

The threat of women: Gender roles among Mennonite missionaries in argentina

Agustina Altman (CONICET-FLACSO)
agustina.altman@gmail.com
Alejandro López (CONICET – UBA)
astroamlopez@hotmail.com

The aim of this work is to explore the role of Mennonite missionary women in Argentina since their arrival to the country in 1917 until the 1960s.

The role of women in Christian missions in the case of Latin America is still scarce. Our investigation aims to contribute to this field with a deeper understanding of the missionalization processes in general.

Usually assigned to the domestic sphere, the Mennonite women became especially visible in their role as missionaries. Their role was crucial in sustaining the institutions associated with social actions of the Mennonite Church, which the missionaries soon realized, were keys to the success of the missionary enterprise. Despite this key role our sources also showed the subordinate role that these women were forced to play. Displayed as utopic examples of how someone should “be Christian”, with their behavior they possessed the potential of challenging traditional Mennonite female roles.

Hence, the study of the Mennonite missionary women is simultaneously an approach to the ways in which women were thought in this group and the transformation processes of these conceptions and practices.

Using different sources such as diaries, letters, publications and administrative reports we seek to reconstruct the role, often made invisible, of women in the missionary enterprise. In this way, not only we seek to contribute to a better understanding of the missionalization process but also, to the debate about the ideas and practices of gender in the context of Christianity in the first half of the twentieth century.