“By Love, Serve One Another’: Foreign Mission and the Challenge of World Fellowship in the YWCAs of Japan and Turkey”

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Abstract

By the 1910s, the international consortium of women involved in the interdenominational Protestant Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) faced a reckoning. Over the previous decade, a largely European and North American YWCA leadership had expanded successfully what it called the “association movement” into countries it designated as foreign mission territories, establishing dozens of multifunctional community centers across the Asian continent. With their religious, educational, recreational, and vocational programming, YWCAs proved adaptable to a wide variety of settings. This success, however, brought the challenge of indigenization, a challenge that sharpened as Western women came to terms with anti-colonial agitation and egalitarian Gospel rhetoric of foreign mission. Detailing the YWCA of the United States's administration of the YWCAs of Japan and Turkey in the early 20th Century, this article contends that interpersonal and organizational negotiations of power ultimately gave rise to transnational partnerships that thrived as the U.S. women's missionary movement ebbed.

Keywords

Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) – U.S. Orientalism – Women Missionaries – Women and Internationalism – Michi Kawai – Women and Japan – Women and Turkey

When European and North American women organized the World's Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in 1894, they took as their motto an Old Testament verse prophesying the reign of God—“not by might, nor by power,

but by my spirit, saith the Lord.”¹ The verse evoked the millennial impetus driving foreign mission, the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth, as well as the optimistic visions of the international Christian women’s movement that had produced the YWCA. In this vision, moral righteousness, rather than dominance, would bring global uplift. By the 1930s and 1940s, a number of YWCAs in nations affiliated with the World’s YWCA had adopted a different biblical verse for their mottoes, a New Testament directive of the apostle Paul: “By love, serve one another.” The difference in tenor between the cooperative and emotive ethos of the New Testament verse and the triumphalism of the World’s YWCA’s inaugural mission statement is telling. This article details how an evolution in the practical work of international YWCA expansion shadowed these shifting sentiments. It highlights resistance to the presumptions of “woman’s work for woman,” a European and American Protestant theory of mission based on, in the words of historian Dana Robert, a “maternalistic, albeit idealistic, belief that non-Christian religions trapped and degraded women, yet all women in the world were sisters and should support each other.”²

However dominant such ideological tenets may have been among Western women evangelizers, complex negotiations of power at the personal and organizational levels marked the day-to-day administration of YWCAs in missionary-receiving communities in Asia, giving rise, in many instances, to long-term transnational partnerships. Perhaps nowhere was this process more visible than in U.S. women’s participation in establishing YWCAs in early 20th Century Japan and Turkey, together the subject of this article. Taking shape amid the rise of anti-colonial struggles and world war, the institutions and interpersonal relationships described in this account complicate overly simplified narratives of unidirectional power relationships in missionary work. The process of realizing more fully a vision of global Christianity came out of the interactions—sometimes collaborative, sometimes contentious—between YWCA participants in missionary-receiving territories and the architects of international expansion, a group in which U.S. staff figured centrally. Although mission was a vector of colonial and cultural domination, the groups this article will

- 1 In 1955, the organization renamed itself the World Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). Zechariah 4:6; Anna Rice, *A History of the World’s Young Women’s Christian Association* (New York: Woman’s Press, 1947), 76.
- 2 Galatians 5:13. For examples of this motto, see Annual Report, Beyrouth, Lebanon, 1932–33, 3, Lebanon/Syria: National Programme Work and Conference Report, 1945, 6, World Executive Committee: Eastern Mediterranean Federation, World YWCA Archives (hereafter, WYWCA), Geneva, Switzerland; Dana Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 133.

examine show how religiously rooted efforts to forge cross-cultural connection could provide a means to address power imbalances between races, religious creeds, and nations. The YWCA's successful growth proceeded from the imperialistic roots of the women's foreign mission movement, but the product did not reflect the exultant "evangelization of the world in this generation"—the goal turn-of-the-century U.S. mission supporters proclaimed.³ Rather, the disjuncture between the democratic ideals of Christian fellowship and unacknowledged inequalities of mission practice came to the surface quickly. By the 1920s, challenges from Asian YWCAs to ethnocentric models of foreign mission produced a radically revised conception of the meaning of evangelization and international outreach.

The case studies of Japan and Turkey, as the following account will explain, reveal how U.S. women, driven by an expansive, orientalist confidence in their ability to transform religion and culture in the "Far" and "Near" East alike, came to terms with on-the-ground struggles for autonomy unfolding across Asia during the imperial realignments of the years surrounding World War I. Given the diversity of women's global activism at this time, one may not necessarily take the events that transpired in these particular organizations as broadly representative of trends in religious internationalism. However, they do support the contention that the YWCA was, as Jane Hunter contends, "at the forefront of efforts to reconceptualize and internationalize" Protestant mission in the 1920s.⁴ This article calls attention to the ways in which such changes came out of negotiations of power that occurred in interpersonal interactions as well as in larger political struggles. In the end, the utility of the organization in a variety of contexts, rather than the triumphal progress of Western Christianity, spurred growth, giving an instructive lesson in how women's institutions rooted in the foreign mission movement survived after American fantasies of the conversion of "the East" had faded.

The YWCA movement had been growing in scope and geography for forty years before the establishment of the World's YWCA in the 1890s.⁵ In the 1850s,

3 Sidney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, Second Edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 864–65.

4 Jane Hunter, "Women's Mission in Historical Perspective: American Identity and Christian Internationalism," in *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812–1960*, Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie Shemo, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 36.

5 Although the men's group, which originated in 1840s London, influenced the creation of the YWCA, the two organizations operated independently. Historians have produced a rich body of scholarship about the YWCA, particularly related to the United States and China. In *A His-*

the evangelical Protestant revivalism that also gave rise to the Young Men's Christian Association inspired London women philanthropists to convene the YWCA to bring the salutary benefits of prayer and wholesome housing to the city's single, working-class women. The single-sex, interdenominational community center model proved popular, and the idea spread to the European continent and North America in the coming decades. Offering a variety of educational and vocational programming, as well as recreational and religious activities, the association gained renown as a Protestant women's organization aimed at bridging the divides of age, social class, and denomination. Though the YWCA reserved full association membership, which brought voting and leadership privileges, for congregants of evangelical Protestant churches, programming generally did not discriminate by creed. The interest of young women participants and the volunteer energies—as well as the donations and dues—of affluent and middle-class members caused YWCAs to become part of the institutional landscape of many industrial cities and college campuses. British women initiated associations in the colonies, creating outposts where settlers attempted to subsume denominational allegiances, forge connections among themselves as European Protestants, and convert local women to Christianity. By the end of the century, they had established these scattered associations on every continent.

This success prompted leaders from the United States, Britain, and northern Europe to coordinate plans for global expansion and create an international confederation, the World's YWCA. The world group had as its mission both asserting a collective identity for the dozens of YWCAs organized at the national level and carrying out the practical work of extending its geographic reach. To the latter end, national YWCAs designated funds from their operating budgets to support work in countries where associations were not financially self-sustaining. They also supplied staff members to administer the new associations. The international YWCA consortium established a distinct place for itself in the foreign mission movement that was then in full bloom. Its single-sex structure, which extended from membership to the professional staff (called secretaries) who administered association programming, imparted freedoms that women engaged in denominational mission activities, especially the general boards subject to the oversight of male religious leaders, often did not find.⁶ A transatlantic swell of ambitions and material resources energized the

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tory of the World's Young Women's Christian Association, Anna Rice details the organizational history of international work up to World War II. See also Nancy Boyd, *Emissaries: The Overseas Work of the American YWCA, 1895–1970* (New York: Woman's Press, 1986), 10–32.

6 Robert, *American Women in Mission*, pp. 128–30.

YWCA, enabling the organization to create an institutional infrastructure that made it a peer of the major denominational mission boards and an outlet for single women hoping to embark on an exotic professional career.

Organizers designed the YWCAs to be distinct from, but complementary to, denominational mission groups. Insisting that “as YWCA workers it is against all our principles to proselytize,” association leaders aimed to supplement religious evangelization, providing wholesome social services, recreation, and socialization to women of a variety of backgrounds. YWCAs might serve as the setting for revival-style conversions, but they targeted other domains for Christianization and personal development, such as health and entertainment. The “truly trained and professional officers” who pioneered the multifunctional community centers of urban YWCAs impressed World’s YWCA leaders, who encouraged U.S. associations to export their workforce and institutional infrastructure. The YWCA of Toledo, Ohio, was the first to respond to such a call and sent Agnes Hill to Madras (Chennai) in 1895.⁷

The World’s YWCA self-consciously patterned its expansion strategy after imperial spheres of power—representatives from European associations supervised development in territories their nations colonized while U.S. women claimed a broad terrain for their informal empire. A representative to the World’s YWCA asserted in 1906 that the U.S. association “should control as fully ... the work in those countries which [it] ought to claim,” and by this, she meant the hemisphere that American politicians and business labored to bring under their sway, as well as new territories they pursued in the Pacific—specifically “China, Japan, the Philippines, the West Indies, and North and South America.”⁸ Because of this broad geographical purview and its resources, including a professional training school for secretaries, the U.S. national organization—the YWCA of the USA—carried considerable responsibility for staffing and administering associations in missionary-receiving countries, including Japan and Turkey.

YWCA organizers built their plans for expansion on a Janus-faced perspective on global relationships among women. On one hand, despite overt references to the designs of empire, European and U.S. leaders conceived of their organization as part of a cooperative international women’s movement, a Christian arm of the “worlds of women” who came together in a turn-of-the-century coalition to raise women’s collective status. As staff fanned out to create new associations in the Balkans, Middle East, and East and Southeast

7 Boyd, *Emissaries*, p. 34.

8 Quoted in Rice, *A History of the World’s Young Women’s Christian Association*, p. 116.

Asia, they hoped to inspire a sense of connection among women that superseded nation. They expected that associations would not be foreign settlements, set apart from indigenous context. YWCA supporters believed that under the tutelage of Western professionals, women in mission territories, whom they called their sisters, would embrace the association movement and make it their own. Lucy Tritton, an English president of the World's YWCA, explained that the goal was "to develop leaders in each nation," not to install colonies of Western women.⁹

As in most women's movements, activists premised their efforts on universalizing declarations of women's concerns and capacities. The YWCA's view of the shared strengths and needs of the world's women contrasted with ethnological models of racial differences, which placed women on an evolutionary scale that reified intrinsic biological and sociological divisions.¹⁰ European and American YWCA leaders emphasized bonds among women as children of God and global citizens. Invoking the apostle Paul's declaration of the radical equality of Christianity—"for in him, there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, but all are one in Christ Jesus"—these women pursued not only the global expansion of Christianity but also the creation of emotional connections to women in distant lands. In such fashion, American secretary Mary Hill identified Christianity, rather than the sexed body or common conditions of oppression, at the root of the feminist trope of sisterhood when she told the 1911 United States convention that "we, of America, think of the women in India as being our sisters because we are all one in Christ Jesus." Social, political, and economic changes occurring around the globe, the association proposed, also connected women. As Tritton explained, women shared "the same dangers, the same sins, the same temptations, the same aspirations, the same human

9 Leila Rupp has documented secular dimensions of these women's movements. Leila Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Mrs. J.H. [Lucy] Tritton remarks, Printed Convention Proceedings, 1911, p. 27, YWCA of the USA Records [hereafter, YWCAR], Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

10 This affirms Jennifer Snow's description of Protestant missionaries' support of rights for Asians in the United States as a "racial project [that] competed with the racial project of scientific racism." Jennifer Snow, *Protestant Missionaries, Asian Immigrants, and Ideologies of Race in America, 1850–1924* (New York: Routledge, 2007), xiv. See also Hunter, "Women's Mission in Historical Perspective," pp. 33–37; Karen Seat, *"Providence Has Freed Our Hands": Women's Missions and the American Encounter with Japan* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008).

nature, with increased freedom from restraints.”¹¹ Whether viewed through increases in women’s participation in the paid labor force, access to education, or opportunities in civic life, the factors that generated the interest in and need for the YWCA crossed national boundaries.

On the other hand, even if—unlike some of their contemporaries—European and U.S. women yearned to transcend national and racial divisions in the creation of a global movement, they unsurprisingly crafted hierarchies that naturalized their control of association development and underwrote their sense of a global sisterhood. They justified this through imagined cultural differences between West and East, a construct that encompassed creed, racial character, temperament, and social structures, but defied geography—they occasionally listed Argentina among the “oriental” associations.¹² Western women reasoned that despite the inimical effects of “heathen” culture, women in mission lands would join the movement as equals as they experienced the salubrious effects of Christianity and civilization.

Given their belief that the “foundations for the larger civilization of the West are founded deep-down on the bedrock of Christianity,” YWCA leaders predicted that their call to evangelize would catalyze the uplift of the world’s women. This stewardship model of internationalism proceeded from the feminist missionary conviction that Christianity uniquely held the key to women’s advancement. As one contributor to a YWCA magazine noted in 1914, it was axiomatic that “the spread of Western civilisation [*sic*] to mission lands undoubtedly raises the status of women, and our sympathy must go out to all those who are seeking to take advantage of the new possibilities.”¹³ Discerning God’s guiding hand in the social and intellectual progress of his followers, the leadership proclaimed a divine endorsement of the unique capacities of Europeans and white Americans. U.S. YWCA board member Effie Price Gladding

11 Paul from Galatians, 3:28, as quoted in Ethel Stevenson, “The World’s Committee as a Pioneer and Unifying Force,” Printed Convention Proceedings, 1911, p. 157, YWCAR; Mary Hill remarks, p. 167, *ibid.*; Tritton remarks, p. 27, *ibid.*

12 “Foreign Division Statistics,” 15 January 1922, USA: Reports, WYWCA.

13 “Does Japan Need the Social Message?,” *Women’s International Quarterly*, (January 1914), p. 70; E.I.M. Boyd, “YWCA in Mission Lands,” *Women’s International Quarterly*, October 1914, p. 31. Several studies supply foundational accounts of missionary discourses of women’s empowerment. See, for example, Joan Jacobs Brumberg, “Zenanas and Girlless Villages: The Ethnology of American Evangelical Women, 1870–1910,” *Journal of American History* 69, no. 2 (September 1982): 347–71; Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 179–81; Robert, *American Women in Mission*, pp. 133–37.

attributed Americans' "unique responsibility ... to the world's work [to] God's providence." Lucy Tritton vaunted the cultural inheritance of the "Anglo Saxon races," who "have had great privileges, an open Bible, with God-fearing teaching for generations." She underscored the duties this engendered, explaining that "*therefore* our responsibilities are great toward those who have surroundings of darkness, of atheism ..., superstition, and ... ignorance."¹⁴

A wide scope characterized their orientalism. Although YWCA women employed generalizations about the "different countries of the Orient" that might sweep "Japan, China, India, Norway, Russia, Italy" into the same category, they also enumerated particular national and racial conditions crying out for feminist Christian solutions.¹⁵ In India, with "that awful caste system" and "religions so vile [that] they believe in the sanctity of the cow and the depravity of women ...," Mary Hill predicted confidently, "all of the western, civilizing influences ... are going to have an effect in molding the lives of young women." In Japan, Inez Crawford wrote in a Quarterly Report, it was "the relationships and principles governing ... homelife [that] doubtless hold the secret of the lack of initiative and of the sweet docile spirit and submissiveness of Japanese women." The YWCA set out to bring them into their "rightful place in the work and service and life of the world." Convinced that "the needs of women are always pathetic in countries of Mohammedan prejudice," the association celebrated that "new liberty has come to the women of the Near East" in the wake of World War I.¹⁶ The women looked to East Asia and the Arab world in equal measure, surmising that Christianity and Western culture held universal tools for undoing culturally specific forms of oppression. Contrasting themselves with their countrymen who sought to gain influence through gunboats and treaties, they looked to an "evangelism of intimacy" as the source of their in-

14 Mrs. Thomas Stantial [Effie Price] Gladding, "The Unique Responsibility of the American Associations to the World's Work," Printed Convention Proceedings, 1909, p. 63, YWCAR; Tritton, remarks, p. 27, *ibid*.

15 Elisa Cortéz, "Oriental Students in America," *Association Monthly*, July 1910, p. 243. Elisa Cortéz, a Mexican secretary who worked for the U.S. YWCA, identified herself as an "Occidental foreign student," but other U.S. YWCA sources sometimes listed the Latin American field as part of the Orient. See, for example, "Foreign Division Statistics," 1922, USA: Reports, WYWCA.

16 Mary Hill, remarks, Printed Convention Proceedings, 1911, p. 168, YWCAR; Inez Crawford, Quarterly Report, Fourth Quarter, 1917, Japan: Minutes and Reports, WYWCA; "World Fellowship Week of Prayer," pamphlet, 1920, 11, International Work, Projects and Programs, Record Group [RG] 5, YWCAR. *ibid*.

fluence, hoping to use emotional connection and sentimental attachment to effect individual transformations.¹⁷

Michi Kawai's path to local control of the Japanese YWCA over the 1910s indicates how the emotionally charged interactions staged in missionary settings could militate against Western women's assumption of authority. Kawai's response to the demands of the world organization suggests pragmatic strategies by which local women who were involved with the YWCA in missionary-receiving countries resisted the domineering tendencies of overseas—in this case, American—administrators. Under her influence, Japanese women quickly assumed control over the volunteer and professional leadership of the YWCA of Japan, which activists had founded in 1901.¹⁸

Caroline Macdonald, a Canadian the World's YWCA assigned to oversee the emergent Japanese association, set the transfer of authority into motion when she recruited Michi Kawai in 1905. Early YWCA histories described Kawai as literally the answer to their prayers. In these retellings, Macdonald wheedled Kawai, a recent college graduate employed as a teacher, to join the association as a full-time secretary. Initially, Kawai “stubbornly refused to give up her teaching in the college.” “Well, I shall pray you into the work,” Macdonald told her. “And before Miss Kawai knew how it came to pass, the prayer was answered.”¹⁹ In 1916, Kawai became the first Japanese woman to serve as the general secretary—akin to executive director—of the YWCA of Japan.

Kawai answered YWCA prayers in a broader sense. A devout Protestant and a proponent of the Christianization and Westernization of Japan, she had extensive experience as both an educator of Japanese women and as an informal cultural ambassador who embodied the promising future of Japan to mission supporters. Her leadership portended the indigenization of the association and evangelization of “the East”—and accordingly the coming of the kingdom of God. She emblemized, though perhaps only as a token, that the association was truly a world women's movement. Kawai had found her life path through Christianity and through the sponsorship of mission supporters around the globe.

Born in 1877, Michi Kawai was the daughter of a Shinto priest who lost his post at the imperial shrine in Ise as a consequence of the Meiji-era reforms.

17 Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, 174.

18 Michi Kawai's autobiographies are as of yet the most comprehensive English-language sources of information on the educator and reformer. Michi Kawai, *My Lantern* (privately printed, 1949); Michi Kawai, *Sliding Doors* (Tokyo: Keisen-jo-gaju-en, 1950).

19 Kawai recounts the exchange in *My Lantern*, 135. John McNab, “White Angel of Tokyo, Miss Caroline Macdonald, LL. D.,” 1940s?, 15, WYWCA.

Starting a new life in Hokkaido, the family weathered profound social dislocation through its immersion in Christian faith and community. Kawai distinguished herself among the pupils at the North Star Girls' School, which was under the operation of the American Woman's Board for Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church. Also, she gained the mentorship of Nitobe Inazō, renowned intellectual and educator. Nitobe and Mary (née Elkington), his U.S.-born wife, put Kawai in contact with not only a network of Quaker mission sponsors, but also Tsuda Umeko, a women's education activist. Kawai, whose missionary education had conferred English fluency, was a natural candidate for Tsuda's campaign to provide more Japanese women the opportunity to study overseas. With the personal and financial assistance of the Quakers, Kawai would graduate in 1904 from Bryn Mawr College, Tsuda's alma mater. In these years, Kawai received informal training in transnational projects. To earn her education, she gave speeches at Christian student conferences, made visits to the homes and churches of mission enthusiasts, and allowed herself to gain regard as an exotic symbol of the successes of an international Christian movement. Kawai then settled in Tokyo and took a teaching post at the Joshi Eigaku Juku (Women's English School), the pioneering post-secondary institution for women Tsuda had founded.²⁰ Kawai divided her time between teaching and volunteering for the YWCA until she accepted, at Macdonald's behest, the position of general secretary.

Kawai was able to give expression to her interests in education and evangelicalism in the YWCA. Japanese associations, which by the 1910s included groups in Tokyo, Kobe, Osaka, and Yokohama, focused their programming on support services for students, religious activities, and outreach among factory workers. One prominent area of programming had ties to the evangelical Protestant lineage of social morality but also spoke to transformations in Japanese family life tied to the "good wife, wise mother" (*ryōsai kembo*) domestic ideal the government promoted under Meiji modernization. Animating a purity campaign that called for temperance and attacked prostitution, concubinage, and the geisha profession, the discourse of "good wife, wise mother" assigned mothers critical responsibilities in imparting civic virtue. Conferring upon women a crucial role in building the Japanese state without politically enfranchising them, it asserted the value of women's "hard work, their frugality ..., and their respon-

20 Barbara Rose, *Tsuda Umeko and Women's Education in Japan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 124–41. Kawai discusses the school, which is now called Tsuda College, in *My Lantern*, 114–116.

sible upbringing of children,” and it inspired an outpouring of reform efforts.²¹ To such ends, the YWCA lent support to groups like the Japan Woman's Christian Temperance Union, a leader in efforts to criminalize prostitution, and it offered courses in health and housekeeping that emphasized piety, hygiene, and companionate marriage as foundational to good families and a strong nation.

Although the administrators of the YWCA of the USA, which oversaw association work in Japan, viewed the recruitment of Kawai as a major coup, they fretted over her ascension to the executive post. She did not fit the fantasy of a docile student who eagerly deferred to her elder sisters in the movement. At times, U.S. secretaries used the term “imitators” to describe Japanese people, projecting expectations of deference and dependency.²² Coming into the position with considerable experience traversing missionary networks and Japanese Christian communities, Kawai defied these preconceptions. Friction between Kawai and her supervisors in the U.S. association never erupted into open conflict, but U.S. women struggled to impress their plans on a woman who had well-developed ideas about the direction of the work. The installation of a Japanese board and staff was foremost among Kawai's priorities. As she explained to World's YWCA executives, “we Japanese members have come to see that our Association work should be represented by a Japanese, otherwise it will be understood as a foreign work.” Accordingly, it would not be an effective force for evangelization for those who saw Christianity as a means of foreign domination. Obliquely critiquing the imperial thrust of western interventions, she noted that missionary efforts “were sincere and good [but] their means were criticized as unwise and ... some of them cannot have the sympathy of the natives.”²³

While Kawai's receptiveness to the Western reform spirit appealed greatly to the international leadership, her management of the association often did not. The divergent expectations of Kawai and the U.S. YWCA were most plainly apparent in conflicts over staff and money. U.S. women held the purse strings in

21 Sharon Nolte and Sally Ann Hastings, “The Meiji State's Policy toward Women, 1890–1910,” in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, Gail Lee Bernstein, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 152. See also Rumi Yasutake, “Men, Women, and Temperance in Meiji Japan,” *Japanese Journal of American Studies* 17 (2006): 91–111.

22 Secretary Katherine Hawes was one of many U.S. women in the international field who characterized the Japanese as “imitators.” See Katherine Hawes, “Report of Visit to Japan,” July 1919, 5, Japan: Minutes and Reports, WYWCA.

23 Michi Kawai to Misses Spencer, Stevenson, and Boyd, 16 September 1912, Japan: Miscellaneous, *ibid.*

Japan. To turn an overseas YWCA over to local control, the U.S. group stipulated that the association needed to be professionally and financially self-supporting, compelling the Japanese staff to secure their own salaries as part of training for financial independence. The U.S. association provided programming and building funds, and it paid the salaries of its own secretaries working in Japan. Kawai pointed out the bind this created for Japanese leadership—it was the indirect means U.S. women used in reserving power to themselves. “Our difficulty is that while you furnish us with splendid workers from America we cannot keep pace with our Japanese workers,” she complained. “Neither workers or money can be had.” When the U.S. association proposed sending more of its staff in the late 1910s, Kawai rejected this strategy for growth because it depended on giving non-native secretaries new responsibilities. Prioritizing indigenization, she wrote, “unless we can secure more native workers I do not wish to ask for a great many foreign workers to Japan.”²⁴

On a personal level, Kawai was a profound believer in the power of cross-cultural exchange to undo the prejudices that divided nations and races, and her appraisal of women involved in foreign mission and international YWCA endeavors was consistently effusive. But it seems likely that she was sensitive to stirring Japanese resentment against U.S. threats to sovereignty, as well as racism Japanese immigrants experienced in the United States. Still, she couched her plan to indigenize as pragmatic rather than political. Like other Japanese Christian activists, she labored to evangelize with the goal of actively transforming Christianity “from a foreign religion into a Japanese creed.”²⁵

In private, U.S. administrators revealed their difficulty in treating Kawai as a peer in building a world movement. They described her as “unquestionably one of the most superb and outstanding women of Japan today, the greatest asset that the association has.” Moreover, the U.S. administrators judged that “the future of our work in Japan depends upon our being able to hold her in our organization.”²⁶ But they were not as enthusiastic about Kawai’s assertions of executive power. When personnel trouble in the Japanese association that an American secretary of “questionable mental balance” had triggered prompted Charlotte Adams, a high-ranking secretary in the U.S. association, to travel to Tokyo to evaluate the situation in person, she concluded that a “foreign executive is absolutely necessary in Japan.” Like others working in the liberal mis-

24 Michi Kawai to Miss Taylor, September 1917 [?], Foreign, Japan: Staff Reports, microfilm reel 59, YWCAR.

25 Jon Thares Davidann, *A World of Crisis and Progress: The American YMCA in Japan, 1890–1930* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1998), 81.

26 Hawes, “Report of Visit to Japan,” p. 2.

sionary tradition who, in the words of historian William Hutchison, “championed autonomy in principle [but] found it inapt in particular situations,” she sought to take charge to remedy the problems in the Japanese association.²⁷

Adams came to this conclusion after identifying a host of personal shortcomings rooted in Kawai’s racial and national background. A non-native executive was necessary to supplement what Adams interpreted as the insufficient leadership capabilities of Asian women. Adams elaborated to the World’s YWCA executive committee that over time, Michi Kawai had become “constrained, aloof, and, worst of all ... anti-foreign”—a mindset that Adams believed was the source of the Japanese YWCA’s troubles. “To keep the [association] Japanese is a master passion” of Kawai, she wrote. Adams charged that Kawai was highly suspicious of “anything which might bring a preponderance of foreign influence.” She did not see any pragmatic grounds for Kawai’s perspective, but instead read these priorities as inimical prejudices tied to broader racial characteristics. Adams thought that Kawai inherited from her father’s “aristocratic bloodline ... the pride and sensitiveness and the autocratic qualities of the high class Japanese.” Kawai “did not love foreigners” and was “jealous of any assumption by them of leadership which is either aggressive or superimposed,” she believed. “She does not enjoy the feeling that the Japanese need foreign help.”²⁸ In effect, Adams faulted Kawai because Kawai rejected the premises of Western women’s Christian internationalism. Her attention to institutional power imbalances and confidence in the capacities of indigenous leadership signaled an unwillingness to view national borders as inconsequential and Western stewardship as beneficial.

In fact, Kawai was quite willing to ask for foreign help. In the speeches, writings, and private communications in which she made these requests, she used the missionary’s rhetoric of sentimental attachment and emotional reciprocity to militate against institutional inequities. While Adams was assisting the Japanese association, Kawai traveled to the United States to attend the national convention of the U.S. YWCA. There, she asked for international friendship and intercessory prayer—and funds for overseas work. Kawai gave many such talks, and one can interpret her 1920 convention speech as a strategic appeal to the orientalist sensibilities of the audience that pushed against the power dynamics of mission relationships. In previous speeches, she had drawn upon

27 Charlotte Adams to Miss Spencer, 6 March 1920, Japan: Miscellaneous, YWCA; William Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 97.

28 Charlotte Adams, “Confidential Report on Japan,” 1920, Foreign, Japan: Staff Reports, microfilm reel 59, YWCAR.

themes of infantilization. She described Japan as an “unlovely” adolescent, “not old enough ... to lead others” but “full of curiosity,” to explain Japan’s need for Western influence, an assertion U.S. women were fond of citing.²⁹ At the 1920 assembly, Kawai subtly veered away from this narrative while still playing to paternalist longings. She asked U.S. women to give material and spiritual support, rather than directives, to help the Japanese build up their own work. Japanese association work was not an adolescent endeavor, she explained, but one now fully realized and in need of reinforcement.

Kawai opened by expressing “humble penitence” for the national weaknesses of Japan— “our militarism, our commercialism, our immorality.” She urged a similar spirit of renunciation on the part of the audience. Citing critiques of Japanese industrial life that caused workers to live “in ignorance, disease, sin, superstition,” Kawai pointed out the transnational economic relationships underlying such labor conditions. She then instructed her listeners to “turn back your hat, the lining of your hat.” “Our women are making that silk ...,” she told them, “working thirteen hours a day.” Instead of giving the West responsibility for the uplift of the East, her speech spotlighted where Westerners could take responsibility for problems to which they contributed. To address such circumstances, Kawai asked the YWCA to demonstrate “true Americanism, which is not self-aggrandizement or materialism,” suggesting the audience might scrutinize their own national weaknesses. Americanism at its best, she encouraged them, was a disinterested sentiment embodying “the spirit of Jesus, who said, ‘I came to this world not to be ministered unto, but to minister and give life to many.’”³⁰ This Christ-like spirit was not messianic but self-sacrificing. Such reminders of the cooperative thrust of Christian principles posed a rhetorical challenge to the presumptuousness of the American partners in Japanese work at the same time that they reinforced a sense of bonds intimately connecting women of the West and East.

Ultimately, Kawai’s practical success as an administrator was most critical in thwarting the U.S. leadership’s inclination to make heavy-handed interventions. Adams’s recommendation that an American executive assume leadership in Japan went unheeded. Over her tenure, Kawai achieved many of her goals, among them securing a Japanese staff and making the YWCA a lively center of evangelical Protestant religious life. Her exit from the YWCA of Japan was also an assertion of autonomy. The U.S. YWCA pinned its hopes on Kawai leading the association in perpetuity, but she did not. When she resigned in

29 Michi Kawai, “Japan’s Present Need,” Printed Convention Proceedings, 1915, pp. 133–34, YWCAR.

30 Michi Kawai, “Japan,” Printed Convention Proceedings, 1920, pp. 314–16, YWCAR.

1926, a U.S. secretary hinted that this act endangered the future of the association, which otherwise would “have seemed full of promise.” While citing her twenty-year tenure as evidence of ample service to the movement, Kawai maintained that her resignation came at a time when the existence of competent Japanese leadership assured the future of the association. She trusted that her successors “might dream greater dreams and aspire to still greater heights in the service ... for the girlhood of Japan.” The YWCA of Japan’s growth over the coming decades substantiated her prophecy. Another Japanese woman, Yamamoto Koto, succeeded Kawai. Because Kawai rebuffed American secretaries’ attempts to reserve positions of authority for themselves, she ensured that the YWCA was well rooted in Japanese soil. She herself led a post-YWCA career of distinction. Following the examples of Tsuda Umeko and the Hokkaido missionaries who provided her education, Kawai opened a women’s institute of higher education in 1929 now known as Keisen University, advancing a curriculum that emphasized Christianity, international understanding, and horticulture, while matching the educational standards of men’s schools.³¹

The U.S. staff’s muted petulance at Kawai’s departure—seemingly unable to believe that there was more than one woman in Japan able to lead the organization—indicated that although they increasingly affirmed “respect for the rights of others” as crucial to international relations, they were unable to recognize paternalism in their own practices. Still, over the 1920s the U.S. and world organizations phased out affirmations of Western civilization in recognition “that in the bringing in of the Kingdom of God each nation and race has its unique contribution to make.”³² “World friendship” came to replace “woman’s work for woman” as the watchword of international outreach, signaling recognition that the era of stewardship had come to a close and that its inequalities were unchristian. As historian Karen Seat has documented, such changes reverberated more widely in women’s mission circles. Where they had once positioned themselves as the saviors to benighted people, the rising generation of Protestant women internationalists prodded “Americans themselves to reexamine their ideological assumptions about gender, race, Christianity, and civilization.”³³ YWCA leadership had celebrated the heritage

31 Jane Scott report, June 1926, Japan: Minutes and Reports, WYWCA; Kawai, *My Lantern*, 167, 180.

32 National Board Report, 1924, p. 226, National Conventions and Conferences, RG 4, YWCAR; “World’s Young Women’s Christian Association International Commission Findings,” 1920, History of Social and Industrial Work, WYWCA.

33 Seat, “*Providence Has Freed Our Hands*,” p. xiii. For the shift to a discourse of “world friendship,” see Robert, *American Women in Mission*, pp. 272–73.

of the “Anglo Saxon races” as the root of association success, but by 1924, they acknowledged that associations were “too few and too Anglo-Saxon.” Only a more pluralistic movement could interpret the unique conditions of women’s lives around the world, which was necessary for discerning “God’s will in the complexity of modern life.”³⁴

While Michi Kawai’s story fleshes out interpersonal encounters that checked the colonialist designs of overseas mission, the evolution of the YWCA in Turkey provides a more direct window into the ways in which nationalist and anti-Western movements provoked U.S. women to make dramatic transformations in their work. In laboring to build associations appropriate for local contexts, U.S. secretaries adjusted their organizational practices and spiritual commitments alike. As Turks secularized their civic life while waging anti-colonial cultural battles directed at Christian missionaries, the YWCA in Istanbul evolved into a community center that fostered a markedly interfaith and inter-ethnic constituency.

This evolution might seem unlikely given the origins of this association. Michi Kawai had assured the 1910 World’s YWCA convention that Asian countries were extending “open doors and earnest invitations” to missionaries and, presuming this was true, the organization initiated expansion work in the “Near East” following a 1911 student missionary conference in what was then Constantinople. There, in the words of the YWCA magazine, delegates witnessed “glittering mosques and minarets, proclaiming here that Mohamed, and not Christ, was the ruling Spirit.” The World’s YWCA planned for a “more glorious future, when, in spite of every opposing enemy, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess the Crucified to be the Lord of all.”³⁵

After 1911, the World’s YWCA strengthened the association’s presence in the contested terrain in and around the former Ottoman Empire, specifically Greece, the Anatolian peninsula, Syria (which included what would come to be Lebanon and Palestine), and Egypt. While British women oversaw work in Syria and Egypt, American women had charge of Turkey. There, they established associations called “service centers” in three cities, Izmir (Smyrna), Adana, and Istanbul. Unlike some associations, these operated more as community centers than as boarding facilities. Clubs, vocational and physical education, and a particularly popular summer camp—“the Garden of Happiness” on the

34 Tritton remarks, Printed Convention Proceedings, 1911, p. 27; “Report of the General Secretary,” 1924, Annual Reports, WYWCA.

35 “The World’s Policy for the Next Four Years Adopted at the Berlin Conference,” *Association Monthly* (September 1910): 322; “Constantinople Conference,” *World’s Young Women’s Christian Association Quarterly* (July 1911): 61.

Marmara Sea—attracted a religiously and ethnically heterogeneous membership. Religious programming had a special importance because Eastern Rite Christians sought out the YWCA for worship activities. Greek and Armenian young women, communicants of Orthodox and Gregorian churches, represented the largest contingent of the membership, but the associations drew a cosmopolitan mix. Istanbul secretaries recorded 26 nationalities and eight religious creeds among program participants in 1924.³⁶

Amid the crises of war and revolution that erupted after World War I, YWCA women were unclear about the role Islam would play in the lives of Turkish women and association programming. But they already had apprehended that the religious life of the territory was not theirs for the taking. While making an initial survey of the field in 1911, a U.S. secretary noted, “the question of race and religion is so hopelessly mixed in people’s minds that for a Turk to give up Mohammedanism, or an Armenian to leave the Gregorian Church ... would seem to many equivalent to shameful desertion of his race and its traditions.” She doubted the prospects for evangelization, reporting that “I did not see one baptised [sic] convert from Islam, though the Christian Church has been in Turkey for centuries.”³⁷

When Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his colleagues established the Republic of Turkey in 1923, American secretaries endeavored to adapt service centers to the needs of the emergent nation. The association voiced approval of the democratic ideals under which Atatürk carried out the revolution. After all, effused U.S. YWCA publicity, “wherever the watchword of a country becomes ‘Liberty, Equality, Justice,’ the emancipation of women is inevitable.” Turkey, it seemed, was on the path to Western civilization, and the U.S. group made the confident prediction that political revolution created a favorable climate for a religious revolution. A pamphlet asserted that “the Moslem faith, although the religion of the rulers, has been superimposed upon the people and not assimilated.” Accordingly, “many Moslems are turning to Christianity [in recognition that it] has a higher type of civilization to offer than that which they have known.” The association, “the handmaid of the church in every place where women are coming to a new life,” was ready to show the way to evangelization and emancipation.³⁸

Perhaps the glory of such a crusade lost its luster as YWCA women witnessed the toll of religious animosity on the frontlines of the Greco-Turkish War (1919–

36 *YWCA News*, September 1924, p. 1, WYWCA.

37 “Report from Miss Spencer,” 1911, Foreign: Turkey, Reports, microfilm reel 63, YWCAR.

38 “Turkey, Our New Field,” 1914, International Work, Country Files, Turkey, Publications, RG 5, YWCAR.

1922). Secretary Margaret Stewart did not know what to make of the somber mood of service center members in 1921 until a young woman pointed out the disjuncture between the YWCA's sunny ideals and her difficult circumstances. As the woman told her, "it is easy for Americans to talk of co-operation, the common good, economic progress and forgiveness for [they] have no deportations to remember." Stewart reported the pall cast over recreational activities. In arts and crafts, "pictures of storm and stress at sea or lonely coasts were first place, [and one young woman] expressed 'muses' that make me shiver with sadness." She concluded that "the girls here are old in sadness."³⁹

In Turkey, YWCAs became conduits for war relief. They sheltered refugees and carried on programming in service centers as Mustafa Kemal's army drove out the Greek military occupation, bringing devastation to Greek and Armenian communities. Receiving protection from a guard of U.S. soldiers stationed to watch American property, the Izmir Service Center took in hundreds of refugees as the Greek army abandoned the city in advance of the Turks in 1922. When the city began to burn, association staff helped lead more than one thousand refugees to safety on an American freighter, which transported them to Greece.⁴⁰

The YWCA tried to demonstrate that it was not an institution for Christians alone. Christians evacuated the city of Adana upon order of the Kemalist regime in late 1921, but even though only ten of the YWCA's five hundred members remained in the city, secretaries decided it "unwise to discontinue the center." They attempted to refute Turkish accusations that YWCAs were "interested primarily in serving the Armenians and Greeks." After the great fire in Izmir, accusations flew as to whether the retreating Greek army set the fires to ruin the city for the Turks or the advancing Turks burned the city to drive out Christians. Service center secretary Jean Christie stated her allegiances:

39 Margaret Stewart report, 1921, Foreign: Turkey, Girls Clubs, microfilm reel 63, YWCAR.

40 Elizabeth Wilson, *World Cooperation of the Young Women's Christian Associations of the United States of America*, ca. 1929, 140–41, International Work, History, RG 5, YWCAR; Ruth Woodsmall report, 28 September 1922, and "Report of the Smyrna Disaster," 5 December 1922, in World Executive Committee: Regions, Near East, WYWCA. The *New York Times* reported 1,200 refugees, the YWCA 2,000. "Eyewitness Tells of Smyrna Horror," *New York Times*, 10 October 1922, 3.

I do not know who set the fires. When people ask me if I am pro-Turk, or pro-Armenian, or pro-Greek, I answer that I am pro-all-of-them. I am pro-girls, all religions.⁴¹

The association had once hopefully envisioned a martial-like subjugation of Islam in Istanbul where, “in spite of every opposing enemy, every knee shall bow” before Jesus. After the revolution, it sought peace.

Closing all but the Istanbul service center, U.S. administrators attempted to adapt to the new republic. They did not predict that these new conditions would require choosing between the YWCA’s religious identity and its commitment to a global women’s movement; before, the two had worked in tandem. As a foreign, religiously affiliated educational institution, the YWCA was caught in the crosshairs of national secularization and modernization. While in Japan, the association could draw on the state’s tolerance of the Christian minority, in Turkey, because of state pressure, the organization had to revise the ideological foundations of its work and rehabilitate its image as a missionary interloper.

Although secular republican ideals guided the founding of the state, Islam had central importance as a constitutive element of national identity, and Turkish press and officials took the occasion of the revolution to vent hostility toward the predatory designs of mission groups. One official accurately pointed out to the YWCA that “Young Christians’ Organizations were opened for the purpose of making Christians of our Moslem young people, and that having spent thousands of liras they have not been able to do this.”⁴² By the mid-1920s, the policies of the Turkish republic governing religious education forced the YWCA to establish whether it was a religious organization for Christians, offering Bible study and worship alongside secular activities, or a service organization for all, in which case it could not provide religious instruction. When weighing the future of the work under these circumstances, Ruth Woodsmall, the U.S. executive in Turkey, asserted that the intrinsic religious mission of the YWCA depended on the participation of Muslim women; the participation of Muslim women in turn depended on relinquishing ambitions for their conversion. In her opinion,

41 Wilson, *World Cooperation*, p. 89; Margaret White, “Summary History,” April 1934, Foreign: Turkey, Reports, microfilm reel 63, YWCAR.

42 Excerpts typesheet, 28 May 1923, World Executive Committee Regions: Near East, WYWCA.

if it is really desired that the YWCA should be broadly effective, a true force for the interpenetration of Christian ideals, the YWCA must avoid the danger of being too distinctly identified with the Christian races. Otherwise the Moslems will be alienated from its influence.⁴³

The YWCA would not be able to bring a Christian message to Muslim women if Muslim women stayed away from the association altogether.

Woodsmall, who later would receive support from the Rockefeller Foundation to produce *Moslem Women Enter a New World* (1936), a scholarly interpretation of the Middle East, was not intent on overt proselytization. She put to rest fantasies of the Christianization of this strategic gateway to the East and made clear to the World's YWCA what many missionaries had refused to understand. Istanbul was a Muslim city, Woodsmall emphasized, and "the Christian races ... will continue to be a minority with no hope of having the controlling power or influence." Association activities instead needed to be "practical demonstrations of the value to Turkey of life and institutions dominated by the spirit of Jesus." She wanted to assure Turks that "we are not interested in criticizing Islam," yet hoped to call attention to "the creative values ... which can be found in any understanding and serious observance of Jesus' way of life."⁴⁴ Here, she turned toward the sentiment underlying the New Testament version of the YWCA motto: "By love, serve one another." Adherents manifested the Christian spirit when they engaged in solicitousness and service, not a triumphal fight for the kingdom.

To attract Turkish participants and avoid harassment at the hands of Turkish authorities, the YWCA registered itself in 1925 as a secular educational institution. It also renamed itself the American Girls' Service Center, taking seriously the words of a consultant who warned "that the word 'Christian' stands out as a red flag before the people; it offends their national as well as their religious sensibilities; it connotes enmity and all the hateful things that have come down through history." While it still affiliated itself with the World's YWCA and many of its employees were U.S. women, the Turkish YWCA "no lon-

43 Ruth Woodsmall, "Report on the YWCA in the Near East," 1 June 1925, World's Executive Committee Regions: Near East, WYWCA. For a recounting of these transitions more generally, see Roger Trask, "Unnamed Christianity in Turkey," *The Muslim World* 55, no. 1 (January and April 1965): 66–76; Deniz Kandiyoti, "End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey," in *Women, Islam, and the State*, Deniz Kandiyoti, ed. (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan, 1991).

44 Ruth Woodsmall, "Report on the YWCA in the Near East"; "How would you modify these points ...?" typesheet, n.d., Turkey: Industrial Work, WYWCA.

ger functions in the minds of the police." The staff made a firm decision "not to have any Christian teaching for Christian girls because it separates the girls into Christian and non-Christian groups." Instead of carrying out a narrowly religious program for the Christian minority, they pursued fellowship across creedal lines. This change in policy elicited a "constant increase in Moslem membership," according to a 1929 report.⁴⁵

Grappling with these challenges, the Turkish YWCA staff themselves gained a more ecumenical sense of evangelization, reasoning that the message of Christianity did not hinge on inducing conversion. In their ethos, if not in the governing documents, the leadership remained convinced that their response was not capitulation to an outside religion but instead a mark of Christian ethics. In a demonstration of their interpretation of the Gospel message of human unity, they created a more Turkish and Muslim association. The secretaries identified members' individual growth, as well as ethnic and religious cooperation, as the expression of the Christian spirit undergirding the service center. Through such activities as charity work and educational discussions, girls' clubs aimed to develop "fellowship, cooperation, helpfulness, real understanding of each other, [and] free and fearless self-expression." The programs promoted Christian ideals without demanding religious allegiance. The YWCA of the USA's magazine, using a New Testament quote, touted these "character building ideals which are held in common" across creedal lines as the "spirit which leavens the whole."⁴⁶

Most poignantly, the service center had become a place for ethnic and religious rapprochement. Publicity described the YWCA as an "international safety zone." The Izmir service center once had served as a safety zone when it delivered refugees from danger. Now, the multiethnic Istanbul service center could help young women move forward from the trauma of war and learn how to co-exist. One pamphlet advertised how "girls check their ... prejudices at the door and enter on neutral ground, brought together by common needs and common desires—the love of self-expression through service; the desire for mental improvement ...; or for association and fellowship." The center served as "living proof of the fact that the individuals of the Near East, belonging to antagonistic races, can come into sympathetic understanding with each other."

45 Ruth Woodsmall, "Memorandum on Present Position of the YWCA in Constantinople," 27 October 1925, World Executive Committee Regions: Near East, WYWCA; "Resumé of Discussion at a Meeting of the Foreign Division to Consider the Policy of the Association in Turkey," January 1929, Foreign: Turkey, History, microfilm reel 63, YWCAR.

46 Eurydice Akdjeoglou speech, 8 March 1926, Foreign: Turkey, Girls Clubs, microfilm reel 63, YWCAR; Genevieve Lowry, "Inventory in Istanbul," *Womans Press*, February 1932, p. 88.

The pamphlet's conclusion—"that peace is after all, more fundamental than war, if built on the basis of mutual understanding and friendship"—served as the cornerstone of the secular service center's mission. The YWCA predicted that structural change, a transition from a war-like to a peaceful, and hence Christian, society, would come from the foundation of interpersonal connection. The association itself could have an instrumental role in healing historical divides, the pamphlet asserted. Because of its success in "steadily increasing the number of personal friendships ...," the publication explained, "the YWCA is widening their horizon beyond narrow racial, nationality, and religious antagonisms into the common ground of international friendship and understanding."⁴⁷

The leadership cited anecdotes that demonstrated the effectiveness of its new approach. A Turkish educator pointed out the importance of dropping the language of Christianity:

There used to be a good deal of suspicion of your work because of your name YWCA ..., but now there is no longer so much suspicion. You are gradually proving to them what you are trying to do in this country.

An "old Turkish woman" noted the convergences between the service center's dedication to character development in a single-sex setting and the Islamic value of gendered spheres of activity. She told them:

Your center is doing a good work here. Now we have found the place where my daughter will be away from men, and I myself might come to your ... programs. This is a safe place to send my daughter.⁴⁸

Her comments seemed to indicate that YWCA leadership now was achieving their goals.

The service center's decision to prioritize a heterogeneous membership over a focus on Christian community eventually placed it at odds with the World's YWCA. The Turkish situation challenged the international organization's religious requirements, which stipulated that affiliated associations affirm a profession of faith in doctrines of Christian salvation. When the executive board of the Istanbul service center still was composed of Christians, several of whom were European and North American, this had not posed difficulties. However,

47 "YWCA in Turkey," pamphlet, 1925 [?], Foreign: Turkey, History, microfilm reel 63, YWCAR.

48 Typesheet, 13 April 1932, Turkey: Miscellaneous, WYWCA.

as the service center began actively recruiting Turkish Muslims for board service in the early 1930s, it eliminated religious pledges. The World's YWCA responded with the decision that, although it offered "sympathetic interest," it would not align itself with the novel endeavor. The executive committee concluded that "in view of the development toward indigenous control involving the entrance of Moslem women into the directing committee, the Service Centre work in Istanbul could no longer be recognised [*sic*] as having an organic relationship to the World's Young Women's Christian Organization."⁴⁹ The interfaith spirit of fellowship that the service center's foreign staff promoted did not align with the world organization's still-evangelical purpose.

Overall, the religious rhetoric of the World's YWCA followed a trajectory similar to that of the YWCA of the USA, which grew markedly more liberal and ecumenical after World War I. However, in this particular period of the 1930s, the World's YWCA pulled back from such influences. The world organization faced discontent in some quarters over the extent to which social reform and religious pluralism preoccupied the agenda; the national associations of Finland and South Africa disaffiliated from the world group for these reasons in 1931. While the World's YWCA still endorsed application of Christian principles to social problems, it feared that "the very variety of our modes of expression [have] given an impression of dispersion of energy." In response, the governing board determined that "the religious needs of existing groups of Protestant girls be safeguarded" and "re-affirmed that a dynamic Christian conviction should be at the heart of all our work."⁵⁰ To promote Protestant religiosity anew, it turned to religious education as a major programming outlet until leadership changes and World War II brought revived interest in social issues.

While the World's YWCA distanced itself from the Istanbul venture, the U.S. YWCA continued to maintain its relationship. Phoebe Clary, a U.S. secretary, stayed at the helm from the 1930s until the 1960s, but local women took over most staff and board positions. In 1968, the organization changed its name to the Youth Cultural and Service Foundation. It continued to offer programming that had long been part of the service center, such as clerical training and English-

49 "Report by the General Secretary on the Work of the Executive Committee," June 1930-June 1934, p. 15, Annual Reports, WYWCA.

50 "Memorandum on the Interconfessional Position of the World's YWCA as presented at the Budapest Conference," 1928, Ecumenical Work and Interconfessional Documents: History of Interconfessionalism, WYWCA; "Report by the General Secretary on the Work of the Executive Committee," June 1930-June 1934. See also Rice, *A History of the World's Young Women's Christian Association*, p. 207.

language instruction. The U.S. YWCA maintained a liaison with the center until the late 1980s, when it moved the remaining funds designated for Turkish work to the foundation. The organization today continues to operate as a community center and educational facility.⁵¹

U.S. and European women once envisioned the internationalization of the YWCA through a distortive lens of an orientalist women's evangelicalism. They saw headway made in non-Protestant countries as a demonstration of the success of leadership based on the guiding forces of Christianity and western civilization. They understood the participation of women native to these countries as a sign that the pull of the kingdom of God was effecting a revolution in women's lives. From World War I forward, this vision faced a mounting set of challenges. Women in missionary-receiving countries ably took over the leadership of their associations and proposed their own plans for the movement.

Early leadership may have misunderstood the reasons behind the YWCA's successful expansion, but one piece of the rhetoric of the international movement seems accurate—women in many parts of the world faced “the same dangers, the same sins, the same temptations, the same aspirations, the same human nature, with increased freedom from restraints.”⁵² Or, rather, industrialization, nation-building and empire-building, and growing educational opportunities elicited an outpouring of women's activism in many places around the globe. Middle-class (and, to a lesser extent, working-class) women in a variety of countries aligned around YWCA efforts to cope with these changes. They believed that uplift could transform the conditions of women's lives, and they found promise in an international movement that could create leverage for women's issues that otherwise had a secondary place in national political agendas.

Western women's vision of the global YWCA movement was rife with contradictions. They yearned for unity, but created racial and national hierarchies. They sought peace in the realms of labor and international relations, but made only incremental reforms in their own operating practices. They pursued the indigenization of the association, while making it difficult for YWCAs in missionary-receiving communities to gain autonomy. As the U.S. YWCA learned in Japan and Turkey, those contradictions were ultimately unsustainable. Even as they struggled with the presumptions of U.S. administrators, local

51 American Liaison Committee, International Work, Country Files, Turkey, RG 5, YWCAR.

52 Tritton remarks, Printed Convention Proceedings, 1911, p. 27.

women used the associations as vehicles to promote their own ideas of development and social change. They elaborated on the strands of progressive internationalism that drove world expansion, but they discarded the orientalist feminist ideologies that accompanied this impulse. The stories of the YWCAs of Japan, Turkey, and the USA impart an important lesson about the type of everyday exchanges of power involved in the practical work of transnational institution building. The YWCA's pledge to love and serve was a lesson learned, in some ways, through the evangelization of the evangelizers—the refusal of women in places designated as mission destinations to brook the coercive presumptions Western women activists had built into the idea of Christian sisterhood.

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