

The Unsung Heroines of the British Empire

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The female perspective of British travelers to the British Empire has been widely ignored by historians. The study of gender migration is a relatively newer field of history that has gained some attention. For the historians who have taken a look at female migration to and female explorers in the empire's colonies, some tend to over romanticize the experiences these women had in their travels abroad. This trend seems to take root in naming women such as Gertrude Bell and Mary Kingsley as heroines for being groundbreaking female explorers. While Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell are from two different time periods, they both encompass images of women who defied traditional gender roles and influenced how historians examine female travelers today. These women are outliers due to their own British privileges, socioeconomic statuses and the masculine nature of their achievements. Feminist historians give overwhelming credit to Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell for essentially "breaking the mold" of the influence women had in their travels to the distant lands of the British Empire. Unfortunately, claiming Bell and Kingsley as all-encompassing heroines depletes the recognition of ordinary women being nurses, teachers and missionaries in the empire. These everyday professions should be considered as heroic because all three fields are essential in the wellbeing of the people within the empire and without them the empire could never exist.

Before delving into the achievements of Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell, one must ask what constitutes the very meaning of a hero. When considering what a hero is, one can better see the pedestal created for Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell in a different more varied light. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a hero may be defined as "a person who is

THE UNSUNG HEROINES OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

admired for great or brave acts or fine qualities: The chief male character in a story, play, movie etc” (Merriam-Webster Dictionaries, 2016). Females are not named heroes, but instead are called heroines that also embody the same characteristics that are held to the definition of a hero. But if both sexes accomplish something brave or present fine qualities and are equally admired for them, why do two words exist for the same meaning? It may be because in order for a woman to be called a heroine, she must first accomplish an achievement that would also be considered honorable for a man. Perhaps it may be that there needed to be a distinction between a male and female and they were not to be placed on the same pedestal. Many times throughout history, one can see this trend of females being named as heroines for performing brave acts and duties similar to what would be considered an accomplishment in a man’s life. Thus, this could be the reason Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell are raised as heroines and given exaggerated acclaim by historians for ‘breaking the female mold’ by embodying male characteristics. As a result, everyday courageous acts by women which led to advancements in education, medicine and missionary work abroad are left out and essentially undermined when compared to the likes of Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell who perform traditionally masculine acts of bravery.

While it would be quite ignorant to downplay the work of Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell, one must question why these women receive the most attention of feminist historians. By ignoring the accomplishments of everyday women in the empire it would seem as though historians who focus on gendered studies are missing the broader scope of the topic. Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell are considered to be exceptional female figures in history. As a result of their untouchable statuses, ordinary British female contributors to the British Empire are overshadowed. These women are not widely recognized by their own traditionally feminine achievements in education, missionary work and medicine. This could be due to a myriad of

reasons including the male and female characteristic definitions of heroism, the socioeconomic status of both Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell, and the stigma surrounding women in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

According to the distinct definitions of heroism that separates male bravery from female bravery, how could it be possible for the likes of Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell to be considered heroic? As aforementioned, it is possible that in order for the two women to be considered heroic they had to complete traditionally masculine acts of bravery. It can be said that both Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell performed masculine acts of heroism by exploring uncharted territory abroad. But one must delve further than that to see such discrimination against women and heroism in the British Empire. Surrounding the notion of both Victorian masculinity and imperialism is a sense of violence and the need to exert fighting power over a subordinate figure. One example of this would be the geographical accomplishments of Halford Mackinder, a prominent imperialist who wanted to collect valuable fauna and flora in East Africa and make a careful map to leave his name upon it (Kearns, 1997). Both people have almost identical initiatives, but because Mary Kingsley is a woman, it seems as though the society of the time gave more attention to Mackinder for his natural masculine endeavors. Other examples of male explorers who had similar goals to that of Kingsley include Sir Richard Burton, George Mallory and Francis Young. While Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa* were popular back in the homeland, she was still not as recognized as the male explorers. Thus, it can be said that there was an undying interest in the true men of the empire that were strictly driven by their 'male rivalry' and 'ambition' (Dawson, 1994). Women on the other hand were expected to have virtually no similar drive, but were tied to the domestic sphere of influence. These definitions attempt to label society and do not take outliers into consideration. For instance, labeling men as

THE UNSUNG HEROINES OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

one homogeneous face of the British Empire disregards an individual's affiliations and identities in certain situations. If any men chose to give attention to Kingsley or Bell, they were most likely undermined by this masculine rhetoric. This could be a reason why historians praise Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell because of one general societal identity; the women weren't given feminine distinction apart from their English male counterparts. Instead both women were distinguished for their 'unnatural' roles and ultimately declared the heroines of their times. These unnatural roles, exploring alone in uncharted territory, embodying race and ethnicity for their accomplishments rather than gender, and being brave in rather tense situations are all factors that contribute to this unnatural role. Instead, according to Victorian gender norms standards, those women should have been focused on marriage and the upbringing of children inside the home otherwise they would never truly feel satisfied in their lives. But there is no indication in their personal letters that Mary Kingsley or Gertrude Bell was unsatisfied or regretful for not marrying or having children.

Mary Kingsley does deserve the recognition and honor of carrying out non-traditional female accomplishments. She encompassed every characteristic of a heroine needed to travel off to distant lands and survive harsh foreign environments. Kingsley's bravery and strong spirit contributed to her advancements in European exploration. For instance, Kingsley became the first European to explore the depths of West Africa, which was something far outside of the norm for Victorian women. It could be said that because Kingsley did not travel to West Africa with the intention to spread Christianity or hold down household duties abroad that she is an example of a woman who essentially 'broke the mold' of traditional Victorian gender roles. Instead, Kingsley was primarily interested in scientific exploration of foreign territories with the goal of discovering raw fetish and freshwater fish (Brisson, 2005). Mary Kingsley also lived in a

society where gender roles were to be abided by and a woman who asserted masculine qualities was in danger of ruining her reputation. If a woman were to dabble in a man's world, this would make her look rather rugged and therefore an unsuitable female for marriage. If a woman was unsuitable for marriage then she could never have children that, according to historians Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, would never satisfy her biological maternal instinct (Davidoff & Hall, 1987). Thus, Kingsley walks a fine line between keeping her modesty and asserting such apparent masculine assertiveness when she discusses her scientific discoveries (Brisson, 2005). Besides her elite reputation at risk in Britain, one should not ignore the groundbreaking work Kingsley accomplished in her travels to West Africa.

As aforementioned, Kingsley spent her time abroad exploring the depths of West Africa in search of valuable specimens of fish. In order to do so, she had to endure some of the harshest environmental conditions in West Africa. One example in Kingsley's own writings shows that she had a moment of doubt in her desire to travel in foreign conditions: "...why, after having reached this point of absurdity, you need have gone and painted the lily and adorned the rose, by being such a colossal ass as to come fooling about in mangrove swamps" (Kingsley, 1982, p.89). Here, she wonders why she did not just conform to the traditional role of a Victorian woman since it would have been easier than getting stuck in an African mangrove for the sake of scientific discovery. Kingsley admits that she had two moments of this type of "chatty incident" where she fearfully pondered over the nature of what she was doing but kept pushing forward in order to carry out her desire of exploration and scientific discovery. In addition, Kingsley discusses her tactics to warn off crocodiles after a day of exploring the swamps of West Africa as if she were merely talking about how to patch up a wound. She does not even believe in stating that she was fearful during her escape from the crocodiles because she believes that it is obvious

THE UNSUNG HEROINES OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

that at some point she was fearful. “I had to retire to the bows, to keep the balance right, and fetch him a clip on the snout with a paddle, when he withdrew, and I paddled into the very middle of the lagoon, hoping the water there was too deep for him or any of his friends to repeat the performance... I have measured them when they have been killed by other people, fifteen, eighteen, and twenty-one feet odd. This was only a pushing young creature who had not learnt manners” (Kingsley, 1982, p. 89). Her attitude alone is unique for a woman to display since the Victorian woman was supposed to be unknowing and simple. Yet, Kingsley did not embody either characteristic but remains rather blunt and to the point in her diary entries. This kind of bravery and dedication to her studies and travels warrants Mary Kingsley recognition and honor as a groundbreaking female explorer.

Gertrude Bell is another female explorer that is considered to be groundbreaking in her exploration of the Middle East. Born into a wealthy family, Bell’s desire for otherworldly travels came from her ability to attend upper class schools. She asked her father for permission to attend higher education at Oxford University, which was out of the norm for Victorian women. In pursuing higher education, Bell would venture outside the world of domesticity and enter a realm of professional and powerful educated elitists almost completely controlled by men (Wallach, 2005). However, Bell seemed entirely unaffected by this male dominated sphere of influence; she instead seemed to welcome it. In this letter to her father on January 15, 1915, Gertrude writes her feelings about her new job as a writer and taking over some work from another male co-worker named Mr. Darell at Oxford University. Not much is revealed about Mr. Darell himself, but it is apparent in this source that he is not too happy about sharing the work with his female counterpart. “He is very willing, but there is more than any one man can do. And the Paris letter writing is handed over to me. I like having it. I think the form in which news

is conveyed is one of our most important points in our work” (Burgoyne, 1958, p.22). Here, it seems as though Mr. Darell would have rather done all of the work, but because it would be too much for any single person to complete, Bell was given a man’s work. Yet, she does not seem affected by his pessimism at all and is clearly excited about taking on his work. This early display of confidence and determination would also be essential for Gertrude Bell’s travels to the Middle East.

Gertrude Bell’s experiences in the Middle East are rather unique. As a wealthy, white British female she does not seem to flaunt her socioeconomic status abroad. Instead, she tries to be as diplomatic and politically correct as possible. One way in which Bell remained sensitive to the native people of the Middle East is that she paid careful attention to translate *The Divan of Hafez*. This overlooked creative work by Bell gave her a sense of understanding of the ‘non-dominant culture’ she was being exposed to in the Middle East. The translation was an eye-opening one for Bell, simply because as an upper-class, English atheist woman of the empire this work took major focus and dedication since it is an Islamic mystical work of poetry by Hafez (Workman, 2010). However, in a quote from one of her letters to an unidentified friend at home in 1900, Gertrude Bell shows a hint of popular imperialistic sentiment. “My Syrian girl is charming... I took her out for a long walk on Friday afternoon and went photographing about in Jerusalem... though she was no good as a guide, for she had never been in the Jewish quarter though she has lived here all her life here! That’s typical of them. I knew my way, however, as every Englishwoman would- it’s as simple as possible!” (Bell, 1930, p.58). Here, Bell is indicating that the Englishwoman was superior to that of a Syrian woman. According to historian Angela Woollacott, non-Europeans were commonly represented as overworked, degraded and miserable people (Woollacott, 2001). Due to this, non-European women were easily

THE UNSUNG HEROINES OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

disenfranchised while the Englishwomen were able to look at themselves in a superior light. In addition to her 'superior' status, Bell was a fearless explorer of the foreign territories of the Middle East. One night in late June of 1920, Haji Naji, a leader of a Muslim clan in the Middle East that held a friendship with Bell, was fearful of native terrorists terrorizing his home. Her ability to reassure the Arabic man of his dangerous counterparts is fascinating. "...For the extremists have been pressing him with threats and abuse to join in the agitation..." "I don't sleep at night. I put watchmen round my house, for here I am all alone and far away from you" (Burgoyne, 1958, p.144). This quote from Haji Naji shows how brave and influential Bell must have been for a man native in his lands to be comforted by a foreign white woman to protect him from dangerous native men. In addition, Naji Haji may also have been inclined to think that the terrorists would not harm a white woman for they would face dire consequences. Along with her desire to explore the Middle East in order to reach and unite the people of Iraq, Gertrude Bell defied the average Victorian woman's role in the empire and can be declared a heroine to the people of the Middle East.

Perhaps one of the most interesting factors of Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell's fame is that it separated them from their world of distinct gender roles. It was not unheard of for British women to travel abroad to the colonies and dominions. One example of this would be Australian women who traveled to the heart of the Empire for new opportunity or to merely just explore where their society came from. In this way, Australian women in London were able to share imperial status with Britons. According to Angela Woollacott, this imperial identity would shift depending on where the women were migrating. As Sydney novelist Vera Dwyer once asserted, "Australians feel that England belongs to them the same as Britishers who stay at home" (Woollacott, 2001, p. 142). This belief may undermine the achievements of these female

explorers from Australia to London because saying that the far away foreign place of London belongs to them is similar to stating that they were just visiting a familiar place which was not the case. London is very far from Australia and the trip to make it there would have been troublesome and would have taken some accommodation before they would feel any sort of comfort living in London. This artificial closeness of London and Australia may be another way to feminize the actions of these women and justify why women would travel so far. However, Kingsley and Bell did not perform traditionally feminine tasks abroad and essentially stepped out of education and missionary work. Feminist historians beam over their nonconforming attitudes and their tales of exploration and foreign reform. But would this not mean that Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell are upholding the patriarchy in the British Empire? The patriarchy in this sense would be upholding imperialistic attitudes that were the essential piece in Victorian masculinity. By venturing out and charting unknown lands as their own Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell were essentially supporting imperialistic methods. One literary scholar by the name of Georgina Howell writes: "I have come to agree with her old friend from Oxford, Janet Hogarth, who wrote of her [Gertrude Bell]: "She was, I think, the greatest woman of our time, perhaps amongst the greatest of all time"" (Howell, 2008, p.xviii). While her achievements in the Middle East should not be ignored, it may be much of an over statement to believe that Bell is the greatest woman of all time. This of course undermines other women from their own reforms abroad. Just because those women did not delve into masculine roles in politics and exploration as Bell and Kingsley, it is undoubtedly ignorant to glance over their advancements in the feminine sphere of missionary work, education and the medical field. Granted, Howell is not a historian and may not have much historical background to be able to distinguish the everyday British imperial woman abroad. However, this is an indication that historians have over done

THE UNSUNG HEROINES OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

their praise on the narrative of figures like Bell and Kingsley for upholding the imperial masculine identity.

The socioeconomic backgrounds of Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell are significant and therefore should not be ignored. Since both women came from upper class families it could be said that they were already set up for better opportunities, fame and adventure than women without a sufficient monetary status. One example would be of Mary Kingsley and her means of travelling to West Africa in order to pursue her father's scientific studies of migrant birds and fish. Prior to her travels, Kingsley was confined to her parent's household to perform domestic duties as would be expected from any other woman in the empire. Her father was a doctor and her mother is described as an invalid stuck to the home. When both of her parents passed away, Kingsley was left with abundant free time: "It was in 1893 that, for the first time in my life, I found myself in possession of five or six months which were not heavily forestalled, and feeling like a boy with a new half-crown, I lay about in my mind..." (Mundhenk & McCracken, 1999, p. 440). The truth of the matter is that had Kingsley been a middle or lower class female, she most likely would have had to find a husband to marry or have found work in order to maintain herself monetarily. Without her brother, mother or father Kingsley was still able to take her time and choose what sort of endeavors she would be willing to go on next.

A similar argument can be made for Gertrude Bell since she was also freed from the confines of traditional feminine tasks. Bell's father, Sir Hugh Bell, was a large figure in English politics and her mother, Mary Shield Bell, was a traditional Victorian upper-class mother. The aforementioned literary scholar Georgina Howell arguably writes: "The Bells were very rich: but it was not money that got Gertrude First at Oxford, or helped her survive encounters with murderous tribes in the desert..." (Howell, 2008, p.xvi). It should also be noted that Bell's father

accumulated most of their riches from his father's relationship with iron and steel industries through his company known as the Bell Brothers (Grace's Guide, 2016). While money may not have literally helped Bell through her achievements, her monetary status certainly enabled her to apply and attend Oxford. Her riches would also enable her to travel across the world. Her monetary status, along with her race and gender, could have possibly protected her from potential dangers in the Middle East. As mentioned before in a letter by Gertrude Bell visiting Haji Naji, it is fascinating that Bell would be able to protect him from his native terrorists. Here, one can see that Bell's British female privilege may warn off the terrorists from Haji Naji's home since it was seen as a crime to touch, let alone murder, an English white woman. Her brother is able to jokingly mock her privilege to be able to leave behind the feminine world of domesticity. "He had brought with him a book for Gertrude entitled *Manners for Women*, and took much pleasure in reading improvising passages to her while she sat in a deck-chair smoking..."(Howell, 2008, p.60). Since many women in Britain were still confined to their realms of the domestic sphere, it could clearly be seen that Gertrude's socioeconomic status in society played a role in her escape from the traditional gender role.

Perhaps most obvious of the factors discerning the fame and opportunity of Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell would be the fact that women were just not thought of as capable, able-bodied individuals. In Mary Kingsley's time during the nineteenth century, gender roles were more rigidly defined in the British Empire than seen ever before. Generally, women have always been expected to care for the home in British society. For instance, historian John Tosh describes the Victorian household as being exclusively left to the authority of women. "Indeed the popular image of Victorian domesticity is so focused on women and children that it is hard to avoid the conclusion that their needs were its governing rationale" (Marsden, 1998, p.78). The

THE UNSUNG HEROINES OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

idea of women being inferior to men along with the increasing emphasis of women conforming to their domestic duties was under a more oppressive eye. One might think that this would be unreasonable since servants began to take most of the domestic labors from Victorian women, allowing them time to take up outside hobbies. However, this just seemed to further stress the importance of women staying in the home. In fact, women were looked at as more delicate and therefore must be protected from the dangers a man's world possesses. "By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation: The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril..." (Plunkett et al., 2011, p. 85). This excerpt from John Ruskin's lecture titled *Of The Queen's Garden's* proves the Victorian's need to distinguish a female's role from a male's.

By considering the challenges women faced breaking out of their gender roles, one might give further credit to Mary Kingsley. As a Victorian woman of the upper class, she still broke out and pursued scientific exploration abroad. To view Kingsley in awe for this notion of 'breaking of the mold' would be somewhat unjustified. Mary Kingsley herself believed that women were not as worthy as men and agreed that women should not have their own say in politics or anything else within the British Empire. She states: "[woman's suffrage] was a minor question; while there was a most vital section of men disenfranchised women could wait" (Flint, 1963, p.95). Kingsley was filled with female self-loathing and advocated policies that reflect the distrust of femininity (Stephenson, 1985). Another example of Kingsley's conservative mindset is in an interview where she is certain to uphold her feminine character. "—On the contrary, I am very domesticated, and I certainly never adopted any costume other than the ordinary skirt and blouse during my tramps" (von Zedlitz, 1896, p.432). While a change of clothing may have been useful to facilitate her exploration, Kingsley remains adamant about presenting herself as the

proper Victorian woman. In this way, Kingsley cannot be held to feminist standards of the groundbreaking kind due to her negative stance towards women in Victorian society.

Gertrude Bell on the other hand, was not as anti-progressive as Mary Kingsley towards the position of women. She did not feel obligated to fulfill the same gender roles as Kingsley and did not have a feminine self-loathing complex either. Although Gertrude Bell was not outright feminist by modern day standards, does not mean that she was not a feminist at all. Georgina Howell incorrectly claims: "...her cartridges wrapped in white stockings and pushed into the toes of her Yapp canvas boots. She was not a feminist; she had no need or wish for special treatment. Like Mrs. Thatcher – admire her or despise her – she took on the world exactly as she found it" (Howell, 2008, p.xi). Here, Howell assumes that feminists need and wish for a 'special treatment'. The so-called special treatment she speaks of seems to be about basic human equalities. Just because Bell may not have been 'outwardly' expressive of equal rights it could just be her personality or her focus on her own travels and political reform abroad. It could also be a result of an oppressive Victorian society back at home and advocating for feminine equalities would be dangerous for her place in that society as well as for her exploration abroad. However, it is important to clarify that Bell and Kingsley were seen as able-bodied women because of their non-feminine activities outside of the empire. The fact that these women had to complete a kind of masculine task is what ultimately allowed the two women to be considered groundbreaking in feminist history.

To say that the ordinary women travelling the empire were unaware of exploration or lacked an interest of their new surroundings would be incorrect. While it was considered a masculine trait, women quite often remarked on the surroundings of the foreign territories. On November 7th, 1832, Georgianna Molloy, a British female traveler in Australia writes: "Another

THE UNSUNG HEROINES OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

remarkable feature in the botany of this country, S.W. Australia, is the numerous kinds of leaves with the identical flowers, some of them leguminous” (Stierstorfer , 2006, p.144). Here, one can see the level of interest Georgianna has in the scientific field of plant study. Although she may not be trekking through the roughest of terrains, an ordinary woman is showing plain interest and attention to the same kind of details Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell sought for in their own explorations. Another example of an ordinary woman who was interested in the foreign lands of the empire would be Alice Massey who wrote a letter to her father while in India at Camp Hussen Abdal on August 12th, 1875. “Francis had to go inspect a village so I proposed we should all go... We had to cross the Hurroh river, which was swollen with the rain... I rode prudently behind them when wading through the water I saw first Francis’s then George’s go plump into the river” (Stierstorfer , 2006, p.59). Clearly, in order for Alice to go on the trek with the men she had to have a desire to explore the places the man needed to go. Being just an ordinary woman, her desire to explore is overlooked by the large shadows of Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell. Therefore, it is imperative that historians do not ignore the interests of travel and exploration as shown by ordinary women like Alice Massey and Georgianna Molloy.

Unfortunately, the rise in fame of big figures like Gertrude Bell and Mary Kingsley have overshadowed the ordinary females who have also left significant marks in history. Many women travelled across the Empire into foreign places such as Australia and India. These travels were excruciatingly long and working against their fears of the unknown territories, women still were able to hone in on their skills and grow beyond their gender roles. In addition, the travel and stresses of living within a foreign territory placed great strain on family ties. Not only did women have to adjust to their new homes themselves, but they also had to facilitate their husbands and children as well. Beyond their own household members, many women left behind

family members and it was a struggle to stay in contact with those family members due to the time spent away from those members. In fact, according to historian Elizabeth Buettner, letters could not represent accurately the writers' lives and attitudes (Buettner, 2004). When studying the lives of these ordinary women abroad, one can see that they too had their daily struggles just as both Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell. Just because these women are not recognized for traditionally feminine occupations does not mean that their actions did not impact the lives of others in historically significant ways. Some of those traditionally feminine roles that have shaped the Empire include participation in education, missionary work and medicine.

Education may be perhaps the most important of the listed factors in determining how much of an impact these everyday women had within the British Empire. By educating the masses of native people of imperialism and empire, one could have a profound effect on her area. In this time of the British Empire's imperial obsession, many people believed in "the concept of the Englishwoman as an invincible global civilizing agent" (Hammerton, 1979, p.163). One of the most direct ways women were able to leave an imperialistic mark on the children of the empire was through education. In 1882, there were six girls in University, over two thousand in secondary schools and 124,000 in primary schools and for every one thousand boys; only forty-six girls were going to school (Seth, 2007). While this may not seem like many girls, it is important to remember that the son in an upper-class family took priority in receiving an education and that working-class families could not afford to send their children to school at all. The education of females in Europe and the colonies highlights the shift of British class structure and, at the same time, shows an emphasis on domesticity and enforced conservative gender norms. Elizabeth Buettner believes that upper class women were most likely to go to better schools and were educated in fields that were considered to enable them to become married and

THE UNSUNG HEROINES OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

would also facilitate them into their respectable domestic spheres. For the girls who were lucky enough to go to school in India the curriculum was heavily tilted away from the ‘important’ fields of science and mathematics. Instead, dancing, gymnastics and needlework was at the core of the curriculum for female students (Buettner, 2004). While it is true that families were much more concerned about their son’s education than their daughter’s, the schooling of females in fields such as nursing, missionary work and education is significant. Such professional occupations provided the emancipation and professional opportunities to free themselves of gender ideals in the home. In the early nineteenth century, it was looked down upon for a woman to go to school. This was due to the widespread belief that education for females would not automatically improve the financial status of the family. Historian Geraldine Forbes believes the opposite may have been true as it was nearly impossible for women to receive well-paying jobs based on the typical feminine curriculum taught in the schools (Forbes, 1999). However, by the 1850s one can see a shift in attitudes about female education with the rise in all-female schools. The people of India began supporting feminine education because they wanted to see social, religious, and financial reform. In 1854, there were 626 girls’ schools in India (Forbes, 1999). Of course, the opening of all female schools in India meant that female educators were in demand. By British women taking on these roles to educate non-European women, they were allowing emancipation not only for themselves in their home country, but also allowed those non-European women to shift their own gender roles within their society. By 1911, it is clear that the priority for women in education was emphasized in the empire. In a quote by Margaret Nobel, a well-educated woman and great influence in women’s education in India, one can see this shift in popular sentiment on the education of women. “You have no idea of the passion that has suddenly awakened in India for women’s education, of course in non-Christian and national

ways. It is a perfect passion, and one is still much exercised as to the amount of time that should be spent in household service and cooking, and the amount that may rightly be given to this personal development (Stierstorfer, 2006). While the rise of women's education was liberating for women, this quote shows that domestic virtues were also being taught to women. Thus, one can conclude that ordinary British women of the empire were helping non-European women of the empire become educated and domesticated.

In another quote by Margaret Noble, one can see that it was considered an accomplishment for an Englishwoman to take up a teaching profession. "Christine has decided to go to the Brahmo School for a year, as trainer of a class of teachers there, and Head of the lower school...for fifty others I am delighted of her decision. I feel sure that through it, she will gain the breadth and experience of independence that I felt she much needed" (Stierstorfer, 2006, p.126). Since Margaret Noble was an activist for women's education in India, her happiness from Christine's decision may stem from her own desires. Although it is unclear who Christine is, one can determine that she is an ordinary Englishwoman in India since Margaret does not spend too much time discussing her in the letter. Had Christine been a notable figure, Margaret may have taken extra care in discussing her accomplishment as it may have furthered her cause of female education in India. Here, this Christine seems as if she accomplished great things in education as she educated the teachers of Empire and became the Head of a lower school. Yet, we hear so much about the likes of Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell while feminist historians ignore these accomplishments of women like Christine. Such accomplishments in education not only liberated women of the empire, but also proved that women were capable of comprehensible tasks that go beyond the domestic sphere. It is this profession that ordinary

THE UNSUNG HEROINES OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

women participated in that should not be overlooked by feminist historians because of the domestic emancipation it provided to many women of the British Empire.

Another profession that many ordinary women of the British Empire have taken up is the art of missionary work. This profession is arguably one of the most important in shaping the empire and ‘civilizing’ its constituents. Women were not engaged in missionary work until the second half of the nineteenth century when influxes of single women were travelling abroad within the empire. By 1900, over sixty percent of the British missionaries in South Asia were female (Pass, 2011). Women-run societies hired both missionaries’ wives and single women abroad to provide a Christian education to ‘native females’ (Hall & Rose, 2006). There was a popular belief that women embodied an ability to spread ideas through their feminine gentleness. This idea goes hand and hand with the perception that women have a greater ability to domesticate the home because of their delicateness and feminine skill. While these women were not battling crocodiles in western Africa or taming the Middle East, they were breaking their own boundaries abroad. For instance, this was the first time where middle class women were encouraged to venture outside of the home and publicly participate. A paradox brought forward by Antoinette Burton can potentially be seen since British feminists commonly saw non-European women as objects of feminist salvation while their own British women had “no place in the empire” (Burton, 1994, p.19). Before this time, men were the only ones expected to carry out life in the public sphere while women were confined to the home. If women were seen at any time outside the home, they were to maintain their good feminine nature and participate in benevolent activities such as volunteer work. While the women were still not completely emancipated from the home, their work in missionary study abroad from the empire allowed

them to envision feminine roles beyond the domestic, volunteer and locally based (Hall & Rose, 2006).

By looking at the public opinion of Mary Kingsley's adventures abroad, one can see the stigma surrounding women in relation to their domestic roles. As aforementioned, Kingsley's 'heroine' status always kept a tone of femininity. "The latest African novelty is seen in the return of an English lady from the most surprising and courageous adventures, undergone without any assistance from the "Creature Man," and in a portion of the Continent recently regarded as practically inaccessible" (*The Daily Telegraph*, December 3, 1895). The independence held by Mary Kingsley established her as paternalistic and therefore one can see how nationality and gender seem ultimately inseparable (Blunt, 1994). Although Kingsley did transgress boundaries between the masculine and feminine world, she still held onto a feminine aura. This can be related to the missionary work taken by women surrounding Kingsley's time. Jemima Thompson was a famous female writer in the early nineteenth century. Her own work was groundbreaking since female writers were not taken seriously during her time. One of her most famous works, *Memoirs of British Female Missionaries*, was written in 1841. Thompson's text indicated that women "had they before them some great and benevolent object, such as taking a share in the regeneration of the world, they would be much happier, and much more amiable" (Thompson, 1841, p. xxvi). Here, missionary work is considered a woman's role and so it is easy to allow this field of study to fall under a gendered category. This may be one reason why these ordinary women who have been groundbreaking in their roles outside the home have been widely ignored by feminist historians. However, this seems to be an area that these feminist historians should focus on since these missionary positions are being encouraged to ordinary women where, for the first time, they could have influence outside of their domestic spheres.

THE UNSUNG HEROINES OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

Historian Susan Thorne sees missionary work as an integral part of the British Empire's social and imperial ideology. Thorne's study argues that the missionary movement contributed significantly to the making of class and gender identities. An excerpt from Alice Massy's letter to her father in 1875 supports Susan Thorne's claim. "*Pre-Adamite Man* is written by a lady – a fact that must not prejudice you against it... I should like to hear what you think of the authoress' theory. She goes entirely on the Bible" (Stierstorfer, 2006, p.59). Here, one can see that Alice must disclose the fact that a woman has written the work as if it would affect whether or not her father would read it. She goes on to praise the book as to intrigue her father into reading it. *Pre-Adamite Man* is a groundbreaking religious work by Isabelle Duncan and is the first full-length treatment of preadamism by an Evangelical Christian (Snobelen, 2001). Yet, Isabelle Duncan is still a rather downplayed historical figure and is ignored by feminist historians. Being an ordinary woman, Isabelle Duncan was a brave individual for venturing out and writing a work that encompassed an entirely new area of religious work. But perhaps the authoress is not recognized because the area of religious work was becoming feminized through missionary work. However, it should be noted that just because the religious aspect of the work was feminized does not mean that the publishing of a work was. It seems through the written words of Alice Massy that published work was still male-dominated or that female authors still had ways to go before their work would be considered relevant or professional.

Women have been subtly recognized for their work in education and religious field study. However, what may be one of the most interesting forms of female participation in the empire, the field of medicine has been widely overlooked by historians. There was a wide stigma during the second half of the nineteenth century that women were unable to become doctors not only because they had familial duties, but also because they were difficult to understand and also seen

as irrational beings. A quote in Sir William James Moore's *A Manual of Family Medicine for India* he writes: "Numerous maladies well known to medical men, as for example various diseases of the liver, are not even mentioned, as their introduction might tend to confuse the unprofessional reader. For the same reasons minute details of variation of symptoms, as those for instance distinguishing *peritonitis* from *enteritis*, have not been attempted" (Moore, 1877, p.x). This book was clearly written for a woman to administer home remedy to her sickly family members. Sir William James Moore has taken extra care as to not confuse the unsuspecting English housewife. However, Moore fails to account for the many women who were taking an active part in the field of medicine during the time of his work's publication.

Women were very much aware of the medical terms and illnesses people suffered from abroad. One quote from the letter of Marie Elizabeth Hayes in India to members of Raheny 'Children's Missionary Union' shows how active women were in the Delhi Hospital. "Her mother came in with her...but now she trusts her to us, and comes and goes...She still has a good deal of pain from an abscess in her back, which has to be dressed everyday... They are also very strict... 'people who live behind a curtain' – That is, they must not be seen by any *man*, except their own relations" (Stierstorfer, 2006, p.85). This quote shows that not only were women educated in the treatment of others, but also they were vital to women's health care in India. Hindu women are not permitted to be seen by any man except men of their own family lines. This would hinder the ability for a woman of the Hindu religion to be seen by male doctors and if there had been no females in the field of medicine, those women's ailments would not have been cared for. It is also important to note that English women were not the only females involved in the study of medicine. In the same letter written by Marie Elizabeth Hayes, it is clear that Indian women were also nurses working alongside English women in the Delhi hospital.

THE UNSUNG HEROINES OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

“Wouldn’t it be nice if you knew their names... Salome, Dhaniya, Hannah, Khiroda, Agnes, Dassota, Sabiti and Mathuriya” (Stierstorfer, 2006, p.86). Historian Narin Hassan would agree with the involvement of both Indian and English women working alongside in the field of medicine. His work proves that medicine allowed for interaction between native Indian women and English women, as medicine was increasingly available to women abroad (Hassan, 2011). Thus, women’s involvement in medicine was groundbreaking as it allowed English as well as Indian women to participate outside of the home in a respectable, professional field of study.

After researching the role of women abroad in the British Empire, it is clear that ordinary female participation was an integral piece of what shaped the direction of the empire. While the lives of Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell are quite fascinating, it is wrong and rather backwards for feminist historians to overlook the everyday lives of women working in professional fields. By actively ignoring the diverse role of women in the Empire, historians are allowing for a gap in the historical comprehension of the female perspective. Unfortunately, it takes the large mould shattering actions of Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell for any female to earn a claim to fame in order to gain wide popularity. Thus, the everyday progress made by women abroad is hindered from recognition as their roles are considered to be quite small as compared to masculine advancements. It seems as though feminist historians have lost touch with their main message in recognizing women and their historical advancements, as they cannot seem to give proper attention to the ordinary feminine perspectives. Hopefully, with the rise of popularity in gender history, these ordinary women will become more recognized for their own feminine trailblazing endeavors.

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GIOVANNA DIFILIPPO

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