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Cleall, E. (2024) Imperial optics and colonial disability: missions to blind and deaf children in 'the East', c. 1880-1939. Postcolonial Studies, 27 (1). pp. 17-35. ISSN 1368-8790

https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2024.2320084

Imperial optics and colonial disability: missions to blind and deaf children in 'the East', c. 1880-1939

Writing in the 1920s, M. E. Hume-Griffith, the wife of a missionary and author of several missionary texts in her own right, wrote of the 'terribly sad state in which many of the afflicted children of the East live'. Work amongst disabled South and East Asian children could demonstrate, Hume-Griffiths argued, 'how apparently hopeless the raw material is, and at the same time how wonderfully God uses His instruments in bringing out all that is good and worthwhile in these saddened lives, making them bright and glorifying for Him'.[1] The children of whom Hume-Griffith wrote were, in her thinking, doubly 'afflicted': they were 'heathen' and they were disabled. They could be saved only, she suggested, by Protestant British missionary intervention. This article examines some of these interventions, focusing on missions to blind and deaf children in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century India, Sri Lanka and China established under the auspices of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society (CEZMS) and all condescendingly grouped under the remit of work to 'the East'. Missionaries aimed to make disabled children 'bright' by addressing their bodily, spiritual and social needs and, as such, worked within a complex framework of race, disability and gender difference.

The CEZMS missions can be contextualised in terms of two traditions of historical developments that have tended to be explored relatively separately. One is 'overseas' missionary activity in South and East Asia. This work, which dates back to the late eighteenth century, was well-established by the late nineteenth-century, and the writings of missionaries provided a major 'conduit of information' about various disparate geographical locations, back in metropolitan Britain.[2] These endeavours have been much analysed by critical colonial historians and historians of missionaries who, whilst seldom putting disability into the analytic frame, have elucidated the workings of race and gender on the mission stations, providing a useful foundation for this article.[3] A second important context is philanthropic (including missionary) work amongst largely white disabled people back in the British metropole.[4] Although most work analysing these developments has not taken an imperial framework, it provides a wonderful basis for understanding another set of pedagogical and institutional forerunners upon which CEZMS

[1] M. E. Hume Griffith, *Dust of Gold: an account of the work of the CEZMS among the Blind and Deaf of India, China and Ceylon* (London: CEZMS, 1925), pp. 2-3.

[2] Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in 19th-Century England* (California: California University Press, 1999).

[3] Anna Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1880-1860* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003); Esme Cleall, *Missionary Discourses of Difference: negotiating otherness in the British Empire, 1840-1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012). For more on missionaries more generally see Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant missionaries and overseas expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: MUP, 2004); Emily Manktelow, *Missionary Families: race, gender and generation on the spiritual frontier* (Manchester: MUP, 2013).

[4] See for example, David Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: imagining physical impairment* (Basingstoke: Routledge, 2012); Ian Hutchison, *A history of disability in nineteenth-century Scotland* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007).

missionaries also drew. In flagging some of the commonalities and differences between the treatment of disability in colonial and metropolitan spaces throughout this article, I argue that the CEZMS missions to disabled South and East Asian children represent a dense locus point through which to think about ideas about disability in a colonial context.[5]

I also build on a range of work that interrogates the complex relationship between disability and post/colonialism and that explores the intersections between disability and race. In his important 2011 publication *Blackness and Disability*, the cultural theorist Chris Bell urged work on the 'recovery and detection' of bodies that were both raced and disabled.[6] Part of my interest in working on CEZMS missions is to uncover the lives of the South Asian and East Asian children who lived in them. Besides a fantastic article on blindness in colonial India by the medical historian Aparna Nair, and a recent biography of Amy Oxley Wilkinson, a missionary to blind people in India, there is little written about these missions.[7] Recovery will form the basis of part one of this article, which sets up what we know about life on the missions, and part four of the article asks questions about 'resistance' and indigenous agency. However, because access to these children's lives is heavily filtered through archival and published records left by the (white, British) missionaries, missionary discourses themselves are by necessity also central to my analysis and this occupies the middle part of this article. In working with missionary writings, I argue that we come back to ideas about the construction of 'race' and intersectional relationship with disability. The complex relationship between blackness and disability has been explored from both sociological and historical perspectives.[8] Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy's work, for example, powerfully analyses how systems of enslavement were not only physically and psychologically disabling for people who were enslaved, but also created discursive associations between disability and blackness.[9] In analysing intersections between race, otherness, and disability in South and East Asia, I hope to add another strand to this work.

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[5] For a discussion of a 'dense point of transfer' see Stoler, drawing on Foucault: Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: race and the intimate in colonial rule* (California: California University Press, 2002, p. 49).

[6] See Chris Bell as discussed in n *DisCrit--Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory in Education*, edited by David J. Connor et al. (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 2015).

[7] Aparna Nair, ''They Shall See His Face": blindness in British India, 1850-1950', *Medical History*, 61 (2), April 2017: 181-199; Linda Banks and Robert Banks, *They Shall See His Face: The Story of Amy Oxley Wilkinson and her Visionary Blind School in China* (Sydney: Acorn Press, 2017). See also Esme Cleall, *Colonising Disability: impairment and difference in and across the British empire, c. 1800-1914* (Cambridge: CUP, 2022).

[8] Helen Meekosha, 'What the Hell are You? An Intercategorical Analysis of Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Disability in the Australian Body Politic', *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 8(2-3), 2006: 161-176.

[9] Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy, *Between Fitness and Death: disability and slavery in the Caribbean* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2020).

I: 'Dust of Gold': the establishment of missions and the children who lived on them

Whilst almost all missions (particularly medical mssions) had *ad hoc* interaction with disabled people, the female-led Church of England Zenana Missionary Society (CEZMS) was by far the leading British missionary organisation in this period to work systematically with disabled children.[10] CEZMS work with blind children started in 1887 in Amritsar (a school that later moved to Rajpur in 1901), and continued amongst missionaries to China with institutions for blind people established in Fuzhou (Foorchow) in 1903 and Jianning (Kienning) in 1908, both in the heavily missionized province of Fujian. Florence Swainson, a missionary at the Sarah Tucker College in Tirunelveli (Tinnevelly), is usually credited with establishing CEZMS work amongst deaf people in South Asia, having come across a 'poor deaf girl' whom she tried to educate, and subsequently finding herself inundated by requests for similar treatment from the parents of other deaf children. Swainson established the Palayamkottai (Palamcottah) mission to deaf children in 1897. A similar school was then set up in Mayilāppūr (Mylapore), also in the Madras Presidency, in 1913, to meet the needs of prospective pupils to Palmayamkotta who did not speak Tamil, and had to travel too far to reach the school. A school for the deaf and blind was established in Mount Lavinia in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) in 1912.

In writings for metropolitan audiences, missionaries strove to 'bring alive' the children for their readership back home. The missionary Gladys Bergg who voiced this desire: 'How I wish that you could see the "babies"', she wrote of the children under seven years of age at the Sri Lanken mission, 'several of these have only just been admitted into the school and are the most charming little atoms of humanity!'[11] In writing in detail about those with whom they worked, missionaries produced one of the few bodies of writing about disabled indigenous children available to a British readership in this period and indeed to the twenty-first-century scholar. One such child was Grace Anandhi, a resident of the Rajpur mission and the 'school baby' (aged about three in 1915), who comes through clearly in missionary writing. She was found at Saharanpur railway station 'saying her mother was dead, her father had gone to fetch corn and her big brother had gone to work'. The police had taken charge of her, but no one came to claim her, so they took her to the missionaries. Being totally blind, the missionaries sent her to the CMS station at

[10] For the historiography of medical missions see for example: Charles M. Charles Jnr., *The Steamer Parish, The Rise and Fall of Missionary Medicine on an African Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); David Hardiman (ed.), *Healing bodies, saving souls: medical missions in Asia and Africa* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006); David Hardiman, *Missionaries and their medicine. A Christian modernity for tribal India* (Manchester: MUP, 2008); Markku Hokkanen, *Medicine and Scottish Missionaries in the Northern Malawi Region, 1875-1930: Quests for Health in a Colonial Society* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007); Amanda Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity* (Oxford: OUP, 2005); Norman Etherington, 'Education and Medicine', in Norman Etherington (ed.), *Missions and Empire: The Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), pp. 261-85; Rosemary Fitzgerald, '"Clinical Christianity": The Emergence of Medical Work as a Missionary Strategy in Colonial India, 1800-1914', in Biswamoy Pati and Mark Harrison (eds), *Health, Medicine and Empire, Perspectives on Colonial India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2001), pp. 88-137.

[11] Gladys Bergg, 'School for the Deaf and Blind, Ceylon', *India's Women and China's Daughters*, Aug 1915, p. 148.

Rajpur, where she was described as 'a loveable, tractable, intelligent and happy creature' who had 'learned to lisp the Lord's prayer, several texts and the hymn "Jesus Loves Me" in Hindustani.'[12] Called 'Nanni' when she arrived, she was baptised Grace Anandih. 'If she happens to be in disgrace, she sidles up and shamefully whispers that just now she is not Grace but Nanni; if, however, she is good, which is far oftener, she comes forward gleefully calling "*Nani ji* (grandmother) *salaam*", and tells me proudly that her name is Gracie.'[13]

In his recent monograph on disability in postcolonial literature, the literary and deaf studies scholar Christopher Krentz emphasises that 'important cultural work' is performed by disabled literary characters in postcolonial fiction by helping to generate 'connection' and empathy not just with the characters themselves but with 'real' disabled people in the Global South through making visible those who are traditionally marginalised.[14] Whist missionaries produced non-fictional accounts rather than postcolonial novels, some of the same processes were at work whereby the stories missionaries told about their lives on the missions were self-consciously, as in the writing about Grace Anandih, intended to provoke an emotive reaction and perhaps even a sense of empathetic 'kinship', as Kretz calls it. Of course, we cannot use this account as in any way a 'true' representation of Grace Anandhi's life, filtered as it is so strongly through the missionary lens, but it does perhaps, give us a glimpse of life on the mission.

In more general terms, everyday experience on the missions involved a strong emphasis on daily routine, education, and in some cases Christianisation. Children were fed, clothed in line with missionary ideas about modesty and sometimes received medical treatment, and in some cases being involved in more general missionary activity bound up with conversion. Pupils at the school encountered various techniques of special education, including those being developed in Europe. The aforementioned Florence Swainson and Nesammal, a Tamil resident of the Palayamkottai mission, invented a 'finger alphabet' for the 240 Tamil letters to use with deaf children. Reflecting on this method in 1915 Swainson described it as 'very crude and unorthodox' but that 'it answered its purpose'.[15] Despite the transition from manual to oral methods of deaf education in Europe and North America that followed the 1880 Conference of Milan and subsequent shunning of sign language in favour of the oral vernacular, the school in Palayamkottai continued to use an exclusively manual (sign language-focused) method until around 1912.[16] Even then, it was felt that the Palayamkottai school could 'never be totally oral',

[12] J. B. and N. R. Nix James, 'Twelfth Annual Report of the North India Industrial Home for the Christian Blind', SOAS IFNSIS/BMMF/Interserve Northern India, Rajpur, Sharp Memorial Blind School/Annual Reports, 1903-1930 (incomplete), np.
[13] 'North India Industrial Home for Christian Blind', *India's Women and China's Daughters*, Aug 1915, p. 144.
[14] Christopher Krentz, *Elusive Kinship: disability and human rights in postcolonial literature* (Temple University Press, 2022), p. 3.
[15] Florence Swainson, 'Work Amongst the Deaf and Dumb in India', *India's Women, China's Daughters*, April 1915, p. 67.
[16] For these developments see, for example, Jan Branson and Don Miller, *Damned for their For Difference: the cultural construction of deaf people as disabled* (Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2002); Douglas

due to the age of pupils on arrival, and the short time spent at the mission.[17] Sign language there continued to be part of pedagogical communication, as well as everyday life. In Mayilāppūr and Mount Lavinia, however, a different approach was taken with the emphasis on oralism and English language teaching. In Sri Lanka, '[m]any of the children' were claimed to 'both speak and lip-read extremely well and have an excellent command of language, so that one is able to carry on a conversation with them with very little difficulty'.[18] We might, however, drawing on scholarship of deaf communities elsewhere, imagine that sign language continued to be used communally between deaf children, if not strictly 'allowed'.[19]

Blind students also encountered pedagogic methodologies used in Europe, which were quickly adapted by missionaries to Indian, Sri Lankan and Chinese situations. In North India, Mrs Sheriff and Annie Sharp adapted a Braille 'Hindustani' alphabet that was used as the main form of written communication in the Amritsar and Rajput missions.[20] 'Sheriff Braille', as it became called, was then adapted by CMS workers for use in Urdu and Hindi.[21] In Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese Braille code was used.[22] In China, a huge amount of effort was put into producing 'local dialect Braille' books, pioneered by missionaries, before this was scrapped in the late 1920s in favour of adopting standard Chinese Braille, which allowed missionaries to purchase Braille books in Shanghai.[23] The work of transcribing indigenous written languages into Braille and other tactile alphabets was a huge task and it is striking that, at least before the establishment of the Braille Missionary Union in the early twentieth century, this was done by individual missionaries on an *ad hoc* basis.[24] Many indigenous people became very successful in reading these tactile scripts, and in China in particular, some went on to read Bible stories, from tactile texts themselves, in a proselytising capacity..

Another important part of day-to-day life on the CEZMS missions concerned engaging in 'industrial' practices. Usually taking the form of manual artisanal crafts such as basket-weaving and woodwork, the idea was to occupy the inmates, to train them in skills from which it was hoped they would eventually be able to earn an independent living, and to raise money for the mission. Over time, this element of the missions became increasingly successful with industrial work described as a 'large business' in Palayamkottai in 1904 and inmates contributing to a large

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Baynton*, Forbidden Signs: American culture and the campaign against sign language* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996.

[17] Swainson, 'Work Amongst the Deaf and Dumb', p. 67.

[18] Miss Miskin, 'Letters from the Field (Mt Lavinia), *India's Women and China's Daughters*, Sept 1921, p. 130.

[19] Branson and Miller, *Damned for their Difference*; Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*.

[20] Hume Griffith, *Dust of Gold*, p. 29.

[21] Miss Hewlett, 'Work for the Blind', *India's Women and China's Daughters,* Nov 1907, p. 162.

[22] M. F. Chapman, 'School for the Deaf and Blind, Ceylon', *India's Women and China's Daughters*, Aug 1915, p. 147.

[23] Mary E. Darley, 'Blind and Crippled Sisters in Kienning', *India's Women and China's Daughters*, Nov 1932, p. 212.

[24] 'The Braille Missionary Union', *India's Women and China's Daughters,* Sept 1917, p. 108.

Exhibition and Bazaar in Rajpur in 1907, winning an award 'for excellence of quality of cane work' in the latter. The same was true in China where weaving was a major operation in the Jianning mission. To some extent the use of industrial techniques in these missions followed on from the structures of institutions for deaf and blind children (and indeed adults) back in Britain, where British deaf children were taught carpentry, blind adults were taught to make baskets, and inmates of asylums for those deemed mentally unwell or experiencing learning disability were taught weaving, knitting and the like.

In the colonial sphere, as well as 'back home', 'industrial work' was also an important part of the reconfiguration of disabled children in relation to ideas of work. As scholars such as David Turner, Kirsti Bohata and Steven Thompson have argued, the '[i]n/ability to do productive labour has been crucial to definitions of disability in many cultures, past and present.'[25] In British culture, beliefs that work was 'good' for disabled people and would help maintain 'social order' significantly pre-date the onset of industrial capitalism. And, with the Industrial Revolution, as Sarah Rose and others have demonstrated, the inability to work in new, increasingly regularised ways demanded by industrial capitalism became pivotal to new configurations of disability in the modern era.[26] Those who did not have what Rose refers to as 'intact and interchangeable bodies' or whose minds were unable to comply with specific demands, faced increasing processes of exclusion.[27] Productivity was also figured as masculine and work represented as something that did not denote the reproductive labour of birthing, raising, clothing, feeding and cleaning those destined to be 'workers'. Gendered divides were reflected in the work given to children in Britain and in South Asia and China, with boys tending to be trained in carpentry whilst girls tended to be given lighter craft work. For girls, domestic labour was also a substantial part of the daily routine. In the colonial sphere more so than in Britain, however, ideas of work in missionary writing also drew on long traditions of the racialisation of labour, from claims that people of colour were inherently 'lazy' and would not work unless coerced with a whip, to East India Civil servant's denunciations of indolent South Asians.[28]

In attempting to 'recover' the lives of indigenous children, we might also consider the bonds that the children and adolescent residents of the missions formed socially. There is lots of evidence in Britain and North America that missions and schools formed sites of camaraderie and solidarity between disabled people. Although one has to read against the grain to find it, this can also be seen on the missions. Missionaries were proud of their South Asian mission stations where

[25] D. M. Turner, K. Bohata, S. Thompson, 'Introduction to Special Issue: Disability, Work and Representation: New Perspectives', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 2017; 37 (4): 6101.
[26] Sarah F. Rose, 'Work' in Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss and David Serlin (eds), *Keywords for Disability Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), pp. 187-90, cited in Turner, Bohata and Thompson, 'Introduction'.
[27] David Turner and Daniel Blackie, *Disability in the Industrial Revolution: physical impairment in British coal-mining, 1780-1880* (Manchester: MUP, 2018).
[28] Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: metropole and colony in the English imagination* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 347-363.

'children of every caste, from the highest to the lowest, Christian, Mohammedan, Hindu and Buddhists, all live and learn together'.[29] Whilst sexuality on the missions was taboo, some relationships inevitably developed. By the 1920s, private correspondence between missionaries at the Mount Lavinia station in Sri Lanka described the issue as 'how to provide for many of our young people who have reached...manhood and womanhood', as a 'real problem'. Aside from the problem of how these young people could be supported independently (sending them 'home' was considered 'undesirable for many reasons' and besides Mount Lavinia had come to rely on these older students for the 'routine work of maintaining this large institution'), there was the question of burgeoning sexual relationships between the residents. In early twentieth-century Britain, a context in which eugenics was gaining increased cultural and political resonance, intermarriage between two similarly disabled people was frequently seen as a *de facto* if not *de jure* restriction on marriageability.[30] Interestingly, this does not seem to have been the case in missionary communities. In Palayamkottai there were several marriages amongst former pupils and, in the 1920s, Hume Griffith wrote publicly that such marriages were 'satisfactory', not least because 'the children of these marriages are 'normal healthy children.'[31] The same was proposed for blind residents, of whom it was claimed that they 'should intermarry, and live where they can be still looked after and cared for', thus solving the problem that 'a normal man will seldom desire to take a blind wife, unless it be as a 'secondary' which would of course exclude Christian girls'. In the early twentieth century, such an attitude is strikingly different from that surfacing around British schools for the deaf and blind, where inter-marriage, though not uncommon, was feared in terms of anti-eugenic implications. Perhaps this points to the importance of racial difference in framing the expectations of missionaries. Unlike in Britain, missionaries in South Asia were not concerned about the reproduction of disabled people leading to a 'tainting' of the 'imperial race'. Such discrepancies, which point to the way in which difference along racial lines was formative to missionary thinking, form the basis of the next part of this article.

[29] Swainson, 'Work Amongst the Deaf and Dumb', p. 67

[30] For an articulation of the 'wrongs' of such marriages, see archetypically, Alexander Graham Bell 'On the formation of a deaf variety of the human race' discussed in Cleall, *Colonising Disability*, pp. 215-247. This did not, of course, mean that such marriages didn't take place.

[31] Hume Griffith, *Dust of Gold*, p. 58.

II: 'In spite of their yellow faces':[32] race and disability on the mission

Writing from Fujian in 1918, one missionary explained to her juvenile audience in Britain that 'Chinese children are very much like English children in spite of their yellow faces'.[33] Such a statement both dismisses skin colour and notices it, and the power it could hold. Here we get the crux of the missionary dilemma: whilst theoretically committed to human universalism, race that mattered to missionaries.[34] This is unsurprising as missionaries operated in a heavily racialised imperial framework which read 'race' from a range of markers, and straddled 'biological' difference and the difference of 'culture' in their writing. Writing from Palayamkottai in 1902, Miss Campbell, a newly arrived missionary to India, listened in appreciation and astonishment to (hearing) children on the station singing: 'I had understood that Indians cannot sing in tune', she proclaimed naively in response to their song.[35] Some years later, Miss Nightingale, a visitor to the same station, commented in a letter that '[y]ou would love the little children at once with their merry smile; most of them are naked, but what does that matter if you have a nice brown skin?', again returning to skin colour as a marker of difference.[36]

Disability was also an important marker of difference that went well beyond the impairment used to characterise blind and deaf children and intersected with ideas of race in complex ways. 'It is a singular fact', the missionary Sarah Hewlett remarked, 'and I am not aware whether anything of the same sort has been observed in England or other countries, but in India the blind are peculiarly depraved, and sayings such as the following are quite provable: "If one devil is in an ordinary man, ten are in a blind man".' Speculating on the cause of this 'depravity', Hewlett hypothesised that a 'quickening' of 'hearing' accompanied by 'habitual laziness', 'street beggary', and the 'licentiousness' of both 'Hindu Temples' and 'Mohamedan Masjids' were to blame. Elaborating further, Hewlett explained that a 'very large proportion of the cases of blindness in India are the direct result of sin', citing 'child marriage' and the 'shameful degradation of Hindu widows' as 'responsible for instances of idiocy, malformations, and congenital blindness, quite too numerous to come at all within any known process of computation'. She concluded that there were 'hundreds and thousands' of 'helpless little ones whose eyes, limbs or mental devices proclaim them the victims of parental vice'.[37] In linking indigenous cultures with high numbers of impaired children, Hewlett constituted disability as a signifier of racial difference.

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[32] 'Playmates', *Homes of the East,* Jul 1918, p. 2.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 22.
[34] Cleall, *Missionary Discourses of Difference*. For racial and gendered hierarchies on the mission station in a different colonial location see Hall, *Civilising Subjects*.
[35] Miss Campbell, 'Our Deaf and Dumb School, Palamcottah', *India's Women and China's Daughters*, April 1902, p. 89.
[36] S. Nightingale, 'A Walk Round Palamcottah', *India's Women and China's Daughters*, Feb 1927, p. 37.
[37] S. S. Hewlett, *They Shall See His Face. Stories of God's Grace in work among the blind and others in India* (Oxford: Alden and Company, 1898), pp. 12, 22.

Working from the opposite perspective, part of the way in which disability was constructed in missionary writing was the recurring trope that disabled people overseas were cruelly treated by indigenous cultures: '[o]ne of the saddest facts in Indian life today is the indifference shown by the majority of the population towards the afflicted, the deaf, the dumb and the blind.'[38] The pupils are literally depicted as the 'afflicted children of the East'.[39] This affliction was also gendered. 'In many Hindu households', one missionary wrote,

> blind and deaf children are looked upon as accursed – as people who have sinned in a former birth and are now paying the penalty of their misdeeds. This feeling is so strong that in the case of girl deaf mutes, whose lives are considered of little value compared with boys, many disappear as soon as their infirmity is discovered.[40]

The same was argued in China. Miss Codrington, writing from Fujian, deplored the 'startling facts regarding the terribly sad condition of the blind girls and women. Blindness, being looked upon as coming from the Devil is treated as a cursed thing, and the treatment meted out by heathen people to these sufferers is indeed pitiless and cruel'. 'It is a significant reality that blind *women* are comparatively rare in China', she continued, 'because so few survive to womanhood. A motherless blind girl is [often] doomed to death, and for others their usual fate is to be married to beggars, with whom they live in unspeakable beggar houses, and for whom they have to solicit money in the streets.'[41] Writing from Fuzhou (also in Fujian), Katharine Watney wrote that 'China is a land where the afflicted receive neither pity nor help; but rather hatred and contempt', before going on to detail girls 'who have been rescued from death', and other children who had 'disappeared'.[42] In missionary discourse, this violent and unsympathetic treatment of disabled people was, as I have argued, heavily racialised, but pity was, of course, also central to the way in which disabled people were also constructed back in contemporary Britain, where domestic missions also wrote about 'saving' (British) disabled people from degradation. As much work has already argued, disabled people were constructed as 'objects of pity' in a range of contexts.[43]

Both in Britain, and in what missionaries referred to as 'the foreign field', pity was closely linked with the construction of disabled people as intrinsically vulnerable. In *Embodying the Monster*, the feminist scholar Magrit Shildrick points us to an important relationship between 'corporal insufficiency' (which tended to be read off disability), 'vulnerability' and 'monstrosity' in Western thought. Both the monstrous and the vulnerable, she argues, are constituted as negative conditions, and jettisoned from understandings of the contained 'self'. Regarding both

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[38] H. Tempest Reilly, 'Foreword' in Hume Griffith, *Dust of Gold*, p. iii.
[39] Hume Griffith, *Dust of Gold*, p. 3.
[40] Tempest Reilly, 'Foreword' in Hume Griffith, *Dust of Gold,* p. iii.
[41] Hume Griffith, *Dust of Gold*, p. 15.
[42] Katharine Watney, 'The Blind Girls' School, Foochow', *India's Women and China's Daughters*, Oct 1926, p. 209.
[43] Martha Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

vulnerability and monstrosity, she writes, 'what is at issue is the permeability of the boundaries that guarantee the normatively embodied self', neither being 'fully containable within the binary structure of the western logos'.[44] Both monstrosity and vulnerability 'signal a transformation of the relation between self and other such that the encounter with the strange is not a discrete event but the constant condition of becoming'. Both vulnerability and monstrosity exist in the realms of 'corporeality', expressed as 'differential' bodies.

The children on the CEZMS can be read as having 'differential bodies' from several perspectives. As Shildrick writes, the 'ideal of the humanist subject of modernity' (the 'self-sufficient', 'rational' 'self) can only be 'maintained' through a 'series of putative exclusions' that typically would include 'black people' 'foreigners', 'animals', the 'congenitally disabled', and 'women', all of which have been seen as, in some ways, 'monstrous'.[45] In the language missionaries used to describe their work with brown disabled children, whose disabilities often rendered them (in missionary discourse) animalistic, the figure of the 'monster' (the profoundly other though disconcertingly 'like') is never far away. However, ideas of monstrosity are closely linked with extreme vulnerability. To understand further it is useful to broaden out from those missions directly aimed at disabled children, to think briefly about the wider genre of missionary literature of which missionaries' writing was a part.

In the colonial sphere, ideas about monstrosity were embodied both culturally and in human actors. One example of this can be seen in the representations of Hindu manifestations of divinity in missionary writing, which are the focus of numerous articles, accounts and journals and are often resonant of that triumvirate of monstrosity, vulnerability and disability to which Shildrick refers in a very different context. In one depiction of the Snan Jatra bathing festival in Serampore, the idol of the god is described by an unnamed missionary thus:

> What an ugly monster he is! His goggle eyes stare fiercely. His grinning mouth stretches all across his face. His stunted arms are fixed close to his side, and he looks altogether a hideous, helpless, misshapen monster.[46]

The relationship between the 'monstrous' and the 'helplessness' in missionary thought, signified through 'goggle eyes', 'stunted arms' and helplessness, into which we might also read vulnerability in light of Shildrick's discussion, is striking. These tropes also occur, though very differently, in depictions of cultural practice as embodied in Indian people themselves. The figure of the Indian husband is often a stock character in missionary literature (paired with equally formulaic depictions of the 'child-bride') and is often represented as monstrous. Again, in such accounts, we can see the weaving in and out of images of monstrosity and images of

[44] Magrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: SAGE Publications, 2002).
[45] *Ibid*.
[46] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, Feb 1863, p. 22.

vulnerability with disability both overtly and implicitly present. I quote from an article published in 1911 at some length:

> While the girl is still an infant she is bargained away irretrievably to be the bride of a youth whom she has probably never seen and who may turn out… an imbecile, a tyrant or a brute. While still a child the actual marriage takes place, and at an age when our happy children are only half out of the nursery the ignorant and immature Indian girl… will soon be suffering the pains and burdens of motherhood. Her mind is cramped like a pot-bound plant, her body enfeebled by enforced inactivity.[47]

Here we see the man with a learning disability held up alongside brutishness and tyranny as the archetypal demonisation of the undesirable Indian husband. The girl is depicted as disabled, intellectually 'pot-bound', by the marital situation, by the pain of early motherhood, the condition of *purdah*), and confined in both body and mind. Further, through constructing disabled children as particularly vulnerable, the European, non-disabled and adult 'self' is solidified and strengthened through a process of counterfoil. As Shildrick argues, both vulnerability and monstrosity are effectively exteriorised, as part of a profound process of racialisation. Whilst I have analysed this here in regards to South Asia, similar processes can be identified in the Chinese material.

Despite the obvious difference in imperial status between Sri Lanka and India as British colonies, compared with mainland China as outside the formal jurisdiction of the British empire (and indeed between disparate parts of India itself), and between the states of being deaf and being blind, very similar language was used to describe all these endeavours. Missionaries deplored the 'sorrows of the three million heathen blind in China', alongside proclamations that the '600,000 blind of India' would, if left undisturbed, 'strengthen Satan's kingdom'.[48] The '105,000 blind people in the United Provinces alone' were listed alongside the 200,000 'deaf mutes' in India and 3,000 'deaf and dumb' in Sri Lanka. In all cases disabled people were described as 'a heavy burden upon the hearts of some of God's children', a 'multitude' who 'live[d] not only in the blackness of heathenism, but also in the blackness of physical blindness', and as victims of 'ignorant and superstitious practice' as well as organic disease and congenital disability.[49] Comparisons were drawn between 'at home' and 'overseas': '[i]n England the proportion of blind to seeing is as one to a thousand, while in India it is as one to five hundred'.[50]

The utter homogenisation of the cultures, languages, peoples and traditions missionaries encountered between the South Asian and Chinese missions is one example of the 'Orientalism'

[47] *India's Women and China's Daughters*, July 1911, p. 122.
[48] 'North India Missionary Institute for the Blind', *India's Women and China's Daughters*, Feb 1903, p. 40.
[49] Hume Griffith, *Dust of Gold*, p. 14.
[50] Hewlett, *They Shall See His Face*, p. 7.

Edward Said so famously explored.[51] The complete collapse of cultures into 'the East' is indicative of a profound failure to engage with indigenous cultures at an autochthonous level and a refusal to engage with the specificity of geo-political, cultural and linguistic difference. 'Natives' and 'Europeans' were the categories with which missionaries worked, refusing to acknowledge in doing so not only cultural differentiation, but also the geo-political differences between British involvement in South Asia and in China. Alongside skin colour, the language of 'heathenism' was used to bind disparate groups together. Metaphors of 'darkness' played off both colour and spirituality as missionaries discussed their 'great work' of 'bringing light out of darkness to many'. Disability too contributed to the power of these extended metaphors.

At a more granular level, we can also see this homogenisation informing praxis in the missions themselves. Whilst many missionaries were at pains to demonstrate the individuality of the children for their British readership, naming them, describing their appearance and characteristics, and providing a backstory to their time at the mission, there is also evidence that the children were treated as a homogenous group and at times reduced to their disability. One revealing slip appears in a description of the work of the matron at the Sri Lankan Station which, significantly, was not intended for publication. The matron ensured that each boy had his correct shirt on: 'No boy must leave her care with Khaki shirt incorrectly buttoned... or hair rough. Nor must B 21 (which means twenty first blind boy) appear in the shirt marked D10 (which means tenth deaf boy) for such an exchange when it did occur, caused confusion in Matron's orderly department.'[52] The fact that the boys were reduced to a number and letter (and a letter reductive of their disability) is hugely striking here and undermines attempts to individualise the children elsewhere. It also brings to mind the work of disability theorist Anita Ghai, and her reading of Albert Memmi's 1967 *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Drawing on a disability studies perspective, and on Memmi's scholarship, Ghai writes that those demarcated as 'Others' are seen not as belonging 'to the human community, but rather as part of a muddled, confused and nameless collectivity'. The other, she writes, according to Memmi all 'carry…"the mark of the plural". In other words, they all look alike'.[53] Throughout missionary writings we see tensions between attempts at individualisation and subterranean convictions that individuals also carry the 'mark of the plural', feeding into, contracting and enabling patterns of racialisation.

There were other ways, too, in which discourses of race and ableism shaped daily praxis on the mission station. Some missions such as the Mount Lavinia school were proudly reported to 'know no distinction between races and dominions', however, even here, a special fee was charged for European students which covered separate accommodation, so the limits of this lack

[51] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin [1978], 2003).
[52] Cadbury Library, Birmingham, CEZ/G/EA 4/7: Miscellaneous overseas items 1880-1956, School for the Deaf and Blind. Manuscript notebook concerning pupils and staff of the School for the Deaf and Blind.
[53] Anita Ghai, 'Engaging Disability with Postcolonial Theory', in D. Goodley, et al. (eds), *Disability and Social Theory: New Developments and Directions* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 270-287, p. 274.

of distinction are questionable.[54] Other missions were more explicit in considering race to be more of a 'problem'. For example, missionaries struggled with how to handle 'Eurasian' (dual heritage) pupils at the mission stations. One laid out the situation thus:

> There will be no difficulty in appreciating a problem which has been presenting itself to Miss Swainson in a very concrete form. Where are English and Eurasian children who have this sad affliction to go in order to receive the special instruction they need? Applications for admission have been made to Palamcottah several times, and they can hardly be refused when there is nowhere else for the children to be sent. But more accommodation is a necessity if these newcomers are to receive proper attention. Miss Swainson is at present in England, and will no doubt be pleading the cause of her "dummies" in different places.[55]

Implicit in such an account was the taken-for-granted assumption that English and 'Eurasian' children, whilst in this case accepted by the mission (not the case for all CEZMS missions), would not share accommodation with indigenous Indian children. That is, there were segregated living conditions and, it is suggested, educational experiences. In the introduction to this passage, we can note that such a practice was completely naturalised through racialised discourses in missionary thinking.

[54] 'Where the Dumb Speak', *India's Women and China's Daughters*, May 1915, p. 97.
[55] 'School for the Deaf and Dumb', *India's Women and China's Daughters*, Dec 1908, p. 179.

III: 'A marked change':[56] conversion, 'civilisation' and education

Nevertheless, although there are many ways in which missionaries represented difference as innate, the premise of the missionary endeavour was change, an endeavour to eradicate the difference, or perhaps some of the difference, as explored above. As many scholars of missionaries in other contexts have demonstrated, their work of transformation did not simply concern itself with proselytization but with shifting the entire social and cultural fabric of the people amongst whom they worked.[57] This included shifts in the cultural construction of race, changes to religion, and changes to the configuration of disability. Writing of blind children at the Fujian mission, Mrs Wilkinson wrote of two ostensibly happy boys before reflecting: 'How different would have been the lives of these blind boys in their heathen homes. For the *Heathen* have no pity, and the blind are neglected and often ill-treated; they have nothing to brighten their lives and know nothing of the 'Happy land' to look for beyond this life'.[58] Whilst the missionary endeavour to change will be familiar to scholars of missions to non-disabled people, so too, from a different perspective, are they reminiscent of the 'overcoming' narratives and tropes likely to be familiar to scholars of disability in British and North American contexts. It is therefore unsurprising that, woven throughout the writing about the CEZMS missions for the deaf and blind, were powerful narratives of redemption, 'civilisation' and Christianisation.

Mission stations were literally described as places of transformation, as it was claimed that missionary education let 'sunshine and joy' into the formerly 'wretched lives' of the inmates.[59] For example, at the Rajpur mission it was recorded that many of the children 'have been saved in this school from a life of miserable idleness and brought out of the darkness of ignorance into the wonderful light of reading, writing, and general knowledge, while not a few have found the Light of Life and have begun to be Christians indeed'.[60] Such generalisations were then illustrated by individual examples, as in the case of an unnamed Hindu girl 'whose life', it was said, 'has been transformed as by a miracle from a state of utter degradation to one of useful service'. The girl was reported to have grown up 'absolutely without the care or control of the parents' who had thought 'it was not worthwhile to trouble about a deaf and dumb child (and that only a girl), who was useless, and also, in their estimation, devil-possessed.' Following this 'early neglect', when she came to the school at the age of twelve, 'her mind was degraded, and her whole being seemed depraved and degenerate. She was scarcely normal in her behaviour, and often frightened the other children by her wild outbursts of temper, accompanied by fits of screaming.' After a period of hard work, the missionaries believed they had been rewarded: 'the change was

[56] Miskin, 'Letters from the Field (Mount Lavinia)', p. 130.
[57] Amongst others see Patricia Grimshaw, 'Colonising motherhood: evangelical social reformers and Koorie women in Victoria, Australia, 1880s to the early 1900s', *Women's History Review*, 8 (1999): 329-46; John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, *vol. 1, Christianity, colonialism, and consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Hall, *Civilising Subjects.*
[58] Mrs. G. Wilkinson, 'The Blind in China', *A Quarterly Token for Juvenile Subscribers*, Jul 1904, pp. 1-2.
[59] 'Where the Dumb Speak', *India's Women and China's Daughters*, May 1915, p. 97.
[60] S. S. Hewlett, 'Most Blessed for Ever', *India's Women and China's Daughters*, Oct 1903, p. 227.

very gradual, but very real, and now this child, formerly uncontrolled and disregarded, is asking for a Christian baptism. What a change! Surely a miracle, and ho! How well worthwhile, to save such as these from lives of sin and misery, for the service of the Master'.[61]

This said, the extent to which they actively engaged in systematic Christianisation varied between stations. Overtime, the Rajpur mission became explicitly named 'North India Industrial Home for the Christian Blind', and in Amritsar, Rajpur and Mount Lavinia, stories of conversion were frequently and uncritically repeated. We are told, for example, about 'Blind Nihali' at the Amritsar mission, who was 'feebleminded as well as blind' and despite at first seeming as though 'she would always be like an animal', the 'truth found its way into her heart, and she gave satisfactory evidence that she was really a Christian'.[62] In China this tendency was even stronger, as blind people were explicitly trained up as evangelists and 'scripture readers' in their own right.[63] In the Palayamkottai mission, meanwhile, it was cautioned that '[w]e cannot speak of many baptisms as unless the children are given over to us entirely, it would not be legal to baptise them without the consent of their parents, who would surely object, though they do not mind what we teach.'[64] Writing from all the missions is pervaded with a triumphant sense of the 'marked change' the children underwent. Whilst this *could* entail Christianisation, it was also about 'civilisation' (by which missionaries often meant Westernisation) and education. These forceful narratives of change drew on a powerful combination of overlapping tropes that occurred in writing about missions to non-disabled people (conversion and Westernisation) and those to disabled British children in the metropole (education and 'civilisation').[65] The centrality of change to missionary practice can be seen in the very titles of their writing, not least in C. F. Gordon-Cumming's pamphlet *Work for the Blind in China. How Blind Beggars may be transformed into useful Scripture Readers.*[66]

The mitigation of the difference of disability was also a central axis of transformation. The ability, after missionary education, of previously deaf-mute children to communicate, perhaps even to use oral speech, was seen as transformative: from a degraded state reinforced by the use of animalistic imagery, to a 'civilised' being. As a missionary from Mayilāppūr put it:

> The child enters the school deaf and dumb. We cannot cure their deafness, but practically all of them can be taught to speak … thoughtful people will realise that it is no easy task and that special teaching is very necessary if these children are to

[61] Hume-Griffith, *Dust of Gold,* p. 24.
[62] Miss Sharpe, 'Light in Darkness', *India's Women and China's Daughters*, May 1898, p 115.
[63] C. F. Gordon-Cumming, *Work for the Blind in China. How Blind Beggars may be transformed into useful Scripture Readers* (London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1887).
[64] Swainson, 'Work amongst the Deaf and Dumb', p 68.
[65] Esme Cleall, ''Deaf to the Word': Gender, Deafness and Protestantism in Nineteenth-Century Britain and Ireland", *Gender and History*, Oct 2013: pp. 590-603.
[66] Gordon-Cummings, *Work for the Blind in China*.

> be raised from the state of the "dumb animal" to any kind of equality with normal people'.[67]

The kind of imagery that accompanies such a description of the teaching of speech here, which evokes a transition from animal state to human state, from abnormality to normalcy, is typical of the language used to describe the education of disabled white British children in the metropole as well as those overseas, who were also described as 'little above brutes' until the transformation of education.[68] In Britain, deafness was readily understood as a barrier to being Christian, particularly since the Reformation and amongst Protestants where spiritual well-being was intimately linked with being able to hear the 'Word of God'.[69] Those who were deaf and 'on that account do not attend church' were an identifiable constituency back in Britain. In India too it was felt that children at the mission 'have not only the ordinary barriers to the entrance of the gospel message, but the strong barrier of *deafness'* (italics original).[70]

Teaching blind children to read was invested with much the same importance. In *They Shall See His Face. Stories of God's Grace in Work among the blind and others in India*, the missionary Sarah Hewlett repeatedly equated blind children learning to read (Braille) with the bringing of 'light' to their lives, which operated metaphorically to signify Christianisation and education. In China too great stories of transformation were told, the difference in state heightened by emphasising in great detail the 'degraded' state of blind people prior to arrival at the mission. As the aforementioned missionary Gordon-Cumming put it,

> many of these blind men and women are simply the most miserable beggars, hungry, and almost naked lying on the dusty highway and clamouring for alms… thus for unnumbered centuries have the blind legions of China dragged through their darkened, dreary lives, a burden to themselves, to all around them.[71]

The same was true of the 'industrial work' discussed earlier in this article. The assumption underlying missionary thinking was that, as disabled people, the natural life-course of the children on the mission would be unproductive. And this was contrasted against their own lives, which were considered to be highly productive, in keeping with what Max Weber called the 'Protestant work ethic'.[72] That the value of industry and the commitment to labour went beyond its practical benefits can be seen in how it was valorised in missionary writing and praxis.

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[67] M. Katherine Mace, 'The Deaf and Dumb School at Mylapore, Madras', *India's Women and China's Daughters,* Feb 2021, p. 29.

[68] Charles Baker, *The Blind* (London: Sampson Low, 1895), p. 11. For a discussion of this see also Esme Cleall, *Colonising Disability* (Cambridge: CUP, 2022), pp. 123-146.

[69] Cleall, '"Deaf to the Word", pp. 590-603.

[70] 'With our Deaf and Dumb Children', *India's Women and China's Daughters,* Aug 1901, p. 178.

[71] Gordon-Cumming, *Work for the Blind in China*.

[72] Max Weber, *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: OUP, 2007 [first published 1905]).

Missionaries were highly anxious to convey the changes that their pupils had undergone to their supporters back in Britain. Missionary periodicals and magazines repeated stories of conversion (religious and social) so often that they became formulaic. Photographs and sketches often accompanied the textual imagery, in an attempt to enable the British readership to affectively connect with the children. And on some occasions prize children even travelled to Britain in order to encounter a British audience in person. In 1922, for example, Mrs Wilkinson, a missionary at the Fuzhou Chinese mission, took 'twelve blind boys' to London where they were to play their 'brass band' at the Church Missionary Society's Africa and the East Exhibition.[73] Of course the boys were not there simply to play music but also to perform other dimensions of 'civilisation' and 'conversion', representing both disabled populations and Chinese populations as both 'like' and 'other'.[74]

The exhibition of model students could occur within the missions as well as outside them. It was not just the children resident at the mission who were thought to be transformed by deaf and blind education: the success of the missions was also thought to have a transformative effect on visitors and other locals, who could 'witness' the work of God. For example, one missionary wrote of the Mount Lavinia mission that, '[o]ne Sunday morning three Buddhist priests came to see our school. They were filled with wonder when they saw the blind boys reading and writing, and heard the so-called "dumb" child speak. Before they left, they asked who we were and why we did this wonderful work, and this gave us the opportunity of witnessing for our master'.[75] The tropes of 'civilisation', 'Christianisation', 'Westernisation' and 'education' are heavily entangled in missionary writing.

IV: Disability and Resistance

Part of the way in which racist and ableist discourses operated in colonial writing was to assume (or perhaps hope for) passivity. In such writing, non-disabled people of colour and disabled white people were both denied agency, depicted as waiting for the attention of white and/or non-disabled people to 'help' them or conversely to oppress or commit violence against them. Both postcolonial analysis and disability studies have complicated this, increasingly emphasising ideas about resistance which, as the theorist Michel Foucault argued, always coexists with regimes of power. As the queer cultural theorist Robert McRuer explores in his book *Crip Times*, there are multiple ways in which disability (or 'crip') resistance can and has been configured, not least in terms of the powerful reclaiming of 'crip' identity, participation in global political and anti-capitalist movements, and the queering of the relationship between disability and sexuality. But what about resistance on the mission station?

[73] Mrs Wilkinson, 'An Excursion with Blind Chinese Boys', *Eastern Ho!,* May 1922, p. 51.
[74] For more on the display of indigenous peoples back in Britain see Sadiah Quereshi, *Peoples on Parade: exhibitions, empires and anthropology in nineteenth-century Britain* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011).
[75] Chapman, 'School for the Deaf and Blind, Ceylon', p. 147.

The vast majority of published accounts of the children who lived on the mission stations represent these children as obedient, eager to learn, highly compliant and committed to the missionary enterprise. In the uniformity of these accounts, we can perhaps read insecurity in the missionary mindset. To confess to resistance, even in small ways, may be seen as deeply troubling to their project. However, on closer inspection, cracks in their accounts can also be identified. In these cracks we catch glimpses of small acts of resistance from turbulent bedtimes through acts of petty theft to more generalised 'disruptive' behaviour.

One such resistant child was Stephen, referred to as 'a poor little waif', who was sent to the Palayamkottai mission in 1901 at six years old. 'Sharp as a needle and full of mischief his one idea seemed to be, *wandering about*.' 'For weeks it was almost impossible to get him to sit still many minutes and unless watched he was sure to be doing some mischief', one missionary wrote, and '[t]wice when punished he managed to run away, and both times was found after some hours fast asleep with his pockets full of cakes which some kind-hearted shopkeeper had given him'. He kept back bits of the charcoal to be used to clean his teeth and scribbled on the walls with it, chipped away bits of the plaster from the school buildings and was generally up to 'pranks'. Always 'up to some queer tricks', missionaries tried disciplining Stephen by whipping him, dosing him with 'Gregory' (presumably 'Gregory's Stomachic Powder') 'in the hope that his naughtiness came from his not being quite well', praying for him more than they did any other child and, in desperation resorting to putting him in a girl's petticoat so he could not run away (apparently because of the embarrassment of being found 'in *that* dress', rather than its ability to physically restrain him). Such children not only proved challenging in practical terms, but also had the power to rock the discursive power of the mission, which relied on the idea that children should be grateful for the 'help' that had been 'bestowed' on them. It is therefore interesting that in reporting the example of naughty Stephen, the account concluded with his ultimate conversion and his death some years later from whooping cough.[76] Ending the account in this way may have been a strategy for containing some of the threats his mischief posed. Describing the behaviour through discourses of 'naughtiness' and 'mischief' may have been another such strategy of containment and indeed the very title of the article, 'Stephen one of the "Dummies" at Palamcottah', can be seen to diminish the power Stephen may have represented.

In one particularly fascinating case, the children of the mission are discussed using their bodily impairments themselves to engage in resistant behaviour. Writing of the Palayamkottai mission, Miss Swainson asked: 'What can you do when a naughty [deaf] child deliberately closes her eyes and will not look at you when you are trying to reason with her, and not being able to reach her through her ears, you realise how powerless you are to influence her for what is right.'[77] The

[76] 'Stephen, one of the "Dummies" at Palamcottah, a story for the children', in *India's women and China's Daughters*, July 1911, p. 134.
[77] 'Our Deaf and Dumb Schools Palamcottah', *India's Women and China's Daughters*, Aug 1902, p. 178.

limitations to Swainson's power here were indeed considerable and the acts of the children were, as such, subversive.

An even more substantive threat to the wellbeing of the mission was behaviour that challenged the heart of missionary activity itself such as children leaving the mission, refusing to give up 'heathen' ways or 'relapsing' on return to their parents. Whilst these were common strategies of resistance to missionary enterprise, all such acts of resistance were highly disruptive to the missionary assumption that disabled indigenous people should be 'grateful' for the 'help' 'bestowed' upon them, as well as the worrying potential of providing fodder for those who believed that people of colour were 'incapable' of 'civilisation'. In the aforementioned article by Miss Swainson about the 'naughty' deaf children refusing to look at her, we also see the wider framework of resistance as Divine Struggle, within which this pretty mild behaviour was interpreted. 'Many a time we feel discouraged', she wrote, and 'almost tempted to give up'. 'We have had cases which one can only describe as "possessed by an evil spirit" in which the devil seems really fighting for a soul and all we can do is to ask Christ to cast the devil out'.[78] It is evident, that despite their strategies of containment, physical and discursive, missionary regimes in regards to the treatment of disability, as in their wider project of proselytization, were also contested.

Conclusion

The relationship between postcolonial and disability studies is evolving rapidly from a range of disciplinary perspectives. In literary studies, Clare Barker, Stuart Murrey, Christopher Krentz and others, have analysed the multiplicity of disabled characters in post/colonial fiction and the resonant symbolism and narrative power with which they are invested.[79] Whilst I have been examining the representation of 'real' children here, not fictional characters, missionary literature, with its tendency to formulaic melodrama, uses many of the tropes identified in novels and, at the very least tends to share the tendency to use certain 'characters', albeit here based on the work of individuals, to 'bring alive and attract sympathy for the plight of people often doubly disadvantaged'.[80] These children, though difficult to get at in an authentic sense due to the way in which their lives were heavily filtered through missionary discourse, are nonetheless examples of disabled people of colour, who, in nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial discourse, are frequently marginalised into obscurity. Their discussion here, including their small-scale acts of resistance, is only a tiny part of a long process of recovery. In the social sciences, meanwhile,

[78] *Ibid.,* p. 178.
[79] Clare Barker and Stuart Murray, 'Disabling Postcolonialism: Global Disability Cultures and Democratic Criticism', *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 2010, 4(3): 219-236; Alice Hall, *Disability and Modern Fiction: Faulkner, Morrison, Coetzee and the Nobel Prize for Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan in 2012); Alice Hall, *Literature and Disability: Contemporary Critical Thought* (London: Routledge, 2015); Christopher Krentz, *Elusive Kinship: disability and human rights in postcolonial literature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2022).
[80] Krentz, *Elusive Kinship*.

scholars such as Helen Meekosha have pointed to the connections between disability and colonialism and in particular the way in which colonialism, race, class, gender and disability intersect.[81] By exploring how disability and race interwove on the mission station in both discourse and praxis, this article has also attempted to think about race and disability intersectionality, and to do so historically. One thing that is clear is the power of colonial discourses to layer difference on top of each other, to use ideas of disability to exemplify and symbolise differences otherwise attributed to 'race'.

Writing of the work at the Mount Lavinia mission in 1915, Miss E. Chapman summed up the hardships she felt were faced by the children there, and the ways in which they could be overcome by the education the mission offered:

> To be deaf, to be dumb, to be blind, is to have blundered past the three great roads to life and joy, to wander, groping, faltering and afraid, along a narrow path of gloom haunted by vague impressions; and then the new creation, the link between self and the world; a system of dots in relief, tuition in lipreading and most wonderful of all, infinite patience – these are the slender threads which lead to the door of expression, not flung wide open, it is true, but left ajar, hinges well oiled, ready to be pushed back with trembling hands.[82]

Putting aside the question of blame that, in the use of the word 'blundered', appears to be attributed to blind and deaf people themselves, the passage is instructive. Written of the children encountered in Sri Lanka, the imagery here bears a marked similarity to writings about blind and deaf people in the metropole, who were also depicted as 'afflicted' people, a 'burden' on their non-disabled counterparts, and in need of education and 'civilisation'. But within the rest of the paragraph the missionary Miss Chapman moves swiftly to position the reader in Sri Lanka, pointing to the 'appalling' high rates of blindness and deafness found on the island, particularly amongst its children, and the suspicion in which the missionaries were held by the children's 'heathen' parents. The combination of being disabled *and* racialised as different, was a powerful one in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, where 'darkness' was associated with both disability and racialised otherness, and missionaries with light, metaphorical and physical. And yet within these heavy racialised and ableist discourses, this article has also attempted to discuss the 'trembling hands' of those children with whom missionaries worked and who resisted, as well as complied with, the worldview they attempted to construct.

[81] See in particular Meekosha, 'What the Hell are You?', pp. 161-176.
[82] 'Where the Dumb Speak', *India's Women and China's Daughters*, May 1915, p. 96.