Let us "also work with our hands, so that the Lord's work may be furthered": A Disruptive Ecclesial Economy at Kafumba, 1922-1943

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Abstract: Aaron and Ernestina Janzen, American Mennonite Brethren missionaries, resigned from the Congo Inland Mission in 1920 in order to begin independent work at Kafumba. A lack of financial support from their Mennonite Brethren Conference led them to undertake significant self-supporting activities, including the production of palm oil, coffee, and food crops. Historians have disagreed about whether this episode of independent, self-supporting mission—which ended after the conference takeover in 1943—should be interpreted as an all-too-brief moment of gospel equality and economic sharing, or as an unfortunate derailment into a colonialist, station-centered pattern of ministry. This essay offers the first detailed analysis of the ecclesial economy of Kafumba prior to 1943 based on primary sources. It demonstrates that the experiences of church shared by the Janzens and Congolese believers played a crucial role in shaping the development of this economy over time. Though marked by a degree of paternalism and racial separation, the Kafumba economy followed a disruptive logic by providing a refuge to Congolese young people from the most exploitative and abusive aspects of the palm oil industry that dominated the region.

INTRODUCTION

Aaron and Ernestina Janzen were American Mennonite Brethren (MB) missionaries who arrived in the Kasai District of the Belgian Congo in 1913 to work with the Congo Inland Mission—a joint initiative, founded in 1911, of two American Mennonite denominations, the Defenseless Mennonite Church and the Central Conference Mennonite Church. They thus became some of the first Mennonite missionaries to work in the Belgian Congo, even though at the time, their Mennonite Brethren Conference was not officially supervising any mission work in Africa.[1]

*Anicka Fast is a doctoral candidate at the Boston University Center for Global Christianity and Mission. This article is dedicated to the memory of Kikweta Mawa Jean (1947-2019), Congolese Mennonite Brethren historian and founder of the *Centre de recherches Aaron Janzen*. Discussions with Kikweta, in which he shared his passion to recover the memory of the contributions of the first Congolese missionaries to work alongside the Janzens at Kafumba, played a large part in inspiring this research.

1. Melvin Loewen, *Three Score: The Story of an Emerging Mennonite Church in Central Africa* (Elkhart, Ind.: Congo Inland Mission, 1972), 39-41; J. B Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Church*

Though Aaron regretted the lack of an MB "working field" in Africa, he and Ernestina believed that the opportunity to work "under this branch of the Mennonites" constituted God's leading.[2] However, after a decade of work with the Congo Inland Mission, the Janzens left in 1922 to begin an independent missionary effort several hundred miles away in the Kwango-Kwilu region, hoping that this work would eventually be supported by their Mennonite Brethren Conference.[3] There, at Kafumba, they founded a station that would thrive for the next two decades.

Major centers of Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren mission activity in Belgian Congo, ca. 1959.[4]

In contrast to common Protestant mission practice in Belgian Congo, the work at Kafumba was largely self-supporting through the production of coffee, palm oil, and food crops. Though individuals and congregations in North America channeled some financial support for Kafumba through the treasurer of the MB Conference, the work at Kafumba was not

in Zaire (Fresno, Calif.: Board of Christian Literature / Hillsboro, Kan.: General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), 42-43. The Defenseless Mennonite Church is now known as the Evangelical Mennonite Church, while the Central Conference of Mennonites joined the General Conference Mennonite Church in 1945.

2. Aaron A. and Ernestina Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2397), *Zionsbote*, Jan. 8, 1913, p. 2.

3. Board of Foreign Missions, Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, *Foreign Missions, Africa* (Hillsboro, Kan.: Board of Foreign Missions of the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1947), 36.

4. Cartography by Hans Fast and John Clarke.

officially supervised and supported financially by the Mennonite Brethren Conference until 1943, following six appeals for support by the Janzens and their fellow North American missionaries.[5] After taking over the work, the MB Conference promptly liquidated the palm and coffee plantations.[6] Subsequently, the AMBM (American Mennonite Brethren Mission) embarked on a wave of rapid post-war expansion that brought it into step with other Protestant missions in the Belgian Congo, most notably through its acceptance, in 1952, of colonial subsidies for its primary schools.[7] By 1959, on the eve of independence, forty-four AMBM missionaries were at work on seven stations.[8] Enrollment in mission-run primary schools climbed to 10,000 students by 1971, slightly surpassing the baptized membership in 1972 of 9,720 Congolese Mennonite Brethren.[9]

This brief interlude of self-supporting mission work at Kafumba between 1924 and 1943 has attracted sharply opposing interpretations by Congolese and North American MB historians. Soon after their official involvement in Belgian Congo began, North American MB mission administrators started to interpret the self-supporting activities at Kafumba as incompatible with a growing emphasis on "indigenization"

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5. The treasurer of the MB Conference regularly remitted funds to the Janzens that had been sent to the conference for the Kafumba work, and included these amounts in regular reports in the *Zionsbote*. The Janzens' letters to the *Zionsbote* regularly thanked supporters for their gifts. The funds received were sporadic and did not cover the needs of the Kafumba station; however, gifts were sometimes generous enough to permit significant purchases, such as that of a truck in 1931.— Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), Jan. 13, 1932; *Zionsbote*, March 16, 1932, p. 2. The Janzens appealed for official conference support in 1919, 1927, 1930, 1936, 1938, and 1940. Hans Kasdorf, "A Century of Mennonite Brethren Mission Thinking, 1885-1984" (Th.D., University of South Africa, 1986), 524-530; George W. Peters, *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions* (Hillsboro, Kan.: Kindred Press, 1984), 138-141; Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire*, 55-56; A. E. Janzen, "Historiography of the Africa M.B. Mission Endeavor in Congo by the M.B. Conference, and Antecedent Events," Nov. 1969, MB Mission Archives, A250-10-3, Box 7, File: Historical Accounts. Kasdorf and Peters review the 1919, 1927, 1930, 1936, and 1938 appeals. Toews records only the acceptance in 1943. A. E. Janzen is the only one to mention a sixth appeal in 1940.

6. Mawa Wabala Kikweta, "Histoire de la Communauté des Églises des Frères Mennonites du Zaïre (CEFMZ)" (Institut Protestant de Théologie, 1977), 93. See also John B. Kliewer, "Historical Sketch of Certain Aspects of the Work [of] the Mennonite Brethren Missions Services in the Congo" (unpublished manuscript, 1968), 12, MB Mission Archives, A250-10-3, Box 7, File: Historical Sketch Kliewer.

7. Anicka Fast, "Sacred Children and Colonial Subsidies: The Missionary Performance of Racial Separation in Belgian Congo, 1946-1959," *Missiology: An International Review* 46:2 (April 2018), 124-136; Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire*, 105-107.

8. Minutes, Africa Field Council, July 26-Aug. 2, 1959, MB Mission Archives, A250-10-1, Box 1, File: Minutes and reports, Field Council, 1959-63.

9. "Education and teacher preparation." N.d. (ca. 1971), MB Mission Archives, A250-10-3, Box 6. File: Education, general & misc., 1969-1987; Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire*, 166.

that began to influence the MB Conference in the 1940s.[10] By 1952, the new group of missionaries, under the strong leadership of J. B. Toews, a visiting representative of the home board, agreed that the economic activities of the previous era had contributed to an excessively station-centered ministry, which had undermined the development of an "indigenous church."[11] Toews himself lamented during this visit that the relative lack of evangelism in relation to the "institutional" work of running schools and hospitals constituted the greatest weakness of the work.[12] Decades later, in his 1978 history of MB mission work in Zaire, Toews reflected that if self-support at Kafumba had been moderately successful, this should be considered as God's providential provision for a time when little support was available from home, but not as a desirable arrangement.[13] For Toews, station-centered ministry was a "pattern" influenced by "colonialism." He approvingly quoted a former mission board secretary, A. E. Janzen, who concluded that this form of mission work prevented the church from becoming self-sufficient and "gave them the concept that the mission churches were a foreign movement."[14]

Later developments likely also played a role in shaping Toews's interpretation of the self-supporting activities at Kafumba. As executive secretary of the MB Mission Board from 1953 to 1963, during a period of major political transition in the MB mission fields of India and Congo,

10. Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire,* 101. For a few contemporary examples of the promotion of "indigenous church" language during the 1940s, see A. E. Janzen, "Survey of Five of the Mission Fields of the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America Located in India, Africa, Brazil, Paraguay and Colombia, made by A.E. Janzen, executive secretary and treasurer of the Board of Foreign Missions during Dec. 1948 to June 10, 1949" (Unpublished manuscript, 1950), MB Mission Archives, 57; A. E. Janzen to J. B. Kliewer, Dec. 5, 1947, MB Mission Archives, A250-10-2, Box 4, File: John B. and Ruth Kliewer, 1947-1949; Minutes, Africa Field Council, March 14-17, 1949; Kafumba. MB Mission Archives, A250-10-1, Box 1, File: Minutes and reports, Field Council, 1949-1954. A missionary who arrived in 1953 recalled the frequent advice of home board secretary J. B. Toews to "Work your way out of a job," and emphasized that turning things over to local leadership was "why we were there."—Anonymous MB missionary, oral history interview, June 30, 2016, Reedley, Calif. (USA), by Anicka Fast.

11. Minutes, Africa Field Council, June 24-28, 1952, Belle Vue, esp. p. 3-4, MB Mission Archives, A250-10-1, Box 1, File: Minutes and reports, Field Council, 1949-1954.

12. "Today I am much alarmed, no deeply convicted on this point. We have expanded, we have been building new stations, overtaken new field, and not done what we went to do in Africa. May God show us a way," Toews concluded in a report written to his fellow board members.—J. B. Toews, "Continuation of Preliminary Report to the Chairman and Ex. Secr. of the Board," 4.

13. Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire*, 51-55.

14. Ibid. Toews was citing A. E. Janzen, "The Development of Missionary Dynamic among American Mennonite Brethren," in *The Church in Mission: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to J. B. Toews* (Fresno, Calif.: Board of Christian Literature, Mennonite Brethren Church, 1967), 160.

Toews played an influential role in promoting a mission strategy focused on the "indigenous church," and in attempting to shift the MB missionaries away from strategies and relationships that seemed imperialistic or "colonial."[15] During a time when intense debates about evangelism vs. social action pitted evangelicals against mainline Christians, Toews and his fellow board members earnestly sought to keep evangelism as the "central aim of [the] missionary program."[16] Though Toews and others believed they were distancing themselves from colonial logic through a strategy of indigenization, through their acceptance of subsidies they soon found themselves even more deeply mired in the very station-centered and "institutional" setup they had thought they were rejecting when they abandoned the plantation approach at Kafumba.[17] From within this set of commitments—with hindsight sharpened by regret about subsequent developments—it is not surprising that Toews's account presented the Janzens as loyal denominational missionaries whose straitened financial circumstances had unfortunately derailed them into a distracting focus on economic activities.

In contrast, Congolese MB historians have tended to narrate the self-supporting activities at Kafumba as an important step toward ecclesial self-sufficiency and equality between North American missionaries and Congolese. For them, it was unfortunate that the mission halted those activities when it took over the work in 1943. Thus, Kikweta Mawa Wabala Jean (first reference in footnotes was: Kikweta Mawa Jean] and Matsitsa Maurice have expressed the belief that "if the AMBM had continued with Aaron Janzen's vision, the CEFMC [Communauté évangélique des Frères mennonites au Congo / Evangelical Community of Mennonite Brethren in Congo] would have become more self-sufficient." They argue that by subsidizing the mission station and shutting down the agricultural

15. Clarence Hiebert, "J.B. as Missiologist," *Direction: A Mennonite Brethren Forum* 26:2 (1997), 34-37.

16. J. B. Toews, "Continuation of Preliminary Report to the Chairman and Ex. Secr. of the Board," p. 4. ca. 1952, MB Mission Archives, A250-0-3, Box 16, File: J. B. Toews, 1950-1952. Other examples of this perspective are abundant in AMBM meeting minutes and reports from the late 1940s and early 1950s. See for example Minutes, Missionary administrative committee, Dec. 26-27, 1952, Kipungu, MB Mission Archives, A250-10-1, Box 1, File: Minutes and reports, Missionary Administrative committee, 1947-1952; and Minutes, Field Council, June 24-28, 1952, Belle Vue, MB Mission Archives, A250-10-1, Box 1, File: Minutes and reports, Field Council, 1949-1954. For a brief historical overview of the tensions within the Western missionary movement at mid-twentieth century, and the debates about the relative priority of evangelism and social justice in mission, see Dana Lee Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 68-72.

17. Fast, "Sacred Children and Colonial Subsidies," 133.

activities, "the AMBM imitated the policies of the Belgian colonial state."[18] Interviewed by Congolese historian Erik Kumedisa in 2001, a number of Congolese Mennonite Brethren pastors also lamented the ending of the self-supporting activities at Kafumba in 1943, claiming that the funding of church activities solely by North Americans—instead of by local resources managed by the Janzens in collaboration with Congolese as "responsible partners"—contributed significantly to a "mentality of dependence."[19] Congolese historian Pakisa Tshimika sees the error of the 1943 move away from self-financing activities to be its entrenchment of a separate economic system for missionaries and Congolese. In his view, the result of the AMBM shutdown of palm nut and coffee production activities at Kafumba was that missionaries were now "paid by the mission . . . but they forgot the locals."[20]

In short, the perspective of Congolese MB historians is diametrically opposed to that of North American MB mission administrators, specifically as it relates to questions of dependency, self-sufficiency, and equality. In general, the interpretation of Congolese historians is that the ecclesial economy at Kafumba prior to 1943 constituted a unique historical moment in which the equality of believers was expressed concretely through economic structures that included both white missionaries and Congolese.

These sharply contrasting interpretations of the significance of the Kafumba economy confront scholars with perplexing ironies. How could mission administrators appeal to "indigenization"—a discourse that evoked the ideal of a self-supporting church—in order to end self-supporting activities at Kafumba? If American mission administrators truly believed they were moving away from "colonial" mission practices, why have Congolese historians understood the actions of the mission board as a step in precisely the opposite direction?

In this essay, I argue that in order to untangle these divergences, an ecclesial lens of interpretation must be applied, both to the events of the past and to the debates in the present. By paying close attention to divergent understandings of the church and its mission in relation to

18. Jean-Claude Wabala Kikweta and Maurice Matsitsa-N'singa, "The Mennonite Brethren Church in the Congo," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church around the World: Celebrating 150 Years*, ed. Abe J. Dueck and Mennonite Brethren Church (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 2010), 168.

19. Interviews with Congolese Mennonite Brethren pastors Mukoso, Giwoma, Mabaya, Shindanyi, Kusangila, and Ndunda. Kikwit, Feb. 2001, as cited in Kumedisa, "Mennonite Churches in Central Africa," 60.

20. Interview, Pakisa Tshimika, June 30, 2016, Fresno, Calif., by Anicka Fast. My translation from French original.

contested moments in the missionary encounter, this research seeks to shed new light on the complex relationship between mission societies and colonial governments.

More broadly, through the use of an ecclesiological lens, I seek to contribute to an ongoing reconception of the historiography of the missionary encounter itself. Following increasing scholarly awareness of the shift of Christianity's center of gravity to the Global South, historians of world Christianity have begun to call for a renewed historiography of the world Christian movement—one that would not only move beyond a fixation with the actions of Western missionaries,[21] but would also avoid the opposite error of downplaying non-Western forms of Christianity as a "a mummified specimen of Western colonial hegemony."[22] Such a historiography would use the entire church as its frame of reference.[23] Increasingly, historians have adopted a focus on the missionary encounter as an orientation that has the potential to overcome a false dichotomy between "mission" and "church," and to illuminate the agency of all parties while maintaining awareness of power differences.[24] More recently, scholars of world Christianity have become increasingly explicit about the need for this "aspiration for unity" to shape the study of world Christianity as a "mode of doing research" that does not apologize for the

21. J. F. Ade Ajayi and E. A. Ayandele, "Writing African Church History," in *The Church Crossing Frontiers. Essays on the Nature of Mission. In Honour of Bengt Sundkler.*, ed. Peter Beyerhaus and Carl F. Hallencreutz (Lund: Gleerup, 1969), 94; Lamin Sanneh, "World Christianity and the New Historiography: History and Global Interconnections," in *Enlarging the Story: Perspectives on Writing World Christian History*, ed. Wilbert R Shenk (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 97; Andrew F. Walls, "Eusebius Tries Again: The Task of Reconceiving and Re-Visioning the Study of Christian History," in *Enlarging the Story: Perspectives on Writing World Christian History*, ed. Wilbert R Shenk (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002), 8.

22. Sanneh, "World Christianity and the New Historiography," 103; see also Wilbert R. Shenk, "Toward a Global Church History," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20:2 (April 1996), 54. Among the earliest calls for scholars to become aware of the southward shift of the Christian population are Dana L. Robert, "Shifting Southward: Global Christianity since 1945," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24:2 (April 2000), 50-58; see also Shenk, "Toward a Global Church History." A broad scholarly consensus about this shift began to develop after the publication of Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

23. Shenk, "Toward a Global Church History," 54; Walls, "Eusebius Tries Again," 8.

24. *Paul V Kollman, The Evangelization of Slaves and Catholic Origins in Eastern Africa* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2005), 12. Other significant monographs on the twentieth-century missionary encounter in Africa include Dorothy Louise Hodgson, *The Church of Women: Gendered Encounters between Maasai and Missionaries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Barbara MacGowan Cooper, *Evangelical Christians in the Muslim Sahel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Richard Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa*, Reconsiderations in Southern African History (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012).

"intrusion of theology" into the supposedly objective study of religion, but recognizes the situated nature of all engaged scholarly inquiry.[25] The call of these colleagues resonates with a significant current within Anabaptist theology, in which ecclesiology and missiology, church and mission, are intimately connected.[26] It also overlaps with the passion for catholicity that undergirds the definition of mission proposed by several prominent African theologians. For example, Jean-Marc Ela, a Cameroonian Catholic theologian, defined mission as "the activity by which the church seeks to render itself universal," while Ghanaian Protestant theologian Kwame Bediako understood mission as the activity of bringing people "together to become and to recognize each other as one people."[27]

In this article, I attempt to bring together these insights into a historiographical frame of reference that seeks to take a further step beyond the subtle dichotomy that still persists between "church history" and "mission history." I propose that all church history must pay close attention to the missionary encounter as the site where what it means to be church is first negotiated and performed in a way that shapes all the parties permanently as members of one body. At the same time, all mission history must be attentive to the ways in which church was constituted concretely by both arriving missionaries and the local believers. In the case of Kafumba, such a refusal to exempt expatriate missionaries from "church," or Congolese Christians from "mission," helps to reveal the heart of the tension around the divergent interpretations of its ecclesial economy. At the same time, such a historiographical orientation makes the importance of revisiting contested and even painful episodes within the missionary encounter readily apparent. As the recent dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation

25. Joel Cabrita and David Maxwell, "Introduction: Relocating World Christianity," in *Relocating World Christianity: Interdisciplinary Studies in Universal and Local Expressions of Christianity*, ed. Joel Cabrita, David Maxwell, and Emma Wild-Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 38; Emma Wild-Wood, "Afterword: Relocating Unity and Theology in the Study of World Christianity," in *Relocating World Christianity: Interdisciplinary Studies in Universal and Local Expressions of Christianity*, ed. Joel Cabrita, David Maxwell, and Emma Wild-Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 338.

26. In Anicka Fast, "The Earth Is the Lord's: Anabaptist Mission as Boundary-Crossing Global Ecclesiology," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 90 (July 2016), 307-322, I review the work of several scholars within the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition who develop an ecclesiological understanding of mission: David A. Shank, John H. Yoder, Wilbert Shenk, Larry Miller, John D. Roth, Steven Nolt, and César García.

27. Jean-Marc Ela, *African Cry*, trans. Robert R Barr (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 9; Kwame Bediako as interviewed in James Ault, *African Christianity Rising* (James Ault Productions, 2013).

and Mennonite World Conference has reminded us, the act of revisiting places of competing memory has ecclesiological significance precisely because remembering rightly is part of what binds us together into a single body.[28] Debates about the interpretation of the past are thus closely connected to our ongoing ability, as Mennonites from around the world, to understand ourselves as a global church engaged together in mission.

Drawing on this historiographical perspective, this essay revisits the understudied episode of a self-supporting economy at Kafumba. Though historians have expressed strongly divergent opinions on this matter, none have yet produced a detailed description and analysis of the ecclesial economy of Kafumba prior to 1943 based on archival sources. This research draws for the first time on two significant and nearly untapped sources of information about Kafumba's ecclesial economy—the *Zionsbote*, a North American Mennonite Brethren weekly church magazine published in German, and recently published correspondence from a member of a Belgian Study Commission into labor conditions in the region in 1929-1930.[29] Broadly, the data presented here supports the interpretation of Congolese historians. The economy at Kafumba, though marked by a degree of paternalism and racial separation, provided a refuge for early Congolese Mennonite Brethren from some of the harshest aspects of the colonial economy. Moreover, in order to appreciate the development and impact of this economy, it is necessary to pay careful attention both to the ecclesial self-understandings of the Christians at Kafumba and to the larger colonial and commercial context.

My argument proceeds in four stages. First, I show that the foundation of a self-supporting station at Kafumba was a conscious choice by the Janzens in response to the economic context and the lack of support from the MB Conference. Second, I argue that the development of this economic

28. The Lutheran World Federation and The Mennonite World Conference, *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ - Report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission* (Geneva; Strasbourg: Lutheran World Federation; Mennonite World Conference, 2010), 6, https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/OEA-Lutheran-Mennonites-EN-full.pdf. This study commission was formed to address the condemnation of Anabaptists in the Lutheran Augsburg Confession. For more information about the process of creating a joint history as a major task of the study commission, see John D. Roth, "How to Commemorate a Division? Reflections on the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation and Its Relevance for the Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Church Today," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 91 (Jan. 2017), 5-36.

29. Jacques Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre, Église, Capital et Administration dans le Congo des années trente*, vol. 1 (Bruxelles: Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer/Koninklijke Academie voor Overzeese Wetenschappen, 2006). This volume includes candid personal correspondence from Pierre Ryckmans to his wife, as well as official correspondence with Catholic and company representatives during the commission's operation. A second volume is forthcoming.

system at Kafumba flowed from specific ecclesiological assumptions—understandings of church—that shaped the Janzens' decisions and that corresponded with the aspirations of Congolese young men and women. Third, I examine the concrete impact of this economy, which I call an alternative, "Mennonite" form of Christendom, by exploring how the logic of the Kafumba economy interacted with that of the palm oil industry that dominated the region. Fourth, I briefly touch on the fragility of this new economy, as it was undermined by racial separation, paternalism, and assumptions of white superiority.

The Founding of Kafumba as an Economic Strategy

The Janzens, along with a half-dozen Congolese Christians who accompanied them from Kasai, began their work at Kikandji during the dry season of 1922 with language learning, the construction of rudimentary dwellings, and day and evening schools that initially attracted about twenty-five boys and ten adults, respectively.[30] Despite modest progress, the Janzens soon noticed that the local population did not have a terribly strong interest in the Christian message, and they concluded that the reason for their limited success could be traced to economic concerns. Because the local economy was still sufficiently robust to provide ample subsistence, it was difficult to recruit labor for activities of building and maintenance, and to provide an economic arrangement that was attractive enough to keep potential schoolchildren at the station. "[T]hey don't have to worry about the few francs they get for their work, because they have a lot to eat and live on," explained Ernestina, noting that workers preferred being paid in cloth.[31] Though poor soil made gardening impossible at Kikandji, the Janzens observed that most inhabitants of the area enjoyed an abundance of produce and fertile soil, especially in villages near the Kwilu river, a short walk down the mountain.[32]

To compound the problem, from the Janzens' perspective, the growing activity of European traders introduced competition for Congolese labor, which drove wages up and attracted Congolese youth to employment in

30. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), Kikandji, Oct. 28, 1922, *Zionsbote*, Jan. 10, 1923, pp. 2-3. It is fair to assume that the attendees of the night school were workmen, since it was common practice to offer schooling to these workers after their day's work was done.

31. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), Kikwit, May 8, 1923, *Zionsbote*, July 11, 1923, pp. 3-4. All translations from German are my own.

32. Ernestina and Aaron Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), Aug. 6, 1923, *Zionsbote*, Oct. 10, 1923, pp. 5-7.

various companies.[33] "There is a lot of trading of all kinds going on here," observed Ernestina in early 1923.[34] The Janzens noted the arrival of new traders regularly, some of whom were looking to settle very near Kikandji.[35] Congolese young people could earn "far more per month" by selling their rubber and palm nuts to the traders than they could hope to earn on the mission.[36] When the Janzens became aware, sometime in 1924, of the colonial government's plans to make Kikandji officially into a "Commercial Center," they realized that this would lead to a further dramatic increase in competition for the time and labor of any children whom they could attract to the mission station as pupils; the children were already being "tempted" by the higher wages offered by traders, and the Janzens began to feel that the future of their mission was at stake.[37] The Janzens also needed better gardens in order to raise food for themselves, since as independent missionaries they could not count on regular support from their church in the United States.[38] It was at this point in 1924 that the Janzens decided to move to a new station site, located on the more fertile land on the other side of the Longo River. They obtained permission to build at the new location, sold their station at Kikandji to one of several interested buyers, and moved to Kafumba by mid-1924.[39]

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33. This general dynamic, occurring all over Congo, has been described in detail by Julia Seibert. See Julia Seibert, "More Continuity than Change? New Forms of Unfree Labor in the Belgian Congo, 1908-1930," in *Humanitarian Intervention and Changing Labor Relations: The Long-Term Consequences of the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, ed. Marcel Van Der Linden (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 369-386.

34. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), Kikwit, May 8, 1923, *Zionsbote*, July 11, 1923, pp. 3-4.

35. E.g., Ernestina and Aaron Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, March 26, 1924, pp. 2-4. For evidence that the settlement by traders was increasing through 1924, see Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886). *Zionsbote*, Feb. 17, 1926, pp. 3-4.

36. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Feb. 17, 1926, pp. 3-4.

37. Ibid.

38. Ernestina explained that prices were too high in Kikwit to be able to buy many provisions, and that they ordered "provisions from England or America" during their stay at Kikandji. Their reliance on these provisions decreased drastically after Kafumba's gardens and orchards began to produce.—Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, (2886), "Aus Afrika." Kikwit, May 8, 1923, *Zionsbote*, July 11, 1923, pp. 3-4.

39. Ernestina and Aaron Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), May 26, 1924, *Zionsbote*, July 30, 1924, p. 3; Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Feb. 17, 1926, pp. 3-4. Writing decades later, Janzen gives the date of the move as July 1924.—Aaron A. Janzen,, ca. 1945. "Mission work for the M.B. Conference." 6pp. MB Mission Archives, A250-10-2, Box 3, File: A. A. and Martha Janzen, 1954-1970. However, contemporary sources suggest it may have been a few months later. Ernestina, writing around Oct. 1925, claimed that they had been at Kikandji for "a year."—Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Feb. 17, 1926, pp. 3-4. This concurs with Alma Doering's observation during her Nov. 1925 visit.— Anna Doering [*sic*]. "Aus Afrika" (750), Kafumba, Nov. 3, 1925, *Zionsbote*, Jan. 13, 1926, pp. 4-5.

After the move to Kafumba, the Janzens were happy to find that the rich agricultural land went a long way toward helping them meet their needs. "Our fields here help us a lot, since they produce well," Ernestina rejoiced.[40] With the schoolchildren, the Janzens planted large fields of corn, beans, rice, and peanuts.[41] Children worked four hours a day, before and after school hours, to cultivate the fields that provided their food.[42] After being at Kafumba for just over a year, Ernestina concluded that feeding the children "twice a day" was successful; "when they get fed here, they are far more willing to come to work and to school."[43] As they settled in, the Janzens dreamed of a time when the inhabitants of nearby villages would combine the great potential of their material situation with a saving faith in Jesus. "Our prayer every day is that this people will accept Jesus," explained Ernestina. "They will have it so good then, because this is a rich land from which so much can and will be drawn."[44]

Almost immediately, the Janzens expanded the economic activities of Kafumba to include not only subsistence agriculture but also revenue-generating activity. They planted 2,000 coffee trees, which began to produce a harvest by the early 1930s, as well as an orchard of fruit trees.[45] A few months after arriving, they also applied for an additional land grant of 120 hectares of natural palm plantation.[46] Eventually, they set up an oil production workshop on the station, where oil was extracted from the palm nuts with two hand presses prior to being sold.[47] The revenue

40. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), Sept. 28, 1925, *Zionsbote*, Dec. 16, 1925, p. 3.

41. Ibid.

42. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Feb. 17, 1926, pp. 3-4. Sick people staying at the station for medical attention were also fed. When bananas were ripe in 1925, Ernestina noted that she and Aaron would only eat a few of them; "after all we have the boarding children and many sick people who love to help eat."—Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), Sept. 28, 1925, *Zionsbote*, Dec. 16, 1925, p. 3.

43. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Feb. 17, 1926, pp. 3-4.

44. Ernestina and Aaron Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), July 8, 1924, *Zionsbote*, Sept. 10, 1924, pp. 4-5.

45. Aaron A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), *Zionsbote*, Sept. 12, 1934, p. 2; Anna Doering [*sic*], "Aus Afrika" (750), Kafumba, Nov. 3, 1925, *Zionsbote*, Jan. 13, 1926, pp. 4-5.

46. Anna Doering [sic], "Aus Afrika" (750), Kafumba, Nov. 3, 1925, *Zionsbote*, Jan. 13, 1926, pp. 4-5. They received the contract for this land in mid-1926 but may have been working it earlier.—A. A. and Ernestina Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Oct. 13, 1926, pp. 3-4. The land already contained oil palms; they were not planted there.—Aaron A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), *Zionsbote*, Sept. 12, 1934, p. 2.

47. A. F. Kroeker, an American MB who briefly joined the Janzens at Kafumba in the early 1930s, described a process of collecting and pressing the palm nuts to extract oil, which was then sold.—Joanne Kroeker, *Shiny Shoes on Dusty Paths: The Polishing of Grace* (Shippensburg, Pa.: Treasure House, 1995), 102. Yongo recalls an "oil production workshop" from the 1940s.—Interview, Yongo Antoine, Sept. 28, 2018, Delvaux, DR Congo, by Anicka Fast and

generated from these activities was used to support teacher-evangelists, and to cover the administrative, building, and labor costs associated with the running of the station.[48]

While it is difficult to reconstruct the exact financial and economic arrangements that governed the livelihood of the children and young adults at Kafumba, the residents seem to have retained a degree of control over their agricultural production and their wages, from which they willingly tithed to support the congregation and especially the teacher-evangelists who were placed in distant villages. Schoolgirls and schoolboys had their own assigned tracts of land.[49] Young men seem to have been free to harvest the wild palm nuts for cash—presumably to market to traders in the region who were collecting their own quotas to sell to one of the major palm oil companies—and they often chose to tithe on these earnings.[50] In 1938, one-third of the forty-four teachers placed in various villages were supported by the congregation.[51]

The agricultural activities on the station were varied and demanding. White visitors to the station uniformly expressed their amazement at the scale of the self-supporting activities and the management skills displayed by the Janzens. Anna Bartsch, a Canadian MB who arrived at Kafumba with her family in 1933, recalled that she "could not believe her eyes"

Maurice Matsitsa; my translation from French original. The Janzens' reference to the consumption of some of the oil as food on the station suggests that oil was indeed pressed on site. "On our land of the mission there are palm trees, which grow by nature and produce a fruit, which when pressed, produces an oil, which is quite valuable for various purposes. The natives like to use it in their food. We also use this oil and profit from it a little."—Aaron A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), *Zionsbote*, Sept. 12, 1934, p. 2. Writing later, Aaron Janzen referred to "two hand presses."— Board of Foreign Missions, Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, *Foreign Missions, Africa*, 36.

48. Kroeker, writing in 1995, recalled that the palm oil production was used to support the teachers.—Kroeker, *Shiny Shoes on Dusty Paths*, 101; Kikweta, drawing on a 1972 interview with Nganga Paul Diyoyo, claims that the funds were used to administer the station and pay for building materials and labor.—Kikweta, "Histoire de la Communauté des Églises des Frères Mennonites du Zaïre (CEFMZ)," 89, 92. Janzen, writing in 1947, specified that the money "was used to pay the boys and men and help support the work."—Board of Foreign Missions, Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, *Foreign Missions, Africa*, 36.

49. Esau mentions "fields in which the girls raise their food."—Mrs. H. T. Esau, *First Sixty Years of M.B. Missions* (Hillsboro, Kan.: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1954), 332. Ernestina describes other schoolchildren, who normally lived off the station during the dry season, coming before the start of school to "prepare their fields."—Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), *Zionsbote*, Sept. 23, 1931, pp. 3-4.

50. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886). *Zionsbote*, Dec. 15, 1926, p. 5; Pierre Ryckmans to Madeleine Ryckmans, Jan. 10, [1931], on board the Bulungu. As cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*,1:129-131, letter 84. All translations from French are my own.

51. Aaron A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), Kafumba, March 30, 1938, *Zionsbote*, May 11, 1938, p. 3.

when she saw the "vast mound of coffee beans," and observed that the "palm oil industry was very remunerative."[52] Alma Doering, an independent missionary and former colleague of the Janzens in the Congo Inland Mission, visited Kafumba in late 1925 and expressed her amazement at the work accomplished on the station in a single year. She marveled at the fruit and coffee plantations, and at the ingenuity of the Janzens in feeding 125 children daily and supporting eleven evangelists.[53] Contrasting Kafumba favorably with the stations of the Congo Inland Mission, she rejoiced that mission work at Kafumba could involve "industrial effort," yet be conducted in "faith."[54]

In the midst of these building, planting, and settling-in activities, the population of schoolchildren at Kafumba rose rapidly. Within a year, there were more than 100 pupils, including twenty-two girls.[55] A revival among the children in mid-1926 led to the conversion of forty of the now 140 children on the station and to the baptisms of twenty-one later that year.[56] Over the next years, waves of conversions continued. By the time the Janzens took a furlough in 1927-1928, sixty believers had been

52. Anna Bartsch, *The Hidden Hand in the Story of My Life*, trans. Arthur Bartsch (Winnipeg, Man.: The Christian Press, 1987), 88.

53. Anna Doering [*sic*], "Aus Afrika" (750), Kafumba, Nov. 3, 1925, *Zionsbote*, Jan. 13, 1926, pp. 4-5. Doering did not actually mention the Congo Inland Mission, but when she favorably compared the Janzens with "other missionaries," it is almost certain that she was referring to this mission, from which she was in the process of separating herself in a protracted and conflictual way.

54. Aaron Janzen also referred briefly to the "industrial school" as a source of income "on the side."—A. A. and Ernestina Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, July 1, 1925, p. 2).

55. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), Aug. 27, 1925, *Zionsbote*, Nov. 4, 1925, pp. 2-3; Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), Sept. 28, 1925, *Zionsbote*, Dec. 16, 1925, p. 3.

56. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), July 30, 1926, *Zionsbote*, Sept. 29, 1926, p. 5; Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Nov. 17, 1926, pp. 4-5. Given the inconsistencies between the sources, I have chosen to follow the earliest written source, the *Zionsbote*, for baptism statistics. According to the Janzens' letters to the *Zionsbote*, the "first baptisms" of five believers occurred in early 1924, prior to the move to Kafumba.—Ernestina and Aaron Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), May 26, 1924, *Zionsbote*, July 30, 1924, p. 3. The first baptisms at Kafumba were of eighteen girls and three boys in mid-1926.—Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Nov. 17, 1926, pp. 4-5. According to the Board of Foreign Missions, sixteen Christians were baptized prior to 1926, and thirty-seven more in 1926.— Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, *Foreign Missions, Africa* (Hillsboro, Kan.: Board of Foreign Missions of the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1947), 27. J. B. Toews states that Luka Sengele was the first convert, and was baptized in 1926, with thirty-seven more baptized later that year.—Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire*, 50. A 1964 account by Djimbo Timothy does not give numbers but notes that there were baptisms in 1925 of "Baluba people" who had accompanied the Janzens from Kasai, and baptisms of Christians "from the Kwilu area" the following year.—Pastor Djimbo T., ca. 1964. "The M.B. Church in Zaire 1924-1935," MB Mission Archives, A250-10-3, Box 7, File: Historical Accounts.

baptized.[57] By 1947, the baptized believers at Kafumba numbered over 1,600.[58]

A Holistic Ecclesial Economy at Kafumba

What factors shaped the development of this economy at Kafumba, which looked so different from what was happening on other Protestant mission stations? I suggest that ecclesial factors—namely, the experiences of church that the Janzens and the Congolese believers shared—played a crucial role in shaping the development of this vision over time.

First, in church, black and white residents of Kafumba experienced gospel equality in a familial, charismatic atmosphere. Since children were the first to convert and be baptized, the church began to take shape at Kafumba as a "crowd" or "flock" of children (*Kinderschar*) with Aaron and Ernestina as their parents.[59] The church was also shaped by the strongly revivalistic emphasis of the Janzens. The couple felt a strong sense of obligation and interest in the spiritual development of the children. During the first revival among the children in mid-1926, for example, Ernestina expressed her joy in seeing God working among "our children"; she wept to see "how the newly converted embraced each other"; and she reminded her readers of the equal footing of these children in church due to God's lack of partiality.[60] "We can say with Peter that the Lord is doing for these pagans the same as he has done for us," she insisted.[61]

Relating to these children allowed the Janzens to experience forms of solidarity that extended beyond blood ties. In the wake of revival meetings in 1929, Ernestina reminded readers at home that their children were privileged to have adults in their lives who prayed for them regularly and provided spiritual direction. She asked her readers to join her and Aaron in their efforts to pray for the Congolese children as if they were their own. "Who prays for these poor ones if you and we do not want to?" she asked. "They don't have fathers and mothers who willingly help them pray. . . . That's why we're happy to have the children here to teach them praying and God's word every day."[62] The Janzens sought to foster

57. A. A. and Ernestina Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), Kafumba, March 28, 1927, *Zionsbote*, June 15, 1927, pp. 2-3.

58. Esau, *First Sixty Years of M.B. Missions*, 338.

59. Ernestina Janzen used this term on multiple occasions; e.g. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Feb. 17, 1926, pp. 3-4.

60. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), July 30, 1926, *Zionsbote*, Sept. 29, 1926, p. 5.

61. Ibid.

62. Ernestina and Aaron Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), *Zionsbote*, June 26, 1929, p. 2.

a sense of kinship between their friends at home and the children on the station. "We call these children ours, but are they not yours, too? Yes, because you are part of this all-important work by giving and praying."[63] When Ernestina died in 1937, she was surrounded by her adopted *métis* children, as well as by an evangelist and a church leader in whom she had invested particular effort.[64] She was mourned by all as "the mother of the station"—one who had always had time to give help and counsel to anyone, white or black, who needed it.[65]

Second, baptism led to a heightened awareness among the Kafumba believers that they were joined together as active members of a missional congregation. As the church grew and the first twenty-one children—eighteen girls and three boys—were baptized following the 1926 revival, the Janzens began to describe their relationship to the children in more explicitly ecclesial terms. "We feel our responsibility to them so much more now," remarked Ernestina.[66] At the same time, the Janzens rejoiced that they now had new young co-workers in missionary outreach to the surrounding population. After preaching in a village one Sunday morning, Ernestina and Aaron were returning via another village in order to conduct an evening service there. To their surprise they found that a group of schoolchildren had preceded them and had already held a meeting complete with prayer and singing for a "huge crowd." Meanwhile, the three newly-baptized Christian boys had gone to a third village to hold meetings there as well. "We are so thankful that Jesus has chosen these underage children to announce his praises, and that they help us in the work," concluded Ernestina.[67] Even as the Janzens remained clearly in charge of the children's spiritual guidance, they also recognized their kinship with them as fellow missionaries and church members.[68]

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63. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Nov. 17, 1926, pp. 4-5.

64. Martha Hiebert, in her account of Ernestina's death, did not mention the names of the "church leader" or the "evangelist"; likely the former was Djimbo Timothy, soon to be ordained.— Martha A. Hiebert, "Aus Afrika" (2311), *Zionsbote*, Dec. 22, 1937, pp. 3-4.

65. Aaron A. Janzen,, ca. 1945. "Mission work for the M.B. Conference." 6pp. MB Mission Archives, A250-10-2, Box 3, File: A. A. and Martha Janzen, 1954-1970. See also details about Ernestina's availability for help and counsel to both white missionaries and Congolese on the station in Martha A. Hiebert, "Aus Afrika" (2311), *Zionsbote*, Dec. 22, 1937, pp. 3-4.

66. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Nov. 17, 1926, pp. 4-5.

67. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Nov. 17, 1926, pp. 4-5. The German word used is *unmündig*.

68. Richard Elphick, in his excellent monograph that explores the role of missionary institutions in fostering gospel equality in South Africa, nevertheless pays surprisingly little attention to the practice of baptism as one with equalizing implications. While he notes that baptism turned out to be an insufficient guarantee of social equality, he pays little attention to how and when baptism may have been practiced as a performative religious encounter,

Third, the Janzens did not make a strong distinction between sacred and secular spheres of work and worship. As historian James Juhnke has argued, this was typical for Mennonites of Dutch and Russian origin.[69] Mennonites of Dutch-Russian descent—including the large population of Mennonite Brethren in North America—differed from both Old Older Mennonites and Mennonites of Swiss-South German origin in having developed, already in the "old world," a "pattern of peoplehood" that resembled an "autonomous" mini-Christendom, centered on the "face-to-face relationships" experienced within the congregation or *Gemeinde*.[70] This holistic congregational ethos developed further in North America after these Mennonites—including the MBs—migrated there in the late nineteenth century.[71] In the *Gemeinde*, the relevant distinction was not between sacred and secular, but between the "world" and the church as a new commonwealth.[72]

At Kafumba, several aspects of church life resembled this Russian Mennonite ethos, and this understanding of the *Gemeinde* as the most relevant political entity. The integrated rhythm of work and worship contrasted not only with the "godlessness" of surrounding villages but also with the "worldly people" who engaged in commerce outside the station.[73] Baptism created a new political body whose members shared the Lord's Supper together,[74] were expected to make a complete separation from the practices and spiritual beings associated with their former religion,[75] participated in missionary efforts among the nearby population, and engaged in economic activities, both in order to ensure their own livelihood and in order to support the community financially.[76]

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with the express intent to transform power relations within a given political order.—Richard Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 38; see also Yolanda Covington-Ward, *Gesture and Power: Religion, Nationalism, and Everyday Performance in Congo* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016).

69. James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890-1930* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1989), 83-86; 105.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid., 86ff.

72. Ibid., 85-86.

73. A. A. and Ernestina Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), Kafumba, March 28, 1927, *Zionsbote*, June 15, 1927, pp. 2-3.

74. The example of baptized visitor Emma's participation in the Lord's Supper confirms that baptism was a prerequisite.—Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Feb. 2, 1927, p. 5.

75. Aaron A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), Kafumba, Oct. 9, 1929, *Zionsbote*, Dec. 11, 1929, p. 7.

76. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Dec. 15, 1926, p. 5.

The daily rhythm of life on the station interspersed communal work and worship. For example, the girls' regular activities could be interrupted if necessary for an "earnest prayer meeting" on the Janzens' veranda.[77] All-night prayer could be necessary when one of the children was afflicted by an evil spirit.[78] Occasional series of "deeper life" meetings were aimed at strengthening the children's prayer life and teaching them to "keep themselves unpolluted by the world."[79] Church members were encouraged not to leave and work for the commercial companies, even though they could earn higher salaries there.[80] When those who did leave the station in search of higher wages returned to Kafumba, the Janzens described their return as one of giving up their involvement in the economy of "worldly people" and being "accepted anew into the congregation" (*Gemeinde*).[81] This discourse reflected the Janzens' conception of the work of the mission as the true economy—the true work—which would lead to the ultimate betterment of the local residents in contrast to the "worldly" work that was undertaken for gain.

Fourth, Congolese Christians at Kafumba were active participants in congregational work and worship. Though Congolese voices are sparse in the sources, there are multiple indications that Congolese Christians living at Kafumba actively embraced its holistic ecclesial logic. The sources that exist show individual Congolese going through deep personal experiences of conversion, participating actively in missionary outreach, and willingly contributing financially to the congregation.

Joseph, a young man who was adopted by the Janzens at age 10, wrote down his own testimony in which he expressed his willingness to "work for Jesus":

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77. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, July 21, 1926, pp. 2-3.

78. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Feb. 17, 1926, pp. 3-4.

79. Aaron A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), Kafumba, Oct. 9, 1929. *Zionsbote*, Dec. 11, 1929, p. 7.

80. Aaron A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), Kafumba, Oct. 9, 1929. *Zionsbote*, Dec. 11, 1929, p. 7. A. A. and Ernestina Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889). *Zionsbote*, April 22, 1931, p. 2.

81. Janzen reported: Last Sunday, when we had a testimony hour with our blacks, two of our young brothers were there, who had left us before Christmas to work for the Company, since they receive more than double the salary there as they get with us. They said, after we had seriously admonished them not to leave, that they would be surely back in six months and would then work for us again. We let them go, of course, but they didn't hold out for longer than two months, then they were here and didn't want to go back again. They no longer fit in with worldly people and had had neither peace nor good fortune. Both were exceptionally happy that they could be back here again, and could be accepted anew into the congregation (*Gemeinde*).—A. A. and Ernestina Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), *Zionsbote*, April 22, 1931, p. 2.

> I was ten years old when I came here and heard God's word and turned my whole heart to the Lord. . . and now I only want to work for Jesus until he comes and picks me up; then I will go with him to his home. I would like to . . . try to pay some of my debt by working for him... I am happy here, I will do everything that comes up. . . . In the weekly school I have my class, and every evening I have prayer hour with the boys who live here on the station. I also often go to the nearby villages to tell them God's Word. And so I am on the way of Jesus. Jesus is my guide in all things.[82]

Various accounts of the initiatives taken by Kafumba students, to preach in villages, to initiate prayer meetings, and to exhort each other to reject traditional medicines after their baptism, suggest that the young people at Kafumba had embraced the vocation of evangelism along with the communal ethos of a congregational life separate from the society around them.

Congolese members of the Kafumba congregation were also willing to contribute financially to the church treasury and to take responsibility for church repairs and personal living arrangements. In 1934, Aaron reported that some of the Kafumba Christians had resolved to begin giving more and had started to give a full tenth of their income. This covered the costs of repairs to the chapel. Some of the schoolboys also began to pay the costs of their own houses, without financial help.[83] In 1938, Aaron again observed that the "Christians" helped to "support the Lord's work by tithing and other giving," and expressed his gratification at their "willingness to make sacrifices" despite what was often a high level of poverty.[84] A historical account written by Kafumba's first ordained Congolese pastor, Djimbo Timothy, in the late 1960s, emphasized the generosity of early Christians in the Kafumba area who, "as [they] accepted the Lord . . . joyfully gave their offerings." Djimbo's perception was that this generosity peaked in the 1940s, before declining gradually "for various reasons" in later years.[85]

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82. Joseph K. Janzen, [Untitled], translated from Tshiluba to German by Aaron A. and Ernestina Janzen—*Zionsbote*, Sept. 2, 1931, pp. 2-3. For details of Joseph's adoption by the Janzens, see Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), Feb. 20, 1926, *Zionsbote*, April 28, 1926, p. 4; and Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Etwas vom Malto [*sic*] Kindergarten im Congo Gebiet" (2889), *Zionsbote*, Oct. 31, 1934, pp. 2-3.

83. A. A. and Ernestina Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), Jan. 10, 1934, *Zionsbote*, March 21, 1934, p. 2.

84. Aaron A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), Kafumba, March 30, 1938, *Zionsbote*, May 11, 1938, p. 3.

85. Pastor Djimbo T., ca. 1964. "The M.B. Church in Zaire 1924-1935," MB Mission Archives, A250-10-3, Box 7, File: Historical Accounts.

In short, though the modalities of the ecclesial economy at Kafumba had been initiated by the Janzens, Congolese children and young adults were active participants in the development and implementation of this new lifestyle. Together, the Janzens and their Congolese family members had experienced a new kind of kinship that relativized previous family ties. While this led the Janzens to initiate a new economy that drew on the familiar shape of Russian Mennonite patterns of congregational life, it also attracted Congolese young people to embrace this ecclesial logic and to express their allegiance to their new polity, the church, through both spiritual and financial practices. The Janzens were happy at Kafumba in the 1920s, surrounded by their family. In 1926 Ernestina wrote, "Dear ones, we're not living on roses, but the blessings, the peace and the answers to prayer that Jesus grants us are worth more than all the rest."[86]

Aaron and Ernestina Janzen, surrounded by the children whom they brought up in their home at Kafumba, ca. 1933-1934. From left to right: Joseph Nkoy, Marthe Senene, Aaron, Marie Pierre, unknown (standing), Yvonne/Evon, unknown (possibly Josephine), Ernestina, unknown (baby), Louise Manenga (holding baby), Paul Nganga.[87]

86. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), July 30, 1926, *Zionsbote*, Sept. 29, 1926, p. 5.

87. The identification of the children in the photo, and the dating, is based on information provided by Yongo Antoine (Aug. 16, 2019), on Janzen, Ernestina and A. A. "Etwas vom Malto [sic] Kindergarten im Congo Gebiet," (2889) *Zionsbote*, Oct. 31, 1934, pp. 2-3; and on

Despite the Janzens' efforts to build bridges between their supporters in North America and their congregation in Kafumba, the MB Conference continued to decline their requests to officially support the work. The Janzens' appeals in 1927 and again in 1930 were both refused.[88] After the 1930 refusal, the Janzens made a shift toward claiming their self-supporting activities in Kafumba more openly as a legitimate option: not just as a stop-gap measure, but as sound mission strategy.[89] Aaron's letter to the *Zionsbote*, following his reception of the conference decision, openly described Kafumba's self-supporting activities as a supplement to the gifts and prayers of individual North American MBs. He wrote,

> [E]ven though the work here has not been able to be taken up as a work and field of the Conference, we are nevertheless grateful for the help which brothers and sisters of the congregations show us and also want to donate to us. We are in need of your prayers and help, and not only we alone, but also our native fellow Christians, and those who are still to be won for the Lord. But also we want to place our trust more and more in the Lord of all good gifts, and like Paul we want to work with our hands, so that his work may also be further built here and proceed in blessing.[90]

By appealing to Paul's example, Aaron claimed legitimacy for the economic activities of Kafumba as akin to the apostle's tent-making efforts. He may also have been echoing the way in which Paul associated

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Mrs H. T. Esau, *First Sixty Years of M.B. Missions* (Hillsboro, Kan.: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1954), 357. The photograph is from MB Mission Archives, A250-10, Series 6 (Photographs), Box 2, Missionaries—A. A. and Ernestina Janzen. Used by permission of the Mennonite Library & Archives at Fresno Pacific University.

88. George W. Peters, *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions* (Hillsboro, Kan.: Kindred Press, 1984), 138-139. MB historian Hans Kasdorf has argued that the official reasons given—including a difficult financial situation during the Depression, and the desire to give adequate support to existing mission work in India and China before expanding elsewhere—do not adequately explain the conference's remarkably persistent refusal to take up the Africa work for more than two decades. Drawing a parallel with MB mission work in China, he interprets the mission administrators' hemming and hawing as evidence of their "inability to establish constructive relationships with people who had gone independent routes and thereby caused dissension."—Kasdorf, "A Century of Mennonite Brethren Mission Thinking, 1885-1984," 532.

89. New appeals followed in 1936, 1938, and 1940, before the request was finally granted in 1943. Kasdorf, "A Century of Mennonite Brethren Mission Thinking, 1885-1984," 524-533; George W. Peters, *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions* (Hillsboro, Kan.: Kindred Press, 1984), 138-139.

90. A. A. and Ernestina Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), *Zionsbote*, Nov. 26, 1930, p. 3. Aaron's letter to the treasurer of the conference expressed a very similar sentiment, but without reference to Paul or to "native fellow Christians."—Aaron A. Janzen to J.W. Wiens. Sept. 23, 1930, Kafumba. MB Mission Archives, A250-10-2, Box 3, File: A. A. and Martha Janzen, 1920-1939.

self-supporting activities with an appropriate level of independence from "outsiders."[91]

As the Christians at Kafumba, both white and black, lived out a familial ecclesial ethos that was grounded in memorable shared experiences of the power of the gospel, the Janzens' awareness of their kinship with these believers helped to shift their allegiance toward their new family and toward the economy of work and worship in which they participated alongside their Congolese "children." To be sure, the Janzens' loyalty to the MB Conference never disappeared; and they and their colleagues continued to appeal for conference recognition. But the fact that Aaron stayed on in Congo for an additional ten years after Ernestina's death—totaling sixteen years without a furlough—indicates that his home and primary allegiance had now shifted to his new family in Kafumba. In 1937, shortly after Ernestina's unexpected death, Aaron's first letter to the *Zionsbote* emphasized the great blessings he received from "fellowship with the native Christians."[92] As the MB Conference continued to hold back on a full commitment to the work, the Janzens increasingly felt free to own the economic activities at Kafumba as a legitimate expression of the gospel. Working with their hands became an integral part of the ecclesial economy at Kafumba.

The Economy at Kafumba in Broader Context

This analysis of the internal ecclesial logic that drove the development of the holistic economy at Kafumba is incomplete without an examination of the concrete impact of these self-financing activities within the larger economic context of the Kwango-Kwilu region. While Kafumba was a small station compared with the massive concessions owned by the various palm oil companies or even the Catholic missions, it followed a disruptive logic by providing a refuge to Congolese young people from the most exploitative and abusive aspects of that economy.

The Kwango-Kwilu area was under the particularly strong influence of the Huileries du Congo Belge (HCB), a company owned by the British Lever Brothers that had been accorded leases in five areas of Belgian Congo since 1911.[93] One of HCB's main areas of operation, the Lusanga

91. 1 Thess. 4.10b-12. "But we urge you, beloved . . . to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and be dependent on no one."

92. Aaron A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), Kafumba, March 30, 1938, *Zionsbote*, May 11, 1938, p. 3.

93. Henri Nicolaï, "Le Congo et l'huile de palme. Un siècle. Un cycle ?," *Belgeo. Revue belge de géographie*, no. 4 (Dec. 31, 2013), 4, https://doi.org/10.4000/belgeo.11772.

Circle, encompassed much of the Kwango-Kwilu region.[94] Kafumba was located at the edge of this circle, between the areas under HCB control and those dominated by HCB's Portuguese rivals, such as the Madail company to whom Kafumba sold its oil.[95] HCB provided most of the infrastructure of the region (for example, roads, ferries, bridges, and docks), but also engaged in coercive tactics among the population in order to recruit cutters of palm nuts. The company pressured cutters to sign contracts, renewed workers' contracts without their consent, and imposed high quotas on cutters regardless of seasonal variation.[96] By the end of the 1920s, the labor situation was critical. Indeed, historians have identified HCB's tactics as one of the main triggers of the Pende Revolt in 1931, a significant uprising against Belgian rule that resulted in more than 1,000 deaths.[97] Already prior to the revolt, the Belgian government appointed a study commission to examine labor problems in the colony, including in the Kwango-Kwilu area.[98] One of the commissioners was Pierre Ryckmans, a lawyer from Brussels who would later become governor general of the colony. Ryckmans's recently published private correspondence with his wife, company officials, and the Jesuit vicar apostolic provides several essential insights into the labor situation in the Kwango-Kwilu region, and especially into the role of missions, both Protestant and Catholic.[99]

First, affiliation with a Christian mission in the region prompted many Congolese young people to refuse cutting contracts. Both the Jesuits and the company officials complained to Ryckmans that Congolese young people, Catholic and Protestant, were refusing to sign contracts as cutters, especially after they were baptized.[100] As a result, HCB perceived missions

94. Ibid., 4.

95. See map in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre,* 1:XI; the 1955 map shows the spheres of influence of HCB, Portuguese companies such as Madail, and the Compagnie du Kasaï (CK).—Nicolaï, "Le Congo et l'huile de palme. Un siècle. Un cycle ?," 10. For Madail's Portuguese ownership, see Jules Marchal, *Lord Leverhulme's Ghosts: Colonial Exploitation in the Congo* (London; New York: Verso Books, 2008), 177; Kikweta is the only source to specify that Madail was the company to which Kafumba sold its oil and/or palm nuts.—Kikweta, "Histoire de la Communauté des Églises des Frères Mennonites du Zaïre (C.E.F.M.Z.)," 92.

96. Nicolaï, "Le Congo et l'huile de palme. Un siècle. Un cycle ?," 12; Marchal, *Lord Leverhulme's Ghosts*; Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*; Louis-François Vanderstraeten, *La répression de la révolte des Pende du Kwango en 1931* (Brussels: Académie royale des sciences d'outre-mer, 2001).

97. Nicolaï, "Le Congo et l'huile de palme. Un siècle. Un cycle ?," 13; Marchal, *Lord Leverhulme's Ghosts*, 167; Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*, 1:vii.

98. Vanderlinden, Main-*d'oeuvre,* 1:ix.

99. Ibid.

100. Pierre Ryckmans to Madeleine Ryckmans, Jan. 15, 1931, Yasa. As cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*, 1:141-43, letter 89; Mgr van Hee, vicar apostolic of the Kwango

in the region as a direct threat, even when they attempted to cast themselves as its collaborators. The Jesuits, who were numerous in the Kwango region, were seen as a "formidable competitor" by HCB. At any given time, they had 1,500 catechumens living and working at their Madimbi mission near Yasa, and "once baptized," these Christians "categorically" and "unanimously" refused to sign contracts as cutters.[101] Being a Protestant Christian had the same dampening effect.[102] "If there is a threat for the future, it is exactly this attitude of non-participation of our Christians to the harvesting of palm nuts," lamented Van Hee, the vicar apostolic for the Kwango diocese.[103]

Second, young Congolese Christians refused cutting contracts in part due to the dignity they gained from Christian teaching. They renounced employment with the companies because the indignities associated with it were incompatible with their self-understanding as Christians. In the words of Van Hee,

> when they are called "monkey" or *niama* too often, a bitterness develops in the hearts of these good people which manifests itself on the day when, having become Christian, they believe themselves to be completely emancipated.[104]

Affiliation with a mission also increased Christians' awareness of their specific rights as laborers. Ryckmans interpreted the situation as follows:

> Basically, I think that Christians don't hate cutting any more than pagans; or rather, the pagans hate it just as much as the Christians;

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diocese, to P. Ryckmans, member of the Labor Study Commission. "Les Huileries du Congo belge au Kwilu." Undated (ca. 1930-1931). As cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*, 1:270-278. Mgr van Hee, vicar apostolic of the Kwango diocese, to C. Dupont, general director of the Lusanga Circle, Sept. 7, 1929, Leverville. As cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*, letter 136, pp. 214-218.

101. Pierre Ryckmans to Madeleine Ryckmans, Jan. 15, 1931, Yasa. As cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*, 1:141-43, letter 89; Mgr van Hee, vicar apostolic of the Kwango diocese, to P. Ryckmans, member of the Labor Study Commission. "Les Huileries du Congo belge au Kwilu." Undated (ca. 1930-1931). As cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*, 1:270-278.

102. Mgr van Hee, vicar apostolic of the Kwango diocese, to C. Dupont, general director of the Lusanga Circle, Sept. 7, 1929, Leverville. As cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*, letter 136, pp. 214-218.

103. Mgr van Hee, vicar apostolic of the Kwango diocese, to P. Ryckmans, member of the Labor Study Commission, Nov. 28, 1930, Kisantu. As cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*, letter 147, pp. 253-255.

104. Mgr van Hee, vicar apostolic of the Kwango diocese, to P. Ryckmans, member of the Labor Study Commission. "Les Huileries du Congo belge au Kwilu." Undated (ca. 1930-1931). As cited in Vanderlinden 1:270-278. *Niama* means "beast" or "animal" in Lingala and Kikongo.

> and the only difference between them consists in the fact that the Christians know better than the others that despite all threats, basically one does not have the right to *force* them to cut if they don't want to . . . while the good pagans, when one tells them they have the choice between becoming cutters and joining the *Force Publique*, my goodness, do they ever prefer to become cutters.[105]

Third, Congolese Christians were not necessarily opposed to the actual activity of cutting palm nuts, but to being tied into contracts from which it was difficult or impossible to extricate themselves.[106] Increasingly, young Christians chose other options. Ryckmans observed that they preferred either to cut palm nuts independently and get paid piecemeal by a contracted laborer,[107] or to cut palm nuts on a mission station, independently of a company contract. On the Jesuit mission, for example, workers had lower quotas and more time off. Van Hee believed that these superior conditions were behind the observation, which he claimed to have heard frequently, that "the work of the fruit as it is practiced on the mission is good."[108] In short, missions were attracting the labor of young Congolese Christians by offering superior conditions as well as a new sense of dignity and a new awareness of labor rights—even when, as was the case for the Jesuits, the missionaries themselves were generally in favor of trying to get Christians to overcome their "ridiculous prejudices" and work for the company.[109]

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105. Pierre Ryckmans to Madeleine Ryckmans, Jan. 15, 1931; Yasa as cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*, 1:141-43, letter 89, emphasis original.

106. Pierre Ryckmans to Madeleine Ryckmans, Jan. 12, 1931, Masi Maniemba. As cited in Vanderlinden *Main-d'oeuvre*, 1:134-135, letter 86.

107. Pierre Ryckmans to Madeleine Ryckmans, Jan. 10, [1931] on board the Bulungu. As cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*, 1:129-131, letter 84; Pierre Ryckmans to Madeleine Ryckmans, Jan. 12, 1931, Masi Maniemba. As cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*, 1:134-135, letter 86.

108. In Van Hee's words, "How often I heard the blacks making the observation, *Kisalu ki ngashi bonso na mission, kimbete* ('the work of the fruit as it is practiced on the mission is good')."—Mgr van Hee, vicar apostolic of the Kwango diocese, to C. Dupont, general director of the Lusanga Circle, Sept. 7, 1929, Leverville. As cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*, letter 136, 214-218.

109. Mgr van Hee, vicar apostolic of the Kwango diocese, to P. Ryckmans, member of the Labor Study Commission. "Les Huileries du Congo belge au Kwilu." Undated (ca. 1930-1931), as cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*, 1:270-278.

Young Congolese men harvesting palm nuts (Photo H. Nicolaï, 1955).[110]

Fourth, missions that owned their own oil press or mill constituted an additional threat to the monopoly of HCB. The economy of such missions was even more independent from the vagaries of state and company. The Jesuits did not have their own press.[111] HCB, for its part, worried that if the Jesuits did obtain a press, HCB profits would decrease.[112] In the 1920s, small-scale oil mills or presses owned by Belgian and Portuguese companies or even by individuals—such as the press at Kafumba—began to proliferate, increasing the threat to HCB.[113]

Taking the Study Commission sources into account, it seems fair to conclude that the ecclesial economy that existed at Kafumba offered a level of economic well-being to the Congolese young people who lived there that differed markedly from the exploitative practices of the palm oil industry that dominated the region, and to a lesser extent, from the

110. Source: OpenEdition Journals.— https://journals. openedition.org/belgeo/11772 #illustrations.

111. Mgr van Hee, vicar apostolic of the Kwango diocese, to C. Dupont, general director of the Lusanga Circle, Sept. 7, 1929, Leverville, as cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*, letter 136, pp. 214-219.

112. The Jesuits did not have their own press, having been refused permission to install one by their superiors. They sold the palm nuts collected on their concessions directly to HCB. —C. Dupont, general director of the Lusanga Circle, to E. Dusseljé, managing director of HCB in Leopoldville, Sept. 15, 1929, Leverville, as cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*, letter 137, pp. 219-227. The Jesuits had proposed to HCB the idea of creating villages of Christian cutters, and appeared to be seeking to reduce the non-participation of Christians in cutting; the reaction of Dupont shows that even missions who cast themselves as collaborators with state and company could constitute a significant threat.

113. Nicolaï, "Le Congo et l'huile de palme. Un siècle. Un cycle ?," 6-7.

collaborative logic of the Catholics who were the Protestants' main missionary rivals.

Through ownership of an oil press, the Janzens at Kafumba retained greater control over oil production. In addition, the type of ecclesial economy being practiced at Kafumba differed from the Catholic version that proceeded in closer collaboration with HCB. While the Jesuits also offered improved working conditions that made them a threat to the company, their logic of collaboration with both company and state differed from the tone of the Janzens' more separatist "Mennonite sort of Christendom."[114] For example, Van Hee maintained a conciliatory attitude toward the company, suggesting it was guilty of only a few "excesses" and "tactical errors" and needed to make only some basic concessions in order to allow the workers "not to feel completely imprisoned by their profession."[115] In contrast, by viewing the company simply as "worldly," the Janzens were freed from any particular burden to collaborate with other expatriates for the supposed "betterment" of the Congolese population. They focused their attention rather on developing the *Gemeinde* as an alternative polis, which was not bound to any particular collaborative arrangement with state or company.

Finally, the potential for exploitative labor conditions at Kafumba was mitigated by a shared sense of belonging to the church. Unfortunately, very little data is available that reflects exactly how working conditions at Kafumba differed from those in other missions or in the oil companies. However, when the existing sources are read with close attention to the ecclesial assumptions that they reflect, they strongly suggest that a shared sense of belonging to a congregation at Kafumba was a factor that ensured, on the whole, humane and dignified working conditions for the Congolese residents of the station. Both those who supervised the work and those who were supervised developed a sense of allegiance to the same ecclesial body. For example, the Portuguese man who oversaw the "oil business," a Mr. d'Oliveire, had been baptized and "received into the church" at Kafumba alongside several Congolese believers in 1931.[116] D'Oliveire felt free to occasionally leave the press to preach in villages, modeling the intermingling of manual work and missionary outreach that

114. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 35.

115. Mgr van Hee, vicar apostolic of the Kwango diocese, to P. Ryckmans, member of the Labor Study Commission. "Les Huileries du Congo belge au Kwilu." Undated (ca. 1930-1931). As cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*, 1:270-278.

116. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), Sept. 13, 1931, *Zionsbote*, Nov. 4, 1931 pp. 2-3.

characterized life at Kafumba.[117] Aaron Janzen washed the feet of baptized believers at an annual footwashing service.[118] While it is certain that the Janzens and the other white missionaries exerted a degree of control over the labor habits of the Congolese residents at Kafumba, it seems equally undeniable that the nature of this control differed dramatically from that which characterized the life of a contract laborer for HCB or other companies, precisely because of the ecclesial allegiance that expatriate missionaries shared with their "black brethren."[119]

An account from 1931 by Katherine Harder, a newly arrived American MB missionary, offers what is possibly the only contemporary comparison of the labor conditions at the company with those at Kafumba. Harder's account highlights both the dramatically different levels of well-being associated with company employment vis-à-vis life on the mission, and the way a sense of shared belonging to the church contributed to an alternative ethos. "About three days before we got to the station," Harder recalled,

> we stopped at a certain place and went to the shore. There were about a hundred black people who were getting their wages from an oil company they worked for. There was only one white man. When the workers didn't do exactly what he liked, he screamed at them as if he were going to kill them. There wasn't a friendly face to see either. I lamented for the people, that they were treated so heinously.
>
> When we came to Kafumba, there were two boys on the shore. One ran to let the Janzens know that we had arrived. The other stayed with our things. He showed us the path to the station. We then went up through the forest. They were all big trees. It was beautiful. After half an hour on the way we heard loud cries. It was the boys from the station. But how differently did these faces look than those we saw in that company. Beaming with joy, they greeted us and clasped our hands warmly. As we went on, Brother Janzen also came to meet us. As we approached the station, we heard singing at some point. It was

117. Wilhelm and Fannie Jantz, "Aus Afrika" (2809), *Zionsbote*, March 21, 1934, p. 3.

118. Interview, Yongo Antoine, Sept. 28, 2018, Delvaux (DR Congo), by Anicka Fast and Maurice Matsitsa. Yongo stated that the practice of footwashing ended when the church attained about thirty baptized members. However, according to the *Zionsbote*, there were already more than sixty baptized believers at Kafumba before Yongo was born in 1935. While it is unclear when the transition away from footwashing occurred, it seems likely that it was after Yongo arrived at Kafumba in 1940.

119. For examples of this terminology being used by North American missionaries, see Ernestina and Aaron Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, March 26, 1924, pp. 2-4, and Hiebert, Martha A. "Aus Afrika" (2311), *Zionsbote*, Dec. 22, 1937, pp. 3-4.

> Sister Janzen and the other brethren with the school children. They sang beautiful Christian songs. What joy![120]

The newly-arrived Harder had the same reflex as the Janzens to put the exploitative behaviors of the oil company into the category of "worldly," and to contrast them with a different kind of work that took place in the church or the "Kingdom of God." "I want to show others the difference between the work of the world and the work of the messengers of God," she concluded, in a plea for those at home to send more "workers for the Kingdom of God."[121]

A Fragile Balance

While the ecclesial economy at Kafumba seems to have constituted a genuine alternative to an exploitative colonial economy, and while it was grounded in a sense of kinship between expatriate missionaries and local believers, it is important neither to overstate the level of empowerment that was available to Congolese at Kafumba, nor to understate the real racial hierarchy and paternalism that continued to exist. The practices that expressed gospel equality at Kafumba were fragile, and assumptions of white superiority remained strong. At least five factors contributed to making the ecclesial economy at Kafumba tenuous.

First, the economic arrangements at Kafumba concentrated a great deal of power in the hands of the Janzens, both as spiritual leaders of the church and as administrators of station affairs. There is no evidence that Aaron consulted any Congolese with regard to his financial management of the plantations or the oil industry. Although the Janzens invested much time in training preachers and teachers, it was not until 1934, nearly a decade after his baptism, that Djimbo Timothy was designated as the first Congolese church leader. He was ordained in 1939.[122] Congolese MB historian Matungulu Floribert is right to assume that Aaron Janzen alone was "administrator, funder, and legal representative of the work at

120. Katherine Harder, "Mein erster Eindruck von der Arbeit in Afrika," (1656), Kafumba, Jan. 15, 1931. *Zionsbote*, March 11, 1931, p. 7. Harder's term "brethren" here refers to the other white missionaries.

121. Ibid.

122. Aaron A. Janzen, "Mission work for the M.B. Conference," [ca. 1945], p. 3, MB Mission Archives, A250-10-2, Box 3, File: A. A. and Martha Janzen, 1954-1970. See also Kikweta, "Histoire de la Communauté des Églises des Frères Mennonites du Zaïre (C.E.F.M.Z.)," 91; Esau, *First Sixty Years of M.B. Missions*, 341. This was similar to the Congo Inland Mission timeline; the first six ordinations occurred in 1930, about fifteen years after the first baptisms.—Melvin Loewen, *Three Score: The Story of an Emerging Mennonite Church in Central Africa* (Elkhart, Ind.: Congo Inland Mission, 1972), 142.

Kafumba," and that the white missionaries at Kafumba, even during this era, often exhibited a "paternalistic attitude."[123] The control exerted by the Janzens in deciding how to use the revenues generated from this business meant that, if they had so desired, they could have taken on the role of autocratic plantation-owners, as other independent expatriates increasingly did during this period.[124]

Second, though some racial boundaries were crossed at Kafumba, many others were maintained. For example, the adoption of a number of "mulatto" children by the Janzens was a kind of transgression of racial boundaries.[125] Yet at the same time, the Janzens' differing treatment of, and attitudes toward, these children in comparison to the "black" children showcased their assumptions about white superiority.[126] Visits from other white missionaries invariably elicited a yearning for more fellowship with other whites, and the Janzens had a tendency to describe these visits from "dear children of God" in terms that showed that they continued to conceive of their fellowship with other white believers as superior to that which they experienced with black Christians.[127] As the number of white

123. Matungulu Givule Floribert, "Mission Paternalism Factor in Self Reliance of Congo Mennonite Brethren Church," *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 16 (2008): 18. Matungulu's analysis unfortunately lacks reference to contemporary sources. His broad claim that expatriate Mennonite missionaries in Congo did not encourage Congolese Mennonites to take on a missionary task is unsupported by many of the sources cited in this essay.

124. Nicolaï, "Le Congo et l'huile de palme. Un siècle. Un cycle?," 6.

125. The circumstances of the adoption of Nganga Paul Diyoyo (b. ca. 1922), Senene Marthe (b. ca. 1921), Louise ("Luisa") (b. ca. 1916), and Joseph (b. ca. 1914) are related in Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), Feb. 20, 1926, *Zionsbote*, April 28, 1926, p. 4. For additional details as well as information about Yvonne ("Evon") (b. 1927), Josephine (b. 1929), and Marie ("Mary") (b. ca. 1930), see Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Etwas vom Malto [*sic*] Kindergarten im Congo Gebiet" (2889). *Zionsbote*, Oct. 31, 1934, pp. 2-3. Esau, *First Sixty Years of M.B. Missions*, 357, also names these seven children.

126. *Métis* children lived in white missionaries' homes, and received better food and clothing than the black children.—Interview, Yongo Antoine , Sept. 28, 2018, Delvaux (DR Congo), by Anicka Fast and Maurice Matsitsa. Both Ernestina and Aaron described their adopted children as being faster and more efficient workers, or better missionaries, because of their partly white ancestry.—e.g., Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), Feb. 20, 1926, *Zionsbote*, April 28, 1926, p. 4; Board of Foreign Missions, Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, *Foreign Missions, Africa*, 31.

127. Ernestina looked forward to Christmas of 1927 because Doering and some other white missionaries would be visiting Kafumba. "We expect an especially blessed Christmas this year, since several dear children of God will be here," she wrote. "It does us so much good to kneel together with God's children and to go to the Lord's table."—Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Feb. 2, 1927, p. 5. About an earlier visit from Doering and Erma Birky of the Congo Inland Mission, Ernestina wrote, "Dear ones, you who have the privilege of uniting with other dear brothers and sisters in prayer almost every Sunday, you can hardly understand how beneficial it was to us and how much we appreciated having other dear children of God with us."—Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, March 10, 1926, pp. 3-4. For a similar example, see Ernestina and

personnel on the station increased after 1929, meal and prayer times appear to have become more segregated.[128]

Over time, the interracial fellowship on the station was progressively undermined by the creation of additional distinctions and boundaries among white, black, and mixed-race residents. The conception of the church as a "family," in which the Janzens were the parents, had constituted a step toward interracial fellowship when the Janzens were the sole expatriates, the children were still young, and revivalism was the keystone of Kafumba spiritual practices. But as the children became adults and new white missionaries arrived, this arrangement could easily entrench into a deepening paternalism as racial boundaries hardened. Racial boundaries solidified even further in the years after the MB Conference takeover in 1943, when white missionary children began to be present in significant numbers, as the privileged educational opportunities of these children contrasted blatantly with those available to *métis* and black children and young adults.[129]

Third, despite its subversive potential, the economy of Kafumba was also integrated into the colonial economy in several ways. Most obviously, the Janzens would not have been able to hold title to Kafumba if the colonial officials had not believed that a mission station would be of some benefit to the colonial economy, notably in inculcating Western work habits into the local population. The state administrator who "gladly granted" the Kafumba station site to the Janzens in 1924 apparently did so on the condition that the Janzens were to "convert this high bush into

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Aaron Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), May 26, 1924. *Zionsbote*, July 30, 1924, p. 3. Though the Janzens were undoubtedly expressing a desire for fellowship with those who shared a similar culture and language, their use of ecclesial language to describe white visitors implicitly communicated the perspective that their fellowship with these visitors somehow constituted church in a deeper way than their ongoing fellowship with Congolese believers.

128. By 1930, there were eleven white missionaries eating around one table.—Ernestina and Aaron Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), *Zionsbote*, April 23, 1930, p. 3. See also Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), *Zionsbote*, Sept. 28, 1932, pp. 2-3. Separate prayer meetings for the white missionaries began to be mentioned after 1929, e.g., Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), *Zionsbote*, Sept. 7, 1932, pp. 3-4; Jantz, William and Fannie. "Aus Afrika" (2809), Kafumba, Oct. 5, 1930. *Zionsbote*, Nov. 26, 1930, p. 3.

129. Matungulu, "Mission Paternalism," 19; Anicka Fast, "Sacred Children and Colonial Subsidies," 124-136; Anicka Fast, "Enacting Whiteness: Colonial Subsidies, Missionary Kids, and the Performance of Racial Separation through Missionary Politics in Belgian Congo, 1947-1953" (Term paper submitted to Timothy Longman, Dec. 16, 2016). Antoine Yongo's vivid memories of being denied the education available to white missionary children, and of being harshly beaten by one of the white missionary men after he engaged in what he thought was innocent horseplay with a white missionary boy of his own age, exemplify the poignant awakening that occurred for some *métis* residents of Kafumba when they realized that they would henceforth be racialized as black.—Interview, Yongo Antoine , Sept. 28, 2018, Delvaux (DR Congo), by Anicka Fast and Maurice Matsitsa).

fields and plant them with corn, beans, rice, coffee, bananas, fruit trees, indeed to plant much all around and to teach the blacks how to work, even if it requires a lot of patience."[130] In some ways, the Janzens' involvement in large-scale agricultural production at Kafumba played into the colonial government's goal of integrating the population into an "export economy."[131] Historian Julia Seibert has shown that this colonial discourse of African "laziness" was part of a complex of ideas related to efforts to increase exports from the colony and to strengthen colonial social control over the indigenous population.[132] For example, "peasants" were routinely punished for their unwillingness to conform to the requirements of obligatory agricultural production.[133] At the time, however, the promotion of peasant agriculture in the colony was framed by some, including prominent Protestant missionaries, as a benevolent attempt to reduce migration and depopulation, thereby safeguarding the human rights of Congolese against the unacceptable harshness of forced labor.[134] The Janzens at Kafumba, though relatively isolated from mainline Protestant missionaries, may have believed that they were collaborating with this supposedly more benevolent side of colonial rule.

Fourth, the Janzens were not explicitly seeking to improve the well-being of the general population, or to undermine the colonial economy, but to create a fully functioning ecclesial economy separate from the "world" in a way that was reminiscent of the Russian Mennonite economic ethos in the colonies of South Russia. Sometimes this discursive rejection of "worldliness" seems to have led them to turn a blind eye to broader questions of economic justice. The Janzens may or may not have obtained the press with the specific aim of protecting Congolese at Kafumba from the exploitation of the oil companies. Certainly, the suffering of the Pende Revolt did not evoke much sympathy from them,

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130. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Feb. 17, 1926, pp. 3-4. Janzen clarified that this was an actual "condition" of being granted the land in a later account.—Aaron A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), *Zionsbote*, Sept. 12, 1934, p. 2.

131. Seibert, "More Continuity than Change?," 383-384.

132. Ibid., 383.

133. See for example the data from 1934 cited by Robert Eugene Smith, "Les Kwilois parlent de l'époque coloniale," *Annales Aequatoria* 26 (2005), 181.

134. A good example of this is Henri Anet, a prominent Belgian Protestant missionary who served as somewhat of a spokesman for the Congo Protestant Council in its earliest years. In an article in the *International Review of Mission*, he set up a contrast between the unacceptable harshness of forced labor and what he saw as the more humane approach of encouraging agricultural activity, approvingly quoting a 1925 report of the International Labor Organization.—Henri K Anet, "Economic Development and Welfare of Natives: Theory and Practice in the Belgian Congo," *International Review of Mission* 17:4 (Oct. 1928), 629.

though the explicitly religious overtones of the Revolt may have diverted their attention from its link to labor dissatisfaction.[135] Aaron was sympathetic to Dr. Leslie, a Baptist missionary who was known in the region as an opponent of Belgian occupation, and had gone to see him for reasons of "business."[136] It is possible that they spoke about the economic situation in the region as it affected Christians in particular—an area in which Ryckmans found Leslie to be impressively well-versed.[137] Ultimately, however, the Janzens were not overtly trying to undermine, or even to reform, the colonial economy. They were trying to create an alternative economy. Their focus was on the spiritual and physical well-being of the ecclesial community at Kafumba, not on the broader socioeconomic context. In this they differed from the Catholics, who saw themselves as contributing to a much larger social project.

Fifth, even though their economic initiatives at Kafumba were consistent with their Russian Mennonite ecclesiology and with their lifelong attention to matters of livelihood and well-being, the Janzens were not consciously setting out to develop a holistic ecclesial economy because they believed that this was inherently the best mission strategy. Rather, the Janzens articulated their policy of self-support largely in response to the failure of the MB Conference to offer them direct support. The two-decade episode of economic self-sufficiency at Kafumba did not so much represent the Janzens' preferred strategy as it did the result of the MB Conference's rejection of responsibility for the Kafumba field. The Janzens consistently tried to rally the home conference to their side and never stopped urging them to take up the work officially. Indeed, in 1943 Aaron Janzen seemed to welcome the conference takeover, seeing it as an answer to prayer and as "our heart's desire of many years."[138] He may not have

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135. The Janzens described the Revolt in two letters to the *Zionsbote*.—Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), *Zionsbote*, Sept. 23, 1931, pp. 3-4, and Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2889), Sept. 13, 1931, *Zionsbote*, Nov. 4, 1931 pp. 2-3. They seemed primarily concerned that the Revolt made some villagers more indifferent to the gospel, rather than about the labor conditions that had triggered it. However, recent research by Thomas has shown that the socioeconomic causes of the revolt were at first downplayed in favor of its "sectarian" religious aspects, so that full awareness of the labor-related causes may only have emerged a little later for the Janzens.—Martin Thomas, *Violence and Colonial Order: Police, Workers and Protest in the European Colonial Empires, 1918-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 308.

136. Ernestina and A. A. Janzen, "Aus Afrika" (2886), *Zionsbote*, Sept. 9, 1925, pp. 2-3.

137. After meeting with Leslie, Ryckmans concluded that he was, after all, a "reasonable" man and that his subversive reputation had been greatly exaggerated.—Pierre Ryckmans to Madeleine Ryckmans, Jan. 16, [1931], Madimbi and Vanga. As cited in Vanderlinden, *Main-d'oeuvre*,1:143-144, letter 90.

138. Aaron A. Janzen, ca. 1945. "Mission work for the M.B. Conference," p. 6. MB Mission Archives, A250-10-2, Box 3, File: A. A. and Martha Janzen, 1954-1970.

realized the extent to which that step would end business as usual in Kafumba. In short, the episode at Kafumba was possible because of a convergence of factors and circumstances. Things could have gone very differently if the conference had funded the work from the beginning.

Conclusion

Congolese MBs remember the Janzens' tenure at Kafumba as a moment of economic sharing and gospel equality, despite their clear awareness of the tenuous and imperfect nature of this arrangement. Their interpretation challenges the assumption that a station-centered mission, in which residents engaged in commercial activities under the supervision of an independent white missionary, should be understood primarily as an unfortunate derailment of appropriate mission strategy. The economic activities at Kafumba are not best understood as an embarrassing moment of participation in colonial exploitation, but rather as a disruption of that logic.

Through a detailed analysis of the primary sources available from this era, this research supports the conclusion that Kafumba offered a refuge to young Congolese Christians from the coercive labor practices of the palm oil industry through the development of a holistic, congregation-oriented ecclesial economy that resonated with their aspirations. The economy of Kafumba empowered Congolese residents of the station. The young people who chose to live and work at Kafumba saw it as a superior option to working for the main palm oil company in the region, HCB. Though wages from HCB could be higher, the dignity that came with being active, contributing, and baptized members of a congregation was more attractive to many. In contrast to the exploitative practices of the oil companies and the civilizing ethos of the Catholics, the Janzens were providing a livelihood to Kafumba residents, which, though not particularly lucrative, offered refuge from the coercive recruitment tactics of the oil company by giving them a role as active supporters of an alternative *polis*.

One crucial contribution of this story is historiographical. The sources from this era of mission history in the Congo are dominated by the perspectives of expatriate missionaries and colonial and company officials. A reading of these documents through an ecclesial lens is necessary both for the retrieval of Congolese agency during this period and in order to bring to light the subversive impact of the ecclesial economy at Kafumba. The primary frame of reference in the Janzens' discourse was not the oil industry but the church, in both local and transnational manifestations. Therefore, one must pay attention to their

accounts of ecclesial practices—such as footwashing, baptism, tithing, preaching, singing, and prayer—in order to discern a new economy taking shape in which Congolese were active participants. The juxtaposition of these missionary-authored sources with colonial sources provides additional crucial evidence of the changed consciousness of Christians and the disruptive impact of Christian missions on the palm oil industry, allowing the significance and distinctiveness of Kafumba's ecclesial economy to take on an even clearer shape.

The ecclesial economy at Kafumba station was empowering because the church understood itself as an alternative polity. In other words, it was Kafumba's ecclesiology that was a threat to the logic of exploitation that drove companies like HCB. The practice of a familial, revivalistic model of church led to a deepening sense of gospel equality, enabling the Janzens to increasingly shift their allegiance toward the congregation at Kafumba. As their growing sense of kinship with Congolese believers increasingly pushed them to embrace economic self-support as a valid strategy, they drew on their Russian Mennonite congregational ethos to develop a holistic economy which offered a livelihood to Congolese, invited them to change their allegiance away from "worldly" work and toward the "work of the Kingdom," sheltered them from some of the harshest aspects of the colonial economy, and fostered their sense of being equals in this new body.