

Transcultural Conjuality: The International Missionary Council and Research into African Marriage and Family

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This paper is about a book, almost four centimetres thick, fifteen centimetres wide and twenty five centimetres long. It has 462 pages, and it written in about an 8 pt font. This isn't a book review, so I am not going to write in detail about the content of the book, but it is an account of the background to the writing of the book. I give the figures in order to convey something about the sheer corporality of the book, because it seems to me that anything that thick had to have a lot of work going into it. The book itself, *Survey of African Marriage and Family Life* is exactly what its title claims it to be.¹ It consists of three volumes, on the subjects of *African Marriage and Social Change* (by Lucy Mair), *Marriage Laws in Africa* (Arthur Phillips), and *Christian Marriage in African Society* (Lyndon Harries). It was intended to be the definitive guide to these subjects, a collaborative project between missionaries and anthropologists which brought under one roof, so to speak, commentary on the above organised into distinct regions, Southern, East, Central and West Africa.

In 1953, the foreword to the *Survey of African Marriage and Family Life* recorded the genesis of the volume as follows:

Proposals for a comprehensive inquiry into African marriage customs were first brought to the attention of the International Missionary Council by the African Delegates to the World Missionary Conference at Madras in 1938 ... Early in 1946 the suggestion that the Churches should give serious consideration to questions concerning African marriage customs and their relation to both Government and Church ordinances was made by Lord Hailey in a conversation with the research director of the International Missionary Council. Lord Hailey suggested that an inquiry into this subject would be most useful if carried out jointly by sociologists, government officers and missionaries working upon a co-ordinated plan ... The aim of this survey has been to present a factual account of the existing situation against the background of indigenous social organization and custom; to point out and analyse the changes in African social organization due to modern developments and contact with Western

¹ A. Phillips (ed), *Survey of African Marriage and Family Life* (London, International African Institute/ Oxford University Press 1953).

industrialized societies; and to give an account of the various ways in which administrations and missionary bodies are handling these problems.²

A consummately political introduction, it begins with a reference to the African origins of the project, it makes reference to Lord Hailey, the author of the monumental African Survey, it links the work of the IMC to that of scientists and it neatly lays out the vectors of change for a non-modern and non-industrialized Africa. However, this foreword was not entirely correct, both in terms of the origins of the volume, the political forces that brought it into being, and the aims of the project. In this paper I want to examine the origins of the volume as a preliminary to answering these questions. Amongst others, I am interested in the degree to which the project reflected (despite the first line of the quote) the research agendas of bodies like the International African Institute (IAI) and the Carnegie Foundation, which is really a question about the extent of colonialism in anthropology and mission work. There is a whole slew of work, see below, which would suggest this is the case. Alternately, to what degree did the project reflect some of the impetus which the quote would indicate it did. Another way of viewing these questions is to ask what kinds of battles were being waged on the anthropological hinterland of the postcolonial project, and what kind of foot soldiers did missionaries make.

The International Ecumenical Movement

In the years following the Edinburgh Conference of 1910, the loose ecumenical and spatially-disparate movement it gave rise to was given organisational content in the formation of a number of different organisations. Included amongst these were two regional associations of missionary societies, the Foreign Missions Conference of North America (FMCNA) and the Conference of British Missionary Societies (CBMS) in 1912; and the International Missionary Council (IMC) in 1921. While the IMC represented the formalization of the Continuation Committee of the Edinburgh Conference, the two other organisations represented regional co-ordinations of effort by bodies interested and active in mission work.

The intent of the IMC was to act as a co-ordinating and central planning body for the efforts of its members.³ In addition, the success of Edinburgh had shown the need for similar meetings, providing support to the idea of a succession of international missionary conferences to address international ecumenical concerns. Further, though, the IMC and its associates saw themselves as advocacy bodies, straddling the line between their own national governments and the needs of those whom they saw as their colonial and foreign mission constituents. These colonial constituents consisted of Christian Councils, the national bodies that the IMC envisaged being established in countries where white missionary influence stood in contrast to the evolution of indigenous churches.

² Ibid.

³ R. C. Brouwer, *Modernizing Women, Modernizing Men: The Changing Missions of Three Professional Women in Asia and Africa, 1902-1969* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press 2002). p.12

In the spirit of ecumenical fellowship which had led to their foundation, the operation of the IMC and especially the CBMS was initially indistinguishable. The IMC, as Ruth Compton Brouwer has so aptly noted, acted as a sort of ecumenical superstructure to the world movement, while the two other organisations provided its most powerful supports.⁴ In London, the IMC and the CBMS shared headquarters in Edinburgh House.⁵

Most of the funding for the IMC came from the US, as did personnel and programmes, but London provided the movement with its primary actors. John Mott, who had taken the chair at the Edinburgh Conference, severed as the IMC's first chair, while Joseph Oldham, to become editor of the *International Missionary Review*, and A.L Warnshuis became joint secretaries (they were joined by a third, William Paton, in 1927). Based in London, too were Margaret Wrong, secretary of the International Committee on Christian Literature in Africa, and Betty Gibson, secretary, both at Edinburgh House.

Research at Edinburgh House

The IMC and CBMS came into existence at a moment in which Christianity in the western world was showing signs of strain. The growth of secularism was turning many adherents away from organised religion, turning away too their funding and support for missionary work.⁶ At the same time the shock of the First World War had brought the meaning of faith into question, the focus now falling on what has been described as “the life lived and not the message delivered”.⁷ This shift took many Christian organisations into what is often referred to as the work of the social gospel, where efforts were to be expanded from mere proselytisation to work which supported the economic and social needs of potential converts and their wider communities. The IMC supported such a position, particularly through the person of Joseph Oldham, but at the same time recognised that research was needed in order to uncover the most pressing needs of future Christians. In addition, a focus on social gospel also directed western attention to the plight of Africans making, as many would have seen it, the slow and unconfident move out of primitive social organisation into modern social mores.

With this kind of attention, it is not surprising that soon after the formal constitution of the IMC it established a research wing (based in Geneva), and fostered research through various of its sub-committees. The research covered a wide variety of topics, much of it conducted under the auspices of John Merle Davis, who became the first director of the IMC's Economic and Social Research and Counsel wing after 1928, and

⁴ Ibid. p.12 See Brouwer, chapter one, for a more detailed history of the IMC.

⁵ I am going to use Edinburgh House to refer to the joint activities of the IMC/CBMS in London, in order to avoid acronymical overkill.

⁶ Though secularisation itself is not quite the process it might seem.

⁷ R. C. Brouwer, *Modernizing Women, Modernizing Men: The Changing Missions of Three Professional Women in Asia and Africa, 1902-1969* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press 2002) p.11.

later also Bengt Sundkler, who became research secretary for the IMC in the 1940s. While the IMC carried out research into a number of issues, a significant bias in the research was directed towards Africa. This research covered a variety of topics, including Merle Davis' own work on the Copperbelt in Zambia, and was often undertaken in conjunction with the IAI (see below).

From early on, one of the subjects to preoccupy at least Edinburgh House was African marriage. Before I discuss the content of this concern, though, let me address the issue of how marriage came to be recognised as subject of concern.

While the regional mission organisations in Africa had been discussing the issue of marriage for many years, the period after the First World War had seen increased concern for the subject, in the light of what many mission societies perceived as the deleterious effects of modernisation on their pastoral charges. However, this concern might not have been taken further, had it not been for the efforts of a determined group of women associated with Edinburgh House. In 1933, Margaret Read, an anthropologist, had written to Joseph Oldham on the subject of a recent paper delivered to the Africa Education Group (AEG) at Edinburgh House by her Cambridge contemporary Dr Monica Hunter. Margaret Read shared a house with Margaret Wrong, director of the ICCLA, a Canadian who had read History at Oxford.⁸ All of these women were in regular correspondence with Betty Gibson. Monica Hunter had addressed the AEG on the subject of illegitimacy, and perceptions of sexual purity amongst the amaMpondo in South Africa.⁹ According to Dr Read, the paper had pointed out two key problems around the subject of marriage – the meaning of so-called pagan marriage and the real meaning of marriage in the west – the solution to which lay initially in further study of these phenomena.¹⁰

In a memorandum issued in 1933 by the African Education Group, the context of this concern was further revealed.

The following memorandum has been prepared embodying some of the discussions which have taken place and indicating questions on which more light is desired ... To speak of Christian marriage in Africa does not mean that marriage is real only when it is celebrated according to Christian forms ... The important point, however, is that marriage and the family are the fundamental institutions on which our social life is based, and an understanding of them and of the sanctions attached to them might help us in our studies in Africa ... Modern anthropological opinion tends to emphasise the view that the institution of marriage, as also that of the family, is a permanent institution in society. The social organisation of native peoples may be vitally affected by contact with European culture, but so far the institution of marriage remains as

⁸ For more on Margaret Wrong, see Brouwer, 'Modernizing Women'.

⁹ SOAS, ICM/CBMS Africa 1 Box 210, Mintues 19 May 1933.

¹⁰ SOAS, ICM/CBMS Africa 1 Box 210, Read to Oldham, 22 May 1933.

the bedrock of society. This being so, it is very important that we should study marriage as an institution in African society ...¹¹

As the memo indicates, the object of concern in these discussions was the disjuncture which existed between African and European conceptions of marriage. This concern rested on two key debates: how intrinsic to Christianity were established Protestant Christian teachings around sexual morality, including the relationship between monogamy and Christianity; and (though not so explicitly formulated) to what extent ought Christian marriage formalities be standardised across the colonies so as to bring them into line with the requirements of colonial rule.

Explicit in the memorandum was the notion that research work of this nature required the input of both missionaries and anthropologists. This was not something the AEG had suddenly come to. A previous meeting of the AEG had heard an address by the Rev. James Welch on the very subject, while the influence of Margaret Read here must not be underestimated.

Over the next few years, and especially around preparations for the upcoming World Missionary Conference to take place in Madras, India, in 1938, the AEG kept discussion of African marriage active within the more extended programme of the group. In October 1937 Betty Gibson wrote to the local members of the AEG, urging them to consider the collection of African Christian views on marriage at the upcoming conference, while in the same month Henri Junod had commented specifically on the issue of marriage in a talk on 'Africans and the Christian Church in south Africa'.¹²

Edinburgh House and the International African Institute
Support for an approach which fused the expertise of missionaries and anthropologists had a very local postcode, and represents some of the cross-pollination taking place between ecumenical organisations and more formal research institutions in the inter-war period.

On the 1 July 1926 a new research institute, the International Institute of African Languages and Culture, opened its doors in London. The origins of the IAI as it became known, lay in a most efficacious blend of missionary zeal fused with colonial administrative penny pinching, reminiscent of Benthamite utilitarianism at its best.¹³

¹¹ SOAS, ICM/CBMS Africa 1 Box 210, African Education Group – African Marriage, Memo from M. Read and JHO, June or July 1933. Dora Earthy was one of the respondents to the questionnaire that went out as a result.

¹² SOAS ICM/CBMS Africa 1 Box 208, File: British Group Meetings. BD Gibson to Members, 8 October 1937; Address by Junod, 15 October 1937.

¹³ See D. Forde, 'Anthropology and the Development of African Studies: The Tenth Lugard Memorial Lecture', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 37, 4 (1967), p. 389, J. W. Cell, 'Lord Hailey and the Making of the African Survey', *African Affairs*, 88, 353 (1989), p. 481, F. A. Salamone, 'The international African institute: the Rockefeller Foundation and the development of British Social Anthropology in Africa', *Transforming Anthropology*, 9, 1 (2000), p. 19.

Sometime in 1925 a group of colonial administrators, missionaries, and anthropologists (sometimes one and the same, certainly not as distinct as this list appears) had met to discuss “the need for an application of scientific method to a solution of the questions arising generally from the contact of Western civilization with African culture”.¹⁴ Amongst this group, Joseph Oldham, then Secretary within both the IMC and the CBMS, had key status and became its first administrative director. Oldham had managed to convince the Rockefeller Foundation, Lord Lugard and Bronislaw Malinowski to throw their weight behind a research institute which would conduct research designed to respond to Edwin Smith’s statement above. As John Cell has described it, the IAI ‘thus became a triple alliance of gifted entrepreneurs each with his own agenda: Oldham’s notion of modernizing Christianity in Africa, Lugard’s of promoting his own definitions of indirect rule and trusteeship, Malinowski’s of obtaining support for his research students.’¹⁵

But what the IAI actually did was to promote research, including research which examined the problems of indirect rule, and the problems of Africans caught up – as they saw it – in a whirlwind of modernization. The institute awarded a number of grants in its first years of operation to scholars for fieldwork, including to Audrey Richards, Monica Hunter, Isaac Schapera and Margaret Read. The work of these scholars together with others associated with the institute, for instance Zacchareus K. Matthews, appeared in IAI-sponsored and funded publications, like the journal *Africa*. The most monumental pieces of research to emerge from the IAI was the *African Survey*, edited by Lord Hailey, in which Joseph Oldham had played a key motivating role.¹⁶

The IAI is of interest for several reasons. The first is fairly self-evident. Given the overlap that existed between the IMC, its supporters, and the personnel of the IAI, it is clear both that British social anthropology of the 1930s was heavily indebted, indeed facilitated by, missionary endeavour and that missionaries saw in the principles of functionalist anthropology utility for their own work. In some cases the links were formalised through joint endeavours, such as that between the ICCLA and the IAI concerning African literature. In other respects the collaboration probably consisted of separate institutional functions being carried out under different hats by the same people, like Oldham himself.

For all the number of anthropologists who must have carried about a deep distrust of religion, especially Christianity, a London contingent, either for pragmatic or personal

¹⁴ Edwin Smith, one of this group, in D. Forde, 'Anthropology and the Development of African Studies: The Tenth Lugard Memorial Lecture', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 37, 4 (1967), p. 389. p.391.

¹⁵ J. W. Cell, 'Lord Hailey and the Making of the African Survey', *African Affairs*, 88, 353 (1989), p. 481. p.483.

¹⁶ Ibid, and F. A. Salamone, 'The international African institute: the Rockefeller Foundation and the development of British Social Anthropology in Africa', *Transforming Anthropology*, 9, 1 (2000), p. 19, M. Crowder, "Us' and 'Them': The International African Institute and the Current Crisis of Identity in African Studies. A Public Lecture Delivered at the Iwalewa Haus of the University of Bayreuth on Saturday, 19 July 1986, to Mark the Diamond Jubilee of the Institute', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 57, 1 (1987), pp. 109-122.

reasons, cleaved to a belief in the indispensability of missionaries. This latter view is captured by Lucy Mair (one of the contributors to the volume on which this paper is based) in a comment upon “Anthropologists versus Missionaries”. “As far as U.K.-based missionaries are concerned, I think it is true to say that the rapprochement between their views and ours has come about largely since the inclusion of anthropology in the preparation for mission work that arose from the collaboration of Malinowski with J.H. Oldham.”¹⁷

However, while it is possible to view this as a form of academic ecumenism, it is also important to remember that the IAI was as interested in proselytization as the missionaries themselves. This is where I come to the second reason for interest in the IAI.

According to Frank Salamone, the research carried out under the auspices of the IAI was the direct result of donor-driven agendas, principally that of the Rockefeller Foundation. He links together a post-First World War western crisis of confidence, rising anti-colonial aspirations and a increasingly self-confident US in his explanation for the IAI’s research project. Accordingly to Salamone’s overall premise (and in reference to a later period of research), “Moneyed interest could purchase for a price hegemonic control over a discipline’s theoretical and empirical interests ... such hegemonic control ... would advance their own cause while deflecting most scholars from pursuing research that would challenge the dominant ideology. Rather, mainstream research would help preserve the status quo and its power structure”.¹⁸

While Salamone’s words are evocative of a different theoretical era, they would sound strangely familiar to any left-inclined South African social scientist observing the National Party’s apartheid strategies before the early 1980s. Research, or knowledge, for ideological gain has long been a concept familiar to parties as disparate as the Catholic Church and beret-bedecked French philosophers. In the instance of the IAI, Salamone wants to suggest that it was funded on the back of a desire to promote the extension of colonial rule in Africa. While this was undoubtedly correct, it is nevertheless apparent that the IAI, including in its association with the IMC, was both subject to a peripheral influence on its research agendas, coming from within Africa itself, and that it enabled the production of research which went beyond any funder-driven remit.

Polygamy, the Younger Churches and Tambaram

The 1938 IMC Conference at Madras Christian College is important for a number of reasons, but in this paper I want to look specifically at the conference’s contribution to discussion of marriage as an issue of particular importance for Africa. Discussion at the conference was grouped into a number of sections (16) which met throughout to

¹⁷ Stipe et al get ref

¹⁸ F. A. Salamone, 'The international African institute: the Rockefeller Foundation and the development of British Social Anthropology in Africa', *Transforming Anthropology*, 9, 1 (2000), p. 19.

deliberate issues of common concern. In addition, though, the conference included space for the discussion of specific issues or those peculiar to different parts of the world. For the Africa Group, discussion centred on three key issues: witchcraft, Christian separatism and polygamy. The first two are, fortunately for me writing this paper at the last minute, not my current concern, but I do want to look at what we know of the discussion around polygamy.

In fact, this is actually quite little. Despite the seven plus one official publications which flowed from the conference, and the numerous reports included in the *International Review of Missions*, there are not many detailed reports of this discussion.¹⁹ The issue is not a reflection of lack of debate, but lack of reportage, the latter a reflection of the split between the African and Asian, and western delegates to the conference.

From private sources it is apparent that many of the West African delegates had gone to the conference with the purpose of discussing the insistence on monogamy as a prerequisite for communion. Many of the other African delegates had also been prepared for such a discussion (see Edinburgh House efforts above). Nevertheless, European missionaries dominated the conversation.²⁰

The key paper on the issue was read by a Presbyterian missionary, a Dr Turner.²¹ Dr Turner, who worked in Nyasaland, spoke openly about the bar which polygyny placed in the face of men becoming Christians and how many Christian men carried on illicit relationships in order to overcome this prohibition. However, according to him, Christian teachings and the Bible were clear on the fact that monogamy was the only true path to a Christian life. This paper became the substance of the official report on the Africa Section's deliberations (and the official conference position).²²

So, while a groundswell of sentiment prior to the conference favoured an open and frank discussion on this subject, and while this may indeed have happened, the official version of the discussion attributed to the black delegates a support for monogamy. Importantly, though, the issue had been raised, and in an international forum.

The IMC and African Marriage

Back at Edinburgh House the Tambaram pronouncement was met with disappointment. Documents from this period, included in the file on African marriage,

¹⁹ F. Ludwig, 'Tambaram: The West African Experience', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 31, 1 (2001), p. 49. for the best example of this, and for an account of why.

²⁰ Ibid, p.72

²¹ Ibid, p.72 and SOAS IMC, CBMS Africa 1 Box 210 African Education Group – African Marriage, Memorandum, Carey Francis, 3 July 1942.

²² Ibid. p.73

reflect this position. In 1942, Betty Gibson made this clear in a letter, where she castigate Turner's report and animadverted on the discussion and those involved.²³ She was commenting upon a memorandum submitted by E. Carey Francis, a missionary and high school principle in Kenya, to the Africa Education Group, on the subject of polygamy.

Carey Francis' memorandum, which had widespread discussion, was an explicit attack on the Tambaram position²⁴. After quoting the Tambaram report, he wrote, "Having devoted half-a-dozen or so lines to the argument (extremely unsound) the Report goes on to a page or more of generalities about redemption and holy partnership and love of children ... a cloud of pious words".²⁵ Carey Francis' point was that the matter deserved honest discussion, that it was a burning issue, and that there was not really any scriptural defence for opposition to polygamy.

The disappointment of the IMC at the Tambaram pronouncement, though, had already resulted in action. In December 1939, the New York office of the IMC hosted a one day conference on the subject of polygamy, separatism and witchcraft. I had an initial, and personal title for this section of the paper, 'The Men Take Over', which I deleted because it sounded grumpy and non-academic, but what I was trying to reflect upon is that the impetus for discussing marriage in the IMC now switched, post-Tambaram, to a different level of player.

The New York conference was opened by Edwin Smith, sometime missionary and anthropologist, who read a paper on 'Polygamy and Marriage Customs'.²⁶ Smith's paper was heard by John Merle Davis, by CT Loram, educationalist and liberal extraordinaire, from South Africa, and a host of other (male) retired missionaries.

In contrast to the Tambaram discussion, the New York conference moved straight into a support for polygamy. Moreover, as Smith's paper made clear, it was necessary to consider polygamy in relation to all sex customs, which by extension included marriage. Unlike the focus of Tambaram, where the missionaries rather than anthropologists had dominated (even if they were the same person), the anthropologists within each delegate was to the fore. Smith, who had spent much time in discussion with South Africans at Tambaram, spoke positively of practices like *ukumetsha* and *lobola* which, following the only black African woman to attend Tambaram, he called the 'Bantu Women's Charter of Liberty'.²⁷

²³ SOAS IMC, CBMS Africa 1 Box 210 African Education Group – African Marriage, Gibson to JW.C Dougall, 17 November 1942.

²⁴ See also the papers of the Church of Scotland Foreign Missions Committee. National Library of Scotland (NLS), Edinburgh, Acc.75486, Vol B: 404, African Marriage.

²⁵ Ibid, Polygamy, E. Carey Francis, 3 July 1942.

²⁶ IMC 26.31.31 African Marriage, FNB 50, Fiche 1-12, Conference on Marriage Customs, New York, 9 December 1939.

²⁷ Ibid.

These sentiments were strongly supported by the majority of delegates to the meeting, especially Merle Davis, who had been having his own conversations with the South Africans (probably James Dexter Taylor and the black South African delegates) at Tambaram. Following the South Africans, Merle Davis was of the view that they should have ‘a belief and understanding of the facts so that we would make the bridge between the Christian heritage and the African heritage’, and that the best way to effect this was to bring about a triangular setup (his words) between academics, missionaries, and Africans. By academics Merle Davis meant anthropologists, since the South Africans had indicated to him that what were needed were anthropologists friendly – read ‘tolerant’ – to the subject of African marriage practices.

Merle Davis himself was particularly interested in the issue of African marriage. Prior to the conference he had written to several of the South Africans on the issue. He had also indicated his interest to the IMC in doing a study of the subject.²⁸ Following the conference, then, he set about gathering information on the subject, particularly views on sexual practices, polygamy and the disjuncture that existed between marriage rites by custom, by colonial law, and under Christianity. His efforts were assisted by Edinburgh House, where the CBMS in particular began urging its members to contribute to the ongoing discussion on African marriage.²⁹

The story now takes two different directions. Not all the member societies of the CBMS were happy with debating marriage the way in which Edinburgh House was driving them. The Scots, for instance, were fairly adamant that polygamy was contrary to their teachings (something their offshoot in South Africa, the Bantu Presbyterian Church, had mixed views upon). Others though, particularly the East African contingent, were more sanguine about the position.

However, it is not with the missionaries that I am now concerned. Back at Edinburgh House, and in the IMC more generally, the issue of research into African marriage was – as much as could be possible during the Second World War – gathering speed. Oldham and Paton encouraged Merle Davis to put together a more concrete research proposal for such a project, which he duly did so. The proposal found light in 1946, when Merle Davis began having conversations on the subject with the IAI. In 1947, project funding was received through the Carnegie Corporation and the British Colonial Social Science Research Council, and in 1948 a committee established to oversee the project.³⁰ In 1948 Lucy Mair, Arthur Philips and Lyndon Harries began research on the three separate volumes of the book, which was published in 1953.

²⁸ IMC 26.31.31 African Marriage, FBN 50, Fiche 1-12, Merle Davis to William Paton, 19 August 1939.

²⁹ NLS Acc.75486, Vol B: 404, African Marriage, Memorandum on African Marriage.

³⁰ Foreword in A. Phillips (ed), *Survey of African Marriage and Family Life* (London, International African Institute/Oxford University Press 1953) p.v.

Thereafter, as any citation search, or library catalogue search will show, the book became a standard reference volume on marriage in Africa. Mair's contribution was reprinted in 1971, and still stands as the definitive overview of marriage and social change up until that point.

Conclusion

This, then, is where I come to the significance of the IAI and its mandates, as well as the quotation in the introduction to this paper. However, the foreword to the volume is not entirely accurate in its ascriptions of the origins of the volume. I haven't been able to pick up Lord Hailey's participation in the volume in the records I have consulted. This is not to say he was not involved, but his influence – certainly as I see it, was overstated. Then why include him? Well, he had status as an elder statesman on research into Africa, and he certainly held cachet with the funders of the project, so the reference to him seems to be as much about marketing (another anachronism) as anything else.

Was Tambaram responsible for the volume, more specifically the African voice? If my reconstruction of events is correct, then no. Yes Africans were engaged in debating polygamy (not marriage) at Tambaram, but the official proceedings of the conference largely write out their contribution. There again, the attention Edinburgh House had been paying to African marriage was clearly a product of local concern, and so the answer is also a qualified yes. African voices were present in the genesis of the volume, but not necessarily as reflected.

So where did the volume come from?

To this I would answer, Edinburgh House, and in particular a group of women interested in the relationship of mission work, anthropology and African social practices to one another. While the impetus for a research project may have concretised under Merle Davis, and under the influence of the IAI and its links with the IMC, it is possible (I haven't done the research) that this was not lost in the appointment of Lucy Mair, who would have been Monica Hunter and Margaret Read's contemporary, to the project.

