

“Lord, if I am the one, open the way”: Willie Ann Bowman and the Methodist transnational circulation (1895-1906)

“*Senhor, se eu sou a escolhida, abra o caminho*”: *Willie Ann Bowman e a circulação metodista transnacional (1895-1906)*

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ABSTRACT

Starting from some biographical traits of Willie Ann Bowman, missionary from Methodist Episcopal Church, South who worked in Brazil between 1895 and 1906, the article aims to investigate the transnational circulation of people, knowledge and practices enabled by the North American Protestant denomination. Using official documents produced by the Church, including reports, letters, and periodicals, we focus on the female role while framing the problem with the support of the Transnational History of Education. Thereby, the investigation allowed to demonstrate that the vigor of the circulation of people and repertoires dynamized by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South between the United States and Brazil contributed to the construction of educational meanings in the local sphere.

Keywords: Methodist education. Missionary circulation. Transnational history of education. World Christianity.

RESUMO

Partindo de alguns traços biográficos de Willie Ann Bowman, missionária vinculada à *Methodist Episcopal Church, South* que atuou no Brasil entre 1895 e 1906, o artigo tem o objetivo de investigar a circulação transnacional de pessoas, saberes e práticas viabilizada pela denominação

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protestante norte-americana. Utilizando documentos oficiais produzidos pela Igreja, entre os quais destacam-se relatórios, missivas e periódicos, focalizamos o protagonismo feminino ao mesmo tempo em que enquadramos o problema a partir dos referenciais da História Transnacional da Educação. Desse modo, a investigação permitiu demonstrar que o vigor da circulação de pessoas e repertórios dinamizado pela *Methodist Episcopal Church, South* entre os Estados Unidos e o Brasil contribuiu para a construção de sentidos educacionais em âmbito local.

Palavras-chave: Circulação missionária. Cristianismo mundial. Educação metodista. História transnacional da educação.

Introduction

On January 24th, 1862, Willie Ann Bowman was born. Daughter of a poor couple, she converted to Methodism as a child at the Eighth Street Methodist Church in Saint Louis – Missouri, United States of America. According to her narrative, it was during a ceremony and due to the lack of conditions to donate a sum of money to the Church, her mother touched by the religious revival, offered: "I have no money to give, but I give my child to the Lord" (JOHN, 1899, p. 75). Little did she know that, more than a century later, little Willie's name would baptize the museum from the Methodist Institute of Education in the city of Ribeirão Preto, Brazil. The stories of a young Missourian and the interior of São Paulo were connected through the missionary actions engendered by North American Southern Methodists in the second half of the 19th century (SUBRAHMANYAM, 1997). This is the matter of this article.

The analysis intended goes along two parallel paths that complement each other. Part of the biography of a missionary is the main focus and, at the same time, a concrete case that reveals a broader and more complex process. On the one hand, we are guided by the reflections of Dana Robert¹ (1996), according to whom among the initiatives of contemporary historiography of Christian religious missions is the attempt to give visibility to female actions. Robert (2006) even argues that the very construction of world Christianity in the 20th century was, to a large extent, a result of women's efforts. In this perspective, this article highlights the diversification of actions of a social category that was strongly linked to marriage and motherhood, being even neglected on the documentary production elaborated over the years by the American Methodists. In addition to highlighting protagonism, the historiographical production centered on

¹ Dana Lee Robert works as a historian of Christian missions and professor at Boston University since 1984. More information about her importance, academic performance and publications can be found at: <https://www.bu.edu/sth/profile/dana-l-robert/>. Accessed on: Jul. 22th 2022.

women also intends to reveal this silencing (SOIHET; PEDRO, 2007). The displacement of the gaze to a female historical subject who becomes an educator within an institution organized outside the North American state apparatus, demonstrates, as Soihet (2003) proposes, the vigor of the production of spaces occupied by women in civil society.

The beginning of the Methodist feminine missionary enterprise in Brazil took place with the arrival of Martha Hite Watts. She was born in Louisville (Kentucky) and in 1881 assumed the organization of *Piracicabano* School (MESQUISTA, 2001). After Watts, between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, dozens of other women contributed and became the main responsible for the educational practices developed by the Protestant institution (RIBEIRO, 2008; ALMEIDA, 2016). In addition to participating in the circulation of information at the transnational level through periodicals such as the *Woman's Missionary Advocate*² (SILVA, 2017). It was in this scenario that Willie Ann Bowman fits in, whose work as a missionary took place between 1895 and 1906. Working initially in Rio de Janeiro, she also passed through Piracicaba and Ribeirao Preto, in Sao Paulo's countryside. If in 1881 the female Methodist institution counted as only one woman in the Brazilian mission field, in 1906 they totaled 21 (WMA, July 1906, p.47).

Despite the relevant role of Willie Ann Bowman, her trajectory has not yet been explored in a deeper way by specialized historiography. We understand that the missionary's biographical traits help to fit one more piece into the complex panorama of Methodist educational actions engendered by women in Brazil. At the same time, we believe that this particular case can concretely subsidize the analysis of one perspective of the transnational circulations that made possible the arrival of a broad cultural repertoire in Brazil between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. The aim of this work is to extract elements that allow reflection around a vigorous protestant institutional dynamic that made Brazil one of the mission fields on which educational actions were used as a strategy of religious propagation. The biographical pretext feeds, inductively, an analysis that distances itself from the approaches that understand Methodist education from sociological categories operated in the register of the copy or cultural transplant. On the contrary, by emphasizing the repertoires circulation, we locate the sociocultural components in the field of transnational circuits which allowed the anchoring of actions aimed at childhood education (SANTOS, 2021).

The Transnational History of Education has become an approach that privileges subjects and cultural objects in circulation, demonstrating connections between different spaces that until then were separated by traditional historiography. The

² *Woman's Missionary Advocate* was issued monthly between 1880 and 1910 by the Woman's Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The periodical was constituted, among other subjects, as a communication and publicity channel for reports, letters and statistics sent from the mission fields. In this article, references to the journal will be done using the abbreviation WMA.

term "transnational" entered the field of education in the 1990s and has served as a theoretical-methodological parameter to understand the action of institutions dissociated from the official apparatus of national states (FUCHS; VERA, 2019). The concern in this field of analysis is to understand how the frontiers were crossed by the actions of diverse subjects, revealing that state entities were not constituted as organisms closed on themselves. In this sense, we understand that the reconstruction of the transnational threads woven by the Methodist movement shows that the missionary agency was able to develop its operations due to this porosity. The analysis of the Protestant institution reveals the strength of circulation as different people and repertoires were introduced into the sociocultural fabric of countries like Brazil. At the same time, one cannot lose sight of the fact that this movement was dynamized through the support of the technical infrastructure built by the capital expansion process in the genesis of modernity, through railroads, telegraphs, steam transport, printing houses and post offices (SANTOS; FONSECA; NARITA, 2019).

Therefore, the article, using mainly the official publications of the American Southern Methodist institution, seeks to understand how the circulation of people and pedagogical repertoires that connected the United States to Brazil occurred through the analysis of the work of the missionary Willie Ann Bowman. Thus, we will demonstrate the protagonism of a woman who, enrolled in an institutionally organized movement at the transnational level, contributed to the territorialization of practices among which were educational actions in Brazil.

Stepping into transnational Methodist paths

The May 11th, 1895 edition of the *Birmingham age-herald*, a periodical published and distributed in the state of Alabama, United States of America, publicized the holding of a Methodist meeting that had taken place in Meridian, a city located in the state of Mississippi:

The woman's board of foreign missions of the Methodist Episcopal church, south, has convened in Meridian to hold its meetings for about a week. This board consists of officers, managers and delegates from thirty-four home conferences³, and is the executive committee of the Woman's Foreign Missionary society, which has its workers located in Mexico, Brazil, Indian territory and China (*Birmingham age-herald*, May 11th 1895, p. 1).

³ The Conferences were territorial divisions of the Methodists that, in general, coincided with the Southern states that made up the framework of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. It was common practice to create local Conferences in regions where missionary work was consolidated. Its subdivisions were called districts, within which were the stations of religious activity.

Methodist Episcopal Church, South⁴ was a denomination based on the theology of John Wesley that had emerged in 1844 in the United States after the split of the Methodist Episcopal Church – among the issues that were at the heart of the schism was the presence or not of slave owners among the institution's bishopric (BUYERS, 1945). Since its foundation, the creation of missionary societies has been developed within MECS with the aim of projecting work inside and outside the United States – the so-called domestic and foreign missions. During the 1850s, for example, domestic emphasis was placed on sending preachers to immigrant, native, and African American populations that were not Protestant Christian. Externally, Liberia and China were the main regions that gained importance as destinations for Methodists (SLEDGE, 2005). However, the missionary movement did not develop as expected due to the shock caused by the Civil War that devastated the country between 1861 and 1865⁵. It was during the American Reconstruction that a great force of religious transnational expansion occurred in order to allocate works of evangelization in different regions of the world (CANNON III, 1926). According to Dana Robert (1995), in this process, the protagonism of women missionaries contributed to the installation of educational actions, especially in schools and Sunday schools, in addition to the creation of aid societies. At the end of the 19th century, as the 1895 news suggest, the presence of MECS in foreign lands was already felt in Mexican, Chinese, and Brazilian territories⁶.

Among the organizations of Southern Methodists that were created with the intention of stimulating missionary work was the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society⁷. Created in May 1878, it was constituted from the efforts of female leaders who placed their own demands within the framework of the institutional disputes of MECS. According to Noreen Dunn Tatum (1960), it involved the need to give autonomy and expand the participation of women in missionary activities. The organization was justified on the argument that women were more efficient in the evangelization work of women who inhabited the mission fields. This meant strongly integrating a social sector that had

⁴ From now on, Methodist Episcopal Church, South will be mentioned as MECS.

⁵ During the American Civil War, several MECS temples were destroyed, and many difficulties were faced to keep the institution running. The aggravation in the situation of the missionaries who were in foreign fields was due, among other things, to the economic breakdown in the south that determined the reduction of financial collections in the congregations that subsidized the work (SLEDGE, 2005).

⁶ In Brazil, the first missionary sent officially by MECS was John James Ransom, in 1876. The initiative took place, among other reasons, due to the possibilities exposed by the preacher Junius E. Newman with the community of North Americans formed in Sao Paulo's countryside by the immigration that occurred after the Civil War (BUYERS, 1945).

⁷ From now on, Woman's Foreign Missionary Society will be mentioned as WFMS.

worked, until then, almost exclusively due to marriage ties. The first edition of *Woman's Missionary Advocate* makes it explicit:

There is nothing more apparent, even to an unreflecting mind, than the impress of woman's hand upon the work of the present time; and nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the enterprise known as 'Woman's Work for Woman.' It remains for the women of the nineteenth century to do that which had never been undertaken before – that is, through the organization of her own sex into societies, to procure the means to begin the work of Christianizing the women in heathen lands (WMA, July 1880, p. 13).

The event organized in Meridian was the seventeenth annual meeting of the Board that composed the WFMS. It was the moment in which several boards of headers debated about the articulations regarding the maintenance and expansion of missionary activities, both domestic and foreign. Under the leadership of the women who managed the institutional high hierarchy, at the meeting, according to the official records, "twenty-two Conferences were represented by their Secretaries, three by reserve delegates, and ten had no representation" (SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT..., 1895, p. 69). With a total of thirty-five Methodist members present, among the items on the agenda that guided the meeting, the debates on the reports of the missions, the institution's financial statements, the reach of religious publications and the evaluation of the works carried out stand out.

The transnational missionary impetus indicated by the *Birmingham age-herald* report is substantiated by the seventeenth annual report of the WFMS, also published in 1895⁸. Reverberating the importance of female performances, the document opens by arguing that "woman is the climax of God's creative energy" (SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT..., 1895, p. 5) and says that, "of the 38 missionaries supported by the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 15 are working in China, 14 in Mexico, 8 in Brazil, and 1 in the Indian Mission" (SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT..., 1895, p. 6). According to reports, the institution supported 12 boarding schools and 40 schools around the world, where 4.379 women and children studied. Of this total, 1.266 were served in China, 1.789 in Mexico and only 308 in Brazil. A question immediately stands out: what reason can explain the low reach of the work in Brazil when compared to the mission fields in China and Mexico?

Verification of the circumstances was possible due to the reports sent by the missionaries who worked in the country – at that time, the cities that had educational

⁸ The annual reports were official WFMS documents that contained, among other matters, the descriptions sent by the missionaries regarding the work carried out in the different transnational fields.

works were Piracicaba (founded in 1879), Rio de Janeiro (founded in 1888) and Juiz de Fora (founded in 1891). The documents arrived in the United States and were received by the higher hierarchy of the WFMS, feeding the institution with information that, in general, described the precarious infrastructure in the schools, the lack of staff and the work overload of the missionaries in Brazil (SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT ..., 1895).

According to the official records, on the third day of the annual meeting held in Meridian, Miss Trueheart, who was secretary for domestic affairs on the governing body of the Board that led the WFMS, delivered a speech with the panorama described by the Methodists in report. Next, the floor was given to Miss Mary W. Bruce, a missionary of the institution who had arrived in Brazil in 1884 (JOHN, 1899). She worked at *Colégio Mineiro* in Juiz de Fora and was on a leave in the United States that year. According stated in the records: "She gave a short account of the origin of the school in Juiz de Fora, and spoke most highly of its success, and urged its needs; the overtaxed and faithful teachers so much requiring reinforcement" (Seventeenth annual report..., 1895, p. 88). The importance of Miss Bruce's participation in the event gained capillarity in Methodist publications of the period. Proving the centrality of her speech for help request to the mission in Brazil, the *Woman's Missionary Advocate* echoed: "The importance of reinforcements for Brazil was made plain. At the conclusion of this report Miss Bruce was called forward to tell of the work in the city of Juiz de Fora. Her remarks were full of interest" (WMA, June 1895, p. 364).

The debate that went beyond the Meridian annual meeting makes evident the web of transnational connections engendered by the MECS that enabled a significant flow of information and people between the United States and Brazil at the *fin de siècle*. The sending of reports from the mission fields to the institutional headquarters was converted into printed documents that, in turn, circulated through the Methodist network (SANTOS, 2021). By the way, at that juncture, the religious already had their own printing house, located in Nashville (Tennessee), where, incidentally, the headquarters of the WFMS board of directors was also located. The city was the destination of the documents, letters and missives that were selected, diagrammed, and composed the annual reports and periodicals (such as the *Woman's Missionary Advocate*) that were distributed transnationally by the WFMS. Thus, the mission fields also stood out as content-producing sites that fed a kind of media conglomerate, as defined by David William Scott (2016). These communication channels, by making use of the experience of acceleration made possible by the technique spread in the 19th century, allowed the institutional headquarters to be connected to the frontiers of missionary work. This thriving transnational circulation was the condition that made possible to raise awareness among the WFMS's board of directors. At the Meridian meeting, the executive committee, in addition to approving the release of a total sum of US\$ 17.905, realized "the imperative need of reinforcements for Brazil" (SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT..., 1895, p. 113). Accordingly, it was decided that:

The names of seven accepted missionary candidates were presented to this committee. Five young ladies from the Training School appeared before us in person, and we were most favorably impressed with their modest, gentle bearing, their earnest piety and consecration, and their ardent desire to enter upon the work 'whereunto they have been called.' After much prayerful consideration your committee respectfully recommends the following:

1. That Miss Willie Bowman, of the St. Louis Conference; Miss Eliza Perkinson, of the Missouri Conference; and Miss May Umberger, of the Holston Conference, be appointed to work in Brazil (SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT..., 1895, p. 110).

It was through the WFMS joints in Meridian that Willie Ann Bowman's missionary life and her connection to Brazil began. The Board referred her because she was part of the group of students in the process of completing the preparation course for the missions offered by the Scarritt Bible and Training School. Her entry into the institution took place more than twenty years after his mother's omen, as exposed in the introduction to this article. A few years earlier, reminiscing her childhood, it was in the midst of creating a missionary society at the Immanuel Methodist Church, still in Saint Louis, that she describes having received "the call":

At that moment it seemed like a hand was laid on my head as it had been twenty years before, and a voice said I was to be the one. I answered, 'Lord, if I am the one, open the way'; which he did very soon, for two years after I entered the Scarritt Bible and Training School, where I remained two years for training (...) (JOHN, 1899, p. 75).

According to a religious publication, "the St. Louis League Union assumed the expenses of Miss Willie Bowman at the Scarritt Bible and Training School for one year" (The Missionary Review of the World, Jan. 1896, p. 75). In this sense, Bowman composed the complex social fabric of North American Methodist women who, through various institutional efforts, were part of a preparation process before being sent to the mission fields. It seemed important for the directors that they possess a specific training that would allow a more efficient performance in the evangelical work in Churches, societies, Sunday schools and Methodist schools.

The Scarritt Bible and Training School was created in September 1892 in Kansas (Missouri) and had the objective, according to the seventeenth annual report of the WFMS, to promote "the education of missionaries and other Christian workers" (SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT..., 1895, p. 132). According to the document:

The institution is in successful operation, and promises to meet the ends sought – namely, practical instruction in the study of the Bible and drill in methods of teaching it, the study of the history of Missions and of the different mission fields,

and practical training in city missionary work, industrial schools, and nursing, which may both fit and test the missionary candidates before entering on their work (SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT..., 1895, p. 132).

The principal, Maria Layng Gibson, was at the annual meeting in Meridian and publicly read the Training School's report as a kind of institutional accountability. According to the official records, "our students are earnest, true-hearted young women" (SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT..., 1895, p. 90), which were exposed to a diversified *curriculum*. Three books justified the classes about Evidence for Christianity and Moral Philosophy Department: *History of the Christian Church* and *Manual of Christian Evidences* by George Park Fisher and *Witnesses to Christ* by Methodist Bishop Alpheus Waters Wilson. Religious study also emphasized the four gospels, the biography of the prophet Ezekiel, Hermeneutics and readings on Creation and the miracles of Christ (SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT..., 1895, p. 93-94).

In addition to religious issues, according to the records, two other types of knowledge also made up the grid: "bookkeeping and study of the mission fields" (Seventeenth annual report..., 1895, p. 90). Preparing future workers through knowledge of accounting and home economics was an important issue for managing resources when they were *in loco*. Maintaining a healthy financial income was a condition for the continuity of the evangelical work. In that regard, it is as if the institution were concerned with reproducing a business *ethos* among its students (SANTOS, 2021). Furthermore, to be an accurate study of the mission fields, it was essential to send information from those who were already at the forefront of action. To contribute as such, the institution had its own journal. According to school's principal Gibson: "The Evangel, our paper, published monthly, has been a valuable means of communication with the outside world" (SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT..., 1895, p. 93).

From a pedagogical point of view, future missionaries learned about primary methods illustrated by classroom teaching, music, and work in Sunday schools. Pedagogy was mainly, but not exclusively, associated with religious teaching. At the same time, knowledge in the area of nursing was part of the *curriculum*. Interestingly, the course was not restricted to theoretical classes. Studying and training domestically what would be practiced in foreign fields was one of the premises that guided training. A better sense of the place that practical work took in missionary preparation may be gained from the statistics set forth in the official records of Meridian's seventeenth annual meeting. Reportedly, in the course lasting between 1894 and 1895, in which Miss Bowman took part, the number of children attended at the industrial school in Kansas was 1.097. Those taught in Sunday schools totaled 8.428. If we also consider the visitations that distributed food, Bibles, copies of the New Testament, toys at Christmas, bouquets of flowers, clothes, books, in addition to visits to nursing homes, offerings of thanksgiving dinners, community prayers, reading excerpts from scripture and the number of religious calls made, we must add approximately 4.000 more actions

with the local community (SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT..., 1895, p. 91-92). The thrust of the mission was the means and end of training at the Training School.

More than a simple preparation of future missionaries, we are facing one of the points of the problem investigated here. The displacement of people and knowledge, based on the referral made by the WFMS in Meridian and the biennial preparation in Kansas, was possible due to the plots constructed by MECS in its process of religious expansion. As we will demonstrate, the repertoire appropriated by Miss Bowman in the training course subsidized her work in Brazil, demonstrating the complex texture of the transnational circulations engendered by the missionary institution. The seventeenth annual meeting of the WFMS ended on May 15th, 1895. On June 22nd, Bowman left New York for Brazil accompanied by Misses Perkinson and Umberger, on a 20-day steam journey to Rio de Janeiro.

Walking the path: protagonism in transnational circulations

Upon their arrival in Brazil on July 12th, 1895 (JOHN, 1899, p. 75), Willie Ann Bowman and her traveling companions were received in Rio de Janeiro by members of the Methodist Church, among whom was Miss Amelia Elerding⁹. A report she wrote provides insight into Bowman's reception and direction of the work.

(...) our hearts were made glad by the arrival of our three new missionaries. After spending a few days in Rio and a week in the Petropolis, Miss Bowman returned to Rio, to be my colleague, Miss Perkinson went to Juiz de Fora, and Miss Umberger remained in Petropolis. I was delighted with Miss Watts's¹⁰ distribution of the young ladies, especially in sending Miss Bowman to Rio. She is just the kind of a worker we sorely need, and I feel well repaid for having been alone for more than two years (WMA, Oct. 1895, p. 110).

Miss Elerding's description shows that, as soon as Bowman landed, her work already showed the importance of the training obtained at the Scarritt Bible and Training School: "Miss Bowman began to study the Portuguese language at once. She renders valuable assistance in housekeeping, and on certain days accompanies Miss Hamilton on her rounds of visiting" (WMA, Oct. 1895, p. 110). The following year, the young Missourian sent her own reports to the North American headquarters. The eighteenth

⁹ Amelia Elerding was born in Illinois and was sent by the WFMS to Brazil in 1892 (JOHN, 1899).

¹⁰ In this context, Martha Hite Watts, mentioned in the introduction to this article, was responsible for leading the women missionaries in the work carried out by the WFMS in Brazil. In 1895, she contributed decisively to the foundation of yet another Methodist school in the country, the American College of Petropolis.

WFMS yearbook published in 1896 corroborates, from Bowman's own words, the description of the beginning of her work:

I left home and friends for Brazil June 18, 1895, after a pleasant trip across the United States and on the Atlantic arrived in Brazil July 12, 1895, spent a week pleasantly, in Petropolis, and returned to Rio to begin work July 22. (...) I began at once with the language, taking three lessons a week, assisted with the housework, taking charge of the bookkeeping for the house, looking after supplies, doing the marketing, and relieving Miss Elerding wherever I could (EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT..., 1896, p. 63).

The troubles in mastering the language limited Bowman's performance. Even having a small pedagogical experience, she reports that had started "with a class of English-speaking children in the Sunday school" (EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT..., 1896, p. 63). Her work between 1895 and 1900 was, as developing in the learning Portuguese, associated, above all, with visits aimed at evangelical preaching in the Anglophone community in Rio de Janeiro. Related to that, she reported:

Before Miss Elerding left I looked after the housekeeping and assisted her in the afternoons with the visitation; since then I have done all I could to carry on the work alone, have made one hundred and fifty calls, read the Bible and prayed in eighteen homes, gave out three Bibles, three hymn books, one hook and twenty religious papers (TWENTIETH ANNUAL REPORT..., 1898, p. 70-71).

Despite not being part of the Methodist Church's institutionally high hierarchy composition, their actions were still articulated from the domestic environment, a place closely linked to the social function of women for nineteenth-century Brazilian society (DEL PRIORI, 1997). Methodists found mechanisms of action through mobilization of practices and construction of spaces that favored evangelical preaching. It was in this direction that the works built through aid societies were heading, among which the local version of the Ladies' Aid Society¹¹ stood out. Its objective was "to promote the spiritual, social, and financial interests of the Church, and at the same time give the sisters something definite to do, that they may be led out and develop into active Christian workers" (WMA, Apr. 1897, p. 304). As one of the architects of transnational circulation, Bowman herself reports the results of this work with the English-speaking society in Rio de Janeiro:

¹¹ The performance of Methodist women through the Ladies' Aid Societies dates back to the context of the North American Civil War and, despite having been ignored for a long time by specialized historiography, it is currently considered one of the precursors of the female missionary organization. From the beginning, this type of society was strongly linked to community and religious work (BRUNGER, 1967).

Our duties and any special donations the ladies give we spend in charity or in repairs and improvements for the church, have contributed some each month for two years toward keeping a boy in Granbery College, the son of a widow, member of our church; have bought for the church new curtains for organ, communion cloths and communion table, matting for the aisles of the church, and assisted the gentlemen in paying for three new gas fixtures for the center of the church (WMA, July 1897, p. 26).

The vigor of the work carried out by Bowman in Rio de Janeiro can be measured through her report on her work in 1899. According to the missionary: "During the year I have made five hundred and twelve visits among the people, and always try to make them feel that I come in the name of the Lord, bringing to them his message of love and life" (TWENTIETH-SECOND ANNUAL REPORT..., 1900, p. 66). After a short time working at *Piracicabano* School, due to the illness of one of the missionaries, Bowman took leave and returned to her homeland. Despite the fact that the period was, in practice, a kind of vacation, she remained active in the cause of the missions and, literally, helped to weave the transnational circulation that connected the United States to Brazil.

Seven months of this year I spent in the United States, not resting as I had planned, but going from place to place, telling of the needs of the work in Brazil. During the seven months I made sixty public talks in different places, attended the General Missionary Conference of our Church in New Orleans in April, and attended the Annual Meeting of our Board at Asheville, N. C., in June (TWENTIETH-FOURTH ANNUAL REPORT..., 1902, p. 84).

One of the public talks was reported by the July 7th, 1901 edition of *The St. Louis Republic*. According to the Missouriian newspaper: "Miss Willie Bowman of this county has returned from mission work in Brazil to spend a short vacation. She delivered a lecture last Sunday evening at the Fifth Street Methodist Church" (THE ST. LOUIS REPUBLIC, July 7th 1901, p. 11). Associated with the exhibition of evangelical works, the name of the missionary is also found in the papers of the General Missionary Conference, which took place between April 24th and 30th, 1901 in New Orleans (Louisiana). As it was stated: "Brazil's table held beautiful laces, crucifixes, beads, etc., which were displayed by Miss Willie Bowman (...)" (MISSIONARY ISSUES..., 1901, p. 557). In this regard, he attended the twenty-third annual meeting of the Board that administered the WFMS, held on June 6th, 1901 in the city of Asheville (North Carolina). According to the records: "Miss Bowman spoke of what is known in Brazil as '*estalagem* work' – i.e., visiting the people who live in tenement houses, and are crowded together in ignorance, sin, and filth" (WMA, July 1901, p. 11-12).

Back in Brazil in August 1901, after a period in Rio de Janeiro, she was transferred to work at *Metodista* School of Ribeirao Preto, in Sao Paulo's countryside, which opened in 1899. It was at that moment that her work was more directly linked to the

educational actions. Writing about the school term ending on September 30th, 1902, Willie Ann Bowman reported that "The children seem to enjoy the study of the Bible" (WMA, Jan. 1904, p. 258) and gave an accurate pedagogical overview: "(...) it is quite difficult, as we have no helps and explanations in the Portuguese language, and use only the Bible. This makes my work double, as I must do all my studying in English and then translate it into Portuguese" (WMA, Jan. 1904, p. 258). From the *curriculum* point of view, Bowman reported, in a 1904 publication: "I have six Bible classes – three in the Old and three in the New Testament – each one in a different part, so it gives me as much studying as if each class were studying a different subject" (WMA, July 1904, p. 31). These performances were based on the North American training course and demonstrated the strength of transnational circulation through missionary networks. According to Bowman: "My classes are all studying the life of Christ. I follow the 'Harmony of the life of Christ' used at the Scarritt Bible and Training School and find it a great help" (TWENTIETH-FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT..., 1903, p. 82). According to Mary L. Hargrove, professor responsible for Bible teaching offered in Kansas: "The life of Christ, as arranged in Stevens and Burton's 'Harmony of the Gospels', has been a portion of Scripture studied by both classes" (TWENTIETH-FIRST ANNUAL REPORT..., 1899, p. 108). Initially published in 1892, the manual was intended for use "not only in colleges and theological schools, but in clubs for private study, and in Bible classes of all grades" (STEVENS; BURTON, 1892, p. 3). Guiding the use of mnemonic methods for teaching the context of Jesus' life, the book understood that a Christian education "reveal their true meaning only to him who comes to their study with a mind open to the beauty and power of life, and to the grandeur of its far-reaching plan for the redemption of our race" (STEVENS; BURTON, 1892, p. 36).

The joint of Ribeirao Preto into the works of the WFMS suggests that the religious frontier expanded towards the interior of Sao Paulo at the same time that configured the new space sociologically (SANTOS; FONSECA; NARITA, 2019). More than circulation, the description points to possible cultural transfers (ESPAGNE, 2013), as the translations carried out by Bowman show the mission field as a place of cultural production. The repertoire assimilated in the United States was re-elaborated due to absence of adequate pedagogical supports from the need to build didactic strategies that were effective. Missionary educational action presupposed the social as an open field for interventions, which were intended to galvanize a broad moral repertoire in the conduct of children through biblical teaching (NARITA, 2017). Education was clearly understood as a mechanism through which the Protestant religion was propagated. Describing the results of her work with the girls at the boarding school in Ribeirao Preto, Bowman found in 1903:

My work in our School at this point, the Escola Methodista, is a little bit of everything. I look after the housekeeping and do some teaching. I have five Bible classes and one class in arithmetic. Besides this, I visit three afternoons in

the week. (...) In our home life we have many opportunities for Christian work among the children. A few days ago one of our little girls bought three nice Bibles to send to her father, mother, and a cousin at home. She brought them to me and asked me to mark them; she wanted certain passages marked so they would be sure to read them. I was very much pleased with some of the passages she asked me to mark, for they showed that she knew what she was doing – and she is only twelve years old. She sent the Bibles home, and wrote a letter telling her father that she wanted them to read them and accept Jesus as their Saviour. It is through the children that we hope to reach the parents, for the parents usually idolize their children (WMA, Apr. 1903, p. 371).

In this regard, there was a report signed on March 28th, 1905. We can observe the repercussion of training in home economics and how these actions also served as moments of religious education. Bowman stated that: "While teaching them plain sewing or how to make simple cakes, pies, or bead, I try to preach the gospel to them, and am happy to say that I can already see good results of my work" (WMA, 1905, p. 463). In this context, the school had just over a dozen students in boarding school, under the responsibility of Bowman and Miss Ada May Stewart¹². In a 1904 publication on the work of the missionaries in Ribeirao Preto, the circulation of pedagogical methods is evident, in this case, mutual teaching. This is yet another evidence that local pedagogical actions were constructed with a view to a complex transnational circulation.

Of our twelve boarders, eight are full pay, and one a pupil teacher. The majority of these are from influential homes, and we expect the school in this way to become better known. One of the first things a new girl learns when she enters the home is to sing the hymns, the **older girls acting as teachers**. They assemble in the yard or in the dormitory, and I fear that our neighbors often wish them farther away. These hymns are carried into the homes and from there to other homes, and other families are becoming interested through the influence of their children who come to our school. Two years ago there was a family here who was bitterly opposed to us and to Protestantism in every form. Now their children are pupils in the school and attending Sunday school and church. More and more am I convinced that through the children we reach the parents (WMA, Aug. 1904, p. 54. Our highlight).

In general, the term "mutual teaching" is associated with a form of organization of school teaching developed at the end of the 18th century attributed by some to Joseph Lancaster, an English religious and teacher, and by others to Andrew Bell, a missionary

¹² Ada May Stewart was a graduate of the Scarritt Bible and Training School and arrived in Brazil as a missionary in 1901 (RIBEIRO, 2008). Incidentally, she was selected at the twenty-third annual meeting of the WFMS held in Ashville, North Carolina, which Willie Ann Bowman attended.

and teacher who, in a school located in India under British colonial control, developed procedures to organize the classroom, the content and the lessons. The objective was to teach several groups of students, with the advertised advantage of spending less effort on controlling the subject by applying a continuous cycle of exercises and lessons, in a reward system based on the work of students/ monitors chosen because of their aptitude and advancement, whose function was to accompany their colleagues, supervise and support them in carrying out the tasks dictated by a single master. Despite the authorship claimed by Lancaster and by Bell and their sympathizers, other appropriations of this form of teaching organization emerged and became popular in Europe between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, always adopting the basic principle of organize the classroom and the class from the simultaneous way of teaching. In Brazil, the general law on public education of 1827 (which came to compensate for the scarcity of content in the 1824 constitutional text in terms of education) provided for the monitorial teaching method as the official method of Brazilian public schools in view of its promise resource savings, as a single teacher would take care of many students supported by monitors. This seemed to indicate a very useful tool to create schools across the country without the massive contribution of state resources. However, in the 19th century itself, as recognized by Maria Helena Câmara Bastos (1997), it was proved that it was not feasible to implement the creation and continuity of schools making use of mutual teaching, so that their existence in the school environment went from decline to disappearance by the end of the 19th century. Interestingly, in the case of the Methodists, as highlighted in the aforementioned source, a fragment of the general practices of the mutual teaching method still made up the repertoire of school pedagogical actions in the early 20th century. The female students became monitors of the others ("the older girls act like teachers") as an usual practice assumed by the missionaries when working in the classroom in the neophyte school in Sao Paulo' countryside.

One last fact that reinforces the analysis intended here involves the yellow fever epidemic that affected Ribeirao Preto between 1902 and 1903, a period in which Bowman and Stewart were the WFMS representatives at *Colégio Metodista*. According to the young Missourian: "Miss Stewart and I decided that if we could help in any way we were willing; so, we offered our services to the committee, and were accepted at once" (WMA, Nov. 1903, p. 170). The action in the fight against the disease, again, shows the transnational circulation that connected Kansas to Ribeirao Preto. According to Bowman: "The work was new to me, and I found use for all the lessons and lectures in nursing that I had had at the Training School" (WMA, Nov. 1903, p. 170).

The last reference that the *Woman's Missionary Advocate* makes to Bowman as a missionary is in November 1906. The December issue of the same year reveals the reason. According to the press release, in the fall of that year she had visited the Scarritt Bible and Training School to introduce her husband, Henry M. Blackwell. At that time,

the missionary was already signed as Willie Ann Bowman Blackwell (WMA, Dec. 1906, p. 266). The marriage made her withdraw from the mission field in Brazilian lands, where she worked for 11 years. The memory of her work with the Ribeirao Preto community was the motivating factor for the Methodist Institute of Education to name, in the 1990s, its museum after the young Missourian.

Final remarks

Since the 19th century, even before the American Civil War, MECS defined as an important horizon of its action to take the word and preaching to the ends of the world, fulfilling the call of John Wesley: "the world is my parish". As a coincidence with the cycles of capitalist expansion and following the routes of international economic circuits, American Methodists integrated their self-proclaimed vocation for the preaching and conversion of various peoples in distant lands as a structuring element of their Church from an early age (SANTOS, 2001). Thus, MECS built a type of missionarism that placed school education as one of its fronts of action at the service of preaching and religious conversion.

The missionary women led by the WFMS were acclimated to having the world as a preaching field, so that from training to the work on mission fields, a complex institutional articulation made their transnational dynamics possible. It was precisely in this context that the Methodist missionaries who came to Brazil acted, as Willie Ann Bowman case. Bowman's generation reveals, on the one hand, the vigor of a movement that connected the United States to Brazil and, on the other hand, the protagonism of women who worked in favor of the evangelization of peoples through a variety of actions. Some of the missionary's biographical traits demonstrate how local educational meanings were constructed with a broad transnational network in mind. Beyond an isolated case, Bowman's work reflects the vigor of the movement of people and repertoires that made up a dynamic and complex scenario of cultural circulation that connected the United States to Brazil between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th.

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