Mission Networks and the African Diaspora in Britain

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Abstract

Scholars have frequently commented on the networks fostered by Africans living in the diaspora. It is not commonly recognized that many African Christians also relied upon ‘mission networks.’ These networks exerted a degree of influence on migrants, but were also a great help, particularly to students, and for that reason many Africans valued them while living in Britain. Such was the case with G. Daniels Ekarte, who founded the African Churches Mission in Liverpool, and others including: James ‘Holy’ Johnson, Byang Kato, Parmenas Mukiri Githendu and Emmanuel Akingbala.

Keywords

G. Daniels Ekarte, James Johnson, Byang Kato, Parmenas Mukiri Githendu, Emmanuel Akingbala, mission networks, African communities in Britain, history

Résumé

Les chercheurs ont souvent formulé des observations sur les réseaux soutenus par les Africains vivant dans la diaspora. Il n'est pas toujours reconnu que beaucoup d'Africains de confession chrétienne se sont également servis des ‘réseaux de missions’. Ces réseaux ont exercé une influence appréciable sur les immigrants, mais ont été à la fois d'une grande aide, pour les étudiants en particulier, et pour cela beaucoup d'Africains habitant au Royaume-Uni leur sont encore reconnaissants. Ce fut le cas de G. Daniels Ekarte, fondateur de l'église African Churches Mission à Liverpool. Parmi d'autres exemples, il y a: James ‘Holy’ Johnson, Byang Kato, Parmenas Mukiri Githendu, et Emmanuel Akingbala.

Mots-clés

G. Daniels Ekarte, James Johnson, Byang Kato, Parmenas Mukiri Githendu, Emmanuel Akingbala, réseaux missionnaires, communautés africaines au Royaume-Uni, histoire

*¹) The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the members of the Editorial Board or the publisher.

Introduction

Black British have endured isolation, discrimination and intermittent periods of open hostility as part of life in the twentieth century. This is almost universally attested to in the secondary literature, leading to firmly entrenched assumptions about white attitudes towards the African communities in Britain. The other side of the coin, of course, is that many whites supported the African migrant community, particularly those who had connections with the missionary societies. Africans relied upon these networks for financial assistance, guidance and help in times of trouble. This article will discuss historical examples of the phenomenon and explore how mission networks also exerted an influence on Africans in Britain by analyzing the role of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and in particular the effect it had on G. Daniels Ekarte. The insights gained from his story will be complemented by other examples from Nigeria and Kenya.

Those who have studied diaspora communities understand the importance of 'networks' in sustaining Africans abroad. Africans maintain connections with their homeland as a means of gaining support, bolstering influence and sustaining cultural links (Adi 2000: 71). Africans created community organizations in the diaspora, reflecting new "self-identifications and solidarities" and aiming at self-support (James 2004: 348; Adogame 2008: 300; Olupona 2007: 42-44). For many Africans, like G. Daniels Ekarte, mission networks provided another means of support in the diaspora. The missions had been an important part of his life in Africa and continued to hold significance in the diaspora.

The term 'mission networks' refers here to the often extensive organizations brought together by the work of missionary societies, connecting a range of religious, medical and educational facilities in communities outside of Europe with religious, educational, and political groups inside Europe. The bureaucratic machinery of a missionary society was responsible for sustaining the network from headquarters in Europe. These networks were as varied as the missionary societies themselves and must be studied on a case by case basis. The Church Missionary Society was one of the larger and better known missionary societies. In 1930, the CMS boasted nine missions in Africa, sixteen in Asia and two in the Middle East; it had a total of 8,207 stations and out-stations, which were staffed by 1,217 missionaries and 16,842 'native' pastors and workers. More than one million 'adherents' were connected with CMS churches around the world; 368,000 students attended more than 7,300 CMS 'schools,' which were supported by 14,360 teachers; 750 CMS doctors, nurses and attendants looked after nearly 1.5 million patients in CMS hospitals. If all of these churches,

schools and hospitals were dots on the map and connected to the headquarters at Salisbury Square, it would reveal a network of global proportions, but in order to appreciate the scope of the CMS organization one would also have to consider the number of dots in Britain. Church Missionary House at Salisbury Square employed thirty secretaries to oversee different aspects of the work of the missionary society. The General Committee, Executive Committee, Vice Presidents and Trustees were all involved in governing the affairs of the CMS, and a web of local organizations spread across England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, whose job it was to raise interest in, and support for, the work of the CMS.¹ The global footprint of the CMS was impressive, but when one considers that in 1938 there were nearly 560 Protestant missionary societies in Europe and North America the implications are staggering (Parker 1938: 8-91).

G. Daniels Ekarte came from Calabar in southeast Nigeria and founded the African Churches Mission (ACM) in Liverpool, where he worked tirelessly to minister to the needs of the African diaspora community and the so-called 'half-caste' orphans of the city. His story is at once inspiring and tragic. He built the ACM, often in the face of local antipathy and animosity; the mission did valuable work for many years, but gradually fell into debt and disrepair. In 1949, officials closed the orphanage based upon the assumption that the premises were unsafe for children. The failure of the orphanage was attributed to the racism of mid-century Britain (Hardage 2008: 298). There is little doubt that Ekarte, and African migrants in general, experienced racial discrimination and other obstacles. Carlton Wilson and Ogbu Kalu have been most ardent in expressing this thesis in regards to the ACM, but they have given no meaningful account of the scores of whites in Britain and Nigeria who did support Ekarte (Wilson 1992: 57-73; Kalu 2008: 277). This omission suggests certain weaknesses in the argument. The financial and moral support Ekarte received from Europeans is not a peripheral issue; on the contrary, it is central in explaining the obvious success Ekarte enjoyed in the 1930s and 1940s. It was not unconditional support, of course, but it was present among political officials to a considerable degree, and even more so among missionaries.

The most comprehensive source on Ekarte is Marika Sherwood's, *Pastor Daniels Ekarte and the African Churches Mission*. This book was written with some difficulty because of the paucity of documents and Sherwood pieced together the history of the mission from Home Office documents, newspaper clippings, random pieces of correspondence, and interviews. Though it remains the most authoritative source on Ekarte, she openly acknowledges its

¹ *Annual Report of the Church Missionary Society* (London 1930: v-xvi).

limits, particularly on the relationship between Ekarte and Africa (Sherwood 1994: 101). The Nigerian National Archives in Ibadan, the University of Ibadan Library, and the Church Missionary Society archives in Birmingham, contain numerous documents that were not consulted by Sherwood. Based upon these sources, it is possible to give an account of this aspect of Ekarte's history for the first time. This underscores the importance of the present study, but these documents are also valuable for the insights they offer into the relationship between Ekarte and mission networks in Nigeria.

Ekarte and Britain

The African diaspora community first emerged in Britain in the Roman period, but comparatively little is known until the sixteenth century when Africans arrived in greater numbers, most the victims of the slave trade, though some wealthy Africans sent their children to be educated in Britain and others worked as merchants aboard ships (Adi 2000: 70). This period, ending in the nineteenth century, has been called the 'old' diaspora; a 'new' diaspora commenced with the end of the slave trade and most Africans thereafter came voluntarily as students and workers. Ekarte was part of the new diaspora, arriving in Britain during a period of rapid growth in African migration after the First World War. Some scholars tentatively estimate that there were around 20,000 Black British in the interwar period; it can be asserted with more confidence that by the end of the century there were more than a million Blacks living in Britain (Okpewho 2009: 5; Blakely 2009: 5; Boateng 2009: 146).

Ekarte was born at the end of the nineteenth century in Calabar. He became a Christian under the tutelage of Scottish Presbyterian missionaries named Arthur Wilkie and Mary Slessor. He was a promising student and at one time missionaries considered sending him to Edinburgh for further education, but the plan was never realized. Ekarte ran away to sea for a period, but he eventually tired of this lifestyle and longed somehow to become a "holy man." He believed that possibly he could change his life by going to the "holy country" of Britain, but his expectations were soon dashed when he encountered, what he thought to be, the shocking state of immorality in Liverpool.² Neither was he prepared for the racism that was a conspicuous part of the life in Britain. Ekarte actually arrived during a period of heightened racial tensions when

²) John W. Wilkie to Dr. Fraser, 1931. From Nigerian National Archives at Ibadan (Hereafter NNAI) file CMS(Y)2/2/20.

increasing economic competition among the working class drew attention to the presence of the migrant community. Riots broke out in 1919 and as many as ten thousand people from the white community took to the streets in protest. Hostility escalated until it claimed the life of a man named Charles Wootton, who drowned while trying to escape a mob. Throughout the 1920s, Africans continued to experience discrimination (Zack-Williams 1997: 531-33). Naturally, disillusionment set in and Ekarte briefly renounced his faith, determined to return to Nigeria and denounce the missionaries. But in time, his faith was rekindled and his mission reborn in the desire to minister to the needs of Africans in the diaspora.

Ekarte began his ministry near the Liverpool docks in 1922. The crowds that gathered about him congested the streets and brought him into conflict with the police on a number of occasions. To avert future clashes Ekarte moved his meetings indoors by renting a hall from two sympathetic vicars. In 1931 an anonymous white British donor enabled him to rent a larger hall at 122/124 Hill Street. This building became the headquarters of the ACM, where Ekarte conducted services, aided immigrants, argued for racial equality, and offered a home to orphans.

To support his mission Ekarte fostered connections with a variety of organizations and denominations. His connections with missionaries in Calabar opened the door to a number of contacts in Britain. This was the case with the Reverend John W. Wilkie, who visited the ACM at the behest of Dr. Fraser, a missionary in Nigeria. When the two met for lunch Wilkie hoped to “get at his aims and work.”³ At the conclusion of the meeting Wilkie reported back to Fraser that “I have had a rather wonderful experience and am perhaps still to near it to get a proper prospective. If therefore what I write appears ill considered or extravagant you must put it down to emotionalism.” What excited Wilkie was not merely Ekarte’s connection to Calabar (where his brother Arthur Wilkie was a missionary), but his work in Liverpool, which he viewed as a fascinating example of the phenomenon known today as ‘reverse missions.’ He wrote, “the teaching has performed a whole circle – from Britain to Africa and from Africa back to Britain. It is one of the most striking incidents I have ever heard of in the sowing of the Word.” Their meeting was the beginning of a long association. He became an advocate of the ACM, raised support for Ekarte and helped to establish a committee to oversee the work; Wilkie also served as a trustee for many years.

³) All quotes from: *Ibid.*

Despite Ekarte's strenuous attempts to improve the financial condition of the mission, economic difficulties doggedly followed him through the years resulting in the gradual decline of the Hill Street premises. The struggle to raise support was a challenge faced by many organizations during the Great Depression and WWII. The ACM may have fared worse than some missions, but its experience was in keeping with many others. Locally in Liverpool, authorities were also beginning to press for urban renewal and this may have influenced their decision to close the orphanage, a task callously performed by the Children's Department (Wilson 1992: 54, 72). On 3 June 1949, officials came to collect the children. Ekarte described the episode in a statement.

At about 7:30am . . . representatives of the Children's Department and a squad of police constables came to the Home and demanded the removal of the children. The sergeant shouted me to silence when I asked the Children's Officers to read the correspondence I have had with the Home Office. He then lifted a baton to hit me on the head and absurdly exclaimed "we have more power than the Home Office." Then, with force, I was carried and locked up in my office by three constables. The children who were then in bed were removed and . . . they cried bitterly.⁴

Ekarte continued other aspects of the mission until the building was finally condemned in 1964 and he moved to council housing. By this time, Ekarte was an elderly man and lived only a few more weeks. He was remembered fondly, having achieved a great deal in his life, despite the obstacles. Besides being an important example of the life of an African in the diaspora during the colonial period, Ekarte was a pioneer of reverse missions, the movement of missionaries from the global south who viewed the West as a mission field (Adogame 2008: 300-01; Hanciles 2008: 121-27).

Ekarte and Anglicans in Nigeria

Ekarte viewed religious leaders in Nigeria as a source of revenue and an avenue for the dissemination of ideas and influence. As early as 1931, European missionaries in Nigeria were interested in the ACM.⁵ His work gained broader recognition by 1935 when the conference of Anglican West African Bishops (including, Frank Melville Jones, Bertram Lasbrey, George William Wright, Adolphus Howells, Alfred William Smith, Alfred Gelsthorpe, and Alexander Akinyele) published a *Pastoral Letter* recognizing the mission. In the section entitled, "West

⁴ G. Daniels Ekarte, "Statement," 17 June 1949. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (60).

⁵ John W. Wilkie to Mr. Gardiner, 23 March 1931. NNAI: CMS(Y)2/2/20.

Africans in Europe," they wrote, "We commend to Africans visiting, or working in England, the use of the African Churches Mission in Liverpool and similar institutions elsewhere, and impress upon all Christians the desirability of supporting such efforts."⁶ These bishops served in various parts of West Africa and illustrate how Ekarte received broad support from the highest levels of white Anglican leadership. The Bishops were not merely recommending Ekarte, they were seeking to articulate the Church's position on how to relate to the African diaspora. "The Church holds that it has a definite responsibility for the welfare of West Africans sojourning in Europe and America." And elsewhere, "We ask our clergy and our Church members whether African or European, when visiting England to seek out Africans resident there specially students with the object of offering such service and friendship as they may be able to give." It is unclear how much of an impact this letter had on the West African church, but it appears to have had some affect, at least in the case of Ekarte. European missionary societies, including, the Church Missionary Society and the Qua Iboe Mission, responded by donating to the ACM in 1936 and 1939.⁷

Ekarte sought to establish contacts with missions in southeast Nigeria in the hope that they would support his work and there is every indication that Anglican leaders did. Bishops A. C. Onyeabo and Bertram Lasbrey of the Niger Diocese visited the mission in Liverpool to see the work first-hand; afterwards Onyeabo wrote, "Rev. Ekarte is doing a great deal of work among the coloured people, and needs all the support that could be given to him." Striking a similar tone, Lasbrey stated, "We are very favourably impressed" with Ekarte (Sherwood 1994: 79-80).⁸ In 1935, the Niger Diocese discussed Ekarte during a meeting of the synod. George Basden, a British missionary and member of the Nigerian Legislative Council, visited the mission, spoke positively before the synod and even donated his own money (Bersselaar 2006: 433). Bishop Thomas Charles John raised a motion calling upon the synod to appropriate £25 annually for Ekarte; the motion was seconded by J. Onyelobi and carried after a vote.⁹ It is unclear how long these resources were made available due to the absence of financial records; Ekarte reported donations of £30 in 1936 and £25

⁶ All quotes from: Conference of Bishops of the Anglican Communion, "Pastoral Letter," 9-15 March 1935. Church Missionary Society Archives, University of Birmingham (hereafter CMS/B) in file AF35/49 G3/A2/d1/1.

⁷ Financial reports for 1936 can be found in NNAL: CSO/26/23610/s461 and for 1939 in University of Ibadan Library, Special Collections, A. B. Akinyele Papers (hereafter UIL: ABA).

⁸ Onyeabo and Lasbrey visited in 1937.

⁹ "The Synod of the Diocese on the Niger," 11-17 May 1935. UIL: ABA.

in 1939, and there is evidence it was given even as late as 1943.¹⁰ Others in the southeast also donated to the mission including a group from Port Harcourt, which gave £10 each year, though for an unknown duration, and the Duke Town School of Calabar, which gave £8.15.0 in 1936.¹¹ Ekarte extended his influence to Ibibioland by 1941 when he appointed Pastor I. D. Ime representative of the mission.¹² And Dr. S. R. Tawna-Abels and his wife traveled around Nigeria raising support for the mission in 1945.¹³

One would expect Ekarte to have some success among the Scottish mission in Calabar, but it is significant that Anglicans were equally supportive. It is also worth noting that Ekarte found support among other ethnic groups, including the Yoruba in southwest Nigeria. Frank Melville Jones and Alexander Akinyele, Anglican bishops of the Lagos Diocese boarded at the mission in 1933.¹⁴ Two years later, Ekarte was still corresponding with Akinyele, asking him to use his influence to attain funds for the mission.¹⁵ The exact nature of their relationship is not clear, although Akinyele was described by Ekarte as the vice president of the ACM in some documents (Sherwood 1994: 79-80, 122). Like its neighbor to the east, the Diocese of Lagos contributed to the mission; Ekarte's financial report for 1939 recorded a donation of £20, and apparently, a grant was given each year. In 1943, I. O. Ransome-Kuti and A. A. Afunkoya, sought to increase donations to Ekarte after they visited the mission and knew that it "was doing very good work."¹⁶ J. Olumide Lucas, who was the secretary of the Diocesan Board, suggested that more funding could be found in the Nigerian Pastorate Fund. The idea was well received by the synod, on which at least five Europeans were present, including, the Bishop of Lagos, G. Burton, H. Dallimore, C. Wakeman and Henry Carr.

To put these sums in context, the donations received by the ACM amounted to £415 in 1936 and £436 in 1939. Ekarte received a total of £58 from Nigerian missions in 1936 and £47 in 1939, which amounted to an average of 12.3% of

¹⁰ J. Olumide Lucas, "Minutes of the Diocesan Board," 11 March 1943. NNAI: CMS(Y)2/2/24.

¹¹ John W. Wilkie to A. B. Akinyele, 4 February 1935. UIL: ABA.

¹² G. Daniels Ekarte to the Colonial Secretary of Nigeria, 19 September 1941. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461.

¹³ S. R. Tawma-Abels to the Chief Sectary of the Nigerian Government, 30 July 1945. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (23). G. Daniels Ekarte to the Chief Secretary of the Nigerian Government, 22 June 1945. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (19).

¹⁴ John W. Wilkie to A. B. Akinyele, 4 February 1935. UIL: ABA.

¹⁵ G. Daniels Ekarte to A. B. Akinyele, 24 December and 5 March 1935. UIL: ABA.

¹⁶ J. Olumide Lucas, "Minutes of the Meeting of the Diocesan Board," 11 March 1943. NNAI: CMS(Y)2/2/24.

his annual revenue. By comparison, Ekarte collected an average of 3.8% from tithe and 4.7% from the Christmas appeal.¹⁷ Needless to say, missions in Nigeria played a notable role in sustaining Ekarte's work financially, but they also leant their moral support which was helpful, for instance, in attempts to raise funds from other sources.

How does the support of missionaries square with current historiography of the ACM? In an article on the subject, Carlton Wilson contrasts the response of John Harris to two different missions that served African immigrants: the African and West Indian Mission (AWIM) and the ACM. The former was paternalistic and condescending towards migrants, whereas the ACM encouraged them to be politically active and outspoken, and as head of the Committee for the Welfare of Africans in Europe, Harris was in a position to decide where to allocate funds. He chose to withhold funding from Ekarte, but to offer his moral and financial support (of between £10 and £25 from 1923 to 1939) to AWIM. Wilson's conclusion is that Europeans did not support African initiatives, especially those that were controlled by such politically outspoken Africans (Wilson 1992: 60-73). But in forming his conclusion, Wilson has overlooked a great deal of contradictory evidence and has exaggerated Harris' importance in the history of the ACM. Certainly, Ekarte would have welcomed grants from Harris, but the funds he made available to AWIM would have only amounted to between 2.2% and 5.7% of the donations received by the ACM in 1939. In fact, Ekarte recorded donations from eighty-seven people that year, the majority of which appear to be white supporters, and the highest single donation was £210, so it is not clear why Harris has factored so largely in Wilson's historiography of the ACM. White British supporters in other documents included five European bishops and missionaries such as George Basden and Bertram Lasbrey. Europeans were among the leaders of the Niger and Lagos Dioceses, and the Duke Town School, all of which supported Ekarte. The CMS and the Qua Iboe Mission were British societies, supported predominantly by Europeans. Wilson may not have known about these contributions; he may not have known about other British organizations that donated to Ekarte either, such as Barclays Bank Ltd., the Elder Dempster Shipping Line, Messrs. Thomas Porter & Sons, McDougall & Co. Ltd., the Hanover Methodist Sunday School, and the Oakvale Congregational Church.¹⁸

¹⁷ NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 and UIL: ABA.

¹⁸ NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 and UIL: ABA.

Ekarte and the Nigerian Colonial Government

Ekarte's network of contacts with Nigeria was not merely religious in nature. He also fostered a network of political connections, which were less financially rewarding overall, but historically significant nevertheless. He first made contact with the Nigerian government in 1935 when the depression was "sweeping the country like a hurricane." The ACM had been so affected "that except some financial assistance is obtained, its doors will be forced to close."¹⁹ The depression had halted fledgling British attempts to invest in colonial humanitarian development and under such circumstances, Ekarte's mission in Liverpool was apparently deemed extraneous. Nigeria was experiencing its own financial problems and Governor Donald Cameron was not favorably disposed to the mission.²⁰ Fortunately for Ekarte, the government's position began to soften over time. The next decade witnessed the rise of a politically conscious educated elite, a more broadly sympathetic colonial government and growth in funding for organizations like the ACM (Falola et al. 2008: xv, 136). In 1937, King Ademola III, the Alake of Abeokuta, and Resident A. E. Murray visited the mission and both offered praise for Ekarte's work. With such encouragement the government finally agreed to make grants to Ekarte in 1945; once the approval was in place, officials committed to do so for five years.²¹

African politicians played a notable role in this reversal. Under the Clifford Constitution of 1922, the Nigerian government permitted the election of "unofficial" members to represent African interests and that is how at the meeting of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council in 1945 two unofficial Nigerian members raised their voices in support of the ACM. "The Member for the Rivers Division, supported by the Member for Ondo Division, suggested that Government should subsidize the Ekarte Mission... which was doing great welfare work."²² The government had recently proposed a ten-year plan to invest 11.3 million pounds in Nigerian infrastructure, education, health and social services (Falola et al. 2000: 146-47). Thus, when unofficial members

¹⁹ G. Daniels Ekarte to Donald Cameron, 4 February 1935. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461.

²⁰ R. D. Ross to G. Daniels Ekarte, 25 February 1935. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461.

²¹ "Meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance," 27 September 1945. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (20). Secretary of State for the Colonies to Officer Administering the Government of Nigeria, 12 January 1946. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (34). G. Daniels Ekarte to the Governor of Nigeria, 9 April 1947. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (35).

²² S. Phillipson, "Memorandum of Finance Committee," 21 September 1945. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461.

proposed supporting the mission, the secretary of the committee did not resist, but began the process of vetting Ekarte with the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London.²³

The response from the Secretary of State was less than enthusiastic, even though the Colonial Office had given grants to Ekarte in the past, and would do so again in the future. He wrote, "Ekarte's mission does some useful social work of a limited kind among the coloured population . . . particularly among children, but it cannot be said to be doing work of any great value among colonial seamen."²⁴ The Secretary falsely assumed the needs of African sailors were addressed by the Welfare Department, blind to discrimination they faced from such institutions. Another concern expressed by the Secretary was the financial condition of the mission, especially its inconsistent financial records and frequent fund drives. Despite these concerns, the Secretary advised the Nigerian government to give a small annual grant to the Mission with one stipulation – the funds were to be earmarked for Ekarte's work among the orphans not the sailors.²⁵ In turn, S. Phillipson, the Secretary of the Nigerian government, made the recommendation that £25 be given to Ekarte annually.

Again in 1948 African political leaders instigated discussions about increasing government funding. During a meeting of the Select Committee, Nnamdi Azikiwe, founder of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons and an unofficial member of the Legislative Council, requested an increase in the support for Ekarte.²⁶ Since his return to Nigeria in 1937, Azikiwe had grown in prominence and began to openly call for independence after 1943. Officials were not blind to his influence so when he called for an increase in support for Ekarte in 1948, government took the request seriously (Hargreaves 1985: 57-73, 124-25). A. W. Savage, the Financial Secretary, contacted D. I. Scanlan, the Chief Secretary, about the idea. Two days later, the Governor wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies seeking the latest information on Ekarte.²⁷

²³ Select Committee to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London, 13 July 1945. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461.

²⁴ S. Phillipson, "Memorandum of Finance Committee," 21 September 1945.

²⁵ Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Officer Administering the Government of Nigeria, 6 September 1945. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (25).

²⁶ A. W. L. Savage, "Minutes of the Select Committee" to D. I. Scanlan, 16 June 1948. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461.

²⁷ Governor of Nigeria to Secretary of State for the Colonies in London, 18 June 1948. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (42). D. I. Scanlan to the Under Secretary for the Colonies in London, 21 September 1948. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (46).

The Secretary of State for the Colonies responded by saying that it was "extremely difficult to assess the value of the work being done from this Mission as the organization and methods of Pastor Ekarte are 'unorthodox.'"²⁸ Another concern was the lack of support from local officials in Liverpool. There were, however, reasons to support Ekarte according to the Secretary. "Pastor Ekarte's personality and work appears to attach the sympathy of a certain section of the public, African and European, who are interested in the welfare of Africans in Britain; his intentions... are probably sincere." Despite his ambivalence, the Secretary suggested that the Nigerian government maintain its support for the mission. And significantly, despite the Secretary's recommendation to maintain the level of support, Scanlan advocated an increase. The heart of his argument was that "The scale of our subvention to this 100% African institution does not... compare favourably with subventions to non-African bodies" such as the missionary schools.²⁹ It is unclear what the government decided on the question. Most likely, they were still considering the issue when new information about Ekarte came to hand that changed the terms of the debate altogether.

After the closing of the orphanage in 1949, Ekarte published a statement that laid much of the blame at the feet of local officials for not supporting the mission.³⁰ He concluded the statement defiantly, "We are prepared to fight to get our children [back]. We hope that many will join us in our... fight."³¹ Ekarte launched a new fund drive in the hopes of raising £5,000, writing directly to Governor Macpherson in Nigeria. He had identified a new location for the children's home but needed cash to purchase the building.³²

K. M. Walmsley, of the Select Committee in Nigeria, responded to the new appeal with doubts. He acknowledged that the mission was worthy of support, but was put off by, what he felt to be, the sensationalized account of the closing of the orphanage. "It is a pity," he wrote, "that the writer must... overdraw his case so much. The spectacle of the average English policeman using unnecessary violence... [against] small children and [a man of] the 'cloth' is so absurd as to alienate possible sympathizers."³³ Walmsley was not hostile towards Ekarte, though, and even admitted feeling a "degree of sympathy;"

²⁸) All quotes from: Secretary of State for the Colonies in London to the Officer Administering the Nigerian Government, 15 November 1948. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (47).

²⁹) D. I. Scanlan, "A.F.S.," 30 November 1948. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (48).

³⁰) G. Daniels Ekarte, "Statement," 17 June 1949. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (60).

³¹) *Ibid.*

³²) G. Daniels Ekarte to the Governor of Nigeria, 28 June 1949. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (59).

³³) All quotes from: K. M. Walmsley, "A.F.S.," 7 July 1949. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (54).

ultimately, he suggested that if Ekarte raised fifty-percent of the needed sum, the Nigerian government would “give favourable consideration to the possible contribution.” But Walmsley also noted that the grants given between 1945 and 1949 were intended for the orphans, and since the children’s home was closed, they should cease until the orphanage was reestablished. In the meantime, Macpherson asked Ekarte to send financial proposals for the new home. Ekarte’s response revealed that the £5,000 only covered the down payment; the total cost of the new venture was actually £16,000. Discovering this substantially different figure would have given Walmsley ample justification for withdrawing his support and the fact that he did not suggests that there actually was a level of genuine support. Of course, it was also politically expedient to support Ekarte; £25 a year was a small price to pay for the public relations benefits that it would presumably reap.

Other officials weighed in on the new scheme of the ACM as well. J. G. Davies, the newly appointed Secretary of the colonial government, was of the opinion that despite recent decline the mission had done good work. The financial position was cause for concern because reports submitted by Ekarte were unaudited and one could have no assurance of their veracity. Even if they were accurate, however, they revealed an enterprise slowly sinking in debt.³⁴ The new home was much larger than the Hill Street building and Davies struggled to understand how Ekarte’s much more costly new mission would be more successful than the last. Despite these concerns, Davies supported the idea of continuing annual grants to Ekarte at the same rate or slightly higher.

The decision taken by the government was that because the children’s home was closed, financial support would cease, but not until the 1950-51 fiscal year, thereby fulfilling the five year commitment.³⁵ Ekarte was assured that the government was prepared to reconsider its position should circumstances change.³⁶ Unfortunately, Ekarte was not able to raise the necessary funds and the issue was never revisited.

From this narrative, several points seem *apropos* to the discussion of colonial responses to the African diaspora in Britain. First, these colonial officials

³⁴) J. G. Davies and K. M. Walmsley, “A.F.S.,” 26 September 1949. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (70). Between 1936 and 1947, Ekarte’s debt rose from £160 to over £1,600.

³⁵) J. G. Davies to G. Daniels Ekarte, 5 October 1949. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (72).

³⁶) In internal correspondence, Davies acknowledged that he anticipated appeals from Ekarte and left room for the government to reverse their decision. “It may be expected that Mr. Ekarte will promptly write us a number of letters asking us to reconsider this decision, and I have inserted the words ‘at present’ in the draft in case it is decided later to make a grant after all.” J. G. Davies to the Accountant General, 10 July 1950. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461.

possessed some of the negative assumptions about African leadership that historians have come to expect, such as skepticism about Ekarte's ability to manage finances. Second, these negative attitudes towards Ekarte did not necessarily lead to opposition. The Secretary of State, for instance, was not enthusiastic about the mission in 1948, but advised the Nigerian government to lend its support. After the orphanage had been closed in 1949, K. M. Walmsley was alienated by Ekarte's 'sensationalized' account of the episode, but maintained his support for the mission. J. G. Davies was dubious about Ekarte's financial records, but advocated the idea of giving grants to the mission at the same or an even higher rate. Third, these documents highlight the way the government made decisions about Africans in the diaspora. The government was influenced by the views of prominent individuals in Nigeria, such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, but probably more so by the advice of the Colonial Office. The views of the Colonial Office, in turn, were influenced by prominent individuals in Britain, such as the Bishop of Liverpool, but perhaps more by the views of the Home Office.³⁷ Fourth, the influence of African politicians was instrumental in altering the position of the government in 1945 and 1948, though not influential enough to ensure support of the troubled mission after 1950. The contribution of African Anglicans was also clearly evident, although missionaries were apparently as eager as their Nigerian counterparts to support the ACM.

This essay has considered the efforts of G. Daniels Ekarte to establish connections with religious and political groups in his homeland and how, in turn, he received support from both mission and government sources. What is striking about these documents, especially considering contemporary assumptions about the experience of Africans in the diaspora, is that they reveal a positive relationship between Ekarte and European religious leaders in Nigeria. Ekarte's interaction with the Nigerian government was less clearly positive, but still there was a degree of support for his mission after 1945. The government was slow to embrace Ekarte and by the time it did, his mission was already in trouble. In the end, these troubles, and the less than favourable attitude of the Home Office, caused government support to be short lived. Having said this, the narrative reveals interesting dynamics about the attitudes of Europeans towards Ekarte. Both European officials and missionaries displayed a personal interest in the Nigerian diaspora. This was accompanied by a sense of responsibility to support the work on some level. This was the basic argument of the West African Bishops in their *Pastoral Letter* and of Secretary S. Phillipson.³⁸

³⁷) Especially in: K. M. Walmsley, "A.F.S," 7 July 1949. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (54).

³⁸) S. Phillipson, "Memorandum of Finance Committee," 21 September 1945.

It was not merely altruism that convinced colonial officials to support the ACM, however. In a letter to the Governor, Ekarte wrote, "Many . . . sympathizers have asked whether or not any support would come to us from our African Governments," and this expectation may have generated a degree of coercive pressure.³⁹ This article has not delved into the support Ekarte received from Europeans in Britain, but a preliminary investigation suggests numerous possibilities, none of which have been entertained in print. Wilson focuses on how clergy in Britain were a major source of opposition to Ekarte, but as discussed above, his argument seems to be based primarily on one person and he has overlooked literally scores of others. The most intimate portrait of a white supporter in these documents is the Reverend John W. Wilkie, whose involvement with the ACM has been given above. Perhaps the most obvious place to begin looking for others is the financial records of the mission. It is evident based solely upon reports for 1936 and 1939, which record over 140 donors, that Ekarte claimed support from a cross section of white British society. Lords and Ladies, mayors, priests, doctors, professors, lawyers, bankers, military officers, and many others contributed to the furtherance of the ACM. The anonymous donation which enabled the mission to open the Hill Street premises has been attributed to a white donor. Ekarte received support from prominent members of society, but also from many living down by the docks, where he was well known and respected. Mrs. Roberts was perhaps closest to Ekarte, as she spent many years cooking, cleaning and helping him raise the orphans; eventually they are said to have established a "personal relationship" (Sherwood 1994: 34-39, 101). Finally, account needs to be given of the Europeans who were involved in the leadership of the mission. While Ekarte was the founder and director of the mission, numerous Europeans served as trustees, including: Dr. Kitty Fraser, Lieutenant John Grindrod, Reverend A. L. J. Shields, Reverend J. W. Wilkie, Reverend Canon T. A. E. Davey, Vera Bevan, Dixie Bedwell, J. Howard Bradley, M. B. Carr, Arthur Kiss esq., and P. E. Howorth esq. Notable white patrons of the ACM included: the Bishop of Liverpool, Rear Admiral Sir Arthur Bromley, and F. T. Harshall esq.⁴⁰ It is clear that Ekarte did experience opposition from certain segments of British society, but neither Wilson, Kalu or Sherwood explore the support he received from Europeans in Nigeria or Britain.

³⁹ G. Daniels Ekarte to the Governor of Nigeria, 21 July 1949. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (63).

⁴⁰ These individuals are recognized by Ekarte in official correspondence written between 1931 and 1950.

It should not be assumed that officials in Africa, still less in Britain, always favoured African initiatives for it is quite clear from history that they did not. But scholarship on Ekarte seems to have embraced uncritically the assumption that because racism existed in European societies, then all whites opposed African initiatives. There is in this case quite simply too much evidence to the contrary. And because so much evidence has been omitted in the case of Ekarte, it should at the very least raise questions about the possibility that European support for other African migrants has been diminished by historians as well.

These documents suggest the importance of mission networks in the study of the African diaspora. African Diaspora Studies recognizes the importance of colonial history for explaining the shape of modern Africa, the migratory patterns of Africans and the differences between various diaspora communities. Colonialism is also seen as an essential part of the context when describing European racial attitudes (Ifekwunigwe 2010: 29; Butler 2010: 315; Keaton 2009: 108). The present study suggests additional reasons why colonial history should be important in African Diaspora Studies. Not only were missionaries in colonial Africa aware of the African diaspora, they were deeply involved with it; many of them were in positions of authority from which they could lend or withhold valuable support. Like the colonial project, western missionary endeavors created “transnational structures” and “global networks” that were useful to Africans trying to migrate to Europe and America (Hanciles 2008: 121).

Ekarte used his missionary contacts to gain support in Britain. The example of J. W. Wilkie has already been discussed; another example is his association with Mary Slessor. In correspondence and conversations, Ekarte was known to speak often of his connection to Slessor and to quote “her with great reverence,” presumably because it opened doors and pocket books.⁴¹ Ekarte was probably not being disingenuous when he referred to her as the “white Queen” and to himself, surprisingly, as “Mary Slessor’s boy.” It appears that he had genuine affection and respect for her. In Calabar, Slessor had been involved in rescuing twins who by tradition were often killed. Ekarte claimed that he was carrying her “mantle” to Liverpool by adopting “illegitimate children.”⁴²

⁴¹ John W. Wilkie to Dr. Fraser, 1931. NNAI: CMS(Y)2/2/20.

⁴² G. Daniels Ekarte, “Annual Report,” 1939. UIL: ABA. G. Daniels Ekarte, “The Letter for Constructive and Building Programme,” 1945. NNAI: CSO/26/23610/s461 (21).

Additional Examples from Nigeria and Kenya

One has but to look at the biographies of African leaders of the twentieth century to discover that mission networks played a notable role in the migration of many others. For example, it was James “Holy” Johnson’s connection with the CMS that necessitated four trips to Britain between 1886 and 1908. Johnson was born to Yoruba parents in Sierra Leone. He trained at the Fourah Bay Institution, was ordained and migrated to Yorubaland as a CMS missionary, where he became a leading religious figure in Nigeria and an outspoken nationalist. Johnson experienced the ‘Scramble for Africa,’ and though arguing for an independent African Anglican church, he did not leave the mission along with many of his supporters. This seems to be connected, in part, to his time in the diaspora.

Over the course of his career, he was a vocal proponent of changes in colonial and missionary policy. His heartfelt vituperations caused some concern to the CMS Parent Committee and he was summoned to headquarters at Salisbury Square in London. He negotiated with officials and won a notable victory when they agreed to transition Fourah Bay into a fully-fledged college. Johnson also negotiated with Lord Knutsford at the Colonial Office and though rebuffed on several fronts, succeeded in securing promises for the creation of a central bank in Sierra Leone. He had gone to England to seek change in West Africa, but perhaps unexpectedly was transformed by his experience of Britain, according to E. A. Ayandele. His personal contact with officials at Salisbury Square altered his attitude towards the CMS generally, cementing his loyalty to the mission in Nigeria. It had such an impact on him that he thereafter believed that whatever problems he was having with missionaries in Sierra Leone or Nigeria, Salisbury Square could be trusted to do what was best for West Africa and so he remained when many of his supporters left the Anglican Church to establish African churches. The exposure to the “technological and material advancement of England” also impressed him greatly and “From this time on England became in his eyes the exemplar that he would like Africa to imitate” (Ayandele 1970: 60-80). Johnson was called back to Salisbury Square three more times and each visit deepened his integration into the CMS network. He spent much of his time in Britain preaching at Anglican churches, speaking before the Keswick Convention, and participating in the Pan-Anglican Conference. Johnson was elected a Vice President of the CMS and consecrated Bishop while in Britain. According to his biographer, he became the “cynosure of Church Missionary Society supporters” (Ayandele 1970: 140-44, 263-66, 342). For historians today, it is clear that Johnson’s connection with the CMS required successive journeys into the diaspora. And if Johnson’s experience in the diaspora

seems to differ from many other Africans, it is largely to do with his position in the CMS network.

Parmenas Mukiri Githendu was eight years old when Johnson was making his final visit to Britain. It was not Githendu's connection to the CMS that caused him to migrate to Britain, but when he found himself in financial straits as a student in Birmingham he relied upon the mission to find a solution. Githendu was born in the predominantly Kikuyu district of Fort Hall (Murang'a) in central Kenya. As a boy he violated the clan taboo against eating wild game and after a severe beating escaped to the CMS station at Gathukeine. He was educated in CMS and Church of Scotland schools and became a teacher at the CMS Primary School at Kahuhia. John Karanja suggests that Githendu began to distance himself from the mission in 1927 after experiencing the scorn of a missionary over his political activities (Karanja 1999: 17-19, 41). That same year, Githendu also leveled allegations against a missionary named William Whibley for "immoral advances to his wife."⁴³ After an investigation, Whibley was cleared of the charges, but the scandal may have also played a role in his departure from the Kahuhia station compound. Githendu did not leave his teaching position until 1936, though, and in the meantime he joined the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), and as a representative of this political organization, was released by the CMS to accompany Jomo Kenyatta to Britain to give evidence before the Hilton Young Commission in 1928. He went primarily to testify about the dangers of an East African Federation, but was instructed by the Association to also further his education and it was in this pursuit that he got into some financial trouble.

Githendu had apparently been in contact with Salisbury Square all along, particularly the Africa Secretary named H. D. Hooper, who was very deeply involved in finding a suitable teacher-training college for him. Hooper consulted two schools in London, but was informed that Githendu was unqualified for their programs. He then turned to Fircroft, a school in Birmingham, and inquired about enrolling Githendu. Fircroft responded favorably and after hearing about his financial situation even offered a scholarship that would reduce his expenses by more than half. But Githendu did not have the money to pay his rent much less Fircroft so in October 1931 Hooper took the initiative to contact the KCA. The Association had sent Githendu to Britain with enough money for the journey and a few weeks lodging, but he now owed £12 to his landlady; if he accepted the offer from Fircroft, he would need an additional £35 for the course, £18 in incidental expenses, and £40 for a return trip to Kenya. Hooper wrote:

⁴³ H. D. Hooper to the Bishop of Mombasa, 21 July 1927. CMS/B: G3/A5/O.

I do hope your people will make a great effort to find this money on his behalf. He will be well looked after, and there are men who have had experience in African on the staff of the college... Indeed there are one or two West Africans who the CMS has sent there for training and who are reliable men who will do all they can to help Parmenas.⁴⁴

For Githendu the mission network was a boon for it meant having a British insider to offer guidance, support and connections. Hooper was instrumental in enabling Githendu to solve his financial problems and achieve his educational goals. In part, this may have been an unstated duty of the Africa Secretary, for Hooper performed a similar service for others, but from other correspondence it is clear that his concern was personal and even more so in this case, for Hooper had served as a missionary at Kahuhia, the very same station that Githendu was then employed. In the end, Hooper's efforts were not without reward, for the very same year District Commissioner Vidal reported that the KCA had begun to collect money to pay Githendu's school fees.⁴⁵

These first two case studies deal with mission networks during the colonial period, but there is also evidence of their importance after independence. Byang Kato's connection to the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) proved instrumental in his decision to study in Britain in 1963 and France in 1966. His integration into the SIM network also set him on a path to study in the United States in 1973.

Kato was from northern Nigeria and became a born-again Christian at the age of twelve while attending the SIM school at Kwoi. At this time SIM was in the process of devolving its mission stations onto an autonomous African body known as the Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA), so when he graduated from Kwoi, Kato studied at the ECWA Bible School in Igbaja and then became a teacher at the SIM Kwoi Bible School. Shortly after, the ECWA/SIM Scholarship Board awarded him funds for the purpose of furthering his education. Those who received this scholarship traditionally went to London Bible College and in this way the ECWA/SIM network was instrumental in encouraging Kato to live in the diaspora. This episode reveals how mission organizations also influenced the specific educational choices of Africans, which happened again for Kato when he won a second SIM scholarship, this time to study at the Child Evangelism Fellowship Institute in Paris. When Kato returned to Nigeria he took up a post at Igbaja Seminary and became the General Secretary of ECWA. In 1970, Kato chose to leave Africa for further study in America. There is no indication that his involvement with SIM/ECWA directly influenced his

⁴⁴ H. D. Hooper to Gideon, 6 October 1931. CMS/B: G3/A5/L13 (196).

⁴⁵ M. R. R. Vidal, "Annual Report Fort Hall District," 1931. Kenya National Archives Nairobi in file: DC/FH/1/10.

choice to go to Dallas Theological Seminary, but there was perhaps a more subtle influence in that this school was very much in keeping with the theological outlook of the SIM/ECWA network. After earning a Masters in Sacred Theology and a Doctorate in Theology, Kato returned to his post with ECWA and was also appointed General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals of African and Madagascar. He continued to expand his influence in numerous other evangelical organizations around the world, so that by the time of his untimely death in 1975, he was widely regarded as one of the most influential African evangelicals on the world stage (Haye 1986: 36-68).

Connection with a particular mission network opened certain doors to an African living in the diaspora. Missionary societies had historic or religious ties to institutions in Europe and America and, more often than not, missionaries directed African migrants in these pre-established directions. For that reason one can identify patterns of migration among Africans associated with a given mission network. Such was the case with Githendu at Fircroft and Kato at London Bible College. Another example is Emmanuel Akingbala, a Yoruba pastor who was President of the Nigerian Baptist Convention between 1972 and 1977. When he won a scholarship from the Southern Baptist Convention USA (which had missionary ties to Nigeria) in 1947 he chose to study theology at Virginia Union University. The reason given was that "Numerous Nigerian Baptist men and workers have had a stint with this University over the years" (Ajayi 1999: 70-71). Another example is that for many years, Nigerian Anglicans migrated to Sierra Leone for higher education. Thus in 1930 there were at least twenty-nine priests with degrees from Fourah Bay College.⁴⁶

It has already been mentioned that mission networks continued to influence Africans after independence, but did this influence exist among the churches that emerged after the end of colonialism? In Igboland, a spate of neo-Pentecostal churches emerged in the 1960s and 1970s with limited formal ties to the historic missions. What is striking is that even these independent churches sought to establish relationships with western mission networks. This subject has been discussed by Richard Burgess in *Nigeria's Christian Revolution*. Neo-Pentecostals were influenced by Pentecostal theology emanating from the West and so a number of Igbo leaders made contact with Pentecostals in the United States. Thus Burgess writes, "Out of the nineteen [neo-Pentecostal church] founders interviewed, fifteen have travelled to the US during the late 1970s or early 1980s. Of these, eleven attended some form of American Bible

⁴⁶ *Annual Report of the Committee of the Church Missionary Society*, (Salisbury Square, London, 1930).

training institution (eight attended Pentecostal institutions), and nine have maintained links with American Pentecostal ministries or churches" (Burgess 2008: 198-99). Burgess' analysis suggests, therefore, that mission networks are continuing to influence the migration patterns of Africans.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that African migrants relied upon mission networks while living in Britain. These networks will likely prove useful in analyzing patterns of migration in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Africa, especially among students (Sanneh 1983: 130-135, 162-4). Historically, African Christians relied on missions for protection, social advancement and solutions to the problems they encountered in colonial society. This essay suggests parallels in the ways Africans related to mission networks in the diaspora. If this is indeed the case, it is an area that warrants further investigation and may help explain how migrants overcame obstacles in Britain, particularly those connected with the missions in Africa. It is not clear how many did, but there is anecdotal evidence that the number is significant. Even if the number is not terribly large, this topic is probably worth exploring because most political and intellectual leaders of independent Sub-Saharan Africa were connected with the missions in their formative years. Many of them also lived for a time in the diaspora and it would be helpful to learn what role mission networks played in the process. As it stands, none of these questions have been thoroughly considered in African Diaspora Studies.

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