

Conference Report

> Lize Kriel

Associate Professor, Department of Visual Arts,
University of Pretoria, South Africa.

lize.kriel@up.ac.za

People, images, a world. Images of human beings in missionary magazines during the time of the German Empire

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From 6 to 8 October 2016, I was privileged to attend a colloquium on the above topic held at the Leibniz Institute for European History in Mainz, Germany, sponsored by the Institut für Mainzer Kirchengeschichte and the Fritz Thyssen Foundation. What follows is a fairly free English translation of the purpose of the colloquium as articulated by the organisers, and an overview of the presentations.

Images of "faraway" regions of the world had been an integral part of the European Christian missionary movement. While missionaries had already been sending etches from Asia and America to Europe since the early modern period, their successors in the nineteenth and twentieth century produced an overwhelming number of illustrations, photographs, and later in films, from all over the world. Images produced and circulated by male and female missionaries were initially intended for consumption by a European audience which, especially during the nineteenth century, revealed a remarkable fascination with "people" and "cultures". For the first time in history, mass -media now provided them with the opportunity not only to read about societies outside of Europe, but also to "see" them.

How did early mass-media portray the "other"? Which concepts of "self" and "stranger" did the pictures and photographs in missionary magazines from the German Imperial era perpetuate? This international and interdisciplinary colloquium aimed at investigating visual constructions and representation of "selves" and "strangers" in the religious publications from the German imperial era. Specific attention was paid to the role and function of printed reproductions of images. Simultaneously, the missionary world of images in the era of the German Empire was assessed in its transnational

dimension and situated in the broader European context. The aim with the colloquium was to lay a foundation for knowledge about the dynamics, typology and aesthetics of the visual representation of human beings from Asia and Africa in Christian missionary magazines.

The first session was dedicated to presentations about media and medial genres. Cristraud Geary presented a paper on photographers for missionary journals and the selection of their pictures. This was followed by a case study on South American missionary photography presented by Hunnerk Onken. Christoph Rippe impressed with his knowledge and interpretation of the remarkable photographic collection of the Catholic missionaries from Marianhill in Natal, South Africa. Rippe's contemplation of the photographers' slippage between producing propaganda, genre photography and ethnography, was followed by conference organiser Christophs Nebgen's consideration of the relationship between the confessional profile of missionary magazines and the way they constructed images of cultures outside of Europe.

During the evening of the first day of the colloquium, art historian Monica Juneja enthralled the public audience with a display of Asian and American artists' renderings of the Last Supper and the Madonna and Child in a presentation she playfully entitled the 'nightlife' of Christian icons on their travels through the world.

The colloquium theme for the next morning was stereotypes and visual categorisation in missionary periodicals. Anke Schürer-Ries presented on images from the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) in the *Evangelischen Heidenboten* of the Basel Mission and Lize Kriel presented a paper on images of people reading, with a focus on the Transvaal region of South Africa, in the popular periodical of the Berlin Mission, *Der Missionsfreund*. In his paper, Kokou Azamede traced the visual representation of the Ewe people of West Africa in missionary magazines. Conference organiser Judith Becker concluded the session by returning to the Basel Mission's *Evangelischen Heidenboten* and comparing its rendering of the contrast between Christians, Muslims and "heathens" in the Barmer Missionsblatt.

The last session, entitled humanity and religious humanitarianism, was introduced by Mrinalini Sebastian with a paper in which she linked missionary representations of particular communities in India with their self-representation. Felicity Jenz critiqued the missionary propaganda through the use of images of children and families, and pointed out parallels with contemporary humanitarian propaganda photography. Armin Owzar continued with this topic on the last morning of the conference, followed by two case studies: missionary reportage on the Armenian genocide and on Christian humanitarianism in the Holy Land, presented by Andreas Frings and Karène

Sanchez respectively. Conference organiser Katharina Stornig concluded the session with a framing of the image-making practices in missionary magazines' visualisation of suffering, need and aid.

A previous conference in Münster, Germany, held in 2010, stated a bold argument for the need to study missionary magazines as a genre of a particular kind and culminated in a very useful book, *Missions and media*, edited by Felicity Jensz and Hannah Acke and published in 2010 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner). The 2016 colloquium held in Mainz affirmed the need to acknowledge the centrality of visual images in the way missionary periodicals operated as an early form of mass-media. The conference organisers also envisage collecting the conference findings in a scholarly book. Focus areas for future research identified during the colloquium included missionary periodicals intended for the "missionised" in Africa, Asia and America; as well as the way those depicted as 'strangers' in the European-produced periodicals were looking back at European missions and missionaries' representations of themselves. The continuation of a missionary visuality in global humanitarian media of the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, which had been alluded to by some presenters, also vouches for further investigation.