WORLD VISIONS: ‘NATIVE MISSIONARIES,’ MISSION NETWORKS AND CRITIQUES OF COLONIALISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY SOUTH AFRICA AND CANADA

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It is unclear from extant scholarship how Indigenous people responded to, understood and engaged with the global dimension of nineteenth-century Christian missions.¹ This chapter begins to address this question by examining the way two ‘native missionaries’ in different parts of the British Empire—Tiyo Soga in the Cape Colony (1829–1871) and Henry Budd in the Canadian Northwest (1812–1875)—used their involvement with British mission organisations to construct and mobilise visions of the wider world and respond to colonialism.² Examining the writings of Soga and Budd this chapter argues two things: ‘native missionaries’ saw the world as a place divided by religion and connected by Biblical history; and they used this world vision to critique colonialism and create unique understandings of either pan-Africanism or what might be termed ‘pan-Indigeneity,’ the belief that historic and contemporary experiences connected so-called ‘Indigenous’ people in the nineteenth-century.

¹ Peggy Brock, “New Christians as Evangelists,” in Missions and Empire, Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series, ed. Norman Etherington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 132–52, is one of the few scholars to comment directly on the global awareness of the ‘Native missionary,’ although, for the most part, she downplays the influence of ‘the global’ in the lives of Indigenous Christians. J. D. Y. Peel, Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), implies that Biblical narrative and some ideals of modernity shaped the lives of African missionaries, but he does not explore how they developed images of the wider world due to their lives as missionaries. Elizabeth Elbourne, Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions, and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799–1853 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s, 2002), chapter 7, hints at how European missionaries made Indigenous Christians aware of global networks of mission societies in the 1830s, although she does not comment directly on how these Indigenous Christians developed visions of the wider world.

² To avoid the use of the outdated term ‘Native’ in the South African context, throughout this chapter, ‘Indigenous,’ ‘African’ and ‘Aboriginal’ are terms used somewhat interchangeably to describe the ethnicity of Henry Budd and Tiyo Soga. ‘Native missionary’ and ‘The Native Church’ are retained when referring to the profession and institution associated with British mission organizations.
Transregional networks created by British mission organisations introduced ‘native missionaries’ to the wider world. Zoë Laidlaw describes mission Societies as “structures providing ready-made imperial networks.”3 Indeed, compared to informal transregional networks based on school connections and the more formal networks of colonial administrators and scientific societies, mission organisations were remarkably well organised to facilitate the movement of information across the British Empire.4 The exact outlines and dynamics of the networks created by mission societies are difficult to determine precisely and each mission organisation—such as the Church Missionary Society (CMS); The Foreign Mission Committee of the United Presbyterian Church (FMCUPC) and London Missionary Society (LMS)—had their own way of operating and shaping their networks.5 Centred in the home-office of particular mission organizations in Britain, mission networks comprised the hundreds of missionaries employed throughout the world, and the thousands of mission supporters and contributors in Britain. The official correspondence from the mission field/periphery formed the bulk of the information moving through these networks. These writings were often added to and edited by administrators in Britain before being passed on to supporters in Britain and missionaries around the Empire in the form of mission periodicals and other publications. Another avenue through which information moved outwards from the metropolitan centre comprised letters from Britain to individual missionaries. In these ways, information flowed from one field to another, usually through the central node of the mission society’s headquarters in Britain. These networks were very dynamic.


4 Laidlaw, Colonial Connections, 14.