of Elizabeth Kidogo and Vincent M’kono, two of the mission’s first adherents, both of whom had been incorporated as children. In 1875, there were several additional marriages “being negotiated between the elders of the respective schools.” This number included John Swedi and his fiancée, and Francis Mabruki and his fiancée,
our Kate Kadamweli. Francis, John, and John's fiancée had arrived with Kate at the mission in 1865. The mission's attempts at social engineering were so effective that their success surprised even Steere: “I have been greatly amused at the utter contempt of the elder boys for any girls not brought up by us; they treat the idea of looking for a wife anywhere else as utterly preposterous.”

These engineered, monogamous marriages were important not only because they were the foundation of the ideal Christian family. The Christian mother, missionaries believed, had an inordinate influence on the development of the family, and on all that family came into contact with. During the 1820s and 1830s, mission organizations became aligned, at least in the eyes of the metropolitan public, with the burgeoning antislavery and humanitarian movements. New theories of overseas evangelism, such as those discussed in the previous chapter, forged an explicit association between evangelical Christianity, civilization, and commerce—the “Three C’s.” Missionaries and the supportive public came to understand cultivating among heathens the benefits of Christianity, education, and Western ways of living as among the goals of imperial outreach. Missionary propaganda portrayed the objects of evangelical outreach as savage, depraved, and ignorant, with their women debased by all manner of social ills. This was particularly troubling to Western missionaries because contemporary social theorists had convinced them that the place women held within a society was a direct indication of the society’s advancement from a state of barbarism to civilization. Indigenous women’s piety and conversion, as historian Susan Thorne has argued, thus became the “crucial precondition of any culture’s salvation,” for, once converted, women could change the whole moral system of a society. No longer the “corner-stone of heathenism,” their influence shifted and they became “natural repositories of religious piety.” As wives and mothers, Christian women made “the home a haven safe from worldly temptations and the family the critical unit of worship.” In order to raise the civilizational quotient of an entire society, missionaries focused their work on indigenous girls, who they believed were in “desperate need of moral rescue.” Their salvation—and indeed their entire society’s salvation—would come through domestic education and basic literacy training.

Just as with Kate’s introduction to the mission, it is likely that relationships between British lady workers and African female refugees were not as straightforward as the missionaries imagined them to be. To begin, most of the above statements were elicited for printed sources aimed at metropolitan audiences for the purpose of raising funds or other support. The relationships would therefore have been
rendered in terms familiar to readers, and in terms that missionaries expected or imagined to be true. Further, even without Tractarian religious obligation and the practical necessities of raising orphans, the missionaries would likely have felt pressure from the freed slaves themselves to become in loco parentis. Among the older orphans and unaccompanied young adults from the first cohorts of freed slaves, previous experience might have taught them to depend on their new masters for all their worldly necessities and spiritual guidance. Younger orphans would naturally have sought comfort in the people who raised and tended to them from infancy. Women in general, we have seen, were motivated by their inherent vulnerability to form familial, kinship, and affective ties with their patrons, rooting them more firmly in their new community. Of course, this is not to say that slaves did not come to develop fond relationships with their female patrons, or that they did not think of the missionaries as pseudo-parents, for there is evidence to suggest that they did. Rather, it is to say that the relationships of dependence were expected, very real, and very powerful, but at times ambiguous.