

# “IF I DIE, I DIE”: WOMEN MISSIONARY WORKERS AMONG DANES, ARMENIANS, AND TURKS, 1900-1920<sup>1</sup>

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Based on extensive studies of archival material and little-known contemporary published sources, this article will explore how and why Danes – famous in certain circles like Maria Jacobsen, virtually unknown like Hansine Marcher and Jenny Jensen, but all women – ended up in remote corners of the Ottoman Empire before and during the Armenian Genocide. They were sent out as field workers for one of the world’s first proper NGOs, the Danish branch of the Evangelical organization Women Missionary Workers. What did these women from the European periphery experience, and how were they perceived at home and abroad during peace, war, massacre, and genocide? Why did the Armenians among all the suffering peoples of the world become their destiny, even after the genocide? And how did they try to make sense of it all, from everyday life and work before 1915 to the destruction of the Ottoman Armenians and the immediate aftermath? The article will put the missionary and experiences into an ideological, institutional, local, regional, and international context, and consider to what extent the Danish women could be considered feminist and humanitarian pioneers.

*Key-words:* Armenian genocide, missionaries, humanitarianism, gender studies, Christian millenarianism, Armenophilia, Middle East, Turkey, Ottoman Empire.

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1. This paper is based to a large extent on heavily edited and updated parts of my two monographs in Danish: Matthias Bjørnlund, *Det armenske folkedrab fra begyndelsen til enden* (Copenhagen: Kristeligt Dagblads forlag, 2013) (*The Armenian Genocide from the Beginning to the End*), and idem, *På herrens mark: Nødhjælp, mission og kvindekamp under det armenske folkedrab* (Copenhagen: Kristeligt Dagblads Forlag, 2015) (*In God’s Field. Relief Work, Mission, and Suffragettes during the Armenian Genocide*), as well as a paper I wrote for the Workshop for Armenian-Turkish Scholarship (WATS) conference in Berlin, 2017. For a more complete list of primary and secondary sources used, see [https://www.academia.edu/18733050/Komplet\\_kilde-\\_og\\_litteraturliste\\_til\\_Matthias\\_Bj%C3%B8rnlund\\_P%C3%A5\\_herrens\\_mark.\\_N%C3%B8dhj%C3%A6lp\\_mission\\_og\\_kvindekamp\\_under\\_det\\_armenske\\_folkedrab\\_2015](https://www.academia.edu/18733050/Komplet_kilde-_og_litteraturliste_til_Matthias_Bj%C3%B8rnlund_P%C3%A5_herrens_mark._N%C3%B8dhj%C3%A6lp_mission_og_kvindekamp_under_det_armenske_folkedrab_2015). See also, “*The League of Nations in Aleppo: Armenian Women and Children Survivors 1921-1927*,” eds. Dicle Akar Bilgin, Matthias Bjørnlund, and Taner Akcam, 2014, <http://www.armenocide.de/armenocide/orphan-children.nsf!OpenDatabase>; Matthias Bjørnlund, “Danish Missionaries in the Kharpert Province: A Brief Introduction,” *Houshamadyan: a project to reconstruct Ottoman Armenian town and village life*, <http://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayetofmamuratulazizharput/harputkaza/religion/missionaries.html>, November, 2015; idem, “The Big Death’: Finding Precise Terminology for the Murder of the Armenian People,” *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, 23 April 2015; idem, “Armenia as a State of Mind: 100 Years after the Genocide,” April 2015, 100lives.com; *The Armenian Genocide and Scandinavian Response*, ed. Matthias Bjørnlund, Hayk Demoyan, Suren Manukyan (Yerevan: AGMI, National Academy of Sciences, 2014); Matthias Bjørnlund, “‘A Fate Worse than Dying’: Sexual Violence during the Armenian Genocide,” in *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe’s Twentieth Century*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 16-58; idem, “At skabe håb i helvedes forgård: Da Industrimissionen i Armenien kom til Grækenland,” serialized article in *Dansk Armeniermission* (May and December 2017), 2-4 and 4-6. All online resources were accessed 03.12.2018.

## **Prologue: “The Misses Jacobsen, Jensen, and Petersen are still at their Posts and in Good Health”**

It was early 1916 that the Armenia Committee of the Danish branch of Women Missionary Workers (*Kvindelige Missions Arbejdere*, hereafter KMA) wrote a letter from their headquarters in Copenhagen to the Danish diplomatic minister at Constantinople (Istanbul), Carl Ellis Wandel, with a simple, urgent question: Are there any news from our four missionaries in the towns of Harput (Kharpert) and Mezreh (Elazig) in the province of Mamouret-ul-Aziz? That was the province or *vilayet* that came to be known as the slaughterhouse province when the Armenian Genocide began in 1915, where tens of thousands of Armenian men, women, and children from this and other regions were murdered, enslaved, or died of thirst and exhaustion in front of the missionaries. From November 1914, when WWI reached the Ottoman Empire after the attack on Russia, censorship and other conditions of war had seriously hampered communication between the missionaries and their homeland. And now, February 1916, virtually nothing came through; no one knew if the missionaries were alive or dead. The KMA committee already informed through the press and visiting or returning Western missionaries about the ongoing genocide were well aware that no news might just be bad news.<sup>2</sup>

In the absence of information, the Armenia Committee saw no other solution than to contact Wandel posted at the posh Pera Palace Hotel near Grande Rue de Péra (Istiklal Avenue) in the Ottoman capital with what amounted to a missing persons-report on “Danish women missionaries who are at the moment staying in Asiatic Turkey”:

- 1) “Miss Maria Petrea Jacobsen, born 6 November 1882 in Dover parish, Jylland [*Jutland, mainland Denmark*]. Father: Jens Jacobsen, factory worker, now living in Horsens. Sent to Turkey in the year 1907 by the association Women Missionary Workers which sponsors her. Works for the American mission association *American Board* in Harpoot. Nurse and evangelization.
- 2) Miss Karen Marie Petersen, born 8 February 1881 in Nykøbing Sjælland. Daughter of Jens Ulrik Petersen, customs manager, now living in i Skælskør. Sent out in the year 1909 by the association Women Missionary Workers which sponsors her. Works in Mezereh as leader of an orphanage (Danish).
- 3) Miss Jenny Kristine Jensen, born 2 January 1873 in Lemvig. Daughter of now deceased draper Jensen; mother: widow M. Jensen – address: Mr. Dr. Andersen, Lemvig. Sent out in the year 1905 by *Deutscher Hilfsbund für christliches Liebeswerk im Orient* which sponsors her. Works in Mezereh as leader of an orphanage (German).
- 4) Miss Hansine Franciska Marcher, born June 1874 in Allinge, Bornholm. Father dead, mother: widow H. Marcher, Allinge. (Address in Copenhagen: merchant Hans Marcher, 12-14 Vesterbrogade.) Sent out in the year 1904 by *Deutscher*

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2. Leslie A. Davis, *The Slaughterhouse Province: An American Diplomat's report on the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917* (New Rochelle, New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1989). See also below, where Karen Marie Petersen describes Mezreh as “The Great Slaughterhouse.”

*Hilfsbund für christliches Liebeswerk im Orient* (Frankfurt am Main) which sponsors her.”<sup>3</sup>

There was in fact reason to be worried. That same month, for instance, February 1916, Jacobsen wrote extensively in her diary about the dire circumstances and tense atmosphere in the Ottoman province, where “many Turks openly acknowledge that this is the punishment for their sins.” “Their sins” were obviously the extermination of the Armenians, while “this” was the approaching Russian army from the north. That army never reached the slaughterhouse province, but, according to Jacobsen, still for a while it managed to simultaneously create widespread panic, occasional introspection or pangs of guilt, and plans for further atrocities among local Turks: “Why did we kill the women and children, they were innocent?” But at the same time they make plans to completely annihilate the Armenians before they leave the town themselves.”<sup>4</sup> No one knew were that would leave Westerners protecting Armenians such as the Danish missionaries – at that point, Jacobsen was co-responsible with *American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (ABCFM) for hundreds of Armenians at American compounds, while Karen Maria Petersen was sheltering more than 100 Armenian women and children at KMA’s *Emaus* orphanage, some of them secretly, and working with local Kurds to smuggle them to safety.<sup>5</sup>

The main part of the genocide had been completed in the region the year before, but it was by no means a finished project. In January 1916, for instance, the Armenian children from the German orphanage *Elim* (right next to *Emaus* in Mezreh) were taken by the local Ottoman authorities, allegedly to be reunited with their parents. The parents were dead, of course, and the children were sent to be murdered, burned or drowned a few hours journey from the town. KMA’s Jenny Jensen, head mistress of the *Elim* orphanage, could not believe that this could be true, but the next day she rode out herself and saw the charred bodies of the children with her own eyes.<sup>6</sup> All four KMA missionaries had also witnessed the initial phases of the genocide, from dehumanization and fake accusations to imprisonment, torture, massacre, and death marches, which they describe in detail in letters, meeting protocols, diaries, and published works. Here is how Karen Marie Petersen remembers the massive, previously announced deportation from Mezreh, 3 July

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3. Rigsarkivet (Danish National Archives), Udenrigsministeriets Arkiver (Foreign Ministry Archives; UM), 2-0355, Konstantinopel/Istanbul, Diplomatisk Repræsentation, 1822-1920, Korrespondancesager. Korrespondance om sunheds- [sic] og humanitære sager, 1897-1920.

4. Maria Jacobsen, *Maria Jacobsen’s Diary 1907-1919, Kharpout – Turkey* (Antelias, Lebanon: The Armenian Catholicosate, 1979), 444 in the original Danish diary. On the advance in north-eastern Anatolia in early 1916 that was halted a few months later, see, e.g., Ronald Grigor Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else: A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 296-297.

5. Matthias Bjørnlund, *Det armenske folkedrab & På herrens mark : nødhjælp, mission og kvindekamp under det armenske folkedrab* (Kristeligt Dagblad, 2015).

6. Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 402; James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916*, uncensored ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Gomidas Institute, 2000 (1916)), 286-289.

1915, which she and some of her Danish, German, and American missionary colleagues followed as far as the Ottoman gendarmes would let them. It was an experience that, as she puts it, left the missionaries paralyzed at the time and served as the stuff of nightmares for her for years to come:

The summer morning when we had to bid farewell to our dearest friends in Mezreh who were driven from their homes that day was so awful! Early in the morning, I walked through town to say goodbye. Everyone is busy breaking up and loading their clothes on donkeys or carts. In the poor neighborhood in particular there is total confusion, since many have refused to believe it would become serious and have thus made no preparations, so they are being forced out as they are. They do not want to go, they cry and throw themselves to the ground: "Let us die here!," they plead. The gendarmes hit them with their rifle or drag them out by the hair, lock the door behind them, and put the key in their pocket. They have no home anymore – and walk with the crowd. – Down the road they move, constantly, until late in the afternoon. Young and old, the blind and the crippled, women so exhausted from fear and emotion that they cannot stand up, and old men with canes, struggling, wavering. A head of family surrounded by his children yells when he sees us: "We have taken up our cross and follow Jesus!"

I have met [German missionaries] Mr. and Mrs. Ehmann, and together we walk part of the way on the road with the caravan. They all want to shake our hands to say goodbye while the tears stream down their faces, and they say: "We walk to our deaths, pray for us!" It is as if our heart [sic] will burst; to watch this misery and not be able to do anything! Still the crowd grows; we see ox carts with a sun screen over a group of smiling children's faces, cows loaded with bedding and kitchenware, and finally whole columns of mounted gendarmes armed with rifles, filled cartridge belts, and knives and revolvers by their side – they go out "to protect," it sends shivers down our spine to see them!<sup>7</sup>

The Danish envoy Carl Ellis Wandel, well-informed and well-connected in the heart of Empire, knew better than most people the precarious situation for Armenians and missionaries, particularly in the eastern provinces. He had at this point already written numerous reports on various aspects on the genocide for the Danish Foreign Ministry, like in September 1915, when he outlined the CUP's (Committee of Union and Progress; Young Turks) "road of Turkification" and "xenophobic and nationalistic" policy, "which at the moment has as its main purpose the extermination of the Armenian population in the Empire."<sup>8</sup> But 24 March 1916, after having examined the case through US consul Leslie Davis in Mezreh, Wandel could inform KMA in Copenhagen that three of the missionaries were in fact still in the *vilayet* and in good health (a bit of an exaggeration, as Maria Jacobsen was still recovering from serious illness), while the fourth, Hansine Marcher, had just left the province on a perilous and eventful journey home through

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7. Quoted in Amalie Lange, *Et Blad af Armeniens Historie. Kvindelige Missions Arbejdere 1910-1920* (KMA, 1920), 47-48.

8. Matthias Bjørnlund, "'When the Cannons Talk, the Diplomats Must Be Silent': A Danish Diplomat in Constantinople during the Armenian Genocide," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 1, no. 2 (2006): 203.

Diyarbakir, Urfa, and Constantinople. Not because she wanted to, none of the Danish missionaries wanted to leave their flock voluntarily, but because of what seems to be pressure from her German employers and the Ottoman authorities.<sup>9</sup> On that journey Marcher was accompanied by a German colleague and an Assyrian assistant and, like several other eyewitnesses, including Karen Marie Petersen, passed through an area "sown with human bones" around the great massacre site at Lake Göljök (Hazar Gölü/Gölcük/Dzovk), witnessed how the great Armenian cathedral in Diyarbakir had been turned into an auction house for stolen Armenian goods, and how forcibly assimilated Armenian survivors lived in fear under Turkified or Kurdified names in the city, etc.<sup>10</sup>

Marcher, who was leader of a German girl school with 200 Armenian and Assyrian children in Mezreh as well as nurse at the local German Red Cross hospital, reached Copenhagen later that year. Here, she told KMA's Armenia Committee about how the children in her care were sent to their deaths. As it is put in the minutes of this 15 June 1916 meeting: "*After Miss Marchers return most of the ladies of the committee were gathered with her to learn about conditions in Mezreh, and at this meeting she elaborated on those matters. It may be that none of our sisters over there have suffered more personally from the systematic extermination of a people than her, as she has witnessed her whole school work destroyed and all her students leave, crying and wailing, with the expelled*".<sup>11</sup>

March 1915, before the genocide began, Hansine Marcher had been informed by a visitor, the strongly Armenophobe and anti-Semitic German vice consul at Erzerum, Max Erwin von Scheubner Richter, that the newly appointed *vali*, Sabit Bey (Sagiroglu), had claimed that all Armenian in the empire were to be exterminated, as they had allegedly grown so numerous and prosperous that they threatened Turkish dominance. Many such rumors or pieces of information floated around at the time, but few Western missionaries or diplomats would believe them, including Marcher. In the summer of 1916, soon after Marcher had left, Jenny Jensen embarked on a similar journey with her adopted

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9. Bjørnlund, "When the Cannons Talk," 197-223; [www.armenocide.de](http://www.armenocide.de) – this website contains 80 documents (reports from Wandel on the Armenian Genocide and other relevant archival sources) in Danish as well as in English and German translation.

10. Hansine Marcher, *Oplevelser Derovrefra* (KMA, 1919), 10.

11. Rigsarkivet (Danish National Archives), Kvindelige Missions Arbejdere, (KMA), 10.360, pk. 42, "1912-1921," protokol fra møde i Armenierkomitéen, 15. juni 1916. On the persecution of Assyrians/Nestorians/Syriacs in the region and on the Assyrian Genocide/Seyfo/Sayfo in general, see, e.g., Anahit Khosroeva, "Assyrians in the Ottoman Empire and the Official Turkish Policy of Their Extermination, 1890s-1918," in *Genocide in the Ottoman Empire: Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks, 1913-1923*, ed. George S. Shirinian (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017), 123; Jozef Nacim, "Turkarnas Folk mord på Assyrier-kaldéer och Armenier," in *Händelserna i Kärme/Xarput/Harput*, ed. Jan Beth-Sawoce, Sayfe Beth-Nahrin (1920), 71ff; Sargon George Donabed and Shamiran Mako, "Harput, Turkey to Massachusetts: Immigration of Jacobite Christians," *Chronos, Revue d'Histoire de l'Université de Balamand*, no. 23 (2011): 20; *Let Them Not Return: Sayfo – The Genocide against the Assyrian, Syriac and Chaldean Christians in the Ottoman Empire*, eds. David Gaunt, Naures Atto, Soner O. Barthoma (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017); *The Assyrian Genocide: Cultural and Political Legacies*, ed. Hannibal Travis (London: Routledge 2017); Sargon Donabed and Ninos Donabed, *Images of America: Assyrians of Eastern Massachusetts* (Charleston, Arcadia Publishing 2006), 13.



Armenian daughter Margarit, a genocide survivor, while Maria Jacobsen and Karen Marie Petersen ended up staying in Harput and Mezreh to the bitter end.<sup>12</sup>

The experiences of the Danish missionaries during the genocide will be dealt with in some detail below, but why were they there, in the Ottoman Empire, in the first place, why was there such a relatively large representation of Danish women working with, for, and among Armenians and other Ottoman populations in the first decades of the 20th century (there were, as we will see, quite a few more during those years than the four abovementioned KMA missionaries), and why did they not all return home during the genocide and its aftermath when they had the chance?

## **The Start of Activities of Women Missionary Workers**

“The church bells chimed on New Year’s Eve. [...] Solemn, full-toned, strangely earnest they sounded over the capital of Denmark in the beautiful moonlit night in the first hour of the new century, while resounding salvos, rockets, and the thunder of the cannons from the battleships anchored outside the harbor spoke their festive language.” That is how Women Missionary Workers ten years later with some pathos describe that fateful night in Copenhagen that marked not only the beginning of the 20th century, when 1899 became 1900, but also of the creation of Danish KMA. KMA was an organization explicitly founded in the service of sanctity with “women working for women,” as the official motto went, and on the agenda was first and foremost easing the continuing suffering of Ottoman Armenian women and children in the wake of the 1890s massacres during the reign of sultan Abdülhamid II (the Hamidian massacres). Like in the rest of the Western world, the massacres had been extensively covered in the media, creating public debate between Armenophiles on one side and Armenophobes (who were often pro-Turkish/Muslim as well as anti-Semitic) on the other. Mostly, though, the coverage created sympathy towards the persecuted in “the land of blood and tears,” as Ottoman Armenia was often referred to.<sup>13</sup>

But what to do in small, neutral, peripheral Denmark about the Armenians living in poverty and fear? To H. V. Sthyr, Danish bishop and conservative Minister of Culture, writing on the occasion of a large-scale pro-Armenian petition in 1896 supported by some of the most influential Danes at the turn of the century, including royalty, clergy,

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12. Davis, *The Slaughterhouse Province*, 40-42; Bryce and Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians*, 286; Elise Bockelund, *Høsten er Stor – KMA’s Historie Gennem 50 År* (København: KMA, 1950), 37; 1915-08-05-DE-002, Enclosure 1. by Scheubner-Richter, a few years later one of Adolf Hitler’s most faithful supporters, is counted as a particularly reliable and well-informed source. Already early 1915, he reported on violence against Armenians in Erzerum and of the likelihood of a coming great massacre, [www.armenocide.de](http://www.armenocide.de); Hilmar Kaiser, “‘A Scene from the Inferno’: The Armenians of Erzerum and the Genocide, 1915-1916,” in *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah/The Armenian Genocide and the Shoah*, ed Hans-Lukas Kieser and Dominic Schaller (Zürich: Kronos Verlag, 2002), 130ff. Alma Johansson likewise reports on how local officials in Mush such as Ekran Bey talked openly about massacres and extermination as early as November 1914 and April 1915; Göran Gunner, *Folkmordet på armenier: sett med svenska ögon* (Stockholm: Artos Norma Bokförlag, 2012), 189.

13. Matthias Bjørnlund, “Virtuous Victims? Imagining Armenians in the West,” *Armenian Weekly*, Special Issue (April 2012): 38-42.

intellectuals, and representatives of all major political parties, "We Danes could do absolutely nothing in a political sense; but everyone with a heart hurting for their suffering could give a little to ease their suffering. The petition is particularly meant for those sensing a brotherly bond with everyone who shares our faith in our Lord and Savior." The women of KMA were inspired by, supported, and initiated such initiatives, though the bond they felt with Ottoman Armenians was definitely more of a sisterly kind. But, like the other large Danish association dedicated to helping the Ottoman Armenians around the year 1900, the largely secular Danish Friends of Armenians (DA) that were to employ the famous teacher and relief worker Karen Jeppe in Urfa and Aleppo, a supporting role was not nearly enough for KMA. They wanted to go out, be on the frontline, and actively save the remnants of a people. Thus, with the creation of KMA and DA, began the first large-scale, long-term, country-wide, professional Danish humanitarian grassroots initiatives on behalf of a faraway, persecuted, "exotic" minority: The Armenian aid.<sup>14</sup>

For Danish KMA a main inspiration to enter the field of mission, humanitarian relief, and developmental aid came, as noted, from outrage and pity after learning about the Hamidian massacres through mass media reports that travelled faster and farther than ever before due to the proliferation of the telegraph, while newspaper correspondents and eye-witnesses had easier access to, e.g., Constantinople with the Orient Express as well as by sea. When trying to collect money for the Ottoman Armenians in the immediate aftermath of the 1890s massacres, Ingeborg Marie Sick, novelist and founding member of Danish Friends of Armenians, succinctly described the broad appeal of this new *cause célèbre* as well as the genuine outrage over these sometimes very public atrocities, like the 1896 slaughter of some 6,000 Armenians in the Ottoman capital following the ARF (Armenian Revolutionary Federation; Tashnag/Dashnag) takeover of the Ottoman Bank in August that year: "*The first contribution was given by the queen [Queen Louise of Denmark]. The next by a captain of a ship anchored at Constantinople when the Armenians were beaten to death in the streets; he saw cut-off ears, noses, and fingers float in the red water of the gutter. That was when he decided that the people who were treated like this should receive all the money he made from his journey.*"<sup>15</sup>

But in order to explain the sudden creation of a proper broad and viable Armenophile movement at that particular time and place, Denmark c. 1900, a number of factors have

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14. Bjørnlund, *Det armenske folkedrab*, 105 and passim.

15. Bjørnlund, *På herrens mark*, 125; Arman J. Kirakossian, *The Armenian Massacres 1894-1896: U. S. Media Testimony* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), passim; Selim Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 206; Fuat Dündar, *A Crime of Numbers: The Role of Statistics in the Armenian Question (1878-1918)* (New Brunswick & London: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 143; Armen Garo (Karekin Pasternadjan), *Bank Ottoman: Memoirs of Armen Garo, the Armenian Ambassador to America from the Independent Republic of Armenia*, translated by Haig T. Partizian (Detroit: Armen Topouzian, 1990); Yair Auron, *The Banality of Indifference: Zionism and the Armenian Genocide* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000), passim; Keith David Watenpaugh, *Bread From Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 63-64.

to be considered. There were, for instance, vital outside influences on the population in general and on KMA and DA in particular. DA was founded in 1902 after several members had attended the Pan-Armenian congress in Brussels in July that year, and further outside influences included European and American organizations such as Pro Armenia, National Armenian Relief Committee, and Friends of Armenia. A few years earlier, the impetus to create Danish KMA came when letters and visits were received from Swedish KMA (formed in 1894) urging a small Danish Bible study group of upper class Copenhagen women to form a committee of a similar nature, with Lutheran-Evangelical women working for women based on a fundamentalist, personal, deeply devotional reading of scripture. The letter writer was teacher and headmistress Fredda Hammer, who had a background in various Swedish women's organizations, and now, after having received a calling from God, aimed at uniting "the women of the North" – Sweden, Denmark, and Norway (in 1900 still part of Sweden), as well as smaller groups in Finland, a Russian principality – to help the Armenians and proselytize abroad, where "souls were to be won for Christ."<sup>16</sup>

"Winning souls for Christ" was in fact a rallying call for the new millenarian Evangelical movement emerging mostly outside established, mainstream religious circles worldwide. It was a virtual "Protestant International," as it has been called, aimed at reviving global ties between the faithful, revitalizing Christianity, and proselytizing at home and abroad in the face of modernity, Darwinism, and secularization, ideally to prepare the second coming of Christ, no less. Though in reality riddled with what some may deridingly call "white savior complexes," often Orientalist, and at times in the service of Western imperialism and colonialism, this International was envisioned as a trans-national peaceful love revolution conquering every inch of every soul and corner of the world through intense Bible study, mission work, education, and aid to the poor. It was simultaneously aimed at returning to the roots of faith, whether imagined or real, *and* at a new way of living, thinking, and acting that gave women a relatively prominent role. While most Evangelical organizations were still male dominated (not counting the Scandinavian KMA branches, obviously), it was widely recognized that without active female participation, no movement could be truly global or effective, especially when it came to reaching out to women and children at home and abroad. All of this deeply appealed to and influenced the women of KMA, who not only read about that broad, heterodox movement, but sought it out at conferences round the world.<sup>17</sup>

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16. Svenbjörn Kilander, "*En Nationalrikedom av Hälsoskatter*": *Om Jämtland och Industrisamhället 1882-1910* (Gidlunds Förlag, 2008), 191-192; Kvinnliga Missions-Arbetare [Women Missionary Workers] (1894). Secretary: Miss Anna Baeckman, Brunnsgatan 3, Stockholm. Object: The spread of the Gospel, and the winning of souls for Christ, especially among the women in non-Christian lands. Income: 23,611 Kr. Organ: "När och fjärran." Fields: China, India, Africa, Armenia, Russia, Sweden, Lapland. In *World Atlas of Christian Missions*, eds. James S. Dennis et al. (New York: 1911). Encyclopedic entry on Swedish KMA; *Great Need over the Water: The Letters of Theresa Huntington Ziegler, Missionary to Turkey, 1898-1905*, ed. Stina Katchadourian (Ann Arbor, MI: Gomidas Institute, 1999), xv.

17. Bjørnlund, *På herrens mark*, passim; Hans-Lukas Kieser, "Johannes Lepsius: Theologian, Humanitarian Activist and Historian of Völkermord. An Approach to a German Biography (1858-1926)," in *Logos im dialogos: Auf der Suche nach der Orthodoxie*, eds. Anna Briskina-Müller, Armenuhi Drost-



By creating their own Evangelical organization, Danish KMA could actively work to answer that cry for help from Armenia which they genuinely believed in hearing, but also be part of an international movement to spread the Christian message of love through mission as well as seek or create opportunities for personal expression and growth, leadership, career, influence, respect, philanthropy, and adventure. Not always on equal terms, as there was an actual class divide in KMA in the early phase – Danish field workers tended to come from working class or lower middleclass backgrounds, while committee members were most often upper class. But fields workers, while having fewer privileges and taking greater personal risks, still gained opportunities in the Ottoman Empire and elsewhere they rarely had at home, including meaningful roles in a religious community other than, say, making coffee while the men were talking.<sup>18</sup>

To name one example, the Danish Lutheran State Church only ordained the first women priests in 1948, while missionaries like Maria Jacobsen and relief workers like Karen Jeppe could and would on occasion go as far as to function as *de facto* priests at ecumenical services for what remained of their flock during the genocide, when all other spiritual leaders were absent, killed or in exile. As another trailblazing Danish missionary, Andrea Gehlert, expressed it around 1900: At home as well as abroad women have an important and ever growing role in “the crusade of our time, the struggle for heavenly Jerusalem.”<sup>19</sup> To find religious and historical justification for this active role the missionary women would, e.g., refer to early Christian communities at the time of Jesus and Paul that could have more liberal views on women as active and prominent in religious matters, and they also seem to have been inspired by certain empowering interpretations of the ancient concept of “the priesthood of all believers” (a.k.a. universal priesthood) that was particularly popular among Lutherans.<sup>20</sup>

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Abgarjan, Axel Meissner (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011), 209-229. On an earlier incarnation of a Protestant International, see, e.g., David E. Lambert, *The Protestant International and the Huguenot Migration to Virginia* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010).

18. Bjørnlund, *På herrens mark*, passim. In contrast, the two Norwegian missionary field workers in the Ottoman Empire at the time, Bodil Bjørn and Thora von Wedel-Jarlsberg, came from wealthy, influential backgrounds: Bjørn's father owned a shipping company, while Wedel-Jarlsberg was a baroness. They both witnessed aspects of the Armenian Genocide: See, e.g., Inger Marie Okkenhaug, “Women on a Mission! Scandinavian Welfare and the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1905-1917,” in *Interpreting Welfare and Relief in the Middle East*, eds. Nefissa Naguib and Inger Marie Okkenhaug (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 57-82.

19. N. Dalhoff, *En Kvindelig Missionær. Efter hendes egne Breve* (Copenhagen: Diakonissestiftelsens Depot 1893), 4. Andrea Gehlert went to proselytize among the Karen-people in Burma (Myanmar) in 1888, but, after encountering Scandinavian sailors in Rangoon, decided they needed saving more than the “heathens”: Karin Lützen: “Andrea Gehlert Franks (1857-1942),” <http://www.kvinfo.dk/side/597/bio/1307/origin/170/>. For an early appraisal of female missionaries, see “Kvinden som Missionær,” in *Gudelige Smaaskrifter*, ed. Foreningen til gudelige Smaaskrifters Udbredelse, Vol. 11 (Copenhagen: 1868), 269-296. The term “crusade” often used by missionaries such as Gehlert should rarely, if ever, be taken literally. As it was put, Christians needed to be careful “not to imitate the example of the crusaders, those deluded champions of the cross.” Quoted in Judd W. Kennedy, *American Missionaries in Turkey & Northern Syria and the Development of Central Turkey and Aleppo Colleges, 1874 – 1967*, unpublished MA Thesis (Virginia: College of William and Mary, 2008), 11.

20. See, e.g. Christine Lienemann-Perrin, “Den Frauen in der Missionsgeschichte Namen und Gesichter

KMA was and remained at heart an Evangelical organization, unlike the non-proselytizing, largely secular organization Danish Friends of Armenians – created and mostly run by Danish-Jewish-Icelandic linguist and free thinker Aage Meyer Benedictsén, himself an eye-witness to the immediate aftermath of the Hamidian massacres when traveling in the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Caucasus, and Iran; with leading members and supporters from Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and non-confessional Danish circles; and led in the field by Karen Jeppe, a liberal and somewhat unconventional Lutheran with a deep distrust of mission work as well as a deep respect for the Armenian Apostolic Church. But in vital matters such as creating possibilities not only for themselves, but, for instance, for Armenian girls and women too, DA and KMA were united rather than divided. Danish KMA's Hansine Marcher is thus rather typical (although unusually direct) in her denunciation of gender inequality and oppression of females at home and abroad from fellow Christians as well as from Muslims in this 1911 letter from the German school for Armenian girls at Mezreh published in a Danish Christian women's journal:

...It is so wonderful to know that Christian women back home are awakening and fight for their rights [Marcher is referring to the feminist struggle in Denmark that, e.g., finally allowed women the right to vote and be elected for parliament in 1915 through a referendum, a struggle where some Christian women's organizations participated alongside more militant suffragettes, MB]. Out here we feel how painfully backwards women are, and the strange thing is that some may be interested in the matter, but those same persons easily come to look at the surface and lose focus of the matter itself. It is not difficult to get a class of children interested in a subject like this so that their thoughts are set in motion, but, e.g., once you begin to work with the female teachers you feel how inexperienced they are when it comes to logical thinking.

And yet these women are living in a wonderland when it comes to freedom. They get to attend the teachers' meeting Friday night and sit on chairs (though only on those close to the door). And since that meeting is also a prayer meeting they are not forbidden to pray as they are elsewhere. Indeed, we have even taken it so far that the female teachers are doing the introduction. That took 3 months of struggle! I felt violated on behalf of the female teachers when they had to sit on the floor and were generally treated with contempt, while the young male teachers sat on chairs; I therefore told the German missionary, who is leading the meeting, and the Armenian Badwilli (priest) that either this had to change, or the female teachers had to have their own prayer meeting. When they would not agree with the second proposal they had to put up with the first.

And when one of the teachers at the girl school that I lead was to introduce the next meeting I asked him to hand over that task to me. After having spoken with the female teachers first, the meeting was held in my living room, with the best seats given to the

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geben," in *"Die Mission ist weiblich": Frauen in der frühen Hermannsburger Mission*, ed. Jobst Reller (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2012), 7-24; Malcolm B. Yarnell III, "The Priesthood of Believers: Rediscovering the Biblical Doctrine of Royal Priesthood," in Thomas White et al., *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008), 221ff; Timothy George, "The Priesthood of All Believers," *First Things* (31 October 2016), <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/10/the-priesthood-of-all-believers>.

female teachers, while the male teachers sat down by the door. They did not feel at home there at all; with the female teachers it was different, they participated enthusiastically in everything, and then I finally declared to the whole group (we have more than 30 male and female teachers) that the female teachers would hereafter lead the meetings. For two weeks the male teachers went along, then they started to long for supremacy again and speak against the agreement. The storm has passed now, though, and, even if the female teacher leading the meeting is not granted the spot that according to Oriental customs belong to the person introducing the meeting, the female teachers are joining in with death-defying energy. – At our teachers' conferences it is always the same struggle! – And yet we demand as much from a female teacher as we do from a male, even though she only gets less than half the salary!

– And we, who have gone out here, are trampled upon by Armenian and Turkish men if we don't time and again force them to show us even a moderate amount of respect. And with every single new male teacher who arrives here at the girl school there is a fight – without words – before he understands how he must behave. For the first couple of days he does not even greet you, while he bows down almost to the ground for a man. The Badwilli (the priest) is for instance in a Protestant congregation like a monarch; that you as a woman dare tell him the truth if he does not follow the school schedule is so unheard of that he is not capable of giving that bold woman a single answer.<sup>21</sup>

Field work was challenging in many ways for Western women, not least when they met resistance from patriarchal individuals and structures such as described by Marcher here. But the possibilities this work created for the missionaries, the spiritual and material rewards gained when, say, a life or a soul was saved and a hospital or an orphanage built, outweighed the negative aspects for most. It is thus no coincidence that if missionary wives (who very often played active roles with mission, relief, nursing, teaching, book keeping, etc.) are counted alongside women missionaries, there were perhaps twice as many women as men sent by missionary organizations to regions such as the Ottoman Empire.<sup>22</sup> There were, of course, also practical reasons for this break with traditional gender roles in Evangelical circles. For instance, as mentioned above, women missionaries

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21. Hansine Marcher, "Af et Brev fra Frk. Marcher i Armenien," *Kristeligt Kvindeblad* 2, no. 10 (1911): 78-79. On Jeppe's background in the liberal Protestant movement Grundtvigianism, the second major revivalist religious as well as socio-cultural 19<sup>th</sup> century movement in Denmark besides Inner Mission, see Matthias Bjørnlund, "Karen Jeppe, Aage Meyer Benedicson and the Ottoman Armenians: National Survival in Imperial and Colonial Settings," *Haigazian Armenological Review* 28 (2008): 9-43.

22. Engelsviken, in *SMT* 91, no. 4 (2003): 498-99. On the importance of having specialized female missionaries, see *World Missionary Conference* (1910): 313, where Miss Rouse, *World's Student Christian Federation*, states: "We have passed through one stage and arrived at another as regards the requirements concerning the preparation and training of women for foreign missionary work. During the first stage the Missionary Societies, through their Candidate's Department, and in other ways, called for, on the part of the women they sent out, earnestness, love of souls, zeal, and success in the winning of souls at home, and Christian experience. But they did not call for specialized preparation. Later on, and now, we find the call coming from the mission field in every direction and from the Boards in every direction for women that have had specialized training. There is a call on all sides for trained teachers for kindergarten workers, for those with M.A. degrees, and doctors and nurses, even for those who have special training in literature, in music, and I have even had demands for specialists in agriculture. The specialist training is right if the specialist demand is right."

had easier access to working among women and children in the Ottoman Empire and elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> Still, in most missionary organizations women were marginalized.<sup>24</sup>

But, all things considered, the Protestant International did significantly overlap with a movement of what has been dubbed “missionary feminism” with scores of active, assertive women acting and negotiating on equal terms with men nationally and internationally, a direct consequence of the utopian Protestant millenarian belief of a radically new and different social and religious order at home and abroad. Here, beliefs in “progress” – which included “civilizing” measures such as modern approaches to teaching and health as well as ideas of increased gender equality – were combined with a transboundary, revolutionary, evangelical spirituality that would in turn help inspire contemporary and later feminist, pacifist, and anti-imperialist movements. Because in the ideals of these missionary feminists there were many things, including a good deal a critical potential directed not only against what they saw as ills of contemporary society – atheism, depravity, materialism, alcoholism, the destruction of family values, etc. – but also against inequality, violence, oppression, and imperialism.<sup>25</sup>

## **Conquering Denmark and Coming to Armenia: Danish KMA as a Global Actor**

The women running Danish KMA were well aware from the beginning that in order to take the leap from local to international affairs meticulous preparation was needed. So, besides from their sisters in Swedish KMA, they sought inspiration from the British Evangelical Keswick movement in particular in the early phase, and they received visits from charismatic individuals involved with the Protestant International such as the influential and controversial Welsh Pentecostal missionary, activist, and writer Jessie Penn-Lewis, as well as by British revivalist preacher Lord Radstock, who had shocked the Russian nobility by trying to bring English Evangelical Protestantism to Orthodox Russia. Other sources of inspiration were local, such as Rev. H. L. Larsen from the Bethlehem Church in one of the largest and poorest working-class neighborhoods in Copenhagen, where the nucleus that were to become Danish KMA was already involved with charity and mission work. Larsen had a background in another major source of inspiration for KMA, Inner Mission, a rural Danish Evangelical movement founded in 1861 on the fringes of the Lutheran State Church. He went on to become an early and active male

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23. See e.g. Dalhoff, *En Kvindelig Missionær*, 16.

24. Anne-Lise Schou, *Ydre og Indre Mission i Vendsyssel 1870-1920* (København: G.E.C. GAD, 1987), 82.

25. Elisabeth E. Prevost, “Introduction: Missionary Feminism,” in *The Communion of Women: Mission and Gender in Colonial Africa and the British Metropole* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Kristin Fjelde Tjelde, “Lærerinnenenes Misjonsforbund gjennom 100 år” in *Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjon* 56, no. 2 (2002): 78-79; <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hic3.12383/full>; Hans-Lukas Kieser, “Some Remarks on Alevi Responses to the Missionaries in Eastern Anatolia (19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> cc.),” 2000, <http://www.hist.net/kieser/pu/responses.html>; Inger Marie Okkenhaug, “Women in Christian Mission: Protestant Encounters from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” <http://kilden.forskningsradet.no/c18372/artikkel/vis.html?tid=17564>.

supporter of women's mission and the Ottoman Armenians, and, as such, a natural ally of KMA, especially in the early phase when they met significant resistance from circles within and outside the Lutheran establishment who believed women should not play too active a role in religious matters.<sup>26</sup>

Further impulses came from German Pastor Ernst Lohmann from Bad Freienwalde, who toured Scandinavia with his brother and fellow priest Johannes on a lecture tour in 1897 arranged by local YMCA/YWCA branches to speak on the suffering Armenians. They had witnessed those sufferings themselves among survivors from the mountains of Tarsus through the plains of Mesopotamia to the river Tigris and the Black Sea.<sup>27</sup> Ernst Lohmann was outraged like so many others about the official German-Ottoman alliance and the resulting poor coverage of the massacres in the German press, where they compared to, say, the Danish or US press, were more often justified or denied. So, he dedicated most of his time to collecting money and raising awareness of the plight of the Armenians in and outside of Germany. In 1896 he founded *Deutschen Hilfsbund (Hilfsbundes) für christliches Liebeswerk im Orient*, the abovementioned organization for "Christian labor of love" in the Orient that soon was to employ Danish KMA-missionaries Jenny Jensen and Hansine Marcher in Mezreh.<sup>28</sup>

As noted, the women of Danish KMA now knew what they wanted, which was to go beyond mere local charity work and Bible study to become active parts of mission and relief among Ottoman Armenian survivors. To achieve this they needed more than support and inspiration: they needed to grow as an organization, which they quickly did through a five-pronged strategy: 1) Writing bylaws, getting permissions, and making a long term outline for operations; 2) Write newspaper articles, pamphlets, etc., to highlight the Armenian cause, to show the general public that Armenians were worthy of sympathy and support, and to explain and defend why they, as women, had the right to not only play such an active role in religious life, but to do it in a potentially dangerous place such as the Ottoman Empire; 3) Networking among Copenhagen high society to get the (semi-)official stamp of approval and additional funding they needed as an NGO with no state support; 4) Cultivating their international network and professionalizing prospective field workers through academic and vocational training at home and abroad; 5) Creating an increasing base of support through numerous meetings, lectures, and bazaars in churches, meeting houses, etc., all over the country. Through this activity, KMA managed to get into contact with thousands of supporters over the years who would contribute through membership of the organization (the only role men could play in Danish KMA were as passive – but paying – members), as sponsors of Armenian children, etc.

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26. Bjørnliund, *På herrens mark*, passim.

27. H. L. Larsen, in "Industrimissionen i Armenien," vol. 1, no. 1 (Juli-August 1922): 1-2. Rev. Larsen, who later was to co-found Jensine Ørtz's *Industrimissionen i Armenien*, functioned as an interpreter at these meetings. See also Ernst Lohmann, *Från blodets och tårernas land: En reseberättelse från Armenien*, (København & Jönköping, no year), 1.

28. Ernst Lohmann, 1860-1936: *Pioner, Gründer, Evangelist*, ed. Martin Knispel (Berlin, 2011), 17-18 and passim; Uwe Feigel, *Das evangelische Deutschland und Armenien: die Armenierhilfe deutscher evangelischer Christen seit dem Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts im Kontext der deutsch-türkischen Beziehungen* (Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1989), 72.



After some initial skepticism (not only because of the gender and lack of formal theological training of the KMA women, but also because of the foreign influences on their religious practice that some regarded as suspicious and alien), they had a major breakthrough when the new, unorthodox chairman of Inner Mission, dean and war veteran Frederik Zeuthen, in 1902 gave them permission to use the more than 500 mission houses all over the country to hold meetings as they pleased. That was a radically and sometimes frightening new experience for KMA as well as for pretty much everyone else. Because letting women speak in such facilities where merely men thus far had spoken, facilities that, besides from the regular parish church, quite often were the only religious, social, and cultural meeting places in any given village or small town, was nothing short of revolutionary. Here was a unique chance to speak to congregations – only women at first, then increasingly diverse groups started attending, including men – about the suffering Armenians and the active role women could play in their salvation, as well as in the salvation of humankind, even in the farthest, most inaccessible and conservative corners of the small kingdom of Denmark. For the aristocratic, urban women leading KMA, those parts of their own country were about as exotic as the Ottoman Empire.<sup>29</sup>

So, with “the Lord’s permission,” as KMA put it, the organization grew rapidly: by 1907, out of a population of some 2,5 million Danes, there were 2,600 loyal paying members plus a significant number of children’s groups and sympathizers, a wide net to back up KMA’s international ambitions. They also established a professional mission school in Copenhagen attended by almost all Scandinavian missionaries in the Ottoman Empire before and during the genocide, published numerous books and pamphlets, e.g., by Ernst Lohman, Irish-Protestant writer Deborah Alcock, and Swiss missionary teacher Beatrice Rohner, as well as the journal *Bring Lys* (*Bring Light*) and a journal specifically for the youth branches.<sup>30</sup> The women and children that Danish KMA worked for were no longer found only in Denmark and the Ottoman Empire. In the years leading up to WWI, the organization’s mission fields reached from the Danish West Indies (Virgin Islands) to China, Syria, and North Africa. But even when KMA went truly global, the Armenians were never forgotten, “Armenia” – whether understood as a state, a part of the Ottoman Empire or the Turkish Republic, maybe a small group of exiled Armenians in an orphanage or a memory, an idea of past freedom and glory – remained the primary focus of Danish KMA until the end of the organization in 1981. The first impression of the suffering of Armenian women – “our sisters” – and children was permanent, inescapable, as expressed in KMA’s very first *Flyveblad for Armenien* (*Leaflet for Armenia*) from 1900, a humble, cheap four-page publication: “As women, our hearts are bleeding for our sisters in Armenia. They have suffered the very worst a woman can suffer. No one

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29. KMA, *Jubilæumsskrift* (1910), unpaginated; *Ringsted Folketidende* (7 May 1902), 1; *Viborg Stifts-Tidende* (7 September 1907), 3.

30. D. Alcock, *For Kristi Skyld*, KMA pamphlet no. 2 (Copenhagen: Missionstrykkeriet, 1900); Beatrice Rohner, *Kristus vort Liv*, KMA pamphlet no. 29 (Copenhagen: Missionstrykkeriet, 1903); Ernst Lohmann, *Ruiner: Skildringer af Armeniske Forhold og Tilstande* (Copenhagen: Kristeligt Dagblads Bogtrykkeri, 1905).

*can imagine what Armenian women and little girls have gone through in the hands of the Turks, and many of these victims live in Turkish harems, in Kurdish towns, or wander about in their misery like those who seek death but do not find it. Something must be done! Christian women like us must do something for the multitude of miserable, homeless children. Many have already been taken in by Christian schools and homes, but thousands are still outside, exposed to worse things than we can speak of."*<sup>31</sup>

Something had to be done, and done by them. They wanted to be in the frontline, for they had a vision: *"A crowd of women slide past the eye; praying women, women united hand in hand, woman for woman across the globe. [...] The curtain is torn and the women from the forecourt have gained access to the holiest of holy by the blood of Christ. The world of women, conquered by a woman's hand [...], the nauseating prison of the harem opened to sun and air, women's hearts – lonely, empty, sad – opened to Jesus!"*<sup>32</sup>

Orientalism, infantilization, Western arrogance, it is all there – the vision of the Middle Eastern woman sitting passively, imprisoned in her harem, waiting for the emancipated, enlightened Western woman to rescue her. That, though, is only part of it. The full KMA vision was in fact more universalist and Christian humanist than Orientalist, and, unlike some colleagues, they were highly skeptical of being used for any worldly cause, including Western imperialist purposes. Rather, their stated ideal goal, which I have no doubt they were sincere about, was to create God's kingdom on earth through mission, relief work, and developmental aid – a free, healthy, enlightened, grateful populace was believed to be more receptive to the words of the Gospel. Helping the poor, emancipating women, and educating the uneducated were also goals in themselves (and it was throughout the years what the women spent by far the most time and energy doing), but it was never the final goal.<sup>33</sup>

It may appear a paradox that while the women of KMA had such grand ambitions and were extremely active, outspoken, and wrote extensively – reports, letters, post cards, books, etc. – we actually know little about them in terms of biographical details. As opposed to, e.g., Danish relief worker and teacher Karen Jeppe, the subject of several

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31. Flyveblad for Armenien, no. 1 (København, 1900); *Bring Lys* 58, no. 4 (April-May 1960): 2; Suzanne E. Moranian, "The Armenian Genocide and American Missionary Relief Efforts," in *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915*, ed. Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 185; *Urd* 6, no. 32 (8 August 1902): 380; Elise Bockelund, *En Tjenergerning blandt Martyrfolket. Kvindelige Missions Arbejdere 1900-1930* (KMA, 1932), 18; KMA, *Jubilæumsskrift*, unpaginated; Leon Arpee, *A History of Armenian Christianity: From the Beginning to Our Own Time* (New York: The Armenian Missionary Society of America, 1946), 275; Johanne Blauenfeldt, "Hvorledes Tysklands Troende Kvinder kom med i Kvindebevægelsen," *Kristeligt Kvindeblad* 2, no. 5 (1911): 34-35; Dalhoff, *En Kvindelig Missionær*, 34-35.

32. KMA, *Jubilæumsskrift*, unpaginated. See also Lange, *Et Blad af Armeniens Historie*, 10-11: "The Armenian woman, too, has been degraded under the yoke and influence of Mohammedanism to such a degree that her situation is little better than the Mohammedan woman and, like her, will often be veiled in public."

33. Bjørnlund, *På herrens mark*, passim; Maria Småberg, *Ambivalent Friendship: Anglican Conflict Handling and Education for Peace in Jerusalem, 1920-1948* (Lund University, 2005), 27; Lange, *Et Blad af Armeniens Historie*, 10-11; Jensine Ørtz, *Fra Armenien*, KMA (no year), 18.

monographies, knowledge of the background of the women of Danish KMA, especially life before they received their calling and went into the field, is mostly sketchy at best. Like Jeppe, they rarely find their personal relations and early life particularly interesting. But unlike Jeppe, there are only few examples where the KMA women violate that unspoken principle for PR-reasons.<sup>34</sup> The answer lies in the ideal of self-sacrifice, even of “the death of the self,” as it was put at the Danish KMA’s third conference in Copenhagen in 1907, a state where one only lived and worked for the Lord and those who were suffering.<sup>35</sup> For the Danish women such ideas never excluded pragmatism when confronted with real world problems, nor did it stand in the way of love of life and the living, but those ideas were nevertheless seriously meant, even to the extent that they were ready and willing to pay the ultimate price as martyrs for the cause, as can be seen from this description in an official KMA publication from an international meeting of missionaries in the German city of Rostock in 1902:

We were a small crowd who had travelled there together from Sweden and Denmark, and days of earnest introspection with many blessings became a milestone on K. M. A.’s journey; a new carpet was added to the others. We saw the work of other women, heard the voice of other women bring new impulses, add new subject matters. [...] For all of us Countess Elisabeth Waldersee’s earnest words on, like Esther, “daring all to win all” were also an inspiration to not live oneself, not dwell on the “soft blanket” in the paneled houses, but, like Esther, to want to say and dare to say: “And if I die, I die” (Esth. 4, 16).<sup>36</sup>

“And if I die, I die.” Those were not empty words: Late summer 1901, some 18 months after establishing Danish KMA, they were ready to send the first missionaries into the Ottoman field. At this point they already sponsored some 40 orphaned Armenian girls at German orphanages in and around Mezreh and Harput in the Mamouret-ul-Aziz province and in Bitlis by Lake Van, as well as a smaller number of Armenian girls and boys in American Board facilities further to the east and south in Marash, Mush, and Diyarbakir. But even that was not enough, well-aware of the risks and challenges of field work the Danish women wanted full control of an operation with mission, relief, and an orphanage of their own. So, in August 1901, head nurse Christa Hammer was sent to Mezreh as the first Danish KMA missionary in the Ottoman Empire, at first to gain experience at the German *Elim* orphanage for girls and to learn Armenian and Turkish. But, as planned, she quickly began to search for a suitable building for KMA’s own orphanage.

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34. *Meddelelser fra Armenien*, K.M.A.s Komité for Armenien (1901), 4; *Et Tilbageblik. K.M.A. (Kvindelige Missionsarbejdere) 1902-1912* (Kristiania: KMA, 1912), 5, 11, 12-13; Inger Marie Okkenhaug, Herren har givet mig et rigt virkefelt. Kall, religion og arbeid blant armenere i det osmanske riket,” *Historisk Tidsskrift*, vol. 88 (2009), passim; *Great Need over the Water*, xii; *Bring Lys*, vol. 6, no. 7 (September-October 1908): 1-5.

35. *Kvindelige Missions Arbejderes 3. Konference i København, fra 13. til 15. Oktober 1907* (Copenhagen, 1907).

36. KMA *Jubilæumsskrift*, unpaginated. “Paneled houses” is a reference to Haggai 1:4, “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?”, <http://biblehub.com/haggai/1-4.htm>.

KMA never shied away from close cooperation with foreign or male dominated organizations – organizations such as ABCFM and *Deutsche Hilfsbund* could after all provide vital know-how, security, connections, and infrastructure in the Ottoman Empire, an unsafe and largely unknown environment for the Danes, however well-prepared they were. But it was always the ambition that core operations were run solely by the women themselves. It was not an easy job. Hammer came straight from relatively uneventful Copenhagen to an area still struggling with the effects of the 1890s massacres – many Armenian men, traditional breadwinners, were gone, women abducted or living in poverty, orphaned children roaming the streets. Also, the local Ottoman authorities were actively trying to prevent this new Western, Christian missionary organization from establishing a foothold, even threatening to forcibly remove Armenian children from the *Emaus* orphanage; Apostolic Armenians were mostly welcoming aid, schools, hospitals, and orphanages, but, especially after the many forced conversions to Islam in the wake of the 1890s massacres, they were naturally against losing more believers to Protestant and Catholic proselytization that often followed relief work; while oppression and violence were still widespread, according to sources such as *Kom og hjælp os! (Come and Help Us!)*, KMA’s pamphlet no. 16, 1902:

Indeed, in the year 1901 too much blood has been shed, many tears have been cried in Armenia, in the land of blood and tears. Besides from the abovementioned atrocities, considerable massacres have taken place in the vicinity of Van and Bitlis in July and August; the country is still flooded, partly by Kurds, partly by regular Turkish troops, and both parties ravage and grind down the land, kill men and ravish women, rob and plunder wherever they can. Many orphaned and homeless children still wander around, and a good many miserable widows suffer endlessly.

And what is being done to relieve the suffering? The various European Powers have made their suggestion to the Sublime Porte, but since they do not act in unison the Porte has yet to change the way it treats the Armenians, and the eerie silence which by and large has settled over the events in this miserable country is not a good omen. So there is not much help to expect from the world’s mighty empires and powers.<sup>37</sup>

In 1907, the situation had hardly improved according to American Board missionary, priest, and dean of the Anatolia College at Marsovan (Merzifon), George E. White:

There is no direct hindrance to religious liberty other than the usual one: no permission to build anything for religious purposes. Many during the past two years have come into the Protestant community, and there have been encouraging additions to the Churches in several places. But the outlook is not very encouraging to Evangelical Christianity, chiefly because of government oppression. They have begun collecting the arrears of the soldier-taxes remitted three years ago. They are also forcing those Armenians who have been to America to leave the country, arresting, imprisoning, and expelling them under guard.

Oppressive and depressive as things are here, Van, Bitlis, and the eastern Turkish

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37. KMA, 10.360, pk. 40, “Protokol for Armenien. K.M.A. Komite for Armenien. Maj 1900-Dec. 1902,” meeting 26/11 1902; *Kom og hjælp os!*, KMA pamphlet no. 16 (Copenhagen: Kristeligt Dagblads Bogtrykkeri, 1902).

border are far worse. In Van the merciless exaction of taxes leads to the taking of bedding, furniture, implements of trade, and standing crops. The Armenians of the province of Van are ground to powder between two mill-stones, the revolutionists and the government officers, and their cry goes up, Lord! How long! Were it not for this, spiritual prospects there would be bright. But how can men think of their souls, when they are in terror for their lives? There is an enormous exodus to America, and it sweeps away preachers, teachers, and those who should be the backbone of the Church and of society.<sup>38</sup>

And there were the diseases, which destroyed the health and lives of many locals and Westerners alike, including Christa Hammer:

Sister Christa's departure took place from Copenhagen Central Station on 30 august [1901], where we met her wise, mild eyes and felt the warm, firm shake of her hand for the last time ... Two years! Years filled with happiness in the service of the Lord, years filled with difficulties, longing, and hardship, until the hour came when the Lord called his servant home after only 14 days of sickness – typhoid, which she most likely contracted by nursing a German sister. Then the white casket was lowered into the soil of Armenia, the soil that has drunk the blood of so many Christians and chosen witnesses.<sup>39</sup>

But before that, Hammer had managed to accomplish her task by gaining vital local knowledge, establish a network of contacts among Ottomans and Westerners, and acquire a building for the Danish KMA orphanage, *Emaus*, with some 40-60 Armenian orphan girls in the years before WWI. And other well-trained, highly motivated women KMA missionaries, all with relevant educations and practical experience – teaching, nursing, midwifery, administration, etc. – were sent to work among Armenians in the Harput region in the years before the genocide. They included nurse Christiane Black, Wilhelmine and Sigrid Grünhagen (a widowed mother and her daughter), Maria Jacobsen, Hansine Marcher, Jenny Jensen, Jensine Ørtz, and Karen Marie Petersen, as well as Swedish KMA's Alma Johansson and Norwegian KMA's Bodil Biørn, who mostly worked further to the east in the empire, but kept close contact with their Danish friends and colleagues, most of whom they knew from the mission school in Copenhagen and from meetings and conferences around the world. They were there to, first of all, learn the necessary Ottoman languages, then as soon as possible to build schools, hospitals, orphanages, and to change the world – and be changed, because the meeting or clash of cultures and religions in or outside a colonial context leaves no one and nothing untouched.

Few converted to the missionaries' preferred branch of Christianity (Ottoman Armenians and other local populations were rarely uncritical or passive recipients of whatever missionaries and relief workers had to offer) – and, the occasional propaganda

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38. *Maintaining the Unity: Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference and Diamond Jubilee Celebration of the Evangelical Alliance Held in London, July 1907* (London: The Council of the British Organization of the Alliance, 1907), 328-29. See also, e.g., "Die armenischen Forderungen," *Sonnen-Aufgang: Mitteilungen aus dem Orient*, vol 7, no. 1 (October, 1904): 4.

39. KMA, *Jubilæumsskrift*, unpaginated.



piece for public consumption aside, it is doubtful whether conversion of Apostolic Armenians was ever a goal for KMA. They rather wanted the same thing for Armenians as they wanted for Danes: a faith that went beyond tradition and rituals to become a deep, intimate, lived experience that filled the hearts of the practitioners and would ultimately transform the world. Anyway, many Ottomans were 'saved' in a more material sense. Last, but not least, the missionaries witnessed the transformation of the Ottoman Empire from 1900-1920. At first with hope and joy mixed with caution during the 1908 Young Turk revolution, then, from the 1909 massacres in and around Adana, with increasing disillusion and pessimism until the outbreak of world war and genocide.<sup>40</sup>

## Life During Genocide

The systematic implementation of the genocide in the Harput region has been touched upon above and dealt with extensively elsewhere.<sup>41</sup> In short, by the end of 1916, some

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40. Karen Vallgård, "Omvendte omvendelser: Om to danske missionærers møde med Indien i første halvdel af det 20. århundrede," *Historisk Tidsskrift* 108, no. 2 (2008): 389-426; Bjørnlund, *På herrens mark*, passim; Kurt E. Larsen, "Var Indre Mission og grundtvigianismen hinandens modsætninger?," *Kristeligt Dagblad* (21 November 2017).

41. See Bjørnlund, *Det armenske folkedrab & På herrens mark*, passim. See also, e.g., Ara Safafian, *Talaat Pasha's Report on the Armenian Genocide* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2011), 21 and passim; Leslie A. Davis, "Turkey, Harput, 15 March 1915," *Supplement to Commerce Reports: Daily Consular and Trade Reports Issued by the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce*, no. 18a (Washington D. C.: Department of Commerce, 1915), 1; Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, especially chapter 7; Davis, *The Slaughterhouse Province*, passim; *Armenian Tsopk/Kharpert*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers 2002); *A Village Remembered: The Armenians of Habousi*, ed. Vatche Ghazarian (Monterey: Mayreni Publishing, 1997); Jacobsen, *Maria Jacobsen's Diary*, passim; Helle Schøler Kjær, *Danske Vidner til det Armenske Folkedrab* (Forlaget Vandkunsten, 2010); *The United States Official Records of the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917*, ed. Ara Sarafian (Princeton & London: Gomidas Institute, 2004), passim; Hagop S. Der-Karapetian, *Jail to Jail: Autobiography of a Survivor of the 1915 Armenian Genocide* (New York, Lincoln, Shanghai: iUniverse, Inc., 2004 (1957)), 9-20 and passim; Vahakn N. Dadrian and Taner Akcam, *Judgment at Istanbul: The Armenian Genocide Trials* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books 2011), passim; James L. Barton, *Turkish Atrocities: Statements of American Missionaries on the Treatment of Armenians in Ottoman Turkey 1915-1917* (London: Gomidas Institute, 1998), passim; Henry H. Riggs, *Days of Tragedy in Armenia. Personal Experiences in Harpoot, 1915-1917* (Ann Arbor: Gomidas Institute, 1997); Mardiros Chitjian, *A Hair's Breadth from Death* (London and Reading: Taderon Press, 2001), 81-82; Ruth A. Parmelee, *A Pioneer in the Euphrates Valley* (Princeton: Gomidas Institute, 2002 (1967)); Abraham D. Krikorian and Eugene L. Taylor, "Filling in the Picture: Postscript to a Description of a Well-Known 1915 Photograph of Armenian Men of Kharpert Being Led Away under Armed Guard," 13 June 2013, *Armenian News Network/Groong*; idem, American Missionary Physician Dr. Ruth A. Parmelee Describes the 1915 'Harpoot Deportations': with Appendix of some rare imagery from our files to complement what she wrote; included is the Infamous 'Deportation Proclamation,'" *Armenian News Network/Groong*, 29 September 2017, <http://groong.usc.edu/orig/ak-20170929.html>; Bryce and Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians; The Armenian Genocide: Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915-1916*, ed. Wolfgang Gust (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2013), passim; Tacy Atkinson, "The German, the Turk, and the Devil Made a Triple Alliance": *Harpoot Diaries, 1908-1917* (Princeton, NJ: Gomidas Institute, 2003); Vahé Tachjian, "Building the 'Model Ottoman Citizen': Life and Death in the Region of Harput-Mamüretülaziz (1908-1915)," in *World War I and the End of the Ottomans: From the Balkan Wars to the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser, Kerem Öktem, Maurus Reinkowski (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2015).

80-90% of local Armenians were killed in the region or on the death marches, while the rest were exiled, forcibly assimilated, or living in fear protected by Western missionaries. All four Danish KMA missionaries make abundantly it clear in their diaries and memoirs that it was an experience of utter horror, as when Karen Marie Petersen describes her encounter in Mezreh with survivors of death marches from the north and north-east early July 1915. Everyone now knew that deportation meant extermination:

It was then that another crowd of people came to the town – expellees from Erzinjan and Erzerum, who had left their homes one month earlier, just as our friends had done today [Petersen is referring to the deportation of Mezreh Armenians that same day, 3 July 1915, described above in the prologue, MB]. All were ragged and half-naked, starved and exhausted. They camped in a field outside of town. It was mostly women and children, with a few old men and adolescent boys. The strong, powerful men were killed after one day's journey. They yelled and screamed for something to eat. At the orphanage we cooked for in big containers in a hurry and drove it to them in a wagon.

They threw themselves at us like wild animals, we were nearly crushed to death. In a moment all the food was gone – it had been like a drop in the ocean. Many were lying on the ground, sick with fever and begging for milk; their tongues were swollen, and they had not been able to eat for days. Their arms were burnt by the sun, their skin was shredded, and their feet were swollen so that they could hardly walk. The air was filled with stench; most had dysentery – around us dead people were lying, but dead was greeted with joy, as a liberator! This was the first time I came into close contact with the expelled, but it was not the last. Indeed, all summer the same event was repeated; one group after another went through the town, that was now dubbed: “The Great Slaughterhouse” – because the dreadful thing was that when they reached our town all men were killed a few hours from there.<sup>42</sup>

At this point there was little talk about Evangelical world revolution in the letters, diaries, and postcards of the Danish KMA women. Disease and famine raged, no Armenian was safe anywhere in the Empire, not even at Western compounds, so for Maria Jacobsen, Karen Marie Petersen, and their colleagues it was purely a matter of saving lives, even if that meant breaking Ottoman laws and decrees for the normally extremely law-abiding missionaries. For instance, Petersen reported on the decree ordering everyone, Christian or Muslim, sheltering Armenians to be hanged in their doorway while their house was burned down, but she still kept 121 Armenian women and children at the *Emaus* orphanage, double the normal maximum capacity, filling all floors of the building to such a degree that when Bodil Biørn and Alma Johansson came by on

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42. Lange, *Et Blad af Armeniens Historie*, 3-4. On the temporary concentration/death camp outside Mezreh at a place called the Four Fountains and at an Armenian cemetery, see also Jacobsen, *Maria Jacobsen's Diary*, 232-233, 269-273, 288; Rouben Paul Adalian, “American Diplomatic Correspondence in the Age of Mass Murder: Documents of the Armenian Genocide in the U.S. Archives,” in *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915*, 160; Bryce and Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians*, 297, 306; Atkinson, “*The German, the Turk, and the Devil*”, 40, 53; Riggs, *Days of Tragedy in Armenia*, 146-147; Barton, *Turkish Atrocities*, 68; Esther Mugerditchian, *From Turkish Toil: The Narrative of an Armenian Family's Escape* (New York: George H. Doran co., 1918), 15.

their journey home after having witnessed the genocide in Mush, they had to sleep in a tent in the garden.<sup>43</sup>

Some of the Armenians at *Emaus* the Ottoman authorities knew about and tolerated, although they could never feel safe, as Petersen later related: "*The Turks looked at us with evil eyes, and they often threatened us, saying that our turn to be sent away would come. It also happened quite often that Turkish officers walking on the street looked at the orphanage and talked about what they would use the building for when we had been chased out by them. Indeed, we had no other choice than to count on possibility that we would be sent away, so we had, among other preparations, made knapsacks for the children to carry on their backs containing their clothes and some bread.*"<sup>44</sup>

Others, like a number of former students at *Emaus* who had escaped or been thrown out from Muslim households, were there secretly. Vartanush Lusigian was the name of one of them; according to the orphanage protocol she was "taken in Sept. 1915. 14 years old. Orphaned, her whole family has been killed. Quiet, appealing, modest." That was also the case with the only adult male at the orphanage, the priest Durdad. He had brought his wife and six children to Karen Marie Petersen and wanted to leave immediately, willing to sacrifice his own life in case he was wanted by the authorities. Petersen would have none of that, she conveniently heard God speaking to her through the Book of Proverbs 24:11-12, "Deliver those who are being taken away to death, And those who are staggering to slaughter, Oh hold them back. If you say, 'See, we did not know this,' Does He not consider it who weighs the hearts? And does He not know it who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work?" So Durdad was hidden in a secret compartment in the wood shed.<sup>45</sup>

People like Durdad were obviously not safe in the region, nor were it safe to hide them, so during the genocide, some or all of the Danish missionaries at Mezreh and Harput not only protected Armenians. They also became part of the proverbial "underground railway," where Armenians and Westerners cooperated with some of the many Kurds who opposed the regime and aided Armenians for political, humanitarian, and/or economic reasons in order to smuggle the most immediately threatened Armenian survivors to the Dersim area (Tunceli) north of Harput and beyond. August 1915, for instance, *Emaus* became a stop on the escape route to freedom when Misag, a local

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43. Bjørnlund, *På herrens mark*, 154. See also, e.g., Taner Akcam, "Mahmut Kamil Paşa'nın ilk telgrafı: 'Evinde Ermeni saklayanın evi yakılacak ve evi önünde idam edilecektir,'" *Agos*, May 3, 2017. On Alma Johansson and Bodil Bjørn: Alma Johansson, *Ett folk i landsflykt: Ett år ur armeniernes historia* (Stockholm: KMA, 1930); Maria Småberg, "Witnessing the Unspeakable – Alma Johansson and the Armenian Genocide of 1915," (Lund, 2009) (unpublished paper, which I thank Maria Småberg for sharing); idem, "The Swedish Mayrik': Saving Armenian Mothers and Orphans 1902-1941," in *In Times of Genocide 1915-2015*, ed. Lars Hillås Lingius (Studieförbundet Bilda, 2015); Inger Marie Okkenhaug, "Religion, Relief and Humanitarian Work among Women Refugees in Mandatory Syria, 1927-1934," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 40, no.3 (2015): 432-454.

44. Lange, *Et Blad af Armeniens Historie*, 45.

45. Bjørnlund, *På herrens mark*, 154-155; KMA, 10.360, pk. 112, "Protokol over Plejebørn i Børnehjemmet 'Emaus' i Mezreh, 1909-1917"; <http://biblehub.com/proverbs/24-11.htm>; Lange, *Et Blad af Armeniens Historie*, 45.

Armenian barber, arrived disguised as a veiled Turkish woman to hide in the Danish orphanage until nightfall, as Karen Maria Petersen later recalled:

One afternoon a silk-clad Turkish woman came; it turned out to be – Misag the barber. The evening before he had come out of his hiding place and came to us to hide until the evening, when he would leave with the Kurds. [A footnote is added in the original text here: “In the final part of the time of deportation Kurds helped Armenians escape.”] They had sent a man back to pick him up and waited by the river with the other refugees. The barber’s wife, a Portuguese woman with two children, was here, and it is touching to see his joy when he was reunited with his children. His beard had grown completely wild, and when he was later dressed as a Kurd he could pass as one. He said that he had been hiding 8 hours from here on the other side of Gølsjik [Lake Göljök].

God alone had miraculously saved him, because it was a nest of robbers. He saw how they attacked people sent into exile. Once they had brought a woman to the house and promised to defend her – and then they killed her right in front of his eyes. He had paid one lira a week, but they did not dare to keep him any longer. He thanked me with tears in his eyes because I had taken in his wife, because otherwise they would have all been dead by now. Had she and the children been with him on the road he would not have been able to escape.<sup>46</sup>

Those who did not manage to get away were often found dead shortly after, or they remained in virtual imprisonment such as Digin (Mrs.) Versjin, a close personal friend of several missionaries, including Karen Marie Petersen. There are several reasons (besides, perhaps, plain luck) why it was possible for the missionaries to stay in the region and help surviving Armenians, even during a genocide.<sup>47</sup> Among those reasons the most important one was perhaps bribery, which Danish KMA also resorted to when they managed to get small shipments of gold safely through to Harput with the help of the Danish and US legations and ABCFM headquarters in Constantinople. Luckily, many local soldiers and officials, including *vali* Sabit Bey himself, were corrupt. Furthermore, many wanted to be on a good footing with the missionaries in case the Russians occupied the area, but missionaries were often also genuinely respected by local Muslims and Christians alike, as they worked tirelessly to save the lives of not only Armenians, but also of Ottoman soldiers and civilians.<sup>48</sup> January 1918 Maria Jacobsen was thus nominated for an Ottoman medal of bravery for having helped a large number of sick and wounded Ottoman soldiers at the risk of her own life. It was an Ottoman army doctor who nominated her via Turkish Red Crescent, at this point in reality a Young Turk outfit.<sup>49</sup>

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46. Bockelund, *En Tjenergerning blandt Martyrfolket*, 45–46.

47. Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 237; Burcin Gercek, Taner Akcam and Ömer Türkoglu, *Turkish Rescuers: Report on Turks who Reached Out to Armenians in 1915*, [http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/wp-content/files\\_mf/1435335304ReportTurkishrescuerscomplete.pdf](http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/wp-content/files_mf/1435335304ReportTurkishrescuerscomplete.pdf), 57ff.

48. Bjørnlund, *Det armenske folkedrab & På herrens mark*, passim. See also, e.g., Susan Billington Harper, “Mary Louise Graffam: Witness to Genocide,” in *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915*, 222.

49. Bjørnlund, *På herrens mark*, 157; Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 943, note 39.

22 April 1917, the Ottoman Empire and the USA broke diplomatic relations. That had severe repercussions in the Harput region, as Leslie Davis and those remaining of the originally 72 American missionaries left the country mid-May. The consul tried to take Armenians with US citizenship with him, but at this point the authorities allowed no ethnic Armenians to leave the country.<sup>50</sup> Hereafter, it was basically left to Maria Jacobsen, a neutral citizen working for both KMA and ABCFM, and a handful of Armenian co-workers who had survived this far to care for what remained of the vast American Board operation and the Armenians in their care. The Danes were short on funding and had to choose who to feed among starving Armenian survivors in Harput and Mezreh. They had to focus on the survivors at *Emaus* and the American compound, all in all 800-1,000, as well as some additional 1,000-1,500 Armenian women and children in the final phase of the war.<sup>51</sup>

As Maria Jacobsen wrote in an uncensored letter 11 February 1917 that had been smuggled out with German help to Elise Blædel from Danish KMA's Armenia Committee, poverty and misery were boundless, worse than ever before. The Danish missionary expressed clear frustration that it was hard to explain to the Committee exactly how bad the situation was: there were 5,000 Armenian survivors in Harput and Mezreh at this point, most of whom had until recently been abducted to Turkish and Kurdish households as wives and slaves. But now they had been put on the street as the Muslim "owners" no longer could or would feed them. Those Armenians had nothing, they were dirty, starved, abused, and ragged, there was no work and no help to get from the authorities or the local population, there were only the missionaries.<sup>52</sup> Finally, in 1919, the last Danish missionaries in the Empire, Maria Jacobsen and Karen Marie Petersen, were relieved by their American Board colleagues. The few remaining Armenians were expelled, evacuated, or left behind facing continuing oppression, Turkification, forced conversion, and constant threats.<sup>53</sup>

## In Lieu of a Conclusion

The Armenian Genocide was aimed at destroying the physical, religious, and cultural presence of a people in their ancient lands. But even such a cataclysmic event left survivors. Almost all were exiled, most in the immediate vicinity of what was to become

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50. *The United States Official Records of the Armenian Genocide*, 683-684; Barbara J. Merguerian, "Kharpert: The View From the United States Consulate," in *Armenian Tsopk/Kharpert*, 305.

51. Jacobsen, *Maria Jacobsen's Diary*, 764, 792.

52. KMA, 10.360, pk. 13, "1917", letter from Maria Jacobsen to Elise Blædel, 11/2 1917; Jacobsen, *Maria Jacobsen's Diary*, 932; Parmelee, *A Pioneer*, 50-51; Levon Marashlian, "Finishing the Genocide: Cleansing Turkey of Armenian Survivors, 1920-1923," in *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 113ff.

53. Jacobsen, *Maria Jacobsen's Diary*, 932 and passim; Parmelee, *A Pioneer*, 50-51; Marashlian, "Finishing the Genocide," passim. On the similar fate of deported Greeks in the Harput region post -WWI, see Robert Shenk, *America's Black Sea Fleet: The U.S. Navy Amidst War and Revolution, 1919-1923* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012), passim.



the Turkish Republic, so this was where the Danish women missionaries and relief workers of KMA and DA went from 1919: to Constantinople before the Kemalists came, and then to Greece, Syria, and Lebanon. Karen Jeppe went to Aleppo and became a League of Nations commissioner working to free Armenian women and children from Muslim households. Among her staff was Jenny Jensen, formerly of KMA in Mezreh. No matter the ideological differences between KMA and DA, there was always agreement that saving the remnants of a nation, also spiritually through education, religion, and language, was of primary importance. Jensine Ørtz of Women Missionary Workers, posted in Malatya until the summer of 1914 when she went home on sick leave, started her own organization to help Armenian survivors in Greece from 1921, an organization that still exists today. And Maria Jacobsen and Karen Marie Petersen worked among the Armenians in the Lebanese refugee camps from 1922 before establishing the Bird's Nest Orphanage for Armenian girls and boys, first in Zouk Mikhail and Sidon outside Beirut, then in Byblos (Djbeil). More KMA missionaries followed over the decades, including Maria Jacobsen's younger sister.<sup>54</sup>

Like numerous international relief worker and missionary colleagues and, not least, Armenian organizations, the Danish women literally dedicated their lives to the starving, traumatized survivors. The genocide and what was viewed as the subsequent betrayal of the Armenians by the Western powers did at times lead to depression and a temporary loss of purpose and hope for some missionaries. But almost all bounced back. Their faith could be shaken, but it was fundamentally strong, and they even sometimes found some meaning in meaningless slaughter – during and after 1915 the Armenians are, for instance, quite often referred to as “the Martyred People,” suffering not in vain, but for faith, and therefore for all of us. Besides from faith and meaning, the women definitely found a purpose with their own lives again when learning that they were still needed among the survivors. It is thus no coincidence that Maria Jacobsen, Karen Jeppe, and lesser-known KMA worker Dorthea Kulager Pedersen all laid buried in the faraway field. Like KMA's Christa Hammer, who died in Mezreh in 1903, and Else Kjærsgaard, a Danish female agronomist employed by Jeppe who succumbed to illness in Urfa in 1909 while helping to establish agricultural colonies in the area before them, they all willingly once more gave up their “normal,” arguably safer lives in Denmark for idealistic and ideological reasons as well as to seek meaning, opportunities, challenges, and adventure.<sup>55</sup>

The Christian world revolution desired by the women of KMA did not materialize, however, and there is little evidence that the Danish women even managed to convert a single non-Protestant Armenian, let alone a Muslim, in the Empire. But, all rhetoric aside, KMA was from the beginning more concerned with “vitalizing” the allegedly petrified Apostolic Armenian faith than in actual proselytizing as noted above. And while working for their revolutionary ideal they furthered a transnational cause that may in a broad sense be called humanitarian. At the very least it was a cause that involved “the practices of building trust through close relationships and responding to actual needs of concrete others and the values of interdependence, empathy, sensitivity to the context and

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54. Bjørnlund, *Det armenske folkedrab & På herrens mark*, passim.

55. Bjørnlund, *Det armenske folkedrab & På herrens mark*, passim.

responsiveness – in contrast to abstract universal principles of impartiality, individual rights and justice.”<sup>56</sup> And, according to at least one precise, meaningful, non-anachronistic definition, it was a feminist cause: the women did indeed have “a gender-based, but egalitarian vision of social organization.” Furthermore, by caring for the most vulnerable, they saved thousands of lives and mobilized thousands of others in the process, creating an enduring legacy from Denmark to Armenia and beyond.<sup>57</sup>

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56. Maria Småberg, “On Mission in the cosmopolitan World. Ethics of Care in the Armenian Refugee Crisis, 1920-1947,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 40, no. 3 (2015): 409.

57. Bjørnlund, *På herrens mark*, passim. The definition of feminism is found in Karen Offen, “Defining Feminism. A Comparative Historical Approach,” *Signs* 14, no.1 (1998): 135-136.