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Becoming an African Noah:
John Chilembwe's Prophetic Missionary Consciousness in the Black Atlantic World (1872-1915)

By

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

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This project argues that Reverend John Chilembwe drew on numerous sources to frame new visions for an African Church and a future African society delivered from the violent tyranny of White colonial rule and the long-enduring legacy of slave trades. Through preaching, teaching, and practice, he propounded a form of Christianity that reclaimed African dignity and humanity and asserted a central role for African Christians in divine history. As an early 20th century African Christian missionary among his own people, Chilembwe's vision of an African Church was shaped by various Christian ideas and discourses emanating from European, African, and African American sources. In turn, Chilembwe's mission became an intercultural African mission experiment as members of his churches contended with the past legacies of slavery and slave trades and the devastating upheavals of colonization through religious gathering and practice.

My study expands our understanding of how an intercultural form of Christianity, namely Black Christian Nationalism, furnished narratives, motifs, and practices that inspired Chilembwe's missionary consciousness at the height of the colonial takeover of African lands, resources, and peoples. As an intercultural form of Christianity, Black Christian Nationalism reflected Christian ideology and practice as refracted through African American experiences in North America. Black Christian Nationalism inspired a number of African expressions of Christianity at the turn of twentieth century. To that end, this study highlights the ways in which Chilembwe understood himself as a missionary among his own African kin and illustrates practices he implemented to creatively recontextualize Black Christian Nationalism as a religious response to social change. Specifically, this project establishes that recasting Chilembwe as a missionary brings to the fore how intercultural African Christianity could meet contextual challenges related to colonialism.

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I am in the end a person of Christian faith; I share that with Reverend John Chilembwe. For the kindness, justice, and tenderness of God who has Her eye on the sparrow, the lilies of the field, and those on the margins of power. For the privilege to see this project through but more so for a life continually marked by equal parts deep joy and profound sorrow, Lord, I am grateful.

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Preface

My thoughts have lived with John Chilembwe as two images haunted me—one captured in a photograph and one conjured in my imagination.

In the first, African bodies hang with heads covered in cloth sacks, ropes noosed around necks, arms and legs draped from the wooden gallows, erected hastily as makeshift trials of "Chilembwe's Christians." I have never been able to let go of the image of colonial state-sponsored lynching of rebellious catechists, baptized Christians hung for their alleged participation in a short-lived resistance. I close my eyes at night and that image flickers across my mind. I think it will always reside there.

The second image is one of my own making. Adhering closely to the historical record and oral reports as we have them, I imagine Chilembwe and two of his baptized members moving speedily and surreptitiously out of the lush landscape of the Shire Highlands in the southern region of today's Malawi and into more arid brush as they cross into Portuguese East Africa. My eyes follow the shadows of the three men tracked by *askari* conscripted into the Colonial Army and King's African Rifles out across the open land as they notice their hunters' determined approach. Chilembwe, standing on a low-rising hill, lifts his arms. From one angle they appear to surrender. From another, they are defiant fists shaking. He and his Christians know this is their end, and their heads are raised high. Then, in a moment of conjured drama, a gun blasts and Chilembwe crumples. The other two witnesses look on the death of the man who led them in prayer and baptism and in learning the Christian faith over the past fourteen years. And while they look down, two more shots pierce their reflections—ending their breath, but leaving traces of their hopes unextinguished.

The photograph and the conjuring.

Over the duration of crafting this project, they have lived with me. They require me to acknowledge that while this is first a historical and thematic treatment of a biography that engages historiographic elisions regarding religious consciousness and experience, it is also a story in which the terror of colonial violence lingers in postcolonial shadows. My interest in starting this project was first motivated by an interest in recovering the creative and paradoxical influences of black Atlantic Christianity among Africans experimenting with Christianity. And it remains as such. But my thinking has deepened over the duration of time that germinated seed into fruit, such that my senses of accountability to Chilembwe and those he sought to deliver from evil outrun his life, the constraints of scholarship, and even more, Christianity and African Christian communities. The accountability toward which I write is for those whose livelihoods and sacred longings breathe and pulse in the shadows of anti-African and anti-Black dehumanization, violence, and their always haunting aftermaths that persist across our globe.

To their hopes unextinguished. In solidarity and with humility.

Introduction

"…it seems to me that God incessantly beckons God's creation to new horizons."
Laurenti Magesa

John Nkologo Chilembwe spoke often with Harry Kambwiri Matecheta, a colleague from his school days at Blantyre Mission who served as a preacher in the Blantyre Mission outposts. In 1911, Matecheta was the first African ordained in the Blantyre Mission, so he and Chilembwe shared a point of prestige and training among their fellow Christians and family members—both were ordained within Protestant churches and missions. The key difference between the two, however, might be best indicated by the missions who trained them and ordained their ministries. Chilembwe was a minister under the direction of and receiving financing from the National Baptist Convention, USA, a newly nationalizing Black Baptist denomination with a strong (if debated) investment in African missions.[1]

Matecheta was and would remain a loyal member, teacher, and preacher of the Blantyre Mission until his death in 1964 at 91.[2] He also penned a short history of the mission, which was published in 1951. Chilembwe and Matecheta appear to have been colleagues and friends who engaged in regular conversation with one another. They took tea together and on at least a few occasions, Matecheta borrowed Chilembwe's bicycle.[3] On another occasion, Chilembwe invited Matecheta to preach at an evening service at Providence Industrial Mission, where Chilembwe was a pastor.

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[1] James Melvin Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power* (Macon, GA: Mercer Press, 1986).
[2] Harry Kambwiri Matecheta, "Blantyre Mission: Stories of Its Beginning," trans. Thokozani Chilembwe and Todd Statham (Blantyre, Malawi, 1951).
[3] John McCracken, ed., *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising: Witness Testimonies Made to the Nyasaland Rising Commission of Inquiry, 1915* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, for The British Academy, 2015), 146.

Matecheta recalled one conversation that occurred between them around February 1913 while giving his testimony to the Commission of Inquiry organized to investigate a shocking "disturbance" that had occurred in the southern region of the Nyasaland Protectorate in what is present-day Malawi, namely Chilembwe's armed rebellion. Matecheta relayed that he and Chilembwe discussed Genesis 6 and the nature of the Christian notion and activity of sin. Following this brief point of exchange, Chilembwe then produced a blue book, the title of which is unknown. According to Matecheta, Chilembwe "read from it, and said the first resurrection is freedom from bondage and slavery. And then he said the second resurrection is the future resurrection, and then he said all the Europeans have risen from the first resurrection…" The problem for Chilembwe was that "the natives have not risen from it…Because we are ruled by Europeans." Chilembwe continued, "When we shall be free from their rule then we have risen."[4]

Matecheta strongly disagreed with Chilembwe's assessment, arguing in response that when Africans had learned all they could from government, missions, and planters and traders, "when we are well educated, some of us shall be asked by the Government to help them in the matters of the country." As Matecheta made known from yet another remembered conversation, Chilembwe did not consider the British king or governor as acting in the interests of Africans, or as Chilembwe said, "natives." Throughout the duration of their many conversations and teas, Chilembwe implored Matecheta to join his church or separate entirely from the Blantyre Mission and begin his own. Matecheta consistently—due to his vows, he noted—refused to do either.

From the beginning of his mission in 1900, Chilembwe had become a source of mutually reinforcing curiosity, interest, and division.[5] Both prior to Chilembwe's determined exchanges

[4] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 250.
[5] George Shepperson and Thomas Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, University of Edinburgh. Edinburgh University Publications History, Philosophy, and Economics, no 8 (Edinburgh, Scotland: University of Edinburgh Press, 1958), 128, 132.

with his African and Scottish Church of Scotland colleague Matecheta in 1913 and after, Chilembwe and his church members incurred general disdain among local chiefs. Chilembwe was both respected and envied by Africans in the region and even within his own family.[6] They disliked his adoption of British clothing and questioned his adoption of the "white man's religion."[7]

Chilembwe and Matecheta's remembered conversations portray some of the tensions and complexities that arose for African Christians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whose encounters with different forms of Christianity stimulated plurality in African Christian thinking and practice. Chilembwe's encounter with Black Christian Nationalism encouraged him to forge religious visions and practices that promoted independent, separatist African churches. His encounters with *Africa for the African* thought and Black Christian Nationalism guided him to retool Christianity as a religion by and for Africans at his Providence Industrial Mission in what is now south central Malawi. He did so from 1884 to 1915 as African territorial cult practitioners questioned the veracity of Christianity as a divinely revealed religion. This new religion's practice among White men, and to some extent women, led M'bona cult practitioners, of whom most were Mang'anja and therefore Nyanja-speaking, to question if God had spoken to White men. By the White men's behavior, territorial cult practitioners observed, there was little evidence of divine revelation or message.

In one recalled conversation between Chilembwe's mentor and friend, British missionary Joseph Booth, Chilembwe, and M'bona cult practitioners, the practitioners doubted Booth's declaration that "God loved them by sending his son." They described this claim as *mwambi wa*

[6] Willie Mae Hardy Ashley, *Far from Home*, Limited Edition (Fernandina Beach, FL: W.M.H. Ashley, 1987), 2.
[7] Ashley, *Far from Home*, 2.

chabi in Nyanja, "a tale of nonsense."[8] They knew God had spoken to them, the cult practitioners shared, by the skeleton head of M'bona that they kept in their house of worship.[9] "Perhaps," they wagered, "God the Creator had spoken to white men also."[10]

To this response, Booth produced a small Bible and told them that this book held the message that he proffered God had given to White men. Booth records that the cult practitioners responded by encouraging him to "Open it, let us know the words and we will know if God spoke them."[11] Booth and Chilembwe then proceeded to translate the Ten Commandments into Nyanja as recorded in Exodus 20. After Booth and Chilembwe spoke, Booth records that there was "great excitement and very much talking amongst the Chief Men."[12]

Upon consideration, the M'bona cult practitioners declared that the divine code of behavior as Chilembwe and Booth taught it could not possibly have originated with White men. A representative spoke at length, Booth's journal indicates, acknowledging that "the chiefs and the people have examined the Message of God to white men" and they considered it "very good." In great part they assessed it as very good because "no white man, or black man, could or would make such a message…No black man or Chief would say men must not covet cattle, or land, or woman," Booth records, "and that if they had power, that they should not take, or steal them." Booth's recounting continues, "But hardest of all that they should not fight, or kill, those who did those things."[13] White men, they observed, commonly broke these instructions from God. Therefore, they discerned, this message "could not be from either white man or black man, but only from the Great God and Father who made both of them."[14]

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[8] Malawi National Archives, 64/JC/1/2.
[9] Malawi National Archives, 64/JC/1/2.
[10] Malawi National Archives, 64/JC/1/2.
[11] Malawi National Archives, c1549c.
[12] Malawi National Archives, 64/JC/1/2.
[13] Malawi National Archives, 64/JC/1/2.
[14] Malawi National Archives, 64/JC/1/2.

Like the Mang'anja among whom he was raised and to whom he preached, Chilembwe considered Christianity and the Christian message as one that could hold White men accountable for their grievances against Africans. He also encountered the Christian message as divine revelation that promoted African freedom—spiritual as well as material. Chilembwe was initially schooled through Scottish missions, who had taken up strong and sustained interest in the south central region of Africa that David Livingstone had traversed. Chilembwe was then baptized in 1893, not by Scottish missionaries but by Joseph Booth, an English Baptist missionary who had arrived in the Nyasaland Protectorate in 1892 with his son and daughter. Accompanying Booth to the United States, Chilembwe theologically trained among the African American National Baptists from the United States from 1897 to 1900. Chilembwe then made it his life's work to preach and practice a Christian message that he believed addressed the lived realities of Yao, Mang'anja, Lomwe, and Ngoni groups that ebbed and flowed out of the Shire Highlands and Lower Shire region, adjusting to the onslaught of colonial presence and reeling from the impact of generations of slave trades.

In retrospect, Chilembwe's work to preach and practice the gospel message on African terms faltered in some key ways. He dismissed African traditions and religions out of hand as "heathen." He considered Islam, called "Mohammedism" in his day, an inferior and competing religion that promoted trades in enslaved Africans and from which his fellow Africans needed to be dissuaded to follow. While considering women central to the spiritual and educational work of his mission, he also described them as "poor and benighted," in need of being rescued from their pagan, semi-clothed state.[15] At first brush, Chilembwe reads as a harbinger of the worst of Christianity to emerge in the twentieth century, caught up in the inherited legacies of Eurocentric

[15] Twentieth Annual Session, National Baptist Convention, September 1900, Chilembwe correspondence, 46.

theology and cultural ideas that lingered in this period of Black Atlantic Christianity.[16] While not erasing or diminishing Chilembwe's fraught pronouncements about African religious cultures, Islam, and African women, it is important to note that despite his failings, Chilembwe did constructively imagine African society through a variety of religious sources as a missionary among his own and thus his missionary consciousness warrants further investigation.

This project argues that Chilembwe drew on numerous sources to frame new visions for an African Church and a future African society delivered from the violent tyranny of White colonial rule and the long-enduring legacy of slave trades. Through preaching, teaching, and practice, he propounded a form of Christianity that reclaimed African dignity and humanity and asserted a central role for African Christians in divine history. As an early 20th century African Christian missionary among his own people, Chilembwe's vision of an African Church was shaped by various Christian ideas and discourses emanating from European, African, and African American sources. In turn, Chilembwe's mission became a dynamic intercultural African mission experiment as members of his churches contended with the past legacies of slavery and slave trades and the devastating upheavals of colonization through religious gathering and practice.

My study expands our understanding of how an intercultural form of Christianity, namely Black Christian Nationalism, furnished narratives, motifs, and practices that inspired Chilembwe's missionary consciousness at the height of the colonial takeover of African lands, resources, and peoples. As an intercultural form of Christianity that emerged in post-Reconstruction United States, Black Christian Nationalism reflected Christian ideology and

[16] See Josiah Young for a trenchant critique of Eurocentric sensibilities in Black Atlantic Christianity in this period. Josiah U. Young, *A Pan-African Theology: Providence and the Legacies of the Ancestors* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1992).

practice refracted through African American experiences in North America. Through encounters between African Americans and Africans in the broader Black Atlantic world, Black Christian Nationalism inspired a number of African Christian churches and missions at the turn of twentieth century. To that end, this study recasts Chilembwe's self-understanding as a missionary among his own African kin and demonstrates that he implemented practices to creatively recontextualize Black Christian Nationalism as a religious response to social change within an African continental context. Specifically, this project establishes that recasting Chilembwe as a missionary brings to the fore how intercultural forms of African Christianity could meet contextual challenges related to colonialism while also replicating the racial logics which it aimed to contest.

A Biographical Overview of John Chilembwe

To provide context for the inquiry that follows, it is necessary to recount what is admittedly a shortened and deceptively linear narrative of John Nkologo Chilembwe's life. Chilembwe was born likely in what is today Malawi between 1871 and 1872 on Tsangano Hill, near Chiradzulu Hill and Zomba— later to become the colonial capital of the Nyasaland Protectorate—as the first and only born male in a family of sisters.[17] His birth date suggests that he began to experience his earliest memories a little over a decade before the 1885 Berlin Conference, which formalized the ongoing carving up of Africa according to European interests. Chilembwe is one of the oft-remembered figures within histories of modern African Christianity, political histories of colonial Africa, and nationalist historiography. Chilembwe's adolescent years unfolded during a notably violent period in intra-African relations as well as intra-imperial

[17] George Simeon Mwase and Robert I. Rotberg, *Strike a Blow and Die: The Classic Story of the Chilembwe Rising* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1967), 12.

and African-European communities.[18] He lived north of the Zambezi River and to the east of the Shire River and south of Lake Nyasa in the village that became the city of Blantyre, not far from some of David Livingstone's famed journeys in south central Africa, and in the midst of land and peoples long caught up in the Indian Ocean slave trades.[19] Livingstone's expeditions determined the area to be a known and desirable location for early Scottish missionaries. During this period, Chilembwe lived as a free and mobile African.

From his early years, Chilembwe demonstrated natural intellect such that his Yao father, named either Kaundama or Chilembwe, enrolled him in school.[20] The Church of Scotland initiated what grew into the Blantyre Mission in southern Nyasaland in 1878, with a formal restart in 1881 under the leadership of David Clement Scott.[21] Oral histories indicate that Chilembwe received his earliest education through the fledging Scottish mission-related schools and that he passed his Standard Three (four years including vernacular instruction and three including English instruction).[22] His curiosity led him sometime between late 1892 and early

[18] John McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966* (Rochester, NY: James Currey, 2012), 25–56. The convergence of three slave trades in the Shire Highlands as well as the absence of a centralized political power (thus generating small scale contests for control) contributed in great part to this volatility.
[19] D. D. Phiri, *Let Us Die for Africa: An African Perspective on the Life and Death of John Chilembwe of Nyasaland*, Expanded (Blantyre, Malawi: Central Africana, 1999), 2.
[20] Phiri, *Let Us Die for Africa: An African Perspective on the Life and Death of John Chilembwe of Nyasaland*, 2.
[21] Andrew Ross, *Blantyre Mission and the Making of Modern Malawi*, no 1 (Mzuzu, Malawi: Luviri Press, 2018), 20, 23. For the most recent critical biography with a focus on his views on an African church see Harri Englund, *Visions for Racial Equality: David Clement Scott and The Struggle for Justice in Nineteenth-Century Malawi* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2022).
[22] Regarding the Scottish contributions to Chilembwe's Christian background and his general education see Todd Statham, "Scottish and Evangelical Elements in the 1915 Nyasaland Uprising (Part One)," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 33, no. 1 (2015): 39–57; Todd Statham, "Scottish and Evangelical Elements in the 1915 Nyasaland Uprising (Part Two)," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 33, no. 2 (2015): 204–17. Phiri, *Let Us Die for Africa: An African Perspective on the Life and Death of John Chilembwe of Nyasaland*, 2; Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 39; Mwase and Rotberg, *Strike a Blow and Die: The Classic Story of the Chilembwe Rising*, 20–24. Phiri provides more details about Chilembwe's schooling than Shepperson and Price, who conjecture "it is also possible he had come into contact with teachers from the Church of Scotland mission school at Chiradzulu." Neither secondary source provides definitive evidence other than to be able to claim that Chilembwe did receive some schooling through Standard Three, and more than likely, given the educational landscape of the Chiradzulu District, it was provided through Scottish missions growing into the Blantyre Mission.

1893 to seek out the newly arrived Joseph Booth, a missionary preaching a message of "Africa for the African" and determined to develop industrial missions in the region.[23] Booth preached a gospel message that emphasized African equality and capacity, resonating, it seems, with Chilembwe's observations of change transpiring around him.[24]

It must be conceded that Booth was not the only European preaching the gospel in a way that promoted African livelihood. Indeed, Blantyre Mission's David Clement Scott, noted above, and Alexander Hetherwick, Scott's successor who assumed the Mission's leadership in 1898, both openly criticized and condemned British imperial disregard of African lives, land, and livelihood. [25] Scott respected African agency and epistemology. For one, he paid careful attention to African forms of deliberation, or *mlandu,* and according to historian Harry Englund, consistently committed himself to learning Mang'anja epistemologies and language.[26] When Africans were baptized at Blantyre Mission they "were not forced to adopt European or 'Christian' names as was the case in other missions."[27] Scott even envisioned "an African Church in which Africans and Europeans would worship together, their communication with one another and with the divine carried by the African vernacular."[28] Scottish missionaries levied substantial critique at colonial administrator Harry Johnston, who instigated violent pacification

[23] Klaus Fiedler, *Interdenominational Faith Missions in Africa* (Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2018), 70, first published as Klaus Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions in Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1995).
[24] See Emily Booth Langworthy, *This Africa Was Mine* (Stirling, Scotland: Stirling Tract Enterprises, 1950); Harry W. Langworthy, *Africa for the African: Lhe Life of Joseph Booth* (Blantyre, Malawi: Christian Literature Association in Malawi, 1996). In Booth's absence, Chilembwe cared for Booth's daughter, Emily, as well as his son, Edward, who passed away. Shepperson and Price record that Booth and Chilembwe met in the fall of 1892, while D.D. Phiri records that they met in February 1893. See Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 47; Phiri, *Let Us Die for Africa: An African Perspective on the Life and Death of John Chilembwe of Nyasaland*, 4.
[25] Englund, *Visions for Racial Equality*, 31.
[26] In 1892, Scott published *A Cyclopaedic Dictionary of the Mang'anja Language Spoken in British Central Africa.* See David Clement Scott and Church of Scotland. Foreign Mission Committee, *A Cyclopædic Dictionary of the Mang'anja Language Spoken in British Central Africa* (Edinburgh, UK: The Foreign Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland, 1892).
[27] Englund, *Visions for Racial Equality*, 164.
[28] Englund, *Visions for Racial Equality*, 78.

schemes throughout what became today's Malawi from 1891 to 1895.[29] Although it was the Scottish missions specifically who had persistently asked for British imperial protection against slave raids in the region, they never anticipated Johnston's methods.

Given the nearby context of Blantyre Mission, it is a matter of some curiosity why Chilembwe first approached Booth to be "his cook boy." He also asked Booth "to carry him to God," and quickly became an integral member of the family.[30] Later in 1893, Chilembwe asked to be baptized by full immersion, having read in the Gospels that Jesus was baptized in this manner and not by sprinkling water as Scottish missionaries practiced.[31] The manner of baptism was indeed an ongoing discussion among African Christians and may very well have been Chilembwe's initial impetus to pursue Booth.[32] Chilembwe cemented his place in the Booth family when he cared for Joseph Booth's ill son, Edward, during Booth's fundraising trip in England. While Booth was away from the Protectorate, Edward, with whom Chilembwe was friends, had fallen sick with fever during overland treks. Edward died February 22, 1894.[33]

Alongside his role in the Booth family, from Chilembwe's baptism in 1893 until 1900 he served as a translator, preacher, and missionary alongside Booth. He became an integral part of the founding of Zambezi Industrial Mission and a signatory on Booth's *Africa for the African* manifesto.[34] Booth's *Africa for the African* was incendiary for the time as a mission theory. Indeed, Booth claimed "we must enlarge our missionary methods somewhat if we would do for

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[29] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 57.
[30] Langworthy, *This Africa Was Mine*; Phiri, *Let Us Die for Africa: An African Perspective on the Life and Death of John Chilembwe of Nyasaland*, 4.
[31] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African*, 48.
[32] Harry Englund makes mention of differing preferences when it came to baptism at Blantyre Mission. See Englund, *Visions for Racial Equality*, 164.
[33] George Shepperson and Thomas Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, University of Edinburgh. Edinburgh University Publications History, Philosophy, and Economics, no 8 (Edinburgh, Scotland: University of Edinburgh Press, 1958), 59. See also Emily Booth Langworthy, *This Africa Was Mine* (Stirling, Scotland: Stirling Tract Enterprises, 1950).
[34] Phiri, *Let Us Die for Africa: An African Perspective on the Life and Death of John Chilembwe of Nyasaland*, 6.

Africa as we would wish done for ourselves…We should wish for the Gospel of good will relating to the present life as well as the life to come."[35] It correlated a Christian message, predicated on the person of Jesus Christ, with "desire to see full justice done to the African race," including giving to Africans "the rights and privileges accorded to Europeans." Included in the manifesto's numerous objectives was a petition for "British and other European governments holding or claiming territory to generously restore the same to the African people…"[36]

Thus, in the period from 1893 to 1900, Chilembwe's partnership with Booth steeped him in the precepts that Chilembwe would encounter in religious rhetoric, practice and structure among the National Baptists in the United States.[37] In 1897, Chilembwe first met National Baptists, among other Black American Christians, as he traveled to the United States with Booth. The two men, however, departed for their journey, it appears, with two different aims in mind. Booth primarily intended to raise interest, money, and awareness for his industrial missions. Chilembwe joined him holding a concern for his kin in mind. He made the sea voyage and overland travels, as Booth recounts, "charged in my presence by his parents and many Yao friends to become 'eyes, mouth, ear for them and quietly write to those who could read Yao what he found and how he was received by these lost and forgotten black people."[38] Slave and ivory traders from the Swahili coast had circulated rumors that "whites were cannibals" but Booth

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[35] Joseph Booth and Laura Perry, *Africa for the African*, 2nd ed., Kachere Text, No 6 (Blantyre, Malawi: Christian Literature Association in Malawi, 2008).
[36] Booth and Perry, *Africa for the African*, 72–73.
[37] See especially Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship*, 136–38, 206 Washington argues that Black Baptists were never able to achieve "the solidarity needed to become an effective social and political force…because the various sociological consequences of more than 250 years of slavery have not been taken seriously by black Baptists themselves." Washington's piercing insight accounted for, this does not however diminish the religious missionary fervor, on which Washington comments, and the national structures to support Black Baptist life and mission that Chilembwe encountered. See also Sandy D. Martin, *Black Baptists and African Missions: The Origins of A Movement, 1880-1915* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
[38] Malawi National Archives, 64/JC/1/2, C154/7 "re: John Chilembwe the Yao Native Messenger to the Negroes of the USA."

recalls that Chilembwe was "one of few to believe the writer that the descendants of those slaves still lived in USA and as free men and he volunteered" to go determine the truth.[39] Chilembwe then traveled from the Shire Highlands through London and Liverpool, stopping in New York City, Richmond, Virginia, and Baltimore, Maryland with Booth.[40]

During their American tour, Booth and Chilembwe traveled and lectured together on the mission theory laid out in *Africa for the African.*[41] Throughout their travels, they stayed together in the same host homes and houses in Washington, D.C. and Richmond, Virginia, among other locations. White mobs, whose lynching of Black individuals and communities, including religious establishments, rose dramatically in the last decade of the nineteenth century, followed and tormented them. Along with violence and terror that plagued their journey, so too did Booth's seemingly thin financial margins, drawing them both closer toward, in Booth's own words, "poverty."[42]

The National Baptists stepped in at Booth's encouragement and, through the care and advisement of the National Baptist Convention Foreign Mission Board's General Secretary Lewis Garnet Jordan, supported Chilembwe's education at Virginia Theological Seminary and College in Lynchburg, Virginia for two years. Following his education, Chilembwe was ordained as a National Baptist minister. He met his friend and mentor Booth once again in Philadelphia in 1899, where he chose to leave Booth permanently. As Booth recorded it, Chilembwe said, "God has brought me to good friends. I am now a man and can walk alone…They [know] well the

[39] Malawi National Archives, 64/JC/1/2, C154/7 "re: John Chilembwe the Yao Native Messenger to the Negroes of the USA."
[40] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 88.
[41] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 92.
[42] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 93.

ways of the whites towards blacks better than [Booth]."[43] It was on a note of appreciation and friendship, not of malice, that they parted ways.

Under the care and in the company of National Baptists, Chilembwe was not entirely free from prejudiced treatment by African Americans. He began using the word "Che"—Portuguese for "mister"—when in the company of African Americans, asserting that it meant "prince" and that he was the son of an African king.[44] He did so, according to historian D. D. Phiri, because African Americans at the end of the nineteenth century imbibed the images of Africa circulated in White missionary newsletters or popular White supremacist writings that depicted Africans as cannibals. The gaze of disdain, as Phiri describes it, followed Chilembwe the African among Black Americans.[45] While Phiri makes a conjecture regarding Chilembwe's experience among Black Baptists in Virginia, it is plausible that his suggestion is at least partly true.[46]

Before his return to the Shire Highlands, Chilembwe fell sick and was assumed by his National Baptist friends to be on his deathbed. Nevertheless, he rallied with the spiritual condition of his kin in mind. He declared to the National Baptists gathered around him that God had brought him to the United States not to die but to prepare him to return to his people as a missionary and pastor.[47] When in 1900 Chilembwe departed the United States and traveled through London to procure a land grant for his mission, he did so as a pastor ordained by the

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[43] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 93 quoting Joseph Booth.
[44] Phiri, *Let Us Die for Africa: An African Perspective on the Life and Death of John Chilembwe of Nyasaland*, 11.
[45] Phiri, *Let Us Die for Africa: An African Perspective on the Life and Death of John Chilembwe of Nyasaland*, 11.
[46] On this point of potential distancing to point of disdain between African Americans that Chilembwe encountered, Blyden notes that African Americans "sought to distance themselves from a place their captors regarded as primitive and heathen" due to circulated "negative representations of Africa in this era," namely in the nineteenth century. She further notes regional differences between African Americans' relationship to African roots. They were "more readily embraced..." on Southern plantations, "while the newly freed black populations in Northern states strove to discover where they fit into the new nation." Blyden also points out that as increasing knowledge about Africa circulatetd in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, notions of Africans being "primitive, savage, backward, and heathen" come under increasing scrutiny. See Nemata Amelia Blyden, *African Americans and Africa: A New History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 19–20, 21.
[47] *Mission Herald,* Volume 11, Number 12, February 1907, Louisville, Kentucky.

National Baptists and a missionary appointed and funded by the National Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

In 1901, Chilembwe returned to Nyasaland and initiated Providence Industrial Mission with two National Baptist missionaries, Landon N. Cheek, who arrived in 1901, and Emma Delaney, who arrived in 1902. Until 1906, Chilembwe labored closely with both Delaney and Cheek. After training as a nurse at Spelman College from 1889 to 1894 and completing Spelman Seminary's well-known Mission Training Program in 1896, Delaney departed for the Shire Highlands at the age of 31 and began diligent work in schooling the young women there in sewing skills and reading.[48]

According to an official marriage certificate recorded at the British Central Africa Administration in Blantyre, on May 11th 1904, at the approximate age of 33, Chilembwe married Ida Zuao, a young woman under the age of 21.[49] Although likely married by his colleague, Reverend Cheek, at Providence Industrial Mission prior to the May 11th date, the certificate nonetheless corroborates otherwise historically fuzzy details about Ida's identity. It appears that Ida Zuao worked closely and energetically with Delaney to organize newly baptized women in the church as well as through small outpost schools.[50] National Baptist women funded the building of a brick house in which Delaney lived and out of which she also ran a medical clinic.

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[48] For biographical data concerning Delaney's life and her missionary work see Ashley, *Far from Home*; Brien Laing, "Henry Beard Delany and Emma Beard Delaney: Two African-Americans Who Rose from the Obscurity of an Enslaved Family to Achieve Distinguished Success in Their Individual Lives" (Ph.D., Ann Arbor, Union Institute and University, 2003). While Delaney waited for her appointment by the National Baptists to an African mission, Delaney taught at the Florida Baptist Institute, Live Oak, Florida, today's Florida Memorial College relocated to Miami in 1968. The Institute was the target in the 1880s of White terror and violence due to "the presence of white teachers brought in from the North who were employed to teach Blacks at the institute." This northern region of Florida, also Delaney's home, was an epicenter of lynchings from 1882-1901. See Laing, 232-234.

[49] Mike Bamford et al., "The 1904 Registrations at the Blantyre Registrar's Office of the Marriages of Pastor John Chilembwe and the Reverend Landon Cheek," *The Society of Malawi Journal* 66, no. 1 (2013): 46–50.

[50] David Stuart-Mogg, "Ida Z. Chilembwe – Pioneer Nyasa Feminist," *The Society of Malawi Journal* 74, no. 2 (2021): 2.

Prior to her departure in May 1905, Delaney wrote to the National Baptist Foreign Mission Board, "The work is moving slowly, twenty-five [women] have been baptized already this year and many more are interested."[51] Her words indicate slight yet steady interest in Christianity among women in the Shire Highlands.

Alongside the promising baptisms and education of women that Delaney and his wife Ida oversaw, John Chilembwe encouraged his Blantyre Mission school peers and members of other mission churches, some now employed within mission churches, to join his mission or begin their own. He urged them to seek ecclesial independence. His invitations were often rebuffed. Following the failure to convince fellow African Christians in other missions to join him, Chilembwe began conducting evangelistic ventures, akin to his and Booth's past preaching journeys, into the countryside of the Shire Highlands and across the borders into Portuguese Mozambique. He often played the part of a hunter and carried a gun as he crossed colonial borders since it was easier for him to cross the border as a hunter than a missionary.[52] He started schools to train interested young adults and children in reading and industrial skills. His schools produced, for example, the first woman to gain a certificate to teach English, Rachel Malekebu.[53]

From 1906-1913, John and Ida Chilembwe labored without the personnel support of Delaney and Cheek, and financing from the National Baptists grew more inconsistent due to differing priorities for the National Baptists back in the United States which impacted the level of funding. Nonetheless, through steady evangelistic ministry, church construction, schooling efforts, and fundraising campaigns, Chilembwe established the first African- and African

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[51] Ashley, *Far from Home*, 5; Laing, "Henry Beard Delany and Emma Beard Delaney: Two African -Americans Who Rose from the Obscurity of an Enslaved Family to Achieve Distinguished Success in Their Individual Lives," 252.

[52] *Mission Herald,* Vol. 13, No. 7, October 1908, Chilembwe writes, "I have been living partly by using a gun hunting wild game, which I believe to be out of right for me to keep up."

[53] Ashley, *Far from Home*, 4.

American-led mission in the region. Its membership crept up toward nine hundred, not an insignificant number for that time. During this period, conversations occurred at Mbombwe, Chiradzulu, where the main church was located, to initiate an African Industrial Society. This Society would have as its aim a place of investment of African money in an organization that could generate work locally for African laborers, rather than incur loss of labor to white-administered South African mines and capital to Indian traders whom Chilembwe criticized "for sending the money they made out of the country, thus depriving the community of capital.[54] Even as one of the most educated and influential people in the region, however, it seems that general fear of government surveillance and disapproval prevented Chilembwe from growing significant attendance. The aim to create an African Industrial Society languished. However, as Shepperson and Price show, the meeting held to initiate the Society in and of itself and a pamphlet circulated afterwards in English indicate that Chilembwe's missionary vision was taking hold. Increasingly, Providence Industrial Mission offered—in addition to worship, baptism, and Christian ritual celebrations, such as Christmas—opportunities for African landowners to gather and plan for African initiatives in commerce and development outside the purview of colonial eyes.[55]

Chilembwe's mission had from its inception been separatist in ecclesial aim and ethos. He refused, for example, to federate with European missions when Scottish Alexander Hetherwick approached him repeatedly about the prospect of doing so. Chilembwe resisted on Christian grounds. He maintained that the Spirit brought freedom for the African, and to link

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[54] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 167, 415.
[55] Patrick Makondesa, "The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission, 1900-1940." *Kachere Series Theses No. 5.* Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Series, 2006, 80. Patrick. Makondesa, *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission, 1900-1940* (Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Press, 2006), 80.

efforts in any form with White bodies—be they in missions or churches—could compromise this freedom.[56] By 1913, the culmination of a number of changes in the Nyasaland Protectorate, principally environmental and economic in nature, occurred.[57] Famine leading to starvation had raged from 1911 onward, then deluges of rain deterred recovery. Migration out of the Protectorate, more than likely toward the mines of South Africa, exacerbated the fallout of famine as labor shortages prevented crop preparation.[58] Environmental and economic precarity contributed to poor health in the Shire Highlands, as families struggled under the burden of food scarcity and the ongoing transition to a wage labor and cash-based economy.

Two colonial policies enacted in 1912 also contributed to the strain that impacted Chilembwe's ministry and outlook. The District Administration (Native) Ordinance formalized colonial attempts to reorganize African social and political life, although it was not implemented uniformly or entirely in Nyasaland. Looking back, this Ordinance was a type of colonial surveillance, a violence enacted through policy against African initiative and autonomy and according to externally imposed systems of rule and control. Additionally, the increase of hut taxes—wherein Africans had to pay taxes for their houses, or "huts"—occurred in 1912. Taken together, while uneven in effect, both created new colonial-induced pressures on people already suffering under the burden of climate disasters and food insecurity.[59]

Numerous baptized members of Chilembwe's churches by this time were Lomwe, immigrants who moved across Portuguese borders and into the areas transformed into British

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[56] McCracken, *Voices*, p. 122.
[57] I am grateful to the insight from Dr. Klaus Fiedler on this point who directed my attention to a shift in Chilembwe's outlook that appears to have occurred around 1913, such that his thinking and mission became more pronounced as anti-colonial, following his ecclesial separatism ethos. I think there is indeed merit in Fiedler's insight, and I have periodized Chilembwe's ministry attentive to it. My periodization differs then somewhat but not substantially from Shepperson and Price.
[58] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 191.
[59] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African*, 189.

estates. As migrants, they became a labor source and were burdened under the thangata system, wherein they were made to pay in labor rent to live on the land claimed (it is more accurate to say stolen) by British settlers. Lomwe migrants and Chilembwe's churches and schools on estates were consistently and violently deterred from expanding or gathering, particularly on the approximately 170,000 acres Bruce Estates under the proprietor William J. Livingstone, to the extent that Livingstone instructed two schools built on the estate be burnt down. This undoubtedly aroused Chilembwe's anger.[60]

Having already returned from the United States in 1900 intent on leading an independent and separatist church, Chilembwe's ecclesial dissent and theological difference from European missions regarding what constituted sin set him at odds with African Christians baptized at Blantyre Mission but kept him held in esteem of European missionaries as well as Yao and Mang'anja kin the region. European missionaries were indeed some of Chilembwe's friends and frequent visitors, even if he would not federate. Chilembwe's understanding of the Christian message, especially as taught and embodied through *Africa for the African* and Black Baptist predecessors, held out the aim and promise that as a result of the Christian message, Africans would enjoy the fruits of their labors in their own lands without the intrusive and violent presence of White colonizers and against the historical tides of weakening slave trades. As famine, hut taxes, thangata, colonial ordinances of surveillance and rule, and wage labor economies expanded, the terrain in which Chilembwe ministered were quickly altering the prospects of any of African autonomy over land, labor, and religious life. In fact, it seemed the possibilities were unraveling.

[60] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 78.

By late 1914, World War I encroached into all regions of Africa where European imperial powers operated—western, eastern, and south-central Africa. This period and Chilembwe's actions will be covered in more detail in chapter 5, but we know that Chilembwe openly condemned European conscription of his members and other locals into the war effort. His public critique was a rare occurrence of bald African defiance against the war effort in colonial Africa.[61] Following his submission of two letters protesting the war effort in the latter quarter of 1914, the second of which was printed and then censored, he seemed intent to organize his own small army to make his opposition more pointedly known.

A dramatic turning point in Chilembwe's story and legacy occurred when he initiated a violent uprising on January 23, 1915, which included the beheading of a known antagonist of African laborers, William J. Livingstone. However, Chilembwe's exact motivation for the violence continues to be debated. Some have suggested he was inspired by the story of John Brown, while others contend that under financial and physical duress, he saw no other means by which to make his frustrations known. Still others have contended that the uprising took place on British plantations and that he did not have problems with colonial administrators but with the abuses by British planters on Lomwe immigrants, many of whom attended his schools or churches.[62] World War I and the conscription of male labor in imperial war, which in turn widowed women and made children orphans, weighed upon him to the point of despair.[63]

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[61] Melvin Page estimated that 200,000 men from the Nyasaland Protectorate served in World War I, roughly two-thirds of the adult male population. See Melvin E. Page, "The War of Thangata: Nyasaland and The East African Campaign, 1914-1918," *The Journal of African History* 19, no. 1 (1978): 94 George Shepperson astutely pointed out that we have very few evidences of Africans' response to World War I, much less one as staunchly opposed and calling into question the hypocrisy inherent between the purported "civilizing mission" and the reliance on African lives in support of a European/imperial war.

[62] Mwase and Rotberg, *Strike a Blow and Die: The Classic Story of the Chilembwe Rising*.

[63] George Shepperson and John Chilembwe, "A Major Chilembwe Letter," *The Society of Malawi Journal* 68, no. 1 (2015): vi–2.

However varied the theories, by February 1, Nyasaland Protectorate Governor Smith telegraphed that "Although the person…is still at large, closely hunted, his following has been broken up, and the rising may be regarded as suppressed."[64] On February 3, Chilembwe himself was killed by a dispatched corps of King's African Rifles and the Nyasaland Volunteer Reserves who were instructed to "break up any bodies of rebels" and apply martial law as "circumstances of the moment…require it."[65] Governor Smith declared the rebellion contained and suppressed on February 4.

The uprising prompted a ruthless colonial crackdown of anyone suspected or confirmed to have been involved with Chilembwe. "Chilembwe's Christians" and co-conspirators were imprisoned, hung or shot, and scapegoated foreign missionaries were imprisoned or deported.[66] Mission education came under intense colonial scrutiny.[67] Under the colonial administrative gaze, European missions were no different in their analysis from Chilembwe's mission. Colonial administrators pointed to missionary school training and literacy gained among Africans that enabled them to read and interpret the Bible without European guidance (and thus wrongly, in the colonial Commissions' estimation) as a major part of a problem to address. Education—especially mission education—and reading the Bible had to be controlled or curtailed.[68] In the

[64] Governor Smith telegram to Secretary of State for the Colonies, February 1, 1915, Kew National Archives (KNA), CO 525/61.
[65] Governor Smith instructions to KAR, January 31, 1915, KNA, CO 525/61.
[66] This term appears in the witness testimonies in reference to those who participated in the uprising.
[67] Relying on Church of Christ Mary Bannister's diary, Shepperson and Price give a limited account of the colonial violence the uprising provoked. Chilembwe's co-conspirators were imprisoned, beaten, shot, and hung. It has also been argued that the forms of British colonial surveillance and control took their inspiration, in part, from how responses to the uprising were cobbled together hastily and across ad hoc colonial communications and inquiries. George Shepperson and Thomas Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, University of Edinburgh. Edinburgh University Publications History, Philosophy, and Economics (Edinburgh, Scotland: University of Edinburgh Press, 1958). See also Mwase and Rotberg, *Strike a Blow and Die: The Classic Story of the Chilembwe Rising*.
[68] MNA, 86/ZOM/2/8/9, Hetherwick to Murray, March 17, 1915. Alexander Hetherwick's correspondence of Blantyre Mission was very concerned that the Scottish missions represent themselves at the Commission as "It will be a big fight—they will make an effort to close all schools—primary as well as secondary as well. We have wild

wake of Chilembwe's uprising, oral traditions developed around his life and death. Some claimed he was not dead, but roaming across the Portuguese colonial border in today's Mozambique. Many waited for his reappearance, and some held that Malawi's first president, Hastings Banda, was Chilembwe's reincarnation.

John Chilembwe in Memory and Historiography

In memory, practice, and historical scholarship, Chilembwe has been upheld most consistently as a storied proto-nationalist and the father of Malawian independence. The earliest published study into the "long train of causes" of Chilembwe's uprising, George Shepperson and Thomas Price's 1958 publication, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, proved to be an influential contribution to Africanist historical scholarship writ large.[69] Shepperson and Price's level of transatlantic conceptual sophistication; use of African, American, and British sources; and historical empathy afforded to an African rebellion leader, written at a moment wherein the threads of colonial rule were unraveling with accumulating force, made an influential early contribution to then-nascent Africanist fields of study. Their analysis continues to offer a rigorous account of Chilembwe's resistance as a "small but significant link in the great chain of faith, hope, and tragedy…being forged in the Africa of the early years of this century."[70] The volume laid both methodological and interpretive groundwork for studies that followed in the fields of African political and social history.

The scope and depth of their study set the framework for the investigations that followed. Both

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beasts at Ephesus before us who are determined to over their own errors by this attack on the Missionary work of the Country…The atmosphere here is wild…So buckle on your armour."

[69] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 5.

[70] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 5.

D.D. Phiri and Landeg White utilize records unavailable to Shepperson and Price in the official archives of the Commission Inquiry (1916). D.D. Phiri argues in *Let Us Die for Africa* that Chilembwe's education in the United States, along with his goals of establishing and teaching in schools, elevated Chilembwe's vision for Black freedom and equality. Noting the dual sources that may have nourished both his educational projects and a pan-African vision—Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, respectively—Phiri suggests Chilembwe's educational program propelled his vision of African freedom, equality, and uplift. Chilembwe's transnational education made him restless with assertions of European superiority and set him on a course to wrest Black friends and colleagues from the colonial control—be it economic or spiritual—of missionaries, settlers, and colonial administrators.[71]

Landeg White's 1987 microhistory *Magomero* tells the story of two successive villages, one destroyed in 1863 and the other reconstructed on the site in 1901 by immigrants from Mozambique, which was the principal location of Chilembwe's uprising.[72] Intent on "unraveling…the long inheritance of Christianity, Civilisation and Commerce," White emphasizes the agency and complicity of British missionaries in land alienation, and oversimplifies missionary-colonizer in a binary collusion.[73] From a Marxist perspective, White interprets Chilembwe as the leader of proletarian resistance and analyzes the uprising as evidence of emergent class consciousness. While White's volume gives minor attention to the religious dynamics and history within the region, he deftly excavates the dynamics of migration across Nyasaland through trade, commerce, and conflicts that emerged between Mang'anja, Yao, Ngoni, Anguru, and colonial personnel.[74]

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[71] Phiri, *Let Us Die for Africa: An African Perspective on the Life and Death of John Chilembwe of Nyasaland*, 30.
[72] Landeg White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), xi, 83; xi.
[73] White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village*, 259. See also Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1990); Andrew Porter, *Religion Versus Empire?: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004).
[74] British, Portuguese, and German.

Written in the 1930s but unpublished until 1967, George Mwase's *Strike a Blow and Die* provided the first African perspective on the events of the uprising.[75] Born near 1880, of Tonga origins, and employed as a postal then tax clerk in the Government of Nyasaland, Mwase went on to found and preside over the Central Province Universal Native Association. Mwase, as historian Robert Rotberg discovered, was quite involved in Nyasaland politics, including colonial-era associations such as the Nyasaland African Congress. He even ran as a candidate for Malawi's United Federal Party in 1961, but was defeated by the Malawi Congress Party. Mwase died in 1962. He wrote some of the volume on Chilembwe while imprisoned for embezzlement at Zomba Central Prison from 1931-1932.[76] As Rotberg learned, very few records exist that mention Mwase, though he was an active figure in early nationalist organization and wrote consistently on behalf of African tenants, denouncing British plantation treatment as well as the colonial-era relocation of villages.[77]

Mwase's biography reveals his analysis of Chilembwe. Chilembwe, Mwase argues, intended to communicate the discontent about World War I felt across Nyasaland and toward White settlers' land alienation. Mwase interprets Chilembwe's actions symbolically, suggesting that Chilembwe rebelled violently in order to make a dramatic statement to "white Planters, Traders, and other white settlers" about the African working conditions.[78] Tellingly for Mwase's predicaments and aspirations relative to the period in which he wrote, he argues that Chilembwe "had no intention of rebelling against the Government itself."[79] The value of Mwase's contribution to extant literature includes his offering an African perspective regarding Chilembwe and his uprising penned only fifteen years after the uprising, as well as his writing in light of his political career in the Protectorate, while imprisoned in the location

[75] Robert Rotberg wrote the introduction to Mwase's published volume, including biographical data about which Mwase wrote very little. See Mwase and Rotberg, *Strike a Blow and Die: The Classic Story of the Chilembwe Rising*, xxxvi–xli.
[76] Mwase and Rotberg, *Strike a Blow and Die: The Classic Story of the Chilembwe Rising*, xliii.
[77] Mwase and Rotberg, *Strike a Blow and Die: The Classic Story of the Chilembwe Rising*, xxxviii.
[78] Mwase and Rotberg, *Strike a Blow and Die: The Classic Story of the Chilembwe Rising*, 29.
[79] Mwase and Rotberg, *Strike a Blow and Die: The Classic Story of the Chilembwe Rising*, 29. 29.

where Chilembwe's church members had been or were still held.[80] According to Mwase, Chilembwe is certainly the symbolic forerunner of movements toward political freedom and independence.

Robert Rotberg solidified the nationalist treatment in his 1965 *The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa: The Making of Malawi and Zambia* and his 1971 *Rebellion in Black Africa.* Rotberg later revised his 1965 symbolic nationalist martyr[81] thesis as he more fully developed a psychoanalytic approach to the nationalist argument. [82] He correlated Chilembwe's health problems[83] with emotional stress, further indicating that Chilembwe's close relationship with his mother bred his "aggression, ambition, hypersensitivity, and so forth."[84] Though Rotberg conceded that his assertions were merely speculative, he pressed his point by noting that Chilembwe's "own perception of reality had become unavoidably distorted and/or heightened…encouraging him to equate the outbreak of war with the imminence of existential doom…"[85] Rotberg speculated that the rebellion provided "psychic liberation"[86] in the midst of financial, health, and colonial pressures.

Reading across colonial time for nascent evidences of African political consciousness, historians of colonial Africa searched out how African communities challenged or countered

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[80] Mwase includes an entire chapter on the Zomba Central Prison, notably never touching on Chilembwe. He does note that the concept and words for prison and prisoner never existed in languages spoken in Malawi but were imported by slave and ivory traders from north of the region. He records that prisons and prisoners did not exist but that captives did; however, what captives meant and how they lived differs significantly from prisoners. In the chapter Mwase writes so as to correct perceptions of ill-treatment in the prison, claiming that prisoners are happy and their health is taken care of and they are not forced to work while ill. Since Mwase was writing three decades prior to independence, we may employ a hermeneutics of suspicion to his descriptions of the colonial prison, which is still operative today. See Mwase, 101-114.

[81] Robert I. Rotberg, *The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa: The Making of Malawi and Zambia, 1873-1964* (Harvard University Press, 1965), 85.

[82] Robert I. Rotberg, *"Psychological Stress and the Question of Identity: Chilembwe's Revolt Reconsidered," in Rebellion in Black Africa*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1971), 147; 154–58.

[83] Chilembwe purportedly suffered from asthma, one of the reasons he returned from America to Nyasaland.

[84] Rotberg speculates that Chilembwe was more than likely excessively and overly dependent on his mother. See Rotberg, *"Psychological Stress and the Question of Identity: Chilembwe's Revolt Reconsidered," in Rebellion in Black Africa*, 158.

[85] Rotberg, *"Psychological Stress and the Question of Identity: Chilembwe's Revolt Reconsidered," in Rebellion in Black Africa*, 163.

[86] Rotberg, *"Psychological Stress and the Question of Identity: Chilembwe's Revolt Reconsidered," in Rebellion in Black Africa*, 159.

European imperial sprawl. Chilembwe's uprising captured attention within this historiography not because of his resistance effort's ultimate effectiveness in blunting the terror of colonialism. Rather his uprising contributed to closer colonial scrutiny and surveillance of mission education, African religious leaders, and collaborations between African Americans and Africans. As primarily European historians began investigating the unraveling of colonial rule as well as interrogating biases in the study of African societies, considered to be ahistorical, rebellions such as Chilembwe's became visible as a common if differentiated phenomenon recurring across colonized African communities. His stood out however as unique in the landscape of resistance since he organized his under the covering of his mission church and as ordained clergy. Henceforth, his resistance was interpreted as evidence of emergent African political agency. While capturing the ingenuity of Africans who worked against the fabric of colonial rule, nationalist historians who investigated him and others diminish the role of religious discourse, experience, and narrative that filter through the cracks of colonial Christianity and African life for subjects under colonial rule.

The religious aspects of Chilembwe's work remained largely unaddressed or secondary until Jane and Ian Linden and historians of Malawian Catholicism levied the most substantive critiques to nationalist historiography in their 1971 article, "John Chilembwe and the New Jerusalem."[87] They argued that "the ideological content of Africans' religious beliefs has been given short shrift" and that "in contrast to the detailed consideration of the theological niceties involved in the politico-religious movements of Europe…those of African Christians are labelled

[87] Jane Linden and Ian Linden, "John Chilembwe and the New Jerusalem," *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 4 (1971): 629–51; See also Karen Fields' scholarship, which is an exception; her study focuses on Chilembwe's contemporary, Elliott Kamwana, and the Watchtower Movement. Nonetheless, her approach to religious motivation as rational is a compelling and instructive study. Karen E. Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997).

en bloc 'Christian revolutions.'"[88] Seeking to right this occlusion, the Lindens reread Chilembwe's context to reveal an "impending [sense of] catastrophe"[89] among different Christian groups. They argued that "revolutionary chiliasm" and "millenarian expectations"[90] informed the context of Chilembwe's uprising. The popular spread of millenarianism and its influence within Chilembwe's movement, they argued, thus far has been unexamined, as well as the place of religious ideology within historical perspectives on Chilembwe more generally. The Lindens argue that a plurality of religious and political motivations pulsing through the region at the time furnished energy to a cross section of communities who participated in Chilembwe's mission and uprising.

In his historical survey of church independency in Malawi, J. Chaphadzika Chakanza pays scant attention to Chilembwe in his construction of African independency, simply noting that Chilembwe founded the "first African-led independent church in Malawi."[91] Patrick Makondesa provides the most thorough examination of Chilembwe's Providence Industrial Mission, but his work's thematic concepts, which describe Chilembwe's methods or outlook as "pietistic," "social gospel," "Christianization," "ministry of justice," while helpful, do not fully account for a re-envisioned theatre of Black Atlantic life and experience.[92]

Complementing the numerous historical studies of Chilembwe and Providence Industrial Mission but directing analysis in a refreshingly theological direction, activist-theologian Thandi

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[88] Linden and Linden, "John Chilembwe and the New Jerusalem," 629–30.
[89] Linden and Linden, "John Chilembwe and the New Jerusalem," 647.
[90] iLinden and Linden, "John Chilembwe and the New Jerusalem," 634.
[91] See Kenneth R. Ross, "Malawian Christianity: Shall We Tell the Whole Story?" *Religion in Malawi* No. 7 (April 1997): 30-39; J. Chaphadzika Chakanza. 1994. "The Independency Alternative: A Historical Survey." *Religion in Malawi* No. 4 (February): 32-42, 33. Kenneth R. Ross, "Malawian Christianity-Shall We Tell the Whole Story?," *Religion in Malawi*, no. No. 7 (November 1997): 30–38; J. Chaphadzika Chakanza, "The Independency Alternative: A Historical Survey," *Religion in Malawi* No. 4, no. February (1994): 33.
[92] Thandi Soko, *Black Theology and the Pre-Independence Providence Industrial Mission: The Influence of Black Liberation Theology on the Development Work of the Providence Industrial Mission during the Malawian Colonial Era* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2010).

Soko-de Jong focuses her brief but notable study by examining the relationship between Providence Industrial Mission, Chilembwe, and the aim of development which she defines as "the struggle towards the expansion of real freedoms that people enjoy."[93] Soko-de Jong argues that in Chilembwe's pursuit of development, or "the expansion of real freedoms," he "espoused an early form of Black liberation theology" given the British colonial use of "racially discriminatory policies as a tool of social dominance through economic control."[94] Soko-de Jong argues that the work of Providence Industrial Mission was relevant to "both the ecclesial and socio-political spheres of colonial Malawi prophetically, through Black liberation theology."[95] Aspects of Soko-de Jong's study prove quite insightful even as her use of Black liberation theology falters conceptually in analytically anachronistic ways. The study, while well-conceived, is far too brief to develop her arguments toward their full import. These criticisms noted, Soko-de Jong produced the one study, in any form, to be written in over a decade that takes Chilembwe's contribution to theological innovations seriously.

Centenary observations of Chilembwe's uprising in 2015 generated a spate of new investigations and have resuscitated debates regarding Chilembwe's legacy. Historians prior to this new scholarship treated Chilembwe as forerunner to the African, and specifically Malawian, nationalist cause that emerged through nation-building politics in post-World War II colonized Africa. Scholars over the last seven years have actively interrogated this historiography, not by dismissing the nationalist potential but by reinvigorating it through analysis of Chilembwe's religious consciousness, vision, and motivations.[96] John McCracken asserts in *History of Malawi*

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[93] Soko, *Black Theology and the Pre-Independence Providence Industrial Mission*, 2.
[94] Soko, *Black Theology and the Pre-Independence Providence Industrial Mission*, 3–4.
[95] Soko, *Black Theology and the Pre-Independence Providence Industrial Mission*, 5.
[96] Scholars have also focused on recovering the life and contributions of John Chilembwe's wife, Ida Chilembwe, prior to her death in 1918/19; artistically depicting Chilembwe's pivotal role in British imperial history; suggesting possible research trajectories, particularly in regards to some of his closest colleagues. See for example the following Bamford et al., "The 1904 Registrations at the Blantyre Registrar's Office of the Marriages of Pastor John

that Chilembwe should be remembered more as prophetic than as a nationalist.[97] Jack Thompson argues that the religious mythology that inspired Chilembwe's uprising as well as mission has been muted in light of what, he implies, are ongoing racist treatments of African Christians as nontheological.[98] In sum, the last decade and a half of Chilembwe studies, in tandem with newly recovered or published primary sources, indicates that scholars utilizing new approaches to lingering questions regarding Chilembwe have more than reopened questions about his legacy across fields of religious studies, history, and theology.

The Transnational Study of Intercultural African Christianity and Black Christian Nationalism

Reenergized discussions of Chilembwe occur in a period when careful articulations of world Christianity as an approach to the study of Christianity, as well as related reevaluations of the historical study of African Christianity, are unfolding.[99] Historians David Maxwell and Joel

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Chilembwe and the Reverend Landon Cheek"; David Stuart-Mogg, "NOTES & QUERIES - a Footnote to the Battle of Karonga, 1914," *The Society of Malawi Journal* 61, no. 1 (2008): 51–53; David T. Stuart-Mogg, "The Identification of John Chilembwe's Body and Its Secret Burial," *The Society of Malawi Journal* 61, no. 2 (2008): 42–50; Stuart-Mogg, "Ida Z. Chilembwe – Pioneer Nyasa Feminist"; David Stuart-Mogg, "The Chilembwe Rising and William Emberson: An Unpublished Missionary's Account," *The Society of Malawi Journal* 72, no. 2 (2019): 16–29; David S. Bone, "Chilembwe Revisited: A Report on a Symposium to Mark the Centenary of the Chilembwe Rising in Nyasaland in 1915 Held at New College, University of Edinburgh, 7 Th February 2015," *The Society of Malawi Journal* 68, no. 1 (2015): 3–10; David Stuart-Mogg, "Some General Observations on John Chilembwe's Family and Progeny and the Circumstances of His Death and Secret Burial: A Paper given by David Stuart-Mogg at the Chilembwe Revisited Symposium, Edinburgh University, 7thFebruary 2015," *The Society of Malawi Journal* 68, no. 1 (2015): 54–63; Paul Cole-King, "Letter to John Chilembwe," *The Society for Malawi Journal* 54, no. 1 (n.d.): 1–21; David Stuart-Mogg, "FREDERICK NJILIMA (GRESHAM) M.M," *The Society of Malawi Journal* 60, no. 1 (2007): 23–30; David Stuart-Mogg, "FREDERICK NJILIMA, M.M.: AN UNLIKELY AFRICAN HERO OF THE WESTERN FRONT," *African Research and Documentation* 128, no. 128 (2015): 37–45, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305862X00023505.

[97] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 140.

[98] Thompson argues in conclusion that "One would have to add, however, that though [Chilembwe was] concerned with political, racial and colonial matters, many of these issues were at heart essentially theological." T. Jack Thompson, "Religion and Mythology in the Chilembwe Rising of 1915 in Nyasaland and the Easter Rising of 1916 in Ireland: Preparing for the End Times?," *Studies in World Christianity* 23, no. 1 (March 21, 2017): 51; 64–65.

[99] Regarding ongoing evaluations and reevaluations of "world Christianity" as an approach, field, theological method, or theoretical framework in the study of Christianity, notably gathered frequently in edited or collaborative volumes, see for example Raimundo Barreto, *World Christianity as Public Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017); Jehu Hanciles 1964-, ed., *World Christianity: History, Methodologies, Horizons* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021); Adrian and Ciprian Burlacioiu Hermann, "Introduction: Klaus Koschorke and the 'Munich School' of Perspective on the History of World Christianity," *Journal of World Christianity* 6, no. 1 (2016): 4–27; Klaus Koschorke, "Transcontinental Links, Enlarged Maps, and Polycentric Structures in the History of World

Cabrita, for example, argue that the first generation of world Christianity scholars Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh, as well as Kwame Bediako, "[emphasized] indigenous agency and local cultural appropriations of Christianity" because they were "indebted to formative experiences on the independence-era African continent in their turn to the local and to the particular in their understanding of world Christianity."[100] Namely, culture in each scholar's corpus and conceptualization of world Christianity was the lens or resource through which Christianity needed to be best expressed and legible and therefore studied in an era of postcolonial Christian growth.[101] As Cabrita and Maxwell summarize, this first significant generation of world

Christianity," *Journal of World Christianity* 6, no. 1 (2016): 28–56; Jehu J. Hanciles, "The Black Atlantic and the Shaping of African Christianity, 1820-1920," in *Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity/Polyzentrische Strukturen in Der Geschichte Des Weltchristentums, Studien Zur Aussereuropäischen Christentumsgeschichte (Asien, Afrika, Lateinamerika)*, ed. Klaus Koschorke and Adrian Hermann (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014); Klaus Koschorke, "New Maps of the History of World Christianity: Current Challenges and Future Perspectives," *Theology Today* 71, no. 12 (2014): 178–91; David Daniels III, "Reterritorizing the West in World Christianity: Black North Atlantic Christianity and the Edinburgh Conferences of 1910 and 2010," *Journal of World Christianity* 5, no. 1 (2012): 102–23; Joel Cabrita, Maxwell, David, and Wild-Wood, Emma, eds., *Relocating World Christianity: Interdisciplinary Studies in Universal and Local Expressions of the Christian Faith*, Theology and Mission in World Christianity, VOLUME 7 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2017); Martha Theodora Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy, eds., *World Christianity: Methodological Considerations* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2021); Bidegain, Ana Maria, "Rethinking the Social and Ethical Functions of a History of World Christianity," *Journal of World Christianity* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 88–119; Dale T. Irvin, "What Is World Christianity?," in *World Christianity: Perspectives and Insights: Essays in Honor of Peter C. Phan*, ed. Peter C. and Jonathan Y. Tan Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 3–26; Dale T. Irvin, "World Christianity: An Introduction," *Journal of World Christianity* 1, no. 1 (2008): 1–26; Paul Kollman, "Understanding the World-Christian Turn in the History of Christianity and Theology," *Theology Today* 7, no. 2 (2014): 164–77; Arun W. Jones, ed., *Christian Interculture: Texts and Voices from Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021); Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

[100] Cabrita, Maxwell, David, and Wild-Wood, Emma, *Relocating World Christianity*, 19. For examples of the literature that Cabrita and Maxwell reference see Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Cumbria, UK: Regnum Books, 1999); Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995); Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed., no 42 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009); Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

[101] On the emergence of Christianity as a statistically, theologically, and historically important faith tradition in formally colonized contexts, especially throughout the continent of Africa, see for example out of a vast literature Dana L. Robert, "Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24, no. 2 (April 2000): 50–58; Dana Lee Robert, "World Christianity as a Women's Movement," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 30, no. 4 (October 2006): 180–88; Brian Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018); Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*.

Christian scholarship and the formative scholars' direct ties to African experience and history led to a privileging of the study of Christianity's movement across languages and cultures.

Taken together, this first generation of world Christianity scholars critiqued any expression of Christianity that elevated one linguistic or cultural expression as normative or universal above another. Bediako, Walls, and Sanneh considered the multiplicity of both language and cultural forms on the African continent as making possible the pluralizing and "unexpected" widespread practice of Christianity on the continent in the post-independence era.[102] For each scholar, insofar as African languages and religious traditions serve as the substructure of Christian theology and practice, resonance with and endurance of African traditions and religious cultures is possible through Christianity; therefore in practice, it is a localized religion.

Maxwell and Cabrita do not dismiss this scholarship but rather interrogate how world Christianity scholarship reflects this conceptual inheritance in being "largely invested in studying how Christians imprint local concerns upon a universal faith, rather than how a universal faith provides a basis for imagined and actual solidarities between highly divergent believers across the world."[103] Their observations join with German historian Klaus Koschorke's global connective approach to world Christianity studies, which underscores the globalizing context and connections that make Christianity a world religion. Koschorke cultivates keen attention to the global strands of Christianity beyond the current global phenomenon of twentieth and twenty-first century demographic shifts and growth. He has emphatically argued that in contrast to what

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[102] Scott W. Sunquist, *The Unexpected Christian Century: The Reversal and Transformation of Global Christianity, 1900-2000* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015).
[103] Cabrita, Joel and Maxwell, David, "Introduction: Relocating World Christianity," in *Relocating World Christianity: Interdisciplinary Studies in Universal and Local Expressions of the Christian Faith*, ed. Joel Cabrita and Maxwell, David (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 1–44., 21.

can become a limiting contemporary interpretive lens, "the Christian movement, from its very beginning in the first and second centuries, has defined itself as a community transcending the barriers of geography, language, ethnicity, and culture."[104]

To this end, Koschorke prioritizes interpreting the histories of Christianity through polycentric structures, transregional links, and "multidirectional transcontinental interactions" in order to write comparative and connective histories of the religion.[105] He enlarges and reconceives of global maps of exchange and encounter to engender perceiving local, regional, and denominational Christianity "as part of a greater whole."[106] In other words, Koschorke's model interprets Christianity as a global religion that is connected across local and regional expressions. Writing global connective histories accounts for multiple centers, multiple actors and "indigenous initiatives, and local appropriations of Christianity."[107] Further, he proposes that comparative analysis both refines "the profile of specific regional developments" as well as "identif[ies] overarching trends and issues…for an 'integrated'" knowledge of history of Christianity.[108] Thus, Koschorke does not sacrifice the margins to global comparisons nor to new

[104] Klaus Koschorke, 2016, "Transcontinental Links, Enlarged Maps, and Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity." *Journal of World Christianity* 6 (1):28-56, 32.
[105] Koschorke, "Transcontinental Links, Enlarged Maps, and Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity," 29.
[106] Koschorke, "Transcontinental Links, Enlarged Maps, and Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity," 32.4/26/2023 10:56:00 PM
[107] Koschorke, "Transcontinental Links, Enlarged Maps, and Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity," 34.
[108] For examples of the possibilities to which Koschorke gestures see Jehu J. Hanciles, *Migration and the Making of Global Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2021); David F. Lindenfeld, *World Christianity and Indigenous Experience: A Global History, 1500-2000* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021) Hanciles utilizes the lens of migration to produce a sweeping history of the centuries of Christian growth. Lindenfeld explores a variety of "vocabulary of strategies" to detail the range of engagements with Christianity from the emergence of a world system in 1492 through until the present. Both illustrate the possibilities as well as limitations of such sweeping, interpretive global histories of people's lived experience. On the utility of using globalization in approaches to social history see Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014).

maps with fixed centers, but makes sense of local and regional histories in light of larger connections and exchanges.

As global, connective, and comparative studies of world Christianity have emerged in third generation approaches in the study of the faith and African Christianity specifically, scholars of world Christianity increasingly point to a historical facet of Christianity little examined—namely, interculturality or intercultural pluralism. Historian Arun Jones argues that Christian communities have always interacted and communicated with one another in history and practice in their development Christian identities, practices, and communities. As he elaborates, Christian communities have agreed and shared with, borrowed from, committed to, and "made concerted efforts" to communicate with other Christian communities. Such intentional "interaction and intercommunion" across Christian communities "has led to both severe disagreements and deep intercommunion between different incarnations of the Christian faith."[109] Such disagreements and intercommunions have resulted nonetheless interculturality as characteristic of Christian traditions.

In addition to interculturality being a "vital" and to some extent expected dimension of Christian self-understanding, Jones further elaborates that intercultural Christianity emerges as Christian communities consistently and historically draw upon a range of traditions, "conceptual worlds," and "other ritual and social practices" as they generate their own Christian identities and self-expressions."[110] As Jones further notes, Christians across time and space have developed "polyvalent identities" as well as Christian traditions embedded in "more than one religious tradition, more than one culture, and more than one social location."[111] Such identities and

[109] Jones, *Christian Interculture: Texts and Voices from Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, 2.
[110] Jones, *Christian Interculture: Texts and Voices from Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, 2.
[111] Jones, *Christian Interculture: Texts and Voices from Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, 9.

communities emerge through local negotiations, intercontinental and intracontinental encounters, struggles, and exchanges and "could lead to unexpected allegiances and resistances, as well as interesting confluences and divergences."[112] I draw upon these insights and conceptualization of interculturality in order to underscore that no Christian missionary, leader, or community develops in isolation from other Christians and communities. I also draw upon these insights throughout the project to draw readers' attention to the historical reality that the creation of new Christian identities communities is always predicated on creative recontextualization and thus change is expected and idiosyncrasies abound in theology and in practice.[113]

Transnational, and global, studies of African Christian history that attend to both earlier iterations of cross-cultural and recently investigated intercultural characteristics of Christian identities and communities have been slow to emerge within a re-envisioned landscape of world Christian scholarship, with the notable exception of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal studies.[114]

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[112] Jones, *Christian Interculture: Texts and Voices from Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, 10.

[113] On this point, see for example Kenneth Mills, "Ocaña's Mondragón in the 'Eighth Wonder of the World,'" in *Christian Interculture: Texts and Voices from Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, ed. Arun W. Jones (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021), 132.

[114] On transnationalism in Pentecostal and migration studies see for example André Corten and Ruth A. Marshall, *Between Babel and Pentecost : Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001); Frieder Ludwig and J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Christian Presence in the West: New Immigrant Congregations and Transnational Networks in North America and Europe* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2011). On transnational and global historical concepts and sources consulted in the writing of this project see C. A. Bayly, "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History," *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (December 2006): 1441–64; Thomas J. Csordas, *Transnational Transcendance : Essays on Religion and Globalization* (Berkeley: Berkeley : University of California Press, 2009); Peter G. Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics : Reimagining the Umma* (London ; New York: London ; New York : Routledge, 2001); Valentine M. Moghadam, *Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Todd Shepard, "Making French and European Coincide: Decolonization and the Politics of Comparative and Transnational Histories," *Ab Imperio-Studies Of New Imperial History And Nationalism In The Post-Sovi*, no. 2 (2007): 339–60; Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins, eds., *Black Experience and The Empire* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004); Antoinette M. Burton and Tony Ballantyne, *World Histories from Below: Disruption and Dissent, 1750 to the Present* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016) see especially "The Persistence of othe Gods"; James Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 11, 12 Matory asks the provocative question, "What would a culture look like, and how would an ethnography look, if we attended consciously to the transnational processes that have constantly informed the meanings and motives of its participants?" He questions the "loyalty" of citizens and subjects to territorialized places. He further argues for an investigation of mutually reinforcing processing that occur between "local meaning and transnational context."; Françoise Lionnet and Shu-

Historians of African Christian communities and their diasporas, such as Charlotte Walker-Said and Jehu J. Hanciles, have begun carefully sketching out potential and fruitful research agendas to investigate Catholic and Protestant transnational religious networks as important conduits of ideas and nerve centers of globalizing religious and missionary consciousness.[115] A transnational turn with a focus on interculturality in historical studies of African Christianity has begun to develop robustly, even if slowly.

John Sensbach, Joel Cabrita, and Andrew Barnes each contribute significant historical and methodological insights into renarrating African Christianity as a transatlantic phenomenon. Sensbach pursues a biographical mode of inquiry to trace the transatlantic Moravian community formed between the West Indies (St. Thomas), Germany, and today's Ghana in his careful study of Rebecca Protten. A former slave born in 1718, Protten became a traveling evangelist and

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mei Shih, eds., *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005). In addition to African Christian literature, Africanist scholarship suffers an analogous dearth of global historical scholarship on Africa with exceptions as noticeable in the following important literature: W. E. B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part Which Africa Has Played in World History* (New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1947); Charles Piot, *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Donald R. Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa: A History of Globalization in Niumi, the Gambia*, 4th edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018); John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Howard W. French, *Born in Blackness : Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World, 1471 to the Second World War*, First edition (New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2021). The relevance of Africanist scholarship on the slave trades is debatable within this brief review of literature; where necessary, appropriate references will be made throughout the project. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that where the most robust transnational and global histories of African history have been attempted, the field of transatlantic slavery scholarship is among the most substantial. See for a brief example to indicate the breadth Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Boubacar Barry, Elisee Akpo Soumonni, and Livio Sansone, *Africa, Brazil, and the Construction of Trans-Atlantic Black Identities* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2008); Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585-1660* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Linda M. Heywood, *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Kristin Mann and Edna G. Bay, *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil* (Portland, OR: F. Cass, 2001).

[115] Jehu Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008); Hanciles, "The Black Atlantic and the Shaping of African Christianity, 1820-1920"; Jehu J. Hanciles, "'Africa Is Our Fatherland': The Black Atlantic, Globalization, and Modern African Christianity," *Theology Today* 71, no. 2 (2014): 207–20; Jehu J. Hanciles, ed., *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions: The Twentieth Century: Traditions in a Global Context*, vol. IV, The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019).

teacher in the Moravian Church who prompted a widespread religious movement in an evangelical tradition of revivalism.[116] Joel Cabrita reexamines Zionism in South Africa, a healing movement that spread throughout the Atlantic world across Black and White communities in North America and southern Africa. While the movement has diminished in size in the United States, it continues to serve as a sizable Christian healing movement in southern Africa.[117]

Andrew Barnes retraces a Black Atlantic discourse conducted among African Christians about the implementation of industrial education in colonial western and southern Africa. Historical debates have pitted Booker T. Washington's industrial education model as an accommodationist approach to racial equality against W.E.B. Du Bois's talented tenth ideal as a more radical approach to racial equality. Barnes, however, carefully examines African-edited and circulated newspapers between Africans in western and southern regions in order to locate debates and arguments "uttered by people who self-identified as Christians and who both wrote and read articles…in the pursuit of a Christian understanding of the world around them."[118] In their reading and writing, Barnes argues, African Christians asked questions and sought answers as to "what it meant to be black and Christian…when the intellectual edifice of Western civilization was rejecting the commensurability of those two qualities."[119] African adoption of industrial education during the colonial period as a means to establish African autonomy does not reflect the North American-oriented debates that juxtapose Washington and Du Bois.

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[116] Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).
[117] Joel Cabrita, *The People's Zion: Southern Africa, the United States, and a Transatlantic Faith-Healing Movement* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018).
[118] Andrew E. Barnes, *Global Christianity and the Black Atlantic: Tuskegee, Colonialism, and The Shaping of African Industrial Education* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2017), 10.
[119] Barnes, *Global Christianity and the Black Atlantic: Tuskegee, Colonialism, and The Shaping of African Industrial Education*, 10.

Barnes argues convincingly that African Christian discourse on race and Western missions, including their rejection, pre-dated social and political African contestations with the colonial state. Barnes follows the general arguments of African American religious historian Gayraud Wilmore, who wrote that "influences…circulated back and forth and generated quite early a spirit of incipient black consciousness and anti-colonialism more than a hundred years before what came to be known as the Pan-African movement against colonialism."[120] Concepts and practices that became some of the tools deployed to critique colonial frameworks of rule and sovereignty were first developed in the nexus of African American and African Christian exchange and encounter.

Religious discourse, Barnes argues, contained racial ideas and arguments about Christianity and Christian "civilization," Western missions, and colonialism that later fermented within decolonizing discourses and practices following World War II. Without accounting for the substantial religious discourses and debates between African American and African Christians and among African Christians themselves, Barnes shows that the picture of modern African Christianity's larger location and contribution to the religious, social, and political future of the continent is incomplete. The Black Atlantic did not merely teem with humanistic ideas about racial uplift. Its waves washed ashore ideas about divine history, sacred humanity, and race that came bottled in Christian-inspired thought and practice.[121] The emergence of Black

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[120] Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, 3rd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 126.

[121] On this point, Brian Stanley brought to my attention that at the 1910 World Missionary Conference, an undocumented and back door set of meetings were held amongst African Americans participating in the conference, including Lewis Jordan, one of Chilembwe's mentors. Given that only one known African participated, Mark Casely Hayford, the African diasporic dimension of Edinburgh conversations illustrates what Gilroy refers to as the "partially hidden public sphere" or "hidden sphere" of Black Atlantic cultures which will be discussed in Chapter 1. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 38, 105.

Christian Nationalism was one such movement that transpired and appealed in thought and practice to Africans moving between spaces and homelands.[122]

As a variegated movement argued to have antecedents in the American Revolutionary period and reaching its apex from 1850 to 1925, Wilson J. Moses defined classical Black nationalism as "the effort of African-Americans to create a sovereign nation-state and formulate an ideological basis for a concept of a national culture."[123] He further elaborated that the movement's "essential feature…is its goal of creating a black nation-state or empire with absolute control over a specific geographical territory, and sufficient economic and military power to defend it," what amounts to in the end being a "conservative ideology."[124] Thus, Black nationalism, he argued, developed as a racialist construct to address the terror, exclusions, and lack of freedom experienced among Black communities within a nation-state as an "adaptation to social environments" of White supremacy.[125]

Black nationalism was then nourished most significantly in the experiential soil of post-Reconstruction United States among Black American communities disenfranchised from the full rights of American citizenship. Grappling with the continuing oppressions of post-slavery and heightening White supremacist violence in post-Reconstruction North America, African

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[122] On homelands as "global black collectivity" relative to Black Atlantic experience see Angel Evans, "From David Walker to John Chilembwe: Global Black Collectivity as Resisting Race and Affirming Culture," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (2022): 311–22.

[123] Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Classical Black Nationalism: From the American Revolution to Marcus Garvey* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1996), 2. On Black nationalism literature see as consulted Eddie S. Glaude, *Is It Nation Time?: Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002); William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Tunde Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1998).

[124] Moses, *Classical Black Nationalism: From the American Revolution to Marcus Garvey*, 2, 11.

[125] Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), 25.

diasporic communities circulated ideas, texts, and practices to promote the equality of and secure freedom for Black communities peopling the Atlantic basin.

Wilson J. Moses' definition and historicization are useful in capturing Black nationalism's entanglement in White ideology, as a resisting response to its terror. However, Eddie Glaude argues that antecedents to Black nationalism can be located in the biblical typology of Exodus and thus that "nation is imagined not alongside religion but precisely through the precepts of black Christianity."[126] Glaude moves readers toward religious historian Tracey Hucks's intervention, wherein she argues that "black nationalism was never exclusively about seeking self-determination and territorial autonomy."[127] She contends that "at its root" Black nationalism "attempts to respond to racial alterity, the systematic devaluing of Black humanity, and the disciplined efforts 'in pathologizing the religious experiences of blacks.'"[128]

Instead of a territorial framework or conservative ideology, Hucks argues in her study of Yoruba traditions for a conception of Black nationalism that is religious, with an origin that "presumes as its starting point the normalcy, and not the aberration, of blackness and argues for its theological integrity and sacredness."[129] Religious nationalism emerges, then, out of the work among African diasporic communities to "reclaim ultimate human worth, meaning, and transubstantiality with the divine" against "social definitions of blackness as a 'negatively marked reference.'"[130]

Similarly, but relative to Protestant Christian traditions, historian Adele Oltman describes Black Christian Nationalism's emergence in Savannah, Georgia, and the southern United States

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[126] Eddie S. Glaude, *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 6.
[127] Tracey E. Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions & African American Religious Nationalism* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), 27.
[128] Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions & African American Religious Nationalism*, 27.
[129] Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions & African American Religious Nationalism*, 27.
[130] Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions & African American Religious Nationalism*, 27.

generally, as a movement that developed at the nexus of spiritual and secular (economic) concerns. Oltman argues that "Black Christian Nationalism grew out of a spiritual space that although not territorial, was far from ethereal: it combined narrative constructions of collective identity with a materialist foundation and a Christian worldview."[131] Black Christian Nationalists, she contends, pursued "a utopian ideal that connected truth, communities of faith, and the world of business."[132] As a movement, Black Christian Nationalism reflected theological innovation relative to Black experience within a Protestant Baptist tradition; prophetic critique of American democracy as failing to deliver on its fundamental premises; and commitment to redeeming a material world, with all its peoples, Black as well as White, through economic development.[133]

My project integrates Hucks' interpretation of Black nationalism as a constructive and creative religious nationalism that embraces Blackness as sacred with Oltman's insight that Black Christian Nationalism integrated a spiritual, or sacred, outlook on Black life with materialist needs and aspirations. Their work guides my own intervention in calling attention to Chilembwe's work as revalorizing African peoples and lands as the terrain of divine call, initiative, and history enacted through African agents. Their work likewise informs my attention to material, social, and embodied practices as the means through which divine history would be realized by African Christians. In my project, then, I stretch and particularize Hucks' intervention to claim that Chilembwe preached and practiced an intercultural form of Christianity embodied as Black Christian Nationalism that in practice returned Africans to their central place

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[131] Adele Oltman, *Sacred Mission, Worldly Ambition: Black Christian Nationalism in the Age of Jim Crow* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 5. Throughout this project I follow Oltman's capitalization of Black Christian Nationalism and her use of lower case black nationalism in her monograph.
[132] Oltman, *Sacred Mission, Worldly Ambition: Black Christian Nationalism in the Age of Jim Crow*, 48.
[133] Adele Oltman, *Sacred Mission, Worldly Ambition: Black Christian Nationalism in the Age of Jim Crow* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 5–6.

in divine history, and thus established them as the primary actors creating and building their spiritual and material world and future.

To be clear, Hucks' analysis begins with African American experience of negated divine capacity in a context of religious anti-Blackness as she investigates the emergence of North American Yoruba traditions as a form of religious nationalism.[134] Oltman also begins with African American experience in Jim Crow-era Georgia as she details the intertwining concerns of spiritual redemption and economic welfare that promoted "a sacralized black business ethos."[135] My analysis begins with African Christian experience of European colonialism, which I define as historical phenomena that took form in cultural, structural, political, and economic practices and structures across time and space.[136] My analysis relatedly begins and contends with African Christian experience of what Latin American historian and theorist Walter Mignolo, drawing on Peruvian Anibal Quijan's work, defines as "coloniality," or a "colonial matrix of power."[137]

Mignolo contends that control of economy; authority; gender and sexuality; and knowledge and subjectivity characterize the colonial matrix of power. He further argues that racism, or in his and Madina Tlostanova's words, "the classification of human beings according to a certain standard of 'humanity,'" binds all four together.[138] Racism, they contend, "is a device

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[134] Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions & African American Religious Nationalism*, 27.
[135] Oltman, *Sacred Mission, Worldly Ambition: Black Christian Nationalism in the Age of Jim Crow*, 37.
[136] My definition expands on Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova's reference to colonialism as "specific sociohistorical configurations," such as "the Spanish and British empires' colonies in the Americas and Asia." Mignolo and Tlostanova, "The Logic of Coloniality and the Limits of Postcoloniality," 109.
[137] Both terms are consistent theoretical terms across Mignolo's corpus. See Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova, "The Logic of Coloniality and the Limits of Postcoloniality," in *The Postcolonial and the Global*, ed. Revathi Krishnaswamy and John C. Hawley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 111. Mignolo expounds upon coloniality as the twin emergence of imperialism and capitalism that thus correlates with worldwide, violent, and systemic extraction and appropriation of labor, life, and resources among colonized peoples.
[138] Mignolo and Tlostanova, "The Logic of Coloniality and the Limits of Postcoloniality," 111.

to deprive human beings of their dignity."[139] They are primarily concerned to show that the coloniality within which anti-colonial, postcolonial, and decolonial visions of human dignity are recast remains invisible in our history writing as a matrix, or in Mignolo's words, "wound," in contrast to "modernity," or that view of history that moves progressively forward and upward.

Reflecting both Hucks and Oltman's insights, this project understands "coloniality" broadly as a form of control that emerges through militaristic violence in the 1870s through 1880s and structurally and legally in the 1890s in the Shire Highlands. The project therefore examines the ways in which Chilembwe's missionary consciousness in a world of Black Atlantic encounter promoted his creative responses to such control.[140] Colonial matrices of power, I contend, historically diminish and ignore the divine and human capacity of Africans. My project shows how Chilembwe's encounter with Black Christian Nationalism, however, furnished religious narratives and concepts that he "creatively recontextualized" in thought and practice.[141]

I argue that through Chilembwe's material work of self-fashioning, gathering across kin, sartorial practices, and technologies of representation, Chilembwe internationalized Black Christian Nationalism as an African Christian movement to address colonial control of both spiritual and material aspirations. Furthermore, I show that Chilembwe understood that material practices asserting African equality and their role in divine history likewise made pronouncements about Africans as fully human and about the sacrality of their worlds.[142] Such pronouncements regarding Africans' humanity could upend the balance of coloniality and the

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[139] Mignolo and Tlostanova, "The Logic of Coloniality and the Limits of Postcoloniality," 112.
[140] Mignolo and Tlostanova, "The Logic of Coloniality and the Limits of Postcoloniality," 111.
[141] James A. Pritchett, "Christian Mission Stations in South-Central Africa: Eddies in the Flow of Global Culture," in *Christianity and Public Culture in Africa*, ed. Harri Englund (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011), 32.
[142] See for example, Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer, eds. "Introduction," in *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality.* New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2013, 6; Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997); Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? : African Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013).

exercise of imperial power. African Christians like Chilembwe found promise in Black Christian Nationalist discourses that promoted a doctrine of uplift predicated on asserting Africans' humanity and divine capacity, even while denigrating African cultural and ritual heritage.

To that end, this study demonstrates that Chilembwe made and remade Black Christian Nationalism into a religious internationalist movement as a response to social and political control of African life. In so doing, he infused African Christian theology, life, and practice with a prophetic radicality pulsing throughout the Black Atlantic world. Grappling with Chilembwe's missionary vision as a Black Christian Nationalist sheds critical light on how African Christians recontextualized Black nationalist discourse and practice as African religious responses to colonial rule. However, the case for a Black Christian Nationalist rendering of Chilembwe's mission efforts in southern Malawi requires careful accounting if it is intended as a counter to a political nationalist framework of analysis.

First, I argue that Black nationalist movements contained sacred meanings and longings that the particularities of Black human experiences as shared across space, i.e., understood as global, count as meaningful and true human experience. Against the tides of political and imperial disenfranchisement, Black nationalist movements have historically upheld lived Black experiences as the grounds from which social, political, and intimate possibilities and relations that oppose exclusionary forms of gathering and practicing belonging might be constructed.

Black nationalists have implicitly or explicitly centered the sacredness of all Black life and history—wherever it may be located in time and space—as composed in the interior and intimate matrices of lived experience and stretched between continents. Written on the canvas of sacred history as a counter to, using Paul Gilroy's language, modes of discourse that reject lived

global Black experiences as human and valid within an imperial and colonial social imaginary, Black nationalism has been an unfolding, polycentric transnational religious movement.[143]

Black nationalism has also been one of the modes through which countercultures have been created to confront a world conditioned by the transatlantic slave trade, coloniality, racial capitalism, and Western missionary ethnocentrism. Within Black nationalist discourses, debates about community, racial uplift, and freedom were crafted and deeply informed by religious idioms and metaphors. As such, progenitors of Black nationalism put religious ideas, practices, and structures to work both against and within imperialist and nationalist projects to promote African liberation.

Black nationalist dimensions in the histories of transnational African Christianity, however, remain overlooked. Religious historian Gayraud Wilmore observes in *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* more generally that, "The nationalistic aspect of black religion in North America, Africa, and the Caribbean has been greatly neglected by scholars."[144] Wilmore addresses this oft-ignored dimension by treating Black religion as a radical movement within the Christian tradition. Wilmore argues that from inception of Black religious life in the Americas,

> notwithstanding elements of white evangelicalism in the mainstream black faith, there was from the beginning a fusion between a highly developed and pervasive feeling about the essentially spiritual nature of historical experience, flowing from the African traditional background, and a radical secularity related both to religious sensibility and to the experience of slavery and oppression. This fusion accounts for the most significant characteristics of black religion.[145]

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[143] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 37.
[144] Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, 160.
[145] Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, 24.

Out of this fusion emerged a radical tradition that Wilmore argues was an accident of Christian influence. The radical tradition that Wilmore argues "ebbed and flowed in black religion" was characterized by "the quest for independence from white control", "the revalorization of the image of Africa", albeit in terms entangled in White imaginaries of Africa as other, and accepted "protest and agitation as theological prerequisites for black liberation and the liberation of oppressed peoples."[146] This radical tradition called to African Christians as they encountered Black Atlantic Christians' forms and practice of the Christian faith as seeding the potential of ecclesial separation and theological dissent.

Throughout the project, I pay attention to the ways in which Chilembwe's creative recontextualization and internationalization of Black Christian Nationalism always occurred as he lived and moved across multiple worlds. Inhabiting the Shire Highlands, divine history, and the Black Atlantic world, Chilembwe's mission thus generated fragilities which were perhaps, in the end, the movement's unraveling.[147] Here I draw on Achille Mbembe's notion of "time as lived" to show over the course of the following chapters that Chilembwe inhabited an African society in a particular point in time that was entangled "in a complex order, rich in unexpected turns, meanders, and changes of course."[148] Historically, he was born into a mobile world of familial and social entanglements. Thus, Chilembwe moved over the span of his abbreviated lifetime as a free and "reflexive subject" between intersecting "multiplicity and simultaneities," generating "meaningful human expressions" through religious practice.[149] He did not pursue rehabilitating a buried or mythologized "African past" through religious practice but instead

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[146] Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, ix–x.

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[148] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 8.

[149] Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 6, 8.

envisioned and practiced African Christianity as a meaningful and constructive articulation of Africans' divine capacity to create their own futures.

As a participant in Black Atlantic religious discourses from the 1880s until 1915, Chilembwe understood himself as called by God to gather his people to be delivered from the evil that persisted through colonial rule. There is little evidence that he understood or asserted himself as a messiah or savior, but rather as a missionary called to invite his kin into a space, the ark, wherein the Divine Creator of all living things would protect and save them. He differs then from political nationalist leaders who emerged across post-World War II Africa, and especially in Malawi through the leadership of Hastings Banda.[150] Chilembwe understood himself as called to God's work, as evidenced across his lifetime, in the likeness of John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and in the likeness of Noah. To this end, he preached and practiced a Christian message that denounced evil, restored Africans' divine capacity to themselves, and provided an ark of safety to weather the storms and emerge in a new creation.[151]

In order to describe and analyze Chilembwe's missionary consciousness, I made what may be a surprising but to my mind necessary analytic and interpretive decision. This project does not treat Chilembwe's uprising in full and indeed only hints at its occurrence in the Afterword. Memories of Chilembwe are hemmed up in this important event as are the analyses that follow his bloody demise as a missionary and pastor. Crisis and chaos struck in the

[150] I did not spend significant time investigating Banda's cultivation of himself as deliverer. However, in correspondence consulted at Main Library, Edinburgh University in George Shepperson papers, the following was written from BTG Chidzero to Shepperson, dated January 5, 1959: Chidzero could not speak definitively to the connection between Chilembwe and Banda as Chidzero was not at airport when Banda returned to Nyasaland in 1958, so cannot speak to crowds' interpretation of Banda and any popular linking between the two. However, he goes on, "What I did say to Mr. Untermeyer was, however, that I had heard it said, half seriously I am afraid, that Dr. Banda was Chilembwe re-incarnated. The aura of Messiah around Banda's return must no doubt have contributed to this way of thinking. But I did not take the matter seriously at that time and did not therefore bother to probe into it. But there is doubtless some vague talk about it in some quarters in Nyasaland."

[151] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 27.

Nyasaland Protectorate in the immediate fallout of the uprising. The lynching of possible collaborators was hastily set in motion to stymie any potential influence of Chilembwe's remaining rebellious Christians. Colonial administrators and European missionaries alike demanded a Commission of Inquiry in order to both ascertain Chilembwe's potential motives and establish what parties might be at fault in neglecting warning signs of its clandestine organization. Indeed, few archival traces remain that indicate Chilembwe was considered a potential threat against British settlers or the colonial state; yes, rumors circulated but no action could be taken because evidence could not be found to corroborate the chatter.

The small but important uprising has not without reason occupied scholarly attention and interest, but the aims of my project differ such that the uprising fades as centrally important in this iteration of analysis and contribution. My project's aim is to bring under closer scrutiny the identities, cultures, and practices that Chilembwe drew upon and navigated as a participant in multiple missionary movements—black Atlantic, African, and to some extent European. Through the double lens of world Christianity and black Atlantic approaches in historical studies, I place interpretive focus on how Chilembwe named himself as a baptized Christian called as a missionary and clergy to his people in the context of imperial subjectivity, and fashioned a new religious community accordingly. His narrative is illustrative of a period in world Christian history in which African identities and African Christianity underwent significant construction due to a growing consciousness not only of contextual, i.e., local, concerns or European missionary influence, but additionally in relation to a broader world of Black Atlantic realities that took racialized form in colonial policies and settler practices.

In using world Christianity approaches, a black Atlantic framework, and postcolonial theory, my project shifts the analytic and interpretive gaze away from parsing potential causes of

an uprising and toward the complexity of Chilembwe's self-understanding and a mission created in light of the worlds colliding and comingling within himself. Simultaneously, this project interrogates the Black Atlantic world through a focus on its margins, geographically and otherwise. I find that the Black Atlantic is as much an ontological category as it is a historical reality, and so I position and analyze Chilembwe accordingly.

Project Outline

In chapter 1, I set out the conceptual terms in which I reconstruct a transnational history of African Christianity's emergence as an intercultural faith in the tradition of Black Christian Nationalism. This chapter reviews the vigorous debates and critiques that continue to revolve around the "Black Atlantic" as a concept. It investigates the extent to which the establishment of Christianity in modern Africa was fashioned by major strands of transatlantic religious exchange and ferment. In the end I argue that Black Atlantic religiosity augmented the ideology and practice of African Christianity at the turn of the twentieth century. Relatedly, I argue that Black Atlantic-conscious religious movements and aspirations thus influenced African encounters with Christianity during the colonial period, and that African theological responses and strategies of engagement, drawing on African aspirations and concerns, became, in turn, vital experiments in intercultural Christianity out of which were generated critiques of both African histories and colonial practices in the Black Atlantic world.

In chapter 2, I examine Chilembwe's missionary consciousness as an African Noah—a person who understood himself to be gathering a disparate people to be protected and rescued from evil. I show that the references to a biblical Noah elucidates how biblical sources and narratives embraced in a tradition of Black Christian Nationalism could inspire new visions of an Afrocentric Christianity, and even more, Afrocentric divine history.

In chapter 3, I explore how gendered images of "Africa" and African women that circulated in the Black Atlantic world intersected with Chilembwe's matriarchal culture of origin to influence his fashioning a public intercultural Christianity of paradoxes. I first establish that women were central to the vision of Chilembwe's African Christian mission and society building. To do so I examine a Black Atlantic image of Africa as suffering mother, his use and interpretation of scripture to prescribe dress for women, and the context within which each became practice. This chapter demonstrates that gendered notions of Africa in practice contributed to the intercultural formation of African Christianity that reflected the intersection of Black Christian Nationalist, Victorian, and African cultures.

In chapter 4, I argue that in the period of African Christian history from 1892-1915 in which Chilembwe ministered, ecclesial imaginaries emerged in contrast to customary, ethnic, or class imaginaries as a framework to reconstitute kin groups based in religious belonging and practice. Chilembwe's vision led him to establish Providence Industrial Mission across the borders of space, language, and social location. In so doing, he continued African practices of kin assimilation and implemented Black Christian Nationalist visions that correlated spiritual longings with materialist aspirations. Considering his larger purposes to lead a separate ecclesial community, "prophetic ministry" is the term that best describes the social dimensions of Chilembwe's ecclesial vision.

In chapter 5, I show that Chilembwe's mission was decidedly anti-colonial and in his capacity as a pastor-missionary, he critiqued colonial violence that took the form of war. I examine his protest World War I as an extension of his mission's radical prophetic ministry in a Black Christian Nationalist tradition. This chapter argues that Chilembwe's ministry is most aptly understood as a prophetic critique of colonial states of violence.

A Note on Terminology[152]

In writing a biographical and thematic treatment of Chilembwe—who lived, traveled, and ministered prior to the emergence of the nation-state Malawi as a political formation recognized under international law—my use of certain terminology throughout the project necessitates some warrant and explanation if the project's coherence and cogency is to be maintained conceptually as much as historically. First, I use *Nyasaland* or the *Nyasaland Protectorate* throughout the project to designate the land that was partitioned under colonial rule and claimed by the British Empire in 1891. I utilize this term for a twofold reason. "Malawi" as a nation-state and national identification is a derivative of "Maravi," the prior Kingdom that extended as far east as the Indian Ocean. It overlayed regions now quantified as parts of Mozambique, Malawi, and Zambia. The Kingdom disintegrated due to a complex of effects, including slave raids by groups living contiguously to the Kingdom (primarily Yao) and the intensification of slave trades due to European-driven global expansion of trade in enslaved Africans. By the colonial period, it was all but a memory. The language of Nyanja, one of Chilembwe's languages, was spoken in the region but through the process of nation-state building and national consolidation of a myriad of groups and identities, both Chinyajna and Chichewa officially became Chewa, or Chichewa, and is spoken by a significant percentage of Malawians, especially in the Central and Southern region.

Between the disintegration of the Maravi Kingdom and the crafting of a Malawian national identity, various religious visions and communities, political unions and federations became prominent vehicles through which Nyasaland's Africans organized to form a unified voice under the British colonial regime. During Chilembwe's lifetime and following, the region

[152] I am grateful to the external reader Tite Tiénou who urged the inclusion of this section to clarify nomenclature for my readers.

formerly known as the Maravi Kingdom was a land of migrating slave and ivory traders, agriculturalists, fisherwomen (and some men), and laborers. Chilembwe himself was a human product of the Maravi Kingdom heritage, slave trades, and migrations as the son of a Yao father and Mang'anja mother. Additionally, as will be evident in the project, he located himself as a subject within the British Empire and appealed to the British Empire's obligation to provide protections to Africans, covered in detail in chapter 5, as in his own words "our country which is known as Nyasaland."[153] Further, his work of "fashioning a people" and "gathering a people," practices treated in chapter 3 and 4 respectively, need to be understood in light of the colonial and somewhat liminal and temporary political configuration of the Nyasaland Protectorate. When I do reference or utilize *Malawi*, I do so to bring clarity to how I discuss peoples or land.

Second, I utilize the term *African* to refer to any group or individual that resides on the African continent during the period of this study. Throughout the project, I utilized *African* as a term to primarily refer to a collective, not to be conflated with identity, that can analytically hold together a myriad of differences when I write or describe generalities regarding religions, land, and most often, peoples. To utilize *indigenous* or *autochthones* introduces theoretical considerations into the project that are not germane to the project's aim. Namely, I do not establish a *particular* political or cultural sense of claim to land or place beyond the Black internationalist vision which I argue Chilembwe creatively recontextualized and which he in his own words expressed, as is later discussed.

Additionally, as anthropologist John Bowen argues, the use of *indigenous* or *indigenous peoples* "as a universal analytical framework" is weak when assumptions about what it purports

[153] Shepperson and Chilembwe, "A Major Chilembwe Letter."

to assert or describe are assumed rather than made explicit.[154] To that end, in terms of African historical scholarship as well as in reference to the last four hundred years of history in what is contemporary Malawi, use of either term obscures the historical reality that the nation-state Malawi, named Nyasaland during British colonial rule and overlaying in part the former Maravi Kingdom, is a land of agriculturalists and migratory peoples who intermarried, assimilated, and incorporated across groups frequently.

To use *indigenous* in this project enters an unnecessary fray of ongoing postcolonial political machinations that wield identities and language in tandem with claims to land and thus its resources in efforts to secure the more ontologically significant sense of belonging. Indigeneity to lay claim to origin in African contexts can and has spiraled out into the creation of what Derek Peterson calls "ethnic patriotisms" or into, as in the case of Rwanda, genocide. In such nation-states as Tunisia, Cameroon, and the Côte d'Ivoire, for some recent examples, the term indigeneity, or autochthony in francophone nations, has been correlated with language, religion, and/or skin color and weaponized to deny certain rights to internal and nationally external migrants as well as national citizens. In the case of Cameroon, the regionalized legacies of colonial language uses have been used to assert or deny autochthony, or indigeneity, and thus the protections afforded to citizens who speak English.

Nonetheless, as will be explored in chapter 3, *Africa* and *African* are external creations and used to name, to consolidate, and to essentialize. I use *African* to gesture toward anthropologist James Ferguson's question, "How does Africa as a vantage point to assess

[154] John R. Bowen, "Should We Have a Universal Concept of Indigenous Peoples Rights?: Ethnicity and Essentialism in the Twenty-First Century," *Anthropology Today* 16, no. 4 (2000): 12–16. John Bowen argues that the use of "indigenous peoples" should not be granted "universal legal privilege" but that "in certain regions and cases that concept has been, and presumably will continue to be, the most appropriate one for purposes of analysis and political struggle." See John R. Bowen, "Should We Have a Universal Concept of Indigenous Peoples Rights?: Ethnicity and Essentialism in the Twenty-First Century," *Anthropology Today* 16, no. 4 (2000): 12–16, 16.

globalization alter what we understand globalization to be?"[155] If Chilembwe understood himself as a missionary and ordained clergy in the liminal as well as regional space amidst shifting landscapes of kin formations and group identifications, who also employed imperial, national, ethnonymic, and pan-African self and group references, then Ferguson's question comes to light through his epistemic negotiations and peregrinations. Indeed, emic terms utilized for group description and self-definition during the period under examination is somewhat possible based on oral traditions or oral histories. Accessing emic group identification terms requires further work in additional languages with the research assistance of fluent contemporary speakers or readers in context, which the exigencies of a global pandemic prevented. This, I admit, is a weakness of the project, such that concessions have been made in the use of generalizing and etic terms such as *African*. However, I have worked to particularize histories, group or self-identification, and experience with ethnonyms, which I address next.

I use ethnonyms, or names of people or peoples' ethnic names, throughout this project, primarily in reference to Yao, Mang'anja/Nyanja, Ngoni, and Lomwe, groups who peopled the Shire Highlands where Chilembwe ministered but who also have entangled histories throughout the south central African region. Ethnonyms are names, but even more so, they are the linguistic building blocks of historical memory and the scientific evidence of how people describe themselves in the present in relation to the past.[156] Use of ethnonyms is not without challenges, such as transcription, but this project makes careful use of them as is helpful to describe and analyze Chilembwe's context.

[155] James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
[156] See *African Ethnonyms and Toponyms*, UNESCO, 1984.

Further on ethnonyms, I draw in part from Chilembwe's self-description as a Yao as well as from his contemporaries who wrote about him, such as George Mwase, who utilized ethnonyms to describe him and his parents. The use of ethnonyms also correlates with how they were used during the colonial period, as reflects primary and secondary source materials, extant records from Chilembwe's writings, and African and European witness testimonies in the *Voices of the Commission Inquiry*. To conclude, it is important to note that Malawi's cultural, political, and economic landscape today is more defined by region—northern, central, and southern—than by ethnonymic reference. The regionalized politics of Malawi's national life is not without problems in theory or in practice, but its relevance to this study in its current form is debatable.

Lastly, I use *African American* primarily to indicate those communities in the United States who trace their origins to the African continent via an ancestry of enslavement, have been racialized as Black, and are nationalized as American. I use *African diaspora* when being inclusive of Caribbean and South American communities in the relevant discussion. As will be evident in chapter 1, I utilize *Black* as an adjective to describe an entangled, intercultural, and racialized iteration of Atlantic history, discourse, and life, i.e., the Black Atlantic and Black Atlantic Christianity. I similarly utilize *Black* as an adjective to describe a form of religious nationalism and internationalism.

Chapter 1
Debating the 'Black Atlantic' and Its Significance for the Study of African Christianity

The World the Black Atlantic Created

Ships have crossed over the Atlantic Ocean's surface for centuries. Depending on the season, they glide across the Atlantic's calm waters or they and their cargo are caught up in churning waves and storms. The waters of the Atlantic have conducted and engulfed goods, ideas, and lives. On the Atlantic's waves, humans migrated and explored at the will and whim of kings, queens, courts, merchants and popes, as well as on their own initiative. Beginning in the fifteenth century, emissaries and religious leaders from the established Ethiopian Kingdom, Akan states, Kingdom of Kongo, and Zulu Kingdom made themselves at home in the halls of Iberian and Italian grandeur. Enslaved Africans were forced into service in those same political and social entities. Simultaneously, Iberian traders and missionaries negotiated ports of trade and established their work within and outside African empires and kingdoms.

Trading routes for enslaved humans and goods had long run throughout the Mediterranean world and traced aquatic fingers throughout the Indian Ocean world.[157] The Red Sea, Black Sea, and Sahara Desert were also established causeways for trade in goods and slaves. Overland circuits were prevalent in the Kingdoms of Mali and Songhai in the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, feeding enslaved individuals into various networks of trade. Having coursed as a central artery of migration, encounter, and trade in the fifteenth century, by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Atlantic increasingly became a conduit of enslaved Africans traded

[157] On the Indian Ocean trade see for example Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). On Africans' control of trade within an emerging world system see John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

and exchanged for guns, labor, gold, and raw materials on European and African continents. Then, the trade in enslaved Africans rapidly expanded into the Americas and Caribbean.[158]

The increasing and globalizing demand for sugar and other goods produced by enslaved African labor in the Caribbean and Americas spurred on the development of the transatlantic slave trade. Through a confluence of political, economic, and social forces from every part of sub-Saharan Africa, Africans were engulfed by the most dramatic, sustained, and devastating forced relocation of humans in recorded history. This trade in African lives was the "largest human migration to date" and the "first of the world's modern migrations," according to historian Paul Lovejoy.[159] The brutal enslavement and involuntary relocation and dispersal of Africans throughout the Atlantic world increased into the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. The trade in enslaved Africans reached its highest proportions by the eighteenth century as global cravings for sugar, cotton, and other goods, driven by a globalizing European trading system, likewise increased.[160] The trade transformed the Atlantic's borders and pathways into waterways of simultaneous terror and resilience; capital, goods, and humanity; enslavement, slavery and dogged pursuit of freedom.

The Atlantic is filled to this day with the histories of the slave trade and its refuse in extinguished human life and aspiration. It also pulses with the creative dreams and efforts of enslaved African peoples working to determine their futures as liberated from oppressive systems and practices. Some enslaved Africans entered the Atlantic's depths as a last defiant act

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[158] I understand African slavery as a historical and globally particular phenomenon that took brutal and racialized form in the transatlantic slave trade.

[159] The use of "migration" to describe the forced movement of enslaved Africans is a contested description. I utilize Lovejoy's nomenclature here that supports his larger argument he makes to indicate the dramatic proportions of the trade in enslaved Africans relative the formation of the modern era. See Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 3rd ed., 117 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 135.

[160] Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006)., Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*, 46.

of choosing, willing themselves a passage back to their homelands in hope that a watery grave would become a gateway of return. Other enslaved Africans were tossed casually into the Atlantic's wake, seen only as dead weight cargo filling ships' crawl spaces with the putrid scent of rotting flesh. Others traveled on in states of subjected labor to "make a way out of no way given."[161] Still others remained laboring on African coasts and in inland communities, assimilating into kin groups by whom they were captured.[162] Across often migratory communities and ensnared in multiple slave trades, those who lived free in African regions and societies gathered up—and at times abetted—the tatters of trades that ravaged coastal as well as hinterland polities on the African continent.

Europeans increasingly perceived Africans as the labor source through which wealth and power could be created and accumulated at minimal cost to European prestige and power due to emerging racist ideology. As an "idiom" to investigate human descent, "race was first used in a theistic context" to correlate human difference and similarity with divine origin and intention, according to Michael Banton.[163] Humans were understood to belong to one species that was internally differentiated. However, during the Enlightenment, Aristotle's *scalae naturae,* or great chain of being, was revised "in service of racial hierarchy" in which human difference was organized according to subspecies, or race.[164] Buttressed by early German, French, and Anglo schools of racial science and corroborated through racial readings of the Bible, Europeans increasingly began to perceive Africans with dark skin, who had traveled in the Atlantic world as free diplomats, religious scholars, and political and economic emissaries, as objects on which to

[161] This expression is part of from African American vernacular sayings.
[162] On the devastating political, economic, and social impacts of the slave trade and colonialism for African communities, see the pivotal contributions of Joseph Miller and Walter Rodney.
[163] Banton, Michael, "The Idiom of Race: A Critique of Presentism," in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, ed. Les Back and John Solomos, Routledge Student Readers (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 53.
[164]

prey.[165] Sociologist Joseph L. Graves argues that as intercontinental encounters increased in this same period, "changes in social institutions during the European Age of Discovery, and the subsequent colonial domination and enslavement of non-European populations, were responsible for the development of racist ideology" positing White-skinned Europeans as superior in knowledge and civilization.[166] Accordingly, numerous Europeans theorized Black Africans within a hierarchy of being as the last subspecies on a scale of racialized human difference, likened to beasts of burden created only for hard labor and subjection.

Displaced and enslaved Africans employed rituals, hidden materials such as seeds, and historical memory to generate communities of affinity that could replicate the diversity of their origins as well as hold and reflect the depth of their shared experiences of trauma.[167] While numerous European colonial communities came to be understood or defined by what they accumulated in the Americas and eventually what they claimed as their territory in Africa, the Americas and Caribbean, and parts of Asia, enslaved African communities in contrast came to be characterized by what they lost in the Atlantic's powerful wake—lives, memories, kin, generations.[168]

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[165] On "race-thinking" see for example Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of An Idea in the West* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996); Joseph L. Graves, *The Emperor's New Clothes: Biological Theories of Race at the Millennium* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Banton, Michael, "The Idiom of Race: A Critique of Presentism," 54.

[166] Graves, *The Emperor's New Clothes: Biological Theories of Race at the Millennium*, 23.

[167] On this point see for example Jason R. Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); Ras Michael Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012); John W. Catron, *Embracing Protestantism: Black Identities in the Atlantic World* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2016); Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, 1st Vintage Books Edition (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1984); Elizabeth Pérez, *Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions* (New York; London: NYU Press, 2016); Cécile Fromont, *Afro-Catholic Festivals in the Americas: Performance, Representation, and the Making of Black Atlantic Tradition* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019).

[168] Substantial and long-running debates concerning "African retentions" and "African discontinuities" have characterized the study of Black religions in the Caribbean and Americas. See "Death of the Gods" in Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*, Updated Edition (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 43–94 for a summary of the debates; by Dianne Stewart and Tracey Hucks'

More powerfully, these same communities with linguistically and culturally diverse origins have also been recalled by historians, religious studies scholars, and theologians for what their inheritors fashioned out of the refuse of memory, death, waste, and resources denied.[169]

intervention proposing transdisciplinary approaches in the study of African heritage religious cultures in the Americas. See Dianne M. and Tracey E. Hucks Stewart, "Africana Religious Studies: Toward a Transdisciplinary Agenda in an Emerging Field," *Journal of Africana Religions* 1, no. 1 (2013): 28–77.

[169] This literature is interdisciplinary, vast, and growing. For a sampling of literature consulted in the writing of this project see Simon Gikandi, "Introduction: Africa, Diaspora, and the Discourse of Modernity," *Research in African Literatures* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 1–6; Jeremy Braddock, *Paris, Capital of the Black Atlantic Literature, Modernity, and Diaspora* (Baltimore Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); John R. Chávez, *Beyond Nations: Evolving Homelands in the North Alantic World, 1400-2000* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Laurent Dubois and Julius Sherrard Scott, *Origins of the Black Atlantic* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010); Lucy Evans, "The Black Atlantic: Exploring Gilroy's Legacy," *Atlantic Studies: Tracing Black America in Black British Culture* 6, no. 2 (2009): 255–68, https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810902981308; Yogita Goyal, "Africa and the Black Atlantic," *Research in African Literatures* 45, no. 3 (Fall2014): v–xxv; Bénédicte Ledent and Pilar Cuder Domínguez, *New Perspectives on the Black Atlantic: Definitions, Readings, Practices, Dialogues* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2012); Beatriz G. Mamigonian, *The Human Tradition in the Black Atlantic, 1500-2000* (Lanham, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009); David Northrup, *Crosscurrents in the Black Atlantic, 1770-1965: A Brief History with Documents*, 1st edition. (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins, 2008); Nkiru Nzegwu and Isidore Okpewho, *The New African Diaspora* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009); Joseph R. Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996); James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); John Wood Sweet and Lisa A. Lindsay, *Biography and the Black Atlantic* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Sheila S. Walker, *African Roots/American Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001); Olabiyi B. Yai, "African Diasporan Concepts and Practice of the Nation and Their Implications in the Modern World," in *African Roots/American Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas*, ed. Sheila S Walker (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001); Michelle M. Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Michelle M. Wright, "Middle Passage Blackness and Its Diasporic Discontents: The Case for a Post-War Epistemology," in *Africa in Europe: Studies in Transnational Practice in the Long Twentieth Century*, ed. Eve Rosenhaft and Robbie Aitken (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2013); Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic," *African Affairs* 104, no. 414 (2005): 35–68; Robert F. Reid-Pharr, "Engendering the Black Atlantic," *Found Object* 4 (1994): 11–16; Deborah Gray White, "'Yes', There Is a Black Atlantic," *Itinerario* 23, no. 2 (1999): 127–40; Melissa Schindler, "Home, or the Limits of the Black Atlantic," *Research in African Literatures* 45, no. 3 (2014): 72–90, https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafrilite.45.3.72; Phillips, Caryl in Conversation with John McLeod, "Who Are You Calling a Foreigner?," in *New Perspectives on the Black Atlantic: Definitions, Readings, Practices, Dialogues*, ed. Bénédicte and Pilar Cuder-Domínguez Ledent (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2012), 275–94. For Black Atlantic literature and religion, see consulted works including Joanna Brooks and John Saillant, *"Face Zion Forward": First Writers of the Black Atlantic, 1785-1798* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2002); Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé*; James A. Noel, *Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Daniels III, "Reterritorizing the West in World Christianity: Black North Atlantic Christianity and the Edinburgh Conferences of 1910 and 2010"; Juan M. Floyd-Thomas, "Towards a Religious History of the Black Atlantic: Charles H. Long's *Significations* and New World Slavery," *Journal of Religious History* 42, no. 1 (March 2018): 3–24; Fromont, *Afro-Catholic Festivals in the Americas: Performance, Representation, and the Making of Black Atlantic Tradition*; Cedrick May, *Evangelism and Resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1760-1835* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008); W. Bryan Rommel-Ruiz, "Colonizing the Black Atlantic: The African Colonization Movements in Postwar Rhode Island and Nova Scotia," *Slavery & Abolition* 27, no. 3 (2006): 349–65; Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic*

Crafting new kin networks, rituals, and tactics for survival, Black Atlantic communities rejected a status of unfreedom and subjection. Rather than accepting abject humiliation and dehumanization, they innovated and crafted ideological, communal, and material means for the work of surviving and healing, resisting slavery in all its forms—ideological, social, psychological, spiritual, political, and economic—and reclaiming their denied humanity. Indeed, scholars have increasingly demonstrated that Black Atlantic communities and labor built the world which we now materially inhabit.[170] Scholars have also shown that Black Atlantic communities adopted, disrupted, utilized, adapted, and in fact changed the course of European-derived ideological, aesthetic, and religious trajectories. Through the insights and innovations generated to counter a world made through human domination and subjection, Black Atlantic communities expressed affinity and ideological innovation through other modes of self-determination and kin formation.

The Black Atlantic as Conceptual Framework

The concept of the "Black Atlantic" was first explicitly coined by art historian Robert Thompson in *Flash of the Spirit* (1984). In an investigation of artistic and philosophical forms that he located throughout the Atlantic world, Thompson traced the appearance and circulation of African aesthetic forms, namely in the Caribbean and Americas, to establish African cultural continuities in the then-termed New World. He theorized his empirical findings as new

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World (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Brandi Suzanne Hughes, "Middle Passages: The Redemption of African America through the African Mission Field, 1862–1905" (Ph.D., New Haven, CT, Yale University, 2009); David Killingray, "The Black Atlantic Missionary Movement and Africa, 1780s-1920s," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33, no. Fasc. 1 (February 2003): 3–31; Pérez, *Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions*; Alphonso F.I. Saville, IV, "The Gospel According to John Marrant: Religious Consciousness in the Black Atlantic, 1755-1791" (Ph.D., Ann Arbor, MI, Emory University, 2017); James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York: New York : Oxford University Press, 1995); J. Mutero Chirenje, *Ethiopianism and Afro-Americans in Southern Africa, 1883-1916* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

[170] See French, *Born in Blackness : Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World, 1471 to the Second World War*.

philosophical and aesthetic traditions, the repositories of African cultural memory and practice contributing to the modern emergence of a Black Atlantic world.[171] According to Thompson, African communities who derived their origins from among West African Yoruba, Bakongo, Fon, Ewe, Mande, and Ejagham peoples, passed down aesthetic and philosophical memories and cultures in material form, including but not limited to architecture, dance, and art.[172]

Thompson's reconstruction of the Black Atlantic showed that West Africans were active agents in the intellectual and material creation of Atlantic cultures. For example, he argued that Vodun as practiced in Haiti "is one of the signal achievements of people of African descent in the Western Hemisphere: a vibrant, sophisticated synthesis of traditional religions of Dahomey, Yorubaland, and Kongo with an infusion of Roman Catholicism."[173] In order to establish such claims, Thompson recognized and drew upon African traditional religions and African-derived spiritualities as integral dimensions of Black Atlantic creativity and aesthetics. In so doing, Thompson confronted Eurocentric relegation of African religious traditions and practices to the realm of "primitivism."

In addition to reconstructing Atlantic aesthetics as African in origin and achieved through a "sophisticated synthesis" of religious sources and practices by African agents, Thompson captured the centrality of female experience, power, and contributions within African religious and moral epistemologies.[174] One of the singular and compelling contributions of *Flash of the*

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[171] See Dianne M. and Tracey E. Hucks Stewart, "Africana Religious Studies: Toward a Transdisciplinary Agenda in an Emerging Field," *Journal of Africana Religions* 1, no. 1 (2013) for an update of this debate in the field of Africana religious studies.
[172] Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, 104 165, for example.
[173] Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, 163.
[174] See Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, 68–72; as he describes Nana Bukúu as "the grand ancestress of all the Yoruba-derived deities of the pantheon of the Fon" and the role of women as priestesses; 176, on Dahomean Fon's highest deity Mawu-Lisa, a combination of male and female aspects; 230-244, for detailed treatment on the Ejagham females of Calabar and their being "traditionally considered the original bearer of civilizing gifts" and their role in the moral field of religious practice..

Spirit establishes that the practice of African spirituality centers women as providing moral leadership and spiritual discernment within newly synthesized Black Atlantic religious traditions. Contradicting discourses and arguments that rendered African women as silent, helpless, or victims within West African societies stereotyped as patriarchal, Thompson's careful excavation of origins, sophisticated synthesis, and women's central importance in Black Atlantic aesthetic and philosophical cultures established a precedent for the task of reclaiming a world of Black Atlantic-making in which women's work was pivotal.

Thompson's volume altered the field of art historical scholarship, but the conceptual contribution of the "Black Atlantic" to other disciplines appears somewhat limited. In 1993, Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* proposed the "Black Atlantic" as a theory of modernity that accounts for cultural-political formations and intellectual traditions that emerged in the wake of Africans' forced migration and enslavement throughout the Atlantic world. If Thompson's iteration of the Black Atlantic, which established Atlantic world aesthetics that emerged from the circulation and practice of African-derived cultures, was anti-racist in impact, the weight of Gilroy's Black Atlantic conceptualization was anti-nationalist and a political commentary against the abuses and exclusions of nation-state politics and nationalist cultural formations.[175]

Gilroy argued that in contrast to the nation-state, predicated on territorial borders and sovereignty, Black Atlantic cultures "countered" and exceeded nationalized boundaries. Created out of shared experiences of Middle Passage trauma and the reinterpretation of Enlightenment ideas, Black Atlantic political and artistic cultures provisioned the modern world with a "counterculture [that] defiantly reconstructs its own critical, intellectual, and moral genealogy in

[175] Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*.

a partially hidden public sphere."[176] Against the exigencies of the nation-state and amidst multiple experiences of violence, loss, death, dislocation, and relocation in the Middle Passage, Black Atlantic community leaders—including artists, writers, poets, preachers, healers and diviners, and others not formally acknowledged by the modern state—nurtured political and aesthetic formations that defied containment to national spaces, where Black Atlantic communities were and remained denied within the premises of, for example, rights and citizenship discourses.[177]

In contrast to the constraints of nationalized and racialized forms of identity and belonging, Gilroy asserted that other means of creating cultural and political formations were indeed possible. To render this world, Gilroy indicated that two sources were utilized in generating the Black Atlantic counterculture—the experience of the Middle Passage and the intersection with Enlightenment aspirations and ideals.[178] Gilroy thus mapped an ideological trajectory by which the sensation of double consciousness—first described by W.E.B. Du Bois as "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro…"[179]—could be traced in Black aesthetic and intellectual cultures in the modern world.

Gilroy interrogated political and intellectual histories that do not attend to the centrality of Middle Passage experience, enslaved Africans, and the legacies of slavery, which he argued

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[176] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 38.
[177] As Gilroy writes, Black artistic expressions "overflowed from the containers the modern nation state provides for them." See Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 40.
[178] Ibid., 55. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 55.
[179] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Dover Thrift Editions, 1994), 2. Du Bois described also, "…two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

were integral to the emergence of modern cultural and political formations.[180] Following this conceptual lead, historians in particular have reconstituted a litany of cultural and intellectual discourses on independence, liberty, rights, freedom, identity, and citizenship as invested with Black Atlantic history and experience.[181]

Although Gilroy's Black Atlantic in theory accounts for the location of a Black Atlantic counterculture that exceeds and overflows national boundaries, he renders the Black Atlantic as utopic and coherent, with origins traced to a particularized remembrance or experience of terrorized movement through the Middle Passage toward North America.[182] The diversity and transcontinental interconnectivity of the Black Atlantic world as well as local contexts fade from view even though a transnational framework of analysis does come into focus.[183] In other words, relying on the Middle Passage as the key interpretive locus out of which Black Atlantic cultures are created forecloses other sources with origins, or ends, elsewhere than through the Middle Passage experience. Scholars have thus generally associated the Black Atlantic with North American African diasporic experience as they use the concept to examine Black participation in the construction of the world. The consistent interpretive weight that equates Black Atlantic experience with North American Black experience and the overidentification of Black Atlantic

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[180] See Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 15.

[181] See collections of essays Laurent Dubois and Julius Sherrard Scott, *Origins of the Black Atlantic* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010); Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Erik R. Seeman, *The Atlantic in Global History, 1500-2000*, Second edition. ed. (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018). See the important contribution on Black identity in Jason R. Young, "Black Identities in the Formation of the Atlantic World," in *The Atlantic in Global History, 1500-2000*, ed. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra; Erik R. Seeman (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018).

[182] Gilroy's use of hybridity intersects with other postcolonial theorists writing in the last three decades of the twentieth century. On hybridity, see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004); on culture and diaspora, see Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity, Community, Culture, and Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London, UK: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990). Gilroy drew significantly on James Clifford's work on traveling cultures. See James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[183] Joan Dayan, "Paul Gilroy's Slaves, Ships, and Routes: The Middle Passage as Metaphor," *Research in African Literatures* 27, no. 4 (1996), 12. Dayan writes "Under the pretext of a diasporic movement, the need for local knowledge is circumvented."

traditions with Middle Passage origins and North American exports leave unaddressed the question of how and to what extent continental Africans located themselves and their communities in Black Atlantic discourses and exchanges in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[184]

Secondly, Gilroy's treatment of religion does not reflect the data nor the entangled religious sources that also infused Black Atlantic political and cultural formations. Read from one angle, religion as a type of ideology is swallowed up in the legacy of the Enlightenment, in which scientific rationalism precedes and encourages secularization and thus other, more critical forms of anti-nationalist Black Atlantic formations. Read from another view, religion, namely Christianity, is only implicated as complicit in the sordid histories that generated phenomena including the transatlantic slave trade, Middle Passage, plantation and slave labor economies.[185] In Gilroy's limited treatment of religion, we only perceive religious experience as undermining or preventing critiques fundamental to Black Atlantic flourishing.

The excision of African histories and religious experiences in Gilroy's Black Atlantic construct has received significant criticism.[186] Because his analysis privileges North Atlantic and Anglophone communities, Africans seem to contribute to the formation of Black Atlantic

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[184] See Michelle Wright for example critiques discourses of Blackness that align with "a chosen arrangement of historical events (spaces and times) perceived to be the defining moments of collective on Blackness." By these she includes the following: "Middle Passage, linking our cultural practices and expressions, our politics and social sensibilities, to the historical experience of slavery in the Americas and the struggle to achieve full human suffrage in the West." Wright argues that such discourses of Blackness need to be excavated not only as historical but as epistemological, or as sine qua non of what knowing as Black and being as Black does and can mean in light of multiple pasts. History as epistemology as a rule of Being replicates a kind of essentialism that Wright does not want to discard. Rather, she urges that Middle Passage epistemology is one way of "reading Blackness" that "offers nuances and ambiguities worthy of our respect while never foreclosing on the possibility that there are more to be discovered." Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*, 7–8; Wright, "Middle Passage Blackness and Its Diasporic Discontents: The Case for a Post-War Epistemology," 20.

[185] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 28, 59.

[186] See Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic," *African Affairs* 104, no. 414 (2005); Gikandi, "Introduction: Africa, Diaspora, and the Discourse of Modernity,", 5; Pharr, Evans, Deborah Gray White…; Dayan, "Paul Gilroy's Slaves, Ships, and Routes: The Middle Passage as Metaphor,", 1996, 9, 12.

cultures only by moving away from their continent of origin. They become Black Atlantic subjects in so far as they participate in and contribute to American and European histories and spaces.[187] He also forecloses the contributions of Black Atlantic religious communities, which scholars of religion have increasingly demonstrated have been some of the most sustained and creative communities of Black Atlantic resilience and critique.

Laura Chrisman incisively dissects Gilroy's omission of Africa and Africans. She asserts that scholars in the new field of Black internationalism, in step with Gilroy, "equate 'diaspora' with the totality of anti-imperialist and global consciousness," thereby "eliminating African activists and thinkers as contributors to global movements."[188] Chrisman argues instead for a "critical black Atlanticism" that makes possible "a more truly transnational grasp" of Black Atlantic experiences that are comparative in scope and analysis.[189] According to Chrisman, a critical Black Atlantic framework invites "analysis that is alert to the historical variability and complexity of the dynamic" of the flows and exchanges which transpire between particular contexts of, in her case, "black South Africa and African America."[190] Otherwise, the Black Atlantic-influenced political and cultural formations that arise from within specifically African contexts risk being analyzed only and "exclusively in terms of [their] relation with African America," therefore producing a distorted lineage of African cultures that arose "through and against European colonialism."[191] Chrisman argues that a critical Black Atlantic framework recognizes Africans as participants in the Black Atlantic not only as those who aspire to

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[187] Yogita Goyal, "Africa and the Black Atlantic," ibid.45, no. 3 (2014).
[188] Laura Chrisman, "Whose Black World Is This Anyway?," in *New Perspectives on the Black Atlantic: Definitions, Readings, Practices, Dialoguues*, ed. Bénédicte Ledent and Pilar Cuder-Domínguez (Bern, Switerland: Peter Lang, 2012), 27-28.
[189] Laura Chrisman, "Whose Black World Is This Anyway?," in *New Perspectives on the Black Atlantic: Definitions, Readings, Practices, Dialoguues*, ed. Bénédicte Ledent and Pilar Cuder-Domínguez (Bern, Switerland: Peter Lang, 2012), 43.
[190] Laura Chrisman, "Rethinking Black Atlanticism," *The Black Scholar* 30, no. 3–4 (2000): 14.
[191] Chrisman, "Rethinking Black Atlanticism," 14.

uncritically imitate, emulate, or reproduce African American structures, formations, or cultures. Africans who participate in Black Atlantic discourses did and do so through deliberate reflection and action, conscious of their own global connections and local contexts.

In a similar comparative vein of insight and recovery, religious historian Jason R. Young shows that religion became a powerful medium in the Black Atlantic world of creative expression and resilience amidst the unpredictable reign of European terror against the organization of Black Atlantic communities. Through religious practice, enslaved Africans who survived the Middle Passage questioned and resisted their enslavement on terms familiar to Europeans. For example, in Jason Young's comparative analysis of religious practices between enslaved Africans in the Lowcountry of Georgia and South Carolina and their ancestors in west central and West Africa, he finds that religion "operated as a central form of resistance not only against the system of slavery but also against the very ideological underpinnings that supported slavery in the first place."[192] More specifically, he demonstrates that African Atlantic Christians reinterpreted the Christian practice of baptism as a form of resistance to and protection from "the brutalities of the master class."[193] Their reformulation of baptism elucidated an opposition to "the very theoretical and religious underpinnings that supported and justified enslavement of Africans in the first place."[194] They also contributed to new streams in Christianity by introducing a radicality in both practice and ideology that challenged Christendom and territorialized modes of religious affiliation and practice.

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[192] Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*, 11.
[193] Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*, 102. See especially Chapter 2 *Saline Sacraments, Water Ritual, and the Spirits of the Deep*, 42-104.
[194] Young, 102. Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*, 102.

Chrisman and Young return us to Thompson's earlier Black Atlantic conception even as they invite us toward a more dynamic, polycentric, and globalized rendering of Black Atlantic agency and creativity. While Gilroy's Black Atlantic is transcontinental and anti-nationalist, it persists in being unidirectional. To this end, Thompson and Young offer a compelling model of how to reassess religious cultures in a Black Atlantic mode that enfold Gilroy's nationalist critiques while also attending to incisive critical intervention.[195] Conceptualized through religious networks and practice, the Black Atlantic becomes useful in reconstructing regional, global, and local histories and discourses that grant equal weight to enslaved and freed African Americans and their descendants and to Africans who lived and remained on the continent as architects of liberative religious cultures. The question, in the end, is not one of degree of participation and contribution, but how African-descended religious communities and practices fashioned themselves considering their knowledge of a larger world of Black Atlantic undercurrents.

The World that Black Atlantic Christians Made

Historians of world Christianity could profitably apply a critical black Atlantic framework as a dimension of their study of African Christianity.[196] Across the same centuries in

[195] The dearth of reference to major world religions such as Islam or Christianity in Thompson's treatment of the Black Atlantic is difficult to explain. He treats Catholicism as an exclusively European phenomenon; and appears oblivious to the fact that by the time of the transatlantic slave trade both Christianity and Islam were practiced as African religions and could become important sources with philosophical and religious import in Black Atlantic cultures. See Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, 17-18, 77, 89. For a detailed and updated rejoinder to Thompson's inability to account for Catholicism as an Africana heritage religion in the Caribbean, see Dianne M. Stewart, "The Orisa House That Afro-Catholics Built: Africana Antecedents to Yoruba Religious Formation in Trinidad," in *Afro-Catholic Festivals in the Americas*, ed. Cécile Fromont (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), 140–62.

[196] Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy outline world Christianity as an *approach* to the study of Christianity as "the conscious and consistent endeavor to study" Christianity "in light of and in relation to Christianity's wider (his)story." As an approach, Nagy argues that "world-ing" the study of any subject is "non-neutral, political, purposeful, public, informed by power dynamics, and determined by the positionality of the researcher." See Martha Theodora Frederiks 1965- and Dorottya Nagy, eds., *World Christianity: Methodological Considerations* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2021), 19, 57, 60.

which African-European diplomatic exchanges transmuted into destructive trade in lives and goods, the intentional and unintentional movement of Christian individuals and communities throughout the Atlantic world spurred on a concurrent circulation of Christian ideas, symbols, and practices across a number of cultural centers.[197] The spread of Christianity around the Atlantic perimeter from the fifteenth century onward is often narrated as a European-initiated process and story. This telling does not accurately present the totality of historical reality.[198] Christian ideas and practices moved not only at the behest of Europeans through imperial and religious networks. Perhaps even more importantly for the trajectory of world Christianity, Africans circulated Christian ideas and practices through diplomatic, economic, and ecclesial as well as informal networks.[199]

In addition to initiating the fundamental movement of Christian ideas and practices on regional and transcontinental scales, Africans also engaged in sustained and deliberate practices of adapting African religious beliefs and practices, including rituals, according to their discernment of Christian revelations.[200] Thus, from the fifteenth century onward, expressions of sub-Saharan African Christianity developed in complex and dialogical relationship to European religious initiatives as well as in conversation with the contextual realities of African cosmologies, revelations, and histories.[201] As Africans' movement in the Atlantic world

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[197] Koschorke, "New Maps of the History of World Christianity: Current Challenges and Future Perspectives."
[198] For an interpretation of Christian origins of global Christianity that can be traced to the earliest forms of African Christianity, see Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 6-13.
[199] Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making*, 262; Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, 16.
[200] Thornton, 254. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 254.
[201] I use "conversation" as a gloss for *palaver* as an African form of discerning a plurality of practices that promote life for both individual and community. *Palaver* can occur through verbal and nonverbal dialogue or silence; it is communal and as a method of discerning how best to secure life for a community, "begins with contextual questions…" See especially Bénézet Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 2001), 46, 47, 161.

expanded and increased—whether through enslavement and force or as free travelers, traders and migrants—their repertoires of cultural and religious cultures likewise augmented and expanded.

Christianity as an African religion thus traveled especially, but not exclusively, with enslaved Africans torn from west central African coastlands and hinterlands and forced in chains toward the Americas.[202] Through their movement in the Atlantic world, Africans transplanted their own forms of Christianity to the Americas, including the Caribbean Islands, beginning in the sixteenth century, initially generating a ritual world of predominantly Afro-Catholic Christian practice.[203]

Like other African religious traditions that traveled with and amongst Africans throughout the Atlantic world, traces of African Christian affinity and practice were altered, though not dormant. The real test to religious change was influenced as much by the amalgamation of African communities in the Americas as by Middle Passage trauma.[204] The transatlantic slave trade induced a reconfiguration in African social groups brutally thrown together through enslavement and disembarkment in ways that altered the languages, aesthetics, cultures, and religions of the Atlantic world.[205] The fusion of African communities and culture due to the slave trade had important implications for Christianity and its African practice, and recontextualization, in the Americas and Caribbean.

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[202] Thornton, 262. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 262.
[203] Fromont, *Afro-Catholic Festivals in the Americas: Performance, Representation, and the Making of Black Atlantic Tradition*.
[204] See for example Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*, 15th anniversary edition. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013); Michael Angelo Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*, Updated Edition (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[205] Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*; John K. Thornton, *A Cultural History of the Atlantic World, 1250-1820* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Following this point, historian John Catron insists in his study of Black Atlantic Protestant Christians that through their "embrace" of Protestantism, namely in Moravian and Methodist networks, Black Atlantic individuals and communities chose Protestantism and within it forged a "middle path" between continuity with and discontinuous creativity from their African pasts. He eschews interpreting Black Atlantic Christian practice and community through functionalist and idealist theories of religion that uphold "continuity versus creativity" as dichotomizing characteristics. Rather, he shows that Black Atlantic Protestant Christians assumed "a transnational African-Atlantic identity that allowed them to remain fiercely loyal to their ethnic and sub-ethnic African identities" and become active participants in religious networks that supported their demands and work for freedom in their contexts of enslavement.[206]

In eighteenth and nineteenth century North America, Black Atlantic Christians demonstrated an increasing interest in joining their own missionary endeavors with their communities' struggles for social and political freedom. They resisted, subverted, adopted, and debated the terms of the Christianity into which they were baptized, even as they looked further afield for Black Atlantic converts and compatriots.[207] From the 1730s, enslaved Africans became the wellspring of informal evangelical mission activity within a pan-ethnic network of Africans in the Caribbean and North America.[208] They outnumbered both White planters and White missionaries in congregations, converts, and missionary zeal.[209] Through Black Atlantic Christians' active movement and outreach, by the 1780s they had transformed the Caribbean island of Antigua into "an important seedbed from which Afro-Christian congregations on

[206]Catron, *Embracing Protestantism: Black Identities in the Atlantic World*, 11, 4.
[207] Katharine Gerbner, *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 191–95.
[208] On the relationship between Caribbean Christianity and African American religious life see for example Noel Leo Erskine, *Plantation Church: How African American Religion Was Born in Caribbean Slavery* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[209] Catron, *Embracing Protestantism: Black Identities in the Atlantic World*, 51, 83.

neighboring and more distant islands grew."[210] Black Atlantic Christians eventually influenced such far-flung African American settlements as in Nova Scotia and then in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Catron further argues that in the wake of the American Revolution and amidst decreasing commitment to racial and social equality among White communities, "black Christians in North America realized that the only chance they had to gain power and an independent identity lay with their ability to reach out to other Afro-Christians in the Atlantic world."[211] Consequently, Black Atlantic Christians contributed to processes by which Christianity "evolved as a lived practice."[212] They accepted, reinterpreted, and challenged the terms of European-derived Christian ideology and practice in order to address and redress oppressive chattel slavery systems and plantation economies. As Gayraud Wilmore describes, "They accepted the spirited, evangelical interpretation of the Baptist and Methodist preachers and imitated them, but they also went beyond that understanding of the faith to fashion it according to their own social, recreational, and personal spiritual needs."[213]

As Black Atlantic Christians augmented Christian practice relative to their lived experience in North America and the Caribbean, some also embarked upon repatriating to West Africa during and after the American Revolution through colonization schemas intent to Christianize their African kin through a civilizing mission. As the initial colonizing founders of and missionaries to the colonies of Liberia and Sierra Leone, they accepted the British promise of freedom for those who remained loyal to the crown during the Revolution.[214] These new

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[210] Catron, *Embracing Protestantism: Black Identities in the Atlantic World*, 83.
[211] Catron, *Embracing Protestantism: Black Identities in the Atlantic World*, 6, 50.
[212] Gerbner, *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World*, 190-193.
[213] Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, 29.
[214] Catron, *Embracing Protestantism: Black Identities in the Atlantic World*, 197.

waves of formerly enslaved, displaced and resettled Africans in the Black Atlantic world further circulated African American and African British Christianity, based on their perceptions of African issues, in order to promote an African Christian society.[215]

As Lamin Sanneh argues, evangelical African Christians who resettled in West Africa initiated a fundamental break in a Christendom understanding of faith, society, and body politic.[216] They preached and taught a type of Christianity that addressed social structures of inequality in West African societies. In so doing, they linked their evangelistic efforts among fellow Africans with an African-led abolitionist movement.[217] These African American Christians promulgated a "gospel of human freedom and political reform" that commenced a "new kind of religious history" in which the primary actors were not chiefs and ruling elites. Enslaved and marginalized individuals instead were freed and "redeemed by God" to be "the root and branch of society, politics, and law" in Liberia and Sierra Leone.[218] The fusion of evangelical religious ideas with the antislavery movement in the end "empowered slaves," Sanneh argues.[219]

There is however contradiction in the historical legacy of the world black Atlantic Christians made vis à vis colonization schemes. For one, Josiah Young, III agrees with Sanneh's initial assessment that "colonization in Liberia, and in Sierra Leone, did indeed mitigate the slave

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[215] Catron recounts differences that African Baptist missionary George Liele encountered in his interaction with African Jamaican Christians. See Catron, 195, 201.
[216]Lamin O. Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 64, 136, 138.4/26/2023 10:56:00 PM
[217] Lamin O. Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 4, 16-18, 58, 63. For an important and updated interpretation of the Black abolitionist movement and the influence of Puritan theology set within "within the context of global freedom struggles," see Christopher Cameron, *To Plead Our Own Cause: African Americans in Massachusetts and the Making of the Antislavery Movement* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2014). For a collection of essays that contribute Atlantic perspectives to the history of abolitionism, see Derek R. Peterson, *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa, and the Atlantic*, African Studies from Cambridge, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010).
[218] Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad,* 57, 62, 64, 67, 238.
[219] Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad,* 18.

trade."[220] However, he argues that "to claim without qualification that Liberia was an asylum of the oppressed is ahistorical…"[221] In fact, as Young and others have shown, African Americans internalized and propagated ideas about civilization that upheld European cultures, religion, and politics as the epitome of achievement.[222] Although denouncing white supremacy, African American missionaries and colonizers did implement technologies of Euro-imperial thinking and colonization, namely violence and force, from their earliest iterations in Sierra Leone and Liberia, running well into the twentieth century.[223] Such attitudes and tactics were anti-African in effect as African American settlers and missionaries denigrated African cultures and perpetuated the absence of African history, demonstrated for example in the career of Alexander Crummell. Imbibed notions of European cultural and civilizational superiority worked their way through black Atlantic colonization movements in ways that were or became oppressive to African populations in the nineteenth and into the second half of the twentieth century.[224]

Nonetheless, the vigor of Christian ideas and Christian-inspired practices infused diverse and expansive black Atlantic religious cultures, from as early as fifteenth century Kongolese Christianity to the ongoing arrivals of enslaved Africans in the Caribbean and Americas. They have endured well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Each black Atlantic iteration of Christian culture and ritual arose within a specific historical moment and contextual reality, as all

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[220] Young, *A Pan-African Theology*, 31.
[221] Young, *A Pan-African Theology*, 31.
[222] Young, *A Pan-African Theology*, 33.
[223] Young, *A Pan-African Theology*, 32.
[224] In addition to Josiah Young, III see also See Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission*, 111–13 for a trenchant critique of black American nationalism. Adeleke demonstrates, "Europeans and black American nationalists constituted two rival groups of imperialists, of unequal force, who converged on African in the second half of the nineteenth century...The underlying impulse of late-nineteenth-century black American nationalism was the pursuit and realization of American nationality...Had [Martin Delany, Alexander Crummell, and Henry McNeal Turner] been inspired and driven by a deep commitment to an African nationality, and an equally deep consciousness of cultural and historical affinity with Africa, their attitudes toward Africans and response to Eurocentric values would have been demonstrably different. See also Elisabeth Engel, *Encountering Empire: African American Missionaries in Colonial Africa, 1900-1939*, Band 56 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015) regarding African Americans relationship to colonial empires in this period.

cultures and ritual practices do. In response to the harsh realities of slavery over the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, black Atlantic Christians (along with others) critiqued forms of Christianity that promulgated enslavement as the natural state of Africans. Further, they rejected Christian theological traditions that diminished Africans' role in divine history.

As an increasingly interconnected world Christian community, black Atlantic Christians demonstrated profound capacity to incisively consider the Christianity on offer, reject what dehumanized, and recontextualize what served their purposes to create a world of African capacity and regeneration. The basis of creating such a world in conversation with African cultures and languages however altered over time as Black American consciousness of African history and cultures changed with increased exposure through circulated images, texts, and black Atlantic encounters between African Americans and Africans. Admittedly, during the period when Chilembwe initiated his mission, black Atlantic perspectives perpetuated a denigration of African cultures even as voices such as W.E.B. DuBois and Edward Wilmot Blyden's began to assert the genius and originality of African cultures and histories.

In this black Atlantic world of synergy and contradiction, Christian encounters with territorial or otherwise regionalized religions and African polities were fundamental to black Atlantic Christianity's emergence as a cross-cultural, intercultural, and global religion.[225] In this black Atlantic world, to accept the white European man and woman's Christianity unequivocally rendered black Atlantic Christians erased within history and subservient in an emerging world order of plantation economics and colonial rule. In this black Atlantic world, the lived experience of white terror, violence, and slavery necessitated black Atlantic Christians' problematizing European-derived Christian theological claims that rendered Africans as fit only for enslaved

[225] Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism,* 49.

labor in a racialized hierarchy of human difference. In this black Atlantic world, the forced dispersion of Africans throughout the Atlantic world altered the historical trajectory of Christianity's development throughout the world.

Even as Christian ideas had been employed to devise a modern world of European terror and domination, black Atlantic Christians propounded and practiced Christianity on terms that challenged such a world while also re-inscribing some of the more anti-African cultural dismissals endemic to European thought.[226] These terms originated from Africans, in religious worlds altered by African encounters with Christianity over the duration of three centuries and across four continents, and thus as many local contexts.[227] African Christianity can thus be conceived as historically cross-cultural and intercultural. Such terms reflect on the one hand the multiplicity of contexts out of which Christianity's African practices emerged as globally influential and on the other, the long relationship of African Christians to other Christian communities of affiliation and practice, including broadly conceived Mediterranean, European, Asian, and African American Christian communities.[228]

The Emergence of Intercultural African Christianity in the Black Atlantic World

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Africans were reintroducing Christianity on the African continent through their own initiatives. Africans had already led the way in refashioning Christianity relative to the diversity of Atlantic world contexts in which they

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[226] Gayraud Wilmore provides the most compelling historical synthesis of the theological and historical changes induced into the character of Christianity relative to black religious experience. He showed that "there has been and continues to be a significant difference between black religion and white religion in their approaches to social reality and social change—whether in reference to theological liberalism or to fundamentalism." Fundamentally, Wilmore insists that "black faith has been 'more radical' in the proper sense of that much-maligned term." By "radical," Wilmore points to "the quest for independence from white control; the revalorization of the image of Africa; and the acceptance of protest and agitation as theological prerequisites for black liberation and the liberation of all oppressed peoples" as characteristic of this tradition. See Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism,* ix.

[227] Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World,* 253-254.

[228] Arun Jones, *Christian Interculture,* 2; Josiah U. Young, *A Pan-African Theology: Providence and the Legacies of the Ancestors* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1992), 31.

lived and labored.[229] It is then justified to assert that the Black Atlantic was multidirectional and dynamic. It is also more than warranted to emphasize Christian dimensions as influential in the making of a Black Atlantic world. Historian Andrew Barnes argues that a "Christian Black Atlantic" existed prior to a more secular iteration of the Black Atlantic developed by the 1920s.

In Barnes' study of African debates concerning the use of industrial forms of education in the western and southern regions of colonial Africa between 1880-1920, for example, he shows how the Black Atlantic developed as a space of Christian cross-cultural exchange.[230] In his view, African Christians and African Americans navigated the Black Atlantic as a religious community. In a "Christian Black Atlantic," western and southern African Christians debated the merits of Booker T. Washington's industrial education and retooled it for African purposes. African Christians made the observation that industrial schools in North America appeared to generate a means for African Americans to stand against White power structures. They then considered how industrial education as a type of schooling could "provide a racially empowering alternative to the racially demeaning training provided at mission schools."[231]

Barnes shows that African-led industrial education movements ultimately unraveled due in large part to colonial government opposition and suppression of exchanges between African American and African Christians. However, germane to my use of the Black Atlantic, he also demonstrates that in studies of African Christianity, African appropriations of European-inspired

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[229] See for example the story of Sierra Leone as a site in Black Atlantic Christian history in Jehu Hanciles, *Euthanasia of a Mission: African Church Autonomy in a Colonial Context* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).
[230] Andrew E. Barnes, "The Christian Black Atlantic," in *"To Give Publicity to Our Thoughts" : Journale Asiatischer Und Afrikanischer Christen Um 1900 Und Die Entstehung Einer Transregionalen Indigen-Christlichen Öffentlichkeit. Journals of Asian and African Christians around 1900 and the Making of a Transregional Indigenous-Christian Public Sphere*, ed. Adrian Hermann Klaus Koschorke, Frieder Ludwig, and Ciprian Burlacioiu, Studies of Christianity in the Non-Western World (Germany: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2018); *Global Christianity and the Black Atlantic: Tuskegee, Colonialism, and the Shaping of African Industrial Education* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2017).
[231] Barnes, *Global Christianity and the Black Atlantic: Tuskegee, Colonialism, and The Shaping of African Industrial Education*, 2.

technologies hold sway in the interpretation of Africans as "negating their African identity" that overlooks the influence of African American sources of knowledge.[232] Barnes instead draws critical attention to how African Christians at the turn of the twentieth century more often than not looked to African Americans, not Europeans, as the purveyors of knowledge, technologies, and ideas, including Christian ones, which they believed could be of strategic use in a context of colonial domination and racialized disavowal of African capability.[233]

Within this Christian Black Atlantic, African Christians engaged in what might best be understood as "creative recontextualization."[234] According to historian James Pritchett, creative recontextualization entails "refashioning and reassigning meaning and uses to symbolic resources originally belonging to cultural others in order to fit them into existing knowledge and repertoires."[235] Such a conceptualization of African adaptations of and contributions to Black Atlantic thought and practice maintains that while African Christians found common cause with African American Christians, they nonetheless remained differentiated relative to context. Second, this conceptualization of adaptation upholds shifting African political contexts, including but not limited to the colonial state, as occurring simultaneous to the exigencies of North American and Caribbean contexts.

Utilizing the notion of creative recontextualization helps us reimagine African Christianity rising in a Black Atlantic world in which African resources circulated and predated the terror and rupture of the Middle Passage. Africans' creative recontextualization of Black

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[232] Barnes, *Global Christianity and the Black Atlantic: Tuskegee, Colonialism, and The Shaping of African Industrial Education*, 159.
[233] Barnes, *Global Christianity and the Black Atlantic: Tuskegee, Colonialism, and The Shaping of African Industrial Education*, 160.
[234] James Pritchett, "Christian Mission Stations in South-Central Africa: Eddies in the Flow of Global Culture," in Harri Englund, *Christianity and Public Culture in Africa.* See also Philip Serge Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000).
[235] James Pritchett, "Christian Mission Stations in South-Central Africa: Eddies in the Flow of Global Culture," in Harri Englund, *Christianity and Public Culture in Africa.*

Atlantic Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries continued a long history in which African Christians have considered the specificity of contextual realities alongside encounters with new information. As such, African Christians were established and active participants in fashioning a Black Atlantic world in ways that had far-reaching implications for African Christianity. In my study, I demonstrate that John Chilembwe's decision to draw upon Black Christian Nationalism to address local African realities as a religious experiment that redressed the problem of colonialism and the running history of multiple slave trades invites robust analysis of this deliberate activity.

By historicizing the emergence of modern African Christianity within a theater of African diasporic and African transnational religious exchange and ferment, I draw attention to the centrality of Black experience and agency in the Atlantic world of religious and social change and the materialization of African missionary consciousness. For my purposes, a Black Atlantic approach to studies of modern African Christianity helps to capture the ambiguities, contradictions, and tensions that unfolded within transnational religious encounters as they took shape in local African contexts. A Black Atlantic perspective questions imperialist and nationalist frameworks by revealing the flexibility and creativity of local African actors and communities to debate and determine practices and structures purported to promote their well-being in contrast to the mechanisms of the colonial state by drawing on histories and values that predate ethnic identities and divisions.

. In contrasting or interrogating a nationalist interpretive inheritance that reflects colonial demarcations of space, peoples, language, polities, and religion as arbitrary relative to African experience and history, Black Atlantic perspectives can draw on histories and values that pre-date ethnic identities and divisions. In addition, Black Atlantic perspectives can interrogate the

extent to which race captures the lived experience of Black Atlantic communities who wrestle against its strictures as a fundamental ontological and structural means of organizing human life and creating well-being. Black Atlantic perspectives also draw attention to the multiplicity and malleability of sources utilized to construct new identities, new networks of kin, and new ways of being human in the world. In this way, Black Atlantic perspectives elucidate interculturality as a dimension of world Christian and African Christian legacies.

Within studies of African Christianity situated in world Christianity approaches, African agency, religious plurality, local context, and Christian movements as broader social movements, not only ecclesial or institutional, has captured the attention and imagination of scholars.[236] Dale Irvin describes world Christianity as an approach to historical and theological scholarship that is "particularly concerned with marginalized experiences or expressions of Christian faith that have been underrepresented in scholarship and underappreciated for their wider contributions."[237] The problem addressed, however, is not only a lack of representation that necessitates reconceiving the apparatus by which we assess Christianity as a global faith that changes.

Scholars of African Christianity have long rejected the assumed absence of African history, agency, and creativity in the fashioning of African Christian expressions. Nonetheless, the lived realities of African diaspora and African communities, conditioned as much by experiences of racialized unfreedom as freedom, need to be more fully accounted for within studies of world Christianity. The Black Atlantic as a theater of African experiences of terror, suffering, and death, while simultaneously a field of African agency, creativity, and resilience,

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[236] A. Mathias Mundadan, "The Changing Task of Christian History: A View at the Outset of the Third Millennium," in *Enlarging the Story: Perspectives on Writing World Christian History*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 43; Andrew F. Walls, "Eusebius Tries Again: The Task of Reconceiving and Re-Visioning the Study of Christian History," in *Enlarging the Story: Perspectives on Writing World Christian History*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 17.

[237] Dale T. Irvin, "What Is World Christianity?," in *World Christianity: Perspectives and Insights: Essays in Honor of Peter C. Phan*, ed. Peter C. and Jonathan Y. Tan Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 4.

has yet to be fully realized in the development of world Christian historical scholarship.[238] The centrality of the Black Atlantic as a site of religious experience and epistemic creativity that generated world Christian cultures was born of particular and racialized African suffering, resistance, agency, and contribution that receives only limited historical attention within the interdisciplinary field of world Christianity.

To that end, my study relies on the insights of historians whose work examines or touches on the life and times of Chilembwe and historians of African Christianity in broader terms even as I reexamine local African Christian practice and debates within the context of a broader transnational movement, Black Christian Nationalism. I analyze strands of African Christian ideas and practice as a means to write "an ecumenical history of African Christianity."[239] As historian Ogbu Kalu argues, although nationalist historians demonstrate "that Africans were the real agents who spread Christianity...they fail to show that Africans internalized western models, and served as interpreters to their communities."[240] My project thus questions the frameworks and assumptions that uphold the nation-state as the modern realization of African agency at work in crafting possible futures by demonstrating instead the open possibilities of world-making that religious networks, narratives, and practices provided the circulation of Black Christian Nationalist ideas and practices.[241]

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[238] Jehu J. Hanciles, "The Black Atlantic and the Shaping of African Christianity, 1820-1920," in *Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity/Polyzentrische Strukturen in Der Geschichte Des Weltchristentums, Studien Zur Aussereuropäischen Christentumsgeschichte (Asien, Afrika, Lateinamerika)*, ed. Klaus Koschorke and Adrian Hermann (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014), 45.

[239] Ogbu Kalu, *African Christianity: An African Story*, ed. Ogbu Kalu (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007), 18–20.

[240] Kalu, *African Christianity: An African Story*, 15.

[241] Derek Peterson significantly challenges a nationalist framework in two complementary monographs wherein he employs contingency and cosmopolitanism, respectively, as frameworks and phenomenon that disrupt the emergence of types of nationalism and ethnic national identity/patriotism in eastern Africa. His work has significantly influenced my own thinking on "contingency and openness of the future" during the tumult of colonialism, as well as the centrality of debate and practice in contributing to competing possible futures. See Derek R. Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004); Derek R. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c. 1935 to 1972*, 122 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

John Chilembwe's Mission

By the close of the nineteenth century, the black Atlantic teemed with visionary energies of Christian lineage. Within the black Atlantic world, African and African American Christians embedded sacred meanings and longings within material structures and religious practices to establish and uphold Black human life and experience as interconnected and sacred. Composed in the interior and intimate matrices of lived experience as well as in public rituals and structure, black Atlantic Christianity, to use Gilroy's language, countered Euro-Christian ideas and practices that dismissed, overlooked, or saw past lived Black experience, be it in the diaspora or on the African continent, as fully human. Black Atlantic Christians rejected slavery as the natural state for Africans but even in their rejection of White supremacist ideas did not completely challenge or undermine some of the more problematic anti-African foundations in Euro-Christian thought and practice. Black Atlantic Christian ideology and practice upheld all Black life as sacred while simultaneously perpetuating the denigration of African cultural inheritance as barbaric, heathen, and child-like.[242]

As African Americans worked to construct and realize dreams of freedom in the United States, they also looked increasingly to Africa as the locus of divine providential outworking of their collective redemption. Through Africa, they would be freed and free at last. Meanwhile, by the late nineteenth century, as the post-Reconstruction United States bled into the Jim Crow era, establishing legitimate trade in Africa became the premise of European imperial expansion throughout almost every corner of the continent.[243] Culminating formally at the close of the nineteenth century and advancing through a variety of ideologies, technologies, tactics, and

[242] Wilmore, 24. See also for example Blyden, *African Americans and Africa*; Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission*; Young, *A Pan-African Theology*.
[243] Except for Egypt and Ethiopia.

structures, the sprawl of European imperialism on the African continent continued, presenting challenging circumstances for African Americans' missionary vision to pursue collective redemption on the African continent.

While the terror of the Jim Crow era grew in the United States, the colonial carving of the African continent also unfolded in a similarly violent and devastating measure for African communities. Having begun with Dutch and Portuguese efforts in west central and southern Africa as early as the sixteenth century through the transatlantic slave trade and settlement schemas, colonization morphed into further intrusive and destructive forms as the transatlantic slave trade came under moral scrutiny in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the British Empire, as abolitionists expanded their efforts, they did so as proponents of the concept of legitimate trade.[244] In order to quell the trade in slaves, abolitionists, including Thomas Falwell Buxton and David Livingstone, asserted the moral obligation of Britain to develop African consciousness of their raw materials and goods that could drive trade rather than slaves. While acknowledging the British role in the transatlantic slave trade to some extent, for the most part the crux of abolitionist discourse narrated the slave trade paternalistically as an African-originated problem that could be addressed and solved through making alternative goods more attractive and lucrative to Africans for trade.

Abolitionism had the unintended consequence and adverse effect of spurring on more significant, sustained, and often violent European imperial conquests in almost all realms of the African continent. Through the discourses and activities of "legitimate trade" and "civilizing mission," imperial rivalries emerged on the African continent as the colonial scramble to

[244] Sir Thomas Falwell Buxton, *The African Slave Trade*, accessed February 21, 2022, 192.

reconfigure trade and control labor on the continent was formally plotted from 1884 to 1885.[245] The scramble introduced waves of social unrest as imperial conflicts, political and economic restructuring, including land alienation and labor conscription, were exercised through violent military conquests against chiefly rulers and guardians of land.[246] As colonialism induced changes into local polities, Africans generated numerous responses as agents of their past, present, and future.

At the same time, African Christian movements, known most often as Ethiopian churches and the growing Watchtower Movement, began to bud separately or leave from under mission control in much of southern and western Africa. Many of the Ethiopian churches partnered with African American churches, most often the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Through ecclesial separation, the growing Watchtower Movement in central Africa, Ethiopianist churches in southern (and western) Africa, and burgeoning African Christian healing movements in southern, central, and western Africa began to challenge missionary control over churches and African Christian life.

During this period, John Chilembwe lived as a mobile and free African. He was more than likely born in the early 1870s, a little over a decade before the 1885 Berlin Conference that formalized the destructive carving up of Africa according to European interests. This means that

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[245] The various ideological motivations for colonialism reflect various approaches to imperial histories. For a sampling of the literature on British Empire most relevant to this study, see Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire*, First edition. (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2022).; David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).; C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).; Hilary M. Carey, *God's Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c.1801-1908* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).; Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[246] Caroline Elkins also discusses how colonization intersected with "resuscitating a beleaguered monarchy." As a part of this initiative, the 1897 Diamond Jubilee nurtured "a late Victorian mentality, grounded in notions of British superiority, Christian ethics, industrial and cultural achievements, and hardened racist attitudes, [that] evolved into a unifying moral and racial authority that would be bequeathed to future generations." See Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire*, 68, 70, 71..

Chilembwe's adolescent years unfolded during a notably violent period in intra-African relations as well as intra-imperial and African-European communities.[247] The Church of Scotland established Blantyre Mission in southern Nyasaland, where Chilembwe received his earliest education.[248] However, in 1891 Chilembwe heard of Joseph Booth, a newly arrived British Baptist missionary in the region who was working to build a new model of mission, eventually called the Zambezi Industrial Mission (ZIM). Booth preached a gospel message that emphasized African equality and capacity, awakening Chilembwe's curiosity.

Chilembwe traveled to the United Kingdom and the United States in 1897 with Booth, and in 1900 Chilembwe departed from the United States and traveled to London to procure a land grant for his mission. He left as an ordained pastor and self-declared missionary funded by the National Baptist Foreign Mission Board. Chilembwe returned to Nyasaland in 1901 to found Providence Industrial Mission with National Baptist missionaries Landon N. Cheek in 1901 and Emma Delaney, who arrived in 1902. When as part of his evangelistic efforts, Chilembwe encouraged his Blantyre Mission school peers, some now employed within mission churches, to join his mission or begin their own, he did so with their ecclesial independence in mind. His invitations were often denied. Through steady evangelistic ministry, church construction, schooling efforts, and fundraising campaigns, Chilembwe established the first African and African American-led mission in the region. He did so with the welfare of his kin in mind.

Chilembwe's transatlantic journey may have removed him temporarily from his local context. However, his travels appear to have amplified and deepened his relationship to his kin

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[247] McCracken, *History of Malawi.* The convergence of three slave trades in the Shire Highlands as well as the absence of a centralized political power (thus generating small scale contests for control) contributed in great part to this volatility.

[248] Statham, "Scottish and Evangelical Elements in the 1915 Nyasaland Uprising (Part One)"; Statham, "Scottish and Evangelical Elements in the 1915 Nyasaland Uprising (Part Two)."

and others in Nyasaland.[249] His return to his people was a missionary call to answer the real and pressing question about the myth of the White cannibals and to carry a message of spiritual and material uplift through baptism into Christ as a gathered people of God who would be saved from evils plaguing the countryside.

Chilembwe's education at Blantyre Mission, his encounter with Joseph Booth and subsequent conversion to Christianity, and his nearly three years of study with and ordination by the National Baptist Convention in Virginia cultivated him to take up the deliberate work of "creative recontextualization" as missionary work. Beginning with how he consciously narrated himself and expanding to include his vision to gather an African Christian community from the peoples that moved in and through the Shire Highlands, Chilembwe's creative recontextualization work set himself and his Christians on a crash course with Scottish missionaries, local African clergy, and British settlers. Notably, as Chilembwe's multilingual and geographically disparate mission work developed, Black Atlantic Christianity was refashioned relative to the contextual realities percolating among Africans in the Shire Highlands.

This project takes up Black Atlantic interculturality as a generative framework that captures more fully Chilembwe's mission theory and practice. Ogbu Kalu writes, "Christianity has inbuilt universal and local characteristics. Its expression in any place must benefit from the forms of expression in other places without losing an African quality…A dynamic culture must borrow from others to enhance its viability."[250] The dramatic and violent end of Chilembwe, the colonial destruction of his church, the systematized murder and surveillance of his followers, and the temporary shuttering of his mission can distract us from seeing clearly the visionary hopes

[249] "Brudder Jordan, I no going to die. God bring me to this land [USA] to get light to take back to my people. He is not going to kill me here," Makondesa, *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission, 1900-1940,* 18.
[250] Kalu 2007, 294.

that preceded. Stirred by Booth's mentorship, Chilembwe labored over time to realize the mission among his own, envisioning an African Christianity that was responsive to the needs and realities of his context. Through his partnership with National Baptists, Chilembwe learned of a shared history of Black oppression, then garnered the support and built structures to initiate "Africa for the African" through his mission.

Chilembwe's mission was a constructive response to the pressing concerns generated by European oversight of both religious and economic life in his local context of the Shire Highlands. Chilembwe initiated a profound, if conflicted and fleeting, change in the religious landscape of the Shire Highlands. He sought to address the spiritual and material wellbeing of those on the margins of African power: women trapped in the slave trade; widows and orphans; African landowners; and Lomwe migrant laborers. The separatist intent of his mission signaled the potential tenacity of a religious body independent from European Christian regulations, no longer content with their theology or practice. In their place, Chilembwe pursued an ecclesial vision of a people worshiping, living, and working in a sphere of African spiritual and economic autonomy.

Chapter 2
Chilembwe as African Noah:
African Christian Missionary Consciousness in the Early Twentieth Century

Within a Black Atlantic Protestant network, religious initiatives and actors fueled encounters and exchanges that had the potential to incubate intercultural social change amidst imperial structures of conquest and domination. In conversation with their Black Atlantic colleagues, some African Christians began conceiving of themselves as missionaries, religious leaders called to preach Christian ideas and start initiatives that condemned issues internal to African societies, such as long-running slave trades, and likewise contended with an emergent and fundamental restructuring of African society within a racial colonial order.[251]

To that end, in this chapter I examine Chilembwe's missionary consciousness as an African Noah—a person who understood himself to be gathering a disparate people to be protected and rescued from evil. In a land threatened by lingering divisions generated through slave trading practices and African polities being reorganized in a racial colonial order, Chilembwe's call to his own as a missionary him oriented him to preach the gospel as good news that addressed both as persistent evils. I show that Chilembwe's missionary consciousness in reference to a biblical Noah elucidates how biblical sources and narratives embraced in a tradition of Black Christian Nationalism could inspire new visions of an Afrocentric Christianity, and even more, Afrocentric divine history.

"Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed,
this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands."
Genesis 5:29

Recalling John Chilembwe as Noah

[251] See Christopher Fyfe, "Using Race as an Instrument of Policy: A Historical View," *Race & Class* 36, no. 2 (1994): 69–77; David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

In testimonies provided orally and in writing to the Commission of Inquiry that investigated Chilembwe's January 1915 uprising, various witnesses—including Reverend Harry Kambwiri Matecheta and Reverend Stephen Kundecha, African clergy from the Church of Scotland's Blantyre Mission; Marist Fathers missionary Reverend Father Swelsen; and District Resident Lewis Moggridge—submitted oral evidence that Chilembwe and his commissioned deacons referred to his church as Noah's Ark and preached that Chilembwe was or would be a "new Noah."[252] Testimonies concur that Chilembwe proclaimed himself to be a new Noah. His teachings, as well as those of his deacons, echoed the divine warnings of the biblical texts Genesis 6 through 8 among fellow Africans. Reverend Kundecha especially recounts that one of Chilembwe's deacons preached "that those who were not in [Chilembwe's] Church were outside the Ark and would perish."[253]

The exact details of how those outside his church would die, European and African alike, concerned Reverend Archibald Smith of the Church of Scotland Mission.[254] Reports of the sermon he referenced, however, "made small impression" on District Resident Moggridge when he also heard of them. At the Commission, Moggridge conceded that in light of the uprising, Chilembwe's prior claims to be Noah and to commandeer an ark were indeed "interesting."[255] The metaphor of Noah and his ark appears to have gripped Chilembwe's deacons' imaginations in particular. Commission testimonies indicate that their sermons fixated on declaring Chilembwe a new Noah and his church the ark. Chilembwe as Noah and Providence Industrial Mission as ark resonated such that they conveyed this message to those inside and outside the Chilembwe's church as both invitation and as warning.

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[252] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 7, 29, 126.
[253] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 126.
[254] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 125., 125.
[255] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 127.

Chilembwe preached that a storm was brewing that would sweep away the evils plaguing the land and that his ark would stand as the bastion of salvation. Similar to African Christian preachers and scholars in the first four centuries of Christian practice, Chilembwe too preached that those who gathered into his ark, or mission, would find haven and rescue through baptism into Christianity. To those who did not gather into his ark, Chilembwe and his deacons proclaimed that they would be caught up in the violent storm, presumably of judgment, looming over the land. Chilembwe preached that his fellow Africans would secure their future as free African Christians if they heralded a Christian message, were baptized, and joined his churches and schools.

Biblical Narratives and African Christian History

For context, in the biblical narrative commonly referred to as "Noah and the Flood," God declares the person of Noah as righteous, "blameless among the people of his time…" in a landscape overrun by human evil.[256] This attribution permits Noah to "find favor" in God's sight. Biblical studies scholar Carol Kaminski helps shed light on the Noah text and how we can forge a relationship between biblical narratives, Chilembwe's missionary consciousness, and Chilembwe's seeing himself less as a messiah and more as a human called by God to a specific task. Kaminski argues that God does not declare Noah righteous in light of a specific flood generation whose intensified evil warranted judgment, but rather God names Noah as righteous in reference to "humanity over an *extended period*."[257] Second, Kaminski argues that Noah's being declared "a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time" does not render Noah without fault or without also "[sharing] in the condition of the human heart."[258] Rather, the use of

[256] Genesis 6:9. Biblical references either New International Version or New Revised Standard Version.
[257] Carol M. Kaminski, *Was Noah Good? Finding Favour in the Flood Narrative*, First edition.., Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2014), 78.
[258] אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה; Kaminski, *Was Noah Good? Finding Favour in the Flood Narrative*, 104.

the Hebrew idiom "to find favor in the eyes of," which according to Kaminski's study "occurs more often in Genesis than in any other book of the Old Testament," is rendered as an act of "kindness or generosity of one person to another" and ascribed to Noah not because it is due or out of obligation."[259] That a long duration of human history is in view; the reality of human fault persisting through Noah despite the flood; and God's favor as being an act of generosity or kindness can assist us in engaging Chilembwe's missionary consciousness as a self-proclaimed Noah.

Returning to the biblical narrative, God promises a deluge of water will "cover the earth," the region that Noah understood as the sum total of geographic space that all living beings inhabited. The deluge, God declared, would sweep away "evil" plaguing the earth because in the waters, humans—the authors of evil—would be caught up and drowned. The land would nonetheless be replenished by the waters and a new community of all living beings birthed from the kept animals and Noah's family would descend from the safety of the ark to build this new creation.

After God announces this coming climate disaster to Noah, God instructs him to build a structure—an ark—that God promises will protect Noah, his wife, his three sons, and his sons' wives.[260] God further instructs Noah to gather two or fourteen (depending on the version of the story one is reading) of all living things as well as food to be eaten and stored. God tells Noah that water will pelt down on the earth's surface for forty days and forty nights, covering it entirely, and no living creature will survive. Yet Noah's family, gathered in the ark, will be

[259] Kaminski, *Was Noah Good? Finding Favour in the Flood Narrative*, 106, 109, 111. Of note, Moses too is described as finding favor in the sight of God.
[260] Genesis 6:18, NIV.

protected from the waters' destructive force. They will emerge, God promises Noah, in a new land to recreate a life together in the wake of evil's removal.

According to the biblical text, Noah diligently constructs the wooden structure as temporary shelter for his kin and all living creatures. In anticipation of the promised flood, Noah stores food to nourish those he has gathered for the designated time. The flood occurs and the waters "lifted the ark high above the earth…the ark floated on the surface of the water."[261] Intensifying rhetoric in the passage delivers a dramatic conclusion of the flood's effects. "Every living thing that moved on land perished…everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died…everything living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out."[262] In the end, according to the narrative, "only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark."[263]

Chilembwe's identification with the biblical figure of Noah as recalled in personal testimonies and as preached by his deacons conveys his and their acute sense of historical location and a unique form of missionary consciousness. The implications of his self-understanding as an African Noah may not have been fully grasped by Chilembwe's contemporaries, and they were certainly lost on members of the Commission. Mentions of his identification with Noah in the testimonies of British witnesses read as addenda rather than as noteworthy points on which to dwell. It is also unclear how extensively Chilembwe intended to chart a course through history as an African Noah.

Preaching a message in which Noah's ark served as prefiguring the church was not unique to Chilembwe in the long arc of historical Christianity. In the second century, the scholar

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[261] Genesis 7:17-18, NIV.
[262] Genesis 7: 21-23, NIV.
[263] Genesis 7:23, NIV. The flood narrative follows a chiastic structure, the structure and sources of which are debated by biblical scholars. Across comparative chiastic arrangements, however, Genesis 7:21-24 is generally recognized as culminating chiasmus within the larger narrative structure before the narrative structurally transitions to describe God's remembrance of Noah.

Origen who lived in Alexandria of today's Egypt, sermonized on Noah's Ark. He preached that "this people, therefore, which is saved in the Church, is compared to all those whether men or animals which are saved in the ark."[264] He elaborates further on the ark's having compartments as the Church also being one entity in which all are baptized but in which also all mature in their growth differently.[265] In addition to Origen, the third century African Bishop of Carthage Cyprian, of today's Tunisia, referenced the first epistle of Peter when he highlighted the image of the ark as a type of the church, unified and one.[266]

As African Americans increasingly looked to African sources to revise histories of Christianity in Afrocentric terms, we can at minimum speculate that Chilembwe would have heard sermons or speeches during his studies with National Baptists wherein Noah and the ark were lifted up from biblical texts as well as early African Christian sources.[267] Did the biblical figure's mythological import resonate with him given a landscape he interpreted as awash in evil, a relevance that would dissipate upon a future re-creation after the apocalyptic flood? Chilembwe did after all select the baptismal name "John" after the disciple whom Jesus loved.[268] Some evidence points to his identification if not with the biblical prophet Daniel, at least with Daniel's predicament of addressing royal, i.e., imperial, courts and foreseeing scenes of apocalyptic

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[264] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Baltimore, MD: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 78.
[265] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 78.
[266] Cyprian, *Epistle 75*, https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/050675.htm, accessed April 21, 2023.
[267] In Robin Jensen's study on early Christian baptism, she notes that when the African Fathers reference the ark, they correlate the waters of the flood with the purifying baptism and the ark as symbolic of the Church, the exclusive locus of salvation. She further cites that Noah's story and the ark were important references also for I Clement, Justin Martyr, Ambrose of Milan, and Cyril of Jerusalem, beyond the African Fathers who nonetheless offered the most constructive typology. See Robin Margaret Jensen, *Living Water: Images, Symbols, and Settings of Early Christian Baptism* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 267–69.
[268] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African*, 39.

doom.[269] In any case, while Chilembwe's possible multiple self-identifications are not mutually exclusive by any means, the one recalled by witnesses was Noah.

Nonetheless, it is not only Chilembwe who articulated his identity as Noah. His deacons, whom he appears to have sent throughout the region to preach and teach, proclaimed him to be in the likeness of Noah. Their sermons or references to Chilembwe were frequent or notable enough that they are a refrain across African clergy, Scottish missionaries, and colonial administrators' witness testimonies in the wake of Chilembwe's rebellion. Chilembwe's identification with the first biblical persona with whom God speaks after nine generations, as recorded in the biblical text, and the first with whom God creates a covenant of judgment, protection, and recreation illuminates Chilembwe's missionary consciousness. Chilembwe preached a gospel message that he understood, based on his interaction with biblical narratives, as implicating the trajectory of human history and the social ordering of the created material world.

My assessment of Chilembwe's recalled identification with Noah is informed by Derek Peterson's analysis of Gikuyu intellectual history, wherein he traces the relationship between reading, writing, and political imagination in colonial Kenya.[270] In his study, Peterson argues that early Gikuyu Christian converts, church elders, female revivalists, radical Marxists, and nationalist politicians during the colonial era and through early independence read texts as a "compositional activity because texts inhabited, called up, and referred to discourses outside the text."[271] In other words, as Peterson pointedly defines it, "reading" was "a socially creative

[269] On this perspective see Thompson, "Religion and Mythology in the Chilembwe Rising of 1915 in Nyasaland and the Easter Rising of 1916 in Ireland."
[270] Derek R Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004.
[271] Derek R Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004, 6.

activity."[272] Drawing on Richard Rorty's notion of contingency, Peterson argues that "the work of grammatical, vocabularic, and orthographic innovation is never done," but rather the ongoing creative "language work was the work of imagination."[273] Language, then, is not a medium by which to approximate or establish God or Nature or truth or reality.[274] Language, and thus texts, images, and motifs derived from linguistic ways of knowing, are contingent and open as humans enact words, narratives, and ideas in real time.

History unfolds in the play between language, texts, and motifs falling apart and coalescing relative to how vocabularies are translated, adopted, and acted out in time in a diversity of social, economic, and political contexts. This process—the interplay between local histories, reading, writing, and performing texts as imaginative work—produces unanticipated outcomes. Peterson shows, for example, how Gikuyu entrepreneurs "restaged textualized ideas, sentences, and plot lines" as compositions, and thus as potential communities, "off paper."[275] Relative to the local worlds their vocabularies speak into being, actors form new communities of belonging, or solidarity, to draw on Rorty's term. In brief, creative, innovative, and new uses of language and texts enacted beyond the strictures of page and typeface create new communities of (political) belonging and solidarity.[276]

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[272] Derek R Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004, 6.
[273] Derek R Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004, 9.
[274] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 16.
[275] Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya*, 242.
[276] Peterson's argument is philosophically indebted to the work of Richard Rorty. Rorty argues in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* that "only sentences can be true, and that human beings make truths by making languages in which to phrase sentences." His argument is predicated upon a removal of the idea of intrinsic natures, i.e., the idea that the real or truth exists, to which human use of language aspires to attend or express. In its place, Rorty suggests that language, or more exactly, vocabularies, are created and recreated, invented and reinvented, and thus invoke new worlds into being through their use. This occurs not to better capture a "reality" or to puzzle together previous vocabularies but to "[do] something which could not have been envisaged prior to the development of a particular set of descriptions." Because "no deep sense of how things are," or to multiply the logic forward, ought to be, can occur in this world, pursuit or discovery of truth as natural fact or divine reality fades. In its place, vocabularies and

In his study of the Liberian Christian William Harris, David Shank underscores that numerous African Christians during the colonial period enacted the biblical world in real time by embodying personas central to a history of divine intervention played out through human agents. In contrast to encountering biblical narratives as providing content through which "personal belief" or "speculative matters of faith" were determined—a modern Lockean understanding of religion as separate from matters of reason and thus governance in theory, if not in practice—Africans recognized in biblical narratives divine revelations through which they discerned themselves and their histories in dialogue with preexisting knowledge systems as well as histories.[277] Likewise, Chilembwe and others located themselves and their communities within these new revelations as essential actors in a continually unfolding divine history. Biblical narratives thus expanded African Christians' already vibrant vocabulary and narrative imaginary relative to their cultural contexts and local histories.

African Christians enacted biblical narratives most significantly as the "plays" or "scripts" created off the page or beyond orally received traditions or revelation. Biblical narratives like that of Noah provisioned a mythological world complementary to previous spiritual and cultic myths and narratives in which African Christians consciously located themselves and situated their reality on Christian terms in active dialogue with African history, revelation, and knowledge. Self-styling in African Christian history, and in African history writ large, may be best comprehended as an act of naming one's self in relationship within and to a communal, social, or universal world by inhabiting a myth in real time.[278] In other words,

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sentences, and thus truths, multiply and create new worlds ad infinitum. See Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity,* 9, 12, 16.

[277] Derek Peterson and *The Invention of Religion: Rethinking Belief in* , 4. Derek R. Peterson and Darren R. Walhof, eds., *The Invention of Religion: Rethinking Belief in Politics and History* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 4.

[278] See Bujo who writes "…people in Africa are able to avoid both the ethnocentric and the ontological fallacies, since they are not confined to the little world of their clan community—ultimately, they understand community as a

African Christians consciously participated in divine history by identifying with or embodying biblical figures or metaphors within their communities.[279]

It is of no small significance that Chilembwe envisioned himself as a human agent in divine history by identifying with Noah. In the landscape of African Christian initiatives in this period, I have found that the Noahic narrative does not seem to have been drawn upon or referenced as a point of African Christian religious or missionary consciousness. Chilembwe's self-identification as an African Noah then elucidates a number of insights into how he imagined himself and his ministry in this period of "sudden and unpredictable" colonial upheaval.[280] Even more, his identification with Noah beginning in 1901 opens a gateway to investigate his missionary consciousness, often foreclosed or diminished within a historiography that conceives of him as primarily a proto-nationalist.

By identifying with Noah, Chilembwe located himself and his people within a divine drama that included all peoples of African descent who generated creative ways to live under and through the oppressive policies and structures of racial colonialism. He also recognized in the biblical drama of Noah a narrative akin to his own in which a multiplicity of evils in the land—some historical and long-running, such as slave trades, and others newly forming, such as

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world community in which they can encounter every single human person...African ethics does not define the person as self-realization or as ontological act; rather, it describes the person as a process of coming into existence in the reciprocal relatedness of individual and community, where the latter includes not only the deceased but also God. This means that the individual becomes a person only through active participation in the life of the community. It is not membership in a community as such that constitutes the identity: only common action makes the human person a human person and keeps him from becoming an 'unfettered ego.'...the human person in Africa is from the very beginning in a network of relationships that constitutes his inalienable dignity." Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*, 86, 87.

[279] Lamin O. Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity*, Oxford Studies in World Christianity (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 201; David A. Shank, *Prophet Harris, the "Black Elijah" of West Africa*, Studies on Religion in Africa ; 10 (Leiden ; New York: EJBrill, 1994), 212–16; Casely Hayford, *William Waddy Harris The West African Reformer: The Man and His Message* (London, UK: C.M. Phillips, 1915).

[280] A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism*, 15th (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 1. My language here reflects Boahen's description of colonial imposition from an African perspective.

colonial rule—were eradicated.[281] More sustained investigation of Chilembwe's missionary consciousness as an African Noah can contribute to an emerging historiography that recovers a multiplicity of sources drawn upon during the colonial period to imagine and build possible African futures. In particular, this project underscores the necessity of accounting for a broader scope of narratives, motifs, and practices that informed African Christian missionary visions of African futures.

Ethiopianism's African Noah: African Agents in Divine History

To grasp the depth and import of Chilembwe's missionary consciousness as an African Noah taking up his rightful place as an agent in divine history and calling others to do the same, we need to briefly set him within the larger context of Black Atlantic Christianity. In this world, he received his final installment of theological training.[282] African American Christians in the early and mid-nineteenth century drew on the biblical imagery of the Exodus narrative and motif as a "metaphorical framework for understanding the Middle Passage, enslavement, and quests for emancipation."[283] Religion and biblical motifs, Eddie Glaude argues, encouraged African American Christians to imagine themselves as a people "not *alongside* religion but precisely *through* the precepts of black Christianity."[284]

Therefore, Black religious institutions served as public space apart from the purview of White ecclesiastics and politicians, and out of them, Black political consciousness took increasingly potent form in this hushed space of creative intercultural religious formation. Glaude argues that "out of black religious life emerged a conception of black national identity"

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[281] Mbembe describes colonization as "co-invention" which challenges binaries of colonized and colonizer and brings into view the diversity and range of both colonial policy and action as well as African responses and engagements with colonization. Achille Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 262.

[282] Scottish mission article; S&P chapter

[283] Glaude, *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America*, 3.

[284] Glaude, *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America*, 6 emphasis mine.

that captured the "ambivalent relation" of African Americans to America in the early and middle nineteenth century.[285] Nation language, he claims, became a means to assert peoplehood or identity in a space made separate first by White Americans and through the "collective humiliation" caused by the enduring legacy of slavery and the reality of a "violently racist nation."[286]

The Exodus narrative mobilized African American Christians to craft ways of living as a people in a tenuous and uncertain relationship to the colonial United States as racialized free and unfree men, women, and children disenfranchised by the emerging state apparatus. By the late eighteenth century and following the American Revolutionary War, free African Americans settled in Rhode Island and Nova Scotia looked increasingly to African shores as a place of exodus from slavery and the violence that plagued them in North American colonies. Seeing the western African coast as a place in which to realize their own freedom dreams, establish commercial networks, and preach Christianity, African Americans' repatriation and colonization projects reflected the larger import of the Exodus metaphor not only as a means to imagine themselves as a people in North America. As Glaude argues, they also saw themselves as a people who could leave the American wilderness altogether for the Promised Land of African shores.[287]

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[285] Eddie S. Glaude, *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-century Black America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 7, 6.

[286] Eddie S. Glaude, *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-century Black America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 8.

[287] Colonization schemes whereby free and freed Black Americans settled on the west African coasts, namely Liberia and Sierra Leone, were significantly contested and debated across African American communities. Colonization was not summarily or uniformly adopted as a means of exodus, but for some it was. On this point see Rommel-Ruiz, "Colonizing the Black Atlantic: The African Colonization Movements in Postwar Rhode Island and Nova Scotia.", 352. In addition, African Americans were not readily embraced as culturally the same or similar by West Africans, especially in Liberia. Historian Robert P. Murray investigates the constructed and malleable nature of race in his study of African American settlers in Liberia, whom West Africans called in turn "the black-white people" or "white man," men and women alike. Murray then shows how these same African American settlers returned to the United States and "used their African whiteness as part of a broader effort to lay claim to a new identity, exotic and foreign, without the accompanying associations of primitivism." See for example Robert P.

Much as the Exodus motif was a lens of imagination for belonging, identity, and to some extent Black Atlantic emigration schemes such as repatriation and colonization, according to Roy Kay, the text of Psalm 68:31, which reads "Ethiopia shall soon stretch her hands out to God," also "became a dominant heteronomic subject constituting text that would be the basis of how [Black readers] made sense of their world, their history and destiny, and themselves."[288] Kay argues that "black exegetes" interpreted Psalm 68:31 "as a verse prefiguring the conversion and salvation of Ethiopia from a spiritual and intellectual morass," adopting the gloss of "Black" for Ethiopia.[289] In other words, they read this text as a prophecy regarding the "uplift" or movement of Black peoples into Christianity through conversion and therefore into a Christianized ordering of history.

Kay shows the "flexibility and malleability" of the Ethiopia motif and text in how Black readers transformed it as "a figure of spiritual redemption and intellectual uplift" and how the sign produced twinned missions—one focused on the spiritual and material emancipation of African Americans in the United States and one igniting visions of redeeming the African continent darkened through ignorance of the gospel and, in some views, the spread of Islam.[290] Both visions, born of the fluctuating sign of Ethiopia, however, reclaimed in different ways a central role for emancipated African Americans in divine history on the one hand, and Africans' role and contribution in divine providential history through its Christianization on the other.

Murray, "Whiteness in Africa: Americo-Liberians and the Transformative Geographies of Race" (Theses and Dissertation-History.23., University of Kentucky, 2013), https://uknowledge.uky.edu/history_etds/23. 3-4, 20.

[288] Roy Kay, *The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2011), 18.

[289] Kay, *The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters*, 54.

[290] Roy Kay, *The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2011), 19, 107. On the national mission, see Chapter 3: Uplifting Ethiopia in America; on the African mission, see Chapter 4: Missionary Emigrationism.

By the late eighteenth century and toward the middle of the nineteenth century, Kay underscores that Black readings and interpretations of Psalm 68:31 had become "self-evident" in homiletical and literary references. He notes especially that founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Richard Allen (1760-1794), "links spiritual emancipation with physical emancipation" in a reference to Psalm 68:31 in 1793.[291] He likewise demonstrates that writer, teacher, and abolitionist Maria Stewart (1803-1879) also makes self-evident references to Psalm 68:31 when she equates Ethiopia's gesture toward God "with the movement from slavery to freedom, from ignorance to knowledge, disunity to oneness, and impiety to faith."[292] Stewart's larger point is not that Africans, free and unfree, in America are lodged in a kind of immovable state. Rather, they, like all other Americans, "have the same human capacity as all other peoples" to attain education and unity.[293] For Allen, Stewart, and others, enslavement of African peoples prevented their spiritual redemption, their material emancipation, and their literate possibility from being realized.[294] Thus, slavery, active policing, and informal protocols to keep African descendants, particularly in the United States, held in a lower status foiled their being folded into divine history.

What developed into a symbol of prophetic declaration and fulfillment within the religious and national life of African Americans simultaneously informed certain readings of Psalm 68:31 aimed at cultivating a Black Atlantic missionary movement directed toward Africa, including emigrations and colonization as means to this spiritual end of redemption.[295] Writers

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[291] Kay, *The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters*, 58. On the ministry and legacy of Allen see especially Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and The Black Founding Fathers* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2008); Dennis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church: A History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
[292] Kay, *The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters*, 61.
[293] Kay, *The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters*, 62–63.
[294] Kay later summarizes these aims as "conversion, acculturation, and English literacy." See Kay, *The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters*, 80.
[295] Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*.

such as Phillis Wheatley claimed that "the figure of Ethiopia signifies a people who are, and a place that is, part of the divine scheme to spread the Gospel to all peoples and lands."[296] Contrary to Ethiopians—African peoples on either side of the Atlantic—inhabiting the bottom of a racialized hierarchy of being, Wheatley claims for all Black peoples a location and role "within universal history and the design and agency of Providence."[297]

Notably, between the two significations of Ethiopia and thus the two visionary aims that emerge from them, Kay argues that the Black preacher, minister, and chaplain John Marrant (1755-1791) reads the text as signifying "one's spiritual status instead of one's nationality or race…Although race had become an inevitable category of social definition in America, in 1785 it was possible to organize the world according to religious categories instead of racial ones."[298] What changes between the two periods and conceptualizations of missions in Black readings of Ethiopia is the pliability of Ethiopia from a religious identification marker among enslaved, free, and emancipated African Americans towards a sign of a historicized African civilization used to reconceptualize human history out of a superior and divinely elected racial, or Black, Ethiopian civilization. By signifying a religious people being nationalized, Psalm 68:31 becomes the focal point and interpretive sign in an Afrocentric reading of history that contributes to a reconceived racialized and common history of destiny for all Black peoples.[299]

As St. Clair Drake describes in a fitting a summary, the Ethiopian motif served most broadly as a "counter-myth" challenging the landscape of White American Christianity.[300] African American Christians interpreted this text most often within both Afrocentric and

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[296] Kay, *The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters*, 86.
[297] Kay, *The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters*, 87.
[298] Kay, *The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters*, 56. On the nationalist rhetoric in Marrant's religious consciousness see Saville, IV, "The Gospel According to John Marrant: Religious Consciousness in the Black Atlantic, 1755-1791."
[299] Kay, *The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters*, 78.
[300] St. Clair Drake, *The Redemption of Africa and Black Religion,* 50.

providential design frameworks. A providential design framework urged African American Christian men and women to interpret their forced movement and enslavement as God's design to introduce them to Christianity and prepare them to return to their separated African brothers and sisters with a gospel message of redemption, accompanied with the tools of trade and education.[301] An Afrocentric reading emphasized the centrality of African, or Black, peoples within divine history as read in the biblical text. Combined, the two strands infused what in other ways was painful memory of the linking of two continents through the sordid trade in enslaved Africans with instead a divine purpose, suggesting that Africans would now regain their place among the great civilizations of the world.

Kay argues that once the problem of slavery was seemingly addressed, Ethiopia as a signifier of emancipatory hopes among Black readers, preachers, and writers waned. The prophecy, as initially iterated, had come to fulfillment and Black achievement could proceed unfettered. Only as the disappointments of Reconstruction and the emerging terrors of Jim and Jane Crow began did the sign of Ethiopia return in force. Here Kay falters in only negligibly including West Indian intellectual Edward W. Blyden's significant contribution to resignifying Ethiopia in a larger Black Atlantic world, including the Caribbean.[302] One needs to engage Blyden and read with him to trace the sign of Ethiopia and Psalm 68:31 into a formidable religious movement, Ethiopianism.

In and through the writings and lectures of West Indian philosopher and theologian Edward Wilmott Blyden (1832-1912), the sign of Ethiopia was transfigured by intellectuals, missionaries, and African and African American church members into Ethiopianism, a carefully

[301] St. Clair Drake, 25.
[302] Admittedly, Kay's volume focuses on "black American" legacies of reading Psalm 68:31; nonetheless, his marginalization of Blyden in this otherwise analytically and literarily astute analysis of Black reading and readership evidences a fault line in nationalist boundaries on what is otherwise Black Atlantic thought and practice.

"integrated thought-style providing a rationale for the missionary movement of Black churches, the emigration movement to Africa, independent and separatist African churches, and various expressions of black nationalism."[303] Proposing that Psalm 68:31 called Africans living on both sides of the Atlantic to act on their divine role in history, Blyden urged Africans, African Caribbeans, and African Americans to transgress the trauma and burden of slavery, violent dislocation, and a continent ruptured into a globally fragmented set of communities to reengage a deep African history wherein all Africans claimed a central place in divine history, similar to the earlier words of Wheatley.

Having suffered the terrors of capture, the Middle Passage, and enslavement, African American Christians adopted Psalm 68:31 as inspiration to return to their "suffering motherland of Africa" with a gospel of spiritual redemption and material uplift.[304] As a religious movement, Ethiopianism then spiraled out into an array of local and regional expressions of ecclesial life.[305] To that end, the verse was both compass and rudder for a small yet energetic missionary movement led by African Americans in partnership with Africans.[306]

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[303] St. Clair Drake, 57.
[304] Sylvia M. Jacobs, *Black Missionary Movement*, 221.
[305] Kalu, *African Christianity: An African Christian Story,* 230, 232.
[306] According to my research, John Chilembwe wrote the only African-authored report in extant records from the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, 1910. It is further telling that during the height of this movement, little to no records in world mission conferences, such the Ecumenical Mission Conference in New York, 1900 and the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, 1910, make mention of the movement, nor include notes from any African American attendees. On the absence of records regarding Africans American participation especially at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, 1910, Richard V. Pierard notes that Africa was "grossly underrepresented" and that "mistakenly mentioned" African delegates were actually "six to eight African-Americans who represented black Baptist and Methodist missionary societies in the United States." See Richard Pierard, "The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910: Its Shortcomings and Historical Significance," in *Missionsgeschichte Als Geschichte Der Globalisierung von Wissen*, ed. Andreas Feldtkeller and Ulrich van der Heyden (Stuttgart, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012), 304. In contrast, the *Report of the Centenary Conference (1888) on the Protestant Missions of the World,* Vol. I does note that "Africa was represented not merely by Missionaries from the dark Continent, but, what is in many respects more important, by representatives of Missionary Societies from amongst the descendants of the African race liberated from slavery in America." See The Rev. James Johnston, ed., *Report of the Centenary Conference on The Protestant Missions of the World, Vol. I* (London, UK: James Nisbet & Company, 1888)., xiv.

The promise contained in Psalm 68, Blyden argued, held out hope to those who traced their lineage to the African continent that their suffering had not occurred in vain. The promise addressed all Black humankind as created in the image of God but bent through racial colonial structures and practices under the double rods of slavery and colonialism. The promise of Psalm 68 assured those enslaved in the Americas and Caribbean that Africans worldwide would actively be drawn into the already unfolding divine history. African American Christians conjured hope that their suffering and emancipation could transpire as movements for "racial equality and ecclesiastical independence," as historian Jehu J. Hanciles describes Ethiopianism.[307] Political independence remained a latent and secondary goal within the grand scheme of the movement. The emphasis rested on restoring an African dignity and African capacity within the divine outworking of history.[308]

Ethiopianism was one framework through which African American Christians recognized themselves and their separated kin across the Atlantic as actors within divine history. Moreover, Ethiopianism countered the ideological and practical bias of certain forms of colonial Christianity that affirmed Africans as capable but *not yet* ultimately skilled to forge and direct their own destinies, including reading, interpreting, and enacting biblical texts and narratives.[309] Indeed, Hanciles argues that Ethiopianism "represents the earliest constructive attempt to articulate an authentic African Christian identity in the modern period."[310] Adrian Hastings, among others, further points out that Ethiopianism as a movement was diffuse and took on characteristics relevant to local context.[311]

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[307] Hanciles, *Euthanasia of a Mission,* 148.
[308] As Yolanda Pierce tells it, African American Christians, especially women, were motivated by love for their brothers and sisters. See Yolanda Pierce, "Leaving Husband, Home, and Baby and All: African American Women and Nineteenth-Century Global Missions," *The Journal of World Christianity* 6, no. 2 (2016): 277–90.
[309] Ogbu Kalu, African Christianity: *An African Story,* 228.
[310] Jehu Hanciles, *Euthanasia of a Mission,* 148.
[311] Jehu Hanciles, *Euthanasia of a Mission,* 148.

As both constructive and diffuse, each aspect contained deeply subversive potential in that it inspired African Christians to recognize themselves and their communities' realities in biblical texts and envision divine history through their actions.[312] Across colonial racialist systems dependent on extraction of African lives, goods, and genius as means to generate wealth, as African Christians embraced divine history as their own, they implicitly challenged emergent economic and political orders. By confronting church order and practice that maintained African Christians as capable but not yet ready or educated enough to carry on their own religious affairs, they undermined racial colonialism in ecclesial practice.[313]

Biblical Narratives and African Missionary Consciousness

Returning to the Shire Highlands, arguments about African agency and capacity to understand and teach specifically biblical narratives and texts were a common refrain in both questions and testimonies at the Commission of Inquiry investigating the causes and origins of Chilembwe's uprising. To what extent were the missions entrusting Africans with studying the Bible on their own? Were African Christians teaching and preaching outside of European missionaries' direction or control? What did African Christians preach or teach? Witnesses such as Bishop Thomas Cathrew Fisher, Bishop of Nyasaland as of 1910, were quick to describe the "ideal staff" of their mission stations, including "an European priest in charge, an assistant priest, a layman, a nurse and a teacher—all Europeans."[314] No Africans, he insisted, were charged with teaching or interpreting the Bible.

Fisher did not agree with a growing viewpoint that the colonial government should restrict circulation of the Bible. Seemingly pragmatic, when asked if the government should,

[312] Jehu J. Hanciles also uses the phrase "subversive potential."
[313] Modern capitalist system; Walter Rodney, Cedric Robinson
[314] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 388.

Fisher responded, "I do not think they could."[315] Fisher did take issue, however, with "isolated texts published in newspapers," considering them dangerous when separated from the larger corpus of context. In addition, and importantly for my analysis, he determined that Africans could neither learn nor access the entirety of the Bible. Fisher noted, "As a matter of practice, the native gets the New Testament in parts—he does not get the whole Bible straight away."[316] Ironically, although Fisher took issue with texts isolated in brief, he seemingly did not see a problem with detaching portions of the New Testament from the whole, or the New Testament from the Hebrew Bible in general. Fisher's White Fathers colleague Bishop Guillemé concurred, going further to say he would not, for example, give the Song of Songs or Leviticus "to a girl or to children, and natives are like children are they not?"[317]

Europeans were not alone in this viewpoint. Reverend Harry Kambwiri Matecheta, Chilembwe's frequent visitor and friend, answered the question "Which do you think is the better for preaching to the African, the old or the new testament?" with the brief "the new testament."[318] When Matecheta taught Africans he distinguished between "old and new dispensations" and taught "the portions [of the old] that have been fulfilled in the new."[319] He admitted too that he concurred with the statement "the old testament is swallowed up by the new testament." When Matecheta was further asked a two-part question, "Do you remember St. Peter saying that St. Paul spoke many things which were hard to understand…And you think there are things possibly you cannot understand in the Bible?" he responded, "Yes–many."[320]

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[315] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 389.
[316] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 389.
[317] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 390.
[318] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 143.
[319] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 143.
[320] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 145.

Comparatively analyzed, while European missionaries were generally questioned as to the extent they entrusted Africans with teaching biblical narratives to other Africans, ordained Africans such as Matecheta or the Watchtower Movement leader Elliott Kamwana, who corresponded with Chilembwe, were asked what they taught, the extent to which they comprehended what they taught, and what were the sources of their teachings—what portions of the Bible or what sources outside of the Bible did they consult.[321] Elliott Kamwana, who delivered curt and tightlipped responses to the Commission, subtly circumvented probing questions, such as when asked, "But when the full kingdom comes in, will there be no more taxation?" He responded, "The Bible does not say that." When pressed further, "What are your views about it? Do you understand it would be so?" he replied, "What I don't understand from the Bible, I would not say anything about. The Bible is silent on that point."[322]

While the matter appears to focus on biblical comprehension and teaching, the larger concern was what could and would African Christians do with how they read biblical narratives. Surveying the landscape of several of Chilembwe's African Christian contemporaries preaching in such disparate locations as today's Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, west central Africa (including the Democratic Republic of Congo), South Africa, Nigeria, and Ghana, a significant number identified themselves or their ministries with biblical prophetic figures and texts, including for example west Africans William Waddé Harris's and Garrick Braide's identifications with the prophet Elijah.[323] They correlated their own calls to ministry among their fellow Africans with biblical prophets' calls as recorded in the Hebrew Bible. By inscribing themselves into divine

[321] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 202–11.
[322] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 209.
[323] Shank, *Prophet Harris, the "Black Elijah" of West Africa*; Frieder Ludwig, "Elijah II: Radicalisation and Consolidation of the Garrick Braide Movement," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 23, no. 4 (1993): 296–317.

history as prophets, they also grafted themselves into west and central African prophet traditions and in so doing also extended biblical drama into African society.[324]

While some African Christian prophetic movements certainly intersected with Ethiopianist-inspired African missions and churches, many did not. Closer to Chilembwe's home, the situation in which biblical personas were dramatized in material life differed from that of west and west central Africa. As detailed above, an impending sense of destruction permeated the region and plagued Chilembwe.[325] His contemporaries, Charles Domingo and Elliott Kamwana, charismatic leaders of Watchtower Movements and also students of Joseph Booth, drew upon apocalyptic texts that resonated with the experience of constant colonial violence, loss of land, erosion of autonomy, and labor migrations that were altering social and political formations in the Shire Highlands. Because in both culture and structure European missions were seen as akin to the colonial apparatus, no matter how much differentiation between the two did in fact occur, the missions seemed ill-suited to address the precarities that the introduction of the new colonial interests and powers stirred across kinship groups. Domingo and Kamwana addressed the entangled realities of violence and dispossession while also directing hopes and attention toward a New Kingdom, a new epoch in history in which Jesus Christ would appear to initiate a world freed from White men and their economics and politics that bent and constrained Africans as laborers.[326]

Unlike his contemporaries helming prophetic movements in west and west central Africa, however, Chilembwe neither participated by symbolic proxy in the tradition of biblical

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[324] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 185-186, 205.

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[326] Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa*; Karen Fields, "Charismatic Religion as Popular Protest," *Theory and Society* 11, no. 3 (1982): 321–61, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00211661; J. Chaphadzika Chakanza, *Voices of Preachers in Protest: The Ministry of Two Malawian Prophets, Elliot Kamwana and Wilfred Gudu* (Mzuzu, Malawi: Luviri Press, 2018).

prophetism nor did he adopt a prophetic persona. He looked over time to such apocalyptic texts such as in the biblical book of Daniel, as Jack Thompson argues, to interpret upheavals in his context.[327] Unlike Kamwana and Domingo, the imagery of a New Kingdom makes scant appearance in Chilembwe's remembered teachings or in his reports to the National Baptists. Chilembwe is, however, singular in his early identification with Noah and the related narrative of the Flood as inspiration for his sense of missionary call among his fellow Africans. As I propose, Chilembwe named himself as an African Noah when he initiated his mission because he understood his missionary call as a confrontation with the diffuse machinations of evils harming the region, namely, land theft and the lingering effects of intersecting slave trades.[328] While Chilembwe never declared European missionaries as evil per se, it is necessary to indicate that he considered the missionary legacy in the region at minimum problematic and at most impotent to address the virulent evils persisting in the land. Chilembwe enacted the call of Noah as an African pointing to a new epoch in the history of Christianity and in African society, whereby the evils sweeping the land and the curse of toil would give way to a recreated order under African unity and leadership.

Evils in the Land: Slave Trades, Slavery, and Land Theft[329]

When Noah is born, his father Lamech names him, saying, "He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed."[330] Notably, while the LORD is named as the one who cursed the ground, it is the ground that is the causal

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[327] Jack Thompson, "Religion and Mythology in the Chilembwe Rising of 1915," 63.

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[329] Genesis 6: 5-6, 11-12, NRSV: [5] The LORD saw that the wickedness of humans was great in the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. [6] And the LORD was sorry that he had made humans on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart… [11] Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. [12] And God saw that the earth was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth.

[330] Genesis 5:29. In Hebrew, Noah means "comfort."

agent in the human pain of labor. Beginning with the ground, or land, and human pain, is an apt place from which to narrate Chilembwe's sense of calling to be a Noah in the Shire Highlands. As he founded his mission, Chilembwe located aspects of his own sense of divine calling in relation to freeing land and labor for African purposes in the story of Noah. A short story illustrates this point.

On July 13th, 1915, in Blantyre, Nyasaland, Reverend Harry Kambwiri Matecheta took the testimony stand at the British Colonial Commission of Inquiry into the Rising. As previously discussed, the Commission examined Kambwiri in detail concerning his conversations and potential affiliations with Chilembwe, as well as with Chilembwe's collaborators. In giving his testimony, Kambwiri recalled a theological conversation that occurred between himself and Chilembwe two years prior to the uprising.

Chilembwe posed the question to Kambwiri, "What is sin?"[331] Kambwiri responded, "Sin is to do what God forbids." As the conversation proceeded, Chilembwe pressed Kambwiri further and made implicit reference to Genesis 3 as he queried, "To become like God – is that sin? Explain that to me."[332] As Kambwiri sat in silence, Chilembwe argued back with his own answer that "to be like God is not sin." When Kambwiri reposed the question "What is sin?" to Chilembwe, he responded, "sin was what the Europeans were doing here, coming and taking away the land here." Kambwiri, however, did not agree.[333]

Chilembwe's preoccupation with evil in the Shire Highlands focused initially on the disrupted and unstable relationship between Africans, their land, and their labor caused by

[331] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 149.
[332] In the culmination of the biblical narrative in which God finds Adam and Eve knowing themselves as naked in the Garden of Eden, God stitches together clothes from them and according to Genesis 3:22 says, "The (hu)man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil…"
[333] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 149.

colonial intrusion. Colonial theft of land through privatization, alienation, and taxation followed if not in form in effect the centuries-long incursions of slave trades in the region. Indeed, in one conversation with a Blantyre Mission colleague, Chilembwe interpreted the Christian idea of a first resurrection as "freedom from bondage and slavery."[334] He further maintained that colonialists were implementing a new form of slavery by alienating land from Africans and then forcing them to pay to live and work on lands previously held in trust and under guardianship.[335] In Chilembwe's view, then, resurrection required both the abolition of slave trades and slavery as well as cessation of European sins, which he interpreted as akin to new slavery in the land.

If we are to grapple with Chilembwe's equating colonial land theft with sin vis à vis the history of slave trades, it is of consequence to detail a more regional and historical description of the slave trades to which Chilembwe made reference.[336] Today's Malawi maps onto the once-expansive Maravi Kingdom that overlapped the contemporary national borders of Mozambique, Malawi, and Zambia from the late fifteenth century until the encroachment of slaving raids on its sovereignty in the nineteenth century. From 1801 to 1875, the Maravi Kingdom's nearly equidistant location between slave ports on the Swahili Coast and Zambezi River's exit into the Indian Ocean transformed the region into a nerve center of oceanic slave trades. The three categories of which we are most concerned include the Swahili Coast, transatlantic, and internal slave trades.

Zanzibar's Swahili/Arab traders, European—mostly Portuguese—traders and shippers, and primarily Yao traders and brokers forged a triangular oceanic economy through the trade in

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[334] First and second resurrection are prophetic and Pauline notions in the biblical text.
[335] J. M. Schoffeleers, ed., *Guardians of the Land: Essays on Central African Territorial Cults*, 5 (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1979).
[336] Paul Lovejoy argues for three periods through which slavery as a "fundamental feature of the African political economy" developed: 1350-1600, 1600 to 1800, and 1800-1900. See Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 3rd Edition, 1. My description is primarily concerned with the third period and its relevance and effects in Malawi at the turn of twentieth century.

enslaved Africans over the duration of three to four centuries.[337] Due to the development of oceanic trades, slave trading internal to the African continent, as historian Paul Lovejoy argues, expanded and "became more common over an increasingly greater geographical area."[338] Concurrently, enslaved Africans' importance grew economically and socially. Expansion and increased importance both occurred in association with external trades, namely the transatlantic slave trade and the Swahili coast and Indian Ocean slave trades.

The internal trade in enslaved Africans that impacted today's southern Malawi can be traced back to the trade in gold moved along the Zambezi River prior to the seventeenth century, creating what Lovejoy describes as a river trade "corridor to the Indian Ocean."[339] By the 1770s and into the early 1800s, slaves replaced gold as the more valuable cargo to be transported to the Indian Ocean, often to French sugar plantation islands in the Indian Ocean.[340] Yao traders helmed the internal trade in enslaved Africans in conjunction with Swahili/Arab traders and sultanates working along the Swahili Coast. However, it is incumbent to include that the long-running internal trade routes morphed into byways on which enslaved Africans were exported as the Portuguese and French expanded trade, due in part to the global demand for a workforce to cultivate raw goods, such as sugar, cotton, spices, and gold.

Swahili-speaking Arabs directed most of the East African coastal trade in enslaved Africans. The growth of the trade along the coast increased relative to the pull into oceanic trades.[341] The mouth of the Zambezi poured into the Indian Ocean, providing easy access to one

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[337] Jonathan Glassman, *Feasts and Riot Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888*, Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1995.
[338] Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 1.
[339] Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 76.
[340] Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 76.
[341] For treatments of the Swahili Coast trade in enslaved Africans, see Thomas McDow, *Buying Time: Debt and Nobility in the Western Indian Ocean,* Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2018, 8, 6 for an oceanic perspective on the region developed through the themes of time, debt, mobility, kinship, and environment in the Indian Ocean world as an analytic move toward process geographies rather than national histories. McDow offers a richly

of the primary ports of embarkment of enslaved Maravi, Nyanja, and others exchanged for guns as well as cutlery, beads, brass, and foodstuffs, including sugar, turmeric, and dates.[342] In her collection of oral histories, Rosemary Argente notes that the East Coast slave trade initiated the loss of "myths, religious beliefs, historical ritual, prophesy, songs, craft skill, genealogies, customs; and the obliteration of all the spiritual and intellectual resources of their culture—the memory of their origins completely defaced."[343] While Argente may overstate the argument for total destruction of memory, her larger point regarding the violence of the East Coast slave trade as it continued unabated despite abolitionist pushes for "legitimate trade" stands.

Interior groups, such as the Yao, became principal trade brokers both in internal and Swahili Coast trades, as noted. While Swahili/Arabs accumulated political and economic power, the Yao generated economic and social power through trade that increased their wealth by extending their domains. As will be detailed later, many Yao converted to Islam concurrent to expanding slave trades in the southern region of today's Malawi for both political and religious reasons.[344] However, as Yao accumulated wealth through trade in enslaved Africans, they never acquired accumulated enough social capital to establish political power, or a polity over which they ruled.[345]

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complex economic, social, and environmental history. See also Jonathan Glassman, *Feasts and Riot Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888*, Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1995; Frederick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890-1925*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980.

[342] http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates, accessed August 17, 2018. The Slave Voyage database indicates that the height of the East African slave trade occurred between 1801-1875, with the Portuguese slave trade accounting for approximately 64 percent of embarked voyages of enslaved Africans between 1601 to 1875. Of the 64 percent of total voyages, 93.7 percent of Portugal's voyages occurred between 1801-1850. Spain and France trail substantially behind Portugal as second and third most voyages.

[343] Rosemary Argente, *Blantyre and Yao Women*, Mzuzu, Malawi: Mzuni Press, 2018, 48.

[344] Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 92.

[345] Melvin E. Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 232.

In addition to internal and Swahili coast slave trades, approximately 543,000 enslaved Africans were pulled into the transatlantic slave trade from southeast Africa through the port of Quelimane, in modern Mozambique, well into the nineteenth century. The legal but tenuous abolishment of slave trade in Great Britain in 1807 barely stymied the commerce.[346] For the fraction of enslaved Africans who survived the journey, most disembarked as enslaved laborers in southeast Brazil.[347] More importantly for the story at hand, coastal and oceanic export of enslaved Africans drove an increase in transport and use of enslaved labor as endemic to nineteenth century African political economies in the region. Even though the slave trade was banned by Britain in 1807, as Lovejoy argues, the push for "legitimate trade" in goods that was proposed to supersede, replace, or prove as lucrative as the trade in enslaved Africans had in fact the opposite effect for inland African communities.[348] This case appears especially true in the region of today's Malawi and is apparent as a concern within Chilembwe's imagination of and approach to mission.

These three intersecting slave trades had long kept the region of the current nation-state of Malawi in turmoil; over time the trades upended prior kinship ties, set off constant migrations, and increased social vulnerability, particularly for women.[349] Starting in the first half of the nineteenth century, numbers of slaves transported in the region increased between 8,000 to 10,000.[350] Although not directly from the region of Malawi, the trade and the migrations and

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[346] Laws to abolish or ban slave trades were passed in France in 1818, in French colonies in 1848; in Denmark in 1802; in 1791 and 1794 in the United States. It should be well noted that abolishment of slave trades did not equate to legal abolishment of slavery.
[347] https://www.slavevoyages.org/static/images/assessment/intro-maps/09.jpg; https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates, Accessed January 19, 2023.
[348] Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 161.
[349] Megan Vaughan, "Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi: A Study of Rural Communities in the Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley Frmo the Mid-Nineteenth Century to 1915" (London, UK, University of London, 1981), 37.
[350] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966,* 19.

disruptions it fostered nonetheless impacted the area. By the end of the nineteenth century, the three trades' intersections and correlating expansions hit Malawi with what John McCracken describes as "exceptional force," even if the southern region was less impacted.[351] As Megan Vaughan further corroborates, trade in enslaved Africans superseded the trade in ivory by the 1870s, the decade as well as phenomenon into which Chilembwe was born.[352]

Chilembwe himself was offspring of a slave-trading Yao father and a Mang'anja mother who was most likely captured, enslaved, and incorporated into his father's Yao kinship-based clan. The not-too-distant history of slave raiding and trading in the region would have then worked on Chilembwe's analysis of the colonial realities that plagued himself, his mission, and the region. His lived experience would have surely informed his ability to forge connections between the predicament of colonialism and residue of a slaving economy. In fact, Chilembwe's correspondence with the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention includes references to the travesty of slavery and the slave trades as an evil that he both observed and knew as his lived reality.[353] Furthermore, he correlated the violent colonial conquest of the region under the banners of abolitionism and the cause of legitimate trade that surrounded him with this history.

In contrast, one of the primary architects of formal colonial rule, Frederick Lugard, described the Swahili Coast trade as "unspeakable atrocities" committed by Swahili/Arabs. He also recognized that the British likewise had "for two and a half centuries…stained our hands…and pocketed the gold which was the price of human blood."[354] Lugard considered

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[351] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 8, 19.
[352] Vaughan, "Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi: A Study of Rural Communities in the Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley Frmo the Mid-Nineteenth Century to 1915," 37.
[353] *Mission Herald; NBC Convention Report*
[354] Frederick D. Lugard, *The Rise of Our East African Empire: Early Efforts in Nyasaland and Uganda*, 27.

terminating the practice of slavery and the slave trades as a "duty to perform towards the African."[355] Yet Lugard perceived that the largest problem to stymying trade in enslaved Africans was in the "nature of the African" who was "wedded to slavery through centuries on centuries."[356] It was incumbent on the British "to raise him [the African] to a higher level."[357]

In his analysis, however, Lugard failed to make connections between the three types of trades as intertwined problems. The massive forced movement through enslavement of Africans from western, southwestern, southern, and eastern ports into the transatlantic slave trade implicated his identified culprits of wrongdoing, i.e., African and Swahili-speaking traders. Internal trades grew at unprecedented scales in African history relative to the increased global demand for labor to transform raw materials into consumable goods. Although Lugard admits to the role played by the British in slave trades, he seems to diminish or not be aware that the British transatlantic and Indian Ocean trades drove expansion of inland slave trades and slavery as well as broader social change among Africans—especially Yao, Ngoni, Mang'anja, and Lomwe—in the Nyasaland Protectorate.[358] Although he acknowledged British culpability in the history of slavery, the reality of the mid- to late nineteenth century slave trade was an African, Swahili/Arab, and Portuguese problem that the British determined was theirs to solve. Through patrol of seas, violent eradication, and development of legitimate trade, the abolitionist cause transpired into imperial rivalries to declare regions and their goods the purview of either the Portuguese or British crowns and the stuff of legitimate trade.[359]

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[355] Frederick D. Lugard, *The Rise of Our East African Empire: Early Efforts in Nyasaland and Uganda*, 27.
[356] Frederick D. Lugard, *The Rise of Our East African Empire: Early Efforts in Nyasaland and Uganda*, 27-28.
[357] Frederick D. Lugard, *The Rise of Our East African Empire: Early Efforts in Nyasaland and Uganda*, 28.
[358] For a comparative examination on how the transatlantic slave trade caused social instability in west Central Africa, Benguela, see Mariana Candido, *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World: Benguela and Its Hinterland* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[359] Having decided that policing the coasts and waterways proved ineffective to reduce trade in enslaved Africans, Lugard schemed to move the work of abolition forward through inland wars waged "against the slave-raiders in their own headquarters." See Frederick D. Lugard, *The Rise of Our East African Empire: Early Efforts in Nyasaland and*

The point here is not to enter debates about culpability for increased African social vulnerability and instability, dislocations, and petty wars between a variety of parties implicated in different slave trades .[360] The evidence I underscore is that expanded, heightened, and prevalent slave trades and British-led attempts to halt them were recent memories of Chilembwe and his kin, perhaps especially for his mother. Prior to Chilembwe's departure from and return to the Shire Highlands from the United States in 1901, he would have more than likely known of or heard rumors about any one of the small-scale African conflicts and early colonial conquests that were each in some way consequences of lingering slave trades. For example, prior to formal British rule, Lugard led White South African mercenaries under the auspices of the Africa Lakes Company in waging a minor battle against Swahili traders in 1887, who had engaged in earlier disputes with the Ngoni who raided the region for potential slaves to capture and trade.[361]

These limited wars, however, segued into imperial competition between the British and Portuguese to control the flow of legitimate trade that they sought to establish and claim as their own. Parceling and alienating land were endemic to imperial means and were intended to establish control. British settlers and planters first began alienating land as early as the 1870s.[362] For example, former Blantyre missionary John Buchanan negotiated with Yao chiefs in 1889 to 1890 to secure one million acres in the Shire Highlands.[363] In the area in which Chilembwe

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Uganda, 64, 208. For a summary of Lugard's scheme, including setting up a force of African, Indian, and British members on Lake Malawi see Lugard, *The Rise of Our East African Empire: Early Efforts in Nyasaland and Uganda*, 202-210.

[360] For a representation of arguments and engagements with how the transatlantic slave trade drove social, economic, and environmental change see for example Joseph Calder Miller, *Way of Death:Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade: 1730-1830* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988) and Mariana Candido's recent review wherein she argues that Africanist scholarship needs to be more fully integrated into studies of capitalism, in contrast to studies of capitalism that only grant Africans weight in the discourse once they arrive in the Americas. See also Mariana Candido, "Capitalism and Africa: Revisiting Way of Death 35 Years After Its Publication," *American Historical Review* 127, no. 3 (September 2022): 1439–48.

[361] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 52.

[362] Landeg White, *Magomero*, 77. White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village*, 77.

[363] White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village*, 77.

eventually started his mission and church, Buchanan and two brothers purchased land in Zomba, Blantyre, Chiradzulu, and Thyolo.[364] Buchanan bought land totaling 169,000 acres on behalf of Alexander Low Bruce from Yao chief Mpama in February 1890, which became the Bruce Estates and the most significant site of Chilembwe's uprising. In the southern region, alienation of land proceeded across the 1880s under the direction, discretion, and connections of Buchanan, without recourse to military intervention.[365]

Notably, this land was uninhabited and thus not a significant source of potential slave trading. The most compelling explanation of why Mpama surrendered it without recourse to violence lies in the longer history of the slave trade, Mpama's own need for potential protection from Yao chiefs opposed to him, and the immediate reality that the land had been primarily abandoned. As historian Landeg White writes, from this point forward, the "issue dominating the politics of colonial Nyasaland, at least in the southern region, was not the terms on which Africans could be driven from their ancestral lands but the terms on which they would be permitted to settle."[366]

Following Buchanan's oversight of land alienation and with his support, colonial administrator Harry Johnston, who was the first British Commissioner in Nyasaland, implemented militarized subjugation and land alienation.[367] On June 11, 1891, Portugal and Great Britain formally and on paper determined the respective boundaries on African lands. British efforts to then establish formal rule segued into violent military campaigns, as McCracken describes, between 1891 and 1895, the very years of Chilembwe's work with Joseph

[364] White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village*, 77.
[365] For an extended discussion and hypotheses about the later confusion concerning how so much land was rendered to British settlers without force, see White, Magomero, 78-81.
[366] White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village*, 81.
[367] Brian Morris, *An Environmental History of Southern Malawi: Land and People of the Shire Highlands* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 95.

Booth, which will be detailed below.[368] Johnston used the resources of Cecil Rhodes' British South African Company—including enlisting 200 Jat Sikhs, Makua mercenaries, and British officers, as well as local troops drawn primarily from among the Ngoni, and eventually Tonga mercenaries—in these years to wage conquest, securing land as British territory.[369] According to McCracken, when by 1898 colonial rule had been all but established, military posts were built along known slave trade routes for the purpose of disturbing the slave trade while also safeguarding routes for trade in "legitimate" goods, just as Lugard and eventually Johnston had schemed and implemented.[370]

Chilembwe would have witnessed or been aware of at least some of the increasingly violent atrocities between the British and shifting African factions, depending on the intended enemy of ever-pivoting colonial takeover. Colonial conquest left in its wake scorched villages, stolen livestock, and destroyed food supplies. These catastrophes turned into food shortages. Simultaneously, colonial conquest set off waves of migration during the "cycles of violence" as McCracken describes the period.[371] While the trade in slaves may been shaken, domestic slavery remained a mainstay practice. Thus, for Chilembwe to liken British land alienation and privatization to slavery and to interpret it as sin made an astute connection and levied a calculated theological argument among African Christians in the Protectorate.

As the terror of colonial military campaigns changed into structural colonial administration, the architect of colonialism in Nyasaland, Harry Johnston, implemented a land policy and received "land claims" from Europeans desiring to settle in the region.[372] Land claims

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[368] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 57.
[369] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 59.
[370] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 65.
[371] In contrast to views that colonial administration would bring peace and security to warring chiefdoms and traders who dealt in both slaves and ivory.
[372] Morris, *An Environmental History of Southern Malawi: Land and People of the Shire Highlands*, 103.

made by British settlers developed over time into a plantation economy in Chilembwe's home region of the Shire Highlands, subtle in its violence but no less pernicious than the military tactics employed against slave traders.[373] As environmental historian Brian Morris describes it, the plantation economy advanced through land alienation, the thangata (or labor tax) system, and growth of cash crops through tenant or migrant labor.[374]

Scholars have widely discussed and documented the role of colonial land policy and British settler activity in the Shire Highlands in encouraging Chilembwe's uprising. Indeed, "land" figures prominently as a motif in John McCracken's detailed *A History of Malawi 1859-1966,* Landeg White's *Magomero,* and Brian Morris's *An Environmental History of Southern Malawi.* Most scholars concur that Chilembwe's final violent stand was motivated at least in part by British alienation and privatization of land away from Africans, including agriculturalists and as well as Lomwe migrants who were moving north into the Protectorate.

Shepperson, McCracken, Jack Thompson, the Lindens, and Melvin Page do nonetheless offer the most tempered analysis by showing that Chilembwe's displeasure over land policy in the newly declared Protectorate intertwined with his own weakened health and other distressing factors he observed over time, such as the widowing of women and wartime conscription, which encouraged a possible shift in his thinking and actions toward a millenarian, or apocalyptic, view of his context.[375] Prior to each of these developments, the Noahic narrative nonetheless resonated with Chilembwe due to his perceptions of pervasive evil, a call to minister to his own, and the constructive vision given to Noah to build an ark, gather all living creatures, and save them from

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[373] Brian Morris, *An Environmental History of Southern Malawi,* 5.
[374] Brian Morris, *An Environmental History of Southern Malawi,* 5.
[375] Thompson, "Religion and Mythology in the Chilembwe Rising of 1915 in Nyasaland and the Easter Rising of 1916 in Ireland"; McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*; Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*; Linden and Linden, "John Chilembwe and the New Jerusalem"; Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*.

impending doom while waiting a new creation. In ascribing the identity of Noah to himself, frequently or clearly enough that it was recalled at the Commission of 1915, Chilembwe's sense of African Christian subjectivity attests to his resounding commitment to face evil in the land as had Noah, by creating an alternative shelter of safety.

As the colonial administration continued to implement the land policy as designed by Harry Johnston, Chilembwe's argument with his fellow Christian Matecheta illustrates differing approaches among African Christians to the predicament of colonialism as it accumulated into policy and practice. Chilembwe's heightened attention to the removal of land from African guardianship as a new form of slavery was not misdirected. British colonial policy privatized land and its uses in the Shire Highlands. The fruit of African labor and toil became required payment to live on the newly privatized and British-claimed land.[376] In effect, African agriculturalists and migrant laborers became subjects on land which had been plenty and "held in common" in the nineteenth century.[377]

Chilembwe was not the only missionary in the Shire Highlands to describe colonial land policy as a new type of slavery. Scotsman David Clement Scott of Blantyre Mission, for one, also asserted that British land policy amounted to no more than "enslavement."[378] In fact, Church of Scotland missionaries working contemporaneous to Chilembwe consistently and openly critiqued colonial administrators and British settlers in the Protectorate for their wanton disregard of African rights to land and to the control of their own labor.[379] The well-known and well-regarded Alexander Hetherwick of Blantyre Mission, appointed to represent African interests on

[376] Morris, *An Environmental History of Southern Malawi: Land and People of the Shire Highlands*, 104, 109.
[377] Morris, *An Environmental History of Southern Malawi: Land and People of the Shire Highlands*, 107.
[378] As referenced in Morris, *An Environmental History of Southern Malawi: Land and People of the Shire Highlands*, 109.
[379] MNA 86/ZOM/2/8/9 Robert Laws to Alexander Hetherwick, March 20, 1915 commenting that the colonial government had to provide land security to Africans if they were going to demand taxes.

the colonial council, often spoke out on behalf of protecting African access to land. Their protests amounted to little to no change, and their missionary practices of either restricting African Christians from teaching the Bible, as the Marist Fathers did, or overseeing African training, seemed to contradict overtures to promoting Africans' capacity to direct their future and to regain autonomy over their land, labor, and social life.

What is distinct, however, in Chilembwe's assessment of his context was his self-consciousness as a missionary to his own, whose call included saving them from material evil as much as preaching a message of spiritual redemption. From his work with Booth to his days of study and training among National Baptists, Chilembwe claimed a missionary identity. When ailing and on the brink of death in Newport News, Virginia in 1899, Chilembwe in his words declared, "God bring me to this land to get light to take back to me people. He is not going to kill me here."[380] The National Baptists in turn described him as being "earnestly engaged in preaching the Gospel to his own people."[381]

As a self-asserted African Noah, then, Chilembwe conceived his missionary task to include addressing what he described as the sins of Europeans. As an African missionary with a historical relationship to and vested interest in the future of the Shire Highlands, he recognized in himself a person akin to Noah, in that he sensed himself called to "bring relief" to his family and to those he considered kin in a broader sense—those whom he observed were buckled under the burden of colonial land policy. Chilembwe extended the divine drama of Noah off the biblical page and into the Shire Highlands by calling attention to evils in the land. He concurrently preached a gospel message that addressed a spiritual as well as material ordering of life in the Protectorate. At a dramatic crossroads in African history, Chilembwe imagined a no less crucial

[380] As recorded in *Mission Herald,* Volume 11, Number 12, February 1907, Louisville, Kentucky.
[381] *Mission Herald,* Volume 11, Number 12, February 1907, Louisville, Kentucky.

turn in divine history wherein Africa and Africans reclaimed their place in the making of a new creation wiped clear of European evils.[382]

The Problem and Potential of Missionary Christianity

In Chilembwe's estimation, certain practices within missionary forms of Christianity did not adhere to what he understood as biblical teaching. For example, "because he had read in the Gospel of Matthew that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan," Chilembwe refused to undergo baptism by sprinkling at the Blantyre Mission. According to National Baptist reports, when Chilembwe met Baptist missionary Joseph Booth in 1892, he asked to be baptized by immersion.[383] This brief story regarding Chilembwe's baptism illustrates that how he heard, read, and understood biblical narratives set him at odds, even prior to baptism, with the Scottish missionaries working in the region. This point does not conclusively establish that Chilembwe considered missions and missionaries as evils or as problematic. He participated in two larger mission movements—the Western missionary and Black Atlantic missionary movements—through this affiliation with both Booth and the National Baptists. This narrative, however, does make the point that Chilembwe was working within the biblical record to discern the practice, implications, and meaning of Christianity for himself and his context.

From Livingstone's first treks up the Zambezi, in numerous African views, Christianity closely aligned with European culture and power structures.[384] Harry Johnston indeed recalled this correlation when he wrote in 1911, that "a great outburst of zeal on the part of the Protestant Churches of Britain and Ireland, especially Scotland" after Livingstone's death in 1873, resulted

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[382] Voices, 126.
[383] *Mission Herald,* Volume 11, Number 12, February 1907, Louisville, Kentucky; see also Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 48.
[384] Hanciles, *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions: The Twentieth Century: Traditions in a Global Context*.

in the recreation of missionary settlements in Nyasaland, which in turn led to the establishment of a protectorate over that region."[385] By the close of the nineteenth century, statistically and in practice Christianity remained under the purview of "white men" in many an African's eyes and experience.

Chilembwe's family subjected him to this critique when he adopted the religion as his own through baptism and education. They raised concerns about his going to America with a White Christian, for example, fearing that he would not return.[386] Thus, the form of Christianity introduced into the Shire Highlands posed a problem of its own making for Africans like Chilembwe who wished to practice Christianity. The issue of missionary Christianity for Chilembwe's family, among others, was as much about the potency of African Christian practice as it was about the integrity of this new religion to promote African well-being and life.[387]

Islam seemed poised in retrospect to become a "new" influential religion in the region, into which African territorial practices and institutions were being absorbed or reconstituted prior to the 1858 arrival of David Livingstone in today's Malawi.[388] As historian David Bone details, between 1840 and 1887 Islam spread in Malawi due to linkages with Swahili, or East African, coast traders of slaves and ivory (along with the attempted establishment of Swahili/Arab sultanates in Nkhotatkota and Karonga) as well as substantial conversion of the Yao to Islam. The nascent spread of Islam in the Nyasaland Protectorate occurred primarily around the trading and slaving centers Nkhotakota and Karonga, central and northern sites on Lake Malawi, where Salim bin Abdullah in 1840 and Mlozi bin Kazbadema in 1880, respectively, made efforts to

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[385] Harry Johnston, *The Opening Up of Africa* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1911), 250–51.
[386] Shepperson & Price discuss the operating myth about America and Europeans at this time in the Shire Highlands as the land of cannibals. Shepperson & Price, *Independent African*, 9-10.
[387] Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, 25, 285.
[388] McCracken, *History of Malawi*, 37.

establish themselves as sultans under the authority of Zanzibar.[389] The correlation of newly established sultanates with increased wealth and power through territorial domination and increase in kin via enslavement mapped onto preexisting narratives and practices.

As slave and ivory traders who ran westward routes as well as Swahili Coast routes in and through the former region of the Maravi Kingdom, the Yao's initial exposure to the religion transpired through their slave trade connections. As their work as slave as well as ivory traders tied into the power brokering by sultans hailing from the Swahili Coast, the Yao perceived Islam as imbuing them with a sense of "prestige" in a landscape of contested power.[390] Importantly, Bone contends that Yao conversion to Islam was initially "a movement of primarily political and social rather than a religious nature." [391] In other words, the Yao sought economic and social capital rather than the adaptation of rites and rituals transformed. However, as Bone and Edward Alpers argue, by the last two decades of the nineteenth century, "adjustment" of Islam and its incorporation into east central African cosmological beliefs and adaptation vis à vis ancestor veneration practices, chief installation ceremonies, initiation rites, and funeral ceremonies, i.e., "life-cycle rituals, or rites of passage," promoted widespread Yao conversion to and identification with Islam as their religion. [392] Itinerant sheiks in tandem with patron chiefs encouraged "transforming Islam in Malawi from a primarily political force to a truly religious movement" between 1900 and 1920, a period that coincided substantially with Chilembwe's ministry and lifetime.[393]

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[389] David S. Bone, edited volume, 14; See also (Bone 1982), 127; (Pachai 1973), 42-44, 49. David S. Bone, ed., *Malawi's Muslims: Historical Perspectives*, Kachere Book, no. 9 (Blantyre, Malawi: Christian Literature Association in Malawi, 2000), 14; David S. Bone, "Islam in Malawi," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 13, no. 2 (1982): 127, https://doi.org/10.2307/1581207; Bridglal Pachai, *Malawi: The History of the Nation* (London, UK: Longman Group Limited, 1973), 42–44, 49.
[390] Vaughan, Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi, 162.
[391] Bone, *Malawi's Muslims: Historical Perspectives,* 119.
[392] Alpers, in *Malawi's Muslims: Historical Perspectives*, 60, 29-40.
[393] Bone, *Malawi's Muslims: Historical Perspectives,* 121.

Colonial rule did not blunt the spread of Islam in the Protectorate.[394] As in colonized French West Africa, British colonial administrators viewed Islam as less of a problem with which to contend than the lingering slave trade.[395] Colonial administrators often attempted to work with Islamic religious leaders to "pacify" or bring disparate parties under colonial rule. In any event, although Islam was not widespread throughout the Protectorate, and perhaps negligibly so in the Shire Highlands, the activity of Arab sultans, Muslim sheiks, and Yao Muslim converts provided a pathway for the Yao, as well as the Makuna, to preserve a sense of shared cultural heritage while also maintaining or developing sociopolitical cohesion.[396] Such African autonomy would not require adoption of Christianity and European customs.

European missionaries were concerned with Islam's influence in stoking rebellion. Invested in the eradication of the slave trades in the region as they were, missionaries saw converts to Islam as purveyors of a religious way of life but more so as one of the final frontiers in their fight against slavery.[397] To remove one implicated confronting the other. Colonial state activity and technologies had been invited, and indeed welcomed, especially by Scottish missions from the 1860s to the 1880s as a means to protect their mission stations against Yao and Swahili Coast ivory and slave traders and raids.[398] However, missionaries' reliance on the colonial government to authorize and safeguard their abolitionist efforts had the unintended effect of cementing Yao and more widespread African perceptions that Christianity and European cultural mores were indelibly linked. To adopt one required capitulation to the other,

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[394] The British Colonial Office pursued similar policies in its various colonized African territories, such as in northern Nigeria. See for example Yusufu Turaki, *The British Colonial Legacy in Northern Nigeria: A Social Ethical Analysis of the Colonial and Post-Colonial Society and Politics in Nigeria.* (Yusufu Turaki Foundation and Otakada.org Publishing, 2019).

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[396] Bone, *Malawi's Muslims: Historical Perspectives,*16-17.

[397] Bone, *Malawi's Muslims: Historical Perspectives* 121.

[398] McCracken, 50-53. This occurred in other parts of the British Empire, including South Africa.

with no recourse to the seeming preservation or absorption of cosmological myths and rituals. Thus, by roughly 1890, a significant portion of Yao found in Islam a "non-traditional alternative to accepting the package deal of European Christianity and western civilization that had been offered to them so abruptly."[399]

Of relevance to this story and analysis, however, is the finding by historian Megan Vaughan that although the Yao converted in significant numbers to Islam, "Yao chiefs relied on Nyanja leaders to appease the ancestors and ensure that the rains falls."[400] Mang'anja were considered by other kin groups in area, including the Yao, as "the owners of the soil," and so their ritual power to guard the land through calling down rain persisted.[401] Thus, the Yao astutely recognized the limitations of Islam relevant to their own perceptions and practices of ritual authority and guardianship over land. As such, they reflected a larger reality in which Chilembwe grew up, was baptized, and worked as a missionary to his own. Namely, external or newly introduced religions, such as Islam or Christianity, were not necessarily considered an evil to destroy. In practice, they simply did not appear to provide compelling narratives or rituals to ensure guardianship of land.

The Yao peoples' ongoing reliance on the Mang'anja to ritually care for and protect the land demonstrates two aspects of life in present-day southern Malawi relevant to our story. First, despite Yao accumulation of social prestige through increased wealth in slaves and affiliation with Islam, the Yao admitted in practice that they did not possess the ritual power necessary to ensure rain.[402] Instead, the Yao recognized that the Mang'anja peoples' "kinship-based" political

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[399] Bone, *Malawi's Muslims: Historical Perspectives,* 123, 125.
[400] Vaughan, "Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi: A Study of Rural Communities in the Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley Frmo the Mid-Nineteenth Century to 1915," 75, 219.
[401] Vaughan, "Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi: A Study of Rural Communities in the Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley Frmo the Mid-Nineteenth Century to 1915," 102.
[402] Vaughan, "Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi: A Study of Rural Communities in the Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley Frmo the Mid-Nineteenth Century to 1915," 36.

power as "expressed through a territorial religious cult" remained a necessity to access in order to promote nourishment of the ground.[403] Second, for the Yao, conversion to Islam did not require them to dismiss long-running rituals such as those practiced by territorial cults to call down rain and prevent famine, and with it starvation and precarity.

The Yao's intertwining of different religious and ritual systems illustrates the larger legacy of religious practice in the region. The Maravi Kingdom had disintegrated prior to British colonization, but in its political wake, no one group emerged as a centralizing political force in the regions of today's Malawi until the second half of the nineteenth century under the Yao. Instead, political formations were loose, based on kinship and shared ritual traditions and practices that supported a relationship of care and reliance on land. What seemed to be missing from missionary Christianity was this ritualistic and political understanding that possessing the power to gather and stabilize new kin corresponded with the power to protect land and the human relationship to it. Thus, when Chilembwe asserted himself as a Noah, so named and called to "bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands" on cursed lands, he embodied the profound relationship understood in African cosmologies to establish continuity between human community, religious practice, and land. For Chilembwe to identify with Noah as one who brought relief from labor on cursed lands did not assert the notion that the land was the problem. It demonstrated a breakdown in correlating preservation of human life with guardianship of land, or creation. As a missionary preaching himself in the likeness of a Noah, he also asserted himself as a protector or guardian of land and African access to it.

This regional history of interculturality and cosmological correlation of self, community, and land was not widely reflected in the narrative or the structures of missionary Christianity.

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[403] Vaughan, "Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi: A Study of Rural Communities in the Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley Frmo the Mid-Nineteenth Century to 1915," 36.

During the period that spanned from 1858 until administrative formalization of colonialism in 1891, the form, character, and leadership of Christianity in the region remained under the policing and regulation of European missionaries. From the early 1860s in what was then called British Central Africa, European-led mission efforts—including that of the Church of Scotland, Universities Mission to Central Africa, the White Fathers and Monfort missionaries, and the Dutch Reformed Church Mission—principally shaped the landscape of Christianity. The wave of missionary activity that followed Livingstone's treks up the Zambezi River continued what has been described as the enmeshed era of "Christianity, commerce, and civilization."[404]

In this period, missionaries promulgated the idea that "free trade" was "a necessary precondition for the spread of Christianity" in the Protectorate.[405] The entanglement of all three promoted a form of territorial Christianity wherein politics, economics, and religious life coalesced.[406] Mission outposts formed as small colonies, and the political role and protection of missionaries as new power brokers in the land was evident and accessed by refugees, former slaves, and other African kin groups.[407] Christianity's very character appeared political, just as the Yao perceived Islam, because its structures were deeply tied to European oversight and protection. However, its power to guard the land and sustain life seemed questionable, if not impotent.

Beyond structure and African perceptions of missions' power, African converts at the Blantyre Mission underwent a lengthy period of catechesis to be baptized. In Catholic missions, African Christians were not often entrusted to teach Scripture. In fact, during the Commission

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[404] See Thomas Fowell Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy,* (London, UK, John Murray Ltd, 1840).
[405] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966,* 39; See also Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1990), 51; Brian Stanley, "'Commerce and Christianity': Providence Theory, the Missionary Movement, and the Imperialism of Free Trade, 1842-1860," *The Historical Journal* 26, no. 1 (1983): 71–94.
[406] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966,* 39.
[407] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966,* 46.

into the Inquiry, Reverend Father Swelsen of the Marist Fathers Mission at Nguludi took pains to communicate that converts in their mission were never allowed to teach the Catechism.[408] Alexander Hetherwick of the Blantyre Mission, however, affirmed African intellectual capacity when he commented, "The native is able to interpret the Bible as you are."[409] For the most part, however, the catechizing process was predicated on missionaries' self-designated role to direct and determine if African Christians were capable of choosing to be baptized and whether they were permitted to teach others.

With time, however, the spread of Christianity in what is today Malawi hinged substantially on African initiatives and leadership. In the case of the Blantyre Mission, for example, the real impetus for growth occurred from 1888-1889 when "teachers and senior students of the Blantyre Mission schools…would go out and preach in villages, remaining afterwards for long discussions about the message they had brought."[410] In other words, although with varying results, African initiative, even if not yet ordained to ecclesial leadership, generated the early spread of Christianity in each region of what is now Malawi.

Structurally however, by the close of the nineteenth century, Christianity was and remained closely aligned with European culture and power structures in numerous African views.[411] However much missionary engagement with Africans may have in practice been distinguished from colonialist attitudes, as Andrew Walls argues, "colonial rule changed the basis of missionary life," from that which was dependent upon African receptions and initiatives

[408] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 10.
[409] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 373.
[410] Kenneth R. Ross and Klaus Fiedler, *A Malawi Church History 1860 - 2020* (Mzuzu, Malawi: Mzuni Press, 2020), 67.
[411] Hanciles, *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions: The Twentieth Century: Traditions in a Global Context*, IV:23.

to that which was now "part of the structures of power," i.e., the colonial government.[412] As Jehu J. Hanciles further argues, from African perspectives, any distinction between European missionaries and colonialists amounted to little differentiation in the eyes and lived experience of local African communities.[413]

By the years of 1891 and 1892, at least two changes in the region altered not only the missionary landscape but also the character of Christianity as practiced. The first was the declaration of the British Protectorate of Nyasaland following European struggles—between Portugal and Britain, in this case—to claim and demarcate African lands as their own.[414] With the newly-bordered, fertile sliver of land declared a Protectorate, wedged between other land claimed by Portugal and Germany, Nyasaland held symbolic as much as economic and political value for British colonialists. Indeed, it was in this region that the famed David Livingstone had developed camaraderie and trust with local communities and embarked on his declared project of eradicating the slave trade through establishing "legitimate trade" and Christianity.

Almost at the same time as the formalization of the Nyasaland Protectorate as British territory, Joseph Booth arrived in the Shire Highlands and unsettled his fellow missionaries.[415] Booth preached what he described as "Christ's gospel…one of acts as well as of words," which upheld a Gospel "relating to the present life as well as the life to come."[416] His was a vision that

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[412] Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith*, 97. Scottish missionaries demonstrated the most substantial engagement with Nyanja and Yao vernaculars as well as group decision-making processes.

[413] Chilembwe's family, for example, subjected him to this critique when he adopted the religion as his own as an older adolescent. See also David Lindenfeld, *World Christianity and Indigenous Experience: A Global History 1500-2000*, 2.

[414] Pachai, *Malawi: The History of the Nation*.

[415] On Joseph Booth's role in the pluralism of Christian expression in the region see R. L. Wishlade, *Sectarianism in Southern Nyasaland* (London, UK: Published for the International African Institute by the Oxford University Press, 1965); Langworthy, *Africa for the African: Lhe Life of Joseph Booth*; Chakanza, "The Independency Alternative: A Historical Survey"; Chakanza, *Voices of Preachers in Protest: The Ministry of Two Malawian Prophets, Elliot Kamwana and Wilfred Gudu*; Ulf Strohbehn, *The Zionist Churches in Malawi: History-Theology-Anthropology* (Mzuzu, Malawi: Mzuni Press, 2016).

[416] Booth and Perry, *Africa for the African*, 21.

depended upon restitution of land to both African Americans and Africans alike. Booth cast this vision by claiming, "The spirit of God demands that we shall not rob these, his little children, of their land and liberty."[417] As witness reports from the Commission of the Inquiry into the Uprising indicate, education as a form of spiritual and cultural uplift occupied the center of European missionary endeavors until this time. Booth's vision of *Africa for the African* centered instead on restoration of land and reliance on African labor for African-determined purposes only. All else amounted to theft.

Booth's industrial missions intended to counter practices of land alienation and raw material and labor extraction contrasted with missions who, while demonstrating concern about colonial land alienation, presented few options to curtail it.[418] Industrial missions were conceived as self-supporting missions that would generate income through agriculture and trade. Industrial missions generally aimed to not only provide religious education among African Christians but also industrial training, activities considered to be "self-supporting" particular as determined by outside British and Americans.[419] Industrial missions yoked a Christian message of spiritual renewal to an ecological message that guarded African autonomy over land and labor, both of which were quickly being threatened in the Protectorate. Booth openly denounced any Christian mission effort that redirected African labor and land toward colonialist ends and uses.[420] The import of Booth's missionary message denouncing European appropriation of African lands and labor as a means to insure "further subjugation" as "unscrupulous" cannot be overstated.[421]

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[417] Booth and Perry, *Africa for the African*, 30, 37.
[418] Booth and Perry, *Africa for the African*, 11, 15, 46.
[419] See Klaus Fiedler, *Interdenominational Faith Missions in Africa* (Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2018), 70, first published as Klaus Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions in Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1995); Harry W. Langworthy, *Africa for the African: The Life of Joseph Booth* (Blantyre, Malawi: Christian Literature Association, 1996). See for example Wilcox, "The Need of Industrial Missions in Africa," *The Biblical World* 41, no. 2 (1913): 106.
[420] Booth and Perry, *Africa for the African*, 37.
[421] Booth and Perry, *Africa for the African*, 16.

Booth's published booklet *Africa for the African,* addressed to Queen Victoria, upheld similar principles as Ethiopianism in that Africans were to be the creators of their own futures and guardians of their own lands. Like other missions operating in the Protectorate, however, African leadership of Christian missions and movements traced to Booth's encouragement grew into the most effective Christian religious work in the region, compared with Booth's own short-lived and often contentious efforts.[422]

Becoming African Noah in Light of Slavery and Land Theft

Upon his return to the Shire Highlands in 1900, Chilembwe heralded the call and message of *Africa for the African* as his own when he identified with Noah, as preached by himself and deacons and even though overlooked as irrelevant under the British colonial gaze. Chilembwe's association with the person and call of Noah speaks to the gravity of his assessment of what was at stake in the Protectorate: African futures and the trajectory of divine history. Chilembwe's conscious assertion of himself as Noah provides evidence for the idea that although we have only fragmentary written records, based on his missionary activities, he seems to have experienced a kind of call—perhaps from his encounter with biblical narratives or fired by images of the church as the ark of salvation—to carry out divine work among his own. Chilembwe recognized himself not primarily as a harbinger of cataclysmic doom but as a person summoned by God to gather in his own before evil was removed from the face of the earth. Amidst the onslaught of evils stalking the land, Chilembwe located himself in African Christian history by recalling Noah in biblical history—called by God to save those who would gather into his ark, or mission.

[422] On enduring African leadership following Booth's encouragement see analysis in Chakanza, "The Independency Alternative: A Historical Survey."

Chilembwe has been analyzed and set most frequently, it has been shown, within nationalist historiographies and memory. Notably, Cameroonian postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe has roundly critiqued nationalist historiographies and criticism as replicating "instrumentalist paradigms" of history in which "narratives of the African self and the world have been superficial."[423] They derive their superficiality, Mbembe argues, by inscribing Africans in an "economy of alterity" reflective of Enlightenment thinking that perpetuated Africans and Africa as wholly Other. Over the course of "three distinct intellectual moments with distinct political implications," "Africans" as Other and outside of history, humanity, and universal potential were perpetuated. According to Mbembe, Africans were distinguished as unique, or living outside of universal experience, vis à vis ontological difference.[424] African Otherness was then perpetuated in a second Enlightenment derivative of the late nineteenth century in which ontological alterity was displaced by a philosophy of difference based on the colonial notion of "custom." African self-determination could occur through "custom," i.e., "a distinct institutional order, a native order" but Africans were again inscribed within this order which was not nor could be universal.[425] An economy of alterity was thirdly perpetuated, Mbembe argues, through a politics of recognition and assimilation in that Africans, Europeans claimed, could, like Jews, experience and participate in a "world common to all human beings," but in order to do so they needed to be converted and cultivated, and thus recognized as assimilable into a world of universal civil rights.[426]

[423] Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing," 245.
[424] Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing," 246.
[425] Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing," 248.
[426] Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing," 248–49.

Nationalist African criticism leaves these premises of alterity untroubled by failing to account for "the wide variety of African experiences of colonial conquest."[427] The point here is to indicate that Chilembwe's self-assertion as a type of Noah, an ancestral figure present across three religious traditions, during the period of colonial conquest, contended with European claims of African alterity, capacity, and agency as he inscribed himself into divine history and biblical narratives shared across Black Atlantic Christian communities of praxis. Chilembwe participated in and was entangled within "multiple worlds" at one time.[428]

As scholars of African religious and political history have well documented, the spiritual world within African societies is implicated within and by the material conditions in which human life occurs.[429] As such, African Christian communities have historically dissented from forms of Christianity that contest integrating spiritual and material spheres into a singular realm of concern. In this way, African Christians such as Chilembwe inaugurated what Andrew Walls describes as "a new period in the history of African religion…and a new period in the history of Christianity…being expressed in intellectual, social and religious milieus which it has not previously entered."[430] In restricting Chilembwe's study and memory to nationalist history, we have yet to reconcile the historiographic assumptions, empirical models, and ecclesial modes of

[427] Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing," 262.
[428] Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 8.
[429] See for example David M. Gordon, *Invisible Agents: Spirits in a Central African History* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012); Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa*, 1 (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004); Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa*; Gerrie ter Haar, *How God Became African : African Spirituality and Western Secular Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Paul Stuart Landau, *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa, 1400-1948* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Dorothy Louise Hodgson, *The Church of Women: Gendered Encounters between Maasai and Missionaries* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005); Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*; Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? : African Spirituality*.
[430] Andrew Walls as quoted in Kalu, *African Christianity: An African Story*, 4–5.

life with the weight of obligation this "new period of history" places upon probing Chilembwe's consciousness as African, Christian, and missionary.

Theologian Kwame Bediako has argued that African life and realities are not incompatible with the tenets and practices of Christianity, referenced as the "incompatibility thesis." In his *Theology and Identity*, Bediako argues instead that a community's engagement with "the gospel of Jesus Christ…introduces a '*historical category'* which by transcending the stubborn human divisions of race, culture and lineage, not only provides a means of making manifest the dynamic of spirituality for what it is, but also *clarifies in a way the nature of identity as ultimately rooted* in God in Christ."[431] He makes the case that self-conscious social or public self-identification with Christianity, such as Chilembwe regularly engaged, furnishes the energies and content for "the Christian's response to the religious past as well as to the cultural tradition generally in which one stands, and the significance of that response for the development of theological answers to the culturally-rooted questions of the context."[432]

What is at stake for Bediako in the claim that Africans being consciously Christian is incompatible with African life is that it rejects how African Christians embraced themselves and their communities beyond assumed "European value-setting for African Christianity." On the other hand, dismissal of African self-identification with Christianity rejects African religious pasts as the ground from which, Bediako quotes Desmond Tutu as saying, to "fashion new ways of speaking to and about God, and new styles of worship consistent with our new faith."[433]

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[431] Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*, 441.
[432] Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*, 7, 8.
[433] Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 3.

As Tanzanian priest and theologian Laurenti Magesa writes, the "generally destabilizing, rapid, and relatively unrestrained…exchanges increased by contemporary globalization" have heightened the import of the question of African Christian identity. The answer to "who we 'really' are is…by no means straightforward," and the "puzzle of whether we are 'truly African' at the same time we are 'fully Christian' has increasingly taken on new urgency…as a disturbing reality."[434] He calls for a radical deconstruction and reconstruction of both Africanness and Christianity in "sacrilegious" proportions to fulfill the African quest for identity.

The issues outlined here are intricate, but for the sake of this project may be consolidated as a commentary on world Christianity scholarship's tentative engagements with the multiple worlds within which African Christians have consciously embraced Christianity and then consciously scripted themselves and their concerns into a divine, or Christian, rendering of history. The new period to which Andrew Walls refers intersects temporally and conceptually with the Black Atlantic world's emergence as a realm of African Christian exchange, encounter, and consciousness. As anthropologist James Matory highlights, the Black Atlantic is "a commercial, migratory, and discursive field" but it is only one such field "in which black Atlantic people stake their claims of belonging."[435] What a Black Atlantic approach to the study of Chilembwe's missionary consciousness illuminates are the multiple sites and communities through which he asserted his claims of being a missionary in the likeness of Noah.

In identifying his calling with that of Noah's, Chilembwe placed himself within a still unfolding divine narrative at a strategic point in human history that included African history

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[434] Laurenti Magesa, "Truly African, Fully Christian? In Search of a New African Christian Spirituality," in Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orabator, ed., *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III,* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2016.
[435] Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé,* 297, 298.

beyond the confines of what Achille Mbembe describes as "dominant African discourses…inscribed within an intellectual genealogy based on a territorialized identity and a racialized geography."[436] In seeing himself as Noah and designating his mission as an African ark, Chilembwe claimed a certain trajectory of divine activity relative to biblical narratives, African religious experience, and what would become Malawian Christian history. Namely, Chilembwe upended a hierarchy of human life based on the "Curse of Ham," one of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' most formative biblical narratives and interpretations within Eurocentric racialist thinking.[437]

The story of Noah, the Noahic Covenant, and the building of an ark precedes the biblical narrative located in Genesis 9 (referred to as the "Curse of Ham") that was utilized over time to legitimize enslavement of Africans, based upon a shifting equation of Ham with Blackness of skin. White men looked to the "Curse of Ham" "to provide a compelling explanation of the world and the white man's place in it."[438] Chilembwe, in contrast, located himself as an African Noah prior to the so-called Curse of Ham and as a consequence asserted himself as enacting a divine drama to rescue his kin from new forms of slavery. In other words, if Exodus was the metaphor for Black Christian Nationalist belonging, if Moses, the central leading figure, and if racial redemption the "recurring subject" or aim of African American mission work on the African continent, for Chilembwe the metaphor for belonging was the ark, he (as Noah) was the

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[436] Achille Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing," *Public Culture* 14(1): 256-257.
[437] Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000*, 120. See also on the history of the Curse of Ham David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); David M. Goldenberg, *Black and Slave: The Origins and History of the Curse of Ham* (Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2017); David M. Whitford, *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era: The Bible and The Justifications for Slavery* (Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2009); Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Pres, 2002).
[438] Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000*, 121. Further research is necessary to investigate how White women in both North American and European contexts referred to or interpreted this biblical narrative.

leading figure, and the recurring subject was salvation vis à vis protection from evils in the land.[439]

In preceding both the Curse of Ham narrative and the Exodus saga as an African Noah, he challenged racialist thinking and African alterity by inscribing himself in the first biblical narrative of divine covenant of protection and the important promises of material and epistemic recreation.[440] In practice, Chilembwe embraced both biblical and African notions of kin and family by first approaching his mother, as well as sister, to be baptized, then pursuing his fellow African Christians in other missions to join his ark, and eventually moving beyond biological and spiritual family to create and gather an extended and new form of kin.

It is key to consider that, like Chilembwe, in the biblical narrative, Noah never experienced enslavement. Noah was named according to his call and served as a divine messenger, delivering a warning of a coming tempest of judgment in the form of water that would both cleanse and recreate the inhabited earth. His work, however, did not stop with warnings. He gathered those who responded to his message to be rescued. Chilembwe likewise understood himself as being commissioned with a specific task "to build" an ark as a means of escape from the ensuing storm[441]. Indeed, identifying himself with Noah associated Chilembwe's missionary call with two phenomena. First, he correlated his call with the removal of evil from the face of the earth, or the space Africans inhabited; he conceived of his mission as spanning from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic.[442] As his mission covered "the face of the earth," he also

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[439] On Exodus as metaphor for Black belonging, see Glaude, *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America*. On racial redemption as the "recurring subject of African American missionary theology," see Hughes, "Middle Passages," 25. On the biblical prophetic figure in Black nationalist preaching see Saville, IV, "The Gospel According to John Marrant: Religious Consciousness in the Black Atlantic, 1755-1791."
[440] On "race" as a the organizing principle of modern colonial imperialism and the nation-state Fyfe, "Using Race as an Instrument of Policy: A Historical View"; Goldberg, *The Racial State*..
[441] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 138–40.
[442] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 7, 126.

conceived of his call, as did Noah, to gather a new type of kin, transgressing boundaries of land and language, generated through a collection of industrial missions and churches which, in Chilembwe's words, were freed from the evils in the land, or "sin," including slavery and land alienation.[443]

Second, as an African Noah, Chilembwe understood his mission as calling his people to gather according to the providence of God, who, according to the Psalmist, had included Africans in the divine and biblical drama centuries prior. Chilembwe identified the fulfillment of his mission with both gathering his people to be saved and the eradication of rampant violence directed toward them through the twin evils of colonial rule and slavery. Chilembwe's missionary consciousness as Noah illustrates the foundational premise I posit: that in this period of African Christian history from 1882-1916, biblical narratives contributed to altered imaginaries through which African Christians conceived and built new worlds, created new orders.

Such biblical narratives, received often as oral traditions and divine revelations through African Christian missionaries, did not always supplant or confront African histories and rituals, although they sometimes did. As J.D.Y. Peel argues in his analysis of Christian conversion among the Yoruba of Nigeria, "Christian mission is about the effective telling of a story, and conversion occurs when people are prepared to take that story as their own."[444] Part of the story Chilembwe told included his own identification with the figure of Noah and the story in which

[443] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 149.
[444] J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and The Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 310.

Noah's life and call unfolded.[445] To step into the ark Chilembwe worked to build was then to step into a story that held together threads from the past, the present, and the future.

Although Chilembwe never assumed the literal name "Noah" for himself, his self-assertion to be working like Noah, who was divinely called to build an ark for and among his own, inscribes Chilembwe both within divine history and in African history as an important agent of change. His self-consciousness as an African Noah directed the biblical narrative off the page and out of orally received traditions and into the material particularities he inhabited. In doing so, Chilembwe looked toward fashioning a people who would herald his call to gather and be saved.

[445] Here I disagree with Paul Gilroy's argument that religion, and Christianity specifically, was a deterrent to creating a Black Atlantic countercultural world. Indeed, I show that religious sources were essential to its inspiration in this period.

Chapter 3
Fashioning the Motherland:
The Redemption of African Women in the Chilembwe's Thought and Practice

The Gender Factor in Black Atlantic Christianity

This chapter makes the case that Chilembwe wrote, thought about, and prescribed the sartorial presentation of women—what I term fashioning—in the Protectorate in light of Black Baptist images of Africa and African women. I show that Chilembwe drew upon the image of "Africa the suffering motherland" motif prevalent in Black nationalist thought to draw attention to colonial violence in the land that harmed women. These images were also useful in soliciting funding from his National Baptist supporters, many of whom were women. However, the images likewise captured a social dimension of life in the Shire Highlands. Most kin groups were matrilineal, and therefore women's bloodlines and kin had long been crucial to society-building and power accumulation. Albeit through racialized and gendered notions of Africa and her female offspring as suffering, the images captured the matriarchal dimensions of Shire Highlands' history that was undergoing a slow transformation at the time.

This chapter further makes the case that a gendered paradox ran at the center of Chilembwe's concern for women in his missionary vision. Descriptors that both he and his wife Ida Zuao Chilembwe employed to generate support of their mission further convey a paradox that coursed throughout the Black Atlantic world that may be best captured in how and why he prescribed particular dress for them upon baptism in his mission.[446] Namely, Chilembwe and Ida drew on Black Atlantic metaphors of Africa imagined as both motherland and as a mother in African matrilineal cultures, such as the one in which both were raised. In the latter, women were

[446] It is difficult to parse out whose voice commands the letters that speak to Ida's wishes or their joint reportage and solicitation of support. At minimum, however, we must credit Mrs. Chilembwe with appealing to her own gendered experiences to garner a sustained investment from the National Baptists in women of the Shire Highland.

indeed the source of social continuity and stability, and their lineages were the bloodlines of Chilembwe's family and numerous kin groups in the region. Conversely, he described African women as "caught" in the throes of enslavement and spiritual "ignorance" and in need of help, reinforcing racist and gendered notions that African women were "heathen," "ignorant, uninteresting and unlovable."[447] As he wrote often and fervently to his National Baptists colleagues and funders, "Remember the plight of your heathen sisters…caught up in slavery, Islam, etc."[448]

Like some other contemporaneous African Christian-led missions and movements, Chilembwe did not require extensive catechetical training for those who wished to be baptized. He did, however, require certain sartorial practices for newly baptized women and men, if they had not already adopted these practices. In Chilembwe's estimation, the fashion of baptized African women and men needed to signify the African future that their conversion made possible—a Christian, skilled, and economically autonomous African society.[449] To this end, my use of fashioning captures two intersecting phenomena best understood as narrative and pedagogical practices.

Chilembwe's instruction to baptized women and men to adopt Victorian dress as an African fashion in the Shire Highlands embodied a narrative about an African Christian future.[450] Fashioning the body, as I show, asserted a belonging within what Europeans deemed "civilized" company, or those human communities which demonstrated an ability to change or

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[447] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 133.
[448] Thirty-sixth Annual Report of Foreign Mission Board, National Baptist Convention, Memphis, TN, September 1906, 16.
[449] McCracken, Voices, 149.
[450] On the relationship between clothing, or fashion, and the narrating of stories and histories, see Victoria Rovine, *African Fashion, Global Style: Histories, Innovations, and Ideas You Can Wear* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2015). I have long been interested in how sartorial practices narrate religious communities' relationships both internally and externally, as well as the pedagogical function of dress for religious communities.

"progress."[451] For Chilembwe's baptized members to make such a claim of belonging with their bodies—independent of White directives to do so—placed them at direct odds with the civilizing impulse for colonial rule. Their dress also conflicted with a fundamental ontological claim running at the center of pseudoscientific racial science on the rise at the turn of the twentieth century.

Colonial rule in civilizing form was unnecessary if Africans could alter sartorial practices of their own volition. Relative to the race theories and Hegelian theories of human development popular in Europe at the time, adoption of Victorian dress at Providence Industrial Mission troubled a racialized hierarchy of being and thus threatened the rather tenuous balance of power sought through colonial rule, indirect or direct. By instructing women and men to adopt calico dresses and waist coats and top hats, respectively, Chilembwe demonstrated a conscious recognition that fashioning the body was a public means to narrate Africans as writing their own story through sartorial practice. While the context of colonial Nyasaland put his directive in conflict with one of the British racialized scripts about African capacity, his broader consciousness of the Black Atlantic world underscored to him the import of his baptized members declaring their conversion in dress like that of their Black Baptist brothers and sisters in North America.

My use of fashioning also recognizes that while colonialism changed conditions of life in the Shire Highlands, Chilembwe's primary mission, or call, was to communicate a Christian message to his people and build an African church, literally and figuratively. The correlating work was then to form those he baptized into a Christian community through practice. In the earliest Christian communities, the typically unremarkable activity of eating together was

[451] On African entanglements in European notions of progress and civilization see Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing."

upended when Jewish followers of Christ began to contend with a growing contingency of Gentile initiates into their community. My point here is not to dwell upon conflicts and negotiation of difference between these early communities, although that will have import in the next chapter. My main objective is to call attention to the weight of everyday practice as it relates to the religious life of the church and ecclesial growth, one of Chilembwe's objectives.

In this way, I draw on the pedagogical work of Maria Harris, who demonstrates that "all facets of the church's life" is "church curriculum."[452] She associates "all facets" with curricular forms—kerygma, didache, leiturgia, koinonia, and diakonia—which are the church's educational ministry. Curricular forms, she argues, comprise in practice "a far broader reality" than "schooling" through, for example, religious literature. Instead, practices that form a people require "fashioning and refashioning" as part of the church's "educational ministry."[453] She shows that as the concept of curriculum grows, so do "all facets" of ecclesial life and the potential for its pedagogical value.

Theologically, Harris's concept of curriculum is grounded in biblical narratives and poetry that attest to rendering God as one who creates, molds, makes, forms, and fashions creatures. In being created in God's likeness, humans join with God "to fashion as we are fashioned," a mutual and reciprocal choreography of divine and human exchange and change.[454] In describing Chilembwe's instructions on sartorial practice as "fashioning," I am not simply lifting Harris's language. I play on her ecclesial vision of a comprehensive construction of the church's pedagogical ministry to argue that, in Chilembwe's thought and practice, how baptized

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[452] Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 18.
[453] Harris, *Fashion Me a People*, 16, 17. Defined according to Harris as "Kerygma, proclaiming the word of Jesus' resurrection; didache, the activity of teaching; leiturgia, coming together to pray and to re-present Jesus in the breaking of bread; koinonia, or community; and diakonia, caring for those in need."
[454] Harris, *Fashion Me a People*, 16.

members of his church fashioned themselves was a form of schooling of Providence Industrial Mission in a colonial context both internal and external to the life of the church. The pedagogy of fashioning had implications for life within the church as well as without, indicating individual and collective religious change as well as status by asserting an ontological position of sameness and embodying a theological claim of common humanity in and through a shared ecclesial practice.

What the colonial context throws into further relief is that Chilembwe grappled with baptizing people into his church amidst the ongoing fallout of the historical phenomena of multiple slave trades, competing political formations, intersecting African migrations, and colonial land policies in the Shire Highlands, and the question of how religious community would enshrine their status as baptized Christians through the quotidian—how people live daily life in practice. Shifting social and political realities of the Shire Highlands necessitated not only prayer, preaching, and baptism as means of proclamation and formation. Routine practices such as fashioning oneself indicated a new status that was spiritual, social, and political. The gospel message did not make Africans human or equal. They were born as such. But the gospel message called them to proclaim that ontological fact on their bodies in light of the promise of a second resurrection, which, Chilembwe asserted, was freedom from bondage.[455] To establish this argument, I examine how Chilembwe employed gendered images and ideas circulating through the late nineteenth century Black Atlantic missionary movement for his fashioning of women in his mission.

As historian Ogbu Kalu and others have argued, the "racial factor" was crucial in recreating ties between African Americans and Africans through the Black Atlantic missionary

[455] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 149.

movement.[456] What I call the "gender factor" was no less significant in reestablishing intercontinental connections and motivating African-led missions.[457] Historian Nemata Blyden outlines the way that these connections were forged through descriptions and images of Africa that circulated among African Americans who employed them to answer the long-enduring question of their relationship to Africa. As the works of W.E.B. Du Bois and historian Charles Long demonstrate, although the question's "answers changed over time," as Blyden shows, these "real or imagined" links sustained African American communities struggling to establish their place in the world and in the United States.[458]

Nonetheless, the images were often "illusory" and "incomplete and distorted" through White European and American lenses.[459] This is not to say that tangible associations and continuities with African pasts did not persist in African American memories, especially through religious practice . However, the passage of time did indeed erode concrete knowledge of

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[456] Regarding the racial dimension of the Black Atlantic missionary movement see for example Ogbu Kalu, "Black Joseph: Early African American Charismatic Missions and Pentecostal-Charismatic Engagements with the African Motherland," in *Afro-Pentecostalism: Black Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in History and Culture*, ed. Amos Yong and Estrelda Alexander (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2011), 212–13; Killingray, "The Black Atlantic Missionary Movement and Africa, 1780s-1920s"; Walter L. Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa, 1877-1900* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982); Hanciles, "The Black Atlantic and the Shaping of African Christianity, 1820-1920"; Kimberly Hill, *A Higher Mission: The Careers of Alonzo and Althea Brown Edmiston in Central Africa*, New Directions in Southern History (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2020). Kalu classifies Black Atlantic missionary engagement with Africa as six types: organization, such as funding; sponsoring programs of uplift, such as educating Africans in the United States; going as missionaries, like their White counterparts; emigration to Africa as a "sacred duty" of return; Black church-sponsored missionaries; recruitment of African Americans by White churches to go serve on their behalf as missionaries. See Ogbu Kalu, "Black Joseph," 212-213.

[457] Evelyn Higginbotham lays the groundwork for me to make this case when she argues that separatist persuasions among Black Baptist women, manifested through their organization of women's conventions, "derived also from gender consciousness, which served to reinterpret the philosophy of self-help beyond the singular discourse of race…For Black Baptist women, the double consciousness of race and gender led to the perception of a dual struggle." See Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, 67–68.

[458] Blyden, *African Americans and Africa*, 17. See Du Bois, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part Which Africa Has Played in World History*; Charles H. Long, "Perspectives for a Study of Afro-American Religion in the United States," *History of Religions* 11, no. 1 (1971): 54–66; Floyd-Thomas, "Towards a Religious History of the Black Atlantic: Charles H. Long's *Significations* and New World Slavery."

[459] Blyden, *African Americans and Africa*, 17.

African homelands by the late nineteenth century as images were "mediated by their experience of enslavement, discrimination, and racism."[460] Experiences of each of these historical realities, however, were profoundly gendered.[461]

Gendered dimensions of experience, I argue, contributed to sharing metaphors in the Black Atlantic world that oscillated between an Africa imagined as the motherland and an Africa personified as mother. Notions of a universalized idea of "Africa" as "primitive, savage, backward, and heathen" alongside images of "Africa" in need of rescue percolated through feminized and maternal metaphors in Black American sermons, colonization schemes, and missionary visions across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[462] These maternal images betrayed an important paradox that would also surface in Chilembwe's mission reports and ministry. On the one hand, references to "Africa" as a feminized and suffering mother perpetuated racist notions that located African civilizations and cultures as outside of history and at the bottom of pseudoscientific racial hierarchies of being. Such references also inscribed African, or more broadly Black, women within patriarchal lineages of social organization that disavowed or ignored social and political formations more representative, for example, of Chilembwe's own matrilineal heritage.

Conversely, by the late nineteenth century, this notion of a suffering and female Africa contributed to a particular symbolic focus on African women as racialized and gendered figures in need of uplift in the Black Atlantic missionary movement. For Africans in the diaspora reconfiguring ancestral ties to a distant place, their suffering mother-country "Africa" beckoned

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[460] Blyden, *African Americans and Africa*, 17.
[461] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Rev. 10th anniversary (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000); Kimberlé Crenshaw, *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings* (New York, NY: New Press, 2019); Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*.
[462] Blyden, *African Americans and Africa*, 21.

them home. For Africans such as Chilembwe, whose travels and missionary vision kept him tied to local realities, these images comingled with his lived experiences to inform both his external portrayal of women in the Shire Highlands and shape his missionary vision and work within the Shire Highlands. By investigating more closely this gender factor, I illustrate the creative and contradictory elements of Chilembwe's Black Atlantic consciousness that in practice relative to race and gender—always multiple, shifting across borders, and amorphous based on contextual conditions.

The Suffering Motherland in National Baptist Thought and Practice

By the late nineteenth century, the feminized image of a land of origin and return informed the lifelong commitment to missions in Africa by one of Chilembwe's African American mentors, Lewis Garnet Jordan. Jordan's writings on Africa, Black Baptist missions, and Africans writ large captured the gendered spirit of Black nationalist Christian thinking that inspired his dedicated energies in support of intercontinental religious activity between African Americans and Africans. Jordan served as president of the National Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board from 1896 to 1922. A former slave who became a well-known pastor in the Convention, Jordan became an even more highly regarded mission theorist and church historian of the Black Baptist tradition. He came slowly, even reluctantly, to what grew into a long-sustained and impassioned commitment to mission in Africa.

Jordan's interest germinated New Hope Baptist Church, in Waco, Texas. During Jordan's tenure as pastor at New Hope from 1884 to 1887, a few members of his congregation expressed interest in emigrating to West Africa.[463] Initially, Jordan left them to their planning. The Black congregation in central Texas had enough opportunities and challenges of its own in the

[463] Lewis Garnett Jordan, *On Two Hemispheres: Bits from the Life Story of Lewis G. Jordan* (Place of publication not identified: Printed by Full Court Press, 1935), 26.

segregated trading town as it grew into an important pillar of Waco's Black community. The more Jordan accompanied this group's efforts as a pastor, however, the more "Africa" intrigued him, even if it did not elicit action from him. Surprising Jordan, this small committee selected him as their representative to investigate the possibility of their emigration to West Africa.[464] On their behalf, Jordan traveled to Liberia in February 1885 to accomplish this task.[465] This journey firmly planted the seeds of what became over his lifetime a "duty" of connecting African American Baptists with the mission field of their "motherland," Africa.[466]

Jordan positively described "Africa" as "the mother-country" whose inhabitants were the "kith and kin, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh," evidencing race consciousness and racial identification and solidarity, foundational aspects of Black Atlantic mission motivations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[467] Due to their ancestral and racial relationships with Africa, Jordan posited that Black Baptists "owed" their African brothers and sisters the gospel, an argument in step with the larger Black Atlantic Christian traditions of the nineteenth century.[468] Jordan went a step further as he also built in a gendered dimension to this racial relationship as he personified "Africa" in maternal terms.

Jordan's external construction of "Africa" in feminine and maternal language invoked images of a physical land that birthed a people. This people, dispersed by force and enslavement throughout the Atlantic world, were the orphaned children of the continental woman. Yet, God—understood as male—in his providential mercy had made it possible for them to return to their mother as conduits of her salvation. Jordan paid homage to Africa's labor pains and the still

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[464] Jordan, *On Two Hemispheres,* 27.
[465] Jordan, *On Two Hemispheres,* 27.
[466] Jordan, *On Two Hemispheres,* 42.
[467] Jordan, *On Two Hemispheres,* 43. See also Martin, *Black Baptists and African Missions: The Origins of A Movement, 1880-1915*, 1–2, 4, 38, 189, 206, 217.
[468] Jordan, *On Two Hemispheres,* 43; Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, 149.

births of the slave trade and Middle Passage in his maternal personification of "Africa." Furthermore, he linked the historic and continuing ongoing extraction of material wealth from the African continent—such as gold, precious metals, rubber, etc.—with the earlier violent theft of its peoples. "Still," he lamented, "the continent is being robbed and depleted."[469]

In addition to the historical and ongoing violence perpetuated against "Africa the mother-country," Jordan grieved the spiritual state of the motherland. "Africa the motherland," he declared, was rendered spiritually "poor, sorrowing, sobbing" because the world's earliest Christians lost interest in her evangelization.[470] The earliest Christian leaders—who he noted were Africans—focused their attention on what he estimated were petty theological and philosophical debates.[471] The effect of their disinterest and misguided attention accumulated over the centuries and rendered the motherland a "hotbed of Mohammedanism, paganism, and idolatry" from which it needed rescue.[472] The rescue and redemption of the suffering mother-country, he argued, was the responsibility of African American brothers and sisters to initiate. In conjuring up images of a mother in need of external rescue, he participated in larger discourses which imagined Africa in the image of a woman that generated a gendered subtext to the race-conscious relationship between the diaspora and the continent. [473]

As a joint venture of three smaller Black Baptist conventions, the National Baptist Convention, USA, required Jordan's time, physical energy, and visionary leadership to steer the

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[469] Jordan, *On Two Hemispheres,* 44-45.
[470] By earliest, he indicates the first six centuries.
[471] Jordan, *On Two Hemispheres,* 44.
[472] Jordan, *On Two Hemispheres,* 44. In this way, Jordan's construction of Africa as a mission field reflected broader theological and missiological influences of the period. As Martin points out, "It should be reiterated, however, that the idea that Christians should conduct dialogue with adherents of other religions rather than convert them is a recent one. Basic Christian traditions in the period under study called for the conversion of all non-Christian peoples to the faith." See also Martin, *Black Baptists and African Missions: The Origins of A Movement, 1880-1915*, 190, 193.
[473] As explored in chapter 2, the notion of "Africa" was a foreign notion, or import, with which Chilembwe worked upon his return to Chiradzulu in 1901.

Convention and its resources in line with this carefully crafted race- and gender-conscious mission to Africa.[474] When Jordan was elected the Third Executive Corresponding Secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Church, USA, in 1896, repatriation efforts that had stoked previous interest in the material and spiritual life of African homelands had diminished.[475] For African Americans, the desire and need to establish themselves as free and equal participants in American national life, and therefore due all the rights afforded to free citizens of the United States, pressed with a daily sense of urgency.[476]

Though technically freed from slavery, African Americans experienced acute social, legal, extrajudicial, and economic bondage and violence through the White supremacist machinations of the American nation-state.[477] Thus, as African Americans looked increasingly to secure their place in the United States as free citizens, assertion of a collective, nationalized identity appeared requisite to this effort's success. An expressed pan-African or global African identity—though always operative in Black American double consciousness—could be perceived as politically and economically detrimental in the ongoing struggle for Black freedom on American soil and in American hallways of representation and power.

Amid such everyday brutalizing and disenfranchising national realities, Jordan and other leaders of the Black Atlantic missionary movement nurtured the concept of a beleaguered African mother as both the womb of origin and place of sacred return. Familial separation would have indeed worked on and through the memories of numerous formerly enslaved and newly free African American individuals and communities who had known violently enforced familial

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[474] Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, 65; Martin, *Black Baptists and African Missions: The Origins of A Movement, 1880-1915*, 221.
[475] Jordan, *On Two Hemispheres,* 30.
[476] Blyden, *African Americans and Africa*, 151.
[477] Blyden, *African Americans and Africa,* 150.

separation. More than "homeland," crafting Africa as the motherland encouraged a type of longing for and fidelity to African uplift among African Americans in ways that, I suggest, recognized and drew upon memories of the intimate terror of family separation and destruction. In this case, the race consciousness of Black Atlantic symbolism and images was buttressed and strengthened by a gendered consciousness of Africa's persistent call to her children from whom she had been forcibly separated.

Even though "Africa" consistently captivated Jordan's attention and focus as a place of spiritual as well as racial and gendered obligation, Black Baptists struggling under the load of domestic terror and inequality were hard-pressed to finance this work.[478] Given the exigencies of life as a Black woman living and working in turn of the twentieth century United States, it is therefore perhaps significant that, reflecting both the racial and gendered factors of the Black Atlantic missionary vision, African American Baptist women stood at the vanguard of the movement.[479] As historian Sandy Martin shows, although Black Baptist women "did not occupy high, visible" or ordained positions, they generated a multitude of responses to the call of the suffering, robbed, and forgotten mother-country Africa. They became the movement's most significant financiers, its eager, vocal champions, and eventually some of its most committed and effective missionary personnel.[480]

In the final two decades of the nineteenth century, which historian Evelyn Higginbotham describes as "an age of women's missions," Black Baptist women overwhelmingly supported Black Baptist initiatives domestically and overseas in financing and personnel, often through

[478] Martin, *Black Baptists and African Missions: The Origins of A Movement, 1880-1915*, 116, 134.
[479] Sandy Martin, *Black Baptists and African Missions: The Origins of a Movement, 1880-1915*, p. 107.
[480] Martin, *Black Baptists and African Missions: The Origins of A Movement, 1880-1915*, 133–34.

interracial cooperation.[481] While Higginbotham details the joint mission efforts of White and Black Baptist women, I build on the insights of scholars of mission and African American history to summarize their motivations related to mission endeavors in Africa as follows. First, Black Baptist women supported the larger Black nationalist vision of separating Black churches and missions institutionally from White denominational oversight. Because of their gender consciousness, they also appear to understand the import of internal separatism of their conventions from Black male oversight.[482] This correlated with the aim of African Christian movements in the mission field of establishing African churches beyond the purview of White missionary oversight.

Second, African American Baptist women embraced the Ethiopianist ideology that upheld Africa as blessed rather than cursed.[483] In their enthusiastic embrace of an Ethiopianist vision of African redemption, Black Baptist women demonstrated "love both for themselves and for other people," historian Yolanda Pierce argues, "in a time when Africa was openly spoken of as cursed and denigrated."[484] African American women were moved to extend the "radical act" of embrace to their long separated motherland and her remaining children.[485]

Pierce points to Black women's focus on African women and children to illustrate the potency of Black women's love to move the Black Atlantic missionary gaze toward other margins. As Black women in a White supremacist national context, they did not merely understand but lived on social and political margins. Their love for those who lived on the

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[481] Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, 66, 74, 90.
[482] Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, 74.
[483] Pierce, "Leaving Husband, Home, and Baby and All: African American Women and Nineteenth-Century Global Missions," 286–87.
[484] Pierce, "Leaving Husband, Home, and Baby and All: African American Women and Nineteenth-Century Global Missions," 287.
[485] Pierce, "Leaving Husband, Home, and Baby and All: African American Women and Nineteenth-Century Global Missions," 287.

margins in a globally imagined motherland of "Africa," the locus of God's blessing and redemption but also the unredeemed mother to whom they needed to return and render care, occupied the center of Black women's efforts.[486] In this way, Black Baptist women embraced their mother-country Africa not because she or her children were forgotten, but because, as Black Baptist women, they had been seen by God and thus they, too, were called to remember the place and offspring from which they were severed.[487]

Most relevant to this study, Black Baptist women overwhelmingly and consistently supported Chilembwe's fledgling mission on the periphery of the Black Atlantic world with funds and personnel. The small Providence Industrial Mission outpost nearer to the Indian Ocean than the Atlantic often seemed to fade from view amidst the larger National Baptist's most strident mission efforts. President Lewis Garnett Jordan of the National Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board focused most heavily on sending African American missionaries to the American colony of Liberia, established by freed slaves, and to some extent to Sierra Leone in West Africa. Fundraising energies were spent accordingly. For the financial and material realization of the mission effort on the Black Atlantic periphery of the Shire Highlands, the work of Black Baptist women was essential.[488]

National Baptist women often prodded the ordained male leadership of the Foreign Mission Board to remember Chilembwe, his wife Ida, and their beloved sister Emma Delaney by sending funds and supplies. Providence Industrial Mission, the Chilembwes, and Delaney, along with her male colleague L.N. Cheek, occupied the center of the National Baptist Women's

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[486] Pierce, "Leaving Husband, Home, and Baby and All: African American Women and Nineteenth-Century Global Missions," 286.
[487] Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, 66, 74; Jeannine DeLombard, "Sisters, Servants, or Saviors? National Baptist Women Missionaries in Liberia in the 1920s," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24, no. 2 (1991): 323–47.
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Auxiliary Foreign Mission arm in imagination and efforts across the first decade of the twentieth century. A close review of financial records reported in the *Mission Herald* show that, if it had not been for Black Baptist women, little funding would have made its way to Providence Industrial Mission.[489] Black Baptist women consistently and persistently brought the mission's cause before their female members as well as the broader National Baptist Convention, reminding them of the labors taking place far afield in their mother-country from whom they had long been separated.

The Suffering Motherland in Chilembwe's African Mission Practice[490]

The gendered images of Africa to which African American mission leaders appealed and which Black Baptist women supported contradicted and overlaid Chilembwe's personal history. Both his mother and father came from matrilineal kinship networks in which women's networks played vital roles in sustaining family lines and thus use of land, economic productivity, and social stability. In the early and mid-nineteenth century, as the Maravi kingdom-state disintegrated (prior to colonial presence in the region), concurrent and multiple migrations of Yao, Nyanja, Lomwe, and Ngoni generated common practices of intra-group assimilation based primarily on matrilineage.[491]

Whereas matrilineal networks or intergroup marriage may have served as a mode of social security for women, the multiple trades in slaves—including the Swahili Coast, British and White transatlantic, and internal sub-Saharan trades—increasingly rendered women as

[489] National Baptist Convention Foreign Mission Board Annual Reports 1901, 1902, 1904.
[490] The argument presented here reflects my analysis of sources particular to this project, but they began formulating during my studies of African Christian practices and culture in Abidjan, Côte D'Ivoire. This was my first introduction to ecclesial pagne culture and I continue to reflect on the theological and social arguments that women make with and on their bodies by displaying certain images, messages, and symbols in their dress. The field of fashion studies has not been incorporated into world Christianity approaches to African history, and this is my attempt to link material practice with theological argument and spiritual practice.
[491]Christine Saidi, *Women's Authority and Society in Early East-Central Africa* (Suffolk, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), 68.

pawns vulnerable to enslavement and exchange.[492] Acquisition of women as slaves increased communal wealth in people as economic instability increased for the Yao, Mang'anja, and Ngoni. Even though trade in enslaved Africans had been legally stymied in the Atlantic world, slave trades in Central Africa continued and even increased well into the final decade of the nineteenth century.[493] These three intersecting slave trades impacted the Shire Highlands less significantly than other locations in the region. Raids on the Highlands and in the Upper Shire Valley nonetheless destabilized the region and rendered women's status increasingly insecure.[494]

Chilembwe's familial circumstances were a direct effect of the slave trade. He was the offspring of a Yao man named Kaundama and a Mang'anja woman named Nyangu, as far as records confirm.[495] His mother was more than likely enslaved and incorporated into his father's Yao kin group. Within his social and familial structures, then, Chilembwe would have lived amidst the intimate precarities women experienced because of the slave trade that encroached regularly into the region. He would also have been at least partially aware of the matrilineal legacy through which social security and stability was attained and maintained. In addition, his context of the Shire Highlands would have illustrated the integral nature of both male and female labor in supporting the welfare of the region.

That said, while in the United States from 1897 to 1900, Chilembwe referred to his father's status as a Yao political leader and claimed this status for himself by birth and in name. He referred to himself as "Che," or prince, and claimed that his name means "a chief, a headman,

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[492] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 10.
[493] Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi,* 108.
[494] Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi,* 148-150. As Vaughan writes, "The predominance of women as 'domestic slaves,' and the ease with which many of them were absorbed into new lineages, implies that their productive and reproductive capacities were highly valued." She also notes, however, that "the very instability of these relationships undermined their productive capacities, as did their potential exchange value…"
[495] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African,* 42.

a name of honour."[496] National Baptists would have had limited knowledge of the contextual history in which the Yao achieved such status in the late nineteenth century—namely through their status as travelers and traders and, by the late nineteenth century, as traders in enslaved Africans and accumulators of wealth in slaves.[497]

Upon his return to the Shire Highlands, however, Chilembwe appears to have at least subtly distanced himself from his Yao heritage in his condemnation of colonial land policy as a new form of slavery, covered in chapter 2. His notable and insistent commitment to women's status, including their education in his mission, and his consistent cry that colonial policies conscripting men into war made married women into widows underscore his empathy with women's lived realities.[498] Women's social precarity from the slave trades and enslavement as well as the colonization of the region highlighted the centrality and importance of their place in his imagined future African society. Freed from the trade in slaves, land alienation, and conscripted war labor, women would be able to assume their places as Christian members of a new African society.

Chilembwe's concern with and commitment to women in the Shire Highlands is evident from his correspondence with his National Baptist Convention financiers. He, Ida, and Emma Delaney each communicated regularly with the broader convention as well as the Women's Auxiliary. Spelman College also published some of their correspondence in the college newspaper, *The Spelman Messenger*. Their letters often reported on financial need, food insecurity, and women's status within the mission and the Shire Highlands. Chilembwe also frequently and consistently denounced European colonial violence in the Protectorate because it

[496] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African,* 115.
[497] Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi,* 67, 311.
[498] In Chilembwe's view, the recruitment of men into colonial wars was the primary culprit of widowhood.

widowed women and made children into orphans. The needs of women and their precarity in the Protectorate, as he reported them, were frequent refrains throughout his tenure as a pastor and mission leader.

Much has been made of Chilembwe's vocal and consistent focus on women's spiritual as well as material uplift in the Shire Highlands.[499] Shepperson and Price make special note of it in their study, *Independent African*. The later work of Providence Industrial Mission's church historian, Patrick Makondesa, provides names of Chilembwe's first converts, both women and family, namely his sister and mother.[500] Indeed, women occupied a central place in Chilembwe's mission work.[501] He wrote and spoke regularly about women's precarious situation in the slave trades and as the colonial state became more entrenched in the economic and political life of the Shire Highlands. As the slave trade and colonial economic endeavors decreased women's social and economic stability in the region, Chilembwe worked to secure their futures as part of his mission.

One way to encourage women's position relative to both life in the Protectorate and within networks of slave trades entailed instructing them in new forms of fashioning. At the Blantyre Mission, where Chilembwe received his initial schooling, missionaries focused their efforts primarily on men's religious lives. Although by the 1890s the Mission took a clear interest in women, the work of cultivating leaders for an "African native church" nonetheless depended almost exclusively on educating African men for ordained life. [502] When Blantyre Mission director Alexander Hetherwick commented in 1913 that Church of Scotland mission

[499] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African,* 173.
[500] Makondesa, Patrick. *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission.* Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Series, 2006, 37.
[501] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African,* p. 173.
[502] Statham, Part One, 48-49.

church membership totaled 662 "of whom the men are twice as numerous as the women it being a feature of ours that the men come first and the wives and children later on," he reflected a gendered sentiment evident in some European missions, even if the Blantyre Mission had schooled women since the 1890s.[503]

Despite Hetherwick's brief statement on the matter, historian Adrian Hastings shows that in numerous contexts of the colonized world during this period and following, where Western missionary networks and activities were most prevalent, women were among the earliest converts to Christianity.[504] The same was true of Chilembwe's mission. In word and in deed, Chilembwe focused on the conditions of women, men, and children alike. One could even say he paid more attention to women's bodily comportment and industrial skill development in light of the imagery of Africa and African women that he employed.[505] In correspondence as well as in his reasoning in the Protectorate, these images signified Chilembwe's inscription within a modern Black Atlantic religious imaginary shot through with racial and gendered logics.

As noted earlier, the maternal personification of "Africa" underscored a priority and set of experiences shared across the Black Atlantic world: that within systems designed through racial and colonial logic, women and children were the most marginalized. For example, when Chilembwe and Ida sent reports to the National Baptist Convention, like Chilembwe's mentor Lewis Garnet Jordan, they painted a picture of Africa as wounded and her female offspring as

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[503] Malawi National Archives, Alexander Hetherwick correspondence, 86/ZOM/2/71. Isabel Phiri attests to the patriarchal structures and practices of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian in Malawian religious history. It's worth noting that much of the literature on women's significance in the reemergence of Christianity as a globalized religion has responded to the paradoxical phenomenon that although women were not the intended or primary recipients of the missionary message, they nonetheless became, in good part, its most committed, active, and statistically and phenomenologically significant practitioners and messengers.

[504] Adrian Hastings, "Were Women a Special Case?" in *Women and Missions: Past and Present* (Oxford, UK: Berg Publishers, 1993), 112.

[505] Shepperson and Price, 174.

cast into the deepest throes of her suffering. To lift her out of this state, baptism and new sartorial practices were required.

The advised dress for women baptized into Chilembwe's church proceeded as follows. Women were to cover themselves, if they had not done so previously, with collared bodices and petticoats in a European style. For baptism and prayer, women exchanged their Victorian dresses for simple white cloth dresses and cotton head coverings. Chilembwe instructed women to cover their heads based on the Pauline text I Corinthians 11:4-5.[506] In this biblical text, the apostle Paul instructs women in the church of Corinth to cover their heads. Women's use of head coverings at Providence Industrial Mission imitated this practice from the early church. Photographs of Ida Chilembwe and other women show that some women also adopted the use of hats.

The practice of dressing in Victorian-styled suits with hats or dresses with petticoats distinguished Chilembwe's church members in the region and intended to signify a change in status.[507] Cotton—whether produced by Africans or imported as calico—was a luxury good in the region surrounding Chiradzulu.[508] For one, the Shire Highlands' cool temperatures did not readily support cotton production, so, according to Vaughan and McCracken, if one wanted to wear cotton-woven clothes, one either had to purchase pre-fabricated calico imports from the

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[506] I Corinthians 11:4-5 reads: Every man who has *something* on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for it is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. (NASB)

[507] For example, in a 1913 record, Ida Chilembwe reported that "If a native woman wears dresses or skirts, or a girl wears her hair long, she is subject to be mocked by both English and even her own friends, who are taught by nature to despise women. Take off (Chosa) is the common word yelled to the dressed woman. So my sisters are still lying asleep by the wayside all unconscious of the dogs fighting around their heads." See National Baptist Convention of the United States of America. Foreign Mission Board, "Thirty-Third Annual Report of the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention, Inc.," September 17, 1913, 17 as well as; Makondesa, *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission, 1900-1940,* 9.

[508] Megan Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi*, 53, 103; McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 16. According to Vaughan, by the mid-1880s the African Lake Corporation paid its porters in calico (*merikani),* thus associating the imported good with a certain type of new wage laborer in the Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley.

coast or trade with African producers of *likambambo*, a rough local cloth woven on handlooms, in the warmer Shire Valley.[509]

In addition, local women dressed primarily in the more readily available and African-produced bark cloth, or *chiwondo* in Chinyanja.[510] Described as "light and warm" and fabricated primarily from mombo trees, bark cloth could be made into skirts or shirts for men and women.[511] Some reports indicate that bark cloth would last only one month. However, the raw material for bark cloth occurred naturally in the region and provided more warmth during the cooler seasons of the Shire Highlands than calico. Besides bark cloth, some women may have worn locally fashioned cotton cloth, but the texture would have differed from the soft, imported calico textiles.[512]

Relative to the regional economy of trade and production, then, fashioning women in calico signified a changed socioeconomic status within a broader context of political and economic fluctuations.[513] In the last decade of the nineteenth century, "soft goods" imports into the Protectorate steadily increased such that by 1900 they comprised over fifty percent of imported items.[514] British estates and transportation companies began paying African workers in calico by the 1890s. African workers received "a monthly rate in calico which roughly equaled the annual hut tax," according to Vaughan.[515] Whereas the slave trading economy extended

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[509] Megan Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi,* 45, 47; McCracken, *A History of Malawi,* 15-16. By the first decade of the twentieth century, cotton production did increase in the Shire Highlands under British land policies as an attempt to generate revenue within the Protectorate, which was not yet the self-sustaining colony that was the economic intention of the British Colonial Office. Even though cotton grew as an export in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Shire Highlands were not as productive as the Shire Valley and other locations with soil more conducive to cotton production. See Vaughan, 121.
[510] Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi,* 53.
[511] Cosmo Haskard, "Barkcloth," *Journal of the Society of Malawi,* 39.
[512] McCracken, *A History of Malawi,* 16.
[513] Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi,* 59.
[514] Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi,* 115.
[515] Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi,* 114.

African measures of wealth in people, as Yao or Ngoni integrated enslaved individuals into their kin groups, the acquisition and use of calico indicated a changed African status as a "wage laborer" in the emerging early capitalist economy.

As wage laborers, African possession and use of calico indicated an economic arrangement in which labor was exchanged for pay within a capitalist mode of production. This also indicated participation in an expanding set of economic networks and possibilities beyond and including the Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley. Similar to how the Yao adopted Arab-styled dress due to their linkages with the Swahili coastal trade, Chilembwe's Christians' dress set them apart from other African Christians in the region as, like Chilembwe himself was after his return from the United States, "an object of respect and envy."[516] Their dress communicated publicly that an African future could be secured autonomously of White European missionaries and colonial administrators, as they relied on training African women in sewing skills. As inscribed within a racialized world, fashioning baptized African women in Victorian-inspired calico styles asserted embodied and public arguments that Africans were equal to their European counterparts and thus fully human.[517]

The fashioning of baptized Christians at Providence Industrial Mission likewise signaled participation in global networks, albeit ones of cross-cultural Black Atlantic exchange entangled in Victorian-era values. When, for example, Emma Delaney arrived in the Protectorate, she wore calico dresses. Sewing clothing was one of the primary industrial activities of women. Though African women's daily practice of clothing themselves in Victorian-style dresses reinforced

[516] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African,* 129.
[517] See also Eliza Kent's discussion of the emergence of "discourse of respectability" through ideas on proper dress and adornment. "Changes in dress…provide the very ground on which the cultural codes that give meaning to social life were fought over and negotiated. See Eliza Kent, *Converting Women: Gender and Protestant Christianity in Colonial South India,* 9, 13, 202.

European standards of feminine comportment, this new style of dress was adopted not simply from Europeans but from the African Americans Chilembwe encountered in the United States as well as those who worked at his mission. Rules for women's dress in the Black Atlantic world were by any standard inculcated not in countercultural form, i.e., adoption of African-inspired styles, but by countercultural logic.

Similar phenomena regarding women's sartorial decisions occurred throughout the colonized world. For example, in colonized India, Dalits did not have access to Sanskritization, or "a mechanism of social mobility."[518] By converting to Christianity, Dalits located themselves in what Chad Baumann describes as "a quasi-neutral space where the signs and behaviors of upper-caste Hinduism could be appropriated without provoking the ire of these cultural elites."[519] Relative to women, their social status, and sartorial style, Bauman argues that "by appropriating signs of Victorian domesticity and femininity, *Satnami*-Christians were at the same time appropriating the symbols of upper-caste Hindus," and thus indicated a changed, and better, "social status."[520] While this process of Sanskritization through Christianization presented a public assertion of a caste status elevation, as Baumann shows, it also likewise curtailed women's' mobility vis à vis restraining her sphere of influence primarily to domestic life.[521]

Relative to religious life in the Nyasaland Protectorate, use of Victorian dress and head coverings signified that a woman's spiritual and economic status was as equally important to Chilembwe as a man's position amidst states of precarity. Their dress proclaimed a paradoxical Christian message to which Chilembwe closely adhered. On the one hand, women's fashioning asserted through embodied means what Chilembwe wrote to his National Baptist supporters: that

[518] Chad Bauman, *Christian Identity and Dalit Religion in Hindu India,* 55, 188.
[519] Chad Bauman, *Christian Identity and Dalit Religion in Hindu India,* 188.
[520] Chad Bauman, *Christian Identity and Dalit Religion in Hindu India,* 171.
[521] Chad Bauman, *Christian Identity and Dalit Religion in Hindu India,* 171.

women and men needed to be taught that God had ordained for women a place "as man's helpmeet, his equal, not his slave."[522] This ordained position invited instruction on God's "purpose for male and female, and that women have work to do that man cannot do." According to Chilembwe, this included teaching girls, learning industrial skills such as sewing, teaching the Bible to other women, and discouraging "early marriage among our girls."[523] Thus he inscribed women in an emergent patriarchal order that ironically reflected matrilineal history and values.

Conversely, women's new fashions communicated a changed status not only in relationship to Europeans. In altering women's styles among the Yao, Nyanja, and Ngoni, he intended that refashioned women present publicly in a manner that indicated they were no longer vulnerable pawns in a slave trade. The Christian message declared women free and equal, not only from missionary oversight, not exclusively from the effects of colonial rule, but as much if not more relative to their experiences of being reduced to traded objects.

Baptized women's new fashioning also indicated that female African Christian converts possessed as much capacity to conduct themselves according to Victorian sensibilities as did their African American Christian counterparts, given baptism, education, and autonomy. In the colonial context of the Nyasaland Protectorate, the practice of fashioning women in calico asserted not only a changed socioeconomic status internally but a visibly changed religious status that held weight outside of missionary oversight. Whereas other missions pursued men as their first converts, for Chilembwe, women's religious livelihood mattered as much or more.

Chilembwe's focus on women's comportment illustrated his concern for women's social welfare and his active inclusion of women as contributors to a new African Christian society. Conversely, his implementation of this focus also demonstrated the paradoxical imagery of

[522] Makondesa, 42 quoting from Shepperson and Price, 174-175.
[523] Makondesa, 42 quoting from Shepperson and Price, 174-175.

"Africa" as the suffering mother in need of rescue that was created in the Black Atlantic world. Like the Africa imagined in the Black Atlantic world, Chilembwe conceived of African women as in need of rescue so they could assume their rightful place in a future African world freed from both slave trades and colonial interference. Yet he also understood the importance of women's power and roles in securing social and economic stability that the slave trades and enslavement threatened and undermined. To reassert women's status and power required religious change that affirmed their being human subjects and equal to men amidst ongoing upheavals and tenuous social ties.

Conclusion

The bodies of African women have often become the terrain on which men make arguments and wage debates about social change or political power. This may be illustrated by a fictional vignette from Kenyan writer N'gugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*. The body of the novel's female protagonist, Muthoni, lies at the crossroads of three symbolic worlds as she is carried out from her aunt's house, weak and dying from an initiation ritual gone awry, hidden from her Christian family. In the arms of Waiyaki, she passes out of her village and to the nearby by mission hospital established among the Gikuyu as her sister Nyambura trails behind. Raised in the Christian household of her father Joshua, who served as the surrounding village's preacher, Muthoni defies her father's restrictions by choosing to slip away during early morning church service to participate in a ritual initiation ceremony of cutting.[524]

Muthoni's sister Nyambura and Waiyaki's defiant love for one another, and overtures to their eventual leadership among the Gikuyu, emerges in N'gugi's *The River Between* as a salvific emblem and resolution to the long, contorted road of social change generated in part by the

[524] Today's nomenclature is FGM, female genital mutilation.

arrival of missionaries in Gikuyuland. Yet Muthoni's will to believe that her future, though secured in the Christian God, will not be complete without formal ritual entrance into womanhood marks her body as the landscape on which religion was practiced and social change wrought. Muthoni's decisions about her body illustrate the ambiguous process of change wherein men's prescriptions raise new questions for women about community and personhood.

The fictional Muthoni dies at the mission hospital, and even as her father rejects her, her mother "knowing that this [Christian] religion was chosen but always there was a Gikuyu woman rising within" laments loudly at her death.[525] With her very body, Muthoni discerns the terms, limits, and expanse of her future. On her body, the debate between fidelity to her community's history and confidence in the Christian God to secure her future encompassed her past, present, and future unfolds. In her death, she offers up a sign of the sacrifice that religious change has often exacted on the bodies of women.

Although fictional, Muthoni carries us beyond written texts and archives to the fashioning practices that altered how African women's lives and bodies were apprehended and encountered publicly. Dress as Chilembwe prescribed reinforces Jean and John Comaroffs' assertion that fashioning the female body was a daily contested "sacrament." In their classic study of Tswana encounters with Nonconformist missionaries in southern Africa, the Comaroffs insightfully show that the routine, or mundane, aspects and negotiations of signs and symbols were the crux of cultural change in the Nonconformist missionary and Tswana encounters. As a dimension of their larger argument, the Comaroffs argue that how a community or individual dressed was "an everyday sacrament" in light of the "nineteenth-century religious sensibility" of Victorian Britain.[526]

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[525] N'gugi wa Thiong'o, *The River Between.*
[526] Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution,* 220.

Chilembwe understood that fashioning the female Christians under his leadership as a religious practice ascribed to them as African women a human status that, under a colonial gaze and within a context marred by intersecting slave trades, was rendered a "non-being."[527] Fashioning his Christians moved a theological claim about African personhood from within the church into a public sphere as a material practice and existential argument to be contested. It is difficult to overstate the theological heft and political weight of the fashioning practice that Chilembwe prescribed for women, men, and even children.

Under colonial rule and amidst developing realities of social change, how a people such as the converts in Chilembwe's church fashioned themselves made deliberate, public, embodied arguments about African capacity and women's equality. In a context that militated against such open assertions, to dress like their British counterparts—whether as a settler, missionary, or colonial administrator made little difference—baptized Christians under Chilembwe's leadership invited open contempt at their bold provocation that they were equal subjects in the sight of the Christian God they claimed as their own. To the Yao and Ngoni who continued to enslave and trade women, even if in decreasing rates, how women dressed asserted an image not of a suffering mother but of a powerful woman assuming her place in the divine work unfolding in the Shire Highlands.

My argument contrasts with the Comaroffs' claim that the common practice of fashioning Tswana converts in Victorian-style dress drew them "into a global economy of goods and signs," thereby contributing to the rise of capitalism.[528] Rather than interpret Chilembwe's prescribed fashioning as primarily early capitalist, it is more productive to broaden the frame to recognize both colonial economies and the ferment of Black Atlantic countercultures as intertwined worlds.

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[527] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks, 2*.
[528] Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution,* Vol. 2, 4.

Fashioning African Christians in Victorian petticoats, waist pockets, and hats caught Providence Industrial Mission's baptized members up in the daily business of confronting colonial rejections of Africans' full humanity. Baptized women claimed their equality as humans and as Africans with colonial settlers and administrators.

Fashioning women in calico for daily life or using head coverings to signal obedience to biblical teachings also asserted an emerging form of social power embodied in dress. Through tailored means, Chilembwe's baptized church members argued their equality with Europeans and baptized women in particular asserted their right to be free as subjects, not as vulnerable pawns. They also exposed the temperamental character and veneer of colonial attitudes and the capitulations of local power brokers to colonial enticements of indirect rule. The rather quiet practice of fashioning a people was religious and political, an embodied voice. In the Nyasaland Protectorate, it was also a mode of accumulating and asserting the potential of collective power through shared practice and identity in a community of faithful practice.

Within African studies, anthropologist Dorothy Hodgson's pathbreaking study among Maasai female converts at the Spiritan missions in Tanzania from the 1950s to 1990s demonstrates that utilizing gender as an analytic in studies of encounter and conversion illuminates new sites of power through which gender is structured, articulated, and rendered meaningful. The question for African women encountering the Western missionary project across many African contexts, she argues, was not about what women gained or lost through the introduction of Christianity. The better question she found in her study was, "How do gender differences in meaning and experience of conversion interact with gendered political and economic dislocations…compelling Maasai women to surmount the restrictions on their

involvement with the Catholic Church, [and thus] shaping terms and outcomes of the missionary encounter?"[529]

In answering this question, Hodgson's study establishes that Maasai women's conversion to Catholic Christianity allowed them to identify and carve out space to exercise their religious and spiritual authority as political authority became more consolidated through the male leadership of nationalist movements and, more pointedly, through "return to tradition" initiatives.[530] The analytical use of gender in Hodgson's study troubles theoretical treatments of conversion and spirituality, as an illustration, that presuppose male experience as the interpretive measure and model for *both* male and female.[531] Conversion was for women and men a "site for struggles over gender relations, ethnic identities, and claims to power and moral authority" that informed what it meant to be Maasai, male, and Catholic, or Maasai, female, and Catholic in colonial and postcolonial contexts.[532]

In the end, the centrality of the "spiritual domain" in women's lives invited Hodgson as an anthropologist to reconsider her previous inattention to reconciling moral and material worlds and to analyses of power beyond the political, namely the spiritual or supernatural. Hodgson's use of gender as a conceptual framework in this instance intersects with her increased attention to religious lives in a way that elucidates spirituality as a means for women to express power that was not "subordinate to," or merely functionalist relative to, political and economic experience.[533]

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[529] Hodgson, *The Church of Women*, 5.
[530] Hodgson, *The Church of Women*, p. #.
[531] Hodgson, *The Church of Women*, 17.
[532] Hodgson, *The Church of Women*, 210-211.
[533] Hodgson, *The Church of Women*, 5.

I approach my insights from a complementary point of view. Chilembwe's prescribed dress and women's practice of it asks us to reconsider how materiality and spirituality became entwined sacramental, or enchanted, worlds for African women in colonial contexts. Although perhaps less articulated than dress, the body was a central part of concern for Chilembwe as he worked to establish himself and gather a people. Chilembwe's call to gather a people into his ark entailed the work of fashioning a people through the seemingly ordinary activity of dress. Chilembwe's instruction to women on how to fashion themselves then indicates that he recognized women as foundational to this vision.

As outlined in chapter 2, Chilembwe's missionary consciousness in the image of Noah was a deliberate and constructive imaginative process that extended biblical drama into a material world of chaos and possibility in the Shire Highlands. But his consciousness of his mission and call was not an individual activity. The God who called Noah also called Chilembwe to gather all living creatures into an ark for protection. Part of this work included fashioning a new people, a new creation of all living things.[534] As Chilembwe embarked upon his call to build a metaphorical ark for his people, he called people to be baptized and to alter their dress to indicate their new life bestowed by baptismal waters. As his first baptized members were women, in accord with his instructions, they adopted the fashions of the period worn in Britain but also worn among African Americans in the United States.

As Chilembwe fashioned a new people, he was mindful not only of the racial dimensions that spun together the Black Atlantic world. He played on the gendered factors as well in how he portrayed African women to his supporters and how he instructed them to dress in the Shire Highlands. In practice, when he taught baptized women to drape themselves in calico or cover

[534] Several biblical injunctions may have been operative as Chilembwe correlated corporal fashion with becoming a signified Christian people. See for example Genesis 3:7; Colossians 3:12 , Galatians 3:26-27; Revelation 3:5.

their heads with white cloth, he drew on a long history of matrilineage in which women publicly personified the wealth of kin and the networks that spun a community into a people. Women's dress in Victorian fashions extended matrilineal cultural values while also inscribing women and men in a hierarchal world of gendered logics. Fashioning women as well as men was one of the deliberate habits that moved religious change into the realm of public argument and thus social change.

My claims are not meant to leave unchallenged the adoption of Victorian dress as a sign of respectability and "progress." My claims do not also intend to leave unaddressed a particular reading of scripture that required women to literally cover their heads for prayer and teaching. However, in this period of immense change in African Christian historical development, debates about African women's sartorial style illustrate that they were integral to religious visions of African futures, albeit for conflicting reasons and based on paradoxical imagery. Chilembwe's insistent focus on women as central to his mission's work encapsulates a chapter in the development of African Christianity that might otherwise be overlooked as insignificant, failed, and conflicted within the larger Black Atlantic missionary movement. As men increasingly led the building of the ecclesial institutions and anticolonial movements, African women have often been seen as the faithful auxiliaries who kneeled in deference to male authority.[535] Indeed, Adrian Hastings has argued that as the church became more "central to African society," so too did "the traditions of male primacy."[536] In this light, Chilembwe's prescription to women to

[535] For example, Chilembwe appears to have had several conversations with Church of Scotland African ministers encouraging them to dress women in European clothing to signify their education and Christian conversion. Matrilineality is a notable feature of southern Malawi history, and I examine to what extent local history inflected his construction of a gendered mission discourse.

[536] Adrian Hastings, "Were Women a Special Case?," in *Women and Missions: Past and Present* (Oxford, UK: Berg Publishers, 1993), 121.

clothe their bodies in a particular manner generated not only embodied practices. It left a legacy to recall that fashioning a new people started and ended with a community's women.

Chapter 4: Gathering a People, Building the Ark
African Missionary Consciousness, Black Reason, and Ecclesial Visions

As chapter 2 established, Chilembwe located himself within a divine drama that included peoples of African origins and descent creating ways to live under and through the oppressive logic and structures of racial colonialism and slave trades. When viewed in this light, Chilembwe participated in and led constructive efforts to imagine and build African futures through gathering a new religious community of African Christians. In identifying with Noah, Chilembwe heralded the call and message of *Africa for the African* upon his return to the Shire Highlands in 1901 as his own, leading others to become part of this new African Christian society through baptism and schooling. Chilembwe recognized in himself an individual called to gather his own people, yet his own people traversed borders of land, language, and social location. So too did his mission.

Chilembwe returned to the Shire Highlands energized by the "Africa for the African" vision in which he was mentored by Joseph Booth. He also returned theologically schooled in the Black Baptist tradition that took root in America. He understood his relationship to the several groups who moved and lived throughout the Shire Valley and Highlands as a missionary, gathering all living creation into an ark, the makings of a new people. What Chilembwe witnessed in the United States during his travels with Booth and through his relationship with National Baptist leaders informed not only his sense of calling but to whom he was called. The exigencies of his local context also underscored the need to cultivate a new people.

With eyes freshened from his travels and over the course of his ministry, Chilembwe identified the shared plights of imperial exploitation of African resources and labors occurring across groups, and a problem to which the Christian message as he preached it offered both critique and possibility for an alternative way of life together. Among disparate groups

populating the vital and volatile region surrounding Chiradzulu, Chilembwe initially named his mission Ajawa Industrial Mission, reflecting his Yao heritage. However, he soon changed the descriptor to "Providence."[537] In this way, whether Mang'anja, Ngoni, Lomwe, or Yao, at least in name, all were potential members of the mission through which he baptized and gathered into his ark.

The memory of Chilembwe, as well as its suppressions, has endured in significance somewhat separated from Chilembwe's missionary consciousness that informed the ecclesial vision of this gathering. As Adrian Hastings astutely comments, "Chilembwe has proved vastly more powerful in death than in life," particularly in relation to the politics of national memory.[538] The influence of Chilembwe's ecclesial vision has also in practice been superseded by the religious legacies of Booth's other protégés, institutionalized namely through the Churches of Christ, Seventh Day Adventists, and Watchtower Movements. Booth's ever-changing relationship with Christian denominations and movements, his seemingly fickle flirtations with several theological ideas and related practices, and his influential liaisons with numerous African Christians all contributed to a vibrant landscape of African Christian initiative and independence in the Nyasaland Protectorate as well as the Malawian nation-state.[539]

As much as the logic for Chilembwe's uprising remains conjectured across multiple influences and agitations, so too do his ecclesial vision and hopes for the mission remain undertheorized. The entanglement of cultural formations contributing to the religious practices and character of his mission—European imperial constructs, African histories and concerns, and

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[537] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African*, 127-128.
[538] Adrian Hastings, *The Church in African History 1450-1950*, 489.
[539] For studies on each of the movements linked to Booth see Kenneth P. Lohrentz, "Joseph Booth, Charles Domingo, and the Seventh Day Baptists in Northern Nyasaland, 1910-12," *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 3 (1971): 461–80. On Booth's legacy in Malawian Christianity see Ross and Fiedler, *A Malawi Church History 1860 - 2020*.

the lively ideological impulses of the wider Black Atlantic world—complicate the proto-nationalist framework in which Chilembwe has been cast. While certainly not dismissive of Chilembwe's missionary consciousness altogether, a proto-nationalist imagination and telos can privilege political subjectivity and representation over the religious consciousness manifested in missionary vocations and ecclesial visions, linking them instead in dual causality. This can have the unintended consequence of eclipsing religious visions that in practice could and often did engender political consciousness among African Christian communities across disparate histories and affinities. In a colonial context where establishing and structuring African alterity both internally vis à vis "tribe" and externally vis à vis White European and Black African, visions of Christianized affinity could be incendiary as well as delicate.

African Christian communities were fragile due to the broader global realities in which they were embedded. Under the specter of what Achille Mbembe calls "Black reason," African Christians such as Chilembwe who encountered Christianity in both European and African American forms helmed a transitional period in the history of African Christianity in which they not only "internalized western models" and "domesticated western culture in the hinterlands," as historian Ogbu Kalu argues.[540] They did so all the while wrestling against the very ecclesial, social, and racial strictures in which they were being cast.

Black reason, according to Mbembe is both discourse, transformed "into common sense and a habitus," and practices, "the daily work…whose goal was to produce the Black Man as a racial subject and savage exteriority, who was therefore set up for moral disqualification and practical instrumentalization."[541] Both discourse and practice generate what Mbembe describes

[540] Ogbu Kalu, *African Christianity: An African Story*, 15.
[541] Mbembe, Achille. 2017. *Critique of Black Reason*. Translated by Laurent Dubois. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 27.

as the "founding narrative of the *Western consciousness of Blackness"* that, in discourse and practice, continually shifts in order to guard at center the *"I,"* understood as that which or they who are not Black and thus, by effect, cannot be the measure and arbiter of all that has meaning.[542]

As this founding narrative emerged out of Western, or White European, consciousness as "identity judgment," Mbembe further argues, the one who is circumscribed in it and by it in turn declares an identity as "Black Man" and "that which cannot be captured or controlled."[543] This identity is forged through creation of community as "freed [Black] peoples" who are in relationship through a shared faith, among other elements, including respectability and solidarity.[544] As a founding narrative countering Western consciousness of Blackness, this "declaration of identity" can function at the level of morality—in terms of both imagination and identity. It asserts a Black self and Black community against and outside the confines of the subjugating *Western consciousness of Blackness,* namely the practices, to use Mbembe's words, of "segregation, extreme violence, and racial terror."[545]

[542] Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 29. Mbembe describes the founding narrative as "a constellation in perpetual reconfiguration over time."
[543] Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason,* 29.
[544] Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason,* 29.
[545] Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason,* 29.

Chilembwe cultivated his mission in the shadows of the British Empire amidst notions of "racial superiority, capitalism, and religious virtue."[546] As a particular form of Black reason, this imperial ideology crept through colonial structures into practices of divide and rule and economic extraction.[547] Building a church and gathering a people also occurred relative to the long African history of migrations and slave trades. Thus, as an African Noah, Chilembwe's ecclesial vision reflected an African need and desire to reconstitute self and community in a context of fracture, division, and precarity. In this way, Chilembwe led as a missionary figure who gestured toward a new human community gathered through baptism into an ark of safety.

This chapter argues that in the period in African Christian history in which Chilembwe ministered (1892-1915), ecclesial visions emerged in contrast to customary, "traditional," "tribal," ethnic, or class categories and frameworks to reconstitute kin groups based on religious belonging and practice. Chilembwe's vision led him to establish Providence Industrial Mission across the borders of space, language, and social location. In so doing he continued African practices of kin assimilation as well as implemented Black Christian Nationalist visions that correlated spiritual longings with materialist aspirations.

John McCracken has suggested Chilembwe be reconsidered as "prophetic" over and above nationalist.[548] I do not disagree with McCracken's assessment, but I do wish to nuance the work the term does in reestablishing and assessing Chilembwe's missionary consciousness. I draw on the work of Derek Peterson and Karen Fields to demonstrate that religious and ecclesial visions that promoted shared practices often contended with and challenged both colonial tactics of divide and rule as well as ethnic nationalisms substantiated in one created ethnic tradition.

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[546] Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire*.
[547] Fyfe, "Using Race as an Instrument of Policy: A Historical View."
[548] McCracken, *History of Malawi*, p.#

Derek Peterson shows in his study of colonial and postcolonial Kenya that religious movements such as the East African Revival could generate practices and ways of interpreting lived experience that unsettled or, at minimum, introduced competing African and colonial frameworks through which social and political life were imagined and organized.[549]

From her study of post-Reconstruction Black Christian Nationalism in the United States, Adele Oltman describes forerunners of Black Christian Nationalism in Savannah, Georgia, and the southern United States as pursuing "a utopian ideal that connected truth, communities of faith, and the world of business."[550] As a movement, Black Christian Nationalism reflected theological innovation relative to Black experience within a Protestant Baptist tradition; prophetic critique of American democracy as failing to deliver on its fundamental premises; and commitment to redeeming a material world, with all its peoples, Black as well as White, through economic development.[551]

As Leroy Vail writes it, "Nationalism, not only Malawi, but in many other areas of Africa as well, had been a basically negative force, directed against colonialism, with little positive vision about the nature of the new society after colonialism's demise."[552] Contrary to his assessment of nationalism, Black Christian Nationalism as a "narrative construction" was not only "negative," or reactive; it was "positive," or constructive. One of the ideological pillars shaping Black Christian Nationalist thought and practice, or Christian worldview, to use Oltman's phrase, was the idea of providential design or divine providence. Recall from chapter 2 that Ethiopianism as a religious movement developed out of Afrocentric and providential design exegesis of both history and biblical texts. African American Christian men and women

[549] Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c. 1935 to 1972*.
[550] Oltman, *Sacred Mission, Worldly Ambition: Black Christian Nationalism in the Age of Jim Crow*, 48.
[551] Oltman, *Sacred Mission, Worldly Ambition,* 5-6.
[552] Vail, Introduction, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa,* ix.

interpreted their forced movement and enslavement in terms of divine design to introduce them to Christianity. In the case of Chilembwe, the notion of divine providence as a dimension of an *Africa for the African* framework directed his confident return to the Shire Highlands as well as his vision for perceiving "all creatures" as potential African Christians of Providence Industrial Mission in a landscape of colonial and racialized partition and extraction.[553]

Ecclesial Visions and African Christian Missions

Malawian historian and Providence Industrial Mission insider Patrick Makondesa has authored the most thoroughgoing revision of the political history and legacy of Chilembwe in writing *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission*. His volume fills in key gaps in data and knowledge for the first decades of Providence Industrial Mission's history from a local and African perspective, including numerous interviews. As a church historical approach, the volume places a needed emphasis on the reopening of Providence Industrial Mission by Daniel and Flora Zeto Malekebu in 1926.[554] The volume is an important contribution to Malawian church history but it does not fully address Chilembwe's vision for African ecclesial life in light of his missionary consciousness and perception of local crises.[555]

Chilembwe identified ecclesial dependency of Africans on White European missions in the Shire Highlands and Lower Shire Valley as a problem. While Nyanja, Ngoni, Tonga, Lomwe, and Yao had been baptized and become catechumens in Protestant and Catholic missions operating in the Shire Highlands and Shire Valley, each of the ecclesial structures they worshiped in was tied formally to European churches and missionary societies at the turn of the twentieth century. These included the Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland, the

[553] St. Clair Drake, 25; NemBlyden, *African Americans and Africa*, 20.
[554] Makondesa, *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission, 1900-1940*, 124, 64.
[555] Makondesa, *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission, 1900-1940*, 124.

Dutch Reformed Church, the White Fathers mission at Mpondasi and the Montfort mission in southern Malawi.[556] Sisters from the Congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom followed in 1904.[557] The majority of Christian missions in central Africa at the turn of the century traced their initial structures and practices to European visions and structures for an African church.

Nonetheless, it would be dismissive and historically inaccurate to claim that only European ecclesial visions from each mission's earliest days directed their initiatives and development. Most notably at the Church of Scotland and Free Church of Scotland's Blantyre and Livingstonia Missions, African Christians eagerly and thoughtfully led evangelistic, preaching, and teaching endeavors. In some cases, individuals such as the Blantyre-educated Reverend Harry Kambwiri Matecheta exercised sustained and influential leadership within the mission that led to the eventual development of an African-led church.[558]

In another illustrative case, the Livingstonia-educated Yesaya Zerenji Mwasi provided energetic theological and ecclesial leadership as one of the first ordained African clergy at Livingstonia in 1914.[559] He eventually seceded from the mission in 1933 after nearly two decades of conflicts with the mission's Scottish leaders. He then ministered through what he called The Blackman's Church. Although Mwasi's secession occurred well after Chilembwe's tenure and life had ended, his independence of mind and spirit developed concurrently with Chilembwe's, albeit in the northern region. By 1933, Mwasi argued that "In each country, there must be a Moses, a Luther, a Calvin, a Zwingli, a Knox, etc." if Christianity and indeed if God

[556] Ross and Fiedler, *A Malawi Church History 1860 - 2020*, 97.
[557] Fiedler and Ross, *A Malawi Church History 1860 – 2020*, 98.
[558] Ross, *Blantyre Mission;* Harry Kambwri Matecheta, *Blantyre Mission: Stories of Its Beginning.*
[559] Introduction, Kenneth Ross, 7.

was to belong to Africans as their own, apart from "exotic," as he termed it, or outside, mission work.[560]

In addition to Matecheta and Mwasi, one last comparative example helps set the interpretive scene for the year 1900 and the decade and a half in which Chilembwe ministered. One of Chilembwe's contemporaries working in northern Tongaland and a discreet witness for the Commission of Inquiry, Elliott Kamwana began baptizing and preaching a new millennium in the tradition of the Watchtower Movement in 1908 after studying with Joseph Booth in Cape Town at the Overtoun Institute. Similar to Chilembwe, who received his earliest education at the Blantyre Mission, Kamwana received his education at Livingstonia Mission in the northern region. He, Chilembwe, and their other contemporary, Charles Domingo, have frequently been analyzed in tandem due to their early mission school days, their close relationships with Joseph Booth, and their quite different but also intersecting African Christian ministries in the region.

Each individual illustrates that European mission churches and schools appeared on the surface to have been the dominant theological and cultural scaffolding for African Christianity at the turn of the twentieth century. Yet as has been repeatedly shown, African initiative and leadership of a variety of Christian missions, churches, and movements set much of the trajectory for the historical proliferation of African Christian churches and movements in the region, including Malawi, from as early as the 1870s and 1880s.[561] Nonetheless, even though a

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[560] Yesaya Zerenji Mwasi, *Essential and Paramount Reasons for Working Independently* (Blantyre, Malawi: CLAIM, 1999), 16–17.

[561] On the proliferation of African Christian movements during the colonial period, there is a substantial literature. See most significantly David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi, Kenya: Oxford University Press, 1968); Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Joel Cabrita, *The People's Zion: Southern Africa, the United States, and a Transatlantic Faith-Healing Movement* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018); Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001); M. L. Daneel, *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches*, no 17 (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1987); Edward W. Fasholé-Luke, *Christianity in Independent Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press,

significant number of African Christians actively led in all regions of today's Malawi, no Nyanja, Ngoni, Tonga, Lomwe, or Yao Christian had yet attempted to work apart from European missionaries or their mission churches at the time Chilembwe founded his mission.

Where religious imagery has been investigated in Chilembwe's missionary consciousness, the focus has usually come to rest on apocalypse or destruction.[562] This, however, is only part of the story and in my analysis is misleading. Chilembwe was peculiar in the Shire Highlands and among African religious leaders broadly in the forward-moving, future-oriented direction of his mission's endeavors. Constructive as well as destructive visions animated Chilembwe's energies. His constructive ecclesial visions developed with the slow but steady implementation of colonial rule through divide and conquer policies, land partitioning, and economies of extraction.

Charles Taylor's concept of social imaginary is instructive in interpreting Chilembwe's ecclesial vision.[563] Taylor defines "social imaginary" as "ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations."[564] A social imaginary is not comprised of ideas but rather "it is what enables…the practices of a society," namely those of modernity according to Taylor.[565]

1978); C. G. Baëta, *Christianity in Tropical Africa: Studies Presented and Discussed at the Seventh International African Seminar, University of Ghana, April 1965* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1968); Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, 2d ed. (London, UK: Published for the International African Institute by the Oxford University Press, 1961); Michael Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion: Millenarian Protest Movements against the European Colonial Order* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Terence O. Ranger, "Religious Movements and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa," *African Studies Review* 29, no. 2 (1986): 1–69.

[562] Linden and Linden, "John Chilembwe and the New Jerusalem"; Thompson, "Religion and Mythology in the Chilembwe Rising of 1915 in Nyasaland and the Easter Rising of 1916 in Ireland."

[563] This section has been adapted from a published article, see Jennifer L. Aycock, "J. Casely Hayford's Social Imaginary of 'Church Universal' in William Waddy Harris the West African Reformer: The Man and His Message (1915)," *Journal of Religious History* 44, no. 2 (2020): 230–50.

[564] C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 23.

[565] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* 2.

Taylor's notion of imaginary is admittedly Eurocentric in analytical scope, although his intention is that specifying what is Western may clarify commonalities and divergences within "contemporary modernization."[566] Taylor differentiates social imaginary from social theory in that the former "is often not expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories, and legends," and is often "shared" among people or perhaps by a "whole society."[567] His concept mirrors Achille Mbembe's critique that social theory fails to account for "time as lived…in its multiplicity and simultaneities, its presence and absences" within African societies.[568]

Social theory, Mbembe argues, imposes universality that denies "that all human societies participate in a complex order, rich in unexpected turns, meanders, and changes of course."[569] Mbembe notes that none of these indicate chaos or lack of rationality. Rather, for Mbembe, following lines of inquiry into the layers of human practice and experience within African societies may tell us about "what they [African societies] actually are" rather than more of what they "are not."[570] What is more, such inquiry can in my estimation also clarify the visioning work of African missionaries who claimed African experience as central in divine history.[571]

Taylor also differentiates social imaginary from social theory in another vein, arguing that a social imaginary generates a "common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy."[572] The focus on practices and legitimacy is

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[566] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* 2. While I disagree with Taylor's claim that determining Western specificity is the vehicle to understand multiple modernities, I do nonetheless find Taylor's concept of analytic use.
[567] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* 23.
[568] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 8.
[569] Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 8.
[570] Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 9.
[571] My thinking on this topic has been inspired in several ways by A. Mbembe and S. Nuttall, "Writing the World from an African Metropolis," *Public Culture* 16 (2004) (3):347-372. While I do not quote directly from the piece, I would be remiss to not mention the intellectual spark it stirred. Although Mbembe would likely critique my piece for its reliance on textual sources, I hope nonetheless that I am able to show that Hayford's attention to the complexity and non-linearity of lived experience informs the text he produces.
[572] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* 23.

key. Chilembwe's ecclesial vision for Providence Industrial Mission both critiques and constructs. Chilembwe's mission legacy invites us to reexamine how African Christians did not mimic but creatively recontextualized a diverse array of Christian forms, in this instance that of Black Christian Nationalism, in how they pursued their missionary endeavors within and across human communities.[573] Through creative recontextualization of ecclesial visions, Chilembwe disrupted not only notions of racial and civilizational superiority. He also challenged both long-running African divisions as well as slowly formed colonial partitions.

Born of both Mang'anja and Yao lineage, Chilembwe often asserted himself primarily as a confident and royal Yao.[574] When Chilembwe traveled and studied in the United States, he referenced his paternal Yao lineage as a sign of prestige. After his travels and return to the Shire Highlands, however, he seems to have begun muting his Yao lineage in contrast to asserting his role and identity as an ordained clergyman, missionary, and imperial subject. As Chilembwe traveled back to the Shire Highlands via London and during meetings in London requesting a land grant for his mission, he identified himself as an imperial subject, missionary, and minister ordained by the National Baptists.[575]

When Chilembwe submitted his report in 1909 to the World Missionary Conference to be held the following year in Edinburgh, he wrote, "Yao people are the very hardest people to believe the Gospel of Christ, but when converted, he is regenerated and it does not take long for

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[573] The theoretical purchase of "colonization of consciousness" and the homogenizing effects of global processes is a wide and complex interdisciplinary debate. Jean and John Comaroff set up the influential terms of the debate but numerous criticisms and engagements have followed, evidence perhaps of their provocative significance. See J. and J. L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*. 2 vols. Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); J. and J. L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*. 1 vols. Vol. 2 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Ryan Dunch, "Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Missions, and Global Modernity," *History and Theory* 41, no. 3 (October 2002) :301-325.

[574] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 49.

[575] Makondesa, *Church History of PIM,* 19-20.

him to become a leader and a Christian teacher among his people."[576] Chilembwe articulates a historical fact, that the Yao at his time of writing were the least likely among groups such as the Mang'anja, Lomwe, and Ngoni—primary kin groups in the region—to adopt and practice Christianity. Historian Megan Vaughan is mindful of unhelpful and reductionist stereotypes, but her research confirms Chilembwe's statement. She identifies "two basic patterns of social and economic behavior" in the region to which Chilembwe returned to minister.[577] She shows that at the turn of the century, the Yao participated in the colonial economy and administration but did not participate in European education or convert significantly to Christianity. She argues that this behavior was not so much tied to a past socioeconomic reality but was in action "innovative and 'modern.'"[578]

As slave and ivory traders whose economic stability and political authority depended on wealth in and control of people, the Yao utilized intermarriage, fluid and expanding clan identity, and military tools to stabilize, control, and principally assimilate groups, including the Mang'anja and Lomwe. The expansion of Yao authority and control in southern Malawi confronted Ngoni migrations and aggressions from the south. Yao chiefdoms functioned as small political centers through which ritual authority was legitimated and practiced as part of a broader project of assimilation, including seeking advice from Nyanja-respected territorial cult mediums.[579] The point here is that the Yao peoples among whom Chilembwe would have lived as an adolescent historically existed and propagated based on assimilation of other groups, often through enslavement and other forms of violence. Internally among the Yao at this time, it would be nearly impossible to establish clear linguistic lines or kinship networks.

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[576] MRL 12: World Missionary Conference Records, 1883- 2010, series 1, box 16, and folder 1-4.
[577] "Admittedly for convenience," Vaughan identifies these patterns as Yao and Nyanja.
[578] Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi,* 261.
[579] Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi,* 220.

Conversely, Mang'anja who were not assimilated by intermarriage into Yao kin structures served often, according to Vaughan's findings, as intermediaries and diplomats.[580] Vaughan makes the case that 'Mang'anja' also had closer contact with European culture and converted in more significant numbers to Christianity, yet they did not participate significantly as did the Yao in the colonial economy.[581] As in their relationship to Yao-descended peoples, some Mang'anja-descended peoples also assimilated into Ngoni networks and lived and worked as early as the 1870s on what was determined to be a Yao-Ngoni border.[582] Mang'anja groups who were transient and migratory lived often with a central aim to escape the external slave trade and to do so through intermarriage and incorporation.[583]

Chilembwe's report provides additional information about social patterns and behaviors of which he was aware. The Ngoni, Chilembwe writes, "are more ready to accept the Gospel, but it does not take time for some of them to fall back into the old state of degradation."[584] Chilembwe here may be referencing what he considered one of the primary sins in the region that Christianity, he believed, would eradicate—slave raids and slave labor.[585]

Chilembwe's description of the Yao, who were involved in similar slaving activity, contrasts in two notable ways with his presentation of the Ngoni. Although both groups historically conducted slaving raids and utilized military means to establish political authority and economic dominance and dependence, Chilembwe comments on the differing degrees of openness to Christianity and the gospel message. According to him, Ngoni are more open while the Yao are less so, and difficult to draw toward Christianity. However, he notably distinguishes

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[580] Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi*, 220.
[581] Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi*, 262; see also Leroy Vail, "'Tribes' and the Aftermath of the Chilembwe Rising," 512.
[582] Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi*, 220.
[583] Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi*, 221.
[584] MRL 12: World Missionary Conference Records, 1883- 2010, series 1, box 16, and folder 1-4.
[585] Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi*, 77.

what may occur for them upon baptism. Though hesitant, once they join a Christian community the Yao become its most committed members and leaders. The Ngoni, in comparison, may readily convert but easily regress in behaviors he considers unconducive to Christian life.

Such social behaviors and patterns are by no means meant to be understood as fixed or unchanging. Including such a detail indicates two points relevant to the missionary consciousness Chilembwe. One, the differing descriptions included in his report indicate that local internal social fluidity and intergroup dynamics animated Chilembwe's own identity as well as his calling. Tellingly, there was indeed no significant movement of Yao toward Christianity more generally or into his mission or schools. That did not, however, seem to deter him from reporting in somewhat autobiographical terms about the possibilities of Yao conversion.

Second, Vaughan's descriptions point to another significant dynamic with which this chapter is concerned. Responses to colonialism, Vaughan finds, differed more relative to economic formations and "labor profiles" rather than polities and "political formations."[586] Thus, in the saga of Chilembwe, the intersection of social and economic location proves to be a more productive interpretive lens to consider how Chilembwe envisioned himself as a missionary in his context, and pursued his mission of gathering all living creatures into his mission, the ark.

Scant but good evidence of Chilembwe's parental lineage provides key data with which to interpret his mission as a kind of socio-ecclesial gathering. Indeed, Chilembwe was of mixed Yao-Mang'anja heritage, giving him fluid identity. So, too, was his mission composed of mixed heritage members. Baptized membership did not fall along ethnolinguistic lines or already established kin groups, nor did Chilembwe's mission in the end facilitate the development of an

[586] Vaughan, *Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi*, 268.

ethnic identity during or after the colonial period.[587] A survey of who Chilembwe baptized, who populated his membership lists, and who joined his uprising efforts, suffered death, went into hiding, or rejected being identified as the pejoratively known "Chilembwe's Christians" after the uprising suggests that he developed an ecclesial vision that was interlaced with African histories and practices of kin incorporation.

Chilembwe never advocated a particular kind of identity or linguistic homogeneity beyond that of "African" and "Christian" held under the umbrella of God's providence. His ecclesial vision reflected his work to rescue and gather a new people from persistent colonial abuses. His ecclesial vision also produced an imagination of the future for a people gathered across language, gender, generation, and economic position as a religious people separate from White European Christians. To fast forward briefly, when Chilembwe began organizing his rebellion, he found support not just among literate African individuals who comprised an elite group, including African landowners, but also among members from a variety of independent African churches; Nguru and other labor emigrants; Ngoni; Yao chiefs and other local leaders; and "a few simple adventurers" joined the effort.[588]

The plight of Lomwe immigrants has historically been central in the analysis of the origins and causes of Chilembwe's uprising because they made up a significant percentage of migrant laborers on the British estates in the Nyasaland Protectorate where the uprisings occurred. [589] Along with the groups noted above, Lomwe migrant laborers were also important to Chilembwe's ecclesial vision, as in both African and colonial political economies they suffered a

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[587] Leroy Vail and Landeg White, "Tribalism in the Political History of Malawi," in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. Leroy Vail (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1989), 151–92.
[588] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 240.
[589] See on this point Landeg White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987); John McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966* (Rochester, NY: James Currey, 2012), 128, 132.

lack of representation and were increasingly the group most likely to be taken advantage of through the extractive colonial economy. Just as Noah ushered a call to all living creatures to gather into the shelter of the ark, so too did Chilembwe's call extend beyond boundaries of land, status, and language. In this way, Chilembwe aimed to generate intergroup consolidation negatively, through the shared experiences of displacement and disenfranchisement endemic to African life in the colonial state, and positively, through their baptism into a new peoplehood or religious community.

Malawian playwright and historian D.D. Phiri confirms that Chilembwe assembled an impressive and diverse array of supporters and participants in his uprising. He notes that Yaos, Lomwes, Nyanjas, Chikundas, Ngonis, Tonga, and others gathered at Providence Industrial Mission on Friday, January 22, 1915 in the afternoon to join Chilembwe's organizing efforts. The diverse personalities and interests may have indeed been the uprising's fatal flaw, or internal fragility. We should also be careful to differentiate Chilembwe's ecclesial vision from that which was realized as his small "army." In terms of who was baptized, who joined his schools, and who participated in the uprising effort, the sheer diversity across the varied forms of participation highlights how Chilembwe's travels changed his orientation to African society and his perception of a Christian mission's implications for it. Chilembwe's ecclesial vision consistently encapsulated broader aims and hopes for a future African society that in practice superseded particular group identities and interests, with the exception of Islam, to be realized as an African Christian society.

As Chilembwe built his mission, he often crossed into Portuguese-held territory, a European-imposed category that at the time meant little to the group in terms of organized political life and social networks. Similar to how his contemporary William Wadé Harris in West

Africa transgressed colonial borders of Liberia and today's Côte D'Ivoire and Ghana with a gospel message, so too did Chilembwe move across colonial partitions of land and people with a message meant to expand and renew, not divide and conquer, human communities of a new Africa. In Chilembwe's mission work, we glimpse the unfolding of a missiological emphasis not rooted in comity agreements, i.e., territorial or racial difference, fabricated according to colonial logic and design, or linguistic difference, which made little sense in multilingual contexts of religious practice. Reflecting a longer tradition of territorial cults, Chilembwe expanded what was meant by guardianship and territory relative to both African history and colonial rule, deterritorializing to be inclusive rather than exclusive and divisive.

Black Christian Nationalism and African Ecclesial Visions in the Shire Highlands

In her *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa,* a study of the Watchtower Movement in Malawi and Zambia, Karen Fields argues that missionary forms of Christianity had built into them the seeds of potential dissent. Within a millenarian framework, she argues, "Jesus' message was a 'profound source of disorder, [proclaiming] the rupture of traditional ties and assertion of individual conscience."[590] The study also shows that Watchtower practices were unevenly repressed when one compares the United States to central Africa.[591] Thus, Chilembwe's contemporary and a witness in the Commission hearings Elliot Kamwana's movement was monitored and suppressed and Kamwana deported, in contrast to the rather innocuous and lenient surveillance of the Watchtower Movement in the United States.

Field's interpretation of millenarianism contends with political and cultural approaches to the study of such movements in central Africa. She argues that the political approach "understands millenarianism in terms of an evolutionary sequence whose telos is a secular fight

[590] Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa*, 45.
[591] Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa*, 98.

to seize state power."[592] She likewise points out that the cultural approach focuses not on "political hopes but cultural disruption and an attempt by the colonized to restore cultural coherence."[593] In her estimation, both arguments, however, focus on "rationality of millenarianism" and propagate "vulgar Marxist conception that social conditions cause religious ideology" and therefore miss the point.[594]

Elliott Kamwana, according to Fields, cannot be listened to "as a nationalist while ignoring him as a preacher. The nationalist succeeded because the preacher did…mass involvement and excitement made the preacher visible and audible to colonial authorities."[595] Field's intervention makes the pointed case that on the one hand, religious and secular cannot be separated or necessarily related through a lens of causality, as in the case of Kamwana. She also underscores that as a millenarian revivalist, he maintained "full reliance" on the idea that divine interruption in time and place, not a political state, were the source of change in a context of colonial rule.[596]

Derek Peterson argues that in the 1930s and 1940s, "ethnicity in central Kenya…was a forum of argument" employed by various groups to construct "different accounts of history" and thus to claim and place themselves differently in "the social world."[597] He shows that during the East African Revival that occurred in this period, Revivalists' open confessions and dramatic conversions challenged such broader political formations taking shape throughout eastern Africa. He contends that as the East African Revival spilled across colonial borders, including Rwanda, Uganda, Tanganyika (today's Tanzania), Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, they

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[592] Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa,* 16.
[593] Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa,*18.
[594] Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa,* 20.
[595] Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa,* 99.
[596] Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa,* 9.
[597] Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c. 1935 to 1972*, 3–4.

troubled colonial as well as ethnic forms of argumentation. While those whom he describes as political entrepreneurs worked at "identifying the historical grounds for moral discipline and creating ethnic homelands" grounded in a shared language to claim independence, Revivalists disrupted political respectability. They were multilingual, migrated across borderlands, and connected to others through shared practices of divulging public confession.[598] In contrast to East African ethnic patriots, as Peterson terms them, Revivalists rejected histories being constructed to legitimize the claims of "patriotic sons and daughters of the soil."[599]

To this end, Peterson argues that conversion within the movement not only altered religious identities. Conversion transformed Revivalists into political dissenters and cultural critics as they did not conform to political respectability or consolidated ethnic identities.[600] Peterson reasons that Revivalists rejected political power claimed through resurrected "traditions" and ethnic identities as they assumed "a new position in the social world…and distance[d] themselves from their native lands."[601] Similar to how Fields shows that the Watchtower Movement that grew up on American soil found fresh resonance in central Africa in practices that challenged colonial regimes of control through belief in divine intervention, so too does Peterson show that religious practice threatened incipient forms of African political authority and solidarity contending with the colonial order between the 1930s and mid-1970s.[602]

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[598] Derek R. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c. 1935 to 1972*, 122 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5.
[599] Derek R. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c. 1935 to 1972*, 122 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4.
[600] Derek R. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c. 1935 to 1972*, 122 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 293.
[601] Derek R. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c. 1935 to 1972*, 122 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 12.
[602] Derek R. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c. 1935 to 1972*, 122 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3. For other accounts of the regional revival, see Emma Wild-Wood, *Migration and Christian Identity in Congo (DRC)*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2008; Ward, Kevin, and Emma Wild-Wood, "The East African Revival: History and Legacies." In. New York, NY: Routledge Publishing, 2016; Jason Bruner, "'The testimony must begin in the home': The Life of Salvation and the Remaking of Homes in the East African Revival in Southern Uganda, c. 1930-1955." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 44:3-4 (2015), 309-332.

In both cases, the Watchtower Movement, led by Kamwana and the East African Revival, became socially and politically important as the movements gathered disparate people into new social formations. Predicated on shared religious practice, formation of borderless Christian community promoted dissent and rebellion in the form of binding new spiritual kin to visions of a possible, material world beyond colonial rule or ethnic politics.

Chilembwe's own ecclesial vision that he structured and worked to realize through Providence Industrial Mission was nurtured in two communities that by 1904 had become the first gatherings of a potentially disruptive African-led church in a landscape of European missions whose ministries were nonetheless fueled by African teachers. The realities pressing upon his local and social context contributed substantially to his ecclesial vision. In a region of identity fluctuations, migration, kin extension and assimilation, and territorial cults, Chilembwe experienced firsthand that differentiating African communities were colonial strategies aimed to divide, conquer, and subdue. These strategies had an afterlife as post-independence nationalist movements authorized and galvanized the creation of ethnic traditions to secure political power.[603]

Chilembwe also understood that spiritual approaches to biblical interpretation and theological reflection undergirded European visions for African Christian life. Chilembwe's ecclesial vision deviated from European-derived ecclesial visions being implemented in the region. While his fellow African Christians ordained in the neighboring Blantyre Mission promoted a spiritual orientation to the Christian message, he preached a gospel that upheld a

[603] British colonial strategies have been described as "divide and conquer," while French colonial strategies have been termed "pacification." On the afterlives of ethnic formation and creation of ethnic traditions in Malawi, see especially Meghan Vaughan, Vail, etc. Hastings Banda directed and controlled pre- and post-independence history writing to create a "Chewa" history and tradition. See Megan Vaughan, "Reported Speech and Other Kind of Testimony," in *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History*, ed. Luise White (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 53–77.

separatist African church and embodied practices such as baptism and fashioning that made his community visible and dissenting relative to both ecclesial cultures and colonial structures. In a period of heightening racial logics that structured political, economic, and religious life, Chilembwe's ecclesial vision rejected the Curse of Ham and racialized hierarchies that rationalized spiritual and ecclesial dependency on Europeans. He also rejected an economic ordering of life where Africans were the base on which imperial wealth and power were built. To this end, he propounded African land ownership and industrial education to prevent Lomwe migrant laborers from becoming tenant farmers on British plantation estates.

Importantly, his ecclesial vision interwove fragilities endemic to the Shire Highlands and the broader Black Atlantic world with which he was connected. He sought to develop a deterritorialized ecclesial community that could nonetheless claim rights as subjects within a benevolent empire. Such entanglements between ecclesial life and imperial subjectivity reflected a good deal of his theological training among National Baptists in the United States. Post-Reconstruction and Jim Crow-era National Baptists were ecclesial separatists but upheld a politically integrationist vision.[604] Like his National Baptist counterparts, when Chilembwe returned to the Shire Highlands, he harbored no plans to work or federate with the European missions.[605] Notably, however, in Chilembwe's report sent to the World Missionary Conference, he included that his mission "does welcome foreign guidance and influence."[606] That "foreign" presence was African American, not European or White. Similar to National Baptists, he saw in ecclesial separation a mode of gathering a people who would also make economic demands, such as access to land and African resources, upon the apparatus of empire.

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[604] Adele Oltman, *Sacred Mission, Worldly Ambition,* 4.
[605] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 122.
[606] MRL 12: World Missionary Conference Records, 1883- 2010, series 1, box 16, and folder 1-4, p. 1.

In his own words, Chilembwe described himself in a local paper as "ordained a minister and adopted as a missionary under the auspices of the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention."[607] Chilembwe's ecclesial vision has been compared with both the industrial approach and Ethiopianism of Booth's *Africa for the African* as well as the dissenting Baptist tradition out of which National Baptists shaped a Black Atlantic Protestant tradition.[608] Shepperson and Pierce indicate that Chilembwe's theological commitments to the Black National Baptist tradition of the United States reflected potentially conflicting points with Booth's admittedly more radical ecclesial and economic projects. Specifically, Black American Baptists resisted overtures to being attached to Ethiopianism "emanating from southern Africa," unlike Booth, who encouraged the spirit of Ethiopianism in his relationships with African Christians in southern and central Africa.[609]

This paradoxical mixture that Chilembwe worked to manifest has been simply described as "independent" by political and church historians alike. In his lineage of Malawian ecclesial life, Malawian historian Joseph Chaphadzika Chakanza positions Providence Industrial Mission as the "first African-led independent church in Malawi," notably in partnership with the National Baptist Convention.[610] British historian Adrian Hastings disagrees with ascribing "independent" to Chilembwe's church, considering it instead a mission in the Black American Baptist tradition and exemplifying what he describes as "restrained Ethiopianism." Hastings does indeed provide a necessary nuance, but he does so on the basis of claiming that African Americans directed Providence Industrial Mission for a portion of time.[611] This claim is not substantiated in either

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[607] Makondesa, *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission, 1900-1940*, 20.
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[609] Martin, 202-203.
[610] Chakanza, "The Independency Alternative: A Historical Survey," 33.
[611] Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa: 1450-1950* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1994), 486.

Shepperson and Price's *Independent African* or Patrick Makondesa's *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission.*[612]

In Marxist historiography, those that Chilembwe gathered by baptism as well as motivated to take up arms have been described as possessing a nascent proletarian class consciousness.[613] In nationalist historiography, Shepperson and Price point to the social composition of the church members and uprising participants as a prelude to nation-thinking.[614] Both types of frameworks limit our understanding of Chilembwe's own imagination for himself and the social landscape in which he conceived his ecclesial vision for an ark and gathering. Chilembwe himself contained multiple strands within himself and his experience, reflecting what Arun Jones describes as polyvalent identity.[615] His education, travels, and return to the Shire Highlands as an ordained Baptist clergyman accompanied by African American missionaries further contributed to the vision of whom he worked to gather as a new people vis-à-vis church and mission. In both Marxist and nationalist assessments, Chilembwe's ordained minister and missionary consciousness become subservient to class and political formations as primary forms of group consciousness.

Within a Black Christian Nationalist framework, however, we can grasp the prophetic dimensions of Chilembwe's ecclesial vision in a colonial context of structural Black reason. Chilembwe's mission expanded and developed according to the interests, needs, and desires of women, African landowners, Lomwe migrant laborers, and interconnected and assimilated kin groups in the Shire Highlands and Lower Shire Valley, as well as in neighboring Mozambique.

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[612] In contrast, Yesaya Zerenji Mwasi, for example, wrote the theologically erudite document, see Mwasi, *Essential and Paramount Reasons for Working Independently*.
[613] Such as for example White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village*.
[614] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 401.
[615]

The vision also reflected Chilembwe's personal history to some extent. Chilembwe's self-assertion as an African Noah appears to have catapulted him toward employing the broader biblical narrative as a symbolic world to enact through his mission, the ark. In conceiving of himself as a kind of Noah and his mission as an ark, it is possible that the Noah narrative contributed not only to Chilembwe's critical insights regarding colonial rule but also the constructive vision that Chilembwe set out to achieve through Providence Industrial Mission.

Chilembwe's consistent efforts to preach and baptize across colonial partitions, ethnolinguistic boundaries, and gendered life demonstrate the extent to which he envisioned a new kind of gathering, a new kinship group characterized by a shared religion and common interests but deterritorialized in practice and identity. Shepperson and Price argue that Chilembwe fought for "the founding of a nation rather than of restoring the fortunes of tribes."[616] They argue that "a sense of wide [pan-ethnic] purpose"[617] marked Chilembwe's eventual uprising against British plantation owners and his mission. They suggest that Chilembwe saw his work as establishing an independent African society freed from a multiplicity of evils, including colonial domination.[618]

We have scant textual evidence that captures Chilembwe's thinking on the matter, but we do have the evidence of his actions and practices, church membership rosters, the legacy of Emma Delaney, and the witness reports from the Commission of Inquiry in 1915 to corroborate the claim that Chilembwe's mission did not necessarily stir a kind of collective meaning or

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[616] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 409; Jones, *Christian Interculture: Texts and Voices from Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, 9.
[617] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 409.
[618] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 239.

identity as correlated with an emerging ethnically-driven identity.[619] Rather, his ecclesial vision critiqued Black reason structured through territorializing borders and group boundaries as a fiction of colonial making. He quite simply practiced a long history of group assimilation and kin extension, but through peaceful and prophetic means rather than slaving ones. In a context of empire, ecclesial separatism was prophetic in that as a social form of communal life, it both criticized colonial divisions and energized the gathering of a new people.[620]

African Ecclesial Visions and Chilembwe the African Noah

One of the main aims in Christian history and practice is to gather, fashion, and create a new people: a new kind of kin or sense of relatedness. Within the Noahic narrative, when Noah descends from the ark onto dry ground, he first builds an altar of worship and thanksgiving. Then God says, as God did to Adam and Eve, "As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it." Then God makes a covenant with Noah and his descendants.[621]

Granting interpretive weight to the Noahic narrative in Chilembwe's self-understanding directs our attention toward a pivotal moment in the biblical text, wherein the emergence of a new type of kin seems on the horizon. Indeed, this covenant binds together "the clans of Noah's sons" who became "nations, or ethne, spread out over the earth after the flood."[622] If Adam and Eve serve as a foundational myth for narrating humankind's origins, Noah's family and all living creatures descending from the ark can also be considered the fundamental narrative through

[619] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African,* 401.
[620] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination: 40th Anniversary Edition*, ed. Davis Hankins, Project Muse, and Project Muse, 40th anniversary edition. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018), 3.
[621] Genesis 9:7
[622] Genesis 10:32

which a new type of kin is imagined and made possible on the other side of evil's removal and natural destruction. This is in the end a re-creation story.[623]

In understanding himself, his call, and this new gathering as transgressing colonial boundaries and borders, Chilembwe built in the potential seed of creative resistance. In fact, the colonial administrators had not been entirely wrong in their assessment of the potential for that favorite colonial word, sedition, if Africans united around common cause and purpose. What they did not yet anticipate was that potential to emerge from the diligent Baptist man and his respectable church members, asserting their equality and dignity as a gathered people being fashioned anew.[624]

[623] Kaminski, *Was Noah Good? Finding Favour in the Flood Narrative*.

[624] A similar phenomenon occurred in the ministry of Liberian William Wadé Harris, who traveled across colonial borders and between ethnolinguistic groups in coastal West Africa, preaching among Kru, Akan, Kwa, Ebrie, and West Atlantic linguistic groups, under which exist related dialects and ethnolinguistic communities. Harris's ministry crossed ethnic lines and brought previously at odds groups together across common needs, interests, and symbolic and material worlds. As anthropologist Sheila Walker writes, "Harrists say that before the prophet came, a stranger or a member of a different ethnic group could not go into some villages and feel safe" due to the activity of opposing spirits and powers. Further, she suggests that the city of Abidjan became possible through the unity that the Harris movement forged across ethnolinguistic groups as they chose to worship "the same [God] and regard people of different ethnic groups as members of their human family." See Gordon Haliburton argues these four larger language families are comprised of no less than fifteen dialect groups historically living as clusters along West African lagoons. See also Sheila S. Walker, *The Religious Revolution in the Ivory Coast: The Prophet Harris and the Harrist Church*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983, 44.

Chapter 5:
Critiquing Imperial Reciprocity: Chilembwe's Pastoral Letter

"The striking surprise is that prophets of Israel were tolerated at all by their people. To the patriots, they seemed pernicious; to the pious multitude, blasphemous; to the men in authority, seditious."

"All men care for the world; the prophet cares for God's care. In the process of such redirection, he may be driven to be careless about everything else."[625]

–Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*

African Missions in a Time of War

By August 1914, the town of Zomba in southern Malawi became the hub of World War I activity in the British Protectorate of Nyasaland.[626] As the lush center of colonial political life in the Shire Highlands, rumors circulated within and on the peripheries of the small town that war, perhaps even the end of the world, drew near. Men trudged across the Shire Highlands and into Zomba, at first readily responding to the British call to enlist in its carrier corps. The rate of newly enlisted African carriers was so positive that by November 1914, Blantyre District Resident Lewis T. Moggeridge declared that he predicted no foreseeable problems in recruiting military labor for the war fronts developing in East Africa.[627] Passage of the Nyasaland Defense Ordinance in December 1914 allowed Nyasaland's colonial governor to "require any person to do any work necessary to order in aid of or in connection with the defense of the Protectorate."[628]

For Reverend Chilembwe, ministering approximately thirty-eight kilometers away from Zomba in the Chiradzulu sub-district, the disruptive and deleterious effects of nascent war were

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[625] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*, 1st Perennial classics (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2001), 619. I have retained Heschel's masculine language here.
[626] Melvin E. Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 28. The Blantyre township that grew up around the Church of Scotland mission became the Protectorate's commercial capital. See Brian Morris, *An Environmental History of Southern Malawi: Land and People of the Shire Highlands* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 5.
[627] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 28.
[628]Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 38. This Ordinance was replaced in 1916 by the British Protectorates Defense Order in Council. See also Page, 38.

palpably evident.[629] Formal conscription that became visible in Zomba followed the events of September 8th and 9th in 1914 at Karonga in the northern region of the Nyasaland Protectorate. At Karonga, recruits from Nyasaland into the King's African Rifles fought alongside British soldiers against German forces, including their own African recruits. Of the sixty British troops killed, forty-nine were African, news of which circulated through newspaper or rumor among Africans throughout the Protectorate.[630]

In addition to the disproportionately African loss of life in this battle, the commencement of the war coincided with widespread famine in the region.[631] As men left villages, labor, such as animal trapping, fell to women and increasingly to girls, adding new burdens to their agricultural work.[632] Chilembwe's letters to the National Baptist Convention, published in the *Mission Herald,* conveyed his sense of fear and prayerfulness about the matter. In the midst of famine, he observed that local commerce stalled as the instability of war disrupted trading activity dependent on the waterways of Lake Malawi and the Shire River.[633]

In light of his observations, Chilembwe publicized a critique and open condemnation of wartime conscriptions by submitting a letter for publication to the *Nyasaland Times* in October 1914. The letter is worth quoting at length:

> We understand that we have been invited to shed our innocent blood in this world's war which is now in progress through the wide world…we understood that it was said indirectly that Africa had nothing to do with the civilized war. But now we find that the poor African has already plunged into the great war.
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> A number of our people have already shed their blood, while some are crippled for life. And an open declaration has been issued. A

[629] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War,* 27–28.
[630] George Shepperson and Thomas Price, Independent African (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1958), 233-235.
[631] Morris, *An Environmental History of Southern Malawi: Land and People of the Shire Highlands*; Landeg White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
[632] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War,* 134.
[633] Shepperson and Chilembwe, "A Major Chilembwe Letter," 1–2.

number of Police are marching in various village persuading well built natives to join in the war. The masses of our people are ready to put on uniforms ignorant of what they have to face or why they have to face it.

We ask the Honourable government of our country which is known as Nyasaland, Will there be any good prospects for the natives after the end of the war? Shall we be recognized as anybody in the best interests of civilization and Christianity after the great struggle is ended? Because we are imposed upon more than any other nationality under the sun. Any true gentleman who will read this without the eye of prejudice will agree and recognize the fact that the natives have been loyal since the commencement of this Government, and that in all departments of Nyasaland their welfare has been incomplete without us. And no time have we been ever known to betray any trust, national or otherwise, confided to us. Everybody knows that the natives have been loyal to all Nyasaland interests and Nyasaland institutions. For our part we have never allowed the Nyasaland flag to touch the ground, while honour and credit have often gone to others. We have unreservedl[y] stepped to the firing line in every conflict and played a patriot's part with the Spirit of true gallantry. But in time of peace the Government failed to help the underdog. In time of peace everything for Europeans only. And instead of honour we suffer humiliation with names contemptible. But in time of war it has been found that we are needed to share hardships and shed our blood in equality. It is true that we have no voice in this Government. It is even true that there is a spot of our blood in the cross of the Nyasaland Government. But regarding this world-wide war, we understand that this was not a royal war, nor a government nor a war of gain for any description; it is a war of free nations against devilish system of imperial domination and national spoliation. If this were war as above mentioned such as war for honour, Government gain of riches, etc., we would have been boldly told: Let the rich men, bankers, titled men, storekeepers, farmers and landlords go to war and get shot. Instead the poor Africans who have nothing to own in this present world, who in death, leave only a long line of widows and orphans in utter want and dire distress invited to die for a cause which is not theirs. It is too late now to talk of what might or might not have been. Whatsoever be the reasons why we are invited to join in the war, the fact remains, we are invited to die for Nyasaland. We leave all for the consideration of the Government, we hope in the Mercy of Almighty God, that some day things will turn out when that Government will recognise our indispensability, and that justice win prevail.

JOHN CHILEMBWE, In behalf of his countrymen.[634]

The *Nyasaland Times* editor printed the letter and likely ran its distribution in November 1914. The colonial censor became aware of the issue's contents and "papers not already distributed" were collected in haste by colonial police.[635] The initial reach of the issue's circulation remains unknown, but the quick censorship and seizure of distributed newspapers indicates that at least some individuals within the colonial infrastructure considered words critical of imperial war and African participation in it as written by the local African pastor Chilembwe could influence popular opinion and induce widespread resistance to ongoing conscription. The British could ill afford for local recruits, who initially enlisted for conflicting reasons, to turn against the imperial war machine. The question was one of manpower, and the British relied heavily on African men (and some women) to fill its ranks and fight its wars in its far-flung imperial reaches.

Chilembwe's public and prophetic protest against the fallacies of empire illustrates his internationalization as well as recontextualization of Black Christian Nationalist values and aims. Chilembwe was not singular in addressing colonial officers and administrators in written form concerning the imperial war and its implications, which were already being felt in the Nyasaland Protectorate by the middle of 1914.[636] However, Chilembwe authored his letter as an ordained pastor and missionary in the region and his words and his actions must be assessed as such on at least two fronts. First, as an individual who had left the Shire Highlands to cross the Atlantic and returned, his status changed accordingly. He embarked on travels under the premise of seeking out evidence to confirm or deny White men's cannibalism, about which locals had heard rumors.

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[634] Shepperson and Chilembwe, "A Major Chilembwe Letter," 1–2.
[635] George Shepperson and Thomas Price, Independent African (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1958), 236.
[636] General unrest across the Protectorate amounted to raised alarms about the possibility of war. Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 48, 152.

He returned with knowledge, education, and status in 1900, confirming that White men were not cannibals, and that indeed, not only White men but also Black men and women practiced this new religion Christianity and studied, read, or heard its book, the Bible.

With this status, Chilembwe built his mission and eventually wrote this letter. He wrote as a world-traveling African and a Yao-Mang'anja who acquired prestige by becoming ordained African clergy. Although this type of status was new in the landscape of religious and political Shire Highlands life, it nonetheless bestowed upon Chilembwe a standing recognized among peers, colleagues, and colonial administrators. With this position and title, Chilembwe submitted his letter to critique the idea and promise of empire as a form of governance in which both African and European subjectivity could be guarded and preserved. Pointedly, Chilembwe asked whether serving in a war would gain Africans equal rights alongside European compatriots."[637] Alongside his critique of the faltering promises of empire, Chilembwe criticized British treatment of African lives as expendable for causes, i.e., war, that rendered no benefits to African livelihood.

Second, similar to his assessment of long-running slave trades and their extension through colonial land policies—including privatization and alienation amounting to theft—Chilembwe authored his critique as an indictment against the imperial demand for "innocent" African blood, and a taking of African livelihood. Here a shift occurs in Chilembwe's focus of critique. Whereas earlier he correlated British land theft with the three entangled slave trades, implicating a host of actors in this evil, in this letter he upholds Africans as innocently going to war without knowledge of the threat to their lives and kin that awaits. Chilembwe presses the

[637] John Chilembwe, "A Major Chilembwe Letter," *The Society of Malawi Journal* 68, no. 1 (2015), 1, paraphrased.

British Empire to deliver on its message of Christianization and civilization among Africans by calling into question the integrity of its imperial aims, methods, and promises.

For Chilembwe, the absence of imperial integrity is an affront to African humanity and identity, illustrated in the question, "Shall we be recognized as anybody in the best interests of civilisation and Christianity after the great struggle has ended?"[638] Here Chilembwe lays bare the fissures in "Christianity, commerce, and civilization," or as historian Caroline Elkins describes it, "the self-fashioning of a devout British nation for whom racial superiority, capitalism, and religious virtue were inextricably linked."[639] To question the integrity of the British Empire could unravel the threads of the colonial state that were most precarious in states of war. To question the methods of empire, including its heavy and exacting reliance on violence to secure power and control, could and did confront the idea of a "devout British nation" and the narratives it employed to justify its terrors.[640] In so doing, Chilembwe's words could stir others like himself—Yao, Nyanja, Lomwe, or Ngoni—to consider more closely the faults of the new regime which they were drafted to defend.

In short, Chilembwe's letter is reflective of the larger spirit of his ministry and should be most aptly understood as a prophetic critique of the intertwined logics of the British Empire, especially racial superiority and religious virtue. Hebrew Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann argues that, "the task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us."[641] Brueggemann argues that prophetic critique is not based on isolated incidents or associated only

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[638] John Chilembwe, "A Major Chilembwe Letter," *The Society of Malawi Journal* 68, no. 1 (2015), 1.
[639] Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire*, 73.
[640] See Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire*. on the British use of violence as a method of empire-building.
[641] Brueggemann, Walter. 2018. *The Prophetic Imagination: 40th Anniversary Edition*. Edited by Davis Hankins, Project Muse, and Project Muse. 40th anniversary edition. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 3.

with "addressing [a] specific public crisis."[642] Instead, prophetic critique invests in cultivating an alternative consciousness that both "services to criticize" and "services to energize."[643] Criticizing, Brueggemann writes, is to "engage in a rejection and delegitimizing of the present ordering of things." Energizing, he continues, offers a "promise of another time and situation toward which the community of faith may move."[644]

In writing and publishing this letter, Chilembwe expressed his missionary consciousness in the form of prophetic critique aimed at the hypocrisies of imperial rule. He consistently criticized missionary Christianity as complicit in colonial rule growing into a new slavery. He also energized those who were baptized into his church and mission into a new form of community, or peoplehood. Historian Patrick Makondesa has described Chilembwe's ministry as illustrative of three dimensions of mission, including a dimension "of justice," or "political evangelism."[645] Makondesa argues, as do I, that Chilembwe confronted a number of "crises" over his ministry that were unjust, and either in sermons or conversations he denounced them as such.[646]

By 1914, Chilembwe's missionary consciousness was decidedly prophetic in that his letter was an open, public critique of the reduction of African lives to war machines in service of empire. With his letter, Chilembwe turned from his congregants and fellow Africans to confront a literate colonial public to communicate on behalf of "chiefs and headmen and all eldermen of

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[642] Brueggemann, Walter. 2018. *The Prophetic Imagination: 40th Anniversary Edition*. Edited by Davis Hankins, Project Muse, and Project Muse. 40th anniversary edition. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 3.
[643] Brueggemann, Walter. 2018. *The Prophetic Imagination: 40th Anniversary Edition*. Edited by Davis Hankins, Project Muse, and Project Muse. 40th anniversary edition. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 3.
[644] Brueggemann, Walter. 2018. *The Prophetic Imagination: 40th Anniversary Edition*. Edited by Davis Hankins, Project Muse, and Project Muse. 40th anniversary edition. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 3.
[645] Makondesa, Patrick. 2006. *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission, 1900-1940*. Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Press, 124.
[646] Makondesa, Patrick. 2006. *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission, 1900-1940*. Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Press, 124-125.

Mlanje," according to George Mwase, who "unanimously asked John to write a letter and request" on behalf of them.[647] Although he was not the only individual to criticize the conscription of men and women into the British imperial military ranks, Chilembwe has been frequently remembered as authoring the "first pastoral letter" to be published in Malawi.[648]

Colonial States of Violence and Their Tribal Wars[649]

War was not new within the Nyasaland Protectorate, nor more specifically in the Shire Highlands. For the many groups who peopled and moved in and through the Highlands, violence and general migratory precarity characterized the final decades of the nineteenth century and entrance into the twentieth. But the experience of violence and crises dated to the mid-nineteenth century was inseparable from the ravages of the slave trades on the Swahili Coast and Southeast Africa.[650] Coupled with militarily sophisticated invasions by the Zulu Kingdom and migration in the mid-nineteenth century, the confluence created what historian John McCracken describes as a "mounting cycle of violence" prior to the imposition of colonial rule.[651] A devastating famine lasting from 1861-1863 further exacerbated the cycle's social and economic impact.[652]

Introduction of colonial violence in the region principally followed Scottish missionaries and political, or economic, interests, although colonial violence should not be conflated with missionary activity entirely. Scottish missionaries established their first stations at Livingstonia,

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[647] Mwase and Rotberg, *Strike a Blow and Die: The Classic Story of the Chilembwe Rising*, 35.
[648] Makondesa, *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission, 1900-1940*, 126.
[649] Melvin Page argues, quoting Hector Duff, that because of World War I, "Europeans were no longer feared…as the war taught Africans that the British, the Germans, the Belgians, and the Portuguese 'were merely tribes,' quite capable of arguing among themselves.'" See Melvin E. Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 206.
[650] Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[651] John McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966* (Rochester, NY: James Currey, 2012), 31, 29. See also Emmanuel Katongole on "the endless cycle of violence, plunder, and poverty" that has characterized so much of African national politics following independence movements. Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).
[652] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 32; White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village*, 48-49.

Cape Maclear and Blantyre in 1875 and 1876, respectively.[653] Earlier visions of Scottish missions in central Africa derived inspiration from David Livingstone's abolitionist intent to establish "legitimate trade" in order to displace and eradicate slavery. By the founding of Livingstonia and Blantyre, however, the notion of developing a Christian enclave—"secure, self-supporting, and independent settlements"— within which Africans could be Christianized and therefore civilized took precedent.[654]

Missionaries utilized brutal forms of "civilizing control" at Cape Maclear and Blantyre, including whipping and execution when new converts, many of whom were refugees from slave trades, failed to work or comport themselves according the Scottish missionaries' demands.[655] Reports filtered back to Scotland and were an embarrassing stain on the Church of Scotland's missionary endeavors and action was taken to remove the offending parties from any mission leadership. The mission appointed David Clement Scott in 1881 at Blantyre and Robert Laws in 1877 at Livingstonia to redress the wrongs once found out. In the intervening years, Scottish missionaries continued to envision their mission work as a bulwark against slave trades and their mission stations offered a kind of protection to individuals attempting to escape capture.

In order to stave off external violence perpetuated by slave trading factions and to maintain semblance of political neutrality, Scottish missionaries requested that the British government provide armed protection from traders from the Swahili coast to the north and Portuguese incursions in the south.[656] The British government acquiesced begrudgingly to

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[653] Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1990), 123.
[654] Andrew Porter, *Religion Versus Empire?: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004), 269; McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 46-47.
[655] *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 46-47; Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 123-124; Porter, *Religion Versus Empire?: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914*, 270; Kenneth R. Ross and Fiedler Klaus, *A Malawi Church History 1860 - 2020* (Mzuzu, Malawi: Mzuni Press, 2020), 57.
[656] Porter, *Religion Versus Empire?: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914*, 271-272.

Scottish missionary requests in 1883 by appointing a Consul.[657] It refused to grant any military attaché, however, and a formal colonial protectorate would not be declared until 1889.[658] In January 1890, Lord Salisbury threatened to militarily press Portuguese to withdraw from the region; McCracken notes that it was "one of only two occasions" during the partitioning of Africa "when there was a real possibility of European powers coming to blows."[659] All told, British concession to missionary requests opened a door to new actors in the region, as Harry Johnston observed, and thus the possibilities of continuing yet dramatically altered cyclic violence.[660]

As British political and economic interests developed in the region, so too did territorial tensions with neighboring European imperialists, including Portugal and Germany. In the Nyasaland Protectorate, contests between European states over land and its resources, including human life, had begun as early as 1887. On June 11, 1891, Portugal and Britain finalized a treaty delineating the borders of their respective colonies, including the Nyasaland Protectorate. In so doing, the hardening of colonial state borders set in motion new power dynamics which Africans

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[657] Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire?: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004), 270.
[658] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 51, 55.
[659] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 56–57.
[660] Johnston, *The Opening Up of Africa*, 250–51. The literature on the relationship between the expansion of the British Empire and the Western missionary movement is a well-developed, and active, field of inquiry. Here is not the place to explore the point further, but for studies most relevant to African contexts, see Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*; Porter, *Religion Versus Empire?: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914*; Norman Etherington, *Missions and Empire* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005); David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciouness in South Africa*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Jean; Comaroff Comaroff, John, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 1 vols., vol. 2 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

negotiated.[661] Colonial violence increased in intensity between 1891 and 1895 as Harry Johnston directed a wave of murderous decimation against local chiefs.[662]

The imposition of colonial rule was on all accounts a combination of wars of suppression, most against Ngoni in the south and Yao, and treaties made through negotiation and intimidation. In the words of Caroline Elkins, "Empires did not rule their subjects by consent."[663] Abolitionist notions of crushing trade in enslaved Africans through legitimate trade may have inspired such influential figures such as David Livingstone. In actuality, the imposition of colonial rule exacted a "stiff price," "first by conquest, then by establishing rule of law and a monopoly over legitimate violence,"[664] according to both McCracken and Elkins. As Basil Davidson notes, "with every internal war that could be stopped, another and uglier war of invasion of pacification was likely to be started: and the records of all this are dark with slaughter and destruction."[665] Any lingering myths that assert colonialism was welcomed or that Africans passively conceded bear little resemblance to the reality.[666] An imbalance of power, namely in the technologies of war, statecraft, and manpower utilized to wage war and raids outstripped the resources of primarily regional chiefs to mount any lasting or determinative resistance en masse in southern Nyasaland.[667]

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[661] A. Adu Boahen, ed., *Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*, General History of Africa, Vol. Vii (London, UK: Heinemann Educational Books, 1985), 292.
[662] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 52, 57-65. It must be noted that Scottish missionaries vocally protested the use of force, guns, and military occupation at this point.
[663] Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire*, 94.
[664] Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire*, 100.
[665] Basil Davidson, *Africa in History* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 284-285.
[666] Shepperson and Price make a related note in their assessment of the 1915 Uprising. "The 1915 Rising, then was not simply a temporary lapse in a placid record of mutual acceptance." George Shepperson and Thomas Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, University of Edinburgh. Edinburgh University Publications History, Philosophy, and Economics (Edinburgh, Scotland: University of Edinburgh Press, 1958), 400.
[667] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 59.

Open tensions between the British, Portuguese, and Germans persisted even as raids against local chiefs transformed into eventual warfare as colonial powers increased efforts to secure their territorial boundaries and thus their global political and economic dominance. Africans observed warring Europeans often in bewilderment. Having been told that Europeans were morally, technologically, and politically superior due to purported racial commonality, they were stunned to see them fight and kill one another.[668] As wanton perpetration of violence shifted to European actors, the cycles of violence permanently altered for decades to come the machinations of the colonial state waging their wars on African soil.

At this point in time, the conception of the state was developing and would continue to do so over the nineteenth century. But, as historian C.A. Bayly argues, by 1914, "the state was potentially in a more powerful position in the world…than it had been in 1780."[669] This power was due in great part to an improvement in recruiting, arming, and deploying manpower to secure natural resources, land, and labor.[670] "Over much of the world," Bayly insists, "the modern state was designed precisely to create an economy which could support a technologically efficient military power."[671] European practices of "territorial control and regular taxation" therefore characterized the "export" of the European state through imperial expansion. Securing resources and building an economy based on extraction of said resources thus required active and militarized plunder of people, goods, and land under the auspices of mutual reciprocity, or imperial obligations to its subjects and vice versa.[672] States' power only deepened with the

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[668] Boahen, *Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*, 292. See also Anne Samson, *World War I in Africa: The Forgotten Conflict among the European Powers* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 5.
[669] Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons*, 265.
[670] Bayly keenly points out that while European states strengthened military technologies and power, they also embarked on projects of disarmament between 1840 and 1880 in India and French North Africa, pacification schemes that rendered local communities seemingly powerless in the face of colonial advance. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons*, 278.
[671] Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons*, 278.
[672] Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons*, 271–73.

increase of military manpower recruited to enforce adherence to a new structure of political and economic life inching ever so violently throughout the African continent.

By this stage of colonial occupation and imposition of rule, colonial administrators needed more human power to churn the engines of territorial security and defense than imperial metropoles could provision. Mobilization of Africans into colonial armies predated World War I, yet as European tensions erupted into war more broadly between European empires, colonial military conscription as "a new form of labor organization" increased steadily.[673] Efforts to recruit African military labor in service to the "Great War" broadened across major regions of the continent, including south central, western, and eastern regions.[674] Thereafter, British, French, and Germans alike utilized Africans foot soldiers and *tengatenga*, or carriers, in four different campaigns that occurred between 1914 and 1918—the Togoland Campaign (1914), Cameroon Campaign (1914-1916), the South West African Campaign (1914-1915), and the East African Campaign (1914-1918—the Togoland Campaign, Cameroon Campaign, the South West African Campaign, and the East African Campaign.[675] Africans in both the military service corps and as *tengatenga* became essential laborers in the European war fronts in Africa as well as in Europe.[676]

In British colonies and especially in the Nyasaland Protectorate, Africans were

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[673] Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 278. See also Timothy Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999).

[674] Military historian Hew Strachan provides the most comprehensive global history of World War I in Hew Strachan, *The First World War: To Arms*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001). Literature on the King's African Rifles and askari includes Moyd, Michelle R. *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014; Parsons, Timothy. *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999; Hodges, Geoffrey, and Roy Griffin. *Kariakor: The Carrier Corps: The Story of the Military Labour Forces in the Conquest of German East Africa, 1914 to 1918.* Abridged edition / ed. Nairobi, Kenya: Nairobi University Press, 1999.

[675] Melvin E. Page, *Africa and the First World War* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1987), 11.

[676] Page, *Africa and the First World War*, 13.

significantly recruited into the carrier corps or as *tengatenga*. Even more than military foot soldiers, *tengatenga* were the backbone of the British army. Africans enlisted as *tengatenga* moved supplies for ranking British staff and soldiers across landscapes devoid of railways or other means of transportation. While serving as foot soldiers and often on frontlines of battle decimated African life, *tengatenga* service was no less brutalizing. As Page describes, "the work was arduous" and poorly compensated. The Defense Ordinance of 1914 that was used to force mobilization into the carrier corps "often resulted in panicked reactions."[677] While becoming military foot soldiers who eventually carried and used rifles could gain one a certain amount of prestige, working as *tengatenga* produced little social or monetary value. Rattled by the prospect of being drafted as *tengatenga*, men especially fled, hid, and threatened violence to headmen charged by colonial officers to recruit from their villages.[678] Small, inconsistent and potentially violent resistance to conscription in the carrier corps, however, drew more firm and violent colonial suppression over time, most significantly of Chilembwe's rebellion.[679] Notably, Page found that recruitment of *tengatenga* "was the most important war demand in the Chiradzulu sub-district," surrounding Chilembwe's Providence Industrial Mission headquarters.[680]

Employing Africans primarily as supply carriers provided a sense of security to skittish colonialists. German, French, British, and Portuguese alike feared that arming Africans would open the way to coordinated, armed resistance against them. For Britain, the South African War of 1899 lingered in recent memory as a telling example of how difficult establishing and maintaining British imperial hegemony over raw materials—gold and diamonds—and the

[677] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 38.
[678] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 39. Page found that at least on one occasion villagers burned down a headman's house.
[679] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 39.
[680] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 40.

laborers to mine it—both Africans and Dutch Afrikaners—continued to be.[681] For Germany, the Herero and Nama resistance efforts against land alienation under German colonial occupation in what is today Namibia hung over the mounting tensions between colonial states.[682] The German military, *Schutztruppe*, responded to the resistance efforts by implementing the earliest tactics of genocide to be employed in the twentieth century. Between 1904 and 1908, the German military systematically sought out and killed persons identifying as either Herero or Nama using a variety of means.

From Colonial Subjugation to the War of Thangata in the Nyasaland Protectorate

The physical location of Malawi held strategic importance for trade, transport, and territorial control due to the waterways that sit at its center and run throughout the small but significant piece of land.[683] As a borderland between colonial German East Africa and British protectorates, "Malawi's importance on the world stage was assured."[684] With the border of German East Africa directly to the north of the Nyasaland Protectorate, residents in the northern

[681] The South African War endured from 1899 to 1902 and occurred between Afrikaner republics Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek, or the Transvaal Republic, and the Orange Free State *and* British imperialists. The British first utilized camps for those displaced by the but their implementation of scorched earth policies turned these camps into prison-like internment camps. The war wreaked devastation on Boer descendants as much as if not more on various African nations throughout the southern African region. Shula Marks estimates that of 118,000 White interned men, women, and children, 28,000 died, mostly women and children. Marks further indicates that "thousands of displaced Africans were rounded up and put into segregated internment camps. Recent estimates suggest that African camp mortality may have been even greater than that of Boers. See Shula Marks, "War and Union, 1899–1910," in *The Cambridge History of South Africa: Volume 2: 1885–1994*, ed. Anne Kelk Mager, Bill Nasson, and Robert Ross, vol. 2, Cambridge History of South Africa (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 157–210, 159. Caroline Elkins argues calls the camps "concentration camps" and argues that their establishment "represented the first time a single ethnic group had been targeted en masse for detention or deportation." Further inquiry would need to be conducted to corroborate this claim in comparison with the history of colonization of the Americas. However, her point on the systematic brutality of British imperialist military campaigns is of importance to note. See Elkins, 81-82; 89-90. For a history of the use of the term "concentration camps," that raises comparative and contextual questions on its historical uses, see "The Term "Concentration Camp" in Historical Perspective" by Paul J. Springer, June 27, 2019, FPRI: Foreign Policy Research Institute, accessed March 18, 2023.

[682] Regarding this history see especially Horst Dreschler, *Let Us Die Fighting: The Struggle of the Herero and Nama against German Imperialism (1884-1915)* (London, UK: Zed Press, 1966).

[683] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 6.

[684] Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964*, 5. Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 6.

region were impacted by the war from its beginning. British interests to the south in today's Zimbabwe and South Africa also ensured that the sliver of land would figure importantly in the East African war effort. Though further from direct lines of military action in the south, active recruitment of Africans into the carrier service and eventually as foot soldiers altered social, political, and agricultural landscapes in ways that would only be felt in full after the war's conclusion.[685]

Even more than its physical location, Nyasaland's human population played a crucial role on the eastern African front. In order to encourage African enlistment in Nyasaland, British recruiters first manipulated the idea of a "German threat" to land security.[686] When this proved ineffective as a ploy, British recruiters initiated a rumor among Africans that "should [the Germans] come into Nyasaland, [they] would take away the land and then enslave or even kill the African population."[687] British imperial propaganda perpetuated tales of conflict between historically opposed groups in the former region of the Maravi Kingdom, such as between Yao and Ngoni in the northern region. Such tales were used to convince specific groups in Nyasaland that war service would serve their interests.[688] Thus, local and social incentives such as perceived opportunities to take up the role of "brave warrior," threats by chiefs to confiscate land, and salaried employment encouraged rather positive rates of enlistment for the first two years of combat.[689]

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[685] On this point, for Malawi specifically see *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 44-48.
[686] Historian Melvin Page has most exhaustively researched and documented World War I particular to Malawian experience. See Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*; Page, "The War of Thangata: Nyasaland and The East African Campaign, 1914-1918"; Melvin Page, "Malawians and the Great War: Oral History in Reconstructing Africa's Recent Past," *The Oral History Review* 8, no. 1 (1980): 49–61, https://doi.org/10.1093/ohr/8.1.49. See also *Chiwaya War Voices,* compiled by Melvin E. Page, published by the Great War In Africa Association, March 2020 for the most extensive primary source collection of Malawian soldiers and porters oral histories on the war. I am indebted to David Bone for pointing me toward Page's resources.
[687] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 28–29.
[688] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War,* 60.
[689] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War,* 57.

It must be noted that during the first decade of the twentieth century, Africans did not simply acquiesce to colonial conquest nor to passive participation in Europe's imperial proxy wars. Indeed, they negotiated, undermined, and resisted claims upon their autonomy.[690] From an African perspective, as the recently demarcated and violently acquired colonial territories became frontlines of European war, so too were the explicit means at African disposal to actively resist European presence. Europeans rightly perceived this and feared that by arming Africans for military service, they would create the conditions for even more African resistance. Thus, the British Colonial Office determined that Africans in central and eastern Africa were to remain "unarmed and unmechanized."[691] For the first two years of the war, this decision stood.

By 1916, when "the burden of fighting" shifted to African hands, particularly in the East African Campaign, the British altered policy and outfitted African recruits with firearms.[692] For the British, this was the first large scale armed mobilization of Africans to occur across the continent. Africans who served as *askari,* or foot soldiers, in the King's African Rifles—primarily young men from Kenya and Nyasaland—maintained "the stability and security of British rule in East Africa" under duress throughout the war and in the years following.[693]

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[690] A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 39. Boahen identifies three main strategies "with a primary objective of safeguarding their sovereignty"—submission, alliance, and confrontation. See also Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 5-9.

[691] Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964*, 18.

[692] Strachan, *The First World War: To Arms*, 1, 497; Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964*, 18.

[693] Page, *Africa and the First World War*, 3. In his study of the King's African Rifles formed in this period, Timothy Parsons argues that with World War I, labor took the form of military service, understood by Africans who served as "a long-term labor contract." See Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964*, 5. Askari is the Swahili (Arab-Swahili-Somali) term, meaning soldier or police, for African soldiers who initially served in the German East African army. Eventually the recruitment of askari became a common colonial practice across British, French, Italian, Belgian, and Portuguese militaries. In the British Empire, askaris became the human labor force of the King's African Rifles. For general as well as German military history see Timothy Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999); Michelle R. Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014).

Payment for their services at least initially incentivized African participation. In fact, on the East African front, in which the majority of Malawians participated, young men embraced military service as "the most lucrative form of unskilled wage labor in colonial East Africa."[694] Local factors, both economic and social, encouraged their enlistment, rather than service to a distant king, queen, or imperial cause.[695]

Yao, Ngoni, and other recruited groups, however, increasingly found ways to evade enlistment, and described British strategies to incentivize military inscription as "tricks" and "the work of magic," or "bewitchment."[696] Among them, participation in the war front became progressively understood as "another kind of forced labor requirement," akin to the system of thangata through which British settlers extracted African labor in exchange for land.[697] Thus, locally, the war was called "the war of thangata," or "of African labor."[698] At its apogee, when the brutal costs of disease, displacement, starvation, and combat had ravaged African prospects for a future of reciprocity and equity alongside their British compatriots within the empire, Malawians described their recruitment into British military labor as, like land expropriation and thangata, a new slavery.[699]

The cost exacted on human life as colonial empires expanded through military mobilization and their own tribal wars was dramatic on all African fronts of the military conflicts. In the East African Campaign, which occurred principally in Kenya and Tanganyika

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[694] Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964*, 182.
[695] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 67.
[696] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 33, 37.
[697] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 35, 38. On this point, Page notes that the Nyasaland Defense Ordinance implemented in December 1914 allowed "the Governor may require any person to do any work necessary to order in aid or connection with the defense of the Protectorate." See Page, 38.
[698] Ibid., 49, 87.
[699] Ibid., 49. Based on oral histories and interviews gathered in the 1970s in Malawi, Page writes, "Many other Malawians recalled the days of the slave trade and drew the most appropriate analogy they could: 'slavery was the actual way people were taken to war.'"

(today's Tanzania), African military recruits more often than not lost their lives to starvation, disease, and exposure due to long distances traveled by foot.[700] In Nyasaland, by the war's end, the burden on life and land was profound. Page estimates that roughly two-thirds of Nyasaland's adult male population served in World War I military units between the years of 1914 and 1918.[701] As historian John McCracken puts it, while Nyasaland was spared being used as a battlefield, in terms of African life lost, "No other British dependency in Africa suffered the loss to the military of such a high proportion of its manpower…"[702]

Prophetic Rumblings and Chilembwe's "War of Thangata" Letter

The extent of violence and the instability of wartime migrations ravaged local communities and effectively hastened "the erosion of the power of chiefs and headmen."[703] In service of European tribal wars and colonial empire-building, African lands were desecrated and pillaged, and African lives became the plunder of European gain.[704] World War I, or the War of Thangata, as it was called in the Protectorate, extended and deepened the trauma induced by brutal colonial conquest and the imposition of British imperial rule. The tenuousness of colonial empires coupled with various circulating rumors interpreting colonial change left open the possibility of multiple types of engagements with colonial power and apparatus. In other words, it is reductionist to assess actors during the time period that includes colonial conquest and the onset of World War I as two essentialized, and even further, stereotyped, sets of actors—

[700] Page, *Africa and the First World War*; Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*.
[701] *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 54. See also Melvin E. Page, 1978, "The War of Thangata: Nyasaland and The East African Campaign, 1914-1918." *The Journal of African History* 19 (1):87-100, 94, 87; McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 147-161.
[702] McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, 147.
[703] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 203.
[704] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 126-127. Scholars today acknowledge that a West African discharged the first British-led gunfire of the war in today's Togo and that the final German surrender occurred in what was Northern Rhodesia, today's Zambia, under Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck. On this point, see also Donald R. Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa: A History of Globalization in Niumi, the Gambia*, 4th edition ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 152-153.

colonizer and colonized. For all parties, colonial empires were an unknown and violent, unpredictable formation.[705]

Although the war's impact was a hypothetical in 1914, its potential implications to desecrate African life and undermine African welfare, as Chilembwe observed, coincided with growing angst that preceded and pulsated from a variety of corners throughout the Protectorate. Between 1907 to 1914, meteor showers, changing spiritual mediumships, the appearance of prophet figures, and circulation of millenarian rumors gestured toward a new era in history. Taken together, they deepened expectations for cataclysmic, unknown change.[706] In each case, as wind of natural phenomena or African responses to religious ideas and practices became known among colonialists, the local population's various forms of gathering and ritual practices stirred colonial anxieties about the possibility of clandestinely-planned African resistance to the fragile machinations of the colonial empire.

In 1908, a prophetess named Chanjiri from nearby Mozambique offered a revelation to her followers that Europeans would leave the region and thus, "no hut tax need be paid to the British Government."[707] She prophesied to those both under Portuguese and British rule as her message filtered across the colonial borders of today's Mozambique and Malawi. Also in 1908, the growing influence of Elliot Kamwana and the Watchtower Movement, with its attendant millenarian eschatology, likewise circulated a message that the colonial government would end with Christ's return in 1914.[708] Through baptism, members secured their places both in the

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[705] On the violence of the British Empire especially see Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire*.
[706] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 8-11.
[707] *Annual Report of the Colonies 1908*, Native Affairs: General Conditions, 2.
[708] T. Jack Thompson, "Religion and Mythology in the Chilembwe Rising of 1915 in Nyasaland and the Easter Rising of 1916 in Ireland: Preparing for the End Times?," *Studies in World Christianity* 23, no. 1 (2017), 58-59; Chakanza, *Voices of Preachers in Protest: The Ministry of Two Malawian Prophets, Elliot Kamwana and Wilfred Gudu*, 19-21; Jane and Ian Linden, "John Chilembwe and the New Jerusalem," *Journal of African History* XII, no. 4 (1971); Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 153-156.

movement as well as in the coming theocracy that held Jesus Christ as its head. Indirectly, the Watchtower Movement's religious vision of the future embedded a political threat to colonial order, albeit through "no human participation" beyond religious reform itself, as Karen Fields argued.[709]

In each case, natural and religious phenomena took on political registers of meaning relative to the pressures and trauma of the colonial context—both for Africans and for colonial administrators.[710] Shooting stars, prophecies, and mass baptisms signaled an irruption in a historical epoch felt to be on the brink. Neither the prophetess Chanjiri nor millenarian preacher Elliot Kamwana encouraged instigating such change or causing dramatic disruption, however much they openly expressed disdain for colonial presence.[711] Rather, Chanjiri's followers simply stopped paying hut taxes, and they prayed and fasted in their homes in anticipation of colonial departure.[712] Kamwana's followers likewise awaited "the establishment of a new polity on earth with Jesus Christ as its head."[713] Their inclusion, or salvation, within this coming polity of theocratic power required baptism in expectation but nothing more to usher in its advent. As Fields argues, the Watchtower theological view of baptism "provided a Christian vehicle for the assertion of political independence."[714] Explicit political action, however, was not prescribed.

Nonetheless, Chanjiri and Kamwana's messages resonated with their listening publics as they channeled growing collective discontent and fear, and thus they came under colonial surveillance. Both were exiled so as to distance them from their followers.[715] In both cases, they

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[709] Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa*, 99, 100; see especially 99-126 on the Watchtower Movement in Malawi.
[710] Fields's analysis of the Watchtower Movement captures this dimension of the USA-based movement particularly well. See Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa*, 91–98.
[711] Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa*, 115–16.
[712] Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, 8.
[713] Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa*, 118.
[714] Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa*, 118.
[715] *Annual Report of the Colonies 1908*, Native Affairs: General Conditions, 2.

interpreted social and political changes in frameworks that resonated with their listeners and followers' religious consciousnesses. Chanjiri on the one hand explained natural phenomena in light of colonial confiscation of land and responded to concerns that without immediate departure of colonialists, Africans would be left with no space of their own. Kamwana remained famously detached and standoffish when he came under imperial scrutiny and was eventually exiled from 1909-1914 to South Africa. Chilembwe's message and practices, though they encouraged close inspection, never quite attracted the same level of surveillance and attention until right before his writing his pastoral letter.

Having spent the years of 1892 to 1897 preaching, teaching, and baptizing with Booth, and from 1897 to 1900 working and studying with National Baptists in the United States, from 1901 to 1913, Chilembwe focused his earliest mission efforts on the work of starting churches and schools throughout the Shire Highlands and across the Portuguese-imposed border. Chilembwe interacted frequently and eagerly with other missions' church members as well as with African clergy and religious leaders preaching in the Protectorate, including Kamwana. He also visited with Scottish missionaries. His emphasis through 1913 lay in establishing Providence Industrial Mission through baptism, building a church, and starting industrial schools. He taught a message of Christian conversion and African uplift, and his prominent point of initial resistance was against federation with other missions. Throughout his ministry, Chilembwe never asserted himself as a prophet but presented himself and his ministry in the metaphorical terms of Noah gathering in his people to be saved, as chapter 2 argues. Thus, when in 1914 he levied a direct and substantial critique of the colonial empire's conscription of Africans into war, he wrote as a religious leader writing representatively on behalf of his people.

Chilembwe's letter provides invaluable insights into how he perceived the war and its

implications for his region and the whole of Africa as well as his own role in intervening in its onslaught.[716] He hypothesized that war would leave only detritus of life and land in its wake. Indeed, if local rationales for African enlistment may offer corroboration, men and women knew little about the actual requirements and costs of the war. Their primary reasons for enrolling in the military had more to do with local demands, such as monetary provision to support themselves in an increasingly cash economy or the hope for prestige and status in their villages and families.

Chilembwe's letter also underscored that he doubted African service to empire would transpire into fulfillment of promises granted in regard to protections and interests. He rightly perceived that enlisting in porter service would not deliver "good prospects" to African servicemen or women when the war ended. Chilembwe's own views expressed in the letter diverged notably from such thinkers as W.E.B. Du Bois, who wagered that African service and sacrifice in the war effort would be returned to them in the form of citizenship and political representation.[717] The rates at which individuals attempted to evade conscription as the war progressed, and the ever-changing recruitment tactics employed to stem the hemorrhage of potential recruits, appear to indicate an increasing lack of African confidence in the colonial empire's guarantee to improve political and economic prospects in exchange for their service.[718]

Chilembwe's written critique focused on immediate costs of war to local communities, particularly for women and children, as well as broader, more global questions such as "to what end?" and "for whom?" In the letter, Chilembwe seems to wonder if Africans will "be recognized as anybody" relative to "the best interests of civilization and Christianity" for having

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[716] D. D. Phiri, *Let Us Die for Africa: An African Perspective on the Life and Death of John Chilembwe of Nyasaland*, Expanded ed. (Blantyre, Malawi: Central Africana, 1999), 64-65.
[717] As noted by Melvin E. Page, *Africa and the First World War*, 8.
[718] Page, *Africa and the First World War*, 5.

served in the war.[719] Chilembwe's larger argument about African loyalty and reciprocity underlies his question, but he never actually critiques "civilization and Christianity" as aims. Instead, he appears at least in rhetoric to assert imperial subjectivity of Africans as he questions if the colonial government's interests and demands for economic gain and territorial security in Nyasaland, provided "since the commencement of this Government" by loyal Africans, would amount to African benefit in this age characterized by "civilization and Christianity."[720] The fact that Africans had served European interests even prior to the war, had suffered humiliation, and had been granted no representation in the colonial government did not bode well for African prospects in a land of colonial empires. And still, he argues, "we are invited to die for Nyasaland."[721]

A few additional notes about the letter should be offered. Chilembwe does not outright condemn the colonial Nyasaland government or call for its removal or destruction. Instead, he points out that its practices perpetuate unequal status between Europeans and Africans and do not serve African welfare. To this end, Chilembwe's letter critiques the promises of colonial empire as he writes on behalf of his fellow Africans who have "no voice in this Government."[722] If we revisit for a moment his contemporaries, Chanjiri and Kamwana, their messages were directed to their followers. Chilembwe preached and wrote his letter both for converts in his mission and for a broader reading public. His direct and public engagement with imperial apparatus through newspapers illustrates his own consciousness as a missionary across multiple worlds, what Arun Jones describes as a polyvalent identity. He was a practiced correspondent with the National

[719] There are several published versions of this letter. Here I use pagination from the edition published in the *Society of Malawi Journal.* Shepperson and Chilembwe, "A Major Chilembwe Letter," 1.
[720] Shepperson and Chilembwe, "A Major Chilembwe Letter," 1.
[721] Shepperson and Chilembwe, "A Major Chilembwe Letter," 2.
[722] Shepperson and Chilembwe, "A Major Chilembwe Letter," 2.

Baptist Convention and had at times submitted small print notices to colonial papers in the early days of his mission. He was seasoned in the ways of communicating, convincing, eliciting, and securing attention in the Black Atlantic as much as within and between the empires in which he lived and ministered.

Chilembwe's letter does not hint at millenarian expectations, even though they were the most prominent religious ideas circulating at the time. He does not advocate a new millennium of spiritual authority and reign. Rather, Chilembwe protests African participation in World War I because it does not serve African interests on their land in the present moment. Chilembwe is not otherworldly in his orientation. His argument engages the exigencies of the British Empire in which his mission was founded and in which his members worked and lived, the cyclical nature of violence, and the unequal treatment of Africans and Europeans perpetuated rather than disrupted under the colonial state.

Chilembwe sent his first letter in October 1914 to the editor of the *Nyasaland Times* in Blantyre, and it was initially set for circulation. However, the letter was suppressed and Chilembwe was instructed to hide the letter should his property be searched.[723] Colonial police quickly worked to collect the distributed papers. One of Chilembwe's church members employed in the colonial office caught wind of the discussion. He rushed to warn Chilembwe to hide or remove any materials that could be searched and encourage colonial officials to take further action against him or his church.

Disheartened by the censure of his first letter, Chilembwe wrote a second time in December 1914 and was promised in return a visit from government officials to discuss his concerns. However, his colleague in the colonial offices in Zomba wrote Chilembwe to alert him

[723] Makondesa, *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission, 1900-1940*, 127.

that the aim of the proposed visit was not conversation but Chilembwe's arrest.[724] By December 1914, Chilembwe had turned his energies toward assembling a small army that could not be so easily dismissed. Although the Colonial Office had earlier been encouraged to conduct surveillance of Chilembwe's activities and teaching, his letter was the concrete evidence needed to prompt a colonial response.[725]

Chilembwe's nonviolent legacy of pastoral and missionary critique, last exercised in writing to a local paper, was maligned when he resorted to taking up arms on January 23, 1915. An additional communiqué he penned on Sunday, January 24th after having preached his post-rebellion Sunday sermon likewise introduces a wrinkle into the final analysis of Chilembwe as an anticolonial African missionary who confronted empire. In Chilembwe's letter, carried by one of his students, Yotam S. Bango, through Portuguese East Africa and to German East Africa, Chilembwe may have solicited assistance from the Germans to aid his small resistance movement.[726] He also seems to inquire about the fates of the British and German empires. In a response written to him but never received by him, the author Hellman writes, "With regard to the war, you are correctly informed; overseas the Germans are beating the English thoroughly."[727] Based on Hellman's response, one could hypothesize that Chilembwe questioned after German fatalities in comparison to British. Perhaps Chilembwe wanted to know which empire was winning and incurring fewer losses, and was thus considering throwing his energies into securing and gaining that empire's support for his own endeavors.

We can hypothesize and wonder, but we cannot know for certain. Nonetheless, much like

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[724] Phiri, *Let Us Die for Africa: An African Perspective on the Life and Death of John Chilembwe of Nyasaland*, 61.
[725] Makondesa, *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission*, 128.
[726] The information we have about the letter is not from a copy itself but gathered from colonial correspondence discussing the letter's contents; thus, its contents are conjectured by reading across colonial records. See Cole-King, "Letter to John Chilembwe."
[727] Cole-King, "Letter to John Chilembwe," 3.

his Black Christian Nationalist colleagues navigating the unkept promises of emancipation, Reconstruction, and most of all, the failures of representation in the American democracy, by the end of 1914, Chilembwe increasingly addressed the concerns of his people making life within a context of empire. If empire was here to stay, at least for a time, how would African livelihood and futures be secured within it? Thus, while Chilembwe's prophetic legacy is conflicted, his missionary consciousness never waned but rather attended to each new problem that arose as the realities of empire constantly presented new challenges, most which thwarted African interests and life.

Conclusion: Recasting Chilembwe as a Missionary Between Worlds

African Christians who ministered during the time of colonial conquest, imposition of colonial rule, and the deepening and expanding structures of empire were not unaware of the shiftiness of empire and the lack of investment in African interests. They contended over their ministries with a range of imperial formations, hypocrisies and tensions relative to context.[728] As Philip Morgan writes, "In some situations, the British Empire actively encouraged black subjects to think of themselves as British, especially when it called on them to make military sacrifices."[729] "In other situations," Morgan continues, "imperial authorities often refused to reciprocate these forms of loyalty…The British Empire oscillated between asserting the universality and exclusiveness of British identity, producing what has been called a 'dialectical of imperial formation and disavowal."[730]

The diversity of African Christian responses to empire and colonial state structures depended on a range not only of context and shifting imperial formations. African Christian responses to empire reflected particular encounters with various forms of Christianity, with biblical narratives, and with conversations internal to African Christian communities, such as illustrated in those between Chilembwe, Matecheta, and Kundecha. Ultimately, the imposition of the colonial state as a form of political organization and economic structure generated changes often felt as crises to which African Christians crafted a repertoire of engagements, responses, and interpretations as missionaries, prophets, ordained clergy, healers, and teachers.

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[728] For an example of the vast literature that examines what Frederick Cooper and Anna Stoler describe as "the tensions of empire," see Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).
[729] Morgan and Hawkins, *Black Experience and The Empire*, 2.
[730] Morgan and Hawkins, *Black Experience and The Empire*, 2.

In responding to the colonial pressures in his environment, Chilembwe more than likely knew his increasingly public actions placed him at the mercy of the colonial empire. Like other African Christian contemporaries such as William Waddé Harris, Garrick Braide, Nontetha Nkwenkwe, and Simon Kimbangu, Chilembwe was first and foremost a minister to his people and a missionary among his people.[731] Thus, when his people were plagued by land alienation, brutalizing treatment on settler plantations and as enslaved labor, or by conscription into external wars, he made it his business to intercede. Perhaps in the end, his next to final act of communicating in a public forum of newspaper, legible to the colonial gaze, was a fatalistic decision, knowing already of Kamwana's exile. However, what he wrote he had rightly divined: the outcome of Yao, Nyanja, and Lomwe participation in the war would amount to death, disease, and dismemberment without recourse to representation or power to demand reparations or protections within the British Empire.

Over the course of his ministry, Chilembwe responded out of his sense of call to baptize and cultivate a community of African Christians. These African Christians would be among those rescued from the evils in the land, gathered to recreate a new world of African making. Yet this possibility of a new creation was increasingly frustrated by cycles of violence that plummeted into full-scale imperial wars wreaking havoc among African communities. Nonetheless, Chilembwe continued to fulfill his missionary calling between and within the worlds of the Shire Highlands, the Black Atlantic world, and the structures of empire.

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[731] Shank, *Prophet Harris, the "Black Elijah" of West Africa*; David A. Shank, "The Taming of the Prophet Harris," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 27, no. 1 (February 1, 1997): 59–95; Ludwig, "Elijah II: Radicalisation and Consolidation of the Garrick Braide Movement"; Robert R. and Hilary Sapire Edgar, *African Apocalypse: The Story of Nontetha Nkwenkwe, a Twentieth-Century South African Prophet* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000); Susan Asch, *L'Église Du Prophète Kimbangu : De Ses Origines à Son Rôle Actuel Au Zaïre, 1921-1981*, Hommes et Sociétés, (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1983); Aurélien Mokoko Gampiot, *Kimbanguism: An African Understanding of the Bible* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017).

Chilembwe's missionary consciousness and his public engagement with imperial hypocrisies, demands, and dismissal of African interest is instructive for the historian revisiting an era of in the history of African Christianity typically associated with the "Western missionary movement," a period of mission Andrew Walls describes as motivated by a "the territorial 'from-to' idea" derived from a conceptual tie between Christendom and Christian missions.[732] Chilembwe's public challenge of the British Empire's predatory reliance on African life for its wars and his rejection of the British settlers' increasing power over land in the Protectorate is also useful in reviving the Chilembwe historiography with fresh lenses of analysis. Namely, when conceived as consciously missionary, Chilembwe's religious work between worlds disrupts Western missionary movement motives, aims, and outcomes as definitive in this period of mission. Being from the Shire Highlands, he envisioned himself as a missionary preaching a message of freedom from a new slavery, a message as much for the body as it was for the soul. Expansion of territory made Christian was not his aim, but rather the pursuit of freedom in a context rapidly trending toward colonial rule.

The emergence of the Black Atlantic world and the growth of Black Atlantic Christian networks in which Chilembwe participated altered the very nature of mission. As Jehu J. Hanciles argues, "the ideas and instincts that shaped African Christian rejection of racial inequality and denunciation of European missionary structures derived considerable impetus from black American influences."[733] Identifiable in the pursuits and aims of Black Christian Nationalists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, gaining political representation and creating Black economic wealth within an American context was important to expressing a

[732] Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, 1st edition (Maryknoll, N.Y. : Edinburgh: Orbis Books, 1996), 258.
[733] Hanciles, "'Africa Is Our Fatherland': The Black Atlantic, Globalization, and Modern African Christianity," 217.

vibrant religiosity. While at times African Americans perceived European colonialism as a productive means of achieving their goal "in extending Christianity in the Continent," their deeper motivations toward a free and prosperous Black community informed Chilembwe.[734]

For African Christians like Chilembwe who ministered amidst the exigencies of colonial conquest and rule, imperial hypocrisies were far too evident and real in daily life. The reduction of African spiritual, economic, and political interests into dust were felt daily. For Chilembwe, this did not mean that Christianity was at fault. Rather, the form of Christianity needed reviving to reflect *Africa for the African* and Black Christian Nationalist aims. Conflicted at times in practice as these aims were, in a world of heightening racial attitudes and policies, Chilembwe's missionary focus to reclaim for Africans spiritual and material wellbeing on the margins of empire locates his missionary consciousness at the center of the Black Atlantic world.

[734] Killingray, "The Black Atlantic Missionary Movement and Africa, 1780s-1920s," 20.

Afterword: The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved

When he was baptized in 1893, Nkologo Chilembwe chose for himself the name "John." He did not select the name John after the prophet of the New Testament whose voice cried in the wilderness to prepare the way for Christ. Rather, Chilembwe selected the name John after "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23).[735] John Chilembwe's experience of divine love is the fitting summative word on which to conclude this study of his life, ministry and death.

This project argues that from 1897 to 1915, John Chilembwe, like other early twentieth-century African Christian leaders, drew on Black Christian Nationalism to frame new visions for an African Church and a future African society. Chilembwe intended that this church and society would be free and delivered from the tyranny of White colonial rule as well as the long-enduring legacy of intersecting slave trades. Through the work of self-fashioning in the likeness of Noah; gathering a new kin; requiring new sartorial practices upon baptism; and publicizing in writing his protest against war conscription, Chilembwe worked to creatively recontextualize the aims of Black Christian Nationalism in African Christian thought and practice in the Shire Highlands. In conclusion, I argue that Chilembwe can be best remembered as prophetic in his missionary work. However, I also identify that his creative recontextualization was as much informed by the broader context of the Black Atlantic world as it was conscripted within the experience of the colonial matrix of power, or the conditions in which Africans creatively crafted, improvised, and practiced religious life during this period.[736]

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[735] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 39 quoting from Emily Langworthy, *This Africa Was Mine* (Stirling, UK, 1952), 53. Shepperson and Price utilize the record of Emily Langworthy, Joseph Booth's daughter, in her autobiography *This Africa was Mine* to substantiate this claim. The author of this project has read Langworthy's earlier manuscript held in George Shepperson's papers at Edinburgh University but has not obtained the copy published in 1950.

[736] W. Mignolo and M. Tlostanova in "The Logic of Coloniality and the Limits of Postcoloniality," eds. R. Krishnaswamy and J. C. Hawley, *The Postcolonial and the Global* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 111.

Chilembwe's vision did not, according to his own words and the words of those who recalled him, mean that he understood himself as a messiah or as a deliverer. His ecclesial separatism, his rejection of federation with European missionaries, his creation of a Freedom Army and willingness to die each manifested his experience of knowing himself as an African man, one whom God loved, and understanding his people as those accounted for in divine history through the act of divine, incarnate love.[737] Excluded in European racial ideologies from being seen and treated as historical agents capable of manifesting divine activity in the material world, Chilembwe reclaimed his humanity as an African by witnessing in name to being enveloped in divine love, a determinative condition of African flourishing. His pleas to his fellow Africans to gather into his ark of safety can thus be interpreted as an act of his extending this divine love to his kin who lived in lands irrespective of borders created by European powers, those whose lives, in his words, "spanned space from the Indian to Atlantic Ocean."[738]

Arguing that an "embodied proto-womanist theology" motivated African American women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries into mission, Yolanda Pierce calls our attention to African American women's "love both for themselves and for other black people" as compelling them into missionary service as nurses, educators, adoptive mothers, preachers, and lecturers in Malawi, Liberia, and Ghana.[739] In a day and age when to be Black or to be African was to experience being despised and denigrated in contexts of White supremacist or colonial violence, love for self and others in the Black Atlantic world was, and remains, astoundingly

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[737] Mwase and Rotberg, *Strike a Blow and Die: The Classic Story of the Chilembwe Rising*, 48. He called individuals to take up arms as "Amor Patria," for love of people under the banner of "Omnia Vincit Amor," or, Love conquers all.
[738] Shepperson and Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, 3; McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 122.
[739] Pierce, "Leaving Husband, Home, and Baby and All: African American Women and Nineteenth-Century Global Missions," 282, 286.

radical. As Pierce describes it, African American women left "husband, home, and baby and all" because of this love.[740]

Using Pierce's protowomanist formulation as an interpretation of African American female missionaries' motivation, her insights can be used to draw our close attention to a summative word regarding Chilembwe's inspiration and motivation for his mission.[741] Pierce perceptively accounts for love as inspiration and motivation for women called into the Black Atlantic missionary movement. The same can be claimed for Chilembwe. His religious experience of divine love called him to his work of becoming Noah, creatively recontextualizing Black Christian Nationalism as a radical, prophetic, and at times, in practice and in word, paradoxical ministry and mission. In conclusion, Chilembwe's call and missionary vision correlates to a profound interior religious experience that had implications for the public practice of his faith. It likewise informed his exegesis of human concerns in his context.

Theologian James Cone, writing on the Black American experience, claims, "The ethic of liberation arises out of love, for ourselves and for humanity. This is an essential ingredient of liberation without which the struggle turns into a denial of what divine liberation means."[742] Love separated from justice, Cone recognized, would never reflect the Black experience in North America. Love, through a Black American theological lens, was not simply the twin of

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[740] Pierce, "Leaving Husband, Home, and Baby and All: African American Women and Nineteenth-Century Global Missions," 278.
[741] Pierce, "Leaving Husband, Home, and Baby and All: African American Women and Nineteenth-Century Global Missions," 282.
[742] James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 199. See on this point also Marvin E. Wickware, "The Labour of Black Love: James Cone, Womanism, and the Future of Black Men's Theologies," *Black Theology* 19, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 3–17, https://doi.org/10.1080/14769948.2021.1896841. Wickware argues that "...by accepting the designation of affective labour as women's work, Black men have made it far more difficult for ourselves to participate in the divine work of liberation that expresses God's love…[Delores] Williams and Spillers offer a gift of possibility, as well, revealing that all Black people can tap into affective resources that can sustain us as we nurture self-love and deepen bonds of connection that can resist and undermine White supremacy and its demonic family of systemic evils." See Wickware, 13.

forgiveness, as espoused by White Americans, for sins past and present committed against Black American communities. For Cone, love grounded in a truly incarnate divinity, the person of Christ, implicated theological discourses of love emptied of prophetic and radical meaning for seeking justice. His rejoinder to vacuous, simplistically forgiving White love was to reground love in the death, the lynching, of Christ as an act of solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized.[743]

Cone's writings return us not only to the baptismal waters in which Chilembwe requested to be immersed, following the example of Christ in being submerged. They also return us to the words of Joseph Booth, who wrote that the "gospel ought to implicate not only the spiritual but also the material order."[744] Injustice in the colonial context in which Chilembwe ministered undermined African claims to personhood and threatened any community gathered on the premise of shared *umunthu,* or "human-ness," to draw on Malawian theologian Augustine Musopole's theology.[745] Divine love, being loved, as Chilembwe experienced, persisted despite empire, challenged group boundaries, and interrogated racial mythologies that ordered and hierarchized intersecting Black Atlantic worlds of religious experience.

This project has drawn attention to contextual and external factors, influences, and motivations that informed Chilembwe's missionary outlook and practice. It has also located Chilembwe within transatlantic Black Atlantic discourses of divine history in which Africans figured centrally and prominently as creative agents of change. To conclude, this project gestures to the final word with which John Chilembwe is hardly recalled: his name, which is the name of

[743] See in particular James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013).
[744] Booth and Perry, *Africa for the African*, 21; Augustine Chingwala Musopole, *Umunthu Theology: An Introduction* (Mzuni Press, 2021).
[745] Musopole, *Umunthu Theology: An Introduction*, 26. James Cone supervised Musopole's dissertation when Musopole was a student at Union Theological Seminary in the late 1980s.

"the disciple whom Jesus loved." Like his Black Atlantic Baptist compatriots in North America—male and female alike—Chilembwe understood divine love as radical and so lived, envisioned, and ministered to realize its implications in the material world, made legible to us most of all in his self-naming.

To be divinely loved and render such an experience as communal and as justice in the colonial matrix of power is, like all loving, fragile. In the material world, love in practice as justice may flag under the persistent assault of cultural, economic, political, and most of all, intimate and ontological, violence. It may falter in a matrix in which racial hierarchies and scripts, gendered notions of respectability, and technologies of warfare transpire to drown divine love in oceans of human refuse and diminishment. Love realized as freedom, or what Chilembwe called "the first resurrection," does not bestow life in full just as divine history does not confer on all humans equal agency.[746] Divine, incarnate love confirms freedom's possible realization and illuminates the systemic, cultural, and theological fissures that thwart its fulfillment. It calls individuals such as Chilembwe to gather a new people to work out this vision, despite the ever-present threat in real time that often transpires into deadly consequences.

Immersed as he was in waters of divine love, Chilembwe worked to creatively recontextualize Black Christian Nationalism into African Christian thought and practice in the Shire Highlands. As an act of extending and embodying divine love's incarnational solidarity as a response to African needs, Chilembwe, the disciple whom Jesus loved, also loved. He worked against the grain of the colonial order. He refused federation with European missions. He also denounced the ravages of intersecting and intensified slave trades. He took aim at any injustice

[746] McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 124.

that bent Africans under the pain of the *chikoti*.[747] Out of his experience of divine love, he renamed himself John to reclaim for himself and all Africans a human status and to ground freedom and justice in the realization of divine history. And that in and of itself warrants his also being recalled as prophetic.

[747] Chikoti means "whip" in Nyanja and is as referenced often in the Commission of Inquiry testimonies. Use of the *chikoti* is a well-documented practice that was administered quite liberally under British colonialism physical punishment of Africans, either at the Boma, or colonial administrative center, in the Zomba prison, or on British estates. See especially the testimony of Robertson Namate, Blantyre Mission School graduate and African clerk/typist in colonial offices. McCracken, *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising*, 112.

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