



Universiteit
Leiden

Dutch Missionaries and Deaf Education in Africa

Applicants

Supervisor Name	Discipline
Prof. dr. Monika Baar, Institute for History, UL	History
Dr. Hope Morgan, Leiden University Centre for Linguistics	Sign Language Linguistics

Project description

Historical and linguistic research has pointed out the important role that deaf schools have played in numerous countries in shaping the Deaf community and the sign language landscape. In East Africa, these schools were often initiated by missionaries. For Kenya, De Schutter presents an analysis of the history of educational efforts and the emergence of Deaf associations, while Morgan has written various works on the emergence of Kenyan Sign Language from a linguistic perspective.¹ Studies on the role of missionaries in the Deaf history of East Africa are however lacking.

We know that roughly between 1950 and 1990, Dutch missionaries played an important role in the education of deaf people in (East) Africa. We also know that local sign languages emerged around these deaf schools, paralleled by the emergence of the first associations of deaf people. In this project we want to make a first assessment of the involvement and influence of Dutch missionaries on the formation of Deaf communities and the development of local sign languages, particularly in East Africa.

¹ Sam De Schutter, “‘Help Build our Deaf Nation’: A Transnational History of the Deaf Community in Kenya, 1950s-1980s”, in preparation; Hope E. Morgan, ‘The Phonology of Kenyan Sign Language (Southwestern Dialect)’ (PhD dissertation, University of California, 2017); Hope E. Morgan et al., ‘Kenyan Sign Language’, in *Sign Languages of the World: A Comparative Handbook*, ed. Julie Bakken Jepsen et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 529–52.



Picture of two children at the deaf school in Tabora in 1965. The school was built with money from the so-called 'vastenactie', supported by the Katholieke Actie. Source: archives of the Landelijk Centrum van de Katholieke Actie, Katholiek Documentatie Centrum, Nijmegen.

The fact that the archival materials to study the role of Dutch missionaries are scattered and not yet located is one reason why this history has not yet been written. The first step will therefore be to locate different materials pertaining to the education of deaf children in different archival institutions, beginning with the Katholiek Documentatie Centrum (KDC) and the Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven.² Next, we will develop one case study, being the Dutch missionary involvement with the education of deaf children in Kenya. For this one country, we will look at how Dutch missionaries organized their educational efforts, what kind of ideas they had about communication and how that affected the deaf people that were taught by them. This project is thus a first step to study the early developments of deaf identities and sign languages on the African continent, making a contribution to both the study of sign linguistics and the historiography on colonial and postcolonial Africa.

Research Trainee Profile

The Research Trainees for this project should be able to find their way in the landscape of missionary archives, identify valuable sources within these archives and bring this together in a structured and organized inventory. Trainees should therefore be able to work independently, be curious and well-organized. Knowledge of and experience with archival research are a plus. Research Trainees should also have good analytical and writing skills in order to analyse the data collected and assist in the setting up and writing of an academic article. A background in sign language studies, Deaf Studies, African Studies, or history is an advantage, but motivated students from any other discipline are also welcome to apply.

The project is designed to be academically challenging for the students involved. It will develop their skills in identifying, collecting, organizing and analysing archival materials and in academic writing. It will also give them the opportunity to broaden their knowledge of missionary and educational history, sign language studies and Deaf Studies. It also has the advantage of offering an international outlook, as it pertains to transnational exchanges between the Netherlands and Africa, offers the possibility of collaboration with researchers in Kenya, and is embedded in the Leiden based "[Africa 2020](#)" event (see below).

² The research guide *Repertorium of Dutch Protestant and Catholic missionary archives, ca. 1800-1960* will help to identify further possible archives. See <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/zendingoverzeesekerken/RepertoriumVanNederlandseZendings-EnMissie-archieven1800-1960>

Collaboration

The outcomes of this project will be of significant value to both historical and linguistic research. It also makes use of the expertise at both institutes. At the Institute for History, Monika Baar is currently leading the ERC funded Rethinking Disability project. As part of that project, Sam De Schutter is doing research on disability policies in East Africa, in which he is also looking into the history of educational efforts for deaf people in Kenya. At the LUCL, the team of Victoria Nyst has a long track record of working on sign language and Deaf studies in Africa. Recently, Hope Morgan has joined the LUCL and she has expertise in Kenyan Sign Language and a current project that features a component looking at the history of the first signs in Kenyan deaf schools. Both teams have already been exchanging through workshops and lecture series and this project would be a further step in the establishment of a more formal and permanent collaboration as part of a Disability and Deaf Studies Network at Leiden University.

In addition to that, the project would make possible further collaboration between the two institutions on the one hand and African partners on the other. In this project we will seek to include contributions from deaf people in Kenya, in order to provide information on the experiences of deaf students who attended the schools where Dutch missionaries were active.

Deliverables

1. An inventory of source material, which is scattered over several archival institutions in the Netherlands. The first goal is to get an overview of what can be found in these different archives and to make an inventory that will be made public through a website, so that it becomes an open source tool for other researchers in both Dutch and English
2. A short guide to the interviews with missionaries that are held at the KDC. This database contains interviews with some missionaries that were involved with education for deaf children in different (East) African countries.³ Short summaries of relevant parts will be added to the above inventory
3. A paper on the role of Dutch missionaries in deaf education in Kenya and the early phases of local Kenyan Sign Languages
4. A contribution to the [Festival on African Sign Languages and Deaf Studies 'HANDS!'](#), in the form of a poster or a short presentation. This festival, which will take place on 19 September 2020, roughly coincides with the end of this project. It is also part of "[Africa 2020](#)", a major event in Leiden hosted by the African Studies Centre Leiden.
5. The information gathered in this project will be used as the basis for new grant proposals on the involvement of missionaries in educational efforts for deaf people in colonial and postcolonial Africa, and their role in disability interventions in Africa more broadly. It will also be used in the current project conducted by dr. Hope Morgan at the LUCL.

Planning

7 months of 5,7 hours per week x 2 = 31 days of 11,4 hours, combined between the two Research Trainees

Phase 1 **Data collection & inventory**

Day 1	Briefing the students and identifying any challenges, opportunities or other issues
Day 2-5	Identifying and collecting archival material at the Katholiek Documentatie Centrum
Day 6-9	Identifying and collecting archival material at the Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven
Day 10-12	Identifying further archives and archival materials using the <i>Repertorium of Dutch Protestant and Catholic missionary archives, ca. 1800-1960</i>
Day 13-15	Putting together an inventory of the identified and collected materials

Phase 2 **Analysis & writing**

Day 16-20	Identifying and analyzing the materials pertaining to educational efforts in Kenya
Day 21-28	Working out a draft plan for an article together with the supervisors

Phase 3 **Dissemination**

Day 29-31	Assisting with the construction of the inventory website
-----------	--

³ See J. Hogema, H. Niessen and K. Prent, *Missie verhalen: interviews met missionarissen. Deel II: Afrika* (Nijmegen: Katholiek Documentatiecentrum, 1998).

Student Application

Students can apply by sending a resume, a motivation letter and a recent sample of academic writing to h.e.morgan@hum.leidenuniv.nl.