

I REALLY CANNOT MAKE AFRICA MY HOME:
WEST INDIAN MISSIONARIES AS ‘OUTSIDERS’
IN THE CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY
CIVILIZING MISSION TO SOUTHERN NIGERIA,
1898–1925

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ABSTRACT: Informed by the notion of racial affinity, the European managers of the Church Missionary Society Niger Mission had required all black West Indians in their employ to make Africa their home. However, because the African posting involved a substantial devaluation in the material benefits to be derived from missionary service, West Indians vigorously objected to the idea of making Africa their home. They demanded instead to be perceived and treated as foreigners on the same footing as Europeans. Although they were subsequently defined as part of the expatriate workforce of the Mission, they were still denied parity with Europeans in the allocation of scarce benefits on the basis of racial considerations. Unresolved tensions over the redistribution of scarce resources led to the premature collapse of the West Indian scheme. This essay is an analysis of how the pursuit of socioeconomic self-interest affected the construction and representation of race and identity among the West Indians in the Niger Mission.

KEY WORDS: Diaspora, Nigeria, Christianity.

PUBLISHED views on the West Indian missionary project in Southern Nigeria have identified the patriotic ideals of race unity and belonging, including pan-Africanism and the humanitarian desire to uplift Africans from their cultural and spiritual degradation, as the most decisive and fundamental forces that induced the migration of black West Indian missionaries to Africa under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) civilizing mission. The present article argues that, based on previously unexplored CMS Niger Mission archives, a comprehensive understanding of the remote and immediate motivations of these missionaries, including their relationship with the ancestral homeland, can only be attained through a study of both their socioeconomic motives and the more altruistic ones cited above.

A comprehensive study of these motives will show that, notwithstanding the forces of race unity and black nationalism, these West Indian missionaries strongly objected to making Southern Nigeria their permanent home when invited to do so by the Niger Mission. That objection, which was informed by their socioeconomic self-interest, supports W. Moses's assessment of Paul Cuffe's involvement in the African repatriation movement in the United States: 'It is essential to the success of nationalism that patriotic ideals go hand in hand with economic self-interest'.¹

¹ W. J. Moses, *Classical Black Nationalism: From the American Revolution to Marcus Garvey* (New York, 1996), 48.

“‘We poor because we black’ still reflects’, according to M. C. Alleyne, ‘the understanding of black people [in Jamaica] of the way in which, historically, their race and colour have been the object of exploitation and degradation’.² Among African-Americans, B. M. Magubane has also noted that the ideas of returning to Africa ‘always surfaced and became an issue when the heel of oppression descended heavily upon them’ in the latter part of the nineteenth century.³ Race consciousness, as these observations indicate, reflects the changes taking place in the socioeconomic and political conditions of people in society. Hence, according to P. Gilroy, it ‘is most constructively apprehended as a specific social product, the outcome of historical processes that can be mapped in detail’.⁴

Given the inspiration and insights provided by these scholars, this article explores how the pursuit of socioeconomic self-interest affected race thinking and identity among the West Indians in the CMS Niger Mission between 1898 and 1925. The discussion is informed by the assumption that race ideas, including notions of personal and group identity, are socially constructed representations that unfold at specific stages in the history of individuals, institutions and states.

MOTIVES FOR EVANGELIZING WEST AFRICA AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR RACE THINKING

A broad survey of the motives and circumstances informing the evangelization of West Africa by West Indians will inevitably highlight the thoughts of Christian Missions on the subject, including those black political activists who expressed the desirability of civilizing the ancestral homeland through its sons and daughters in the New World. The ideas and contributions associated with these organizations and persons overlap in many respects because they were fostered and influenced by a number of related social and ideological forces, including race, during the nineteenth century. Regarding race, for example, they all believed that racial essences could determine the actions of people because ‘there must be some real essence that held the [African] race together’.⁵

The publication in 1839 of *The Slave Trade and its Remedy* by T. F. Buxton, one of the most articulate and unrepentant critics of the slave trade, provided an ideological inspiration for the British civilizing mission to the Niger in 1841.⁶ That expedition, which claimed the lives of many Europeans, suggested the urgency of recruiting persons of African descent

² M. C. Alleyne, *The Construction and Representation of Race and Ethnicity in the Caribbean and the World* (Jamaica, 2002), 193.

³ B. M. Magubane, *The Ties that Bind: African-American Consciousness of Africa* (Trenton NJ, 1994), 77.

⁴ P. Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge MA, 2000), 57. For more views on the sociohistorical process of race construction see A. K. Appiah, ‘Race, culture, and identity: misunderstood connections’, in A. K. Appiah and A. Gutman (eds.), *Colour Consciousness: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton, 1996).

⁵ Appiah, ‘Race, culture, and identity’, 52–83.

⁶ C. C. Ifemesia, ‘The civilizing mission of 1841: aspects of an episode in Anglo-Nigeria relations’, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, no. 11, vol. 3 (1962), 291–310.

as partners in the evangelization of West Africa. The prevailing disease theory was that these persons would be more resistant to some of the abiding ailments associated with the West African environment. Thus, for example, those African-Jamaicans who accompanied Hope Waddell on the 1846 Church of Scotland Mission to Old Calabar, Southern Nigeria, were recruited on the reasoning that

[The European leaders of the Mission] see plainly that the fittest men for the evangelization of Africa are the native Christians of the West Indies, headed, in the first instance at least, by European missionaries inured to the tropics.⁷

The above Church of Scotland Mission was, however, preceded by a mission in 1841 to Fernando Po under the auspices of the Baptist Church in Jamaica. Like the former mission, the personnel of the latter had been drawn largely from among Jamaicans of African ancestry.⁸ By the mid-nineteenth century the Church of England, the focus of this essay, had also decided to explore the West African missionary field. In 1861 the Jamaica Church of England Home and Foreign Missionary Society was founded to pursue, among other aims, the propagation of the Gospel 'in that portion of Western Africa, bordering on the River Pongas'.⁹

However, before the formation of the above organization in Jamaica, the Anglicans in Barbados had formed an association to sponsor a West Indian Mission to West Africa. In 1855 that association commenced operations at the Rio Pongas; it became known thereafter as the Pongas Mission.¹⁰ Between 1861 and 1869 the Jamaica Church of England Home and Foreign Missionary Society was able to contribute cash donations to the Pongas Mission. After its disestablishment in 1870, the finances of the Church of England in Jamaica suffered and contributions to the Rio Pongas Mission fell drastically.

The appointment of Enos Nuttal as the bishop of Jamaica in 1880 gave a new fillip to the West African mission. According to P. Bryan, Nuttal was a believer in Anglo-Saxon civilization and a 'keen imperialist' who 'spoke of the promotion of the "mental and moral elevation" of the African, by those who had an interest in their welfare'.¹¹ He therefore encouraged and prepared black Jamaicans for missionary work in the Pongas Mission. In 1896 – a period roughly coinciding with the inauguration of the CMS Niger Mission scheme – Nuttal sent three black Jamaicans to the Rio Pongas as missionaries of the Church of England in Jamaica.¹²

Directly or indirectly, the ideological background that encouraged and produced the aforementioned projects within the Protestant churches – whether based in England, the United States or the West Indies – was also influenced by the race thinking of many nineteenth-century black scholars,

⁷ M. H. Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: A Review of Missionary Work and Adventure 1829–1858* (London, 1970), 663.

⁸ I. K. Sibley, *The Baptists of Jamaica* (Kingston, 1976), 23–5.

⁹ J. B. Ellis, *The Diocese of Jamaica: A Short Account of its History, Growth and Organization* (London, 1913), 81–96.

¹⁰ A. C. Dayfoot, *The Shaping of the West Indian Church 1492–1962* (Gainesville FL, 1998), 182–3.

¹¹ P. Bryan, *The Jamaican People 1880–1920* (London, 1991), 50.

¹² E. L. Evans, *The 150th Anniversary of the Diocese of Jamaica 1824–1974* (Kingston, 1970), 37–46.

activists and publicists in the New World, including W. E. Blyden and A. Thorne. The latter had argued, for example, that the slave trade, its bitter and dehumanizing legacies notwithstanding, could be seen as God's own grand design to achieve a purpose. In a similar vein, Blyden wrote:

God has his designs upon that vast land ... The branch torn away from the parent stem in Africa, by our ancestors, was brought to America – brought by Divine permission – in order that it might be engrafted upon the tree of the Cross. It will return in part to its own soil, not by violence or deportation, but willingly, and borne on the wing of faith and charity.¹³

The above thinking reflects the biblical idea regarding Joseph's servitude in Egypt that later became a blessing for his family when they were reunited. Symbolically, the sons and daughters of Africa in the diaspora perceived themselves as 'Josephs' who were going home. Inspired by this combination of providential philosophy and a strong sense of race belonging – also called 'Evangelical Pan-Africanism' by Tony Martin¹⁴ – Blyden campaigned for the voluntary homecoming of the sons and daughters of Africa. Once home, as he put it, they must work to roll 'back the appalling cloud of ignorance and superstition which overspreads the land'.¹⁵ Motivated by these factors persons of African descent in Barbados founded the Fatherland Union Society and the Colonization Society 'for assisting in the suppression of the slave trade, and the introduction of civilization into Africa'.¹⁶ Thorne, a Barbadian who had settled in Jamaica, also campaigned for the migration of Jamaicans to Africa. Between 1893 and 1899 he formulated a scheme, the African Colonial Enterprise, with a view to achieving the following objective, among others: 'To assist enterprising members of the African race now resident in the Western Hemisphere to return and settle down in their fatherland, Nyasaland, British Central Africa, being the site selected'.¹⁷

Setting aside the grand objective of Africa's redemption from the perceived cultural and spiritual degradation, relocation to the fatherland was also perceived as an exercise to liberate blacks from the political and cultural domination of the Western Hemisphere by Europeans. Only by relocating to Africa, these publicists and activists argued, would the oppressed black populations in the New World achieve 'any material change' in status.

This much the history of the world establishes, that races either fossilized, oppressed, or degraded, must emigrate before any material change takes place in their civil, intellectual, or moral status; otherwise extinction is the consequence.¹⁸

These activists, in essence, held the view that relocation could be mutually rewarding: while holding out the prospect of greater material advancement for the returnees, the benighted populations in the ancestral homeland would also gain enlightenment through the secular and evangelistic activities of the former.

The views represented by Blyden and Thorne were not different from those of the Pan-African Association that was inaugurated in 1897 by

¹³ W. E. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Baltimore, 1994), 115.

¹⁴ T. Martin, *The Pan-African Connection: From Slavery to Garvey and Beyond* (Cambridge MA, 1983), 31–46.

¹⁵ Blyden, *Christianity, Islam*, 47.

¹⁶ J. A. Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa 1900–1945* (Oxford, 1978), 20.

¹⁷ Bryan, *The Jamaican People*, 258.

¹⁸ Blyden, *Christianity, Islam*, 123.

S. Williams of Trinidad.¹⁹ Williams and his ideological allies, including W. E. B. Du Bois, were cognisant of the potential material benefits to be derived by Africans from the educational and industrial programmes of European missionary societies; but they were unequivocally critical of the alliance being forged between these missionary societies and the colonial state to enhance the exploitation of Africa. As Du Bois put it: 'Let not the cloak of Christian missionary enterprise be allowed ... to hide the ruthless economic exploitation and political downfall of less developed nations'.²⁰

Race, as the above overview shows, was the central and overriding motive force generating interest in the evangelization of Southern Nigeria by black West Indians. There is very little or no discussion of the fact that these people were also going to Africa to pursue their own socioeconomic self-interests under the cloak of Christianity: this is a conspicuous shortcoming in the established historiography – particularly the works of Ellis, Sibley, Bryan, Martin and Dayfoot. Nor do these earlier histories explain why the European managers of the CMS Niger Mission began turning to the West Indies for missionaries of African descent after the death of Bishop S. A. Crowther. To address these shortcomings I will examine the inauguration of the West Indian scheme by the Niger Mission.

THE INAUGURATION OF THE WEST INDIAN SCHEME BY THE CMS NIGER MISSION

Up until 1891 the CMS Niger Mission was headed and administered by Samuel A. Crowther, a Yoruba by birth and an ex-slave. Henry Venn, the advocate of the philosophy of 'native agency' and the secretary of the CMS, took the extraordinary step of advancing Crowther as an illustration of that philosophy. After Venn's death in 1872, however, the bishop's administrative authority came to be questioned. Subsequently, his powers were gradually taken away and restored to Europeans. In 1890 a committee, dominated by Europeans, was inaugurated to investigate a report on the finances of the Niger Mission.

Although the aged bishop was spared, this committee made scandalous allegations of huge financial misappropriation and social and moral improprieties, including spiritual unfitness, against the officials of the Niger Mission. In the subsequent purge that followed, most of the Sierra Leonian officials – clergymen, catechists and teachers – were disgracefully dismissed from the Niger Mission. The complex and intricate matters that were generated in the aftermath of this purge had not been fully settled or resolved before the bishop died in 1891.

After the bishop's death, his son and heir apparent D. C. Crowther, encouraged by other African missionaries such as Bishop J. Johnson, formally seceded from the Niger Mission to form the Niger Delta Pastorate Church. Over time, however, Crowther reconciled with the Niger Mission under Bishop Herbert Tugwell – the man appointed in 1894 by the Church of England to succeed the late bishop. With this reconciliation the Pastorate

¹⁹ Martin, *The Pan-African Connection*, 11.

²⁰ Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism*, 28.

became a branch of the Church of England, but within an independent African diocese.²¹

By 1894, as a direct consequence of the mass dismissal of the Sierra Leonians, there were only six indigenous – that is non-European – members of staff in the entire workforce of the Niger Mission. Among them was one ordained minister, William Spencer, as well as three catechists and two teachers. As the Mission struggled to readjust its operations with the personnel now available, another disaster struck. Following an outbreak of yellow fever on the coast of Southern Nigeria in 1894, six Europeans in the Mission's workforce died. The Mission was thus left with one European as its secretary and the six indigenous members of staff who had survived the purge of 1890–1.

Given the shortfall in its workforce, the Niger Mission was unable to man and protect its stations scattered across Southern Nigeria. In the general climate of hostility against Christianity in West Africa during the nineteenth century, any missions left unmanned and unprotected tended to degenerate rapidly. Thus at Abonnema and Brass, all in the Niger Delta, the CMS churches and their converts came under attack from advocates of the indigenous religious heritage. Destruction at these stations persuaded Sir Claude MacDonald, the consul-general of the Niger Coast Protectorate, to send the following telegraphic message to Salisbury Square in 1894: '[M]issions at Abonnema and Brass have been for several months without a head and are rapidly being ruined, immediate action necessary'.²²

Salisbury Square was unable to respond immediately for two reasons: it neither possessed the personnel nor the incentive to recruit more Sierra Leonians. As observed above, the events leading up to Bishop Crowther's death, which culminated in the formation of the Niger Delta Pastorate, had damaged the decades of trust and confidence that Salisbury Square reposed in Sierra Leonians and their spiritual fitness for missionary work in West Africa. Based on this, Salisbury Square began to think about recruiting black West Indians for those positions previously held by Sierra Leonians in the Niger Mission.

Two other related factors recommended black West Indians to Salisbury Square during this critical period of acute labour shortfall in the Niger Mission. In 1892, following a visit to Jamaica on the instructions of Salisbury Square, the bishop of Sierra Leone, E. G. Ingham, made a submission to the Lady Mico Charity urging it to undertake the training and preparation of 'young men of African descent who may be selected for the work in Africa, either as ordained clergymen, or catechists, or school masters'.²³ The Lady Mico Charity, it should be noted, was founded in 1834 for the 'Christian education of the liberated slaves in the West Indies, and other British colonies'.²⁴ In making the above recommendation, the bishop of Sierra Leone

²¹ G. O. M. Tasié, *Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta 1864–1918* (Leiden, 1979), 83–165.

²² W. E. Wariboko, *Planting Church Culture at New Calabar: Some Neglected Aspects of Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta 1865–1918* (Bethesda, 1998), 128–39.

²³ CMS papers – Heslop Room, University of Birmingham Library – G3A3/1906/52 'The Lady Mico Charity and West Indian Missionaries in the Niger Mission'.

²⁴ *Ibid.* Also see F. J. Klingberg, 'The Lady Mico Charity Schools in the British West Indies, 1835–1842', *Journal of Negro History*, 24 (1939), 291–344.

was extending the trail blazed by the Basel Mission in Ghana. By the mid-nineteenth century the latter had worked out an arrangement with the Mico Charity School 'to train young men [of African descent in the Caribbean] for the work of evangelists' in Ghana. The Basel Mission had preferred West Indians to Sierra Leonians because they were not sure of securing 'second and third generation tested African Christians' in Sierra Leone.²⁵

The arguments of the CMS Niger Mission for wanting to recruit West Indians, rather than Sierra Leonians, re-echoed some of the prejudices of the Basel Mission. Before the death of Bishop Crowther in 1891, the CMS leadership debated whether West Indians were 'a more hopeful bridge between Europe and Africa than an indigenous recaptive [Sierra Leonian] population'.²⁶ The preference for black West Indians was predicated on the fact that they had been 'long uprooted from Africa, ... and thus were less likely to lapse into Africa's unredeemed past'.²⁷ This debate, in a way, was revisited after the death of Bishop Crowther. James Norris Cheetham, the chief accounting officer of the Niger Mission between 1899 and 1931, argued that all the African employees of the colonial state in Sierra Leone, their level of education and Christianity notwithstanding, needed the 'constant oversight by Europeans or they seem at once to fall back into loose and slovenly ways'.²⁸

Such sentiments about Sierra Leonians persisted. In 1907 Cheetham used the example of Bishop Crowther and his team of Sierra Leonian clergymen and lay teachers to illustrate the ease with which the enlightened indigenous captives could relapse.

Up to 1890 the [Niger] Mission was entirely in the hands of Africans, and, as usually happens in such cases, abuses of different kinds crept in amongst the agents and converts which certainly would not have been tolerated by Europeans. As I have often said in these columns, the black man almost invariably makes a bad leader, and Bishop Crowther appears not to have been an exception to this rule.²⁹

In terms of race thinking these remarks could readily illustrate, as Gilroy has argued, how 'race was given philosophical gravity by the notion that character and talent could be distinguished unevenly and had been distributed by nature along national and racial lines'.³⁰ As these comments also demonstrate, race was used to shape missionary organizations during the expansion and development of the imperial system outside of Europe.

²⁵ D. J. Antwi, 'The African factor in Christian Mission to Africa: a study of Moravian and Basel Mission initiatives in Ghana', *International Review of Mission*, 88, no. 344 (1998), 62.

²⁶ L. Sanneh, 'The CMS and the African transformation: Samuel Ajayi Crowther and the opening of Nigeria', in K. Ward and B. Stanley (eds.), *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799-1999* (Richmond, 2000), 85. ²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ 'Southport Missioner: Mr. J. N. Cheetham on his way to Sierra Leone', in *Southport Visitor*, 19 Dec. 1899. For details on James N. Cheetham see W. E. Wariboko, 'James Norris Cheetham and the CMS civilizing mission to Igboland: an examination of his "letters" to the *Southport Visitor*, 1899-1931' (unpublished manuscript, 2002).

²⁹ J. N. Cheetham, 'Fifty years on the Niger', in *Southport Visitor*, 3 Sept. 1907.

³⁰ Gilroy, *Against Race*, 58.

Having rationalized the preference for West Indians as discussed above, arrangements were put in place for the Mico Training College to prepare candidates for the CMS civilizing mission in Southern Nigeria. In addition to its regular students, the College began to admit three missionary students every year until the demise of the scheme in 1925.³¹ Most of these students, drawn from the families of Christianized small peasant farmers and agricultural wage-labourers in Jamaica, were from a very modest socioeconomic background. It could therefore be argued that, among other reasons, they had been attracted to the programme with a view to getting respectable education that would facilitate their upward social mobility in society. Salisbury Square had, for example, acknowledged that these students were being offered 'a corresponding training to what is given to our elementary school masters in England'.³²

The education offered at the Mico Training College was designed to instil European secular and spiritual values in the missionary students. At a farewell party in 1915 the principal of the College had described all the graduating missionary students as 'fine specimens of our black English men in Jamaica'.³³ Anglicized black Jamaicans, according to Bryan, had 'a tendency to distance themselves from the culture of Africa, but not from Africa as homeland'.³⁴ The Niger Mission became the principal beneficiary of the Mico Training College programme. The other sister CMS Missions in Nigeria – the Yoruba Mission and the Northern Nigeria Mission – employed very few West Indians as compared with the Niger Mission.

In an apparent response to the ideological opinion³⁵ prevalent in the West Indies, which encouraged peoples of African descent to migrate to the continent, Salisbury Square demanded that West Indians employed at the Niger Mission 'should settle down in Africa in the same way as Europeans settle as colonists in Canada or South Africa and come home on visit occasionally'.³⁶ Assimilation or incorporation of West Indians into the host communities of Southern Nigeria was the ultimate principle that informed the position of Salisbury Square. Bearing in mind that '[w]here strangers are visibly different from indigenous inhabitants, fusion between them is less likely than where they are physically indistinguishable',³⁷ the following condition was given by Salisbury Square for the recruitment of West Indians into the scheme.

³¹ CMS papers, G3A3/1915/19, 'Lady Mico Charity [11 North Station Road, Colchester] to Mr. G. T. Manley', 12 Mar. 1915.

³² CMS papers, G3A3/1901/10, 'Extract of a letter dated March 30, 1899 from Rev. F. Baylis to Rev. T. J. Dennis'.

³³ CMS papers, G3A3/1915/16, 'Extract of a letter from Elliot Howard to the Archbishop of the West Indies', 26 Feb. 1915. ³⁴ Bryan, *The Jamaican People*, 259.

³⁵ I am referring here to the opinions that informed the formation of the Back-to-Africa movement, including the African colonization schemes, championed by black activists such as W. E. Blyden and A. Thorne. See the relevant subsection of this article: 'Motives for evangelizing West Africa and their implications for race thinking'.

³⁶ CMS papers, G3A3/1917/12, Sidney Smith to G. I. Manley, 7 Apr. 1917.

³⁷ M. Wilson, 'Strangers in Africa: reflections on Nyakyusa, Nguni, and Sotho evidence', in W. A. Shack and E. P. Skinner (eds.), *Strangers in African Societies* (Berkeley, 1979), 51–66.

Offers of service from candidates of mixed descent thought suitable for service in West Africa should not be accepted [in order to avoid] the misunderstanding of those ['in the interior districts of West Africa'] who are not accustomed to the idea of black and white races intermarrying.³⁸

It is obvious that Salisbury Square had launched this programme of homecoming on one assumption: that the perceived racial affinity, including any other shared racial characteristics between black West Indians and West Africans, would persuade the former to embrace the programme enthusiastically and unconditionally. The responses of the West Indians, as discussed below, highlighted the flaws in the race thinking of Salisbury Square and drew attention to the fact that 'wherever the modern idea of "race" took hold, a characteristic perversion of the principles of democratic politics was the result'.³⁹

RESPONSES OF THE WEST INDIANS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR
INTERPRETING MOTIVES AND RACE THINKING

T. J. Dennis, the secretary of the Niger Mission, wrote to Salisbury Square in 1901: 'If it is decided to let us have one of the two men [referring to S. M. Binger from Jamaica] ... it should be made plain to him before hand that his footing here will be that of a Sierra Leone or Lagos agent, and he will be ranked and paid as a school master only'.⁴⁰ Ranking West Indians on the same footing as Sierra Leonians was based on the assumption that they had decided to make Africa their home as contained in the *Special Regulations for West Indian Workers*.⁴¹ The endorsement of that document, the Niger Mission subsequently argued, had disqualified West Indians from securing any privileges and benefits constitutionally provided for 'foreign' missionaries within the establishment.

The West Indian recruits were not pleased with this policy. Responding to the above arrangement and the race thinking that informed it, the West Indians declared their desire to 'be treated [and perceived] as ... missionaries sent from the West Indies in the same way *mutates mutandis* as white men sent from Europe'.⁴² As the spokesperson for the West Indians, W. E. Blackett, put it:

I have been informed that the Society expects West Indians to make Africa our home, while I agree – that is if things work well – to spend as much as possible of my life in the Society's work in this or any other of its missions to which I may be sent, I really cannot agree to make Africa my home.⁴³

The desire to retain their status as 'foreign missionaries' on the same footing as Europeans begs one question: within the CMS Niger Mission establishment what socioeconomic benefits accrued to the 'foreign missionaries'

³⁸ CMS papers, G3A3/1898/1, 'Initial guidelines for the deployment of West Indian missionaries', Nov. 1898.

³⁹ Gilroy, *Against Race*, 62.

⁴⁰ CMS papers, G3A3/1901/36, T. J. Dennis to F. Baylis, 6 Mar. 1901.

⁴¹ CMS papers, G3A3/1903/96, minutes of the Executive Committee, Niger Mission, Sept. 1903.

⁴² CMS papers, G3A3/1905/72, J. MacIntyre to Rev. F. Baylis, 11 June 1902.

⁴³ CMS papers, G3A3/1902/62, 'Petition from Mr. Blackett', Mar. 1902.

as distinct from those considered indigenous? These included, among others, guaranteed periods of furlough to the United Kingdom paid for by the CMS; a guaranteed education plan for the children of European missionaries in any of the CMS colleges in Great Britain; and the guarantee that, if disabled in Africa, European missionaries would be sent back to the United Kingdom and maintained thereafter by the CMS.⁴⁴

Attracted by these and other socioeconomic benefits to be mentioned later, these West Indians began to define themselves as a group of 'outsiders' culturally and socially distinct from the indigenous populations. According to R. Smith, West Indians outside of the Caribbean 'experience a feeling of identity that is based not only on race or territorial affiliation, but on the common inheritance of a created, valued way of life that is creole'.⁴⁵ A petition from Blackett to the Niger Mission emphasized how the West Indians viewed themselves and their creole way of life: 'The West Indian on the [West] Coast whether in business or Government employment ranks himself above the Sierra Leone educated man'. In terms of food consumption, the petition went on, the former 'has been used to milk, bread, butter, sugar, tea, coffee, fresh meat and fresh fish as necessities of life'; while the regular and staple food items of the latter consisted of rice and yams, including 'inexpensive sauces made with dried fish, dried meat or vegetables'. The case for social and cultural differentiation ended on the note that: 'The domestic matters of West Indians differ greatly from Sierra Leonians with whom we are classed'.⁴⁶

By differentiating themselves as 'outsiders', these West Indians could be considered, for analytical purposes, as strangers and liminal entities in their ancestral homeland. The stranger, according to D. N. Levine's 'Paradigm for the sociology of the stranger',

may wish merely to *visit* the host community, remaining an outsider throughout his visit; or he may desire *residence* in the host community without becoming assimilated into it – to be in the group but not of it; or he may aspire to gain *membership* as a fully integrated participant in the host community.⁴⁷

To gain that membership as a fully integrated participant in the host community, however, would involve a transition from the state of liminality to the state of *communitas* – a process rejected by the West Indians in order to qualify for the benefits accruable to 'foreign' missionaries in the CMS Niger Mission.

Paradoxically, as the passage below suggests, the West Indians as strangers were still being denied full membership of the family of 'foreign' missionaries they were prepared and willing to identify with. Their situation, in a sense, reflected the plight of the 'marginal man' as portrayed by R. E. Park: 'one who lives in two worlds, in both of which he is more or less a stranger'.⁴⁸ However, notwithstanding the matter of 'marginality', these West Indians were challenging and renouncing 'race' as the basis for common action and

⁴⁴ CMS papers, G3A3/1905/72, J. MacIntyre to Rev. F. Baylis, 2 Mar. 1905.

⁴⁵ R. Smith, *Kingship and Class in the West Indies* (Cambridge, 1988), 184.

⁴⁶ CMS papers, G3A3/1902/62, 'Petition from Mr. Blackett', Mar. 1902.

⁴⁷ D. N. Levine, 'Simmel at a distance: on the history and systematics of the sociology of the stranger', in Shack and Skinner (eds.), *Strangers*, 21–36. ⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 23.

belonging. In short, they were reproducing their own constructions of identity, community and history with a view to contesting and transforming existing racial meanings.

Because the West Indian mode of life among the upwardly mobile closely resembled the European lifestyle, as Blackett tried to argue in the petition, they deserved to be on the same footing as Europeans. With reluctance, as this excerpt from Thos Alvarez's letter to Salisbury Square reveals, the Niger Mission reclassified its workforce in order to satisfy the West Indians:

Certainly when we all came to look into the matter we all came to the conclusion that, much as we regretted it, we did not see any prospect of avoiding a separate classification of workers – West Indians as distinct from Sierra Leonians.⁴⁹

With this reclassification, the West Indians succeeded in retaining their status as 'outsiders' or 'foreign missionaries'; but they were still 'not acceptable as substitutes for Europeans'.⁵⁰ This was because, according to the secretary of the Niger Mission, Sidney Smith: 'West Indians however good they may be can never take the place of Europeans'.⁵¹

The sentiments underlying Smith's comments appear similar to those described by Gilroy when he argued that 'Racially differentiated groups no longer shared the same present. The dominant group could enlist the irresistible momentum of history on their side and treat their apparently anachronistic subordinates as if they belong to the past and had no future'.⁵² To press the case for equality, however, the West Indians formed an association called the West Indian Missionaries Conference to 'deal with matters which affect them as a body and to make such representations to the home and local boards of the Society as may seem necessary from time to time'.⁵³ Rather than promote their goals of equality with white missionaries as they had hoped, the West Indian Missionaries Conference actually created further racial and ethnic polarization between West Indians and Europeans in the Niger Mission.

Europeans, as 'foreign missionaries', could apply for ordination into priesthood. Hence, following their reclassification as 'outsiders', interested West Indians decided to approach the Mission on the matter of ordination. In 1911, for example, R. A. Llewellyn 'asked that he might be allowed to read during his furlough at the Church Theological College, Jamaica, with a view to being ordained before his return to the mission field'.⁵⁴ But his application to Herbert Tugwell, the bishop of the Niger Mission, was

⁴⁹ CMS papers, G3A3/1902/61, Thos E. Alvarez to Rev. F. Baylis, 11 June 1902.

⁵⁰ CMS papers, G3A3/1911/32, minutes of the Executive Committee, Niger Mission, 30 Jan. 1911.

⁵¹ CMS papers, G3A3/1914/13, Sidney Smith to G. Manley, 3 Jan. 1914.

⁵² Gilroy, *Against Race*, 57.

⁵³ W. L. Brown, 'The CMS cause: some facts about Mission work', *Jamaica Times*, 18 Mar. 1910. (These newspapers are available at the National Institute of Jamaica in Kingston.)

⁵⁴ CMS papers, G3A3/1918/28, minutes of the Executive Committee, Niger Mission, July 1918.

rejected on the note that: '[T]he CMS declines to nominate any for ordination save those of English birth'.⁵⁵

In addition to being deprived of equality with Europeans in the payment of wages and allowances, West Indians were also denied ordination on the basis of race. In fact, notwithstanding their reclassification, their pay remained on par with the Sierra Leonian agents. According to Blackett, West Indians 'cannot close the year without debts' because their annual salary of sixty pounds was 'insufficient to keep [them] on the most economical lines'.⁵⁶ To impress upon Salisbury Square how deeply they felt about their exploitation and gross underpayment by the Niger Mission, Brown and Llewellyn – all from Jamaica – undertook to compare the earnings of Blackett with those of G. S. Basden, a European.

W. E. Blackett came out about the same time as ... G. S. Basden. The former has given eighteen and a half years actual service at a total cost of about two thousand, two hundred pounds or one hundred and eighteen pounds per annum [including travelling and furlough allowances]; the latter has done thirteen years actual service in the field, ... we are of the opinion from a rough calculation that the amount would not be less than four thousand, five hundred pounds or three hundred and forty-six pounds per annum and that exclusive of personal grants not made to West Indians.⁵⁷

In another protest action W. W. White, also from Jamaica, resigned to seek a more lucrative employment with the colonial administration at Zungeru in Northern Nigeria. This excerpt from his resignation letter is very reflective of the socioeconomic motives that propelled these missionaries to Southern Nigeria.

No aspirant in this practical world would be contented to earn enough only to supply the demands of the belly and neglect his aged and widowed mother, other dependent-on-him relatives and his own other necessary wants. Such is my case. Am taken from my country and brought here and am paid five pounds per month which can scarcely supply the existence of life. I may then regretfully say that no aspiring West Indian, as all ought to be, will be able to work contentedly ... at so small a salary.⁵⁸

The responses of the Niger Mission to the demands for socioeconomic parity revealed one sad fact: they were calculated to defend 'the white-skin privilege',⁵⁹ as Appiah calls it, from encroachment. In advising Salisbury

⁵⁵ CMS papers, G3A3/1915/8, Bishop Herbert Tugwell to G. T. Manley, 8 Jan. 1915. (Before the programme ended, however, the CMS revised the policy that prevented West Indians from ordination.)

⁵⁶ CMS papers, G3A3/1902/62, 'Petition from Mr. Blackett', Mar. 1902.

⁵⁷ CMS papers, G3A3/1919/44, Reuben Llewellyn and Walter Brown (on behalf of West Indian Missionaries) to the foreign secretary, CMS papers, Rev. G. T. Manley, 7 Aug. 1919.

⁵⁸ CMS papers, G3A3/1903/99, W. William White, 'Conflict with the superintendent of the Lokoja Mission, Rev. J. MacIntyre', May 1903.

⁵⁹ Appiah, 'Race, culture, and identity', 82.

Square about the demands of the West Indians, the secretary of the Niger Mission had this to say:

I feel strongly that while I value the West Indians and appreciate their work as much if not more than any one, I would not be prepared to make any radical changes in order to keep them in our service if by so doing the status of the men becomes for all practical purposes that of European missionaries.⁶⁰

To put the matter squarely in the words of C. W. Mills, the foregoing passage suggests that race was being perceived and used by the managers of the Niger Mission as 'the marker of entitlement or dispossession, ... normative inclusion or ... exclusion, full or diminished personhood'.⁶¹

Disillusioned and demoralized by the CMS's policy on equity and status, which barred some of its members from assuming their rightful places on the basis of race and colour, the agents began writing letters to the West Indies in order to discourage enlistment into the programme. In one of these letters, which was published in the *Jamaica Times*, Brown lamented thus: 'All of us are considerably tied in subordinate positions under European missionaries ... and any advance in our position depends on the goodwill of those Europeans'.⁶² Thus in 1919 R. J. Daley, who had completed training and was awaiting deployment, withdrew from the programme on the direct advice of those aggrieved missionaries in Southern Nigeria. Part of his letter read as follows:

I find that the salary offered is only sixty pounds per annum ... and conditions created by the War are such that this amount cannot be considered a living wage. *I have been informed by other West Indians that even prior to war times that amount was inadequate.* I would be very grateful if this question could be settled before my sailing for the field [my italics].⁶³

I only need to remark that Daley never sailed out for the West African missionary field in Southern Nigeria. In fact, between 1920 and 1925, those in West Africa gradually resigned from the scheme to take up more lucrative jobs within and outside of Nigeria. The recruitment programme of West Indians collapsed in 1925. The force of racism within the CMS Niger Mission eroded the initial philanthropic and patriotic ideals of those West Indians who had enlisted in the scheme.

The entire narrative on the struggle for socioeconomic parity with Europeans has underscored, according to Alleyne, one of the principal forces influencing the construction and representation of race and ethnicity in the Caribbean and the world: '[E]conomic deprivation will continue to nourish racial/ethnic assertion and polarization. In the context of scarce resources, persons and groups may fall back on ethnicity and ethnic rivalry to protect themselves'.⁶⁴ It also supports Nancy Foner's conclusion regarding the responses of West Indians 'to life abroad'. Their responses, according to

⁶⁰ CMS papers, G3A3/1917/2, Sidney Smith to G. T. Manley, 7 May 1917.

⁶¹ C. W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (London, 1998), 127.

⁶² Brown, 'Looking into West Africa', *Jamaica Times*, 30 July 1910.

⁶³ CMS papers, G3A3/1920/6, R. J. Daley to the secretary, CMS papers, 15 Dec. 1919.

⁶⁴ Alleyne, *The Construction and Representation of Race*, 252.

Foner, 'are neither inevitable nor "natural". Much depends on where they move. Of critical importance are the structures of incorporation in the receiving society, including the structures of race and ethnic relations, ... and occupational opportunities'.⁶⁵ Given the CMS's assumptions about race and racial belonging, including the lack of occupational opportunities for the West Indians, we can now better explain their responses to the programme to recruit them for service in West Africa.

CONCLUSION

The quest for scarce socioeconomic benefits, including the agitation for social equality with Europeans in the workforce of the Niger Mission, has clearly indicated that the West Indian missionaries came to West Africa in part for personal advancement. They saw participation in the Niger Mission as a means of social mobility, but they were also motivated by deep philanthropic sentiments. Many joined with the thought of influencing, in some ways, the 'benighted' peoples of the ancestral homeland. In doing so, however, they were no less critical of the ancestral homeland and its heritage than the Europeans. Brown, the secretary of the West Indian Missionaries Conference, described the Igbos in 1910 as 'a hopelessly savage and degenerate race; a people who had no time to attend to religion, whose daily round was to eat, drink and be merry; but never with the thought that tomorrow they will die'.⁶⁶

This kind of derogatory perception of the continent and its inhabitants, Alleyne has argued, was 'The effect of the "creolization" and nativization of Africans in the Americas'; and it was also responsible for 'the rejection of Africa, its norms and its values, in favour of European norms and values'.⁶⁷ It is therefore not surprising that Brown's creolized perception of Igboland, 'which has as its mirror image the glorification of "white" and "Europe"', was not dissimilar to that of Cheetham – a European missionary in the Niger Mission – who described the Igbos in 1908 as not having 'very deep and subtle minds such as are found in some of the Asiatic countries'.⁶⁸

Wittingly or unwittingly, Brown and his colleagues in the Niger Mission, more than any other single group in the Caribbean, assisted in keeping the myth of African 'savagery' alive during the post-slavery period in the Americas. In contrast, African-American missionaries to the continent were more circumspect in their portrayal of Africa to the New World. According to D. F. Roth: 'In their letters to stateside periodicals and in speeches during furloughs, black missionaries increasingly refused to portray the African as "uncivilized" and "savage"; he was unsaved, perhaps, but not unsound'.⁶⁹ This was because the African-Americans, unlike their counterparts in the

⁶⁵ N. Foner, 'Towards a comparative perspective on Caribbean migration', in M. Chamberlain (ed.), *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities* (London, 1998), 47.

⁶⁶ Brown, 'Looking into West Africa'.

⁶⁷ Alleyne, *The Construction and Representation of Race*, 223.

⁶⁸ Cheetham, 'Southern Nigeria – native habits and customs', *Southport Visitor*, 28 Apr. 1908.

⁶⁹ D. F. Roth, 'The "black man's burden": the racial background of Afro-American missionaries and Africa', in S. M. Jacobs (ed.), *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa* (Westport CN, 1982), 34.

Niger Mission, only sought, as Roth puts it, 'to convert the African soul without changing the African heart [culture]'.⁷⁰

Frantz Fanon, originally from Martinique, has described what he calls a 'creole identity and consciousness'. Gilroy describes this as a 'double consciousness'. According to Fanon, Brown and his West Indian colleagues suffered from a condition that reflected 'the special difficulties arising from black internalization of European identity'⁷¹ and sensitivity to the 'badge of colour'. 'Don't pay attention to my skin', the West Indian urged the European in Fanon's account, 'it is the sun that has burned me; my soul is as white as yours'.⁷² The rejection of the 'badge of colour' also amounted to a rejection of blackness – a given particularity, according to the political language of identity, as distinct from a chosen connection⁷³ – in their construction of personal and ethnic identities.

On the other hand, as Appiah has argued, they were being sensitive to the collective black racial identity because 'Once the racial label is applied, ideas about what it refers to, ideas that may be much less consensual than the application of the label, come to have their social effects'.⁷⁴ The relationship of domination based on culture and race, which barred West Indians from asserting their preferred and chosen identity among the family of 'foreign' missionaries in the CMS Niger Mission, is a vivid illustration of the inimical social effects of race described by Appiah.

It could also be argued in the same vein that, by rejecting the CMS offer and choosing instead to remain as 'liminal entities' in their ancestral homeland, these missionaries were echoing Appiah's critical commentary on the politics of recognition, identity and personhood within the Niger Mission: '[T]he insults to their dignity [or personhood] and the limitation of their autonomy imposed in the name of [black racial identity is] seriously wrong'.⁷⁵ Put differently, like those suffering oppression in the racialized politics of the New World, they were demanding that recognition and selfhood be disengaged from race.

The West Indians in the CMS Niger Mission acted in other ways to prevent challenges to their personal identities. They rejected the CMS policy that they were 'expected to marry Sierra Leonians'.⁷⁶ As the following indicates, they also objected to the idea of spending vacation in West Africa: 'We have been informed that furlough means to spend the time at Sierra Leone or some other place on the coast, to this we cannot agree. Sierra Leone or any other place on the coast is not our home'.⁷⁷ By rejecting opportunities for social integration within Africa, however, and also condemning the

⁷⁰ The attempt by these African-Americans to protect African cultures, Roth admits, did not work; this was because African cultures had come under attack by other forces of change during this time. The critical point, however, is that these missionaries, unlike their West Indian colleagues, attempted to protect these cultures.

⁷¹ This is the concept of 'double consciousness' or 'twoness' as espoused by W. E. B. Du Bois; for more on this see P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, 1993), 126–45.

⁷² F. Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution* (London, 1970), 35.

⁷³ Gilroy, *Against Race*, 106. ⁷⁴ Appiah, 'Race, culture, and identity', 78.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 98.

⁷⁶ CMS papers, G3A3/1902/76, W. E. Blackett to Thos Alvarez, 21 Aug. 1902.

⁷⁷ CMS papers, G3A3/1902/62, 'Petition from Mr. Blackett', Mar. 1902.

indigenous heritage, these missionaries were unequivocally indicating how they intended to relate to West Africa. P. E. Skinner describes this as a 'dialectic between diasporas and homeland': 'They would learn about Africa, help it become free [from anti-Christian prejudices], but not necessarily return there'.⁷⁸ This type of race belonging and identification with Africa represents a version of diaspora consciousness that is markedly different from the position held by those Rastafarians in the Caribbean who continue to advocate for their repatriation to Africa.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ P. E. Skinner, 'The dialectic between diasporas and homeland', in J. E. Harris (ed.), *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora* (Washington, 1993), 23.

⁷⁹ B. Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Syracuse NY, 1995), 248–58.